

THE HOMELAND SECURITY *NEWS CLIPS*

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TO: THE SECRETARY AND SENIOR STAFF

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LEADING DHS NEWS

Supreme Court Oral Arguments On Immigration Executive Action

[CNN](#), April 18, 2016

Supreme Court on immigration executive action:
Transcript of oral arguments

Supreme Court Appears Deadlocked Over Obama's Immigration Plan

By David G. Savage, Contact Reporter

[Los Angeles Times](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court appeared deadlocked Monday over President Obama's plan to offer work permits to as many as 4 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

A 4-4 tie vote – possible since the death of Justice Antonin Scalia – would be a defeat for Obama since it would leave in place a lower court's ruling to block his program and make it almost impossible to implement before he leaves office.

In 2014, the administration announced a sweeping immigration program, saying it wanted to focus deportation efforts on immigrants in the country illegally who are drug traffickers, smugglers, gang members or have links to terrorists.

The executive action would have extended relief to more than 4 million immigrants who were parents of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents.

But shortly after the president announced this policy, lawyers for Texas and 25 other Republican-led states filed suit in a federal court in Brownsville, Texas, on the Mexican border. They claimed they would be burdened by the costs of issuing identification cards to the immigrants.

U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen said the states had standing to sue the federal government, and he put the Obama policy on hold. The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, by a 2-1 vote, upheld that order last year.

On Obama's Immigration Actions, Supreme Court Seems Sharply Divided

[NPR](#), April 18, 2016

President Obama's controversial executive actions on immigration were challenged in the Supreme Court on Monday.

While it's impossible to glean how the court will ultimately decide the case, the eight justices seemed evenly split along ideological lines during oral arguments, leaving a real possibility of a 4-4 tie.

If that comes to pass, a lower court decision that stopped the actions from going into effect will stand, Obama's term will come to an end and his executive actions, which

were intended to shield some 4 million people from deportation, will never go into effect.

Two things were important to look at during arguments: the question of standing — whether Texas should be allowed to bring a suit on this matter against the government in the first place — and where Justice Anthony Kennedy, a swing vote even on an eight-justice court, landed on the issue.

The issue of standing took up a lot of time during arguments. Chief Justice John Roberts, who famously sidestepped a broader opinion on same-sex marriage in 2013 based on the issue of standing, is a critical voice to that end. He seemed to side with Texas, which argued the state had standing because it would be harmed by the actions as it would cost more money to issue driver's licenses to people in the country illegally.

Kennedy, who has in the past has written opinions in favor of giving the executive broad powers on enforcement, seemed dubious in this case. He said 4 million people is a lot of people and it seems that to give them quasi-legal status should be a legislative decision, not an executive decision.

In other words, the court seemed evenly split.

Outside the court, hundreds of protesters gathered to show their support for the president.

Marcy Suarez, a 20-year-old who was shielded from deportation by a previous executive action that is not in dispute now, said she hopes the court takes into account what she calls the humanitarian dimension of the issue.

"We are here to work hard, contribute to the country," Suarez said. "This is our home; that's why we don't want to leave."

Initial Prognosis Poor For Obama's Immigration Program At Supreme Court

By Robert Barnes

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

There was little indication at the Supreme Court on Monday that President Obama has found needed conservative support to revive his stalled plan to shield millions of undocumented immigrants from deportation and give them the right to work legally in this country.

Instead, the court's conservatives and liberals seemed split, and a 4-to-4 tie would leave in place a lower court's decision that the president exceeded his powers in issuing the directive. It could affect about 4 million undocumented immigrants who have been in the country since 2010 and have family ties to U.S. citizens and others lawfully in the country.

In questions and comments, the administration did not receive support from Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. or Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, seen as most likely to let the program proceed. But in this case, oral arguments might not tell the whole story.

In the wake of the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the court seems wary of having too many important cases concluded with a split decision.

It has shown itself willing to go to unusual lengths to try to find compromise, and that may be what happens in private now that the case has been argued.

But in 90 minutes of arguments, the justices showed a common divide: conservatives supportive of the complaints of Texas and 25 other states that Obama's executive action went too far, and the court's four liberals saying it seemed like a power that other presidents have exercised.

It was another in the enduring battles in which the court must weigh Obama's ambitious social agenda and Republican opposition to it

The justices are confronting a fundamental tension of Obama's tenure: whether the president is correctly using the substantial powers of his office to propel the nation past political gridlock or whether he has ignored constitutional boundaries to unilaterally impose policies that should require congressional acquiescence.

Obama's immigration program, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), would allow illegal immigrants in the affected categories to remain in the country and apply for work permits if they have been here at least five years and have not committed felonies or repeated misdemeanors. Obama announced the executive action in November 2014 after House Republicans did not act on comprehensive immigration reform.

The administration says the program is a way for a government with limited resources to prioritize which illegal immigrants it will move first to deport. As a practical matter, the government has never deported more than 500,000 undocumented immigrants per year and often sends home far fewer than that.

But Texas and the Republican-led states sued to stop the initiative, and a federal district judge in Texas and then a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit said the program could not be implemented.

Kennedy said it seemed the president was expounding immigration policy and calling on Congress to come along. "That's just upside down," Kennedy said.

Roberts said the logical extension of Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli Jr.'s view of presidential power was that the president could decide not to deport any illegal immigrant. Verrilli denied that was the case.

The liberals seemed to agree with the administration's contention that the states have no legal standing to sue because it is up to the federal government to set immigration policy, and that the Department of Homeland Security did not violate federal statutes in devising the program.

The White House said it makes sense to concentrate on border security and deporting illegal immigrants who

commit crimes, rather than deporting those who have made a life in this country and have connections through their children. It notes that the program does not provide a path to citizenship, and that even those who qualify for the program could be deported at any time.

Justice Stephen G. Breyer was most skeptical of Texas' argument that it had standing to sue because of a state law requiring it to provide driver's licenses to those authorized to work. He said it could lead to a flood of litigation on other matters.

Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Elena Kagan argued that Texas seemed to have conceded that the president could grant delayed deportation individually, and thus could do it to classes of immigrants.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor objected when Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller said Obama's action was "unprecedented."

"How can you say that?" she asked, saying previous presidents have also protected specific groups from deportation.

One important question in the case is Texas' legal standing to sue. District Judge Andrew S. Hanen agreed with the state that, because it would face a financial cost in providing driver's licenses to those covered by the new program, it had standing to challenge the initiative.

The administration countered that Texas was not required to issue the licenses. It should not be able to injure itself, the White House argued, to achieve standing to sue.

In the 2 to 1 decision by a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, U.S. Circuit Judge Jerry Smith rejected the administration's argument that DAPA was a form of "prosecutorial discretion" in which a government with limited resources sets priorities for enforcement.

The program, Smith wrote, "is much more than nonenforcement: It would affirmatively confer 'lawful presence' and associated benefits on a class of unlawfully present aliens. Although revocable, that change in designation would trigger eligibility for federal and state benefits "that would not otherwise be available to illegal aliens."

When the court accepted the case in January, it added a constitutional question about whether Obama's actions violated the Take Care Clause, which commands the president to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

In vowing to aggressively use executive action to counter congressional inaction on his priorities, Republicans have claimed that the president disregards the Constitution.

But both sides devoted little of their briefing to the question. Without Scalia, there was little questioning about that Monday.

The case is U.S. v. Texas .

Supreme Court Seems Split On Obama's Immigration Plan

By Adam Liptak And Michael D. Shear
[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday seemed sharply divided during an extended argument over a challenge to President Obama's plan that would shield millions of undocumented immigrants from deportation and allow them to work in the country legally.

Much of the argument was technical, but the justices occasionally paused to acknowledge realities outside the courtroom. Justice Stephen G. Breyer said the case had enormous political implications. Justice Sonia Sotomayor said that about 11 million immigrants live "in the shadows."

"They're here whether we want them or not," Justice Sotomayor said.

The case, brought by 26 states, may produce a significant ruling on presidential power and immigration policy in the midst of a presidential campaign in which both issues have been prominent.

Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli Jr., the government's top appellate lawyer, opened the arguments with a vigorous defense of Mr. Obama's authority to set priorities for immigration enforcement, but within minutes he was challenged by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and several of the court's other members.

Justice Anthony M. Kennedy questioned whether the president can defer deportations for millions of people without specific congressional authorization, saying "that is a legislative task, not an executive task."

"It's as if the president is defining the policy and the Congress is executing it," Justice Kennedy said. "That's just upside down."

In making his case, Mr. Verrilli asserted that the state of Texas should not be allowed to challenge the president's actions by claiming that it would cost the state money to give driver's licenses to the millions of immigrants affected by the federal policy. Mr. Verrilli argued that Texas could simply change its law to deny driver's licenses to the immigrants.

"You would sue them instantly," Chief Justice Roberts said as he repeatedly questioned the government's arguments.

He also pressed Mr. Verrilli on whether the president could simply deem all illegal immigrants to be legally present under the new policy. Mr. Verrilli said there were statutory constraints that would prevent the president from doing so.

Scott A. Keller, Texas's solicitor general, said Mr. Obama's plan was unprecedented and unlawful. He faced skeptical questions from the court's more liberal members about whether his state had suffered the sort of direct and concrete injury that gave it standing to sue.

The case, *United States v. Texas*, No. 15-674, was heard by an eight-member court, and the absence of Justice Antonin Scalia, who died in February, has altered the judicial dynamic. A 4-4 deadlock is now a live possibility, one that would leave in place an appeals court ruling that blocks the plan without setting a Supreme Court precedent.

When the court agreed in January to hear the case, it raised the possibility of a broad decision by taking the unusual step of asking the parties to address whether Mr. Obama had violated his constitutional obligations to enforce the nation's laws. This month, the court granted a lawyer for the House of Representatives, which supports the challengers, 15 minutes to present arguments on that issue.

But a broad ruling on the scope of presidential power seems unlikely to emerge from a short-handed court.

The states challenging Mr. Obama's immigration plan say he has repeatedly taken unilateral and unlawful action to sidestep Congress on gun control, gay rights, the minimum wage, contraception and climate change. White House and Justice Department officials have defended Mr. Obama's approach as legal and valuable.

Monday's case concerns a program intended to allow as many as five million unauthorized immigrants who are the parents of citizens or of lawful permanent residents to apply for a program sparing them from deportation and providing them work permits. The program, announced in November 2014, was called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, or DAPA.

The line for one of the coveted red tickets that allow members of the public into the Supreme Court for the oral arguments stretched around the block on Monday. Some groups had been camping in front of the court since Friday night, eager for a chance to witness history.

Some members of Susana Sandoval's group, Dreamer's Mothers in Action, had come from as far as Michigan — and some of them had fasted all weekend in a show of support of the president's executive actions.

"This is just a little bit of sacrifice for the four to five million people that will benefit from this," Ms. Sandoval said.

Groups of young people walked up and down the sidewalk holding banners and chanting mantras like "Sí se puede," the Spanish version of one of Mr. Obama's 2008 campaign slogans — "Yes we can."

Thomas Pittman, a retired firefighter and a deacon at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, said he was looking for the effect the case might have on the presidential race. "I think it's going to have a major impact on the election, due to the fact that Trump wants to deport people and close our borders down," he said, referring to the Republican front-runner, Donald J. Trump.

Mr. Obama has said he took action after years of frustration with Republicans in Congress who had repeatedly refused to support bipartisan Senate legislation to update

immigration laws. A coalition of 26 states, led by Texas, promptly challenged the plan, accusing the president of ignoring administrative procedures for changing rules and of abusing the power of his office by sidestepping Congress.

In February 2015, Judge Andrew S. Hanen of Federal District Court in Brownsville, Tex., entered a preliminary injunction shutting down the program while the legal case proceeded. The government appealed, and a divided three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in New Orleans, affirmed the injunction.

If the Supreme Court upholds Mr. Obama's actions, the White House has vowed to move quickly to set up the program and begin enrolling immigrants before his successor takes over early next year. Democratic presidential candidates have said they would continue the program, but most of the Republicans in the race have vowed to dismantle it and redouble immigration enforcement.

In their Supreme Court briefs, the states acknowledged that the president has wide authority over immigration matters, telling the justices that "the executive does have enforcement discretion to forbear from removing aliens on an individual basis." Their quarrel, they said, was with what they called a blanket grant of "lawful presence" to millions of immigrants, entitling them to various benefits.

In response, Mr. Verrilli told the justices that "lawful presence" is merely what has always followed from the executive branch's decision not to deport someone for a given period of time.

"Deferred action does not provide these individuals with any lawful status under the immigration laws," he said. "But it provides some measure of dignity and decent treatment."

"It recognizes," Mr. Verrilli added, "the damage that would be wreaked by tearing apart families, and it allows individuals to leave the shadow economy and work on the books to provide for their families, thereby reducing exploitation and distortion in our labor markets."

If the states are to prevail, they must show that they have suffered the sort of direct and concrete injury that gives them standing to sue.

Judge Jerry E. Smith, writing for the majority in the appeals court, focused on one injury said to have been suffered by one state, Texas, which he said would have to spend millions of dollars to provide driver's licenses to immigrants as a consequence of the federal program.

Mr. Verrilli told the justices that Texas' injury was self-inflicted, a product of its own decision to offer driver's licenses below cost and to tie eligibility for them to federal standards.

Texas responded that being required to change its laws was itself the sort of harm that confers standing. "Such a forced change in Texas law would impair Texas's sovereign interest in the power to create and enforce a legal code," the state said in a brief.

Jada F. Smith contributed reporting.

U.S. Top Court Appears Unlikely To Revive Obama Immigration Plan

By Lawrence Hurley

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Supreme Court Could Hand Obama Stinging Immigration Loss

By David Francis

[Foreign Policy](#), April 18, 2016

The U.S. Supreme Court appears to be divided over President Barack Obama's 2014 executive action on immigration, endangering his plan to allow millions of illegal immigrants to stay in the United States.

During opening arguments Monday, Justice Anthony Kennedy, typically the court's swing voter, seemed to side with Texas and the 25 other states that argue the president overstepped his executive authority by granting deferred deportation to

roughly

four million undocumented immigrants.

"It seems to me that's a legislative, not an executive, task," Kennedy

said. "It's as if the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That seems upside down."

Obama has said that he took the action because Congress refuses to take up comprehensive immigration reform, one of the president's top priorities in his final months in office. Leading Republicans like Florida Sen. Marco Rubio had once expressed a willingness to back such legislation, but abandoned that support in the face of fierce opposition from the Republican Party's grassroots. GOP frontrunners Donald Trump and Ted Cruz have promised to deport the

roughly

11 million illegal immigrants estimated to be in the U.S., and Trump has famously promised to build a wall along the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

The White House did not return a request for comment on Monday's hearing. On Twitter, Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders called on the court to rule for the president.

Greg Chen, director of advocacy at the American Immigration Lawyers Association, told

[Foreign Policy](#)

Monday that he expects the White House to win the fight over the executive actions, which his organization supports.

"Nothing was done that would shake the foundations of the president's authority," he said. "We think the existing

practices and precedents of several past presidents are very much in line with what President Obama has done.”

Under Obama’s executive actions, roughly 4 million people who have lived illegally in the United States at least since 2010,

have

no criminal record, and have children who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents would be allowed to enter a program that protects them from deportation and gives them work permits. It’s officially called the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents. The president instituted the plan without approval from a Republican-majority Congress, which has refused to take up any kind of immigration reform.

If the court splits 4-4, it would leave a lower court decision in place that blocked the president’s action. This would be a severe blow to Obama, who maintains his executive action is legal. The eight justices — one Supreme Court seat is vacant due to the unexpected

death

of Justice Antonin Scalia in February —

agreed

to take the case in January. The court is expected

to formally rule on it by the end of June.

Supreme Court Could Block Obama’s Immigration Executive Actions.

[Slate](#), April 18, 2016

If Justice Antonin Scalia were still on the Supreme Court, the headlines Monday would likely declare that five justices appear poised to invalidate President Barack Obama’s executive actions on immigration.

Mark Joseph Stern is a writer for Slate. He covers the law and LGBTQ issues.

But in his absence, the justices appeared to arrive at an apparent deadlock during Monday’s arguments in *United States v. Texas*, a challenge to those executive actions. Texas, along with 25 Republican-controlled states, argues that Obama does not have the power to defer deportation for the undocumented parents of citizens or lawful permanent residents. It also insists that Obama lacks authority to expand a previous program that defers deportation for undocumented immigrants who arrived in America as children. (Together, Obama’s programs are called DAPA and DACA+.)

An extremely conservative district court—which Texas carefully selected to increase its odds of success—sided with the state in 2015, issuing a nationwide injunction to prevent the immigration actions from taking effect. An equally conservative 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that decision. If the Supreme Court reaches a 4-4 stalemate, it will affirm that lower court decision without setting precedent

for other circuits. That means the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals might reach an opposite outcome, upholding Obama’s actions, which would mean that ...

Well, actually, nobody is quite certain what would happen then. Would the Texas court’s nationwide injunction remain? Would it apply only to states within the 5th Circuit, allowing DAPA to take effect elsewhere? Will the election of President Donald Trump and the prompt deportation of 11 million undocumented immigrants render this case moot?

The inevitable chaos of a potential 4-4 split led many court-watchers (myself included) to speculate that Chief Justice John Roberts would settle the case narrowly, on standing grounds. Under Supreme Court precedent, parties may only challenge a government action if it harms them. Texas claims that DAPA and DACA+ injure the state because the DMV will have to provide driver’s licenses to some immigrants who secure deferred deportation. But Texas provides licenses to noncitizens by choice, meaning it could theoretically stop the practice and halt the alleged harm. More importantly, states aren’t usually allowed to sue just because some federal action requires them to spend a marginal amount of new money. If they could, states could crowbar their way into the courthouse to challenge everything the federal government does.

But within minutes of Monday’s arguments, it became painfully clear that Roberts was unpersuaded by the government’s standing argument. He noted that, if Texas did deny licenses to deferred action beneficiaries, they may well sue the state, possibly for an Equal Protection violation. To Roberts, that puts Texas in “a real Catch-22”: The state can remedy the legal harm by refusing to give licenses to some immigrants—but in doing so, it would open itself up to a lawsuit. (I’m not sure that’s actually a real Catch-22, but whatever.)

With standing apparently out the window, the court entered the muck of Texas’ substantive arguments, which revolve around a flimsy statutory claim and an extremely goofy constitutional claim. That constitutional claim asserted that DAPA violates the Take Care Clause of the Constitution, which requires the president to faithfully execute federal law. But the Supreme Court has never enforced that clause, for good reason: There are thousands of federal laws, not all of which can be enforced with equal vigor simultaneously, meaning the president must prioritize. As I explained in January, if courts could use the Take Care Clause to force the president’s hand on a certain statute, the federal judiciary would become a scullion of the minority party: Whenever a Democrat holds the presidency, Republicans could sue to make him enforce their favorite statutes and vice versa.

The Take Care Clause made no appearance on Monday’s arguments, suggesting it is a nonstarter, at least with Scalia gone. Instead, the court’s conservatives gestured toward a broad separation of powers principle, which seems

misguided. All DAPA really does is deprioritize the deportation of a certain class of citizens. Federal law clearly allows for that, since it instructs the executive branch to “establish ... national immigration enforcement policies and priorities.” But Justice Anthony Kennedy fretted that by establishing a policy that affects a class of more than 4 million people, Obama overstepped his executive authority. In the most important exchange of the day, Kennedy declared that Obama was “defining the limits of discretion”:

And it seems to me that that is a legislative, not an executive act. The briefs go on for pages to the effect that the President has admitted a certain number of people and then Congress approves it. That seems to me to have it backwards. It's as if the President is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That's just upside down!

When your argument flusters Justice Kennedy, you've probably lost him. And without Kennedy—or, it seems, Roberts—the court looks stuck at a stalemate. Ever wondered what happens when Republican governors cook up a political challenge to an executive action affecting millions of people, one justice dies, and a Republican Senate refuses to even consider confirming his potentially tie-breaking replacement? Hope so! Because it looks like we're about to find out.

Justices Divided On Obama Immigration Actions

By Nolan D. McCaskill

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

The Obama administration struggled to find a critical fifth vote at the shorthanded Supreme Court on Monday to allow President Barack Obama to revive his foundering immigration legacy by moving forward with a new round of executive actions granting quasi-legal status and work permits to millions of immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally.

Two Republican appointees the administration hoped to win over — Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Anthony Kennedy — were surprisingly critical of many of the arguments the administration offered against the challenge 26 states brought to the latest set of Obama's actions, namely his moves in 2014 to protect and provide benefits to illegal immigrants who are parents of American citizens.

Kennedy said Obama's drive to authorize broader use of “deferred action” for immigrants seemed to be dictating immigration policy rather than following Congress' lead in that area.

“What we're doing is defining the limits of discretion. And it seems to me that is a legislative, not an executive act,” Kennedy said. “It's as if ... the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That's just upside down.”

However, Kennedy didn't definitively signal his position on the case and, at another point, he seemed open to arguments that the suit brought by Texas and the other states should be thrown out on technical grounds. With all the court's liberal justices appearing inclined to reject the Texas-led lawsuit, any defection by the GOP-appointed justices would allow Obama to launch his latest policy moves — which have been suspended by an injunction as the legal battle has unfolded — and give a huge boost to his immigration legacy during his remaining months in office.

Roberts seemed less open to the procedural and technical arguments than Kennedy. The chief justice also appeared to accept the state of Texas' view that increased costs for driver's licenses were enough to give the states standing to sue over Obama's actions.

“Isn't losing money the classic case for standing?” the chief justice asked.

Roberts also raised a series of popular conservative arguments against Obama's moves, including quoting statements the president made in his early years in office suggesting he did not have authority to go as far as he did in 2014. “What was he talking about?” the chief justice asked.

While the key policy issued under Obama's executive actions said illegal immigrants who apply for special status could now be considered lawfully present in the U.S., Solicitor General Donald Verrilli argued that the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans, or DAPA, policy amounted to more of a “tolerated presence” of those in the United States without legal status. “If he had said, I'm actually going to give these people lawful permanent resident status or legal status, that would be going further,” Verrilli said.

Verrilli argued that states like Texas went to court prematurely, because they did not first pursue the option of changing their laws regarding driver's licenses in order to try to deny driving permits to recipients under Obama's deferred action program.

However, Roberts said it appeared likely the federal government would sue any state that did so, arguing that it was intruding on federal authority over immigration matters.

“I just think that's a real Catch-22,” the chief justice said. “You would sue them instantly.”

Justice Samuel Alito jumped on the same point, arguing that Verrilli was obliged to say whether it would be legal for Texas to deprive of licenses the beneficiaries of Obama's actions.

“You have to tell us whether, in the view of the United States, it would be lawful for them to do that,” Alito declared.

Verrilli would not say definitively what stance the federal government would take in such a situation, and he suggested it would depend on what reasons a state articulated for restricting the issuance of licenses.

“It would depend on what they did and why they did it,” he said.

Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller called the DAPA program “an unprecedented, unlawful exercise of executive power,” arguing that DAPA amounted to “one of the largest changes in immigration policy in our nation’s history.”

That prompted Justice Sonia Sotomayor to raise the “Family Fairness” program under President George H.W. Bush. “How can you say that?” she shot back at Keller. “Forty percent of the immigrant population at the time was affected. ... (A)t least once before, the president has taken action that has greater percentage than here.”

Keller and counsel for the GOP-led House of Representatives repeatedly argued that Congress had never passed legislation intending the undocumented population to obtain lawful presence. Other grants of deferred action, they said, were for immigrants who had some sort of a “bridge” to being in the United States legally, Keller argued — such as foreign students who were granted the right to be here following Hurricane Katrina.

Justice Elena Kagan pressed Keller on whether the administration had the right to tell so-called “low-priority” immigrants that they weren’t likely to get deported. Keller responded “If that’s all they were doing, yes,” and added that it was giving the immigrants the ability to work legally that Texas and the other 25 states found problematic.

Kagan then responded that it was perhaps general regulations concerning work authorization that Texas should be challenging, not so much DAPA itself. “The real challenge is to the regulations,” Kagan said.

If the court’s liberal and conservative wings deadlock in a 4-4 vote, Obama’s plans will almost certainly remain on ice through the end of his presidency.

The challenge argued before the justices on Monday, *United States v. Texas*, was brought by states that contend they and their citizens would suffer as a result of Obama’s efforts to provide some protection and benefits to a large swath of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. One key question for the justices is whether Texas and the other states have the legal standing to sue over a federal immigration program that does not directly impose any requirements on state officials.

A 4-4 tie is possible in the case since the court has been operating one justice short as the result of the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia. Despite the deep divisions on display Monday, the justices could be eager to avoid a tie vote in this case because it would have an unusual impact: upholding a nationwide injunction a judge in Texas issued last year barring Obama from going forward with his latest round of executive actions.

A tie vote at the high court results in the ruling below being upheld. That sometimes allows differing legal rules to apply in different parts of the country. However, due to the injunction in this case, the conservative 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision blasting Obama’s immigration moves as

exceeding his legal authority would appear to set the standard for the whole country, at least through the end of Obama’s term next January.

If the justices are divided evenly in the case and that scenario is unpalatable to them, they also have another option: Set the case for reargument in the fall in the hope a replacement for Scalia will be in position by then and can break the tie.

However, with Republicans in the Senate vowing to block confirmation of anyone to the court before the November election, Obama’s nominee — D.C. Circuit Chief Judge Merrick Garland — doesn’t seem likely to be confirmed to the high court by the time the justices start hearing cases again in the fall. It also would likely be too late by fall for the administration to launch its expanded programs, so the issue would essentially be left to the next president.

Some indication of where the justices stand is expected by June, when the court usually issues its final opinions of the term before breaking for the summer.

Whichever way the high court ultimately rules, its decision will almost certainly re-energize the volatile issue of immigration in the presidential campaign. Both Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have pledged to push the bounds of executive power and expand Obama’s immigration actions. Meanwhile, the top two GOP hopefuls — Donald Trump and Ted Cruz — have promised to rescind the programs immediately and have taken particularly hard-line stances against undocumented immigrants.

Intentionally or not, some of Roberts’ questions also seemed to address proposals Clinton and Sanders have made to expand Obama’s executive actions further — suspending deportations of nearly all illegal immigrants except for criminals.

“Could the president grant deferred action to every unlawful, unlawfully present, alien in the United States right now?” Roberts asked.

“Definitely not,” said Verrilli, who added that the executive branch would still need to make an effort to remove criminals and recent border-crossers.

Verrilli also made an unusual concession, inviting the court to strike out the portion of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson’s 2014 memo that described recipients of the deferred action status to be “lawfully present.”

“If the court wants to put a red pencil through it ... it’s totally fine,” the solicitor general said. “I understand the issues that it’s caused. ... That’s the tail of the dog.” He said the only consequence of that phrase was to make deferred action recipients with work permits eligible for Social Security benefits.

Toward the end of the argument, there were glimmers of hope for the administration both from Kennedy and Roberts. Kennedy said the states might have targeted the wrong thing by going after Obama’s order, when they should

have used a different mechanism to challenge the issuance of work permits.

And Roberts asked Verrilli how many immigrants would be affected if the court ruled that the executive branch doesn't have authority to issue work permits to people who are technically in the U.S. illegally but who aren't going to face deportation. The solicitor general said it could jeopardize work authorization for hundreds of thousands of people seeking asylum as well as millions of foreigners who are technically in violation of immigration law as they wait for the government to act on applications to change their status.

"It would ... totally upend the administration of immigration laws. Frankly, it's a reckless suggestion," he said.

Top administration officials, including Johnson and Attorney General Loretta Lynch, were in court for Monday's arguments, underscoring how Obama's immigration legacy is on the line in the high court fight. He was not successful in signing comprehensive immigration reform into law, and Obama has come under fire from advocates for deporting more than 2 million immigrants during his tenure. Meanwhile, several of his sweeping executive actions have been blocked for more than a year, and even if the Supreme Court rules in his favor, the administration is likely to have less than seven months to jump-start the programs before Obama leaves the White House.

Inside the courtroom, a lawyer for the House of Representatives made that chamber's case against Obama's executive actions to provide deportation protections and work permits to more than 4 million immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally but are parents of U.S. citizens or green-card holders. Obama's actions also expanded a 2012 initiative granting those benefits to immigrants who came here illegally as children. Senate Republicans also filed a brief defending the conservative coalition opposing the immigration actions.

"Congress has passed a statute that says if you are living in this country without legal authority, you cannot work," said Erin Murphy, the lawyer representing the House. The administration has "not pointed to a single deferred action program that granted it to a class of individuals who had no lawful path to status in this country."

On the opposing side, an attorney representing three undocumented mothers from South Texas had 10 minutes to make an appeal on behalf of the immigrant women who say Obama's program would bring needed stability to their lives.

"I believe ... in fact, this is a political dispute," said Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, which was representing the women. "They do not agree with the policy adopted by the administration, though they have conceded in this case that it is within the executive's discretionary authority."

Supreme Court Suggests Divide Over Obama Immigration Plan

By Greg Stohr

[Bloomberg Politics](#), April 18, 2016

U.S. Supreme Court justices suggested they are divided on a challenge to President Barack Obama's plan to shield millions of unauthorized immigrants from deportation.

Hearing arguments in a case that will shape Obama's legacy and the November election, the justices clashed Monday over contentions that the president overstepped his authority when he announced the executive action in 2014.

The 90-minute session suggested the court might divide 4-4 – an outcome that would leave intact a lower court ruling blocking the plan. Some justices, however, discussed a compromise that would leave intact Obama's ability to shield millions from deportation while potentially not resolving whether those people could legally get work.

The likely swing votes in the case – Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Anthony Kennedy – both aimed skeptical questions at the Obama administration lawyer defending the plan.

The plan appears "as if the president is setting a policy and Congress is executing it," Kennedy told U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli during arguments Monday. "That's upside down."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg countered that with more than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., "inevitably priorities have to be set" about how to handle them.

Texas and 25 other mostly Republican-led states are suing over the policy. The administration is trying to overturn a federal appeals court ruling that blocked the plan on a 2-1 vote. Political Fireworks

The case is fraught with political implications. Immigration is already a hot topic in the presidential campaign, with leading Republican candidates Donald Trump and Ted Cruz saying they would deport the 11 million people who are in the country illegally. Even if the Supreme Court upholds Obama's policy, a victory by Trump or Cruz in November would mean the new president could rescind the plan.

The Feb. 13 death of Justice Antonin Scalia has complicated the case, raising the prospect of a 4-4 split that would leave intact the lower court decision and a trial judge's order blocking the policy from taking effect.

The Republican-controlled Senate has refused to consider Obama's nomination of federal appellate judge Merrick Garland to succeed Scalia.

Under Obama's plan, known as DAPA, people whose children are either U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, and who meet other requirements, could get relief from deportation for three years plus the right to apply for work

permits. Those people, who are primarily from Mexico and Central America, wouldn't be given an easier path to citizenship.

"How is it possible to lawfully work in the United States without lawfully being in the United States?" asked Justice Samuel Alito during the argument.

The administration says about 4 million people would qualify for DAPA, although estimates vary.

The case is U.S. v. Texas, 15-674.

Supreme Court Justices Appear Split On Immigration Case

If court deadlocks, Obama's policy to shield millions from deportation likely would be frozen

By Brent Kendall, Jess Bravin And Louise Radnofsky

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Chief Justice Roberts Uses Obama's Words Against Him On Immigration Case

By Stephen Dinan

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. prodded the Obama administration Monday to explain President Obama's immigration flip-flop, when Mr. Obama in 2014 reversed himself and decided he did, after all, have powers to grant a tentative amnesty to as many as 5 million illegal immigrants.

Mr. Obama had repeatedly denied he had that kind of power, then after the 2014 election, when Congress refused to act on his policies, the president claimed a do-over and said he did have the power.

Chief Justice Roberts wondered what changed in Mr. Obama's mind, and even read back one of Mr. Obama's quotes to Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli Jr. recounting the president saying he would be "ignoring the law" if he were to grant a broad stay of deportation to millions of illegal immigrants.

"What was he talking about?" the chief justice prodded.

Mr. Verrilli said Mr. Obama may have changed his mind after asking the Justice Department's legal advisory branch to take a closer look at his powers.

"You know, what happened here is that the president and the secretary went to the Office of Legal Counsel and asked for an opinion about the scope of their authority to --the scope of this discretionary authority, and they got one. And they exercised it consistently with that and up to the limits of that and no further," Mr. Verrilli said.

Immigrant-rights activists had repeatedly told Mr. Obama he had authority to grant "deferred action" to million of illegal immigrants, but the president shot those requests

down, telling the activists he didn't think he could defend that action in court.

But he reversed course in November 2014 and concluded he did have the power. Under his policy, millions of illegal immigrant young adults and parents with children who do have legal status would be eligible for a three-year proactive stay of deportation and for work permits and taxpayer benefits, including driver's licenses.

Texas and 25 other states sued, arguing the president overstepped his powers. Lower courts halted the amnesty, and cited Mr. Obama's own words in their rulings.

Texas Leads Supreme Court Case Against Obama's Immigration Actions

By Christine Ayala

[Dallas Morning News](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON – The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Monday in an immigration case that could affect as many as 4 million people in the country illegally.

The case centers on two executive actions by President Barack Obama that shield certain people in the country from deportation and allow them to work legally in the United States.

Texas is leading the case against the immigration actions and is backed by 26 other states, challenging a 2014 policy put on hold by lower courts, known as

Deferred Action for Parents of Americans. It furthered a 2012 policy known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

The protection would apply to parents whose children are U.S. citizens, and expand the 2012 policy to include those brought to the country illegally as children. More than 700,000 people have taken advantage of those protections since 2012, although it could affect as many as 4 million people

. There are more than 11 million people in the country illegally.

The high court will weigh state standing in the case and the president's duty to faithfully execute the law.

According to SCOTUSblog, Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller challenged the actions, along with Erin Murphy, representing House Republicans.

The state argues that it has standing to sue because it would be saddled with the cost of issuing driver's licenses to those who qualify for legal status under either of Obama's deferred action plans. Keller noted the president needs Congress to grant legal authority before he can defer deportations.

"Our lawsuit to stop President Obama's illegal immigration policy is about a concept as old as the nation's founding: that one person cannot unilaterally change the law," Attorney General Ken Paxton said in a statement, claiming if Obama goes unchecked "nothing would stop a future

president from issuing an executive order" to dissolve rights of the people and of the states.

"What's at stake in this case is a lot more than immigration policy ...the outcome will determine the vitality of the constitutional separation of powers," said Curt Levey, FreedomWorks Foundation executive director.

U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. and Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, defended Obama's action, noting the family benefits of the policies.

Saenz represents two unnamed mothers living in the country illegally. He said they

"live in daily fear they will be separated from their families," according to The Wall Street Journal

"Solicitor General Donald Verrilli made clear that DAPA and the expansion of DACA are on solid legal ground and well within the parameters of the president's authority to set common-sense priorities in the execution of immigration law," said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center.

"The presence of thousands of people at the Supreme Court today demonstrates both how many families are impacted by this needless delay and how important it is to let these programs go forward," said Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza.

A decision is not expected until late June, just before presidential nominees are named. The campaign cycle has seen heated immigration rhetoric, with proposals involving a border wall, deportations and immigration bans from the leading Republican candidates.

Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton said Obama acted "within his legal and constitutional authority in halting the deportation of parents and children," calling for the court to uphold the policies.

"They call America home and want nothing more than to continue to contribute to their communities," she said.

Rep. Pete Olson, R-Sugar Land, tweeted Monday "payers constitutional order is restored."

Austin Democrat Lloyd Doggett urged for support of "Obama's pro-family immigration actions."

Daniel Garza, executive director of the nonpartisan LIBRE Initiative, said although immigration reform is past due

"it must be done the right way," noting Obama's policies were not consistent with constitutional law.

Supreme Court Split On Obama Amnesty; Kennedy: Policy 'Just Upside-down'

By Stephen Dinan

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court divided deeply Monday over President Obama's deportation amnesty, with conservative justices saying the White House was trying to steal Congress's law-making powers, and liberal justices suggesting the court should stay out of the fight altogether, leaving the president with a free hand.

Outside the court, thousands of Hispanic-rights protesters rallied, demanding legal status from the courts and vowing political retribution on Congress — and Republicans in particular — if Mr. Obama loses his case.

Inside the courtroom, however, the argument was lower-key, with the justices sparring with lawyers over the tricky interplay between the law, federal regulations and Mr. Obama's hopes of shielding most illegal immigrants from deportation.

"It's as if the president is setting the policy and Congress is executing it. That's just upside-down," said Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, who is expected to be an important voice as the court decides what to do.

At issue is the amnesty Mr. Obama and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson announced in November 2014, granting nearly half of the 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. a proactive stay of deportation, along with the promise of work permits that entitled them to driver's licenses, Social Security numbers and some taxpayer benefits.

Texas led 25 other states in suing, arguing they suffered economic harm from the amnesty, and saying it would likely lead to even more illegal immigrants. The states said Mr. Obama broke administrative law and immigration law, and violated the Constitution.

Lower courts sided with the states and halted the amnesty on statutory grounds.

But the high court's liberal justices questioned whether Texas could sue, suggesting the states don't have standing because they haven't shown a concrete harm that couldn't be staved off with a quick change in Texas's own driver's license laws.

Indeed, liberal justices said if Texas could sue to stop immigration policy like this, it would open the door for states to sue any time they find fault with a federal policy, making judges the referees in myriad disputes.

"That really pits the states against every federal agency," said Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

A ruling is expected from the justices by the end of June.

But with the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the eight-member court could deadlock 4-4. That would leave the appeals court's decision in place, which would be a victory for Mr. Obama's opponents.

A tie ruling, though, would also mean the court wouldn't issue a definitive statement on Mr. Obama's claims of power. That would leave for a future court the question of just how

far a president can go to shape or, as Mr. Obama said, to “change” the law on his — or her — own.

Supreme Court Hears Landmark Obama Immigration Case

By Lomi Kriel And Kevin Diaz

[Houston Chronicle](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON – A shorthanded Supreme Court heard a Texas-led challenge against President Barack Obama’s 2014 immigration plan Monday with sharp questions about whether the state could bring the case to begin with and if the president had overstepped.

The eight justices appeared largely divided with the four liberal justices asking questions that seemed to indicate it supported the president’s plan while the four conservative justices questioned the limits of his executive authority.

As stake is not only the future of about 4 million immigrants here illegally, mostly the parents of American citizens, but the extent of presidential authority and the scope states have to challenge federal policy. A decision could be the most important related to immigration in decades.

The case comes at the height of a presidential campaign where immigration has been a defining issue and as the court itself is embroiled in a political battle to fill the seat of Justice Antonin Scalia.

Texas, leading a coalition of 26 mostly Republican states, filed to stop the plan immediately after Obama announced it in November 2014. It would provide provisional work permits to largely the parents of American citizens who have been here since 2010 without committing serious crimes.

Many think the eight justices may not be able to reach a majority decision on the matter or want to wait until they have a full bench to decide an issue of such import. If they split 4-4, it would uphold a lower court’s decision to block the president’s plan but wouldn’t resolve any of the issues at hand and other states could sue to try enact the program.

Chief Justice John Roberts is considered a contender to side with the four liberal judges in deciding that Texas isn’t able to bring the suit in the first place because it can’t prove it will suffer as a result of the program, necessary for it to sue in federal court.

Texas said it would lose money if it is required to provide driver’s licenses to the nearly 600,000 immigrants who would be eligible for a provisional work permit through the president’s plan. The state subsidizes the document by about \$130.

But U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli argued Monday that Texas could simply change its policy and not offer these immigrants licenses or choose not to offset the cost of the documents.

Roberts, who has taken a narrow position on so-called standing in the past, noted that not granting licenses to certain immigrants with work authorization when others with a similar status have them could be considered discriminatory, putting Texas in a tough spot.

He asked Verrilli whether the injury Texas argues it might suffer is similar to a 2007 environmental case in which Massachusetts sued the Environmental Protection Agency about its refusal to regulate vehicle emissions linked to climate change.

“There wasn’t a way for Massachusetts to avoid the effects of climate change but there is a way here,” Verrilli said, because Texas isn’t required to discount the license.

Massachusetts had argued that rising seawater, a result of global warming, would erode its coastline and hurt the state, giving it sufficient claim to sue the federal government. The state prevailed but Roberts led the court’s conservative dissent, arguing Massachusetts could not prove it was hurt by the government’s policy.

Monday Justice Stephen Breyer noted that the state’s main argument that it would be harmed is that it would lose money.

“We can’t just let you sue on the basis that you as a taxpayer would pay more money,” he said. “Because if we do, taxpayers from all over the country would sue” about their unhappiness with any number of federal programs.

Much of the argument revolved around whether Texas has the right to challenge the program in the first place. But Roberts also seemed concerned about the scope of the program and asked whether the president could defer the removal of all 11 million immigrants in the country illegally.

No one disputes that the administration must prioritize whom it deports because there simply aren’t enough resources to remove all of them. But Texas contends proactively choosing not to deport such a big pool of immigrants and granting them work permits is abdicating the president’s authority to enforce immigration law.

At issue is how much authority the president wields to shape policy, especially if it goes against Congressional will,

Justice Anthony Kennedy, who is often the deciding vote in close cases, worried Monday that the administration may have overstepped its authority by having the executive branch set immigration policy rather than carry out laws passed by Congress.

“What we are doing is defining the limits of discretion,” he said. “It seems to me that this is a legislative and not an executive act it’s as if the president is setting policy and and the Congress is executing it.”

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sounded an optimistic note on the court house steps.

“It’s an amazing opportunity, an amazing day for us,” he said. “Our efforts to stop the president’s illegal immigration plan go back to fundamental principles – which is that one

person doesn't have the unilateral authority to change the law and make new law."

He was joined by solicitor general Scott Keller, who added, "fundamentally this case has always been about the separation of powers. What DACA does is transform unlawful conduct into lawful conduct, and if the president or the executive has the power to do that, it should trouble every American."

As the lawyers filed out of the court building, a small clutch of administration critics, including U.S. Rep. Louis Gohmert, a Republican from Texas, set up a microphone to make speeches.

"It's ironic that people who came into this country illegally want us to be like the countries they came from where we don't respect the law," Gohmert said.

He, as well as Iowa U.S. Rep. Steve King, another immigration hard-liner, were largely drowned out by pro-Obama activists who surrounded them.

At one point during a chaotic street scene, Gohmert's group started to sing the national anthem when some of the immigration activists joined in.

Supreme Court Is Divided Over Immigration Case That Affects Families

By Maria Recio

[McClatchy](#), April 18, 2016

A divided Supreme Court considered President Barack Obama's far-reaching immigration program affecting 4 million people Monday as hundreds of chanting protesters gathered outside.

The court heard oral arguments in *Texas v. U.S.*, a challenge by the Lone Star State and 25 other states to the Obama administration's 2014 policy allowing immigrant parents of U.S.-born or legal-resident children who have here illegally since 2010 to defer deportation and get work permits.

Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, or DAPA, never took effect, because Texas secured a preliminary injunction against it. (The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA, program applies to children brought to the U.S. illegally and is not affected by this case, except for the administration's proposal to extend the work permit for so-called Dreamers to three years from two.)

Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. sparred Monday with Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. over the government's position that Texas did not have "standing" to sue the federal government. The state claims that having to issue an additional 500,000 driver's licenses as a result of the program is a burdensome cost that gives it the right to sue.

The government counters that states would be able to sue over any program or regulation to which they objected.

This class of aliens is the lowest priority. And there is a pressing humanitarian concern in avoiding the breakup of families that contain U.S. citizen children.

U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, often the swing vote when the court had nine members, questioned the administration making a decision that he said belonged to Congress. "That seems to me to have it backwards. It's as if – that the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That's just upside down."

(There are currently eight members of the court after Justice Antonin Scalia died in Texas in February.)

Obama acted after lawmakers failed to pass a comprehensive immigration overhaul in 2014. The Supreme Court case is considered to be extremely political, with immigration a front-burner issue in the 2016 presidential campaign.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor sparred with Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller over the millions of immigrants in the United States illegally. Keller told her, "Congress has to grant the statutory authority first for the executive to be able to act. And to do so, on a question that's of this deep economic significance, it would have to do so expressly."

Sotomayor retorted, "Those nearly 11 million unauthorized aliens are here in the shadows. They are affecting the economy whether we want to or not. The answer is, if Congress really wanted not to have an economic impact, it would – it would allot the amount of money necessary to deport them, but it hasn't."

The three female justices interjected frequently throughout the 90-minute argument – Justices Elena Kagan and Ruth Bader Ginsburg following on each other's comments and those of Sotomayor. Justice Clarence Thomas did not ask any questions, as is his custom, but he is considered a reliably conservative vote.

Supreme Court Divided On Obama's Immigration Actions

By Ariane De Vogue

[CNN](#), April 18, 2016

Washington (CNN)The Supreme Court appeared closely divided along ideological lines during oral arguments Monday in a case that could determine President Barack Obama's legacy on immigration.

Conservative justices questioned Obama's authority to use executive actions to shield some 4 million undocumented immigrants from deportation. Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito seemed particularly concerned with language in the administration's guidance that said the program's recipients would be "lawfully present," which they suggested would contradict immigration law.

"How is it possible to lawfully work in the United States without lawfully being in the United States?" Alito asked.

Roberts added: "I mean, they're lawfully present, and yet, they're present in violation of the law?"

Transcript: Supreme Court oral arguments on immigration executive action

Liberals on the bench seemed sympathetic to the administration's arguments. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg noted at one point that there are 11.3 million undocumented aliens in the country and Congress has provided funds for removing about 4 million. "So inevitably, priorities have to be set," she said.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor said there are not enough resources to deport everyone. "They are here whether we want them or not," she said.

Obama announced the moves to great fanfare in late 2014, as a response to congressional inaction on immigration reform. But a federal court blocked them after Texas and 25 other states sued.

Immigration at the Supreme Court: What you need to know

Busloads of immigrants' rights activists – some of them undocumented – appeared on the court's plaza to support the policies. The moves are meant to shield them from deportation and allow them work permits.

Nancy Garcia, a U.S. citizen from Milwaukee, who was protesting with the Wisconsin group Voces de la Frontera (Voices from the Border), said she became active on the issue after Wisconsin lawmakers tried to crack down on undocumented immigrants.

"We're not drug lords. We're not rapists. We're good people," Garcia said.

Tea Party Patriots member Gregg Cummings said he arrived at 6 a.m. to find a spot in front of the court to protest the executive actions. Cummings, from Lamoni, Iowa, said he is concerned about the prospect of Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, changing the ideological balance of the court.

"Our number one purpose of being here is supporting the senators better standing strong on no votes on the new Supreme Court justice," he said.

Critics of Obama's moves say they are part of a pattern of the White House looking to go around the Republican Congress.

"Basically the President has stepped in and taken over what normally would be associated with Congress," Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said in an interview. "Congress makes the laws."

Roberts also seemed concerned with the scope of the government's argument defending Obama's moves. "Under your argument, could the President grant deferred removal to every unlawful – unlawfully present alien in the United States right now?" he asked Solicitor General Donald Verrilli.

At one point, Justice Anthony Kennedy suggested that the president might have strayed into Congress' territory. "It's as if – that the President is setting the policy and Congress is executing it," he said. "That's just upside down."

The GOP Congress was involved at oral arguments as well. The House of Representatives, in an unusual move, intervened in the case against the administration, and had 15 minutes before the eight justices.

That only eight justices are hearing the case – due to the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia – could impact the final result. A split court between the four Democratic-appointed justices and four GOP-appointed justices would mean the programs remain blocked and the case is sent back to the district court in Texas that blocked them in the first place.

How the Supreme Court has changed since Justice Antonin Scalia died

Standing issue on center stage

For the administration, a key argument before the court is to say that the states do not have the legal right to bring the case in the first place. If it can convince a majority of justices on that issue, the court may not even get to the merits of the immigration debate.

All eyes were on Roberts, who has in past cases sometimes limited who can bring challenges to court. On Monday, he asked some critical questions of the government's position, but it was unclear how interested he might be in dismissing the case on standing.

"The question is: Does Texas have the right to bring this case?" said CNN Senior Legal Analyst Jeffrey Toobin. "Texas says if you give legal status to these people, then we'll have to give them drivers licenses. The federal government says there's nothing in this law about drivers licenses. This law is directed entirely at the immigrants themselves, it does not impose any obligations on the states. So the states should not have the right to challenge it. That's the standing argument. I think the Obama administration thinks they have a better chance at winning over one of the conservatives on standing than they do on the merits of the case."

Elizabeth Wydra, President of the Constitutional Accountability Center, who filed a brief in support of the government says she wouldn't write off the chief justice on the merits of the case or on the issue of standing.

"On the merits, Chief Justice Roberts' concerns seemed to be alleviated when the Solicitor General clarified that undocumented immigrants—given relief under the programs – are simply afforded deferred action but none the less are subject to removal proceedings at any time the executive changes its enforcement priorities," she said.

Should it win on that count, the injunction would be lifted, and the programs would be able to go into effect during the final months of the Obama presidency.

However, because the actions can be changed or reversed by the next President, immigrants would have to decide whether to come forward for the remaining months of the Obama administration or risk doing so with the possibility of Donald Trump or Ted Cruz in the White House.

"There's no question that the ultimate fate of the deferred action policy hangs in the balance of the upcoming election," said Stephen I. Vladeck, a professor of law at American University and CNN Legal Analyst.

"Like any other executive order, it can be modified, rescinded, or expanded by the next President, and codified or overruled by the next Congress," Vladeck added. "But the fact that the Supreme Court expedited its consideration of the Obama administration's appeal so that it could resolve the dispute by June suggests that, even short-handed, the justices want to have their own say first."

Legacy issue for Obama

The White House announced the programs in November 2014, issuing a five-page guidance memo enabling qualifying undocumented workers to receive temporary relief from the threat of deportation and to apply for programs that could qualify them for work authorization and associated benefits.

The Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) targets the nearly 4.3 million undocumented parents of citizens and lawful residents, and the second rule expands Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), initiative aimed at non citizens who came to the country as children.

"We'll bring more undocumented immigrants out of the shadows so they can play by the rules, pay their full share of taxes, pass a criminal background check and get right with the law," Obama told an audience in Nevada after the programs were announced.

The programs remain frozen nationwide. They were first blocked by a federal judge in Texas and a divided federal appeals court later upheld the preliminary injunction.

Obama's lawyers argue in court papers that the lower court rulings threatened great harm, "not only to the proper role of federal courts and to federal immigration law, but also to millions of parents of U.S. citizens and permanent residents, aliens who are the lowest priorities for removal yet now work off the books to support their families."

As a threshold issue, Verrilli says that the states don't have the legal right to be in court, because the Constitution "assigns the formation of immigration policy exclusively to the National Government precisely because immigration is an inherently national matter."

He stressed that the guidance from the government does not provide any kind of lawful status under immigration law as the aliens remain removable at any time.

"Immigrant communities fought for these programs," said Marielena Hincapié, the executive director of the

National Immigration Law Center. She says that her groups have been informing people about the risks of the rules being changed by the next president and she believes many will come forward should the Obama administration win.

Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller argues that the states have standing to bring the challenge in part because DAPA would create a new class of recipients for state subsidized driver's licenses in Texas. He says that Texas would stand to lose millions of dollars if even a small fraction of DAPA eligible aliens applied.

"DAPA is an extraordinary assertion of executive power," Keller wrote in court papers. "The Executive has unilaterally crafted an enormous program – one of the largest changes ever to our Nation's approach to immigration," he said. "In doing so, the Executive dispensed with immigration statutes by declaring unlawful conduct to be lawful."

He points to the guidance and says that the eligible undocumented immigrants would be permitted to be "lawfully present in the United States," which would make them eligible for work authorization and some types of Social Security and Medicare benefits.

Texas is supported by the GOP-led House of Representatives, who say that the programs went forward after the President failed in his attempts to persuade Congress to revise immigration laws.

Erin E. Murphy, a lawyer for the House, called the administration's position, "the most aggressive of executive power claims."

Andrew Pincus, a lawyer who supports the administration's position, says that allowing Texas to bring the case would have broad implications.

"If a state can sue every time the federal government does something to increase the state's costs, states could sue to challenge almost anything the federal government does," he said.

Pincus points out that Texas is not objecting to the administration's use of prosecutorial discretion, it just doesn't want the undocumented workers to be able to work legally.

"You are saying to these people, you can stay here, but we are keeping you in a bubble," he said.

Court Appears Divided, Signaling Trouble For Obama On Immigration

By Lydia Wheeler

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court appeared divided during oral arguments Monday in a crucial case challenging the executive actions on immigration President Obama took in 2014.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, who is typically the court's swing voter, seemed to side with Texas and the 25 other states arguing the president overstepped his executive

authority in granting deferred deportation to nearly 5 million immigrants.

Kennedy said the justices were being asked to define the limits of discretion, adding that Obama's actions seemed more like a legislative act than an executive one.

"It's as if the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it," he said. "That's just upside down."

A 4-4 split by the court, which has shown signs of struggling to decide cases with just eight justices, would leave in place a lower court decision blocking Obama's actions. The split outcome would virtually guarantee that Obama's programs wouldn't start until after he leaves office, if at all.

The justices spent the majority of the 90-minute arguments Monday grappling with whether Texas has a legal basis to challenge the creation of the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) initiative and the expansion of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Both programs have been on hold since February 2015.

The states claim they would be burdened by having to spend more on public services like healthcare, law enforcement and education if undocumented parents of both American citizens and legal permanent residents are allowed to stay in the country.

Texas, specifically, said it would be hurt by having to issue more drivers licenses, a benefit that's now subsidized.

"Isn't losing money the classic case for standing?" Chief Justice John Roberts asked.

Since the administration argued that DAPA does not injure states because it does not require them to do anything, Roberts wanted to know whether it would be illegal for Texas to deny DAPA recipients drivers licenses.

"If they did not offer licenses to those who are lawfully present because of your policy, avoided that injury, you would sue them, wouldn't you?" he asked Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr., who argued on behalf of the administration.

Verrilli said he wasn't sure if the government would sue since Texas has not changed its law.

"No, because they have what seems to me a perfectly legitimate policy," Roberts quipped.

Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan questioned why the states aren't challenging federal regulations that have long granted recipients of deferred action the ability to work and receive public benefits.

"It seems to me that what you should be attacking is not DAPA," Kagan said. "What you should be attacking is the work authorization regulations DHS [Department of Homeland Security], or before that, the INA [Immigrant and Nationality Act] has had for 30 years," Kagan told Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller.

But Keller said the states chose to challenge DAPA itself instead of the government regulations.

"That is what is transforming unlawful conduct into authorized lawful conduct," he said.

Sotomayor jumped on Keller's comments that DAPA is "one of the largest changes in immigration policy in our nation's history."

"How can you say that?" she asked. "We have the Fairness Act that happened in 1990. It granted basically the same thing, deferred action and work authorization, to 1.5 million people out of 4 million. Forty percent of the immigrant population of the time was affected. Here, the best estimate is that only 35 percent are affected."

When Keller corrected Sotomayor and said that only 47,000 people actually got relief, she pointed to congressional action.

"Here, we have a Congress that's decided — some members of the Congress have decided — they don't like it, and so Congress has remained silent," Sotomayor said. "It doesn't mean that at some later point after the election or whenever, Congress can't step in and do what it wants to do."

The House of Representatives had 15 minutes Monday to argue that the president's programs should be struck down.

Erin Murphy, the attorney representing the House, argued the president does not have the power to give immigrants the ability to work in the U.S. If all the administration wanted to do was protect people from being deported, she said, it would have simply issued an enforcement priority memo.

"What the executive wanted to accomplish was something more," she said. "To say not only are you not an enforcement priority, but we want you to be eligible to work and to receive benefits. And the way that we do that is by taking this affirmative act of converting you into a status that, under our own regulation, changes your eligibility."

The Supreme Court issued the order giving lawmakers a chance to be heard after the House filed an amicus brief in support of the states. Democrats who disagreed with the Republican-led brief filed a brief of their own in support of the administration but did not get time in court to argue their position.

The case could have a devastating effect on the president's legacy. Obama vowed when he campaigned in both 2008 and 2012 to push for comprehensive immigration reform but has yet to fulfill those promises.

A 4-4 tie could kill the immigration programs for good. The lower court's temporary injunction would stand while the states seek to permanently block the president's actions. The litigation could then span into the next administration, which may or may not fight to uphold Obama's actions, depending on who the next president is.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest on Monday declined to guess how the justices will decide.

"At this point, I am going to withhold any prognostication on behalf of the administration and reiterate our confidence in

the power of the legal arguments” made by administration lawyers, he told reporters.

The high court asked both parties to argue an additional question in their briefs — 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. That move signaled the justices are determined to settle the case, though the question was never raised during oral arguments.

— Jordan Fabian contributed to this report, which was updated at 3:01 p.m.

Supreme Court Split On Obama Immigration Plan

By Richard Wolf

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — President Obama’s plan to offer temporary protection from deportation to more than 4 million undocumented immigrants ran into opposition from conservative justices on the Supreme Court Monday, but the outcome of the case remained unclear.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Anthony Kennedy didn’t give much ground, as immigration rights advocates had hoped, on Texas’ right to sue the federal government or on the president’s right to go around Congress.

“We’re defining the limits of discretion” for who the government can and cannot deport,” Kennedy told U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli. “That seems to me to be a legislative, not an executive act.”

The court’s more liberal justices argued that all Obama’s deferred-action program does is tell undocumented immigrants who qualify that “you will not be deported unless we change our minds,” Justice Elena Kagan said.

The immigration battle took two forms before the court as the Obama administration fought with Texas and 25 other states as well as with the House of Representatives, which blocked the president’s effort to confer legal status to some of the nation’s more than 11 million illegal immigrants.

And it occurred in the midst of a presidential election in which Republican candidates Donald Trump and Ted Cruz have promised to crack down and deport the same people that Democrats Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders want to help.

Much of the debate before the eight-member court following the death of Justice Antonin Scalia focused on the words “lawfully present” — a phrase used by the federal government, but which Verrilli insisted had no meaning in immigration law. Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito didn’t buy that explanation.

But the case also could be decided on more narrow grounds: whether Texas even has the right to sue based on

its prediction that it would have to spend money issuing driver’s licenses to hundreds of thousands of immigrants who receive the three-year reprieve from possible deportation.

“The bottom line is if we’re going to issue more driver’s licenses, we’re going to have to spend more money,” said Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller.

Obama announced the “Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents,” or DAPA program, in November 2014. It would extend protections to more than 4 million parents who meet the criteria, just as a 2012 program did for immigrants brought to the United States as children. More than 700,000 have qualified for that earlier program.

Once qualified, the parents also could apply for work authorization and could receive public benefits, such as Social Security. Those with criminal backgrounds or who have arrived since 2010 would not qualify.

Texas and 25 other states challenged Obama’s authority to do it by executive action, rather than going through Congress. Federal district court Judge Andrew Hanen in Brownsville, Texas, upheld the challenge in February 2015 and blocked the program from being implemented nationally.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit upheld that ruling last November in a divided, 2-1 decision. The panel’s majority also said Obama exceeded his authority by going around Congress.

The Supreme Court agreed in January to hear the case and expanded its scope to include whether Obama’s action violated the Constitution’s “Take Care” clause by failing to faithfully execute the nation’s immigration laws. The justices did not mention that at all during Monday’s argument.

Scalia’s absence is not expected to influence the case, since a 4-4 vote would leave the federal appeals court ruling in Texas’ favor standing. A tie vote would not set a national precedent, but it would keep the national injunction against the program in place.

Supreme Court Seems Divided Over Obama Immigration Actions

By Mark Sherman

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appeared divided between its liberal and conservative justices Monday over President Barack Obama’s immigration programs that could affect millions of people who are in the country illegally.

The administration’s best hope for a favorable ruling after 90 minutes of arguments at the high court appeared to rest with Chief Justice John Roberts. Roberts asked questions suggesting he could side with the administration if there were a small change in the proposed programs.

The administration is asking the justices to allow it to put in place two programs that could shield roughly 4 million people from deportation and make them eligible to work in the United States.

Texas is leading 26 states dominated by Republicans in challenging the programs that Obama announced in 2014 and that have been put on hold by lower courts.

The programs would apply to parents whose children are citizens or are living in the country legally. Eligibility also would be expanded for the president's 2012 effort that applies to people who were brought here illegally as children. More than 700,000 people have taken advantage of that earlier program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The new program for parents, known as Deferred Action for Parents of Americans, and the expanded program for children could reach as many as 4 million people, according to the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute.

The fate of the programs could hang on a two-word phrase the administration used to describe the status of immigrants under the programs—lawful presence. Texas and congressional Republicans who back the state say the phrase is important because it gives the immigrants more rights than federal law allows.

Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. told the justices that they could get rid of that phrase and essentially leave the programs unchanged. "If the court wants to put a red pencil through it, that's totally fine," Verrilli said.

Later in the arguments, Roberts sounded interested in that idea, asking lawyer Erin Murphy if the court could, in fact, just "cross it out."

Murphy, representing House Republicans, said it wasn't that simple.

If the court is split ideologically, the case could end in a 4-4 tie following Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February. That would leave the programs in limbo, almost certainly through the end of Obama's presidency.

Both sides acknowledge that the outcome of the presidential election could determine the programs' fates, even if the Supreme Court rules for the administration. Republican candidates have pledged to roll back Obama's actions, and Republican candidate Donald Trump has proposed deporting the roughly 11 million people who are living in the U.S. illegally.

As arguments began, hundreds of pro-immigration demonstrators filled the sidewalk in front of the court and spilled into the street, leading police to close the road to traffic. Demonstrators held signs that read "Keep Families Together" and chanted "Si se puede," which is Spanish for "Yes we can."

"We are here to tell them this is our home and we are not going anywhere," said Cristina Jimenez, director of United We Dream, a group that advocates for immigrant families.

A small group of demonstrators opposing Obama's action held signs saying the president had overstepped his authority.

The high court is expected to decide by late June whether the efforts can move forward in the waning months of Obama's presidency, amid a presidential campaign that has been marked by harsh Republican rhetoric over immigration.

Republican governors and members of Congress have argued that Obama doesn't have the power to effectively change immigration law. When he announced the measures 17 months ago, Obama said he was acting under his own authority because Congress had failed to overhaul the immigration system. The Senate had passed legislation on a bipartisan vote, but House Republicans refused to put the matter to a vote.

The administration and immigration advocates say the immigration orders are neither unprecedented nor even unusual. Rather, they say, Obama's programs build on past efforts by Democratic and Republican administrations to use discretion in deciding whom to deport.

The administration and its supporters said the challenged programs do not offer blanket protection, but depend on case-by-case reviews. The protection from deportation also would be temporary, for three years.

Another 16 Democratic-led states and the District of Columbia said they would reap billions of dollars in additional taxes and would see other benefits, including increasing trust between immigrant communities and police, if the programs are allowed to take effect.

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The 5 Key Questions From The Supreme Court's Immigration Arguments

By Sam Baker

[National Journal](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court on Monday seemed to blow right past every off-ramp it could have taken if it wanted to avert a 4-4 tie in a major challenge to President Obama's immigration policies.

There did not appear to be five votes for anything Monday—not for a decision dismissing the case, or a decisive victory on either side, or even the narrower rulings that some briefs had suggested. The justices never even mentioned a potentially enormous constitutional question they had specifically asked the two sides to argue.

The Court will likely hand down its immigration ruling in late June, at the height of the 2016 campaign season. And because it will decide whether Obama can implement even part of his signature immigration program known as

DAPA, many legal observers expected the eight-member Court to seek out some way to avoid a tie.

A 4-4 split would prevent Obama from implementing the program, and that appeared to be the most likely outcome following 90 minutes of oral arguments Monday. But as the justices enter private deliberations, they still have plenty of options to avoid a dead-lock—if they want to.

Here are the five most important questions that the justices asked Monday, when the court's conservatives seemed to reject arguments that the White House had tailored to them and its liberal bloc sought to raise the stakes of an anti-DAPA ruling:

John Roberts: "Isn't losing money the classic case for standing?"

Heading in to Monday's oral arguments, some legal experts on the left thought they had a good shot at persuading Chief Justice Roberts that Texas did not have the legal standing to bring this law-suit. He has taken a limited view of standing in the past, and he might be looking for a way to keep the Court out of the bitter politics surrounding immigration policy—so, the thinking went, standing was the way to get his support.

But Roberts didn't appear to take the bait Monday. He quickly and aggressively challenged Solicitor General Donald Verilli on the standing issue, and suggested later that Texas had in fact presented a "classic case for standing."

Texas offers driver's licenses, which it subsidizes, to undocumented immigrants with legal status. The state says DAPA would harm it by making more people eligible for those licenses, thereby increasing the state's costs. The Justice Department says that's simply an "incidental" effect—and that Texas could avoid the additional costs if it simply stopped providing driver's licenses to non-citizens.

"I just think that's a real Catch-22," Roberts said. "You would sue them instantly."

Oral arguments aren't always what they seem: Sometimes, justices ask aggressive questions because they're trying to tease out the limits of a position they're inclined to support. It's possible that's what Roberts was doing Monday, but he didn't make much effort to press both sides of the issue. And the rest of his questioning seemed skeptical of DAPA.

Anthony Kennedy: "It's as if the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That's just upside down."

Kennedy was reacting to the Justice Department's argument that, when past presidents have exercised similar enforcement discretion, Congress has often gone on to codify those policies into law—a process that seems to "have it backwards," Kennedy said.

Neither Roberts nor Kennedy seemed especially likely to provide a deciding vote in the Obama administration's

favor—making a 4-4 dead-lock appear to be the most likely outcome, unless the justices' private deliberations yield some sort of narrow compromise. Although Kennedy questioned whether Texas should have pursued a different legal strategy that might not have blocked DAPA so quickly, he was also skeptical about the administration's assertions of executive authority.

Roberts: "Why don't we just cross out 'lawfully present'?"

The Court spent a great deal of Monday's arguments mired in a circular and ultimately unresolved debate about "legal status" and "lawful presence"—what they mean, who has them, and who can grant them. Although the DAPA guidance uses the term "lawfully present," the Justice Department says it does not confer legal status—people shielded by DAPA are still breaking the law.

"Lawfully present does not mean you're legally present?" Roberts asked. Correct, Verilli said, comparing DAPA beneficiaries to other groups who are allowed to work inside the U.S. but are still at least potentially subject to deportation.

"If the Court thinks it's a problem and wants to put a red pencil through it, it's totally fine," Verilli said.

Texas's attorneys said striking that one phrase would not alter DAPA's effects, but the dispute over the extent of DAPA's legal protections opened the door for the liberal justices.

Elena Kagan: "It seems to me ... that what you should be attacking is not DAPA. What you should be attacking is the work authorization regulations that the DHS ... has had for 30 years."

If DAPA lives, Kagan will likely deserve the credit for its survival.

Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller conceded that the Homeland Security Department has the authority to decide not to deport certain people. The problem, he said, comes when those people gain legal status and, with it, the ability to work and collect Social Security benefits. ("We admit that they could do forbearance from removal. But what they can't do is grant authorization to be in the country," Keller said Monday.)

Kagan's goal was to separate the two. DAPA, she said, is nothing more than a statement of non-enforcement. Its previous regulations, written in the 1980s, extend work authorization and federal benefits to people who are shielded from deportation. And DAPA wouldn't be a burden on Texas if DAPA itself does not grant work authorization and benefits.

"Where does it say that in DAPA? We have the DAPA directive. I didn't see anything in it about work authorization or about Social Security," Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said Monday.

And if it's not DAPA that allows some undocumented workers to obtain a work authorization, what are the limits on those work permits?

Kagan: "A policy that said, 'If you've been in the United States for 30 years and you have children here, we're not going to deport you unless we decide otherwise, and you're entitled to work on the books'—could DHS do that?"

Kagan posed this question to Erin Murphy, who represented House Republicans. Murphy argued that the executive branch cannot grant work permits without specific permission from Congress—meaning, she said, that even the more limited form of deferred action in Kagan's hypothetical would also be illegal.

"Forget about deferred action. There are millions of people who get work authorization under existing law now who couldn't get it if that were the proper interpretation of the law," Verilli said. "It would completely and totally upend the administration of the immigration laws, and, frankly, it's a reckless suggestion."

That concern at least piqued Roberts's interest. As the argument came to a close Monday, he asked Verilli how many people would lose existing work permits under the House's view.

"Millions. Millions," he said. "Huge numbers."

Supreme Court Justices Hear Arguments In Dispute Over Obama Immigration Actions

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appears divided over Obama administration programs that could affect millions of people who are in the country illegally.

U.S. Border Patrol agent Richard Funke looks for footprints from illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.- Mexico border on December 7, 2010 near Nogales, Arizona. Although a new fence has been built along the majority of Arizona's border with Mexico, critics have called for fencing of the entire stretch. Much of the unfenced terrain is in remote and mountainous areas. Although illegal immigration has slowed all along the U.S. Mexico border, Border Patrol officials say the Tucson sector remains the most heavily trafficked in the nation. (Image source: Getty Images)

The administration's best hope for a favorable ruling after 90 minutes of arguments at the high court Monday appeared to rest with Chief Justice John Roberts. Roberts asked questions suggesting he could side with the administration if there is a small change in the proposed programs.

The administration is asking the justices to allow it to put in place two programs that could shield roughly 4 million people from deportation and make them eligible to work in the United States.

Texas is leading 26 states dominated by Republicans in challenging the programs President Barack Obama announced in 2014 and that have been put on hold by lower courts.

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Supreme Court Justices Seem Divided On Obama Immigration Actions; Roberts The Wild Card

[Fox News](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court appeared split along ideological lines Monday as justices took up one of the most significant challenges yet to President Obama's use of executive power — an election-year dispute over his bid to shield millions of undocumented immigrants from deportation and make them eligible to work in the U.S.

The justices' questions and comments over the course of the 90-minute arguments left the possibility of a 4-4 tie — which would represent a defeat for the Obama administration. A split decision also would set no guiding precedent on the use of presidential authority moving forward.

Still, comments by Chief Justice John Roberts helped keep a final decision in doubt, as he suggested a possible quick-fix in a key part of the policy. In doing so, he gave possible hope to the White House and its allies, even if a split decision still appears the most likely outcome.

"We believe at the end of the day, that even though there are only eight justices, there will be enough justices to uphold" the policies, said Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., who is backing the White House.

But Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who was also inside the court, warned, "If we allow a president ... to make changes in the law without congressional approval, then we will end up with a perverted Constitution."

Texas is leading 26 states dominated by Republicans in challenging the programs Obama announced in 2014 and that have been put on hold by lower courts.

At issue is whether as many as 5 million illegal immigrants can be spared deportation — including those who entered the U.S. as children, and the parents of citizens or legal residents. The programs — known as Deferred Action for Parents of American Citizens and Permanent Residents (DAPA) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) — effectively went around the Republican-led Congress. The court is expected to decide by late June whether the efforts can move forward in the waning months of Obama's presidency, amid a presidential campaign marked by tough Republican rhetoric over immigration.

The justices on Monday were considering a fundamental question: how much power does the president truly have?

But the 90-minute public session dealt mostly with a more mundane question – whether the states have legal authority, or “standing,” to even bring their case.

Some liberal justices seemed to reject Texas’ claim of great financial and sovereign harm by voluntarily using taxpayer dollars to subsidize drivers licenses given to undocumented workers.

“Those nearly 11 million unauthorized aliens are here in the shadows. They are affecting the economy whether we want to or not,” said Justice Sonia Sotomayor. “The answer is, if Congress really wanted not to have an economic impact, it would ... allot the amount of money necessary to deport them, but it hasn’t.”

But Justice Anthony Kennedy questioned Obama’s authority. “That’s the whole point, is that you’ve talked about discretion here. What we’re doing is defining the limits of discretion. And it seems to me that that is a legislative, not an executive act,” he said. “That seems to me to have it backwards. It’s as if the president is setting the policy and the Congress is executing it. That’s just upside-down.”

Only Roberts among the conservative bloc seemed open to a compromise.

At issue was a two-word phrase in the Obama-issued policies – “lawful presence” – which opponents say gives undocumented aliens greater access to benefits than was intended by Congress.

Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito pointed out the confusion, wondering what the difference was between “lawfully present” and “legally present,” which the Justice Department said were two separate things.

“How can it be lawful to work here but not lawful to be here?” asked Alito.

The chief justice – who years ago helped preserve ObamaCare – later said “crossing out” the “lawfully present” phrase might keep the executive action intact, a suggestion the Justice Department lawyer eagerly embraced, saying it would be “totally fine.”

The coalition of states calls the president’s immigration actions an executive power grab. But the White House contends this authority is clear, and the policies humane and reasonable. Obama has promoted his program as a plan to “prioritize deporting felons not families.”

A federal appeals court earlier had struck down DAPA, which has yet to go fully into effect. The Justice Department then asked the high court for a final review. The immigrants who would benefit from the Obama administration’s plan are mainly parents of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents.

However, as with other high-profile Supreme Court appeals this term – on ObamaCare, abortion rights and

affirmative action – the outcome here likely will be affected by the death in February of Justice Antonin Scalia, which left a 4-4 bench split along conservative-liberal lines.

A 4-4 ruling would effectively scuttle the issue until after Obama leaves office in nine months, and mean at least a temporary setback to his domestic policy legacy. The justices also could rule narrowly on procedure, finding a compromise on a technical issue not directly related to the larger policy questions.

On the legal side, the GOP-controlled House filed an amicus brief supporting the states, telling the high court, “the Executive does not have the power to authorize – let alone facilitate – the prospective violation of the immigration laws on a massive class-wide scale.”

The case is U.S. v. Texas (15-674).

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

The Supreme Court’s Choice: Chaos Or More Chaos

By Dana Milbank

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

Visiting justices from Canada’s high court sat in on Monday’s immigration arguments before the Supreme Court — and after their 90-minute education in the current state of American jurisprudence, our neighbors to the north would be forgiven if they had fantasies of building a border wall of their own.

The Senate’s refusal to confirm a replacement for the late Justice Antonin Scalia has left the U.S. high court evenly split and increasingly paralyzed. As the justices heard arguments about President Obama’s executive actions on illegal immigration, there were really only two possible results: chaos or more chaos.

A divided Congress couldn’t agree on legislation to deal with the 11 million immigrants here illegally. Obama tried to do something on his own — use his executive authority to defer deportation of parents of children who are American citizens — and the rift grew deeper. Texas, supported by 25 other states, all led by Republican governors, sued. Sixteen other states and the District of Columbia filed briefs on the other side. The GOP-led U.S. House sued as well, but 186 members of the House and 39 senators (virtually the entire Democratic caucus) filed opposing briefs.

Now the Supreme Court has to rule on Obama’s DAPA policy (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans). But with no expectation that the justices can reach agreement on the merits of the case, that leaves two options:

Chief Justice John Roberts joins the liberals in dismissing the case on a technicality — that Texas doesn’t have standing in court. This would leave it unclear whether DAPA is legal and set off confusion in the country as other

entities try to file suit and the administration tries to enforce its legally ambiguous policy.

Or, the justices come to a 4-to-4 tie on the merits of the case, and even greater chaos ensues. An appellate ruling invalidating the law stands, at least in part of the country. Cases will be brought in other circuits, probably causing different views of the law to arise in different parts of the country.

"With either of these two possibilities you have chaos about whether DAPA is legal or not," says Neal Katyal, the Supreme Court litigator with Hogan Lovells who filed a brief in the case from former immigration officials supporting the administration.

The current confusion, following the 4-to-4 split in an important labor case, is another indication that the Supreme Court is struggling to function. The justices have granted only three cases since Scalia died, according to a list kept by the court, a figure Supreme Court watchers say is extraordinarily low. "They're tending away from deciding much, and when they do reach decision, it is often a very narrow ruling," Katyal tells me.

On Monday, the justices seemed split down the middle, both on the merits of the case and the question of standing. Roberts said Texas's position, that it would lose money because it would have to issue driver's licenses to those aided by Obama's order, was "the classic case for standing," and he accused the administration of putting Texas in a "Catch-22."

Justice Anthony Kennedy, too, said that the policy was being done "backwards" and "upside down" and that the decision should be "a legislative, not an executive, act."

But Justice Sonia Sotomayor ridiculed the claim that the executive orders would have a negative economic impact on Texas. "Those nearly 11 million unauthorized aliens are here in the shadows — they are affecting the economy whether we want to or not," she said. "If Congress really wanted not to have an economic impact, it would allot the amount of money necessary to deport them, but it hasn't."

Nobody disputed that the administration has the discretion to defer action on certain illegal immigrants. What disturbed lawyers for the House and for Texas was that those who receive such "deferred action" are, under long-standing federal law, eligible to apply for authorization to work based on economic need, even though they don't have legal status.

"How is it possible to lawfully work in the United States without lawfully being in the United States?" Justice Samuel Alito asked. "I'm just talking about the English language."

Erin Murphy, representing the House, said flatly that "Congress has passed a statute that says if you are living in this country without legal authority, you cannot work."

But Donald Verrilli, the administration's solicitor general, pointed out that, even without DAPA, there are millions of people who don't have legal status but legally work in the

United States. They would be out of luck — and out of work — under the law as the House Republican majority would like it to be interpreted.

Tossing millions from their jobs would cause chaos. But chaos is what you get when you sideline the Supreme Court.

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Obama Deserves To Win On Immigration

[Bloomberg View](#), April 18, 2016

The Supreme Court on Monday heard oral arguments in a momentous case about the high cost of driver's licenses. It also implicates the historic place of immigration in the U.S. economy and society, not to mention the proper separation of powers between the executive and the legislature in the American system of government.

United States v. Texas isn't really about driver's licenses, of course, which Texas implausibly says cost the state more than \$100 each. It's about the president's right to execute immigration policy — especially in the absence of congressional action. It's a case that — for his own sake and for that of his successors — President Barack Obama deserves to win.

In the case, the federal government is seeking to overturn a ruling that prevents the administration from following through on Obama's executive actions shielding roughly 4 million undocumented immigrants from deportation while enabling them to apply for work permits. As Solicitor General Donald Verrilli told the court, deferring deportation of these immigrants does not make them citizens. It does, however, provide them with a measure of dignity. It also acknowledges a practical and political reality: The U.S. will not deport 11 million people, many of whom have lived here for more than a decade.

Since the federal government maintains "broad, undoubted power over immigration and alien status," as the Supreme Court affirmed in 2012, Texas needed to show a specific harm to have the standing to sue. It claimed that, among other costs, the executive actions would increase the cost of issuing state driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants enrolled in the programs.

The Obama administration argued that a ruling in Texas' favor would allow any state to sue the federal government willy-nilly whenever federal laws or regulations change. Meanwhile, other states, such as California, pointed

to Obama's policy as a source of increased economic activity, higher incomes and state tax revenue that would directly benefit them. In other words, if Texas wins, California is harmed. What then?

The question of whether Obama overstepped his constitutional authority is reasonable. Justice Anthony Kennedy complained from the bench that the administration had turned the traditional constitutional order – Congress passes the law and the president executes it – upside down.

It's true that a legislative solution to the immigration problem would have been best. Obama should have pushed harder to reach a deal with Congress after Republicans won control of the Senate in 2014. Nevertheless, the immigration crisis the U.S. faces is political, not constitutional.

It's worth noting that Congress has refused to supply funds sufficient to do what the House majority implicitly has endorsed – deporting 11 million undocumented immigrants. Consequently, it's up to the executive to prioritize deportations in accord with available resources and the public interest.

Faced with a choice between a failed status quo perpetuated by a dysfunctional Congress, or an aggressive use of executive authority, Obama chose the latter. There is reason to regret that necessity. Judging from the arguments heard by the court on Monday, however, there is little reason to believe that it violates constitutional limits on executive power or imposes onerous burdens on states.

New EU Passenger Data Measure Gets Warm Reception At DHS

By Mark Rockwell

[Federal Computer Week](#), April 18, 2016

The European Union's vote to set up a new system to gather and transmit passenger data from airlines is a boon for law enforcement, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said.

The European Parliament voted on April 14 to require airlines to submit passenger data for all flights in and out of member nations under a Passenger Name Record (PNR) system. Covered data includes name, itinerary, contact information and payment details.

Under the rule, EU member nations would establish passenger information units to manage data collected by air carriers.

The proposal, which passed on a vote of 461 to 179, awaits formal approval by the EU Council. Member states will have two years to incorporate the directive.

The EU had previously been reluctant to take on such measures because of strict privacy controls in many member states, and it has been critical of DHS' gathering of similar data in the past. However, EU officials said they had struck a balance between privacy and protection in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.

"We have adopted an important new tool for fighting terrorists and traffickers," said Timothy Kirkhope, the European Parliament member who led negotiations on the legislation. "PNR is not a silver bullet, but countries that have national PNR systems have shown time and again that it is highly effective."

Under the proposed rules, the data must be retained for five years, but after six months, names, addresses and contact details that might lead to the identification of individuals would be stripped out, according to the EU. The passenger information units would be responsible for collecting, storing and processing the data and for transferring it to law enforcement agencies and other PIUs.

In an April 15 statement, Johnson praised the action, saying it would help law enforcement agencies prevent criminals and terrorists from boarding planes and help Europe prevent attacks against aviation targets.

"I look forward to a swift adoption of the directive by the Council of the European Union," Johnson added.

DHS CIO Walks Back Staff Comments On Open Source

By Mark Rockwell

[Federal Computer Week](#), April 18, 2016

Some IT professionals at the Department of Homeland Security raised eyebrows over recent comments on GitHub that suggested a proposed federal open-source policy could result in the "mafia having a copy of all FBI system code" or could give terrorists "access to air traffic control software." The comments were attributed to the CIO's office.

However, DHS CIO Luke McCormack has since filed his own official comments, noting that "prior comments do not represent DHS policy or views."

The draft policy, released for public comment in March, asked agencies to participate in a three-year pilot program that would require publishing at least 20 percent of their custom code. The goal is to save money and spur innovation by making the software used by agencies more open, sharable and reusable.

In the new comments, McCormack applauded the open-source policy's objectives of saving time and money but said he was concerned "that the requirement of releasing 20 percent of custom code will encourage releasing code without thinking thoughtfully" about how to get the most value from it.

He said the private sector has rejected the volume of lines of code released as a metric of engineering productivity. Instead, he suggested requiring that a "significant portion of at least 20 percent" of agency systems be released as open source. At the same time, agencies should be encouraged to refactor code into usable modules before release or developed with that goal in mind, he added.

McCormack also countered the idea that there were security risks inherent to open source.

"When managed appropriately, releasing code as [open-source software] and engaging with the community can have extensive cybersecurity benefits," he said. "Security through obscurity is not true security: We cannot depend on vulnerabilities not being exploited just because they have not been discovered yet."

Agencies "should thoughtfully consider what components and libraries they release, and build active communities around their projects to ensure these benefits are realized," he added.

Without proper management and feedback, he said, "we believe the value of [open-source software] is significantly diminished."

'Einstein' Program Helps DHS Gain Cyber Situational Awareness

By Mary-Louise Hoffman

[ExecutiveGov](#), April 18, 2016

Phyllis Schneck, deputy undersecretary at the Department of Homeland Security for cybersecurity and communications, has said DHS is ready to help secure federal networks with the National Cybersecurity Protection System, Fedscoop reported Thursday.

Greg Otto writes Schneck told an Intel Security-sponsored forum that the department uses the system, nicknamed Einstein, to gain situational awareness of cyber threats as DHS' National Protection and Programs Directorate explore ways to bolster the platform's intrusion detection and prevention functions.

She added DHS aims to facilitate exchange of threat information between companies and agencies through the department's Automated Indicator Sharing initiative.

The report said the department also uses data collected during cyber investigations by the Secret Service and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Is Delco Man A Liberian War Criminal? Feds Say Yes

By Jeremy Roebuck

[Philadelphia Inquirer](#), April 18, 2016

As his family sees it, Mohammed Jabbateh is the very picture of an immigrant success story – a man who fled political turmoil in his native Liberia nearly two decades ago and has since established a successful business in Philadelphia and a growing family in the suburbs.

Prosecutors beg to differ. They say Jabbateh is hiding here, running from a past in which he once led rebel commandos in acts of violence so horrific that a bridge bearing his nom de guerre – "Jungle Jabbah" – still stands in his home country at the site of a brutal attack.

But as both sides painted their dueling portraits of the 49-year-old East Lansdowne man during a detention hearing Monday in federal court, a third possibility emerged: Elements of both stories could be true.

"This is a case of credibility," Jabbateh's lawyer Gregory Pagano said. "Some number of [Liberians] will come into court and say my client did these things – but I don't know who these people are and what their political motivations might be."

Federal agents detained Jabbateh last week, alleging that while seeking political asylum in 1998 he lied to U.S. immigration authorities about his role in the two civil wars that roiled Liberia throughout the '90s.

According to the indictment against him, he either personally committed or oversaw the murders of civilians, the sexual enslavement of women and the conscription of child soldiers while serving as a commander in the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO).

The group was one of many rebel factions that fought the government and each other for control of the West African nation between 1989 and 2003.

Jabbateh has never denied that he led ULIMO'S Zebra Battalion or that he claimed the name "Jungle Jabbah" during the war.

Nor did he, while sitting in court Monday, dispute that the photo displayed by prosecutors – a faded image of a gaunt young man dressed in military fatigues with an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder – was him.

A vehement denial

Yet, as Pagano urged U.S. Magistrate Judge Timothy Rice to release his client pending his trial, he sought to make one thing perfectly clear.

"My client vehemently denies having encouraged, enticed or otherwise participated in acts of genocide or crimes against civilians," he said, adding later: "He is peaceful, deeply religious and he is intensely loyal to the United States of America."

Jabbateh's indictment – which charges him with perjury and immigration fraud – lays out a sweeping history of Liberia's tribal conflicts and outlines several atrocities allegedly committed by ULIMO forces as they sought to maintain their grip on the country's northwest region between 1992 and 1995.

Massacres of rural villages are mentioned, as are attempts at ethnic cleansing. In one violent attack that the document describes, a ULIMO commander was said to have cut the ears off a victim, torn the heart out of another and

tortured a woman by crushing her legs between pieces of wood.

But missing from the 14-page filing are any details of what role Jabbateh is alleged to have played in that violence.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Linwood C. Wright rectified that Monday, outlining for the judge an incident that he said exemplified Jabbateh's bloody behavior.

While leading ULIMO forces in Gbarpolu County, a jungle region 65 miles north of Liberia's capital Monrovia, Jabbateh was irate when a makeshift bridge of logs collapsed underneath them, dumping a military truck into a 50-foot ravine.

As Wright described it, Jabbateh blamed a nearby village for the shoddy construction and stormed into the town, ordering the flogging of its elderly residents and watching while the arms of the village youth were slashed with bayonets.

The bridge later was rebuilt and opened under a new name: "Jungle Jabah Bridge."

Wright said Monday that he and agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have taken multiple trips to Liberia and lined up more than 30 other witnesses who have agreed to testify about other alleged misdeeds by Jabbateh.

'Wartime atrocities'

"The underlying facts of this case are replete with wartime atrocities that the government contends Mr. Jabbateh either personally committed or oversaw," he said.

Still, Wright conceded, since arriving in the United States 18 years ago, Jabbateh has led a largely peaceful life.

He has no criminal record. He owns a Southwest Philadelphia business that packs shipping containers for export to Liberia. And he is supporting a fiancée, an ex-wife and five children, ranging in age from nine months to 21 years old.

Jabbateh also recently attempted to sponsor for immigration to the United States some of the seven other children he has with a third woman still living in Africa.

In court Monday, dozens of family members and supporters from Philadelphia and Delaware County's large Liberian expatriate community packed the courtroom to vouch for his character. At least 14 offered to stake their homes as collateral to ensure his future appearances in court.

Ultimately, their presence was enough to convince Rice, who ordered Jabbateh released under house arrest if he could find properties worth \$1 million to forfeit should he flee before trial.

But whether he wins or loses in court, Jabbateh's time in the U.S. is likely to end soon.

Immigration authorities have signaled they will seek to deport him whether or not he is convicted.

Baldwin Park Contractor To Pay \$27,500 In Settlement Of Immigration Rights Case

By Stephanie K. Baer

[Pasadena \(CA\) Star-News](#), April 18, 2016

A private firm that operates the City of Baldwin Park jail has agreed to pay \$27,500 to a resident and an immigrant rights group that alleged the city broke a state law when jail officials held the man for several days after a traffic stop in 2014.

As part of a settlement reached late last month, the firm, GEO Group Inc., will pay \$15,000 to Baldwin Park resident Sergio Flores and \$12,500 to the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, according to court documents.

The lawsuit alleged that the city, which tendered its defense to the GEO Group and its attorneys, violated the California TRUST Act by detaining Flores for an immigration hold at the city jail for four days in March 2014 after police officers arrested him for driving without a license. The GEO Group operates the city's jail facility under the supervision of a police lieutenant.

The TRUST Act prohibits local law enforcement agencies from detaining immigrants only for an immigration hold.

City officials said at the time that the detainment was legal because they believed he had an outstanding federal warrant, but that turned out to be false.

"The information that we were provided was incorrect," said City Attorney Robert Tafoya, who added that the city and GEO Group did not admit liability as part of the settlement. "We acted on the information that was provided to us (and) the TRUST Act does provide an exception to that."

The state's TRUST Act, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2014, limits "cruel and costly" immigration holds in local jails and prohibits law enforcement agencies from detaining individuals solely based on an ICE hold after they are otherwise eligible for release. It specifies that the person can be detained for a number of reasons, including being "identified by the United States Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement as the subject of an outstanding federal felony arrest warrant."

Tafoya said that the private contractor could have argued in court that it had a good faith belief that there was a warrant out for Flores.

"Rather than trying to figure all that out, GEO just settled the case," Tafoya said.

MALDEF Staff Attorney Matthew Barragan said the case sends a message to other local law enforcement agencies that they will be held accountable for violations of the TRUST Act.

"It's the first ever lawsuit alleging violations of the California TRUST Act and in that way it is a case to look at to

see how local law enforcement agencies should bear the burden of ensuring that they're in compliance with this law," Barragan said. "We hope that the settlement encourages Baldwin Park and other cities to build trust between their law enforcement agencies and immigrant families."

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

US Customs Prepares For More International Flights In Keys

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

MARATHON, Fla. (AP) — A new customs checkpoint is opening at Florida Keys airport in preparation for more traffic involving the island chain and Cuba and other international destinations.

According to a statement from the Monroe County Board of Commissioners, the new Customs and Border Protection facility opens April 20 at The Florida Keys Marathon International Airport. The airport hasn't had a customs officer on duty since the 1980s.

The airport currently serves corporate jets, private planes and charters but no commercial flights.

The county's assistant director of airports, T.J. Henderson, says the Middle Keys airport could be an attractive alternative to busier South Florida airports. Henderson says Marathon's location would be convenient for both residents and tourists coming from Cuba and the Caribbean as well as Central and South America.

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Border Patrol Agent Pleads Not Guilty To Assault

[WWNY-TV Watertown \(NY\)](#), April 18, 2016

The Border Patrol agent accused of attacking a Massena couple who stopped to help his wife after a fatal accident pleaded not guilty to felony assault charges.

Thirty-five year old Bryan McDonald entered the pleas at his arraignment in St. Lawrence County Court Monday morning. He was indicted on the charges earlier this month.

"Mr. McDonald was arraigned on a two-count indictment today, being the first day we appeared, and entered a not guilty plea," said McDonald's lawyer Anthony Neddo.

His wife, 33 year old Ashley McDonald, was hit by a car and killed on County Route 37 near Massena in December. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

The couple, Carol and Richard LaDue, stopped to help when Bryan McDonald allegedly attacked them, punching and kicking Carol LaDue unconscious.

Judge Jerome Richards suspended McDonald's pistol permit Monday and gave him 10 days to transfer "a half dozen" rifles out of his possession.

The judge also issued a no contact order of protection for Carol and Richard LaDue.

McDonald, of Lyon Mountain, is on administrative leave from his job as a Border Patrol agent.

Prosecutors said they're ready for trial.

"The case was adjourned for discovery and motion practice," said Neddo.

McDonald was released under probation supervision on the assault charges.

Update: Border Patrol Agent From El Paso Killed In Fort Hancock Crash

By Jesse Martinez

[KFOX-TV El Paso \(TX\)](#), April 18, 2016

FORT HANCOCK, Texas — A 29-year-old El Paso man was killed Monday morning in a crash in Fort Hancock.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation, the crash was reported around 7:30 a.m. on Interstate 10 west near mile marker 78.

Jose Daniel Barraza, who was assigned to the Big Bend sector in Marfa, Texas, was driving a white Ford F-150 when it rear-ended a semi, DPS officials said.

Barraza, who was wearing his seat belt, was pronounced dead at the scene.

The driver of the semi was not injured.

Barraza had been an agent with the Big Bend sector since August 2008. He was on duty and on his way home at the time of the crash, according to Bill Brooks, a spokesman for the Big Bend sector.

The cause of the crash is not known.

Border Patrol Agent Killed In 18-wheeler Crash Identified

[KVIA-TV El Paso \(TX\)](#), April 18, 2016

HUDSPETH, Texas —

Border Patrol agent Jose Daniel Barraza died in a crash involving an 18-wheeler and his Ford F-150 truck. The crash took place on westbound lanes of I-10 at Mile Marker 78 near Esperanza.

According to a fundraising site, YOCARING, Barraza was going home after working the midnight shift.

According to a DPS spokeswoman, a preliminary investigation shows Barraza's truck was traveling behind the 18-wheeler when for an unknown reason, the agent's truck ran into the rear of the semi. Both vehicles came to rest on the shoulder of the westbound lanes.

A recent picture posted on The National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers Facebook page showed BP

Agents mourning the loss of Barraza. The picture was taken after resuscitation efforts were stopped.

The Border Patrol Council started the YOUCARING account to help his family during this very tough loss.

According to the YOUCARING page, Barraza left behind a wife and two children.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

ADMINISTRATION

Get Ready For Long Airport Security Lines This Summer

By Linda Loyd

[Philadelphia Inquirer](#), April 18, 2016

A perfect storm is brewing at U.S. airports ahead of the busy summer travel season: Longer lines to get through security screening.

Airlines and airports are warning fliers to get to the airport two hours early for domestic flights and three hours for international trips. Traffic is up, TSA staffing is down and the security workers who remain are charged with carrying out more stringent measures in the wake of recent terror attacks.

Passengers on American Airlines in Philadelphia, and four other cities, got a taste of the longer waits over spring break, March 14 to March 20, when lines through screening checkpoints were an hour or longer.

A total of 6,800 passengers missed their flights in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Miami, Atlanta, and Dallas Fort Worth, said American spokesman Ross Feinstein. He declined to specify the numbers for each city.

"For that one week, Philadelphia was in the top five for American with regard to passengers delayed at TSA checkpoints who missed flights due to the lines," said Feinstein. "We continue to speak with the TSA and Department of Homeland Security because we are trying to find common sense solutions to fix this issue. It's unacceptable for passengers to be waiting in TSA lines for an hour."

The reasons for longer wait times include more people traveling, fewer airport screeners because of Congressional budget cuts, and tightened airport security measures after the Paris terrorist attacks and the crash of a jet flying between Egypt and Russia, believed to have been brought down by a bomb.

TSA adopted more extensive security tactics after an inspector general report last summer found that 67 out of 70 mock weapons and explosives got past TSA agents in regular security tests.

Expedited security lines, known as TSA PreCheck, were thought to be the answer to longer lines when launched in 2012.

The program which gives vetted passengers, who pay an \$85 fee, faster screening – shoes and belts and light jackets stay on, laptops and liquids stay in bags – has not attracted the once-a-year flier. Only 25 percent to 30 percent of passengers use it on any given day, TSA said.

Even the PreCheck lanes can be long, but passengers move through them twice as fast as in standard lines, the agency said.

TSA screeners nationwide have been cut by Congress from a peak of 47,147 in 2013 to 42,525 this year at nearly 440 airports.

"The main thing to understand, there's been a huge increase in passenger volume across the country," said TSA spokesman Michael McCarthy. The number of passengers going through security checkpoints has risen from 643 million three years ago to 740 million predicted in 2016.

Philadelphia International Airport will see 7.4 percent more passengers this year, and some U.S. airports are looking at double-digit passenger growth, McCarthy said. "Nationwide, we're seeing about 7 percent to 8 percent more passengers on average."

The longer waits have distressed passengers.

Philadelphia airport has seen an increase in tweets about the TSA. "We get tweets about the lines, and we get questions about how to sign up for PreCheck," said airport spokeswoman Mary Flannery. "Overall, both questions and concerns about TSA have increased."

Looking to the summer when more families and vacationers will be traveling, the airport is working with the airlines, and TSA, about their needs and to coordinate staffing "to get passengers to their destinations as quickly as possible," Flannery said.

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, which saw 12.9 percent passenger growth last year, is hiring 90 private contractors for the summer to speed up the lines.

The workers will take over some TSA duties, including telling passengers to take out their laptop, empty their pockets, throw out water bottles, and remove their shoes. They will shift passengers within the queue to balance the lines, and take bins that have been through x-ray machines to the front of the line, said airport spokesman Perry Cooper.

The TSA said it plans to hire more staff, use more canines, and pay overtime to keep officers on the floor to open additional lanes this summer, McCarthy said.

Philadelphia airport once had nearly 800 TSA officers in the mid-2000s and today has about 650, said Joe Shuker, president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Philadelphia local.

The officers staff seven Philadelphia terminals, in two shifts, and other TSA officers screen passengers' checked bags before they go on planes, Shuker said.

The emphasis used to be getting passengers through security quickly, he said. Then last year, the TSA directed

officers to perform more thorough screening checks. "Now the emphasis is on security – don't worry about the lines – make sure you are mitigating the threat," Shuker said.

"It's almost like you can't have both, unless we get more people," Shuker said. "If we had more staff, we could open up more lines, and we'd be able to bring more people in. But with the staff we have, you can only open so many lanes."

'Unacceptable' TSA Lines To Last Well Into Summer

By Andrew MacFarlane

[Weather Channel](#), April 18, 2016

If those vexing airport security lines had you sprinting through crowded terminals only to arrive at an empty gate, you're definitely not alone, but you also might experience that frustration again.

Across the country, the lines at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints are getting longer and longer and, unfortunately, they show no sign of shrinking.

During the most popular days of spring break almost 6,800 American Airlines fliers were left grounded after long TSA lines kept them from reaching their planes in time, according to Fox News.

"The lines at TSA checkpoints nationwide have become unacceptable," said Ross Feinstein, an American Airlines spokesman. "The result: our customers are waiting in TSA lines greater than one hour."

"As we approach spring and summer, we are concerned that these lines will grow even longer," Feinstein added.

The lines will continue to grow as a result of a failing formula — an increasing number of passengers and decreasing number of TSA officers.

Nearly 700 million people are expected to shuffle aboard planes this year, a 7 percent jump from the number of fliers in 2015, says the Department of Transportation.

TSA, on the other hand, has only 42,500 officers to screen the nearly 2 million travelers that remove their shoes, jackets and hats every day, which is the administration's lowest number of officials in half a decade, according to a TSA report. Those 42,000-plus officers are responsible for checking 1.2 million checked bags and 4.4 million carry-ons daily.

"This is one of the highest-volume travel years we've ever seen," TSA Administrator Peter Neffenger told the Washington Post. "That means we're going to have lots of people moving through the airports."

Neffenger's solution to the growing dilemma?

"Get to the airports early, because even if I can move you efficiently through the line, you're still going to find long lines there."

Passenger Traffic Keeps Growing At Detroit Metro Airport

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

Economic improvements in the Detroit area and more low-cost flights have helped to boost passenger traffic to near-record levels at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport, officials said.

After five years of holding flat at 32 million passengers a year, officials saw a jump to 33.4 million passengers using the airport in 2015, the Detroit News reported.

Passenger travel at the airport in Romulus increased 8% for the first two months of the year over past year, officials said, in part supported by an improving Detroit-area economy fueled by a bolstered auto industry.

"The American auto industry is all the way back. And I think that is a lot of it. The economy here is definitely humming," said Joe Cambron, the airport's director of air service development, who works to attract airlines to compete on routes.

More non-stop flights from low-cost carriers have increased competition for Delta Air Lines, which has a hub at the airport. Delta has consistently attracted more than 12 million passengers annually to the airport over the past five years.

If the increased passenger travel trend continues, airport officials say it would come close to the record 36.3 million travelers of 2005.

"Delta's continued to invest in adding larger aircraft on more of its flights in the Detroit market," said Anthony Black, a spokesman for Atlanta-based Delta.

One side-effect of the increase, officials note, is longer waits at security. Michael McCarthy, a regional spokesman for the Transportation Security Administration said travelers are encouraged to arrive at least two hours before a domestic flight.

With more passengers, "we are anticipating that you could see longer than usually wait times, especially heading into the very busy summer travel season," McCarthy said.

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FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Floods Shut Down Most Of Houston, With More Than 1,000 Rescued

By Dan Frosch And Erin Ailworth

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

5 Dead As Historic, 20-inch Rain Swamps Houston Area

By Doyle Rice

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

Drenching rain, which brought flash floods to much of eastern and southern Texas on Sunday and Monday, deluged Houston, killing five and leading to scores of water rescues.

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett said two people died in a vehicle that ignored barricades at a freeway underpass. He said traffic cameras recorded the vehicle going around the blockade and head into the water. The vehicle didn't make it through.

Two deaths reported earlier Monday included one man found inside a truck that that drove into high water on a freeway service road.

Harris County Precinct Sgt. Herbert Martinez says crews monitoring the high water on the road saw the man in the 18-wheeler truck drive directly into the water. He says it's possible the driver may have suffered some kind of medical emergency.

Another man, identified only as a contractor working for the city's airport system, also was found dead in a submerged vehicle not far from Houston Intercontinental Airport.

In Waller County, west of Houston, the Royal Independent School District confirmed Monday evening that teacher Charles Odum died in rising floodwaters.

Monday was one of the rainiest single days ever recorded in Houston, with nearly 10 inches of rain reported at the city's official weather observing location at the airport as of mid-afternoon.

Hundreds of homes and many major roads were flooded out in the Houston area, forcing schools, governments and businesses to close and causing power outages for thousands of residents.

Many areas reported over a foot of rain. One spot near Houston unofficially recorded as much as 20 inches.

Nearly 900 water rescues were performed in the city of Houston alone, and 1,222 total in the metro area, according to Harris County officials.

The National Weather Service called it a "historic rainfall event" for the region.

A flash flood emergency was in effect on Monday for the Houston area, and the weather service warned residents to stay off the roads.

The city opened several emergency shelters throughout the region, AccuWeather reported.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner called the flooding "unprecedented" in the city. More than 100 water rescues were performed overnight, he said at a press conference Monday morning.

Seven bayous were over their banks in Houston, Turner said.

The weather service said flooding was ongoing and warned residents to stay out of the floodwater, noting the risk of drowning along with potential encounters with "chemicals, ants and snakes."

Parts of northwest Harris County and the nearby communities saw rates of 2 to 4 inches of rain per hour.

Hundreds of flights at both Houston airports were canceled or delayed.

Several school districts and many government buildings in the Houston area were closed Monday.

The storms were part of a wide weather system that left warnings and watches through Tuesday morning for Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, and as far east as Texarkana.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott says some taxpayers affected by severe rain and flooding will qualify for an extension to file their federal tax returns that were due at midnight.

Abbott said Monday that his office had been in contact with the IRS about pushing the tax filing deadline for those in areas inundated by heavy downpours. More than a foot of rain dumped on parts of Houston and knocked out power to thousands of residents.

The storms were from the same system that walloped the Rockies with heavy snow over the weekend, including more than 50 inches in Pinecliffe, Colo.

In Austin, flash flood watches and warnings were issued; some extend until Tuesday morning.

The weather service issued flood watches and warnings for parts of North, Central and South Texas on Monday. Many areas could see 3 to 8 inches of rain; isolated pockets could get even more.

In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, a flash flood watch remains in the area through Tuesday morning with rain continuing in the forecast through at least Wednesday into Thursday. Road closures have been reported and commuters are urged to exercise caution on roadways.

In Johnson County, south of Fort Worth, more than 30 road closures were reported.

There were also reports of voluntary evacuations underway in the community of Horseshoe Bend in Parker County, west of Fort Worth.

Contributing: KHOU-TV, Houston ; Steve Newton, KVUE-TV, Austin; WFAA-TV, Dallas-Fort Worth; The Associated Press;

Texas Got Slammed By 14 Inches Of Rain Overnight And It's Leading To "Unprecedented" Flooding

By Lydia Ramsey

[Business Insider](#), April 18, 2016

The Houston area was pummeled with rain last night.

Over a 12-hour period, more than 14 inches fell across certain parts of Texas, according to the National Weather Service. Here are the areas that got hit hardest, where there are also flash flood warnings in effect:

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner called the flooding "unprecedented," USAToday reports.

As much as 21,000 square miles of land is covered in the flash flood warning, extending west toward San Antonio and Austin. And it's not over just yet, with more rain coming soon across the south:

Here's some of the damage that's happened so far, as seen in Houston. People have had to evacuate their houses and apartments in search of dry shelter.

With floodwaters high, it's close to impossible to take cars out on the road, and public transportation in Houston has been shut down.

The dump truck below is braving the more than a foot of standing water.

Some have even taken to alternative modes of transportation:

The Texas Department of Transportation is urging people to stay off of the roads, especially in Houston.

Deadly Storms Wreak Havoc In Houston Area

By Mike Morris, Mihir Zaveri And Mike Tolson
[Houston Chronicle](#), April 19, 2016

Once again the assault came under the cover of night, loud and impressive, and by the time daybreak arrived, Houston and its neighboring communities were literally awash in familiar scenes of misery.

Storms that had been anticipated for two days finally descended with a fury Sunday night, bringing as much as a foot and a half of rain to parts of Texas' most populated region. Once again its residents were confronted by power outages, submerged and dangerous roadways, overloaded bayous, and flooded homes, some recently rebuilt after last year's Memorial Day deluge.

Authorities said at least five people drowned as a result of this storm, which was another reminder of the vulnerability of the broad South Texas coastal plain where water can rise quickly, especially so at dipping highway underpasses, but often drains at an achingly slow pace.

Hoping to keep the human toll at a minimum, all local school districts canceled classes early Monday and the Metro transit system was suspended. Many employers, large and small, never opened their doors. Government offices also were shuttered. At least nine hospitals stopped accepting emergency traffic. Scores of flights at Bush and Hobby airports were cancelled.

240 billion gallons of water

Those areas within Houston that struggled most with flooding, Mayor Sylvester Turner said, were Meyerland,

Greenspoint, Inwood Forest, and Acres Homes. During the height of the storm, the city had received 180 calls for assistance that responders could not answer due to high water, Turner said.

"I don't think anyone expected the rainfall to come as soon as it did and persist as long as it did," Turner said, citing totals between 10 and 15 inches in different parts of town.

Turner acknowledged the event was difficult to forecast but said city officials would not have prepared any differently than they did. City personnel were on alert Sunday night, Turner said, and he and Harris County Judge Ed Emmett early on decided to have only public safety personnel report to work.

The powerful storm sent an estimated 240 billion gallons of water into more than a dozen creeks and bayous, and eventually into more than 1,000 buildings and homes. Near the Waller County line, Harris County officials recorded a high of 17.6 inches of rain. Much of the northwest swath received over 15 inches in 24 hours.

"This was so widespread," Emmett said, contrasting the flooding with last year's Memorial Day floods that were more concentrated in certain areas. "This was pretty much over the entire county and the entire region."

Emmett said the fatalities included one at Greenspoint Drive and Beltway 8, one at West Hardy Road and the Beltway, and three at frontage road underpasses east and west of the U.S. 59/Loop 610 interchange. A death in Waller County could also be attributed to the storm.

While officials hope the worst of the weather has passed, the National Weather Service put the chance of additional showers and thunderstorms Tuesday at 70-80 percent. More rain is likely into Thursday.

A handful of Houston-area school districts and campuses already plan to close or start late Tuesday. Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, the state's third-largest district with 114,000 students, will be closed again, citing "rising water and transportation concerns." Likewise, the Royal ISD in southern Waller County will be shut down. Alvin ISD in northern Brazoria County will start two hours late Tuesday.

Even without more rain, flooding in the north and west parts of the county could continue through Wednesday, officials said, and the west fork of the San Jacinto River likely will see elevated levels in the coming days as water from the rains slowly feeds into it. County and city officials warned people not to travel if they don't need to, saying that high water could still pose dangers.

After conferring with area officials, Gov. Greg Abbott signed a state disaster declaration for nine counties: Harris, Bastrop, Austin, Colorado, Fort Bend, Grimes, Montgomery, Waller and Wharton. That will allow local officials to implement state emergency-assistance plans and order curfews, if necessary, should heavy rains continue through Tuesday.

Immediate estimates of property damage were not available. Should they prove excessive following a detailed assessment, a federal disaster declaration is expected in a few days.

"The rainfall so far is about half of what we had for (Tropical Storm) Allison ... but some areas of Houston had well over a foot of rain in 24 hours," Abbott said. "That's the most I have ever seen."

Flooding hit most areas adjacent to local creeks and bayous, resulting in the evacuation of a number of apartment complexes and more than 1,200 high-water rescues throughout the county. One of the most dramatic rescues involved more than 70 horses stabled at facilities near overflowing Cypress Creek. Stable employees and volunteers braved roiling waters to pull, nudge, and coax the frightened animals toward higher ground. No horses were said to have drowned.

West and northwest Harris County received a powerful blow from the storm, which began just after dark and continued on through the night. Swollen creeks, including South Mayde, soon spread water into neighborhoods that don't typically see it.

Also hit hard were neighborhoods near Brays Bayou, all too familiar with the ravages of heavy, sudden rainfall. The Memorial Day flood damaged many homes in and around the Meyerland subdivision, and some were hit again in Monday's early-morning hours.

"I regret anyone who's having to go through the flooding of their homes again," Turner said. "For some individuals, they've just finished the repairs and moved back into their homes, and then less than a year later, here we go again. I know it's very difficult. This is just one of those things that no one can control."

The city of Houston has opened four shelters for residents whose homes have been made unlivable because of floodwaters:

Meyerland area: Johnston Middle School, 10410 Manhattan.

Northwest area: {Bingle, Little York, TX 249, Alabonson, Victory}: St. John United Methodist Church, 8787 N. Houston Rosslyn.

Westside: Jersey Village Baptist Church, 16518 Jersey Drive.

Northside: M.O. Campbell Education Center, 1865 Aldine-Bender.

Thousands of homes in all parts of town were affected by the rapid downpour. In Aldine, for example, Roberto Figueroa found himself standing in ankle-deep water when the skies brightened Monday afternoon. Less than 24 hours earlier, he had been gardening in his backyard and noticed the ground seemed a little dry.

The 67-year-old Figueroa, surveying his now-soaked yard and one-story rental home afflicted with six inches of mud-brown water, said: "Nothing is damaged, I hope."

As Figueroa spoke, a neighboring family of five floated past on an inflated air mattress. On board were Jesus Amador, Fabiola Medina and three children, ages 7, 4 and 2. Asked why they had set out on the makeshift raft, Amador said in Spanish, "to seize the moment."

Their side street started flooding around 5 a.m., said Amador, 34, and water had seeped into his garage.

"I'm afraid it will come into the house," he said.

Oblivious to the danger still lurking, his 7-year-old son Isai reveled in being able to float down his street. "This is my first time," Isai said triumphantly.

For those who have lived in southeast Texas for a while, that is not true. And it surely will not be the last.

At Least 5 Dead, Hundreds Rescued From High Water In Houston Flooding

By Michael Pearson And Melissa Gray

[CNN](#), April 19, 2016

At least five people have been killed in flooding that has covered the Houston region, officials said Monday, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people and knocking out power to thousands of homes and businesses.

"This is a life-threatening emergency," the city said on an emergency website. "Houston residents should avoid travel at all costs today."

Four of the deaths happened in hard-hit Harris County, officials said.

The driver of an 18-wheeler was found dead inside the cab after he drove into high waters, a Harris County constable reported, and another man was found dead in a submerged car, the Houston Fire Department said.

Two others were found dead after driving around a barricade on Houston's west side, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett said.

In neighboring Waller County, a 56-year-old man was found dead in a submerged vehicle, County Judge Trey Duhon said.

"It is believed the car rode off the road and into a ditch," Duhon said.

Crews performed 1,200 high-water rescues as of Monday afternoon, Harris County Emergency Management said.

"There's flooding in every part of Houston," Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said, telling stranded citizens. "We will rescue you."

At least 1,000 homes were flooded in Harris County, according to Emmett. Some people were trapped in their homes or attics, fire department spokesman Ruy Lozano said.

The water was too deep for crews to reach them in high-water vehicles, so rescuers were trying to get to those people in boats, he said.

Nine hospitals in the region were closed to additional patients because of the flooding, the mayor said. Three apartment buildings were evacuated and residents were being sheltered at a mall, Turner added.

Emmett said Monday afternoon he estimates 240 billion gallons of rain has fallen in the Houston area. That estimate may soon rise: Rain and thunderstorms are forecast for Houston through late Tuesday, according to the National Weather Service.

A flash flood watch is in effect for the Houston area through Tuesday morning, with "life-threatening" flash flooding possible Monday night, the weather service said. As little as an inch of rain could aggravate the flooding, it said.

Emmett called it the most significant flood event since Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, which left 41 people dead. It caused more than \$5 billion in property damage in Harris County alone, according to the county's Flood Control District.

At the Royal Phoenician apartment complex in north Houston, the brown floodwaters submerged cars in the parking lot early Monday, a resident said. He posted video to Twitter later showing the waters had gone down slightly, though levels still reached car windshields.

Another north Houston resident posted video of residents leaving their flooded homes in a canoe as the rain continued to fall.

Portions of I-10 and numerous roads throughout the metropolitan area were closed, as were many government offices. City bus and rail service shut down early Monday amid "severe and ever worsening weather conditions."

The storm snarled traffic at Houston's Hobby Airport, where nearly 200 flights were canceled by midafternoon, according to the airport's Twitter account.

Around 45,000 customers in the region were without power as of Monday afternoon, emergency management officials said, down from a peak of 123,000 earlier in the day.

Some areas had received as much as 16 inches of rain by Monday morning, according to the flood control district.

The heavy rains forced seven of the city's many bayous out of their banks and created flooding in parts of the city that had not flooded for many years, Turner said.

Flash flood warnings were up in about two dozen Texas counties across in the southern part of the state, including the Houston and Austin metropolitan areas.

The situation is the result of a nearly stationary area of low pressure that has stalled over the western United States, allowing moisture from the Gulf of Mexico to flow into Texas over the last few days, according to CNN meteorologist Sean Morris.

Very heavy rainfall is expected to continue through Tuesday before the system begins to move off to the northeast and weaken, he said.

Rains Swamp Businesses Big And Small

By Collin Eaton

[Houston Chronicle](#), April 18, 2016

Monday's relentless downpour could cost local businesses hundreds of millions in lost sales and repairs.

Grocery stores, restaurants and retail centers closed their doors for the day. Chevron, BP and other big oil companies told their engineers and geologists to stay home. Cargo ships all but stopped moving in and out of the Port of Houston for much of the day, and airlines canceled dozens of flights. Hourly workers lost a day's pay and contractors lost a day's work.

"A day's sales is a lot of money," said James D'Agostino Jr., chairman of Houston Trust Co. and former chief executive of Encore Bank in Houston. "Some of it is lost for good."

The storm was a temporary but disruptive setback for a region that has already seen thousands of job losses in energy and manufacturing in the wake of a deep two-year oil rout. Physical damage from floodwaters can often leave uninsured business owners no choice but to close shop rather than pay for extensive repairs out of pocket.

Until the insurance adjusters come out, it will be difficult to assess the total damages facing Houston. In 2001, Tropical Storm Allison dumped more than 2 feet of rain and cost the region \$3.5 billion in insured losses, according to the Insurance Council of Texas. The storm on Monday left as much as 16 inches of rain in some areas.

"I walked outside this morning and I said, 'Oh, Lord,'" said Patrick Jankowski, senior vice president of research at the Greater Houston Partnership. "It came up while we were asleep. People left their cars in the street and found them underwater when they got up. I wouldn't be surprised if 10,000 automobiles were totaled in the flood."

Flooded roads prevented people from getting to work and forced businesses to decide whether to open, alter their operations or send their skeleton crews home early.

Though some stores in Houston opened with just a small crew of employees on Monday, many more closed for the day, said Ed Wulfe, whose Wulfe & Co. owns and manages shopping centers throughout the region.

"Street flooding has never been more extensive and is everywhere," Wulfe said in an email. "In my many years in Houston I cannot recall flooding of this magnitude across the entire area."

For businesses that remained open, the storms forced changes. Some fast-food restaurant locations operated on drive thru-only status, for example, and managers at Knapp Chevrolet chipped in to help on the sales floor as the

Washington Avenue dealership pondered whether to close early.

At The Halal Guys restaurant on Farnham near the Southwest Freeway, two managers and four other workers were able to make it into work, with others calling in, texting photos of their treacherous commute attempts. German Alvarez, the assistant general manager, had plied through floodwaters from Texas 6 to get the Upper Kirby-area restaurant.

"I'm short five people, but we're still working and still going," Alvarez said between taking phone orders.

When Houston lawyer Gregg M. Rosenberg of Rosenberg Sproach saw how bad the weather was this morning, the law firm immediately launched its group text messaging system and told everyone to stay put.

"I didn't want any of my employees to be shown on the news swimming out of cars," he said in an email.

During last year's Memorial Day storms, Ed Wulfe's house in Meyerland took on 18 inches of rain, so he and his family moved into an apartment for nine months while the flood damage was repaired. They moved back home six weeks ago, and today, they watched as the waters again began to seep in.

"This is not bad," Wulfe said of the two inches that came into his kitchen and living room, "if the water recedes."

Wulfe said Houstonians need answers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which provides disaster assistance.

"There really needs to be some heavy investigation as to why this is occurring, what we can do to prevent it in the future and make a deal with FEMA that we'll do what it takes," he said.

"FEMA starts to be less forgiving for events that occur twice in a decade and this is twice in 12 months," he said.

As developers continue to build and increase density, flooding issues will exacerbate, said Ted C. Jones, chief economist at Stewart Title Guaranty Co.

"We're going to decrease the absorption and increase the runoff," he said.

"I don't care where you live in Houston, you must buy flood insurance," Jones said.

Economists say the region's economy will take a hit for now but in coming weeks, construction crews and repairmen, including specialists from out of state, will be paid to fix roofs and clean up roads, bringing extra money into Houston.

In terms of the broader economy, that influx of repair workers and the boost in activity – and insurance payouts – will likely make up for the local damages and lost sales, to a certain extent.

"We probably don't have enough roofers in this town to handle all of that repair work," said University of Houston economist Bill Gilmer. "It's sort of twofold good news and bad

news. Things tend to balance out in the long run." Nancy Sarnoff, Mike Smith, Lynn Sixel, Sarah Scully contributed.

Tax Day May Get A Rain Delay

By Andrea Rumbaugh

[Houston Chronicle](#), April 18, 2016

Water-logged Houstonians who couldn't file their federal income taxes on Monday may be spared late fees, the Internal Revenue Service announced.

Fees aren't an issue for those receiving refunds, but taxpayers who owe money generally pay a penalty for not meeting the Tax Day deadline. But the IRS said people affected by the storm can request an abatement of these penalties and may receive relief. Decisions will be made case-by-case.

In a release, the IRS pledged to "closely monitor the situation." It noted that the Federal Emergency Management Agency makes disaster declarations, "which allows the IRS to provide additional relief for taxpayers."

U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, said the tax agency indicated it would extend the filing deadline if the flooding is recognized as a disaster federally.

Heavy rain and street and house flooding across the Houston area made it difficult for some last-minute filers to get to post offices or tax preparer offices. The local IRS offices were closed, too.

Dianne Ketcham, the owner and operating manager of a Liberty Tax Service in Spring, didn't have electricity to help customers early Monday afternoon. When people arrived to file their tax returns, she took their information so she could file an extension when the power came back on.

Only five or six people had shown up by 1 p.m., she said, presuming that flooding prevented many from getting there. Ketcham said she got out of her own subdivision thanks to her husband's four-wheel-drive Toyota Sequoia.

She also said many people this had already filed their taxes, not realizing they had three extra days this year.

"It hasn't been as bad as it would be on April 15," she said.

H&R Block was focused on employee and customer safety Monday morning, said Gene King, director of corporate communications. The tax preparation giant will keep all of its Houston-area offices open through Wednesday. Many offices also will be open by appointment.

US CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Ahead Of Immigration Ruling And Election, Citizenship Finds Increased Importance

[NBC News](#), April 18, 2016

The day before her court appearance in 2003, Carlin Sadangsal went to the mall to find something nice to wear.

Her parents, Rebeck and Grace, had been granted a hearing to change their immigration status, and Carlin Sadangsal, a junior high school student at the time, was preparing herself to be called to answer questions about her family.

"I said, 'Oh man, this is pretty serious,'" Sadangsal told NBC News. "This is not something that you should just forget about. This is something very life-changing."

Rebeck and Grace Sadangsal were both undocumented immigrants, arriving in Los Angeles in 1992 after leaving the Philippines in search of better opportunities. But without any papers, the ever-present fear of deportation loomed large — a fear sharpened by the possibility that their then three-year-old son's epilepsy might become worse if forced to return to the tropical climate of the Philippines, a fear of how their three kids, all born on U.S. soil, would survive in a country to which they traced their heritage but one where they never lived.

"After going to court, I kind of put it all together and understood what the consequences would be if they were not granted to stay here," said the now 23-year-old Carlin Sadangsal. "It was really scary."

The Sadangsal's predicament and others like it won't be far from the debate taken up in the U.S. Supreme Court Monday, when oral arguments are heard in *U.S. v. Texas*, a case examining the constitutionality of President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) and expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), both announced in November 2014.

The initiatives, halted last February by a federal court in Texas, would impact five million undocumented immigrants, many of them parents of children who are legally in the U.S. Those given DAPA status, renewable every three years, would no longer face deportation and would be allowed to temporarily remain in the U.S. to legally work and access public benefits. The existing DACA program is not affected by the judge's injunction.

Critics of DAPA, including the 26 states suing the federal government, argue that the president exceeded his authority by carrying out immigration reform by executive order, a claim the Obama administration denies. Some 475,000 undocumented Asian Americans would be eligible to apply for either DAPA or the expanded DACA, according to the Pew Research Center.

"It's sometimes lost in the debate that 1.5 million undocumented people — 14 percent of the undocumented population in the U.S. — are from Asian countries," Chris Kang, national director of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, told NBC News. "More than a quarter of them would benefit from the expanded DACA and DAPA

programs, so our community has a huge stake in the outcome of today's case. We urge the Supreme Court to uphold these programs and allow them to proceed without further delay."

For years, the Sadangsal's faced the prospect of having their family split up if Rebeck and Grace Sadangsal were deported. At first, the couple considered applying for citizenship through Grace Sadangsal's mother, a U.S. citizen, but Rebeck Sadangsal said he was worried the process would take too long. Petitioning through their kids was also not an option because they were too young.

A pathway called "cancellation of removal," which requires 10 years of continuous U.S. residence and proof that deportation would cause a family hardship, was their best hope, Rebeck Sadangsal said.

An immigration judge agreed in 2007 to change the couple's status to lawful permanent residents, Rebeck Sadangsal said. It was a decision that cleared a path for them to file papers in 2014 to become U.S. citizens.

"It was a very stressful situation, but thank god we're one step closer to the finish line," Rebeck Sadangsal, 46, told NBC News.

The Sadangsal's are one example of a growing number of immigrants recently applying for citizenship. Over the last three years, during each period from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, the number of naturalization applications rose from 157,786 in 2013 to 187,635 in 2015, an increase of around 19 percent, according to figures from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Nasim Khansari, the citizenship project director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice — Los Angeles (Advancing Justice — LA), told NBC News in an email that her organization this year has also seen an uptick in citizenship applications it has processed.

Each quarter, Advancing Justice — LA usually helps between 150 and 200 clients, but between January and March that number doubled to around 400, Khansari said. With a little less than seven months before a new president is elected, many applying for citizenship have been motivated by this year's presidential race, Khansari said.

The same is true of Rebeck Sadangsal. The first time he voted was in the Philippines in a mayoral election for his town of Nampicuan, just north of Manila.

"I felt great," he said. "I felt involved. My vote mattered." "It took a long, long time, and we're finally here and a step closer to my parents being citizens. It's a long journey and totally worth it in the end."

Even though his candidate lost, the election process left an indelible impression on him.

"The mayor who won the election, he was great," Rebeck Sadangsal said. "He was a great guy, and he had done a lot of good things in my hometown."

A lack of opportunities in the Philippines and the hope of a better life brought Rebeck and Grace Sadangsal to the U.S., where his mother-in-law and some aunts and uncles already lived. Back in the Philippines, Rebeck Sadangsal had studied to be a dental lab technician, but without much demand for that career, he was forced into a number of odd jobs, including janitor and supermarket bagger.

When the Sadangsals arrived in Los Angeles 24 years ago, Rebeck Sadangsal found himself in a similar situation, working in a nursing home for five months, after studying to be a nursing assistant, then as a caregiver, and then a security officer. Today, he's an account executive with the Asian Journal, a Filipino-American newspaper, and Carlin Sadangsal works as a spa concierge.

Rebeck Sadangsal said he hopes to become a citizen before the November election so he can vote for president. The couple recently provided their biometrics, a procedure to confirm an applicant's identity and run background checks, and they expect a call for an interview in a few months.

In the meantime, Rebeck Sadangsal is following the presidential race with keen interest, though he's still undecided about who should get his vote. The economy and immigration, he said, are among the most important issues in this year's race.

"A lot of Asians right now, a lot of immigrants are waiting for immigration reform," Rebeck Sadangsal said.

Carlin Sadangsal said she remembers the energy her dad put into making sure their immigration application was just right — pulling all-nighters and rising early in the morning, collecting documents to show their daughter was an honors student, gathering evidence to prove that they were good people, that they gave back to their community, that they tried to live the American way.

"It took a long, long time, and we're finally here and a step closer to my parents being citizens," Carlin Sadangsal said. "It's a long journey and totally worth it in the end."

IMMIGRATION

King, Gohmert Clash With Pro-immigration Protesters

By Sarah Wheaton

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

Top immigration hardliners in Congress clashed with protesters outside of the Supreme Court on Monday, as justices took up President Barack Obama's directive to protect millions of undocumented immigrants from deportation.

Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) lectured the protesters, who chanted "We want justice" and booed loudly while he tried to speak from a podium at the base of the court's steps.

"Why are you all yelling?" said King, who was yelling into a microphone himself. "You want to be citizens of America? And conduct yourselves in a fashion where you try to shout down someone who is exercising their right to freedom of speech? Do I need to start reading the Constitution from the First Amendment?"

Shouting people down, King continued, does not count as peaceable assembly under the Bill of Rights.

"You're supposed to be demonstrating what good citizens you would make, rather than the kind of actions you have here," King said. "Are you an example of the America we can expect if this court finds that the president can write law and violate the Constitution? If so, then we are in for a rough future."

News conferences sponsored by the Tea Party and FreedomWorks also featured Reps. Ted Yoho (R-Fla.) and Louie Gohmert (R-Texas), as well as other speakers who unsuccessfully tried to lead the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance and "America the Beautiful." An effort to lead a singalong of the national anthem backfired when the singer forgot the lyrics midway through, drawing jeers.

Organizers for the pro-immigration protesters wore fluorescent vests to create a human chain around the hardliners' press conference, a move that may have prevented a more direct confrontation. At one point, a FreedomWorks organizer accused the protesters of trying to unplug their speaker.

Gohmert was greeted with chants of "racist." It was "ironic," Gohmert said, that people come to the United States for better opportunities, "and yet once here, they want us to be like the country they came from, where they don't enforce the law evenly across the board."

"I thank God for what Hispanic culture brings to America, but I thank God for the part of the Hispanic culture that requires that everyone be treated equally," Gohmert added.

King tried to do an interview with Telemundo as he walked back toward the House office buildings. Protesters surrounded the frame and shouted "Shame on you!" The reporter held the mic closer.

Republicans Face Off With Protesters Outside Supreme Court

By Mike Lillis

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

Several defiant Republicans faced off against thousands of immigration reform advocates outside the Supreme Court on Monday in a lopsided showdown highlighting both the ferocity and partisanship of the fight over President Obama's executive actions.

The chanting activists accused the lawmakers of "hateful" efforts to break up immigrant families by opposing

Obama's plans to rein in deportations. The Republicans shot back that Obama's supporters are promoting an "anarchic" system that threatens to undermine the very structures and principles that make America attractive to immigrants.

At stake, said Rep. Louis Gohmert (R-Texas), is nothing less than the distinction between a country "where the rule of law doesn't matter" and "the shining light on the hill that causes people to want to come here illegally."

"Once we give in to this kind of anarchy and the demands to forget the law ... then we're done," Gohmert said, straining to be heard above the jeering crowd at the base of the courthouse steps. "Nobody will want to come here, nobody will want to live here, including those that destroyed the country by demanding that the law not be enforced."

Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), among Capitol Hill's most vocal opponents of comprehensive immigration reform, was even more personal. He accused the activists of disparaging the nation's constitutional institutions and elected officials — not least of all himself.

"This behavior out here in the streets of America that we see today that disrespects this court, that disrespects the Congress of the United States, disrespects this congressman who's served on the Constitution subcommittee on the full House Judiciary Committee — are you an example of the America we can expect if this court finds that the president can write law and violate the Constitution at will?" King asked. "If so, we're in for a rough ride in the future."

Neither speech was well-received by the hulking crowd, gathered just a few feet away, which heckled both lawmakers with a chorus of boos and chants that drowned out much of their message. King was hit with chants of "No more hate!" Gohmert faced jeers of "You are an immigrant!"

The showdown came on a gorgeous, cloudless morning in Washington, just moments after the justices had heard oral arguments in a case challenging Obama's 2014 executive actions easing deportation for millions of people living in the country illegally.

Texas and 25 other states contend the programs represent an abuse of executive power that would hit their budgets with costs they can't afford, particularly in issuing driver's licenses. Administration officials say the changes are a simple matter of prioritizing enforcement efforts given budget limitations of their own — a power they think falls well under Obama's jurisdiction.

The court is expected to decide the case in June.

The thousands of activists gathered outside the court represented countless advocacy groups, from labor and human rights organizations to feminists and Buddhist monks. An overwhelming majority of them were there in support of Obama's programs, and their slogans were as diverse as themselves: "Keep Families Together." "Si Se Puede." "Take on Hate." "Don't Deport My Dad." "The Borders Crossed Us."

Yamilex Rustrian, a 20-year-old college student from Los Angeles who's benefiting from Obama's 2012 program deferring deportations, said she made the trek to Washington on behalf of people like her mother, who is undocumented.

"My dad was killed by gang members back in Guatemala," Rustrian said, explaining why, at the age of 7, she and her sister made the journey to the U.S. "My mom was already here and we didn't have any other option than, either stay back home knowing we can be raped or something bad can happen to us ... or try to cross the border alone with a complete stranger."

"We just took the chances to try to get here."

Siding with Texas outside the court was a much smaller group — almost all of them older men — who read from the Bible, lead the Pledge of Allegiance and held aloft signs reading "#LetThePeopleDecide" and "#UpToUsToDecide." They also sang the national anthem, though the effort hit a snag when a singer forgot the words.

It was a long day for the Capitol Police. The crowd gathered for the immigration case shut down First Street NE, which separates the Supreme Court from the Capitol. And a separate group of liberal demonstrators, protesting under the banner of Democracy Spring, crowded the Capitol steps, leading to the arrests of roughly 300 people and forcing police to cordon off the usually bustling promenade just east of the Capitol.

Immigrants, Advocates Hold Vigil Outside Supreme Court

By Arelis R. Hernández

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

Some drove more than 30 hours to get there. Hundreds more boarded buses or hopped on planes. No matter how they came to the Supreme Court on Monday, the purpose was the same: To humanize a debate they say has long been dehumanizing.

This was the moment for thousands of families, many of mixed immigration status, to present their own case outside the nation's highest court as the eight justices inside heard arguments over President Obama's deportation relief proposal, a case titled *United States vs. Texas*.

The multitude augmented their arguments with songs, signs, and their own stories. Some were nationally recognized faces of the immigrant rights movement, including Gaby Pacheco, Jose Antonio Vargas, members of Congress, religious leaders and little Sophie Cruz, who became a mini-celebrity last fall when she presented Pope Francis with a letter during his trip to Washington.

Sophie and her mother, Zoila Cruz, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, were among the first people admitted to the court to watch the 90-minute arguments.

But many of the others who came for the hearing were ordinary folk, traveling from as far away as California and as close as Columbia Heights.

"Whatever they decide, it will impact my life," said Marly Arevalo, a community college student who lives in Prince George's County.

She arrived in the United State seven years ago from Guatemala, crossing the border without permission. If the justices uphold the president's executive action, she would be eligible for the extension of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Arevalo was one of about 100 people who arrived before sunrise to win a ticket to enter the courtroom. Inside, she said she grew nervous as lawyers representing Texas and the other 26 states challenging the programs laid out their arguments.

"They were forceful and clear," she said. "I felt that the justices may have been convinced and were doubtful. And that worried me."

Those outside the court were far more optimistic, believing their crusade is morally imperative, as well as legally justifiable.

Jeannette Vizguerra of Colorado camped out Sunday night as temperatures dipped into the 40s, joined by her son and about 25 other mothers from a group that had formed on social media and called itself Dreamers, Mothers in Action.

The group set up banners, displaying shoes donated by people who had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. Inside the shoes, they placed small American flags, held in place by crumpled paper towels.

Organizer Lenka Mendoza led a vigil Sunday afternoon, praying aloud and holding photos of the justices. Others held signs with messages such as "Families have no borders" and "Supreme Court, show me justice."

"Equal justice under the law," Mendoza said, gazing up at that inscription engraved onto the face of the Supreme Court. "That is what we are looking for."

Nearby, the Tea Party patriots staked out a spot and set up a lectern for their own event, a news conference featuring four members of Congress that was to focus on the court vacancy created by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

Field organizer Gregg Cummings said the group is deeply opposed to extending deportation relief to those who have crossed the boarder into this country illegally.

"We are a nation of laws. We cannot be the world's playground," Cummings, of Iowa, said. "A nation without borders is no longer a nation."

The group of women from Dreamers, Mothers in Action came from more than two dozen different states, organizers said. All would be eligible for Obama's Deferred Action for Parents of Americans program if the court allows it to go forward.

They had been fasting since Friday, had not showered and were exhausted.

But as the crowd swelled Monday morning, ready to listen to Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) and other speakers, the mothers held onto their piece of sidewalk. Wearing matching hot-pink shirts, they became one of the most visible groups at a rally that had suddenly swelled to at least 2,000 people.

Vizguerra, the Colorado mother, danced the steps of "el jarabe tapatio," better known as the Mexican hat dance, when a mariachi band began playing.

She also listened carefully as a cavalcade of speakers whipped up the crowd in a raucous "Si se puede!"

"Our job here is to make sure they see the needs of our families," said Vizguerra, who is facing final deportation orders that would separate her from her husband and children. "I am a woman of faith and I have hope. If it doesn't happen, the struggle will continue."

Immigration Activists Make Some Noise As Supreme Court Hears Obama Amnesty Case

By Bradford Richardson

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

Immigration rights activists supplied plenty of thunder on an otherwise temperate Monday in the nation's capital, staging a lively and colorful demonstration as a landmark case challenging the constitutionality of President Obama's executive action deferring deportation for illegal immigrants was being argued before the Supreme Court.

The protests were loud and one-sided. Bilingual chants, drum beats and mariachi music could be heard blocks away from the courthouse and were at times deafening. One of the quieter moments came, paradoxically, when La Santa Cecilia — a Grammy-winning band from Los Angeles — performed before the courthouse steps.

Many wore daisy-yellow T-shirts and carried bouquets of matching-colored balloons. Others held pink, heart-shaped posters that read "Keep Families Together!"

The crowd numbered near 1,000 and spilled into First Street, which was closed off to traffic. Almost all of the demonstrators were there to support President Obama's executive actions designed to protect millions of illegal immigrants from deportation, but a small squadron of dissenters cropped up toward the back of the crowd. Their American flags at first appeared to be part of the larger chorus waved by immigration rights activists.

Keeping with American tradition, several demonstrators made appeals to the Bible.

One group took its inspiration from Exodus for a long banner reading, in all capital letters, "Let my people vote." Several men mounted a golden calf on their shoulders and

marched through the street — although they appeared to be crashing the protest to stump for campaign finance reform.

Legal analysts were divided on the Obama administration's prospects in the case, but Marielena Hincapie, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center, told the crowd she was encouraged by how the court arguments had gone.

"We are leaving confident," Ms. Hincapie said. "We know that the law is on our side, Supreme Court precedent is on our side, as many of the justices said, and we are on the right side of history and the law."

Sophie Cruz, a 6-year-old American citizen whose mother is eligible for the president's Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents program, made an emotional plea to the Supreme Court after oral argument.

"We are united by a single mission: We want the same rights for all," she said. "I ask the judges to protect us children and all immigrants."

A number of immigration activists in the plaza outside the Supreme Court took particular issue with the rhetoric of Republican front-runner Donald Trump, who has promised to crack down on illegal immigration and built a giant wall along on the U.S.-Mexican border. One man wore a black cowboy hat with a "Deport Trump" ribbon wrapped around the crown.

Clinton Says She Would 'Go Further' Than Obama On Immigration: Statement

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Clinton Urges Supreme Court To Uphold Obama's Immigration Moves

By Eliza Collins

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

Hillary Clinton urged the Supreme Court to uphold the legality of President Barack Obama's executive actions on immigration on Monday, weighing in just as the eight remaining justices heard oral arguments in *United States v. Texas*.

"The fates of about 5 million people in this country—and their families—are at stake. They call America home and want nothing more than to continue to contribute to their communities," Clinton said in a statement. "President Obama acted within his legal and constitutional authority in halting the deportation of parents and children, and I hope the Court will uphold his actions."

"If elected president, I will do everything I can to protect the President's executive actions and go further to bring more people relief and keep families together," she added.

Clinton also promised to propose legislation on comprehensive immigration reform within her first 100 days.

The Obama administration faced tough questioning on Monday from some of the justices, who wondered whether the style of the president's executive action was more of a legislative task than an executive one.

With the court ideologically split 4-4 after Justice Antonin Scalia's death, there is a possibility of a deadlock that would keep in place an appeals court ruling that blocked Obama's actions.

How South Carolina Could Fail Refugees And Religion

By Mark Hetfield

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

Mark Hetfield is the president and chief executive of HIAS, a Jewish nonprofit dedicated to refugee resettlement. Jack Moline is a rabbi and the president of Interfaith Alliance, an organization committed to protecting faith and freedom.

South Carolina became a pioneer in providing sanctuary to refugees fleeing religious persecution with the March 1, 1669, Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina protecting the rights of "Jews, heathens, and other dissenters from the purity of Christian religion." This included a Charleston community of Sephardic Jews, who finally found sanctuary after generations of roaming the globe following their expulsion from Spain.

The document, co-authored by John Locke, was revolutionary. It helped to form the philosophical bedrock that laid the foundation for the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the American tradition of serving as a refuge for the persecuted.

In the coming days, however, South Carolina could go in a different direction, this time pioneering dangerous and misguided legislation that would create a hostile environment for refugees, pressuring them — and the faith-based groups that help them — to "self-deport" from the state.

This legislation, which recently passed the state Senate and will soon be considered by the House, would force social service agencies and houses of worship to register any refugees they help resettle and hold them liable in civil court for any crimes those refugees might commit.

As the shocking rise in anti-Muslim bigotry collides with increasing concern about terrorism at home and abroad, legislation attacking refugees has spread rapidly across the country. But South Carolina's bill could set a unique and dangerous precedent. If South Carolina passes this disastrous legislation, it risks not only endangering those seeking refuge on our shores and tarnishing our country's proud tradition of assisting those forced to flee their homes, but also jeopardizing the promise of religious freedom that is the core of American civic life.

This proposal rests on a fundamental misconception about refugees and immigrants, one too often promoted by those who peddle in bigotry and fear. From our experiences, from the stories of our families and communities, and from countless people we've worked with over the years, we know the significant contributions that refugees make to our country. Refugees have become our religious leaders and successful entrepreneurs. They are artists, scientists, scholars, police officers, doctors and soldiers; they are our neighbors. But most important, they are children of God, entitled to equal opportunity, dignity and respect.

Moreover, South Carolina's bill is a solution in search of a problem. Crime rates are actually much lower among the foreign-born than among those born in the United States. To force religious organizations to bear responsibility for any crimes refugees might commit is at once to demonize those refugees and to pretend that they do not hold the same responsibility for their own actions as anyone else. This is to deny their God-given potential and their humanity.

This bill is a failure of both our religious ideals and our promise of religious freedom. Houses of worship and religious communities have always held a privileged place in American life, groundwork that was also laid in the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina. That privilege has allowed religious communities to be at the forefront of movements for social justice throughout our history, and it enables us to step up and serve refugees today. Conservatives have used this religious-freedom claim to carve out exemptions for religious organizations to non-discrimination laws, health-care mandates and much more. That so many of them seem ready to abandon religious-freedom concerns when it comes to refugees, subjecting religious organizations to undue scrutiny and impeding their ability to serve, suggests that these politicians value religious freedom only when it serves their political agenda.

Our nation is struggling to address the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and the largest global refugee crisis since World War II. We cannot allow South Carolina's dangerous proposal to become an example for states across the country and our international neighbors. We hope that the people of South Carolina will help defeat this legislation and continue the hard work of finding real solutions.

The ultimate irony is that faith organizations have played such a vital role in responding to the refugee crisis precisely because of the failure of our federal, state and local governments to act. If South Carolina's disastrous, discriminatory idea becomes the norm, who will be left to reach those people in need? All of us who cherish religious freedom should be deeply concerned by this proposal that is so obviously aimed at discouraging religious organizations from fulfilling our sacred duty to serve.

Read more on this topic:

Kathleen Parker: Syrian refugees deserve freedom from slaughter

Khalil Tawil: Syrian and Iraqi refugees seek freedoms cherished by all Americans

Nicholas Burns and David Miliband: Syria's worsening refugee crisis demands action from the West

US COAST GUARD

Search For Sunken Cargo Ship's Black Box Resumes

Investigators of maritime disaster that killed 33 will use robotic device to comb ocean floor for El Faro's voyage data recorder

By Robbie Whelan

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Vessel To Resume Search For Sunken Ship's Recorder Off Bahamas

By Barbara Liston

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

108-year-old Veteran Stays On Solid Ground, Skips Flight

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

CHICO, California (AP) — A 108-year-old woman believed to be the oldest living female military veteran kept her feet firmly on the ground Monday, deciding at the last minute to turn down a flight aboard a World War II-era biplane, according to the nonprofit that organized the ride.

Lynn Balmer was scheduled to take off from Chico, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) north of Sacramento, but decided against the flight in the morning, said Darryl Fisher, president of the Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation, a group that gets aging veterans into the sky.

Balmer was at the airfield but said, "I don't need it," when asked whether she would fly. She did not elaborate.

The foundation honors seniors and U.S. military veterans with flights aboard a Boeing Stearman biplane, the same type of plane used to train military aviators during World War II.

Balmer served in the U.S. Coast Guard, working as a coder while stationed in Seattle, according to the foundation. The Chico Enterprise-Record reported she enlisted during World War II. She achieved the rank of lieutenant.

Balmer, the oldest of nine children, worked as a math teacher before that.

NATIONAL PROTECTION AND PROGRAMS

Minnesota Edging Closer To Real ID Compliance

By Maya Rao

[Minneapolis Star Tribune](#), April 19, 2016

Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Scott Dibble said he is committed to passing a law this session to implement the federal government's Real ID requirements, ensuring Minnesotans can board commercial airliners and enter federal buildings in the future.

Department of Public Safety leaders told senators Monday that the new ID program would cost between \$4.3 and \$5.1 million, an expense that includes producing new cards, training driver's license agents and upgrading the state motor vehicle computer system.

The presentation of the report brought Minnesota a step closer toward resolving its yearslong dispute with the federal government. The Real ID Act of 2005 set more stringent requirements for licenses as a result of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, but Minnesota politicians objected over concerns over mass collection of private data.

In 2009, the Minnesota Legislature barred the Department of Public Safety from complying with the measure.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security rejected the state's request for an extension last year as a looming deadline threatened to prevent Minnesotans from boarding commercial airlines and enter federal buildings or military bases.

Then in January, the federal government approved a two-year extension on enforcing the law for air travelers in Minnesota and other states. Minnesota legislators lifted the ban this spring and gave the department a few weeks to study the issue and report back.

DFL Gov. Mark Dayton, who has been a leader in the state's effort to conform with the Real ID issue, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson early in April asking for another extension so Minnesotans could enter federal buildings and military bases with their current IDs.

The Department of Public Safety officials said the state could start issuing the cards as soon as October 2016 or wait until July 2017. The cards meeting the new federal standards would have a small gold star in the upper corner. Those that don't meet Real ID standards would say, "not for federal purposes."

Some legislators voiced concerns about the cost to driver's license holders.

Dawn Olson, driver and vehicle services director, told senators her research showed there would be little difference in the price of Real IDs and those that weren't compliant with new standards.

After the meeting, Dibble questioned whether motorists would see additional expenses because they would have to renew their driver's licenses sooner than the standard four-year cycle.

Dibble, DFL-Minneapolis, said he's also concerned about how the state would pay for the new program, with the budgetary surplus largely tied up with other priorities.

"Are we going to foist that expense onto individuals or are we going to absorb it somehow?" he asked.

TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

GOP Angry About Weekend Gitmo Transfer

By Kristina Wong

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

Republicans on Monday blasted the Obama administration's weekend transfer of nine Guantánamo detainees to Saudi Arabia, and vowed to fight efforts to shut the detention facility down.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee who is facing a tough reelection fight, said the transfer unnecessarily puts Americans at increased risk.

"With the release announced this weekend of nine Yemeni detainees to Saudi Arabia, the administration continues to dangerously release terrorists from Guantánamo and unnecessarily put Americans at increased risk in order to fulfill a misguided campaign promise — all while refusing to level with the American people regarding the detainees' terrorist risks, activities, and affiliations," she said in a statement.

The administration released its plan earlier this year to transfer as many detainees as possible from the facility in Cuba, and then bring those remaining to a facility in the U.S.

The detainees released on Saturday, all from Yemen, include hunger striker Tariq Ali Abdullah Ahmed Ba Odah. The other released detainees are: Ahmed Umar Abdullah Al-Hikimi, Abdul Rahman Mohammed Saleh Nasir, Ali Yahya Mahdi Al-Raimi, Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed Al-Hamiri, Ahmed Yaslam Said Kuman, Abd al Rahman Al-Qyati, Mansour Muhammed Ali Al-Qatta and Mashur Abdallah Muqbil Ahmed Al-Sabri.

Republicans — as well as some Democrats — oppose bringing detainees to U.S. soil, but the administration has vowed to continue transferring detainees approved for release. Only 80 detainees remain at the facility today.

Ayotte earlier this month introduced the Detaining Terrorists to Protect Americans Act of 2016, which would permanently ban the transfer of detainees to the U.S. and suspend their transfer internationally.

Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.), a member of the House Intelligence Committee and Army veteran, warned that previously released detainees have “returned to jihad and killed Americans.”

“The risk of these nine men doing the same is far too high and the president should cease his effort to empty out the detention facility,” he said on Monday.

Republicans point to a 30 percent figure that represents detainees released by Presidents George W. Bush and Obama who are confirmed or suspected of re-engaging in terrorism.

Administration officials, meanwhile, highlight a 4.9 percent figure that represents the number of detainees released by Obama confirmed to be re-engaging in terrorism. Another 8 percent released by Obama are suspected of re-engaging.

The administration is considering several locations inside the U.S. to bring the remaining detainees to, including Pompeo’s state of Kansas.

“I will continue to fight to ensure that does not happen,” he said.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), another member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said although Saudi Arabia is an important ally, their ability to prevent detainees from returning to the fight is “poor.”

“While Saudi Arabia is an important ally in the fight against radical Islam, their track record in preventing Guantanamo detainees from returning to the battlefield is poor, and they share a border with the failed state of Yemen, home of [al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula],” he said.

“The American people and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia deserve to know the full extent of past terrorist activities of the nine terrorists released today,” said Cotton, an Army veteran.

CYBER NEWS

Police Urge Surmounting Encryption In Plea To U.S. Lawmakers

By Chris Strohm

[Bloomberg News](#), April 18, 2016

The use of strong encryption is preventing state and local police across the U.S. from fully investigating murders, sex offenses against children, drug cases and child pornography, according to law enforcement officials who will testify before a House hearing.

The officials plan to come to Tuesday’s hearing armed with emotional pleas, evidence of stalled investigations and

statistics to back up their arguments that companies including Apple Inc. and Alphabet Inc.’s Google are making criminal investigations increasingly difficult by using encryption, which scrambles data with a code that can be unlocked only with a special key. They also warn of the consequences as companies such as Yahoo Inc. and Facebook Inc. move toward stronger encryption.

“During my years as an investigator, I have not seen any impediment to rescuing child victims or identifying and prosecuting child sexual predators that even comes close to the impediment created by encryption,” Captain Charles Cohen, commander of the office of intelligence and investigative technologies for the Indiana State Police said in testimony prepared for the hearing and posted on the congressional panel’s website. He cited specific investigations that he said are being blocked by encryption.

The hearing before a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee comes as lawmakers, the Obama administration, companies and privacy advocates struggle with how to balance the needs of national security and criminal investigators against the value of encryption in protecting privacy rights and combating hackers. Also slated to testify at the hearing are Amy Hess, the FBI’s executive assistant director for science and technology, and Bruce Sewell, Apple’s top lawyer.

Apple and the FBI are in a legal standoff in a case in Brooklyn, New York, over accessing encrypted data on a drug dealer’s phone. That case, coupled with the law enforcement testimony scheduled for tomorrow, expands the debate beyond the terrorist attack that the FBI initially cited in its confrontation with Apple.

The agency in February served Apple with a court order compelling the company to help break into an encrypted iPhone used by Syed Rizwan Farook, who with his wife carried out the deadly December attack in San Bernardino, California.

Apple resisted, bringing national attention to an issue that has simmered for years under the surface. The FBI dropped that case last month after saying it bought a tool from a private organization it hasn’t identified to break into the phone. However the underlying issues remain far from resolved.

Police Cite Child Victims In Encryption Plea To Congress

By Chris Strohm

[Bloomberg News](#), April 18, 2016

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"The best way we, and the technology industry, know how to protect your information is through the use of strong encryption," Sewell said in his prepared testimony. "To suggest that the American people must choose between privacy and security is to present a false choice. The issue is not about privacy at the expense of security."

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The statistics and examples cited by law enforcement officials demonstrate that most cases involving encrypted devices are criminal, not terrorism-related.

From October 2015 to March of this year, New York City police have been locked out of 67 Apple devices lawfully seized during investigations into 44 violent crimes, including murders, rapes and the shootings of two officers, according to testimony by Thomas Galati, chief of the New York City Police Department's intelligence bureau.

In Texas, 20 percent of devices presented to the the Greater Houston Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory can't be accessed due to encryption and that's likely to increase substantially, said Harris County Sheriff Ron Hickman, who also sits on the FBI's national advisory board.

Investigators working for the Indiana State Police estimate that more than 40 percent of all mobile phones confiscated in relation to Internet crimes against children have encryption that prohibits forensic examination, Cohen said.

"Put yourselves in the shoes of the parents of a child whom we have just discovered is being victimized online," Cohen said. "The victimizer has thousands of photographs of your child in a digital vault that is impossible for law enforcement to open."

Technology and Internet companies have defended the use of encryption as essential to protect the data of their users and customers and have resisted calls to build new surveillance capabilities into their devices and services.

"As technology companies, we want to keep people safe, we want to stop crime, and accordingly, we cooperate with law enforcement in ways that are consistent with the law," the Reform Government Surveillance coalition said in a statement last month in response to the FBI's order to Apple in the San Bernardino case. "But we do not believe that the law allows the government to demand that a company create new software that supplies a backdoor to a secure technology."

The coalition includes Apple, Google, Yahoo and Facebook.

Developing a mechanism that would give only law enforcement agencies access to communications is "effectively impossible" given the state of technology, said Matthew Blaze, associate professor and cybersecurity expert at the University of Pennsylvania, who will also testify at the hearing.

"Attempts to mandate one would do enormous harm to the security and reliability of our nation's infrastructure, the future of our innovation economy, and our national security," Blaze said in prepared testimony.

Poll: Voters Trust Tech Companies Ahead Of FBI On Data Security

By Mario Trujillo

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

A majority of voters trust major technology companies to protect customers' personal information more than the federal government, according to a poll commissioned by The App Association.

The results released Monday found that when given the choice, 54 percent of voters said they trust companies like Apple, Google and Facebook to do a better job securing their personal information. Another 21 percent chose federal agencies like the FBI ahead of tech companies. A large portion did not choose either.

The survey was commissioned by the technology trade group and conducted by the firm Purple Insights.

The poll showed most people are concerned about their private data being breached and seven in 10 believe hacking is increasing.

The poll is meant to bolster the technology industry's arguments as it battles the government over encryption.

While the FBI dropped its demand for Apple to create software to help law enforcement break into the phone of one of the shooters in the San Bernardino attack, the government has continued to push a similar case in New York. Some lawmakers have also pushed legislation that would require technology companies to offer technical assistance to access the data.

Earlier polls showed Americans are split when asked about the specific fight between Apple and the FBI, with a slim majority siding with law enforcement.

A Pew poll last year found only 31 percent of people were confident that records maintained by the government would remain private and secure. That number remained nearly the same for email providers and cable companies. Only 16 percent had confidence records of their activity done through search engines would remain private and secure.

Monday's poll surveyed 1,250 voters between April 11-14. It contains a 2.8 percent margin of error.

Bill Gates Says U.S. Needs Limits On Covert Email Searches

By Dustin Volz And David Shepardson

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Cybersecurity Gets Five Hearings On Capitol Hill This Week

By Tim Starks

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

With help from Darren Goode

HILL HEARTS CYBER — It's another busy week on Capitol Hill: Five separate committees are holding hearings on cybersecurity.

Story Continued Below

On Tuesday, the FBI and Apple square off again at a hearing of a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee, albeit on different panels. A Senate Armed Services subcommittee meets behind closed doors to scrutinize the fiscal 2017 budget proposal for Cyber Command. And a House Ways and Means subcommittee becomes the third panel in the past two weeks to hold a hearing heavily focused on what the IRS is doing to protect sensitive taxpayer data from hackers.

On Wednesday, a House Oversight subcommittee brings in officials from State, Homeland Security and Treasury to address a range of cyber issues, one of which is how the Juniper firewall backdoor affected federal agencies; the hearing notice identifies Treasury as one agency that was "impacted by the vulnerability." And the House Small Business Committee holds a hearing on how cyberattacks affect small businesses and government agencies.

— COMSTOCK SAYS IRS CHIEF SHOULD RESIGN OVER CYBER FAILURES: A House Republican calling for the resignation of IRS Commissioner John Koskinen isn't exactly groundbreaking territory these days. But Rep. Barbara Comstock on Friday became the first to do so by targeting the agency's failures to shore up the protection of taxpayers' personal information from hacks. "Commissioner Koskinen has provided little confidence that cybersecurity is a top priority at the IRS, Comstock said in a statement following a subcommittee hearing she chaired Thursday featuring Koskinen. A GOP report in March detailed how the IRS needed to improve, and IRS officials have pledged to follow through. But Comstock said Koskinen needed to follow the lead of former OPM Director Katherine Archuleta, who resigned following the revelation of a major breach of personnel data last summer, and "allow for new and trusted leadership at the IRS."

— ELSEWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA: If the IRS is feeling picked on by the swarm of House committees, it should know that it has company among other tax agencies whose handling of sensitive data has drawn fire. The Canadian Revenue Agency is the "worst offender" among government bodies up north when it comes to privacy breaches by employees, according to the Privacy Commissioner of that country. The CRA accounted for a whopping 69 percent of such data breaches among federal agencies, per CTV News. In its defense, the Canadian agency said the most common kind of breach was simply misdirected mail. "Other privacy breaches documented include lost USB drives, stolen laptops, emails with sensitive information sent to the wrong people, and one case where a hard drive with more than 500,000 student loan receipts went missing."

HAPPY MONDAY and welcome to Morning Cybersecurity! Thanks for suffering for us, actors. Send

thoughts, feedback and especially your tips to tstarks@politico.com and follow @timstarks, @POLITICOPro and @MorningCybersec. Full team info is below.

TECH COMPANIES BETTER THAN GOV AT SECURITY, POLL SAYS — Voters trust Apple, Google, Facebook and other tech companies to safeguard their information more than the federal government, according to a new wide-ranging poll on encryption out today from the App Association and Purple Strategies. The association of application makers, also known as ACT, found that 54 percent of voters they surveyed picked the tech companies over the government, which garnered 21 percent. Of those polled, 92 percent agreed with the statement that encryption is needed for consumer protection, although most of the questions focused on the positives of encryption and negatives of backdoors. The industry group is opposed to Senate encryption legislation sponsored by Richard Burr and Dianne Feinstein that is meant to help law enforcement officials access encrypted tech products for their investigations. As policy makers look for a way forward, they should know that Americans understand that backdoors and other security vulnerabilities should not be part of the equation.

POSSIBLE BURR-FEINSTEIN SIDE EFFECTS — Big time cryptographer Bruce Schneier believes Burr-Feinstein legislation unrelated to the authors' intentions. He told The Register it could render many NSA activities illegal, block file compression and complicate how companies handle deleted data. Schneier isn't the only one warning of the bill's possible unintended effects. Critics have said the bill would force Apple and Google to police their app stores to delete encrypted applications, or hit open source projects. Fight for the Future is planning its next campaign now that the bill has dropped.

— **IN OTHER ENCRYPTION NEWS:** Apple engineers told reporters their biggest security concern isn't the government breaking into the iPhone used by San Bernardino shooter Syed Farook — it's hackers. Apple's latest court filing in New York over a similar fight with the government says that the FBI shouldn't need its help there, since it got into Farook's phone without Apple's assistance. And the quantum computing race is on, between those who want to crack scrambled communications and those who want to render encryption invulnerable to quantum computers. If you were wondering what quantum computing is, here's the Canadian prime minister explaining it.

MICROSOFT MAKING FRIENDS — Tech companies and privacy groups are throwing their backing behind Microsoft's lawsuit against the federal government for the right to tell its customers when federal agencies are examining their emails. The suit, filed last week, immediately won support from companies like Yahoo and Box. A slew of other organizations have since. "We applaud Microsoft for challenging government gag orders that prevent companies

from being more transparent with their customers about government searches of their data," said Andrew Crocker, staff attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

WEST POINT TAKES THE CROWN — The U.S. Military Academy has won this year's Cyber Defense Exercise. The NSA, whose Information Assurance directorate sponsors the annual competition, announced the victor Friday. "NSA experts who help secure the U.S. government's most sensitive communication systems challenged service academy teams to protect networks they designed, built, and configured at their respective schools," the agency said in a news release. "Working out of the Parsons facility in Columbia, Md., another group of NSA specialists graded each team's ability to effectively maintain network services while detecting, responding to, and recovering from security intrusions and compromises."

KARMIC JUSTICE? — A data breach two years ago led to the leak of a sizable number of nude celebrity photos; now, some of the aficionados of those same photos have been hit themselves. Users of a forum devoted to the stolen pics got blitzed by malvertising and ransomware, Softpedia reported, adding that some of them thought it was a good idea to sign up for the forum with .gov addresses. The site added that "some of them might also have to pay fees to free their device from the grip of a few ransomware variants."

Cyber Criminals Target Wisconsin Manufacturers For Secrets, Harm

By Rick Barrett

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#), April 18, 2016

Eric Isbister learned, in an unusual way, that his company's website was vulnerable to an attack when it was hijacked by someone selling leather jackets.

Isbister is president of GenMet, a Mequon metal fabrication company that's not in the leather apparel business, yet someone was using the GenMet site for that purpose.

"I don't know exactly how he did that, but he can't do it anymore," Isbister said about putting a stop to the shenanigans.

Increasingly, manufacturers face cyber security risks, including the loss of confidential data and trade secrets worth millions of dollars. The attacks sometimes come from overseas competitors trying to steal proprietary designs and manufacturing processes, according to a new report from Sikich LLP, a professional services firm based in Naperville, Ill., with an office in Milwaukee.

How much attention do manufacturers pay to cyber security?

"The short answer is 'not nearly enough,'" said Austin Ramirez, president and chief executive officer of HUSCO

International Inc., a Waukesha manufacturer of automotive components.

"For the first time, one of our major automotive customers is forcing us to do a much more rigorous audit of our electronic security protocols," Ramirez said.

"This is something we are really starting to focus on," he added.

Only 33% of the manufacturers surveyed by Sikich did annual computer network penetration tests, which many in the cyber security field consider essential.

Manufacturing has tended to fall behind the curve when it comes to security, probably because many companies aren't held to the standards applied to financial and health care institutions, said Brad Lutgen, a Sikich partner involved in its security and compliance division. A thumb-drive test

Simple human curiosity, and not being able to resist temptation, also could be a cyber threat, according to a recent study by the University of Illinois.

The study's researchers purposely dropped 297 USB thumb drives around the Urbana-Champaign campus to see what would happen. Tracking files indicated when someone found one of the devices and accessed the files.

Nearly half of the finders plugged the device into their computer and opened one or more files. Many said they took no precautions, which could have left them wide open to computer viruses and other malware had the devices been dropped by someone with malicious intentions.

Some people opened intriguing files, including photos, before they attempted to locate the thumb drive's owner.

Experts say thumb drives and other portable data devices, including photo-memory cards, should be treated like hypodermic needles. If you don't know where it's come from, don't touch it.

Some of the worst cyber security breaches have come from thumb drives. Even IBM was caught in a thumb-drive scandal when, at a trade show, the company gave out free drives unknowingly infected with a virus. Emails another threat

Likewise, many cyber attacks against companies stem from an employee opening an email or a website link they believe is safe, when it's not.

"Even if only one person out of a thousand clicks on one of those, the damage is done," said Despoina Perquil, an assistant professor in computer science at Marquette University.

Another threat is ransom ware, a malicious software that encrypts files on your computer until you pay a ransom to have them unlocked.

Businesses, hospitals, and even law enforcement agencies have paid thousands of dollars to get their data back. Often the payments are made through digital currencies such as Bitcoin, which are difficult to trace.

Backing up data to an offline computer or separate drive that hackers can't access is probably the best way to avoid the scam.

"Otherwise your only choice is to pay the money. They will actually give you back your data because that's how they work," Perquil said.

Often the attacks are from outside the United States, leaving law enforcement agencies with few means to pursue the offenders.

Some of the most common methods used to break into a computer system include a malicious email or phishing, the latter an attempt to obtain a password or username by pretending to be a trustworthy entity.

"Attackers are becoming less extravagant and complex, but instead are relying on easily exploitable, well-known vulnerabilities," the Sikich report said.

GenMet does work for the U.S. defense industry, and Isbister takes cyber security very seriously. After the website incident, about five years ago, the company hired Superior Support Resources Inc. of Brookfield to manage its computer systems.

GenMet has about 60 computers on its shop floor.

"My job routings are there, my drawings are there. If I have a computer problem, it quickly brings me to my knees," Isbister said.

"I have a firewall and security system that prevents some devious person from getting at my customers' intellectual property," he added.

Many businesses, including professional services firms, are vulnerable to attacks, said Sarit Singhal, president and CEO of Superior Support Resources.

One example: Visitors to a law firm's website were redirected by hackers to a pornography site. In another example, a real estate firm wired \$23,000 to a scam operator who pretended to be a vendor on a large construction project.

"This kind of stuff happens all day long," Singhal said, adding that attackers use social media, email and websites to gather information about businesses and use it against them. The need to keep testing

Businesses should have penetration tests done on their network to reveal the weaknesses, according to experts, although it can cost thousands of dollars.

With the tests, a security firm will simulate an attack and attempt to take control of a computer system, sometimes over a period of days, but often access is gained within an hour.

"If we have done our homework, it's pretty typical for us to gain access quickly, especially if a company hasn't had this type of testing before," said Lutgen with Sikich.

Some business owners believe their company is too small to be the target of a cyber attack, but the offenders don't necessarily see it that way.

Likewise, some companies tell new hires about their computer system policies, but then the information gets lost in the day-to-day business activities.

Often, Singhal said, people are the weak link in the cyber chain.

West Point Cadets Claim Cyber Defense Exercise Crown

U.S. Military Academy beats Navy, other entrants to take eighth title in NSA event's 16-year history

[Army Times](#), April 18, 2016

The U.S. Military Academy flexed its cyber-muscles this week, with a team of more than two dozen cadets taking top honors in the National Security Agency's annual Cyber Defense Exercise.

West Point students bested teams from the Naval Academy, Coast Guard Academy, Merchant Marine Academy and Royal Military College of Canada in a showdown against NSA professionals, who posed as hackers attempting to breach student-built networks.

Judges of the weeklong contest evaluated teams based on how well their networks held up and how they prevented, recovered from and analyzed infiltrations. West Point has won half of the 16 yearly contests, which began in 2001.

The Naval Academy took top honors last year. The Air Force Academy won in 2012 and 2013 but did not participate this year.

"Defensive skills and insights are gained not only by the network defenders, but also by those playing offense during the exercise," Kim Beam, a senior leader with NSA's Information Assurance Directorate, said in Friday's news release announcing the winner. "They'll go back to defending networks post-CDX."

NSA Cyber Exercise Hones Skills At Military Academies

By Sean Lyngaas

[Federal Computer Week](#), April 18, 2016

Members of the red team seek to disrupt student-defended networks at NSA's 2016 Cyber Defense Exercise. (Photo credit: NSA Public and Media Affairs)

An annual cybersecurity exercise run by the National Security Agency for the military academies has put students alongside NSA's red team network hunters for the first time. The goal is to expose the future Defense Department cyber workforce to intrusion techniques they'll be called upon to thwart.

"To learn defense, you have to know offense," said James Titcomb, an NSA official who was the technical lead for this year's Cyber Defense Exercise.

The multiday competition wrapped up on April 14, with the Army's U.S. Military Academy taking first place for the

eighth time. (The Air Force Academy has won four times, and the Naval Academy three.)

There were a few noticeable changes in CDX this year: An "ethical hacking" challenge was part of the exercise, as was a session tasking graduate students with securing and exploiting drone communications. Additionally, Army Cyber Command had network defenders participating in the exercise for the first time.

At the beginning, a black pirate flag hung over the exercise's operating room, hosted by a contractor in Columbia, Md., not far from Fort Meade. "We're waiting for the game to start right now," Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. D'Adrian Mills said. "We probably have a few more tricks up our sleeves, so we're going to write a few more scripts to make it a little bit harder for them today."

Mills was part of the red team of computer specialists who attacked networks set up and defended by the academies. The Royal Military College of Canada also participated in CDX.

Mills and his colleagues developed exploits for Windows and Unix derived from open-source tools. They wreaked havoc overnight, when the network defenders were off-line. The academy teams then had to clean up the networks during operating hours. They were also thrown curveballs such as an assignment to strip an application of malware and deploy it on a specific schedule.

Teams are graded on their ability to keep networks running and protect confidential data, among other metrics.

"It makes it real for them," said Kimberly Beam, NSA's chief of remote deployed operations. "It takes it a little bit out of the academic world in [that] they have a real environment that they're working in and defending."

A fake news network pumped out updates during the simulation to mirror the real-life attention agencies receive when they are breached. The adversary was dubbed Synonymous after the infamous hacking collective Anonymous.

The Naval Academy won last year because "they stuck to the fundamentals," 1st Lt. Christopher Shields said. "At every single step, they used least privilege," meaning system-administering privileges were minimized to prevent attackers from moving laterally within a network.

Shields participated in CDX while at the Air Force Academy and now works at NSA's Information Assurance Directorate, which supplies the network-probing red team.

The Naval Academy's Dennis Devey was back at the competition this year defending his title. He said the inter-service rivalries come to the fore during CDX with the scoreboard in plain sight.

"Everyone has used a computer before, but there's a huge step up from being good at Excel to being able to do this sort of thing," he added, describing the technical acumen required of participants.

Absent from the competition this year was the Air Force Academy, which has a team of cyber cadets that train weekly for this sort of competition.

MIT Reveals AI Platform Which Detects 85 Percent Of Cyberattacks

By Charlie Osborne

[ZDNet](#), April 18, 2016

Today's cybersecurity professionals face daunting tasks: protecting enterprise networks from threats as best they can, damage limitation when data breaches occur, cyberforensics and documenting the evolution and spread of digital attacks and malware across the world.

It can be a challenge in an industry where many companies find themselves short-staffed and unable to find enough trained staff to maintain their ground against state-sponsored hackers which are tasked with stealing financial data, sensitive corporate intellectual property or spying upon unsuspecting victims.

Protecting infrastructure and people often is down to two sectors: man or machine. In today's current climate, there is a vast array of digital tools available to security professionals to streamline their tasks, but the bulk of the burden falls on human shoulders.

Could a new artificial intelligence platform change this? MIT researchers believe so.

On Monday, MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) said that while many "analyst-driven solutions" rely on rules created by human experts and therefore may miss attacks which do not match established patterns, a new artificial intelligence platform changes the rules of the game.

The platform, AI Squared (AI2), is able to detect 85 percent of attacks – roughly three times better than current benchmarks – and also reduces the number of false positives by a factor of five, according to MIT.

The latter is important as when anomaly detection triggers false positives, this can lead to lessened trust in protective systems and also wastes the time of IT experts which need to investigate the matter.

AI2 was tested using 3.6 billion log lines generated by over 20 million users in a period of three months. The AI trawled through this information and used machine learning to cluster data together to find suspicious activity. Anything which flagged up as unusual was then presented to a human operator and feedback was issued.

"You can think about the system as a virtual analyst," says CSAIL research scientist Kalyan Veeramachaneni. "It continuously generates new models that it can refine in as little as a few hours, meaning it can improve its detection rates significantly and rapidly."

AI2 is able to scan billions of log lines per day, assigning each piece of data as "normal" or "abnormal." The more attacks that come in and the more feedback which is given by human operators, the better, as AI2 learns what to look out for.

According to Veeramachaneni, this "cascading" effect can only improve the accuracy of future attack predictions.

MIT says the AI uses three different learning methods in order to show the top events at the end of each day for operators to label. The artificial intelligence platform then builds a model which is refined with input in what the team calls a "continuous active learning system."

The research institute says that on the first day of training, the AI will pick out the 200 most abnormal events for the operator to view. As the system learns, it identifies which events are actual attacks, and so within a matter of days analysts may only be viewing 30 or 40 events on a daily basis.

"This paper brings together the strengths of analyst intuition and machine learning, and ultimately drives down both false positives and false negatives," says Nitesh Chawla, the Frank M. Freimann Professor of Computer Science at the University of Notre Dame.

"This research has the potential to become a line of defense against attacks such as fraud, service abuse and account takeover, which are major challenges faced by consumer-facing systems."

CIA Surveillance: CIA Is Getting Serious About Monitoring Social Media

By Yoni Heisler

[BGR](#), April 18, 2016

Though not a secret, it's not widely known that the CIA has its own venture capital firm called In-Q-Tel. The purpose of In-Q-Tel is simple: invest in high-tech companies as a means to ensure that the CIA remains on top of the latest and greatest technology breakthroughs and advancements. As In-Q-Tel's first CEO Gilman Louie once stated, the firm's work allows the CIA to remain "at the cutting edge of information technology advances and capabilities."

Earlier this year, In-Q-Tel (IQT) held a CEO Summit that brought together the CEOs of a number of companies that IQT has investments in. Some of the featured speakers at the event included FBI director James Comey, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency director Robert Cardillo and Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work.

Recently, The Intercept acquired documents detailing the aforementioned CEO Summit. In turn, the publication provides us with an up close and personal look at many of the technologies the CIA finds to be of interest. Most notably, the CIA, via its venture capital arm, seems to be extremely interested in keeping an eye on social media activity.

Yet among the 38 previously undisclosed companies receiving In-Q-Tel funding, the research focus that stands out is social media mining and surveillance; the portfolio document lists several tech companies pursuing work in this area, including Dataminr, Geofeedia, PATHAR, and TransVoyant.

Those four firms, which provide unique tools to mine data from platforms such as Twitter, presented at a February “CEO Summit” in San Jose sponsored by the fund, along with other In-Q-Tel portfolio companies.

Geofeedia, as a quick example, has technology that collects and analyzes geo-tagged posts on social networks like Twitter and Instagram. The underlying goal is to track news events as they break in real-time.

Geofeedia’s website boasts:

Aggregating social media posts from any user-defined location in the world allows you to stay ahead of topics, trends and situations with proactive insights and alerts from real-time location-based intelligence. You can discover trends and patterns within the world’s largest set of location-based social data to inform better decision-making. And you can respond effectively and efficiently based on real-time location-based insights.

PATHAR’s capabilities, meanwhile, seem even more noteworthy.

The Intercept writes:

PATHAR’s product, Dunami, is used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to “mine Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other social media to determine networks of association, centers of influence and potential signs of radicalization,” according to an investigation by Reveal.

All told, the information obtained by The Intercept identifies 38 new companies that have received funding from IQT. Make sure to hit the source link below for a full list of the companies and technologies the CIA has its eye on.

Feds Prep For Cybersecurity Buying Spree

By John K. Higgins

[E-Commerce Times](#), April 18, 2016

There are hundreds of CRM solutions on the market today, so how do you know which one is best for your organization? This free buyer’s guide compares the best CRM software systems and allows you to request a price or demo for the system that best fits your needs. [View the Guide]

The U.S. government’s objectives for improving cybersecurity are taking shape in updated contracting procedures, contracts and projected increases in spending. Several recent developments have underscored the federal commitment to bolstering the protection of IT resources.

On the contracting front, the General Services Administration has asked vendors to respond by Wednesday to a research survey on what it should do to expedite federal

acquisition of cybersecurity products and services. The quick-turnaround survey was released earlier this month.

Information from the survey will be used to develop contracting vehicles to help federal agencies “procure both proactive and reactive cybersecurity services, such as penetration testing, incident response and security engineering to include post-incident or post-assessment remediation,” said Shon Lyublanovits, acting director of the Federal Acquisition Service for Strategic Solutions and Security Services. FAS is a unit of GSA. Vendors Asked for Input

“Providing federal agencies better access to private sector talent that can identify threats, address vulnerabilities and assist in recovery from malicious cyber events is a key component of helping the entire federal government improve its cyber posture,” she said.

GSA posed nearly 20 survey questions to vendors, including the following:

How do private sector entities contract for cybersecurity products and services?

What are the advantages or disadvantages of how the government currently purchases cybersecurity products and services?

What contracting type and pricing methodology structures are currently offered, or should be offered, for the government to purchase proposed cybersecurity services?

The GSA reference for the survey document is Cybersecurity Services, Solicitation No. QTA00DF16DPI0002.

“We are encouraged that GSA is soliciting industry best practices in advance of putting into place contracts for buying cybersecurity services,” said David Wennergren, executive vice president of operations and technology at the Professional Services Council.

“Cybersecurity is a national imperative, and it is crucial that federal agencies address long-standing requirements, like using their PIV cards for cryptographic logon, finishing their Trusted Internet Connection/Einstein monitoring work, patching software, and retiring legacy systems and infrastructure that are no longer secure or effective,” he said.

“Simultaneously, agencies must embrace additional cybersecurity priorities, to include continuous monitoring, mobile device management, managed security services, proactive assessments and trusted computing from untrusted devices. Taken together, these actions will help to ensure that cybersecurity is baked into IT solutions rather than trying to bolt on security measures after the fact,” he said. Funds Still Rolling Out

While contracting procedures certainly could be improved, federal agencies still are utilizing existing acquisition vehicles for cybersecurity capabilities – often at hefty levels of investment.

For example, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has set a deadline of May 13 for vendors to respond to a request for proposals on a cybersecurity contract with a potential value of US\$395 million. The request was issued this month, but interested providers have had ample time to prepare for the final version as DHS released a preliminary draft last year. DHS also conducted information sessions for vendors.

The contract involves support services for the DHS Security Operations Center. The single-award, indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity contract covers a broad range of services for monitoring, intrusion detection and protective services. Tasks will involve wide area networks, Trusted Internet Connections, policy enforcement points, security devices, servers and workstation needs.

Also, the U.S. Defense Department has selected vendors for a \$5 billion vehicle known as the Cyber Security and Information Systems Technical Area Tasks contract managed by the Defense Technical Information Center, or DTIC. The contract covers the full spectrum of IT capabilities, with an emphasis on cybersecurity, including research and development projects.

Contractors chosen for the work have been publicizing their participation since the DTIC revealed the selections late last year. Several have highlighted the cybersecurity elements of the program.

Booz Allen Hamilton was "honored to be a central component of this program, which will serve as an invaluable boost to the federal government's cybersecurity research and development efforts," said Robin Portman, executive vice president of Booz Allen Hamilton.

"Our team encompasses truly world-class cybersecurity analysis and management capabilities and looks forward to serving a lead role in improving the nation's cyberdefenses," she noted.

To date, the DTIC has not assigned any specific tasks to the selected vendors, according to Jennifer Heddings, contract office representative.

"Right now we are preparing the task packages, and we expect to issue various task orders during the current fiscal year," she told the E-Commerce Times. Pressure on OMB

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., has asked the Office of Management and Budget to respond by May 8 to his concerns that federal agencies are not taking advantage of innovative cybersecurity offerings, particularly from small businesses and startups.

"From what I understand, however, flaws in the federal acquisition process can limit the tools agency network defenders can obtain," he noted in a letter to OMB Director Shaun Donovan.

"Our discussions made it clear that, because the techniques our adversaries use against us online are always evolving, deploying innovative products and services is

critical to staying ahead of the threats we face online," Carper said, referring to a meeting he attended with small businesses.

The companies pointed out that private sector financial institutions, power companies, retailers and others "are able to quickly reap the benefits of the many new and innovative cyberdefense products put on the market each year," he said.

"It was not clear to them that federal agencies are similarly able to rapidly acquire new and innovative cybersecurity solutions," Carper added.

"What are agencies doing to acquire innovative cybersolutions developed by startups and other companies that have not traditionally done business with the government? How successful have agencies been in doing so? Are any agencies piloting innovative procurement processes for rapid acquisition of cybersecurity tools? What action has OMB taken, or is planning to take, to guide agencies in the rapid procurement of new and emerging cybersecurity tools?" Carper asked. Expedited Contracting

In another initiative, GSA's FAST Lane procurement system has benefitted cybersecurity vendors. The program was started last fall and is designed to speed up the process in which vendors qualify to participate in the GSA information technology procurement program known as "Schedule 70."

"FAST Lane is a game changer. In the past it took an average of 110 days to get on Schedule 70. In our first pilot, we were able to cut that down to 45 days," said Kay Ely, deputy assistant commissioner at FAS. "Over the past several months, we've used this process to bring on more than 40 new companies at an average time of only 29 days."

While the schedule covers the full range of IT offerings – and not just cybersecurity – several cybersecurity vendors have recently qualified for the program. One is Kryptowire, a DHS contractor.

The company will provide mobile app vetting for Android and iOS apps and mobile app archiving across 10 product lines, which will let the government analyze the security and privacy of its own apps as well as third-party apps used in the workplace, according to the department.

Another FAST Lane beneficiary is SynchroCyber, which obtained Schedule 70 status earlier this year. The company provides digital identity, credentialing and access management solutions.

"GSA was very accommodating and the process worked out well," said company CEO James Burke.

"Our first step was to gain the status of a small-business HUBZone company. We were then a subcontractor to a prime vendor on a federal contract. In the future, the agency wanted to deal with us directly and assisted us in the FAST Lane program," he told the E-Commerce Times.

These latest developments come against the background of President Obama's Cybersecurity National Action Program, which was launched earlier this year.

Boston Fed's Cybercrime Prevention Efforts Drawing More Interest

Other Fed banks take note of Boston's meeting with financial firms to share hacking stories

By Katy Burne

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Bangladesh Identifies 20 Foreigners As Suspects In Cyber Heist

By Arun Devnath

[Bloomberg News](#), April 18, 2016

At least 20 foreign citizens were involved in the cyber theft of \$81 million from Bangladesh's central bank, according to a senior investigator in the case.

The names and nationalities of the suspects would be disclosed later, Shah Alam, additional deputy inspector general of Bangladesh's Criminal Investigation Department, told reporters in Dhaka on Monday.

"The names of the foreign nationals came up during our official visits to the Philippines and Sri Lanka this month as part of our investigation," Alam said. "We may have to visit those countries again, but we can't disclose the names at this moment for the sake of the investigation."

Hackers attempted to steal almost \$1 billion from Bangladesh's account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in early February. While the Fed blocked most of the transfers, about \$81 million ended up in the Philippines, and most of that is missing. Another \$20 million sent to a bank in Sri Lanka was returned.

The case has sparked investigations in the Philippines and Bangladesh, and prompted central banks around the globe to double check cyber security systems.

Bangladeshi investigators also found evidence of neglect among several central bank officials, Alam said.

"We have to find out if the officials at Bangladesh Bank had any criminal intention or they just got involved in the episode unknowingly," he said.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Officers Try To Stop Muslim Youth From Radicalizing

By Linda A. Thompson

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

BRUSSELS — When towns across Belgium started seeing alarming rates of young men leaving to fight in Syria, lawmakers offered a very Belgian solution — put a public servant on it.

Since Belgium had become the European Union country sending the most fighters to Syria per capita, local

officials freed up close to \$2.3 million in U.S. money to help recruit fighters.

"In 2013, we saw around 70 youths leave to fight in Syria," said Johan Vermant, a spokesman for Antwerp Mayor Bart De Wever. He says the city's five deradicalization officers, hired in 2014, have been effective.

Vermant said there are still a number of people who have left. "But the figures show that that group has become smaller," he added.

Deradicalization officers can be found everywhere from heavily immigrant districts in Brussels such as Sint-Joost and Anderlecht, to sleepy towns like Maaseik in the northeastern province of Limburg.

The officers are typically embedded in a municipality's crime prevention team and serve as a bridge between at-risk youths and their families, and social workers, community workers and counselors on the ground.

"What they try to do is get a foot in the door with these youths at home, establish contact with their families so they can assess what problems specifically led them to enter the picture," Vermant said. "Sometimes people appear on the radar for reasons that aren't radicalization itself — for instance no future prospects, problems at home, problems at school. The aim is then to offer youths assistance so they can get back on the right track."

Deradicalization officers in Flanders — the Dutch-speaking portion of Belgium — typically act on tips from relatives, teachers, youth workers, counselors and mosques.

"Of course those are not all potential terrorists — the majority of reports are on people we don't need to massively worry about," said Dirk Staessens, a deradicalization officer in the Flemish town of Kortrijk.

Staessens said they saw spikes both after the Paris and Brussels attacks. "We have had a number of cases that were transferred to the federal police, which means they are being very closely monitored."

Still, the program has come under fire.

Dyab Abou Jahjah, Belgium's best-known Muslim activist, wrote in the newspaper *De Standaard* that a "deradicalization industry" had developed that "was threatening to weaken our society with incorrect insights and policies in order to safeguard positions and subsidy budgets."

In the wake of the attacks in Brussels in April, critics said these officers have failed to achieve exactly what they were hired to do: track and prevent the radicalization of Muslim youth.

Others noted that Brussels' deradicalization officers were going about their work in an amateurish way compared to their counterparts in Flanders — not based on a list of names from intelligence services, but rather randomly looking for radicalized youth in neighborhoods.

Lieven Pauwels, a professor in criminology at the University of Ghent, says it's too simple to dismiss the work of

Brussels' deradicalization officers. The capital, with 19 districts and multiple police zones, cannot be compared to other Belgian municipalities, he said.

"It is extra difficult to achieve successes there because of the complex institutional structures there," he said. "Things will take more time there than in Flemish municipalities."

Moreover, he says, it's too early to evaluate the fruit of the officers' labor in Brussels.

"Prevention policies have failed, sure. People underestimated the problem," Pauwels said. "But not enough has been done at this point to say that the deradicalization policies have failed. If they haven't begun yet, they can't have already failed."

Still, even the deradicalization officers themselves have questioned their job description.

"I'm not sure whether it is possible to deradicalize someone," Staessens said. "What I do know is that you can monitor people, that you can flag people and assess whether they represent a risk. But whether you can completely make someone change their mind as a public servant — that I don't know."

He says they follow up on people but can never be sure whether they will radicalize.

"You can't look inside someone's head," he said.

NATIONAL SECURITY NEWS

Obama Calls Putin For 'Intense' Talks On Syria, Ukraine

By Gregory Korte

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — President Obama called Russian President Vladimir Putin Monday morning for what the White House said was an "intense" conversation about the breakdown of the cease-fire in Syria.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the purpose of the call was to "make the case to President Putin that he should use his influence with the Assad regime to live up to the commitments that they've made in the context of the cessation of hostilities."

The call came as fighting escalated along Syria's border with Turkey, with Syrian government forces and the U.S.-backed opposition renewing their fighting after a seven-week cease fire.

In its account of the presidential phone call, the Kremlin news service said the two leaders agreed on the importance of upholding the cease-fire and giving the peace talks a chance. But Putin also suggested to Obama that the U.S.-supported moderate opposition has close ties to terrorist groups in Syria.

The Russians also made a point of noting that the phone call was made at Obama's initiative.

Obama and Putin also discussed Ukraine. The White House said Obama "urged President Putin to take steps to end the significant uptick in fighting in eastern Ukraine." But the Kremlin said it's up to the new Ukrainian government to live up to its end of the 2015 Minsk agreements.

One topic that did not come up: The recent incidents of Russian planes "buzzing" U.S. ships in the Baltic Sea.

"These kinds of incidents, while provocative and concerning, are not particularly unusual," Earnest said. He said the United States had protested the flight tactics through the military attache at the U.S. embassy in Moscow.

TASS: Russian Politics & Diplomacy

[TASS \(RUS\)](#), April 18, 2016

MOSCOW, April 18./TASS/. In a telephone conversation on Monday, the presidents of Russia and the US, Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama, discussed the situation in Syria, confirming a bid to contribute to the strengthening of the cessation of hostilities regime in that country initiated by Russia and the US, and to ensure access of humanitarian aid to Syrian regions, the Kremlin press service reports, noting that the conversation was initiated by the US.

"Putin put an accent on the need for moderate opposition distancing itself as soon as possible from IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, as well as for shutting the border between Syria and Turkey from where gunmen keep infiltrating and arms are supplied to extremists," the press service said.

They also agreed to "keep boosting coordinated effort of the two countries in the Syrian direction, including through secret services and defense agencies," it went on. "With this aim additional measures will be worked out for prompt reaction to the existing violation of the ceasefire regime," it said.

Obama Calls On Putin To Help Reduce Violence In Syria After Peace Talks Stall

By Michael D. Shear And Nick Cumming-Bruce

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — President Obama had "an intense conversation" with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Monday in which he expressed concern on the eve of his visit to the Middle East and Europe about the fragile Syrian peace talks and increased violence in Ukraine, White House officials said.

In a strongly worded statement, the White House said that Mr. Obama had urged Mr. Putin to use his influence with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria to press him to stop attacks against opposition forces and abide by his commitment to a partial cease-fire.

The so-called cessation of hostilities, brokered by Russia and the United States in February, has shown signs of crumbling in recent days, with increasing ground clashes and

airstrikes. Syrian government forces have been mounting an offensive near the northern city of Aleppo, while rebel groups have reportedly made advances against government positions in the areas of Latakia in the north and Hama in the center of the country.

A statement released by the office of Mr. Putin said he had stressed the need for moderate opposition leaders in Syria to distance themselves from the Islamic State and other extremist groups.

On Monday, efforts to negotiate a political settlement to the five-year conflict grew more difficult when opposition representatives pulled out of formal talks in Geneva. The United Nations special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said that the opposition High Negotiating Committee had told him that it was suspending its participation because of the surge in fighting and a decline in deliveries of humanitarian aid.

"Since these talks began in Geneva, the Assad regime has worsened the situation on the ground," Salem al-Meslet, a spokesman for the opposition coalition, said in a statement. "The progress in Geneva is directly connected to the realities faced by our people in Syria. If the ground situation is not improved, it will affect the advancement of the political process."

Josh Earnest, the White House press secretary, said that while the call between Mr. Obama and Mr. Putin was "intense," there was not an impasse between them over Syria.

"It's an opportunity for the president to, once again, make the case to President Putin that he should use his influence with the Assad regime to live up to the commitments that they've made in the context of the cessation of hostilities," Mr. Earnest told reporters.

For Mr. Obama, the phone call with Mr. Putin offered a chance before his arrival in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to demonstrate his resolve in moving toward a political solution in Syria. Mr. Obama is expected to urge Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf nations to renew their focus on helping to end the Syria conflict and fight the Islamic State.

Last week, Rob Malley, the president's top Middle East adviser, said in a briefing for reporters that the cease-fire "has held so far," adding that "we're far from having achieved the goals that we set, but the trend line is positive."

Mr. Obama's call with Mr. Putin appears to have been less optimistic. In describing the exchange, Mr. Earnest cast blame on Mr. Assad, saying that "unfortunately, we've seen that the cessation of hostilities continues to be fragile and increasingly threatened due to continued violations by the regime."

The statement from the Kremlin said that the two leaders had "reiterated their commitment to strengthening the cease-fire," and that "additional measures will be put in place for rapid response to violations of the cease-fire."

The latest round of indirect talks in Geneva, the third so far, began last week and had been focused on a political transition. Extremist groups like the Islamic State and the Qaeda-linked Nusra Front are not included.

Mr. de Mistura, the United Nations special envoy, told journalists that the peace process would continue and that opposition negotiators would stay in Geneva for "technical discussions." He said that on Friday he would take stock of the prospects for continuing the talks, adding that "ups and downs" in the peace process were to be expected.

Mr. de Mistura said there was hope that aid convoys would be able to head for besieged areas. In the political talks, though, "the gap is clearly wide," he said.

Opposition negotiators flatly rejected an idea floated by Mr. de Mistura on Friday that would allow Mr. Assad to remain as president, with three vice presidents nominated by the opposition. The coalition representatives have insisted that any transitional government exclude Mr. Assad.

During the phone call on Monday, Mr. Obama and Mr. Putin also discussed the situation in Ukraine, where fighting has continued between government troops and Russian-backed separatists. A cease-fire in Ukraine has reduced the violence, but a political resolution, known as the Minsk agreement, has yet to be fully put in place.

Mr. Obama is also traveling this week to Britain and Germany, where the situation in Ukraine is expected to top a list of European challenges he will discuss.

The president urged Mr. Putin to end what the White House called a "significant uptick in fighting" in eastern Ukraine, along the border with Russia.

The Kremlin said that Mr. Putin had told Mr. Obama that he hoped the Ukrainian government would "finally start taking concrete steps towards implementing the Minsk agreements of Feb. 12, 2015."

Michael D. Shear reported from Washington, and Nick Cumming-Bruce from Geneva.

Syria Peace Talks Near Collapse As Opposition Declares Pause

By Suleiman Al-Khalidi, John Irish And Tom Miles
[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Amid Fighting, Syria Opposition Backs Away From Geneva Talks

By Sarah El Deeb And Jamey Keaten
[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

GENEVA (AP) – Syria peace talks ran into trouble on Monday, with the U.N. mediator saying the opposition has suspended its formal participation in the indirect discussions

with President Bashar Assad's government to protest "worrisome" new violence, especially near the northern city of Aleppo, and rising concerns about the humanitarian situation.

Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. envoy for Syria, said he will press on with the talks despite the suspension by the opposition High Negotiations Committee. The HNC said it would no longer attend meetings at the U.N. office in Geneva that has hosted weeks of on-and-off peace talks aimed ultimately at ending the country's devastating five-year war.

The HNC delegation will remain at their hotel in Geneva, and de Mistura said he will continue "technical" discussions with its envoys by phone or off-site in hopes of firming up a blueprint for a political transition in Syria. He said he would "take stock" of progress toward that goal on Friday.

The HNC, in a statement late Monday, said it had asked de Mistura for a "brief hold in order to end the Assad regime's truce violations."

De Mistura has repeatedly said that political transition – as called for under a U.N. Security Council resolution – is "the mother of all issues." On Monday, he acknowledged a "gap" between the two sides on that issue: the HNC wants no role for Assad in any transitional government, and Assad's envoys have proposed a "broad-based government."

The suspension came just hours after Syrian opposition fighters launched a new offensive against government forces in a number of northwestern areas. Rebel groups said attacks in rural parts of Latakia province, a government stronghold, were in retaliation for violations of a U.S. and Russian-brokered cease-fire.

De Mistura said the new fighting in parts of Syria, especially near Aleppo, was "particularly worrisome," and said that he expected that the U.S. and Russia – who are leading oversight of the truce – will hold a special meeting about it "if this trend continues."

In a statement, the Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama discussed the situation in Syria and agreed to increase coordination between the special services and militaries of the two countries.

The U.S. state department spokesman John Kirby said that the concerns raised by the opposition before pausing the talks are "concerns we share in terms of the lack of some sort of sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance and what are violations of the cessation of hostilities." He added that despite these violations, the cease-fire had reduced the overall level of violence in Syria.

The HNC's chief negotiator, Mohammed Alloush, said the fragile cease-fire that started in late February "has effectively been ended by the regime." He said government forces carried out 70 air raids on Sunday, Iran had sent in two new fighting groups to help reinforce Assad's troops, and Russia has supplied Syrian soldiers with weaponry.

"All this intervention gives a clear indication that the solution in Syria, with the presence of this regime, has become shut – or we have hit a wall," he told The Associated Press.

In a telephone interview with AP, Khaled al-Nasser, a member of the opposition group the Syrian National Coalition who is in close contact with the HNC, said "there is no intention to boycott the talks. We will not be responsible for the collapse of the negotiations. The regime will be."

The rebels said their offensive came in response to government attacks against refugee camps and residential areas. Different rebel factions shared videos of their fighters lobbing rockets at government positions in the Jabal al-Akrad area, close to the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib. They claimed on social media to have gained ground.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed the rebels seized control of at least two areas and said al-Qaida's branch in Syria, the Nusra Front, is taking part in the fighting. Neither the Nusra Front nor the Islamic State group is included in the cease-fire.

The cease-fire, which has been planned to help buttress the Geneva talks, had reduced violence across Syria despite alleged violations on both sides. The opposition says the government has breached the agreement more than 2,000 times. De Mistura has said that many Syrian civilians have felt positive effects from the truce overall.

The cease-fire has held in most of Syria, except in the north, where it has practically collapsed. The Nusra Front is deeply rooted in the areas in northern Syria controlled by opposition forces, complicating the oversight of the truce.

A Syrian opposition member in Geneva, Mohammed al-Abboud, said the rebels have the right to defend themselves.

"We have the right to retaliate and defend ourselves in case we are attacked and we will not be silent about any aggression and we will continue our main mission to defend civilians," al-Abboud said in comments published on the SNC's Twitter account.

Syria's U.N. ambassador Bashar Ja'afari, who is leading the government's delegation in Geneva, said rebel fighters had called for a "revocation of the cessation of hostilities." Before de Mistura spoke, Ja'afari said that the government delegation planned to meet with him again on Wednesday.

In Moscow earlier Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the two sides in Geneva should move to direct talks. The two delegations only have met separately with de Mistura, not face-to-face. Lavrov also denied claims that Moscow and Washington were negotiating Assad's departure behind closed doors.

Syria's civil war, which began in 2011, has killed over 250,000 people and displaced millions.

El Deeb reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Bishr El Touni in Geneva and Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow contributed to this report.

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UN Battles To Save Syria Peace Talks As Opposition Walks Out

By Layal Abou Rahal And Rouba El Hussein

[AFP](#), April 18, 2016

Geneva (AFP) – The UN was struggling Monday to keep troubled Syria peace negotiations on track, as the opposition suspended its “formal participation” in the talks in protest at escalating violence on the ground.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Barack Obama meanwhile agreed to help strengthen a fragile ceasefire in Syria, seen as essential to paving the way towards a lasting deal to end the bloodshed.

With fighting surging around Syria’s second city Aleppo and negotiations in Geneva stalled over the fate of President Bashar al-Assad, the opposition said they had had enough.

“Since these talks began in Geneva, the Assad regime has worsened the situation on the ground,” Salem al-Meslet of the main opposition High Negotiations Committee said in a statement.

The group said the quotes must be placed on “brief hold in order to end the Assad regime’s truce violations”, accusing the regime of more than 2,000 violations of the ceasefire since it began on February 27.

“The HNC remains fully committed to the political process and establishing peace through diplomacy,” Meslet said. “We remain in Geneva ready to engage in serious talks.”

HNC coordinator Riad Hijab said earlier it was “unacceptable” for the negotiations to continue while Assad’s regime continues to “bombard and starve civilians” in Syria.

But UN peace envoy Staffan de Mistura insisted the ongoing round of indirect discussions, which began on April 13, would continue through the week as planned.

The HNC may continue to meet UN staff at their hotel “to pursue technical discussions”, including on a political transition in Syria, de Mistura said.

– Clear blow –

The UN envoy stressed that the indirect talks format – which has seen the HNC and Assad’s representatives meet separately with UN mediators – created flexibility to continue the discussions.

But the opposition’s announcement is a clear blow to the already precarious negotiations aimed at achieving political transition, a new constitution, and presidential and parliamentary elections by September 2017.

The landmark ceasefire negotiated by Russia and the US in February dramatically curtailed violence across much of Syria, raising hopes that a lasting deal could be struck to end the five-year civil war.

But the spread of fighting around Aleppo and the regime’s apparent unwillingness to hold concrete talks on forming a new government has led the opposition to question Assad’s commitment to a political solution to a conflict that has killed more than 270,000 people.

Areas in Syria controlled by jihadists like the Islamic State (IS) group and Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front are exempt from the ceasefire, but the renewed Aleppo clashes are drawing in other rebel groups and straining the truce.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 22 civilians were killed on both sides over the weekend in Aleppo city – one of the highest single tolls since the truce began.

And medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) warned the situation was “critical” for more than 100,000 people trapped by fighting in the Azaz district of Aleppo governorate.

Piling further pressure on the ceasefire, 10 rebel groups vowed Monday to strike back against alleged violations of the truce.

Among the groups was Jaish al-Islam, the most important opposition faction in East Ghouta, a key rebel-held town east of Damascus.

Mohammed Alloush, the HNC’s chief negotiator in Geneva and a senior member of Jaish al-Islam, on Sunday urged rebel groups to “strike” regime positions.

A fellow opposition figure said this did not represent the HNC’s position and Alloush clarified that he was calling on rebels to defend themselves from attacks.

The regime’s lead negotiator in Geneva Bashar al-Jaafari slammed Alloush’s comments Monday as “irresponsible and provocative”.

– US, Russia try to boost ceasefire –

Despite the surging violence on the ground, De Mistura insisted “the cessation of hostilities is holding,” but acknowledged: “We are concerned.”

Putin and Obama meanwhile agreed during a phone call Monday to help strengthen the ceasefire, according to the Kremlin.

Both leaders had stressed the “significance” of the Geneva talks and agreed that their security services and defence ministries would ramp up cooperation over Syria, it said.

“With this end in view additional measures on how to quickly react to existing ceasefire violations will be worked out,” the Kremlin added.

French President Francois Hollande also said everything must be done to maintain the truce.

"If negotiations do not resume, if fighting does, there would again be the worst fears for civilians (and) consequences in terms of refugees," he said.

Regardless of whether the ceasefire is strengthened, the Geneva talks will likely continue stumbling on the tricky issue of Assad's fate.

The HNC insists that any peace deal must include Assad's departure from power. Damascus has so far said the president's future is off limits.

"The gap is clearly wide," de Mistura admitted.

Obama Talked To Putin Monday

[The Blaze](#), April 18, 2016

President Barack Obama spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin Monday, but the leaders did not discuss the issue of Russian attack planes buzzing a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Baltic Sea last week, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

Earnest told reporters that the incident "did not necessitate a presidential-level conversation."

However, last week, Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States "would have been justified" in firing on the planes.

Instead the two leaders spoke about the situations in Ukraine and Syria, Earnest said.

"[The Baltic Sea incident] did not come up in the call between the two presidents. As I mentioned, those kinds of activities are destabilizing and a source of some concern, but they are not particularly unusual," Earnest told the press. "There is an already well-established channel for expressing our concerns about these incidents from the U.S. military attaché in Moscow to his Russian military counterpart."

The Russian attack planes buzzed the naval destroyer multiple times on April 10 and 11, coming as close as an estimated 30 feet from the ship and twice passing below the ship's navigation bridge, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

From the White House readout of the call issued after the press briefing:

President Obama spoke today by phone with President Vladimir Putin of Russia to share his concern over the status of the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria between the Syrian regime and its allies on the one hand and the armed opposition on the other. President Obama stressed the importance of pressing the Syrian regime to halt its offensive attacks against the opposition. The two leaders committed to intensify their efforts to shore up the Cessation of Hostilities and affirmed the need to end attacks by all parties and ensure humanitarian access to all besieged areas. President Obama also stressed that progress on these issues needed to be made in parallel to progress on political transition to end the conflict in Syria.

On Ukraine, President Obama urged President Putin to take steps to end the significant uptick in fighting in eastern Ukraine and stressed the urgent importance of moving forward with full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Obama Fails To Mention Russian Jets Buzzing Navy Ship During Talk With Putin

By Dave Boyer

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

President Obama spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin Monday but didn't raise the issue of Moscow's fighter jets buzzing a U.S. destroyer, the White House said.

"That did not come up in the call between the two presidents," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest, who said they had a "rather intense" discussion instead about Syria's civil war.

Russian fighter jets made several low flights over the Navy destroyer in the Baltic Sea last week, and a U.S. Embassy official in Moscow complained through diplomatic channels to the Russian government.

Mr. Earnest said such events are "destabilizing, but they're not particularly unusual." He said that's the reason Mr. Obama didn't bring it up in his phone call with Mr. Putin.

Secretary of State John F. Kerry said the U.S. warship would have been justified in firing on the Russian aircraft, due to the dangerous actions of the Russian pilots.

Mr. Earnest said the two presidents also spoke about Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

Obama Phones Putin But Doesn't Bring Up Jets Buzzing US Ship

By Jordan Fabian

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

President Obama spoke by phone on Monday with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss a series of thorny international issues.

But Obama did not raise the issue of Russian military jets buzzing a U.S. Navy ship last week in the Baltic Sea.

The two leaders had a "rather intense discussion" about the civil war in Syria and Russia's intervention in Ukraine, according to White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

"That did not come up in the call between the two presidents," Earnest said when asked about the jets. Such incidents are "destabilizing" but "not particularly unusual," he added.

Two Russian planes took several low passes over the USS Donald Cook, raising eyebrows in the U.S. and prompting new concerns about Russian aggression.

An American military defense attaché in Moscow last week registered a formal complaint with Moscow.

The leaders spoke amid a new round of peace talks between the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad and opposition groups.

But the U.N.-sponsored talks in Geneva have shown signs of collapse.

Mohammed Alloush, a top opposition negotiator, said Monday the talks have "hit a wall" and that his coalition will postpone its participation in the talks, citing the Assad government's violation of an agreement to cease hostilities that went into place in February.

Russia is a chief ally of Assad's and the Obama administration has insisted the Syrian leader step aside through a negotiated political transition.

Both Obama and Putin agreed, however, to take steps to ensure both sides abide by the cessation of hostilities deal, the White House and Kremlin said in separate statements.

Obama-Putin Discuss Need To Implement Ukraine Peace Deal

[ABC News](#), April 18, 2016

Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Barack Obama have spoken by telephone, and the White House says they spent much of the call discussing Ukraine, with Obama urging Putin to abide by a 2015 agreement aimed at ending the conflict.

The Kremlin readout of Monday's call stresses Putin's hope that Ukraine will "finally begin to take concrete steps to implement the Minsk agreement."

The cease-fire has significantly reduced fighting between government troops and Russia-backed separatists, but the political settlement that was part of the agreement hasn't been implemented.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said: "Russia needs to abide by their commitments and, by doing so, they can begin to relieve some of the isolation sustained as a result of interfering with their sovereign neighbors in Ukraine."

Putin, Obama Discuss Crisis In Ukraine

[TASS \(RUS\)](#), April 18, 2016

MOSCOW, April 18./TASS/. In a telephone conversation on Monday, the presidents of Russia and the US, Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama, discussed the situation in Ukraine, the Kremlin press service reports, noting that the conversation was initiated by the US.

Focusing on the Ukrainian crisis, President Putin said he expected Kiev's new government to take concrete steps to implement the Minsk agreement of February 12, 2015, the Kremlin press service said

He said he expected the new government in Ukraine "to establish direct dialogue with Donbass, announce amnesty, carry out a constitutional reform and enforce the law on special status upon agreement with representatives of Donetsk and Lugansk," the press service said.

Putin and Obama also discussed other topical issues on bilateral and international agenda. In particular, Obama thanked Putin for Russia's assistance in setting free American national Kevin Patrick Dawes, who was under arrest in Syria for illegally crossing into the country.

Obama And Putin Discuss Syria, Ukraine In Phone Call

Leaders had 'intense conversation' about Syria cease-fire, White House says

By Carol E. Lee

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Russian Jet Barrel-rolls Over U.S. Spy Plane, Passing Within 50 Feet, Pentagon Says

By Thomas Gibbons-Neff

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

A Russian Su-27 multirole fighter barrel-rolled over a U.S. spy plane operating in international airspace over the Baltic Sea last week, at one point coming within 50 feet of the U.S. aircraft, the Pentagon said Monday.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the Russian jet went "from the left side of the aircraft, over the top of the aircraft and ended up on the right side of the aircraft." He said the U.S. aircraft, an RC-135U, was on a routine mission at the time it was intercepted. Davis did not know if the Russian jet was armed.

The close call comes less than a week after Russian Su-24 jets buzzed the USS Donald Cook, at some points coming within 30 feet of its deck while the destroyer was on a routine patrol in the Baltic Sea. The Su-24s were not armed.

In both instances, the Pentagon has decried the Russian maneuvers as unsafe and aggressive, maintaining that the the U.S. craft were operating in international airspace and waters respectively. Russian officials downplayed the incidents.

"There have been repeated incidents over the last year where Russian military aircraft have come close enough to other air and sea traffic to raise serious safety concerns, and we are very concerned with any such behavior," said Navy Capt. Daniel Hernandez, a European command spokesman, in a statement.

The RC-135U is a converted Boeing jetliner and one variant of the RC-135 line of reconnaissance planes. The RC-135U is known as the Combat Sent and is designed to detect and collect electronic information broadcast from enemy positions, specifically radar emissions.

"On the one hand, the [RC-135 flight] is a part of a broader presence saying that 'we're here,'" said Peter Singer, a senior fellow and strategist at New America. "On the

other, it's soaking up all kinds of electronic information and seeing if there are any changes in the area."

Russia maintains a modest naval base in the port of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea, and in recent months has reportedly moved S-400 surface-to-air missiles there. S-400s, called the SA-21 Growler by NATO, are also stationed at Russia's main airfield in northern Syria. The S-400 relies on an advanced radar system to locate its targets and has the ability to intercept aircraft hundreds of miles from its launch sight. S-400s located in Kaliningrad would be able to strike into the airspace over neighboring NATO countries such as Lithuania, Latvia and Poland.

The recent fly-bys of U.S. ships and aircraft by Russian jets are nothing new. Aside from repeated incidents in recent years, especially after Russia's intervention in Crimea and Ukraine, the "Top Gun" style antics were a hallmark of the Cold War. The frequent close calls prompted both countries to create formal and informal agreements that dictated how Russian and U.S. aircraft and ships would conduct themselves in the skies and on the sea.

Carter Says US To Deploy More Forces To Back Iraq's Anti-IS War

By Laurent Barthelemy

[AFP](#), April 18, 2016

Baghdad (AFP) – The United States will deploy additional forces to Iraq and make Apache attack helicopters available to support the country's troops, US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter said Monday in Baghdad.

President Barack Obama hailed the 2011 withdrawal of American troops from Iraq as a major accomplishment of his presidency, but the US has been steadily drawn back into the country since the Islamic State jihadist group overran swathes of territory in 2014.

Washington heads an international coalition that is carrying out strikes against IS and also providing training and other assistance to forces fighting the jihadists in both Iraq and neighbouring Syria.

"We are going to bring in additional forces," Carter said after arriving in Baghdad on a surprise visit, without specifying the size of the new deployment.

Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis told reporters an additional 217 personnel would be deployed, bringing the official number of US troops in Iraq to 4,087.

Troops will also be authorised to advise Iraqis at the battalion and brigade level as opposed to the larger divisions, potentially exposing them to greater risks closer to the front lines.

Carter also said that the Apaches – which can respond "quickly" and "dynamically" when needed – will support Iraqi efforts to surround and eventually recapture second city Mosul from IS.

– Political chaos –

"They are being offered for the move on Mosul. It will be at the government of Iraq's discretion as to whether or not they are deployed," Davis said of the Apaches.

And Carter pledged \$415 million in assistance for the peshmerga forces of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, which are fighting IS in the north.

The region has, like Baghdad, been hit by financial difficulties from low oil prices.

Carter's visit comes after a week of political turmoil that has been a setback for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. The US defence chief has previously stressed the need to support the embattled premier.

Carter met with Abadi after arriving in Baghdad from the United Arab Emirates, his first stop on a Gulf tour during which he will seek to shore up support for Iraq.

He has said that "the success of the campaign against (IS) in Iraq does depend upon political and economic progress as well," and that "it's important that we continue to support" Abadi.

The premier has sought to replace the current cabinet of party-affiliated ministers with a government of technocrats, but has faced major opposition from powerful parties that rely on control of ministries for patronage and funds.

Abadi's cabinet efforts were overshadowed by days of chaos in parliament, where lawmakers held a sit-in, brawled in the chamber and sought to sack the speaker.

The premier called on Monday for parliament to put aside its differences and do its job, saying he hoped a new cabinet would be approved "in the coming days".

– Economic woes –

In addition to major security and political challenges, Iraq also faces a serious economic crisis caused by low oil prices and years of mismanagement and corruption by officials.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces have since regained significant ground from the jihadists.

Iraqi forces have begun preparatory operations in Nineveh province, of which Mosul is the capital, but the actual assault to retake the city is not expected for months, and possibly not until next year.

While most American forces in Iraq play advisory and support roles, Washington has also sent in special forces to carry out raids against IS, and US Marines have deployed to provide artillery support for Iraqi troops.

Obama repeatedly pledged that there would be no "boots on the ground" to combat IS, but US forces are engaged in combat with the jihadists and two American military personnel have already been killed.

An American Marine was killed in a rocket attack in northern Iraq last month, and a US special forces soldier wounded during a raid last year later died.

US-led forces invaded Iraq in 2003, overthrowing dictator Saddam Hussein and unleashing an insurgency and years of brutal sectarian violence due to poor planning and a lack of understanding of the country.

Rampant violence was eventually brought under control, and American forces withdrew at the end of 2011 after talks on a residual troop presence broke down over Washington's insistence that they have parliament-approved immunity.

US To Send 200 More Troops, Apache Helicopters, To Iraq

By Lolita C. Baldor

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

BAGHDAD (AP) – The U.S. has agreed to deploy more than 200 additional troops to Iraq and to send eight Apache helicopters for the first time into the fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq, the first major increase in U.S. forces in nearly a year, U.S. defense officials said Monday.

The uptick in American fighting forces – and the decision to put them closer to the front lines – is designed to help Iraqi forces as they move to retake the key northern city of Mosul.

Speaking to reporters Monday in Baghdad, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said the decision to move U.S. advisers to the Iraqi brigade and battalion level will put them “closer to the action,” but he said they will have security forces with them and the U.S. will do what's needed to reduce the risks.

A senior U.S. official said that there will be eight Apache helicopters authorized to help the Iraqi forces when Iraqi leaders determine they need them. The official was not authorized to discuss the numbers publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity.

Last June the Obama administration announced that hundreds of troops would be deployed to help the Iraqis retake Ramadi – a goal they accomplished at the end of the year.

Of the additional troops announced Monday, most would be Army special forces, who have been used throughout the anti-Islamic State campaign to advise and assist the Iraqis. The remainder would include some trainers, security forces for the advisers, and maintenance teams for the Apaches.

The decisions reflect weeks of discussions with commanders and Iraqi leaders, and a decision by President Barack Obama to increase the authorized troop level in Iraq by 217 forces – or from 3,870 to 4,087. The advise-and-assist teams – made up of about a dozen troops each – would embed with Iraqi brigades and battalions, likely putting them closer to the front lines and at greater risk from mortars and rocket fire.

The U.S., said Carter, is “on the same page with the Iraqi government” in how to intensify the fight against the Islamic State.

Sen. John McCain, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said the deployment of troops was welcome but called it “yet another example of the kind of grudging incrementalism that rarely wins wars, but could certainly lose one.”

The proximity to the battlefield will allow the U.S. teams to provide more tactical combat advice as the Iraqi units move toward Mosul, the country's second-largest city, still under Islamic State control. Until now, U.S. advisers have worked with the Iraqis at the headquarters level, well back from the front lines.

Carter called the addition of the Apache helicopters significant, because they can “respond so quickly and so dynamically to an evolving tactical situation.”

He said he discussed the Apaches with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Monday and, “he understood that it would be necessary for just these cases and agreed with me that we would provide it.”

Last December, U.S. officials were trying to carefully negotiate new American assistance with Iraqi leaders who often have a different idea of how to wage war. At that time, the Iraqis refused Apache helicopters for the battle to retake Ramadi, saying they didn't think they were needed.

Speaking to U.S. troops at the airport in Baghdad, Carter also said that the U.S. will send an additional long-range, rocket-assisted artillery system to Iraq.

U.S. officials have also said that the number of special operations forces in Syria would be increased at some point, but Carter did not mention that in his comments. Officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Carter's announcement Monday came after several meetings with his commanders and Iraqi leaders about how the U.S. can best prepare Iraqi forces to retake Mosul.

In addition to his session with al-Abadi, Carter also met with Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, the top U.S. military commander for the Islamic State fight, and minister of defense Khalid al-Obeidi.

He also spoke by phone with the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, Massoud Barzani. Later, Carter announced to the troops that the U.S. aid will extend to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces fighting in northern Iraq. Carter said the U.S. has authorized sending up to \$415 million to the Kurds over time.

MacFarland told reporters that the money will be used in part to help feed the Peshmerga troops, who have been dealing with food shortages.

Carter on Tuesday will travel to Saudi Arabia to meet with defense ministers from Gulf nations. And Obama will also be in Riyadh to talk with Gulf leaders about the fight

against the Islamic State and ask for their help in rebuilding Ramadi, which took heavy damage in the battle.

U.S. military and defense officials have made it clear that winning back Mosul is critical, but will be challenging, because the insurgents are dug in and have likely peppered the landscape with roadside bombs and other traps for any advancing military.

A senior defense official told reporters traveling with Carter that while Iraqi leaders have been reluctant to have a large number of U.S. troops in Iraq, they also need certain capabilities that only more American or coalition forces can provide. The official was not authorized to discuss the issue publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity.

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U.S. To Send 217 More Troops To Iraq

By Jim Michaels

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

The U.S. approved dispatching an additional 217 troops to support Iraq's military as its forces attempt to retake Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, the Pentagon announced Monday.

The Pentagon also expanded its authorities so that U.S. advisers can accompany Iraq's combat battalions as they advance toward Mosul. They had been limited to remaining at higher headquarters, which generally meant they were not close to the battlefield.

Retaking the sprawling city is expected to be the biggest challenge Iraq's military has faced since much of it collapsed in the face of an Islamic State attack into Iraqi territory two years ago.

The Pentagon also said it would provide \$415 million in aid for Kurdish forces, called Peshmerga, who are expected to play a key role in the effort to retake Mosul. The money will be disbursed in monthly increments, said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman.

The semi-autonomous Kurds have long been at odds with Iraq's central government over the disbursement of oil revenues, which declined as prices fell. Davis said the money destined for the Kurds would still go through Iraq's central government.

The additional advisers will raise the authorized level of U.S. troops to 4,087 from 3,870. The Pentagon acknowledged the number can exceed the authorized level when troops are deployed on temporary assignments. The new authorizations for U.S. advisers to accompany Iraqi battalions could place American troops closer to fighting.

Davis said the new authorities were required because Iraqi units will be advancing north.

The new authority would not change their role of being advisers to Iraqi forces. "They're not engaged in direct on the ground combat," he said.

In making the announcement, the Pentagon also said it was offering Iraq's military the use of U.S. Apache attack helicopters, which excel at providing close fire support to help ground troops engaged in urban combat.

The U.S. military made a similar offer to Iraq during an operation to retake Ramadi, a city west of Baghdad that had also fallen under Islamic State, also known as ISIL or ISIS, control. The Iraqis declined the offer.

Iraqi forces have already begun preliminary operations to retake Mosul, but a final assault to clear the city is months away. As many as a million civilians remain in Mosul and the city is defended by thousands of Islamic State fighters.

Prior to Monday's announcement Pentagon officials have said they have been discussing with the Iraqi government ways to accelerate the offensive to retake Mosul.

"I do expect that there'll be increased capabilities provided to the Iraqis to set the conditions for their operations in Mosul," Marine Gen. Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last month.

US To Send Military Advisers Closer To Front Lines Of ISIS Fight In Iraq

By Michael S. Schmidt

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

BAGHDAD — President Obama will send American military advisers closer to the front lines of the conflict against the Islamic State in Iraq, part of a series of measures that will escalate the United States military campaign to defeat the extremist group.

The advisers — who up until now had been assisting Iraqi military divisions, which have about 10,000 troops — will extend that assistance to units of about 2,000 soldiers who are more directly involved in day-to-day combat, Defense Department officials said on Monday.

American and Iraqi commanders want the advisers, who the officials say will not be on the actual front lines, to move closer to the fighting so they can provide timely, tactical guidance to the Iraqis as they prepare for the long-awaited assault on Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, which was seized by the Islamic State in 2014.

Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter, who made the announcement in a speech to dozens of American troops at the airport in Baghdad, said the Pentagon would also deploy several Apache attack helicopters and long-range artillery to aid in the fight. The Apaches, known for their withering — and accurate — fire, can quickly provide powerful air support to

ground forces. He said that the Pentagon would also increase its logistical support for the Iraqi military.

The announcement of an enhanced American presence in Iraq comes as the administration has said that the campaign against the Islamic State is gaining momentum. In recent days, the Iraqis reclaimed the city of Hit, where commanders estimated there were several hundred Islamic State fighters. The administration says that the Iraqis, with American advisers and air and logistical support, are now poised to move toward larger cities.

Yet it is not clear how seriously to take those claims. It has been two years since the administration began operations against the Islamic State, and the military estimates that the organization still has 10,000 fighters in Iraq. The group controls large sections of the country, including Mosul. Defense Department officials had said that the Iraqis would recapture Mosul last year. Now, they say that the earliest that could happen is later this year.

"We want to have our forces there with them so they can help them and they can bring the great weight of the coalition's enablers to this campaign," Mr. Carter said. "It's all consistent — these additions are consistent with our overall strategic approach, which is to enable the Iraqi security forces, not to substitute for them."

Mr. Carter's visit to Baghdad on Monday was not announced. He flew from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, then took a helicopter to the Green Zone, where he met with the Iraqi prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, who has been contending with Shiite leaders backed by Iran who oppose an expanded American role in the country. In December, Mr. Abadi declined to take up the Pentagon's offer of Apache helicopters and advisers to work with smaller units.

Mr. Carter did not say why Mr. Abadi was now in favor of the measures, but said that he had discussed the use of the helicopters with him on Monday.

"He understands this capability perfectly well, and he understood it would be necessary for just these cases and agreed with me that we would provide it," Mr. Carter said, referring to how the helicopters would be used when forces on the ground needed quick air support.

The package of military aid will involve dispatching more Army Special Forces, or Green Berets, who specialize in advising and training foreign military forces. Mr. Obama will increase the number of American forces that commanders can use in Iraq by 217, to 4,087. That number, however, is largely symbolic because the Pentagon uses a system that has exceptions for soldiers who are supposed to be in the country less than four months, and commandos. Defense Department officials have said that there are more than 5,000 service members in Iraq.

Mr. Carter said that sending more American forces into Iraq would also enable the Pentagon to increase its logistical

support of the Iraqi military, which he said would become even more important as the Iraqis move toward Mosul.

"It's particularly important now as Iraqi forces relocate from where we have trained and equipped them, northward importantly to Mosul, and their moving around," Mr. Carter said.

"The provision has to be made for them to be supplied and for their equipment to be repaired as they go into action," he said. "So, we want more action by Iraqi forces towards victory here and more action will require more logistics, and that will be an important part of this gathering momentum and gathering effort to strengthen our enablers."

The Kurds are an important part of the anti-Islamic State campaign in the north, and Mr. Carter said the United States would give the Kurdish regional government more than \$415 million. A significant portion of that money is expected to be used to pay and feed Kurdish soldiers.

Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said that the money would be paid in monthly installments to cover their expenses. The Kurds, like the Iraqi government, have seen their revenues decline with the price of oil.

Pulling American forces out of Iraq was a crucial plank of Mr. Obama's campaign platform when he ran for president in 2008. Since the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, he has pledged that there will be no "combat" troops deployed in those countries, leading senior administration and Defense Department officials to sometimes offer conflicting accounts as they have tried to explain the military's role in the campaign.

Another example of that arose on Monday.

Mr. Carter acknowledged that the advisers would be closer to the front lines. But the top American general in Iraq, Sean MacFarland, said "not necessarily closer to the fight," in response to a reporter's question about the new policy.

General MacFarland said the American troops would be "closer to the commanders who are making the critical decisions on the ground." Continue reading the main story

U.S. To Send More Troops To Iraq To Tackle Islamic State

By Yeganeh Torbati

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Obama To Send More Troops To Iraq

By Kristina Wong

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

The Pentagon on Monday announced that it will send more than 200 troops to Iraq to support Baghdad's offensive to re-capture the city of Mosul from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In addition, teams of about a dozen U.S. troops each can now embed with Iraqi brigades and battalions — putting them closer to the fight than before. Those teams, which will offer advice and assistance, will be protected by U.S. security forces, officials said.

Among the new initiatives announced by the Pentagon, U.S. troops in Iraq will employ the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, a multiple-launch rocket system.

Apache helicopters will also support Iraqi troops for the first time since the administration pulled U.S. troops from the country after the war.

The 217 additional forces will be a mixture of advisers, and troops providing protection for other forces, aviation support and fire support.

They will increase the authorized troop level in Iraq from 3,870 to 4,087.

The new steps follow weeks of discussions among U.S. commanders in Iraq and Iraqi officials, Pentagon and White House officials.

They also come as Obama seeks to help Iraqi forces retake ISIS strongholds of Mosul and Raqqa by the end of this year.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters that the risks to U.S. troops “are not new.”

“There have been risks to U.S. personnel all along,” he added.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.) said he welcomed the deployment of additional troops, but called it “grudging incrementalism.”

“This is yet another example of the kind of grudging incrementalism that rarely wins wars, but could certainly lose one,” he said.

Earlier this month, he warned in a letter to Carter that the intensifying U.S. involvement in the fight against ISIS reminded him of the “slow, grinding failure” he witnessed in Vietnam.

McCain has criticized the administration for putting too many constraints on the U.S. air campaign against ISIS, as well its reluctance to commit more U.S. troops to the fight.

“This deployment is also representative of the increasing operational demands imposed upon our military that are not funded in the President’s already inadequate defense budget request,” he added. “Continuing to ask our military to do more with less is irresponsible and is placing the lives of our service members at increased risk.”

The Pentagon also announced Monday that the U.S. will spend \$415 million on a financial package for Kurdish peshmerga units that will help pay for stipends and other needs in light of the Kurdistan Regional Government’s budget crisis.

Davis emphasized that the support will be distributed “by, with and through the government of Baghdad.”

— This story was last updated at 4:58 p.m.

U.S. Pledges More Troops For Iraq As Senior Isis Fighter Reported Dead

Defense Department promises 217 more troops while Kurdish state media reports Salman Abu Shabib al-Jebouri is killed near Mosul

By Matt Bradley And Paul Sonne

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Bob Gates’ Criticism Of Obama Sounds A Bit Like Praise

By Steve Benen

[MSNBC](#), April 18, 2016

Looking back, it was still one of President Obama’s most striking personnel moves. Not long after the 2008 election, then-President-Elect Obama decided he wanted Robert Gates, George W. Bush’s Defense Secretary, to remain on the job. For all of the dramatic differences between the two presidents, Obama saw Gates as a competent, steady hand at the Pentagon, so there was no need to replace him – even if that meant having a Republican serving in a top cabinet post in a Democratic administration.

Islamic State Overruns Parts Of Refugee Camp In Syria Where Civilians Face Starvation

By Nabih Bulos

[Los Angeles Times](#), April 18, 2016

Islamic State extremists in Syria dislodged other militant groups from a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus on Monday, even as the United Nations warned that weeks-long clashes have spurred horrendous conditions for thousands of civilians.

Activists in the Yarmouk camp, southeast of the center of Damascus, the capital, reported that Islamic State had overrun parts of the camp after the withdrawal and surrender of fighters with the Al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front. Islamic State confirmed the attacks in a statement.

The move by Islamic State in Yarmouk came as Syrian opposition fighters attacked government forces in a new offensive in the country’s northwest and opposition leaders said they would postpone participation in peace talks in Geneva.

The opposition’s High Negotiations Committee reportedly said its decision stemmed from the ongoing fighting in Syria. U.N. special envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura said the opposition delegation was expected to stay in Geneva for discussions.

Also Monday, officials in Turkey said several rockets fired from Syria struck the Turkish border town of Kilis, killing three Syrian children and a Syrian man.

The latest advance in Yarmouk means Islamic State controls more than 70% of the camp, a shambolic sprawl that was once considered the capital of the Palestinian diaspora, with more than 110,000 registered refugees in 2002.

The area is a densely populated urban landscape with shops, schools and stadiums whose control was divided among the 14 Palestinian factions found in the camp, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (known as the PFLP-GC) and Hamas.

Christopher Gunness, spokesman for the U.N Relief and Works Agency, said in a statement Sunday that fighting that began April 6 had affected the most densely populated areas of Yarmouk and has used “heavy weapons, explosive devices and weapons of indiscriminate effect.”

“The impact on civilian life has been devastating,” said the statement, adding that the estimated 10,000 civilians still trapped in Yarmouk faced the specter of “starvation and dehydration.”

“The size and the caliber of weaponry used... it’s extraordinarily disproportionate, and people are hunkering down in their homes to avoid being hit by bullets and shrapnel,” Gunness in a phone interview Saturday.

“Those people are stuck between two fires, and they wake up and find decapitated heads on the sidewalk,” said Abdullah Jumaah, a member of the PFLP-GC contacted by phone from Damascus.

The U.N. has been unable to deliver supplies to Yarmouk because of the fighting, but Gunness said that the U.N. “stands ready to resume its humanitarian missions” in the area. Other groups, such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, continue to deliver food and water to the camp, Jumaah said.

Local media outlets, however, reported that the only accessible passage between the government-controlled areas and Yarmouk had been closed by the government.

“With this, the residents of Yarmouk Camp [and adjacent neighborhoods] are totally besieged, for all foodstuffs and goods come through this passage,” said Al-Modon news website.

Last April, Islamic State fighters infiltrated the camp from the adjacent Hajar Al-Aswad district. It has since made steady progress inside the camp, even though it has not yet reached northwestern areas of Yarmouk controlled by factions allied to the Syrian government.

But Islamic State’s renewed assault is an indication that the group is seeking to secure its grip on the dagger-shaped neighborhood, a strategic passageway that leads to the administrative heart of Damascus and the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Yarmouk’s importance has made it the scene of violent clashes throughout the Syrian civil war, now in its sixth year, dividing the Palestinian factions between those who fight on

the side of the government and those who have joined the opposition factions seeking to end Assad’s rule.

The fighting pushed out the majority of the camp’s residents, but left thousands to face a punishing siege by Syrian army units that was subsequently relaxed after a U.N.-brokered aid deal.

Bulos is a special correspondent.

4 Killed In Rocket Barrage From Syria, Including 3 Children

By Oren Dorell

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

Four people were killed, including three children, in southern Turkey on Monday — the third day of rocket and artillery fire from Syrian government controlled areas — as Syrian rebels launched a new offensive in the country’s northwest.

The attacks come as representatives of the Western-backed Syrian opposition met in Geneva for indirect talks with the Syrian government. Each side accused the other of violating the partial cease-fire that began Feb. 27.

The governor’s office in the province of Kilis said four rockets hit the town of Kilis, where Syrian refugees outnumber the local population. A 40-year-old shepherd was killed near a middle school, and six others were wounded, according to the Hurriyet Daily News. Projectiles struck also hitting an olive garden and an oxygen depot of the Kilis State Hospital.

The shell came from a region controlled by the Syrian army, Turkey’s state-run Anadolu Agency reported. The Turkish Army responded with artillery fire across the border. Twelve people were wounded on April 11, and two people were killed on April 12, Hurriyet reported.

On Monday, rebels launched an attack against Syrian government forces in Latakia province, on the Mediterranean coast, and made separate advances further east in Hama, while there were heavy government airstrikes in Homs province to the south, according to Reuters.

The opposition’s chief coordinator in Geneva, Riyad Hijab, said continuing the negotiations was unacceptable so long as the government and its allies continued to lay siege and to bomb civilian areas.

The talks are aimed at a political transition for Syria that would bring an end to five years of fighting that has left at least 270,000 people dead, mostly at the hands of the government, according to international observers.

The Syrian government’s chief negotiator, Bashar Ja’afari on Monday accused Israel, on Syria’s southern border, of cooperating with Islamic State and al-Qaeda militants in the Golan Heights, territory Israel has occupied since 1967. Ja’afari did not provide any evidence to support his allegation, but said a festive cabinet meeting held Sunday

in the Golan by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was evidence enough.

"This Israeli provocation... confirms without any doubt the cooperation between Israel and terrorists," Ja'afari said after meeting U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura, the Associated Press reported.

De Mistura, on Friday floated the idea of Syrian President Bashar Assad remaining in power symbolically in exchange for the opposition naming three Syrian vice presidents. The opposition rejected the proposal.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, center, poses with ministers prior to the weekly cabinet meeting in the Israeli controlled Golan Heights, Sunday, April 17, 2016. (Photo: Sebastian Scheiner, AP)

Obama Will Meet With Gulf Leaders. Here's A Probable Agenda.

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

President Obama will meet with leaders from the Gulf Cooperation Council this week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The influence of the council, whose members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has grown across the Middle East since the Arab Spring, and these countries have tried to counter what they view as an increasingly assertive Iran.

Here are some of the issues likely to be on the agenda when Mr. Obama and the gulf leaders sit down together.

The gulf monarchies have been concerned that the nuclear deal struck last year has empowered Iran, their main regional rival, and has frayed their relations with the Obama administration. Iran's recent missile tests have further infuriated the gulf states. The United Arab Emirates' ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, recently said that Iran remained "as dangerous as ever."

The United States has looked to reassure the council members with plans for a new missile defense infrastructure and cyberdefenses. Persuading gulf states to support the Iran nuclear deal is unlikely, but the Obama administration still hopes it can minimize their complaints about it.

The United States relies heavily on council members, particularly Saudi Arabia, to provide money and arms to Western-backed rebel groups fighting the Syrian government and Islamic State extremists.

The gulf states want to increase international pressure on Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, to maintain a partial cease-fire that appears increasingly fragile and commit seriously to the current round of diplomatic talks in Geneva.

The Obama administration has quietly supported the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, providing intelligence, airborne fuel tankers and munitions.

The United States' Arab allies have at times complained that the American support is insufficient, and comes with too many restrictions.

The mounting civilian death toll in Yemen has led to international criticism of how the Saudi-led coalition is carrying out its military operations as well as questions over American support for what critics call a reckless war.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been part of the international campaign against Islamic State extremists since the summer of 2014, but their participation fell off as they became more deeply involved in the conflict in Yemen.

As the United States steps up its military campaign after battlefield successes by Western-backed forces in Iraq and Syria, one point of discussion may be how the gulf states can help thwart the expansion of the Islamic State in Europe, Libya and Afghanistan.

Mr. Obama will most likely push the council members to bolster their defense spending and take on even bigger military roles in the region so the United States does not have to. He also may have to address his recent description of America's gulf allies — and some Europeans — as "free riders."

The sharp drop in the price of oil has hurt the gulf states' economies, leading to budget deficits and cuts in public spending in Saudi Arabia.

With young populations — a recent study found that more than half of Saudi Arabia's population is under 25 — the gulf states will need to create millions of jobs in the coming years.

Looking beyond the success of the United Arab Emirates in becoming a financial and transportation hub, Mr. Obama may want to hear about plans to diversify the regional economy.

It is not among the topics that the gulf monarchies are eager to discuss, but Mr. Obama might question how the Sunni-dominated countries are treating their Shiite populations, and raise the issue of equal rights for women.

With Alliances Strained, Obama Seeks To Reassure Gulf States On Iran

By Angus McDowall, Roberta Rampton And Sylvia Westall

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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U.S. Poised To Approve Boeing Fighter Jet Sales To Qatar, Kuwait

By Andrea Shalal

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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Obama's First Farewell Tour Starts With Damage Control

By Kathleen Hennessey

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) – President Barack Obama sets out this week on his first in a series of international farewell tours, a sometimes wistful tradition for presidents in legacy mode. But in a reminder of this president's uneven ties to allies, Obama's first stop will involve more damage control than nostalgia, more friction than fondness.

When Obama lands in Riyadh on Wednesday for a Persian Gulf summit, he'll be met by leaders roiled by his recent public complaints about global "free riders" and harboring deep distrust of his dealings with Iran and his posture in Syria. Before heading on to what will likely be valedictory visits to Great Britain and Germany, the White House will be tasked with providing some measure of reassurance to a set of allies that remain critical of U.S. counterterrorism goals – even as they increasingly look to his successor.

"I think the trip is to reassure Arab allies that the United States is there for the long run and not cutting and running," said David Ottaway, a Middle East expert at the Wilson Center, a Washington think tank.

Obama has appeared to be more in the mood for frank talk than handholding.

In an interview published in the Atlantic magazine this month, the president broadly blasted allies who don't pull their weight and too often look to the U.S. to provide security. Even more eyebrow-raising in Riyadh, the president argued that the Saudis and Iran "need to find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace" – an insult to the Saudis who view Tehran as a bitter, destabilizing foe.

The president's comments reflect the firm belief that "ultimately there's not a military resolution to the challenges in the region," deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes said.

Obama's first meeting with the Gulf Cooperation Council last year at Camp David was focused on addressing these worries as the U.S. tried to build support for its nuclear deal with Iran. His recent comments ensure that reassuring them about Iran will remain a major piece of the follow up meeting this week with the group, which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

In talks leading to the summit, officials from the United States and Persian Gulf states have discussed ways the U.S.

can back up that reassurance, including help with new counterterrorism, military, missile defense and cybersecurity capabilities. The U.S. recently pledged \$139 million in humanitarian aid for Yemen, where the Saudis are embroiled in a proxy war in with Iran.

The Saudis have long pushed, with no success, for more aggressive U.S. military action to counter Iran in Syria and Iraq, a position that sets up tense talks between Saudi King Salman and Obama over shaky prospects for negotiations about the political future in Syria. The U.S. and the Saudis are divided over what to do if the talks fall apart. Saudi Arabia and several gulf states maintain President Bashar Assad must go, under military threat, if necessary, while the U.S. backs a transition plan that would allow Assad to remain in power for months.

The U.S.-Saudi alliance is under pressure on other fronts. Amid persistent suspicions in the U.S. that elements of the Saudi government were involved in the Sept. 11 attacks, the Saudis recently lobbied against legislation that would allow Sept. 11 victims' families to hold the government liable in U.S. court. The White House says it opposes the bill because it could expose Americans overseas to legal risk. The president does not intend to bring up the matter in his meeting Wednesday with King Salman, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Monday.

"We surely do not agree on everything, but our differences are differences that can be resolved through diplomacy, and don't have to be resolved in a way that opens up the United States to significant potential vulnerability and a whole host of countries around the world," he said.

Saudi Arabia is cooperating with efforts to trim the population of prisoners being held at the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Pentagon announced Saturday that nine Guantanamo detainees had been transferred to Saudi Arabia, cutting the number of detainees there to 80.

The U.S. is coming to the summit with some requests. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has said the president will push Gulf states to contribute economic aid to the effort to rebuild regions of Iraq devastated by the war against the Islamic State extremists.

Obama has recently said his biggest mistake was not focusing on reconstruction after the military invention in Libya, leaving the country in ruins and a breeding ground for radicals. The White House has said Obama hopes the U.S. – and more pointedly, its allies – learn from that error.

That's a message Obama is likely to carry on with him to Europe, where he is likely to get a warmer reception.

The president remains popular in the UK and Germany and on his final visits, where he will lunch with Queen Elizabeth and hobnob with business leaders at a German industrial fair, he's likely to try to trade on that political capital.

The White House has said Obama will make the case for why Britain should stay in the European Union, potentially providing a boost to a struggling Prime Minister David Cameron. He and first lady Michelle Obama will also have dinner with Prince William and his wife, the former Kate Middleton, along with Prince Harry, according to Kensington Palace.

In Germany, the president is expected to reinforce Chancellor Angela Merkel's policies on refugees and trade, two areas where the chancellor has faced intense pressure.

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Obama's Big Damage-control Tour

Visiting three major allies, the president is likely to face as many jeers as cheers.

By Michael Crowley

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

President Barack Obama will drop in on three of America's most important allies this week, possibly for the last time. But he isn't expecting an adoring reception in any of them.

The U.S. relationship with all three nations is distressed, and Obama will be doing more than a little damage control.

In Saudi Arabia, where he lands on Wednesday, Obama will try to soothe anger over his nuclear deal with Iran and his increasingly public complaints about the Saudi kingdom. In London, he'll make amends for comments about British foreign policy that rattled the teacups at 10 Downing Street. And in Germany, he'll confront one of Europe's most anti-American moods and lingering bitterness over NSA spying in Berlin.

U.S. officials say Obama's agenda will be proactive, bolstering efforts against the Islamic State, helping Europe deal with its refugee crisis and shoring up NATO — “a very consequential series of engagements,” as deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes put it last week.

But Obama will also spend much of his time on the defensive.

The tensions will be highest during Obama's first stop, in Saudi Arabia. Obama's relationship with the Saudis has been rocky since his first, awkward visit to Riyadh in mid-2009. Things have only deteriorated since over Obama's policy in Syria and his nuclear deal with Iran, which Saudi leaders see as the first step towards a larger U.S. thaw with their country's mortal enemy.

People who have recently spoken to Saudi officials say that Riyadh's annoyance with Obama has spiked since last month's publication of a much-discussed Atlantic magazine article on Obama's worldview, which described the president as “clearly irritated that foreign-policy orthodoxy compels him to treat Saudi Arabia as an ally.”

Obama also told the magazine that Saudis will need to learn to “share” the Middle East with their archrival Iran.

“This is kind of an awkward visit for Obama in the wake of his confessions in *The Atlantic*,” said David Ottoway, a Middle East scholar at the Wilson Center in Washington. “These are fighting words back in Riyadh, so I'm sure they're going to ask him about what he means by these comments — and they will defend themselves.”

The same Atlantic article also caused a fuss in London — hardly a capital accustomed to jibes from Washington — thanks to some less-than-reverential Obama comments about British Prime Minister David Cameron.

The magazine reported that Obama had recently insisted to Cameron that Britain contribute its “fair share” to NATO's budget (an agreed-upon minimum of 2 percent of British GDP) or endanger the famed “special relationship” with Washington; Obama partially blamed Cameron for the chaos of post-Gaddafi Libya, saying the British leader became “distracted” by other issues when he should have been playing a leading role in rebuilding the country; and he cited Cameron's “failure” to win parliamentary approval for action supporting Obama's 2013 air strikes in Syria as a key reason why Obama aborted his planned military action.

Obama officials quickly sought to mitigate the damage, issuing statements and tweets about the value of the “special relationship.” But London wasn't buying it.

“Britain's ‘special relationship’ with the US comes under threat,” declared the Daily Mail. “Obama Savages Cameron on Libya,” blared London's Independent.” Obama leaves Iraq in a mess, disengages from the Mid East, does nothing in Syria, Libya or Palestine & then blames us. Not much of a legacy,” tweeted Alan Duncan, a senior member of Cameron's Conservative Party.

Rhodes noted that, since the “fair share” conversation between Obama and Cameron, the UK has increased its defense spending to 2 percent of GDP, meeting its NATO commitment. He called Britain “the opposite of a ‘free rider,’ “ a label Obama also seemed to apply to Britain in the article.

Obama can offer his own views when he holds a Friday press conference with Cameron at 10 Downing Street after lunch with Queen Elizabeth II. Obama is also likely to weigh in — at the press conference and at a town hall with young Britons the next day — on the country's upcoming referendum on whether to withdraw from the European Union, a proposal which Obama opposes.

But Obama's position on a so-called “Brexit” is also the subject of acrimony. More than 100 members of parliament

have signed a letter telling Obama to, in effect, butt out. "It has long been the established practice not to interfere in the domestic political affairs of our allies and we hope that this will continue," the letter declares.

The centerpiece of Obama's trip will be a stop in Hanover, Germany, where his relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel is strong — the Atlantic described her as "one of the few foreign leaders Obama respects" — but where America's relationship with the German people is not.

Obama will try to address that with a speech on Monday that Rhodes said will "step back" and "review" the relationship, which has been tested by recent revelations of U.S. spying in Germany, including NSA monitoring of Merkel's personal phone, and disdain towards what many Germans see as a militaristic U.S. foreign policy: A June 2015 Pew Research Center poll found that Germans have only a slightly positive attitude of the U.S. overall, with just 50 percent viewing America favorably and 45 percent unfavorably.

Though well above the 31 percent favorable rating the U.S. enjoyed at the end of the Bush era, that is by far the most negative view of America among the major European nations Pew polled. And it means Germany views the U.S. only slightly more favorably than does China, where Pew found the U.S. registering a 44-49 favorable-unfavorable rating.

It is also something of a letdown for Obama in a country where he drew a crowd of 100,000 when he spoke at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate as a presidential candidate in the summer of 2008.

"I know my country has not perfected itself," Obama said in that speech. "At times, we've struggled to keep the promise of liberty and equality for all of our people. We've made our share of mistakes, and there are times when our actions around the world have not lived up to our best intentions."

That's a theme Obama will likely return to when he addresses the German people — as he works to assuage one of several disgruntled allies in the coming days.

In Europe And The Middle East, Obama Will Get An Earful

By George E. Condon Jr.

[National Journal](#), April 18, 2016

Pres-ident Obama has some ex-plain-ing to do this week as he un-der-takes what may be his fi-nal trip as pres-ident to the Middle East and his last vis-its to Eng-land and Ger-many, a jour-ney made dip-lo-mat-ic-al-ly dicey by his can-did com-ments about the lead-ers of key U.S. al-lies. For Obama, it's a week of dam-age con-trol as he holds high-

level talks with Per-sian Gulf lead-ers and tackles trade, ter-ror-ism, and Rus-sia in his European stops.

The tone for the sev-en-day, three-coun-try swing was set by the pres-ident's ex-tens-ive com-ments to Jef-frey Gold-berg in April's is-sue of The At-lantic, when he cast doubt on Saudi Ar-a-bia's re-li-ab-il-ity as a U.S. ally, dis-missed many NATO al-lies as "free-riders" not pay-ing their fair share, and seemed to blame Brit-ish Prime Min-is-ter Dav-id Camer-on and oth-er al-lies for the mess left be-hind after Liby-an dic-tat-or Muam-mar el-Qad-dafi was ous-ted from power in 2011.

"Quite frankly, I think the pres-ident had bet-ter live down the At-lantic art-icle," said An-thony Cordes-man, a former Pentagon in-tel-li-gence of-fi-cial and na-tion-al se-cur-ity aide to Sen. John Mc-Cain. Both Camer-on and Saudi King Sal-man were known to be peeved by the pres-ident's com-ments and will be listen-ing to Obama's ex-plan-a-tions. "One of the things you have to do when you cre-ate a ma-jor level of dis-trust among your al-lies is go out and re-as-sure them," said Cordes-man.

In Saudi Ar-a-bia, there was con-sid-er-able dis-may as well at what the Saudis see as the pres-ident giv-ing pref-er-en-tial treat-ment to their long-time foe, Ir-an. "This is kind of an awk-ward vis-it for Obama in the wake of his con-fes-sions in The At-lantic about how he feels about his Ar-ab al-lies as free-riders and ur-ging the Saudis to 'share the neigh-bor-hood' with Ir-an," said Dav-id Ot-t-away, a seni-or schol-ar in the Middle East pro-gram at the Wilson Cen-ter. "These are fight-ing words in Riy-adh. I'm sure they are go-ing to ask him what he means by these com-ments, and they will de-fend them-selves."

At the White House, though, Obama aides don't ac-know-ledge the need for any dam-age con-trol on the trip. Ben Rhodes, deputy na-tion-al se-cur-ity ad-viser, con-ten-ded that the pres-ident in the in-ter-view merely re-stated long-stand-ing ad-min-is-tra-tion policy. "The only way to truly deal with glob-al chal-lenges is if every-body does their part," Rhodes said, adding: "So the ba-sic point that we want every-body to play their part is a reg-u-lar fea-ture of our dia-logue with these coun-tries, pub-licly and privately."

In-stead, the White House points to oth-er chal-lenges that will con-front the pres-ident this week. None is trick-i-er than find-ing a way to deal with the on-go-ing Brit-ish de-bate and up-com-ing ref-er-en-dum on the coun-try's con-tinu-ance as a mem-ber of the European Uni-on. Obama wants to re-peat his earli-er stated strong po-s-i-tion that the United States wants Bri-tain to stay in the EU. But he has to do it in a way that does not in-trude on Brit-ish sov-er-eignty. "The ap-proach he's go-ing to take is that he will of-fer his view as he is asked his view," said Rhodes. "He will make very clear that this is a de-cision for the people of the United King-dom to make; it's not a de-cision for us to make. But we have no

closer friend in the world, and if we are asked our view as a friend, we will offer it.”

The president arrives in Riyadh on Wednesday for meetings with the king and, on Thursday, a summit meeting with the heads of the six members of the Gulf Co-operation Council—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. The fight against terrorism tops that summit agenda, which will also feature discussions on the fighting in Yemen, Syria’s civil war, and the latest developments in Iraq and Libya.

On Friday, Obama moves to London, where he and first lady Michelle Obama will begin their visit with lunch at Windsor Castle with Queen Elizabeth, who the day before will have celebrated her 90th birthday. They will be joined at the lunch by Prince Philip. That evening, the Obamas will have dinner at Kensington Palace with the duke and duchess of Cambridge, Prince William and his wife, Kate, and Prince Harry.

Obama also will meet with Cameron on Friday, with the state of Europe and the alliance up for discussion. Complicating Obama’s task is continual concern about anti-alliance comments by Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. “The alliance system is under profound stress,” said Heather Conley, director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, citing Obama’s comments and campaign rhetoric. On Saturday, the president will hold a town hall meeting with young people before moving on to Germany.

On Sunday, he will attend the Hannover Messe, the world’s largest technology trade show. The gathering is expected to draw 250,000 people from more than 70 countries, including a heavy representation from the United States. In Hannover on Monday, the president is scheduled to deliver the major speech of the trip. It is viewed by the White House as an opportunity to look at the biggest challenges facing the Western democracies as well as “review what we’ve done over the course of the last seven and a half years of his presidency and look ahead to what we need to be doing going forward.”

A Cold-eyed View Of Allies Has Left Obama With Few Overseas Friends

By Greg Jaffe And Griff Witte

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

For someone who preaches the importance of diplomacy and outreach, even to longtime enemies, President Obama can be awfully tough on his friends.

In recent months, he has offended most of the United States’ Persian Gulf allies. “All I need in the Middle East is a few smart autocrats,” he joked privately, according to a recent

profile in the Atlantic magazine. Publicly, he has said he “weeps” for Saudi and Kuwaiti children.

The United States’ European allies, he complains, have grown too dependent on American firepower to keep them safe.

Even the United Kingdom, a U.S. “special” partner, has received criticism. Obama seemed to blame the postwar chaos in Libya on British Prime Minister David Cameron, who he said “became distracted by other things” and didn’t do enough to bring order to the fractious country.

In the next several weeks, Obama will take a series of overseas trips to firm up U.S. alliances and help set the president’s foreign-policy legacy. The first of the trips begins Tuesday with stops in Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and Germany, where the president will tackle an ambitious agenda that includes battling the Islamic State, constraining Iran, sustaining support for sanctions against Russia and warding off a British exit from the European Union.

One big challenge for Obama will be squaring the careful diplomatic rhetoric that’s a standard, and frequently stultifying, part of all presidential visits with his tougher, more honest language from interviews back home.

“Leaders are going to have to deal with that dichotomy,” said Heather Conley, a former State Department official and a Europe analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, “and I don’t believe it’s going to be very easy.”

Even before he became president, Obama introduced himself to the world as a multilateralist who aimed to solve the thorny problems of the 21st century collaboratively. “True partnership and true progress . . . require allies who will listen to each other, learn from each other and, most of all, trust each other,” Obama told adoring crowds in Berlin in 2008.

He followed up that speech one year later in Cairo by quoting verses from the Koran, acknowledging America’s mistakes and calling for a new partnership with the Muslim world “based upon mutual interest and mutual respect.”

Seven years later, the soaring, optimistic language of those early speeches has long since been subsumed by the messy reality of war and diplomacy. Obama has not been able to forge a close rapport with many world leaders.

The president’s cold-eyed view was apparent last year after the attack on the Charlie Hebdo satirical weekly by two militant gunmen. World leaders from Germany, France and the United Kingdom marched through the streets of Paris with longtime adversaries such as the Israeli prime minister and the head of the Palestinian Authority. No senior official from the United States marched with the European leaders, prompting a rare apology from the White House.

“I’ve never heard that Obama has a personal relationship with any of them,” said Xenia Wickett, head of the Americas program at the London-based think tank Chatham House. “It is neither hot nor cold. There is no personal relationship.”

For Britons especially, that's a break from a long history of starry-eyed relationships between leaders across the Atlantic. Roosevelt and Churchill. Reagan and Thatcher. Bush and Blair. Obama, the mixed-race child of a single mother, and Cameron, a stockbroker's son with royal lineage, have never had the same kind of personal chemistry.

Obama's cool relations with European leaders is partly a product of his style — even in Washington, the president is known for his frosty relationship with fellow Democrats and big donors. He disdains neediness and sometimes struggles to empathize with allies. It's also a product of an era in which Western leaders have been focused inwardly on domestic politics.

"Who are Cameron's close relationships with? Who are Merkel's? Or Hollande's?" Wickett asked, referring to the British, German and French leaders. "We're just not as focused on one another in the same way that we might have been historically."

One big question is whether Obama's lack of personal ties to his fellow world leaders is hindering his foreign policy. The primary cause of the strain between Obama and Arab allies is rooted in big differences over how to deal with the collapse of autocratic governments and huge refugee flows.

The United States' Persian Gulf allies have lambasted Obama for not doing enough to confront Iranian aggression or to stop Syria's bloody civil war. "This policy has led to increased chaos and bloodshed," Nawaf Obaid, special counselor to the Saudi ambassador to the United Kingdom from 2011 to 2015, wrote earlier this week in the National Interest magazine.

The president's tough, and unprecedented, critique of longtime Arab allies has not helped in the search for common ground. Nor has the bitter and divisive presidential campaign in which all of the major Republican presidential candidates have called for barring the refugees of Syria or other majority-Muslim countries from entering the United States.

"It's clear that the president's cerebral, dispassionate approach isn't well-suited to the gulf leaders," said Perry Cammack, a former State Department official in the Obama administration and associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The end of the Obama administration can't come quickly enough for these leaders."

In Europe, where Obama remains popular with the public, his tough-love approach has been less of a handicap. A Pew Research Center survey last year showed that about three-quarters or more of voters across France, Germany and Britain trusted Obama to do the right thing — a lofty status that is down only slightly from his first year in office.

Often, Obama seems a bit bored by issues on the continent. Still, Europeans like Obama's deliberative, rational, technocratic style. "He looks and smells like a European," Wickett said.

When Obama appeared to lash out at Cameron in the Atlantic magazine piece, saying the British leader had become "distracted" after the Western air campaign in Libya, the remarks fed a few days of headlines in Britain.

But the controversy quickly faded, and the close cooperation between the two governments moved forward without a hiccup.

"The so-called special relationship isn't about how Thatcher and Reagan get on," said Walter Ladwig, a professor at King's College London. "When you get under the hood of intelligence networks, for instance, in some respects the British and American operations are inseparable. And that kind of cooperation continues irrespective of whether Barack and Dave are grilling hot dogs together."

Still, when Obama is standing next week with the Saudi king, the British prime minister or the German chancellor, talking about their countries' enduring alliance, it's possible that some may be thinking back to an interview the president did late last year with comedian Jerry Seinfeld.

"How many world leaders do you think are just completely out of their mind?" Seinfeld asked Obama.

"A sizable percentage," the president replied without missing a beat. "Some of these people, you meet them, you'll just be chatting and you look in the eyes and go, 'Oh, this guy's gone.'"

Witte reported from London.

Obama To Face Uneasy Allies At Gulf Summit

Relations between U.S., Saudi Arabia are at a low point over such issues as Iran, 9/11 bill

By Carol E. Lee, Margherita Stancati And Colleen McCain Nelson

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

White House Signals Veto On Saudi 9/11 Bill

By Jordan Fabian

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

The White House on Monday signaled President Obama would veto legislation to allow Americans to sue the Saudi government for any role officials played in the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks.

"Given the long list of concerns I have expressed ... it's difficult to imagine a scenario in which the president would sign the bill as it's currently drafted," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters.

Earnest argued that the legislation could jeopardize U.S. citizens overseas if other countries pass reciprocal laws that remove foreign immunity in their courts.

"It could put the United States and our taxpayers and our service members and our diplomats at significant risk if other countries were to adopt a similar law," he said.

"The whole notion of sovereign immunity is at stake."

The legislation drew widespread attention after Saudi officials reportedly informed the Obama administration that they would sell off \$750 billion in U.S. assets if the bill becomes law, a threat that carries widespread economic consequences if the Saudis follow through.

Earnest appeared to strongly caution the Saudi government against taking such a step.

"A country with a modern and large economy like Saudi Arabia would not benefit from a destabilized global financial market and neither would the United States," he said.

The fierce debate over the legislation has bubbled up at a precarious time for Obama, who is set to land in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to meet with King Salman.

Earnest said he is not sure if Obama will raise the issue with Salman during a meeting in which the leaders are expected to discuss the Iran nuclear agreement and the fight against the Islamic State and Iraq and Syria.

"If this issue were to come up ... the potential consequences of rolling back this core principle of international law is how the president would explain our position to his counterparts," he said.

The nuclear agreement has already strained relations between Washington and Riyadh and the 9/11 legislation could raise tensions even higher.

Saudi officials have for years denied their government had any role in plotting of the attacks. The 9/11 Commission report said the Saudi government "as an institution" or its senior officials individually did not fund the attackers.

But there has long been speculation lower-level officials may have been involved. And victims families and lawmakers in both parties have pressed to release 28 pages of a 2002 report on the attacks that reportedly details Saudi officials' role in the plot.

The legislation, called the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, would allow victims of terror attacks on U.S. soil to sue the governments of nations that support terrorism.

It has bipartisan support — Sens. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) both authored the bill. They argue it would allow American citizens to recoup damages from countries that have provided financial support to groups like al Qaeda.

Earnest said Obama has "devoted significant time in office to fighting for the 9/11 families and those who have risked their lives to rebuild after 9/11."

Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders both bucked Obama and backed the legislation ahead of Tuesday's New York primary. Sanders also said he supports making the 28 pages of the 9/11 report public.

Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes on Monday appeared to acknowledge concerns shared by critics of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

He said the Saudi government paid "insufficient attention" to money flowing to extremist groups before the 9/11 attacks from wealthy Saudis.

"There was, certainly, at least kind of a insufficient attention to where all this money was going over many years from the government apparatus," Rhodes said in an interview with former senior Obama adviser David Axelrod.

Updated at 3:45 p.m.

Senate Democrats, Obama Split On Bill That Angers Saudi Arabia

By Steven T. Dennis

[Bloomberg Politics](#), April 18, 2016

Two U.S. Senate Democratic leaders said they'll continue to push legislation that would allow Saudi Arabia to be held responsible in U.S. courts for any role in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, splitting with the Obama administration amid Saudi opposition to the measure.

"If Saudi Arabia participated in terrorism, of course they should be able to be sued," Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the No. 3 Democratic leader, said in a statement. Allowing a lawsuit by victims of the attacks to proceed, and the Saudi government to be held accountable if it participated, ensures the Arab kingdom will "pay a price," he said.

The New York Times reported April 15 that Saudi Arabia has warned the administration that if the bill is enacted, the kingdom might retaliate by selling up to \$750 billion in Treasury securities and other assets in the U.S.

Second-ranking Senate Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois dismissed the report of such a threat, saying, "It has no bearing whatsoever on my position."

The No. 2 Republican in the Senate, John Cornyn of Texas, said Monday that he hopes the bill will move soon, perhaps even by the unanimous agreement of the Senate.

"I don't think we should let foreign countries dictate the domestic policy of the United States, so no it doesn't bother me at all," Cornyn said in an interview.

Sovereignty Question

Tension with the White House over the bipartisan legislation, introduced by Cornyn and co-sponsored by 22 other lawmakers, escalated Monday.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Monday the measure puts "the whole notion of sovereign immunity at stake" and risks alienating a key ally in the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group and al-Qaeda.

"Given the long list of concerns that I've expressed about rolling back core principles of international law, it's difficult to imagine a scenario in which the president would sign this piece of legislation," Earnest said at the White House daily press briefing.

Cornyn rejected the White House's argument.

"This bill is very narrow," Cornyn said. "What it would do is waive sovereign immunity for terrorist activity that occurs on U.S. soil." He added that the law already does waive immunity for countries that are listed as state sponsors of terrorism.

The New York Times report said the White House and State Department's lobbying against the bill, S. 2040, has angered some lawmakers and families of Sept. 11 victims.

The skirmish over the measure threatens to add strain to President Barack Obama's visit this week to Saudi Arabia, where he is scheduled to meet with Saudi King Salman.

Classified Section

Durbin said he wants the public to see a classified portion of the 9/11 Commission report. Former Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Bob Graham, a co-author of the commission's 2004 report, said during a report on "60 Minutes" earlier this month that those 28 pages should be declassified to shed light on possible Saudi support for some of the hijackers.

"The truth should prevail," Durbin said. "People have a right to know exactly what happened here. And I understand it's a complicated situation with Saudi Arabia, but their threats should not discourage us."

The Saudi Arabian government has long denied any involvement or role in the Sept. 11 attacks.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, said she supported Schumer's legislation, and fellow Democratic candidate Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont has also said he backs the measure.

Speaking to reporters at a campaign stop Monday in New York, Clinton refused to comment on whether she has read the 28-page section of the 9/11 Commission report or on whether the material should be declassified.

"The administration should take a hard look at them and determine whether that should be done consistent with national security," Clinton said.

White House: Not In Saudi Interest To Destabilize Global Economy

By Jeff Mason And Timothy Gardner

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Obama To Visit A Saudi Arabia Deep In Turmoil

By Ben Hubbard And Nicholas Kulish

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — The images of the past year have been deeply unsettling for the people of Saudi Arabia,

long accustomed to oil-fueled prosperity and regional clout: militants firing at communities along the country's southern border; protesters storming the Saudi Embassy in Tehran; civil wars raging in three nearby states.

The view from Riyadh has become increasingly bleak as stubbornly low oil prices constrain the government's ability to respond to crises and as the kingdom's regional rival, Iran, moves aggressively to expand its influence at Saudi Arabia's expense.

Under huge stress, the Saudis have responded in unpredictable ways, often at odds with Washington's interests. They have launched a costly military offensive in neighboring Yemen that has failed to defeat the Houthi rebels and has empowered the Qaeda affiliate there. They have executed dozens of men on terrorism charges, including a prominent dissident Shiite cleric. And they have largely walked away from Lebanon, suspending billions of dollars in promised aid as Iranian influence there grows.

This is the Saudi Arabia that will greet President Obama, who is scheduled to arrive in Riyadh on Wednesday and who is the source of no small share of this nation's anxiety. Policy makers across the kingdom have long said that they feel Mr. Obama does not share the country's regional interests. And after he criticized the Saudis as "free riders" last month, those suspicions have hardened into fears that he may be actively undermining them.

Mr. Obama may try to use his visit to mend relations, but it remains unclear how badly the ties that have long bound the United States and the Saudi monarchy have weakened, and whether the damage can be repaired.

"It is a concerning factor for us if America pulls back," said Prince Turki al-Faisal, an outspoken member of the Saudi royal family, a former head of intelligence and a former ambassador to the United States. "America has changed, we have changed and definitely we need to realign and readjust our understandings of each other."

The moment is a perilous one for the Saudis as they face economic and demographic challenges as well as strategic and security concerns. Domestically, a growing cohort of young Saudis is entering the job market as low oil prices constrain economic opportunities and undermine the welfare system. Regionally, Iran has outflanked and outmaneuvered Saudi Arabia in crucial countries as the Arab Spring and the war in Syria have upset the local order. Globally, the drift of the United States away from the monarchy's side has made the Saudis realize how much they have relied on the world's most powerful nation.

"A large number of factors have come together, both in the region and at home, to create a very challenging threat environment for the Saudis," said Lori Plotkin Boghardt, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The Saudis feel under siege."

For decades, the kings and princes who rule Saudi Arabia wielded their oil wealth and religious clout as the controllers of Islam's holiest sites to pull strings and fund proxies across the Arab world and beyond.

Since the kingdom has never had the military might to protect itself, its alliance with the United States has been essential, and hugely beneficial to both sides. Saudi Arabia knew that in exchange for a steady flow of oil and billions of dollars for the American arms industry, the United States would come to the rescue if its ally faced an external threat — and that it would never speak out too loudly about the kingdom's closed political system or its poor human rights record.

That relationship was unsettled by the Arab uprisings of 2011, when Saudi officials saw the United States cut loose another Arab ally, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, amid popular protests. Since then, frustration among Saudi officials has grown as Mr. Obama limited American engagement in later crises, in Libya, Syria and elsewhere, and as he made a deal with Iran to lift sanctions in exchange for the reining-in of its nuclear program.

In Syria, the Saudis saw the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad as an opportunity to replace an Iranian ally who was killing his own people. The hope was that a government more amenable to Riyadh's influence, and less to Iran's, would come to power. But that hope dwindled when the United States backed away from military action after Mr. Assad crossed Mr. Obama's "red line" against the use of chemical weapons.

Over time, it became clear that Mr. Obama had prioritized combating the Islamic State over ousting Mr. Assad. This infuriated Riyadh, which wanted to marry the two causes. Privately, Saudi officials blame Mr. Obama for prolonging the war by barring Saudi Arabia and other countries from giving Syrian rebels more powerful arms, like anti-aircraft missiles, which Mr. Obama feared could be used outside Syria by terrorists.

The mounting frustration has led Saudi Arabia, under a new monarch, King Salman, to abandon its quiet checkbook diplomacy and lash out. In January, it executed 47 men on terrorism charges, including Qaeda militants and the Shiite cleric — sending what it thought was a message to deter jihadists and Iran from trying to destabilize the kingdom.

Analysts have begun speaking of a "Salman Doctrine," although it is mostly associated with the king's son Mohammed bin Salman, 30, who is the defense minister and is second in line to the throne. The doctrine calls for increased self-reliance and more assertiveness in regional affairs.

Last month, Saudi Arabia suspended \$4 billion in aid promised to the Lebanese Army and security forces, saying that Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite militant organization in Lebanon, had become too powerful. The Saudis and their

Gulf allies also issued travel warnings, depriving Lebanon of Gulf tourism dollars.

Those moves surprised American officials, who have reported no change in the security situation in Lebanon and who continue to support the Lebanese Army as a counterbalance to Hezbollah.

Saudi Arabia has also shown a growing willingness to use direct force. Last year, its military spending grew to \$87.2 billion, as the country passed Russia to become the world's third-highest military spender. Last month, it opened a new arms factory, and it has proposed building a military base in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, to project power abroad. Prince Mohammed has also spearheaded the creation of an international alliance of Muslim countries to combat terrorism, although it is unclear when — if ever — it will begin operations.

Diplomats who track the kingdom question whether Saudi Arabia has the strategic capabilities to match its new ambitions. One test case is Yemen, where the kingdom and its allies have carried out a bombing campaign for more than a year, trying to oust the Houthi Shiite militant group from the capital and restore the government — at tremendous cost to the people of Yemen. An estimated 6,400 people have been killed, more than half of them civilians; nearly half the country's provinces are on the verge of famine; and Al Qaeda has expanded its control in the south.

The Saudis defend the war as essential to their national security. "It is a war of necessity," said Abdulaziz Sager, a Saudi political scientist and the chairman of the Gulf Research Center. "You can't let a failing state with a violent nonstate actor be your neighbor."

Domestically, the fall in oil prices has echoed through the Saudi economy, forcing the government to run a large deficit, impose spending limits and ponder steps that were once unthinkable, like imposing taxes on citizens and privatizing parts of Saudi Aramco, the state oil giant.

Fitch Ratings and Standard & Poor's have downgraded the country's credit rating this year, and companies that depend on government contracts have struggled to pay workers, creating problems for citizens and for the kingdom's many foreign workers.

"These are really uncharted waters," said Ms. Plotkin Boghardt, the Washington Institute fellow. "The oil income has been like the superglue between the Saudi government and the Saudi citizens. With this glue beginning to melt away, it opens up a whole situation that we've never seen before and they've never been in before."

It is not all dire news for the kingdom. Saudi Arabia still has the world's largest reported reserves of oil, which remains essential to the global economy. The country also has low debt and large cash reserves.

And although Iran has increased its influence in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, it has done so at great cost,

financially and militarily. “The Saudis took the region for granted while Iran put a strategy in place back in the ‘80s, and has been implementing it year by year and dollar by dollar,” said Randa Slim, an analyst at the Middle East Institute.

But the kingdom maintains strong ties with many other countries — including Egypt, Britain and Pakistan — and as a leading Sunni nation, it has the demographic upper hand against Shiite Iran. “The score is still in their favor because it is a majority Sunni Arab region,” Ms. Slim said.

Officials involved in the Saudi-United States relationship acknowledge the chill, but say that it has not filtered down to the operational level, and that cooperation remains robust on issues like security, counterterrorism and business. And many Saudis realize that Mr. Obama’s days in the White House are almost over and that his successor may engage differently with the kingdom.

“I’ve read so many accounts over the years predicting the demise of the House of Saud, and each time they’ve managed to survive,” said Robert W. Jordan, a former United States ambassador to Saudi Arabia. “They have an enormous survival instinct.”

Ben Hubbard reported from Riyadh, and Nicholas Kulich from New York.

Saudis Mix Politics And Oil Policy

The kingdom’s decision not to freeze production and to blame Iran underscores the regional rivalry

By Bill Spindle And Summer Said

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Obama Aide: Saudi Arabia Paid ‘Insufficient Attention’ To Extremist Funding

By Eliza Collins

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

President Barack Obama’s deputy national security adviser said that the government of Saudi Arabia had paid “insufficient attention” to money that was being funneled into terror groups and fueled the rise of Al Qaeda.

Ben Rhodes was speaking to David Axelrod in his podcast “The Axe Files” out Monday when he was asked about the validity of the accusation that the Saudi government was complicit in sponsoring terrorism.

“I think that it’s complicated in the sense that, it’s not that it was Saudi government policy to support Al Qaeda, but there were a number of very wealthy individuals in Saudi Arabia who would contribute, sometimes directly, to extremist groups. Sometimes to charities that were kind of, ended up being ways to launder money to these groups,” Rhodes said.

“So a lot of the money, the seed money if you will, for what became Al Qaeda, came out of Saudi Arabia,” he added.

“Could that happen without the government’s awareness?” Axelrod asked.

Rhodes said he doesn’t believe the government was “actively trying to prevent that from happening.”

But he said that certain people, within the government or their family members, were able to operate on their own which allowed for the money flows.

“So basically there was, at certainly, at least kind of a insufficient attention to where all this money was going over many years from the government apparatus,” Rhodes said.

The remarks from Rhodes come as Obama prepares to head to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday and confront the strained relations between the two allies. The Saudis are still fuming over an Atlantic magazine article that described Obama’s frustrations with Saudi Arabia’s religious ideology, its treatment of women and its rivalry with Iran. Obama also suggested in the piece that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states are “free riders” who rely too much on the U.S. military.

Friction has also been created by a push from relatives of people who died on 9/11 and a bipartisan group of lawmakers to allow U.S. courts to hold the Saudi government responsible if it is found to have played a role in the 2001 attacks.

In the meantime, the Saudis have mounted their own counter-messaging campaign, insisting they are playing a major role in combating terrorism.

During the podcast, Axelrod pushed Rhodes on at-times awkward dynamic between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, asking, “How do you explain that to Americans, that, you know, on the one hand we call them an ally on the other hand they have these deep roots in these extremist elements?”

“I would stop short of saying that there was any willful government intention from Saudi Arabia to support Al Qaeda,” Rhodes said. “I think the difficult thing that Americans need to understand is we forge these relationships with governments because we have some shared interest with them.”

He added that for a long time the main interest was oil and security which meant that the U.S. was “slow to pay attention to that [connection to extremist groups] because the way the relationship was set up was we just kind of thought about security and oil and didn’t kind of go that other layer down.”

Kerry To Meet Iran Minister On Nuclear Deal, Visit Egypt, Saudi

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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

Kerry, Iran FM To Meet Amid Iranian Sanctions Complaints

By Matthew Lee

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State John Kerry will meet Iran's foreign minister this week amid Iranian complaints that it's not getting the sanctions relief it deserves under last year's landmark nuclear deal, the State Department said Monday.

Kerry and Mohammad Javad Zarif will meet in New York on Tuesday before Kerry flies to Saudi Arabia to join President Barack Obama at a summit with Gulf Arab leaders, department spokesman John Kirby said. Meanwhile, Kirby said the department had sent letters to U.S. state and local officials advising them of changes to federal sanctions policy.

The Kerry-Zarif meeting follows complaints from top Iranian leaders that the U.S. is not fulfilling its part of the nuclear agreement, in which Iran curbed its atomic program in exchange for sanctions relief. The U.S. insists it has met its obligations but is facing demands from foreign banks to make clear what transactions with Iran are legal and which are still punishable under remaining sanctions.

"We're obviously aware of these concerns that they have expressed about the status of sanctions relief," Kirby said. "And the secretary is very mindful that that topic will come up tomorrow, that that is very much on Foreign Minister Zarif's mind."

He declined to say whether Kerry would provide Zarif with any notice of action the administration might take in regard to sanctions relief.

Over the weekend, Zarif said he would ask the United States to ease restrictions on non-American banks doing business with the Islamic Republic, saying it would help reassure Iranians over the nuclear deal.

"Iran will definitely put pressure on the United States to pave the way for the cooperation of non-American banks with Iran," he said on Saturday at a Tehran news conference with visiting EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. "The other party, particularly the United States, is required to implement its commitments in banking cooperation"

A day earlier, the head of Iran's central bank, Valiollah Seif had accused the U.S. and the European Union of failing to honor the nuclear agreement by keeping Iran locked out of the international financial system.

The White House, Treasury and the State Department have all said the U.S. has done what is required of it. Yet, officials say the administration has been toying with the idea of easing or formally clarifying financial restrictions that

prevent U.S. dollars from being used in transactions that enable business with Iran.

Administration officials have ruled out granting Iran access to the U.S. financial system or direct access to the dollar but have left the door open to other steps to encourage trade that is now legal under the nuclear deal.

That has met fierce resistance from lawmakers who believe that Tehran would be getting more than it deserves.

On Monday, House Speaker Paul Ryan renewed his opposition to any easing of the current rules.

"The administration should definitively rule out any potential workaround that provides Iran — directly or indirectly — with access to the dollar or the U.S. financial system," he said in a statement.

"Instead of helping the regime get richer, the administration should hold it accountable for its continued ballistic missile tests, egregious human rights violations, and support for terrorism. We will continue to oppose any efforts to grant further concessions to the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism," Ryan said.

In a related matter, the State Department said it had sent letters to governors of all 50 U.S. states and some localities informing them of changes made to federal sanctions as a result of the nuclear deal. Some states and municipalities have enacted local sanctions against Iran.

Kirby said the letter, which was first reported by Bloomberg View, "calls their attention to some of the changes now to our sanctions posture as a result of (the agreement) and encourages them to consider that as they enact local laws for their jurisdiction."

He said the letter does not require state and local officials to take any action and doesn't order them to change existing laws and regulations.

A second official said the administration was not aware of any state or local law that would violate the terms of the nuclear deal and that the letter was sent mainly in response to questions that had been posed.

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Ryan Urges Obama To Rule Out Sanctions 'Workarounds' For Iran

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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Benjamin Netanyahu Moving Israel In 'Wrong Direction,' Joe Biden Says

[CBC \(CAN\)](#), April 19, 2016

Vice President Joe Biden acknowledged “overwhelming frustration” with Israel’s government on Monday and said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s administration has led Israel in the wrong direction, in an unusually sharp rebuke of America’s closest ally in the Middle East.

Biden, in a speech to the advocacy group J Street, offered a grim outlook for peace efforts, reflecting dim hopes for progress during the remainder of the Obama administration. Although he said Israelis and Palestinians shared blame for undermining trust and shirking responsibility, he was emphatic in his critique of Netanyahu’s government, suggesting his approach raised “profound questions” about how Israel could remain both Jewish and democratic.

“I firmly believe that the actions that Israel’s government has taken over the past several years — the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures — they’re moving us and more importantly they’re moving Israel in the wrong direction,” Biden said.

He said those policies were moving Israel toward a “one-state reality” — meaning a single state for Palestinians and Israelis in which eventually, Israeli Jews will no longer be the majority.

‘I firmly believe that the actions that Israel’s government has taken over the past several years — the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures — they’re moving us and more importantly they’re moving Israel in the wrong direction.’ — U.S. VP Joe Biden

“That reality is dangerous,” Biden added.

Biden, who met in March with both Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said he came away from that trip discouraged about prospects for peace anytime soon. Still, he said it was the U.S. obligation to guarantee Israel’s security and to “push them as hard as we can” toward a two-state solution despite “our sometimes overwhelming frustration with the Israeli government.”

“There is at the moment no political will that I observed from either Israelis or Palestinians to go forward with serious negotiations,” Biden said.

The vice president’s remarks to J Street, a dovish Israel advocacy group that frequently criticizes Netanyahu, came at the height of a campaign season in which candidates have been scrutinized over their adherence to traditionally stalwart U.S. support for Israel. Ahead of Tuesday’s primary in New York, Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders has sparked controversy for saying the U.S. should be even-handed and mustn’t always say that Netanyahu is right.

Biden also singled out Palestinian leaders, including Abbas, for declining to condemn specific acts of terrorism carried out against Israelis, in a nod to the seven-month wave of Palestinian stabbings and other attacks. He said he didn’t

know whether Monday’s bus explosion that wounded scores in Jerusalem was a terrorist attack, but added that the U.S. condemns “misguided cowards” who resort to violence.

“No matter what legitimate disagreements the Palestinian people have with Israel, there is never justification for terrorism,” Biden said. “No leader should fail to condemn as terrorists those who commit such brutalities.”

Biden’s tough talk about a key U.S. partner reflected diminishing patience within the White House as President Barack Obama’s term nears an end, compounded by deep disagreements over Iran and a strained relationship between leaders. In recent weeks, the Obama administration has left open the possibility that it could support or at least not block a UN resolution laying out parameters for a future peace deal, a possibility that Israel has railed against.

In another dig at Netanyahu and his Likud party, Biden singled out for praise Stav Shaffir, a young member of Israel’s parliament and Netanyahu critic from the left wing of Israeli politics.

“May your views begin to once again become the majority opinion in the Knesset,” Biden said.

U.S. Feels ‘Overwhelming Frustration’ With Israeli Government

[Reuters](#), April 19, 2016

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

Biden Blasts Netanyahu, Israeli Government For Moving Country In ‘Wrong Direction’

By Victor Morton

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

Vice President Joseph R. Biden took unusually direct aim Monday night at the Israeli government, telling a liberal U.S. Jewish group that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government was hurting the chances for peace.

Mr. Biden criticized the Israeli government for a series of “counterproductive” moves on security issues, most specifically Jewish settlements, in a speech to the progressive J Street group.

“I firmly believe that the action Israel’s government has taken over the past several years — the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures — they’re moving us, and more important, they’re moving Israel, in the wrong direction,” the vice president said.

Mr. Biden said those moves were efforts to make a two-state solution impossible logistically, making the possibility of any peace with the Palestinians doubtful.

“They’re moving us toward a one-state reality, and that reality is dangerous,” Mr. Biden said.

Biden Blasts Israeli Government At J Street Gala

By Edward-Isaac Dovere

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

Vice President Joe Biden several times criticized what he called an Israeli government that causes “overwhelming frustration” in a speech that seemed to rule out the chances of a final year peace push from the Obama administration.

“The present course Israel’s on is not one that’s likely to secure its existence as a Jewish, democratic state— and we have to make sure that happens,” Biden said, in a speech to the annual gala dinner of the left-leaning J Street held in Washington.

Despite the Obama administration’s frequent clashes with the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the White House carefully avoided weighing in ahead of last year’s Israeli elections. But Monday, Biden went harder at Netanyahu as he sketched out a reality he said that’s left him feeling that “the path for peace is shrouded.”

“There is, at the moment, no political will among Israelis and Palestinians to move forward with serious negotiations,” Biden said.

Biden kicked off his remarks by praising Stav Shaffir, a 30-year-old member of the Israeli Knesset from the left whom he said was a “flashback” to his own election to the Senate at the age of 29.

“May your views once again begin to have a majority opinion in the Knesset,” Biden said.

Biden said his trip to the Middle East last month, when he met with both Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, had left him with a sense of pessimism. Both governments, he said, have made damaging moves that he said have set back efforts, and exacerbated tensions: the Israelis by expanding settlements, and the Palestinians by trying to force a solution by threatening to go through international institutions.

Biden said his meetings with the two leaders did not leave him “feeling encouraged about the prospects of peace.”

Speaking ahead of Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry expressed more optimism, saying his efforts continue, but stressing the need for a two-state solution, and quickly: “Anything else will not be Jewish, and will not be democratic,” he said.

Whatever happens, Biden said, the United States has a vital role to play, and organizations like J Street, which “proves there’s no contradiction between being progressive and pro-Israeli,” are at the forefront. America, he said, must continue pushing the government to make moves toward peace while at the same time guaranteeing security.

“We are Israel’s maybe not-only friend,” Biden said, “but only absolutely certain friend.”

Biden: Israeli Actions Moving Country In Wrong Direction

By Jesse Byrnes

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

Vice President Joe Biden on Monday evening criticized the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, arguing that his actions in recent years have hurt the prospect of peace with Palestinians.

Biden noted the “damaging moves” by Palestinians to join the International Criminal Court last year and need for a more forceful denouncement of specific violence against Israelis, but also criticized moves under Netanyahu as “counterproductive” to Israel’s security.

“Settlement policies are hurting support for Israel and moving us further away from a two-state solution,” Biden said during his address at the progressive pro-Israel advocacy group J Street.

“I firmly believe that the action Israel’s government has taken over the past several years – the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures – they’re moving us, and more important, they’re moving Israel, in the wrong direction,” Biden said. “They’re moving us toward a one-state reality, and that reality is dangerous.”

Biden suggested there was little likelihood of progress toward a two-state solution anytime soon, following meetings in the region last month amid speculation about whether the administration may outline the parameters of an agreement before President Obama leaves office.

Secretary of State John Kerry vowed in his own address shortly before Biden took the stage that “for these next nine months, we will not stop working” toward a two-state solution.

“I’m sorry to say I didn’t come away from my recent meetings with either Prime Minister Netanyahu or [Palestinian Authority] President [Mahmoud] Abbas feeling encouraged by about the prospects of peace in the immediate future,” Biden said.

“There is, at the moment, no political will that I observed among Israelis or Palestinians to move forward with serious negotiations,” Biden said, suggesting that trust among leaders is “fractured on both sides.”

Biden also called on young American-Jews to reject efforts to “delegitimize Israeli” and issued a general call for Jewish allies to speak out more forcefully against the growth of anti-semitism in Europe.

Biden and Kerry defended the Obama administration’s work to secure the Iran nuclear deal last year, hailing it as one of the biggest moves toward pursuing security and peace in the region for Israel.

The pair also offered condolences to those affected by a bus bombing earlier in the day in Jerusalem, with Kerry

suggesting the bombing had “all the hallmarks” of a terrorist attack.

Biden previously addressed the progressive group in 2013, while Kerry spoke at the gathering for the first time Monday.

Jerusalem Bus Blast Wounds 21, Called Terror Attack By Police

By Michele Chabin

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

JERUSALEM — A bus exploded Monday in Jerusalem, wounding 21, in what police called a “terror attack.”

Israel Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the incident was caused by an explosive device. The blast then ripped through a second bus next to it, causing both buses to catch on fire, Channel 2 said. Plumes of black smoke could be seen miles from the scene.

Rosenfeld said two people on board the bus that exploded were seriously wounded, while the other injured people were in a nearby bus and car that were also damaged.

Police are trying to determine whether one of the two critically injured bus passengers was a possible suicide bomber.

“Since we know there was an explosive device that exploded on a bus, there is no doubt that it was a terror attack,” said Yoram Halevy, chief of the Jerusalem District Police.

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat said the explosion was caused by a “small bomb” but did not elaborate further.

Alexis Hope Silverman, a Jerusalem mother of three, said she heard sirens “screeching non-stop for ten minutes straight. I knew something happened. I’m used to sirens but this was different.”

Hannah Jo Kanarek said she was sitting in her car at an intersection not far from the explosion.

“I watched all the emergency services racing towards the area. I knew immediately what it was,” she said.

The blast comes amid a wave of Palestinian attacks on Israelis the past several months and raised initial fears of suicide attacks a decade ago in Israeli cities, the Associated Press reported.

Attacks on Israeli buses by suicide bombers were frequent during the Palestinian uprising in 2000-2005 but they have been rare since, according to Reuters.

Bus Bombing In Jerusalem Wounds 21

By Isabel Kershner

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

JERUSALEM — A bomb exploded on a bus in Jerusalem on Monday, wounding about 21 people and feeding a sense of vulnerability among many Israelis after months of simmering violence.

The sights and sounds were familiar: Television images of a burned-out hulk of a bus and wailing sirens, immediately reminding many Israelis of the second Palestinian uprising, which erupted in 2000, when suicide bombers blew up buses in Jerusalem and other Israeli cities, killing scores. Attacks on buses have been rare in recent years.

Describing the blast as a terrorist attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose image as Israel’s security czar has been dented in recent months, vowed to track down those responsible.

“We will find whoever prepared that explosive device, we will get to those who sent it and we will also get to those who stand behind them,” he said, adding, “We will settle accounts with those terrorists.”

The bombing came as many Israelis were already on edge after a six-month wave of stabbings, shootings and vehicle attacks by Palestinians that have killed about 30 people. More than 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces during that period, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Israeli officials say that most of the Palestinians were killed while carrying out, or attempting, attacks, and that others were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces.

Unlike the major assaults of the second uprising, which were engineered by the main Palestinian groups, most of the recent attacks appear to be the almost spontaneous work of by individuals.

“We are in an ongoing battle against terrorism,” Mr. Netanyahu said, “terrorism of knives, terrorism of shootings, of bombs, of rockets and even of tunnels.”

He was referring to a tunnel that the Israeli military said on Monday it had discovered and “neutralized.” Running from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, it was the first such tunnel found since a cease-fire ended 50 days of fighting in the Palestinian coastal territory in summer 2014.

Mr. Netanyahu hailed the discovery, saying, “the State of Israel has achieved a global breakthrough in the ability to locate tunnels.” He described the breakthrough as “unique,” but did not provide any details about the technology involved. The military said the tunnel had been built 100 to 130 feet underground by Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls Gaza; that it could have been used for terrorist attacks against Israeli border communities; and that it was equipped with electricity and communications lines.

Israeli officials have said in recent months that Hamas had most likely rebuilt much of the tunnel network that was damaged by Israel during the 50-day war. The officials also said Hamas was trying to restock its rocket supplies.

The threat of the tunnels continues to sow fear in Israeli communities along the border. Some residents have reported hearing digging underground.

Feeding those anxieties, Hamas’s military wing said in a statement that the recently discovered tunnel “is only a drop

in the ocean of resistance preparations” meant to defend the Palestinians.

Hamas also praised the Jerusalem bus bombing on Monday, without claiming responsibility for it. “We bless the Al-Quds operation,” the organization wrote on its Twitter account, using the Arabic name for Jerusalem.

The details of the bus explosion on Monday emerged slowly. The blast came shortly before 6 p.m. in Moshe Baram Street, by the Talpiot industrial zone in southeast Jerusalem. A fire caused by the explosion spread quickly to a second bus, but the police said it was not immediately clear whether the blaze was the result of a bomb or caused by a mechanical flaw.

More than two hours later, Yoram Halevy, the Jerusalem district police chief, said in a televised statement that a bomb had caused the blast, but the police were cautious about determining if it involved terrorism, or crime.

Mr. Halevy said the police were still investigating the circumstances surrounding the blast, including whether one of the people who was wounded had brought the bomb onto the bus. Two victims were in serious condition. The identity of at least one of the wounded was still unknown hours after the blast, Micky Rosenfeld, a police spokesman, said.

Mr. Rosenfeld said the police were investigating how the bomb got onto the bus, and if it was meant to go off there or was intended for another location.

Racheli Dadon, a Jerusalem resident, described from her hospital bed how she had boarded the No. 12 bus with her daughter, Eden, 15. “I had not even sat down when I heard a huge blast and all the glass fell on us,” she told the Israelie news site Ynet. She said she searched for her daughter amid smoke and darkness, finding her with burns all over her body.

The driver of the No. 12 bus, Moshe Levy, said he had inspected the vehicle twice before setting out on his route. “The whole way was fine,” he said. “I got to Baram Street in Talpiot and stopped in a traffic jam. I heard a blast in the back portion of the bus and I opened the doors and told people to exit the bus.”

Prof. Avraham Rivkind, head of the trauma unit at the Hadassah Medical Center in Ein Kerem, on the southwestern edge of Jerusalem, said the hospital received several of the wounded who had suffered burns as well as injuries from nails and bolts — “wounds,” he said, “that are familiar to us from past events in our city.”

Also on Monday, Israeli military prosecutors filed a manslaughter charge against a soldier who fatally shot a Palestinian assailant in the West Bank city of Hebron last month as he lay on the ground, wounded and subdued. The military court lifted an order banning the publication of the name of the soldier, Sgt. Elor Azaria, from Ramle, in central Israel, and said his trial, in a military court, would begin on May 9.

Follow Isabel Kershner on Twitter @IKershner

Jerusalem Bus Bomb Wounds 16, Netanyahu Hints At Palestinian Link

[Reuters](#), April 18, 2016

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Bomb On Jerusalem Bus Injures 21

Israeli police say most of those hurt were riding a bus that was driving alongside

By Orr Hirschauge

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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Israelis Find New Tunnel From Gaza Into Israel

By Isabel Kershner

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said on Monday that it had discovered and “neutralized” a tunnel running from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory for the first time since a cease-fire ended 50 days of fighting in the Palestinian coastal territory in the summer of 2014.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the discovery, saying, “the state of Israel has achieved a global breakthrough in the ability to locate tunnels.”

Describing the breakthrough as “unique,” but without providing any details of the technology involved, Mr. Netanyahu added, “The government is investing considerable capital in countering the tunnel threat. This is an ongoing effort that will not end overnight.”

Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, a spokesman for the Israeli military, refused to elaborate on the technological means but said that the incomplete tunnel that was recently discovered did not have an exit coming up to the surface, suggesting that it was detected deep underground.

Colonel Lerner said that the tunnel was new, had been built by Hamas, the Islamic militant group that controls Gaza, and could have been used for terrorist attacks against Israeli border communities.

He added that it was 100 to 130 feet underground, equipped with electricity, communications lines and a rail line to allow its builders to clear rubble. Its discovery, he said, resulted from the combined effort of technology, intelligence, engineering and troops on the ground.

Israeli forces “neutralized the tunnel in Israeli territory, decommissioning it and rendering it unusable,” he said.

Israel said it had destroyed 32 tunnels by the end of the 2014 war, which left more than 2,100 Palestinians and 70 Israelis dead. Those tunnels included nearly a dozen that ran beneath its border, some of which were used to carry out

ambushes against Israeli forces. Locating them was a painstaking process that relied on finding entry and exit points.

Israel's decision to send ground forces into Gaza during the 2014 conflict came after 13 Hamas gunmen were intercepted as they emerged from the mouth of a tunnel in Israeli territory about a mile away from Sufa, a small kibbutz near the border with southern Gaza.

Military officials did not provide the exact location of this latest tunnel but said that it was found close to the border fence and ran from southern Gaza into southern Israel.

Israeli officials have stated in recent months that Hamas has most likely rebuilt much of the tunnel network that was damaged during the war. The officials also said Hamas was trying to restock its rocket supplies.

The threat of the tunnels continues to sow fear and panic in Israeli communities along the border. Some residents have reported hearing the sounds of digging underground. About a dozen Palestinians have been killed in recent months, Israeli officials have said, after several tunnels collapsed.

Israeli officials have accused Hamas of spending millions of dollars to rebuild the tunnels, diverting building materials and money from reconstructing Gaza after the devastation caused by the 50-day war.

Since 2008, Israel has carried out three offensives against Gaza, all after rocket attacks by militants. Although the border has remained relatively quiet recently, many Israelis and Palestinians consider the next round of violence to be only a matter of time.

"Hamas is in operational distress; but for some reason it's actually here in Israel that a panic about war has commenced," Alex Fishman, a military affairs analyst, wrote in Sunday's edition of the Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

"It is true that while the Palestinian media have been reporting for several days about the I.D.F.'s use of heavy equipment within Palestinian territory in the southern Gaza Strip, not a single shot has been fired in that sector," he added, referring to the Israeli military.

The military wing of Hamas said in a statement that the tunnel "is only a drop in the ocean of resistance preparations" meant to defend the Palestinian people, their holy sites, their land and their prisoners. The Hamas military wing added that while Israel had refused to divulge details about the tunnel, it would publish "all the details hidden by the Zionist enemy at the right time."

Also on Monday, Israeli military prosecutors filed a manslaughter charge against a soldier who fatally shot a Palestinian assailant in the West Bank city of Hebron last month as he lay on the ground, wounded and subdued. The military court lifted an order banning the publication of the name of the soldier, Sgt. Elor Azaria, from Ramle, in central

Israel, and said his trial, in a military court, would begin on May 9.

Follow Isabel Kershner on Twitter @IKershner

Israel Uncovers Tunnel From Gaza, First Since 2014 War

By Oren Dorell

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

Israel's military reported Monday finding the first tunnel from Gaza to southern Israel since the 2014 fighting with Hamas militants, according to Israeli media.

The tunnel ran along eastern Gaza, and reached a depth of 90 feet in some areas, according to Israel's Arutz Sheva TV. The report was initially blocked by military censors who cleared it for publication Monday, according to the station's report.

Palestinian media had been reporting intense IDF activity, including heavy digging equipment, along the border with Gaza for the past several days.

Major General Gadi Eizenkot, the Israeli military's chief of staff, has made a priority of establishing and expanding a specialized unit to locate and destroy tunnels, which Hamas militants have promised to rebuild to enable an attack into Israel, Arutz Sheva TV reported.

Hamas' military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qazzam Brigades, dismissed the tunnel find as "a drop in the bucket of what the resistance has prepared to defend the people and liberate our holy sites, land and prisoners," according to Israel's Ynet News. Hamas did not expect an escalation of violence with Israel in the near term, Ynet reported.

Hamas used a vast array of tunnels to smuggle goods and weapons past blockades by Israel and Egypt, to store rockets and enable rocket attacks, and to enable commando raids against Israeli military and civilian targets in southern Israel.

During the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas, at least four separate teams of Hamas commandos used tunnels to launch raids into Israel. The Israeli military said it uncovered more than 60 entrances to about two dozen tunnels.

The war involved Israeli attacks from the air and on the ground against Palestinian militants firing rockets at Israeli civilian targets. The fighting killed 2,200 Palestinians and 71 Israelis. Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system prevented many of the thousands of rockets that were fired from reaching population centers.

An Israeli army officer walks near the entrance of a tunnel in Gaza on July 25, 2014 that was allegedly used by Palestinian militants for cross-border attacks. (Photo: Jack Guez, AP)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters Monday that such tunneling is easier for Israel to

prevent in the much larger West Bank because of its continuous presence there, according to The Jerusalem Post. Israel can act at once when it receives intelligence about the possibility of burrowing from the West Bank. And this is one of the nation's considerations regarding any future agreement with the Palestinians, he said.

"For that reason I demand freedom of action," he said.

This photo taken on August 6, 2014 shows a Palestinian man looking out over destruction in part of Gaza City's al-Tufah neighborhood after a ceasefire was called between Israel and Hamas militants. (Photo: Mahmud Hams, AFP/Getty Images)

Jordan Halts Jerusalem Al-Aqsa Cameras Project

[AFP](#), April 18, 2016

Amman (AFP) – Jordan has decided not to install security cameras at Islam's third holiest site, the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem, because of some Palestinian doubts, Prime Minister Abdullah Nsur said Monday.

"We have been surprised by the reactions of some (Palestinians) who have made comments expressing their doubts about the aims of the project," the official Petra news agency quoted Nsur as saying.

On March 20, Jordan said it would set up 55 security cameras around the flashpoint compound to monitor any Israeli "violations".

The site – revered by Jews as their holiest site, the Temple Mount – is administered by a Jordanian trust or "Waqf".

In October, US Secretary of State John Kerry endorsed a plan for cameras at the site in a bid to calm repeated disturbances, after meeting Jordan's King Abdullah II and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed.

"Because we respect the point of view of the Palestinians... we believe the project is no longer consensual, but a potential source of conflict, and have decided to end it," Nsur was quoted as saying.

He said Amman's main objective had been to install surveillance cameras "at the compound, not inside the mosques, to document repeated Israeli aggressions at the holy places".

Firebrand Israeli Arab cleric Raed Salah, leader of the Islamic Movement, had called on Jordan to reconsider the project, fearing that it would become "the eyes of Israel".

The compound in east Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed in a move not recognised internationally, houses the famed golden Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque.

Clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli security forces erupted at the compound last September amid fears among Muslims that Israel was planning to change rules governing the site.

Netanyahu has repeatedly said there are no such plans.

Yemeni Rebels Back Out Of Peace Talks At Last Moment

By Ahmed Al-Haj

[Associated Press](#), April 18, 2016

SANAA, Yemen (AP) – Yemen's Shiite rebels backed out of U.N.-brokered peace talks just hours before the negotiations were to start Monday in Kuwait, demanding the Saudi-led coalition abide by the weeklong cease-fire and halt airstrikes against them.

Officials from the internationally-recognized government hit back and accused rebels of violating the cease-fire deal by shelling the war-torn city of Taiz. It was not immediately clear if the negotiations were completely scuttled.

A statement issued on behalf of the U.N. envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, described the Kuwait talks as "delayed" and gave no details on when they might resume. "We are working to overcome the latest challenges and ask the delegations to show good faith, participate in the talks in order to reach a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Yemen," the envoy said. "The next few hours are crucial. We call on the parties to take their responsibilities seriously and agree on comprehensive solutions."

"Our demand from day one was for the talks to be held in a calm, peaceful, and stable environment," Mohammed Abdel-Salam, spokesman for the Shiite rebels known as Houthis and the head of their U.N. delegation, said in a statement late Monday. Abdel-Salam said airstrikes and hostilities by the Saudi-led coalition have not stopped.

Abdel-Karim Shayban, an official with the internationally recognized government who was appointed to monitor the cease-fire in the western city of Taiz, accused Houthis of not abiding by the truce deal.

The delegation representing the Yemeni government in Kuwait said in a statement late Monday that the delegation had respected its obligations and went to Kuwait for the talks in spite of what they described as cease-fire violations by the Houthis.

Officials from the Saudi-led coalition could not be immediately reached for comment.

The Kuwait talks are aimed at finding ways to resolve the year-long conflict between Yemen's internationally recognized government, backed by the Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthis and their allies.

Abdel-Rahman al-Ahnouni, a Houthi media official, accused the U.N. envoy of trying to “jump over our” the rebels’ demands and head directly to the talks.

“This just reflects that they are not serious about the whole deal,” the media official said. “Talks amid the continued airstrikes will be useless.”

Shayban, the official in Taiz – where Houthis have imposed a yearlong siege- told reporters that Houthis have showed “no seriousness.”

The U.N. envoy said during peace talks he would encourage both sides to negotiate a way forward on issues such as creating interim security arrangements, withdrawing militias and armed groups, handing over heavy weapons to the government, resuming an inclusive political dialogue and releasing of political prisoners and detainees.

The Houthis seized the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and expelled the government led by President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who flew to Saudi Arabia. The Yemeni government had since enlisted the help of the Western-backed coalition and retaken most of the southern region.

A U.N.-brokered cease-fire announced earlier this month has sought to facilitate the negotiations in Kuwait, though it has repeatedly been breached by both sides. Along with Sanaa, cities of Taiz, Marib and Juf have seen most of the cease-fire violations.

Yemen’s war has killed thousands and displaced 2.4 million people while Houthis still retain control in much of the country’s northern regions. The conflict has also fueled secessionist aspirations among the Southerners’ for independence, which they had before Yemen was unified in 1990.

Also Monday, tens of thousands of Yemenis rallied in the port city of Aden, demanding the secession of the south from the rest of the country and the return of the one-time independent state of South Yemen.

Associated Press writer Maggie Michael in Cairo and Adam Schreck in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

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Yemen Peace Effort Falters As Houthis Refuse To Attend Talks

By Saeed Al-Batati And Kareem Fahim
[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

AL MUKALLA, Yemen — Peace talks aimed at ending Yemen’s civil war that were set to begin on Monday faltered before they could start, when delegates representing Yemen’s Houthi rebels refused to attend.

The setback followed several aborted cease-fires and a previous round of failed negotiations to end Yemen’s 14-month conflict. The latest talks, in the Persian Gulf state of Kuwait, were supposed to bring together the Houthis and delegates from Yemen’s government, which was driven from power by the Houthis last year.

There is growing international alarm at the civilian toll from the hostilities, as well as frustration at the continuation of a conflict effectively locked in a stalemate since last summer. More than 6,200 people have been killed, and most of the population in Yemen, the Arab world’s poorest state, requires some form of humanitarian assistance.

The war has shaken the Middle East, aggravating regional rivalries while drawing foreign troops to Yemen, including Persian Gulf soldiers who are part of a Saudi Arabia-led military coalition fighting on the side of the Yemeni government. A power vacuum has empowered the country’s powerful affiliate of Al Qaeda, allowing it to seize territory, money and arms.

The Houthis said they did not attend the talks because of what they described as violations of a shaky truce that was supposed to begin last week but never fully took hold. Abdurahman Alahnomi, a spokesman for the Houthis, said that “the delegation will travel after it ensures that the other party commits to the cease-fires.”

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the United Nations special envoy to Yemen, who has been shuttling between the combatants for months, said in a statement that the talks were “delayed.” He scolded the Houthis and their allies, saying he hoped they would “not miss this opportunity that could save Yemen the loss of more lives.”

There had been optimism about the talks. Both sides had made conciliatory statements, and there was a feeling that the combatants were beginning to see diminishing returns from the war. Yet no breakthrough was expected. The negotiations were designed to ease the violence and confront manageable issues, like prisoner exchanges, in hopes of creating a climate for a broader political dialogue.

Even that limited agenda was contested. A Houthi delegate said the group was opposed to a proposal that would allow the government, led by President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to return to the capital, Sana. The Houthis favored a consensus government with a new prime minister, with Mr. Hadi remaining as a figurehead until a new president could be elected, according to the delegate, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on behalf of the rebels.

A sense of urgency surrounded the negotiations in Kuwait, because of the hair-trigger nature of the violence and

because neither the Houthis nor the government fully controlled the constellation of armed groups on the ground.

April Longley Alley, who researches Yemen for the International Crisis Group, said that several powerful political figures on both sides of the conflict could scuttle the diplomacy.

Most prominent among them is former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who stepped down in 2012 but has retained his influence — malign, his critics say. Mr. Saleh and his loyalists have been allied with the Houthis throughout the war. But his exclusion from the talks that led to the cease-fire last week, as well as doubts about his political future in Yemen, meant that “he has the incentive to be a spoiler — a dangerous one,” Ms. Alley wrote in a blog post on the crisis group’s website.

On Monday, both sides reported fresh violations of the tentative truce, including airstrikes and clashes in Marib province, east of Sana.

Beyond the negotiations in Kuwait, tangled questions about Yemen’s political future are looming, including the demand by a southern Yemeni movement for an independent state.

North Yemen and South Yemen were separate countries until 1990. After unification, southerners complained that they were being marginalized by the country’s northern leaders, leading to a movement calling openly for secession.

The current war has hardened those demands. Southerners, with backing from the Saudi-led coalition, successfully routed the Houthis and Mr. Saleh’s forces from much of the south, making them less willing to relinquish control to any central authority.

The secessionists held huge rallies in the southern port city of Aden for a second consecutive day on Monday — to ensure that the delegates in Kuwait understood they would not yield, said Nasser al-Yazidi, a leading figure in the Southern Movement.

If the government ignores their demands, the southerners will confront them, “like we did with Saleh and the Houthis,” he said.

Follow Kareem Fahim on Twitter @kfahim.

Cuba Minister Calls Obama Visit ‘An Attack’ As Communists Defend Ideology

[Reuters](#), April 18, 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. Talent Agent Deal With Cuban Entrepreneur Marks Change In Business Climate

By Alan Gomez

[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

MIAMI — A U.S. talent agency signed a contract in Havana on Monday to work with a Cuban entrepreneur, a seemingly simple deal that marks a big change in the relationship between the two countries.

Jonathan Blue, chairman and managing director of the Louisville-based investment firm Blue Equity, made a deal with Pedro Rodriguez, an entrepreneur licensed by the Cuban government to work in the entertainment field. Rodriguez will scout talent in Cuba for Blue’s talent company, Blue Entertainment Sports Television, or BEST, which represents broadcasters, models and celebrities.

The deal is not the first time a U.S. company has hired one of Cuba’s entrepreneurs, a new segment of the population that works outside of the state-run economy. What’s different is both parties’ willingness to operate openly in public.

San Francisco-based Airbnb began working with private homeowners in Cuba last year, and U.S. companies have hired Cuban computer programmers, translators and fixers since the two countries announced in Dec. 2014 that they would re-establish diplomatic relations. Most of those deals have stayed deliberately under the radar, says Carlos Saladrigas, a Cuban-American businessman in Miami, and chairman of the Cuba Study Group, who travels frequently to the island and advises companies interested in working there.

Regulations passed by the Obama administration allow U.S. companies to hire Cuban workers, and lets those workers establish bank accounts in the U.S. to make it easier to get paid. Saladrigas said the Cuban government has not kept up with its own changes, leaving Cuban entrepreneurs uncertain if they can legally work for American businesses.

“The difficulty is that in our system, everything is legal unless it is prohibited. In Cuba, everything is prohibited unless it is made legal,” said Saladrigas, who has briefed Obama about Cuba and traveled there for the president’s historic visit last month. “That leaves Cubans in a legal limbo.”

Blue and Rodriguez are not hiding anything. On Monday, they held a signing ceremony and press conference at the José Martí Cultural Society headquarters in Havana announcing the new partnership.

That openness, Saladrigas said, is what makes the deal unique. “That would be a first,” said Saladrigas, who was not part of the deal.

Blue has traveled to Cuba for years, but started looking for ways to expand his business there after President Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro announced that the Cold War foes would begin normalizing relations.

Blue said his company, which represents sports broadcasters including Bomani Jones, Lawrence Taylor, and Ronde and Tiki Barber, helped arrange a Havana fashion photo shoot in December. That’s where he met Rodriguez, who coordinated the shoot logistics. Blue said the two hit it off

immediately, which started the months of research that led to Monday's deal.

Under the agreement, Rodriguez will find artists in Cuba and funnel them to Blue's BEST company, which will then serve as their agents for events in the U.S. and elsewhere. Blue said his firm could also represent the Cuban artists in Cuba, but said there are many limitations there. For example, if one of the artists performs at an event paid for by the Cuban government, Blue could not receive any compensation for that because it would violate U.S. law.

That's why Blue and Rodriguez worked for months to craft a contract that satisfied both U.S. and Cuban law. Blue hired a Miami-based law firm that focuses on Cuba to advise him on U.S. law, and Rodriguez frequently ran the proposals by Cuban officials.

The end result, Blue said, is the start of a long-term presence in a Cuban market filled with all kinds of largely unknown talent.

"We see so much potential in Cuba," Blue said before traveling to Havana for the ceremony. "We've done this all over the world, so Cuba is just such a natural, close market. We're big believers in the long-term potential there."

Augusto Maxwell, an attorney at the Miami-based Akerman law firm who helped craft the contract, said he's confident the deal will pass legal muster. Regulations passed by the U.S. Treasury and Commerce departments since 2014 created a general license that allows U.S. businesses to import goods and services from private entrepreneurs. And while Cuban law doesn't expressly state that Cuban entrepreneurs can work for U.S. companies, Maxwell said Cuban law doesn't prohibit it either.

"This is all new terrain," he said. "We've moved from a situation where Cubans weren't even allowed to enter a hotel room for fear they would come into unauthorized contact with Americans, to one where American companies are welcomed to be in Cuba and Cubans are welcome to provide services to them. This deal is another step in that direction."

Many of the question marks hanging over Cuba's entrepreneurs could be addressed by Cuba's Communist Party Congress, which began Saturday in Havana. But for now, Saladrigas said Blue's new, public deal could pave the way for other companies to take the plunge.

"The good news is that they are happening and they're growing," he said. "It is leaving the Cuban government with few options but to come around to the idea that (these deals) have to be recognized and made legal. I hope they do."

Burundi Is Torturing Prisoners In Crackdown On Dissent, United Nations Says

By Nick Cumming

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

GENEVA — Burundi's security services are torturing and illegally detaining increasing numbers of people, the United Nations said on Monday, reinforcing international alarm over the government's ferocious crackdown on political opponents.

United Nations investigators had documented at least 345 cases of torture and ill treatment since the start of the year and met detainees with fresh wounds, including some who had been beaten or burned so severely they could not walk unaided, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, the agency's high commissioner for human rights, said in a statement.

"These shocking figures are a clear indicator of the widespread and growing use of torture and ill treatment by government security forces," Mr. al-Hussein said.

He added that he was also deeply concerned over reports emerging of the existence of secret detention facilities across the country.

His statement follows mounting international pressure on President Pierre Nkurunziza to defuse a political crisis characterized by escalating violence since he decided in April last year to run for a third term.

The United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, and a number of African leaders, among them South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, have visited Burundi in recent weeks to try to persuade Mr. Nkurunziza to negotiate with political opponents and avert a civil war that could ignite wider regional violence. Their efforts have had little visible result so far.

The United Nations has documented the deaths of about 500 people in the past year, but human rights groups believe many more have died at the hands of the president's security services and Imbonerakure, a militia of the ruling party's youth wing.

Thousands have also been detained and more than a quarter of a million Burundians have fled to neighboring countries to escape the violence, the United Nations has reported.

Overt violence had shown signs of subsiding but covert violence was rising, Christof Heyns, the United Nations expert monitoring the crisis, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva last month. He cited a growing number of disappearances and underscored the fear that the political crisis could "open up old wounds" between Burundi's ethnic Hutu and Tutsi communities. More than 300,000 people are estimated to have died in a 12-year civil war that ended in 2005.

Mr. al-Hussein on Monday drew attention to reports that some government security agencies were involved in arrests, killings and disappearances of members of the army and the police. These abductions appear to have singled out mostly Tutsi members of a group known as Ex-Fab, made up of veterans who served in the armed forces before the end of the civil war. Continue reading the main story

Global Debate Over War On Drugs Heads To U.N. General Assembly

By Somini Sengupta

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

UNITED NATIONS — Canada has promised to legalize marijuana. Mexico's highest court has allowed some citizens to grow cannabis for personal use. Colombia has reversed its decades-long policy of aerial spraying against coca, the raw ingredient in cocaine.

Even in the United States, once the chief architect of the global war on drugs, four states permit the recreational marijuana sales. Other states have pro-legalization ballot measures pending. And a heroin epidemic has prompted the mayor of at least one city to propose establishing a supervised injection clinic.

It's not as if the United Nations snack bar is going to start selling pot-laced gummy bears anytime soon. Still, a growing worldwide insurgency is confronting the war on drugs, with public health workers, the police and lawmakers questioning the wisdom of a decades-old global conventions meant to eradicate illegal substances and punish those who produce and consume them.

That fight will preoccupy the United Nations General Assembly this week, as world leaders debate whether punitive international drug laws should be eased to reflect the times. It is the first time in nearly two decades that countries will debate longstanding drug laws.

That debate comes at a time when countries large and small are rethinking their approaches to the drug issue, adopting policies that experts say breach current global conventions against drugs by legalizing some substances in some places — and lessening punishment for offenders in others.

"We are on the cusp of the collapse of the regime," said Vanda Felbab-Brown, an analyst at the Brookings Institution.

The conflict pits two equally improbable alliances against each other. On one side are the insurgents, led largely by several countries in Latin America that have begun to challenge conventional antidrug strategies or to legalize some drugs in hopes of blunting the violence that the drug wars have wrought. Canada's health minister will make his country's pitch to legalize marijuana, along with the presidents of Bolivia and Colombia, critics of the existing treaties.

On the other side are the staunch defenders of those conventions.

They are led by Russia and China, and they are joined by smaller countries with some of the strictest drug laws, including those that impose the death penalty, such as Singapore, Iran and Saudi Arabia. A push to prohibit the death penalty in drug cases is expected to be one of the most contentious items in the discussions this week.

The United States, once the world's principal drug-law enforcer, is in the most awkward spot. It opposes overturning the relevant global treaties (there are three, the first dating to 1961). But it has also been put on notice for violating those treaties with initiatives that legalized recreational cannabis use in four states. That makes it hard for American officials to scold other countries for taking a less-than-prohibitionist stance against drugs.

William R. Brownfield, the top State Department official in charge of combating drug-trafficking, sought to strike a balance when he told reporters last month that the United States would, in effect, not oppose how other governments choose to deal with drug laws within their own borders. American officials have also argued that because federal law continues to prohibit recreational use of marijuana, and it is therefore not afoul of the global drug treaties.

"My view — my government's view — is let's establish some basic pillars: Defend the integrity of the conventions, accept the inherent discretion within those conventions, tolerance for governments exploring their own national policies, and a commitment to combating the transnational criminal organizations," Mr. Brownfield said.

For years, international drug laws have been geared toward eliminating illegal substances — in 1998, the last time the United Nations took up the subject, a declaration stressed that the consumption of illicit "must not become accepted as a way of life" — and to punish those who produce and use them.

That approach has since come under sharp scrutiny, not just in public health and human rights quarters, but, increasingly, from law enforcement authorities and politicians who suggest it may have done more harm than good.

In the United States, the Obama administration has taken steps toward addressing what it considers unduly harsh prison sentences for nonviolent drug offenses. Such sentences have also become an issue in this year's American presidential race.

The three-day review of drug laws at the United Nations this week is expected to yield much less than reformers hope.

The drug treaties are not likely to be abrogated or renegotiated, largely because of the influence of countries like Russia (one of whose career diplomats runs the United Nations drugs office) and Egypt (one of whose envoys will lead this week's General Assembly Special Session).

The meeting does, however, highlight how divided the world has become over the right approach to drug laws.

Inside the General Assembly hall, countries are expected to endorse a document, finalized after weeks of negotiations, that reaffirms the commitment to "promote a society free of drug abuse," but also acknowledges public health concerns and recognizes "alternative or additional measures" to punishment. The document makes no mention of decriminalization.

Bernie Sanders, campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, was moved to weigh in on the topic. Last week, he was among hundreds of people, and one of six senators, who signed an open letter to the United Nations secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon. The war on drugs had proved “disastrous for global health, security and human rights,” stated the letter, which expressed support for state and national governments around the world that had legalized marijuana.

The letter was endorsed by an unlikely alliance of politicians, business leaders and activists, including the billionaire investor Warren Buffett, the founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garza, Ernesto Zedillo, a former president of Mexico, and the musician Sting.

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NATIONAL NEWS

Study: Drop In Competition If United Leaves ObamaCare

By Peter Sullivan

[The Hill](#), April 18, 2016

If the insurer UnitedHealth dropped off the ObamaCare marketplaces nationwide, it would have an “appreciable” effect on the number of choices available to consumers, but would not affect premium prices much, according to a new study.

The new study from the Kaiser Family Foundation finds that if United dropped out nationwide, a majority of U.S. counties would only have the choice of one or two insurers on the ObamaCare marketplace, which is below the threshold of three insurers seen as needed for strong competition.

The percentage of counties with only one or two insurers to choose from would grow from 36 percent to 53 percent, the study finds.

As a result, 1.4 million people, or 11 percent of ObamaCare enrollees, would have the choice of only one insurer if United exited nationwide, up from 2 percent currently.

Still, the large majority of enrollees, 70 percent, or 8.9 million, would continue to have a choice of three or more insurers even if United exited.

Also, because United often is not offering one of the cheapest plans, the effect on premiums would be small if the insurer exited, the study finds. Nationwide, the benchmark premium would have been just 1 percent higher on average in 2016 if United had not participated anywhere in 2016, the study finds.

For about 6 percent of the enrollees in areas United currently serves, premiums would increase by \$25 to \$100. For about 1 percent, premiums would increase by \$100 or

more. But for a much larger share of people, 78 percent, premiums would change by less than \$1.

UnitedHealth in November said it might drop off the ObamaCare marketplaces in 2017 because of financial losses. The company will have a closely watched earnings call on Tuesday.

The Obama administration argues that the attention on United is overblown, given that it is a fairly small player in the ObamaCare marketplaces, with about 6 percent of enrollees.

United is just part of the picture, as a range of insurers have complained of financial losses on the ObamaCare marketplaces, and some others have pondered exits.

Premiums are widely expected to rise next year to help make up these losses, though those effects will often be cushioned for consumers by ObamaCare’s tax credits.

The administration says it expects that insurers will both come and go as the new market set up by the law develops, but that the marketplace will continue to succeed.

“The Marketplace is a reliable source of coverage for millions of Americans with a robust number of plan choices,” Department of Health and Human Services spokesman Ben Wakana said in a statement. “We have full confidence, based on data, that the Marketplaces will continue to thrive for years ahead.”

Obamacare Premiums To Spike For Some If UnitedHealth Withdraws, Reducing Competition: Study

By Tom Howell Jr.

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

A million more Obamacare customers would face an exchange market with only one insurer if UnitedHealth Group follows through on its threat to drop out of the program in 2017, nonpartisan researchers said Monday in an analysis that also found premiums could rise in select markets.

As the nation’s largest insurer, UnitedHealth shocked the health care sector when it announced last year that it is losing money on web-based portals set up under the Affordable Care Act and may have to withdraw from President Obama’s signature domestic program.

The Minnetonka, Minn.-based company already plans to ditch exchanges in Arkansas and Michigan for 2017 and partially withdraw in Georgia, raising the stakes before a first-quarter earnings call scheduled for Tuesday.

Other major insurers have said sicker-than-expected customers are driving their own losses, although they are ready to stick it out and hope the situation stabilizes.

The ripple comes at a pivotal time for the health overhaul, which Mr. Obama sold in 2009 and 2010 as a catalyst for competition in the private marketplace. Yet more than half of Obamacare’s nonprofit co-op plans have failed,

raising fresh questions about the extent of consumer choice on the portals.

Those doubts would become more pointed if UnitedHealth, which in 2016 operated on Obamacare exchanges in 34 states, pulled out.

If it exited entirely, the Kaiser Family Foundation says that customers in a majority of the nation's 3,142 counties could still choose from at least three insurers, which is generally considered enough to foster competition.

Yet the number of counties with only one or two insurers would rise from 1,121 to 1,653, leaving 1.1 million more customers in markets with only one insurer and another 1.8 million in ones with two insurers.

In response, the Health and Human Services Department said the Obamacare marketplace is still a reliable source of coverage for millions and that it has "full confidence, based on data," that it will thrive for years to come.

"The number of issuers per state has grown year-over-year," HHS spokesman Benjamin Wakana said. "With millions of Americans insured through the marketplaces, it's clear that this is a growing business for insurers, and it's a product consumers want and need. The marketplace should be judged by the choices it offers consumers, not the decisions of any one issuer."

The agency also said that participation in the exchanges can be dynamic, with 39 issuers exiting and then 40 issuers entering the market for 2016.

Kaiser said a complete exit by UnitedHealth would impact people differently, depending on where they live.

Monthly premiums for the second-lowest cost silver, or "benchmark," plan would be \$25-\$100 higher for a 40-year-old in roughly 300 counties, and more than \$100 higher in 13 counties.

The government uses the benchmark plans to determine how much financial assistance it will give eligible customers in the form of tax credits.

Nationwide, the second-lowest silver plan would rise only about 1 percent if UnitedHealth pulled out completely.

"Since UnitedHealth often is not one of the lower cost plans, the effect nationally on premiums of an exit by the insurer would be modest," Kaiser said.

HHS highlighted this point, saying United enrolled only 6 percent of Obamacare customers, overall, and that its products in Arkansas, Georgia and Michigan were priced "well above" its rivals, doing little to foster competition.

The Kaiser study assumes no other insurers will step in to fill the hole left by UnitedHealth and says premium changes would be most pronounced in Alabama, Arizona, Iowa, Nebraska and North Carolina,

"The impacts of a UnitedHealth withdrawal would vary considerably by state and market area, with a more pronounced effect in rural areas," Kaiser said.

Insurers will be filing their 2017 rate requests with state regulators over the next few months.

Hoping to head off an outcry over requested premium increases, HHS said Americans should "put little stock" in those initial figures.

Despite the hue and cry over "double-digit" rate hikes in 2016, the average customer who qualified for subsidies purchased exchange coverage for \$106 per month, a 4-percent increase over 2015, the agency said.

"Averages based on proposed premium changes are not a reliable indicator of what typical consumers will actually pay because tax credits reduce the cost of coverage for the vast majority of people, shopping gives all consumers a chance to find the best deal, and public rate review can bring down proposed increases," the report said.

Panel Would Make Insurers Help Contain Rising Drug Costs

By Robert Pear

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — An influential federal advisory panel is calling for Congress to force private insurers to rein in rapid increases in prescription drug costs — by cutting some Medicare payments to insurance companies while shielding older Americans from higher out-of-pocket expenses.

The recommendations by the nonpartisan Medicare Payment Advisory Commission would squeeze private insurers and drug makers alike, creating strong new incentives for insurance companies to manage the use of prescription medicines by beneficiaries and negotiate larger price discounts with pharmaceutical manufacturers. The Obama administration agrees with the reasoning.

Since its start a decade ago, the Medicare drug program, known as Part D of Medicare, has been hailed as a success: a benefit delivered entirely by private insurance companies and subsidized by the government at a cost far below expectations.

But with drug prices increasing, Medicare beneficiaries now find that they may have thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs, even with prescription coverage, and the government is subsidizing more of the benefit than originally intended.

Federal spending on prescription drugs under Part D rose 16.6 percent last year, to \$75 billion, in part because of new drugs to treat hepatitis C. The Congressional Budget Office expects similar growth this year.

Beneficiaries are feeling the pinch. Barbara N. DalPonte, 67, who lives in a suburb of Salem, Ore., takes six drugs, including one for chronic lung problems and another, Nexium, for excess stomach acid. She was in a Humana plan last year, but when she learned that the costs to her would total \$7,400 this year, she switched to one offered by another

company — EnvisionRx, a unit of Rite Aid — with out-of-pocket costs of \$3,400.

“The costs are distressing,” she said, “but the drugs are effective, they work for me, and I don’t know what I would do if I did not have coverage for them.”

The government currently reimburses insurers for 80 percent of a Medicare beneficiary’s drug costs exceeding a certain “catastrophic” level — roughly \$7,500 this year. The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission voted this month to recommend that Congress cut the federal share of catastrophic drug costs to 20 percent.

At the same time, the panel said, Congress should eliminate Medicare beneficiaries’ 5 percent share of drug costs above the threshold.

John F. Hoadley, a research professor at Georgetown University and a commission member, said this change would be “a huge benefit” for people with very high drug costs.

The recommendations will be included in a June report to Congress, which often heeds the panel’s advice.

More than 40 million of the 56 million Medicare beneficiaries have drug coverage through Part D, and national surveys indicate that most are satisfied with the coverage. But out-of-pocket costs for some beneficiaries have increased in recent years as insurers require them to pay 25 percent or more of the cost for expensive specialty drugs to treat chronic or complex illnesses, including cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis and hepatitis C.

“Out-of-pocket costs can exceed thousands of dollars for beneficiaries who take just one specialty drug or a large number of less costly brands and generics,” the Kaiser Family Foundation, which tracks the health insurance market, said in a recent report.

Dr. Rita F. Redberg, a commission member and cardiologist at the University of California, San Francisco, noted that many of the medicines approved recently by the Food and Drug Administration were costly specialty drugs.

Pharmaceutical companies and advocates for beneficiaries said some of the panel’s recommendations could harm patients’ access to certain medicines and raise costs for some low-income people.

From the inception of the drug benefit in 2006 to 2014, the basic premium for Medicare drug coverage rose by less than a dollar. But in their annual report last July, Medicare trustees, including top administration officials, predicted the monthly premium would double from 2014 to 2024, reaching \$64.

Opinion polls show that a majority of Americans of both political parties support government action to keep down drug costs. Those costs have become an issue in the presidential campaign, with Donald J. Trump, Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders all saying Medicare should directly negotiate

prices with drug manufacturers, a practice now forbidden in Part D.

Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon, the senior Democrat on the Finance Committee, said he was drafting legislation to cap certain drug costs in Part D. Most types of health insurance, other than the traditional fee-for-service Medicare program, have limits on out-of-pocket costs, he noted.

“It defies common sense that a similar protection has not been put in place for seniors, especially with the rise of high-cost prescription drugs,” he said.

The commission would give insurers new tools to manage Medicare drug benefits. It would, for example, grant insurers more discretion in covering antidepressants and immunosuppressants, used in transplants. Medicare now requires insurers to cover “all or substantially all” drugs in those “protected” classes.

It would also require some beneficiaries to pay more for brand-name drugs before qualifying for so-called catastrophic coverage. And it would create financial incentives for greater use of generics by low-income people, who, the commission says, account for about 70 percent of Part D spending.

“These recommendations will significantly harm beneficiaries by eroding coverage and protections for some of the most vulnerable enrollees,” said Allyson Funk, a spokeswoman for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a trade group.

Andrew Sperling, a lobbyist at the National Alliance on Mental Illness, said the proposals “could adversely affect people with serious mental illness who are below the poverty level.”

Clare Krusing, a spokeswoman for America’s Health Insurance Plans, a trade group, criticized the proposed cut in Medicare payments, saying this change could lead to higher premiums for beneficiaries.

Medicare beneficiaries with incomes less than 150 percent of the poverty level — under \$17,820 a year for an individual — can often obtain extra help with drug costs through Medicare Part D. But Jocelyne Watrous, who works with clients at the nonprofit Center for Medicare Advocacy in Willimantic, Conn., said that for people with somewhat higher incomes, the out-of-pocket costs could be unmanageable.

“As a result,” she said, “people are still skipping doses, cutting pills in two or taking them every other day just to get by.”

Senate Dems To Mitch McConnell: Take Up \$2B Zika Request Now

By Tom Howell

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

Senate Democrats pleaded with Republican leaders Monday to take up President Obama’s \$1.9 billion request to combat the Zika virus “as soon as possible,” saying the

mosquito-borne illness poses a real threat to pregnant women.

The Obama administration recently shifted \$510 million from the largely successful fight against Ebola in West Africa to the new threat, which has been directly tied to serious birth defects and other problems.

Forty Senate Democrats and two independents said that was a stopgap measure, so new money is still needed.

"Although [the transfer] was necessary in the face of congressional inaction and the growing and rapidly changing public health threat posed by Zika, it would be shortsighted and dangerous for Congress not to act quickly to give the administration the resources it needs to fully fight the Zika virus and protect Americans," their letter to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said.

The White House has ratcheted up its own rhetoric in recent days, accusing the GOP of sleepwalking while Zika threatens its shores.

House appropriators say they are ready to disburse funds as needed, but want more detailed information about how the money would be used.

Democrats said the request cannot wait. Researchers have confirmed a link between the Zika epidemic and an uptick in the number of babies born with abnormally small heads, and they are investigating its ties to a syndrome that can cause paralysis.

The U.S. territories have reported 471 locally acquired Zika cases, most of them in Puerto Rico.

While it isn't circulating on the U.S. mainland, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recorded 358 cases that were brought back by travelers to the hot zone and a handful of sexually transmitted cases.

Health officials said they expect locally transmitted cases when temperatures rise, making the climate more hospitable to the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that carries the virus.

Democrats said it isn't clear how far north those mosquitoes will travel, raising the stakes in the fight.

"We cannot delay approving critical resources to assist in the Zika response," the lawmakers wrote. "We must act now to pass the president's request for supplemental funding."

Union Seeks Higher Tariffs On U.S. Imports Of Raw Aluminum

[New York Times](#), April 19, 2016

HONG KONG — An American labor union is pushing the United States to impose broad, steep tariffs on aluminum imports using a little-used but wide-ranging trade law that has riled the country's trading partners in the past.

The effort by the United Steelworkers union comes with trade increasingly an election-year issue in the United States

and elsewhere. More than three-quarters of the United States aluminum smelting industry that existed five years ago will have been idled or shut down by this summer as imports have surged, according to the union's legal petition.

The union blames China's rising exports, though if successful its effort would also affect American imports from Canada and many other countries.

The union's law firm on Monday filed a petition covering raw aluminum imports with an American trade panel. The petition invokes Section 201 of the 1974 Trade Act. The section was last invoked by President George W. Bush in 2001 to start a legal process that led to American tariffs on steel imports the following year.

A Section 201 case covers essentially all imports of a product from all over the world. That makes it more substantial than anti-subsidy and anti-dumping cases against imports from a single country. The European Union objected to President Bush's use of Section 201, which resulted in American tariffs on a wide range of steel products, until the administration dropped them in late 2003.

But Section 201 cases are also harder to win. They require proof that a domestic industry has been "seriously injured" by imports, a harder test than the mere proof of "injury" from imports that is required for other trade cases.

Terence P. Stewart, the managing partner of the law firm Stewart and Stewart and the lead lawyer on the aluminum case, contended that raw aluminum could meet the test. "The domestic industry is disappearing before our eyes," he said. "Quick relief and addressing the underlying imbalance between global supply and demand are essential if we are going to have any industry left."

The union also argues that aluminum is important to national defense because it is widely used in military equipment.

Section 201 cases are reviewed by the United States International Trade Commission, a bipartisan, quasi-judicial group of trade experts in Washington. The commission then makes a recommendation within two to six months to the president, who makes the final decision on whether to impose tariffs. The law allows government officials, industries or unions to file claims.

Presidents have almost always followed the commission's advice, although President Carter turned down a recommendation for tariffs on stainless steel flatware in 1978 and President George H.W. Bush rejected a recommendation for tariffs on extruded rubber threads in 1992. The Office of the United States Trade Representative declined to comment on the union's contentions.

China, which already produces more than half the world's aluminum, is expanding capacity even as its economy decelerates. The result has been a surge in exports and falling prices for aluminum.

Chinese exports of aluminum jumped more than 27 percent in the past two years, Chinese customs figures show.

A spokesman for the government-affiliated China Aluminum Association, who gave his family name as Zeng, said aluminum's increasing use in high-speed railway equipment, aerospace and electronics justified China's expanding production capacity and rising exports.

Smelters in Canada and elsewhere, having been displaced in their traditional international markets, have stepped up shipments of raw aluminum to the United States. American imports of raw aluminum from Canada, the biggest supplier, jumped 10 percent by tonnage last year, United States customs data shows.

Other factors are influencing the aluminum trade. Alcoa, the main aluminum smelting company in the United States, has announced the closing of a series of smelting operations in the United States while relying more on production in Canada, Iceland and Saudi Arabia, as part of what it describes as an effort to improve overall efficiency. In a statement it said, "Alcoa has a long history of cooperation with the U.S. government. We haven't seen the petition and look forward to reviewing it."

Exports to the United States are an important source of employment in China, and Chinese officials have been increasingly concerned about Donald J. Trump's populist appeals for a tougher trade policy, including a steep tariff on goods from China. Finance minister Lou Jiwei of China told The Wall Street Journal during a visit to Washington in the past week that imposing such a tariff would violate World Trade Organization rules. Continue reading the main story

Watch President Obama Coach Stephen Curry

By Toni Akindele

[Essence Magazine](#), April 18, 2016

In a video released by the White House on Saturday, President Obama mentors Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry, assisting him with his résumé, science experiment and even his jump shot. The video was released in support of Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to encourage the mentorship of young men and boys of color.

As the video states, "you don't need to be an NBA star or the President of the United State to be someone's hero."

Ayesha, Stephen Curry Team Up With Michelle Obama For The Cutest Dubs Mash

Last week President Obama appeared in a PSA reaffirming the potential of young people of color.

"If we believe in their futures," said the President, "they will believe in them too."

Ayesha, Stephen Curry 'Turnip' With Michelle Obama

President Obama Was Nice Enough To Help Steph Curry With His Jump Shot

By Jack Moore

[GQ](#), April 18, 2016

They also played Connect Four and built a volcano.

As the Obama presidency winds down, let's take a moment and appreciate just how good at the Internet this administration is. Whether we're talking about Reddit AMAs, personal Twitter accounts, or the President going on popular podcasts and web series, the Obama administration has built on the Obama campaign's unparalleled ability to reach young people. Add this new video to the list. In an effort to promote the My Brother's Keeper mentorship program, President Obama mentored a certain NBA MVP for a day. The results? Adorable.

And though, I'm sure Steph was excited to get his resumé in order and build a volcano, as a Cavs fan I have to say I'm most excited at the prospect that Steph might actually take shooting tips from Barack Obama. Because as much as I like our current president, and as much as he's probably the best basketball playing president we've ever had, his shot can sometimes leave something to be desired. And that something is successfully getting the ball into the bottom of the hoop.

So come on, Steph. I know you think you know how to shoot, but don't you owe it to your country to take the president's advice? It'd be unpatriotic for you not to. (Psst... You're welcome, LeBron.)

Obama And Stephen Curry Play Connect Four For My Brother's Keeper Initiative

By Char Adams

[People](#), April 18, 2016

Stephen Curry may be a champion on the basketball court, but when it comes to a game of Connect Four with President Barack Obama, not so much. The two sat down for a round of the classic game to promote Obama's "My Brother's Keeper

"initiative – launched in 2014 to help disadvantaged youth, particularly boys and young men of color.

"I gotta get serious, hold on for one second," the NBA star says in an Instagram clip

before popping in a mouth guard.

The president took a moment to compose himself as well: "Hold on a second, I gotta get my game face on," he said.

Although the full game between the two men is not shown in the Instagram clip, an Instagram photo

later posted by official White House photographer Pete Souza

showed that Obama came out the victor.

The photo showed Obama raising both fists in the air as Curry buried his head in his hands.

"Two super competitors: POTUS and @stephencurry30," the caption read in part.

The White House took to Twitter to share some outtakes from the shoot.

In the full-length version of the video, an ad calling for men to become mentors, the two engaged in a series of mentor-mentee activities.

Obama helped Curry with his resume – he advised the NBA star to remove the basketball clip art – showed him how to activate a paper mache volcano and even helped Curry perfect his jump shot.

President Obama Teams Up With Steph Curry For ‘My Brother’s Keeper’ PSA

By Tanasia Kenney

[Atlanta Black Star](#), April 18, 2016

In this one-minute video, President Barack Obama teams up with NBA star Steph Curry to push the importance of mentors in young people’s lives.

The president’s mentoring initiative, My Brother’s Keeper, is “a call to action for all Americans to make a difference for young people by becoming a mentor,” according to Mentor.gov. Mentorship is the centerpiece of the initiative, as research has shown the impact of positive outcomes in the lives of those who have been mentored.

In the video, President Obama helps Curry with his resume, beats him in an intense game of Connect Four and even shows him the correct form for a jump shot.

“You don’t need all the time in the world or all the answers to be the mentor someone needs,” a voiceover says. “And you don’t need to be an NBA star or President of the United States to be someone’s hero.”

Barack Obama Takes Steph Curry Under His Wing In New Mentoring Commercial

[New England Sports Network](#), April 18, 2016

President Barack Obama is a huge basketball fan.

So it’s no surprise that the latest video for “My Brother’s Keeper,” an initiative started by the president to help show how impactful a mentor can be for a young person’s development, starred him and Golden State Warriors superstar Stephen Curry.

In the video, Obama helps Curry update his resume and provides tips on how to shoot a basketball. It’s pretty funny.

Curry, of course, was at the White House in February when the Warriors were honored as 2015 NBA champions.

Puerto Rico Markup Unlikely This Week

By Colin Wilhelm

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

The Natural Resources Committee will not mark up its bill to address Puerto Rico’s fiscal crisis this week, according to sources in House Republican leadership.

The committee would have to publish a hearing memo Tuesday in order to hold a markup on Thursday, the last day the House is in session this week. But sources in leadership told POLITICO that won’t happen.

A committee spokesman wouldn’t rule it out though. “We have not ruled out the potential for a markup this week,” he said.

Puerto Rico’s Government Development Bank is expected to default on all or a portion of payments due next month, when it owes \$422 million. The commonwealth’s governor ordered public corporations to place a moratorium on debt payments earlier this month.

The next major payments due from Puerto Rico come due July 1.

A markup delay signals that House leadership and the Treasury Department need more time to sew up enough votes through tweaks to the bill and assurances on its effects.

When asked Friday what direction on the political spectrum the legislation could be pushed to satisfy more members in order to move it through the House, Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop responded, “Both.”

“That’s why I have new respect for leadership around this place. Look, this is too major of an issue to be partisan. And I don’t want to break it down to that. And so far we haven’t been,” said Bishop, who expressed doubt then that a markup could happen this week.

John Bresnahan contributed to this report.

Lindsey Graham To Meet With Garland On Wednesday

By Seung Min Kim

[Politico](#), April 18, 2016

Merrick Garland will meet Wednesday with South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of his Republican critics who nonetheless reversed his initial opposition to sitting down privately with the Supreme Court nominee.

Garland will also meet with Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) on Tuesday, Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) on Wednesday, and Democratic Sens. Bob Menendez of New Jersey and Tim Kaine of Virginia on Thursday. The latest slate of meetings were announced by White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

Graham, who like nearly all other Senate Republicans is opposed to confirming Garland before November, has been one of more than a dozen GOP senators willing to meet with the nominee. That was a role reversal from Graham’s initial position when Garland’s announcement in mid-March.

Yet there is little indication that Garland’s meet-and-greets are going anywhere beyond headlines and Democratic talking points. Of the Republican senators who have met with

Garland, none have reversed their position on proceeding with his nomination this year.

If statements from Graham's spokesman are any indication, the South Carolina senator won't be joining the two moderate GOP senators who have called for hearings this year.

"Senator Graham remains opposed to moving forward with the Garland nomination," Kevin Bishop said when Graham announced he would meet with Garland. "He continues to believe the next president should pick the next nominee for the Supreme Court."

When A Senator Passes Judgment On A Chief Justice

By Adam Liptak

[New York Times](#), April 18, 2016

WASHINGTON — The other day, Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, decided to lecture Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.

Senate Republicans, Mr. Grassley said, were not to blame for the partisan deadlock over President Obama's Supreme Court nominee. The real culprits? The chief justice and his colleagues.

Mr. Grassley's tongue-lashing, delivered on the Senate floor, was in response to an analysis in this column last month of the chief justice's stance as Senate Republicans refuse to consider the nomination. Chief Justice Roberts has said, for instance, that partisan confirmation hearings feed a false public perception that justices cast their votes "as Democrats and Republicans," rather than as neutral arbiters of the law.

Mr. Grassley offered a different take.

"The chief justice has it exactly backwards," he said. "The confirmation process doesn't make the justices appear political. The confirmation process has gotten political precisely because the court has drifted from the constitutional text and rendered decisions based instead on policy preferences."

"Physician, heal thyself," Mr. Grassley told the chief justice.

Mr. Grassley did not list the decisions that troubled him. But he did say that only two members of the court, presumably Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel A. Alito Jr., "stick to the constitutional text and vote in a consistently conservative way."

Mr. Grassley's logic, if that is the right word, was that conservative decisions are apolitical but that liberal ones are partisan.

As for Chief Justice Roberts, Mr. Grassley said, "a number of his votes have reflected political considerations, not legal ones." Again, the senator did not say which votes he

was talking about, but they probably included ones rejecting challenges to the Affordable Care Act.

Chief Justice Roberts has said that the president's two previous nominees, Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, were "extremely well qualified for the court." Yet they were confirmed almost strictly along party lines, he said in remarks in Boston 10 days before Justice Antonin Scalia died on Feb. 13.

"That doesn't make any sense," Chief Justice Roberts said. "That suggests to me that the process is being used for something other than ensuring the qualifications of the nominees."

There is truth on both sides, said Lee Epstein, a law professor and political scientist at Washington University in St. Louis.

"I think Grassley may be right," she said, "to blame the court for the increasing role of ideology, as opposed to qualifications and other factors, in Senate confirmation proceedings." She added that politics had played a significant role in Supreme Court decisions since at least the 1950s.

"But Chief Justice Roberts is also right," Professor Epstein said. "Political science research shows that Americans are less likely to support the court when it is portrayed as a political body — as it is during confirmation proceedings — and not a legal body."

Chief Justice Roberts has said nothing in public about the confirmation process since Justice Scalia died. He has been silent on the nomination of Judge Merrick B. Garland. Mr. Grassley's remarks, made on April 5, seemed calculated to make sure that Chief Justice Roberts stays quiet notwithstanding exhortations from constitutional scholars that he speak up.

"That's a political temptation that the chief justice should resist," Mr. Grassley said.

But there is precedent for measured intervention by a chief justice in a clash over the nature and future of the Supreme Court. Consider another chief justice's response to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's court-packing plan.

In 1937, unhappy with Supreme Court decisions striking down New Deal programs, Roosevelt announced a plan to add justices, saying the current ones were overworked.

The plan was defeated after a letter from Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes to the Senate rebutted Roosevelt's charges in mild language backed by detailed figures.

"The present number of justices," Chief Justice Hughes wrote, "is thought to be large enough so far as the prompt, adequate and efficient conduct of the work of the court is concerned."

Chief Justice Roberts may also have views about whether the present number of justices on his court — eight — is adequate. He certainly admires Chief Justice Hughes, as he made plain in remarks in November at New York University's law school.

"One of the greatest crises facing the Supreme Court since Marbury v. Madison was F.D.R.'s court-packing plan," Chief Justice Roberts said, "and it fell to Hughes to guide a very unpopular Supreme Court through that high-noon showdown against America's most popular president since George Washington."

"There are things to learn from it," Chief Justice Roberts said.

James F. Simon, the author of "F.D.R. and Chief Justice Hughes," said he saw parallels between the two historical moments.

"I think Hughes would have been frustrated and annoyed by the present Senate Republicans' vow to ignore their constitutional obligation to consider Garland's nomination," Mr. Simon said. "I suspect that Roberts shares those feelings. Both Hughes and Roberts put great value in protecting the court's integrity."

The key difference, Mr. Simon said, is that senators had asked for Chief Justice Hughes's views.

"Should the Senate Judiciary Committee make a similar request to Roberts, I think he would probably respond, giving a carefully worded nudge to the committee to consider Garland," Mr. Simon said. "But I don't see Grassley reaching out to the chief justice."

How The U.S. Tax System Disadvantages Racial Minorities

By Christopher Faricy

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

As Americans rush to file their taxes by today's deadline, many of them will take advantage of the tax breaks afforded them by the U.S. government. The government allows us to reduce our tax burden by taking deductions for things such as home mortgage interest and individual retirement accounts.

But these benefits won't help all Americans. These benefits may have value — such as encouraging Americans to save and invest — but those benefits disproportionately help whites and provide less to people of color.

Racial disparities in tax treatment begin at home. For most homeowners, their home is far and away their biggest and most important financial asset. However, racial minorities are less likely to own a home, and, if they do, tend to own one of lower value.

In 2012, three-fourths of white families owned a home, compared to less than half of blacks and Hispanics. The median home value among white homeowners is \$45,000 more than that among black homeowners.

These racial differences in home ownership are due in part to past federal policies that codified real estate discrimination. The National Housing Act of 1934, for

example, openly denied federal backing for home loans to black families while helping low-income whites.

Although legal housing discrimination was outlawed in 1968, discriminatory lending practices still exist today. Racial minorities were much more affected by subprime loans during the housing crisis.

The federal government's spending patterns reinforce, rather than combat, the racial housing divide. In 2015, more than twice as much was spent on the home mortgage interest and property tax deductions than was allocated to Department of Housing and Urban Development, whose major programs assist low-income homeowners. Moreover, there are no federal tax breaks for renters, who are disproportionately black and Latino.

Racial inequalities in tax benefits also extend into the workplace. In the United States, a worker's economic security depends a great deal on access to employer-provided social insurance. The two largest tax breaks are for employer-based health-care insurance and pension plans. These programs cost the federal government over \$300 billion dollars in 2015.

Both programs disproportionately benefit whites. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 71 percent of whites were covered under an employer-based health-care plan, compared to only 47 percent of black workers and 39 percent of Latino workers. The modal worker who receives an employment-provided pension is a white male earning a higher-than-average income in a large corporation. White workers also receive larger tax subsidies since they earn more (and therefore have higher marginal rates) than minority workers, on average.

Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racial and ethnic job discrimination was legal and widely practiced in the United States. Studies show that to this day persistent job discrimination is partially responsible for racial differences in unemployment levels, full-time employment and total salary. Latino families may also face additional barriers due to immigration laws that restrict their rights in the workplace.

Of course, the tax code also contains provisions intended to benefit lower-income people. One is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The EITC encourages work by offsetting federal taxes and offering tax refunds for families that earn between \$40,000 and \$53,000. The EITC is credited with helping lift more than 6 million people above the poverty line.

But even among the EITC-eligible population, nearly half are white. Lower-income people with only high school degrees — who are disproportionately non-white — are less likely to know if they are eligible for the program.

These racial discrepancies in tax breaks add up. In 2011, white households reported a median wealth 16 times higher than the median wealth of black households. Federal policy has helped create this gap.

To be sure, these tax breaks may serve noble goals. Many citizens and policymakers consider promoting home ownership and helping people with their retirement nest eggs as good goals for government. But the reality is that these federal programs aren't building nest eggs for everyone. These programs are amplifying racial discrepancies and discrimination.

Christopher Faricy is assistant professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University and the author of "Welfare for the Wealthy."

The Final Toll Of Taxes: 6.1 Billion Hours Of Preparation Time, \$234 Billion In Compliance Costs

By Jennifer Harper

[Washington Times](#), April 18, 2016

Here's the hidden toll of federal taxes: 6.1 billion hours of preparation time and \$234 billion in compliance costs. So says a National Taxpayers Union Foundation study of tax complexity in the U.S. released Tuesday, as the nation's final tax deadline looms.

Taxpayers spent an average of 6.1 billion hours in complying with current individual and corporate tax filing requirements, said Demian Brady, director of the nonpartisan research and policy group.

"Between the value of this time, and the money Americans shelled out on supplies, overhead, software, and tax preparation fees, we estimate that the federal tax system imposes over \$234 billion in compliance costs alone. And billions more hours of time burdens, along with higher costs, may soon be on the way," warned Mr. Brady.

The solutions for these problems are not rocket science. The organization recommends some common sense.

"A fair and sound tax system should be based on five basic principles: simplicity, transparency, predictability, responsiveness and efficiency. Our findings show that the current Tax Code gets failing grades on these points, and taxpayers suffer the consequences throughout the year, not just on Tax Day," noted Mr. Brady.

Despite a culture that offers software and smartphones to make many chores easier, complying with federal tax laws continues to be a "massive drain" on time, energy and finances, noted Pete Sepp, president of the group.

"It doesn't have to be this way," he said. "For the sake of our economy at home, our competitiveness abroad, and our rights as citizens wherever we choose to live, Congress and the president must begin simplifying the tax system now."

U.S. Comes Up Short On Corporate Transparency

By Celestine Bohlen

[New York Times](#), April 19, 2016

PARIS — Journalists have done their job, again, with another enormous leak of documents outing a global list of rich and powerful people who hid their wealth in offshore companies.

This time, prompted by the Panama Papers, several European governments have followed up with new measures intended to rip away the veil of secrecy that is costing them billions of dollars in tax revenues.

"Populist outrage doesn't by itself collect a single extra pound or dollar in tax or put a single criminal in jail," said George Osborne, the chancellor of the Exchequer in Britain, at a news conference on Thursday in Washington.

To that end, the biggest economies in the European Union — Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain — announced a plan to automatically share information about the true, or "beneficial," owners of shell companies and overseas trusts.

This is good news for the global campaign to expose the ill-gotten gains of the corrupt and the secretly held wealth of tax evaders who benefit from a system that rewards anonymity.

But there is one major player that is coming up short, and that is the United States, which in 2015 ranked third, behind Switzerland and Hong Kong, in a financial secrecy index published by the Tax Justice Network, a nonprofit organization based in Washington.

The Obama administration has recently taken steps to require banks to check the identities of clients setting up companies and to track the ownership of expensive real estate.

Resistance to greater corporate transparency is still strong at the state level, however, where companies and corporations are registered.

Attention has focused on Delaware, Wyoming and Nevada, which aggressively market tax advantages for offshore companies. But in fact, full disclosure of ownership is not required in any of the 50 states.

This has created an enormous black hole not only for tax inspectors but also for law enforcement officials who "can't follow the money," said Tom Cardamone, managing director of Global Financial Integrity, a research and advocacy group based in Washington. "What we have in place is compete secrecy, and it is secrecy that is the problem," he said.

A bipartisan bill to make the states require disclosure of ownership is now before Congress, but it has stalled.

Opposition comes from the American Bar Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and a less-known but powerful lobby, the National Association of Secretaries of State. That final group fears a loss of revenue for state budgets if more transparency is required, said Robert Palmer,

campaign director at Global Witness, an anticorruption organization.

"Passing legislation in the U.S. is challenging," he said.

Failure to respond to the worldwide clamor for financial accountability looks hypocritical from afar, considering the United States' aggressive extraterritorial pursuit of foreign companies that violate its Foreign Corrupt Practices law and its demands that foreign banks provide information about accounts held by American citizens.

"Though the U.S. has been a pioneer in defending itself from foreign secrecy jurisdictions it provides little information in return to other countries, making it a formidable, harmful and irresponsible secrecy jurisdiction," according to a Tax Justice Network report.

Though legislation in the United States has faltered, other countries began moving ahead with the creation of registries of corporate beneficial owners even before the Panama Papers came to light. Such a registry will be available to the public in Britain on June 30, while national registries required by the European Union will be ready by 2017, although access to their information will be more restricted.

Pressure is now growing on Britain to force its overseas territories — like the British Virgin Islands, which is home, on paper, to more than half of the companies revealed by the Panama leak — to follow suit, a subject sure to dominate an anticorruption summit meeting in London next month.

Transparency advocates hope similar pressure will build in the United States to shine a light on what Mr. Osborne called "those hiding spaces, those dark corners of the global financial system" right in its own backyard.

As Mr. Palmer says, "I don't think we should have to rely on journalists." Continue reading the main story

Oil Slips After Output Deal Fails

By Georgi Kantchev And Nicole Friedman
[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Rally By Energy Shares Helps Dow Top 18,000

[Associated Press](#), April 19, 2016

Major U.S. stocks indexes closed higher, led by a recovery in the energy sector.

The market started lower on Monday as the price of oil sank, but turned higher in morning trading and stayed higher for the rest of the day. In addition to energy stocks, health care and consumer companies posted big gains.

Hasbro jumped 6 percent after reporting better results than analysts were expecting. The toy maker turned in a solid quarter thanks to strong sales of "Star Wars," Disney Princess and "Frozen" merchandise.

The Dow Jones industrial average gained 106 points, or 0.6 percent, to 18,004, its highest level since July.

The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index added 13 points, or 0.7 percent, to 2,094. The Nasdaq composite climbed 21 points, or 0.4 percent, to 4,960.

NO DEAL The main focus in markets was the failure of the talks in Doha, Qatar, to reach a consensus on freezing production to support prices. Saudi Arabia said it would not back a deal if Iran, which is trying to ramp up output as international sanctions are lifted, was not involved. Already tense relations between the two countries deteriorated in recent months over issues including the wars in Syria and Yemen, in which they have backed opposing sides.

THE QUOTE Word of the failed talks initially pulled oil prices lower, weighing on stocks. But investors decided that expectations for a deal on oil production had been very modest to begin with, said Eric Wiegand, senior portfolio manager at U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

"The Saudis, back in January, had continued to point to June as being the OPEC meeting that they were really focused on," Mr. Wiegand said. "Perhaps the expectations for something before June were misplaced."

ENERGY U.S. crude fell 58 cents, or 1.4 percent, to close at \$39.78 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, the international benchmark, lost 19 cents, or 0.4 percent, to close at \$42.91 a barrel in London. Earlier, both prices had been even lower, with New York crude down 7 percent at one point.

In other energy trading, wholesale gasoline fell about 2 cents to \$1.44 a gallon. Heating oil was little changed at \$1.24 a gallon. Natural gas rose 38 cents, or 2 percent, to \$1.94 per 1,000 cubic feet.

PUMPED UP Energy companies were rising again after a sell-off earlier in the day. Shares of Hess rose 4.4 percent, while Marathon Oil climbed 2.9 percent. Baker Hughes gained 4 percent.

CHILD'S PLAY Shares of the toymaker Hasbro jumped more than 5 percent after the company reported better results than analysts were expecting. The toy company benefited from strong sales of "Star Wars," "Frozen" and Disney princess products.

BIG PHARMA Several pharmaceutical companies were trading higher. Endo International stock rose 7.5 percent. Shares of Regeneron Pharmaceuticals climbed 3.9 percent.

STREAM THIS Amazon stock rose 1 percent after the company introduced a stand-alone video streaming service available to non-Amazon Prime subscribers.

RATTLED Shares of Taser, which makes electrical weapons and body cameras, were down about 3.4 percent after news that Los Angeles would delay a plan to put body cameras on almost all of its police officers.

EUROPEAN MARKETS In Germany, the DAX was up 0.68 percent and in France, the CAC 40 rose 0.26 percent. The FTSE 100 was up 0.15 percent in Britain.

ASIAN MARKETS The Nikkei 225 declined 3.4 percent in Japan, while in Hong Kong, the Hang Seng lost 0.7 percent. The Shanghai composite index shed 1.4 percent in China. The Kospi declined 0.3 percent in South Korea. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.4 percent. Taiwan's benchmark also fell while shares in Southeast Asia were mixed.

CURRENCIES AND BONDS Bond prices fell. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 1.77 percent from 1.75 late Friday. In currency markets, the dollar slipped to 108.77 yen from 108.70 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1315 from \$1.1288.

METALS Precious and industrial metals futures ended narrowly mixed. Gold edged up 40 cents to \$1,235 an ounce, silver slipped six cents to \$16.25 an ounce and copper edged up a penny to \$2.16 a pound. Continue reading the main story

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Dow Industrials Top 18000 For First Time Since July

Energy stocks rise the most in the S&P 500, erasing earlier losses

By Riva Gold And Corrie Driebusch
[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Lawmaker Kills Tennessee's Transgender Bathroom Bill

By Joel Ebert
[USA Today](#), April 18, 2016

NASHVILLE — The House sponsor of a controversial bill that would require students in public K-12 and higher education institutions to use the restroom that corresponds with their sex at birth is delaying action on the bill until next year.

Rep. Susan Lynn, R-Mt. Juliet, told The Tennessean on Monday that she plans on effectively killing her own bill so she can study the issue further.

"I have learned that our school districts are largely following what the bill says," she said. "I am still absolutely 100 percent in support of maintaining the privacy of all students. But I'm going to roll the bill over until next year so we can work on those issues."

The announcement comes as competing groups descended on the State Capitol on Monday to continue the

battle over the bill, while a panel of senators delayed taking action on the controversial legislation.

On Monday, about 30 pastors from the conservative Tennessee Pastors Network joined the head of the Family Action Council of Tennessee at the Capitol to show support for the controversial bill.

Around the same time, two transgender high school students — Henry Seaton and Jennifer Guenst — headed to Gov. Bill Haslam's office to deliver more than 67,000 signatures from Tennesseans, including nearly 6,000 people from who identified as clergy or people of faith, who are opposed to the measure.

Proponents, including the Alliance for Defending Freedom and the Family Action Council of Tennessee, as well as the bill's sponsors — Lynn, and Sen. Mike Bell, R-Riceville — say the measure is necessary to protect the privacy of students.

Opponents argue the bill is discriminatory in nature while also pointing to the legislation's fiscal note and a recently released opinion from Attorney General Herbert Slatery both of which suggest the state could be jeopardy of losing more than \$1.2 billion in Title IX funding.

In advance of the Senate finance meeting, the group of pastors stood behind FACT President David Fowler, a former Republican state senator, at a Legislative Plaza news conference in which he downplayed the potential loss of convention business and federal education funding and corporate opposition to the bill.

"Today we call upon our legislators and governor to make that same kind of principled stand relative to the protection of the young people who attend our public schools and colleges when it comes to intimate settings like bathrooms, locker rooms and showers," Fowler said, while attempting to differentiate between the Tennessee bill and a broader North Carolina law that has attracted national attention and which applies to restrooms at public facilities.

"Ours only applies to the bathrooms and locker rooms in our public schools and colleges that may be used by young people," he said.

As Fowler and the pastors led their event, Seaton and Guenst, who have both spoken against the measure in front of Senate and House committees, were joined by representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee, the Tennessee Equality Project, the Tennessee Transgender Political Coalition, and the Human Rights Campaign, all of which have been highly critical of the proposed legislation.

"I'm a boy — I live my life as a boy, my friends know me as a boy, my parents accept me as a boy. I shouldn't have to use the teacher's bathroom because some politicians feel uncomfortable with who I am," Seaton said in a statement, adding that the legislation would "legalize bullying" and "stigmatize and humiliate" transgender students.

"That's not what laws should do," he said. "Personally, I think our elected officials should spend their time making sure that every student can be safe and feel welcome."

Guenst said the current system, which allows schools to offer accommodations to students on a case-by-case basis, is working.

"I have been a public school student for two years and haven't had any issues using the same restroom as other students – it's this bill that would create a lot of problems for me and my friends," she said. "It means a lot to me to be carrying this message of opposition from thousands of people to lawmakers."

In recent weeks, opposition to the legislation has continued to mount. Last week, executives from 60 businesses, including Cigna, Hilton Hotels, Dow Chemical Co. and Alcoa Inc., signed a letter that was delivered to the Republican leaders of both chambers expressing their concerns about the bill that has garnered national attention.

The letter was the latest warning against the legislation. In addition to company executives, elected officials, musicians and businesses, including Nashville Mayor Megan Barry, Viacom and Miley Cyrus, have also criticized the measure.

The debate over bathrooms comes as the legislature began what is expected to be its final days of the 2016 session, which has featured a variety of "culture war" issues.

During the House floor's Monday evening calendar, the East Tennessee sponsor of a bill designating the Bible as the official book of the state will serve formal notice of his attempt to override Gov. Bill Haslam's veto of the bill last Thursday.

The actual override attempt is not expected to occur on the House floor until Wednesday.

In addition, the governor is still trying to decide whether to approve or veto a third controversial bill, giving counselors authority to deny their mental health services to people if serving them would violate their "sincerely held principles."

Rick Locker contributed to this report.

Follow Joel Ebert on Twitter: @joelebert29.

Snyder Says He Will Drink Flint Water For Next 30 Days

By Paul Egan

[Detroit Free Press](#), April 18, 2016

FLINT — Gov. Rick Snyder said he visited a Flint home on Monday and drank filtered water out of the family's kitchen tap, adding that he plans to continue drinking filtered Flint tap water for the next 30 days to show it is safe.

Snyder told reporters in Flint that he filled three, gallon jugs with the water. "I'm going to start drinking that tonight and do it for the next 30 days," Snyder said during a visit to a water distribution station at Greater Holy Temple Church in Flint.

Asked if his family also would be drinking the water, Snyder said his wife "Sue is on board with this." His three children no longer live at home.

Snyder's actions Monday followed developments Friday, when the governor encouraged Flint residents to start using more filtered tap water instead of bottled water and was told by a state official that Flint residents wanted him to start drinking the tap water first.

"I completely understand why some Flint residents are hesitant to drink the water and I am hopeful I can alleviate some of the skepticism and mistrust by putting words to action," Snyder said. "Flint residents made it clear that they would like to see me personally drink the water, so today I am fulfilling that request. And I will continue drinking Flint water at work and at home for at least 30 days."

Snyder spokesman Ari Adler said two media outlets were invited to the home to watch Snyder drink the water. Snyder's office later released photos of him drinking the tap water.

The governor said he won't always be able to drink the Flint tap water when he is travelling, but he plans to drink it when he is at his downtown Ann Arbor home and when he is at work in his office in the Romney Building in Lansing. He said he will get more filtered Flint tap water when the initial three gallons runs out.

But Snyder's comments drew immediate criticism from some Flint residents as a public relations exercise.

"His whole family has to drink it," said Elizabeth Taylor, 73, a Flint retiree who said she doesn't feel the filtered water is safe to drink.

"They have to cook with it and bathe with it."

Taylor also questioned why Snyder didn't give notice he was coming to Flint and expressed skepticism that Snyder will drink the Flint water for the next 30 days.

"He thinks we just trust him because he says so?"

Flint's water became contaminated with lead in April 2014 when the city, while under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager, switched its drinking water source from Lake Huron water treated by the Detroit water system to Flint River water treated at the Flint Water Treatment Plant. Michigan Department of Environmental Quality officials have acknowledged a disastrous mistake when they failed to require the city to add corrosion-control chemicals as part of the treatment process.

The corrosive water caused lead to leach from pipes, joints and fixtures. Although Flint reconnected to Detroit water in October, after state officials acknowledged the lead-poisoning problem after months of denials, the risk remains because of damage to the water infrastructure system.

Officials also are exploring possible links between the river water and outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease tied to 12 area deaths.

The state and city are now treating the pipes with higher levels of phosphates in an effort to build up a protective coating that will prevent lead from leaching. Having more water flowing in the system would help that process, and that's one reason Snyder and other state officials want Flint residents to start using their taps again.

Officials says the more Flint residents run water through their pipes, the quicker the distribution system will heal. That's one of the reasons Snyder said he encouraged residents Friday to start using more filtered water, instead of bottled water.

Snyder's comments, however, may have spurred fears that the free distribution of bottled water will soon be cut off.

William Harris, a team support leader at the water distribution station Snyder visited Monday, said some residents are stockpiling so much water that the foundations of their homes are shifting. He said residents are able take as much free bottled water as they want when they visit water distribution stations in Flint. There are no plans to stop distributing the water and no need to stockpile, Harris said.

Snyder agreed.

"We have no plans to end the water distribution system," he said. "It's basically indefinite at this point. We're doing this based on science."

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Snyder To Drink Filtered Flint Water For Month

[Detroit News](#), April 18, 2016

Flint — Bottoms up for Gov. Rick Snyder.

The governor announced Monday for the next 30 days, he'll drink filtered tap water drawn from the city.

"One of the things I thought would be helpful, because people asked me about drinking the water, that's why I said I want to go out and drink filtered Flint water," Snyder said.

The governor said he and his wife, first lady Sue Snyder, will use the water at home and work for drinking and cooking for a month, and the governor will resupply during frequent visits to the city.

Snyder was challenged by a reporter last week to try Flint's filtered water, which many residents don't trust themselves.

He responded: "Yeah. I mean if someone ... I'm happy to look into that."

Snyder added Monday that his wife "is on board."

Snyder earlier filled up on 3 gallons of water while visiting the home of Flint residents Cheryl Hill and Todd Canty that is part of the state's sentinel site testing program, which has been monitoring the changes in lead levels at hundreds of homes in the city.

The home has a lead service line and, according to the governor's office, has tested higher than the federal action level for lead of 15 part per billion without filtration.

Filters are rated to handle lead levels under 150 parts per billion.

Snyder said he didn't know the home's most recent reading but that the residence did have one in the "200 (ppb) some range."

Asked why he chose now to drink the water in Flint, the governor said: "I didn't really wait. Again this is where we're encouraging people to make the transition after the science meeting."

Earlier this month, state, federal and independent water quality experts confirmed the water in Flint "is safe to drink as long as a filter is in place," according to the governor's office.

Snyder added that "we went around asked people if they would like to be a part of this, and we had a house that wanted to."

Bishop Roger Jones of Greater Holy Temple ministries said it's "very gratifying" to have the governor visit the city. Asked whether Snyder is taking the water crisis seriously enough, Jones said: "I think so now."

"I believe now that he's working to bring this to a resolution," Jones said.

Flint, an impoverished city of nearly 100,000 residents, is under a three-month-long state of emergency.

Residents have been urged to use faucet filters or bottled water until damaged pipes are effectively recoated with anti-corrosion chemicals that were not used for 18 months after Flint temporarily switched water sources to the local river in 2014 while under state financial management.

Michigan officials are collecting data on lead contamination from roughly 600 total sites in the city. The scattered sites are helping to pinpoint Flint's trouble areas.

The latest rounds of testing results from Flint's drinking water have shown improvement for the beleaguered city. But state officials still have urged continued caution moving ahead.

Particulate lead — small scales that are flaking off damaged underground pipes — is an ongoing concern and the system remains "unstable," according to the the Environmental Protection Agency.

William Harris, 29, a team support leader at the Greater Holy Temple water distribution center, said Monday he has been getting reports that people are stockpiling bottled water over concerns about filtered water.

"People are afraid. People honestly believe the water availability will end and think that all of this water is going to go away soon," he said.

Harris said he has heard reports of packs of water bottles falling through floors and foundation problems "because people are stacking pallets of water at home."

Snyder responded to those fears Monday.

"Anyone living through this has concerns and issues," Snyder said. "We're encouraging people not to stockpile. If they're taking a few extra cases, I appreciate that, but we're showing the filters are working."

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Michigan Residents Are Pretty Unhappy With Rick Snyder

[Huffington Post](#), April 18, 2016

One-fifth of Michigan residents polled blame Gov. Rick Snyder (R) for the avoidable lead poisoning emergency in the city of Flint, according to a poll released Monday.

Michigan State University's latest State of the State Survey revealed that 57 percent of respondents said Snyder's administration was most responsible for the city's water crisis. That includes the

governor himself, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Darnell Earley, the former emergency manager of Flint who was appointed by Snyder.

Another 13 percent of those polled said various local officials were most responsible for the crisis, and 17 percent blamed "everyone."

The governor's approval rating has reached its lowest point since he took office in 2011.

Flint switched its water source to the Flint River two years ago to cut costs, but failed to implement corrosion control measures. Lead from aging pipes leached into the system, and a pediatrician documented elevated blood lead levels in the city's children

. Even very small amounts of lead can have long-term neurological effects and health problems.

Residents had complained about smelly, discolored water coming out of their taps since 2014, and experts began raising concerns last year. Snyder declared a state of emergency in January, but has been criticized

for his slow response.

The question of who's at fault for the contaminated water

has been widely debated. Snyder has accepted responsibility and directed resources toward improving water quality in Flint, but has also blamed his own staff

and federal regulators.

According to the MSU survey, Snyder's approval rating dropped sharply after the extent of the crisis came to light. Though 41.8 percent of Michigan residents polled called his performance "excellent" or "good" in the fall, only one-quarter felt that way in the most recent poll. Meanwhile, the portion of respondents rating the governor's performance as "poor" climbed from 20.9 to 44.1 percent.

Michigan State University State of the State Survey MSU's latest State of the State Survey found that Gov. Rick Snyder's approval rating is at its lowest level since he took

office, though it has not reached the lowest approval rating of his predecessor, former Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D).

MSU interviewed 995 people between Jan. 25 and March 26 for the survey, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.11 percent. (The previous edition of the routine survey took place from Oct. 25 to Dec. 23, 2015.)

The survey takes two months to complete because of the length of the questionnaires, number of interviewers and relatively large sample size, survey director Charles Ballard explained in an email. Ballard is an economics professor at MSU.

The Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, part of MSU's College of Social Science, conducts the survey several times a year. This time, it coincided with growing national focus on Flint.

"If we combine the 'excellent' and 'good' to get a total-favorable category, we found that Gov. Snyder had 29 percent positive in January, 28 percent positive in February and then dropped to 16 percent positive in March," Ballard said. "My interpretation is that the steady drip of news about the Flint crisis probably had a cumulative adverse effect for Gov. Snyder."

Flint's struggles have brought attention to crumbling infrastructure and the scourge of lead pipes

in cities nationwide. The city of Flint is spending millions on upgrades

, and the MSU survey offers some evidence of public support.

Since 1995, the survey has asked residents what they consider to be the most important problem facing Michigan's governor and legislature. Offered four different choices, only a tiny fraction of respondents said "infrastructure of cities" — until the latest survey, when the number jumped to 32.5 percent. Respondents ranked the issue as a bigger problem than all the other options, including jobs and the economy.

Michigan State University State of the State Survey Michigan State University's State of the State Survey, released in April 2016, found that the state's residents are more concerned about city infrastructure than ever before.

Despite these concerns, a slightly larger portion of respondents said they could trust state government "nearly all or most of the time" since the fall survey. There was also a 5-point increase in the number of residents who said they trusted state government "seldom" or "almost never."

Suggest a correction

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High Lead Levels Found At Some Grosse Pointe Schools

By Candice Williams

[Detroit News](#), April 18, 2016

Elevated lead and copper levels were found in six classroom buildings in Grosse Pointe Public Schools, the district said Monday.

In an email to parents, Superintendent Gary Niehaus said 10 of 130 samples taken at the district's 15 schools had levels that exceeded federal standards.

Lead levels at or above 15 parts per billion were found in pre-flush samples taken at Defer, Kerby and Maire elementary schools, the Barnes Early Childhood Center and at Brownell and Pierce Elementary schools.

Copper levels at or above 1,300 parts per billion were found in pre-flush samples at Barnes and Pierce.

A pair of samples — one drawn immediately from taps and a second drawn after two minutes of flushing — were taken at “representative drinking foundations and sinks at each building,” the district said.

Two drinking fountains — one at Defer and one at Pierce — showed excess levels of lead after being flushed, the district said.

Niehaus said in the email that the district has disconnected all of the fountains where tests showed excessive lead or copper levels and delivered bottled water to Defer and Pierce schools.

“This weekend, Grosse Pointe Public School System received the results of its voluntary water screening sampling and analysis for lead and copper conducted March 29-31, 2016,” Niehaus said in the email. “Like many school districts across the state after the Flint crisis, GPPSS wanted to be proactive in protecting its students and staff. Our district was among the first to begin voluntary testing.”

Lead and copper exposure can lead to health problems ranging from stomach pain to brain damage, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The test results from the Grosse Pointe schools come days after Detroit Public Schools announced that excessive lead and copper levels had been found in 19 of 62 schools tested in late March.

The tests in DPS showed 15 schools had tested positive for high lead levels and eight had excessive copper levels.

Democratic Lawmakers Dismiss Comptroller's Get-In-Line Paycheck Move

By Celeste Bott

[Chicago Tribune](#), April 18, 2016

A day after the Republican state comptroller announced paychecks would be delayed due to the budget impasse, Democratic lawmakers dismissed it as a political ploy and pondered how they'll make ends meet.

Comptroller Leslie Geissler Munger contends there isn't enough money to cover the \$1.3 million a month it costs to pay lawmakers and statewide officials. And so her office will

continue to process lawmakers' paychecks, but officials won't get the money right away because the payments will be added to the state's multibillion backlog of unpaid bills.

That's the same pile where invoices from hundreds of service providers that do everything from care for the elderly to supply state prisons have languished for months awaiting payment.

Munger, who faces a special election in November to keep the post she was appointed to by Gov. Bruce Rauner, said she hopes forcing lawmakers to share in that pain could spur a resolution to the impasse. The state has operated without a budget since last July as Rauner and Democrats who control the legislature remain locked in an ideological battle over the governor's pro-business, anti-union agenda he's tied to a larger budget deal.

On Monday, a top deputy of House Speaker Michael Madigan said he expects little to change, blasting the move as a way for Munger to get publicity. Munger faces Democrat Susana Mendoza, the Chicago city clerk backed by Madigan.

“I don't think anybody's fazed by it. What we have to do, we will do,” said Democratic Rep. Lou Lang of Skokie, an attorney. “She has a difficult re-election ahead of her and she's looking for every chance she can get to get her name in the paper. It's what we all do in the political world, but it should just be called what it is.”

Comptroller says she will delay paychecks to lawmakers amid budget impasse

The 177 legislators receive a base salary of \$67,836, but most earn thousands more in stipends by holding Democratic or Republican leadership positions, or acting as chairman of various committees.

Serving as a lawmaker is considered a part-time job, but some are better positioned to go without pay than others. Many of the legislative leaders have lucrative law practices or financially successful spouses, while for some rank-and-file, a state paycheck is their only income. Given the political dynamics of the issue, few were willing to publicly complain Monday.

“I'll do what the families in my districts have done over the last year. Lean on the credit cards, lean on friends and family,” said Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago. “My girlfriend will have to take me out to dinner every once and a while. It'll be tough, but it's tough all over.”

Rep. Jaime Andrade, D-Chicago, said his legislative salary is his family's only source of income.

“At least I know I might get a check down the line, but I have residents who know they will never get a check,” Andrade said. “For me, this might be a difficult situation, but for others it's worse.”

Comptroller says Illinois lawmakers will have to get in a long line to get paid

Illinois Comptroller Leslie Geissler Munger plans to delay monthly paychecks for lawmakers and statewide

officials, saying there isn't enough money to pay the state's bills and that other services should come first.

The comptroller's office will still process the paychecks, estimated at \$1.3 million... (Kim Geiger and Monique Garcia)

Democratic Sen. Heather Steans of Chicago said "anything that puts pressure on is a good idea. I think it was probably a good idea 10 months ago too."

Rep. David McSweeney, a Republican from Barrington Hills who introduced legislation to freeze lawmaker pay during the impasse, supported Munger's move.

"We should be working on a budget around the clock now. Every day that goes by, the budget deficit's increasing. Social services are getting decimated. And our credit rating is getting downgraded. We need to do our jobs," he said. "It's not a question of motivation, it's the right thing to do. We shouldn't get paid until we get a budget. We should get in line."

Munger said Monday that she had not heard complaints from lawmakers since she announced the decision.

"I think a lot of people think it's a good idea," Munger said. "Maybe it should have been done sooner. But honestly, I had to make sure that I could do this legally."

Hardly Anyone Trusts The Media Anymore

By Nick Visser

[Huffington Post](#), April 18, 2016

Only 6 percent of people say they have a great deal of confidence in the press, about the same level of trust Americans have in Congress, according to a new survey released on Sunday.

The study mirrors past reports that found the public's trust in mass media has reached historic lows, according to data gathered by the Media Insight Project, a partnership between The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute. The report found faith in the press was just slightly higher than the 4 percent of people who said they trusted Congress.

Alongside the dire findings, the report found respondents valued accuracy above all else, with 85 percent of people saying it was extremely important to avoid errors in coverage. Timeliness and clarity followed closely, with 76 percent and 72 percent respectively saying those attributes were imperative among media sources.

"Over the last two decades, research shows the public has grown increasingly skeptical of the news industry," the report reads. "The study reaffirms that consumers do value broad concepts of trust like fairness, balance, accuracy, and completeness. At least two-thirds of Americans cite each of these four general principles as very important to them."

Ironically, despite news organizations' ongoing battle to master social media platforms, that trust doesn't extend to the likes of Facebook and Twitter. The report found just 12 percent of people trust media delivered via Mark

Zuckerberg's evolving juggernaut, even though 87 percent of people get news from Facebook.

LinkedIn, in fact, garnered the most faith over competitors like Instagram and Reddit, with 23 percent of people finding links from the site trustworthy.

The Associated Press notes the news media has been embattled by a series of high profile missteps, particularly Rolling Stone's retracted report about a rape at a fraternity at the University of Virginia.

The media has also faced a barrage of criticism during the ongoing presidential campaign season, particularly from Republican leaders including Donald Trump and Ted Cruz. Trump has launched repeated attacks against Fox News' Megyn Kelly (culminating in a reported "clearing of the air" last week), while Cruz has lambasted the press for being too hostile.

You can take a look at the full results here.

Obama's Ed-Run

The Administration tries to dictate state and local school funding.

[Wall Street Journal](#), April 18, 2016

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

Following An Officer's Death, Maryland Finally Cracks Down On Drunken Driving

[Washington Post](#), April 18, 2016

IT TOOK a perfect storm of good timing, tragic events and tenacious advocates, but finally Maryland has started to overcome the retrograde forces in Annapolis that for years blocked no-nonsense laws to control drunken driving.

In the closing hours of this year's legislative session, those forces combined to impel, and shame, Maryland legislators into passing a bill that significantly expands the use of ignition interlocks, dashboard devices that prevent vehicles from starting if the driver has had too much to drink.

The legislation was spurred by the death of a young police officer in Montgomery County, Noah Leotta, who died after being struck by a suspected repeat drunk driver on Rockville Pike last December while on patrol to catch just such offenders. Mr. Leotta was one of 50 Montgomery County officers to be struck by a drunk driver in the past three years. Many people, including Mr. Leotta's parents, worked hard to ensure his death would not be in vain.

The resulting legislation, known as "Noah's Law," was similar to previous bills that had been buried in the Judiciary Committee of the House of Delegates, where harrumphing lawmakers seemed concerned with protecting drunk drivers more than their victims. This year, with anti-drunken-driving advocates dedicated to the memory of Mr. Leotta, the dynamic in Annapolis changed. No longer could legislators mumble about the unfairness of imposing dashboard

Breathalyzers on offenders who were just “one sip over the line.”

The measure toughens existing law considerably. Under current law, ignition interlocks are optional, and easily avoided, for run-of-the-mill drunk drivers. They are imposed mainly on repeat and youthful offenders, or those who are inebriated to the point of incoherence, with a blood alcohol content of 0.015.

Under Noah’s Law, the devices, which have proved highly effective, will be required for drivers who meet the legal definition of drunk, meaning 0.08 or higher. The interlocks, which require the driver to prove his sobriety by blowing into a tube before the car will start, will be imposed for six months upon conviction, or nine months should a driver refuse to take the breath test. The number of devices installed in Marylanders’ cars (at the drivers’ expense), currently around 11,000, could increase substantially.

The public outcry about drunken driving in this country has faded over the past couple of decades, but it was revived in Maryland for Noah’s Law. Joining Mr. Leotta’s parents as eloquent and compelling advocates for tougher laws were activists from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, police officials including Montgomery County Chief J. Thomas Manger, and lawmakers such as Del. Benjamin Kramer (D-Montgomery).

In the House of Delegates, Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) made it clear to the Judiciary Committee chairman, Joseph F. Vallario Jr. (D-Prince George’s), who has routinely blocked such legislation, that the jig was up. At last, lawmakers were ready (or forced) to reckon with the fact that about one-third of the traffic deaths in this country still involve drunk drivers — one sip over the line or not.