

Revue de presse américaine

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



Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Mercredi 1^{er} mars 2017, réalisation : Josselin Brémaud



FRANCE – EUROPE3

- François Fillon, Candidate in French Election, Vows to Run Despite Inquiry (online)3
- France's Fillon: 'I won't surrender' despite pending charges3
- Scandal-hit François Fillon stays in French presidential race but rivals sense openings (online)4
- French presidential candidate Fillon vows to fight on despite formal probe4
- Embattled François Fillon vows to remain in French presidential race4

- NBC : France's populist leader Marine Le Pen may be losing momentum — and investors like it5
- France Inc. Snubs Le Pen as Campaign Shifts Onto Economic Policy5
- 2 injured as officer accidentally fires weapon during speech by France's Hollande (online).....6
- French sniper accidentally fires weapon during Hollande speech, injuring 2.....6
- CBS : French police officer accidentally fires at Hollande speech; 2 injured.....7
- NPR : Gunshot Rings Out As France's President Hollande Speaks.....7

As France's Towns Wither, Fears of a Decline in 'Frenchness' (UNE).....	7	Trump, in Optimistic Address, Asks Congress to End 'Trivial Fights' (UNE)	27
A Paris exhibit of Nazi-looted art honors a Europe many fear is under threat again.....	9	A tale of two speeches: The contradictions of Donald Trump's presidency (UNE).....	28
Vinocur : The 'Cult of Lying' and France's Presidential Campaign	9	Trump tries on normal.....	29
Longing for Obama as President — of France	10	How Trump's disciplined speech came together	30
Petition urging Obama to run for president in France gains 42,000 signatures.....	11	Was this the Trump that could win in 2020?	31
Newsweek : Make Obama the next French president? Yes We Can, Say Campaigners	11	President Trump makes most of the moment in address to Congress.....	31
The Underdog Candidate in France's Elections: Obama.....	11	President's speech leaves executives optimistic, wanting more details	32
French Holocaust historian detained for 10 hours at US customs	12	The presidential Trump emerges, at least for a night....	33
Inside the Heart of French Prisons.....	12	Donald Trump Finally Sounded Like a President.....	33
In Films From France, Dark Answers to 'What's Eating Us?'	13	Grading Trump on a Curve	34
Friedman : Tony Blair's Lesson for President Trump ..	13	Health Care Is Front and Center in Democrats' Response to Trump Address	35
How Geert Wilders Became America's Favorite Islamophobe.....	14	Editorial : Trump Makes His Pitch	36
Editorial : Norway's model of prudence in oil wealth..	15	Editorial : Trump's Unrealistic Budget.....	37
		Editorial : Trump's budget plans are magical thinking at its worst.....	37
		Editorial : Visions of Trumptopia	38
		Editorial : Trump would explode the deficit.....	38
		Milbank : The most important word Trump didn't say in his speech.....	39
		Rubin : Trump's speech to Congress was mostly devoid of substance.....	39
		Bernstein : Trump Strikes a Better Tone. So What?	40
		Editorial : Trump reprises his bleak vision of America — but offers few ideas for fixing it.....	40
		FBI once planned to pay former British spy who authored controversial Trump dossier (UNE).....	41
		Editorial : There's a chance Congress can't be trusted investigate Russian meddling.....	42
		President Donald Trump plans to issue new executive order restricting travel.....	42
		Trump seeks immigration overhaul, signals he's open to compromise.....	43
		Trump says he is open to immigration compromise including legal status.....	44
		Escobar : How Trump Will Hurt My Border Town.....	44
		White House proposes slashing State Department budget by 37% to fund defense increase.....	45
		Editorial : Has the State Department been sidelined?	45
		Trump trade policy expected to seek smaller WTO role in the U.S.....	46
		Sessions says Justice Department to ease up on police department probes	47
		Sessions Indicates Justice Department Will Stop Monitoring Troubled Police Agencies	47
		Threats and Vandalism Leave American Jews on Edge in Trump Era	48
		Galston : Steve Bannon and the "global tea party,"	49
		Bruni : Donald Trump's Military Preening.....	50
		Evan McMullin: Conservatives, stop caving to Trump 50	
		Editorial : Trump's Clean Watershed.....	51
		Editorial : A South Dakota Silencing.....	51
INTERNATIONAL.....	16		
Trump Sticks to a Protectionist, Isolationist Script in First Big Speech.....	16		
Trump signals a US shift from 'soft power' to military might.....	16		
From 'America First' to a More Conventional View of U.S. Diplomacy.....	17		
Russia and U.S. Clash Over Syria in Security Council Vote.....	18		
Russia, China veto at U.N. on Syria chemical weapons is 'outrageous,' U.S. says.....	19		
Syrian peace talks flounder as participants ask: Where is America?	19		
In push for influence in North Africa, Russia seeks U.S. backing for Libyan strongman.....	20		
Editorial : Russia Sides With Chemical Weapons.....	21		
Jenkins Jr. : What's behind the Putin fantasies.....	21		
Israel comptroller report criticizes Netanyahu on readiness for 2014 war	22		
Israeli government watchdog slams Netanyahu, army over failures in 2014 Gaza war	23		
Awad and Tadros : The Muslim Brotherhood: Terrorists or not?.....	23		
China gloats as Trump squanders some moral high ground in Asia.....	24		
Confidential U.N. Report Details North Korea's Front Companies in China.....	25		
ETATS-UNIS	26		
In speech to Congress, Trump asks Congress to unite behind health care, tax overhauls (UNE).....	26		

Editorial :Ms. DeVos’s Fake History About School
Choice 52
Cannon : How ObamaCare punishes the sick, from
Michael F. Cannon..... 52

Ignatius : Trump is selling snake oil to the Rust Belt ...53
Stier : Trump’s off to a rough start. Here’s what can
make his job easier. 53

FRANCE – EUROPE



François Fillon, Candidate in French Election, Vows to Run Despite Inquiry (online)

Adam Nossiter and Dan Bilefsky

François Fillon, the center-right candidate, announced at a news conference in Paris on Wednesday that he would not abandon his bid for the presidency. Christian Hartmann/Reuters

PARIS — François Fillon, the conservative candidate, defiantly declared on Wednesday that he would not abandon his bid for the French presidency, four days after prosecutors said they were opening a formal investigation into his possible misuse of public funds.

Mr. Fillon’s campaign announced earlier in the day that he would not be visiting the annual Salon International de l’Agriculture in Paris, normally an obligatory stop for politicians seeking to draw support from France’s important farming sector, prompting widespread speculation that he would pull out of the race.

Instead, speaking in Paris, Mr. Fillon said that his lawyers had informed him that he had

received a summons on Wednesday, but he likened the investigation to a political assassination and said, “I will not give in.”

Mr. Fillon’s campaign was thrown into turmoil in January after *Le Canard Enchaîné*, a weekly satirical newspaper that is also known for its investigative journalism, reported that Mr. Fillon’s wife, Penelope, had been paid with taxpayer money for a bogus job assisting him and his deputy in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

The scandal surrounding Mr. Fillon escalated when French prosecutors said they had opened a full-scale investigation into whether he had embezzled public funds, threatening to make his candidacy increasingly untenable. Mr. Fillon, who has played up his moral probity during his candidacy, has vehemently denied any wrongdoing.

The candidate has struggled to campaign effectively since the revelations were made public. He

has consistently and adamantly maintained his innocence, lashing out at the news media and insisting that hiring his wife and two of his children was legal. There are no rules in France against lawmakers hiring family members, as long as the work is genuine.

In an article published on Wednesday before Mr. Fillon’s news conference, the French daily *Le Monde* described him as a “candidate in a bunker” who was “hunched up” and “in his shell.” It noted that he no longer traveled by train for campaign trips out of fear of being called out by protesters.

If Mr. Fillon had dropped out of the race, the greatest beneficiaries would most likely have been Emmanuel Macron, 39, who has started his own political movement and who favors keeping the country in the European Union; and Marine Le Pen, a right-wing populist whose potent cocktail of protectionist economic policies and right-wing nationalism has resonated with voters.

Mr. Fillon, a 62-year-old former prime minister, triumphed in primaries for center-right parties in November, edging out Alain Juppé, a former prime minister, and Nicolas Sarkozy, a former president.

He campaigned on a conservative platform, promising to impose stricter administrative controls on Islam and immigration and to champion traditional French values. He vowed to cut state spending and overhaul labor rules, and he sought to project an image of probity and honesty.

In France, if no presidential candidate wins a majority of votes outright in the first round, set for April 23, then the top two move to a second round. Until recently, polling has indicated that Ms. Le Pen would lead in the first round, which is often used by voters to vent frustrations, and that she would face either Mr. Fillon or Mr. Macron in the second round, which this year would be held May 7.



France's Fillon: 'I won't surrender' despite pending charges

ABC News

French conservative candidate François Fillon is refusing to quit the presidential race despite receiving a summons Wednesday to face charges of faking parliamentary jobs for his family.

Calling the investigation a “political assassination,” Fillon called on his supporters to “resist” and said he would leave it up to voters to decide his fate. Once a front-runner in the race for the April-May two-round election, Fillon’s chances have slipped since the probe was opened in January.

Fillon abruptly canceled a campaign stop Wednesday after receiving the legal summons, prompting media speculation that he would quit the race.

“I will not surrender,” he told reporters at his headquarters later. “I will not withdraw.”

Fillon denied all allegations and said legal procedure was not properly followed in the probe, which he called unprecedented and unacceptable during a presidential election campaign. He said he was summoned for questioning March 15 “with the goal of being given preliminary charges.”

The court summons was widely expected after the financial prosecutor’s office pushed the case to a higher level Friday, opening a formal judicial inquiry that allows investigating judges to file preliminary charges.

Financial Prosecutor Eliane Houlette denied reports that Fillon’s wife Penelope was taken in for questioning Wednesday.

Fillon, who won the conservative primary on a platform of tighter security and public spending cuts, initially said he would withdraw from the race if he was charged — but later said he was determined to let the voters judge him instead of investigators.

“France is greater than my errors,” he said Wednesday.

The alleged fake jobs are especially shocking to many voters because of Fillon’s pledged spending cuts and his clean-cut image. Investigative weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* reported that payments were made to Penelope Fillon and two of their five children that totaled more than 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) over many years.

After a preliminary investigation opened Jan. 25, the financial prosecutor’s office decided Friday to launch a formal judicial inquiry, turning it over to investigating judges who can bring charges or throw the case out. The list of potential

charges include misappropriation of public funds, abuse of public funds and influence trafficking.

Protesters have been at Fillon's recent campaign events for the election, in which far-right candidate Marine Le Pen is expected to make a strong showing.

Fillon's Republicans party has no clear Plan B for an eventual withdrawal by Fillon. The runnerup in the party's first-ever primary, the more center-leaning Alain Juppe,

has said he would not want to run in Fillon's place.



Scandal-hit François Fillon stays in French presidential race but rivals sense openings (online)

McAuley

By James government funds for work they never actually did.

PARIS — Former French Prime Minister François Fillon defiantly refused to suspend his scandal-battered presidential bid Wednesday, but showcased political weaknesses that could open more room for the country's far-right leader pressing an anti-immigrant message.

Although nepotism is common in the French political establishment, the allegations of a do-nothing salary had extra teeth. Last week, French prosecutors launched an investigation into the claims of "misuse of public funds."

In any case, the accusations have grossly undermined the moral authority of a candidate who had promised fiscal responsibility, the slashing of unnecessary public spending and the elimination of as many as 500,000 public sector jobs.

With Fillon apparently in decline, the top choices are either Le Pen or the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron, a former economy minister under France's current president, François Hollande.

"I will not yield. I will not surrender. I will not withdraw," Fillon said in a news conference after abruptly canceling a campaign appearance.

As the Wales-born Penelope Fillon had said of her professional relationship with her husband in 2007: "I was never his assistant."

The scandal has hit Fillon where it hurts: among the predominately rural, agricultural voters who had supported him in the first place. According to the latest study conducted by the Cevipof research center for France's Le Monde newspaper, support among these voters for the center-right party — their traditional choice — has plummeted by over 50 percent between 2012 and 2017.

Macron has galvanized support among Parisian elites and young people across France, but his vague policy views often alienate voters on both the left and the right.

Fillon, 62, had presented himself to the French public as a caretaker of traditional Catholic conservatism in a country struggling with issues of identity and culture following a historic influx of mostly Muslim migrants and a string of terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of 230 since 2015.

Fillon has fiercely rejected the accusations of any wrongdoing, accusing his opponents and the French media of orchestrating a "political assassination." His approval ratings had plummeted, but his stubborn refusal to budge enabled him to make a slight comeback in recent weeks.

Many of these votes could now be siphoned off by the National Front, the far-right populist party headed by Marine Le Pen. According to the Cevipof study, 35 percent of voters polled said they would back Le Pen in the first round of the vote in late April; only 20 percent said they would support Fillon.

Le Pen — the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a convicted Holocaust denier who founded the National Front in the mid-1970s — sees herself as the third chapter in a global populist upheaval that began with the Brexit vote last June and continued onto the election of President Trump in November. She is expected to qualify for the second and final round of the vote, to be held in early May.

Please provide a valid email address.

The announcement of the formal investigation led to widespread speculation that Fillon would finally be forced to drop out. But he stood his ground on Wednesday.

The dwindling popularity of Fillon — who had once been seen as a shoo-in to victory — adds another dimension of upheaval to an election many see as a major turning point in an increasingly fragile European Union.

Fillon, who handily won the conservative primaries in November to become the presidential candidate of Les Republicains, France's center right-wing party, previously served as the country's prime minister between 2007 and 2012, during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

But Fillon's political fortunes crumbled in a spectacular public fashion following the accusation last month — first published in Le Canard Enchaîné, a French satirical newspaper — that his wife Penelope and two of his children had been paid approximately 900,000 euros in

"I will be at the rendezvous that democracy — and it alone — gives us to choose our collective future," he said, referring to next month's election.



French presidential candidate Fillon vows to fight on despite formal probe

William Horobin

into political limbo.

suspect is ordered to stand trial or the case is dismissed.

seeking to subvert the democratic process.

Updated March 1, 2017 7:43 a.m. ET

The announcement is a further setback for the center-right candidate, who was once the front-runner in the presidential race.

At the end of January, Mr. Fillon said he would withdraw from the race if he faced preliminary charges, saying the initial investigation would clear him and his wife.

"I won't give up," Mr. Fillon said. The timing of the summons—just days before a deadline for Mr. Fillon's conservative Les Republicains party to name a possible replacement—amounts to an "assassination" of the election itself, Mr. Fillon said.

PARIS—François Fillon, the conservative candidate to become France's next president, said Wednesday he is facing preliminary charges on suspicion he used public money to fund phony jobs for his wife and children, plunging his campaign deeper

Mr. Fillon said he has received a March 15 summons for judges to press preliminary charges against him. Preliminary charges are significant procedural step before a

Mr. Fillon denied any criminal wrongdoing and struck a defiant tone, accusing investigators of

Write to William Horobin at William.Horobin@wsj.com



Embattled François Fillon vows to remain in French presidential race

Bittermann, CNN

By Laura Smith-Spark and Jim his campaign headquarters in Paris on Wednesday.

- France votes on April 23, with a runoff May 7 if no candidate wins first round outright

ongoing inquiry into allegations that he paid his wife and children for work they did not do.

Updated 7:49 AM ET, Wed March 1, 2017

Story highlights

- François Fillon said he would be told on March 15 that he is under formal investigation

Paris (CNN)Embattled French presidential candidate François Fillon said Wednesday he will persevere in the race despite an

In a televised statement in Paris, Fillon announced that he will be placed under formal investigation on March 15, yet he would not step aside.

Presidential candidate Francois Fillon gives a press conference at

"I will not resign. I will not give in. I will not withdraw," he said. "I will go to the end because it is democracy that is being defied. I ask you to follow me."

Fillon said the timing of the meeting with magistrates was intended to damage the Republican Party's chances in the election, and that he was the victim of a "political assassination."

What you need to know about Francois Fillon 01:54

Presidential candidates must present 500 signatures of support from elected officials around France by March 17. French voters go to the polls on April 23.

Fillon, who complained that the presumption of innocence had "entirely disappeared," denied embezzling public funds and said he would answer the charges against him. "I have not lost faith in justice," he said. "I will tell the truth, my truth."

The impromptu nature of his news conference had prompted speculation that Fillon would say he was stepping down from his embattled campaign.

He had earlier postponed a planned appearance at the annual Paris farm

fair, a traditional campaign stop for presidential hopefuls.

Stiff competition

France's financial prosecutor's office said Friday it would open a judicial investigation into the claims against Fillon and his wife Penelope.

Francois Fillon and his wife Penelope Fillon at a campaign meeting on January 29 in Paris.

Fillon said on Wednesday he had been summoned before investigative judges on March 15 to be placed under formal investigation -- the French legal equivalent of being charged or indicted.

Fillon was chosen as the center-right Republican party's nominee in November and had been considered a leading contender in the presidential race, where he faced stiff competition from independent candidate Emmanuel Macron and far-right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen. The French Socialists nominated Benoit Hamon.

If neither candidate gets more than 50% of the vote on April 23, there'll be a runoff ballot on May 7.

Three recent polls each have Le Pen in the lead in the first round, with Macron and Fillon fighting for

second place. The surveys were all completed before Fillon's news conference Wednesday.

Fillon: 'Nothing to hide'

The questions began when investigative newspaper Le Canard Enchaîné published reports that Fillon's wife and two of his adult children earned nearly 1 million euros (\$1.08 million) as parliamentary assistants, but didn't show up for work.

What to know about Emmanuel Macron 01:26

Fillon, 62, has rejected the claims and insists that he has "nothing to hide."

He has said his wife worked for 15 years, as his "deputy," carrying out several roles, including managing his schedule and representing him at cultural events.

Fillon, who was prime minister from 2007 to 2012, said that his daughter and son were employed in similar positions for 15 months and six months respectively, which he said is not illegal, but was an "error of judgment."

He first offered an apology to the French people on February 6.

Controversy embroils Le Pen

Fillon's lawyer, Antonin Levy, accused the prosecutor's office of failing to prove any wrongdoing in its initial inquiry.

Le Pen's chief of staff under investigation 02:06

The investigation will look at allegations of embezzlement of public funds, misuse of public assets, complicity and concealment of such objects, traffic of influence and noncompliance with the reporting obligations before the High Authority, according to the financial prosecutor's office.

Le Pen's campaign was embroiled in controversy last week after her chief of staff was hit with a formal judicial investigation into whether she held a fake European Parliament job.

Catherine Griset and Le Pen's bodyguard, Thierry Legier, are alleged to have been paid for nonexistent jobs at the European Parliament.

CNN's Jim Bittermann reported from Paris and Laura Smith-Spark wrote and reported from London. CNN's Melissa Bell and Maud Le Rest contributed to this report.

NBC : France's populist leader Marine Le Pen may be losing momentum — and investors like it

Fred Imbert

Stephane Mahe | Reuters

Marine Le Pen, French National Front (FN) political party leader and candidate for French 2017 presidential election, at a political rally in Saint-Herblain near Nantes, France, February 26, 2017.

Marine Le Pen's chances of becoming France's next president may be slipping and investors are breathing a sigh of relief.

A poll released Tuesday by French firm Ifop showed the far-right candidate's lead over centrist Emmanuel Macron declining to just 1.5 percentage points. Another poll released by Opinionway showed Macron defeating Le Pen in the May 7 runoff election. France holds two rounds of voting in presidential

contests.

French bond prices rose after the polls, bringing their yields closer in line with more steady German yields. The French 10-year note yield declined to 0.888 percent, narrowing its spread with the 10-year German sovereign yield to around 0.68 percentage point. Bond yields move inversely to bond prices.

France 10-year yield in 2016

Source: FactSet

French debtholders had been selling their bonds out of fear that a Le Pen victory would lead to France leaving the European Union — potentially threatening the future of the EU itself. The French-German spread rose last week to its highest since August 2012.

France's CAC 40 stock index climbed 0.28 percent on Tuesday, slightly outperforming the broader Stoxx 600 index, which was 0.23 percent higher.

John De Clue, chief investment officer of the Private Client Reserve at U.S. Bank, said the recent sell-off in French bonds may have gone too far.

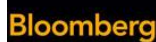
"We are surprised with the market's concern over a Le Pen victory and how these spreads have widened," he said. "If this gets resolved, I'd say the market turns back to the fundamentals, which have been fairly positive."

The pace of economic growth in the euro zone reached its highest level in almost six years in February, with job creation rising to a 9-1/2 year high, according to IHS Markit.

But can polls be trusted?

The latest batch of polls suggests Le Pen will ultimately lose. That said, political polling recently has been a terrible predictor of actual results. Polls heading into last year's Brexit vote and the U.S. presidential election were mostly wrong, causing shockwaves across financial markets.

"Over the last year, we've learned that anything can happen," said Minh Trang, senior FX trader at Silicon Valley Bank. "But there is a bit more confidence that things won't go awry and remain more stable."



France Inc. Snubs Le Pen as Campaign Shifts Onto Economic Policy

@HeleneFouquet
More stories by

Helene Fouquet

by and

28 février 2017 à 13:15 UTC-5
1 mars 2017 à 00:00 UTC-5

- Anti-euro candidate says establishment panicking at her rise
- Lobbyist says Le Pen's polices out of step with their goals

French industry is starting to signal its opposition to Marine Le Pen.

Lobby groups representing more than 13 percent of the French economy and 3.1 million jobs held a policy debate with the main presidential campaigns Tuesday and Le Pen's team wasn't invited --

her plan to pull France out of the euro and introduce protectionist measures meant that she wouldn't have made a positive contribution to the debate, industry leaders said.

Marine Le Pen, Feb. 28.

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

"It wasn't useful to speak with candidates who don't defend European ideas," Vincent Moulin Wright, head of the Group of Industrial Federations, said in an interview.

As the 2017 campaign gathers pace, investors and executives have been unnerved by the prospect of Le Pen emerging from the most open election in living memory with a mandate to withdraw from the European currency union.

French bonds have whipsawed with the ebb and flow of her campaign. Ten-year yields reached their highest in 16 months earlier in February as the nationalist gained momentum and they've have shed 25 basis points since then as the centrist front-runner Emmanuel Macron bolstered his own bid with a series of key endorsements.

Macron will be seeking to consolidate his advantage when he sets out the detail of his policy proposals on Thursday. Le Pen will be aiming to demonstrate her own credentials on the economy when she gives a speech the same night.

Le Pen Left Out

While Le Pen is favorite to win the first-round vote on April 23, no poll yet has shown her coming within even 10 percentage points of victory in the run-off on May 7.

"I think I know why I wasn't asked to speak," Le Pen said in a statement on her website. "There's total panic in a system that is off the rails."

Also excluded was Jean-Luc Melenchon, the far-left candidate who has promised to review all of France's commitments to the European Union.

Le Pen's National Front team was left off the guest list because the discussion was focused on competitiveness within the EU and she is opposed to French membership of the bloc, according to Michel Grandjean, head of the Federation for Mechanical Industries, which represents 629,000 employees and 30,200 companies including trainmaker Alstom SA. Le Pen and Melenchon's demand for more protection for French companies also ran counter to the focus of the debate, he added.

"Competitiveness implies free trade, which is not an option that Le Pen or Melenchon have supported," Grandjean said, describing the National Front leader's response as

"sharp." He said he's open to discussing protectionist measures with both Le Pen and Melenchon.

Cross-Border Operations

Keep up with the best of Bloomberg Politics.

Get our newsletter daily.

Le Pen has tapped into voters' concerns about immigration with a pledge to end the rules that allow EU citizens to work in other countries with their own domestic contracts, saying it hurts French workers. Republican Francois Fillon has also made opposition to the so-called guest-worker program a feature of his campaign while Macron tightened rules on European workers while serving as economy minister under Socialist President Francois Hollande.

Still, the National Front's broader proposals to erect trade barriers with the rest of Europe and bring back border controls are anathema to many French corporations whose businesses criss-cross European frontiers.

Lobbyists in industries from construction and health care to financial services or chemicals typically organize both public and private meetings with candidates

during French election campaigns in a bid to shape the policy plans of the next administration.

Le Pen though has had contact with a few groups -- she was invited to the construction federation gathering last Thursday and Moulin Wright said the GFI has had talks with her adviser and life partner Louis Aliot. But most lobbyists and major corporations have ignored her, signaling that her party's history of racism and anti-Semitism makes her too toxic to meet with.

One group that was happy to meet the candidate on Tuesday were farmers. Le Pen spent an entire day at the country's annual trade fair, drawing large crowds everywhere she went as she chatted with cattle and pig farmers. An Ifop study released Feb. 27 said 35 percent of farmers would vote for Le Pen in the first round on April 23, up from 19.5 percent in 2012.

Before it's here, it's on the Bloomberg Terminal. [LEARN MORE](#)



2 injured as officer accidentally fires weapon during speech by France's Hollande (online)

By James McAuley

PARIS — A sniper mistakenly fired his weapon during a Tuesday speech by President Francois Hollande in southwestern France, slightly injuring two people, according to a regional official.

Video footage of the speech — on the opening of a high-speed train between Tours and Bordeaux — shows Hollande stopping mid-sentence at the sound of gunfire about 17 minutes into his remarks.

"I hope it's nothing serious," Hollande said, turning to look in the direction of the commotion. "I don't

think so," he concluded a few seconds later, launching back into his speech.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

[After Louvre attack, France foils another terrorist plot]

According to the Figaro newspaper, whose reporter was on site, the sniper was stationed under a marquee near where guests were to gather for a cocktail reception. The

sniper apparently belonged to the PSPG, an elite protection platoon, and had fired accidentally when he changed his position, the Figaro reported.

The prefect of the Charente region, where Hollande was speaking, told reporters gathered for the speech in the town of Villonon that the victims' injuries were not life-threatening.

"Their days are not numbered," Pierre N'Gahane said of the victims, who were not identified. "We were able to talk with them immediately afterwards."

N'Gahane said the local prosecutor's office would launch an investigation.

Hollande's speech comes toward the end of a five-year presidency rocked by terrorist attacks. During his tenure, 230 people have been killed in attacks in Paris, Nice and elsewhere in the country.

In December, Hollande, a Socialist whose approval ratings had fallen to a historic low, made the highly unusual announcement that he would not seek reelection.



French sniper accidentally fires weapon during Hollande speech, injuring 2

A police sharpshooter protecting France President Francois Hollande accidentally fired his weapon during a speech Tuesday, wounding two people.

Pierre N'Gahane, the top official of western France's Charente region, said the incident happened at the

inauguration of a new train line in the town of Villonon, The Associated Press reported.

Local media reports said a waiter and a railway company employee were slightly wounded — one in the ankle and the other in the leg, according to the BBC.

"I hope it's nothing serious. I think not," Hollande said as he stopped his speech to see if anyone was hurt.

The BBC cited a local report noting that the safety catch on the sniper's gun was unlocked and the firearm discharged. The sniper was positioned on a roof about 330 feet

away from where Hollande was speaking, officials said.

The shooting remained under investigation.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

CBS : French police officer accidentally fires at Hollande speech; 2 injured

French President Francois Hollande's speech was interrupted at the inauguration of the new 'Sud Europe Atlantique' (South Europe Atlantic) high-speed rail line on Tue., Feb. 28, 2017.

Last Updated Feb 28, 2017 7:10 PM EST

PARIS -- A police sharpshooter accidentally fired his weapon during a speech by French President Francois Hollande and two people were slightly injured, the top official of France's Charente region said Tuesday.

Pierre N'Gahane said the incident occurred Tuesday while Hollande was inaugurating a new fast train line in the western town of Villonon.

The regional prefect, speaking to journalists near the scene of the incident, said the gendarme, or military police officer, was located on a high spot, "his regular position," when his weapon was fired.

Asked if the sharpshooter fired accidentally, N'Gahane responded: "Yes, without doubt."

He said two people were slightly wounded, each in one leg. "We were able to discuss with them immediately afterward," he said.

On a video of Hollande's speech posted on the Twitter account of the Elysee Palace, Hollande is seen speaking on a platform in front of an audience when suddenly a sound resembling a shot is heard.

Hollande briefly stopped speaking, looked in the direction of the noise and quietly said he hoped it was nothing serious, then that he didn't

think it was, and resumed his speech.

The incident occurred shortly before the end of the 20-minute speech. His speech was interrupted less than 20 seconds.

N'Gahane said a judicial probe has been launched under the supervision of the local prosecutor. An administrative inquiry will also be carried out, and the gendarme will have to give an account of what happened, he said.

NPR : Gunshot Rings Out As France's President Hollande Speaks

Bill Chappell Twitter

A gunshot was heard near the spot where French President Francois Hollande was speaking Tuesday, momentarily disrupting his inauguration of a new line in France's high-speed train system. Local media are reporting that the shot was mistakenly fired by a police sniper. The shot left two people wounded.

Hollande was nearly 17 minutes into his roughly 20-minute speech when the loud crack of gunfire was heard.

While there was no sign of panic, the leader was also plainly uncertain of what had just happened.

You can watch the video here — the shot is heard at the 16:50 mark, and this clip begins about 10 seconds before that point:

"I hope that it's nothing serious," Hollande said, looking off to the side of the stage where he heard the shot. He then paused for several seconds to take stock of the situation.

"I don't think so," the president concluded, raising a hand to assure those in the audience. He then launched back into his speech, discussing the merits of a rail project to take passengers between Bordeaux and other parts of France.

The errant shot was fired by a police sniper who was positioned on a roof as part of the security plan for the event, the Sud Ouest news outlet says, citing a local prefect in Villonon, the town in Charente the president visited today. The officer

fired while adjusting his position, prefect says.

Two people — a waiter who was there with the catering crew, and a worker who's employed by the train line — were wounded by the bullet: one whose calf was grazed and another who was shot in the leg, Sud Ouest says. Their injuries were not serious, the news outlet adds.

When major news happens, stay on top of the latest developments, delivered to your inbox.



As France's Towns Wither, Fears of a Decline in 'Frenchness' (UNE)

Adam Nossiter

Albi, an hour northeast of Toulouse, is among a growing number of French towns encountering commercial decline. Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

ALBI, France — The paint is fading, but the word is still clear. *Alimentation*, "Groceries." It seems like a stage prop, grafted above the window of the empty old storefront. Opposite stands a tattoo parlor. Nobody enters or leaves. The street is deserted.

Keep walking, and you'll find more vacant storefronts, scattered around the old center of this town dominated by its imposing 13th-century brick cathedral, one of France's undisputed treasures. Tourist shops and chain clothing stores are open, but missing are the groceries, cafes and butcher shops that once bustled with life and for centuries defined small-town France.

Measuring change, and decay, is not easy in France, where beauty is just around the corner and life can seem unchanged over decades. But the decline evident in Albi is replicated in hundreds of other

places. France is losing the core of its historic provincial towns — dense hubs of urbanity deep in the countryside where judges judged, Balzac set his novels, prefects issued edicts and citizens shopped for 50 cheeses.

A nearly empty street in Albi. "This phenomenon of the devaluation of the urban centers is worrisome," a government report said, "as the stores contribute so much to city life and largely fashion it." Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

In January, I went to Albi while covering the French presidential election. I've known the city for nearly 35 years, visiting a handful of times as part of a lifetime's engagement with France that began at age 4 when my family moved to Paris. My first trip to Albi came in 1982, with my college girlfriend, and I found a bustling, jewel-like city that took its ochre-red color from bricks that had been used since the Middle Ages and echoed the hot, meridional sun. I was captivated.

I returned in January not on the trail of a presidential candidate but to better understand a French paradox just beneath the surface of the campaign: the deep pride felt by the

French in what they regard as an unparalleled way of life, always accompanied by anxiety that it is facing extinction.

The campaign is like few before it in France, because of the looming question of whether the far-right candidate, Marine Le Pen, will do the once-unthinkable, and win. She has already pushed the discourse rightward and made a visceral promise to voters: to protect not just France, but *Frenchness*. Whether the menace is defined as Islam, immigration or globalization, her vow to voters is the same: I am the woman to preserve the French way of life.

The visible decline of so many historic city centers is intertwined with these anxieties. Losing the ancient French provincial capital is another blow to *Frenchness* — tangible evidence of a disappearing way of life that resonates in France in the same way that the hollowing out of main streets did in the United States decades ago. A survey of French towns found that commercial vacancies have almost doubled to 10.4 percent in the past 15 years. As these towns have declined, voters have often turned sharply rightward. Albi is traditionally

centrist, but the same conditions of decline and political anxiety are present, too.

Turn a corner in Albi, and you'll pass the last school inside the historic center, abandoned a few years ago. Down another street is the last toy store, now closed, and around a corner is the last independent grocery store, also shuttered. Walk down the empty, narrow streets on some nights and the silence is so complete that you can hear your footsteps on the stones.

Vacant storefronts in Albi. Adam Nossiter/The New York Times

"If nothing is done, a substantial part of the French soul will perish, taking with it more than half the French population," the businessman Charles Beigbeder wrote in *Le Figaro* recently, calling for a "Marshall Plan" for "peripheral France."

A Way of Life Fades

I arrived in Albi, population 49,000, on a Thursday evening, having driven in from Toulouse, an hour away. At the edge of town, I passed a giant shopping center, Les Portes d'Albi, where the parking lot was black with cars. In the Albi I had

known before, people had lived in town above their stores. Centuries of accumulated living were packed inside the tree-shaded boulevards. Shopping was as much about sociability as about buying.

Before arriving, I picked up a government report, an autopsy of many French provincial capitals: Agen, Limoges, Bourges, Arras, Beziers, Auxerre, Vichy, Calais and others. In these old towns, many harder hit than Albi, the interplay of the human-scale architecture, weathered stone and brick, and public life had been one of the crucibles of French history and culture for centuries. Now they were endangered, as even the dry language of the report conveyed that an essential part of French life is disappearing.

"This phenomenon of the devitalization of the urban centers is worrisome," the government report declared, "as the stores contribute so much to city life and largely fashion it."

My first appointment was with the town whistle-blower, who had agreed to give me a tour. Florian Jourdain wasn't exposing local corruption but the decline of the town that was hidden in plain sight. His meticulous blog, picked up by the French press, caused such resentment among Albi's commercial establishment that last year the merchants' association staged a demonstration against him in the main square.

Florian Jourdain has documented the decline of the town in his blog. Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

With a degree in history and studies in geography, Mr. Jourdain published an online map, with a skull-and-crossbones marking each vacant store. He discovered that nearly 40 percent of the remaining shops sold clothes, and he suspected that much of the trade was with tourists. Only a single traditional boulangerie, or bakery, remained in Albi's old core, and not a single free-standing butcher shop.

A Parisian by origin, Mr. Jourdain worked quasi-undercover, and few in town, even among his allies, seemed to know his last name. I met him on a Friday morning in the windswept plaza of the looming Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile, a giant brick fortress built eight centuries ago to awe the region's restive heretics. As we started on the Rue Mariès, the city's main commercial street, Mr. Jourdain pulled his hood down over his head to avoid being recognized, as I struggled to mentally repopulate the empty street with the liveliness that had delighted me 35 years before.

"For me, if you are precise, you can't be attacked," he said of his work. "It's a big problem for me that there are no grocery stores in the center of the city. There is no neighborhood cafe."

Street after street, we took the measure of the town's fragility. Name tags were missing from buzzers at the doorways of the old buildings. Above them the shutters stayed closed night and day, with estimates that 15 percent of these old houses are vacant.

Mr. Jourdain knew something was amiss soon after arriving from Paris in 2013. "Right away I realized it," he said. "Just across from us, and right next to us, there were two magnificent buildings, vacant. I thought it was strange. And then I started to see more and more empty stores."

We came to the Place Lapérouse, named after the great French explorer who was born in Albi in the 18th century. I had a flashback. On a warm afternoon many years before, I sat on a bench here, gazing at the old buildings around me. It had been quiet enough to hear the birds in the centenarian plane trees shading the square.

Now, it was a frigid intersection combined with a soulless pedestrian plaza. Cars whizzed past.

We moved on, passing two storefronts with "total liquidation" written across them. The sense I had many years before, of a dense urban space that was a living, breathing organism, was gone.

"Look, here, this used to be a cafe," he said, pointing to a woman's clothing store where the faint remains of a traditional cafe awning were still visible.

Mr. Jourdain spoke with the fervor of a disappointed suitor. He had moved to Albi to embrace its beauty and to escape the clamor of Paris but instead found a creeping listlessness. He saw his role as waking up his fellow citizens. "The risk is great for our beautiful episcopal city," he wrote in his blog.

We moved on to the empty Rue de la Croix Blanche. Again, we were the only walkers, passing a line of closed stores. On the Rue Puech Bérenguer we passed the last grocery store. On the Rue Peyrolière we saw the abandoned elementary school, closed in 2013, a classic Third Republic building where generations of Albigeois were educated. On the wall inside, a children's drawing from the last class was still visible.

Some streets in Albi stay empty much of the day. "There are whole buildings where there isn't a soul,"

Mr. Jourdain said. Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

"The cries of children will resound no longer," the local paper, *La Dépêche du Midi*, wrote when the school closed.

In former days, the covered market, the *Marché Couvert*, would have been a hub of life and commerce. No more. "You feel as though time has been suspended," Mr. Jourdain said.

Hours had passed on a sunny Friday in the center of town, yet on some streets we saw almost no one. "You see clearly that we are on a street that is dying," Mr. Jourdain said on Rue Emile Grand as we concluded our tour. "There are whole buildings where there isn't a soul."

I called City Hall for a meeting with the mayor, a member of France's center-right party, but was met with a distinct lack of enthusiasm from her spokeswoman. I was put off with the promise of a phone call the following week, and when I finally reached the mayor, Stéphanie Guiraud-Chaumeil, she argued that urban "devitalization" has had a "relatively moderate impact." She also angrily condemned Mr. Jourdain.

"He is an extraterrestrial," she said, "who came here to get talked about."

The head of the merchants' association, who had led the demonstration against Mr. Jourdain, was equally elusive. He was not to be found at the anonymous basement supermarket he runs beneath the *Marché Couvert*. Nobody knew when he would show up or how to reach him, and the association's office in the center of town had long since closed.

Leaving City Centers Behind

The next morning was a Saturday, the busiest shopping day of the week, with shops promising sales and customers inside the clothing stores. There was a hint of the liveliness I had remembered from many years before, but these were weekend shoppers, many from out of town.

I went to see Fabien Lacoste, a Socialist city councilman, in the shadow of the cathedral. As on most Saturdays, he was at work, flipping crepes at his outdoor food stand.

To him, Albi's fate was a cultural misfortune. City leaders had poured money into a high-concept modernistic new culture center at the town's edge. And the shopping mall had been built. Large grocery chains, called hypermarkets, had also been constructed outside the

city, with free parking. It is not that Albi no longer had commerce, or activity. But the essence of the ancient city was being lost.

The rise of the shopping centers traced the sharp rise in living standards brought on by what the French call the *Trentes Glorieuses*, the 30 glorious years from 1945 to 1975. Growth was around 4 percent; purchasing power of the average worker's salary rose 170 percent. The boost to consumer demand could not be met by the old center-city structure of small shops, small purchases. Malls and strip centers were born.

A shopping center outside Albi. France has the highest density of malls in Europe. Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

Today, France has the highest density of such retail space in all of Europe, even as vacancies in 190 historic town centers have gone to 10.4 percent in 2015 from 6.1 percent in 2001, according to the government report. Thus, the French paradox: a newly consumerist society that had stripped France of its "soul" — made even worse, now, by the fact that economic growth has collapsed.

"There's no bar, no cafe. We're in the southwest, for heaven's sake. It's a scandal," said Mr. Lacoste, serving up crepes to his customers. "We've lost that conviviality that was our signature. Before, each little neighborhood had its own center, with its own cafe. All that has disappeared."

"What I deplore is this devitalization," Mr. Lacoste added. "You won't be doing your shopping here."

By Sunday, Albi had reverted to its weekday torpor. I went for my evening run along the green Tarn river and passed a half-dozen people at most. In the twilight the town felt abandoned.

I finally caught up with the head of the merchants' association just as he was leaving his supermarket. He did not seem pleased to see me and was even less pleased with Mr. Jourdain. "There are town centers where the situation is much more complicated," he said.

Albi risks becoming a town appealing only to tourists. "Twenty years ago, the center of town was still animated," said Eric Lamarre, who closed Albi's last toy store last year. "People really came to town to buy. There were loads of lovely things. It buzzed with people." Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

My last interview before leaving town was with Eric Lamarre. Last

year, he closed Albi's last toy store. "Twenty years ago, the center of town was still animated," he said. "People really came to town to buy.

There were loads of lovely things. It buzzed with people."

The big shopping center opened in 2009, and his business declined until the end, when he was losing

50,000 euros (about \$53,000) a year.

"It's a political problem," he said. "These towns have been had. They

always say yes to the shopping center developers."

Albi, he said, "is still a magnificent city — for the tourists."

The
Washington
Post

A Paris exhibit of Nazi-looted art honors a Europe many fear is under threat again

McAuley

By James

PARIS — "If only the paintings could talk," she said.

For Anne Sinclair, the prominent French journalist and granddaughter of the legendary Parisian art dealer Paul Rosenberg, the modernist masterpieces in her family's collection contain multitudes of often dissonant stories. They represent major developments in 20th-century art: fauvism, expressionism, cubism. But they also testify to the darkness and brutality of the Holocaust.

After Adolf Hitler invaded France in 1940, the Nazis seized hundreds of thousands of works of art from Jewish collectors and dealers: The French government estimates around 100,000, but experts say the real figure is at least three times higher. Rosenberg, an early champion of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Georges Braque, was among the notable targets. Several of his most-prized pieces, including a 1918 Picasso portrait of the dealer's wife and daughter, made their way into the hands of Hermann Göring, the high-ranking Nazi official and connoisseur of stolen art.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

Please provide a valid email address.

Since her grandfather's death in 1959, Sinclair and her family have worked to recover as many missing works from the Rosenberg collection as possible — sometimes engaging in lengthy legal battles. On Thursday, Sinclair will open an exhibition at Paris's Musée Maillol of 66 paintings that once passed through her grandfather's gallery. But in the Europe of 2017, as nationalist parties soar in popularity — including in France — Sinclair, now 68, sees the exposition as a warning of what that type of regime can do when put in power.

"For the first time, I understood what my grandparents and my parents used to say about the 1930s," she said. "This is not to say we live in

the same kind of moment. It's different. But I feel I am also facing a world that all of a sudden seems totally foreign — and a world that disdains culture."

The exposition — an earlier version of which opened in Liege, Belgium, last fall — is titled "21 Rue La Boétie," after the address of Paul Rosenberg's original Paris gallery and the French title of Sinclair's memoir. In a cruel irony, the Nazis transformed the elegant mansion into what they called the Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question during the war.

[Art looted by the Nazis could be hiding in plain sight on the walls of Europe's great museums]

"The Nazis tried to destroy European civilization," Sinclair said. "They saw in art what they wanted to attack, to destroy." This, she noted, is the point in recovering and presenting these artworks — even more than preserving family memories: "Of course, we have to know what their story is, but the memory they preserve is ultimately the memory of a civilization."

The major restitutions to the Rosenberg family—two canvases by Henri Matisse, "Femme Assise" from the Cornelius Gurlitt collection discovered in Munich and "Robe bleue dans un fauteuil ocre" from a museum outside Oslo, Norway—were led by Art Recovery International, an organization founded by the lawyer Christopher Marinello in 2013.

For Emmanuelle Polack, a Paris-based art historian who also researched the two Matisse canvases, the project of restitution is both personal and collective. "When you give back a painting, you give back an identity, a family, a memory — but also a culture," she said.

More than 70 years after the end of World War II, the story of the Nazi assault on European art — Jewish-owned or otherwise — is well known. After the war, the Nuremberg trials established looting as a war crime, and after decades of delays, a number of high-profile

restitution cases have been successful.

In 2006, for example, the Austrian government was forced to return a famous Gustav Klimt portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer — the wife of a Jewish industrialist who later died in exile following Nazi persecution — to her niece, the Los Angeles resident Maria Altmann, who had fled to the United States as a young woman and who died in 2011.

In most cases, however, restitution is the exception, not the rule. The burden of proof lies with the plaintiff, and public institutions typically are loath to part with works of art they have held for decades. Also complicating matters is the fact that a particular artwork may have been stolen by the Nazis from its original Jewish owner but then legally acquired by an unsuspecting buyer after the war. In addition, few claimants have the means to fight a case that can last more than a decade.

Despite public fascination with restitution cases, some European governments have stopped actively searching for the rightful owners of stolen artworks. According to Agnes Peresztegi, a Paris-based lawyer and president of the Commission for Art Recovery, France is chief among them.

"Some countries have at least started," she said. "France hasn't scratched the surface."

According to statistics from the French Ministry of Culture, more than 60,000 stolen works of art were returned from Germany after the war. While more than half were reclaimed by their original owners in the late 1940s, a quarter were kept by the French state. Some 13,000 of those were sold, with the proceeds going into France's coffers, while the remaining 2,000 went to French museums.

Many are still on public display, marked with the anonymous "MNR," the French initials for "National Museums Recovery."

In the mid-1990s, when then-President Jacques Chirac for the first time formally apologized for

France's collaboration in the Holocaust, the French government did launch an investigation into the provenance of these orphaned artworks. But since restitution began in 1951, only 107 of the works kept by the French government have been returned, 79 from the MNR collection.

Progress has slowed since then — mostly, researchers say, because the government does not have the funds for arduous searches. Despite a push in recent years by French Sen. Corinne Bouchoux to reopen the restitution project, critics say little has changed.

"What I would like is for there to be put in place a welcome center that could orient people who have questions," said Polack, the historian, noting that many descendants are daunted by the bureaucratic red tape involved in filing such a claim. "It should be the honor of France to do this, an honor for citizens to work on this. If there is ever the possibility to repair — even a little bit — why not?"

Sinclair's exhibition presents just a sliver of the art that left Paris in the 1940s — a collection she hopes can testify to the power of European culture in a Europe where growing numbers no longer seem moved by the memory of the Holocaust and World War II.

Ahead of France's presidential election this spring, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front party, appears almost certain to at least qualify for the final round of the vote. Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, now 88, who co-founded the party in the mid-1970s, is a convicted Holocaust denier.

Even if Marine Le Pen loses, Sinclair said, "what does it mean for France — as a refuge, an asylum and a country of human rights — that so many French will have supported her? For me, that's a country that makes me afraid."

In the meantime, there are the canvases of Picasso, Matisse and Braque. "What we hope to show in this exposition," Sinclair said, "are, well, the forces of culture."

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Vinocur : The 'Cult of Lying' and France's Presidential Campaign

John Vinocur

Feb. 27, 2017 2:15 p.m. ET

The man who, it seems, has the best shot at keeping Marine Le Pen out of France's presidential palace is also offering voters these goodies: 100% reimbursement by the state for dentures, hearing aids and eyeglasses.

Emmanuel Macron, the 39-year-old former economy minister who often calls himself a "progressive," doesn't stop there. Without any apparent gift for reassuring the French about halting their sense of national decline and loss of identity, Mr. Macron has also promised the end of a residential tax that costs 80% of French families about €600 (\$635) a year.

Beyond vote fishing, he comes on big as a transcendent, post-left-right candidate committed to the "moralization" of French political life.

Beating Ms. Le Pen's nasty populists would be of great merit. Projections currently have Mr. Macron running ahead of the hard-right leader by more than 10 points for France's May 7 presidential election runoff. (The first round is April 23.)

But who believes anything about self-proclaimed above-the-melee politicians in France today? The depth of contempt for the political class in France is riveting. In a late-December poll, only 18% agreed with the proposition that "most politicians try to keep their election-

campaign promises." By contrast, 75% agreed that "French political leaders and elected officials are rather corrupt."

As they're-all-the-same-anyway disrespect is one reason François Fillon, the former prime minister and mainstream right-wing candidate, has poll scores that, though slipping, still indicate he could defeat Ms. Le Pen. Mr. Fillon is being investigated for having given his wife and children jobs as his assistants from 1988 to 2013, paying them hundreds of thousands of euros at taxpayers' expense—without his family doing much real work.

Here's a reflection of a political culture in deep decomposition. Mr. Fillon, who bills himself as the "moral" candidate, has offered only a vague apology about what he insists were legal jobs. His party, the Republicans, barely shrugged.

This lack of accountability extends to an incumbent Socialist Party, irretrievably split between its hard left and soft-liners. And to a Macron campaign whose positions have swiveled on the decriminalization of cannabis (from yes to no); on whether the candidate is a Socialist (again, yes to no); and on whether France's totemic 35-hour maximum workweek should be ended (once more, from yes to no).

Sadly, there are no exemplary promise-keepers or Honest Abes in France's immediate presidential past. Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-12) ran on a plank of affirmative action for

minorities and dropped it once on the job. The current president, François Hollande, got nowhere near success with his plans for economic and job-market reform. Although hardly anyone remembers, the very popular Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011 on embezzlement charges over fake jobs during an earlier term as Paris's mayor.

Thierry Pfister, a government spokesman during François Mitterrand's presidency (1981-95) and the author of a remarkable book on the French political mindset, reminded me last week that French law demands witnesses tell the truth but frees defendants from that obligation. Mr. Pfister believes that among its politicians, "France has a cult of lying. Some see it as the sign of a superior civilization. Attempting to limit its use makes you look ridiculous."

There's no overwhelming concern about the dishonesty of quick turnabouts from politicians' supposed convictions. Last week François Bayrou, a three-time centrist presidential candidate, proposed an alliance, which Mr. Macron accepted. The two insist that together they will "moralize" politics.

Anything goes. French television then showed earlier clips of Mr. Bayrou describing Mr. Macron: "I don't recognize myself in what he represents," Mr. Bayrou is shown to say. "It won't work. What's behind all

this is an attempt to achieve political power by very great financial interests."

Mr. Bayrou now calls Mr. Macron, a former Rothschild banker, "brilliant." Cocksure in his youth, Mr. Macron says, "I assert my immaturity and political inexperience."

Beyond that, what do we actually know of Mr. Macron's views on a consistently meaner world? He likes to use the word "independence" in describing France's global role—which means trying not to take sides—although in January Alexander Orlov, Moscow's ambassador to Paris, described Mr. Macron to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung as "pro-Russian."

In the end, the options in this election are not the worst that France could have, with Mr. Macron and possibly Mr. Fillon (who also proposes free dentures) but most hopefully a sensible electorate pointing to the defeat of Ms. Le Pen. She's currently defying the police by refusing to answer questions about her National Front's alleged fake job-making.

But the visible French dollop of national common sense is accompanied by a miserable truth. There's not a single politician in the country who can credibly reassure voters: Trust me, everything is going to turn out fine.

Mr. Vinocur is a columnist for The Wall Street Journal Europe.

The New York Times

Longing for Obama as President — of France

Aurelien Breeden

Obama for President? Bonne Chance!

A poster-driven campaign calling for the former American president to become France's next leader, started as a joke between friends, has gained tens of thousands of signatures online.

By AURELIEN BREEDEN and CAMILLA SCHICK. Photo by Martin Bureau/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images. Watch in Times Video »

PARIS — Many voters in France cannot identify all the candidates running for president, who now number more than a dozen. But they recognize the smiling politician on campaign posters with the slogan "Oui on peut."

That's French for "Yes we can." While the politician, Barack Obama,

is American, that has not stopped a group of Parisians who have started a campaign to persuade him to run for president of France.

They say they are deeply uninspired or worried by the actual candidates, most notably Marine Le Pen, the far-right politician who is leading in the polls.

The organizers have placed red-white-and-blue posters with Mr. Obama's portrait, and the French translation of his slogan, around Paris to publicize their campaign.

"There isn't one man or woman that we can project ourselves onto, someone we would want to vote for and fight for without hesitation, someone who unites people and has a strong aura," one of the French organizers said of why they are supporting Mr. Obama.

The idea was originally conceived as a joke, concocted recently over drinks with friends, said the organizer, who asked to be identified only by the name Antoine.

He described himself as a fan of the Yes Men, the famous political pranksters, and said that he and his friends were surprised by how many people had signed their online petition. By Tuesday evening, it had attracted more than 43,000 signatures.

The goal is to gather one million signatures by March 15 to convince Mr. Obama that he should run because "he has the best C.V. in the world for the job," according to the petition.

Kevin Lewis, a spokesman for Mr. Obama, declined to comment.

Europeans viewed Mr. Obama's departure from office with a mix of

admiration and regret, and for those who have struggled to come to grips with President Trump's attitude and policies, that feeling has only intensified.

"I think the timing of it all means that people are very nostalgic of Obama," Antoine said.

But the organizers do not have French law on their side.

Presidential candidates must be at least 18 and part of the French electorate. They must gather the signatures of at least 500 elected officials from around the country to be put on the ballot, a requirement introduced by President Charles de Gaulle in 1962. (At that time, the bar was 100.)

Most important, they have to be French.



Petition urging Obama to run for president in France gains 42,000 signatures

The slogan in French is, "Oui, on peut," which translates into "Yes, we can."

Former President Obama is a U.S. citizen, which means he is an ineligible candidate, but that did not stop 42,000 supporters in the country to sign an online petition urging him to run.

One of the petition's organizers told the BBC that the message is intended to the eligible candidates running for office: "Hey guys, you don't really make us dream."

With Europe's migrant influx and fears of Islamic extremism on many voters' minds, polls show high support for the tough-on-security platform of conservative former Prime Minister Francois Fillon and the nationalist campaign of far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

However, Fillon has stumbled on allegations of fake taxpayer-funded jobs for his wife and children - particularly damaging for someone pledging to slash public spending. Le Pen, who came in third in the 2012 race, is facing financial

investigations too. And while she hopes to ride a wave of anti-establishment, anti-European Union sentiment to power, numerous critics fear her worldview is racist and dangerous.

The New York Times reported that many voters in France are unable to identify many of the 12 candidates.

The paper reported that some political organizers in the country have been placing red-white-and-blue posters with Obama's picture on city streets.

"There isn't one man or woman that we can project ourselves onto, someone we would want to vote for and fight for without hesitation, someone who unites people and has a strong aura," one of the organizers told the paper.

A spokesman for Obama declined to comment for the paper.

Newsweek : Make Obama the next French president? Yes We Can, Say Campaigners

A petition aimed at making a liberal icon the next president of France is taking off. Dissatisfied with the choices on offer, fans of a much-loved statesman are insisting he step in.

There's just one problem; the statesman in question is an American: former U.S. President Barack Obama.

The petition had garnered almost 44,000 signatures as of Wednesday morning.

Try Newsweek for only \$1.25 per week

"The French are ready to make radical choices," the petition website states, "That's lucky because we have a radical idea to propose to them."

"We think it is time to move to the 6th Republic to get France out of its lethargy.

"To launch this 6th Republic, we wish to strike a blow by electing a

foreign President at the head of our beautiful country.

"Barack Obama has completed his second term as President of the United States on January 21, why not hire him as President for France?"

Organizers aim to collect one million signatures before March 15.

There's just one problem. Although he is out of a job and organizers say Obama has "the best CV in the

world for the job," the former U.S. leader is not a French citizen—a requirement for presidential candidates.

Still, it's 2017. Who knows what could happen next... (Disclaimer: this is definitely not going to happen.)



The Underdog Candidate in France's Elections: Obama

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

On Tuesday night, U.S. President Donald Trump will address both houses of Congress in his first joint address to Congress. The address — which is like a State of the Union in all respects except that it is not technically a State of the Union — is typically used by the U.S. president to present his vision for the coming year, and to call on Congress to see that vision.

Trump's speech probably won't be an exception to that, although it may be different in tone. Based on speeches and statements he has made since his inauguration, the address could take on the feel of a campaign speech filtered through the frustration that comes with the responsibilities of governing and doing daily battle with the media.

This is what we expect to hear tonight. (If you are the drinking game type, please feel free to pair each of these with a sip. If you feel that treating this as a drinking game is inappropriate given the gravitas of this situation, feel free to ignore this parenthetical):

The phrase "radical Islamic terrorism." Much was made by Republicans of U.S. President Barack Obama's refusal to use the phrase tying terrorism to Islam. Trump has no such qualms, although some around him do — his new National Security Advisor, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, apparently tried to caution Trump against using the phrase, or at least to change it to "radical Islamist terrorism," which draws more of a distinction between fundamentalist Muslims and the rest of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. Some suspect Trump will use it anyway.

Reaffirmation that his stance on immigration is the correct one. Trump ran into some trouble with respect to immigration in his first five weeks in office, what with his ban on individuals from seven Muslim majority countries blocked (for now) and Mexico staying firm in its refusal to pay for a border wall. He may use this speech to note that Americans want his immigration and border policies to be implemented.

Some reference to his margin of Electoral College victory. If he mentioned it in response to a question on anti-Semitism in front of

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he could very well mention it in front of Congress.

A brief explanation of why his victory means Congress should confirm his nominations more quickly. This has been a favorite refrain of U.S. press secretary Sean Spicer at White House press briefings, and Trump could take his opportunity speaking before Congress to say the same.

A brief explanation of why intelligence leaks are a threat to America. Trump may avoid this subject all together, given that it is directly connected to what Trump says is the lesser story — his potential ties to Russia. However, mentioning only the importance of intelligence and the need to stop leaks could be both a chance to repair ties with the intelligence community and to insist to Congress that leaks are indeed more problematic than the president's potential relationship to Russia.

Insistence that Obamacare will, in time, be repealed and replaced with a better plan. Trump surprised some by his remarks on Monday that "nobody" knew how complicated

replacing Obamacare would be. The speech could serve as a corrective to that.

Insistence that the economy will dramatically improve. Trump already took credit on Twitter for how much lower the national debt is now than it was during Obama's first month in office. The speech could contain some promise of how the economic best is yet to come (and how that will be achieved through bilateral, not multilateral, trade).

"America first." Last Friday, Trump told the Conservative Political Action Conference that there is no global flag or anthem, and that his job is to consider Americans. This idea could make a verbal appearance tonight.

The country needs to come together. Trump has said that, while he could give his achievements so far in office an "A," his messaging deserves more of a "C." Some close to Trump have reportedly suggested the speech will be an optimistic one, reestablishing the president's tone. And it might be. Alternatively, it might include lines like this, which seem to be calling for America to come together, but in effect call for

one part of America to come over to the other.

"We will make America great again."



French Holocaust historian detained for 10 hours at US customs

By Donie O'Sullivan and Mayra Cuevas, CNN

Updated 10:57 AM ET, Tue February 28, 2017

Historian Henry Rousso works with the French National Centre for Scientific Research and has ties to Columbia University, Harvard, and others.

Story highlights

- Henry Rousso detained in Houston for ten hours
- Academic has been traveling to US for 30 years

New York (CNN) A French Holocaust historian who was detained for 10 hours at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport says "The United States seems no longer quite the United States."

Henry Rousso was due to take part in a discussion "Writing in dark times" at Texas A&M University when he was stopped last week.

He says it was the first time in 30 years of traveling to the US that he experienced any problems on entry.

Rousso says an immigration officer told him he wasn't "allowed to give a lecture and receive an honorarium" with his tourist visa. The US State Department allows foreign nationals to receive an honorarium under a tourist visa if they are a lecturer or a speaker and under certain guidelines, all of which Rousso met.

'Shaken' and 'disturbed'

"He is shaken," said Richard J. Golsan, director of the Center for Humanities Research at Texas A&M, who invited Rousso to the conference.

"At this point he loves this country but is frankly disturbed about what is going on. We asked him if he saw this was a result of the new immigration ban. He said he thinks this is the new spirit for immigration, much more suspicious and frankly a hostile take on these things."

Golsan, who invited Rousso to the conference, told CNN an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent called him to corroborate Rousso's story.

"My own experience talking to the agent was unsettling," he said. "All he had to do was Google 'Henry

Rousso' and he could see he is who he claimed to be."

Rousso specializes in the study of the World War II and post-war period.

"He was born in Egypt and left Egypt under extremely painful circumstances because he was Jewish. This reminded him of those traumatic experiences," Golsan said.

Golsan notified Texas A&M lawyers and the French Consulate after Rousso told him that he was being "deported." When they intervened, Rousso was told his detention had been a mistake and he was allowed to enter the US.

News reaches France

"We deplore this incident and we hope that the American authorities will remain attentive to the conditions of circulation of our French citizens, who, as in the case of Professor Rousso, contribute to the vitality of relations between France and the United States," the French Foreign Ministry told CNN.

French presidential Emmanuel Macron weighed in on the story, tweeting on Sunday, "There is no excuse for what happened to

@Henry_Rousso. Our country is open to scientists and intellectuals. #WelcomeToFrance."

Fellow historian, and CNN contributor, Ruth Ben-Ghiat paid tribute to Rousso on Twitter, saying his work on the cost of forgetting the past is "so relevant."

'A welcoming nation'

ICE said it would not comment on an individual case but said, "The United States has been and continues to be a welcoming nation." It added: "Applicants for admission bear the burden of proof to establish that they are clearly eligible to enter the United States. In order to demonstrate that they are admissible, the applicant must overcome all grounds of inadmissibility."

In a blog post about his experience, Rousso alluded to Donald Trump's comments about Paris at CPAC last week. Rousso wrote, "I heard recently that 'Paris isn't Paris anymore.' The United States seems no longer quite the United States."

Camille Verdier in Paris contributed to this report



Inside the Heart of French Prisons

Tara John

Prisons reflect the societies they inhabit, says Magnum photographer Paolo Pellegrin. France's over-stuffed penitentiaries, in which over half the population is estimated to be Muslim, offer a rather unsettling mirror for an electorate soon to decide on the future of their country.

Pellegrin — whose nearly three-decade-long career brought him to penitentiaries in Guantanamo Bay, Liberia, Brazil and Cambodia — spent five days documenting life in the French prison of Meaux-Chauconin, 35 miles northeast of Paris. Meaux-Chauconin is one of 185 French prisons that have been thrust to the forefront of political campaigns ahead of first round presidential elections in April; elections that polls suggests a second-round run-off in May between far right, National Front leader Marine Le Pen and centrist candidate, Emmanuel Macron.

Human rights groups have deplored the deteriorating conditions of French prisons for more than a decade, a situation caused by a prison population growing faster than available cells. A 2006 Council

of Europe report detailed endemic overcrowding, dirty cells, unsanitary toilets and inmates sleeping on mattresses on the ground. The issue has yet to be remedied. Today, according to the Ministry of Justice, there are 68,500 inmates against a nominal capacity of 54,600.

But it took recent terrorist attacks to bring this issue to the forefront of public discourse. While serving time in Fleury-Mérogis, Europe's largest prison, Chérif Kouachi met Amedy Coulibaly. Kouachi attacked the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo with his brother, Said, days before Coulibaly's raid on a kosher supermarket in Jan. 2015, killing a policeman and four Jewish shoppers. In June 2016, Larossi Abballa, a former prisoner flagged by prison officials for attempting to make other inmates join him in jihad, killed a police officer and his wife in an incident described by President François Holland as "unquestionably a terrorist act."

In the aftermath of these attacks, politicians railed against the radicalization in prisons while numerous reports on the notoriously overcrowded facilities highlighted

how weaker cellmates languishing in dangerous conditions could be indoctrinated. France's Prime Minister Manuel Valls has since promised to build 33 more prisons by 2025, but prison officials say this is insufficient to alleviate the burden.

Responding to the terrorist threat, judges have started to deliver harsher sentences that push the conviction rate up and exacerbate the problem of overcrowding. "French people are becoming more and more traumatized and they want to see tough systems to terrorism," Farhad Khosrokhavar, an expert on radicalization at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), tells TIME. "When two attacks kill more than 250, authorities cannot [react] liberally to it."

Officials have tried different initiatives to address these issues. De-radicalization programs are already in place, which see extremists and those susceptible to extremism corralled off from the general population and placed in high security units, where they receive visits from imams, teachers, sociologists and psychologists.

Macron has reportedly suggested taking this one step further by creating separate prisons for French citizens who have fought for Islamic State. Le Pen, meanwhile, visited Meaux-Chauconin on Feb. 22, pledging an extra \$2.3 billion in funding to create 40,000 extra cells, and reiterated her promise to make life imprisonment "real."

Yet the problem goes beyond the prisons, where the susceptibility of inmates to radicalization is reflective of more complex problems in French society. Many Muslims, who come from impoverished backgrounds, feel "rejected by the society" due to the strong arm of the French state, and are arrested at a higher rate than other demographic groups. Khosrokhavar estimates that Muslims make up between 40-60% of inmates; a population highly susceptible to messages that promise them an alternative sense of solidarity.

A 2015 study found that Muslim men are four times less likely to secure job interview compared to their Catholic counterpart in France. This sense of discrimination has been further exacerbated by the French

form of secularism known as *laïcité*, which separates religion from public life, leading to the ban on face veils in public. "Laïcité has become a religion itself" Khosrokhavar says,

"they [Muslims] feel rejected by the system, and there is a kind of suspicion [in French society] that once you are a Muslim, you are not a good citizen."

Paolo Pellegrin is a photographer represented by Magnum Photos.

Alice Gabriner, who edited this photo essay, is TIME's international photo editor.

Tara John is a reporter at TIME.

The New York Times

In Films From France, Dark Answers to 'What's Eating Us?'

Stephen Holden

Jamil McCraven in "Nocturama." Grasshopper Films

In the French horror comedy "Nocturama," one of the most talked about films in this year's *Rendez-Vous With French Cinema* series, a diverse group of young Parisians plant explosives in public places, then hide out in a luxury department store as the city burns. Who are they, and what do they want? As the mystery deepens, it looks increasingly as though they are just bored kids acting out a terrorist fantasy without regard for the consequences. There is no mention of the Islamic State or terrorism with political roots.

Written and directed by Bertrand Bonello ("Saint Laurent," "House of Tolerance,") this expertly choreographed piece of nihilistic mayhem was conceived well before the Charlie Hebdo shooting and a succession of terrorist attacks in the French capital in 2015.

The amorality of "Nocturama" suggests the chic cinematic equivalent of a violent video game played for no other reason than to pass the time by stirring up adrenaline. Might it be Mr. Bonello's vision of capitalism self-destructing in a fit of boredom?

"Nocturama" and other films in the series, which opens Wednesday under the auspices of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, scramble genres, starting as one thing, then turning into another. They're distinguished by a coldblooded sense of humor and a cynical, smirking embrace of the world's horrors as entertainment.

Nocturama (2016) - Trailer (English Subs) Video by UniFrance

In "Nocturama," the aura of deadly stealth and dread that pervades the first half turns comically satirical in the second half, when the terrorists hole up in the department store. They try on clothes, sample food and wine, play loud music and fitfully monitor the response on television. One apple-cheeked young man even ventures outdoors and invites a homeless man, who later fetches his wife, to join the party inside. The movie observes the man and his wife, both blissfully unaware of the day's traumatic events as they gorge on the store's goodies. And in a must-see *tour-de-force* moment of hilarity, a young man dons makeup and lip-syncs Shirley Bassey crowing "My Way."

If taken seriously, "Nocturama" is a critique of a culture anesthetized by a rampant materialism that the younger generation takes for granted. To these self-styled terrorists, the store's contents are little more than worthless stuff, the equivalent of Christmas toys that will soon be abandoned.

That ennui applies to the deadly escapade itself. Once carried out with minor hitches, these warriors lose interest and regress into whiny, petulant children. They plan to leave the store just before the break of dawn, but what then?

Slack Bay / Ma Loute (2016) - Trailer (English Subs) Video by UniFrance

"Nocturama" is not the only movie among the series's 23 selections to evoke the overturning of the social order. The misanthropic provocateur Bruno Dumont's "Slack Bay" is a slapstick detective farce set in 1910 in a picturesque seaside fishing village near Calais where everyone is demented. Humanity consists of deformed half-wits with bestial

appetites. They earn extra money by transporting the rich by rowboat from one shore to the other.

The story focuses on two clans: one made up of poor full-time residents, the other of rich summer vacationers with whom they uneasily coexist. Disappearances plague the rich tourists; what they don't know is that the poor are imprisoning and then cannibalizing them. In a grisly moment, the monstrous matriarch emerges from the shack they call home waving a severed limb and asks, "Who wants more foot?"

Other extreme caricatures include Aude (Juliette Binoche), a trilling, head-tossing socialite, and Machin (Didier Després), the buffoonish police chief, who is so fat he can hardly stand. Late in the film, he levitates while the others frantically try to catch him.

Unlikely as it seems, "Slack Bay" received nine nominations, including best film, at the César Awards (the French equivalent of the Oscars), though it didn't win any prizes.

"Slack Bay" is not the only film in the *Rendez-Vous* series to explore cannibalism. Julia Ducournau's debut film, "Raw," is set in a veterinarian college where a young vegetarian develops an insatiable appetite for raw flesh while undergoing grotesque hazing rituals. As the gore escalates, the movie, which nauseated some audience members at the Toronto International Film Festival, becomes a flesh-eating orgy of cannibalistic sex.

Trailer: 'Frantz'

A preview of the film

By MUSIC BOX FILMS on February 28, 2017. Photo by Jean-Claude

Moireau&mdash — Foz/Music Box Films. Watch in Times Video »

One of the most anticipated entries, François Ozon's "Frantz," another multiple César nominee, is a remake of Ernst Lubitsch's 1932 film "Broken Lullaby." A stern antiwar screed has been softened into a romantic melodrama in which Adrien (Pierre Niney), a young Frenchman, travels to Germany just after World War I to seek out the family of Frantz, a German soldier he says he knew and befriended in Paris before the war.

Through Anna, Frantz's fiancée, Adrien meets Frantz's parents and becomes a surrogate son, regaling them with fictional personal memories. He is actually the guilt-stricken French soldier who shot Frantz. The mostly black-and-white film, which periodically bursts into color, represents Mr. Ozon at his most lyrically seductive. But except for a fiery speech Frantz's father makes to other Germans who lost their sons, the fierce antiwar message of "Broken Lullaby" is superseded by Adrien and Anna's blossoming romance.

"Frantz" is something of an anomaly in a series where the most controversial and acclaimed films push boundaries and blur genre distinctions. In addition to "Nocturama," "Slack Bay," "Raw" and "Elle," a current French import that isn't in the series, all qualify as horror comedies. As we grow increasingly unshockable, the horror movie has emerged from its niche, and laughing and screaming are becoming the same thing.

The New York Times

Friedman : Tony Blair's Lesson for President Trump

Thomas L. Friedman

Playing with these big systems is dangerous, not because they don't need improving — they do — but because many of the prescriptions — let's just put up a wall or exit — will make things so much worse for so many more people. The critics are great at pointing out the flaws of these systems, but they always forget to mention the hundreds of millions of people they lifted from poverty to prosperity and the

extraordinary 70 years of peace they maintained since the end of World War II.

In their place, the Brexiters and Trumpsters want to return us to a globe of everyone-for-themselves nationalisms that helped to foster two world wars. They speak of leading grand "movements." Their vow is "rip it, don't fix it." As Blair noted, "The one incontrovertible characteristic of politics today is its propensity for revolt."

It's dangerous nonsense. In the Cold War era the world was glued together by these global institutions and by the fear and the discipline of two superpowers. In the post-Cold War era the world was glued together by these big global systems and a U.S. hegemon. We're now in the post-post Cold War world, when U.S. leadership and the glue of these big global systems are *needed more than ever* — because the simultaneous accelerations in technology, globalization and climate change are weakening

states everywhere, spawning super-empowered angry people and creating vast zones of disorder.

If we choose at this time to diminish America's global leadership and these big stabilizing systems — and just put America first, thereby prompting every other country to put its own economic nationalism first — we will be making the gravest mistake we possibly could make.

That was a big part of Blair's speech. Blair is unpopular in the

U.K. — but that's precisely what liberated him to say what many in British politics know to be true but won't say: Brexit was a stupid idea, based on an old political fantasy of a minority of conservatives; it was sold with bogus data; and following through on it will make Britain poorer, weaker and more isolated — and Europe more unstable.

"The British pound is down around 12 percent against the euro and 20 percent against the dollar since the Brexit referendum," he noted. "This is the international financial market's assessment of our future prosperity: We will be poorer. The price of imported goods in supermarkets is up, and thus so is the cost of living."

The way Blair described Prime Minister Theresa May's commitment to executing Brexit — no matter what — sounded just like G.O.P. leaders' support for Trump's ideas after they had denounced them as utterly crackpot during the presidential campaign. "Nine months ago," Blair said of May, "she was telling us that leaving would be bad for the country, its economy, its security, and its place in the world. Today, it is apparently a 'once-in-a-generation opportunity' for greatness."

Blair added: "May says that she wants Britain to be a great, open trading nation. Our first step in this endeavor? To leave the largest free-trade bloc in the

world. She wants Britain to be a bridge between the E.U. and the U.S. Is having no foothold in Europe really the way to do that?"

"We are told that it is high time that our capitalism became fairer. How do we start laying the foundation for such a noble cause? By threatening Europe with a move to a low-tax, lightly regulated economy, which is the very antithesis of that cause."

And what will future historians say about all those immigrants who came to the U.K. and were a key reason for the pro-Brexit vote, Blair asked? "That the migrants were terrible people who threatened the country's stability? No, they will find that, on the whole, the migrants were well behaved, worked hard, paid their taxes and were a net economic benefit to the country."

Blair recalled other bogus arguments that were used by Brexit advocates and that have already evaporated — like the notions that leaving the E.U. would save Britain some \$440 million a week for its national health care service and that there was a danger — most effectively exploited in a fear-inducing poster — that Syrian refugees would overwhelm the U.K., but there was no Syrian refugee flood.

"None of this," concluded Blair, "ignores the challenges that stoked the anger fueling the Brexit vote:

those left behind by globalization; the aftermath of the financial crisis; stagnant incomes for some families; and the pressures posed by big increases in migration, which make perfectly reasonable people anxious and then feel unheard in their anxiety."

That is true in America, too. Donald Trump is not wrong about everything. We do need to fix our trading relationship with China, which has taken advantage of some of our openness. NATO members should pay their fair share for the alliance. We can't let in every immigrant who wants to come to America. We do need to rebuild our infrastructure and enact sensible deregulation.

It's what Trump believes — but is provably wrong — that scares me.

Like that imports from Mexico and China — not robots, software and automation — are the big culprit in taking middle-class jobs; that we are being swamped by immigrants from Mexico, when immigration from Mexico today is really net zero (most migrants are coming from failed states in Central America, which Mexico, the second-largest source of paying tourists to our country, plays a key role in preventing); that climate change is a hoax and we should lower emission rules on coal-fired power plants to restore coal jobs and ignore the long-term health implications and the impact on

better-paying clean-power jobs; that the key to restoring middle-class jobs is not by investing in people, health care, infrastructure and lifelong learning, but rather by imposing a border tax. And that the E.U., NATO, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and Nafta are just outdated pillars of a global, oppressive "administrative state" that needs deconstructing — rather than pillars of a liberal democratic order that have globalized our values and our rules and our standards to our great benefit.

As Blair said of the E.U.: "In the long term, this is essentially an alliance of values: liberty, democracy and the rule of law. As the world changes and opens up across boundaries of nation and culture, which values will govern the 21st century? Today, for the first time in my adult life, it is not clear that the resolution of this question will be benign. Britain, because of its history, alliances and character, has a unique role to play in ensuring that it is."

So does America. But the spread of those values doesn't animate Trump. The world is a win-lose real estate market for him. In the short term, he may rack up some discreet wins. But America became as prosperous and secure as it is today by building a world in our image — not just a world where we're the only winners.



How Geert Wilders Became America's Favorite Islamophobe

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

For years, the Dutch populist quietly built ties to fringes of the Republican party. Now he's got friends in the White House.

At a dinner at the Reagan Presidential Library in June 2009, a then-relatively obscure Dutch MP named Geert Wilders was being honored as a "hero of conscience" by an organization called the American Freedom Alliance, which purports to defend Western values.

After cocktails and a three-course meal, the lanky Dutch lawmaker with the shock of peroxide blond hair got up to give what by then was his standard speech. Its core message? That Islam is not a religion, but "first and foremost, an ideology; to be precise, like communism and fascism, a political, totalitarian ideology, with worldwide aspirations." There is no such thing as "moderate Islam," he continued, because "Islam's heart lies in the Quran and the Quran is an evil book." He then laid out his plan to combat this evil: a stay on immigration from Muslim countries; the expulsion of criminal foreigners

and, following denaturalization, criminals with dual nationality; the closing of Islamic schools ("for they are fascist institutions"); and a ban on the construction of mosques.

To Dutch ears, Wilders speech was not new — these ideas had already cropped up in interviews with Dutch media and in articles Wilders had written. Mainstream politicians had dismissed his ideas as "ridiculous" and unconstitutional, but a portion of the Dutch public, at least, was fascinated. And his American audience that night at the Reagan library found the anti-Islam rant exciting, too. When he finished speaking, Wilders received a standing ovation. My tablemate was ecstatic. "I have never heard a politician say this," she exclaimed.

She was right. Few political figures in the United States in 2009 would have said publicly that Islam is not a religion. But that was then; this is 2017, a time when Wilders's words could have easily come straight out of the mouth of any number of officials from Donald Trump's administration, from prominent White House aides Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, and Sebastian

Gorka to Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Long before Nigel Farage became a household name in the United States, before Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany had even been founded, and before Marine Le Pen emerged from the local council of a small northern French town, it was Wilders, an MP from a small northern European country, who was laying the groundwork for closer ties between the European far right and a then-peripheral element of the Republican Party. Those ties now have the potential to coalesce into an international populist, anti-Islam movement.

In Wilders, whose Party for Freedom (PVV) is currently in a tight race for the top spot in the polls in the Netherlands's upcoming parliamentary election, Americans who sought to further the demonization of Islam found a perfect role model and poster child. Wilder wasn't just an agitator, but a victim of both extremist death threats and politically correct culture — and one untainted by accusations of anti-Semitism or Nazi ties.

The up-and-coming Wilders, for his part, found in America what he needed, too: attention, adoring crowds, and financial support.

The up-and-coming Wilders, for his part, found in America what he needed, too: attention, adoring crowds, and financial support.

Geert Wilders first appeared on the American right-wing scene earlier in 2009. He made an appearance that year in Washington D.C., where he spoke at the annual Conservative Political Action Committee conference (though not as an official speaker), and later turned up in Florida, Boston, and California. When I first reported on Geert Wilders's supporters in the United States, I was struck by how the organizations sponsoring him seemed to overlap. The same people appeared at the same conferences, sat on each others' boards, gave each other awards. This "Islamophobia network," as critics called it, operated at the time on the outer fringes of the Republican Party. It included Daniel Pipes's Middle East Forum, the David Horowitz Freedom Center, Frank Gaffney's Center for Security

Policy. as well as bloggers like Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, who once called Wilders “the ideal man.” All these organizations would at some point host Wilders as a speaker at their conferences.

A year before, Wilders had released his anti-Islam film *Fitna*, which led to his prosecution under Dutch law for hate speech. The case against Wilders turned him into a sort of celebrity in American anti-Islam circles: It made him a martyred freedom fighter, a Cassandra of the consequences of allowing Islam to invade the West. Wilders, who had been threatened by extremists, had already been under 24-hour protection from Dutch security since 2004. His court case was seen as a further harbinger of things to come. If Muslims could use the legal system to try to silence a critic of Islam, would similar tactics be used in America? When I spoke to David Horowitz in 2009 about his support of Wilders, he told me that Wilders was “Exhibit A” of the terrible results of the “Islamization of Europe.” Wilders was “the canary in the coal mine,” he said. Daniel Pipes launched an initiative which he called “lawfare,” about the abuse of the legal system to muzzle critics of Islam. Buttons started to appear on the websites of American organizations to donate money for a defense fund for Wilders.

In fact, no such defense fund existed: The buttons took readers to a page where they could donate directly to Wilders’s PVV. The amount raised is not known; at the time, political parties in the Netherlands were not required to disclose contributions from abroad. Wilders himself denied that the money he was raising benefitted him or his party. It was all to finance his defense, he told me at the time.

The hate speech charges, of which he was acquitted after a lengthy trial, turned out to be a pivotal moment for Wilders and his efforts to spread his anti-Islam message beyond the Netherlands. What appeared to be an extremist message incompatible with conservative American ideas, was transformed into a brave stance for freedom of speech and against encroaching jihadi attempts to

silence a speaker of truth about the growing assault by Muslim immigrants on the Judeo-Christian, humanist values of Western democracies. I recently talked to Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, someone who has followed Wilders for years. He called Wilders “one of the most effective spokespersons for the idea that Islam is a danger to national security. The fact that Wilders himself is under 24-hour protection gives him authenticity. He is seen as a seer and truth-teller.” It also helped in the United States that he wasn’t tainted by ties to anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi organizations, as other far-right European politicians have been. Wilders is a huge and vocal admirer of Israel, which he has visited numerous times and talks about Israel often as the last defender of democracy in an anti-democratic Muslim region of the world before his American audiences.

In the years since *Fitna*, a growing number of prominent figures in American politics have become interested in Wilders’s message. In November 2014, Wilders spoke at the “restoration weekend” that the David Horowitz Freedom Center organizes every year in Palm Beach, Florida. Horowitz has financially supported Wilders for years, according to disclosure statements that Wilders’s party filed with the Dutch government. In 2015, the PVV received 108,000 euros from the Horowitz Freedom Center; it is not clear how Wilders spent the donation. On another disclosure form that lists Wilders’s international travel, six trips to the United States are listed in the period from June 2013 to July 2016. They were sponsored by the Freedom Center, the Gatestone Institute, and the International Freedom Alliance Foundation. The latter, according to its 2015 IRS form, lists Robert J. Shillman as the only office holder of the foundation. Shillman is the founder and chairman of Cognex Corp., and he is an important donor to the David Horowitz Freedom Center.

The restoration weekend that year was also attended by then-Alabama

senator, now attorney general, Jeff Sessions, his aide Stephen Miller, now White House senior policy advisor, and Congressman Louie Gohmert (R-Texas), who, at the event, invited Wilders to Capitol Hill. Wilders subsequently spent two days in the nation’s capital in April 2015, when he gave a press conference near the Capitol with Gohmert and Steve King (R-Iowa) and spoke at a breakfast meeting organized by King. Congressmen King and Gohmert are known for their anti-gay and anti-women’s rights positions, but Wilders, though he himself holds much more liberal views on gay rights and women’s issues, and describes himself as agnostic, had no problem aligning himself with American-style religious conservatives. The anti-Islam, anti-immigrant message had become their unifying issue.

Mark Potok, senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, who has studied Geert Wilders’s forays in America for years, told me that

Wilders played a pivotal role in the convergence of America’s anti-immigration movement with the anti-Islam movement.

Wilders played a pivotal role in the convergence of America’s anti-immigration movement with the anti-Islam movement. “What were in the past distinct movements, became one because immigrants came to be portrayed as a threat to national security and Wilders played a part in this.” As early as May 2009, Wilders raised the issue of immigration in an address (via telecast) at a conference in Nashville, Tennessee organized by the conservative magazine *New English Review*. He was giving advice on how to deal with “the enormous amounts of Somali people coming to your city.” If they commit crimes, send them back to where they came from, Wilders recommended. “If they are not willing to integrate, the penalty should be as harsh as possible.”

Congressman King recently told *Politico* that he has sent messages to the White House recommending that they reach out to Wilders. But Wilders hardly needs an introduction. Since January 2016, Wilders has written a monthly

column for the right-wing news site Breitbart, where White House Chief Strategist Stephen Bannon was, until recently, the CEO. Wilders’s “Netherlands First,” anti-immigrant, anti-Islam writings are a natural fit for the website. In his columns, Wilders often depicts the Netherlands as a country under siege from crime committed by Muslim immigrants and Dutch youth of Moroccan descent. “Yesterday, I visited Maassluis,” wrote Wilders last September. “It is town near Rotterdam, where the indigenous Dutch inhabitants have become the victims of immigrant youths of Moroccan descent. Cars have been demolished, houses vandalized, people threatened. The Dutch no longer feel free and safe in their own city.”

For now, Wilders’s U.S. outreach is on hold. His priority is the upcoming Dutch parliamentary elections, scheduled for March 15. For the moment, he has suspended his public appearances after a member of his security detail was arrested. The officer, of Moroccan descent, allegedly leaked details of Wilders’s whereabouts. Last December Wilders was found guilty of inciting discrimination against Dutch Moroccans, but he received no punishment. When he kicked off his election campaign, he called Dutch youth of Moroccan descent “scum” (in English). Currently, his Party for Freedom has a slight lead in the polls, but even if the PVV becomes the largest party, it’s far from clear that Wilders will become prime minister. In the Dutch system, he will have to find other parties with which to form a coalition government. At least for the moment, those other parties have shunned him, finding his inflammatory brand of politics too alienating and his campaign promises of closing mosques and banning the Quran unconstitutional.

Until recently, those proposals and that sort of language would have been too alienating in the United States, too. But today, even if Wilders doesn’t become prime minister in the Netherlands, he can feel safe knowing he can always go where he has plenty of friends these days: Washington, D.C.



Editorial : Norway’s model of prudence in oil wealth

The Christian Science Monitor

February 28, 2017 —In about 20 countries, revenue from oil drilling accounts for more than 10 percent of the economy. This natural wealth has long been a tempting source of easy cash for a government’s short-term needs or budgetary holes. Yet

as oil prices have fallen, more petroleum-producing nations are taking the long view. They are saving or investing the money to benefit future generations – and to prepare for the day the oil wells run dry.

In recent years, the world has seen a rapid rise in the number of

government-run kitties, or “sovereign wealth funds.” In all, more than 75 of these funds now hold \$7.4 trillion. Most sock away money earned from natural resources. Others are set up by big exporters, such as Singapore, to keep their foreign earnings for future needs.

With so much money, the funds can be easy targets for politicians. Yet even as the funds have multiplied, many have adopted principles, set down nearly a decade ago by the International Monetary Fund, to be transparent and accountable in how the money is invested and spent.

It also helps that the world's largest sovereign wealth fund is also a model. Norway, which is Western Europe's largest oil producer and one of the world's largest natural gas exporters, has put aside more than \$900 billion in its fund since the 1990s. To put that in perspective, the fund owns more than 1 percent of the world's traded equity shares.

Its purpose is to shield the country's economy from price fluctuations in oil and to support government savings.

Norway's example in the prudent use of its natural wealth is especially important as Saudi Arabia plans to set up its own fund by selling a portion of its state-run oil company, Saudi Aramco. In fact, Saudi

officials have consulted Norway for advice. Since the 2011 Arab Spring, the kingdom has realized it must better invest in the future of its young people by wiser investments in jobs and non-oil industries. Its fund may eventually be twice the size of Norway's.

In recent days, the Norwegian model has become even more

inspiring. The government decided that it will draw only 3 percent from the fund each year, not the usual 4 percent, in order to maintain budget discipline. This means the oil wealth may last long after Norway's oil is gone. History may note this as one of the most generous acts from one generation to the next.

INTERNATIONAL



Trump Sticks to a Protectionist, Isolationist Script in First Big Speech

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

President Donald Trump struck a comparatively restrained tone in his first speech to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, but he showed no sign of easing up on his isolationist, protectionist agenda, and he avoided any reference to Russia, a country whose interference in his election has cast a long shadow over his young presidency.

His speech repeated themes and promises he touted as a candidate, particularly the idea that America is being taken advantage by other countries and the assertion that trade deals and immigration have destroyed jobs and fueled crime. In a departure from his bleak inaugural address and recent public comments, though, Trump scaled back his usual dystopian rhetoric and avoided attacking the media.

Although Trump paid lip service to unity and bipartisan cooperation, he gave little indication he was ready to tack to the center or give ground on his signature issues, devoting large sections of his speech to the alleged dangers of illegal immigration, free trade, and crime.

"Above all else, we will keep our promises to the American people," said Trump, referring to his campaign as a grassroots "rebellion" that grew into a political "earthquake."

The divisive atmosphere that has followed Trump's election was on full display in the chamber, with Democrats — including female members of the caucus clad in white to honor the suffrage

movement — sitting silently through the speech, while Republicans across the aisle repeatedly leapt to their feet to applaud.

When Trump, who has recruited billionaires and Wall Street tycoons to his cabinet and who has refused to divest from his own family business, said his administration was draining the "swamp" of corruption in Washington, Democratic lawmakers openly snickered. Others gave a thumbs down when Trump vowed to repeal the health insurance law known as Obamacare.

The inward-looking speech did not lay out any foreign policy vision, and unlike his predecessors, he did not reaffirm America's role as leader of the free world. Trump's hour-long speech contained no reference to Russia's hacking of the U.S. election, its invasion of Ukraine and seizure of Crimea, China's actions in the South China Sea, or the thousands of U.S. troops deployed in wars in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

Since taking office, Trump has been dogged by questions about his persistent affinity for Russia and his campaign team's contacts with Moscow before and after the election. In his speech, Trump avoided any mention of Russia, whose interference in the U.S. election — and possible connivance with the Trump campaign — has spurred multiple Congressional investigations and growing unease among Republican lawmakers.

Trump and his press secretary have responded to reports and criticism over the issue by lashing out at the news media and vowing to stamp

out leaks from officials inside the administration. In an interview with Fox News aired before his joint address, Trump suggested — without providing evidence — that former president Barack Obama was behind damaging leaks and widespread protests at town halls for Republican lawmakers.

In keeping with his "America First" campaign rhetoric, Trump's address was almost entirely devoted to domestic issues, except for some shots at trade, citing cherry-picked trade statistics that were wildly misleading about the positive and negative outcomes from trade flows. Trump cheered scuppering the Trans Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation trade deal President Barack Obama negotiated, and which would have given the United States privileged access to nearly half the global economy. Trump called the pact "job-killing."

Trump made ambitious promises to bring dying industries back to life, to produce millions of new jobs and to "demolish" Islamic State — but there were few if any details on how he intended to deliver on those promises.

The president also railed against the threat he says is posed by terrorism, which he referred to pointedly as "radical Islamic terrorism."

The president employed the phrase even though his own national security advisor, Gen. H.R. McMaster, and numerous experts and former counterterrorism officials have warned the term plays into the hands of extremist propaganda by implying a conflict between the West and Islam.

Trump claimed, erroneously, that the majority of terrorist-related offenses since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks have been carried out by those "from outside of our country." He then cited the deadly 2015 attack in San Bernadino, which was carried out by a U.S. citizen, Syed Rizwan Farook, and his Pakistani wife.

A Department of Homeland Security report last week said that out of 82 people inspired by a foreign terrorist group to attempt or carry out an attack in the U.S., just over half were native-born citizens. And numerous attacks and attempted assaults have been carried out since 9/11 by Americans subscribing to far-right, racist ideology, including the 2015 shooting rampage by a white supremacist at an African-American church in South Carolina that killed nine people, and the murder last week of an Indian engineer by a 51-year old Kansas man imploring him to "get out of my country."

"We cannot allow a beachhead of terrorism to form inside America — we cannot allow our nation to become a sanctuary for extremists," Trump said.

And he promised the administration would soon take unspecified action to "keep our nation safe," which is expected to take the form of a new executive order imposing restrictions on foreign immigrants and refugees. A federal court overturned a ban introduced by Trump in his first days in office that had barred entry to travelers from seven mostly Muslim countries.



Trump signals a US shift from 'soft power' to military might

February 28, 2017 —The United Nations’ Human Rights Council opened its annual session in Geneva Monday amid chatter that the United States was weighing withdrawal from the world’s top rights watchdog body.

The US relationship with the council has long been problematic, in part over concerns that it focuses too much attention on alleged rights abuses in Israel while ignoring rogue states with far worse records.

Now reports have surfaced that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is questioning the council’s value to the US and considering a range of options – including simply pulling out. On Monday, a White House budget outline proposed as much as a 30 percent cut in State Department spending to help offset a \$54 billion increase in military spending.

US spending on international organizations like the rights council is small change in the grand scheme of the US budget. Indeed the entire State Department budget –about \$50 billion – is less than the increase Mr. Trump seeks for the Pentagon.

Taken together, some experts say, the potential withdrawal from the council and proposed State Department cuts represent a shift away from the increasing use of “soft power” to defuse or head off tensions overseas before they turn into conflicts.

“Trump seems to see US involvement in the world as a zero sum, so that increases in defense spending and the exercise of hard power mean pulling back from multilateralism and diplomacy,” says Melissa Labonte, an associate professor of political science and expert in international organizations at Fordham University in New York. “It’s a retreat from the idea that the constellation of interests of a global power like the US is best served by participation in an array of international organizations.”

Value of soft power

In recent years, soft power has been a crucial part of the US security toolkit as presidents have sought to make military intervention more of an option of last resort.

Under President Obama in 2013, for example, then-Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power went to the Central African Republic to help stop sectarian violence from turning into civil conflict during a tense election campaign. And over the past decade, USAID has initiated programs in drought-sensitive and conflict-prone pockets of Africa to help women farmers respond to food shortages that otherwise might have meant destabilizing family displacement.

Military leaders have underscored the essential contribution that investments in soft power make to US security. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates’s close working relationship with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was well-known. And current Defense Secretary James Mattis told members of Congress in 2013, when he was commander of US Central Command, “If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition.”

On Monday, a group of more than 120 retired generals and admirals sent a letter with the same message to members of Congress, saying “now is not the time to retreat” on State Department and USAID spending. “We know from our service in uniform that many of the crises our nation faces do not have military solutions alone,” the group said, citing examples ranging from “confronting violent extremist groups like ISIS” to stabilizing weak states that, unaddressed, can lead to greater instability.

Are US interests served?

As the Trump administration reassesses US engagement overseas, the question revolving around the Human Rights Council is whether it is worth even the relatively small investment the US makes.

The Obama administration decided the US was better off influencing the global human rights agenda from inside the council, and stuck with it.

But some critics say the council’s track record is less than inspiring.

“The US probably has influenced council actions on the margins, but the real question we should be asking is whether it serves our national interests to remain a part of it,” says Brett Schaeffer, a fellow in international regulatory affairs at the Heritage Foundation in Washington. “Certainly we still see many of the same problems that people have been drawing attention to for a long time.”

Mr. Schaefer notes that the council replaced the earlier Human Rights Commission a decade ago after then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the commission’s failures were casting a shadow over the entire UN. But those failings have hardly been addressed, Schaefer says. It still allows some of the world’s worst rights abusers onto the commission, shies away from investigating the most egregious cases of rights abuse, all while demonstrating a bias against Israel.

“The impression you get is that the council is repeating the same mistakes that led Kofi Annan to call the commission a disgrace,” he says.

Schaefer says his recommendation to the Trump administration would be to either name a “firebrand” to represent the US at the council and forcefully call out its shortcomings – or withdraw from the council altogether.

How US has changed council

Others worry that withdrawal from the council would signal a broader US global retreat that would not serve US interests and would rattle allies who rely on robust US global participation.

“Even something like our participation in the Human Rights Council is not just about us but sends strong reassurances to our allies that we intend to be out there

not just on security issues but defending the same values,” says Dr. Labonte.

In her view, the council offers evidence that strong US participation can lead international organizations to work better and to take steps that are in American interests.

“The US had a strong hand in bringing the council into the 21st century, and I think we see that in some significant improvements like the internal peer reviews, where countries hold each other accountable,” she says. The US has instigated investigations into countries, including Iran and Syria, that were either largely overlooked before or protected by larger powers, and has championed LGBT rights in the global forum, she adds.

Schaefer says US spending on the council is peanuts, but he notes that overall spending on international organizations (including activities like refugee assistance and international peace-keeping) has jumped by more than a third since 2010 to about \$10 billion. “Any administration would be neglecting its responsibilities if it didn’t look at those contributions with a close eye,” he says.

Still, Schaefer says any cuts should reflect an assessment of what is working for the US. “I would hope the US would base its participation in the UN and its organizations on whether it is serving US national interests, rather than simply on a budget assessment,” he says.

For others, cutting the budgets that underpin US multilateral activities would be the embodiment of “penny wise, pound foolish.”

“The US contribution to multilateral institutions is already a rounding error in our defense budget,” Labonte says. “Spending more on the military and building up our nuclear arsenal” – two things Trump wants in a new budget – “should not come at the cost of global engagement that makes the need for military intervention less likely.”



From ‘America First’ to a More Conventional View of U.S. Diplomacy

Mark Landler

WASHINGTON

— President Trump on Tuesday offered a muted reaffirmation of his “America First” approach to foreign policy — one rooted in the realities of the complex world he has confronted since taking office, not the uncompromising vision he sketched during the 2016 campaign.

“My job is not to represent the world,” Mr. Trump declared. “My job is to represent the United States of America. But we know that America is better off when there is less conflict, not more.”

The president did not utter the slogan “America First,” which figured so prominently during his campaign and became a symbol of his plans to shred alliances and agreements. He said the United

States would work with allies — old and new, including those in the Muslim world — to seek stability and avert future wars. And he offered his most ringing affirmation of NATO, which he had threatened to mothball during the campaign.

“We strongly support NATO, an alliance forged through the bonds of two World Wars that dethroned fascism, and a Cold War that

defeated communism,” Mr. Trump declared to thunderous applause.

Photo

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis applauded during the speech. Credit: Al Drago/The New York Times

The president’s first address to Congress came after a turbulent debut on the world stage, when he

unnerved allies with erratic statements on diplomatic issues and tempestuous phone calls with foreign leaders. But in many ways, it reflected his administration's return to convention on several issues: support for allies in Europe and Asia, resistance to Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, and fidelity to the "One China" policy.

Mr. Trump offered few foreign policy specifics in his speech and sprang no surprises. He said his administration had reaffirmed the "unbreakable alliance" with Israel and imposed sanctions on entities and individuals connected with Iran's ballistic missile program.

But Mr. Trump did not elaborate on the Iranian threat, which is one of the consuming preoccupations of his national security team. In general, he steered clear of the bellicose language he used on the stump or even that of previous presidents, like George W. Bush, who used a State of the Union address in 2002 to declare an "Axis of Evil."

"We want peace, wherever peace can be found,"

Mr. Trump said. "America is friends today with former enemies. Some of our closest allies, decades ago, fought on the opposite side of these world wars. This history should give us faith in the possibilities for a better world."

Peering down at Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who was seated with other members of his cabinet, Mr. Trump noted that he had ordered the military to develop a plan to destroy the Islamic State, which he described as a "network of lawless savages that have slaughtered Muslims and Christians, and men, and women, and children of all beliefs."

"We will work with our allies, including our friends and allies in the Muslim world, to extinguish this vile enemy from this planet," he said.

Mr. Trump asserted that the United States had spent \$6 trillion in the Middle East — he did not clarify on what, or when — and said that if the United States had spent that amount at home, "we could have rebuilt our country — twice," maybe even three times, if the nation was

run by people who knew how to negotiate deals.

He also repeated his demand that America's partners in Europe, Asia and the Middle East "pay their fair share" of the cost of strategic and military partnerships around the world. On that score, he claimed some quick results, saying: "I can tell you, the money is pouring in. Very nice."

Mr. Trump's only allusion to Russia was indirect, when he said the United States was "willing to find new friends, and forge new partnerships, where shared interests align."

He made it clear he would shun the foreign entanglements and democracy promotion of Mr. Bush. "America respects the right of all nations to chart their own path," he said, adding, "We must learn from the mistakes of the past — we have seen the war and destruction that have raged across the world."

"Our foreign policy calls for a direct, robust and meaningful engagement with the world," Mr. Trump said. "It is American leadership based on

vital security interests we share with allies across the globe."

Perhaps most surprisingly, Mr. Trump mentioned America's greatest economic and strategic rival, China, only once in his speech, in the context of lost American jobs since China joined the World Trade Organization. And he did not mention the nuclear threat from North Korea at all. Mr. Trump has complained bitterly that the Chinese are not doing enough to curb the aggressions of the North Korean government.

On Monday, China's top foreign policy official, Yang Jiechi, visited the White House to meet with the national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, and got a brief greeting from Mr. Trump. On Tuesday, Mr. Yang met with Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson at the State Department amid reports that they were planning Mr. Trump's first face-to-face meeting with President Xi Jinping of China, possibly later in the spring.

The New York Times

Russia and U.S. Clash Over Syria in Security Council Vote

Somini Sengupta

UNITED

NATIONS — Russia and the Trump administration clashed in a vote at the United Nations Security Council for the first time on Tuesday, as the Kremlin vetoed a measure backed by the United States and its Western allies to punish Syria for using chemical weapons.

While the Russians had long signaled their intent to block the resolution, which was supported by dozens of countries, the clash offered insights into the big divisions that remain between the Kremlin and President Trump, who has vowed to improve ties.

Russia and China, two of the five permanent members of the Council, blocked the measure. It was the Kremlin's seventh Security Council veto in defense of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria over the war that has been convulsing his country for nearly six years.

The American ambassador, Nikki R. Haley, who has called chemical weapons attacks in Syria "barbaric," accused Russia and China of putting "their friends in the Assad regime ahead of our global security" in her blunt rebuke of the vetoes.

"It is a sad day on the Security Council," Ms. Haley said after the vote. "When members start making excuses for other member states

killing their own people, the world is definitely a more dangerous place."

Diplomats said that Ms. Haley had insisted on putting the measure up for a vote this week, signaling a desire to take a tough stand on Russia.

In recent weeks, Ms. Haley has condemned what she called Russia's "aggressive actions" in eastern Ukraine, vowed to maintain sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea and, in her Senate confirmation hearing, went as far as saying that Russia was guilty of war crimes in Syria.

Her comments on Russia have sometimes contradicted the more conciliatory language of Mr. Trump, who has made clear his desire to increase cooperation with Russia. Ms. Haley, by contrast, has often echoed the talking points of the previous administration, as well as the concerns of Republicans in Congress who distrust the Kremlin.

The resolution, proposed by Britain and France months ago and endorsed by the United States last week, would have imposed sanctions on a handful of Syrian military officials and entities for having dropped chlorine-filled barrel bombs on opposition-held areas on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015, according to a United Nations panel.

Russia's envoy, Vladimir Safronkov, defended the veto, calling the resolution "politically biased" and asserting that Russia's concerns about the draft language had not been addressed. "This is railroading the draft by the Western troika," he said.

China's ambassador, Liu Jieyi, recalling the now-discredited American warnings of Iraq's "so-called W.M.D.s" in 2003, criticized the resolution as an example of "hypocrisy" by the Western powers. "It was forced through to a vote while Council members still have differences," he said. "This is in no way helpful to finding a solution."

Chlorine is banned as a weapon under an international treaty that Mr. Assad's government signed in 2013.

The French ambassador, François Delattre, said he welcomed the solidarity from Ms. Haley on the resolution. "The Trump administration has a very clear position that is also our French position, the British position and the position of the majority of members of the Security Council," he said. "We're exactly on the same page."

Britain's ambassador, Matthew Rycroft, said: "This isn't even about Syria. It's about taking a stand when children are poisoned."

The arguments and vote over the resolution were important because

they shed light on how Mr. Trump would deal with the Kremlin over the Syria war. Russia is Mr. Assad's most important foreign ally.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly expressed admiration for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and said he wanted to strike a deal with him to stop the Syrian war and focus on fighting terrorism. But disagreements within Mr. Trump's administration appear to have complicated that goal.

A former governor of South Carolina, Ms. Haley has by her own admission limited foreign policy experience. Since she was confirmed on Jan. 24, she has limited her comments to a handful of foreign policy issues that plainly deliver political dividends at home.

She has maintained a tough line on Russia and Iran, pledged to defend Israel and promised more oversight of how American funding for the United Nations is spent.

She has said nothing about the Trump administration's travel ban on refugees and visa applicants from seven predominantly Muslim countries, which the United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, has criticized.

Ms. Haley, an American of Indian descent who grew up in a small South Carolina town, also has been silent on the attack on two Indian engineers in Kansas last week,

which is suspected of being a hate crime and which threatens to cloud Indian-American relations.

The conflict over the Syria resolution was in sharp contrast to a Russian-American consensus on the need to contain Syria's use of chemical weapons. After a sarin gas attack on a suburb of Damascus in August 2013, Moscow and Washington struck a deal to force Mr. Assad to sign the chemical weapons treaty and dismantle his stockpile of the poisonous munitions under international supervision.

The
Washington
Post

Russia, China veto at U.N. on Syria chemical weapons is 'outrageous,' U.S. says

By DeYoung Karen
(Reuters)

Russia and China vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution on Feb. 28, that would have imposed new sanctions on Syria for its use of chemical weapons against its own citizens. U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley criticized the vote, saying, "It is a sad day on the Security Council when members start making excuses for other members states killing their own people." U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said it is "a sad day on the Security Council when members start making excuses for other members states killing their own people." (Reuters)

The Trump administration accused Russia and China of "outrageous and indefensible" action Tuesday after they vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution that would have imposed new sanctions on Syria for using chemical weapons against its own citizens.

In a sharply worded speech after the vote, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said the message the council was sending to the world was that "if you are allies with Russia and China, they will cover the backs of their friends who use chemical weapons to kill their own people."

Her comments marked a rare administration criticism of Russia, which President Trump has said could be a partner in counterterrorism operations in Syria, and of the Syrian government's behavior in that country's five-year civil war.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

The Syrian government, though, violated the deal, according to a United Nations panel set up by the Security Council, known as the Joint Investigative Mechanism. It found that the government had used chemical weapons at least three times.

Russia helped to create the panel but questioned its findings when it implicated the Syrian government. The panel also found that Islamic State militants in Syria used mustard gas in August 2015.

Please provide a valid email address.

Russian envoy Vladimir Safronkov called Haley's statement "outrageous" and said that "God shall judge" attempts by the West to discredit the legitimate Syrian government.

[As U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Nikki Haley would face world's most intractable conflicts]

The United States sponsored the resolution, along with Britain and France. It followed the October conclusion of a joint investigation by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that the Syrian government had dropped munitions containing chlorine on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

The OPCW concluded after the alleged attacks that they had taken place, but it had no mandate to assess responsibility. That led the Security Council, with Russian and Chinese backing, to establish the joint investigation to identify the perpetrators.

In a report issued in October, investigators concluded that the Syrian government had dropped chlorine-filled munitions on the three dates in question. The investigation also concluded that the Islamic State had used mustard gas on at least one occasion.

The Tuesday resolution called for travel and economic sanctions against several Syrian air force and intelligence officers linked to the attacks by investigators, along with asset freezes of several Syrian companies and government-linked organizations. It also established a mechanism to monitor compliance.

Moscow made clear last week that it would defeat the draft measure to impose sanctions on the Syrian government, calling it unbalanced. The Russian veto signaled how far Russia was willing to go to shield its ally in Damascus.

Mr. Putin reinforced his opposition before the vote on Tuesday, adding that any Security Council penalties on the Syrian government would complicate diplomatic efforts underway in Geneva aimed at halting the war.

A single veto from one of the 15-nation council's five permanent members — Russia, China, the United States, Britain and France — can kill a resolution. Bolivia, one of 10 nonpermanent, rotating members, also voted against Tuesday's measure.

In denouncing the resolution, Safronkov suggested that evidence was uncorroborated and came from "suspicious eyewitness accounts... armed opponents, sympathetic [nongovernmental organizations], media and also the so-called Friends of Syria."

The latter is an international group, made up largely of U.S. allies, set up in 2012 in response to Russian and Chinese vetoes of previous U.N. resolutions on Syria.

Russia, Safronkov said, saw "no convincing evidence on the basis of which any sort of allegations could be made."

The United States and Russia have been on opposing sides of Syria's civil war since its outset. While the United States and European and regional allies have supported armed fighters and political opponents against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Russia has been Assad's primary foreign backer.

In 2012, President Barack Obama said that he did not intend to intervene in the Syrian war but also that Assad's deployment of Syria's known chemical arsenal could change his calculation. When chemical attacks were reported in the summer of 2013, Obama first said he would use U.S. and allied air power in Syria, but he later backed down when Congress refused to authorize such attacks.

"As for sanctions against the Syrian leadership, I think the move is totally inappropriate now," he told a news conference while visiting Kyrgyzstan. "It does not help, would not help the negotiation process. It would only hurt or undermine confidence during the process."

Human Rights Watch concluded in a recent report that the Syrian military had not only violated its promises not to use chemical weapons but had systematically dropped chlorine bombs in the final weeks of the battle to take the northern city of Aleppo last fall.

The United States and Russia then forged an agreement — to which Assad acceded under Russian pressure — for the removal and destruction of Syria's stockpile of mustard gas and nerve agents, a task that was completed in the summer of 2014. Syria also signed the international Chemical Weapons Convention.

But the war continued, including Russia's decision to supplement Assad's airstrikes with its own warplanes starting in the fall of 2015.

While chlorine is technically not listed as a chemical weapon, the Security Council in early 2015 passed a resolution, supported by Russia, condemning the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons of war and saying that those responsible would be held accountable.

But Russia, with support from China, continued to veto resolutions that were specifically directed at Syria.

President Trump, who has suggested a possible coalition with Russia against the Islamic State in Syria, has given less attention to the civil war there and has indicated that he may cut back assistance to the armed opposition.

At the United Nations, however, Haley has condemned Russian actions in both Ukraine and Syria.

On Tuesday, a day after meetings at the White House, she said it was "sad day" when Security Council members "start making excuses" for perpetrators of chemical attacks. In vetoing the resolution, she said, Russia and China had "ignored the facts" and "put their friends in the Assad regime ahead of our global security."

The
Washington
Post

Syrian peace talks flounder as participants ask: Where is America?

<https://www.facebook.com/lizsly>

GENEVA — The vacuum in U.S. policy on Syria is being keenly felt at the latest round of peace talks aimed at negotiating a political solution to the Syrian war — talks that seem destined to wind down this week without meaningful progress.

Five days into a round of discussions intended to take place between delegations representing the Syrian government and the opposition, government and opposition negotiators still have not met. Instead, the talks, due to end Friday, have become snarled in debates about procedures and process without yet addressing the major issues surrounding the remote possibility of finding a political solution to the nearly six-year-old war.

These talks, known as Geneva IV because they represent the fourth round of discussions aimed at securing a political settlement on the basis of a communique drafted in Geneva by the United States and Russia in 2012, are taking place against the backdrop of a new regional balance of power in which Russia has the leading role in Syria.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

For the first time, the United States is not taking the initiative in pushing for a negotiated settlement. The rout of rebels from their stronghold in eastern Aleppo in December was a defeat for U.S. policy as well as for the Syrian opposition, and it effectively left a vacuum of U.S. decision-making on Syria that has yet to be filled by the new Trump administration.

Although Russia has since sought to position itself as a mediating power between the government and the opposition,

there are growing questions over how much pressure it is prepared to put on President Bashar al-Assad to make concessions, diplomats said. Russia's veto of a U.S.-backed U.N. Security Council resolution Tuesday that would have imposed sanctions on the Assad government for its continued use of chemical weapons has further exposed the gulf between opposition and Russian perspectives on the war.

"We all desperately need the U.S. to engage in this and drive this forward with the Russians. The process is skewed in one direction. There is no other counterweight," said a Western diplomat attending the talks, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject. "There is a vacuum here, and I am not sure the Russians have enough incentive to move forward to fill the vacuum."

U.S. diplomats have been present at the talks alongside representatives of European and regional allies. But until the Trump administration articulates its policy on Syria, participants and diplomats said, there is little reason for either the Syrian government or the opposition to make substantial concessions.

Both sides have been encouraged by President Trump's often contradictory statements on the Middle East to think that the new administration may shift its policy in their favor.

His emphasis on the importance of fighting the Islamic State has raised hopes in Damascus of the United States dropping its support for the Syrian opposition and joining an alliance with Assad against terrorism.

As was the case in previous years, Bashar al-Jaafari, the lead negotiator for the Assad government, has stressed that the focus of the talks should be on fighting terrorism, not on a political

transition from Assad's rule that the United States had demanded in previous years or the milder political reforms that Russia has been promoting.

The opposition is likewise optimistic that Trump's pledges to roll back Iranian influence will translate into more robust support for the rebels than was the case under the Obama administration. Assad owes his survival in large part to Iran's immense support, and backing Assad means empowering Iran in Syria, opposition figures argue.

Mindful that it has much to lose or gain from whatever the Trump administration decides, the opposition delegation has sought to be on its best behavior. It announced ahead of the talks that it would not walk out — as it did last time — and it has agreed to discuss all the items on the agenda set by Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. envoy mediating the discussions.

"Our aim now is to continue with the political process to show Mr. Trump we are serious about a relationship, about a political solution and about limiting the role of Iran," said Nasr al-Hariri, head of the opposition delegation. "But if the U.S. vacuum continues, I think Mr. de Mistura will face a lot of obstacles on the way to a political solution."

A review of U.S. policy on Syria is expected to be included in a broader review of strategy against the Islamic State ordered by Trump and due to be delivered to the White House on Tuesday. Although the focus of the review is on ways to speed up the fight against the Islamic State, there is a recognition, U.S. officials said, that the war against the militants cannot be won without also addressing the wider Syrian conflict.

"We do need to have a vision of how our military actions set conditions on the ground that actually then become the platform

from which Secretary [of State Rex] Tillerson goes to Geneva to come up with a political solution," Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a forum at the Brookings Institution last week.

Whether a political settlement is even possible, given the current circumstances on the battlefield, is in question, however, analysts said. Russia's intervention and the government's victory in Aleppo decisively tilted the balance in favor of Assad, who is now in no danger of being toppled militarily by the rebels.

"Logically speaking, why would the regime give up something in Geneva that the armed opposition failed to gain militarily on the ground?" said Jihad Makdissi, who leads a separate opposition organization called the Cairo Group. "The word 'concession' is not now in the dictionary of the regime's mind. As long as the regime can't manage to get international recognition again, why would they give concessions?"

Given the obstacles, de Mistura, the U.N. envoy, set expectations low as he opened the talks last week, telling journalists that he anticipated no breakthrough.

"The Geneva talks seem to be something that everyone wants because they want to have talks," said Aron Lund, a fellow at the U.S.-based Century Foundation think tank. "But no one really knows what they are going to say."

Read more:

Today's coverage from Post correspondents around the world

Like Washington Post World on Facebook and stay updated on foreign news

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Thomas Grove

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 12:14 p.m. ET

MOSCOW—The flagship of the Russian navy welcomed aboard a VIP as it cruised the Mediterranean in January: a Libyan general Moscow sees as the best chance to defeat Islamist extremists and re-establish order in the chaotic country.

The Kremlin's growing embrace of Gen. Khalifa Haftar, a rival of the United Nations-backed coalition

In push for influence in North Africa, Russia seeks U.S. backing for Libyan strongman

government in Tripoli, signals Moscow's desire to extend its influence in the Middle East and North Africa after intervening in Syria's war. Now the Russian government is courting the Trump administration to get its support for the controversial general, people familiar with the Kremlin's thinking said.

Russia sees its role in the fight against Islamist terrorism as a selling point, and President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin have touted the idea

of Washington and Moscow cooperating to fight Islamic State.

Andrey Kortunov, director-general of the Russian International Affairs Council, which is close to the country's Foreign Ministry, said Russia had through diplomatic channels made the case to Washington for "potential cooperation on international terrorism because Libya might become one of the major hotbeds."

A person close to the Kremlin said Russian officials had spoken to officials at the U.S. National

Security Council about Gen. Haftar, as well as efforts to combat Islamic State in Libya and Moscow's desire to make oil deals in the crude-rich country.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the Kremlin hadn't reached out to the security council about Gen. Haftar. A White House National Security Council spokesman didn't respond to a request for comment.

Even though Mr. Trump has said he desired closer ties with Moscow, following the recent resignation of

national security adviser Michael Flynn, he said the political mood in the U.S. made it difficult for him to pursue a rapprochement.

Russian air power and special forces have helped turn the tide in Syria in favor of the country's authoritarian president, Bashar al-Assad, and bolstered the Kremlin's ambitions as a regional power willing to use military force in fractured states.

In Libya, an adviser to Gen. Haftar's Libyan National Army, which controls much of the eastern part of the country, said Russia has sent midlevel military officers, including Arabic-speaking personnel from Russia's predominantly Muslim Chechnya region, to help train its forces.

Ms. Zakharova said no Russian soldiers had been sent to aid Gen. Haftar.

Gen. Haftar and his spokesman couldn't be reached for comment. A spokesman for the Libyan National Army, which Gen. Haftar leads, didn't respond to questions about the general's contact with Russian officials and the presence of any Russian forces in Libya.

Gen. Haftar, seen by critics as a would-be autocrat in the mold of late Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, has traveled to Moscow twice in the past eight months and has requested weaponry, people close to the Kremlin said, despite a U.N. arms embargo.

Moscow says it maintains contact with all sides in Libya in the interest of finding a political solution to divisions in the country. Ms. Zakharova, the ministry spokeswoman, has described Gen. Haftar as "one of the political heavyweights who has real influence on the balance of political forces in modern Libya."

Before Gadhafi's demise, Libya was a long-standing ally of the Soviet Union and Russia. Mr. Putin opposed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's intervention that helped topple him. Observers say the loss of Libya as a client for Russian arms sales was a factor in Mr. Putin's decision to boost support for Mr. Assad.

"Russia wants to help Haftar become the absolute leader of Libya, the way it did with Assad," said Alexey Malashenko, the chief researcher at the Institute for the Dialogue of Civilizations, a think tank with ties to the Kremlin. He

said he believes Russia "is very ready to provide assistance" in the form of weapons to Gen. Haftar.

A Defense Ministry spokesman declined to comment on any discussions of supplying arms to Libya.

Washington has largely kept its distance from Gen. Haftar, who has had links to the American Central Intelligence Agency and was part of an effort to oust Gadhafi in the late 1980s. He went on to live in the U.S. for two decades. The general returned to Libya in 2011, as rebels fought to remove Gadhafi from power.

After Gadhafi was killed and Libya splintered into disarray, Gen. Haftar pulled together a fighting force and went on the offensive against militant groups. His forces have scored some gains against Islamic State and regained control of some oil installations.

U.S.-backed forces have also made progress in the coastal city of Sirte and took over Islamic State's headquarters last year.

European countries have lobbied Russia to use its influence with Gen. Haftar, who has received support from Egypt, the United Arab

Emirates and Saudi Arabia, to get him to reconcile with the Tripoli government, which has broad international backing.

The leader of the U.N.-backed government, Faiez Serraj, was expected to arrive in Moscow in the coming days, Russian news agency Interfax quoted the deputy foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, as saying on Monday.

The Government of National Accord, with which Gen. Haftar has refused to join hands, sent a request to NATO in February for help to improve its security and defenses.

NATO had agreed at a summit last year that it would offer support to the government, which Europe wants as a bulwark against migration from the North African country.

—Benoit Faucon, Tamer El-Ghobashy, Hassan Morajea and Paul Sonne contributed to this article.

Write to Thomas Grove at thomas.grove@wsj.com

The New York Times Editorial : Russia Sides With Chemical Weapons

The Editorial Board

Russia proved again on Tuesday that there is no crime heinous enough to make it turn against Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad. It vetoed a resolution before the United Nations Security Council that would have punished Syria for using chemical weapons.

The Kremlin's decision was in keeping with President Vladimir Putin's vigorous support of the Syrian military in a six-year-long war that has killed half a million people.

Nikki Haley, the American ambassador, speaking at the United Nations Security Council meeting on Tuesday. *Bebeto Matthews/Associated Press*

The vote marked the seventh time since 2011 that Mr. Putin protected Mr. Assad from international condemnation or sanctions and, as often is the case, China followed Russia's example. Although Moscow had made clear in advance that it would veto the resolution, Britain and France were right to insist on a vote and to expose Russia's moral bankruptcy.

The resolution, supported by Britain, France and the United States, would have imposed sanctions on some Syrian military officials and entities for dropping chlorine-filled barrel bombs on rebel-held areas in 2014 and 2015, according to a United Nations panel. The use of chlorine as a weapon is banned under an international treaty that the Assad government signed in 2013, as part of the deal struck by the

United States and Russia to force Mr. Assad to dismantle his stockpile of the chemical munitions.

Although much of the stockpile was destroyed, the United Nations panel subsequently determined that the Syrian government had violated the deal. In addition, a recent report by Human Rights Watch concluded that the Syrian military had systematically dropped chlorine bombs in the final weeks of the battle last fall to take Aleppo from opposition forces.

Although Russia was deeply involved in the Security Council's deliberations on Syria, it rejected the resolution as "politically biased" and complained that its concerns about the draft language had not been addressed. If such complaints were legitimate, other Council

members would undoubtedly have made adjustments to secure Russia's vote. Mr. Putin's argument that the resolution interfered with cease-fire negotiations between the Syrian government and the rebels was also not credible.

Given President Trump's affinity for Mr. Putin, his administration's decision to vote for the resolution was unexpected and encouraging. The American ambassador, Nikki Haley, took a hard stance, calling chemical weapons attacks in Syria "barbaric" and accusing Russia and China of putting "their friends in the Assad regime ahead of our global security." That's been true for years, with the catastrophe in Syria showing no sign of ending.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Jenkins Jr. : What's behind the Putin fantasies

Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Feb. 28, 2017 7:22 p.m. ET

Several Trump campaign advisers had business ties to Russia, so that must be nefarious, right?

Except that until the Crimea sanctions in 2014, it was U.S. policy to encourage American business in

Russia—and had been since 1991. That a handful of advisers did business in Russia is amazing only because it's so few. In July 2009, President Obama himself visited Moscow with a passel of U.S. execs in tow. Joe Biden was in Moscow a few months later partly for business-promotion purposes.

Go back and read the press. In 1995, Al Gore, presiding over the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, helped enable Exxon's Sakhalin Island venture. Sixteen years later, the Obama White House helped enable its Russian Arctic venture. These two deals define almost the entirety of Rex Tillerson's CV in Russia.

But wasn't Paul Manafort, Mr. Trump's sometime campaign adviser, an adviser to Viktor Yanukovich, Vladimir Putin's favorite in Ukraine's 2010 presidential election? At the time, Mr. Yanukovich was promoting an economic tie-up with the European Union, a near-and-dear U.S. interest. Mr. Manafort may not have been working for the Obama

administration's preferred Ukrainian pol, but he was following in the footsteps of previous U.S. political aides, including some dispatched by Bill Clinton to save Boris Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 (enabling Mr. Yeltsin eventually to hand power to Mr. Putin to protect his entourage's stolen wealth).

Only later, when Mr. Putin yanked Mr. Yanukovich's chain, did the events unfold that now have Democrats eager to discern nefarious patterns.

What about Mr. Trump's ties to "shadowy" Russia banker Carter Page? A hilarious and lengthy article at Politico.com finds Mr. Page an elusive wannabe who held a minor job in Merrill Lynch's Moscow office.

What about Roger Stone, the make-believe secret shaman of American politics? Mr. Stone *wants* you to believe he's connected to the KGB.

In the Trump-as-mole screeds, the biggest wonder is the non-mention of Goldman Sachs. After all, Gary Cohn and Steve Mnuchin both worked there when Goldman, on

the eve of Russia's 1998 default, arranged a convenient bond sale to tide the Yeltsin government over. Then again, another Goldman alum, Robert Rubin, was running the Clinton Treasury at the time, and pitched in with an IMF bailout for Russia.

We come to the sorry truth: So much hopeful money that poured into Russia only helped fund the emergence of the Putin kleptocracy. Over the course of three administrations, when the U.S. goal was to promote business ties with Russia, Mr. Trump was notable mainly for failing to find a seat on the train. His Russian-backed property and branding deals all came a cropper. He did manage to hold his Miss Universe contest in Moscow in 2013. Unlike Formula One, however, he hasn't been back since. At least, like all high-end New York real-estate developers, he couldn't fail to profit from selling overpriced condos to Russian emigres.

"Mr. Trump's rhetoric and actions as president bear more than a passing resemblance to those of Mr. Putin

during his first years consolidating power," writes veteran foreign correspondent Susan B. Glasser in a New York Times op-ed last week. "The similarities are striking enough that they should not be easily dismissed."

The similarities are indeed striking. Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump both have arms and legs. When it comes to distinguishing noise from signal, however, two men could not be less alike.

Russia was a country in chaos. Its president was a drunk seeking a successor to protect his daughter and friends from corruption investigations. Mr. Putin, a former KGB agent and head of the secret police, ran one of the few, after a fashion, functioning institutions in Russia, albeit arm in arm with organized crime.

Mr. Trump's rise couldn't be more different. He's a reality TV star and brand manager. To an unusual degree, he's a president who lacks even a party. Meanwhile, the courts, the bureaucracy, the media, the political parties all continue to function as they always have.

By all means, investigate Russia's propaganda efforts directed toward influencing the U.S. election, as long as we don't kid ourselves unduly that something novel and unprecedented took place. As for Mr. Trump, even to a broken-down Russian intelligence he simply would not have been that interesting a person until very recently. Now, somehow, he's got the power of the U.S. president if he can figure out how to use it (a big if).

His increased military spending plus his support for U.S. energy, ironically, would amount to harsher sanctions on Russia than any Mr. Obama imposed. In a second irony, his rise has half the U.S. political firmament, Democrats plus a smattering of Never Trump Republicans, willing to see the Putin regime for what it is. Thinking clearly about Russia might finally become a fashion in Washington. It won't happen, though, if the only goal is to turn Mr. Putin into a partisan club against the Trump administration.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Israel comptroller report criticizes Netanyahu on readiness for 2014 war

Rory Jones

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 5:40 p.m. ET

TEL AVIV—Israel's government watchdog on Tuesday issued a highly critical report of the government and military's preparedness for its 2014 Gaza Strip war with Hamas, increasing domestic pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to step down.

Mr. Netanyahu and other officials failed to thoroughly brief the government security cabinet on the threat of tunnels Hamas had dug into Israel for use in terror attacks, the report said. It challenged previous comments by Mr. Netanyahu that he had highlighted the issue to ministers in meetings, although the prime minister hasn't made clear the extent of the discussions.

The military also was unprepared for the 50-day conflict with the Islamist movement, and the government hadn't outlined strategic goals or considered all diplomatic initiatives before hitting Gaza with airstrikes, it said.

The much-anticipated special review by state comptroller Yosef Shapira was conducted to deduce insights ahead of future conflicts, Mr. Shapira said. Details had been

steadily leaked to Israeli media, spurring a flood of recriminations between current and former Israeli officials.

"The report proves beyond any doubt that the prime minister knew about the strategic threat of the tunnels, didn't order the [army] to prepare an operational plan, didn't inform the security cabinet and didn't tell the public the truth," Yair Lapid, the leader of the opposition Yesh Atid party who served as finance minister at the time of the war, said in a statement Tuesday.

The publication comes as Mr. Netanyahu repeatedly denies corruption allegations that have damaged his popularity.

"Every day that goes by the citizens of Israel are exposed to a new failure or scandal," Isaac Herzog, leader of the opposition Zionist Union party, said in a Facebook post that called for Mr. Netanyahu to step down. "Netanyahu must draw conclusions and leave the keys."

Israel launched airstrikes in Gaza in July 2014 in response to volleys of rocket fire from Hamas. Soon after, the government began a ground offensive to destroy the dozens of tunnels the army determined had penetrated Israel.

Some 2,200 Palestinian civilians and militants and more than 70 Israeli soldiers and civilians were killed in the fighting, according to the United Nations. About 11,000 homes were destroyed, according to the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank and ceded control of Gaza to Hamas in 2006.

Mr. Netanyahu has in recent days argued that the years since the war have been relatively calm for Israelis, underpinning the conflict's success in damaging Hamas's defense and weapons infrastructure.

"The [army] gave Hamas the hardest blow in its history," he said following the report's publication. "The unprecedented quiet in the communities around Gaza since [then] attest to the results."

But his critics counter that Hamas has been replenishing its arsenal of rockets and rebuilding destroyed tunnels.

The group announced earlier this month that it had elected former militant commander Yahya Sinwar as its political leader in the Gaza Strip, indicating the growing influence of its armed wing.

Economic reconstruction in Gaza has been slow since the war, amid tight Israeli restrictions on goods moving in and out of the

enclave. More than half of nearly 2 million Gazans receive some kind of humanitarian assistance from the U.N. and other aid agencies.

Without further political changes to the Islamist movement's leadership or an approach that's more conciliatory with Israel, another round of fighting could kick off in the future. Israel has launched airstrikes at Gaza multiple times in recent weeks in response to Hamas rocket fire.

"The whole story could be repeated in Gaza soon," Amos Harel, a military analyst and correspondent for Haaretz newspaper, told reporters Tuesday.

During the 2014 conflict, Hamas fired thousands of rockets on Israeli cities and towns, many of which were destroyed in mid air by the Iron Dome missile defense technology developed with the U.S.

Israel's military has also been developing a system to counter the threat of underground attacks.

Its development is being partly funded by the U.S. government, which agreed to offer \$40 million to the project last year, Israeli and U.S. officials have said.

Write to Rory Jones at rory.jones@wsj.com

Israeli government watchdog slams Netanyahu, army over failures in 2014 Gaza war

<https://www.facebook.com/william.booth.5074?fref=ts>

JERUSALEM — Israel's intelligence was severely lacking and its military not adequately prepared to swiftly destroy the network of offensive tunnels used by the Palestinian militant group Hamas during the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip, according to a scathing official report released Tuesday.

Critics seized on the report by Israel's state comptroller to argue that the failures prolonged the war, which lasted 50 days, and led to greater losses on both sides.

The report highlights systemic shortfalls in the planning, preparations and real-time decisions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, then-Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, the army's chief of staff at the time and others in the security cabinet.

National News Alerts

Major national and political news as it breaks.

Please provide a valid email address.

If Israel's objective in the war was to find and destroy dozens of attack tunnels dug by Gaza's militant Islamist organizations to infiltrate into Israel, its mission failed, the report states.

The investigators estimated that only half of the tunnels were neutralized by the war's end in August 2014, despite claims by Israel's military that it had eliminated the threat.

"Even though the threat of the tunnels was severe and was known to the army's southern command since 2008, the military's southern command had no strategic operational plan to deal with the threat," the investigators said.

[Hamas tunnels stoke anxiety, bolstering Israelis' support of war]

The report was written by an Israeli general and released by the comptroller, Yosef Shapira, after an audit from September 2014 to August 2016. In Israeli eyes, the

report is far more important than those previously released by human rights groups and the United Nations.

The comptroller's report does not address exactly how many of the tunnels are still operational. Israeli forces continue to report that Hamas is digging new tunnels and expanding older ones. Since the war's end, the Gaza front has been relatively quiet, though Salafist groups in the coastal enclave occasionally fire rockets into Israeli territory.

The report highlights that in the months between the creation of Netanyahu's previous administration, in March 2013, and the start of hostilities with Hamas in July 2014, his security cabinet did not discuss how conditions in the Gaza Strip — soaring unemployment, lack of water and electricity blackouts — could pressure Hamas to go to war.

The war was preceded by weeks of Israeli pressure on Hamas militants in the West Bank, including hundreds of arrests, after three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped by a Hamas cell near Hebron. The teens were found dead a week before the war began July 7.

Seventy-four Israelis, including 68 soldiers, and more than 2,100 Palestinians were killed in the fighting. The United Nations and human rights groups say that 7 in 10 Palestinians killed were civilians, including 500 minors. Israel says that about half the Palestinian dead were combatants and accuses Hamas of employing "human shields," leading to large numbers of civilian fatalities.

Israeli airstrikes and ground troops also caused extensive damage to Gaza's infrastructure, much of which has not yet been rebuilt.

The comptroller's investigators concluded that Netanyahu and his government did not actively seek diplomatic alternatives to a war.

[Hamas shows resilience in face of Israeli ground incursion]

At the war's start, the most pressing challenge was stopping the

constant barrage of Hamas rockets and mortar shells.

The report concludes that the military initially believed it could quickly neutralize the threat of tunnels from outside Gaza. After 10 days of Israeli bombing — and rocket salvos by Hamas — the Israel Defense Forces sent tanks and troops, alongside sappers and combat bulldozers, into the enclave to destroy the tunnels. Most of the casualties on both sides occurred during this period of the war.

While the report is the most in-depth investigation to date into events that led to the war and Israel's actions during it, the comptroller notes that the inquiry does not assess the validity of Israel's decisions or the overall results of the war.

Embargoed copies of the report were distributed to politicians and journalists days earlier, leading to lengthy analyses by Israeli commentators and finger-pointing by leaders involved in shaping the outcome of the war.

The report stresses that Netanyahu, Yaalon and senior members of the defense, intelligence and security establishment failed to share crucial information with the decision-makers, primarily the select handful of ministers on the security cabinet.

"The audit notes that during the security cabinet briefings starting with the disappearance of three Israeli teens in June and until the start of the war in July 2014, the tunnel threat was not discussed, nor was it brought up by the ministers," the report says. "And that is despite the fact that the escalation with Gaza had already begun, with rockets being shot into Israel."

A member of the security cabinet who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity said: "I can tell you that they did not tell us anything. The prime minister does not need to tell the inner security cabinet every problem if he has a plan to take care of it. But there was no defensive plan, and security mechanisms were even removed from Israeli communities around Gaza in the lead-up to the operation."

Yaalon dismissed the complaints as untrue and grandstanding.

"And the biggest lie of all? That we weren't prepared and lost. It's nonsense," he wrote on his Facebook page.

Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, the former chief of staff, said that "there was fine intelligence, excellent, accessible, not always perfect," according to a report in the Israeli newspaper Maariv.

"The outcome of the operation was a severe blow to Hamas, a disruption of the tunnels, the establishment of deterrence and Hamas remaining as the sovereign power on the ground," he said. "Forget about what people say."

[U.N. report on Gaza: Israel, Hamas may both have committed war crimes]

Netanyahu wrote on his Facebook page that the army had achieved great success in the war.

"The army hit Hamas hard, we took out around 1000 terrorists and destroyed thousands of Hamas's rockets," he wrote. "We prevented attacks on Israeli cities with the Iron Dome batteries and foiled Hamas's plans to tunnel into southern Israel to kidnap civilians."

Netanyahu also said that the security cabinet discussed the issue of the tunnels 13 times before the war and that its severity was highlighted.

However, parents of Israeli troops killed in the fighting said it was time that certain leaders accepted blame for what they now see as a failed war.

Speaking to Israel's Channel 2 News, Ilan Sagi, whose son Erez was killed in the fighting, called the government and military's handling of the war "shameful."

"Politicians are celebrating, and all of them are denying what happened," he said. "My child was killed for this state and for his people. Those who made mistakes should pay the price."

Awad and Tadros : The Muslim Brotherhood: Terrorists or not?

Mokhtar Awad and Samuel Tadros

Should the U.S. designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization? That question has once again acquired force in Washington. In recent years congressional Republicans have

pushed for such a designation, but the Obama administration always stood in the way. Now, with the Trump administration appearing to move toward a designation, both sides are airing their arguments.

Supporters of the idea insist that the Muslim Brotherhood has helped incubate terrorist ideologies and encouraged violence. Moreover, the Brotherhood has already been designated as a terrorist group by

several American allies, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Opponents counter that a terrorist designation from Washington would do more harm than good. They argue it would empower Islamic State by pushing into their corner those sympathetic to the Brotherhood. It could undermine U.S. relations with several countries where Brotherhood-affiliated parties are in power, such as Morocco and Tunisia. It could potentially be used against certain Muslim American organizations that are accused of having ties to the Brotherhood.

What's striking is how little this debate has changed since 2001, specifically when it comes to the Egyptian mother organization. One side sees the Brotherhood as a complex international conspiracy that is slowly infiltrating America. The other side sees a moderate Islamic group that has embraced democracy and renounced violence. Neither of these views reflects the truth, which is that the old Muslim Brotherhood no longer exists, having splintered after its fall from power in 2013.

When the Mubarak regime collapsed in 2011, the Brotherhood achieved its goal of reaching power. But it lost control of the country two years later in a military coup that eventually installed Egypt's current president, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. For the Brotherhood, a hierarchical organization that prides itself on discipline, the

coup came as a shock. So did the new regime's severe crackdown against the Brotherhood in the summer of 2013. As its leaders were arrested, went into hiding or escaped abroad, the group faced two immediate challenges: creating a new leadership structure and developing a strategy to topple the Sisi regime.

In early 2014, new leadership bodies were elected in Egypt and in Turkey, which had become the hub of Brotherhood activity. Key among them was Mohamed Kamal, a veteran leader of the group's Guidance Office who had survived the crackdown. As the protests that the Brotherhood had hoped would undermine the coup began to fizzle, its activity intensified.

Already so-called deterrence committees had been created from physically fit brothers to protect their demonstrations or engage in street fights with the police. Small firearms and Molotov cocktails started appearing during clashes with authorities. By early 2014, Kamal and some of his comrades had given the green light to violence within limited parameters, calling "special committees" to target state infrastructure with bombs and arson. A slogan soon became popular in Brotherhood circles: "All that is below bullets is nonviolent."

But if the first wave of violence was in theory limited to infrastructure—with a few police officers targeted nonetheless—the second wave was not. In late 2014 and early 2015,

groups began to emerge under the Popular Resistance Movement or the banner of Revolutionary Punishment. Turkish-based Brotherhood television channels cheered the murder of police deemed responsible for killing Brotherhood members.

Theologians drew up justifications for these operations. Pro-Brotherhood scholars released a book, "The Jurisprudence of Popular Resistance to the Coup," that outlined an explicit ideological basis for violence within the framework of the Brotherhood's ideology. It argued that targeting security forces and government officials was a form of self-defense.

The Brotherhood was also undergoing a major internal civil war, pitting the Kamal faction against the more pragmatic and cautious old guard. The division, which came into the open in May of 2015, was followed by a decline in violent attacks, likely as a result of the old guard cutting off funds it controlled.

The lull proved temporary. A third and more sophisticated wave of violence hit Egypt in the summer of 2016 as newer groups under the names Hassm (Decisiveness) and Liwaa al-Thawra (Revolution's Brigade) emerged. These operations were no longer limited to police assassinations; they included car bombs and ambushes at security checkpoints. As the internal Brotherhood strife continued, Egyptian state security forces killed

Mohamed Kamal in October 2016. The power struggle continues today, with neither side accepting the other's legitimacy.

The old Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is disintegrating. In its place stand two competing leaderships, along with spinoff groups engaged in terrorism. This collapse should not be surprising. The Brotherhood was all but eradicated by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and '60s. Had it not been for an Islamist revival across Egyptian universities in the 1970s, the Brotherhood would have been history.

The Trump administration should note these developments. Designating the entire Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a terrorist organization wouldn't reflect today's realities—to say nothing of a blanket designation against all Brotherhood-affiliated groups in the world. Instead the administration should target specific individuals, factions and spinoff groups that have been involved in terrorist activity. Then the administration can move to the larger and more critical question: how to tackle comprehensively the overall Islamist ideology.

Mr. Awad is a research fellow at George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Mr. Tadros is a fellow at the Hudson Institute and the Hoover Institution.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

China gloats as Trump squanders some moral high ground in Asia

Andrew Browne

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 9:07 p.m. ET

SHANGHAI—When the White House barred reporters from several media organizations, including the New York Times and CNN, from a briefing last week, Xinhua News Agency issued an urgent bulletin.

China is often excoriated in the West for its harsh treatment of the media: It ranks almost at the bottom of the World Press Freedom Index, a notch above Syria.

So, to Chinese propagandists, the widely criticized White House move was a cause for glee—and another example of Donald Trump playing into China's hands.

For almost seven decades, the U.S. has championed a liberal order in the Asia-Pacific—free trade, open borders and open societies. The system has scored some of its greatest triumphs in the region; from South Korea to Indonesia, growing

prosperity begat democracy that, in turn, helped to secure an enduring peace.

Today, America's ideological shift, part of a populist backlash to globalization, threatens to undermine Washington's position in a region it transformed.

To the extent that the Trump White House closes the country's borders to immigrants, raises the specter of trade tariffs or impedes the operations of a free press—even when those restrictions have no equivalence in the repression that Chinese journalists suffer—it creates an opportunity for Beijing.

This is a soft-power battle. For China, the prize is greater influence—in time, pre-eminence—in Asia, and Mr. Trump is a godsend.

Increasingly, the image makers around Chinese President Xi Jinping are defining him in contrast to his U.S. counterpart: an optimist where Mr. Trump takes a dark view of the U.S. and its place in the

world; an internationalist to his "America First" nationalism.

Mr. Xi speaks of an Asian "community of common destiny," and he backs the slogan with generous infusions of cash.

His signature project, worth hundreds of billions of dollars, is to provide trading infrastructure across the Eurasian landmass, as well as maritime routes to Europe—ports, energy pipelines, electricity grids and telecommunications networks.

China is building connectivity with its neighbors; Mr. Trump wants to erect a Mexican border wall.

The Nation, a Thai newspaper, said the White House attempt to restrict immigration from seven mainly-Muslim countries heralded "an era of unprecedented, globe-sweeping intolerance," with potential consequences for Southeast Asia, a region that encompasses Indonesia and Malaysia, two Muslim-majority nations.

A sharply worded editorial in the paper warned that the new U.S. president would "make America ugly again."

Apart from Japan, which feels most threatened by China's rise and has gone all out to court the new White House, the most enthusiastic support has come from the region's authoritarians, who calculate that Mr. Trump won't push democracy or lecture them about media freedoms and other civil liberties.

Cambodian strongman Hun Sen this week invoked the White House press restriction in arguing for a tougher line against media "anarchy," and suggested the move should silence his own critics. "They do not condemn Trump as a dictator. Ah! Or is it true, the United States has a dictator? Please make clear on this," the Phnom Penh Post quoted him as saying in a speech to mark National Clean City Day.

In much of the rest of Asia, the notion of American exceptionalism is fraying.

Even before Mr. Trump took office, U.S. friends and allies were playing Washington against Beijing, extracting what they could from both sides while trying to avoid getting entangled in their strategic rivalry.

The prime exponent of this diplomacy is Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who in the final months of the Obama presidency solemnly declared, on a visit to Beijing, that it was time to “say goodbye” to America. He was promptly rewarded with promises of Chinese loans and investment worth \$24 billion.

In reality, says Chito Sta. Romana, Manila’s incoming ambassador to Beijing, the

Philippine president doesn’t intend to cast aside his country’s main security backer. Rather, he is trying to navigate between the two great powers to “maximize gains.”

For Washington, rather than a sudden parting of the ways, this could become a drawn-out estrangement.

So far, no other country has shifted as dramatically toward China as the Philippines. But America’s Asian partners are growing more distant as they weigh the benefits of security cooperation with the U.S. against the economic advantages that flow from China.

Thailand is drifting away. So is Malaysia. South Korea, home to some 28,500 U.S. troops, agonizes over whether it can afford to offend China by installing a U.S. missile-defense system against North Korea that Beijing sees a threat to its own security.

In Australia, Mr. Trump’s tetchy phone call with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has intensified a debate over how to strike a balance between loyalty to the U.S. and commitment to a Chinese trading partner that takes the lion’s share of its iron-ore exports, while filling its universities with fee-paying students.

Gradually, China is finding itself in a position to fill a vacuum in its neighborhood as American traditional values recede.

Geoff Raby, a former Australian ambassador to Beijing, argues that Mr. Trump is tipping the regional balance further in China’s favor. Mr. Xi, he says, “is like the cat that’s got the cream.”

Write to Andrew Browne at andrew.browne@wsj.com

Report



Confidential U.N. Report Details North Korea’s Front Companies in China

A maze of shadowy businesses allows Kim Jong-un to evade sanctions and experts say there’s no way Beijing doesn’t know.

When China announced last week plans to cut off imports of coal from North Korea, a vital source of revenue for the cash-starved Hermit Kingdom, it fueled optimism that Beijing may be getting serious about reining in its erratic neighbor.

But an unpublished U.N. report obtained by Foreign Policy that documents sophisticated North Korean efforts to evade sanctions shows that China has proved a fickle partner at best in Washington’s effort to stymie Pyongyang’s nuclear ambitions.

That poses a fresh challenge for U.S. President Donald Trump, whose prospects of containing North Korea’s nuclear weapons program — which has made great strides lately — rest largely with Beijing. But instead of low-key diplomatic spadework, Trump has sought to browbeat China into helping, blaming the Asian powerhouse with failing to use its influence to clip Pyongyang’s atomic aspirations.

North Korea “is flouting sanctions through trade in prohibited goods, with evasion techniques that are increasing in scale, scope and sophistication,” according to the report compiled by an eight-member panel, which is chaired by a British national and includes experts from China, Russia, and the United States. The North Korean schemes are “combining to significantly negate the impact” of international sanctions.

China, despite its apparent cooperation of late with international efforts to sanction North Korea, has instead served as Pyongyang’s

economic lifeline, purchasing the vast majority of its coal, gold, and iron ore and serving as the primary hub for illicit trade that undermines a raft of U.N. sanctions that China nominally supports, the report’s findings suggest.

As early as December 2016, China had blown past a U.N.-imposed ceiling of 1 million metric tons on coal imports, purchasing twice that amount. China then shrugged off a requirement to report its North Korean coal imports to the U.N. Security Council sanctions committee. When U.S. and Japanese diplomats pressed their Chinese counterpart for an explanation in a closed-door meeting this month, the Chinese diplomat said nothing, according to a U.N.-based official.

North Korean banks and firms, meanwhile, have maintained access to international financial markets through a vast network of Chinese-based front companies, enabling Pyongyang to evade sanctions. That includes trades in cash and gold bullion and concealing financial transactions behind a network of foreign countries and individuals, allowing North Korea to gain ready access to the international financial system, as well as to banks in China and New York. North Korea’s business “networks are adapting by using greater ingenuity in accessing formal banking channels as well as bulk cash and gold transfers,” the report found.

There is no direct evidence that the Chinese government is actively supporting North Korea’s sanctions busters.

But William Newcomb, a former member of the U.N. sanctions panel on North Korea, said it is hard to believe China is unaware of the illicit trade.

“You have designated entities that have continued to operate in China,” he told FP. “It’s not an accident. China’s security services are good enough to know who is doing what” inside their country.

China has a pattern of showing goodwill in the U.N. Security Council by supporting a succession of sanctions resolutions aimed at curtailing Pyongyang’s nuclear trade, according to Newcomb. But it has shown less commitment to enforcing those measures.

And it has used its power in an obscure Security Council sanctions subcommittee — which makes its decisions by consensus and in secret — to “slow-roll” efforts to ensure that sanctions are respected, Newcomb said.

The Chinese mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. An official at the North Korean mission who declined to identify himself said: “I don’t think there is anyone available for this issue.”

The evasions raise fresh questions about China’s commitment and pose a major challenge to Trump, who has vowed to prevent North Korea from achieving its goal of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a nuclear explosive to American cities.

Pyongyang has already conducted five nuclear tests since 2006, and it has made huge strides in missile technology, conducting a record 26 ballistic missile tests in 2016, including the firing in April of a submarine-launched ballistic missile using solid fuel. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appears poised to test an ICBM with much greater reach.

“The unprecedented frequency and intensity of the nuclear and ballistic missile tests conducted during the reporting period helped the country to achieve technological milestones in weapons of mass destruction capability, and all indications are that this pace will continue,” according to the report’s findings.

The report — which is expected to be made public next week — “shows once again that the North Korean regime continues its methodical effort to develop a nuclear military program and the means to deliver the corresponding weapons,” said François Delattre, France’s U.N. ambassador. “It is a real challenge to the [nuclear] nonproliferation regime.”

The extent of Chinese companies’ role in enabling North Korea’s evasion of sanctions is detailed deep in the fine print of the still unpublished 105-page report. For instance, North Korea’s Daedong Credit Bank (DCB) and Korea Daesong Bank, both subject to U.S. and U.N. sanctions, continue to operate in the Chinese cities of Dalian, Dandong, and Shenyang in violation of U.N. resolutions. The panel suspects that one of the banks, Daedong, may in fact be majority-owned by Chinese shareholders, citing July 2011 documents indicating the sale of a controlling stake, 60 percent, to a Chinese firm.

Daedong “effectively accesses the international financial system through a network of offshore accounts and representative offices in China,” the panel report states. Its operations, according to the report, provide evidence that North Korean banks “manage to operate abroad through the establishment of front companies that are not

registered as financial institutions but function as such.”

The United States sanctioned Daedong; its finance wing, DCB Finance; and their Dalian-based North Korean representative, Kim Chol Sam, in June 2013 for providing financial services to the Korea Mining Development Trading Corp., or KOMID, North Korea’s chief arms dealer.

Kim has established a series of front companies in China, including a Hong Kong firm he opened with a fake ID indicating he was a citizen of South Korea, according to the report. He has facilitated millions of dollars in “payments and loans between companies linked to DCB and exchanged large quantities of bulk cash transferred to China from the Democratic Republic of Korea.” The report says member states — an obvious reference to China — are obliged to expel Kim and “freeze all property, assets and other economic resources owned or controlled by him.”

The Chinese connection is at the center of an international web that stretches from Angola to Malaysia and the Caribbean and involves a large network of North Korean diplomats, entrepreneurs, smugglers, and foreign facilitators. The off-the-books trade includes the export of gold, coal, and rare-earth metals and the sale of rockets, Scud missile parts, government monuments, and high-tech battlefield communications equipment, among other things.

Last year, the panel’s investigations exposed trade in “encrypted military communications, man-portable air-defense systems, and satellite-guided missiles that may involve large teams of the country’s technicians deployed to assemble or service the banned items,” according to the report.

One example of a new niche market: North Korea buys cheap electronics in Hong Kong for a pittance and then turns them into military-grade radios it sells to

developing countries for \$8,000 a pop.

In July 2016, authorities from an unidentified nation seized an air shipment containing 45 boxes of battlefield radios, and assorted high-tech communications gear, from China to a technology company in Eritrea.

By the standards of North Korea’s multibillion-dollar black-market trade, the Eritrea haul was a drop in the bucket; North Korea earned \$1.2 billion in coal sales to China last year. But the case provided insights into Pyongyang’s elaborate, and ever evolving, financial scheme to evade U.N. sanctions and stay two steps ahead of the United States and other key powers seeking to thwart North Korea’s illicit trade.

The equipment bore the trademark of Global Communications Co., or Glocom, a Malaysia-based front company for North Korean firm Pan Systems Pyongyang, which operates a network of front companies and agents in Malaysia

and China. The company also has a branch in Singapore. Efforts to reach the company were unsuccessful.

But the head of Pan Systems in Singapore, Louis Low, told Reuters — which first reported on the scheme — that his company set up an office in Pyongyang in 1996 but that it severed relations with North Korea in 2010 and has had no dealings with Glocom. He suggested that North Koreans might still be using the company’s name without his agreement.

The mastermind behind the operation is North Korea’s premier intelligence agency, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, which runs Pan Systems and other front companies.

“The global network consisted of individuals, companies and bank accounts in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Middle East,” the report stated.

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

In speech to Congress, Trump asks Congress to unite behind health care, tax overhauls (UNE)

Michael C. Bender and Louise Radnofsky

Updated March 1, 2017 12:39 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump turned from the ominous language that characterized his major campaign speeches as he delivered Tuesday an impassioned plea for Congress to capitalize on a political uprising and unite behind major overhauls of health-care and tax laws.

Referring to the surge of nationalism that lifted him into the White House as a “renewal of the American spirit,” Mr. Trump struck an optimistic tone while calling on lawmakers to rebuild the middle class and inner cities instead of financing “one global project after another.”

“We will look back on tonight as when this new chapter of American greatness began,” Mr. Trump said. “The time for small thinking is over. The time for trivial fights is behind us.”

Mr. Trump gave few specifics during the hourlong speech, but offered guidelines for Congress to repeal

and replace the Affordable Care Act, rebuild the nation’s roads and bridges and find an elusive compromise on an overhaul of immigration laws.

In a break from campaign pledges, he also said he is willing to discuss immigration law changes that could provide a legal status to those in the country illegally today.

“Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed,” Mr. Trump said. “Every problem can be solved. And every hurting family can find healing and hope.”

Mr. Trump’s ability to persuade his fellow Republicans who control both the Senate and the House will be the first major test of his leadership after an erratic start to his administration.

To that end, the president used much of his prime-time speech, his first before Congress, to highlight his own accomplishments after 40 days in office, but with more subdued tones and few policy surprises. Appearing practiced and calm, Mr. Trump almost exclusively stuck to his script, delivering none of the improvised zingers that tend

to dominate headlines and overshadow his message.

It was the kind of performance that Republican leaders have been waiting to see from the party standard-bearer. Heading into the speech, Republican lawmakers who control both the Senate and the House were looking for the president to jump-start momentum on their top initiatives.

Leaving the speech, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) said Mr. Trump hit a “home run.”

But Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey, a rising star in the Democratic Party, said Mr. Trump did little to meaningfully reach out to opponents of his policies.

“This speech was more of the same fear and factual distortion that President Trump has made central to his campaign, transition, and first weeks in office,” Mr. Booker said.

The president laid out a set of guidelines without explicitly taking sides in the specific fights that are dividing the GOP caucus.

Mr. Trump repeated his promise to overturn the 2010 health law, at a time when the party’s factions are

threatening to withhold support for the effort if their demands aren’t met. He said a new health-care plan should ensure coverage for pre-existing conditions and minimize disruptions for people with coverage under Obamacare.

He backed the use of tax credits to help people buy coverage, expanding health savings accounts to pay for treatment and said governors needed the resources to continue to fund their Medicaid programs for the poor.

In the Democratic response, former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear said his party would oppose every GOP move to undo the 2010 health law they view as a signature domestic achievement of former President Barack Obama, a Democrat.

“This country made a commitment: that every American deserved health care they could afford and rely on,” Mr. Beshear said. “We Democrats are going to do everything in our power to keep President Trump and the Republican Congress from renegeing on that commitment. But we’re going to need your help—by speaking out.”

Mr. Trump promised “massive tax relief” for the middle class and lower tax rates for corporations. He said that his administration is developing a specific plan to do that.

He echoed some of the language used by House Republicans in their controversial proposal for a border-adjusted corporate tax, one that taxes imports and exempts exports. He complained that other countries impose tariffs and taxes on American goods while the U.S. doesn't do so.

Mr. Trump has wavered on the idea, and Tuesday night's comments brought him somewhat closer to House Republicans, who have seen their border-adjustment plan run into a buzz saw of corporate lobbying from retailers and sharp

opposition from Republican senators.

Mr. Trump essentially agreed with Republicans on the diagnosis without directly backing their prescription. “We must create a level playing field for American companies and workers,” he said.

Mr. Trump used the phrase “radical Islamic terrorism” in talking about his immigration ban and the plan he ordered from the Pentagon to combat Islamic State.

In an emotional high-point of the speech, he defended as highly successful a raid in Yemen that resulted in the death of a Navy special operator, William “Ryan” Owens, and singled out his widow in a moment that received extended rounds of applause. Mr. Owens's

father has been critical of the mission, and declined to meet with the president to discuss it.

“Ryan's legacy is etched into eternity,” Mr. Trump said.

“And Ryan is looking down right now. You know that. And he's very happy, because I think he just broke a record,” the president continued, in one of the few quips that veered off his prepared remarks. The comment prompted a smile from Carryn Owens, his widow.

Mr. Trump said it is “not compassionate, but reckless” to forgo stricter vetting of those seeking to enter the U.S.

Mr. Trump promised a multilateral approach to the fight, saying the U.S. “will work with our allies,

including our friends and allies in the Muslim world, to extinguish this vile enemy from our planet.”

Separately, he offered one line about Iran and Israel. “I have also imposed new sanctions on entities and individuals who support Iran's ballistic missile program, and reaffirmed our unbreakable alliance with the state of Israel,” he said.

The speech marked Mr. Trump's first visit to the Capitol since he took office Jan. 20.

—Byron Tau and Carol E. Lee contributed to this article.

Write to Michael C. Bender at Mike.Bender@wsj.com and Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@wsj.com

The New York Times Trump, in Optimistic Address, Asks Congress to End ‘Trivial Fights’ (UNE)

Julie Hirschfeld Davis, Michael D. Shear and Peter Baker

WASHINGTON — President Trump, in his first address to a joint session of Congress, defended his tumultuous presidency on Tuesday and said he was eager to reach across party lines and put aside “trivial fights” to help ordinary Americans.

He called on Congress to work with him on overhauling health care, changing the tax code and rebuilding the nation's infrastructure and military.

But he raised new questions about his policy priorities and how he plans to achieve them, especially on immigration.

Only hours before his address, Mr. Trump had broken from his tough immigration stance in remarks at the White House, suggesting that legal status be granted to millions of undocumented immigrants who have not committed serious crimes. Many of Mr. Trump's core supporters had denounced that approach as “amnesty” during the campaign.

President Trump emphasized the need for increased vetting of immigrants, a constant theme throughout his campaign.

But in his speech, Mr. Trump never mentioned legalizing undocumented people and over all held to the tough-on-immigration theme of his campaign.

“The time is right for an immigration bill as long as there is compromise on both sides,” the president said at the White House, according to people in attendance who asked for

anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the meeting.

The idea is a sharp break from the crackdown on immigrants in the United States illegally that Mr. Trump ordered in his first weeks in office and the hard-line positions embraced by his core supporters that helped sweep him into the White House.

But Mr. Trump made only a glancing reference to an immigration overhaul in his speech, calling for a new “merit-based” system that would admit only those able to support themselves financially. Over all he took a hard line on immigration, much as he had during the campaign.

“As we speak, we are removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals that threaten our communities and prey on our citizens,” Mr. Trump said. “Bad ones are going out as I speak tonight and as I have promised.”

But in contrast with the dark themes of his inaugural address, Mr. Trump's speech to Congress was a more optimistic vision of America and what he called the promises ahead. The themes were largely Republican orthodoxy, delivered soberly and almost verbatim from a prepared text. Mr. Trump read from Teleprompters and appeared restrained and serious.

Republicans interrupted dozens of times with standing ovations, although Democrats mostly sat stone-faced. Mr. Trump presented himself as eager to put aside some of the vitriol of his presidency.

“The time for small thinking is over, the time for trivial fights is behind us,” he said. “From now on, America will be empowered by our aspirations, not burdened by our fears.”

The most emotional moment of the speech came when Mr. Trump recognized Carryn Owens, the widow of William Ryan Owens, a member of a Navy SEAL team who was killed during a commando raid that the president authorized in Yemen. Ms. Owens sobbed as Mr. Trump said, “Ryan's legacy is etched into eternity.”

Mr. Trump said that Defense Secretary Jim Mattis had guaranteed him that it was a “highly successful raid that generated large amounts of vital intelligence.” Mr. Trump has been criticized for the raid, including by Mr. Owens's father, with some arguing the operation was botched. Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump had blamed Mr. Owens's death on “the generals” who oversaw the mission.

Although Mr. Trump's presidency has been defined by executive orders and pronouncements, his speech appeared to be an attempt to open a new phase and reflected his need for cooperation from Congress.

“My administration wants to work with members in both parties to make child care accessible and affordable, to help ensure new parents have paid family leave, to invest in women's health, and to promote clean air and clean water and rebuild our military infrastructure,” Mr. Trump said.

The president has yet to propose major legislation to achieve his

goals, with members of his cabinet and senior staff members divided over key elements of tax and health plans, and congressional Republicans split on how to structure them. By this point in his presidency, Mr. Obama had established an active — if not always friendly — working relationship with a Democratic Congress, having signed into law a \$787 billion package of spending and tax cuts intended to stabilize the economy.

Mr. Trump laid out the broad outlines of a health care overhaul that papered over divisions among Republicans about how to structure it, calling for a plan that uses tax credits and tax-advantaged savings accounts to help Americans buy insurance, and promising a “stable transition” from the existing system.

Yet he made no mention of an array of challenges abroad, including Syria, North Korea and Russia. Nor did Mr. Trump criticize one of his favorite foils, the “fake news” media. He did pledge his full support for NATO after questioning the need for the alliance, and argued that his demands that nations contribute more money to NATO had paid off.

“I can tell you that the money is pouring in,” Mr. Trump said without providing examples or specifics. “Very nice.”

Similarly, Mr. Trump offered no specifics on his suggestion earlier in the day that he might seek a comprehensive immigration overhaul. Such a move would be a significant turnaround for Mr. Trump, whose campaign rallies rang with shouts of “build the wall!” on the Mexican border. In January,

he signed an executive order directing the deportation of any unauthorized immigrant who has committed a crime or falsified a document. The standard could apply to virtually any of the estimated 11 million people in the country illegally.

In his comments to the television anchors at the White House, Mr. Trump went so far as to raise the idea of granting citizenship to young undocumented immigrants who had been brought to the United States as children, one person present said. Such a change would go well beyond the temporary work permits President Barack Obama offered them through a 2012 executive order.

During his campaign, Mr. Trump criticized Mr. Obama's directive as an "illegal amnesty," and promised to immediately end the program if elected. But he has delayed acting on the matter since taking office and expressed sympathy for its beneficiaries, sometimes known as Dreamers.

The White House did not dispute Mr. Trump's remarks to the

anchors, but Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the deputy press secretary, said she had not witnessed the conversation and was therefore unable to confirm it.

"The president has been very clear in his process that the immigration system is broken and needs massive reform, and he's made clear that he's open to having conversations about that moving forward," Ms. Sanders said. "Right now, his primary focus, as he has made over and over again, is border control and security at the border and deporting criminals from our country, and keeping our country safe, and those priorities have not changed."

The president's remarks about immigration came as he prepares to issue a new version of his executive order banning travel to the United States from seven predominantly Muslim countries and suspending the acceptance of refugees. The ban has been revised because of legal challenges.

Mr. Trump defended that order in his address to Congress.

"It is not compassionate, but reckless, to allow uncontrolled entry from places where proper vetting cannot occur," Mr. Trump said. "Those given the high honor of admission to the United States should support this country and love its people and its values. We cannot allow a beachhead of terrorism to form inside America — we cannot allow our nation to become a sanctuary for extremists."

The speech reflected the war Mr. Trump is fighting with himself and his inner circle. Even as he held out the possibility of legal status for millions of undocumented immigrants, Melania Trump, the first lady, was hosting the families of victims of violent crime by such immigrants — a way of highlighting the president's belief that immigrants who lack legal status pose a grave threat to Americans and should be feared and removed, not embraced.

Mr. Trump singled out the victims' families, saying, "Your loved ones will never be forgotten."

Giving the official Democratic response, former Gov. Steven L.

Beshear of Kentucky offered an implicit contrast to the president by noting his own humble background and military service, accusing Mr. Trump and his "cabinet of billionaires and Wall Street insiders" of favoring banks and the wealthy over ordinary people.

"You and your Republican allies in Congress seem determined to rip affordable health care away from millions of people who most need it," Mr. Beshear said. "This isn't a game. It's life and death for people."

For Mr. Trump's speech, the president turned to the top advisers who helped develop his inaugural address: Stephen Miller, his senior policy adviser, and Stephen K. Bannon, his chief strategist. The two were still working on the speech late Monday, aides said.

Mr. Miller and Mr. Bannon, both architects of the president's tough immigration policies, were responsible for shaping the dark themes of the president's speech on Inauguration Day.

**The
Washington
Post**

A tale of two speeches: The contradictions of Donald Trump's presidency (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/danbalzwapo>

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

President Trump promised to lower taxes, combat terrorism and replace the Affordable Care Act in a speech to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. Here are key moments from that speech. Here are key moments from the president's address to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Jonathan Newton/The Washington Post)

The President Trump who spoke to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday night bore only passing resemblance to the President Trump who spoke from the Capitol's West Front on Inauguration Day. Some of the words were the same, but the tone was utterly different. Therein lies the contradiction — and — challenge of his presidency.

In his inaugural address, Trump spoke of American carnage and as the tribune of the forgotten American. To the assembled members of Congress seated behind him that January day, he offered a rebuke and the back of his hand. On Tuesday, he made repeated appeals for national unity and cross-party cooperation. Looking out across the House chamber, he seemed to offer an

open hand to the same political establishment he had pilloried just weeks ago.

Trump as president must attempt a perpetual juggling act, at once capitalizing on public insecurities and stoking anti-establishment anger among those who helped carry him to the White House while sounding broader notes of optimism and playing nice with establishment Republicans, whom he needs to help enact his agenda. It is no longer a question of which is the real Donald Trump but more the question of whether he can build a successful presidency out of this split political personality.

The opening weeks of the administration have put on vivid display the tensions within his presidency and potential strains within the Trump and GOP coalitions. At times, as he did at last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, the president channels the worldview of White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, the nationalist firebrand who seeks permanent warfare against the established order. At other times, as on Tuesday night, he is a mostly (though never entirely) conventional Republican, embracing the worldview of House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (Wis.), who keeps alive the flame of traditional conservatism.

Trump remains the master of constant action, of both strategic diversions and politically damaging digressions. His days have been filled with gatherings at the White House, crowded photo opportunities in the Oval Office, tweets and interviews and pronouncements, all to project a sense of forward motion and promises kept. He has signed multiple executive orders. He has given several campaign-style speeches. He has stoked the emotions of Trump Nation with an us-vs.-them style of leadership. He has carried on his war with the news media.

Still. Executive orders have pointed to a new direction, but they are limited in what they can accomplish. The campaign-style speeches are just that, a litany of familiar promises. The president set the tone and dominated Washington, and he gives himself an A grade for what he has accomplished. What he has not done is what Republican elected officials want him to do, which is to put flesh on the bones of his campaign promises, set a clear order for his priorities and make some of the difficult choices about those devilish details.

That's proving difficult. The president stunned the nation's governors Monday when he declared that "nobody knew health care could be so complicated."

Nobody, perhaps, other than those who have looked seriously at what it took President Barack Obama to enact the Affordable Care Act or anyone who has looked seriously at what it would take to replace it with a conservative alternative.

Trump has repeatedly promised to produce a health-care plan soon. On Tuesday night, the principles he outlined mostly echoed those that Republican leaders have enunciated for replacing Obamacare. But that blueprint for reform splits congressional Republicans and also divides GOP governors. Will congressional Republicans expect Trump to find a consensus path forward, or will he turn over the responsibility to them? That will be a test of leadership.

Another major priority, for Trump and certainly for congressional Republicans, is tax overhaul. Candidate Trump had more than one plan. Sixteen years ago, when President George W. Bush spoke to a joint session of Congress at a similar moment, he talked about the details of his tax cut plan. President Trump has yet to explain what his would look like, particularly whether he supports a border adjustment tax, and Tuesday's speech did nothing to answer those questions.

Trump has moved quickly on immigration. He ordered the construction of a wall along the

Mexican border and is seeking to deport some of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants, focusing first on those who have committed crimes. His actions are deeply controversial among his opponents but enthusiastically supported by his base.

On Tuesday, he suddenly veered in a different direction, saying that real immigration reform is possible.

"If we are guided by the well-being of American citizens," Trump said, "then I believe Republicans and Democrats can work together to achieve an outcome that has eluded our country for decades."

(The Washington Post)

President Trump practices the speech he will deliver to the first joint address to Congress on Feb. 28. President Trump practices the speech he will deliver to the first joint address to Congress on Feb. 28. (The Washington Post)

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

A comprehensive immigration overhaul, which has included either a path to citizenship or legal status for those here illegally, has ruptured the Republican base for years. A path to legalization would meet stiff resistance from many of Trump's most loyal supporters, unless loyalty trumps ideology. Trump ran as a hard-liner. His sudden change of course and tone is a reminder of his unpredictability. It also raises the question of whether he will seriously pursue another complex and contentious legislative battle any time soon.

The president's agenda is nothing if not ambitious. Again, on Tuesday, he spoke about a big infrastructure initiative. He is a builder, after all. Such a plan would be a key element

of a jobs agenda, something he says is a priority. So it is a costly priority and he offered no timetable for bringing it forward.

Republicans who disagree with the president on changes to trade or entitlement policies nonetheless see him as their great hope for a dramatic reversal from the Obama years. He has made a down payment in cementing support from establishment Republicans with his nomination of federal appeals court Judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. It takes little more than a look back at the speech Obama gave eight years ago under similar circumstances to understand why those GOP leaders see the potential for a significant change in direction for the country during his presidency.

Obama called for a comprehensive health-care overhaul; Trump would undo it. Obama called for tough regulations on the big banks; Trump has targeted Dodd-Frank. Obama

denounced previous GOP-initiated tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans; Trump's campaign plans would give wealthy taxpayers substantial cuts. Obama criticized cutbacks in regulations during GOP administrations; Trump has begun rolling back many of the Obama administration's regulations.

Tuesday's address was described in advance as a moment for Trump to reset his presidency after an opening that included controversies, missteps and internal turmoil. In tone, he succeeded in offering an alternative to what many saw as the harshness of his inaugural address. In substance, much was familiar — the speech went only a few steps beyond where he has been before. Now comes the less glamorous work of governing and finding the balance between Inauguration Day and Tuesday night.

POLITICO Trump tries on normal

By Shane Goldmacher

President Donald Trump's first address to Congress was remarkable for how unremarkable it was.

Stately, scripted and subdued, Trump delivered perhaps the most traditional speech of his political career on Tuesday night. Sounding much like so many of the other presidents who have preceded him, he drew on history and the personal narratives of his hand-selected guests as he recited a prosaic laundry list of policy proposals, interrupted with spurts of soaring rhetoric and paeans to American exceptionalism.

Story Continued Below

"A new chapter of American greatness is now beginning," Trump declared.

He honored the widow of the late Antonin Scalia. He paid homage to Abraham Lincoln. He spoke about "the hopes that stir our souls."

In an unusually trim-fitting suit, Trump arrived on Capitol Hill only hours after he had given himself a rare poor review on anything, a grade of "C or a C-plus" for messaging early in his presidency. And from the earliest moments of his speech, when Trump invoked "civil rights" fights that remain unfinished and condemned "hate and evil in all its forms" after recent threats and attacks on Jewish cemeteries and community centers, it was clear that Trump had

undergone, at least for one night, a messaging makeover.

Trump traded the language of "American carnage" that defined his darker inaugural address for softer rhetoric, declaring that "a new surge of optimism is placing impossible dreams firmly within our grasp."

The words were conciliatory instead of combative. Some had been virtually unheard from him during the 20 months since he launched his political career: "true love," "common ground," and "the common good," "cooperate." Indeed, as Trump prepared to depart the White House, he could be seen seated in the backseat of his limo amid a drizzling rain, mouthing his lines.

The practice showed. On the big stage, Trump appeared at ease in a setting that Republicans were worried about, especially as the easily-baited commander-in-chief was looking out on an audience of hostile Democrats, many of whom wore white in symbolic protest.

If Trump's tone was new, his themes weren't necessarily. He talked of drugs pouring in, jobs fleeing, food stamps exploding, poverty rampant and terrorists threatening, piles of debt. It was just presented with the rougher edges shaved off and polished up.

"Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed. Every problem can be solved," Trump said. "And every hurting family can find healing, and hope."

And unlike his convention speech last summer — which was criticized as messianic — Trump wasn't saying that he alone could do that but calling for the collective help of Congress and the public.

"Each American generation passes the torch of truth, liberty and justice — in an unbroken chain all the way down to the present," Trump said. "That torch is now in our hands."

Senior administration officials said Stephen Miller, Trump's top policy adviser, who also wrote the inaugural, took the lead in drafting the speech. Chief strategist Stephen Bannon was involved, along with chief of staff Reince Priebus and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. One White House official said Vince Haley, another Trump speechwriter, had come up with the idea of framing the speech around the upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Trump did offer red meat for his supporters, urging Congress "to save Americans from this imploding Obamacare disaster" and speaking at length about the crimes committed by illegal immigrants and the need to build a border wall. He also repeated the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism" despite a push from new National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster not to.

He promised to create a new office for victims of such crimes and cited four guests by name whose families, he said, were impacted by those who "should have never been in our country."

Still, he sought to sell his policies — including a rewrite of his most controversial executive order, halting immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, that is expected on Wednesday — in subtler ways.

"It is not compassionate, but reckless, to allow uncontrolled entry from places where proper vetting cannot occur," Trump said.

Trump offered some olive branches to Democrats saying he wants to work "with members in both parties to make child care accessible and affordable" as well as for "paid family leave" and "clean air and clean water." Some of that rhetoric does not match the reality of what Trump has pursued as president; the administration rolled out a budget blueprint to gut the EPA's budget by about one-quarter on Monday.

Throughout, Trump stuck unusually closely to the text scrolling before him on the teleprompter. One of his few ad-libs was a powerful one: to acknowledge the sustained applause bestowed upon former Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens, who was killed in a Trump-ordered operation that has come under some criticism.

"I think he just broke a record," Trump said, as Owens' widow fought back tears, in a reference to the length of clapping.

But if Trump was hoping the speech would serve as a turning point from a tempestuous first 40 days, he did not act like it in the preceding hours.

On Tuesday morning, he'd appeared on Fox and Friends and deflected blame to military leaders for the death of Owens, a 36-year-old Navy SEAL. "They lost Ryan," Trump said.

He hosted a lunch for television network anchors and expressed a new openness

comprehensive immigration reform — something he'd campaigned vociferously against. And in a meeting with attorney generals, he'd veered toward the conspiratorial in suggesting that threats and attacks on Jewish centers and cemeteries were being done to "make people...look bad."

On Tuesday, Trump tried to float above such controversies, many of which he incites daily from his early-mornings tweets to his late-night phone calls to friends.

"The time for small thinking is over," Trump said, without a hint of irony. "The time for trivial fights is behind us."

As he exited the chamber, the question was for how long.

POLITICO How Trump's disciplined speech came together

By Josh Dawsey

President Donald Trump sat in the White House Map Room Tuesday with a coterie of advisers, a black Sharpie, stacks of paper and a teleprompter. Beside him much of the day — the 40th day of his presidency — were Stephen Bannon and Stephen Miller. Other aides frequently circled in, from Gary Cohn to Reince Priebus to Kellyanne Conway to Jared Kushner to Sean Spicer to Hope Hicks, suggesting language and offering advice.

He remained unhappy with parts of the speech, scribbling notes on printed drafts for aides to incorporate and bring back. He practiced twice on the teleprompter, timing the cadence for specific lines. He continued to pepper his team with questions.

Story Continued Below

The president spent the day of his first address to a joint session of Congress, according to multiple White House officials, much as presidents have before him: revising, reworking and rehearsing. The attention to detail was somewhat unusual for a president who often seems to wing it.

On Tuesday morning he had "marked up from front to back" 17 or 18 pages, one White House official said. He edited again at 3 in the afternoon. The first paragraph was edited as late as 5.

Around 6:15, he was convinced the speech had come together. Most in the White House never saw the remarks before he delivered them, with aides conscientious about leaks. He kept practicing in the presidential limo on the way over.

What emerged was a presidential address carrying little of the jarring tone and "American carnage" of his previous speeches, a similar message but a far lighter tone. It heartened his Republican allies and soothed some worried Democrats. While some Democrats criticized the speech, amid lingering questions about whether he could follow through, for one night it seemed Trump had done what his Republican allies wanted him to do: seem presidential and deliver a

message that hewed to the party line.

"The delivery was solid. It had true moments of emotion," said presidential historian Douglas Brinkley. "It was the moment he went from being a partisan figure to trying to be a unifying figure. For the first time, he seemed like a president. He seemed to have the aura. It was the high-water mark of his presidency."

One senior administration official said Trump was "very pleased" afterward. Back at the White House, he huddled with senior staff in the residence to ask them what they'd heard about the speech and thank them, said several people present. He told aides that members of Congress had given him rave reviews.

The senior White House official said Vince Haley, another Trump speechwriter, had come up with the idea of framing the speech around the upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Allies say Trump still needs to focus on the details, and that it will take more than one speech to advance his legislative agenda. And Democrats said to not read too much into the speech, questioning some of his facts and ability to fulfill his promises.

"The speech and reality have never been more detached," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

Brinkley said that most Americans don't remember a speech and that Trump will still have to deliver. "He made a lot of promises he doesn't have to fulfill," he said. "You can say you're going to Mars, you can say you're going to build that, you can say there are all these problems that you didn't create."

Trump, senior White House officials say, took an active role in crafting parts of the speech. He was convinced it needed a far less aggressive tone since he was speaking in the U.S. Capitol and that his message had been getting mis-characterized.

He sought advice from allies and aides and New York friends. He

was convinced to "get the part right," one top adviser said. "The guy knows the crowd. He understands delivery."

Rep. Chris Collins, a New York Republican, said "I think Democrats were even more surprised than the Republicans. I'm not going to question who was able to emphasize the tone, delivery and substance, but I thought it was great for the joint session."

There were last-minute decisions and reversals. At 6:30 a.m. Tuesday, aides were in Miller's office, homing in on their Obamacare specifics.

"We decided last night that it needed to be rewritten," one administration official said.

Then, in a meeting with TV anchors Tuesday, Trump seemed to indicate major movement on immigration policy — a call for a bipartisan bill to come to his desk. He didn't emphasize that in his remarks, leaving everyone guessing whether he changed his mind, whether it was a trial balloon or whether he never intended to do it.

A senior administration official also said references to NASA and space travel were dropped at the last-minute due to timing. "We wanted to keep the speech to an hour," this person said. Other details on taxes and border tariffs were also dropped to consolidate the speech, this person said.

On Monday afternoon, Trump told Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan he would include a promise of tax credits for health care, one person briefed on the conversation said.

While aides did some of the heavy lifting in drafting part of the speech — the framework was provided by Stephen Miller and Bannon — they said Trump was interested in every paragraph and wanted nearly daily updates.

He often gave aides and advisers broad ideas and told them to add paragraphs or do research. He sometimes called speechwriters several times in an afternoon.

He wanted to reference anti-Semitic attacks and Black history month near the top because he felt he was

being unfairly attacked and "wanted to set the tone," one senior official said.

After he promised aides he'd stick to the script, he kept his word. The president largely hewed to the teleprompter — though with some Trumpian flourishes.

Instead of a "great wall," Trump said "great, great wall." Instead of "billions of dollars," he said "billions and billions of dollars." He said money "poured in very much," which wasn't in the teleprompter. He talked about declining a Harley-Davidson ride.

But most of his remarks were read straight from the teleprompter, a tool he had spent years deriding other politicians for using.

His team also showed more tactical touches than normal.

On taxes, Trump's team was determined to give some support to Paul Ryan's border tax while not "alienating senators," one person said.

Aides had bowled in the White House alley with their Capitol Hill colleagues last week. They had surrogates prepared on Capitol Hill to send tweets and go on TV. White House press secretary Sean Spicer made an unusual trip to the Hill Tuesday and fielded questions from staff.

While friends worried he might grow tired in a long and structured speech, the delivery showed remarkable discipline for a man who likes to riff wildly, ignore the teleprompter, bash the media and fire up a room.

"I think he can weave his agenda with an optimistic message," longtime adviser Roger Stone said. "He is more than capable of that. We have to give him a chance to do that."

Chris Ruddy, a friend who often talks to Trump, said "if he keeps the positive tone, he can get legislation through and he will get a bump in his approval ratings."

"The question is how he carries the football after this," he said.

Shane Goldmacher contributed to this report.

POLITICO Was this the Trump that could win in 2020?

By Edward-Isaac
Dovere

"Donald Trump did indeed become presidential tonight," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday. | AP Photo

Forty days into his term, the president won acclaim for delivering a presidential speech.

President Donald Trump cleared a low bar: He read proficiently off a teleprompter, he looked human as he spurred long applause for the widow of the Navy SEAL killed in the raid he ordered, he didn't get into a shouting match with any Democrats or slip off into a rant about reporters as the enemy of the people.

Or, in the words of House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.), who was excited Trump threw him a bone on some details of health care reform: "That was a home run."

Story Continued Below

The only Trump who's proven he can win is the Trump who ran in 2016, defiantly never conforming to the political norms every pundit and experienced strategist insisted he had to. He was raucous and baiting and insulting and aggressive, and the voters put him in the Oval Office for it.

But for all the ways conventional wisdom was proven wrong last year, most still assume the 2020 race that Trump's already announced and held his first campaign rally for would have to be different. He'd be without the foil of a Hillary Clinton that so many voters either hated or couldn't get inspired by, with clear benchmarks Trump declared over the course of his campaign for Democrats to hold him to, running as a person who'd have to answer for his record rather than just attack from the peanut gallery.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

11:14 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—For a president who has disrupted traditional Washington, Donald Trump's address to a joint session of Congress was, in many ways, a picture of tradition from the moment when the House of Representatives' sergeant at arms led a procession into the chamber and announced the president's arrival.

It was a political stage on which Mr. Trump was the star but with a large cast of supporting players in their

And yet as much as Democrats want to believe they can beat Trump, want to be bucked up by a Republican Congress that's so far been unable to pass a single significant bill and the grassroots energy bursting in their own base, the tentacles of doubt started creeping in as many watched the speech: What if now he's this guy? What if they're underestimating him like they did all through the campaign? What if they have to change up the strategy again?

Trump's solid but substance-light speech came after six weeks of a struggling, sputtering presidency captured in a NBC/Wall Street Journal poll out earlier in the day showing Trump doing decently on being decisive and direct, but underwater on changing Washington, getting things done, dealing with the economy, honesty, knowledge, handling international crisis and temperament.

And yet, Tuesday night was for the first time actually different from anything Trump's done before. It was the kind of upbeat outreach speech that many Republicans had hoped he'd deliver at the convention last summer or at his inauguration in January, and that Republicans in Congress will need more if they're going to pass his agenda rather than duck and cover every time he opens his mouth or takes out his phone.

"I think he'll continue to grow at this and do this more often," said House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.). "I think people looking at home, some may have a different impression watching him tonight and seeing that he's a president for all Americans."

It was enough of a success that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) seemed to suggest that he hadn't before the speech been convinced Trump

should have the job, but it had pulled him over the edge.

"Donald Trump did indeed become presidential tonight. And I think we'll see that reflected in a higher approval rating," McConnell said.

Now the question is whether the speech breaks through. Or whether he'll be able to hold to it before some riled-up tweetstorm in the next few days or hours. Or if the sense of him is so set in most Americans' minds already. Or if any memory of this version of Trump will seem like another one of those mass hallucinations that seem to have overtaken American politics these days when he does finally release the revised travel ban executive order and order the deportation forces he said were already at work as he stood there in the House chamber.

"Even when he has good moments, he gets in his own way," one-time Obama strategist David Axelrod said on CNN.

The holes in the speech were gaping, like who exactly is going to pay for that "great, great wall" Trump again promised would run along the Mexican border and how, or what kind of guidance he might give on that infrastructure plan that was supposed to be his big revolutionary success right out of the gate and instead remains a mystery stuck on a shelf somewhere in the West Wing. Repeal and replace Obamacare, and somehow in Trump's telling American healthcare would end up cheaper, better and more widely available under a completely different plan.

That's not to mention the budget abracadabra Trump promised by implementing those infrastructure and healthcare plans, massively raising the military budget, creating paid family leave, cutting taxes and

managing not to increase the deficit along the way.

But politics is a lot of theater, and there's nothing more theatrical than a presidential address to a joint session of Congress.

"The thing is, he's behaved so badly that if he doesn't behave badly, people think he's getting better," said Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), now the deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee. "He's not getting better. This was a theatrical performance. That's all that it was, and nobody should be fooled by it."

The Democratic talking points were apparent: Nice speech, sure, but focus on the actions, not the words.

"This is another one of his speeches where he talks like a populist, but the way he's been governing is totally the opposite. He has been governing from the hard right," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said on CNN after the speech. "Until his reality catches up with his speeches, he's got big trouble."

"One speech cannot make the man," said House Democratic Caucus Chairman Joe Crowley (D-N.Y.). "And he only had up to go at that point, given how he acted at his last press conference and the inaugural address."

Democrats were almost daring Trump to follow through on being Mr. Conciliatory, which seems about as far off as his passing promise in the speech to have Americans soon landing on distant planets as part of new space missions.

"The tone doesn't really matter," said Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), "if he's not prepared to turn rhetoric into legislation."

President Trump makes most of the moment in address to Congress

Siobhan Hughes

Feb. 28, 2017

customary roles, many of whom the president needs to bring to his side if he is to see his policy priorities become law. Eschewing his fierce campaign rhetoric and not mentioning his usual foil of the media, Mr. Trump began his speech with a call to unity and peppered his remarks with a call for bipartisan action.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) and Vice President Mike Pence took their ceremonial places in seats behind the dais, in near-identical dark-blue suits and royal-blue ties, projecting the image of a unified Republican party in control

of both the White House and Congress, even though there are significant differences on major policy priorities at opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

For many Republican members of Congress, it was the first time they had heard a Republican president give what was, in effect, a State of the Union address. So many new lawmakers have swept into the House over the past eight years that until now nearly two-thirds of the House had only heard presidential addresses from former President Barack Obama.

"Now we have a standard-bearer who has the bully pulpit," said Rep. Dennis Ross (R., Fla.), who was elected to Congress in the 2010 Republican wave. There were familiar faces from the past, however. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a disruptive force in Congress two decades ago who anticipated Mr. Trump's own disruptive presence, was in the chamber as a guest.

During Mr. Trump's last visit to the Capitol, on Inauguration Day, dozens of Democratic members of Congress stayed away in protest over issues ranging from Russian

hacking efforts aimed at influencing the election to derogatory tweets that Mr. Trump directed at civil rights leader Rep. John Lewis (D., Ga.).

Rep. Maxine Waters (D., Calif.) boycotted Tuesday's speech. Some of her colleagues sought to display how they felt in more subtle ways. Rep. Eliot Engel (D., N.Y.) said he usually arrives early to such occasions to get an aisle seat within hand-shaking distance of the president, but not this year.

A group of Democratic women, including House Minority Leader

Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.), dressed in white, a color associated with the suffragette movement to show support for policies such as equal pay for equal work and the women's health group Planned Parenthood, which Republicans want to stop funding.

The guests in the chamber's gallery reflected the two parties' priorities and, as in the past, points they wanted to make. The president's side included: Maureen McCarthy Scalia, the widow of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who died last year; Jessica Davis and Susan

Oliver, widows of two slain California police officers; and Jamie Shaw Sr., whose son the White House said was killed nine years ago by an immigrant living in the U.S. illegally.

The Democrats' invited guests included refugees, Iraqi translators, and immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children—representing fear over the direction of the Trump administration's tougher immigration policies.

There were almost no Democratic hands to shake as Mr. Trump worked his way down the aisle

before he began his speech. And many Democrats sat stone-faced as Republicans jumped to their feet in frequent clapping.

As Mr. Trump himself noted, however, the biggest applause of the evening belonged to Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens, who died in a raid earlier this month. His widow, Carryn Owens, applauded forcefully as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Write to Siobhan Hughes at siobhan.hughes@wsj.com

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

President's speech leaves executives optimistic, wanting more details

John D. McKinnon

March 1, 2017 12:16 a.m. ET

In the first five weeks of his presidency, Donald Trump has left business leaders with a sense of cautious optimism—they're optimistic because they like his message on taxes, infrastructure and regulations, but cautious because so many details are left to be filled in.

On Tuesday night, optimism appeared to gain ground. Business leaders cheered the positive tone in the president's speech to a joint session of Congress, even as they acknowledged a continued lack of specificity in many areas, such as taxes.

But the executives said they hoped the president's unifying message could ease current logjams on the issues they care most about and give him a better shot at eventual success in the current fractured Congress.

"President Trump delivered a very strong economic message that hit the right notes," said Juanita Duggan, president of the National Federation of Independent Business, a small-business group. "Small business owners have waited a long time to hear a speech like that from the president of the United States."

And on health care, GOP leaders said they saw a breakthrough of sorts in Mr. Trump's endorsement of their emerging approach. That could help crack one of the toughest legislative puzzles lawmakers face, opening the door for progress on other business issues.

Still, Mr. Trump's speech did little to answer lingering questions about how his administration would tackle other big issues such as tariffs or trade pacts such as the North American Free Trade Agreement,

two issues many business executives are watching closely.

Overhauling the tax code and immigration rules—another idea floated by Mr. Trump—"will be music to the business community's ears," said Jake Colvin, vice president for global trade issues at the National Foreign Trade Council, a business group. He added, however: "Until there are more details, it's hard to say how different segments of the business community might react."

Doug Berenson, a managing director at defense consultant Avascent, said he wasn't surprised Mr. Trump didn't dip "into the weeds" of defense funding plans in this speech though he said the appetite for more details remained.

"As a defense budget analyst, I'd like to know exactly what they're prepared to propose," he said. "I'm also very curious about how the various personalities and competing agendas within the Trump administration and the GOP leadership will come to agreement given widely divergent views on budgetary issues."

The president promised not only to "bring back millions of jobs" and establish "a new program of national rebuilding" for aging infrastructure. He also promised to make child care accessible and affordable and to "help ensure new parents have paid family leave."

"Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed," he said. "Every problem can be solved. And every hurting family can find healing, and hope."

Mr. Trump again underscored the vital importance of stimulating more economic growth. "To accomplish our goals at home and abroad, we must restart the engine of the American economy," he said, "making it easier for companies to do business in the United States,

and much, much harder for companies to leave."

He said his administration is developing "historic tax reform" to reduce business rates "so they can compete and thrive anywhere and with anyone." He added: "It will be a big, big cut." He also promised "massive tax relief for the middle class."

Many firms as well as investors had a lot riding on Mr. Trump's address, given the potential impacts of some of his policy priorities, such as a tax overhaul and infrastructure spending.

Joshua Bolten, president of the Business Roundtable, said Mr. Trump's remarks "should help build momentum for the kind of big tax reform this country needs for economic growth and the creation of more high-wage jobs."

Already in his first weeks in office, Mr. Trump has aligned himself closely with businesses, particularly manufacturers. He has announced a series of ambitious regulatory rollbacks and other actions, and even marked plant openings and aircraft launches, frequently surrounding himself with executives.

The president also has made bold promises to deliver on some of the business community's long-sought legislative goals such as added infrastructure investment, as well as the tax and health care overhauls.

"This is really our opportunity," said Jay Timmons, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, whose group met with Mr. Trump last week.

Small-business and consumer confidence, as well as stock indexes, have generally risen since the November election, and polls suggest voters largely view Mr. Trump's handling of the economy more favorably than other aspects of his job performance.

But despite the steady churn of White House activity, particularly on regulatory rollbacks, some observers have worried that the administration might be failing to do enough to solve key legislative disputes—some of which reflect difficult disagreements within the business community itself.

Target Corp., for example, warned that a feature of the House tax proposal known as border adjustment would raise prices on customers' everyday essentials because the chain relies heavily on overseas factories. CEO Brian Cornell said he and other retail executives made a "very important fact-based case" against the measure when they visited Mr. Trump and congressional leaders in Washington earlier this month.

Mr. Trump generally steered clear of the idea on Tuesday night.

Some business leaders also have questioned whether Mr. Trump's plan to improve transportation and other infrastructure is sliding down the president's list of priorities.

Thomas Pellette, president of heavy-equipment maker Caterpillar Inc.'s energy and transportation group, said at a recent investor conference that postelection optimism about Mr. Trump's construction plan has yet to translate into new projects.

Even Mr. Trump's first stab at boosting military spending—widely reported as a massive increase—fell short of some businesses' expectations. The proposed rise to \$603 billion for fiscal 2018 is only 3% above the plan outlined by the Obama White House, though Mr. Trump could surprise with additional spending under the so called war budget that circumvents budget caps.

For their part, pharmaceutical industry executives were watching the speech closely for clues about how Mr. Trump might tackle high

drug prices, an issue he has mentioned often since taking office.

Mr. Trump called in his speech for working to “bring down the artificially high price of drugs,” but offered few specifics for doing so, which could be seen as a positive for drugmakers, said Geoffrey Porges, a biotechnology analyst at Leerink Partners LLC.

Mr. Trump also praised the development of new medicines for rare diseases and pledged to “slash the restraints” that keep drugs from being approved faster by the Food and Drug Administration. He specifically praised John Crowley, a biotechnology CEO who helped develop a drug to treat a rare disease that his children suffer from.

The drug costs more than \$100,000 annually per patient.

Leonard Schleifer, CEO of Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc. in Tarrytown, N.Y., said he “was very pleased” that the president in his speech seemed to distinguish between companies that habitually raise prices on older drugs, and those developing innovative new

medicines whose prices reflect their research costs and “the value they bring to patients.”

—Doug Cameron, Andrew Tangel and Joseph Walker contributed to this article.

Write to John D. McKinnon at john.mckinnon@wsj.com



The presidential Trump emerges, at least for a night

The Christian Science Monitor

March 1, 2017 Washington—On the morning of his debut speech to Congress, Donald Trump awarded himself high marks as president — except on communication.

“In terms of messaging, I would give myself a C or a C+,” President Trump told Fox News.

Trump may well revise the grade, after delivering the most polished, optimistic address of his short political career on Tuesday night.

“This speech was a new face on the president that looked very presidential,” Rep. Michael McCaul (R) of Texas, chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, told the Monitor in the Capitol rotunda afterward.

After almost six weeks in office, Trump supporters hope he is hitting his stride and has learned from his early stumbles. The next phase of Trump’s crash course in public service now moves to Congress, where he will embark on the delicate task of trying to pass a budget, and legislation on health care, tax reform, and immigration.

Whether this proves to be the long-awaited pivot toward a more presidential Trump, or a rare night of polished oratory remains to be seen. And while even Democratic lawmakers and commentators agreed that the president showed a new face Tuesday night, some offered a caveat: A more effective communicator of an unacceptable

agenda makes Trump more dangerous.

For now, Trump is apparently allowing himself to linger in this presidential “moment,” and reportedly won’t sign a revised travel ban on Wednesday, as planned. The original order, drafted hastily and now on hold, temporarily barred travel to the US by citizens of seven largely Muslim countries and suspended Syrian refugee resettlement.

Trump did not discuss the travel ban in his speech Tuesday, or his reported willingness to allow millions of otherwise law-abiding illegal immigrants to stay in the US and work — a revival of previous talk of a compromise on immigration.

‘A message of unity and strength’

On its face, the content of Trump’s speech contained many of the touchstones of a typical State of the Union address. He spoke of healing and hope, and called for bipartisanship in the name of common national purpose.

And he began by condemning the recent vandalism and threats against Jewish targets, and the shooting of two Indian men in Kansas last week, following criticism that he was slow to speak out against such attacks.

“I am here tonight to deliver a message of unity and strength,” Trump said.

It was also a message centered on policies that serve his controversial campaign theme of “America first,”

including a major increase in defense spending, a pull-back from multilateral trade agreements, the border wall, and tax cuts for corporations and the middle class. He expressed support for NATO, but also signaled a retrenchment of America’s role on the global stage.

“My job is not to represent the world,” Trump said. “My job is to represent the United States of America.”

In addition, Trump offered policies that play well across the aisle, such as a call for investment in infrastructure, paid family leave, and guaranteed access to health insurance for those with pre-existing conditions.

The speech won early high marks from the American public, with 7 in 10 Americans who tuned in saying it made them feel more optimistic about the country, according to a CNN poll.

Republicans hopeful, Democrats unmoved

Still, these are early days for the mercurial Trump, and it’s anybody’s guess as to whether he can keep up the more presidential posture he adopted Tuesday night.

All through the campaign, as even supporters and family members urged him to tone down the inflammatory rhetoric, he insisted he could be “presidential.”

But he never quite got there, until now. His convention address came across as dark and dystopic; ditto his short inaugural speech,

remembered for the phrase “American carnage.” Now his supporters have a more positive message to point to.

Republican strategist Ford O’Connell points to a particular moment of “optimism and compassion” in Tuesday’s speech: “Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed. Every problem can be solved. And every hurting family can find healing and hope.”

Some Democrats weren’t particularly moved by Trump’s message. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D) of Oregon dismissed his talk of clean air and water as “empty” words. He was also unimpressed by the president’s inclusive language.

“It’s just a rehash of everything we’ve heard before,” said Senator Merkley, one of the chamber’s most liberal members.

Democrats are in the minority on Capitol Hill, and they have pledged to do everything they can to block a Trump agenda that aims to undo key parts of President Obama’s legacy. But Republicans are hopeful.

“Trump’s overall goal of the address was to instill in Congress the ‘will to govern,’ to compromise where possible in an effort to get things done on behalf of the American people,” writes Mr. O’Connell in an email. “It’s not an easy task in a broken, bipartisan town like Washington, D.C. But on this night, he succeeded.”

Staff writer Francine Kiefer contributed to this report.



Donald Trump Finally Sounded Like a President

Alex Altman, Zeke J Miller

For the first time in his presidency, Donald Trump acted the part.

“I am here tonight to deliver a message of unity and strength,” he announced from the Speaker’s rostrum moments into his hour-long joint address to Congress on Tuesday night. For once, that message bucked his bombastic instincts and channeled the

aspirational aims of conventional predecessors. It was perhaps the clearest sign yet that after 40 days in the West Wing, the President is beginning to come to grips with the public responsibilities of the office.

Trump opened with a perfunctory nod to Black History Month and an overdue condemnation of a rash of recent hate crimes. He spoke about reforming the nation’s immigration laws and ramping up space exploration. He cheered Democrats

by calling for investments in infrastructure and paid family leave. At a moment when his legislative agenda is sputtering in a Congress controlled by his own party, he rallied wary allies by laying out a plan for economic revival.

Gone, for the most part, were the braggadocio and the bluster, the unscripted asides and off-message score-settling. The man who began his presidency picking fights over crowd size uttered lines like “the

time for trivial fights is behind us.” Trump hewed closely to his prepared text, which he was spotted practicing in his armored limousine on the drive to the Capitol.

The speech was still unmistakably Trumpian. Even in an address stuffed with banal platitudes—“we just need the courage to share the dreams that fill our hearts,” Trump said, “the bravery to express the hopes that stir our souls”—the President echoed the grim themes

that have marked his major speeches.

He lamented “the cycle of violence” in urban neighborhoods and warned against “a beachhead of terrorism” forming inside the U.S. Moments after taking credit for a stock market rally, he blamed his predecessor for a shrinking labor force and generational economic trends. The protectionist themes Trump laid out on the campaign trail—what chief strategist Steve Bannon has dubbed “economic nationalism”—were a pillar of the speech. Those lines underscored the strange scrambling of American politics that Trump has exploited, drawing awkward silences from mainstream Republicans along with cheers from the left.

The familiar warnings about the dangers posed by undocumented immigrants were back. Not long after declaring that “real and positive immigration reform is possible,” Trump was announcing the formation of a new office called

VOICE—“Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement.” Instead of inviting a cast of Americans with feel-good stories to First Lady Melania Trump’s box in the balcony, the President’s team summoned four people whose family members were killed by criminals in the U.S. illegally.

The result was an address of jarring tonal shifts. It pinballed between the optimistic chords that usually undergird such speeches and the darker notes that Trump hit in his inaugural address and his convention speech last summer. The dissonance reflected the dueling visions within Trump’s White House, where one faction has urged more conventional behavior and another counsels him to follow the freewheeling formula that won him the presidency.

But Trump arguably proved for the first time on Tuesday that he can hit some of the office’s ceremonial high notes. Perhaps the most poignant moment of the speech was the

sustained applause for Carryn Owens, the widow of Senior Chief William “Ryan” Owens, the Navy SEAL killed in the first operation Trump ordered of his presidency. “Ryan’s legacy is etched into eternity,” Trump said, quoting the Bible and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis’ defense of the disputed Yemen raid that took Owens’ life.

With few exceptions, Trump didn’t delve into domestic or foreign policy specifics. (In a calculated nod to Speaker of the House Paul Ryan’s agenda, however, the President embraced the House-GOP plan to replace Obamacare with a package that includes tax credits and expanded health savings accounts.) He made no mention of Russia or the calls for a congressional investigation into its meddling in the 2016 election. Nor did the President make an explicit reference to the ongoing U.S. conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Over the objection of his new national security advisor, Gen. H.R.

McMaster, he repeated his denunciation of “radical Islamic terrorism.”

But what audiences were looking for on this occasion was not just policy or key phrases but presentation. Almost every occupant of the Oval Office has a huge ego; almost all refashion themselves to fit the job nonetheless. Trump has been an exception. What thrilled Republicans most about Tuesday’s address was how conventional it was. “Donald Trump did indeed become presidential tonight,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told CNN after it was over, in tones that were as uncharacteristically excited as Trump’s speech was muted.

It was only one night. But for Republicans, who have struggled to defend Trump’s incendiary style, it was a merciful reprieve—and a sign, perhaps, that he has the capacity to grow into the role.

the Atlantic Grading Trump on a Curve

James Fallows

During Richard Nixon’s years as slashing anti-Communist U.S. senator and vice president, *The Washington Post*’s famed cartoonist Herblock (Herbert Block) was a relentless critic. His trademark was portraying Nixon with a heavier and heavier five o’clock shadow, caricaturing him as a thug.

Then in 1968, when Nixon returned to Washington as president, Herblock drew a famous cartoon saying in effect, “every new president deserves a clean shave” and began drawing a better-looking Nixon (for a while).

I decided to approach Donald Trump’s speech tonight to Congress in the “clean shave” spirit. During the campaign I was not an admirer. I thought his inaugural address was unique among such speeches in its dark divisiveness, and since the inauguration I’ve considered his actions more rather than less abrasive than even I foresaw.

But suppose I didn’t know or think any of that. Suppose I was listening to this as just another of the presidential addresses to Congress I’ve heard over the years (and for many years annotated here for the *Atlantic*, for instance going back to this one by President George W. Bush in 2003 through these by President Obama in 2012 and 2014).

Of course it’s impossible to forget what we’ve learned about Trump over these past 18 months. But I tried my best to watch this speech

with new eyes. And at the end of the exercise I thought that the speech would simultaneously seem less impressive, more impressive, and in a particular way shocking if we set aside what we already know about Donald Trump. Here goes:

Less Impressive: From a rhetorical perspective, State of the Union addresses are necessary evils, as I’ve tried to explain over the years. Structurally and stylistically they are inevitably cumbersome, since every part of the government views this as its opportunity to cram in the sentence or budget-number goal that will bolster its case in legislative battles. The speeches are always supposed to have a “theme” but rarely do, since their obligation is to be encyclopedic. They’re usually lumbered with would-be eloquent passages but are more often notable for their creaky transitions, on the model of “turning now to world affairs” or “we cannot be strong overseas unless we are strong at home.”

But precisely because the whole government can see them coming so far in advance, State of the Union addresses usually reveal a certain pride in *workmanship*. The president usually practices. The fact-checkers usually take care with questionable facts. The speechwriters are usually ready to kill themselves by the end of the process, but they’ve done their best to avoid clichés or passages that could have been taken from high-school oratory contests.

By those usual standards, Trump’s quasi-State of the Union address (some first-year presidents call these speeches State of the Union, some don’t) was of a low-average level. Trump read the speech from the prompter in a perfunctory and sometimes rushed-seeming fashion—or so I say, mentally comparing him with the dozens of such speeches I have seen. You could tell the difference in the handful of moments when he ad libbed—“a great, *great!* wall”—and momentarily came alive. Paragraph by paragraph, the speech dispensed even with the pretense of transitions from one theme to another, or feints at continuity. Sentence by sentence, it was uncomfortably close to speech contests at the junior-high school level: “The challenges we face as a Nation are great. But our people are even greater.”

So if this were just one more address to Congress—by either of the Bush presidents, or Reagan or Clinton or for that matter any modern figure—I think the general reaction would be: *This is OK, barely.*

But because this was by Donald Trump, and because stylistically it was such a contrast to his other big-deal rhetorical presentations, it is in my view receiving a significant grading-on-the-curve benefit. For other presidents, sticking close to the pre-released text was a normal expectation. In Barack Obama’s case, it was the source of right-wing criticism that he was “slave to the teleprompter.” In Bill Clinton’s case,

a prompter emergency gave rise to his policy-detail improvisation in 1994. But before Trump, no one wondered or worried whether a president *could* stick to the text, or felt relief that he had.

Trump’s “American carnage” inaugural address, as I argued, was shockingly dystopian. His “I alone can fix it” acceptance speech in Cleveland was shockingly *Il Duce*-like. His speeches along the campaign trail—well, we remember them.

Although the substantive proposals in this speech were consistent with what Trump has been saying all along, it *sounded* more normal. It began with a mention of the anti-Semitic threats and desecrations about which the Trump team had been so notably silent, plus Black History Month. It avoided attacks on the media as the “enemy of the people” or the obsessive comments about his “historic” “landslide” victory that had studded so many of Trump’s remarks. Even as the substance tracked Trump’s previous positions—or even, as with his re-emphasis on the threat of “Radical Islamic Terrorism,” it reemphasized positions that advisors like James Mattis and H.R. McMaster had seemed to challenge—it was several decibels down from his accustomed tone. Linguistically it was far less aggressive. Trump didn’t describe his opponents as “losers” or “enemies” (though he made ample use of his favored term “obamacare” to describe topics from Obamacare to current foreign policy). It had no more of the “we

Americans are in this together” notes than usual State of the Union addresses—but because it had so many more than what we’re accustomed to from Donald Trump, it was received in TV-pundit land as being more “presidential” and statesmanlike than *the same speech from a different president* would have been.

More Impressive. Massive as they typically are, most joint-session speeches like this are actually tips of the iceberg, mere hints at the huge bulk of policy work and attention-to-detail that lie beneath. Criticize as you will the policies that presidents as different as Carter and Reagan, or Clinton and Obama compared to both of the Bushes, have laid out, you won’t find many obvious factual errors in the claims they made in their major national addresses. Shading facts in a favorable direction, sure, but willfully misstating them? In most cases, someone inside the government would say “wait a minute!” before whoppers made their way into a speech.

For example: as part of his “the economy was terrible when I got here” pitch, Trump said that “94 million Americans are out of the labor force.” That’s “true”—if you include people who have retired, or have disabilities, or are still students, or for a variety of other reasons aren’t actively looking for jobs. Which is to say, it’s completely false in the context in which Trump used it—and its preposterousness has been pointed out before. I know that the economics team would have given me trouble if I had tried to put a cooked figure like that into one of Jimmy Carter’s speeches, and I believe the same is true of other administrations. The *New York Times* offered a real-time fact-check of similar sloppiness in Trump’s speech. One of the most notable was his claim that foreign-born terrorists were a major source of violence inside the United States. (They are not.)

Again, from the Vietnam War through the Iraq War to Syria, administrations have mis-stated reality, wittingly or otherwise. But as a routine matter, they have *tried* to avoid unnecessary distortions. Thus if you heard this speech with fresh ears, not knowing its origin, you would probably give it the benefit of the doubt and assume that its

factual claims had been through the standard vetting process.

Perhaps more important, you would probably also assume that there was an iceberg of *policies*—real ones, with budgetary estimates attached to them, and specific details, and decisions made about the toughest trade-offs—beneath those tips of conceptual goals that stuck up in the speech. If you say in the State of the Union that you’re taking a new approach to crime, then in normal administrations you’ve got a whole set of proposals ready for the Congress. If you say, as Trump did, that you want to spend \$50+ billion more on the military, you have specifics ready on how and why and where. If you promise to build a “great, great wall” or have a huge infrastructure program, you’ve ready with the details on funding—and how, exactly, they match up with your simultaneous promises to cut taxes and reduce the deficit. If you’re taking up the two very most contentious issues for your own party—in Trump’s case, what *exactly* to do about immigrants who are already here, and how *exactly* to “replace” Obamacare—you don’t make it a major subject of your speech unless you’ve already worked it out to at least the first-principles level.

And on through a long list. To wrap up this theme: If you heard this speech from another president, you might have had a *more* favorable reaction to it, because you would assume that the factual claims had been more carefully examined, and that the main policy objectives were backed up with ready-to-go proposals. When Barack Obama gave his initial address to Congress eight years ago this week, he explained the long-term goals of his \$800 billion stimulus plan—which he had already presented to Congress six days after he took office, and which had passed both houses and taken effect before February was out. Something similar was true of Jimmy Carter with his energy legislation in 1977, and Ronald Reagan with his tax-cut plans four years later. Yes, moving too fast can cause problems, just like moving too slow. But we have no recent parallel for an administration with so few of the big questions answered (and so few senior officials in place to do the

answering), so many weeks into its term.

Particularly Shocking: When I was working on State of the Union speeches in the 1970s, the “Lenny Skutnik” tradition did not yet exist. Skutnik was a young civil servant who in January, 1982 dived into the frigid Potomac to help rescue survivors of an airliner that had crashed into the river. For his State of the Union address two weeks later, Ronald Reagan invited Lenny Skutnik to sit next to Nancy Reagan in the First Lady’s box, and he called out him out in the speech as an example of American heroism. Ever since then, the First Lady’s box has included guests whose character or achievement illustrate themes the president would like to stress.

I’ll pass over Trump’s inclusion of a group prominently featured at the Republican convention: relatives of those who were killed by illegal immigrants. This is hateful in my view—you’d have a much larger pool to draw from if choosing relatives of those killed by domestic violence, or by drunk drivers, or by accidental or intended gunfire, or by opioids or heroin, or by suicide and depression, or by other modern evils—but I know they’re part of the Trump brand.

The shock to me was Trump’s calling out Carryn Owens, widow of the Navy SEAL, Ryan Owens, who died in the raid in Yemen that Trump authorized during his first week in office. He spoke of her husband’s bravery and sacrifice; she naturally broke down in tears; and the camera stayed on her as the Congress stood and gave a prolonged ovation.

The pundits I saw on TV were calling the moment “powerful” and “presidential.” I disagreed. For Ryan Owens’s own commitment and sacrifice, I feel only respect, honor, and admiration. His wife’s grief must be bottomless—like that of Ryan Owens’s father, who is so bitter about the raid that he refused to acknowledge Trump or shake his hand when Ryan Owens’s body was returned to Dover Air Force base.

But the public use of a widow’s grief in this ceremony seemed all too close to the spectacle that was the heart of Ben Fountain’s unforgettable novel *Billy Lynn’s*

Long Halftime Walk, or the phenomenon I called “Chickenhawk Nation” in my cover story two years ago. In that piece I defined a chickenhawk nation as one “willing to do anything for its military except take it seriously.” Raise military budgets, sure. “Salute the heroes” at sporting events—and big presidential speeches—yes, as well. But thinking *seriously* about where and how Americans will be asked to risk their lives? About exactly how the defense budget will be spent? About how the burdens of service can be more fairly shared? These topics are not so interesting.

On the very same day in which Trump had tried to deflect blame for Ryan’s death and other problems of the Yemen raid, saying (incredibly) of military leaders “they lost Ryan”; on the very day after he said publicly that the nation’s military “doesn’t win any more” and “we don’t fight to win”—at that moment, Donald Trump thought it suitable to use a grieving widow in this way. And then to say, as the applause finally died down, that the cheers had “set a record.”

If you thought this “presidential,” fine.

For me, it was too easy.

The president I worked for, Jimmy Carter, forthrightly took personal responsibility after his administration’s most dramatic failure, the attempted rescue of American hostages from the embassy in Teheran. “It was my decision to attempt to the rescue operation,” he said on national TV. “It was my decision to cancel it ... The responsibility is fully my own.” The first president I remember, John F. Kennedy, took public responsibility early in his administration for the failed invasion of Cuba’s Bay of Pigs. Our most recent president, Barack Obama, said after an intelligence failure, “Ultimately, the buck stops with me.” This is, finally, what presidents do. As George W. Bush put it, each is “the decider.” They can accept credit for success, but they must take responsibility for failures.

I am not yet aware of the latest incumbent ever taking public responsibility for a mistake or a failure. That will be the next step in becoming presidential.

The New York Times Health Care Is Front and Center in Democrats’ Response to Trump Address

Jonathan Martin

In responding to President Trump’s address to Congress on Tuesday, Democrats had to navigate between

the expectations of their angry base in America’s cities and the need to appeal to a broader array of voters

in parts of the country where the president is far more popular.

The party handed that task to former Gov. Steven L. Beshear of

Kentucky, an emblem of the sort of largely rural state that Democrats lost in last year’s presidential election. Delivering the party’s

official response, Mr. Beshear, dressed in khakis and a blue shirt, sat in a Lexington diner and offered down-home references to Friday night football, Sunday morning worship and life as a preacher's kid.

Mr. Beshear noted that the Americans who had gained health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, a law he championed in his state, were the sort of "friends and neighbors" he surrounded himself with in the diner.

Before the law was passed, "they woke up every morning and went to work, just hoping and praying they wouldn't get sick," he said. "Because they knew they were just one bad diagnosis away from bankruptcy."

Now, he vowed, "Democrats are going to do everything in our power to keep President Trump and the Republican Congress from reneging on that commitment."

Reporters from The New York Times fact checked the Democrats' response to President Trump's address to Congress, which was delivered by former Gov. Steve Beshear of Kentucky

The decision by the congressional Democratic leadership to invite Mr. Beshear, 72, who has been out of office for more than a year, was a departure from tradition for the opposition party, which usually chooses a rising star to offer the televised response to the president's speech.

But Democratic leaders are determined to make health care — particularly Medicare and the Affordable Care Act — the centerpiece of their attacks against Republicans leading into next year's midterm

elections. And as Mr. Beshear alluded to, he has a compelling story to tell about the effect of the health law in a conservative-leaning state.

But congressional Democrats are struggling to keep a tight grip on their most impassioned voices, just as Republicans did with the rise of the Tea Party in opposition to President Barack Obama.

So while Mr. Beshear devoted a substantial portion of his remarks to health care, he also turned away from his easygoing tone with strongly worded remarks on immigrants and refugees that he may have avoided were he facing re-election.

"President Trump has all but declared war on refugees and immigrants," he said, adding, "We can protect America without abandoning our principles and our moral obligation to help those fleeing war and terror without tearing families apart."

And Mr. Beshear castigated Mr. Trump over the president's incendiary rhetoric.

"When the president attacks the loyalty and credibility of our intelligence agencies, the court system, the military, the free press, individual Americans simply because he doesn't like what they say, he's eroding our democracy," he said. "And that's reckless."

The former governor was not the only prominent voice on the left responding to the president's address to Congress. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who has perhaps the most intense following of any currently serving liberal, delivered a rejoinder via Facebook Live.

"The Republicans are now on the defensive, and we have to continue to push them back," Mr. Sanders said, invoking issues such as climate change and mass incarceration, which Mr. Trump made no mention of but are particularly important to many liberals.

And Astrid Silva, an immigration activist who came to America as an undocumented immigrant, delivered the first ever Spanish-language response to such a presidential address, saying, "Immigrants and refugees are the heart and soul, and the promise, of this country."

Mr. Sanders, a political independent, has been made a member of the Senate Democratic leadership, so his remarks were not of the same renegade nature as those delivered in 2011 by Michele Bachmann, a Minnesota congresswoman at the time, who offered a Tea Party-flavored speech after Mr. Obama's State of the Union address. The Republicans' official response that year was delivered by Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin.

Still, many rank-and-file Democrats, and some elected officials, believe Mr. Trump was illegitimately elected and are focused more on how to quickly expel him from office than on promoting a poll-tested message against him and other Republicans on health care.

Representative Maxine Waters, the veteran California Democrat, said the demands from liberal voters were growing only more intense.

"Even though many of my Democratic colleagues are not ready to talk about impeachment, in

the grass roots I'm hearing a lot about impeachment — and treason," said Ms. Waters, who boycotted Mr. Trump's speech, adding that she shared their desire to drive him from the presidency.

"I believe he can be found guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors, with the interaction and the collusion that is taking place with Russia and the Kremlin," she said. "And I'm going to keep on it, and I think I'm going to be proven to be right."

Beyond Ms. Waters's absence, there were other signs of quiet protest that illustrated how uneasy Democrats are with a historically unpopular new president. Many of the female Democratic lawmakers in the audience were clad in white to honor the women's suffrage movement.

And some of the House Democrats known in the past to stage an endurance test to be seen on camera shaking the hand of the president bypassed the rite, leaving mostly Republicans to greet Mr. Trump when he walked down the center aisle to deliver his speech.

After his remarks, among the few Democrats to greet the president was a grinning Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, perhaps the most conservative member of his party in Congress.

Representative Joe Crowley of New York, the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, was less pleased.

"We don't agree with much of anything he said tonight," he said.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Editorial : Trump Makes His Pitch

March 1, 2017
12:19 a.m. ET

131 COMMENTS

Donald Trump's challenge Tuesday night was to look like he was up to the Presidency after a rocky start and set a clear direction for Congress. He succeeded more on the former than the latter, and the test now will be whether he can corral a fractious Congress to deliver in particular on tax reform and health care.

As a presidential rookie, Mr. Trump showed he could deliver a speech on this kind of stage in a calm and measured way. We haven't seen enough of that in his first five weeks, and in that sense on Tuesday he rose to the occasion in democracy's center ring. He was less tendentious than in his

inaugural, and he began and ended with notes of unity and inclusiveness that have been too few in his early days.

Mr. Trump's tone was also less combative than in his press conferences or TV appearances, and he didn't sound like he was delivering a moral lecture as President Obama so often did. His blunt, plain language has been part of his political appeal, and for the most part he also avoided the defensiveness and self-focus that are unbecoming in the world's most powerful political leader.

Even better was a tone of relative optimism. We say relative because his previous major speeches, including the inaugural, have included a parade of American horrors. On Tuesday he offered

more than a few downbeats, including an overwrought picture of crime and a country besieged by foreign scoundrels. But he also pointed to better days and noted that Americans have always overcome their troubles.

The speech was less helpful in laying down clear markers for Congress on his signature reforms. The biggest miss was on taxes, where he barely developed his case for reform beyond what he has said in the campaign. He made only a tepid argument for the supply-side benefits of tax reform and instead cast corporate tax cuts mainly as a way to "create a level playing field for American companies and workers."

This generality may reflect the indecision within his own economic

team about how to proceed on tax reform. But with Republicans on Capitol Hill all over the place on taxes and spending, Mr. Trump missed an opportunity to make a better case and to set a firm timetable for action that can't afford to go beyond 2017.

Also striking are the President's contradictions on the wellsprings of economic growth. He understands that tax cuts and deregulation are essential to unleashing investment at home, but his capitalist instincts stop at the border. His invocation of the hoary old Lincoln quote about the virtues of "protective policy" couldn't be less appropriate for the modern U.S. economy that needs global markets and world-class talent to succeed.

This is the “economic nationalism” promoted by his chief strategist Steve Bannon, and it is intended to show voters that Mr. Trump is on their side. But if it is ever put into practice it will undermine the rest of his growth agenda.

The President was better on health care, where he offered a set of sound principles. These included more competition and individual choice: “it must be the plan they want, not the plan forced on them

by the government.”

**NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE**

Editorial : Trump’s Unrealistic Budget

Ahead of his address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, President Trump has released the first details of his broad budget goals for fiscal year 2018, the headline-grabbing element of which is a proposed 10 percent increase in defense spending. To offset this additional \$54 billion for the Pentagon, the president is recommending across-the-board cuts in as-yet-unspecified discretionary-spending programs.

The specifics are still forthcoming, but the president’s budget preliminaries suggest that his fanciful campaign promises — to solve the nation’s pecuniary woes by targeting “waste, fraud, and abuse” and cutting foreign aid — have not been adapted to fiscal reality. It’s still in the earliest stages, but his plan portends a significant increase to an already massive federal debt.

It goes without saying that the federal government is chock-full of waste.

Bureaucracies

Perhaps most important, he made clear that Republicans can’t merely repeal ObamaCare and hope for the best. Too many conservatives seem to think this is all they need to do to honor their campaign promises, but the moment they repeal it they will own every premium increase and cancelled health plan. Mr. Trump will have to keep making the case that Republicans need to improve the health-insurance marketplace or voters will hold them accountable.

Mr. Trump also made a strong pitch on education, which he rightly called “the civil-rights issue of our time.”

He called on both parties to fund more school choice for “disadvantaged youth,” and Democrats should want to help, though most will follow whatever the teachers unions demand.

As usual for new Presidents, Mr. Trump’s main focus was domestic reform, and the foreign-policy sections offered no notable details. He was reassuring in calling for “a direct, robust and meaningful engagement with the world” and he also invoked “American leadership.” How that will manifest itself beyond

destroying Islamic State, he did not say.

Our guess is the speech won’t do much to move Democrats in a polarized Washington. But perhaps it will reassure nervous Republicans who have wondered when he would focus on the hard task of governing. The speech puts him on firmer ground for that challenge.

are beset with bloat — duplicative or ineffective programs, overstaffing, and more — that can and ought to be trimmed. However, deep cuts to the EPA, the Department of Education, the Department of State, and the rest, which the White House’s budget outline partly relies on, are not only politically unrealistic but also unlikely to balance out the administration’s proposed spending.

Beyond the \$54 billion heading to the Pentagon — which is welcome after the neglect of the Obama years — the president continues to promote large-scale infrastructure spending. On Monday, meeting with several governors at the White House, he promised: “We’re going to start spending on infrastructure — big.” (On the campaign trail, Trump proposed \$1 trillion in roads, bridges, and more.)

Again, where the money is to come from is anyone’s guess, especially as the White House and congressional Republicans pursue tax cuts. If reports are accurate, the

administration seems to be predicating its budget on optimistic annual growth projections.

In reality, the specter looming over America’s financial prospects is not waste or foreign aid. Foreign aid amount to \$42.4 billion per year, or less than 1 percent of the federal budget; but some of this aid is in the interest of the U.S., and not the uniform waste the president sometimes suggests. The graver menace is our entitlement programs, which at present constitute 60 percent of federal government spending; they are expected to reach two-thirds of federal spending within a decade. The president’s budget, though, is designed to protect the largest of those programs — and not just from cuts to benefit levels, but from any cuts at all. This is silly. Ensuring that Social Security benefits are paid out at expected levels (for many current beneficiaries, a sudden cut would be untenable) should not mean that the Social Security Administration is exempted from budgetary oversight.

Until Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and our host of other unsustainable programs are reconfigured, the country will continue adding to its debt burden.

What is ultimately needed, of course, is long-term entitlement reform. Until Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and our host of other unsustainable programs are reconfigured, the country will continue adding to its debt burden.

From what we know so far, though, the administration is proposing no change in the trajectory of the federal budget. In the meantime, an increase in (disciplined) defense spending and an aggressive approach to administrative excess are fine priorities. But without setting itself to the country’s most pressing financial problems, the White House will never succeed in making its math add up.

**Los
Angeles
Times**

Editorial : Trump’s budget plans are magical thinking at its worst

The Times
Editorial Board

The Times Editorial Board

The president’s annual budget request is more of a wish list than a blueprint, given that members of Congress routinely ignore most of the initiatives the White House proposes in favor of their own priorities. So the budget outline that President Trump floated this week should be viewed as an opening bid by player who’s about to step away from the game.

Nevertheless, Trump’s proposal is a window into his priorities, and it reveals a sort of reckless abandonment of working-age Americans and their children in favor of the armed forces, defense contractors and retirees. And like Trump himself, it ignores some of

the core values of both Republicans and Democrats, which should guarantee that it will quickly be shunted aside on Capitol Hill. And deservedly so.

The proposal’s major piece is a \$54-billion increase in the defense budget, which already consumes more than half of the federal tax dollars not spent on interest payments or entitlements. Inexplicably, the hike would beef up the country’s ability to fight the sort of overseas wars that Trump railed against during the campaign, and would come at the expense of the diplomatic and foreign aid programs designed to avert those conflicts, as well as domestic programs that protect the environment, help the poorest and most vulnerable Americans, and enforce the tax laws.

Although Trump’s outline may not cause the federal deficit to mushroom immediately, it seems to give no thought to how to slow the growth in the federal debt over the long term. In fact, new Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said the president won’t do anything to stabilize entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, at least not now. Instead, Trump told Fox News on Tuesday, he’s counting on faster economic growth to solve the deficit problem.

That’s magical thinking. As vital as they may be, entitlements, particularly the ones that provide healthcare to the elderly and the poor, are at the heart of Washington’s long-term spending problem. Of course, Trump just discovered what every other policymaker in Washington already

knew — that healthcare is “complicated.” So it won’t be easy to turn the tide of red ink in these programs while preserving their much-needed benefits. But that’s no excuse to punt the burgeoning debt to the next generation.

Trump isn’t the first president to avoid addressing the government’s long-term fiscal problems; Presidents Bush and Obama accomplished little on that front as well. But Trump’s desire to needlessly gin up military spending while slashing vital safety-net programs — not to mention the State Department, which is crucial to avoiding wars — indicates that he has no clue what the nation’s best interests are in the near term too, or how to achieve them.

Editorial : Visions of Trumptopia

The Editorial Board

If there was a unifying theme to President Trump's campaign, it was his pledge to serve America's "forgotten men and women," working people forsaken by the economy and Washington.

In his speech Tuesday night to a joint session of Congress, Mr. Trump presented himself as having made an aggressive start at championing the cause of working people, and promised a new era of rising wages, bustling factories and coal mines, sparkling air and water, and cheaper and better health care, all behind a "great great wall." He told a few whoppers, but largely kept his eyes riveted to his teleprompter and his delivery subdued. He even opened his speech with a long-overdue condemnation of hate "in all of its very ugly forms."

We heard again the same sorts of gauzy promises and assertions of a future Edenic America, a sort of Trumptopia, that characterized his campaign. He didn't explain how he would get it all done, much less pay for any of it; indeed, it sounded at times as though he were still running for the job, rather than confronted with actually doing it. Across his first few weeks in office,

Mr. Trump has shown little sign of delivering anything for working Americans beyond whatever satisfaction they may derive from watching him bait the Washington establishment and attack the reality-based media.

Mr. Trump likes to describe his chaotic first month as "promises kept." Really? Remember how he promised during the campaign to "immediately" fix Obamacare and deliver "great health care for a fraction of the price"? He hasn't even put a plan on the table. On Monday, he complained to the nation's governors that "nobody knew" replacing Obamacare "could be so complicated."

As in the campaign, Mr. Trump also promised Tuesday night to accelerate economic growth with a \$1 trillion infrastructure plan. "Crumbling infrastructure," he said, "will be replaced with new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and railways, gleaming across our very, very beautiful land." Sounds great. What's the plan? How will we pay for it? He wasn't saying. He also renewed his promise of "massive tax relief" for the middle class — but once again there are no details in sight.

It is very early yet in this presidency — though it sure doesn't feel that

way — and Mr. Trump may yet keep some of his proliferating commitments to Americans.

But the plans he has put forward so far, and the few actions he has taken, do not bode well. He proposes to cut the health, disability and job-training programs that working people, as well as the poor, rely upon. Mr. Trump's first big initiative was a draconian immigration ban, now mired in court challenges, that's caused problems for businesses from Silicon Valley to Wisconsin. Mr. Trump proudly noted Tuesday that one of the administration's first orders froze federal hiring, but he seems unaware that those jobs aren't only in Washington, they're in communities across the nation.

Mr. Trump has successfully started a national assault on unauthorized immigrants — and it is already tearing families apart and disrupting businesses, and is likely to cost billions without improving the fortunes of the working poor. On Tuesday he dangled the possibility of supporting some form of "merit based" immigration reform that would make struggling families "very very happy indeed."

Again, that last bit sounds really nice. But it's hard to escape the conclusion that, so far, the only

working people the president has really delivered for are members of his own family, who are using his presidency as a brand-building opportunity, and former campaign officials, who are cashing in as lobbyists in Washington.

Yet Mr. Trump has certainly not forgotten America's "forgotten men and women." The White House is assiduously stoking their fears, grievances and prejudices, and selling photo-ops as accomplishments in order to portray an undisciplined, unfocused president as "President Action, President Impact."

Meanwhile, he and his aides have counted on the protests of Americans outraged by his antics to create the appearance of an activist presidency. The cable shows are always on in the West Wing, where Stephen Bannon loves seeing split-screen television images with Mr. Trump meeting business executives on one side and opposition protest rallies on the other.

Mr. Trump closed his address to Congress by recalling the historic accomplishments of "the country's builders and artists and inventors" and imagining what Americans can accomplish today. It's time for the American president to do his job as well.



Editorial : Trump would explode the deficit

The Editorial Board, USA TODAY

Joint session of Congress on Feb. 28, 2017. (Photo: Pool photo by Jim Lo Scalzo)

The president's policy priorities, touted Tuesday night in his wide-ranging first address to a joint session Congress, were quintessential Donald Trump, though with a softer tone: based on deception and impractical on many levels.

"Our military will be given the resources its brave warriors so richly deserve," he said. "Crumbling infrastructure will be replaced with new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and railways gleaming across our beautiful land."

More money will be spent on a "great, great" border wall, drug treatment and child care. Corporations will receive a "big, big" tax cut, and there will be "massive tax relief" for the middle class.

It all sounded terrific, except for one thing: The numbers don't add up.

Even before his speech, Trump's plan to hike military spending by 10%, or \$54 billion, next year — coupled with large offsetting cuts in diplomatic, environmental and other non-defense programs — was facing stern opposition on Capitol Hill. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., called it "dead on arrival."

You simply can't boost spending on the military that much, start a \$1 trillion infrastructure program, hold Social Security and Medicare harmless, and slash taxes without exploding the deficit, which already exceeds \$500 billion a year.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, seated behind Trump, and other congressional Republicans know this well. They understand that fiscal sanity depends on reining in the health and retirement programs that have swelled to nearly two-thirds of all federal spending.

Even if Congress and the president do nothing, spending on benefits is projected to rise from an already lofty \$2.6 trillion this year to \$3.3 trillion by the time the last budget of

Trump's first term rolls around in 2021.

To pretend that he's doing something about red ink, Trump is targeting just one narrow band of spending: non-defense programs that have long been squeezed and can't be cut much more without real damage.

To pay for the defense buildup, while exempting preferred areas such as highways and law enforcement, the administration is said to be weighing cuts of 25% at the Environmental Protection Agency and 37% for the State Department and foreign aid.

In reality, to balance the budget without touching defense or benefits, you'd have to eliminate virtually every non-defense, non-benefit program, including transportation, housing, education, medical research and national parks.

Why would Trump, a business guy, traffic in budgetary irresponsibility? Perhaps, as the first president without government or military

experience, he doesn't yet have a good grasp on federal finances. More likely, his budgetary policies are designed to sound plausible to the uninitiated while allowing him to say he is fulfilling campaign promises. But he is not fulfilling anything until Congress actually passes legislation implementing his proposals.

If Trump plows ahead with those proposals, it will be up to Ryan, and the other Republicans who were applauding the president Tuesday night, to prevent him from plunging the nation into a major fiscal crisis.

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.

To read more editorials, go to the Opinion front page or sign up for the daily Opinion email newsletter. To respond to this editorial, submit a comment to letters@usatoday.com.

Milbank : The most important word Trump didn't say in his speech

President Trump addressed Congress on Tuesday night.

Or was it the state Duma?

And how can you tell the difference?

Trump uttered some 5,000 words and spoke for 60 minutes, but not one of those words was "Russia," and not one of those minutes was devoted to the so-far successful effort by our geopolitical adversary to undermine American democracy.

The FBI and intelligence community have unanimously charged that Vladimir Putin's government interfered in the U.S. elections in its successful attempt to get Trump elected. Ties between Trump and his team and Russia have been well established, right up through contacts with the Russian ambassador during the transition that led to the resignation of Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn — all while Trump has promised a friendly new approach to Russia.

It was hard to ignore this elephant, even in a room as large as the House chamber. And yet Trump excised it, like Trotsky from Soviet photos.

Putin could not have done better — nor could he have appointed better men to investigate Russia's interference in the U.S. election than those now charged with doing it.

Consider Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and head of the House investigation into Russia.

On Friday, The Post reported that Nunes participated in a White House-led effort to knock down a New York Times story asserting the Trump campaign had contacts with Russian intelligence. On Saturday, Nunes said at a forum in California that Flynn, who was pushed out over the Russia controversy, "is an American hero, and he was doing his job." On Monday, Nunes, the man responsible for overseeing the House's probe into the Russia matter, assembled reporters and declared: "The way it sounds to me is it's been looked into and there's no evidence of anything." Of contacts between Russia and Trump lieutenants, he said, "What I've been told ... by many folks is that there's nothing there."

Nunes even offered Trump and Flynn an alibi, saying "they were so busy" that Trump couldn't have possibly directed Flynn to call the Russian ambassador to talk about sanctions. And Nunes said a special prosecutor should be called in only if "serious crimes have been committed. ... But at this point, we don't have that."

It was a trip through the looking glass: The very purpose of an investigation is to determine whether crimes have been committed; if you have proof, you don't need an investigation.

Nunes, who served on Trump's transition committee, has already said executive privilege prevents him from examining discussions between Trump and Flynn. And Nunes echoed Trump's claim that the real scandal isn't about contacts with Russia but about the unauthorized leaks about such contacts.

And this man is supposed to lead an impartial investigation? You might as well ask the Kremlin to conduct one.

You don't need to be a partisan Democrat to know that, as former president George W. Bush told NBC, "we all need answers" on Trump's Russia ties. But the congressional Republicans leading the investigation have already declared their partiality. Richard Burr (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, also participated in the White House campaign to debunk the Times report.

During the previous administration, seven congressional committees issued eight reports on the Benghazi affair — and that was before the two-year Select Committee investigation concluded. Now we have the White House pressuring the FBI and senior intelligence officials to debunk allegations against Trump.

So where are these crack investigators now?

Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), chairman of the House Oversight Committee, has offered a bevy of excuses: He

doesn't need to probe the Flynn affair because "it's taking care of itself"; other panels could better protect "sources and methods"; he didn't want to pry into the "private systems of a political party"; and he won't "personally target the president." As for Russian hacking, Chaffetz echoed a Chris Farley skit on "Saturday Night Live": "It could be everything from a guy in a van down by the river down to a nation-state."

The pressure not to probe must be considerable. On Friday, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) told HBO's Bill Maher that "you're going to need to use the special prosecutor's statute and office" to probe the Russia-Trump matter. But on Monday, Issa retreated, saying he would support an "independent review" but not a special prosecutor because there's no "individual under suspicion."

Nunes, serving as judge and jury, told reporters Monday that it was "ridiculous" to suggest Flynn's transition talks with the Russian ambassador violated the law prohibiting private citizens from conducting foreign policy. "We should be thanking him," Nunes declared, "not going after him."

Good idea. And after they thank Flynn, the Duma investigators should send chocolates to Putin.

Twitter: @Milbank

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

Rubin : Trump's speech to Congress was mostly devoid of substance

By Jennifer Rubin

President Trump promised to lower taxes, combat terrorism and replace the Affordable Care Act in a speech to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. Here are key moments from that speech. (Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

President Trump promised to lower taxes, combat terrorism and replace the Affordable Care Act in a speech to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. Here are key moments from that speech. Here are key moments from the president's address to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Jonathan Newton/The Washington Post)

Vice President Pence and House Speaker Paul Ryan listen as President Trump addresses a joint session of Congress.

On the positive side, President Trump's speech began with a long overdue condemnation of the anti-Semitic attacks across the nation and the shooting in Kansas. He did not repeat his claim from a press briefing earlier in the day that desecration at Jewish cemeteries may have been the work of people who wanted to make him look bad. The speech was not as gloomy or sinister as his inaugural address. ("A new national pride is sweeping across our nation.") There was no message about "carnage." And he did not rail at the press. So he did not feed the narrative that he is unstable or plagued by paranoid delusions.

He framed the speech as a look ahead to the 250th anniversary of the country's founding. ("What will America look like as we reach our 250th year? What kind of country will we leave for our children? I will

not allow the mistakes of recent decades past to define the course of our future.") This was, by far, the most presidential we have seen him.

He also talked in a more reasoned fashion about immigration. "I believe that real and positive immigration reform is possible, as long as we focus on the following goals: to improve jobs and wages for Americans, to strengthen our nation's security, and to restore respect for our laws," he said. "If we are guided by the well-being of American citizens then I believe Republicans and Democrats can work together to achieve an outcome that has eluded our country for decades." What that would entail is far from clear, especially because his base is opposed to any comprehensive immigration reform. (Unfortunately, he also fanned the myth that

immigrants disproportionately commit more crimes, choosing to single them out with a special office within the Department of Homeland Security.)

By far the most dramatic moment came with a call-out to the widow of slain Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens. Tearing and looking upward to heaven, she received extended applause from the entire audience.

Aside from that, the speech had little to commend in it. The substitute for gloom and doom turned out to be sophomoric pabulum like: "We just need the courage to share the dreams that fill our hearts." Entirely devoid of substance, the fortune-cookie-like admonitions sounded like time fillers to extend the speech to an acceptable length. ("From now on, America will be empowered by our aspirations, not burdened by our fears.") With too many clunkers like

"Think of the marvels we can achieve if we simply set free the dreams of our people," it's evident he really needs a presidential-caliber speechwriter.

Trump has been president for about 40 days, but he sounds like he is still giving stump speeches. Alas, on health-care policy he largely repeated campaign promises. "I am also calling on this Congress to repeal and replace Obamacare with reforms that expand choice, increase access, lower costs and, at the same time provide better health care." Well, the issue is *how* to do that, and there was no indication he had any idea how to approach the issue. The only items he listed were protection for preexisting conditions (how, he did not say), health spending accounts and unspecified tax credits, litigation reform and flexibility for governors. That's it. *Nothing was mentioned about whether people will be able to buy equivalent insurance without*

Obamacare subsidies. Even more cringeworthy, he continued to raise expectations to new, unattainable heights. ("Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed. Every problem can be solved. And every hurting family can find healing, and hope.")

On taxes, the lack of content was laughable. "My economic team is developing historic tax reform that will reduce the tax rate on our companies so they can compete and thrive anywhere and with anyone. At the same time, we will provide massive tax relief for the middle class." And how is this paid for? Don't ask. Do the rich get tax breaks, too? You wouldn't know from his remarks.

While devoid of particulars, there were some intriguing lines about foreign policy: "The only long-term solution for these humanitarian disasters is to create the conditions where displaced persons can safely return home and begin the long

process of rebuilding. America is willing to find new friends, and to forge new partnerships, where shared interests align." That, perhaps, suggests a more engaged and collaborative foreign policy than he's described before. (However, he might not, then, want to cut the State Department budget by 37 percent, as he suggested earlier today.) He also gave a shoutout to NATO and even to democracy. ("We strongly support NATO, an alliance forged through the bonds of two World Wars that dethroned fascism, and a Cold War that defeated communism. . . . Free nations are the best vehicle for expressing the will of the people — and America respects the right of all nations to chart their own path.") He claimed the "money is pouring in" from allies agreeing to up their contributions. We await the fact-checking on that one.

So, if you were looking for real details about policy matters, you no

doubt were disappointed. Most critically, GOP members of Congress got little sense as to what the president would and would not accept as an Obamacare replacement. That means they'll be flying blind, hoping to reach consensus that won't be so unpopular with voters that Trump turns on his own party members. One cannot over-emphasize how strange it is that the White House is providing no cover, let alone direction, on arguably the most important aspects of its own agenda.

Happy talk and mindless phrases, of course, leave Trump with wiggle room to blame Democrats or Republicans, or both, when things don't work out, but it makes success on complex and controversial issues much more difficult.



Bernstein : Trump Strikes a Better Tone. So What?

Jonathan Bernstein

Donald Trump finally gave a first-class nomination acceptance speech. Unfortunately, he's running about eight months behind what he needs to be doing now.

After 40 days of presiding over a remarkably dysfunctional and chaotic administration, Trump didn't spend (much) time rehashing the election, bashing the media, or ad-libbing nonsense. There were a few whoppers, but my guess (before the fact-checkers do their work) is that for a convention speech addressed to partisans and curious independents, most of the exaggerations and misstatements were relatively normal.

That, along with a couple of days without nutty stuff on Twitter, offers good news for those worried about his self-discipline.

The bad news is it isn't summer 2016, and Trump isn't a candidate sketching out broad themes and aspirations. He is

the President of the United States of America. For a president giving one of his few major speeches in support of his legislative agenda, substance matters. Trump came up as short as ever. Whether it was taxes, health care, immigration, or infrastructure, the speech wasn't just light on details; it was almost entirely lacking in them.

Which would be okay if Trump already had, say, a health care and a tax plan. Or, for that matter, if Republicans in Congress were moving ahead solidly on one or more of his legislative priorities.

But none of that is true.

Governing, the old saw says, is choosing. To the joint session of Congress, Trump made no choices at all. It was an hour plus of cotton candy. I suspect it'll get excellent reviews; a lot of pundits who have been brutal to Trump will welcome the chance to praise him, and I suspect everyone is pleased to have the president toss aside his clown act, at least for one night.

But it's a sugar high, and there won't be much if anything remaining of it after a few hours.

There was simply nothing in this speech to break the deadlock Republicans in Congress are facing on health care. Nothing to reconcile Trump's instincts for promising huge tax cuts and huge new spending with budget realities, let alone with his complaints about the debt. He talked big on infrastructure, but we know the Republican leadership in Congress has already indicated they have no interest, and it's hard to see anything in this speech to change that. And the immigration section followed a day of flipping and flopping around on the topic.

Meanwhile, there was hardly anything on foreign and national security policy. Or trade policy. Oh, he used the words "radical Islamic terrorism," and he complained as always that everyone is taking advantage of the United States on trade. But he didn't, for example, say anything about what new trade deals he might want, or how he

would propose to fix the ones he considers unfair. On Islamic State, he merely said he had asked the Pentagon for a new plan to defeat it.

At best, this speech, in which Trump declared that the "time for trivial fights is behind us," could be heard as a promise to make up for the time he lost during the campaign, the transition, and during his first month. Or at least not to lose any more time. We'll see soon if that's a promise he'll really keep.

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: Jonathan Bernstein at jbernstein62@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Mike Nizza at mnizza3@bloomberg.net



Editorial : Trump reprises his bleak vision of America — but offers few ideas for fixing it

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

February 28 at 11:29 PM

PRESIDENT TRUMP opened his first speech to a joint session of Congress in a conciliatory tone, declaring that he had come to "deliver a message of unity and

strength" and proclaiming "a new surge of optimism" and "the renewal of the American spirit." But the sunny tone and a laudable condemnation of recent attacks on minorities soon gave way to the same dark and false vision of the country featured in the president's grim inaugural address — one in which borders are open, drugs are pouring in, illegal immigrants prey

on law-abiding Americans and globalization has impoverished vast swaths of the nation. When it came to specific policy proposals, Mr. Trump similarly offered a few encouraging signs — but many more reasons for skepticism.

In describing his bleak vision of a ruined United States exploited by foreigners, Mr. Trump wrote a

series of checks he almost certainly cannot cash. He promised that "dying industries will come roaring back to life," that "crumbling infrastructure will be replaced" and "our terrible drug epidemic will slow down and ultimately stop."

Encouragingly, Mr. Trump told news anchors before his address that he is open to an immigration reform

that includes a pathway to legal status for undocumented people. Yet the president only obliquely referenced this head-turning position in his speech. Similarly, he called for new policy on child-care accessibility and family leave, as well as expanding drug "treatment for those who have become so badly addicted." Yet repealing the Affordable Care Act, as he proposed, would likely make life much harder for those who need new family benefits and addiction treatment.

The president called to "restart the engine of the

American economy," in part by making it "much, much harder for companies to leave," which implies ruinous protectionism or other government misdirection of investment. Mr. Trump decried foreign duties on American goods after bragging that he tore up the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an agreement that would have lowered those very duties.

Mr. Trump called for a \$1 trillion "program of national rebuilding," "one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history" and "massive tax relief for the middle class," all issues

on which he could work with Democrats. But he will have to find ways to finance these priorities that do not involve hollowing out the State Department, the Environmental Protection Agency and other essential government services.

In foreign policy, Mr. Trump mixed praise of the NATO alliance with bursts of isolationist and xenophobic rhetoric, claiming the United States had "defended the borders of other nations" but not its own. He made no mention of relations with Russia or China and offered no substantive indication of

what his strategy would be for the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The ugliest moment in the 60-minute address came when Mr. Trump announced the formation of an office on "Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement," and then introduced families of people allegedly murdered by illegal immigrants. It was an appeal to raw prejudice and fear that will do nothing to promote the national unity he claims to be seeking.



FBI once planned to pay former British spy who authored controversial Trump dossier (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/PostRoz>

(Jason Aldag, Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

Washington Post reporters Tom Hamburger and Rosalind S. Helderman explain the latest development in the story behind a controversial dossier on President Trump. The FBI's arrangement with Christopher Steele shows that investigators considered him credible and found his line of inquiry to be worthy of pursuit. (Video: Jason Aldag, Sarah Parnass/Photo: Matt McClain/The Washington Post)

The former British spy who authored a controversial dossier on behalf of Donald Trump's political opponents alleging ties between Trump and Russia reached an agreement with the FBI a few weeks before the election for the bureau to pay him to continue his work, according to several people familiar with the arrangement.

The agreement to compensate former MI6 agent Christopher Steele came as U.S. intelligence agencies reached a consensus that the Russians had interfered in the presidential election by orchestrating hacks of Democratic Party email accounts.

While Trump has derided the dossier as "fake news" compiled by his political opponents, the FBI's arrangement with Steele shows that the bureau considered him credible and found his information, while unproved, to be worthy of further investigation.

Ultimately, the FBI did not pay Steele. Communications between the bureau and the former spy were interrupted as Steele's now-famous dossier became the subject of news stories, congressional inquiries and presidential denials, according to the people familiar with the arrangement, who spoke on the

condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter.

At the time of the October agreement, FBI officials probing Russian activities, including possible contacts between Trump associates and Russian entities, were aware of the information that Steele had been gathering while working for a Washington research firm hired by supporters of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, according to the people familiar with the agreement. The firm was due to stop paying Steele as Election Day approached, but Steele felt his work was not done, these people said.

[Inside Trump's financial ties to Russia and his unusual flattery of Putin]

Steele was familiar to the FBI, in part because the bureau had previously hired him to help a U.S. inquiry into alleged corruption in the world soccer organization FIFA. The FBI sometimes pays informants, sources and outside investigators to assist in its work. Steele was known for the quality of his past work and for the knowledge he had developed over nearly 20 years working on Russia-related issues for British intelligence. The Washington Post was not able to determine how much the FBI intended to pay Steele had their relationship remained intact.

The dossier he produced last year alleged, among other things, that associates of Trump colluded with the Kremlin on cyberattacks on Democrats and that the Russians held compromising material about the Republican nominee.

These and other explosive claims have not been verified, and they have been vigorously denied by Trump and his allies.

The FBI, as well as the Senate Intelligence Committee, is

investigating Russian interference in the election and alleged contacts between Trump's associates and the Kremlin.

On Tuesday, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) told reporters that he had seen "no evidence so far" of Trump campaign contacts with Russia but said a bipartisan House inquiry would proceed so that "no stone is unturned."

The revelation that the FBI agreed to pay Steele at the same time he was being paid by Clinton supporters to dig into Trump's background could further strain relations between the law enforcement agency and the White House.

A spokesman for the FBI declined to comment. Steele's London-based attorney did not respond to questions about the agreement.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer declined to comment.

Steele, 53, began his Trump investigation in June 2016 after working for another client preparing a report on Russian efforts to interfere with politics in Europe.

U.S. intelligence had been independently tracking Russian efforts to influence electoral outcomes in Europe.

Steele was hired to work for a Washington research firm, Fusion GPS, that was providing information to a Democratic client. Fusion GPS began doing Trump research in early 2016, before it hired Steele, on behalf of a Republican opposed to the businessman's candidacy. The firm declined to identify its clients.

Steele's early reports alleged a plan directed by Russian President Vladimir Putin to help Trump in 2016.

"Russian regime has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years," Steele wrote in June.

Steele's information was provided by an intermediary to the FBI and U.S. intelligence officials after the Democratic National Convention in July, when hacked Democratic emails were first released by WikiLeaks, according to a source familiar with the events. After the convention, Steele contacted a friend in the FBI to personally explain what he had found.

As summer turned to fall, Steele became concerned that the U.S. government was not taking the information he had uncovered seriously enough, according to two people familiar with the situation.

In October, anticipating that funding supplied through the original client would dry up, Steele and the FBI reached a spoken understanding: He would continue his work looking at the Kremlin's ties to Trump and receive compensation for his efforts.

But Steele's frustration deepened when FBI Director James B. Comey, who had been silent on the Russia inquiry, announced publicly 11 days before the election that the bureau was investigating a newly discovered cache of emails Clinton had exchanged using her private server, according to people familiar with Steele's thinking.

Those people say Steele's frustration with the FBI peaked after an Oct. 31 New York Times story that cited law enforcement sources drawing conclusions that he considered premature. The article said that the FBI had not yet found any "conclusive or direct link" between Trump and the Russian government and that the Russian hacking was not intended to help Trump.

After the election, the intelligence community concluded that Russia's interference had been intended to assist Trump.

In January, top intelligence and law enforcement officials briefed Trump and President Barack Obama on those findings. In addition, they provided a summary of the core allegations of Steele's dossier.

[Intelligence chiefs briefed Trump, Obama on unconfirmed Russia claims]

News of that briefing soon became public. Then BuzzFeed posted a copy of Steele's salacious but unproven dossier online, sparking outrage from Trump.

"It's all fake news. It's phony stuff. It didn't happen," Trump told reporters in January. "It was a group of opponents that got together — sick people — and they put that crap together."

He later tweeted that Steele was a "failed spy."

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Please provide a valid email address.

The development marked the end of the FBI's relationship with Steele.

After he was publicly identified by the Wall Street Journal as the

dossier's author, Steele went into hiding. U.S. officials took pains to stress that his report was not a U.S. government product and that it had not influenced their broader conclusions that the Russian government had hacked the emails of Democratic officials and released those emails with the intention of helping Trump win the presidency.

"The [intelligence community] has not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable, and we did not rely upon it in any way for our conclusions," then-Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. said in a statement in January.

The owner of a technology company identified in Steele's

dossier as a participant in the hacks is now suing Steele and BuzzFeed for defamation. BuzzFeed apologized to the executive and blocked out his name in the published document.

Comey spent almost two hours this month briefing the Senate Intelligence Committee. Democrats in the House have informally reached out to Steele in recent weeks to ask about his willingness to testify or cooperate, according to people familiar with the requests. Steele has so far not responded, they said.



Editorial : There's a chance Congress can't be trusted investigate Russian meddling

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

February 28 at 6:43 PM

AS LONG as questions have swirled about the Russian plot to influence last year's presidential election, it has been fair to wonder whether a partisan Congress could be trusted to conduct thorough and evenhanded investigations into this nationally important but politically sensitive matter. Now, there are tangible warning signs that the integrity of the Senate and House inquiries is at risk.

First, The Post reported Friday that Richard Burr (R-N.C.), the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which is running the Senate's investigation, had spoken to journalists as part of a White House effort to rebut a New York Times article reporting communications between members of President Trump's circle and Russian officials. Among other things, this

suggested there were discussions with the White House on matters Mr. Burr should be investigating independently.

Then Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), Mr. Burr's counterpart in the House, went further, making a series of strong statements that suggested his mind is already made up. "We still have not seen any evidence that anyone from the Trump campaign, or any other campaign for that matter, has communicated with the Russian government," he said Monday. "There is no evidence that I've been presented of regular contact with anybody within the Trump campaign."

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

Please provide a valid email address.

Adam Schiff (Calif.), the ranking House Intelligence Committee Democrat, pointed out that

Mr. Nunes said this even though the committee had not received any documents or conducted any witness interviews. Mr. Nunes also played down questions about Michael Flynn, suggesting the ousted national security adviser had really done the nation "a big favor" by staying in contact with the Russians. Mr. Nunes seems more interested in pursuing government leaks — "major crimes," he termed them — which are, at best, a distraction from the issue of a hostile government's attempt to compromise the U.S. political system.

For the moment, the Senate investigation still appears to have enough credibility to be useful. Democrats on the Senate intelligence panel have vowed to condemn the inquiry if it becomes a whitewash. So has Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) released an encouraging statement on Sunday. For his part, Mr. Burr should refuse to discuss any substantive matter relating to

the investigation with the White House, except in the context of formal interviews the panel conducts. He should certainly not agree to serve as a public relations flack for the president on issues relating to the inquiry. Before this episode, Mr. Burr had, behind the scenes and publicly, prepared the committee to conduct a real investigation. He should stick with that more constructive behavior.

Meanwhile, the House Intelligence Committee agreed Monday night to investigate both high-level leaks and any ties between Mr. Trump's circle and Russia. But, given Mr. Nunes's comments, along with the already strong disagreements apparent between him and Mr. Schiff, it seems unlikely the House investigation will serve to clarify matters. It would be better to shut down the House inquiry than to pollute the record with a slanted report from a halfhearted investigation, if that is to be the result.



President Donald Trump plans to issue new executive order restricting travel

Laura Meckler

Updated March 1, 2017 1:09 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump will soon sign a revised executive order banning certain travelers from entering the U.S., but unlike the original version, it is likely to apply only to future visa applicants from targeted countries, according to people familiar with the planning.

The original executive order, signed in January, affected existing visa holders as well as new applicants.

The State Department said that as a result, it revoked the visas of nearly 60,000 people. Those visas were subsequently reinstated when the Trump order was put on hold by a federal court.

Exempting existing visa holders would mark a notable scaling back of the original order. It also could put the revised ban on firmer legal footing by focusing more directly on individuals who haven't previously been granted approval for U.S. travel.

The new order also is expected to remove a provision giving

preference to refugees who are members of religious minorities, which was expected to benefit Christians coming from Muslim nations, several people said, another change that could help the government's constitutional case in court.

The revised order also is expected to again temporarily suspend the admission of refugees to the U.S., but unlike the original, it is likely to treat Syrian refugees the same way as those from other countries, according to two people familiar with the planning. The original

executive order suspended the entire refugee program for four months and indefinitely suspended admission of Syrian refugees.

The people familiar with the planning cautioned that changes were still possible before the final order is issued. A White House spokesman declined to comment.

The original order temporarily banned travel from seven Muslim-majority countries, with the White House citing terrorism concerns. Some people familiar with discussions said the list of affected countries wasn't likely to change,

but one person said Iraq would be removed from the list, given that many people coming from there helped the U.S. military or had family members who did.

The other countries on the original list are Iran, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan. The Trump administration singled out the seven countries as posing a particular terrorism concern. Officials said people from these countries had been singled out for tighter scrutiny under the Obama administration.

But last week, The Wall Street Journal reported that a Department of Homeland Security intelligence report found that immigrants from these seven countries pose no particular risk of being terrorists, contradicting the White House claims.

DHS said its staff "assesses that country of citizenship is unlikely to be a reliable indicator of potential terrorist activity." In response, the White House said the report was politically motivated and poorly researched.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Louise Radnofsky and Laura Meckler

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 10:28 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump said privately Tuesday he wants to see a broad immigration overhaul that addresses the status of people living in the U.S. illegally, and in a speech to Congress he held out the idea of a bipartisan compromise.

"If we are guided by the well-being of American citizens, then I believe Republicans and Democrats can work together to achieve an outcome that has eluded our country for decades," he said Tuesday evening in his prime-time address to lawmakers.

But he gave no details, nor did he mention any of the elements of immigration policy favored by Democrats. Much of the rest of his speech was focused on increased enforcement of existing laws.

During a lunch with TV network anchors on Tuesday, Mr. Trump voiced support for a compromise immigration overhaul, sparking speculation about the president's goals after a campaign and early policy directives built on strict immigration enforcement and a repeated insistence on a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Under the original order, legal permanent residents, or green-card holders, weren't permitted to return to the country, though White House officials subsequently said they were. The new order will make clear that green-card holders are exempt from the ban, several people said.

The revised approach including only new visa applicants is meant to address concerns raised by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, which stayed several key provisions of the original order.

The federal appeals court said the original order likely violated constitutional due-process protections for travelers excluded from the country, because they weren't given notice of the policy or a chance to challenge their denial of entry into the U.S. It is possible the administration could avoid the same kinds of due-process issues by focusing on foreigners who don't have green cards or visas in hand, meaning they haven't been previously approved for U.S. travel.

The president has broad powers over U.S. borders, but judges have said those powers aren't absolute. No court has issued a final ruling on the original executive order, but judges across the country found preliminary legal problems with the Trump administration's initial order.

While the Ninth Circuit focused on the due-process issue, a Virginia federal judge ruled two weeks ago that the travel ban likely violated constitutional protections against religious discrimination by singling out Muslims.

Not all courts have ruled against Mr. Trump. A federal judge in Boston sided with the president.

One expert in immigration law predicted that even with these changes, a new executive order would still run into legal jeopardy.

Jonathan Meyer, who was deputy general counsel at DHS in the Obama administration, said the courts are likely to continue to see the order as religious discrimination, based on past proposals by Mr.

Trump during the presidential campaign and statements by one of his top supporters that characterized the effort as a Muslim ban.

"No rewrite of the order can retract those statements, so it doesn't look like the First Amendment problem will go away," Mr. Meyer said.

Many of the cases remain pending, though any legal challenges may have to start afresh if the new order fully replaces the old one.

The Justice Department has said in recent legal papers that the old order would be rescinded and replaced, but White House press secretary Sean Spicer has made public statements that were more equivocal about the old order.

—Shane Harris and Brent Kendall contributed to this article.

Write to Laura Meckler at laura.meckler@wsj.com

Trump seeks immigration overhaul, signals he's open to compromise

Louise Radnofsky and Laura Meckler

After the lunch, White House deputy press secretary Sarah Sanders said the president was "open to having conversations" about how to repair a broken immigration system and he believed the system was in need of "massive reform."

Those conversations would have to include discussion of a legalized status for people currently in the country, as well as issues such as deportation policies and work authorizations, White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Tuesday night. The president didn't have a position on the issues and wasn't advocating for them in the reported remarks on Tuesday, Mr. Spicer said.

Mr. Trump made clear over the lunch that he wouldn't support a pathway to citizenship, a senior White House official said.

Legal status for undocumented immigrants is backed by virtually all Democrats in Congress, who generally support offering those who qualify a path to citizenship as well as legalization. Many Republicans oppose legal status of any kind for those in the U.S. illegally, calling it amnesty that rewards lawbreaking, but some have expressed interest in a compromise position that stops short of citizenship.

Even the suggestion of openness to an immigration compromise is extraordinary, however, from a president whose candidacy was fueled by forceful denunciations of illegal immigration that resonated with voters receptive to his message that unlawful residents were responsible for everything from a struggling economy to violent crime. That message contributed in no small measure to the early success of Mr. Trump's unlikely campaign, and calls to build the wall were a feature of his rallies.

As president, Mr. Trump has ordered a crackdown on immigration, including stepped-up deportations, tougher border security and new restrictions on travel to the U.S. Some of his top advisers, such as Attorney General Jeff Sessions and policy aide Stephen Miller, are longtime and leading opponents of liberalized immigration policy.

During his speech to Congress on Tuesday, Mr. Trump also sounded a tough line on immigration. "By finally enforcing our immigration laws, we will raise wages, help the unemployed, save billions and billions of dollars and make our communities safer for everyone," he said. "We want all Americans to succeed—but that can't happen in an environment of lawless chaos."

But this isn't the first time Mr. Trump has privately expressed support for a more liberal immigration policy. At a lunch with a bipartisan group of senators several weeks ago, Mr. Trump said he is open to the sort of comprehensive overhaul passed by the Senate in 2013, which included a path to citizenship for most of the 11 million people living here illegally, according to one senator who was there and several others familiar with the meeting.

At the time of the lunch with the senators, the White House disputed that characterization and said Mr. Trump was only voicing general support for addressing the issue.

The 2013 bill died in the GOP-run House, and since then such ideas have largely been shunned by Republican candidates and officeholders.

Few have expected any move toward bipartisanship on illegal immigration, and there has been virtually no talk in Congress about trying again to pass a major piece of legislation on the issue.

—Michael C. Bender contributed to this article.

Write to Louise Radnofsky at louise.radnofsky@wsj.com and Laura Meckler at laura.meckler@wsj.com

Trump says he is open to immigration compromise including legal status

<https://www.facebook.com/PhilipRuckerWP>

President Trump offered mixed signals Tuesday about his plans on immigration, suggesting privately that he is open to an overhaul bill that could provide a pathway to legal status — but not citizenship — for potentially millions of people who are in the United States illegally but have not committed serious crimes.

Yet Trump made no mention of such a proposal during his prime-time address to a joint session of Congress, instead highlighting the dangers posed by illegal immigration.

At a private White House luncheon with television news anchors ahead of his speech, Trump signaled an openness to a compromise that would represent a softening from the crackdown on all undocumented immigrants that he promised during his campaign and that his more hard-line supporters have long advocated.

“The time is right for an immigration bill as long as there is compromise on both sides,” Trump told the anchors. His comments, reported by several of the journalists present, were confirmed by an attendee of the luncheon.

Trump said he hopes both sides can come together to draft legislation in his first term that holistically addresses the country’s immigration system, which has been the subject of intense and polarizing debate in Washington for more than a decade. Former presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush both failed in their attempts to push comprehensive immigration reform bills through Congress that offered a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

President Trump promised to lower taxes, combat terrorism and replace the Affordable Care Act in a speech to a joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. Here are key moments from that speech. Here are key moments from the president’s address to a

joint session of Congress, Feb. 28. (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Jonathan Newton/The Washington Post)

Trump’s comments to the news anchors were particularly striking given his long history of criticism of U.S. immigration policy and a presidential campaign centered on talk of mass deportations of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. Last week, the Department of Homeland Security issued new guidelines that dramatically expand the pool of immigrants that could be targeted for removal.

His remarks came shortly before he met at the White House with family members of Americans killed by illegal immigrants. Trump invited those family members to sit near first lady Melania Trump at his address, part of an emotional appeal by the president and his administration to build support for stronger border-control measures.

[Trump prepares to address a divided audience: The Republican Congress]

At the meeting with television anchors, Trump suggested he is willing to address legal status for those who are in the country illegally but have not committed crimes. But he would not necessarily support a pathway to citizenship, except perhaps for “Dreamers,” a group of nearly 2 million who were brought into the country illegally as children, according to a report by CNN’s Wolf Blitzer and Jake Tapper, who attended the luncheon.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House principal deputy press secretary, said she could not confirm Trump’s comments in the private event.

“The president has been very clear in his process that the immigration system is broken and needs massive reform, and he’s made clear that he’s open to having conversations about that moving forward,” Sanders said in a Tuesday afternoon briefing with reporters. “Right now his primary focus, as he has made [clear] over and over

again, is border control and security at the border.”

Trump on Tuesday reiterated his vow to build a “great, great wall” along the U.S.-Mexico border and increase funding for federal law enforcement efforts in border areas.

“As we speak, we are removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals that threaten our communities and prey on our citizens,” Trump said. “Bad ones are going out as I speak tonight.”

[Trump touts recent immigration raids, calls them ‘a military operation’]

It is unclear whether Trump will follow through on pursuing an immigration compromise. The president in the past has made comments, in private or in media interviews, that have not been borne out by his administration’s policies. For example, he has yet to follow through on his pledge to investigate alleged voter fraud in the 2016 election.

In early February, Trump expressed openness to revisiting past immigration overhaul efforts, including the failed 2013 “Gang of Eight” bill, which drew opposition from Republicans. At a meeting with moderate Democratic senators, Trump told them he thought that bill was something he was interested in revisiting, according to the senators.

The White House later denied that Trump was open to the legislation and said that he considered the bill to be “amnesty.”

In his address to Congress, Trump called on lawmakers to pursue reforms to move the nation’s legal immigration program toward a more “merit-based” system.

Trump said curbing the number of “lower-skilled” immigrants who are entering the country would help raise wages for American workers who would be able to “enter the middle class and do it quickly. And they will be very, very happy indeed.”

Though he didn’t spell out details in his speech, Trump’s aides have envisioned proposals to

dramatically slash the number of immigrants who receive green cards — granting them permanent residence in the United States — which stands at more than 1 million per year. If enacted, such moves could be the first major cuts to legal immigration in more than half a century.

After his meeting with the anchors Tuesday, Trump met in the Oval Office with Jamiel Shaw Sr., whose son was shot by a gang member in Los Angeles in 2008, and Jessica Davis and Susan Oliver, who were married to California police officers killed in the line of duty in 2014.

Trump’s spotlight on the victims’ families has sparked an outcry among those who charge that the president is exaggerating the risks to sow public fear and make his proposals more politically expedient. Studies have shown that immigrants, including the estimated 11 million living in this country illegally, have lower crime rates than the native-born population.

“It is consistent with the campaign and also with the political tone of the executive orders he signed,” said Randy Capps, director of research at the Migration Policy Institute. “They are very clearly trying to highlight a criminal element that does exist in the unauthorized population. But they are implying it’s a broad population, when we believe it’s a narrow population from the statistics we’ve seen.”

Trump was joined several times on the campaign trail by family members of victims of crimes committed by illegal immigrants, including “angel moms,” whose children had been killed. As president, Trump has pledged to raise their profiles, and the new DHS guidelines issued last week included a provision to create a new office to support such victims and their families.

“I want you to know — we will never stop fighting for justice,” Trump said Tuesday night, addressing his guests. “Your loved ones will never be forgotten, we will always honor their memory.”

Escobar : How Trump Will Hurt My Border Town

Veronica Escobar

Politicians from both sides also like to harp on the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement,

and cross-border trade generally, on our economy. And there’s no denying that the advent of NAFTA cost Americans jobs and brought with it a host of economic and social challenges.

But again, they’d get a different story if they came to El Paso. We felt the blow swiftly and severely when manufacturing jobs left for Mexico. But El Paso adapted to make our location on the border

work to our advantage — for example by building state-of-the-art shipment and distribution centers.

In El Paso alone, \$90 billion in goods travels through our ports of

entry annually (nationally, the value of cross-border trade is \$400 billion). The El Paso-Santa Teresa, N.M., region has become the 11th-largest exporter of goods in the nation, and Mexico is Texas' No. 1 trading partner.

Unfortunately, too few Americans understand that cross-border trade creates jobs, not just in our region and state but in the rest of the country. In fact, trade with Mexico supports nearly five million American jobs — so it's not just the border that will lose if Mr. Trump fulfills his promises.

El Pasoans also know the cost that Mr. Trump's policies and rhetoric will have in terms of human capital. There's a moral case for humane immigration reform, but there's an economic one as well. Mr. Trump has said that whatever his position on undocumented immigrants, he will preserve protections for so-called Dreamers — undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as

children. But his blunt talk, and the stepped-up arrests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, say otherwise.

These young people have pursued an education in the United States, and they've helped us increase our local tax base. We've invested in them, and they are investing in our country. Over the next decade, if Dreamers are allowed to legally work in jobs that reflect their skill level, they will raise government revenues by \$2.3 billion. El Paso stands to benefit enormously, but so does every state with a large Dreamer population.

While the wall may never be built, and while many undocumented immigrants will remain — a lot depends on Mr. Trump's wild, daily policy swings and congressional purse strings — his words are already having unmistakable economic consequences. The Mexican peso, for example, was dealt a heavy blow on election night, and its value has continued to

plummet. That means that Mexicans will spend less money in El Paso and other border regions, in turn decreasing revenues and jobs in border states. Investments and the flow of commerce have also slowed significantly.

The question for many of us during the presidential election was whether communities like mine would hold 2016 general election candidates accountable. Would Hispanics in border communities reject the harmful anti-border and anti-Mexico rhetoric?

I can proudly say that El Paso did. Voter turnout in El Paso broke records — early voting and Election Day numbers soared, with a 32 percent increase in turnout, handily breaking the 2008 record locally. Hillary Clinton carried El Paso by a wider margin than Barack Obama did in 2008.

El Pasoans may have finally had enough of the misrepresentation of our people and communities and

decided to create our own "border surge." That surge helped Mrs. Clinton close the gap in Texas. In 2012, there was a 19-point spread between Mr. Obama and Mitt Romney in our state. In 2016, thanks to border communities like El Paso, it was shaved down to nine points between Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Trump — closer than Iowa.

While many of us have grown wearily accustomed to politicians' talk of "securing" the border, for many, this election became more about securing our identity. In the coming years, those of us who live on the border must rise above the bad policies that will hurt our communities — but more important, we must sustain and expand that sense of identity, and show our neighbors the impact their votes can have. We need to do it for El Paso, and for the country.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

White House proposes slashing State Department budget by 37% to fund defense increase

Felicia Schwartz

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 6:50 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration is proposing deep cuts in U.S. diplomatic and foreign-aid funding while dramatically increasing defense expenditures, a bid to fundamentally shift the emphasis of U.S. foreign policy that has sparked fierce criticism from lawmakers and international-affairs experts.

The White House has proposed a spending cut of 37% to the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development budget said a person familiar with the budget deliberations. Those agencies now receive about \$50.1 billion.

At the same time, President Donald Trump is developing a federal budget that officials said would add \$54 billion to the base defense budget, funded by cuts elsewhere, including the State Department and its foreign-aid division. The addition would increase military spending to more than \$600 billion.

Lawmakers opposed to the cuts say they will unavoidably devastate the State

Department. People familiar with the deliberations said the Trump administration is examining the growth in spending by the State Department during the Obama administration, including through the addition of adding special envoys, they said, though that would not cover the proposed cuts.

One U.S. official said that the Trump administration also was eyeing U.S. development assistance to other countries as a significant source for the cuts.

Word of the proposed cuts met with swift objection from Republicans and Democrats, who said it would sharply curtail Washington's ability to guide world events.

"That is definitely dead on arrival," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on state and foreign operations, told reporters Tuesday. He said the proposed budget "destroys soft power" and puts diplomats at risk.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said he didn't believe that a 37% cut would make it through Congress. "The diplomatic portion of the federal budget is very important and you get results a lot cheaper frequently,"

than through military spending, he said.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D., Md.), the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, said cutting the State Department budget by more than a third would "have serious and detrimental effects on our national-security posture."

The proposed cuts also drew swift condemnation from aid and advocacy organizations.

"A budget that slashes State Department and USAID funding, while further expanding the Pentagon, shows Trump is intent on undermining U.S. government agencies that address pressing human-rights issues, most of which aren't dealt with by military force," said Sarah Margon, Washington director at Human Rights Watch

The proposed cuts unveiled by the Trump administration this week mark the beginning of a monthslong process within the administration and then with Congress over how to fund the government for the year beginning Oct. 1.

Officials at federal agencies will provide input to the Trump administration's initial proposal ahead of the mid-March release of

the White House's budget blueprint. The White House will build off that document for the release of its full budget, which isn't expected until May.

More than 120 retired three- and four-star generals on Monday sent a letter urging Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress to preserve funding for U.S. diplomatic efforts.

The retired military officials cited 2013 testimony from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, then the head of U.S. forces in the Middle East, who told the Armed Services Committee, "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition."

The Bush administration tripled development assistance since 2001, according to an archived version of the State Department's website. The Bush administration's final budget request for 2009 was \$26.1 billion, which is about \$29.4 billion in current dollars, adjusted for inflation.

—Kristina Peterson contributed to this article.

Write to Felicia Schwartz at Felicia.Schwartz@wsj.com

The Washington Post

Editorial : Has the State Department been sidelined?

Opinion A column or article

in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

February 28 at 6:43 PM

PHOTOS FROM the restaurant at the Trump International Hotel in the

Old Post Office on Saturday night confirm that President Trump had dinner with Nigel Farage, the former leader of the U.K. Independence

Party and a key leader of the campaign for Britain to exit the European Union. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and his wife were

dining separately, not included in Mr. Trump's party, according to the account of a journalist, Benny Johnson, who had booked a nearby table. The scene nicely captures a question being asked in Washington about Mr. Tillerson: Has the State Department been shoved aside in the making of foreign policy?

Mr. Tillerson's corporate experience raised hopes of a steady hand at the helm of U.S. international relations after Mr. Trump's erratic campaign rhetoric. Perhaps that is still the secretary's intention, but so far there is little sign of it. As Carol Morello and Anne Gearan reported recently in *The Post*, the White House appears to have largely sidelined the State Department from its role as the preeminent voice of U.S. foreign policy. Decisions on hiring, policy and

scheduling are being driven by the West Wing, where Mr. Trump's advisers are deeply suspicious of the foreign policy establishment. They are reportedly planning to ask the State Department to absorb a huge budget cut.

Mr. Tillerson's sluggish start is evident in several areas. Since his choice of a deputy, Elliott Abrams, was torpedoed by the president, he has yet to select someone. Nor has the administration picked assistant secretaries and others who are vital to managing policy around the world. Right now, these jobs are being carried out on an acting basis by officials who know they are in a holding pattern.

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

Please provide a valid email address.

Meanwhile, the department's daily televised briefing, scrutinized around the world, has not been held since Jan. 19. This pause is extremely unusual. Officials say it will restart March 6. At the same time, Mr. Tillerson has not been included in key meetings between the president and world leaders; instead, the acting deputy, Tom Shannon, attended discussions with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Middle East peace efforts are said to be in the hands of Mr. Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. In his early days in office, Mr. Tillerson has taken a very low-profile approach, without speeches or news conferences, and sometimes neglected press

statements about his conversations with foreign leaders.

On Monday, the department issued a brief comment marking the second anniversary of the murder of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov. The four-sentence statement largely repeated sentiments expressed last year but dropped language from 2016 calling on Russia to "uphold its obligations" to "promote and protect universal human rights, including the fundamental freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association." Does the United States no longer insist Russia respect human rights and democracy? Good first question, when and if the lights come back on in Foggy Bottom.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump trade policy expected to seek smaller WTO role in the U.S.

Ian Talley and William Mauldin

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 10:22 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration is developing a national trade policy that would seek to diminish the influence of the World Trade Organization in the U.S. and champion American law as a way to take on trading partners it blames for unfair practices, according to a draft document reviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*.

The policy, contained in a draft document due to be published as early as Wednesday, represents a dramatic departure from the Obama administration, which emphasized international economic rules and the authority of the WTO, a body that regulates trade and resolves disputes among its members.

By contrast, the new Trump administration will more assertively defend U.S. sovereignty over trade policy, ramp up enforcement of U.S. trade laws, and use "all possible sources of leverage to encourage other countries to open up their markets," according to the document.

President Donald Trump defeated Republican rivals and beat Hillary Clinton based in part on strong rhetoric on trade, accusing China and other countries of currency manipulation, unfair state subsidies and other infractions.

In his speech to a joint session of Congress Tuesday night, Mr. Trump said he wouldn't let American workers and businesses be taken advantage of. "I believe strongly in free trade but it also has to be fair trade," he said.

Some business groups and Republicans who back traditional trade policy have hoped the new administration would moderate its most aggressive policy proposals to protect U.S. industries.

But the administration sees a clear mandate to change its approach. "The American people grew frustrated with our prior trade policy not because they have ceased to believe in free trade and open markets, but because they rejected the way in which the framework of rules governing international trade operates," the document says.

The U.S. trade representative's office said it has a policy of not commenting on draft documents.

Congress requires the president to submit the administration's trade policy annually by March 1, according to U.S. law. The framework is a signal to lawmakers, businesses and trading partners about how the administration plans to carry out its policies. Several business leaders and congressional aides were briefed on the trade-policy blueprint and are aware of the draft document's contents.

In the face of Republican concerns, a congressional aide said language in the draft challenging the WTO could still be toned down in a final, public version.

The policy mainly spelled out a broad approach to dealing with trading partners—including China, South Korea and Mexico, where the U.S. has trade deficits—and the global trading system as a whole, via the Geneva-based WTO.

The outcome of two important test cases at the WTO could help determine the Trump administration's attitude toward the

international trading system, trade lawyers say.

The first is a challenge China brought when the U.S. failed to grant the country "market economy" status in December on the 15th anniversary of the country's membership in the WTO. By not granting Beijing that status, the U.S. can continue calculating punitive tariffs on allegedly dumped Chinese goods in ways that are often disadvantageous to Chinese companies.

The second is a case the Obama administration brought that challenges China's subsidies for aluminum production. The WTO has only limited rules to prevent subsidies, and a ruling for China in that case could lead the Trump administration to look for other measures to challenge Chinese subsidies.

"Americans are subject only to U.S. law not to WTO decisions," the draft document reads. "The Trump administration will aggressively defend American sovereignty over matters of trade policy."

The draft document outlines the legal argument for rejecting WTO dispute-settlement decisions. Some economists and lawmakers fear that failure of the U.S. to abide by WTO decisions or unilateral action by the U.S. not compliant with international law will trigger retaliation by other countries. The risk is that such an approach, if copied by other countries, could weaken adherence to the WTO's rule-based system around the globe and upend seven decades of increasing U.S.-led cooperation on trade since World War II.

The WTO sometimes interprets trade agreements in a way that

hamstrings the ability of the U.S. to respond effectively to unfair trade practices under WTO rules, the administration said in the document.

"Those activist interpretations, untethered from economic realities, undermine confidence in the trading system," the document said. The administration "will act aggressively as needed to discourage this type of behavior."

One trade lawyer who has been briefed by the administration said while the principles may appear more aggressive on paper than past administrations, the true test is how the administration applies the agenda in practice. "It's red meat for the public, but the question is, how do they actually execute it?"

Beijing is singled out in the document, which pointed to China's entry into the WTO in 2001 as when U.S. trade policy went awry. The Asian powerhouse—now the No. 2 economy in the world—has been targeted as representing many of the administration's worst trade-practice complaints. Mr. Trump and his trade lieutenants have lambasted Beijing for using a depreciated exchange rate to gain a competitive advantage, subsidizing industries, including through state-owned firms, inadequately protecting against theft of intellectual-property rights and using a host of nontariff trade barriers to block access to international firms.

One key principle the administration said it plans to apply is a form of trade quid pro quo called "reciprocity" to countries that refuse to open up their markets. Lawmakers and the Trump administration are considering toughening up national-security reviews of foreign investments into the U.S. to leverage better trade

terms with China. If Beijing doesn't open up its markets to U.S. investors or exports, for example, the administration could use its powers to block Chinese deals to buy U.S. assets, or threaten higher tariffs on Chinese imports.

"This is a completely new challenge of the WTO, existentially questioning whether we should be

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Aruna Viswanatha and Beth Reinhard

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 5:31 p.m. ET

The Justice Department will "pull back" from investigations into alleged civil rights abuses by local police departments, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Tuesday in addressing what had been a hallmark of the Obama administration.

In his first major speech as the nation's top law-enforcement officer, Mr. Sessions told a gathering of state attorneys general that the intervention had made police less aggressive, and he vowed to crack down on violent crime as a central part of his tenure. Mr. Sessions used more measured language than did President Donald Trump, who in his inauguration speech vowed to end "this American carnage," and the attorney general did not give many specifics outside of plans to step up prosecution of drug and gun crimes and increase border security.

"The Justice Department has an absolute duty to ensure that police operate within the law...but we need...to help police departments get better, not diminish their effectiveness, and I'm afraid we've done some of that," Mr. Sessions said. "We are going to try to pull back on [police departments], and I don't think it's wrong or mean or insensitive to civil rights. I think it's out of a concern to make the lives of people, particularly in poor, minority communities...safer, happier."

The national murder rate is down substantially from a 1980 peak, but some cities have experienced a recent uptick in killings, a trend Mr. Sessions said was "driving a sense that we're in danger." Some criminal justice experts say further study is needed before drawing broad

part of the WTO," said a senior congressional aide who reviewed the document. "Previous administrations never called that into question."

The administration says it intends to update the document when Congress confirms a U.S. trade representative. Robert Lighthizer, Mr. Trump's pick, is widely expected

conclusions.

A Wall Street Journal analysis of homicide data since 1985 for the country's 35 largest cities shows that four—Chicago, Baltimore, Milwaukee and Memphis, Tenn.—have in the past two years approached or exceeded records set a quarter-century ago, when cities across the country were plagued by gang wars and a booming crack trade.

"Where you see the greatest increase in violence and murders in cities is [where] somehow, somehow, we undermine the respect for our police, and make, oftentimes, their job more difficult," Mr. Sessions said.

The Obama administration opened a series of investigations of police departments and their use of force, often in the wake of high-profile police killings of black men. It obtained court-approved settlements requiring changes to how police departments train officers, investigate abuses and perform other functions.

"You can't deny what has happened over the past few years," said Cornell Brooks, president of the NAACP, recalling African-American victims of police shootings like Michael Brown, the unarmed 18-year-old whose death set off riots in Ferguson, Mo.

He said Mr. Sessions will need to cultivate support from civil rights groups, which generally opposed his nomination. Mr. Sessions reached out to him and they spoke on his first day on the job, Mr. Brooks said, and they are scheduled to meet in person next week.

Police leaders welcomed Mr. Sessions's remarks.

to win confirmation but is facing questions about decades-old work representing foreign governments.

Parts of the policy document contain arguments similar to those in a widely circulated memorandum Mr. Lighthizer wrote in 2010. At the time, Mr. Lighthizer told a congressionally mandated China commission that the U.S. could put

"I'm glad to see that the rhetoric we saw during the last eight years is going to stop," said Chuck Canterbury, president of the Fraternal Order of Police. "We agree that police officers have become more cautious because they didn't know if the administration would stand with them."

In January, the Justice Department found the Chicago Police Department had engaged in an unconstitutional use of excessive force, including deadly force, though it was left to the Trump administration to settle the issue.

Mr. Sessions told reporters on Monday he had only read a summary of that report but found evidence used in such reports to be "anecdotal." He said he had not yet decided how to proceed in the Chicago case.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel reiterated on Tuesday his commitment to reforming the city's police department regardless of the change in administration, but stopped short of saying that he will push for a court-binding order that mandates police reform. He said that he does not want to "do what Ferguson, or Cleveland, or Baltimore has done," all cities in which the Justice Department had a court-appointed monitor oversee changes there. The mayor said he would listen to Chicago police in making changes.

FBI Director James Comey has raised the possibility of officers becoming less aggressive in the wake of heightened criticism, possibly contributing to a rise in violent crime. Former Attorney General Loretta Lynch said there was no evidence of the so-called "Ferguson effect."

Since Mr. Trump took office, the Justice Department has signaled

its WTO commitments on hold, restricting imports from China until the country changes its behavior in key areas.

Write to Ian Talley at ian.talley@wsj.com and William Mauldin at william.mauldin@wsj.com

Sessions says Justice Department to ease up on police department probes

plans to follow through on an overhaul of the Baltimore Police Department hammered out in the waning days of the Obama administration.

Justice Department lawyer Timothy Mygatt said at a recent court hearing that the consent decree reached with the city in January would survive the shifting "political winds" in Washington.

The 227-page agreement is aimed at rooting out racial bias and unconstitutional practices.

Also on Tuesday, Mr. Sessions announced a new task force on crime reduction, to be staffed by the heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Advocates for lighter sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, and those supporting better mental health and drug treatment programs, say they hope to have input.

Mr. Sessions had told reporters Monday he was considering whether to keep in place a 2013 memo from the Justice Department that outlined priorities in which federal authorities would still investigate and prosecute marijuana sales, as multiple states have legalized the drug's use. "I'm not sure we're going to be a better, healthier nation, than if we have marijuana being sold at every corner drugstore," he said.

—Shibani Mahtani and Scott Calvert contributed to this article.

Write to Aruna Viswanatha at Aruna.Viswanatha@wsj.com and Beth Reinhard at beth.reinhard@wsj.com

The New York Times

Eric Lichtblau

Sessions Indicates Justice Department Will Stop Monitoring Troubled Police Agencies

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions indicated on Tuesday

that the federal government would back away from monitoring troubled

police departments, which was the central strategy of the Obama

administration to force accountability onto local law enforcement amid rising racial tensions.

In his first speech as attorney general, Mr. Sessions did not name any specific cities, but he indicated that Justice Department scrutiny from afar was undermining the effectiveness of the police across the country. It was a clear reference to the aggressive efforts of the Obama administration to oversee law enforcement agencies charged with civil rights abuses.

"We need, so far as we can, in my view, help police departments get better, not diminish their effectiveness," Mr. Sessions said in remarks to the National Association of Attorneys General. "And I'm afraid we've done some of that. So we're going to try to pull back on this, and I don't think it's wrong or mean or insensitive to civil rights or human rights."

The Trump administration, Mr. Sessions said, is working "out of a concern to make the lives of people in particularly the poor communities, minority communities, live a safer, happier life so that they're able to have their children outside and go to school in safety and they can go to the grocery store in safety and not be accosted by drug dealers and get caught in crossfires or have their children seduced into some gang."

Echoing President Trump's dark vision of crime in the United States, Mr. Sessions said that rising violence in some big cities was "driving a sense that we're in danger" — even as crime rates nationwide remain near historic lows. Monitoring police departments, Mr. Sessions added, did not help.

"One of the big things out there that's, I think, causing trouble and where you see the greatest increase in violence and murders in cities is somehow, some way, we undermine the respect for our police and made, oftentimes, their job more difficult," he said.

A rise in violence in some large cities, including Chicago, Baltimore and St. Louis, drove a 10.8 percent increase in murders nationwide in the most recent data from the F.B.I. last September. Even so, crime remains far below the 1970s and 1980s, when drugs and gang violence drove crime rates to new heights, and some Democrats accuse Mr. Trump and Mr. Sessions of exaggerating the threat.

At the close of the Obama administration, the Justice Department issued a scathing report on systemic civil rights abuses at the Chicago Police Department and set the stage for negotiations with the city for a federal monitoring agreement.

But prospects for a deal now look doubtful, with Mr. Sessions saying this week that he was unimpressed by the report and openly questioning the value of such agreements.

Mr. Sessions spoke as his influence within the Trump administration has become increasingly apparent. In the past week, he has shunted aside two key Obama administration civil rights decisions — protecting transgender students and Texas minority voters — and vowed to recommit federal resources to fighting crime, drugs and illegal immigration, a theme he repeated on Tuesday in his address to the law enforcement officials.

After a bruising confirmation battle, Mr. Sessions appears poised to topple a range of other practices that he often challenged as a conservative senator from Alabama, including the Obama administration's phasing out of new prisoners at Guantánamo Bay.

Mr. Sessions was the first senator to support Mr. Trump's campaign last year, and was picked to formally nominate him at the Republican National Convention in July. He has now leveraged his early loyalty to vault to a strong position in the cabinet: At an Oval Office meeting last week, the president sided with Mr. Sessions when Betsy DeVos, the secretary of

education, initially opposed rolling back anti-discrimination protections for transgender students, officials said.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Sessions bonded in the campaign over their shared desire to secure the borders, crack down on illegal immigration and reduce crime that both men depicted as out of control.

Mr. Sessions's aggressive early steps at the Justice Department — promising that the federal government will do more on drugs and crime and leave civil rights issues to the states — has buoyed a number of conservatives.

"I think he's right," Doug Peterson, the Republican attorney general in Nebraska, said after listening to Mr. Sessions pledge what amounted to a new war on drugs at a speech on Tuesday in a Washington ballroom. He also said that he agreed with Mr. Sessions's decisions to defer to the states on things like the use of bathrooms for transgender students. "I appreciate the attitude he's taken," said Mr. Peterson, whose state was among a dozen that challenged the transgender decision by the Obama administration. "It's really a separation of powers issue."

While civil rights advocates and liberal groups say that a number of the stances Mr. Sessions has taken were not unexpected, they remain troubled. The focus on states' rights — which some see as a code phrase for segregation in the civil rights era — is particularly worrisome, they say.

"Trump went out of his way to select an attorney general who had a history of hostility to immigrants' rights, minority protections and other issues, said David Cole, the legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union who testified in the Senate against Mr. Sessions's nomination. "Thus far, all signs are that Sessions is playing to type."

Meanwhile, the department's reversal of its legal policy this week in a major voting case in Texas

signals that other voting rights cases could be in peril, as well.

One of the most closely watched cases is in North Carolina, where the courts have ruled that a state voting measure was designed specifically to disenfranchise minorities. The Obama administration helped fight to overturn the law, but Mr. Sessions has not said what he will do. That case is now bottled up by political infighting between the legislature and the governor.

As a former federal prosecutor and a senator for two decades, Mr. Sessions is one of the few Washington insiders in the Trump cabinet. The White House sees him as a man with the political experience to provide a legal framework for many of the president's more controversial policies — such as his travel ban, which has been blocked by the courts.

Beyond Mr. Sessions's influence, at least a half-dozen of his former Senate aides are entrenched in prominent spots in the administration. The most notable among them is Steven Miller, a White House aide who has pushed a hard-line stance on immigration and helped craft the president's controversial travel ban targeting seven predominantly Muslim countries. The measure was blocked in federal court, and the administration is now rewriting it.

Mr. Sessions's imprint can be seen in a number of the new administration's directives on immigration restrictions, arrests and deportations, said Jayashri Srikantiah, a law professor at Stanford University specializing in immigration law. But not all of Mr. Sessions's views on immigration have won favor in the White House: While he has pushed aggressively in the past to deport so-called Dreamers — those undocumented residents brought to the United States as young children — the Trump administration has left Obama-era protections for that group intact so far.

**The
New York
Times**

Threats and Vandalism Leave American Jews on Edge in Trump Era

Alan Blinder,
Serge F.
Kovaleski and Adam Goldman

The high-pitched, rambling voice on the telephone was disguised and garbled, and warned of a slaughter of Jews. The voice spoke of a bomb loaded with shrapnel and of an imminent "blood bath." Moments later, the caller hung up.

The mid-January threat to a Jewish community center turned out to be a

hoax. The warning was one of at least 100 that Jewish community centers and schools have reported since the beginning of the year, a menacing pattern that has upended daily life for people in 33 states and prompted a federal investigation that has come under increasing scrutiny from lawmakers, security specialists and Jewish leaders.

Combined with the recent vandalism at Jewish cemeteries in Missouri and Pennsylvania, the

calls have stoked fears that a virulent anti-Semitism has increasingly taken hold in the early days of the Trump administration.

At the beginning of an address to Congress on Tuesday night, Mr. Trump said the episodes, along with last week's attack on two Indian immigrants in Kansas, "remind us that while we may be a nation divided on policies, we are a country that stands united in

condemning hate and evil in all of its very ugly forms."

In a meeting with state attorneys general earlier Tuesday, Mr. Trump suggested that the threats and destruction might be a politically coordinated effort to "make people look bad," according to the attorneys general of Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia.

"First, he said the acts were reprehensible," said Attorney

General Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, a Democrat who asked Mr. Trump about the episodes during a session at the White House. "Second, he said: 'And you've got to be careful; it could be the reverse. This could be the reverse, trying to make people look bad.'"

Jewish leaders denounced Mr. Trump's comments to the attorneys general, and some urged the federal government to accelerate its investigation of the threatening calls, the latest of which came on Monday.

"The person or persons doing this have broken the law, and it's the responsibility of our system to investigate it and apprehend the individual or individuals responsible," said David Posner, the director of strategic performance for the JCC Association of North America.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been leading an inquiry since January, and a federal law enforcement official, who was not authorized to discuss a continuing investigation, said that a single person may be making the threats using an internet calling service. Independent analysts, including extremism researchers and retired law enforcement officials, share that theory and said that, so far, they have seen no evidence of an organized effort.

Though some people had suspected that the calls were recorded and automated, there was evidence to the contrary. In Milwaukee, for instance, a switchboard operator asked questions and received responses from the caller, said Mark Shapiro, the president of the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community

Center.

Mr. Posner said an F.B.I. official had emphasized that the investigation was a priority for the bureau, involving experts in behavioral analysis, civil rights and hate groups.

"Agents and analysts across the country are working to identify and stop those responsible," Stephen Richardson, the bureau's assistant director for the criminal investigative division, said. "We will work to make sure that people of all races and religions feel safe in their communities and in their places of worship."

According to Mr. Posner's group, more than 80 community centers and day schools in the United States and Canada have been threatened, some repeatedly. The calls have come in five rounds, most recently on Monday, when there were 31 threats.

Many of the calls have prompted evacuations and bomb sweeps, forcing schoolchildren from classrooms and employees to push cribs full of infants into parking lots. Retirees have been rushed from swimming pools, and offices and streets shut down.

The threats are frequent and alarming, community center leaders said.

"My initial reaction was, 'This is our turn,'" said Karen Kolodny, the executive director of the JCC of Mid-Westchester in Scarsdale, N.Y., where officials responded to a bomb threat on Monday. "My reaction was not complete shock. We thought it was going to happen at some point."

F.B.I. data shows that most hate crimes are linked to race, ethnicity or ancestry. In 2015, the most

recent year for which federal data has been released, the authorities recorded 664 episodes they classified as anti-Jewish.

Analysts said they believed that anti-Semitic commentary online before last year's presidential election had gradually escalated into more sinister behavior toward the Jewish institutions, which have long prepared for threats and often employ private security.

"You started out with the hostile tweets," said Mitchell D. Silber, who was director of intelligence analysis for the New York Police Department. "You moved to the bomb threats against JCCs and other institutions, and now you have a physical manifestation at the cemeteries with the gravestones knocked over."

Although the F.B.I. is investigating damage to headstones at a Jewish cemetery in Philadelphia, the episode there, as well as a similar one near St. Louis, is not believed to have been the work of anyone behind the bomb threats.

The bureau's inquiry into the bomb threats is likely complicated by the reality that criminals have embraced new technology, said Ronald T. Hosko, one of Mr. Richardson's predecessors as an assistant F.B.I. director.

"This is unlikely to be little twisted Johnny calling from his parents' house," Mr. Hosko said.

Instead, Mr. Hosko suggested, the caller could be relying on libraries, restaurants or other public places with internet access, sites that might be equipped with surveillance cameras that the F.B.I. could use to help identify someone who frequented those places at the dates and times of the calls. Each

new threat, Mr. Hosko said, increased the odds of an arrest.

"Every one of those contacts presents another opportunity," he said. "It's another dot in the pattern analysis."

As the threats have poured in, from Albuquerque to Nashville to Providence, there have been rising worries over whether people might stay away from the centers, which also serve people of other religious backgrounds. Some have fretted that the intense public attention might be encouraging whoever is behind the calls.

"Given that this is happening wave after wave, there are concerns for people's families, and people are concerned about whether they should still send their kids to JCCs," said Oren Segal, the director of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism. "When communities start second-guessing like this, it is incredibly alarming and disruptive and serves the purpose of whoever is carrying out these threats."

But Jewish institution leaders, in interviews and in conversations with one another, have expressed more frustration than fear.

"By attacking the JCC, they're really attacking what is best about America: the diversity, the pluralism, the inclusion that one faith community can be as welcoming to other faith communities and demonstrate that through deeds on the ground," Mr. Posner said. "That's something we will never surrender."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Feb. 28, 2017 7:17 p.m. ET

In a different kind of regime, Steve Bannon would be described as the government's chief ideologist—so it makes sense to take his words seriously. During his appearance last week at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Mr. Bannon offered a profession of faith: "The center core of what we believe, that we're a nation with an economy, not an economy just in some global marketplace with open borders, but we are a nation with a culture and a reason for being."

As it happens, I think Mr. Bannon is right about this. In a 2014 conversation with a Vatican-based organization of Catholic

Galston : Steve Bannon and the "global tea party,"

William Galston

conservatives, he presciently declared that there is a "global tea party movement." He described it as "the working men and women in the world who are just tired of being dictated to by what we call the party of Davos." Mr. Bannon continued: "There are people in New York that feel closer to people in London and in Berlin than they do to people in Kansas and in Colorado, and they have more of this elite mentality that they're going to dictate to everybody how the world's going to be run."

The members of the global tea party, says Mr. Bannon, reject this idea and believe they know best how to lead their lives. This is why they are pushing back against centralized government wherever

they find it, whether in Beijing, Brussels or Washington.

These antiglobalist sentiments reveal a deep truth about contemporary politics: Although economic theory may be indifferent to national borders, economic policy cannot be. Economist Branko Milanovic's famous "elephant chart" shows that in recent decades globalization not only has enriched the wealthy everywhere but also has lifted hundreds of millions of people in developing countries out of poverty and—in many cases—into the middle class. Yet substantial portions of the working and middle classes in developed countries have fallen behind.

No doubt this has made the world as a whole more prosperous and

has helped more people than it has hurt. If the world were a single political unit, economic globalization would survive not only cost-benefit analysis but also a democratic vote.

But of course the world is not a single unit. Politicians owe their primary duty to their own citizens. When leaders ask their countrymen to make short-term sacrifices, they must justify their proposals as conducive to the long-term interests of their citizens—not people in other countries. If the Marshall Plan had been presented as a charitable contribution to Europe, Congress probably would have rejected it, and rightly so.

We can argue about the policies most likely to promote America's long-term interests. I doubt that they

are Mr. Trump's—one of the myriad reasons I oppose him. But at the level of principle, the proposition that our leaders should put America first is hard to argue with.

In the same vein, I agree with Mr. Bannon that we are a nation with a culture and a reason for being. But we disagree about what this means. Unlike most other countries, our citizens hail from virtually every nation on earth. They share neither ancestry nor race nor ethnicity nor religion. When we speak of American culture in the singular, we cannot be talking about the culture of any particular

group. We must mean, instead, the civic culture of principles, institutions and history that we can share—the only culture that can bind us together as one nation. Every form of ethno-nationalism is un-American.

America's reason for being is spelled out in the preamble to the Constitution, the charter of our civic life: to "form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

**The
New York
Times**

Bruni : Donald Trump's Military Preening

Frank Bruni

Trump's address was an opportunity to change the narrative of his presidency from one of an administration in disarray to one of a man on a methodical mission, and to accomplish that, he donned a new kind of tie and a new kind of tone: less truculent, more inspirational. He began with a mention of Black History Month and a condemnation of hate crimes.

But his remarks didn't have sufficient details or offers of compromise to turn the page or to erase all the nonsense to date. Just a day earlier, at a meeting with the nation's governors, he maintained that when he was young, America was the proud victor in all of its wars.

Really? World War II wrapped up before Trump came along, and the Korean War, which ended when he was 7, was no unfettered American triumph.

Gen. Joseph Dunford, center, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, applauding President Trump during his speech on Tuesday. Al Drago/The New York Times

Then came Vietnam, which found Trump in college and unable to serve because of a podiatric ailment so debilitating that he couldn't recall which foot was affected when he was asked about it in 2015. Surely,

though, he remembers that Vietnam didn't continue some glorious winning streak.

In Trump's telling, everything about the America of yore was superior, everything about the America of today is wretched, and somehow, magically, he has solutions that even the most practiced hands don't.

That was a theme of his military musings during his campaign, when he touted a secret plan for defeating ISIS that he conveniently couldn't divulge, lest he trample on its secret-ness.

He subsequently ordered his top military advisers to come up with their own strategy, which makes a skeptical voter wonder what happened to his. Are the generals and he going to compare plans — I'll show you mine if you show me yours — to determine whose is mightiest? For now that's still a secret.

Details aren't his thing. He's all over the place. One moment, his chosen generals are sages for the ages. The next, he fingers them for any flaws in the Yemen raid during which a Navy SEAL, William Owens, who was called Ryan, died. "They lost Ryan," he said on Tuesday morning.

But on Tuesday night, before Congress, they were geniuses anew, architects of a brilliantly

I find nothing in these words about a particular religion, or the Judeo-Christian tradition, or a specific canon of the virtues, or social conservatism (or social liberalism, for that matter). It would be interesting to learn whether Mr. Bannon has a different view—he certainly appears to—and if so, on what it rests.

I close on a note of agreement. Mr. Bannon believes that contemporary capitalism has lost its moral bearings. He told the Vatican meeting that the question of whether we should "put a cap on wealth creation and distribution"

successful operation. I was moved to see the effect of Trump's words on the SEAL's widow, Carryn, who stood in the audience, tears streaming down her face. I was also floored by the opportunistic shifts in Trump's take on those events.

He used his speech to complain once again that America was paying too much of the defense bill for our allies. He said that he was finally getting them to pony up.

If so, why do we need to pump tens of billions of additional dollars into the military, especially when we already spend more on it than the seven countries that spend the next most *combined*?

We can't afford the increase, not if Social Security and Medicare are off limits, not if he follows through with the tax cuts he promised, not if he's going to embark on the infrastructure projects that he's (rightly) calling for, not unless he's willing to gag Paul Ryan and shove him into some Capitol broom closet while the debt balloons.

And that increase doesn't square with all that Trump has said about being more reluctant to embroil us in military conflicts than some of his predecessors were.

I suppose he could argue that maximum military readiness is a deterrent, but does America's count of aircraft carriers really give jihadists pause? The wars that

should be "at the heart of every Christian that is a capitalist." Even more pointedly: "What is the purpose of whatever I'm doing with this wealth?"

The invisible hand, Mr. Bannon implies, is not enough to create a moral order. It will be interesting to see how he squares this proposition with his pledge to deconstruct the administrative state.

we're fighting aren't traditional ones, and they hinge on the kind of diplomacy and foreign aid that Trump is giving short shrift. But then soft power doesn't gleam or puff up the ego the way that new fighting equipment does.

His approach is provocative, antagonistic. He berates and bad-mouths allies in a fashion that threatens to push them away while promising a barrier along America's southern border and an upgrade of our nuclear arsenal.

He's saying that we can and will go it alone, and while that attitude may be emotionally satisfying to many Americans, it's not at all certain to keep us safe.

I suspect that it's emotionally satisfying to Trump most of all. He's determined to cast himself as a figure of epic proportions and has to size everything around him accordingly.

Hence his (latest) grandiose description of his election in Tuesday night's address. "In 2016, the earth shifted beneath our feet," he said, going on to mix metaphors as they've seldom been mixed before. "Finally, the chorus became an earthquake."

And hence his desire to upsize our armed forces. The military is one of his many mirrors. If it's more muscular, so is he.



Evan McMullin: Conservatives, stop caving to Trump

Evan McMullin

Evan McMullin, a former CIA officer, was the chief policy director for House Republicans before entering the 2016 presidential race as a conservative independent candidate. He is a co-founder of Stand Up Republic, which aims to defend and promote democracy in America. The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.

(CNN)What American doesn't love a good deal? A free lunch, a gallon of unleaded for \$1.50, half-priced theater tickets -- they never get old. We love them so much that we even invent opportunities for more in the form of game shows such as "Let's Make a Deal" or "The Price Is Right."

But in the era of President Donald J. Trump, the stakes of our political deals are much higher. That is why,

especially for conservatives, reading the fine print with every purchase is critical. If we do not, we risk getting taken for a ride -- trading away the health of our democracy for less critical wins.

In his first month as President of the United States, Trump has acted swiftly to keep his end of deals he made in the form of campaign promises to his supporters. They've included rolling back business

Story highlights

- Evan McMullin: Conservatives are trading away core values in exchange for small wins
- He says Trump's actions weaken democracy, jeopardize liberty that conservatives prize

regulations, nominating a conservative justice to the Supreme Court and pursuing a travel ban on refugees and other immigrants. These actions have been well-received

by a majority of Republican voters

But they have also left Trump with dismal nationwide approval ratings

that hover

between 38% and 44%.

This means that Trump now needs conservatives far more than we need him. Understanding this leverage will be critical to our negotiations with him for the rest of his presidency.

He knows this all too well and has turned to conservatives, recently hosting a campaign-style rally in Florida and, last week, appearing at the Conservative Political Action Conference, where he heralded his election as a "win for conservative values." On Tuesday night, he'll address Congress and, if past is prologue, direct his comments again to his core supporters.

Trump has deployed his deal-making skills in our direction from the beginning. His pitch was simple: "Vote for me and I'll appoint conservative justices to the Supreme Court." Most conservative voters were willing to hold their noses and agree to this, in spite of his many concerning qualities.

But as we would with any other important deal in life, we must now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Updated Feb. 28, 2017 8:04 p.m. ET 29 COMMENTS

Speaking of deregulation (see nearby), President Trump on Tuesday ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider an Obama Administration rule that seized control over tens of millions of acres of private land under the pretext of protecting the nation's waterways. EPA chief Scott Pruitt will now follow due process to rescind one of his predecessor's lawless rule-makings.

In 2015 the Obama EPA reinterpreted the Clean Water Act with a rule extending its extraterritorial

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

COMMENTS

Republicans typically oppose limits on free speech, at least when they

assess what we're actually giving up against what we're receiving. Because what we're compromising, in this case, may be worth far more than what we're getting in return.

For example, Trump promised national security through increased military spending, but then opened the door to Russia's assault on our democracy and that of our most important allies in Europe.

He promoted a departure from political correctness in the name of free speech, but then put us in league with white nationalists, who oppose equality, as he undermines our free press, and even truth itself, by labeling them "fake news."

He said he would "drain the swamp" in Washington by limiting the role of lobbyists, but then gave key White House roles to family members and refused to divest himself of his foreign assets,

which may put him in violation

of the Constitution's Emoluments Clause.

He sold us a conservative justice but appears intent on also delivering a judiciary branch with diminished independence through his attacks on what he calls "so-called judges," whose reasonable, yet unfavorable (to him) decisions he calls "political."

He guarantees savings through reducing government employment

but is poised

to grow our now \$20 trillion national debt by failing to ensure the

claims to any creek, muddy farm field, ditch or prairie pothole located within a "significant nexus" of a navigable waterway. EPA defined significance broadly to include any land within the 100-year floodplain and 4,000 feet of land already under its jurisdiction, among other arbitrary delimitations.

Mr. Trump summed it up well, if not eloquently, when he said "it's a horrible, horrible rule" and "massive power grab" that has "sort of a nice name, but everything else is bad."

The rule would force farmers, contractors and manufacturers to obtain federal permits to put their property to productive use. After

put principle ahead of politics. Then there's South Dakota, where a GOP legislature is indulging in progressive methods to restrict political speech.

solvency of health and welfare programs.

He promises regulatory reform but is creating an economy run by

in too many cases

intimidated executives now making decisions that impede innovation and growth for fear of ad hoc government retribution in the form of share price-killing presidential tweets.

He committed to protecting Christianity, while eroding our commitment to freedom of religion through his vow to i

nstitute what amounts to a religious test for refugees and other Muslim immigrants

This deal should have us checking to see if we still have our wallets. It's as though Trump is granting us a free night in one of his garish gold-plated hotels as long as we part with our life savings in the casino downstairs.

Each of these trades is designed to give us a policy win we want in exchange for our turning a blind eye to Trump's amassing of power at the expense of our republic's essential ideals, norms, and institutions, which are enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution.

Conservatives have loudly warned of their erosion as a matter of highest concern for decades. Will we now trade them away them for important, but lesser prizes? If so, was liberty ever our real concern, or

recent flooding in California, millions of more acres could come under EPA's jurisdiction. Green groups could use the rule to block pipelines, housing projects or any development they don't like. Farmers might be prohibited from using fertilizers that could flow downstream.

The Clean Water Act applies only to navigable waterways, but the EPA seized on the opening created by Justice Anthony Kennedy in the unfortunate 2006 Supreme Court case *Rapanos v. U.S.* that split 4-1-4. His controlling opinion invented the "significant nexus" standard that is a classic in judicial ambiguity and

The South Dakota House voted 42-25 last week to require sweeping disclosure of names and addresses of donors to political nonprofits. The bill requires any group that spends

was it merely a partisan prop in a political play?

We should expect Trump to approach the rest of his presidency in this transactional manner and our nation will be well-served if we demand first his respect for that which ensures our freedom.

We'd also do well to take a page from his book "

The Art of the Deal.

" While discussing real estate opportunities, Trump advised, "What you should never do is pay too much, even if that means walking away from a very good site."

For conservatives, protecting the republic requires our walking away from supporting Trump when the price is too high. As important as they are, defense spending increases, regulation rollbacks and tax reform are not a good enough trade for Trump's alignment with Russia, attacks on our free press and other branches of government, and conflicts of interest associated with his foreign business interests.

Continuing to back him while ignoring his attempts to weaken our democracy jeopardizes our liberty and will have long-term, negative political consequences for Republicans.

For the country, and for ourselves, it's time for us to say "no deal" and demand better of our president.

which the EPA used to expand government control over private property development.

Thirty-one states sued the EPA, and the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals enjoined the rule nationwide in 2015 after finding that appellants were likely to win on the merits and that the rule-making was "facially suspect." EPA even acknowledged that the "science available today" doesn't support the regulation. Mr. Pruitt will be doing a national public service if he advises the Justice Department to withdraw the rule as an abuse of administrative power.

more than \$25,000 in independent political expenditures in a year, or more than \$25,000 on a ballot question, to disclose the names of its top 50 donors. This is the kind of

chilling “transparency” legislation you might find in California or Vermont, not a statehouse with GOP supermajorities.

The bill is a response to a new Democratic strategy, unveiled in 2016, to use ballot measures to overcome the party’s failure to win other South Dakota elections. The Mount Rushmore State has a loose ballot-initiative process, and out-of-state progressive groups swamped South Dakota with liberal policy initiatives. These ranged from challenging the state’s right-to-work law to requiring nonpartisan elections. Most failed but donors from outside the state bought enough ads to pass an ugly campaign-

finance restriction.

Republicans in the legislature wisely undid that measure, but they are smarting from the political blowback and eager to stop another ballot-swamping in 2018. Their bad response is the bill shredding donor privacy.

Republicans say this is about exposing outsiders who are meddling in state elections, but both sides know the real goal is chilling political participation. Money for issue advocacy will dry up if donors fear becoming targets of political retribution, boycotts or bureaucratic assaults. (See Lois Lerner’s IRS.)

Democrats pioneered the disclosure game, with enforcers such as New

York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman trying to scare away nonprofit political donors. Republicans say their bill will protect the privacy of donors who give less than \$5,000. But that’s not much these days, and why is one citizen’s privacy worth less than another’s?

What silences the political left will end up silencing everyone. That’s why a coalition including the National Rifle Association, Americans for Prosperity and the state Chamber of Commerce oppose the bill. Groups like these helped to defeat the progressive ballot initiatives, which is proof that more voices and better arguments are the way to win debates—not a limit on campaign donations.

The coalition wants the legislature to rewrite the bill to tighten up the ballot initiative law while preserving democratic participation and free-speech rights. A state Senate committee can take them up on that offer later this week when it takes up the House bill—and with any luck kills it.

Republicans hold supermajorities across the U.S., and some will be tempted to abuse that power to muzzle opponents. They should remember life in the minority, and the importance of free voices and allies.

The New York Times

Editorial :Ms. DeVos’s Fake History About School Choice

The Editorial Board

A gate to Howard University, in Washington. Gabriella Demczuk/The New York Times

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos offered a positively Orwellian explanation Monday of why historically black colleges and universities were created in the United States. Incredibly, she suggested that they were “real pioneers” in the school-choice movement and “started from the fact that there were too many students in America who did not have equal access to education.”

The Education Department’s own website — on a page titled “Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Higher Education Desegregation” — offers a more accurate history. These colleges, it shows, were created, beginning in the 19th century, as a direct

response to rigid racial segregation when the doors of white colleges were typically closed to African-Americans.

Rather than integrate colleges, the Southern and border states established parallel, Jim Crow systems in which black college students were typically confined to segregated campuses handicapped by meager budgets and inferior libraries and facilities. Litigation over the funding equity issue continues to this day.

Ms. DeVos’s insulting distortion of history, which she tried to pull back after furious criticism, grows out of her obsession with market-driven school policies, including the idea of a publicly funded voucher program that public school students could use to pay for private education.

But as Kevin Carey reported in The Times just last week, new research shows that voucher programs may

actually harm many students by shunting them into low-quality private schools. Taken together, three of the largest voucher programs in the country, enrolling nearly 180,000 children nationwide, showed negative results.

A 2015 study of an Indiana program that served tens of thousands of students found that voucher students who transferred to private schools did significantly worse in mathematics — and showed no improvement in reading.

A study of a Louisiana voucher program last year serving predominantly black and low-income families found reading and math scores went down when children transferred to private schools. The performance decline was significant: Public elementary school children who started at the 50th percentile in math dropped to the 26th percentile within a year of transferring to a private school.

And a study of a large program in Ohio — conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute — found that students who used vouchers to attend private schools fared worse academically compared with their peers attending public school.

At the very least, these studies show that the private schools cannot be presumed superior to public schools. These dismal results also make clear that free-market mechanisms that work well in business can be damaging when applied to the lives of schoolchildren.

Ms. DeVos’s strange interpretation of this country’s racist history was probably meant to pave the way for market-driven education policies. Ignorant statements notwithstanding, those policies have proved to be failures.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Cannon : How ObamaCare punishes the sick, from Michael F. Cannon

Michael F. Cannon

Feb. 28, 2017 7:15 p.m. ET

Republicans are nervous about repealing ObamaCare’s supposed ban on discrimination against patients with pre-existing conditions. But a new study by Harvard and the University of Texas-Austin finds those rules penalize high-quality coverage for the sick, reward insurers who slash coverage for the sick, and leave patients unable to obtain adequate insurance.

The researchers estimate a patient with multiple sclerosis, for example, might file \$61,000 in claims. ObamaCare’s rules let MS patients buy coverage for far less, forcing insurers to take a loss on every MS patient. That creates “an incentive

to avoid enrolling people who are in worse health” by making policies “unattractive to people with expensive health conditions,” the Kaiser Family Foundation explains.

To mitigate that perverse incentive, ObamaCare lobs all manner of taxpayer subsidies at insurers. Yet the researchers find insurers still receive just \$47,000 in revenue per MS patient—a \$14,000 loss per patient.

Predictably, that triggers a race to the bottom. Each year, whichever insurer offers the best MS coverage attracts the most MS patients and racks up the most losses. Insurers that offer high-quality coverage either leave the market, as many have, or slash their coverage. Let’s call those losses what they are:

penalties for offering high-quality coverage.

The result is lower-quality coverage—for MS, rheumatoid arthritis, infertility and other expensive conditions. The researchers find these patients face higher cost-sharing (even for inexpensive drugs), more prior-authorization requirements, more mandatory substitutions, and often no coverage for the drugs they need, so that consumers “cannot be adequately insured.”

The study also corroborates reports that these rules are subjecting patients to higher deductibles and cost-sharing across the board, narrow networks that exclude leading cancer centers, inaccurate provider directories, and opaque cost-sharing. A coalition of 150

patient groups complains this government-fostered race to the bottom “completely undermines the goal of the ACA.”

It doesn’t have to be like this. Employer plans offer drug coverage more comprehensive and sustainable than ObamaCare. The pre-2014 individual market made comprehensive coverage even more secure: High-cost patients were less likely to lose coverage than similar enrollees in employer plans. The individual market created innovative products like “pre-existing conditions insurance” that—for one-fifth the cost of health insurance—gave the uninsured the right to enroll in coverage at healthy-person premiums if they developed expensive conditions.

If anything, Republicans should fear *not* repealing ObamaCare's pre-existing-conditions rules. The Congressional Budget Office predicts a partial repeal would wipe out the individual market and cause nine million to lose coverage

**The
Washington
Post**

Ignatius : Trump is selling snake oil to the Rust Belt

<https://www.facebook.com/davidignatiusbooks>

President Trump boasts that his "America First" trade and economic policies are bringing well-paid manufacturing jobs back to America. That's probably his biggest "deliverable" to Trump voters. But is this claim true?

Trump won the presidency partly because he voiced the anger of American workers about lost jobs and stagnant wages. But in the process, he fundamentally misled the country by claiming that trade is the major cause of job losses, and that renegotiating trade agreements would save the middle class.

What Trump is offering is a palliative that has raised false hopes. He implies that a few good trade deals will refurbish the Rust Belt and restore the good old days of manufacturing. It won't happen, and to pretend otherwise is a hoax.

Read These Comments

The best conversations on The Washington Post

Please provide a valid email address.

Trump campaigned on a false argument that global trade was taking away American jobs. So he killed the Trans-Pacific Partnership his first week in office and is now demanding changes in NAFTA and other trade agreements. He has

unnecessarily. And contrary to conventional wisdom, the consequences of those rules are wildly unpopular. In a new Cato Institute/YouGov poll, 63% of respondents initially supported ObamaCare's pre-existing-condition

dressed up a few announcements from jittery U.S. corporations to argue that doomed manufacturing plants are being saved and that jobs are "already starting to pour back."

Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, has inflated this economic nationalism into a full-blown ideology that posits a battle between workers who are being hurt by globalization and an elite that benefits. Referencing the TPP at last week's Conservative Political Action Conference, Bannon said that Trump "got us out of a trade deal and let our sovereignty come back to ourselves."

But the numbers show that Trump and Bannon are fighting the wrong battle. Manufacturing employment has indeed declined in America over the past decade, but the major reason is automation, not trade. Robots, not foreign workers, are taking most of the disappearing American jobs. Rather than helping displaced blue-collar workers, Trump's promises of restoring lost jobs could leave them unprepared for the much bigger wave of automation and job loss that's ahead.

The most persuasive numbers were gathered in 2015 by Michael J. Hicks and Srikanth Devaraj at Ball State University. They showed that manufacturing has actually experienced something of a revival in the United States. Despite the Great Recession, manufacturing grew by 17.6 percent, or about 2.2

rules. That dropped to 31%—with 60% opposition—when they were told of the impact on quality.

Republicans can't keep their promise to repeal ObamaCare and improve access for the sick without

percent a year, from 2006 to 2013. That was only slightly slower than the overall economy.

But even as manufacturing output was growing, jobs were shrinking. The decade from 2000 to 2010 saw "the largest decline in manufacturing employment in U.S. history," the Ball State economists concluded. What killed those jobs? For the most part, it wasn't trade, but productivity gains from automation. Over the decade, the report notes, productivity gains accounted for 87.8 percent of lost manufacturing jobs, while trade was responsible for just 13.4 percent.

Robotics allows manufacturers to create more output with fewer people. That's not a conspiracy imposed by Bannon's global elite. It's simply a fact of economic life and progress. And it's not just blue-collar workers who are suffering. Smarter machines kill jobs in finance, law and, yes, even journalism.

To see how Trump is mislabeling the causes of workers' anger, take a look at job losses in various industries. In motor-vehicle manufacturing, 85.5 percent of job losses came from productivity gains; in steel and other primary metals, 76.7 percent; in paper products, 93.2 percent; in textiles, 97.6 percent.

Trump proposes that we "buy American." But in a world of globalized supply chains, what is an

repealing the ACA's penalties on high-quality coverage.

Mr. Cannon is director of health policy studies at the Cato Institute.

American car? Does a Toyota Camry made in Kentucky count? Is a Ford F-150 assembled in Kansas City American even if some of its parts were made in Mexico? The interdependence of global manufacturing is part of why Ford and Toyota stay healthy and profitable, for workers and shareholders both. How does Trump propose to unthread this subtly woven quilt?

Trump wants to deliver on his campaign promises. Good for him. But by misidentifying the source of the Rust Belt's woes, he is doing his supporters a double disservice. He's giving them false hope that jobs replaced by machines will be reclaimed by people. Alas, economic history doesn't move in reverse. Perhaps worse, Trump is giving people reasons to avoid the job retraining that would prepare them for the next tsunami of automation, which consultants predict could destroy more than half of all current jobs.

What will Trump say then to the workers in Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia who believed in him — who thought the old jobs were coming back — and are savaged in the next round of job losses?

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

**The
Washington
Post**

Stier : Trump's off to a rough start. Here's what can make his job easier.

Max Stier is president and chief executive of the Partnership for Public Service.

Donald Trump campaigned for the presidency as a billionaire businessman who would bring private-sector expertise to Washington. But as he quickly discovered, it is much harder running the federal government than a family enterprise.

The White House got off to a rocky start during its first weeks, appearing disorganized and in turmoil at times. Every new administration has encountered speed bumps and made mistakes, having never faced the enormous

task of managing such a large, complicated enterprise as the federal government.

The true test, however, will be how fast Trump and his team adjust and whether they will learn the right lessons from this baptism by fire.

The Daily 202 newsletter

A must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

Please provide a valid email address.

Based on the experience of past administrations, here are steps the president and his team should take to manage the government better,

create more orderly decision-making processes and engender greater public confidence:

Accelerate the nomination of agency leadership teams.

Running the U.S. government is a team sport, and the Trump administration is behind in putting its team on the field, even if the president intends to leave some positions unfilled, as he indicated this week. The president's personnel operation must step up its game, selecting hundreds of political appointees needing Senate confirmation as quickly as possible — starting with the deputy, under- and assistant secretaries, chief financial officers, general counsels

and ambassadors. While no prior administration has gotten a full complement of political appointees in place quickly, the increasing danger and volatility of our world raise the standard for this president. Every president faces the unexpected, and Trump will need his team in position to respond to crises that the world will inevitably throw at him.

Empower the Cabinet. There is a big difference between operating a bed-and-breakfast and a Trump hotel. There is an even bigger difference between running a large corporation and a government with \$4 trillion in yearly spending, 2 million civilian employees, hundreds

of agencies and 535 members of a board of directors known as Congress.

The government is too large and complex to micromanage everything from the White House, where urgent issues crowd out important matters and complete information is hard to come by. Former defense secretary Robert Gates criticized President Barack Obama for consolidating too much power in the White House, arguing that the president's staff should respect the role of the Cabinet secretaries and make them partners in policymaking. To successfully address the diversity of issues managed by our government, the president will need his White House to set the direction and coordinate activities but expect autonomous action by agencies and their leaders. Trying to run everything through the tiny White

House pipe is a recipe for getting little done and allowing smaller problems to mushroom into crises.

Seek out people who understand how our government works. You can't drain the swamp without the expertise of people who understand swamps, and when it comes to government, you can't successfully change the system without naming political appointees in deputy and other agency leadership jobs who know the ins and outs of the agencies and their operations. Bringing in outsiders without experience to shake things up sounds fine, but you need a strong subset of people with a clear understanding of the government you are trying to change.

Don't view the career civil servants as the enemy. The president and his Cabinet face a big challenge of making full use of the

skills and expertise of the career workforce. Trump needs to find ways to work with — not go to battle against — the people in his own administration to be successful.

The president will set policy and should expect it to be carried out by federal employees. But he should also create decision-making processes that allow experts inside the government to have a voice, to offer ways to improve policies and to raise red flags that could help avoid embarrassment or prevent harm to the nation. Slamming the door on authorized channels for dissent or dialogue will result only in increased leaking of information, creating unnecessary firestorms.

Remember that implementation matters. Thomas Edison aptly observed that vision without execution is hallucination. It is one thing to issue executive orders and

make grand policy announcements; it is another to carry them out. How policies are implemented is critical — a lack of attention to detail has burned many an administration, caused scandals and political fallout, and set back the best-laid plans.

One of the great tests for highly successful individuals taking on new and different challenges is whether they are able to adjust to the changed circumstances. President Trump has the opportunity to demonstrate he can be an effective leader on the biggest stage in the world, but he will need to change his playbook and management approach if he wants a well-functioning government that meets the needs of the American people.