

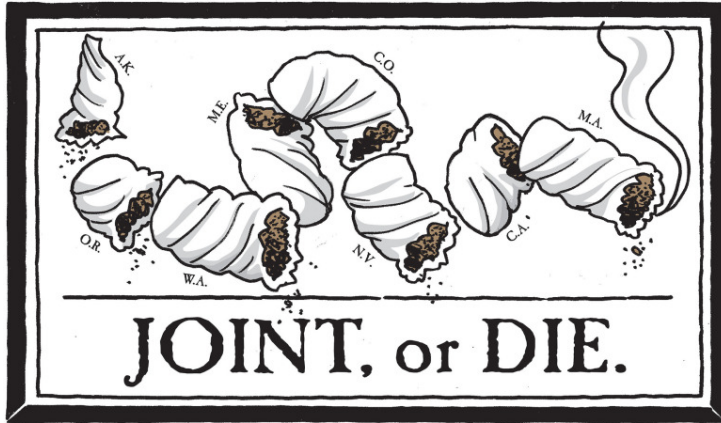
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Emmanuel Macron Is Everything America's Democrats Are Not

Of all the potential outcomes that could have emerged from the first round of Sunday's French presidential election, the one that observers seemed to fear most was a second round duel between Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the hard right Front National, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the hard left La France Insoumise (Defiant France). That face-off between representatives from the far ends of France's political spectrum has been averted.

Remarkably, however, two extremes will nevertheless confront one another in the run-off on May 7. Le Pen, who placed second with 21.4 percent of the vote, will continue on to the second round of the election. She will be up against Emmanuel Macron, who came in first with nearly 24 percent. The 39-year-old former investment banker is commonly referred to as a centrist. Such a moniker, however, tells us very little. Instead, we should think of Macron as the embodiment of a particularly French kind of center — the extreme center.

The "extreme center" is a notion coined by the historian Pierre Serna, in his seminal work on the French Revolution and, more particularly, the Restoration, the 15-year period that followed Napoleon's fall and saw the return of the Bourbon monarchy. The Restoration was caught between those committed to maintaining the ideals of the French Revolution and those committed to their extirpation. In his paradoxical phrase, Serna sought to emphasize the efforts made by the court of Louis XVIII, during a few brief years, to tack between the revolutionary left and counterrevolutionary right. Squeezed between these two utterly antithetical worldviews, Louis and his ministers staked out a position uncommonly dedicated to compromise and moderation, as well as a kind of proto-technocracy. Most importantly, they insisted upon

their devotion to what was called the "general interest." This experiment in moderate extremism, however, did not last long. It ended in 1820 with an act of terrorism: a follower of Napoleon assassinated a member of the royal family, pushing the monarchy into the arms of the extreme right.

Of course, the differences between Macron and Louis XVIII are greater than the similarities. But Macron, facing a political landscape potted with craters where the country's two establishment parties once stood, has cast himself as the ultimate centrist: "neither left nor right," as he likes to put it. On the one hand, he vows to impose an austere diet on the bloated public sector, eliminating 120,000 positions over five years; on the other hand, he promises major investments in the environmental, health and agricultural sectors. A friend of the financial and industrial worlds, Macron also portrays himself as the defender of France's revolutionary and universal values of liberty and equality. And short of an different kind of act of terrorism between now and May 7, Macron is the odds-on favorite to win.

Le Pen's electoral options from this point on are limited. No doubt she will look to center-right candidate François Fillon's more conservative supporters: Tellingly, Christophe Billon, the leader of the archconservative Catholic organization Sens Commun, which had rallied to the scandal-plagued Fillon, refused last night to choose between Le Pen and Macron, leaving his members to "follow their conscience" come the second round. More strikingly, Le Pen will also appeal to working class voters who had cast their ballots for Mélenchon. Interviewed by the magazine *L'Obs*, one such voter declared: "For me, it's out of the question to vote for Macron. And so, it's going to be either Le Pen or abstention. We've got to resist international finance."

But, by and large, Le Pen has few potential allies: her party and her person remain radioactive for the vast majority of the French political class. Not surprisingly, once the official results were announced last night, a great chorus of voices across the political spectrum declared their support for Macron. On the right, senior figures like former prime ministers Alain Juppé and Jean-Pierre Raffarin rallied to Macron, as did a depressed Fillon. On the left, there was a similar mobilization; the Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, though reeling from a disastrous showing — he secured scarcely 6 percent of the vote — nevertheless called on the party's faithful to vote for Macron. The one notable exception was Mélenchon, who has refused to endorse Macron until he learns, through the social media his campaign used so skillfully, where his supporters stand on the issue. (That they were chanting "Résistance, résistance" during Mélenchon's concession speech does not bode well for a Macron endorsement.)

All of this — along with polls the show him crushing Le Pen by more than 20 points in the second round of voting — suggests that Macron's great challenge will not be gaining the Elysée, but instead fashioning a functional extreme center, one that doesn't end, as it did in repeatedly in 19th century, with sharp lurches to either the extreme right or left. Though outstanding French theorists from Benjamin Constant through Raymond Aron have defended the virtues of centrism and moderation, French history, in thrall to ideological politics, has proved mostly allergic to its actual practice. (The failure of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the one notable exception to this rule, to win a second term as president in 1981 reflects the difficulty balancing act of centrist politicians in France.)

Assuming he becomes president, Macron's hopes for success will depend on the legislative elections

in June. Historically, the French have tended to give the presidents they vote into office the parliamentary majorities they need to carry out their campaign promises. All of these presidents also led broad-based, long-established and well-oiled political parties. Macron, by contrast, founded his movement, *En Marche!*, less than a year ago, when he was still serving as the economy minister in President Francois Hollande's administration.

Nevertheless, his movement claims to have reviewed more than 14,000 applications for those seeking to run as representatives, and promises to reveal a full list of candidates for the 577 parliamentary slots after the run-off election. By way of a teaser, fourteen *En Marche!* candidates were presented to the press earlier this month. Gender balanced and multi-racial, they ranged from farmers, teachers and journalists to the former head of RAID (France's SWAT unit), civil servants and intellectuals. Their professional, ethnic and class diversity may well represent a new approach to extreme centrism in France, one that seeks to bridge at least some of the schisms that bedevil French political life.

But, of course, both the extreme left and extreme right are not going away anytime soon. As the specialist of the Front National, Nicolas Lebourg, argues, if Le Pen succeeds in winning at least 40 percent of the vote, she will lay the groundwork for a new assault on the Elysée in five years. Similarly, Mélenchon will use his powerful showing in the first round to push to ever farther to the left a thoroughly deflated and diminished Socialist Party. No less important, the social and economic forces that have lifted Le Pen and Mélenchon will continue to swell once this electoral season ends and it remains to be seen if the extreme middle will hold against the extremes of both the left and right.

POLITICO Brussels suitors jostle for Macron's attention – POLITICO

Maïa de La Baume

French presidential candidate's centrist movement.

Emmanuel Macron still has an election to win but rival blocs in the European Parliament are already competing for the affections of the

Macron, a former economy minister in the Socialist government but not a party member, set up *En Marche* a year ago but never wedded it to any family in the European Parliament.

The liberal and center-left blocs would love to get a sizeable injection of French MEPs in their ranks at the next EU elections in 2019, representing a French president who they hope will breathe new life into the European project.

The enthusiasm generated by Macron's narrow first-round victory over the Euroskeptic MEP Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Front, and the expectation that he will win the second round on May 7, has triggered jostling for position by the Alliance of Liberals

and Democrats (ALDE) — home of the sole existing En Marche MEP, Sylvie Goulard — and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

“Macron’s victory is very good news for us, both in tactical and political terms,” said one ALDE insider, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “It gives credit to what we have been saying for years, with a possibility to get our ideas implemented.”

Although a majority of ALDE MEPs have supported Macron’s pro-European movement since its creation, Macron never specifically returned the compliment by hitching his party to their wagon.

“Emmanuel has not completely decided yet if he wants to join ALDE,” said Goulard, a French MEP who has helped promote the Macron brand in Brussels. “There are obvious affinities with ALDE but it’s too soon to say.”

When Macron was asked which political group’s traditional pre-EU summit gathering he would attend if elected president, “he responded that the French couldn’t care less about these meetings,” Goulard said.

That attitude didn’t discourage ALDE’s parliamentary leader, the irrepressible former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, from

gathering reporters at his office in Brussels shortly after Macron’s first-round victory to talk about what it meant for the future of Europe and ALDE. Asked whether he would like Macron to join his ALDE group, Verhofstadt said: “I hope so, yes.”

Hans van Baalen, the president of the ALDE pan-European party, tweeted Sunday after the French election results came in: “Let’s work together w/ winner of 1st round.”

Macron-compatible

Macron was by far the most Europhile of the main candidates in the first round of the French vote and his ideological affinity with ALDE is clear. His pledge to revive Franco-German cooperation and to set up a eurozone parliament and finance ministry are long-standing ALDE aspirations. “If he does what he said he’d do, he would put in place most of Verhofstadt’s ideas,” said the ALDE official.

En Marche could choose not to be affiliated with any European party, the way Macron shunned France’s mainstream political parties to cast himself as an anti-establishment candidate — albeit one with plenty of mainstream appeal, as a former investment banker.

Verhofstadt tried to head off that argument by trying to convince reporters in Brussels that ALDE is

anti-establishment and “radical,” full of bold centrists that go “beyond the left and the right.”

If Macron did buy that argument and plump for ALDE, it would allow En Marche to tap into EU party funds. For ALDE, it would mean a huge boost in their influence in the Parliament, where the French are already the second-largest delegation. ALDE’s seven existing French MEPs are the group’s second-largest national delegation after the Spaniards, and the ALDE party has 60 member parties across Europe, including Ciudadanos in Spain and D66 in the Netherlands.

Although the S&D endorsed Hamon, one S&D official estimated that about half of the group could be described as “Macron-compatible.”

The European liberals currently have wind in their sails, after some recent election boosts in Northern Europe that partly offset the setbacks suffered by Germany’s Free Democrats (FDP). In the Netherlands, Mark Rutte’s VVD recently fended off a Euroskeptic challenge by Geert Wilders, and seven of the 27 EU leaders in the Council are ALDE members, including Luxembourg’s Xavier Bettel, Belgium’s Charles Michel and Lars Løkke Rasmussen in Denmark. Some in the group would like an ALDE member to become

the future president of the Council, according to party insiders.

But the liberals have rivals for En Marche’s affections — including the S&D, the second-largest party in the Parliament after the center-right European Popular Party (EPP). Although the S&D endorsed the official French Socialist first-round candidate, Benoît Hamon, one S&D official estimated that about half of the group — including French MEPs such as Pervenche Berès or Sylvie Guillaume — could be described as “Macron-compatible.”

“Nobody said it out loud but almost half of the group felt much closer to Macron than Hamon,” said the official. “We can perfectly imagine people from the S&D joining En Marche while staying in the Socialist group.” In the Parliament, members can choose to belong to a political group that differs from their national party’s group membership.

Macron could also disappoint them both and follow his French liberal allies in François Bayrou’s MoDem party into the much smaller European Democratic Party (EDP), which is allied to ALDE.

“Where will Macron choose to go?” asked the ALDE official. “It will be Verhofstadt’s job to influence him.”

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

French Election: Marine Le Pen a 'Far Right' Candidate?

In case you’ve been confused by the last few days of punditry, let me say outright that France is not America.

For example, we recently concluded a presidential election in the United States in which many argued that it was imperative to smash the “final glass ceiling” by electing a female president. One doesn’t hear that kind of talk in France about Marine Le Pen, who just came in second in the first round of presidential elections. If she wins the runoff against Emmanuel Macron on May 7, she would be France’s first female president.

Why is there no “ready for Marine” rhetoric? Because Le Pen would also be the first “far-right” president. Identity politics has its limits.

And so does the term “far-right.”

Indeed, the terms “left” and “right” rank among the worst of France’s exports. Their inspiration wasn’t ideology, but a seating chart. Supporters of the monarchy sat on the right in the General Assembly while radicals, revolutionaries, republicans, and other foes and critics of the Ancien Regime sat on

the left. (In Britain, by contrast, members of Parliament switch sides according to whichever party is in power.)

Thus, champions of free markets and limited government were every bit as “leftist” as the Jacobin totalitarians who would usher in the Reign of Terror. To this day, a “liberal” in France is closer to what many call a “right-winger” in America, at least on economic issues.

As for what constitutes “far-right,” that has come to be defined as a grab bag of bigotry, nativism, and all the bad kinds of nationalism. Le Pen, the youngest daughter of the even more “far-right” anti-Semitic politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, until recently led the National Front party (FN), which was founded in 1972 by, among others, veterans of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy government.

How far the apple fell from the tree is hotly debated, but what is clear is that Marine Le Pen is a smarter, more opportunistic, and more inclusive politician. She even defenestrated her father from the FN in an effort to “un-demonize” the party.

One of the main reasons she has come so close to being the next president of France has been her ability to sap support from former strongholds of the French Communist Party in the north. This is less shocking than it may sound, once you account for the fact that the French Communist Party has its own history of racially tinged attacks on immigration. Nearly a third of FN voters said their second choice in the first round of the elections was the doctrinaire socialist candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the French Bernie Sanders.

Le Pen rejects the “far-right” label, preferring a “third-way” approach that has a long intellectual history among nationalists and fascists. She says that the symbiotic issues of immigration and globalization (specifically relating to the European Union) yielded a new politics that “no longer put the right and left in opposition, but patriots and globalists.” She has downplayed social issues, highlighting the fact that she’s a twice-divorced single mother who champions “women’s rights.” She’s vowed to leave abortion laws alone.

Her “economic patriotism” — a mélange of anti-immigration, protectionism, support for civil-service protections, and entitlements (at least for the native-born French) — is an updated variant of old-fashioned national-socialism.

In other words, those looking to cherry-pick easy comparisons to American politics have their work cut out for them.

Except in one regard.

For decades, critics of America’s mass immigration have argued that the social upheaval such policies produce is dangerous and destabilizing. But the topic became radioactive for reasonable politicians, creating an opening for unreasonable ones among the working-class constituencies most affected by immigration.

This is precisely what has happened in France. Interviews with Le Pen voters tell this story over and over again. They bemoan the great “replacement” of not only workers but also customs, traditions, and lifestyles brought by waves of immigrants.

These resentments are perhaps more acute in France than elsewhere, a country where national identity precedes political and

ideological orientations, and where assimilation is narrowly defined. But the same dynamic is playing itself out across Europe and America.

Le Pen will probably lose, but the problem will endure long past May 7.

**The
New York
Times**

UNE - Marine Le Pen May Get a Lift From an Unlikely Source: The Far Left

Adam Nossiter

It has also set off a dynamic in the French race much like when Hillary Clinton defeated Senator Bernie Sanders in the Democratic presidential primaries last year — leaving his supporters, still in the thrall of populism, up for grabs as party allegiances broke down.

Mr. Mélenchon's 19.6 percent of the vote Sunday is now a rich booty — triple the score of the mainstream Socialist Party, whose collapse has elevated Mr. Mélenchon to be de facto leader of the French left. He even won in big cities like Marseille and Lille.

But it is not clear where that vote will now go, not least because far-left populism and far-right populism may have more in common than the seemingly vast gulf between them on the political spectrum would suggest.

Mr. Mélenchon, 65, a former Trotskyite, ran a campaign denouncing banks, globalization and the European Union — just like Ms. Le Pen.

A grizzled orator with a penchant for Latin American dictators, he has the same forgiving attitude she does toward the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin.

Both were competing for working-class voters suspicious of the global financial elite. Mr. Macron had already "ruined the lives of thousands of people" with his pro-market policies, Mr. Mélenchon said during the campaign.

And like Ms. Le Pen, Mr. Mélenchon regularly attacked the news media during the campaign. On election night, after his defeat, he tore into what he called "mediacrats" and "oligarchs." They were "rejoicing" over "two candidates who approve and want to maintain the current

institutions" of government, the longtime fan of Castro and Hugo Chávez said.

The shared lines of attack gave the candidates at the political extremes their best showings ever, if from opposite ends of the spectrum. Mr. Mélenchon almost doubled his 2012 result, refused to concede for hours and then attacked both finalists, refusing to distinguish between them.

In that, he is alone. Across the board, politicians and other former candidates have urgently counseled their supporters to vote for Mr. Macron to block Ms. Le Pen's path to the Élysée Palace.

The French call this the "Republican Front," and it has proved effective at preventing the National Front — perceived by many in France as a threat to democracy — from taking power before.

Mr. Mélenchon is having none of it.

Instead, his party has announced an internet "consultation" of his followers, with three choices offered for the May 7 vote: a blank ballot, a vote for Mr. Macron or an abstention. A vote for Ms. Le Pen is not one of the choices, and Mr. Mélenchon's aides insist that is the last thing they want.

On Tuesday, a site linked to Mr. Mélenchon's party bristled with debate, with one poster saying Mr. Macron and Ms. Le Pen represented "the failure of the system" and others agonizing over whether to abstain or vote blank.

Critics of Mr. Mélenchon — who have become numerous in the Socialist Party and Mr. Macron's camp — say a blank ballot or abstention can only help Ms. Le Pen.

"It's his pride. It's led him to make an extremely serious mistake," a leading Socialist member of Parliament, Malek Boutih, said in an interview Tuesday. "He's given them a huge boost," he said of the National Front.

"This gesture of Mélenchon, it's exactly like the political behavior of the whole European far left," added Mr. Boutih, who is part of the centrist bloc Mr. Mélenchon despises. "The radical left has a problem with democratic culture. It's a new force, but with old Stalinist ideas."

The National Front is delighted. The party has extended a welcome mat to Mr. Mélenchon's supporters, pointing out similarities between the candidates.

The Front's founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen — kicked out of the party by his daughter partly over his racism — hailed Mr. Mélenchon's position warmly in an interview on French radio Tuesday.

"This seems very worthy to me, coming from a candidate who made a remarkable breakthrough, and who was — it must be said — the best orator," Mr. Le Pen said.

His daughter's top lieutenant in the far-right party, Florian Philippot, said "many voters" for Mr. Mélenchon may now join Ms. Le Pen in the second round, adding that there was a "a kind of coherence, after all" in his refusal to endorse Mr. Macron.

"Among his voters, many will refuse to vote for Macron, and many could vote for us," Mr. Philippot said on France Info, tying the former economy minister to "finance," as Mr. Mélenchon does, and to the unpopular government of President François Hollande, in which Mr. Macron served.

"Lots of voters in the electorate that chose Fillon, Dupont-Aignan" — two

candidates on the right — "and even Mélenchon are open to a number of our themes," another top National Front official, Nicolas Bay, said in an internal memo quoted by Agence France-Presse on Tuesday.

The coming vote would be a contest between "fans of Mrs. Merkel and the unsubjected," he wrote — an apparent reference to Mr. Mélenchon's movement and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who is criticized on both the far left and the far right as pursuing policies that have impoverished European Union states.

One of Mr. Mélenchon's top aides derided the candidate's critics in a telephone interview Tuesday. "You've got to look at where the criticism is coming from," said Éric Coquerel, a member of the Paris regional council.

"It's coming from those whose policies have favored the development of the National Front, from the Socialist Party," said Mr. Coquerel, referring to the quarrel that divided the French left for five years: the governing Socialists' mild pro-market turn, seen as a betrayal by France's far left.

"We don't want to help Marine Le Pen, but we don't want to endorse Mr. Macron," he said.

"He's the candidate of free trade," Mr. Coquerel said. "He's going to assist in the Uberization of society. Everything we are going to fight against in the coming months. There's no possible rapprochement."

UNE - A Marine Le Pen Victory Wouldn't Necessarily Be a Win for Trump

Mark Landler

Ms. Le Pen has vowed to withdraw France from the integrated military command of NATO, an alliance that Mr. Trump once derided but has more recently supported. She condemned his missile strike on Syria. And she has promised to hold a referendum within six months about whether to pull France out of the European Union — a move that, if successful, would almost certainly destroy the union and cause turmoil in global financial markets.

That last point ought to weigh heavily on Mr. Trump. He has pointed to the buoyant performance of the stock market as one of the most tangible yardsticks of his performance as president. The market's rally on Monday — fueled by the relief that Ms. Le Pen's rival, Emmanuel Macron, seems poised beat her in the next round — was a reminder of how much investor confidence hinges on the continued stability of the European Union.

"For the sake of world psychological health, it would be better if Macron won," said John C. Kornblum, a former American ambassador to Germany who now works as a businessman in Berlin.

Mr. Kornblum said he believed Ms. Le Pen would be less of a change agent than many in France fear she will be — a corollary, perhaps, of Mr. Trump, who has not been able to carry out the most extreme elements of his campaign platform.

Still, Ms. Le Pen's election would inject a degree of uncertainty into Europe and NATO that would complicate the Trump administration's efforts to deal with

the Islamic State, the Syrian civil war, Iran, Russia and Afghanistan. In all these cases, analysts said, her inclination would be to pursue a more inward-looking path and to defy American leadership.

"She would be everything that was bad about de Gaulle, but much worse," said Eliot A. Cohen, a professor of military history at Johns Hopkins University who served in the administration of George W. Bush.

Charles de Gaulle, he said, supported the United States during the Cuban missile crisis and in the early days of the Vietnam War, even though he, too, withdrew France from NATO's military command — a decision that was not reversed until 2009 by President Nicolas Sarkozy. Not only would Ms. Le Pen refuse to contribute more to NATO's budget, she would also likely shun NATO-led military campaigns in places like Afghanistan.

Leaders across Europe backed Mr. Trump's strike on a Syrian airfield. Ms. Le Pen viewed it as a betrayal of his campaign promises.

"Trump had said repeatedly that he didn't intend the United States to be the world's policeman any longer, and that is exactly what he did," she told French television.

While most European leaders welcomed Mr. Trump's about-face on NATO, she described it as incoherent.

"I am coherent," she said to French radio. "I don't change my mind in a few days. He had said he would not be the policeman of the world, that he would be the president of the United States and would not be the

policeman of the world, but it seems today that he has changed his mind."

To some extent, Ms. Le Pen seems like a disillusioned fan. After Mr. Trump's surprise victory, she said it had "made possible what had previously been impossible." During the transition, she turned up in the lobby of Trump Tower, where she was seen having coffee at a cafe. But Mr. Trump kept her at arm's length. Though he met with Nigel Farage, a prominent British euroskeptic, he did not meet Ms. Le Pen.

Mr. Trump seems more attracted to Ms. Le Pen's populist ideas than to her personally. Last week, after a terrorist attack on the Champs-Élysées left a policeman dead, he said on Twitter that it would transform the French election. In an interview with The Associated Press, Mr. Trump said Ms. Le Pen would be the prime beneficiary, though he did not formally endorse her.

"It'll probably help her because she is the strongest on borders and she is the strongest on what's been going on in France," he said.

In the end, Mr. Trump's political analysis was only half right. While Ms. Le Pen finished second to Mr. Macron in a crowded field, virtually all the other candidates moved to isolate her, urging their supporters to back Mr. Macron. An independent former banker, Mr. Macron campaigned on a message of openness and not succumbing to fears of Islamic terrorism.

For some in Mr. Trump's camp, the victory was less one of far-right

populism than of anti-establishment insurgency. France's two major parties were decimated in the election. And even Mr. Macron, who made millions at the investment firm Rothschild & Company, would not look out of place among the Goldman Sachs alumni in Mr. Trump's White House.

Still, White House officials said Mr. Trump had more affinity for Ms. Le Pen, and was closer to her on the issues than his recent reversals suggested. He remains deeply suspicious of NATO, they noted, and has little affection for the European Union. As someone who long urged the United States to steer clear of foreign conflicts, one official said, he could even respect Ms. Le Pen's misgivings about the Syria strike.

The trouble is, Mr. Trump, like his predecessors, relies heavily on France for help in military operations and intelligence sharing. When President Barack Obama called off his missile strike on Syria in 2013, French warplanes were fueled up and waiting on the runway. France takes part in the multinational military campaign against the Islamic State.

"If Le Pen were to win, the counter-ISIL campaign in Iraq and Syria and broader antiterrorism efforts in North Africa would probably take a big hit," said Mr. Kupchan, who teaches at Georgetown University, using an acronym for the Islamic State. "The worst-case scenario is that the E.U. collapses and Europe's borders come back to life."

"My sense," he added, "is that Trump is in the process of discovering Atlanticism."

Marine Le Pen's Bid to Lead France Hinges on Low Turnout

Joshua Robinson
and Noemie

PARIS—National Front leader Marine Le Pen's hopes to win the French presidency lie in the hands of voters like Pierre Gilbert.

Mr. Gilbert, 23 years old, is by no means a supporter of the anti-European Union, anti-immigration politician, who has qualified for the May 7 runoff against centrist Emmanuel Macron. He defines himself as a die-hard leftist.

But breaking with a longstanding tradition of French voters setting personal beliefs aside to coalesce

behind whoever could block the National Front, he plans to stay home for the second round.

"No matter who wins, it'll be a catastrophe," he said.

Voters like Mr. Gilbert illustrate how Ms. Le Pen has succeeded in weakening the political bulwark—known here as the "front républicain"—that broke National Front waves in past elections, largely because of the party's tradition of xenophobia.

In 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen, her father, unexpectedly stormed into the second round of the presidential election, stunned

French voters put aside their reservations about conservative incumbent Jacques Chirac and re-elected him with 82% of the vote. In late 2015, National Front candidates led in six of France's 13 districts after the first round of regional elections, but failed to win a single region—a result analysts attributed to the republican front.

Ms. Le Pen must attract voters who didn't support her in the first round to defeat Mr. Macron, and the apathy of a large part of the electorate could play into her hand. Surveys suggest about a third of leftist voters and almost a quarter of

conservatives will abstain in the runoff.

"The knee-jerk republican front is gone," political analyst Christèle Marchand-Lagier said. "The National Front is now well established in France."

Polls conducted by the OpinionWay firm show Ms. Le Pen could nearly double her first-round total of 21.3% in the face-off against Mr. Macron, but would lose, 39% to 61%.

Unlike her father, who cultivated the image of the National Front as a fringe movement, Ms. Le Pen has sought to impose herself as a stateswoman who is prepared to

govern. On Tuesday, she stood alongside Mr. Macron at the national police headquarters as President François Hollande paid tribute to the officer killed in Thursday's terror attack on the Champs-Élysées.

Earlier this week, she announced she was taking a leave of absence from her position as National Front president—a bid to send a message that she would represent all French people if elected, not just her party supporters. This approach is likely also aimed at helping Ms. Le Pen position herself as the leading face of the opposition if she loses to Mr. Macron.

On Sunday evening, conservative candidate François Fillon offered a reluctant endorsement of Mr. Macron after he was knocked out of the presidential race, citing the need to block the National Front and its “history of violence and intolerance.”

“Abstention isn’t in my DNA, especially when an extremist party is closing in on power,” he told supporters.

But in the crowd, Fillon supporter Alexandre de Hubsch said the plea had fallen on deaf ears.

“I have never voted for the far right before, but I can’t vote for [Mr. Macron],” he said, adding he would support Ms. Le Pen in the second round, despite opposing her stance on leaving the EU.

According to poll by the Elabe firm, 28% of first-round Fillon voters said they would vote for Ms. Le Pen, while 23% plan to cast a blank vote or stay home.

Such mixed feelings are equally palpable on the left side of the political spectrum.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the far-left firebrand candidate who captured 19.6% of the first-round vote with a promise to tax the rich and lift blue-collar workers, has stopped short of endorsing anyone for the second round.

Instead, he asked the 450,000 members of his Parti de Gauche (Party of the Left) movement to express their preference for the second round via his website.

At the National Front, his holding back was seen as a welcome break from the republican-front tradition. “I think it was quite chivalrous on Mr. Mélenchon’s part not to give voting instructions,” said Mikael Sala, Ms. Le Pen’s economic adviser. “Voters are grown-ups.”

The Elabe poll shows Ms. Le Pen could capture 16% of Mr. Mélenchon’s voters. But it suggests

many more, stranded without a left-wing candidate, don’t want to cast ballots for her or for Mr. Macron, a former investment banker they view as an embodiment of globalization.

“Mr. Macron is dangerous because he will keep the capitalist system. Marine Le Pen is dangerous because she will hurt minorities,” said Clement Pairot, a 27-year-old supporter of Mr. Mélenchon who won’t go to the polls on May 7.

Some voters said even though they oppose Ms. Le Pen, they wouldn’t cast their ballot for Mr. Macron. Dojima Ounei, a 33-year-old musician, said he doesn’t want the future president to win in a landslide and claim a mandate from the entire country.

“I’m not going to vote because I don’t want him to collect 80%,” Mr. Ounei said. “I’d prefer it to be close.”



Fighting Back Against Putin’s Hackers

Christopher Dickey

PARIS—Looking back on the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton last year, one sees an appalling passivity and helplessness as online attackers stole her campaign secrets and now-President Donald Trump exploited that information without shame or discretion.

But, having learned many lessons from the Clinton debacle, the digital team working for French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron not only took precautions, it decided to fight back.

Next to the U.S. presidential elections, none in the world have had such high stakes riding on them: the future of the European Union, NATO, global commerce—the list is long. And Macron’s team realized early on, as they watched the Democratic Party’s implosion in America, that they too might be the targets of a group of hackers known by many sobriquets, including Pawn Storm, Apt28, STRONTIUM, and rather more colorfully, Fancy Bear.

The group’s hacking operation is most clearly identifiable by its techniques and targets. It’s made up of cyber-criminals with political agendas that fit so closely the priorities of Russian President Vladimir Putin that they are widely believed to be working on his behalf or under his direct orders. (Indeed, the American intelligence community appears to have little doubt on that score anymore.)

And, sure enough, when Macron’s upstart centrist political movement began to gain real momentum toward the end of last year, the “spear phishing” attacks against it started.

The 39-year-old candidate, formerly an investment banker with Rothschild and then the economy minister under President François Hollande, was drawing support from both the left and the right for his independent movement, *En Marche!* (Onward!), and he had started to look like a real contender.

It is important to note that all the other leading candidates in the race—but especially far-right anti-immigrant, anti-European Union, anti-NATO, anti-American, pro-Trump candidate Marine Le Pen—were unabashedly pro-Putin.

Then polls started to show that Macron might upset Le Pen’s well-laid plans to restore what she likes to call French “sovereignty,” albeit with Russian funding and Russia’s endorsement, including a high-profile meeting in Moscow with Putin himself. (Oh, and Trump chimed in, too, on her behalf ...)

Putin could be forgiven for thinking that with such useful allies, pawns, or what-have-you as this, he need never contemplate an invasion of Europe through the Fulda Gap, like in some old Tom Clancy novel about World War III. Today a demoralized and dysfunctional Europe might just come to him.

All he needed in France was a dose of what he’s alleged to have done in the United States: introduce a bit of infowar to create doubts about the

viability of the system—maybe with the help of a few Fancy Bear hackers—and usher the most unviable candidate into office.

So, whether it was a matter of coincidence or conspiracy, take your pick, aggressive attacks on the Macron campaign began in earnest.

Mounir Mahjoubi, head of Macron’s digital team, traces the hostile activity back to December. And as the first round of the presidential contest reached its climax just last Sunday, with Macron and Le Pen emerging as the finalists, concerns about Russian attempts to manipulate the results grew so intense that Macron’s campaign finally refused to give the Russian state-funded news media, RT and Sputnik, accreditation to cover the home stretch.

“RT France and Sputnik have been since the very beginning of our campaign the first source of fake news about our candidate and campaign,” Mahjoubi told me Tuesday afternoon. As *The Daily Beast* reported on Monday, another staffer called RT, flatly, “a propaganda organ.”

But that is not the only way the Macron campaign is pushing back against the hacking onslaught.

“We also do counteroffensive against them,” says Mahjoubi.

To understand how that might work, one needs to know that the basic techniques used by Pawn Storm to gather intelligence and their alter egos in Fancy Bear to disseminate it are relatively simple, at least in the first skirmishes of a cyber battle.

“They only have to be as sophisticated as they need to be,” says Ed Cabrera, the chief cyber security officer of Trend Micro, a global firm based in Japan which has just published a report on Pawn Storm’s activities, including some data related to the Macron campaign.

Most email users are accustomed to clumsy phishing: those mysterious Nigerians who want to help you collect millions of dollars from some long-lost uncle if you’ll just pass on your bank details. That sort of thing.

This is much, much more polished. And it’s not about money. It’s about intelligence gathering for the exercise of political—indeed geopolitical—power.

Their “well-crafted phishing campaigns,” as Cabrera puts it, are meant first to work their way into an email system by tricking people into revealing their IDs and passwords. Then the hackers exploit that knowledge not only to collect private emails in secret, but to mine them for intelligence, using them to focus new and more targeted attacks on specific individuals to gather still more private data, and in some cases—this is the “Fancy Bear” specialty in the Pawn Storm shop—to reveal those secrets to the public through various channels (like WikiLeaks) in order to affect political outcomes.

“As soon as they identify a group and as soon as they identify the individuals they want to compromise they come at them from many different angles,” Cabrera told me over the phone.

The new Trend Micro report makes the case that Pawn Storm/Fancy Bear's targets over the last several years coincide very closely with Russian concerns. "Foreign espionage and influence on geopolitics are the group's main motives, and not financial gain," the report says. "Its main targets are armed forces, the defense industry, news media, politicians, and dissidents."

The Trend Micro chronology shows that if you present an obstacle to Putin's ambitions, whether standing up to pro-Russian insurgents in Ukraine or disqualifying drug-drenched Russian athletes from sports competitions or running against Putin's chosen paladins in Western politics, Pawn Storm will target you, and Fancy Bear will peddle the information that's uncovered.

Yet, as Cabrera and Mahjoubi acknowledge, without the kinds of resources the U.S. intelligence community has brought to bear, and the results it has yet to reveal in any detail, it is hard to make that final definitive connection between the Pawn Storm gang and Putin.

That's inferred from the pattern, says Cabrera, "the victimology—when they are attacking, how they are attacking, and who they are attacking."

One is reminded of John Le Carré's master spy George Smiley searching the shadows for his Soviet-backed nemesis Karla, presuming his presence based on otherwise hard to explain events.

"Espionage is nothing new, and cyber espionage is really not that new," says Cabrera. "It's the same type of tradecraft but in bits and bytes."

But again, how do you defend yourself in this shadowland if, like Macron and his campaign, you know you are targeted? What is that "counteroffensive" Mahjoubi was talking about?

The phishing attacks targeting the Macron campaign exploited the fact that its email system was based on Microsoft's OneDrive, which has a unique portal for many different operations, not only emails. Pawn Storm would send official looking emails encouraging the recipients to sign in by clicking on a link that appeared to be exactly the same as usual—except the dots in the address had been replaced by hyphens. "If you speed read the URL, you can't make the distinction," said Mahjoubi. And when the fake sign-in page came up it was "pixel perfect."

The Trend Micro report publishes one of the fake URLs, but Mahjoubi said there were about 10 related to

Pawn Storm/Fancy Bear discovered since December. And many more that may come from other hostile attackers.

Some hackers have used a more sophisticated technique called tabnabbing. The Trend Micro report says it is part of the Pawn Storm arsenal, and Mahjoubi says the Macron campaign has been hit by it, but he can't verify the source.

"In this attack scenario," says the Trend Micro Report, "the target gets an email supposedly coming from a website he might be interested in—maybe from a conference he is likely to visit or a news site he has subscribed to. The email has a link to a URL that looks very legitimate. When the target reads his email and clicks on the link, it will open in a new tab. This new tab will show the legitimate website of a conference or news providers after being redirected from a site under the attackers' control. The target is likely to spend some time browsing this legitimate site. Distracted, he probably did not notice that just before the redirection a simple script was run, changing the original webmail tab to a phishing site. When the target has finished reading the news article or conference information on the legitimate site, he returns to the tab of his webmail. He is informed that his session has expired and the site

needs his credentials again. He is then likely to reenter his password and give his credentials away to the attackers."

"We believe that they didn't break through. We are sure of it," said Mahjoubi. "But the only way to be ready is to train the people. Because what happened during the Hillary Clinton campaign is that one man, the most powerful, [campaign chairman] John Podesta, logged on to his [fake] page."

To keep the entire Macron campaign aware of such dangers, Mahjoubi said, "Every week we send to the team screen captures of all the phishing addresses we have found during the week." But that's just the first phase of the response. Then the Macron team starts filling in the forms on the fake sites: "You can flood these addresses with multiple passwords and log-ins, true ones, false ones, so the people behind them use up a lot of time trying to figure them out."

Mahjoubi, a Parisian who is 33 and got his first job as a technician with one of France's first internet service providers when he was 16, seems to enjoy the challenge. The core purpose of all these attacks "is to unfocus us," he says. "My role in this campaign is to make sure our message goes through." And he's determined that no Fancy Bear will stop that from happening.



With First Round Over, French Presidential Candidates Look Ahead To Parliamentary Elections

Emily Tamkin

As France and the world look to the second round of French presidential elections, the candidates themselves, past and present, are also eyeing June's parliamentary elections.

On Monday, François Fillon, who placed third in the April 23 first round with 20.01 percent of the vote and so will not be a contender in the May 7 second round, said he will not seek to be the leader of his party. So, too, did he say he will not run to keep his seat in parliament. "I will have to think about my life in a different way, and to heal the wounds of my family," said Fillon, who was charged during his campaign for using roughly a million euros in parliamentary funds to pay for "jobs" as parliamentary aides for his wife and children.

This means that someone else — perhaps former president Nicolas Sarkozy, perhaps some Sarkozy-backed candidate — can make a move to don the Republican crown heading into the parliamentary elections.

And which party wins by how much in those parliamentary elections is likely to matter quite a bit. If Emmanuel Macron, who came in first in the first round, is elected president of France, he will need to work with parliament to translate his platform of hope and optimism into policies that somehow address the roughly 40 percent of French voters who put their ballots behind the far-right Marine Le Pen and far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon, both of whom appealed to globalization's discontents — and who aren't going to disappear after June.

If Macron manages not only to win the presidential race, but win by a

hefty margin, it could help him overcome the fact that his movement is only roughly a year old. His first task: recruiting and selecting 577 people to run for parliament as members of his quasi-party. But while a decisive victory in May would give him a bump in the parliamentary elections, it's unlikely he'd win a majority, Sheri Berman, a French politics expert at Barnard College, said.

A governing coalition seems the more plausible scenario, and the question is whether he would be able to cobble one together from more centrist socialists and more reasonable center-right members, Berman said.

The next question is whether that governing (and governable) coalition will be able to pass bills that actually work. Or, to put it another way: if April's big story in France was the end of the traditional parties, June's

may be whether politicians across party lines can work together for the good of their people.

And if Macron loses and Le Pen wins? She's stepping aside as head of her party — which, at present, has two seats in the National Assembly — to show she's above partisanship (her replacement, Jean-François Jalkh, is on record saying he believes it was impossible for Zyklon B to have been used for mass extermination, which was its exact purpose at Auschwitz). But as endorsements for Macron by Fillon and Benoît Hamon showed on Sunday, there's strong opposition to Le Pen and the National Front across party lines. Unless that sentiment reverses dramatically by June, Le Pen, too, may find it difficult to make good on those pesky campaign promises.

Social Unrest Is France's Biggest Risk

Jean-Michel Paul

With such high turnout in Sunday's first-round presidential vote, one thing that would seem to be working in France is democracy. But a recent survey revealed that 70 percent of French voters believe that democracy does not work well in France. Only 11 percent trust political parties and 24 percent trust the media (the army and police are the exception, with close to 80 percent support). In this context, the big question facing the next French president is whether he -- as it almost certainly will be Emmanuel Macron -- can keep the social peace in a country that is seething with divisions and has a long history of airing them on the streets.

The signs of pent-up social discontent are everywhere. Some 63 percent of young French claim to be ready for a "large scale revolt." The head of France's general directorate for internal security warned, in a parliamentary commission deposition last year, that the country was "on the verge of civil war." The numbers of days lost to strike action is the largest among comparable countries; 40,000 cars are set ablaze annually in France's often ghettoized suburbs. The portion of voters who rejected mainstream political offerings -- over 40 percent -- was higher than at any time in France's modern political history, revealing a much deeper

level of discontent than previously acknowledged.

The French may be more prone than almost any other nation to take their grievances to the street; it's a country better suited to revolution than reform as Alexis de Tocqueville observed. But while the source of discontent has been increasing, the government's room for maneuver has been shrinking.

While Germany and Spain enacted some reforms of their labor laws and education systems to improve competitiveness, France has largely kept its existing system, best known by the 35-hour work week. This has resulted in a marked reduction of French industrial production, while Germany's has been expanding (a drop of 15 percent in France since 2000 versus an increase of over 20 percent in Germany) and an unemployment level that, at 10 percent, is far higher than Germany's at 3.8 percent.

Meanwhile, continuous flows of poor, uneducated migrants from Africa, attracted by high level of benefits and free public services, have created a combustible underclass in France's suburbs. While they carry French citizenship, they have not been as well-integrated as previous waves of immigrants. If foreigners are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed, the second generation of non-EU immigrants is three times as likely. Over 40 percent of young foreigners have no job; many live in restless

ghettos where drugs and crime thrive.

Successive French governments have attempted to buy social peace through ever increasing social spending. The level of state expenditures has now reached 57 percent of gross domestic product; social spending is the highest among major developed nations at 31 percent of GDP. The spending spree has been financed by debt, now around 100 percent of GDP and by heavily taxing labor. The French one-earner family is now the most heavily taxed among developed countries.

The tax burden and competitiveness issues have resulted in what is probably the largest emigration of young entrepreneurs and successful French citizens since the Huguenot exodus under Louis XIV. The French are generally not inclined to leave home; but according to the French business magazine Capital, a fifth of the country's wealthiest individuals have moved to Belgium, and London has enough French expatriates to count it as a small French city, the size of Strasbourg or maybe Nice.

With the state no longer able to buy time or pay off those who are discontent with more generous services, the French social contract -- the implied deal that a generous state will be funded by high levels of taxation -- has broken down. Immigrants feel unfairly treated, workers unfairly taxed, the lower

class unfairly abandoned and the retirees frightened. The result of fear and insecurity was a massive rejection of the "establishment" in Sunday's vote, to the point that all leading presidential candidates have positioned themselves as "anti-system" in a campaign that was dominated by allegations of corruption.

On May 7, Emmanuel Macron is almost certainly going to be elected president. In June, parliamentary elections will be held, in which candidates with over 12.5 percent of the registered vote reach the second round. Which means, in the new fragmented political landscape, that he is unlikely to have a presidential majority. Yet a coalition or minority government would be unable to offer the clear parliamentary majority to support desperately needed reforms, easily slipping to compromise reminiscent of the unstable Fourth Republic.

The government will then, as it has in the recent past, use a special prerogative to bypass the parliament when enacting laws; but that is a dangerous exercise in an increasingly restless society. France generally takes in its stride the kind of social unrest -- car burnings and weeks' long protests and strikes -- that would unsettle other nations. The new president traditionally enjoys a honeymoon period. He'll have to use it well before the gloves come off again.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

EU Hopes to Increase Dialogue With Moscow but Obstacles Remain

Laurence Norman

BRUSSELS—

The European Union wants to expand its dialogue with Russia on key foreign policy issues, the first significant sign of a thaw in relations and a move that reflects growing concerns in Brussels about U.S. foreign policy.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said she discussed the issue with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on Monday in Moscow, the first formal bilateral visit to Russia by a top EU official since the Ukrainian crisis erupted in early 2014.

The EU has for some time been exploring a reopening of formal channels of communication that were cut after Moscow's annexation of Crimea and its intervention in eastern Ukraine. Before that, the EU and Russia held regular summits that dealt with issues from energy

and foreign policy to economic cooperation and trade.

Ms. Mogherini worked closely with Mr. Lavrov during the Iranian nuclear talks and they have met and spoken frequently on such issues as the Syrian civil war and the Libyan conflict. However, with the EU imposing economic sanctions on Russia in 2014 over its actions in Ukraine and with Moscow firing back with its own ban on European agricultural imports, those conversations have remained ad hoc.

A number of European capitals have called for greater political engagement, including some that firmly support the bloc's economic sanctions.

Ms. Mogherini said now is the time to move ahead.

"We discussed the possibility to intensify, to have more regular exchanges on foreign policy issues,

which is exactly in our interests," Ms. Mogherini said, specifically mentioning Syria, the Middle East, Iran, Libya, Afghanistan and North Korea.

No detailed plans have yet been elaborated, officials said. Mr. Lavrov said Monday his government has always favored retaining the full range of dialogue with the EU.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization last year resumed meetings with Russian officials through the NATO-Russia Council, and the two sides have begun more regular meetings.

When they restarted, the council was a forum for each side to lecture the other on Ukraine, Afghanistan and other contentious issues. The meetings have since become more regular and emerged as a forum for each side to discuss its military buildup and exercises, in an effort to increase transparency.

For Brussels, stepped-up discussions with Russia would broaden the bloc's options at a time when the Trump administration has sent mixed signals about its desire to work with the EU.

On a number of issues, including support for the Iranian nuclear deal and backing for a two-state solution in the Middle East, the EU's foreign policy positions are closer to Moscow's than to Washington's. Ms. Mogherini reiterated Tuesday that the EU fully supported the nuclear deal.

President Donald Trump said last week it was possible the U.S. could withdraw from the nuclear deal, which he has described as a terrible agreement.

Ms. Mogherini said in a December interview that the EU was ready for a more "transactional way of working" with Washington under Mr. Trump and that, where necessary, it

would cooperate with Moscow to defend the EU's views and interests.

Still, the prospect of genuinely closer ties with Moscow looks distant for now. In addition to

continued EU sanctions on Russia, Brussels is backing a transition away from the Assad regime in Syria while Russia is heavily involved militarily in shoring up the Syrian government.

The EU still has major trade disputes with Russia, and European leaders from Berlin to Stockholm have raised alarms about alleged Russian cyberattacks, political interference and military threats.

INTERNATIONAL

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and Yeliz Candemir

UNE - Inside Turkey's Irregular Referendum - WSJ

Ned Levin,
Margaret Coker

At lunchtime on April 16, a polling monitor at a school in Turkey's third-largest city made a troubling discovery. Numerous ballot envelopes for the referendum on whether to increase the power of the presidency were missing verification stamps.

The monitor, in the city of Izmir, had been taught during prevote training that unstamped ballots and envelopes shouldn't be counted. So he reached for a telephone and did what colleagues across the country also were doing: He asked what to do with the suspect ballots.

Two hours later he got his answer—count them.

The chairman for Turkey's Supreme Election Council, known by its Turkish initials YSK, said the decision followed a petition from a representative of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party to declare all unstamped ballots and envelopes valid.

Even before final vote tallies were published, Mr. Erdogan declared victory, by a margin of 51% to 49%, for constitutional changes that could make him the most influential Turkish leader since the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Speaking to a crowd outside the presidential mansion, he responded to complaints about the vote in a puzzling way by referencing a Turkish folk tale about a man who stole his horse back from robbers. Translation: What's done is done.

Behind the scenes, many of the irregular ballots were retroactively stamped by local election officials, making it impossible to tell which had been suspect in the first place. Lawyers following the referendum and opposition politicians say the vote was so compromised it will be impossible to ever be sure of the result. Opposition parties claim that as many as 2.5 million ballots could be suspect. It is impossible to know on which side the disputed ballots were cast.

The 11-judge YSK board—eight members were appointed in September, including three replacements for purged judges—declared the vote valid, rejecting, in a 10-1 decision, opposition demands to annul it. Mr. Erdogan said the ruling resolved the matter and called for the opposition to respect the will of the people. The referendum, he has said, was highly democratic. Final voting results are expected by the end of this week.

The YSK hasn't commented on its deliberations that day. YSK representatives didn't respond to questions from The Wall Street Journal about complaints of irregularities or allegations that its decision violates Turkish law.

The vote altered Turkey's democracy. The changes, many of which take effect after the next elections, scheduled for 2019, will reorient power to the office of the president. They could allow Mr. Erdogan, who has run the country for 14 years, to stay in power for another 12.

Diplomats from several European nations say they are now rethinking their relations with Turkey, one of the European Union's most significant economic partners and its security ally in the fight against Islamic State.

"We knew something was wrong from the start," says Metin Feyzioglu, president of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, who ran a call center in Ankara for election legal advice. "If you ask whether it was an organized scheme to affect the referendum, I would say I don't know. But the result is so clear."

That the vote went ahead at all is a testament to how much Turkey has changed in the past year of Mr. Erdogan's tenure. After he was almost toppled in a failed coup last July, the president has been ruling with extraordinary powers under the continuing state of emergency.

His Justice and Development Party, or AKP, drafted and parliament passed the constitutional amendment package, setting the stage for April's referendum. State authorities had jailed dozens of

opposition lawmakers and purged or detained one-third of Turkey's judicial officials. Mr. Erdogan's supporters dominated airwaves during the campaign and denied opposition figures permits for rallies.

Many in Turkey's legal community have questioned how a fair election could be held during the state of emergency. Since last summer, some 3,000 judges and more than 100,000 other civil servants have been fired or detained, according to Turkish media reports.

The chairmen of 221 lower electoral committees have been replaced, and more than 500 electoral board staff members were detained or arrested after the failed coup, according to European election monitors, who say the April referendum failed to meet international standards.

Eric Meyersson, an assistant professor at the Stockholm School of Economics who studies Turkish elections and voting patterns, says he has never seen irregularities of the magnitude reported on April 16. There is no public information about how many ballots were printed for the referendum or how many were distributed to voters without verification stamps.

"On election day in Turkey, more than 50 million people go out to vote," he says. "Stuff happens. But there seems to be a difference in magnitude this time around."

On the morning of the referendum, Servet Akman roused himself at 4 a.m. As chairman of the country's main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, in the Altindag district of the capital city of Ankara, he had been responsible for vote monitoring in three prior elections. On April 16, he led a team of 200 ballot-box observers. Each had had two days of training.

His workers spread out after 6 a.m. to the schools to which they were assigned. The police refused entrance to several of the teams, he says. At the same time, AKP monitors walked in without any hassle, he says. An officer at the local police station later told the

Journal that he wasn't aware of any such obstruction.

If poll observers weren't at their stations by 7 a.m., the head of the polling station could replace them with other people. Mr. Akman says he had to intervene with the local election official to ensure the CHP's teams could work.

In Reyhanli, a town on the border with Syria in Turkey's far southeastern province of Hatay, police obstructed CHP voting observers at eight polling stations, according to Hurol Yasar, a local real-estate developer and party member.

In some cases, police removed observers after they had already entered schools, Mr. Yasar says. The officers either gave no explanation or said they were just following orders, he says. An officer at the Reyhanli district police department told the Journal that he wasn't aware of any obstruction.

Turkish voters received paper ballots that said "yes" on one side and "no" on the other. They voted by stamping "choice" on one side or the other, then sealing the ballot into an envelope and placing it in a ballot box. Both the ballots and the envelopes are supposed to be pre-stamped by election officials with verification seals, a measure to prevent ballot-box stuffing.

In Hatay province, voters using 159 ballot boxes got improper stamps that said "yes," potentially confusing the process, says Mr. Yasar. He estimates that at least 55,000 voters could have been affected before local election officials sent replacement stamps.

These problems led to the YSK's first decision of the day. Ruling No. 559 stated that ballots marked with the improper "yes" stamps would be accepted, as would ballots where the verification stamp was improperly placed.

Back in the Altindag district of Ankara, one polling station monitored by a member of Mr. Akman's team reported that 185 ballots of 364 cast were on ballots lacking verification stamps.

By lunchtime, Mr. Feyzioglu's election-advice call center in Ankara had logged nearly 1,000 phone calls as his legal teams fielded reports of ballot irregularities. Ballots being handed out across the country weren't stamped at all with verification seals by local election-agency representatives.

"This was happening all over the country," says a call-center coordinator who logged hundreds of complaints from urban centers including Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. "It's not rocket science...to stamp the ballots. We had a very hard time understanding what the deal was."

In Isparta, in southwestern Turkey, a poll observer from the opposition People's Democratic Party, or HDP, says 300 voters cast ballots in envelopes without verification stamps before the problem was discovered. His ballot-box committee reported the problem to the district election agency.

The judges arrived at noon, he recalls, with a perplexing answer. "They told us that 45 minutes ago, a decision was made by YSK to accept unstamped ballots."

Around 3 p.m., Mr. Feyzioglu says, the phone calls to his call centers stopped abruptly, which he attributes to the YSK decision to accept unstamped ballots.

Many vote monitors only became aware of the decision shortly after polls closed for the day, when they started tallying votes from the nation's 175,000 ballot boxes.

Around 5:30 p.m., a brief announcement appeared on the YSK website. It said the YSK was aware of "heavy volumes" of reports about irregularities and declared the suspect ballots would be counted. It gave no further details about its decision.

The AKP representative to the YSK board, Recep Ozel, told the Journal he petitioned the YSK to count the irregular ballots after consulting with AKP headquarters. "We couldn't ignore the voters' will due to the ballot-box committees' failures," he said. Mr. Erdogan wasn't involved in the decision, and the election was fair despite minor issues, he said. Election officials may have neglected to stamp ballots and envelopes because they were delivered the morning of the vote, he said, instead of 48 hours before, as in past elections.

European election observers said in a report that the ruling "significantly changed the ballot validity criteria, undermining an important safeguard and contradicting the law."

On the afternoon of the referendum, polling stations also were reporting other irregularities.

Suruc, a Kurdish district in Urfa province in southeastern Turkey, ran out of ballots, according to Halil Karadas, the opposition HDP's district chairman. When new ballots arrived, they were a different shade of brown than the ones used earlier, raising questions about their authenticity, says Mr. Karadas.

In other parts of Urfa province, voting rolls showed that dead people, convicts and those who had moved away were casting ballots, according to Mr. Karadas. As many as 3,000 ballots from Suruc lacked verification stamps, he says.

Mr. Feyzioglu says the YSK ruling gave district election officials the legal rationale to prevent observers from recording instances of unstamped ballots, and to erase evidence of possible irregularities by putting stamps on ballots retroactively. "The ruling meant that there were no irregularities, and so there was no need to file reports," he says.

The formal decision permitting the unstamped ballots showed up on the YSK's website three days after the voting. An assistant delivered a copy to Mr. Feyzioglu during an interview with the Journal. The decision said the YSK didn't want to disenfranchise voters.

"It's bullshit," Mr. Feyzioglu says.

When Turkey's polls closed, some of the first ballots to be counted were from 2.9 million registered overseas voters. Opposition poll monitors reported irregularities in these tallies.

One poll monitor from the HDP said some ballot envelopes were unstamped. In addition, she said, state officials in charge of her ballot boxes discarded slightly damaged ballots for "no," while counting similarly damaged "yes" votes.

At 6:01 p.m. state television began broadcasting results from the state-run Anadolu news agency, whose numbers were updating faster than the YSK's internal portal accessible to political parties and government officials. Anadolu's chairman later said the agency got its data directly from ballot boxes after they were counted.

By 7:45 p.m., state broadcaster TRT had called the vote for "yes."

The poll monitor in Izmir says he was still counting votes at that time. At 9:30 p.m., he joined about 50 others lined up at a local election office to submit results. Anadolu already was reporting that 95% of Izmir's votes had been tallied even though he and many others had not submitted their totals yet, he says. Izmir overall voted "no."

At 9:45 p.m., Turkey's Prime Minister Binali Yildirim declared victory. Mr. Erdogan followed suit at 10:15, telling a supportive crowd in Istanbul that "yes" had won by 1.4 million votes. At the time, results published by Anadolu showed the "yes" side ahead by 1.1 million.

More than an hour later, the YSK declared the "yes" side won, but it didn't provide numbers.

"This nation has realized the most democratic election, the likes of which has not been seen in any Western country," Mr. Erdogan said the next day.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

UNE - White House intervened to toughen letter on Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON— President Donald Trump told aides to toughen a State Department letter last week that declared Iran in compliance with a landmark nuclear deal, senior U.S. officials involved in a policy review said.

Top White House officials said the initial letter the State Department submitted was too soft because it ignored Tehran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East and support for regional terrorist groups, these officials said.

Mr. Trump personally weighed in on the redrafting of the letter, which was sent to Congress on April 18, the officials said. The final version highlighted Iran's threatening regional behavior and called into question the U.S.'s long-term support for the multinational accord.

Mr. Trump also told Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to follow up the next day with a strident public message that the new

administration was planning a shift on policy toward Iran, putting the nuclear deal in play, these officials said.

"An unchecked Iran has the potential to travel the same path as North Korea and take the world along with it," Mr. Tillerson said at the State Department on April 19.

The episode highlighted the divisions between Mr. Trump's hard-line position on Iran and the approach taken by some career State Department diplomats and many European allies. State Department officials didn't respond to a request for comment on Mr. Tillerson's role in the exchange.

The nuclear agreement, which was implemented in January 2016, constrained Iran's nuclear capabilities in return for the lifting of most international sanctions, including some unilateral penalties imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department.

The White House is conducting a 90-day review of its Iran policy and considering steps to significantly ratchet up U.S. efforts to push back against Iran and its military operations in the Middle East.

Potential steps include sanctions against hundreds of Iranian companies that would be vetted for suspected ties to Tehran's elite military unit, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, these officials said.

The Trump administration also is exploring ways to enhance international efforts to combat Iran's ability to smuggle weapons to its military proxies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

The Pentagon has announced its intention to more aggressively challenge Iran's naval presence in the Persian Gulf, noting its threat to shipping lanes and commercial traffic in the oil-rich region.

In recent days, Mr. Trump and other senior administration officials have publicly questioned the terms of the nuclear deal, which was negotiated by the Obama administration over three years. They have hinted at the need to renegotiate it and voiced skepticism that the U.S. and its allies could separate Iran's nuclear program from its other destabilizing activities.

In a White House where advisers have often been divided on security issues, the pursuit of a tougher Iran policy presents a rare case of broad consensus.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said on Monday that the White House policy review aims to look at "how we take a more comprehensive look at Iran and its bad behavior in the region."

Some White House officials said they expect the U.S. won't withdraw from the nuclear deal, but enforce it to the letter and possibly reinstate sanctions that were lifted as part of

the accord under different reasons, such as human-rights abuses or Iran's ballistic-missile tests.

Iran has ruled out any renegotiation of the nuclear agreement. It also has said any new sanctions imposed by the Trump administration would be viewed as a violation of the deal. Iran also says it's in compliance with the nuclear deal and blames the U.S. for preventing other countries from investing in Iran by maintaining bilateral sanctions on Iran.

Congress requires U.S. administrations, via the State Department, to notify Capitol Hill every three months about whether Iran is in compliance with the terms of the nuclear deal.

The initial State Department letter on Iran, senior U.S. officials said, was drafted by career diplomats who played leading roles during the Obama administration in negotiating and implementing the Iran deal.

Key players on Iran at the State Department, both under former President Barack Obama and Mr.

Trump, include Stephen Mull, who serves as lead U.S. coordinator for the deal's implementation, and Chris Backemeyer, deputy assistant secretary of State for Iranian affairs.

The initial draft met swift resistance when it was sent to the White House for approval last week, the U.S. officials said.

It was taken by White House staff to National Security Adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who pressed for tougher language and raised the issue with White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, the officials said.

Mr. Trump then reviewed the letter, they said. The final draft submitted to Congress last week said Tehran was in compliance with the agreement but highlighted Iran's role in supporting international terrorism and said the Trump administration was reviewing whether lifting sanctions on Iran as part of the deal was in the U.S.'s "national security interests."

Mr. Tillerson initially was skeptical of delivering a hard-hitting speech on Iran at the State Department, but relented, the officials said.

Iran is holding presidential elections in May. President Hassan Rouhani, who championed the nuclear agreement, is seeking to win his second four-year term. Some U.S. and European officials have warned the White House that Mr. Trump's tough talk on Iran could hurt Mr. Rouhani. His chief opponent, Ebrahim Raisi, is a hard-line Islamic cleric who is viewed as promoting potentially an even-more-aggressive line internationally.

"We have no dog in this fight, but it's obviously important that the moderates get the upper hand and win and get the benefits of the deal," said a senior European diplomat who has discussed Iran with the Trump administration.

Top aides to Mr. Trump have discounted this analysis. They said they believe Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top commanders in the IRGC make all

major decisions on foreign affairs and national security. They have said Tehran's military interventions in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have actually increased since the nuclear deal and Mr. Rouhani's election. Iran says it is seeking to combat terrorism.

Mr. Khamenei said during a speech on Monday that Iran's next president should limit engagement with the West, a rebuke of Mr. Rouhani's policies.

The Trump administration met on Tuesday for the first time with Iranian officials as part of a coordinating meeting in Vienna for the implementation of the nuclear deal. Messrs. Mull and Backemeyer led the U.S. delegation.

Participants in the meeting said U.S. diplomats didn't express any major shift in Washington's policy toward Iran. But Iranian diplomats protested the sharp words made by President Trump and Mr. Tillerson in recent weeks.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Iran Deal -- Obama Administration Dropped Charges against Wanted Iranians

In January 2016, the Obama administration released seven Iranian-born prisoners in what President Barack Obama called a "one-time" "humanitarian gesture" intended to sweeten the nuclear deal hammered out between Washington, D.C., and Tehran. The prisoners — who Josh Earnest insisted were guilty only of "sanctions violations or violations of the trade embargo" — were exchanged for five Americans, unjustly held by Iran since as early as 2011. In fact, some of the Iranian prisoners were national-security threats, and it wasn't a straight prisoner swap: The *Wall Street Journal* revealed that on the day of the exchange the U.S. flew \$400 million in cash on an unmarked cargo plane to Iran.

When it came to its negotiations with Iran, duplicity was the hallmark of the previous administration's public statements. (Sanctimonious preening was a close second.) But supporters assured skeptics that the administration was acting in the country's best national-security interests. Now comes a new bombshell investigation that shows the lengths to which the previous administration went to secure Iranian cooperation, even when it meant putting American security at risk.

According to an investigation by *Politico*, in addition to the prisoner release, the Justice Department quietly "dropped charges and international arrest warrants against 14 other men, all of them fugitives." Several of them were wanted for alleged roles in helping to funnel materiel to Iran-backed terror outfits, such as Hezbollah, or for participating in the global network to procure components for Iran's nuclear program. One was believed to have helped supply Shiite militias in Iraq with a particularly deadly type of IED — one that killed "hundreds" of American troops. Furthermore:

Justice and State Department officials denied or delayed requests from prosecutors and agents to lure some key Iranian fugitives to friendly countries so they could be arrested. Similarly, Justice and State, at times in consultation with the White House, slowed down efforts to extradite some suspects already in custody overseas, according to current and former officials and others involved in the counterproliferation effort. And as far back as the fall of 2014, Obama administration officials began slow-walking some significant investigations and prosecutions of Iranian procurement networks operating in the U.S.

As *Politico* says, "through action in some cases and inaction in others,

the White House derailed its own much-touted National Counterproliferation Initiative at a time when it was making unprecedented headway in thwarting Iran's proliferation networks."

Last Tuesday, facing a deadline, the Trump administration certified that Iran is compliant with the terms of the deal, and extended sanctions relief. However, at a press conference the following day, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that the deal "fails to achieve the objective of a non-nuclear state," and announced that the administration is reviewing the deal. President Trump has said that Iran is "not living up to the spirit of" the deal.

This is a fitting criticism, given that the "letter" of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was written narrowly, so as to make it as easy as possible for Iran to comply; the central concerns were handled in side deals, negotiated in secret and never disclosed. (Notice a trend?) Meanwhile, the JCPOA remains almost entirely toothless. Under the deal, the mullahs in Tehran have to wait a few years until they can continue enriching uranium, but they are charging ahead with efforts to weaponize the fissile material Iran has (at military facilities such as

Parchin, which have been subject to "self-inspection") and to develop ballistic missiles to carry nuclear warheads, when the time comes. And, of course, this work is being facilitated by American largesse through the relaxed sanctions regime.

President Trump has declared, on more than a few occasions, that when it comes to dealings with foreign powers, he will aim to put American interests first. He could start with Iran. The JCPOA has not stopped Iran's saber-rattling or its material support for terrorist outfits throughout the Middle East, and it has only slightly delayed Iran's nuclear calendar. The security of the United States and its allies requires an aggressive, tough-minded approach to the hostile regime in Tehran, one that deals with that regime as it is, not as we wish it were.

Barack Obama, John Kerry, and the rest of the foreign-policy team that crafted the nuclear deal with Iran grossly misled the American people. This deal is a calamity for our national-security interests, and with this latest revelation, that is clearer than ever.

How Trump Could Get China's Help on North Korea

Peter Beinart

So far, the Trump administration's North Korea policy consists of declaring that America's patience has run out, refusing to negotiate, hinting at preventive war, and hoping that China bails it out. In January, Trump—who is perpetually learning things that most other people know and then congratulating himself for having discovered them—announced that China has “total control over North Korea.” This month, after meeting China's leader, he announced that “it's not so easy” for Beijing to force Pyongyang to dismantle its nuclear program. Still, he tweeted that “I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea.”

Barely anyone else does. Barely anybody familiar with the relationship between the two countries believes China's leaders will make North Korea denuclearize just because Trump tells them to. Yes, China wants to calm Trump down so he doesn't start World War III. And yes, China considers North Korea both embarrassing and infuriating, the geopolitical equivalent of a childhood friend who keeps borrowing money and getting drunk in front of your wife and kids. Nonetheless, China has excellent reasons not to do as Trump says.

China wants stability on its border. The United States is fond of violently bringing down dictators half a world away, but when those dictatorships turn into failed states, it's their neighbors that suffer the consequences. Beijing doesn't want to experience what Jordan endured after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Trump is demanding that China pressure North Korea—perhaps by cutting off its food and fuel until Kim Jong Un scuttles his nuclear program. But China is less afraid of a North Korean nuclear explosion than a North Korean political implosion, which would send refugees cascading across its border. China also fears that North Korea's collapse will lead to a

reunification of the Korean Peninsula on South Korean and American terms. That could leave U.S. troops on China's border for the first time since 1950, when Beijing went to war to chase them away.

Trump isn't wrong to want North Korea's nuclear program to end. He's not wrong to want North Korea to end. It is, after all, the closest thing to hell on earth. Ending its nuclear program would be a blessing, and freeing its 25 million people would be the greatest advance of human freedom since the end of the Cold War. But if the Trump administration is to have any chance of moving in that direction, it must begin thinking not only about what China can do for America but what America can do for China.

The Chinese aren't suckers. They won't strangle an ally just because Trump promises not to start a trade war that would hurt America as much as them. The most tempting carrot Trump could dangle would be a promise that, if Korea reunifies, America won't move its troops into what is currently the North. The Chinese might not believe those promises. After all, the Russians think America promised not to move U.S. troops into East Germany after that country reunified. But the Trump administration could at least begin a conversation about how to alleviate Chinese fears of reunification. It could support warmer relations between Seoul and Beijing. As part of a deal, it could even withdraw the THAAD anti-ballistic missile system it began deploying in South Korea this spring, a system the Chinese fear is aimed at much at them as against Pyongyang.

The problem is that this type of thinking runs directly contrary to the mentality Republicans inherited from the Cold War. As Trump's foreign policy has become more conventionally conservative, he seems to have embraced the conventional conservative myth about Ronald Reagan: that Reagan

brought down the Soviet empire through ideological pressure and unyielding hostility. Like the George W. Bush administration, which thought it could curb Iran's nuclear program by branding Tehran a member of the “axis of evil” (a riff on “evil empire”), threatening “preemptive” war, and refusing to negotiate until Tehran stopped enriching uranium, the Trump administration is now ruling out direct negotiations with Pyongyang and openly threatening a military strike. Last week Mike Pence, who loves comparing Trump to Reagan, stared fiercely across the DMZ while remembering a youthful visit to the Berlin Wall.

This is horrendous policymaking based on historical ignorance. Yes, Reagan built up America's military, aided anti-communist regimes and rebels, and morally condemned the U.S.S.R. But by 1984, Reagan's genuine terror of nuclear war (sparked in part by movies about the subject), and his concern that his warmonger reputation might imperil his reelection, had led him to shift his rhetoric. That January, 15 months before Mikhail Gorbachev took over the Soviet Union, Reagan said in a speech that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. “should always remember that we do have common interests and the foremost among them is to avoid war and reduce the level of arms.” When Vice President Bush travelled to Moscow for the funeral of Gorbachev's predecessor, Konstantin Chernenko, the White House instructed him to tell the new leader that “We should seek to rid the world of the threat or use of force.” When Reagan met Gorbachev in 1985, he told him, “I bet the hardliners in both our countries are bleeding when we shake hands.” By 1987, Reagan had signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the first agreement of the Cold War to actually destroy nuclear weapons. This was two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Charles Krauthammer was still calling

Gorbachev “Khrushchev with a tailor.”

Reagan didn't force Gorbachev to release Eastern Europe from Moscow's grip by refusing to negotiate and threatening war. Quite the contrary. By making America appear less threatening, he helped convince Gorbachev that the U.S.S.R. could safely relinquish its Eastern European buffer. Reagan himself said, “I might have helped him [Gorbachev] see that the Soviet Union had less to fear from the West than he thought, and that the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe wasn't needed for the security of the Soviet Union.” In the words of longtime Soviet ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin, “If Reagan had stuck to his hard-line policies in 1985 and 1986 ... Gorbachev would have been accused by the rest of the Politburo of giving everything away to a fellow who doesn't want to negotiate. We would have been forced to tighten our belts and spend even more on defense.”

The analogy isn't perfect, of course. Even if China wanted Korea's reunification, Xi Jinping has less influence over Kim Jong Un than Gorbachev had over Erich Honecker. And given its booming economy, Beijing can afford to subsidize its North Korean ally far more easily than Moscow could afford to prop up its clients in Eastern Europe.

It may be that there's not much America can do to change China's calculus. But if the Trump administration wants to have any chance, it needs to allay Beijing's fears about a future without Kim Jong Un. That means making the United States appear less threatening, not more so.

It would help if Donald Trump discovered the real history of the end of the Cold War. But that might require him to read.



Senate Heads to White House for Briefing on North Korea, But U.S. Strategy Still At Sea

The White House will host the entire Senate on Wednesday for an extraordinary briefing on North Korea amid rising tensions with Pyongyang and growing questions about how the Trump administration intends to halt the regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Classified briefings for lawmakers from top officials are not unusual

and are held on a regular basis on Capitol Hill. But in this case, President Donald Trump belatedly proposed that a planned briefing on North Korea be hosted at the White House, with the secretaries of State, Defense, the U.S. military's top officer and the head of national intelligence due to speak to senators.

The last-minute decision, coinciding with tough rhetoric from the White House and bellicose threats from North Korea, took lawmakers by surprise and fueled doubts about the Trump administration's often disjointed efforts at crafting a policy to neutralize the North Korean nuclear threat. Administration officials have publicly jettisoned

long-standing U.S. policy on North Korea but have yet to articulate what will replace it.

In a meeting with U.N. Security Council representatives on Monday at the White House, Trump cited the urgency of the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and suggested his

administration was determined to address the danger once and for all.

“People have put blindfolds on for decades, and now it’s time to solve the problem,” Trump told the diplomats.

The White House has repeatedly said that it has abandoned the Obama administration’s approach of so-called “strategic patience,” saying it will not tolerate North Korea’s march toward a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile. But it’s not clear how Trump and his deputies intend to crack a problem that has vexed the United States and its allies for more than a quarter of a century.

Senior officials say the primary focus of U.S. policy at the moment centers on a diplomatic push to persuade China to use its influence with North Korea to force Pyongyang back from the brink.

But it’s doubtful Washington has sufficient leverage to convince Beijing to impose an economic squeeze on the North. Moreover, China has always feared any action that could trigger the collapse of the Pyongyang regime on its border. Previous U.S. administrations have tried the same approach and come away disappointed with China’s cautious steps.

“All sides understand the stakes and understand what needs to happen,” a White House official told Foreign Policy, referring to discussions with China. But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it remained to be seen if China would take the necessary steps against North Korea. He added that “there is not infinite patience on our side” but did not elaborate.

Some experts have urged the White House to impose sanctions directly on Chinese companies if Beijing refuses to press Pyongyang, but administration officials declined to say if that option is under serious consideration.

Experts told the Senate Armed Services Committee at a hearing on Tuesday that even if China agreed to ramp up pressure on the regime, North Korea probably would not give up its efforts to build nuclear warheads for long-range ballistic missiles.

“We essentially have to prepare for a North Korean capability that will ultimately reach the United States,” said Victor Cha of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who served in the former Bush administration.

Cha said efforts at deterring the North through sanctions or military deployments are worth pursuing but also posed dangers “because of the unpredictability of this regime.”

The Trump administration has warned that all options are on the table, including potential military action. But a former senior official in the Bush White House said that destroying North Korea’s nuclear arsenal through military strikes could prove impossible, given the technical advances made by the regime.

There are an increasing number of nuclear targets and those targets are increasingly hard to reach, said Aaron Friedberg, a professor at Princeton University who served under former Vice President Dick Cheney.

“North Koreans are starting to develop mobile ballistic missiles. The problem with preempting or attacking in a preventative way and destroying the North Korean nuclear capabilities is only getting worse,” Friedberg told the committee.

The sense of urgency over North Korea’s nuclear program has steadily mounted in the U.S. intelligence community and the Pentagon over the past decade, as the regime has demonstrated increasing technical prowess.

Although the North makes plenty of false claims about its nuclear capabilities, “the nuclear tests are

not solely provocations or opportunities for saber rattling,” said Kelsey Davenport of the Arms Control Association. Over the past five tests, the country has increased the explosive yield of its nuclear warheads, and the regime’s scientists are also likely using the tests to experiment with different warhead designs.

“After five tests we should also assume that North Korea can build a warhead small enough to fit on short or medium range ballistic missiles,” Davenport said.

It’s unlikely that Wednesday’s briefing at the White House will clear up concerns among many lawmakers about the administration’s handling of tensions on the Korean peninsula, particularly after its bungled messaging about the location of an aircraft carrier.

The administration suffered an embarrassing episode last week when it acknowledged that a naval strike group, spearheaded by the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier, was not off the coast of the Korean peninsula as officials had announced earlier. In fact, the warships were thousands of miles away, training with the Australian navy.

The incident reinforced fears in Japan and South Korea about U.S. credibility and that the Trump administration was failing to consult with allies about its responses to North Korea. One South Korean presidential candidate, Hong Joon-pyo, from the conservative party of ex-president Park Geun-hye, said the confusion caused by the American administration’s statements on the whereabouts of the carrier could mean that Seoul would “not trust” Trump’s words in the future.

Still, administration officials believe an assertive U.S. military presence in the region in recent weeks has sent an unmistakably stern warning to North Korea as the regime appears poised to conduct its sixth nuclear test.

The United States is set to test one of its own missile systems on Wednesday, when an unarmed Minuteman III ballistic missile will be launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

“These Minuteman launches are essential to verify the status of our national nuclear force and to demonstrate our national nuclear capabilities,” Col. John Moss, commander of the U.S. Air Force’s 30th Space Wing commander, said in a statement.

Off the coast of Korea and Japan this week, U.S. Navy ships are also conducting drills in the Sea of Japan with the South Korean and Japanese navies. The destroyers USS *Wayne E. Meyer* and *Wang Geon* are engaged in one exercise, while two other destroyers — the USS *Fitzgerald* and Japan’s *Chokai* — are also operating together nearby.

Pyongyang greeted the deployments with typical bombast, after the USS *Carl Vinson* eventually made its way toward the Korean peninsula, and the USS *Michigan*, a guided-missile submarine, made a port visit to South Korea this week.

“If the enemies dare opt for the military adventure despite our repeated warnings, our armed forces will wipe the strongholds of aggression off the surface of the earth through powerful preemptive nuclear attacks,” Defense Minister Pak Yong Sik said in a televised speech Tuesday.

The regime kicked off Tuesday with a vast live-fire artillery exercise that included as many as 400 long-range guns — the same weapons that would be trained on Seoul’s civilian population in the event of a war.



This Sub Could Attack North Korea

David Axe

The USS Michigan and its 154 Tomahawk missiles—plus a mini-sub for transporting Navy SEAL commando teams ashore—just pulled into a South Korean port, and the Navy wants the world to know.

The U.S. Navy has deployed one of its most powerful submarines to South Korea in a naked display of military might. The USS *Michigan*’s arrival significantly escalates the

Trump administration’s confrontation with North Korea over Pyongyang’s nuclear-weapons program.

Michigan pulled into Busan, a large port city in southern South Korea, on Tuesday for what the Navy described as “a routine visit during a regularly scheduled deployment to the Western Pacific.” But the sub’s arrival in South Korea is no coincidence.

An Ohio-class guided-missile submarine, the 560-foot-long

Michigan carries as many as 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles plus a mini-sub for transporting Navy SEAL commando teams ashore.

To put that into perspective, Trump’s April 6 missile strike on Syria’s Sharyat air base—retaliation for the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons—involved just 59 Tomahawks.

Michigan possesses “unprecedented strike and special operation mission capabilities from a

stealthy, clandestine platform,” according to the Navy.

The Navy has just four guided-missile submarines, only one or two of which are normally available for combat. Sending *Michigan* to South Korea is big deal. That the Navy announced the sub’s arrival in an official press release is equally significant—the sailing branch doesn’t normally comment on the comings and goings of its elusive submarines.

"The beauty of submarine operations is that only our team knows where they are, and that keeps the enemy guessing," Eric Wertheim, an independent naval analyst and author of *Combat Fleets of the World*, told The Daily Beast.

In other words, the Trump administration wanted *Michigan* to be on hand as the crisis on the Korean peninsula worsens. And it wanted Pyongyang, and the world, to know that *Michigan* was hanging around.

"By announcing her presence in the region, our government is likely sending a message of strength, which when combined with the other military assets in the region is probably aimed at both our potential adversary and our allies as a demonstration of American resolve," Wertheim said.

North Korea, which already possesses a small number of atomic warheads, tested an apparently nuclear-capable ballistic missile on

April 15. "The missile blew up almost immediately," the U.S. Defense Department noted.

But the test failure hasn't defused tensions. Having declared in mid-March that America's "policy of strategic patience" with North Korea "has ended," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was scheduled Wednesday, along with Defense Secretary James Mattis, to brief the U.S. Senate on President Donald Trump's plan to deal with North Korea.

The Trump administration is apparently trying to achieve decisive results on the Korean peninsula before South Korea's May 9 election. Voters will elect a replacement for former president Park Geun-hye, who was removed from office in early March amid corruption allegations and a bizarre scandal involving a shamanistic cult.

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The frontrunners for the next president are all left-leaning and have advocated a softer approach to Pyongyang.

In other words, if Trump plans to preemptively attack North Korea—an act that, to be clear, could plunge the world into wide-ranging, catastrophic warfare—then he probably needs to do so before May 9. After that date, South Korea could become a far less hospitable place for *Michigan* and the thousands of U.S. troops who are permanently based in the country.

For their part, South Koreans are unimpressed by *Michigan's* visit and Trump's saber-rattling. The submarine's arrival is "minor news on the website of one of the more hawkish dailies," Robert Kelly, a professor at Busan National University—yes, that Robert Kelly—told The Daily Beast.

"It has been made reference to on TV," Kelly said of the submarine. "But not that much."

Despite the Trump administration's rhetoric and *Michigan's* high-profile deployment, South Koreans don't expect war between the United States and North Korea, Kelly said. South Koreans "have been living with this threat for a long time. They are pretty sanguine about it."

If Trump does choose to strike North Korea, *Michigan* would probably need help. The submarine's Tomahawk cruise missiles could inflict heavy damage on North Korean airfields and any exposed military installations. But Pyongyang has concealed many of its most important facilities, including nuclear sites, in tunnels hundreds of feet underground.

To destroy those, the U.S. Air Force developed the world's biggest non-nuclear bomb.



America's 'Strategic Patience' Runs Out

William A. Galston

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared in Seoul last month that the U.S. policy of "strategic patience" toward North Korea had ended. Four weeks later, during an extensive diplomatic mission to East Asia and Australia, Vice President Mike Pence repeated this statement. President Trump has underscored the urgency of the North Korean threat. This united front, which has not been characteristic of the Trump administration's foreign dealings thus far, reportedly reflects an intensive and well-organized policy review process. It should be taken seriously at home and abroad.

The Obama administration's embrace of strategic patience rested on assumptions that subsequent developments undermined. The U.S. could not afford to wait for North Korea to decide to denuclearize, as President Obama had hoped, because its regime had no intention of doing so. No wonder Mr. Obama told President-elect Trump that North Korea was the most urgent and difficult foreign-policy problem he would face when he took the oath of office.

Even though the Trump administration has rejected the status quo and committed to a change of course, its deliberations will continue to be bounded by the

constraints that bedeviled its predecessors.

First, there are no good military options. A pre-emptive strike against North Korea's nuclear facilities would also certainly trigger a massive attack against Seoul, which lies only 35 miles from the demilitarized zone. The magnitude of the projected death and destruction is sobering. And Pyongyang could decide to use whatever nuclear weapons survive a U.S. first strike. This would devastate not only South Korea's population, but also the more than 28,000 U.S. troops that remain stationed there more than six decades after the end of the Korean War.

Second, the U.S. has a longstanding network of security obligations throughout the region, including formal treaties with both Japan and South Korea. In the event of an attack on these key allies, the U.S. is committed to come to their defense. Any failure to do so would destroy America's credibility as a security guarantor.

Third, China, the key regional actor, has interests that diverge from those of the U.S. Still, there are signs of mounting Chinese frustration with North Korea's unpredictable and belligerent adventurism. Like the U.S. and its regional allies, China would welcome a denuclearized

North Korea. At this point, Beijing's relations with Seoul are warmer than with Pyongyang.

Nevertheless, China's longstanding, overriding concern is that the collapse of the Kim family's heredity tyranny could send millions of North Korean refugees surging across its border and lead to the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under a pro-Western government. The prospect of South Korean and U.S. troops on its border led Mao Zedong to send 700,000 Chinese troops across the Yalu River during the Korean War. It is far from clear that Beijing's fundamental calculus has changed in the ensuing decades.

Within these constraints, the essential first step is to reach a clear understanding with the Chinese government at the highest level. The Trump administration should make clear that the U.S. regards North Korea's nuclear threat to its neighbors as intolerable—and that the North Koreans cannot be permitted to develop a nuclear-armed missile capable of reaching any American target. Given the history of North Korea's nuclear program over the past three decades, the only acceptable outcome is permanent and complete denuclearization. Whatever may have been the case in the past, Mr. Xi must know that these concerns

now take priority over every other aspect of the bilateral relationship.

Two policies would follow from this new understanding with Beijing. The U.S. would continue to ramp up the antimissile systems being deployed in South Korea and perhaps elsewhere in the region, and China would accept them as consistent with its own security interests.

The U.S. would also put in place a policy of "secondary sanctions" against North Korea, as recommended by former Deputy CIA Director and Treasury Undersecretary David S. Cohen in the Washington Post this weekend. This would force Beijing to choose between continuing its financial relationship with North Korea and maintaining access to the U.S. financial system.

In addition, the U.S. would accelerate its development of cyberwarfare tools to disrupt the functioning of North Korean missiles and destroy them early in their launch trajectory.

The Korean War never formally concluded. If North Korea permanently and verifiably ends its nuclear program, the U.S. should agree to sign a peace treaty recognizing the indefinite division of the Korean Peninsula until the two Koreas peacefully agree on terms to reunify.



Trump's possible logic on North Korea

The Christian Science Monitor

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One reason individuals support their police is so they don't have to own a gun. Police are the preferred night watchmen of safety. Yet if some neighbors start to buy guns, the police look less reliable. And more people than buy guns. That same logic may be at play in Northeast Asia.

As North Korea moves to own more nuclear weapons and missiles, will Japan and South Korea seek nuclear weapons rather than rely on the United States – as the preferred cop on the beat – with its deterrence threat of nuclear retaliation?

For decades, many allies of the US have trusted its nuclear "umbrella" enough not to develop their own atomic arsenal. This has helped

curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, helping to keep the world safe from a devastating type of warfare. But the North Korea crisis could change this key aspect of the global order. If a major country like Japan, despite its deep and constitutional commitment to pacifism, ever feels the need to go nuclear, what will stop other countries from doing the same?

It is in this moral context that the world must watch what President Trump, along with China, is doing about North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Despite Mr. Trump's rhetoric about "America first" and his mixed signals about honoring defense commitments to allies, he so far seems engaged in finding ways to restrain North Korea. He will brief all 100 US senators on North Korea in

an unusual summit on Wednesday. And he met with United Nations Security Council members on Monday.

"Whether we want to talk about it or not, North Korea is a big-world problem, and it's a problem we have to finally solve," he said. That is not the rhetoric of someone who believes in retrenchment from America's unique role in nuclear deterrence.

Among all Americans, Trump has the strongest backing from his core supporters in dealing with this issue. According to a 2016 survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 68 percent of those supporters see a "critical threat" in the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers. That percentage is higher than for Republicans in general and

Democrats. And their strong support is in contrast to their lukewarm support – only 51 percent – for the US to take an active role in world affairs.

Trump's real strategy toward North Korea remains uncertain. He has suggested negotiations, putting pressure on China, and beefing up missile defenses in the region. And his aides say a military strike on the North's nuclear facilities is one option. "I don't have to tell you what I'm going to do in North Korea," he says. "You know why? Because they shouldn't know."

At the least, however, he is engaged, holding fast to a logic that nuclear proliferation is not a moral course for the world.



Trump's North Korea Obstacle: Sanctions Are Unevenly Enforced

Ben Kesling in Washington and Alastair Gale in Tokyo

Several countries aren't fully enforcing United Nations sanctions on North Korea, the Trump administration point person on the nation said Tuesday, as the U.S. sought to ratchet up diplomatic pressure on the regime amid a military show of force by both Washington and Pyongyang.

The White House, which has planned a classified briefing for all 100 U.S. senators on Wednesday, stressed that the administration is continuing to consider "all options" and would seek to persuade U.N. members to isolate North Korea.

U.S. special representative for North Korea policy Joseph Yun, after meeting with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts, said a recently concluded administration review called for "enhanced pressure" on Pyongyang to try to force it to give up its nuclear weapons.

His comments came as Pyongyang conducted long-range artillery drills to mark the anniversary of the founding of its military and appeared to be preparing for a possible weapons test.

The U.S., meanwhile, sent a guided missile submarine to a South Korean port, while the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and its strike group continued on its way toward the area. South Korea's defense ministry said some elements of a

planned U.S. missile shield, known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, had been deployed in a battery site in the county's southern region of Seongju. A Pentagon spokesman said the military is working to "complete the deployment" of the missile system as soon as possible.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer sought to play down talk of an inevitable military confrontation with North Korea. At a briefing, he said the administration would "continue to apply pressure on China and other countries to use the political and economic tools that they have" to stabilize the region and tamp down the threat posed by North Korea.

"I think we've seen very positive signs with respect to a nation like China," Mr. Spicer added.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the U.S. is still "looking at all options," pointing to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's meeting Friday with the U.N. Security Council. He said administration officials would be "very vocal" that countries who aren't fully enforcing U.N. sanctions on North Korea must do so.

"This is a pressure campaign," Mr. Toner said in Washington, adding that the U.S. goal is to "isolate North Korea."

Mr. Toner said that a key difference between the Obama administration's strategy on North Korea and the Trump administration's is speed,

and that the Trump administration wants to move more quickly.

"The time for waiting on North Korea to do the right thing has long passed," he said.

The administration's approach was backed by Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who urged a hard-line on toward both North Korea and China.

"I welcome the Trump administration's outreach to China on the issue of North Korea," Mr. McCain said before the committee's hearings on Tuesday on the North Korean threat. "But as these discussions continue, the United States should be clear that while we earnestly seek China's cooperation on North Korea, we do not seek such cooperation at the expense of our vital interests. We must not and will not bargain over our alliances with Japan and South Korea, nor over fundamental principles such as freedom of the seas."

Mr. Yun's meeting in Tokyo with his Japanese and Korean counterparts followed a session on Monday in Washington at which Mr. Trump told visiting members of the United Nations Security Council that they must step up action against North Korea.

U.N. diplomats involved in monitoring sanctions on North Korea say enforcement among member states is one of the biggest problems in ensuring their effectiveness.

"There are a number of countries who could be more pro-active in terms of Security Council resolutions," Mr. Yun said. "So we expect them to do that."

U.N. members are expected to file a report each year about their implementation of a series of sanctions on North Korea going back to those imposed after its first nuclear test in 2006. In February, a U.N. panel said 116 of 193 U.N. member states had yet to submit a report on their implementation of a set of sanctions introduced a year earlier after North Korea's fourth nuclear test.

Diplomats say North Korea takes advantage of weak sanctions enforcement to obtain resources for its regime and weapons program. In one possible example, the U.N. panel said in its February report that it hadn't received responses from the Malaysian government to its questions about a company operating in the country and suspected of violating sanctions.

China's enforcement of sanctions on North Korea is the most closely scrutinized by diplomats and analysts because China accounts for nearly all of Pyongyang's external trade. Mr. Yun echoed recent comments by Mr. Trump and U.S. officials that have played up Beijing's cooperation in applying pressure on North Korea. China has filed implementation reports on new U.N. sanctions introduced last year after North Korea's two nuclear tests.



Trump's billionaire friendly tax plan

Edward J. McCaffery

(CNN)What we have learned about Donald Trump's leanings on tax policy make them Exhibit A in his bait-and-switch presidency. Although he was elected as a man of the people, Trump's tax reform plans make it clear that he is serving as a baron for billionaires.

The tea leaves that pass for a coherent legislative policy suggest that Trump's Plan A had pulled a page or two from House Speaker Paul Ryan's playbook, long on the shelves. Ryan had a wonky, but nifty, three-step:

-- One, repeal, but don't quite replace Obamacare;

-- Two, enact a corporate tax reform featuring a brand new "border adjustment" tax, also known as tariffs; and

-- Three, enact sweeping income tax cuts and repeal the estate tax.

All in, and roughly, this would be a \$2 trillion loss (over 10 years) for the lower classes, 24 million of whom would

lose health care

coverage and all of whom would pay higher prices for basic goods under the "border adjustment" tax. It

would also be roughly a \$2 trillion win for the upper classes, who would benefit from repeal of the Obamacare taxes, the lowering of corporate tax rates, the slashing of income tax rates and the elimination of the estate tax.

Alas, Plan A didn't quite work. Turns out that the people paid attention to details, like the devilish one about the 24 million who stand to lose health insurance coverage.

No worries: Trump is now hinting at Plan B, another tried and true Republican trick for getting the country to go along with yet more tax cuts for the rich. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin says the Trump tax plan will rely on economic growth to pay for itself, such that we can get to Step Three, where the real goodies for the billionaire class lie. Voodoo economics, welcome back!

Unfortunately, real tax policy ought to be more than a Vegas-style magic show. There are two painfully serious sets of problems with the return of supply-side witchcraft.

First, this is risky fiscal business. The nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget reports that America has not seen

sustained growth rates of 4% (a rate optimistic Trumpians target), since

the early 1960s, when our population was younger and growing.

Even if growth were to spike up quickly to these rosy-hued levels, interest rates, still historically low, would certainly rise. This would doubly hurt the federal government, because it would have more debt to finance, due to the tax cuts, and at higher interest rates.

As is, the federal government spends more on interest payments on its debt than on education, energy and the environment, international affairs, and science -- combined. An increase in both debt levels and the interest rate would be devastating for domestic discretionary spending for decades to come.

Second, even if we were to plunge into more debt on a risky gambit for greater growth, why should tax cuts for the rich get the first (and maybe only) priority for the corresponding goodies?

The rich already get away with paying little if any taxes, as the President himself knows perfectly well. Is the best way to make America great again, to get more jobs for more Americans, really to eliminate the estate tax? So Sheldon Adelson's heirs won't have to ever pay tax?

Couldn't the trillions for billionaires be better spent, say, on middle-class tax cuts, infrastructure investments, and/or education, with perhaps a little left over for science, the environment and international affairs?

Donald Trump got elected president promising to be a man of the people, a ruler for the forgotten. Now it is he who seems to have forgotten. His Plan A on tax reform was to take from the bottom to give to the top. Thwarted in that effort by the people, who turn out to like having health care, Trump turned to Plan B: take from the future to give to the top.

Let us hope that the people rise up again and stop the latest attempt at a billionaire money grab.

Then maybe, just maybe, Trump could live up to his promise to be a new kind of politician, one for the American middle class. He could give us Plan C: a tax reform that, instead of giving more breaks to the billionaire class, actually asks them to share more with the rest of us. Unfortunately, it is exactly such a sensible reaction to rising economic inequality and mounting associated political concerns that sounds like voodoo these days.



UNE - Trump's Tax Plan: Low Rate for Corporations, and for Companies Like His

Julie Hirschfeld Davis, Alan Rappeport, Kate Kelly and Rachel Abrams

Republicans are likely to embrace the plan's centerpiece, substantial tax reductions for businesses large and small, even as they push back against the jettisoning of their border adjustment tax. The 15 percent rate would apply both to corporations, which now pay 35 percent, and to a broad range of firms known as pass-through entities — including hedge funds, real estate concerns like Mr. Trump's and large partnerships — that currently pay taxes at individual rates, which top off at 39.6 percent. That hews closely to the proposal Mr. Trump championed during his campaign.

But Mr. Trump's decision to extend the corporate tax cut to real estate conglomerates like his own will give Democrats a tailor-made line of attack.

"Yesterday, we learned President Trump wants to slash the corporate tax rate, even though corporations already dodge most of their tax responsibilities while making record profits," said Frank Clemente, executive director of the liberal Americans for Tax Fairness. "Today, we find out it's even worse. In trying to slash taxes for 'pass through' business entities, Trump is seeking to dramatically reduce his own tax bill."

The people who were briefed on the plan spoke on the condition of anonymity before a formal

announcement that Mr. Trump has said will come on Wednesday, three days before he reaches the 100-day mark in office with nothing to show for his promises to cut taxes or revamp the health care system.

The border adjustment tax may be revisited later but was considered too controversial to include now.

Spokeswomen for the White House and the Treasury Department declined to comment on the details of the plan before Wednesday's announcement, which is expected to contain only broad principles, leaving unanswered crucial questions about the financing of the package and the process for advancing it through Congress.

Emerging from a meeting at the Capitol where he briefed Republican congressional leaders on Tuesday evening, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said participants had "very, very productive discussions" and were united in their desire to accomplish a tax overhaul this year.

The broad contours of the plan seemed to please conservatives who had worried in recent weeks that Mr. Trump, who has dropped or modified many of the major proposals of his campaign, was drifting away from the plan he had laid out for voters.

"Conservatives are going to be very happy with this plan, because it achieves a lot of the objectives that we've wanted: lower business

taxes, simplification and not a major tax increase that is unacceptable," said Stephen Moore, an economist at the Heritage Foundation who advised Mr. Trump's campaign and helped craft his tax proposal.

But Mr. Moore conceded that finding ways to offset the large revenue reductions envisioned in the blueprint would be a challenge.

"That's the unknown right now, is whether there is some sort of pay-for for any of this," he said.

Government officials crafting the tax plans are aware of the math problem, one of the people involved in the proposal said, but they see the 15 percent corporate tax rate as a compelling starting point for negotiations. Mr. Trump may yet reveal other tactics for replenishing lost tax revenue, someone who has been briefed on the plans said.

But the final plans remain very much in flux. At midafternoon on Tuesday, for instance, it was still not clear whether personal income-tax rate cuts or an increase in the standardized deduction for individuals would be part of Wednesday's announcement.

The demise of the border adjustment tax was met with relief by Republicans in the Senate, who had been cool to it from the start.

On Tuesday, Senator John Cornyn, Republican of Texas, said it was safe to conclude that the provision was "not going anywhere" because of skepticism in the Senate.

But Mr. Cornyn described Mr. Trump's plan to cut the corporate income tax to 15 percent as "pretty aggressive," with unknown consequences for the deficit.

Other Republican senators appeared ready to embrace a tax proposal that adds to the deficit in the name of jump-starting the economy. Republicans appear intent on using parliamentary rules that would block Democrats from filibustering the plan in the Senate, but would also put a time limit on the tax cuts.

"I'm open to getting this country moving," said Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee. "I'm not so sure we have to go that route, but if we do, I can live with it."

Most analysts say the notion that Mr. Trump's tax cuts will pay for themselves is unrealistic. A Tax Foundation analysis concluded this week that, on its own, a 15 percent corporate tax rate would reduce federal revenue by about \$2 trillion over a decade. To make up for those losses without raising taxes elsewhere, the economy would have to become 5 percent larger.

Senator Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri, said he was also open to tax cuts with an expiration date if that was the only way to get them passed without Democratic support, pointing to President George W. Bush's cuts.

"You look at the tax cuts from 2002 and 2003 — well over 90 percent of them became permanent law," Mr. Blunt said.

Democrats have criticized Republicans for failing to engage with them on a tax overhaul. Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon, the ranking Democrat on the Finance Committee, said he would be open to working with Republicans on a plan that would bring home corporate profits parked overseas

and use some of the funds to pay for infrastructure.

But Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, said on Tuesday that he intended to pass tax legislation through budget rules that would block a filibuster. He accused Democrats of being more interested in "wealth transfers" than in spurring economic growth.

So far, the Senate has taken a back seat in tax discussions. The abandonment of the border adjustment tax will deal a blow to the comprehensive rewrite of the tax code championed by Speaker Paul D. Ryan and Representative Kevin Brady of Texas, the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.

Mr. Brady said Tuesday that he would press ahead with the import tax, not merely because it would make up for lost revenue but because it would protect American jobs.

However, he acknowledged that his goal of producing legislation before summer was slipping.

"I'm less focused on the month than on the year for tax reform, which would be this year," Mr. Brady said.



UNE - Trump to propose large increase in deductions Americans can claim on their taxes

President Trump on Wednesday plans to call for a significant increase in the standard deduction people can claim on their tax returns, potentially putting thousands of dollars each year into the pockets of tens of millions of Americans, according to two people briefed on the plan.

The change is one of several major revisions to the federal tax code that the White House will propose when it provides an outline of the tax-overhaul pitch Trump will make to Congress and the American people as he nears his 100th day in office.

Trump will call for a sharp reduction in the corporate tax rate, from 35 percent to 15 percent. He will also propose lowering the tax rate for millions of small businesses that now file their tax returns under the individual tax code, two people familiar with the plan said.

These companies, often referred to as "pass throughs" or S corporations, would be subject to the 15 percent rate proposed for corporations. Many pass throughs are small, family-owned businesses. But they can also be large — such as parts of Trump's own real estate empire or law firms with partners who earn more than a million dollars

annually. The White House is expected to pursue safeguards to ensure that companies like law firms can't take advantage of this new tax rate and allow their highly paid partners to pay much lower tax bills.

Trump's proposed tax changes will not all be rolled out Wednesday. White House officials are also working to develop an expanded Child and Dependent Care Credit, which they hope would benefit low- and middle-income families facing substantial burdens in paying for child care. Trump had touted a tax measure for child care during the campaign, but it was criticized as not significantly benefiting families of modest means.

White House officials think these changes will give Americans and companies more money to spend, expand the economy and create more jobs.

The existing standard deduction Americans can claim is \$6,300 for individuals and \$12,600 for married couples filing jointly. The precise level of Trump's new proposal could not be ascertained, but it was significantly higher, the two people said, who spoke on the condition of

anonymity because the plan has not yet been made public.

During the campaign, Trump proposed raising the standard deduction to \$15,000 for individuals and \$30,000 for families.

Like other parts of Trump's tax proposal, an increase in the standard deduction would lead to a large loss of government revenue.

A standard deduction works like this: If a couple filing jointly earns \$70,000, they deduct \$12,600 from their income, adjusting their income to \$57,400. They then would pay taxes on the \$57,400 in income, not the \$70,000 they earned. Increasing the standard deduction would reduce their taxable income, ensuring that they can keep more of their money. A taxpayer who claims the standard deduction cannot also itemize deductions for items such as mortgage interest or charitable giving. But if the standard deduction is large enough, many would be likely to bypass the itemized deduction.

The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center estimated last year that if Trump raised the standard deduction as much as he proposed during the campaign, about 27 million of the 45 million tax filers who itemized

their tax breaks in 2017 would instead opt to take the standardized deduction, creating a much simpler process.

This would also match one of the goals outlined by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. He has said that filing taxes has become too complicated for many Americans and that his goal would be for many Americans to be able to file their taxes on a "large postcard."

White House officials including Vice President Pence also met late Tuesday with congressional leaders and said they wanted to pass a tax-code overhaul through a process known as "reconciliation," a person familiar with the meeting said, which means they could achieve the changes with only Republican votes.

They also said they were going to push for steep cuts in tax rates but would be willing to raise some new revenue with other changes to the tax code. The White House on Wednesday is expected to reiterate this openness to new revenue without getting into specifics of which tax changes it would seek, as that could create a fierce corporate blowback based on which exemptions could be cut.

[Republicans' plan to cut corporate taxes would lead to massive revenue losses, congressional accountant finds]

Congressional Republicans praised President Trump's ambitious effort to overhaul the tax code and slash corporate income tax rates to 15 percent.

But they cautioned that some parts of the plan might go too far, illustrating the challenges the president continues to face in his own party as he seeks political support for one of his top domestic priorities.

Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) and Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Tex.), who head Congress's tax-writing panels, said they were open to Trump's plan to push forward with sharp cuts in the rates that businesses pay but suggested that changes might be needed.

"I think the bolder the better in tax reform," said Brady, who chairs the House Ways and Means Committee. "I'm excited that the president is going for a very ambitious tax plan."

Hatch, meanwhile, said the White House appears to be "stuck on" the idea that certain small businesses, known as S corporations, should have their tax rates lowered to 15 percent, just like large businesses. S corporations pay the same tax rates that individuals and families pay, with a top rate of close to 40 percent.

"I'm open to good ideas," Hatch said. "The question is: Is that a good idea?"

Meanwhile, Democrats denounced the 15 percent corporate tax rate and criticized Mnuchin, who said that faster economic growth would generate enough new tax revenue to compensate for the corporate rate cuts.

Asked whether the 15 percent target was workable, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) told reporters: "It is, if you want to blow a hole in the federal budget and cut a whole lot of things like Meals on Wheels and Lake Erie restoration and then lie about the growth rate of the

economy."

He said that the Trump administration would have to do something "huge" such as scrapping mortgage interest deductions, adopting a border adjustment tax or relying on "outrageously inaccurate projections."

The Trump tax package has won the support of most of the business community, but divisions remain.

The biggest winners from the corporate tax cut would include companies in industries such as retailing, construction and services that have had trouble taking advantage of the loopholes in the existing tax code.

The list of losers from tax reform could include technology companies, domestic oil and gas drillers, utilities and pharmaceutical firms that have been adept at playing the current system by using loopholes to deduct interest payments, expense their equipment and research, and transfer profits to foreign jurisdictions with lower tax rates. Under the Trump plan, many of those tax breaks would be eliminated in return for lowering the rate.

"Retail companies are the ones who pay closest to the rate of 35 percent," said Len Burman, a fellow and tax expert at the Urban Institute. "They can't ship their profits overseas. They can't take advantage of the research and experimentation credit."

A study of 2016 data for all profitable publicly listed companies by Aswath Damodaran, a finance professor at New York University's Stern School of Business, showed that U.S. firms pay vastly different income tax rates.

On average, engineering and construction firms, food wholesalers and publishers paid about 34 percent. At the other end, oil and natural gas companies paid 7 to 8 percent on average.

"The U.S. tax code is filled with all kinds of ornaments" that help the oil and gas industry, said Damodaran. A decades-old depletion allowance,

for example, allows companies to deduct money as a natural resource is produced and sold. This comes on top of other deductions for various expenses.

A Treasury Department study last year based on tax returns for 2007-2011 showed that debt-laden utilities paid only 10 percent in taxes, while construction firms and retailers paid 27 percent. "Retailers pay a higher effective tax rate of any sector in the United States," said David French, the head of government relations at the National Retail Federation. "But the devil is in the details."

With many key pieces of the Trump tax plan still missing, French is worried that Trump might propose something to offset the lost revenue from cutting the corporate tax rate to 15 percent. A border adjustment tax, such as the one House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) favors, would more than offset the benefits of a rate cut to 15 percent, French said, "while others would see their taxes go to zero."

French said that he expects a middle-class tax cut and business tax reform, but he does not expect Trump to unveil a complete package with offsetting items. "I don't think that's going to be in the president's plan," French said. "I expect it will be big-picture, high-level, without a lot of details."

"There are so many special interests involved," said Ed Yardeni, an investment strategist and president of Yardeni Research. "This is going to be a real test of whether he's going to be able to drain the swamp or whether he's going to pump more water in."

[Trump just promised the biggest tax cut in history. Here's how big it would have to be.]

Among the other big losers could be companies such as utilities or cable companies that have accumulated large debts and currently can deduct interest payments. A lower tax rate would make those tax deductions less useful.

In a report to investors in December, a team of JPMorgan analysts said that "we see reform to

the corporate tax code as currently envisioned ... as an overall net negative" for big utilities. The analysts said that because the utilities had large amounts of debt, they would be hurt more than other companies.

A big corporate tax cut could also create a crisis for individual income taxes. Without a matching cut in individual income tax rates, individuals would be able to change the structure of their pay checks so that the payments went through limited liability companies that would pay no more than 15 percent under the business tax cut, a rate far lower than the top individual rate of 39.6 percent.

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That's similar to what basketball coach Bill Self did after Kansas exempted entrepreneurs from paying taxes and eliminated the business tax. Self, the coach of the University of Kansas Jayhawks, put about 90 percent of his pay package into a corporate entity to sidestep the taxes he would have paid if it were all considered simply salary, according to a report by radio station KCUR-FM.

"Whenever a lower rate is imposed on one kind of economic activity versus another, that low-rate activity all of a sudden becomes a lot more important," Burman said. "A lot of tax sheltering was done to make ordinary income look like capital gains."

He added, "An associate professor in the Kansas philosophy department probably pays a higher tax rate than Bill Self."

But if Trump cuts individual income taxes to match the cut in corporate rates, that would create an enormous shortfall in tax revenue and a ballooning of the budget deficit.

the Atlantic Trump Tax Plan Places Low Priority on Deficit

Russell Berman

"I am the king of debt," Donald Trump famously boasted during last year's campaign. On Wednesday, the president is going to set about proving it—but perhaps not in the way he originally meant.

All indications are that the tax plan the White House is slated to unveil will include what Trump has

described as a "massive" cut in the rate that corporations and many small businesses pay to the government. But it will omit the more politically painful choices that Republicans would need to make to offset the corresponding loss of revenue, such as House Speaker Paul Ryan's proposed tax on imports or the elimination of popular deductions for charitable giving and

homeowners. The result is a tax plan that, like the ones Trump offered as a candidate, could add trillions of dollars to the national debt. You can call them tax cuts, but they aren't tax reform.

In pursuing the cuts-only approach favored by supply-side economic conservatives, Trump is forgoing—at least for the moment—the more

ambitious overhaul of both the corporate and individual tax code that Republicans like Ryan have been pursuing for years. That would take months, if not years, more to complete, and the president plainly does not want to wait. He caught both Republican lawmakers and, reportedly, his own staff off-guard by announcing that the White House would unveil some sort of tax

plan this week, ahead of the 100-day marker of his presidency. What Trump will actually release might be little more than a sheet of paper with some broad principles, much less a detailed legislative proposal. It's the Cliffs Notes version of a tax plan, which will make for a clean headline and is simpler to explain to voters than a proposal with the inherent winners and losers that a broader reform package would create.

Choosing the simpler path is a familiar move for Trump, and so is picking a policy that places deficit reduction far behind his other priorities. While the president has at times talked about tackling—and even pledged to eliminate—the nation's nearly \$20 trillion debt, he has campaigned and governed as a bigger-government conservative. He's called for up to \$1 trillion in new infrastructure spending, proposed a \$30 billion increase in the military budget, and wants to build a wall along the southern border that could cost billions more. Trump's initial budget proposal called for steep cuts to domestic programs to pay for some of the increased spending elsewhere, but it notably omitted any effort at restraining the entitlement programs eyed by Republicans as the main drivers of long-term deficits. When Trump called himself "the king of debt" in a CBS interview last year, he was referring to how he used strategic borrowing in the operation of his businesses. But he's resorting to a similar approach to run the government as well.

"The Trump campaign proposed two revenue-decreasing tax plans during the campaign. It should not be so surprising if they also propose a net tax cut once in the White House," said Scott Greenberg, an analyst with the Tax Foundation, which projected that the Trump campaign's final tax plan would

have increased deficits by as much as \$5.9 trillion.

"I'm just saying that if we can get more growth from it, do it. And if that means you're going to have a higher deficit, so what?"

The president's outline is likely to win some fans among Republicans in Congress, but it will cause conflict with others. In the House, GOP leaders have been writing a tax bill that would not add to the deficit under the formula the party uses to estimate its impact on the budget (calculations that Democrats vigorously dispute). That's a major reason why Ryan has been pushing for a "border adjustment tax" designed to offset an estimated \$1 trillion in rate reductions over a decade.

But with that plan facing bipartisan opposition and with the GOP health-care bill stalled, conservative economists have been pushing the party to advance a tax proposal that would be politically easier and, in their view, more quickly stimulate economic growth. They're advancing the theory popularized under former President Ronald Reagan that lower taxes will generate more economic activity and thereby lead to more revenue for the government from a broader base of taxpayers. Adopting that view, the White House has decided to go big on rate cuts. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the proposal will call for a 15 percent tax rate both for corporations—down from 35 percent—and for smaller businesses in which the owners currently pay the highest individual rate of 39.6 percent. "The tax plan will pay for itself with economic growth," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters on Monday.

Yet even the most ardent supply-side advocates don't believe a cut that deep will refill the government's

coffers through economic growth alone. Their argument is that the deficit concerns are less important than the need to jolt the economy, which has been growing at a modest rate of around 2 percent or less for the last several years. "I'm not saying that cutting the corporate rate from 35 [percent] to 15 [percent] is going to pay for itself," Stephen Moore, a conservative economist who advised Trump during the campaign, told me on Tuesday. "It may. It may not. I'm just saying that if we can get more growth from it, do it. And if that means you're going to have a higher deficit, so what? It's worth it to get more growth."

After years of belt-tightening that congressional Republicans forced on former President Barack Obama, the assumption that deficits are automatically bad has taken a hit with politicians in both parties. Progressives have called for a new round of government spending to boost jobs and reduce income inequality, while conservatives argue for business-oriented tax cuts at the expense of the federal balance sheet. But the loosening fiscal policy of the last couple of years has alarmed those who believe the debt remains a long-term threat to economic stability. "If this tax reform is not paid for, it is backwards and disappointing. Tax reform is supposed to be done to create economic growth, not paid for by economic growth," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. She argued that the negative impact of a rising national debt, including the risk of higher interest rates, would undercut the very economic growth Republicans claim to want. "This is maybe politically expedient, but it will be economically damaging and a real lost opportunity for the growth agenda we need to be pursuing," she told me.

Moore, along with fellow supply-siders Steve Forbes, Larry Kudlow, and Art Laffer, published an op-ed in *The New York Times* last week urging the president to "keep it simple" and prioritize a tax cut over a broader overhaul. Trump appears to be taking their advice. The latest reports suggest that in addition to the overall rate cuts, the White House will seek to offer corporations a discount rate to "repatriate" profits held off-shore so it can use the revenue for infrastructure—a plan designed to attract Democratic support. The proposal could also contain a childcare tax credit sought by Ivanka Trump.

But the plan's overall price tag could be a hinderance both politically and procedurally. Democrats are unlikely to back unpaid-for tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy no matter how much money for infrastructure is included. That will force Republicans to try to pass a bill through the budget reconciliation process—as they tried to do with health care—that would circumvent a filibuster in the Senate and require only a simple-majority vote. But the budget rules forbid legislation advanced through reconciliation to add to the debt over the long term, so Republicans might have to make their tax cuts temporary and expire after 10 years, which is what they did under former President George W. Bush 15 years ago.

Even with that fine print, Trump's pain-free plan likely would be easier to pass than a far more complicated overhaul that raises taxes on some industries and cuts them for others. As they have before, Republicans will argue that they're returning money to the people in service of a brighter economy. All they have to stomach is higher short-term deficits, and for the president, that's no obstacle at all.



The Trump administration's magical thinking on taxes would bust the budget

PRESIDENT TRUMP is set to reveal the outlines of a tax reform plan Wednesday. The country will be improved if Mr. Trump leads the way toward lower rates, fewer loopholes and a simpler code. Where the plan could go dangerously astray is if the administration bases it on wishful thinking — specifically, that tax-cutting will pay for itself.

Specifics have been sketchy in the run-up to Wednesday's announcement, in part because administration officials appear to be of different minds. But a few details

emerged early in the week. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Mr. Trump wants to reduce the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent and the top tax rate on so-called pass-through companies from 39.6 percent also to 15 percent. According to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, slashing the corporate rate by such a large amount would reduce revenue by \$2.4 trillion over a decade, which is half of everything the government will spend in fiscal 2017. Cutting the tax on pass-throughs, meanwhile, would boost

tax avoidance by encouraging people to take wages in the form of lower-taxed pass-through income.

There are several honest ways out of the resulting budget hole: end or limit tax breaks such as the mortgage-interest deduction; raise the rates of other taxes; cut spending; or some combination. The dishonest way is to pretend the hole is shallower than the experts predict it will be — or even that the hole does not exist. That was the approach Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin appeared to be taking last Thursday. "The plan will

pay for itself with growth," Mr. Mnuchin said, claiming that the Trump economic program could goose the economy so much that the government would recoup nearly \$2 trillion over 10 years. He may be preparing some limits on deductions, but not nearly enough.

This is magical thinking. Of course cutting taxes or increasing federal spending affects the economy, but experience shows that tax cuts are almost never self-financing. If the Trump administration used optimistic economic growth assumptions to justify a deficit-

enhancing tax cut, "I would start drinking earlier every day," leading GOP economist Douglas Holtz-Eakin told The Post's Damian Paletta and Max Ehrenfreund.

There is another dishonest way to ignore the budget arithmetic: pretend the hole doesn't matter.

POLITICO Instead of launching tax reform, Trump could ground it

Ben White

President Donald Trump on Wednesday will release a plan to radically overhaul the American tax code that many Republicans say is unrealistic and could end up hurting the chances of getting anything done on the issue, long one of the party's top priorities.

Driven by a president eager to show momentum heading into the close of his first 100 days in office, the hastily written plan could wind up alienating critical Hill Republicans while offering little or nothing to entice Democrats. It could also be widely dismissed by outside observers as an over-hyped rehash of promises the president already made during the campaign.

"So far at least, the contours of this are starting to look a lot like what happened with Trump and Congress on health care," said Lanhee Chen, a top adviser to Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign and now a professor at Stanford. "On health care you had irreconcilable differences on the scope of government. And in the same way here, whether or not you pay for a tax cut is a fundamental difference Republicans have. And what we could see Wednesday is that there isn't even as much middle ground on taxes as there was on health care."

The main problem, political analysts and tax experts say, is that Republicans are caught between two irreconcilable models for enacting major tax changes.

The president is likely to release a plan that repeats his campaign call for slashing the top corporate rate from 35 percent to 15 percent and reducing and simplifying individual rates, while doing little or nothing to replace the trillions of dollars in lost revenue from such cuts beyond relying on rosy forecasts for faster growth.

The White House confirmed that the plan will include a boost in the standard deduction for individual taxpayers. The housing and charitable sectors fear that will hurt their bottom lines by making the mortgage interest and charitable

The Journal reported that Mr. Trump may be taking this approach, ordering his staff to stick to the 15 percent corporate tax goal even if it would expand deficits. In fact, a deficit-raising tax cut would eventually harm economic growth by driving up government debt. As the population ages, the country is

deductions less attractive to taxpayers.

The non-partisan Tax Policy Center estimates that reducing the corporate tax rate to 15 percent would cost the federal government \$215 billion in 2018 alone and become a more expensive proposition as each year passes, according to the center's analysis of Trump's campaign plan.

Many congressional Republicans, led by House Speaker Paul Ryan, prefer a radically different approach that would employ a new border tax to generate over \$1 trillion in revenue over 10 years to pay for a cut in the top corporate rate to 20 percent from 35 percent. People close to Ryan are dismissive of Trump's approach to unfunded tax cuts as a "magic unicorn" that will never clear the House.

By releasing his plan without the border tax, as widely expected, Trump will be setting himself up in direct opposition to Ryan, whose help the president will need to get any major tax bill passed.

"The fundamental disagreement here is basically over which kind of Reagan-style tax change that Trump is going to embrace," said Jeffrey Birnbaum, a former journalist and author of a book on the epic 1986 tax reform fight. "Will it be 1986-style reform, which neither raised nor lowered the budget deficit or will it be 1981-style, which was just a reduction in rates and was eventually viewed by both Democrats and Republicans as too deep a cut. It's clear Trump wants to echo Reagan but we don't know which version of Reagan it will be."

For the moment, Republicans on the Hill are trying to stress the areas where they agree with Trump, including a desire to lower and simplify both corporate and individual rates to spur what the party hopes will be much faster economic growth that creates millions of new jobs and lifts wages. But many are signaling that significant differences remain that could prove insurmountable.

"We all agree on the benefits of tax reform and the place we want to

already on track to borrow more and squeeze spending for everything except interest on the debt, pensions and health care: national parks, the FBI, defense, schools and more. It would be the height of imprudence to worsen the problem, whether based on phony math or sheer heedlessness.

land, and the question is how you reach that place," said AshLee Strong, a spokeswoman for Ryan. "We continue to have productive discussions with the administration about all ideas on the table."

But Ryan's office also cited guidance from the Joint Committee on Taxation on Tuesday suggesting it would be impossible to pass a big corporate rate cut through the reconciliation process — which would avoid a Democratic filibuster in the Senate — without paying for it.

The guidance held that even letting the cuts lapse after three years would still increase the deficit beyond ten years, which would violate the reconciliation process. "We project a nonnegligible revenue loss in the tax years immediately following the budget window," the Joint Committee said.

Pointing to this report is House Republicans' way of saying that Trump's current approach to the tax issue simply won't work.

On the Senate side, Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), who has been dismissive of the 15 percent target as unattainable, also tried to sound positive on Tuesday.

"Every administration has had its own ideas, I've never seen one that hasn't," Hatch said. "They're working with us and we're interested in whatever they come up with. Even if it's really expensive, I'm going to be interested in whatever they come up with. That doesn't mean I'm necessarily going to follow it, but I want to support the administration if I can."

Democrats, meanwhile, stand ready to savage the plan as a giveaway to big corporations that would balloon the deficit. "I'm very skeptical. I've seen no plan in the past that could get to that [15 percent] level without adding to the deficit," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), a member of the Finance Committee.

Democrats are likely to also blast the proposal if, as expected, Trump repeats his campaign pledge to extend the 15 percent rate to so-called "pass-through" companies, which are often owner-operated

For eight years, Republicans mercilessly attacked President Barack Obama for doing too little to cut federal deficits. Will they really turn around now and approve a budget-busting tax cut?

businesses, like Trump's own real-estate and branding empire. The argument Democrats will make is that if the proposal became law, it would give the president himself a giant tax cut.

"In trying to slash taxes for 'pass-through' business entities, Trump is seeking to dramatically reduce his own tax bill," said Frank Clemente, executive director of Americans for Tax Fairness.

The 15 percent tax on pass-through income would also be far lower than the 25 percent top rate proposed by Ryan and House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Texas).

Privately, Democrats say they relish the thought of Republicans battling each other on how to rewrite the tax code. One Democratic aide predicted "a lot of Republican-on-Republican violence this week."

Others say it appears that Trump is simply pushing for a giant tax cut under the guise of more politically palatable "tax reform."

"Is it just tax cuts, or truly tax reform? I think the administration sometimes has confused the issue by calling everything tax reform when it is not," said Mark Mazur, the former assistant secretary for tax policy at the Treasury Department under the Obama administration and now director of the non-partisan Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. "If you're going to do tax reform, you need to be thinking about making the system simpler and more efficient."

Trump himself is personally invested in an overhaul of the tax code, far more than he was in any machinations of the health care legislation, according to one source familiar with the White House's internal tax deliberations. The lone tax policy staffer on the National Economic Council, former Hill staffer Shahira Knight, has personally briefed the president on tax questions, say two sources.

The president has a much stronger attachment and understanding of the tax code than, say, health insurance because the real estate industry relies so heavily on tax breaks such as the mortgage interest deduction for homeowners

or the interest deduction for businesses. In this area, Trump's proposal to increase the standard deduction could actually harm his beloved real estate industry by making the mortgage deduction less attractive for tax filers.

Inside the administration, Trump's pledge to produce a new tax reform document this week took officials by surprise. And not all were thrilled to have to produce something this early in the process with major policy decisions still up in the air and meetings with congressional leadership still in their early phases.

"This was all about doing something in the first 100 days and really it's doing the process backwards," one senior White House official said this week. "I'm not sure how helpful it is."

The rushed nature of the effort was reflected in conflicting statements from administration officials about what the package to be released Wednesday would include. Initially, several administration officials said it would probably include some kind of infrastructure investment to appeal to Democrats. Several Democrats support the idea of using

some funds generated by the taxation of repatriated foreign earnings to pay for infrastructure projects such as rebuilding decaying roads and bridges.

But as of late Tuesday afternoon, officials said the plan to be released Wednesday would probably not include infrastructure spending but instead just focus on individual and corporate rates.

"The reason your head is spinning on this is that the plan isn't even written yet," one White House official said ahead of a planned meeting Tuesday evening between

the administration and top Capitol Hill leaders.

That meeting, which lasted about 45 minutes, appeared to be perfunctory.

"This is just a preliminary meeting," Hatch said afterward. "They went into some suggestions that were mere suggestions and we'll go from there."

**The
New York
Times**

UNE - Threat of Government Shutdown Fades as Trump Retreats on Wall

Jennifer Steinhauer, Matt Fliegenheimer and Peter Baker

Democrats have now turned that threat on its head, insisting that the payments — which the administration has quietly continued to make — be guaranteed as part of any deal. "Six million people could lose their health care, which could become unaffordable," said Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader.

The House Democratic whip, Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland, said the payments were something Republicans "need to do for the American people, not as a 'give' to Democrats in negotiations."

Another central point in the negotiations is a dispute over health benefits for retired miners who may lose their coverage, an issue that led to a near shutdown last year. Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia and other Democrats want those benefits extended, and miners have been a big constituency for Mr. Trump. On Tuesday, Mr. McConnell said he supported "a permanent fix on miners' health care."

"It's my hope that that will be included in the final package," he said.

Democrats would also like to see Congress bail out Puerto Rico's ailing Medicaid program as part of the deal.

One fact suggests that both Republicans and Democrats have gotten much of what they wanted in the spending bill: They have strikingly avoided the sort of inflamed talk that is often a part of fights over budgets.

After a fractious period in the Capitol — cresting this month with

Democrats' filibuster of Mr. Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, and Republicans' deployment of the so-called nuclear option to confirm him — members seemed modestly hopeful for a reset of sorts.

"This is a good time to stabilize the government," said Senator Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri and a member of the Appropriations Committee. "And then whatever debates we didn't have in the next three days, we could have in the next three months or three years."

As lawmakers on Capitol Hill continued negotiations on Tuesday, White House and Senate staff members seemed to agree that the wall had been reduced to something like a metaphor for broad-based border security funding, which is all but certain to end up in a final spending package.

Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, praised Mr. Trump for relenting.

"He's not going to overplay his hand," Mr. Graham said. "Here's the challenge to the Democrats: Are you going to overplay your hand?"

At the very least, Democrats seemed inclined to declare victory on the wall for now.

Mr. Schumer — whose caucus is delighting this week in pointing out areas in which Mr. Trump has fallen short of campaign promises as he approaches his 100th day in office — exulted on Tuesday in the wall's near-term fate. "For weeks, we have been making good progress in negotiating with our Republican colleagues," Mr. Schumer said. "The president's 11th-hour demand threatened to upend the progress. We're pleased he's backing off."

At the same time, Mr. Trump took care to avoid the appearance of acquiescence on the wall, eager to reinforce his long-term commitment. "Don't let the fake media tell you that I have changed my position on the WALL," he wrote on Twitter on Tuesday morning. "It will get built and help stop drugs, human trafficking, etc."

Mr. Trump is showing "some reasonableness on the wall," the White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, said. He said the president was willing to talk about finding a compromise, even while seeking to put Democrats on the defensive.

Speaking later to reporters at the White House, Mr. Trump went so far as to say the wall would be built in his first term, regardless of this week's spending measure.

"The wall is going to get built," he said. "Just in case anybody has any question, the wall is going to get built."

Asked when, he said: "Soon. We're already preparing. We're doing plans. We're doing specifications. We're doing a lot of work on the wall, and the wall gets built."

The current legislation would keep the government operating through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30. But the president could refocus his battle for wall construction in spending bills for the next fiscal year.

The promise to build a wall — or, actually, to extend a series of barriers that already exist along parts of the border — was a central theme of Mr. Trump's campaign. Not only would he protect the United States from a tide of immigrants coming across the

border illegally, he said, but Mexico would pay for it.

But the cost estimates for the wall have gone up, and Mexico has made clear it has no intention of spending money on it.

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, has said that Mr. Trump is still determined to make Mexico pay, but that he will proceed first with American tax dollars.

"The president has been very clear" that "in order to get the ball rolling on border security and the wall, that he was going to have to use the current appropriations process," Mr. Spicer said. "But he would make sure that that promise would be kept as far as the payment of it."

Mr. Spicer insisted that Mexico would eventually pay.

Mr. Trump initially estimated during the campaign that the wall would cost \$12 billion, but the figure has soared since then. A Department of Homeland Security internal report in February estimated that the wall could cost about \$21.6 billion. A report issued by Senate Democrats last week put the cost far higher, at nearly \$70 billion.

Even without the wall, illegal crossings of the southwestern border have been falling significantly. The number of people apprehended fell 40 percent from January to February and 30 percent from February to March, according to Customs and Border Protection.

The White House has attributed that to Mr. Trump's tough talk and increased enforcement. Since November, when Mr. Trump was elected, illegal crossings have fallen by nearly 75 percent.

Congress set to deny Trump wall money

By Jack Shafer

Lawmakers and the White House are eager to step back from the brink of a government shutdown.

President Donald Trump is almost certainly not going to get his money for a wall on the border with Mexico this week. But Republicans are confident they can deliver him a significant boost in border security spending that allows Trump to spin the government funding bill as a victory anyway.

Trump has been sending mixed signals on how hard he is pressing for wall funding in a bill that must pass by Friday night to avoid a government shutdown. On Monday evening he signaled to conservative journalists that he would be content fighting for the money in the fall — but on Tuesday he tweeted to his followers to not believe the “fake media” reporting on a change in position.

Still, aides, senators and White House officials said on Tuesday that Trump is coming to terms with the reality that pushing for wall funding would invite a shutdown fight because of the Democrats’ blanket opposition.

“It sounds like they’re moving away from that insistence,” said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Texas), who wants Trump to submit a comprehensive border security plan to Congress.

“The wall has become sort of a code word for border security,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who had dinner with Trump and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) on Monday. “I’m confident that he doesn’t want a shutdown. I hope the Democrats don’t either. Border security, rather than a physical wall, is probably an acceptable outcome here.”

But Trump is also aware that fully backing down at this point could embolden Democrats who are

clamoring for a commitment to permanently fund Obamacare’s insurance subsidies, according to one person involved in spending bill negotiations. Democrats are likely to receive no better than a temporary patch to keep those funds flowing to low-income Americans, which will cost about \$7 billion this year. Trump’s administration has threatened to cut off those funds as a condition for getting his wall funding.

However, a White House official said acceptance is setting in that, at least for now, Trump will not get money for his central campaign promise to build a massive barrier on the southern border.

Congress “will ramp up border security money with additional fencing and security measures short of the great wall,” said the official. “Then push for wall money in the fall.”

McCain explained the shift as typical for a chief executive still in his first 100 days in the White House: “Presidents are allowed to modify their views with additional information.”

But White House press secretary Sean Spicer insisted that there is no delay in Trump’s wall and that the president’s “priorities have not changed.” Trump himself said on Tuesday afternoon that “the wall is going to be built.”

Some prominent conservatives immediately criticized Trump for backing away from a confrontation with Democrats over a must-pass spending bill. Democrats have vowed they would not vote for a bill funding the wall, even as top Trump officials have insisted it be included in the spending bill.

“I hope this is not the case. But it looks like, from here, right here, right now, it looks like President Trump is caving on his demand for a measly \$1 billion in the budget for

his wall on the border with Mexico,” said Rush Limbaugh.

By Tuesday afternoon, Democrats were ebullient about Trump’s newfound flexibility. Democrats are, however, willing to send more than \$1 billion in border security to Trump, as long as it doesn’t directly fund the border wall.

“He understands that he could jeopardize the budget process. We’ve really warned him weeks and weeks ago not to try and fight the wall battle,” said Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.). And cutting off Obamacare subsidies now would mean “the net result of this is going to be to cut off health insurance of 6 million people.”

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said that Trump’s statements backing away from a shutdown fight with Democrats signaled to Republicans that the border fight, for now, is over.

“The president is easing off his demands for the border funding in this bill,” Schumer told reporters. “All of the signals we’re getting is what the president said last night is being taken at face value by our Republican negotiators.”

Sen. John Boozman (R-Ark.), who oversees the homeland security spending panel, said GOP leaders would likely fund the entirety of Trump’s border security proposal — the \$1.4 billion that he initially wanted for the wall — but for everything but the “physical barrier” that Trump wants.

With the wall issue seemingly settled, Democrats are divided over how far to take the fight to fund Obamacare subsidies.

Democrats led by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi had been demanding the subsidies be permanently funded in the final deal. But that position didn’t sit well with some Democrats who said they

shouldn’t be negotiating on the issue at all.

“From my perspective, this is not a part of our negotiations,” said House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) Tuesday. “We’re not dealing on this. This is the law.”

The Trump administration can continue to supply the subsidies without congressional action, which most Democrats would ultimately accept. Schumer did not insist that the subsidies need to be included in the funding bill when asked directly on Tuesday afternoon, though a Democratic aide said it is both Schumer and Pelosi’s position that the spending bill “must include” a permanent commitment to the subsidies.

Senators also said that Trump will likely receive much of his request for nearly \$30 billion in new defense spending. Appropriators are still negotiating a host of other issues.

“There are still many open items that are unresolved, which span the gamut of the 11 unfinished bills,” House Democratic appropriations spokesman Matt Dennis said.

Indeed, even with the border wall sticking point seemingly off the table, passage of a full-year spending package is not necessarily attainable by the Friday deadline, potentially requiring a short-term continuing resolution to buy more time for negotiations.

Congressional leaders are still hoping for enactment of an omnibus, with updated funding, rather than a long-term stopgap that drags out current spending levels through the end of September. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said it may be a couple days before a deal is struck, making it difficult to finish the larger bill this week.

The bill is also likely to include money to help Puerto Rico with a Medicaid shortfall, aides said.

Trump Blinks on His Border-Wall Demand

Russell Berman

Donald Trump wants his border wall funded, but he apparently wants to keep the government open on his 100th day in office a little bit more. Facing the prospect of a government shutdown in four days, the president reportedly backed off his demand that a must-pass spending bill include a downpayment for the wall he wants to construct along the nation’s southern border. Trump told a group of conservative journalists on

Monday evening that he would be willing to accept money for the wall during the next government-funding debate in September, effectively defusing a clash that had been building between Capitol Hill and the White House ahead of the April 28 deadline to avert a partial shutdown.

The president’s softening line wasn’t all that surprising. Democrats had held firm against funding the wall from the start, and Republican leaders were in no mood for a

countdown-clock showdown so early in Trump’s tenure and after they had already muffed their attempt to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. A battle over the wall, they reasoned, could come later. Not even the president seemed to have his heart fully in the fight—neither he nor his top advisers would take the necessary step of actually threatening to veto a spending bill that did not include some of the \$1.4 billion the

administration had requested to begin development of the wall.

Trump’s bigger worry may be of a pattern beginning to emerge. In March, the president sent his staff to deliver a well-publicized ultimatum to House Republicans: Pass the leadership’s health-care bill, or Trump would leave Obamacare in place and move on to other issues. The lawmakers balked, and a month later, it became clear the president was

bluffing. He's now back on health care and insisting he never left.

Democrats were quick to accept the president's willingness to back off from the shutdown brink. "The president's comments this evening are welcome news given the bipartisan opposition to the wall, and the obstacle it has been to the continuing bipartisan negotiations in the appropriations committees," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said in a statement. Her Senate counterpart, Chuck Schumer, added: "It's good for the country that President Trump is

taking the wall off the table in these negotiations. Now the bipartisan and bicameral negotiators can continue working on the outstanding issues."

The two parties must still agree on how much additional money to appropriate for defense, how much they might give the president for border security that doesn't include building the wall, and whether Congress will tell the Trump administration to continue making subsidy payments to health insurers as part of Obamacare. But the wall had become the chief sticking point,

and lawmakers were confident of avoiding a shutdown if Trump did not insist on its funding.

Perhaps Democrats thought if they praised the president fast enough, he wouldn't have time to reverse himself. Indeed, by the morning, Trump was tweeting again about the wall.

Nobody believes the president has given up entirely on building the wall; the issue is whether Congress will start funding it now. Trump's tweet was not a veto threat. There's still time for Trump to change his

mind again and confront the Democrats. Assuming he doesn't, however, his tactical retreat might benefit him in the short run. A government shutdown would have been an ignominious, if perhaps fitting, coda to Trump's first 100 days in office. But for a man who boasts about his negotiating skills and likes to keep his opponents guessing, a second called bluff in a month suggests the new president might, to his great dismay, be a tad too predictable.

Bloomberg RIP Trump's Wall - Bloomberg View

Jonathan Bernstein

Donald Trump's wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, the signature issue of his presidential campaign, can safely be moved now from the "nearly dead" category to the just-plain-dead file.

That's the only conclusion to be drawn from the Washington Post's report on the new Republican bidding on the funding bill for the remainder of the current fiscal year, which won't include anything for the wall. But it's not just that. Instead of the wall -- which would have drawn a filibuster from Senate Democrats, at least eight of whom are needed to pass the bill to keep the government open -- Republicans will be including money for "new surveillance technology to patrol the nearly 2,000-mile border" as well as "to repair existing fencing."

That's the total giveaway, especially the latter bit. It's true that this bill only covers through September, and Trump and the Republicans

could certainly still push for wall funding for fiscal year 2018. But if the wall is the answer to border security, then why would new technology be necessary? And even more to the point: If a big, beautiful wall measuring as high as 55 feet is on its way, then why would anyone bother appropriating money to repair old rickety fences?

Of course, the answer is that there isn't going to be any wall, and everyone knows it. Perhaps even Trump. It wouldn't be a big surprise if Congress winds up giving him just enough funding to build a stretch long enough to fill one camera shot and provide the backdrop for a self-congratulatory ceremony in time to kick off Trump's re-election bid, but anything significantly bigger hasn't seemed likely for a long time. It's just never been a very practical idea (even people who do care a lot about border security generally prefer high-tech solutions, not a beatable physical barrier), and it's never been very popular, especially among those who would have to

live near it. A recent Quinnipiac survey found only 33 percent of Americans in favor of it.

And the idea that Mexico would pay for it was, well, idiotic, not to mention an insult that would have rapidly turned a friendly neighbor into a resentful enemy had Trump stopped insisting on it.

So how does Trump climb down from his wall?

In a practical sense, that's what he did when he signaled on Monday that he wouldn't veto the funding measure (and thereby shut down the government) unless wall funding was included. Trump continues to tweet out checks that his wallet can't cash: last week he was supposedly preparing for a shutdown showdown, but he blinked as soon as Congress returned to town. If he's not going to fight for it now, there's no reason to believe he'll fight for it this fall or at any point.

Normal presidents would have seen all this coming by now and have gradually walked back the original commitment. Trump, however, is still pretending that he hasn't backed down at all from building the wall (and even forcing Mexico to pay). My guess is that he'll continue to claim it's not only going to be built soon, but that everything is proceeding ahead of schedule and under budget. Even if it means spending money on designing something that's never going to happen.

The trick is that Trump doesn't appear to care at all about either his professional reputation among Washingtonians, or about making false claims to his supporters. The former have therefore learned to discount everything he says, while the latter remains steadfast -- for now. The problem for Trump's re-election, however, is that he'll be needing more than just his strongest supporters. And even they might catch on after a while.

POLITICO Trump's already making his mark on climate

By Eric Wolff

President Donald Trump's aggressive rollback of the Obama administration's climate policies is already changing the trajectory of the world's efforts on global warming, with some analysts estimating it will mean billions more tons of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere during the next decade and a half.

It could be one of the most durable legacies of his young presidency -- regardless of whether Trump decides to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate agreement.

Story Continued Below

Trump has spent much of his first 100 days in office launching a series of efforts to undo former

President Barack Obama's domestic climate policies, seeking to ease pollution limits on power plants, vehicle tailpipes, coal mining, and oil and gas wells. And while Democrats and environmental groups promise fierce resistance, analysts say Trump's efforts could bring an effective halt to U.S. efforts to cut the carbon pollution that scientists blame for warming the planet.

"This is an experiment we can only run once, and then it's too late," said Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer. "We were in a lot of trouble with climate change already. This only makes it more risky. It's hard to quantify how much it matters, but it makes attainment of a difficult-to-achieve target more or less impossible."

The United States is the world's second-largest carbon polluter, but its greenhouse gas output has slid sharply in the past decade -- a trend driven partly by increases in energy efficiency and a shift from coal to natural gas as a power source. Obama had pledged to continue those reductions in the coming decade to meet U.S. commitments in the 2015 Paris agreement, in which nearly 200 nations made nonbinding promises to cut their carbon pollution. Hillary Clinton had promised even steeper reductions.

Trump, in contrast, has vowed to reverse Obama's policies, lift restrictions on the energy industry and "save our wonderful coal miners" -- pledges that helped him win fossil fuel-producing swing states like Pennsylvania and Ohio.

And his actions will have a real-world effect, based on POLITICO's analysis of estimates from the Democratic-leaning consultant Rhodium Group and the World Resources Institute. Instead of falling, Rhodium's projection estimated that Trump's policies, if fully implemented, will cause U.S. carbon pollution to continue more or less at current levels. That means that by 2025, according to POLITICO's analysis, the U.S. would be pumping 900 more megatons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere each year than under Obama's most ambitious target.

That extra U.S. carbon would exceed the annual output of Germany, one of the world's top greenhouse gas polluters. That would be enough to increase the

world's annual carbon emissions by almost 2 percent, Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann said — at a time when climate researchers say the world urgently needs to accelerate its cuts.

Through 2030, the cumulative gap between the Trump and Obama policies could exceed 4 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, based on Rhodium's estimates.

In other words, Trump's domestic actions on energy would be his real contribution to global climate policy — a fact obscured by the noisy political fight on whether the U.S. should withdraw from Paris. The figures don't even account for the possibility that a U.S. retreat on climate efforts would cause other major polluters, such as China and India, to pull back on their commitments.

"If you're going after the Clean Power Plan and going after everything else and all the other rules, then whether or not you stay in Paris appears to be symbolic from the perspective of U.S. emissions," said Andrew Light, a fellow at the World Resources Institute who worked for the State Department under Obama.

Rhodium based its analysis on a March 28 executive order in which Trump directed his agencies to take the first steps toward reversing some of Obama's most significant climate actions, including regulations on coal miners, oil and gas drillers, and thousands of power plants.

Trump and his appointees have made no secret of their disdain for Obama's attempts to rally the world on climate change, an issue the president has labeled a Chinese-inspired "hoax" that's wiped out American jobs. White House budget director Mick Mulvaney dismissed climate programs last month as "a waste of your money," telling reporters that "we're not spending money on that anymore."

Mulvaney was defending Trump's proposal for a 31 percent budget cut for the Environmental Protection Agency, whose carbon regulations on the power, auto, coal, oil and gas industries had provided the heart of Obama's climate policies.

Among other steps to erase Obama's climate legacy, Trump has

ordered the EPA to begin unwinding Obama's 2015 regulations on greenhouse gases from power plants, moved toward easing the agency's vehicle fuel-efficiency requirements and signed off on Congress' repeal of stream-pollution restrictions that had threatened to hinder some coal mining activity. He is also due to take steps this week toward opening up vast new offshore regions for oil and gas production — a sharp break from the limits Obama imposed late in his second term.

More quietly, the administration has postponed Energy Department efficiency standards for commercial and consumer appliances such as freezers and boilers, withheld grants for research into next-generation energy technologies, and ordered the government to revise a metric called the "social cost of carbon" that seeks to factor the impacts of climate change into regulatory actions. Administration lawyers have also persuaded appellate judges to postpone rulings on several Obama-era rules facing industry challenges, giving Trump's agencies more time to pull them back for reworking.

Rhodium's analysis of the effect of Trump's executive order comes with plenty of caveats: It assumes that cities and states will fail to fill the gap in federal policy, and that a climate advocate will not take over the White House in 2020. It also does not allow for faster-than-expected advances in renewable energy technologies — notably battery storage — that could accelerate the shift to wind and solar power.

But Rhodium also doesn't include other measures that Trump could take, such as reneging on a 2016 treaty to limit the production of potent greenhouse gases known as hydrofluorocarbons. That agreement by itself could forestall 0.5 degrees Celsius in global warming during this century, according to U.N. estimates. The Paris agreement is meant to prevent the rise in average global temperatures from exceeding 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Rhodium's partners include Trevor Houser, who was a top outside adviser to the Clinton campaign on energy issues.

Climate researchers say the world is so close to a tipping point that any backsliding would be dangerous.

For example, carbon dioxide levels in the Earth's atmosphere have been hovering above 405 parts per million since November, the highest on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — significantly higher than the 350-parts-per-million level that some leading climate researchers say the world needs to move back to. The estimated change in emissions allowed by Trump's executive order would add 2 parts per million in the next 20 years, according to a rough estimate by Pieter Tans, chief of the Carbon Cycle Greenhouse Gases Group at the NOAA Earth Science Research Laboratory.

Put another way, those extra emissions alone would move the world 4 percent closer to 450 parts per million — the point at which the world still has a better-than-50-percent chance of stabilizing global temperatures, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Failing to stabilize temperatures would could mean intensifying extreme weather events at "unprecedented levels," the OECD says. It could also move the world to a point where temperature and emissions feedback loops make changes in the world's climate change irreversible.

"Thus far, we human beings have mostly controlled climate change through emissions of greenhouse gases," Tans said in an email. "Continuing on this path will likely lead to uncontrolled and potentially very large emissions of [carbon dioxide] and [methane] from the melting of permafrost in the Arctic, to name one plausible feedback effect."

Still, some advocates for deep cuts in carbon emissions, such as Mann, hold out hope that Obama's policies will prove difficult to uproot. They're counting on the courts and resistant federal staffers to stall Trump's plans.

"Bureaucracy can be both a good and bad thing, depending on the circumstances," Mann said in an email. "In this case, I think it may save us.

"Were Democrats to win back one or both houses of Congress in the mid-terms less than two years away, I think that much of the damage could almost certainly be mitigated," he added.

Skeptics of Obama's policies argue that the U.S. would absorb most of the pain of the Paris agreement while countries such as China and India — the world's biggest and fourth-biggest carbon polluters, respectively — would get off easy. Both countries are expected to produce more carbon dioxide in 2030 than they did in 2015.

"The Obama administration made really ambitious commitments in Paris with no clear way to get there under current regulations," said Robert Dillon, an energy expert with the American Council for Capital Formation, who contends that Trump's decision to ease off on Obama's carbon rules puts the U.S. on a level playing field.

"Any time you have a concern where you're tying one hand behind your back to compete in the global market, there are legitimate concerns about how the country remains competitive and improves the standard of living for American families," he added.

Meanwhile, Trump's rollback puts pressure on other countries to decide how to respond. The U.S. already butted heads with other G-7 nations this month when Energy Secretary Rick Perry's insistence that the Paris agreement should not be mentioned scuttled a joint communique.

Some foreign leaders are choosing to be optimistic, for now.

"I don't see the world backing off," Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin told reporters last week in Washington. Instead she expressed concern about the next stage of the Paris agreement, which calls for nations to further cut their greenhouse gases.

"We are concerned that some might point to the U.S. and say, 'We don't have to raise ambitions now if the U.S. is not going to take part of this,'" she said. "And the U.S., of course, has a great responsibility for the historic emissions. That makes it a really bad chase to the bottom."

March For Science -- Democrats Try to Claim Science

Science joined the #resistance over the weekend, or so the organizers of the March for Science would have us believe.

Thousands of demonstrators marched in Washington, D.C., and in cities around the country under the banner of science and in the spirit of the Women's March opposing President Donald Trump back in January.

The march had its share of harmless and charmingly nerdy science enthusiasts holding signs like "I was told there would be pi" and "I was told to bring a sine" (get it?). Who can possibly object to people, who may have waited a lifetime for the opportunity, finally getting a chance to make trigonometry puns in public?

The problem with the march was its larger ambition to enlist science in the anti-Trump movement. Not only does this represent a jaw-dropping misunderstanding of science — the Large Hadron Collider has no position on whether Trump is violating the emoluments clause —

but if taken seriously, it will damage the reputation of science.

The left loves to argue that Republicans are anti-science, usually by accusing them of being budding theocrats who value only faith and not science. Since Donald Trump is no one's idea of a theocrat, the latest argument is that his "alternative facts" administration is an implicit assault on the basis of science. It is certainly the case that Trump says things that aren't true, although science has survived other fast-and-loose presidents. No one thought that Bill Clinton, during the course of his various falsehoods, was somehow calling into doubt the second law of thermodynamics.

Trump has pronounced on all sorts of things over the decades, but so far the scientific method has escaped his wrath on Twitter. Indeed, putting up glass-encased 98-story buildings implies a certain acceptance of the laws of physics and a respect for engineering.

This is why it's absurd for any clique to claim ownership of science, which belongs to all of us.

No one disputes that the modern world rests on an edifice of scientific advance, and that we owe much of our material well-being to it. No one wants to argue with Francis Bacon, one of the philosophic founders of modern science, about the importance of empiricism. No one wants to dispute the work of Newton, Bohr, or Curie.

This doesn't mean that science should be apotheosized. It is value-neutral. The same science that gave us penicillin gave us the hydrogen bomb. As Francis Bacon himself put it, "The mechanical arts are of ambiguous use, serving as well for hurt as for remedy."

For the marchers, though, science stands for all that is good and true, and it just happens to bless their preferred policy positions, especially on climate change. The passion and certitude they bring to the climate debate doesn't exactly speak to a rigorously scientific disposition. The advocates on climate change often use "science" as a weapon, even as they spin out apocalyptic scenarios that go well beyond the current scientific consensus.

At its worst, the March for Science was tinged with the spirit of three scientists who wrote an anti-Trump essay calling on scientists at universities to consider work slowdowns and strikes. How else to respond "when one party is committed to ignoring science at best, and leveraging it for systemic oppression at worst?" In this view, scientists are simply social-justice warriors in lab coats, political activists who are good at math.

All of this is a mistake, no matter how much Bill Nye, "the Science Guy," might have delighted at the turnout for the March for Science. Since the country currently lacks for institutions that exist outside the nation's poisonous partisan divide, besides the military and perhaps big-league sports, it is a disservice to try to enlist science for an ideology.

It is the marchers who are the ones trying, literally, to politicize science. It deserves better defenders.

POLITICO Trump's First 100 Days: What Mattered, And What Didn't

By Michael
Grunwald

The indelible takeaway from Donald Trump's presidential campaign was his unrelenting assault on political norms, the countless things he said and did that serious candidates just weren't supposed to say or do. It was a reality-show circus of OMG, WTF and sometimes LOL, and it was all supposed to be disqualifying: his birtherism and vaccine denialism, his racially charged critique of a Mexican-American judge, his mockery of a disabled reporter and a Gold Star family, his insinuations that Vince Foster and Antonin Scalia were murdered, his refusals to release his tax returns or disavow David Duke, and finally his taped musings about where he likes to grab women. But none of it disqualified him. The norms that White House aspirants can't make up crime statistics or admit they've never read a presidential biography or publicly urge foreign powers to hack their opponents' emails are now ex-norms. You can't even say that violating them is unpresidential, because their violator has been the president for almost 100 days.

The indelible takeaway from those first 100 days is that Trump's assault on political norms has continued. In fact, he has violated

Washington norms so casually and constantly that his norm-breaking is becoming normalized. That shattering of protocol and expectations may turn out to be more consequential than any of his massive policy promises or modest policy achievements to date.

Some of Trump's he-did-what? provocations have been consequential in their own right, like his explosive accusation that President Barack Obama wiretapped him, which he refused to retract even after it was debunked, or his conspiracy theory about 3 million illegal voters, which many see as a prelude to a push to restrict voting rights. He's flouted democratic norms with banana-republic attacks on journalists, judges, protesters, the Congressional Budget Office and other critics beyond his control. He's flouted anti-corruption norms by refusing to divest his business empire, spending almost every weekend at his own clubs, and making little apparent effort to avoid conflicts of interest. He's defied the Washington hypocrisy police with incredibly brazen flip-flops on Syria, Medicaid cuts, China, NATO, Goldman Sachs and the nefariousness of presidential golf. And even though he had no experience in government, he's shocked Washington by

surrounding himself with aides with no experience in government: his son-in-law, his daughter, the former head of a right-wing website and a Goldman executive.

What's also shocking is what's no longer shocking, like the president getting his news from "Fox & Friends," or calling the Senate minority leader a "clown," or obsessively trashing Hillary Clinton months after he beat her, or congratulating Turkey's leader for rolling back democratic rules, or repeatedly threatening to let the individual health insurance market collapse to score political points, or suggesting his speech to Congress was the best speech ever given to Congress, or appearing to suggest he thinks his "good friend" Luciano Pavarotti and even Frederick Douglass are still alive. Trump's Twitter feed is a through-the-looking-glass jumble of baseless allegations, over-the-top boasts and all-caps reactions to whatever he just saw on TV. Even more amazing: Trump's national security adviser was fired after just three weeks in office for lying about his contacts with Russia, and his White House aides apparently helped engineer a charade where the House Intelligence chairman pretended to uncover evidence supporting the president's impulsive wiretapping tweets. The thing is,

whenever there's amazing news, new amazements soon overshadow it, and the national conversation moves along.

The point is that the unprecedented is becoming commonplace. Imagine how the media would have reacted if Obama had signed a party-line bill to let oil companies hide their payments to foreign governments, or if his spokeswoman had urged Americans to buy products from his daughter. Imagine how Fox News would have reacted if Obama's White House had released (and defended!) a Holocaust remembrance statement that didn't mention Jews, or if his wife had decided to live in Manhattan instead of the White House. In the Trump era, it all blends into Trump-being-Trump background noise. We barely notice when he promises to negotiate bilateral trade deals with European countries that are legally prohibited from negotiating bilateral trade deals, or when his administration puts out a press release consisting entirely of administration officials praising him. It wasn't a big story when Trump's nominees for Army secretary, Navy secretary and deputy commerce secretary withdrew because they couldn't unwind their financial conflicts, even though their would-be boss didn't even try to unwind his. Remember his trash talk about

Arnold Schwarzenegger's ratings at the National Prayer Breakfast? Did his White House really accuse the British of spying on him, too? The bar for surprise rises every day.

Trump's critics complain that his constant envelope-pushing distracts from more important news, like the Russia scandal, his failure to deliver on his campaign policy agenda, and his unwillingness to drain the Washington swamp he once railed against. And yes, it's important to focus on issues that matter. Trump's "Contract with the American Voter" listed 10 pieces of legislation in his "100-day plan," and it's a big deal that he and the Republican-controlled Congress have passed zero of the 10. He keeps saying he's achieved far more in his first 100 days than any previous president, but other than the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and a tougher approach to undocumented immigrants, he hasn't implemented many tangible changes to federal policy. It's just as important to recognize that he's proposed some radical shifts for the future—lower taxes, less regulation of businesses, a reversal of Obama's climate and civil rights policies—and installed movement conservatives in positions where they could help make them happen. Presidents also have a lot of power to affect the world, and Trump has already begun talking tough with nuclear North Korea, sending missiles into Syria and dropping mega-bombs on Afghanistan.

Still, the weirdness and norm-breaking of this White House isn't a distraction from what matters. It matters.

It matters partly because it reflects Trump's apparent belief, most famously expressed in his observation that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue without losing votes, that he can do whatever he wants without repercussions. It also matters because Trump's whoppers about everything from his inaugural crowds to media cover-ups of terrorist attacks actually do have repercussions for his credibility, serving notice to the world that he'll invent his own facts to suit his own narratives. Trump promised to be unpredictable in foreign affairs, and he has kept that promise, but his turn-on-a-dime decisions to bomb Syria and declare NATO no longer obsolete also served notice to the world that nothing America says can be taken for granted. If the Trump administration says a naval carrier is heading toward North Korea, it might be, or maybe not.

This is uncharted territory for America, and that's the real

takeaway from Trump's first 100 days. In this fifth edition of Politico's Did-It-Matter-Meter, we'll try once again to evaluate the immediate impact and potential significance of major Trump-era developments. But honesty compels us to admit that we don't really know how this Life Comes At You Fast presidency will shake out. Nobody does.

The Short List: On a recent cold opening of "Saturday Night Live," a fake President Trump—played by Alec Baldwin, whose impression of Trump, according to the real Trump, "just can't get any worse"—asked Vice President Mike Pence to read his list of 100-day accomplishments. "Of course, sir," Pence replied. "Nominated Neil Gorsuch."

"God, I love that list," Trump replied. "What a beautiful long list."

That was an exaggeration, but not a wild exaggeration. Trump seemed to think he could snap his fingers and reverse the Obama era, but so far, he has gotten very little done. His travel ban was blocked in court, so he revised it, but the revised version was blocked as well. The Republican effort to repeal and replace Obamacare crashed and burned. Trump pledged to undo Obama's Wall Street reforms, carbon regulations and tax hikes on the rich, but they're all still in place. He hasn't pulled the U.S. out of the Paris climate agreement, reversed Obama's opening to Cuba, scuttled Obama's nuclear deal with Iran, or moved the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, either. Not only has he failed to persuade Mexico to pay for his border wall, he's failed to persuade Congress to pay for it. His entire budget was declared dead on arrival on Capitol Hill, and there's still no sign of his trillion-dollar infrastructure plan. He's signed a lot of executive orders, but most of them were glorified memos, signaling policy desires without forcing policy changes. He did sign bills blocking 13 out of more than 20,000 Obama-era regulations from taking effect, but they merely preserved a small slice of the status quo, and he hasn't signed any other substantive legislation. Of course, getting a Scalia-style conservative on the high court was a victory that produced real change; Gorsuch could swing U.S. jurisprudence to the right for decades. Trump also formally pulled the U.S. out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal—although Congress hadn't ratified it, and wasn't going to ratify it—and began the process of trying to renegotiate NAFTA, although that could be as difficult as replacing Obamacare. Whether or not Trump is right to boast that he's put together "the highest IQ of any Cabinet ever assembled," he's stocked that Cabinet with some

extremely conservative forces for change, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions, budget director Mick Mulvaney, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, and Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price. Elections do have consequences, and those men will steer their agencies in new directions.

So far, though, 532 of the 554 key jobs requiring Senate confirmation are still empty—and Trump has not even nominated a candidate for 508 of them. In general, the story of his first 100 days has been a words story, not a deeds story, an embarrassing contrast to Obama's action-packed early presidency. Trump has seized control of the national narrative and taken up residence in the national headspace, but he hasn't put much of a stamp on federal law, federal rules or the federal bureaucracy. So far he's been a showhorse, not a workhorse, and in Washington, showhorses often struggle to produce lasting change.

Immediate Impact: 4. Potential significance: 8.

A Change in the Climate: Perhaps the most significant example of the gap between Trump's rhetoric and early achievements is in the high-stakes arena of climate policy. The president has promised to scrap Obama's Clean Power Plan regulating carbon and other EPA restrictions on electric plants, ease fuel efficiency mandates for automakers, abandon the Paris climate deal and bring coal mining back to life. He hasn't done any of those things yet. He's gotten a lot of press for signing executive orders proclaiming his desire to do many of them, but that's not the same thing. Utilities are continuing to phase out coal. Clean energy is still on the rise. Trump's administration probably won't enforce rules that limit carbon, mercury, ozone, methane and other fossil-fuel pollution too vigorously, but it won't be easy for him to kill the rules.

Still, as the scientific community and national security establishment warn of a climate emergency, it's undeniably consequential that Trump has transformed the U.S. government from the leader of the world's efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to a hostile bystander. The climate doesn't care that the president has dismissed global warming as a made-in-China hoax; last year was the hottest year ever recorded on Earth, and last month the extent of Arctic sea ice melted to a record low. Nevertheless, the U.S. was the only country that refused to reaffirm its commitment to the Paris deal at a recent meeting of G-7 energy ministers. Trump's budget proposed

to slash climate programs—it dismissed NASA's climate research as overly "Earth-centric"—and Mulvaney called them all "a waste of your money." Pruitt has been a climate skeptic as well as an avid opponent of EPA regulations, and now he's in charge of them.

Trump can't stop climate progress. But he can slow it down, when the fate of the planet may depend on full-speed-ahead.

Immediate impact: 2. Potential significance: 9.

You're Not Welcome: The domestic policy area where Trump is having the biggest impact is immigration enforcement, because it's the area where he has the most discretion. He hasn't changed any laws or built any walls, but he has sent a powerful message that undocumented immigrants are no longer welcome here, and he has ended the Obama administration's policy of leaving noncriminal aliens alone. His tougher approach has produced instant results: The Border Patrol said its arrests at the southern border were down 67 percent in March, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests of noncriminal aliens inside the U.S. have more than doubled. America's undocumented population—which remained steady around 11 million during the Obama years, despite Trump's claims of an overwhelming surge—seems likely to shrink significantly under Trump, through voluntary and involuntary removals.

This is obviously a promise kept. And even if you think the Obama administration was right to focus scarce enforcement resources on felons rather than undocumented hotel maids and tomato pickers, Trump has the right to enforce the law. But he is causing a lot of stress in immigrant communities; families are living in fear of getting torn apart, and many American-born children now worry that their undocumented parents might get detained and deported while they're at school. Trump has also demonized the undocumented as dangers to ordinary Americans, ordering regular government reports on crimes they commit as well as a new federal office to care for their victims. At the same time, Trump's Fortress America attitude—even while his proposed ban on new refugees remains on hold—is sending a stay-away message to the world. Tourism officials have reported a distinct "Trump Slump" as foreign bookings decline, with Travel Weekly estimating a drop of 6.8 percent.

The U.S. hasn't always honored the "give us your tired, your poor" creed on the Statue of Liberty, but we've always been seen as a welcome-

mat country, sending an inviting message to the world. Trump sees us more as a doormat country, letting the world walk all over us, and that's something even a showhorse president can change.

Immediate impact: 5. Potential significance: 8.

From Russia With Love: The slow-rolling scandal over Russia's meddling in the U.S. election is clearly a threat to the Trump agenda and the Trump presidency, but it's pretty complicated to follow. And Trump has further muddied the waters with his unfounded allegations about political surveillance, which have helped his allies spin bombshell revelations about his campaign—like the Justice Department getting a warrant to investigate whether one of his foreign policy advisers was a Russian spy—into talking points about Obama overreach. The Trump campaign's connections to Russia have the makings of a Watergate-style nightmare, but Trump's allegations about Obama, if true, would also be a Watergate-style nightmare. It's just that there's no evidence for Trump's charges, while the Russia revelations continue to drip, drip, drip.

Here's a simple way to think about it. Watergate required a byzantine connect-the-dots investigation to connect low-level burglars to the president, while two of the figures at the heart of Kremtingate, Michael Flynn and Paul Manafort, were Trump's *national security adviser* and *campaign manager*. Both have a history of ties to Russia, and both are reportedly under FBI investigation for neglecting until recently to register as foreign agents—Flynn for Turkey, which has cozied up Russia in recent years, and Manafort for his work with a Ukrainian political party with close Moscow ties. Flynn was fired after just three weeks in the White House for lying about his chats with the Russian ambassador, and has asked Congress for immunity to testify about what he knows. Manafort has said he did not knowingly talk to Russian intelligence officers while working for Trump, but top presidential campaign officials don't usually need to include the word "knowingly" in statements like that. Those guys were major figures in Trump world. There's no need for elaborate connecting of dots beyond them.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Sessions, who chaired the Trump campaign's national security committee, was forced to recuse himself from his department's Russia investigation after misleading Congress about his own

contacts with Russia. House Intelligence Chairman Devin Nunes had to step aside from his committee's investigation as well, after his odd Kabuki show designed to promote Trump's surveillance conspiracy theory was exposed as a sham. Trump's connections to Russia are still shrouded in mystery, but he did publicly call for Russia to hack Clinton's emails, he was bizarrely solicitous of Vladimir Putin on the trail, and wide-ranging investigations are never good news for a president. The fate of his White House could depend on the results, and this story will be a major headache for him until the results are in.

Immediate impact: 4. Potential significance: 9.

Team Players. Democrats have spent Trump's first 100 days raging about his Russia connections, his business conflicts, his unreleased taxes, his government-funded trips to Mar-a-Lago and just about everything else he's said or done. But the Republicans who control Congress have not. In fact, when the federal ethics watchdog criticized Trump's conflicts of interest, House Oversight Committee chairman Jason Chaffetz threatened to subpoena the watchdog. And when damning news has aired about Russia, Chaffetz, Nunes and other Republicans have vowed to get to the bottom of who leaked the news, not the actual news. After its ferocious, interminable, generally fruitless investigations of the Obama administration, the GOP has shown little interest in oversight of the Trump administration.

This is perhaps predictable in this hyperpartisan era, even though Trump repeatedly attacked the Republican establishment and the Republican Congress on the trail. After all, GOP lawmakers will depend on Trump supporters to reelect them in 2018. The president's overall approval ratings have hovered around a historically abysmal 40 percent, but more than 80 percent of Republicans still back him, so congressional Republicans are reluctant to buck him. The big exception was the GOP health care bill, which was so wildly unpopular—one poll found just 17 percent of the public liked it—that House leaders couldn't cobble together a majority to pass it. Still, for the most part, Capitol Hill Republicans have generally aligned themselves with Trump, voicing few objections to any of his Cabinet picks, acknowledging him as the leader of their team. "Saturday Night Live" parodied this phenomenon, too, in this trailer for a movie about a brave Republican—TBD—who stood up to Trump.

There are still a fair amount of Never Trump Republicans on Twitter and in think tanks, but not in Congress.

That's crucial, because as long as Republicans continue to support Trump and hold majorities in Congress, he won't be impeached or probably even seriously investigated. On the other hand, if GOP lawmakers start to distance themselves, everything could be fair game, and Trump's hopes for his legislative agenda could go from slim to none. GOP leaders were thrilled to get Justice Gorsuch, and they're hoping for more victories on judges, tax cuts and other conservative priorities. But in swing districts and swing states, Republicans know there could be risks to aligning with the president if he doesn't get more popular.

Immediate impact: 4. Potential significance: 9.

Who Is Trump? Why Is He Here? One reason Washington Republicans are sticking with Trump is that, when you look past the noise, he has mostly tried to govern like a typical Washington Republican, more corporatist/globalist than populist/nationalist. He has already broken his populist promises to fight cuts to Medicaid, stay out of the Syria conflict, and declare China a currency manipulator. He signed all 13 of those Republican bills striking down Obama-era rules, even though most of them reflected the desires of GOP-friendly business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce rather than his drain-the-swamp campaign rhetoric. He's stocked his administration with Goldman alumni and K Street lobbyists, and he's relying heavily on the CEOs he keeps shuttling into the White House for advice.

The big proxy battle for this struggle over the soul of Trumpism has been the vicious White House rift between chief strategist Steve Bannon, the former Breitbart media mogul who is the keeper of Trump's populist/nationalist flame, and more establishment-minded advisers like Trump's daughter Ivanka; son-in-law, Jared Kushner; and top economic aide Gary Cohn. Bannon was winning early on, engineering a slot for himself on the National Security Council, inspiring a variety of President Bannon memes and a Time magazine cover that angered his boss. But lately his star is fading, as he's lost repeated policy battles, gotten kicked off the NSC and suffered the indignity of a public presidential warning that he isn't indispensable. Bannon is the White House aide who best represents Trump's middle finger of a campaign—the racial and cultural

resentments, the America First assault on the free-trade, global-cop Republican establishment, the appeal to working men at VFW halls rather than businessmen at country clubs. Bannon still keeps a whiteboard of Trump's campaign promises in his office. But the dimming of his star suggests that Trump is embracing a more standard Republican ideology, ditching his fight-the-power campaign rhetoric.

Then again, Trump used to be a pro-choice Democrat; he's never been driven or constrained by deep ideological principles. If standard Republican ideology doesn't work out for him, he could easily evolve again.

Immediate Impact: 6. Potential Significance: 8.

The Community Organizer: The 2016 election was a debacle for Democrats, and the aftermath has featured a predictably circular firing squad. But Trump may be achieving the impossible, mobilizing Bernie Bros and Wall Street Dems and Hillary dead-enders toward the common purpose of fighting him. The anti-Trump energy has been obvious ever since the day after his inauguration, when Women's March protests attracted more people than the inauguration itself. The Trump backlash has helped a populist Bernie Dem in Kansas and a more conventional Clinton Dem in Georgia run competitive races in special House elections in deep-red districts, and it could conceivably drive a Democratic wave in 2018.

Or maybe it won't. Democrats not named Barack Obama have not fared well at the polls in recent years, and they face a tough political map in 2018. But the resistance to Trump, like the tea party resistance to Obama, is already making a substantive mark; ferocious grass-roots opposition to the Republican health care bill helped scuttle it in Congress. The mobilization against Trump could persuade vulnerable Republicans to resist him on issues like tax reform as well. And if Democrats do manage to convert Trump's unpopularity into House or Senate majorities next year, it will completely scramble American politics.

Immediate Impact: 4. Potential Significance: 9.

Tough Town: Trump is obviously a successful man with a flair for communication and self-promotion. He resurrected his business career after bankruptcies; he stunned the political world by winning the presidency. He's often underestimated.

Still, it must be said: He seems totally clueless about Washington.

It was no secret during the campaign that Trump knew virtually nothing about public policy, but it's still been eye-opening to watch that play out on the White House stage. "Nobody knew health care could be so complicated," he said at one event, which was like saying that nobody knew Geico could save you 15 percent on your car insurance. Trump has also admitted that he dropped his opposition to the Export-Import Bank after a brief chat with the CEO of Boeing, the biggest beneficiary of the Export-Import Bank, and that he believed China controlled North Korea before a brief chat with Chinese President Xi Jinping. "After listening for 10 minutes, I realized it's not so easy," Trump said.

In fairness, Trump never claimed he was a policy wonk. He always said he would rely on his common sense and his instincts rather than briefing books and study. But he did claim he was a master negotiator, and so far the author of *The Art of the Deal* has shown no feel whatsoever for the art of the Washington deal. He summoned the House Freedom Caucus to the Oval Office to try to muscle them into supporting his health care bill, to no avail; he also threatened them on Twitter with primary challenges, to no avail. He's been just as ham-handed with Democrats on health care, infrastructure and the budget; he noisily demanded that they fund his border wall, but when they refused, he backed down. His assumption that he could easily bully Mexico into paying for the wall and granting big concessions on NAFTA looks wrong, too. He hasn't made an

actual deal yet on anything. He never seems to recognize how much leverage he has or doesn't have, or what his negotiating partners might want or need. He just blurts out what he thinks should happen and then distributes the blame when it doesn't happen.

The usual Washington solution to this kind of Washington problem is to bring in a "Washington hand," a fixer who can help the president get things done. But Trump sees himself as his own fixer, working the phones, cutting the deals. It's just not clear whether his particular set of fixing skills can work in D.C. There's some truth to Trump's recent complaint that 100 days is a ridiculous timeline for judging accomplishments—even though he promised unprecedented accomplishments in his first 100 days, then repeatedly declared that he had kept his promise—but he doesn't seem eager to change his approach over the next 100 days. And presidents don't usually get more powerful as time passes without major achievements.

Immediate Impact: 5. Potential Significance: 8.

The Freak Show: Yes, the Trump administration really did hire a massage therapist with no energy experience to run a major office at the Energy Department, and yes, the guy really was fired for calling Muslims "scum sucking maggots of the world" on Twitter. Yes, the president attacked Nordstrom for dropping his daughter's clothing line, and yes, the Chinese government approved 35 of his trademarks almost immediately after he agreed to respect its One China policy. Yes, he had Sarah

Palin, Kid Rock and Ted Nugent to dinner at the White House, and yes, he quasi-endorsed a quasi-fascist in the French election.

The Trump presidency often feels like reality TV. But it's reality. His current showdown with North Korea is a real showdown. His painfully awkward meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel was a real meeting. His news conference where he described his rookie-run, blood-feuding White House as a "fine tuned machine," claimed his Electoral College victory was the largest since Reagan's—it was actually the second-smallest—and asked a black reporter whether she could broker a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus was a real news conference. His tweet urging his 28 million followers to buy a gag book called "Reasons to Vote for Democrats"—the gag is that all 266 pages are blank—was a real tweet.

It wasn't normal, though. Very little about the past 100 days has been normal.

Trump made it clear the day he descended his golden escalator to launch his campaign, and within minutes accused Mexico of sending rapists across the border, that he was not a normal candidate. And he swiftly built his candidacy around a dystopian vision of America that simply wasn't real. Unemployment was falling, not soaring; crime was near a 45-year low, not a 45-year high; illegal immigration was not surging at all. But Trump had tremendous success with his alternative facts, and made it clear during his dark inaugural address about "American carnage" that he'd continue to deploy them in the

White House. He'll decide what's fake news, not the fact-checkers. When Obama was president, the low unemployment rate was "phony," but as his press secretary Sean Spicer sheepishly explained, now that Trump is president, the low unemployment rate isn't phony anymore. That's his story, and he's sticking to it.

This kind of gaslighting works better for messaging than governing. Trump made lots of promises about a terrific theoretical health care plan that would increase coverage and improve care and reduce costs, but when he finally backed an actual health care plan that didn't do any of those things, hardly anybody liked it, and he couldn't browbeat Republicans into passing it. He's promised a wonderful tax reform plan and a fabulous infrastructure plan, too, but he hasn't shared any details yet with anyone on Capitol Hill. Reality has also intruded on his foreign policy promises about swiftly crushing ISIS and fixing NAFTA and showing China who's boss; actual war and diplomacy has turned out to be much harder than theoretical war and diplomacy.

This is why Trump has gotten so little done, and why he's breaking unpopularity records for new presidents. For now, though, only 2 percent of Trump's voters say they regret their vote. They still trust Trump's alternative facts more than reported facts. And they still prefer Trump's norm-breaking to Washington norms.

It's a good bet that he'll keep breaking them. It's anyone's bet how that will turn out.

POLITICO Deep schisms among voters at the 100 day mark

By Jack Shafer

President Donald Trump promised on Election Night to unite the country – but nearly 100 days into his presidency, Americans remain profoundly divided on his policies, from health care to immigration to the environment.

While the general public opposes Trump's plans to dismantle Obamacare, build a wall across the Mexican border and gut the Environmental Protection Agency, Republicans want Trump to push ahead on key campaign promises that have caused some stumbles early into the new administration, according to a new POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll.

Story Continued Below

In the aftermath of the GOP's decision to pull its Obamacare repeal bill from the House floor last month, 60 percent of the general public said they want Trump and Republican lawmakers to work with Democrats to fix Obamacare or move on to other issues. But just as many Republicans, who have been promised by their party for years that the health law would be dismantled, said Trump and Congress shouldn't give up the effort to repeal or replace Obamacare.

"Doing nothing on the Republican side is probably the worst of all options," said Bob Blendon, a Harvard expert on health care policy and public opinion who designed the poll with POLITICO.

Republicans this week are facing heightened pressure to revive the

repeal effort, even as House leaders acknowledged they likely won't pass a plan before the 100-day mark of Trump's presidency despite recent pressure from White House officials. The White House, working with key House Republicans, on Tuesday night finalized text of an amendment meant to bridge intraparty divisions over the repeal effort – but it's unclear if the deal will win enough support to pass the House.

Meanwhile, Democrats are newly energized, particularly by the fight over health care. Thirty-six percent of registered voters said the repeal effort makes them more likely to vote for a Democrat in 2018, while 24 percent said they're more likely to vote Republican. After using Obamacare to rally their base for years, Republican leaders risk depressing voter turnout in the 2018

midterms if they fail to replace the health law.

"There's a nervousness here that Republicans are not energized about doing nothing," Blendon said. "They're trying to get a bill that will energize Republicans."

Glen Bolger, a longtime Republican pollster who co-founded the firm Public Opinion Strategies, stressed that Republican leaders should recognize the country is divided politically and push ahead with repeal.

"They need to do a better job of not worrying about that damn calendar and just worrying about the damn policy," he said.

On immigration, only a third of adults said they favored a border wall, while 72 percent of Republicans support it. Among

those who want the wall, an eye-popping 95 percent said they support construction even if Trump doesn't make Mexico pay for it as he promised throughout the campaign. Congress, hoping to avoid the risk of a government shutdown, isn't planning to include funding to a must-pass spending bill this week. Trump insists that he'll eventually secure the funding.

The public also opposes the administration's immigration

restrictions, which sparked massive protests across the country and have been blocked by the courts. Fifty-five percent of adults oppose the temporary ban on refugees entering the country, while 42 percent support it. Half of adults oppose the temporary immigration ban on six Middle Eastern countries and 46 percent support it.

On both measures, the partisan schisms are striking. However, the general public is more likely to see

the controversial immigration orders as national security measures (53 percent) than an outright ban on Muslims (40 percent).

On the environment, 60 percent of the public oppose Trump's proposal to slash the EPA's budget by 31 percent. A similar number want the United States to remain in the 2015 Paris climate change agreement. However, more than two-thirds of Republicans support the EPA cuts and 56 percent want to withdraw

from the Paris accord, negotiated by Barack Obama's administration.

The poll finds some middle ground on charter schools, an issue that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has championed. A little more than half of adults back charter schools and approve of using public funds to support private nonprofit and religious schools. But support for charter schools plummets to 30 percent if funding is taken away from traditional public schools.

Bloomberg Trump's Next 1,361 Days - Bloomberg View

The Editors

Donald Trump is not wrong: Judging a presidency on its first 100 days is an inherently ridiculous exercise. There is, however, a less ridiculous way to assess Trump's first few months, and he does not fare well.

It's worth noting that when President Franklin Roosevelt first used the 100-day standard in a 1933 radio address, he was referring to Congress's time in session, not his own time in office. In that context it makes some sense -- and a public debate on what this Congress has done in its first 100 days (April 13, but who's counting) would actually be useful. Legislators are supposed to legislate. It's fair to ask what they've accomplished.

A president, by contrast, is supposed to lead, and that is a very different thing. The news media's difficulty distinguishing between the two is another aspect of its embarrassing obsession with this 100-day marker. The president is not the legislator in chief.

A president's most important job during the first 100 days is building a team that will allow him (or her) to succeed in the 1,361 days that follow. In both the public and private sectors, executive leadership begins with hiring talented and qualified people who have both the creativity to conceive of innovative solutions and the competence to carry them out. Strong executives understand that their success depends on putting in place the right team and allowing their deputies to choose their own staff.

Trump has failed both tests. He lags far behind past presidents in filling the senior ranks of government. The Partnership for Public Service, which studies presidential transitions, reports that Trump has nominated people for only 79 of 554 positions that require Senate confirmation. Even some cabinet positions remain unfilled.

Trump has also refused to allow his cabinet members to hire their own staffs, sometimes blacklisting those who spoke critically of him during the campaign. This has slowed down hiring and kept good people that could help advance his agenda out of government. Combining micromanaging with pettiness is a recipe for failure -- and characteristic of someone unaccustomed to managing a large organization.

Another crucial part of an executive's job is getting people to work together, but Trump has failed to get control of the infighting and leaks plaguing the White House. No administration is free from such drama, but Trump's predecessors generally did a good job of keeping private divisions from becoming public distractions.

Trump has failed the 100-day test not because of legislation he failed to get through Congress, but because of the leadership he failed to exert in the executive branch. For his presidency to be a success, he will need to focus more energy on building and empowering a team -- and getting its members to work together.

THE DAILY BEAST President Jeff Sessions's First 100 Days

Betsy Woodruff

From the failed Obamacare repeal to the rise of the 'Goldman gang,' Donald Trump's first 100 days in office may have disappointed the base, but the attorney general has been keeping Trump's campaign promises for him.

Over the last 100 days, one thing has become indisputably clear: More than any other member of President Donald Trump's Cabinet, Attorney General Jeff Sessions is the keeper of the flame.

He unflinchingly advances the president's ideological priorities and frequently appears in conservative media to tout that work. He may be better at keeping Trump's campaign promises than the president is himself. Like Eric Holder before him, he's the ideological lodestar to the president—a true believer's true believer.

In the last 100 days, everyone else has disappointed. House Speaker

Paul Ryan couldn't get his House conference to repeal Obamacare. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley exchanged friendly fire on the Sunday shows over what exactly the administration wanted to do in Syria. Gary Cohn, Jared Kushner, Steve Mnuchin, and the rest of the Goldman gang have undercut Trump's populist bona fides and reportedly muscled out the White House's most ideological senior staff. Mike Flynn got axed, K.T. McFarland got shipped to Singapore, and Betsy DeVos—well, she's trying.

But as bedlam has unfolded at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, six blocks east in a quiet office on the fifth floor of the imposing Robert F. Kennedy Department of Justice Building, Sessions has busily kept Trump's campaign promises for him. The attorney general is prioritizing immigration prosecutions, delighting police unions, perusing the border to warn would-be undocumented immigrants to stay away, and rolling

back the Justice Department's litigation against voter ID laws.

He generated extraordinary opposition from the moment his nomination was announced, with Democrats and civil rights activists ripping into his stances on immigration, policing, and voting rights. A back-bench Democratic congressman recently called him "a racist and a liar," and one of his Senate colleagues, Cory Booker, took the unprecedented step of testifying against him at his confirmation hearing. None of that has slowed Sessions.

"I think he's one of the most successful individuals in Washington right now," said John Ashcroft, George W. Bush's first attorney general. "It's an agenda which he helped shape in the campaign and it's an agenda with which he's very comfortable."

Sessions has demonstrated a high comfort level with making sweeping changes, and fast. He reversed the previous administration's decision to stop contracting with private

prisons, he directed every U.S. Attorney's office to make someone responsible for overseeing prosecutions of immigration offenses, and directed those offices to focus on going after people who illegally re-enter the U.S. after being deported. He sent more than two dozen immigration judges to the border to speed up deportations, and he moved quickly to hire dozens more. He's also threatened to cut federal grant funding to cities like New York and Chicago that block their law enforcement officers from fully cooperating with the feds on immigration enforcement, sending a shiver of fear through city mayors and managers.

Sessions's most ardent opponents and devoted supporters agree on one thing: He's incredibly predictable. Through his decades in public life, he's never flinched in his opposition to illegal immigration, his skepticism about the Justice Department's use of court orders to push for police reform, and his support for tough-on-crime drug enforcement.

"He's been a very consistent voice in opposition to any number of civil rights issues," said Sherrilyn Ifill, the president of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "No one can say that they didn't know who he was."

"There's a heightened consciousness about what he represents, about this administration and where it stands on civil rights, and as a result we have calls like never before, support like we haven't seen in a very long time," she added. "We are inundated with offers of people saying, 'How can I help?'"

On policing in particular, Sessions is poised to undercut much of President Obama's legacy. During Obama's presidency, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department investigated a host of police departments for civil rights violations and then negotiated court-enforced agreements—called consent decrees—with them. Civil rights advocates cheered that effort as the only way the federal government could effectively pressure troubled departments to embrace reform.

But many conservatives and police unions said the agreements were meddling federal overreach and only served to discourage police officers. Sessions shares those concerns and has ordered staff to review all current and pending

consent decrees with an eye to making changes that could boost officer morale. Civil rights advocates have ripped Sessions's decision.

"He is picking and choosing which laws he intends to enforce," said Ifill. "The impact is that those of us who do this work are stepping up and having to expend our resources to fill in and stand strong where the DOJ has failed to enforce civil rights laws."

Ashcroft, however, praised Sessions's move.

"I think one of the big challenges for the country right now is what has been the prior administration's disrespect for the rule of law and, as a result, disrespect for law enforcement officials," he said. "And the idea that we've had law enforcement officials whose lives have been taken in ambush attacks—and nearly a couple dozen of them in the last year—is a terrible outcome when you consider what the rule of law means, not only for their personal safety but to the idea of liberty in America."

Sessions has criticized the federal judge who blocked Trump's travel ban, iterated and reiterated and reiterated that all undocumented immigrants—DREAMer or not—are subject to deportation, and become one of the Trump Cabinet's most visible faces in conservative media.

He's appeared several times on Fox News (twice with Tucker Carlson, the new center of its prime-time lineup) and called in to a bevy of conservative talk radio shows—Hugh Hewitt, Laura Ingraham, Mark Levin, Lars Larson, Howie Carr, you name it.

Whether it's on purpose or not, Sessions is becoming the White House's de facto emissary to its base. And the base is happy. Mark Krikorian, who heads the immigration restrictionist think tank Center for Immigration Studies, told *The Daily Beast* he's delighted with Sessions's time at Justice thus far.

"Sessions is Trump's Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," he said. "If Sessions ever gets to the point where he says, 'Look, I can't work for this administration anymore,' then it's all over for Trump."

"I'm certain that Sessions will do the right thing," Krikorian added. "I don't have to hope about that."

Sessions could face some of the thorniest challenges confronting an attorney general in recent memory—namely, policing the Trump White House, where some aides appear to treat ethics rules with reckless abandon.

"I'm a partisan," said Matt Miller, a spokesman for Eric Holder during

his time as attorney general. "But this is not a partisan statement: The people in this White House are going to do a lot more legally questionable things than happened in other White Houses. They're just sloppy and inexperienced, and in some ways, I think, morally compromised. Your Seb Gorkas of the world are not your typical White House employees."

Sessions has already recused himself from anything related to investigations of connections between members of the Russian government and Trump campaign officials during the election—a recusal that came after *The Washington Post* reported that he didn't disclose to the Senate Judiciary Committee that he himself had met with the Russian ambassador.

That didn't appear to slow Sessions down. Instead, he's moved with inexorable efficiency to advance Trump's agenda. While Congress dithers and Cabinet secretaries argue among themselves, the attorney general has used his extraordinary power as the nation's chief law enforcement officer to start dismantling Obama's signature endeavors—impervious, thus far, to extraordinary levels of outside criticism.

"The dogs may bark," Ashcroft said, "but the caravan moves on."



Republicans control all of Washington. Why aren't they winning more?

Apr. 5th, 2017

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April 25, 2017 Washington—Republicans have a majority in both the House and Senate, and there's a Republican in the White House. So why does it seem the GOP doesn't fully control the levers of Washington power?

The party hasn't been able to repeal Obamacare, after all. An upcoming tax package remains a work in progress. Beyond that, the legislative outlook is hazy. Maybe they'll get around to an infrastructure bill. But that's far from a sure thing.

Like many US chief executives before him, President Trump is discovering that partisan dominance isn't a magic button. There are numerous impediments to a party working its will in national governance, even if it has a congressional majority and holds the executive branch.

One is the particular interplay of the president's personality and congressional leaders. But perhaps

the biggest is the very nature of the US political system. There are only two major parties, meaning that by definition both will have numerous factions. That guarantees lots of colorful internal disagreement.

"Presidents have learned the hard way they can't always count on their parties supporting them," says Brian Balogh, an associate professor of history at the University of Virginia and co-host of the podcast "BackStory with the American History Guys."

Of course, as far as party leaders are concerned, unitary control is still a lot better than the alternative. House and Senate majorities, combined with the Oval Office, have produced some of the most productive periods in US history, as far as passage of major laws is concerned.

Passing bills is just plain hard

The New Deal began with a historic spate of legislation passed by a Democratic Congress and signed by Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first 100 days or so in 1933. A second New Deal in

1935 and 1936 produced major additions such as Social Security and rural electrification.

Lyndon Johnson used large Democratic majorities won in 1964 to enact his Great Society, including Medicare, the Voting Rights Act, and other milestone bills.

With those events as context, it's easy to believe that anytime one party bestrides Washington, big things should result. But that's just not the case. History is also full of times when presidents and congresses of the same party just couldn't get in synch.

"Unified control is not a silver bullet. There are a lot of barriers to a party working its will," said Sarah Binder, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a political science professor at George Washington University, at a National Press Foundation seminar earlier this year.

One barrier is obvious to anyone who has spent time in D.C. — passing bills is just hard.

National legislation is complicated business. Big bills attract lots of attention and comment and lobbying and pressure from constituents. This can weigh against what party leaders want to do. At the least, it slows the process down.

"These things look very simple ... when you are looking in from the outside. As we know, being here, these are difficult things to get done," says Sen. John Boozman (R) of Arkansas, interviewed on his way to an evening vote.

A second barrier is the variable nature of the relationship between Capitol Hill and the White House. Democrat Jimmy Carter famously had a difficult time working with a Democratic-controlled Congress, in part because Speaker Tip O'Neill and some top Carter staffers did not get along.

Republican Herbert Hoover had the same problem. He had little experience working with Congress, and the conservatives of his party viewed him as suspiciously progressive. Thus the GOP-

controlled Congress paid their party's president little heed.

Fault lines within the GOP

But perhaps the biggest reason that one-party control isn't overwhelming is that the parties themselves aren't homogeneous. In European democracies there are lots of parties for people of all political persuasions – Greens, Social Democrats, Conservatives, Radicals, etc. In the American democracy most of those groups cram into the two major parties around which the nation's political life revolves.

Democrats and Republicans are coalitions. That creates fault lines and lots of opportunity for partisan infighting.

"These factions are what has done in the best intentions of presidents of both parties," says Brian Balogh of the University of Virginia.

Southern conservative Democrats went along with the early stages of FDR's New Deal, for instance, but by 1937 they weren't happy with where the Democratic

administration was going. They started to put a brake on things, legislatively speaking, infuriating the president.

As a result FDR in 1938 tried to purge such Southern conservatives as Sen. Millard Tydings (D) of Maryland and Sen. "Cotton Ed" Smith (D) of South Carolina by directly supporting more liberal Democrats in primaries. The effort flopped. Of 10 conservatives targeted by FDR, only one lost.

"The others returned to Washington even more antagonistic toward the President. In addition, many other Democrats resented the President's meddling in local affairs," writes William Leuchtenburg, a professor emeritus of history at the University of North Carolina, in an essay on FDR for the Miller Center of Public Affairs.

Republican President Dwight Eisenhower, for his part, entered the White House with a paper-thin GOP majority in both House and Senate. He needed votes from supporters of Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R) of Wisconsin, an

inflammatory disrupter whose irresponsible allegations of Communist influence were tearing apart much of the US government.

Eisenhower hated Senator McCarthy but felt constrained from counterattacks due to the nature of his party coalition at the time.

"A lot of people believe Eisenhower should have spoken out more publicly against McCarthy ... but he didn't do that precisely because he was worried about holding together his party," says Balogh.

A thin GOP margin of control

Now it's President Trump's turn to discover the challenges of trying to deal with the army of cats that is a modern US political party.

That hasn't gone fabulously so far. True, Senate Republicans stood behind new Supreme Court justice Neil Gorsuch. But the attempt to repeal Obamacare was a disaster, as tea party conservatives and more moderate Republicans have entirely different visions of what a GOP replacement for the Affordable Care Act should look like.

Looking forward, Trump and GOP congressional leaders need to keep in mind that their majority is thin – maybe not paper-thin, but not much thicker than an L.L. Bean catalog.

With a 52 to 46 edge in the Senate (two senators are Independents), the GOP has little room to maneuver on big bills. It needs to attract eight Democrats and/or Independents to pass legislation subject to filibuster, a daunting prospect given current levels of partisan animosity.

Perhaps with the artificial 100-day deadline passed, pressure for quick action will abate. A slower approach might result in more party unity.

"You've got to build a coalition and get stuff that you can actually get enacted," says Sen. John Thune (R) of South Dakota, the third ranking member of the Senate GOP leadership, interviewed Monday on his way into a party event. "I think the lesson coming out of a lot of this is that we want to make sure we get it right; it's better than getting it fast."

The New York Times

Donald Trump Is a Real Republican, and That's a Good Thing

Charles R. Kesler

Mr. Trump is not and never was a movement conservative. Apart from a youthful flirtation (is there any other kind?) with Ayn Rand, he has displayed little to no patience for libertarianism, traditionalism, neoconservatism or the other endangered ideological species that the movement has sought to conserve for so many decades. "Don't forget," he told George Stephanopoulos on ABC News during the campaign, "this is called the Republican Party. It's not called the Conservative Party."

He raised in that remark, glancingly, the possibility that conservatism ought to be measured by the standards of Republicanism, or at least ought to be defined in conjunction with Republican principles and history, rather than the other way around – that is, rather than simply taking today's conservatism as the standard to which to hold the Republican Party. Mr. Trump's policies suggest that what he calls his "common sense" conservatism harks back to the principles and agenda of the old Republican Party, which reached its peak before the New Deal.

In those days the party stood for protective tariffs, immigration tied to assimilation (or what Theodore Roosevelt called Americanization), judges prepared to strike down state and sometimes federal laws

encroaching on constitutional limitations, tax cuts, internal improvements (infrastructure spending, in today's parlance) and a firm but restrained foreign policy tailored to the defense of the national interest. Are these not the main elements of Trump administration policies?

It's not that Mr. Trump set out consciously to return the Republican Party to its roots. By temperament and style he's more attracted to President Andrew Jackson, whose portrait now hangs in the Oval Office. "I'm a fan," he said after visiting Jackson's home, the Hermitage, near Nashville, in March. It's more likely that his own independent reading of our situation led him to similar conclusions and to similar ways of thinking. The bread crumbs he dropped at the joint session pointed in that direction. President Trump quoted a well-known statement by Lincoln in 1847 that "the abandonment of the protective policy" will "produce want and ruin among our people." Lincoln was a great protectionist before he became the great emancipator.

But Mr. Trump could have as easily quoted McKinley's 1896 platform (protection is "the bulwark of American industrial independence and the foundation of American development and prosperity") or Coolidge's in 1924. Mr. Trump praised Dwight Eisenhower not for ending the Korean War, say, but for

building "the last truly great national infrastructure program," the Interstate System of highways.

The old Republican Party stretched from Lincoln to Herbert Hoover and continued to influence Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. It dominated national politics to an extent that the modern conservative Republican Party, forged during the Cold War, could only dream of: Between Lincoln's election in 1860 and Hoover's loss to Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, the party elected every president but two (Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson) and controlled both houses of Congress for about 46 of the 72 years. Those halcyon days coincided with a determined embrace of Trump-like policies. It helped, to be sure, that the Democrats spent those decades living down their shameful support of slavery, secession and Jim Crow.

Yet President Trump cannot simply ignore the modern conservative movement. For one thing, its two great successes, victory in the Cold War and reigniting economic growth (through Ronald Reagan's tax cuts, spending policies and regulatory reforms), have made plausible his own visions of post-Cold War foreign policy and a resurgent economy. After those successes, however, modern conservatism mostly marked time and dreamed of limiting government. It had vain imaginings of how to build a

conservative majority in the electorate, but nothing more.

Mr. Trump offers a way out of the stalemate, toward electoral success and ideological renewal that begins with a return to former Republican policies that put Americans first, on trade, immigration, infrastructure and more, which are attractive to millions of working- and middle-class voters.

The old Republican Party also had a sizable progressive or liberal wing. As his fondness for Jackson shows, Mr. Trump is more a populist than a progressive, but in any case he will be fighting mostly over the party's definition of conservatism, trying to stretch an orthodoxy, or a clutch of orthodoxies, to accommodate a governing majority. Nonetheless, he will have some room to reach to his left, or to the center, and could invoke Theodore Roosevelt as a model, without necessarily following T.R. on his later Progressive Party bender.

America today is a very different country from what it was in the 1920s or the late 19th century, when Republicans reigned. So the Trump administration's policies will have to be a mixture of old and new. It's too early to tell whether this mixture will evolve into a doctrine of Trumpism. Few presidents' policies, principles and

persona are so distinctive that they congeal into an “ism.”

The movement that brought him to power is, by Mr. Trump's own admission, almost spontaneous and still strangely nameless. It cannot fill the thousands of executive branch

positions at his disposal; for that, he needs to rely mainly on the broad conservative movement and the Republican Party.

It's likely, then, that his administration will have to maneuver between the older and

the current strains of conservatism, and between the populist and establishment sensibilities. On foreign policy he has demonstrated a pugnacity easily exceeding the old Republican Party's. Though he will move trade policy toward greater

protection, he will fall far short of McKinley's standards.

Donald Trump's populism may be protean, but look for it to move both conservatism and the Republican Party closer to their former selves.



America is getting used to Trump's insanity

By Max Boot

As he approaches his 100th day in office, Donald Trump does not have many achievements or much support. Fewer than 42 percent of Americans approve of his job performance, the lowest level of support of any president at this point in his administration — lower even than Gerald Ford's numbers after pardoning Richard Nixon. But he is benefiting from two trends. First, his base still loves him; his approval rating among Republicans is, I'm sorry to say, 84 percent.

The second trend is harder to discern, and it can't be reduced to numbers, but I am convinced it is real. I refer to the country's growing acceptance of the unacceptable.

People adjust to any situation, no matter how bizarre or abnormal. An alien landing on Earth would be “yuge” news, to use Trump's favorite word, but alien landings every day would quickly become ho-hum. So it is with the outlandish occupant of the Oval Office — he is increasingly being treated as a normal president even though he is anything but.

What was once unthinkable is now unremarkable. There is now a tendency, even among many of my Never Trump friends, to shrug their shoulders at his latest shenanigans. It is simply too difficult to stay outraged nonstop for 100 days, much less for 1,461 days — the length of one presidential term. Trump continues to say and do things that are, by any reasonable standard, egregious, but we notice his offenses less and less because they are such a frequent occurrence.

A few recent examples, big and small, illustrate the point.

—Trump all but endorsed Marine Le Pen for president of France, telling The Associated Press that a terrorist attack in Paris will “probably help her because she is the strongest on borders and she is the strongest on what's been going on in France.” He had not one word of censure for Le Pen in spite of her party's long history of anti-Semitism, racism, anti-Americanism, pro-Putinism, and Holocaust denial. Trump's

statement did not appreciably help Le Pen, who finished second behind the centrist Emmanuel Macron, and it may even have hurt her. But it is inconceivable that any previous president would have offered words of praise for such a fringe figure who is, according to one of her own former advisors, surrounded by “real Nazis.”

— Trump has been outspoken in praising cruel dictators. He rolled out the red carpet for Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, praising this tyrant, who is overseeing mass torture and mass detentions, for having “done a fantastic job in a very difficult situation,” and saying he has the “strong backing” of the United States. Trump did manage to win the release of an American citizen who was held unjustly in Egyptian prison for three years, but he has nothing to say about the many other innocents locked up and abused by Sisi.

Even worse, Trump called Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan to congratulate him on his victory in a rigged referendum that was widely seen as the death knell for Turkish democracy. The U.S. State Department noted that the vote was marred by “irregularities” and an “uneven playing field,” but Trump was silent regarding these abuses. You would have to go back to the Nixon administration to find any precedent for an American president offering such unambiguous support for human rights violations and the destruction of democracy.

— While expressing support for foreign demagogues, Trump consistently criticizes America's staunchest allies. Just last week, he said Canada's measures to support its dairy industry were a “disgrace,” as if the United States didn't engage in its own market-distorting agricultural subsidies, and added, “We're not going to let Canada take advantage [of the United States].” Now he's imposing 20 percent tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber imports. This comes after he had picked fights with other allied leaders, from Mexico to Australia.

— Trump hosted a motley crew — including Kid Rock, Sarah Palin, and Ted Nugent — for dinner on April 19 at the White House, during which they posed for a disrespectful

selfie in front of Hillary Clinton's official portrait as first lady. The real problem, however, was inviting Ted Nugent at all. This is the same Ted Nugent, after all, who referred to former President Barack Obama as a “subhuman mongrel” and a “piece of shit”; who called former Secretary of State Clinton a “toxic cunt” and a “worthless bitch”; who said Obama and Clinton should be “tried for treason & hung”; who said, “I'd like to shoot them dead,” in reference to undocumented immigrants; and who claimed there is a Jewish conspiracy to push gun control. Any one of these comments would have disqualified Nugent from stepping foot into any other White House. Trump, however, spent four hours squiring Nugent and his other guests around the executive mansion.

Trump continues to be a conflict-of-interest disaster area.

Trump continues to be a conflict-of-interest disaster area. Not only has Trump himself recently won coveted trademarks from China, but so has his daughter Ivanka, who is a senior aide to her father in arguable violation of an anti-nepotism law. Both the Trump Organization and Ivanka Trump Marks LLC continue to expand their activities around the world, doing business with companies closely tied to foreign regimes. As the AP notes, “The commercial currents of President Donald Trump's White House are unprecedented in modern American politics, ethics lawyers say.”

— Trump casually bragged in his AP interview that his TV ratings on CBS's *Face the Nation* — or, as he prefers to call it, “Deface the Nation” — are the highest “since the World Trade Center came down.” Coming from any other president, this insensitive comment would have caused days of news coverage; coming from Trump, it's barely noticed.

The problem with the Trump administration, just as with the Trump campaign, is that the outrages come so fast and furious that there is hardly any time to digest any of them before we are on to the next one. As a result, the public becomes numb to what is happening.

This apathy is especially damaging when it comes to Kremlingate — the ties between Trump and Vladimir Putin, who, evidence suggests, intervened in the U.S. election to help elect him. Troubling new connections continue to come to light. Just recently, for example, we learned that the Trump inaugural committee accepted \$1 million from Alexander Shustorovich, who is, as the *Wall Street Journal* notes, “a Russian-American businessman whose business dealings and relationships with top Russian officials and state-owned companies—dealings that prompted the U.S. to refuse to allow him to be part of a uranium deal two decades ago, on national-security grounds—led the Republican National Committee to return a \$250,000 check from him in 2000.”

Yet the Shustorovich donation was not noted until the sixth paragraph of the *Journal* story and was generally ignored by the rest of the news media. Just as little attention has been paid to other Trump-Kremlin connections — such as the secret meetings that Erik Prince, Blackwater founder and brother of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, had in January with Russian representatives in the Seychelles. The Trump campaign claims that Prince was not part of the transition; the *Boston Globe* has assembled compelling evidence that the White House is lying.

Countless other Trump-Kremlin links cry out for investigation, and there is scant reason to think that the Republican-controlled intelligence committees in the House and Senate will be up to the job. There is an obvious need to appoint a special counsel and/or a bipartisan, 9/11-style committee, but that will never happen absent a lot more public pressure than has been evident to date.

Trump doesn't have much support, it is true, but the failure among his many critics to mobilize and maintain a higher level of indignation is letting him get away with his offenses against good taste, sound policy, ethical norms, and possibly even the law itself.



Trump isn't making America great yet: Paul Brandus

Are we great again yet?

President Trump, closing in on his first 100 days, says things are going just fine. "I think we've had one of the most successful 13 weeks in the history of the presidency," he said not long ago. It was only 11 at that point, but whatever.

The truth is that Trump has had *one* successful week. His April 6 attack on Syria sent a message not just to President Bashar Assad but to other "bad hombres" like North Korea's Kim Jong Un, Russia's Vladimir Putin and the mullahs in Tehran, that he's willing to use force when in his view it advances our national security. And the next day, thanks to a parliamentary sleight of hand by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, 49-year-old Neil Gorsuch was confirmed for the Supreme Court, guaranteeing that Trump's influence will be with us for decades to come.

As for the other weeks, here's what comes to mind: Trump weakened regulations that let companies dump toxins into the water supply. His budget and tax proposals offer not a helping hand but a kick in the teeth to those less fortunate than him. He was disappointed that his health care plan, which would have denied coverage to 24 million Americans over the next decade, sank without

a vote. And, despite claiming after Assad's chemical attack that "no child of God should ever suffer such horror," he's fighting to keep those very same children from escaping Assad's hell and coming here.

Ask yourself, honestly: Do those things make us great?

I don't think so. I think they reflect what much of our nation has become: fearful, intolerant and increasingly devoid of confidence or compassion. Two wars, two recessions, two stock market crashes and a psyche-shattering terror attack, all in just the span of a decade and a half, will do that to you. Stir in an immature, narrow-minded, petty and tone-deaf political class and you've got quite a toxic stew.

Let's face it: We're one-sixth into the 21st century and it's not going particularly well. Our setbacks have left us scarred and scared. Trust in our institutions is down. We spend more time arguing with one another than working together for the common good.

Trump's rise has roots in much of this, and since he's now head of state, much of the responsibility for turning things around starts with him. How to become great again? I say he can start with the basics:

First: Presidents set the tone and provide an example for others. The best of them reached out in earnest, and with humility, to those who didn't vote for them. I believe Trump has an added responsibility to do this, given that most Americans didn't vote for him. In this regard, and like Barack Obama before him, Trump's "I won" mentality isn't helpful. If, after the carnage of the Civil War, Lincoln could speak of "malice towards none" and "charity for all," what's Trump's excuse?

Second: Use more — not less — soft power to advance American interests abroad. Our openness, pluralism and so much more has long been part of our global appeal, and brings enormous economic and national security benefits. Yet this seems beyond Trump's grasp. "Speak softly and carry a big stick," Theodore Roosevelt said. Trump just likes the stick part. Big mistake.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Third: Speak and act with honesty and transparency. Trump seems unaware that his failures here are harmful well beyond his own reputation. They further erode public trust and send the wrong message to impressionable younger Americans about public service which, call me naive, ostensibly

remains an honorable profession. Speaking to the nation for the first time after taking over for the disgraced Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford put it best: "In all my public and private acts as your president, I expect to follow my instincts of openness and candor with full confidence that honesty is always the best policy in the end." Americans will always respond to and respect a president who speaks with honesty and good faith. Trump's a failure in this regard, but has an opportunity, if it is within him, to do better. It is in his and more importantly the national interest for him to do so.

Fourth: Honor the pillars of our democracy. Trump swore to preserve, protect and defend the constitution, but talks down parts of it, like that pesky First Amendment that safeguards the media when they challenge or criticize him. The same protections that allow Trump to spout off on Twitter cannot be watered down for others. The president must also stop questioning the integrity of federal judges and congressional opponents who challenge him. The art of disagreeing without being disagreeable has faded; such decency and civility must be restored.

Want to make America great, Mr. President? You can start here.