Report-Hawking

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/14/stephen-hawking-legendary-physicist-dies-76-family-says/423044002/>

Stephen Hawking, one of the world's foremost theoretical physicists, has died at age 76. On the cover of the Oxford Dictionary of Scientists, Hawking appeared with Einstein and Madame Curie, an apt demonstration of his renown.

For decades, Hawking used a wheelchair by a form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig’s Disease, a neurological disease that handcuffs movement. He communicated via a speech synthesizer. A cause of death was not immediately available. His family announced his death via statement early Wednesday.

Hawking was best known as the author of A Brief History of Time, the best-selling 1988 book that first brought modern astrophysics into popular understanding for many and made him into an icon. His comments on black holes and other physics phenomena were regularly noted in newspapers. The fact that The Simpsons featured him in one of its cartoon episodes showed his reach into popular culture. He was also featured in Big Bang Theory, as a hero to one of the show's main characters, theoretical physicist Sheldon Cooper.

His book The Grand Design, co-authored with Caltech’s Leonard Mlodinow, again attracted readers, as well as controversy, with its claim that cosmology showed God was unnecessary to the creation of the universe.

His public image could not have occurred without the media. With his participation, they shaped and molded it,” wrote American University science writing professor Declan Fahy, in the Columbia Journalism Review on the occasion of Hawking’s 70th birthday in 2012. “This has led to tensions within his field. Other physicists have been, at times, ambivalent about his reputation, because of what some of them see as his having a public profile that is out of proportion to his scientific merit.”

However, Hawking’s popularity rested on genuine achievement, remarkable strides in understanding black holes and the origin of the universe, Fahy noted, starting with a 1974 paper entitled “Black hole explosion?” published in the journal, Nature. “Hawking radiation,” for example, the emission of heat from black holes, is now accepted as a fundamental, unexpected, concept in physics, one that solved a puzzle of how these imploded stars could exist and be theoretically reconciled with conventional understanding of energy. He showed that black holes served as cosmic laboratories for sorting out Einstein’s theory of gravity with the “quantum” theories of electromagnetic and nuclear forces that has divided physics for decades.

He also excelled at encouraging other researchers, famously betting his theories against others as a spur to research. Hawking conceded one such bet in 2004, admitting his theory, created in collaboration with physicist Kip Thorne, that black holes may remove information entirely from the universe, by pulling everything including light down its gravitational maw and preventing it from ever re-entering space, was probably wrong. He delivered a baseball encyclopedia to American physicist John Preskill as the price for losing his wager (Thorne did not concede).

Born in Oxford, England, Hawking graduated from Oxford University and later Cambridge University, taking the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics position there in 1979, a position once held by Isaac Newton. He is survived by his three children, Robert, Lucy and Timothy, children of his first marriage. Hawking’s second marriage, to Jane Hawking, ended in 2006, a subject of tabloid news stories.

He was known for a direct and dry wit, often combining the marvelous and mundane in his observations. “We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star,” he told Der Spiegel in 1989. “But we can understand the universe. That makes us something very special.”

Opinion-Hawking

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/14/some-people-angry-how-media-covering-stephen-hawking/423996002/>

Stephen Hawking, one of the greatest scientists of the modern age, [died this week at 76.](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/14/stephen-hawking-legendary-physicist-dies-76-family-says/423044002/) The pioneering astrophysicist spent his life changing the way we think about the universe, but some people say his obituaries show how much work remains in changing how we think about people with disabilities.

Social media users decried some coverage of Hawking's death as "ableist," a term to describe discrimination or prejudice against people who are disabled. Hawking, who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) when he was 21, used a wheelchair and communicated through a computerized voice system. While the media described his remarkable scientific achievements, many also fixated on his ALS, something advocates say perpetuates stereotypes about people living with disabilities.

"There are people who think he's a hero because he lived with this degenerative motor neuron disability. Well, no. The alternative to that was dying," said Colleen Kelly Starkloff, co-founder of the Starkloff Disability Institute, which works to change attitudes about people with disabilities. Starkloff and her late husband Max Starkloff, who was disabled, met Hawking at a White House reception in 1998. "He wanted to live. He wanted to make a contribution. He was a curious man, and he did a great deal to help us think differently about the universe. ... His pictures will draw attention to his disability. What should be focused on primarily was that this man was a genius and that he advanced physics in a way that most people have not."

Many stories about Hawking's death used phrases such as "overcame his disability," or "in spite of his disability," which Starkloff said have negative connotations. [As one Twitter user wrote,](https://twitter.com/CatalyticRxn/status/973923264702664710?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.yahoo.com%2Flifestyle%2Freactions-stephen-hawkings-death-slammed-ableist-heres-155031194.html&tfw_site=YahooLifestyle) "We really need to stop referring to disability and success/achievement as if they're somehow diametrically opposed."

People also took issue with cartoons depicting Hawking standing in heaven — a place he did not believe in — for implying he was now finally "free."

Hawking's accomplishments were extraordinary for anyone, able-bodied or not, and yet in a headline recapping his life Buzzfeed wrote "Stephen Hawking, Astrophysicist With A Paralyzing Disease, Dies At 76."

From the Washington Post's obit: "Stephen W. Hawking, the British theoretical physicist [who overcame a devastating neurological disease](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/stephen-hawking-physicist-who-came-to-symbolize-the-power-of-the-human-mind-dies-at-76/2018/03/14/d4298e14-273a-11e8-874b-d517e912f125_story.html?utm_term=.1649fbced18e) to probe the greatest mysteries of the cosmos and become a globally celebrated symbol of the power of the human mind, died March 14 at his home in Cambridge, England."

From CNN's obit: "Stephen Hawking, the brilliant British theoretical physicist [who overcame a debilitating disease to publish wildly popular books probing the mysteries of the universe,](https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/health/stephen-hawking-dead/index.html) has died, according to a family spokesman."

From USA TODAY's obit, which has since been corrected: ["Despite his physical ailments,](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/14/stephen-hawking-legendary-physicist-dies-76-family-says/423044002/) he was known for a direct and dry wit, often combining the marvelous and mundane in his observations."

Report-Gun control

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/14/congress-turns-school-safety-students-protest-inaction-gun-violence/422217002/>

WASHINGTON — As students across the country protested congressional inaction on gun violence, the House on Wednesday overwhelmingly passed legislation to help schools identify potential threats — hours after an FBI official told senators at a hearing about missed tips that pointed to the danger of the alleged Parkland, Fla. mass shooter.

A parent at that Senate Judiciary Committee hearing blamed those lapses and others for the Valentine’s Day massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

"The testament to their failure is 17 dead children and teachers, 17 more with life altering injuries, a burden we must bear forever," said Ryan Petty, whose daughter, Alaina Petty, was among the slain students.

But a language arts teacher who survived the attack pointed the finger at Congress, saying its inability to enact gun control legislation is allowing mass shootings to happen. Increased funding for mental health programs and school security will have positive effects, but "mass shootings will not stop until we rid society of the weapons that make them possible,” Katharine Posada told senators.

The Senate hearing focused on the government’s response to the shooting and legislative proposals to improve school safety as students from nearly 3,000 schools [staged National School Walkout events](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/14/thousands-students-across-u-s-walk-out-class-today-protest-gun-violence/420731002/) to urge lawmakers to do more to address gun violence.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said Congress must rally around "consensus, evidenced-based solutions" to protect young people from violent attacks.

But gun-control advocates say they expect more from Congress than additional school security. They are calling for an expansion of background checks, a ban on "assault weapons" and high-capacity magazines, and other measures.

"High school students who have lost their friends are literally begging us to take action," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, of California, the committee's ranking Democrat and one of the most vocal proponents of gun control.

Hundreds of students rallied outside the White House, calling out President Trump and the National Rifle Association with signs and chanting, “No more silence. End gun violence!”

Gun-control measures are unlikely to advance in the GOP-controlled Congress. The less controversial school safety bill that passed the House 407-10 does nothing to curb access to guns, but it marks Congress’s first legislative action in response to the Florida shooting.

The bill, which is backed by the NRA, would fund training for students, school personnel and law enforcement to detect early signs of violence. It would also fund threat assessments and “anonymous reporting systems” such as phone apps, hotlines and websites for threats of school violence.

"As we saw in Florida, students and families saw obvious red flags and warned authorities repeatedly about their concerns for the shooter’s mental health," said House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "At the same time, schools are currently open targets for would-be attackers."

Though the bill passed with bipartisan support, House Democrats on Wednesday complained that lawmakers are not doing enough to stop gun violence.

Opinion-Gun control

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/03/14/students-right-gun-control-and-republicans-wrong-dianne-feinstein-column/420144002/>

We’ve heard passionate pleas in recent weeks from students who survived a massacre and lost their friends and teachers. Through their pain, with Wednesday’s [National School Walkout](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2018/03/13/what-students-and-parents-should-know-before-national-school-walkout-march-14/415273002/) and in many other ways, this generation of students growing up with active-shooter drills is demanding that lawmakers take action to reform gun laws.

Unfortunately, there’s a lot of misleading information about reasonable measures to ensure gun safety, and it distracts from the fundamental issue at hand: the safety of our children, communities, schools and businesses.

One frequent refrain: “Criminals don't follow the law.” This is absurd on its face. By this logic, we shouldn’t criminalize murder, rape or kidnapping. Laws exist to deter crime, and when a crime is committed, laws are there to ensure punishment is meted out.

Banning assault weapons won’t prevent all shootings, but contrary to Republican talking points, we already know that banning these military-style weapons does reduce mass killings of six people or more. When the original ban was in place from 1994 to 2004, the number of [such massacres fell](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/02/15/its-time-to-bring-back-the-assault-weapons-ban-gun-violence-experts-say/?utm_term=.86f3d2431aa3) by 37% and the number of people dying from them fell by 43%. After the ban expired, the number of gun massacres killing six or more increased by 183% and the number of people dying from them increased by 239%.

Another canard: The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. Tell that to the 49 people killed in Orlando at the Pulse nightclub, where an [armed guard was on duty](https://www.factcheck.org/2016/06/orlando-club-had-armed-security/) and was unable to prevent the murders.

Another particularly terrible idea floated recently: arming teachers. How can we expect teachers, who already have too much on their plates, to undergo the same training as law enforcement officers and be able to confront killers armed with AR-15s?

The falsehood that is most frustrating, however, is that Democrats have no ideas to counter this violence. That couldn’t be further from the truth.

The first is getting military-style assault weapons such as the AR-15 off the streets.

These weapons [fire much faster](https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2018/02/15/are-mass-killers-weapons-florida-they-easier-buy-than-handgun/gJpujilGQUPcOD6NOeX3kJ/story.html) than typical hunting rifles. They fire rounds that are also [deadlier](https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2017/11/the-nature-of-the-ar-15/545414/) than those fired from a hunting rifle. A Parkland radiologist noted that an AR-15 round may leave an [exit wound](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/what-i-saw-treating-the-victims-from-parkland-should-change-the-debate-on-guns/553937/) “the size of an orange.” These weapons are designed to kill people, not animals.

Our current bill would ban [205 weapons](https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-co-sponsors-bill-to-ban-assault-weapons) by name, and any other weapons that accept a detachable magazine and have one [military characteristic](https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/assault-weapons-ban-summary). The 1994 ban required [two additional characteristics](http://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/hardware-ammunition/assault-weapons/), a loophole that gun manufacturers exploited. We'd close that loophole.

Importantly, the bill also bans high-capacity magazines that can hold more than 10 rounds. The shooter at the grade school in Newtown, Conn., for example, used [30-round magazines](http://nypost.com/2012/12/16/hundreds-of-bullets-multiple-30-round-magazines-found-at-newtown-school-evidence-shows-adam-lanza-may-have-prepared-for-larger-massacre/).

High-capacity magazines also lead to deadlier mass shootings. While law enforcement might be able to respond to mass shootings in a matter of minutes, a matter of minutes is all it takes to fire hundreds of rounds. In [Las Vegas](http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/11/23/las-vegas-massacre-gunman-fired-more-than-1100-rounds-sheriff-says.html), for example, the shooter fired 1,100 rounds in just 10 minutes — 110 rounds per minute.

Report-Haspel CIA

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/13/gina-haspel-trump-nominee-first-woman-leader-cia/419547002/>

Gina Haspel, President Trump’s nominee to become the first woman to lead the Central Intelligence Agency, made her career in covert action, but her involvement in controversial interrogations has already provoked Senate opposition to her confirmation.

Haspel, who joined the CIA in 1985, earned high-level awards during her career. She was sworn in early last year as deputy director and helps manage intelligence collection, analysis, covert action and counterintelligence.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said he would move to quickly confirm Haspel. "She has the right skill set, experience and judgment to lead one of our nation’s most critical agencies," he said.

Haspel's past in the agency drew opposition to a potential promotion. Shortly after she became deputy director, senators raised questions about Haspel drafting a cable that called for the destruction of taped CIA interrogations in 2002 at a secret prison in Thailand.

Christopher Anders, deputy director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Washington legislative office, called Haspel the “central figure in one of the most illegal and shameful chapters in modern American history.”

“She was up to her eyeballs in torture, both in running a secret torture prison in Thailand and carrying out an order to cover up torture crimes by destroying videotapes,” Anders said. “One man held at the secret prison she ran was waterboarded 83 times, slammed against walls, sleep-deprived and locked in a coffin-like box. After she was promoted to a position back at CIA headquarters, she worked to destroy evidence of the torture crimes committed at the prison she ran.”

Trump said in a statement that Haspel’s appointment would be “a historic milestone.” Haspel and Pompeo “have worked together for more than a year and have developed a great mutual respect," he said.

Haspel said that after 30 years at the CIA, she was honored to serve with Pompeo during the past year. “If confirmed, I look forward to providing President Trump the outstanding intelligence support he has grown to expect,” she said.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., called Haspel “an excellent choice” and a “true professional.”

John Brennan, a former CIA director, told MSNBC the "very controversial" interrogation program Haspel was connected with was approved by President George W. Bush and deemed lawful by the Justice Department.

“Gina Haspel has a lot of integrity,” Brennan said. “She has tried to carry out her duties at CIA to the best of her ability, even when the CIA was asked to do some very difficult things in very challenging times.”

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who was tortured as a prisoner during the Vietnam War, said the Senate would need the same commitment from Haspel as Pompeo gave to comply with the Army Field Manual’s rules for interrogation. He called the decision to waterboard prisoners after the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, “dangerously misguided” and said the techniques are clearly banned now.

“The torture of detainees in U.S. custody during the last decade was one of the darkest chapters in American history,” McCain said. “Ms. Haspel needs to explain the nature and extent of her involvement in the CIA’s interrogation program during the confirmation process.”

Opinion-Haspel CIA

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/03/14/gina-haspel-nomination-welcome-u-s-where-torture-rocket-fuel-your-career-jonathan-turley-column/423619002/>

The [firing of Rex Tillerson](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/13/secretary-state-rex-tillerson-ousted-favor-cia-chief-trump-announces/419363002/) occupied much of the news yesterday as shocked anchors recounted how the Secretary of State was effectively dispatched by a single Trump tweet. The shock, however, should not be over Twitter but torture. Once CIA Director Mike Pompeo replaces Tillerson, President Donald Trump wants Pompeo's second in command to take over the CIA: Deputy Director [Gina Haspel](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/03/13/gina-haspel-trump-nominee-first-woman-leader-cia/419547002/).

Most people have no idea who Haspel is. She is, however, well-known to human rights advocates and civil libertarians around the world. Haspel was not simply a key figure in the torture program run by the Bush administration, she headed one of the infamous foreign black sites and was accused of knowingly destroying evidence of the torture carried out on her watch.

After years of Congress and former Bush officials denouncing the torture program, the confirmation of Haspel would reaffirm that torture as not simply acceptable but a potential path to promotion in the United States. Trump has declared the possible confirmation of the agency’s first female director as a “historic milestone.” Given her role in the torture program, however, Haspel’s confirmation would be equally historic and one milestone we would be wise to avoid.

The [torture program](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/10/washington/10detain.html) approved by former president George W. Bush on Sept. 17, 2001, represented one of the most infamous moments in our history. The Justice Department memo used to justify the program was ultimately [denounced by the Justice Department](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/10/08/the-torture-memos-the-case-against-the-lawyers/)as [seriously flawed](http://www.newsweek.com/torture-report-could-be-trouble-bush-lawyers-82707) and withdrawn. The program was ultimately closed as both Republicans and Democrats belatedly lined up to pledge to [block any such program](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/jun/16/senate-passes-torture-ban-republicans) in the future. On Dec. 30, 2005, the [Detainee Treatment Act](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/28/AR2006092800824.html) was passed to reaffirm the long-established fact that [waterboarding is torture](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/RL33655.pdf) and torture is a violation of not just [international law](https://www.hrw.org/news/2003/03/11/legal-prohibition-against-torture) but United States law.

The shocking accounts of the U.S. torture program destroyed the credibility of the United States and emboldened our enemies in China and other countries in their own use of torture. Among these shocking accounts, however, one CIA officer and one case stood out: Haspel and the torture of Abu Zubayda. Zubayda was the subject of one of the CIA’s “[extraordinary rendition programs](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/us/politics/cia-deputy-director-gina-haspel-torture-thailand.html)” where suspects were taken to foreign locations were they were tortured. Haspel was the “Chief of Base” at the Thai torture site known as CIA’s “[Cat’s Eye](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-haspel/trumps-pick-for-new-cia-chief-dogged-by-secret-prisons-idUSKCN1GP2C1).”

Zubayda was waterboarded 83 times in one month. He was denied sleep, forced into a small [coffin-like box](https://www.propublica.org/article/cia-cables-detail-its-new-deputy-directors-role-in-torture) for long periods of time and physically abused, including having his head slammed into walls. The CIA reportedly got nothing from the torture but each session was carefully detailed by Haspel.

Accounts of the torture sessions describe “fluid intake and involuntary leg, chest and arm spasms" and "[hysterical pleas](https://books.google.com/books?id=KImICwAAQBAJ&pg=PT51&lpg=PT51&dq=%22fluid+intake+and+involuntary+leg,+chest+and+arm+spasms%22&source=bl&ots=MgUXKQ5imH&sig=QWnqXm34wWQIOICk0oUxBcg6NXM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj9gOCekuzZAhUhw4MKHbDSDFYQ6AEILjAC#v=onepage&q=%22fluid%20intake%20and%20involuntary%20leg%2C%20chest%20and%20arm%20spasms%22&f=false)." Zubaydah "became completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth." None of that mattered even when Zubaydah could no longer communicate and lost consciousness. There was only one person who could stop the sessions: chief of base Haspel ... and she didn’t.

Report-Kudlow

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/14/trump-name-cnbc-host-larry-kudlow-economic-adviser/424773002/>

WASHINGTON — President Trump tapped CNBC commentator Larry Kudlow on Wednesday to head his National Economic Council, the post [vacated when Gary Cohn resigned because of his opposition to the president’s steel tariffs](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/06/gary-cohn-trumps-top-economic-adviser-reportedly-leave-white-house-tariff-tiff/401272002/).

Kudlow has also been a staunch opponent of trade barriers. But Trump's appointment of his longtime friend and loyalist may say more about Kudlow's evolving views than Trump's.

"If it comes to that, I would be in favor targeted tariff and tax increases on China until they play ball and come to the table with us," Kudlow told CNBC Wednesday. "I've known the president a long time. We have a mutual admiration society. He is the president. He has a different role, and I will abide by that."

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders confirmed the move after it was [first reported by Kudlow's network](https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/14/trump-to-name-larry-kudlow-as-gary-cohn-replacement.html). She said the timing of the appointment hadn't been determined.

Trump had signaled Kudlow was the leading contender on Tuesday, saying he and Kudlow had come to an understanding on tariffs.

"He now has come around to believing in tariffs as also a negotiating point. I'm renegotiating trade deals and without tariffs we wouldn't do nearly as well," Trump said Tuesday.

One of the first economists to back his 2016 campaign for president, Kudlow served as an informal economic adviser to the campaign.

Kudlow, 70, worked in the Reagan administration as associate director for economics and planning at the Office of Management and Budget. As director of Trump's National Economics Council, he would likely be the president's most visible voice on issues of jobs, taxes and trade.

Before joining the business news cable channel CNBC, Kudlow was chief economist at investment bank Bear Stearns & Co.

In 1994, Kudlow [publicly acknowledged to The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/03/business/a-wall-st-star-s-agonizing-confession.html)that he had developed an addiction to drugs and alcohol at Bear Stearns, but that he had undergone 15 months of treatment at that point to kick the habits.

In a tearful interview on CNBC, Kudlow thanked the network, which he said "gave me a second chance after my crash and burn."

"I love this place. I'm honored to take this position. It's an enormous honor. My life has had twists and turns, as people know," he said. "With God's grace I'll have 23 years clean and sober in a few months. That made it all possible."

Kudlow's official title will be assistant to the president for economic policy and director of the National Economic Council. The post does not require Senate confirmation.

Opinion-Kudlow

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/03/14/larry-kudlow-economics-appointment-makes-sense-steve-forbes-column/425691002/>

When we see the initials GOP, we think of the Republican nickname — Grand Old Party. With Larry Kudlow’s appointment as the new director of the National Economic Council, those initials might soon become an acronym for Growth, Opportunity, and Prosperity.

Since his days working in Ronald Reagan’s budget office, Kudlow has been the happy warrior fighting for policies that would enable all of us to have better lives. He played an indispensable role in devising the 40th president’s economic revival program of promoting tax cuts, battling inflation, cutting regulations and reducing trade barriers. Not for him the pessimism of those who think we’re headed for long-term stagnation and or the defeatist thinking of those who believe we must go through austerity and grim times before we can ever prosper again.

Tax Cuts. Unlike all too many economists, Kudlow knows that taxes impose a financial burden on labor. They create a disincentive to hard work and risk-taking that is so critical to achieving success. Lower that burden through reductions in tax rates and we get more prosperity. Larry co-authored a book — JFK and the Reagan Revolution: A Secret History of American Prosperity — that chronicles how President John Kennedy’s historic, growth-igniting tax cuts came into being. The result was one of history’s greatest economic booms.

We saw the same economic miracle materialize as a result of Ronald Reagan’s tax cuts — tax cuts that Kudlow was instrumental in formulating and implementing.

Last year, Kudlow had another crucial hand in making tax cuts a reality — this time advocating President Donald Trump's cuts. The historic bill that the president signed in December already is ginning up the kind of positive economic activity we haven’t seen in a generation.

Critics carp that that these tax reductions — and Kudlow will be pushing hard to help make a reality President Trump’s stated desire for more cuts — are bad because they mean more budgetary red ink. Short-term, of course they do: new investments rarely bear fruit overnight! But Kudlow knows — and history shows he’s right — that the only way we get some sanity in Washington’s finances is when the economy is booming.

Cutting unnecessary regulations. The cost to the US economy from rules and regulations comes to some $2 trillion. The president has made more progress in reducing these burdens than any other president in his first year in office. Kudlow will work hard to do more of the same.

Technology. Closely related to the subject of deregulation is making sure government doesn’t hobble the development of exciting new technologies. One example is the deployment of next generation 5G broadband. This is a technology that has the potential to make possible billions upon billions of dollars in new economic activity. Nearly all of the investment will be made by the private sector, but government help is needed to clear red tape and minimize state and local regulatory roadblocks for the sake of national economic progress. Kudlow will be an advocate for just that policy.

Report-Tillerson

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/13/secretary-state-rex-tillerson-ousted-favor-cia-chief-trump-announces/419363002/>

WASHINGTON – After months of disputes with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, President Trump removed him Tuesday and nominated CIA Director Mike Pompeo to head the State Department.

White House officials said a Tillerson aide was also fired for giving reporters differing accounts of how the secretary of State learned of his fate. The two officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the move.

The officials said they are bracing for more staff changes, citing Trump's comment Tuesday as he prepared to fly to California: "I'm really at a point where we're getting very close to having the Cabinet and other things that I want."

Tillerson, who said Trump called him hours after he tweeted an announcement about Pompeo's nomination, said his last day would be March 31, and he pledged an "orderly and smooth transition."

Trump said he made the decision on Tillerson, citing disagreements with the secretary of State that included North Korea diplomacy, steel and aluminum tariffs and the Iran nuclear agreement.

"I think Rex will be much happier now," Trump said.

Tillerson, whose voice cracked at times during a brief statement at the State Department, did not take questions.

Steve Goldstein, the Tillerson aide who was fired, said Tillerson wanted to stay as secretary of State.

As for Pompeo, Trump praised his new nominee's "tremendous energy, tremendous intellect" and said, "We’re always on the same wavelength. The relationship has been very good, and that’s what I need as secretary of State."

Trump said in a written statement that at the State Department, Pompeo "will continue our program of restoring America’s standing in the world, strengthening our alliances, confronting our adversaries, and seeking the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Before his departure to California, Trump said he got along with Tillerson, but they disagreed on things. Trump cited the Iran nuclear deal in particular: "I think it's terrible. I guess he feels it was OK." He complimented Tillerson for "his commitment and his service, and I wish him well. He’s a good man.”

Goldstein, undersecretary for public diplomacy, said Tillerson "did not speak to the president and is unaware of the reason" for the decision.

"The secretary had every intention of staying because of the critical progress made in national security," Goldstein said. "He will miss his colleagues at the Department of State and the foreign ministers he has worked with throughout the world."

Hours later, Goldstein was fired.

The two anonymous White House officials said chief of staff John Kelly spoke with Tillerson on Friday and Saturday about the change.

“It was clear on Friday,” one of the officials said.

The State Department said Tillerson did not speak to Trump — something White House officials confirmed — and the secretary didn't know about the final decision until the tweet.

Opinion-Tillerson

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/03/13/rexit-right-move-wrong-reason-editorials-debates/419903002/>

President Trump's tacky dismissal of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday was the right decision, if almost certainly for the wrong reasons and announced in the wrong way (by tweet).

Tillerson, a lifelong oilman who had risen to chief executive of behemoth ExxonMobil, was an unorthodox choice last year to become America's chief diplomat, and he never quite rose to the challenge.

He earned his departure, effective March 31, because the State Department under his leadership was hollowed-out and demoralized as diplomatic crises burned in hot spots around the world.

Preoccupied with reorganizing the sprawling agency, Tillerson acquiesced to large budget cuts that Congress mostly and properly ignored. Failure to fill crucial positions left [seven of nine administrative posts empty](https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-state-department-vacancies/), a [60% vacancy rate](http://afsa-nfe2015.informz.net/informzdataservice/onlineversion/ind/bWFpbGluZ2luc3RhbmNlaWQ9NzEwMTE2MyZzdWJzY3JpYmVyaWQ9MTA4MzgxMjY1MA) among top-tier career diplomats and a free fall in new applications.

One crucial example of the brain drain: Just as Trump agreed to ascend the Everest of negotiations — a face-to-face meeting with North Korea's Kim Jong Un — there is [no U.S.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/?utm_term=.b5268f5578a4) ambassador to South Korea, assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, or undersecretary of State for arms control and international security. And, oh yes, the chief U.S. envoy to North Korea just retired abruptly.

There's no evidence, however, that Tillerson was fired for his management failures. Rather, it was his frequent clashes with Trump on issues where Tillerson's pragmatic instincts were right, among them sticking with the Paris climate agreement and upholding the Iran nuclear deal. "We disagreed on things," Trump told reporters after the firing.

Tillerson, who barely mentioned Trump in Tuesday's remarks at the State Department, never clicked with his impulsive boss and never recovered from the leaked comment that he had called Trump a "moron."

Trump, complaining to underlings that Tillerson's views were "totally establishment," too often left his secretary of State looking foolish. The president once tweeted that [Tillerson's bid to negotiate with Pyongyang](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/914497877543735296?lang=en) was a waste of time — then months later surprised him by agreeing to direct talks with Kim. The result was that foreign governments were never sure that America's chief diplomat spoke for America, or even the White House — an unsustainable situation.

Trump's pick to succeed Tillerson, the more hawkish CIA Director Mike Pompeo, enjoys much better rapport with Trump. The choice was long rumored. But at his upcoming confirmation hearings, Pompeo, who has little diplomatic experience, deserves close scrutiny by the Senate for his controversial views on topics ranging from torture to the Russian investigation.

In addition, Pompeo should be asked about his strange decision, apparently at Trump's urging last year, to [meet with a conspiracy theorist](https://theintercept.com/2017/11/07/dnc-hack-trump-cia-director-william-binney-nsa/) who argues that the theft of Democratic emails was an inside job rather than Russian malfeasance. Although personal chemistry is important, Trump and the nation would be ill-served by installation of a yes man in such a sensitive post.

The coming change offers an opportunity for a reset at State — and the risk of a Trump foreign policy going even further off the rails.

Report-Stormy

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stromy-daniels-incidents-during-trump-presidency_us_5aaca879e4b0337adf83eb6a>

An attorney for Stephanie Clifford ― the adult film star who goes by the name [Stormy Daniels](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/stormy-daniels) and has alleged President Donald Trump’s lawyer paid her to stay silent about an affair with Trump ― said Friday that at least one element of his client’s allegations against the president has occurred since his inauguration.

CNN’s Jake Tapper asked attorney Michael Avenatti: “Is there anything in the litany of accusations — you would call them facts — that surround this case that happened while Donald Trump was president?”

“Yes,” Avenatti responded, but he declined to elaborate.

When Tapper asked Avenatti why people should care about an alleged sexual relationship between Trump and Daniels from many years ago, the attorney answered: “It’s all about the cover-up.”

Avenatti repeated an earlier charge that Daniels had been [physically threatened to keep quiet](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stormy-daniels-physically-threatened_us_5aabaf83e4b0c33361afaa17) about her alleged affair with Trump. He also encouraged viewers to watch “60 Minutes” on March 25, when an interview with Daniels is scheduled to air.

“I think that when the American people hear from my client, who will provide details — very specific details related to this threat — they will conclude, as I have, that this was not a random threat by some wing nut ... out of the blue,” he said.

Daniels has filed a lawsuit to [nullify her agreement](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stormy-daniels-sue-trump_us_5a9f3867e4b002df2c5ea659) to keep quiet about her alleged relationship with Trump, and the president and his personal attorney are attempting to get it transferred to federal court. They also claim they can [sue her for $20 million](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-lawyers-move-stormy-daniel-suit-to-federal-court_us_5aac5ac1e4b0c33361b0871b) for violating the secrecy agreement, for which she was paid $130,000.

Check out the rest of Avenatti’s interview above. His comments about what might have occurred during Trump’s presidency come at the end around the 8:30 mark.

Opinion-Stormy

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-mastromonaco-trump-blackmail_us_5aa1ab97e4b01b9b0a398ad4>

When you want to work in the White House, it’s important to tell the truth.

I don’t mean that from an ethical perspective, though of course it’s important to tell the truth for the good of society, too. I’m talking about practicality. As the frenzied untangling of the Trump administration’s histories shows, when you work in the White House, telling the truth can save you a lot of hassle, and the rest of the country a lot of worry. Working as Barack Obama’s director of scheduling and advance in the weeks before the 2008 presidential election, I learned this through what I thought at the time was the hard way: by doing it.

I’ve [written before](https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/kzew39/how-my-love-of-weed-could-have-lost-me-my-job-at-the-white-house) about my struggles with the SF86, the extensive form you must fill out if you need national security clearance. The form is the starting point for the FBI’s interviews and background checks, which they use to evaluate a person’s fitness to serve in high-stakes positions. It’s no joke. Though my SF86-related panic attacks had mainly to do with my lifelong love of marijuana, these interviews are about a lot more than having done a bump of coke in a club in college.

Even the most junior potential staffers are expected to spill the details of everything they did since the age of 18 — where they lived, their landlords, the contact information for their French cousins they visit every summer. My dorm at the University of Wisconsin had been torn down; to complete the form, I had to show the FBI on Google Earth where it had been and give contact information for people who could validate it had existed. I had to call my boss at a job I had when I was 26 and which I quit, badly, on the day they gave me my bonus. I had to ask if I could provide his phone number, email and address to the FBI. If part of your family lives in a remote village in Siberia, chances are you won’t get your final clearance until the FBI has talked to them.

I mention the nitty-gritty, behind-the-scenes things we had to deal with not to be a martyr or because any of us felt the intensity of the questioning was unfair or inappropriate. I tell you this because it was a job to complete this form, and it was a job we all — senior advisers and junior assistants alike — took seriously. We knew that the security of the United States could be compromised if we screwed up the SF86. That was far more important than saving ourselves from an awkward conversation with an FBI agent; mine was about whether it was accurate to say I’d smoked weed “more than 500 times” in my life.

Now, imagine we’re not talking about staffers. Imagine we’re talking about the president. Actually, never mind. No need to imagine. We are talking about the president. With every passing news cycle, the current administration is learning this lesson, about the importance of telling the truth, an even harder way. The total failure to follow protocol, to tell the truth about staffers’ backgrounds, is biting them in the ass.

Report-Flint

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/supreme-court-flint-contamination_us_5aafed2ce4b00549ac7df0b6>

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday gave the green light to two class-action lawsuits filed by residents of Flint, Michigan who are pursuing civil rights claims against local and state officials over lead contamination in the city’s water supply.

The justices left in place a July 2017 ruling by the Cincinnati, Ohio-based 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that revived the litigation after the lawsuits were thrown out by a lower court.

The high court rejected separate appeals filed by the city of Flint, Genesee County’s drainage commissioner and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality officials.

The 6th Circuit decided that the civil rights claims brought by the plaintiffs under federal law could proceed, ruling they were not precluded by a statute that sets the standards for drinking water, the Safe Drinking Water Act. That law has its own provisions for people to file suit over unsafe water, although they cannot seek monetary damages like those available under civil rights law.

Flint, a predominantly black city, switched its public water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River in a cost-cutting move in April 2014. The polluted river water caused lead to leach from pipes. Lead poisoning stunts children’s cognitive development. No level of exposure is considered safe.

The city switched back to Lake Huron water in October 2015, but lead levels remained above federal standards until early 2017.

The crisis prompted several lawsuits against the city, state, Republican Governor Rick Snyder and several individual city and state officials. Two of those suits were the subject of the Supreme Court appeals.

In one, Melissa Mays and several other Flint-based parents sued in November 2015 on behalf of themselves and their children. In the other, Flint residents Beatrice Boler, Edwin Anderson and others sued in January 2016 on behalf of Flint residents and businesses.

Julie Hurwitz and Bill Goodman, lawyers representing Mays, praised Monday’s action by the justices, saying in a statement that it “signals that the State of Michigan and all of its cronies are reaching the end of the line in their ongoing efforts to avoid being held accountable.”

Opinion-Flint

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-lewis-flint-needs-help_us_5aa7b857e4b087e5aaedb962>

With the news cycle in hyperdrive ever since the inauguration of President [Donald Trump](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/donald-trump) (and even before that), it feels as though most Americans have forgotten about one of the most horrifying examples of government malfeasance and environmental racism in recent memory: the Flint Water Crisis.

It was heartening to see the Michigan city get some attention as a result of Will and Jaden Smith’s [eco-friendly water company](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/will-jaden-smith-flint-michigan-water_us_5a9ea76ce4b0a0ba4ad7dac5), which has vowed to donate water to the beleaguered, majority-black city. But it reminded me that what happened in Flint, an hour north of my hometown of Detroit, has largely faded from the public eye. I have friends in Flint, many of whom are still wary of drinking the tap water, even with the [free filters](http://michiganradio.org/post/experts-caution-flint-residents-whole-house-water-filters-have-downside) provided by the state. When the cameras and celebrities left, thousands of poor, now-poisoned Flint residents, including infants and children, remained. And we’ve all but abandoned them.

On April 25, 2014, Flint officials made the cost-cutting decision to switch the city’s main water supply from the Detroit system to the Flint River. Initially an effort to save [$5 million](http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2015/01/flints_dilemma_how_much_to_spe.html), the decision proved to be more costly than they thought. And shortly after the switch, residents started to complain about discoloration in the water, a taste of “[urine](https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/09/30/flint-water-woes-seep-city-state-politics/73129478/)” and an [odd smell](https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21688922-how-michigans-state-government-endangered-people-flint-flinty-taste). Rashes and hair loss were also a [common complaint](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/23/flint-lead-tainted-water-crisis-skin-rashes-hair-loss-michigan).

The river water was dangerously corrosive to the city’s pipes, so much so that a General Motors plant stopped using it because it was [eroding car parts](http://www.autonews.com/article/20160131/OEM01/302019964/how-gm-saved-itself-from-flint-water-crisis). Over a year later, researchers found [evidence of dangerously high levels of lead](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/water-crisis-in-flint-michigan-declared-public-health-emergency/) in the water, which finally prompted the city to take action.

While we won’t see the long-term health effects on a city filled with lead-poisoned individuals for another 10 or 20 years, some side-effects of the contaminated water have already occurred. An outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease caused by the water crisis has killed a [dozen people](http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2017/02/cdc_finds_first_genetic_link_b.html). A study discovered a ”[horrifyingly large](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/21/flints-lead-poisoned-water-had-a-horrifyingly-large-effect-on-fetal-deaths-study-finds/?utm_term=.68bdb215c4dd)″ increase in fetal deaths and miscarriages in Flint in recent years.

Flint is one of Michigan’s [poorest and blackest cities](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racist-roots-of-flints-water-crisis_us_56b12953e4b04f9b57d7b118). People of color represent [57 percent](https://www.vox.com/2016/2/15/10991626/flint-water-crisis) of the population and were the primary victims of a system that failed them.

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission said in a report that officials whose decisions caused the crisis ― as well as those who reacted slowly to it ― may not have been racist, but that systemic racism was the real culprit. The report [asked](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcr/VFlintCrisisRep-F-Edited3-13-17_554317_7.pdf) if the Flint water crisis would have been allowed to happen in affluent, largely white Michigan communities, such as Ann Arbor or Bloomfield Hills.

Report-China

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trade-groups-china-tariffs_us_5aaf6548e4b0c33361b1ee68>

Forty-five U.S. trade associations representing some of the largest companies in the country are urging President Donald Trump not to impose tariffs on China, warning it would be “particularly harmful” to the U.S. economy and consumers.

The organizations said in a letter sent to Trump on Sunday that potential tariffs on China would raise prices on consumer goods, kill jobs and drive down financial markets.

The letter marks the latest in a growing rift between Trump and the business community on trade policies, as the president has begun to take more aggressive steps he says are needed to protect domestic industry.

“We urge the administration not to impose tariffs and to work with the business community to find an effective, but measured, solution to China’s protectionist trade policies and practices that protects American jobs and competitiveness,” the groups wrote.

“Tariffs would be particularly harmful,” they said.

The groups called on Trump to work with trade allies to push for changes to China’s policies. The business groups said while they had serious concerns about China’s approach to trade, unilateral tariffs by the United States would only separate the country from allies, and encourage them to replace the U.S. business presence in China when Beijing retaliates.

Trade associations publicly pushing back include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Retail Federation and the Information Technology Industry Council.

The Trump administration is said to be preparing tariffs against Chinese information technology, telecoms and consumer products in an attempt to force changes in Beijing’s intellectual property and investment practices.

The Republican president recently announced plans to impose tariffs on certain steel and aluminum imports, despite opposition from some business sectors.

The groups also called on Trump to allow industry experts to comment on the economic impact of any changes in trade policy before the measures take effect.

“We urge the administration to take measured, commercially meaningful actions consistent with international obligations that benefit U.S. exporters, importers, and investors, rather than penalize the American consumer and jeopardize recent gains in American competitiveness,” they said.

Opinion-China

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-kuttner-trump-korea_us_5aa66e65e4b086698a9f96b7>

To his most ardent supporters, [Donald Trump](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/donald-trump) is a kind of genius whose intuition takes him into policy realms where lesser leaders fear to tread. He takes willful pleasure in not reading briefing books or checking with experts, but in trusting his ample gut.

Exhibits A and B, which dominated the news last week, were his declaration of tariffs on aluminum and steel ― to the horror of every orthodox economist, and the joy of his base ― and his even more abrupt decision to accept the invitation of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for a face-to-face meeting.

Might either of these impulsive decisions produce policy breakthroughs, proving the conventional view of both substance and process wrong? Don’t bet on it.

Take the case of Korea first.

Going back to the Clinton administration, the North Koreans have repeatedly tried to pull the United States into a process that would trade some kind of limits on their nuclear program for security guarantees and the lifting of economic sanctions. But after more than three decades of false starts under three generations of Kims, starting with the current leader’s grandfather Kim Il Sung in 1994, North Korea’s program of intercontinental missiles and nuclear weapons has only moved relentlessly forward. Given the logic of mutually assured destruction, Washington has lost leverage over Pyongyang with every passing year.

The diplomacy is even more complicated now, because a left-of-center president governs in South Korea. To the consternation of the U.S., which has wanted to keep North Korea isolated, South Korean President Moon Jae-in has made multiple overtures to the North to move toward more normal relations. It was a South Korean emissary who passed on Kim’s [invitation to meet with Trump](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/north-korea-says-it-s-willing-talk-u-s-halt-n853941), which Trump impulsively accepted. The same emissary said Kim has already agreed to temporarily suspend nuclear and missile testing as a gesture while talks are ongoing.

What sort of agreement could conceivably result? Ironically, a rough model is the deal with Iran, a bargain negotiated by Barack Obama that Trump scorns and regularly threatens to upend.

North Korea would have to promise to freeze or roll back its nuclear program. In exchange, the U.S. would lift sanctions and maybe even pull some troops from the peninsula. There would be more normalization of relations between South and North, and the whole deal would be guaranteed by the great powers, including China.

Report-Devos

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/devos-i-dont-know-whether-sexual-assaults-outnumber-false-accusations_us_5aa67531e4b086698a9f9fa4>

Education Secretary [Betsy DeVos](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/betsy-devos), who has said she’s rolling back campus sexual assault guidelines to protect the rights of the accused, wouldn’t say whether she thought false accusations outnumber actual sex crimes in a [“60 Minutes” interview](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/secretary-of-education-betsy-devos-on-guns-school-choice-and-why-people-dont-like-her/) broadcast Sunday.

“Are you ... suggesting that the number of false accusations are as high as the number of actual rapes or assaults?” host [Lesley Stahl](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/lesley-stahl) asked during the 13-minute interview.

DeVos first attempted to dodge the question, telling Stahl that “one sexual assault is one too many, and one falsely accused individual is one too many.” When Stahl repeated the question, DeVos became flustered.

“I don’t know. I don’t know,” DeVos answered. “But I’m committed to a process that’s fair for everyone involved.”

The Education Department did not immediately return HuffPost’s request for comment.

DeVos has been widely criticized for [rescinding](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/09/22/devos-withdraws-obama-era-guidance-on-campus-sexual-assault-read-the-letter/?utm_term=.b4dad93bde5f)an Obama-era Title IX guideline called “[The Dear Colleague Letter.](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf)” The 2011 letter was a comprehensive set of guidelines that clarifies schools’ responsibilities under the gender-equality law. It also serves as a tool for victims and those accused throughout the reporting process.

The education secretary [came under fire last summer](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/118-sexual-assault-survivors-write-letter-asking-trump-who-are-you-here-to-serve_us_59650307e4b005b0fdc8bcc6) when she met people “wrongly accused” of sex crimes in group discussions of campus sexual assault. One group she met with [mainly consisted of members](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/118-sexual-assault-survivors-write-letter-asking-trump-who-are-you-here-to-serve_us_59650307e4b005b0fdc8bcc6) of the National Coalition for Men, which a [survivor advocate described](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/118-sexual-assault-survivors-write-letter-asking-trump-who-are-you-here-to-serve_us_59650307e4b005b0fdc8bcc6) as “viciously and very intentionally harass[ing] rape survivors.”

During a [September 2017 speech](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/betsy-devos-announces-she-plans-to-roll-back-title-ix-guidelines_us_59b14e36e4b0dfaafcf5dfeb?i6j) at George Mason University Law School, DeVos called the current campus reporting process a “failed system” that is “increasingly elaborate and confusing.” She dedicated nearly half of her 20-minute speech to anecdotes about people wrongfully accused of assault.

Opinion-Devos

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-hopkinson-school-choice_us_5aa2cd35e4b01b9b0a3b2133>

It’s March, which means it’s “choice” season for a lot families living in urban areas. Like many households, mine is on pins and needles waiting to learn where our teenage daughter has been accepted to high school.

She has taken three different standardized tests to be considered for admission at various public, Catholic and independent schools. She tried to convince us to hire a tutor, as some of her peers’ parents have, to give her advantage on these tests. We refused, because it seemed a bit much for eighth grade. Her father and I have spent hours crafting essays and filling out applications. We played in the local lottery to attend schools across town. We have taken off work to take her to visit school after school, where she has arrived, nervous in starched shirts, legs carefully crossed, to implore administrators to accept her. She is 14.

We have done all of this so we can avoid our struggling neighborhood school.

This system of school choice has powerful backers. The most influential is Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, the billionaire heiress whose proposed budget would [pump hundreds of millions of dollars](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2018/02/12/446423/trump-devos-continue-undermine-public-education-proposed-fiscal-year-2019-budget/) into the various privatizations schemes such as vouchers and charters that power this system of “choice.”

Washington, D.C., where I live, recently lost yet another city schools chancellor when it was revealed he had jumped the line to choose a school for his own daughter. Antwan Wilson [resigned for violating a policy](https://wamu.org/story/18/02/20/d-c-schools-chancellor-antwan-wilson-school-transfer-scandal/) that he had authored, a policy that was supposed to stop well-connected parents and officials from gaming the system to win their kids spots at top schools. Wilson apologized, explaining that he got “tunnel vision” in trying to make the best choice he could for his own child.

He’s wrong about this. The tunnel is the feature, not the bug, of school choice. It is the same dark tunnel into which DeVos herself gazed, when she [dodged Michigan state taxes](http://www.eclectablog.com/2016/11/dick-and-betsy-devos-avoided-paying-school-taxes-on-summer-home.html) for public schools that her own children might have attended if not for her fortune. Radical self-interest and self-preservation is the rotten, racist core of the whole ideology of school choice. There is no “we” in this: The entire point is to give individual kids an advantage. In putting his daughter above everyone else, Wilson used the school choice system precisely as it’s designed to operate.

This vision must change, both from the top down and from the bottom up. Families and taxpayers have swallowed the line that a privatized school “marketplace” will deliver on its promise of upward mobility for all. It is a cynical game that has done nothing to build up communities like mine, despite all promises to the contrary.

[There was a time when education](https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/historical-timeline-public-education-us) was not a public matter at all. In the early 19th century, wealthy families ― the DeVoses of the day ― hired their own tutors. Churches set up some private schools. Philanthropists like Sears executive Julian Rosenwald [sponsored schools](http://cct.org/2015/09/5000-schools-for-black-students-rise-across-the-south-in-rosenwald/) for some black children. The rest of America’s poor children, of all races, mostly worked to support their families and did not go to school. This changed after the Civil War, when reformers convinced the federal government to take over schools previously funded through private philanthropy, thus laying the groundwork for a universal right to education for all American children.

Report-Climate

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/fema-climate-change-strategic-plan_us_5aac2484e4b0c33361b06283>

The government agency tasked with guiding relief and recovery efforts after catastrophic natural disasters has decided not to take climate change into account as it plans ahead for the future.

On Thursday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency released its 2018-2022 “[Strategic Plan](https://www.fema.gov/strategic-plan),” a document it describes as setting FEMA’s “overall vision” with the aim of readying the nation for catastrophic disasters.

While it concedes disasters will become more devastating and more costly in the next five years, FEMA has stripped all mention of climate change from the 38-page document, despite it being a significant cause of exactly the type of damaging storms they’re preparing for.

Instead of acknowledging the risks posed by climate change, FEMA said “rising natural hazard risk, decaying critical infrastructure, and economic pressures that limit investments in risk resilience” are primarily to blame.

Weather and climate-related disasters [cost the U.S. $306 billion](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-climatechange/weather-disasters-cost-u-s-record-306-billion-in-2017-noaa-idUSKBN1EX1XC) in 2017, making it the costliest, most damaging year on record. That figure ― and the damage behind it ― will increase as the temperature rises.

“Natural disasters have caused a record-setting amount of damage in the U.S.,” said Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) in response to the 2017 figures when they were released in January. “There’s no denying that climate change will cost the U.S. trillions more in the next decade and that we have a financial and national security reason to act.”

FEMA Public Affairs director William Booher defended the puzzling exclusion in an [email to NPR](https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/15/594140026/fema-drops-climate-change-from-its-strategic-plan), emphasizing the agency focuses less on causes and more on mitigating their effects.

“It is evident that this strategic plan fully incorporates future risks from all hazards regardless of cause,” Booher wrote. “Building upon the foundation established by FEMA’s previous two Strategic Plans, this plan commits the agency, and the nation, to taking proactive steps to increasing pre-disaster investments in preparedness and mitigation.”

In contrast, FEMA’s [2014-2018 Strategic Plan](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1405716454795-3abe60aec989ecce518c4cdba67722b8/July18FEMAStratPlanDigital508HiResFINALh.pdf) named climate change as a prime contributor to increasing disaster risk ― and it urged we take action.

“Scientific evidence indicates that the climate is changing and significant economic, social, and environmental consequences can be expected as a result,” the previous document warned. “A changing climate is already resulting in quantifiable changes to the risks communities face, showing that future risks are not the same as those faced in the past. The emergency management community will need to adapt appropriately to these changing risks as they strengthen their risk management programs.”

Opinion-Climate

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-goodrich-democrats-climate-change_us_5a9476b7e4b02cb368c4b4af>

In April 2016, at a campaign stop on the campus of SUNY Purchase, just north of New York City, I filmed [a short video of Hillary Clinton](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Myl7HJjD6P4). I captured the former secretary of state berating my friend for asking if she would commit to refusing money from the fossil fuel lobby. “I’m so sick,” Clinton answered, “I’m so sick of the Sanders campaign lying about this.”

The video quickly went viral, partly because of the outsized response from a famously tight-lipped politician, partly because it played so well into the Democratic primary narrative that pitted Clinton, buddy-buddy with Wall Street, against the people-powered challenge of Sen. Bernie Sanders.

The furor that the video generated sprang from fissures in the [Democratic Party](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/democratic-party) that perfunctory resistance to President Donald Trump has only papered over. Americans care deeply about who finances our lawmakers, an issue often framed as a proxy for whether our politicians can be trusted. One wing of the Democratic Party, represented in 2016 by Clinton, sees corporate money like fossil fuel donations as the price of business in Washington. The other wing, awakened by Sanders’ muscular grassroots fundraising operation, views big-pocketed donors as anathema.

These factions will battle each other again in primaries this year. To mount the strongest challenge to the party of Trump in November, the Democrats will need to energize their young activist base. They must commit to what Clinton would not ― refusing fossil fuel money. The wellbeing of our climate and our communities is at stake.

In an era when schoolchildren are cut down by assault weapons with horrifying regularity, climate change can seem like a distant problem, a speck on the horizon. It’s not. It’s a present and deadly reality ― just ask the 900,000 Puerto Ricans [without power](https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/puerto-rico-crisis/why-does-restoring-full-power-puerto-rico-seem-never-ending-n847211) five months after Hurricane Maria slammed into their homes.

Common sense dictates that the economy undergo a massive restructuring away from fossil fuels to save lives. And a [growing body of research](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/07/much-worlds-fossil-fuel-reserve-must-stay-buried-prevent-climate-change-study-says) shows that the only way to avoid catastrophic levels of climate change is [to cease production](https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/theres-a-dangerous-bubble-in-the-fossil-fuel-economy-and-the-trump-administration-is-making-it-worse) of vast amounts of “unburnable” carbon. Accomplishing this requires bold government action ― not faith in the current system that subsidizes both [the production of fossil fuels](http://priceofoil.org/2017/10/03/report-trumps-energy-dominance-plans-rely-on-billions-in-fossil-fuel-subsidies/) and [the salaries of oil and gas executives](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-01/billions-from-trump-tax-cuts-supercharge-fossil-fuel-industry).

Report-McCabe

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/16/politics/andrew-mccabe-fired/index.html>

Attorney General Jeff Sessions fired former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe late Friday, less than two days shy of his retirement, ending the career of an official who had risen to serve as second-in-command at the bureau.

McCabe had more recently been regularly taunted by President Donald Trump and besieged by accusations that he had misled internal investigators at the Justice Department.

In a blistering statement Friday night, McCabe said his firing is part of a larger effort to discredit the FBI and the special counsel's investigation.

"This attack on my credibility is one part of a larger effort not just to slander me personally, but to taint the FBI, law enforcement, and intelligence professionals more generally," McCabe said. "It is part of this Administration's ongoing war on the FBI and the efforts of the Special Counsel investigation, which continue to this day. Their persistence in this campaign only highlights the importance of the Special Counsel's work."

Shortly after midnight, Trump tweeted.

"Andrew McCabe FIRED, a great day for the hard working men and women of the FBI - A great day for Democracy," Trump said. "Sanctimonious James Comey was his boss and made McCabe look like a choirboy. He knew all about the lies and corruption going on at the highest levels of the FBI!"

McCabe had been expected to retire this Sunday, on his 50th birthday, when he would have become eligible to receive early retirement benefits.

But Friday's termination could place a portion of his anticipated pension, earned after more than two decades of service, [in significant jeopardy](https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/16/politics/andrew-mccabe-pension-if-fired/index.html).

The origin of his dramatic fall stems from an internal review conducted by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz. That report -- the details of which have not been publicly released -- is said to conclude that McCabe misled investigators about his role in directing other officials at the FBI to speak to The Wall Street Journal about his involvement in a public corruption investigation into the Clinton Foundation, according to a source briefed on it.

CNN reported on Wednesday that the findings in Horowitz's report on McCabe were referred to the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility, staffed with career officials, who recommended McCabe's termination. McCabe, accompanied by his lawyer, tried making a last-ditch effort Thursday to avoid the firing, meeting with officials at the deputy attorney general's office at the Justice Department for several hours while Sessions was traveling, but to no avail.

Opinion-McCabe

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/17/opinions/mccabe-fired-opinion-gagliano/index.html>

As the news arrived Friday night that former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe had been [fired](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fbis-andrew-mccabe-is-fired-a-little-more-than-24-hours-before-he-could-retire/2018/03/16/e055a22a-2895-11e8-bc72-077aa4dab9ef_story.html?utm_term=.0a5f8bf5f688) by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, I felt a visceral numbness. The announcement had certainly been anticipated. Nonetheless, the expected blow still stunned the senses.

I have known Andy since he was a young SWAT operator on the FBI's New York Office SWAT team that I led as senior team leader. No matter my opinions on some of his actions as deputy director, this humiliatingly drawn-out public flogging had happened to "one of us."

The McCabe I knew was an ambitious ladder-climber whose sights were squarely fixed on advancement within the organization. But I never doubted his integrity, his dedication to duty, or his character. I found his decision not to immediately recuse himself -- even after his wife left the political arena -- from oversight of a case targeting Hillary Clinton a bad judgment call. The FBI has stated that McCabe acted in [accordance](https://www.npr.org/2017/12/19/571726696/senior-fbi-official-mccabe-to-face-closed-door-grilling-from-house-lawmakers) with the agency's protocols while his wife was running for office.

And his possible violations of the Hatch Act while supporting his wife's failed Virginia senate campaign in 2015 is also worthy of scrutiny. However, an apparent lack of judgment doesn't equate to accusations of treason and criminality, as some have recklessly charged.

I never doubted Andy's fealty to the Constitution or the FBI's mission.

But the attorney general's decision to fire him was based on an inspector general's report that was critical of McCabe that has not yet been released to the public. The nonpartisan IG for the Department of Justice, Michael E. Horowitz, worked hand in glove with the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) on the case. The IG's recommendation to terminate McCabe is not predicated on timing, "optics" or empathy considerations.

Although the IG report's release should clear up any misconceptions as to the evidence gathered, the central charge appears to be "lack of candor." Folks unfamiliar with this agency vernacular should understand that what it equates to is "lying" to investigators. This covers anything and everything related to an administrative inquiry -- like an OPR investigation -- and doesn't only attach to sworn testimony at trial, or during a deposition, or that which is gathered under oath.

In my quarter-century of service in the FBI, I personally witnessed innumerable instances of forgivable egregious offenses by fellow employees. However, the one violation that always resulted in separation from the FBI was lying. I simply cannot recall an instance when an agent's career survived a proven case of "lack of candor."

Horowitz, appointed by President Barack Obama in 2012, heads a fiercely independent agency that relies on the facts it uncovers and follows the evidence, wherever it may lead. In my experience in the FBI, Horowitz's name was synonymous with ruthless efficiency and an apolitical mien.

Report-Facebook

<http://money.cnn.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-data-scandal-explainer/index.html>

Facebook ([FB](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=FB&source=story_quote_link)) is under intense pressure to answer these questions — and more — after it admitted that a company linked to President Donald Trump's campaign had accessed and improperly stored a huge trove of its user data.

The controversy erupted as UK media and The New York Times reported that data analysis firm Cambridge Analytica tried to influence how Americans voted using information gleaned from millions of Facebook profiles.

Here's what you need to know.

Facebook said it gave permission to University of Cambridge psychology professor Aleksandr Kogan to harvest information from users who downloaded his app — "thisisyourdigitallife."

The app offered a personality test. But Facebook users who downloaded the app also gave the professor permission to collect data on their location, their friends and content they had "liked."

That was allowed under Facebook's rules at the time.

[The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html), however, reported that Kogan provided that data — which included information from over 50 million profiles — to Cambridge Analytica, breaching Facebook's rules.

Cambridge Analytica was working to develop techniques that could be used to influence voters.

Facebook said it asked Cambridge Analytica to delete the data in 2015, but learned several days ago from "reports" that not all of it had been purged.

Cambridge Analytica said that the data set revealed by The New York Times was not used "as part of the services it provided to the Donald Trump 2016 presidential campaign."

The company's methods came under further scrutiny late Monday after a British television channel aired a report showing CEO Alexander Nix discussing potential bribery and entrapment of politicians.

In the report, Nix is seen suggesting the encounters could be filmed and posted to the internet.

Cambridge Analytica said in a statement that the undercover Channel 4 report was "edited and scripted to grossly misrepresent the nature of those conversations and how the company conducts its business."

Nix said the company does not engage in bribery or entrapment.

Facebook has been unable to shake off questions over its role in the 2016 presidential election.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg initially expressed skepticism that Facebook could have been used to influence voters, but a series of revelations over Russian meddling have caused the company to make big changes in recent months.

It has sought to crack down on fake news, undermine the business model used by trolls and make political advertising more transparent.

Opinion-Facebook

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/19/opinions/congress-must-act-on-facebook-cambridge-analytica-alaimo/index.html>

On Friday, Facebook [announced](https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/) that it had [banned Cambridge Analytica](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html), a political consulting firm with ties to President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign, from using the platform. According to Facebook, "in 2015, we learned that a psychology professor at the University of Cambridge named Dr. Aleksandr Kogan lied to us and violated our [Platform Policies](https://developers.facebook.com/policy) by passing data from an app that was using Facebook Login" to Cambridge Analytica and Christopher Wylie. Facebook says that about 270,000 people who downloaded Kogan's app, called "thisisyourdigitallife," gave permission for Kogan to access information about them, such as their locations and posts they liked -- but Kogan violated the rules by sharing it.

Kogan [disputes](http://money.cnn.com/2018/03/19/technology/cambridge-analytica-scientist-aleksandr-kogan/index.html) Facebook's claim that he lied about why he was collecting the data.

Wylie helped to found Cambridge Analytica but left in 2014, and [now says](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html) the firm wrongly used the data to build psychological profiles of 50 million Americans for the Trump campaign.

"Cambridge Analytica will try to pick at whatever mental weakness or vulnerability that we think you have and try to warp your perception of what's real around you," Wylie said [in an interview](https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/trump-linked-analytics-firm-cambridge-analytica-stolen-data/story?id=53844305) with ABC News. "If you are looking to create an information weapon, the battle space you operate in is social media. That is where the fight happens."

Facebook says it thought the third parties with whom Kogan shared the data had deleted it in response to the social media company's demands, but has now learned they didn't. Cambridge Analytica said [in a statement](http://money.cnn.com/2018/03/19/technology/cambridge-analytica-audit/index.html) on Saturday that it deleted the data Kogan provided when it became clear that Kogan had not gathered it in line with Facebook's terms of service.

Being profiled in this way by a political campaign is different than being targeted by a company selling shoes, for example, with a Facebook ad. While companies may select Facebook users based upon generic data such as what school they graduated from or what zip code they live in, industry practices [prevent advertisers](https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-10-27/that-facebook-quiz-might-not-be-so-innocent) from knowing the personal identities of the people they're targeting. Congress needs to respond now -- in two ways.

First, we need laws that give Americans more information about how data we share online will be used. As I've [argued before](https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-10-27/that-facebook-quiz-might-not-be-so-innocent), organizations asking us to share personally identifiable information on social media should be required to say who they are, from whom they get funding, and how they're going to use the data. This stipulation could help prevent situations like this in the future.

Second, Congress should force Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, to testify about what happened. This could shed some light on the shady way this all played out, helping lawmakers figure out how to prevent such episodes from recurring. It would also rightly publicly shame the company for failing to live up to moral obligations it had to its users to be forthcoming and transparent about what it knew.

Report-Rohingya

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/14/asia/myanmar-rohingya-msf-intl/index.html>

At least 6,700 Rohingya were killed in attacks during the first month of a military crackdown in Myanmar in late August, [Médecins Sans Frontières estimates](http://www.msf.org/en/article/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks).

The aid group interviewed several thousand Rohingya refugees in four camps in Bangladesh in late October and early November, asking how many members of their families had died and how, both before and after the violence began.

The survey showed that a minimum of 6,700 Rohingya -- including 730 children -- were killed by shooting and other violence between August 25 and September 24, and that at least 2,700 others died from disease and malnutrition, according to MSF.

The aid agency's death toll far surpasses estimates from Myanmar's government, which has put the figure in the hundreds.

More than half a million Rohingya have fled northwestern Myanmar into Bangladesh since a concerted military crackdown began in late August, following militant attacks on a border post. Both the UN and the US have described the campaign as ethnic cleansing.

"We met and spoke with survivors of violence in Myanmar, who are now sheltering in overcrowded and unsanitary camps in Bangladesh," Sidney Wong, MSF's medical director, said in a statement. MSF also is known as Doctors Without Borders.

"What we uncovered was staggering, both in terms of the numbers of people who reported a family member died as a result of violence and the horrific ways in which they said they were killed or severely injured."

He said that the "peak in deaths coincides with the launch of the latest 'clearance operations' by Myanmar security forces in the last week of August."

Zaw Htay, a Myanmar government spokesman, did not respond to a request for comment on the MSF report.

The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar's Rakhine state thought to number about 1 million people. Myanmar does not recognize them as citizens or as one of the 135 recognized ethnic groups living in the country.

[In an exclusive CNN report published last month](http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/12/asia/myanmar-rohingya-tula-toli-massacre-testimony/index.html), refugees described surviving mass killings and rape before reaching the relative safety of the camps, where conditions are dire.

"They killed and killed and piled the bodies up high. It was like cut bamboo," said Mumtaz, a Rohingya woman from the village of Tula Toli in western Myanmar, who woke up to find herself on a mound of charred bodies.

"In the pile there was someone's neck, someone's head, someone's leg. I was able to come out, I don't know how."

Opinion-Rohingya

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/15/opinions/rohingya-women-ashley-judd-opinion/index.html>

The Kutupalong refugee camp is situated in Cox's Bazar, the most southeastern part of Bangladesh, along its border with Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Six months ago, the area was a pristine jungle preserve. Now it is home to more than a half million Rohingya Muslim refugees, who since August have fled rape, torture and murder [at the hands of the Myanmar armed forces](https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/17/asia/myanmar-rohingya-rape/index.html).

They are, quite rightly, too terrified to return to Myanmar, but they are not allowed to move on, so they sit in a purgatorial limbo.

A heaving, sprawling settlement is fashioned from tarps and bamboo, slapped haphazardly on dusty mud terraces and made up of nearly a million traumatized, persecuted people.

They have almost nothing: no electricity, no paved roads, no sewers. People are reduced to defecating openly -- especially the children, who can't wait for long hours to get to the latrines.

Women and children have to wait after the men, so even if they've been in line, men cut in front of them. One might say the conditions could not be worse, but the monsoon season, with its lashing rains, is coming.

While the Rohingya fled to Bangladesh seeking safety, life in the camp is full of dangers, especially for women and girls. Once the sun sets, basic tasks, like going to a toilet, become unsafe: sexual violence can skyrocket in refugee camps.

Hyper-vigilance is required at all times. It is not a good situation for any of the women and girls. Some 34,000 of them are pregnant, either by their husband or because of this epidemic of rape.

Ajida is a Rohingya who walked and waded to Bangladesh while she was pregnant. Four of her children drowned when the boat they were in capsized.

While I held her hands at a maternity clinic, Ajida looked limply at the confusing identify card that says she is from a country that denies her existence and is actively engaging in what has widely been described as the ethnic cleansing of her people. She explained to me that her baby hasn't moved in months and that she has a terrible burning sensation in her chest.

I met Ajida in my capacity as Goodwill Ambassador for UNFPA, the United Nations reproductive health and rights agency. She was one of hundreds of pregnant women waiting for an urgently needed check-up at a UNFPA-supported reproductive health clinic, and is one of the 47,000 women for whom our health workers have provided vital antenatal care in the past six months.

Patiently waiting for hours, the women with whom I talked, whose babies I held, defied the hell they had lived by maintaining their dignity and composure. It is one thing to cheat death and flee to safety. The determination and resilience required to cross rivers, hills and jungles when pregnant is superhuman.

Report-Kushner

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/jared-kushner-manipulation-mexico-israel-china-uae/index.html>

Officials from at least four countries have discussed ways they could use Jared Kushner's intricate business arrangements, lack of experience and financial woes to manipulate President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior White House adviser, [The Washington Post reported Tuesday](http://wapo.st/2EZTMcW).

The paper reported that it is unclear, based on current and former US officials familiar with intelligence reports on the matter, that the countries -- - Mexico, Israel, China and the United Arab Emirates -- acted on the conversations.

The revelation is the latest in a series that call into question Kushner's ability to work in the White House given his complex business ties.

[CNN reported earlier on Tuesday](http://www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/jared-kushner-security-clearance/index.html)that Kushner has been stripped of his access to the nation's top secrets after chief of staff John Kelly mandated changes to the security clearance system. Kushner had been working on a temporary clearance, but, under the new system, aides who previously had "top secret" interim clearances saw their access downgrade to the less sensitive "secret" designation.

Peter Mirijanian, a spokesperson for Kushner's attorney Abbe Lowell, declined to comment on the story.

"We will not respond substantively to unnamed sources peddling secondhand hearsay with rank speculation who continue to leak inaccurate information," Mirijanian said.

According to the Post, national security adviser H.R. McMaster told his deputies in spring of 2017 that he wanted all the intelligence reports on conversations where foreign leaders discussed interactions with senior Trump officials, including Kushner. The order came after McMaster learned that Kushner had contacts with foreign officials without coordinating with the National Security Council.

Kushner -- while on Capitol Hill Tuesday for a meeting on prison reform -- declined to respond to repeated CNN questions about his security clearance and The Washington Post report. Kushner's meeting had been scheduled long before news about his security clearances broke, and according to a source in the room, the story did not come up during the meeting.

Top White House officials were worried Kushner was "naive and being tricked" by foreign officials, one former White House official told the Post.

Before stepping into the White House, Kushner worked at the CEO of his family's real estate and development company, Kushner Companies. The extensive network and debt from the company, according to the Post, was also seen as leverage foreign officials talked about in efforts to manipulate Kushner.

Officials from the White House and National Security Council did not immediately respond to requests for comment on this story.

The news of foreign interest in Kushner's business ties and financial woes comes after [CNN reported](https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/19/politics/mueller-investigation-kushner-foreign-financing-efforts/index.html) special counsel Robert Mueller has expanded his probe beyond Kushner's contacts with Russia into his efforts to secure financing for his company from foreign investors during the presidential transition.

Opinion-Kushner

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/28/opinions/jared-kushners-problems-are-only-just-beginning-psaki/index.html>

Jared Kushner's security clearance downgrade is not the end of the story, unless you are talking about his diplomatic career. That is over.

Despite the claim by both White House Chief of Staff John Kelly and Kushner's lawyer that "the new clearance policy will not affect Mr. Kushner's ability to continue to do the very important work he has been assigned by the President," it will do exactly that.

The reliance on Jared Kushner as the primary negotiator for everything from Middle East peace to trade deals to the United States' relationships in Asia has been dying a slow death over the last year due to a combination of his lack of experience, lack of respect from world leaders and the actions of his boss and father-in-law, President Donald Trump. The official loss of his interim top security clearance should come as no surprise. A valid question the White House should have to answer is why it took so long.

After working in the White House on and off for eight years and traveling around the world for two years with an actual top diplomat, Secretary of State John Kerry, I can confirm without a doubt that it is not possible to be on the front lines of diplomacy as the chief representative of the United States without the highest level of security clearance.

Why? Because a top-level security clearance gives access to information and insights into foreign powers, their leaders and their thinking about ongoing issues that gives chief negotiators a leg up. And it is impossible to do the job of chief negotiator or chief representative for the president without it.

We don't actually know the real reason for the downgrade, but Kushner's portfolio changes are the least of his problems.

If you believe White House spin, the memo sent to White House staff, including to Jared Kushner, that informed them that their security clearance had been downgraded, was all part of an effort by Chief of Staff John Kelly to take a significant step in clearing the deck of high-level employees with interim security clearances.

Donald Trump had the power to override that decision -- but he didn't. And Kushner's father-in-law, the President, hasn't exactly shied away from breaking the rules, conflicting his own public commitments or making decisions that are clearly conflicts of interest. But he didn't on Kushner's behalf, even though it will significantly reduce his portfolio.

The more likely reasons for Kushner's downgrade affect far more than his job responsibilities.

[New reports surfaced on Tuesday](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kushners-overseas-contacts-raise-concerns-as-foreign-officials-seek-leverage/2018/02/27/16bbc052-18c3-11e8-942d-16a950029788_story.html?utm_term=.3b1e50b84d86) that not one, [but four foreign powers](https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/jared-kushner-manipulation-mexico-israel-china-uae/index.html) -- the United Arab Emirates, China, Israel and Mexico -- had been discussing ways to influence Kushner. Why? Because of his lack of experience, knowledge and his financial vulnerabilities.

Jared Kushner's problems are only just beginning

Revelations like these would prompt immediate calls for a brand new congressional investigation in almost any other administration.

Report-Putin

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/18/europe/vladimir-putin-russian-election-2018-results-intl/index.html>

Vladimir Putin has extended his grip on Russia for another six years after an overwhelming victory in Sunday's presidential election, a result that was never in doubt.

With 99.8% of the votes counted, Putin won with 76.7%, according to Central Election Commission data. It means Putin will rule until 2024, when he will be 71 and obliged by law to step down.

Putin sailed to victory against the backdrop of wall-to-wall support from state media and with no serious challenger. His nearest rival, Communist Party candidate Pavel Grudinin, won 11.79%,while ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky took 5.7%. Former reality TV presenter Ksenia Sobchak was on 1.7%, while veteran liberal politician Grigory Yavlinsky received just over 1% of the vote.

His [fiercest opponent, Alexei Navalny, was barred from the race.](https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/27/europe/alexei-navalny-says-putin-regime-is-corrupt-intl/index.html)

Putin, a former KGB spy, has dominated Russian politics for 18 years and the 65-year-old was already the country's longest-serving leader since Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

He declared victory in front of thousands of people gathered in below-freezing temperatures at Moscow's Manezhnaya Square near the Kremlin, where he called for unity in the country.

"We are a single team, I am a member of this team, and all those who cast their ballots today are members of our large national team," he said, after a colorful show of high-energy musical performances.

"I see this as a sign of trust and hope, the hope of our people that we will work as hard, with the same responsibility and effectiveness as before. Thank you for being such a powerful, millions-strong team. We will definitely succeed."

Although his victory was a foregone conclusion, the high score is a major boost to Putin, who already enjoys sweeping powers over his country. He won with 63.6% of the votes cast in the 2012 election.

Voter turnout was put at 67.5%, close to the 70% ambition of the Kremlin.

Under current Russian law, Putin can not stand for re-election. But he has not groomed a successor, prompting speculation he may try to find ways to extend his power beyond this term.

Putin's critics have slammed the election as unfair, citing the Kremlin's tight control over the media, quelling of the opposition and restrictions on some election monitors to ensure a free vote.

By early evening Sunday, the non-governmental election monitoring group Golos had counted 2,000 incidents of voting irregularities, including observers being prevented from carrying out monitoring.

Opinion-Putin

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/18/opinions/presidential-weekly-briefing-putin-opinion-vinograd/index.html>

Modeled on the President's Daily Briefing, which the director of national intelligence prepares for the President almost daily, I am providing a glimpse of the kind of intelligence assessments that are likely to come across the desk of the President of the United States this week.

No one, especially Vladimir Putin, considered the Russian election a nail-biter. He and the Central Election Commission may have gone through some of the motions of a democratic election -- campaign speeches, letting opponents' names appear on the ballot, urging Russians to go to the polls -- but, much like previous elections, the outcome was all but guaranteed. This was Putin-esque theater, plain and simple, and with another six-year term stretching ahead of him, at least according to exit polls, we can expect the Russian threat matrix to expand.

Putin may feign dismay over Western sanctions and diplomatic repercussions after his attacks around the world, but his new term will probably mean more hostility.

Cybersecurity -- penchant for penetration: With [the news](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/15/us/politics/russia-cyberattacks.html) that Russia targeted American and European nuclear power plants and energy and water systems, we have one more indication that Putin views all infrastructure -- whether election related or otherwise -- as free for the taking. Putin seemingly has the ability to enter sensitive systems, poke around and lurk at will. This now public capability bolsters his image as omnipotent and omnipresent. We could expect a show of force from Putin any time to demonstrate his capability to wreak havoc, similar to his [shutting off the lights](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-cyber-attack-energy/ukraines-power-outage-was-a-cyber-attack-ukrenergo-idUSKBN1521BA) in Ukraine in 2015 -- and then, of course, denying it.

Hiding in plain sight -- chemical weapons are not off limits: A tit-for-tat between Russia and the United Kingdom will likely continue this week after Theresa May's response to Russia's alleged use of a nerve agent against a former Russian double agent and his daughter. The UK took initial retaliatory steps and expelled Russian diplomats, among other measures.

And Putin, unsurprisingly, kicked out UK diplomats and seized some diplomatic properties. Putin doesn't care about diplomatic fallout -- he doesn't need "diplomats" in the UK to gather information. He has other means to get intelligence. The brazenness of Putin's attack could signal his willingness to use nerve agents in the future to send a clear message to any rogue agents and to signal to a global audience that he is willing and able to use chemical weapons wherever and whenever he pleases.

Since South Korean shuttle diplomacy resulted in a purported agreement for a face-to-face meeting between the United States and North Korea (the North Koreans have yet to publicly acknowledge that Kim wants to proceed with the meeting, but reporting has indicated the [CIA is working](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/16/us/politics/north-korea-cia-trump.html) with intel partners on the potential meeting), the devil may be in the details. While we wait for official word from Kim, his foreign minister [spent three days](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/world/asia/north-korea-trump-talks.html) in Sweden meeting the Swedish foreign minister and the Swedish Prime Minister. Sweden has offered to host a US-NK meeting, but it is unclear whether Kim would be willing to travel based on his [deep paranoia](http://www.newsweek.com/kim-jong-un-russian-spies-protection-655308) about his safety.

Report-North Korea

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/06/591120368/in-possible-breakthrough-north-korea-offers-talks-on-denuclearization>

South Korean officials who returned from a two-day visit to the North Korean capital reportedly brought back the communication. The North also said it was willing to send a delegation for dialogue with the South next month at the border village of Panmunjom.

"North Korea has clearly expressed its intention for denuclearization on the Korean peninsula, and if there is no military threat and North Korea's regime security is promised, they have clarified that there is no reason to hold nuclear weapons," South Korean President Moon Jae-in's office said.

Taken at face value, the sudden shift would mark a major diplomatic breakthrough following last year's heated rhetoric, with Pyongyang threatening the U.S. with ballistic missiles and President Trump promising to rain "fire and fury" on the North. However, the North has yet to corroborate the South Korean statement.

Kim made the offer during a meeting with Moon's special envoy in Pyongyang, and NPR's Elise Hu reports that the surprise change in position includes a promise to temporarily suspend nuclear and missile tests while negotiations were underway.

The United States current has 28,500 troops stationed in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War. That conflict ended with a truce, but no peace treaty — something that has kept the two Koreas on a war footing ever since.

Last month, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement, "the international community broadly agree that denuclearization must be the result of any dialogue with North Korea."

However, in a Tuesday morning tweet, the president said: "Possible progress being made in talks with North Korea. For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned. The World is watching and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!"

Hours later, Vice President Mike Pence issued a statement saying, "Whichever direction talks with North Korea go, we will be firm in our resolve. The United States and our allies remain committed to applying maximum pressure on the Kim regime to end their nuclear program. All options are on the table and our posture toward the regime will not change until we see credible, verifiable, and concrete steps toward denuclearization."

And in the afternoon, Trump, speaking in the Oval Office, said he was encouraged by the apparent diplomatic progress. "We have come certainly a long way, at least rhetorically, with North Korea," he told reporters.

"The statements coming out of South Korea and North Korea have been very positive. That would be a great thing for the world," he said.

"Hopefully we'll go in the very very peaceful, beautiful path," the president said. "We're prepared to go whichever path is necessarily. I think we're having very good dialogue, and we're going to certainly find out pretty soon what's happening, but we have made progress, there's no question about it."

Opinion-North Korea

<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/03/20/593472700/what-trump-needs-to-know-before-talks-with-north-korea>

North Korea has earned a reputation as a country that knows how to play a weak diplomatic hand well. Or at least, it is known to have confounded U.S. negotiators and persisted in its nuclear drive by hook or by crook, despite both its relative weakness and repeated American efforts to halt and reverse North Korea's nuclear development.

What lessons should the U.S. government bear in mind if President Trump indeed ends up sitting across the negotiating table from Kim Jong Un, and what should Trump do differently?

Kim Jong Un is different from his father and grandfather. President Trump is also unmistakably different from his predecessors who have dealt with North Korea. Here are some lessons from prior negotiating experience between the countries.

1. America's attention deficit disorder limits its ability to hold North Korea to commitments

North Korean ideology places the country at the center of global attention and as the most important item on the U.S. agenda. At moments when it becomes the biggest global crisis, North Korea draws top-level attention, as President Trump has shown. But when the crisis abates, American presidents have a tendency to move on to other crises, even though North Korea continues to demand attention.

During Clinton-era negotiations, the issue received top-level attention until the United States and North Korea signed the [Agreed Framework](https://www.iaea.org/publications/documents/infcircs/agreed-framework-21-october-1994-between-united-states-america-and-democratic-peoples-republic-korea) in Geneva in 1994. But the Clinton administration did not hold North Korea's feet to the fire to implement the deal.

One result of the Clinton administration's failure to pay sufficient attention to implementing the agreement is that it provided space for North Koreans to cut corners and eventually pursue an alternative covert uranium enrichment path to securing materials for a bomb.

Whatever the merits of any agreement Trump may achieve with Kim, it will mean nothing unless the president and his staff are willing to see the deal through to implementation. Otherwise, the North Koreans will exploit the American attention deficit and push forward once again with nuclear development.

2. North Korea has tried limiting the scope of negotiated commitments to avoid denuclearization

In six-nation talks a decade ago, the North Koreans skillfully forced the United States to make a choice between addressing the urgent question of plutonium pathways to making a bomb at the expense of including North Korean uranium enrichment efforts on the negotiating agenda. North Korea also limited negotiations and inspections to the site of its 5 megawatt reactor at Yongbyon in an effort to restrict verification of all aspects of its nuclear program. Christopher Hill, lead U.S. negotiator in the Six-Party Talks, accepted limitations on the agenda as an expedient way to start North Korea's denuclearization, but the process broke down before a broader verification of the country's entire nuclear program could begin. Today, verifying the scope of the program is even more difficult because of the North's uranium enrichment efforts, which are harder to assess and easier to hide.

Report-Kentucky

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/01/23/580030733/shooting-at-kentucky-high-school-leaves-2-dead-at-least-12-wounded>

A 15-year-old high school student will be charged with two counts of murder and several counts of attempted murder after a mass shooting at Marshall County High School in Benton, Ky., according to police.

Kentucky State Police identified the students who were killed as a girl, Bailey Nicole Holt, who died at the scene, and a boy, Preston Ryan Cope, who died at the hospital. Both were 15 years old.

Authorities say 12 other people were shot and five are in critical condition. In addition, five people suffered other kinds of injuries in the scramble when the shooter opened fire with a handgun on students and faculty.

"We are trying to determine that every one of those that has been shot was a student. It is our belief that they are," Gov. Matt Bevin said at a news conference Tuesday.

"The shooter was a student, a 15-year-old male," he added. "That student is in custody. That student was apprehended at the scene."

Kentucky State Police Commissioner Rick Sanders said that the shooting began just before 8 a.m. and that first responders arrived on the scene within 10 minutes of the first gunshot. The shooter was soon arrested in a "nonviolent" fashion and will be charged with murder and attempted murder, according to Bevin.

"I did not see the shooter, but I did see the commons after. It was a disaster. Everyone just dropped their stuff and ran," Allissa Hubbard, 16, [told member station WKMS](http://wkms.org/post/updating-shooting-marshall-county-high-school-two-dead-17-injured).

She had been in the library when a series of loud pops were heard, and students began to run outside. According to WKMS, Hubbard hid beneath a set of stairs with another girl as they listened to the screams of their teachers.

"I'm terrified," she added. "I've been feeling like I'm going to throw up all day long. It was awful."

"It was the most frightening thing," Gloria Hollifield, a parent, told WKMS. "I'm 60-some years old and I've never been so damn scared in my entire life."

"I know I speak for communities across my home state in sending prayers of comfort and healing to students, faculty and everyone affected by this violence," Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., [said on the Senate floor](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YOdYVTdOLw) midday Tuesday morning as information about the shooting was beginning to surface.

"Our hearts are with the entire community in Marshall County and our gratitude is with the first responders who rushed into harm's way."

Opinion-Kentucky

<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/27/581216851/school-shootings-are-sad-but-no-longer-surprising>

Bailey Holt and Preston Cope were killed in their high school this week. They were both 15 years old. But has the news of students being killed in their school lost the power to shock and sober us?

At least 16 other students, all between 14 and 18, at Marshall County High School in Kentucky were injured when another student, age 15, opened fire in their school on Tuesday.

"Bailey Holt and Preston [Cope] were two great people," their friend, Gabbi Bayers, said on Facebook. "It hurts knowing we won't be able to share the laughs anymore."

And Jasen Holt told [WKRN in Nashville](http://wkrn.com/2018/01/24/parents-of-slain-high-school-student-say-she-was-perfect-daughter/) of his daughter, "She was an angel here on Earth."

That's how parents feel about their children in their souls.

To report that two students were killed in their school was once the kind of story that would dominate the news of a week. And to be sure, the deplorable deaths and bright lives of those two youngsters have received intense attention.

But the killings in Kentucky were the 11th school shooting of the year, and the first month of the year is not over.

There have been almost 300 school shootings in the United States since 2013, according to the gun control advocacy group [Everytown for Gun Safety.](https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/#5884) While we may remember some of the names of places where students died — Santa Monica, Calif.; Roseburg, Ore.; Rancho Tehama Reserve, Calif. — and many of the names of the victims, those harrowing statistics suggest school shootings now occur at the rate of almost one per week.

If another school shooting takes place next week, we may be shocked and saddened all over again. But not surprised.

School shootings have become commonplace. News organizations now know whom to call for reflections on how families and towns can try to contend with loss and grief, and on counsel and care for sad and traumatized students. And of course, we know who to call to hear from those who dispute even the most modest regulation on guns. We have had to make those calls time and time again.

Many U.S. schools now have routine drills on how to take shelter if a gunman bursts into their school. Parents may worry if those drills do more to prepare or panic their children. But it's hard to say training to hide from a shooter doesn't make as much sense as fire drills, when the tragic and outrageous fact is that more youngsters are injured or killed in school shootings each year than in school fires.

The fear of children dying in their classrooms has become an everyday fact of our lives. But have we stopped being shocked?

Report-Oreskes

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/10/31/561267272/nprs-head-of-news-placed-on-leave-after-past-harassment-allegations-surface>

NPR has placed its senior vice president for news, Michael Oreskes, on leave after fielding accusations that he sexually harassed two women seeking career opportunities nearly two decades ago, when he worked at The New York Times.

The allegations from the two women [were first reported by The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/nprs-top-editor-accused-of-sexual-harassment-by-two-women/2017/10/31/a2078bea-bdf7-11e7-959c-fe2b598d8c00_story.html?tid=sm_tw&utm_term=.a2be8e0097a2) on Tuesday afternoon. They included similar accounts of unwanted and unexpected kisses during business meetings.

Meanwhile, a current NPR employee is going public with her account of filing a formal complaint with the network's human resources division in October 2015. Rebecca Hersher says she considers the incident less severe but nevertheless felt it crossed a line and made her uncomfortable. At the time a 26-year-old assistant producer on Weekend All Things Considered, she said Oreskes hijacked a career counseling session into a three-hour-long dinner that delved into deeply personal territory.

Oreskes did not respond to multiple efforts to reach him for comment. NPR executives say that they cannot address individual personnel matters but that they take concerns of sexual harassment or other inappropriate workplace behavior seriously.

According to The Washington Post, there were two separate complaints about Oreskes from his tenure as Washington bureau chief at The New York Times nearly 20 years ago. Both women tell similar stories: After meeting Oreskes and discussing their job prospects, they said he unexpectedly kissed them on the lips and stuck his tongue in their mouths. The Post did not disclose their names, stating they spoke on condition of anonymity because they did not want to damage future employment prospects. The women also shared their allegations with NPR management in mid-October.

After joining NPR in the spring of 2015, Oreskes encouraged staffers to reach out to him to discuss their careers during his visit to NPR West in Culver City, Calif. At the time Hersher had been working a series of temporary assignments for NPR, and she took him up on his offer during a subsequent visit to Washington. An afternoon meeting was pushed off into evening and an invitation to dinner at a seafood restaurant near Union Station.

Hersher, now a reporter and producer on NPR's science desk, says she wanted to tell him about her belief that she would need to leave NPR to transform from a producer to a reporter. Her dinner with Oreskes became increasingly uncomfortable as the conversation veered into personal matters involving relationships and sex. At one point, she says, he referred to a former flame as his first "sex girlfriend."

Hersher says the conversation made her uncomfortable.

"From my point of view, every little thing that he or I said pointed to the relative difference in power," she said. "Like he's the one with the power. He's the one who gets to decide what we talk about — and I am trying to keep up."

Opinion-Oreskes

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ombudsman/2017/11/06/561834350/npr-looks-inward-as-it-covers-its-own-sexual-harassment-allegations>

Last week was extraordinarily difficult at NPR, as the top newsroom executive, Michael Oreskes, was forced to resign in the wake of profoundly unsettling allegations that he had engaged in multiple incidents of sexual harassment over the span of two decades, including while at NPR.

Oreskes had been at NPR since April 2015; his departure is yet another dramatic high-level staff change at an organization that had seen — until the last three years or so — a virtual revolving door of chief executives and heads of the news department.

Listeners and readers have contacted me with many questions (and lots of anger). I am NPR's news ombudsman (or public editor), not a corporate ombudsman, and so many of the decisions made by NPR's corporate side are largely outside my purview, unless they reflect on NPR's journalism. That said, serious questions have been raised about NPR's handling of this situation. Chief executive Jarl Mohn (to whom I report, with a contract that is designed to keep my work independent) [has apologized](http://www.npr.org/2017/11/03/561952314/tensions-build-in-npr-newsroom-over-handling-of-sexual-harassment-allegations) to staffers and announced that an outside law firm is being hired to examine NPR's actions in the Oreskes case. I hope for, and expect, a thorough assessment.

In the meantime, here are answers to some initial questions that have been asked by NPR's listeners and readers about how the newsroom has responded to this situation, and how the broader issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault have been reported by NPR.

The story about NPR was broken not by NPR's own journalists, but by [TheWashington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/nprs-top-editor-accused-of-sexual-harassment-by-two-women/2017/10/31/a2078bea-bdf7-11e7-959c-fe2b598d8c00_story.html?utm_term=.4568264ae2b5), which wrote about two women who alleged they were harassed two decades ago when they met Oreskes to discuss job options when he was an executive at The New York Times. Both women had contacted NPR in mid-October about those allegations (and one had previously contacted NPR in 2016, as well).

That the company was looking into allegations for a couple of weeks and didn't alert the newsroom frustrated some (I am referring to the issue of informing NPR for its reporting purposes, not the separate issue of leaving newsroom employees potentially vulnerable). But that is the way it should be, if the newsroom and corporate operations are to remain editorially independent (although I'll address, below, one problematic editorial aspect of the separation, concerning Oreskes' oversight of NPR's coverage of sexual harassment in general).

NPR subsequently jumped quickly on the story; The Washington Post story hit at about 4 p.m. on Halloween and NPR's media reporter David Folkenflik was interviewed on [All Things Considered](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/10/31/561267272/nprs-head-of-news-placed-on-leave-after-past-harassment-allegations-surface) at 7:35 p.m. and again on [Morning Edition](http://www.npr.org/2017/11/01/561309140/npr-executive-faces-sexual-harassment-allegations)the morning of Nov. 1. He was able to move so quickly partly because, as he reported, he had previously been looking into a complaint about Oreskes that had been filed internally. (Folkenflik had not been able to report it because the woman did not initially want to go on the record.)

NPR also got beat on the second-day story: The Associated Press, where Oreskes worked before coming to NPR, broke the story that he had resigned from NPR (under pressure). That [rankled NPR employees](http://www.npr.org/2017/11/01/561427869/top-npr-new-executive-mike-oreskes-resigns-amid-allegations-of-sexual-harassment), who wanted to hear it from NPR first, and, of course, no newsroom wants to get scooped about internal news by a competitor.

Report-Roy Moore

<https://www.npr.org/2017/12/12/570291123/will-it-be-moore-or-jones-polls-are-closed-in-divisive-alabama-senate-election>

Democrat Doug Jones has won the Alabama Senate special election, a victory that was a stunning upset in a deeply red state that voted overwhelmingly for President Trump. The president, who had backed Republican Roy Moore despite multiple accusations of sexual misconduct and assault, congratulated Jones on Twitter.

The win by Jones, projected by The Associated Press two hours after the polls closed Tuesday night, is sure to send shock waves through Washington. The special election to replace Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who left the Senate in February, was upended in November as multiple women came forward to say Moore had pursued them romantically as teenagers when he was in his 30s. Some alleged he had sexually assaulted them, including one woman who said he had initiated sexual contact with her when she was just 14. Moore has denied the accusations.

The unfolding controversy made what should have been a safe GOP race anything but. It's the first Democratic Senate victory in the state in 25 years and now gives Republicans an even narrower, 51-49 Senate majority that could imperil GOP legislative priorities in 2018. Jones will be up for re-election to a full term in 2020.

"Alabama has been at a crossroads. We have been at crossroads in the past, and unfortunately we have usually taken the wrong fork," Jones said in his victory speech. "Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, you took the right fork."

NBA legend Charles Barkley returned to his native Alabama to campaign for Jones in the closing days and told CNN after the Democrat's victory, "We got a bunch of rednecks and ignorant people, but we got some amazing people here and they rose up today."

It's the first major electoral blow to Trump since his own upset victory just over a year ago, giving Democrats a special election win after several near misses. Democrats were victorious in November in the Virginia and New Jersey governors' races, but the win in such a red state that Trump won by almost 30 points is a political earthquake heading into the 2018 midterm elections.

The president had come to Moore's defense, casting doubt on the women's allegations — much as he has done with the multiple women who have accused him of sexual assault. While Trump didn't campaign with Moore, he did hold a rally just across the border from Alabama in Pensacola, Fla., on Friday evening and recorded a robocall on his behalf, urging voters to choose Moore because he would support his agenda in the Senate. And after Trump reaffirmed his endorsement for Moore last week, the Republican National Committee reinstated its financial support for the GOP nominee after having pulled it following the accusations.

Trump was unusually restrained on Twitter late Tuesday, congratulating Jones and refraining from placing blame.

Opinion-Roy Moore

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ombudsman/2017/11/17/564862869/when-sexual-misconduct-is-so-much-more>

Sexual "misconduct," "abuse," "assault," and "harassment." NPR has used all — sometimes multiple descriptors in the same story — to characterize the allegations that have been leveled against former Alabama judge and current Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore.

For some listeners, calling the allegations "misconduct" minimizes them.

"Please stop using the phrase 'sexual misconduct' to describe Roy Moore's alleged abuse of children. The allegations are about sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexually predatory behavior. 'Sexual misconduct' doesn't cut it," wrote Marjory Ruderman, of Charlottesville, Va.

Other listeners have complained about a single reference, in [this story](https://www.npr.org/2017/11/13/563894796/senate-majority-leader-mitch-mcconnell-says-roy-moore-should-step-aside), to Moore's alleged victims as "very young women," instead of "teenagers." (That issue seems to surface regularly; NPR recently changed the headline in [this piece](https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/06/562335869/italy-probes-deaths-of-26-nigerian-women-at-sea), which initially only referred to the teenage victims as women and not as girls, following many social media complaints.)

NPR should always use very clear language when describing any situation.

As Mark Memmott, NPR's standards and practices editor, often points out, the best language is to give the actual facts, to the extent they can be known; labels should be secondary. That means including the ages of the alleged victims, or descriptions in their own words, of what they said happened to them.

But labels are also sometimes necessary for the fluidity of the narrative, and in particular for headlines and for newscasts, where the amount of space or time for detailed description is limited.

We went back and looked at the many stories devoted to the Moore allegations, as well as some of the other recent coverage of sexual harassment and abuse. For the most part, the reporting has been quite clear. Even the story that used the inexact phrase "very young women" also called them "teenagers" and specified the age (16 at the time) of one of the alleged victims. The story also quoted her saying, "And he then looked at me, and he told me — he said, you're just a child." I don't believe any listener would have come away misled.

As for the phrase "sexual misconduct," NPR has [used it quite a bit](https://www.npr.org/templates/search/index.php?searchinput=sexual+misconduct&tabId=hoa&dateId=7&sort=match&sort=match&start=0). Perhaps too much; it's a convenient catchall, but it means different things to different people. At the same time, many of the stories that use the phrase, either in the headline or in the story itself, also include sound bites of the accusers, which include more detail. Still, NPR should sharpen its language in these stories. As Memmott [wrote](http://ethics.npr.org/category/memos-from-memmott/#3250) in recent guidance to the newsroom, "To only say he's accused of 'misconduct' or 'inappropriate' behavior does not reflect the seriousness of the accusations."

[Memmott's advice appears to have been heeded in NPR's Thursday and Friday coverage of allegations against Sen. Al Franken (D.-Minn.), which refers clearly to accusations of behavior that would be "sexual assault." The Franken story also underscores the need for descriptions, and not just labels, since the Moore and Franken allegations are on a different scale.]

Report-Harvey

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/28/546714612/-the-goal-is-rescue-harvey-s-historic-deluge-met-with-equally-massive-response>

Just days into one of the biggest storms to hit the U.S. in decades, authorities have rescued thousands of people in Houston alone. And as floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey, now a tropical storm, continue to rise across southeast Texas and neighboring Louisiana, officials expect that still thousands more evacuees will need to be sheltered in the days to come.

Several deaths have been reported, but the exact number remains unclear. A spokesperson with the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences told NPR six deaths are suspected of being related to flooding, though final determinations will not be made until autopsies are finished.

"This is a landmark event," Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Brock Long said at a news conference Monday. In fact, it has been such a landmark event — with more than 3 feet of rain having already hit some regions — the National Weather Service has even had to [revise its traditional methods](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/28/546776542/national-weather-service-adds-new-colors-so-it-can-map-harveys-rains?live=1) of representing storms "in order to effectively map it."

So how does one respond to a catastrophe of such historic proportions?

For authorities, that has meant summoning a rescue and evacuation effort nearly as massive. "The goal is rescue," Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner told reporters Monday. "That's the major focus for the day."

Here's how that rescue effort is taking shape, sketched in a few telling — and staggering — numbers.

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo told reporters Monday that officers have rescued roughly 2,000 people in the city — out of about 4,000 water-related calls for assistance — since the storm came ashore Friday evening.

That includes …

...nearly 300 rescues over a 12-hour span since midnight on Monday. But that number does not include the 185 critical rescue requests in the city still outstanding as of midday.

Police hope to work through that backlog of requests by nightfall, because they say their boats are not properly equipped to conduct rescue operations in the dark.

Many of those people who required rescue will also require a place to stay — which brings us to …

Opinion-Harvey

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ombudsman/2017/08/31/547587324/-whatever-happened-to-those-hurricane-harvey-victims>

NPR listeners are a compassionate bunch. All week they have been emailing to say they are anxious to know what happened to 19-year-old Jada Wilson in northeast Houston, who on Sunday [told Michel Martin of being trapped](http://www.npr.org/2017/08/27/546603347/high-floods-trap-houston-residents-in-home) with her family in her grandmother's home in waist-deep water, in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey flooding. As Martin noted, listeners could hear the water, seemingly lapping around her, in the background.

"Ever since I heard that, I have been on the verge of tears and waiting to hear if she and her family got rescued," Colorado listener Lara Duran wrote. "Please follow up on this family. I am very concerned. Please, if you are going to do a story on trapped people, please follow up."

That's the power of radio, to create that intimacy between listeners and interview subjects. With that comes a certain responsibility, in my opinion. In this case, listeners need an update on how Wilson and her family fared.

The weekend and weekday All Things Considered staffs are separate; the weekend crew passed Wilson's contact information on to the weekday staff. Christopher Turpin, NPR's vice president of news programming and operations, told me All Things Considered had indeed been trying to reach the family all week, without success. "We are as anxious as those listeners to track Jada and her family down," he wrote in an email, and said the show would update listeners if and when they do.

(While NPR hasn't talked to her, later Sunday night Wilson posted this on Twitter: "UPDATE: we are safer than we were before. Thank you for all of the prayers, concerns and advice. We are finding a place to stay now. Thanks!")

"I'm a huge believer in following up on compelling individual stories at moments like this," Turpin wrote. "In the aftermath of Katrina it was folks we went back to time and time again"— people such as Randy Adams, whose [last interview](http://www.npr.org/2015/08/29/435741117/10-years-after-hurricane-katrina-randy-adams-still-counts-his-blessings) of nine total was in 2015, 10 years after [he and his family fled the New Orleans hurricane](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4831399) — "who became like family to our listeners, who really helped us understand the arc of the tragedy."

Report-Taxes

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-trump-signs-tax-bill-law-leaving-holidays/story?id=51954035>

President [Donald Trump](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/donald-trump.htm) signed the $1.5 trillion rewrite of the tax code into law at the White House on Friday capping off a victory lap before leaving to spend the holidays in Mar-a-Lago.

"Everything in here is really tremendous things for businesses, for people, for the middle class, for workers. And I consider this very much a bill for the middle class and a bill for jobs. Corporations are literally going wild over this," Trump said.

Trump indicated that he was going to wait until after the new year to sign the bill, but when he saw reports on the news speculating about the timing he "immediately called and said let’s get it ready."

"I'll sign this today rather than having a big formal ceremony in two weeks when we were going to do it. I didn't want you folks to say I wasn't keeping my promise. I'm keeping my promise," Trumps said. "I'm signing it before Christmas. I said the bill would be on my desk before Christmas. And you are holding me literally to that. We did a rush job today. It's not fancy. But it's the Oval Office."

The measure, known as the the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, is being hailed by [the GOP](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/republican-party.htm)as the biggest legislative achievement for Trump and [congressional Republicans](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/congressional-republicans.htm). After the bill’s passage, Trump celebrated with Republican lawmakers at the White House’s South Lawn.

Trump thanked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan, among other Republican lawmakers for their efforts to get the bill passed.

"I don't think I'm going to have to travel too much to sell it. I think it's selling itself. It's becoming very popular," Trump said.

Some 55 percent of Americans oppose the tax bill, while 33 percent are in favor according to a [CNN poll released Tuesday](http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/19/politics/cnn-poll-tax-bill-opposition-grows/index.html).

Ryan and McConnell held an enrollment ceremony for the bill on Thursday at the U.S. Capitol.

Trump also on Friday signed a one month-long stopgap spending bill aimed at keeping the government running until January 19. The "continuing resolution" passed both GOP-controlled chambers on Thursday and maintains current government spending levels. The bill also includes a $4 billion defense funding provision.

Opinion-Taxes

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-19/how-the-tax-system-slugs-australian-youth-ian-verrender-analysis/9561726?section=analysis>

Remember then-treasurer Joe Hockey's impassioned plea to the nation just on three years ago when he released the most recent Intergenerational Report?

"Madam Speaker, we need to ensure that we can pay for today, and we also need to ensure Australians will be able to afford the future. We are currently living beyond our means."

He ended with a flourish.

"We need to ensure that we take the steps now to ensure our prosperity for generations to come, that we leave nobody behind."

Fine sentiments. But rarely has the future looked more uncertain for our younger generations.

A rapidly expanding population may have kept our economy growing but it has put upward pressure on housing costs, downward pressure on wages and is squeezing the life out of our urban areas.

And increasingly, the older generation — of which your columnist sadly now is a member — appears determined not to ensure the prosperity of future generations, but to grab as much of the pie as humanly possible right now.

Woe betide anyone who stands in the way.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Treasurer Scott Morrison learned that the hard way when they attempted to unwind some of the more generous aspects of superannuation two years ago.

And last week's move by Opposition Leader Bill Shorten [to rescind a generous tax handout to retirees](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-13/labor-plan-scrap-5-billion-year-shareholder-refund-policy/9541016)who own shares sparked an uproar. More on that later.

Our taxation system overwhelmingly favours older Australians.

Thanks to an overhaul in 2007, retirees over the age of 60 can have up to $1.6 million in super and pay absolutely no income tax on the investment earnings the fund earns. Earnings on anything above that $1.6 million limit are taxed at just 15 per cent.

It's a policy that has distorted our tax system and left the federal budget bereft of billions.

Think about this. A retiree, earning $60,000 a year from a super fund pays no tax at all.

Compare that to a 30-year-old, earning exactly the same amount through a wage, who racks up an $11,047 tax bill.

Then add in a Medicare levy of $1,200.

On top of that, many younger workers have student loans to repay as well.

Report-Uber

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/woman-killed-driving-uber-car-identified-company-suspends/story?id=53853861>

A self-driving Uber car hit and killed a pedestrian Sunday night in Tempe, Arizona, police said, in what appears to be the first case of a pedestrian death caused by an autonomous vehicle.

The vehicle was in "autonomous mode at the time of the collision, with a vehicle operator behind the wheel," Tempe police said in a statement.

The female pedestrian, identified as 49-year-old Elaine Herzberg, was walking her bicycle across the street outside the crosswalk when she was struck, police said, adding that an investigation is ongoing.

She died of her injuries at a hospital.

There were no passengers in the Uber vehicle.

In a briefing on Monday afternoon, police said the car was equipped with multiple cameras -- one looking forward and one facing the human driver.

Police added that the driver showed no signs of impairment and that prosecutors will be looking at the case for possible charged.

The vehicle was going 40 mph when it hit the pedestrian. There was no indication the car attempted to slow itself before the collision.

In a statement to ABC News, Uber said, "Our hearts go out to the victim’s family. We are fully cooperating with local authorities in their investigation of this incident."

In the wake of the crash, Uber has suspended its self-driving operations in San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Phoenix and Toronto, the ridesharing service said.

Opinion-Uber

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/uber-driverless-car-accident-who-is-to-blame/9567766?section=analysis>

The [news](http://www.bbc.com/news/business-43459156) that an Uber self-driving vehicle has killed a pedestrian in the US has made headlines around the world.

It's a reminder that the era of self-driving cars is fast approaching. Decades of research into advanced sensors, mapping, navigation and control methods have now come to fruition and autonomous cars are starting to hit the roads in [pilot trials](https://www.cio.com.au/article/625560/driverless-vehicle-trial-start-sydney-olympic-park/).

But partial or full autonomy raises the question of who is to blame in the case of an accident involving a self-driving car.

In conventional (human-driven) cars, the answer is usually simple: the driver is responsible because they are in control. When it comes to autonomous vehicles, it isn't so clear cut.

We propose [a blockchain-based framework](https://arxiv.org/pdf/1802.05050.pdf) that uses sensor data to ascertain liability in accidents involving self-driving cars.

[Uber has suspended self-driving car tests](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/uber-suspends-self-driving-car-tests-after-fatal-crash/9565586) as US authorities gather data about the circumstances surrounding the accident, which involved a car moving in autonomous mode with an operator behind the wheel.

For partially autonomous vehicles, which still involve human control, assigning liability depends on what action led to the collision and whether it was based on decisions by the driver or the vehicle. For fully autonomous vehicles, the blame can be assigned to, or shared by, one of many parties — including the manufacturer, the service centre and the vehicle owner.

Manufacturers could be liable in the case of a design fault, the software provider for buggy system software, or the service centre for inadequate service to the vehicle. On the other hand, negligence liability might fall to the owner for failing to implement a software update from the manufacturer, or with the manufacturer if the accident could have been prevented by a human driver.

In this complex web of potentially responsible parties, how can the circumstances surrounding an accident be determined?

Report-Xi

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-xi-strikes-nationalistic-tone-parliament-address-53864137>

President Xi Jinping vowed Tuesday to protect "every inch" of China's territory, improve the lives of its people and promote the resurgence of Chinese culture and creativity as he kicked off his second term, poised to rule indefinitely.

Xi, China's most powerful leader in decades, sounded a stark warning clearly directed at the government of self-ruled [Taiwan](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/taiwan.htm), which Beijing claims as its territory, and advocates of independence in the southern Chinese city of Hong Kong.

"Every inch of our great motherland absolutely cannot and absolutely will not be separated from [China](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/china.htm)," Xi declared in his speech before the nearly 3,000 members of the National People's Congress.

"All acts and tricks to split the motherland are doomed to failure and will be condemned by the people and punished by history!" he said.

Xi is set to shape China for the coming decades after the historic legislative session that closed Tuesday abolished presidential term limits to allow him to rule for as long as he wants.

As an indication of what is to come, Xi stressed the absolute leadership of the ruling Communist Party — of which he is head — in all aspects of Chinese life. That authority is central to Xi's vision of a confident, rising China with him at the helm to tackle thorny challenges that include slowing growth, risky excessive borrowing, a possible trade war, tensions with rival Taiwan and other challenges.

Xi said the mainland would continue to promote "peaceful unification" with Taiwan. The island's 23 million residents are strongly in favor of maintaining their de facto independent status, but Xi has warned a Taiwanese envoy that the issue of unification cannot be put off indefinitely.

Now that he has made it possible to be president-for-life, Xi seems determined to bring Taiwan under Beijing's control during his time in office, something that would place him in the history books alongside Mao Zedong, said Willy Lam, an expert in Chinese politics at the Chinese University in Hong Kong.

That increases the potential for provocative, dangerous actions, he said, possibly drawing in the U.S., which is legally bound to respond to threats against Taiwan.

"Xi is consumed by hubris," Lam said. "Now that he's made himself emperor-for-life, he might be feeling impregnable on the foreign policy front, and this is very dangerous."

Xi's hard-line remarks might have been prompted by President Donald Trump's signing of a law on Friday that encourages expanded contacts between officials from Washington and Taiwan, Lam added. China has officially protested the law, saying it violates U.S. commitments not to restore direct official contacts with Taiwan that were severed when Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.

China's longer-than-usual, 16-day legislative session had earlier approved a range of new appointments, including that of key Xi ally Wang Qishan as vice president. New ministers were also appointed and a law passed establishing a powerful new anti-corruption body to oversee the party and civil service.

Opinion-Xi

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/china-e28093-xi-jinping-is-all-powerful-what-will-he-do-next/9563170?section=analysis>

Human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng did the unthinkable in Xi Jinping's China. In an open letter, last October he criticised the President's "totalitarian rule" and called for immediate political reform and democracy.

The next day, as he was walking his son to school, he was detained by a squad of security police and man-handled into a van. His wife, Xu Yan, hasn't seen him since.

"I am very worried about Yu Wensheng, he acted within the laws and did what he thought was right but he lost his freedom," she said.

"I've run around to different departments but no-one can tell me what's happening. I can't see any hope for the future."

From today, the National People's Congress has handed Mr Xi a powerful new weapon to deal with any dissent or opposition, even before it surfaces.

It can overrule the highest courts in the land and is only answerable to the cabinet and, of course, Xi Jinping.

Xi now controls Communist Party

People in China are bracing themselves for another round of repression.

Mr Xi has already targeted human rights lawyers, NGOs, the media, academics and he's now tipped to go further.

It is not surprising that the Congress will approve a domestic security budget that is a whopping $320 billion — 20 per cent more than the national defence budget.

Mr Xi has put a bigger priority on fighting the enemy within rather than abroad.

The end of the 13th National People's Congress means Mr Xi's remaking of the Chinese political system is complete. China now has a much more centralised structure of governance answerable to him, collective leadership with an emphasis on consensus has been discarded.

Professor Stein Ringen from Oxford University, author of The Perfect Dictatorship — China in the 21st Century, says the curtain has been pulled aside and Mr Xi has finally revealed his true nature:

"It's been extraordinary and rapid how he has amassed power. He's moved from being a cautious leader to a very adventurous one showing off power.

"He can launch policies on his own without any process and no safeguards. This is now a system with more instability than it had two to three months ago."

Professor Ringen says at the same time there's also been a dramatic shift in how an emboldened Mr Xi is projecting China's power and influence overseas.

"We are now hearing from Xi Jinping that the Chinese model is one for others, one that they can learn from. This is an entirely new direction. And for many developing nations the model is attractive for its ability to deliver growth while democracy dithers," he says.

Susan Shirk, a former China advisor to US President Bill Clinton and now a professor at the University of California, says this is a turning point for China and is a direct challenge to America and the democratic world.

"Xi Jinping has thrown down the political gauntlet and is ready to compete. This is something previous Chinese leaders didn't want to say because it would provoke a major reaction on the part of democratic countries because it reeks of cold war ideological competition," she says.

"For decades we've said the China-US relationship was different from US-Soviet relationship because we don't compete about political systems, but this is something very new."

Report-Mueller

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-fire-senate-republican-special-counsel-mueller/story?id=53832942>

A Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee said he does not believe [President Donald Trump](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/donald-trump.htm) will move to fire special counsel [Robert Mueller](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/robert-s.-mueller.htm), despite a tweet this weekend by a Trump attorney calling for an end to the Russia investigation.

Sen. [James Lankford](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/james-lankford.htm) of Oklahoma told ABC News Chief Anchor [George Stephanopoulos](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/reporters/george-stephanopoulos.htm) on “This Week” Sunday, “I don’t see the president firing him. I think the White House has said 10 times, maybe more, that they are not going to fire Robert Mueller. They want him to be able to finish the investigation."

Stephanopoulos asked Lankford about a statement by Trump attorney John Dowd to [The Daily Beast](https://www.thedailybeast.com/trumps-lawyer-its-time-to-fire-robert-mueller) on Saturday suggesting that the [Justice Department](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/justice-department.htm) official who appointed Mueller end the Russia probe.

“I pray that Acting Attorney General Rosenstein will bring an end to alleged Russia Collusion investigation," Dowd said, calling the probe "manufactured."

Lankford said on "This Week," "The clearest thing that I can explain from that is the president’s exceptionally frustrated, that he wants to be able to see this investigation come to an end. He has stated over and over again there was no collusion."

"So it’s not that Mueller has found nothing, it’s that the president seems to be very, very frustrated that they have not connected anything to him and ... he wants to be able to move on," the Oklahoma senator said.

Lankford added that Dowd’s comments were nothing more than talk typical from any attorney.

"What I read yesterday was what a typical attorney puts out at every stage during every investigation saying, 'This is wrapped up. We should be done,'" Lankford said. "So it’s not different than what an attorney does typically."

The Oklahoma Republican sits on the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is conducting its own probe of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. election and possible ties to Trump associates. He said the special counsel should be allowed to finish his investigation.

"I would say the best thing the special counsel can do is to finish the investigation, gather all the information that’s needed [and] come to a conclusion so the American people can make their own decisions,” Lankford said. "What I have said over and over again as well is it’s best for the special counsel to be able to go through their process. It’s best for the president, best for the presidency for this to be resolved and to be finished one way or the other."

Lankford added that he has had concerns about some of the people on Mueller's investigative team.

“It is odd the number of Democrats that he’s put on board his team. That does raise some flags in some sense there,” the senator said, adding that Mueller seems to have addressed the issue of any possible bias in the probe.

“Clearly, he also identified some individuals that were biased that were from the [FBI](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/federal-bureau-of-investigation.htm)that he fired immediately once he found out that they were biased, that tainted that,” the Senate Intelligence Committee member said, referring to federal agents dismissed over text messages showing possible bias against Trump.

Mueller "seems to be moving on from there," Lankford said.

Opinion-Mueller

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/robert-mueller-the-man-donald-trump-fears-most/9563366?section=analysis>

The Secretary of State fired, and then humiliated by the President's chief of staff. The National Security Adviser threatened with his own firing. A long-term law-enforcement official axed two days before he would have received a pension.

And a Twitter diatribe against a seasoned investigator who may very well hold his fate in his hands.

It's easy to look from afar at the nastiness of Donald Trump's administration and wonder why it is at such a fever pitch.

This is what it looks like when Mr Trump is in over his head, and there is no-one who can counsel him or calm him down.

Veteran political operatives, who might be able to be of assistance, are staying far away. Those who remain on staff never know when they will be bullied privately or criticised in public.

Incredibly, this could all get more chaotic before the dust settles.

On Sunday night, the New York Times reported Mr Trump now feels unshackled, and free to say whatever he likes.

Earlier on Sunday, he turned [his wrath on Robert Mueller](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-19/donald-trump-lashes-out-at-mueller-over-russia-investigation/9561786), the former Federal Bureau of Investigations director who is leading the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

It was the first time he had mentioned Mr Mueller by name, and his Twitter tirade flummoxed legal experts who said Mr Trump was simply handing Mr Mueller ammunition.

The White House quickly issued a statement saying there was no discussion or consideration of firing Mr Mueller.

That may or may not be true. But the former FBI director is the person who Mr Trump fears most, and who fits the model of the kind of men he resented most during his turbulent days in the real estate game.

Mr Mueller is the ultimate establishment player, the ultimate upper-class Republican. Even his name sounds like what used to be called "white shoe" — Robert Swan Mueller III.

He was appointed to his FBI position by George W Bush, himself a scion of an old-school Republican family. His original 10-year term was extended for two years by Mr Bush's successor, Barack Obama, making him the longest-serving FBI director since J Edgar Hoover.

His resume gleams with sterling credentials — Princeton University and the University of Virginia. Service as an officer in the Marine Corps, where he was awarded a Bronze Star, among America's highest military honours, as well as a Purple Heart, given to soldiers wounded during action.

He has bounced between the private sector and public service, between San Francisco and Washington, Boston and New York.

Everything in his background is as much a contrast to Mr Trump's hustling, lying (by his own admission), adulterous (by his own admission) life.

When Mr Trump was rising in New York in the 1980s, the old money elite looked down on his arriviste persona.

Mr Trump, at the time, declared he didn't care, hanging his name from banners in full sight of city landmarks such as Grand Central Station, heading off to play golf at a country house before building his own golf courses.

And, as the Trump name appeared in more and more places, not just in New York, but across the United States and around the world, it seemed Mr Trump had triumphed over the old guard, which seemed to be less and less relevant as global billionaires became richer and richer.

Report-Election

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-votes-vladimir-putin-eyes-4th-presidential-term-53830130>

[Vladimir Putin](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/world/vladimir-putin.htm) rolled to a crushing re-election victory Sunday for six more years as Russia's president, and he told cheering supporters in a triumphant but brief speech that "we are bound for success."

There had been no doubt that Putin would win in his fourth electoral contest; he faced seven minor candidates and his most prominent foe was blocked from the ballot.

His only real challenge was to run up the tally so high that he could claim an indisputable mandate.

With ballots from 80 percent of Russia's precincts counted by early Monday, Putin had amassed 76 percent of the vote. Observers and individual voters reported widespread violations including ballot-box stuffing and forced voting, but the claims are unlikely to dilute the power of Russia's longest-serving leader since Josef Stalin.

As the embodiment of Russia's resurgent power on the world stage, Putin commands immense loyalty among Russians. More than 30,000 crowded into Manezh Square adjacent to the Kremlin in temperatures of minus 10 (15 Fahrenheit) for a victory concert and to await his words.

Putin extolled them for their support — "I am a member of your team" — and he promised them that "we are bound for success."

Then he left the stage after speaking for less than two minutes, a seemingly perfunctory appearance that encapsulated the election's predictability.

Since he took the helm in Russia on New Year's Eve 1999 after Boris Yeltsin's surprise resignation, Putin's electoral power has centered on stability, a quality cherished by Russians after the chaotic breakup of the Soviet Union and the "wild capitalism" of the Yeltsin years.

But that stability has been bolstered by a suppression of dissent, the withering of independent media and the top-down control of politics called "managed democracy."

There were widespread reports of forced voting Sunday, efforts to make Russia appear to be a robust democracy.

Among them were two election observers in Gorny Shchit, a rural district of Yekaterinburg, who told The Associated Press they saw an unusually high influx of people going to the polls between noon and 2 p.m. A doctor at a hospital in the Ural mountains city told the AP that 2 p.m. was the deadline for health officials to report to their superiors that they had voted.

"People were coming in all at once, (they) were entering in groups as if a tram has arrived at a stop," said one of the observers, Sergei Krivonogov . The voters were taking pictures of the pocket calendars or leaflets that poll workers distributed, seemingly as proof of voting, he said.

Other examples from observers and social media included ballot boxes being stuffed with extra ballots in multiple regions; an election official assaulting an observer; CCTV cameras obscured by flags or nets from watching ballot boxes; discrepancies in ballot numbers; last-minute voter registration changes likely designed to boost turnout; and a huge pro-Putin sign in one polling station.

Opinion-Election

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/even-putins-fake-election-serves-important-purpose/9564862?section=analysis>

So, Vladimir Putin won his nation's presidential "election" race in a "landslide".

What a shock!

With no serious competitor and almost total control over the media, not even the Kremlin could suggest with a straight face this result was ever in doubt.

It is staggeringly easy to poke fun at a process with so many obvious democratic deficits.

The images of officials appearing to stuff ballot boxes in remote Russian regions are bizarre, not to mention the complaints from some citizens that they were forced to vote multiple times.

I find this particularly amusing considering how closely the ABC was supervised, monitored and checked when we entered a polling booth or filmed on the street.

Even an election coordinator in central Moscow confided to me in an awkward, embarrassed kind of way that "irregularities" and "widespread voter fraud" were fairly common.

It seems highly unlikely he was a Putin supporter — they have spent the past 10 days claiming Russia's version of democracy is its own "unique" process that I can't comprehend due to my misguided, western "Russophobic" ways.

But to purely mock or focus on the broader geopolitical consequences of Vladimir Putin's "re-election" — quote marks intended — is to miss a few interesting aspects of this whole, theatrical process.

Russians, the many we met at least, seem to genuinely like voting, even though they almost all know the outcome has already been decided.

In their eyes, the fact they can actually cast a ballot puts them miles ahead of a stack of other countries.

Opposition supporters of course are campaigning for change.

But even had the banned and oft-arrested Alexei Navalny been allowed to run, it's highly unlikely he would have forced the election into a second round.

It's true, no-one knows for sure what would happen if Russia suddenly gave its people the freedom to openly, safely challenge the political establishment, though it's safe to say there's no sign that's about to happen.

And that seems at least partly because Mr Putin appears to have a solid support base.

Russians have repeatedly told us, "they're not better off", "life isn't better", but they think their President is carving out a greater place for them on the world stage and that makes them very proud.

So the "election", while flawed, serves a purpose — it's almost a sort of ritual.

In the eyes of many Russians, the process, the show, legitimises Mr Putin's enormous power at home and licenses him to keep projecting it abroad.

Here, many expect him to keep antagonising and confronting Western nations for the next six years.