

THE EPOCH TIMES

OUR NATION

Trump Says He Will Designate Mexican Cartels as Terrorists

Mexican officials reject designation, ask for cooperation **8**

Members of the Lebaron family watch the burned car where part of the nine murdered members of the family were killed and burned in Bavispe, Mexico, on Nov. 5, 2019.



US Weekly Jobless Claims Drop Sharply; GDP Growth Higher

JACK PHILLIPS

The number of people who applied for unemployment benefits fell sharply in the week before Thanksgiving, according to statistics provided by the Labor Department.

Meanwhile, in a separate report, U.S. economic growth picked up in the third quarter at a higher pace than was initially reported by the Commerce Department.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits fell by 15,000 to a seasonally adjusted 213,000 for the week ending on Nov. 23, the agency said on Nov. 27.

The report was published a day early because of the Thanksgiving holiday on Nov. 28.

The prior week's claims were revised up by 1,000 to around 228,000.

"In the week ending Nov. 23, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 213,000, a decrease of 15,000 from the previous week's revised level. The previous week's level was revised up by 1,000 from 227,000

(Right) Construction workers in New York on Oct. 12, 2019.

(Below) A "Now Hiring" sign hangs on the door of a Staples store in New York on Jan. 4, 2019.



to 228,000. The four-week moving average was 219,750, a decrease of 1,500 from the previous week's revised average. The previous week's average was revised up by 250 from 221,000 to 221,250," the Labor Department stated in its report.

Economists had expected jobless claims to drop to 221,000 from the 227,000 originally reported for the prior week, according to reports.

The Labor Department's report

noted that the "advance number for seasonally adjusted insured unemployment during the week ending November 16 was 1,640,000, a decrease of 57,000 from the previous week's revised level," noting that it is "the lowest level for insured unemployment since Aug. 4, 1973."

On a daily basis, President Donald Trump notes his administration's work to improve the U.S. economy and labor market, making it a centerpiece of his reelection campaign.

On Nov. 25, he retweeted a video that showed the stock market reaching record levels.

3rd-Quarter GDP Growth More Than Expected

U.S. economic growth picked up slightly in the third quarter, rather than slowing as initially reported, and there are signs the downturn in business investment could be drawing to a close.

The economy's prospects were further brightened by other data on Nov. 27, showing that the number of Americans filing claims for unemployment benefits dropped last week after being stuck at a five-month high for two straight weeks.

The reports were released in the wake of data showing an acceleration in housing market activity early in the fourth quarter and a sharp decline in

the goods trade deficit, as well as a solid pace of inventory accumulation by retailers. The improvement in the economic data further diminished the risks of recession in the near term.

The Federal Reserve last month cut interest rates for the third time this year and signaled a pause in the easing cycle that started in July, when it reduced borrowing costs for the first time since 2008.

In the week ending Nov. 23, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 213,000, a decrease of 15,000 from the previous week's revised level.

Report by the Labor Department

Gross domestic product increased at a 2.1 percent annualized rate, the Commerce Department said in its second estimate of third-quarter GDP. That was up from the 1.9 percent pace estimated last month. The economy grew at a 2.0 percent pace in the April-June period.

Reuters contributed to this report.

CATHERINE WEN/NTD



Nick Sandmann from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky stands in front of Native American activist Nathan Phillips while the latter bangs a drum in his face in Washington on Jan. 18, 2019.

Judge Allows Covington Student's Defamation Suit Against NBC to Proceed

MATTHEW VADUM

A defamation lawsuit against NBCUniversal filed by Nicholas Sandmann, a teenager from Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky accused by legacy media of picking a fight with an elderly activist in the nation's capital in January, is being allowed to move forward after a series of legal setbacks.

Sandmann, who claims he was wrongly portrayed as the aggressor, may now proceed with two other defamation lawsuits against The Washington Post and CNN. He's asking for \$275 million in punitive and compensatory damages against NBC for generating a "false narrative" driven by its "anti-Trump agenda."

Sandmann's attorney, Lin Wood, celebrated the court ruling against NBC on Twitter on Nov. 21.

The court finds that the statements that plaintiff 'blocked' Phillips or did not allow him to retreat, if false, meet the test of being libelous per se under the definition quoted above.

William Bertelsman, U.S. district court judge

"As predicted, today Judge Bertelsman entered an order allowing the Nicholas Sandmann case against NBCUniversal to proceed to discovery just as he had earlier ruled with respect to WaPo & CNN cases. Huge, huge win!"

A series of videos posted online in January that showed the young Trump supporter's awkward reaction to having his personal space invaded by a loud activist quickly went viral.

Sandmann was shown in the videos wearing a red pro-Trump "Make America Great Again" baseball cap at the Lincoln Memorial, after attending this year's March for Life.

An elderly Native American man named Nathan Phillips was shown in the videos getting too close for comfort to Sandmann, who at times stared back at the activist and smiled. Sandmann was shown in the videos standing firm without responding, as

Phillips loudly pounded a drum just inches from his face. Phillips told reporters the high school kids were "beasts," and, "It was racism. It was hatred. It was scary."

Sandmann's attorney said the judge's order 'identifies a clear path to liability for the media defendants.'

Sandmann and his cohorts were angrily denounced by pundits on both the left and the right for supposedly showing disrespect to Phillips, even though Sandmann says he intended no such disrespect. Critics say the reporting by media outlets led to the widespread vilification of the high school students across the nation. Sandmann and his classmates even received death threats.

U.S. District Court Judge William Bertelsman ruled the case may proceed on limited grounds after he previously threw out parts of the \$275 million lawsuit against NBC, while permitting discovery on allegations the media outlet defamed the young man by reporting he "blocked" Phillips in the Jan. 18 encounter.

"The court finds that the statements that plaintiff 'blocked' Phillips or did not allow him to retreat, if false, meet the test of being libelous per se under the definition quoted above," Bertelsman wrote in his order.

While Bertelsman also initially tossed Sandmann's \$250 million lawsuit against The Washington Post, last month he permitted an amended complaint dealing with three of the 33 allegedly libelous statements to proceed. All three are related to the allegation that Sandmann blocked Phillips.

Sandmann attorney Todd V. McMurtry was quoted by The Washington Times saying the judge's order "identifies a clear path to liability for the media defendants."

"If we prove Nathan Phillips lied, it is defamation per se," McMurtry said. "Then, all we have to do is prove that the media negligently republished those defamatory statements."

NBC couldn't be immediately reached by The Epoch Times for comment.

KAYA TAITANO VIA REUTERS



DREW ANDERER/GETTY IMAGES

Trump Approval Among Blacks Tops 34 Percent in Emerson Poll

PETR SVAB

Approval of President Donald Trump rose to 34.5 percent among black registered voters in a recent Emerson poll.

The number is notable because only 8 percent of blacks voted for Trump in 2016, according to Cornell University's Roper Center.

The poll of 1,092 registered voters was conducted Nov. 17-20, partly by automated landline calls and partly online. The same poll taken a month earlier showed approval for Trump's presidency at 17.8 percent among blacks.

The number is notable because only 8 percent of blacks voted for Trump in 2016, according to Cornell University's Roper Center.

The pollster warns that results for subsets of voters have a higher margin of error than the 2.9 percentage points the poll has as a whole. For black voters, the margin is 8.3 percent, according to Spencer Kimball, assistant professor at Emerson College who oversees the polling.

But there doesn't seem to be any issue with

the data itself that could explain such a significant increase.

In November, Emerson interviewed 153 black voters, compared with 140 in October. There were slightly more Republicans in the November group (13.1 percent versus 10.2 percent in October). But there were also more Democrats (69.5 percent

vs 64.1 percent).

"There was no change to the methodology," Kimball said in an email to The Epoch Times. "This could be attributed to variance within the subsets ... and be an anomaly, or it could be the start of a trend. ... I have noticed [Trump's] approval with minority voters slightly higher than his 2016 vote to-

als and think he might do better with this vote than he did in 2016."

The poll also showed significantly higher approval among Hispanic voters—38.2 percent in November compared to 26.2 percent the month earlier. Again, there were more Hispanic Republicans interviewed in November (16.8 percent vs 12.9 percent the month before), but not enough to explain the rise in Trump approval.

Overall, the poll showed Trump's approval at 48.3 percent, up from 43.2 percent the month before.

Several other contemporary polls showed much lower Trump approval among blacks in November. The Economist/YouGov had the number at 16 percent among American adults. Morning Consult/Politico reported 18 percent among registered voters. Gallup showed 21 percent approval among non-white adults.

Other polls, however, fell roughly in line with Emerson. Trump had 33 percent approval among non-white adults in the mid-November NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll. A Rasmussen poll indicated 34 percent support among likely black voters.

Poll Issues

While Rasmussen was the most accurate in predicting Trump's 2016 victory, polls proved largely inaccurate that election season.

At least part of the reason is that the polls



Guests at the Young Black Leadership Summit at the White House on Oct. 26, 2018.

ALEX EDELMAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Bloomberg Spends \$34 Million on Campaign Ads in 46 States

ZACHARY STIEBER

Billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who has officially entered the 2020 Democratic primary field, has spent roughly \$34 million across 46 states on advertisements as of Nov. 22, according to data from Advertising Analytics.

"This buy is MASSIVE," Ben Taber, an analyst for the firm, said in an email to Politico.

"I think it's going to be the biggest buy of all time," he added. The amount would top then-President Barack Obama's \$30 million one-week spree in 2012.

The former mayor of New York City "could spend more in one day than other presidential candidates spend in an entire campaign's lifespan," Ferdinand Amandi, a Democratic consultant pollster who worked for Obama's campaigns, told the outlet.

"What makes the Bloomberg campaign budget so amazing is that there is no budget. Everything is attainable. ... We haven't seen a presidential campaign like one that Michael Bloomberg could run."

Earlier this month, the campaign planned a \$100 million advertising campaign; it appears the \$34 million is part of that plan.

One ad showed an image of President Donald Trump's Twitter account and said in all capital letters, "A TWEET SHOULDN'T THREATEN OUR COUNTRY'S SECURITY."

The new ad buys included one in West Palm Beach, Florida, where Trump's Mar-a-Lago club is located, and one in Dallas. The ad, a one-minute long portion taken from Bloomberg's announcement video, includes criticism of Medicare for All, a socialist proposal that's championed by a number of Democratic candidates.

"Everyone without health insurance can get it and everyone who likes theirs keep it," it states. It also says Bloomberg is a "job creator" and a "leader" who can solve problems.

While the buy is large, some said it might not help Bloomberg that much. "TV spending isn't everything," Kevin Cate, a consultant to Democratic



Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg speaks with the media after touring the W.H. Bagshaw Co. during an exploratory trip in Nashua, N.H., on Jan. 29, 2019.

candidate and billionaire Tom Steyer, wrote on Twitter. "Earned media is king in presidential campaigns. I ran a one week @criticalmention report on Elizabeth Warren's TV coverage & it came out to about 3x the monetary value of this [Bloomberg] buy."

Rivals and other Democrats have also criticized the massive purchase, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.).

Bloomberg, 77, has a net worth of \$58 billion and is among the richest people in the world. He has financially supported a number of political causes, including gun control, since leaving office in 2013. He owns Bloomberg LP, which includes Bloomberg News.

Bloomberg officially announced his bid for the presidency on Nov. 24 after testing the waters for weeks.

He is trying to position himself as the best Democratic candidate to beat Trump, an argument that various candidates have made in recent months.

What makes the Bloomberg campaign budget so amazing is that there is no budget. Everything is attainable.

Fernand Amandi, Democratic consultant pollster

"I'm running for president to defeat Donald Trump and rebuild America. We cannot afford four more years of President Trump's reckless and unethical actions. He represents an

existential threat to our country and our values. If he wins another term in office, we may never recover from the damage. The stakes could not be higher. We must win this election. And we must begin rebuilding America," Bloomberg said in a statement.

"I believe my unique set of experiences in business, government, and philanthropy will enable me to win and lead. As a candidate, I'll rally a broad and diverse coalition of Americans to win. And as president, I have the skills to fix what is broken in our great nation. And there is a lot broken."

Recent polls show Bloomberg behind a slew of other candidates, who have a major head start on him. Only 3 percent of respondents at most say that Bloomberg is their first choice for president.

Supreme Court Asked to Uphold Convictions in NJ 'Bridgegate' Case

MATTHEW VADUM

The Trump administration has asked the Supreme Court to sustain the convictions of two former members of then-New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's inner circle. Attorneys for the two claim they were engaged in routine "bare-knuckle" political behavior when they participated in the "Bridgegate" scandal.

Oral arguments before the Supreme Court in the case, cited as Kelly v. U.S., are scheduled for Jan. 14, 2020. The court agreed on June 28 to hear the case on appeal from the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals.

The two former officials are Bridget Kelly, former deputy chief of staff to Christie, a Republican, and William Baroni, the former deputy executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Prosecutors say the plan was devised by

The government's contention is that the duo committed fraud as they conspired to close two of three local access lanes leading to the toll plaza of the frequently congested George Washington Bridge in a political payback scheme.

(Right) Then-New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie in the Assembly chamber at the state house in Trenton, N.J., on Jan. 14, 2014.

(Below) The U.S. Supreme Court on June 25, 2007.



David Wildstein, a Port Authority political appointee and Baroni's de facto chief of staff. Wildstein became a witness for the prosecution.

Christie, a high-profile ally of candidate Donald Trump during the 2016 election, was never charged in connection with Bridgegate and denied knowing about the plan.

The government contends that Kelly and Baroni committed fraud as they conspired to close two of three local access lanes leading to the toll plaza of the frequently congested George Washington Bridge in a political payback scheme.

The George Washington Bridge is a double-decked suspension bridge spanning the Hudson River that connects Fort Lee, New Jersey, and New York City. Run by the Port Authority, it is reportedly the busiest motor vehicle bridge in the world.

Acting U.S. Solicitor General Jeffrey B. Wall filed a 67-page brief on Nov. 22 stating the government's position. Wall's superior, Solicitor General Noel Francisco, is recused in the case.

The plan is said to have unfolded over four days in September 2013 and was designed to inundate Fort Lee with traffic after its Democratic mayor, Mark Sokolich, chose not to endorse Christie's reelection effort.

"Kelly and Baroni lied about a traffic study in order to hijack Port Authority resources to gridlock a town, cause maximal harm to its

residents, and endanger public safety," according to the brief. "That was both outside their authority and repugnant to the goals of safe and efficient transportation."

The two directed Port Authority employees to manufacture a bottleneck at the toll plaza of the bridge to send a message to the mayor, the brief stated.

"By telling those lies, and diverting the agency's resources to serve their own personal ends of inflicting massive four-day gridlock on Fort Lee, Kelly and Baroni committed fraud."

At the end of a federal jury trial in New Jersey in November 2016, Kelly and Baroni were each convicted of multiple counts of fraud-related offenses, as well as conspiracy to violate civil rights and deprivation of civil rights under color of law. The trial judge sentenced Kelly and Baroni to 18 months and 24 months imprisonment, respectively, each to be followed by one year of supervised release.

An appeals court vacated the civil rights convictions and remanded the case to the trial court for resentencing, leading to Kelly receiving 13 months imprisonment and Baroni 18 months, both followed by one year of supervised release.

Lawyers for Kelly and Baroni argued in briefs filed with the Supreme Court that the prosecution unfairly made ordinary political maneuvering seem criminal and that the anti-theft and anti-bribery laws in the case had never been used in political corruption cases. Kelly claimed the lane closures were ordered as part of a routine traffic study.

"The alleged conduct here was petty, insensitive, and ill-advised. But in our system, political abuses of power are addressed politically," they wrote.

Baroni's attorneys referred to Bridgegate as "a case of bare-knuckle New Jersey politics, not graft." If the government could have a public official found guilty of fraudulently depriving a public agency of resources merely for deploying his agency's resources "with a concealed political motive," then the federal government could charge officials for all sorts of ordinary political jockeying, they wrote.

Timeline of Alleged Ukrainian-Democrat Meddling in 2016 Presidential Election

SHARYL ATTKISSON

As we rapidly approach Campaign 2020, Democrats and Republicans have fired up a new debate about which foreign entities tried to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Both sides agree that Russian interests made attempts to meddle in the 2016 campaign. Special counsel Robert Mueller wasn't able to connect any Americans to the alleged scheme, but filed a case against 13 Russians. He charged that they were instructed to write social media posts opposing Clinton and "to support Bernie Sanders and then-candidate Donald Trump." Although it hasn't been widely reported, Mueller also testified there were instances of Russian social media support for Hillary Clinton as well.

But there's widespread disagreement on the role Ukraine may have had in U.S. election interference in 2016.

This past week, Democrats stepped up efforts to dismiss such allegations as "debunked" and a "conspiracy theory." Republicans doubled down, stating that the alleged Ukrainian efforts may not have been a "top-down" operation—as they believe Russia's—but could have been significant all the same and deserve serious investigation.

The Republican heads of two Senate committees have asked the FBI and the Department of Justice for records related to reported collusion between Ukraine and U.S. Democrats to get "dirt" on the Trump campaign from Ukraine in 2016.

At least part of Ukraine's alleged role has been easier to piece together than the Russian interference, thanks to public reporting and interviews with some of those involved. Additional facts are available through federal lobbying disclosures filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and from documents published by WikiLeaks.

According to reporting by Politico in January 2017, efforts by Democrats and Ukraine to "sabotage" the Trump campaign in 2016 did impact the race, even though Trump won in the end.

Both Politico and Yahoo News interviewed a key player in the controversy, Democratic National Committee (DNC) consultant Alexandra Chalupa, who previously worked under the Clinton administration.

Chalupa reportedly acknowledged in her 2017 interview with Politico that she worked as a consultant for the DNC during the 2016 campaign with the goal of publicly exposing Trump campaign aide Paul Manafort's links to pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. Chalupa admitted coordinating with the Ukrainian Embassy, and with Ukrainian and U.S. news reporters.

In public accounts since the original news articles, Chalupa—a Ukrainian American—has claimed that her role and intentions have been misrepresented.

Relevant allegations are recounted below, in chronological order.

2014

Chalupa began researching Manafort.

The FBI investigated and wiretapped Manafort for allegedly not properly disclosing his Russia-related lobbying work. The FBI failed to make a case at the time and discontinued the wiretap.

2016

March 25: Chalupa reportedly met with top Ukrainian officials at the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington in an effort to tarnish the Trump campaign by exposing "ties between Trump, top campaign aide Paul Manafort and Russia," according to Politico.

The Ukrainian embassy proceeded to work "directly with reporters researching Trump, Manafort and Russia to point them in the right directions," ac-



ording to an embassy official, though other officials later denied engaging in election-related activities.

March 30: Chalupa reportedly briefed DNC staff on alleged Russian ties to Manafort and Trump. It was the day after the Trump campaign hired Manafort to manage the July Republican convention.

With the "DNC's encouragement," Chalupa reportedly asked the Ukrainian embassy to arrange a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to discuss Manafort's lobbying for Ukraine's former president, Viktor Yanukovich. The embassy reportedly declined to arrange the meeting but became "helpful" in trading information and leads, according to Politico's reporting.

Ukrainian embassy officials and Chalupa "[coordinated] an investigation with the Hillary team" into Manafort, according to a source to Politico. This effort reportedly included working with U.S. media.

April: Ukrainian member of Parliament Olga Bielkova reportedly sought meetings with five dozen members of U.S. Congress and reporters including former New York Times reporter Judy Miller, David Sanger of The New York Times, David Ignatius of The Washington Post, and Washington Post editorial page editor Fred Hiatt.

The week of April 6: Chalupa and the office of Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), co-chair of Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, reportedly discussed holding a possible congressional investigation or hearing on Manafort and Russia "by September." Chalupa says she began working with reporter Mike Isikoff around this time.

April 12: Bielkova and a colleague met with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) associate David Kramer with the McCain Institute, according to government records. Kramer is a former U.S. State Department official affiliated with the anti-Russia "Ukraine Today" media organization. He would later be sent to London by McCain to meet with the author of the anti-Trump dossier, Christopher Steele.

Bielkova also met with Liz Zentos of the Obama administration's National Security Council, and State Department official Michael Kimmage.

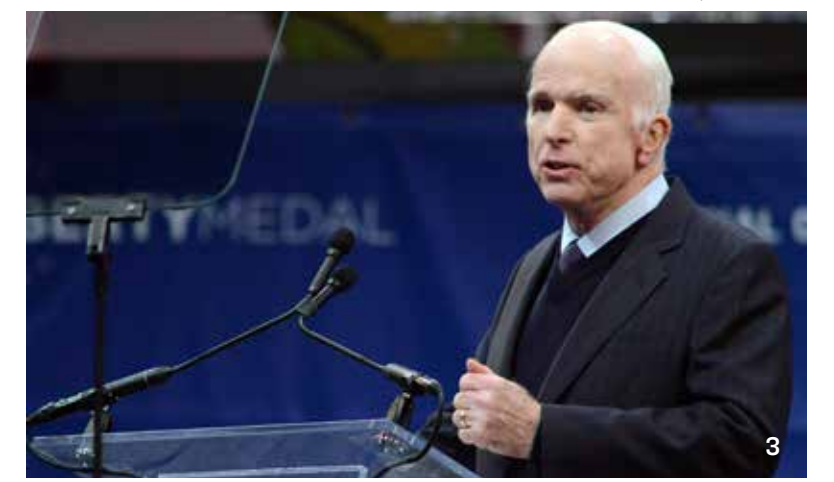
April 20: Chalupa reported that she was a victim of a cyberattack on this date. The FBI imaged her laptop and smartphone. (Two Republican Senate committee chairmen are now seeking these records.)

April 26: Isikoff published a story on Yahoo News about Manafort's business dealings with a Russian oligarch.

April 28: Chalupa reportedly was

The Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington on Jan. 30, 2018.

Both Democrats and Republicans agree that Russian interests made attempts to meddle in the 2016 campaign.



1. Paul Manafort arrives for a hearing at U.S. District Court in Washington on June 15, 2018.

2. David Kramer, then-U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, addresses a news conference in Islamabad on April 22, 2008.

3. Then-Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on Oct. 16, 2017.

invited to discuss her research about Manafort with 68 investigative journalists from Ukraine at the Library of Congress for the Open World Leadership Center, a U.S. congressional agency. Chalupa said she invited Isikoff to "connect him to the Ukrainians." After the event, Isikoff reportedly accompanied Chalupa to a Ukrainian embassy reception.

May 3: Chalupa emailed the DNC that she would share with them sensitive information about Manafort "offline," including "a big Trump component ... that will hit in next few weeks."

Aug. 8: Strzok wrote to Page that they would "stop" Trump from becoming president.

Aug. 14: The New York Times broke a story about Manafort allegedly taking improper cash payments a decade prior from pro-Russia interests in Ukraine. Ukraine's so-called "black ledger" showing the cash payments was publicized by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine.

Ukraine had formed the National Anti-Corruption Bureau in 2014 as a condition to receive U.S. aid.

Aug. 19: Manafort resigned as Trump campaign chairman. The same day, Ukrainian Parliament member Sergii Leshchenko, who was part of the "Petro Poroshenko Bloc" political faction, held a news conference to draw attention to Manafort and Trump's "pro-Russia" ties. The original link to a photo of the news conference was recently removed.

At the news conference in Ukraine, Leshchenko was said to be exposing "a firm run by U.S. businessman and Republican Party presidential candidate Donald Trump's campaign chairman Paul Manafort, who reportedly directly orchestrated a covert Washington lobbying operation on behalf of Ukraine's ruling political party, attempting to sway the American public's opinion in favor of the country's pro-Russian government, during the presidential period of Viktor Yanukovich, according to a report by the Ukrainian Independent Information Agency."

Nov. 18-20: McCain and his long-time adviser Kramer—a former U.S. State Dept. official—attended a security conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Sir Andrew Wood, former UK ambassador to Russia, told them about the Fusion GPS anti-Trump dossier. They discussed taking steps to confirm that the information had reached top levels of the FBI for action.

Nov. 28: Kramer flew to London to meet Steele for a briefing on the anti-Trump research. Afterward, Simpson reportedly gave McCain a copy of the dossier. McCain soon arranged a meeting with FBI Director James Comey.

2018
Feb. 22: Kramer invoked his Fifth Amendment right not to testify before the House Intelligence Committee.

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Finance Committee, have asked Attorney General William Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray for various records, including forensic images of Chalupa's devices.

The two senators are also seeking records from the National Archives to obtain White House visitor log records regarding any meetings between Chalupa, Ukrainians, and Obama officials.

Click here to read the letter to the FBI and DOJ.

Sharyl Attkisson is The New York Times bestselling author of "Stonewalled," a five-time Emmy Award winner, and the host of Sinclair's national investigative television program, "Full Measure with Sharyl Attkisson." She is a recipient of the Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative reporting and has reported nationally for CBS News, PBS, and CNN.



ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

Former Drug Addicts Provide Crucial Lifeline in Ohio Jail

Mired in the opioid crisis, a hard-hit county hires former addicts to support inmates, who respond to these kindred souls

CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON

DAYTON, Ohio—Montgomery County, in southwest Ohio, was ground zero in the United States' opioid crisis that reached a peak in 2017. That year, almost 50,000 people overdosed on opioid-related drugs nationwide, and Montgomery was one of the counties that suffered the highest number of overdoses. The jail was packed with drug addicts, many of whom also had underlying mental health issues.

The sheriff's department needed to find a way to stop the revolving door of arrest, release, arrest, release. That help came in the form of Scotty Mays and Kristen LaCaze, both former addicts and inmates. LaCaze was in and out of the jail 14 times while addicted to heroin, including a one-year stretch and two six-month stints.

The hope was that the inmates would talk more openly with peers, people who have been where they are. In April 2018, Mays and LaCaze started providing peer support to inmates who were seeking addiction treatment. At the same time, the jail started offering medication-assisted treatment such as Vivitrol and Suboxone, which both help to control opioid cravings and assist addicts through the detox process.

Sitting in jail is "a strong motivator" to want to change your life, Mays said.

Mays and LaCaze each made a video of their stories, which are broadcast every morning at 9 a.m. in the respective male and female housing units in Montgomery County jail.

Often, after seeing their faces and connecting with their stories, male inmates will request a one-on-one meeting with Mays, while females request LaCaze.

Mays said he gets about 20 requests a week from inmates, but once others see him talking, they get curious and he expands his reach. They both connect with an average of 100 inmates a month.

"A lot of people request us now because they know that Scotty and I have both been addicted and we're in recovery—and we're not cops so we're easier to talk to, from their standpoint," LaCaze said.

Often, the issues on the women's side are more complex. "A lot of the females have been victims of human trafficking and some of them are pregnant from a rape or from being trafficked," she said.

"I can't think of where more help is needed than inside those walls," Mays said. "And to talk with a bunch of men, a bunch of manly men, who don't want to talk about their feelings—to get them to talk about their feelings, that's pretty amazing, you know?"

"I'm primarily there to listen. ... [These] are people who don't have anywhere else to turn. A lot of family and friends have turned their backs on them—rightfully so. They've had to distance themselves ... just because of the chaos that was created from the substance abuse and mental health disorders that go hand in hand."

He lets inmates know that he's not there to judge, but to help bridge the gap to wherever they want to seek treatment.

"I don't force them to go to any treatment program. They tell me what they want to do, and I collab-

orate with the discharge planner, and we set a plan in place. Now, obviously it's going to be up to the courts on what's going to happen. But most of the time it's successful navigating them into treatment," he said.

Aside from medication-assisted treatments, treatment options vary from inpatient rehab centers to community meetings and sober-living homes. Depending on the outcome of their court cases, inmates can often substitute jail time for inpatient treatment programs.

Scotty's Story

Mays describes his former self as an "all-aholic." "Whatever drugs there were, I was going to do them. Not only was I a drug addict, but I was a serious alcoholic," he said.

Mays started young, regularly drinking alcohol by age 13 and progressively getting worse over time. A knee surgery in 2001 got him hooked on prescription opiates, then hard narcotics. Around 80 percent of all heroin addicts start their habit through prescription painkillers.

Mays thought drugs and alcohol would help him "fit in" somewhere in society—something he'd sought from a young age.

"See, the drugs and alcohol don't discriminate. They don't care who I am. They'll love me for who I am," he said.

"But what the drugs and alcohol don't care about, is the fact that they will kill you and they don't have no problem with that."

Mays ended up in the jail in 2012 for drunk and disorderly conduct. That was a "spiritual awakening," he said. He decided to never drink again—and stuck to it. But the drug use continued.

"But those drugs destroyed my life just as much as that alcohol did. And I don't want to get it confused—alcohol is a drug. A drug is a drug is a drug. But the opiates and the crack cocaine, all that stuff, it caused us to lose our house," he said.

Mays, his wife, and their two children moved into a bedroom at a friend's house in West Carrollton in 2014, where they lived for the next 18 months. His children left home as soon as they turned 18.

"I don't blame them. You could see in their eyes that they were counting down the days to where they didn't have to live with us anymore—that's how toxic that environment was," he said.

"And then late 2015, the fentanyl slowly started to creep in here."

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. By mid-2017, fentanyl was more prevalent than heroin on the streets of Dayton, and the sheriff's deputies were responding to an average of 10 overdoses a night.

"I lost a really good friend to a fentanyl overdose—and I should have been with him because he had called and wanted me to come over and party with them. I told him no. And they found him dead the next day," he said.

A couple of weeks later, at the beginning of 2016, Mays said he was at a local park with an extension cord around his neck, ready to hang himself. Then his phone rang.

"It was a guy I hadn't talked to in months and he said, 'I don't know why I'm calling you, but I wanted to see if you wanted to go to church with me,'" he said.



Scotty Mays, peer supporter for Montgomery County jail and former drug addict, at the Montgomery County jail in Dayton, Ohio, on Oct. 29, 2019.

"I knew that there was a power greater than myself that was intervening at that moment. So I told him to come and pick me up, and I remember sitting in that church and I cried like a baby that whole hour."

A few days later, Mays reached out for help at a community meeting run by Capt. Mike Brem from the sheriff's office. Brem put Mays in touch with Lori Erlon, the founder of Families of Addicts, who helped connect him with resources and got him involved in volunteer work.

"Between that phone call that I got from my buddy to go to church, the [captain], and Lori, those three people played a huge part in saving my life, and I'm forever in debt to all of them," Mays said.

The drugs and alcohol don't discriminate. They'll love me for who I am. But what the drugs and alcohol don't care about, is the fact that they will kill you and they don't have no problem with that.

Scotty Mays, peer supporter and former addict

But he had no insurance and couldn't find a treatment center that would take him. Frustration set in with another rejection and Mays started driving to a known drug area to get high.

He was halfway there when he got a phone call saying Recovery Works was ready to assess him and help with insurance for treatment.

"So I turned around, went back there, and had the Vivitrol injection, started treatment there, and literally my life hasn't been the same since," Mays said. He hasn't taken a drug since Jan. 13, 2016.

"I definitely have another relapse in me. But I seriously doubt that I have another recovery in me," he said. "I'm not going to lie, I loved doing drugs. I loved getting a high. It was the consequences that sucked. And there's always going to be consequences. You can't avoid it."

It's perhaps that part of Mays that the inmates connect with—a raw vulnerability that lies within them all. Mays is still in recovery himself. It's not a process that just ends at a certain point. "Think about going up a down escalator. So as you're going up [the escalator], you have to keep moving, right? But as soon as you stop, you start going backwards. And that's how I kind of look at my recovery. I'm walking up a down escalator right now."

He's passionate about helping people and knows that it only takes one person in your corner to provide

the strength to stay clean. He makes sure the inmates know he's there for them once they leave the jail.

"I'll give them my card and I'm like, 'Look, this isn't a one-time thing. Even once you get out of here, let me be an extension of your accountability, reach out to me. This is how this works. We support each other,'" he said.

And the success rate is greater than the relapse rate—a statistic Montgomery County sorely needs.

"Even if they come back in, I still encourage them. There's an element of success because you reached back out to get help," Mays said.

Helping others is a way for Mays to help himself, too.

"When I see somebody struggling, I remember when I first was trying to get clean, I burned all my bridges. I didn't have a whole lot of support, I had to build that network," he said.

"But there's a sense of security that comes with helping others and working with other people. Knowing that today I don't have to pick up." That daily habit of going to get drugs is replaced with the habit of going to help people who are relying on him.

Peer support is more than just helping someone with an addiction and mental health issues, he said. "Sometimes people just need somebody to listen to them. Sometimes they just need somebody to talk to, to where it doesn't feel like you're inconveniencing them. And that's what I love about what I do."

As for his own bridges, he has repaired his relationships with his children and says those relationships are stronger than ever. His five grandchildren also keep him busy.

"Am I going to stay sober forever? I have no idea. I don't know. I know I am today. And that's the only way I can look at that," he said.

Bringing Ex-Addicts Into Jail

The jail's treatment coordinator, Teresa Russell, was hired at the end of June 2017, primarily in response to the opioid crisis.

Russell said she acts as the "air traffic controller" for all the health service contracts with the jail, but most of her time is spent finding drug treatment centers for inmates.

She was the brains behind the peer support program that brought in Mays and LaCaze, and the success has exceeded her expectations.

She said other jails are often hesitant to bring in people with criminal backgrounds or with histories of addiction. There are fears they'd bring in contraband, or fears that they'd be responsible for putting someone in a situation that instigates a relapse.

When asked how she got past those fears here, she said "faith."

"We just vetted the right people to bring it inside the jail. Their his-

ALL PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON/THE EPOCH TIMES

stories, their stories, their passion, and what they did."

She said Mays is so good at what he does that the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services pays him to teach others how to become an effective peer supporter.

Kristen's Story

LaCaze, who is now 28, thought her life was over when she became pregnant at 17. Still in high school and with a history of depression and anxiety, she struggled to cope with the enormous responsibilities she now faced, while her friends were buying prom dresses.

One day, after she'd had her baby, LaCaze tried snorting the painkiller Vicodin with a friend. "It was amazing. That's when I realized, 'Wow, I don't have to be miserable every day. I can be happy,'" she said.

It only took two years for LaCaze to transition from Vicodin to heroin. Montgomery County started shutting down the "pill mills," where doctors were dispensing opioid-based painkillers for anything and everything. Like LaCaze, those who were already addicted eventually turned to heroin because it was cheaper and more accessible.

"I lost my nursing assistant license when I moved to heroin. I lost my car. I lost everything. And it's like you see everything dwindling away, but you still can't stop. Just for fear of the physical withdrawal—it's so severe," she said. Her mom looked after her son.

She was charged with her first felony at 20. Unbeknownst to her, she'd racked up four—two for trafficking and two for possession, and she was hit with them all at once.

She was in and out of jail for years because she was still using drugs while on probation. She was also in and out of treatment centers, both inpatient and outpatient.

"But it still wasn't successful until they started addressing the actual mental health issue, because that's what kept me going back, even despite the negative consequences," she said. "When we were able to finally address my depression and my anxiety and the trauma that came with using heroin—like having to sell your body and be a prostitute—[that] was when I was able to start to become better."

But she had to hit rock bottom first. In July 2015, LaCaze took a mix of heroin and cocaine and ended up in a coma, on life support, for two weeks.

"That really made me think, 'OK, I've already lost my house, I've already lost my car, my mom's taking care of my child, but now I'm going to lose my life,'" she said.

She went to an inpatient rehab and also started medication-assisted treatment.

"I still struggled to stay clean, but I didn't relapse," she said. "It was a nine-year process, four felonies, and two years of incarceration later."

In April, LaCaze moved out of her parents' home into a place with her son, who is now 10. After repairing relationships with her siblings, she is now allowed to see her nieces and nephews again. When she was using drugs, her parents were scared to let her into their house in case she'd steal their credit card again, or their car.

Looking back, she said the difference in her life now is dramatic.

"I don't wake up sick in the morning anymore. I don't have to go have sex with men to take care of my habit. I have my child, I have a car, I have a home, I go to school, and I don't have people calling me asking me to go do crazy things with them anymore," she said.

LaCaze is inspired by her job at the jail, both by the program itself and by the women she helps.

"I couldn't get myself clean, but now I'm even able to help other people get clean," she said. She sees herself in all of the women in one way or another, and it helps remind her where she doesn't want to fall back to.

She said so many of the women tell her later that she helped them at their worst time. "When they're in their cell and they're throwing up and they're dope sick, and now they're out and they have their kids and they're working. Just to know that I even helped a little bit in that change makes me want to keep doing it forever," she said.

LaCaze is juggling the peer support program in the jail with college and internships, but she's thriving on the challenges.

"I just wasted so much time. And everybody I went to school with, now they're doctors and married with kids and I'm like, 'I have to catch up.' I don't think I really will, but I want to get further. I don't know when I'm going to stop though," she said.

"I'd say within the last year I've been really happy. Because I found that I'm making a difference. I've found that people look up to me and they aren't like, 'Oh, here comes Kristen, hide your purse.'"

For Help

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (4357)
Samhsa.gov

Montgomery County Drug Free Coalition
McDrugFree.org

3 Senate Committees Now Investigating the Bidens and Ukraine

IVAN PENTCHOUKOV

As House Democrats wrapped up the public impeachment hearings on Nov. 21, Senate Republicans sent the latest round of records requests as part of a growing inquiry into the Obama administration's actions related to Burisma, the Ukrainian gas firm that hired Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joe Biden.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) wrote to the National Archives requesting records of January 2016 White House meetings with senior Ukrainian officials. The senators reference events detailed in an April 25 article by investigative reporter John Solomon, who quoted firsthand witnesses to report that Ukrainian officials who attended the White House meeting were encouraged to reopen an investigation involving the chairman of the Trump campaign and stand down from an investigation into Burisma.

On the same day, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) requested records from the State Department regarding the communications in 2016 between Biden, then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, and their respective offices.

Graham also requested information about a March 2, 2016, meeting between Devon Archer, Hunter Biden's business partner, and then-Secretary of State John Kerry. The meeting took place weeks after Ukrainian authorities seized the assets of Mykola Zlochevsky, the owner of Burisma. Archer and Hunter Biden were on the board of directors of Burisma at the time of the seizure.

The Nov. 21 letters are the latest request by the Senate Republicans, all three of whom have described the requests as an investigation. On Nov. 6, Grassley and Johnson sent a request for an extensive list of documents and information pertaining to the Bidens and Burisma to State Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. On Nov. 15, they asked for Suspicious Activity Reports from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) on a list of key players in the Burisma matter, including Hunter Biden, Archer, and their firm, Rosemont Seneca Partners. The Nov. 15 letter specifically referred to the Burisma inquiry as an active investigation.

"I love Joe Biden as a person but we are not going to give a pass to what is obviously a conflict of interest," Graham, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, wrote on Twitter on Nov. 25. "I believe Hunter Biden's association on the Burisma board doesn't pass the smell test. If a Republican was in the same position, they'd certainly be investigated!"

The Republican inquiry is closely related to and may have an impact on the Democrat-run impeachment probe, which centers on a July 25 call between President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Grassley is the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. Johnson is the chairman of the Senate Committee



Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) of the Senate Judiciary Committee during the confirmation hearing for William Barr, nominee for attorney general, at the Capitol in Washington on Jan. 15, 2019.

on Foreign Relations. Graham is the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

During the call, Trump asked if Zelensky would "look into" the firing of Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin. Joe Biden has publicly bragged about forcing Shokin's ouster by withholding \$1 billion in loan guarantees from Ukraine.

Weeks before submitting his resignation, Shokin's office had ordered and executed the seizure of assets of Zlochevsky. While Biden withheld the loan guarantees, Ukraine faced a fiscal default and was fighting a war with Russia. At the same time, Biden's son served a paid position on Burisma's board.

We are not going to give a pass to what is obviously a conflict of interest.

Lindsey Graham, U.S. senator

The Epoch Times didn't receive a response to a request for comment from the State Department, the White House, the attorneys for Hunter Biden and Archer, Burisma Holdings, the National Archives, or Joe Biden's 2020 campaign.

The offices of Grassley and Johnson declined to comment. A spokesman for FinCEN said the agency "does not comment on particular Suspicious Activity Reports, including whether or not they exist."

The records from FinCEN could be particularly illuminating because it's still unclear how much Biden and Archer were paid for their positions on the board of Burisma. According to bank records obtained in an unrelated federal lawsuit, the gas firm sent more than \$160,000 every month to Rosemont Seneca Bohai from April 2014 through the end of 2016.

The events relating to Burisma in 2015 and 2016 weren't limited to Ukraine. A U.S. representative for Burisma, Karen Tramontano, reached out to the State Department in February 2016 and leveraged Biden's position

on the board in a request for a meeting with Deputy Secretary Catherine Novelli, according to emails obtained through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

In the email, a State Department official states that Tramontano asked the State Department to end its allegations of corruption against Burisma. Grassley and Johnson are working to ascertain if Novelli and Tramontano met.

Tramontano didn't respond to a request for comment.

Biden and Archer made overtures of their own to the State Department. On Feb. 4, 2016, Shokin's office announced the seizure of Zlochevsky's assets, including several homes and a Rolls Royce Phantom luxury car. On the same day, Hunter Biden followed Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken on Twitter. According to Graham, the signal suggests "that the two may have initiated conversations regarding Prosecutor General Shokin's investigation into Burisma."

Emails suggest that Biden and Blinken also met in May 2015 and July 2015. The senators are looking to learn whether the meetings occurred, what was discussed, and who attended.

In March 2016, Archer appears to have met with Secretary of State John Kerry, according to another email obtained through a FOIA lawsuit.

"Devon Archer coming to see S today at 3:00pm — need someone to meet/greet him at C street," the email states.

Kerry's stepson, Christopher Heinz, roomed with Archer in college. The two went on to become business partners, but Heinz distanced himself from Archer and Biden over their decision to accept paid positions on the Burisma board.

Democrats running the impeachment inquiry allege that Trump sought to boost his reelection chances by asking Zelensky to look into what happened to the prosecutor who was investigating Burisma. The Democrats further allege that Trump delayed aid to Ukraine and leveraged the prospect of a White House meeting as part of the effort to pressure Zelensky. Zelensky has said he didn't feel pressured and wasn't aware of a connection between the hold on aid and Trump's request for an investigation.

After weeks of hearings, the evidence House Democrats gathered to substantiate their allegations consists of hearsay, presumptions, personal opinion, and policy positions. No witness offered direct evidence of Trump's intent to benefit himself politically or of a connection between the hold on aid and Trump's request for a potential investigation.



NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Vice President Joe Biden (R) speaks with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko before he addresses a joint meeting of Congress at the Capitol on Sept. 18, 2014.



Forensic experts and investigators of the prosecution office work at the crime scene next to a man's corpse in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on April 20, 2019.

Trump Says He Will Designate Mexican Cartels as Terrorists

IVAN PENTCHOUKOV

President Donald Trump said he will designate Mexican drug cartels as terrorist groups for their role in the trafficking of narcotics and people, prompting a speedy request for talks by Mexico.

"They will be designated," Trump said in an interview with Bill O'Reilly that aired on Nov. 26. "I have been working on that for the last 90 days. You know, designation is not that easy, you have to go through a process, and we are well into that process."

Cartel violence is rampant in Mexico. Earlier this month, Trump responded to the bloodiest attack on U.S. citizens in Mexico in years by offering to help the nation "wage WAR on the drug cartels and wipe them off the face of the earth."

Three women and six children of dual U.S.-Mexican nationality were killed in an ambush in northern Mexico. Mexican authorities said they may have been victims of mistaken identity amid confrontations among drug gangs in the area.

In the interview, Trump declined to say what steps he'll take after formalizing the terrorist group designation.

"I don't want to say what I am going to do, but they will be designated," Trump said. "Look, we are losing 100,000 people a year to what is happening and what is coming through from Mexico."

"They have unlimited money, the people, the cartels, because they have a lot of money, because it is drug money and human trafficking money."

Mexico's foreign ministry issued a

They have unlimited money, the people, the cartels, because they have a lot of money, because it is drug money and human trafficking money.

President Donald Trump

statement saying it would quickly seek a high-level meeting with U.S. State Department officials to address the legal designation, as well as the flow of arms and money to organized crime.

"The foreign minister will establish contact with his counterpart, Michael R. Pompeo, in order to discuss this very important issue for the bilateral agenda," the ministry said.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Mexico would take up the issue after Thanksgiving and that he had asked his foreign minister to lead talks.

"Cooperation, yes, intervention, no," López Obrador said in a morning news conference, when asked about Trump's comments.

What Does It Mean?

The State Department criteria for designating terror organizations requires that the group must be a foreign organization and that its "terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States."

Once a group is designated as a terrorist organization, under U.S. law, it's illegal for people in the United States to knowingly offer support; its members can't enter the country and may be deported. Financial institutions that become aware they have funds connected to the group must block the money and alert the U.S. Treasury Department. Suspected agents of foreign terrorist organizations can also be targeted for a certain level of surveillance under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Some U.S. officials have previously suggested the United States might be forced to take action if Mexico can't deal with the cartels.

Reps. Chip Roy (R-Texas) and Mark Green (R-Tenn.) have introduced legislation that would designate three cartels as foreign terrorist organizations: the Reynosa/Los Metros faction of the Gulf Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and the Cartel Del Noreste faction of Los Zetas.

On the day before Trump's interview aired, Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said that he didn't expect the United States to designate cartels as terrorists. He said the two countries were already cooperating to fight cartels and suggested a designation was not necessary.

"I don't think the United States will pursue this path because we're working together, and I don't think they would want to open up the possibility of Mexico invoking the same legal principles," Ebrard told reporters.

The LeBarons

Alex LeBaron, a former Mexican congressman and relative of some of the victims of the Nov. 4 attack, on Twitter rejected the idea of a U.S. "invasion."

"We have already been invaded by terrorist cartels," he wrote. "We demand real coordination between both countries... both countries are responsible for the rising trade in drugs, weapons, and money."

Mexican army Gen. Homero Mendoza said at a Nov. 6 press conference that a criminal group called La Linea is believed to be responsible for the attack as it sent a group of gunmen to the area to prevent incursion from a rival crime group, Los Salazar, which is aligned with the Sinaloa cartel.

But the LeBaron extended family has often been in conflict with drug traffickers in Chihuahua and victims' relatives said the killers must have known who they were targeting.

More than 100 people have left the village the victims lived in since the attack, heading for the United States.

The LeBarons belong to a Mormon colony in Chihuahua, Mexico, that was set up in the late 1800s. Its first members left the United States when polygamy was outlawed.

The colony has had run-ins with the cartels for years, in the form of slayings, kidnappings, and other crimes.

In 2010, two members of the Mormon community, including one from the LeBaron family, were killed in apparent revenge after the Mormons pressured authorities to secure the release of another member of their community kidnapped by the cartels. The Mormons eventually broke

strict Mexican gun control laws and armed themselves for defense, Vice reported in 2012.

Runaway Violence

López Obrador has tried adopting a softer approach to cartels than some of his predecessors, arguing that violence only begets more violence.

"It was lamentable, painful because children died, but do we want to resolve the problem the same way [as previous administrations]? By declaring war?" he said at a press conference. "That, in the case of our country, showed that it does not work. That was a failure. It caused more violence."

Mexico has faced an escalating murder epidemic in recent years. The government has recorded more than 250,000 homicides in the past dozen years, including more than 30,000 in the first seven months of 2019, most of them related to the drug war. That excludes an unknown number of disappearances.

The violence spills over into the United States, with a large part of shootings and murders across the country being related to drug-dealing gangs.

In addition, the drugs smuggled from Mexico are a major driver behind the opioid epidemic in the United States, which cost almost 70,000 lives in 2018.

The drug trade proceeds from the United States are then funding the cartel operations, allowing them to procure heavy armaments.

"We're talking about surface-to-air missiles, grenades. They have armored vehicles. They have big machine guns on the top of the vehicles," Derek Maltz, former head of the Drug Enforcement Administration's special operations division, previously told The Epoch Times.

Maltz has been advocating for designating some cartels as terrorists, likening the drug trade to waging a chemical war on the United States.

"They're killing the citizens of our country, they're destroying our country, they're causing us to focus our resources on this problem, [and] it's helping to destabilize our country," he said.

"Now you have Chinese organized crime that are making mass amounts of fentanyl in these labs in China ... selling it to the Mexican cartels. [They're] combining the fentanyl with all the other drugs that they're selling and dumping these chemicals into our country. Well, the chemicals are like a poisonous chemical attack."

Zachary Stieber, Petr Svab, Charlotte Cuthbertson, and Reuters contributed to this report.

We are losing 100,000 people a year to what is happening and what is coming through from Mexico.

President Donald Trump

Trump Campaign, GOP Accuse Google of Voter Suppression

With New Ad Rules

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PETR SVAB

The Republican National Committee (RNC) and the campaign of President Donald Trump have rebuked Google's new political advertising rules and accused the company of voter suppression.

"Google has made an extraordinarily poor decision which will lead to less-informed voters, lower voter engagement, and voter suppression," according to a Nov. 26 joint statement by the campaign, the RNC, and the party's senatorial and congressional committees.

"Google should immediately reverse its decision in order to ensure they do not suppress voter turnout during both the Democrat primaries and the 2020 general election."

The Democratic National Committee, while supporting more regulation, also complained about the new rules, inviting tech companies to "an open and transparent conversation about how we effectively regulate political advertising online," in a Nov. 22 statement.

Google's new rules put additional restrictions in two areas: ad targeting and "misleading content."

'Misleading'

While the company had already prohibited making false claims in ads displayed to its users, it recently added an additional rule against "making claims that are demonstrably false and could significantly undermine participation or trust in an electoral or democratic process."

As examples, it listed "information about public voting procedures, political candidate eligibility based on age or birthplace, election results, or census participation that contradicts official government records; incorrect claims that a public figure

Google is effectively saying they want to reach fewer people and engage less with voters, which will have the impact of suppressing voter turnout."

A joint statement by the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee, and the party's senatorial and congressional committees

has died, or been involved in an accident."

It also added a prohibition on "manipulating media to deceive, defraud, or mislead others."

It gave an example of "deceptively doctoring media related to politics, social issues, or matters of public concern."

"Of course, we recognize that robust political dialogue is an important part of democracy, and no one can sensibly adjudicate every political claim, counterclaim, and insinuation," the company stated in a Nov. 20 blog post announcing the rule changes. "So we expect that the number of political ads on which we take action will be very limited—but we will continue to do so for clear violations."

Republicans voiced concern about bias.

"Given the growing and documented cases of anti-conservative bias in Silicon Valley, we are highly skeptical that such a ban would be applied equally to conservative and liberal organizations," the joint statement said.

Targeting

Google also announced it will no longer allow targeting of election ads to more specific user groups, such as targeting "based on public voter records and general political affiliations (left-leaning, right-leaning, and independent)."

"To further promote increased visibility of election ads," the company stated, starting Jan. 6 it will be "limiting election ads audience targeting to the following general categories: age, gender, and general location (postal code level)."

Republicans criticized the decision.

"By limiting the abilities of candidates and political organizations to communicate, Google is effectively saying they want to

reach fewer people and engage less with voters, which will have the impact of suppressing voter turnout," their statement said.

Trump's 2016 campaign was noted in media for a massive and sophisticated digital advertising campaign that took advantage, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, of the options to display ads to highly specified audiences.

The campaign was also constantly improving and customizing its digital ads, producing close to 6 million different ads between the Republican conventions and Election Day, according to Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale, who was at the time responsible for the digital operation.

Parscale previously clarified that the operation was predominately aimed to boost voter turnout.

We are highly skeptical that such a ban would be applied equally to conservative and liberal organizations.

A joint statement by the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee, and the party's senatorial and congressional committees

"For the most part, we just tried to get our people to show up," he told Frontline PBS in 2018.

For 2020, it appears the campaign is ramping up an even more robust and sophisticated operation.

"There can be no denying that President Trump and his campaign have built the greatest digital operation in all of politics, and that Google's decision will disproportionately impact both the Trump operation and all of the Republican candidates and organizations that derive strength from it," the joint statement said.



Trump 2020 campaign manager Brad Parscale in Grand Rapids, Mich., on March 28, 2019.



MANUEL VELASQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON/THE EPOCH TIMES



President Donald Trump meets with rapper Kanye West in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington on Oct. 11, 2018.

Disaster Looms for Democrats as Trump Goes 'Bigly' With Blacks

ROGER L. SIMON



Commentary

While the media remains obsessed with an increasingly pointless impeachment by the House and the even more dubious removal of the president by the Senate, political news of genuine electoral importance has slipped under the rug.

According to two new polls, Trump has now gained popularity with African Americans—and the numbers are significant, even “bigly.”

Both polls—Rasmussen, which usually tilts Republican, and Emerson, which is considered evenhanded—came out almost exactly the same, putting Trump’s support among blacks at a surprising, almost astonishing, 34 percent and 34.5 percent, respectively. Typically, Republicans poll in the single digits among blacks.

“Game changer” may be one of the great clichés of our time, but this would actually be one. If even remotely true, Democrats should be having a nervous breakdown. They depend more than ever on African Americans for success in elections. If Trump were to garner even 18 percent of the black vote, he would easily win in 2020. If he had anything close to the 34 percent, it would be a runaway, a disaster for the Democrats.

But is this accurate? Polls are fickle, as we know, and are often distorted by

Almost equally important and working in tandem is the Kanye West factor.

the skewed nature of the questions; but in this case, several factors lead me to believe there is truth to this.

One is, of course, economic. Due in great part to Trump’s policies, African American unemployment rates are the lowest on record, even for teenagers, and wages are rising, as they haven’t in years. This is likely not being overlooked at the kitchen table.

Almost equally important and working in tandem is the Kanye West factor. Wildly talented and justifiably one of the most popular entertainers in the world, the rapper has made a sensation wearing a MAGA hat, while telling an obvious truth: No group, blacks or anybody else, profits by putting all its political eggs in one party’s basket. That group is setting themselves up for exploitation.

It may be painful to hear that, but when it comes from West, young people especially are listening and agreeing. Being a Republican, even and possibly especially a Trump supporter, can be cool, if West does it.

Which leads to the Al Sharpton factor. How much longer will blacks follow the likes of exploitation artists who obviously prosper when other blacks fail—indeed, prosper because they fail? Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and the rest of the victimologists (Larry Elder’s great term) prey on their people, raising money off their economic and social problems and, in essence, perpetuating them. This is the exact opposite of progress, masquerading under the rubric progressive.

In West’s world, the right approach isn’t to see yourself as a victim, but to

improve yourself as an individual, to work hard, go to school, be entrepreneurial, and, of course, as we know from his latest hit and endeavors, believe and trust in God.

Would you follow West or would you follow Sharpton? The results of the decision are obvious, irrespective of the extreme differences in their talent.

Meanwhile, Trump has been doing his part, quietly (for him) going about wooing black voters with his message of economic opportunity at their schools and churches. His success has either been ridiculed or, more often, deliberately ignored by the mainstream media. They are loath to report what he is doing for fear that it might be good. Nevertheless, he is continuing and increasing his efforts going into the campaign.

In the larger political schema, this is about a turning away from the “identity politics” (actually a new form of segregation) so beloved by the Democrats and back to the color-blind society envisioned by Martin Luther King Jr. Wouldn’t it be ironic if the idealism of those days was finally realized with the help of Trump or an alliance of Trump and West? Stranger things have happened.

Academy Award-nominated screenwriter Roger L. Simon’s new novel, “The GOAT,” is available in paperback, hardcover, audiobook, and Kindle.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

Socialized Medicine: What’s in a Name?

SHAWN WHATLEY



Commentary

Last fall, Jim Carrey, the well-known comedian, spoke on “Real Time with Bill Maher” about Canadian single-payer medical care.

“I grew up in Canada, OK? We have socialized medicine,” he said.

“I’m here to tell you this [expletive] line you get on all the political shows from people is that it’s a failure, the system is a failure in Canada. It is not a failure in Canada.”

Carrey used an old term for the mascot of Canadian exceptionalism. Twenty years ago, socialism was dead. People avoided calling anything socialized, especially Canada’s crown jewel of post-war welfare. Even today, people still prefer to talk about single-payer health care. It has ranked between 5 and 25 times more common than the term socialized medicine on Google Trends since 2004.

Celebrities love to defend socialized medicine. That shouldn’t surprise us. But their comfort with the term “socialized” is worth noting. As the New Yorker noted this spring, socialism is back.

A Glorious Beginning

Socialized medicine started in the late 1960s with a promise: care regardless of ability to pay. Doctors and nurses could keep doing what they had always done. And government would pay. Who could argue with that?

The glory days of socialized medicine soon ended.

By 1977, the federal government stopped giving the provinces blank checks for 50 percent of whatever the provinces chose to spend on medical care. That led to cuts and rationing, which led to halfway medicine and patients being admitted to closets and bathrooms.

Socialized medicine started as a wonderful dream. It has ended up as a harsh reality for many.

Why Call It ‘Socialized’?

The “socialized” component of socialized medicine goes back to Karl Marx. He and other socialists wanted to emphasize the

role of society and downplay the role of the state. Marx preferred “socialization” to describe state control of an industry. He avoided using the term “nationalization”—it sounded too much like state control.

The state, according to famous sociologist and political economist Max Weber, is a polity, or group, that possesses a monopoly on violence. If you break the law, the state can send people with guns to put you in jail. The state is a complex apparatus that includes government, regulators, the legal system, and more.

Marx didn’t like the state, but he needed it for his revolution. He and the early socialists believed that workers, who represented the bulk of society, would be free if they could escape the tyranny of business owners. The socialists believed that the only way to free the working class was to use the state to “take ownership of the means of production.”

In other words, Marx wanted to take businesses away from business owners. But Marx also knew that the state could be just as tyrannical and oppressive toward workers. He needed the state to help free the working class in his revolutionary march toward freedom and equality, but he believed in a future where the state no longer needed to exist. True freedom lay in the future with no private ownership of businesses—no private property at all, for that matter—and no state: a collectivized utopia where everyone shared everything and we all helped each other.

Modern socialists realize they don’t need to actually own a business. They just need to control it. So, modern socialist governments take control of an industry, avoid the term “nationalization,” and use “socialization” instead. Thus, we end up with socialized industries, and in Canada’s case, socialized medicine.

So What Is Socialized Medicine?

Today, socialized medicine means state-run medicine. It means centralized control and government rationing of care. It means that patients don’t decide when their pain needs treatment—bureaucrats decide whether your symptoms merit treatment or not.

Socialized medicine has become a political football used to win votes and stay

in power. In political hands, socialized medicine has little to do with patient care. Patient care, if it eventually comes up after budgets and benchmarks, falls to a footnote.

For policymakers, modern socialized medicine is about wealth redistribution. We take money from the wealthy and healthy and give it to the poor and sick. It is part of an overall plan to level economic inequality in a nation: one plank among many others that form the overall welfare state. Socialized medicine lines up alongside equalization payments, the pension plan, unemployment insurance, and all the other handouts controlled by the state.

Medical Insurance

Most Canadians still support a provincial insurance plan for medically necessary care. Canadians love insurance, and medical insurance seems reasonable—except that Canadians don’t have medical insurance in the same way that they have any other kind of insurance. Waiting months or years to see a medical specialist doesn’t seem like insurance. Even if we insist on using the language of insurance, Canadians are woefully underinsured.

Canadians support medical insurance, but they’ve been given managed care. Socialized medicine is not a single-payer, state-funded insurance plan. It looked like that at the start. But the true nature of socialized medicine and the original intent of its champions became evident over time.

We should celebrate people using the term socialized medicine again. It lays bare the real nature of our approach to medically necessary care in Canada. An accurate diagnosis is the first step toward treatment.

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Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.



A sign shows the times of temporary emergency department closures at Eastern Shore Memorial Hospital in Sheet Harbour, N.S., Canada, on Aug. 6, 2018.

DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES



Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, National Security Council Director for European Affairs, testifies before the House Intelligence Committee in the Longworth House Office Building on Capitol Hill on Nov. 19, 2019.

The Patterns of Communist Subversion Behind Impeachment Inquiry

DIANA WEST



Commentary

The towering anti-communist dissident Vladimir Bukovsky was laid to rest in a London cemetery on Nov. 19. In Washington, American democracy threw dirt on itself.

Impervious to the irony, the Democrats of the House of Representatives staged another fake impeachment “show trial” in its coup, like no other, to thwart the anti-communist will of the American electorate that sent Donald Trump to the White House.

The battle isn’t drawn in such terms; they have been taken from us. But to understand the desperate, unceasing efforts to unseat President Trump requires a longer lens on recent events, one that can focus on over a century of what Whittaker Chambers described as “the forces of that great socialist revolution, which, in the name of liberalism, spasmodically, incompletely, somewhat formlessly, but always in the same direction, has been inching its ice cap over the nation.”

Chambers was writing in the 1950s, when the socialist “New Deal” was only two decades old. In 2016, six decades past Chambers, as the socialist ice cap had all but completely smothered our democratic republic, Trump won the presidency. With his agenda to save the United States by restoring the nation-state, Trump became a one-man counter-revolutionary army.

The revolutionaries within—leading figures in what is known as “the Swamp”—responded as true Marxists do: by any means necessary. And why not? Their ideological roots in varieties of Marxism are documented in my short book, “The Red Thread.”

The dangers they pose in these end-stages of our democratic republic cannot be overstated. That makes Election 2020 our D-Day for retaking our Swamp-occupied continent.

Maybe the second time around, a wiser, battle-tested counter-revolutionary Trump will call in reserves who actually support him. This is precisely what our deeply embedded and powerful communistic enemies, confronting this unexpected American “insurgency,” fear more than anything.

Reluctant or unable to imagine the war in these terms, Republicans have rallied as misdirected. In Rep. Adam Schiff’s (D-Calif.) kangaroo court of an “impeachment inquiry,” they didn’t call out the treason all around, or even stand up on their hind legs and ask Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman to confirm the identity of the “whistle-blower” whom he admitted leaking the Trump-Zelensky phone call to.

While Republicans scored the easy

Perhaps Republicans came closest to exposing one of the underlying Big Lies of the impeachment inquiry when Rep. Chris Stewart (R-Utah) zeroed in on Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman’s attitude toward alleged bona fide high crimes and misdemeanors committed by Joe Biden.

points on contradictions in witness testimonies, many undoubtedly perjurious, contrary to the appalling case of Roger Stone, however, perjury charges will never be referred for indictment, let alone go to trial.

However satisfying, like junk food, in the moment, none of these accrued debating points will cause the House to reject the coup in its impeachment stage; nor will they arouse the sleeping American people to the highest stages of concern for their republic.

Perhaps Republicans came closest to exposing one of the underlying Big Lies of the impeachment inquiry when Rep. Chris Stewart (R-Utah) zeroed in on Vindman’s attitude toward alleged bona fide high crimes and misdemeanors committed by Joe Biden, according to Biden’s own, uncoerced videotaped confession.

Sounding like the mob capo Schiff channeled when the House Intelligence Committee chairman (never, ever forget) read to the American people a call transcript he had made up, Biden had bragged that as vice president, he gave Ukraine six hours to fire the prosecutor investigating corruption at Burisma, a Ukrainian oil and gas company that employed Biden’s son Hunter on its board for an estimated \$80,000 per month, or else—the “or else” being the loss of \$1 billion in U.S. aid. Talk about “quid pro quo.” Talk about corruption. Talk about bribery. Talk about mixing personal gain with the affairs of state.

What did Vindman have to say about that? Here is the brief exchange.

Rep. Stewart: There are dozens of corrupt nations in the world, hundreds of corrupt government officials. Exactly one time did a vice president go to a nation and demand the specific firing of one individual and give a six-hour time limit and withhold or threaten to withhold a billion dollars in aid, if not. It was the one individual who was investigating a company who was paying his son. I’ll ask you: Was that also “wrong”?

LTC Vindman: I, that is not what I understand—I, frankly, don’t have any firsthand knowledge of that.

Stewart: You haven’t seen the video?

Vindman: I’ve seen the video.

Stewart: That’s all I’ve described. Everything I just said to you was in the video. Was that “wrong” as well?

Vindman: Congressman, this is something I actually participated in and (unintelligible) ...

[Oh really? That’s interesting!]

Stewart: Well, I think the American people can make a judgment.

Vindman: ... that I don’t know ...

Chairman Schiff: The time of the gentleman has expired. Colonel Vindman, if you would like to answer the question, you’re more than welcome to.

Vindman: I frankly don’t know any, that much more, about that particular incident. I saw the snippet of the video, but I don’t know if I could make a judgment off that.

Any child, however, could make a judgment. It’s former Vice President Biden who should be the subject of this “impeachment inquiry.”

There was one extraordinary revelation to come out of Vindman testimony. Earlier this year, Vindman confirmed that the Ukrainian government invited him on three occasions to lead the Ukrainian armies by joining the government of Ukraine as its minister of defense.

What?

When asked why the Ukrainians might have tried to hire him away from the White House and his country to lead the Ukrainian military, Vindman said he didn’t know. The question went largely unmined for its rich and deeper possibilities. What was really going on here?

CIA whistleblower and former counterintelligence officer Kevin Shipp wrote on Twitter: “A foreign government pitches a US government intelligence official to come over and work for them? This is called an espionage pitch. What prompted Ukraine to do that? What is in Vindman’s personal life that made him a mark?”

Vindman, meanwhile, made the whole affair sound routine. Other U.S. service members, he claimed, took up positions in “the developing democracies in that part of the world, certainly in the Baltics”—a new one on me—and he even invoked an unnamed U.S. Air Force officer who, he thought, had become “minister of defense.”

Is this true? No idea. Still, why Vindman? What was it in this National Security Council official that made the Ukrainian government believe he had sufficient loyalty to its national destiny to be entrusted with its national defense, not once, but three times?

When Vindman concluded his remarks by saying it was actually “kind of comical” for a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army to be offered “that illustrious a position,” a shaft of sunlight appeared. Were these Ukrainian offers even designed to win Vindman’s acceptance?

Researcher Jeff Nyquist saw through to another possible layer of motivation, writing on Twitter: “I think it was was an ‘atta boy’ from the Soviet Ukrainians.”

Atta boy? Soviet Ukrainians? Such notions will short-circuit the linkage between disinformation and

conventional wisdom, a linkage that deceptively or naively asserts that to be “Ukrainian” is to be safe from all Moscow subversion and infiltration, to be air-tight and walled-off from Moscow’s sophisticated, relentless, time- and battle-tested programs of Active Measures. (Active Measures is KGB-speak used, to quote a 1982 interagency definition, “to refer to active operations intended to provoke a policy effect, as distinct from espionage and counterintelligence. ... Specifically, they are intended to influence the policies of foreign governments ... undermine confidence in foreign leaders and institutions, and discredit opponents. ...”)

To disregard the history of Active Measures in Ukraine or anywhere else (of course, including in the United States) isn’t only absurd but reckless. However, such disregard is the basis of consensus across the political and media spectrum.

It’s widely believed that there separately exist purely Russian vectors of influence and purely Ukrainian vectors of influence—that never the twain shall meet or be mixed; that never the long history of Soviet/Russian subversion of Ukraine and every other nation Moscow seeks to influence shall come under even theoretical consideration in trying to understand the facts of the anti-Trump, anti-America conspiracy, let alone force them into the light.

As an aside, consider a graph in a 2015 Wall Street Journal article showing that out of all the nationalities in the world, “Ukrainians” topped the list of foreign donors to the Clinton Foundation (1999–2014). “Russians” don’t even make the top 15. Really?

By week’s end, a new phase of Trump–Russia was taking shape, shepherded by the testimony of the curious Fiona Hill (to be discussed in the next installment): We are now supposed to take sides on whether it was this separate state called Russia or this separate state called Ukraine that tried to influence the U.S. election.

Again, consider Nyquist’s notion of “Soviet Ukrainians” offering the defense ministry as a blandishment to the plump White House lieutenant colonel who has been so very cooperative and empathetic to “Ukrainian” interests. ...

Consider also that if there are “Soviet Ukrainians,” there are “Soviet Americans,” too.

Diana West is an award-winning journalist and author, whose latest book is “The Red Thread: A Search for Ideological Drivers Inside the Anti-Trump Conspiracy.”

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