

Revue de presse américaine

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



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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Mercredi 03 mai, réalisation : Josselin Brémaud



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FRANCE – EUROPE



French anti-terror police arrest 5 just days before presidential election

By Ray Sanchez,
CNN

Story highlights

- Four men and a woman were arrested by French anti-terror investigators, the prosecutor's office said
- Independent centrist Emmanuel Macron faces far-right National Front rival Marine Le Pen on Sunday

(CNN)French anti-terror investigators have arrested five

people just days before the presidential election, the Paris prosecutor's office told CNN Tuesday.

Four men and a woman were arrested in three areas of the country and four weapons were recovered, the office of Paris Prosecutor Francois Molins said. No other details were available.

Independent centrist Emmanuel Macron is edging towards the Élysée Palace, but the frontrunner still faces challenges ahead of Sunday's second-round vote against far-right National Front rival, Marine Le Pen.

A deadly attack last month on a police bus in the heart of Paris dramatically changed the course of the presidential campaign.

The three main candidates canceled campaign events and instead made televised statements in which they competed to talk tough on security and vowed a crackdown on ISIS.

One officer died after a gunman wielding a machine gun leapt out of a car and opened fire on the Champs-Élysées, Paris's most famous boulevard, as candidates were engaging in their final TV debate.

In mid-April, two men arrested in Marseilles were accused of preparing an "imminent violent attack" in the run-up the presidential election, French Interior Minister Matthias Fekl told CNN's French affiliate, BFM.

The arrests "took place as part of an investigation by the anti-terrorist section of Paris public prosecutor's office," Fekl said. The men, born in 1993 and 1987, of French nationality, had the intention of committing an attack on French soil within the next few days, he said.



French Presidential Candidate Le Pen Attempts to Broaden Appeal by Copying Rival's Speech

Max Colchester and Stacy Meichtry

5-7 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 4:55 p.m. ET

PARIS— Marine Le Pen's efforts to broaden her voter base took an unusual turn Tuesday when the far-right candidate's campaign admitted she lifted sections of a speech mainstream conservative François Fillon delivered before getting knocked out of the race.

In kicking off the final week of her presidential campaign before a packed convention center on Monday, Ms. Le Pen had used a "beautiful passage" from an address Mr. Fillon delivered in mid-April, her campaign manager David Rachline said Tuesday.

"I totally admit to this wink," Ms. Le Pen told French TV on Tuesday. "We and the voters of François Fillon, it's true, have the same vision of France."

An official of Mr. Fillon's party, Les Républicains, said the use of the former candidate's words without attribution was an "outrageous attempt to steal our voters."

The borrowed verbiage was a measure of how Ms. Le Pen is straining to broaden her appeal beyond the National Front's anti-immigrant base as she seeks to narrow the gap with Emmanuel Macron, the pro-Europe candidate

who polls say is ahead of her by 60% to 40%.

Mr. Fillon was narrowly beaten in the first round of voting after he was forced to apologize for a public expense scandal involving his wife and children.

Still, he managed to garner 20% of the vote of the first-round vote by running as a law-and-order candidate unafraid to publicly embrace his Roman Catholicism in a country where the separation of church and state is strictly enforced. That made Mr. Fillon popular with voters who view the country's Christian heritage as a bulwark of national identity, buffeted by waves of migrants from the Middle East and terror attacks that have killed more than 200 people in recent years.

At the same time, Mr. Fillon's pro-Europe stance made him a more moderate choice for voters nervous about Ms. Le Pen's proposals to resurrect France's borders with its European Union neighbors and ditch the bloc's common currency.

Mr. Fillon's following is particularly strong among practicing Catholics, who account for about 15% of France's voting base, said Jerome Fourquet, director of polling firm IFOP. In last month's first round, Mr. Fillon was backed by 44% of the voters who attend Catholic Mass at least once a month, far surpassing Mr. Macron and Ms. Le Pen, who each garnered 16% of those voters, according to a Harris Interactive poll.

Mr. Fillon's first-round loss has left many of his supporters in a bind. He has pledged to vote for Mr. Macron to block Ms. Le Pen's path to power. But some voters who rallied behind Mr. Fillon, in part for his opposition to France's legalization of gay-marriage in 2012, are finding it hard to cast votes for the socially liberal Mr. Macron.

"They don't want to back the National Front, but they don't agree with Mr. Macron," says Mr. Fourquet, the pollster.

Mr. Macron "shatters the foundations on which the identity of this country was built," said Christophe Billan, leader of Sens Commun, a grass-roots movement of Catholics and other people who took to French streets after gay marriage was legalized.

In endorsing Mr. Fillon, Mr. Billan threw Sens Commun's vast network behind him. But he is so far unwilling to do the same for Ms. Le Pen, dismissing her attempts to portray herself as the face of French conservatism as "pure marketing."

The challenges of channeling Mr. Fillon were on full display this week as Ms. Le Pen borrowed wholesale from Mr. Fillon's April address. In the original speech, Mr. Fillon called on France to forge a national identity that rejects totalitarianism and materialism.

"France, I've said, is one history, one geography, but it's also a sum of values and principles transmitted

from generation to generation like passwords," Mr. Fillon said. "In the end, it's a unique voice directed at all peoples of the universe."

On Monday, Ms. Le Pen struck a similar note. "France, it's also a sum of values and principles transmitted from generation to generation, like passwords," she said, adding: "It's also an extraordinary, unique voice that speaks to all peoples of the universe."

Ms. Le Pen departed from Mr. Fillon's original speech in key passages, however. In a section on Germany, Mr. Fillon referred to "the Germanic world with which we've had so many conflicts and with which we still have so much cooperation to build."

Ms. Le Pen described "this Germanic world with whom we have so much cooperation to build as long as we regain the status of ally, and not that of subject, slave or servant."

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church has tried to keep out of the election. Asked about the race last week, Pope Francis said: "I know that one represents the far-right, but the other I don't know where he comes from, so I can't give my opinion on France."

Rev. Marc Boule, a priest in the Catholic stronghold of Versailles just west of Paris, said parishioners have been meeting to weigh their decision. "Each one has their own conscience," he said.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Le Pen Takes Up Rival's Words in Campaign.'

**The
New York
Times**

Marine Le Pen, French Presidential Candidate, Is Accused of Plagiarism

Aurelien Breeden
6-8 minutes

PARIS — Marine Le Pen, the far-right presidential candidate in France, was battling accusations on Tuesday that she had plagiarized sections of a speech by her conservative former opponent, François Fillon, at her May Day rally.

Supporters of Ms. Le Pen, who is seeking to broaden her appeal with French voters before the second round of the presidential election on Sunday, said that she had merely “winked” at voters with remarks that amounted to a “small loan.”

Ms. Le Pen’s efforts have focused in part on persuading voters who backed Mr. Fillon in the first round of the election to choose her over Emmanuel Macron, her centrist opponent and a strong favorite. Polls show Mr. Macron drawing about 60 percent of the vote.

The plagiarism accusations first came to light Monday evening after the French news media noted that several sections of Ms. Le Pen’s speech at a rally near Paris closely matched an address by Mr. Fillon on April 15, before the first round.

In his speech in April at Le Puy-en-Velay, a small town in central France, Mr. Fillon referred to France’s land and maritime borders:

This near perfect hexagon, a wonder of balance, three maritime coastlines: the English Channel and the North Sea, open on the Anglo-Saxon world and on the northern vastness; the Atlantic coastline, which for centuries has given us the open seas, and which hands us its adventures; the Mediterranean coastline, home to some of history’s oldest and richest human civilizations.

Ms. Le Pen, speaking on Monday, also referred to France’s “three maritime coastlines.”

... the English Channel and the North Sea, which links us to the Anglo-Saxon world and the northern vastness; the Atlantic coastline,

which gives us the open seas and speaks to us of adventure; the Mediterranean coastline, home to some of history’s oldest and richest human civilizations.

Mr. Fillon praised the country’s language and culture, saying France “is a history, is a geography, but it is also a set of values and principles passed down from generation to generation, like passwords.”

If one learns our language, sometimes at great expense, in Argentina or in Poland; if there are waiting lists to sign up for the Alliance Française in Shanghai, in Tokyo, in Mexico or for the French high schools in Rabat or in Rome; if Paris is the first tourism destination in the world; it is because France is something else, and much more, than an industrial, agricultural or military power.

Ms. Le Pen used very similar terms on Monday, when she said, “France is also a set of values and principles passed down from generation to generation, like passwords.”

If one learns our language, sometimes at great expense, in Argentina or in Poland; if there are waiting lists to sign up for the Alliance Française in Shanghai, in Tokyo, in Mexico or for the French high schools in Rabat or in Rome; if Paris is the first tourism destination in the world; it is because France is something else, and much more, than the industrial, agricultural or military power that it can and must become again.

Neither Mr. Macron nor Mr. Fillon has commented directly on the accusations, but *Ridicule TV*, a pro-Fillon Twitter account, posted side-by-side video comparisons of the remarks, as did several news organizations in France.

Asked about the accusations that Ms. Le Pen had lifted parts of Mr. Fillon’s speech, Louis Aliot, the candidate’s partner and a vice president of her National Front party, told the news channel LCI on Tuesday morning that it was a “clin

d’œil” — meaning a wink or a nod — to Mr. Fillon’s voters.

“With part of the right, we have the exact same view on the nation’s identity and on national independence,” he added.

Mr. Fillon, who drew 20 percent of the votes in the first round, only 1.3 percentage points less than Ms. Le Pen, did not qualify for the second round and has asked his supporters to vote for Mr. Macron.

On Tuesday, the centrist Mr. Macron also received the unexpected backing of Yanis Varoufakis, Greece’s former finance minister in the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and a darling of the political left.

Mr. Varoufakis, writing in an op-ed for *Le Monde*, said that “French progressive voters have all the reasons to be angry against Emmanuel Macron” because of his economic policies, but he said it was crucial to keep Ms. Le Pen from winning power. Mr. Varoufakis also praised Mr. Macron for personally reaching out to him at the height of Greece’s debt crisis in 2015, to try to reopen talks.

“I think it is my duty to ensure that French progressives, who are about to enter (or not enter) the voting booth in the second round of the presidential election, be fully aware of this as they make their choice,” he wrote.

Many hard-left voters have been put off by Mr. Macron’s economic policies and his support for labor regulation overhauls when he was economy minister. So much so that the France Unbowed movement of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the hard-left candidate who received 19.6 percent of the first-round vote, announced that its members were not inclined to turn out for Mr. Macron on Sunday.

In an unscientific online survey of Mr. Mélenchon’s supporters conducted by his party, only 34.8 percent said they would vote for Mr. Macron against Ms. Le Pen. Nearly two-thirds of those who participated

in the poll said they would abstain or cast a blank ballot in the final round.

Though more than seven million people voted for Mr. Mélenchon in the first round, fewer than 250,000 people took part in the online straw poll. Voting for Ms. Le Pen was not one of the options.

Ms. Le Pen may have an equally difficult time, no matter whose words she uses, persuading the supporters of her vanquished rivals to back her candidacy. Damien Abad, a former spokesman for Mr. Fillon, said that she was unlikely to persuade many of those who had voted for Mr. Fillon. “François Fillon’s voters aren’t fooled,” he told BFM-TV. “They won’t be bought because one copies parts of their candidate’s speech.”

On Twitter, Paul-Marie Coûteaux, a French writer and editor, provided a possible explanation for the similarities between Mr. Fillon’s April speech and Ms. Le Pen’s comments on Monday: The words both candidates used were his, pulled from a book published in 1997.

“It is good (and significant) that Marine Le Pen and François Fillon, expressing themselves on France’s universal calling, do so with the same terms,” wrote Mr. Coûteaux, who founded but no longer presides over a small far-right organization close to the National Front called Sovereignty, Identity and Liberties.

“These terms, of a Gaullist inspiration, are those of my work ‘Europe’s Road to War,’ ” he said, referring to the heritage of former President Charles de Gaulle, and adding the hashtag #clind’œil.

Speaking to the newspaper *Journal du Dimanche* on Tuesday, Mr. Coûteaux confirmed that he had provided notes to Mr. Fillon for his speech on April 15, but he denied having done so for Ms. Le Pen.

Still, he told the newspaper that he supported Ms. Le Pen and was not “displeased” that the two candidates had used his words.

Argument



France’s Presidency Is Too Powerful to Work

Emmanuel

Macron will likely be the next occupant of the most powerful office in the democratic world. He’ll also be its next victim.

By Robert Tombs

May 2, 2017

On April 23, many French people were profoundly relieved by the victory, in the first round of the presidential elections, of Emmanuel Macron, a man against whom most

of them had voted. To see the French presidency fall into the potentially dangerous hands of the far-right is, in theory, no small matter. President Macron (as it will almost certainly be) will hold an immensely powerful office — what

is, on paper, perhaps the most powerful office in the democratic world. Yet the chances of him being able to wield that tremendous power with any semblance of effectiveness are, if we are to gauge by recent history, slim. Macron might not only

be the next French president but also the French presidency's next victim.

The French presidency today is a unique institution. It was created as a reaction against the failings, real and perceived, of the parliamentary-controlled governments of the preceding Third (1870-1940) and Fourth (1946-58) Republics. These two systems had themselves been reactions against the autocratic regimes of Napoleon III (1851-70) and Marshal Pétain (1940-44) — but French conservatives criticized both republics for weakness, instability, and lack of leadership. For years, they hankered for a regime that would again give authority to a powerful leader, whether monarch or soldier, who would embody national unity, keep political factions under control, and provide strong long-term direction. The disasters that befell France in 1940 (invasion by Nazi Germany) and in 1954-62 (a colonial war in Algeria that threatened to engulf the whole country) seemed to prove the inability of a “weak” parliamentary republic to guarantee national survival.

Charles de Gaulle, the Catholic conservative soldier who had led wartime Free France and helped bring about its liberation in 1944, had long wanted to transform the system, and in 1958, he finally got his chance. France was in the midst of a national crisis brought about by the bloody war of decolonization in Algeria. The Fourth Republic had collapsed while de Gaulle had been absent from politics for a decade. He made his comeback on the condition that he would finally be granted what he had long desired: sweeping power to create a new constitution in his own image. It deliberately concentrated power and prestige in the president, whom de Gaulle viewed as a “national arbiter,” and downgraded the role of Parliament and political parties. The faithful Gaullist Michel Debré, who supervised the text, called it a “republican monarchy,” and it has loomed over French political life ever since.

This “monarch” has huge powers — far greater than, for example, those of an American president. He (all have, so far, been men) is literally irresponsible, in that neither Parliament nor any other institution can dismiss, impeach, or force him to resign. He appoints the prime minister, is commander in chief of the armed forces, and chooses the holders of a vast range of offices, including in the judiciary, the administration, the military, and state industries. He can also exercise near-dictatorial powers in times of emergency. These powers are further enhanced by limits on the

role of Parliament; the president can, on his own authority, dissolve the legislative body and call for referendums. Parliament's power to oppose governments or amend legislation is restricted. It can only overthrow a government after a vote of no confidence, in strictly limited circumstances. Moreover, if the government itself declares any of its legislation a “question of confidence,” it can only be defeated by a vote of censure within 24 hours — otherwise, the laws are automatically enacted without a vote. In practice, the president exercises even greater powers than the constitution specifies: He generally runs the government with the prime minister as his subordinate and takes personal control of foreign and defense policy.

François Mitterrand, himself later a ruthless user of presidential power, originally attacked this Fifth Republic institution as a “permanent coup d'état” — and indeed, it was intended to bypass selfish lobbies and ignore factional opposition. Undeniably, the system has had considerable achievements. It allowed de Gaulle to extricate France from the Algerian bloodbath, most dramatically by giving direct orders to the troops over public radio. Moreover, his Fifth Republic became the first political system since the French Revolution to be almost universally accepted. It has enabled political power to pass peacefully from the right to the left, and vice versa, without any attempt by extremist parties to disrupt the process or undermine the system. Unlike some of its right-wing predecessors under earlier regimes, even the National Front insists that it works only within the system.

But as the provider of strong and decisive government — its essential task in the eyes of its founders — the republican monarchy has been at best a partial success and one that, as the decades go on, has been more effective at undermining its own authority than asserting it.

The French presidency seemed to function well enough in its early years, though even de Gaulle, national savior and hero that he was, departed from power in 1969 more ignominiously than any other president so far. Still, however one judges the successes and failures of his immediate successors — Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and Mitterrand — France's government worked, broadly speaking, as well as or even better than those of its European neighbors. But for the last generation, this has been decreasingly true. Elected on promises of great changes, all

presidents, whether right- or left-wing, have failed to deliver.

Why this failure? The fundamental problem is the “republican monarchy” itself, which both warps the processes necessary for effective democratic governance and holds those who assume the office to near-impossible standards, ensuring that they inevitably leave the nation disappointed.

The presidency dominates the political game in France; in doing so, it also sucks the life out of other great institutions of the state. Parliament and consequently the political parties are devalued. The great departments of government, such as the prime minister's office, finance, foreign affairs, and defense ministries, are in practice subordinate to the president's advisors, ensconced in the Élysée Palace. There have been many cases of major decisions being taken by the Élysée before the relevant ministries have even been informed. The president's unaccountability, and his isolation within his bubble of power, causes a repeated pattern of political failure: Policies are frequently decided by the president without significant consultation, then, in the absence of an effective legislative body to channel criticism within the system, are instead abandoned in the face of public outcry, including strikes and resistance in the streets. This, in turn, enhances both the French reputation for mass militancy and the sense that the country is in crisis. Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy, and François Hollande all promised sweeping change and all ended despised and impotent.

But the problem of the republican monarchy goes beyond structural hurdles to good governance. The office of the president — created by and for a legendary figure — demands too much of a normal politician. He is required not just to lead a party or form a government but to embody national unity, to set national strategy, and to symbolize the dignity of the nation, both to itself and to the world. Yet he is, at the same time, a politician. The president cannot be removed, but as soon as he is elected, he becomes the target of opposition and discontent, obsessed with his ratings and prospects for re-election. The two competing demands do not complement one another; they mean that the president can never be, as de Gaulle intended, a leader of the whole nation, standing above party politics. This results in outcomes like that of Hollande, who was, for almost the whole of his tenure, the most unpopular president on record, with his approval ratings falling to an astonishing 4 percent.

It is difficult to say what has changed between the Mitterrand presidency and today: It may be simply that the rot was there all along and that it is France's underlying problems that have grown worse, putting more demands on its politics. Regardless, most agree that France today seems stuck in a state of stagnation, even decline. Most people are clearly discontented. A functioning political system — and none, of course, is perfect — needs ideally to create a consensus in the country or at least present it with coherent and realistic choices. France's system is patently failing to do that: The four leading presidential candidates in the first round, all self-proclaimed rebels, proposed a range of nonconsensual, divisive, and even extreme programs, all of which could only potentially be carried out because of their personal powers as president. The first-round result, in turn, was decided by a small margin within a confused and disillusioned electorate. Under such circumstances, future protests in the street are almost guaranteed.

After the second round of the election, on May 7, the Fifth Republic will face an unprecedented test. De Gaulle's “republican monarchy” was assumed to be supported by a popular consensus and backed by a strong and docile party in Parliament. The next president can count on neither. A President Marine Le Pen might try to use the powers of the “republican monarch” to force through a divisive program, but this would precipitate a dangerous national crisis, with the clear danger of serious violence in the streets.

In the more realistic scenario of a President Macron, he will be a moderate committed to playing by the rules, but he, too, is likely to struggle. Though there will be a pro-Macron surge, it would be miraculous if he won a parliamentary majority in June. So he may be forced from the beginning of his term to accept either “cohabitation” with a conservative prime minister, which would hamper his chances of uniting the country, or a coalition with the Socialists and other left-wing parties, which reject his core program of economic liberalization. Moreover, Macron is strongly pro-European Union in a country where criticism of the EU is rapidly growing: Of the 11 first-round candidates, only two (Macron and François Fillon) were unambiguously pro-EU. Whatever happens, much depends on the untested Macron showing remarkable capacities for leadership and guile. Macron promised as the first-round results came in that he

would turn a "new page in our political life." That he has such intentions is clear.

But the record of recent "republican monarchs" shows that their power to shape events is often an illusion.

Photo credit: FRANCOIS NASCIMBENI/AFP/Getty Images

The
Washington
Post

Where is France's famed 'Republican Front' in 2017?

By James
McAuley

6-8 minutes

PARIS — The last time the National Front was on the verge of power, in 2002, nearly 2 million people took to the streets of France to reject the party of far-right extremism.

Those protests took their toll: Jean-Marie Le Pen, the convicted Holocaust denier and co-founder of the National Front, was crushed in the election's final round, receiving 17.8 percent of the vote that year. In a symbol of political sacrifice, some leftists even wore clothespins over their noses as they voted for Jacques Chirac, France's conservative incumbent.

"Republican Front" is the French term for the bipartisan opposition that has prevented an extremist from winning the presidency. It is what defeated Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002, but its impact on his daughter's bid in 2017 has yet to be seen.

[Emmanuel Macron could fight off French populism. But it won't be with his ideas.]

This year the National Front is again on the cusp of power with a far greater chance of winning the presidency than in 2002. According to polls, Marine Le Pen will win at least 40 percent of the vote in the second and final round — more than double her father's total 15 years ago. But there have been no notable mass protests this year on anything close to the same scale. Although many politicians and voters remain opposed to the National Front, few can claim to be taken aback by its ascent.

"There was no element of surprise this time," said Dominique Moïsi, a French political scientist and the author of a well-known book about the role of emotions in political discourse. "In 2002, people were genuinely shocked by the fact that someone like Jean-Marie Le Pen could actually reach power. This time, everybody expected it."

When Marine Le Pen emerged in second place from the election's first round with 21 percent of the vote, politicians from both the left and the right immediately backed her opponent, the former investment banker Emmanuel Macron. But in a remarkable break with tradition, others did not.

The most notable example remains that of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the outspoken, witty ex-Trotskyist defeated in the election's first round but who won 19 percent of the vote. Although he urged his fellow leftists to support Chirac in 2002, Mélenchon has stubbornly refused to endorse Macron in the final round of this year's vote.

Some on the far right, such as politician Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, have even endorsed Le Pen — much to the chagrin of France's conservative establishment.

Likewise, a growing number of anti-Le Pen voters have refused to lend their support to Macron, who many fault for the labor reforms he drafted as economy minister and who many on the left still see as too much of a neoliberal.

A poll released late Tuesday indicated that about 65 percent of Mélenchon's supporters said they would not vote for Macron in the final round. As the gap narrows between Macron and Le Pen, many of the Mélenchon backers appear to

lean toward leaving their presidential choice blank or staying home altogether.

[French voters face choice between hope and fear in runoff for presidency]

On Monday in Paris, thousands gathered for the annual International Worker's Day union demonstrations. The largest of these events — held in Paris's symbolic Place de la République, a vast pedestrian square whose center is a statue of Marianne, the avatar of the French Republic — condemned Le Pen but stopped short of endorsing Macron for Sunday's final round.

"I'm here because I want to say no to the National Front, but also because I want to say no to Macron," said Valérie, 53, a Mélenchon supporter and a nurse in a Paris public hospital who declined to give her last name. "Whoever wins, there will be no one who defends the rights of workers."

"There is no more 'Republican Front,'" said Hamid Djodi, 57, the owner of a cleaning company in Paris. He was standing in the Place de la République wearing a mask that had superimposed Marine Le Pen's hair onto Jean-Marie Le Pen's face.

"For years, the right and left just divided the Republic with their disputes, and now there is little left. In 2002, we believed it, this idea of a 'Republican Front.' But now we don't believe it anymore — all you have is a capitalist running against a - fascist."

Moïsi said that the "failures" of the past three French presidents — Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande — to reconcile French citizens with the political

process is one reason that relatively few are protesting this year.

"The political atmosphere has greatly deteriorated since 2002. Suffering and anger have grown so much since that time, and these two emotions explain the fact that no one is in the streets as they were in 2002."

Valérie, the Mélenchon supporter, said that in 2002 she had voted for Chirac, who was ultimately much more of a traditional conservative than Macron, whose platform has sought to blend economic reforms with social liberalism.

"Macron is far too much on the right — just look at his labor reforms," she said, referring to a slew of changes Macron advocated last year, which he had promised would stimulate a stagnant economy by injecting more competition into the workplace.

"I protested against that, and so I'm protesting against him."

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Despite slight fluctuations in the past week, most still place Macron winning nearly 60 percent of the vote in the second round, with Le Pen taking close to 40 percent.

Even if unsuccessful, Le Pen will probably win a significant percentage of the vote, Djodi said, and the Republican Front will have failed in its mission.

"That family doesn't change — like father like daughter," he said, gesturing to his mask.

The
Washington
Post

France's critical election happens in June, not on Sunday (online)

By John M. Carey
8-10 minutes

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron accuses Marine Le Pen's National Front of being "anti-France" in a blistering attack on his far-right rival. (Reuters)

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron accuses Marine Le Pen's National Front of being "anti-France" in a blistering attack on his far-right rival. Macron, Le Pen exchange May Day blows (Reuters)

The second round of France's presidential election, on Sunday, is commanding worldwide attention. The contest pitting Emmanuel Macron's globalist cosmopolitanism against Marine Le Pen's France-first nationalism is important, to be sure.

But the election that will shape how the country is governed for the next five years will take place a month later, when the French elect their National Assembly, or parliament.

Outside analysts tend to discuss France's election season as though its presidency works just like the one in the United States — the president

heads the executive branch, controls government ministries and wields important legislative powers. None of this is the case in France — at least, not unless the president controls a majority in the Assembly.

[Here's what happened in the first round of France's presidential election, and what happens next]

Here are answers to some fundamental questions:

How is the French system different?

France has a hybrid constitution, combining a presidential

government like the United States, and elements of parliamentary government, like most European democracies. The French president is popularly elected and, like the U.S. president, has some important constitutional powers. But like parliamentary systems, a prime minister — called a premier — directs the French government.

France's president appoints the premier, but once in office, the premier can be removed only by the assembly. This means the premier answers to the parliament, not the president. And the French constitution gives the premier, not

the president, greater lawmaking powers. The president, for example, has no veto power, so the assembly can pass legislation by a bare majority even over the president's objections.

The French premier also has some tools that have no real parallel in pure presidential systems with their separation of powers. Article 49 of the French constitution allows the premier to propose legislation under a special rule — if the assembly takes no action, the proposal becomes law, but a negative vote from the assembly brings down the government. The maneuver is known as the *guillotine*.

[France votes on Sunday. Can an 'enemy of the Republic' pull off a victory?]

Using the guillotine means the premier can raise the stakes on a government initiative while simultaneously allowing legislators to duck responsibility for controversial policies. It affords the French premier more influence to coerce wayward or ambivalent lawmakers than any U.S. House speaker could dream of.

So why is the premier largely invisible?

If the premier is so important, why is there so much attention on the presidential race and not on the parliamentary contests to follow? In part, it's because the president's party usually has a majority in the parliament, which means the hybrid structure of the French executive is largely invisible.

Under the French version of unified government, the president is the leader of the majority party (or coalition of parties that runs under a common banner). The president appoints a premier who is a subordinate within the party, and the premier then acts as the president's agent — because the party

demands it, not because the constitution does.

What happens when a president doesn't have an assembly majority?

Presidents who lack an assembly majority must appoint opposition premiers who can command support in the assembly, and everything changes. The French have experienced three spells of divided executive government, which they call "cohabitation," from 1986 to 1988, then from 1993 to 1995, and a five-year stretch from 1997 to 2002.

At the time, the French political system encouraged mismatches between the presidency and the assembly majority because the presidential term was seven years — and the assembly term was five. The French president's greatest power is the authority to dissolve the parliament and call for new elections. Newly elected presidents, flush with victory, then called elections quickly to secure a majority and unified government.

But five years in, the honeymoon glow dims, and late-term assembly elections are less kind to sitting presidents. That's what happened to Socialist François Mitterand, who saw electoral defeats in the assembly late in his both of his presidential terms, forcing him to endure conservative, Gaullist premiers.

The election of Jacques Chirac in 1995 ended cohabitation briefly by bringing the presidency in line with the Gaullist assembly majority. But when Chirac called an election in 1997, the voters shifted the parliamentary majority back to the left, forcing Chirac to live with a Socialist premier, Lionel Jospin, during the last five years of his presidency.

Why is political "cohabitation" so frustrating?

During cohabitation periods, the presidency diminished in stature, and the premier tended to exercise the main executive policymaking authority. For example, in the late 1980s, Chirac as premier engineered a major tax cut and privatized state-owned enterprises while the Socialist Mitterand could only watch.

But when Chirac was president, Socialist Party Premier Jospin pushed through legislation to shorten the workweek from 39 hours to 35.

Cohabitation proved frustrating to French politicians, and in 2000 Chirac engineered a constitutional amendment to shorten the presidential term and synchronize it with the assembly. Assembly elections were set to follow immediately after the presidential contest to maximize the likelihood that a president controls an parliamentary majority.

For the past 15 years, the reform has had its intended effect — no cohabitation. But there's a new twist. We may be witnessing the collapse of France's traditional party system. And it is the election in June, not the one in May, that will provide the next clue.

[France's big parties probably won't even get into the presidential election's final round. Here's why.]

Can Macron and Le Pen come up with the Assembly numbers?

The parties of Macron and Le Pen, between them, currently control only three of the assembly's 577 seats. So each faces a far bigger challenge than just how to win Sunday's runoff presidential election. How can they engineer a campaign for the June elections that can deliver an assembly majority? Or short of that, can either candidate produce a fractured parliament that cannot

impose a strong opposition premier and a return to cohabitation?

Neither presidential contender has a clear road map to success. Le Pen's National Front has been shunned by other French parties for decades. Macron's Onward party is new and lacks the organization or the roster of local leaders to run effective campaigns in over 500 electoral districts.

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The rules for French assembly elections add one more measure of uncertainty. Like the presidential election, there is a second round if no candidate wins an outright majority, but in assembly elections any candidate winning more than 12.5 percent may contest the second round.

Up to now, France's two main coalitions, one on the left and one on the right, have dominated assembly elections. But with France's traditional parties weakened as never before — and now out of the presidential race altogether — what happens next? Voters may see little reason to remain united. In short, the electoral terrain going into a French Assembly election has never been so uncertain, yet the stakes have never been so high.

So go ahead and watch the presidential second round carefully. Macron and Le Pen are compelling, if not always appealing, personalities, and the contest matters, of course. But *after* the voters choose a president, French elections are going to get really interesting.

John M. Carey is the Wentworth professor in the social sciences at Dartmouth College. He is a co-director of Bright Line Watch.

The New York Times Marine Le Pen, Polished but Frank, Heads to Finale in French Election (online)

Adam Nossiter

12-15 minutes

The far-right French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen at a rally in Nantes in February. Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

NICE, France — The lights dimmed and the music steadily built. Ravel's "Bolero," at once martial and sensual, wrapped the crowd in its sinister embrace, the atmosphere laced with menace. The audience

murmured in the dark, expectant, awaiting deliverance.

It came in a carefully orchestrated burst of bright lights and radiant chords. The far-right presidential candidate of the National Front, Marine Le Pen, strode onto the stage, beaming. The symbolism was obvious. The darkness enveloping the hall, and France, could lift.

Darkness and light: For most of her career, ever since Ms. Le Pen, now 48, broke into the political spotlight 15 years ago as the daughter and defender of the National Front's

patriarch, Jean-Marie, her path has been defined by their interplay. "She busted the TV screen wide open!" he once admiringly told an interviewer of that moment.

Ms. Le Pen campaigning for the legislative elections at a market in Harnes, in northern France, in 2002. Franck Crusiaux/Gamma-Rapho, via Getty Images

To her admirers, she still does. Her speech before an adoring crowd of thousands in Nice last week juxtaposed the threats posed by immigrants, Islam, globalization and

banks with her fierce will to crush them. And sometimes her words also offered a shaft of light. "My dear compatriots, I'm not interested in your race, your origin, your sexual orientation," she said. "What interests me is your happiness."

Now a global figure, a far-right populist who has threatened to bring down the European Union, Ms. Le Pen is at the threshold of power as France prepares for the final round of voting for president on Sunday. Her odds, judging by the polls, are long. But even if she does not succeed against the independent

centrist Emmanuel Macron, Ms. Le Pen is likely to be a powerful fixture of French politics for years to come. She is a political veteran, a fierce debater and perhaps the ablest campaigner in the entire French political spectrum.

Yet she has made a risky bargain. She has cast off the xenophobic legacy of the National Front, and she has not. Her father never wanted to govern and never swayed from the hardest, most hate-filled of political lines. The daughter aspires to the presidency. She has made a very public campaign of “undemonizing” — shedding the party’s bigoted heritage — even as skeptics still wonder if the effort is more tactical than genuine. Her unspoken gamble is that she can keep the National Front legacy even as she reassures millions of French that she has transcended it.

Seven months ago, when Donald J. Trump won the American presidential election, Ms. Le Pen suddenly seemed part of a global populist vanguard. But if that populist surge appears to be peaking — for now — it is also true that Ms. Le Pen is no Mr. Trump.

Unlike him, she does not improvise her policies, which are the product of a decades-long honing of National Front ideology. That ideology is not *sui generis*, unlike Mr. Trump’s. Its roots are in classic French far-right thinking going back 100 years or more. Indeed, some reputable scholars think that France, not Italy, was the true birthplace of fascism at the turn of the 20th century.

A National Front supporter wearing a T-shirt with a portrait of President Trump at a meeting in La Bazoche-Gouet, in central France, in April. Thibault Camus/Associated Press

And she speaks in polished, complete sentences, informed by her training as a lawyer and by the advisers, some well versed in old French far-right doctrines, who surround her. She easily jousts with reporters, even while working a crowd, brushing off a British television reporter who questioned her electoral potential at one stop with a quotation from the right-wing Roman Catholic author George Bernanos.

“She’s not cultivated, but she has a pretty extraordinary memory,” said Aymeric Chauprade, a member of the European Parliament and a onetime favorite of Ms. Le Pen’s who fell out with her. “She’s got a huge capacity to assimilate. She’s very skillful.”

French economists, political analysts and think tanks are virtually united in predicting a crisis for

France if Ms. Le Pen is elected. Her plan to take France out of the eurozone would lead to an immediate devaluation of any new national currency, with devastating effect on her core base of supporters, economists say. Her stigmatization of immigrants would exacerbate social tensions in already edgy suburbs.

Yet in many parts of France, her appeal is undeniable. Hatred of the political establishment, seen as responsible for France’s economic stagnation, its persistent unemployment rate of 10 percent, its shuttered factories and its waves of immigrants, provides her a powerful boost. In person and on the campaign trail, the twice-divorced mother of three conveys tough frankness — in familiar, gravelly tones conditioned by years of smoking — an alluring combination to growing ranks of French voters.

Her campaign posters are affixed across France, subtle reminders of her efforts to run from the past. There is no mention of the National Front, and its associations with anti-Semitism, racism, and nostalgia for France’s collaboration with the Nazis. Even the Le Pen name, tied to her father, is absent. There is just her recognizable face, her blond visage and her recognizable given name, Marine. She is the brand; the National Front is the unspoken subtext of her politics.

National Front members unveiling the new campaign poster and slogan for Ms. Le Pen after the first round of presidential voting last month. Michel Euler/Associated Press

That recognition is the result of a life in the spotlight, if often in the shadow of her father, whose cronies once sneered at the young upstart, a wealthy heiress with a fondness for Champagne and parties — until she took leadership of the party from him in 2011 and cast him out in 2015.

“She got up there with all her awkwardness, and she had a freshness, with her round cheeks,” Jean-Claude Martinez, one of her father’s old party associates, recalled of Ms. Le Pen’s early appearances in the news media, which thrust her into the national consciousness. “The world discovered her. She was born in the media.”

At the raucous rallies that pack in thousands, many proudly trace their allegiance back to her overthrown father. But under the daughter, the National Front’s appeal has grown steadily. She got over seven million votes in the election’s first round, on April 23, a million more than in 2015 regional elections, and nearly two

million more than her father received in 2002.

“She’s permanently underestimated,” said Jean-Lin Lacapelle, a top aide and friend to Ms. Le Pen, with a long history of National Front activism. “Macron is the candidate of the system.”

Her critics regard her as a dangerous nationalist and demagogue. Her supporters interpret her willingness to cast blame on “the system,” “the oligarchy” and especially immigrants as proof of her sincerity.

“It’s the truthfulness with which she expresses herself,” said Michel Duvernet, a middle-aged shopkeeper from the southern town of Cogolin, explaining why he had come to Ms. Le Pen’s rally in the coastal city of St.-Raphaël in March.

“Also, the simplicity of her words,” said Mr. Duvernet, praising Ms. Le Pen for putting her finger on what he called “the Islamic unbearableness of what we live every day,” in the speech she had just given.

“Plus, she just reaches out to ordinary people,” he said.

Raymond Herbreteau, a physical education coach from the Orne administrative department, who traveled to Ms. Le Pen’s rally in the western city of Nantes in February, spoke of Ms. Le Pen filling a new vacuum in French politics.

“She sticks to the same line, of sovereignty,” Mr. Herbreteau said. “Besides, the left isn’t even the left any more. They’re for globalization and capitalism. More and more are convinced by her.”

A campaign rally for Ms. Le Pen in Lyon in February. Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

For the unconvinced, Ms. Le Pen has staged the elaborate “undemonizing” of her party, as even her aides put it, in the full glare of the public spotlight. As ultimate proof of this sanitizing, she presents an act of “violence,” as she put it in a television interview Sunday night: the expulsion of her own father from the party after yet another anti-Semitic outbursts.

“For the higher interest of the nation, you’ve got to be capable of hurting yourself,” she said. “And that did hurt me, because I am a daughter,” she told the interviewer, explaining her decision to get rid of her father.

What part of it is sincere, and what part is mere political calculation?

“For 40 years, she had been hearing exactly the same things” from her father, “and it did not bother her in the slightest,” said Mr. Martinez, Mr. Le Pen’s old associate.

Her aides, often close personal friends in the National Front’s clannish culture, reject this view.

“Le Pen is a man of the 19th century,” said Philippe Peninque, a former lawyer and consultant who is often described as Ms. Le Pen’s *eminence grise*. “And Marine is a woman thoroughly of her time.”

“She’s got the French national heritage stapled to her being, but modernized,” he added.

The record suggests a constant shifting back and forth: edging away from her father’s worldview, and then edging back toward it, or at least part of it.

Her first big break with her father, in 2005, came after he called the German wartime occupation of France “not particularly inhumane.” Furious over his maintaining what she called a “counterproductive” strategy, she fled with her children to the family’s seaside villa and began writing her autobiography. Despite the split, she remained important in the party hierarchy.

Ms. Le Pen with her father, Jean-Marie, by a statue of Joan of Arc at the National Front headquarters in Nanterre in 2010. Samuel Bollendorff for The New York Times

After 2010 regional elections, when Ms. Le Pen did well, she began to consolidate her hold on the National Front. That same year, she described the Muslim presence in France as an “occupation,” a remark that brought her to court on charges of inciting religious hatred.

After she gained control of the party in 2011, she went on television to declare the Nazi camps “the height of barbarity” — a clear break with years of National Front policy.

In the current campaign, she has repeatedly found herself on the defensive over the issue, clumsily denying France’s responsibility in a wartime roundup of Jews, and forced to accept the resignation of an interim party president whose old Holocaust-denying remarks had been dredged up. Ms. Le Pen called the reports a “defamation.”

Mr. Peninque said the Parisian preoccupation with the National Front’s antecedents meant nothing to the electorate, and was actually helpful to the party. Opponents dredged up the issue “because they don’t have any other arguments. It’s not a debate. And it’s only going to help the Front.”

Mr. Chauprade was more categorical. “She’s got an enormous capacity to lie,” he said.

Newsweek : French Election's Latest Polls Show Marine Le Pen Would Easily Win—if She Was a Candidate in Russia

By Jason Le Miere On 5/2/17 at 1:17 PM

4 minutes

Far-right candidate Marine Le Pen may still be struggling to win over French voters ahead of Sunday's presidential-election second round, but there is at least one country where she enjoys overwhelming support—Russia.

Related: French elections: Marine Le Pen campaign hits back at 'plagiarism' accusations

Le Pen is viewed favorably by 61 percent of Russians, according to a survey by the state-run All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, released Tuesday. Carried out just ahead of last month's first round in which 11 candidates were on the ballot, the poll showed only 8 percent support for Emmanuel Macron, who will vie with Le Pen in Sunday's runoff.

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Unfortunately for Le Pen, opinion polls in France continue to show her trailing by up to 20 percentage points. Macron, an independent centrist, won the first-round vote with 24 percent, with Le Pen coming in second with just over 21 percent.

Polls taken both before and since the first round of voting have shown Macron handily defeating Le Pen in a straight contest. An Opinionway poll released Tuesday had Macron garnering 60 percent of the vote to Le Pen's 40 percent.

Since the first round, Republican candidate François Fillon and Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon have come out in support of Macron, as has outgoing President François Hollande. Meanwhile, Le Pen, who has temporarily stepped down as leader of the National Front, has picked up the support of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, who, as leader of a small right-wing party, picked up 4.7 percent in the first round.

The election is expected to have far-reaching consequences, with Le

Pen stating her intention to withdraw France from the eurozone and, at the very least, renegotiate her nation's relationship with the European Union. In the manner of other populist candidates across Europe, and along with Donald Trump in the United States, she has criticized sanctions against Russia and called for forging closer ties with Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with Marine Le Pen, the National Front leader and a candidate in the French presidential election, during their meeting in Moscow on March 24. Sputnik/Mikhail Klimentyev/Kremlin/Reuters

"As far as we are concerned, the most vital issue is what policy towards Russia will the next French president carry out," All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion Director General Valery Fyodorov said. "In this context, the overwhelming majority of Russian respondents' sympathies lie with Marine Le Pen, which is becoming clear given that she explicitly calls for overcoming the current conflict

between Moscow and the West, and normalizing ties with Russia."

In Russia, 57 percent of those surveyed said that the election in France would be significant.

In March, Le Pen traveled to the Kremlin for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. She has also taken a large loan from a Russian bank to fund her campaign. And, although the Kremlin has denied picking a favorite in the race, there have been repeated allegations that Russia has been attempting to influence the election in favor of Le Pen.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Le Pen is the most visible candidate in Russia, with 71 percent of Russians in the survey stating that they knew of her, compared with around 50 percent for Macron.

The poll, which was carried out April 25 and April 26, surveyed 1,200 Russians and had a margin of error of 3.5 percent.



Carol Matlack

5-6 minutes

French CEOs Break With Tradition to Back Macron, Reject Le Pen

@CarolMatlack
More stories by

- National Front win would be 'catastrophe,' Veolia chief says
- Airbus, Michelin bosses among those openly embracing Macron

French executives are ditching their traditional reluctance to speak publicly about politics, openly supporting independent Emmanuel Macron in the May 7 presidential runoff against Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front.

In statements published in business newspaper Les Echos, the CEOs of 13 companies -- including five members of the CAC 40 stock index -- said Le Pen's policies would severely harm the country. Her plan to reintroduce a national currency to replace the euro "would be a catastrophe for French companies and inhabitants," wrote Antoine Frérot, CEO of utility group Veolia Environnement SA. "The National Front's program would pose a risk to the political stability of our country," he added.

Although Macron had picked up endorsements from high-tech entrepreneurs such as Marc Simoncini of online-dating site Meetic and Jacques-Antoine Grandjon of e-commerce site Vente-Privee.com SA, most French CEOs until now had refrained from speaking publicly about the election. That changed after Le Pen advanced to the runoff against Macron as one of two survivors of the first-round election last month.

Jean-Dominique Senard, CEO of tiremaker Michelin, warned in Les Echos that a French exit from the euro would trigger inflation and produce "a breakdown in competitiveness," while Thierry Breton of digital-services provider Atos SE said Le Pen's protectionist policies would halt foreign investment and cause skilled professionals and researchers to flee the country.

Separately, CEO Tom Enders of aerospace giant Airbus SE sent a letter to Macron promising his "full support in the second round of the election, and in the legislative elections that follow." Excerpts were published by the business news site La Tribune on April 30. An Airbus spokesman confirmed the contents of the letter, in which Enders, who is German, wrote that Macron's pro-

European Union policies were "fundamental for a company like ours."

'Very Alarming'

"As the leader of a major industrial group and as a citizen," CEO Jean-Pierre Clamadieu of chemical manufacturer Solvay wrote in Les Echos, "I cannot remain silent."

For most corporate leaders, "the prospect of a National Front presidency is very alarming," said Douglas Webber, a political scientist at the Insead business school near Paris. Besides worrying about a possible exit from the euro, CEOs of "internationally active" companies fret that Le Pen would harm them by enacting trade barriers and retaining cumbersome labor regulations that weigh on French competitiveness, Webber said.

CEO support can be a double-edged sword at a time of rising populist sentiment. Business leaders in the U.K., for example, mostly supported remaining in the European Union when the country last year voted to leave the bloc. The embrace from corporate executives isn't likely to harm Macron, Webber said, because "the huge majority of French citizens have already made up their minds" about how they'll vote. Polls show

about 60 percent of voters favor Macron.

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Other CEOs who spoke against Le Pen in Les Echos, which is owned by luxury conglomerate LVMH, included Martin Bouygues of construction and communications company Bouygues SA; Michel-Edouard Leclerc of retailer E. Leclerc; Olivier Mathiot of PriceMinister, a French e-commerce site acquired in 2011 by Rakuten Inc. of Japan, and Jean-Baptiste Rudelle of Criteo SA, a Paris-based Internet advertising group that's listed on Nasdaq.

"If France places a tax on foreign workers as Marine Le Pen has promised, and closes its borders, that would certainly force us to rethink our decision to remain in France," Rudelle wrote. "That's the paradox of the National Front's program. Supposedly it would prevent jobs from leaving the country, when in fact exactly the opposite would happen."

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Newsweek : Trump Should Steer Well Clear of France's Marine Le Pen

By Marc Thiessen On 5/3/17 at 12:10 AM

7-8 minutes

This article first appeared on the American Enterprise Institute site.

Donald Trump has not endorsed far-right nationalist candidate Marine Le Pen, but he has hinted at his preference in the French presidential election.

"Another terrorist attack in Paris," Trump tweeted on April 21 after a radical Islamist killed a French policeman on the Champs Elysees. "The people of France will not take much more of this. Will have a big effect on presidential election!"

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Then on April 23, he cryptically told his Twitter followers: "Very interesting election currently taking place in France."

No doubt there are parallels between the French and US elections. Like Trump, Le Pen is an outsider riding a wave of populist, anti-establishment, nationalist sentiment. And in Emmanuel Macron, she is facing a centrist liberal in the mold of Hillary Clinton.

So it is no doubt tempting for Trump to see the election through the prism of his own — as part of a global populist movement that started with Brexit and his election and is now reaching the shores of the European continent.

He should resist the temptation. Marine Le Pen is no Donald Trump. Indeed, she is the living embodiment of everything the left falsely accuses Trump of being — an anti-Semite in cahoots with Vladimir Putin.

The Democrats' narrative of Trump-Russia collusion has been debunked in recent weeks, in the wake of the airstrikes Trump

ordered against the Putin's Syrian ally Bashar al Assad, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's chilly visit to Moscow and Secretary of Defense James Mattis's charge that Russia is arming the Taliban.

These are hardly the actions of a Putin puppet. As Trump put it, relations with Russia in his first 100 days are at an "all-time" low. A campaign poster of French presidential election candidate for the far-right Front National (FN) party Marine Le Pen, in Cessales, near Toulouse, France, April 28, 2017. Marc A. Thiessen writes that Marine Le Pen is no Donald Trump. She is an anti-Semite in cahoots with Putin and her campaign is funded by Russian interests. ERIC CABANIS/AFP/Getty

Le Pen, by contrast, is openly allied with Putin. In 2014, she took \$12 million loan from a Kremlin-linked Russian bank — a loan which came through right after she endorsed Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Not only is her campaign directly funded by Russian interests, Le Pen recently went to Moscow and received a warm embrace from Putin. Unlike Trump, it is doubtful she would spend her first 100 days sticking it to the Kremlin.

Related: Is Trump a Closet Holocaust Denier? What About His Followers?

Or take anti-Semitism. The Washington Post reported on April 25 that Trump gave a moving and resolute speech at the Capitol Hill ceremony marking Holocaust Remembrance Day:

President Trump on Tuesday paid tribute to Holocaust victims and survivors with a resolute speech in which he vowed that his administration would confront anti-Semitism and protect Israel from those seeking the Jewish state's destruction.

"Those who deny the Holocaust are accomplices to this horrible evil," Trump said in a 15-minute address before a crowd of several hundred, including some survivors, at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Days of Remembrance event at the US Capitol. "We will never be silent . . . in the face of evil again."

Related: Trump Has Unleashed a Wave of Anti-Semitic Hatred

No such comments were uttered by Le Pen. She chose instead to mark the approach of Holocaust Remembrance Day by declaring — against all historical evidence — that France was "not responsible" for deporting Jews during the Holocaust.

The Washington Post reports:

After dark on July 16, 1942, French police rounded up about 13,000 Jews from across occupied Paris and deposited them in the "Vel d'Hiv," a famous indoor stadium that had hosted the 1924 Summer Olympics and where the likes of Ernest Hemingway would come to enjoy the races.

From the stadium, not far from the Eiffel Tower, the vast majority of these interned Jews in 1942 were deported to Auschwitz. Most would never return from that World War II Nazi concentration camp.

The reason the Vel d'Hiv lingers in France's national memory is that the roundup was carried out by French police — not by the German occupiers.

In a republic devoted to the lofty ideals of equality and universal citizenship — and that had legally emancipated its Jews long before any of its European neighbors — the Vel d'Hiv roundup exposed the deadly hypocrisy of collaboration with the Nazi regime.

In 1995, speaking at the site of the stadium, then-President Jacques Chirac put it this way: "France, the

homeland of the Enlightenment and of the rights of man, a land of welcome and asylum — France, on that day, committed the irreparable. Breaking its word, it handed those who were under its protection over to their executioners."

Now enter Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right National Front party, who is making a run for the presidency in the April 23 election.

"I don't think that France is responsible for the Vel d'Hiv," she declared Sunday on French television. "I think that in general, more generally, if there were those responsible, it was those who were in power at the time. This is not France."

In remarks that elicited outrage across the French media, Le Pen went further: "France has been mired in people's minds for years. In reality, our children are taught that they have every reason to criticize her, to see only the darkest historical aspects."

"I want them to be proud to be French again."

Her father, National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, is a convicted Holocaust denier of the sort that Trump denounced in his speech. The daughter has tried to distance her party from her father's extremism to make the National Front more electable, but her recent comments suggest that the apple did not fall far from the tree.

This is not the sort of person President Trump should want to embrace. She is the left's caricature of Trump come to life. Her victory would be a disaster for France, and the Western world, and would be used by Trump's enemies to tarnish his administration by association.

He should stay clear of the National Front. "Le Pen" is not French for "Trump."



Macron, Le Pen, or neither? French voters mull third option

By Bryony Jones, CNN

Who is Marine Le Pen? 01:47

Bordeaux, France (CNN) French voters have two choices in Sunday's presidential election, far right candidate Marine Le Pen or independent centrist Emmanuel Macron, but with days to go until the ballot a third option is gaining momentum -- sitting out the election entirely.

A campaign is urging voters to stay at home, leave their ballot envelope empty or submit a blank piece of paper instead of a ballot slip.

Hashtags such as #SansMoiLe7Mai (without me on May 7), #NiPatrieNiPatron (neither country, nor boss) and #NiMarineNiMacron (neither Marine, nor Macron) have emerged on social media platforms.

A woman in Bordeaux reads posters urging voters not to turn out this weekend.

Official government figures show more people decided to abstain from voting in the April 23 first round of the French presidential election than voted for any single candidate -- including Macron and National Front's Le Pen.

And while many leading politicians from left and right have thrown their support behind Macron ahead of Sunday's vote, far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon has refused to do the same. That raises the question: what effect will a high abstention level have on the result?

READ MORE: How Macron and Le Pen compare

A survey of Melenchon's far-left La France Insoumise (France Unbowled) coalition released this week found that 36% of its supporters want to leave their ballots blank, while 29% don't want to vote at all. The survey didn't include the option of voting for Le Pen.

The latest polls suggest Macron is comfortably leading Le Pen by about 60% to 40% -- but many of those

who plan to vote for Macron say they are doing it to stop her, rather than to support him.

'Neither will do anything for me'

"I backed Melenchon in the first round, but the two candidates who are left aren't mine," said Paris taxi driver Abdel, who declined to give CNN his second name.

"Macron wants to sell France off, and Le Pen wants to get rid of the immigrants -- and I'm an immigrant."

Stall holder Patrice said he'd vote 'blanc' on Sunday.

In Bordeaux, a market stall holder said Macron is the same as the current French President Francois Hollande.

"I'm voting, but I'm voting 'blanc,'" Patrice Mounnier said.

"He's all about the banks and finance, not for the middle class.

"Le Pen says nice things for the little guys, but I don't want to leave Europe or the euro," he said, adding that he also

objected to Le Pen's views on Muslims.

Bordeaux coffee stall owner Anne-Marie (who also declined to give her second name) said she too would vote "blanc" leaving her ballot envelope empty in the final round.

"I voted for Melenchon," she said about the first round. "Macron, Le Pen, they're the same thing, and neither will do anything for me."

READ MORE: Is it Macron's election to lose?

'The current system... does not benefit the working class'

At a trade union rally in Paris, an activist for the "Voice of the Proletariat" group said his "comrades" were divided over what to do on Sunday.

"Some of them will hold their nose and vote for Macron," he said, "but it's 50/50 -- the other half won't vote at all, they will find it too difficult to vote for him, because of his links to bankers."

Boycott 2017 badges at a rally in Paris. Boycott 2017 is calling on voters to back neither candidate.

Voting legitimizes an anti-democratic system, according to Jeremy, a campaigner for the Boycott 2017 group, who declined to give his second name.

"The current system is not democratic -- it's a bourgeois dictatorship that does not benefit the working class."

However Jeremy said he was concerned that Le Pen could benefit if voters abstain.

"I don't think she will [win]. If she does, though, the struggle will continue."

Will it change the outcome?

In 2002, when Le Pen's father, National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, made it through to the second round against Jacques Chirac, voters from across the political spectrum united around the opposing Republican candidate, handing him a landslide win.

In that contest, some 20% of voters abstained.

Matthew Goodwin, visiting senior fellow at London-based think tank Chatham House, said high abstention levels could hit Macron's hopes of a comprehensive victory over Le Pen.

"Macron will be hoping for a 2002-style bump in turnout against Le Pen, but it is clear that this might not materialize to the same extent," he said.

"In 2002, lots of trade unions mobilized against Le Pen, only two have this time, and... left-wing voters appear to be saying they will abstain in larger numbers," he added.

"The numbers suggest that Le Pen will still struggle to win, but it is clear that over the long term, she is doing much better than her father."

James Masters contributed to this story from London.

The New York Times As France Prepares to Vote, Angela Merkel Praises Emmanuel Macron (online)

Alison Smale

4-5 minutes

Ms. Merkel, who heads the center-right bloc in the German Parliament and faces elections in September, when she will be seeking a fourth term, added that success for Mr. Macron "would be a positive signal for the political center, which we also want to keep strong here in Germany."

In a speech on Thursday to business leaders attending a forum ahead of the G-20 summit meeting in Hamburg in July, Ms. Merkel continued to push the theme that isolation was not the way forward in the global economy. The message seemed clearly directed at Britain and the United States.

A victory for Macron on Sunday would also send a positive signal for Franco-German relations, Ms. Merkel added. That axis, uniting the Continent's two biggest powers, has traditionally determined the élan and

effectiveness of the European Union.

Ms. Merkel, who said last week that Mr. Macron would make a "strong president" for France, made no mention of his rival. Ms. Le Pen criticized the German chancellor in 2015, when Ms. Merkel visited the European Parliament with the current president of France, François Hollande.

Emmanuel Macron addresses the press after a meeting with Ms. Merkel in the Chancellery in Berlin in March. John Macdougall/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Berlin has been careful to refrain from publicly commenting on the campaign of Ms. Le Pen, who has indicated she might seek a referendum on France's use of the euro, if not on membership of the European Union.

There are concerns across Europe that a victory for Ms. Le Pen, in conjunction with "Brexit," as a British withdrawal is known, would call into question the viability of the European Union.

It's unclear whether Germany will revise its economic and financial policies if Mr. Macron seeks changes in European Union affairs. But backing for Mr. Macron from the powerful chancellor would certainly be a prerequisite for any new direction for Europe's economy, or the euro.

Mr. Macron already had explicit backing from Ms. Merkel's vice chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel, a leading member of the center-left Social Democrats in Ms. Merkel's grand coalition government.

Mr. Gabriel, who also holds the post of foreign minister, got to know Mr. Macron when they were their countries' economy ministers. "He would be a great president," Mr. Gabriel said after Mr. Macron finished first in the first round of France's election, on April 23.

Mr. Macron, 39, is a former banker, and relatively new to politics. His pro-European stance has made him the obvious candidate for the European elite and for citizens who see the European Union as a source

of stability and strength, uniting 500 million people in one bloc.

Supporters of the European Union are hoping that France will provide a third straight victory against nationalist candidates. A pro-European candidate won Austria's largely ceremonial presidency in December, beating back a strong challenge from right-wing populists. Then Dutch voters denied the populist nationalist Geert Wilders a first-place finish in parliamentary elections.

The difficulties of negotiating Britain's exit from the European Union and the presidency of Donald J. Trump in the United States have added to doubts among some Europeans about the viability of conservative populism of the kind embraced by Ms. Le Pen.

Ms. Merkel said before the British vote on "Brexit" last June that she hoped Britain would choose to stay. Since then, she has appealed strongly to the other 27 member states to stick together and strengthen the European Union.

the Atlantic French Elections 2017: Who Will Win?

Yasmeen Serhan

11-14 minutes

When Jean-Marie Le Pen, the far-right National Front (FN) candidate, came in second place in the first round of France's presidential election in 2002, earning a coveted spot to the runoff against then

President Jacques Chirac, he was met with outright rejection. His shocking advance, the first time a member of the far right had advanced that far in a French election since World War II,

prompted French voters on the left and right to rally in Chirac's favor, handing him an unprecedented 82 percent of votes in the runoff, and sending a defiant "non" to Le Pen

and the vision for France his party represented.

Related Story

Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron Advance

Fifteen years later, and for the second time in FN history, a Le Pen has once again made it to the presidential runoff. But it's no longer Jean-Marie on the ballot, nor has there been the same kind of uproar the party faced the last time it made it this close to the Élysée Palace. Like her father, Marine Le Pen isn't expected to become president—polls project she'll lose by a wide margin to Emmanuel Macron, her independent challenger. But unlike her father, and unlike 2002, Le Pen's standing in the May 7 runoff was widely anticipated.

Dr. David Lees, a researcher on French politics at Warwick University, tells me the FN's expected advance signals a shift from the France of 2002—one that is best illustrated through the covers of French left-wing daily *Libération* from both periods.

The cover of French newspaper *Libération* in April 2002 (L) and April 2017. (*Libération*)

"If you look at this year's *Libération*, it's simply a picture of Macron celebrating his victory over Le Pen, rather than decrying the presence of Le Pen, and that's really important," Lees said. "It shows you where we are in France now—it's just not a shock that she's there."

Le Pen has been a force throughout the presidential contest. Since December polls showed her consistently in either first or second place in the first round of the presidential election. When she formally launched her campaign in February, Le Pen cast her candidacy as part of the larger populist wave sweeping the Western world and advocated a France with closed borders, its own currency, and a government that put the country, and its people, first. It's a vision of France the FN has promoted since its founding in 1972—and which has now gained momentum.

"Part of the reason 2002 was so phenomenal was partly because we had an extreme right candidate in that situation for the first time," Lees said, "but part of it was socially, because it came on the back of World Cup victory for France in 1998."

The country's 3-0 upset against Brazil was a big deal. Not only did France earn its first World Cup title, it did so using its star power in Zinedine Zidane, the Marseille-born footballer of Algerian descent; Lilian Thuram, a defender from the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe; and Marcel Desailly, a defender from Ghana. Their victory was regarded by many as a milestone for multicultural harmony. *The New York Times* called the win "a rebuke, in an athletic sense anyway, of the anti-immigration stand by Jean-Marie Le Pen and the right-wing National Front party that has gained popularity in recent years." *The Economist* said the victory was "a blow for Jean-Marie Le Pen and his racist National Front," but added that not all French media was as jubilant, noting the *Libération* editor who said that while the victory cannot change the France's social reality, "it can change the image the French have of themselves."

It was this image that French voters seemingly sought to protect when they turned out en masse to support Chirac in 2002. But absent a swell of national pride, which has since been superseded by concerns over unemployment, immigration, and mounting terrorist attacks, Lees said the French may have less of an impetus to deflect a Le Pen victory.

"People across the political spectrum seem to have already decided it's a forgone conclusion that Macron is going to win," Lees said. "So there's a political and social element here as well, and I think the social context is very different because we have a situation now where terrorism is frequent and the ideas around immigration that Le Pen is proposing are quite mainstream."

Recent opinion polls (which demonstrated their track record of accuracy in the first round) project Macron to earn approximately 64 percent of the vote in the runoff. This, coupled with the endorsements of both Republican candidate François Fillon and Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, have prompted many to celebrate Macron's victory as all but certain.

Though Macron's victory is likely, Lees said the overall outcome could be closer than anticipated, fueled in part by the endorsement of Macron by François Hollande, the unpopular Socialist president, and the lack of endorsement by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the far-left candidate who came in fourth place in the first round. Unlike Fillon and Hamon, who endorsed Macron within minutes of the exit polls's release, Mélenchon refused to endorse any candidate on the onset, waiting exactly one week after the first

round before cautioning his supporters against making the "terrible mistake" of voting for the FN. He refused to say whether or not he would vote for Macron.

"[Mélenchon's decision] leaves the door wide open for people who are Euro-skeptic on the extreme left to back Le Pen or to abstain," Lees said.

Indeed, Mélenchon's supporters deviating to the far-right or abstaining altogether may be what Le Pen is hoping for. In a surprise announcement last week that she would step down as leader of the FN to focus on the runoff, Le Pen said, "I am no longer the president of the National Front. I am the candidate for the French presidency."

Though it's unclear if the move will be permanent, Lees said it signals Le Pen's effort to distance herself from the FN's fringe reputation and attract more left-wing voters.

"The party of course is still perceived despite Marine Le Pen's best efforts as being a little bit toxic, and I think what she's trying to do here is if there are extreme left Socialists who are very Euro-skeptic who don't want to back Macron because they see him as a kind of embodiment of the neoliberal elite," Lees said. "This is an opportunity, a door, to vote Le Pen without necessarily voting for the Front National."

Although Le Pen may have attempted to distance herself from the FN, she has not moved away from its policies. On Saturday, she announced that, if elected, she would nominate Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, a right-wing politician and her former first-round rival, to be prime minister. Like Le Pen, Dupont-Aignan ran a Euro-skeptic platform and advocated headline approaches to security and economic protectionism. While his addition to the campaign isn't expected to bolster her base of support significantly—he carried 4.7 percent of the vote in the first round—the move could signal Le Pen's willingness to soften certain FN policies such as its position on the euro. Dupont-Aignan said their alliance would come with "modifications" to her platform, noting, for example, that reincorporating the franc as the national currency would no longer be "a prerequisite for any economic policy."

But Le Pen has also signaled her desire to court center-right voters. The FN candidate was criticized Monday after video surfaced of her lifting word-for-word sections of speeches from her formal rival, Fillon.

The FN was undeterred. Florian Philippot, the FN vice president, "completely owned up" to the fact Le Pen's speech resembled Fillon's in an interview Tuesday with Radio Classique, calling the move a "nod-and-a-wink" to Fillon's speech meant to "launch a real debate" about French identity. David Rachline, Le Pen's campaign manager, offered a similar explanation to French broadcaster France 2 Tuesday, adding the move "was appreciated, including by all of Fillon's supporters"—though the Republican candidate has endorsed Macron.

Apart from each candidate's overall appeal, voters will too have to consider their ability to govern once they make it to the Élysée—a challenge markedly more difficult for Macron and Le Pen, one of whom, Macron, has no legislative presence, and the other, Le Pen, whose presence is marginal. As I previously reported, neither the FN nor Macron's En Marche party are likely to gain enough seats in the June election for the National Assembly, France's lower but more powerful house of parliament. This makes cohabitation, in which the president must share power with the prime minister of a different party, almost certain. Though the power-sharing arrangement has never historically been a favorable one, it may not be totally insurmountable for Macron, whose centrist platform Lees said could appeal to legislators across the political spectrum.

"Macron is not a well-known right-wing president governing with a left-wing government, or vice versa," Lees said. "If he ends up governing with the center-right, he'll probably become more center-right, and likewise he's already been with the Socialists in some form so he can probably get on with them very well. It'll be a very different form of cohabitation, but it's going to be absolutely vital."

Macron has already begun to voice his willingness to address the concerns of Euro-skeptics, telling the BBC that while he is "pro-European," he would fight for the European Union's reform.

"I defended constantly during this election the European idea and European policies ... but at the same time we have to face the situation, to listen to our people, and to listen to the fact that they are extremely angry today, impatient and the dysfunction of the EU is no more sustainable," Macron said, adding: "So I do consider that my mandate, the day after, will be at the same time to reform in depth the European Union and our European project."

Le Pen may not be as lucky. With the FN claiming only two of the National Assembly's 577 seats, she is unlikely to claim a legislative majority no matter how well the FN performs in June. What's more, she may struggle to find legislators on the left or the right to back her far-right platform.

"It would be virtually impossible for Le Pen to govern on an everyday basis," Lees said. "She would find it

very hard to get anything through the National Assembly, even though it'd be a right-wing National Assembly ... it would be very, very difficult."

With the second-round of voting this Sunday, Macron and Le Pen will now have the task of persuading voters who supported their former opponents. Though recent polls project many of these voters will turn out to vote for Macron (French

pollster Ipsos projects that 62 percent of Mélenchon's voters, 48 percent of Fillon's, and 79 percent of Hamon's will support him), abstention could play a role. France saw a 22.2 percent abstention rate in the first round, slightly higher than the rate in the presidential elections of 2007 and 2012.

Regardless of how many people turn out to vote in the second round, Lees warned France is unlikely to

see the 82 percent turnout that averted a Le Pen victory in 2002.

"There's an apathy, there's a complacency, and there's a sense that 'Well [Jean-Marie Le Pen] didn't do it in 2002, so why can [Marine Le Pen] do it in 2017?'" Lees said. "That's a slightly worrying attitude."



5-7 minutes

By Sylvie Corbet | AP May 3 at 7:16 AM

PARIS — As French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron prepares for a Sunday runoff against far-right rival Marine Le Pen, his wife is pondering the prospect of a prominent job herself. That's unusual for France, as is the fact that throughout the campaign Brigitte Macron has been her husband's closest collaborator.

Le Pen and her companion, Louis Aliot, an official with her far-right National Front party, remain discreet about their relationship, only occasionally appearing publicly as a couple.

Brigitte Macron, meanwhile, has become one of the most talked-about women in France. Much of it is mean-spirited, focusing on her age: She is 63 while her husband is 39. Feminists denounce the comments as sexist and note that the Macrons' age difference is identical to that of Donald and Melania Trump.

Many voters have ignored such talk, focusing on the economic and security issues in the campaigns.

"Of course it's very unusual for a woman to be much older than her husband, but once you've said that there's nothing much to add," said Parisian Marie Coste, 34. "It's more

Would-be French first lady an unusual presence in campaign (online)

By Sylvie Corbet | AP

important to focus on the candidates' policies."

Emmanuel Macron responded to the issue Monday by acknowledging that his family is "a little different."

"So yes, there are in France lots of families," he told a crowd chanting his wife's name. "There are same-sex couples and different-sex couples. There are different filiations. And there is plenty of love."

The crowd gave him a standing ovation.

The couple met when she was about the age he is now; he was a teenager.

Then known as Brigitte Auziere, the married mother of three taught French literature in the northern French town of Amiens, where Emmanuel Macron attended a Catholic high school.

Although she never was assigned as his teacher, she was in charge of the high school drama club when he joined. They got to know each other when the 16-year-old Emmanuel suggested they write a play together.

"We wrote, and little by little, I was totally awed by the intellect of this boy," she recalled in a documentary on French television last year. "His culture, how his head is clever, well-formed. Amazing."

Macron's parents, worried about the budding love affair, sent him away for his last year of high school. Brigitte eventually divorced, returned

to her maiden name, Trogneux, and joined him in Paris.

The couple married in 2007. They have no children together but Macron says his wife's three children and seven grandchildren are his family.

The couple appeared hand-in-hand on stage the night he placed first in the presidential election's first round. They waved at the crowd with tears in their eyes and kissed — another rarity in French politics, where politicians usually keep their private lives private.

Brigitte Macron often accompanies her husband on campaign stops, taking selfies and listening to people's concerns. She also helps prepare his speeches.

A fashion lover, her style is often described as "modern" in French magazines. She sat in the front row at recent Dior and Louis Vuitton shows.

She quit her job at a chic Parisian high school in 2015 to help her husband. Former students at the Lycee Saint-Louis de Gonzague describe her as an enthusiastic, dynamic, joyful person keen to share her passion for French authors.

As a first lady, she says, she would continue to focus on young people.

"My combat will be education," she told Paris Match magazine last year.

Genevieve Perrier, 91, who lives in the countryside in the Burgundy region, praised Brigitte Macron's

Related Video

apparent "simplicity" because "she seems to speak to everyone when we see her on television. She seems very kind."

Perrier said Brigitte Macron reminds her of another atypical woman, Germaine Coty, France's first lady in the 1950s. At first mocked for her grandmotherly style, Coty went on to enjoy great popularity because of her devotion to the French people.

More recently, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's now-former wife, Cecilia, played a major role in his campaign and worked alongside him.

The couple split up a few months after Sarkozy's election in 2007 and he remarried model and singer Carla Bruni, who assumed a more traditional role as first lady by staying out of politics and taking part in charity events.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

Emmanuel Macron says he would formalize the job of first lady if he wins the election, and his wife would help decide how.

"She has her word to say in this," he said this month.

France has not had a first lady since current President Francois Hollande and his girlfriend, Valerie Trierweiler, parted ways. Their breakup came in 2014 after a tabloid magazine exposed his affair with actress Julie Gayet. Gayet and Hollande have never appeared together in public.



Niha Masih

9-11 minutes

These are heady times for the far right in France, and particularly for the far-right elements in the small southwestern town of Béziers. When I visited the town last year and spoke to its mayor, Robert Menard, he described the place as a sort of

Inside Béziers, France's Far-Right Laboratory

laboratory for the French far right, one that produces results predictive of the country's future. "What is happening in Béziers today," he said, "will happen in France in 20 years."

And yet, so far, the results are mixed. On the one hand, the far-right National Front party, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, registered its best electoral

performance to date in the first round of the presidential elections on April 23. Le Pen's path to the presidency is a difficult one; the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron is heavily favored to win in the May 7 runoff. But her strong showing in the first round was an indication that for many in France, a far-right leadership is no longer unthinkable, particularly in the wake of multiple terror attacks on French

soil. It was also a stinging rebuke to the establishment Socialist and Republican parties, which received a drubbing while outsider candidates Le Pen and Macron took political center stage.

Related Story

What the French Election Might Have Looked Like in America

On the other hand, two days after that vote, Menard—a leading proponent of the far right who is backed by the National Front—was found guilty of inciting hatred against Muslims. In a television appearance last September, he'd said, "In a downtown class in my hometown, 91 percent of the children are Muslim. Obviously, this is a problem." He'd also tweeted, "#BackToSchool: the most striking proof of #GreatReplacement in progress. Just look at old class photos." The term "Great Replacement" refers to the theory, popularized by French author Renaud Camus, that the ethnic French population will be replaced by Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa.

Menard was slapped with a 2,000-euro fine, plus damages of 1,000 euros to be paid out to the civil society organizations that had brought him to court. Questioning the "unjust" court verdict, an angry Menard told me on Friday, "In France, it is forbidden to tell the truth. I'm just saying how things are. I'm just saying what everyone is seeing."

These two incidents—the vote and the verdict—illustrate the country's paradoxical relationship to the far right. While the French are voting for the far right in significant numbers, they also have institutional mechanisms in place to keep it in check. What remains to be seen is which of these two forces will win out in the battle for the leadership of France.

Nowhere is this battle being fought more stridently than in the narrow, serpentine alleyways of small towns like Béziers. Here, Le Pen won 31 percent of the vote, 10 percent higher than her national average.

For Franck Manogil, a young National Front councilor in Béziers, this was an important marker of the party's success. "People are voting for us rather than against other parties," he said.

Marc Giner, 61, a retired pharmaceutical executive from Béziers and generally a supporter of the Republican party, voted for the

National Front in 2015 for the first time. "When you see that the right and left are doing nothing, you turn to the extremists, who have solutions," he told me. Giner also supports Menard and believes that the media unfairly maligns the mayor and that the court verdict against him was problematic. "Menard may have spoken clumsily, but what he said was the truth. He is saying aloud what everyone is thinking in their heads."

Menard isn't a traditional politician, but a former journalist who co-founded Reporters Without Borders, a global organization promoting press freedom. In 2014, he ran as an independent for the post of mayor in Béziers, winning with the official support of the National Front.

In his three controversial years in office, Menard has focused on the redevelopment of the city center and on civic issues like cleanliness, but also on stoking fears related to security, immigration, and French identity. Among other things, he armed the municipal police with handguns (not the norm), attempted to throw out Syrian refugees squatting in a public housing unit (not his jurisdiction), and opposed kebab shops in the city (of which he said there were "too many").

"What Menard does in Béziers—particularly on immigration, the French identity, and how he behaves with his opponents—shows what the obsessions of the National Front are," said Jean-Yves Camus, co-author of *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. "Béziers is like a testing ground for what the policies of the National Front would be if Marine Le Pen were elected."

Robert Menard speaks during a National Front campaign rally in Perpignan on April 15, 2017.

Béziers' economic distress offers one clue as to why Menard's brand of politics has taken root. Vineyards once dominated the landscape and the local economy, until stiff competition from countries like Spain, where the labor costs were lower, made wine-making less profitable. Many vineyards closed or scaled down operations.

Unemployment soared higher as the national economy faltered amid the 2008 global financial crisis. The unemployment rate in Béziers is about 16.7 percent, significantly above the national average of 10 percent. The town is among the poorest in the country.

Menard claimed he would address this, as well as the growth of the town's immigrant population. Situated just under 100 miles from the Spanish border, close to Perpignan, Béziers' Mediterranean climate attracted many Spaniards during the Spanish Civil War, as well as French Christian settlers from Algeria, like Menard's own family. It also attracted Muslim immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Menard told me last year that with each successive generation of immigrants from the Maghreb, integration gets worse.

Jérôme Fourquet, director of the opinion department at the French Institute of Public Opinion, said that Béziers represents the far-right strain that leverages the tension between locals and people of immigrant origin. This is being replicated by the far right at the national level. "They successfully play on the three main insecurities of voters—economic, physical, and cultural," he explained. "Their motto is '*On est chez nous*' (We are at home), which means that the French are still around to decide how they want to live, how they want to eat, how they want to dress. Béziers is very emblematic of this."

"We could see the growth of the extreme right wing. We have been living under it here since 2014."

This strategy has proved effective on the local level in Béziers, and it may be scalable on the national level up to a point. But France's two-round voting system means that what worked for the far right in the first round may not be enough to win over the nation in the second round, when an anti-establishment platform may make it hard to attract a broad enough voting base.

Even locally, Menard's tenure has had its setbacks. In 2016, a court struck down the mayor's plan to form a vigilante force of former security professionals to patrol the

streets of the city. Later in the year, he tried to hold a referendum on whether Béziers should take in more refugees as directed by the national government; the courts put a stop to this move as well. And the latest penalties imposed by the courts on Menard show that, for all the apparent shift toward the far right, there are checks and balances to counter his agenda.

Some of the pushback to Menard's rhetoric has come from local activists like Mehdi Roland, 35, a Catholic-born convert to Islam. Describing how his sister-in-law was asked to remove her headscarf for a job, he told me that the headscarf ban was a major force driving Muslim disillusionment with French society. "The problem is, people repeat, 'Muslims are not French.' The more they say this, the more Muslims believe they are not," he explained.

The National Front's strong showing didn't come as a surprise to Roland. "We could see the growth of the extreme right wing. We have been living under it here since 2014," he said. "This has caused considerable damage and division between people. ... I don't wish that for my country."

Undaunted, Menard told me that part of what has made his strategy successful in Béziers is bringing together "parts of the traditional right, the extreme right and everything in the middle." With the decimation of the Socialists and the poor performance of the Republicans, he hopes the same convergence will soon happen at a national level. Apart from Le Pen's anti-EU stance, he said, there is very little difference between a Republican and a far-right voter. Thirty-one percent of Republican voters have indicated a preference for Le Pen, even though their candidate came out in support of Macron after the first round.

"I aspire for a grand party, conservative on social issues, liberal on economic ones," Menard said. "I hope this election will accelerate its creation."

NPR : Despite Drop In French Election Polls, Supporters Stand Behind Marine Le Pen : NPR

Eleanor Beardsley Facebook Twitter Instagram

5-6 minutes

The far-right candidate in the French presidential election is lagging way

behind the front-runner, but supporters of Marine Le Pen say she can still become the next president of France.

ROBERT SIEGEL, HOST:

Far-right French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen is running

15-20 points behind her centrist rival. The runoff is on Sunday. Even so, Le Pen has been running an effective campaign, and she says she can beat Emmanuel Macron. NPR's Eleanor Beardsley says that result can't be ruled out. It's been an unpredictable election year that has

seen every establishment candidate eliminated.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED LE PEN SUPPORTERS: (Chanting in French).

ELEANOR BEARDSLEY, BYLINE: Le Pen has been drawing huge crowds. Her supporters hang on every word, chanting and booing as if on cue. Le Pen says she's fighting for the people against Macron's cold world of profits and finance.

MARINE LE PEN: (Speaking French).

UNIDENTIFIED LE PEN SUPPORTERS: (Booing).

BEARDSLEY: "He is about globalization and the oligarchy. He's a pure immigrationist, selfish individualist and European unionist. He's exactly the opposite of what we stand for."

JEAN MARC ILLOUZ: I do think that Marine Le Pen can win because she's such a great speaker, because she is so able to use passion.

BEARDSLEY: That's Jean Marc Illoz, a former political correspondent with France 2 Television. He says the election is Macron's to lose. And when it comes to political rhetoric, the political newcomer doesn't hold a candle to the biting,

experienced Le Pen.

ILLOUZ: He is dwarfed by her demagogical approach to solving problems with a magic wand. People are mad at unemployment. People are afraid of terrorism. And Marine Le Pen says look, Marine Le Pen will do it all. I'm Superwoman.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED MACRON SUPPORTERS: (Chanting in French).

BEARDSLEY: Macron supporters admit their candidate had a slow start in the second round but say he's now hitting his stride. Addressing a huge rally on May 1, Macron called Marine Le Pen the anti-France.

EMMANUEL MACRON: (Through interpreter) Both our enemies and Madame Le Pen want the same thing. They want to see this country divided, and they want civil war. And they are feeding off each other. I will never let this country be divided over race or religion.



France Emerges as VC Dealmaker for Alternative to Nuclear Energy

@ahirtens More stories by Anna

Hirtenstein

7-9 minutes

- Companies anticipate next government will stimulate renewables
- Funding for grid technology to manage variable power flows

Three French companies have emerged as the most prolific venture capital dealmakers for new energy technologies as the country starts to seek out low-polluting alternatives for its aging nuclear reactors.

Engie SA, Demeter Partners SA and Total SA participated in more green-energy deals than any other venture capital firms last year, according to the most recent data compiled by Bloomberg New Energy Finance. While the \$62.3 million that French funds put into the industry is a fraction of the overall \$7.5 billion VCs invested in green energy, the number of deals indicates a budding community of early-stage financiers outside Silicon Valley.

Even as Electricite de France SA seeks to prolong the lives of aging nuclear reactors, the leading presidential contender is pushing for a shift toward renewables and companies are gearing up to make

bigger investments in wind and solar farms. The VC funds are backing technologies that modernize the power grid to cope with power supplies that vary with the weather and can accommodate more electric mobility.

"They are finally prioritizing renewables, perhaps at the expense of nuclear," said BNEF analyst Dario Traum, referring to tenders where the government awards building permits and power purchase agreements. "France has set a clear quarter-by-quarter auction schedule through to 2019. Very few other markets in the world are as clear right now."

The French firms remain small against established Silicon Valley companies. The three that led the ranking completed 21 deals in 2016 -- as many as the next six VC institutions combined -- in the Bloomberg New Energy Finance ranking. Draper Fisher Jurveston and Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers LLC continue to lead the industry, with a total of 286 deals between them since BNEF started collecting data more than a decade ago.

"We invest either as minority shareholders if it's very technological, or take control if it's core business, in companies which may become global leaders," said Thierry Lepercq, head of innovation, research and technology at Engie,

BEARDSLEY: In 2002, when Le Pen's father made the runoff, every other political party came together to block the far-right. Jean-Marie Le Pen was soundly defeated. But this time, there are cracks in the anti-National Front unity. As many as a third of far-left voters say they don't like Le Pen but can't bring themselves to vote for Macron either. Even so, says political commentator Thierry Arnaud, a Le Pen victory is still a very unlikely scenario.

THIERRY ARNAUD: But it is not an impossible one. For that to happen, you would have to have a very low turnout, a massive abstention by French standards. And let me remind you that about 80 percent of the French electorate usually goes to the polls for a presidential election.

BEARDSLEY: But this presidential vote falls in the middle of a three-day holiday weekend. While fervent far-right voters are sure to go to the polls, Macron supporters are worried turnout for their side might be lower. Meanwhile, Le Pen is trying to appeal to more mainstream voters by backing off of some of her more

extreme positions and toning down her anti-EU talk. Two polls out today show the gap between Macron and Le Pen closing slightly. Political science professor Pascal Perrineau says she could win, but all of her stars have to align.

PASCAL PERRINEAU: (Through interpreter) She would need a terrorist attack, a huge abstention rate from the left that refuses to vote for a banker, and on top of that, a massive protest vote, people who say, enough, we're voting anti-system come what may.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

MACRON: (Speaking French).

BEARDSLEY: Today in a radio interview, Macron said he planned to win the election by talking to people's intelligence not playing on their fears. He has four days to do so.

Eleanor Beardsley, NPR News, Paris.

(SOUNDBITE OF BEIRUT SONG, "AS NEEDED")

the utility formerly known as GDF Suez.

VC funding has always been a small but important part of the money going into clean energy, which reached \$287.5 billion pounds last year. The VC funds typically put small amounts of money into frontier technologies, hoping for a double-digit return on the ones that work. Investment by VC and private equity firms increased a fifth annually over the last three years, rebounding from a peak in 2011 when the industry was backing manufacturers of wind turbines and solar cells.

Since then, the investments have moved onto technologies like electric cars and computer software that helps utilities better manage power grids.

To date, France has lagged neighbors developing renewable energy, which account for 15 percent of installed capacity, excluding hydropower. That compares with 34 percent in the U.K. and 51 percent in Germany. Last year, France received 72 percent of its electricity from nuclear reactors, according to BNEF.

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A shift already is underway. President Francois Hollande's government has introduced a

clearer and more favorable legal framework for clean-energy and boosted incentives to switch to electric vehicles with higher taxes on gas guzzlers. Emmanuel Macron, who is the front runner in the presidential contest that culminates on May 7, has called for greater use of renewables. His rival Marine Le Pen has said she would prolong the country's dependence on atomic power

Even so, the government will need a replacement for aging reactors, and renewables are looking increasingly cheap. Germany in April awarded the biggest contracts yet to build offshore wind farms without subsidy, prompting developers such as Dong Energy A/S to forecast a drop in technology costs.

"All outcomes require the government to think about accommodating the growing share of renewables," said Traum from BNEF. "Policies will be needed to incentivize technologies that help integrate them into the grid."

Total Venture

The French government has put money into eight of the 10 active funds managed by Demeter Partners, a Paris-based investor that stakes as much as a third of its seed funds in startups. The European Investment Fund is another key investor at Demeter, which has been putting money into technologies that help grids handle renewable energy.

"Regarding the new frontiers such as storage, energy efficiency and smart grids, I think there's a lot to do," said Lionel Cormier, managing director at Demeter. "The energy transition is on the way, this will open up a lot of opportunity for the French players."

Total's venture capital unit similarly sees opportunities in computer software and other gadgets that facilitate the way electricity is used.

"For renewables energies, one of the key elements is how you do connect to the grid, how do you arbitrate between what you produce and what you consume," said Francois Badoual, CEO of Total Energy Ventures. "That's clearly an area of interest for us."

While its parent remains focused on oil exploration and production, Badoual unit has invested about 160 million euros (\$170 million) in clean

energy-related technology companies since 2008. Most of them are in the U.S. where activity levels have been high, but he also sees opportunities in France, particularly in the emerging clean mobility sector such as car-sharing and digitalized parking.

Paris's new role in clean technologies dealmaking may continue. Engie's Lepercq says that his company's venture capital unit

has invested more in the first quarter than in all of 2016.

"In VC, we'll do fewer deals in 2017, but the amount is already exceeding last year," he said. "Each investment is bigger, their number will be more limited, and the vision will be much more strategic."

New York Post : Knicks enamored with 18-year-old French point guard

By Marc Berman

2 minutes

The last time the Knicks went French in the draft, it was a disaster, but times have changed since 1999.

According to an NBA source, Knicks general manager Steve Mills jetted to France to catch 18-year-old point guard Frank Ntilikina play Tuesday night for Strasbourg in a French

League match against Nanterre.

The 6-foot-5 Ntilikina is considered the top international prospect in the draft, and if the Knicks stay with the seventh pick, he would be heavily considered.

Ntilikina is all potential: a reserve playing 15 minutes per game, shooting 57 percent and 44.2 percent from 3-point range and averaging 5.2 points. Strasbourg lost Tuesday, 74-65, to fall to 20-10.

When Ntilikina's season finishes in late May after the playoffs, he will head to the United States. But he will miss next week's NBA Draft Combine in Chicago.

In 2015, Mills traveled to Spain without team president Phil Jackson to watch Kristaps Porzingis play for Sevilla and stumbled upon his teammate, center Willy Hernangomez. Porzingis and Hernangomez are slated as the Knicks front-court tandem for the next several years.

In that fateful 1999 draft, the Knicks selected French center Frederic Weis in the first round. He never played in an NBA game. In 2014, with the 57th pick of the second round, Jackson selected Frenchman Louis Ayberie, who has yet to come over to the U.S.

**The
New York
Times**

Angela Merkel Presses Vladimir Putin on Treatment of Gays and Jehovah's Witnesses

Neil MacFarquhar and Alison Smale

5-6 minutes

MOSCOW — Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, took the opportunity of a rare visit to Russia to raise human rights issues on Tuesday with President Vladimir V. Putin, a noted departure from their continuing differences over Ukraine and Syria.

Ms. Merkel said she had talked to Mr. Putin about her concerns on civil rights in Russia, including, among other issues, the persecution of gay men, a new ban on Jehovah's Witnesses and the arrests of anti-Kremlin protesters.

"I have, in my talks with the Russian president, indicated how important is the right to demonstrate in a civil society and how important the role of NGOs is," Ms. Merkel said at a news conference in Sochi, Russia, referring to nongovernmental organizations.

"I also spoke about the very negative report about what is happening to homosexuals in Chechnya and asked Mr. President to exert his influence to ensure that minorities' rights are protected," she added. He hosted her at his residence in Sochi, her first visit to Russia since May 2015.

There was no indication during the news conference that the two

leaders had made progress on other topics during their nearly two-hour meeting, including economic problems like sanctions and differences over Ukraine and Syria.

Germany has repeatedly pressed Russia to fulfill the Minsk peace agreements, which are meant to end the fighting in southeastern Ukraine. Although Mr. Putin endorsed the idea of their importance, he again accused Ukraine of fanning the problems there.

Europe remains Russia's most important interlocutor, despite the Kremlin's multifaceted attempts to undermine European Union solidarity and to depict the region as a caldron of anarchy and economic problems and as lacking traditional values. Moscow has repeatedly brushed off criticism of its disinformation and other campaigns in Europe as the product of "Russophobia."

In Germany, the talks are important for the chancellor as she faces a difficult race for a fourth term in elections scheduled for Sept. 24. Gay rights protesters had engaged in a 48-hour vigil outside Ms. Merkel's office, demanding that she bring up the issue of gay men in Chechnya.

Asked about recent arrests of protesters in Russia, Mr. Putin said, "Our law enforcement and judicial organs act within the framework of the laws that exist in Russia and will

continue to act in that way, observing order and discipline."

Relations between Germany and Russia have been fraught since 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and then destabilized the rest of Ukraine by its not-so-secret promotion of an insurgency in the southeast of the country. Russia also denies interfering in recent elections in the Netherlands and France, with any such plans for the German election this fall probably of particular concern for Ms. Merkel.

Ms. Merkel has led the effort among European leaders to keep Western sanctions in place until the fulfillment of the peace agreements signed in Minsk, Belarus.

One crucial economic matter is building a second branch of the Nord Stream pipeline carrying Russian gas to Europe. The strategy is to bypass Eastern European countries by shipping natural gas under the Black Sea in the south and the Baltic Sea in the north. If completed, the system of subsea pipelines would allow Russia to shut off gas to Eastern European countries during political disputes without disrupting hard-currency earnings from customers in Western Europe.

Germans have been among the staunchest supporters of the plan, while European capitals generally hostile to Moscow are opposed to

increasing dependence on Russian gas.

The head of the Russian gas giant Gazprom, Alexei Miller, was quoted in Russian news reports last week as saying that the two sides had agreed on paying for construction costs, with Russia paying about half of the more than \$10 billion and five European companies the rest.

The twin issues of Crimea and Ukraine could block any improvement in relations, Ms. Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said before her visit. "These are burdensome circumstances which cannot just be talked away," he said.

Berlin also has doubts about Russia's intervention in Syria, particularly its support for President Bashar al-Assad in the face of repeated evidence that he deployed chemical weapons against his civilian population.

Mr. Putin also said that the two sides had discussed settling the conflict in Syria; later on Tuesday, he was scheduled to talk by phone with President Trump about Syria.

Asked whether he had influence over Mr. Assad, Mr. Putin said Russia, in tandem with Turkey and Iran, was trying to "create the conditions for political cooperation from all sides."

A cease-fire is a top priority, he said, and will be the focus of talks on Wednesday and the next day in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Putin is also scheduled to hold talks on Wednesday in Sochi with the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, that will most likely focus on Syria. Mr. Erdogan said on Tuesday in Ankara, the Turkish

capital, that he would discuss possible operations against the Islamic State in Syria with Mr. Putin.

Ms. Merkel and Mr. Putin last met in October, when she hosted him, along with the leaders of France and Ukraine, for inconclusive talks on carrying out the cease-fire in Ukraine.

The official reason for the visit on Tuesday was the agenda of the Group of 20 summit meeting in July in Hamburg, Germany, where Ms. Merkel will be the host. It will probably be the first face-to-face encounter between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin.

Given the uncertainties of American policy toward Russia, which has

moved from warmth from Mr. Trump as a candidate to something more antagonistic, Germany might find itself serving as an intermediary despite its own qualms over the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The New York Times

To Understand 'Brexit,' Look to Britain's Tabloids

Katrin Bennhold

16-20 minutes

LONDON — Tony Gallagher, editor of The Sun, one of Britain's most raucous and influential tabloids, looks down on the government, literally. From the height of his 12th-floor newsroom, all glass and views, the Palace of Westminster seems like a toy castle, something to be played with or ignored at will.

Mr. Gallagher also looks down on the editor of the more measured Times of London, whose office is one floor below and who makes a point of keeping his blinds drawn. The hierarchy is not lost on either man.

In Britain after the so-called Brexit vote, the power of the tabloids is evident. Their circulations may be falling and their reputations tarnished by a series of phone-hacking scandals. But as the country prepares to cut ties with the European Union after a noisy and sometimes nasty campaign, top politicians court the tabloids and fear their wrath. Broadcasters follow where they lead, if not in tone then in topic.

Their readers, many of them over 50, working class and outside London, look strikingly like the voters who were crucial to the outcome of last year's referendum on membership in the European Union. It is these citizens of Brexitland the tabloids purport to represent from the heart of enemy territory: Housed in palatial dwellings in some of London's most expensive neighborhoods, they see themselves as Middle England's embassies in London.

In the campaign leading up to a snap election on June 8, most tabloids can be counted on to act as the zealous guardians of Brexit and as a cheering section for the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May — even though the city that houses them voted the other way.

The Sun offices are just below Mr. Murdoch's office. José Sarmiento Matos for The New York Times

Mr. Gallagher made his mark on three of Britain's most stridently pro-Brexit newspapers. He was editor of The Daily Telegraph, a conservative broadsheet, and deputy editor of the more midmarket Daily Mail, one of The Sun's main rivals, before Rupert Murdoch poached him 20 months ago. Together, these three titles are a central reason that print coverage of the referendum campaign was skewed 80 percent to 20 percent in favor of Brexit, according to research by Loughborough University.

In the marble-and-glass lobby of the 17-story News Building, home to Mr. Murdoch's British media empire, there is a small plaque that commemorates the building's 2014 opening by Boris Johnson, then the mayor of London and now the British foreign secretary.

Mr. Johnson, wild-haired and witty, became a chief architect of Brexit when, four months before the referendum, he threw his weight behind a cause until then most closely associated with the populist U.K. Independence Party. But his main contribution to Brexit may go back more than two decades.

A correspondent in Brussels for The Daily Telegraph in the early 1990s, Mr. Johnson was credited by fellow reporters with pioneering the euroskeptic coverage of the European Union that has since become the default setting for much of the British press. With little regard for the truth — he was previously fired by The Times of London for making up a quote — Mr. Johnson wrote about a Europe scheming to impose standard condom sizes and ban his country's beloved prawn-cocktail-flavored chips (both untrue).

"Boris invented fake news," said Martin Fletcher, a former foreign editor of The Times, who was in Brussels shortly after Mr. Johnson. "He turned euroskepticism into an art form that every news editor in London came to expect."

Before the referendum, Mr. Fletcher added, "Boris campaigned against the cartoon caricature of Brussels that he himself invented."

The campaign was marked by a relentless drip of anti-immigration

rhetoric and a couple of big lies that stuck: the 350 million pounds (about \$450 million at current rates) that Britain paid to the European Union every week (false) and the prospect of millions of Turks' making their way to Britain if it stayed in the union (Turkey is not joining the bloc). Two years ago, the United Nations urged Britain to deal with hate speech in its newspapers, specifically citing a column in The Sun that compared migrants to cockroaches and the norovirus.

The tabloids say they merely reflect the concerns and fears of their readers. But their critics say they poison the debate by playing to people's worst instincts and prejudices, distorting facts and creating a propaganda ramp that mainstreams intolerance and shapes policy.

Tony Gallagher, editor of The Sun, in his office. José Sarmiento Matos for The New York Times

Respected, and Feared

I had emailed Mr. Gallagher seeking an interview on March 29, the same day Britain delivered a letter to European Union leaders in Brussels formally initiating the two-year Brexit negotiations. I argued that it was difficult to understand Britain today without understanding the tabloids. He must have agreed.

The elevator rose past the offices of The Wall Street Journal, the Dow Jones news agency, The Sunday Times and The Times, all the way up to The Sun's newsroom. Mr. Murdoch, proprietor of The Sun since 1969, sits right above.

At The Telegraph, Mr. Gallagher won respect for overseeing coverage of one of the biggest political scandals in recent British history: More than two dozen lawmakers resigned after the paper revealed widespread abuse of allowances and expenses that paid for, among other things, limed oak toilet seats and the clearing of a moat.

But he also has a reputation for losing his temper. "Mail Men," a new book about The Daily Mail, where Mr. Gallagher spent much of his career, quotes former colleagues

describing him as a "figure of death" who "put the fear of the devil into his reporters."

A tall, lean figure, he guided me to a seat opposite a panoramic view of London. Throughout our conversation, he was cautious and mostly unsmiling, but polite. (He called the book's depiction of him "mean.")

Unprompted, he pointed to a staircase and explained that The Sun's newsroom was the only one in the building with direct access to the management floor. ("They are up and down those stairs all the time," a journalist said later. "They" are Mr. Murdoch, when he is in town, and his British chief, Rebekah Brooks, a former editor of The Sun and of the now-defunct News of the World who was charged with criminal offenses related to phone hacking but was cleared by a jury in 2014.)

Mr. Gallagher was still enjoying the aftermath of a recent showdown with the government. The Sun had printed bumper stickers and run an eight-page special report on how a rise in national insurance contributions for self-employed people would hurt "White Van Men," shorthand for members of the working class, who, in The Sun's view, were getting the shaft.

A front-page splash last fall insinuated that child refugees arriving in Britain from Calais, France, were lying about their ages and should have dental X-rays.

It was the first time the tabloids had turned on the nine-month-old government of Mrs. May, and she swiftly retreated. "It took them less than a week," Mr. Gallagher recalled.

He recounted the fury of David Cameron — Mrs. May's predecessor as prime minister, who called for the referendum and campaigned to stay in the European Union — when The Sun turned against him on Brexit with a blistering front-page attack.

It so happened that Mr. Gallagher had a prearranged meeting with Mr. Cameron that day — "Just a catch-up," the editor recalled. Mr. Cameron was cursing "about the

coverage that he was getting in the early stages of the referendum," Mr. Gallagher said. "He was in a red-faced four-letter rage."

"I put my pen in my mouth because I thought I was going to burst out laughing," he added.

At their best, Britain's irreverent tabloids report without fear or favor, aggressively holding the political elite to account. But they can be selective about whom they hound — and boastful. In 1992, when the Conservative Party unexpectedly beat Labour after a ferocious anti-Labour campaign in The Sun, the paper's headline proclaimed, "It's the Sun Wot Won It."

And Brexit? Was it The Sun wot won it?

"We campaigned for Brexit," Mr. Gallagher said carefully. "I don't think we caused Brexit."

In June, barely an hour after the referendum results were in, he struck a very different tone in a text message to a journalist at The Guardian: "So much for the waning power of the print media."

A newspaper shop in Dagenham, England. José Sarmiento Matos for The New York Times

Mirroring or Inciting Readers?

According to a recent analysis by the Media Reform Coalition, a pressure group, senior executives from Murdoch-owned companies met with the prime minister or the chancellor of the Exchequer 10 times in the year ended in September, when the study was completed — more than any other media organization in the country.

Yet The Sun sells only 1.6 million copies today (more than 80 percent of them outside London and the country's wealthy southeast), down from a peak of 4.7 million in the mid-1990s. It lost more than £60 million, about \$75 million, last year.

Why are politicians still so scared?

"It's a fact that print newspapers, national newspapers, set the agenda here far more effectively than broadcasters, who are essentially a reactive medium," said Mr. Gallagher, noting that newspapers can keep hitting certain issues.

"So if you as a newspaper are making much of the fact that all our laws are made in Europe, eventually that permeates the national consciousness," he said.

Britain makes many of its own laws, of course. But it is an interesting choice of example. A more obvious one might have been immigration.

Front-page splashes in The Daily Mail showing hostility toward migrants in the weeks leading up to last year's "Brexit" vote.

Research by a former Times journalist, Liz Gerard, showed that tabloids pounded the immigration issue, with at least 30 hostile front-page splashes in The Daily Mail in the six months leading up to the referendum, and 15 in The Sun. The headlines — "Britain's Wide Open Borders" The Daily Mail shouted — often tended toward histrionic. The Sun insinuated that child refugees arriving in Britain were lying about their ages and should have dental X-rays.

"Tell Us the Tooth," the headline read.

A week earlier, I had met Kelvin MacKenzie, a former Sun editor and a columnist who was subsequently suspended for referring to a mixed-race soccer star as a "gorilla." He said that the paper still reflected the "beating heart of Britain," and that Brexit was won on immigration "by a thousand miles."

Mr. Gallagher was more nuanced.

The Sun newsroom is the only one in the building with direct access to the management floor. José Sarmiento Matos for The New York Times

"It was about a combination of migration, sovereignty under the broad umbrella of taking back control, and a sense that, as a country, we were no longer able to control our destiny," he said.

The Sun, which recruits some employees straight out of high school, has an almost personal relationship with its readers, like that with a trusted friend down at the pub.

Other newspapers in Mr. Murdoch's group supported remaining in the European Union, Mr. Gallagher noted, reflecting the views of their readers. Among that group was the Scottish edition of The Sun, which like Scottish voters backed Remain.

"It makes commercial sense," said Mr. Gallagher. But he has also been a passionate euroskeptic for years.

"Undoubtedly, we fed people's enthusiasm," Mr. Gallagher said. But, he added, "the idea that we can somehow drag otherwise unwilling readers to a point of view that they don't otherwise have is delusional."

Roy Greenslade, a former features editor at The Sun, disagreed. In 1975, he said, the last time Britain held a referendum on membership in what was then the European Economic Community, and a time when polls suggested that most people wanted to leave, all papers

(except the communist Morning Star) campaigned to stay. People voted to stay.

"Every populist editor will tell you, 'We are merely reflecting and articulating the public views,'" said Mr. Greenslade, now a journalism professor at City University of London. "But they are publishing inaccuracies and distortions which help people to feel the way they're feeling."

The view of London from The Sun's offices. José Sarmiento Matos for The New York Times

'Creative' Headlines

It was 2:30 p.m., and Mr. Gallagher had already mocked up Pages 3-29 of the next day's paper. He expected the front page to lead with the funeral of the police officer who had been killed in the recent Westminster terrorist attack. The officer's widow and child would appear in public for the first time, which could make for "emotional" pictures, the editor said. But the decision would not be made until the daily 5 p.m. Page 1 conference.

Mr. Gallagher said he had once attended a news meeting at The New York Times. He was not impressed.

"I was shocked at how threadbare and how little actual discussion there was in the meeting," he said. "There was no energy, there was no creativity. It could not have been more desultory and perfunctory, the discussion. It was awful."

The Sun's news meetings are much more "lively," he said.

O.K., I said. Could I attend the Sun meeting that afternoon?

He stiffened. "No," he said. "It's an inner-sanctum meeting."

A what?

"We have lawyers in the meeting," he explained, adding, "We try our headlines there. It's quite a creative meeting."

Britain's tabloids pride themselves on their "creativity." Perhaps The Sun's most brazen front-page claim last year was "Queen Backs Brexit," a headline later ruled misleading by Britain's press regulator.

The Sun's unchallenged king of "creative" headlines is Mr. MacKenzie, once the paper's editor. Some of the meeting rooms are named after his most memorable creations, like "Gotcha," his take on the sinking of an Argentine warship during the Falklands War that killed more than 300 people, and "Up Yours Delors," telling Jacques Delors, then the president of the European Commission, where to

stick a proposed new European currency.

I had met Mr. MacKenzie a week earlier to ask about those headlines. "Your front pages were sometimes funny and sometimes outrageous," I began, at which point he interrupted and said, "And sometimes untrue!"

Wow.

I asked what headline he would like to see in the paper were he still in charge.

"I think the fake news headline that would give this country the most joy," he replied cheerfully, "would be 'Jeremy Corbyn Knifed to Death by an Asylum Seeker.'"

Mr. Corbyn is the leader of the Labour Party. Mr. MacKenzie's fake news headline inevitably brought to mind the murder of Jo Cox, a pro-Remain Labour lawmaker who was killed by a man with far-right leanings a week before the referendum. Her death prompted a lot of soul-searching over whether the tone of the campaign had encouraged hate crimes.

(The next morning, I got a text message from Mr. MacKenzie: "Hi Katrin, Can you change that perfect headline from 'Jeremy Corbyn knifed to death by asylum seeker' to 'Jeremy Corbyn Defrauded by Asylum Seeker.' In the light of Jo Cox murder mine is in tol poor taste.")

Mr. Gallagher left for his "inner-sanctum meeting" but promised to brief me later. I wandered up to the canteen on the 14th floor.

The servers were all Southern European. An assistant chef strolling by said the kitchen staff was mostly foreign-born, too. He could not imagine how they would staff the kitchen after Brexit. "It will be chaos," he said.

It was 5:40 p.m. The lineup for the next day's front page had been decided. The photos of the police officer's funeral were found "unsatisfactory" for a full-page splash. A soccer player, Ross Barkley, who had been beaten up in a nightclub and who would later become the subject of Mr. MacKenzie's gorilla column, was the main story. The headline: "Barkley's Spank."

My time was up. Mr. Gallagher had kept his poker face all afternoon. The only time I thought he had shifted in his seat was when I asked about his children's views on Brexit. Two were too young to vote, he said, but his oldest, who is 21, cast her ballot for Remain.

He accompanied me to the door. "Don't stitch me up," he said.

EU Says It Won't Retaliate Over U.S. Visa Policy

Valentina Pop

3 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 12:29 p.m. ET

BRUSSELS—The European Union won't impose visas on American travelers in retaliation for the U.S. continuing to exclude five EU countries from its no-visa regime, the bloc's executive branch said Tuesday.

Imposing visas, as requested by the European Parliament in March, would be "counterproductive" and scupper ongoing diplomatic efforts with the Trump administration to expand the Visa Waiver Program, said European migration commissioner Dimitris

Avramopoulos.

"The EU will always choose engagement, commitment and patient diplomacy over any form of unilateral retaliation—because this is in the mutual interest of both EU citizens, as well as the citizens of the U.S. in this case," Mr. Avramopoulos said.

He noted that similar diplomatic efforts with Canada had yielded results. As of Monday, Canada lifted its visa requirements for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens who held a Canadian visa in the past 10 years and plans to lift all visa restrictions for these two countries on Dec. 1.

"We have been working hard in the past months with the five affected member states and our U.S. counterparts to launch a more

result-oriented process, which would bring those member states closer to meet all U.S. Visa Waiver Program requirements," Mr. Avramopoulos said. The commission will report back on where things stand in December, he added.

In March, EU lawmakers made a nonbinding request for the European Commission, the EU's executive body, to retaliate after a deadline expired last year for bringing Poland, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus within the U.S. visa-free travel regime.

Under EU visa-reciprocity rules, countries allowed visa-free travel to the EU must reciprocate the no-visa regime to all EU countries. However, the U.S. Visa Waiver program is based on a country-by-country analysis of several criteria ranging

from security to visa overstays. The five newest EU members didn't make the cut, mainly due to an above-average rate of people overstaying or being denied visas.

Canada had also refused to include Romania and Bulgaria in its visa-free travel program, but that changed as part of negotiations on an EU-Canada free-trade deal last year. Australia and Japan, as well as Brunei, which also required visas from some EU countries, have also granted visa-free travel to all EU citizens over the past two years.

Write to Valentina Pop at valentina.pop@wsj.com

7-9 minutes

Greek Austerity Deal Opens Up Potential Path Out of Bailout

Nektaria Stamouli

Updated May 2, 2017 2:11 p.m. ET

ATHENS—Greece agreed to a deal with its international creditors Tuesday on fresh austerity measures to keep its €86 billion (\$93.74 billion) bailout on track, clearing the way for debt relief talks that offer a chance to heal the battered economy and avert another crisis in the European Union.

Since Greece's first bailout in May 2010, its economy has been in nearly constant decline, having shrunk by more than 25% in seven years under the pressure of €70 billion of spending cuts and tax increases demanded by international creditors. Greece's economic crisis has been as severe as the 1930s Great Depression in the U.S., but has lasted longer, according to International Monetary Fund calculations.

Now, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is betting that by conceding to more belt-tightening, including pension cuts and a broadening of the tax base, he can win a bigger prize: a restructuring of Greece's crushing €315 billion debt that will lure back international investors and revive its economy. But Greece must first win the support of a German government wary of conceding too much ahead of national elections in September.

A restructuring and a return to the capital markets could mark a turning point. Years of thorny negotiations have exacted an enormous social and economic toll and threatened a

crash out of the euro, a potential earthquake for the common currency.

Pressure has been rising on Athens as politicians in Europe try to avoid making unpopular concessions on Greece's debt. Tuesday's agreement, which comes after months of renewed brinkmanship over how much new austerity Greece is willing to accept, will release a payment of around €7 billion, without which Greece would be insolvent by July.

The deal will go to the Greek parliament in mid-May, government spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said. It would require the support of the German government, which indicated the agreement is important but not yet sufficient for Berlin to agree on debt-relief measures.

"The agreement between Greece and the institutions on further reform measures is an important step forward," the German Finance Ministry said, though stressing that the second review on the bailout program is not yet complete.

The deal could potentially ease another headache for the EU, which has been dogged by a series of challenges. It comes as confidence in the bloc is slowly returning, as nationalist movements threatening the prospects of the eurozone appear to be receding and the region's economy finally recovers after a long and painful downturn.

"It is now for all partners to reach an understanding on the question of Greece's debt in the coming weeks," said Pierre Moscovici, EU's economics commissioner. "With this agreement, we need now to write a new story of stability, jobs and

growth for Greece and for the euro area as a whole."

The agreement sets the conditions for talks, possibly by the end of May, with creditors on a deal to lengthen the maturity and lower payments on Greece's debt.

If the debt becomes more sustainable, the European Central Bank could decide to include Greece in its bond-buying program, effectively clearing the way for Athens to return to capital markets for financing. It has been shut out of international bond markets since 2010, except for a brief window in 2014.

Other EU countries that needed bailouts, such as Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus, have long returned to capital markets.

Under ECB rules, the central bank would purchase no more than €3 billion of Greek bonds. However, "if the country becomes eligible, borrowing costs will go down, Greece will regain access to markets and attract international investors' interest, a substantial factor in re-engineering growth," says Nikos Karamouzis, president of Hellenic Bank Association and Greece's lender Eurobank.

At least one local businessman was pleased with the deal.

"Our clients abroad became nervous again" in recent months, said Nikos Vasileiou, owner of an Athens-based lighting company. "Today's decision and a deal on debt that will follow are putting the country back on the right track."

Enormous obstacles remain. Greece's serious problems mean

the International Monetary Fund doesn't expect the country to grow more than 1% in the long term.

The insistence by Greece's creditors on large budget surpluses means the country, whose government debt is 179% of GDP, will live with extremely tight budgets for many years.

Greek banks are immersed in nonperforming loans, which make up 45% of all lending, contributing to a steady contraction in private credit since late 2010. And officials privately don't expect a wholesale solution to that problem soon.

The Greek economy has paid a heavy price for the delay in debt talks and the tussle with international creditors over the next bailout payment. International investors interested in Greek assets last spring decided against it. Meanwhile, Greeks withdrew €2.3 billion in deposits from the country's banks in the first two months of the year.

The economy contracted 1.2% in the fourth quarter of 2016, halting the gradual decline in Greece's sky-high unemployment rate and pushing lending down 6.6% in February, according to UBS. Economists now expect gross domestic product to grow 1.5% this year, down from a 2.7% forecast late 2016.

Bankers say interest from foreign investors could return now. Distressed -debt investors are eyeing packages of bad loans, they say, while there has been interest in Greek real estate, whose prices are down by as much as half since the start of the crisis. There are also opportunities in tourism, which will

likely see a record year in Greece in 2017.

"The time is now and the time is right," says John Koudounis, a leading investor in Greek-American consortium EXIN. "The Greek economy is close to bottom, if not [at] bottom, and will turn around. It's not going to happen overnight." EXIN and Chinese conglomerate Fosun are the two front-runners to buy a majority stake in a large insurance fund.

"Investor appetite is rising," says Andreas Andreadis, head of the

Greek tourism confederation. "Small businesses could finally access lending by banks, which were either excessively strict or didn't have the tools to manage the bad loan problem."

Tuesday's deal also includes measures aimed at rendering the economy more competitive, including legislation to encourage out-of-court settlement for companies to work out their debts to banks, tax authorities and suppliers.

If the ECB includes Greek sovereign debt in its bond-buying program,

Athens could expect to sell bonds with an interest rate of about 4%, according to some experts. While that is higher than the 1% it now pays for bailout funds, a return to capital markets by the government would trickle down by helping lower the interest rates Greek banks and companies now pay to issue bonds.

It could also ease access to capital markets for the many Greek companies currently shut out of bond markets. A handful of export-oriented firms such as oil refiner Motor Oil and gaming company

OPAP have issued five-year bonds with coupons of about 3.5%, but small companies struggle to secure any financing at all.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Greek Deal Opens Path to Debt Talks.'

INTERNATIONAL

**The
New York
Times**

MacFarquhar

6-8 minutes

Trump and Putin Agree to Seek Syria Cease-Fire (UNE)

Peter Baker and
Neil

according to diplomats and analysts.

WASHINGTON — President Trump reopened direct communications with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Tuesday and sought to reignite what he hoped would be a special relationship by agreeing to work together to broker a cease-fire in war-torn Syria.

In their first telephone conversation since the United States launched a cruise missile strike on Syria's Moscow-backed military to retaliate for a chemical weapons attack on civilians, Mr. Trump agreed to send a representative to Russian-brokered cease-fire talks that start on Wednesday in Astana, Kazakhstan. He and Mr. Putin also discussed meeting each other in Germany in July.

But American and Russian officials offered divergent accounts of their interest in establishing safe zones in Syria to protect civilians suffering from a relentless, six-year civil war. A White House statement said the two leaders had discussed such zones "to achieve lasting peace for humanitarian and many other reasons." The Kremlin statement made no mention of safe zones, and Mr. Putin's spokesman said they had not been discussed in detail.

Still, at the talks in Astana, Mr. Putin's envoys plan to propose that Russia, Iran and Turkey act as buffer forces separating government and rebel forces in some areas of Syria. The government of President Bashar al-Assad is skeptical of the plan, seeing it as the first step toward a partition of the country,

The call between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin was aimed at getting past the rupture of recent weeks and beginning to forge a more collaborative relationship. Mr. Trump came to office praising Mr. Putin and making it a priority to draw closer to Moscow, but his goal has been hobbled by multiple investigations into Russian meddling in last year's election and the clash over Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own people.

The initial optimism on both sides has given way to a sour and uncertain mood as geopolitical gravity has pulled Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin in opposite directions and lowered expectations. While a grand bargain now seems out of reach, the two leaders appeared intent on finding areas where they could agree while managing areas where they did not.

"Still some hopes, disappointment and caution," Vladimir Frolov, a prominent foreign policy analyst and columnist, said of the atmosphere in Moscow. "And apprehension. They are apprehensive about the way that the Trump administration behaves internationally, the unpredictable, unilateral nature of their steps. But they are still hoping for some agreement."

Mr. Trump never gave up, even after he said relations between the United States and Russia "may be at an all-time low." While senior members of his team excoriated Moscow for enabling the Syrian government to use nerve agents against civilians, the president tempered his language, making sure not to criticize Mr. Putin personally and later expressing optimism that "things will work out

fine between the U.S.A. and Russia."

When Mr. Trump met with ambassadors from the United Nations Security Council last week, he told them, "The future of Assad is not a deal-breaker," a Russian diplomat said afterward. And last weekend, he returned to his past equivocation on whether Russia hacked Democratic servers last year, saying it "could've been China, could've been lots of groups."

Tuesday's phone call was the third between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin since the American inauguration in January. Both sides offered positive assessments, with the White House characterizing the conversation as "a very good one" and the Kremlin calling it "businesslike and constructive."

Neither side mentioned the dispute over the chemical attack and cruise missile strike.

"President Trump and President Putin agreed that the suffering in Syria has gone on for far too long and that all parties must do all they can to end the violence," the White House statement said. The Kremlin said Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov would "intensify" their dialogue to "search for options" in Syria.

"It was a very constructive call that the two presidents had," Mr. Tillerson told reporters. "It was a very, very fulsome call, a lot of detailed exchanges. So we'll see where we go from here."

In a sign of the domestic pressure surrounding a rapprochement, Democrats seized on Mr. Trump's phone call with Mr. Putin to paint him again as a puppet of the Russian leader.

"Trump's bromance with Putin appears to be back on track," Adrienne Watson, the deputy communications director of the Democratic National Committee, said in a statement. "Instead of sending Putin a tough messaging on backing Assad's brutal regime, Trump appears to be opting for a strategy of appeasement."

Mr. Trump's effort to ease tensions coincided with a visit to Russia by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who met with Mr. Putin in the southern resort city of Sochi. At a news conference before his call with Mr. Trump, Mr. Putin emphasized that cooperation with Washington was critical to settling the Syria conflict.

"Certainly, without the participation of such a party as the United States, it is also impossible to solve these problems effectively," Mr. Putin said. "So we are and will continue to be in contact with our American partners, and I hope that we will attain understanding there regarding joint steps in this very important and sensitive area of international relations today."

Asked whether he had the influence to sway Mr. Assad, Mr. Putin said that Russia, in tandem with Turkey and Iran, was trying to "create the conditions for political cooperation from all sides."

A cease-fire is the main priority, Mr. Putin said. It will be the focus of the multiparty talks that are to take place in Astana. Until now, the United States had not had any important role in those talks, which Russia, Iran and Turkey set up outside the previous system of negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Putin again dismissed allegations that Russia was seeking to influence the political landscape in the West by supporting far-right

parties and undercutting mainstream factions. "We never interfere in the political life and the political processes of other countries, and we don't want anybody interfering in our political life and foreign policy processes," Mr. Putin said.

The Astana talks were set up as a sort of alternative to the process favored by the United States and the United Nations in Geneva. But Staffan de Mistura, the

United Nations special envoy on Syria, said Tuesday for the first time that he would attend the talks, and Mr. Trump said he would send a representative. The White House would not say whom, but an American official said it would be Stuart E. Jones, the acting assistant secretary of state for the region.

Under the Russian proposal expected at Astana, forces from Russia, Turkey and Iran would patrol dividing lines between Syrian government and other forces in

what Russia calls "deconfliction zones." They would be set up around rebel pockets in the Damascus suburbs; Idlib Province; southern Syria, near the Jordanian border; and north of the central city of Homs, according to Sputnik, a Russian state-run news outlet.

But Russia said rebels in those areas would first have to push out jihadist groups like the Islamic State and the former Nusra Front, which is linked to Al Qaeda. Other rebel groups, including those supported

by the United States and Turkey, have shown intermittent willingness to talk to Russia in Astana, seeing Moscow as more committed to whatever policies it adopts in Syria than the United States has been. But they have also frequently expressed disappointment that Russia has failed to rein in attacks on civilians by the Syrian government.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Nathan Hodge

5-6 minutes

Trump, Putin Discuss Crises in Syria and on Korean Peninsula

Carol E. Lee and

Tillerson said as he went into a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir at the State Department.

Mr. Tillerson said, without elaborating, that it was "very fulsome" and included "a lot of detailed exchanges."

"So we'll see where we go from here," he said.

The phone conversation lasted about 30 minutes and was initiated by Mr. Putin, according to a U.S. official briefed on the call. The official said there was no breakthrough during the call, and the Trump administration is uncertain if Moscow is serious about resolving the Syrian conflict.

The phone call took place after several weeks after Mr. Trump described relations between Washington and Moscow as reaching an all-time low.

Messrs. Trump and Putin also discussed how to resolve the threat of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic-missile development programs, both governments said, describing tensions on the peninsula as "dangerous."

Mr. Trump took office amid high hopes in Moscow that a new U.S. administration would move swiftly to repair relations and lift sanctions imposed after Russia's annexation of the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea in 2014.

But tensions between the two leaders have been mounting since Mr. Trump took office—over Russia's continued intervention in Ukraine, allegations of Moscow's interference in the U.S. election last year and Mr. Trump's embrace of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Mr. Putin, speaking earlier in the day after meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Sochi, repeated his position that Russia didn't meddle in the politics of other countries, dismissing allegations of interference in the U.S. election as "simply rumors."

U.S.-Russian tensions nearly boiled over last month after the U.S. accused the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of launching a chemical weapons attack on an opposition-held town.

Russia denied the Assad regime was behind the attack. U.S. officials suggested Russia may have known in advance of the regime carrying it out.

Mr. Trump responded by ordering missile strikes on a Syrian airfield.

Mr. Trump has been exploring the option of creating unofficial safe zones in Syria, dubbed "interim de-escalation areas" by some U.S. officials, along the Turkey and Jordan borders. The Pentagon has long opposed the idea of creating formal safe zones in Syria, arguing

doing so is costly and requires significant military commitments.

The idea of unofficial safe zones, however, has gained some traction and is supported by U.S. allies such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The U.S. and Turkey have differed over other aspects of strategy in Syria, notably how to launch an offensive to retake the Raqqa area from Islamic State.

Syria policy also has been a major sticking point in U.S.-Russia relations. The Kremlin said Monday that the U.S. and Russian presidents agreed to push forward on a Syria peace process and consolidate a cease-fire. The White House said the U.S. would send a representative to Russian-backed cease-fire talks in Astana, Kazakhstan this week; the Trump administration largely sat out the Astana talks when they began in January.

A one-on-one meeting between the U.S. and Russian leaders has yet to materialize. The Kremlin said Messrs. Trump and Putin discussed meeting in person at a meeting of the Group of 20 leading economies in Hamburg, Germany, in July. A U.S. official said there was no agreement to meet at that time.

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9-11 minutes

Trump and Putin discuss cease-fire in Syria in first conversation since U.S. airstrikes

crisis in Syria in a phone call Tuesday, with both countries expressing interest in working toward a cease-fire in the region.

The two men also discussed the possibility of trying to organize a personal meeting at the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg in July, according to the White House and the Kremlin.

The phone call came amid escalating tensions between Russia

and the United States in recent weeks, following a targeted military strike on a Syrian air base in April that Trump ordered in retaliation for a sarin nerve-agent attack allegedly carried out by the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"President Trump and President Putin agreed that the suffering in Syria has gone on for far too long and that all parties must do all they

can to end the violence," the White House said in a readout of the call.

The White House described the conversation as "a very good one," while the Kremlin called it "businesslike and constructive."

But the dueling readouts contained some discrepancies. Though both governments spoke of a cease-fire, with the United States announcing that it planned to send a representative to the cease-fire

MOSCOW — In their first publicly announced conversation since the United States launched a Tomahawk cruise-missile strike in Syria last month, President Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the humanitarian

talks that begin in Kazakhstan on Wednesday, the Trump administration also said the two leaders spoke of establishing safe zones in Syria. The Russian government, however, did not mention the possibility of safe zones.

The conversation also included, according to both readouts, a discussion of fighting terrorism in the Middle East, and the "dangerous situation" in North Korea.

Saying that lasting peace in Syria is impossible without the participation of the United States, Putin expressed hope Tuesday — ahead of his conversation with Trump — that Moscow and Washington could agree on how to end the six-year-old conflict.

"I hope that we will achieve understanding on joint measures in this very important and very delicate area of international politics," Putin said at a nationally broadcast news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who met with the Russian leader Tuesday in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Putin has said the chemical attack, which killed more than 80 people, was a provocation by rebel forces, an assertion the Trump administration has dismissed while placing the blame on Assad. Trump, who spent his election campaign expressing admiration for Putin, said after the missile strike that relations with Russia "may be at an all-time low."

The two presidents spoke after Trump's inauguration in January and again when Trump offered condolences in the wake of an April 3 bombing in the St. Petersburg subway that claimed 16 lives.

"Certainly, without involvement of such a country as the U.S., these problems cannot be solved efficiently," Putin said.

[Tillerson meets with Putin amid deepening tensions over U.S. strikes in Syria]

On Monday, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed in a phone conversation to meet on the sidelines of an Arctic Council meeting next week in Fairbanks, Alaska, according to State Department and Russian officials.

Putin has orchestrated a peace process in Syria that has brought together competing regional powers Iran and Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is visiting Sochi on Wednesday to discuss Syria with the Russian leader.

But despite Putin's expressed hope for a rapprochement with Trump over Syria and the cooperative tone of Tuesday's phone call as expressed in the readouts from the White House and Kremlin, some Russian analysts have ruled out cooperation between Russian and U.S. forces.

The American demand to remove Assad "rules out the possibility of Russian-American cooperation in Syria, because we won't allow the removal of Assad before his term is up," Dmitry V. Suslov, deputy director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, said recently. "Of course, we will not give in to such blackmail."

Russia is committed to a peace process, put together by Putin, that brings together Turkey, Iran and Syrian rebel groups. Putin also wants to use Syria as the site of Russia's permanent military base in the Middle East.

Konstantin Sivkov, a member of the Russian Academy of Rocket and Artillery Science, said that "an alliance with the United States is impossible."

At the heart of Russian uncertainty was the "impulsiveness of decision-making" that led Trump to order the April 7 missile strike on a Syrian government air base.

"The lack of consideration of these decisions, and lack of a clear goal and assessment of the consequences, sharply raises the possibility of military conflict," he said.

Merkel, meanwhile, arrived in Russia to meet with Putin as German industry stepped up pressure on her to lay the groundwork for improved economic relations with Moscow. Those relations have been dampened by international sanctions tied to the Kremlin's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its proxy war on behalf of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

But Merkel and Putin sparred over Ukraine, where a peace process

worked out with the German chancellor's considerable effort, called the Minsk accords, has bogged down, with both sides accusing the other of breaking cease-fire agreements.

"I would like us to make sure that the sanctions are lifted upon the implementation of the Minsk accords," Merkel said at the news conference.

In Ukraine, many oppose the stipulation in the Minsk accords that would allow two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine broad autonomy. Kiev considers it a Kremlin ploy to prevent Ukraine from integration with Western European organizations.

The issue is a matter of national pride in Russia, where nightly reports on state-controlled news programs tell of atrocities by Ukrainian "fascists" while denying the involvement of Russian armed forces in the conflict. Tuesday was the third anniversary of an event in which Russia says Ukrainian nationalists in Odessa forced people into a building and burned them alive.

"Those responsible have still not been held accountable and have not been punished," Putin said. "The international community cannot either forget about that or allow such barbarous crimes to be committed again in the future."

A Western condition for the lifting of sanctions has been Russia's return of Crimea to Ukraine, which Moscow has ruled out.

Alexei Pushkov, a senior Russian legislator, tweeted Sunday that neither "sanctions nor resolutions will change the fact of the unification of Russia and Crimea. They can kick themselves, but they can't have it back."

Merkel also brought up allegations that authorities in the Russian province of Chechnya arrested 100 gay men, at least three of whom died, according to the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta. Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said last month that Moscow had received no confirmation that any violations against gays took place.

"I asked the president to use his influence to protect the rights of minorities," Merkel said.

Putin, in response to a question about the detention of protesters in

Russia, said Russian police behave far more "liberally" and with more restraint than European authorities, "who use tear gas and truncheons to break up demonstrations."

Another cause for tensions between Germany and Russia is the assertion from European political parties that Russia is meddling in their elections with hackers and fake news stories, the same accusations that the U.S. intelligence community directed at Moscow following Trump's election victory.

Russia backs the candidacy of right-wing leader Marine Le Pen, who will face off against centrist Emmanuel Macron in France's presidential runoff vote Sunday.

[Cyberattack on French presidential front-runner bears Russian 'fingerprints']

The Kremlin has consistently denied involvement in any of the election campaigns.

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"We never interfere with the political life of other countries," Putin said Tuesday while dismissing the allegations that Russia had also interfered in the U.S. presidential election as "rumors" created "for a domestic battle."

The U.S. intelligence community has concluded that Russia meddled in the election in favor of Trump — an issue Democrats have sought to highlight along with Trump's positive statements about Putin during the campaign, before the airstrikes in Syria strained relations between Washington and Moscow.

"Trump's bromance with Putin appears to be back on track," Adrienne Watson, deputy communications director at the Democratic National Committee, said Tuesday with regard to the phone call. "Instead of sending Putin a tough message on backing Assad's brutal regime, Trump appears to be opting for a strategy of appeasement."

Anthony Faiola and Stephanie Kirchner in Berlin, Rick Noack in London and Carol Morello in Washington contributed to this report.



Editorial : Talk with North Korea? Recent precedents help.

The Christian Science Monitor

3-4 minutes

May 2, 2017 —When President Trump says he might be willing to talk to North Korea under certain

conditions, his hope may be based on examples of other countries and groups — also known as a nuclear or terrorist threat — that have recently

changed their hard positions. To see an enemy as hopelessly intractable is sometimes not the best path to peace.

Iran is the most obvious recent example. The United States and other countries agreed to talk with Iran, finally reaching a deal in 2015 to curb its nuclear program. The Islamic regime backed down largely because it was losing support from restless young Iranians hurt by an economy suffering from sanctions and low oil prices.

Mr. Trump might also point to the negotiations in Colombia that led to an agreement this past year ending a long and violent civil war. The Marxist rebel group FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) agreed to talks in large part because it was losing the war. But rebel leaders also made major concessions after realizing how their own supporters and families were as much victims of useless violence as pro-government civilians. "There

is no room for winners or losers when you achieve peace through negotiations," stated FARC negotiator Rodrigo Granda. "Colombia wins, death loses."

In Spain and France, meanwhile, the separatist group known as ETA — which stands for Euskadi ta Askatasuna, or Basque Homeland and Freedom — announced last month that it had fully disarmed. The group killed hundreds of people over decades in an attempt to create a Basque homeland. But after losing popular support, it has rejected violence and is ready to talk. One model for ETA is the peace process in Northern Ireland, where the Irish Republican Army disarmed and its political arm, Sinn Féin, was granted a political role.

Another terrorist group that appears to have made concessions is Hamas, the anti-Israel Islamic group

that governs Palestinians in Gaza. On Monday, it issued a policy document that accepts the idea of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders. Hamas still does not recognize Israel. And its anti-Semitic charter from 1988 remains intact. But Hamas feels pressure to change from Arab states. In addition, a poll in February by the Arab World for Research and Development found an increase in support among West Bank Palestinian youth for a two-state solution with Israel. Last year, 57 percent opposed such a plan. The new poll found a more even split, with 47.7 percent opposed and 47.4 in favor.

While Hamas and Israel are a long way from negotiations, Israel does talk to the Palestinian Authority. And the PA is in contact with Hamas, as is Egypt. Trump, meanwhile, has

started again the perpetual US search for an end to that conflict.

Like President Barack Obama before him, Trump may believe that not talking to adversaries should not be considered punishment to them. Keeping the option of negotiations can make it easier for an enemy to shift positions.

Former US negotiator Victor Cha says he used to tell his North Korean counterparts that the US is only hostile to their nuclear weapons. "With regard to the rest of your people and everything, we don't have a hostile policy," he said. Such a distinction — between people and their actions — can help keep open a door for negotiations.

**The
Washington
Post**

Ignatius : Trump is right. America needs to talk to bad guys — but carefully.

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5-6 minutes

Here's a shocking statement: President Trump is basically right that the world is too dangerous and that the United States should hold peace talks with, let's see, Chinese President Xi Jinping, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Russian President Vladimir Putin and any other autocrats who are making trouble.

American values tell us to oppose the undemocratic policies of these leaders and their blood-stained brethren, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. But our interests tell us to avoid war and seek agreements where possible.

The problem is that beyond the "why can't we all get along better?" bromides, Trump doesn't offer clear ideas for easing the underlying tensions. Suppose all the bad guys came to the bargaining table and said, okay, let's deal. Trump is still so low on the learning curve (and his administration so pathetically understaffed) that I'm not sure he would know what to answer.

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South Korea's likely next president asks the U.S. to respect its democracy

Trump's "concert of nations" approach has a weird appeal, in this period when the old order has so obviously broken down. He's just naive enough, a bit like Ronald Reagan, to think we don't need all these wars and that he's the guy to fix things. Surely that explains his strange comment about how Andrew Jackson (his ego ideal) could have prevented the Civil War. It expressed Trump's own aspiration to prevent wars.

Trump's flurry of recent diplomatic comments has been as volatile as a fever chart. He talked last week of "major, major conflict" with North Korea, whose leader's rationality he earlier questioned. But then on Monday, Trump said he would be "honored" to talk to Kim, "under the right circumstances."

Trump had accused China during the 2016 campaign of "raping" America and threatened initially to alter the one-China foundation of U.S. policy. But now, Beijing is the cornerstone of his strategy for dealing with North Korea. Some Asia specialists fear that he has all but subcontracted some aspects of policy to China's Xi, seemingly his new best friend.

The charm offensive even included a Tuesday phone call with Russia's Putin (otherwise under FBI investigation for organizing a covert action to destabilize American politics).

Flattery and cajolery are eternal parts of the diplomatic tool kit. (Ask Henry Kissinger.) But rarely have they been deployed so extravagantly as by the verbose Trump. After several hours at Mar-a-Lago, Xi was touted as "a very good man." Later, the bubble machine turned to Kim, whom Trump described as a "pretty smart cookie" who knows how to hold power.

Trump's basic ambition to shake up the status quo makes sense, but let me offer some caveats:

- Trump is too vain and self-centered in his approach. All presidents believe in the efficacy of their personalities, but Trump's braggadocio risks making him look ridiculous. He's too impatient for quick wins. Countries will feed him flattering comments and what appear to be concessions — hoping to bind him to their agendas. That has already happened to some extent with China, which has drawn the United States into its framework for protecting Chinese interests in Asia.

- He's too inexperienced to rely so much on his gut instincts. He doesn't have a very educated gut, to put it bluntly. Aides who brief his team come away amazed that Trump never seems to have thought before about the U.S. nuclear deterrent, or the complications of Chinese-Korean history. Harry S. Truman had read a library full of

history books before his accidental presidency. Not so Trump.

- He's so full of bluster at the start of negotiations, and so accommodating later, that he risks looking like a man who can be had. Potential adversaries learn to wait Trump out. Experience tells them that if they hold tight, the Twitter storm will blow itself out. Once that perception builds, it becomes a serious problem — encouraging the president to take unwise risks just to restore a measure of his unpredictability.

- He needs to think more about process. Let's imagine that North Korea announced tomorrow it would suspend nuclear tests and return to the bargaining table. What position would the United States take? I'd like to see a framework like the "two plus four" talks that united Germany in 1990 — that is, a direct round of confidence-building and armistice discussions between North and South Korea, framed by denuclearization talks backed by the United States, China, Russia and Japan. Does the Trump team have a similar strategy? Who knows?

Trump's disruptive personality has usefully opened the door for diplomacy. But what comes next? Never mind getting to "yes." Does the Trump team even know what "yes" might look like?

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8-11 minutes

SEONGNAM, South Korea — South Korea is on the brink of electing a liberal president with distinctly different ideas than the Trump administration on how to deal with North Korea — potentially complicating efforts to punish Kim Jong Un's regime.

He is also a candidate who fears that the U.S. government has been acting to box him in on a controversial American missile defense system and circumvent South Korea's democratic process.

"I don't believe the U.S. has the intention [to influence our election], but I do have some reservations," Moon Jae-in told The Washington Post in an interview.

Barring a major upset, Moon will become South Korea's president Tuesday, replacing Park Geun-hye, who was impeached in March and is on trial on bribery charges. Because Park was dismissed from office, Moon will immediately become president if elected, without the usual transition period.

[*Transcript of the Post interview with South Korean presidential candidate Moon Jae-in*]

(Jason Aldag/The Washington Post)

In response to continued testing of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons by North Korea, the United States is in the process of deploying an advanced missile defense system called THAAD in South Korea. But China is not happy with the plan, saying the system could undermine its own defense systems. What is THAAD and why doesn't China want it deployed in South Korea? (Jason Aldag/The Washington Post)

With Moon pledging to review the Park government's decision to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) antimissile system, the U.S. military has acted swiftly to get it up and running. This has sparked widespread criticism here that the United States is trying to make it difficult, if not impossible, for Moon to reverse it.

The final components for THAAD were taken to the site in the middle of the night last week, triggering protests, and the system became operational Monday. It is designed to shoot down North Korean missiles, but many in South Korea fear it will make them more of a target.

[*Controversial missile defense shield operational in South Korea*]

"It is not desirable for the [caretaker] South Korean government to deploy THAAD hastily at this politically sensitive time, with the presidential election approaching, and without going through the democratic process, an environmental assessment or a public hearing," said Moon, sitting on the floor in a Korean restaurant after an evening rally in Seongnam, south of Seoul.

"Would it happen this way in the United States? Could the administration make a unilateral decision without following democratic procedures, without ratification or agreement by Congress?"

Privately, Moon aides say they are "furious" about what they see as the expedited installation of THAAD. U.S. Forces Korea said the deployment is in line with plans to have the system operational as soon as possible.

But Moon warned that the U.S. actions could undermine south Koreans' faith in Washington and complicate the countries' security alliance.

(Reuters)

The U.S. military began moving parts of its controversial THAAD anti-missile system to a deployment site in South Korea amid tension over the North's nuclear program. The U.S. military began moving parts of its controversial THAAD anti-missile system to a deployment site in South Korea amid tension over the North's nuclear program. (Reuters)

"If South Korea can have more time to process this matter democratically, the U.S. will gain a higher level of trust from South Koreans and, therefore, the alliance between the two nations will become even stronger," Moon said.

But in a move that shocked South Koreans, President Trump said last week that he would make Seoul pay \$1 billion for THAAD, despite an agreement that South Korea provides the land and the United States supplies and operates the battery.

Far from hurting Moon, Trump's insistence could actually boost Moon's chances of becoming president, as it has angered people who were on the fence about THAAD and further enraged the system's opponents.

"Is South Korea a colony that has to cough up cash whenever the U.S. wants it to?" Park Hee-ju, an anti-

THAAD activist, told the left-leaning Hankyoreh newspaper, which Moon helped found.

Even conservative papers have been taken aback. "Trump's mouth rocking South Korean-U.S. alliance," declared a headline in the right-wing Chosun Ilbo.

[*In South Korea, mystification over Trump's defense and trade comments*]

Moon, 64, a former human rights lawyer who was chief of staff to former progressive president Roh Moo-hyun, has a commanding lead in opinion polls. He regularly attracts twice the support his closest rival, centrist Ahn Cheol-soo, does.

Thanks to THAAD, and to North Korea's recent provocations and Trump's tough talk, foreign policy is at the top of the election agenda.

Moon, who is closely associated with the "sunshine policy" of engagement with North Korea, could hardly be more different from Park — or from Trump.

He wants to reopen an inter-Korean industrial park and in TV debates has talked about South Korea taking the initiative on North Korea. He wants South Korea, not the United States, to have operational control of the military alliance if a war breaks out.

American analysts say that some of Moon's campaign pledges — such as his promise to reopen the industrial park — are "fantastical," and the candidate struck a markedly more measured, more diplomatic tone in the interview.

"The answer is no," Moon said when asked whether he would seek to rebalance the security alliance with the United States.

"I believe the alliance between the two nations is the most important foundation for our diplomacy and national security. South Korea was able to build its national security, thanks to the U.S., and the two nations will work together on the North Korean nuclear issue."

But Moon did say he wants South Korea to be "able to take the lead on matters on the Korean Peninsula."

"I do not see it as desirable for South Korea to take the back seat and watch discussions between the U.S. and China," he said, although he would not approach or open talks with North Korea without "fully consulting" the United States.

[*President Trump says he would be 'honored' to meet with North Korean dictator*]

Moon has said he would be willing to go to anywhere, including Pyongyang, to make progress on denuclearizing North Korea.

"I could sit down with Kim Jong Un, but I will not meet him for the sake of meeting him," he said. "I will meet Kim Jong Un when preconditions of resolving the nuclear issue are assured."

There is some overlap here. Trump said this week that he would be "honored" to meet Kim "under the right circumstances." This comment struck a markedly different tone from Trump's recent talk about the potential for military action, the deployment of warships to the region and the possibility of a "major, major conflict."

Indeed, Moon stressed the factors that he and Trump have in common — such as their belief that the Obama administration policy of "strategic patience" toward North Korea was "a failure." Moon agreed with Trump's method of applying sanctions and pressure to bring North Korea back to negotiations — although this is essentially what "strategic patience" was.

"I believe President Trump is more reasonable than he is generally perceived," Moon said. "President Trump uses strong rhetoric toward North Korea, but, during the election campaign, he also said he could talk over a burger with Kim Jong Un. I am for that kind of pragmatic approach to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue."

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Even if there is a large divide between Moon and Trump on most issues related to North Korea, analysts doubt this will put much strain on the alliance.

"For the last decades, through two conservative presidents, South Korea had a more friendly relationship with the United States," said Kang Won-taek, a professor of political science at Seoul National University.

"Moon Jae-in's position is clearly different from those conservative presidents, but, generally speaking, I don't think relations between the two countries will change that much," Kang said. "After all, we have a common enemy."

Yoonjung Seo contributed to this report.

Trefor Moss

6-8 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 1:50 p.m. ET

SHANGHAI—U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to slash business taxes is having a domino effect on a major American economic competitor: China.

Like Mr. Trump, many Chinese executives say corporate taxes are too high, with some calling it the "death tax."

"We pay a lot to feed the civil servants," said Zhou Dwen, director of the Zhejiang Private Investment Enterprise Association, a business lobbying group.

China has tried for years to reduce business costs. Now, Chinese officials and executives worry that the tax proposal Mr. Trump announced last week will set back China's global competitiveness and spur companies to invest in America instead of China.

In anticipation of the U.S. tax move, the State Council, China's cabinet, said in April that the government will reduce corporate taxes by over \$55 billion to "improve business conditions." The Communist Party's newspaper, People's Daily, warned on Friday that the new U.S. plan could trigger a "tax war" if countries start competing to offer the lowest rates.

Despite China's reputation as an export and manufacturing juggernaut, rising labor and land costs and slowing economic growth are eroding its edge. Officials and businesses seek lowering taxes as key to countering that trend.

"China is losing its competitive advantage," said Liu Huan, a professor of the

Central University of Finance and Economics and an adviser to the State Council. "There is no dispute now that Chinese companies' tax burdens are relatively large."

While U.S. companies pay a higher national income-tax rate—35% versus 25% in China—Chinese companies face a welter of other taxes and fees their U.S. counterparts don't, including a 17% value-added tax. And while Chinese firms don't pay state taxes, as U.S. companies do, Chinese employers pay far higher payroll taxes. Welfare and social insurance taxes cost between 40% and 100% of a paycheck in China.

World Bank figures for 2016 show that total tax burden on Chinese businesses are among the highest of major economies: 68% of profits, compared with 44% in the U.S. and 40.6% on average world-wide. The figures include national and local income taxes, value-added or sales taxes, and any mandatory employer contributions for welfare and social security.

In practice, tax experts say, Chinese companies typically pay taxes on about 40% to 50% of their profits after various deductions. Tax experts say the average U.S. rate after deductions is lower than that, though a precise estimate wasn't available, and will fall even further if Mr. Trump fulfills his aim of more than halving the income-tax rate to 15%.

Many Chinese companies also use government incentives to limit their outlays, say tax experts. Some, especially state-owned enterprises, further benefit from easy access to cheap capital, a subsidy that helps offset tax demands.

But Beijing is even squeezing state companies as economic growth and tax revenue slow. In recent months,

Beijing has imposed capital controls, blocking proposed overseas investments by Chinese companies that it deemed nonstrategic and potentially making it harder for Chinese firms to take advantage of lower tax rates in foreign jurisdictions.

With costs rising and profit margins shrinking, companies complain that a high tax burden is harder to bear. "It's like a person who used to be able to carry a heavy load on his shoulder: When he gets sick he just can't shoulder the same pressure anymore," said He Jun, an economist at Beijing Anbound Information Co., a private think tank.

Chinese auto glassmaker Fuyao Glass Industry Group recently crystallized the concerns of some businesses and officials. In an interview late last year with China Business News, its chairman Cho Tak Wong cited excessive taxation as a reason for investing \$1 billion to revive a former General Motors factory in Moraine, Ohio, rather than start a new plant in China. Mr. Cho and Fuyao didn't respond to requests for comment.

Officials in Beijing say Fuyao's American gambit could be just the beginning if U.S. tax rates drop drastically. Mr. Liu, the tax-policy expert, said Beijing is serious about lowering taxes, but can't act too quickly because changes take time—and because it needs the revenue.

For China's legions of smaller manufacturers, Mr. Cho's blunt comments about excessive taxation were a welcome intervention. Smaller, private businesses provide most of the jobs, but struggle to get access to tax breaks and lower interest loans, which generally go to larger state-owned companies and tech firms.

In a November survey conducted by the Beijing-based Unirule Institute of Economics, 87% of the 113 private companies polled said their tax burden was either very high or relatively high.

The tax reductions China announced in April aim to address some of those complaints by increasing the tax threshold for small businesses and reducing the value-added tax rates on certain items, such as agricultural products.

But smaller companies, tax experts and officials say more changes are needed. The value-added tax—which was expanded to all businesses in recent years—was supposed to be an improvement. Unlike the business tax it replaced, it levies taxes incrementally at each stage of production and is deductible.

But it has resulted in higher taxes for some companies, tax experts say. And the paperwork to claim the deductions is onerous for smaller companies who often can't obtain the receipts needed from their suppliers, these people add.

The overall tax burden "is a crisis for enterprises," said Mr. Zhou of the Zhejiang private business association, which represents more than 100 private companies in eastern China. "I've heard a lot of complaints from small to medium-size enterprises. It's really very difficult for them to survive."

—Liyang Qi in Beijing contributed to this article.

Write to Trefor Moss at Trefor.Moss@wsj.com

Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Trump's Tax Plan Spurs Concern in China.'

Branstad Promises to Press China on North Korea, Trade, Rights

Felicia Schwartz

7-9 minutes

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's pick to be ambassador to China pledged Tuesday to confront Beijing on trade issues, North Korea's nuclear program and human rights as he faced a mostly congenial Senate panel that sought assurances about the Trump administration's foreign policy.

The confirmation hearing for Republican Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad took place amid the Trump administration's heightened focus on North Korea's nuclear and missile program. Mr. Trump and others in recent days have held out the possibility of direct talks with North Korea while also seeking to enlist other countries, especially China, to ratchet up economic pressure on Pyongyang.

Mr. Branstad, who is expected to win confirmation, said he would urge China to do more

"diplomatically and economically to send a clear signal that they, as well as the United States and other countries in the world, do not tolerate this expansion of nuclear technology and missiles by the North Korean leadership."

Lawmakers from both parties said Tuesday that they were skeptical that China would use its full influence to encourage North Korea to change course, particularly because Beijing and Washington don't have the same goals for North Korea.

"While right now we see them taking actions that they haven't taken in recent years, will that continue or will they slip back into what China does—that is, a policy of its own doctrine of patience as it relates to North Korea?" asked Sen. Cory Gardner (R., Colo.).

Sen. Ben Cardin (D., Md.), the committee's top Democrat, said he remains concerned "that we've seen this movie before and we haven't really seen a change in China's position" on North Korea.

Mr. Branstad said he would use his personal relationship with China's President Xi Jinping, first forged in Iowa in 1985 while Mr. Xi was in his state as part of an agricultural delegation, to serve as a bridge between Beijing and Washington.

"What's happening right now with North Korea is an example of why that needs to change," Mr. Branstad said, in reference to China's failure to fully implement sanctions. "This is a very serious situation and I don't think that China wants to have a flood of refugees from North Korea going into their country."

He added: "I hope that [with] my longtime relationship with the leader of China, I can convey to him that we sincerely want to work with them and we want to

work with other nations as well because this is one of the most important and serious threats facing us all at this time."

Sen. Bob Menendez (D., N.J.) said he and others are still trying to understand Mr. Trump's world view following shifts in his positions.

On China, for example, Mr. Trump had pledged to label the country a currency manipulator, then changed course. In addition, his administration has spelled out varying conditions for talks and the use of military force to confront North Korea.

Mr. Branstad pledged to uphold traditional U.S. positions on the South China Sea as well as Washington's "One China" policy,

which Mr. Trump had said he might rethink during the transition but later reaffirmed ahead of his meeting with Mr. Xi.

Republicans and Democrats urged Mr. Branstad to press China on cybertheft and the protection of intellectual property as well as better trade terms for steel, chicken, beef and other goods.

"In keeping with President Trump's mission, I am committed to making sure that the trade relationship between the U.S. and China puts the American worker first," he said.

And, as the White House has expressed a desire to privately air human rights concerns rather than publicly, Republicans and Democrats urged Mr. Branstad to

press China on human rights publicly and privately as well as meet with opponents of the Chinese government

"This is really important for the human rights community to feel like their ambassador to China is someone who is going to raise these issues even if it makes our hosts, in this case the Chinese Communist Party, uncomfortable," said Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.)

Mr. Branstad pledged to raise human rights concerns and to travel the country to seek out victims of injustice.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

North Korea Protests Flyover of U.S. Bombers

Jonathan Cheng
5-7 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 8:55 p.m. ET

SEOUL—North Korea complained about a flyover of a pair of U.S. bombers, as the Central Intelligence Agency's director wrapped up a three-day visit to South Korea and the U.S. declared operational a missile-defense system that it is installing in South Korea.

The flurry of activity on the Korean Peninsula underscores U.S. President Donald Trump's continuing focus on North Korea as he seeks a way to contain the threat from Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Tuesday's developments came a day after Mr. Trump said he would be "honored" to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

On Monday, the U.S. Air Force flew two B-1B Lancer bombers near the Korean Peninsula with the South Korean and Japanese air forces, said Lt. Col. Lori Hodge, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Pacific Air Force Command.

North Korea's state media lashed out on Tuesday at the flight, complaining that it was taking place "when Trump and other U.S. warmongers are crying out for making a pre-emptive nuclear strike at the DPRK," using an acronym for the country's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"The reckless military provocation is pushing the situation on the Korean Peninsula closer to the brink of

nuclear war," Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency said. It added that the North Korean military "is keenly watching the military movement of the U.S. imperialists," and could respond with nuclear arms, repeating a frequent threat made in North Korea's media.

Col. Hodge said the bomber missions "are not related to any specific situation or nation," and that the U.S. military has maintained a bomber presence in the region since 2004.

"The U.S. conducts continuous bomber presence operations as part of a routine, forward deployed capability supporting regional security and our allies in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region," Col. Hodge said.

The exchange over the flyover came as CIA Director Mike Pompeo wrapped up a three-day visit to South Korea, where he toured Yeonpyeong Island, the site of the most recent serious military engagement between the two Koreas, in November 2010.

During the visit to Yeonpyeong Island and the disputed inter-Korean waters around the island, Mr. Pompeo was able to "gain a firsthand appreciation of the North Korean threat to South Korea," said U.S. Forces Korea, which oversees the military's combat forces in South Korea.

Mr. Pompeo also met with South Korea's top spy chief. The CIA chief's visit was the fourth high-level trip to South Korea this year, following tours by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, Secretary of

State Rex Tillerson and Vice President Mike Pence.

Earlier Tuesday, USFK declared the missile-defense system it is installing in South Korea, Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or Thaad, operational, stirring controversy a week before a South Korean election that is expected to vote into office a presidential candidate who has called for an immediate halt to the missile battery's deployment.

Thaad is "operational and has the ability to intercept North Korean missiles and defend the Republic of Korea," USFK said.

The speedy deployment of the missile-defense system comes days after a series of statements from senior White House officials about whether South Korea should pay for the \$1 billion Lockheed Martin Corp. battery, upending expectations in Seoul about the status of an agreement last year that said the U.S. would pay for it.

It also comes in the midst of a snap election that looks set to elevate to the presidency Moon Jae-in, a candidate who has called for more distance from Washington and an immediate halt to the deployment of Thaad. Mr. Moon says any decision on deploying Thaad should be made by the next South Korean administration, in consultation with the public.

China also opposes the Thaad system. At a regular press briefing on Tuesday, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang repeated calls for an immediate halt to the deployment of the Thaad battery, pledging to take any necessary

measures to protect Beijing's interests.

At a security conference in Washington on Tuesday, a White House official emphasized the importance of allied action against North Korea while restating the administration's stand against trying to replace Mr. Kim.

"Our policy is not one of seeking regime change," said Matt Pottinger, the senior director for Asian affairs on the White House National Security Council.

He spoke at a security forum organized by Sasakawa USA, a group that promotes U.S.-Japan relations.

Mr. Pottinger said the administration knew from the start it would pursue a "path of doubling down on our alliances in the region."

Of all the alliances in the region he said "Japan is the starting point of the starting point," he said, pointing to the relationship between Mr. Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which advanced during an early visit by Mr. Abe to Mr. Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. Later, Chinese President Xi Jinping went to the Florida club, a visit that led to what Mr. Trump has termed a positive relationship.

—Gordon Lubold and Ben Kesling contributed to this article.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'North Korea Protests U.S. Bomber Flyover.'

Saudi Prince Defends Renewal of State Perks but Warns of Further Belt-Tightening if Oil Prices Fall

Updated May 2, 2017 5:59 p.m. ET

Saudi Arabia's powerful deputy crown prince defended a decision to reverse a contentious government austerity program by reinstating perks for state employees, but cautioned more belt-tightening could follow if oil prices dropped.

Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the second-in-line to the throne, was speaking in a rare televised interview that aired on Tuesday. The 31-year-old royal is the driving force behind the ambitious plan for economic change unveiled a year ago aimed at ending the kingdom's dependence on oil revenues.

A year on, the Saudi monarchy is under growing pressure to show that its plan is working.

The slump in oil prices that began in 2014 forced the government to cut public spending and to fundamentally rethink the country's economic model. The austerity measures introduced so far have succeeded in reducing the kingdom's budget deficit to around \$79 billion last year from a record \$98 billion the previous year.

But in a country where citizens have long benefited from generous government spending, the transition has been painful. In recent weeks, many Saudis turned to social media to air their discontent. Then, in a surprise U-turn, the government late

last month restored bonus payments and allowances for public-sector employees that it had canceled months earlier.

Prince Mohammed in the interview ruled out that the benefits were reinstated because of popular pressure. "The decision to stop them was temporary," he said. "It was reviewed after the economic performance improved."

The International Monetary Fund said in a report that the sharing of oil wealth through government jobs and lavish subsidies is no longer sustainable for Saudi Arabia and its neighbors in the Middle East.

"There is a need to reduce the dependence on oil and generate private sector jobs for the rapidly growing labor force," the IMF said in its latest outlook report for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The IMF expects Saudi Arabia's economy to grow 0.4% this year down from 1.4% last year. In Saudi Arabia, oil income still contributes to more than 60% of government revenues.

Central to the success of the kingdom's economic transformation is the initial public offering of up to 5% of Aramco, the state-owned oil giant formally known as Saudi Arabian Oil Co. The proceeds of that share sale, planned for next year, will be transferred to the kingdom's sovereign-wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, so that it can build a war chest for investments in non-oil sectors at home and abroad.

Prince Mohammed said the fund will invest at least 50% of the money it receives from the Aramco IPO inside the kingdom, in sectors including mining, defense and car manufacturing. He estimated domestic investments will total around 500 billion Saudi riyals (\$133 billion) in the first three years after the Aramco IPO.

Currently, about 90% of Aramco's profit goes to the state, including a fraction to members of the royal family, according to people familiar with the country's finances. The rest gets reinvested in the company.

Last year, Prince Mohammed said he expected the IPO would value Aramco at \$2 trillion at least. However, officials at Saudi Aramco have told their superiors that the firm is likely worth at least \$500 billion less than the government previously suggested.

Saudi Arabia will still be in charge of policy and decide on oil-production levels for the kingdom even after the Aramco IPO, Prince Mohammed said in the interview. The prince also stressed that the kingdom's oil fields will be owned by the state and not by investors following the sale.

The prince defended the government's decision to list part of Aramco, and dismissed opposition to the sale as "socialist and communist ideas."

"Listing Aramco will give us a shortcut...to develop other sectors and create jobs," he said.

Prince Mohammed, the second-in-line to the throne, has risen to a

position of almost unrivaled power since his father, King Salman, assumed power in early 2015. As the country's defense minister, he is also behind Saudi Arabia's costly and increasingly unpopular war in Yemen.

The prince in the interview dampened hopes that relations between Saudi Arabia and its regional rival, Iran, would improve in the near future.

He said it was impossible to have dialogue with a country guided by the religious belief that it should expand its control of the Muslim world while it awaits for the so-called Hidden Imam, a relative of the Prophet Muhammad whom Shiite Muslims believe will eventually return to rule.

"How can you have a dialogue with this?" the prince said.

Riyadh severed diplomatic relations with Tehran in early 2016 and has said it wants Iran to stop interfering in Arab affairs through Shiite proxies as a condition for improved relations.

—Dahlia Kholaf in Cairo and Nikhil Lohade in Dubai contributed to this article.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Saudi Prince Defends Renewal of State Perks.'

Dialogue With Iran Is Impossible, Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister Says

Ben Hubbard

3 minutes

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Saudi Arabia's powerful deputy crown prince slammed the door Tuesday on the prospect of dialogue with Iran, the kingdom's regional rival, accusing it of following an "extremist ideology" and seeking to take over the Muslim world.

The prince, Mohammed bin Salman, 31, who is second in line to the throne and serves as defense minister, said Saudi Arabia would fight what he called Iran's efforts to extend its influence.

"We are a primary target for the Iranian regime," Prince Mohammed

said, accusing Iran of seeking to take over Islamic holy sites in Saudi Arabia. "We won't wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia. Instead, we'll work so that the battle is for them in Iran."

The two countries, which stand on opposite sides of the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, are competing for religious and political influence across the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, ruled by a Sunni royal family, is a close ally of the United States and accuses Iran of spreading its revolutionary ideology to destabilize the Arab world. Saudi leaders have taken heart from the Trump administration's criticism of Iran.

For its part, Shiite-led Iran says Saudi Arabia's ultraconservative

religious creed, known abroad as Wahhabism, endangers minorities and feeds terrorism. Iranian officials did not immediately respond to Prince Mohammed's statements.

The prince said that dialogue with Iran was impossible because of its belief in the Imam Mahdi, the so-called hidden imam, who many Shiites believe is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who will return to save the world from destruction.

"Their stance is that the awaited Mahdi will come, and they need to create a fertile environment for the arrival of the awaited Mahdi, and they need to take over the Islamic world," he said. "Where are the common points that we might be

able to reach an understanding on with this regime?"

Prince Mohammed gave a positive view of the war in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Arab countries have been bombing for more than two years to try to push Shiite rebels aligned with Iran out of the capital.

He said that Saudi forces could uproot the rebels "in a few days," but that doing so would kill thousands of Saudi troops and many civilians. So, he said, the coalition is waiting for the rebels to tire out.

Aid organizations have been sounding the alarm about an escalating humanitarian crisis and the threat of famine in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country,

exacerbated by a Saudi-led blockade of rebel-held territory and airstrikes on a key seaport.

Prince Mohammed said Saudi Arabia was in no hurry.

"Time is in our favor," he said.

The prince spoke during an extended interview that was broadcast simultaneously on a number of Saudi-owned satellite

networks and heavily promoted in advance. It was his second television interview since his father, King Salman, assumed the throne in 2015.

The king has vested enormous power in his son, who runs the Defense Ministry, oversees the state oil company, and is spearheading a program known as Vision 2030 to reduce the

kingdom's dependence on oil and improve the quality of life for Saudi citizens.

Much of the interview was aimed at a domestic audience, with Prince Mohammed assuring Saudis that the government was working hard to fight corruption and improve the economy, which has been hurt by low oil prices.

The prince's high public profile has caused many in the kingdom to speculate that he wants to succeed his father on the throne, displacing Mohammed bin Nayef, the current crown prince.

During the nearly hourlong interview, he did not mention the crown prince once.



The Arab Prince Standing Up to Trump

Paul McLeary |
43 mins ago

10-13 minutes

If ever there were a sign that the world is upside down, it is that a Muslim prince from an Arab royal family is now one of the leading voices defending human rights on the global stage. At a time when the issue seems to be taking a back seat everywhere, Prince Zeid Raad al-Hussein of Jordan, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, has excoriated Western politicians for their xenophobia and requested an investigation into allegations of torture in Bahrain — even as the United States announced it is lifting human rights restrictions on arm sales to the kingdom.

Before the U.S. election, Zeid stood in front of the U.N. General Assembly in September and decried "race-baiting bigots who seek to gain, or retain, power by wielding prejudice and deceit at the expense of those most vulnerable."

He explicitly called out Geert Wilders and Donald Trump in another speech, decrying Wilders's "lies and half-truths, manipulations, and peddling of fear." He added that his own personal background must be a nightmare for xenophobes everywhere, as a "Muslim, who is, confusingly to racists, also white-skinned; whose mother is European and father, Arab." And since Trump's ascension to the White House, Zeid has not shied way from criticizing him, calling the new administration's travel ban "mean-spirited" and illegal under human rights law. In fact, he was the only prominent Arab voice on the world stage denouncing the ban and speaking out about the impact on Arab communities in the United States while Arab governments stayed mum.

Zeid, a former U.N. peacekeeper in the Balkans and Jordanian ambassador to Washington and an expert of international justice who played a central role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court, is now regularly taking on the populists and

demagogues who increasingly dominate the world stage. At the same time, he has blasted several of the most powerful regimes in the Arab world for their human rights abuses — and has been criticized in the region for airing its dirty laundry.

Don't get me wrong: Plenty of Arabs have fought and died for human rights in the region's history. And Western countries, especially the United States, have far from a pristine record when it comes to human rights. If you live in the Arab world or Latin America, on the receiving end of American foreign policy, you look at Trump's embrace and praise of strongmen and autocrats, and you probably feel that at least his words match U.S. actions.

But when big powers throw the defense of values out the window, and stop even paying lip service to it, it emboldens countries with questionable human rights records to stamp out dissent without fear of international consequences. It even raises concerns about accountability and rule of law within the West. At the Conservative Party conference in October, British Prime Minister Theresa May attacked "activist left-wing human rights lawyers" who "harangue and harass the bravest of the brave the men and women of our armed forces."

Speaking to me over the phone recently from Geneva, Zeid remains deeply worried about what he sees unfolding in the United States and on the world stage. He has yet to meet anyone from the Trump administration, and while he holds out some hope that the administration will recognize the importance of defending human rights, it's dwindling fast. Most recently, Trump invited President Rodrigo Duterte, the strongman in the Philippines, who has been accused of ordering extrajudicial killings, to the White House after what the administration termed a "very friendly conversation."

"No U.S. administration since 1946 has ever spurned the human rights agenda," he told me. "Let's hope this is not the first administration to do so."

Although he admits that the current international order is not perfect, he reproaches those who want to tear it down for not thinking through what would replace it.

"When these institutions start to crumble, then the [international] laws go with them, and where does it stop?" he wondered.

"When these institutions start to crumble, then the [international] laws go with them, and where does it stop?" he wondered.

The Trump administration is reportedly seeking to cut \$1 billion in funding for U.N. peacekeeping and several hundred million dollars for other U.N. agencies like UNICEF and the U.N. Development Programme. It also just ended funding for the U.N. Population Fund. The impulse of defunding U.N. bodies ignores the leverage gained inside the international organization by being its largest funder. This is not a new debate. Sen. Jesse Helms was a fierce critic of the United Nations and led the effort to cap U.S. contributions to its budget to 22 percent. The enacting of the Helms-Biden Act to reform the U.S.-U.N. relationship in 2001 meant that the United States released millions of dollars in back dues to the organization, which was hailed at the time as a way to strengthen the U.S. role at the U.N. Although working through the United Nations may seem at odds with an "America First" agenda, it can in fact help to advance America's own goals on the world stage.

But for Zeid, the key message he wants to convey to Western leaders is that while the defense of human rights may seem like a fluffy endeavor of leftist activists, it is in fact the best antidote against extremism. He pointed to the March 22 attack in London, in which an Islamist extremist drove a car into pedestrians near Westminster Palace, killing five people and injuring 50. "No increases in defense budgets or the like would have had any effect on preventing someone like that," Zeid said. Extremism and intolerance can be more successfully combated by the

West and Arab world, he suggested, if their societies showed more consistent respect for everyone's rights and concerns.

More crucially, Zeid made the case that there is a connection between a country's respect for human rights and its political stability — a link that explains why and how dictatorships have come undone in the Middle East over the past several years. He cites the overreaction of the Syrian authorities in 2011 to children scribbling anti-government slogans in the southern city of Daraa as an example of how human rights abuses can trigger massive upheaval.

"Had the police not abused these children, then the demonstration wouldn't have been so widespread and maybe we wouldn't be where we are right now in Syria," he said. "Human rights are very often a very sensitive seismograph for problems that can expand into a giant security issue."

Zeid also worries about the West's reaction — rather, overreaction — to terrorism. Security policies that limit civil liberties help fuel the very sort of radicalism that these countries are trying to prevent. But Western leaders and politicians tend to be flummoxed when Zeid brings up their human rights failings, he said — not least because the criticism is coming from an Arab.

"It's a question I often receive: 'Who on earth do you think you are, lecturing us?' especially European countries or the U.S. or Canada, or whoever it may be, given my background," Zeid said.

Whether it's members of Congress or European parliamentarians, they all assume that when Zeid meets with them, it's solely to discuss abuses in an African country or the Middle East — i.e., the "global south" — not the treatment of refugees in Europe or the abuse of force by American police officers.

"It's amazing to see that they hadn't even thought that the human rights agenda applies to them," he said.

"It's amazing to see that they hadn't even thought that the human rights

agenda applies to them," he said. "I think the relevance of the agenda is that it's universal."

Though the Trump administration has not yet criticized him, Zeid has faced the ire of the Russians, who lodged an official complaint with the U.N. secretary-general after his comments about xenophobic populists like Trump and Wilders in September 2016.

"Prince Zeid is overstepping his limits from time to time, and we're unhappy about it," said Russia's then-U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin. "He criticized a number of heads of state, government. He should stick to his file, which is important enough."

But the fiercest pushback Zeid has faced comes from his own region, the Arab world, where he and his office have called out various governments, from Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, on the

use of torture and restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Zeid said he doesn't pull his punches, pointing out that in 2014 he pointedly criticized his own country for reinstating the death penalty. In 2015, Zeid also issued a report saying the Saudi-led military coalition fighting in Yemen may have committed human rights violations. The Jordanian foreign minister publicly rejected the report and defended the work of the coalition.

"I think they look at me in disbelief, believing in a very tribal sense that as an Arab, my job is not to disclose the dirty laundry of Arab governments," he told me. "I don't take instructions from any government. I don't respond well to pressure from any government; neither do any of my staff."

This has put a strain on his relationship with his home country of Jordan, which he represented

both in Washington and at the U.N. (King Abdullah of Jordan is his cousin.) Zeid has spent a total of only three days back home on a private visit since he took up his post in 2014.

"It pains me, because it's a country that I love and that I represented with pride for many years — not that it's a country that has a perfect human rights record, clearly not, but it's a country that I have an attachment for. But now the relationship is quite cool."

Zeid is in his post until September 2018 and would have to be re-elected by the General Assembly, but he believes his outspokenness will mean there will be little support for him to remain in the job. While he still has his position, however, he hopes he can set an example and inspire other young activists and human rights lawyers in the Arab world, when they see that he not only raises the issue of human

rights in the Arab world but also is the only voice defending the rights of Arab communities in Europe and the United States — Arab governments have been shamefully silent about the treatment of refugees in Europe and the U.S. travel ban and the impact it had on their citizens.

"I hope that in the future, you would have a whole generation of young Arab activists, lawyers taking part in this global movement" of fighting for human rights, he told me. "One legacy that I hope I can leave behind is that young people, young lawyers, young activists are inspired by the work our office does."

ROBERT VOS/AFP/Getty Images

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL

Palestinian Authority Urges Hamas Toward Unity Ahead of White House Meeting

Rory Jones

4-5 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 11:33 a.m. ET

TEL AVIV—Palestinian officials in the West Bank urged Hamas on Tuesday to take concrete steps to reconcile with the Palestinian Authority, a day after the Islamist movement issued a revised set of principles in which it dropped its longstanding call for the destruction of Israel.

In a six-page document issued just days before Mahmoud Abbas, head of the rival Palestinian Authority, is to meet with President Donald Trump at the White House, Hamas also approved the establishment of a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, aligning it with the Authority's longstanding position.

In bridging some differences with the Authority, the document "takes away this Israeli accusation that Palestinians are divided," a Palestinian official said in Ramallah, the Authority's governing seat. "It's a good step. It's whether they will implement it or not."

The document, unveiled Monday in the Qatar capital Doha, allows Mr. Abbas to display a united Palestinian front when he meets the U.S. president, Palestinian officials said.

Israel has repeatedly highlighted the division between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority as proof that it doesn't have a Palestinian partner for peace. Hamas rules the Gaza Strip, while the Palestinian Authority, which is dominated by Mr. Abbas's more secular Fatah movement, governs the West Bank.

Israel scathingly rejected suggestions that the document, a supplement to the group's 1988 charter, was anything more than a rhetorical makeover that disguised the determination of Hamas to annihilate Israel.

"They dig terror tunnels and have launched thousands upon thousands of missiles at Israeli civilians," said David Keyes, a spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "This is the real Hamas."

Daniel Shapiro, who served as U.S. ambassador to Israel during the Obama administration, suggested that nothing essential about Hamas

had changed. The group has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. and other Western governments.

"It may serve some purpose on the Palestinian or Arab side, but it isn't fooling anyone on the Israeli or American side," said Mr. Shapiro, now a senior fellow at Tel Aviv's Institute for National Security Studies.

Arab nations and Turkey were likely to withhold comment until after the White House meeting between Mr. Trump and Mr. Abbas, the Palestinian official said.

In recent weeks, Mr. Abbas has put financial pressure on Hamas in an apparent attempt to show Mr. Trump that he understands the importance of bringing some semblance of unity to Palestinian government and politics.

"If Abbas is smart enough he can use it [the document of principles] to show that everyone is under his umbrella," Mahdi Abdul Hadi, head of the Jerusalem-based Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs.

The "Document of General Principles and Policies" also more explicitly defines Hamas as a

national movement to create a Palestinian state, distancing it from the Muslim Brotherhood, which has branches in Egypt and across the region.

Until Monday, Hamas had rejected the notion of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, a longstanding position of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization, which Israel officially recognized in 1993 as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Hamas head Khaled Mashaal said at Monday night's announcement in Doha that Hamas was willing to enter negotiations with Israel. But the document of principles doesn't recognize the state of Israel and indicates that in time, Hamas will control all of what is now Israel.

An Israeli official said Hamas's approach remained different from the Authority's.

"Instead of trying to destroy us in one go, they will do it two goes," the official said. The charter is "cosmetics and nothing more."

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

The
Washington
Post

Palestinians think Trump can make a deal

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

7-9 minutes

JERUSALEM — As Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas prepares for his first meeting with President Trump at the White House on Wednesday, the Arab leader and his advisers are

expressing a kind of optimism not heard in years.

The Palestinians are saying they think Trump might be the one — with the right mix of bombast and

unpredictability — to restart peace negotiations with Israel with the aim of securing Palestinian borders, a capital and a state.

It is an unusual moment because hope is not in abundant supply in the Middle East these days.

Most Israelis and Palestinians tell pollsters that they have low expectations for any change. Israel's military occupation of the West Bank turns 50 years old in June, and Trump has called a possible Palestinian-Israeli accord "the toughest deal in the world."

Similarly, former U.S. peace negotiators in Washington and their Israeli counterparts in Jerusalem say conditions are not right for a renewal of talks.

"There's incredibly low expectations" for the Trump-Abbas meeting, said David Makovsky, a former negotiator who is a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"There's no context for a grand deal," he said. Makovsky said neither Trump's base nor the Jewish American community seems to be pushing for new talks.

[Trump's Middle East diplomacy just got more complicated]

But Abbas and his aides insist that movement is possible and say Trump just might be able to make headway.

Nine months of peace talks under then-Secretary of State John F. Kerry broke down amid bitter recriminations by Israelis and Palestinians in April 2014.

Since then, there was a year-long spike in violence by lone-wolf-style Palestinian assailants armed with knives and family cars, leading to tough countermeasures by Israeli security forces.

Abbas told Japanese reporters last month that he is prepared to hold a trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington "under the patronage of President Trump."

In an interview with Reuters on Thursday, Trump said: "I want to see peace with Israel and the Palestinians. There is no reason there's not peace between Israel

and the Palestinians — none whatsoever."

Trump sent former real estate attorney-turned-Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt to Jerusalem and Ramallah in March to explore the possibilities. Greenblatt got good marks from both sides. Trump also named his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as his point man for making peace in the Middle East.

In March, Trump met with Netanyahu at the White House, where administration officials pushed for constraint on the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, on land the Palestinians want for a future state. Those talks ended with no firm agreement. There are about 400,000 Jewish settlers living in the West Bank on land they say was promised to them by history and God.

By the end of the Obama administration, Palestinian leaders had moved away from seeing Washington as the key to a peace deal, emphasizing instead their campaign to "internationalize" the Palestinian quest for statehood, through U.N. resolutions and a symbolic gathering of world diplomats in Paris.

Trump has spoken with Abbas on the telephone. The meeting Wednesday will be their first face-to-face.

[Trump's real estate lawyer-turned-diplomat wades into Middle East]

Abbas, 82, is not known for his oratory or sparkle, in public or private. He is often guarded and does not hold news conferences or tweet. He is unpopular among his own people, who question his legitimacy. Palestinian elections are years overdue.

But Abbas and his circle want to hear what Trump has to say. "We are glad that now the U.S. administration listens about us from us, and not from third parties," Abbas told the Japanese reporters.

Jibril Rajoub, a top Palestinian official and a leader of the dominant Fatah political party, told The

Washington Post on Monday: "We are very optimistic. I was in the States recently, and I was told this conflict is a priority issue for President Trump and he is serious to engage and have the ultimate deal."

Rajoub added: "From our side we will cooperate with President Trump. We believe that he is not in the pocket of anyone, except the American people." Trump's "America first" policy extends to national security, "which means settling the core of the conflict in the Middle East," he said.

The new chief representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Husam Zomlot, told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz last week: "When you have a president who from Day One commits himself to peace, and invests time and effort in reaching a solution, that's the definition of a historic opportunity."

"President Trump has the political capital, the relationships with all the parties involved, and the will to actually achieve this goal," Zomlot said.

Since taking office, Trump has met with Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Israel's Netanyahu.

Some administration officials have pressed for a regionwide push to solve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, a grand bargain that would give the Palestinians a clear road to statehood in exchange for the moderate Arab states' public recognition of Israel.

Netanyahu often says he is prepared to meet Abbas anywhere, anytime, without preconditions — before listing his preconditions: that Abbas must recognize not only Israel, which Abbas has done, but Israel as "the Jewish state." Abbas has been reluctant to do so, in part because more than 20 percent of the Israeli population consists of Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

Today, Israel and its congressional supporters are urging Trump to push Abbas to stop social welfare

payments that the Palestinian Authority makes to the families of Palestinian prisoners and assailants either wounded or killed by Israeli forces during terrorist attacks.

This would be hard for Abbas because prisoners and "martyrs" are almost unassailable in Palestinian society. The issue has become even thornier since one of Abbas's main rivals, Marwan Barghouti, and hundreds of other prisoners began a hunger strike more than two weeks ago. Barghouti was convicted by an Israeli court of five counts of murder and membership in a terrorist organization.

Abbas is also hemmed in by the Islamist militant movement Hamas, which has controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007.

If Trump asks Abbas if he speaks for the Palestinians in Gaza, his answer might be a muddle.

Abbas has been fighting with rival Hamas over payments to government workers in Gaza, security arrangements, taxes and who should pay to keep the lights on in the economically crippled enclave.

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This week, Hamas issued a policy document, a kind of addendum of its hard-line anti-Jewish founding charter. The new document states for the first time an apparent acceptance of an interim Palestinian state along pre-1967 borders, without recognizing Israel. Some see a softening of Hamas positions, to stay relevant. Israel called it propaganda from a terrorist organization.

Dennis Ross, a longtime U.S. peace negotiator, said at a panel Monday in Washington that after 30 years, "I can safely say that we are at a low ebb."

He said, "There's complete disbelief on both sides in an ultimate deal."

Sufian Taha in Ramallah contributed to this report.



A US president hosts a Palestinian leader. Has anything changed? Maybe.

The Christian Science Monitor

6-8 minutes

May 2, 2017 —Donald Trump is not the first president to believe he can deliver a peace deal in the interminable Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After Jimmy Carter's 1978 Camp David Accords came the Reagan Peace Plan. That was followed in 1991 by George H.W. Bush's Madrid Conference — and on and on it has gone for decades, through Barack Obama's failed stab at peace at the hands of former Secretary of State John Kerry.

Yet while virtually no one believes conditions are ripe for the master of "the art of the deal" to deliver quickly on what by now is the holy grail of American diplomacy, some experts with long experience in peace efforts say the potential for progress may be less dismal than meets the eye.

The key reason is the regional context — and specifically how Arab countries, in particular the Gulf states, may suddenly be seeing their renewed commitment to helping further Middle East peace as a way of accommodating a new president — and of keeping the US anchored to the region.

So when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas takes up Trump's surprise invitation and visits the White House Wednesday, as much attention is likely to be paid to how the Arab states fit in the conversation as to the public commitments Mr. Abbas does or doesn't make.

"The Sunni states want the US to be in the region" to put a brake on the ambitions of their archenemy, Shiite Iran, says Dennis Ross, a longtime Middle East diplomat who worked in five administrations on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "They perceive President Trump's interest in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and they may be using [it] to keep him in the region," he says.

The corollary is that Trump can use the prospect of US engagement in the region "to keep the Arabs involved and contributing" to a relaunched peace process, Ambassador Ross says, primarily by deploying their influence with the Palestinians.

There are some signs the dynamic is already working, says Ross, now a distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He notes that Sunni Arab leaders, who of late had shown dwindling interest in Mr. Abbas and the Palestinian issue generally, quickly reversed course after Trump issued his White House invitation to the Palestinian leader.

"[Abbas's] position in the region had really been weakened," particularly with two key players, Jordan's King Abdullah and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Ross notes.

"But both agreed to see him after Trump's invitation," he adds.

Pressure on Hamas

Some even see Abbas's resurrected stature regionally and internationally as a factor in recent efforts by the militant Palestinian organization Hamas — rival to Abbas's Fatah organization — to soften its image and present itself as a more widely palatable alternative to Fatah.

Hamas leaders chose the run-up to Abbas's Washington visit to unveil a new set of principles that, while still claiming the right to armed struggle against Israel, downplay anti-Semitic rhetoric and accept the idea of a provisional Palestinian state as an interim step.

The document, which also calls for Hamas to develop closer ties to Egypt, was released not from the group's power center in Gaza, which it controls, but through a series of public events in the Gulf state of Qatar — another US regional ally with renewed interest in the Palestinian issue.

Abbas remains unpopular in the West Bank, but his suddenly rising regional star poses a threat to Hamas.

Yet even with his burnished regional relevance in tow, Abbas will only count with his White House host if he demonstrates that he is ready to deliver, regional experts say — if not dramatically, at least in promising ways that tell the dealmaker-in-chief that Abbas is someone he can work with to bring about the ultimate deal.

The conventional wisdom both in Washington and in the region is that "there is no context for talks, for a grand deal," say David Makovsky, who served as a senior adviser to Mr. Kerry's peace initiative. "Ironically, the only person who doesn't talk like that is the president of the United States. He believes in the deal."

What Abbas could offer

The challenge for Abbas, Mr. Makovsky says, is that even with expectations for a "big deal" at rock bottom, pressure will mount for the Palestinian leader to come forth with some offer, to lay some cards on the table.

"If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not ripe for the home run, what's the single?" says Makovsky, an aficionado of baseball analogies. "The administration is going to say, 'What's your step? We're not only asking [something] of Israel,'" he adds, "so what's the single?"

Ross cites two things he believes Abbas could do to demonstrate his relevance to Trump and his readiness to act to get the peace process moving again.

Perhaps most important, Abbas could state a willingness to end the practice of paying the families of Palestinian "martyrs" who die in attacks on Israelis and of other Palestinians imprisoned by Israel for anti-Israeli violence.

Second, Abbas could acknowledge that "two national movements are competing for the same space, that two national identities [require] two states for two peoples," he

says. More than a restatement of support for the two-state solution, it would be an affirmation of Israeli rights that could lead the Israeli public to take a second look and perhaps break the stalemate.

Neither action would be easy for Abbas, Ross says, but he says they could demonstrate a willingness to shake things up to keep Trump interested. "These hard steps won't produce the final deal," he says. "But they can break the stalemate and restore the sense of possibility."

Dramatic move by Trump?

If Trump hears enough encouraging words, speculation in Washington is that he could announce a dramatic step of his own, if not during the Abbas visit then shortly thereafter.

"Could Trump be going to Israel" late in May as part of his first trip to Europe as president? asks Makovsky, now at the Washington Institute. Might he announce he's bringing Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu together for the first time since 2010?

Ross says such a flashy announcement would mean little absent the preliminary steps demonstrating that conditions on the ground have really changed.

"I can tell you, if you bring the two leaders together it's a one-off. It doesn't change anything," he says. "What diplomacy has to do," he adds, "you have to give the publics on each side a reason to take a second look," a reason to believe "something is different this time."

**The
New York
Times**

Hamas Leader Plays Final Hand: Trying to Lift Group's Pariah Status

Declan Walsh

7-8 minutes

DOHA, Qatar — In the violent flux of the Middle East, Khaled Meshal is one of the great survivors. Down the years other senior figures in Hamas, the Islamist militant group that resists Israel, have died in hotel rooms at the hands of Israeli assassins or been crushed by laser-guided missiles during the wars in Gaza.

Mr. Meshal, who spent his career shifting from one Arab capital to another, had his own close scrape: In 1997, a year after he became the leader of Hamas, Israeli spies sprayed poison into his ear on a street in Jordan, sending Mr. Meshal into a coma and setting off an angry diplomatic showdown between Jordan and Israel that ended with the delivery of a lifesaving antidote.

Now Mr. Meshal is stepping down as the senior leader, ending a 21-year reign during which Hamas grew into a formidable military force and also joined politics to rule Gaza for the past decade. Yet it has become an international pariah for its attacks on civilians.

Mr. Meshal's parting shot is a new political document, released at a luxury hotel in Doha on Monday, that he is pitching as an attempt to pull Hamas from its isolation by presenting a friendlier face to the world.

A big part of that is its watering down of the anti-Semitic language of the original Hamas charter in 1988, with its talk of war between Arabs and Jews. "We are making it clear that ours is a liberation project — not about religion or the Jews," Mr. Meshal said in an interview on Tuesday in Doha, his latest home.

His offer found few takers. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of

Israel immediately rejected the overture as an exercise in insincerity. "Hamas is attempting to fool the world, but it will not succeed," his spokesman said Monday. Hamas is loathed in Israel for bombings and rockets launched indiscriminately into civilian areas, and critics say the group spends too much money preparing for war and not enough on Gaza's besieged residents.

The document was also greeted with silence by Western countries, a reflection of the fact that Hamas failed to bend on any of the factors that have caused it to be branded a terrorist organization — and has not even formally repudiated the 1988 charter, with its talk of "obliterating" Israel and creating an Islamic State on "every inch" of historic Palestine.

The failure to achieve even that cosmetic gesture offers a telling indication of how Hamas is hamstrung by its own deep-seated

ambivalence toward reform, said Nathan Thrall, an analyst with the International Crisis Group who is based in Jerusalem, who noted that the original charter has long been a source of quiet embarrassment among more reform-minded Hamas leaders.

"On one hand, they are attempting to appeal to hard-liners by not giving up their core principles," said Mr. Thrall, the author of a forthcoming book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "The Only Language They Understand."

Mr. Meshal, center left, speaking in 2012 alongside the Gazan prime minister at the time, Ismail Haniya, center right. Mr. Haniya is a favorite to succeed Mr. Meshal. Pool photo by Mohammed Saber

"On the other, people like Meshal were hoping the document could lead to openings with Sunni Arab states and the West. It attempts to

please everyone, and in so doing pleases no one."

Yet the attempted rebranding of Hamas comes at a moment of sudden change in the Middle East. Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the rival Palestinian Authority, is due to meet with President Trump in Washington on Wednesday.

Mr. Trump has spoken of his desire to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but his interlocutor, Mr. Abbas, who is 82, is seen as politically depleted, and his rivals have started maneuvering to succeed him.

Hamas is changing, too: Secret elections now underway will decide who succeeds Mr. Meshal as leader in the next two weeks. That in turn raises the question of what Hamas might become.

In an hourlong interview, Mr. Meshal, wearing his usual dark suit with an open-neck white shirt, demonstrated the political polish he has brought to the organization over two decades, as it has developed from a localized fighting group, blowing up buses and cafes in Jerusalem, to a force that now posits itself as a potential leader of all the Palestinian people.

When the document was released on Monday night, he was giving interviews in a hotel ballroom until 1

a.m. — an unusual flurry of publicity for a secretive organization.

He said the document — the product of four years of dialogue among leaders in Gaza, in prison and in exile — at the very least showed that Hamas was open to changing its ideas.

In recasting itself as a national liberation movement, rather than as part of a wider Islamist struggle, Hamas appears to be distancing itself from the Muslim Brotherhood, which was conspicuous by its absence from the text.

That omission has been interpreted as an attempt to curry favor with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, whose troops control part of the border with Gaza and whose intelligence service determines when and which Hamas leaders can leave Gaza.

Mr. Meshal being greeted in 2009 by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president at the time, in Tehran, with Saeed Jalili, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, at right. Iran is Hamas's main arms supplier. Baqer Nasir/Mehr News Agency, via Associated Press

Just as important, Mr. Meshal said he hoped the document would bring Hamas closer to Saudi Arabia, which, like Egypt, is staunchly

opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood. "We already hold dialogue with Western parties, and if we do so with the West, we might as well be doing this with our Arab brothers," he said.

Yet in the next breath, Mr. Meshal acknowledged that such a rapprochement could be tricky with Hamas's main arms supplier, Iran, which is engaged in proxy wars against Saudi Arabia in the region's most explosive conflicts.

"We are keenly aware of the amount of anger toward Iran because of the burning conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen," Mr. Meshal said. "Our priority is to serve our own cause without getting tangled in internal disputes."

Looking back over his time in charge, Mr. Meshal lists sheer survival as one of his greatest achievements.

"It gives me pride that the people of Gaza have remained steadfast under Hamas despite three devastating wars," he said. During the last conflict with Israel, in 2014, 1,462 Palestinian civilians in Gaza were killed, according to a United Nations report, and Palestinian rockets killed six Israeli civilians. But the relative peace of recent years — with comparatively few rockets fired into Israeli territory from Gaza since 2014 — also presents challenges.

In the latest chapter of the long-running fight between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas recently slashed salaries for Palestinian Authority employees in Gaza, the latest blow in a territory whose miserable living conditions are often compared to a giant prison camp.

The Egyptian and Israeli blockade of Gaza means that its two million inhabitants feel trapped, Mr. Thrall, the analyst, said. "Students on scholarships, people wishing to travel abroad — nobody can leave. It's one of the greatest pressures the people of Gaza feel."

Doggedness comes with a price, and Mr. Meshal is trying to balance that toughness with the need to open up, in a reflection of the shifting political landscape — and just maybe tilt toward more expansive politics that might one day bring Hamas out of the cold.

The favorites to succeed Mr. Meshal are Ismail Haniya, a Hamas leader in Gaza, and Abu Marzouk, who is said to be living in exile in Cairo.

It is widely assumed Mr. Meshal will take another senior role in Hamas after stepping down. Typically tight-lipped, he said only, "A resistance fighter never retires."



Hindin : The United Nations' campaign against business in Israel makes no sense

By Doron Hindin

5-7 minutes

By Doron Hindin May 2 at 7:51 PM

Doron Hindin provides global trade and regulatory advice at the international law firm Covington & Burling.

There is increasing political tumult over the treatment of Israel at the United Nations. Last week, all 100 U.S. senators — Republicans and Democrats alike — admonished the organization for anti-Israel bias, and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) recently sponsored a bill to withhold U.N. funding because of "anti-Israel, or anti-Semitic rhetoric or propaganda."

Add to that an important related bill now percolating through Congress that takes aim at a widely unknown initiative at the U.N. Human Rights Council: an effort to create a database designed to shame companies simply for doing business in the West Bank.

The blacklist effort targeted by the bill — known as the Israel Anti-Boycott Act — is procedurally flawed and substantively misguided and violates core principles of international trade.

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Procedurally, companies would be added to the U.N. database without any form of due process. Listing criteria do not exist. Businesses would not be able to contest their inclusion before it was made public, and once designated, they would not have access to review or delisting mechanisms.

Substantively, the list abuses well-established principles that encourage multinationals to instill ethical norms into their worldwide business conduct. This is because companies would be branded wrongdoers simply based on their presence in a politically contentious region, without consideration of their conduct with regard to human rights, the environment and social governance.

And finally, the Human Rights Council list likely violates international law. The World Trade Organization protects politics-free global economic development by limiting the ways in which governments regulate trade. U.N. efforts to publicly censure companies unless they conduct business on prescribed political lines would generally constitute unlawful trade discrimination.

Why should a company invest in a region if it will be prejudged by the United Nations based not on its impact on the ground or its positive commercial influence, but on its association alone with governments and territories embroiled in conflict? And while the U.N. database ostensibly seeks to target only those companies operating in the West Bank, the reality is that any meaningful business in Israel entails business in disputed territories.

When a foreign company is engaged in contracts with the Israeli government or sells retail products anywhere in the country, that company will necessarily have business regularly affecting the

West Bank. Boycott, divestment and sanctions organizations already target hundreds of companies worldwide, regardless of how tangential their West Bank activities are.

The same holds true for multinationals with business in other conflict regions. Foreign sales in Turkey, Morocco, Russia or China would be impossible if — due to ethics programs — companies prohibited their products from being used in disputed territories in Northern Cyprus, Western Sahara, Crimea, Taiwan or on islands in the South China Sea.

The French Court of Appeals in Versailles has held that business in disputed or occupied territory is often essential to ensure the well-being of the local population. In 2015, a British tribunal — applying business and human rights guidelines from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development — determined that even if a company's relationships with foreign governments technically run afoul of ethical norms, the company should not end

its government contacts but rather work toward leveraging its commercial influence to bring about positive change.

These principles come from a clear interest in having ethically minded companies actively engaged in politically contentious regions. Such companies are preferable to the less ethically inclined competitors that would otherwise fill the

commercial void and operate solely to maximize profits.

As for the issue of legality, several of the U.N. members that voted to create and fund the list are members of the World Trade Organization. Individually, these states have violated their duties under international trade law by taking this step. Collectively, they

have caused an unfortunate clash of U.N. and WTO trade principles.

Governments should work with their U.N. ambassadors and with Secretary-General António Guterres to ensure that this list is never published. Meanwhile, multinationals must mobilize in opposition, leveraging their considerable economic ties to prevent the United Nations from

erecting harmful hurdles to international business.

This dual track of government and company pressure — coupled with mounting rebuke of the Human Rights Council from Congress — might shift U.N. policy and avert a misguided shaming campaign. In turn, companies would regain the incentive to invest in ethical brands of business.

The New York Times

Prieto : Chaos Looms Over Venezuela - The New York Times

Hugo Prieto
6-7 minutes

Irene Rinaldi

CARACAS, Venezuela — This episode took place on my street in downtown Caracas last week. People were shouting, running past my building, trying to escape from a contingent of national guardsmen who had opened fire a block away with buckshot, rubber bullets and tear gas canisters on a peaceful demonstration outside the offices of PDVSA, the state-owned oil company.

One protester, a woman in her 60s, sought refuge from the tear gas by hiding behind a tree. We opened the door for her, but she wasn't too happy about taking shelter; she felt that she was shirking her duty as a citizen by not facing the attackers openly. "We can't do anything if we're dead, Missus," said a young man who obviously sympathized with her. "And they're starving us to death, so nobody can stop me going out on to the streets to protest," the woman said.

That's what's new in the protests taking place in Venezuela — the conviction that the 21st-century socialism begun by former President Hugo Chávez has failed and has left the country in ruins. And there are other, darker new elements involved — police brutality, mass detentions and the use of paramilitary groups armed by the government to carry out the dirty

work the military doesn't want to handle: murdering people.

A demonstrator near a fire barricade at a rally against President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela in Caracas last month. Christian Veron/Reuters

The demonstrations multiplied across the country. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets, knowing they face armed repression, because they have realized that the institutions that make democracy work are in grave danger and that they must defend themselves against a despotic government. What awakened them was the declaration made early last month by the attorney general, Luisa Ortega Díaz, concerning two resolutions, 154 and 155, issued by the Supreme Court's constitutional division that in effect voided the National Assembly. She denounced the ruling as "breaking the thread of constitutional continuity," words that were translated into a rallying cry for the protesters: "Maduro, coup-monger! We didn't say so — the attorney general said so!"

In over a month of protests, 29 people have been killed, and there have been over 1,200 arbitrary detentions, according to human rights organizations and the prosecutor's office. President Nicolás Maduro's government went from autocracy to dictatorship in just a few weeks. Today, it's only a step away from tyranny. But the people aren't giving up. They're no longer afraid. At long last, liberty and democracy have become an

existential struggle, a matter of life and death.

Lacking the leadership skills of Mr. Chávez or the unconditional support of his own followers, Mr. Maduro has given more and more power to the military. When he appears in public, he seems erratic and disoriented. Over 80 percent of Venezuelans reject his administration. But the Chavista ruling class is in denial over its failure, which springs from its own ineptitude.

The opposition has been firm in its demands: Open a channel for distributing food and medicine to alleviate the people's suffering; restore the National Assembly's constitutional roles; set a timetable for elections; and free political prisoners. For the government, agreeing on even one of these points would be like opening a tiny crack that would soon turn into an enormous hole through which its control would slip away.

The greatest fear of Chavismo has always been the revolt of its own electoral base: the impoverished segments of the population who saw in President Chávez a quasi-religious figure who would redeem them. The most radical change under Chavismo was to place "el pueblo" — his label for the poor — at the center of Venezuelan politics. In return, "el pueblo" kept Mr. Chávez the indisputable master of power from 1999 to his death in 2013.

The people of Petare — Latin America's most heavily populated

shantytown, with 1.2 million inhabitants — joined the protests on April 20, when they met violent repression and clouds of tear gas extending the length of Caracas's main traffic artery, the Autopista del Este. Their slogan was "Listen, Maduro, we're from Petare. Do your worst, do your best, you'll never, ever, stop our protest." People from other low-income quarters of the city, such as El Valle and La Vega, have also demonstrated against the government. The role of Mr. Chávez's political base in the demonstrations is unclear, but it could mark the beginning of the end of Mr. Maduro's government.

Is there a way out of this labyrinth? The possibility of a negotiated transition satisfactory to the opposition is negligible, even more at a time when Mr. Maduro has called for a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. But there is still a small window for dialogue. If that doesn't happen, the alternative would be a military intervention to install a national unity government that would organize free and fair elections — in essence, the plebiscite that Mr. Maduro refuses to hold. Although it is dangerous to allow the military to mix in political matters, it has happened before in Venezuela; in 1958, a civic-military alliance toppled the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez. There is also the risk of a Communist-type dictatorship modeled on Cuba's.

It's an enormous challenge to find a political solution, but we must try. Without one, we can hope for only a miracle.

ETATS-UNIS

The Washington Post

GOP health-care push faces new obstacles as concerns about preexisting conditions grow (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/daveweigel?fref=ts>

9-11 minutes

Republican efforts to overhaul the nation's health-care system collided Tuesday with fierce resistance about how it would affect people with preexisting medical conditions, casting the proposal's future into

deeper uncertainty as GOP leaders scrambled to try to salvage it.

On Capitol Hill, influential Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) came out against the plan, dealing a major blow to proponents trying to secure enough

votes to pass it in the House. Across the country, late-night host Jimmy Kimmel's emotional story about his newborn son's heart condition reverberated on television and the Internet. And former president Barack Obama, who

signed the bill Republicans are trying to dismantle, took to Twitter to defend it.

All three voiced concerns about losing a core protection in the Affordable Care Act for people with preexisting conditions, as is possible under the latest GOP plan. Such growing worries threatened to derail the revamped attempt to revise key parts of the ACA — or at least send Republicans back to the drawing board.

[Which Republicans are putting the health-care bill in jeopardy this time]

"I do think each minute that has passed, each hour and each day, the 'no' members are becoming more locked in 'no,' and we may be losing members," said Rep. Chris Collins (R-N.Y.), who favors going back to the original version of the American Health Care Act that was scrapped by GOP leaders earlier this year.

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

President Trump promised on April 30 that new GOP health-care legislation will preserve coverage for people with preexisting medical conditions — but critics say that's at odds with his promise to lower premiums. Will the GOP health care bill cover people with preexisting conditions? (Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

Republicans left their weekly conference meeting Tuesday with no health-care vote on the schedule. The House is slated to recess Thursday until May 16.

In an interview with WHTC radio in Holland, Mich., Upton, a former chairman and current member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he opposes the House GOP plan because it "torpedoes" safeguards for people with preexisting conditions.

"I told the leadership I cannot support the bill with this provision in it," Upton said. "I don't know how it all will play out, but I know there are a good number of us that have raised real red flags."

A Washington Post analysis shows 21 House Republicans either opposed to or leaning against the bill, and 22 more either undecided or unclear in their positions. If no Democrats support the bill, the Republicans can lose no more than 22 GOP votes to pass it in the House.

Upton's comments came a day after Rep. Billy Long (R-Mo.), a longtime opponent of the ACA, voiced similar concerns as he came out against the latest plan. On Tuesday, Long

said the preexisting-condition provision was the sole reason for his opposition.

"They take that out, put the vote on the floor that they pulled, and I'm with them," Long said, referring to the first version of the bill, which House GOP leaders withdrew in March after it was clear that it lacked the support to pass the chamber.

After the failure, Republicans renegotiated and opted to add an amendment to the bill that would enable insurers to deny coverage or charge more to people with preexisting conditions if their states opted out of provisions in the ACA barring such decisions. The states would have to set up "high-risk pools" to absorb some of the costs of caring for those people.

The idea was to find a middle ground that would attract conservative Republicans who want to do away with as many ACA regulations as possible and centrist Republicans who worry about stripping vulnerable populations of the coverage they receive under the ACA.

That balance has been very hard to reach. And external pressure has made it no easier.

On his show Monday night, an emotional Kimmel repeatedly teared up as he told the story of his newborn son Billy's surgery for a heart defect. The procedure was successful but shook him.

Kimmel encouraged lawmakers not to threaten the protections people with preexisting conditions receive under the ACA.

"Whatever your party, whatever you believe, whoever you support, we need to make sure that people who are supposed to represent us — and people who are meeting about this right now in Washington — understand that very clearly. Let's stop with the nonsense. This isn't football, there are no teams," he said on ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live."

Kimmel tweeted a link to the video Monday night. By Tuesday evening, it had received more than 4.2 million views on YouTube. Among those who had seen it: the 44th president.

"Well said, Jimmy. That's exactly why we fought so hard for the ACA, and why we need to protect it for kids like Billy," Obama wrote on Twitter.

"I read about it," said Rep. Leonard Lance (R-N.J.) of Kimmel's viral speech, though he said he had not seen it. Lance opposes the current GOP plan.

President Trump, who has shown an eagerness to swiftly pass a health-care bill, continued pressing congressional Republicans to act. On Tuesday, Vice President Pence traveled to Capitol Hill again to coax legislators to support the bill. Trump called lawmakers from the White House.

"How's health care coming, folks? How's it doing? All right. We're moving along? All right. I think it's time now, right? Right?" he said after name-checking some lawmakers in attendance as he presented the U.S. Air Force Academy football team with the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy at the White House.

Trump has also added confusion to the debate, saying in an interview that aired Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation" that the health-care plan would "beautifully" protect those with preexisting conditions.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) appeared keen to avoid signs of discord Tuesday, telling reporters that Trump has been "nothing but helpful" on health care. He and his top lieutenants also tried to defend the GOP plan against criticism that it would harm Americans with preexisting conditions.

"Our bill protects people with preexisting conditions, and it actually provides multiple layers of protection for people with preexisting conditions in ways that Obamacare doesn't do," House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R-La.) told reporters.

Scalise's defense was that current law offers such protections and any states opting out "actually have to lay out how they are going to protect people with preexisting conditions."

Rep. Paul A. Gosar (R-Ariz.), a member of the far-right House Freedom Caucus who did not support the first GOP proposal but does back the new one, said he was hearing that a new amendment would add money for the high-risk pools — though he didn't know how they would be paid for. Collins said he heard something similar, but he was pessimistic that the differences could be ironed out.

"I've heard it, but I don't believe it's a dollar-and-cents issue," Collins said.

Some reluctant Republicans continued to talk throughout the day as if the bill could still be negotiated.

"Hopefully we're just a handful away," said Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), the chairman of the Freedom Caucus, who helped put

together the latest proposal. "There's still a lot of undecided, but generally, at this stage of the game, you can address the concerns of the undecideds."

Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-N.J.), a co-chairman of the centrist Tuesday Group who negotiated the new proposal with Meadows, dodged questions about possible further changes. "I'm not in every conversation, so I can't really say," he said.

Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.), another Tuesday Group co-chairman, who has not taken a position on the bill, told reporters that she was "involved in all of the discussions."

Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), who opposed the earlier version of the bill, evaded repeated questions about whether he would vote yes now.

"The position I'm taking is that the most important thing is to keep the government open for business," he said, referring to a different bill to keep the government funded through September.

In the Senate, where the measure is likely to face an even steeper climb if it makes it there, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) painted a less-than-rosy picture of its outlook.

"It's no secret that this has been a big issue in the last four campaigns, and we're going to continue to work on it," McConnell said. "And when they send it over here, it'll be a real big challenge on the Senate side as well."

The Daily 202 newsletter

A must-read morning briefing for decision-makers.

Back in the House, the difficulty of the more immediate hurdles was as clear to advocates of the proposal as to its detractors.

"The most sincere anger I've noticed comes from people who are sincerely scared, people who may have a preexisting condition who feel like they're about to lose [coverage] and they're going to die, and they're going to die because of a vote that we might be taking," Rep. Thomas J. Rooney (R-Fla.), who supports the current plan, told reporters.

"If we cannot explain to people that is not going to happen, then it is going to be very difficult to ever bring a bill to the floor."

Read more at PowerPost

Ed O'Keefe, Paul Kane and Kelsey Snell contributed to this report.

Thomas Kaplan
and Robert Pear

8-11 minutes

WASHINGTON — With two days left before an 11-day recess and no vote scheduled, House Republican leaders worked on Tuesday to win votes one at a time for their latest bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act after an influential Republican voice on health care came out against the measure.

A failure to get the repeal bill to a vote this week would be the third time that Speaker Paul D. Ryan could not rally his considerable House majority around a legislative priority that Republicans have promised for seven years.

Republican leaders were ready to move on from health care after the embarrassing collapse of their measure in March, but President Trump pressed Mr. Ryan hard to deliver on a major campaign promise and personally pressured House members to fall into line.

If the effort fails, it will greatly weaken the president's hand on Capitol Hill and cast a shadow across the rest of his legislative agenda, especially the deep tax cuts and rewrite of the tax code that he has proposed — and that are likely to be no easier to tackle than health care.

Representative Fred Upton of Michigan was only the latest Republican defector, but he carries more sway than most. The former chairman of one of the House committees that drafted the American Health Care Act, as the Republicans call their measure, Mr. Upton said the latest version of the health care bill “torpedoes” protections for people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Mr. Upton, who led the House Energy and Commerce Committee as the repeal movement built steam, declared on a local radio show, “I cannot support this bill with this provision in it,” just as Mr. Ryan was insisting that the legislation would protect the sick.

The loss of Mr. Upton, who has served in the House for 30 years, was a huge blow to Republicans, who had hoped to get the bill through the House by Thursday, before lawmakers go home again and face pressure from constituents. The Upton decision, which could give other Republicans cover to defect, came as party leaders faced an onslaught of advocacy groups saying the bill

would harm the nation's most vulnerable citizens — and as a late-night talk show host, Jimmy Kimmel, made an emotional appeal.

A tearful Mr. Kimmel on Monday night told the story of his infant son, Billy, who was born with heart defects and had surgery. Mr. Kimmel pleaded with Congress not to undermine the Affordable Care Act's ban on discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions.

After Mr. Kimmel's monologue went viral, former President Barack Obama weighed in on Twitter, writing: “Well said, Jimmy. That's exactly why we fought so hard for the ACA, and why we need to protect it for kids like Billy.”

House Republican leaders are also fighting against the clock. The House is scheduled to be in recess beginning on Friday and is not set to return until May 16. Republicans who are on the fence are likely to get an earful from their constituents.

“I think it's imperative that we have a vote before we leave for a week,” said Representative Mark Meadows, Republican of North Carolina and the chairman of the conservative House Freedom Caucus.

In the radio interview, Mr. Upton was explicit: Concessions made to win over the hard-line members of the Freedom Caucus were costing the leadership support from more moderate Republicans. He said “there are a good number of us that have raised real red flags and concerns.”

Mr. Upton said he wanted to make sure that people with pre-existing illnesses like cancer or lupus are “not going to be discriminated against with a lot higher premiums.”

Mr. Trump, whose advisers have been pressing aggressively for a vote on the health care overhaul, seemed oblivious of the latest setback for the measure on Tuesday.

“How's health care coming, folks, how's it doing — all right?” Mr. Trump said, addressing Republican lawmakers attending a trophy award ceremony in the White House Rose Garden for the United States Air Force Academy's football team. “We're moving along? I think it's time now, right?”

After visiting the Capitol on Monday, Vice President Mike Pence returned on Tuesday, trying to corral votes for the repeal bill. Mr. Ryan insisted that Republican leaders were “making very good progress with our members,” but he offered no

indication of when a vote might be held.

Republicans were clearly divided over the adequacy of the bill's protections for people who are sick or disabled.

Representative Fred Upton, Republican of Michigan. Win McNamee/Getty Images

“There are a few layers of protections for pre-existing conditions in this bill,” Mr. Ryan said.

At the heart of the debate is an amendment to the repeal bill proposed by Representative Tom MacArthur, Republican of New Jersey. The amendment, which won over the Freedom Caucus last week, would give state governments the ability to apply for waivers from the existing law's required “essential health benefits,” such as maternity, mental health and emergency care, and from rules that generally mandate the same insurance rates for people of the same age, regardless of their medical conditions.

With a waiver, states could permit insurers to charge higher premiums based on the “health status” of a person who had experienced a gap in coverage. To qualify for a waiver, a state would have to have an alternative mechanism, like a high-risk pool or a reinsurance program, to provide or subsidize coverage for people with serious illnesses.

“States can't leave people with pre-existing conditions high and dry,” Mr. MacArthur said Tuesday, defending his proposal.

But the MacArthur amendment has distressed some Republicans because of concerns that it would allow states to gut protections for consumers.

Representative Tom Rooney, Republican of Florida, said he was “leaning yes” on the repeal bill, but agonizing over how to explain his vote to constituents.

“I have a lot of people who call my office on a daily basis who are extremely angry,” he said. “It's not just because I'm a Republican, but because they are sincerely scared.”

Many people with pre-existing conditions fear that they may lose coverage and “are going to die because of a vote we might be taking,” Mr. Rooney said.

The Freedom Caucus had pushed hard to roll back federal insurance requirements.

“The pre-existing condition debate and discussion in Congress, far as I'm concerned, is over,” Representative Scott Perry, Republican of Pennsylvania and a member of the Freedom Caucus, said Tuesday. “They are covered; we acknowledge it; we provide for it; it is done.”

The White House threw a hand grenade into the delicate negotiations over health care on Tuesday when Mr. Trump's budget director, Mick Mulvaney, suggested the administration might take action that would undermine the Affordable Care Act, with or without Congress.

Mr. Mulvaney raised doubts about whether the federal government would continue making certain payments to insurers. The payments enable insurers to reduce deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs for low-income people, a form of assistance known as cost-sharing reductions.

Discussing a bipartisan agreement in Congress to fund the federal government for the next five months, Mr. Mulvaney said, “There's absolutely no language in this bill that requires us to make any Obamacare bailout payments, any C.S.R. payments of any way, shape or form as a result of this deal, O.K.?”

Asked whether the Trump administration would stop making the payments, he said, “We've not made any decisions at all on May.”

The White House Office of Management and Budget later said Mr. Mulvaney meant to say that the administration had made no commitment to pay the subsidies beyond May.

The House Democratic whip, Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland, said Mr. Mulvaney's comments undermined confidence in insurance marketplaces and added of the Trump administration, “Its actions, continuing to sabotage the Affordable Care Act, will inevitably force premiums to skyrocket, hurting consumers.”

Congress's inability to agree on health care legislation is already sending tremors through insurance markets, making it much more difficult for insurers to plan for 2018.

Monday was the deadline for insurers in California to file preliminary information on rates and benefits for next year. Dave Jones, the California insurance commissioner, said he had taken “the unprecedented step of authorizing health insurers to file

more than one set of proposed rates for 2018 — one assuming the A.C.A. is enforced and funded, and the other assuming that President Trump and House Republican leaders continue to undermine or

repeal the law and cause unnecessary premium increases.”

Even as some Republicans have come out in opposition to the repeal bill in recent days, the Trump administration and House

Republican leaders have also picked up support from other party members.

Representative Paul Gosar, Republican of Arizona, said Tuesday that he had switched to

yes after receiving assurances that the Senate would vote on one of his bills, which would scale back the federal antitrust exemption for health insurance companies.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GOP's Health-Bill Woes Show New Power of Party's Centrist Wing (UNE)

Kristina Peterson and Stephanie Armour

10-12 minutes

Updated May 3, 2017 6:20 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The latest Republican effort to reshape the nation's health-care system teetered on the brink of collapse in the House, reflecting a new assertiveness by GOP centrists, a group that in recent years has rarely wielded such power.

Rep. Fred Upton (R., Mich.), an influential former committee chairman who is considering a Senate bid next year, said Tuesday he was opposed to the current version of the bill, delivering a major blow to the GOP leaders' effort to overhaul the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare.

GOP leaders said late Tuesday they were still sewing up support for the bill, but the ranks of Republicans opposed or undecided on the bill swelled to numbers almost large enough to derail it. As of Tuesday, at least 21 House Republicans said they wouldn't support the legislation, with a similar number undecided.

House GOP leaders most likely can't lose more than 22 Republican votes to pass the health-care bill, which isn't expected to receive any Democratic support.

- Donald Trump Raises His GOP Allies' Stress Levels

President Donald Trump's latest tweets and his spate of interviews marking 100 days in office have heightened the stress levels of his Republican allies in Congress negotiating over spending and health care.

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- Trump Says Government Shutdown Could Be Needed 'to Fix Mess'

President Donald Trump said a government shutdown and a change in Senate rules might be needed to get his priorities through Congress, comments that came as the White House tried to bat down suggestions that Democrats were

the winners in the recent short-term spending deal.

Mr. Upton's opposition expanded political cover for centrists to oppose the bill, including some facing tough re-election battles in swing districts. In recent years, many of these lawmakers have complained that House leaders were catering too much to the party's conservative faction.

The show of defiance suggested that GOP leaders may not be able to count on the cooperation of their centrist flank on upcoming bills that could prove just as thorny as the health measure, including the president's plan to overhaul the tax code.

"If this process is replicated for other bills, it sets a very bad precedent," said Rep. Charlie Dent, a centrist Republican from Pennsylvania opposed to the health-care bill.

GOP leaders have struggled for weeks to craft legislation that strips provisions of the 2010 health-care law aggressively enough to appease conservatives, while maintaining enough patient protections to keep support from centrist Republicans. Defections from both camps forced GOP leaders to pull the bill from the House floor in late March.

Conservatives inside and outside Congress were especially vocal, deriding the earlier GOP bill as "Obamacare-lite" and an abandonment of years of Republican promises, attracting the public ire of fellow Republican, President Donald Trump, when the bill collapsed.

Rep. Tom MacArthur (R., N.J.) then won over conservatives by introducing an amendment to let states opt out of parts of the law. It would allow insurers in states that get waivers to charge higher premiums to people with pre-existing health conditions who let their coverage lapse.

The House Freedom Caucus, a group of about three dozen conservatives, endorsed the revised bill last week, saying it could help lower premium costs.

"The speaker said we moved the ball down the field, and it was good

policy," said Rep. Dave Brat (R., Va.), a Freedom Caucus member.

The amendment sparked a debate beyond the Capitol. In an emotional speech Monday night, ABC talk-show host Jimmy Kimmel grew tearful speaking about his infant son, born days earlier with a congenital heart defect. Clips of his remarks in favor of protections for patients with pre-existing conditions went viral, retweeted by former President Barack Obama, a Democrat, among others.

Concern over the bill's effect on costs for sicker people weighs particularly heavily on centrist Republicans, many of whom represent districts won by Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Democrats said Republicans would struggle to coalesce behind a health-care bill, no matter which faction they sought to please first.

"They don't have any guiding, unifying principle when it comes to health care," Rep. Luis Guterrez (D., Ill.) said.

Mr. Trump and his aides have been hoping for a speedy approval. "I think it's time now, right?" the president said Tuesday at a White House event.

In midterm congressional elections, the president's party often loses seats, and moderate Republicans are especially vulnerable. They face a tricky landscape, potentially risking a GOP primary rival if they oppose the health bill and a Democratic opponent if they support it.

Those considering statewide races, like Mr. Upton, may face similar perils. Mr. Upton told Michigan radio station WHTC on Tuesday he couldn't support the Republican bill in its current form.

"I've supported the practice of not allowing pre-existing illnesses to be discriminated against from the very get-go," Mr. Upton said. "This amendment torpedoes that, and I told leadership that I cannot support this bill with this provision in it."

Mr. Upton's opposition is a significant blow to House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) and other Republican leaders, because the Michigan lawmaker was one of the

main authors of previous bills that would repeal the health law. He served on the task force that helped craft Mr. Ryan's health plan last year and has been a strong proponent of toppling the law.

House GOP leaders launched this week an effort to sway reluctant centrists by assuring them the Senate would significantly change the bill, beefing up money for a program that helps people with high medical costs get insurance and restoring some of the bill's steep cuts to Medicaid.

But centrists said it didn't make sense for them to take a potentially career-ending vote on a bill that might not be passed by the Senate, which has 52 Republicans. If the Senate does pass the measure, it is likely to amend it significantly to address the concerns of centrists in that body—and that version, in turn, could be rejected by conservatives back in the House.

That prompted centrists to question the strategy of appeasing House conservatives who, they say, aren't likely to back the bill's final form.

"Trying to placate the hard right and get these bills out of the House, knowing they have an uncertain fate in the Senate, just further exposes members in marginal districts politically because we know darn well the bill on the rebound from the Senate won't satisfy those on the hard right," Mr. Dent said.

House GOP leaders will need centrist lawmakers' votes on another matter as soon as Wednesday, when the House votes on a five-month spending bill that many conservatives are expected to oppose.

"We are always the people who take the tough votes," Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R., Ill.) said.

House leaders could still weigh concessions to win over more centrist votes, but that risks alienating conservatives once again.

Any such changes would likely have to reduce the number of people who could lose coverage under the bill. An estimate showing 24 million more Americans would be uninsured by 2026 under the first

iteration of the legislation alarmed many centrist GOP members.

Despite the challenging outlook, the push could continue throughout the month, with a plan to bring the bill to the floor if it's clear it has enough votes.

Republicans could return from next week's recess more determined to get legislation accomplished if they face a backlash from constituents. But Republicans from swing districts are also likely to get an earful from Democratic voters and others

alarmed by potential changes to their health-care benefits.

—Michelle Hackman and Louise Radnofsky contributed to this article.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Health Bill Edges Close To the Brink.'

POLITICO No good GOP options if Obamacare repeal fails

Adam Cancryn

7-9 minutes

If their latest Obamacare repeal efforts fail, Republicans really have only a few options. And each means political peril for President Donald Trump and Republican congressional leaders.

First, they could keep negotiating with themselves on a repeal and replacement bill, but the difficulties this week make it increasingly clear just how hard it is to write legislation that would bring together a coalition of Freedom Caucus conservatives and moderates in politically vulnerable districts.

Story Continued Below

Alternatively, they could use executive powers to starve Obamacare by denying funding, while pushing regulatory buttons that unravel it. People would lose coverage, and the whole thing could collapse.

The other option is a more modest "repair" bill that keeps the foundation of Obamacare — such as the online marketplaces, the subsidies and Medicaid expansion — while addressing weaker parts of the law. That effort might even attract some Democrats, but it would be politically risky for a Republican Congress — and president — who campaigned for four election cycles on repealing Obamacare.

None of these options are great for Republicans politically, which is why Congress remains tied up in knots over how to fulfill one of Republicans' biggest promises.

Here's a deeper look at the three choices on Obamacare.

If at first you don't succeed ...

With the defection of key moderates like Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) — the former Energy and Commerce chairman who has written multiple bills to dismantle Obamacare — the repeal effort is on the verge of crumbling again. GOP leaders still insist they're not giving up the fight,

but that may be in part because the alternatives aren't very attractive. Republicans have spent months trying to make good on their seven-year vow to repeal and replace Obamacare — only to find themselves stymied by their own members.

The latest GOP struggle is a mirror image of the problem House Republicans faced just six weeks ago, when the conservative hard-liners of the Freedom Caucus were largely responsible for scuttling the repeal effort because it didn't take down enough of Obamacare. This time, centrists are balking because it repeals too much — and puts popular protections for people with pre-existing conditions at risk. That's left the conference treading water, with little sign of a breakthrough on the horizon.

"All that's happened here is the blame, so to speak, has shifted from one part of the party to the other," said John Rother, who was the top lobbyist at AARP for more than two decades and now works on drug costs.

Even so, after pouring weeks of political capital into the bill, Republicans are loath to walk away. House lawmakers are still floating potential compromises aimed at winning a few crucial votes, including pouring more money into a proposed \$130 billion fund to stabilize insurance markets and support people with pre-existing conditions, hoping to find the magic formula that vaults them above the 216-vote threshold.

"Not getting a bill done would be very detrimental," said Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), who chairs the House Freedom Caucus. "I don't know that you put any arbitrary deadlines on it, but obviously this week is a critical, critical week."

Implode

The Trump administration could blow up the exchange markets simply by cutting off crucial subsidies that insurers are counting on to help provide coverage to low-income people — and Office of Management and Budget director

Mick Mulvaney darkly hinted yet again Tuesday that it's still a live option.

"We have not made any decisions," he said at a press briefing. The May payments will be made, OMB later confirmed, but after that it's an open question.

But Republicans would risk being blamed for the ensuing mess as millions of Americans lose health care coverage — and in some states, it could happen fast. Pulling the subsidy funding — valued at \$7 billion this year — would likely prompt insurers to flee the individual market en masse. Swaths of the country would risk having no coverage options on the Obamacare exchanges, creating a crisis within a health care system that would by then be firmly under the Trump administration's watch.

Already, insurers are warning that the White House is risking chaos. Insurers are getting ready to file their plans and proposed premiums for 2018 with regulators, some of whom are filing two sets of prices based on whether the cash keeps coming or not.

And even if the subsidies do flow, the foot-dragging isn't inspiring much confidence in the administration's broader commitment to keeping the insurance markets stable. Companies are well aware that Trump could still undermine Obamacare any number of ways, perhaps most simply by opting not to enforce the law's individual and employer mandates.

Repair it

This is the most difficult scenario to envision right now, given the fire-breathing rhetoric on the right and the deep partisan divides and distrust in D.C. But the health care law covers roughly 20 million Americans — many of whom would be at risk of losing coverage or being forced to swallow skimpier benefits under the House bill. Much of what's plagued the law could be fixed if Republicans and Democrats sought common ground, starting with releasing payments to insurers

that Republicans have blocked and lowering the threat level on repeal.

"The president's principles that he enunciated on the campaign ... pretty much everybody can get around," said Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), referring to Trump's call to ensure coverage for all. "It doesn't have to be a large-scale rewrite."

Obamacare is more popular than ever, too, now that it's under threat, with voters more in favor of fixing than killing it. And on the Senate side, there may be some appetite for working across the aisle, starting with a plan from Cassidy and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) that would give states the option of keeping Obamacare or shifting to a new system.

"It offers something that's solid policy, with a bipartisan approach," Collins said.

Of course, taking the bipartisan route would mean first admitting defeat — a painful prospect in the early days of a Republican administration that was supposed to be all about winning.

"I believe we're closer than ever on this," Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady said. "After seven years, many of us just believe when the time is right — sooner rather than later — let's move."

Still, there are plenty of big priorities left on the GOP's agenda, and spending a few months focusing on less controversial health care issues — like reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program — might be the break lawmakers need before trying to tackle Obamacare once again.

"There's a bipartisan caucus of members who want to have a serious discussion on those issues," said Chris Jennings, a veteran Democratic health care strategist. "We just have to get past this endless and fruitless debate on repeal."

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3-4 minutes

House Republicans should vote for the latest version of the health-care bill. We say so even though we have criticized previous versions and the process that led to this one, and even though we still have serious reservations. We say it because the bill has moved in the right direction, and because in our judgment passage through the House now considerably raises the likelihood that we will see improvements in health policy this year.

The bill as it stands would abolish Obamacare's fines on people without health insurance, reduce taxes and spending, reform Medicaid by moving it closer to federalist principles, and open the door to deregulation in states that choose to pursue

it. It would thus move us closer to a system in which people would be able to buy renewable catastrophic coverage, and without subjecting such policies to disadvantages compared with other types of insurance.

Some House Republicans are concerned that the bill might undermine protections for people with pre-existing conditions because, under some circumstances, it would let states allow insurers to consider people's health status when pricing coverage. But those circumstances should ease their concerns. Insurers could consider health status only in the case of people who have not been continuously insured, and even then could consider health status only for each person for a one-year period, and only in states that offer such people access to high-risk pools. The point of that provision is to give people an

incentive to buy coverage when they're healthy and remain continuously insured without an individual mandate. It is not intended to leave people with pre-existing conditions unprotected, and it takes some care to avoid doing that.

Senators should pursue two complementary objectives in amending the bill if it comes before them: lowering premiums through further deregulation and promoting broad coverage levels through reforms (and if necessary augmentations) to the bill's subsidy structure. The House has based its work on some assumptions about what the Senate's procedural rules will ultimately bear. Senators will be better positioned to test those assumptions. It may turn out, given Senate rules, that the right approach would be simply to send money to the states with a directive to use it as they see fit to ensure

that people without access to Medicare, Medicaid, and employer-provided insurance have coverage. Additionally, senators should take the strongest possible measures to keep government subsidies from benefiting abortionists.

We're not going to give up on health-care reform if this bill fails in the House. Republicans should be under no illusion that either passage or failure will make this issue go away: They are going to continue to face conflicting pressures from different groups of voters for years to come. They need to find a way to pull the health-care system back from the centralizing path on which Obamacare put it. At the moment, House passage of this bill looks like the most plausible way.



Editorial : Republicans are risking millions of Americans' health coverage

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

4-5 minutes

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

May 2 at 7:49 PM

THE NATION faces a health-care emergency. But it is not, as President Trump and other Republicans have described it, that Obamacare is on the verge of imminent, unavoidable collapse. It is that Mr. Trump and the Republican Congress are sabotaging Obamacare, which millions of people rely on.

"Obamacare just so you know,

Obamacare's terrible on preexisting conditions, you know why? Cause you're not going to have it," the president told Bloomberg News on Monday. "It's folding. It's gone." In fact, Obamacare will not fold, unless Mr. Trump destroys it. Republicans face a test: Will they govern responsibly, or will they force a disastrous failure in health-care markets?

An essential feature of Obamacare is subsidies that help low-income people afford out-of-pocket expenses and stabilize health-care markets for insurers. Without those payments, premiums would rise by double-digit percentages, along with the effective deductibles people would have to pay. But those essential subsidies are in danger. The House sued the Obama administration, charging that the payments are being made illegally, without the consent of congressional appropriators.

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The House GOP could save the program by appropriating the funds, which would make the lawsuit

irrelevant. If they don't, Mr. Trump could save the program, at least for now, by continuing to contest the lawsuit, as the Obama administration did. The longer Republicans fail to provide clarity on their intentions, the more likely they will scare insurers out of Obamacare markets in 2018, reducing or eliminating people's access to coverage.

Instead of providing clarity, Republicans have only increased the uncertainty in recent days. At a news conference last week, House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) ducked his own responsibility for solving this policy mess. The president committed to keeping the payments going "for now," but then White House budget director Mick Mulvaney suggested Tuesday that no such decision has been made for May, let alone future months. Meanwhile, time is running short as insurers decide whether to jack up their rates next year or leave the Obamacare system altogether because the Trump administration has let essential elements of health-care policy linger in doubt. "They are a poor partner, even worse than Obama," an exasperated health insurance representative told us.

One apparent motivation for this destructive opacity is the White House's urgent campaign for a weak and unpopular repeal-and-replace bill. Though the Trump administration has been desperately trying to push it through the House, opposition from moderate Republicans rightly concerned about ripping up protections for people with preexisting conditions has slowed its passage there and would likely doom it in the Senate. Mr. Trump further complicated the effort in interviews released Sunday and Monday in which he appeared unfamiliar with what is in his bill and suggested that it is "not in its final form right now," yet made the impossible promise that "it will be every bit as good on preexisting conditions as Obamacare." It would have to change dramatically.

Obamacare is the law of the land. Even if Republicans manage to replace it, they will still need a functioning individual insurance market from the time they pass their bill to the time it is phased in, which requires that they refrain from blowing up the current system. Instead, Republicans are risking millions of Americans' coverage.



Trump, in Wake of Deal to Avoid a Shutdown Now, Calls for One Later

Julie Hirschfeld Davis

7-9 minutes

WASHINGTON — President Trump said Tuesday that the United States

needed "a good 'shutdown'" this fall to force a partisan confrontation over federal spending and suggested that he might move to reverse longstanding Senate rules that effectively require a supermajority to approve most major pieces of legislation.

The declarations, in two posts on Twitter, appeared aimed at defending a compromise spending package that Congress is likely to clear this week, but that fails to accomplish many of Mr. Trump's stated goals — including allocating any money to build a wall on the

southern border, a project that was his most talked-about campaign promise. Conservative activists have criticized the agreement as one that does not address their priorities and swells the deficit, but the White House has signaled that the president would accept it rather

than set off a government shutdown.

Senate Republicans promptly and uniformly rejected Mr. Trump's threats of a more partisan approach in the future.

The Twitter messages were also an indication of the degree to which bipartisan negotiations in Congress on the spending bill and others, including a health care overhaul that appeared on Tuesday to be stalled again, have bedeviled Mr. Trump at this early stage of his presidency, forcing him to bow to political realities to which he had insisted he was immune.

Mick Mulvaney, his budget director, conceded as much in a briefing with reporters later in the day, saying that Mr. Trump had made the comments because he had become "frustrated" that congressional Democrats had decided to "spike the football" and claim victory on the spending package.

"The reason for the plan negotiated between the Republicans and Democrats is that we need 60 votes in the Senate which are not there!" Mr. Trump said in one post, apparently a reference to the measure, which would fund the government through September.

The solution, he said, was either to elect more Republican senators in 2018, the next midterm elections, "or change the rules now to 51%." That appeared to refer to scrapping the filibuster, which allows any senator to insist on a three-fifths vote, rather than a simple majority, to act on legislative matters.

Republicans already moved last month to eliminate the use of the tactic for Supreme Court confirmations, allowing them to move forward with the approval of Justice Neil M. Gorsuch over near-unanimous Democratic opposition.

"Our country needs a good 'shutdown' in September to fix mess!" Mr. Trump said.

The Twitter posts set off a scramble at the White House, upending a frenetic effort by Mr. Trump's advisers to portray the spending agreement as a major victory for the president. By early afternoon, Mr. Trump had turned an appearance with Air Force Academy cadets in the Rose Garden into a pep rally for the spending bill, which he declared "a clear win for the American people." And he dispatched Mr. Mulvaney to brief reporters twice —

once by telephone in a conference call that devolved into a comedy of errors, and once in person — to defend it.

The president cited large spending increases for the military and border security contained in the measure, saying that those resources were "enough money to make a down payment on the border wall," despite the fact that the bill provides no funding for the structure.

Later, at a news conference in the briefing room where he showed photographs of border barriers, Mr. Mulvaney told reporters that money included in the measure to repair or replace up to 40 miles of fencing that already exists would yield a solution that "works better" than the 1,900-mile, 30-foot concrete structure the president has requested. This, he said, amounted to "a huge win for border security."

Mr. Mulvaney argued that the president had actually outfoxed Democrats who were eager for a shutdown.

"They wanted to try and make this president look like he could not govern," Mr. Mulvaney told reporters in a chaotic call that featured a shouting budget director, dueling on-hold music and reporters frantically trying to figure out how to ask questions (mostly without success). "They wanted to make this president look like he did not know what he was doing, and he beat them on that at the very, very highest level."

Democrats, Mr. Mulvaney added, "were desperate to show that we were not reasonable, and we completely destroyed that narrative by negotiating this deal."

"This is a huge victory for the president," he said.

But by publicly courting a government shutdown, an extraordinary move for a sitting president, Mr. Trump instead seemed to be confirming his reputation for rash statements that may yield little in the way of follow-through.

"President Trump may not like what he sees in this budget deal, but it's dangerous and irresponsible to respond by calling for a shutdown," said Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington and the ranking member of the appropriations committee. "Hopefully, Republicans in Congress will do for the next budget

what they did for this one: Ignore President Trump's demands, work with Democrats and get it done."

Indeed, Republicans appeared eager to ignore Mr. Trump's latest outburst and focus on an agreement they said was worth supporting.

"How many times have I had this: 'Do you agree with a tweet this morning?'" the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin, joked after being asked about the president's Twitter statements.

Mr. Ryan said he did "share the president's frustration" but noted that bipartisan support was required for spending measures.

"Having said all that, I feel very good about the wins we got with the administration in this bill," Mr. Ryan said.

Many conservative activists were not so enthused. Heritage Action, a conservative group, urged lawmakers to vote "no," saying the measure "woefully fails the test of fiscal responsibility and does not advance important conservative policies."

Charles Krauthammer, a conservative commentator, said Monday on Fox News: "Trump got rolled. The Republicans got rolled."

Anti-abortion rights groups also objected because the measure does not defund Planned Parenthood, a goal that Mr. Trump has said he shares.

"One has to wonder if the Democrats are the majority party in Congress," said Mathew D. Staver, the chairman of Liberty Counsel, a group that promotes socially conservative policies. "We urge President Trump to keep his promise, and we call on the Republican Congress to start leading and stop supporting failed policies."

Mr. Mulvaney said the move to defund Planned Parenthood would wait for enactment of the health care overhaul, a prospect that seemed to be growing more remote, not less, on Tuesday as influential Republicans said they could not support it.

And he said the president's shutdown threat stemmed from anger at Democrats. "The president is frustrated with the fact that he negotiated in good faith with the Democrats and they went out to try and spike the football and make him look bad," he said.

Democrats said Mr. Trump's actions assured that partisan rancor would continue to hang over Capitol Hill in the coming months.

"Threatening to shut down the government, on the heels of a successful bipartisan agreement, is a sour and shameful note to kick off negotiations" for the coming year, said Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont.

Mr. Trump's comments also seemed to augur more difficulties in the months to come with his own party.

"That will not happen," Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, said of Mr. Trump's threat to eliminate the filibuster, citing an "overwhelming majority" of support for the rules in the Senate, where more than 60 have signed a letter urging their preservation.

"I just don't agree" with Mr. Trump's suggestion of a shutdown, said Senator John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Republican, who said he would try to stop any effort to obliterate the filibuster.

"The rules have saved us from a lot of really bad policy," he added. "We all are into short-term gratification, but it would be a mistake in the long term."

Some House Republicans who have long chafed at the strictures of Senate procedure cheered the efforts to change the rules.

"He understands what is at stake," Representative Trent Franks, Republican of Arizona, said of the president. "The more he brings it to the American people, the more the American people will reject this idiocy of no debate."

Senator Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee, who said he planned to vote against the spending bill, made it clear that he wished that Mr. Trump would keep his musings on the subject to himself.

"I do wish somebody would take his iPhone away from him," Mr. Corker said.

Correction: May 2, 2017

An earlier version of this article referred incorrectly to the filibuster. It allows any senator to insist on a three-fifths vote — not a two-thirds vote — rather than a simple majority to act on legislative matters.

might need to prohibit future filibusters, threatening to fracture Washington's basic underpinnings to make progress on his legislative goals.

His latest outbursts — no sitting president has called for the government to be shut down like this — could cast a shadow over how Congress approaches numerous bills this year. Trump wants Congress to overhaul the tax code, approve a \$1 trillion infrastructure package and raise or suspend the debt ceiling before the government begins falling behind on its obligations.

He has made little legislative progress in any of these areas, and he is on the verge of being dealt another stinging defeat as House Republicans splinter on a health-care bill for the second time in recent weeks. Trump's new threats suggest he will jettison attempts at compromise and instead use the bombastic partisan warfare he employed during his campaign.

The threats come after White House officials said they were furious at what they viewed as gloating by Democrats over the terms of a short-term spending bill that funds government operations through Sept. 30. In morning Twitter posts, Trump said he had to make concessions because Senate rules require 60 votes to pass legislation and Republicans control only 52 seats in the 100-seat chamber.

[Congress reaches deal to keep government open through September]

(Reuters)

Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney defended President Trump's shutdown threats on May 2, saying "if we get to September and it's still business as usual, nothing changes, and it takes a shutdown to change it, I have no problem with that." Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney defended President Trump's shutdown threats on May 2. (Reuters)

He wrote that Republicans needed to pick up more seats in the 2018 midterm elections or consider changing filibuster rules so that the Senate's minority party cannot block bills.

"Our country needs a good 'shutdown' in September to fix mess!" he wrote.

Trump could easily trigger a partial government shutdown in October, by directing Republicans not to negotiate with Democrats or by refusing to sign a spending bill that Congress sends him for approval.

White House Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said Tuesday that Congress needs to return to the practice of passing one-year appropriations bills and sending them to the White House for approval, not continuing the recent practice of lurching from one stopgap spending bill to the next.

"This is a change-agent president, and he's going to change Washington, D.C.," Mulvaney said. "And if it takes a shutdown, that's what it's going to take."

Mulvaney added, though, that a shutdown was not "desirable," seeming to break with the president.

Mulvaney plans to release a full-scale budget in mid-May that is supposed to help lawmakers craft their 2018 budgets. He said he wants work on those spending bills to begin immediately.

[Video: Mulvaney defines a 'good' shutdown]

Timothy Naftali, a presidential historian at New York University, said Trump's threat of a shutdown was "totally, totally, totally" unprecedented.

He said the threat, coupled with talk of changing filibuster rules, was typical of Trump's approach.

"Really what he's talking about is destroying congressional procedures to get his way," Naftali said. "When he's losing, he likes to flip the game board."

The White House did win numerous concessions during the recent negotiations with Congress over the stopgap spending bill. Democrats agreed, for example, to \$1.5 billion in new money for border security and roughly \$21 billion in new defense spending, two of Trump's top priorities. But, Mulvaney said, Democrats tried to "spike the football" because they blocked new funding for a wall along the Mexico border.

Despite the White House's frustration, Trump's suggestion that

spending bills should be able to pass with a simple majority was quickly dismissed by numerous top Republicans, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

And Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said he was "deeply disappointed" in Trump's calls for a shutdown.

"It is truly a shame that the president is degrading it because he didn't get 100 percent of what he wanted," Schumer said. He went on to quote a Rolling Stones song to make his point, adding, "You can't always get what you want."

Trump's attacks Tuesday illustrate how he continues to take a defiant stand with Congress more than 100 days after taking office.

Top White House officials are hopeful that he can reach a deal with lawmakers to overhaul the tax code later this year, but budget rules will make that difficult without Democratic support. Democrats have so shown no willingness to accept the large-scale tax cuts that Trump proposed last week, imperiling another of his campaign promises.

Sensing how difficult it is to cobble together legislative support, Trump in recent weeks has openly floated numerous approaches to build a political coalition. He has said he wants to package his tax plan with his infrastructure plan, package his health-care plan with his infrastructure plan, pursue his health-care plan first, pursue his tax plan first, and pursue them separately but at the same time.

The last government shutdown, in 2013 when Republicans controlled Congress, lasted more than two weeks. During that partial shutdown, the Obama administration said that at one point 850,000 federal employees were placed on "furlough," or leave without pay. Many other federal employees continued to work but were not paid until the shutdown ended. In total, the furloughs accounted for 6.6 million days of lost work. The lost productivity cost the government \$2 billion, the Obama White House said at the time.

Diplomatic meetings were canceled, and U.S. officials largely stopped traveling to conferences and events

across the country. The processing of tax returns slowed, and many agencies begin operating with much smaller staffs.

Many government functions, such as law enforcement and national security, continued, but national parks closed and economists say there was a sizable impact on the economy, particularly in the Washington area.

Once government shutdowns end, the federal employees are typically repaid for the time they were on furlough.

Many lawmakers from both parties agree that the way the government funds its operations is broken and does not allow agencies to plan or prioritize. But the stopgap system has remained in place because lawmakers have a hard time agreeing on spending levels for different programs. Steve Bell, a Republican former staff director of the Senate Budget Committee, said Trump's call to shut down the government over the problem was merited and could lead to a breakthrough.

"I don't know anything other than a really dramatic statement that could fix this," he said.

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But Republican Judd Gregg, a former senator from New Hampshire, said Trump was finally coming to grips with the major differences between finding success in Washington compared with the business world.

"I get the sense they are beginning to realize this isn't like building a building or opening a golf course," Gregg said of the White House. "This is high politics, not high-rise buildings, and the process is entirely different. The motivation is entirely different."

Former senator Kent Conrad, a Democrat from North Dakota and like Gregg an ex-chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said Trump's call for a shutdown shows how he refuses to adjust to his role as president.

"We really need a president to reach higher and to set a positive tone of responsible leadership," Conrad said. "That's what the country desperately needs."

NATIONAL
REVIEW
ONLINE

Editorial : Trump & Republicans' Budget Bill: Unsatisfactory

3-4 minutes

Republicans control the White House and both branches of

Congress, but you wouldn't know it by the budget they are preparing to pass into law.

After avoiding a government shutdown last week, and with another shutdown looming on Friday, House and Senate leaders have hammered out a 1,700-page,

\$1 trillion omnibus spending bill to fund the government through the end of fiscal year 2017 (which falls on September 30). It is noteworthy for what it does not include: namely,

most of Donald Trump's and Republicans' recent campaign promises. The bill does not defund Planned Parenthood. It does not include any of the president's deep cuts to domestic agencies. Public broadcasting is funded at current levels. The National Endowment for the Arts' budget is increased. There's even funding for California's high-speed rail.

So what did Republicans get? As has been widely reported, the bill does not fund the president's border wall. Instead, it provides \$1.5 billion for border-security improvements, such as new technology and repairs to existing infrastructure. Inasmuch as the border wall was oversold as a solution to illegal border crossings, that may be a decent trade, but there is

no indication that these measures at the border will be accompanied by financing for more-aggressive interior enforcement. Indeed, the \$1.5 billion cannot be used to hire additional Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

Additionally, while increasing spending for border security, Republicans are once again backing an increase to the H-2B visa program, which issues visas to foreign workers for temporary non-agricultural service jobs. Republicans temporarily quadrupled the program in the December 2015 omnibus bill, apparently under the impression that ski lifts would go unmanned without help from Guatemalan workers. Now they are set to double the program's cap for the remainder of the fiscal year,

giving seasonal businesses new opportunities to undercut American workers.

That said, there is one significant victory. The president received \$15 billion for the Pentagon, half of his desired defense-budget increase, as well as \$10 billion for emergency defense spending through the overseas contingency fund — and these defense outlays were not tethered to an equal increase in non-defense discretionary spending. That was the precedent during the Obama years, and it's good that it has been broken.

Nonetheless, these things aside, it's hard to chalk the bill up as anything but a loss. Yes, there were limits to what Republicans could do: They need Democratic votes to push a

spending bill over the finish line, and they would undoubtedly shoulder the blame for any shutdown — justifiably or not. Presumably, Republican leadership decided that, since they'll be negotiating another budget in September, they should keep their powder dry for the time being.

But Republicans have a tendency to keep their powder dry indefinitely, and it's hard to imagine a different outcome in future negotiations. After all, Republican voters supposedly elected a "fighter," yet neither the president nor the Republican leadership seem to have fought for much of anything in this round.



Navarro, Trump trade chief: Our trade policy is already working

By Peter Navarro

Updated 6:40 PM ET, Tue May 2, 2017

Trump to automakers: You'll be respected again 02:26

Story highlights

- Peter Navarro: President Trump has been successful in strengthening American trade policy in his first 100 days
- He has defended American workers and taken new steps to protect domestic manufacturers, writes Navarro

Peter Navarro is Director of the White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy. The opinions expressed in this commentary are his own.

(CNN)A strong historic defense of American workers and domestic manufacturers aptly summarizes the first 100 days of the Trump Administration's trade policy.

On his first working day in office, President Trump terminated one of the worst trade deals ever proposed: the Trans-Pacific Partnership. TPP would have further eroded the US manufacturing base, decimated our auto industry and surrendered yet more of American sovereignty to

globalism.

Next, the President informed congressional leaders of his intent to renegotiate one of the worst trade deals the United States ever signed, NAFTA, and the congressional leadership has agreed to accelerate these negotiations once a US trade representative is confirmed.

After that, President Trump called into question our South Korean trade deal -- a pact that promised us 70,000 jobs, but instead cost us almost 100,000, even as our Korea trade deficit has more than doubled.

Trump on NAFTA: We will renegotiate 01:36

The President also signed an executive order directing Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to conduct an omnibus study of the unfair trade practices our partners use to run up our more than \$700 billion annual trade deficit in goods. Ross' analysis will provide all of the economic and political ammunition the administration will need to take bold and legally defensible actions - - should the studies conclude such actions are necessary.

The administration also launched investigations into the national security risks that may arise from a global glut of aluminum and steel capacity. And there are clear indications that a flood of imports is eliminating the jobs needed to maintain a pool of skilled workers essential for the continued

development of advanced aluminum and steel manufacturing.

In addition, the administration broke important new ground by using a methodology known as "particular market situation," authorized by the Trade Preferences Extension Act of 2015, to combat the unfair dumping of products into our markets at below market cost. As a result, Korean oil tubing is now subject to duties as much as triple that of what would have been levied under the old methodology. Over time, the use of this new methodology will save thousands of American jobs by holding the cheaters at bay and creating the space for American production to flourish.

Commerce Sec. Ross on Canada lumber tariff 01:24

Ross also slapped 20% tariffs on Canadian lumber. The Canadian dairy lobby, which is now sticking it to Wisconsin farmers, should take note that gaming the trade system by putting in new rules that unfairly disadvantage our own farmers will not be tolerated.

Commerce is hardly the only agency getting tough on trade. The President directed Customs and Border Protection to implement enhanced bonding requirements to prevent the under-collection of duties; we have lost over \$2 billion from lax enforcement.

A second direction gives CBP far broader powers to crack down on

counterfeit and pirated goods and other copyright infringements that cost American companies billions more.

President Trump also signed an executive order that takes giant steps toward fulfilling his "Buy American, Hire American" pledge. He directed every agency head to maximize the use of "Made in America" in domestic procurement and minimize the number of waivers; put our trading partners on notice that we may no longer waive our "Buy American" rights in free trade agreements; and added sharp new teeth by allowing procurement officers to take into account any unfair advantage a bidder might gain by using dumped or subsidized foreign content like steel.

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As for China, at an historic summit at Mar-a-Lago, the President and his trade team negotiated a far-ranging 100-day plan and follow-up strategy with Chinese counterparts to balance our trade -- and the President has established a solid bond with President Xi Jinping. By the end of those 100 days, we should know much about the future of US-China trade relations.

It has been a historic 100 days of action -- and we are just getting started.



Trump Adviser Kushner's Undisclosed Partners Include Goldman and Soros (UNE)

Jean Eaglesham, Juliet Chung and Lisa Schwartz

9-11 minutes

Updated May 3, 2017 12:14 a.m. ET

Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and senior adviser, is currently in business with Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and billionaires

George Soros and Peter Thiel, according to people familiar with the matter and securities filings.

The previously undisclosed business relationships with titans of the financial and technology worlds are through a real-estate tech startup called Cadre that Mr. Kushner cofounded and currently partly owns.

Goldman and Messrs. Soros and Thiel, as well as other billionaires' firms, also have stakes in the company, which is based in a Manhattan building owned by the Kushner family's company, according to people close to Cadre.

The Cadre stake is one of many interests—and ties to large financial institutions—that Mr. Kushner didn't identify on his government financial-disclosure form, according to a Wall Street Journal review of securities and other filings. Others include loans totaling at least \$1 billion, from more than 20 lenders, to properties and companies part-owned by Mr. Kushner, the Journal found. He has also provided personal guarantees on more than \$300 million of the debt, according to the analysis.

In his disclosure form filed earlier this year, Mr. Kushner didn't identify Cadre as among his hundreds of assets. The Journal identified his Cadre stake through a review of securities and other filings as well as interviews with people familiar with the company and Mr. Kushner's finances.

Jamie Gorelick, a lawyer representing Mr. Kushner, said in a statement that his stake in Cadre is housed in a company he owns, BFPS Ventures LLC. His ownership of BFPS is reported on his disclosure form, although it doesn't mention Cadre.

Ms. Gorelick said the Cadre stake is described in a revised version of his disclosure form that will be made public after it has been certified by ethics officials. She said Mr. Kushner has previously discussed his Cadre ownership with the Office of Government Ethics and that Mr. Kushner has "resigned from Cadre's board, assigned his voting rights and reduced his ownership share."

A spokesman for the Office of Government Ethics didn't respond to a request to comment.

Ms. Gorelick said it is "very normal" for a financial-disclosure form to be revised and that the form was prepared by Mr. Kushner's lawyers on his behalf. A White House spokeswoman referred questions to Mr. Kushner's lawyer.

Trevor Potter, a Republican former chairman of the Federal Election Commission, and other ethics experts said investments such as Mr. Kushner's ownership of Cadre typically need to be disclosed. They said Mr. Kushner didn't appear to violate disclosure rules by not publicly reporting his business-related debts and guarantees. But they said such arrangements ideally should be disclosed, in part because they could force Mr. Kushner to recuse himself from certain issues involving the lenders.

"Anything that presents a potential for the conflict of interest should be disclosed so that the public and the press can monitor this," Mr. Potter said.

Ethics experts' concern is that Mr. Kushner's business connections could jeopardize his impartiality in certain areas and that, absent disclosures, the public is in the dark about potential conflicts.

Mr. Kushner's rapidly expanding responsibilities range from working on a Middle East peace deal to making the federal government operate more efficiently. As a senior federal official, he is bound by ethics laws that require him to recuse himself from matters that would directly affect his financial interests.

Ms. Gorelick, who was deputy attorney general in former President Bill Clinton's administration, said Mr. Kushner will "recuse consistent with government ethics rules."

Mr. Kushner, the 36-year-old scion of a real-estate family, agreed with federal ethics officials to divest himself of more than 80 assets after he and his wife, Ivanka Trump, were hired by her father, President Donald Trump, as senior aides. White House officials have said some of the sales were needed to avoid potential conflicts between Mr. Kushner's far-reaching job duties and his personal financial interests.

Mr. Kushner is retaining more than 200 other assets, worth a total of at least \$116 million, according to his disclosures. These are mostly apartments and office blocks around the U.S. Like his father-in-law, he has declined to put these assets in a blind trust, which ethics experts regard as the cleanest way to avoid conflicts of interest. Someone close to Mr. Kushner said there are practical problems that made a blind trust not a realistic option.

Mr. Kushner co-founded Cadre in 2014 with his brother, Joshua Kushner, and Ryan Williams, a 29-year-old friend and former employee of Kushner Cos., the family-controlled business that Mr. Kushner ran until recently. Cadre markets properties to prospective investors, who can put their money into specific buildings or into an investment fund run by Cadre, which collects fees on each deal.

To get off the ground, Cadre turned to a Goldman Sachs fund and a number of high-profile investors. Among them were the venture-capital firms of Mr. Thiel, Silicon Valley's most prominent supporter of the GOP president, and Vinod Khosla, a co-founder of Sun Microsystems Inc., according to Cadre's website. Personal backers include Chinese entrepreneur David Yu, co-founder with Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.'s Jack Ma of a Shanghai-based private-equity firm, hedge-fund manager Daniel Och and real-estate magnate Barry Sternlicht, people close to Cadre said.

Cadre also secured a \$250 million line of credit from the family office of Mr. Soros, a top Democratic donor who Mr. Trump criticized during his presidential campaign, the people close to the company said. Mr. Soros's family office is also an investor in Cadre.

The investors declined or didn't respond to requests for public comment on their backing of Cadre, but a person familiar with Mr. Soros's family office said it had invested in early 2015 before Mr. Trump declared his presidential candidacy.

Cadre has solicited money from investors for several Kushner Cos. real-estate projects, according to information sent to prospective investors and reviewed by the Journal. Jared Kushner personally has stakes in some of the real-estate projects for which Cadre has raised money, according to Cadre documents and his disclosure form.

While Mr. Williams acts as the public face of Cadre, Mr. Kushner remains one of the owners, with the power to "influence the [firm's] management or policies," according to the latest public information on file with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority. Mr. Kushner's company JCK Cadre LLC is shown as owning 25% to 50% of Quadro Partners Inc., which owns at least 75% of RealCadre LLC, which does business as Cadre. Mr. Kushner

has reduced his ownership stake to less than 25%, his lawyer Ms. Gorelick said.

Mr. Williams, chief executive of Cadre, said the company has been working with regulators to update its public filings to "reflect Jared's nonoperational, nonmanagement relationship with the company, which has been in place since the inauguration."

BFPS Ventures, the company that Mr. Kushner's lawyer said holds his Cadre stake, is shown on his financial-disclosure form as owning unspecified New York real estate valued at more than \$50 million. The form adds that "the conflicting assets of this interest have been divested."

Beyond Cadre, some of the assets Mr. Kushner is holding on to are hard to pinpoint, partly because they are housed in entities with generic names such as "KC Dumbo Office," according to the disclosure form.

The Journal matched many of the assets to specific real-estate investments. An analysis of the debts on those properties, using real-estate data services PropertyShark and Trepp LLC as well as property records, found ties to a broad swath of U.S. and foreign banks, private-equity firms, real-estate companies and government-owned lenders.

Lenders to Mr. Kushner, either directly or via properties he co-owns, include Bank of America Corp., Blackstone Group LP, Citigroup Inc., UBS Group AG, Deutsche Bank AG and Royal Bank of Scotland Group PLC. Royal Bank of Scotland didn't respond to requests for comment; representatives of the other firms declined to comment.

Mr. Kushner will recuse himself from matters to which Deutsche Bank or RBS are parties because he has provided personal guarantees on their loans, said a person familiar with his ethics arrangement.

—Coulter Jones contributed to this article.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Kushner's Partners Include Goldman And Soros.'

While in White House, Trumps remained selling points for 'very special' Philippines project (UNE)

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

10-13 minutes

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

The Post's Matea Gold explains how a real estate project involving the Trump Organization in Manila illustrates the ethical questions that can arise about the intersection of President Trump's business interests and his work as president. A Trump real estate project illustrates the questions that can arise about the intersection of President Trump's business interests and his work as president. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

Investors looking to buy a condo at Trump Tower in the Philippines would have found, until this week, some high-powered video testimonials on the project's official website.

There was Donald Trump, in a message filmed several years before he was elected president of the United States, declaring that the skyscraper bearing his name near the Philippine capital would be "something very, very special, like nobody's seen before." Then there was his daughter Ivanka Trump, now a senior White House adviser, lavishing praise on the project as a "milestone in Philippine real estate history."

Four months into President Trump's tenure, his business relationship with a developer who is one of the Philippines' richest and most powerful men has emerged as a prime example of the collision between the private interests of a businessman in the White House and his public responsibility to shape U.S. foreign policy.

The potential conflict first came into focus shortly before Trump was elected, when the Philippines' iron-fisted president, Rodrigo Duterte, named the Trump Organization's partner on the Manila real estate venture his top trade envoy.

The connection burst back into public view this week, after Trump stunned human rights advocates by extending a White House invitation to Duterte, known for endorsing hundreds of extrajudicial killings of drug users, following what aides described as a "very friendly" phone call. Trump aides have said the outreach to Duterte is part of a

broader effort to isolate North Korea.

Although the promotional videos were posted online in 2013, the continued presence of Trump and his daughter in marketing materials for the Manila tower reflects the extent to which they remain key selling points even as they have vowed to distance themselves from their global real estate and branding businesses.

After The Washington Post inquired Monday about the use of the Trumps in promoting the Manila project, the links and videos on the corporate website could no longer be accessed. Nonetheless, their lingering connection to the property's sales pitch shows how difficult it is to separate the president from Trump-branded projects, particularly in foreign markets where there is less oversight of how his image is used.

[Trump keeps praising international strongmen, alarming human rights advocates]

Amanda Miller, vice president of marketing for the Trump Organization, said the material was "historical clips" that were not related to ongoing sales and marketing activity. Ivanka Trump was not aware that she was still featured in materials touting the Manila project, according to someone familiar with her views. The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump's company does not own or invest in the Manila project, a luxurious 57-story tower nearing completion in Makati, a bustling financial center that is part of metropolitan Manila.

In a long-term licensing deal, the project's development company agreed to pay royalties for use of the Trump brand. Trump reported receiving \$1 million to \$6 million in payments from the project between 2014 and mid-2016, according to his financial disclosures.

Jose E.B. Antonio, chairman of the development company, has retained his leadership of the firm even as he functions now in his official capacity as a Duterte appointee. Kris Cole, a spokeswoman for the developer, said that Antonio's envoy role is an unpaid, non-governmental position promoting Philippine business interests in the United States.

Antonio, who Cole said was traveling and could not comment,

told Bloomberg News in November that his role is to "enlarge the relationship between the two countries," adding of his business relationship with Trump: "I guess it would be an asset."

Trump company executives directed their international business associates to pull any promotional materials featuring Trump's presidency or Ivanka Trump, officials said. A Trump lawyer circulated documents in January pledging that no company communications or social-media accounts "will reference or otherwise be tied" to Trump's high office or public power.

Trump left the management of his company to his two adult sons, but he retained his ownership stake and can still withdraw money from his business interests at any time.

Now, to ethics experts who have warned for months that Trump's refusal to divest from his business created the potential for his personal financial interests to compete with his public role, Trump's recent interactions with Duterte serve as a worrisome sign.

"It does look like the way he is handling U.S. policy to the Philippines is consistent with Donald Trump's business interests," said Kathleen Clark, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis who is an expert on government ethics. "It is inconsistent with how the U.S. has been relating to Duterte since he came to power. But it is consistent with what is important to Donald Trump."

[How Trump's tax proposal could impact his own business empire]

The \$150 million Manila tower, which was originally slated to open last year, is set to be finished in the coming months, with 95 percent of the units sold, according to the Trump Organization.

The Trump family has been a key part of marketing the project since it began in 2012 with promises of becoming one of the Asian nation's tallest towers.

An early billboard inviting potential buyers to "live exquisitely" in the tower featured a large portrait of Ivanka Trump wearing a black sheath dress and diamond pendant earrings. Miller said the sign was removed several years ago.

The project, by Antonio's development firm Century Properties Group, has continued to

tout its connection to the Trumps, even in the months since Antonio assumed his post in the Duterte administration.

Jose Roberto "Robbie" Antonio, the developer's son, who called himself a "good friend" of the Trumps in his online biography, said in one video, "We're really privileged not just to partner with such a remarkable organization, but with a fantastic family." The elder Antonio describes the project as "a celebration of a partnership between two corporations, a partnership between two families, a partnership of two countries and a partnership of people who have the same passion — the passion to build the best real estate projects in the world."

Cole, the development firm's spokeswoman, said the younger Antonio was traveling and could not comment.

The site also included promotions for Ivanka Trump's jewelry collection, with blurbs describing her as a "scion of brand sophistication." Other descriptions cited the "Trump lifestyle," while the Trumps appeared in videos talking up the bona fides of their business partner and his work.

"You're not going to see a better-appointed building than this one" Ivanka Trump said in an eight-minute video she narrated, adding that the developer is "one of the most innovative real estate firms in Asia."

"Manila represented a great opportunity for our brand," Ivanka Trump says in a promotional reel. The video ends with a plug from Donald Trump, who says: "It's really great working with Century Properties and the Antonio family. True professionals, they really know what they're doing."

On another page of the website touting media coverage of the project, the top story was a 2015 piece from a Philippine website headlined, "Donald Trump happy with strong sales of Trump Tower in Makati."

Since founding his development company in the 1980s, Antonio has become one of the country's wealthiest star developers, with a net worth that Forbes estimates at \$195 million. His company's share price climbed 20 percent on the Philippine Stock Exchange the day Trump won the election.

The relationship between the Antonios and the Trumps goes back

at least a decade, when Jose Antonio dispatched his son, a company managing director, to Manhattan to oversee the development of a luxury condominium on West 56th Street near Trump Tower.

Robbie Antonio took the opportunity to get to know the Trumps, meeting first with Ivanka at her office, he told the Philippine network ANC in an interview. He said he hit it off with the Trump siblings.

"At the right juncture, I called them up to discuss a deal in Manila, and they were very excited by the project and the location, and they wanted something significant," Antonio told the network.

"It's always a great thing when you can take a friendship and then turn it into a great business relationship,"

Donald Trump Jr. — the president's oldest son, who now runs the family company — told ANC.

The Antonios' development firm has built a reputation for signing deals with celebrities to help promote their brand. Antonio, who in November referred to himself as a "liaison to the stars," signed Paris Hilton, a socialite heiress of the family that founded the Hilton hotel empire, to design the beach club at his nine-building Azure Urban Resort Residences, and Hilton appeared on a promotional billboard at Manila's domestic airport.

Like Trump, Robbie Antonio is known for conspicuous consumption. For the walls of his \$15 million Manila mansion, he paid millions of dollars to commission top artists to paint dozens of portraits of

himself, according to a 2013 Vanity Fair article about the then-36-year-old multimillionaire. The median income for a Philippine family in 2015 was about \$5,300 a year, national data show.

The Trump Tower in Manila is one of more than a dozen luxury residential projects around the world licensed by the Trump company, including projects in Seoul; Mumbai; Istanbul; Dubai; and Punta del Este, Uruguay.

Although Trump pledged in January that his company would push for "no new foreign deals," the company continues to pursue Trump-licensed projects that already were underway in Indonesia and other countries.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

The Trumps and the Antonios also have discussed partnering on new Trump resorts and other projects in the Philippines, Jose Antonio said in interviews late last year.

In one promotional video predating his father's presidency, Donald Trump Jr. promised that "this will not be our last project in the Philippines," adding, "We're really looking forward to rolling out a couple things."

Miller, the Trump company spokeswoman, said this week that the company has no plans for additional projects in the Philippines.

Alice Crites contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

and Maggie Haberman

17-22 minutes

Ivanka Trump Has the President's Ear. Here's Her Agenda. (UNE)

Jodi Kantor,
Rachel Abrams

Seven months later, Ms. Trump is her father's all-around West Wing confidante, an adviser whose portfolio appears to have few parameters, making her among the highest-ranking women in a senior staff stocked almost entirely with men.

Photo

Ms. Trump, seated near her father, took part in March in a discussion with women who are small-business owners. Credit Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

The two trade thoughts from morning until late at night, according to aides. Even though she has no government or policy experience, she plans to review some executive orders before they are signed, according to White House officials; some earlier orders had set off a firestorm. She calls cabinet officials on issues she is interested in, recently asking the United Nations ambassador, Nikki R. Haley, about getting humanitarian aid into Syria. She set up a weekly meeting with Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary.

In interviews last week, she said she intended to act as a moderating force in an administration swept into office by nationalist sentiment. Other officials added that she had weighed in on topics including climate, deportation, education and refugee policy.

Even as Ms. Trump said she was seeking to exert more influence, she acknowledged she was a novice about Washington. "I'm still at the early stages of learning how everything works," she said, "but I know enough now to be a much more proactive voice inside the White House."

Ms. Trump, 35, a former model, entrepreneur and hotel developer, says she will focus on gender inequality in the United States and abroad, by aiming to create a federal paid leave program, more affordable child care and a global fund for women who are entrepreneurs, among other efforts. Her interest in gender issues grew out of a "Women Who Work" hashtag and marketing campaign she devised a few years ago to help sell \$99 pumps and \$150 dresses. On Tuesday, the career advice book she worked on before the election, whose title echoes her hashtag, was released.

By inserting herself into a scolding set of gender dynamics, she is becoming a proxy for dashed dreams of a female presidency and the debate about President Trump's record of conduct toward women and his views on them. Critics see her efforts as a brash feat of Trump promotion — an unsatisfying answer to the 2005 "Access Hollywood" recording that surfaced during the campaign and the seas of pink, cat-eared "pussy hats" worn by protesters after the inauguration — by a woman of extraordinary privilege who has learned that feminism makes for potent branding. (Ms. Trump says she will not be promoting her book for ethics reasons.)

In the two interviews last week, Ms. Trump talked about unleashing the economic potential of women — some of her phrases sounding uncannily like those of Hillary Clinton — and effused about finding a new role model in Eleanor Roosevelt, whose autobiography she is reading. Ms. Trump is reaching out to influential women like Ginri Rometty, chief executive

of IBM, and Mary T. Barra, the C.E.O. of General Motors, and studying up on child care policy. She waved away questions about her motivations for embracing feminist themes.

"Suddenly, after my father declared his candidacy, it became that all the things that I was doing that I was praised for, the same people, the critics, viewed them through this different lens," she said. "Somehow, all the same things they applauded me for as a millennial, as a female entrepreneur, were now viewed very cynically as opportunistic."

Some former employees express surprise at her new policy interest, saying she was once reluctant to grant them maternity leave. But other observers call her the administration's best hope for progress on gender issues and say they are encouraged to see a presidential daughter, and a top member of a Republican White House, advocate federal paid family leave. (She intends to go beyond her father's campaign pledge and push to include both fathers and mothers, according to a White House official.)

"I hope she will go on to become a great champion in this area," said Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank, which is working with Ms. Trump on funding female entrepreneurs.

Ultimately, "the only test is whether she is able to achieve something other than personal gain," said Umber Ahmad, a banker turned baker and one of several women quoted in Ms. Trump's new book who now say they feel uneasy about being included in it.

Those close to Ms. Trump say she is generally business-friendly and socially liberal. But she says that on many issues, she does not have strongly held views. (In the White House, she uses corporate terms — like “business plan” — as much as partisan or political ones.)

She has one skill unmatched by almost anyone else, family members and aides say: She can effectively convey criticism to a man who often refuses it from others, and can appeal to him to change his mind.

Protesters picketed a dinner for Ms. Trump held at Deutsche Bank offices in Berlin last month. Sean Gallup/Getty Images

“I’m his daughter. I’ve known him my entire life. He trusts me,” she said. “I don’t have a hidden agenda. I’m not looking to hit him to help myself.”

Though their demeanors are different — she is guarded where he is unfettered — Ms. Trump is more like her father than most people realize, according to people who know them both.

She has his eye for image and branding, his sensitivity to perceived criticism. They are both skilled at the art of the sale. Like him, she sometimes makes sweeping, and arguably overreaching, claims: She portrayed Mr. Trump as an advocate for women in last summer’s convention speech, and described her brand as a stereotype-shattering movement. Like him, she appears confident she can master realms in which she has little expertise or experience. The two even speak in similar streams of superlatives: “tremendous,” “unbelievable.”

But can she influence his actions as president? In her 35 years, she has left little traceable record of challenging or changing the man who raised her. Mr. Trump did tape an apology for the “Access Hollywood” recording, but by then doing so had become a political necessity.

Mr. Trump summons Ms. Trump to the Oval Office to ask her questions and hear her ideas. (She calls him “Dad,” not “Mr. President.”) If he asks his daughter about an unfamiliar subject more than twice, she will often do research so she can develop a view. Sometimes she seeks out Mr. Trump, telling other staff members, “I need 10 minutes alone with my father.”

“A lot of their real interactions happen when it’s just the two of them,” Jared Kushner, Ms. Trump’s husband and fellow aide, said in a telephone interview.

In 2008, Ms. Trump and her father placed their hands in concrete during topping-off ceremonies for a Trump hotel in Chicago. Associated Press

Alone with her father, Ms. Trump makes the case on what she sees as priorities, she said. “I’ll go to the mat on certain issues and I may still lose those,” she said. “But maybe along the way I’ve modified a position just slightly. And that’s just great.”

The Loyal Daughter

No matter how high-decibel Mr. Trump’s divorces, no matter how outsize his statements, his daughter Ivanka rarely if ever rejected him, rebelled or distanced herself from him. When her parents’ marriage ended before she turned 10, photographers snapped her picture on the way to school and helicopters circled over Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump’s resort in Palm Beach, Fla. His public and private statements raised eyebrows.

“There were definitely times when I was younger I was going, ‘Did you have to say that, Dad?’ ” she told Oprah Winfrey in an interview.

Mr. Trump was always working. “He was not the father to go and play games with them in Central Park or take them for a walk,” Ivana Trump, Ivanka’s mother, told Michael D’Antonio, a biographer who shared his interviews with The Times. But Ivanka would stop by his office to say hello, or accompany him to construction sites, much as she sees him now in the West Wing or joins him on presidential excursions. She was impressed by her father’s empire; he praised her constantly to others.

Her older brother, Don Jr., was at boarding school when their parents divorced, and refused to speak to his father for a year; her younger brother, Eric, was very small. So Ivanka was the child who spent the most time with Mr. Trump, her mother said in an email to The Times. Even then, “Donald knew he could trust her!” she added.

As a teenager, Ms. Trump decided to try modeling, to make money and to show what she could accomplish on her own. She walked European runways, appeared on magazine covers, and was a co-host of her father’s Miss Teen USA Pageant. “She never stood a chance to have a normal modeling career because her name was associated with her dad,” said Audrey Roatta, who worked for the agency that represented Ms. Trump and accompanied her on trips.

A young Ivanka Trump with her father. Family members and aides now say she can effectively convey

criticism to a man who often refuses it from others. ZUMA Press, via Alamy Stock Photo

Others were sometimes cutting about it: “She’s only here because of her dad,” Jennifer Lopez remarked within earshot of the teenage Ivanka at a movie premiere, Ms. Roatta recalled. (Representatives for both women said that they did not recall the incident.)

When her father started his own modeling agency a few years later, she was upset because he was sweeping into her domain — but she suppressed her anger, a friend said.

Just as Ms. Trump joined the family real estate business in 2005, the Trump name became even more of a source of power and opportunity because of the new glow from the reality television show “The Apprentice,” in which her father starred. Even as Ms. Trump was in her mid-20s, learning her way around financing negotiations and construction details, she played an authority figure on the show, weighing in on contestants’ merits during the tense boardroom scenes.

The attention helped her license her name to products: fine jewelry (2007), shoes (2010), clothing (2010) and handbags (2011), all of which were promoted on the show. Her business was closely intertwined with her father’s name and organization, where she continued to spend much of her time, initially relying on Trump Organization resources: payroll services, information technology and lawyers. (A representative for Ms. Trump said that she had reimbursed her father’s company.)

But penetrating the mass market presented a challenge: Ms. Trump’s gilded life felt distant to women who shopped at Macy’s. So, late in 2013, she and her husband gathered with a few employees in front of a whiteboard in their Upper East Side apartment. Sheryl Sandberg’s “Lean In” had just topped the best-seller charts, and Ms. Trump’s team wanted its own catchy yet accessible slogan.

The brainstorming solidified into a new motto: “Women Who Work.”

Cultivating an Image

Ms. Trump and her team set about tailoring her image to fit the concept. An internal document lists one of her challenges as “perceived as rich and unrelatable.” (An additional one: Most of her followers on social media were men.) Ms. Trump was told to post more down-to-earth pictures on her Instagram feed — less made-up model, more mommy.

Ivanka Trump shoes being shown at a trade show in Las Vegas in 2011. WENN Ltd, via Alamy Stock Photo

She hesitated to showcase her young children, but “we certainly had conversations about whether it was O.K. to put her kids on social media and we felt it was important to show who she was as a whole person,” said Abigail Klem, president of the Ivanka Trump brand.

Her company pitched a never-made podcast that would feature Ms. Trump as a chic business guru, interviewing success stories and business-feminism leaders like Ms. Sandberg and Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx. The pitch described the supposed impact of the “Women Who Work” brand campaign: “the outdated caricature of a ‘working woman’ — frazzled, androgynous and entirely one-note — began to crack.”

But Ms. Trump’s brand had not always lived up to its progressive image. Initially, former employees say, Ms. Trump had been reluctant to grant maternity leave, and she did not have a benefits package when she began hiring people to work for her.

Marissa Kraxberger, a former executive who was pregnant when Ms. Trump offered her a job in the summer of 2013, recalled asking her future boss about paid leave. She described Ms. Trump as saying, “Well, we don’t have maternity leave policy here; I went back to work one week after having my child, so that’s just not something I’m used to.”

Ms. Kraxberger said that she and others pushed Ms. Trump to start offering a paid maternity leave policy. Ms. Klem said that the business was new when the issue arose, and that after consulting employees, the company put in place a policy for two-month paid family leave, as well as flexible working hours, in the summer of 2014.

Ms. Trump had not seemed especially focused on gender politics or policy, according to people who have known her at various points throughout her life, beyond awareness of being the rare woman in the male-dominated world of real estate.

“Definitely the brand changed her, and her interests really solidified,” said Ms. Klem, who took over the day-to-day operations of the Ivanka Trump brand after the election. Soon, her office had a play area where children could use crayons and toys while their parents worked.

An Unfamiliar Role

Later, Ms. Trump and those close to her described the period just before her father announced his candidacy as one of the most fulfilling of her life. She had managed to update her family's brand from the older, flashy days, with sleek designs. She was personally developing a hotel at the site of the Old Post Office building in Washington, a historical property. And *Vogue* magazine profiled her as a paragon of millennial taste and accomplishment — a far cry from the tabloid coverage of her youth.

But the very first day of her father's presidential campaign caused her problems: His remarks about Mexico's sending rapists over the border caused two celebrity chefs to drop out of the Old Post Office project.

Ms. Trump was shocked by the heat and fury of the campaign. Before, she had gotten letters of admiration, calling her a role model; now many of the letters she received were scathing. "Everything that was ascribed to him suddenly, for my critics, became true of me," she said.

Last week, speaking in her newly repainted West Wing office — stark white with metallic accents, a contrast with the creamy traditionalism of the rest of the West Wing — Ms. Trump appeared alternately energized, defensive and daunted. Behind the scenes, advisers say, she has been frustrated, unhappy about giving up her life in New York, and determined to prevail and make the best of a White House tour that she never expected. That morning, for the first time since she had moved into her Washington home, photographers had not gathered outside.

It was her first full week in the role of assistant to the president, and she had just hired a chief of staff and was setting up meetings. "There's a lot I don't know about how government works and how

things get done, but I feel I know enough now that I can be much more proactive about the type of change and reform that I'd like to see happen," she said.

Ms. Trump, then a model, walked the runway in February 1999 at the Maurice Malone fashion show in New York. All the models wore a bar code on the left cheek. Reuters

Ms. Trump was leaving that evening for Germany, representing the administration on the world stage for the first time. She flew that night on a commercial jetliner, traveling with her Secret Service detail and Dina Powell, the former Goldman Sachs executive and current deputy national security adviser who has become Ms. Trump's all-around guide in the administration. In Berlin, Ms. Trump appeared on a panel with some of the most accomplished women in the world: Angela Merkel, the German chancellor; Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund; and Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian foreign affairs minister. In contrast, Ms. Trump was introduced as the "first daughter."

As she spoke, the audience murmured with skepticism. (Contrary to some news reports, Ms. Trump was not loudly booed.) One moment, however, appeared more cutting. "The German audience is not that familiar with the concept of a first daughter," the moderator asked. "I'd like to ask you, what is your role, and who are you representing: your father as president of the United States, the American people, or your business?"

"Well, certainly not the latter," Ms. Trump said lightly, adding, "I am rather unfamiliar with this role."

An Inescapable Shadow

Questions about her father trail Ms. Trump everywhere now. Javier Palomarez, the chief executive of the United States Hispanic

Chamber of Commerce, has been in touch with her in recent months about immigration and entrepreneurship, but their conversations have also turned more personal.

In one of their earliest talks, soon after the inauguration, Ms. Trump hinted at her frustration. "Let's talk about your dad," she said to Mr. Palomarez. She asked if he would be "100 percent absolutely proud of everything that came out of your father's mouth," especially when his father was age 70. She acknowledged that there was a difference between their fathers, Mr. Palomarez said — hers is the president.

Playing the role of centrist advocate in a right-leaning administration would be a challenge for anyone, even those steeped in politics. As is the case with her father, Ms. Trump's newness to Washington and preference for straight-ahead business negotiations can result in painful collisions.

Ms. Trump and her father in July 2014 at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Trump International Hotel on the site of the Old Post Office building in Washington. Evan Vucci/Associated Press

During the campaign, Ms. Trump successfully pushed her father to praise Planned Parenthood from a Republican debate stage, a moment that created a stir at the time because of the party's broad opposition to the organization's abortion services. But more recently, with congressional Republicans threatening to cut all funding to Planned Parenthood (even though the women's health organization says it receives no federal funding for abortions), Ms. Trump approached its president, Cecile Richards, to start a broader dialogue. She also had a proposal: Planned Parenthood should split in two, Ms. Trump suggested, with a smaller arm to provide abortions

and a larger one devoted to women's health services.

White House officials said Ms. Trump was trying to find a common-sense solution amid the roar of abortion politics. But Planned Parenthood officials said they thought Ms. Trump's advice was naïve, failing to understand how central reproductive choice was to the group's mission. Ms. Richards sharply criticized Ms. Trump for not publicly objecting to the Republican health care bill that failed in March, and Ms. Trump felt stung.

Speaking generally, Ms. Trump complained in the interview that many advocacy groups were "so wedded to the headline of the issue that sometimes differing perspectives and new information, when brought to the table, are viewed as an inconvenience because it undermines the thesis."

Despite the tension, Ms. Trump helped preserve and increase funding for women's health in the government spending deal devised over the weekend, a White House official said. (A congressional aide noted that such spending remained the same, and did not increase.) But the victory may be short-lived: The coming bill that would repeal the Affordable Care Act is likely to include a measure to strike Planned Parenthood's funding. And a State Department budget document recently circulated would cut funding for a women's rights initiative the agency participates in.

For now, Ms. Trump acknowledges how much she has to learn and asks the public to be patient with her.

"I do believe that in time I'll get to the right place," she said. "In the short run I'll have missteps, and, in some cases, I'll take shots that I could have avoided if I had publicly said what I think."

"I'm really, really trying to learn," she added.

Voice



Can Freedom of the Press Survive Trump's Onslaught?

In the United States, subscriptions are up and investigative journalists are in high demand. But the president's war on the media is just beginning.

This week marks World Press Freedom Day, an annual U.N.-sponsored commemoration noticed mostly by organizations that make their living documenting media freedom interferences overseas. This year, though, with President Donald Trump's well-documented attacks on the news media —

renewed this weekend during a rally scheduled to help dampen coverage of the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner — World Press Freedom Day celebrants here in the United States have turned inward. In the last few months, concerns that have mainly been tracked, documented, and analyzed globally are now being scrutinized, quantified, and called out here at home.

But as Trump's first 100 days recede and his frequent taunts toward the media risk seeming

almost routine, the press and the public have to decide whether press freedom in the United States is truly under siege, or if Trump's is the World Wide Wrestling version, staged pretty much entirely for show.

The wall-to-wall coverage of Trump's first 100 Days came on top of months of critical, no-holds-barred coverage of the president. His attacks on journalists, denigration of press outlets, and evasions of truth have emboldened and energized media organizations

to double-down on probing investigations, incisive analysis, and up-to-the-minute auditing of everything from alleged Russian election interference to the White House Easter egg roll. This past weekend brought together Washington correspondents, news executives, and press-freedom boosters for a series of celebrations of the First Amendment, and the media's feistiness in ferreting out the truth about Trump.

With daily hard-hitting stories from media outlets ranging from the *New*

York Times to *Teen Vogue*, it is tempting to conclude that the Fourth Estate and the public that depends on it are weathering our new president rather well. Perhaps the president's broadside against the media — last week, PEN America released a report documenting 76 instances of White House attacks on the press since Trump was elected — is one Trump-era phenomenon that we don't need to worry about.

The president's declaration that the media is the "enemy of the people" may be just Trumpian hyperbole; an steroidal version of the resentment toward unflattering press that virtually every scrutinized public figure experiences. The press has thick skin and is undaunted: subscriptions and viewerships have spiked; people now even assemble outside the entrance to the White House briefing room to cheer. Some commentators have gone so far as to adjudge Trump's onslaught on the press as a form of "ritualized warfare" that masks cozy relations behind the scenes.

But the repercussions of Trump's attitude toward the press and the truth won't dissipate simply because the media is, for now, unscathed. Trump's barrage on the press, journalists, and the truth is breathtaking: the insults and innuendo, exclusions and endless cries of "fake news." The administration's effort to force Twitter to unmask a dissenting customs official, its excoriations of leakers and whistleblowers, and its veiled threat against diplomats who signed an officially permitted Dissent Channel cable critical of the president's travel ban reveal that the White House's campaign to undermine the media forms part of a larger strategy to disable critics.

The president's disregard for the role of the press and the public's right to information is also reflected in the approach of key senior officials, including most notably Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has pulled a curtain around U.S. diplomacy and shared chuckles with foreign counterparts as they've mocked the U.S. press corps. The purported "drain the swamp" president is even keeping secret the records of White House visitors and closing off the pavement outside the gate to protesters. The overall message is that dissenters are to be shunted aside, the media treated capriciously, and unfavorable coverage punished by humiliation and excommunication.

The principle danger of the president's battle with the media isn't that it will impair effective coverage of the current administration. Leakers and dogged, skilled reporters may take care of that. But the president's approach poses other serious risks.

The message from America's highest official — that the world's most professional and trusted media outlets are malicious frauds, that facts and fakes are equivalent, and that press access to policymaking and diplomacy must submit to the whims of the powerful — represent a set of values that could undermine democracy. As every parent, corporate CEO, and Fox News staffer knows, values are set at the top. A generation of bureaucrats, prosecutors, policy officers, congressional staff, and agency officials are learning at Trump's knee. While the media is girded against Trump's manipulations, their inclination and resources to fight back against copycat efforts up and down the bureaucracy to erode transparency,

impugn motives, and launch character attacks, won't be infinite. Regardless of how he treats reporters behind closed doors, Trump has signaled publicly that it's okay to play nasty with the press. The relationship between the media and the state is an uneasy truce; Trump has offered public officials license to rewrite the terms as they see fit.

Even if it convinces few in Washington or New York City, Trump's public posture toward the media can shape attitudes across the country. While we know that more people are subscribing to newspapers and watching the news, we don't yet know where those people live or what their political views are. If it's simply a matter of more avowed liberals unable to look away from a car crash, the media's triumph will be short-lived. If the 40-odd percent of Americans who approve of Trump buy into his public line about the press, his exhortations could gradually reshape society writ large. His disdain for the media and its information could shape how electorates evaluate claims during campaign cycles, how students are taught in school to ferret out facts, and how corporate officials deal with the media and the public. The watchdog role of the media, an informed citizenry, and the vigilance of public discourse in exposing lies and wrongdoing have separated the United States from kleptocracies, oligarchies, and cronyist regimes all over the world. Those precepts may now be in jeopardy.

That brings us to the ways Trump's attitudes reverberate worldwide. While the U.S.'s record on press freedom ranks below that of many Western democracies, the powerful American news media and its worldwide reach have made

Washington the de facto standard-bearer for robust independent media globally. Between 2009 and 2012, the United States spent more than \$300 million to train and equip independent editors, journalists, and bloggers around the world and advance media freedom. Senior U.S. officials routinely call out foreign governments for mistreating the press. Until recently, that is.

The Trump administration has been mum on crackdowns on the media in Venezuela, and the president himself dismissed journalist murders in Russia saying, "our country does plenty of killing too." At a time when record numbers of journalists around the world are being imprisoned and killed, Washington's retreat from this historic role as a global champion of the free press offers a get-out-of-jail-free card to repressive rulers who hardly need an excuse to go after their media antagonists.

We've already witnessed foreign governments drawing from Trump's pernicious playbook. When Russia argued that the most recent Syria chemical weapons attack was a "false flag" operation, the Kremlin-backed media dismissed news reports to the contrary as fake news. The Cambodian government cited Trump's expulsion of media outlets from a White House briefing when it vowed to "crush" media entities that endanger the "peace and security" of the kingdom.

That the press seems not only alive but invigorated in Trump's America is good news. But it shouldn't be allowed to obscure the danger that our president's approach to the news represents.

Photo credit: MARIO TAMA/Getty Images

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Donald Trump Raises His GOP Allies' Stress Levels

Eli Stokols
9-12 minutes

WASHINGTON—When President Donald Trump tweeted Tuesday morning urging to shut down the government this fall rather than work with Democrats on the next budget bill, his Republican allies on Capitol Hill were once again caught off guard.

"We either elect more Republican Senators in 2018 or change the rules now to 51%," he tweeted, referring to the voting bloc needed to pass legislation. "Our country needs a good 'shutdown' in September to fix this mess!"

In the afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said flatly that Mr. Trump's suggestion to eliminate the 60-vote threshold to pass bills "will not happen." An overwhelming, bipartisan majority of the chamber is "not interested in changing the way the Senate operates," he added.

Mr. Trump's tweet was just the latest in a flurry of sometimes surprising messages coming from the president: He has given more than 40 interviews in his first 100 days, including a dozen in the Oval Office in the past 10 days. Several of the meetings with reporters were spontaneous, with phone calls from the president himself, or with a top aide whisking reporters, in the West Wing on other business, into the

Oval Office with little advance notice.

The uptick in media engagement stems from Mr. Trump's focus on the first 100 days marker of his young presidency, a White House official acknowledged. But his decision to inject himself directly into the assessments of his administration also follows weeks of reports on the internal divide between the "nationalist" and "globalist" wings of his administration.

The president was eager to drown that narrative out with his own voice—to claim victory for early accomplishments, pressure Congress, and explain recent position shifts to his supporters, the aide said.

"Hey, I'm a nationalist and a globalist," he said, in an impromptu interview with The Wall Street Journal. "I'm both. And I'm the only one who makes the decision, believe me."

Ari Fleischer, who served as White House press secretary under President George W. Bush, said it's "a return to the normal Donald Trump of the campaign who regularly did media to his advantage, or at least more often than not to his advantage."

Whether it works in Washington, an establishment town that runs on routines, remains to be seen, but it is heightening stress levels on Capitol Hill and adding to the chaotic sense of the White House operations.

The president's Tuesday tweet urging a shutdown was a response to Democrats' claiming victory over Planned Parenthood funding and complaints from some in conservative media circles that the administration failed to extract funding for the president's proposed border wall in the \$1.1 trillion bipartisan budget agreement negotiated this week, aides said.

It also prompted Budget Director Mick Mulvaney to show up at the White House Press Briefing Room to tamp down the controversy, which he said overshadowed concessions won by GOP lawmakers in the omnibus-spending bill.

Asserting that the president "delivered" on his promises and "out-negotiated" Democrats, Mr. Mulvaney pointed to a photograph of a border fence and implied that construction on Mr. Trump's barrier was under way. "We are building this now," Mr. Mulvaney said.

The budget deal, which has not been approved, would provide money to replace some existing fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. "The pictures represent the kind of wall construction that we can do under this bill, as authorized by this section," a Mulvaney spokesman said in a later e-mail.

"I think any administration has a little bit of

rockiness," said Sen. Bill Cassidy (R., La.). "The president, I think, specializes in this way, then that way," said Mr. Cassidy, gesturing with his hands.

"On the other hand, if you focus on not the sturm und drang, but what's happening, he's pushed regulatory reform big time. He's now pushing tax reform. He wants to reform Obamacare. All of which go into getting jobs going. That's his focus clearly. Everything else is kind of noise," said Mr. Cassidy.

Similarly, Sen. Mike Rounds (R., S. D.) dismissed Mr. Trump's sometimes confusing rhetoric as that of a businessman who is still learning about Washington and the federal government. "You will see him change as he develops the experience as a chief executive in a branch of government," said Mr. Rounds.

"I recognize that he's still having a coffee klatch conversation with the American public," Mr. Rounds said. "The American people like that he's thinking out loud and talking about things out loud."

Privately, however, Republicans were less positive. More than a dozen GOP members and aides grumbled about the president's numerous and at times conflicting comments about the Affordable Care Act repeal bill.

In interviews, Mr. Trump and aides stated that a vote could take place this week, putting pressure on House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.), who wasn't ready for one. The White House also predicted a vote in late March when the House made its first attempt at repealing the health law, but it never happened.

According to one House GOP aide, Mr. Trump's public pronouncements "create an unnecessary amount of drama" and raise expectations in an unhelpful way. "It's the new world we're living in," the aide continued. "Most people kind of expect him to be unpredictable so you just operate with what you can control. But it leads to a bunch of pressure that doesn't need to be there."

Vin Weber, a former GOP congressman from Minnesota, said "flooding the zone the way he does is a way of putting pressure on this Congress that is going to be necessary to getting his agenda through, because it's such an aggressive agenda."

But the president's lack of message discipline can undermine his attempts to unify Republicans. "The more they have to defend things they have difficulty defending, the less likely they are to want to help the president," Mr. Weber continued.

Mr. Trump's tweet came on a morning when cable news chatter was fixated on a controversial statement he had made on Monday about his belief that President Andrew Jackson would have prevented the Civil War.

That historically questionable comment came during a podcast taping with conservative journalist Salena Zito and on the same day as another interview with Bloomberg News in which the president expressed his willingness to meet North Korea's Kim Jong-Un, suggested overhauling the banking system, and imposing a gasoline tax.

Some of the meetings with reporters were part of an official "100 Days" media plan. Others took place without the knowledge of press secretary Sean Spicer and his staff.

Mr. Spicer was "livid for days" after learning that one reporter with whom he has a long-running feud had been in the Oval Office interviewing his boss, said one official. "It's been pretty on-the-fly," the official continued. "He's made a lot of news. It's been largely positive."

—Byron Tau and Louise Radnofsky contributed to this article.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Peter Nicholas

8-10 minutes

Updated May 2, 2017 11:41 p.m. ET

Hillary Clinton took the blame for her election defeat in comments Tuesday but also said sexism, Russian interference and Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey's letter raising 11th-hour questions about her email practices combined to sink her candidacy.

In an interview at the Women for Women International conference in New York, the former first lady and secretary of state described herself as a "citizen" who is now "part of the resistance" arrayed against President Donald Trump.

Mrs. Clinton took a few swipes at Mr. Trump, who won the Electoral College and the presidency while losing to Mrs. Clinton in the popular vote. Mrs. Clinton said he appealed to people's "emotions" during the race but has since struggled to

make good on what she cast as unrealistic promises.

In a reference to Mr. Trump's failure to repeal President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, Mrs. Clinton said that she, by contrast, "wasn't going to appeal to people's emotions in the same way my opponent did, which I think is frankly what is getting him into all kinds of difficulties now in trying to fulfill those promises he made. Because health care is complicated."

The White House declined to comment on Mrs. Clinton's interview.

Late Tuesday night, Mr. Trump tweeted twice in an apparent response to Mrs. Clinton's interview. He tweeted that Mr. Comey was "the best thing that ever happened to Hillary Clinton in that he gave her a free pass for many bad deeds!"

Mr. Trump continued, "The phony Trump/Russia story was an excuse used by the Democrats as justification for losing the election. Perhaps Trump just ran a great campaign?"

Mr. Trump's tweets amount to a rebuke of the FBI director, who has said his agency is investigating whether the Trump 2016 campaign colluded with Russia to influence the election.

Since the campaign, Mrs. Clinton has been selective in her public appearances. She said she is writing a book that will discuss her ill-fated presidential bid. In a bit of introspection, she said the campaign repeated some of the same mistakes from her unsuccessful 2008 run.

"I take absolute personal responsibility," Mrs. Clinton told interviewer Christiane Amanpour. "I was the candidate. I was the person who was on the ballot. I am very aware of the challenges and the problems and the shortfalls that we had—again."

Still, Mrs. Clinton said her campaign was ultimately undone by outside forces over which she had no control. She said she was "on the way to winning" until the campaign was upended by Mr. Comey's

actions and other developments she deemed unfair.

The FBI had been investigating Mrs. Clinton's use of a private email server when she served as secretary of state. In July, Mr. Comey made a public statement saying he was recommending that no criminal charges be filed, though he said she had been "extremely careless" in her handling of classified information.

That appeared to settle the matter, until Oct. 28—less than two weeks before the election—when Mr. Comey sent a letter to members of Congress saying that agents had uncovered additional Clinton emails and were examining them to see if they contained classified information.

Mrs. Clinton said the "reason why I believe we lost were the intervening events in the last 10 days."

The FBI declined to comment on Mrs. Clinton's assertion.

The Comey letter, coupled with WikiLeaks' release of embarrassing emails stolen from her campaign

chairman John Podesta's email account, "raised doubts in the minds of people who were inclined to vote for me and got scared off," Mrs. Clinton said.

U.S. intelligence officials concluded that Russia was behind the hacking of Mr. Podesta's emails.

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Mrs. Clinton said that he "certainly interfered in our election, and it was clear that he

interfered to hurt me and help my opponent."

Mr. Putin on Tuesday denied that his government meddled in the 2016 presidential race, dismissing the charges as "simply rumors."

Other reasons she lost, Mrs. Clinton said, include a reluctance to elect the first woman to be president. Asked if misogyny was a factor in the race, Mrs. Clinton said, "Yes, I do think it played a role."

Though her career in elective office seems to be over, Mrs. Clinton had sharp words for Mr. Trump. The president has talked often about the election, asserting without evidence to back up the claim that millions of people voted illegally. Three weeks after the election, Mr. Trump tweeted: "In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

Mrs. Clinton said, "We've got a lot of other things to worry about, and he should worry less about the election and my winning the popular vote than doing some other things that would be important for the country."

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Clinton Faults Self And Others For Loss.'

POLITICO Warren polishes national profile ahead of 2020

By **Debenedetti** Gabriel
10-12 minutes

Sen. Elizabeth Warren greets business leaders during a New England Council luncheon in Boston on March 27. | AP Photo

When Donald Trump suggested to a National Rifle Association crowd in Atlanta on Friday that he might face a challenge from Elizabeth Warren in three years, he voiced a thought shared by political pros on both sides.

Between her coast-to-coast book tour, a series of high-profile speeches, and greater behind-the-scenes involvement in setting the party's direction in Washington, the Massachusetts progressive the president derides as 'Pocahontas' is providing plenty of evidence that she may be poised to go national after her Senate reelection campaign in 2018.

Story Continued Below

Warren — a fundraising juggernaut, big bank antagonist, and frequent GOP sparring partner — is primarily focused on crafting anti-Trump tactics on Capitol Hill, supporting her more electorally endangered colleagues, and keeping an eye on her own backyard just in case a serious challenger emerges. But she's also doing everything she needs to do to prepare for a presidential run just in case, cutting a noticeably high public profile and harnessing her political celebrity to shape the party's future. It's a future in which many expect she may be running for president, or at least to better position herself to shape the party's priorities in the event she doesn't run.

"She has a very legitimate claim to one of the fundamental arguments of our time, which is how you reverse the downward pressure on the middle class, and different people have different answers to that, but she was on this issue a long time ago, so she really rose to

prominence on this issue. So given the saliency of it, it's not surprising that she should be in the forefront on these discussions, and in this fight," said David Axelrod, Barack Obama's top political advisor in 2008 and an architect of his rise to the presidency. "The absence of a strong economic message was an obvious defect in 2016, so I'm sure she will have a role."

"I look at the U.S. Senate as a parlor of prospective presidential candidates, and obviously her name is among the most prominent among them," added Axelrod, who said he had coffee with Warren a few months back but hasn't talked to her since.

As she hawks "This Fight Is Our Fight" — her eleventh book, a New York Times bestseller — Warren has accepted invitations to speak to prominent left-leaning constituency groups like the NAACP and EMILY's List, as well as to a conference later this month hosted by the liberal Center for American Progress think tank that's a showcase of potential presidential hopefuls.

Along with that stature, her torrid fundraising has placed her in the top tier of national Democratic figures of influence. Using both in-person appeals and a growing online backing, she brought in more money than any other senator in the first quarter of 2017 — much of it raised online after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell silenced her on the Senate floor as she opposed the nomination of Jeff Sessions as attorney general.

She subsequently used her leadership PAC to dole out \$10,000 checks to a wide range of vulnerable Senate colleagues in April, according to previously unreported federal filings, solidifying her status as a top fundraising 'get' for her colleagues. Before she took the stage at the NAACP's annual dinner late last month, for example, she swung by a quick closed-door \$25-per-ticket fundraiser for Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow. The event was expected to bring in

just a few hundred local Democrats — 915 showed up instead.

That fundraising isn't set to stop anytime soon: she's due back in California for another big-money swing in June, multiple people familiar with the plans told POLITICO. There, she'll appear with a handful of the party's most prominent political financiers, including Esprit founder and close Clinton friend Susie Tompkins Buell and Guy Saperstein, the attorney and Oakland Athletics part-owner who offered her \$1 million to run for president in 2016.

In Washington, Warren is playing an increasingly significant role in helping shape the Trump resistance after initially angering grassroots supporters by voting to allow Ben Carson's nomination as Housing Secretary to proceed in January, before apologizing. She's been surfacing more on national television and appearing regularly at quietly-organized, previously unreported private meetings with progressive group leaders that Oregon's Jeff Merkley has started hosting in his Senate office to get everyone on the same page.

Fellow elected leaders and strategists say Warren advocates for the party to better pick its fights against the new president, while raising the alarm about under-the-radar White House and GOP moves she feels aren't getting enough attention. That tactic mirrors the one advocated by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the former Barack Obama Chief of Staff and a prominent party strategist with whom she recently sat down — at his request — while on her book tour.

"I don't get any sense that we're in the Battle Plan Stage One of a presidential run, I think she really is trying to help create some centrifugal forces within the party to take on Trump and deal with the problems in front of us," said Neera Tanden, the CAP president and a Hillary Clinton ally who said she speaks with Warren regularly.

But, Tanden added, "We're in a situation where, without the White House, Democrats and progressives are looking for leaders who will take Trump on. [Warren] was that person before the election. She is that person now."

As a result of that new role, her extensive fundraising network, and her growing online following, few serious conversations about Democrats' 2020 primary get far before they settle on Warren's name.

The lessons of the 2016 election are seared into the minds of those surrounding Warren, after she opted not to run and much of the early-voting state manpower and political infrastructure dedicated to drafting her turned into the foundation for Bernie Sanders' organization.

"I adore her, I thought she was the candidate we should have run in 2016," said Saperstein, explaining that in 2020 Warren is now his second choice for the presidency, behind former Daily Show host Jon Stewart. "The problem we had in 2016 is there was so much effort to clear the field for Hillary, and it was a very unhealthy thing."

Declining to endorse either Sanders or Clinton until after the primary, Warren angered some diehard supporters of the Vermont senator, but — in the minds of her political allies — she managed to shape some of the primary debate around her, tugging the economic conversation to the left.

Even against the backdrop of a prospective 2020 field of over two dozen Democrats, Warren's political following is matched only by Sanders and former Vice President Joe Biden, potentially allowing her to direct the 2020 contest in a similar way.

But that, and a recent book tour that has taken her from New York to Boston to Chicago to Los Angeles, has spurred Massachusetts Republicans to seize on Warren's national moves, eyeing her as potentially vulnerable in 2018 after a January MassINC/WBUR poll

showed that 46 percent of the state's voters said someone else should have a chance at the Senate.

"She's pretty much been nationally focused exclusively since she got elected, running around the country raising money, talking in extremely hyper-partisan doublespeak and really largely ignoring our home state," said Kirsten Hughes, the Massachusetts GOP chair.

No high-profile Republican has yet stepped up to the plate, but Warren isn't taking chances. She's held town hall meetings in her home state and has three Massachusetts commencement speeches scheduled for this spring, working with a campaign team that includes media consultant Mandy Grunwald, strategist Marla

Romash, and advisor Kristen Orthman, an alum of former Senate Majority Harry Reid's office, while her former chief of staff Mindy Myers runs the Senate Democrats' campaign wing this cycle. The senator also frequently travels with her state director Roger Lau and relies on the work of her digital director Lauren Miller.

Even if Warren's 2018 reelection contest never takes shape, national GOP leaders have identified that race as a prime opportunity to test lines of attack on her, starting with portraying her as an out-of-touch Harvard elitist whose political views are too far to the left. In recent years she's campaigned for a wide range of Democratic candidates in states the party needs, they note, but Senate hopefuls from

Kentucky's Alison Lundergan Grimes to Ohio's Ted Strickland have fallen short.

Viewing her national book tour as a delicate endeavor at a time when Democrats continue to struggle to connect to middle class voters, the GOP opposition research group America Rising is treating her much like they did Clinton in the run-up to 2016, monitoring her media appearances and badgering her at every turn in an attempt to tarnish her national image.

"We learned from our experience with Secretary Clinton that the earlier you start, the more chance you have for these narratives to sink in with the electorate," said Colin Reed, the group's executive director.

In a sign of how both sides are eager to leverage Warren for their own political advantage, though, her own party decided to use that GOP push as an alarm in itself.

"A shadowy conservative group called America Rising just announced new attacks on Senator Elizabeth Warren, saying they're planning to do everything in their power to 'make Warren's life difficult,'" the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee emailed party members last month. "Now we're counting on our best supporters to show we've got Senator Warren's back."

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Sattler : Russia wasn't the only election hacker

Jason Sattler

Published 3:18 a.m. ET May 2, 2017 | Updated 22 hours ago

5-7 minutes

GOP Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen discusses her decision to retire from Congress, Miami, May 1, 2017. (Photo: Carl Juste, AP)

Democrats came close to upsets in two special House elections in Republican districts, and now Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., has announced she is retiring. Political scientist Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball instantly changed the 2018 rating for her district, which Hillary Clinton won last year by 20 points, from "likely R" to "leans D."

The good news means that for the first time in more than a decade, Democrats are looking forward to a midterm election. But they would make a terrible mistake to forget the lessons of 2016, and I don't just mean, "Don't trust precedents, polls, or James Comey."

The most important takeaway of the presidential election for the minority party is that our democracy has been hacked, and it wasn't a foreign power that hacked it. Well, it wasn't just a foreign power. Since 2010, when the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling erased limits on anonymous corporate donations, 22 states have passed new restrictions on voting. Even a big "enthusiasm edge" among Democrats likely isn't enough to reboot this system.

Making it harder to vote than it is to buy an election feeds into the Republican Party's natural midterm advantages, which include

the older, whiter composition of the electorate multiplied by Democrats' tendency to cluster in urban areas. Along with the presidency and Congress, Republicans control an all-time high of 69 of 99 state legislative chambers and more governorships than at any time in the past 94 years, thanks in no small part to a decision by right-wing donors to invest in elections in all 50 states.

Democrats thought their Electoral College advantage and diversifying demographics were an answer to the right's comprehensive approach to defining the electorate. They were wrong. If they keep being wrong, the progress reversed in President Trump's first 100 days will be just a preview for the disaster film of the century.

Ari Berman, author *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, argues that voter suppression is a far bigger problem than the fantasy of widespread voter fraud that conservatives have used for centuries to justify voting restrictions. The presidential election was the first in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act, and the first to feature new voting restrictions passed by 14 states.

One of them was Wisconsin. Molly McGrath worked with VoteRiders to help some of the 300,000 registered Wisconsinites who lacked the necessary identification to vote. Two paid staffers and a team of volunteers helped thousands, many who had been voting for decades, secure proper documents.

It wasn't nearly enough.

"The worst was hearing from voters who had no idea they did not have the ID to cast a regular ballot until they showed up at the polls on Election Day," McGrath told me.

Trump won Wisconsin by 22,000 votes, with the lowest turnout in decades.

To begin to reverse Republicans' natural and manufactured advantages, Democrats must wage a two-pronged war that mirrors GOP efforts to restrict voting where they have power and to depress the vote where they don't.

In redder states, efforts such as VoteRiders must be expanded exponentially to overcome not only ID laws but also suppressive tactics that include eliminating early voting and the closing of polling places that serve minorities, students and poor seniors. Non-white voters are already six times as likely to wait more than an hour to vote. In states where laws can't be changed, enormous outreach is necessary.

In bluer states, Democrats must make it easier to register and vote. Oregon has already set a new standard. The state has mail-in voting and recently was the first state to pass automatic registration. The result: Turnout increased 20 percentage points among voters ages 18-29, and registration of voters of color rose 26 points to 79%. "Automatic registration is more effective than any registration drive," Berman told me.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

This is where Democrats can get aspirational. For instance, Texas has draconian voter registration

laws that resemble the Jim Crow era in their requirements and their results. "A policy like automatic registration could transform that state," Berman said. And a competitive Texas would reshape American politics.

The Texas Organizing Project estimates that 1.1 million new voters might break conservatives' hold on the state. But registration has to be just the beginning. In 2010, another midterm election, 2 million African-American and Latino voters in Texas went unregistered, but 3 million registered ones sat home.

The combination of voter suppression and Democrats' inability to turn out voters last year helped Republicans extend a conservative Supreme Court majority that could enable escalating voting restrictions for decades. Only a massive effort to fight for every vote can begin to restore our system's settings to resemble what they were before *Citizens United* and the rollback of the Voting Rights Act.

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Former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates to Testify on Warnings Over Michael Flynn

Former Acting Attorney General Sally Yates is expected to testify before Congress next week that she warned White House officials that former national security adviser Michael Flynn wasn't being truthful when he denied having discussed U.S. sanctions with a top Russian diplomat, according to people familiar with her version of events.

The testimony is likely to contradict White House assertions that Ms. Yates had merely given White House counsel Donald McGahn a "heads up" in a Jan. 26 meeting that Mr. Flynn had misled Vice President Mike Pence about the nature of his conversations with a Russian diplomat.

The vice president had earlier said that Mr. Flynn hadn't discussed sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. The conversations between Mr. Flynn and Russian

Ambassador Sergei Kislyak took place on Dec. 29, the same day the Obama administration levied sanctions on Moscow for alleged meddling in the U.S. election. The timing of the conversation was coincidental, said Mr. Pence.

In fact, Mr. Flynn discussed sanctions with Mr. Kislyak and misled Mr. Pence about the nature of the conversations, according to U.S. intelligence intercepts of the diplomat's phone calls, former officials have said.

Ms. Yates is expected to testify that she expressed alarm to Mr. McGahn about the conflict between what transpired in the phone calls and how the White House was describing the conversations. She also told Mr. McGahn that the national security adviser's false assertions put himself at risk of being compromised by Russian intelligence operatives, the people said.

When the nature of the contacts became public in mid-February, Mr. Flynn was forced out of his job.

The White House has said Mr. McGahn informed President Donald Trump about the issue, and Mr. Trump ultimately asked Mr. Flynn for his resignation.

The general outlines of Ms. Yates' account have been reported, but Monday will be the first time she airs her version of events in public. Ms. Yates, deputy attorney general under President Barack Obama, was elevated to acting attorney general following the departure of Attorney General Loretta Lynch at the end of the last administration.

However, she was fired Jan. 30 for refusing to defend Mr. Trump's executive order on visas and refugees, which has since been suspended by the courts.

Ms. Yates, who couldn't be reached for comment, has been called to testify at a Monday hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on crime and terrorism, headed by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.).

Mr. Graham last year signed a letter as part of a bipartisan group of four senators asking congressional

leaders to create a special committee to investigate alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election. The leaders declined to do so.

The House and Senate Intelligence Committees are conducting high-profile investigations of the alleged Russian interference, but those probes have struggled to move ahead quickly. Mr. Graham has perhaps been the most outspoken Republican pushing for a far-reaching inquiry on possible Russian meddling.

Russia has denied any election interference, and Mr. Trump has rejected allegations that anyone connected to his campaign coordinated with Russian officials.

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Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition as 'Yates to Testify on Warnings Over Flynn.'

Editorial : Not Draining the Swamp - WSJ

May 2, 2017 7:19
p.m. ET 188

COMMENTS

4-5 minutes

Republicans and Democrats are jousting over who won the battle over this week's omnibus spending bill, and we'll give the call to Democrats because they fought to a draw while in the minority. Republicans will be hard pressed to use the power of the purse to set priorities until they return to regular budget order.

The \$1 trillion agreement to fund the government through the end of this fiscal year on Sept. 30 is essentially a modest trade: Republicans got a boost in defense spending and a few policy riders, while Democrats got money for some domestic priorities. The agreement provides \$15 billion in supplemental defense spending, which is overdue, even if that is only half of President Trump's military request. The deal does not include Mr. Trump's proposed cuts to the federal bureaucracy.

Republicans are right that the bill finally breaks the Obama-era rule that every defense dollar be matched by a domestic-spending dollar. Mr. Obama held the military hostage to his domestic agenda, and some Democrats wanted this damaging parity to continue as a price of their votes in the Senate. The GOP made clear this was a nonstarter, which is at least a down payment against military decline.

Democrats are crowing that they killed scores of Republican policy and spending "poison pills" and also won money for their priorities. They blocked funding for Mr. Trump's border wall, though Republicans included some \$12 billion for border and customs security. Democrats got an increase in National Institutes of Health spending, though many Republicans also supported that. Despite their claims, Democrats did not "preserve" funding for Planned Parenthood. The bill contains no direct dollars for that group, but rather funds grants that will be issued by Health and Human Services, which is unlikely to approve any for the controversial abortion provider.

Most of the domestic funding increases and decreases are GOP priorities. The bill contains \$45 million to fund three more years of Washington, D.C.'s popular school voucher program, as well as money for western wildfire fighting and disaster-related repairs at NASA.

Conversely, the bill zeroes out dollars to the international Green Climate Fund (set up as part of the Paris climate accord), and it rescinds, consolidates or terminates more than 150 federal programs or initiatives, including such high priorities as the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation or the National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program. The bill cuts \$81 million from the Environmental Protection Agency, returning it to 2009 levels.

The bill also continues the GOP deregulation drive. In particular, the bill forbids the IRS from spending to issue regulations that would change political standards for nonprofit social-welfare organizations, and it bars the Securities and Exchange Commission from issuing rules that require corporations to disclose

political contributions. It also ends the federal attempt to regulate lead in ammunition or fishing tackle—a particular sore point with hunters and rural Americans.

Republicans could accomplish more if they were united, but too many conservative members refuse to vote for any spending bills. This means the GOP must rely on Democrats for passage, which means accepting some of their priorities. The Senate filibuster rule also gives the minority the whip hand unless Republicans want to risk a government shutdown.

Republicans need to get back to the business of passing the 12 separate appropriations bills, so Congress can debate programs and set priorities with more deliberation than a giant catch-all bill that no one has time to read. If Democrats balk, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell should consider ditching the filibuster for appropriations. These giant spending bills are a favor to those who want giant government.

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson addressing employees at the State Department in February. Mark Wilson/Getty Images

Barring a course change, the State Department is expected to limp along without most of its senior staff until well into 2018. That could be more than a year from now. Even citizens who are deeply jaded about the government must realize that with the world in turmoil, it's dangerous for one of the departments most responsible for managing the chaos to be treading water.

That apparently is what you get when Rex Tillerson, the former chief executive of Exxon Mobil who has no government experience, becomes secretary of state. President Trump and others have long rhapsodized about the value of bringing business skills to government. However valuable these skills are, running a business is not the same as leading the free world in an era of multiple, complex crises.

Three months into his tenure, Mr. Tillerson has

done almost nothing to select nominees for the White House to consider for nearly 200 State Department jobs that require Senate confirmation, The Times's Gardiner Harris reported. No other federal department is as dependent on political appointees, meaning State is uniquely affected by such foot-dragging. And even if Mr. Tillerson named all his choices tomorrow, the confirmation process usually takes months and months.

Mr. Tillerson has no plans to start selecting his choices for top jobs anytime soon. He told NPR that he first wants to embark on a departmentwide listening mission to hear what his diplomats and civil servants have to say. That effort will start Wednesday morning, when he has scheduled a general meeting with department employees.

Many State Department employees will relish the chance to finally hear from the secretary on how he plans to restructure the department in light of Mr. Trump's demand for draconian budget cuts, and to tell him what they think. His delay in waiting until now to engage them has cost him credibility and trust

among his troops and fueled anxiety amid hints of an institutional upheaval.

Many State Department officials believe that he has been inaccessible for far too long, cocooning himself with a small group of aides in a process that deprived him of hearing a broader range of views and policy options. Mr. Tillerson's stumbles have been many, including statements that conflicted with other administration comments on Syria and Iran and initially failing to meet with employees who staff American embassies while he was on overseas trips.

Until the administration gets Senate confirmations of the political positions it decides to keep, professional diplomats and civil servants are filling the jobs on an acting basis. Mr. Tillerson said he has been pleased with their performance, even though temporary holdovers often don't feel fully empowered and part of the decision-making.

Serving an inexperienced and erratic president requires Mr.

Tillerson to spend time developing a close relationship with the White House. And while Congress seems likely to reject the dangerous budget cuts Mr. Trump envisions, it makes sense for a new secretary to evaluate whether the department's structure is the one needed to respond to current challenges.

Mr. Tillerson's laid-back approach to filling top management positions, especially the workhorse jobs of assistant secretary, is nevertheless risky. North Korea, Russia and China are getting a lot of top-level attention, but who's watching out for Afghanistan or the Balkan region, which is showing signs of unraveling after two decades of American leadership helped restore some stability?

Mr. Tillerson may not have wanted to be secretary, but he accepted the job and bears responsibility for how he carries it out. He needs the best possible permanent team to help him.

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : Two Last Obama-Era Rules Worth Saving From the G.O.P.

The Editorial Board

4-5 minutes

A pump jack and natural gas flare near Williston, N.D. Eric Gay/Associated Press

There's only about a week to go before time runs out on fast-track procedures that congressional Republicans have been using to repeal regulations finalized in the last months of the Obama administration. But still more damage could be in store.

So far, President Trump has signed 13 repeal measures passed by Congress, harming worker safety, environmental protection and consumer privacy. To put that number into perspective, before now, Congress had revoked only one rule using the fast-track process — in 2001.

Now the fates of two important protections remain threatened as the Senate decides whether

to follow the lead of the House and vote to repeal them.

One of them allows states to establish payroll-deduction retirement accounts for private-sector workers who have no retirement coverage at work.

Another makes energy companies limit harmful emissions of methane, the main component of natural gas.

The retirement regulation, which allows states to provide millions of employees with a convenient, low-cost way to save for retirement, is also consistent with Republicans' traditional support for states' rights. So, repealing the rule would violate both the interest of the people and Republicans' own professed ideology — in order to curry favor with big financial firms that fear competition.

The vote to repeal the retirement rule, which could come as soon as Wednesday, will be close, with Vice President Mike Pence possibly having to cast a tiebreaking vote — a dubious victory.

The rule to curb methane is opposed by powerful oil and gas interests, and, not surprisingly, by many in Congress who receive campaign contributions from those interests. But its value is indisputable. Capturing methane keeps the air cleaner and reduces emissions of a powerful greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming. It would have the support of most Americans, who — regardless of party affiliation — tell pollsters that measures to restrict emissions are good solutions to climate and pollution problems. And it could be a benefit for industry, since the captured methane can be sold on the market. After Colorado carried out a similar rule, natural gas production increased.

Preserving these rules would allow Senate Republicans to show they have some concerns for the needs of real people. The regulatory rollbacks passed by Congress and signed by President Trump so far have favored broad corporate interests or narrow special interests at the expense of human health, safety and security. For example,

one of the four major environmental reversals undid a rule that would have required coal companies to keep toxic debris from mountaintop mining out of waterways. One of four reversals of labor-related rules stopped a regulation that would have required federal contractors to disclose labor law violations when bidding for government work. A gun-control rule to ensure that mentally incapacitated people would be flagged in background checks for firearms purchases was reversed, as was a rule to prohibit internet companies from collecting and selling customers' data without their permission.

The Republican-controlled Congress and Mr. Trump have made their point about deregulation — and Americans will have to live with their decisions. If they spare the two remaining rules on their hit list, corporate America would do just fine and the American people would be helped.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Panetta and Talent : The Military Needs Modern Ways to Attract and Manage Talent

Leon Panetta and Jim Talent

5-6 minutes

Aboard the Navy's newest aircraft carrier in early March, President Trump vowed that the United States "will have the finest equipment in

the world—planes, ships and everything else." But what good will this equipment do if the military lacks the personnel to use it?

People are the vital ingredient to America's military edge, but increasingly they are in short supply. "The Air Force has a

shortfall of almost 1,500 pilots," Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford testified before a House committee in March. Similarly, the Army is offering bonuses to convince soldiers to extend their enlistments, the Marines cannot produce enough snipers, the Navy is straining to keep officers who operate its ships' nuclear reactors, and all branches have struggled to build new cyber units.

These examples portend larger difficulties ahead. Even with the U.S. being threatened by enemies near and far who are evolving strategically and technologically, our military still operates with a personnel system designed in 1947 to fight the Soviet Union. Unchanged since then, this one-size-fits-all system for recruiting, retaining and promoting troops, treats nearly every service member as an interchangeable cog.

That is why we led a Bipartisan Policy Center task force focused on modernizing how the military manages its personnel. We recommend replacing the current system with a more flexible model that expands the military's access to talent. This model would reward experience and performance without unduly burdening military families.

Since the draft ended in 1973, all new enlistees must be recruited. But the recruiting process—primarily geared toward young adults—is trapped in the past. The future force will also require experienced professionals with highly valuable skills such as engineering, cybersecurity and foreign languages. We recommend discarding policies that prohibit experienced individuals from entering the military at higher ranks so that the military can entice talented recruits.

Once troops are recruited, the Defense Department invests heavily in training them. A new fighter pilot, for example, costs \$11 million. To ensure the military does not lose access to trained people who have already volunteered to serve, it must make it easier to make the transition from active duty to the reserve or National Guard.

The military could encourage troops to continue serving by allowing them to compete for promotion. Military promotions today are largely a seniority-based system governed by predetermined timelines. Those not promoted on schedule are kicked out. We recommend placing increased emphasis on merit and allowing individuals to seek promotion when ready. This will allow troops in critical specialties,

like cyber, to master their skill sets without racing to meet arbitrary promotion cutoffs. Conversely, high-performing service members, ready for greater responsibility, could be promoted more quickly.

Some people would prefer to keep flying than have a desk job or become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The military must recognize this. We recommend creating new career paths for those who want to devote their military service to a particular specialty instead of pursuing senior ranking command. Allowing service members more say in their career aspirations would create a more skilled military while improving satisfaction and retention.

Serving in the military will always require sacrifice. On the battlefield and back home, service members place what's best for the military ahead of their personal desires. Career service members typically will move nearly a dozen times—usually with a family in tow. This can help produce well-rounded troops. But it also results in stress and instability for military families. We recommend giving service members more influence over when and where they move. They should not have to make the untenable choice between serving their nation or their family's best interests.

Uniformed service is not a calling for every American, nor does it need to be. But to build a strong force capable of succeeding against future threats, the military must be attractive to Americans with the skills and talents that are necessary to keep America safe. As an all-volunteer force, the U.S. military competes for talent with the world's top companies, best universities and highest-performing organizations. The military must work to make its offer more competitive.

As Congress considers a military buildup, it should include in its agenda bipartisan defense personnel reform to create a 21st century force. To strengthen our military, we must focus not only on new ships, planes and tanks, but also on those who sail, fly and drive them.

Mr. Panetta, a Democrat, served as defense secretary, 2011-13. Mr. Talent, a Republican, was a U.S. senator from Missouri, 2002-07.

Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition.



Editorial : Another black boy was killed by police. It's time for more than hashtags.

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

4-5 minutes

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

By Editorial Board

The Post's View

Opinion

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

May 2 at 7:49 PM

THE POLICE chief in the Dallas suburb of Balch Springs first said that the car 15-year-old Jordan Edwards was in when he was fatally shot by police was backing down the street in an "aggressive manner" toward officers.

Hours later, the statement was changed; police admitted that the car had actually been driving away from police when an officer with a rifle fatally shot the boy in the head.

And so the questions begin. How could something as mundane as police being called to break up a teen party result in the death of a 15-year-old described as a "kid that did everything right"? Did officers lie and think they could get away with blaming the victim until video evidence proved otherwise? And will this latest, utterly needless death of a young African American male make "Black Lives Matter" more than a hashtag by spurring needed police reforms?

Jordan, a popular football player and model student shot Saturday night after leaving a party with his brother and a group of friends, is the youngest of more than 330 people who have been shot and killed by police this year, according to Post reporters tracking such shootings. About 25 percent of those killed have been black, and

about 7 percent were — like Jordan — unarmed. "This has happened far too often," an attorney for Jordan's family said at a Monday news conference. "We are tired of making the same rhetorical demands, of having the same hashtags; our community is fed up with the same tired excuses."

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The death, ruled a homicide by the Dallas County medical examiner, is under investigation. The officer, Roy Oliver, was terminated for violating department policies, Balch Springs Police Chief Jonathan Haber said Tuesday. Authorities need to act with urgency and transparency, so it is encouraging that the department moved so quickly. It was also to the department's credit that Mr. Haber was forthright about correcting the record after viewing body-camera footage of the incident that made him conclude the shooting did not meet "our core values."

Thank goodness there were body cameras, underscoring yet again their value and the need for police agencies to equip officers with this technology. It would be irresponsible to use this case as a broad brush against all police officers, the majority of whom selflessly place themselves at risk to protect the public. But it's equally irresponsible not to recognize the issues with police training and policies that historically have put minority communities at risk and too long have gone uncorrected.

Questions remain as to what happened during a police shooting in Balch Springs that left 15-year-old Jordan Edwards dead on April 29. The officer, identified as Roy Oliver, was terminated on May 2. Questions remain as to what happened during a police shooting in Balch Springs that left 15-year-old Jordan Edwards dead on April 29. (Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)



Friedman : Trump: Crazy Like a Fox, or Just Crazy?

Thomas L. Friedman

4-5 minutes

Trump was always going to be an unpredictable work in progress because he did no homework before coming to office — which is why he now tells us that he's finding so many problems more difficult than he anticipated — and because he didn't know most of his cabinet members. They're sort of a pickup basketball team, bound not by a shared vision but by a shared willingness to overlook Trump's core ignorance, instability and indecency and serve in key jobs as much to restrain him as to be guided by him.

In his first 100 days, allies and adversaries saved Trump and the country from some of his most extreme, ill-considered campaign promises. His foreign policy team stopped him from tearing up the Iran nuclear deal and moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

North Korea's missile-loving dictator saved him from declaring China a currency manipulator and starting a trade war with Beijing, because Trump discovered he needed China to restrain North Korea and avoid a war.

Boeing and General Electric restrained Trump from getting rid of the Export-Import Bank, which would have left U.S. exporters at a big disadvantage. The federal courts prevented him from imposing his Muslim ban. Border-state Republicans blocked his Mexico wall and other Republicans are blocking his draconian replacement of Obamacare. U.S. farmers, whose exports to Mexico have soared since Nafta was signed, dissuaded him from walking out of that trade deal.

As for the next 100 days, who will protect us? Myself, I am not counting on the Democratic Party. It's too weak. On the issues I care about most, I'm actually counting on California. I believe California's market size, aspirational goals and ability to legislate make it the most powerful opposition party to Trump in America today.

How so? Trump wants to scrap Obama-era standards requiring passenger cars to average about 51 miles a gallon by 2025; today it's just under 37 miles a gallon. But as The Los Angeles Times recently noted, under the Clean Air Act,

California "can impose emissions standards stronger than those set by the federal government, and a dozen other states have embraced the California rules."

More than one-third of the vehicles sold in America are subject to the rules California sets. Trump can deregulate U.S. automakers to make more gas guzzlers all he wants, but they can't if they want to sell cars in California. Trump can sue, but that will take years.

Ditto California companies: Apple is now powering 96 percent of its operations around the world with renewable energy — 100 percent in 24 countries — including the U.S. and China. Trump's pro-coal — make-America-cough-again — campaign will never get Apple back on coal.

Also, notes Energy Innovation founder Hal Harvey: "California has a renewable portfolio standard requiring that 50 percent of all electricity come from wind, solar and other renewables by 2030. Another 15 percent already comes from existing nuclear and hydro — so our grid will be 65 percent decarbonized in 13 years."

As Kevin de León, leader of the California State Senate, told me: California has far more clean energy jobs than there are coal jobs in all of America, and California's now nation-leading growth rate in jobs gives the lie to everything Trump says: *You can* have gradually rising clean energy standards, innovation, job creation and G.D.P. growth — all at the same time.

California is also leading the resistance to Trump's draconian immigration policies, with a web of initiatives embracing tighter border controls while also creating health care, education and work opportunities for illegal immigrants who have been living here responsibly and productively.

"We have made it very clear — we will protect our economic prosperity and our values from Trump," said de León, whose Legislature recently hired former Attorney General Eric Holder to defend it against Trump suits. Holder is California's (and my) secretary of defense.

The New York Times

Debate Over Paris Climate Deal Could Turn on a Single Phrase

John Schwartz

5-6 minutes

WASHINGTON — The debate within the Trump administration over what to do about the Paris climate agreement has reached a critical phase, according to people familiar with the internal negotiations. The decision could hinge on the interpretation of a single phrase in a single provision of a document that took years to write.

The question is whether to walk away from the agreement sealed by the Obama administration and nearly 200 other nations at the end of 2015 — as Donald J. Trump promised as a presidential candidate to do — or to weaken the nation's commitment under the deal to reducing greenhouse gases while remaining in the accord.

The provision at issue, Article 4.11, states that a nation "may at any time adjust its existing nationally determined contribution with a view to enhancing its level of ambition." The question is whether the ability to "adjust" is like a ratchet, allowing progress only in one direction — upward — or if it permits a country to weaken its commitment without violating the terms of the deal.

The fight within the White House over what to do about the Paris deal

has been going on for months. One side, led by the president's chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, and Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, has argued that the language of the provision does not allow nations to weaken their commitments. They urge the president to withdraw entirely from the Paris deal.

Another faction, which includes the president's daughter Ivanka Trump and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and colleagues, believes that the agreement does allow downward adjustments to nations' goals and targets, and that the administration should modify the commitment, not walk away.

Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, too, has called for the administration to "renegotiate" the climate pact without withdrawing from it.

If Mr. Bannon's side of the debate wins the contest for Mr. Trump's approval, the announcement of a decision to withdraw from the climate deal could come as early as next week.

The two sides clashed over the issue in a meeting on Thursday, when the White House Counsel's Office surprised Ms. Trump by suggesting that Mr. Pruitt's faction might have the law on its side, Politico reported. The conflict led to an unusual meeting on Monday involving lawyers from several

government agencies, reportedly including the White House, the Justice Department and the State Department.

Among the hard-line opponents of action against climate change both inside and outside the White House, the strong resistance to the notion that the Paris agreement includes downward flexibility is accompanied by warnings that efforts to relax commitments will lead to burdensome lawsuits from activists.

Christopher C. Horner, a senior legal fellow at the Energy and Environment Legal Institute, said liberal state attorneys general and climate activists would inevitably sue over efforts to weaken the targets. "This will be most aggressive in the Ninth Circuit, which hopefully triggers some memories in the minds of administration lawyers," he said, referring to the fight over the administration's immigration plan, which has been stayed by the California-based federal appeals court.

"Despite the mad rush to insist that plain language means either the opposite of what it says, or else nothing at all, under any canon of construction, Article 4 does not permit revisions downward," Mr. Horner said. "The language is deliberate and reads only one way: the way it was written and, as the

context affirms, was plainly intended."

The officials aligned with Ms. Trump and Mr. Tillerson, however, have suggested privately that the legal theory of a strictly binding agreement is little more than a ploy to force the administration to pull out of the deal.

Todd D. Stern, the lead climate negotiator in the Obama administration and an expert on the deal, said negotiators wrote the flexibility to reduce targets into the agreement by careful design. "It wasn't like, 'Boy, nobody thought of that,'" he said.

The issue was discussed intensely in Paris, he explained. "There were countries that wanted to say, 'Thou shalt not, you are precluded from adjusting now.' We did not want to do that," he said. Downward adjustment had already occurred with climate commitments. Japan, after losing nuclear power facilities in the Fukushima disaster, had to adjust its targets downward.

The United States had feared that without the ability to adjust targets, countries would lowball their commitments, Mr. Stern said.

He said leaving the Paris agreement would be a "serious mistake" that would have grave consequences: "I think it would

produce broad collateral damage for the U.S. internationally."

The question of whether the administration will leave the climate agreement has drawn broad opposition from the nation's trading partners and businesses, and even from fossil fuel companies.

In a recent letter to administration officials, Exxon Mobil called the agreement "an effective framework for addressing the risks of climate change." At the coal company

Cloud Peak Energy, a spokesman, Rick Curtsinger, said, "We do believe that it needs to be amended, but think that it's important to stay at the negotiating table."

Colin Marshall, the company's chief executive, sent a letter to Mr. Trump on April 6 urging him to remain in the Paris agreement, "albeit with a much different pledge on emissions," and to promote technologies that can reduce the

greenhouse gases produced by the use of coal.

Other nations have urged the United States to remain at the Paris table, including Britain, Canada and Australia, where Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has said his country will stay in the deal even if the United States withdraws.

Maros Sefcovic, a vice president of the European Commission, has urged American officials to stick with the agreement, but has also

said that if not, "we are ready to continue to provide the leadership on climate change."

Correction: May 2, 2017

An earlier version of this article quoted incorrectly Todd D. Stern. He said it would be a "serious mistake" to leave the Paris agreement; he did not say a downward adjustment of United States commitments under the agreement would be a serious mistake.



Should US exit the Paris climate deal? Some fossil-fuel firms say no.

The Christian Science Monitor

8-10 minutes

May 2, 2017 —As a candidate, Donald Trump appealed to Americans' worries about jobs by vowing to pull the US out of the Paris climate agreement and end job-killing environmental regulations. But what happens if President Trump calls for a revolt on the international agreement and corporate America doesn't show up?

Increasingly, US businesses have been coming to the conclusion that they're better off if the United States sticks with the Paris accord. Although it may seem counterintuitive, oil and gas companies ranging from ExxonMobil to Royal Dutch Shell, and even coal company Cloud Peak Energy, are pressing the Trump administration not to withdraw from the accord. A dearth of corporate support for a pullout makes it less likely the president will carry through on his campaign promise to "cancel" the agreement.

It also suggests that US companies are looking beyond the Trump administration and seeing more strategic advantage in helping to shape regulation, rather than trying to stop it cold.

"Companies are looking at the Trump administration policies and they've seen this before in the Reagan years," says Andrew Hoffman, a professor of sustainable enterprise at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. "And they say: 'We've seen the blowback'" after President Reagan left office.

Businesses support the Paris accord for a range of reasons — from the altruistic to the less-than-noble. For oil companies, instead of backing out of the accord, "a smarter course would be to stay in Paris and weaken it from within," says Professor Hoffman.

That may sound cynical, but it's actually a business axiom that may prove key in helping to garner support from other businesses for climate-friendly policies, sustainability experts say.

"My definition of sustainable is doing the right thing for the environment and making money — and it's not always in that order," says Steve Hellem, president of Navista, a Washington-based public affairs group that helps companies and other entities meet their sustainability objectives. "It's the recognition that business will always do what is in its own best interest."

A rising business priority

More and more businesses are concluding that action to address climate change is in their interests, according to a report released last week by World Wildlife Fund, Ceres, Calvert Research and Management, and CDP (formerly, the Carbon Disclosure Project). Among Fortune 100 companies, 63 percent have set one or more clean energy targets; among Fortune 500 companies, 48 percent have at least one climate or clean energy target, up 5 percent since a 2014 report. And the plans are increasingly ambitious, according to the report. IBM, Microsoft, and some 190 other Fortune 500 companies report saving nearly \$3.7 billion in 2016 on energy efforts that reduced emissions by the equivalent of 45 coal-fired power plants.

Being climate-friendly is especially important to consumer-facing companies, which may explain why 72 percent of consumer staples firms in the Fortune 500 have set clean-energy goals. By contrast, the report finds that only 11 percent in the energy sector — where profits and carbon emissions often go hand-in-hand — have done the same.

Some business leaders conclude it's simply the right thing to do. And they hope the president is listening to their message.

"The voice of business is an important voice to hear," says Jim Epstein, the founder of an Elkwood, Va. food company, who was in Washington this week as part of the American Sustainable Business Council's effort to lobby Congress around the view that climate change and the environment align with free-market opportunity.

Other companies see the threat of climate change as a business opportunity, especially when it comes to selling new products and hiring the best and brightest Millennials, who tend to support climate-friendly policies.

This is even a factor in the fossil fuel sector. The natural-gas company Cheniere, for example, would benefit from a global shift from coal to natural gas-fired electricity. Coal companies see climate policy as a vehicle to receive support for carbon capture technology.

Risks in the fossil-fuel arena

The risks of not being climate-friendly have also risen, as oil and gas companies are finding out.

Some investors are beginning to flee the oil and gas sector. Last Thursday, Harvard University announced it was "pausing" investments in several fossil fuel interests, following similar moves from Columbia and Yale. These are the first steps toward potential divestment from influential institutional investors.

The risks of lawsuits are rising. Exxon, in particular, is the target of class-action suits and investigations by the attorneys general of New York and Massachusetts around the premise that the company knew that global warming and the threat of regulation were real, but continued to mislead shareholders about the value of its assets. The US Securities and Exchange Commission is also looking at the company's valuation of its oil reserves in a period of low prices and potential restrictions on carbon emissions.

Also last week, Moody's Investors Service released a research paper arguing that as soon as 2020, oil and gas companies' revenues could face material risks from lower demand for their products because of government policies, changing consumer preferences, and disruptive technologies, such as electric cars and alternative energy.

"The industry's product cannot be changed and no technology exists at scale to mitigate its carbon emissions," the report concluded. The Paris agreement "represents a substantial threat to the oil and gas industry."

So why would oil companies support it? One reason is that, as a voluntary agreement, it doesn't have any teeth, as opposed to the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan regulations, which many energy companies balked at and which the Trump administration is starting to dismantle.

"My guess is that we'll stay in [the Paris agreement] because it allows us to participate in the negotiations and it doesn't require us to do anything" specific, says Robert Brulle, a professor of sociology and environmental science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. That would give the companies time to try to delay or minimize regulations.

Hedging their bets?

This also may explain why oil companies often sound contradictory when addressing climate change. Exxon several years ago acknowledged that global warming was real and required action, but was still funding the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, which has questioned the role of human activity, according to a 2016 report by the American Geophysical Union.

Chevron, long an outspoken critic of climate legislation, last year opposed a shareholder resolution that it detail the business risks from climate legislation. But earlier this year, it became the first major oil

company to acknowledge in its 10-K annual report the heightened business risks from potential governmental investigations and private suits around climate change.

In March, Chevron chief executive John Watson said publicly that debate over climate change centers on humans' role in driving it, a common line among climate-change skeptics. But in the same month, the company released a report that said: "Chevron ... recognizes that the use of fossil fuels to meet the

world's energy needs contributes to the rising concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in Earth's atmosphere."

Hoffman explains that corporations are political entities that incorporate competing interests and are speaking to multiple audiences, just like governments. And at a time of regulatory uncertainty, it makes business sense for oil companies to hedge their bets.

Viewed from that perspective of business interests, the entire

climate debate could be made less politically divisive if it were recast as energy efficiency, argues Mr. Hellem of Navista.

"We've got these two tribes that are fighting each other," he says. "How do we get beyond that?"

Companies "are smart enough to recognize ... that they have to be responsible in the long haul," he adds. "Eventually, they are going to be held accountable by communities and states and families."

What's needed, he suggests, is a discussion about how to reduce emissions through energy efficiency, with conversion costs shared by businesses and taxpayers. With the right incentives that can show businesses how they will save money on energy costs, "there's no CEO who wouldn't do it."

Staff writer Mark Trumbull contributed to this report from Washington.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

5-6 minutes

May 2, 2017 7:03 p.m. ET

I'll admit it: I would have found it fascinating to be party to the discussions earlier this year that led to oscillating headlines on the New York Times home page referring to the new EPA chief Scott Pruitt alternately as a "denier" or "skeptic." At least it would have been fascinating for 20 minutes.

Ditto the hysterical discussions undoubtedly now arising from an anodyne piece of climate heterodoxy by the paper's newest columnist, a former Journal colleague who shall remain nameless, in which he advises, somewhat obscurely, less "certainty" about "data."

Whether or not this represents progress in how the U.S. media cover the climate debate, a trip down memory lane seems called for. In the 1980s, when climate alarms were first being widely sounded, reporters understood the speculative basis of computer models. We all said to ourselves: Well, in 30 years we'll certainly have the data to know for sure which model forecasts are valid.

Thirty years later, the data haven't answered the question. The 2014 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, voice of

Jenkins Jr. : Climate Editors Have a Meltdown

Holman W.
Jenkins, Jr.

climate orthodoxy, is cited for its claim, with 95% confidence, that humans are responsible for at least half the warming between 1951 and 2010.

Look closely. This is an estimate of the reliability of an estimate. It lacks the most important conjunction in science: "because"—as in "We believe X because of Y."

Not that the IPCC fails to offer a "because" in footnotes. It turns out this estimate is largely an estimate of how much man-made warming *should have taken place* if the models used to forecast future warming are broadly correct.

The IPCC has a bad reputation among conservatives for some of its press-release activities, but the reports themselves are basically numbing testimonies to how seriously scientists take their work. "If our models are reliable, then X is true" is a perfectly valid scientific statement. Only leaving out the prefix, as the media routinely does, makes it deceptive.

We don't know what the IPCC's next assessment report, due in 2021, will say on this vital point, known as climate sensitivity. But in 2013 it widened the range of uncertainty, and in the direction of less warming. Its current estimate is now identical to that of the 1979 Charney Report. On the key question, then, there has been no progress in 38 years.

For journalists, the climate beat has been singularly unrewarding. It has

consisted of waiting for an answer that doesn't come. By now, thanks to retirements and the mortality tables, the beat's originators are mostly gone. The job has passed into hands of reporters who don't even bother to feign interest in science—who think the magic word "consensus" is all the support they need for any climate claim they care to make.

Take Inside Climate News, an online publication, lately accruing degraded journalism prizes, whose title echoes a successful series of specialist newsletters like Inside EPA and Inside the Pentagon that charge fancy prices for detailed, crunchy, reliable information about the U.S. government.

Inside Climate News might sound like it's doing the same but it isn't. Search its website and the term "climate sensitivity," the central preoccupation of climate science, appears zero times. Any reporter who is truly curious about what scientists know and how they know it would not be working there. Asking such questions would only get him or her suspected of denialism.

But not even the EPA's Mr. Pruitt or the New York Times's newest recruit exhibits the ill grace to phrase the "so what" question.

"So what" is the most important question of all. So what if human activity is causing some measure of climate change if voters and politicians are unwilling to assume

the costs (possibly hugely disproportionate to any benefit) of altering the outcome of the normal evolution of energy markets and energy technology.

Even liberals have noticed that climate advocacy has morphed into a religion, unwilling to deal honestly with uncertainty or questions of cost and benefit. Climate apoplexy, like many single-issue obsessions, is now a form of entertainment for exercised minorities, allowing them to vent personal qualities that in most contexts they would be required to suppress.

Whether apocryphal or even a joke, who did not delight in the story of "Zach," the young Democratic staffer who supposedly stormed out of a postelection meeting after cursing the party's incompetent elders because, thanks to Hillary Clinton's defeat, "I'm going to die from climate change."

For the record, Zach, an estimate recently touted by the Washington Post precisely because it was five or 10 times worse than previous estimates had this to say about the consequences of climate change. If unaddressed, they would reduce economic growth by one-fifth over the next 85 years.

In other words, under the worst scenario, Zach's grandchildren's world would be only nine times richer than ours today.

Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition.

The New York Times

4-5 minutes

Wren McDonald

Every once in a while, President Trump says something that really makes sense, as when he suggested on Monday raising the

Editorial : Donald Trump's Very Good Idea: Raise the Gas Tax

The Editorial Board

federal gasoline tax to help pay for his infrastructure plan. Hold on to that thought, Mr. President. It's a great idea.

The federal fuel tax — 18.4 cents per gallon for gasoline and 24.4 cents for diesel — was supposed to pay to fix and expand the country's roads and transit systems, but Congress has refused to increase it since 1993. Between inflation and

the higher fuel economy of cars, the tax is hardly up to the job. Highway-related tax revenue was only \$37.4 billion in the 2015 fiscal year.

Small wonder then that many of the country's roads and transit systems are somewhere between shoddy and falling apart. The American Society of Civil Engineers recently gave the country's roads a grade of D and transit systems a D-. It said

the poor state of the roads cost the country \$160 billion in time and fuel in 2014. And the country's transit systems have a \$90 billion repair backlog, according to a government report published in January.

Nobody really knows how serious Mr. Trump was when he floated the idea of raising the gas tax in an interview with Bloomberg News. His press secretary, Sean Spicer,

realizing that the president might have touched the third rail of national Republican politics, quickly tried to scale back his comment, saying Mr. Trump was not endorsing a gas tax increase but merely considering it because the trucking industry had asked him to look into it. Still, even the fact that Mr. Trump is considering an increase is encouraging.

A higher gas tax is one way to help pay for Mr. Trump's \$1 trillion infrastructure plan without increasing the federal deficit. It would benefit Americans by shortening their commutes, creating jobs and reducing costs for car

repairs. Businesses would be able to ship raw materials and goods faster. All of that would bolster economic growth, which is probably why, in addition to truckers, the United States Chamber of Commerce and AAA support an increase.

A Tax That Isn't Up to the Job

Adjusted for inflation, the value of the federal tax on gasoline has eroded by almost 40 percent since 1993, the last time it was raised by Congress.

Many states, tired of waiting for Washington, have raised fuel taxes. Just last month, lawmakers in

California, Indiana, Montana and Tennessee voted for increases. Altogether, 21 states have done so since 2013, according to the American Road & Transportation Builders Association. But states cannot do the job alone. Many large infrastructure projects cross state lines and involve multiple modes of transportation, like road, freight rail and mass transit, putting them beyond the capacity of individual states.

Of course, there are substantial political obstacles to increasing the tax. Many conservatives, including the House speaker, Paul Ryan, and

the anti-tax ideologue Grover Norquist, oppose the idea.

Mr. Trump has, so far, shown little interest in or aptitude for the kind of effort that gets legislation through Congress. He could seek some inspiration by looking to President Ronald Reagan, who in 1982 persuaded Congress to pass a 5-cent-a-gallon increase in the fuel tax. "The cost to the average motorist will be small," Reagan said, "but the benefit to our transportation system will be immense."

The
Washington
Post

gtonpostopinions

4-5 minutes

Editorial : Trump has a good tax idea. Here's how to make it work.

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

during an interview with Bloomberg News, to the effect that he "would certainly consider" increasing the federal excise tax on motor fuels to help pay for an increase in federal infrastructure spending.

Mr. Trump's one condition should present no obstacle: He said he could support a hike only if the money went to pay for highways, but the law already requires that it go into a trust fund dedicated to the purpose. Beyond that, his statement was just right. The two main revenue sources of that trust fund — an 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gasoline tax and a 24.4 cents-per-gallon tax on diesel — have not been raised since 1993. That is to say, they have been cut, when you take inflation into account, by 40 percent over the past 24 years. Consequently, the Highway Trust Fund (which also subsidizes mass transit) is chronically underfunded and transportation needs are going unmet. Frightened of being labeled tax-raisers, presidents and members of Congress from both parties have shied away from increasing the levy or even letting it

keep pace with inflation. Politicians chose instead to adopt a bill in December 2015 that purported to replenish the trust fund through such unsustainable budgetary gimmicks as a raid on the Federal Reserve's cash flow.

Mr. Trump said he has been influenced by a friend in the trucking industry, which both benefits from a well-maintained road system and suffers from an insufficient one, in the form of congestion and vehicle damage. Accordingly, American Trucking Associations has long favored higher fuel taxes. The user-fee approach to paying for the roads makes sense for ordinary motorists as well: It's penny-wise and pound-foolish to resist slightly higher prices at the pump, because automobile drivers, too, must pay for pothole-caused damage and time lost to traffic.

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Of course no one likes to pay more for fuel; policy should be adjusted to

help mitigate the impact of this inevitably regressive levy on those who can least afford it. Still, at \$2.38 per gallon, Tuesday's nationwide average price of regular gasoline was less than what Americans paid 70 years ago, adjusted for inflation. The tax increase needed to cover currently planned Highway Trust Fund spending would be small — roughly a dime per gallon, according to a 2015 Congressional Budget Office report. Ideally, Congress and the Trump administration could agree to a significantly larger amount, then index it to inflation permanently to assure the trust fund's long-term stability.

By the way, a higher gas tax would help reduce fuel consumption and thus would be extremely effective in combating climate change as well. Admittedly, that's not exactly one of Mr. Trump's favorite causes. But he wouldn't have to include it in his talking points.

THE WALL
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Melloan : Give Trade Paranoia the Heave-Ho

George Melloan

6-8 minutes

Donald Trump's frequent cries of "America First!" raised fears that he was launching a war against global trade in a misguided effort to "save" American jobs. Those fears are subsiding, as recent Journal articles have noted.

The Trump threat to tear up the North American Free Trade Agreement awakened the farm lobby: *Hey, wait a minute, we sell a lot of food to Mexico!* NAFTA will now be treated more carefully. Congress is in no hurry to finance the Great Wall of the Rio Grande, and

certainly Mexico won't. Mr. Trump's nativist in chief, Steve Bannon, is being trumped by wiser heads, at least sometimes. The president ended his announcement of the strike on Syria with a globalist touch: "God bless the world."

But Mr. Trump turns a friendly ear to the everlasting protectionist demands of the softwood-lumber and steel industries. So it's not a bad time for Washington to get a refresher course in market economics and what does and doesn't create jobs. Politicians are constantly tempted to go to war with markets in a bid to win votes. When they do, they and their constituencies always lose. Markets are a force of nature, and attempts

to use the state's police powers to crush them invariably end in misery. Ask the Russians—or, for that matter, the survivors of 1970s price controls in the U.S.

American nativists last year adopted "globalization" as a newly discovered menace. Yet there's nothing new about globalization. It got going five centuries ago when Europeans invented large, square-rigged ships that could travel long distances on the open ocean without reprovisioning. To what purpose? A bright fourth-grader will most likely give the right answer: to expand trade.

The Dutch, English, Portuguese and Spanish sailed with goods from Europe to trade for the silks of

China, the spices of Java or the gold of the Andes, though the last they mostly stole. Trade gained momentum with new goods yielded by the Industrial Revolution. A merchant class grew and began to match the power of the landed aristocracy. A middle class was born and has expanded enormously, world-wide, ever since.

Today's world is "globalized" like never before. In the space of 38 years, China has become a great trading nation again, lifting millions out of poverty. India is shedding the post-1947 socialist torpor inflicted on its people by English academics. Trade barriers have vanished in Europe along with its history of bloody warfare. With the steady

evolution of an educated middle class and more-enlightened leadership—and despite the atavistic forces always in play—more people than ever enjoy new social and economic opportunities.

Economist Robert Mundell, who helped create the euro, has long argued that there is only one economy, the one created by the peoples of this planet. Multinational corporations like IBM, Toyota and BASF may have national identities, but their factories, supply chains, sales offices and investors are networks that blanket the globe. Private bankers and government central banks exchange currencies at the rate of \$5 trillion a day to provide the global economy with money. Growth of that \$80 trillion economy exceeds 3% annually, outpacing U.S. growth thanks to the burgeoning of places like China and India. A rising tide of trade lifts all boats.

In the post-World War II era, Republicans and Democrats alike knew that the road to economic recovery was paved with trade. The Kennedy Round

lowering of trade barriers in the 1960s was an enormous success. The U.S. promoted a borderless European economic union and created NATO to protect its members from stifling Soviet imperialism. Americans were enthused by Deng Xiaoping's 1979 decision to open up China to trade and were soon investing in this massive and highly successful enterprise.

Americans lose jobs to global competition, but also to domestic competition and, most important, to automation and technological advancement as old industries disappear and new ones form. There's dislocation, but today, despite everything, unemployment is 4.5% of the workforce, close to the 4% statistical definition of full employment.

The slow economic growth in the U.S. over the past decade has resulted not from what the world has done to America but what America has done to itself, according to a Council on Foreign Relations study "How America Stacks Up." It says that the U.S.

"depends far more on the global economy than it did two decades ago, and international trade and foreign investment are increasingly vital to U.S." It also finds that while the U.S. national economy remains by far the world's dominant one, it has grown less so over that period.

One big reason is that "though the United States once had among the lowest corporate tax rates in the industrialized world it now has the highest." As the study confirms and Republican tax reformers in Congress understand, those high rates are not big revenue producers because multinationals choose not to bring home their overseas earnings for the IRS to grab.

The CFR report cites two other reasons why capital investment in the U.S., both domestic and foreign, has suffered: the explosion of business regulation, and soaring national debt and entitlement obligations. These burdens cast doubt on the U.S. capacity for further growth. The U.S. continues to "underperform" in exports relative to other advanced economies, the study says.

What are the lessons for the Trump team? Tell Mr. Bannon to hit the showers. Revive the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations with Japan and 10 other Pacific Rim countries, which Mr. Trump injudiciously scuttled. Also pursue the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiation with Europe. Trade agreements are not only good economic policy but good foreign policy.

Most important, devote full attention to what Barack Obama and the progressives broke. Make a new start on ObamaCare reform. Accelerate the scrapping of antibusiness regulation. And press ahead with tax reform. If those efforts succeed, American business can hold its own in competition with anyone in the world.

Mr. Melloan, a former deputy editor of the Journal editorial page, is author of "When the New Deal Came to Town" (Threshold Editions, 2016).

Appeared in the May. 03, 2017, print edition.



Bloomberg : Trump's promise to bring back coal jobs is worse than a con

By Michael Bloomberg
5-6 minutes

By Michael Bloomberg May 2 at 7:54 PM

The writer, New York City mayor from 2002 to 2013, is the founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies and co-author of the book "Climate of Hope."

"We need to keep it open so we have jobs." Those are the words of a retired miner, explaining why the local mining operation is so important to his community. But he wasn't talking about a coal mine in Appalachia. He was referring to a local asbestos mine — in Russia.

Through the 1970s, the United States was one of the world's top producers of asbestos, which is a set of naturally occurring silicate minerals. As evidence mounted that exposure to asbestos fibers can be deadly, the federal government began limiting its use in consumer and commercial products. Demand for asbestos declined, legal liabilities soared, and the last U.S. asbestos mine closed in 2002. Those jobs have gone overseas, to places such as Russia, China and Kazakhstan, where asbestos mining and production face few restrictions. Yet there has been no political

clamor to put American asbestos miners back to work.

Now consider the coal industry. Pollution from coal-fired power plants kills about 7,500 Americans each year, according to the Clean Air Task Force, an environmental group. That number is down from 13,000 in 2010 for a simple reason: Two hundred and fifty-one of the nation's 523 coal plants have since closed or are being phased out. This decline has been driven by a combination of two powerful forces: cheaper alternative fuels (such as natural gas and renewable energy) and rising consumer demand for cleaner energy that won't pollute the air and water that communities breathe and drink.

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But that decline in power plants isn't the main culprit behind the decline in coal mining jobs. There were 220,000 jobs in the industry in 1980. In the decades that followed, as production increased, jobs declined, because technology and automation made it possible to extract more coal with far fewer miners. When production peaked in 2008 — before coal plants started closing en masse — only 82,000 jobs remained.

There are now about 65,000 jobs left. That number will continue to fall in the years ahead, as technological advancements continue to displace workers and as cleaner and cheaper forms of energy continue to displace the industry itself.

The fact is, putting coal miners back to work is no more possible from a business standpoint than putting telegraph operators back to work taking Morse code or putting Eastman Kodak employees back to work manufacturing film rolls.

Politicians who ignore these market realities and make promises to coal communities they can't keep are engaged in something worse than a con. They are telling those communities, in effect: The best hope they have, and that their children have, is to be trapped in a dying industry that will poison them.

I don't believe that's true. We can save lives by ending coal production — just as we did with asbestos production — while also helping communities make the transition to 21st-century jobs. Doing that will not be easy, nor can it be accomplished quickly — that's why politicians pander with empty promises. But it is the right thing to do both for coal communities and the entire country. It's time for local, state and federal leaders to face up to the task.

Those outside of government can play a role, too. While making "From the Ashes," a new film about coal's impact on our health, climate and economy, my foundation featured several local organizations in Appalachia and the West that are working to create good jobs outside of mining. At least one of those groups is facing the possibility of losing its federal funding. To prevent that from happening, we have decided to step in to provide what the group stands to lose — and by matching a portion of donations from the public. We'll also support efforts in Western states aimed at spurring job growth in professions outside of mining.

The transformation of the energy market away from coal and toward cleaner energy is bringing extraordinary health and economic benefits to the nation — there are now about 500,000 Americans working in the solar and wind industries. But those jobs are dispersed around the country, and coal regions face concentrated job losses that can harm families and depress local economies. We shouldn't let government off the hook for helping them — but we shouldn't sit back and wait for Washington to act, either.

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Rampell : Trump's nifty plan to spend more and hurt poor people more — at the same time!

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

5-7 minutes

Who says President Trump isn't a policy genius? He's figured out a clever way to spend more government money just to stick it to poor people.

His innovation has to do with the intricate interplay of Affordable Care Act subsidies.

Obamacare has two major kinds of subsidies designed to make health care cheaper for low- and middle-income Americans buying insurance on the exchanges. The first is a tax credit that helps enrollees pay their premiums. The second, which is a bit less well-known, is called "cost-sharing reductions." These subsidies shrink poor people's out-of-pocket health spending — for example, the co-pays and deductibles that apply when they fill a prescription or see their doctor.

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Here's how that second subsidy works.

Obamacare plans are offered in different "metal" levels, which refer to the share of total health costs plans are expected to cover ("bronze" plans cover 60 percent on average, "silver" 70 percent, "gold" 80 percent, "platinum" 90 percent). The law says that to participate in the marketplaces, insurers have to offer lower-income people a special deal: They can buy silver-level

plans but still get closer to gold- or platinum-level coverage.

About half of enrollees in the exchanges benefit from these subsidies, and their savings can be huge. For those making below 150 percent of the poverty line, combined medical and prescription drug deductibles are reduced by \$3,354 on average, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study.

Every month, the government reimburses insurers for the costs required to offer this more generous coverage for poor people. But the Trump administration has lately been cagey about how long this will continue.

In 2014, House Republicans sued the Obama administration over this spending; they argued it was illegal because Congress never explicitly appropriated the money for it. A federal judge sided with Republicans last year, but that ruling is on hold while the case is on appeal, and the Trump administration has not indicated whether it will continue defending it.

Last week the administration said it would continue the payments for the time being. But then a Sunday-morning tweet from Trump suggested the end was nigh.

If in fact the subsidies disappear — or even if their funding just remains in doubt for long enough to cause insurers to panic — both bleeding-heart liberals and fiscal conservatives should worry. That's because (a) poor people would lose access to health care; and (b) perhaps counterintuitively, the government would have to spend

even more money on health insurance.

Let's start with (b).

Even if the government reimbursements ended, insurers would still be required by law to continue guaranteeing poor people reduced out-of-pocket spending on silver plans. Where would they get the money for that? Mostly likely by raising premiums on these same silver plans — by about 20 percent, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

President Trump addressed supporters in Harrisburg, Pa., on April 29 marking his first 100 days in office and renewed his promise to "repeal and replace" Obamacare. President Trump addressed supporters in Harrisburg, Pa., on April 29, promising to save health care. (The Washington Post)

(The Washington Post)

And that's where things really go awry — and where the structure of Obamacare creates a domino effect that costs the government billions more.

Recall that the other kind of subsidy offered to poor and middle-income people on the Obamacare exchanges is a tax credit on premiums.

The amount of this credit happens to be pegged to silver-plan premiums. If premium prices increase for the benchmark silver plan, then the size of tax credits for *everyone* eligible for tax credits also increases. This is true even for those choosing something other than a silver plan, and even if the

underlying premiums on their chosen plans don't rise at all.

As a result, the government would be on the hook for about \$12.3 billion in additional premium tax credits, outweighing the \$10 billion it would save by killing out-of-pocket-spending subsidies.

Of course, the other way insurers might deal with the elimination of cost-sharing reduction payments is just to exit the marketplaces altogether. Anthem and Molina have both threatened to do so.

A possible wave of departures, as well as the general chaos likely to result from sharp premium hikes, would result in more hardship and less insurance coverage for poor and middle-class Americans. A broad, bipartisan alliance of insurers, health providers, anti-poverty advocates, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Governors Association and state insurance commissioners have all argued as much.

So has Trump himself, incidentally. With the Obamacare repeal-and-replace plan still in limbo, even some House Republicans are calling for these subsidies to continue.

Insurers have a few more weeks to decide whether to stick around for the 2018 exchanges, and at what price. If Trump doesn't commit to these subsidies by then, expect a full individual-market meltdown — for which Trump will take the blame.

Hey, nobody knew messing up American health care could be so complicated.