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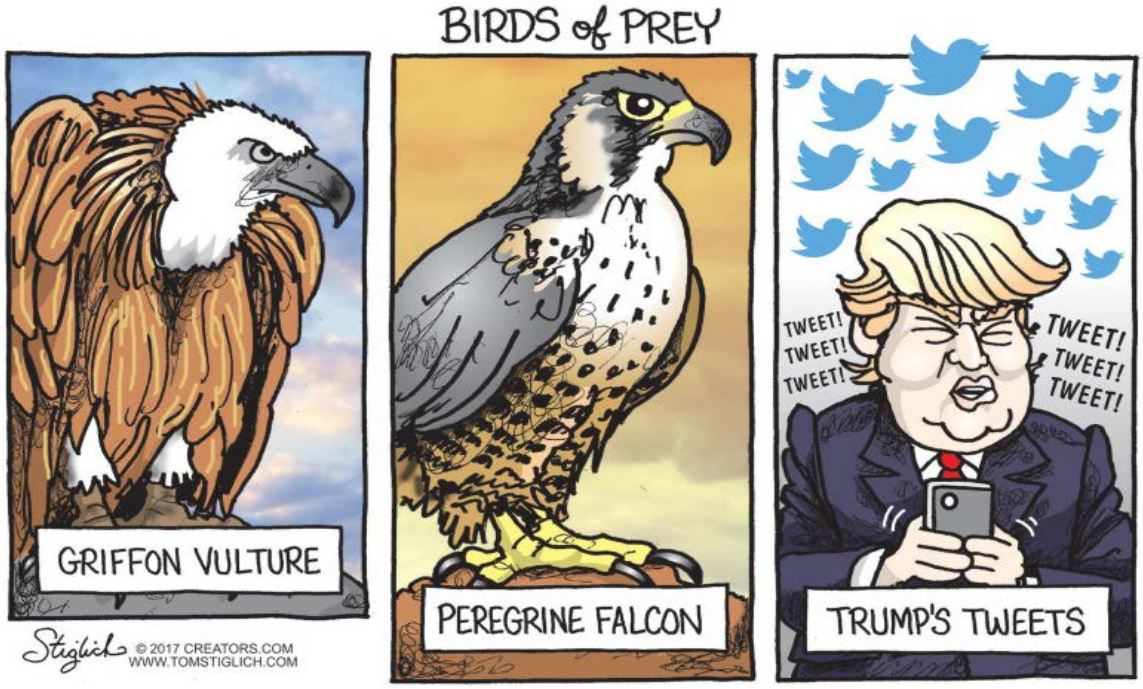

FRANCE - EUROPE 3

Marine Le Pen will have few friends in France's new Parliament 3
EN LIGNE - 2 Ministers Allied With Emmanuel Macron Resign in France 3
Ethics probes hijack Macron's 'moralizing' presidency.4
Ross : Emmanuel Macron Is Facing the 'Mother of All Battles' 4
French Growth Picking Up as Macron Pursues Change.5
Terrorism in Britain: How do you build bridges when 'enough is enough'? 6
Moghul : Trump's silence after attack on Muslims speaks volumes 7
The Political Kindling of the Grenfell Fire.....7
Editorial : More Doubts Are Raised Over Mrs. May's Leadership.....8
O'Sullivan : Theresa May's Troubles and 'The Troubles' 9
Britain's path to hard Brexit revealed in queen's speech.....9
Merkel Signals Openness to Eurozone Reforms.....10
Douglas Murray Book Excerpt: The Roots of the European Crisis.....11
Strokes : The EU Is Alive and Well, But the Referendums Are Coming.....12
Editors : Europe's Unserious Plan for Greece 12
Ukraine's Poroshenko Meets With Trump.....13
Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko met with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and then, briefly, enjoyed a "drop-in" visit with President Donald Trump on Tuesday. 13
Vladimir Putin's man in the Balkans 14

INTERNATIONAL.....15

American Warplane Shoots Down Iranian-Made Drone Over Syria 15
U.S. Military Shoots Down 'Hostile' Drone in Syria 15
Podesta & Katulis : Trump's silent surge in the Middle East — and the slippery slope to war.....15
Saudi King Names Son Crown Prince, Upending Royal Succession 16
Saudi King Salman Ousts Nephew as Crown Prince, Installs Son.....16
Al-Shabaab Kills 15 in Latest Car Bomb Attack 17
UNE - After Otto Warmbier's death, tourism to North Korea comes under scrutiny.....17

UNE - China Falls Short on Curbing North Korea, Trump Says 18
Trump signals shifting approach to North Korea after death of U.S. student 19
Lewis : North Korea Would Not Hesitate to Kill You . 20
North Korea & Otto Warmbier -- Brutal Murder Deserves U.S. Response 20
High Noon in North Korea: Is Trump Ready for War? 21
Why Trump's Foreign Policy Can't Be Stopped 22

ETATS-UNIS 23
UNE - Karen Handel Wins Georgia Special Election, Fending Off Upstart Democrat 24
UNE - GOP's Karen Handel Beats Democrat Jon Ossoff in Georgia 24
Republican Karen Handel defeats Democrat Jon Ossoff in Georgia's 6th Congressional District 26
Rubin : In Georgia's 6th District, is Handel's victory of great consequence — or none at all? 27
Handel Georgia Victory, Ossoff Defeat Disrupts Anti Trump Narrative 27
Trump spikes the ball after Georgia election win 28
Psaki: Democrats, don't lose your cool over Georgia vote 29
Bruni : After Georgia Election, Democrats Are Demoralized, Again 29
Jon Ossoff's Loss in Georgia Is a Gut Punch for Democrats 30
Murphy : Jon Ossoff's $23 Million Loss Shows Dems Have No Idea How to Win in the Age of Trump 31
Shapiro : Apocalyptic Politics' Dangerous Appeal, Left & Right 31
Senate GOP leaders will present health bill this week, even as divisions flare 32
Editorial : The Health Care of Millions Depends on a Few Senators 33
Editorial : GOP's secret Trumpcare bill will impact a sixth of the U.S. economy. What could possibly go wrong? 34
Republicans Will Continue to Stick With Secrecy as Long as It Works 34
Editorial : The U.S. government is still spying on Americans. Here are some fixes for that 35
O'Brien : Trump, Russia, and Those Shadowy Sater Deals at Bayrock 36
Klaas : The Donald Trump hiring crisis means America's got no talent 39

FRANCE - EUROPE

Marine Le Pen will have few friends in France's new Parliament

By James McAuley

PARIS — A little more than a month ago, France's far right seemed on the cusp of power.

But the populist fervor that swept Britain and the United States never reached the same pitch in France, and the National Front fell into disarray when Emmanuel Macron crushed Marine Le Pen in May's presidential election. Now, the party is facing the reality that it will have minimal representation in Parliament.

While Le Pen had hoped that her party might serve as the principal opposition to Macron's majority, the National Front earned only eight of the 577 parliamentary seats, according to totals from Sunday's second round of voting. The result was particularly stunning given that the party had gotten more than one-third of the votes cast in the final round of the presidential election.

There was, however, a silver lining: a seat for Le Pen herself, a small but symbolic victory that some said would enshrine the far-right leader in France's political establishment.

In her victory speech, Le Pen, elected in the northern, industrial constituency of Hénin-Beaumont, insisted that her party retained an important role. "Facing a bloc that represents the interests of the oligarchy, we are the only force of resistance," she said.

Le Pen has been a presence in French political life for decades, although she has never held a major office in the national government. While her father, the convicted Holocaust denier Jean-Marie Le Pen, and her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, have both served in France's Parliament, she never has.

For political analysts, her victory strengthened her personal brand and her chances of remaining party leader. The National Front's total number of parliamentary seats also rose from two to eight — an expansion but far short of what the party had expected.

"The victory of Marine Le Pen is an important thing for her personal image," said Jean-Yves Camus, a leading expert on the radical right. "If her leadership is contested, she can say she was very comfortably elected."

The National Front had approached the presidential election in a confident mood, with polls showing Le Pen at No. 2 in a crowded field of aspirants. She had vowed to "de-demonize" the party, long associated with anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

But during the campaign, she denied France's complicity in an infamous World War II roundup of Jews and named as an interim party head a man who once reportedly challenged the fact that Zyklon B was used in the Nazi gas chambers. She also performed poorly in a critical pre-election debate, and proved incapable of capturing the kind of anti-establishment zeal that contributed to the election of President Trump and Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

Her crushing defeat by Macron led to a crisis in the National Front, with party aides — and even members of the Le Pen family — pointing the finger at one another in public.

After that debacle, there were those — even among the party's supporters — who said that the National Front would perhaps be better served by a total transformation, including a new name and a leader from outside the Le Pen family.

Her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, minced no words Tuesday when he insisted that his daughter should step down as party leader following the disappointing parliamentary results. "You outlive your usefulness when you start harming your party by your policy stances or your stubbornness," the elder Le Pen told reporters, having been locked out of a party meeting at National Front headquarters outside Paris.

The party's co-founder, now 89, was expelled from his party in 2015 after reiterating, in an interview, his view that the Nazi gas chambers were a "detail of history," and is nominally estranged from his daughter. But the elder Le Pen retains an honorary title, and the organization he controls contributed significantly to his daughter's 2017 campaign.

Yet with Marine Le Pen's ascent to Parliament, any such "transformation" is unlikely to come anytime soon, Camus said.

"It gives the party a new voice in the National Assembly," said Camus, referring to the Parliament's lower house. He said that the party leader "has been playing a long game for victory."

Le Pen had unsuccessfully tried four previous times to win a parliamentary seat.

In interviews with The Washington Post during the presidential campaign this spring, both Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, 27, emphasized that regardless of election outcomes, a majority of French voters agreed with their program. "We won the battle of ideas," Maréchal-Le Pen said in April.

But election results would suggest otherwise.

Marine Le Pen, in her victory speech, suggested that the National Front represented a silent majority of voters, if not any kind of significant parliamentary presence.

"It is scandalous that our party — which won 7.6 million votes in the first round of the presidential election and 3 million more in the second round — cannot obtain a group at the assembly," she said Sunday.

A "group" in France's Parliament requires at least 15 seats. Such groups help set the parliamentary agenda and are entitled to certain resources, such as extra office space and larger shares of public funds. Initially, pollsters had said Le Pen could win as many as 50 seats in the legislative elections.

In the end, she received about one-sixth of that number.

But if the political prospects of the National Front remain unclear, the party will have at least some kind of future, Camus noted, especially with Le Pen in Parliament.

As he put it: "It's a party that's going to last for a while."

EN LIGNE - 2 Ministers Allied With Emmanuel Macron Resign in France

Aurelien Breeden and Benoît Morenne

Mr. Bayrou and Ms. de Sarnez are cornerstones of the MoDem, or Democratic Movement, a centrist party led by Mr. Bayrou that aligned with Mr. Macron during the presidential campaign. Ms. Goulard was elected to the European Parliament with the MoDem in 2009 and 2014, but has recently distanced herself from the party.

Mr. Macron's party, the Republic on the Move, and the MoDem won 350 of 577 seats in the elections for the National Assembly, securing a strong mandate to enact the president's planned overhaul.

Because his party won more than 289 seats, an absolute majority, Mr. Macron will not need to rely on his centrist allies for votes.

The MoDem has come under investigation about allegations that it used European Union funds to pay aides who were actually doing work for the party. In 2009, six of its members were elected or re-elected to the European Parliament, including Ms. de Sarnez and Ms. Goulard.

Mr. Bayrou and other members of the MoDem have denied any wrongdoing.

Mr. Macron, who was elected on May 7, promised to run an honest and transparent government. Mr. Bayrou had made ambitious ethics changes a condition to his alliance with Mr. Macron, and he had recently been tasked with designing a sweeping ethics bill.

Georges Fenech, a top official with the center-right Republican Party, now the main opposition group in the National Assembly, said in a statement that the resignations showed that Mr. Macron had "played

for time" and had "fooled the electorate" by waiting to let the ministers go until after the elections.

"It is a rude awakening for the French, who had hoped for a new era in politics," Mr. Fenech said.

Mr. Bayrou's integrity and that of his party allies first came under fire last month, after a member of the far-right National Front party sent a letter to prosecutors hinting that parliamentary aides of MoDem lawmakers at the European Parliament had actually been working for their party. Prosecutors opened an investigation on June 9. The National Front is under investigation over similar allegations.

According to the newspaper Libération, as many as 11 MoDem employees were being paid with European funds as local aides to the party's European lawmakers. One of them worked as Mr. Bayrou's personal secretary.

Mr. Bayrou was also criticized for calling the head of the investigative team at a French radio station to complain about its work on the MoDem. He said he was acting as a "citizen" exercising his right to criticize the media, but many said the move was inappropriate.

Another member of Mr. Macron's cabinet, Richard Ferrand, who was minister for territorial cohesion, on Monday. Mr. Ferrand, an early Macron ally, has been under investigation over claims he favored his wife in a lucrative real estate deal while he was the head of a mutual health fund, before becoming a lawmaker.

Mr. Ferrand, a former Socialist who was re-elected on Sunday, was asked to leave the cabinet to take the helm of the new pro-Macron bloc in Parliament.

Ms. de Sarnez, who also won a seat in the National Assembly last week, is expected to preside over the MoDem group of lawmakers. Mr. Bayrou remains a mayor, and Ms. Goulard will continue as a member of the European Parliament.

POLITICO

Ethics probes hijack Macron's 'moralizing' presidency

Pierre Briançon

PARIS — In what looks like becoming the first crisis of Emmanuel Macron's presidency, Defense Minister Sylvie Goulard said she had "asked" not to be part of the cabinet due to be re-appointed Wednesday in what was supposed to be a post-election formality.

Goulard, a former member of the European Parliament, is one of the four ministers facing allegations of unethical behavior who have been put under a "preliminary probe" by French prosecutors.

On Monday, Richard Ferrand, a former Socialist MP appointed to the helm of the big Regions ministry barely a month ago, learned from Macron that he would leave the government and be sent to head the parliamentary group of the president's party, La République En Marche.

That leaves two ministers still under a cloud: François Bayrou, the justice minister and head of centrist party Modem, whose support helped Macron clinch the presidency; and his close ally Marielle de Sarnez, the European affairs minister. Whether they will remain in the new cabinet is anyone's guess.

Goulard said in a statement Tuesday she wanted "to be free to demonstrate good faith and all the work [she] did" as an MEP. She is contesting allegations that she, like others, had her parliamentary assistant work for Modem in Paris, which could amount to misuse of MEP funds.

It was unclear whether the short-lived minister resigned of her own volition or pre-empted being ousted from Macron's second cabinet.

As is the custom after a new parliament is elected, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe handed in the government's collective resignation to the president on Monday. Philippe was immediately re-appointed by Macron, who asked him to appoint a new team.

What was meant to be a simple, technical move quickly followed by the re-appointment of ministers is turning into a headache for Macron because the allegations against his ministers don't fit well with the new president's promise to "moralize" French politics.

Macron's party won a resounding majority in the National Assembly on June 18, with 308 seats in the 577-strong lower house of parliament. Its ally, Modem, won another 48 seats.

Ferrand, who is one of Macron's oldest allies, is the target of a preliminary probe into allegations of nepotism during the years he headed a small mutual insurance company in the Brittany region.

Safe haven

Although Philippe denied that Ferrand's move to the parliamentary position was a demotion, it could help contain the consequences of a political crisis. Ferrand could have been forced out of the cabinet in coming months if investigative judges decide there are sufficient grounds to put him under formal probe (*mise en examen*) as opposed to just a preliminary one.

Macron has always pledged that any minister placed under formal probe would have to go. Due to the separation of powers, he obviously can't make the same promise regarding heads of parliamentary groups or committees.

The new safe-haven status of parliamentary group leaders seemed to be confirmed by de Sarnez on Tuesday, when she said her immediate options were open and that she would either remain a minister or chair the Modem group in the National Assembly.

The ethics scandal comes at the worst possible time for the French president for two reasons. The first is that Bayrou, the most visible figure to be hit by the allegations, was about to defend a parliamentary bill on "restoring confidence" in the political process, which he had originally wanted to call a bill on "moralizing politics." It's hard to see now how he could have the authority to defend the bill as justice minister.

The second problem for Macron is that it suggests the aloof "Jupiterian" stance he has adopted as president has its limits. He can be accused of being either disconnected or calculating. In the first interpretation, he failed to understand that the ethics problem wouldn't go away, and failed to act swiftly. In the second, he cynically waited until after the second round of the election to act, in order not to lose too many votes due to the nascent scandal.

Bayrou told Le Monde on Tuesday that Goulard's decision was "strictly personal" and he wasn't considering doing the same thing. But one of the newly-elected MPs from the Macron party said he and a few other colleagues would like to see Bayrou go. "It would nicely clean the slate, and we can move forward from now on with the legislative agenda without interference," he said.

Philippe, for his part, said Bayrou had a "vocation to remain" in the cabinet. The centrist leader may then have remembered that Philippe used the exact same expression to talk about Ferrand's political prospects two weeks ago.

FP Foreign Policy

Ross : Emmanuel Macron Is Facing the 'Mother of All Battles'

France is currently marveling at the successes of President Emmanuel Macron. So it should. Relatively unknown not long ago, Macron's centrist presidential campaign took off like wildfire, and shortly thereafter his brand-new "Republic on the Move" party dominated parliamentary elections. But the country would be wise to reserve judgment: Nobody yet knows whether Macron's political virtuosity in elections will be transferrable to policymaking — and his next battle promises to be his most difficult to date.

At the center of Macron's agenda is a vow to immediately focus on reforming France's labor laws, not just to revitalize France but the listless European Union as well. He will no doubt seek to rally his voters behind him, but the depth of their commitment will be tested. Some of the country's militant, risk-taking labor unions — which have managed to stymie major attempts at labor law reform in the past — may be bracing for a fight.

France's labor laws were written mainly in the years of postwar reconstruction and rapid industrial growth and reflect both the country's deep statism and firm beliefs that the age of manufacturing would be permanent. Their regulations touch on almost every aspect of French working life, from collective bargaining to working conditions and hours to vacations, contracts, and grievance procedures to which institutions can represent workers. They have fit less well in the post-industrial era. As long-term, well-protected jobs have declined and less secure service jobs have expanded, the labor market has

become segmented between a diminishing number of workers with stable contracts and an expanding group in more precarious situations, a trend accentuated by lower growth and higher unemployment. Union membership has declined from nearly 30 percent of the workforce in the 1970s to 11 percent today — and much of that is concentrated in the public sector. Strikes, for which France was once notorious, have declined in parallel.

The labor code still stands, however, despite multiple efforts by Macron's predecessors to reform it — a testament to the fact that, when they want to, French unions can still strike with paralyzing effect. Macron learned this during the most recent attempt at major labor reforms in 2015-2016, when he was finance minister under the François Hollande presidency, in which ambitious proposals were watered-down versions because of union mobilization.

Macron now seeks to bring France closer to a Scandinavian-style system of "flexi-security." This will eventually include helping those out of work to transition between jobs less painfully through revamped unemployment insurance plans and more effective worker training programs: a gradual shift toward protecting workers rather than protecting jobs. But his initial measures are aimed at giving companies more flexibility in dealing with employees. Tough requirements for dismissing workers will be streamlined by capping severance costs and lightening legal procedures. Working-time regulations will be loosened, allowing much more flexible scheduling, albeit without completely abandoning France's present 35-hour workweek. In theory, such changes, by making it easier to fire workers and to adjust their schedules to fit business needs, will also make it easier to hire them. The multiple institutions that currently represent workers — on shop floors, in labor tribunals, and in social programs — are also to be consolidated, probably into one. Most controversially, collective bargaining will be decentralized from the sectoral to firm level. These measures, depending upon their details, could weaken existing union confederations; they are unlikely to surrender gently. Also at play are the deep divisions and rivalries within French organized labor, which, historically, have tended to push some unions toward great militancy to gain the upper hand in the competition for members, funding, and bargaining power.

Chronic divisions among the major French union confederations have been around as long as French capitalism. During earlier postwar decades, the pro-communist CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) dominated but had to compete with the stodgy social Catholic CFTC (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) and the anti-communist FO (Force Ouvrière). Each had its particular strongholds, but their rivalries were deeply motivated by Cold War politics: The CGT, a descendant of earlier anarcho-syndicalist movements, tended to pull out all the militant stops against anything it saw as pro-American. The FO, nurtured by American unions and intelligence services, resisted the CGT almost no matter what it did, while the CFTC drew its support from practicing Catholics and anti-communist, anti-class conflict church doctrine. These dynamics have shifted over the years: The CGT has remained rebellious, but its main rival is now the energetic, reformist CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail), which split from the CFTC in the mid-1960s; the FO, meanwhile, has slowly abandoned its visceral anti-communism.

Still, over the decades these divisions have fed patterns of conflict, in which unions often targeted their rivals as energetically as they did employers or the state.

And in these interunion fights, the CGT's aggressive militancy has proved an especially rewarding tactic; it tends to spark conflicts that other confederations, in turn, feel obliged to join. In the past, the CGT initiated crippling strikes in the public sector — on Parisian public transport and the railroads in particular — which have helped block change and, in some cases, had lasting political consequences. The strikes of 1995, in particular, stand out. After new President Jacques Chirac's first prime minister, Alain Juppé, proposed sweeping changes to public pensions and the co-managed organization of other social policies, CGT troops shut down Paris and much of the rest of the country for several weeks. Juppé's reforms were defeated, and Chirac's party was crushed in legislative elections two years later; the 2015-2016 clashes were less spectacular but played out similarly.

Macron knows that this history could threaten his reform plans. To make it difficult for unions to protest, he has thus decided to reform by decrees (though the specific new rules will still eventually have to be approved by Parliament before they become law). Further, he wants to move immediately, to place unions at a disadvantage. Not much but vacationing happens over summer in France, and the French do not take kindly to strikes disrupting their holidays. Macron's goal is to complete the reforms by the time citizens have resumed their post-vacation routines in late September. The procedure requires that France's "social partners" — unions and employers — be "consulted," so 48 consultation sessions have been scheduled until July 21. In these talks, Macron hopes further to divide the unions by seducing the more compliant CFDT, now slightly larger than the CGT, to cooperate in exchange for some influence over the reforms' contents. The CFDT has already announced conditional willingness to accept decentralized bargaining but opposes new legal limits on penalties for abusive firing.

CGT and FO union leaders, by contrast, have made their skepticism clear during these initial consultations, though they have been at pains to maintain a respectful and polite tone with a popular president at the height of his post-victory honeymoon. The CGT's tough general secretary, Philippe Martinez, has announced that "weakening the rights and protection of wage earners is … the equivalent of authorizing social dumping." The FO leader has added that "social policies should not be adjustment variables tied to economic dogma." Both are contemplating opposition but haven't committed yet. What follows will depend on the reforms' final details and on whether in a pro-Macron political climate they risk alienating too many citizens by mounting all-out resistance.

But should the CGT decide to pull the trigger, it could push for public sector strikes, particularly in transportation, to try to bring France to a halt. It can anticipate at least some public support for this. France remains France: The country's militant, left-leaning, and protest-prone subculture still exists, ready to be stimulated by labor action. La France Insoumise (France Unbowed), a coalition of radical left-wing groups led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who won just under 20 percent in the first round of the presidential election — about the same number that the now-eclipsed French Communist Party won in the 1970s — did reasonably well in the parliamentary vote and has talked of new resistance.

The stakes of this effort to change labor law are high, not just for France but for Europe as a whole. Reforming the country's labor code is necessary, according to the new president, for new economic flexibility, greater economic growth, lower unemployment, and increased competitiveness. But it might be even more necessary for re-energizing the EU, Macron's other urgent goal. Macron hopes to restore the Franco-German "engine" to soften Germany's overdriven devotion to austerity, its opposition to a more federal eurozone "economic government" with a budget, finance minister, and parliament, and its rejection of new forms of European financial solidarity. But for France to re-establish its EU influence, Angela Merkel's Germany will first have to be persuaded that Macron can succeed at his domestic reforms. Merkel and her team have long seen France as an ineffective, debt-prone, and politically and economically stalemated neighbor. Macron sees labor reform as a large first step toward changing this perception. On its cover, the French weekly *Le Point* recently worried that Macron's initiatives could provoke "the mother of all battles" and that Macron might be "betting his presidential term." But labor reform is at the very center of his plans, and he can hardly back off now.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

French Growth Picking Up as Macron Pursues Change

William Horobin

PARIS—French economic output is improving and will record its fastest growth in six years in 2017, national statistics agency Insee said Tuesday, giving President Emmanuel Macron a boost as he sets out to shake up the economy.

The eurozone's second-largest economy will expand by 1.6% this year, the highest rate since 2011, as growth continues at slightly above the clip recorded at the start of the year, according to Insee's forecasts. Shocks that held back the economy in 2016—a poor harvest, weak exports and a tourist season disrupted by terror attacks—should no longer do so in 2017, the statistics agency said.

Unemployment will continue declining and reach 9.4% by the end of the year, compared with 10% at the end of 2016, the forecasts show.

The French growth rate will therefore be closer to that of the eurozone as a whole, after lagging

behind its neighbors for the past three years, the statistics agency said.

Recent signs of a firming economy are a boon for Mr. Macron, less than two months after he came to power promising an overhaul of the economic policies of his predecessor and mentor François Hollande.

Mr. Macron says Mr. Hollande's pro-business overhauls didn't go far enough and France needs to further loosen the restrictions of its complex labor code to encourage hiring and catch up with more buoyant European economies.

To meet his goals, the French president will seek parliamentary approval next month to change labor laws by decree, a move that raises the possibility of a showdown with labor unions.

Stronger growth could help the 39-year-old leader smooth the introduction of potentially disruptive changes to labor laws that could give companies greater latitude to work around national rules, such as the 35-hour workweek. Stronger French growth could also help Mr. Macron deliver on promises to contain France's budget deficit while cutting taxes for businesses and households.

Economists have raised their growth estimates for the French economy in recent weeks. The Bank of France earlier this month raised its growth forecasts slightly to 1.4% this year and 1.6% in 2018.

In its report Tuesday, Insee said business confidence has risen since the end of 2016, especially in industry, where managers are bullish about activity as their order books fill up and foreign demand improves. Corporate investment will increase sharply again in 2017, although Insee expects a jolt in the second quarter when a tax-incentive program comes to an end.

In agriculture, cereal and wine harvests should recover in 2017 after poor weather conditions sank output last summer, Insee said. And the construction sector should accelerate sharply after stagnating last year following two years of decline.

French consumer-spending growth will recover after a standstill in the first quarter, although it is unlikely to expand as much as in 2016 due to higher inflation, Insee said.

Terrorism in Britain: How do you build bridges when 'enough is enough'?

The Christian Science Monitor

June 20, 2017 London—When British Prime Minister Theresa May responded to the London Bridge terrorist attack this month with the words "enough is enough," it wasn't just campaign rhetoric.

It sums up a wearing down of patience across Western Europe, which has born witness to over a dozen major terrorist attacks in 30 months.

Britain had been spared the barrage, much of it inspired by the so-called Islamic State, until it shifted to the British stage this spring, with four attacks since March. The first three were perpetrated by Islamist extremists in the name of religion, taking the lives of innocent victims commuting from work, out walking, dancing at concerts, or celebrating. The youngest was just 8 years old. The latest was carried out Sunday night against Muslims worshiping at a mosque during the holy month of Ramadan, confirming the dread that many have felt amid a fraying of nerves: that "enough is enough" will give way to the most violent forms of Islamophobia.

In the middle stand community groups and faith leaders, who are trying to foster dialogue and counter the hotheadedness that threatens to roll back years of work on co-existence. "In the current climate of the world we live in, there's a need for more understanding," says Imam Yunus Dudhwala, the head of chaplaincy at Barts Health NHS Trust, a group of hospitals serving East London.

He was speaking at a recent "sunset walk" – after the London Bridge incident and before the latest attack – that started on the sun-dappled steps of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and ended at the East London Mosque. "The more we meet, the more we have dialogue and events together, it's an opportunity to understand each other," he says. "It breaks the barriers of fear, of the unknown."

Standing beside the imam was Jonathan Baker, the Bishop of Fulham. "It's hugely important that we all witness the fact that we stand together as citizens of the one city," he says. "We all want to live in peace, in safety, in mutual respect with one another."

'Not comfortable in your own area'

That can seem a lofty goal these days, with mistrust running high between communities across many quarters of Europe.

The suspect of Sunday's attack near the Finsbury Park Mosque was named as Darren Osborne, a resident of Wales who allegedly said at the scene that he wished to "kill all Muslims" as he drove a van into a crowd. One person was killed. It immediately generated more shrill reaction, with some right-wing extremists calling it revenge for jihadi violence, while Islamic extremists called for a "wake up" in the Muslim community. The attack was all the more contentious amid media reports that the mosque, once the stage of radical cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri, had recently been recognized for its efforts to fight extremism.

It comes as hate crimes are on the rise. In the week following the London Bridge rampage, reported attacks against Muslims increased by fivefold, according to figures released by London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Nida Mumith, a teen volunteer with British nonprofit Muslim Aid, which sponsored the sunset walk, says she and her friends are frightened by such statistics. "It creates this sense of not being comfortable in your own area – wherever you go you'll hear about someone being beaten up because they're Muslim, or [about] hateful comments thrown at them," she says.

Taking part in the sunset walk, which was initially organized to raise funds in support of Syrian refugees but expanded to condemn extreme religious violence in Britain and around the world, is her way of helping to counter intolerance. "We're all here to show unity. Everyone is sympathetic to each other's beliefs and differences," she says.

Tensions in Britain are high, but the strains are felt everywhere. As London was reeling Monday, a car crashed into a police vehicle on Paris's Champs-Elysees, what authorities call a probable terrorist attack. Such incidents barely dominate the news anymore – after three major attacks in France have left 231 dead and hundreds injured since the first on the offices of the satirical Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015.

Muslim groups have shown the same degree of exasperation over what are starting to feel like incessant strikes. The London-based Quilliam Foundation released a stern statement following the early June attacks in the British capital, seeming to align with Ms. May's sentiment.

"Enough is enough – we need action now and not tip-toeing around the issue," Quilliam Foundation CEO Haras Rafiq said. "The [terrorists'] ideology has its roots in Islamist-inspired Salafi Jihadism and we must all admit the problem before we can attempt to challenge it."

Meanwhile, Muhammad Manwar Ali, a former jihadist fighter who now combats Islamic extremism through his organization JIMAS, tweeted in support of the British government's controversial anti-radicalization program, PREVENT.

Grassroots or state-led efforts?

Still, many fear such programs are counterproductive to trust.

"Basically the state is asking people to spy on each other, and that's really not conducive to an atmosphere of trust", says Amina Yaqin, a senior lecturer in postcolonial Studies at SOAS-University of London. "It also gives groups like ISIS a real opportunity to say, 'Look, you're mistrusted anyway, so come over to our side.'"

She says interfaith and grassroots initiatives are generally more effective than state-led programs in fostering the kind of mutual vulnerability that engenders cooperation – the kind on view as the two-mile sunset walk ends at the East London Mosque on a recent Saturday. Here the evening meal, or *iftar*, to break the fast of Ramadan, is distributed in yellow styrofoam containers. But first a group of speakers reflects on the challenges ahead, even more important after the attack Sunday on the Finsbury Park Mosque, just a few miles away.

"How do we respond to bombs and murder in Tehran, Syria, Manchester, London? By refusing the fragmentation and the fear that these killers wish to instill into our open society," says the Rev. Alan Green, rector of St. John Church on Bethnal Green and chair of the Tower Heights Interfaith Forum. "In the face of fear, murder, and ignorance, we continue to proclaim

that we are better together and have no place for hate…. In the end, the way we will defeat those who seek to divide us – we do it simply by talking and listening."

Moghul : Trump's silence after attack on Muslims speaks volumes

For a long time, a lot of Muslims had their heads in the sand when it came to jihadist violence. They preferred to pretend as if it did not exist, or that foreign policy was solely to blame.

We've come a long way. We've learned that radicalization is a thing, and that we have a responsibility -- if we love our religion and our communities -- to think about what we can do to produce a different future for Islam and for Muslims. To change how our religion is taught in some spaces and some places.

Donald Trump and his supporters are going to have to make the same journey. They've excused, or even encouraged, extremist language and rhetoric for a long time now, and, well, here we are today, with a President who pretends that violence against Muslims doesn't matter.

On Sunday night, I was delivering a book reading at a Muslim cultural center in Florida and was asked to speak directly to the young Muslims in the room, to share my own experiences and struggles growing up as an American Muslim.

The truth is, my experiences and theirs are very different. When I was growing up, Islamophobia wasn't much of a thing. Maybe my friends and colleagues thought I was a little different, my name slightly harder to pronounce, but I never encountered overt hostility. These kids, though, they're growing up in a different world.

Shortly before I took the stage, I heard about an attack in London. A van, mowing down pedestrians.

ISIS, I thought. Again, I despaired.

But soon the details filtered out. The attack had happened outside a mosque. I have long feared that years of attacks by jihadists in the West, coupled with a media that at best dismisses Islamophobia and, at worst -- and especially, but not exclusively, on the right -- fans the flames of bigotry, intolerance and anti-Muslim extremism, would lead us to this outcome. Something like tit-for-tat violence.

Horrified denunciations of the attack rolled out across social media.

President Trump? He had nothing to say. Had the news been of an attack by Muslims, he has by now made clear, he would have boldly taken to Twitter, no matter the hour, and used an instance of outrageous violence to justify his policies. But when it's violence against Muslims, and especially by terrorists who share sympathies with white supremacists, if they are not themselves neo-Nazis, well then it's crickets.

After a mass shooting at a mosque in Quebec, nothing. After a man in Portland stabbed to death two others on a train who were trying to defend a woman from his anti-Muslim epithets -- nothing. And now after London -- nothing.

Trump's silence is all the more disappointing since even his daughter, Ivanka, has spoken out.

But she is not the President, and her words cannot carry the same weight.

Terrorism -- against civilians for political purposes -- has many causes. Some of it is clearly rooted in religious ideology, but is twisted, in a willful perversion of sacred text, to encourage and celebrate brutality. That ideology has to be addressed, and is being addressed, by countless Muslims all across the world. (Muslims are the greatest victims of jihadist terror.)

But some of it has to do with political policies, choices made by men and women in power, whether they be to funnel weapons to regimes or movements guilty of crimes against humanity, or to pursue enormities, such as the Iraq war, whose consequences will likely and unfortunately be with us for a very long time. I know a lot of people don't like to hear this. It's easier to imagine that someone else, far away, and very different from ourselves, is exclusively to blame.

People often ask me what we can do to stop terrorism, and sometimes they're looking for easy answers, which absolve them of any responsibility. They're fine demanding that Muslims, abstractly, do something, and sometimes they seem to believe that Muslims aren't condemning terrorism (which we are), and if they were, terrorism would stop. But what happens if we turn the question around?

I told those young Muslims Sunday night that they have to find their own relationship to Islam. They have to find something that connects them to their religion, something that doesn't come from their parents or their teachers. I told them that it's going to be hard to do that when there's so much hate out there.

Hate by some Muslims -- against other Muslims and against the world. And hate against Muslims, too. They're growing up in a different America.

It's an America in which the President doesn't appear to care if terrible things happen to people just like them. They can choose to fall to his level, or rise to the occasion.

The Political Kindling of the Grenfell Fire

Samuel Earle

During last year's Brexit campaign, both the Leave and Remain camps tried to use Britain's economic health to bolster their respective causes. Remain argued that the country's economy, the world's fifth-largest, was proof it should remain in the European Union, so prosperous had the past few decades been; Leave took it as evidence that membership was unnecessary, and ultimately won the day.

Since Leave's victory, Britain has slipped to sixth in the economic rankings. Yet either position, fifth or sixth, is misleading: Broadly speaking, Britain is an economically average country, with one exceptionally rich region—London, which is reportedly home to more multimillionaires and billionaires than any other city in the world, and serves as the country's economic engine. Of the EU's 15 strongest economies, none rely as heavily on one area as the U.K. does: London's per capita GDP is almost two and a half times Britain's national average. But London's enviable self-confidence, its robust financial services sector, and glittering facade, obscure the devastating inequality that plagues the U.K. While the city is Britain's lone representative among the 10 richest regions in northern Europe, the country also includes a stunning nine of northern Europe's 10 poorest regions.

The fire that ripped through Grenfell Tower in west London was a horrific reminder of the violent contradictions on which this city and country rest. Before being reduced to a cindered skeleton in the early hours of June 14, Grenfell Tower, which opened in 1974, was home to hundreds. The 24-floor building of 120 one- and two-bedroom flats stood in the northwestern quarter of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). This borough is the wealthiest constituency in Britain, and one of its most unequal. Within its 12 square kilometers, Kensington Palace—the royal residence of Dukes, Duchesses, Princes, and Princesses—and Kensington Park Gardens, London's most expensive street, sit just a short walk from Grenfell Tower and its surroundings, which are some of the most deprived areas in England.

While the full human cost of the Grenfell fire has yet to emerge, the facts we do know are horrific and damning. Last year, Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organization (KCTMO), the non-profit group that manages the estate on behalf of RBKC's council, completed an £8.7-million refurbishment of the building. It involved covering the exterior in cladding to improve its insulation and appearance. The cheap, flammable material used, it is now known, was £2-cheaper per square meter than the fire-resistant alternative. Its use on tower blocks is banned in several countries, including the United States and Germany. The £8.7-million, it seems, could not stretch so far as to afford a sprinkler-system for the block, functioning fire alarms in the rooms and corridors, or ventilation systems in the stairwells.

In the aftermath of the fire, at least two of the firms responsible for the refurbishment have seemingly removed reference to their specific roles from their websites. The final, fatal result turned Grenfell Tower into a "death trap," as the front page of the *Evening Standard* raged the following day. The death toll currently stands at 79; it is expected to rise even higher.

Many residents and local members of the community sounded the alarm about the building long before the fire. A blog post from 2016 by Grenfell Action Group, an advocacy association for residents, hammered home this point:

It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders….

Not only were many warnings from residents ignored; officials threatened them with legal action (in 2012, cuts introduced by the Conservative-led coalition government to legal aid almost ended financial support for housing cases entirely). The author of the blog post, which has gone viral since the fire, was accused of "harassment" by the Conservative-run council. "ALL OUR WARNINGS FELL ON DEAF EARS," one of the top blog post of Grenfell Action Group's site now reads.

While this fire could have happened almost anywhere in Britain, it seems that it could not have happened to anyone: Only the most-vulnerable members of British society could be treated with such contempt. Nor is it a coincidence that so many of the residents were of ethnic minority groups; many were Muslim. According to *The Guardian,* Danny Dorling, a professor of geography at Oxford, "has shown that black and minority-ethnic people in social housing are disproportionately housed in flats."

On Friday, Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, aptly labeled the Grenfell story as "a tale of two cities"—a Dickensian tragedy played out in the 21st century, with all the modern flourishes: high-definition footage of the fire live-streamed, minute-by-minute media updates, occasional Facebook statuses from those trapped inside, and then crowd-funding initiatives set up to deal with the fall-out. New props for very old problems: poverty and inequality.

Indeed, the speed of the fire—within minutes, it had spread from the fourth floor to the top of the building, engulfing the entire structure in just a few hours—belied the creeping slowness with which its causes stacked up. The tragedy of Grenfell Tower goes beyond cladding, the contempt of the KCTMO, or the Conservative-run council. The ultimate responsibility lies with the British state, a succession of governing bodies that, over time, have imposed a political system that readily entrusts the safety of citizens to market mechanisms.

This ideology, maintained to various degrees over the past few decades, places austerity above all else. Many local authorities now view it as their duty to spend as little as possible on their residents, and in many cases have no choice. The borough of RBKC may fall more easily into the former bracket, with reports claiming it holds a £274 million contingency fund. But it did not come to embrace such parsimony on its own: It was endorsed by the highest echelons of Britain's political class, Conservative and Labour alike.

Between 1979 and 1990, Margaret Thatcher spearheaded reductions in council funding and encouraged the outsourcing of local services like no one else before her. Tony Travers, the British academic and journalist, has called it an "11-year war" on local government. The New Labour years that followed, between 1997 and 2010, did not surrender any ground: "We are all Thatcherites now," Peter Mandelson, Tony Blair's trusted adviser, famously declared in 2002. Regulations and responsibilities traded hands, and by the 2000s, 85 percent of local government expenditures were being determined by the central government, up from 60 percent in the 1970s. Then, from 2010 on, Conservative prime minister David Cameron (a Kensington resident) took on the task with particular relish. Slashing the deficit became the overarching priority of his two governments, with local authorities charged with implementing the policy.

Grenfell Tower is a scar on London's skyline, and it will not fade even when the building is finally brought down.

Consequently, the local authorities' spending has been reduced by 37 percent since 2010, and is expected to fall even further over the coming years. Housing-service budgets partly pay for property-inspection to ensure homes meet basic standards—and they have been slashed by a quarter over the same period**.** In 2012, a telling pamphlet was distributed to local councils by the department for communities and local government. Entitled "50 Ways to Save: Examples of sensible savings in local governments," its helpful suggestions for councils highlight the pressures placed on them. The suggestions include: "claw back money from benefit cheats," "sell services," "stop translating documents into foreign languages," "earn more from private advertising," and do not "routinely spend time and money on Equality Impact Assessments."

Meanwhile, the Conservative Party's long-standing and deep-rooted opbposition to state-imposed fire and safety regulations is also likely to have laid the ground for the Grenfell Fire. For decades, Conservatives have harbored a unique disdain for so-called government "red tape" that supposedly stands in the way of British businesses. Whereas the Labour Party was complicit in hollowing out council funding and outsourcing public services to private companies, on this particular score—the state's failure to ensure that bare-minimum safety standards were met—the Conservative Party will stand all but alone in the interrogation booth.

Cameron's government sought to loosen the regulations and formalities private firms must comply with, on the premise that this would liberate private developers to build more housing, an area where the country and the capital suffer a chronic shortage. Cameron made this ambition clear wherever he could. Speaking at the Conservative Party conference in October 2011, he declared that the "shadow of health and safety" was "one of the biggest things holding people back. … Britannia didn't rule the waves with arm-bands on," he quipped. In a January 2012 speech, Cameron then revealed his government's new year's resolution "to kill off the health and safety culture for good." He argued that it had become an "albatross around the neck of British business," a "health and safety monster" that contributed to "pointless time-wasting." He wrote an article in the *Evening Standard*, opining on how it "saps personal responsibility and drains enterprise" and is "smothering" Britain's "real pioneering, risk-taking spirit." "We need to realize … that some accidents are inevitable," he wrote.

This desire to de-regulate industry was not for the sake of the public—it was simply the other side of austerity: The more rules there are to impose, the more government must be there to impose them. Take away the rules, take away the need for government; let business run free. Boris Johnson (another Kensington resident) also wrote in 2009 that "health and safety fears are making Britain a safe place for extremely stupid people." As the mayor of London between 2008 and 2015, he would then go on to close 10 fire stations in the capital, cutting 27 fire engines and around 600 firefighter posts, with "savings of over £28-million." In 2014, Conservative MP Brandon Lewis, the housing minister at the time, neatly summed up the Tory stance: "It is the responsibility of the fire industry, rather than the government, to market fire sprinkler systems effectively and to encourage their wider installation." Now we know where such blind faith in the market can lead.

Grenfell Tower is a scar on London's skyline, and it will not fade even when the building is finally brought down. It is a reminder that the wealth of any city or nation is no protection for the safety of its citizens, whether it is fifth, sixth, or first in the rankings. Whatever the immediate causes of the fire, a bundle of government policies lay buried within its walls, so much tinder and fuel for the flames to take light.

The New York Times

Editorial : More Doubts Are Raised Over Mrs. May's Leadership

The Editorial Board

"What the country needs now is a period of calm while we get on with the job at hand," said Britain's chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, no doubt reflecting what was on the mind of the prime minister, Theresa May, and many a fellow Conservative politician.

Alas, politicians usually long for a respite at times when they are least likely to deserve one.

Mrs. May and her party have had two terrible weeks, largely through their own doing. After losing her parliamentary majority in an entirely unnecessary election she called for in April, she was left trying to form a governing coalition with a hard-line Protestant Northern Ireland party, the Democratic Unionist Party, that could spell more trouble. John Major, the former Conservative prime minister, went so far as to publicly warn that such an alliance could undermine the delicate sectarian peace in Northern Ireland, while other Tories voiced concern about the D.U.P.'s opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage.

Mrs. May's standing was further eroded when a horrific blaze in a public housing tower that took at least 79 lives unleashed furious criticism at the government over what survivors and others perceived as the government's longstanding indifference to obvious safety hazards — including, lamentably, the absence of sprinkler systems in older public housing — as well as its failure to invest in better living conditions generally. The prime minister's slow and seemingly

uncaring response did nothing to improve her standing.

Mrs. May is severely handicapped as she opens formal talks on Brexit with the European Union this week and presents an extensive legislative program — much of it required to withdraw from the union — when the newly elected Parliament holds its first session on Wednesday.

The one benefit to be found in this mess is that Mrs. May must now take into account a broader range of ideas on what sort of divorce to seek with the European Union.

Mrs. May has indicated in the past that she wants a "hard" exit that will take Britain out of the bloc's single market and customs union. That way, she argued, she can control British immigration policy — a major objective of many who wanted to leave the union — and make trade deals free of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

But proponents of a softer exit — like Mr. Hammond, who would prefer that Britain remain at least in the customs union in order to protect British jobs and trade — are likely to ask for a stronger voice as well as concessions in exchange for continued fealty to the prime minister.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy should also impress on Mrs. May that she cannot hope to gain the political credibility she needs for a successful Brexit negotiation without simultaneously pursuing a domestic agenda that addresses Britain's domestic inequalities.

Bloomberg

O'Sullivan : Theresa May's Troubles and 'The Troubles'

On Monday, the newly elected Prime Minister of Ireland, Leo Varadkar, emerged from his meeting with his British counterpart, Theresa May, promising good news. Varadkar said he was satisfied May would not jeopardize the peace agreement in Northern Ireland in her efforts to secure the support of that province's Democratic Unionist Party for her government.

Yet even if this is true, it is unrealistic to hope that a deal between the Tories and the DUP will have no impact on the politics of Northern Ireland. And if Varadkar is wrong, we could be headed toward a political stalemate or worse, and a possible economic crisis in that corner of the United Kingdom.

May needs the DUP, which is dedicated to keeping Northern Ireland part of the U.K., to join in a "confidence and supply" arrangement, in which its representatives in Westminster would vote with her Conservatives on votes of no-confidence or other key matters such as the budget. This would give the DUP outsized influence, which some worry might be used to put off a referendum on whether the province should remain part of U.K or join Ireland, which was allowed for under certain circumstances by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that ended the "The Troubles." Varadkar says he's confident May will not yield to any DUP request to put off the vote.

Most Americans probably believe that the conflict in Northern Ireland was resolved years ago and that the region is now a poster child for successful peacemaking. In some ways this is accurate -- violence has dissipated and political parties from different sides of the conflict have successfully shared power for much of the last two decades. But it would be incorrect to think that tensions are gone and that there is no risk of a return to fraught times.

Longtime U.S. diplomat Richard Haass and I learned this firsthand in 2013 when, at the request of the government of Northern Ireland, we sought -- unsuccessfully -- to help broker a deal to resolve many issues that continue to be the source of tension between communities: Republicans and Unionists, Catholics and Protestants.

If not handled deftly, the region -- already unsettled by Brexit -- could become a much bigger headache for London. Earlier this year, the leading Republican Party, Sinn Fein, suspended its participation in the power-sharing government, leading to its collapse. Since then, the British government, with support from Dublin, has been trying to broker an agreement between the DUP, Sinn Fein and other parties to restart the power-sharing arrangements at Stormont, Northern Ireland's parliament. A deadline of the end of this month has been set.

The prospect of the DUP becoming the key partner in a Tory government has already slowed down these talks and added a layer of complexity to them. Some speculate that Sinn Fein would prefer to wait to see whether May will face a leadership challenge or if new British elections will be called, rather than to come to any power-sharing agreement with the DUP now, given that it perceives the party to have the upper hand.

A Tory-DUP agreement could have other effects as well. On the positive side of the ledger, it would increase the chances of a "softer" Brexit, particularly as it relates to Northern Ireland, something the DUP has advocated. What exactly this would entail is not yet clear, and May would obviously be unable to guarantee any particular outcome of a long negotiation with the European Union that just began this week. But almost certainly, the DUP -- as well as other parties in Northern Ireland and the Dublin government -- hope to preserve free flow of goods and people across the land border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, a welcome development since the Good Friday Agreement.

After all, the Good Friday Agreement was predicated on the idea that, over time, borders between countries would become less important, not more. For those who yearned to reunite the island of Ireland, they could take satisfaction that the border between Northern Ireland and the southern republic would become less and less significant, even if the status of the region as part of the U.K. never changed. In any case, all parties today want to avoid a "hard" Brexit that reimposes a strong border and endangers trade links, which would likely cause both economic hardship and political agitation.

A Tory-DUP deal could, however, also adversely affect the politics of Northern Ireland, even if May makes no promises about staving off a referendum. The Good Friday Agreement requires both the U.K. and Irish governments to be "rigorously impartial" in its implementation. Ten Downing Street and its Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, may believe they can remain honest brokers -- and it is Brokenshire who is trying to negotiate the agreement at Stormont right now. But it is very tough to see how a U.K. government dependent on the DUP for its survival can be perceived as unbiased in its efforts to forge compromises between the DUP and other local parties.

May should not dismiss these legitimate concerns about her government's role in Northern Ireland's politics going forward. But in and of themselves, they are probably not sufficient to argue against a confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP.

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Instead, May should talk with all parties involved about inviting an independent outsider -- perhaps a former senior British official now out of government -- to take the lead in arbitrating political issues in Northern Ireland. There is, of course, a long history of such independent negotiators, with former U.S. Senator George Mitchell being the most notable. As Haass and I can attest, this is no cushy job. But if an independent mediator has the active support of both the U.K. and Irish governments, he or she may be able not only to help restore the government at Stormont, but to get all parties to finally address the issues, such as reckoning with the past, that continue to divide Northern Ireland.

POLITICO

Britain's path to hard Brexit revealed in queen's speech

Tom McTague and Annabelle Dickson

LONDON — A hard Brexit it is then.

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for a clean break from the European Union, taking Britain out of both the single market and the customs union, was confirmed Wednesday in a queen's speech containing eight separate pieces of Brexit legislation which clears the way for Britain's eventual departure from the bloc in March 2019.

Over a special two-year parliamentary session until summer 2019, covering the period of Britain's negotiated departure from the EU, the prime minister will aim to pass bills repatriating powers over both trade and customs, ending freedom of movement and ensuring Britain can strike its own free-trade deals outside the EU.

The government will also seek to pass legislation on agriculture and fisheries — both of which will be overseen by the new Environment Secretary Michael Gove, one of the leading Brexiteers — and push ahead with a "Repeal Bill," which downloads EU law onto the U.K. statute book, ensuring there isn't a

regulatory cliff edge when Britain leaves.

The ambition, set out in a speech written by the government but delivered by Queen Elizabeth, provides official confirmation that the U.K. intends to stick to the prime minister's vision of Brexit, as set out in her Lancaster House speech in January, despite the Conservative Party's failure to win an overall majority in the general election earlier this month.

Should the government win majority support for its program in a vote expected next week it will also introduce a "nuclear safeguards bill" and an "international sanctions bill."

The program, which has to be passed in just two years without a majority government to enforce it, is the most detailed breakdown of how Brexit will be enacted in practice.

Several pledges in the Conservative manifesto were omitted from the queen's speech, in particular the expansion of grammar schools and a free vote on bringing back fox hunting, both of which proved controversial during the election campaign. Social care plans, which would have seen assets worth over £100,000 used to pay for social care after people die and were credited as one of the key reasons May lost her majority, were replaced with a promise to "bring forward proposals for consultation."

Here are the eight Brexit bills:

1. Repeal bill

Perhaps more accurately described as the great copy-and-paste bill.

The bill aims to repeal the 1972 European Communities Act, which is the basis of Britain's membership of the EU, but it also seeks to convert all existing EU law into British law, ensuring "a smooth and orderly transition."

Controversially, the bill creates "temporary powers" for parliament to amend EU law without a vote under so-called Henry VIII powers, which critics insist is a government power grab. Downing Street insists it is necessary to tweak the wording of legislation to make it suitable for U.K. domestic law and will not be used to alter the meaning.

2. Customs bill

Whether Britain remains temporarily in the customs union after Brexit remains a contentious issue in government.

Chancellor Philip Hammond is on record with his support for an extended "implementation period" before leaving the customs union entirely.

According to a briefing note published alongside the queen's speech Wednesday, however, the government will "ensure the U.K. has a standalone U.K. customs regime on exit."

New legislation will be introduced to "control the number of people coming here from Europe."

This will give the government flexibility, the document says, to "accommodate" future trade agreements with the EU and other countries.

It will also give the government power to make changes to VAT and excise regimes.

The bill does not rule out a compromise transition arrangement but it sets the course for an eventual hard Brexit.

3. Trade bill

This is the clearest evidence yet that the prime minister still intends to withdraw the U.K. from the single market and customs union.

"The bill will put in place the essential and necessary legislative framework to allow the U.K. to operate its own independent trade policy upon exit from the European Union."

This is simply not possible within the customs union.

4. Immigration bill

New legislation will be introduced to "control the number of people coming here from Europe."

It will allow for the repeal of EU law on immigration, "primarily free movement," which otherwise would become part of U.K. law under the repeal bill.

While there is almost no detail on the nature of the new immigration regime the government hopes to establish after Brexit, the queen's speech states that it will "make the migration of EU nationals and their family members subject to relevant U.K. law once the U.K. has left the EU."

This statement of intent effectively means EU nationals will no longer have the automatic right to live and work in the U.K. under EU law — any right to move to Britain will be subject to the U.K. immigration rules set in Westminster.

The wording does not rule out a liberal immigration regime being introduced — such as a visa waiver area covering all of the EU, meaning any EU citizen could move to the U.K. with a job offer. But it does end the concept of freedom of movement, guaranteed by EU law and enforced by the European Court of Justice.

5. Fisheries bill

Like the immigration bill, the purpose of the bill is radical but leaves plenty of scope for flexibility when it comes to how any new regime will actually work.

How much access the U.K. agrees to give EU fishing fleets remains open for negotiation and compromise.

In short, the bill withdraws Britain from the Common Fisheries Policy. According to a government briefing document published alongside the queen's speech, it will "enable the U.K. to exercise responsibility for access to fisheries and management of its waters." It will also allow the government to set U.K. fishing quotas separate from the EU.

How much access the U.K. agrees to give EU fishing fleets remains open for negotiation and compromise.

The fisheries bill — alongside all the Brexit legislation — will apply U.K-wide and is seen in government as an important tool for winning support in Scotland.

6. Agriculture bill

Almost no details are given on the future shape of U.K. agricultural policy. However, the briefing note accompanying the queen's speech promises that the government will "provide stability" to British farmers currently in receipt of EU subsidies while also aiming to make the sector "more competitive, productive and profitable."

7. Nuclear safeguards bill

This bill confirms Britain will leave Euratom when it departs the European Union.

The proposed legislation aims to give the U.K. Office for Nuclear Regulation the safeguarding powers to meet international standards.

8. International sanctions bill

The purpose of the bill is to "enable the U.K. to continue to impose, update and lift sanctions" after Brexit.

The effect of this will be to "return decision-making powers" over non-United Nations sanctions, which are currently administered by Brussels, to Westminster.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Merkel Signals Openness to Eurozone Reforms

Bertrand Benoit and Andrea Thomas

BERLIN—German Chancellor Angela Merkel for the first time sketched out the outlines of a bargain with France on fixing the governance of Europe's single currency, in the clearest sign yet that the two biggest eurozone countries are inching toward reconciling sharply different views on the matter.

Germany could support two central French demands—the appointment of a eurozone finance minister and the creation of a common budget—if some conditions were met, Ms. Merkel told business leaders in Berlin on Tuesday.

"We can of course think about a eurozone budget as long as it's clear that this is really strengthening structures and achieving sensible results," she said.

In a striking softening of previous language opposing broader financial burden-sharing among member states, Ms. Merkel said "we could think about a common finance minister…if we aren't pooling liabilities in the wrong place."

As qualified as it is, Ms. Merkel's surprise overture on an approach long taboo in Germany suggests the stalled process of reforming the eurozone could kick back into life sooner than most experts had expected. It comes a month after pro-European Emmanuel Macron was elected French president, a win many see as evidence that the continent's political mood is growing more supportive of the European Union—and a moment advocates of further eurozone reforms say should be seized.

An adviser to Mr. Macron said Ms. Merkel's apparent openness to reforms was "very positive," calling it "part of this new Franco-German climate of confidence."

The chancellor's comments took even some German officials by surprise, coming ahead of a national general election in September. Berlin had refused to engage in detailed talks about the eurozone's future before the vote, insisting Mr.

Macron had to prove his mettle first by enacting domestic economic measures over the summer.

Speaking before Ms. Merkel in Berlin, the head of the German Federation of Industry, Dieter Kempf, endorsed the idea of a common eurozone budget and finance minister "if these steps are correctly conceived." With such an approach, he said, "weak periods and imbalances could be countered early and the possibility of real crises further reduced."

The crisis that engulfed the eurozone in 2010 and is only beginning to dissipate laid bare deep defects in the currency union's design, including weak central control on public spending and the absence of incentives for countries to harmonize disparate economies. The eurozone also lacks the ability to raise and spend money in ways that could help buffer downturns.

The severity of the cash crunch forced several member states to seek emergency assistance from their peers and from the International Monetary Fund. It also nearly caused the bloc's weakest member, Greece, which remains under financial tutelage to this day, to drop out of the bloc.

The region has since equipped itself with a banking authority and a rescue fund for states facing liquidity shortages, but most experts agree much is left to be done to make the eurozone a sustainable construction.

Germany has long focused on tougher central controls on public spending and rejected jointly issued bonds, which Berlin thinks would encourage overspending by economically fragile members.

Under Mr. Macron, France has floated the idea of a joint eurozone budget to finance specific areas, such as unemployment insurance and infrastructure investment, across the region—a notion anathema to Berlin until now.

Both countries have at different times suggested the appointment of a finance minister for the eurozone, though France sees that role as overseeing a common budget while Germany envisages a fiscal policeman.

Ms. Merkel's comments, however, suggest these two visions might be reconciled into a common arrangement combining tougher fiscal policing and some fiscal transfers between budget-surplus and deficit countries.

"This looks significant, especially about what it says about the state of mind," said Nicolas Véron, a eurozone expert at Bruegel, a Brussels-based think tank, of Ms. Merkel's comments. "It's a signal there is a will to find a constructive solution."

German officials say they have been reluctant to engage with Mr. Macron on eurozone reform ahead of Germany's general election because fiscal transfers are unpopular among the country's voters. And they say they are still skeptical about the novice president's ability to execute the tough domestic labor market reforms and spending cuts he campaigned on.

"We still need to see the evidence," one official said.

French officials say rather than directly confronting Ms. Merkel on recasting the eurozone, they are concentrating in talks with their German counterparts on shorter-term goals more understandable for voters, such as tightening regulations on temporary workers moving between EU countries. Progress on such issues would give momentum to meeting longer-term objectives for the eurozone, the adviser to Mr. Macron said, which is expected to be a central theme of a joint Franco-German cabinet meeting mid-July.

After last weekend's parliamentary election in France gave Mr. Macron's party a solid majority, recognition is growing in a skeptical Berlin that he may have the seats—and political clout—to deliver on his promises. Mr. Macron says he will move quickly to legislate changes to labor laws by the end of September.

German officials also see the appointment of Bruno Le Maire, an expert on Germany and a fiscal conservative, as France's economy minister as a sign that Paris is serious about engaging constructively on eurozone reform.

Since France and Germany have long sat on opposite sides of the spectrum of ideas about how to fix the eurozone, a Franco-German agreement could go a long way toward mapping out reforms acceptable to others.

German officials say one question will be the scope of a possible agreement, which could range from tweaks to the existing structure to the creation of a fully fledged finance minister's office and even a separate eurozone parliament.

The minimalist option could involve turning the region's rescue fund into a European Monetary Fund with stronger budget-oversight powers.

The more ambitious version would require an amendment to European Union treaties and therefore unanimous agreement among all 28 EU members—an option German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble has deemed "not realistic."

"What's clear is that a political window for eurozone reform will open after the German election," the German official said. "When it does, do we go for the more realistic, small-step approach or for the big vision?"

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Douglas Murray Book Excerpt: The Roots of the European Crisis

There is no single cause of the present sickness of Europe. The culture produced by the tributaries of Judeo-Christian culture, the Ancient Greeks and Romans, and the discoveries of the Enlightenment has not been levelled by nothing. But the final act has come about because of two simultaneous concatenations from which it is now all but impossible to recover.

The first is the mass movement of peoples into Europe. In all Western European countries this process began after the Second World War due to labour shortages. Soon Europe got hooked on the migration and could not stop the flow even if it had wanted to. The result was that what had been Europe — the home of the European peoples — gradually became a home for the entire world. The places that had been European gradually became somewhere else. So places dominated by Pakistani immigrants resembled Pakistan in everything but their location, with the recent arrivals and their children eating the food of their place of origin, speaking the language of their place of origin, and worshipping the religion of their place of origin. Streets in the cold and rainy northern towns of Europe filled with people dressed for the foothills of Pakistan or the sandstorms of Arabia. "The Empire strikes back," noted some observers with a barely concealed smirk. Yet whereas the empires of Europe had been thrown off, these new colonies were obviously intended to be for good.

All the time Europeans found ways to pretend this could work. By insisting, for instance, that such immigration was normal. Or that if integration did not happen with the first generation then it might happen with their children, grandchildren, or another generation yet to come. Or that it didn't matter whether people integrated or not. All the time we waved away the greater likelihood that it just wouldn't work. This is a conclusion that the migration crisis of recent years has simply accelerated.

Which brings me to the second concatenation. For even the mass movement of millions of people into Europe would not sound such a final note for the continent were it not for the fact that (coincidentally or otherwise) at the same time Europe lost faith in its beliefs, traditions, and legitimacy. Countless factors have contributed to this development, but one is the way in which Western Europeans have lost what the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno famously called the "tragic sense of life." They have forgotten what the World War II generation so painfully learnt: that everything you love, even the greatest and most cultured civilizations in history, can be swept away by people who are unworthy of them. Other than simply ignoring it, one of the few ways to avoid this tragic sense of life is to push it away through a belief in the tide of human progress. That tactic remains for the time being the most popular approach.

Yet all the time we skate over, and sometimes fall into, terrible doubts of our own creation. More than any other continent or culture in the world today, Europe is now deeply weighed down with guilt for its past. Alongside this outgoing version of self-distrust runs a more introverted version of the same guilt. For there is also the problem in Europe of an existential tiredness and a feeling that perhaps for Europe the story has run out and a new story must be allowed to begin. Mass immigration — the replacement of large parts of the European populations by other people — is one way in which this new story has been imagined: a change, we seemed to think, was as good as a rest. Such existential civilizational tiredness is not a uniquely modern-European phenomenon, but the fact that a society should feel like it has run out of steam at precisely the moment when a new society has begun to move in cannot help but lead to vast, epochal changes.

Had it been possible to discuss these matters some solution might have been reached. Yet even in 2015, at the height of the migration crisis, it was speech and thought that was constricted. At the peak of the crisis in September 2015

Chancellor Merkel of Germany asked the Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, what could be done to stop European citizens' writing criticisms of her migration policy on Facebook. "Are you working on this?" she asked him. He assured her that he was. In fact the criticism, thought, and discussion ought to have been boundless. Looking back, it is remarkable how restricted we made our discussion even whilst we opened our home to the world. A thousand years ago the peoples of Genoa and Florence were not as intermingled as they now are, but today they are all recognizably Italian and tribal differences have tended to lessen rather than grow with time. The current thinking appears to be that at some stage in the years ahead the peoples of Eritrea and Afghanistan too will be intermingled within Europe as the Genoans and Florentines are now melded into Italy. The skin color of individuals from Eritrea and Afghanistan may be different, their ethnic origins may be from further afield, but Europe will still be Europe and its people will continue to mingle in the spirit of Voltaire and St Paul, Dante, Goethe, and Bach.

More than any other continent or culture in the world today, Europe is now deeply weighed down with guilt for its past.

As with so many popular delusions there is something in this. The nature of Europe has always shifted and — as trading cities like Venice show — has included a grand and uncommon receptiveness to foreign ideas and influence. From the Ancient Greeks and Romans onward the peoples of Europe sent out ships to scour the world and report back on what they found. Rarely, if ever, did the rest of the world return their curiosity in kind, but nevertheless the ships went out and returned with tales and discoveries that melded into the air of Europe. The receptivity was prodigious: it was not, however, boundless.

The question of where the boundaries of the culture lay is endlessly argued over by anthropologists and cannot be solved. But there were boundaries. Europe was never, for instance, a continent of Islam. Yet the awareness that our culture is constantly, subtly changing has deep European roots.

We know that the Greeks today are not the same people as the Ancient Greeks. We know that the English are not the same today as they were millennia ago, nor the French the French. And yet they are recognizably Greek, English, and French and all are European. In these and other identities we recognize a degree of cultural succession: a tradition that remains with certain qualities (positive as well as negative), customs, and behaviors. We recognize the great movements of the Normans, Franks, and Gauls brought about great changes. And we know from history that some movements affect a culture relatively little in the long term whereas others can change it irrevocably. The problem comes not with an acceptance of change, but with the knowledge that when those changes come too fast or are too different we become something else — including something we may never have wanted to be.

Strokes : The EU Is Alive and Well, But the Referendums Are Coming

The resounding June 18 victory of the pro-European Union En Marche party in the French National Assembly elections suggests, to paraphrase Mark Twain, that reports of the imminent death of the EU were premature.

Majorities now hold a favorable view of the EU in nine of the 10 European nations surveyed recently by the Pew Research Center, before the French election. And across these countries, even larger majorities oppose their country following the British example and exiting the EU.

But before EU officials break out the champagne glasses in Brussels, they might reflect on the fact that in every country surveyed, publics want future immigration decisions made by their own government, not the EU. And in most Continental nations, people want to reassert national sovereignty over trade decision-making.

More significantly, in seven of nine European countries, half or more of the population wants their own national referendum on continued EU participation. And, as the 2016 Brexit vote demonstrated to then-British Prime Minister David Cameron, referendums can turn out differently than anticipated.

There is no mistaking that the EU is back — for the moment, at least. Positive views of the Brussels-based organization are up 18 percentage points in Germany and France since last year, 15 points in Spain, 13 points in the Netherlands, and 11 points in Sweden. Nearly three-quarters of Poles (74 percent) have a favorable view of the EU, despite their ruling government's ongoing disputes with Brussels.

This does not mean that Europeans are necessarily satisfied with the current state of affairs in the EU. People feel better about economic conditions, but a median of only 47 percent across the EU say economic conditions are good. And only 42 percent approve of the EU's handling of European economic issues. Moreover, just 25 percent give a favorable rating to Brussels's management of refugee issues.

Possibly because of this frustration with the refugee situation, roughly three-quarters of EU publics want their national government to make decisions about the migration of non-EU citizens into their country; about two-thirds want national sovereignty over the movement of EU citizens into their country. Moreover, roughly half express the desire to have their own governments make decisions about international trade deals, taking back a power Brussels has had since 1957.

Most notably, many publics want a chance to express their own views on their future participation in the European project, perhaps echoing earlier Pew Research findings that many Europeans do not feel they have a voice in Brussels listening to them. Nearly two-thirds of the Spanish (65 percent) want their own vote on continued EU membership. Despite electing Emmanuel Macron, a pro-EU president, and giving his party a majority in the National Assembly, 61 percent of the French say they also want a referendum on EU membership. Similarly, 57 percent in Greece and Italy, 53 percent in Sweden, 51 percent in Poland, and 50 percent in Germany want their own vote.

Mixed views on the EU may find their next outlet in Italy's national elections, which could be as early as this autumn. While most Europeans feel economic conditions are improving, just 15 percent of Italians think their country's economy is in good shape, down 18 percentage points from a year ago.

Such pessimism finds a mirror in Italian views of the EU. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Italians disapprove of Brussels' handling of economic issues, largely unchanged from last year. Even more (81 percent) are critical of how the EU has dealt with the influx of refugees into Europe — an issue where Italy is often the first port of call for people fleeing from Africa and the Middle East.

All these factors may help explain why the Italians are cooler toward the EU than some other member states. And such sentiment may also be behind the fact that a 57 percent majority want Italy to hold its own referendum on continued EU membership.

So, the EU may have dodged a bullet in France, according to some. But public discontent remains a factor in a number of EU countries. And Italy's elections could be the next time such sentiments find popular expression at the ballot box.

Editors : Europe's Unserious Plan for Greece

The deal struck last week between Greece and its euro-zone creditors is business as usual -- and that's not a good thing. This protracted game of "extend and pretend" serves nobody's long-term interests: not those of the Greek government, the International Monetary Fund or, most of all, the people of Greece.

Euro-zone finance ministers have unlocked a payment of 8.5 billion euros ($9.5 billion), the newest installment of a rescue plan worth 86 billion euros. This will let Athens make debt repayments of 7 billion euros that fall due next month. But there's still no agreement on how to get Greece's debt burden under control. The IMF had previously insisted that this question should be settled now.

It was right, and it should have stuck to that position. The new agreement fails to recognize what everybody knows: that Greece's debt is unsustainable on the current terms.

In an effort to pretend otherwise, Athens has promised primary budget surpluses (meaning net of interest payments) of 3.5 percent of gross domestic product until 2022, and then of "above but close to 2 percent" until 2060. True, the Greek

economy achieved a better-than-expected primary surplus last year. As the European recovery gathers pace, there could be more good fiscal news. But the idea that Greece can maintain this degree of fiscal control for the next 40 years is ridiculous.

For instance, at some point during the next four decades, there might be another recession. Stranger things have happened.

The blow to the credibility of the IMF could prove to be lasting damage. The fund points to its refusal to disburse money at this point as proof it's serious about debt relief. Yet it remains a partner in a project that, by its own analysis, is bound to fail. It should have said, enough. Europe doesn't need the fund's money or expertise. Governments only sought the fund's seal of approval -- and should have been denied it.

Granted, the euro zone has done a lot to support Greece since its fiscal crisis began. Athens has been granted no fewer three rescue packages, worth 326 billion euros in total. The euro zone has allowed generous grace periods for official loans, extended their maturities and lowered the interest rate. As a result, Greece's debt repayments are actually quite manageable for now.

But this won't last. Grace periods come to an end. As interest rates creep up, Greece's debt repayments will rise too. The perpetual primary surpluses creditors are demanding will squeeze the economy so hard that they'll be self-defeating even in narrow fiscal terms.

All of this is well understood. Greece needs a new deal, offering debt relief in exchange for progress on reform. Maybe the EU will be willing to agree to this next year, when the existing program expires. But there was no good reason for failing to propose it now.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Ukraine's Poroshenko Meets With Trump

Alan Cullison

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump met briefly Tuesday with Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko, who used his first White House visit to stress his country's alliance with Washington as he pushes for more U.S. pressure against Moscow's support for pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine.

The two leaders spoke during a photo session in the Oval Office, but avoided potentially difficult issues. Mr. Trump called Ukraine a place that "everybody's been reading about," and said "we've had some very good discussions."

Mr. Poroshenko told Mr. Trump that it was a "great honor and great pleasure" to visit the White House, calling the two countries "strategic partners."

He was also scheduled to meet Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later in the day.

Mr. Poroshenko's visit presented challenges for Mr. Trump, who has said he wants to improve relations with Russia, but is under pressure to distance himself from the Kremlin amid burgeoning investigations into the aftermath of alleged hacking by the Kremlin into U.S. elections. Russia denies the interference.

Tuesday's meeting came just weeks before Mr. Trump attends the Group of 20 summit in Germany, where he's expected to speak in person with Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time. For months, Mr. Poroshenko has been angling for a meeting so he could push for more U.S. pressure on Moscow to stop its support of pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Before now, the presidents had only spoken by phone.

The visit Tuesday was a low-profile event, compared to how Mr. Trump has hosted other world leaders. Mr. Trump met briefly with the Ukrainian president in the Oval Office, in what White House officials said described as a "drop by" that took place while Mr. Poroshenko met separately with Vice President Michael Pence.

On Monday, Mr. Trump personally welcomed the visiting president of Panamá, hosted him for an Oval Office meeting that included a photo-op with their wives, and treated him to a luncheon.

Last month, Mr. Trump hosted Russia's foreign minister and U.S. ambassador in the Oval Office, and officials in Kiev had feared the U.S. leader would meet Mr. Putin before Mr. Poroshenko.

In the brief Oval Office appearance Tuesday, Mr. Trump didn't publicly mention pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. A White House statement after the meeting said the two leaders discussed "support for the peaceful resolution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and President Poroshenko's reform agenda and anti-corruption efforts."

Mr. Poroshenko, who made a fortune in a chocolate-making business before going into politics, has hoped his background as an entrepreneur may give him a means to forge ties with Mr. Trump, officials close to the Ukrainian president said.

"This is a good thing that this meeting is taking place before a Trump-Putin meeting," said John Herbst, a former U.S. ambassador to the Ukraine who is now at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, DC. "It's important that there be a real exchange between the two presidents."

The Trump administration has voiced support for Ukraine, saying the U.S. would maintain sanctions on Russia until it reversed its annexation of Crimea. But Ukrainian officials have been unsettled by some other signals. During the presidential campaign last year, Mr. Trump suggested sanctions against Moscow should be eased, and earlier this year Mr. Trump met briefly with a domestic political rival to the Ukrainian president, former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Both U.S. and European officials have expressed frustration over a lack of progress in implementing a peace plan for eastern Ukraine that had been brokered in 2014 and 2015 in the Belarus capital of Minsk with the help of European mediators.

Tenets of the so-called Minsk agreement included holding local elections in Ukraine's breakaway Donbas region and returning the border with Russia to Ukrainian control.

Last week, Mr. Tillerson suggested the U.S. would back an entirely new peace deal, saying it would support efforts of Ukraine and Russia to resolve the conflict outside of the Minsk accord.

FP Foreign Policy

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko met with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and then, briefly, enjoyed a "drop-in" visit with President Donald Trump on Tuesday.

The brief visit appeared to be a departure for the Trump White House, which has been featuring one-on-one meetings with presidents big and small, sometimes followed by a joint press conference — and certainly not relegating foreign heads of state to drop-ins. Poroshenko, though, slipped into Washington, keeping a low profile while he met with the Ukrainian diaspora.

"It was being kept very, very quiet," Askold Krushelnysky, a journalist closely following the visit, told Foreign Policy. Even Ukrainian media was keeping it quiet. They weren't "absolutely sure" that Poroshenko was going to get what he wanted — namely, a visit with Trump. The visit, he said, was intentionally "kept very low key to avoid the embarrassment" of not getting any face time, which was only announced by the White House on Monday, shortly after 10 p.m. Eastern Time.

Ukraine's embassy did not immediately provide comment.

The optics of the meeting are sure to to be the focus of the visit. Poroshenko was hosted by Pence; the two then had a "drop-in" visit in the Oval Office to see Trump and H.R. McMaster, the national security advisor. The Ukrainian leader's treatment is likely to be viewed back in Ukraine, and elsewhere in Europe, as a weather vane of sorts for the White House's stance toward Kiev and Russia's military intervention there, which remains deadlocked since war began in 2014.

That issue remains a critical one to Ukrainians: According to a poll by the International Republican

Institute's (IRI) Center for Insights in Survey Research, 80 percent of Ukrainians nationwide and 73 percent of those in the "war-torn Donbas region" should indeed remain as Ukraine. And Trump's campaign stance on it made Ukrainians nervous: His campaign manager used to work for Viktor Yanukovych, the former Ukrainian president and friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But during the Obama administration, former Vice President Joe Biden was tasked with spearheading engagement with Kiev and wielded great influence over the Ukrainian government as he pressed them for greater efforts in battling corruption and reforming their economy. In that sense, Pence as the new point person for Poroshenko and the administration's stance on Ukraine do not mark much of a radical departure from previous policy, says Matthew Rojansky, director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute.

"This isn't a downgrade compared to before," Rojansky told FP. "I understand the perception and that the Ukrainians are looking for reassurances. But the reassurance isn't about the meeting, it's about the policy."

That policy, so far, seems to be in line with the Obama-era stance on Ukraine and in dealing with Moscow since its annexation of Crimea in 2014. The Senate recently passed new economic sanctions against Russia, although it's still to be seen if they'll make it past the House. But even if they don't, on Tuesday, the Treasury Department announced new sanctions of its own.

"I think it is obvious. To date, the U.S. adopts additional sanctions almost every day. I consider the position of the United States as a solid, reliable and strategic partner of Ukraine," Poroshenko said.

Still, Poroshenko's visit will remain under the microscope. Scrutiny over Trump's relationship with the Kremlin remains intense and Poroshenko's treatment during his visit will invite comparison to Trump's backslapping meeting in the Oval Office with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Sergey Kislyak, Russia's ambassador to Washington, on May 10.

A White House readout of the visit said simply, "President Donald J. Trump met today with President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine to discuss support for the peaceful resolution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and President Poroshenko's reform agenda and anticorruption efforts." Poroshenko has run into no small amount of criticism for what failing to make good on the latter.

But, then, there is at least one feather in Poroshenko's cap — he saw Trump before Putin will. The Ukrainian leader's visit came ahead of Trump's first scheduled meeting with Putin at the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany on July 7 and 8.

"Ukrainians," Krushelnysky said, "will see this as a great victory."

POLITICO

Vladimir Putin's man in the Balkans

Howard Amos

MOSCOW — If appearances are to be believed, Vladimir Putin has a new point man in the Balkans.

Nikolai Patrushev, a Kremlin hawk, career intelligence officer and close associate of the Russian president, is the head of Russia's Security Council, known for his fiery nationalism, conspiratorial world view and extensive espionage experience.

An unofficial Balkans portfolio for Patrushev would fit an emerging pattern. While Russian foreign policy officially falls to Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, actual decision-making is increasingly driven by a small coterie of intelligence officers and defense officials with close access to Putin.

"Russia has been increasingly becoming an 'adhocracy,' where individuals get tasked with responsibilities that may or may not fit with their formal remit," said Mark Galeotti, an expert on the Russian security services and a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague.

"Patrushev is definitely one of those people who think Russia is in an existential struggle for its survival" — *Mark Galeotti, expert on the Russian security services*

The former spy's involvement indicates a more hard-line Russian approach to the region.

"Patrushev is definitely one of those people who think Russia is in an existential struggle for its survival," Galeotti added. "It's a Cold-War, Manichean vision of the world. And one in which any reversals for the West are implicitly good for Russia."

Patrushev joined the Soviet Union's KGB in 1974 and is believed to have first met Putin — also a former intelligence officer — in the early 1990s. After 10 years as head of the FSB, the domestic successor agency to the KGB, he moved in 2008 to the Security Council, an influential body of senior officials set up by Putin.

With much of his career spent in the shadows, Patrushev has little public record of involvement in foreign policy. But he is known to have been one of the small group of advisers close to Putin intimately involved in the planning of the annexation the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014.

Russia's security services are exerting more and more influence on foreign policy, according to Andrey Kortunov, director of the Russian International Affairs Council, a think tank advising the Kremlin.

In public statements, Patrushev has claimed the United States is striving to dismember the Russian state to "open up access to rich resources that they think Russia unfairly controls." He has also criticized what he sees as increasingly aggressive behavior from NATO, claimed that European Union foreign policy is dictated from Washington and warned of the rise of Nazism in Eastern Europe.

Patrushev's unofficial new position leading Russia's Balkan strategy comes at a time of poor relations between Russia and the West.

Russia is particularly angry over the accession to NATO earlier this month of Montenegro, the small Adriatic country that accused Russian intelligence officers of masterminding an attempted coup in the country last year, apparently designed to derail its bid to join the alliance.

In the wake of allegations of Russian involvement in the murky coup plot, Patrushev rushed to Serbia to meet top government and security officials, in what many saw as a mission to smooth ruffled feathers. Media reports had suggested Belgrade had extradited several Russian nationals accused of masterminding the plot.

Officials in Moscow insisted there was nothing out of the ordinary about the trip, but Patrushev's role has only grown since.

Last month, Patrushev was the one to meet Serbian Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic during his visit to Moscow for talks on issues from organized crime to the internet.

"Over the last year, it has become clear that Patrushev has been given the Balkans," said Galeotti. "That says something about how important the Balkans is or how important it will become."

Patrushev has no known professional ties to the Balkans, but appointed Leonid Reshetnikov, a controversial Balkans expert and extremely hawkish former intelligence officer to the Security Council. Last October, on the eve of the Montenegro coup attempt, Reshetnikov said it was "time [for Russia] to return to the Balkans."

Patrushev's rising profile in the Balkans has coincided with an uptick in Russian activity in the region.

Two Russian nationals, Eduard Sismakov and Vladimir Popov, were charged in absentia earlier this month by a Montenegrin court for attempting to subvert the country's constitution during last year's alleged coup attempt. Montenegrin prosecutors believe the two men are Russian intelligence officers. Sismakov was reported by Russian media to have worked as a military attaché in Russia's embassy in Poland before being expelled in 2014 on spying charges.

Documents leaked this year also suggest a concerted effort by Russian spies and diplomats in Macedonia, Serbia's southern neighbor, to increase support for pro-Russian groups.

Russia could take "very serious" measures in response to any further NATO expansion in the Balkan peninsula, according to Yelena Guskova, a professor at the Institute of Slavic Studies in Moscow.

Russia is likely to concentrate its efforts on shoring up existing alliances in the Balkans, according to experts. This means, in particular, Serbia.

"Judging by Montenegro, lots of different steps can be taken," she said, referring to the Kremlin's decision to cut economic ties and urging Russian holidaymakers not to visit the country, which is dependent on tourist revenues.

Patrushev warned earlier this year that NATO is also looking to persuade Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Macedonia to join the security bloc.

Russia is likely to concentrate its efforts on shoring up existing alliances in the Balkans, according to experts. This means, in particular, Serbia, with whom Russia has historically strong links. The two countries share common Slavic origins and are both primarily Orthodox Christian.

"Russia will stick to the countries on the Balkan peninsula that confirm their commitment to not joining NATO," said Kortunov.

INTERNATIONAL

The New York Times

American Warplane Shoots Down Iranian-Made Drone Over Syria

Michael R. Gordon

Tuesday's encounter was the latest in a series that has heightened tensions in Syria. Government forces and the Iranian-backed militias that support them are converging on ungoverned parts of the country where American-backed fighters are also maneuvering as they seek to roll back the Islamic State's self-declared caliphate.

Two days earlier, an American F/A-18 shot down a Syrian SU-22 warplane that had dropped bombs near American-backed fighters south of Tabqa. In response, Russia, which staunchly supports the Syrian government, warned that it would target any American or coalition planes that flew west of the Euphrates River.

Russian officials kept up their war of words on Tuesday. Sergei A. Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, complained that the downing of the drone merely "helps those terrorists whom the United States fights."

Despite the heated remarks, signs emerged that the Russian and American militaries were working to manage the crisis. Although Russia announced Monday that it would suspend the use of a hotline set up for the two sides to avoid unintended confrontations in the skies over Syria, Lt. Col. Damien Pickart, the spokesman for the American-led air war command at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, said the hotline had not been interrupted.

"The de-confliction channel remains active and in use," Colonel Pickart said.

The Pentagon said there were no indications Tuesday of hostile action on the part of the Russians toward American forces, and the United States was also being cautious.

Lt. Gen. Jeffrey L. Harrigian, who commands the coalition-led air campaign over Syria, said Monday that the United States had repositioned its aircraft to minimize the risk from Syrian and Russian air defenses but would continue its strikes against the Islamic State in Syria.

There was a close encounter Monday, however, between American and Russian aircraft in another arena of growing strategic interest to the two sides: the Baltic Sea. An American RC-135 reconnaissance plane was intercepted by a Russian SU-27 fighter, and at times, the aircraft were only several feet apart, officials at the United States European Command said.

Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the encounter was "unsafe" because the Russian pilot had "poor control" of his aircraft and it was racing at a high speed.

Iranian drones have been flying fairly regularly over southern Syria, and Syrian aircraft have begun to venture there as well. That has been a worry for the United States, which along with allies established a garrison at al-Tanf to advise and train Syrian fighters to fight the Islamic State.

This month, an American warplane nearly shot down a Syrian SU-22 that appeared to be maneuvering to drop bombs on American-backed Syrian fighters, but the Syrian aircraft dumped its munitions in the desert and zoomed away.

After the Russian threats to target aircraft west of the Euphrates, Australia said Tuesday that it had suspended its air operations over Syria.

Australian reconnaissance aircraft and refueling tankers have been moved out of Syrian airspace, paralleling what the United States and other coalition members have done. Australia's F/A-18s, however, generally fly over Iraq and not Syria, so the country's move will not greatly affect their operations.

the Atlantic

U.S. Military Shoots Down 'Hostile' Drone in Syria

Aria Bendix

A U.S. fighter jet shot down an armed drone in southern Syria just after midnight local time on Tuesday, the Pentagon announced. The drone, which was made in Iran, was reportedly headed toward a U.S.-backed coalition of Syrian fighters stationed at a military camp near the Syria-Jordan border. For months, the U.S. military has been training Syrian opposition troops in the area to fight against ISIS. Tuesday's drone strike emphasizes another escalating conflict in the region between U.S.-backed forces and those loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

According to the U.S.-backed coalition, the drone "displayed hostile intent" as it approached their camp on Tuesday. Despite U.S. efforts to intercept the drone and make it change course, it continued to veer toward coalition troops. The incident marks the third time this month that the U.S. has shot down an aircraft affiliated with the Assad regime. On June 8, a similar drone from pro-regime forces was taken down after it dropped munitions near the U.S. military camp.

On Sunday, the U.S. also shot down a Syrian air force plane targeting U.S.-backed rebels, inciting criticism from Russia, who supports the Assad regime. The day after the incident, Russia warned that it would target "any aircraft, including planes and drones belonging to the international coalition, operating west of the Euphrates river." The warning was enough to prompt Australia to halt its own airstrikes in Syria, which were helping the U.S. to combat ISIS.

On Monday, Russia also suspended a hotline that enabled communication with the U.S. in order to prevent unexpected confrontations in the air. The Pentagon has since claimed that the hotline remains open, with the U.S. willing to continue its use. "To be clear, we prefer to keep this channel of communication open. We want to de-escalate, not escalate," Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, told the AP. "We remain available on our end. I'll leave it to the Russians to state their level of participation."

While Tuesday showed no sign of hostility between Russian and U.S. forces, the shooting down of a pro-regime drone will do little to improve relations. In the wake of the incident, Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei A. Ryabkov, has accused the drone strike of "help[ing] those terrorists whom the United States fights." And yet, as the U.S. coalition grows closer to overtaking Raqqa, an ISIS stronghold in Syria, any confrontation between U.S. and Russian forces could arguably do the same.

The Washington Post

Podesta & Katulis : Trump's silent surge in the Middle East — and the slippery slope to war

By John Podesta and Brian Katulis

John Podesta, chair of Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, served as counselor to President Barack Obama and chief

of staff to President Bill Clinton and is the founder of the Center for American Progress. Brian Katulis is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

The United States used to debate the wars its military was fighting. But that's not the case with the ongoing silent surge of U.S. military operations and arms sales across the Middle East.

The downing on Sunday of a Syrian warplane by an American F/A-18, along with a strike last month in Syria against a pro-Assad regime militia, were just the latest episodes in a creeping military escalation across the region that lacks well-defined strategy and goals understood by the American public.

Unlike the 2007 Iraq surge under President George W. Bush and the 2010 Afghanistan surge under President Barack Obama, this surge by the Trump administration is occurring without an engaged public discussion of the risks or about diplomacy and other tools of national power needed to protect the United States. Although today's surge doesn't involve hundreds of thousands of troops occupying major urban areas, it represents an increasing military presence, particularly of Special Operations forces, that is not transparent.

In just five months, President Trump has moved U.S. troops closer to the front lines in complex fights in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. As he has recently done in Afghanistan, Trump has also delegated greater authority to the Pentagon to set force levels and hit targets from the air. The frequency of drone strikes has quadrupled compared with Obama's average. In Yemen, U.S. aircraft hit as many targets in just one week in early March as Obama would strike in a year . In Iraq and Syria, the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition released more guided munitions and other weaponry in May than in any previous month of the campaign. The United States also just quietly deployed a long-range artillery system in southeastern Syria, a move that failed to prompt any discussion.

In the Middle East's tinderbox, for every action there's a reaction, and it is not clear that the Trump administration has thought through what could go wrong — such as the possibility of slipping into a direct war with Iran or U.S. troops facing chemical weapons attacks by the Islamic State.

Certainly, some of these moves represent the next step in a long-term campaign to defeat the Islamic State that began under the Obama administration, particularly in Iraq and the drive to retake the northern Syrian city of Raqqa. What's different is the downgrading of diplomacy and other tools necessary to end the fighting and produce long-term stability — including proposed drastic cuts at the State Department and leaving key diplomatic and national security posts unfilled. Trump has also placed the United States squarely on one side of the Sunni-Shiite sectarian conflict roiling the region — quite a shift from Trump's two predecessors.

What's to be done? Congress should do its job of providing oversight and asking tough questions in three areas.

First, safeguard against a slippery slope to war. Congress should renew the debate on a new authorization for the use of military force to replace the one passed to counter al-Qaeda and its associated forces more than 15 years ago. Across the broader Middle East, the United States has about 80,000 troops deployed — far fewer than the more than 300,000 serving in 2008. Today the overall numbers are not as important as where the troops are located, what they are doing — and, most critically, how the use of military force fits into a broader strategy. The Trump team needs to explain this strategy, and Congress needs to authorize it and set appropriate limits.

Second, no blank checks to our regional partners. Congress should carefully examine any proposed weapons sales, such as additional arms to Saudi Arabia and military assistance to countries including Egypt, and ask tough questions of the administration and U.S. partners. The central one is how this security cooperation will produce greater stability and result in de-escalation, rather than the continued fragmentation of the state system in the Middle East.

Lastly, invest in the complete inventory of national security tools. Congress should resist the Trump administration's proposal to gut elements of national power essential to defeating the Islamic State, ending conflict and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. That means fully investing in the State Department and strongly supporting efforts by international organizations such as the United Nations to address the historic refugee crisis.

The United States needs to work with partners to defeat terrorist groups and counter destabilizing policies from countries such as Iran. But in five months, the Trump administration has exposed the country to greater risks without a clear strategy. Drowned out by real concerns about Russia and the daily grind of Trump's erratic politics at home, the United States is lurching closer to the heart of the complicated crossfire in the Middle East without sufficient scrutiny. It's time for Congress to step up.

THE DAILY BEAST

Saudi King Names Son Crown Prince, Upending Royal Succession

Saudi Arabia's King Salman has named his 31-year-old son, Mohammed bin Salman, as crown prince and ousted the kingdom's counterterrorism czar, upending the line of royal succession. The changes were announced by the state-run Saudi Press Agency early Wednesday, with a slew of royal decrees unveiling a major reshuffling. Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who had been first in line to take the throne, was stripped of his title and ousted from his post as interior minister. The new crown prince, who is already in charge of overseeing a large portfolio as defense minister and heads an economic council, was not very well known before his father became king in January 2015. His quick rise to power since then has reportedly left some in the royal family blindsided.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Saudi King Salman Ousts Nephew as Crown Prince, Installs Son

Nicolas Parasie, Margherita Stancati and Summer Said

DUBAI—Saudi Arabia's King Salman on Wednesday designated his son as his successor, paving the way for the young, assertive prince to assume the throne at a time when it is facing tumultuous change at home and intensifying rivalries in the Middle East.

The new crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, is the elderly monarch's 31-year old son and minister of defense. He ascended to the upper reaches of power in the kingdom when his father became king in early 2015. He then set about spearheading an ambitious economic agenda to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil and carve out a more muscular foreign policy in a volatile region.

He replaces as crown prince Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, a nephew of the king, who was stripped of all his positions, including interior minister. His ouster effectively ends the political career of a royal who was one of Washington's most trusted security partners and was known as the country's counterterrorism czar.

Saudi Arabia's state television broadcast footage of Mohammed bin Nayef pledging allegiance to his successor, in an apparent display of royal unity after the changes announced. The video showed Prince Mohammed bin Salman kneeling down and kissing the hands of Mohammed bin Nayef, who told his cousin: "May God help you."

A senior Saudi official at the royal court said the change of succession was endorsed by 31 out of 34 members of the Allegiance Council, a group of senior princes who advise the king on matters of succession.

By appointing his own son as his designated successor, the 81-year old King Salman upends decades of royal tradition. Since the reign of King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi state who came to power in 1932, the throne has passed from brother to brother among his sons.

One of King Salman's first acts as monarch was to remove a half-brother as his heir and to appoint two younger princes in the line of succession—Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Prince Mohammed bin Salman—a change that shocked many royals. The king was able to take such bold action partly because of his stature within the House of Saud. He has long cultivated good ties with his extended family.

Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ascension signals a potential generational shift, one that would bring the monarchy more in line with the country's young population. But it also risks a backlash within the

vast House of Saud, whose members have long ruled through consensus among its various branches.

Kristian Ulrichsen of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy said the future success of Prince Mohammed bin Salman depends on the support he will receive from within the wider Al Saud family, especially if some of the economic reforms he is associated with prove to be controversial.

"Mohammed bin Salman's elevation to Crown Prince has been on the cards for a while, but still represents an enormous shake-up in Saudi succession dynamics," he said.

As next in line to the throne, Prince Mohammed bin Salman could become a rarity: A young Saudi king. A long list of predecessors have taken power as septuagenarians or octogenarians, allowing limited time to see through their visions for the kingdom's future.

"The benefit now is that we have young leader who has the authority to…plan not 10 years in advance but 40 years in advance and insure there is institutional continuity going forward," said Mohammed Alyahya, a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

The royal shake-up coincides with a political crisis in the Persian Gulf region that pits Saudi Arabia and its allies against Qatar. Saudi Arabia is also entangled in a continuing conflict in neighboring Yemen and is challenging rival Iran for regional sway.

Seasoned U.S. diplomats tried to stay out of the succession struggle between Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and the young Prince Mohammed bin Salman, not wanting to risk upsetting their close partnership with the interior minister, who is widely lauded for combating a growing al Qaeda threat in the kingdom over the last decade and a half.

Yet the Saudi monarchy, long synonymous with privilege and patronage, has come under strain in recent years and jockeying has intensified.

In the past two years, Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been the public face of change in the kingdom. He has introduced austerity measures—some of which were reversed later—to help reduce a budget deficit caused by the drop in oil prices. He has also backed the potential listing next year of state oil giant Saudi Aramco, in part to push the economy onto a path of privatization and greater competitiveness needed to generate jobs for the young and attract foreign investment beyond the oil sector.

The economic pressures have precipitated broader social changes. Long an ultraconservative society where women still can't drive, Saudi Arabia is now embracing significant cultural reforms, staging public concerts and is set to open its first movie theaters, once opposed by the religious establishment.

Some senior officials say the secession move is a sign of more big changes afoot. "It is a highly calculated move to make Saudi Arabia as stable as possible," said another senior Saudi official, who asked not to be named. "You need this clarity when you have a big ambitious reform plan you want to achieve,"

Some critics have portrayed the new crown prince as reckless. Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen has cost billions of dollars, killed thousands of civilians and so far failed to oust Houthi rebels from the country's capital. And for all the talk of an economic overhaul, the country's economy continues to depend overwhelmingly on oil revenues. Economic growth and job creation, especially among the young, remains lackluster.

Still, Prince Mohammed bin Salman has embraced the role of the royal prying open the kingdom's economy and society after decades of isolation.

He has met heads of state as well as global business leaders, such as Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, to attract more foreign capital to Saudi Arabia and explore investments overseas. In recent weeks, Saudi Arabia's sovereign-wealth fund agreed with Japan's SoftBank to launch a $100 billion fund that will invest in tech companies.

"I admire his energy," a Saudi close to a powerful strain of the royal family said of the new crown prince. "But at the same time it worries me and worries many Saudis that he is over confident."

Al-Shabaab Kills 15 in Latest Car Bomb Attack

Aria Bendix

At least 15 people are dead and around 18 wounded following a car bombing led by the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab that targeted a government building in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. According to Mohamed Hussein, a senior Somali police officer, the death toll is expected to rise given the state of those injured. Al-Shabaab has since claimed responsibility for the attack, which was carried out by a lone suicide car bomber disguised in a milk delivery van.

On Tuesday, Somalia's prime minister, Hassan Ali Khaire, said the attack targeted civilians who were preparing to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr, or the "festival of breaking the fast"—a three-day event signaling the end of Ramadan. The fact that attackers chose this day to strike, Khaire said, demonstrated their "evil-mindedness." He added that the bombing would not disrupt Somalia's larger efforts toward achieving peace and stability.

In recent years, Somalia has been the target of numerous attacks from al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate that was forced out of Mogadishu, among other major cities and towns, in 2011 by African Union and Somali forces. Despite losing control of its land, the militant group has launched attacks on many high-profile areas in Somalia, including hotels, restaurants, and military checkpoints. The group has also targeted government buildings like the Somali parliament, supreme court offices, and even the nation's presidential palace. While Tuesday's attack likely targeted civilians, it took place at the Wadajir district headquarters, where Somali officials and their staff members were staying. A spokesperson for al-Shabaab claimed that "government and their staff" were among those killed.

According to research from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, al-Shabaab has now surpassed Boko Haram as the deadliest terrorist group in Africa, killing more than 4,000 people in 2016 alone. The group has recently pledged to ramp up its attacks following a military offensive commissioned in April by Somalia's newly-elected government. On June 8, al-Shabaab carried out one of its deadliest attacks in years, killing around 70 people at a military base in Puntland. Just last week, the group detonated a car bomb outside a restaurant in Mogadishu, killing at least 31 more.

UNE - After Otto Warmbier's death, tourism to North Korea comes under scrutiny

TOKYO — For some intrepid travelers, North Korea is the holy grail. There's hardly a place that's more off the beaten path, a travel tale more exotic than one that begins "When I was in Pyongyang . . ."

About 1,000 American tourists visit North Korea each year, looking for an adventure and a glimpse at the "Hermit Kingdom." But the death of Otto Warmbier, the American student who had been imprisoned in the country for 17 months, has focused a new light on tourism to North Korea, which the regime has been trying to promote.

Warmbier's father, Fred, said after his son was sent home in a coma last week that companies promoting tourism to North Korea are providing "fodder" for the regime.

Rep. Edward R. Royce (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, agreed. "Otto's father is right," he said. "Travel propaganda lures far too many people to North Korea."

The United States should ban tourist travel to North Korea, Royce said after Warmbier's parents announced their 22-year-old son's death Monday.

Warmbier, a University of Virginia student, was curious about the world and wanted to explore it, his father said in an interview in April. So, at the end of 2015, the young man joined the "New Year's Party Tour" run by Young Pioneer Tours, a company that boasts "budget tours to destinations your mother wants you to stay away from!"

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has set a goal of attracting a million tourists to the Communist-ruled

county. Critics have said tourism is a significant source of foreign currency for the regime.

The State Department has steadily ratcheted up its travel advisory for North Korea and strongly warns Americans against traveling to the country because of the risk of arbitrary detention. Warmbier was sentenced to 15 years in prison for allegedly stealing a propaganda sign.

Efforts to restrict U.S. citizens from traveling to North Korea are likely to gain new momentum now, with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle calling the regime "barbaric" and "murderous."

A bill is already before the House to limit travel to North Korea for American citizens, and Warmbier's death could prompt the Senate to consider the same. The Trump administration is also considering stopping Americans from going to North Korea as tourists.

Three other Americans are still being detained in North Korea, but they were all working there — two at a private Korean-American-run university and one at a hotel in a northern special economic zone.

Particular attention is now falling on Young Pioneer Tours, a China-based travel company that takes its name from the youth leagues in communist countries.

"The devastating loss of Otto Warmbier's life has led us to reconsider our position on accepting American tourists," the company said in a statement Tuesday, calling his detention "appalling" and saying "a tragedy like this must never be repeated."

Young Pioneer Tours will no longer be taking U.S. citizens to North Korea, it said: "We now consider the risk to Americans visiting North Korea to be too high."

Two other travel companies, British-run Koryo Tours and New Jersey-based Uri Tours, said that they were "reviewing" whether to continue taking Americans to North Korea. All of the companies have had tourists detained in North Korea, but none with the consequences faced by Warmbier.

Red flags have been raised about Young Pioneer Tours for some time among the relatively small group of people who travel to North Korea regularly.

Five people who witnessed Young Pioneer tours in North Korea said they saw reckless behavior, with customers drinking heavily, not being respectful and denigrating their local tour guides. Three of the five people interviewed work in North Korea, and the two others were on tours.

One of the people, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he still works in North Korea, recalled seeing some of the tourists leaving a hotel bar at 7:30 a.m.

A second person, who had been on a Young Pioneer tour, said that the company's spiel about not being a typical travel experience was a big part of its appeal and that drinking was a part of that. The company advertises a "not your average beer festival" trip to Pyongyang in the summer and a St. Patrick's Day tour featuring an "international pub crawl." "So put on your greens and come join us as we challenge the [North] Koreans to a bunch of friendly drinking games!" its site says.

But taking too casual an attitude toward being in North Korea can foster a "reckless" atmosphere among tour groups, said another frequent traveler to Pyongyang.

One tourist did a handstand in front of Kumsusan, the mausoleum where North Korea's first two leaders lie in state, one of the most sensitive sites for the regime. This resulted in the North Korean tour guide losing her job, according to two people with knowledge of the situation.

Alcohol was not involved in that incident, said Troy Collings, a New Zealander who is one of the partners in Young Pioneer Tours. He did not respond to specific questions about reports of excessive drinking on the company's tours. However, he said that the company was professional and well prepared.

"People are quick to embellish their stories when the media are interested," Collings said.

Tour leaders had warned all the customers about the significance of Kumsusan and told them not to act inappropriately near images of the leaders, he said.

"We have taken over 8,000 people to North Korea with only one incident," Collings said, referring to Warmbier's treatment.

Daniel Lahti, a 31-year-old Swede who ran the Pyongyang marathon in April, said he never felt anything less than safe in North Korea, even when enjoying a few beers after the big run.

"It was perfectly fine while we were there," said Lahti, who went on a tour led by Collings. "He was very concerned about safety and told us that everyone should behave in certain ways. As long as you play by the rules, you'll be fine."

Adrian Webster, a 31-year-old Australian who traveled to North Korea with his girlfriend in April, said that he always felt safe with Young Pioneer Tours.

"Before departing to North Korea, a briefing took place in Beijing. They again highlighted the rules and answered any concerns and questions," he said. "When making the booking, you are also required to read and sign a travel agreement."

Young Pioneer Tours was founded in 2008 by Gareth Johnson, a 36-year-old British man who has a large red tattoo on his left arm showing the Communist hammer and sickle that — along with a calligraphy brush — are the emblem of North Korea's ruling party. The brush is replaced by a machine gun in his tattoo.

"I realized there was nothing in the way of a budget company that catered for the demographic of people who would not usually do 'group tours,' so felt I could combine my love of travel with my newfound love for the people and culture of the DPRK!" Johnson says on the company's website, using the abbreviation for North Korea's official name.

He is also believed to be involved with another company, previously called Gross Negligence Tours, but which now goes by GN Tours.

The company, inspired by the movie "The Hangover," offers stag parties in Cambodia — "beaches, babes, bullets and booze (all cheap)" — and the Philippines.

References to Johnson no longer appear on the GN Tours website, although Google searches show that they existed, and several photos on the GN Tours page are the same as those on the Young Pioneers site. The GN Instagram page shows several photos of Johnson, one in a T-shirt with Communist insignia, and Johnson's Instagram handle is "gntours."

The New York Times

UNE - China Falls Short on Curbing North Korea, Trump Says

Mark Landler and Gardiner Harris

It is not clear how Mr. Trump's statement will affect Wednesday's Chinese-American meetings. Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and other American officials had been planning to press their Chinese counterparts on North Korea. On Tuesday afternoon, senior officials said they were still trying to gauge the meaning of the president's tweet.

Reports late on Tuesday of renewed activity at a North Korean nuclear site added to the sense of urgency, and underlined how China had failed to curb Mr. Kim's provocative actions.

Administration officials said they were considering imposing so-called secondary sanctions on a variety of Chinese banks and companies with ties to North Korea. Such a step would greatly increase the pressure on Mr. Kim's government, but it could also antagonize the Chinese government.

In the short run, Mr. Warmbier's death from a brain injury suffered while he was a prisoner makes engagement with the North seem a more remote possibility. Mr. Trump has said in the past that he would be willing to meet with Mr. Kim if the conditions were right.

"Clearly, we're moving further away, not closer, to those conditions being enacted," said Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary. "I would not suggest that we're moving any closer."

But China's failure to do more to pressure North Korea — which was little surprise to anyone who follows the issue — also leaves the United States with few better alternatives to diplomacy. Some American officials had hoped to use the secret negotiations to obtain Mr. Warmbier's release as the predicate for a dialogue with the North on other issues.

The tension between those who want to shelve engagement and take a much tougher line on North Korea and those who want to continue probing for openings is reflected in the administration's ambivalent response after Mr. Warmbier was flown home in a coma last week.

At first, the White House and State Department said very little about the case, beyond expressing relief that he had been reunited with his family. But as outrage over the death of Mr. Warmbier, a 22-year-old college student, grew on social media and cable television, both released statements late on Monday condemning North Korea for his treatment.

Even on Tuesday, however, Mr. Trump appeared to place more of the blame on his predecessor, Barack Obama, for failing to negotiate Mr. Warmbier's release than on Mr. Kim. "It's a disgrace what happened to Otto," the president said. "Frankly, if he were brought home sooner, I think the results would have been a lot different."

But even as he implicitly criticized his predecessor, Mr. Trump appeared to walk away from one of the biggest gambles of his presidency. At a summit meeting in April at his Palm Beach, Fla., estate, Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump tried to enlist Mr. Xi to ratchet up China's pressure on North Korea — something China has historically avoided because of fears that it would precipitate a collapse in a country with which it shares a 880-mile border.

The president made Mr. Xi the centerpiece of his strategy for North Korea, agreeing to soft-pedal his complaints during the 2016 campaign about China's trade and currency practices in return for Beijing squeezing its neighbor to curb its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

"I explained to the President of China that a trade deal with the U.S. will be far better for them if they solve the North Korean problem," Mr. Trump declared in a morning tweet a few days after the summit meeting.

As the evidence accumulated that China was taking only modest steps against North Korea, impatience with Beijing mounted inside the White House. But in his tweet on Tuesday, Mr. Trump seemed to take pains not to allow his disappointment to affect the relationship he has cultivated with the Chinese leader.

"The question we've all been waiting to have answered is, 'When does President Trump realize that Xi Jinping is not going to deliver North Korea for him, and what does he do when that happens?'" said Ely Ratner, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Otto Warmbier's death accelerates that day of reckoning."

The meeting in Washington is part of the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue set up after April's summit meeting. It will include Mr. Tillerson and China's top foreign policy official, Yang Jiechi, as well as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and a Chinese general, Fang Fenghui. The four are expected to meet during the morning, hold a working lunch, break for the afternoon and then reconvene for dinner.

North Korea will top the agenda, but China's increasing militarism in the South China Seas and other maritime issues, the fight against the Islamic State, and other possible military cooperation will also be discussed.

Some China experts said the administration could use Mr. Warmbier's death as leverage to demand that China put pressure on North Korea to release three other Americans being held there.

"The Chinese will only spring into action if they recognize the status quo is unsustainable," said Evan S. Medeiros, a former senior director for Asia in Mr. Obama's National Security Council.

Even apart from North Korea, relations with China could soon turn more contentious. Within days, the administration is expected to declare that foreign steel imports threaten the domestic steel industry. That will lead Mr. Trump to impose duties that will anger the Chinese, a major steel producer.

"This initial period of calm in the U.S.-China relationship was not sustainable," said Eric Altbach, senior vice president at the Albright Stonebridge Group. "We're reaching the end of the beginning for the Trump administration, and things are only going to get worse."

The Washington Post

Trump signals shifting approach to North Korea after death of U.S. student

President Trump on Tuesday appeared to lose faith in China's ability to pressure North Korea, and his spokesman said the White House is "moving further away" from direct engagement with Pyongyang, throwing into question the administration's strategy to contain the rogue nation's growing nuclear threat.

The death of American college student Otto Warmbier in Cincinnati this week, days after his release from 17 months of detention in North Korea, has injected new political complications into Trump's bid to persuade dictator Kim Jong Un to curb his regime's behavior.

Trump called the treatment of Warmbier, who reportedly was in a coma for most of his captivity, "a total disgrace" and suggested that he has given up hope that Beijing could exert meaningful leverage on Kim.

"While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi & China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out," Trump wrote in a tweet. "At least I know China tried!"

Trump had placed a heavy bet on China during a two-day summit with President Xi Jinping in Florida in April, personally lobbying him to impose sanctions on Chinese banks and other entities that do business with North Korea, whose economy and military program rely heavily on financial capital from its large and powerful neighbor.

At the time, Trump said he had chosen to hold off on campaign pledges to punish China over trade disputes, in part because of Beijing's assistance on North Korea. Xi has sought to curry favor with Trump, and the Chinese government this week invited the president's daughter Ivanka Trump and son-in-law Jared Kushner to visit Beijing later this year.

But President Trump's souring views on China's influence with North Korea could affect economic policy, including a pending decision on whether to impose new restrictions on steel imports, which could spark a trade war with China.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis are scheduled to meet with Chinese officials in Washington to resume economic and security-related talks that began during the summit.

"We have been very forceful in the political and economic pressure that has been applied to North Korea," White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Tuesday afternoon, before the president's tweet about China. "We'll continue to apply that. Obviously, China has played and can continue to play a greater role helping to resolve this situation."

Foreign policy analysts have long questioned China's willingness and ability to alter Pyongyang's behavior and slow its pursuit of a more sophisticated nuclear weapons program that could potentially reach the continental United States.

But they acknowledged that the administration has few other options.

The Chinese "have limited capacity to do something, and I think they feel the weight of expectations beginning to burden them," said Christopher Hill, who led the U.S. delegation in the six-party talks with North Korea during the George W. Bush administration. "Now the problem is they are really at a loss to come up with something short of direct action, which they were never prepared to engage in. I'm sure there's a lot of serious thinking in China on this. It's important for the Trump administration to keep the heat on."

Senior White House aides declared early on that the administration would abandon President Barack Obama's policy of "strategic patience," which relied on ramping up economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

In an interview in the spring, Trump said he would be "honored" to meet with Kim under the right circumstances, and he proclaimed that the United States was prepared to handle the threat from Pyongyang on its own if China was unable to do so.

"It's a brutal regime, and we'll be able to handle it," Trump reiterated this week.

Warmbier's surprise release last week raised initial speculation that the Trump administration, which sent U.S. diplomat Joseph Yun to Pyongyang to oversee Warmbier's medical evacuation, would open a direct communications channel with Pyongyang aimed at paving the way for negotiations over the nuclear and ballistic missile programs that have made North Korea an international pariah.

But Warmbier's death has made the prospect of high-level bilateral talks, already fraught with diplomatic risks, even less politically feasible, administration officials and foreign policy experts said. Asked Tuesday whether Trump was still open to meeting with Kim, Spicer said the administration was "clearly moving further away" from direct engagement.

Trump, addressing Warmbier's detention during brief remarks in the Oval Office, said,"It should never, ever be allowed to happen." He appeared to indirectly blame Obama for not doing more to free Warmbier: "And frankly, if he were brought home sooner, I think the results would have been a lot different."

A senior Japanese diplomat in Washington said that Tokyo does not believe the time is appropriate "for talks and negotiations" with Pyongyang.

"If anything, this has even strengthened our argument," said the diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to address a U.S. policy matter. "I don't think human life is negotiable. We should not use this incident as a kind of opening for them."

At the State Department, Tillerson is weighing a ban on U.S. citizens traveling to North Korea, a rare step that would seek to stop the flow of an estimated 1,000 Americans who travel there each year.

Three U.S. citizens remain in detention in North Korea, and Tillerson called this week for their release.

Currently, there is no U.S. travel ban in place for any country.

"Generally, Congress doesn't like to do that," said Victor Cha, a Korea expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies who served as senior Asia director at the National Security Council in the Bush administration. "They believe Americans should be free to travel wherever they want. But it's pretty obvious it's necessary at this point."

Evan Medeiros, who served as the NSC's senior Asia director under Obama, said that the Warmbier case could alter the calculus not just for Trump but also for South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in, who had campaigned on a platform to engage Pyongyang.

Moon is scheduled to arrive in Washington next week for a meeting with Trump.

"If the administration is smart, they'll use this as one more reason why sanctions, isolation and coercion need to be the tip of the spear against North Korea," said Medeiros, now an analyst at the Eurasia Group. "The question is, how does this change the trajectory? It makes the prospect of diplomacy, if that's something the administration is seriously entertaining, much more difficult."

FP Foreign Policy

Lewis : North Korea Would Not Hesitate to Kill You

Parents with small children often have strange little rules that reflect the crushing anxiety of love. Some couples, for example, refuse to take the same flight, lest they both perish, leaving their children as orphans. In our house, we have just one such rule, as promulgated by Mrs. Lewis: NO, JEFFREY, YOU ARE NOT GOING TO NORTH KOREA.

As we have learned from the sad tale of Otto Warmbier, who tragically died yesterday, Americans do travel to North Korea. There are more foreigners in North Korea than you think, and there remain three Americans still in custody of North Korea. To be fair, the vast majority return safely, while the few who are detained usually end up being ransomed off. But the possibility of tragedy is always very real, lurking just offstage.

Poor Otto Warmbier traveled to North Korea on an organized tourist trip. Other Americans travel for work, including journalists and academics participating in Track II diplomatic meetings. Two of the Americans currently detained actually lived in Pyongyong; they worked briefly as instructors at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, a privately funded university in North Korea.

Many of those detained have been accused of missionary-related activities. Communist governments in China and North Korea take a dim view of Christian missionaries, for historical reasons, so leaving a Bible in a nightclub bathroom during a trip to North Korea — as Jeffrey Fowle admits to having done — is a good way to run afoul of the authorities. But North Koreans are also eager to hold people that they can ransom. Laura Ling and Eunha Lee were reporters working along the border between China and North Korea, documenting things the North Korean government didn't like, when North Korean soldiers allegedly crossed to the Chinese side of the border to detain them. When North Korea released them following a visit by former President Bill Clinton, it used the footage as the ending for a massive propaganda film in which Clinton is portrayed as having come to Pyongyang to pay tribute to the late Kim Jong Il.

The North Koreans claim Ling and Lee were on the North Korean side of the border, and the subsequent propaganda was a necessary byproduct of enforcing the law against them. But it's not like Pyongyang is above outright kidnapping people for entertainment. Kim Jong Il — a noted film buff — had his agents abduct a famous South Korean actress in 1978, using her as bait to entrap her ex-husband, himself a famous director, six months later. The two were reunited five years later and forced to make half a dozen films before they escaped to the U.S. Embassy on a trip to Vienna in 1986.

You don't have to be famous to be kidnapped by North Korea. During the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea kidnapped at least 17 Japanese citizens from Japan and took them back to North Korea. These were people guilty of nothing more than taking a moonlit stroll on the beach before happening upon North Korean agents. North Korea also abducted a number of women from around the world to serve as spouses for American serviceman who had deserted and defected. (The North Korean authorities take a dimmer view of interracial marriage among Westerners and Koreans than they do kidnapping.) One young woman, a Romanian named Doina Bumbea, went missing in Rome in 1978. She ultimately turned up in Pyongyang, having been abducted and married off to one of those servicemen. Her two sons appear in North Korean propaganda.

There is a tendency to dismiss these kidnappings as events as happened a long time ago. But that does not mean they have stopped. For many years, Japanese authorities were skeptical of claims that disappeared persons had been taken to North Korea. People go missing all the time, something Pyongyang can count on to obscure an abduction here or there. Consider the case of David Sneddon, an American student who disappeared in China in 2004. Although Chinese authorities insist Sneddon died in a ravine, there is no body to prove that and some distressing indications that he had come across North Korean agents prior to his disappearance. The outlandish idea that Sneddon was kidnapped — and remains alive in Pyongyang — doesn't seem so outlandish given the other cases of kidnapping that are now well-documented.

In all these cases there is a common thread, no matter whether the person did something wrong or was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time: The North Koreans felt like each of these human beings could be useful to them. And so, the North Koreans took them — took them like they were objects, not people with futures ahead of them, families that loved them and a dignity deserving respect.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant, in attempting to craft a series of ethical precepts by which we might live, suggested that each of us should "act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." This is one test that the North Korean government fails completely. For North Korea, every person is merely a means toward whatever end the state seeks at that moment. Sometimes that end is discouraging missionary activity in North Korea or eliciting a high-level visit from a foreign dignitary. But as often as not, the end has been shockingly petty: to provide a wife to a foreign defector, to acquire a native speaker of English, or simply to make a good movie.

The North Koreans didn't hate Otto Warmbier, which makes it all the worse. They had no feelings at all for him as a person. He was just an object to them, to be held for a price and then shipped home at a steep discount when it was clear he might die and lose whatever remaining value he held to them.

This why you shouldn't go to North Korea, even if the odds suggest it is safer than a lot of other dumb things you might do. Because at the end of the day, the North Korean government doesn't believe in human dignity, only in itself. You are willingly putting yourself in the hands of a state that would gladly hold you if, for example, if it thought your release might make a nice ending to its next feature film. And if you happen to resist, it is happy to leave you for dead and grab someone else. The fact that you came home safely doesn't mean that the trip was safe, merely that the North Koreans didn't think they needed you at that moment.

So, listen to Mrs. Lewis. DON'T GO TO NORTH KOREA.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

North Korea & Otto Warmbier -- Brutal Murder Deserves U.S. Response

In a previous era, the death of Otto Warmbier, a 22-year-old American student, at the hands of the regime in North Korea likely would have been considered an act of war. On January 2, 2016, Warmbier was detained by regime officials, allegedly for attempting to steal a propaganda poster. Convicted of a "hostile act" against

the state, he was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor. Upon his release into U.S. custody last week, regime officials said that he had been in a coma for nearly 15 months, and blamed a case of botulism. In reality, Warmbier was almost certainly tortured to death by the regime.

What happened to Otto Warmbier is what has been happening to North Korean citizens for more than 70 years, since Kim Il-sung transformed the new country into what it is today: a hermetically sealed prison state operated by a hereditary dictatorship that some scholars estimate has murdered around 1.5 million people in its network of concentration camps. Those not executed by the regime have fared little better: The country is beset by malnourishment and starvation (a famine in the mid 1990s killed half a million people); its GDP per capita is somewhere south of $1,000, putting North Korea behind Rwanda, Haiti, and Sierra Leone globally; and its shoddy infrastructure causes fires that can be seen from space.

None of these issues has ever been of much concern to the Kim regime, now in its third generation. Kim Jong-un, like his father and grandfather, is dedicated to building up North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Pyongyang has been alarmingly successful in pursuing that end. The regime has missiles that can reach Japan, and reportedly is not far from being able to strike the continental U.S. North Korea is also already exporting terror in less explosive ways. The regime is responsible for several devastating cyber attacks (recently, North Korean hackers paralyzed the United Kingdom's National Health Service, as well as industries in 150 other countries), and Kim Jong-un successfully had an estranged member of the family assassinated in Kuala Lumpur in February, in broad daylight. Meanwhile, Pyongyang maintains friendly, mutually beneficial relationships with other terror-loving regimes, including Iran and Cuba.

The fact that North Korea is now a nuclear-armed state is in no small part a consequence of nearly three decades of ill-conceived American and international policy. The last three administrations all hoped to engage the regime in constructive agreements, usually providing some form(s) of aid in exchange for promises to halt the construction of nuclear weapons. The theory was that the aid would help to facilitate economic and ultimately political liberalization.

It has not worked out that way, largely because the regime in Pyongyang is not a trustworthy partner. The Kim regime cheated on the 1994 Agreed Framework, under which it received aid in exchange for halting plutonium and uranium enrichment; in 2002, it unilaterally withdrew from the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty; the regime reneged on its part in an agreement hammered out by the Bush administration in 2007 after less than a year; and Kim Jong-un violated the terms of the 2012 Leap Day agreement after just six weeks by testing a long-range missile.

But it's also been a case of inconsistent, and often incoherent, American policy. Given the fact that the North Korean economy is almost entirely administered by the regime, these agreements have frequently meant that the U.S. is simultaneously sanctioning and subsidizing Pyongyang, and irregular enforcement by the U.S. Treasury Department took much of the bite out of the sanctions side.

North Korea's brazen murder of an American citizen is reason to reevaluate.

Last year, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act, which mandated sanctions on entities that have contributed to North Korea's nuclear program or are complicit in its human-rights abuses, and on the country's mineral and metal trade (a key source of the regime's hard currency). The Trump administration should expand on this foundation.

Start with the banks. Since 2007, the U.S. has allowed North Korean financial transactions to flow more or less unencumbered through the U.S. banking system. Because almost all transactions in U.S. dollars pass through U.S. banks, the Treasury Department could, if it wishes, effectively end North Korea's access to the dollar system, by supplementing the sanctions on North Korean banks imposed by current law with secondary sanctions on any banks that transact with North Korea. When the U.S. did this from 2005 to 2007, banks around the world — including in China — froze or closed North Korean accounts rather than risk their access to the U.S. financial system. Secondary sanctions are crucial to squeezing the regime. Pyongyang's power relies on a network of bad actors: China launders its money, Iran buys its weapons, Cambodia re-flags its ships (which are smuggling the weapons). The U.S. must be willing to enforce sanctions against these actors, too.

While the U.S. more aggressively goes after the assets of North Korea's elites — currently, only about 200 North Korean entities have had their assets frozen, compared to about 400 in Cuba and more than 800 in Iran — it could also agitate to have North Korean banks kicked out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, reducing its access to the global financial infrastructure. In 2012, the U.S. successfully pressured SWIFT to expel Iran. Meanwhile, the U.S. should be pressuring Europe, as well as countries in Africa and Asia, to stop employing North Korean slave laborers. As many as 100,000 North Koreans have been sent abroad by the regime (guess who's building stadiums for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar?), and defectors report that the regime confiscates 90 percent of their wages when they return home.

On the diplomatic front, North Korea receives an undeserved imprimatur as a member of the United Nations; the Trump administration should work to expel it, as well as from its other international memberships (e.g., the ASEAN Regional Forum and the International Olympic Committee). The State Department should also restore its designation as a state sponsor of terror, removed by the Bush administration in 2008.

And militarily? There are no good military options when it comes to North Korea, it's true; setting aside the threat of a nuclear response, the North could wreak havoc on some of its neighbors just with conventional arms. But the U.S. can still wield a big stick. The idea that North Korea will stand down if the U.S. reduces its activity around the Korean Peninsula has been decisively proven false, so the U.S. should not hesitate to flex its muscle. The U.S. and South Korea should continue with joint military exercises. Meanwhile, the White House should work to strengthen missile-defense capacities throughout the region. The decision by South Korea's newly elected president Moon Jae-in to suspend further deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system pending an environmental-impact assessment may be a precursor to rejecting THAAD altogether; the White House should work with President Moon to make sure that does not happen. The administration should also be working to strengthen its relationship with Japan.

Finally, it should go without saying that the United States should be working from the inside to subvert the regime.

It is persistently remarked that North Korea will never change until China stops shielding it, and there's truth to that. But the United States has leverage, nonetheless, and especially now. And China's position may be wavering: There are reports that Beijing is considering distancing itself from Pyongyang, and a younger generation of leaders in the Communist party is not at all convinced that bolstering North Korea is, in the long run, worth the trouble. These are pressure points that the United States can exploit.

There is no such thing as a "manageable" nuclear North Korea; ultimately, the Kim family and its crime syndicate must go. The U.S. should recognize the murderous regime in Pyongyang for what it is, and respond accordingly.

THE DAILY BEAST

High Noon in North Korea: Is Trump Ready for War?

Gordon G. Chang

The horrific death of Otto Warmbier looks like it forced the hand of President Trump.

A day after the 22-year-old student passed away, the American leader, in what may end up as the world's most consequential tweet, signaled that the United States will soon act on its own to disarm North Korea.

"While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi & China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out," Trump tweeted Tuesday afternoon. "At least I know China tried!"

The announcement, considered in the context of Trump's other comments on the subject, appears ominous. Trump on April 11 said America would defang North Korea by itself if China did not do so. "North Korea is looking for trouble," he tweeted then. "If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! U.S.A."

On Tuesday, Trump in effect declared it was time for the U.S. to act on its own.

Many had assumed that Trump would wait until at least the middle of July before going after the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Japanese newspapers reported that the American leader at the early April Mar-a-Lago summit

gave his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, 100 days—until July 16—to deal with Pyongyang. That timeframe, by the way, matched up with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross's "100-day action plan" on trade, announced at the end of the Trump-Xi meeting.

Yet the outrage over the brutalization of Warmbier looks like it accelerated Trump's timetable.

Now the administration will have to act. What will it do?

There are many "non-kinetic" options. The most effective of them restrict the flow of funds to the Pyongyang regime. The U.S. can, as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested Wednesday, prevent Americans from traveling to North Korea. The administration can also tighten sanctions on the North. Moreover, it can do a far better job of enforcing existing measures designed to stanch the flow of funds into Kim regime coffers.

All of these measures would help, of course, but the big flows of cash to North Korea originate from China or pass through Chinese financial institutions. Bank of China, one of China's "Big Four" banks, was named in a recent U.N. panel report for its active participation in a conspiracy to hide illicit money transfers for North Korea.

Chinese banks in the border city of Dandong have regularly handled funds for suspicious transactions involving the North.

And Chinese banks were almost certainly involved in the February 2016 cybertheft of $81 million from the account of the central bank of Bangladesh at the New York Federal Reserve Bank. U.S. officials think North Korea was the mastermind but that Chinese middlemen helped "orchestrate the theft." If Chinese middlemen orchestrated, Chinese banks were almost certainly participants in the crime.So to starve Pyongyang into disarming, Trump will have to go after China.

He already has the tools to do so. By doing nothing more than enforcing U.S. law, Trump could put Chinese banks out of business by denying them access to their dollar accounts in New York.

Trump administration officials, to their credit, have talked about unplugging Chinese banks, but there is no indication they have now summoned the considerable political will necessary to act.

The failure to summon political will to impose costs on China means Trump, if he honors his promise to disarm North Korea, will eventually have to resort to "kinetic" options, perhaps soon.

Eric Bolling will not be surprised if Trump uses force. "It may be time for a preemptive strike," the Fox News anchor, obviously angered by the North's treatment of Warmbier, said Monday on air.

Is war really the next step? Perhaps so, if for no other reason than the Kim regime has looked unstable for some time. If it is in fact unstable, it will not be able to deal with the international community in good faith. If it cannot deal with the international community in good faith, the chances for of any negotiated settlement with the Trump administration appear slim.

Warmbier is the first detained American civilian known to have been killed by the North Koreans. His killing suggests, among other things, that something is wrong in Pyongyang. Kim Jong Un, at the very least, now looks reckless and dangerous.

So any decision by Trump to use force could trigger history's next great conflict. Decisions on North Korea are about to become extraordinarily consequential.

Why Trump's Foreign Policy Can't Be Stopped

On the surface, it might seem that Donald Trump's foreign policy — such as it is — will be the latest casualty in a stream of endless leaks and ongoing investigations into collusion with Russia and obstruction of justice that will cling to his presidency for months, if not years, like a barnacle to the side of a boat.

In a smart column in Foreign Policy, Micah Zenko made the case that Trump's domestic travails may compel a besieged and beleaguered president to delegate more to the foreign-policy bureaucracy, thus weakening U.S. credibility in the eyes of America's allies and adversaries who will increasingly question the president's reliability and longevity. At the same time, Zenko opines that domestic scandal might push Trump in a kind of wag-the-dog scenario to engage in some very risky military business of a kinetic nature, say should North Korea undertake another nuclear test or conduct one involving a long-range intercontinental ballistic missile.

We're not sure about the about the wag-the-dog thing. But we are convinced the president's general approach to foreign policy — two-thirds disrupter, one-third mainstreamer — is likely to continue. And while his domestic travails with special counsels and congressional committees may undermine his domestic agenda, they will not constrain what he chooses to do (or not do) abroad.

In short, with the exception of dealing with Russia, Trump's foreign policy will remain veritably untouchable: In both style and substance, he's going to have a pretty free hand.

Few domestic constraints: Does anyone really care?

The conduct of U.S. foreign policy is largely an elite issue. This is easy to forget when you're living inside the Beltway — whether you're a member in good standing of the Blob or a realist — where every development abroad is hotly debated and seems like it should be the fulcrum of Western civilization. For foreign-policy wonks, the obvious is never so. How come everyone isn't obsessed with the latest round in the Qatari-Saudi saga?

Like Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*, most Americans frankly don't give a damn about foreign policy: They don't rank foreign-policy issues, with the exception of terrorism, among their top concerns. Few spend much time thinking about the international issues that consume the attention of the foreign-policy elite when a president's missteps sully America's good name, make the United States look weak, undermine its global leadership, or, in an effort to project strength, get Washington into unwinnable wars and conflicts. At the same time, however, a majority of Americans — according to data from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs — also support globalization and free trade.

But for several years, the results of other public opinion surveys, most notably by the Pew Research Center, show that Trump is not completely out of touch with broad public sentiments. For example, according to Pew, most Americans prefer that the United States deal with its own problems and let other countries deal as best they can with their own problems; they are also skeptical of global engagement, believe that the United States does too much rather than too little to solve global problems, and favor a more modest U.S. leadership role. A large number of Americans, including former President Barack Obama and previous presidents and secretaries of defense, agree that America's allies need to pay more for their own defense and do not want the United States to act as the world's police.

All these views are broadly consistent with Trump's "America First" philosophy. Here's the bottom line: Barring a major mistake that puts the well-being of the public at risk or a crisis abroad that tugs at Americans' pocketbooks, there will be no wave of public opinion or opposition from a Republican Congress that will sweep away this disruptive doctrine. Congress will tweak things every now and again — as it did recently on a nearly unanimous vote on Russia sanctions. But on climate, immigration, terrorism, and Cuba policy, Trump's rhetoric and politics play extremely well to his base and to enough Republicans in Congress to help inoculate his approach to more mainstream currents of public opinion. (According to a January Pew poll 38 percent Americans surveyed identified climate change as a top priority.) This president has a great deal of latitude and discretion to put the Trump brand on America's approach to the world.

Discretion to act abroad

Indeed, when it comes to foreign policy, both the U.S. Constitution and the real world guarantee that capacity. Congress and the courts go in and out of session and are largely reactive; when it comes to national security, they simply don't have the information, capacity, or frankly the desire to intrude, let alone to challenge the White House. In the past 30 years, there have only been two instances in which Congress has voted to override a presidential veto on foreign policy. For the most part, the legislative and judicial branches stay out of the executive's way on national security. (Trump's two executive orders on immigration are a notable exception and represent a highly unusual confluence of factors including the administration's politicization of the immigration issue, the dysfunctional rollout, and the contradictions, illogic, and perhaps illegality of the orders themselves.)

Still, for the most part, President Trump is a relatively free agent to shape the optics and substance of his administration's foreign policy, for good or ill. Take his most recent trip abroad. In a scant nine days, the president invested Saudi Arabia as the focal point of his Middle East strategy and re-energized the U.S.-

Saudi relationship through hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of intended arms sales and investment ventures. And that was just for starters. Trump went on to deliver an anti-Iranian message that exacerbated tensions within the Gulf Cooperation Council and made more difficult the task of putting his anti-Islamic State coalition together; tweeted his preference for taking Saudi Arabia's side in its conflict with Qatar, further inflaming the crisis; made clear that human rights have no serious place in his Middle East agenda; became the first sitting U.S. president to visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem; offended and insulted European allies on issues including climate change, trade, and defense spending; and blindsided his advisors when he failed to explicitly reaffirm America's commitment to NATO's mutual defense guarantee.

And all this in a mere nine days. Whether any of this reflects a coherent strategy isn't really the point. The larger takeaway is that the president can act unilaterally — as his withdrawal from the Paris climate change accord reveals — with devastating strategic consequences. There are issues, specifically dealing with Russia, where the current domestic controversy will certainly constrain Trump. Indeed, it's hard to imagine in these circumstances lifting sanctions on Vladimir Putin or playing footsy with him on any significant or sensitive issue. But on most political issues, and perhaps also when it comes to projecting American military power abroad, there are few if any constraints to stop him.

His advisors give him cover and legitimacy

The appointment of several experienced hands in the ways of government and the world — Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly — might have a leavening effect on a volatile and inexperienced president. And although we don't know what Trump's foreign policy would look like if these experienced operators were not around, it's clear that on issues that are important to the president — for example, climate change and turning NATO's Article 5 into a bargaining chip rather than a commitment — they have not been able to restrain him. Indeed, on far too many issues these advisors seem willing to play along with if not endorse Trump's self-consciously self-centered nationalism. This White House operates on the premise that nations do not have a stake in cooperating to solve problems they cannot solve by themselves or in one another's success; instead, Trump lives in a Darwinian dog-eat-dog world where America needs to look to its own interests and cut the best deals it can — allies and adversaries be damned (perhaps minus Putin). When two presumed moderates in the administration — chief economic advisor Gary Cohn and McMaster — basically said as much in a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, they gave legitimacy to this deeply flawed view.

Trump also benefits because in Mattis he has an experienced, intelligent, and sensible advisor who understands and accepts America's responsibilities for global leadership and spends much of his time advising U.S. allies to ignore the tweetstorms from the man behind the curtain. Vice President Mike Pence, Tillerson, and McMaster have also helped to calm the jittery nerves of allies and reaffirm long-standing American commitments — and, in the process, provide cover and legitimacy to Trump's behavior. These "adults" help foster a perception that the administration continues to adhere to long-standing foreign-policy traditions, even as the president does his best to undermine many of them.

Just enough mainstreaming

Trump's role as a disrupter is further insulated and protected, paradoxically, because on many other issues, he opts to color between the lines of what has constituted the traditional foreign-policy goals of his Democratic and Republican predecessors. This mainstreaming creates both the impression and the reality that Trump is actually listening to his advisors or that, on certain issues, his own instincts push him toward a less disruptive posture.

For example, he has chosen for now to preserve the Iran nuclear agreement; to accept the "One China" policy and avoid branding Beijing as a currency manipulator or start a trade war; to renegotiate rather than walk away from NAFTA; and to put off moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem out of concern that such a move would undermine his chances to cut what he calls the "ultimate deal" between Israelis and Palestinians. This mainstreaming not only avoids creating major problems on every foreign-policy front, but it also gives the administration more room to maneuver in the key areas where the president wants to pursue far more unconventional policies. The bottom line: Trump upsets the apple cart when not doing so would either directly undermine high-profile campaign commitments he has made to his base or, in his own view, would not cost him anything.

No bungled crisis … yet

It seems likely that the pattern set in the early months of the Trump administration isn't going to change dramatically any more than the president himself will undergo some kind of profound transformation. The tweeting, the willingness to show disrespect (and at times contempt) for foreign leaders, and the determination to disrupt on issues that either resonate with Trump personally or politically with his base are going to continue. And there appear to be few constraints that offer any prospect of a change in behavior, particularly since his base revels in his sticking it to the "globalists" and "elitists" who are the subject of his rants. A resignation or two of his senior foreign-policy or national security officials might give him pause — as would a major crisis that forces a stumble or more consequential failure. But the former is unlikely and the latter impossible to predict.

For now, what you see in Trump's foreign policy now is more than likely what you're going to get in the future: an approach to the world that on far too many issues denigrates international institutions, multilateral agreements, and America's alliances and partnerships. It defines "America First" to mean America only and harms U.S. national interests and the possibilities of creating a more stable and prosperous world. This is not just a headline; it is likely to be a trend line, too. So to all of you globalists, elitists, and devotees of this magazine (like us) who forlornly believe you're going to influence this administration's foreign policy, here's our advice: Lay down and wait patiently until the feeling — and the Trump administration — passes.

ETATS-UNIS

UNE - Karen Handel Wins Georgia Special Election, Fending Off Upstart Democrat

Jonathan Martin and Richard Fausset

Addressing supporters in Atlanta, Ms. Handel noted with pride that she had become the first Republican woman sent to Congress from Georgia, and she pledged to represent all of her constituents, including Mr. Ossoff's supporters. But she made clear that she would work to pass major elements of the Republican agenda, including health care and tax overhauls.

"We have a lot work to do," Ms. Handel said. "A lot of problems we need to solve."

For Democrats, the loss was demoralizing after questionable "moral victories" in two earlier special election defeats, for House seats in conservative districts in Kansas and Montana. Mr. Ossoff appeared so close to victory that Democrats were allowing themselves to imagine a win that would spur a wave of Republican retirements, a recruitment bonanza and a Democratic fund-raising windfall heading into the 2018 midterm elections.

Addressing a crush of cameras and supporters who spilled out of a hotel ballroom, a subdued Mr. Ossoff tried to strike a hopeful note as he conceded defeat.

"This is not the outcome any of us were hoping for," he said. "But this is the beginning of something much bigger than us."

The margin in Georgia was ultimately larger than even some Republicans had expected, with tax-averse voters in the outer suburbs overwhelmingly siding with Ms. Handel.

Yet the Republican triumph came only after an extraordinary financial intervention by conservative groups and by the party's leading figures, buoying Democrats' hopes that they can still compete in the sort of wealthy, conservative-leaning districts they must pick up to recapture the House.

Both parties now confront the same question: What does such a hard-won victory in the Lululemon-and-loafers subdivisions of Dunwoody and Roswell, where Mr. Trump prevailed in November, augur for Republicans who next year will be defending an array of less conservative seats outside the South?

Even as Mr. Ossoff lost, Democrats' spirits were somewhat lifted by the unexpectedly strong showing of their nominee in another special House election Tuesday, in South Carolina. In a heavily conservative district vacated by Mick Mulvaney — now the director of the White House Office of Management and Budget — African-Americans came out in force for a wealthy Democrat, Archie Parnell, and the Republican candidate, Ralph Norman, won by a narrower margin than Ms. Handel did in Georgia.

In the so-called jungle primary in Georgia — the initial special election on April 18 — Mr. Ossoff, one of 18 candidates on the ballot, captured just over 48 percent of the vote, an unusually strong showing for a Democrat but short of the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff. Ms. Handel came in a distant second, with just under 20 percent, as Republicans divided their support among a number of credible conservative contenders.

But Republican leaders were optimistic that the party's voters would rally behind Ms. Handel in a two-candidate showdown.

Questions also lingered about whether the grass-roots coalition backing Mr. Ossoff — fueled by highly motivated anti-Trump activists who were, in many cases, new to political activity and organizing — could improve on its April showing in a runoff held at the beginning of the summer vacation season, in a district where people have the means to escape to the beach.

Ms. Handel and her supporters portrayed Mr. Ossoff as far too liberal for a district that, covering somewhat different territory, was represented from 1979 to 1999 by Newt Gingrich, a Republican and former House speaker. They also criticized Mr. Ossoff for his youth and inexperience and assailed him for living outside the district, although he was raised in it.

Mr. Ossoff's allies, for their part, paid for an advertising campaign deriding Ms. Handel, a former chairwoman of the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, as a profligate spender while in office. And Mr. Ossoff ran television ads that rehashed Ms. Handel's resignation from the Susan G. Komen Foundation over her belief that the group, which raises money to fight breast cancer, should cut ties with Planned Parenthood.

While Mr. Ossoff's supporters showed great passion, Republicans were presumed to have a heavy mathematical advantage in the district, which Tom Price, now Mr. Trump's health secretary, won by 23 points in 2016. And it was unclear throughout the contest how the two campaigns would ultimately be buffeted by tempestuous events in Washington, including Mr. Trump's handling of the investigation into Russian meddling in the presidential election, the House's passage of an unpopular health care overhaul bill, and the attack last week on a group of Republican lawmakers by an anti-Trump liberal.

Republicans, fearing the symbolic and tangible repercussions of a loss in Georgia, spared no expense in propping up Ms. Handel's candidacy. Mr. Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Paul D. Ryan all came to Atlanta to help her raise money, and conservative groups poured $12 million into the runoff, nearly all of it assailing Mr. Ossoff.

A "super PAC" aligned with Mr. Ryan, the Congressional Leadership Fund, spent more than $7 million from April to June.

Still, the $8 million gusher of liberal money that Mr. Ossoff enjoyed leading up to the April vote only intensified during the two-month approach to the runoff. He brought in another $15 million, much of it in small contributions from beyond Georgia's borders. And national Democratic groups, persuaded that he had a strong shot at winning, rushed in with their own advertisements denouncing Ms. Handel.

Although they received enormous political and financial support from allies in Washington, the two candidates tiptoed around more polarizing national political figures. Ms. Handel rarely uttered Mr. Trump's name of her own volition, preferring instead to highlight the district's Republican lineage and warn that Mr. Ossoff would do Ms. Pelosi's bidding. Only in declaring victory late Tuesday night did Ms. Handel make a point of offering "special thanks to the president of the United States of America," a line that set off a boisterous chant of Mr. Trump's name by the crowd.

Mr. Ossoff, for his part, sought to avoid being linked to Ms. Pelosi or labeled a liberal. He assured voters he would not raise taxes on the rich. And in pledging to root out wasteful spending and seek compromise, he sounded more like an heir to former Senator Sam Nunn's brand of Southern centrism than a progressive millennial who cut his teeth working for Representative Hank Johnson, a DeKalb County liberal.

Voter turnout in April was already high for a spring special election, and it soared during the runoff, to more than 240,000, from more than 190,000. Nearly 150,000 voters cast ballots before the polls opened on Tuesday, nearly three times the early vote in the first round. And nearly 40,000 of those people had not voted at all in April.

By Tuesday, the fatigue among voters was palpable.

Some residents posted warnings demanding that campaign workers stop knocking on their doors.

"NO SOLICITATION!!!!!!!" read one sign, photographed and published on social media by a Handel supporter. "And no! We aren't voting for OSSOFF! I have big dogs!!!"

The campaign so enveloped the Atlanta region that polling places in a neighboring district posted signs telling residents that they were not eligible to vote.

UNE - GOP's Karen Handel Beats Democrat Jon Ossoff in Georgia

Janet Hook, Cameron McWhirter and Reid J. Epstein

SANDY SPRINGS, Ga.—Republicans held on to a hotly contested U.S. House seat in Georgia on Tuesday, beating back an aggressive challenge that showed the Democrats' inability to turn opposition to Donald Trump's presidency into electoral gains.

Republican Karen Handel, a former Georgia secretary of state, beat Democrat Jon Ossoff, a onetime congressional aide, in the most expensive House race in history and the most significant test of the two parties' political strength since Mr. Trump's election.

In nearly complete results, Ms. Handel had almost 53% of the vote to just over 47% for Mr. Ossoff, the Associated Press reported.

In winning the seat, Republicans overcame a Democratic advantage in campaign spending and demonstrated that Mr. Trump retained political capital in the district. The president, Vice President Mike Pence and other party luminaries visited the Atlanta suburbs to support Ms. Handel's candidacy.

The result was a big blow to Democrats, who were hungry for a victory to demonstrate that grass-roots, anti-Trump energy gives them a shot at taking control of the House in the 2018 midterm elections. Democrats earlier this year lost two other contested House special elections, in Kansas and Montana.

In a special election Tuesday in South Carolina, Republican Ralph Norman held the House seat vacated by Mick Mulvaney, Mr. Trump's budget director, but by a far closer margin than expected. Mr. Norman defeated Democrat Archie Parnell, a former Goldman Sachs executive, by less than four percentage points. Mr. Mulvaney won the district by 20 points in November and Mr. Trump carried it by 18 points.

The twin victories mean that Republicans are 4-for-4 in the House special elections that are being widely viewed for signals to each party's prospects next year in the battle for control of the House, which is now held by the Republicans. Georgia had been considered Democrats' best shot at a win.

In her victory speech, Ms. Handel offered a "special thanks to the president of the United States," who had come to the district for a fundraiser and sent supportive Twitter messages in the closing days of the campaign. After her victory, Mr. Trump congratulated her in another tweet.

In conceding, Mr. Ossoff said he didn't get the outcome he wanted but that his campaign had awakened a movement.

"We showed the world that in places where no one thought it was even possible to fight, we could fight," he said. "The fight goes on.''

Mr. Ossoff's defeat will likely prompt soul-searching among Democrats about what it will take to flip Republican-held seats in the 2018 midterm fight for control of the House, given that such a vast effort in Georgia fell short. More than $31 million was poured into the Ossoff campaign by donors and outside groups, compared with more than $23 million spent by Ms. Handel's campaign and its allies.

Still, the fact that Republicans had to work so hard to hold on to a historically conservative district sent a warning to GOP incumbents and candidates that they likely will have a tougher fight than usual next year, especially in suburbs like Georgia's Sixth District, where many residents are affluent and hold college degrees.

Chip Lake, a Republican consultant in Georgia unaffiliated with the Handel campaign, said the Republican win means the party "dodged a bullet."

Republicans should see the expensive race as "a wake-up call to our base and our party," because the election in a traditionally Republican district shouldn't have been close, Mr. Lake said. "I'm glad we won, but we shouldn't have had to spend $20 million to $25 million to do it."

But all that money, and Ms. Handel's use of a tried-and-true strategy of linking Mr. Ossoff to national party figures such as House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, succeeded in waking up Republican voters who had been at risk of sitting on the sidelines. It showed that even in places that Mr. Trump carried only narrowly, GOP voters can unite in the face of a Democratic opponent. Turnout soared in the second round of voting compared with the primary in April, a sign that Republicans managed to match the energy of the Democratic base.

Ed Painter, chairman of the GOP in Georgia's 12th Congressional District, said Ms. Handel won in part because she drew support from Republican voters who might have been slow to come around because they were alienated by Mr. Trump's election.

"We're getting some reluctant Republicans who really don't like Trump," said Mr. Painter. "The specter of seeing another Democrat up there really frightened them."

Among Democrats, an intraparty debate began almost immediately with a critique of the Ossoff campaign coming from the liberal Moveon.org, which issued a statement saying the candidate and the Democratic Party "missed an opportunity" by trying to portray Mr. Ossoff as a centrist.

"The Democratic Party must be the party of real change," said Anna Galland, executive director of Moveon.Org

Rep. Ro Khanna, a California Democrat aligned with Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.), said the party must no longer run candidates who seek to blur the lines between Democrats and Republicans. He said the party's campaign arm should "fire their consultants" who advocate for a centrist message in districts that favor Republicans.

Other Democrats said the race pointed to GOP weakness. "The very fact that we've even been talking about this race for months is an indication of how very bad things are for Republicans right now," said Ian Russell, former political director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

The midterm election map includes many potential battleground districts that aren't as heavily skewed to the GOP as the Georgia seat. For example, Democrats are targeting 23 House Republicans representing districts that Democrat Hillary Clinton won in the 2016 presidential election.

Mr. Ossoff had launched his campaign months ago by tapping into Democrats' surging anti-Trump activism. His early appeals called on donors to "make Trump furious." Donations came from around the country.

But he soon adopted a more centrist campaign message. Mr. Ossoff didn't speak much on the stump about Mr. Trump, focusing instead on local economic development and calling for bipartisan cooperation.

Ms. Handel rallied Republicans with a warning that Mr. Ossoff was too inexperienced and liberal for the district. Despite Mr. Ossoff's centrist tone on the stump, Ms. Handel argued that he would inevitably have to fall in line with liberal party leaders, such as Mrs. Pelosi.

"Republicans are motivated," Ms. Handel said in a CNN interview. "They surely don't want Nancy Pelosi's guy coming in."

Election Day brought torrential rains and flash flood warnings to the district. More than 140,308 people had already voted in early balloting, according to the Georgia Secretary of State's office. That was almost three times the 56,830 people who voted early in the first round of balloting in April, during a special election primary that winnowed an 18-candidate field. The June 20 runoff was needed because no candidate in April won more than 50% of the vote, although Mr. Ossoff came close with 48%.

The race is seen as a potential bellwether for the 2018 midterm elections because many battlegrounds in the fight for control of the House are likely to be suburban, affluent GOP districts like Georgia's Sixth. Mr. Trump struggled in many of these districts in 2016.

The GOP victory could help Mr. Trump advance his legislative agenda in Congress. Mr. Ossoff had made a major issue of his opposition to GOP legislation to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act; his defeat could help bolster Republican resolve to keep trying to move a health bill through the Senate.

The outcome could also shape the candidate field for the 2018 midterm elections, making it easier for Republicans to recruit candidates for the House, as well as keep incumbents from retiring. However, the party holding the White House typically loses seats in a midterm election.

The Georgia district has been represented by the Republican Party since Newt Gingrich won it in 1978. Democrats made it a test of their political strength this year, because Mr. Trump barely won the district in 2016. The seat came open when Mr. Trump chose Rep. Tom Price to be secretary of Health and Human Services.

The president, who attended a fundraiser for Ms. Handel in April, put more of his own political capital on the line in a series of tweets Monday and Tuesday supporting her and attacking Mr. Ossoff. Urging his followers to vote for Ms. Handel, he wrote on Twitter, "She will fight for lower taxes, great healthcare strong security-a hard worker who will never give up!"

The record $60 million in campaign spending saturated the district with fliers, television ads and digital ads—most of them negative—as well as door-to-door canvassing so intense that many voters felt beleaguered.

"I'm voting! I've heard so much about the campaign! I'm voting!'' said one Marietta resident who slammed the door on a canvasser for a conservative group, the Faith and Freedom Coalition.

Cobb County voter Dianne Poland, who supported Ms. Handel in the race, has kept a growing pile of political mail under her living-room table. "I thought I'd have a bonfire!" she said of her post-election plans.

Republican Karen Handel defeats Democrat Jon Ossoff in Georgia's 6th Congressional District

BROOKHAVEN, Ga. — President Trump's hopes of steadying his presidency and his agenda on Capitol Hill were given a lift Tuesday when a Republican won a special congressional election in the Atlanta suburbs.

Republican Karen Handel defeated Democrat Jon Ossoff in Georgia's 6th Congressional District, retaining a seat that has been in GOP hands since 1979 after a grueling, four-month campaign that earned the distinction of being the most expensive House race in history.

Handel won by almost 11,000 votes and by more than four percentage points, and Ossoff failed to reach the 48 percent mark that he topped in the initial round of voting in April.

Handel's win will bring fresh attention to a beleaguered Democratic Party that has suffered a string of defeats in special elections this year despite an angry and engaged base of voters who dislike Trump.

It may also embolden Republicans in Washington to press ahead on an ambitious policy agenda that has yielded few legislative victories since Trump's inauguration in January. Most immediately, the election result could bring momentum to Senate Republicans' efforts this week to craft their version of a major revision to the Affordable Care Act.

"We need to finish the drill on health care," Handel said during her victory speech here Tuesday. Chants of "Trump! Trump! Trump!" erupted before her.

Handel's victory, however, revealed as much about Trump's lingering problems among Republicans as it did the challenges facing Democrats. In a ruby-red district that her Republican predecessor won in November by 23 points, Handel struggled with Trump's looming presence over the race. She won not with an embrace of the president but by barely mentioning his name.

"You showed the world that in places where no one even thought it was possible to fight, we could fight," Ossoff, dressed in a black suit and black tie, told supporters Tuesday.

Handel, who will be the first Republican woman elected to Congress from Georgia, repeatedly ducked opportunities to echo Trump's populist roar and instead presented a classic Republican case to voters, all while deflecting the barrage of questions about Trump's latest tweets or his handling of investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

The Republican unease evident in the district could replay across the country next year, when both major parties are bracing for a bruising season of midterm elections at an uncertain national moment .

Back in Washington, party leaders — and Trump — paid close attention to the race. Inside the West Wing, Trump and his advisers were briefed regularly on Handel's standing in private polls and Republican turnout, according to a White House official. In particular, the official added, strategist Stephen K. Bannon and chief of staff Reince Priebus were involved.

Jon Ossoff, a former congressional aide, is running for the seat of former Republican congressman Tom Price in Georgia's 6th Congressional District. Here's what you need to know about him. Jon Ossoff, a former congressional aide, is running for the seat of former Republican congressman Tom Price in Georgia's 6th Congressional District. (Bastien Inzaurralde/The Washington Post)

(Bastien Inzaurralde/The Washington Post)

"KAREN HANDEL FOR Congress," Trump tweeted as day broke Tuesday, touting the Republican candidate and former Georgia secretary of state. "She will fight for lower taxes, great health care strong security — a hard worker who will never give up. VOTE TODAY!"

Handel and Ossoff vied to fill the seat vacated by Tom Price, who held it from 2005 until he joined Trump's Cabinet this year as health and human services secretary. On April 18, Ossoff had nearly topped the 50 percent threshold that would have given him an outright victory in an 18-candidate primary field. Falling just short, he found himself in a runoff against Handel.

Ossoff, 30, a former congressional staffer, raised more than $23 million, built a devoted grass-roots following and courted Republicans by bemoaning "wasteful" spending.

In another Tuesday tweet, Trump took a swipe at Ossoff's centrist positioning and dismissed him as a liberal who "wants to raise your taxes to the highest level and is weak on crime and security, doesn't even live in district." Ossoff lives just outside the district with his fiancee.

A record turnout was expected Tuesday: About 120,000 people cast early ballots, according to Georgia officials — nearly a quarter of registered voters here.

As Handel's lead climbed late Tuesday, a senior White House official sent The Washington Post a text message: "They haven't figured out how to beat Trump."

For Democrats, Ossoff's loss was demoralizing, coming after months of bitter infighting in the wake of Trump's victory.

His defeat is also likely to lead to more criticism from the wing of liberal activists who want a more confrontational style embodied by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.). They have already complained about the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's willingness to support a more moderate candidate in Ossoff, while more progressive candidates in special elections in Montana and Kansas this year were left largely in the lurch.

Moreover, Ossoff's loss raises real concerns about the continued potency of Republican attacks against Democrats by tying them to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). The anti-Ossoff campaign seemed to veer from issue to issue given the week, but the one constant thread over the last four months has been linking him to Pelosi.

According to one Republican involved in the effort, the Democratic leader had a name identification of 98 percent among voters in the Georgia district, and her disapproval ratings were 35 percentage points higher than her approval numbers.

Still, some Democrats said Ossoff's competitive bid in Atlanta's Republican suburbs could be a positive harbinger of next year, when they must win 24 GOP-held seats to reclaim the House majority.

"This is not the outcome any of us were hoping for, but this is the beginning of something much bigger than us," Ossoff said during his concession speech. "Rather than demonizing each other, we find common ground and move forward."

Democrats are likely to continue to view districts such as Georgia's 6th as their roadmap to taking back the House — swing, suburban districts with well-educated populations and also more diverse electorates than in the poorer, rural districts that once served as the party's foundation.

"We're still going to be here," Bill Atherton, 41, who works for a non-profit trying to transition low-income families into self sufficiency and attended Ossoff's election-night party. "Now we believe we have a strong enough movement, not only to flip this district but inspire others."

As the national political and media world focused heavily on the Georgia race, an underfunded, overlooked Democrat, Archie Parnell, also a first-time candidate, almost pulled off a huge upset in the South Carolina seat vacated by Mick Mulvaney, Trump's budget director. Parnell lost by about 2,800 votes, a little more than 3 percentage points, after party leaders decided to devote all their attention in the run-up to Tuesday's elections to the Ossoff-Handel race.

Of the four special elections prompted by Trump's Cabinet selections, the DCCC identified the Georgia seat as vulnerable to the sort of political climate they expect to target next year. There are dozens of suburban districts with similar demographic makeup currently held by Republicans.

Despite the contest's national sheen and implications, many voters here said they made their decision based less on Trump and more on how they view the two candidates, whose salvos have inundated televisions in a clash that has grown bitter and tense.

Jennifer Wilson, 52, a school counselor who went door to door for Ossoff on the eve of the election, said Ossoff's age, as well as GOP attacks on his residency, were hurdles. "Some people say, 'Oh, he's only 30.' But I tell them that Jon is someone who understands the area," she said. "He grew up here and wants what they want: to bring high-tech and bio-tech jobs to our community."

The Ossoff approach was to toe the middle of the road politically. His calls for civility, at a time of a nontraditional brand of politics from Trump, served as an indirect contrast to the president — a polite rebuke while trying not to offend those who voted for him.

"There is a great hunger here in Georgia, across the political

spectrum, for leadership that is focused on civility, that is humble, that's committed to delivering results instead of notching partisan wins or winning the day on Twitter," he said Monday in an interview.

Handel supporters seemed genuinely puzzled by the attention the 6th District received, given its decades of support for Republican candidates, going back to Newt Gingrich, who began a long stint in 1978 when he won it while Jimmy Carter was in the White House.

Some, including Gingrich, largely rejected the suggestion that the contest was a referendum on Trump's presidency.

"This is a referendum on if enough money can invent a person to win a special election," the former House speaker said, taking a swipe at Ossoff as he watched returns on Tuesday. "He also backed off the whole model of a referendum on Trump. He figured out it wasn't working."

The national significance of the contest brought forth a flood of advertising and organization. Spending in the race by the campaigns and outside groups topped $50 million. The Congressional Leadership Fund, a super PAC affiliated with House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.), spent more than $7 million on its campaign against Ossoff and launched a field program.

Carolyn D. Meadows, a member of the board of the National Rifle Association, has lived in Cobb County her entire life and has been active in conservative politics since she was a "Goldwater Girl" during the 1964 election.

"No, we're not a swing state, and we're not a swing district," said Meadows, who brought her granddaughter to Handel's final event.

And on Tuesday, she was proven right, as Handel reasserted the political lines in suburban Atlanta in the age of Trump.

Kane reported from Sandy Springs, Ga., and Viebeck reported from Washington. Michelle Baruchman, Sean Sullivan and Karen Tumulty in Washington contributed to this report.

The Washington Post

Rubin : In Georgia's 6th District, is Handel's victory of great consequence — or none at all?

By Jennifer Rubin

As promised, the special election in Georgia's 6th Congressional District was nip and tuck for much of the night. Republican Karen Handel nevertheless eked out a win over newcomer Jon Ossoff, a Democrat. In a rational political atmosphere, neither side would take great comfort from nor be seized with panic because of a race determined by a few percentage points. Indeed, it's easy to forget that this special election took place in an overwhelmingly Republican congressional district. But with tens of millions spent on a single race, and both sides determined to extract some indication of its national fortunes — provided it won! — the hype was unstoppable. And to some degree the hype itself becomes self-fulfilling: A psychological boost surely sways candidates' and elected officials' behavior. A GOP win makes Republicans less nervous about sticking with President Trump on health care or other issues; a Democratic win would have encouraged nervous Republicans to break with Trump and look out for their own interests. A GOP loss would have increased the chances of more GOP retirements before 2018; a GOP win, no matter how narrow, encourages incumbents to stick around for 2018.

So how do we assess the importance of the race?

The rational response is that this race does not indicate either that the Republicans are cooked in 2018 nor that they can breathe a sigh of relief and continue to cling to Trump. The district, we need to remember, went to Tom Price by 23 percentage points in 2016, and to Trump by only 1.5 points. If a district rated as safely Republican in past years is now a virtual tossup, that's one sign that Republicans under Trump have an uphill climb to reach highly educated, suburban voters. And, as the New York Times' Alex Burns put it, "The Sixth is still a really Republican district, and the element of surprise was an asset Ossoff had in the first round but not the vote tonight." If Democrats can be faulted, it was in unduly raising expectations in a district that is rated as 9.5 percentage points more Republican than the nation as a whole.

Democrats will continue to debate whether they should focus more on health care or on Trump's scandals and whether to veer far left or hew to the center-left. Advocates of the health-care-heavy approach would say the results would have been different had Ossoff concentrated even more intensely on the GOP's plans to roll back the Affordable Care Act. In reality, the Democrats did exceptionally well in a district no one would have expected them to win six months ago with an atmosphere in which *both* health care and Trump's Russia scandal were front and center. Unfortunately for Democrats, the race will not resolve the internal debate as to where the party should put its emphasis. Moreover, by the time 2018 rolls around, Trumpcare will either be a reality or have crashed and burned.

There are three lessons we might tentatively extract. First, we are seeing the parties divide on class and educational lines; how quickly that takes place and how effectively each party is able to find new voters while holding on to a chunk of its existing electorate will determine the results in 2018 and 2020. Second, both sides have nearly 18 months before the "real" midterms. Rather than dwell on the Georgia 6th District election, both would do well to intensify recruitment and use the remainder of the year to drive home their policy messages. Finally, we should remember that the single biggest determinant of midterm results is the favorability of the sitting president. Right now, that should keep Republicans up at night.

Democrats can take solace in seeing their candidates vastly overperform in what should be easy seats for Republicans. Nevertheless, nothing can compete with tallying an outright win. A Democratic victory would have sent a wave of panic through GOP ranks. A loss leaves them anxious, if not a bit exasperated. For now, Republicans averted outright disaster.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Handel Georgia Victory, Ossoff Defeat Disrupts Anti Trump Narrative

Sandy Springs, Ga. — The last time Jon Ossoff failed to win a seat in the U.S. House, it was pouring all day, too. On a blustery Election Day two months ago, the young Democrat fell just short of the 50 percent needed to turn Georgia's sixth district blue for the first time since 1979.

Yesterday, the skies opened on the district once again, and, just like last time, Ossoff fell short of victory. His worthy competitor, longtime Georgia politician Karen Handel, took 52.7 percent of the vote to top Ossoff's 47.3. Despite raising more than $23 million during the campaign, Ossoff ultimately was unable to overcome the district's solid Republican inclination.

Polls over the last two months consistently gave Ossoff a lead of several percentage points, but on election eve, Handel edged into the lead in the *RealClearPolitics* polling average, hinting at tonight's victory. Over 243,000 residents of the sixth district turned out to vote in the special election, which took place exactly two months after April's "jungle primary" that saw more than a dozen candidates compete.

In April, streets all across the district displayed an array of colorful election posters, each jockeying for the attention of passersby. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Ossoff had earned his plethora of front-yard signs, raising more than $8 million in just a few months and giving every indication that he could win the requisite 50 percent of the vote to go straight to Congress.

When Ossoff missed the mark by a hair, attention turned to Handel, a known entity in the state. After several failed runs for prominent public offices, she has finally achieved victory in what was probably the most hard-fought contest of them all. Her triumph tonight was unexpected in many quarters — she had been hampered in the primary by the presence of several viable GOP candidates, all of whom were competing for the same funding and the district's reliable red votes.

Since that first round of voting, most analysis has ignored the role that April's huge candidate field played in Ossoff's near-win. While the Democratic party had clearly settled on him as their representative, Republicans were extremely divided. But those factions rallied yesterday, lifting Handel to her victory over the Democratic hopeful.

Ossoff's defeat comes as a significant blow to the Democratic

party, which loudly proclaimed that the special election was a referendum on the young presidency of Donald Trump. Indeed, Ossoff's overflow of cash was largely fueled by the intense national attention paid to the sixth-district race. But that cash might've given a clue to his downfall: The vast majority of donations to his campaign came from outside of Georgia. The fact that, over a two-month span, 7,000 Californians gave to the Democrat compared with 800 Georgians should've troubled anyone invested in an Ossoff win. While the narrative was overblown to begin with, Handel's win tonight throws water on the progressives' claim that Trump is severely damaging the GOP in traditionally Republican areas.

Handel's win tonight throws water on the progressives' claim that Trump is severely damaging the GOP in traditionally Republican areas.

Democrats will probably argue that even coming close to defeating a Republican in Georgia's sixth is a victory in itself. There's something to that. But Handel's non-incumbent status matters; Ossoff wasn't running against Tom Price or Newt Gingrich, both of whom represented the district for decades. That fact complicated this race significantly, as does Ossoff's staggering fundraising haul. As a result, it's difficult to draw any conclusions about the strength of the Democratic party in the district and beyond.

Both parties ought to carry serious lessons away from this race — the most expensive House race in U.S. history, by far. But it ought to be a moment of particular reflection for Democrats, who poured unprecedented levels of funding and precious political energy into an effort that failed. At the very least, yesterday's results should show the Left that they will need to devise a new playbook if they hope to succeed in 2018.

POLITICO

Trump spikes the ball after Georgia election win

Alex Isenstadt

Rattled by Donald Trump's tumultuous first five months in office, the Republican Party breathed a collective sigh of relief Tuesday after a much-needed special election victory in Georgia. The White House also exhaled: After Republican Karen Handel was declared the victor in a race billed as a referendum on the new president, Trump fired off a series of celebratory tweets.

"Well, the Special Elections are over and those that want to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN are 5 and O! All the Fake News, all the money spent = 0," wrote Trump.

In the run-up to the Georgia race, Republicans worried that a loss could be the harbinger of a 2018 train-wreck. There were fears that a Handel loss could ripple across the political landscape, spurring GOP retirements, dampening candidate recruitment, and turbo-charging Democrats looking to bounce back following the soul-crushing 2016 election.
The contest, the most expensive House race ever, was viewed by many as the first major strength test of the Democratic resistance to Trump. In the final days before the election, several White House aides said they didn't know if Handel would be able to fend off Jon Ossoff, a 30-year-old filmmaker and former congressional aide who became a cause celebre among liberals nationwide.

But she did, and the president's supporters viewed the outcome as proof that Trump continues to connect with voters.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, an informal Trump adviser and a past occupant of the Georgia seat, contended that the handful of special elections this year revealed that voters were tuning out the Russia scandal that has consumed Washington. He argued that the political establishment, much as it did during the 2016 campaign, continued to underestimate the connection many Americans felt with the president.

"He may be resonating with people in a way that some don't get," Gingrich said. "Maybe there's a whole new conversation taking place in a way that none of us understand."

It would be a mistake to say Republicans are in the clear. With Trump confronting an expanding federal probe into his 2016 campaign's ties to Russia, party strategists concede they are still facing serious headwinds in their efforts to retain the House majority in 2018.

And Tuesday's results weren't entirely rosy. Handel's win disguised the fact that the party only narrowly held onto a Republican-oriented Georgia seat, and barely won another race Tuesday for a conservative South Carolina seat that few thought would be competitive. Both outcomes could easily be interpreted as warning signs for the GOP.

Still, given the national spotlight on Georgia, Republicans breathed easier after the race was called for Handel.

"The Democrats threw the kitchen sink at this deal and they've come up empty again. They haven't won an election all year, and they probably won't until November in New Jersey," said Scott Reed, the chief political strategist at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which spent more than $1 million on ads boosting Handel.

On Tuesday evening, Trump, who previously traveled to Georgia to appear with the Republican candidate, weighed in with four tweets highlighting Handel's performance and one congratulating Ralph Norman in South Carolina. A text message sent to Trump supporters noted that Democrats "lose again (0-4). Total disarray. The MAGA Mandate is stronger than ever."

Handel's win could have immediate implications for her party, possibly helping to dissuade veteran lawmakers – some of whom have been spooked by Trump's underwater approval ratings - from foregoing reelection bids. Hoping to nudge along Republican retirements, Democrats have been recruiting challengers to longtime GOP House members like California Reps. Ed Royce and Dana Rohrabacher and New Jersey Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, who haven't faced serious challenges in recent years but are likely to in 2018. The approach is similar to the one Republicans used with success in 2010, the year the GOP recaptured the House majority.

The Georgia outcome could also give a boost to Republican recruiting, which stalled as the political environment worsened for the party. Several blue-chip GOP recruits, including Wisconsin Rep. Sean Duffy and Indiana Rep. Susan Brooks, had announced they would not be running for Senate — choosing to run for reelection to safe House seats rather than pursue Senate seats in an uncertain environment. Now, as Republicans try to convince other House members to run for Senate, including Fred Upton in Michigan and Luke Messer in Indiana, the Georgia outcome could offer reassurance.

For Republicans confronting the hurdle of running in areas where Trump is unpopular, Handel's campaign seemed to offer a template for how to run. In a suburban Atlanta district filled with upper income and highly educated voters, Handel managed to win over Republican voters who had cooled on Trump. In days leading up to the election, one GOP poll found that Trump's approval rating in the district had plummeted to 45 percent.

Handel maneuvered carefully, declaring her support for the president without fully embracing him. She had Trump and Vice President Mike Pence to the district, but chose to hold private fundraisers with them rather than public rallies. On the trail, Handel said that she wouldn't be an extension of the White House.

Rather than talking about Trump, Handel focused her fire on Ossoff, casting him as a liberal and tying him to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a reviled figure in conservative districts like the one he was running in.

But the biggest source of relief for Republicans was the revelation that the party's base hasn't abandoned the president.

While Trump has failed to follow through on many of his big-ticket campaign promises, polling continues to show that most bedrock Republicans approve of the job he is doing. That dynamic played out in Georgia where, confronting a mammoth Democratic turnout operation and an energized liberal base, GOP voters turned out in droves.

What's still unclear is whether the Georgia win will encourage GOP lawmakers to get behind Trump's troubled legislative agenda. The president has vowed to pass health care and tax reform and an infrastructure package – yet all three face high hurdles on Capitol Hill.

As they digested Tuesday's results, Republicans cautioned that electoral peril still lies ahead — they pointed out that special elections like the one in Georgia are often poor indicators of the political environment.

In the leadup to the 2010 election, for example, Republicans fell short in a special election for an upstate New York congressional seat the party had held since Reconstruction. At the time, operatives and analysts duly issued

doomsday predictions. When the midterms arrived, Republicans captured 63 seats and the House majority.

Republicans continue to see plenty of reason for concern. They note that historical trends aren't favorable, either. During a closed-door meeting with lawmakers last week, House Speaker Paul Ryan reminded the GOP conference that midterms are traditionally unkind for the party in power during a president's first term.

"I don't care who the Republican president is, we know the history of midterm elections," said Vin Weber, a former GOP congressman and longtime party strategist. "Regardless of the president, we're going to see a substantially more energized Democratic base next year. The question is, do we lose the majority or come close to losing the majority?"

Psaki: Democrats, don't lose your cool over Georgia vote

Democrats, don't lose your mind and your motivation over Jon Ossoff's defeat in GA-06.

Democrats wanted a win in the House special election in Georgia Tuesday. And many think they need a win in a special election this cycle. They don't.

In 2010, the special election to fill the seat of Democrat John Murtha, a member who had held his seat in southwestern Pennsylvania for 36 years, was seen as a major test for both parties. And when it was over many Democrats breathed a sigh of relief that the party had overcome attack ads on issues ranging from Obamacare to Nancy Pelosi. But Republicans knew the narrow victory was a good sign for the midterms. They were right.

Even when you lose, special elections can offer an opportunity to try out a message and a window into the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing party.

Health care was a major issue in this election. And concluding that Handel's narrow win is a validation of the Republican health care plan is wrong. It could have been the issue that narrowed the race. In a recent AJC poll, health care was the most important issue in the race, with 81% saying it was either extremely or very important in deciding their vote -- more than any other issue.

In the same poll, voters disapproved of the GOP's Obamacare repeal bill by 37 points (25% favorable to 62% unfavorable) including 66% unfavorable among independents.

Democrats were surprised by the massive influx of donations for their unknown candidate. It will require some work to maintain that enthusiasm and commitment to giving, but it is a good place to start from.

This district could be a model for the kind of demographic district Democrats should aggressively target -- with a suburban, educated population. And with a narrow win by Handel, that strategy shouldn't necessarily be discarded.

Ossoff, a young, energetic, former documentary filmmaker and Georgetown University graduate, nearly defeated a far more seasoned candidate, who formerly led a national advocacy organization in a district that has been represented by a Republican since the seventies.

Now Democrats are going to need to determine where to put resources, which are never unlimited, and whether donors and organizers should be focused on the districts where we have a greater chance of winning. According to the Cook Report, there were 94 Republican held Congressional districts more favorable to Democrats. Should Democrats play in every race or be more selective?

Democrats will also need to take a close look at what happened on the organizing front. According to early reports, Republicans did surprisingly well in turning out their voters and Ossoff did not get far enough ahead on early voting by mail -- an organizing tactic that Democrats have traditionally relied on to bank more votes in advance of Election Day.

Democrats will need to brace themselves. Republicans are going to get a little wind in their sails from this victory. It will give Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan and the NRCC (National Republican Congressional Committee) a momentary reprieve from the doubts and griping they are hearing from their caucus. And for the time being they may be able to keep vulnerable members in line.

But Republicans are far from being in the clear. And Democrats have a lot left to fight for.

Bruni : After Georgia Election, Democrats Are Demoralized, Again

Frank Bruni

Democrats came up empty-handed nonetheless. So a party sorely demoralized in November is demoralized yet again — and left to wonder if the intense anti-Trump passion visible in protests, marches, money and new volunteers isn't just some theatrical, symbolic, abstract thing.

When will it yield fruit? Where will it translate into results? And at what point will Trump be held accountable for a presidency that, so far, has been clumsier and more chaotic than even many of his detractors warned that it would be?

With Handel's victory, Trump caught an enormous break and got fresh hope for his stalled legislative agenda. As he tries to persuade moderate Republicans to support a deeply flawed, broadly unpopular and ridiculously secrecy-shrouded health care bill, he can and will point to the outcome of the Georgia race, in which Handel sided with him and Ossoff pilloried her for it.

Republicans who have been agitated about the investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and the president's low approval ratings will be calmed somewhat, strengthening Trump's hand.

And G.O.P. leaders and strategists will feel reassured that the party isn't tethered entirely to Trump's fortunes and, when it mobilizes its resources, can transcend his failings and all the melodrama he stirs up. In the final weeks of the Georgia race, outside Republican groups poured millions into the contest and worked feverishly to turn out the vote for Handel. Those frantic efforts obviously paid off.

Although her fumbles were many and her charisma in limited supply, she fashioned a model for how a Republican in a district that isn't a ready-made Trump stronghold lurches across the finish line: by being with him and without him at the same time. Handel's bid was mesmerizingly conflicted.

I've watched many campaigns I'd describe as moronic. Hers was oxymoronic.

She held a fund-raiser with Vice President Mike Pence — but not a rally.

She backed Trump's desired rollback of Obamacare, but during her two debates with Ossoff, she sidestepped any utterance of Trump's name to a point where Jim Galloway, a columnist for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, cracked that "the clothes have no emperor."

"Let us be clear," Galloway wrote in an analysis of the first debate. "There is a 70-year-old man with a battleship of a comb-over named Donald Trump, and he lives in the White House. He really, truly exists."

Galloway was in fact noting that Ossoff, too, tended to steer away from Trump talk, and that will be discussed extensively and debated furiously in the days, weeks and months to come, as Democrats second-guess his approach and plot a path forward.

The party has been bitterly divided over whether that route should veer toward the left, which is where Bernie Sanders is beckoning it, or toward the center. Ossoff chose the latter, electing not to put his chips on the demonization of Trump, lest he offend all the district voters who had put faith in the president. His positions, in aggregate, were moderate.

I think that was the right call, given the demographics of this district, in the northern Atlanta suburbs. It's no lefty enclave.

My guess is that Handel's success owed a great deal to the assertiveness with which Republicans painted Ossoff as a liberal puppet, ready to have Nancy Pelosi pull his strings. Because he's just 30, had a paltry record to invoke and seemed to be getting ahead of himself by running in a district in which he wasn't even residing, he was ripe to be defined — and caricatured — by the other side.

That's one lesson to take away from this: Candidates matter. And Ossoff's defeat may make it more difficult for Democrats to recruit the best ones for the equally tough House races to come. Those ditherers craved encouragement, as

did the party. It eludes all of them still.

the Atlantic

Jon Ossoff's Loss in Georgia Is a Gut Punch for Democrats

Molly Ball

ATLANTA—Around midnight, hours after their candidate conceded he had lost the Most Important Special Election in History, the last remaining supporters of Jon Ossoff took over the stage where he had recently stood. One of them waved a bottle of vodka in the air. Together, they took up the time-honored leftist chant: "This is what democracy looks like!"

Sometimes, this is indeed what democracy looks like: you get outvoted.

Democrats were counting on Ossoff, the boy wonder of Georgia's Sixth Congressional District, to deliver the proof that, with Donald Trump in the White House, there was no limit to their political potential. But after a frenzied two-month runoff campaign between Ossoff and his Republican opponent, Karen Handel, the Democrat wound up with about the same proportion of the vote—48 percent—as Hillary Clinton got here in November. If this race was a referendum on Trump, the president won it.

It was a gut punch to Democrats' confidence, a reality check to the idea that vast swaths of the country were ready to deliver a backlash. And it was the capstone to a losing season in which Democrats failed to capture any of the four Republican-held seats vacated by Trump's cabinet appointees. Earlier in the same night, a little-watched South Carolina congressional district was also called for the Republican candidate.

But it was in Georgia, in this well-off, well-educated suburban district, where Democrats had focused their attention, in a much-hyped battle that attracted the hopes and donations of activists across the country. Though both Ossoff and Handel tried to avoid it, they were cast as proxies in the national partisan fight, with enough hype and money—more than $50 million, or nearly $100 for every potential voter—poured in to make it by far the most expensive House race in history.

It was, as a somber Ossoff had told the crowd when the ballroom was still full, "something much bigger than any of us."

Her hopes dashed, a dejected Hazel Hunt made her way through the crowd carrying a canvas on which she'd painted Ossoff's portrait over an original poem, a limerick that began "There once was a country in pain." Hunt's green eyes were moist. "It's very sad," the middle-aged drama teacher told me. "It tells me that despite all the wonderful people I met in this campaign, there are still a lot of people who support the meanness and ignorance and tearing each other apart" that she saw Trump as representing.

Still, Hunt vowed to fight on, as did most of the others gathered there. They pointed out how much closer the race had been than that of the previous Republican congressman, Tom Price,who beat a token opponent by more than 20 points in November, then left Congress to serve as Health and Human Services secretary. The mood was more defiant than dejected.

"With all our hard work, I'm disappointed we didn't make a bigger dent, but we're not going back," said Jennifer Orlow, who stood near the back of the room with three other women in matching blue Ossoff shirts. Orlow, a 45-year-old technology consultant, grew up here and cast every vote of her life in the Sixth District, which has been in Republican hands since 1979. "It has been a good nine months of disappointment for us, but we have to keep fighting," she said.

They hoped to send one message to Washington; instead, they may have sent the opposite one—that the mass of American voters are in no hurry to deliver a rebuke to the chaos in Washington, and that Republican representatives still have wide leeway to pursue their policy objectives on issues like health care without losing or disheartening their base.

That is a tough pill to swallow for Democrats who have convinced themselves opposing Trump will bring them back from the brink of powerlessness. So far, they have cut into Republicans' margins, but they have not yet figured out how to win, and moral victories get no votes in Congress. There was a latent fatalism in Ossoff's parting words: "As darkness has crept across this planet," he assured them, they "have provided a beacon of hope for people in Georgia and for people around the world."

Short of victory, hope would have to suffice.

Driving around the Sixth Congressional District, you feel like you could be anywhere in America, and that was kind of the point. For all the post-election talk of the misunderstood, left-behind rural voter, or the urban liberal bubble, the most contested voters were in the territory in between the coalfield and the ivory tower. This is the America of strip malls and big-box stores, sushi buffets and light-rail park-and-rides, a landscape dotted with charter schools and pet hospitals and retirement villages along endless straight, flat, six-lane roads.

It was voters like these on whom Clinton's campaign spent most of its advertising budget trying to appeal, only to have many of them conclude that Trump, for all his indecorousness, represented less of a threat to their way of life. According to exit polls, about half of the American electorate came from suburban areas in 2016, and Trump, despite losing the popular vote overall, won them by a slightly larger margin (4 points) than Romney had in 2012 (2 points).

Ossoff's army of passionate volunteers—more than 12,000, according to the campaign—were convinced their neighbors had had second thoughts over the past eight months. On the eve of the election, a contingent of those volunteers occupied most of a strip-mall taqueria in Roswell to fuel up for a last night of canvassing.

When she woke up on November 9 and saw Trump had won, Jessica Zeigler recalled, she felt sick to her stomach. Zeigler, a 32-year-old mother of three who works for a medical-device company, couldn't bring herself to tell her 7-year-old son who had won when he asked. After some weeks of feeling lost, she discovered a secret liberal moms' group on Facebook—her first foray into activism, and an emboldening hint that she was not alone.

"I just decided, this cannot be where my kids grow up, this cannot be what is happening around them," she told me over a plate of shrimp tacos. "Sometimes it takes feeling personally attacked to get people to be active."

The mothers organized into a constellation of new organizations—dozens of chapters of the local Indivisible movement; a new local group called Pave It Blue—and drew hundreds of the similarly galvanized to their meetings. Many spoke about their activism in therapeutic terms: something they could do to process and exorcise their feelings of anger, powerlessness, and fear. They made new friends and learned local politics.

Most of all, they flocked to the underdog campaign of Ossoff, a 30-year-old former congressional staffer and documentary filmmaker whose campaign was initially blindsided by the groundswell. By the end, volunteers like Zeigler were sometimes giving the campaign direction, rather than the other way around—she developed a young-voter outreach plan that Ossoff's staff adopted and funded. (The plan frequently involved knocking on the doors of these young adults' Republican parents, who called the police on more than one occasion.)

Zeigler told me the volunteers hoped to build a model they could export to similar districts across the country. "We're going to grab 'em by the midterms," she said. "This is the most important work I've ever done." Just then, a chant of "Flip the Sixth!" went up as three blue-shirted women headed out to their cars. "That's Patricia and Liz and Jenny—they knocked on 450 doors today," Zeigler told the other volunteers at the table.

By the end, the scale of the Ossoff campaign was staggering, with dozens of staffers, a sophisticated voter-turnout operation, and six field offices—the sort of effort normally reserved for presidential campaigns. Most of the Ossoff volunteers I met were local residents who had grown up somewhere else, longtime Democrats who had long felt outnumbered.

In the end, they were no match for their neighbors' deeply rooted political allegiances, and they may have become a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

A few miles down the road, at a different strip-mall restaurant, Handel was holding her own election-eve rally, where a woman in her 60s named Debbie Moscato told me how tired she was of all the canvassers marching around her neighborhood, often knocking and asking for people's voting-age offspring. "They are harassing people," she said. "I have heard so many stories of people our age with grown children getting harassed."

The Republican voters' normally quiet neighborhoods were covered in campaign signs and mailers, their phones ringing off the hook. It was unnerving. "It's a different environment since November," the area's Republican state senator, Kay Kirkpatrick, told me. "The

Democrats have been much more energized." A physician, Kirkpatrick easily won a runoff last month against an upstart activist Democrat; she predicted Handel would do the same.

Sandy Capparell, 65, wore a neckful of sparkling gold chains and a red dress with a button reading "I'm an Adorable Deplorable." She fretted about her 25-year-old son who had, after 16 years of private school and college, moved to California and been brainwashed by the liberals. Capparell, a retired hospital administrator, wished Trump would do more to bring people together—"I don't know that he even is considering that"—but nonetheless said she was "not unhappy" with his performance so far.

I spotted only two red Trump hats in the room. One of them belonged to Joe Webb, a 70-year-old retired IBM manager with a white-blond beard and ponytail. "I worked my way up by myself, first generation off the tobacco farm," he said. Now his children both have college degrees and work in science-related fields. Drawn to Trump for his stance on immigration, Webb's only complaint with Handel was that she never seemed to mention the president.

For both of the candidates, Trump was He Who Must Not Be Named as the race wound down. "This race—it's not about what's going on around the rest of the country," Handel told her supporters in the restaurant. "It's about you and about the people of the Sixth District." Earlier that day, the president had repeatedly tweeted in support of her.

Ossoff, too, seemed to spend most of his time deflecting questions about Trump, pivoting ceaselessly back to well-worn talking points about "fresh leadership" and "quality of life" and "bipartisanship delivering solutions." "There are a lot of folks trying to look for national implications," he told me, sitting in a back room of his campaign office in Chamblee, hands folded in his lap. "But that's not what voters in the Sixth District are focused on."

Despite their agreement on this point, the two candidates had found themselves bit players in a high-stakes contest whose stakes, to the audience outside the Sixth District, were almost entirely symbolic. Win or lose, either of them would be just one vote in a deadlocked Congress. But what would it mean for everyone else?

A documentary crew had set up cameras in the room where I was interviewing Ossoff, trying to find something more than the same answers to the same questions, which he answered with annoyingly unflappable discipline. To get there, I had driven past a Baptist church offering services in English, Spanish, and Korean, as well as gated developments of newly built brick McMansions.

As our interview concluded and I started to leave, Ossoff called me back into the room. "Can I ask you a question?" he said. "Everyone talks about how Ossoff won't mention Trump, right? But when I give a speech about respect and civility and kindness and decency, am I not talking about Trump? I mean, I think everyone in the room understands the contrast, with perhaps a little subtlety, while building a coalition that doesn't want hair-on-fire partisanship."

Just as Handel aspired to be as generic a Republican as possible, Ossoff hoped be, as much as possible, a blank slate, a nice young man in whom disgruntled voters of all stripes could see the alternative they wanted. His campaign slogan proclaimed him "Humble. Kind. Ready to Fight"—a positionless vessel of 2017's cross-cutting political angst. It was a decision many would second-guess after the results were in. For this district, at least, Ossoff believed it was the only way he could possibly win.

THE DAILY BEAST

Murphy : Jon Ossoff's $23 Million Loss Shows Dems Have No Idea How to Win in the Age of Trump

Patricia Murphy

SANDY SPRINGS, Georgia—After $50 million and a congressional contest bigger than some presidential primaries, the special election in Georgia's 6th Congressional District to replace Rep. Tom Price ended up where it began, with the Republican House seat still in Republican hands and national Democrats still looking for a way to turn the resistance to Donald Trump into a victory at the polls.

With 81 percent reporting, former Secretary of State Karen Handel defeated Democrat Jon Ossoff 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent.

From the moment Price announced he was leaving the seat to become President Donald Trump's secretary of health and human services, the race to replace him was a highly nationalized, money-soaked brawl—a referendum, especially for Democrats, on the president in an affluent suburban Atlanta district he'd barely won in November.

After Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) endorsed Ossoff, then a 29-year-old unknown Democrat who lived just outside the district, liberal activists from across the country flooded Ossoff's campaign war chest, blowing it up into a $23 million mega-campaign in five months. Within weeks, he rocketed to the front of the field in the Republican-packed 17-way jungle primary in April.

When Ossoff came up less than 2 points short of the 50 percent threshold to win the primary outright in April, he went on to face off against Handel, a longtime fixture in local Republican politics. While Handel stuck to closed-door fundraisers, avoided national reporters and held invitation-only GOP events, Ossofff knocked on doors, did Republican neighborhood meetings and went to every meet and greet he could. His goal was to ask for every vote. Hers was to stick with what had been working for the last 40 years in the district—turning out reliable Republicans.

The Washington big guns joined in on both sides, with Speaker Paul Ryan's PAC sending millions of dollars to give Handel TV air cover as Trump mean-Tweeted and Comey-fired his way to one bad headline after another.

On the Democratic side, the combined efforts of the Ossoff campaign, the DNC, and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee help build a monster operation unprecedented in Georgia Democratic politics. By the end of the race, they had knocked on more than 500,000 doors, hired 100 staffers, recruited 12,000 active volunteers and spent more than $11 million on ads on everything from the Today Show to Korean newspapers and gospel stations.

But, and this is the part that will sting Democrats for a long time: It still wasn't enough.

In his concession speech, Ossoff told his supporters they had done much more than work on a campaign. "You have provided a beacon of hope, not just for people in Georgia, but for people around the world," he said, finishing. "The fight goes on. Hope is still alive."

When the full returns are counted, Republicans here will have to ask themselves why the race was so close in a community that Mitt Romney won by 23 points in 2012, and also what Handel did right to keep her own fortunes separate and apart from Donald Trump's Tweet storms.

But Democrats will have more soul searching to do. They are now zero-for-four in special elections since Trump became the president and need to understand why.

They'll be quick to say the Ossoff race never should have been so close, which is true. And that Ossoff won in a sense just by being competitive in an R+10 district, which is sort of true.

But after $23 million, a candidate who genuinely ignited the grassroots, and a Republican president who may or may not be (but probably is) under FBI investigation and can't stop talking about it, the real question Democrats need to answer is: What's it going to take to win an election in the era of Trump?

As of Tuesday night, they still have no idea.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Shapiro : Apocalyptic Politics' Dangerous Appeal, Left & Right

We are in love with the apocalypse.

Doomsday thinking justifies anything. If Armageddon lies just beyond the horizon, then all measures are worthwhile in staving it off. Armageddon simplifies the complex. It makes all decisions clear. Judeo-Christian moral qualms are minimized in the face of an implacable enemy bent on bringing hell down to earth.

There's something attractive about all of this. Left adrift, without a mission, Americans find windmills to fight and dub themselves knights in

that battle. And they find *excitement* in that battle.

In an age when nearly nobody has served in the military against an actual existential foe, too many Americans dream of a war that will provide meaning and clarity. They watch *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones* and imagine themselves fighting a faceless enemy, making easy moral decisions. They watch comic-book films and thrill to the fictional antics of those saving the world. In war, at least in theory for the layman, all moral decisions boil down to one: Does it help our side win?

The Left has flattered itself with such illusions since the 1960s. They launched wars on drugs and poverty and repressive Judeo-Christian sexual mores. They saw themselves as guerillas in the fight against a racist, imperialist American government. Imbued with the moral superiority of an existential fight, the Left granted itself license to do anything, to justify anything. As Saul Alinsky put it: "In war, the end justifies almost any means."

The result was chaos.

For two decades, the warlike mentality of the Left crept into remission. But then, with the war in Iraq, it was reinvigorated. That wartime mentality was exacerbated by President Obama, who divided Americans into political battalions by race, class, and sexual orientation, and activated his electoral army to support his grand strategy. Rioters were treated as shock troops, overzealous but necessary. Violent protesters were tut-tutted on college campuses and at campaign events. The Left said that words were violence — and acted accordingly.

With the rise of President Trump, apocalyptic thinking has increased exponentially.

The Left has declared time and again that the end is imminent: President Trump's pullout from the Paris accords, ridiculously enough, meant that the planet would turn into an oven, roasting the flesh of babes and swamping cities with rising tides; Trump's utterly unproven Russian collusion spelled the end of the American democratic experiment; Trumpcare would kill millions. With the end so near, how could the Left be blamed for deploying all of its tactics, from astroturfed boycotts to political intimidation, to stop the oncoming onslaught? A tiny coterie of leftists has even embraced the actual logic of war: In war, people die. In the aftermath of the shooting of House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R., La.), Joy Reid said on MSNBC, "It's a delicate thing, because everybody is wishing the congressman well and hoping that he recovers, but Steve Scalise has a history that we've all been forced to sort of ignore on race."

Apocalyptic thinking of the Left — and its commensurately unmoored rhetoric and behavior — drove the rise of doomsday thinking on the right.

The creeping despair of apocalyptic thinking began with President Obama, who utilized his massive popularity to target his political enemies, mobilizing his leftist media allies as a propaganda army willing to ignore his sins and champion his programs. That despair snowballed with the passage of Obamacare and crescendoed with the defeat of Mitt Romney, an honorable man who fell victim to the Left's troll-based election scheme. The anger reached its apex with the Republican inability to fulfill promises about stopping either Obamacare or President Obama's executive amnesty.

Conservatives felt that the political apocalypse was upon them. The country was at risk, the Constitution a dead letter. Hillary Clinton, the most corrupt politician of our lifetime, was on the verge of the presidency.

It was the political apocalypse. It was doomsday.

Unlike the Left, however, the Right had a guiding Judeo-Christian moral compass written into its political education. The notion of individually virtuous behavior restrained conservatives from likening political warfare to actual warfare, from applying wartime morality to peacetime politics.

The election of President Trump liberated some conservatives from the shackles of that morality. It wasn't that Trump won; it wasn't merely that Hillary lost. It was *how* Trump won: by dumping the trappings of virtue, by reveling in fibs and vulgarities and superfluous cruelties and violent chatter. Because so many conservatives thought Trump would lose, they were convinced when he won that he won *because* of his bellicose behavior, not in spite of it. Trump, the Right convinced itself, won because he saw more clearly than anyone else that a war was upon us, and he fought a war like a war.

Trump, the Right convinced itself, won because he saw more clearly than anyone else that a war was upon us, and he fought a war like a war.

All of which meant that the solution to political despair was *more* political warfare. Toss "muh principles" at the door. An eye for an eye. In fact, a *preemptive eye* for a prospective eye. To defeat the Left, we must imitate the Left. What's more, you're a coward and a spoilsport if you say differently. No more moral struggles. Win! Win at all costs! Rally to your general! The fate of the republic is at stake!

This is dangerous stuff. It's dangerous when the Left peddles it — but it's also self-defeating, since most Americans don't think of the country as irrevocably split. There's a reason Democrats have lost 1,000 legislative seats across the country, nearly two-thirds of governorships, the House, the Senate, and the presidency.

It's far more dangerous when the self-stated guardians of Judeo-Christian morality declare war. Then nobody is left to stand for decent behavior — to remind us that we are brothers rather than enemies, that the proper response to an unhinged violent attack on members of Congress isn't storming a stage at a play in Central Park, and that the proper response to a judicial verdict you don't like isn't setting local stores on fire.

This isn't *The Walking Dead*. It's not a Batman movie. It's a constitutional republic.

When people who have never seen war begin championing wartime tactics with such alacrity, they bring actual violence closer. But this isn't *The Walking Dead*. It's not a Batman movie. It's a constitutional republic with a social fabric that frays every time we jettison traditional morality for wartime tactics.

The Washington Post

Senate GOP leaders will present health bill this week, even as divisions flare

After weeks of secret deliberations, Senate Republicans are in the final stages of a sweeping rewrite of the nation's health-care laws amid growing frustration among the rank and file over how to fulfill the party's top campaign promise over the past seven years.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said Tuesday that GOP leaders will produce a "discussion draft" on Thursday and hinted that a final vote could come next week — even as key senators expressed concern about the emerging legislation, the lack of transparency surrounding it and the disagreement that remains.

McConnell's desire to wrap up before the Fourth of July recess reflects the sense of urgency among Republicans, including President Trump, to show progress on health care after years of vowing to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act.

But McConnell's strategy for achieving that goal — writing a bill with a handful of aides behind closed doors — has come at a cost that reached new heights on Tuesday: anger among Republicans who feel shut out of the process.

"Do you know what the health-care bill looks like?" Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) asked reporters Tuesday, her frustration evident. "Because I don't."

McConnell told reporters that he would "lay out a discussion draft Thursday morning; you'll be able to take a look at it" — but he declined to discuss the specifics. He said the Senate would take up the bill on the floor once it receives a score from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office — possibly Monday.

Trump has sent mixed signals to Capitol Hill and has played a more hands-off role in Senate deliberations than he did in the House. While the president has pushed for swift action on health care and celebrated the passage of the House bill in May, he also "wants a bill that has heart in it," press secretary Sean Spicer said at the White House on Tuesday. And at a private meeting with senators recently, Trump called the version that passed the House "mean."

Senate Republicans have vowed to repeal and replace key parts of the ACA, commonly known as Obamacare, the 2010 law that has provided insurance to about 20 million additional Americans through a combination of expanded Medicaid coverage and private insurance, much of which is federally subsidized.

But even among Republicans — no Democrats are expected to support the bill — competing ideological

goals have complicated Senate negotiations. Among the challenges in a messy drafting process: how to lower insurance premium costs and eliminate what some view as burdensome coverage mandates without increasing the number of uninsured Americans. It has become both a political and a substantive question for some GOP senators — many of whom campaigned on a promise to "repeal and replace" but now face strong evidence that their constituents like their coverage and insurance protections under the ACA.

The more contentious issues have included how to slow spending growth in Medicaid and reducing requirements for health plans, such as mandated coverage for certain diseases or preexisting conditions.

Senate leaders hope to start debate by Tuesday or Wednesday of next week, said two senior GOP aides who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe strategy — yet it remains unclear whether McConnell has the 50 votes he needs (plus the tiebreaking vote of Vice President Pence) to pass the bill. Democrats and Republicans will each have 10 hours to debate the bill before being allowed to offer an unlimited number of relevant amendments in what is commonly known as a "vote-a-rama." If all goes as planned, a final vote could occur by the end of next week, the aides said.

Even lawmakers who have supported the idea of moving swiftly said they don't know what will be in the bill.

Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) told reporters that while he and his colleagues "all understand what the tensions are" in reaching a compromise, it was impossible to say whether they had resolved them yet.

"Every single person is in the same place. They want to see the text," he said. "There's no way for anyone to know what we have until we have language."

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), a key architect of a health-care working group that has been huddling regularly for weeks, said that while the senators "continue to make good progress" on crafting a compromise, "a great deal of work remains to be done."

The critical test, Cruz said, is whether the bill would drive down premium costs. "Right now, the current draft doesn't do nearly enough in that regard," he said.

As he left a working-group meeting Tuesday, Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) was asked whether Republicans had moved any closer to completing their work.

"Didn't seem like it to me," Hatch responded, with a chuckle. "There's still a lot of different points of view. And there are no simple answers to these problems."

One of the biggest and most divisive matters under discussion is how to structure Medicaid. Some GOP senators from states that expanded Medicaid under the ACA are trying to phase out higher federal payments at a slower rate than a bill that passed the GOP-controlled House in May. Some conservatives, meanwhile, are seeking to slow the growth of Medicaid's costs.

Sen. Patrick J. Toomey (R-Pa.) called talks on the bill "a work in progress" on Tuesday. Toomey is leading the conservative Republicans who want to slow Medicaid's costs.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), who has been pushing for a seven-year phaseout of Medicaid expansion that he called a "glide path." McConnell has been pushing for a three-year phaseout. Both would be more gradual than the House bill.

Republicans hold a 52-48 advantage over Democrats and thus can afford to lose only two votes, even under the maneuver known as reconciliation they are using to enable them to pass it with a simple majority rather than the 60-vote majority required of most legislation.

Asked whether negotiations were far enough along to allow for a vote next week, Cruz, who is more concerned with paring back regulations in Obamacare than he is in the Medicaid debate, said, "I think our decision not to set artificial deadlines was the right decision."

Democrats have registered their displeasure this week with both the process and policy Republicans are spearheading. On Tuesday, they continued their protests, using a parliamentary tactic to slow other Senate business.

"If the Republicans continue down this path, ignoring the principles of transparency and the open debate that define this legislative body, we Democrats will continue to do everything we can to shine a light on what our Republican friends are doing," Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said on the Senate floor.

In 2009, two key Senate committees held extensive hearings and votes on bills that eventually formed the basis of the ACA. Two separate committees adopted dozens of GOP as well as Democratic amendments in meetings that lasted 13 days and eight days, respectively. The final Senate bill passed in December 2009, after 25 days of consideration on the floor. All told, the Senate considered the health-care bill for a total of 160 hours.

Cruz dismissed the Democrats' criticism as unfounded.

"There has been no political issue in modern times more debated than Obamacare," he said, noting that controversy over the bill helped propel Republicans' electoral gains in 2010, 2014 and 2016. "The Democrats' complaint that we haven't talked enough is rich with irony."

The closed-door process has left many health-care advocates at a loss. Dick Woodruff, senior vice president of federal advocacy for the American Cancer Society, said in an interview Tuesday, "We're doing what we can to communicate to the Hill what impact on coverage" the health-care overhaul could have on its members.

Woodruff, who said his group was particularly concerned about potential cuts to Medicaid and the bill's impact on people with preexisting conditions, added: "The difficulty is that there isn't much coming back. It's like we're talking to a black box."

The Senate is scheduled to go into recess at the end of next week. If Republicans do not finish their work on health care before then, they may risk losing steam, as senators return to their home states and potentially face fresh resistance to their efforts.

Still, some Republicans said they were confused about the bill taking shape and warned against rushing.

"I'm hearing lots of conflicting information," said Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), a key centrist.

In a video he posted Tuesday afternoon on Facebook, Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) said he had not seen the bill, despite being a part of the Senate GOP health-care working group.

"I'd be fine, don't get me wrong, to be voting on something soon," Lee said. "But we should be able to see it first."

The New York Times

Editorial : The Health Care of Millions Depends on a Few Senators

The Editorial Board

We do not know a lot about what is in the health care bill that Republicans are trying to rush through the Senate, but what we do know suggests it will be as bad or worse than the dreadful legislation that the House passed in May.

The Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, is doing everything he can to keep the public in the dark about his plan to undo major provisions of the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. But Washington being Washington, a few details have become public. All are alarming and depressing. And as they emerge, and the public unveiling of the bill grows closer — it could come on Thursday — the need for a few wise Republicans to stand with Senate Democrats to say "no" becomes ever more urgent.

One provision under consideration in the Senate, according to news reports, would reduce federal spending on Medicaid more than the Dickensian House version does. That would put even more pressure on states to reduce care for the nearly 75 million people who benefit from that program.

Another change would make it much easier for states to let insurance companies sell policies that do not cover treatments like chemotherapy or drugs like insulin, leaving people with pre-existing health problems and those who become sick worse off.

Whatever their differences, the Senate and House versions have this in common: a callous disregard for the health care of millions of people plus a kind of frantic wish to pass something, no matter how destructive and poorly thought out, that lets President Trump and other Republicans claim that they have repealed Obamacare.

The House bill, the American Health Care Act, would rob 23 million people of health insurance and make it harder for millions of others to get the care they need, according to the Congressional Budget Office. It would cut federal spending by about $1.1 trillion over 10 years while giving the wealthy big tax cuts. Those numbers might be somewhat different for the Senate bill but, according to experts, not by much.

Polls show that most Americans do not support the changes the Republicans want to make. A CBS News poll published on Tuesday found that 59 percent of people disapproved of the House bill. That explains why Mr. McConnell wants to have a vote on his legislation before Congress leaves town for the Fourth of July without any hearings or much public debate. He is trying to thread the needle between the ultraconservative and the more moderate members of his caucus. He knows that he can pass the bill with just 50 Republicans and a tiebreaking vote from Vice President Mike Pence.

Democratic senators are trying to slow the train by putting up procedural roadblocks to unrelated bills. They are also demanding public hearings on the bill, which Mr. McConnell has so far failed to provide. These tactics are unlikely to stop Mr. McConnell, but at the very least they have shone a spotlight on his reprehensible tactics.

But the country needs more than a spotlight. What it needs is at least three Republican senators to come out against the bill. Susan Collins of Maine, the most moderate senator in the G.O.P., is expected to be one of them. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska could well be another because the bill would take a huge toll on people in her state, which has very high health care costs. Under the House bill, the insurance premiums for a 40-year-old in Fairbanks who earns $30,000 a year would jump by about $8,500, to $10,430, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Those numbers should also be of concern to the other senator from Alaska, Dan Sullivan, who has so far not shown his hand.

Other Republican senators who ought to be particularly alarmed include Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, Rob Portman of Ohio and Dean Heller of Nevada. Their states expanded Medicaid under the A.C.A. and stand to lose billions of dollars in federal funds under the House and Senate bills. That will make it harder for their states and others to place older adults in nursing homes, provide care to the disabled and offer addiction treatment to people ensnared in the opioid epidemic.

The health care of millions of Americans rests in the hands of a few Republican senators. Who among them will be willing to defy their party and fight for their constituents?

Los Angeles Times

Editorial : GOP's secret Trumpcare bill will impact a sixth of the U.S. economy. What could possibly go wrong?

The Times Editorial Board

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is pushing for a vote next week on a bill to repeal and replace Obamacare despite having held no public hearings, obtained no feedback from budget analysts and taken no testimony from doctors, patients or hospitals.

That's a recipe for disaster.

Senate Republicans have been inundated with complaints about the secret negotiations over the bill, which took as a starting point the House Republican leadership's execrable American Health Care Act. So far, their negotiators have not been deterred by the accusations of recklessness (healthcare spending accounts for about a sixth of the massive U.S. economy), heedlessness (dozens of groups representing doctors, hospitals and other healthcare professionals say their input has been ignored) and hypocrisy (this is, after all, a group that complained for years about Democrats "rushing" the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 after months of hearings and weeks of debate on the Senate floor).

This bill needs maximum public exposure and scrutiny, not the see-no-evil treatment it's getting from the Senate GOP.

Instead, the only thing holding the Republicans up has been the splits within their own caucus over a few key policy issues, such as how much of the cost of healthcare to shift onto the states and their taxpayers. There's no point in involving Democrats — or the public — in shaping the bill, some Republicans say, because only Republicans will vote for it at the end of the day. Funny, but Republicans were involved in much of the wrangling over the bill that became the Affordable Care Act, even though Democrats saw early on that Republicans were determined to vote no.

This time around, the process has not only been maddeningly partisan, but it's also been willfully blind to the real problems in the U.S. healthcare system, as well as the steps insurers and providers have been taking to address those problems. As a consequence, Senate Republicans are on the verge of moving the country backward, and significantly so, when it comes to reducing healthcare costs, improving quality and broadening availability.

McConnell said Tuesday that a "discussion draft" of the bill would be released this week, first to Republican senators, then to the public. Still, we already know that the bill won't simply repeal Obamacare or magically restore the healthcare market to what it had been before — a market plagued by rapidly rising costs, double-digit increases in insurance premiums and a large and growing population of Americans without coverage. That's largely because the legislative shortcut the Republicans are taking to prevent a lethal Democratic filibuster also prevents them from changing any provision of the Affordable Care Act that doesn't directly affect the federal budget. But it's also true because Republicans want to cut the taxes the ACA imposed — on high-income Americans and an assortment of health industry groups — while offering their own version of subsidies to help consumers pay for insurance.

In order to do that, they have to cut something else. And that would be Medicaid, the health insurance program for impoverished Americans. Like their House counterparts, Senate Republicans are reportedly seeking to end the federal government's promise to cover at least half the cost of Medicaid enrollees' healthcare expenses, shifting instead to block grants tied to population and state healthcare spending. It's a huge change in policy that's fraught with risk for the poor and state governments, especially ones like California's that have already pushed through reforms to cut spending per enrollee. And rather than give the industry more incentive to improve the quality of care, it would simply give states an incentive to offer fewer services to fewer people — including optional services such as in-home care that actually save money over the long term.

The Senate GOP also appears wedded to the House's approach to lowering insurance premiums for those not covered by a health plan at work. Rather than trying to lower the cost of care, the focus is on letting insurers offer less coverage and cheaper plans that attract only healthy customers. Doing so would reverse efforts within the industry to spread risks and control costs, which is exactly the opposite of what Republicans say they're trying to accomplish. These sorts of fundamental flaws are exactly why this bill needs maximum public exposure and scrutiny, not the see-no-evil treatment it's getting from the Senate GOP.

the Atlantic

Republicans Will Continue to Stick With Secrecy as Long as It Works

David A. Graham

The paradox of secrecy in American politics is how much attention it gets. Over the last couple of weeks, the penchant of the White House and the Republican Senate for blocking the release of information has become a central issue in Washington. It's a case of making lemonade from lemons: If you can't cover the story, cover why you can't cover it.

Perhaps most immediately important is the Senate GOP's refusal to reveal anything about the bill the health-care bill currently under consideration. Meanwhile, the administration has been quietly clamping down on various forms of access, from public schedules to visitor logs to the daily briefings at the White House. The executive branch has taken to refusing requests for information from congressional Democrats too.

The result is a weird reversal of the normal course of business: Gossipy nuggets leak out of the White House on a daily basis—*Trump is yelling at TVs! Trump is angry at Jared! Sean Spicer/Reince Priebus/Steve Bannon is on the chopping block!*—and the president tweets as fact things his lawyers claim are not true, yet next to nothing is known about a huge bill that could change health coverage for millions of Americans.

This kind of secrecy is bad for policymaking and bad for democracy, but since abstract arguments like that are difficult to plead effectively, it's customary to argue that secrecy is also politically unwise. For example, it is clearly hypocritical. When Obama was president, Republicans complained

that the White House was too secretive, and that Democrats were trying to railroad through health-care reform without public input—even though the process behind the Affordable Care Act was far more public and lengthy than the present process. But hypocrisy is seldom lethal for any politician, let alone a party, especially in today's partisan climate.

Another argument is that clamming up will actually hurt the clams. As *Politico*'s Playbook puts it today, "This could be bad for the White House, as it will be far more difficult for them to drive a message and respond to questions." This might be true, but take it with a healthy dose of skepticism. For one, it's obviously self-serving for journalists to say that giving journalists more access is good for them, and the press corps, smelling blood, is out for damaging stories about Trump. Sometimes openness is not a zero-sum game, but in this case, it probably is.

Second, where's the proof? The George W. Bush administration was more secretive than the Clinton administration; the press howled; and Bush got reelected. The Obama administration was more secretive than the Bush administration; the press howled; and Obama got reelected. Part of Obama's success was that he found other ways to get his message out: Social media, for example, and interviews with non-traditional interlocutors, from Zach Galifianakis to YouTube stars. Trump may be different in degree and extremity from his predecessors, but his administration's secrecy is part of a disturbing, bipartisan progression.

The secrecy will continue as long as it works. It certainly worked in the House, where GOP leaders watched a first attempt at a health bill go down as its flaws became public. For the second try, they acted fast and quietly, not even waiting for the Congressional Budget Office to score the bill.

And so far, the strategy is working for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as well. It's not just Democrats and the press who are upset; some Republicans are speaking out too:

But until enough members of the GOP caucus actually demand that McConnell open up the process, their complaints will make little difference. In fact, that might be by design. McConnell and his lieutenants would much rather have an argument about process and take the lumps they get from that fight: They can write complaints off as either the whingeing of a biased press or hypocrisy from Democrats who did the same thing. That's far better than trying to defend an unpopular bill that will likely push millions off insurance, redistribute money to the wealthy, and slash popular entitlements. The secrecy gives disgruntled Republican members of the caucus something else to complain about instead.

(The general public may not really be the audience from whom the Senate leadership is hiding its bill; public disapproval of the House health bill is already very high, and Democrats will vote en masse against it. The bigger danger for McConnell is that Republican constituencies—from the business lobby to GOP governors—will react fiercely to the bill and convince Republican senators to defect.)

Meanwhile, Senator Chuck Grassley, the Iowa Republican, has taken a bold stand on behalf of Democratic colleagues, writing a letter to President Trump complaining about the executive branch ignoring document requests. But as long as Grassley stands alone, and has only angry letters to write, the White House can blithely ignore him, too.

In the long run, shutting out public attention can have some ill effects. Just ask Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has gone to historically drastic extents to avoid dealing with reporters. The result has been that the State Department can't seem to ever present a clear message about what its policies are, and keeps getting undercut by the president. Perhaps cutting down on briefings will make the administration's message control even worse, though it's hard to imagine what that would look like. (The White House did belatedly add an on-camera briefing to Tuesday's schedule.) Perhaps enough Republican senators will get upset about the closed-door health-care process to force it out into public hearings. But for as along as it continues to succeed, secrecy is likely here to stay.

Los Angeles Times

Editorial : The U.S. government is still spying on Americans. Here are some fixes for that

The Times Editorial Board

The Trump administration is urgently lobbying Congress to reauthorize Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which allows the National Security Agency to collect the electronic communications of foreigners living abroad. Before he was fired, FBI Director James B. Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee that losing Section 702 would be "disastrous."

But Congress should not simply rubber-stamp the law as it exists. Rather, Section 702 should be fine-tuned to afford greater privacy protections for Americans.

Yes, Americans. Because even though residents of this country aren't the targets of Section 702's elaborate electronic dragnet, their emails, phone calls and Internet chats can be caught up in it incidentally — for example, when a foreign "target" is emailing or talking on the phone to an American living in the U.S.

Section 702 is the direct descendant of the warrantless electronic surveillance program instituted by the George W. Bush administration after Sept. 11, 2001, that caused a sensation when its existence was exposed by the New York Times in 2005. Unlike that shadowy program, Section 702 was duly enacted by Congress and is overseen fairly rigorously by a federal court, albeit one that meets in secret.

Americans shouldn't have to face the possibility of prosecution based on information gathered — without a warrant — for foreign intelligence purposes.

Under Section 702, the government does not need to obtain individual warrants authorizing the surveillance of each person who is targeted. Instead, at the request of the attorney general and the director of national intelligence, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court certifies categories of foreigners who may be appropriately targeted. The court also approves procedures for "minimizing" (protecting the privacy) of information about U.S. citizens collected as part of the surveillance.

Comey's view of the value of Section 702 is widely shared. Sen. Dianne Feinstein says it "has been a valuable part of our counter-terrorism effort." In a report published in 2014, after Edward Snowden's revelations, the president's Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board concluded that intelligence collected under Section 702 "has enabled the discovery of previously unknown terrorist operatives as well as the locations and movements of suspects already known to the government."

But civil liberties groups argue that the program does not sufficiently protect Americans' privacy, although they concede that there is no evidence of egregious abuses.

One persuasive complaint about Section 702 is that the intelligence community hasn't quantified the number of Americans whose conversations have been captured by surveillance under the program, making it difficult to assess whether it is sufficiently circumscribed. Trump's director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, told the Senate that "it remains infeasible to generate an exact, accurate, meaningful and responsive methodology that can count how often a U.S. person's communications may be collected." That strikes us as defeatist. Congress should insist the intelligence community make a good-faith effort to keep track of how many Americans are caught in the Section 702 net.

And while the acquisition of intelligence under the law is supposed to be "consistent with the 4th Amendment," information about Americans (which, remember, is gathered without an individualized warrant) can be retained and turned over to law enforcement if it shows evidence of criminal activity. The Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board recommended that the FBI be required to obtain approval from the FISA court before searching a database of communications gathered under the program in connection with criminal matters so that the Section 702 database doesn't become a repository for fishing expeditions.

That recommendation might seem less urgent given statistics from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence showing that the FBI searched the Section 702 database only once in 2016 in connection with criminal matters unrelated to national security. Still, Americans shouldn't have to face the possibility of prosecution based on information gathered — without a warrant — for foreign intelligence purposes. That contravenes the guarantee of the 4th Amendment that searches must be reasonable and the long-standing practice of requiring warrants based on probable cause.

Another way to protect Americans' privacy would be for Congress to codify a recent decision by the NSA to no longer collect communications in which the email address of a foreign target appeared in the text of a message between Americans. The NSA stopped collecting such "about" messages because it apparently felt it couldn't do so without inadvertently violating safeguards of Americans' privacy.

Finally, unlike the Trump administration and some Republicans in Congress, we believe that this law — even in an improved version — should be authorized for no more than five years, as the current version was in 2012. A program that collects so much personal information about Americans, and that was enacted in response to a terrorist threat that we all hope is temporary, should be subject to periodic review.

Bloomberg

O'Brien : Trump, Russia, and Those Shadowy Sater Deals at Bayrock

The special counsel's investigation of the White House has come more sharply into focus.

Robert Mueller is examining whether President Donald Trump obstructed justice when he fired James Comey as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Washington Post recently reported. As we've heard for months now, there is also a probe of possible collusion between Trump's campaign team and the Kremlin to tilt the 2016 election in the president's favor.

But the Justice Department inquiry led by Mueller now has added flavors. The Post noted that the investigation also includes "suspicious financial activity" involving "Russian operatives." The New York Times was more specific in its account, saying that Mueller is looking at whether Trump associates laundered financial payoffs from Russian officials by channeling them through offshore accounts.

Trump has repeatedly labeled Comey's and Mueller's investigations "witch hunts," and his lawyers have said that the last decade of his tax returns (which the president has declined to release) would show that he had no income or loans from Russian sources. In May, Trump told NBC that he has no property or investments in Russia. "I am not involved in Russia," he said.

But that doesn't address national security and other problems that might arise for the president if Russia is involved in Trump, either through potentially compromising U.S. business relationships or through funds that flowed into his wallet years ago. In that context, a troubling history of Trump's dealings with Russians exists outside of Russia: in a dormant real-estate development firm, the Bayrock Group, which once operated just two floors beneath the president's own office in Trump Tower.

Bayrock partnered with the future president and his two eldest children, Donald Jr. and Ivanka, on a series of real-estate deals between 2002 and about 2011**,** the most prominent being the troubled Trump Soho hotel and condominium in Manhattan.

During the years that Bayrock and Trump did deals together, the company was also a bridge between murky European funding and a number of projects in the U.S. to which the president once leant his name in exchange for handsome fees. Icelandic banks that dealt with Bayrock, for example, were easy marks for money launderers and foreign influence, according to interviews with government investigators, legislators, and others in Reykjavik, Brussels, Paris and London. Trump testified under oath in a 2007 deposition that Bayrock brought Russian investors to his Trump Tower office to discuss deals in Moscow, and said he was pondering investing there.

"It's ridiculous that I wouldn't be investing in Russia," Trump said in that deposition. "Russia is one of the hottest places in the world for investment."

One of Bayrock's principals was a career criminal named Felix Sater who had ties to Russian and American organized crime groups. Before linking up with the company and with Trump, he had worked as a mob informant for the U.S. government, fled to Moscow to avoid criminal charges while boasting of his KGB and Kremlin contacts there, and had gone to prison for slashing apart another man's face with a broken cocktail glass.

In a series of interviews and a lawsuit, a former Bayrock insider, Jody Kriss, claims that he eventually departed from the firm because he became convinced that Bayrock was actually a front for money laundering.

Kriss has sued Bayrock, alleging that in addition to laundering money, the Bayrock team also skimmed cash from the operation, dodged taxes and cheated him out of millions of dollars. Sater and others at Bayrock would not comment for this column; in court documents they have contested Kriss's charges and describe him, essentially, as a disgruntled employee trying to shake them down.

But Kriss's assertion that Bayrock was a criminal operation during the years it partnered with Trump has been deemed plausible enough to earn him a court victory: In December, a federal judge in New York said Kriss's lawsuit against Bayrock, which he first filed nine years ago, could proceed as a racketeering case.

(I have my own history in court with the president. Trump sued me in 2006 when I worked at the New York Times, alleging that my biography, "TrumpNation," had misrepresented his business record and his wealth. Trump lost the suit in 2011; my lawyers deposed him and Sater during the litigation. Trump's representatives didn't respond to repeated interview requests for this column.)

Trump has said over the years that he barely knows Sater. In fact, Sater -- who former Bayrock employees say met frequently with Trump in the Trump Organization's New York headquarters, once shepherded the president's children around Moscow and carried a Trump Organization business card -- apparently has remained firmly in the orbit of the president and his closest advisers.

Sater made the front page of the New York Times in February for his role in a failed effort — along with Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen — to lobby former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn on a Ukrainian peace proposal.

Comey was still Trump's FBI director when he testified before the House Intelligence Committee in March about Russian interference in the 2016 election. During that hearing, Comey was asked if he was "aware of" Felix Sater, his criminal history and his business dealings with the Trump Organization. Comey declined to comment.

It's unclear whether Sater and Bayrock are part of Mueller's investigation. But Mueller has populated his investigative team with veteran prosecutors expert in white-collar fraud and Russian-organized-crime probes. One of them, Andrew Weissmann, once led an FBI team that examined financial fraud leading to the demise of Enron. Before that, Weissmann was a prosecutor with the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn and part of a team that prosecuted Sater and mob associates for investment scams in the late 1990s.

However the Mueller probe unfolds, a tour of Trump's partnership with Bayrock exposes a number of uncomfortable truths about the president's business history, his judgment, and the possible vulnerabilities that his past as a freewheeling dealmaker — and his involvement with figures like Sater — have visited upon his present as the nation's chief executive.

Zegna Suits and Luxury Cars

Sater was born in the Soviet Union in 1966 and emigrated with his parents to the heavily Russian enclave of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, when he was about eight years old. He attended Pace University before dropping out when he was 18, then found his way to Wall Street where he worked as a stockbroker.

His early years on Wall Street, according to the recollections of his one-time business partner, Salvatore Lauria, were flush. By his mid-20s, Sater was collecting expensive watches, spending thousands of dollars on Zegna suits and buying luxury cars. That all came to a brief halt in 1993 when he was sent to prison for using the stem of a broken margarita glass during a bar fight two years earlier to attack another stockbroker; Sater's victim needed 110 stitches to hold his face together.

When Sater emerged from prison 15 months later, he found his way back into trouble. With a group that included Lauria (who admits to having had ties to organized crime figures and grew up in New York as a close friend of a prominent Mafia boss), Sater opened an investment firm on the penthouse floor of 40 Wall Street, a Trump-owned building in Manhattan. From there, according to federal prosecutors, Sater and his team set about laundering money for the mob and fleecing about $40 million from unwitting and largely elderly investors, a number of whom were Holocaust survivors.

By the time law enforcement authorities eventually caught on to the 40 Wall Street operation, Sater had fled to Russia. Lauria visited him there.

Sater "was always hustling and scheming, and his contacts in Russia were the same kind of contacts he had in the United

States," Lauria wrote in a 2003 memoir, "The Scorpion and the Frog." "The difference was that in Russia his crooked contacts were links between Russian organized crime, the Russian military, the KGB, and operatives who played both ways, or sometimes three ways."

Sater, who had been charged with racketeering and money laundering by the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn in connection with the 40 Wall Street scam, eventually decided to return to America and face those charges. He had a card to play, however: his knowledge, gleaned from contacts in Russia, about a small stock of Stinger antiaircraft missiles loose on the black market in Afghanistan that were of interest to U.S. intelligence officials.

Sater told authorities that he could use his Russian contacts to buy the Stingers and, according to court filings in Kriss's lawsuit and other accounts, a deal was struck in December, 1998. Sater pleaded guilty to federal fraud charges and then entered into a cooperation agreement with the government that sealed court records in the case and allowed his sentencing to be postponed for 11 years. (Sater would ultimately only pay a $25,000 fine and never go to prison.)

Many years later, as part of her confirmation hearings to become President Barack Obama's attorney general, Loretta Lynch would note that the cooperation deal she made with Sater when she was the U.S. attorney in Brooklyn lasted for a decade -- from 1998 to 2008 -- and that Sater gave the government "information crucial to national security and the conviction of over 20 individuals, including those responsible for committing massive financial fraud and members of La Cosa Nostra."

At some point after becoming an informant, Sater also recast himself as a real-estate savant. He made his way to a Manhattan real-estate investment firm, APC Realty, where he raised money for deals and where he met Kriss in 2000.

Kriss, a native of Miami and a business graduate of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, was an aspiring real-estate developer who was in his early 20s when they met. He says he was initially captivated by Sater.

“Felix knew how to be charming and he knew how to be brutally nasty,” says Kriss. “He has a talent for drawing people in. He has charm and charisma. But that’s what con men do.”

After APC began to fall apart in 2002, Kriss decided to strike out on his own back home in Miami, doing real-estate deals. Sater made his way to a small Hong Kong investment bank that used him as a New York-based rainmaker for real-estate deals.

In addition to his new life as a real-estate investor and government informant, Sater owned a comfortable home in Sands Point, Long Island, a toney New York suburb that was a setting for “The Great Gatsby.” He also had a wife and three daughters and was a member of an Orthodox synagogue in neighboring Port Washington. On one occasion Sater brought his rabbi with him to meet U.S. intelligence officials in New York, where, the rabbi said, agents praised Sater's service to the country.

When Sater received a community service award at his synagogue on another occasion, a band played "Hail to the Chief." Sater gave an acceptance speech in which he noted that he was "not a very religious person" but that his goal in life was to "repair the world or make it a better place."

'Air of Success'

About a year after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Sater joined Bayrock, a company that marketed itself as a property developer and had opened Manhattan offices on the 24th floor of a well-known building at 725 Fifth Avenue: Trump Tower.

In late 2002, Sater phoned Kriss and invited him to consult at Bayrock, bragging about a deep-pocketed investor, Tevfik Arif, who was partnering with him in search of bigger deals.

Arif, born in Kazakhstan, was a former Soviet official who had relocated to Turkey to make his fortune. He ran several upscale, seaside hotels there that catered almost exclusively to Russians, according to Kriss, and he had also redeveloped a shopping center in Brooklyn. At one point in his post-Soviet years, Arif also reportedly took over a former Kazakh state-owned chromium producer with his brother.

Like Sater, Arif had a home in Sands Point and Kriss says that Arif brought his children there from Turkey to learn English. (Arif's representatives declined to respond to a list of questions about his business history, including how he met Sater and brought him to Bayrock, citing ongoing litigation.)

Bayrock was initially funded, in part, with a $10 million investment transferred to the firm by Arif's brother in Russia, who, according to Kriss's lawsuit, was able to tap into the cash reserves of a Kazakh chromium refinery. (A spokeswoman for Arif declined to comment on that allegation.)

A marketing document Bayrock once circulated to prospective investors noted that Alexander Mashkevich, an oligarch born in the former Soviet Union, was one of Bayrock's primary sources of funding. Mashkevich's firm, the Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation, was based in Kazakhstan and elsewhere and had interests in chromium, aluminum, coal, construction, and banking. (A person close to Mashkevich, who requested anonymity because of the Kriss-Bayrock litigation, said Mashkevich never invested in Bayrock.)

Bayrock never seemed to be short of money, however. According to Kriss’s lawsuit, the team running the little development firm in Trump Tower could locate funds "month after month, for two years, in fact more frequently, whenever Bayrock ran out of cash." If times got tight, Bayrock's owners would "magically show up with a wire from 'somewhere' just large enough to keep the company going."

Kriss says that Sater and Arif wooed him to Bayrock by offering him 10 percent of the firm's profits. Bayrock’s Trump Tower offices gave “an air of success to it,” Kriss says. Bayrock also gave Kriss, then 28 years old, the opportunity to work with Trump.

It was Sater who initially developed the relationship with Trump, according to Kriss and court records from Trump's lawsuit against me. Sater had made the acquaintance of three Trump Organization executives who then introduced him to their boss. When the Bayrock team met Trump in 2002, the future president was enduring a long stretch in the financial wilderness, having narrowly escaped personal bankruptcy in the early 1990s.

He eventually emerged from that mess as a pariah among big banks. He was also a determined survivor and tireless self-promoter and he parlayed those skills into recreating himself as a branding machine and golf course developer in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Kriss says that it was Arif and Sater who pitched the future president on the idea of launching an international chain of Trump-branded, mixed-use hotels and condominiums. And Bayrock got to Trump at a time when his “brand” could help get a little extra attention for a condo project, but didn’t amount to much more than that.

“Trump was trying to build his brand and Bayrock was trying to market it,” Kriss recalls. “It wasn’t clear who needed each other more. This was before the show, remember.”

The “show,” of course, was “The Apprentice.” It aired for the first time on Jan. 8, 2004, and became a sensation that vaulted Trump into reality TV stardom. In the real world, Trump's casinos were faltering. But on reality TV, Trump posed as a successful leader and dealmaker who embodied a certain kind of entrepreneurial flair and over-the-top billionairedom -- an impression that stuck with tens of millions of TV viewers.

The popularity of "The Apprentice" also gave the Bayrock-Trump partnership added zing.

“That put Bayrock in a great position once the show debuted,” Kriss says. “The show did it for Trump, man. Nobody was interested in licensing his name before that.”

The hook at Bayrock, for Trump, was an 18 percent equity stake in what became the Trump Soho hotel, a steady stream of management fees on all Bayrock projects and the ability to plaster his name on properties without having to invest a single dollar of his own.

It’s not clear how carefully Trump vetted his Bayrock partners. But his lack of concern about their backgrounds – and the potential risk to his own reputation from dealing with them - was part of a pattern. In Atlantic City, he had partnered with men with organized crime ties. Later, he and his children struck deals in Brazil and Azerbaijan with partners who had murky backgrounds or unusual legal entanglements.

Sater said in court filings that he disclosed his securities fraud conviction to members of the Trump Organization. He assumed they had told Trump, but he wasn't sure.

"It's not very hard to get connected to Donald if you make it known that you have a lot of money and you want to do deals and you want to put his name on it," Abe Wallach, who was the future president's right-hand man at the Trump Organization from 1990 to about 2002, told me in an interview. "Donald doesn't do due diligence. He relies on his gut and whether he thinks you have good genes."

Given Arif's halting English, it was Sater and Kriss who interacted most frequently with the Trump family—and Sater the most often with Trump himself. Kriss says that most of his own contacts were with the elder Trump children, Don Jr. and Ivanka, and included drafting

contracts and occasional nights on the town.

While Trump's kids were involved in the back-and-forth with Bayrock, it was Trump himself who always had the final say.

"Donald was always in charge," says Kriss. "Donald had to agree to every term of every deal and had to sign off on everything. Nothing happened unless he said it was okay to do it. Even if Donald Jr., shook your hand on a deal, he came back downstairs to renegotiate if his father told him to."

The Trumps, Kriss says, saw Sater "frequently" and valued the relationship because "Felix demonstrated that he was loyal to them." He says that at one point Sater was meeting with the future president in his Trump Tower office multiple times a week. Sater, according to a later court deposition, said that his business conversations with Trump in that office were wide-ranging and frequent — "on a constant basis."

The pair had what Sater described as "real-estate conversations," and they talked about "gathering intelligence, gathering know-how, general market discussions," and also chatted about using Sater's Russian connections to build a "high-rise, center of Moscow" that would be a "great opportunity, megafinancial home run."

Although Sater socialized with Trump, "I wouldn't call him my friend," he said in the 2008 deposition. Still, Sater said he traveled with Trump to look at deals and was proud of Bayrock's relationship with the famous developer. "Anybody can come in and build a tower," he said. "I can build a Trump Tower because of my relationship with Trump."

Bayrock and the Trumps then began laying the groundwork for domestic and international hotel-condo projects, eventually exploring deals in Turkey, Poland and Ukraine. Sater escorted Ivanka and Don Jr. on a trip to Moscow, where they looked at land for a Trump-branded hotel.

None of those overseas projects got past the planning stages. In the U.S., Bayrock and Trump projects moved forward haltingly.

In Phoenix, a one-story mall that Bayrock bought out of bankruptcy was meant to be the site of a Trump-branded tower. It became ensnared in zoning debates and then the national real-estate downturn and never got built.

Sater's dealings in Phoenix later landed him in court with a local developer who had invested in the Phoenix project, Ernest Mennes. Mennes said in a lawsuit that when he threatened to reveal Sater's criminal record, Sater told him that he would have a cousin "electrically shock Mr. Mennes' testicles, cut off Mr. Mennes' legs, and leave Mr. Mennes dead in the trunk of his car."

In Mennes's suit against Bayrock and Sater, he alleged that Sater also skimmed money from the Phoenix development. Bayrock and Sater settled the suit (which was later sealed and its terms left undisclosed; Sater's lawyer, in an interview with ABC News, denied Mennes's allegations).

The next project Trump and Bayrock pursued was the Trump International Hotel and Tower, a mixed-use hotel and condominium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Announced in 2005, it later went into foreclosure.

The third and final major project Bayrock and Trump worked on together was their most high-profile effort, the 46-story Trump Soho hotel in lower Manhattan.

Trump, Sater and Arif were all photographed together at a splashy launch party for the Trump Soho in 2007. Trump also pitched the Trump Soho on an episode of "The Apprentice," promising that "this brilliant, $370 million work of art will be an awe-inspiring masterpiece."

Helping Trump and Bayrock fund that masterpiece was a fresh influx of money from an Icelandic investment bank called the FL Group. Sater and Lauria, his longtime mob associate, had jointly recruited FL, introducing the firm to Bayrock and the Trump Organization. (I'll have more on the FL Group and Bayrock in a future column; the firm's former leaders, one of whom was later convicted of tax and accounting fraud, declined to comment or did not respond to interview requests for this column.)

Yet again, the Trump Organization — even though it signed off on the FL investment — appeared to care little about vetting a firm that came into the partnership through Sater. FL operated in a country with a porous, vulnerable banking system, and some investigators who scrutinized other Icelandic banks at the time said they suspected those banks of being conduits -- unwitting or otherwise -- for dirty funds from outside Iceland. (The FL Group collapsed a little over a year after it invested in Bayrock. The firm itself was never prosecuted; the leaders of a number of other Icelandic banks were prosecuted or jailed for crimes including money laundering).

Kriss said in an interview that an Icelandic competitor of the FL Group also contacted him to invest in Bayrock. When he took that offer to Sater and Arif they told him, he says, that the money behind Icelandic banks "was mostly Russian" -- and that they had to take FL's funds for deals they were doing with Trump because the investment firm was "closer to Putin."

"I thought it was a lie or a joke when they said Putin," Kriss recalls. "I didn't know how to make sense of it at all."

(Kriss says he doesn't have financial records showing that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a connection to the FL Group and that his own knowledge is purely anecdotal. A Kremlin spokesman said via email that Putin had no connection to the FL Group or Bayrock.)

'Somebody Said That He Is in the Mafia'

Kriss says that in the wake of the FL deal he was owed a payout that could have ranged from about $4 million to $10 million, but that Bayrock reneged. When he persisted, he claims, Sater threatened him.

So Kriss says he accepted a $500,000 payment instead and then eventually quit. Sater, as it turns out, didn't have much time left at Bayrock either.

In December, 2007 the New York Times published an article detailing some of Sater's past run-ins with the law and some of his ties to organized crime (the article also noted that Sater had begun using "Satter" as an alternate spelling for his last name so he could try to "distance himself from his past" if people Googled him).

Two days after the Times story ran, Trump sat for a deposition with my attorneys as part of the libel lawsuit he had filed against me for "TrumpNation." They asked him whether he planned to sever his relationship with Sater because of Sater's organized crime ties. Trump said he hadn't made up his mind.

"Have you previously associated with people you knew were members of organized crime?" one of my lawyers asked.

"No, I haven't," Trump responded. "And it's hard to overly blame Bayrock. Things like that can happen. But I want to see what action Bayrock takes before I make a decision." (In fact, Trump had partnered in the past in Atlantic City's real-estate business with men he knew were mobbed up.)

Whenever he was asked in later years about his relationship with Sater, Trump routinely misrepresented it as distant. In a 2013 deposition taken as part of litigation surrounding Trump and Bayrock's failed Fort Lauderdale project, Trump was asked again about his partnership with Sater.

"He was supposedly very close to the government of the United States as a witness or something," Trump said. "I don't think he was connected to the Mafia. He got into trouble because he got into a barroom fight."

"I don't know him very well," Trump added, saying that he hadn't conversed very often with Sater. "If he were sitting in the room right now I really wouldn't know what he looked like."

Trump also said that he didn't think that questions about Sater's background meant that he should have ended his business partnership with him: "Somebody said that he is in the Mafia. What am I going to do?"

Shortly after my lawyers asked Trump about Sater, Bayrock began discussing the best way for him to resign, according to company email and court records. By 2008, Sater had left the firm.

The Trump Soho ended in failure. It opened in 2010, but many units failed to sell and early condo purchasers sued Bayrock and the Trumps. Three years later, the Trump Soho went into foreclosure with most of its units still unsold, and a new company took control of the property. Bayrock hasn't done another deal since then. (A spokeswoman for Bayrock attributed the failures of the Trump partnerships to fallout from the 2008 financial meltdown.)

'He Seems to Have Unlimited Funds'

After Kriss left Bayrock, he set up his own development firm in New York and then sued Sater, Arif, Trump and Bayrock in Delaware in 2008, alleging that Bayrock was a criminal enterprise and demanding to be paid in full for his work there.

When the case moved to New York in 2010, it came with a twist. Sater had left a copy of his cooperation deal with the government – the one dating back to his Stinger missile and mob informant days – on the hard drive of his Bayrock computer. A Bayrock employee leaked it to Kriss's attorney, who promptly filed it as an exhibit in court.

Trump was eventually dropped from the case and Sater began carpet-bombing Kriss with his own lawsuits, ultimately filing several

separate actions that claimed, among other things, that Kriss has used the courts to prosecute him maliciously.

Sater also apparently kept busy outside of the courtroom.

Kriss says that about three years ago he started receiving threatening email from websites carrying versions of his name ("JKrissInfo.com," for example). He soon discovered there were hundreds of other new websites that also contained false, disparaging information about him.

Kriss sued the anonymous authors of the websites for defamation and when the court ruled in his favor he was able to get a large portion of the sites delisted from Google. He says he also was able to use the court order to untangle the provenance of the websites, discovering that their registration tracked back to Sater's home address in Sands Point.

Kriss says that goons once showed up at real-estate developments he was overseeing in Brooklyn, asking his employees if they knew the true story about their boss. Waves of letters questioning his bona fides have arrived at his office and in the mailboxes of every resident in two separate buildings where Kriss kept apartments.

Kriss says investors in his new company, East River Partners, have stood by him, but he's worried that Sater's digital vendetta may be hard to overcome. His new lawyer, Bradley D. Simon, says that he's mystified by how Sater has managed to stay afloat all these years.

"Sater was a cooperating witness for the Eastern District of New York and he continued going on a crime rampage," says Simon. "He's filed all kinds of frivolous lawsuits, but that's what he does. He seems to have unlimited funds."

For his part, Sater continues to wear many hats. A couple of years after he left Bayrock, the Trump Organization hired him briefly as a consultant to prospect for real-estate deals, giving him company business cards with his name engraved on them.

More recently, Sater got enmeshed in litigation again, this time around the sale of an Ohio shopping mall -- and the alleged disappearance of tens of millions of dollars -- in a court case that was settled in 2013.

Sater has also entered into a war of words with his former Bayrock partner, Tevfik Arif. Sater claims, according to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, that Arif owes him money -- and that if he isn't paid he'll publicize what he describes as Arif's ties to organized crime and to tainted dealings in Kazakhstan's metals business. (A Bayrock spokeswoman says that Sater's claims about Arif are baseless.)

Meanwhile, Trump is mired a probe that now pivots off sensitive topics for him and his family: their money, their deals and Russia – all of which will test his promise to testify under oath to Mueller and his investigators.

Klaas : The Donald Trump hiring crisis means America's got no talent

The United States government is suffering from a new phenomenon: the Trump Brain Drain. For the first time in memory, the American government is having difficulty recruiting the best and the brightest at the highest levels of power.

Qualified public servants are turning down plum government jobs because they don't want to be exposed to the risks of serving in President Trump's White House. West Wing power-brokers are lawyering up (even Trump's lawyer has hired a lawyer). A special counsel is reportedly investigating the president himself for possibly obstructing justice.

The reputational risk of working for Trump's administration is enormous, and it's not just because of the endless spiraling scandals. There's also the now routine Trumpian ritual of sacrificing his staff on his altar of self-sabotage. We all know the drill: Sean Spicer or Sarah Huckabee Sanders or another sacrificial lamb offers up a flimsy lie to protect Trump. (He fired Comey because he was too hard on Hillary Clinton!) Trump repays the favor by contradicting his staff almost immediately on Twitter or TV. (I fired him because of "the Russia thing.")

Yet working for this president has become a bewildering exercise in trying to figure out what's worse: paying exorbitant legal fees, being tossed under the proverbial bus by your boss, or risking becoming a national punchline (we almost feel sorry for you, Sean). The loyalty that Trump infamously demands from subordinates is clearly not a two-way street.

At least there are job perks. Build your CV with the unique experience of being subpoenaed by Congress. Practice your leader worship skills as you're forced to proclaim your fawning admiration for Trump during a public Cabinet meeting. And if those don't entice you, who wouldn't jump at the chance to work for a beleaguered president with record low approval ratings, a hot temper, and a stalled legislative agenda?

The United States is less safe and government is less effective when top talent must think twice about serving the president.

Less than five months into the Trump presidency, there is a record number of vacancies. Of 558 key presidential appointments requiring Senate confirmation, only 43 have been filled (less than 8% of the total). And before you echo the frequently tweeted but incorrect Trump accusation that this is due to Democrat "OBSTRUCTIONISTS", remember that 405 of the 558 positions don't even have a nominee yet. This snail's pace of selecting people — which involves getting them to agree to serve — is unprecedented in modern history.

When the post of FBI director opened up (through, shall we say, questionable means), at least five dedicated public servants publicly withdrew from consideration. Several seasoned veterans pulled themselves out of the running to replace Michael Flynn as national security adviser. Even Kellyanne Conway's husband withdrew from consideration for a powerful Justice Department role (perhaps he had learned some alternative facts life inside the Trump administration from a well-placed counselor?).

The Trump Brain Drain is sapping talent beyond the White House, too. Six cyber security executives told Reuters that Trump's caustic attacks on intelligence agencies had provoked a marked surge in skilled hackers and cyber talent leaving government agencies to pursue careers in the private sector. Even lawyers, who used to flock to Trump like moths to a litigious orange flame, are now staying away. Four different law firms declined to represent Trump not only because they feared that Trump won't listen to their legal advice but also because working with Trump would kill recruitment for their firms — the trickle-down economics of the Trump Brain Drain in action.

Of course, there are many, many excellent and experienced public servants in the Trump administration (Defense Secretary James Mattis, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao spring to mind). But Trump's top day-to-day advisers are no dream team. We must call an unqualified spade an unqualified spade.

There's hardly anyone on Trump's senior staff who has ushered a bill through Congress. White House chief of staff Reince Priebus, the former Republican Party chairman, has never held elective office and came to his job with virtually no experience at the federal level. Two of Trump's top advisers — now some of the most influential people in the world — are woefully unqualified relatives. And former Breitbart chief Steve Bannon has as much business being in the Oval Office as Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak, yet here we are.

It gets worse. You could start a joke by saying "A neurosurgeon and a wedding planner walked into a bar…" but there's a real-world punchline. Last week, Trump appointed his family's wedding planner to run federal housing in New York. Her boss, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, is an impressive neurosurgeon, but it's hard to see how operating on brains is a relevant qualification for his post.

In other words, Trump's hiring decisions are compounding the recruitment brain drain because many people he selects are unprepared for their roles. Unless he changes his ways, his presidency will continue to languish from the one-two punch of his own incompetence and the government's inability to recruit top talent.