

THE HOMELAND SECURITY *NEWS CLIPS*

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LEADING DHS NEWS

Supreme Court Split Threatens Obama's Immigration Actions

By Lydia Wheeler

[The Hill](#), April 3, 2016

President Obama is facing the very real possibility of a deadlock at the Supreme Court that guarantees his immigration actions won't take effect before he leaves office.

If the justices split 4-4 on the case, as observers say is possible, the president's attempt to shield nearly 5 million people from deportation would be sent back to the lower courts for another lengthy legal battle that would surely spill into the next administration.

Oral arguments in the case are set for April 18, which means a decision could come in late June.

The high court has already deadlocked twice since the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia, most recently in a case that questioned whether public sector workers should be required to pay their "fare share" of union fees.

Given the court's current trajectory, court watchers say an even split in the immigration case, known as *United States v. Texas*, would not be surprising.

"I don't have a crystal ball, but it's certainly possible," said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton.

The immigration actions have been on ice for months, after a Texas district court issued a temporary injunction preventing them from taking effect pending a contrary order from a higher court or a trial on the merits of the case. After the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals failed to lift the injunction, the administration sought to speed up the process by taking the case to the Supreme Court.

Supporters of the administration insist Scalia's death will have no outcome on the case, predicting that Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Anthony Kennedy could rule in the administration's favor.

"I cannot predict the way the case will come out, but I do think we are on very solid legal ground," said Melissa Crow, legal director for the American Immigration Council, which joined a brief in support of the administration. "I don't think Scalia's death set us back in any way."

Crow and other supporters of the administration are hoping the court will find that the states do not have standing to sue over the immigration actions. In that scenario, the lawsuit would be dismissed and the long-delayed immigration actions could move forward.

"The possibility that the case could go forward on such tenuous grounds is frightening," Crow said of the states being granted standing. "It would enable states to essentially have unilateral veto power over federal policies not only in the immigration arena, but other areas where the federal government is steering the course."

Texas and the 25 other states challenging Obama's actions argue the DAPA program will cost them millions of dollars by allowing undocumented parents of both American citizens and legal permanent residents to stay in the country.

Texas says it would incur the most cost by having to issue a substantial number of new driver's licenses.

"Put simply, DAPA will directly cause a flood of new driver's license applications and an injunction of DAPA would allow plaintiffs to avoid the unwanted cost of issuing those licenses," the state said in court documents. "That easily establishes a personal stake in this case."

Supporters of the administration say Texas could pass the added costs for driver's licenses on to residents, and argue that the states actually stand to make money off of Obama's programs.

Tom Jawetz, the vice president of immigration policy at the Center for American Progress, said studies show state and local tax contributions would increase by an estimated \$805 million each year and state GDP would increase by \$91.9 billion over the next 10 years if the immigration actions were allowed to proceed.

But Paxton argues the cost to states is not the central issue in the case — the issue is the rule of law.

"That's what gave us standing, but that's not the issue," he said. "It's can the president change the law and if he can, we're talking about a whole different country, a whole different Constitution."

Though Paxton hopes the justices will unanimously side with the states, he said a deadlocked decision would still be a victory because it would allow the states to go back to the lower courts and fully argue the case on the merits.

"A win's a win," he said. "We want more than a preliminary injunction. We want a ruling on the merits that this action by the president is unlawful."

Paxton said he is encouraged by the court's request for the parties to argue whether the immigration programs violated the Take Care Clause under Article II of the Constitution, which directs the president to take care that the laws are faithfully executed. He said the request for arguments on that point is a sign that the justices are determined to settle the case once and for all.

Some groups are hoping for a dismissal instead.

John Miano, counsel for Save Jobs USA and the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers, said it's unusual for the Supreme Court to rule on a preliminary injunction.

"The government is trying to get the Supreme Court to decide the merits of the case before the merits of the case are decided in the lower courts," he said.

"The best outcome in the Texas case is for the Supreme Court to recognize its mistake and dismiss the writ of certiorari as improvidently granted and let the case proceed."

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS

ENFORCEMENT

Advocates Concerned Bangladeshi Asylum Seekers May Be #Deported2Death

[NBC News](#), April 3, 2016

Asian-American and Muslim-American advocates are speaking out against the possible deportation of 169 Bangladeshi political asylum seekers Monday, using the hashtag #Deported2Death to draw attention to the risk they face if they are returned to Bangladesh.

Fahd Ahmed, executive director of Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) told NBC News that detainees have reported that over 500 South Asian migrants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, have been relocated to a detention center in Florence, Arizona, in preparation for mass deportations on Monday, April 4.

Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) members outside presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's Brooklyn campaign headquarters March 29 demanding that Clinton speak out publicly to halt the deportations of 169 Bangladeshi asylum seekers. Courtesy of Desis Rising Up and Moving

"I left Bangladesh and traveled across a dozen countries to escape political repression and save my life," Jahed Ahmed, an asylum seeker and DRUM member, said in a statement. "Instead, I ended up rotting away in detention for over 10 months. The U.S. government gave the names of many of the detainees to the Bangladeshi government, and they then leaked them to the media. Our asylum cases and hunger strikes have become a political issue for the Bangladeshi government, and now the Obama Administration wants to deport me back to where I will be disappeared, tortured or killed."

According to Fahd Ahmed, increasing numbers of Bangladeshis have fled political insecurity and religious persecution by traveling through South America to request asylum in the United States over the past several years. Once in the United States, Ahmed said they are detained and unable to properly prepare their asylum cases. Many of these asylum seekers also participated in the #FreedomGiving hunger strikes last fall.

Ahmed is also concerned that, due to racial and religious profiling, many of the asylum seekers have been incorrectly identified as "terrorists" for being members of the opposition party in Bangladesh. The asylum seekers and their families may have also been put at risk after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) allegedly gave the Bangladeshi government access to the asylum seekers and allowed their names to be published in Bangladeshi media.

"If they are sent back, they know they will end up in pieces on the side of the road," Ahmed said.

DRUM members protesting outside Hillary Clinton's Brooklyn campaign headquarters on March 29. Courtesy of Desis Rising Up and Moving

Rep. Joe Crowley (D-NY), founder and chair of the Bangladesh caucus, sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson last week asking them to hold the deportations and examine any possible danger those deported could face.

Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), immigration task force chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), and Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA), chair of CAPAC, also sent a letter to Johnson regarding the deportations.

"Given concerns surrounding their asylum proceedings, we strongly request that the deportations of these individuals be delayed by two months to allow for their cases to be reevaluated and allow their lawyers time to file motions to reopen and emergency stays of removal," the letter reads.

Several Asian-American and Muslim-American advocacy groups — including DRUM, MPower Change, #Not1More, and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance — have reached out to elected officials, the State Department, and the Department of Homeland Security, as well as to presidential candidates regarding the asylum seekers.

"Muslim and South Asian communities, and those perceived to be, are among those consistently subject to racial and religious profiling," Gregory Cendana, executive director of Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, told NBC News. "The consequences have put many behind bars, deported and separated from their families, and even killed at the hands of state violence at disproportionate rates. We stand with these Bangladeshi detainees because their experiences show the impact of mass incarceration on communities of color and how Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are not immune to such criminalization."

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

ADMINISTRATION

APNewsBreak: Move To OK Commercial Drone Flights Over People

By Joan Lowy

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — A government-sponsored committee is recommending standards that could clear the way for commercial drone flights over populated areas and help speed the introduction of package delivery drones and other uses not yet possible. The Associated Press has learned.

The Federal Aviation Administration currently prohibits most commercial drone flights over populated areas,

especially crowds. That ban frustrates a host of industries that want to take advantage of the technology.

"Every TV station in the country wants one, but they can't be limited to flying in the middle of nowhere because there's no news in the middle of nowhere," said Jim Williams, a former head of FAA's drone office who now advises the industry for Dentons, an international law firm.

Cellular network providers also want to loosen restrictions so drones, also known as unmanned aerial vehicles, can inspect cell towers, which often are in urban areas. Amazon's vision for package deliveries entails drones winging their way over city and suburban neighborhoods.

The AP obtained a copy of the recommendations, which were sent to the FAA late Friday. The agency is not bound by the recommendations and can make changes when it writes final rules.

The recommendations call for creating four categories of small drones that commercial operators can fly over people, including crowds in some cases.

The first category of drones would weigh no more than about a half-pound. They essentially could fly unrestricted over people, including crowds. Drone makers would have to certify that if the drone hit someone, there would be no more than a 1 percent chance that the maximum force of the impact would cause a serious injury.

For the three other categories, the drones would have to fly at least 20 feet over the heads of people and keep a distance of at least 10 feet laterally from someone.

According to the recommendations:

—Drones in the second category are expected to be mostly small quadcopters — drones with multiple arms and propellers, and weighing 4 pounds to 5 pounds — but there is no weight limit. Flights over people, including crowds, would depend on the design and operating instructions. Manufacturers would have to demonstrate through testing that the chance of a serious injury was 1 percent or less.

—Drones in the third category could not fly over crowds or densely populated areas. These drones would be used for work in closed or restricted sites where the people that the drones fly over have permission from the drone operator to be present. Those people would be incidental to the drone operations and flights over them would be brief, rather than sustained. Manufacturers would have to show there was a 30 percent chance or less that a person would be seriously injured if struck by the drone at the maximum strength impact possible.

—Drones in the fourth category could have sustained flights over crowds. Working with the FAA and engaging the local community, the operator would have to develop a "congested area plan" showing how flight risks would be mitigated. As before, the risk of serious injury would have to be 30 percent or less. Safety tests would be more exacting

and the FAA would set a limit on how strong the drone's maximum impact could be.

"The risks are nominal," said Michael Drobac, executive director of the Small UAV Coalition. "The reality is the technology would likely save lives rather than threaten them."

The FAA announced the formation of the committee in February as a way to circumvent traditional federal rule-making procedures, which can take years. The committee was made up of 27 companies or trade associations, including drone manufacturers and companies that want to fly drones, as well as airline and private pilots, airports, crop dusting companies and helicopter operators.

A last-minute disagreement nearly kept the committee from meeting the Friday deadline for the recommendations.

The Air Line Pilots Association and trade associations for the helicopter and crop dusting industries wanted to require that all commercial drone operators pass an aviation knowledge test administered in person by the FAA and receive a background check from the Transportation Security Administration, according to an industry official familiar with the discussions.

Most committee members opposed requiring anything more than an online knowledge test. The matter was resolved by the inclusion of a dissent by those in favor of the FAA test and TSA clearance. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about internal discussions.

The FAA initially described the panel as a "micro" drone committee. The agency defines such drones as those weighing less than 4.4 pounds. But the committee decided not to set a weight limit for most of the categories. That means it's possible that any "small" drone, which the FAA defines as weighing less than 55 pounds, could win approval to fly over people if the drone met the safety criteria laid out in the recommendations. For example, a smaller drone that flies at higher speeds with fast-moving propellers may prove more of a risk than a heavier drone that flies more slowly and whose propellers don't rotate as quickly.

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Troubling Signs For Aviation Safety

By Christopher Elliott

[USA Today](#), April 3, 2016

Like a lot of air travelers, Scott Cocking feels safe when he boards a plane. But he still worries.

"I think there are things that can be done to make air travel safer," says Cocking, a marketing executive from West New York, N.J.

Topping his list of worries: the Transportation Security Administration's many public failures, and the ever-present fear of an aviation disaster brought to the surface by several

recent events, including the terrorist bombing that killed 11 people and injured 81 in Brussels last month.

None of the world's safest airlines are American, according to the latest numbers from the Jet Airliner Crash Data Evaluation Centre in Germany. Cathay Pacific Airways, Emirates and EVA Air earned the highest marks in their safety rankings. JetBlue Airways (11th) is the top-rated U.S. carrier, and Delta Air Lines (17th) is the safest legacy carrier. Alaska Airlines is the lowest-rated, landing in the 43rd spot out of 60 carriers.

The airline industry wants you to think it's all but crash-proof. The planes might be properly maintained, and the pilots well trained, but air travel is hardly risk-free. And it's no coincidence that "fear of flying" courses are as popular as ever.

Cocking's top concern — a complacent TSA — is well founded. The federal agency assigned to protect America's transportation systems (read: airports) has had well-documented issues. An internal report last year revealed that inspectors posing as passengers successfully smuggled weapons past TSA agents in 67 out of 70 tests. A second round of testing later in the year showed little improvement. The agency generates a predictable number of complaints from customers, who fear TSA's performance makes it a weak link in aviation security.

"TSA is nothing but a hassle," says Beth Allen, a retired paralegal and frequent air traveler from Tucson. "I continually have to be patted down because of joint replacements. My cat even gets patted down. Meanwhile other passengers are flying through security carrying knives and who knows what other potentially lethal weapons."

Taking a big-picture view, the number of commercial airline accidents plummeted in 2015, making it one of the safest years for flying in five years.

"When you look back at the 1970s and early 1980s, there was a major airline wreck in the United States every year," says Phil Derner, Jr., who runs a private aviation company in New York. "Annual airline crash fatalities were in the double or triple digits. Today, however, in over six years the total number of airline crash fatalities is only two. Two people, out of almost five billion people that have flown in the U.S."

Impressive. And yet several recent incidents cast doubts on overall safety of air travel, beyond just lackadaisical airport screening. Among them are the FlyDubai crash in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, last month, which killed all 62 passengers. And looming large is a damning report by French officials about the Germanwings crash in the mountains near Prads-Haute-Bléone, France, which killed all 150 people on board. The mentally ill pilot, Andreas Lubitz, is said to have deliberately steered the aircraft into the Alps. French aviation authorities recommended improved screening for pilots.

Most worrisome is the prospect of another aviation disaster in the United States, raised by maintenance outsourcing and rapidly growing airlines, particularly low-cost carriers with older fleets.

"Old planes, warp-speed growth and a lot of maintenance issues," says Mary Schiavo, a former U.S. Department of Transportation inspector general and author of *Flying Blind, Flying Safe*. "Looking at the trends, it doesn't require a crystal ball to forecast disaster on the horizon."

Aviation insiders dismiss concerns like those, saying the fears are being stoked by a 24/7 news cycle.

"These fixations tend to be short-lived, but they are intense enough to give people the impression that flying is becoming more dangerous," says Patrick Smith, author of *Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel*. "In fact, it has become safer."

Add up all the disasters and the worries and possibilities, and it's no surprise those "fear of flying" programs are still in business. As the summer travel season approaches, we may not have much to worry about when it comes to airline safety. But we will anyway.

How to fly safe this summer

- If you have to fly, choose the safest carriers. In the United States, the three safest, according to the Jet Airliner Crash Data Evaluation Centre, are JetBlue, Delta and Southwest.

- Steer clear of dangerous places. The riskiest places to fly are Nepal, Indonesia and Suriname, according to the site Airlineratings.com.

- If it looks too good to be true ... Airlines that offer rock-bottom fares may cut in other departments as well. Something to remember the next time you see a fare so much lower than any competitors.

I'm A Black Woman; That Doesn't Mean I Have A Bomb In My Hair

[Salon](#), April 3, 2016

Following yet another awful terrorist attack, this one partially in an airport in Belgium, the topic of air-travel security and civil liberties is once again in the news. But my personal experience flying as a black woman shows we still have a long way to go in balancing security and the rights of individuals— especially when those individuals aren't white.

I fly frequently. Between performances, workshops, retreats and conferences, I'm typically on a domestic flight at least once a month. So I am no stranger to TSA flight requirements. I take my laptop out of my bag and put it in a separate tray. Take off my shoes. Remove my belt. Empty my pockets. Throw out my water bottle. Pack liquids under 3.4 ounces. Then, I stand with my hands over my head for scanning. And while I do my best to comply with TSA rules and policies, I am always stopped. Always. Why? Because

their scanning machine says my hair may be, or possess, a security threat. Sometimes they need to “just take a look” – so I stand still while they walk around me in a circle to get a closer look at my hair. Increasingly, a TSA agent will need to pat down my hair, rake their fingers through my tresses and squeeze my scalp. And, of course, the so-called “security threat” is never found.

My hair is a critical part of my self-expression, my artistic practice, a celebration of my heritage and my connection to spirit. So when TSA runs their dirty-ass latex gloves through my hair, it's an insult. It's racist. And it needs to stop.

A couple of months ago I headed to San Francisco from New York City for an annual Echoing Ida retreat. Unsurprisingly, but infuriatingly nonetheless, my hair needed to be inspected by a TSA agent at John F. Kennedy International (JFK) airport. I had had enough. Like many millennials, I took to social media to vent my frustration. When I landed on the West Coast, I opened my Facebook app to find that a bunch of my friends had commented, mostly black women. Many were outraged and others mentioned how they too go through this experience with TSA, wondering what we could do about it. I tweeted at TSA and their related Twitter account @AskTSA. Given my recent encounter with TSA at JFK, I was surprised to find this tweet from them for #BlackHistoryMonth:

I'm curious (and skeptical) about what changes, if any, have resulted from these partnerships. And the response from @AskTSA about my concerns was nothing short of underwhelming:

The TSA's current practice does little to respond to an agreement it made with the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California (ACLUNC) last year.

The agreement was reached after the ACLUNC filed an administrative complaint on behalf of Malaika Singleton, Ph.D. – a black woman with locs who experienced a hair pat-down after going through TSA scanning at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and again at Minneapolis International Airport (MSP) in December 2013. According to the agreement, TSA offered to ensure that “training related to nondiscrimination is clear and consistent for TSA's workforce” as well as specifically track hair pat-down complaints “from African-American females throughout the country to assess whether a discriminatory impact may be occurring at a specific TSA secured location.”

Armed with this information, I vowed that the next time one of these TSA agents tried to touch my hair, I would remind them about the ACLU agreement, take names and file a complaint. I didn't have to wait very long. I had my opportunity on Sunday, March 13, at the Raleigh Durham International Airport (RDA) in North Carolina.

I was on my way home after attending and providing healing services at the BYP100 National Membership

Convening. As usual, TSA needed to check my hair after scanning. I respectfully said no. When the TSA agent told me it was required, I asked for her supervisor. (Ironically, while I'm waiting, another TSA agent compliments me on my hair.) When her supervisor arrived, she said I had two options: 1) get my hair patted down where I was standing or 2) get my hair patted down in a private room. My heart was pounding. My ears were hot. I was steaming mad. It took everything I had to keep my composure. Despite my anger, I calmly explained: “I don't want my hair touched. Every time I go through TSA security I get stopped for my hair, and other black women experience this too.” The agent replied, “It's not just black women; Latina and Asian women get this treatment as well.” She said that if I refused, I would not be able to board my plane. It was 20 minutes until boarding and I didn't want to miss my flight. After taking her name and letting her know that I would be filing a complaint, I “allowed” (can I even call it that?) a TSA agent to pat my hair down, only after I instructed her to change her latex gloves. She squeezed my bun, raked through my scalp. And what did she find? Nothing. What a surprise.

Being a black woman while flying has meant harassment: consistent and constant rummaging through my hair searching for nonexistent threats and weapons. I understand that in a post-9/11 era there is a desire to be cautious — especially given the most recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. I too desire safety and security; however, I am not convinced that my hair is deserving of so much suspicion. While the rare instance of hair smuggling is not completely unheard of, there have to be solutions to this security query that don't involve a breach of civil liberties, racial profiling and humiliating pat-downs.

There are no bombs in my bun. Ain't no weapons of mass destruction tangled in my fro-hawk. I'm not smuggling drugs in my braids. No firearms are concealed in my pinned-up pompadour. No hidden weapons under my headwrap. I promise not to use my bobby pins to stab anyone. Nor will I use my head scarf to choke passengers. My twist-outs are harmless. My high ponytail will not kill you. My black kinky hair in all of its styles (trust, there are many) does not compromise homeland security.

My hair is my crown and glory. Raised by a single mother who had a hectic schedule, I became responsible for doing my hair at the tender age of 9. So you know I take my hair seriously. I've done every hairdo under the sun: from bobs to bangs, Aaliyah swoops to the T-Boz “Crazy Sexy Cool” cut. Short and long. A full head of hair and a frohawk. Perms, weave and natural. The list goes on. My hair is a big part of who I am. That the TSA is ill-equipped to deal with it in a routine and non-invasive manner is symptomatic of systemic racism.

And I'm not the only black woman going through this. Melissa Harris-Perry, Solange Knowles and other, less

famous black women experience this degradation every day. And the problem isn't with TSA alone. TSA operates alongside a number of institutions within a framework of white supremacy that are both fascinated and threatened by what black women do with our hair and heads. In February a school administrator at a high school in Durham, North Carolina, told young black girl students to remove their West-African inspired head wraps because it violated school dress code. Black women in the workplace have been discriminated against for rocking natural hair in general and braids in particular, including Renee Rodgers, who filed a lawsuit (and lost) against American Airlines in 1981 because she was told that her cornrows violated the company's grooming policy. And this is not just specific to corporate America — the U.S. military made it a point to explicitly state that black hairstyles were unauthorized.

Although racial references may not be explicitly stated in their policies, the practices of implementing TSA policy is having a racist impact. It should be noted that not all agents who pat down hair are white. My most recent experience involved two black women TSA agents. But to be clear: that is how systemic racism works – it's not just about the racial identity of the TSA agents implementing these dubious practices; it's about the races that are disproportionately and unfairly impacted by the practices of TSA.

More importantly, this isn't just about TSA agents. Their technology is questionable and ineffective. As Melissa Harris Perry eloquently stated: "If your \$170,000 machine can see under my clothes, but can't figure out I'm not hiding a bomb in my braids, maybe it's time to recalibrate the machine." It seems logical but may not be a reality anytime soon. "We initially asked TSA to audit the scanner triggering false positives for African American hair specifically" said Novella Coleman, an ACLUNC staff attorney who worked on the TSA agreement. "TSA was unwilling to take a look at that."

In her article "The Politics of Black Women's Hair: Why It's Seen with Skepticism and the Need to Discipline," Brittney Cooper says "there is a long history of institutions regulating bodies in such a way that white bodies become the norm." Indeed. So when TSA says they do not engage in discriminatory practices, they only check hair with "anomalies," it is clear that what is outside of the norm is black hair.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FEMA Denies Grand Isle Request For Levee Repairs

[Associated Press](#), April 2, 2016

GRAND ISLE, La. (AP) — Grand Isle officials have been met with another setback as they try to determine how to rebuild their first-line storm defense.

The town's levees were torn up again by heavy storms three weeks ago. WVUE-TV (<http://bit.ly/1ZTO0h7>) reports the Federal Emergency Management Agency notified officials Friday that it had rejected the levee as eligible for funding for repairs.

Mayor David Camardelle said they plan to appeal FEMA's decision.

Meanwhile, the Grand Isle Levee District met to try and figure out how to shore up a 2,000-foot section of shredded levee in need of an estimated \$6 million in repairs. But after years of problems with the levee, the mayor wants the repair done right.

"We want to know if we belong to Louisiana and the U.S.," Camardelle said.

The levee district said rocks are needed about 200 yards off the beach to protect the levee from future damage.

"It's frustrating to ask for \$6 million for a patch-up job," Camardelle said.

Rocks are already in place in other sections of Grand Isle beach. Officials said they offer excellent protection, and in some cases, build new beach. They're now needed off the western shore.

"Put some more rocks on the outside, do it right so I don't have to knock every six months to repair something," Camardelle said.

With no solution in sight right now, officials worry. Hurricane season starts in just two months.

Grand Isle officials will go to Baton Rouge next week to try and find a solution. In the meantime, the mayor said he will perform an emergency patch on the damaged levee if a storm approaches.

Information from: WVUE-TV, <http://fox8live.com>

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FEMA Denies Grand Isle Request For Levee Repairs

By Rob Masson

[WVUE-TV New Orleans](#), April 1, 2016

GRAND ISLE, LA (WVUE) –

Grand Isle officials got bad news Friday as they met to try and figure out a way to rebuild their first-line storm defense. The town's levees were torn up again by heavy storms three weeks ago.

Grand Isle officials were stunned last month when a massive rainstorm pushed in seas rough enough to severely damage the levees.

"Hurricane season is just a couple months away, and this is the narrowest part of the island," said Grand Isle Mayor David Camardelle as he surveyed the damage to a 2,000-foot section of the levee just moments after getting word that FEMA won't help.

"FEMA has rejected the levee as eligible for funding for this emergency," said town levee engineer Oneil Malbrough.

"Something's wrong there. We're going to appeal it," added Camardelle.

The Grand Isle Levee District met to try and figure out how to shore up a shredded levee in need of an estimated \$6 million in repairs. But after years of problems with the levee, the mayor wants the repair done right.

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IMMIGRATION

Colombian Accused Of Using Fake Documents To Obtain U.S. Citizenship Faces Deportation

[Miami Herald](#), April 3, 2016

An undocumented Colombian immigrant who pleaded guilty recently in a case involving the use of a Puerto Rican birth certificate to pose as a U.S. citizen has been sentenced to what amounts to deportation.

At a sentencing hearing March 10, U.S. District Judge William P. Dimitrouleas sentenced Edinson Canaveral Sánchez, 35, to probation for five years for pleading guilty to a false statement in an application for a U.S. passport and false claim to U.S. citizenship to secure a Florida driver's license.

Since Canaveral Sánchez did not get any prison time in his sentence, it means he has to report to federal immigration authorities to be deported to his native Colombia.

"The defendant shall cooperate in any removal proceedings initiated or pending by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement consistent with the Immigration and Nationality Act," the sentencing document said.

The sentencing closes the latest chapter in a long series of similar cases involving the use of Puerto Rican birth certificates by undocumented immigrants in South Florida.

Over the past 12 months, more than a dozen cases have popped up in Miami federal court involving defendants who have illegally procured Puerto Rican certificates to obtain U.S. passports or driver licenses. The cases have emerged despite toughened regulations after Puerto Rico mandated the replacement of birth certificates issued before July 1, 2010.

Court records released in connection with the guilty plea indicate Canaveral Sánchez might have used a pre-2010 Puerto Rican birth certificate.

The guilty proffer in the case shows Canaveral Sánchez first used the Puerto Rican birth certificate on June 30, 2010 — one day before the old certificates became invalid. He used the Puerto Rican certificate again two years later — on Aug. 2, 2012 — to obtain a Florida driver's license, according to court records.

These records do not say how Canaveral Sánchez obtained the fake Puerto Rican birth certificate.

The case was outlined in a criminal complaint filed Sept. 4 by a special agent of Homeland Security Investigations (HIS), a unit of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Puerto Ricans are American citizens by birth. As a result, Puerto Rican birth certificates are potentially useful to Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrants because they can then portray themselves as Puerto Rican.

On Sept. 3, the complaint says, law enforcement arrested Canaveral Sánchez after he admitted that he was a Colombian who illegally entered the United States through San Diego, California, in 2001.

Canaveral Sánchez pleaded not guilty at his arraignment Sept. 22, but changed his plea later.

Trial had been set in Fort Lauderdale federal court for January.

The continuing appearance in courts of false Puerto Rican birth certificate cases have come as a surprise because they were not supposed to be happening after Puerto Rico invalidated the old birth certificates.

Puerto Rico issued new birth certificates under a new law that resulted from widespread evidence of fraud and identity theft involving the sale of legitimate birth certificates by some Puerto Ricans to non-Puerto Ricans, particularly

undocumented immigrants from Latin America, who could then claim to be U.S. citizens.

Federal officials have said that at least 40 percent of U.S. passport fraud cases have been linked to Puerto Rican birth certificates.

Chicago Doctor Charged With Making False Diagnosis To Help Immigrants

By Mark Weinraub

[Reuters](#), April 1, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

US COAST GUARD

Mayor Still Intends On Making Trip From Cuba In A Raft

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

A central Florida mayor still intends to go through with his plan to return home from a visit to Cuba alone in a makeshift raft.

DeBary Mayor Clint Johnson tweeted on Saturday "Ocean test run complete! ... #Cuba next!" after spending Friday night out in the Atlantic Ocean. A GPS tracking website says he started at a Ponce Inlet ramp, went around the jetty and about 12 miles north to Daytona Beach Shores.

Johnson also tweeted out: "Educational, enlightening, and an awesome experience. #Cuba next!"

Johnson said he plans to cross the Florida Straits in a couple weeks without a motor because he wants to understand what Cuban migrants experience. Many, including the U.S. Coast Guard, have urged him to reconsider.

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SECRET SERVICE

White House Fence Jumper Arrested

By Allie Malloy And Peter Morris

[CNN](#), April 2, 2016

man was arrested Friday night after he jumped the north fence of the White House, authorities said.

The individual was taken into custody immediately after throwing a backpack over the fence before jumping over himself shortly before midnight, the Secret Service said in a statement Saturday morning. A law enforcement source said the suspect was a man.

He was charged with unlawful entry and was taken to the Metropolitan Police Department. The Secret Service and

the law enforcement source declined to provide further details about the suspect, including his name and age.

A security sweep after the incident did not turn up anything suspicious. President Barack Obama was at the executive mansion at the time of the incident, but the White House quickly returned to normal operations Friday night.

This is the second arrest at the White House this week. On Monday, a woman who was attending the annual Easter Egg Roll attempted to move a temporary security barrier on the South Lawn and was immediately arrested.

The woman had a valid ticket for the event and went through the security screening process along with approximately 30,000 additional guests who also attended the event.

The woman was previously arrested by Secret Service on March 22 for jumping a bike rack at the White House complex, a law enforcement official source said.

Secret Service Agents Reportedly Catch Intruder Trying To Jump White House Fence

[Fox News](#), April 3, 2016

An unidentified intruder reportedly was arrested after allegedly throwing a backpack over the White House fence and then trying to jump it late Friday.

According to WTTG-TV, the incident at the north fence occurred around 11:45 p.m. Secret Service spokesman Robert Hoback told Reuters in an email the intruder was arrested without incident.

The individual was charged with unlawful entry and transported to Washington's Metropolitan Police Department, the Secret Service told WTTG-TV.

The name of the intruder wasn't immediately released.

Reuters reported there was no indication from the agency that the backpack tossed over the fence contained any weapons.

The agency conducted standard security sweeps after the incident and the White House complex resumed normal operations shortly after they were completed.

The Secret Service has repeatedly been criticized over the several attempts of intruders trying to get into the White House.

Intruder Caught By Secret Service After Climbing Over White House Fence

[Reuters](#), April 2, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Secret Service Deflates Marijuana Protest Outside White House

By By Kristen East

[Politico](#), April 2, 2016

The Secret Service quickly snuffed out the hopes of pro-marijuana activists who planned a photoshoot of a giant, inflatable joint outside the White House on Saturday.

The activists had hoped to draw attention to President Barack Obama's perceived inaction on a pro-marijuana agenda during his time in office.

Roughly 100 people showed up as part of the demonstration, but the 51-foot-long inflatable joint made it nowhere near the view of the White House as Secret Service knew of the plans ahead of time, and asked the group to deflate it, The Washington Post reported.

The group planned to smoke simultaneously at 4:20 p.m. after they had carried the joint within view of the White House. They chose to demonstrate on April 2, instead of April 20, "because Obama's been a BIG ZERO on cannabis reform."

"While we have been able to drastically reduce arrests for marijuana possession in the District of Columbia, millions of Americans across the United States are not so lucky," a description on the event's Facebook page read.

Secret Service Objects To Protesters Carrying 50-Foot Inflatable Joint Outside White House

[Vice](#), April 3, 2016

Hundreds of protesters advocating for marijuana legalization in Washington, DC got into a 30-minute standoff with police and members of the Secret Service after they tried to carry a 50-foot inflatable joint near the White House on Saturday.

The demonstration called for President Barack Obama to remove marijuana from the list of Schedule I controlled substances, a classification reserved for drugs with no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. Although 23 states and Washington, DC now allow some form of medical marijuana, weed remains listed alongside heroin, LSD and other hard drugs in the Schedule I category.

The dispute over the massive fake joint began early in the day as the protesters marched near the White House at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th Street. Adam Eiding, the founder of DCMJ, a medical marijuana advocacy group that organized the demonstration, told VICE News that several police officers were "wedged" between protesters and the large joint during negotiations over whether or not they could proceed.

The cops eventually yielded and passed the situation off to members of Secret Service, who blocked the giant fake doob from entering Lafayette Park in front of the White House for security reasons. Eiding said the Secret Service claimed the inflatable, which had the words "Obama, descheduled cannabis now!" written on the side, created a "sniper issue."

"People could use the joint as a cover, it's an open area," Eiding said. "It's a vulnerable spot in front of the White House. You could have a mass murderer there. So we listened. We're not here to be dangerous."

The protesters complied by deflating the joint and then holding it up as a banner while they continued their rally outside the White House. The event culminated just before 4:20pm — a time closely associated with cannabis culture — when the protesters staged a mass smokeout after a prayer by a church group that considers marijuana to be a holy sacrament.

"They blessed the cannabis, we all said amen and lit up at 4:17," Eiding said. He explained that the smokeout began a few minutes earlier than planned because organizers were worried that police might have been prepared to crackdown on pot smoking at 4:20.

"The police were extremely alert but not really moving in on us," Eiding said. "It was a sensitive issue and we were ready to challenge the law. We had strength in numbers." He estimated that there were around 300 people smoking weed outside the White House.

Eiding said there were no arrests, but a spokesperson for DC Metropolitan Police could not immediately verify if that was indeed the case. There were reports of some protesters receiving \$25 tickets, including a woman who runs a local head shop called Capitol Hemp. Eiding said the woman accidentally blew marijuana smoke into a police officer's face.

In 2014, voters in Washington, DC overwhelmingly approved a ballot initiative that legalized possession of up to two ounces of marijuana for adults 21 and over, and permitted residents of the nation's capital to grow up to three plants. The law took effect last February, but Congress, which controls the city's budget, prohibited the establishment of a regulatory framework that would have allowed for retail sales of the drug. So while weed is technically legal in DC, the city does not gain any tax revenue from it, and it's still against the rules for individuals to buy and sell it. It's also still against the law to smoke pot in public.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY **DIRECTORATE**

Feds Must Work Faster To Test Explosive Detectors

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

NEW YORK (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security must move faster to test explosive detectors that can sense compounds that have been used in recent extremist attacks and to determine if the devices can be installed at

airports and train stations across the country, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer said.

For about eight years, federal officials have funded the development of the electronic trace detection system, which would be capable of continuously monitoring an area for vapor from explosives, including the bomb-making material TATP. But while the technology has proved successful in laboratory tests, it hasn't been scheduled for government field tests until the fall.

"It is now clear it is the go-to explosive that ISIS uses, so we ought to not waste a minute and get it tested in real-life situations," the New York Democrat told The Associated Press in an interview Saturday, using an acronym for the Islamic State group. "It has real potential ... but we have to get on the move and see if it really works."

TATP, formally known as triacetone triperoxide, is relatively easy to make with materials that are readily available in pharmacies and hardware stores, experts say. Even small quantities can cause large explosions.

Otto Gregory, a chemical engineering professor at the University of Rhode Island, developed the technology for the electronic trace detection system and said the work is now at the stage of "packaging" the devices to make them portable. Homeland Security has been funding Gregory's project since 2008, paying \$80,000 to \$100,000 annually, he said.

So far, he said, two field tests have been scheduled – one at a Federal Aviation Administration training site in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and another at a port in Savannah, Georgia. But they won't happen until the fall. Gregory doesn't know the specific dates.

"We've been pushing as hard as we can push," he said in a recent interview.

Schumer said Homeland Security officials need to work faster to begin field tests and do all they can to roll out the technology as soon as possible. He also wants assurances from the department that New York City will be one of the first places where the detectors are installed.

Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the test schedule. John Verrico, a spokesman for the agency's research and development arm, said there are no "current projects planned or in the works to field test TATP detection at airports."

TATP has been used in several attacks, including by the Islamic State group in the Nov. 13 Paris attacks, where attackers packed it into their suicide vests and wielded assault rifles, killing 130 people. The explosive compound was also found in the apartment where the assailants linked to the Brussels attacks were living.

Some law enforcement agencies use specially trained "vapor wake" detection dogs to identify the scent of explosives on people moving through crowded concourses. Experts have said no technology has been capable of matching the 200 million olfactory sensors in a dog's nose.

But the electronic sensors wouldn't need training or breaks, as dogs do. Only about 130 dogs have gotten the patented training nationwide since its development about a decade ago, and only one dog in Europe has had the training.

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Schumer Calls For Expedited Testing Of Terrorist Explosive

[Newsday \(NY\)](#), April 3, 2016

The American government's anti-terrorism agency should expedite testing of technology to detect the "Mother of Satan," an explosive used in last month's Brussels bombings that killed at least 31 people, Sen. Chuck Schumer said Sunday.

Schumer (D-New York), said newly developed detectors to "sniff out" the peroxide-based explosive known as triacetone triperoxide, or TATP, ought to be field-tested quickly so the sensors can be deployed to the nation's transportation hubs and perhaps along the Long Island Rail Road system.

Schumer's call to speed up testing came the same day a New York state senator renewed a push for a state-level review of security in the region's transit and commuter rail systems.

Both politicians made their comments amid heightened security concerns for New York City rail systems in the wake of the Brussels attacks that targeted its subways and airport.

Components of the TATP explosive include common household ingredients, including nail polish and hydrogen peroxide.

But while it's easy to make with basic chemistry skills, it breaks down quickly when exposed to air and is unstable and dangerous for the bombmaker since it could explode during manufacturing. Schumer said testing is being eyed for the fall at facilities in Atlantic City, New Jersey and in Savannah, Georgia, but he wants it done now.

"We don't have a moment to waste. Let's start doing it right away. . . . The detectors could save countless lives," he said at a news conference in Manhattan Sunday.

The testing could not be done now because of personnel and other research-related hurdles, but it could be expedited by several months depending on funding and how much of a priority government officials give the technology, said Otto Gregory, a University of Rhode Island professor of chemical engineering behind the technology.

"You might be able to bump it up a little bit but not a whole lot," he said in an interview.

According to Schumer, the technology would continuously monitor the air and has detected the explosive "even in tiny bits" during lab tests, but now must be tried out

in real-life settings. Schumer wants New York to be one of the first cities to get the technology.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security did not reply to requests seeking comment on Schumer's demands.

TATP was also used by the so-called shoe bomber Richard Reid, who tried to detonate his footwear aboard a Paris-to-Miami flight in December 2001. The explosive — also used in 2005's London bombings — was central in a foiled 2009 plot to blow up the New York City subways, and was a component in suicide vests in last year's Paris attacks.

Schumer said currently no screening is done for TATP and a detector could be small enough to fit on a police officer's belt.

State Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria), said Sunday that proposed legislation would require the New York State division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to conduct regular, comprehensive assessments of security on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's systems, including Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North and city subways.

"With what happened in Brussels, it's obviously brought renewed attention to the vulnerabilities of the subways and transportation infrastructure," Gianaris said at a news conference at Grand Central Station.

TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

Bratton Knocks Obama's Plan To Cut Anti-terror Funding Again

By Ryan Sit

[New York Daily News](#), April 3, 2016

The NYPD's top cop renewed criticism over President Obama's "mind boggling" proposal to slash federal counter-terror funding by 50% during a radio show interview Sunday morning.

"That's the kind of foolishness that goes on down there (in Washington)," Police Commissioner Bill Bratton said of the president's bid to slash funding during an appearance on John Catsimatidis' "The Cats Roundtable" on AM 970.

Later that morning on CNN's Global Public Square with Fareed Zakaria, the NYPD's lead counter-terror official detailed some of the ways those funds are used.

John Miller, the Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counter-terrorism, said the department has sent representatives to terrorist attack sites all over the world to see what useful information and tactics it could glean from the wreckage.

"We went to Paris, we went to Sydney, we went to Tunisia and we studied the attacks in details and we asked the authorities to teach us what they learned," Miller said.

"We took their lessons and we put them into effect here."

Andrew Burton/Getty Images The NYPD has sent representatives to terrorist attack sites all over the world to study useful information and tactics it could glean from the wreckage.

Miller also noted that the department has ballooned the number of officers trained in special weapons and tactics from just five to 1800. Those elite trained units that are critical to responding to active terror threats — especially in incidents involving several sites at once, as in the most recent attacks in Paris and Brussels, Miller said.

Bratton also continued his roast over the GOP hopeful Ted Cruz for his suggestion to "patrol and secure Muslim communities."

"Senator Cruz was very anti-American, anti-Muslim in some of his comments," Bratton said.

"I took Mr. Cruz's remarks as a denigration, not only of a religion, of a people, but of my police officers and civilian employees in this department."

Bratton roasted Cruz in an op-ed that ran in the Daily News last week, calling him a fearmonger and ignorant when it comes to fighting terrorism.

Asked by Zakaria if the NYPD received any blowback from the sharp criticism it leveled against Cruz, Miller said simply, "Not a single bit, Fareed."

rsit@nydailynews.com Tags: nypd , bill bratton , barack obama , terrorism , ted cruz , paris terror attacks , brussels terror attacks , 2016 election , religion

Investigators Home In On Scope Of Terror Network Behind Brussels, Paris Attacks

Documents, interviews paint portrait of some of the at least 22 members believed to be still at large

By Matthew Dalton

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

They Were Freed From Boko Haram's Rape Camps. But Their Nightmare Isn't Over.

By Kevin Sieff

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria — For months, they were kept in tiny thatched huts in the middle of the forest, waiting with dread each evening for their rapists to return. During the almost intolerable violence, the young women's minds drifted to escape or death. The victims were as young as 8.

At the heart of Boko Haram's self-proclaimed caliphate in northeastern Nigeria was a savage campaign of rape and sexual slavery that has only recently been uncovered. Thousands of girls and women were held against their will, subject to forced marriages and relentless indoctrination. Those who resisted were often shot.

Now, many of the women are suddenly free — rescued in a series of Nigerian military operations over the past year that dislodged the extremist Islamist group from most of the territory it controlled. But there have been few joyous family reunions for the victims.

Most of the surviving women no longer have homes. Their cities were burned to the ground. The military has quietly deposited them in displacement camps or abandoned buildings, where they are monitored by armed men suspicious of their loyalties. They are still labeled “Boko Haram wives.”

Few could have imagined such an outcome two years ago, when 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram and the world responded with the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. While most of those schoolgirls from Chibok are still missing, many people assumed the other kidnapped women would be warmly welcomed back.

Instead, they are shunned.

For seven months, Hamsatu, now 25, and Halima, 15, were among Boko Haram’s sex slaves, raped almost every day by the same unit of fighters in the remote Sambisa Forest. Now, they live in a narrow, white tent in a displacement camp, with empty cement bags sewn together to create a curtain. The women spoke on the condition that their full names were not used in order to freely describe their experiences.

When Halima leaves the tent to get food for the two of them, the other people living in the camp scowl at her or cautiously move away.

“You’re the one who was married to Boko Haram,” one older woman spat at her recently.

“We can’t trust any of them,” said one guard.

Authorities say there are good reasons for their wariness. Last year, 39 of 89 Boko Haram suicide bombings were carried out by women, according to UNICEF. Twenty-one of those female attackers were under the age of 18, many of them girls apparently abducted from villages and cities and converted into assassins. Since January, female attackers have killed hundreds of people across northeastern Nigeria, in mosques, markets and even displacement camps.

No one knows exactly why some women who were captured and abused became killers. Maybe it was the indoctrination. Maybe it was the militants’ threats.

Either way, the job of reintegrating the displaced has become vastly more complicated for Ni-ger-ian authorities.

And for survivors trying to move on from a horrific chapter of their lives, there is now a new agony.

“There is no trust here,” said Hamsatu, crouching in her tent and wearing the same pink, flowery dress she had on when she was kidnapped 18 months ago. In her arms, she held the baby of her captor.

‘I don’t know if he’s alive’

It was September 2014 when Boko Haram fighters took over Hamsatu’s and Halima’s home city of Bama, near the Cameroonian border. Many of the 350,000 residents managed to flee. But the fighters immediately started killing the male civilians who couldn’t escape. Some were shot in their homes. Others were beheaded and thrown in mass graves.

With a group of about 25 other women, Hamsatu and Halima say, they were moved by the militants from home to home and then forced to travel on foot and on the backs of motorcycles to the Sambisa Forest, where Boko Haram had set up camps for its sex slaves.

The women were each assigned to a sliver of a hut, barely big enough to lie down. Hamsatu said that days later, one fighter, whose name she never learned, entered the hut and said a prayer in what sounded to her like Arabic.

Now they were married, he told her. She thought of her real husband, who had been missing since the day Boko Haram stormed Bama.

“I don’t know if he’s alive,” she said.

From then on, the days were uniformly violent. Different men would come into her hut each evening, in addition to the one who called himself her “husband,” Hamsatu said. Sometimes they screamed at her for not praying enough. “Even the Chibok girls are better Muslims than you,” a man yelled at her once.

Sometimes the men said nothing at all, tearing off her headscarf and raping her on the floor of the hut, she recalled. After about two months, she became pregnant.

Publicly, Boko Haram members decry the tyranny of Nigeria’s federal government, which is mostly Christian in a nation where Muslims, nearly half of the population, have long complained about being marginalized. The militants rail against secular education and demand strict Islamic observance. The group has declared allegiance to the Islamic State.

But to their prisoners, the fighters’ campaign didn’t seem driven by ideology so much as a wild appetite for sex and violence. It would take the rest of the world some time to learn about Boko Haram’s institutionalized sexual abuse. Rape wasn’t just a byproduct of the chaos of war in Nigeria, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon would say in 2015. It was a calculated “tactic of terror.”

“These people have a certain spiritual conviction that any child they father will grow to inherit their ideology,” Kashim Shettima, the governor of Borno state — where Bama is located — told reporters last year.

At night, Hamsatu heard helicopters and gunshots. Several times, she attempted to escape, but she was caught and returned by guards. After a while, the pregnancy slowed her and she stopped trying.

When the Nigerian military came, it hardly felt to the women like a rescue operation. Soldiers burned the huts

while women were still inside and shot wildly at everyone, they said. Several women were killed or disappeared during the operation, according to accounts from several former captives. Halima is now raising a 3-year-old orphan whose mother vanished during the rescue operation.

The women were loaded in pickup trucks and dumped on a desert road about 50 miles away, they said. Military interrogators arrived.

The women were searched for weapons. After months of being held by one of the world's deadliest terror groups, the women realized: They were now suspects.

Fearing the 'liberated'

"Sambisa woman" — that's what they called Hamsatu and Halima when the women arrived at the Dalori displacement camp on the outskirts of the city of Maiduguri in April of last year. It was the name of the forest where they had been enslaved.

Hamsatu and Halima were taken to a tent they shared with two other women and the 3-year-old orphan — all of whom had been "liberated" from Boko Haram, as the military said. The women who had been forcibly married to fighters were kept apart from other people displaced by the war.

Unlike most of the world's refugee or displacement camps, which are run by the United Nations and international aid groups, the camps where Boko Haram's victims live are administered by the Nigerian military. Outside Dalori, an army captain stands by the front gate. Visitors are patted down. A poster of high-level Boko Haram suspects hangs on the perimeter wall of the camp. Aid workers need military permission to enter the camps.

Some women who lived under Boko Haram are occasionally hauled off to a military base for questioning, and then returned.

"The fear is that they've been converted to Boko Haram's ideology," said Mohammed Ali Guja, the chairman of the city of Bama. "They are now a different person."

The country's displaced population has ballooned. As of March, there were 2.6 million internally displaced people, or IDPs, in northeastern Nigeria, according to the International Organization for Migration. Even local relief workers worry that the women they have been sent to help might be concealing loyalties to their Boko Haram abductors.

"The simple truth is they pose a serious threat to the general public," said Ann Darman, of the Gender Equality, Peace and Development Center, a Nigerian aid group that often works with the United Nations.

Last year, just as the liberated women were pouring into displacement camps and local communities, there was a surge in female suicide bombers. In June, one killed 20 people at a bus station in Maiduguri. A day later, two bombers killed 30 at a market in the city. In July, two more killed 13 people near a military checkpoint. In October, four

girls and a boy targeted a mosque, killing 15. Witnesses said some of the attackers appeared to be no older than 9.

"We think they have more or less brainwashed these children," said Maj. Gen. Lucky Irabor, the top Ni-ger-ian military official in the northeast. "They have become useful tools" for Boko Haram.

Amid the attacks, Hamsatu gave birth last June to the child of her rapist in the camp's rundown clinic.

Her daughter made her an even greater target of scorn. In many Nigerian communities, people believe that the father's blood courses through the veins of his child, "so that at some point in the future they will be likely to turn against their own community," said Rachel Harvey, UNICEF's head of child protection in Nigeria.

A subtle shunning

One morning in mid-March, the women in the narrow white tent woke up on thin mats, each with one pair of clothes to wear. At 10, Halima walked across the scorching-hot sand to get breakfast: rice and beans donated by Nigeria's government aid agency.

At the food-collection point, sometimes people inch away from her, she said, as if it would be dangerous to get too close.

It didn't seem to matter that she had been vetted by the Nigerian military. Or that she actually never wanted children and was now struggling to raise a 3-year-old and blamed Boko Haram each time the girl cried or soiled herself or asked where her real mom was.

Just a few weeks before, three female suicide bombers had blown themselves up in the nearby village of Dalori, part of an attack that killed 86 people, including children. The suspicion of Boko Haram's victims only grew. In late March, a Nigerian girl was apprehended with explosives strapped to her body in Cameroon, near the Ni-ger-ian border. She set off a brief scandal when she said she was one of the Chibok girls, but Nigerian officials denied her claim.

Some worry that in a part of Nigeria that was once torn apart by a homegrown insurgency, another cleavage is forming, this one in the wake of war.

"Subjecting [the victims] to further discrimination and ill treatment due to their status as victims of Boko Haram violence is certain to undermine the entire response to the situation in the northeast," said Martin Ejidike, a prominent human rights adviser to the United Nations in Nigeria.

There are few signs the situation will improve. Many international aid organizations won't work in the north because of the continued insecurity.

The government had opened a deradicalization center to help re-integrate the former victims, but it closed late last year, after admitting only 311 people. Officials at the national security adviser's office did not return phone calls seeking an explanation for the closure.

In the camps, some of the women victimized by Boko Haram down bottles of homemade cough syrup to get deliciously high alone.

Once a week, Halima and Hamsatu attend group therapy sessions in a tent that says "Safe Place for Women and Girls."

There they are known as "the sisters" because of how close they've become. They gather in a circle on the floor with about a dozen other women. The counselor repeats a few lines during each meeting. Hamsatu and Halima wait quietly for them, wishing they were true.

"What has gone has gone."

"You are safe now."

"You are secure now."

CYBER NEWS

Technology Upgrades Get White House Out Of The 20th Century

By Michael D. Shear

[New York Times](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON — Can you run the country with spotty Wi-Fi, computers that power on and off randomly and desktop speakerphones from Radio Shack, circa 1985?

It turns out you can. But it is not ideal, as President Obama's staff has discovered during the past seven years. Now, as Mr. Obama prepares to leave the White House early next year, one of his legacies will be the office information technology upgrade that his staff has finally begun.

Until very recently, West Wing aides were stuck in a sad and stunning state of technological inferiority: desktop computers from the last decade, black-and-white printers that could not do double-sided copies, aging BlackBerries (no iPhones), weak wireless Internet and desktop phones so old that few staff members knew how to program the speed-dial buttons.

On Air Force One, administration officials sent emails over an air-to-ground Internet connection that was often no better than dial-up modems from the mid-1990s.

"We can't do this," recalled Anita Decker Breckenridge, the deputy chief of staff for operations at the White House, who has since worked with the Air Force to upgrade the president's plane to broadband speeds. "This is the Oval Office in the sky. Talk about a network that didn't work."

Part of the problem? Responsibility for White House technology has long been divvied up between four agencies, each with their own chief information officer: the National Security Council, the Executive Office of the President, the Secret Service and the White House Communications Agency. That led to a series of Band-Aid solutions over the years, as one agency or another has attempted piecemeal upgrades to White House gear.

It also led to comical moments. In 2014, when White House aides accompanying Mr. Obama on his summer vacation in Martha's Vineyard struggled with balky laptops as they tried to revise a presidential statement, they could not get on-the-road tech support from the White House Communications Agency because the agency's staff members were not authorized to log in to computers issued by the Executive Office of the President.

Ms. Breckenridge was inspired by Mr. Obama's development in 2015 of the United States Digital Service and its mission to upgrade the federal government beyond the White House. She was determined after her frustrations in Martha's Vineyard to fix the mess, and by March 2015 had hired David Recordon, who designed and maintained the office technology for Mark Zuckerberg and the other employees at Facebook, as the information technology guy for the White House complex.

"It was an interesting challenge and world for me," Mr. Recordon said.

One of his first tasks was trying to map the miles of Ethernet cables and phone wires inside the walls of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The team of technicians eventually discovered and removed 13,000 pounds of abandoned cables that no longer served any purpose.

"They had been installed over the decades by different organizations using different standards, different techniques, from different eras," Mr. Recordon said. "They were finding these pipes that just had bundles of cable that had been cut off over the years, no longer used. So we just started pulling it out."

With the wiring fixed, Mr. Recordon started replacing computers (the new ones have fast, solid-state drives and modern processors) and color printers. The new phone system — the first since the Clinton years — is all digital, with built-in speakerphones and speed-dial buttons that can be changed online. Many White House aides now carry the most recent iPhones. Mr. Obama, however, still carries a specially modified, highly secure BlackBerry.

The Wi-Fi in the Roosevelt Room is finally strong enough to live-stream an event on Facebook, like White House aides did last week when Mr. Obama surprised former federal inmates whose sentences had been commuted. Forgotten passwords are no longer an irritant now that the White House has started requiring users to log on with a chip-enabled smart card and a pin code.

Mr. Recordon's team also designed a new web-based system for admitting visitors to the West Wing that can be managed securely from any computer, including ones outside the White House complex.

To be sure, some important West Wing technology was upgraded by the George W. Bush administration, which overhauled the Situation Room for the first time since the Kennedy administration and added modern communications

gear. Joe Hagin, the deputy chief of staff for Mr. Bush, recalled having to replace the phones in the presidential limousine after Mr. Bush complained that he had not been able to make a single phone call from his motorcade over an entire weekend.

"He said to me, 'What the heck would happen if there were a true national emergency?' " Mr. Hagin recalled. That fear came true months later on Sept. 11, 2001, when communications glitches plagued the government and led to new equipment in Air Force One and the first BlackBerries in the White House.

Mr. Hagin's team also upgraded the Intel 486 computers and got rid of the slow and cumbersome Lotus Notes email system. But the speed of technological advancement has once again left the current White House behind.

"I'm very sympathetic to them," said Mr. Hagin, who commiserated with Ms. Breckenridge last year about the sorry state of White House technology.

Ms. Breckenridge said the White House has not had to request any additional money for the new upgrades, which have been paid for out of the existing technology budgets for the various agencies involved. In some cases, she said, they have saved money by eliminating duplications. The four agencies no longer negotiate their own contracts with cellphone companies and no longer buy duplicate copies of software licenses.

Ms. Breckenridge said she was hopeful that Mr. Obama will leave to his successor's staff a building that is more useful in the Facebook and Twitter era, or whatever comes next.

Mr. Hagin said he wished them well, but predicted it will not be easy. He recalled once discovering a basement room in the West Wing filled with telephone switching gear that technicians said could be replaced with a unit the size of a dorm-room refrigerator. But everyone was nervous about cutting the wires because no schematics or design guides existed anymore, he said.

Replacing the equipment took a full two years.

Hacker Who Exposed Clinton's Private Email, Bush Paintings Appears In U.S. Court

By Matt Zapposky

[Washington Post](#), April 1, 2016

The international hacker who allegedly accessed personal emails and photographs belonging to the family of former president George W. Bush and whose cyber-mischief revealed that Hillary Clinton was using a private email address appeared in a U.S. court for the first time Friday.

Marcel Lehel Lazar — better known by the moniker "Guccifer" that he is said to have affixed to the materials he stole — is charged with cyber-stalking, aggravated identity theft and unauthorized access of a protected computer in a

nine-count indictment filed in 2014 in federal district court in Alexandria, Va. He was extradited to the United States recently from Romania, his home country, where he had been serving a sentence for hacking.

Lazar, 44, wore a black, graphic T-shirt and blue jeans in a brief court appearance Friday and spoke in hushed tones with a translator. He confirmed through the translator that he wanted a "court appointed" lawyer and asked whom that person would be. A magistrate judge told him he would learn later.

Federal prosecutors have alleged that Lazar, a cab driver, was responsible for a range of high-profile hacks. According to an indictment, he accessed the email, Facebook account and other online accounts of a member of the Bush family, a former Cabinet member and a former member of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. He then blasted messages with personal information from those accounts to media organizations or congressional staffers, according to the indictment.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Maya Song said in court Friday that the charges Lazar faces collectively carry with them a possible sentence of more than 100 years. Such a term, though, is highly unlikely. U.S. Attorney Dana Boente said in a statement released after the appearance: "Mr. Lazar violated the privacy of his victims and thought he could hide behind the anonymity of the Internet. No matter where they are in the world, those who commit crimes against U.S. citizens will be held accountable for their actions, pursued by our investigators and prosecutors, and brought to justice."

In a wide-ranging, in-prison interview with journalist Matei Rosca last year, Lazar said he welcomed extradition to the United States and added, "I'll plead guilty, no problem."

Of his methods, he said: "I'm an autodidact but not a programmer. There are 100 million programmers. I use any possible method to break electronic correspondence, including contact lists and metadata, like the NSA programs do, only that's artificial intelligence. I also use Kabbalah, numerology and the occult. Jung's archetypes. Social engineering. It's not the technology but the human factor that makes the difference."

The indictment does not name any of the people whose accounts were compromised. But much of the alleged hacking was already public because the hacker shared some of the materials he had accessed with media organizations.

Former secretary of state Colin L. Powell acknowledged in 2013 that he was aware that his Facebook and personal email accounts had been breached, and the Secret Service had confirmed previously that it was investigating the theft of numerous personal emails from members of the Bush family. Those emails briefly became the subject of gossip because they included paintings by George W. Bush, including apparent self-portraits in the shower and bath. The indictment claims that Lazar was behind both intrusions.

The revelation of Clinton's private email account — which occurred after Clinton stepped down as secretary of state — was somewhat more roundabout. Lazar claimed to have compromised the email account of former Bill Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal and released memos Blumenthal sent to Hillary Clinton. Gawker noticed that the notes were directed to a private, nongovernmental email account. The New York Times later reported that Clinton exclusively used a personal account to conduct government business.

MedStar Hack Shows Risks That Come With Electronic Health Records

[Baltimore Sun](#), April 2, 2016

Spurred on by the federal government, hospitals in Maryland have moved quickly in recent years to roll out electronic medical records.

The benefits are many. Electronic medical records can help patients avoid unnecessary tests. They help doctors tailor treatment even for patients they are meeting for the first time. With more information on hand, everyone can make better decisions.

But as the attack last week on computer networks at MedStar Health hospitals in Maryland and the District of Columbia demonstrated, the new systems can leave hospitals vulnerable.

After unidentified hackers encrypted hospital data, staff members, patients and family members reported delays in service and confusion in treatment. Some cancer patients were unable to get radiation treatment for several days.

For all the enthusiasm about adopting electronic medical records, security remains a concern. The primary worry has been that hackers could steal patients' information to enable identity theft. But recent attacks have demonstrated the threat of ransomware, in which hackers deny access to data rather than stealing it.

In the MedStar attack, as has been the case with other health care providers, the hackers demanded payment in the difficult-to-trace digital currency bitcoin in exchange for the digital keys to unlock the encrypted data, according to copies of the ransom note obtained by The Baltimore Sun.

MedStar declined to make anyone available for an interview about the attack or its response, but issued a page-long statement in response to detailed questions faxed by The Sun.

"With only a few exceptions, handled on a case-by-case basis, care continued throughout this situation and has been provided to thousands of patients during the past five days," the nonprofit health care system said.

"MedStar's priority throughout this attack remains focused on providing high quality, safe care for patients and continuing to meet the care needs of the community."

Hospitals in California and Kentucky also have fallen prey to recent ransomware attacks.

Despite widespread media coverage of those incidents, analyst Ted Harrington said, many health care organizations still have only a vague understanding of the range of threats they face.

Harrington's Baltimore-based Independent Security Evaluators recently completed a two-year study of the digital threats to hospitals.

"Most health care organizations have not up to this point been adequately considering denial of service," he said, using the phrase for attacks that focus on shutting down a target's systems.

It is also not clear that the laws that require businesses to notify their customers and the public when hackers steal data apply when files are locked up but not stolen. Federal and Maryland laws describe a breach as when information is taken out of a computer system.

Jeffrey L. Karberg, who handles identity theft at the Office of the Maryland Attorney General, said the question revolves around the use of the word "acquire" in the laws.

"If I've just taken your house key and am willing to sell it back, have I acquired your house?" he asked.

The attack on MedStar, which operates 10 hospitals in the region, including Union Memorial, Harbor, Franklin Square and Good Samaritan, brought the computer systems of one of the region's largest health care providers to a halt at the beginning of the workweek.

MedStar opened command centers to deal with the crisis, it said in its statement. Information technology teams worked to identify the malware and moved to block it. The health system said it would not discuss the malware details, the attack or the attackers, but did say it had not paid any ransom.

"Additional media coverage featuring criminal acts — offenses against the public that are punishable — perpetuates the infamy of malicious attacks for airtime and publicity," MedStar said.

By Friday, MedStar said, 90 percent of its systems were back up and running. It said a close-to-normal number of patients had passed through the doors of its facilities during the outages.

Health care executives and regulators say their increasing reliance on computer networks and electronic patient data have brought new challenges.

Sharon Boston, a spokeswoman for LifeBridge Health, said the corporation takes information security seriously and works to adapt to new threats as they arise. LifeBridge operates Sinai, Northwest and Carroll hospitals in the Baltimore region.

"The use of the electronic medical record across the health care industry is broader and deeper than it has ever been, and will continue to grow," Boston said. "With the

evolving nature of these electronic threats, LifeBridge Health continually monitors the safety and potential vulnerability of our information systems and takes appropriate action.”

Ben Steffen, executive director of the Maryland Health Care Commission, said electronic medical records are still new and have vulnerabilities, but they benefit patient care.

“Certainly, we are still in the midst of introducing and spreading electronic medical records,” Steffen said. “We’re still at version one in this cycle, and making the systems more secure is one of the more important challenges moving ahead.”

Nationally, about 80 percent of doctors now report using electronic records, up from less than 20 percent in 2001. While those figures do not tell the whole story — many practices mix paper and electronic records, and some electronic records are merely scans of papers — they are now considered mainstream.

Hospitals use a variety of measures to prevent hacks and keep patient information safe, said David Sharp, the director of the state’s Center for Health Information Technology and Innovative Care Delivery, part of the Maryland Health Care Commission.

Hospitals conduct manual cybersecurity tests, Sharp said, and scan continuously for new viruses.

Chief information officers meet regularly with state officials. After the MedStar hack, Sharp said, the commission plans to hold those meetings more often.

“Hospitals are doing what they should do,” he said. “It is unfortunate cyberattacks occur, but no industry is immune.”

That’s true — every industry faces computer security challenges, and businesses in almost every sector have been targeted by hackers — but analysts say health care organizations face particular difficulties.

Tenable Network Security, which conducted a survey of several industries last year, ranked health care companies’ computer security as below average.

“Health care in general has not had a very good track record with information security overall,” said Cris Thomas, a strategist at the Columbia-based firm.

Many medical devices are now connected to the Internet, creating another vulnerability in hospital networks. In some cases, security fixes to the devices can be applied only by their vendors’ technicians.

There are signs that MedStar could have done more to withstand or even ward off an attack, some analysts say.

Many forms of ransomware require tricking a user into opening a file to begin an infection. The best defense is training employees — but even then, there is no guarantee that a craftily worded email from a hacker won’t con a staff member.

The tool used to attack MedStar, according to details of the ransom note and a website to which the hackers directed

MedStar, was Samsam, a different kind that preys on weaknesses in a particular piece of software.

It is dangerous because it can be slipped into a network at any time of day or night and spreads quickly. But the defense against it is easier: Install updates that fix the weaknesses.

“From a resolution standpoint, this is a really easy-to-solve problem,” said Craig Williams, an analyst at Cisco’s Talos who has been tracking the use of Samsam.

The tool is new — it first appeared in December — but private security companies and the FBI have been warning about it, and the weaknesses it exploits are widely known.

By Monday morning, when MedStar discovered what it called a virus in its systems, it was too late to take those steps. Instead, the company’s response was to pull everything offline.

MedStar called the decision “courageous and mission-critical.” The health system said law enforcement and cybersecurity experts praised the move as “a critical component in the resulting recovery time.”

But security analysts who spoke to The Sun have questioned the move, which they called an extreme measure that harked back to the responses of the 1990s.

“It sounds to me sort of like a panic mode,” Thomas said. “Disconnecting and unplugging sort of works, but it’s not a viable solution these days.”

The outage left doctors and nurses relying on older techniques to move information. Paper records stacked up on desks, and fax machines were pressed into service.

One doctor said a little beeping device that is practically an antique in the wider world but still common in hospitals proved invaluable.

It’s called a pager.

Attacks Put Patients At Risk

By Naomi LaChance, NPR’s “all tech considered” blog
[NPR](#), April 1, 2016

The first sign seems innocuous enough if you don’t know what you’re looking at: Files in the computer appear as decrypt.html, or decrypt.txt instead of their usual names.

Then, you click. A box pops up that gives you an ultimatum: Want the file? You’ll have to pay up, and probably in bitcoin.

That is what happened at U.S. hospitals in the past month in California, Kentucky, Maryland and the District of Columbia. The malware attacks have left the 14 hospitals — 10 of which are part of the MedStar hospital group — unable to access patient data and, in some cases, having to turn patients away.

Hospitals are not alone in their vulnerability; last month, a cafe in Maryland was hit with a ransomware attack. In another instance, Mac computers were targeted. Last year, police in Massachusetts paid hackers to return access to their

data. Companies and individuals in the U.S. lost more than \$24 million to ransomware in 2015, according to the FBI.

And in February at the Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles, administrators paid the asking price of 40 bitcoin, about \$16,664 at the time, to regain access to their data. At MedStar, the hospital is being asked to pay 45 bitcoin.

Several MedStar employees saw a message on their computer screens: "You just have 10 days to send us the Bitcoin. After 10 days we will remove your private key and it's impossible to recover your files."

"The big difference with health care is that the consequences are greater," Kevin Fu, an associate professor at the University of Michigan who studies computer security issues in hospitals, told the MIT Technology Review. "You can lose your email and that's annoying, but patient records are needed in order to treat patients."

Though bitcoin is not in itself a driver of cybercrime, it allows the hackers to have instant access to the money without its having to go through a bank or credit card. Peter Van Valkenburgh, director of research at Coin Center, a nonprofit dedicated to digital currency advocacy, explains that often the ransomware will include easy-to-follow instructions on how to quickly access and trade bitcoin.

Hospitals hit by the attack felt the pressure of being without patient information. At a MedStar hospital, a patient was given an antibiotic that, a nurse told the Washington Post, "should have been stopped eight hours earlier." At the Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center last month, patients were diverted to other hospitals. In both situations, the hospitals returned to paper records.

On its website Thursday, MedStar posted: "MedStar Health's priority continues to be providing high quality, safe patient care, as we work to fully restore all of our major IT systems. Our doors remain open, with a few exceptions. With the dedication and commitment of our clinicians and associates, we are thankful that we have been able to perform more than 1,000 surgeries since Monday morning's malicious malware attack."

Rick Pollack, president and CEO of the American Hospital Association, emphasizes that hospitals should take steps to protect patient data: "Hospital leaders are using the lessons learned in previous attacks and are applying best cybersecurity practices shared by the AHA in an effort to anticipate and respond to existing and emerging threats," he says.

The FBI is investigating several of these recent attacks. An FBI official tells NPR:

"Companies can prevent and mitigate malware infection by utilizing appropriate backup and malware detection and prevention systems, and training employees to be skeptical of emails, attachments, and websites they don't recognize. The FBI does not condone payment of ransom, as payment of

extortion monies may encourage continued criminal activity, lead to other victimizations, or be used to facilitate serious crimes."

Hospitals can take a variety of steps to safeguard against these kinds of attacks, like using HTTPS encryption, two-factor authentication and implementing file backups on a separate server. "For hospitals right now, backups of customer data on unconnected machines or machines in other networks is essential," Van Valkenburgh says.

He adds that patients should have more control over who has access to their personal records, and when. But until then? "We really are at the mercy of these centralized institutions," he says.

Security News This Week: Clever Malware Is Sending People Fake Speeding Tickets

[Wired](#), April 2, 2016

This week, the Apple-FBI legal fight finally, officially ended, as the feds at last found a way into San Bernardino shooter Syed Farook's locked iPhone. Don't get too comfortable, though, because this generation's war between law enforcement and encryption technology has only just begun. They've still got lots of drug cases—the most common crime associated with requests to unlock phones—to crack, after all.

Elsewhere, we looked at how ISIS succeeds at social media, and at why the Department of Justice's strategy of charging individuals, rather than nations, for hacking these here United States might backfire. More people want to shut down the dark web than don't, but surely they'd feel differently if they saw this Tor relay sculpture in person. If it seems like hospitals have been a popular ransomware target lately, well, there's good reason for that. And Reddit may have signaled that it got a National Security Letter, meaning it's been asked to provide information about one or more of its users to the feds.

But there's more: Each Saturday we round up the news stories that we didn't break or cover in depth at WIRED, but which deserve your attention nonetheless. As always, click on the headlines to read the full story in each link posted. And stay safe out there. Maryland Ruling in Stingray Case Raises Questions About Convictions in 200 Other Cases

A significant ruling in Maryland's state appellate court around police use of a cell-phone tracking device could put about 200 other cases in that state in jeopardy. The three judges on Maryland's Court of Special Appeals found that Baltimore police violated the Constitution when they used a device called a Hailstorm to track the location of a shooting suspect without obtaining a search warrant first. A Hailstorm is a stingray device that masquerades as a legitimate cell tower in order to trick nearby mobile phones into connecting to them and revealing their unique device ID—which police

can then use to track the location of the device. The court found this a Fourth Amendment violation, ruling that evidence used to convict the suspect—that pointed to both his location and the gun that was uncovered during a subsequent search of the apartment—was inadmissible, bringing the entire case into question. The ruling jeopardizes some 200 other cases involving convicted criminals in Maryland, as well as ongoing cases that involve the use of a stingray device. And although the ruling only sets a binding precedent for Maryland state cases and doesn't directly affect federal cases in Maryland or elsewhere, it will likely embolden defense attorneys around the country to challenge the use of stingray devices in their cases. **Some Very Clever Malware Is Sending Out Fake Speeding Tickets**

Malware that targets everyday citizens is bad, full stop. But it can also be impressively clever! Police in Philadelphia suburb Chester County report that people have been receiving emails that contain fake speeding citations—along with a malicious phishing link. In itself, that's not so surprising. But investigators report that the people receiving those emails really were speeding at the locations the citation claims. They suspect a hacker may have compromised a GPS-enable app to give their scam an added dose of veracity. So far only a handful of people have been affected, and the actual method responsible hasn't been confirmed. If the scheme is half as clever as it seems, though—well, they should still cut it out. **Encryption Keys Could Be Star Witness in US Hacking Case**

A British man, under arrest for allegedly hacking into Department of Defense computers as well as systems belonging to the Department of Energy, NASA, and other US agencies, has been fighting extradition to the US since 2013. But now he's facing another battle in the UK, where authorities there are demanding that he hand over the encryption keys to unlock data on his Samsung laptop, two hard drives, and a memory card that were encrypted with TrueCrypt. Civil liberties groups are concerned that if UK authorities win this fight, it could set a dangerous precedent that makes it easier for UK authorities to demand encryption keys in the future from journalists, activists, and others. **CNBC's Password Safety Segment Was Remarkably Unsafe**

Educating people about the importance of strong passwords? Great. Encouraging them to enter their own passwords into a text box to help "grade" how effective they are? Okay, sure, maybe. Applying zero security to the transmission of those passwords, so that anyone on the same network could pretty easily see what people were inputting? Okay, that's where you lost us. And it gets worse! People who used an interactive feature on CNBC's blog called "The Big Crunch" and hit the "Submit" button sent their passwords to a Google spreadsheet, which in turn was visible to dozens of third-party advertisers. The story was eventually pulled, but not before making a hash of the very lesson it was

trying to teach. **Pentagon (Lame) Launches the Government's First Bug Bounty**

Last month, the Department of Defense announced that it would roll out a program to pay rewards to friendly hackers who report security vulnerabilities in the Pentagon's websites—the first ever "bug bounty" run by the federal government. The project seemed like a bold move from a Defense Secretary whose moves to modernize the military have followed in Silicon Valley's footsteps. But the pilot program that actually launched this week is far less bold than it initially sounded. The "Hack the Pentagon" program, for now, will accept only bug reports from hackers who submit to a background check, vastly limiting participation. It will run for less than a month, ending May 12. And it will exclude any "mission-critical" sites, limiting the white-hat hacking to only a subset of military websites of the DoD's choosing. The pilot program may yet be a conservative version of a more aggressive bounty set to launch later. But in an era when a company like Uber can launch its first bug bounty with \$10,000 payouts, a loyalty program, and even a "treasure map" to help friendly hackers, the Pentagon's attempt at security innovation doesn't measure up. **Drug Cabinet Wins Award For Most Security Holes in One Device**

We've written extensively about security problems in medical devices and hospital networks. But an alert issued this week by DHS's Industrial Control Systems Cyber Emergency Response Team (ICS-CERT) gets the award for most vulnerabilities found in a single device—none of which the manufacturer plans to fix. Security researchers Billy Rios and Mike Ahmadi found more than 1,400 vulnerabilities in the Pyxis SupplyStation, an automated medical supply cabinet made by CareFusion that is widely used in hospitals and clinics to dispense drugs and track drug inventories. The vulnerabilities exist in older versions of the cabinet systems, however, which the company says have reached the end of their life; therefore CareFusion has no plans to patch them. Instead, the company advised customers still using them to reduce their risk of being hacked by disconnecting the drug cabinets from the internet or by taking other precautions. **Researchers Hack Lightbulbs to Cause Seizures or Steal Data**

In the ongoing comedy show known as the Internet of Insecure Things, security researchers have demonstrated an attack using that simplest of household appliances: the light bulb. Eyal Ronen, a researcher at the Weizmann Institute of Science, and his professor, the renowned cryptographer Adi Shamir, have shown that it's possible to use internet-enabled lightbulbs for mischief ranging from exfiltrating data from airgapped networks to causing seizures in people nearby the lights. They showed that with malware planted on a PC connected to the same network as the bulbs, they could modulate the bulbs' brightness to undetectably convey data on the network to a hacker with a telescope. Or, in an attack

that sounds more useful for malicious pranksters than cyberspies, they could cause the bulbs to strobe at frequencies designed to cause epileptic convulsions.

Don't Let Cyber-hackers Peek At Our Tax Returns

[Chicago Sun-Times](#), April 3, 2016

Even if you are not overstating your charitable deductions this year — and of course you are not — you don't want perfect strangers snooping into your federal tax return, right?

Unfortunately, you never know.

Cyber-criminals may have hacked into more than 700,000 tax returns since 2014, and a new audit by the Government Accountability Office, released on March 28, warns that Internal Revenue Service computers remain "unnecessarily vulnerable" to cyberattacks. The GAO found that the IRS has not completely fixed some previously identified weaknesses; it also uncovered new "control deficiencies."

"The financial and taxpayer information on IRS systems will remain vulnerable," the GAO writes, until the IRS addresses a host of "weaknesses" involving, among other things, identification, authorization, cryptography and physical security.

And what has been the IRS' response? You would hope they snapped to attention, shouted "Yes, sir!" and vowed to fix the problem immediately, taking to heart each of the GAO's 43 recommendations.

But no. Instead, IRS Commissioner John Koskinen replied in writing that the agency would "review" the recommendations to ensure it had the information technology and manpower resources to address them. And he promised a written "corrective action plan" within 60 days.

A review. Manpower resources. "Corrective action." Sixty days.

Feeling reassured?

There are two schools of thought about what's gone wrong and what must be done. We suspect there is truth in both schools, with the bottom line being that this is a repair job Congress must get on top of.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., puts the blame firmly on the IRS, knocking the agency for the "usual excuses and evasions." Last week, Ryan demanded that the IRS not waste another 60 days.

"The agency won't even own up to its own problems — again," Ryan wrote. "The agency should immediately take steps to implement these recommendations and report back to Congress with its progress."

We share Ryan's skepticism about that 60 days. Why more delay? This is not a new problem. It is deeply unsettling

to hundreds of millions of Americans that their most private tax return information may be at risk.

At the same time, we're equally skeptical about a U.S. House Majority Staff Report released last year that chalks the whole problem up to IRS waste and inefficiencies, rather than any lack of funding. This is the same Republican majority that questions the existence of the IRS altogether. One of the party's two leading candidates for president, Sen. Ted Cruz, wants to abolish the agency.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., expressing the other school of thought, blames the IRS' failings on funding cuts. He points out that Republicans in Congress have been slashing the IRS' budget for years, pretending that the agency can securely handle hundreds of millions of tax returns on a shoe string.

"In recent years, the IRS has been asked to do more with much, much less," Durbin told us. "As a result of consistent cuts to the IRS budget by Republicans in Congress, the agency's funding is nearly \$1 billion less than it was in 2010 when these cyberattacks were far less sophisticated. While the IRS can't stop every case of identity theft, with the right resources the agency can make Americans far safer than they are today."

"Republicans," Durbin added, "need to put politics aside and provide adequate funding to protect taxpayers."

The IRS collects about 92 percent of all federal revenue. And Koskinen says the IRS could collect an extra \$6 billion a year were it not for a staffing shortage.

The best solution, though we fear the possibility of a political circus in an election year, would be strongly bipartisan congressional hearings. Hash this out in public. Where is there waste and inefficiency? Where is there a true lack of funding?

Cyber-hacking is a national and, indeed, an international challenge. The IRS is "attacked and pinged a million times a day" from increasingly more sophisticated sources, including organized crime syndicates, Koskinen recently said. Meanwhile, high-quality cyber-security experts are hard enough to hold onto in the private sector, let alone the public one.

But when a private company suffers a security breach, customers can take their business elsewhere. U.S. taxpayers have no choice but to share highly personal information with the IRS. They need to feel secure that such data won't be compromised, and that the IRS is using every possible means of keeping it secure.

Cybersecurity Facility Planned For Moffett Field To Protect Spaceflights, Other NASA Work

By Ethan Baron

[San Jose \(CA\) Mercury News](#), April 4, 2016

MOFFETT FIELD – NASA's Ames Research Center is planning a cutting-edge cybersecurity facility at Moffett Field to protect space missions from potentially catastrophic hacking and to increase collaboration with Silicon Valley.

Proponents of "Gryphon X" envision a center connecting Ames to the brainpower of the region's tech sector, with benefits flowing both ways.

The project is in "the proposal and formulation stage," and no budget has been set or funds allocated, Jerry Davis, chief information officer for Ames, said in a statement emailed to this newspaper. Davis said the program may be built jointly but did not confirm a statement from a think tank that Silicon Valley companies would help fund it.

Mark Maggi of Wind River Systems participates in the competition held by Symantec, "Cyber Readiness Challenge" at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, Calif., on Wednesday, March 13, 2013. Symantec, "the challenge itself is a 'capture the flag' type of competition where participants (with all levels of technical expertise) test their skills within a real-world hacking environment to hone their cybersecurity defense skills. (Josie Lepe/Staff)

"Gryphon X focuses on the reduction of cyber-based risks to NASA's missions and their highly connected systems and high-value hardware and software in the field," Davis said.

The plan arose about a year ago from conversations between Ames officials and Silicon Valley tech executives, according to the Institute for Critical Infrastructure Technology, a Washington, D.C., think tank. "Some of these big companies were willing to throw money into the budget to do it," institute senior fellow James Scott said. "Funding didn't seem to be an issue."

Gryphon X would help build a needed bridge between Silicon Valley's tech sector and government agencies, but only if done in a way that allowed the private sector to profit, said analyst Avivah Litan from the Gartner technology research and advisory company.

"You can't just put a building out there and ask people to get together and collaborate," Litan said. "You have to have some business incentive on both sides. The Silicon Valley guys have to make money out of it, and the public sector guys have to get better security out of it."

Ames officials asked the institute, which has ties to Silicon Valley security companies and the Pentagon, the National Security Agency and other federal agencies, to talk the proposal up on Capitol Hill, Scott said. In House and Senate offices, "The support was instant," Scott said.

Across the federal government, cybersecurity has become an increasingly high-profile concern. This year's White House report to Congress on information security noted that the number of cybersecurity incidents in federal agencies rose 10 percent to nearly 80,000 in fiscal year 2015 over the previous year.

In private industry, 90 percent of senior security executives worldwide believe their firms are vulnerable to cybersecurity breaches, according to San Jose data security firm Vormetric's 2016 Data Threat Report. "Many of the most pernicious attacks we've seen in the recent past have come, not just from insiders, but from an assortment of external actors – including cybercriminals, nation-states, hacktivists and cyberterrorists," the Vormetric report states.

For the space shuttle and NASA's work in general, cybersecurity is of crucial importance, said Betsy Cooper, executive director of the UC Berkeley Center for Long-Term Cybersecurity. "They have networks that can be vulnerable," Cooper said.

A profound need exists for Gryphon X, according to a report by the infrastructure institute, to collaborate with industry in the face of threats facing the space program – and ordinary citizens.

"Make no mistake, America is at war," the report states. "The American people are subject to exploitation by a vast and nebulous storm of adversaries. If an enemy country shut off emergency systems and power grids across California for example, and then invaded, the United States may be taken unaware."

Gartner analyst Litan said hackers could indeed shut off the power grid or hack a NASA space mission. "We need to have a sense of urgency about the situation. We just don't want to wait like Brussels did or like we did with 9/11," Litan said.

The institute, which counts representatives from Bay Area information and infrastructure security firms Centrifly, Exabeam, Covenant, Forcepoint and Global Risk Advisors as fellows, said Gryphon X would train government personnel and private-industry staff in cybersecurity. Current anti-hacking training and awareness initiatives in the U.S. are only 85 percent effective, so "at least 15 out of every 100 employees do not retain the training necessary to not make the mistakes that put organizations at risk," the report states.

The institute's report outlines possible outcomes following a hack of NASA, ranging from the theft of intellectual property to a space shuttle crash or the steering of a drone into a federal building.

NASA is now "looking at the cost/benefit analysis and value proposition" of Gryphon X, Davis said.

Still Room For Improving U.S.-China Cyber Relations

[Politico](#), April 1, 2016

TODAY: CYBERWAR ON DONALD TRUMP — It might be an unpleasant day for the Republican presidential candidate in cyberspace, POLITICO's Darren Samuelsohn writes. "The Internet hacking collective Anonymous and its allies have promised April 1 will serve as their launching point

for a 'total war' on the Republican front-runner that includes shutting down his websites and conducting other digital mischief to 'dismantle his campaign and sabotage his brand.'" Samuelsohn spoke to a hacker going by the name Compiled who boasted, "We have more than enough knowledge and power on our team to do almost whatever" — and even though Trump might have bolstered cyber defenses after a series of attacks in the past year, "there's still vulnerability and we know how to take it down."

Story Continued Below

STILL NOT BESTIES — Despite last year's agreement between the U.S. and China to forbid cyber theft of intellectual property, President Barack Obama pointed out Thursday during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit that there's not complete harmony. "Now, as has been true in the past, we will have a candid exchange about areas where we have significant differences — issues like human rights, cyber and maritime issues," Obama said in a joint appearance. For his part, Xi said the two presidents would "explore possibilities of deepening cooperation" in cybersecurity, among other areas.

Mayer Brown JSM's Xiaoyan Zhang told MC there's still room for improvement between the two countries, to say the least. "Since last year's cyber agreement, the alleged cyberattacks between the United States and China have not lessened" — in fact, it might be more accurate to say "they have increased," said Zhang, who is counsel of the Intellectual Property and Technology, Media and Telecoms group and is based in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The lack of a binding treaty makes last year's deal little more than a high-level agreement to general principles, she said. But she expects the two sides to work toward putting flesh on bone, even if the two presidents didn't get there Thursday: "I think there will be a little more definite and specific agreements coming out."

HAPPY FRIDAY and welcome to Morning Cybersecurity! Nothing in today's newsletter is an April Fools' Day prank, so far as we know. Send thoughts, feedback and especially your tips to tstarks@politico.com and follow @timstarks, @POLITICOPro and @MorningCybersec. Full team info is below.

LEARNING TO READ — Nasdaq and cybersecurity company Tanium teamed up with researchers at Goldsmiths, University of London, to assess vulnerabilities at major corporations and rank them according to risk, concluding that 10 percent had a high vulnerability, 80 percent medium and 10 percent low. The survey of top corporate officials at the high vulnerability companies worldwide turned up some interesting results. Among them: "91% of the high vulnerable board members say they can't interpret a cybersecurity report," which prevents them "from asking the right questions." Two out of every five high-vulnerability respondents said they wouldn't feel responsible for a

cyberattack. The report — "The Accountability Gap: Cybersecurity & Building a Culture of Responsibility" — is out this morning.

CARLIN: CYBER TERRORISM ONLY A MATTER OF TIME — There's no question ISIL and Al Qaeda would like to attack U.S. critical infrastructure with cyber weapons and it's only "a matter of time before they acquire some of the capability they're after," Assistant Attorney General John Carlin said Thursday. The evidence that they haven't acquired the capability yet is simply that they haven't used it, Carlin told an audience of corporate attorneys at the Incident Response Forum. In addition to an attack against a bank or power plant, terrorists might be interested in using more common hacking tools, such as ransomware, to deadlier ends, Carlin said. "There's not going to be a dollar amount you can pay," he said. "They're going to hope, for instance, to deny you your [hospital] patient records and hope that results in the loss of somebody's life." Carlin also offered remarks on other cyber topics including the Iran indictments and information sharing.

CONTRACTING WOES AT DHS — A major Homeland Security Department initiative to bolster federal government cybersecurity fell behind its acquisition schedule in 2015, a Government Accountability Office audit out Thursday found. The Continuous Diagnostics & Monitoring program had trouble issuing solicitations, selecting vendors and awarding contracts at various points in its development, according to the GAO. But another initiative — the National Cybersecurity Protection System — was on track as of last year. The GAO review of major DHS acquisitions also cited expanded cyber testing as a factor in some programs falling behind schedule. On Twitter, the House Homeland Security Committee called for passage of a bill that it said would improve DHS's acquisition process to save taxpayer dollars.

MINOR HACKING OFFENSES — When FBI investigators set their sights on a malicious cyber criminal, they sometimes find ... a teenager, said David West, assistant section chief for the bureau's cyber division. When that happens, it's common for the FBI to refer the case to local law enforcement rather than pursue it themselves, West said Thursday. "We have to make a decision whether or not the full weight of the federal government is the right thing," he said at the Incident Response Forum. "When we're dealing with minors, in many cases, we work with our district attorneys and prosecutors and we refer those investigations." The frequency of finding teen cyber criminals is dropping, West said, but the overall trend of cyber crime is going up. "Unfortunately, people have found out that cyber crime pays, so we have traditional criminals migrating to cyber crime," he said.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS — As of Thursday, security researchers can begin signing up for "Hack the Pentagon," a bug bounty program to help the Defense Department tackle

vulnerabilities on its website. The initiative, a partnership with HackerOne, begins April 18 and ends May 12, and the department has set aside \$150,000 for payouts. Enlist here.

ARMY CYBERCOM SEEKS ANALYSTS — The Army released the first notice Thursday for a possible contract to provide a slew of operations and analytical services to Army Cyber Command's training and doctrine office at Fort Gordon, Ga. The contractor would provide analysis supporting Army cyber operations and help develop and maintain the Army's portion of the Joint Information Environment, a planned cross-service computer cloud, according to the notice. The posting is a sources sought notice, which means the Army hasn't committed to buying anything and is just doing market research.

FTC VS. RANSOMWARE — The FTC has scheduled a Sept. 7 seminar on the growing ransomware problem, including whether public education campaigns and antivirus and other technologies are up to par. "And we have no predetermined answer to that question, we really are trying to figure this out," said Dan Salsburg, chief counsel at FTC's Office of Technology, Research and Investigation.

Recent headlines have focused on how ransomware has hit the health care industry, including an attack this week that forced MedStar Health to shut down computers at 10 hospitals in the Washington, D.C., area. But the problem for consumers and businesses is far more pervasive. "What you hear publicly now in terms of significant compromises is not necessarily reflective of who actors are targeting," said John Miller, director of ThreatScape Cyber Crime at iSIGHT Partners. Miller added that user and business education, such as simply stopping people from opening malicious documents, keeping computer security systems updated and ensuring data is backed up, can go a long way. "It sounds really simple but it's actually one of the most effective solutions," Miller said.

KEEP QUIET, THE GOVERNMENT'S LISTENING — People who believe they're under government surveillance online are less likely to speak out if they believe their opinion isn't the majority view, a new study concludes. Published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, it's the "first study to provide empirical evidence that the government's online surveillance programs may threaten the disclosure of minority views and contribute to the reinforcement of majority opinion." Study author Elizabeth Stoycheff found the results troubling, she told Quartz. "A lot more work needs to be done before we can conclusively show the implications that surveillance has on free speech, but the initial results presented here do not paint an optimistic picture," the assistant professor at Wayne State University said. "Free speech for only those who espouse popular, majority opinions isn't free speech at all."

PLOT THICKENS IN BANGLADESH CYBER BANK HEIST — A Sri Lankan woman who received some of the

spoils of a digital bank heist in Bangladesh says a friend set her up, Reuters reported. Hagoda Gamage Shalika Perera received a bank transfer for \$20 million out of the roughly \$1 billion unidentified hackers tried to steal from Bangladesh Bank via its account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in February. Perera expected the transfer, she said, but an acquaintance had led her to believe it was a donation from Japan's international development agency to a foundation she runs.

RECENTLY ON PRO CYBERSECURITY — The FBI says it hasn't agreed to help unlock an iPhone tied to a murder case in Arkansas, contrary to an Associated Press report. ... The military intelligence budget for fiscal 2017 lists improving support for cyber operations as one of the top funding priorities, according to a redacted summary. ... The financial sector's increasing reliance on technology makes it more susceptible to hackers, Treasury Department Deputy Secretary Sarah Bloom Raskin says.

QUICK BYTES

— The FBI is testing whether the technique it used to break into a terrorist's iPhone can be used elsewhere. The Wall Street Journal.

— "Cyber-defense experts found security gaps in a State Department system that could have allowed hackers to doctor visa applications or pilfer sensitive data from the half-billion records on file." ABC News.

— The Office of Personnel Management plans to issue new rules for reporting cyber incidents to health insurers that cover federal employees. Nextgov.

— Cyber warfare is one of the few areas where the Defense Department delegates duties to a machine, said Deputy Secretary Bob Work.

— The electric sector is doing a better job at cyber defense than the media makes out, says Southern Company CEO Thomas Fanning. Electric Perspectives.

— The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency weighed in a little on cyber in a new white paper.

— Reddit apparently got a national security letter. Wired.

— A hacker broke into a porn network and is offering to sell user data. Motherboard.

That's all for today. Keep your head on a swivel.

Stay in touch with the whole team: Darren Goode (dgoode@politico.com, @DarrenGoode); Bob King (bking@politico.com, @BKingDC); Joseph Marks (jmarks@politico.com, @Joseph_Marks_); and Tim Starks (tstarks@politico.com, @timstarks).

U.S. Infrastructure Can Be Hacked With Google, Simple Passwords

[NBC News](#), April 3, 2016

Authorities say the Iranian computer hack of a New York dam is the symptom of a huge weakness in the U.S. infrastructure – dams, stadiums, traffic controls and power grids that can be accessed by anyone, including hostile nations or terrorists – with simple passwords or no passwords at all.

New York U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said that the 2013 hack of the Bowman Avenue Dam in Rye Brook, N.Y., was a “frightening new frontier” of cybercrime that’s “scary to think about.” The lead investigator of the case said it was a “game-changing event.” U.S. officials believe that hackers were probing for weaknesses in hopes of hitting bigger targets later.

Authorities are worried about these attacks because the threat is growing exponentially, and despite years of warnings America’s private sector has been woefully slow to adapt. About 6.4 billion devices and control systems will be connected to the Internet in 2016, a 30 percent spike over 2015, according to a new report. By 2020, nearly 21 billion will be online.

The rise of what the cyber community calls “the Internet of Things” (IoT) – the way in which objects, equipment and buildings are now linked to the web and each other and send and receive data – has ushered in a new era of security vulnerabilities. Hackers can remotely seize control of a spectrum of critical public and private infrastructure. Many of these targets are run by Industrial Control Systems that were designed before cybersecurity became crucial.

Hamid Firoozi, the Iranian hacker charged earlier this month with breaking into the control system of a New York dam, reportedly used a simple, legal search engine that surfs for and identifies unguarded control systems online. Firoozi was one of seven men who work for a pair of private Iranian cyber-security firms that do work for the Iranian government, including its elite military unit, the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps. The men were charged with hacking the financial sector as well as the dam.

While foreign nation-state hacking into U.S. infrastructure is common and growing in scope and sophistication, the dam hack is significant because prosecutors say it’s the first time a simple, search engine-driven hack of a piece of U.S. infrastructure has surfaced as the tool of choice. It’s also the first time federal indictment tied a foreign state to the hacking of critical U.S. assets. “This stuff has been happening undetected for years”

It’s particularly concerning because the so-called “water sector” – bridges, tunnels, dams – is one of the most vulnerable sectors of the U.S. economy. If the small Bowman dam had been breached, some homes in a tony New York suburb would have been flooded, but no lives would’ve been lost. Officials were more concerned that the hack was a test run.

Researchers said that many infrastructure systems require just a default username and password (like “admin” and “admin”) to access. Others have no password security at all. With the growing popularity of search engines dedicated to locating exploitable “open ports,” or unprotected access points – a practice known as “Google dorking” because hackers can use Google to find the ports – authorities believes cyber-attacks on U.S. infrastructure will continue to increase for some time.

“This stuff has been happening undetected for years, and now this is one of the first time that it’s surfaced publicly,” said former F.B.I. computer crime investigator Mike Bazzell. “We’re getting close to a threshold where something must be done,” he said. “The more this type of activity becomes popular and well-known, it will get worse before it gets better.”

Who Is Vulnerable?

The threat of cyber-attacks spans every sector of the U.S. economy, experts said.

In recent years, independent “white-hat” security researchers have shown they can access cities’ traffic control systems and license plate reader networks, sports stadiums, car washes, a hockey rink in Denmark, a Texas water plant, the particle-accelerating cyclotron at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, even an Olympic arena.

In 2013, researcher Billy Rios, a former Google cyber-security expert who studies emerging threats to industrial control systems and critical infrastructure, found that the control systems for about a dozen pro and college sports stadiums in the U.S. were easily accessible to hackers. Three years later, he told NBC News, “I’d say 80 percent of my stadiums are still online” and vulnerable.

In 2014, Rios identified an open control system inside Russia’s Sochi Fisht Olympic Stadium and notified authorities. The vulnerability was fixed the day before opening ceremonies for the Winter Games.

John Matherly – a researcher who built the search engine Shodan to identify unsecured servers online – recently probed a leading automatic license plate reader system in wide use by law enforcement agencies nationwide. He realized he could tap into a Louisiana town’s LPR system, siphon off tens of thousands of images a week, and even “tell [it] to send the pictures elsewhere.” Fellow researchers subsequently identified unsecured LPR systems in ten U.S. states.

Most leading researchers – including a group called I Am The Cavalry that was formed to call attention to these dangerous vulnerabilities – work with federal agencies to contact vulnerable facility or infrastructure owners in both the public and private sectors.

They are also urging private sector leaders to create “bug bounty” programs that explicitly permit hackers to probe their systems for vulnerabilities and rewards those who find flaws.

Private sector companies own 85 percent of U.S. critical infrastructure, said Frank J. Cilluffo, former White House special assistant to the president on homeland security.

The seven Iranian hackers are wanted by the FBI. FBI Who Are the “Bad Actors”?

Cilluffo, now director of George Washington University’s Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, told Congress last month about the ease with which bad actors are launching cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure. In many cases, he said, “virtually anyone with a measure of skills and a special interest can cause harm.”

He said the private sector has been overwhelmed by the growth of cyber-attacks.

“It’s not that they’re necessarily ignoring” their security vulnerabilities, Cilluffo said. “It’s the fact that they’ve got a whole lot of vulnerabilities they are going to need to backfill before they can get to all of them.”

Most nation-states have far more sophisticated cyber capabilities than those required for the search engine hacking to gain control of vulnerable U.S. infrastructure targets. Individual hackers without any ties to groups are capable of these simple hacks.

While authorities believe nation states have mounted numerous attacks on infrastructure and thousands of “dry run” drills in the past, these intrusions can be hard to detect in real time and often go unreported by their targets. Investigators just happened to notice the dam intrusion while monitoring for cyber-attacks in the financial sector.

But in his testimony, and in an interview with NBC News, Cilluffo said that at least four countries are major players in hacking, or supporting hacks, of U.S. targets – China, Iran, North Korea and Russia, with Russia the source of the most sophisticated intrusions.

Eighty percent of worldwide cybercrime emanates from Eastern Europe, according to Europol Director Robert Wainwright. In 2009, cyber-criminals from Russia or China breached the U.S. electric grid, leaving software programs behind, according to the Wall Street Journal. Experts say some hacks may be conducted by Russian organized crime at the behest of the state security service, the FSB.

China is believed to have been responsible in December, 2014 for the largest breach of U.S. federal employee data – compromising personal data on 4 million current and former employees, according to U.S. officials. The increasing sophistication and capabilities have prompted authorities to charge that Chinese cyber-espionage has risen to the level of a strategic threat to the U.S. national interest.

In January, 2013, Iran launched a concerted series of cyber-attacks against American financial institutions, including Bank of America, J.P. Morgan Chase and others. Cilluffo cites a 2015 British tech research firm study which says that under President Hassan Rouhani, Iran’s cyber budget has grown twelve-fold. The recent indictment of the

alleged Iranian dam and financial industry hackers made pointed reference to their apparent ties to various Iranian state agencies.

While North Korea is not known for U.S. infrastructure attacks, it has been accused of hacking power plants, banks and news organizations in South Korea, whose minister of defense said last year that North Korea has a force of “about 6,000 cyber-agents.”

While Cilluffo said foreign terrorist organizations have yet to demonstrate a capacity for the sort of sophisticated attacks believed to have been launched by the nation-states above, he notes that the growing “arms bazaar of cyber weapons” available for purchase or rental, the obvious social media savvy of groups like ISIS/ISIL, makes it likely only a matter of time before they are capable of launching potentially devastating attacks on U.S. assets.

Bowman Avenue Dam on Feb. 13, 2012. City of Rye “Straight Shot to the Internet”

The age of the IoT has created a new generation of “connected” devices that communicate over the Internet – like “smart homes” whose appliances can be controlled remotely with an app. The term also applies to businesses and municipalities which are increasingly taking their operations online. As aging infrastructure moves from old radio and satellite systems to 4G cellular networks, hundreds of thousands of systems worldwide are suddenly visible – and hackable.

Unlike computer software flaws, there is often no easy way to universally patch vulnerabilities in complex Industrial Control Systems or effectively warn customers.

“You have these big control systems that have a straight shot to the Internet – that’s the fundamental security flaw,” said researcher Tod Beardsley.

The legal landscape can be confusing and remains largely untested in U.S. courts. White hat researchers said they never actually breach vulnerable systems – they stop at the open doors. They also use proprietary software to further identify the types of facility they are seeing.

Yet they contend that both the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) are broadly written and afford prosecutors wide latitude in how to interpret them.

A poster for the movie “The Interview” is carried away by a worker after being pulled from a display case at a Carmike Cinemas movie theater, on Dec. 17, 2014 in Atlanta. Georgia-based Carmike Cinemas has decided to cancel its planned showings of “The Interview” in the wake of threats against theatergoers by the Sony hackers. David Goldman / AP

“Fear of civil or criminal prosecution under these vague laws can have a chilling effect on the kind of services we could provide,” said researcher Joshua Corman.

Having worked for years to identify these vulnerabilities, these experts don't want to be the ones who end up testing case law by drawing the wrong kind of attention.

"We have this coming tsunami of IoT devices that are password defaulted, and it can be technically illegal to point them out!" Beardsley said.

That could soon change.

At a conference in February, Corman and colleagues urged federal prosecutors and all 50 state attorney generals to better protect altruistic researchers from prosecution.

They are also urging private sector leaders to create "bug bounty" programs that explicitly permit hackers to probe their systems for vulnerabilities and rewards those who find flaws.

Both General Motors and the Pentagon recently announced bug bounty programs.

"We do need to carve out some immunity for white hat hackers who, as long as their intent is pure, warrant a re-examination of the ways [the laws] are written," Cilluffo agreed.

Corman is hopeful.

"We're really ready and willing to help, if we're allowed to."

A Hacker And The Perils Of 'Dorking'

'Google dorking,' a method by which an Iranian hacker allegedly identified a vulnerable computer linked with an American dam, has roots in the 1960s

By Ben Zimmer

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 1, 2016

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

NATIONAL SECURITY NEWS

Iraqi Forces Take Northern Edge Of IS-held Town

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

HIT, Iraq (AP) – Iraqi forces took the northern edge of the Islamic State-held town of Hit, west of Baghdad, on Sunday in an operation led by the country's elite counterterrorism forces, military officials said.

The operation to recapture Hit was relaunched last week, but the troops' progress has been slowed by hundreds of roadside bombs and efforts to safeguard thousands of civilians trapped inside the town.

"We've never had a delay like this on one of our targets," said Gen. Husham al-Jabri of Iraq's counterterrorism forces. Al-Jabri carefully plotted progress towards Hit on a map in a temporary operations center just south of the city.

The initial push to take Hit was launched last month, but was quickly put on hold when Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-

Abadi pulled forces back to Baghdad after anti-government protests threatened instability in the Iraqi capital.

After the operation resumed, Iraqi forces had to deal with hundreds of roadside bombs laid by IS fighters along the main roads leading in and out of Hit, forcing convoys to veer off into the surrounding desert terrain. Even there, the forces' advance was repeatedly brought to a standstill by booby-trapped explosives. Progress was further complicated by muddy conditions after days of rainfall.

"The roadside bomb is the only weapon they have left to depend on," said Ayad Ghazi, a sergeant with one of the leading battalions inching toward the town. Just a few hundred meters ahead of him plumes of orange smoke rose from controlled blasts. He said it took his men 12 hours to travel just three miles (five kilometers) on Sunday.

While initially used on a limited basis by al-Qaida in Iraq, the predecessor to the Islamic State group, IS now produces roadside bombs on an industrial scale. IS fighters use these bombs defensively, placing the devices to essentially create mine fields to impede advancing government forces. IS also litters cities and towns with the explosive devices to hinder pursuit of their fleeing fighters.

Iraqi forces have struggled to train and equip enough units to deal with the sheer volume of the bombs.

The U.S.-led coalition said Iraqi forces were in the outskirts of Hit and working to surround the town, seeking to build on recent gains made by government forces with the recapture in February of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province in central Iraq.

Hit, 85 miles (140 kilometers) west of Baghdad, lies along a supply line linking the extremist group's fighters in Iraq with those in neighboring Syria. Iraqi military officials say retaking Hit would cut IS supply lines and allow anti-IS forces to link up to the west and north of Baghdad.

Iraqi and coalition officials said that retaking Hit will be a key step before an eventual push on Mosul, the largest Iraqi city held by IS.

Associated Press writer Khalid Mohammed in Hit, Iraq, contributed to this report.

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Syrian Troops Drive Islamic State Out Of Another Town

By John Bacon

[USA Today](#), April 3, 2016

The Syrian Army claimed victory over the Islamic State in the town of Qaryatain on Sunday, one week after driving the militant group out of historic Palmyra.

The Army Command said retaking Qaryatain was crucial for securing oil and gas pipelines in the area and for blocking militant supply routes between Damascus and Homs, the state-controlled Syrian News Agency reported. The town also gives government forces a foothold for attacking areas along the border with Iraq held by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Army units "hunted down fleeing ISIS terrorists inside the city and dismantled scores of explosive devices and mines left behind," SANA said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which supports neither the regime of President Bashar Assad nor the Islamic State, said warplanes were pounding the area and that Islamic State fighters were in retreat.

Qaryatain is a strategic area of less than 50,000 people with a strong Christian influence. After taking control of the town last August, the militants posted photos on social media showing bulldozers destroying the Saint Elian Monastery, which dates to the 5th century. Dozens of Christians were abducted by the extremists.

The Syrian Army, backed by Russian airstrikes and local militias bitterly opposed to the Islamic State, have been pushing hard against the militant group in its effort to carve a Sunni caliphate out of parts of Syria and Libya. A week ago, Syrian government forces recaptured the ancient city of Palmyra, 60 miles to the east. Palmyra's priceless antiquities had been damaged or destroyed by militants who considered the revered works idolatrous.

Almost 500,000 people have been killed in Syria's five years of civil war and bloody three-way struggles pitting the Assad's regime, supported by Moscow, against rebels supported by a U.S.-led coalition, and the Islamic State. The United Nations estimates that 4.8 million Syrians have fled the country and another 6.6 million people have been displaced within Syria.

A tentative partial cease-fire between the regime and U.S.-backed rebels has held for more than a month. The truce does not involve the Islamic State, and that struggle has raged on.

President Obama said the U.S. would be "relentless" in its pursuit of Islamic State militants. When the cease-fire went into effect in February, Obama said the campaign would continue to target Islamic State oil infrastructure and cash stores, an effort which reportedly has led the Islamic State to cut salaries to fighters.

"As its finances shrink, ISIL is also imposing more taxes and fines on those under its brutal rule. That, in turn, stokes even more resentment among local populations," Obama said.

Army Seizes Key IS Bastion In Central Syria: State TV

[AFP](#), April 3, 2016

Damascus (AFP) – Syrian troops on Sunday seized the key Islamic State group bastion of Al-Qaryatain, dealing the jihadists a new blow in the country's centre a week after expelling them from Palmyra, state television said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group however said fighting was still raging in the east and southeast of the town, which is located in the desert in Homs province.

"The army with backing from supporting forces (pro-regime militia) brings back complete security and stability to the town of Al-Qaryatain, after crushing Daesh terrorists' last remaining positions there," state television said, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

But the Britain-based Observatory said the army was still fighting the jihadists in the town.

"Clashes are still ongoing in the east and southeast of the town," it said.

The advance came after the Russian-backed Syrian army dealt IS a major blow on March 27 by seizing the ancient city of Palmyra, known as the "Pearl of the desert", from the jihadists.

Al-Qaryatain is located some 120 kilometres (75 miles) southwest of Palmyra.

Its recapture will allow the army to secure its grip over the ancient city, where jihadists destroyed ancient temples and executed around 280 people during their 10-month rule.

Once Al-Qaryatain returns to government control, "of the whole of Homs province, IS will only hold its bastion in Sukhna" northeast of Palmyra, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

"The recapture of Al-Qaryatain will also allow the army to reclaim the whole of the Syrian desert" spreading all the way south to the Iraqi border, Abdel Rahman added.

A ceasefire brokered by the United States and Russia but which does not apply to the fight against jihadists has enabled the Syrian army to focus its efforts on IS.

– IS executions –

The group has also lost a string of high-ranking commanders in recent weeks to strikes by the US-led coalition which launched an air campaign against the jihadists in Iraq and Syria in 2014.

A drone strike on Wednesday, likely by the coalition, killed Abu al-Haija, a Tunisian commander summoned by IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from Iraq.

Fifteen IS commanders accused of revealing Abu al-Haija's position have since been executed by the jihadist group, the Observatory said Sunday.

The fate of another 20 men accused of collaborating with the US-led coalition remains unknown, it added.

"This is the highest number of executions of security officials by IS," Abdel Rahman said.

The Observatory said on Sunday that 12 fighters from Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah were killed fighting the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front and allied rebels in the northern province of Aleppo.

They died "in shelling and fighting in the south of Aleppo province, during the fierce offensive by Al-Nusra... and rebels the day before yesterday (Friday)," the group said.

Hezbollah has since 2013 been openly fighting in Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

After Palmyra, Syrian Troops Take Another ISIS-controlled Town

[Military Times](#), April 3, 2016

DAMASCUS, Syria — A week after taking back the historic town of Palmyra, Syrian troops and their allies on Sunday captured another town controlled by the Islamic State group in central Syria, state media reported.

The push into the town of Qaryatain took place under the cover of Russian airstrikes and dealt another setback to the ISIS extremists in Syria. However, an activist group that monitors the Syrian civil war said the government forces for the moment control more than half of Qaryatain but have not fully secured the town.

The advance came a week after Syrian forces recaptured Palmyra from IS and is strategically significant for the government side. The town of Qaryatain used to be home to a sizable Christian population and lies midway between Palmyra and the capital, Damascus.

Activists said last summer that Qaryatain had a mixed population of around 40,000 Sunni Muslims and Christians, as well as thousands of internally displaced people who had fled from the nearby city of Homs. Many of the Christians fled the town after it came under ISIS attack.

Dozens of Qaryatain's Christians and other residents have been abducted by the extremists. While the town was under ISIS control, some were released, others were made to sign pledges to pay a tax imposed on non-Muslims.

While IS extremists blew up and destroyed some of the world's most precious relics at Palmyra's archaeological site during their 10-month reign of terror there, the ancient Saint Eliane Monastery near Qaryatain was also bulldozed and destroyed shortly after ISIS took the town in August.

Christians make up about 10 percent of Syria's prewar population of 23 million people.

State news agency SANA said government forces were currently dismantling bombs placed by extremists inside Qaryatain. The report said Syrian troops were fully in control of the town after "wiping out Daesh terrorists inside it," referring to IS by the group's Arabic acronym.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said intense fighting was underway in Qaryatain as government troops fight to capture all parts of the town. The Observatory's chief Rami Abdurrahman said ISIS fighters are still in control of eastern parts and southeastern areas of the town but "are on the verge of collapse." Abdurrahman added that some of the extremists have started withdrawing toward eastern parts of the mountainous Qalamoun region.

IS has suffered major defeats in Syria over the past months amid intense airstrikes by Russian warplanes.

Earlier Sunday, the Observatory reported that fighting in northern Syria the previous day killed several fighters belonging to the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group. Hezbollah has been fighting alongside President Bashar Assad's troops in Syria's civil war.

The Observatory said 12 Hezbollah fighters were killed and dozens were wounded in Saturday's attack by militants led by al-Qaida's Syria branch — known as the Nusra Front — on the northern village of al-Ais.

In southern Lebanon, social media postings on Sunday carried photos of seven Hezbollah fighters said to be among those killed in al-Ais.

Though Nusra Front is not part of a U.S.-Russia-engineered truce between the Syrian government forces and Western-backed rebels, the fighting has threatened to undermine the cease-fire that has held for over a month.

Mroue reported from Beirut.

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Syrian Forces Seize Town Of Qaryatain From Islamic State

[Voice of America](#), April 3, 2016

Syria said Sunday its forces seized another town from Islamic State militants, Qaryatain, in the central part of the country, a week after retaking the historic city of Palmyra.

State media said the seizure of Qaryatain, with support of Russian airstrikes, gives the government a strategic victory, securing oil and gas routes between the Damascus area and oilfields in eastern Syria.

But the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors fighting in Syria from accounts inside the country, said the government claim was premature, even as it said Islamic State fighters "are on the verge of collapse."

The monitoring group said the jihadists still controlled the eastern and southeastern parts of Qaryatain, but that some of its fighters had started retreating to the nearby mountainous region.

Qaryatain was once the home to a sizable population of Christians, dozens of whom have been abducted by the extremists. Some were released, but others were forced to sign a pledge to pay a tax imposed on non-Muslims.

The advance on Qaryatain, held by the militants since late August, comes a week after Syria seized the ancient city of Palmyra, where Islamic State fighters destroyed centuries-old historic relics.

In Qaryatain, Islamic State fighters bulldozed the Saint Eliane Monastery.

Syrian Forces Seize Islamic State-held Town Near Palmyra

By Lisa Barrington

[Reuters](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Mass Grave Found In Syria After Town Taken From IS

[Associated Press](#), April 4, 2016

Syrian troops have found a mass grave containing the bodies of 42 people executed by Islamic State (IS) militants in Palmyra, as Washington said the group's leader will eventually "taste justice."

The Islamic State group has in recent months claimed responsibility for attacks in Brussels and Paris, but has lost ground in Syria and Iraq.

Days after Syrian troops backed by Russian forces recaptured Palmyra and its ancient ruins, the army "uncovered a mass grave of officers, soldiers, members of the popular committees [pro-regime militia] and their relatives," a military source told reporters on Saturday.

Twenty-four of the bodies found were civilians, including three children, he said, asking not to be named.

"They were executed either by beheading or by shooting," he said.

In a major symbolic and strategic coup for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian army on Sunday last week recaptured Palmyra and its UNESCO World Heritage Site, which the Islamic State group had overrun in May last year.

During their nearly 10-month occupation of Palmyra, the militants executed at least 280 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor that confirmed the discovery of the mass grave.

Soon afterward, the Islamic State group stormed Palmyra, shooting dead 25 soldiers in the ancient Roman theater.

It later released a video of the mass killing in which the executioners appeared to be children or teenagers.

Nearly a week on, few of Palmyra's up to 70,000 residents have returned.

"People fear reprisal by the regime and also the mines planted all over the city by IS," Observatory director Rami

Abdel Rahman told reporters. "In addition, many houses were flattened by Russian airstrikes before Palmyra was reclaimed."

About 70km to the west, Syrian troops on Saturday pounded the the Islamic State-held city of Sukhna, which the army wants to take back to consolidate its grip over Palmyra.

"If the regime takes Sukhna, it will use it as a launching pad for an operation against Deir Ezzor province" in eastern Syria, along the Iraqi border, which is mostly controlled by the Islamic State group, Abdel Rahman said.

In the latest reports last night, Syrian state media and the Observatory said government forces had entered a central town that was held by the Islamic State group.

State TV said Syrian troops and pro-government fighters pushed into Qaryatain yesterday after days of intense clashes with militants outside the town.

Additional reporting by AP

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TASS: World – Palmyra Restoration Possible Only After Peace In Syria – French Foreign Ministry Official

[TASS \(RUS\)](#), April 3, 2016

MOSCOW, April 4. /TASS/. A full-fledged start of restoration of monuments destroyed in Syria's Palmyra will only be possible after a comprehensive truce is established in the country, a senior official at the French Foreign Ministry told TASS in an interview.

"In order to reliably protect that wonderful heritage [Palmyra] from barbaric actions, which were destroying it for so long, and completely restore it, being guided by broad international support, peace is required. Not only a temporary truce, which we hail, but real peace," Anne-Marie Descotes, Director-General for Globalization, Development and Partnerships at the French Foreign Ministry, said.

She said official Damascus should accept the necessity of real political transition in line with Resolution 2254 of the United Nations Security Council.

Descotes said that "for Frenchmen, Palmyra is of special significance."

"France's activity in Syria has long-established roots, France has traditionally taken part in archeological works," she said.

Structures Of Hope For A New Syria

[Christian Science Monitor](#), April 3, 2016

The effort to end Syria's civil war may be at its most hopeful point in five years. A two-month truce is largely holding. Russia has pulled back its fighter jets. The Islamic State appears weaker. And a third round of talks will be held

soon in Geneva to find a compromise on forming a democratic, secular state.

The many countries that care about Syria are now asking how this shattered country can be reconstructed and its 22 million people healed of their divisions. The World Bank estimates it would cost \$170 million to rebuild Syria. Even talk of a "Marshall Plan" for Syria can help propel the peace process. The West, in particular, cannot afford to repeat the mistakes made in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya of not providing enough support after a conflict for nation-building and a restoration of civic unity.

One person thinking hard about this problem is Marwa Al-Sabouni. She holds a Ph.D. in Islamic architecture and has continued to live in Homs, one of Syria's most devastated cities, with her husband and children even as bombs fell and snipers killed at random. Her new book, "The Battle for Home: The Memoir of a Syrian Architect," offers good advice as the country tries to restore its national identity.

Her lens is architecture, or the "built environment," and how it can help reconnect Muslims, Christians, and others who once lived peacefully with each other in Syria. As Winston Churchill once said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

Homs itself, which is Syria's third largest city, was once well-known for its religious harmony and a famous mosque and a historic church. If Syrians can work together to rebuild their homes and public spaces to create a caring environment, she says, it will heal wounds and integrate people into a larger community.

She claims the Assad regime had forcibly built residential structures to divide Syrians by sects. Housing complexes were constructed without consideration for beauty or reflective of local values. This contributed to the social breakdown and the eruption of protests for democracy in 2011.

In a United Nations competition, she has offered a design to reconstruct the Homs community of Baba Amr, one that recognizes its peculiar aspects such as its climate, craftspeople, and agricultural richness. Urban planning must rely on understanding a community's moral values, she says. For Baba Amr, those values are best expressed in patio gardens, retail shops, and shared spaces. She likens her design to a tree, with connecting nodes.

The fact that a woman in a war zone can think so clearly and compassionately about post-crisis solutions for her country should serve as an inspiration to others. Her greatest contribution is to insist that Syrians be given a voice in shaping their buildings. The war began with a cry for democracy. It can be ended by granting that wish, both in type of government and style of architecture. She compares architecture to a mirror. In Syria's case, she says, it can lead people out of the black hole of war.

Syria's Qaeda Spokesman, 20 Jihadists Dead In Strikes: Monitor

[AFP](#), April 3, 2016

Beirut (AFP) – The spokesman for Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Al-Nusra Front, his son and 20 other jihadists were killed in air strikes Sunday in the northeast of the country, a monitor said.

"Abu Firas al-Suri, his son and at least 20 jihadists of Al-Nusra and Jund al-Aqsa and jihadists from Uzbekistan were killed in strikes on positions in Idlib province," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

It was not immediately clear if the raids were carried out by Syrian regime warplanes or their Russian allies.

Abdel Rahman said Suri was meeting with other leading jihadists in Kafar Jales when the raids struck and that two other Al-Nusra and Jund al-Aqsa targets were also attacked.

A temporary ceasefire between government forces and rebels has largely held since February 27, but it does not cover Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State group.

On Wednesday, a drone strike near IS's de facto Syrian capital Raqqa killed a jihadist commander, according to the Observatory, in the latest in a series of blows to the jihadists in recent weeks.

U.S. Says It Killed ISIS Militant Who Killed Marine In Iraq

[Reuters](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

U.S. Special Operations Units Are Using Faulty Rifle Sights

By Thomas Gibbons-Neff

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

U.S. Special Operations forces are using rifle sights that are supposed to help shooters accurately hit their targets but instead have a defect, acknowledged by the manufacturer, that potentially endangers the lives of service members in combat, according to court records and military officials.

The U.S. government is aware of the problem and sued the sight's maker in November for fraud, accusing the company L-3 Communications of covering up a range of issues with the sight, which has been used by every branch of the military, the FBI, the State Department and local law enforcement.

The company quickly settled for \$25.6 million. "A sight that 'almost works' is not acceptable," said Naval Criminal Investigative Service Director Andrew Traver in a news release the day the settlement was announced.

But more than four months later, the equipment has not been recalled or replaced, say current service members and military officials. Instead, it is still used by units under Special Operations Command (SOCOM), including Navy SEALs, Army Green Berets, Marine Corps Special Operation units and some parts of Delta Force and SEAL Team Six, according to Navy Cmdr. Matthew Allen, a spokesman for SOCOM. The Marine Corps is also continuing to use thousands of the sights, said Marine Corps spokesman Maj. Tony Semelroth.

The company says it has fixed most of the issues raised in its dispute with the government — except for the one that could be the most serious, based on the government's allegations.

That problem, known as thermal drift because it is weather-related, can cause the holographic weapon sight, or HWS, to be off target by six to 12 inches when a shooter is 300 feet away from a target, a common distance in a combat zone, according to the government's lawsuit. Missing a target by as much as a foot can be disastrous for a soldier since it can be the difference between landing a fatal shot and missing the target.

In the lawsuit, an unnamed employee at the manufacturer was quoted as saying of this particular defect: "This is likely one of the worst types of failure, since most users won't notice the problem until their life is on the line."

The defect tends to surface when the sight is exposed to extreme temperatures, both hot and cold, according to the company — a norm in some combat environments such as Afghanistan, where wide changes in temperature are common.

The website of L-3's EOTech unit, which is responsible for the sight, acknowledges that the thermal-drift problem has not been resolved. "There is no repair currently available to eliminate thermal drift," EOTech's website reads. "If your HWS experiences a degree of thermal drift that is unacceptable to you . . . please contact EOTech . . . to obtain a refund of the purchase price."

"We believe that many of our customers are satisfied with the performance of their holographic weapon sights," said Jason Maloni, a spokesman for EOTech in an email. Maloni added that the company stands by their products and that they are pleased with the progress they are making towards fixing the thermal drift issue.

The Pentagon acknowledges that some troops are using this particular sight. "We take this matter very seriously and pledge an unshakable commitment to the safety and well-being of our U.S. forces," said Air Force Lt. Col. Eric Badger, a Pentagon spokesman.

SOCOM spokesman Allen said the sights are "only used in a role where the limitations of the equipment are not in conflict with the safety or effectiveness of our warfighters."

But others have moved more swiftly to remove the sights altogether. In December, just weeks after EOTech settled its lawsuit with the U.S. government, the Denver police department issued a department-wide memo to pull the sights off their rifles immediately.

A series of problems

Complaints about the sight and its various models date back to the mid-2000s, soon after the Pentagon began regularly purchasing the equipment, a small rectangular device that sits on top of the rifle and projects holographic crosshairs over the target to help the shooter aim.

In winter 2007, when the company tried to secure a contract with the Norwegian military, the Norwegians found that in temperatures below 20 degrees, the sight began to fail, court documents assert. The crosshairs would expand and distort, causing the sight to be inaccurate.

EOTech tried to fix the cold-weather issue but never told the Pentagon, which had by then purchased large quantities of the sight, according to the U.S. government's lawsuit.

Around this time, court records allege, a sales and marketing employee wrote an email to EOTech's co-founder voicing concern that the company was not properly disclosing the cold-weather defect.

"Is it worth risking one person's life on this? What if there is a guy in the mountains in Afghanistan, and he brings up his sight . . . on the enemy who has the drop on him with an AK[?]," the employee wrote. "He takes aim as quickly as possible and puts a shot that misses wide due to the distortion of the reticle [the crosshairs]. He's dead a fraction of a second later. . . . This is a dramatic example, but this is the risk that is posed the longer the end-user is unaware of the risk."

In spring 2008, EOTech presented the problem to the U.S. military and said it had a solution, according to the lawsuit.

In its proposal, the company stated that EOTech "has not received a single report of a problem from the field regarding optical performance of the sight at cold temperature" and failed to mention that the Norwegians had rejected the sights because the issue could put their soldiers' lives at risk, according to the government's complaint. The firm claimed that the fix was undertaken on the company's own initiative, the lawsuit said.

Meanwhile, another problem was emerging with the sight — this one having to do with its performance in humid climates.

Despite EOTech advertising that some of its sights were waterproof after being submerged 66 feet underwater, the sights — through faulty seals — would accumulate moisture, causing the glass around the crosshairs to fog and the crosshairs themselves to dim, according to the lawsuit. Even though EOTech knew about the issue for years, as

alleged in court records, the company did not tell the U.S. military until March 2013 during a contract review and after a video on YouTube appeared that showed the crosshairs fading.

In July 2014, the company told the Pentagon it had fixed this other problem, as well. In the run-up to the announcement, however, there were still worries inside the company, according to the lawsuit.

A project manager relayed concerns from an employee to EOTech's president, according to court records, saying, "[The employee] is concerned that as an operator goes through that door in combat that the device will fail causing the operator to be killed or wounded."

In both cases — with the cold-weather problem and with the humidity issue — EOTech said the "fixes" were upgrades to a sight it claimed had already met the military's specifications, according to the lawsuit.

But a year later, the FBI, which was also using the sights, stumbled on yet another issue with the equipment after conducting tests in its ballistic research facility.

Unlike the problem discovered by the Norwegians, the crosshairs did not change shape. Nor did it dim as with the humidity problem. Instead, hot or cold temperatures were causing the reticle to move, unbeknown to the user.

With help from the U.S. Navy's Crane division, the FBI presented EOTech with evidence of the problem, called thermal drift. In November, the U.S. government sued the company for fraud. The company settled on the same day the lawsuit was filed.

A disclaimer included with the equipment after the settlement acknowledges the thermal-drift issue. A month later, EOTech president Paul Mangano, who was also named in the government's lawsuit, resigned from the company. Mangano declined to comment for this article.

Marines still use the sights

By this time, the sights were widely in use by the U.S. military. Since 2001, according to publicly available contract data, EOTech has been paid about \$24 million in the purchasing of the sights. Every branch of service, including the Coast Guard, has purchased them.

The item is so ubiquitous that the Twitter account of the Navy SEALs, which are still using the sight, features a picture of a person holding a rifle mounted with the EOTech product.

According to Marine Corps spokesman Semelroth, the Marine Corps continues to use 6,000 of the sights purchased between 2007 and 2012 — the years in which some of the most serious issues were found with the sights.

"At this time, the Marine Corps has not been directed nor does it intend to dispose of these systems unless defects are discovered that jeopardize our Marines' safety or negatively impacts their abilities to accomplish the mission," Semelroth said in an email.

Toward the end of last year, SOCOM issued a military-wide "Safety of Use Message" that highlighted the limitations of the sight, noting that the military was "developing a bridging strategy" for the equipment.

According to Allen, SOCOM is evaluating other sights, including a potentially improved version of the EOTech for a long-term replacement for SOCOM's close-combat sight requirements. Semelroth said the Marine Corps is conducting a similar search and running "a series of tests on its EOTech inventory to confirm performance meets or exceeds the equipment requirement."

State Department security teams also use the sight at U.S. consulates and embassies around the world, though they do not use the sight exclusively, according to Aaron Testa, a State Department Diplomatic Security spokesman.

According to Testa, the State Department Diplomatic Security Service "is in the process of procuring replacements for those EOTech optics we have deemed necessary to replace."

Following the lawsuit's settlement, EOTech has also not issued a recall.

Anthony Tai, an EOTech co-founder who later served as the chief technology officer of the company until 2011, said that the company should have recalled the sight. As one of its original designers, Tai was consulted on a number of the equipment's issues prior to his departure from the company, according to the lawsuit.

"But you recall it and then what?" said Tai, who still occasionally consults for the company and said the firm has struggled to fix the problem. "You need to replace it with something that has all the problems fixed. No point in replacing it with the same thing."

EOTech's sights are just one of many publicly available products that accomplish the same task. And some other government agencies have already gotten rid of the holographic weapons sights.

During an October visit to the FBI's armory, agency personnel were seen disposing of the sights in bulk. The FBI, which declined to comment, uses sights manufactured by Aimpoint.

Allen said EOTech is not fulfilling any new contracts with the military's Special Operations forces. But EOTech has not been prohibited from "submitting for future business."

Julie Tate and Steven Rich contributed to this report

Army Tells Officers To Fight Battlefield Intelligence System In Congress

By Rowan Scarborough

[Washington Times](#), April 3, 2016

An internal Army memo is calling on officers to fight legislation from a Marine veteran in Congress who wants to

mandate fixes to a complex intelligence computing network panned by soldiers at war.

The congressman in question, Rep. Duncan Hunter, says that the March 22 email is essentially encouraging lobbying, which is outlawed for the military.

Meanwhile, a new test report on the war-deployed network, the Distributed Common Ground System, found that the latest upgrade, known as "Increment 1, Release 2," is "operationally effective." But the report is a mixed bag. It quotes battalion commanders as saying they did not find it "very helpful" during battle. They said they used "pencil and paper" to track the fight and later added the details to DCGS.

DCGS also provided inaccurate weather forecasts, according to a copy of the 2016 report obtained by The Washington Times, and it requires soldiers to undergo constant training.

The email from the Army National Guard intelligence directorate, or G2, which works closely with the active Army headquarters, also criticizes The Washington Times for its series of stories on DCGS and its spotty performance in the Afghanistan war.

It asserts the newspaper is a "lobby" for the Pentagon to buy an off-the-shelf data processor called Palantir, developed by a Palo Alto, California, technology firm. A functioning DCGS is crucial to fighting hard-to-find insurgents and terrorists. Analysts need to retrieve and study a wide range of reports to help commanders plan operations.

Palantir, a relatively simple network, has won praise from warfighters and is in use in Iraq. Army special forces specifically requested Palantir as they deployed back to Iraq in 2014 in the new war against the Islamic State army.

The National Guard email was sent to a long list of officers informing them that the Army opposes draft legislation from Mr. Hunter, California Republican and a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

His bill would order the secretary of the Army to restructure DCGS. It would also tell the Army to buy functioning, off-the-shelf software, rather than have Army contractors develop new programs.

Previously, the Senate Armed Services Committee adopted language encouraging the Army to buy commercially available computers while DCGS received fixes.

The Army March 22 memo states that buying ready-made software would not work. "Delivering the same capability of DCGS-A with COTS [commercial off the shelf] creates compatibility and lifecycle/software update conflicts," it says.

"We are asking that you approach your federal House of Representative and Senate leadership to provide them your input and advice as military intelligence senior leaders in the Army National Guard," the memo says, according to a copy obtained by The Washington Times.

Mr. Hunter, who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, has read a steady stream of leaked memos from commanders and their soldiers in the field who complained that DCGS is slow, too complex and prone to crashes. In some cases, units in Afghanistan parked DCGS hardware in a corner and used commercially available computers.

The National Guard email aligns with the Army's fierce loyalty to DCGS. The effort has included blocking war-bound soldiers' attempts to win Pentagon emergency approval to buy Palantir, The Washington Times has reported.

The Associated Press reported in March 2015 that, "Special operations troops heading to war zones are asking for commercial intelligence analysis software they say will help their missions. But their requests are languishing, and they are being ordered to use a flawed, in-house system [DCGS] preferred by the Pentagon, according to government records and interviews."

The National Guard email also contains a reprint of a Washington Times story that quoted retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, as saying DCGS has failed to live up to its promises and should be revamped and renamed.

In a statement, Mr. Hunter's office called the National Guard email "more evidence" of a long-standing campaign "within the Army to undercut attempts by Representative Hunter and others to turn DCGS into an effective system."

"By no means should anyone in the Army be encouraging others in the organization to lobby Congress on an issue, which is prohibited," the statement said, accusing the author of "an agenda [he] has no business pursuing."

Mr. Hunter's office also accused the National Guard email of "inaccuracies and misleading statements" about the Times article.

"General Flynn's comments came from experience and there's tremendous value in his insight. He's not on Palantir's payroll nor has he ever been. And he's not the first high ranking officer to say DCGS is a train wreck. He's just the first to say it publicly," Mr. Hunter's office said.

Asked to respond, the Army issued a statement to The Times, referring to a new report on 2015 weapons testing from the Pentagon's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation.

"In December 2015, Distributed Common Ground System — Army (DCGS-A) received positive feedback from both the Army Test & Evaluation Command (ATEC) and the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) after robust operational testing of the program. Report results state that DCGS-A addressed a number of critical issues identified in previous testing, including increased intelligence clarity and improved system reliability and stability," the statement said.

"Working in collaboration with major Army commands and units, DCGS-A Program Management Office is currently fielding the most user-friendly, effective, and interoperable

version to date. There is approximately 80 percent commercial software being used in the current version. The Army looks forward to DCGS-A Increment 2 [the next version] that maximizes competition among commercial vendors and harvests the best capabilities to support the timely, secure and effective exchange of intelligence information."

The 2015 report on an upgraded model marked an improvement compared with DCGS units previously sent to war. The 2012 tester's report said that version was "not effective, not suitable and not survivable."

The 2015 report says that the latest version, "Release 2," is "operationally effective." It was deployed in February.

Yet, it continued to receive low marks for ease-of-use, a consistent complaint from soldiers at war. The report said that "users rated the usability low-marginal" and the system is still "not survivable against cybersecurity threats" because of an Army network problem. This presumably means enemy hackers can break into the network.

The Times obtained a copy of a subsequent, more detailed, Pentagon test report dated January 2016.

The report by top tester J. Michael Gilmore, states that DCGS still has "systematic shortfalls with data collection [and] analysis."

But overall, he wrote, "The test unit successfully received, processed, exploited and disseminated intelligence data with DSCG-A. The unit provided actionable intelligence to commanders, enabling them to make timely decisions."

The testing involved creating "vignettes," such as locating a terrorist leader or a bomb factory or disrupting a planned suicide bomber attack.

The report concluded that Release 2 is "operationally suitable" but with a caveat. This happens only if the Army "intensively trains DCGS-A users and provides continued refresher training to units in garrison. DCGS-A is a complex system and the skills required to use it are perishable. Partly because of the complexity of the system, the analysts stated they cannot maintain high level of skills without constantly using the system."

Other findings:

- Soldiers complained they had trouble finding "relevant results" when searching DCGS's Integration Backbone for data from all sources.

- In changing shifts, the incoming soldiers could not work on the previous shift's intelligence product. Instead they had to copy and post it and then start a new product. "This wastes time and results in many versions of the same DCGS-A products," the test report said.

- "Comments from battalion commanders and staff indicated they did not consider DCGS-A to be very helpful for the fight on the ground. They stated that once the battle starts, it is very difficult to update DCGS-A while also tracking the battle. As a workaround, some battalion analysts resorted

to tracking the battle using pencil and paper and updated DCGS databases once the battle was over."

- A weather staff officer said DCGS produced "inaccurate weather predictions." Instead, the officer used the Air Force weather website. It turned out, DCGS cannot accept the Air Force's three-letter location codes; It was designed to only accept four-letter codes.

- At the battalion level, the command closest to the battle, analysts "expressed frustration with the amount of time they had to spend working on the database. They complained it can take hours to synchronize databases."

Another Western Intervention In Libya Looms

By Missy Ryan And Sudarsan Raghavan

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

The shaky debut last week of a new unity government in Libya brings Western nations, including the United States, much closer to a renewed military mission there, and to a host of obstacles that will test their ability to secure a country gripped by Islamist extremism and civil war.

Tensions ran high on Wednesday after Fayez Serraj, a little-known Libyan technocrat selected as prime minister in a United Nations peace process, arrived by boat in Tripoli from Tunisia. Western officials hailed his installation in the Libyan capital as a sign that the country's two-year political divide is finally coming to an end — despite the existence of rival governments in Tripoli and the country's east.

The United States and European allies, including Italy, France and Britain, have made the unity government's establishment a key precondition for launching twin missions to begin an international stabilization effort and help combat a growing Islamic State affiliate there.

Each of those tasks will be strained by tensions among militia factions that Western nations hope will form a unified front against terrorist groups and by strong reluctance among European nations to wade into Libya's chaos — even among those countries most threatened by the Islamic State's growth across the Mediterranean.

The tentative political progress comes as the United States moves forward with plans to launch intensified attacks against the Islamic State's Libyan branch, which has up to 8,000 fighters and is the group's strongest affiliate outside Iraq and Syria.

Planners at the U.S. Africa Command are now developing dozens of targets across Libya that American or European warplanes might strike. They range from the coastal city of Sirte, where the extremist group has established a refuge, to Ajdabiya, Sabratha and the militant stronghold of Derna. U.S. jets have carried out strikes against the group there twice since last fall.

The Pentagon is also seeking to improve coordination between U.S. Special Operations forces and their French and British counterparts, which have established small cells on

the ground, seeking in part to line up friendly militias that can take on the extremist fighters.

Ben Fishman, who was a White House official responsible for Libya earlier in the Obama administration, said the U.S. campaign against the Islamic State in Libya is likely to be much more modest in scope than ongoing U.S. and allied operations in Iraq and Syria.

"The wild card is, of course, if there are connections between Libya and terror threats in Europe," he said.

Officials at the U.S. Africa Command will also have to contend with the challenges of launching an operation in a region that lacks the same military infrastructure the United States has elsewhere in the Middle East.

U.S. officials continue to seek permission from neighboring countries to launch U.S. flights, which would allow American planes more watch time on surveillance or strike missions. So far, Tunisia and Algeria have declined, meaning that manned and unmanned missions would probably be launched from military installations in Italy, Spain or Greece, or from as far away as Britain.

The prospect of another Western intervention in Libya has divided North Africa. Tunisia is facing increased terrorist threats and is reluctant to attract new attacks. Algeria is categorically opposed to outside involvement. And Egypt is already backing the eastern faction in Libya's civil war.

But the biggest challenge will probably be divisions among Libya's myriad armed factions, including militias formed during the 2011 revolution and remnants of former dictator Moammar Gaddafi's army. Washington hopes to build a coherent force from among those groups to take on the Islamic State, also known as ISIS.

According to one Libyan official, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss planning, the United States may try to muster forces to attack the Islamic State stronghold in Sirte from Misurata, a prosperous city just to the west, and from Ajdabiya, where local militia leader Ibrahim Jathran commands a significant oil-protection force.

But analysts warn that ad hoc Western outreach to individual militia groups, many of which have fought one another repeatedly since 2011, could actually intensify factional violence and reduce the odds of national reconciliation.

"I would caution [against] international intervention of this nature, in this form and at this time, without having a coherent plan for these groups to work together," said Anas El Gomati, director of the Sadeq Institute, a Libyan think tank. "If they are all fighting one another, how are they going to fight ISIS?"

U.S. officials envision a gradual absorption of militia forces into a new national army or at least a network of state-backed regional or tribal forces.

After months of talks, the United States and European and Arab nations have yet to make concrete military commitments to what is known as the Libya International Assistance Mission, potentially undermining the nascent government, which needs to establish its legitimacy and impose order.

Italy has promised to provide at least half of the resources for that effort, which could bring thousands of Italian or other European troops to Tripoli to advise local forces on securing the capital.

But, in a reflection of European nations' reluctance to get pulled into a risky overseas campaign, Rome has also laid out a series of conditions for sending troops, including a U.N. Security Council resolution and — most problematic — adequate security in Tripoli before Italian troops will be deployed.

Karim Mezran, a Libya scholar at the Atlantic Council, said the Italian-led talks have not yet produced a coherent plan to help Serraj's would-be administration confront its militant foes.

"It leads us to ask the question I've been asking from the beginning: Who's going to provide the new government the support it requires on the ground?"

U.S. and European officials say their cautious approach will give the new government time to determine and request the right outside help. But they also acknowledge there will be a limited window for helping the Serraj government prove its legitimacy.

Western plans don't yet appear to take into account the widespread radicalization that has made Libya a hotbed for Islamist groups since 2011.

Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter recently suggested that Libyans, once unified under a new government, will rise up to expel a largely foreign force. Libyans "don't like foreigners who come into their territory. That's what ISIL is," he said, using another acronym for the Islamic State.

While fighters from North Africa and other nations have flocked to join the group's ranks in Libya, U.S. intelligence officials believe the majority of fighters are Libyan.

Local supporters include marginalized tribesmen, loyalists to the Gaddafi regime and youths from some of the many extremist groups that have flourished in Libya since 2011. In western Libya, smugglers and criminal gangs have also fueled the Islamic State's rise.

Claudia Gazzini, senior Libya analyst for the International Crisis Group, said the Islamic State retains some appeal among Libyans, many of whom see the group as a lesser evil compared with militias and other rival factions.

"In the situation Libya is in at the moment, where you have military factions engaging in -localized wars, it's very much a case of survival," she said.

Raghavan reported from Cairo. Souad Mekhennet in Tunis contributed to this report.

Enormous Document Leak Exposes Offshore Accounts Of World Leaders

By Rebecca Savransky
[The Hill](#), April 3, 2016

A massive leak of more than 11.5 million documents exposed the offshore accounts of current and former world leaders, The Center for Public Integrity reported Sunday.

The investigation of the files, known as the Panama Papers, was published Sunday by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

The investigation “exposes a cast of characters who use offshore companies to facilitate bribery, arms deals, tax evasion, financial fraud and drug trafficking,” according to the website.

“Behind the email chains, invoices and documents that make up the Panama Papers are often unseen victims of wrongdoing enabled by this shadowy industry.”

The report exposes hidden information about how banks and lawyers hide dealings with people such as prime ministers, plutocrats and criminals.

The documents have information about Russian President Vladimir Putin, details about England’s gold heist in 1983 and information about bribery allegations regarding soccer’s governing body, FIFA.

The files include nearly 40 years of records and information about more than 210,000 companies in 21 offshore jurisdictions.

Edward Snowden tweeted about the news on Sunday.

“Biggest leak in the history of data journalism just went live, and it’s about corruption,” he tweeted with a link to the Panama Papers.

Biggest leak in the history of data journalism just went live, and it’s about corruption. <https://t.co/dYNjD6eleZpic.twitter.com/638alu8oSU>— Edward Snowden (@Snowden) April 3, 2016

News Group Claims Huge Trove Of Data On Offshore Accounts

By Frank Jordans
[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

BERLIN (AP) — An international coalition of media outlets on Sunday published what it said was an extensive investigation into the offshore financial dealings of the rich and famous, based on a vast trove of documents provided by an anonymous source.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalism, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, said the cache of 11.5 million records detailed the offshore holdings of a dozen current and former world leaders, as well as businessmen, criminals, celebrities and sports stars.

The Associated Press wasn’t immediately able to verify the allegations made in articles that were published by the

more than 100 news organizations around the world involved in the investigation.

However, the German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung, which first received the data more than a year ago, said it was confident the material was genuine.

The Munich-based daily was offered the data through an encrypted channel by an anonymous source who requested no monetary compensation and asked only for unspecified security measures, said Bastian Obermayer, a reporter for the paper.

The data concerned internal documents from a Panama-based law firm, Mossack Fonseca. Founded by German-born Juergen Mossack, the firm has offices across the globe and is among the world’s biggest creators of shell companies, the newspaper said. Mossack Fonseca did not immediately respond to an AP request for comment.

ICIJ said the law firm’s leaked internal files contain information on 214,488 offshore entities connected to people in more than 200 countries and territories. It said it would release the full list of companies and people linked to them early next month.

Obermayer said that over the course of several months Sueddeutsche Zeitung received about 2.6 terabytes of data — more than would fit on 600 DVDs. The newspaper said the amount of data it obtained is several times larger than a previous cache of offshore data published by WikiLeaks in 2013 that exposed the financial dealings of prominent individuals.

“To our knowledge this is the biggest leak that journalists have ever worked on,” Obermayer said.

The newspaper and its partners verified the authenticity of the data by comparing it to public registers, witness testimony and court rulings, he told The AP. A previous cache of Mossack Fonseca documents obtained by German authorities was also used for to verify the new material, Obermayer added.

Among the countries with past or present political figures named in the reports are Iceland, Ukraine, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The Guardian newspaper, which took part in the investigation, published a video on its website late Sunday showing an interview with Iceland’s Prime Minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson. During the interview the prime minister is asked about a company called Wintris. He responds by insisting that its affairs are above board, before breaking off the interview.

In Russia, the Kremlin last week said it was anticipating what it called an upcoming “information attack.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters that the Kremlin had received “a series of questions in a rude manner” from an organization that he said was trying to smear Putin.

“Journalists and members of other organizations have been actively trying to discredit Putin and this country’s leadership,” Peskov said.

The ICIJ said the documents included emails, financial spreadsheets, passports and corporate records detailing how powerful figures used banks, law firms and offshore shell companies to hide their assets. The data spanned a time frame of nearly 40 years, from 1977 through the end of 2015, it said.

“It allows a never-before-seen view inside the offshore world – providing a day-to-day, decade-by-decade look at how dark money flows through the global financial system, breeding crime and stripping national treasuries of tax revenues,” the ICIJ said.

<https://panamapapers.icij.org/>

Natalya Vasilyeva in Moscow contributed to this report.

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Leaked Files Detail Offshore Accounts Tied To World Leaders

By Michael S. Schmidt And Steven Lee Myers

[New York Times](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON — A group of news media outlets published articles on Sunday based on what they said were 11.5 million leaked documents from a Panama law firm that helped some of the world’s wealthiest people — including politicians, athletes and business moguls — establish offshore bank accounts.

The German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* said its reporters had obtained the documents from a confidential source. The newspaper then shared the files with other media organizations, like The Guardian and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

In an article, the investigative journalism organization said the documents revealed the offshore accounts of 140 politicians and public officials, including a dozen current and former world leaders and several individuals with close ties to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. The organization said reporters at 100 news media outlets working in 25 languages had used the documents to investigate the law firm, Mossack Fonseca, and its clients, including political figures in countries like Iceland, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

It is not illegal in many cases to have offshore bank accounts. But they are used in some instances by wealthy

individuals and criminals to hide money and business transactions, and to avoid paying taxes.

The leak followed a series of high-profile breaches in recent years in which individuals working for governments or companies have amassed internal files and then given them to media organizations. In 2014, Edward J. Snowden, a contractor for the National Security Agency, gave reporters what intelligence officials have estimated was at least 1.5 million documents from the agency. Hundreds of articles have been published based on those documents.

The media organizations looking into Mossack Fonseca are expected to publish many more articles based on the new documents in the coming days.

The firm, which has dozens of offices around the world, has been investigated by law enforcement authorities in several countries over accusations of connections to money laundering.

In a lengthy statement provided to The Guardian, the firm said it could not respond to specific questions, but insisted that many of the individuals and companies named in the documents were never clients of Mossack Fonseca. The firm added that in many cases it was “legal and common for companies to establish commercial entities in different jurisdictions for a variety of legitimate reasons.”

“Our services are regulated on multiple levels, often by overlapping agencies, and we have a strong compliance record,” the firm said.

“In addition, we have always complied with international protocols” to assure “that the companies we incorporate are not being used for tax evasion, money laundering, terrorist finance or other illicit purposes,” it added.

According to the news reports, the documents related to Russia identified several officials with close ties to Mr. Putin, including two of his oldest friends, Sergei Roldugin, a cellist, and Yuri V. Kovalchuk, the principal shareholder of Bank Rossiya, a financial institution that has come under sanctions by the United States as the “cashier” of officials in the Kremlin.

The reports said Mr. Putin’s friends and associates had channeled \$2 billion through a complex, deliberately convoluted network of offshore companies. Mr. Putin’s name appears on none of the records for the companies or the transactions, but Bank Rossiya and Mr. Roldugin do.

Mr. Roldugin acknowledged in an interview with The New York Times that he owned a share of Bank Rossiya, which he acquired in the 1990s, but offered few details about an investment that made him, on paper at least, a very rich man.

“I’ve got an apartment, a car and a dacha,” he said. “I don’t have millions.”

According to the disclosures, Mr. Roldugin holds similar shares of other companies, including an advertising firm

founded by another close associate of Mr. Putin's, Mikhail Y. Lesin, who was found dead in a hotel in Washington last fall.

Last week, the Kremlin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, preemptively denounced the articles published on Sunday. He warned that the consortium had prepared an "information attack" against Mr. Putin and his associates, and described the articles as "an undisguised paid-for hack job."

The revelations also touched Ukraine's president, Petro O. Poroshenko, who was elected in the aftermath of the political upheaval in the country in 2014 that led to the annexation of Crimea and open conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Poroshenko, a tycoon with assets in television and a chocolatier before his entrance into politics, pledged to divest himself of his holdings but instead moved the assets into an offshore company in the British Virgin Islands, according to the consortium's reporting. It said that Mr. Poroshenko, who has received political support from the United States, had not disclosed the arrangement.

The documents also contained information about how some foreign leaders used foundations and companies in Panama to anonymously own mining companies and real estate, according to the consortium.

Massive Leak Reveals Money Rings Of Global Leaders

By Greg Toppo

[USA Today](#), April 3, 2016

A massive, anonymous leak of financial documents from a Panamanian law firm has revealed an extensive worldwide network of offshore "shell" companies — including ones with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin — that allow the wealthy to hide their assets from taxes and, in some cases, to launder billions in cash, a German newspaper alleges.

The documents, combed through in the past year by dozens of journalists worldwide, show links to 72 current or former heads of state, including dictators accused of looting their own countries.

The data reveal details of secret offshore companies linked to families and associates of Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak, Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi and Syria's president Bashar Assad, among others.

It also alleges a billion-dollar money laundering ring run by a Russian bank tied to associates of Putin. The bank allegedly channeled money through offshore companies, two of which were officially owned by one of the Russian president's closest friends.

"I think the leak will prove to be probably the biggest blow the offshore world has ever taken because of the extent of the documents," said Gerard Ryle, director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ), a

non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., which coordinated the reporting.

The cache is larger than the one leaked in 2013 by former CIA employee Edward Snowden — who tweeted on Sunday that the "Biggest leak in the history of data journalism just went live, and it's about corruption."

ICIJ said as much as \$2 billion has been secretly shuffled through banks and shadow companies linked to Putin's associates, and that the bank has been instrumental in building a network of offshore companies.

The so-called "Panama Papers" cover a period from the 1970s to the spring of 2016, according to Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the Munich-based newspaper that obtained the trove of documents more than a year ago from an anonymous source tied to the firm Mossack Fonseca.

The newspaper has since shared the documents with more than 100 news organizations and 400 journalists in 80 countries, who have pored over them for the past 12 months.

Among other revelations, the Mossack Fonseca documents show that Icelandic Prime Minister Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson and his wife bought an offshore company in 2007 that he didn't declare when entering parliament in 2009.

The offshore company was used to invest millions of dollars of inherited money. Gunnlaugsson sold his 50% share of the company to his wife for \$1 eight months later, the documents allege.

Gunnlaugsson, who is now facing calls for his resignation, said he has not broken any rules and that his wife didn't benefit financially from the arrangement.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung said Sunday that the 11.5 million-document cache, which includes 4.8 million emails and nearly 2.5 million documents, is several times larger than a previous cache of offshore data published by WikiLeaks in 2013.

Mossack Fonseca didn't immediately respond to a request for comment, the Associated Press reported, but it told the BBC that it has always complied with international protocols to ensure the companies it incorporates are not used for tax evasion, money-laundering, terrorist financing "or other illicit purposes."

"For 40 years Mossack Fonseca has operated beyond reproach in our home country and in other jurisdictions where we have operations," the firm said, adding that it has "never been accused or charged in connection with criminal wrongdoing."

"If we detect suspicious activity or misconduct, we are quick to report it to the authorities. Similarly, when authorities approach us with evidence of possible misconduct, we always cooperate fully with them."

On Sunday, #PanamaPapers trended on Twitter as users around the world reacted to the disclosures.

Follow Greg Toppo on Twitter: @gtoppo

Massive Leak Exposes How The Wealthy And Powerful Hide Their Money

By Kevin G. Hall And Marisa Taylor

[McClatchy](#), April 3, 2016

A massive leak of documents has blown open a window on the vast, murky world of shell companies, providing an extraordinary look at how the wealthy and powerful conceal their money.

Twelve current and former world leaders maintain offshore shell companies. Close friends of Russian leader Vladimir Putin have funneled as much as \$2 billion through banks and offshore companies.

Those exposed in the leak include the prime ministers of Iceland and Pakistan, an alleged bagman for Syrian President Bashar Assad, a close pal of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and companies linked to the family of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Add to those the monarchs of Saudi Arabia and Morocco, enough Middle Eastern royalty to fill a palace, honchos in the troubled body known as FIFA that controls international soccer and 29 billionaires featured in Forbes Magazine's list of the world's 500 richest people.

Also mentioned are 61 relatives and associates of current country leaders, and another 128 current or former politicians and public officials.

The documents within the leak also expose how secretive

offshore companies at times subvert U.S. foreign policy and mock U.S. regulators. When drug traffickers, money launderers or other crooks control companies, they undermine national security, and the trail of dark money flowing through them strips national treasuries everywhere of tax revenues.

The offshore world is the parallel universe of the ultra-rich and ultra-powerful.

Jack Blum, a white-collar crime attorney and an architect of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act

The data breach occurred at a little-known but powerful Panamanian law firm, Mossack Fonseca, which has an office in Las Vegas, a representative in Miami and a presence in more than 35 other places around the world.

The firm is one of the world's top five

creators of shell companies, which can have legitimate business uses, but can also be used to dodge taxes and launder money.

More than 11.5 million emails, financial spreadsheets, client records, passports and corporate registries were obtained in the leak, which was delivered to the Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper in Munich, Germany. In turn, the newspaper shared the data with the Washington-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

Several McClatchy journalists joined more than 370 journalists from 78 countries in the largest media collaboration ever undertaken following a leak.

The document archive is massive at 2.6 terabytes. It would take a desktop computer at least 24 hours to download it at average internet speeds.

As a

registered agent, the Mossack Fonseca law firm incorporates companies in tax havens across the globe for a fee. It has avoided close scrutiny from U.S. law enforcement officials.

Mossack Fonseca denies all accusations of illegal activity.

"We have not once in nearly 40 years of operation been charged with criminal wrongdoing. We're proud of the work we do, notwithstanding recent and willful attempts by some to mischaracterize it," spokesman Carlos Sousa said.

Those exposed in the leak include the prime ministers of Iceland and Pakistan, an alleged bagman for Syrian President Bashar Assad, a close pal of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and companies linked to the family of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The law firm's co-founder, Ramón Fonseca, in an interview last month on Panamanian television, compared the firm to an automaker

whose liability ends once the car hits the road. Blaming Mossack Fonseca for what people do with their companies, he said, would be like blaming an automaker "for an accident or if the car was used in a robbery."

Yet plenty of criminals are in the documents, from drug traffickers to convicted fraudsters.

"The offshore world is the parallel universe of the ultra-rich and ultra-powerful," said Jack Blum, a white-collar crime attorney and an architect of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

The archive, which dates to the late 1970s and extends through December 2015, reveals that 14,000 intermediaries and middlemen bring business to Mossack Fonseca.

No corner of the globe is untouched – including the United States.

States such as Delaware, Nevada and Wyoming register thousands of corporations annually, often without identifying the

true owners. Some of the billions of dollars splashing through the domestic economy come from anonymous foreigners who inflate real estate prices in places like Miami, buying properties outright in cash.

"We know (of) ... upwards to \$6 to \$10 billion a year laundered through the U.S.," said Patrick Fallon Jr., head of the FBI's financial crimes section.

The most extraordinary allegations in the archive revolve around Putin's closest associates, including Sergey

Roldugin (pronounced Roll-DOO-gen), a close friend since the late 1970s when Putin was a young KGB agent.

Roldugin is a classical cellist for the St. Petersburg orchestra, yet his name appears as the owner of offshore companies that have rights to loans worth hundreds of millions of dollars. A Russian news service report in 2010 disclosed that he owned at least 3 percent of Bank Rossiya, Russia's most important bank.

We know (of) ... upwards to \$6 to \$10 billion a year laundered through the U.S.

Patrick Fallon Jr., head of the FBI's financial crimes section

When Mossack Fonseca helped open a bank account in Switzerland on behalf of Roldugin, the application form asked if he had "any relation to PEPs (politically exposed persons) or VIPs."

The one-word answer was "no." Yet, Roldugin is godfather to Putin's daughter Mariya.

"Roldugin is, by his proximity to a serving head of state, clearly an exposed person," Mark Pieth, a former head of the Swiss justice ministry's organized crime division, told the ICIJ team.

The documents show how in 2008 a company controlled by Roldugin exerted influence over Russia's largest truck maker Kamaz, joining with several other offshore companies to help another Putin insider acquire majority control of the company. They wanted foreign investment, and German carmaker Daimler AG later that year bought a 10 percent stake in Kamaz for \$250 million.

The offshore company that connects many Putin loyalists is Sandalwood Continental Limited in the British Virgin Islands. Roldugin was a shareholder until 2012, as was Oleg Gordin, a little-known businessman whom incorporation documents describe as linked to "law enforcement agencies."

The files also mention a company co-owned by Putin friend Yury Kovalchuk, the largest shareholder of Bank Rossiya. Kovalchuk was among those targeted by U.S. sanctions in 2014 in retribution for Russia's invasion of Crimea. Another friend, Arkady Rotenberg, Putin's judo partner and a billionaire construction mogul, openly obtained companies through Mossack Fonseca. The Treasury Department, when sanctioning him in 2014, suggested that the oligarch acted on behalf of "a senior official."

That was widely believed to mean Putin, whose fingerprints were not on any offshore company.

"When you are the president of Russia, you don't need a written contract. You are the law," said Karen Dawisha, an academic, former State Department official and author of the acclaimed 2014 book "Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?"

The Kremlin declined to answer questions for this story. But on March 28, spokesman Dmitry Peskov attempted to front-run the stories by warning Russian media that ICIJ was

publishing a "series of fibs" that amounted to a media "attack" on Putin. Peskov suggested that unknown "organizations and services" were behind the media reports.

The Mossack Fonseca leak is massive – 46 times larger than the 2010 Wikileaks publication of 251,287 secret U.S. diplomatic cables.

The secrets hidden in the offshore documents go far beyond Russian moguls trying to hide money. They raise concerns about how the law firm conducted its background checks.

In a 2015 email exchange, the law firm's manager in the tiny Indian Ocean archipelago known as the Seychelles voiced concern about pending changes in laws and audits. She asked the head office how many companies it had active there, and whether the law firm knew the true owners.

A top headquarters lawyer said the firm had 14,086 active offshore companies in the Seychelles at the time but complete information on true owners for only 204 of them.

We have not once in nearly 40 years of operation been charged with criminal wrongdoing. We're proud of the work we do, notwithstanding recent and willful attempts by some to mischaracterize it.

Mossack Fonseca spokesman Carlos Sousa

Reporters working together in the collaborative effort analyzed more than 580 official law enforcement requests sent to Mossack Fonseca over a decade by the British Virgin Islands' Financial Investigation Agency (FIA).

Between 2005 and 2008, the firm was able to supply the name of a company's owner only five times in more than 110 requests, the documents show. Over time it improved, and in 2015, a name was given in response to all 78 inquiries from the islands' regulator.

Failing to conduct proper

due diligence on customers is no small matter. Mossack Fonseca was forced to write letters in 2010 and 2013 to the Financial Investigation Agency, explaining why the law firm resigned in 2010 as registered agent for two shell companies whose place of business was Pyongyang, North Korea. That is an obvious red flag given U.N. sanctions on the nation over its program to develop nuclear weapons. North Korea today is believed to be perfecting a compact nuclear warhead that can be delivered on a ballistic missile.

The

shell companies were DCB Finance Limited, which included North Korean shareholder Kim Chol Sam, and Phoenix Commercial Ventures Limited, whose shareholders included Yong Nam Thae, a man who listed his address as the International House of Culture, where grandiose events are held to commemorate the country's dictators, past and present.

The North Korean shells were created in June 2006 at a time when the Bush administration tried to isolate the Hermit Kingdom. That was less than four months before

North Korea detonated its first publicly acknowledged nuclear device.

"The blacklisting/sanctioning of North Korea dates back to 2004," Daphne Durand, legal supervisor of Mossack Fonseca & Co. (BVI) Limited, wrote in an internal finger-wagging August 2013 rebuke to Sandra de Cornejo, then the company's Panama-based head of compliance.

In a follow-up email on the same day, Durand noted that "we had not conducted any proper due diligence and risk assessment ... and we only had reason to do so when the FIA issued a letter in 2010 in respect of Phoenix Commercial Ventures."

Regulators caught the mistake, not Mossack Fonseca.

On June 27, 2013, the Treasury Department put the shell companies and its shareholder on a global blacklist, noting that "DCB Finance Limited, and Kim Chol Sam are responsible for managing millions of dollars of transactions in support of the North Korean regime's destabilizing activities."

Documents also show how the law firm wrestled with what to do when it discovered that among its longtime customers was Rami Makhoul, now targeted with sanctions by both Europe and the United States. He's a cousin and close associate of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad.

As early as February 2008, the U.S. Treasury Department called Makhoul a "regime insider" who "improperly benefits from and aids the public corruption of Syrian regime officials." The agency froze Makhoul's U.S. assets and banned U.S. companies or people from working with him.

Later in the year, it blacklisted some of his companies in what was to become escalating global pressure on the Assad regime that led to a civil war in Syria.

Makhoul had long been a customer of the Panamanian law firm, yet the firm's emails at the time record no mention of the sanctions. That changed in 2010 when authorities in the British Virgin Islands sought documents from Mossack Fonseca on Drex Technologies S.A., a company owned by Makhoul and opened a decade earlier.

It was only then, documents show, that law firm employees discovered what had long been circulating on the Internet, details of Makhoul's political ties and alleged smuggling profits.

Even after Mossack Fonseca's head of compliance sought to drop Makhoul abruptly, one of its partners argued against losing business. Chris Zollinger asserted in an email to colleagues that "there are allegations (rumors), but not any facts or pending investigations or indictments."

Zollinger lost the internal discussion at the law firm, but not before citing an earlier conversation with officials of the global bank HSBC, which served as Makhoul's financial manager. HSBC offices in Geneva and London, he argued, "know about Mr. Makhoul" and "they are comfortable with him."

In a recent interview with McClatchy partner Süddeutsche Zeitung, Zollinger said, "In retrospect my comment in the e-mail was wrong, which I regret."

Makhoul did not respond to requests for comment, but another prominent Middle Eastern figure in the documents did.

Former Iraqi Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi is a longtime holder of shell companies. He established IMF Holdings Inc. in Panama back in 1984, his aide, Ali Mazin, told McClatchy.

That original offshore was established to secretly hold British property after an assassination attempt on Allawi while in exile, Mazin wrote in response to queries. Allawi was a fierce opponent of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and a CIA ally.

Mossack Fonseca documents show that company as still active, as is his most recent shell company, Moonlight Estates Limited, established in the British Virgin Islands in 2009. Mazin confirmed Allawi's third offshore, called Foxwood Estates Ltd. On all three, he said, Allawi is the sole director and shareholder.

Foxwood Estates was established in June 2005, just months after Allawi's term as interim president ended in April 2005. All three companies remained active during Allawi's term as vice president in 2014 and 2015.

"Dr. Allawi's position is transparent with UK Tax authorities and the Iraqi authorities with which his assets are registered. These companies were lawfully formed by reputable firms and hold no complex corporate trust structures," Mazin said.

This story contains information gathered by reporters working under the umbrella of the nonprofit International Consortium for Investigative Journalists.

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Panama Law Firm Safeguards Murky Offshore Secrets

By Martha M. Hamilton

[McClatchy](#), April 3, 2016

Mossack Fonseca had a problem in Vegas.

The Panama-headquartered law firm that helps set up hard-to-trace corporate structures for clients worldwide had created 123 companies in Nevada. And prosecutors in Argentina claimed those companies had been used by a crony of Argentina's former president to steal \$65 million from government contracts.

A lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Nevada, seeking to claw back money that was said to have flowed through the

mystery companies, asked the court to order Mossack Fonseca & Co. and its Las Vegas subsidiary to turn over inside information about them.

The law firm tried to protect itself and the confidentiality of its clients by denying that its Las Vegas operations, run by a company called M.F. Corporate Services (Nevada) Limited, were part of the Mossack Fonseca group.

The firm's Panama-based co-founder, Jurgen Mossack, testified under oath that "MF Nevada and Mossack Fonseca do not have a parent-subsidiary relationship nor does Mossack Fonseca control the internal affairs or daily operations of MF Nevada's business."

But secret records obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and other media partners, including McClatchy newspapers, raise new doubts over that sworn testimony.

Not only do they show that the Nevada subsidiary was wholly owned by Mossack Fonseca, but also that, behind the scenes, the firm took active steps to wipe potentially incriminating records from phones and computers to hide details of their clients from the U.S. justice system.

An email from 2014, for instance, instructs that links to Mossack Fonseca's cloud-computing system from Nevada have "to be obscure to the investigators." Other emails report that tech operatives working remotely from Panama "tried to clean the logs of the PC's in the Nevada office" and planned to run a "remote session to eliminate the traces of direct access to our CIS" – the firm's computer information system.

11.5 million Documents obtained by an international team of journalists – emails, bank accounts and client records – showing the offshore holdings of individuals and companies from more than 220 countries and territories. The Mossack Fonseca leak is 46 times larger than the 2010 Wikileaks publication of 251,287 secret U.S. diplomatic cables.

The documents even show that an employee traveled from Panama to Vegas to whisk paper documents out of the country. "When Andrés came to Nevada he cleaned up everything and brought all documents to Panama," said a Sept. 24, 2014, email.

The 11.5 million documents obtained by the consortium – emails, bank accounts and client records – reveal the inner workings of Mossack Fonseca over nearly forty years, from 1977 to December 2015. They show the offshore holdings of individuals and companies from more than 220 countries and territories.

They recount example after example of ethical and legal wrongdoing and provide stark evidence of a firm happy to act as a gatekeeper to the secrets of its clients – even when those clients turn out to be crooks, members of the Mafia, drug dealers, tax evaders, or involved in child sex crimes, political corruption or terrorism.

A leak of secret records reveal examples of ethical and legal wrongdoing, and show a firm happy to act as a gatekeeper to the secrets of its clients – even when those clients turn out to be crooks, members of the Mafia, drug dealers, tax evaders, or involved in child sex crimes, political corruption or terrorism.

The files show that business has been good.

Today, Mossack Fonseca is considered one of the world's five biggest wholesalers of offshore secrecy. It has more than 500 employees in more than 40 offices around the world, including two in Switzerland and eight in China, and in 2013 had billings of more than \$42 million.

A Mossack Fonseca spokesman, Carlos Sousa, denied that the company has facilitated any illegal activity.

"We follow both the letter and spirit of the law. Because we do, we have not once in nearly 40 years of operation been charged with criminal wrongdoing. We're proud of the work we do, notwithstanding recent and willful attempts by some to mischaracterize it," Sousa said in a statement.

Ramon Fonseca began his small, one-secretary law practice in Panama in 1977, then merged it in 1986 with another local firm headed by Jurgen Mossack, a Panamanian of German origin. Both men had international pedigrees and backgrounds in the worlds of money, power and secrets.

Mossack Fonseca partners Jurgen Mossack and Ramon Fonseca move in the highest circles of Panamanian society

Fonseca was born in Panama in 1952 and studied law and political science at the University of Panama and the London School of Economics.

Mossack was born in Germany in 1948. He moved to Panama with his family in the early 1960s, according to his law partner.

Mossack's father had been a member of the Waffen-SS, the notorious armed wing of the Nazi Party during World War II, according to U.S. Army intelligence files obtained by ICIJ.

After earning a law degree in Panama in 1973, the son worked for a time as a lawyer in London before returning to Panama to start the firm that he would later merge to form Mossack Fonseca & Co.

Mossack's holdings, according to the files obtained by ICIJ, include a teak plantation and other real estate, an executive helicopter, a yacht named *Rex Maris* and a collection of gold coins.

Today, both partners move in the highest circles of Panamanian society.

As well as being a lawyer, Fonseca leads an equally high profile second life as an award-winning novelist. Among his books is "Mister Politicus," a political thriller that, his literary website says, "articulates the tangled processes that unscrupulous officials use to gain power and achieve their detestable ambitions."

In 1987, with Panama under the repressive rule of military dictator Manuel Noriega, Mossack Fonseca made its first big move abroad, establishing a branch in the British Virgin Islands, which a few years before had passed a law that made it easy to set up offshore companies without public disclosure of owners and directors.

Today, the British Virgin Islands are home to about 40 percent of the world's offshore companies. Of the companies that appear in Mossack Fonseca's files, 54 percent – about 112,000 – were incorporated in the British Virgin Islands.

Mossack's holdings, according to the files obtained by ICIJ, include a teak plantation and other real estate, an executive helicopter, a yacht named Rex Maris and a collection of gold coins.

Mossack Fonseca made another significant move in 1994.

It helped the tiny nation of Niue – a South Pacific coral outcrop with a population of fewer than 2,000 – craft legislation that provided for incorporation of offshore companies. The law firm had picked Niue, Mossack later told Agence France-Presse, because it wanted a location in an Asia-Pacific time zone and because it would face no competitors.

"If we had a jurisdiction that was small, and we had it from the beginning, we could offer people a stable environment, a stable price," Mossack said.

The firm then signed a 20-year-deal with the small atoll's government for exclusive rights to register offshore companies in Niue. Importantly, Niue offered registration in Chinese or Cyrillic characters, making it attractive to Chinese and Russian customers.

By 2001, Mossack Fonseca was doing so much business out of Niue that it was paying the equivalent of \$1.6 million of the Niue government's projected \$2 million annual budget.

But the firm's cozy relations with the island nation also began attracting unwanted scrutiny. That same year the U.S. State Department questioned the "awkward sharing arrangements" between Niue and Mossack Fonseca and warned that Niue's offshore industry had been "linked with the laundering of criminal proceeds from Russia and South America."

Mossack Fonseca at one time was doing so much business out of the tiny atoll of Niue that it was paying the equivalent of \$1.6M of the Niue government's yearly projected \$2M budget.

Though Mossack denied that Niue was involved in money laundering, in 2001 the Bank of New York and Chase Manhattan imposed embargoes on transfers of dollars to Niue. In 2003, Niue declined to renew four Mossack Fonseca-incorporated companies, signaling that it would be shutting down the firm's exclusive franchise.

Losing Niue didn't slow Mossack Fonseca down. It simply shifted its operations, with the law firm encouraging customers who had companies in Niue to simply re-incorporate in the nearby nation of Samoa.

The switch was part of a pattern that emerges in the documents. When legal crackdowns have hindered Mossack Fonseca's ability to serve its clients, it has quickly adapted and found other places to work.

In the past five years, for example, Anguilla, a British territory in the Caribbean, has climbed to near the top of the firm's list of leading jurisdictions for setting up companies.

Mossack Fonseca has also expanded its operations to take care of the additional needs of its customers, including registering private aircraft and yachts, bringing in new revenue from its wealthier clients.

By 2006, according to the files, Mossack Fonseca expanded its business further by handling the finances of some clients or, as the company described it, "discretionary portfolio management."

An analysis by ICIJ found that Mossack Fonseca has worked with at least 33 companies and individuals blacklisted by U.S. authorities because of their links to terrorism, narcotics trafficking or because they were front companies for rogue regimes such as North Korea or Iran.

According to an analysis of the files by ICIJ, the firm's in-house asset manager operations – called Mossfon Asset Management S.A., or MAMSA – handled nearly 6,000 transactions and at least \$1.2 billion in client money between 2006 and 2015.

MAMSA worked with several banks, including at least two that have been the subjects of money laundering investigations: Banca Privada d'Andorra, accused by the U.S. Treasury Department in a 2015 report of money laundering for powerful criminal gangs, and Deutsche Bank Switzerland, whose parent company is currently being investigated by authorities in the United Kingdom and the United States for possible money laundering for Russian clients. The U.S. treasury withdrew its finding on Banca Privada d'Andorra on Feb. 19, 2016, saying that it "no longer operates in a manner that poses a threat to the U.S. financial system."

The former non-executive chairmen of the bank, brothers Ramon and Higinio Cierco, whose family is the majority shareholder, said they believed that the Treasury action could not withstand a court challenge and that the allegations were based on cases that the Andorran regulator has "been aware of for years."

The files show that, in addition to Deutsche Bank, the firm works with some of the world's other biggest financial institutions, such as HSBC Holdings PLC, Société Générale SA, Credit Suisse Group AG, UBS AG, the Royal Bank of Canada and Commerzbank AG, in some cases to help the banks' clients set up complex structures that make it hard for

tax collectors and investigators to track the flow of money from one place to another.

In Panama, Mossack Fonseca's products include private foundations, which are not subject to taxes in Panama and operate under a law that does not require the names of the founders or beneficiaries to be revealed.

Other services, according to emails and documents found in the files, include backdating documents for clients, offering to use phony invoices from legitimate British companies to secretly take cash out of the United States and the use of donations to fake charities in Panama to evade authorities in the movement of money.

An analysis by ICIJ found that Mossack Fonseca has worked with at least 33 companies and individuals blacklisted by U.S. authorities because of evidence that they had been involved in wrongdoing such as doing business with Mexican drug lords, terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah's military wing or rogue nations such as North Korea or Iran.

Nations have begun to take a harder look at Mossack Fonseca's practices.

In 2012 and 2013 regulators in the British Virgin Islands hit the firm with a series of fines for violating the country's anti-money-laundering rules – including a \$37,500 penalty for failing to properly screen a “high risk” client – Alaa Mubarak, the son of Egypt's ousted former dictator.

Then in February 2015, German authorities launched a series of raids on the Commerzbank office and private homes in Frankfurt. Süddeutsche Zeitung reported at the time that the German authorities were considering legal actions against Mossack Fonseca for possible contributions to tax evasion involving the bank's offices in nearby Luxembourg.

\$37,500 Penalty for failing to properly screen a ‘high risk’ client – Alaa Mubarak, the son of Egypt's ousted former dictator.

In early 2016 in Brazil, Mossack Fonseca became one of the targets of a bribery and money laundering investigation dubbed “Operation Car Wash,” which is rapidly growing into one of the biggest corruption scandals in Latin American history.

Prosecutors allege that Brazilian businesses cooperated with each other to divide up the bidding for contracts with state-controlled oil conglomerate Petróleo Brasileiro SA, or Petrobras, inflating prices and using the extra money to bribe politicians and oil company officials, and to enrich themselves.

Brazilian prosecutors claim Mossack Fonseca's office in Brazil helped some of the defendants by creating shell companies that were used to commit crimes. At a news conference in January 2016, they called Mossack Fonseca “a big money launderer” and announced they had filed criminal charges against five employees of Mossack Fonseca's Brazilian office, involving crimes ranging from money laundering to destroying and hiding documents.

The firm denies any wrongdoing in the case. It said in a statement that the Mossack Fonseca office in Brazil is a franchise, and the Panama law firm, which practices only in Panama, “is being erroneously implicated in issues for which it has no responsibility.”

The argument was similar to the one used in Las Vegas.

This story is part of a larger series, involving McClatchy and other news organizations, working under the umbrella of the nonprofit International Consortium for Investigative Journalists.

Putin Associates Had \$2 Billion In Offshore Accounts, Report Says

By Scott Higham

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

An international collection of journalists published a report Sunday on the financial activities of a dozen current and former world leaders that said associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin have moved as much as \$2 billion through offshore accounts.

The report is based on a data leak of 11.5 million records for 214,488 entities connected to people in more than 200 countries or territories. The leak includes emails, financial spreadsheets, passport information and corporate records. It spans nearly 40 years, from 1977 through the end of 2015.

The records came from a Panamanian law firm, Mossack Fonseca & Co. The firm specializes in setting up companies that allow businesses and individuals to move money offshore and has offices in 35 cities around the world, including in Hong Kong, Miami and Zurich.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists produced the report along with the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung and more than 100 other news organizations.

“In the largest media collaboration ever undertaken, journalists working in more than 25 languages dug into Mossack Fonseca's inner workings and traced the secret dealings of the law firm's customers around the world,” the report said. “They shared information and hunted down leads generated by the leaked files using corporate filings, property records, financial disclosures, court documents and interviews with money laundering experts and law-enforcement officials.”

The consortium said it will release the full list of companies and individuals identified in the data in early May.

Many people use the offshore world for legitimate purposes, to set up legal tax shelters or clear the way for international business deals. U.S. citizens are allowed to move money offshore, but they must report the account information to the Internal Revenue Service. Disclosure laws vary around the world.

The consortium's report emphasized that "most of the services of the offshore industry are legal if used by the law abiding. But the documents show that banks, law firms and other offshore players have often failed to follow legal requirements that they make sure their clients are not involved in criminal enterprises, tax dodging or political corruption."

Mossack Fonseca did not respond to requests seeking comment from The Washington Post. In a statement to the consortium, Mossack Fonseca said it "does not foster or promote illegal acts." The firm said "allegations that we provide shareholders with structures supposedly designed to hide the identity of the real owners are completely unsupported and false."

Mossack Fonseca also said it follows "both the letter and spirit of the law. Because we do, we have not once in nearly 40 years of operation been charged with criminal wrongdoing."

The firm declined to discuss individual cases "to maintain client confidentiality."

The report said an analysis of the leaked documents found that more than 500 banks and their affiliates have worked with Mossack Fonseca since the 1970s to help clients manage offshore companies.

The consortium has been examining offshore accounts based on separate leaks of data for four years, publishing with media partners that have included The Post, the New York Times and "60 Minutes."

The group said the Mossack Fonseca data "dramatically expand on previous leaks of offshore records." For the latest disclosures, reporters at Süddeutsche Zeitung in February 2015 "obtained millions of records from a confidential source," sharing them with the consortium and its media partners.

The report said the documents uncovered a money trail that "came uncomfortably close to Putin."

In February 2011, a firm in the British Virgin Islands loaned \$200 million to a firm in Cyprus, according to the report. The British Virgin Island firm assigned the rights to collect payments on the loan to another British Virgin Islands company. That firm then reassigned the rights to a Panamanian company.

The report said the first British Virgin Islands firm was established by a bank in St. Petersburg whose majority owner and chairman is close to Putin. The Panamanian company involved in the transactions was controlled by one of Putin's oldest friends, the report said.

"The \$200 million loan was one of dozens of transactions totaling at least \$2 billion found in the Mossack Fonseca files involving people or companies linked to Putin," the report said.

The Kremlin did not answer questions posed by the consortium, but on March 28, it publicly accused the group of

preparing a misleading "information attack" on Putin and people close to him.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last week that the government would not respond to "honey-worded queries" from the consortium or its partners because the questions "have been asked hundreds of times and answered hundreds of times," the report said.

The consortium also said it uncovered documents that showed the prime minister of Iceland, Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson, and his wife shared ownership in an offshore company in the British Virgin Islands four years before he took office. The report said that the company held bonds worth millions of dollars in three Icelandic banks that failed in 2008. Gunnlaugsson was then a member of Parliament. He became prime minister in 2013.

Gunnlaugsson's wife said in a Facebook post that the account was hers and that she had paid taxes on it; she also denied any wrongdoing. Her husband said in a recent radio interview that "it is not a tax haven if all assets were declared in the home country, as my wife has done."

The report also shed light on a British gold heist that had been dubbed the "Crime of the Century."

On Nov. 26, 1983, robbers stole nearly 7,000 gold bars from the Brink's-Mat warehouse at London's Heathrow Airport, along with cash and diamonds. The gold was smelted and sold; much of the money was never recovered.

The consortium report cited an internal Mossack Fonseca memo that said one of the principals of a Panamanian company set up by Mossack Fonseca 16 months after the robbery was "apparently involved in the management of the money from the famous theft from Brink's-Mat in London. The company itself has not been used illegally, but it could be that the company invested money through the bank accounts and properties that was illegitimately sourced."

A spokesman for Mossack Fonseca said that any allegations that the firm helped conceal money from the Brink's-Mat heist are "entirely false."

Huge Tax Leak Exposes Putin Aides, World Leaders, Stars

By David Williams

[AFP](#), April 3, 2016

PARIS (AFP)- A massive leak of 11.5 million tax documents on Sunday exposed the secret offshore dealings of aides to Russian president Vladimir Putin, world leaders and celebrities including Barcelona forward Lionel Messi.

An investigation into the documents by more than 100 media groups, described as one of the largest such probes in history, revealed the hidden offshore dealings in the assets of around 140 political figures – including 12 current or former heads of states.

The vast stash of records was obtained from an anonymous source by German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung and shared with media worldwide by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

The investigation yielded 11.5 million documents from around 214,000 offshore entities, the ICIJ said. The leaked documents came from Mossack Fonseca, a Panama-based law firm with offices in more than 35 countries.

Though most of the alleged dealings are said by the ICIJ to be legal they are likely to have a serious political impact on many of those named.

- Cash ‘secretly shuffled’ –

Among the main claims of the ICIJ investigations:

- Close associates of Putin, who is not himself named in the documents, “secretly shuffled as much as \$2 billion through banks and shadow companies,” the ICIJ said.

- The files identified offshore companies linked to the family of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has led a tough anti-corruption campaign in his country, the ICIJ said.

- In Iceland, the files allegedly show Prime Minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson and his wife secretly owned an offshore firm holding millions of dollars in Icelandic bank bonds during the country’s financial crisis.

- The law firm of a member of FIFA’s ethics committee, Juan Pedro Damiani, had business ties with three men indicted in the FIFA scandal: former FIFA vice president Eugenio Figueredo, as well as Hugo Jinkis and his son Mariano who were accused of paying bribes to win soccer broadcast rights in Latin America.

- Argentine football great Messi and his father owned a Panama company, Mega Star Enterprises Inc., a shell company that had previously not come up in Spanish investigations into the father and son’s tax affairs.

Also in the world of football, Francetvinfo named UEFA president Michel Platini as the beneficiary of a Panama-based tax company, adding however that no illegal activity was alleged.

Platini’s communications service said in a statement sent to AFP that “all of his accounts and assets are known to the tax authorities in Switzerland, where he has been a tax resident since 2007”.

At least 33 people and companies in the documents were blacklisted by the US government for wrongdoing, such as North Korea and Iran, as well as Lebanon’s Hezbollah, the ICIJ said.

The leaked data from 1975 to the end of last year provides what the ICIJ described as a “never-before-seen view inside the offshore world.”

Names also figuring in the leak included the president of Ukraine, the king of Saudi Arabia and the prime minister of Pakistan, the ICIJ statement said.

“These findings show how deeply ingrained harmful practices and criminality are in the offshore world,” said

Gabriel Zucman, an economist at the US-based University of California, Berkeley, cited by the consortium.

The leaked documents were reviewed by a team of more than 370 reporters from over 70 countries, according to the ICIJ.

The BBC cited Mossack Fonseca as saying it had operated “beyond reproach” for 40 years and had never been charged with any criminal wrongdoing.

It was not immediately clear who was the original source of the leaked documents.

The NATO Alliance Trump Doesn’t See

By Jackson Diehl

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump’s recent rhetoric about an “obsolete” NATO alliance has surely disturbed Germans and French who think about their nations’ security. But their anxiety level is probably low next to that of a dozen Eurasian nations that Trump has probably never considered — including a few that are not even members of NATO.

One of them is Georgia. This predominately Christian former Soviet republic of 4.5 million people bet its future a dozen years ago on the notion that it could pull away from Moscow’s sphere of influence — and its autocratic political model — and integrate into the West. With broad popular support, its political leaders have struggled to build a market economy and liberal political institutions, including free media, independent courts and competitive elections.

The results have frequently been mixed. There have been ups and downs, including a Russian invasion in 2008 that stripped Georgia of two of its provinces. Yet until now the nation has been kept largely on track by its single-minded pursuit of two big goals: membership in the European Union and admission to NATO.

Now, suddenly, both the union and the alliance appear in danger of crumbling at the hands of populists and nationalists who would retreat behind refortified borders, turn away migrants and abandon international commitments. What happens if the Trumpists win?

“Definitely that will be a shock for [Georgian] society,” the country’s elected president, Giorgi Margvelashvili, told me last week. “And of course it would be a very serious problem for our security. Because we have a neighbor that has a very different idea of what Georgia should be.” That, of course, would be Russia.

As Margvelashvili pointed out, Georgia shares its potential dilemma with a larger region. Trump’s complaints, and those of President Obama, about the “free riders” of NATO such as Germany and France ignore the critical role the alliance has played for a host of smaller and far less prosperous nations since the end of the Cold War. Under the alliance’s tutelage, countries that might have lapsed into dictatorships or chaos instead became functioning

democracies. To earn NATO security guarantees, or even a looser association as “partners for peace,” they granted rights to ethnic minorities, tolerated opposition media and cracked down on corruption.

In the end, NATO oversaw what was probably the most successful nation-building effort in history. A score of countries — Poland and Hungary, Latvia and Estonia, Serbia and Croatia, and yes, Ukraine and Georgia — adopted the Western, liberal model of statehood under the allies’ scrutiny, even though not all have yet joined NATO or the European Union.

A Trump victory would put that historic geopolitical shift at risk. It would open the question of whether new NATO members such as the Baltic states — not to mention Georgia and Ukraine — were really safe from Russian aggression. And it would maroon a bunch of countries that are on their way to Western integration but haven’t yet arrived there.

Trump and his supporters might dismiss such a loss — but Margvelashvili said they would regret it. “You cannot discount countries that are smaller because you think that is the way the world order works,” he said. “If you push cases like Georgia and Ukraine into some bad portfolio and forget about them, you will get further complications — not only vis-à-vis Russia, but in other parts of the world,” where regional powers — China, say, or Iran — aspire to dominate their neighbors.

Georgia offers perhaps the clearest example of how the prospect of NATO membership and progress in consolidating democracy have been intertwined. In 2012, the pro-Western government was ousted in a parliamentary election — itself a democratic achievement of sorts. The new coalition was led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire with distinctly Trump-like qualities, including a penchant for populist demagoguery and an inclination to autocracy.

For a while it looked like the new regime might reverse much of what the country had accomplished. Leaders of the previous government were hounded with criminal investigations; media not supportive of the government came under pressure. But Ivanishvili had promised that he would continue seeking E.U. and NATO membership, which gave Brussels and Washington extraordinary leverage. Thanks to their pressure, the political opposition is still functioning; the most watched television network remains independent and critical of the government; and elections scheduled for this fall look to be hotly competitive. Oh, and by the way, Georgia still has 750 troops under NATO command in Afghanistan.

The rhetoric from Trump has given a boost to pro-Russian parties in Georgia’s campaign. Their argument, said Margvelashvili, has been consistent: “You might want NATO. You might want Europe. But it is not going to happen.” Until now, it hasn’t been a persuasive argument. Georgia’s president, and leaders like him across Eurasia, can only hope this U.S. political season does not make it so.

Yemen President Dismisses PM Bahah Over ‘Failures’

[AFP](#), April 3, 2016

Aden (AFP) – Yemen’s President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi on Sunday relieved prime minister and vice president Khaled Bahah of his duties due to what he called government “failures”.

Bahah’s surprise dismissal comes just a week ahead of a UN-brokered ceasefire planned between Yemen’s warring parties, which is expected to pave the way for peace talks in Kuwait on April 18.

Hadi appointed Ahmed bin Dagher, former secretary general of the General People’s Congress party to which the president once belonged, as prime minister, according to a decision published on the official [sabanew.net](#) website.

He appointed veteran General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar as vice president, and a presidency source said that Bahah would now serve as a presidential advisor.

Hadi said the decision to replace Bahah was “due to the failures that have accompanied the performance of the government during the past period in the fields of economy, services, and security”.

Bahah’s government has “failed to ease the suffering of our people, resolve their problems and provide their needs,” Hadi said in a statement.

Iran-backed rebels have been in control of capital Sanaa since 2014, forcing the government to declare second-city Aden as temporary capital.

But Hadi and many government officials, including Bahah, spend most of their time in Riyadh as they struggle to secure Aden and other parts of the country where Sunni jihadists have gained ground.

Adding to the unrest, the local militiamen who fought alongside the government to retake Aden from the rebels last summer have clashed with guards protecting the presidential palace to protest unpaid wages despite Hadi’s orders to merge them with the security forces.

Hadi spoke Sunday of a “lack of a proper government administration of the unlimited support from our brothers in the Arab coalition, notably Saudi Arabia” which is leading an alliance against the rebels.

– Troubled relationship –

Government sources have in the past spoke of differences between the president and Bahah, who had served as Yemen’s envoy to the United Nations before Hadi appointed him as foreign minister and then prime minister.

In December, Hadi reshuffled his cabinet, naming new foreign and interior ministers in a move that was understood to be aimed at smoothing his relations with Bahah.

Hadi has also recently been involving Ahmar more actively in decision-making, appointing him in February as armed forces deputy commander in a bid to rally support from

tribes and troops in the rebel-held region around Yemen's capital.

Ahmar's troops played a prominent role in the 2011 uprising that ousted strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh, whose loyalists are now allied with the Shiite Huthi rebels in control of Sanaa.

Hadi said his decisions aim to "achieve what our people are aspiring for and to restore the state authority, security and stability."

The United Nations says about 6,300 people have been killed in the war in Yemen since the Saudi-led coalition intervened in March last year, more than half of them civilians.

The planned truce was only agreed by the warring sides after months of shuttle diplomacy by UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

Previous UN-sponsored negotiations between the rebels and the government failed to make any headway, and a ceasefire announced for December 15 was repeatedly violated and abandoned by the Saudi-led Arab coalition on January 2.

Sen. Graham To Arab World: US Hasn't Changed Despite Trump

By Maram Mazen

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

CAIRO (AP) – Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham sought to reassure the Arab world Sunday over the prospect of Donald Trump becoming president, saying in Cairo that Congress would continue to play a primary role in foreign policy, "regardless of what Mr. Trump says or does."

"The Congress is going to be around no matter who is president," Graham told reporters after meeting with Egyptian President Abdel-Fatah el-Sissi as part of a Republican congressional delegation touring the Middle East.

"All of us, regardless of what Mr. Trump says or does, we are going to keep being who we are, so don't let the political scenes at home get you too upset," Graham said. "That's what I told the president."

Graham's comments regarding the front-runner for his party's nomination reflect a growing concern in Washington over the effect a Trump presidency could have on U.S. foreign policy and international relations. Trump has stirred controversy both at home and abroad with proposals that include a blanket ban on Muslim immigration to the U.S. and the building of a massive wall along the entire U.S.-Mexican border.

"Don't let the politics of the moment make you believe that America has fundamentally changed in terms of the way we view the world. It hasn't," Graham said.

Graham has endorsed Sen. Ted Cruz, Trump's main Republican rival, despite the fact that Graham has been a

vocal public critic of Cruz for years. Speaking to The Daily Show's Trevor Noah last month, Graham said he was endorsing Cruz because he is, "not completely crazy."

Speaking to reporters Sunday, Graham said he wants the U.S. to increase its military aid to el-Sissi's government, which is battling a long-running insurgency in the northern Sinai by militants affiliated with the Islamic State group.

With \$1.3 billion annually, Egypt is the second-largest recipient of U.S. military aid after Israel.

Graham said the delegation's main purpose in Egypt is to improve and deepen relations with el-Sissi, and to support the economy to help ensure the stability of Egypt.

"If Egypt fails, every problem in the Mideast becomes a hundred times worse," Graham said.

Graham, along with Sen. John McCain, was vehemently opposed to the July 2013 military ouster of elected Islamist President Mohammed Morsi, led by then-Defense Minister el-Sissi. The military removed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood amid mass protests against his one-year rule.

But on Sunday, Graham appeared to back el-Sissi as "a military man who understands terrorism" and "someone I can work with."

In recent weeks, Egypt was rebuked over its human rights record by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry as well as the European Union's foreign affairs arm, the European Parliament, the U.N. Council for Human Rights and several Western European nations, including key trade partner and EU heavyweight Germany. The case of an Italian student kidnapped and tortured to death in Cairo has also poisoned Egypt's long close ties with Italy, amid suspicions that it was carried out by members of the security forces.

Graham acknowledged those concerns and said he and his colleagues are encouraging Egypt to improve its record on human rights and freedom of expression.

"Our hope is that the Egyptian government can prove to the international community that they're sincerely responding to legitimate concerns while at the same time trying to maintain security," Graham said.

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Nagorny Karabakh Clashes Continue Despite Azerbaijan 'Ceasefire'

By Tofik Bavayev With Emil Guliyev

[AFP](#), April 3, 2016

Terter (Azerbaijan) (AFP) – Clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces rumbled on Sunday, despite Baku announcing a ceasefire after the worst outbreak of violence in decades over the disputed Nagorny Karabakh region sparked international pressure to stop fighting.

Azerbaijan said it had decided to “unilaterally cease hostilities” and pledged to “reinforce” several strategic positions it claimed to have captured inside the Armenian-controlled territory.

The authorities in Karabakh – which claims independence but is heavily backed by Armenia – said they were willing to discuss a ceasefire but only if it saw them regain their territory.

Both sides accused each other of continuing to fire across the volatile frontline that has divided them since a war that saw Armenian separatists seize the region from Azerbaijan ended with an inconclusive truce in 1994.

“Fighting with the use of tanks and artillery continues as Azerbaijan is telling lies that it halted hostilities. Azerbaijan continues shelling both Karabakh army positions and Armenian villages,” Armenian defence ministry spokesman Artsrun Hovhannisyanyan told AFP.

“The Armenians have continued shelling throughout the day, without interruption,” Azerbaijani defence ministry spokesman Vagif Dargahly told AFP.

– ‘Biggest hostilities since 1994’ –

“Intense fighting continues in the southeast and northeast sectors of the front,” said David Babayan, spokesman for the separatist region.

On Saturday, fierce clashes left at least 18 Armenian and 12 Azerbaijani soldiers dead after the two sides accused each other of attacking with heavy weaponry across the volatile frontline.

The Karabakh authorities said one boy was killed in the fighting, while Azerbaijan said two civilians died and ten were wounded.

Armenia’s President Serzh Sarkisian called the clashes the “largest-scale hostilities” since a 1994 truce ended a war in which Armenian-backed fighters seized the territory from Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan said one of its helicopters was shot down as its forces took control of several strategic heights and a village in Armenian-controlled territory.

Karabakh forces on Sunday claimed they took back the strategic Lala-Tepe height in Karabakh which was captured by Azeri troops on Saturday.

Baku denied the report, saying that the height remained under its control and that rebel troops sustained “serious manpower losses”.

– Appeals for calm –

Both Russia and the West appealed to all sides to show restraint, with key regional power broker President Vladimir Putin calling Saturday for an “immediate ceasefire”.

Moscow has supplied weaponry to both sides in the conflict, but has much closer military and economic ties to Armenia and Yerevan is reliant on Russia’s backing.

US Secretary of State John Kerry urged the arch foes to return to peace talks under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), reiterating “there is no military solution to the conflict”.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meanwhile vowed to back traditional ally Azerbaijan “to the end” in the conflict.

“We pray our Azerbaijani brothers will prevail in these clashes with the least casualties,” Erdogan said.

A Saudi-based 57-member Muslim body on Sunday demanded Armenia’s “unconditional” withdrawal from the Nagorny Karabakh region.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, of which Azerbaijan is a member, condemned “the attack by Armenian forces on the borders of occupied Azerbaijani territories” and Yerevan’s “disrespect of the (unilateral) ceasefire” announced by Baku.

OIC Secretary General Iyad Madani called for increased international efforts towards a political settlement that would “preserve” Azerbaijan’s territories.

Ethnic Armenian separatists backed by Yerevan seized control of the mountainous Nagorny Karabakh region in an early 1990s war that claimed some 30,000 lives. The foes have never signed a peace deal despite the 1994 ceasefire.

Energy-rich Azerbaijan, whose military spending has in the past exceeded Armenia’s entire state budget, has repeatedly threatened to take back the breakaway region by force if negotiations fail to yield results.

Moscow-backed Armenia says it could crush any offensive.

The last big flare-up occurred in November 2014 when Azerbaijan shot down an Armenian military helicopter.

While the reasons for the sudden surge remain unclear, analyst Thomas de Waal of Carnegie Europe wrote that the “potential for a serious outbreak of fighting has never been greater” as both sides have bolstered their arms.

“It is more likely that one of the two parties to the conflict – and more likely the Azerbaijani side, which has a stronger interest in the resumption of hostilities — is trying to alter the situation in its favour with a limited military campaign,” de Waal wrote in a blog posting.

“The dangerous aspect to this is that, once begun, any military operations in this conflict zone can easily escalate and get out of control.”

Azerbaijan Declares Cease-fire, But Fighting Continues In Breakaway Enclave

By Andrew Roth

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

MOSCOW — Even as Azerbaijan announced a unilateral cease-fire Sunday, reports of sporadic fighting between Azerbaijani and ethnic Armenian forces over the separatist enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh continued. Regional and world leaders called for an end to the worst violence in the region since a cease-fire halted a war over the territory in 1994.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, both former Soviet republics, fought a bloody ethnic war over the territory as the Soviet Union fell apart. About 20,000 people died. Formally a part of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh is de facto controlled by a separatist government backed by Armenia and has increasingly been the site of sporadic border conflicts in recent years. Today, nearly all of its population is ethnically Armenian.

This weekend's violence has been on a previously unseen scale, analysts said, with reports of the use of helicopters, drones, tanks and artillery along the "line of conflict" that separates the two sides. Thirty soldiers and a boy were killed in fighting Saturday, as Azerbaijan claimed to have seized several strategic heights and several villages from the Nagorno-Karabakh government. Both sides blamed the other for the violence.

The United States and Russia have called for an immediate end to the fighting. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said that he will stand with Azerbaijan "to the end" and that "we pray our Azerbaijani brothers will prevail in these clashes," his office reported.

On Sunday, paramilitary forces from Nagorno-Karabakh said they launched a counteroffensive, which Azerbaijan claimed it had repelled, destroying 10 tanks in the process. It was not possible to confirm reports of casualties on Sunday from either side.

The Azerbaijani government said in a statement that it would implement a unilateral cease-fire Sunday afternoon, but it also said it would reinforce the territories it "liberated." But representatives for the de facto government in Karabakh claimed fighting was continuing along the front lines, Radio Free Europe's Armenian service reported. The news agency has also published video of ethnic Armenian reserve fighters mobilizing.

The violence came at the conclusion of a nuclear summit in Washington, which both Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev attended. The two did not meet. U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry condemned the cease-fire violations, urging the sides "to show restraint, avoid further escalation and strictly adhere to the cease-fire."

Thomas de Waal, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and an expert on the conflict, wrote that this weekend's violence was "much more serious" than the customary violence that resumes each

spring, as soldiers take potshots at one another across the border.

"It is more likely that one of the two parties to the conflict — and more likely the Azerbaijani side, which has a stronger interest in the resumption of hostilities — is trying to alter the situation in its favor with a limited military campaign," he wrote.

Azerbaijan is openly exasperated with a decades-long process of negotiations under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and led by diplomats from the United States, Russia and France, to broker a resolution to the territorial dispute.

"There have been 22 years of attempts to find a peaceful solution to this conflict," said Polad Bulbuloglu, the Azerbaijani ambassador to Moscow, during an interview on the radio station Govorit Moskva on Saturday. "How long can it go on? We are ready for a peaceful solution to the question. But if this won't be solved by peaceful means, then it will be solved by military means."

Richard Giragosian, director of the Regional Studies Center, an independent think tank in Armenia, said in an interview that the West had little leverage over Azerbaijan in the conflict but that it did offer "an opening for Russian unilateral diplomacy," possibly allowing Russian President Vladimir Putin the chance to assert his role as a peacemaker in the region.

On Saturday, Putin called for both sides "to immediately stop firing and exercise restraint," his spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told journalists.

Azerbaijan Says To Stop Fighting In Nagorno-Karabakh, Separatists Voice Doubts

By Nailia Bagirova And Hasmik Mkrtchyan

[Reuters](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Will Azerbaijan Fighting End After Declared Ceasefire?

By Ben Thompson

[Christian Science Monitor](#), April 3, 2016

Following weeks of escalating tensions that culminated in deadly fighting this weekend, Azerbaijan announced a unilateral ceasefire between its military and separatist forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh region on Sunday.

Despite the eastern European country's Defense Ministry pledge to put conflict on hold in the autonomous Caucasus nation, Nagorno-Karabakh rebels are saying that Azerbaijani forces are still firing on them, per The Associated Press.

Nagorno-Karabakh, while technically contained within the Republic of Azerbaijan's borders, has been under Armenian control since a violent conflict ended without resolution in the waning years of the Soviet Union's influence. Since a 1994 ceasefire was declared between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the 4,400-square-mile territory, its official status has not been determined.

Despite two decades of relative calm, at least 30 were killed on both Azerbaijani and separatist sides this weekend including a boy, per the AP. Armenia reported 18 fatalities Saturday, and Azerbaijan 12.

Azerbaijani Defense Ministry spokesman Vagif Dargyakhly said early Sunday that his military was involved in conflict overnight, and that civilian areas also came under fire.

Under international pressure, Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry said it would be "suspending a counter-offensive and response on the territories occupied by Armenia."

Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev said that his side would lay down their arms despite what they view as Armenian transgression.

"Armenia has violated all the norms of international law," Mr. Aliyev said on Azeri state TV, per Reuters. "We won't abandon our principal position. But at the same time we will observe the ceasefire and after that we will try to solve the conflict peacefully."

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed solidarity with the former Soviet republic, saying Sunday that Turkey country "will support Azerbaijan to the end."

"We pray our Azerbaijani brothers will prevail in these clashes with the least casualties," he added.

Turkey shares an extensive border with Armenia, which has suffered from the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh situation as both Azerbaijan and Turkey closed their borders with the state.

Both the United States and Russia urged restraint in the contested area. Russia maintains a military installation in northern Armenia, and Russian President Vladimir Putin asked that both sides should "immediately stop firing and exercise restraint," his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

US Secretary of State John Kerry said that Armenian and Azerbaijani forces should "show restraint, avoid further escalation and strictly adhere to the cease-fire," per The Washington Post.

The Post also reported that Azerbaijan suppressed a Nagorno-Karabakh assault Sunday, and that it would support "liberated" territories in the conflict despite the cessation of fighting. Armenian officials disputed the sincerity of the motion from Baku, with Radio Free Europe reporting that military operations were continuing.

David Babayan, spokesman for the president of the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, called the Azerbaijani announcement an "information trick," according to

RFE, although the region's military leaders say they are still open to a ceasefire – if aimed at "restoring former positions."

Azerbaijan Claims To Halt Fighting In Nagorno-Karabakh, But Warns Armenia

By Neil MacFarquhar

[New York Times](#), April 4, 2016

MOSCOW — Azerbaijan announced on Sunday that it had halted combat operations in the sudden, bloody clashes with Armenia over the long-disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, but it laid the seeds for continued fighting by saying it would keep the slice of territory seized by its forces.

The Azeri Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on its website that Azerbaijan, taking into account appeals for a cease-fire from various international organizations, "has decided to unilaterally cease retaliatory military actions," but that it would continue fighting if Armenia did not stop.

The statement also said Azerbaijan would "strengthen the defense of the liberated territories."

If Azerbaijan consolidates its control over strategic heights seized in fighting on Saturday around several villages in northeastern Nagorno-Karabakh, it will be the first change in the static armistice line in 22 years.

The heavy fighting that erupted over the weekend was the worst since that armistice, leaving about 30 dead. Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has controlled its own affairs with significant military and financial support from Armenia since a separatist war sputtered to a stop in 1994.

Neither Armenia nor the separatist enclave would be likely to find any change in the armistice line acceptable, and both accused Azerbaijan of continuing the fighting in the South Caucasus despite the declared cease-fire.

The situation along the line of contact "remains tense," Artsrun Hovhannisyan, the spokesman for Armenia's Defense Ministry, said in a statement on the ministry's website. "The statement by the Azerbaijan side is an information trap and does not amount to a unilateral cease-fire," he wrote.

Reports from Yerevan, the Armenian capital, said volunteers by the hundreds were streaming toward the front.

David K. Babayan, the spokesman for the president of the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, posted statements on Twitter claiming that Azerbaijan was saying one thing while doing another. "Azerbaijani forces continue shelling, trying to intrude into Nagorno-Karabakh's territory," he was quoted as saying by the local news media. The territory is home to about 150,000 people.

Ethnic divisions have long pitted predominantly Christian Armenia against mostly Muslim Azerbaijan, and war between them erupted after the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991. The dispute has continued to simmer since the cease-

fire in 1994, with occasional flare-ups. As is usual, each side accused the other of starting the latest fighting, this time by unleashing heavy weapons.

The Kremlin, as the former colonial ruler, has presented itself as a mediator between the two, while also selling arms to both. Russia also maintains a small base in Armenia. On Saturday, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia called for a cease-fire.

Analysts were struggling to understand what had caused this eruption and whether it indicated the start of a new, violent phase of the war. The ethnic war that began in the late Soviet period claimed more than 20,000 lives and ended in the cease-fire, but there was no final settlement.

The former Soviet Union is dotted with at least five frozen conflicts that Moscow occasionally heats up to exert pressure on independent states it once controlled, including Georgia, Moldova and most recently Ukraine. Russia does not have a proxy force in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as it does in the others, but both the Armenian government in Yerevan and the Azeri government in Baku depend on Moscow to referee the standoff.

Some analysts described the recent fighting as a natural outburst of the tensions that build up along the cease-fire line but that in this case escalated markedly, not least because both sides were deploying far more sophisticated weaponry.

Instead of just exchanging mortar fire, for example, there were reports that the countries were deploying heavy weapons for the first time since 1994, with the two sides lobbing Grad rockets at each other, which cause far more extensive and unpredictable damage.

"A provocation that begins with the use of large-caliber multiple rocket launch systems and gunships has significantly higher chances of leading to an accidental war because of the casualties it can cause," wrote Simon Saradzhyan, a Russia specialist at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, in a preliminary online analysis.

Azerbaijan alone in recent years has used its oil wealth to purchase about \$4 billion worth of new, mostly Russian weapons. President Ilham Aliyev faced public pressure to show something for the investment, especially amid growing public unrest after the collapse in global oil prices. The country's currency, the manat, dropped about one-third in value against the dollar in December.

The government wants to avoid "leaving the public with the impression that the president has accepted defeat" in terms of ceding control over the separatist region, wrote Maxim Yusin, a Russian analyst, in the daily Kommersant newspaper.

Mr. Aliyev crowed about the blow struck by his forces against Armenia, while accusing the other country of starting the renewed conflict. "I believe April 2 will be a good lesson to

them," he was quoted as saying at a meeting of his Security Council on Sunday, according to the Interfax news agency.

Interfax also reported that Mr. Aliyev had suggested that additional Armenian soldiers would die. "But at the same time we will observe the cease-fire, and after that we will try to solve the conflict peacefully," he said.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey backed the Azerbaijani position "to the end," according to a statement from his office. "We pray our Azerbaijani brothers will prevail in these clashes," he was quoted as saying.

Turkey and Russia have been at loggerheads over Syria, with previously strong trade relations between the two collapsing after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane it claimed had violated its airspace in November. The idea that Turkey is encouraging a war in the South Caucasus, long a tinderbox for Russia, is unlikely to sit well with the Kremlin.

"Two very unpredictable leaders have direct interests in Nagorno-Karabakh," said Cliff Kupchan, the chairman of the Eurasia Group, a Washington-based geopolitical risk analysis company. "That raises risks right there."

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which has been trying to negotiate a settlement for years, condemned the violence and said it will meet Tuesday about the renewed fighting.

Few analysts, however, expected a full-blown war.

"Being a pragmatist, Ilham Aliyev does not want to risk the stability of the present for the sake of the war with an unpredictable outcome," Mr. Yusin, the Russian analyst, wrote in Kommersant. Continue reading the main story

One Year After The Iran Nuclear Deal

Don't be fooled. The Iran we have long known—hostile, expansionist, violent—is alive and well.

By Yousef Al Otaiba

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

China's Buying Up Foreign Companies, So The U.S. Might Need To Rethink Its Trade Strategy

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping has a problem related to his nation's growing demand for high-quality food and other agricultural products. In December 2013, Mr. Xi declared a strategic goal for China: to seize "the commanding heights in biotechnology," in areas such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). It must "not let large foreign companies dominate the agricultural biotechnology product market," he said. However, China is still years behind the United States and Europe in research and development.

One way to square the circle would be to import products from the West to keep Chinese consumers supplied while hoping that the bracing stimulus of foreign competition would impel Chinese firms to catch up. Mr. Xi's government implied such an approach at a U.S.-China high-level trade meeting in Guangzhou in November, which produced a promise that U.S. exporters would henceforth face a regulatory "process based on international standards" and "science" when they tried to sell in the Chinese market — as opposed to the rejection that had met nine out of 12 GMO varieties U.S. companies submitted for approval in recent years.

Now comes word, however, of a bid by China's state-owned chemical company to buy Swiss-based Syngenta, suggesting that Beijing has a rather different strategy in mind: to buy the Western biotech it can't develop on its own — and give one particular importer favored access to China's huge market. The strategic value China places on the deal is obvious from the price tag: \$43 billion, the largest Chinese foreign investment ever. After paying so much for Syngenta, will China grant approval to a GMO made by Dow or Monsanto if its own captive company offers a similar product?

As is so often the case with Chinese mercantilism, it is hard to specify what the United States could do to counter this move. Raising the specter of Chinese control over Syngenta's large U.S. subsidiary, which supplies 10 percent of U.S. soybean seeds and 6 percent of corn, Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) has called for the U.S. commission that scrubs foreign investment deals for national security concerns to let the Agriculture Department weigh in on this one, and perhaps others. That might help — or create a precedent for defining investment-related security concerns beyond traditional law enforcement, military and intelligence considerations, with unintended consequences for the free flow of capital to the United States.

What is clear is that China has embarked on a buying spree of foreign firms, \$92 billion worth so far this year, with motives that range from commercial to nationalistic — to murky, as was the case with the bid for Starwood hotels by Anbang, a previously unheralded Chinese insurance conglomerate with ties to the Deng Xiaoping family but, according to news accounts, no one answering its headquarters telephone. If China deploys its cash to create jobs in the West, well and good. But given the nontransparent and cronyistic nature of Chinese companies, both state-owned and "private," there may be risks, too, of a kind not posed by investment from democratic allies such as Japan, say, or Germany. The United States needs a new approach to account for the new reality.

NATIONAL NEWS

VA Still Plagued By Problems Two Years After Scandal

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), April 3, 2016

If you thought the Obama administration had put its problems with veterans behind it, think again.

Two years after the scandal emerged over phony waiting lists for patients at the Department of Veterans Affairs facility in Phoenix, the department is still beset with problems ranging from fresh accusations of falsified waiting lists to a system-wide failure to discipline wrongdoing.

"The VA is still struggling with a lack of accountability, an inability to properly manage a budget rapidly approaching \$200 billion, and a failure to provide veterans with timely access to care and benefits," said John Cooper, a spokesman for Concerned Veterans for America. "The VA is broken, and if we want veterans to be assured of a VA that works, we need to systemically reform it."

Employee discipline has become an embarrassment. Even in the rare cases where VA management does punish employees, the agency is being thwarted by union-backed civil service rules.

For example, a VA employee in Puerto Rico was reinstated with back pay last month after she was fired upon being arrested for armed robbery. She pleaded guilty, but her union got her job back by arguing in a grievance that a VA manager at the facility is a registered sex offender and another VA hospital manager was once arrested for drunken driving and found in possession of pain pills.

In Alexandria, Louisiana, a VA nursing assistant is still on the payroll while awaiting trial on manslaughter charges in the death of a 70-year-old Air Force veteran in 2013. Hospital officials initially called the veteran's death an accident, but a coroner determined the veteran died from blunt force trauma to the head.

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller, Florida Republican, said the case is an example of "VA's continued and pervasive failure to seriously discipline its employees." The agency has said civil service rules make it difficult to fire poor-performing employees and has recommended changes to Congress.

Mr. Cooper said it's taken the VA two years to propose firing three senior leaders responsible for the Phoenix VA scandal, "which led to nearly 300 veterans dying waiting for care."

The VA didn't respond to requests for comment.

The agency's problems go far beyond civil service rules, however.

The agency's inspector general released twelve reports on VA health care systems in Texas last month, revealing

that seven of them have scheduling mismanagement that led to extended wait times for veterans. The reports blamed that lack of supervision, poor training of employees and weak management controls for data manipulation.

In San Diego, California, the inspector general reported Friday that staff at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center manipulated waiting list data to make it appear veteran patients received mental health care more quickly than they actually did. The report covered fiscal 2012 and 2013.

The department's inspector general told USA Today in February it has investigated 73 VA facilities across the country, and found scheduling problems in 51 cases. But the inspector general still has not released reports with the findings of nearly all those investigations to Congress or the public.

In Denver, the VA said it has no plans to punish any other employees over massive cost overruns at the VA medical facility under construction. The executives responsible for the cost of the project rising to \$1.7 billion have already left the department, the agency said in an internal review, while three other executives were transferred or demoted.

In Jackson, Mississippi, an investigation found that taxpayers are paying millions for VA hospitals to keep health care workers with questionable records on paid leave for years. The Clarion-Ledger reported in February that two surgeons at the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery VA Medical Center whose annual salaries total more than \$500,000 have been on paid leave more than two years. Their salaries count against the Jackson VA's budget, but veterans receive no care from them.

The paper found that 2,560 VA employees spent at least one month on paid leave in 2014, costing taxpayers \$23 million — more than any other federal agency. VA Secretary Robert McDonald said the agency is streamlining the administrative leave process so employees can be disciplined more quickly.

In Clarksburg, West Virginia, veteran Terry Riley has filed suit against the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center, alleging that the facility has "a practice of falsifying and reducing emergency room numbers." His claim accuses the facility's managers of "utilizing false clinics to enable senior managers to reduce ER visits and receive a high yearly bonus," against VA policy.

The VA last month did take disciplinary action against one notable employee. The agency suspended the head of the Veterans Benefits Administration Danny Pummill for allowing two lower-ranking officials to manipulate the agency's hiring system for their own gain.

Mr. Pummill was suspended without pay — for 15 days. Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said Mr. Pummill failed to exercise proper oversight as Kimberly Graves and Diana Rubens forced lower-ranking managers to accept job

transfers and then stepped into the vacant positions themselves, keeping their senior-level pay while reducing their responsibilities.

But Ms. Graves and Ms. Rubens were reinstated last month after administrative judges overturned their firings. The agency reprimanded them and cut their pay by 10 percent.

Last week, Sen. Marco Rubio, Florida Republican, and Mr. Miller wrote to Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Johnny Isakson, Georgia Republican, to warn that failure of Congress to pass new language allowing the VA to fire corrupt or negligent officials would be a "disservice" to the nation's veterans. They urged him to consider Mr. Miller's bill, which would expand the agency's authority to fire employees.

"We are now concerned that you have halted the aforementioned negotiations and may be taking an approach that favors reaching a deal with the administration or others at any cost, regardless of whether it actually addresses the VA's many problems or pays for new programs in a responsible way," the lawmakers wrote. "We hope you realize that any piece of comprehensive veterans' legislation that doesn't provide the VA secretary swift and comprehensive disciplinary authority for all VA employees misses the true mark on what ails the department."

Some veterans groups are concerned that the VA's problems are getting less attention during the presidential election year.

"We are encouraged some of the individuals running for president have been vocal about the plight of our veterans, but what's more important is that our next commander in chief, regardless of party, commit to reforming the VA and standing up to the special interests that have prevented reforms to the department that would ensure our veterans receive the best care possible," Mr. Cooper said.

Rahm's Meeting Skeds Show Juggling Act In, Out Of City Hall

By Fran Spielman

[Chicago Sun-Times](#), April 4, 2016

In the three-week run-up to his stunning selection of a new police superintendent, Mayor Rahm Emanuel juggled Chicago's pension, policing and school funding crises with a heavy dose of image building.

Mayoral schedules, released in response to a Freedom of Information request by the Chicago Sun-Times, show the daily balancing act that factors into how the mayor chooses to spend his time, whom he spends that time with and even the restaurants where he chooses to dine with "a friend," as the records put it.

The daily itineraries also show that even as Emanuel was interviewing the now-discarded three finalists for top cop recommended by his hand-picked Police Board, the mayor held two meetings in his City Hall office with a group of high-

ranking police officials that included his surprise pick: Chief of Patrol Eddie Johnson.

It's not known whether those meetings built Emanuel's confidence in the man he plucked out of obscurity to boost rock-bottom police morale and restore trust between residents and police shattered by the Laquan McDonald shooting video. But they certainly didn't hurt.

On March 15 and again on March 21, Johnson was part of hourlong meetings with the mayor that included interim Supt. John Escalante and his chief of staff, Chiefs Tony Riccio and Gene Roy, and Deputy Chief Dave McNaughton, the records show.

Five days after the second meeting, the Sun-Times first reported Emanuel's end-run around the Police Board to anoint Johnson to replace fired Police Supt. Garry McCarthy.

In between, the mayor held six meetings labeled "public safety update" with chief of staff Eileen Mitchell and public safety liaison Janey Rountree, who were keeping close tabs on the superintendent search. Only one of those meetings — on March 16 — included Police Board President Lori Lightfoot.

The following day, the Sun-Times disclosed the now-discarded list of three finalists. The schedules show that Emanuel started a series of 90-minute "interviews," presumably with the three Police Board finalists, on Saturday, March 19.

Two more 90-minute interviews were held on Sunday, March 20, followed by a 45-minute interview the following Wednesday, March 23.

Between March 1 and 23, Escalante was summoned to the mayor's office three times.

Johnson can expect to be put on an even shorter leash as he struggles to control the outbreak of gang violence that has caused homicides and shootings to skyrocket while police activity has plummeted.

During the same three-week period, Emanuel had just two meetings with Chicago Public Schools CEO Forrest Claypool, Chief Education Officer Janice Jackson and a host of top aides that included Arnie Rivera, senior adviser Mike Rendina, Clo Ewing, Meghan Harte, chief of policy Michael Negron, and Chief Financial Officer Carole Brown.

That's even though CPS is running out of money with a \$676 million pension payment due on June 30 and no help from Springfield in sight.

Thousands of teachers massed in front of the Thompson Center on Friday for a one-day walkout. A mid-May strike is increasingly likely. And the on-time opening of schools this fall is a giant question mark.

Chicago taxpayers have already paid \$760,725 in legal fees tied to the federal civil rights investigation of the Chicago Police Department triggered by the police shooting of McDonald.

The running tab does not include fees paid to former U.S. Attorney Dan Webb to conduct a third-party review of a Law Department that Emanuel initially claimed could not possibly be part of the "code of silence" the mayor has acknowledged exists in the Chicago Police Department.

On March 4, Emanuel met privately with Webb to get a "status update" on that Law Department investigation, information that has yet to be made public.

The police superintendent search wasn't the only job on Emanuel's plate.

On March 4, the schedules show two rounds of "interviews," presumably for the vacancy created by the surprise resignation of Choose Chicago CEO Don Welsh. Those meetings included Choose Chicago Board Chair Desiree Rogers, Deputy Mayor Steve Koch and now-departed senior mayoral adviser David Spielfogel.

The second interview was followed by a meeting titled "legal update-parks," that undoubtedly centered on the court fight being waged by Friends of the Parks in an effort to block Emanuel's plan to give movie mogul George Lucas 17 acres of lakefront land near Soldier Field to build a \$400 million museum.

Spielfogel stuck around for both.

At 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, March 10, Emanuel held a private meeting at Ariel Investments, 200 E. Randolph. The schedule doesn't show the purpose. But it just might have been one of the private meetings the mayor has held with Lucas and his wife, Ariel executive Melody Hobson, in an apparently failed attempt to persuade the couple to consider an alternative site.

Another meeting labeled "museum update" was held in the mayor's City Hall office on March 17. In addition to Spielfogel, Negron and Rendina, participants included McPier CEO Lori Healey, Corporation Counsel Steve Patton and Chief Operating Officer Joe Deal.

The schedules also show that Emanuel got two "pension updates," one of them two days before the Illinois Supreme Court overturned his plan to save two of four city employee pension funds.

The second meeting included former Intergovernmental Affairs Director Matt Hynes and his boss, and Grosvenor Capital Chairman Michael Sacks, Emanuel's most influential business adviser and vice chair of World Business Chicago. Sacks is an investor in the company that owns the Chicago Sun-Times.

Lunches, dinners and drinks "with a friend" were held at an array of restaurants that included Cochon Volant, Chicago Cut, Vivo, Coco Pazzo, Piccolo Sogno Due, Beatrix, Swift and Sons, The Gage, Cherry Circle at the Chicago Athletic Club, the Standard Club, and at the Allium Bar at the Four Seasons Hotel.

In an apparent attempt to rehabilitate Emanuel's public image, the three-week schedule is sprinkled with loads of

media interviews and meetings with unidentified reporters labeled “OTR” or off the record.

Emanuel has made a habit of holding those background sessions with the media since his days in the Clinton and Obama White Houses and in Congress in between. It’s his way of explaining the strategy behind his most controversial decisions, he hopes, to pave the way for more favorable coverage.

Despite the daily juggling act, Emanuel also squeezed in private meetings over the three-week period with Ald. Edward Burke (14th), Marge Laurino (39th), Pat O’Connor (40th) and Debra Silverstein (50th), former Ald. Dorothy Tillman (3rd), state Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago), Avant CEO Al Goldstein, James Ellis of Laborers Local 1001, a delegation from Icelandair, and Jean Francois Decaux, CEO of JCDecaux Group.

JCDecaux is the company that holds lucrative city contracts for advertising on bus shelters, electronic billboards along Chicago expressways and for digital advertising at O’Hare and Midway airports.

There was also two days of “filming” in the mayor’s press briefing room. The purpose was not known.

He’s A Retired Cop. Now His Son Is Accused Of Killing A Police Officer And His Own Wife.

By Ian Shapira

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

The retired police major paced around a crime scene he never imagined he’d see.

Inside his son and daughter-in-law’s rented colonial in Northern Virginia, shards of window glass were scattered by the front door in little heaps. Upstairs in the master bedroom, his son’s camouflage Army uniforms hung in the walk-in closet. In a nearby bathroom, a book titled “Reconciliation: How to Restore Broken Relationships” sat on the sink’s edge. And in the spare room, steps away from an unopened Nerf basketball set, a man in a white biohazard suit yanked up a piece of blood-soaked carpet and carefully wadded it into a garbage bag.

For Ronald W. Hamilton, who spent nearly three decades as police officer in South Carolina, the house reminded him of so many others he’d encountered on domestic violence calls. But this one had shaken him, his family, the community and the Prince William County police force to their core. The crime scene contained the belongings and shattered life of his 32-year-old son, Staff Sgt. Ronald “Ronnie” Hamilton, charged in the Feb. 27 shooting deaths of his wife, Crystal Hamilton, 29, a recovery care coordinator for wounded war veterans, and Ashley Guindon, 28, a Prince William police officer on her first day on the job.

The violence left two other police officers wounded. It left Ronnie and Crystal’s 11-year-old son, Tyriq, without his

parents. And it left the elder Hamilton, a second-in-command in the Charleston police department before his 2001 retirement, struggling to care for his grandson and reconcile his professional and personal loyalties.

“It’s very difficult because I am dealing with family on all sides — the police, Crystal’s family, as well as my son,” said Ronald, 62, who attended the funerals of three Charleston police officers killed in the line of duty during his time on the force. “I brought him up and taught him that he needs to be responsible for his actions. All of these people killed had bright futures, and the police officer was only serving the public. I am still in shock. I don’t know what caused it. It’s just a question I’m trying to answer.”

In charging documents, police said the younger Hamilton admitted to the killings. Paul B. Ebert, Prince William’s chief prosecutor, said he will probably seek the death penalty in the case. But at a March 22 court hearing, Ronnie’s defense attorney, Ed -Ungvarsky, said that “after serving two tours in Iraq, Sergeant Hamilton presents as a psychologically damaged and mentally impaired person.”

His father echoed that sentiment, saying that although he’s proud of Ronnie’s military service, he wasn’t the same after the deployments: “My son wouldn’t have been in this situation had he not volunteered to fight for his country. After he returned, he was depressed.”

But Wendy Howard, Crystal Hamilton’s older sister, disputed that portrayal of her brother-in-law, who worked as an information technology specialist at the Pentagon. She said Ronnie, who deployed to Iraq in 2003 and again in 2005, “was not in a combat role. He was never on the front lines.”

It wasn’t his mind that unraveled over the past few years, she argued. It was his marriage.

‘She’s pregnant’

As a middle school student, Ronnie loved it when his father put him in the driver’s seat of his Charleston police cruiser, flipping on the lights or siren. He told his father it was one of his “proudest moments” when his dad sent police cars and motorcycles to his middle school for career day.

“All the kids looked up to him because he had a father who was a police officer,” Ronald said. “He’d point me out and say, ‘That’s my dad.’”

Ronnie lived with his mother, Diane Williams, a former clerk for various Charleston County magistrates who was not married to his father. As he grew older, he started talking back to his teachers and was sent to an alternative high school, his dad said. At the time, his father, who worked for a nationally prominent police chief, was traveling the country, delivering speeches on law enforcement tactics.

“His mother used to always tell me on the phone that he was being disruptive because that was his reaction to missing me, because I was not there for him,” Ronald said. “I really feel somewhat responsible for his early behavior. I have

some regrets about that. If I could do it all over again, I would have done it differently.”

In high school, Ronnie was already dating Crystal, who grew up in a neighboring town and was three years younger.

He got his GED, then joined the Army shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. By 2002, he was a member of the 101st Airborne Division, based at Fort Campbell, Ky.

Crystal, unbeknownst to her sister and mother, got rides to Fort Campbell on the weekends with a girlfriend who was also dating someone at the base, according to Crystal's sister. Her family had no clue about the seriousness of their relationship until 2004, when Crystal was a community college student in North Carolina.

Crystal's older sister came home one day from her job at Walmart and found her mother, Cherry Howard, distraught.

“My mother says, ‘Did Crystal tell you? She’s pregnant,’” Wendy Howard remembered. “I was completely stunned. Crystal was 18. I was like, ‘Pregnant by who?’ I didn’t even know she had a boyfriend.”

She gave birth to Tyriq in February 2005, and both families gathered to celebrate. Although Ronnie and Crystal were living in different states, they wed at a courthouse a few months later.

When Ronnie deployed to Iraq a second time in October 2005, he never talked about his IT and communications job in his phone calls home to his father.

“He always just said, ‘What’s going on back home, Pops?’ I would tell him to be safe,” Ronald recalled. “And I asked him if there was anything I could do in his absence, and he said that Crystal was fine and she had a lot of support.”

The war changed Ronnie, making him “more withdrawn,” his father said.

After his return in September 2006, he and another man got into a fight in a Tennessee parking lot. The man thought Ronnie had been tailing his girlfriend in the parking lot, according to charging documents. They began shouting at each other, and Ronnie fetched a weapon from his car trunk, boasting that it “ain’t no pellet gun.” He loaded a magazine but then sped off. The other man called police, and Ronnie was charged with aggravated assault. He was placed in an 11-month diversion program and was never convicted of the charge.

His father wouldn’t learn the details of the confrontation until after a far more serious one.

‘Always do what’s right’

A Pentagon assignment beckoned. By 2011, Ronnie, Crystal and Tyriq, who had been living at Fort Shafter in Hawaii, moved to Northern Virginia.

Ronnie went to work for the Joint Staff Support Center. Then Crystal got hired in 2012 as a recovery care coordinator for wounded or ill Marines at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

She tracked the legal and medical paperwork of Marines coping with war injuries or health crises. Chris Molnar, 22, a medically retired lance corporal who suffered a stroke and needed a heart transplant, said Crystal helped lobby on his behalf to improve his disability payments. She even made sure he was doing his homework to restore his memory, he said.

“I had to relearn substitution and addition,” Molnar said. “She’d help me find the tutors and make sure I was going to tutors and she’d check on me and say, ‘Did you do your homework? Did you go to your tutor?’”

But Ronnie grew jealous of Crystal’s interactions at work and suspected she was having an affair, according to a family member who was close to the couple. At one point last year, Ronnie thought Crystal was cheating on him with a man who kept liking her photos on Instagram.

Yet it was Ronnie who had been straying, said the relative, who was sent a photo last year of the woman Ronnie said he’d been seeing.

Despite the tensions in her marriage, Crystal tried to project a stable relationship to their son. At Easter in 2015, Crystal wrote Tyriq a card with a cover that showed a chicken carrying a large egg on its back with the words, “Does it get heavy carrying around so much awesome?” Inside, Crystal wrote: “Remember that Jesus loves us. Always do what’s right no matter what. Live right and always tell the truth and live by HIS word!! We love you Riq and always will! Love Mom and Dad.”

But after Ronnie admitted on Christmas morning that he was having an affair, she made up her mind to leave him and seek full custody of Tyriq, she told the relative who was close to the couple. She figured the spring made sense: Ronnie had orders to move to Italy to work for NATO.

She and Tyriq would stay behind.

‘He didn’t stop running’

On Saturday, Feb. 27, Crystal and several pals were planning to have dinner out, said Shayna Quinn-Colunga, a close friend and hair stylist whose husband worked with Ronnie at the Pentagon. Tyriq had just returned home from a sleepover.

The 11-year-old hopped in the shower, and when he got out, his parents were fighting, according to Wendy Howard, who has discussed the incident with her nephew.

“Tyriq said that Ronnie told Crystal: ‘If you leave, you’re not coming back,’ and Crystal said, ‘Okay,’” said Howard, a safety administrator for a biotech company in North Carolina. “Ronnie told Tyriq to leave the room, but he didn’t. Tyriq stood outside the door and said that Ronnie picked Crystal up and threw her against the wall. The TV fell off the wall. Crystal already called 911 and was yelling Tyriq to run.”

Halfway down the stairs, Tyriq heard two loud gunshots.

"And then he didn't hear Crystal anymore," Howard said. "He didn't stop running. He ran outside. Neighbors took him in."

But the violence wasn't over. Three Prince William County police officers arrived, including Ashley Guindon, who had just been sworn in the day before. When Guindon approached the front door, Ronnie allegedly took out a rifle and fatally shot her and wounded the two other officers.

After he was arrested, Ronnie admitted to the killings, court records show.

'Take care of Tyriq'

Thousands of people showed up at a Woodbridge chapel on March 1 to say farewell to Guindon, the first Prince William police officer to die in the line of duty since 1990.

Several days later, Crystal was buried at a cemetery in South Carolina near where she grew up. Mourners placed sympathy cards and teddy bears on her cream-colored casket. Tyriq, dressed in a dark suit, left a flower.

A second memorial service was held at the Marine Memorial Chapel in Quantico on March 15. One of the eulogies was delivered by the mother of a Marine who had relied on Crystal for help.

"Crystal was my go-to person," Sharon Goetz told mourners. "She became my friend. She was always asking how my son was doing, and then she would look at me intently and say, 'And how are you doing?'"

That same day, Ronald was packing his son's and grandson's belongings into a truck. Before he headed for South Carolina, he went to see Ronnie at the Prince William County detention center, where he's awaiting trial. The former police major said he can't ask about the shootings on the advice of his son's attorney, who declined to be interviewed for this article.

But seeing and talking to Ronnie ease his pain.

"How are you doing?" Ronald said he asked his son during his visit. "And he said: 'Pops, don't worry about me. Just worry about the officers and worry about Crystal. And please take care of Tyriq.'"

Tyriq has been seeing a counselor, his grandfather said, but hasn't talked much with him about what he saw and what he lost. The boy has opened up a bit more to his aunt Julia Hamilton, who is grieving for her sister-in-law.

"I told him, 'I am hurt; I am angry,'" she recalled. "And he was like, 'My dad was sick. You have to forgive him because I already have forgiven him.'"

Read more:

A Marine fights to prove he's innocent of sexual misconduct. Then a lost cell phone is found.

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She's 10. She has HIV. And this is the moment she learns the truth.

Supreme Court Nominee Pushes Ahead Despite Fracas

By Michael D. Shear

[New York Times](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON — Merrick B. Garland, chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals here, has been sequestered in a kind of alternate reality in a small conference room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House, cramming for questions from senators as if hearings on his nomination to the Supreme Court will happen this year.

The preparations — described by top aides as businesslike — are part of a deliberate White House strategy to ignore the fact that Republicans have refused to even consider his nomination. Mr. Obama's aides and Judge Garland's allies have concluded that acting as if the Supreme Court nomination is going ahead is the best way to maximize pressure on their adversaries.

That means maintaining a brisk schedule of one-on-one courtesy meetings with senators for the next month, a period that White House officials consider "phase one." This week, Judge Garland will meet privately with two Republican senators, and on Thursday, Mr. Obama will travel to the University of Chicago, where he taught constitutional law, to press for more Republicans to meet with his nominee.

Also this week, liberal groups are flying in about 40 constituents of Republican senators from Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin to lobby their lawmakers and hold a news conference on Capitol Hill. The Republican constituents include two former staff members of Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, the Republican chairman of the Judiciary Committee, who would oversee confirmation hearings if they ever took place.

White House officials say they remain optimistic. Despite initial reports that Republican senators were united in their opposition to even talking to Judge Garland, 16 Republican senators have said they are willing to at least meet with him in person. Mr. Obama's advisers and his allies on Capitol Hill view that as an early victory.

They also point to polling that suggests that the majority of the population believes that Republicans should treat Mr. Obama's nominee as the way they have previous court picks — with a hearing and a vote.

"We are making steady but significant progress," Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, told reporters on Friday. "Inches will turn into feet. Feet will turn into miles, and, hopefully, Judge Garland will turn into Justice Garland."

The judge's courtesy calls this month will be followed by "phase two," when he will fill out a version of the extensive legal questionnaire that has become routine in Supreme Court confirmations. The White House plans to submit the

questionnaire to the Judiciary Committee even if Mr. Grassley and the committee's Republicans do not ask for one.

Mr. Obama will spend the late spring and summer daring Republicans in speeches, interviews and other public events to block a hearing, aides said. If Republicans relent and hold a hearing, "phase three" will be an all-out public relations campaign aimed at demanding a final, up-or-down vote on Judge Garland.

"The ones who are not meeting with him are going to be a smaller and smaller number," said Neil Eggleston, the White House counsel, who has been gaming out the moves and countermoves. "I think it's going to be harder and harder for them not to accord the basic fairness, first of a meeting and second of a hearing."

In part, that assessment relies on the belief that Judge Garland's record offers no ideological targets that Republicans could use to distract from the Democrats' demands for a fair process. "He does not have grand statements of policy or things like that in his opinions," Mr. Eggleston said. "It's a classic judge's craft."

The White House also believes that Judge Garland's reputation in the legal community, even among conservative jurists and lawyers, will help increase pressure on Republicans. In the last several weeks, the judge has received support from several high-profile Republican lawyers, including Alberto R. Gonzales, a former attorney general; Miguel Estrada, who was nominated by President George W. Bush to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia; and Kenneth W. Starr, who served as solicitor general under Mr. Bush's father.

But on Saturday, two Republican senators, Jerry Moran of Kansas and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, revoked their support for confirmation hearings, saying they oppose Judge Garland's nomination and saw no need for the process to continue.

And Republicans are building a powerful opposition by lobbying Republican senators and rallying important interest groups. Carrie Severino, the chief counsel and policy director for the Judicial Crisis Network, which is working against Judge Garland's confirmation, said in a statement on Friday that she was confident that even the Republican senators who met with Judge Garland would never agree to hold a hearing or vote to put him on the Supreme Court.

"The White House's attempt to manufacture Republican disunity is engaging in wishful thinking and confusing courtesy with weakness," Ms. Severino said.

White House officials acknowledge that if the months pass with no movement from Republicans, it might be difficult to keep the public's attention focused on Judge Garland's nomination, particularly in the midst of the circuslike atmosphere of the presidential campaign.

But the Supreme Court strategists inside the West Wing said they expected to get a lift in attention from the court

itself, which will issue important decisions on abortion, affirmative action and health care by the end of June. Those decisions will highlight the need to confirm Judge Garland, they insisted.

If the court splits, 4 to 4, on some of those cases, the president and his team will be able to use the legal stalemate to press Republicans to relent. One adviser said the image of a court with a structural, institutional problem would help the White House make its case.

The group of presidential aides and lawyers helping to prepare Judge Garland for his Capitol Hill courtesy visits includes Brian Deese, a senior Obama adviser, who manages the study sessions; Eric Schultz, the deputy White House press secretary; and Susan Davies, a former White House deputy counsel who led the confirmation process for Justice Elena Kagan in 2010.

An outside group is also helping to advise the administration, but is not part of the sessions with Judge Garland. Among its members are Ron Klain, a former chief of staff to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.; Karen Dunn, a lawyer at Boies, Schiller & Flexner and a former clerk for Judge Garland; and Cynthia Hogan, the National Football League's top lobbyist who was chief counsel on the Judiciary Committee when Mr. Biden was its chairman.

For now, the group has decided to follow the process that worked in previous confirmation fights. In recent weeks, Judge Garland has played the part of the conventional Supreme Court nominee, remaining silent as he walked past rows of reporters. During this time, he has recused himself from cases on the appeals court but has continued to carry out administrative duties.

White House officials will not say if they might one day break with tradition by letting Judge Garland do interviews or give speeches.

The officials are also counting on the Constitutional Responsibility Project, run by former Obama officials, and the myriad liberal groups that have made it their mission to help Judge Garland win confirmation.

The groups have generated hundreds of editorials in newspapers calling on Republican senators to give the nominee a fair look. They have sent representatives to speak up for Judge Garland at town-hall-style meetings around the country. Some groups have begun targeted advertising calling for senators to "do their job" and give the judge a hearing.

"We just got started," said Brad Woodhouse, the president of Americans United for Change, one of the groups leading the outside-the-Beltway effort. "We are going to be everywhere."

Emmarie Huetteman contributed reporting.

Obama's Confidence Higher Over Supreme Court Pick Merrick Garland

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), April 3, 2016

With senators returning to Washington this week from a two-week recess, the White House is expressing growing optimism it can break a Republican blockade of a Senate confirmation hearing for President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland.

Mr. Obama will try to raise the public pressure on the GOP on Thursday when he travels to the University of Chicago Law School, where he once taught, to make a pitch for the 63-year-old nominee, currently the chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

On Monday night, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Massachusetts Democrat, will hold a nationwide call with progressive activists to marshal more grass-roots support for the Garland nomination.

And on Tuesday, two more Republicans, Sens. Susan M. Collins of Maine and John Boozman of Arkansas, have agreed to meet with the nominee. They bring to at least 16 the number of GOP senators who have at least talked directly with Judge Garland, despite the refusal of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley of Iowa to schedule a committee confirmation hearing.

"We think that we're making progress on this, and we think we have a really good chance," White House counsel Neil Eggleston told reporters Friday.

Sen. Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat, asserted that Republican senators "are beginning to change" partly due to incumbents' fear of the wrath of independent voters in critical swing states.

"Leader McConnell and Chairman Grassley are trying to drive Republicans off a cliff," he told reporters. "But fewer and fewer of them are willing to go along for the ride."

The pro-Obama Constitutional Responsibility Project on Friday detailed the lobbying effort to get the judge a hearing and a vote, claiming that it has collected 1.5 million signatures for the #DoYourJob petition being sent to lawmakers, including 42,000 directly to Mr. Grassley.

But Senate Republican leaders insist their majority is holding firm to the position that voters should have the critical say in filling the Supreme Court vacancy by electing a new president in November. They say the idea of growing momentum for the Garland nomination is wishful thinking.

"A month and a half ago, there were three GOP senators open to hearings and a vote," said McConnell spokesman Don Stewart. "Now, after a massive campaign by the White House, moveon.org, unions, and other liberal special-interest groups, not to mention millions of dollars in

special-interest ad spending, there are two GOP senators calling for hearings. The poll numbers haven't moved, no Republican senators have changed their principled positions — and every liberal special-interest group involved in the project must be starting to wonder about the wisdom of spending all that money for zero change."

In recent days, Ms. Collins and fellow Republican Sens. Mark Kirk of Illinois and Jerry Moran of Kansas have said they favor holding hearings. Mr. Stewart said that Mr. Moran subsequently noted that GOP leaders have ruled out a hearing.

Five Democratic House lawmakers from Illinois called on Mr. Kirk to back up his support for a hearing, saying his comments mean nothing unless he's willing to take on Mr. McConnell.

"As far as I'm concerned, this is just theater," said Rep. Robin Kelly. "Because Senator Kirk is running for office, he decided to be one of the actors. If he weren't running for office, he probably wouldn't have had the meeting [with Judge Garland], so it really calls into question his sincerity. This is just one of the things in a long line of disrespect that the president has been shown by the Republican Party."

'Monumental chutzpah'

Conservative activists say the White House is bluffing with phony optimism about the prospects for a confirmation hearing.

"For President Obama, the first president to have voted to filibuster a Supreme Court nominee, to claim he is not playing politics with the court takes monumental chutzpah," said Carrie Severino, chief counsel and policy director for the Judicial Crisis Network. "No amount of spin or gimmicks is going to change this. The White House's attempt to manufacture Republican disunity is engaging in wishful thinking and confusing courtesy with weakness."

The head of the conservative group FreedomWorks warned that Republican senators who agree to meet with Judge Garland are risking their careers.

"When Republican senators meet with President Obama's Supreme Court nominee, they are playing right into the hands of the White House and advancing President Obama's goal of getting a hearing," said FreedomWorks CEO Adam Brandon. "With a few exceptions, Senate Republicans came out strongly against the idea of an election-year confirmation to the Supreme Court. Most took it a step further by saying that they didn't see the point of even meeting with a nominee. Now, some are changing their tune. By foolishly agreeing to meet with Obama's nominee, Republicans are playing with fire, and they can't blame the conservative grass roots when they get burned."

Progressives point out that polls are consistently show that a majority of voters favor the Senate holding confirmation hearings for Judge Garland. Moreover, 73 percent of respondents in a CBS/New York Times poll and 77 percent in

a recent Monmouth University poll said the GOP is playing politics by blocking a hearing.

Democrats said those findings spell trouble for Republican incumbents in swing states such as Mr. Kirk, New Hampshire Sen. Kelly Ayotte and Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson. Pollster Geoff Garin, president of Hart Research, joined Mr. Schumer in a conference call Friday to review polling data. He said Republican incumbents running for re-election in battleground states "are defending an untenable position and are putting themselves in very substantial vulnerability" by refusing to hold hearings on Judge Garland.

"When they return to Washington from recess, they are going to return as a group of people who will be well aware that they are very much on the wrong side of public opinion," Mr. Garin said.

Democrats also noted that Mr. Obama's job-approval rating reached 53 percent last week in Gallup's daily tracking poll, the highest it has been in the poll in more than three years. They attribute it in part to voters siding with the president on the Supreme Court issue.

During the event at the University of Chicago, Mr. Obama will discuss "his fulfilling his constitutional responsibility and why the Senate needs to do its job as well," senior adviser Brian Deese said.

Liberal groups are planning events this week to pressure Republican senators in Ohio, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Iowa and Illinois.

The Next Supreme Court Pick Matters Less Than You Think

By David Cole

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

David Cole, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, is author of the new book "Engines of Liberty: The Power of Citizen Activists to Make Constitutional Law."

Liberals are understandably excited, and conservatives equally concerned, that the Supreme Court seat vacated by Justice Antonin Scalia's death may be filled by a Democratic president — with either Merrick Garland, President Obama's nominee, or Hillary Clinton's nominee, should she win the election. The court's ideological majority lies in the balance.

The conservatives have had a long run. While control of the presidency and both houses of Congress has changed hands multiple times over the past 40 years, the Supreme Court has been dominated by a consistent majority of conservative justices since the 1970s, even as some Republican appointees, such as David Souter and Harry A. Blackmun, proved to be liberal. The court is now evenly divided, with four liberal and four conservative justices. With a liberal majority in the offing, a whole new world of possibilities awaits.

Or does it? History suggests otherwise. The Supreme Court under Chief Justices Warren E. Burger, William H. Rehnquist and John G. Roberts Jr. has overruled relatively few liberal constitutional precedents. Despite strong invitations to do so, the court did not reverse *Roe v. Wade* (protecting the right to choose an abortion) or *Miranda v. Arizona* (requiring warnings and legal assistance in interrogations). It has not ended affirmative action or overturned decisions banning the public display of religious symbols. Even if Garland or some other Democratic nominee is confirmed, therefore, major changes in existing constitutional doctrine are unlikely. The force of precedent imposes significant limits on the court's ability to change direction, even when its personnel change.

Major transformations of constitutional law do occur, but they require much more than a new justice. They generally follow decades of persistent advocacy in a variety of forums, primarily outside the Supreme Court. The court is much more likely to recognize constitutional change than to generate it. And it tends to do so slowly, only after the ground of public opinion and state law has already shifted. Constitutional law changes incrementally, from the ground up, not suddenly, from the top down.

Brown v. Board of Education, which said segregated schools violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, came only after a decades-long campaign by civil rights lawyers and activists. The court first recognized sex discrimination as a violation of equal protection only after the women's movement had transformed understandings of women's roles in society more generally. While some have criticized it as premature, the decision in *Roe* to protect a woman's right to choose abortion similarly followed a political campaign for reproductive rights. The court's 2008 ruling that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to bear arms is attributable to three decades of concerted work by the National Rifle Association and its allies to develop and propagate the idea of a right to bear arms in other forums, including state legislatures, state courts, the political arena and the legal academy.

The same is true for the newest constitutional right — of gay men and lesbian couples to marry on the same terms as heterosexual couples. In 1972, the court unanimously ruled that a petition arguing that the Constitution requires recognition of same-sex marriage did not even present a serious legal question; it dismissed the petition with one line. Yet last year, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the court recognized a constitutional right to marriage equality. That remarkable shift cannot be explained by changed personnel. The court in 2015 was, if anything, more conservative than the court in 1972. Rather, one must look at the work that gay rights groups did in a wide variety of forums beyond the federal courts to change public opinion about the status of gay men and lesbians, and about the justice of their desire to marry.

The Supreme Court did not so much change constitutional law on marriage equality as acknowledge that it had changed.

Constitutional law will continue to develop in the post-Scalia era. But the changes will come more from the sustained work of committed citizens than from the appointment of a new justice. Over the course of our history, the true catalysts of constitutional evolution have been not the justices — although they obviously play a necessary part — but the people, working together through civil society to make their own shared vision of constitutional ideals into law. Constitutional law reflects what we as a society deem to be our most fundamental values, and those values evolve. But in the most important sense, the impetus for change comes from us, not from the men and women who serve as justices of the Supreme Court.

Read more about this topic:

Richard A. Posner: The Supreme Court is a political court. Republicans' actions are proof.

Dana Milbank: Senate Republicans have birthed new troubles for the Supreme Court

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Linda Hirshman: Why the next Supreme Court vacancy will favor liberals, no matter who retires

GOP Congress' Incomplete: Stalled Bills, No Court Nominee

By Mary Clare Jalonick

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) – Congress increasingly is being defined by what it's not doing this election year.

The Senate returns this week with a strong majority of Republicans saying no to any consideration of President Barack Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court. No hearings, no vote and, for some lawmakers, not even a meeting with federal appeals court Judge Merrick Garland.

Republicans, led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., insist that the decision on filling the court vacancy rests with the next president after voters have their say in November's election.

A bipartisan bill to aid Flint, Michigan, where the city's 100,000 residents are struggling with lead-contaminated water is being blocked by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, who wants to ensure that the money is paid for without adding to the deficit. The dispute over Flint has snagged a far-reaching measure on energy.

In the House, where lawmakers return from their break April 12, conservative opposition probably will make it impossible to pass a budget, in what would be a major embarrassment for Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis. A GOP proposal to aid debt-stricken Puerto Rico has drawn criticism

from House Democrats and conservatives, raising doubts about Congress' ability to resolve the issue.

The latest Gallup Poll shows public approval of Congress at an abysmal 13 percent. Yet, through a half-dozen state primaries, no incumbent lawmaker has lost.

A look at the issues in limbo in Congress:

THE FIGHT OVER GARLAND

Garland plans to meet with 11 senators in the week ahead, including two Republicans. Democrats are maintaining election-year pressure on the GOP for blocking the usual Senate committee hearings and vote on a high court nominee.

Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and John Boozman, R-Ark., are set to sit down with Garland on Tuesday. Collins is one of just two Republicans out of 54 who are open to hearings and a vote on Garland; Boozman is up for re-election this year. Eager to keep the fight in the news, Democrats say there might be 50 more Garland meetings with senators in the coming weeks, and they plan repeated Senate floor speeches on the issue.

Over the Senate's two-week recess, both sides pushed their messages back home, but Democrats were particularly aggressive as senators held news conferences and wrote newspaper columns. Swing-state Republicans facing re-election were top targets, including Sens. Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, Rob Portman of Ohio and Iowa's Chuck Grassley, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responsible for holding hearings on judicial nominees.

Garland has met with just one Republican: Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk. He is embroiled in a difficult re-election fight and has said the Senate should provide "rational, adult, open-minded consideration" of Garland, an Illinois native.

At least 15 GOP senators have said they are willing to meet Garland, though most oppose letting the confirmation process progress. Only Collins and Kirk are open to hearings and a vote. Under intense conservative pressure, Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas backtracked late last week, saying no to hearings and a vote after signaling support days earlier.

SPENDING

It's been years since Congress approved each of the annual appropriations bills – the 12 measures that fund the budgets of agencies and departments. The new normal is an all-encompassing bill at the end of the year. Republicans leaders such as McConnell want to get process back on track, and the Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to start the week of April 11.

It'll be a test for the Senate, and pitfalls await, including potential fights over immigration, environmental regulations, gun rights and display of the Confederate flag.

In the House, GOP leaders are still trying to win approval of a broader budget plan that's usually a precursor to action on the spending bills. Chances are iffy at best. It's

not clear what the path forward on the appropriations bills will be.

PUERTO RICO

House Republicans unveiled a plan to help Puerto Rico with its \$70 billion debt, but a draft bill by the chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, GOP Rep. Rob Bishop of Utah, was rejected by Democrats, GOP conservatives and Puerto Rican officials.

The proposal would create a five-person board designed to audit the territory's government and create fiscal plans and budget measures – steps Republicans say are necessary for Puerto Rico to get its economy back on track. The board would have the authority to enact the plan if the territory's governor and legislature failed to do so.

The draft would not give Puerto Rico the broad bankruptcy authority it has asked for, but would allow the oversight board to decide whether debt restructuring is necessary

The House Republican Study Committee, a group of around 170 conservatives, expressed concerns about the debt restructuring provisions. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and other Democrats said the oversight board would be too controlling.

Puerto Rico's government has defaulted on \$37 million in interest on bonds issued by Puerto Rico's Infrastructure Financing Authority, as well as nearly \$60 million in Public Finance Corporation bonds. The bonds are not protected by the U.S. territory's government. Gov. Alejandro Garcia Padilla has warned there is no money for future payments, including \$400 million due in May in bonds issued by the Government Development Bank.

Bishop said he will continue to work on the bill to gain consensus.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Advocates for a criminal justice overhaul are hoping Congress will move legislation in both chambers before the summer, though the effort has run into roadblocks in the Senate.

The GOP caucus is split over a bipartisan bill that would give judges the discretion to impose lesser sentences than federal mandatory minimums and eliminate mandatory life sentences for three-time, nonviolent drug offenders.

Some conservatives, including Arkansas' Tom Cotton and GOP presidential candidate Ted Cruz of Texas, say the bill could release violent offenders from prison. It's a charge that their GOP colleagues backing the bill strongly deny.

Senators are now rewriting parts of the bill, but even with the expected changes, it's unclear whether McConnell will choose to move forward.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

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Low Jobless Rate Juiced By Workers Who Settle For Part-time Gigs

By Carlos Torres

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

A slowly improving economy is pulling discouraged Americans into the workforce, although some are having to settle for part-time jobs for now.

That's the message from the March employment report issued by the Labor Department on Friday in Washington. Payrolls grew by 215,000 workers last month following a gain of 245,000 in February, according to employers surveyed by the government. The separate poll of households showed that the jobless rate ticked up to 5 percent from 4.9 percent as people streamed into the labor force looking for work, and not all were successful.

The gain in hiring shows that businesses remain confident in U.S. prospects even amid the slowdown in global growth and turmoil in financial markets that Federal Reserve Chair Janet L. Yellen said prompted policymakers to signal a slower pace of rate increases in 2016. The gradual approach in tightening monetary policy to allow the labor market to heat up further was reinforced by readings showing the world's largest economy still wasn't strong enough to provide more full-time work.

"This makes Yellen look smart," said Michael Feroli, chief U.S. economist at JPMorgan Chase & Co. in New York. "People are getting more confident in the labor market, and more people are coming back in." At the same time, the higher number of Americans working part-time for economic reasons shows there's still slack in the economy, "so it's kind of ammo for the go-slow crew."

The labor force participation rate, which indicates the share of working-age people who are employed or looking for work, rose to 63 percent, the highest since March 2014. The rate has climbed by 0.6 percentage points over the past six months, the biggest advance over a similar period since 1992.

Although it's being depressed by the retirement of baby boomers, there is scope for it to continue to keep climbing as more Americans believe the odds of them landing a job are improving. Participation sank to a four-decade low of 62.4 percent in September.

The details showed that some people entering the labor force were only able to find part-time employment. The number of Americans working part-time for economic reasons rose by 135,000 to 6.12 million, the most since August.

That number “is pretty volatile, but it moved in the wrong direction,” Feroli said.

In a speech before the Economic Club of New York on Tuesday, Yellen said she believed there was more slack in the labor market than indicated by the jobless rate, which is hovering near the level that officials say represents maximum employment.

“I am particularly thinking about abnormally high levels of involuntary part-time employment,” Yellen said. She added that there were also more discouraged workers “who could be brought into the labor market.”

Still, the share of the working-age population with a job — any job — is growing, reaching a seven-year high in March, according to the Labor Department’s data. And some of those who want it may be able to transition to full-time work if the Fed’s go-slow approach spurs faster growth.

“The Fed’s still going to proceed with caution,” said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody’s Analytics in West Chester, Pa., and the best forecaster of payrolls over the past two years, according to data compiled by Bloomberg News. “The Fed’s content letting the job market run hot for a while.”

And it probably needs to come to a more vigorous boil to sustain a pickup in wages, another positive aspect of Friday’s report. Hourly earnings on average climbed 0.3 percent in March from the prior month, more than forecast, after a 0.1 percent drop in February. Pay increased 2.3 percent from a year earlier, remaining within the general range seen over the past three years.

Job growth in higher-paying industries would go a long way toward driving up wages. Almost half of the March job growth, about 90,000 positions, occurred at retailers and leisure and hospitality businesses such as restaurants. Construction payrolls climbed by the most in three months, helping remove some of the sting from the biggest decline in factory employment since December 2009.

Another report Friday showed that the hemorrhaging in jobs at the nation’s producers over the past two months may soon end. The Institute for Supply Management said its manufacturing gauge expanded in March for the first time in seven months, fueled by the strongest reading on new orders since November 2014.

— Bloomberg News

Investors Turn More Negative On Dollar

By Ira Iosebashvili

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Republicans On FEC Suggest They May Scrutinize Mystery Corporate Donors

By Matea Gold

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

The three Republican appointees on the divided Federal Election Commission have indicated that political donors who give through private companies solely to shield their identities can be sanctioned, signaling that the agency may scrutinize a rash of “pop-up” corporations giving large sums to super PACs.

Their stance suggests the potential for movement by the polarized six-person panel, where a sense of stasis has been the norm. Democratic commissioners, however, reacted with skepticism, saying their GOP colleagues have until now delayed and actively blocked examination of such cases.

But Lee Goodman, one of the Republican commissioners, said in an interview that contributors seeking to mask themselves through a privately held company or limited-liability corporation should think twice.

“Six commissioners have now taken the position that closely held LLCs can violate the law under certain circumstances when they make contributions to super PACs,” he said. “Now everyone should be on notice.”

“If you funnel money through an LLC entity for the purpose of making a political contribution and avoiding disclosure of yourself, that is an abuse of the LLC vehicle,” Goodman added.

The 2016 elections have seen a proliferation of mysterious corporate donations, with super PACs collecting millions from opaque and hard-to-trace entities, as The Washington Post reported last month.

Advocates for stricter enforcement of campaign finance rules have complained that the FEC is failing to check the use of such vehicles, a complaint echoed by the Democrats on the panel.

Earlier this year, the three GOP members denied a recommendation by the FEC’s general counsel to investigate several donations made during the 2012 elections in which contributors allegedly hid behind “ghost corporations.”

The Republican commissioners explained their reasoning in a 15-page statement released Friday evening. Chairman Matthew Petersen, Commissioner Caroline Hunter and Goodman wrote that pursuing the cases would have been “manifestly unfair” because the FEC had not provided “adequate notice” of how it planned to apply to corporations a longtime federal law banning a donor from giving money in the name of another person or entity.

Direct corporate political spending was not permissible until the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision. More than six years later, the agency has yet to issue new rules regarding the decision.

While the commissioners have not agreed to pursue new regulations, Goodman said he and the other Republicans purposefully made it clear in their statement how they will interpret the law going forward.

"The proper focus will be on whether funds were intentionally funneled through a closely held corporation or corporate LLC for the purpose of making a contribution that evades the Act's reporting requirements," the three commissioners wrote. "If they were, then the true source of the funds is the person who funneled them through the corporate entity for this purpose."

Republican election law attorney Jason Torchinsky said the language was striking.

"The FEC made clear that pop-up LLCs can no longer be used for super PAC contributions," he said. "Going forward, any such pop-up LLCs run a real risk of civil enforcement."

Democratic campaign finance lawyer Marc Elias agreed.

"I don't think the law was as uncertain as they suggested, but it is good news that it appears all six commissioners will now enforce this law going forward," he said.

It remains to be seen whether the panel will authorize an investigation into one of the complaints lodged this cycle against mystery corporate donors — and if it does, whether the commissioners can agree on a circumstance in which a corporate donation violated the straw-donor ban.

In their separate statements filed in response to the 2012 cases, the Republicans and Democrats laid out very different views of when such a contribution would evade disclosure, with the GOP offering a much narrower interpretation.

Commissioner Ann Ravel, one of the Democrats on the panel, said she is not convinced that the Republicans will ultimately support investigations of donations by ghost corporations. Among the 2012 matters that they refused to pursue, she noted, was one in which a donor acknowledged that he gave through a newly formed LLC solely to hide his identity.

The case involved Edward Conard, a friend and former business partner of 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney. Conard admitted that he set up an LLC in Delaware so he could use it to make a \$1 million donation to a pro-Romney super PAC without revealing his identity, saying he was worried that being linked to such a large contribution could jeopardize the safety of his family. In a statement to the FEC, an attorney for Conard described the Delaware LLC as "a vehicle for one man's one-time political donation."

"I don't see any other circumstance that would be quite as clear," Ravel said. "I think they are just trying to give some explanation for their failure to act. If they wouldn't act in these cases, I think it's highly unlikely they would in any case."

Ravel disagreed with the assertion by the GOP commissioners that before the FEC could pursue such cases, it had to first provide notice that the straw donor ban applies to corporate contributions.

"The law is really clear that you cannot use an entity, whatever it is, solely for the purpose of hiding your identity," she said.

Democratic Commissioner Ellen Weintraub said the fact that it took more than three years for the FEC to address the complaints filed in 2012 sends a message the agency is not on the job.

"When the law is plainly violated and the commission just sits on it, then people assume there is not going to be any consequence for violating the law," she said.

Sanders And Clinton Commit To Different New York Debate Dates

By Ben Brody

[Bloomberg Politics](#), April 3, 2016

The debate over a New York debate continues.

Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton told ABC News on Sunday she would attend a debate hosted by the network April 15, four days before the New York primary. The campaign of Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, said in a news release shortly afterward that the Vermont senator had "accepted an invitation from NBC News for a Sunday night prime-time debate on April 10."

The differing commitments are the latest round in an ongoing fight between the campaigns over whether and when the candidates will debate in the delegate-rich Empire State.

Sanders spokesman Michael Briggs said in Sunday's statement the Clinton campaign "disingenuously announced that it had agreed to a debate on another day when it knew very well that Sen. Sanders already had locked in a park permit for a major rally in New York City."

The Clinton campaign did not immediately return request for comment, but spokesman Brian Fallon wrote on Twitter Saturday that Sanders hadn't accepted a debate on the 14th or 15th because they would "rather have excuse to falsely attack Clinton to get headlines."

In appearances on Sunday, both candidates said they believed they would make the debate happen.

Clinton Says FBI Hasn't Reached Out For An Interview On E-Mails

By Ros Krasny

[Bloomberg Politics](#), April 3, 2016

Hillary Clinton said she's not worried that an FBI investigation into her e-mail practices as U.S. secretary of state will linger through the Democratic convention in July and cloud her presidential aspirations.

"No, I'm not. Because I don't think anything inappropriate was done," Clinton said in an interview broadcast Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "And so I have to let them decide how to resolve their security inquiry, but I'm not at all worried about it."

The former first lady said the FBI hadn't reached out to her for an interview: "They haven't. But, you know, back in August, we made clear that I'm happy to answer any questions that anybody might have. And I stand by that."

Democratic competitor Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont has chipped away at Clinton's wide lead in Democratic delegates with recent victories in western state contests, including landslide wins last weekend in Washington state, Hawaii and Alaska.

Clinton said a campaign advertisement now running in New York, which assails Republican positions on immigration, wasn't a sign that she assumes the Democratic nomination is assured and that she's focused entirely on November's general election.

"I know that I still have work to do to win the nomination, and I'm going to keep reaching out to every voter, everywhere, in these remaining contests," Clinton said.

Clinton's campaign continues to squabble with Sanders' about the potential timing for a debate in New York ahead of that state's delegate-heavy primary on April 19.

"I'm confident that there will be" a debate, Clinton said. "But I'm not the one negotiating it."

Clinton: No FBI Word On Email Probe

By Connor O'Brien

[Politico](#), April 3, 2016

Hillary Clinton said Sunday the FBI has not yet reached out to her in its investigation into her private email server and some classified emails — and again vowed to fully cooperate.

"No, no they haven't," the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination said on NBC's "Meet the Press" when asked if the FBI had sought to interview her.

"Back in August, we made clear that I'm happy to answer any questions that anybody might have, and I stand by that," she said.

Clinton also defended her use of a private email server when she was secretary of state, saying she had since made her emails public.

"It's just a wrong set of assertions and conclusions," Clinton said about complaints she's too secretive.

"I have said repeatedly it was not the best choice. It was a mistake," she said. "But I think that anybody who's actually looked at this has concluded that I've now put out all of my emails."

Clinton also said her campaign and that of her rival, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, were still discussing scheduling another debate that Sanders has been pushing for before the New York's Democratic presidential primary.

"We've offered dates and we've done it over the last several weeks," Clinton said, adding her campaign had proposed Thursday, April 14, and Sanders Sunday, April 17, two days before the primary.

Trump Calls On Kasich To Quit Race: 'He's Taking My Votes'

By Jill Colvin and Josh Lederman

[McClatchy](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump on Sunday called for John Kasich to drop out of the Republican presidential race, arguing that the Ohio governor shouldn't be allowed to continue accumulating delegates if he has no chance of being the party's nominee.

Working to recover his edge after a difficult week, Trump said it wasn't fair for Kasich, the winner of only his home state so far, to continue his campaign. He suggested instead that Kasich, who has pledged to make it to the summer convention, follow the example of Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush — candidates who quit after lagging behind.

"Honestly, Kasich should not be allowed to run," Trump told reporters at Miss Katie's Diner in Milwaukee, where he stopped for breakfast. The state holds its presidential primaries Tuesday.

Trump said he had relayed his concerns to Republican National Committee officials at a meeting in Washington this past week. He added that Kasich could ask to be considered at the GOP convention in Cleveland in July even without competing in the remaining nominating contests.

"He doesn't have to run and take my votes," he said.

Kasich's campaign tried to flip the script, contending that neither Trump nor Texas Sen. Ted Cruz would have enough delegates to win the nomination outright going into the July convention in Cleveland.

"Since he thinks it's such a good idea, we look forward to Trump dropping out before the convention," said Kasich spokesman Chris Schrimpf.

Kasich, in an earlier interview with ABC's "This Week," said he was expecting an "open convention" where delegates would look to him because of his experience in Congress and the state level.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton told NBC's "Meet the Press" that she had yet to receive a request from the FBI for an interview regarding the private email system she used as secretary of state, an issue dogging her campaign.

During a series of stops at Brooklyn church services, she got in a dig at her Democratic opponent, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who has identified as an independent for most of his career.

"I know we have to have a Democrat succeed Barack Obama," Clinton said.

Both Clinton and Sanders were looking ahead to the consequential April 19 primary in New York, where Sanders was born and Clinton served as senator. Clinton told ABC News she planned to attend a debate the network hopes to hold in New York on April 15, and Sanders said he expected to reach agreement on the debate as well.

Sanders fired up a crowd in Wausau, hoping to continue his string of recent campaign victories even as Clinton maintains a sizable lead among delegates.

Trump's call for Kasich to bow out came as Republican concerns grew about the prospect of convention chaos if Trump fails to lock up his party's nomination — or even if he does.

Behind Cruz in the polls in Wisconsin, Trump faces the prospect that a loss Tuesday will raise further doubts that he can net the needed delegates, making it far easier for his party to oust him in a floor fight at the convention.

Cruz, Trump's closest challenger, has only a small chance to overtake him in the delegate hunt before the convention. He spent his afternoon rallying supporters in Wisconsin in an event heavy with references to the state's beloved Green Bay Packers.

Kasich has acknowledged he cannot catch up in the delegate race, leaving a contested convention his only path to victory. He has faced calls in the past to step aside, but those nudges became less frequent following his decisive victory last month in his home state.

Still, Kasich suggested that a contested convention would not involve the chaos that party leaders fear. He told ABC that a contested convention will be "so much fun."

"Kids will spend less time focusing on Bieber and Kardashian and more time focusing on how we elect presidents," Kasich said. "It will be so cool."

Republicans fear an unseemly internal fight would damage the party in November's general election, and Trump isn't ruling out the possibility that if he's not the nominee, he could run as an independent, making it that much harder for the GOP to retake the White House.

Such talk has "consequences," said GOP Chairman Reince Priebus, though he tried to quell the prospect of a convention fight. He told ABC that the process will be clear and open, with cameras there "at every step of the way."

Frustration with the GOP field has stoked calls in some Republican corners for the party to use a contested convention to pick someone not even on the ballot. Priebus acknowledged that was a remote possibility, but he said he believed his party's candidate would be "someone who's running."

Working to right his campaign after a rough patch, Trump has found himself on the defensive, struggling to explain away controversies over abortion, nuclear weapons and his campaign manager.

"Was this my best week? I guess not," Trump said on "Fox News Sunday."

Yet as he campaigned in Milwaukee, Trump returned to the confident bravado his supporters have come to expect. Though he acknowledged his recent missteps "might" have cost him some support from female voters, he predicted "great success" on Tuesday after greeting diners at Miss Katie's.

"I think this has the feel of a victory," he told reporters, as a plate of untouched fried eggs and bacon grew cold.

In Egypt, a former Trump rival tried to reassure an Arab world wary of a possible Trump presidency. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham said Congress would continue to play a primary role in foreign policy, "regardless of what Mr. Trump says or does."

"The Congress is going to be around no matter who is president," Graham told reporters after meeting with Egypt's leader. Trump has called for banning Muslim immigration to the United States.

On the delegate front, North Dakota Republicans at their state convention were set to select 25 of their 28 national delegates on Sunday. North Dakota isn't holding a primary or caucus in the 2016 race. Nevada Democrats held county conventions on Saturday, leading up to a final determination of delegates at a statewide convention in May. Clinton turned backed a challenge from Sanders in the state's caucuses in February.

Kasich Says An Open Convention Would Be 'So Cool'

By Connor O'Brien

[Politico](#), April 3, 2016

Ohio Gov. John Kasich sees the prospect of a contested Republican National Convention as "so cool," contending he'd be a strong pick if there were an open contest this summer in Cleveland.

"It's going to be so much fun," Kasich said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

"Kids will spend less time focusing on [Justin] Bieber and [Kim] Kardashian and more time focusing on how we elect presidents," he said. "It'll be so cool."

Kasich is now in third place, far behind New York real estate mogul Donald Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in the race for the 1,237 delegates needed to secure the GOP presidential nomination and would need a contested convention to win.

So far, Kasich has won only his home state of Ohio. But in an open convention, he predicted delegates would flock to him for his experience and electability.

"There's two strong things I have going for me. Number one, I beat Hillary Clinton in virtually every poll," Kasich said. "And, secondly, look at the record...I believe that a convention

would look at somebody like me and that why I think I'm going to be the nominee."

Battleground Wisconsin: A Trump Loss To Cruz Could Reshape GOP Race

By Philip Rucker And Dan Balz

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

MILWAUKEE — Wisconsin has become an unexpected battleground for Donald Trump and the conglomeration of forces desperately aligning against him, with Tuesday's primary emerging as a key moment that could reshape the Republican nominating contest both mathematically and psychologically.

Ted Cruz — who has tried to unite conservative activists, talk-radio personalities and the party establishment — stands poised to take some air out of the Trump balloon.

Bleeding from two weeks of self-inflicted wounds and behind in the polls here, Trump scrambled over the weekend to make up ground here he has lost to the Texas senator.

On Sunday, the New York billionaire predicted he would surprise critics. He drew a parallel to his New Hampshire victory in February following a disappointing defeat the week before in the Iowa caucuses — although he was never behind in New Hampshire as he is here.

"We're having unbelievable response in Wisconsin," Trump said during a visit to a Milwaukee diner. "And it feels very much like New Hampshire to me, where we started off where, you know, Trump wasn't going to win New Hampshire, and then all of a sudden, we win in a landslide."

A defeat for Trump would be an embarrassing setback for the front-runner — not just because of the 42 delegates at stake, but because it would demonstrate weakness in a place where he should be strong. The state's blue-collar demographics, along with party rules allowing independent voters to cast ballots in the primary, have been expected to work in his favor.

A decisive loss also would lessen his chance of amassing the 1,237 delegates needed to secure the nomination outright. Failure to do so would force an open convention in Cleveland in July.

"Wisconsin has always been a barometer state," said former governor Tommy Thompson, a supporter of Ohio Gov. John Kasich. "What you're seeing is that The Donald, who has been moving ahead all across the country, has hit a logjam or a brick wall in Wisconsin."

A fish fry for nearly 1,000 Republican activists inside Milwaukee's timeworn American Serb Hall on Friday night told the story.

The real estate mogul who has been bulldozing the field did not show up. In his place, Trump sent Sarah Palin, once a deity on the right who on this night was exposed as a mere mortal. As she testified to "the awesome awakening" brought

by "the Trump Train," Republicans in the crowd rolled their eyes. They checked their phones. There were plenty of murmurs, even some laughs.

Palin got it. Wrapping up her speech, she thanked the Wisconsinites for "allowing me to kind of crash your fish fry."

When Cruz took the stage a few minutes later, the reception was dramatically different. He declared, "Nominating Donald Trump is a train wreck" — and, pausing for effect, added, "That's actually not fair to train wrecks." The crowd responded with roaring adulation.

Cruz has sought to exploit Trump's vulnerabilities with women voters following a string of controversies. He staged an event in Madison last week that he called "a celebration of strong women." The senator sat in a plush arm chair and listened as wife Heidi, mother Eleanor and supporter Carly Fiorina shared stories about him as a loving father, loyal husband and champion for women everywhere.

Campaigning Sunday in Green Bay with a parade of endorsers, Cruz said, "Wisconsin is a battleground. . . . The entire country is looking to this state Tuesday night."

Recent polls in Wisconsin show Trump trailing Cruz — two polls by 10 points, others by single digits — with Kasich running third. The senator has drawn energy, and crucial grass-roots support, after winning the endorsement of Gov. Scott Walker, who is deeply popular among Wisconsin Republicans.

Trump redrew his schedule to devote the final days to barnstorming the state — even missing his new grandson's bir — in an apparent effort to catch Cruz.

Trump's campaign has been frustrated in recent weeks as Cruz has seemed to outmaneuver him in some aspects of the delegate race. Cruz's campaign has begun leveraging arcane party rules to squeeze additional delegates, even in states won by Trump. The front-runner sees a win in Wisconsin as a way to avert a contested convention.

"I really want to win Wisconsin because if we can win Wisconsin we're going to put all this stupidity away," Trump said at a rally last week in Janesville.

Charlie Black, a veteran Republican strategist who is now part of Kasich's team, said of a possible Trump loss in Wisconsin, "I think it's a big deal because the whole question is can he get to the 1,237. At the rate he's going, he won't. I think he's going to lose Wisconsin and not get very many delegates there."

What makes Tuesday's balloting important is that Wisconsin's electorate plays more to Trump's strength than to Cruz's. The percentages of evangelical Christians or Republicans who call themselves "very conservative" are smaller here than in states where Cruz has done best.

Beyond that, Wisconsin's economy long has had a strong manufacturing base and Trump has drawn significant support all year from white, working-class voters with forceful

denunciations of free-trade deals that have led corporations to shift jobs overseas.

Cruz's allies hope a win in Wisconsin could transform the way the Texan's candidacy is viewed nationally.

"This is a signature win in a blue-collar state . . . that's outside of the South and the West," said Keith Gilkes, a longtime Walker adviser. "It demonstrates his ability to coalesce a bigger, broader coalition. That's the first time he's done that."

Former House speaker Newt Gingrich offers a dissenting view about the potential significance of Tuesday's results, in part because Cruz's victory is now assumed. "I don't think much unless the result turns out very, very different than we think it will be," said Gingrich, who has informally advised Trump. "Cruz should win statewide and half the congressional districts. If he were to sweep as Trump did in South Carolina or Arizona, that would be a bigger thing."

What also makes Wisconsin important is that it is the only contest on Tuesday. That guarantees outsized attention to the results and to the analysis that follows — the sort of singular focus usually reserved for early-voting states such as Iowa and New Hampshire.

Trump will have to live with the loss longer than in the past, with no opportunity to recoup until the New York primary April 19. Trump is the heavy favorite in his home state. A CBS News poll released Sunday showed Trump leading in New York with 52 percent, followed by Cruz at 21 percent and Kasich at 20 percent.

"He will have to show what all winning candidates show, which is resiliency in the face of adversity," GOP strategist Steve Schmidt said.

Gingrich said that Wisconsin could be a wake-up call for Trump that was badly needed. "It might be good that they've had to worry about Wisconsin," he said.

Cruz's campaign sees Wisconsin as potential validation that he has emerged as the clear and perhaps only alternative to Trump. "I think that can have a dramatic impact on the race," Cruz campaign manager Jeff Roe said.

Cruz's team believes the candidate could absorb a loss in New York and recover elsewhere in upcoming contests, with a final June showdown in delegate-rich California.

But he will have to fend with Kasich as well as with Trump. Kasich's team sees the upcoming calendar as more favorable to the Ohio governor than to Cruz. His advisers expect to win a decent number of delegates in New York and are putting significant effort into Pennsylvania, where Kasich grew up. They see opportunities as well in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Delaware.

"The elongated calendar works to our benefit," said John Weaver, Kasich's chief strategist. "It doesn't seem to do so much for Mr. Trump. Probably his advisers would like to go on a cruise with no WiFi."

Jose A. DelReal in Milwaukee and Sean Sullivan in Green Bay, Wis., contributed to this report.

Donald Trump Faces Great Test Against Wisconsin's Conservative Political Network

Badger State's voter-turnout history could bode well for Republican rival Ted Cruz

By Reid J. Epstein

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Trump Vs. Scott Walker

Wisconsin is doing well following conservative economic reforms.

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 3, 2016

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This Time It Really Is The End Of Trump. Really.

By E.j. Dionne Jr.

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

It's time to go back to where we began: not only that Donald Trump will lose the Republican presidential nomination, but also that he could be so weakened by the end of the primaries that his party will not even have to worry about choosing someone else.

I feel your skepticism. Hasn't Trump so far defied all predictions of his demise? Absolutely. Hasn't every claim that "now he's gone too far" been wrong? Of course.

Let's be honest about journalists: We find a lot of ways of being wrong.

One trap is "presentism," the idea that whatever is happening now will keep happening. And it is, indeed, easy to project Trump's impending doom after his most miserable week yet.

He responded rather ineffectually to criticisms from Wisconsin conservative talk show host Charlie Sykes. His campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, was charged with battery. Trump reacted by aggressively attacking the credibility of conservative reporter Michelle Fields, the woman Lewandowski is accused of hurting. The front-runner thus fed the perception that he's a misogynist.

For good measure, Trump flip-flopped on whether women should be legally punished for having an abortion if the procedure were banned, underscoring that he really hasn't thought very much about the positions he is taking or even what he says from moment to moment.

But the killer news for the man who values winning above everything else is that he has dropped well behind Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.) in the polls in Wisconsin, which holds its primary on Tuesday. A loss there, particularly a big one,

would greatly complicate Trump's already difficult path to a delegate majority of 1,237.

You could look at the week as an aberration that Trump, the magician, will somehow surmount. In fact, these episodes tumbling one upon the other ratify what Trump skeptics said all along: that he is utterly unprepared to be a serious candidate, let alone president of the United States; that an endless stream of insults against all who get in his way wears thin over time; that he is winging it and stubbornly refusing to do the homework the enterprise he's engaged in requires; and that trashing ethnic and religious minorities can win you a fair number of votes but not, thank God, a majority of Americans.

The always instructive Yogi Berra explained the New York Yankees' loss of the 1960 World Series to the Pittsburgh Pirates by saying: "We made too many wrong mistakes." In the case of Trump, journalists are so worried about their old mistake of underestimating the man's staying power that they now risk making the wrong mistake of missing his fall.

Why does this matter to anyone except pundits? First, Trump's troubles threaten to go beyond Wisconsin. He could now lose in other big states that vote next, including Pennsylvania, California, New Jersey and possibly even his home state of New York. If this happens, it will be far easier for the Republican Party bosses (such as they are these days) to deny him the nomination. Trump will come to look less like the rank-and-file Republican favorite and more like a flash in the pan.

Second, Democrats Hillary Clinton or Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) would lose their ideal opponent. From their point of view, Trump's collapse may come too early. It's true that if the very right-wing Cruz were the Republican nominee instead of Trump, the Democratic winner — it's still likely to be Clinton, despite Sanders's current surge — would be favored.

But an utter Trump implosion might free the Cleveland convention to turn to someone entirely outside the current crop of candidates, someone unsullied by the ugly and vulgar GOP primary campaign. A sinking Trump would have far less power to resist such an outcome. Democrats need to prepare now for the strong possibility that they will not be lucky enough to run against The Donald.

Most importantly, journalists need to remember that ratings and page views are not the same as votes and that Americans may love circuses but ultimately want elections to be more than Barnum & Bailey productions. Trump has entranced the media and ignited a minority of Republican primary voters. He has never, ever won over anything close to a majority of the American electorate. We demean ourselves as a people if we think that Trumpism is the wave of the future.

Journalists and citizens alike should cultivate, not resist, their most honorable instincts. The instinct that Americans

would never choose as their president a clownish peddler of racial and religious stereotypes who made everything up as he went along was right from the start.

Read more from E.J. Dionne's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

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Danielle Allen: Donald Trump's 'silent majority' doesn't exist

The Post's View: We met with Donald Trump. Electing him will still be a radical risk.

An Argument Against The 'magical Realism' Of The #neverTrump Crowd

By Chris Cillizza

[Washington Post](#), April 3, 2016

Establishment Republicans can barely contain their excitement after the events of the last seven days.

Donald Trump's campaign manager Corey Lewandowski was charged with battery in Florida for an incident in which he grabbed a reporter — and then denied doing so. Then Trump spent 48 hours defending Lewandowski and insisting the reporter had made up her story. Trump followed that political car wreck with another one — telling MSNBC's Chris Matthews that if abortion was ever banned, women who had the procedure should be punished. He spent the next 72 hours trying to get out from under that mistake, taking a series of confusing positions in the process.

Amid all of Trump's problems came even more good news for the establishment: Two polls in advance of Wisconsin's Tuesday primary showed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz with a double digit lead over Trump in the state. And, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker even endorsed Cruz.

For the #neverTrump movement, it was a banner week. But, what will it get them?

Almost certainly Cruz, the man who began this campaign as the candidate the Republican establishment would do anything to keep from the nomination. And, not just that: Someone who even the most dyed-in-the-wool Republican would be hard-pressed to argue could win 64 more electoral votes than Mitt Romney did when he lost the 2012 presidential race. (Romney got 206 electoral votes; you need 270 to be president.)

Asked to dream up a best-case scenario for the broader Republican party coming out of the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in mid-July, longtime GOP strategist Mike Murphy offered this one up: "Somebody other than Trump, Cruz or [conservative radio talk show host] Mark Levin as the nominee." But, Murphy quickly added: "I don't see a path."

Murphy is in what I would describe as the realistic wing of the Republican party when it comes to Trump, Cruz and the national convention. That wing acknowledges that their

best case scenario is a bad scenario — nominating a too-conservative Cruz and beginning the general election at a clear disadvantage to Hillary Clinton in the electoral college. Murphy and his brethren believe the only hope for the GOP in 2016 is to preserve majorities in the Senate and the House, something they believe Cruz might allow them to do whereas Trump would not.

But, Murphy and his realism wing are not the dominant force in the GOP establishment at the moment. That position is held by a group I call the magical realism crowd— with apologies to Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

The belief in that group is that even if Trump and Cruz goes into the Cleveland convention with the most and second-most delegates, respectively, magically a more electable and establishment-friendly alternative will emerge and save the party from itself.

The names floated by the magical realism crowd — John Kasich, Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan — all would likely, on paper at least, be stronger general election candidates than Trump or Cruz. But, so would, on paper again, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Chris Christie — all of whom wound up having more support among donors and establishment types than actual voters.

The idea that delegates on the convention floor — people who are, by and large, quite conservative and are accurately described as the base of the party — would throw over not only the top delegate getter (Trump) but also the person who got the second most delegates (Cruz) is decidedly implausible given what we know about the state of the GOP today.

Peter Hart, a veteran Democratic pollster, recently conducted a focus group in St. Louis comprised of Republican voters — with the aim of understanding the Trump phenomenon and its durability. One of his big takeaways? “A brokered convention would likely backfire.”

“Republicans and Republican-leaning independents remain willing to join together in support of whoever receives the most votes,” Hart concluded in a memo reflecting on the results of the focus group. “If Trump is that person, yet fails to receive the nomination through a brokered convention, then these voters predict that their reaction would be hostile and harsh. This is true not only for Trump voters but also many Cruz supporters.”

In an election wholly defined by the Republican base’s dislike and distrust for the party’s leaders, how can you realistically expect that same base to capitulate to an establishment-favorite candidate who may have not even competed in the primary and caucus process?

You can’t. Or, at least, you shouldn’t. Magical realism in politics is a dangerous thing — it has just enough truth in it to be recognizable but not enough to make it actually doable.

Polls Show GOP Split In Upcoming Primaries

By Kyle Balluck

[The Hill](#), April 3, 2016

Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz leads rival Donald Trump by 6 percentage points in Wisconsin ahead of voting on Tuesday, according to a new CBS News Battleground Tracker poll released Sunday morning.

The Texas senator has the support of 43 percent of likely GOP voters in Wisconsin, compared to Trump’s 37 percent. Ohio Gov. John Kasich has 17 percent.

Trump has a dominant 31-point lead, however, in his home state of New York ahead of its April primary, according to the new poll. The real estate mogul leads Cruz 52 to 21 percent. Kasich has 20 percent.

Trump also holds a significant lead in Pennsylvania before voters there go to the polls later this month, pollsters found.

The billionaire has 47 percent in the Keystone State, compared to 29 percent for Cruz and 20 percent for Kasich.

Poll: Republicans Divided Over Donald Trump, Ted Cruz As April Primaries Loom

[CBS News](#), April 3, 2016

Ted Cruz has the lead in Wisconsin as its primary nears, up 43 percent to 37 percent over Donald Trump in an electorate that plays to Cruz’s strengths, where Republicans are apt to call themselves “very” conservative and Cruz seems poised to take advantage.

He dominates among the voters looking for the most “consistent conservative” as their next nominee over other attributes, taking eight in ten of them.

The endorsement of Republican Gov. Scott Walker has been a bit of a boost as well, with Republicans more likely to say it helped Cruz more than hurt.

In Trump’s home state of New York, however, Trump has a dominant lead over the field, 52 percent to 21 percent for Cruz and 20 percent for Kasich. The billionaire leads by wide margins as best to handle multiple issues including terrorism, bringing back jobs, and the ability to defeat Hillary Clinton if she is the Democratic nominee.

And in Pennsylvania, coming up at the end of April, Trump also enjoys a strong lead at 47 percent while Cruz and Kasich are well back at 29 percent and 22 percent respectively.

All these contests, in particular Wisconsin’s, highlight the divisions among voters in the Republican party. Many of Trump’s voters are not only strong supporters, but say they are Republicans who have been interested in this primary mainly because of Trump. On the other side, most Wisconsin voters who are not backing Trump would like to see the party try to stop the businessman at the convention, even if Trump continues to win primaries.

Voters for either Trump or Cruz would neither be enthusiastic nor satisfied if their opponent ultimately ends up as the nominee. And John Kasich's voters in New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin would not be satisfied with either Trump or Cruz as well.

Republicans in all three say their top priority in the next president is to find the "strongest leader," followed in New York and Pennsylvania by someone who can "shake up the system," while Wisconsin voters are more apt to emphasize that conservatism. Nowhere are voters prioritizing experience on policy issues; that ranks lowest on the list in all three states.

And in all these states, as Republicans consistently have in previous primaries, most voters say they feel they've been betrayed by the Republican party.

There isn't a lot of evidence that Donald Trump's most recent controversies have hurt him, at least in terms of costing him supporters, though it may be limiting his ability to convert new supporters. Donald Trump's own supporters – as well as a large majority of all voters in these states – feel that Trump can sometimes go too far in the things he says. They are voting for him anyway. And a majority of voters, albeit a smaller one, feels the same about Ted Cruz in these states.

No Republican candidate, in any of these states, finds a majority of voters feeling their views have improved.

On the Democratic side, Bernie Sanders has a very narrow lead in Wisconsin, up 49 percent to 47 percent over Hillary Clinton. In New York Clinton leads Sanders by ten points, 53 percent to 43 percent.

Wisconsin Democrats by a wide margin would like to see the next president follow more progressive policies than President Obama, and are more inclined to believe that trade takes away U.S. jobs, both sentiments that appear to be helping Sanders, even as he trails Clinton on the measure of being prepared to be president.

Cruz Revives Winning Iowa Strategy For Wisconsin

The Texan's campaign is a near mirror image of the one that dealt Donald Trump his most stinging defeat.

By Shane Goldmacher And Katie Glueck

[Politico](#), April 3, 2016

ASHWAUBENON, Wis. — The similarities between neighboring Iowa and Wisconsin were supposed to be Scott Walker's secret weapon in his 2016 campaign. Now they are proving to be Ted Cruz's.

As Cruz seeks a watershed defeat over Donald Trump in Wisconsin on Tuesday to reset the Republican race, on the heels of their scramble for delegates in North Dakota over the weekend, the Texas senator is rerunning the same Iowa playbook that dealt Trump his worst loss of the cycle.

Just as in Iowa, Cruz arrived in Wisconsin before Trump, has worked it harder and stayed for longer. He's delivered speeches at rallies across the state, shook hands at a sandwich shop, fought for votes at a fish fry and promised to bring back American jobs at a factory in Oshkosh.

Cruz has opened a "Camp Cruz" to provide free housing for volunteers who make the trek to the voter-rich Milwaukee region, as he did in Des Moines; he's again slammed Trump for refusing to debate him, and has tried to fend off a third candidate (then Marco Rubio; now John Kasich) from serving as nothing more than a spoiler.

The parallels run deeper. Cruz has the backing of one of the state's leading right-wing talk radio hosts (Charlie Sykes in Wisconsin; Steve Deace in Iowa), one of the state's leading social conservative groups (Wisconsin Family Action PAC now; The Family Leader in Iowa), and another extensive and deeply organized grassroots network fueled by county chairs blanketing the state and a long list of supportive faith leaders. He spent Saturday night here in Ashwaubenon, screening a Christian film — just as he did in West Des Moines last fall.

"I am hoping for a similar outcome," laughed Iowa Rep. Steve King, who campaigned across Iowa with Cruz and now serves as his national campaign co-chairman.

Polls show Cruz in a stronger position in Wisconsin than they ever did in Iowa, where he consistently trailed Trump in the lead-up to the caucuses. Two polls in the final week have Cruz opening as much as a 10-point lead over Trump. A margin that wide on Election Day would likely deliver nearly all of Wisconsin's coveted 42 delegates to Cruz.

In fact, the biggest differences between Iowa and Wisconsin only appear to benefit Cruz. Then, he was under fire from the political establishment — from the popular Republican governor there (Terry Branstad) to national leaders like Bob Dole. Now, Cruz has the backing of Wisconsin's popular governor, featuring former rival Scott Walker in one of his closing TV ads, as well as support from key figures in the state legislature, including the majority leader and the Assembly speaker, both of whom were previously supporting Marco Rubio. National leaders like Mitt Romney and Jeb Bush are also rallying behind him.

As he took the stage at a fish fry dinner in Milwaukee Friday night, Cruz hugged Walker after the governor warmly introduced him as a "constitutional conservative" who could shake up Washington and win in November.

"I am so humbled, so honored to be standing here with Gov. Walker," Cruz said. "Scott, thank you for your friendship."

The moment was a jarring contrast with the final weeks before Iowa, when Branstad openly called for Cruz's defeat over his commitment to phasing out federal ethanol subsidies. This time around it's Trump whom the political

establishment detests. Local talk radio hosts have pilloried the front-runner for denigrating Walker when he was still in the race and in recent days.

"When Donald Trump comes into Wisconsin, knows nothing about our state, trashes all the work we've done, trashes our governor, trashes our party, we take it personally," said Vicki McKenna, another prominent conservative radio host. "It's just spectacularly stupid," she said.

Cruz, on the other hand, has taken full advantage of the two weeks leading into Wisconsin that are uninterrupted by any other primary or caucus, McKenna said.

"He's actually got people here in Wisconsin advising his campaign, he's made an effort to understand even district to district, county to county," she said.

Indeed, just like he did before the Iowa caucus, Cruz has gone all-in in Wisconsin: Instead of downing bacon and snacks on sticks at the Iowa state fair, he indulged in a triple jalapeño cheeseburger at a classic burgers-and-Bloody Marys joint in Milwaukee, telling the crowd how much he loved cheese. A former Green Bay Packers football player, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila, has been touted as a top endorsement.

The players and the local touches are different, but the broader, systematic approach to connecting with voters across the state is the same.

"He's going to have a tremendous force both on doors and on phones and driving out folks to vote on April 5," said state Rep. Dave Craig, one of Cruz's Wisconsin co-chairs. "People like the face-to-face conversations with candidates and their surrogates, and our campaign's going to be out in full force."

That was the case in the final days before the primary: Walker and Carly Fiorina spent days crossing the state stumping for Cruz. Walker's wife, Tonette, joined Cruz's wife, Heidi, for a Saturday sprint, hitting three stops along with Utah Sen. Mike Lee.

It was a much larger entourage of national figures than the one Cruz had in Iowa, when King and former Texas Gov. Rick Perry rolled around the state in a bus together ahead of the caucuses.

Wisconsin is also less evangelical and more blue-collar than Iowa is, and Cruz has adjusted his stump speech accordingly, promising to bring back American jobs when he campaigned at a factory in Oshkosh. There is little praying on the stump, as he did in Iowa, and more emphasis on economic and security issues.

But, as in Iowa and elsewhere in the country, the campaign is still focused on mobilizing Christian conservatives. Cruz's father, Pastor Rafael Cruz, played an instrumental role in bringing pastors on board in Iowa, and he is again reaching them here in Wisconsin. He spent Saturday

at Brett Favre's Steakhouse in Green Bay, at a pastors- and clergy-focused breakfast.

On Friday, Cruz's team unveiled a list of 50 Wisconsin faith leaders supporting his campaign — an effort that began, the campaign noted, in Iowa.

"I know the countryside pretty well in northeast Iowa and rural Wisconsin ... match up pretty well," King, the congressman, said. "Their values are much the same, their religion are much the same, they're good family people."

"That all plays very well in Ted Cruz's favor," he said

Donald Trump And Ted Cruz Shift Into High Gear As Wisconsin Primary Looms

By Matt Flegenheimer And Ashley Parker

[New York Times](#), April 3, 2016

GREEN BAY, Wis. — A bastion of "Midwestern nice." An opening for Senator Ted Cruz. Swelling doubts about the go-it-alone approach of Donald J. Trump.

Since his loss in Iowa, Mr. Trump has wanted a rematch with Mr. Cruz. In Wisconsin — another state stocked with conservative activists desperate to stop Mr. Trump — he is getting something like it. And it is not going so well.

As the state prepares to vote on Tuesday, the candidates are at it again, circling and prodding each other in a final sprint before the high-profile contest, which could have outsize ramifications for the Republican nominating contest as Mr. Trump struggles to avoid a contested convention.

And for both campaigns, these final Wisconsin days are proving to be both a necessary stress test and, depending on the results, a likely bellwether of candidate strategy for the rest of the primary season.

Mr. Cruz, who leads Mr. Trump by about 10 percentage points here, according to recent polls, is field-testing a new playbook: exploiting Mr. Trump's growing unpopularity with women — a gambit that crested last week with the introduction of a Women for Cruz coalition, headlined by Mr. Cruz's wife and mother.

And Mr. Trump, who tends to eschew the backslapping, handshaking retail politics of traditional campaigns in favor of large rallies, finds himself in a situation he has not faced since the Iowa caucuses: behind in the polls, not entirely in control and forced to focus, laserlike, on just one crucial state.

After something of a spring break from the trail after the Florida primary, where he dispatched Senator Marco Rubio in his home state, Mr. Trump returned to Wisconsin a week before its primary, with a rally in House Speaker Paul D. Ryan's hometown. And — for Mr. Trump, at least — he has maintained a breakneck schedule, with three events throughout the state on Saturday and another three planned for Monday.

Mr. Trump, who prefers to return to Manhattan after evening events to sleep in his own bed, even spent the night

in a downtown Milwaukee hotel, staying locally overnight just as he did at the end of the Iowa contest.

On Sunday, Mr. Trump missed the bris for his new grandson, Theodore James Kushner, to stop by Miss Katie's Diner in Milwaukee, where he walked in and waved before posing for pictures with about a third of the patrons. Retail politics swiftly checked off, he sat down with six of his staff members for breakfast (fried eggs, bacon and hot chocolate with whipped cream) and had a 20-minute chat with reporters.

Despite the headwinds in Wisconsin, where conservatives like Gov. Scott Walker have aligned against him en masse, Mr. Trump rejected comparisons to Iowa, where he finished behind Mr. Cruz before going on to win the New Hampshire primary in his first victory of the cycle.

Wisconsin, he told reporters, "feels very much like New Hampshire to me."

"Trump wasn't going to win New Hampshire, and then all of a sudden, we win in a landslide," he said. "Because I could I feel it with the people. I can feel it with the people in Wisconsin."

The scramble comes as Mr. Cruz is working hard to outmaneuver Mr. Trump in the shadow primary for convention delegates, leaning on a cadre of campaign officials and loyal activists well versed in the arcana of party rules.

And in the primaries themselves, Mr. Cruz's ground game, which helped lift him to victory in Iowa, has followed him to Wisconsin, where another "Camp Cruz" has been set up for out-of-state volunteers. One of them, Sam Kinnaman of St. Louis, said he had now worked for Mr. Cruz in five states.

At a campaign office on Saturday in Waukesha, a man in a cowboy hat and another in a Green Bay Packers Cheesehead stood shoulder to shoulder as supporters placed calls to Wisconsin voters. The highest-energy Cruz volunteers appeared to be the senator's own daughters, ages 7 and 5, who paid a visit to the office with their mother, Heidi, and held a competition: Who could greet the most voters?

"Hi, my name is Caroline. Thanks for supporting my dad," the older daughter told strangers on a loop. "I'll be 8 in 12 days."

At a rally here on Sunday, Mr. Cruz reveled in the presence of some recent supporters: Mr. Walker, Senator Mike Lee of Utah, Carly Fiorina and Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila, a former star defensive player for the Packers.

Addressing the crowd in a hotel ballroom, Mr. Cruz imagined aloud the prospect of Mr. Gbaja-Biamila's chasing Mr. Trump on a football field. "I think Donald's hair would stand on end," he said.

Mr. Trump's support on the ground has been harder to trace, and the primary offers a critical test for a campaign that has often struggled with its organization, in Iowa and beyond. (Mr. Trump has maintained that Mr. Cruz "stole" Iowa with

caucus-night shenanigans; his crowds are now conditioned to chant "Lyn' Ted" — Mr. Trump's favored nickname for his rival — when his name is invoked at rallies.)

The contest also follows a series of missteps and misstatements Mr. Trump has made in recent weeks, which could hurt him both in the coming Republican nominating contests and in a general election, especially among female voters.

He first drew criticism after reposting an unflattering photo of Mr. Cruz's wife juxtaposed with his wife, Melania, a former model, though he later told Maureen Dowd, a New York Times columnist, that had been "a mistake." More recently, he stumbled through a series of interviews on the topic of abortion, first saying that women who have illegal abortions should face some form of "punishment," then recalibrating.

In recent days, he has dispatched Sarah Palin, the former Alaska governor, in hopes of bolstering his credibility with conservatives. But speaking at a local party dinner on Friday in Milwaukee, where Mr. Cruz and Gov. John Kasich of Ohio also held forth, Ms. Palin struggled to connect.

She drew only occasional applause in a disjointed, uncomfortable speech, and several attendees giggled as he spoke. Some former admirers of Ms. Palin said they could not reconcile her support for Mr. Trump.

"I don't want to be afraid to vote for a candidate," Suzanne Frohna, 65, of Cudahy, said of Mr. Trump, before appraising Ms. Palin's speech as "tweety, like a bird." "I wouldn't be afraid to vote for Cruz," she added.

At the diner on Sunday, where Mr. Trump stopped in, the reception was mixed. Some customers shook his hand and posed for pictures, offering menu suggestions. (One suggested the three-cheese omelet, another the steak and eggs.) But others were less enthusiastic.

As the candidate left, a man eating breakfast turned to a photographer with a question: "Did anyone take a picture of the deafening silence?"

Maggie Haberman contributed reporting from New York.

Trump On Defense As He Tries To Regain Momentum In Wisconsin

By Jill Colvin And Jonathan Lemire

[Associated Press](#), April 3, 2016

RACINE, Wis. (AP) — Following one of the worst weeks of his campaign, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump was on defense Saturday as he kicked off a three-day sprint to Wisconsin's primary.

Trump began the afternoon with a rally in the Milwaukee suburb of Racine, where he defended a series of controversial comments in recent days on NATO, abortion and nuclear weapons.

"This politics is a tough business," said Trump, whose performance in Tuesday's contest will help determine whether he can seize the Republican nomination without a fight at the convention. "Because you can say things one way and the press will criticize you horribly. You say it another way and the press will criticize you horribly."

Offstage, Trump expressed regret that he had retweeted an unflattering photo of rival Ted Cruz's wife, Heidi, paired with a glamorous photo of his own wife, Melania, as part of a bitter feud between the two men.

"Yeah, it was a mistake," he told New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd. "If I had to do it again, I wouldn't have sent it."

Among his biggest missteps have been Trump's recent comments on abortion, which have managed to unite both abortion rights activists and opponents in their criticism.

During a taping of "Face The Nation" on Friday, Trump said he believed that, when it comes to abortion: "The laws are set. And I think we have to leave it that way." His spokeswoman, Hope Hicks, quickly issued a clarification that Trump meant that laws won't change until he's president and appoints judges who can interpret them differently.

It was the second time in days that he'd stepped in hot water over the issue. On Wednesday, he'd said women should be punished for getting abortions if they're ever banned – a position the notoriously unapologetic campaign quickly reversed.

Trump told one audience on Saturday that his words had been repeatedly taken out of context, and complained he was being held to a different standard than his rivals. He called his comments on "Face the Nation" "perfect" and "so good."

"They took words out that I said," Trump told the rally, implying CBS had edited his answer about keeping abortion laws as they are. But the video made clear there was no editing in the exchange about abortion and his response was given in full.

Speaking to a friendlier crowd in Eau Claire Saturday night, Trump said that, on the plus side, he gets millions of dollars worth of free media coverage, "so I can't complain that much."

Trump's abortion comments raised concerns in the Republican Party about whether his unpopularity with women as measured in preference polling would make him unelectable in a general election match-up against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

In an apparent effort to address that concern, Trump said his wife will be campaigning with him Monday. His daughter Ivanka, who just had a baby, will also be returning to campaign with him in another week or so, he said.

Trump's three events Saturday passed peacefully, though some of his supporters waiting in line to enter the Eau

Claire rally exchanged harsh words with the several dozen protesters gathered outside.

Lemire reported from Wausau and Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

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Trump Refuses To Rule Out Third Party Run If He Loses GOP Nomination

By Brian Bennett

[Los Angeles Times](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump refused on Sunday to rule out running as an independent if he fails to win the Republican presidential nomination, renewing a threat that party leaders thought they had quashed months ago.

"I want to run as a Republican. I will beat Hillary Clinton," Trump said on "Fox News Sunday."

When pressed to rule out an independent run, the New York billionaire said, "I'm gonna have to see how I was treated. It's very simple."

The prospect that Trump will launch an insurgent third party run and draw his ardent supporters away from a rival Republican nominee, widening the divisions in the GOP, is a nightmare scenario for party leaders.

Some are supporting efforts to try to deny Trump the nomination if he cannot lock up enough delegates during the primaries to secure the nomination at the Republican National Convention, a movement that Trump has complained is unfair.

The latest lurch in the rocky GOP race began Tuesday when Trump publicly abandoned the pledge he signed in September to support the eventual Republican nominee even if he loses. All the GOP candidates then in the race made similar vows.

At a town hall sponsored by CNN on Tuesday in Milwaukee, Trump was asked if he still felt bound by his pledge.

"No, I don't anymore," he said. Asked why, he responded, "I have been treated very unfairly."

During the same town hall, Trump's remaining rivals, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, also appeared to back off their pledges to support the GOP nominee. Neither was as direct as Trump, however.

Polls show Trump trailing Cruz in Wisconsin, which holds its primary on Tuesday. But Trump appears on solid

ground in New York and several other states that vote later this month.

Trump's backsliding on the pledge prompted Reince Priebus, chairman of the Republican National Committee, to warn Sunday that such comments could discourage rank-and-file Republicans and party leaders from supporting him if he wins the nomination.

"Those kinds of comments, I think, have consequences," Priebus said on ABC's "This Week." "And so when you make those kinds of comments, and you want people to fall in line for you, it makes it more difficult."

At stake for a potential nominee is a valuable database of contacts and party machinery to get out Republican voters in the general election.

"If you were running for president of the Kiwanis Club or the Boy Scouts and you said you don't know if you like the Kiwanis or the Boy Scouts, I think that makes your challenge even greater to ultimately win those kinds of posts," Priebus said.

"It's not different for the Republican Party," he added.

Priebus did not say he would cut off support to Trump for abandoning his pledge.

Trump may be "posturing," Priebus said, adding that he had a "very good meeting" with Trump last week.

Priebus appeared on all five major TV talk shows Sunday, in part to tamp down allegations that party leaders are trying to game the GOP's arcane candidate selection rules to deny the nomination to Trump.

Priebus insisted the GOP would select its candidate fairly and openly, although he made clear that Republicans are preparing for the possibility of a contested convention on July 18 in Cleveland.

If no candidate secures 1,237 delegates on a first ballot, many delegates would be free to pick another candidate in subsequent rounds of voting. So Trump, who has won the most delegates so far but may not reach the required tally, still could lose the nomination.

Kasich has banked his hopes on being an alternative candidate during a brokered convention in Ohio, his home state. So far, he has only won the Ohio primary.

"We just have to keep going, and we're going to have an open convention," Kasich said on ABC's "This Week."

"It's going to be so much fun," he added. "Kids will spend less time focusing on Bieber and Kardashian and more time focusing on how we elect presidents. It will be so cool."

A 3-way Presidential Race? It's Not Too Late For Another White House Bid

By Susan Page

[USA Today](#), April 3, 2016

WASHINGTON — It's not too late: If Donald Trump loses the Republican presidential nomination, he says he

might run for the White House anyway. And if Trump wins the GOP nomination, anti-Trump candidates from the party establishment are considering doing the same.

While it's an uphill climb and state deadlines loom, there are several ways a third candidate could mount a general-election bid consequential enough to demand attention. "'Trump' is easy to spell," notes Democratic strategist Tad Devine, suggesting the billionaire businessman could try a write-in campaign for the nation's highest office.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have promised to support the party's nominee. But all three remaining Republican rivals have walked back commitments they signed last year to support the party's nominee. On Fox News Sunday, Trump refused to rule out an independent or third-party candidacy if he fails to win the GOP nomination. "I'm going to have to see how I was treated," he told Chris Wallace. "It's very simple."

In an election season that already has upended the expected, there are the ingredients that have fueled third-party bids in the past. They include a mercurial potential contender with money — Donald Trump, meet Ross Perot — and the sort of ideological divide that prompted moderate congressman John Anderson to run when the GOP shifted right in 1980 to nominate conservative Ronald Reagan. The power of the parties has gotten weaker since then and the rules for getting on state ballots easier.

"Minor parties have been working and working and working all these years and it's slowly paying off," says Richard Winger, publisher of Ballot Access News, a newsletter that just might see a surge in readership this year. "Nobody notices because it's little incremental changes, but it's adding up."

In a little-noticed ruling last month, for instance, a U.S. District Court struck down the provision in Georgia that required independent presidential candidates to submit petitions with signatures equal to 1% of eligible registered voters. In *Green Party of Georgia v. Kemp*, Judge Richard Story ruled that the state's ballot requirement, one of the toughest in the country, was too onerous. He set an interim standard of 7,500 signatures until the state legislature acts.

"There are two candidates in this race who could be a third-party candidate, and that's Trump and Bernie Sanders," says Republican strategist Ed Rollins, who for a time ran Perot's 1992 independent bid. "If Trump chose to go outside and spend his own money, he'd create chaos," albeit with a better chance of helping to elect Clinton than himself, Rollins says.

Neither Perot nor Anderson won the White House, of course, but they participated in debates and affected the cross-currents of the campaign. Some analysts say Ralph Nader's campaign in 2000 as the Green Party nominee may have pulled enough votes from Democrat Al Gore in Florida

to tip the closely divided state – and with it the presidency – to Republican George W. Bush, although Nader disputes that.

And if Trump is nominated?

"If Donald Trump gets nominated and continues to drive his negatives through the roof, conceivably a third-party candidate could become the de facto Republican nominee," says GOP pollster Whit Ayres. Speculation has centered on establishment leaders who have been outspoken in criticizing Trump, including 2012 nominee Mitt Romney and former 2016 contender Jeb Bush.

Last week, The Texas Tribune reported there was no record of former governor Rick Perry voting in the state's primary, although he had endorsed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. That drew notice because it would preserve Perry's eligibility to run as an independent in the fall. While Perry last year described Trump's candidacy as "a cancer on conservatism," a spokesman said the former presidential hopeful wasn't interested in making an independent bid.

Voters increasingly are open to voting for someone other than the Democrat or the Republican. In the most recent USA TODAY/Suffolk University poll, taken in February, only a third of those surveyed said the two major parties did a good job of representing Americans' political views. A 54% majority said three or more parties were necessary.

Running for president this year as a third candidate isn't easy. That doesn't mean it's impossible. Let's count the ways.

That's what Perot did in 1992. The Texas billionaire said he was open to a draft movement in February, opened a phone bank in March and after an in-and-out campaign was on all 50 state ballots in November. There were times during the campaign when he led Republican George H.W. Bush and Democrat Bill Clinton in national polls, and he participated in the fall debates.

In the end, Perot carried 19% of the popular vote, the most for any third candidate since Teddy Roosevelt's bid in 1912 as the Progressive "Bull Moose" party's nominee.

Texas has the earliest deadline and some of the stiffest requirements for an independent presidential candidate to get on the ballot. By May 9 – just five weeks away – a candidate must submit petitions with 70,939 signatures. Realistically, the number has to be much higher as a cushion for signatures that might be thrown out as ineligible. North Carolina's deadline is next, on June 9. Three other states (Illinois, Indiana and New Mexico) have deadlines in late June.

But thirty-one states and the District of Columbia don't have deadlines until August, and many require only a nominal number of signatures, such as 275 in Tennessee and 800 in New Jersey. In Colorado, a check for \$1,000 gets a candidate on the ballot. The final deadlines (in Arizona, Kentucky, Mississippi and Rhode Island) are on Sept. 9.

That said, 11 states have deadlines before the Republican convention opens in Cleveland on July 18, and

other deadlines begin to follow in a crush. "After the Republican convention is too late," says Ben Ginsberg, a lawyer who was campaign counsel for Mitt Romney in 2012. "I think if you're starting as an individual to get yourself on the ballot, you're quickly running out of time."

The Libertarian Party already is on track to be on every state ballot this fall. Party chairman Nicholas Sarwark, 36, whose family owns an independent car dealership in Phoenix, says more than one of this year's presidential contenders have been in touch to express interest in the Libertarian nomination. He won't name names or even specify if the calls came on behalf of Republicans or Democrats, or both.

"There's a lot of frustration that candidates feel like they weren't able to get a hearing from the Republican or Democratic races, that there wasn't enough oxygen in the room," he says. He says his party could be open to nominating a newcomer. "It would be up to that candidate to make the case that they were Libertarian or Libertarian enough."

The party convention is in Orlando over Memorial Day weekend, with none of the delegates bound to a particular contender beforehand. The first nationally televised debate ever among Libertarian contenders was held last Friday on Fox Business News, featuring former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson, The Libertarian Republic founder Austin Petersen and anti-virus software developer John McAfee.

Johnson, the Libertarian nominee in 2012, doubts some high-profile Republican could move in and win the nomination.

"They're going to get their heads handed to them," he predicted in an interview, saying the GOP's conservative views on social issues would undermine their appeal among libertarians. That said, "they would bring a lot of welcome attention to the Libertarian Party" if they try.

Last month, a national Monmouth University Poll included a three-way race among Clinton, Trump and Johnson. The Libertarian candidate was supported by 11% even though three of four of those surveyed said they didn't know enough about him to have an opinion.

Johnson's name "seems to be more of a placeholder for voters who are not particularly thrilled with either major-party choice right now," says poll director Patrick Murray. "There is an appetite there for a third-party candidate (but) it's still too soon to tell whether that will be a realistic option."

Then there are all those other third parties that already are on some state ballots, but not all.

"People who think it is too late for Donald Trump to run after he is rejected by the Republican National Convention ought to realize there are ballot-qualified parties that would probably nominate Trump," Winger says. He listed 13 of them as prime prospects. They range from the Alaskan

Independence Party (Sarah Palin's husband, Todd, was once a member) to the Independent American Party in Utah.

Forget ballot access: What about running as a write-in?

Five states – Hawaii, Louisiana, Nevada, Oklahoma and South Dakota – have laws that ban all write-in votes, and South Carolina bans write-in votes for president. Election officials in Arkansas and New Mexico say they won't tally write-ins, and Mississippi law says the state will count them only if one of the candidates on the ballot has died.

Campaign rally for Bernie Sanders Saturday at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (Photo: Jim Mone, AP)

Still, that leaves 42 states and the District of Columbia that do allow write-ins and will tally them. Most require a write-in candidate to submit a declaration of candidacy before the vote.

It's a path that most realistic for someone with a fervent following and a famous name – and, ideally, one that is easy to spell. That's not a frivolous concern when it comes to making sure a write-in vote counts: When Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski lost the Republican nomination in 2010 and then ran as a write-in, she aired a TV ad that showed a faux spelling-bee contestant sounding out her name, letter by letter. (Murkowski became the first senator in a half-century to win with a write-in campaign.)

"If Trump doesn't get the nomination, I think he would organize a write-in campaign," predicts Rick Tyler, a former top campaign aide to Cruz, Trump's top rival. "In some ways, Donald Trump already is a third-party candidate. Right now, he is effectively a third-party candidate, running for the Republican nomination."

Republican Hopefuls Must Keep Pledge To Back Nominee, Party Chief Says

By Ben Brody

[Bloomberg Politics](#), April 3, 2016

The remaining Republican presidential candidates must keep their pledges to support the party's eventual nominee, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus said Sunday.

"We expect that when candidates make commitments, that they keep them," Priebus said on "Fox News Sunday," one of five talk show appearances to discuss the state of the Republican race. "The pledge is 'really a data agreement that the candidates signed,'" he said.

The Republican Party has "spent hundreds of millions of dollars on data and information over the last several years," Priebus said. Candidates, whose numbers have been winnowed down from close to 20 to a final three, are able to access it by pledging to support the nominee.

Asked if he was prepared to sue to enforce that agreement, Priebus said no one had clearly broken the pledge so far. "Talking about what might be hypothetical is

one thing," he said. "It doesn't provide standing to do anything."

The last Republicans standing – billionaire Donald Trump, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, and Ohio Governor John Kasich – have distanced themselves from the promise. Trump again sidestepped the pledge during an interview conducted Friday and on aired on "Fox News Sunday."

Priebus said he the remaining candidates were seeking "leverage" and "posturing for a potentially open convention" that would occur if no candidate has secured sufficient delegates by that time. A contested convention is "quite possible," Priebus said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

He said it was possible, although unlikely, that the nominee could be someone other than Trump, Cruz, or Kasich if the convention goes into multiple rounds of voting, when delegates are no longer bound to vote for a particular candidate.

"But that would be an extreme hypothetical I think, highly unlikely," he said. "Our nominee is likely to be one of the three people running."

Appearing at a rally in Wisconsin on Saturday, Trump termed the Republican Party's delegate process "crooked." He has said he should be awarded the nomination even if he fails to amass the 1,237 delegates required to win.

"I don't want to go in there looking at the second ballot because probably with the way the thing is – it's crooked as hell," Trump said, referring to the party convention scheduled for Cleveland in July.

On CBS' "Face the Nation" Priebus, who met with Trump in Washington last week, said the real estate developer turned politician is "being treated fairly."

Priebus said the talk of not getting behind the nominee could make the convention and eventual nomination of a candidate a "challenge."

"If a candidate isn't willing to commit to the principles and values of our party then they ought to just tell us," he said. "I can't imagine a candidate for any position anywhere in America running in front of a group and saying well we don't know if want to be part of this group."

RNC Chief Priebus Cites 'posturing' After Trump Weighs Third-party Candidacy

By Valerie Richardson

[Washington Times](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump revived Sunday the threat that he may run as a third-party candidate if he is denied the GOP presidential nomination, but Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus was unfazed and said the fractious Republican candidates may "posturing" as the primary battle enters a critical phase.

"I think some of this is posturing," Mr. Priebus said on ABC's This Week. "And I think, after talking about this subject

continually for the last eight months, I would think that people in the news media would understand that it's posturing as well."

Mr. Priebus's comment came after the billionaire businessman refused Sunday to rule out a third-party candidacy, despite joining his rivals last September on a pledge not to do so.

"I'm going to have to see how I was treated. Very simple," Mr. Trump said on Fox News Sunday. "It's not a question of win or lose, it's a question of treatment. I want to be treated fair."

Mr. Priebus, who made the rounds Sunday on the news talk shows, pointed out that each of the candidates had signed pledges to support the nominee in exchange for access to what he described as \$100 million in voter data and resources from the RNC.

While Mr. Priebus said that "we expect that when candidates make commitments to the principles and values of our party that they would keep it," he added that the candidates may be "posturing for the possibility of an open convention."

"I think some candidates think that, you know, there's leverage to be had over making these kinds of statements," Mr. Priebus said. "There's no leverage over us. We're going to administer the convention the same way."

Mr. Priebus also rejected accusations that the party may try to "steal" the nomination from Mr. Trump during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. Trump ally Roger Stone said Friday that "Trump Nation" would organize "days of rage" at the convention if the party tries anything underhanded.

"Nothing can get stolen from anyone," Mr. Priebus said. "We have rules in place that if a candidate gets to 1,237 delegates, those delegates are bound and they will vote that way on the floor. And if they don't vote that way on the floor, which they will, but if they don't, the secretary will read the vote as if they were bound regardless."

Mr. Trump leads the delegate count entering Tuesday's Wisconsin primary, followed by Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Mr. Trump added Sunday that he expects to win the Republican nomination. "I'm by far the frontrunner as a Republican. I want to run as a Republican," he said.

If no candidate receives enough votes to win the nomination outright, leading to an open convention, Mr. Priebus insisted the process would be "clear, open and transparent."

"If it's an open convention, then we're going to have to be clear, open and transparent on what the rules say and how they're administered," Mr. Priebus said. "And it will be very clear and there will be a camera — cameras at every step of the way."

Republican Party Boss Dismisses Trump Threat To Run As Independent

[Huffington Post](#), April 3, 2016

Republican presidential candidates were merely "posturing" this week when they refused to confirm that they'd honor past promises to back the eventual party nominee, Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus said Sunday.

Otherwise, the party boss said, candidates such as Donald Trump, Sen. Ted Cruz (Texas) and Ohio Gov. John Kasich would face the loss of \$100 million worth of Republican Party data and other resources as each struggles to clinch the party's presidential nomination ahead of its July convention.

"They're posturing for the possibility of an open convention," Priebus said during a televised interview on ABC's "This Week." "I think some candidates think that, you know, there's leverage to be had over making these kinds of statements. There's no leverage over us."

In recent days, all three Republican candidates refused to state whether they'd honor their pledge, which Priebus said Sunday was made in exchange for resources from the Republican Party, such as its data on would-be voters. Trump has threatened to run as an independent candidate should he fail to win the party's nomination despite winning more votes and contests this year than his opponents.

Trump, despite his posturing, still has access to the party's databases, Priebus suggested.

The Republican Party requires that candidates win a majority of delegates in order to capture its presidential nomination, an arcane system Trump has trashed that could result in the leading vote-getter not becoming the party's standard-bearer in November.

"If the candidate can get to a majority on their own, then they're going to be nominee, but no amount of leverage and statements are going to change it," the party chief said.

Trump's rivals have been trying to pick off would-be Trump delegates in case the self-declared real estate success fails to win a majority in the runup to the convention, a situation that would allow candidates such as Cruz or Kasich to seize the nomination despite having lost most of the primary contests.

Kasich and Cruz could be helped by Trump's difficulty with women voters, who largely view him unfavorably, according to recent polls.

In recent days, Trump has suggested that if abortions became illegal under his presidency women who obtain them should face criminal punishment, only to subsequently back off his position.

Party leaders such as Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Wash.) have criticized Trump for the "inappropriate" comments, arguing that they are "hurtful" to the Republican

Party. Others, such as House Speaker Paul Ryan (Wis.), have bemoaned the increasingly vitriolic and obscene language of the primary campaign.

"Those kinds of comments, I think have consequences," Priebus said, without naming Trump. "And so when you make those kinds of comments, and you want people to fall in line for you, it makes it more difficult."

Editor's note: Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims – 1.6 billion members of an entire religion – from entering the U.S.

Priebus Predicts GOP Nominee Will Be Trump, Cruz Or Kasich

By Connor O'Brien
[Politico](#), April 3, 2016

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus predicted on Sunday the GOP presidential nominee is likely to be one of the three candidates still in the race.

Still, in an interview on "Fox News Sunday," Priebus left open the possibility of a nominee who isn't currently in the race if the Republican National Convention this summer in Cleveland drags on for several ballots.

"At that point, if you get into a multi-ballot convention where you've got five or six or seven rounds, it's possible a person can be nominated that's not one of the three," Priebus said. "But my position is — and...I think it's absolutely correct — our nominee is likely to be one of the three people running."

Still in the GOP race are New York real estate mogul Donald Trump, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Priebus also downplayed comments by Trump, the front-runner, that he won't unconditionally support the Republican candidate if he loses, chalking it up to campaign bluster.

Asked if Trump's reversal worried him, Priebus responded, "Not really."

"I mean, I think some of this stuff is leverage and candidates that are posturing for a potentially open convention," he said.

U.S. Headed Toward "Massive Recession"

By Paul Davidson
[USA Today](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner for president, says the nation is careening toward "a massive recession," because of an inflated stock market, high unemployment and "an economic bubble."

"I think we're sitting on an economic bubble. A financial bubble," the brash real estate magnate told the Washington Post in an interview published Saturday. He would not cite a

specific sector of the economy, saying he was referring to the economy generally.

Trump, who has fashioned his campaign around appealing to disgruntled blue-collar voters, said the stock market is overvalued and he's grown wary of investing. More optimistic views of the economy, he said, are based on distorted employment reports.

"First of all, were not at 5% unemployment," from said. "We're at a number that's probably into the 20s if you look at the real number. That was a number that was devised, statistically devised to make politicians — and in particular, presidents — look good. And I would be getting the kind of massive crowds and I'm getting if the number was a real number."

The Labor Department reported Friday that a broad measure of joblessness — that includes part-time workers who prefer full-time jobs, discouraged workers who stopped looking and the unemployed — was 9.8%.

And JPMorgan Chase said Friday it believes there's a less than 30% risk of recession in the next 12 months. Manufacturers are struggling because of a weak global economy and oil industry slump, but consumer spending has been solid and the housing market is continuing to recover.

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Trump's Prediction Of 'Massive Recession' Puzzles Economists

By Lucia Mutikani
[Reuters](#), April 3, 2016

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Trump's Abortion Gaffe Undermines His Aura Of Invincibility

By Ralph Z. Hallow
[Washington Times](#), April 3, 2016

ANALYSIS

Maybe Donald Trump isn't inevitable after all.

In yet another undermining of the New York tycoon's aura of invincibility, the influential National Right to Life Committee's board of directors voted over the weekend to endorse his chief rival, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas. Meanwhile, several prominent Republicans who had advised making peace with the inevitable are now walking back their earlier acceptance.

Those events were then followed Sunday by Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus' virtually ruling out any "consensus" candidate emerging as the surprise nominee at the Republican National Convention in July, specifically ruling out his personal friend and fellow

Wisconsinite, House Speaker Paul Ryan or anyone else not now running the for GOP nomination.

Mr. Trump set himself up for the weekend whacking when he blasted to smithereens what was left of his credibility with women voters when he said a woman should face some punishment for aborting her unborn child in the event abortion were to become illegal.

He then reversed himself after being told that's not the pro-life movement's position.

That about-face played a role in the National Right to Life Committee's endorsement of Mr. Cruz, said Chelsea Shields, director of the Wisconsin Right to Life Political Action Committee.

The National Right to Life Committee is the nation's largest pro-life lobby, with 3,000 chapters across the country.

Those chapters can now be expected to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in independent expenditures for direct mail, phone banking, radio ads and email promoting Mr. Cruz in the 18 states that have yet to hold their presidential primaries or caucuses.

Ahead of a rally in Wisconsin on Sunday, Mr. Cruz himself said Mr. Trump's serial remarks on abortion were an example of "a liberal trying to say what he thinks conservatives want to hear."

TV news organizations also began highlighting over the weekend poll findings that have Mr. Trump scoring prohibitively high negative ratings with not only women, and even Republican women, but other key voter groups.

The pounding Mr. Trump has taken in the last week has led several influential and surprising sources to cast doubts on their own previous judgments about The Donald's near inevitability, an outcome seemingly supported by numerous delegate-math analyses by The Washington Times and other news outlets.

Veteran presidential campaign strategist Alex Castellanos had been urging fellow Republicans to swallow hard and accept what he regards as the gloomy reality of Mr. Trump as the party's nominee, and Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan had been explaining to her readers why Mr. Trump was right for the times.

Both have done an about-face in recent days.

Mrs. Noonan re-evaluated after a tipping point came in her effort to try to explain away Mr. Trump's series of missteps.

The former Ronald Reagan speechwriter argued in her latest column that it was always a mistake to think one "explosive statement" would bring about the end of Mr. Trump. The damage rather is cumulative and by now perhaps irreversible.

"It's been going on for four or five weeks, and you can take your pick as to the tipping point," she wrote. Maybe it was his threatening to 'spill the beans' about Mr. Cruz's wife, or Mr. Trump's puzzlement over who David Duke is. Or

maybe it was Mr. Trump's 'hinting at riots' if cheated out of nomination.

"Maybe it was when Mr. Trump referred in debate to his genitals, a true national first," Mrs. Noonan wrote. "It has all added up into a large blob of sheer dumb grossness. He is now seriously misjudging the room. The room is still America."

In a missive he sent out to selected recipients over the weekend, Mr. Castellanos said that while the party establishment cannot engage in subterfuge at the convention, beating Mr. Trump fair and square now looks possible.

"I was wrong about the inevitability of Mr. Trump," Mr. Castellanos said. "Even after [Mr. Trump's primary win in] Florida, I should have kept dreaming of a brighter dawn. In these final primaries, we see a few new rays of light."

But Mr. Castellanos repeated that for someone to defeat Donald Trump, "he has to do it fairly."

"The Party's fate in November depends on how it treats Donald Trump at the convention," Mr. Castellanos wrote. "It is up to the players on the field, not the referees on the floor, to determine the outcome. As I've previously expressed, 'It is too late for the limp GOP establishment to ask their mommy to step in and rewrite the rules.'"

But Mr. Castellanos hasn't given up the establishment dream of a Ryan or Kasich nomination over Mr. Cruz or Mr. Trump.

"Would Ryan take the nomination? Would he accept a better-than-even shot at being handed the leadership of the free world? Republican[s] can pray. It doesn't hurt that the House Speaker made this speech last week calling for Party unity and setting himself up as the alternative to Donald Trump," Mr. Castellanos wrote.

Mr. Ryan has himself repeatedly and emphatically ruled out a convention "white knight" scenario. But the reliability of those denials has been suspect among anti-establishment voters on the right since he flatly said in 2012 he would not seek or accept the House speakership — before he accepted the post.

In his appearance Sunday, Mr. Priebus reiterated that a current non-candidate is not going to win, a move seemingly calculated to take some steam out of the Trump forces' planned "Days of Rage" protests in the event the nomination were to be taken from their man.

Their worst-case fear, to which Mr. Castellanos also alluded, involved reported establishment plans to stack the convention delegate deck in favor of Mr. Ryan or someone else who is not now running but who would be acceptable to party regulars who see themselves as power brokers.

"Even if something like that were remotely possible, that candidate would actually have to have a floor operation and an actual campaign going on with the delegates to make something like that possible, and Paul's not going to do that,"

Mr. Priebus said of Mr. Ryan. "He doesn't want to do it. I know Paul very well."

Donald Trump Has 'Major Defects'

[Huffington Post](#), April 3, 2016

Donald Trump, the leading Republican presidential candidate, has "major defects" and there are "probably" better people for the White House, said supporter Ben Carson, the former Republican presidential candidate.

"He has some major defects, there's no question about it – just like the rest of us," said the retired neurosurgeon, who endorsed Trump last month, during the radio program "The Cats Roundtable" on Sunday. He didn't detail what he thought the defects were.

Carson's comments may dog Trump in the coming days as the candidate, a self-declared real estate success and reality television show host, attempts to clinch the Republican nomination in a three-man race with Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Trump has faced withering criticism for comments targeting women, Mexicans and Muslims, among other groups. Some Republican leaders have denounced him. There is widespread fear among Republicans in Washington that Trump would face an almost certain defeat in a matchup against the Democratic front-runner, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, according to news reports.

"Right now what we need is somebody who can help restore the confidence of the American people," said Carson, who failed to win any Republican primaries or caucuses this year during his brief run for office. "No one believes in the government anymore."

After alleging that "everybody believes that we are weak, we are weak on the world stage, we're not doing things that make sense economically," Carson said that Trump is "probably the person who's most likely" to restore American confidence.

American consumer confidence is down slightly compared to last year, according to the University of Michigan's sentiment index, but it hasn't been this high since early 2007, nearly one year before the Great Recession began.

During the radio interview, Carson asked aloud, "Are there better people?" than Trump before quickly answering his own question: "Probably."

Editor's note: Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims – 1.6 billion members of an entire religion – from entering the U.S.