

POLITICO

VOL. 11 • NO. 112 | WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2018 | POLITICO.COM

Fusion GPS: 'Human source' in Trump orbit contacted FBI

A transcript released by Sen. Feinstein includes the claim that a person has 'already been killed' as a result of the controversial Trump-Russia dossier.

PAGE 6



Off Message

How do you parody a reality that already feels like a parody?

PAGE 16

Can Ivanka be both Trump's daughter and #MeToo supporter?

The first daughter didn't consult with aides before tweeting Monday in support of Oprah Winfrey's Golden Globes speech.

PAGE 7



Matt Wuerker

The cartoonist's daily take on the world of politics.

PAGE 18

Democrats punch back on Russia

They are increasingly tired of waiting on the GOP to act and are taking their concerns public

BY ELANA SCHOR

Democrats are going on the offensive on Russia.

The top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday ramped up pressure on the Trump administration to slap new sanctions on Russia, releasing a massive report — written without GOP involvement — that details President Vladimir Putin's alleged electoral meddling around the world.

That came one day after another senior Democratic senator abruptly released the transcript of an interview with a key player in the investigation looking into any ties between President Donald Trump and Russia's interference.

And across the Capitol, a half-dozen House Democrats banded together to push Republicans for a more comprehensive response to Russian disruption of the 2016 election, warning that Moscow will again meddle with the democratic process.

Democrats, frustrated by conservative attempts to undercut the

investigation into Trump's ties to Moscow and growing convinced that Republicans aren't taking electoral security seriously, are increasingly tired of waiting on their colleagues in the majority to act and are taking their concerns public.

"We must counter Russia's well-established election interference playbook," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) said in a floor speech billed as puncturing "partisan efforts to deflect attention and distract from critical inquiries" into Moscow's attempts to upend the 2016 election.

"Russia will hack. Russia will bully. Russia will propagandize," he said.

Sen. Ben Cardin's staff on the Foreign Relations Committee extensively detailed that alleged behavior by Putin's network in the report Wednesday, which does not address special counsel Robert Mueller's probe but repeatedly slams Trump for a lagged response that it says puts U.S.

DEMOCRATS on page 14



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Lawmakers meeting with President Donald Trump on immigration on Tuesday agreed on a framework dealing with the Dreamers, border wall, visa lottery and chain migration.

Dreamer talks jumbled after W.H. summit

Lawmakers were divided over whether a meeting with Trump narrowed immigration negotiations

BY SEUNG MIN KIM, HEATHER CAYGLE, TED HESSON AND RACHAEL BADE

President Donald Trump's freewheeling, televised — and, at times, incoherent — immigration meeting with lawmakers Tuesday accomplished one thing at least, according to attendees:

They agreed on what they would try to agree on.

Yet even that tentative outline is prompting pushback from other members who want to tug a final deal on Dreamers to the right or left — further complicating prospects for an agreement that can be signed into law before

the young undocumented immigrants begin losing legal protections en masse in March.

Numerous attendees of the highly anticipated White House meeting left assured that a deal to address the fate of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

IMMIGRATION on page 10

Bannon steps down from Breitbart News

BY MICHAEL CALDERONE, JASON SCHWARTZ AND ALEX ISENSTADT

Former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon stepped down Tuesday as executive chairman of Breitbart News, a swift and stunning fall for a leading figure on the American right who was recently rebuked by President Donald Trump and abandoned by his key financial backer.

Trump publicly broke with Bannon in dramatic fashion last week, suggesting his former top adviser had "lost his mind" in response to critical comments Bannon made about members of the Trump family and campaign in Michael Wolff's incendiary new book, "Fire and Fury."

Breitbart's announcement came BANNON on page 11



MIKE THEILER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Steve Bannon's expression of regret Sunday did little to quell the White House's frustration over his comments in a new book.

IRS squeezed by GOP's paycheck promise

BY BRIAN FALER

The IRS is facing its first big challenge implementing the new tax law: deciding how much in taxes to withhold from millions of Americans' paychecks.

The agency is under pressure to take as little as possible so people will see big increases in their take-home pay ahead of this year's mid-term elections.

But that would come at a cost: smaller or even nonexistent refunds next year, though millions on them to plug holes in their family budgets. Democrats already are accusing the Trump administration of plotting "phantom windfalls" ahead of the November contests that will come back to haunt taxpayers next tax season.

"We oppose any attempts by

the Administration to systematically underwithhold income taxes during the 2018 tax year, knowing that in 2019 taxpayers may find they owe taxes when they were expecting a refund," Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Richard Neal, the top Democrats on congressional tax committees, wrote in a letter to acting IRS Commissioner Dave

IRS on page 13

YOU SHOULD KNOW

about the middleman standing between you and your medicines.

It's a PBM. Most patients don't even know they exist. But the fact is, three giant pharmacy benefit managers – or PBMs – control 78% of the market for prescription medicines. Profits for PBM corporations have increased exponentially, while you pay more for your medicines.

Shine a light on the middleman.
Get the rest of the story at ncpanet.org/PBMs



Trump says he'll 'take the heat' over immigration reform

President Donald Trump and Democratic lawmakers sparred over immigration during a nearly hourlong meeting in front of reporters, during which Trump pledged to "take the heat" if Congress pursues a comprehensive reform package.

Trump voiced interest in striking a deal on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, the Obama-era initiative that provided protections to roughly 800,000 young undocumented immigrants and which Trump rescinded in September. The bickering focused around whether such a deal would need to incorporate funding for his long-promised border wall and additional funding for border security.

During the summit — about 55 minutes of which was televised, an unusual move by the White House — Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) urged the president to "close the deal" on an immigration reform package. Trump offered to provide political cover for a comprehensive push.

"If you want to take it that further step, I'll take the heat," Trump replied. "You are not that far away from comprehensive immigration reform."

Trump said that after securing a deal on border security and finding a solution for young undocumented immigrants known as Dreamers, the group could discuss broader immigration reform "the following day."

The White House said in a statement after the meeting that participants "reached an agreement to negotiate legislation that accomplishes critically needed reforms in four high-priority areas: border security, chain migration, the visa lottery, and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy."

Still, while reporters were in the room, it seemed at times that participants were talking past each other.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) proposed that Congress take up a "clean" bill that would extend protections for Dreamers. The president replied that he had "no problem" with the proposal, prompting House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a Republican, to point out that it would not include the measures GOP Republicans and the White House want.

"Mr. President, you need to be clear. What Sen. Feinstein is talking about, we don't want to be back here two years later. You have to have security, as the secretary would tell you," McCarthy said.

"That's what she is saying," Trump replied.

McCarthy rebutted: "No, I think she is saying something different. You are saying DACA without security."

Democrats and Republicans struck notes of cautious optimism after the meeting, with both sides seeming to agree that "the wall" and "border security" are interchangeable terms, potentially opening a path for security measures that satisfy



MIKE ZARRILLI/GETTY IMAGES

Trump takes in the title game

President Donald Trump on Monday waves to fans in Atlanta at the college football championship between Georgia and Alabama. Before the game, Trump stood on the field for the national anthem. His appearance seemed intended to emphasize his critique of athletes for using football games as a place for protests.

Republicans without forcing Democrats to support Trump's promised border wall.

"I think the president uses 'wall' for 'border security,'" said House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.). "I think he thinks they're interchangeable."

Republicans, who addressed reporters separately from the Democrats, praised Trump for bringing a new urgency to the process by revoking DACA protections last year.

Even with the details vague, Republicans expressed Trump-like optimism that a deal could be achieved.

"I think it's doable," said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.). "I think we're all going to have to give a bit."

—Cristiano Lima and Matthew Nussbaum

Trump to attend elite annual gathering in Davos, Switzerland

President Donald Trump will attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, later this month, the White House announced on Tuesday.

"The President welcomes opportunities to advance his America First agenda with world leaders," White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement. "At this year's World Economic Forum, the President looks forward to promoting his policies to strengthen American businesses, American industries, and American workers."

Chief executives and world leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to attend the annual gathering in the Switzerland resort town at the end of January. The annual gathering in the Swiss Alps has become a notable event among critics of "globalism," making Trump's decision to attend something of a surprise,

especially after he concluded his first year in office by slashing tax rates on corporate America.

Trump's final ad of the 2016 presidential campaign railed against a "global power structure" and included a video of billionaire investor George Soros speaking at a World Economic Forum meeting.

"Davos really is the global swamp, and I can't think of a person more out of place at the World Economic Forum than President Trump," said Jack Ablin, chief investment officer at BMO Private Bank. "I guess you have to give Davos credit for wanting to listen to different points of view, but I think Trump will be hard-pressed to add anything really valuable to the mix."

President Barack Obama didn't attend the Davos gathering, known for its dizzying schedule of big-think panels and celebrity guests like Bono, Sharon Stone and Angelia Jolie. But many members of his administration did attend. Six of Obama's Cabinet secretaries and Vice President Joe Biden jetted off to Davos in the administration's final year.

Davos attendance has been known to dent GOP careers in the past. Former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor became a regular, earning sharp criticism from some conservatives who view the meeting as a schmooze-fest for bankers and corporate elites who benefit from lax immigration laws, easy-money central bank policies and the kinds of free trade deals Trump ripped during the campaign.

In a shocking upset, Cantor lost a primary in 2014 to tea party-backed conservative Dave Brat. Cantor quickly left Washington and joined investment bank Moelis & Co. as vice chairman.

—Matthew Nussbaum and Ben White

Pence calls Wolff book 'Washington fiction'

Vice President Mike Pence said Monday that the incendiary book about the Trump administration that has roiled the White House for the past week is a "work of Washington fiction" that does not ring true to his experience working with the president.

"I haven't read it, don't intend to read it," Pence told The Wall Street Journal. "What I've heard about in the book bears no resemblance to the president that I serve with every day. None. It just strikes me that it's another work of Washington fiction."

The White House has worked hard over the past week to characterize Michael Wolff's book, "Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House," as inaccurate and riddled with falsehoods. The book, released last week after a series of excerpts were published online, paints a picture of the West Wing as inept and back-biting and of the president as ignorant, narcissistic and potentially declining in mental fitness.

Trump administration officials and allies have particularly chafed at the notion that the president's mental faculties are not at full capacity. They have also disputed the notion that he has approached the day-to-day job of being president with anything less than his full vigor.

"I have never been around anyone in my life with his energy, with his focus, with his capacity to multi-task. I think that this building has not seen his likes since that one," Pence said, gesturing at a painting of former President Theodore Roosevelt.

—Louis Nelson

On Fox, Miller jabs CNN's 'low journalistic standards' after Tapper interview

White House aide Stephen Miller

continued to jab CNN on Monday, the day after he was abruptly cut off by one of the network's anchors during an interview.

Speaking on Fox News, the senior White House policy adviser said his encounter with Jake Tapper on CNN's "State of the Union" showed the network's perceived bias and hostility toward President Donald Trump.

"It's just another example of CNN's very low journalistic standards," Miller said in an interview on "Tucker Carlson Tonight." "I was glad to have people hear what I said on camera and off camera."

He added: "CNN has been extraordinarily biased, extraordinarily unfair to the president and is not giving their viewers honest information."

Miller's comments came after his combative Sunday interview went viral. Tapper cut off Miller, saying he had "wasted" enough of his viewers' time. During the interview, Miller repeatedly sidestepped questions about whether Trump personally met with Russians in Trump Tower in June 2016 after they met with his son Donald Trump Jr.

After the interview, Trump praised Miller in a series of tweets, saying Tapper was "destroyed" in his 12-minute interview with Miller.

"Jake Tapper of Fake News CNN just got destroyed in his interview with Stephen Miller of the Trump Administration," Trump tweeted Sunday. "Watch the hatred and unfairness of this CNN flunky!"

Miller and other Trump surrogates have been making the rounds in the media in an effort to discredit journalist Michael Wolff's new book, "Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House," which has raised questions about Trump's mental fitness.

In the Fox interview, Miller also refused to cede ground on Trump's immigration policy, insisting that any policy would combat the consequences of any action on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Trump has signaled some willingness to negotiate on DACA.

"Look, we need them all, because the reality is that anything you do on DACA, it will have predictable consequences," Miller said. "You will have an increase in illegal immigration, so you will need to have a wall. An increase in the overall number of people coming into the country and have to deal with chain migration. If the deal with the visa lottery."

Democrats have threatened to oppose a government funding bill without a deal to protect so-called Dreamers, undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children and in many cases have no relationship to their country of birth.

Dreamers had been protected from deportation under DACA, which Trump rescinded, with a six-month delay, in September. Trump has said he hopes Congress would use the time to solidify Dreamers into law, promising that if it doesn't, he would "revisit the issue."

—Steve Beynon

RNC can step up efforts on voter fraud as decree ends

Judge allows long-standing measure curbing national party 'ballot security' actions to expire

BY JOSH GERSTEIN

After more than three decades, Republicans are free of a federal court consent decree that sharply limited the Republican National Committee's ability to challenge voters' qualifications and target the kind of fraud President Donald Trump has alleged affected the 2016 presidential race.

Newark-based U.S. District Court Judge John Michael Vazquez ruled in an order released Tuesday that the long-standing decree ended Dec. 1 and will not be extended.

The decree, which dated to 1982, arose from a Democratic National Committee lawsuit charging the RNC with seeking to discourage African-Americans from voting through targeted mailings warning about penalties for violating election laws and by posting armed, off-duty law enforcement officers at the polls in minority neighborhoods.

To extend the decree, the DNC needed to show that the RNC violated the terms of the pact. Democrats pointed to a series of incidents during the 2016 election in which they alleged people who claimed to work or appeared to be working for the RNC were engaged in poll watching. A November 2016 POLITICO report describing RNC spokesman Sean Spicer's Election Day activities led the judge to order Spicer to submit to a deposition.

Vazquez, an appointee of former President Barack Obama, said in his ruling that despite the various claims, the Democrats had not shown any violation "by a preponderance of the evidence."

An RNC official praised the ruling.

"We are gratified that the judge recognized our full compliance

with the consent decree and rejected the DNC's baseless claims," said RNC communications director Ryan Mahoney.

"Today's ruling will allow the RNC to work more closely with state parties and campaigns to do what we do best, ensure that more people vote through our unmatched field program."

While the end of the decree means the RNC is now free to step up its efforts on voter fraud and to take a role in coordinating Election Day poll monitoring, it is unclear whether the national party will resume such work, which has been left to individual campaigns and state parties in recent years.

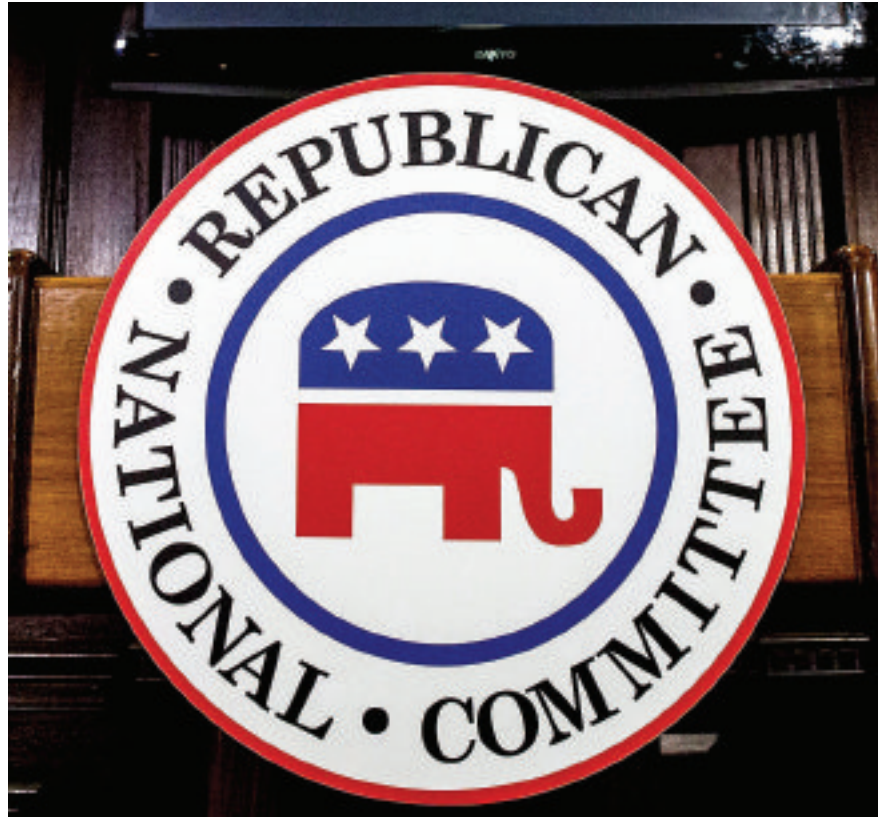
Some GOP leaders have urged the national party to continue to avoid those activities to avoid alienating minority voters, who often view such efforts as discriminatory.

However, during the 2016 campaign, Trump repeatedly expressed concern about voter fraud, sometimes referring to "certain areas" where, he alleged, that kind of election-related misconduct is rampant.

Spokespeople for the DNC and the White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Although the decree technically permitted the RNC to engage in some Election Day activities at the polls and to seek advance permission for so-called "ballot security" work, the national party and its attorneys went to considerable lengths in recent years to urge national party officials and staff to steer clear of such activity, in part to avoid triggering allegations that could lead the consent decree to be extended.

One of the allegations that led to the decree involved use of a prac-



ZACH GIBSON/GETTY IMAGES

Democrats unsuccessfully sought to have the consent decree extended, alleging that people connected to the Republican National Committee engaged in poll watching during the 2016 election. The decree dated to 1982.

tice called voter "caging" — using returned mail to seek to have voters removed from the rolls.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court will take up a case about a similar practice in Ohio, examining the legality of a procedure that state uses to cancel the registration of voters who haven't voted in two federal elections and don't

respond to a mailed notice from election authorities. The Obama administration argued that Ohio's approach violated federal law, but

the Trump administration reversed course and is backing the Buckeye State's effort to slim its voter rolls.

Scalise to undergo 'planned surgery' related to baseball practice shooting

BY NOLAN D. MCCASKILL

House Majority Whip Steve Scalise will undergo surgery on Wednesday as he continues to recover from last summer's shooting at a congressional baseball practice.

"I have been fortunate to make tremendous progress in my healing from last June's shooting, and tomorrow I will undergo a planned surgery as part of my ongoing recovery process," Scalise (R-La.) said in a statement Tuesday. "I will remain fully engaged in my work as I heal from this procedure, and I look forward to returning to the Capitol as soon as I can within the coming weeks."

Scalise first returned to Congress in September after being shot in the hip during a Republican congressional baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia. The gunshot shattered bone and tore through muscles and organs, leaving the Louisiana lawmaker hospitalized for months after initially being in critical condition. A police officer,



ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

Rep. Steve Scalise, shown in December, said he will undergo surgery Wednesday and "remain fully engaged in my work" as he recovers.

a congressional aide and a lobbyist were also shot that day.

"I appreciate all of the continued prayers as I move forward with

my recovery, and I continue to be thankful for the dedicated care I am receiving from my medical team," Scalise said.

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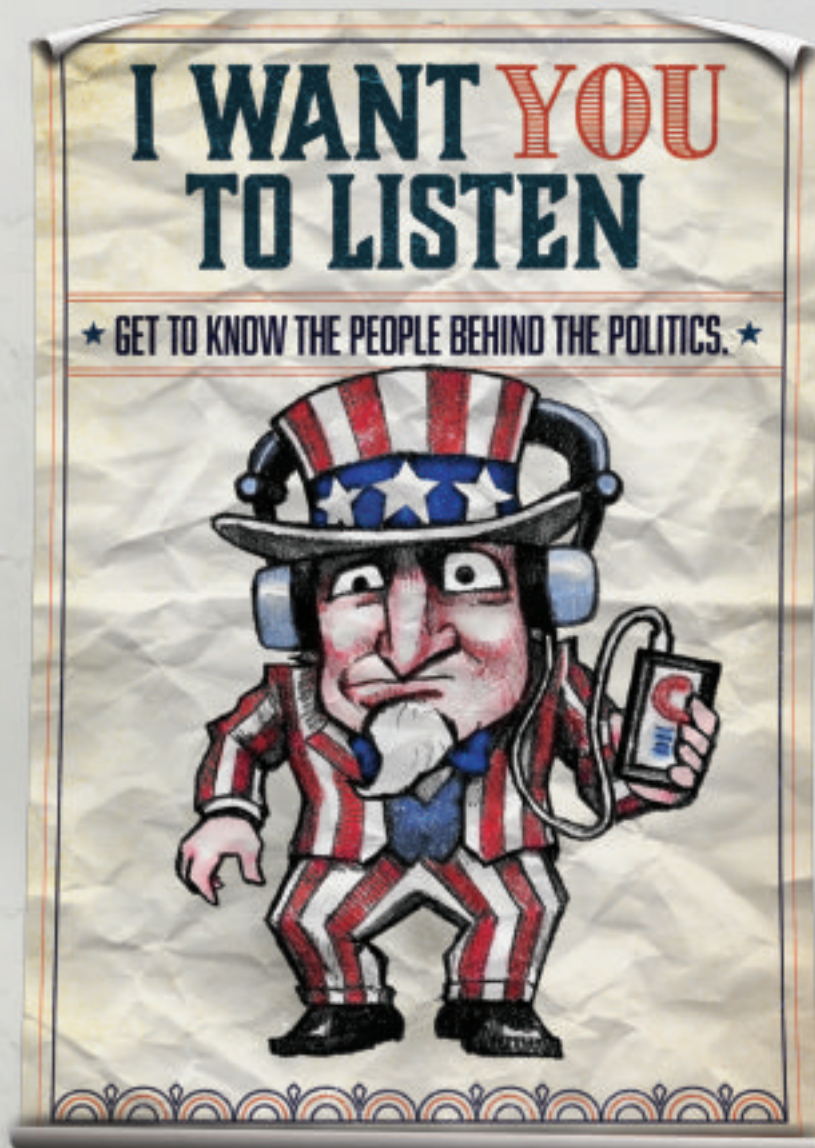
POLITICO is published Tuesday through Thursday when Congress is in session, and on Wednesday when Congress is in recess for one week or less, by POLITICO LLC. Subscriptions are \$200 per year or \$350 for two years for domestic subscribers, and \$600 per year overseas. POLITICO is printed at Evergreen Printing and Publishing Co. Inc., Bellmawr, N.J. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to POLITICO, P.O. Box 36, Congers, NY 10920-0036. © POLITICO LLC, 2018.

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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OFF  **MESSAGE**

What's really driving politics with **Isaac Dove**





PABLO MARTINEZ MONIS/VAIS/AP

Glenn Simpson, co-founder of the research firm Fusion GPS, was interviewed by Senate Judiciary investigators in August 2017 about the firm's role compiling the Steele dossier, a series of memos detailing allegations about Donald Trump's interactions with Russians. Sen. Dianne Feinstein released the interview transcript on Tuesday.

Feinstein angers GOP with Fusion transcript release

'The American people deserve ... to see what he said and judge for themselves,' Democrat says

BY KYLE CHENEY

Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson, whose firm commissioned a controversial dossier alleging secret ties between President Donald Trump and the Kremlin, told congressional investigators last summer that the FBI found the dossier credible because an undisclosed "human source" had offered the bureau corroborating information.

In a 312-page transcript of Simpson's August 2017 interview with the Senate Judiciary Committee, Simpson's attorney also said it was dangerous to discuss the dossier's sources because its public release last year had already led to murder. "Somebody's already been killed as a result of the publication of this dossier and no harm should come to anybody related to this honest work," said the lawyer, Joshua Levy.

The transcript was released unexpectedly Tuesday by the panel's top Democrat, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, angering the committee's Republican chairman, Sen. Charles Grassley.

It's unclear to whom Levy was referring. He didn't respond immediately to a request for comment. But Britain's Telegraph newspaper reported last year about a former

KGB chief who was mysteriously killed around the same time amid questions about his relationship to dossier author Christopher Steele, a former British spy contracted by Fusion.

Feinstein's decision to publish the dossier represents an escalation of partisan tensions that have long been simmering on the Senate Judiciary Committee. Simpson had called for the transcript of his appearance to be made public, but Republican leaders so far had not agreed to release it.

"The American people deserve the opportunity to see what he said and judge for themselves," Feinstein said in a statement about her decision to release the Simpson transcript. "The innuendo and misinformation circulating about the transcript are part of a deeply troubling effort to undermine the investigation into potential collusion and obstruction of justice. The only way to set the record straight is to make the transcript public."

A spokesman for Grassley said Feinstein posted the transcript with "no agreement" from committee Republicans.

"It's totally confounding that Sen. Feinstein would unilaterally release a transcript of a witness interview in the middle of an ongo-

ing investigation — a witness that Feinstein herself subpoenaed last year for lack of cooperation," said Grassley spokesman Taylor Foy. "Feinstein's unilateral decision was made as the committee is still trying to secure testimony from other witnesses, including Jared Kushner. Her action undermines the integrity of the committee's oversight work and jeopardizes its ability to secure candid voluntary testimony relating to the independent recollections of future witnesses."

Republicans have criticized the dossier, saying it contains unsubstantiated and salacious charges, and have sought more information about how it might have influenced the FBI's Trump-Russia investigation. After it was compiled by Steele, the dossier was handed over to the FBI. Later, it was published by BuzzFeed.

In his testimony, Simpson rejected suggestions from Trump allies that Fusion paid journalists to publish anti-Trump material. But he acknowledged briefing journalists before the election.

"There were things that Chris knew and understood to be the case that only he could really explain in a credible way, and ... we thought that he should be the one that explains them," Simpson said. "So we sat down with a small group of reporters who were involved in investigative journalism of nation-

al security issues and we thought we were in a position to make use of him as a resource."

Simpson also said Steele initiated communication with the FBI in July 2016 with "someone that he said he knew." At the time, Simpson said, Steele was told that his information tracked with what the agency had heard from a source from the "Trump organization." It was unclear whether he might have been referring to Trump's business or his presidential campaign. Simpson said he wouldn't share the identity of that source for "security" reasons.

"I know that I just don't feel comfortable sharing because, obviously, it's been in the news a lot lately that people who get in the way of the Russians tend to get hurt," he said.

Steele later briefed a senior FBI official in Rome, Simpson testified, but later "broke off" communications with the bureau.

"Chris was confused and somewhat disturbed and didn't think he understood the landscape, and I think both of us felt like things were happening that we didn't understand and that we must not know everything about, and therefore, you know, in a situation like that the smart thing to do is stand down," Simpson said explaining Steele's decision.

Elsewhere, Steele added that "there was concern that the FBI

was being manipulated for political ends by the Trump people." He did not provide further detail.

He added that Steele told him the FBI didn't pay him for his work.

Simpson said Steele first took his concerns to the FBI in July, shortly after a trove of hacked Democratic National Committee emails were posted publicly. "He said we should tell the FBI, it's a national security issue," Simpson said he recalled telling Steele he was unsure whom to relay the information to at the FBI. "[H]e said don't worry about that, I know the perfect person. I have a contact there. They'll listen to me. They know who I am. I'll take care of it," Simpson said. "I said OK." Feinstein's move came days after Grassley and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) referred Steele to the Justice Department for a criminal investigation. Feinstein said Grassley and Graham did not consult committee Democrats beforehand.

Simpson and Fusion GPS co-founder Peter Fritsch wrote in an op-ed earlier this month that Republicans had selected leaked details of the testimony but refused to release the full materials.

"Fusion GPS commends Sen. Feinstein for her courage," a spokesman said Tuesday. "The transcript of Glenn Simpson's lengthy responses to the Senate Judiciary Committee's questioning speaks for itself."

Can Trump's daughter also be a #MeToo supporter?

Ivanka Trump tries to have it both ways

BY ANNIE KARNI

Days after her father's inauguration last January, new-to-Washington Ivanka Trump tweeted a picture of herself clad in a \$5,000 silver Carolina Herrera gown, en route to a black-tie dinner.

After she was widely criticized for her let-them-eat-cake moment — President Donald Trump's daughter looked terrifyingly tone-deaf vamping for the camera while thousands of travelers sat stranded at airports because of her father's sloppily imposed travel ban — Ivanka Trump admitted to friends she had made a clumsy PR mistake.

Almost a year into her transformation from striving Manhattan lifestyle guru to Washington power player, Ivanka Trump on Monday proved what many of her colleagues acknowledge privately about the player behind the controlled façade: She is still prone to rookie political mistakes. And she seems blind to her circumscribed position as a self-professed champion of women who is simultaneously an unquestioning aide to a president who's been accused of groping women.

"Just saw @Oprah's empowering & inspiring speech at last night's #GoldenGlobes," Ivanka Trump tweeted Monday night, with a link to Oprah Winfrey's viral speech. "Let's all come together, women & men, & say #TIMESUP! #United."

The very mainstream sentiment was confounding on multiple levels, when expressed by the president's daughter. Ivanka Trump last year stood by her father when he was accused by more than a dozen women of unwanted sexual advances and outright assault. And her husband, Jared Kushner, even broke the Jewish Sabbath to huddle with the wounded candidate after the release in October 2016 of the "Access Hollywood" tape.

On top of the odd sexual politics of Ivanka Trump's selective support of the #MeToo movement, the tweet was read as an unexpected endorsement of Winfrey, the en-



SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"Let's all come together, women & men, & say #TIMESUP!" Ivanka Trump tweeted Monday. Trump views herself as an advocate for women, but she is also an aide to a president who has been accused of groping women.

tertainment mogul who lit up the hopes of desperate Democrats that she might be the answer to dethroning Trump and his family in 2020.

In her speech, Winfrey spoke of a "new day" dawning on the backs of empowered women "fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say 'Me too' again."

The first daughter didn't consult with her aides Monday before expressing herself on Twitter. A spokesman on Tuesday declined to comment on Ivanka Trump's private support for the #MeToo

movement, or her tweet.

Friends and colleagues said the person they know would be oblivious to anything incongruous about her support of Winfrey — and likely frustrated by backlash she sees as unfair.

"She thinks she is part of the feminist club," said one New York socialite who used to be friendly with Ivanka Trump on the benefit circuit. "She truly thinks of herself as the greatest champion of women. She would see no irony in it whatsoever."

Ivanka Trump, according to people who have worked with her, fundamentally views herself as

someone who has made a career out of empowering women, even before her move to Washington, through her self-help book for working women and her affordable clothing line.

Despite promoting an administration that has threatened traditional women's interests, like rolling back Obama-era regulations on equal pay and signing into a law a bill that allows states to withhold money from Planned Parenthood, Trump believes she can advance women's issues from within the White House.

But that view is out of sync with how she has come to be viewed in

Washington, one year in. She was once seen as a potential moderating influence on a hard-right administration, but lawmakers on Capitol Hill said they have come to see her as relatively ineffectual, even on one of her signature issues, paid family leave. Her fight for an expanded child tax credit was ultimately seen as a modest policy victory.

Heading into Year Two of the Trump administration, Ivanka Trump is still striving to elevate herself through an embrace of her father, while believing she can maintain a lane of independence.

"What's the alternative — be silent and not give support?" one sympathetic White House aide said of her Monday tweet. "I think she can show support for an important cause independent of the reports about her father."

In recent months, she has tried. Last November, Ivanka Trump angered the president when she expressed outrage at sexual-misconduct allegations lodged against Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore. "There's a special place in hell for people who prey on children," she said at the time, in a rare public break from her father's stated position — that Moore's accusers were lying. "I've yet to see a valid explanation and I have no reason to doubt the victims' accounts."

It was a rare moment when the president expressed frustration, to other aides, about his daughter's public stance.

But it's unlikely to happen with any regularity, according to people familiar with the first daughter's thinking. "A central tenet in her life," according to one confidante, "is that her dad is and will be an amazing president."

Supporters of the #MeToo movement were quick to call her out for trying to have it both ways. "Great!" the actress Alyssa Milano replied to Ivanka Trump's support for Winfrey's message on Twitter. "You can make a lofty donation to the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund that is available to support your father's accusers."

Trump, family voice disparate views on sexual harassment

BY AUBREE ELIZA WEAVER

Ivanka Trump acknowledged the viral #MeToo movement in a tweet Monday, but in the past President Donald Trump's family members have drawn raised eyebrows with their comments about sexual harassment in the workplace.

After Sunday's Golden Globe Awards, the president's older daughter tweeted her praise for Oprah Winfrey's speech, saying "Let's all come together, women & men, & say #TIMESUP! #United." Time's Up refers to an initiative by women in Hollywood to combat harassment. Some critics questioned Ivanka Trump's decision to weigh in, given the sexual misconduct allegations made against her father during the 2016 campaign, which the president has denied.

Here's a look at some of the Trump family's past comments on workplace harassment:

Donald Trump

In August 2016, following sexual harassment allegations against former Fox News chief Roger Ailes, USA Today asked the then-candidate how he would feel if Ivanka Trump faced similar behavior at work.

"I would like to think she would find another career or company if that was the case," Trump said.

In a subsequent interview, Trump seemed to try to adjust his comments.

"I think it's got to be up to the individual," Trump told The Washington Post in an August interview. "It also depends on what's available. There may be a better alternative; then there may not. If there's not a better alternative, then you stay. But it could be there's a better alternative where you're taken care of better."

"Some people would rather change and some people don't," he told the newspaper. "Some people

don't want to be forced to stay in a certain atmosphere."

Eric Trump

In response to his father's comments to USA Today, Eric Trump, the president's third child, said he didn't think his older sister would put herself in a position to be sexually harassed in the first place.

"Ivanka is a strong, powerful woman. She wouldn't allow herself to be objectified [sic] to it," Eric Trump told CBS' Charlie Rose. "And I think she would, as a strong person, at the same time, I don't think she would allow herself to be subjected to that. I think that's a point he was making, and I think he did so well."

Donald Trump Jr.

Donald Trump Jr., the president's oldest child, has suggested in the past that women who cannot handle harassment should consider a

career change.

"I'm of that mind-set — and I'll get into trouble, I'm sure I'll get myself in trouble one of these days," Trump Jr. said on a 2013 episode of the "Opie and Anthony" radio show. "If you can't handle some of the basic stuff that's become a problem in the workforce today, then you don't belong in the workforce. Like, you should go maybe teach kindergarten. I think it's a respectable position."

"You can't be negotiating billion-dollar deals if you can't handle, like, you know," he added, though he said a line should be drawn at certain behavior.

Ivanka Trump

The president's daughter, who has since joined his White House, took a different tone on workplace harassment than her father and brothers in an August 2016 interview with Fox News' Greta Van Susteren.

"I think harassment in general, regardless, sexual or otherwise, is totally inexcusable," she said. "And if it transpires, it needs to be reported and dealt with on a company level."

Melania Trump

Although several members of the Trump family have publicly discussed sexual harassment in the workplace, Melania Trump, who generally avoids making public statements on hot issues, has kept quiet.

Some critics of the White House have called for the first lady, a former model, to be more outspoken.

"I want to hear about the silence of Melania Trump," Meryl Streep told The New York Times earlier this month, in response to a question about why the actress herself had not been more vocal. "I want to hear from her. She has so much that's valuable to say."

Winfrey speech draws cries of 'O! Yes!' from Dems

Hardened pols take a 2020 bid seriously

BY EDWARD-ISAAC DOVERE
AND MATTHEW NUSSBAUM

There's no way someone makes a great speech about hope and American unity on national television and is immediately catapulted into being a serious presidential contender. Totally absurd.

A television star going straight to the White House? Ridiculous.

Like the early talk of Barack Obama and Donald Trump for president before her, the obsession over Oprah Winfrey as a legitimate potential White House contender was widely dismissed Monday as the latest cable-TV catnip — except for all the hardened political operatives who spent the day amazing themselves by taking it seriously.

Forget all the things that people still cling to as defining campaigns, all the usual rules for how people win elections. Winfrey is indeed a celebrity, and the reaction can look like the empty mania The Rock set off when he floated running for president as part of the "Baywatch" movie promotion tour. But she is also an African-American woman who grew up poor and abused, and became a self-made billionaire with a deeper understanding of how to speak to Americans — of all races and gender and geography — than anyone alive.

Her exhibit in Washington at the National Museum of African American History and Culture is already bigger than Obama's.

"There isn't anybody who's a greater antithesis to Donald Trump than Oprah Winfrey," said David Axelrod, who helped turn Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote into a real campaign.

"I don't know whether she's running or not, but I recognize the beats, and they were done exquisitely," said Mike Murphy, who said he felt déjà vu watching Sunday night's speech from the days when he helped Arnold Schwarzenegger become governor of California.

The world needs a fairy tale right now — or at least Democrats do. And Winfrey is, after all, America's fairy godmother. She can tell you to look under your seat and find a car. She can tell you what to read, and how to live your best life. She's a woman who's sat in millions of living rooms in America every afternoon, telling people that she's listening to them and sharing their problems, who still does Weight Watchers commercials because even with a billion dollars, she's still talking to the same women she's struggled alongside for years.

"She is very smart, she has a substantial following. I would take her very seriously as a candidate," said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, one of Trump's most reliable defenders. "Times change and circumstances change — and Oprah is unique, she's not just a celebrity, she is a very successful businesswoman. ... She's a very serious person. She's not in the celebrity league."

"If she was a conservative, I'd be looking at her for 2024!" said Jeff Kaufmann, the Iowa GOP state chairman. "Let's face it, she is a likable, respectable lady. That automatically puts her into conten-



GETTY IMAGES FILE 2013

Oprah Winfrey receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2013. Winfrey's speech Sunday at the Golden Globe Awards galvanized Democrats who envision her as a presidential candidate.

tion by anybody's definition."

Sunday afternoon, Winfrey was on the stage at the Beverly Hilton, rehearsing for the Golden Globes. She largely wrote the speech herself, people familiar with the process said. She wanted to get the delivery just right; and she hit the literary touches, from "his tie was white, and of course his skin was black," describing Sidney Poitier, to "I want all the girls watching here and now to know that a new day is on the horizon!"

Political operatives who know her, and those who don't agreed: A woman as smart and savvy about the American public and the media could not have given that speech without knowing how she'd stir the presidential speculation pot. Now she gets to see how the reaction plays and who comes calling, and decide whether it's something she really wants.

And if it's not, she can just write it off as a speech at an awards show that people were crazy to make so much of. Friends were telling others they were delighted by the response. Insiders were trying to figure out who helped her with the speech.

After the speech, her longtime partner, Stedman Graham, who's known for never saying much, told the Los Angeles Times that a presidential bid would be "up to the people. She would absolutely do it." And by Monday afternoon, a Republican strategist close to

the White House was calling her formidable, while insisting that she'd have trouble getting through a Democratic primary.

There isn't a top Democrat who thinks that's true.

"People are treating Oprah as if she fits into some box. She doesn't. It's not a celebrity box," said Democratic strategist Brian Fallon. "Oprah is a unique, standalone entity that uniquely could win now the field."

Fallon spent two years as press secretary for Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign, working to elect her on the argument that no one else was more qualified and prepared to be president.

Within minutes of Winfrey grabbing Reese Witherspoon's arm and walking offstage, Obama alumni were on Twitter offering up the former president's "O" logo for her to borrow. Obama himself hasn't talked about a campaign with her, and hasn't seen her in person since they were on a yacht together in the South Pacific in April with Bruce Springsteen and Tom Hanks, said a source familiar with their interactions.

People parsing through the mechanics of what a Winfrey campaign might look like said her time might prove infinitely more valuable than however much money she'd self-fund with.

"There are 99 county chairs in Iowa," said Obama's 2012 Iowa state director, Brad Anderson.

"And I promise you every one of them would call her back. And I can't say that about every potential presidential candidate."

("Call me @oprah. I've got some Iowa county chairs who would love to hear from you," Anderson tweeted Monday morning. He said he hadn't yet heard back.)

Donna Brazile, the former interim Democratic National Committee chair, said that by Monday morning, she'd already gotten more emails, texts and phone calls than she had about any other potential 2020 candidate over the past few months.

The skeptics sigh.

"Are you kidding?" said Michigan state Democratic Chairman Brandon Dillon, when asked what he thought of all the Oprah talk.

"It was a great speech, and she obviously has a huge following," Dillon added. But "if that's the standard for electing a president, it's a low bar."

If she wants to run, Dillon said, don't show up at the Golden Globes. Show up in Macomb County, or Detroit. Throw some of that money into helping win the governor's race. Do the things that every serious candidate — other than, of course, Trump — does to make an impact: Get to know people, help the party.

"If somebody said Oprah can replace Donald Trump tomorrow, I'd say, 'I'll take it, put her in,'" Dillon said. "But I'm not going to take it

seriously at this point."

For many Democrats and others, Obama's 2004 speech broke through because it tapped into the frustration of the country without going directly after the president. Winfrey's speech seems to have struck a similar chord.

It was, Fallon said, "as good a crystallization of all the issues that are at stake in the Trump era as anyone in politics or out has given."

"It's hard to picture her going door to door in 99 counties in Iowa," said Ben LaBolt, who worked for Obama in the White House and as the press secretary for his reelection campaign. But in 2020, that might not matter.

"The path would also be to demonstrate that the typical politician may not be the right person to take on Donald Trump and you're going to need somebody that's able to motivate a very diverse coalition," he said.

American politics careened so far through the looking glass that there's a clip of Trump in 1999 saying he'd want Winfrey as his running mate. He was speaking, naturally, on the CNN show of Larry King, now a star of Russia Today.

But Monday on Air Force One, White House deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley left it at this: "We welcome the challenge, whether it be Oprah Winfrey or anybody else."

In Iowa, Kaufmann was already gaming it out for the Republicans. He questioned whether Winfrey would be willing to risk becoming hated by 40 percent to 45 percent of the electorate, and how she'd fare against the Bernie Sanders slice of the Democratic base that might push back on a nominee from the 1 percent of the 1 percent.

Asked whether Sanders supporters would welcome Winfrey to the race, his 2016 campaign manager Jeff Weaver said, "I don't know. I don't know what her politics are. We're all about politics, not personality."

Obama gave a great speech in 2004. He became a celebrity. But he still had to be talked into going through all the work of a presidential campaign, and then had to drive around parts of Iowa and New Hampshire that most people who aren't running for president never go near.

For Winfrey, it would mean giving up a life in which she literally does and says whatever she wants, and takes a supporting role in the new movie "A Wrinkle in Time" because it's fun and she likes the script. Contrast that with all the time that would be spent picking over her personal life, the inevitable leaks of embarrassing details, the opposition research that would dig into every comment in those thousands of hours on daytime television and all the people she has stood by.

"There's a big gulf between the warm feelings that speech generated and the cold, hard reality of running," Axelrod said. "That speech itself is a reminder that one can be a really impactful person without running for president of the United States."

"She's phenomenal. She's broken barriers, she's opened doors," Brazile said. "The question is whether she's looking for a new address."

Don't expect Trump's physical to test mental fitness

Some experts say he needs such screenings

BY DAN DIAMOND
AND ADAM CANCRYN

If President Donald Trump were any other 71-year-old — covered by Medicare and having his annual wellness visit — he'd be checked on his cognitive functions and possible safety risks. But when the president goes for his physical exam Friday, the White House said his mental fitness won't be tested. And it's not certain that the results of cognitive tests would be made public even if Trump were to take them.

White House deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley said such tests are not part of the president's scheduled physical. "He's sharp as a tack. He's a workhorse, and he demands his staff be the same way," he told reporters aboard Air Force One.

That decision concerns physicians and public health experts who say Trump should be assessed just as other elderly Americans are examined, particularly given his globe-shaping job and his control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

"A physical tends to be exactly that — a physical," said Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at the New York University School of Medicine. "They're not really oriented toward the big question that people want to ask about Trump: Are you mentally there? Are you cognitively able to function?"

Trump's visit to Walter Reed Medical Center, where he'll undergo his first physical as president, continues a long tradition of presidents getting semi-regular checkups in order to reassure the public. The most recent physical exam of a president, performed in February 2016 on then-President Barack Obama, was a standard battery of measurements and blood work that revealed Obama had "improved lean body mass" and lowered his cholesterol level since his previous exam in 2014.

But the White House is required neither to perform a regular physical exam of the president nor to release all the details of an exam unless the president consents. The exam also may not include Medicare's standard battery of wellness tests, which are designed for Americans age 66 and older, which includes checking for risks like depression and other neurological problems. When asked whether Trump would have "a psychiatric test," Gidley responded no, but declined to elaborate.

That opens a political loophole because presidents and those who seek the office have an inherent interest in keeping their most troubling medical details secret — a risk that Trump himself tried to exploit during the 2016 campaign, repeatedly questioning whether his opponent, Hillary Clinton, had the "stamina" to serve as president. Clinton, then recovering from a bout of pneumonia, had stumbled leaving a 9/11 ceremony, giving rise to conspiracy theories about her health. Presidents for decades, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, have hidden the details of their own medical conditions, such as partial paralysis, painkiller addiction, and



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

President Donald Trump, who will have a physical exam on Friday, has tried to quell questions about his mental fitness. His exam is not expected to address cognitive issues, but the White House would not be required to release any such details even if such screenings were given.

onset of dementia.

"The things that we'd want to know are the things, unfortunately, that people won't want to reveal," Connie Mariano, White House physician to three presidents, told POLITICO in 2016. Mariano noted that mental illness can be perceived as disqualifying — an issue that's emerged as lawmakers and independent psychiatrists have raised questions about Trump's mental state.

Trump is expected to be examined Friday by Ronny Jackson, the official physician to the president and Navy rear admiral who also administered physicals to Obama. Jackson, a 23-year Navy serviceman, also worked as a White House physician during the George W. Bush administration and now leads

Cleveland Clinic. "Remember, it's the commander in chief being examined by active military doctors. He's more in charge," Caplan said. There's also a privacy benefit with military personnel: "They know they shouldn't be blabbing to reporters" — unlike Bornstein, who's repeatedly given interviews about Trump's health.

The president's physical exam would be familiar to any American who's had an annual checkup: The physician typically measures indicators like resting heart rate and blood pressure, reviews the president's medications and draws blood for further testing. Trump's doctors have said that he takes a statin to control cholesterol, antibiotics for rosacea and Propecia to treat male-pattern baldness.

then-President Bill Clinton's 1999 physical, possibly given his two-year lapse since receiving a physical exam and his recovery from a 1997 knee surgery. The exam revealed that Clinton had gained 18 pounds in two years, but remained in generally excellent health overall.

But experts have warned that the traditional physical doesn't go far enough to assess a president's mental state. Lawrence Mohr, who was a White House physician to Reagan and President George H.W. Bush, believed that presidents should be evaluated for "alertness, cognitive function, judgment, appropriate behavior, the ability to choose among options and the ability to communicate clearly," he told a researcher in 2010. That wouldn't be just a theoretical exercise; about half of all presidents have suffered from a known illness or injury in office.

Mohr, who died in 2013, also believed that a president should retain some right to patient privacy.

"I do feel strongly that confidentiality within the doctor-patient relationship should remain inviolate," Mohr said in a 1993 speech. "There are, however, cases of potential presidential disability in which some of that may need to be violated within the context of an established process," he added, pointing to the 25th Amendment. Under that process, a president may be formally removed from office if the vice president and a majority of the Cabinet deem him physically or mentally "unable to discharge the powers and duties" of the office.

For a typical man Trump's age, any cognitive risk would likely be revealed by the Medicare annual wellness visit, which specifically screens older adults for mental impairment — although the White

House said Trump won't undergo a similar battery of tests.

At 71, Trump would be the first president to qualify for the visit — ironically, created under Obamacare in 2011 and tailored to assess Americans age 66 and older. The test is free for Medicare beneficiaries, although it is not required.

"The focus of these [Medicare] visits is thinking about what are the ways aging adults face unique risks and how we can mitigate them," said Ishani Ganguli, a Harvard Medical School primary care physician who's studied the Medicare's exam and performed many herself. "In this population, I'm thinking about subtle changes in cognitive function."

For example, physicians who treat older patients like Trump commonly administer what's called the Montreal Cognitive Assessment, or MoCA, which assesses an older patient's attention and concentration, executive function and other tests designed to reveal mild cognitive dysfunction. Another test, known as "get up and go," measures a patient's ability to quickly stand, sit and walk, which can indicate possible neurological problems.

Ganguli said regardless of what's covered in a routine presidential physical, a trained physician should tailor tests to the specific patient.

"A physical — really, any opportunity a primary care physician has to evaluate a patient — should always prompt evaluation of concerning symptoms," Ganguli said. "In Trump's case, even if the doctor wasn't doing a cognitive evaluation for routine screening, he or she would be compelled to evaluate for cognitive deficits if they had cause for concern."

"The things that we'd want to know are the things, unfortunately, that people won't want to reveal."

— Former White House physician

the White House Medical Unit, a round-the-clock team of specialists available to the president.

Trump's longtime personal doctor is Harold Bornstein, the New York gastroenterologist who proclaimed during the 2016 presidential campaign that Trump would be "the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency."

Caplan said the White House's traditional decision to get screened by military personnel at Walter Reed gives a president more control than going to a private institution, such as the Mayo Clinic or

The president's physical also includes a height and weight check, allowing the physician to calculate the president's official body mass index — a potential issue for Trump, given that his 2016 appearance on "The Dr. Oz Show" revealed he was on the verge of obesity. At 6 foot, 3 inches and weighing 236 pounds, Trump had a body mass index of 29.5 in that appearance; a measurement of 30 or more is considered obese.

The physical also may be tailored to a president's specific needs. Twelve specialists consulted on

Four-point immigration plan pulled to left and right

IMMIGRATION from page 1

program would include four main parts: legal status for Dreamers, more robust border security, an overhaul of family-based immigration laws and a change to a controversial visa lottery program. That only those elements were included was a clear signal to conservatives, who are demanding more expansive enforcement provisions in any fix to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program Trump is killing.

“Kevin McCarthy was the one who said, ‘All right, it’s down to four things, right? DACA and the other three things?’” said Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin of Illinois, the top negotiator for Senate Democrats, referring to the Republican House majority leader. “And we all agreed.”

Added Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.): “Those are the outlines of what a potential deal could be. Now, what in fact takes place as it relates to each of those elements is incredibly important.”

The White House concurred, with press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders saying the group “reached an agreement to negotiate legislation that accomplishes critically needed reforms in four high-priority areas: border security, chain migration, the visa lottery and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy.”

But some House Democrats say they won’t accept those parameters. They argue Democrats are agreeing only to legalize the Dreamers now, and that debates over “chain migration” and the diversity visa lottery need to happen later.

“The statement issued by the White House is inaccurate,” said House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.).

Meanwhile, there’s also a restive faction of House Republicans pushing their leadership to take a hard line early in the immigration fight, worried that the more moderate Senate will ultimately jam their chamber with a Dreamer deal they can’t accept.

The fact that a mere deal to discuss a deal is stoking such consternation on Capitol Hill illustrates the difficult predicament that lawmakers — not to mention the Dreamers themselves — face in coming up with a solution. And yet it’s not all that surprising that the talks have narrowed after the White House immigration meeting, as a bipartisan group of senators had already been focusing on those four core areas.

The group primarily includes Durbin and Sens. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.); the senators have yet to reach an agreement, although they have been working feverishly for weeks discussing proposals.

For example, the senators have debated whether to effectively dump the visa lottery — which doles out about 50,000 green cards annually to people from countries with traditionally low rates of immigration — by reallocating those visas to immigrants who have benefited from Temporary Protected Status programs that the Trump administration is terminating. Separately, there appears to be a more notable struggle over chain migration, with senators disagree-



EVAN VUCCI/AP

President Donald Trump’s White House meeting Tuesday with lawmakers seemed to set broad parameters for an immigration deal, but soon took fire from restive House conservatives who want stricter controls and don’t want to wait for a Senate bill.

ing on whether restrictions on sponsoring relatives should apply just to the Dreamers or to a larger immigrant population.

It’s still unclear whether the senators will be able to reach an agreement they can successfully sell to Democrats and Republicans in the Senate, not to mention a more conservative House. But defining the mere outlines of a deal was at least a step closer to a final fix, senators said.

“We did make some progress on it today,” Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.) said. “The main thing was, let’s define out the basis of scope.

But later Tuesday, discussion of the bipartisan summit only fueled more dissension among the Democratic ranks.

Democrats spilled out of a more than hourlong meeting in the office of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) Tuesday afternoon differing over what had been decided at the White House as well as what they would entertain in upcoming negotiations.

Durbin and Hoyer left the meeting to huddle one-on-one in a separate room, only to emerge with contradictory talking points.

Hoyer maintained that Mc-

Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois suggested they were open to discussing changes to family-based immigration and the visa lottery, while Sen. Kamala Harris and Rep. Linda Sanchez of California said those discussions should be part of broader immigration reform and not attached to a DACA deal.

“I don’t think a whole lot of folks in that room really even understand, and I mean no disrespect to them, it’s not their areas of expertise, really what [chain migration] means. ... The current law allows for family reunification,” said Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.),

misunderstanding.”

“There were four issues that were agreed to be part of the DACA deal. ... That was what the whole thing was about!” said Diaz-Balart, who also attended the White House meeting. “We have a real opportunity to get this done as long as folks don’t start backtracking from what was talked about today.”

But even if House Democrats ultimately get on board, there’s trouble brewing among the House GOP.

Senior House Republicans used a closed-door conference meeting earlier Tuesday to begin pressuring Speaker Paul Ryan and his top lieutenants to take a harder line on immigration. In particular, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte of Virginia urged leaders to put a conservative DACA bill he will introduce Wednesday on the floor for a vote. It addresses some of the provisions being discussed in the immigration talks, but goes further by changing policies governing unaccompanied child migrants and asylum seekers.

House GOP leaders aren’t sure the bill can pass and worry about upending the bipartisan discussions going on in the Senate. But that’s unlikely to quell demands from rank-and-file Republicans that they pass a conservative solution instead of waiting on a bipartisan Senate deal.

“There’s not a commitment [to a vote] yet, but this is the only bill that can unify the people,” insisted Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-Idaho), who helped Goodlatte write the bill, which would surely be rejected by the Senate. “We can get to 218.”

“I don’t think a whole lot of folks in that room really even understand, and I mean no disrespect to them, it’s not their areas of expertise, really what [chain migration] means. ... The current law allows for family reunification.”

— Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, Chairwoman, Congressional Hispanic Caucus

Let’s break down who’s going to do what, and let’s start the process, because the hard negotiation is obviously going to be in smaller groups.”

Other Senate Republicans were encouraged that Trump said his long-coveted border wall with Mexico doesn’t have to cover the entire, 2,000-mile boundary. “We’ve been begging him to say this kind of stuff before,” Flake said. “It’s only about [700] or 800 miles total. Some of that is replacement. And more importantly, the wall is really a fence.”

Carthy suggested those four areas as the basis for a bipartisan deal during the White House meeting, but that Democrats never agreed to those terms and still haven’t. Durbin, meanwhile, didn’t dispute his earlier comments that those four issues were on the table, telling reporters the “devil is in the details.”

“There are ways to do things that are painless and ways that are fatal,” Durbin said. “So you try to find painless alternatives.”

Other Democrats also left the meeting with different stances:

chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, who successfully crashed the White House meeting after not receiving an invite. “And the same thing with diversity visas. When you really think about who’s getting those diversity visas, it has absolutely nothing to do with the issue we’re trying to address with DACA recipients, and we’re making that case.”

When told some House Democrats were disputing even the parameters of an agreement, a frustrated Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) responded: “There is no

Bannon told friends firestorm hindered Breitbart

BANNON from page 1

on the same day that Trump discussed comprehensive immigration reform at the White House and said he would attend the elite World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, later this month, and just weeks after he signed a bill cutting taxes for corporations and the wealthy — all moves that cut against Bannon's nationalist, populist vision and show how his influence has waned since he was hailed as the mastermind behind Trump's 2016 victory.

"I'm proud of what the Breitbart team has accomplished in so short a period of time in building out a world-class news platform," Bannon said in a statement on Tuesday. Breitbart CEO Larry Solov said Bannon "is a valued part of our legacy, and we will always be grateful for his contributions, and what he has helped us to accomplish."

Bannon, a former investment banker and film producer who became executive chairman of Breitbart after its founder's death in 2012, joined the Trump campaign in August 2016 as chief executive. Later, as White House strategist, he kept a whiteboard with Trump's campaign promises written in black marker, check marks next to those that had been accomplished. After months of squabbling with members of the administration he considered too establishment or too liberal, he was fired in August 2017 by new chief of staff John Kelly and returned to Breitbart.

In recent days, amid tension with the White House over his comments in "Fire and Fury," Bannon privately acknowledged to friends that the firestorm surrounding him was interfering with Breitbart's operations. He did not respond to questions Tuesday about what's next for him.

On Sunday, in an effort to ease the bitterness, Bannon issued a statement uncharacteristically backing down from some of the



"I'm proud of what the Breitbart team has accomplished in so short a period of time in building out a world-class news platform," said former White House strategist Steve Bannon, shown with President Donald Trump last year.

MANDEL NGAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

criticisms that had so enraged the president, including calling Donald Trump Jr. "treasonous" and "unpatriotic" for attending a meeting with a Kremlin-linked lawyer.

Bannon didn't dispute discussing the meeting but said he meant to aim his attack at former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, not the president's son.

"Donald Trump, Jr. is both a patriot and a good man," Bannon said in the statement. "I regret that my delay in responding to the inaccur-

rate reporting regarding Don Jr. has diverted attention from the president's historical accomplishments in the first year of his presidency."

The statement came after White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders suggested that Breitbart and Bannon should "consider" parting ways given the fallout at last Thursday's daily news briefing; his expression of regret Sunday did little to quell the White House's frustration.

Robert Mercer, long Bannon's

primary backer, had already abandoned the former Trump aide in November, selling his shares in the site to his daughter Rebekah. Last week, Rebekah Mercer issued a rare public statement distancing herself from Bannon and reaffirming support for Trump, whom the Mercers backed in the 2016 election.

"My family and I have not communicated with Steve Bannon in many months and have provided no financial support to his political agenda, nor do we support his

recent actions and statements," she said.

Still, Bannon told people over the weekend that he wasn't going anywhere, and he was still holding editorial meetings and hosting his radio show. But people close to him expressed frustration that he wouldn't publicly address the rumors that he might leave Breitbart.

Bannon had boasted when he left the Trump White House and returned to Breitbart that he had his "weapons" back. The site's identity in recent years has been shaped around Bannon's brand of fiery, right-wing populism, which he wielded in the fight against progressives and establishment Republicans.

"He was the operation. The content that you saw across the pages of Breitbart from the moment really that Andrew Breitbart died to the current day was molded in the image and voice of Steve Bannon," said Kurt Bardella, who served as a spokesperson for the site from 2013-16.

Even during the eight months Bannon served in the White House, Bardella said it was still clear his vision was driving the site — and its coverage was often seen as a proxy for his views.

"The problem is, Steve, despite all his flaws, had a clear vision and business acumen," said Lee Stranahan, a former Breitbart News writer. "In politics, he's probably done, but I'm not sure he cares."

Both Bardella and Stranahan said the site found itself at a pivotal moment, with an uncertain future.

"I think Breitbart as a platform is now going to have to take on its own personality outside of Steve Bannon's," Bardella said. "What that will look like and how successful that will be is an unanswered question."

Cristiano Lima contributed to this report.

Release of Trump infrastructure plan may slip past January

BY BRIANNA GURCIULLO AND LAUREN GARDNER

The White House may yet again be pushing back the release of its long-awaited infrastructure package, just a month after saying it would come out by the end of January.

A White House official said Tuesday that there have been "no decisions yet on timing" for the release. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) separately told POLITICO — after a meeting with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao and other officials — that administration officials are still deciding whether to publish legislative principles for the plan before or after the president's State of the Union address Jan. 30.

A White House spokeswoman did not immediately comment Tuesday.

It's unclear whether this represents a major snag for the infrastructure plan, which Trump's aides have talked up as a big priority for 2018. The plan — aimed at creating as much as \$1 trillion in federal, state and private spending — could also be another big win for

Trump on the heels of December's tax overhaul, the president's supporters hope.

Trump's advisers have told him that pursuing an infrastructure bill will give Republicans the best chance of retaining the House majority because the prospect of building new roads and bridges has broad appeal with the electorate.

But congressional Democrats have expressed skepticism about Trump's approach, especially given the administration's signals that it will come with relatively little new federal spending and will attempt to unroll a host of regulatory requirements for transportation projects. And Trump himself has expressed misgivings about the package's expected incentives for government partnerships with private investors — most recently during a huddle last weekend with congressional leaders at Camp David, The Washington Post reported Sunday.

Trump has been raising similar concerns for weeks in private conversations with lawmakers and his advisers, according to people fa-

miliar with the conversations.

D.J. Gribbin, the president's special assistant for infrastructure policy, refused to give specifics on the timing of the plan's release when reporters pressed him Tuesday after the meeting with Cardin and other lawmakers. Besides Chao, members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee also attended the meeting.

A White House official told POLITICO in early December that Trump intended to send "a detailed infrastructure principles document" to Congress sometime in January. Even that was later than Chao had predicted last spring, when she told Fox News that "the legislative proposal will probably be tackled by the Congress in the third quarter" of 2017.

More recently, the White House has decided to focus largely on infrastructure in the coming months, administration officials have said — setting aside for now a bid to make sweeping changes to the country's welfare programs, a top priority for House Speaker Paul Ryan. That de-

cision came after weeks of internal debate about the administration's legislative priorities.

Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, said Tuesday's meeting was less about specifics of the infrastructure plan and more about face time about the plan with the administration, which he called "helpful."

"I don't know that I learned a lot," Carper said. "I just think there's value in sitting down and talking."

The plan is expected to call for as much as \$200 billion in federal spending over the next decade, with the rest coming from private investment, state or local funding and cuts to other federal programs. An administration official has told POLITICO that a wide variety of projects would have to compete for federal assistance, ranging from roads, railroads, bridges and tunnels to rural broadband or veterans hospitals — and that communities hoping for money from Washington will have to be prepared to put up their own cash.

At the same time, the White House has proposed budget cuts for some existing federal transportation programs. And the Department of Transportation told New York and New Jersey late last month not to expect the federal government to pay half of the \$13 billion cost of building a new tunnel under the Hudson River — despite earlier promises to that effect from the Obama administration.

Both developments have increased Democrats' consternation about Trump's infrastructure plan.

Cardin said the administration officials went over their proposal Tuesday but left many of the details unfilled.

"I think we have an understanding [of] the framework they're working under," Cardin said. "What we don't have is specifics. What we don't have is how it adds up. And I think the plea that we're making is let's have a real, open process, but recognize you've got to have the money."

Andrew Restuccia contributed to this report.

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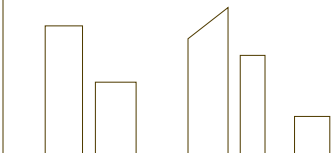
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AP FILE PHOTO 2014

How the IRS decides to implement withholding could go a long way toward shaping public opinion on the new tax law. There is a history of politicians trying to manipulate withholding, but bigger paychecks now could leave workers to find themselves in arrears to the IRS next year.

IRS hard-pressed to implement new law

IRS from page 1

Kautter.

How the IRS — which is supposed to be apolitical — decides to implement withholding could go a long way toward shaping public opinion on the controversial law.

Workers could see changes in their paychecks as soon as next month, the agency said, and for many it will be the first time they see what exactly the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 means to them.

Even before President Trump signed the bill into law last month, Republicans were promising Americans they wouldn't have to wait long to see the benefits.

"You're going to start seeing a lot more money in your paycheck," Trump said Monday during a speech to the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Asked about Democrats' warnings of politically motivated withholding changes, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady said: "There's never been any question about the IRS' timely, accurate withholding tables, nor should there be today."

Democrats will "do and say just about anything to cast doubt" on the revamped tax program, the Texas Republican said.

The IRS did not respond to a request for comment.

There is a history of politicians trying to manipulate withholding, through obscure tables issued by the IRS, with an eye toward providing a short-term boost to the economy. President George H.W. Bush tried it ahead of the 1992 election, and the 1986 tax overhaul attempted, unsuccessfully, to quash refunds altogether.

Most of the new tax law took effect Jan. 1 because Republicans

want it to boost growth before voters head to the polls this fall.

As Wyden and Neal point out, bigger paychecks now could mean a nasty surprise in 2019. Some accustomed to receiving annual refunds could find themselves suddenly in arrears to the IRS.

"This is not something you want to fool the American taxpayer about — you don't want to have them feeling good because they're getting a big bump in take-home pay, only to be surprised next year," said Larry Gibbs, a former IRS commissioner.

"People ought to be able to understand what is being withheld from their paycheck and what that means — not just in terms of a bump in take-home pay, but also whether they're still going to get a refund," he said.

How much is withheld is a product of two things: The allowances claimed on the W-4 tax form filed with employers, and the tables the IRS produces, telling payroll administrators how much to withhold at given income levels, taking into account the allowances employees claimed.

The IRS is now working on withholding tables to reflect the new tax law. In a statement late last month, the agency suggested it would not be issuing new W-4s.

"This information will be designed to work with existing Forms W-4 that employees have already filed, and no further action by taxpayers is needed at this time," the IRS said.

About 80 percent of taxpayers will get a tax cut averaging \$2,100, thanks to the new law, according to the independent Tax Policy Center. About 5 percent will face tax increases averaging \$2,800 while the remainder will see essentially

no change in their tax bills.

Taxpayers have long prized their tax refunds. The share receiving money back from the IRS at tax time has been firmly lodged at 70 percent or more since the 1960s, despite complaints from experts that it amounts to giving the government an interest-free loan.

In 2016, Kautter, then working at a consulting firm, bemoaned the number of people receiving refunds each year, while acknowledging taxpayers like being essentially forced to save.

"It drives me nuts," Kautter told POLITICO that April. "You don't lend money to other people interest-free."

For millions, it is the single largest payment they receive all year.

The IRS generally likes people getting refunds as well, because it means fewer people who owe taxes it must chase down.

So the withholding sweet spot might be for people to get bigger paychecks this year, but not so large that it erases their refunds next year.

That will be technically difficult, experts say, because the Republican plan dumped the concept of personal exemptions, which are key to figuring out how much to withhold from someone's paycheck, and it's not clear how the agency will make up for that.

What's more, about 8.5 million taxpayers will see tax increases, according to TPC, which not only threaten their refunds, it could also potentially put them at risk of incurring underpayment penalties the IRS imposes on those who pay less than 90 percent of their taxes during the calendar year.

The IRS has provided little guidance thus far on how exactly it in-

tends to proceed, leaving payroll administrators scratching their heads.

"There's definitely some unanswered questions," said Mike Trabold, director of compliance risk at Paychex, a payroll administration firm.

He wonders whether the IRS will make any withholding changes retroactive to the beginning of this year. Others wonder if and when the agency will have to develop new W-4 forms, and whether it will waive those underpayment penalties.

Lawmakers have tried to increase people's paychecks before, by unilaterally changing withholding, and faced a backlash from the public.

The 1986 overhaul ordered the Treasury Department to devise a more accurate withholding system that would slash the number of people getting refunds each year. "You can kiss your tax refund goodbye, and with it, the summer vacations, new refrigerators and fall wardrobes it has paid for," The Washington Post reported in April 1987.

But the revised W-4 form the agency produced was so complicated that it became hugely unpopular and was dropped.

A few years later, President George H.W. Bush, then running for reelection, ordered the government to withhold less from paychecks in hopes of boosting the economy.

But many people didn't want the extra money if it meant losing their refunds, and within a few years, refunds had returned to previous levels.

Bernie Becker contributed to this report.

POLITICO INFLUENCE

Welcome to PI. Tips: tmeyer@politico.com. Twitter: [@theodoricmeyer](https://twitter.com/theodoricmeyer).

Husch Blackwell teams with Blunt, Hartley

Husch Blackwell is teaming up with Andy Blunt's Statehouse Strategies and Gregg Hartley's Cloakroom Advisors to start a new lobbying practice called Husch Blackwell Strategies. The new outfit will be based in Jefferson City, Missouri, and will combine Statehouse's state lobbying experience with Cloakroom's federal portfolio. The firm will have strong ties to Missouri's congressional delegation. Andy Blunt is one of Sen. Roy Blunt's sons and managed his 2016 reelection campaign, while Hartley is a former Blunt chief of staff. Amy Blunt, the senator's daughter, worked as a Husch Blackwell lobbyist in 2005 and 2006. And Christian Morgan, who's Rep. Ann Wagner's chief of staff, will join the new firm as principal, according to a person familiar with the arrangement.

■ Husch Blackwell started talking with Blunt and Hartley about joining forces after Catherine Hanaway, a former Missouri House speaker who ran for governor in 2016 and is now a partner at Husch Blackwell, reached out last year, Hartley said in an interview. The goal is to emulate firms, such as Cornerstone Government Affairs, "that have done a good job of adding state practices to their federal practice," Hartley said. "We're going to try to build up the five state" lobbying practices that Husch Blackwell already has, he added.

Could Royce head to K Street?

Rep. Ed Royce's announcement on Monday that he won't run for reelection has set off speculation that the California Republican could remain in Washington, especially since his wife, Marie Royce, was just nominated by President Donald Trump to be assistant secretary of state for education and cultural affairs. "I think Mr. Royce would be attractive to K Street and a good catch," Ivan Adler, a headhunter who specializes in lobbying, wrote in an email to PI. "Not only is he Chair of the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, he also serves on the Financial Services Committee and is from business-rich California, home to a lot of potential clients." Royce's office didn't respond to a request for comment.

Jobs report

■ Dwayne Carson is leaving the Hill to join the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association as managing director of federal relations, leading its lobbying of the Trump administration. He was previously director of coalitions and outreach for the House Republican Study Committee. ■ The Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research has tapped Jeff Rosichan as director of its Crops of the Future Collaborative. He previously ran his own firm, Tri-Ag Consulting.

— Theodor Meyer



ALEXEY NIKOLSKY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee ramped up pressure on the administration to slap new sanctions on Russia, releasing a report — written without GOP involvement — that details President Vladimir Putin's alleged electoral meddling around the world. "We must counter Russia's well-established election interference playbook," said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse.

Dems: Russia investigation has been 'painfully slow'

DEMOCRATS from page 1
security at risk.

"President Trump is squandering an opportunity to lead America's allies and partners to build a collective defense against the Kremlin's global assault on democratic institutions and values," the report states. "But it is not too late."

Among the report's two dozen-plus recommendations is a call for the Trump administration to implement a bipartisan Russia sanctions bill. Lawmakers in both parties raised alarms after the administration missed an October deadline to designate potential targets for new sanctions, and belated compliance came only after a nudge from Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.).

The next critical deadline is Jan. 29, the earliest date that companies could face penalties for engaging in "significant transactions" with targets in the Russian defense or intelligence sectors. The sanctions bill also asks the Treasury Department to give Congress a series of reports by the end of this month, including one on Russian oligarchs who could face future sanctions and their connections to Putin, and another on the effect of expanding sanctions

to Moscow's sovereign debt.

One Democratic aide on the Foreign Relations Committee said the minority would be "waiting and seeing" how the administration treats the required Russian oligarch list as a test of its commitment to sanctions implementation.

"If there's, like, two names on it, then they're probably not taking it very seriously," the aide told

reporters. Other Democratic proposals to safeguard against future electoral disruption by Putin include placing FBI investigators in embassies and disclosing intelligence about the Russian leader's "personal corruption and wealth stored abroad."

Democratic staffers on the Foreign Relations panel were optimistic that the report would win some Republican buy-in after its Wednesday release, much as the

package of Russia sanctions drew widespread GOP support even as Trump continued to publicly deny that Moscow intervened in the 2016 election.

"A lot of Republicans have been publicly critical of how Trump has handled the Russia issue specifically," one aide told reporters.

Corker said Tuesday that he would "look at the whole" Russia

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) already have signed on to legislation that would codify one recommendation in the Cardin report, which proposes that social media companies require disclosure of the funding sources behind political ads on their platforms to prevent Russian attempts at manipulation. Still, the prospects for movement on that measure appear grim at

sier tying Trump to the Kremlin. A spokesman for the Judiciary panel's chairman, Sen. Chuck Grassley (D-Iowa), slammed Feinstein's decision to unilaterally release the document, but she seemed unconcerned Tuesday.

"The only way to set the record straight is to make the transcript public," she said.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said the Senate Judiciary Committee's Russia investigation, "to be very blunt, has been painfully slow."

"If there is no price, it will be done with impunity again," he said.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) expressed skepticism that Republican leaders would heed her call to ramp up the pace of investigative and oversight work against Russian meddling as the 2018 midterms approach.

"On a score of what to what?" she quipped to reporters.

"I have no doubt that if the Democrats were in power, we would have taken action to protect our electoral system," Pelosi said. "I have no doubt if the Democrats were in power, the Republicans would be urging that action, but that's not what they're doing."

"Russia will hack. Russia will bully. Russia will propagandize."

— Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse

reporters.

Other Democratic proposals to safeguard against future electoral disruption by Putin include placing FBI investigators in embassies and disclosing intelligence about the Russian leader's "personal corruption and wealth stored abroad."

Democratic staffers on the Foreign Relations panel were optimistic that the report would win some Republican buy-in after its Wednesday release, much as the

report, adding that he and Cardin (D-Md.) "have a very good relationship. He knew it was probably not something that I'd want to be a part of, but he made me aware of it."

Republicans say they are working on election security ahead of the midterms, and the bipartisan leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee are expected to provide recommendations on the matter before the primary season begins. Eight House Republicans and

present given the scant number of GOP backers.

If Republicans did get on board with Cardin's report, that would mark a stark contrast with the partisan conflagration that erupted Tuesday on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Top Democrat Dianne Feinstein of California released the transcript of the panel's August interview with Glenn Simpson, whose company was behind an explosive dos-

HHS pick appears to be on track for confirmation

Azar's targets: ACA, entitlement programs

BY ADAM CANCRYN
AND SARAH KARLIN-SMITH

President Donald Trump's nominee to run the Department of Health and Human Services appears on the brink of confirmation, which will usher in a new era of Republican efforts to remake major health care programs after legislative stumbles last year.

The expected confirmation of Alex Azar, who appeared before a Senate panel Tuesday, would put the conservative policy expert in charge of rewriting the rules of the U.S. health care system with a broad mandate to use the powers to the fullest. And following a tumultuous year marked by failed Obamacare repeal efforts and the abrupt resignation of Trump's first HHS secretary, Republicans think Azar can ably get the Trump administration's health agenda on track.

"Mr. Azar will be the administration's primary policy driver," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said during Azar's confirmation hearing. "I believe his record shows that he is more than capable of leading HHS through these next few consequential years."

Azar, a former pharmaceutical executive and HHS official in George W. Bush's administration, is expected to lead efforts to unwind the Affordable Care Act through regulation, pursue conservative change to entitlement programs long sought by Republicans and follow through on Trump's unfulfilled pledge to tackle soaring drug prices. With many Republican lawmakers wary of waging another divisive health care fight during an election year, Azar will be charged with steering Trump's health care legacy.

Skeptical Democrats point to a track record that includes a decade spent leading Eli Lilly's U.S. operations, where Azar boosted prices for drugs. That was just standard industry practice, Azar testified



CAROLYN KASTER/AP

Democrats skeptical of Alex Azar, the nominee to run the Department of Health and Human Services, point to a track record that includes a decade spent leading Eli Lilly's U.S. operations, where Azar hiked drug prices.

Tuesday, as he pledged to leverage his industry insight to repair a convoluted system that he said perversely incentivizes higher and higher drug prices. Yet he's largely rejected major government reforms on drug pricing, instead supporting policies typically backed by the industry.

Still, he's also won the respect of more centrist Democrats and health policy officials across the spectrum, who praised Azar as a level-headed and practical manager, capable of leading a department left in disarray by Tom Price's resignation as HHS secretary in September.

"We know Alex to have the temperament, judgment, and necessary focus on practicality that is important to being a successful HHS secretary, even if we do not agree with him on every issue," former Democratic Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle wrote with former Republican Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. So far, Joe Man-

chin of West Virginia is the only Democratic senator to publicly announce plans to vote for Azar when his nomination comes to the floor, possibly later this month.

Azar, who was previously general counsel and assistant secretary in HHS, has backed GOP proposals requiring able-bodied adult Medicaid enrollees to work as a condition of coverage. The idea, which several red states have asked HHS to approve, would amount to a significant restructuring of Medicaid that Democrats fiercely oppose. Azar also hinted at plans to overhaul insurance rules in a way that could undermine the fragile Obamacare marketplaces.

There needs to be "more choice of insurance," Azar said during the hearing. "Insurance that fits [people's] needs as opposed to what I happen to say they should have." Azar said he would support allowing the sale of insurance plans across state lines, another GOP idea

opposed by Democrats and many state insurance regulators.

While these ideas are popular with Republicans, critics say they would lead to patients having less robust health insurance. It could also further fracture the health insurance market, making coverage increasingly expensive for the sickest patients.

"The common thread to all the Republican talk is this: deep, draconian cuts to programs like Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security, anti-hunger programs, support for struggling families," Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said.

During Tuesday's hearing, Azar cast himself as sympathetic to Democrats' concerns, striking a conciliatory tone and pledging to solicit ideas from an array of lawmakers.

"I hope, if I'm confirmed, I can earn your trust," he told Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) following a contentious exchange over drug prices.

But once he is installed, Azar's priorities are likely to fall firmly in line with Republican orthodoxy.

On drug prices, Azar rejected the idea of requiring Medicare to negotiate prices, a progressive idea that Trump at times has embraced. Azar largely declined to endorse specific measures as he expressed support for creating more transparency and competition among drugmakers.

The approaches Azar touted on drug prices, such as increasing competition, haven't worked to bring down costs in the past. Another idea he cited, reducing the list price of drugs, would be difficult since HHS does not regulate how drug companies set prices.

On Obamacare, Azar endorsed stalled legislation from Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Bill Cassidy (R-La.) that would replace the law's funding with block grants to states, signaling his openness to ending Medicaid's status as an open-ended entitlement.

"There are elements that are very positive, such as allowing states to run their own budgets," Azar said. "Incentives can be reoriented in a very positive way for more state empowerment."

That agenda won't win many fans from across the aisle, Democrats warned Azar on Tuesday, prompting some testy exchanges with McCaskill and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio). Brown said the administration's support for Medicaid work requirements could hurt people receiving treatment for opioid addiction.

"You can understand our skepticism and concern that we hear top elected officials and appointed officials in this country talk about able-bodied adults and disqualifying them for Medicaid," Brown said.

But for Republicans, Azar represents a second chance to advance the party's sweeping health care priorities without the risk of another major legislative stumble.

"I'm glad someone with his experience is willing to step forward," Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) said. "Because frankly, we've got a lot of challenges."

Arpaio touts Trump tie as he enters race for Flake's Senate seat

BY KEVIN ROBILLARD
AND TED HESSON

Joe Arpaio, the controversial former Arizona county sheriff who was convicted of defying a federal court order last year and then almost immediately pardoned by President Donald Trump, said Tuesday he is running for Senate.

Arpaio will run in the 2018 Republican primary for the seat held by retiring GOP Sen. Jeff Flake, he told the Washington Examiner, which first reported the news.

Arpaio served as sheriff of Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix, for 24 years before being defeated for reelection by a Democrat in 2016. He has often teased a possible statewide campaign — raising money for his political committee before ultimately deciding not to run.

"I have a lot to offer. I'm a big supporter of President Trump," Arpaio told the Examiner. "I'm going

to have to work hard; you don't take anything for granted. But I would not be doing this if I thought that I could not win. I'm not here to get my name in the paper; I get that every day, anyway."

Former state Sen. Kelli Ward — the conservative firebrand who lost to Sen. John McCain in a 2016 primary — is already in the contest on the Republican side, and Rep. Martha McSally is also expected to run. Rep. Kyrsten Sinema is running for the Democratic nomination.

Arpaio's harsh stance toward undocumented immigrants drew praise from hard-liners but criticism from Democrats and some moderate Republicans. It also earned him the ire of federal courts, which ruled he violated civil rights law. After Arpaio ignored the rulings, he was convicted of contempt of court in July 2017. One month later, Trump pardoned him despite Flake's opposition.

Arpaio said in a phone interview on Tuesday that he hadn't spoken with Trump about his run for Senate.

"I still support him. It doesn't matter what his position is on me running," Arpaio said. "But I'm sure he'll know he'll have a big ally in Washington, and he sure needs [someone] to get his programs and agenda done."

While Arpaio is best known for his tough stance against illegal immigration, he stressed that he also has experience in business and federal law enforcement, which took him to Mexico and Turkey decades ago. "I'm not a one-issue candidate," he said.

The 85-year-old said he isn't worried his age will be an impediment to serving a six-year Senate term, pointing to Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), former Vice President Joe Biden and film director Clint Eastwood, all in their



AP FILE PHOTO 2016

"I have a lot to offer. I'm a big supporter of President Trump," ex-Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio said of his Arizona Senate bid.

70s or 80s.

"I think it's good," he said, "because I survived my controversial 24-year career [as sheriff], strictly on common sense and life experience."

Arpaio said the decision to run

for Senate wasn't an easy one. He'll be a target for Democrats and progressive groups. In addition, any political campaign comes with a hefty workload. Still, he couldn't resist the idea of the Senate race.

"I'm not going to be buried and know — and be sad — that I didn't give it a shot," he said.

Arpaio met several times in the past year with former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon but said Tuesday he hasn't discussed the Senate run with him. Bannon endorsed Ward in October, but she's recently tried to downplay that relationship.

Of Bannon's reported quotes in the explosive Michael Wolff book published last week, Arpaio said he couldn't pass judgment.

"He has to speak for what was in the book. I can't speak for him," the former sheriff said. "That's something that he has to talk to the president about."

How do you parody a reality that already feels like a parody?

Jordan Klepper tours conspiracy theorists' mind-set and worries about weaponizing 'fake news'

BY EDWARD-ISAAC DOVERE

Inside every conspiracy theorist is a person who desperately wants to be thought of as smart and kind, and is angry they're not seen that way. That, and someone who's bored.

That's the read, at least, from Jordan Klepper, the comedian who's spent the past three months hosting the Alex Jones-style parody show "The Opposition" on Comedy Central, working hard to get into the heads of all the conspiracy theorists — including President Donald Trump himself — who've latched onto tales of illegal voters and the "deep state" and media witch hunts.

It's a position that he believes has given him insight into how Trump thinks, Klepper told me in an interview for the latest episode of POLITICO's Off Message podcast. "As a human, there are two things that I am desperately scared of: I'm desperately afraid of being called unkind, and I'm desperately afraid of being called not smart," Klepper said. And in every Trump statement, Klepper hears some version of, "You're trying to delegitimize me and you're trying to make me look dumb and not as popular. I'm not dumb; I'm popular."

The morning after we spoke, in apparent response to a Fox News segment about the questions Michael Wolff's new book raises about the president's mental health, Trump seethed in a series of tweets: "[T]hroughout my life, my two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart. ... I went from VERY successful businessman, to top T.V. Star ... to President of the United States (on my first try). I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius ... and a very stable genius at that!"

Klepper sees the impulse behind tweets like that. "He's the most famous person that has ever lived, and he wants a little credit," Klepper said.

Even so, statements like those from the president of the United States — ostensibly the most powerful man in the world — pose a challenge for Klepper and other satirists: How do you parody reality that can feel like parody already?

Klepper got his break while pretending to be a journalist on "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart, the comedy mainstay that billed itself as "the most trusted name in fake news." In an era in which that term has become weaponized for political purposes, Klepper said the question for writers and performers is "can you heighten the thing that already feels so absurd?"

"I think you can take the



ZACK STANTON/POLITICO

Jordan Klepper, host of Comedy Central's "The Opposition," a parody of shows like Alex Jones' "InfoWars," thinks that satirizing conspiracy theorists has given him insight into the mind of President Donald Trump.

logic that got to that absurdity," Klepper said. "You find ... the tactics and ... the ways in which they're finding the crazy, and use that in the premise and shake it up and multiply it by 10."

But that gets harder not just because of the news, but because of how people are reacting to it. The performers feel as though the stakes are higher — "It's an important time for comedy right now," Klepper said — and he has

noticed that his audiences have grown more earnest over the year as well. The cultural division is obvious: In the studio or at home on their couches, they demand blood, and the performers, eyes on applause and ratings, are complying. Late night comedy has become hours of Trump bashing, less a release than a response.

Klepper grew up in Michigan and says he has at least one relative back home who voted

for Trump but enjoys his show because to her it points out the obvious absurdities of the president without full-on bashing him. But he knows that's not where most of the jokes are landing.

"I don't think we want to be pigeonholed into preaching to that choir, but I also know that we are frustrated in one very similar direction," Klepper said. "You feel the pull. People want

something different than they wanted three years ago. They're scared."

The entire industry is struggling with what to do.

Dave Chappelle concluded a recent performance in Washington, D.C., that was recorded and released on New Year's Eve as a special on Netflix, with an extended retelling of the story of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old boy who was beaten and drowned by a mob for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi in 1955. The woman who accused him, Chappelle recounted, admitted on her deathbed that she'd lied in her court testimony. Mad as that made him, Chappelle said, he also had to be grateful for how much the civil rights movement had changed the world, powered in part by the outrage over Till's murder.

"That's how I feel about this president. ... [It] might be the lie that saves us all, because I have never felt more American than when we all hate [on him] together," he said.

In another performance released as a special the same day, Chappelle addressed comedians in the audience, calling this "the best time" to make jokes. "You have a responsibility to talk recklessly. Otherwise, my kids may never know what reckless talk sounds like — the joys of being wrong," he said.

For comedians, it's the best of times and the worst of times: more material than ever, more engaged audiences than ever, but also more people picking over the same overexposed points.

"As a comedian, we say, 'You have to connect with the audience, what are we all living through right now?'" Klepper said. "Well, like it or not, it's Donald Trump. There is that connection, and I think that helps with writing comedy because we're all starting from that similar place. But we're all looking at that as comedians, and I think that's what's really frustrating. It's hard to find that nuance. It's hard to continue to go after this. It would be nice to be able to choose what you cover as opposed to what you cover choosing you."

I asked Klepper whether he finds what we're living through to be funny.

"I find it mostly scary," he said, of the chaos rippling through politics and government. "I sometimes get afraid that I get too complacent in how commonplace it becomes."

"But we're all looking at that as comedians, and I think that's what's really frustrating. ... It would be nice to be able to choose what you cover as opposed to what you cover choosing you."

— Jordan Klepper

To subscribe to POLITICO's "Off Message" podcast with Edward-Isaac Dove, search for "Off Message" in your favorite podcast app.

OPINION

Nikki Haley's split personality at the U.N.

Shows savvy, but tack on Iran risks isolation

BY RICHARD GOWAN

The United Nations has a long history of hosting slightly pointless meetings. Most are harmless. Now and again, the diplomats in Turtle Bay even come up with ways to make the planet a better place.

Last week, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley convened a Security Council discussion of Iran that may have made the world marginally more dangerous, or at least a little less friendly to America. On Friday afternoon, council members grudgingly hustled through the frozen streets of New York for a public debate demanded by Haley on the recent Iranian protests. Russia had tried to block the meeting but backed down at the last moment. By the end, Haley might have wished the Russians had prevailed.

The U.S. ambassador made a strong plea for the world to back the Iranian people — whereupon a series of America's friends wavered and equivocated over how to deal with Tehran. The French ambassador questioned whether the protests amounted to an international security threat deserving the council's attention. The Swedish representative expressed doubts about the timing of the meeting. The Kuwaiti ambassador reminded his counterparts of how the early protests of the Arab Spring turned sour. It was clear that participants saw the meeting as a ploy for Haley to question the foundations of the Iranian nuclear deal indirectly — and diplomat after diplomat flagged how strongly they support the agreement.

The meeting looked far more like a debate over the Trump administration's foreign policy than Tehran's behavior. There was no official outcome, but the Security Council delivered a mighty “meh” to Haley's efforts to stir up anger over Iran. That may come back to haunt the ambassador — and the U.N., too.

A few weeks short of the first anniversary of her arrival in Turtle Bay, Haley faces now some fundamental questions about what sort of ambassador she wants to be. Is she going to be a force for moderation on the margins of the Trump administration, ironing out tensions between an ever more erratic president and the rest of the world? Or will she loyally represent her chief's hardening positions on Iran and the Korean crisis, potentially setting up diplomatic meltdowns in New York dwarfing that over Iraq in 2003?

The former South Carolina governor has enjoyed a stellar run in New York so far. A safe distance from the chaos of the White House, she quickly made friends with other key ambassadors; pushed through hefty cuts to the U.N. budget,



U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley called a meeting to urge the world to back the Iranian people. It was clear participating nations saw the meeting as a ploy to question the foundations of the Iranian nuclear deal indirectly.

in line with President Donald Trump's wishes; and hammered out serious sanctions on North Korea with the Chinese.

Although Haley could not prevent her volatile boss from taking regular whacks at the U.N., like quitting the Paris climate accord, foreign ambassadors and American foreign policy insiders alike celebrate her role as a sort of diplomatic safety valve. While Trump has seemed close to boiling over, vowing to decimate U.N. aid spending or threatening Pyongyang with war, Haley has been there to let off pressure.

It has been an honorable role, and it is arguable that if she had not been able to put more pressure on North Korea through the Security Council, Northeast Asia would be even closer to war than it is today.

But while Haley the diplomatic fixer has won plaudits, there has always been a second Haley waiting in the wings: a hard-liner who is in lock step with Trump on the need to talk and act tough on many security issues. Above all, she has been one of the administration's top public hawks on the Middle East.

Haley has been extremely consistent about defending Israel and criticizing Tehran since she arrived in New York. As early as

last summer, she was making the case for decertifying the Iranian nuclear deal, and threatened to pull out of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council over its regular criticisms of Israel.

Trump's decision last month to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital threw Haley's position into particularly stark relief. After vetoing a Security Council resolution implicitly criticizing Trump's gambit, Haley went all out to stymie a similar initiative in the General Assembly, effectively turning the issue into a referendum on Trump. Despite a lot of strong-arming, the U.S. still lost by 128-9 — not necessarily out of line with past such votes, but an embarrassment for the president, nonetheless.

Foreign diplomats were slightly unnerved by how fiercely Haley plunged into a battle that she was guaranteed to lose. Of course, the whole Jerusalem debate was ultimately little more than political theater — General Assembly votes are largely symbolic, and the U.S. and Israel have long faced off against the majority of other states over Palestine at the U.N. Everyone treats their bust-ups as opportunities to let off steam without putting other diplomatic priorities at risk.

Within a few days of her defeat, Haley secured a new package of Korean sanctions in the Security Council, and the General Assembly signed off on a new round of budget cuts she had pushed for, so clearly the Israel vote had little practical effect on Haley's influence.

While last week's Iran debate was a lower-profile affair, it was arguably a much more consequential one. If Haley alienates other powers over Iran, she could find that the goodwill she has built up will dissipate extremely quickly. Foreign ambassadors may treat run-ins with the U.S. over Israel as a standard professional hazard, but they broadly see the Iranian nuclear deal as essential to containing the metastasizing regional crisis in the Middle East. This belief unites all the permanent members of the Security Council other than the U.S.: Britain and France are likely to side with China and Russia to defend the nuclear agreement.

Whatever other powers think of the Iranian protests, they now calculate that U.S. efforts to weaken Iran present an overarching security threat in the Middle East that must be contained. Many European security analysts and human

rights advocates, in particular, are uncomfortable with their governments' lack of compassion for the Iranian protesters. But in the age of Trump, most diplomats are much more interested in clinging to the vestiges of international order left from the Obama era than in talking up democracy.

If Trump continues to chip away at the Iran deal, possibly refusing to waive sanctions on Iran as early as this Friday, Haley could suddenly find herself on the defensive and with few close allies at the U.N. The Russians, having effectively won the long-running diplomatic battle over Syria in the Security Council, would be delighted to corral traditional U.S. allies in an anti-Trump bloc over Iran, too. This would not necessarily poison other major diplomatic files, such as talks on Korea, but a drawn-out diplomatic dispute over Iran would be a drain on American prestige in New York.

Trump and ardent Iran hawks inside and outside the administration may be just fine with that. Just as Vice President Dick Cheney was keen to bypass the Security Council over Iraq, enemies of the Iranian nuclear deal would presumably be delighted to see Haley fight a few more symbolic battles over the issue in New York and then declare the U.N. route for dealing with Tehran dead. That would give the president and Congress more room to take on Iran on their own terms.

New York-based diplomats fret that Haley, who they guess has her eye on a presidential run at some point down the road, would pursue this course to prove her credentials as an A-grade Republican foreign policy hawk. If that is the case, Haley should tread with extra care. There are certainly short-term political benefits to beating up on the U.N. and defending Israel, but as the George W. Bush administration discovered, promoting instability in the Middle East can do U.S. politicians considerably greater political damage.

There is another political pathway available to Haley: accepting that she is very unlikely to bend the U.N. to her will over Iran, and focusing instead as much as possible on issues like North Korea, where she still has a great deal of traction. That might be a hard sell to the White House. But if Haley genuinely aspires to the highest office, or to other trophies, such as secretary of state, she should reflect on what could genuinely burnish her reputation. Stirring up trouble with Iran could so easily backfire. Helping craft a way out of a nuclear conflagration on the Korean Peninsula would look like the stuff leaders are made of.

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