Office of Information Governance and Privacy

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 12th St., SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

February 10, 2023

Hart Wood
American Oversight
1030 15th St. NW, B255
Washington, DC 20005
Hart.wood@americanoversight.org

RE: AMERICAN OVERSIGHT v. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY-1:21-cv-01171-TNM
ICE FOIA Case Number 2021-ICLI-00064
Thirteenth Release

Dear Mr. Hart:

This letter is the thirteenth interim response to your client's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), dated July 16, 2021. Your FOIA request seeking records related to all final talking points prepared for Secretary Nielsen regarding the MPP and issues related to it, such as plans for lodging asylum seekers in Tijuana, plans for transporting migrants to and from Tijuana, expansion of the protocol to additional ports of entry, etc.

ICE has considered your request under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A total of 500 pages of records were reviewed for this interim production. These 500 pages of records were located pursuant to a search of the Director's Office. After review of these documents, ICE has determined that 79 pages were nonresponsive, and 115 pages were duplicative. The responsive 306 pages of records are attached and have been marked 2021-ICLI-00064 2506 to 2021-ICLI-00064 2811.

ICE has applied FOIA Exemptions (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and (b)(7)(E) to portions of the pages produced as described below.

FOIA Exemption 6 exempts from disclosure information in personnel or medical files and similar files the release of which would cause a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This requires a balancing of the public's right to disclosure against the individual's right to privacy. The privacy interests of the individuals in the records you have requested outweigh any minimal public interest in disclosure of the information. Any private interest you may have in that information does not factor into the aforementioned balancing test.

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FOIA Exemption 7(C) protects records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes when production of such could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This exemption takes particular note of the strong interests of individuals, whether they are suspects, witnesses, or investigators, in not being unwarrantably associated with alleged criminal activity. That interest extends to persons who are not only the subjects of the investigation, but those who may have their privacy invaded by having their identities and information about them revealed in connection with an investigation. Based upon the traditional recognition of strong privacy interests in law enforcement records, categorical withholding of information that identifies third parties in law enforcement records is ordinarily appropriate.

FOIA Exemption 7(E) protects records compiled for law enforcement purposes, the release of which would disclose techniques and/or procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions, or would disclose guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law. I have determined that disclosure of certain law enforcement sensitive information contained within the responsive records could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law. Additionally, the techniques and procedures at issue are not well known to the public.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Assistant United States Attorney Sean Michael Tepe at sean.tepe@usdoj.gov.

Sincerely,

MERONICA D STONEY Digitally signed by MERONICA D STONEY Date: 2023.02.10 11:13:13 -05'00'

Meronica D. Stoney
(A) Deputy FOIA Officer

Enclosure(s): 306 pages

cc: Sean Michael Tepe
Assistant United States Attorney
sean.tepe@usdoj.gov

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 12 Jun 2019 13:13:02 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Reuters: Exclusive: Asylum seekers returned to Mexico rarely win bids to wait in U.S.

Exclusive: Asylum seekers returned to Mexico rarely win bids to wait in U.S.
Reuters
Reade Levinson, Mica Rosenberg & Kristina Cooke
June 12, 2019 – 6:09 AM
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-returns-exclusive/exclusive-asylum-seekers-returned-to-mexico-rarely-win-bids-to-wait-in-u-s-idUSKCN1TD13Z

(Reuters) - Over two hours on June 1, a Honduran teenager named Tania pleaded with a U.S. official not to be returned to Mexico.

Immigration authorities had allowed her mother and younger sisters into the United States two months earlier to pursue claims for asylum in U.S. immigration court. But they sent Tania back to Tijuana on her own, with no money and no place to stay.

The 18-year-old said she told the U.S. official she had seen people on the streets of Tijuana linked to the Honduran gang that had terrorized her family. She explained that she did not feel safe there.

After the interview, meant to assess her fear of return to Mexico, she hoped to be reunited with her family in California, she said. Instead, she was sent back to Mexico under a Trump administration policy called the “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP), which has forced more than 11,000 asylum seekers to wait on the Mexican side of the border for their U.S. court cases to be completed. That process can take months.

Tania’s is not an unusual case. Once asylum seekers are ordered to wait in Mexico, their chances of getting that decision reversed on safety grounds - allowing them to wait out their proceedings in the United States - are exceedingly small, a Reuters analysis of U.S. immigration court data from the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) shows.

Many migrants and their advocates say they are vulnerable to violence in Mexican border cities, which have some of the highest homicide rates in the world – facing dangers similar to those they fled in their home countries.

Of the 8,718 migrants in the program Reuters identified in the EOIR data, only 106 – about 1% - had their cases transferred off the MPP court docket, allowing them to wait in the United States while their asylum claims are adjudicated.

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The analysis, which provides the first public accounting of who is in the MPP program and how it is being carried out, comes as the program is set to be dramatically expanded. On Friday, Mexico agreed to implement it across the entire southern border to prevent U.S. President Donald Trump from imposing across-the-board tariffs on Mexican goods.

Trump, who ran for office on a platform of cracking down on illegal immigration, has grown increasingly frustrated by the ballooning numbers of mostly Central American families crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and asking for asylum in the United States. The administration devised the policy of returning asylum seekers to Mexico to reduce the number of migrants living in the United States while their cases chug through a backlogged court system.

Kathryn Mattingly, an EOIR spokeswoman, referred questions on the policy to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). A DHS spokeswoman, who declined to be named, said the department could not comment on Reuters' findings but said the program allows the United States "to more effectively assist legitimate asylum-seekers and individuals fleeing persecution."

Many Central American migrants choose to travel through Mexico en route to the United States, so "the great majority" are likely not persecuted there, the U.S. government has said in court filings.

Immigrant rights groups have sued the administration to halt the policy. In April, a federal judge in California ruled it likely violated U.S. immigration law. In May, however, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals allowed the program to continue while the legal challenge proceeds.

A HIGH BAR

Asylum seekers like Tania - who spoke on condition that only her first name be used because she feared for her safety in Mexico – can at any time tell U.S. officials they fear returning to Mexico, according to U.S. guidelines. That triggers an interview intended to ensure they are not returned to danger, in violation of U.S. and international law.

But the bar to pass these interviews is high: Migrants must prove they are "more likely than not" to face torture or persecution in Mexico.

In the pending litigation against the Trump administration, one appeals court judge said migrants might not know they have the right to ask for an interview about their fear of waiting in Mexico. But the government responded in a court filing that asking every migrant if they fear persecution in Mexico would likely produce false claims that "significantly slow down MPP processing and divert scarce resources."

Tania said that when she was separated from her family and first sent back to Mexico in April, she had no opportunity to express her fears. Instead, she said, she was put on a

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

bus and driven across the border. It was only two months later, at her first hearing in immigration court, that she had the chance to tell a judge she was scared, she said. He then referred her to an interviewer.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the division of DHS that oversees the officers that conduct these interviews, declined to say how many migrants plead fear of returning to Mexico and how many are allowed into the United States, citing the litigation.

Instead, Reuters analyzed EOIR data, which tracks every case registered with U.S. immigration courts and shows which are transferred off the MPP docket. When people are returned to Mexico they are given a notice to appear in immigration court, entering them in the system.

Reuters could not track people who may have been removed from the MPP program before their cases were registered with the court. For reasons that are unclear, the total of 8,718 cases registered by June 5 falls somewhat short of the number of migrants that Mexican officials said had been sent back by then.

Immigration lawyers handling MPP cases in El Paso and San Diego said the transfers are a good indication of how many people have been allowed in to wait in the United States, though they say some migrants likely were let in because they were pregnant, sick or otherwise deemed vulnerable - not because they passed a fear interview.

CARTELS AND CRIME

So far, most MPP migrants have been returned to Tijuana and Juarez, Mexican cities with high murder rates, where gangs and drug cartels operate and migrants often are kidnapped or robbed, they and their advocates say.

Returned migrants also say they struggle to find work, immigration lawyers and a permanent address where they can receive notice of their court hearings – circumstances that fall far short of persecution but can affect their cases or ability to continue waiting. At least 106 immigrants in the program have been ordered deported in absentia, meaning they did not show up to hearings, Reuters found.

Authorities appear to have broad discretion in deciding who is placed in the MPP program. Tania was the only one in her family to be singled out. Her mother and younger sisters were allowed to wait in the United States, even as many other adults with children have been returned to Mexico.

More than 3,000 of those returned to Mexico are children, Reuters found, including 107 babies less than one year old.

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DHS officials have said the policy would not apply to unaccompanied minors or Mexicans; however, the data shows 18 Mexicans and one unaccompanied minor on the MPP court docket.

The MPP program includes more than 4,200 Guatemalans, 3,000 Hondurans and 1,300 Salvadorans along with a handful of migrants from Peru, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, according to the EOIR data.

Reuters found the bulk of their individual asylum hearings have been set for this summer and fall, and a handful for later this year and early 2020.

Tania's individual hearing has yet to be scheduled.

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From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 16 May 2019 20:38:23 +0000
To: Feere, Jon
Subject: FW: MPP update

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Date: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 2:19 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>, (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update

FYSA

From: Hott, Russell (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 12:18 PM
To: Murphy, Mark P (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>, (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>, Seguin, Debbie (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: MPP update

They were wired with listening devices and two-way communication, conceivably to permit someone from outside the courtroom to coach them and/or monitor their hearings.

From: Murphy, Mark P
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2019 12:14 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov> (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; Seguin, Debbie (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: Hott, Russell (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: MPP update

I am not sure I understand. These woman were brining these devices to court with them from Mexico? What were these devises for.

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2019 12:02 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; Seguin, Debbie (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Murphy, Mark P (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: Hott, Russell (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update
Importance: High

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

FYSA,

I am sure OCC will let us know but, FYI – the MPP FAMUs arrived to the POEs wired for court.

Regards,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

From: Jennings, David W (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 11:57
To: #ERO CHIEFS OF STAFF (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: FW: MPP update

_____
Assistant Director
Field Operations

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: Price, Corey A (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 11:31
To: Jennings, David W (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Hott, Russel (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Archambeault, Gregory J (b)(6); (b)(7)(C), Lucero, Enrique M
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C), Bible, Daniel (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update

Wow, check this out.

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Date: Thursday, May 16, 2019, 9:27 AM
To: Price, Corey A (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update

Sir,

FYI

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Tom Hernandez
Assistant Field Office Director
ERO El Paso Field Office
915-856-5509 (office)
915-726-3651 (cell)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov

From: Martinez, Gloria A
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2019 9:10 AM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; Hernandez, Frederick T (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update
Importance: High

I am sure OCC will let us know all the W's but FYI – the MPP FAMUs arrived to the POEs wired for court……unbelievable….

I don't think OCC agreed.

And, there were numerous pregnant females who were removed from the program so we will see more pregnant females in NDU for release.

Gloria A. Martinez
Assistant Field Office Director – El Paso Field Office
US Immigration & Customs Enforcement – Enforcement & Removal Operations
(b)(6); (D) (b)(6); (C)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2019 9:05 AM
To: Martinez, Gloria A (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: FW: MPP update
Importance: High

Ma'am,

Please see update below. The 6 pregnant women that were not taken to court CBP made that decision not to take them, they were removed from MPP.

I attempted to make contact with CBP Supervisor (b)(6); I will continue to make contact.

Per (b)(6); GPS CBP HQ was on site in court.

Pictures attached of the wiring on subjects.

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Thank you

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Supervisory Detention and Deportation Officer-Non Detained Unit | El Paso Field Office
US Immigration & Customs Enforcement | Enforcement & Removal Operations
(b)(6); (D) | (b)(6); (C)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2019 8:59 AM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: MPP update

Court update from 05-15

-13 final orders in absentia

-20 claimed fear of being returned to Mexico (have interviews with CIS /asylum today)

-1 case was dismissed due to improper service of NTA (b)(6); (b)(7)(C). Subject was also a no show

-12 no shows that Planet didn't have updates in system as of last night

Update for 05-16 court from PDN

-6 pregnant women were not brought to court this morning and one that recently gave birth

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) - wired
wired

One female gave birth in Mexico
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) wired

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

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From: Blank, Thomas
Sent: Sun, 5 May 2019 21:12:21 +0000
To: Feere, Jon
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Or Tracy Short if he is around.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:05 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Sir -
The WH has scheduled a policy briefing for tomorrow at 4:30 in the Situation Room and I am not going to be able to attend; tomorrow I'm on a tight deadline to ensure our 287(g) program stays afloat. I spoke with the WH and they are fine with sending a surrogate who can speak on the issues in the agenda below. I figure it would be best to let you delegate. I'd recommend an operator/LEO who has been part of the conversation on pulling in other agencies for operations and who can speak on 287(g) expansion.
The agenda is as follows:
Agenda added below

This is a regular meeting chaired by (b)(6); to check-in with those most involved in current immigration policy priorities.

Agenda:

I. Asylum PM Implementation
   a. Immigration officer reprioritization
   b. Regulations update
II. Update on High Priority Regulations
   a. Public Charge
   b. Flores
III. Update on MPP
IV. Expanding & Enhancing ICE Force
   a. 287(g)
   b. Assignment of LEO from other agencies and departments
V. Fines & Penalties
   a. Update on assessment & enforcement
   b. Treasury role
VI. Other
   a. Welfare PM

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b. Healthcare / Women's PM
c. Visa Security (State)

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
State
NSC
DPC
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO

WAVES: (b)(7)(E)

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Blank, Thomas
Sent: Sun, 5 May 2019 21:08:59 +0000
To: Feere, Jon
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

The person most versed in the things on the agenda is Debbie Sequin. Operators are going to be on edge tomorrow because of the Unexpected announcement of a new ICE Director.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:05 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
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DOJ
State
NSC
DPC
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO

WAVES: https://events.whitehouse.gov/?rid=KTFG4V3VG3

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Blank, Thomas
Sent: Mon, 6 May 2019 00:12:56 +0000
To: Feere, Jon
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Debbie will cover. Can you get her name in Waves and advise her please.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:05 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Sir -
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AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

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Participants:
DHS
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NSC
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OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
WAVES (b)(7)(E)

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Policy Coordinator
Sent: Sat, 4 May 2019 21:00:12 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6): Wolf, Chad; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon (b)(6); @state.gov; (b)(6): @state.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

Agenda added below

This is a regular meeting chaired by (b)(6); to check-in with those most involved in current immigration policy priorities.

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   a. Immigration officer reprioritization
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Participants:
DHS
DOJ
State
NSC
DPC
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO

WAVES: (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 1 Aug 2019 13:13:55 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Mornings With Maria (FBN) – Mark Morgan (Asylum Deal With Guatemala, Border Crisis)

Mornings With Maria (FBN) – Mark Morgan (Asylum Deal With Guatemala, Border Crisis)
http://mms.tveyes.com/transcript.asp?StationID=2025&DateTime=8/1/2019%206:35:46%20AM&playclip=true&pbc=search%3a%2b

MARIA BARTIROMO: joining me cbp commissioner mark morgan, mark, great to see you.

MARK MORGAN: thank you.

BARTIROMO: thank you so much for joining us, commissioner. why is it important?

MORGAN: it's important in a couple of factors, one it is signal to go people that are lead -- leaving the country and claiming asylum they will get protection in guatemala a heck a lot sooner than taking the dangerous track all the way across guatemala, all the way across mexico into the united states. that's first and foremost, the american people need to understand it really is for those individuals calling asylum, gives that protection.

BARTIROMO: you will claim asylum there and not come to america and claim asylum.

MORGAN: not put your hands in the hands of smugglers, cartels, mortgage your home, 3 to $10,000, potentially abused on the way here and instead you get protection in guatemala.

BARTIROMO: people in say in guatemala will say more people here and less for the rest of us? why the protests?

MORGAN: similar to the issues that we are having in the country with the immigration but again the president has been driving negotiations, this administration has made this happen because really the crisis that we have on southwest border, it's not the united states crisis only, it's a regional crisis, so this is about mexico and guatemala.

BARTIROMO: good point.

MORGAN: stepping up and addressing --

BARTIROMO: you have seen significant move of apprehensions as a result of the partnerships, explain why?

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

MORGAN: i will go back to the president and specific negotiations with the government of mexico has made it happen, they have stepped up in unprecedented ways 26,000 troops, strengthen the southern border and apprehensions and strengthening operations in u.s.-mexico border, it's a game-changer.

BARTIROMO: apprehensions are down 30%?

MORGAN: heading that way. right now looks like july are continuing downward departure and another thing that's next, mpp, migrant protection protocol that we work with the government of mexico, we have put 26,000 individuals back to mexico waiting in mexico while they go through asylum process in america, that's 26,000 people that would either wait –

BARTIROMO: when you release people to the united states they don't necessarily come back to the hearings, the hearings are years later?

MORGAN: that's exactly right. we would lose the individuals in the interior with the united states, right now the law forces us to deal with children.

BARTIROMO: you have certain laws and congress needs to address and hasn't, you're looking at a good situation given participation with mexico and guatemala, but longer term not a fix.

MORGAN: everything that guatemala and mexico is doing is positive but we are still in a crisis, we are still apprehending over 2600 per day, it's a full-on crisis.

BARTIROMO: 2600 apprehensions a day?

MORGAN: 2600 a day. this past year we got over 5,000 in a single day.

BARTIROMO: incredible.

MORGAN: it's incredible, this is still a full-blown crisis even with help of government of mexico and guatemala. not durable and not sustainable for this to have a true fix we need congress to act, pass meaningful throacion address loophole.

BARTIROMO: they are gone for 6 weeks, we know that, in terms of 20 democratic hopefuls were on stage last night facing in detroit, former vice president joe biden and julian castro got into a heated back and forth on illegal border crossings, watch this.

JOE BIDEN (CLIP): the fact of the matter is you should be able to, if you cross the border illegally, you should be able to be sent back, it's a crime,

JULIAN CASTRO (CLIP): the only way we will guaranty that these kinds of family separations don't happen in the future is that we need to repeal this law, there's still going to be consequences if somebody crosses the border, it's a civil action, also we

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

have 654 miles of fencing, we have thousands of personnel at the border, we have planes, we have boats, we have helicopters, security cameras, what we need are politicians to have guts on this issue.

BIDEN (CLIP): i have guts enough to say this plan doesn't make sense.

BARTIROMO: y you reaction?

MORGAN: maria, it's very simple, for the law enforcement perspective, i'm not going to weigh on the political landscape, what i'm telling the american people if you decriminalize the criminal behavior of illegal entering this country, you're going to make our job more difficult to secure and safeguard the country, it's simple.

BARTIROMO: yeah, what do you think in terms of -- they are getting political, so when they come back in session in 6 weeks, 5 and a half weeks, do you think we are going to see any movement on this in terms of the loophole in.

BARTIROMO: no, i've engaged congress time and time again and it's clear that i'm being told, again, repeatedly that they don't believe that they will be able to come together and pass meaningful legislation and it's very clear what we can do, the flores settlement agreement, we treat kids from canada and mexico different. if your child comes alone from mexico and canada, we send you back to your parents, if you're from guatemala, we keep you. talked to them and said america, please change your law.

BARTIROMO: real quick on 6.1 billion in defensive fund, taken out of variety of fund after supreme court decision last week, how would that money be spent?

MORGAN: every bit of that is going to be for new wall and i think this is another narrative, it's not just a wall, a wall system, so it's not just a physical barrier that's going up, there's technology, there's access roads, there's lighting, it's a wall system and every mile that goes up, raising our capacity with the border patrol to do their job effectively.

BARTIROMO: what i was stunned by when i was at the border was that the border patrol officers are trying to do their job and secure the border and yet they are being forced to take care of kids, take babies to hospitals, i mean, all this other stuff and taking them away from their job that they're supposed to doing. people don't real that.

MORGAN: first of all, thank you for going there. people need to do ve that you have once you've been there. 50% of our resources are being diverted away to humanitarian mission, the border more open and cartel getting into the drugs.

BARTIROMO: looks wide open in el paso because the rio grande was dry. only steps to mexico.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 31 Jul 2019 15:07:10 +0000
To: (b)(6); #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); #ERO CHIEFS OF STAFF
Subject: RE: OPA ISSUE: Reporter with local NPR affiliate WHYY requested agency comment regarding status (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Good Morning,

The below statement has been cleared by ERO.

Thank you,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Staff Officer Detailed

From: (b)(6);
Sent: Wednesday, July 31, 2019 9:47 AM
To: #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: OPA ISSUE: Reporter with local NPR affiliate WHYY requested agency comment regarding status
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Good morning,

If there aren't any objections, OPA will issue the statement below. ERO Philadelphia approved and cleared by Privacy. **No petitions pending**. Thank you.

(b)(6);

ISSUE:
Reporter Laura Benshoff, with the local NPR affiliate WHYY requested agency comment regarding status (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) and her son, Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), removals recent removal from the Berks Family Residential Center.

STATEMENT:

(b)(5)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

afterward, (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) attorney filed another appeal with the BIA, and the BIA granted a stay of removal, pending a motion to reconsider, which prevented ICE from affecting her removal. (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) is currently in ICE custody; her immigration proceedings are ongoing.

"ICE conducts immigration enforcement consistent with federal law, and the Berks Family Residential Center was developed to provide a safe and humane environment for families as they go through the immigration proceedings. Once a resident has exhausted all appeals, petitions for relief, and has been issued a final removal order by an immigration judge and/or BIA, ICE officers must comply with those orders.

"ICE has not returned any families detained at Berks to Mexico as part of the Migrant Protection Protocols program.

"During the week of Aug. 21, 2019, ICE removed three families units from Berks Family Residential Center to Guatemala and one family unit to El Salvador."

BACKGROUND (Internal Only):

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

QUERY:
From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @whyy.org>
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2019 2:44 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: request for information about families recently transferred out of Berks

Hi (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

I hope you had a good weekend. I'm reaching out because I'm trying to get some more context/information on reports that three families have been transferred out of the Berks Family Residential Center in the last week or two. Two were reportedly sent to Mexico as a part the policies spelled out in the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) - can you confirm that or add context and details to that account?

Another family unit, a mother named (b)(6) and her son, were reportedly removed from the Center in the early hours of July 24 or 25, in spite of having a review of their case pending before the BIA. After a judge issued an emergency injunction, they were returned to the Berks Center on Saturday. Can you confirm this family's movements, and explain on what grounds they could have been deported? There have also been allegations from other residents of the Berks Family Residential Center that the alleged attempted deportation was in retaliation for speaking at length with two local Democratic congresswomen who visited the Center last week. Can you respond to that claim?

My deadline for these responses is noon tomorrow.

Many thanks,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Reporter
WHYY.org // 90.9FM

o: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
c:

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Public Affairs Officer
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
Philadelphia Field Office
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) office
cell

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: JIOC-ICE
Sent: Fri, 5 Apr 2019 15:18:10 +0000
To: #Security and Resilience daily report
Cc: #ICE JIOC Management
Subject: Weekly ICE Security and Resiliency Report for 29 March - 5 April 2019

UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE
DO NOT DISSEMINATE OUTSIDE OF ICE



ICE - Security and Resilience Monitoring
Weekly Situational Awareness and Emergency Preparedness Activity Report
Prepared by HSI Office of Intelligence (JIOC)
29 March-5 April 2019
(Updates in Blue)

1. (U) **ICE Office Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

2. (U) **Significant NSSE/SEAR Events/Other Special Events**

(b)(7)(E)

3. (U) **National Capital Region**

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

4. (U) **Acts of Terrorism and Extreme Violence**

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

5. (U) **Significant Weather and Geologic Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

6. (U) **Pandemics and Bio-Surveillance Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

7. (U) **Cyber Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

8. (U) **Infrastructure Protection (Accidents, Suspicious Activity, and Technical Failures):**

- (U) No Significant Activity

9. (U) **Fire Activity**

- (U) No Significant Activity

10. (U) **Other Significant Activity**

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

Respectfully,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Section Chief (acting)
Criminal Analyst
Joint Intelligence Operations Center
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, SW - 10th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20536
Email: (b)(6); @ice.dhs.gov
Desk: (b)(6);
(b)(7)(C)

UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE
DO NOT DISSEMINATE OUTSIDE OF ICE

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 1 Aug 2019 17:59:57 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); Wolf, Chad;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Kelly, Christopher S;Marin, David A;Feere, Jon;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ;SEGUIN, DEBBIE W;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

Agenda:

I. Removal Compression
   a. Border Patrol Procedures
   b. ER / VR / VD / MPP / STCA
      i. Single Adults
      ii. Family Units
   c. Credible Fear Integrity
      i. Border Patrol Pilot
      ii. Internal Relocation
      iii. AG Ruling

II. Juvenile Aliens
   a. Category 1 / TVPRA
   b. ER
   c. Household Application
   d. Expedited Docket
   e. Sponsors
   f. Countering Child Smuggling

III. Strengthening Interior Law Enforcement
   a. Legal Review
   b. 8 USC 1324
   c. Arrests & Removals
   d. Financial Enforcement
   e. Force Multiplication
      i. 287(g)
      ii. State, Local and Federal Resources

IV. Policy Update
   a. USCIS policy actions & regs
   b. DOJ policy actions & regs
   c. Others DHS policy actions & regs

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Seguin, Debbie
Sent: Mon, 6 May 2019 01:10:58 +0000
To: Feere, Jon;Blank, Thomas
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

10/4. Thanks.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 8:55 PM
To: Seguin, Debbie (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: FW: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Debbie —

The Waves link and agenda are below. Happy to discuss further tomorrow.
Thank you,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

Agenda added below

This is a regular meeting chaired by (b)(6); to check-in with those most involved in current immigration policy priorities.

Agenda:

I. Asylum PM Implementation
   a. Immigration officer reprioritization
   b. Regulations update
II. Update on High Priority Regulations
   a. Public Charge
   b. Flores
III. Update on MPP
IV. Expanding & Enhancing ICE Force
   a. 287(g)
   b. Assignment of LEO from other agencies and departments
V. Fines & Penalties
   a. Update on assessment & enforcement

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

b. Treasury role

VI. Other

a. Welfare PM

b. Healthcare / Women's PM

c. Visa Security (State)

Participants:

DHS

DOJ

State

NSC

DPC

OSAP

DCOS/P

WHCO

WAVES: (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Blank, Thomas
Sent: Mon, 6 May 2019 00:06:28 +0000
To: Short, Tracy
Cc: Feere, Jon
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

10-4.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 8:03 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: Feere, Jon (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Tom,
I have a conference call with (b)(6); tomorrow at 4:00. I spoke with Jon about the agenda items below. Because the ICE topics are policy focused, I would recommend that someone from Debbie's shop attend for ICE. Thanks.
Tracy

From: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:49 PM
To: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: FW: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Tracy
Are you available to represent ICE at this meeting tomorrow? Jon is otherwise engaged. Let me know and we will get you cleared in if you can do it.
Tom

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:05 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Sir -

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The WH has scheduled a policy briefing for tomorrow at 4:30 in the Situation Room and I am not going to be able to attend; tomorrow I'm on a tight deadline to ensure our 287(g) program stays afloat. I spoke with the WH and they are fine with sending a surrogate who can speak on the issues in the agenda below. I figure it would be best to let you delegate. I'd recommend an operator/LEO who has been part of the conversation on pulling in other agencies for operations and who can speak on 287(g) expansion.
The agenda is as follows:
Agenda added below

This is a regular meeting chaired by (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) to check-in with those most involved in current immigration policy priorities.

Agenda:

I. Asylum PM Implementation
   a. Immigration officer reprioritization
   b. Regulations update
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   a. 287(g)
   b. Assignment of LEO from other agencies and departments
V. Fines & Penalties
   a. Update on assessment & enforcement
   b. Treasury role
VI. Other
   a. Welfare PM
   b. Healthcare / Women's PM
   c. Visa Security (State)

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
State
NSC
DPC
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO

WAVES: (b)(7)(E)

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 25 Apr 2019 13:38:21 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Fox: 9th Circuit mulls Trump WH policy of returning asylum seekers to Mexico temporarily

9th Circuit mulls Trump WH policy of returning asylum seekers to Mexico temporarily
Fox News
Lee Ross
April 24, 2019
https://www.foxnews.com/politics/9th-circuit-trump-policy-asylum-seekers-mexico-temporarily

SAN FRANCISCO – Another Trump administration immigration control effort went before the critical eye of the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals on Wednesday -- and appears likely to suffer a similar fate as previous government programs that the court's judges have struck down.

Wednesday's case before a three-judge panel examined the legality of the Department of Homeland Security's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), an initiative announced in December to address what the feds called the "dramatically escalating burdens of unauthorized migration, which is causing irreparable harm."

The idea: for Central American migrants who've crossed the U.S. border asking for asylum to be returned to Mexico temporarily. MPP was designed to provide relief to overburdened U.S. detention facilities by targeting people who were unlikely to make successful asylum claims.

Judge Paul Watford took issue with how the migrants have been processed and whether the government was giving them a fair opportunity to express their concerns about returning to Mexico – even if on a temporary basis.

"I don't understand how that's not arbitrary and capricious," Watford said about current protocols which do not demand government border agents ask about fears migrants might have about staying in Mexico.

Judge Diarmuid O'Scannlain, a Reagan appointee who seemed favorably disposed to the government's case, asked the lawyer representing migrants held in Mexico why her clients would rather be in detention in the United States than have freedom of movement in Mexico. "We don't want to be in Mexico. We'd rather be in the United States," Judy Rabinovitz of the ACLU replied.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Outside the courthouse after the hearing, Rabinovitz, who said she was cautiously optimistic for a favorable ruling, went on further to say, “we have... heard of people who are kidnapped and given death threats – didn’t matter – they were returned to Mexico.”

Judge William Fletcher criticized the government’s legal justification for the migrants it's placed in Mexico under existing laws that appear to have given separate classifications for different types of asylum seekers.

“We’ve got dogs and cats who go to the pound but that doesn’t turn a dog into a cat or vice versa,” Fletcher, who was appointed by President Clinton, analogized. President Obama appointed Watford.

Earlier this month, a lower court judge determined the Trump administration's policy violated existing federal law and failed to give adequate protection to migrants who feared for their safety in Mexico.

Judge Richard Seeborg issued a nationwide injunction immediately stopping immigration authorities from placing migrants in Mexico. President Trump blasted the decision, tweeting: “A 9th Circuit Judge just ruled that Mexico is too dangerous for migrants. So unfair to the U.S. OUT OF CONTROL!”

But, several days later, Seeborg’s injunction was stayed temporarily to allow each side to present Wednesday's arguments. That prompted another presidential tweet, “Finally, great news at the Border!”

Over the past couple of years, the 9th Circuit has ruled against the Trump administration’s travel ban and attempt to end protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. It also has ruled in favor of "sanctuary" laws giving protection to illegal immigrants.

The judges gave the packed third-floor courtroom no guidance on when a decision would be announced. The tenor of the arguments suggested the stay would be lifted but it wasn't clear whether the underlying injunction would be preserved in full or modified in a way that would keep MPP in place under an altered state.

If the judges decide to reinstate the injunction, the government has asked for a one-week delay to file an emergency appeal with the Supreme Court.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 18 Apr 2019 00:02:18 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper;#ERO CHIEFS OF STAFF
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: PAO seeking concurrence on several MPP cases on DEADLINE

Good Evening,
Clear for ERO.
Thanks,
(b)(6);

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Date: Wednesday, Apr 17, 2019, 7:03 PM
To: #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: PAO seeking concurrence on several MPP cases on DEADLINE

ISSUE: National Univision reporter requested information on five immigration cases related to the individuals below. All five cases are MPP cases for individuals whose immigration court hearings were delayed pending the outcome of a temporary court injunction that prevented CBP from returning them to Mexico to wait for the outcome of their immigration hearings earlier this month. The MPP hearings have now resumed. PAO is on deadline for COB today. San Diego FOD/ ICE OCC concur.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Sun, 5 May 2019 22:39:50 +0000
To: Short, Tracy
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Cool. My work cell is: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

From: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 6:38 PM
To: Feere, Jon (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

I'll call you in 10 min. (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) is my cell.

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 6:31 PM
To: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

I can't locate your cell. What number should I call?

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

From: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 6:26 PM
To: Feere, Jon (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: FW: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Can you call me?

From: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:49 PM

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

To: Short, Tracy (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: FW: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Tracy
Are you available to represent ICE at this meeting tomorrow? Jon is otherwise engaged. Let me know and we will get you cleared in if you can do it.
Tom

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Sunday, May 05, 2019, 5:05 PM
To: Blank, Thomas (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: WH meeting tomorrow afternoon

Sir -
The WH has scheduled a policy briefing for tomorrow at 4:30 in the Situation Room and I am not going to be able to attend; tomorrow I'm on a tight deadline to ensure our 287(g) program stays afloat. I spoke with the WH and they are fine with sending a surrogate who can speak on the issues in the agenda below. I figure it would be best to let you delegate. I'd recommend an operator/LEO who has been part of the conversation on pulling in other agencies for operations and who can speak on 287(g) expansion.
The agenda is as follows:
Agenda added below

This is a regular meeting chaired by (b)(6); to check-in with those most involved in current immigration policy priorities.

Agenda:

I. Asylum PM Implementation
   a. Immigration officer reprioritization
   b. Regulations update
II. Update on High Priority Regulations
   a. Public Charge
   b. Flores
III. Update on MPP
IV. Expanding & Enhancing ICE Force
   a. 287(g)
   b. Assignment of LEO from other agencies and departments
V. Fines & Penalties
   a. Update on assessment & enforcement
   b. Treasury role
VI. Other
   a. Welfare PM

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

b. Healthcare / Women's PM
c. Visa Security (State)

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
State
NSC
DPC
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO

WAVES: (b)(7)(E)

Please let me know how you'd like to proceed.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 31 Jul 2019 20:34:23 +0000
To: Wolf, Chad
Subject: FW: MPP Retention Memorandum and MPP Information Request
Attachments: MPP Retention Memo.pdf, MPP Information Request.pdf

Sir,

You're likely already aware, but if not, the e-mail below (with attachments) was sent to the components by CRCL as part of their investigation of MPP.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Senior Advisor to the Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) | (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

******** This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and/or deliberative and/or law enforcement sensitive information. It is not for release, review, retransmission, dissemination, or use by anyone other than the intended recipient. Any disclosure of this communication or its attachments must be approved by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ********

From: CRCL Officer (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Tuesday, July 2, 2019 2:03 PM
To: Morgan, Mark A (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C); Albence, Matthew (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Davis, Mike P (b)(6); (b)(7)(C); Cuccinelli, Ken (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @uscis.dhs.gov>
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @cbp.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; Asher, Nathalie R (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Marin, David A (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Johnson, Tae D (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @uscis.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @uscis.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @cbp.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @CBP.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @cbp.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @cbp.dhs.gov>; ERO CRCL (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ICE Civil Liberties (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) JOINT INTAKE (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @cbp.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @uscis.dhs.gov>; Mina, Peter (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @HQ.DHS.GOV>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hq.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hq.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @HQ.DHS.GOV>
Subject: MPP Retention Memorandum and MPP Information Request

Good Afternoon Ms. Groom, Mr. Cuccinelli, Mr. Davis, Mr. Albence, Mr. Falk, and Mr. Morgan,

Attached, please find the retention memo and information request for CRCL's investigation into the implementation of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). Thank you, and please let us know if you have any questions.

Regards,

U. S. Department of Homeland Security
Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Homeland Security

July 2, 2019

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Enclosure

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Homeland Security

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Mon, 1 Apr 2019 15:29:34 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: The Hill: Nielsen orders Border Patrol agent 'surge' amid migrant influx

Nielsen orders Border Patrol agent 'surge' amid migrant influx
The Hill
Zack Budryk
April 1, 2019
https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/department-of-homeland-security/436712-nielsen-orders-border-patrol-agent

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen has ordered the deployment of more Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel to the U.S.-Mexico border, Nielsen announced Monday morning.

In a statement, the Department of Homeland Security said Nielsen has ordered CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan to implement "emergency surge operations" and accelerate the timeline for reallocating 750 officers to border patrol sectors affected by a recent "influx" of migrants.

Nielsen has also directed CBP to expand the Migrant Protection Protocols, a DHS plan to return migrants to Mexico while they wait for their day in immigration court.

Under Nielsen's directive, CBP will return hundreds more migrants per day to Mexico, including those caught at or between points of entry, according to DHS.

Nielsen further ordered the agency to plan to expand the MPP plan beyond California and Texas, the locations where it currently operates.

In late March, the El Paso Border Patrol sector temporarily shuttered checkpoints on the U.S. side of the border, telling The Hill that "to process and ensure appropriate care for those in custody, resources including personnel have been diverted from other border security priorities."

"The crisis at our border is worsening, and DHS will do everything in its power to end it," Nielsen said in a statement. "We will not stand idly by while Congress fails to act yet again, so all options are on the table. We will immediately redeploy hundreds of CBP personnel to the border to respond to this emergency. We will urgently pursue additional reinforcements from within DHS and the interagency. And we will require those seeking to enter the United States to wait in Mexico until an immigration court has reviewed their claims."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Sun, 28 Jul 2019 15:23:32 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Justice With Judge Jeanine (FNC) – Tom Homan (Border Funding, Guatemala)

Justice With Judge Jeanine (FNC) – Tom Homan (Border Funding, Guatemala)
http://mms.tveyes.com/transcript.asp?StationID=130&DateTime=7/28/2019%203:34:20%20AM&playclip=true&pbc=search%3a%2b

JEANINE PIRRO: joining me now, the acting commissioner of border enforcement. congratulations. that is a fabulous decision. i read it. and you know what? it reverses the 9th circuit court of appeal. i call it theth circus, myself. -- the 9th circus, myself. how many miles of the wall have been built so far?

TOM HOMAN: judge, first of all, it's the president, but it's a victory for this country for the continued safety and security. we complete 52 new miles of wall along the southwest border of strategic locations. by 2020 we'll have 205 miles of wall completed. with this new ruling, we are going to be able to build 450 new walls. 450 miles of new wall. right now, we have been building a mile wall every week since may. that's the truth.

PIRRO: on the issue of the border. apparently the united states reached an agreement with guatemala that is apparently helping in addition to what happened with mexico. tell me about what happened with guatemala and the united states.

HOMAN: i'm glad you asked this question. this is potentially a game changer. it shows this administration, they have been relentless working with the government of guatemala. continuing to bring them to the table to come up with this cooperative agreement. what this means is that individual fleeing from their countries and they are seek protection now instead of having to go through multiple countries thousands of miles and turn themselves over to the cartels and risk their lives and safety. this means guatemala agreed these individuals coming into guatemala rsh, they are going to do their best to provide them adequate protection immediately. this is an incredible agreement and it will have an incredible impact on everybody. this crisis is not just the united states crisis. this is a regional crisis. it's the northern triangle and beyond.

PIRRO: let's talk about the people in guatemala who may have crossed illegally. will they be sent back to guatemala and told to apply for asylum there?

HOMAN: right now -- again, the president and this administration has been working tirelessly with the government of mexico. mexico agreed to assist in unprecedented ways. never in modern history have the government of mexico stepped up the way they are doing. they are providing thousands of troops on the southern border. increasing interior enforcement and assisting on the u.s.-mexico border including the migrant protection protocol. what will happen is they will present themselves at the u.s. border and we'll send them back to mexico to wait while they are going through the asylum

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process. that's another game changer. to date there are 24,000 individual waiting in mexico that would have been released into the interior united states.

PIRRO: are you saying mexico is stopping them pursuant to the president's threat to impose the tariff? what i'm asking about is the ones in detention being sent back to guatemala or mexico. do you know?

HOMAN: yes. what was just approved would have done that. when they come to the u.s. border and they have not claimed asylum in mexico or another country, we would have sent them back immediately. but that regulation that this administration put forward, it was even joined. so we are prohibited from doing that. but we are going to fight this.

PIRRO: i was one of the skeptics as were so many people when mexico in the past agreed to work with the united states on protecting them what you just said that they are working with us better than you thought.

HOMAN: they absolutely are. it's unprecedented the amount of support they are providing. it's getting stronger and stronger every day. the southern border tore interior enforcement. and their support of the mvp. 24,000 people that would have been in the interior of the united states are waiting in mexico. even all this great stuff that's being put forth by this administration. it's not the full solution. we need congress to step up to do what they need to do to pass legislation to address loopholes in our legislation.

PIRRO: so good to have you on the show tonight, mark morgan. thank you so much.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 3 Apr 2019 12:03:28 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Wolf, Chad F. (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hhs.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hhs.gov; (b)(6); @hhs.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); Seguin, Debbie; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hhs.gov
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @hhs.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Canceled: Border Security PCC
Importance: High

UPDATE The NSC is cancelling today's PCC. I will be reaching back out in the weeks to come to reschedule

-Ryan

POLICY COORDINATION COMMITTEE
ON
Border Security

Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019
Location: EEOB 374
Time: 11:30-12:50 pm

Please join us for a discussion on Border Security on Wednesday, April 3, 2019

Please come prepared to discuss the agenda items and relevant impact points to your department or agency.

To access the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB), please provide pre-clearance information using this WAVES link: https://events.whitehouse.gov/?rid=VJ28CXX8GH. All information submitted must exactly match the government-issued ID you present when arriving. Cleared guests enter at the Southwest Visitors' Entrance at 17th St. and E St. NW. At the first Secret Service checkpoint, guests are required to show a government-issued photo ID or passport.

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Agenda

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I. Get backs from the Deputies call (NSC)

II. UAC Sponsor Vetting Working Group (DHS / HHS)

a) DHS / HHS MOA

b) UAC Bed space

III. MPP (DHS)

a) Update from POTUS brief

b) Expansion plan

IV. Expansion of Expedited Removal (DHS / DOJ)

a) Status of expansion plan of ER beyond the border

V. Flores (DHS / HHS / OMB)

a) Resource requests

b) Timelines

VI. Country Conditions (NSC)

a) Status of sub-PCC work

(b)(6);
(b)(7)(C)

Director of Border Security
Border and Transportation Security
National Security Council
O: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
C:

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: JIOC-ICE
Sent: Fri, 26 Jul 2019 17:52:02 +0000
To: #Security and Resilience daily report
Subject: (U//LES) Weekly ICE Security and Resiliency Report for 19 - 26 July 2019

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UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE



ICE - Security and Resilience Monitoring
Weekly Situational Awareness and Emergency Preparedness Activity Report
Prepared by HSI Office of Intelligence (JIOC)
19 - 26 July 2019
(Updates in Blue)

1. **(U) Significant NSSE/SEAR Events/Other Special Events**

   - Nothing significant to report.

2. **(U) National Capital Region**

   - Nothing significant to report.

3. **(U) Terrorism, Extreme Violence, and Travel Warnings**

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

4. **(U) Significant Weather and Geologic Activity**

- Nothing significant to report.

5. **(U) Pandemics and Health Related Issues**

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- Nothing significant to report.

6. **(U) Cyber Activity**

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

7. **(U) Infrastructure Protection (Accidents, Suspicious Activity, and Technical Failures):**

- Nothing significant to report.

8. **(U) Fire Activity**

- Nothing significant to report.

9. **(U) Other Significant Activity**

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C); (b)(7)(E)

V/r,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Section Chief
Joint Intelligence Operations Center
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, SW - 10th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20536
Desk/STE: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
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From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Tue, 19 Mar 2019 13:56:09 +0000
To: Albence, Matthew;Kelly, Christopher S;Simon, Joseph D
Subject: Four topics overview

Good morning -

Can you please send me any paper on the following topics and also let me know if there are any specific ICE asks/concerns on these topics that you want me to push at a WH meeting this afternoon?

MPP
Credible Fear
FMUA Enforcement
Alternate Safe Third

Thank you for your help.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Senior Advisor
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 25 Jul 2019 22:53:01 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @state.gov; (b)(6);
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Wolf, Chad; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon; Kelly, Christopher S; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) SEGUIN, DEBBIE W; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group
Importance: High

Agenda:

I. Update on Removal Compression
   a. ER / VR / VD
   b. Travel docs
   c. FMUAs
   d. MPP
   e. Cred Fear Integrity

II. Update on Juvenile Minors
   a. Correct application of TVPRA
   b. DOJ & USCIS Adjudication
   c. Households
   d. Sponsors
   e. Countering criminal child smuggling

III. Strengthening Interior Law Enforcement
   a. ER
   b. 8 USC 1324
   c. Financial Enforcement
   d. State, Local and Federal Resources
   e. Additional Strategies

IV. PMs
   a. DOJ update
   b. USCIS update

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 25 Jul 2019 18:22:50 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @state.gov;(b)(6);
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Wolf, Chad;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ;Feere, Jon;Kelly, Christopher S;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) SEGUIN, DEBBIE W (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

***Agenda*:**

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   a. DOJ update
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***Participants*:**
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 24 Jul 2019 15:25:38 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Washington Examiner: Bedard: July migrant apprehensions plummeting 25%, Mexico's help credited

July migrant apprehensions plummeting 25%, Mexico's help credited
Washington Examiner
Paul Bedard
July 24, 2019 – 11:10 AM
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/july-migrant-apprehensions-plummeting-25-mexicos-help-credited

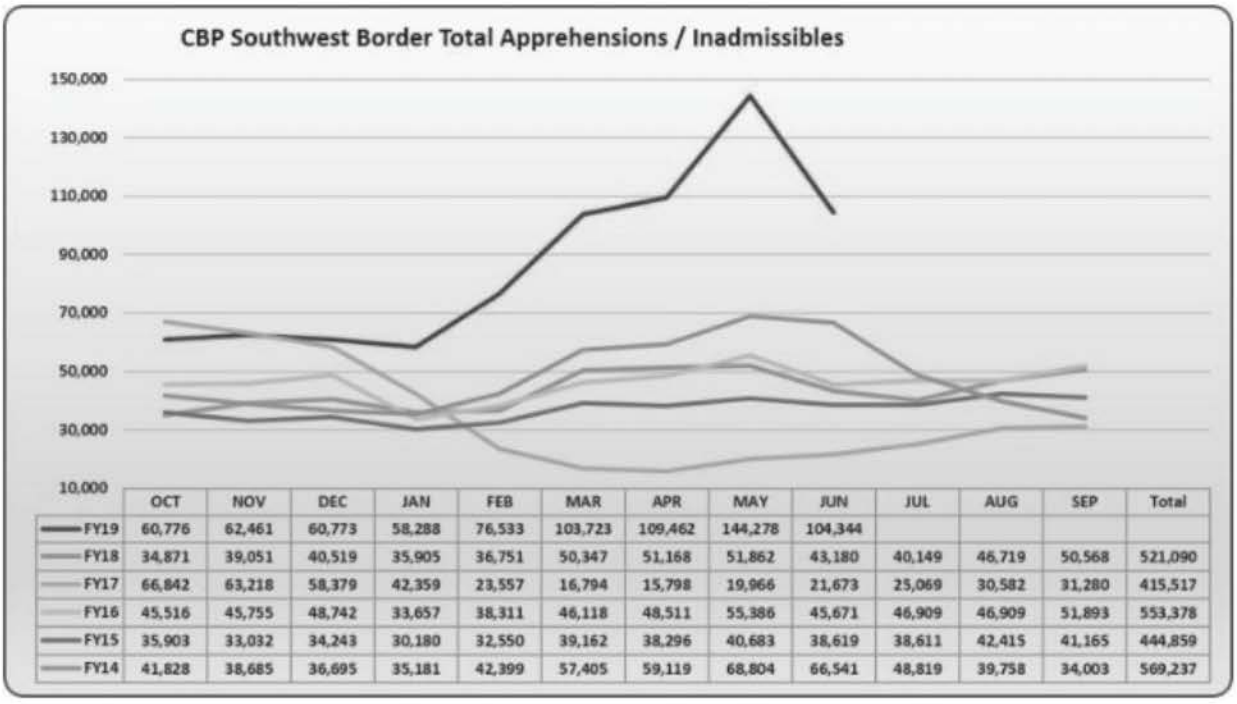
Federal immigration officials, citing Mexico's help and new Trump administration initiatives, are seeing far fewer illegal immigrants at the southern border than expected and now believe that those seized this month will be 25% fewer than in June, far more than the historic average drop.

What's more, said Ken Cuccinelli, acting director of the Citizenship and Immigration Services, the number of illegals encountered at the border should continue to plummet as Mexico stretches its cooperation with the U.S. further across the southern border and changes to the asylum process kick in.

In an interview, Cuccinelli said that those caught at the border will likely be below 80,000 in July, a 25% drop from June when 104,344 were apprehended or turned away.

He said that the drop from June to July is typically 6%, which would result in 98,000 encountered at the border.

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	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	Total
FY19	60,776	62,461	60,773	58,288	76,533	103,723	109,462	144,278	104,344				
FY18	34,871	39,051	40,519	35,905	36,751	50,347	51,168	51,862	43,180	40,149	46,719	50,568	521,090
FY17	66,842	63,218	58,379	42,359	23,557	16,794	15,798	19,966	21,673	25,069	30,582	31,280	415,517
FY16	45,516	45,755	48,742	33,657	38,311	46,118	48,511	55,386	45,671	46,909	46,909	51,893	553,378
FY15	35,903	33,032	34,243	30,180	32,550	39,162	38,296	40,683	38,619	38,611	42,415	41,165	444,859
FY14	41,828	38,685	36,695	35,181	42,399	57,405	59,119	68,804	66,541	48,819	39,758	34,003	569,237

“We’re going to be way below that. If I had to guess we’d probably be below 80,000. A 25% drop is way beyond a seasonal drop,” Cuccinelli told Secrets during an interview in his office.

He cited new changes to asylum rules, a push for “expedited removal” and the “Migrant Protection Protocols” in which Mexico has agreed to hold migrants as they await U.S. immigration court hearings.

Cuccinelli explained that the MPP program has not spread across the border yet and that Mexico is now expanding into the high illegal immigrant traffic area in southern Texas.

“If Mexico continues to cooperate I think the numbers are going to keep going down because part of what’s happening is we are still not all the way across the border with MPP. That’s what’s coming on-line now in the southern part of Texas, for instance, including the Rio Grande Valley, which is the No. 1 corridor. The effect that we’ve had so far is without hitting the No. 1 corridor. And that’s just now starting up and we’re very enthusiastic about that and the potential that has to stem the tide,” said the acting director, a former Virginia attorney general.

As more migrants are sent home without winning a ticket into the United States, he said that it will likely discourage the flow more from Central American nations.

“It does it in two ways. One, when people don’t just get released into the interior, it changes their calculus and of the people back home. And also some of those people are going home,” he said, citing the expedited removal process.

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“So that means people are showing back up in neighborhoods who left not too long ago and couldn’t get in,” he added.

Even with the drop in migrants trying to enter the United States, USCIS and other immigration agencies are working to close it down further and Cuccinelli is working on rules and make that happen, especially since border facilities are full and are expected to stay full for months.

“We really should just turn them back right off the bat. When we are full up, the legal argument can be made, a legitimate argument can be made, that the proper solution is immediate turn around,” he said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Kelly, Christopher S
Sent: Thu, 25 Jul 2019 20:47:27 +0000
To: Feere, Jon
Subject: RE: Tomorrow's WH meeting

Thanks, Jon. Just got out of Matt's hearing. Really appreciate it.

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Date: Thursday, Jul 25, 2019, 2:43 PM
To: Kelly, Christopher S (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Tomorrow's WH meeting

Chris -
I'm not in the office on account of getting over a bad head cold. I figured I'd spare everyone. I may be decent enough to come in tomorrow but I'm thinking likely not. Since you are on the WH invite for tomorrow I thought I'd flesh out a couple of the topics on the agenda:
***Agenda*:**

I. Update on Removal Compression
   a. ER / VR / VD

Here, you can talk about the new directive on ER signed by Albence.

   b. Travel docs

Here, the ask is something we've discussed - the notion of dropping of CentAmers without waiting for TDs. Are we comfortable doing that yet?

   c. FMUAs
   d. MPP
   e. Cred Fear Integrity

II. Update on Juvenile Minors
   a. Correct application of TVPRA
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   c. Households
   d. Sponsors
   e. Countering criminal child smuggling

Anything from HSI would be appropriate here. Any arrests of sponsors? Have we started digging into USCIS databases for targeting purposes, like employment history?

III. Strengthening Interior Law Enforcement
   a. ER
   b. 8 USC 1324
   c. Financial Enforcement

Status of fines. We're about two or so weeks into the 30-day response period for the dozen sanctuary cases. ALSO, I'm working with the bonds team to develop a means to use private collection agencies to go after those not paying their fines. We're currently

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developing new targets — recent VD failures—by comparing data against CBP data. This will eventually involve CBP and EOIR data but we're figuring that out now.

d. State, Local and Federal Resources

This will likely be a discussion of the 287g task force model. Albence was open to some use of the model, but I'm not sure he's given any direction on it.

e. Additional Strategies

I hope this helps. We can talk tomorrow beforehand if you'd like.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor to the Director
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 14 Feb 2019 16:41:36 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: !!! BuzzFeed: The Trump Administration Has Sent The First Asylum-Seeking Families Back To Mexico

The Trump Administration Has Sent The First Asylum-Seeking Families Back To Mexico
BuzzFeed
Adolfo Flores
February 14, 2019 – 11:35 AM
https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/adolfoflores/the-trump-administration-has-sent-the-first-asylum-seeking

Five families, including 10 children, were returned as part of the administration's new plans to force asylum seekers to wait in Mexico.

The first asylum-seeking Central American families were sent back to Mexico from the US on Wednesday. The move is the latest in the Trump administration's plan to force migrants to wait in Mexico while their immigration cases are processed, according to a Mexican official.

The five families sent back to Tijuana, Mexico, were made up of four women, one couple, and 10 children, said the official, who was not authorized to speak about the returned families.

Initially only single adults were being sent back to Mexico from the US as part of the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) policy.

On Feb. 1, a senior DHS official told reporters that up until then, the people returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols have not included families. However, they said they would be moving to remove families "very soon" and were looking to expand it beyond the San Diego-Tijuana border.

"This is a way to make sure families stay together through the duration of their immigration proceedings," the official said.

The head of Mexico's immigration enforcement agency had previously said Mexico wouldn't accept underage migrants as part of the program, and that it wouldn't extend the policy beyond the El Chaparral pedestrian border crossing in Tijuana.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 24 Jul 2019 21:12:59 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @state.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ;Wolf, Chad (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon;Kelly, Christopher S; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) SEGUIN, DEBBIE W; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

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***Participants*:**
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Fri, 1 Feb 2019 22:32:17 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: WaPo: Trump administration to expand wait-in-Mexico measures for asylum-seekers

Trump administration to expand wait-in-Mexico measures for asylum-seekers
Washington Post
By Nick Miroff
February 1 at 4:51 PM
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-to-expand-wait-in-mexico-measures-for-asylum-seekers/2019/02/01/1e782d16-2656-11e9-81fd-b7b05d5bed90_story.html?utm_term=.344aa644b0f1

An experimental U.S. policy that requires migrants to wait in Mexico while their asylum claims are processed will soon expand to multiple border cities and apply to migrant families, Homeland Security officials said Friday.

Since the new measures were implemented this week at the San Ysidro border crossing in southern California, about 12 Central American asylum seekers have been sent back to Mexico after an initial screening, the officials said.

All of those applicants were single adults, but the new rules will extend to parents with children “very soon,” said one senior Department of Homeland Security official, who insisted on anonymity to tell reporters about the Trump administration’s plans for further implementing what it calls the “Migrant Protection Protocols,” or MPP.

El Paso is the next location being eyed by the administration to apply its wait-in-Mexico measures, DHS officials say, though it is unclear when that could happen. Officials insist they want to proceed carefully and have acknowledged privately that they expect to face legal challenges as their efforts to crack down at the border have been repeatedly blocked by federal courts.

Mexican immigration officials warned this week they would not cooperate with U.S. plans to apply the measures beyond San Ysidro nor accept the return of migrants under age 18.

But one senior DHS official said the Trump administration intends to forge ahead anyway, positive that Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s government will continue to take back Central Americans, including families, which now account for roughly half of those crossing the border.

“You’ll see that there’s been conflicting information coming out of Mexico,” the official said. “I think that’s a challenge, they’re trying to square off their communications

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internally, but it's our understanding and it's been our intent all along to scale up" to other ports of entry.

"We've had those conversations with Mexican officials, and we are confident we are going to be able to do so," the official said.

Under the MPP guidelines, underage migrants who arrive without a parent or guardian will not be sent back to Mexico if they can convince a U.S. asylum officer they could face harm or persecution while awaiting their hearing with a U.S. immigration judge.

Such waits can last months or years, and the Mexican government in recent weeks has offered to accommodate those placed in asylum purgatory by offering temporary residency and work permits.

Pleased by Mexico's cooperation, the Trump administration has attempted to walk a fine line between managing the sensitivities of the leftist López Obrador government and its political need to tout the measures as a tough, innovative response to a crisis in the American asylum system as record numbers of Central American families arrive each month.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen worked out a broad agreement with senior Mexican officials during secret talks at a Houston airport hotel late last year. But since then U.S. officials and the López Obrador government have gone to great lengths to cast the measures as a unilateral move by the United States, and an invocation of emergency authority granted under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act.

In reality, American border officials would not be able to move forward with their plans if the López Obrador government refuses to take back Central Americans after they have crossed into the United States.

DHS officials said they are not expecting that to occur.

"The encouraging thing for us is the López Obrador administration, as they came in, started signaling that they would be looking to try to keep individuals in safer conditions," the senior DHS official said. "They've been looking at jobs, at humanitarian visa programs, and some of those policies have actually facilitated our ability to return someone."

"If the Mexican government decided to no longer provide humanitarian protections under their laws and international law to people on their territory, that would be a bigger issue," the official said. "But I think we have confidence that the administration will live up to those commitments and will do what's right."

"At the end of the day, we have an understanding that's working right now, and hopefully that continues," the official said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 17 Jul 2019 20:36:53 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Kelly, Christopher S;SEGUIN, DEBBIE W;Marin, David
A;(b)(6); Wolf, Chad;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

Agenda:

I. Update on Removal Compression
   a. IFR implementation
   b. ER / VR
   c. MPP

II. Juvenile Aliens
   a. Correct application of TVPRA
   b. Repatriation (BP, ICE, USCIS and EOIR)
   c. Sponsors
   d. Countering child smuggling (ICE and DOJ)

III. Interior Enforcement Enhancement
   a. Arrests and Removals
   b. Reprioritization of DHS Resources
   c. State, Local and Federal Assistance
   d. Financial penalties

IV. Credible Fear Integrity
   a. Internal Relocation
   b. Border Patrol Pilot

V. Reg Update
   a. DHS
   b. DOJ

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 17 Jul 2019 20:36:30 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Kelly, Christopher S;SEGUIN, DEBBIE W;Marin, David
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ;Wolf, Chad;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

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   a. DHS
   b. DOJ

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OSAP
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AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 17 Jul 2019 20:49:14 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: RE: Strategic Working Group

I'd recommend Chris Cronin who heads our Enforcement Division under Dave Marin. He is at Cronen, C M (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
I have to travel to see family this week but will be back next week, so will be unable to attend. Obviously working via laptop regardless.

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Senior Advisor to the Director
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @who.eop.gov>
Date: Wednesday, Jul 17, 2019, 1:10 PM
To: Feere, Jon (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Strategic Working Group

Hi (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); wants me to check with you to see if anyone else from ICE should be at the meeting on Friday —
Chris Kelly +1 (he's bringing Dave Marin)
& you
This is the agenda:

I. Update on Removal Compression
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   b. ER / VR
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III. Interior Enforcement Enhancement
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   c. State, Local and Federal Assistance
   d. Financial penalties

IV. Credible Fear Integrity
   a. Internal Relocation

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

b. Border Patrol Pilot

V. Reg Update

a. DHS

b. DOJ

Sent from my iPhone

M: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Fri, 12 Jul 2019 20:27:52 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Your World (FNC) – Robert Perez (Border Crisis)

Your World (FNC) – Robert Perez (Border Crisis)
http://mms.tveyes.com/transcript.asp?StationID=130&DateTime=7/12/2019%204:14:30%20PM&playclip=true&pbc=search%3a%2b(the)

CHARLES PAYNE: vice president pence is visiting detention facilities in mcallen, texas over growing criticism over crisis. now first, deputy commissioner of the customs, robert is here. i'm sure you listened to the testimony on capitol hill who described inhumane conditions and treatment towards the migrants. what are your thoughts on that?

ROBERT PEREZ: good to be you, charles. look, we have been in customs and border protection and the department of homeland security sounding the alarm on these overcrowding and the unprecedented migration crisis for the better part of 18 months. look, we've been open and honest about that discussion. we've been very transparent. we invited congressional delegations every month, multiple times, that members and their staffs and in addition to all the other oversight that we've had to our facilities so they can see first hand the challenges that we've been facing. it's universally accepted now that we do have a crisis, that we have facilities that were never outfitted or built to deal with the volume or demographic that we're dealing with right now. took almost two months to get supplemental funding. we finally got that. that will congestion. now we need targeted changes to the legal frame work to get to the heart of the matter, charles. look, the alien smuggling organizations are smuggling children and using them as virtual passports across our border and recycling them at times to profit their illegal endeavors. the targets have to change the end the criticism.

PAYNE: i get your point. some of these same lawmakers laughed and said this was a manufactured crisis. that the republicans were overblowing the conditions or the circumstances. when you hear representative saying that people were told to drink out of toilets, that women were called names, representative alexandria ocasio-cortez said she first hand saw canker sores in the mouths of migrants as a result of unnutritious foods, i know you weren't prepared for this. nobody could have been prepared for this onslaught. do you take what they're saying? is there a grain of truth there? what has been done since then? particularly with the new funding to make things better.

PEREZ: what we've done has been unprecedented not only control and oversight but ensuring that anyone and everyone in our custody is treated with the utmost care, absolutely everyone has access to freshwater, everybody has access to food, to snacks. we've also served an unprecedented amount of medical capability. nurse practitioners at our facilities to check the folks and monitor them closely. we're still making 80 trips a day to the hospital where people are deemed need hospital care. we have gone over and above the standards that are very high to deal with the best as best

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

we can in our facilities. the overcrowding is what it is and presents challenges. i'm confident that everybody is getting the means i just described to you.

PAYNE: what else can you be provided with? until congress gets their act together, which could be never, because this is a great political football that someone would rather keep in play than have a solution at the southern border. what else does your organization need to make this better for the migrants and the men and women that are doing the jobs that they were never trained for.

PEREZ: so we're not waiting on anybody else as we've been doing since this began, 18 months ago. we're going to continue time mement things like the migrant protection protocol, working with on mexican counter parts, to have asylum seekers wait in mexico while their cases are being adjudicated here in the u.s. we're going to encourage mexico with their enforcement efforts, the ones that they're making along the border with mexico or on the interior. we're encouraged by those respects. we're going to continue to seek solutions on our end to present and bring consequences for illegal activity. it's really important to emphasize there is a criminal element that continues to exist not only exploiting this crisis but that we're combatting every day. drug smugglers, gang members and criminals of all types that we have to pay attention to. i can't say enough about the front linemen and women handling this crisis in and unpreshe debted fashion with the utmost professionalism and we'll keep our eye on the ball and all the other mission sets we have.

PAYNE: thanks, robert.

PEREZ: thanks, charles.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: JIOC-ICE
Sent: Fri, 12 Jul 2019 17:39:54 +0000
To: #Security and Resilience daily report
Cc: #ICE JIOC Management
Subject: (U//LES) Weekly ICE Security and Resiliency Report for 5 - 12 July 2019

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DO NOT DISSEMINATE OUTSIDE OF ICE



ICE - Security and Resilience Monitoring
Weekly Situational Awareness and Emergency Preparedness Activity Report
Prepared by HSI Office of Intelligence (JIOC)
5 - 12 July 2019
(Updates in Blue)

1. **(U) Significant NSSE/SEAR Events/Other Special Events**

   - Nothing significant to report.

2. **(U) National Capital Region**

   - Nothing significant to report.

3. **(U) Terrorism, Extreme Violence, and Travel Warnings**

(b)(7)(E)

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(b)(7)(E)

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4. **(U) Significant Weather and Geologic Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

5. **(U) Pandemics and Health Related Issues**

(b)(7)(E)

6. **(U) Cyber Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

7. **(U) Infrastructure Protection (Accidents, Suspicious Activity, and Technical Failures):**

-

- Nothing significant to report.

8. **(U) Fire Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(7)(E)

9. **(U) Other Significant Activity**

(b)(7)(E)

V/R

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Criminal Analyst
Joint Intelligence Operations Center (JIOC)
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, SW - 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20536
Desk/STE: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Fax: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

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From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 10 Jul 2019 21:04:54 +0000
To: Undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Your World (FNC) – Mark Morgan (Border Crisis, AOC)

Your World (FNC) – Mark Morgan (Border Crisis, AOC)
http://mms.tveyes.com/transcript.asp?StationID=130&DateTime=7/10/2019%204:25:00%20PM&playclip=true&pbc=search%3a%2b(the)

NEIL CAVUTO: mark morgan with us. that's pretty impressive. people hearken back to 100,000 but progress, what did you think?

MARK MORGAN: make no mistake. we are still in a flaw in crisis but those numbers are still dramatic. 20% is a dramatic decrease. make no mistake. the president's efforts with mexico to include the threat of tariffs, or one of the single most important issues. mexico has agreed to and they have stepped up and the past few weeks they are doing exactly as they said they agreed to do and it's making an impact.

CAVUTO: when we look at these numbers, commissioner, they talk about her going down 20-some-odd percent. are we talking about their border, that that's the genesis and it started with what they are doing.

MORGAN: all of the above. mexico has agreed to tighten up their southern border. they have agreed to put additional resources to stop the avenues through mexico and include additional resources of the u.s.-mexico border. one of the biggest things also is what we referred to as the mpp, migrant production protocol. that's where mexico has agreed to keep individuals who are seeking asylum coming to america and mexico while they are going through the immigration process. we've sent back over 17,000 individuals that are residing in mexico while they're going through their immigration process. that's a game changer, neil.

CAVUTO: commissioner,ants to begin deportations of those whose cases have been fully adjudicated. they've been told they have to leave. they haven't left. numbers all over the map. 650,000 to upwards of a million. how will it be executed? how will they start the process?

MORGAN: i'm glad you mentioned it because my former role as director of i.c.e., i supported this. we have to do this. one of the greatest factors, one of the greatest incentives is individuals know you grab a kid, your u.s. passport, once you get here, nothing happens to you. we have to address it. we have to enforce the rule of law. we have to address it through consequences. we have to send a message that once you have due process and you have been ordered removed by a judge, that's what needs to happen. that's what i see is responsible to do.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

CAVUTO: you probably heard about alexandria ocasio-cortez. she wants to get rid of the entire department of homeland security. this is what she said.

REP. ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ (CLIP): i.c.e. is not under doj. it's under the department of homeland security.

INTERVIEWER (CLIP): would you get rid of homeland security?

REP. OCASIO-CORTEZ (CLIP): i think so. when i need to undo a lot of the egregious, a lot of the egregious mistakes the bush administration did.

CAVUTO: what do you make of that?

MORGAN: it is this kind of rhetoric from congress' not doing anything to solve the crisis. it just increases the divisiveness that we are experiencing in this country with this issue. it does nothing to solve the crisis. after months of bleeding congress -- pleading. a few weeks ago border patrol had over 2500 unaccompani custody. today it's less than 250. it's because of the supplement we have been begging to congress to pass for months. that's what we need congress to do. we don't need them to continue this divisive rhetoric. that solves nothing.

CAVUTO: commissioner, thank you. we will see if the progress continues but it's the first positive sign that may be the mexicans are doing exactly as they said they would.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 10 Jul 2019 20:30:05 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Wolf, Chad; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Albence, Matthew; Feere, Jon; (b)(6);
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); @usdoj.gov (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

Attendance varied based on agenda.

Agenda:

I. Procedures for Alien Minors
   a. Correct application of TVPRA
   b. Accelerating and Enforcing Judicial Removal Orders
   c. Post-placement
   d. Interaction with IFR, Safe Third and MPP

II. Child Smuggling Prevention
   a. Sponsors
   b. Enforcement of federal smuggling prohibitions
   c. Other federal laws

III. Streamlining Removals for Single Adults and FMUAs
   a. Procedures upon apprehension (e.g. VR, ER).
   b. Travel Documents
   c. Asylum integrity

IV. Financial Enforcement

V. Resources & Force Multiplication

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

WAVES Link (b)(7)(E)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Wed, 17 Jul 2019 20:36:47 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Kelly, Christopher S;SEGUIN, DEBBIE W;Marin, David A; (b)(6); Wolf, Chad; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Feere, Jon; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @usdoj.gov; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: Immigration Strategic Working Group

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   a. Internal Relocation
   b. Border Patrol Pilot

V. Reg Update
   a. DHS
   b. DOJ

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Fri, 16 Aug 2019 12:40:57 +0000
To: Kelly, Christopher S;Albence, Matthew;Robbins, Timothy S;Marin, David A;Benner, Derek N;Weindorf, Eric J;Murphy, Matthew R;Feere, Jon;Allen, Matthew C;Lucero, Enrique M
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) Short, Tracy;Davis, Mike P;(b)(6);
Subject: WH Immigration Working Group Prep Discussion

Conf Call #: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Participant Code: (b)(6);

Agenda:

I. Removal Compression At Border

* ER / VR / VD / MPP

II. CF, Asylum Integrity

a. Deployment of Border Patrol resources

b. Internal Relocation training, implementation

c. L-E-A

d. A-B

e. IFR

f. Reg update (DOJ)

III. Juvenile Aliens

* ER
* Expedited Docket
* Household & Sponsors
* Countering Child Smuggling

IV. Advancing Law Enforcement & Compliance In the Interior

* Legal guidance review
* Strategic innovation
* Interagency collaboration
* Financial enforcement

i. Application & collection

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

ii. Future reg reform

* Force Multiplication

i. Federal Agencies & Departments

ii. State & Local

iii. 287(g)

* Bonding form

V. Policy Update

* Forthcoming USCIS policy actions
* General regulatory update (DHS, DOJ)
* Other

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
*For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Thu, 15 Aug 2019 21:18:21 +0000
To: Kelly, Christopher S;Albence, Matthew;Robbins, Timothy S;Marin, David A;Benner, Derek N;Weindorf, Eric J;Murphy, Matthew R;Feere, Jon;Allen, Matthew C
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ;Short, Tracy;Davis, Mike P
Subject: WH Immigration Working Group Prep Discussion

Conf Call #: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Participant Code: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Agenda:

I. Removal Compression At Border
   a. ER / VR / VD / MPP

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   c. L-E-A
   d. A-B
   e. IFR
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   d. Financial enforcement
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      ii. Future reg reform
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      i. Federal Agencies & Departments
      ii. State & Local
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V. Policy Update
   a. Forthcoming USCIS policy actions
   b. General regulatory update (DHS, DOJ)
   c. Other

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Participants:
DHS
DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P
WHCO
NSC
****For this meeting we will have no substitutes or plus ones unless specifically approved.***

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: ICE.Scheduler
Sent: Thu, 15 Aug 2019 20:24:01 +0000
To: Kelly, Christopher S;Albence, Matthew;Robbins, Timothy S;Marin, David A;Benner, Derek N;Weindorf, Eric J;Murphy, Matthew R;Feere, Jon
Cc: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: WH Immigration Working Group Prep Discussion

Agenda:

I. Removal Compression At Border
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      ii. State & Local
      iii. 287(g)
   f. Bonding form

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DOJ
OSAP
DCOS/P

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WHCO
NSC
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DHS MORNING BRIEFING

Prepared for the Office of Public Affairs (OPA)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
By TechMIS
www.TechMIS.com

Mobile User Copy

TO: Homeland Security Secretary & Staff

DATE: Monday, August 19, 2019 6:00 AM ET

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Top News

U.S. Can Block Migrants Seeking Asylum, but Only in Some States, Appeals Court Rules (New York Times)

New York Times [8/16/2019 8:00 PM, Michael D. Shear, 22840K]

A federal appeals court said Friday that President Trump can begin blocking some Central American migrants from applying for asylum in the United States, but only along parts of the border with Mexico.

Migrants who seek asylum in New Mexico and Texas can be subjected to the administration's new rules, which effectively prohibit them from requesting protection if they traveled through another country on their way to the United States unless they already tried and failed to receive asylum in that other country or countries, the court said.

But the ruling by the three-judge panel for the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco is only a partial victory for Mr. Trump, whose immigration agenda has repeatedly been delayed by judges.

In July, a lower court had blocked the president's new asylum rules after finding that the administration had probably violated the procedures required to put those regulations in place. The judge suspended the asylum rules nationwide while the court challenge continued.

The appeals court agreed with the lower court, but said that the judge had not provided enough evidence that the rules should be blocked across the country. The appeals panel narrowed the judge's ruling, deciding that the tough asylum rules could not go into effect in the Ninth Circuit, which covers California and Arizona.

The ruling means that the administration can begin blocking the Central American migrants in two border states: New Mexico, which is covered by the 10th Circuit, and Texas, which is covered by the Fifth Circuit. Immigrants from Honduras, for example, who enter the United States through those states will be eligible for asylum protections only if they had been denied asylum in Guatemala or Mexico first.

Lee Gelernt, the lead lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union in the legal challenge to the asylum rules, said his organization plans to provide the judge in the case with more information about why the president's rules should be blocked nationwide.

"We will put in additional evidence about the need for a nationwide injunction," Mr. Gelernt said. "We are hopeful and optimistic that the nationwide injunction will be reinstated."

But Mr. Gelernt also expressed optimism that the court would eventually conclude that the president's policy violates federal law and should be permanently blocked from going into effect. He said the court rejected the Trump administration's argument that the policy should be allowed to go into effect nationwide.

"The overriding takeaway was that the court did not feel this was clearly legal," Mr. Gelernt said.

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It was not clear whether the Trump administration would immediately begin implementing the new rules in Texas and New Mexico. A spokesman for the Department of Justice did not respond to requests for comment about the ruling by the appeals court.

Court limits order that had stopped Trump asylum limits (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 12:41 PM, Nomaan Merchant, AP, 9425K]
A federal appeals court's ruling Friday will allow the Trump administration to begin rejecting asylum at some parts of the U.S.-Mexico border for migrants who arrived after transiting through a third country.

The ruling from the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals limited a lower court's order against President Donald Trump's policy to California and Arizona. U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar's July 24 order won't apply to New Mexico or Texas, the appeals court ruled.

The two busiest areas for border crossings are in South Texas' Rio Grande Valley and the region around El Paso, Texas, which includes New Mexico. About 46,500 people in July crossed the U.S. border without permission in those two regions, according to the U.S. Border Patrol.

The policy would deny asylum to anyone who passes through another country on the way to the U.S. without seeking protection there. Most crossing the southern border are Central Americans fleeing violence and poverty, who would largely be ineligible. The policy would also apply to people from Africa, Asia, and South America who come to the southern border to request asylum.

Tigar had ruled the policy could expose migrants to violence and abuse, deny their rights under international law and return them to countries they were fleeing.

The appeals court ruled that Tigar hadn't considered whether a nationwide order was necessary and that the "limited record" shows that it wasn't.

Judges Mark Bennett and Milan Smith voted to limit Tigar's order. Judge A. Wallace Tashima dissented.

Tigar is a nominee of former President Barack Obama. Smith was nominated by former President George W. Bush and Bennett by Trump, while Tashima was nominated by former President Bill Clinton.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other legal groups had sued the Trump administration after it announced the restrictions last month.

"We will continue fighting to end the ban entirely and permanently," said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the ACLU.

The U.S. Department of Justice did not immediately comment.

9th Circuit removes nationwide injunction against Trump's latest plan to limit asylum (Los Angeles Times)

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Los Angeles Times [8/16/2019 3:51 PM, Maura Dolan, 3575K]
In a partial victory for President Trump, a federal appeals court decided Friday to remove a nationwide injunction against a new rule that would deny asylum to the vast majority of immigrants at the southern border.

Last month, U.S. District Judge Jon S. Tigar, a San Francisco-based Obama appointee, issued a nationwide preliminary injunction against the 10-day-old rule. It made migrants ineligible for asylum if they passed through another country en route to the U.S. and failed to apply for protection in that country.

Most asylum seekers come from Central America.

The Trump administration asked the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals to lift the injunction pending appeal.

A panel hearing motions this month for the 9th Circuit decided 2-1 that the district judge failed to cite evidence in support of a nationwide injunction and removed it.

“Based on the limited record before us, we do not believe a nationwide injunction is justified,” wrote the majority, 9th Circuit Judges Milan D. Smith Jr., appointed by President George W. Bush, and Mark J. Bennett, a Trump appointee.

The panel refused, however, to lift the injunction in the nine states of the 9th Circuit, saying the administration failed to show it was likely to win on appeal.

As a result, border officials in California and Arizona will not be allowed to apply the new rule against asylum seekers, but agents in Texas and New Mexico may, unless a court elsewhere intervenes.

In a dissent, Judge A. Wallace Tashima, a Clinton appointee, said the majority’s decision exceeded the authority of a motions panel.

“Perhaps, the district court did not make detailed findings in support of a nationwide injunction because the need for one in the circumstances of this case is obvious,” he wrote.

“Should asylum law be administered differently in Texas than in California?” he asked. “These issues and problems illustrate why tinkering with the merits on a limited stay motion record can be risky.”

Friday’s order set an expedited schedule for written arguments on the case and said a hearing would be held in December.

Trump scores partial win on asylum ban as court narrows injunction (Politico)
Politico [8/16/2019 2:01 PM, Ted Hesson, 2512K]
A federal appeals court on Friday handed the Trump administration a partial victory in its quest for an asylum ban, appearing to clear the way for imposing it along the border in New Mexico and Texas, at least temporarily.

While the three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit upheld a lower court’s decision to block the ban, it narrowed the nationwide injunction to the 9th Circuit,

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which encompasses district courts in the border states of Arizona and California.

But the panel also said in a related order that the asylum ban, implemented in July, likely violated federal regulatory law because it was issued without an adequate period for public comment.

President Donald Trump and his top aides have argued that many asylum seekers arriving at the border lack valid claims to protection. As a result, the administration has sought to restrict access to asylum through a range of experimental policies.

The latest asylum clampdown came in the form of a fast-track regulation issued in mid-July that barred migrants from seeking asylum in the U.S. if they first passed through another nation without seeking protection.

The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the regulation in the Northern District of California, arguing it violated domestic asylum law and international treaties.

U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar, the judge hearing the ACLU lawsuit, issued a nationwide injunction July 24 that temporarily blocked the ban. He found the regulation was likely invalid because it conflicted with federal asylum laws.

On the same day Tigar ruled to block the policy, a Trump-appointed federal judge hearing a separate legal challenge in Washington, D.C., declined to take similar action.

In the ruling Friday, all three judges on the 9th Circuit panel agreed to uphold Tigar's temporary freeze on the ban's implementation. However, the panel split 2-1 on the issue of limiting the scope of the injunction.

Judges Milan Smith and Mark Bennett — appointees of George W. Bush and Trump, respectively — ruled to apply the injunction only to the 9th Circuit. The pair said in the majority-penned order that the district court "clearly erred" when it blocked the asylum ban across the country.

Judge Wallace Tashima, a Clinton appointee, would have kept the nationwide injunction in place. In a partial dissent, Tashima wrote that the asylum ban should be blocked across the country because it would be applied throughout the U.S.

"Should asylum law be administered differently in Texas than in California?" he wrote. "These issues and problems illustrate why tinkering with the merits on a limited stay motion record can be risky."

ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt praised the decision to keep the asylum ban blocked in the 9th Circuit, but said in a written statement that his organization would "continue fighting to end the ban entirely."

The nationwide injunction issued in July was the second time Tigar had halted a Trump attempt to restrict asylum access. In November, the Obama appointee also blocked an earlier Trump asylum ban that barred asylum seekers who cross the border between ports of entry.

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Appeals court narrows injunction on asylum ban (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 8:37 AM, UPI, 2034K]
A federal appeals court Friday narrowed the injunction on President Donald Trump's asylum ban.

The injunction issued in mid-July would have barred migrants from seeking asylum if they passed through another nation first without seeking protection.

U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar in California issued the nationwide injunction on July 24, saying that it as "inconsistent with existing asylum laws."

Now, Trump has scored a partial win as the federal appeals court narrowed the nationwide injunction Friday to the Ninth Circuit, encompassing district courts in border states of Arizona and California, clearing a path for the asylum ban to be imposed along the border in New Mexico and Texas.

The lower court "failed to discuss whether a nationwide injunction is necessary to remedy the Plaintiff's alleged harm" and "based on the limited record before us, we do not believe a nationwide injunction is justified," the appeals court said.

The three-judge panel was split 2-1, with Republican-appointees in favor of narrowing the scope.

The American Civil Liberties Union has argued that the ban should be blocked completely because it conflicts with federal asylum laws. ACLU attorney Lee Gerlent said in a statement he would "continue fighting to end the ban entirely."

The Trump administration also attempted to implement another asylum ban on migrants who cross the border illegally in November, but that was struck down weeks later by a federal judge who issued temporary injunction, allowing Latin American migrants to seek refuge in the United States even if they enter illegally.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the ruling and the Supreme Court declined to overrule it.

Court ruling allows Trump asylum restrictions in Texas and New Mexico (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 2:17 PM, Marina Pitofsky, 2806K]
The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday ruled partially in favor of the Trump administration in its attempt to impose an asylum ban, appearing to approve the ban for those who cross into Texas and New Mexico.

The court said in a ruling that it denied the government's broader request to reverse a previous decision blocking the policy, but upheld the injunction for states on the border inside of its jurisdiction.

The 9th Circuit runs along the West Coast and includes the border states of California and Arizona, so the ruling appears to clear the way for the policy to be applied in New Mexico and Texas, the areas that see the most border crossings from Mexico and Central America.

About 46,500 people crossed the U.S. border in South Texas's Rio Grande Valley and the

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region around El Paso, Texas, in July alone, PBS reported.

The Trump administration policy denies asylum to migrants who pass through another country on the way to the U.S. without first filing for protections there. Most of the migrants waiting to enter the U.S., legally or illegally, on the southern border have not applied for asylum before reaching the U.S., according to PBS.

The appeals court ruled that a lower court judge, Jon Tigar, did not consider whether a nationwide ban was necessary when he ruled last month that the policy could expose migrants to abuse if they are forced to apply for asylum before reaching the U.S.

“The district court clearly erred by failing to consider whether nationwide relief is necessary to remedy Plaintiffs’ alleged harms,” the ruling said. “And, based on the limited record before us, we do not believe a nationwide injunction is justified.”

But the panel of judges also ruled in a related order that the asylum ban may violate federal regulatory law because it was not issued with an adequate period for public comment.

American Civil Liberties Union attorney Lee Gelernt applauded the decision to keep the ban blocked in the 9th Circuit, but said the organization would “continue fighting to end the ban entirely," Politico reported.

Court allows Trump admin asylum restrictions to take place along most of border (ABC News)

ABC News [8/16/2019 12:58 PM, Quinn Owen]

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rolled back a prior nationwide injunction that blocked the Trump administration’s attempt to deny most asylum claims at the U.S.-Mexico border.

With that decision, the asylum restrictions can now take effect everywhere outside of the 9th Circuit, which includes Arizona, California and Nevada.

Reversing the move everywhere outside the 9th Circuit means those who cross the border into California or Arizona will be able to seek asylum, while those entering into New Mexico and Texas will be barred unless they’re from Mexico, according to Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a former immigration lawyer and policy analyst at the American Immigration Council.

"If this situation continues, smugglers may encourage more people to cross in California or Arizona instead of New Mexico or Texas," Reichlin-Melnick said Friday. "This could have very dangerous consequences — Arizona has long been one of the deadliest places to cross the border, and temperatures are extreme now."

The court said in its decision that "the district court failed to discuss whether a nationwide injunction is necessary to remedy Plaintiff’s alleged harm."

The Trump administration’s restrictions seek to deny asylum claims and immediately deport people who had passed through a third country en route to the U.S., unless that person had already sought asylum in that other country. The purpose of the plan was to force the vast majority of asylum seekers arriving from Central America to apply for asylum in Mexico without crossing into the United States.

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Trump administration gets partial win, asylum restrictions may take effect in Texas, New Mexico (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 3:00 PM, Geneva Sands and Jessica Schneider, 6094K]
A federal appeals court handed the Trump administration a partial win Friday by allowing its asylum restrictions to take effect in Texas and New Mexico.

The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals, known for drawing the ire of President Donald Trump, dialed back a nationwide injunction that a district court had previously issued against the asylum rule.

The 9th Circuit now says the injunction can only apply to migrants claiming asylum in California and Arizona, states that fall under the Ninth Circuit's jurisdiction. Practically, for now, that means that asylum seekers may continue to seek protection without these restrictions in California and Arizona, but asylum seekers in Texas and New Mexico will be subject to the asylum rule.

The rule, which was issued from the departments of Justice and Homeland Security in July, would prohibit migrants who have resided in or traveled through a third country from seeking asylum in the US, therefore barring migrants traveling through Mexico from being able to claim asylum and as a result, drastically limit who's eligible for asylum.

In July, federal district judge in California blocked the rule from going into effect nationwide. Friday's ruling means that the restrictions are still blocked in Arizona and California.

The appellate court ruled that "the district court clearly erred by failing to consider whether nationwide relief is necessary."

The ACLU plans to "immediately" bring new evidence to the district court on why the nationwide injunction should be reinstated, according to ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt.

"The court properly refused to let the new asylum ban go into effect, though currently limited to the Ninth Circuit. We will continue fighting to end the ban entirely," said Gelernt.

In scaling back on a district court's nationwide injunction, the appellate court said that "other litigants" wishing to challenge the rule could do so in other courts, a move that will allow the issue to percolate in the lower courts before it might arrive at the Supreme Court.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the ruling.

Appeals court sides with Trump administration on asylum rule, limits injunction (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 12:44 PM, Adam Shaw and Bill Mears, 10258K] Video: HERE
A federal appeals court sided with the Trump administration on Friday in the legal battle over its efforts to limit asylum claims from Central America – blocking, for now, a nationwide injunction that blocked the implementation of the rule.

Last month a California federal judge blocked the rule that would require migrants to first apply in one of the countries they cross on their way to the U.S. – with certain exceptions. The rule is tailored to target Central Americans from the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras who would travel across multiple countries, including Mexico,

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before claiming asylum in the U.S.

But the San Francisco federal appeals court for the 9th Circuit on Friday ruled that the injunction imposed by the California federal judge can only apply in states within the court's jurisdiction in the western U.S. The ruling says that the court failed to discuss why a nationwide injunction was necessary to remedy the harm alleged by those immigration advocacy groups named in the lawsuit.

"The district court clearly erred by failing to consider whether nationwide relief is necessary to remedy Plaintiffs' alleged harms," the ruling says. "And, based on the limited record before us, we do not believe a nationwide injunction is justified."

The 9th Circuit will hear oral arguments on Oct. 1 on the merits of the lawsuit opposing the asylum policies.

The ruling marks the latest in a series of legal battles the administration is fighting on multiple fronts on the question of immigration and asylum. The administration has said that in order to combat the escalating crisis at the border, loopholes that place limits on how long the administration can detain family units, and who is eligible to claim asylum need to be closed.

This month a federal judge ruled that the government cannot stop migrants from claiming asylum in the U.S. even if they crossed the border illegally, ruling that it conflicts with the law as set out by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

Last month, Trump announced a "safe third country" deal with Guatemala that would require migrants who cross into the country to apply for asylum there instead of at the U.S. border. However, that too faces court challenges in both Guatemala and the U.S.

Court: US Can Reject Asylum Along Parts of Mexico Border (US News & World Report)

US News & World Report [8/16/2019 2:24 PM, Nomaan Merchant, AP, 3196K]

A federal appeals court's ruling Friday will allow the Trump administration to begin rejecting asylum at some parts of the U.S.-Mexico border for migrants who arrive after passing through a third country.

The ruling from the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals allows President Donald Trump to enforce the policy in New Mexico and Texas, rejecting asylum seekers who cross from Mexico into either state. Under Friday's ruling, U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar's July 24 order stopping the policy would only apply in California and Arizona, which are covered by the 9th Circuit.

The two busiest areas for unauthorized border crossings are in South Texas' Rio Grande Valley and the region around El Paso, Texas, which includes New Mexico. Nearly 50,000 people in July crossed the U.S. border without permission in those two regions, according to the U.S. Border Patrol.

The policy would deny asylum to anyone who passes through another country on the way to the U.S. without seeking protection there. Most crossing the southern border are Central Americans fleeing violence and poverty, who would largely be ineligible. The policy would

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also apply to people from Africa, Asia, and South America who come to the southern border to request asylum.

If the policy is implemented, ineligible migrants who cross in New Mexico and Texas could be detained and more quickly deported. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

Under American law, people can request asylum when they arrive in the U.S. regardless of how they enter. The law makes an exception for those who have come through a country considered to be "safe" pursuant to an agreement between the U.S. and that country.

Canada and the U.S. have a "safe third country" agreement. But the U.S. doesn't have one with Mexico or countries in Central America. The Trump administration has tried to sign one with Guatemala, but the country's incoming president said this week that Guatemala would not be able to uphold a tentative deal reached by his predecessor.

The U.S. government is already turning away many asylum seekers at the southern border.

About 30,000 people have been returned to Mexico to await asylum hearings under the government's Migrant Protection Protocols program. Tens of thousands of others are waiting in shelters and camps to present themselves to U.S. border agents at official ports of entry that have strict daily limits on asylum seekers.

Mexico's asylum system is itself overwhelmed, and there are widespread reports of migrants being attacked and extorted. Border cities across from New Mexico and Texas include Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Reynosa, all of which are well-known for their violence and gang presence.

Tigar had ruled the policy could expose migrants to violence and abuse, deny their rights under international law, and return them to countries they were fleeing.

The appeals court ruled that Tigar's order hadn't considered whether a nationwide order was necessary and that there wasn't enough evidence presented yet to conclude that it was. The court instructed Tigar to "further develop the record in support of a preliminary injunction" extending nationwide.

Judges Mark Bennett and Milan Smith voted to limit Tigar's order. Judge A. Wallace Tashima dissented.

Tigar is a nominee of former President Barack Obama. Trump previously derided Tigar as an "Obama judge" after Tigar ruled against another set of asylum restrictions last year. That comment led to an unusual rebuke from Chief Justice John Roberts, who said the judiciary did not have "Obama judges or Clinton judges."

Trump nominated Bennett, while Smith was nominated by former President George W. Bush. Tashima was nominated by former President Bill Clinton.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other legal groups had sued the Trump administration after it announced the restrictions last month.

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"We will continue fighting to end the ban entirely and permanently," said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the ACLU.

The U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment.

Federal Court Allows Trump To Reject Asylum Seekers At Border (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [8/16/2019 5:21 PM, Jason Hopkins, 785K]
A federal appeals court delivered President Donald Trump a limited victory in his bid to reject asylum seekers from Central America and other countries.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Friday that the Trump administration can enforce its asylum ban in a partial capacity, allowing the administration to turn back asylum seekers who pass through a “third” country and reach the southern border in Texas and New Mexico only.

The Justice Department and Homeland Security rolled out a new rule in July that prohibits migrants from lodging asylum claims in the U.S. if they did not first make a claim in a country they crossed during their journey. The rule logistically applies to the tens of thousands of Central Americans who travel northward to the U.S. every month and pass Mexico on their way.

The order was dealt a major blow that same month when an Obama-appointed federal judge on the U.S. District Court in San Francisco issued a preliminary injunction against it, stopping the ban across the country while a lawsuit continued on.

However, the appeals court ruled Friday that the decision didn’t provide enough evidence to conclude that a nationwide order was necessary. Instead of striking the injunction down entirely, the three-judge panel said it could be limited within the 9th Circuit, which encompasses district courts in California and Arizona. The injunction is still in place in those two states.

The rulings appear to show how presidential appointments have played a monumental role in the current immigration debate.

All three judges on Friday agreed to keep the freeze in place, but there was a 2-1 split on whether to limit the scope of the freeze. Judge Milan Smith, an appointee of George W. Bush, and Judge Mark Bennett, an appointee of Trump, both ruled to limit the injunction to only the 9th Circuit. Judge Wallace Tashima, an appointee of Bill Clinton, however, argued to keep the freeze in place for the entire country.

While the ban can only be enforced in two states for the time being, the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and the surrounding areas of El Paso experience extremely high amounts of illegal immigration, giving the Trump administration a lot of room to work with. The policy also applies to asylum seekers from South America, Africa and Asia.

Currently, the U.S. only has a “safe third country” agreement with Canada, but the White House has worked to establish a safe third country deal with Guatemala. While the outgoing administration in Guatemala did recently sign a third country deal, the incoming president said his country would not be capable of abiding by it.

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Court ruling upholds Trump asylum restrictions for migrants in some states (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/16/2019 4:22 PM, Ellie Bufkin, 855K]
The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on Friday that an injunction on President Trump's new asylum rules could only be upheld within the circuit, which includes the border states of California and Arizona.

The federal court's decision means that Texas and New Mexico will uphold Trump's strict asylum rules that forbid migrants who have traveled through more than two countries from applying for asylum. The rules state that migrants from Central American countries who pass through other countries must be denied refugee status in those nations before being eligible to apply in the United States.

The decision on Friday upholds a July 24 decision by a Northern District of California judge to block Trump's rules but only within the 9th Circuit. The July injunction was ruled on just hours after a federal judge in Washington, D.C., ruled to uphold the asylum restrictions. The 9th Circuit's Friday ruling cited that the trial judge who blocked the rules nationwide did not have the right to do so.

Though the decision could be considered a victory for the Trump administration, the liberal-leaning 9th Circuit Court has been a consistent opponent of Trump's strict approach to immigration. On Thursday, the court rejected Trump's attempt to limit facilities for migrant children detained at the border.

"Assuring that children eat enough edible food, drink clean water, are housed in hygienic facilities with sanitary bathrooms, have soap and toothpaste, and are not sleep-deprived are without doubt essential to the children's safety," the three-judge panel said.

Of the Friday decision, the court expressed doubt that Trump's rules were legal but ruled that they did not have the scope or power to impose a nationwide injunction.

California, other states sue over Trump plan to limit poor immigrants' access to green cards (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 1:16 PM, Maria Sacchetti, 9425K]
California — the state with the largest population of immigrants — filed a federal lawsuit Friday hoping to derail the Trump administration's attempt to deny green cards and visa extensions to foreign nationals who use Medicaid, food stamps or other public assistance, or might in the future.

The lawsuit is the fourth legal challenge filed this week since administration officials rolled out a new rule on Monday that seeks to redefine who will be eligible for permanent residency and a path to full U.S. citizenship. The rule, set to take effect in mid-October, will give preference to wealthier, educated immigrants who can support themselves, and it will make it more difficult for immigrants who rely on public help or are determined to be likely to need federal assistance.

Opponents of the rule argue that punishing legal immigrants who need financial help endangers the health and safety of immigrant families — including U.S. citizen children — and will foist potentially millions of dollars in emergency health care and other costs onto local and state governments, businesses, hospitals, and food banks.

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“This cruel policy would force working parents and families across the nation to forego basic necessities like food, housing, and health care out of fear. That is simply unacceptable,” California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement on the lawsuit, which also includes as plaintiffs the District of Columbia, Maine, Pennsylvania and Oregon. “In California, we know that welcoming and investing in all communities makes our entire nation stronger. I know this being the son of hard-working, modest immigrants who likely would have been victims of this regressive policy. We will fight this unlawful rule every step of the way,”

Federal officials say the rule ensures that immigrants can cover their own expenses in the United States without burdening taxpayers for food, housing and other costs. U.S. officials note that the change is not retroactive and exempts refugees and asylees who fled persecution for safety in the United States.

Ken Cuccinelli, acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said Monday that the “public charge” rule will encourage and ensure “self-reliance and self-sufficiency for those seeking to come to, or to stay in, the United States.” He also noted that it will “help promote immigrant success in the United States as they seek opportunity here.”

The Justice Department declined to comment on the lawsuits Friday. However, Cuccinelli has said officials expect the rule “to withstand any legal challenges.”

In a separate lawsuit Friday, nonprofit organizations that serve Asians, Africans and other immigrant groups in Northern California warned that the new rule is fueled by the Trump administration’s “racial animus” and disproportionately targets nonwhite immigrants, and they urged a federal judge to put a stop to it.

“This pernicious regulation would create a byzantine structure designed to send one message and one message only: ‘If you are not white and wealthy, you are no longer welcome in this country, the land of opportunity,’ ” Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center, told reporters Friday.

In an unusual move, the nonprofits’ lawsuit challenges the appointment of Cuccinelli to his USCIS post. The nonprofits said Cuccinelli — a former Virginia attorney general, who took over the role in June — technically does not meet the federal criteria needed to serve in the position on an acting basis, and they asked the court to declare his appointment and the rule invalid. The lawsuit says that only someone who has already been confirmed by the Senate or has served in the agency for at least 90 days in the year prior — among other qualifications — is eligible for the role.

Cuccinelli rolled out the rule on Monday, and the next day Santa Clara County and the City of San Francisco filed a lawsuit to block it in U.S. District Court in the Northern District of California. Three of the lawsuits are filed in the jurisdiction of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, which has heard nearly all of the major immigration litigation challenging Trump’s policies.

On Wednesday, 13 Democratic state attorneys general followed with a separate lawsuit in Washington state, saying the rule is a “radical overhaul” of immigration rules, and that it violates the Constitution and other laws. The states are led by Washington State Attorney

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General Bob Ferguson and Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring, who succeeded Cuccinelli as the state's top prosecutor in 2014.

Nationwide, advocates for immigrants fear hundreds of thousands of migrants will withdraw from food, housing and medical-care programs. They also worry that businesses will suffer and that hospitals will bear higher costs to provide emergency services. They say immigrants in the United States legally could lose their legal status or even be deported if they use public aid.

USCIS says the new rule applies to all immigrants seeking green cards or visa renewals, mainly from inside the United States because they are the only immigrants who would have access to public benefits.

Officials have said they expect nearly 400,000 immigrants to be subject to the rule every year, though they did not provide an estimate of how many could be denied green cards or other immigration benefits as a result.

They also project that more than 232,000 immigrants and their U.S. citizen relatives in nearly 9,000 households across the United States could withdraw from a public benefits programs as a result of the rule, or about 2.5 percent of the enrolled population, according to a USCIS spokeswoman.

The estimate is based on the number of public benefits recipients who are members of households with at least one foreign-born noncitizen. Such a withdrawal would slash federal and state payouts by $2.47 billion a year, which includes $1.5 billion in federal aid and just more than $1 billion in state aid.

California has the largest number of immigrants living within its state borders — about 10 million — according to the American Community Survey, a Census Bureau survey that provides population estimates. About 50 percent of California's immigrant population is made up of naturalized citizens; approximately 5 million people could be affected by the new rule. Texas has 3 million people who could be affected, and New York and Florida each have about 2 million.

DHS said the rule "provides a clear framework" for examining someone's probability of becoming a public charge, examining factors such as a person's income, assets, age, education and English fluency.

Cuccinelli, who outlined the new rule at the White House, said Tuesday that officials want to ensure that immigrants will be self-sufficient.

Asked if that conflicts with a 1903 plaque at the Statue of Liberty that reads "Give me your tired, your poor," Cuccinelli gave NPR's "Morning Edition" a revised version: "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge."

Trump also backed the policy Tuesday, saying it was about putting "America first."

"I don't think it's fair to have the American taxpayer paying for people to come into the United States," he said.

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California sues Trump over 'public charge' rule denying green cards to immigrants (Los Angeles Times)

Los Angeles Times [8/16/2019 12:30 PM, Patrick McGreevy, 3575K]

California on Friday sued the Trump administration to challenge the legality of a new "public charge" rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who receive public assistance, including food stamps, Medicaid and housing vouchers.

The lawsuit was filed by state Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra in federal court in Northern California just days after the Trump administration published a new rule that could make it harder for many immigrants to get legal status in the United States.

"This cruel policy would force working parents and families across the nation to forego basic necessities like food, housing and healthcare out of fear. That is simply unacceptable," Becerra said in a statement.

Gov. Gavin Newsom also criticized the federal policy change in a statement:

"This latest move by the federal administration to demonize immigrants is personal for us, in a state where half of our children have at least one immigrant parent," the governor said. "This new rule, designed to create fear in immigrant families, is cruel and threatens our public health. That is not who we are in California, and not who we are as Americans."

Immigrants applying for green cards are already required by federal law to prove that they won't become a "public charge," posing a financial burden to the United States.

However, the new restrictions outline a broader range of programs that could disqualify immigrants from obtaining legal status, allowing federal officials to consider those programs along with an immigrant's household income, education and health.

The lawsuit argues the new rule posted Monday in the federal register creates unnecessary new barriers to eligible immigrants, setting such a strict standard that if it were applied to U.S. citizens nearly a majority would be considered a "public charge."

In the court filing, Becerra says the new rule violates the equal protection guarantee of the 5th Amendment, disproportionately blocking admission of non-white, non-European immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The new federal rule is also illegal because it interferes with the states' rights to protect their residents, and exceeds the administration's authority under federal immigration law by circumventing congressional intent, the lawsuit argues.

Becerra added that the rule improperly punishes immigrants for participating in widely used public benefits programs, and the federal government failed to adequately determine the cost on the country and its states if more people suffer from poverty as a result of the rule change.

"In California we know that welcoming and investing in all communities makes our entire nation stronger," Becerra said. "I know this being the son of hard-working, modest immigrants who likely would have been victims of this regressive policy. We will fight this

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unlawful rule every step of the way."

The Trump administration defended the new rule this week.

"We certainly expect anyone of any income to stand on their own two feet," Ken Cuccinelli, acting head of Citizenship and Immigration Services, said on Monday. "A poor person can be prepared to be self-sufficient. Many have been throughout the history of this country, so let's not look at that as the be-all and end-all."

The lawsuit is the 56th legal challenge that California has filed against the Trump administration on a wide range of issues that also include policies on healthcare, the environment and the U.S. census.

California leads states in lawsuit over Trump public charge rule (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 1:28 PM, Aris Folley, 2806K]
California, Maine, Pennsylvania, Oregon and the District of Columbia on Friday joined a growing list of states that have filed a lawsuit over the Trump administration's new "public charge" rule, which would make it easier for immigrants to be denied green cards if they are seen as likely to use public services.

In the suit, the states blasted the new rule rolled out Monday as "unlawful" and said it "uproots the understanding of public charge as primary dependence on the government."

"In the Rule, Defendants illegally expand the circumstances in which DHS may deny individuals' admission to the United States on 'public charge' grounds, when seeking an extension of stay, change of visa category, or lawful permanent resident status," the suit states.

"The rule stacks the deck against marginalized populations, such as children, students, individuals with disabilities, older adults, and low-wage working families," the states continued in the lawsuit, accusing the Trump administration of "creating new bars" with the rule that have not been authorized by Congress, such as "making a low income a 'heavily weighted' negative factor in admissibility."

"The rule also penalizes immigrants who use common, non-cash federal public benefit programs," the states also said in the suit, added that "overall, the rule represents a radical departure in the treatment of low- and moderate-income immigrants, whom the United States has historically welcomed."

Attorney General of California Xavier Becerra (D), who filed the suit, told the Los Angeles Times in a statement that the "cruel policy would force working parents and families across the nation to forego basic necessities like food, housing and healthcare out of fear. That is simply unacceptable."

"In California we know that welcoming and investing in all communities makes our entire nation stronger," Becerra added. "I know this being the son of hard-working, modest immigrants who likely would have been victims of this regressive policy. We will fight this unlawful rule every step of the way."

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) also took aim at the rule in a statement obtained by the

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paper, saying: “This latest move by the federal administration to demonize immigrants is personal for us, in a state where half of our children have at least one immigrant parent.”

“This new rule, designed to create fear in immigrant families, is cruel and threatens our public health. That is not who we are in California, and not who we are as Americans,” he added.

The suit comes two days after 13 other states also filed a joint legal challenge over the new policy.

California leads latest lawsuit over Trump immigration rule (ABC News)
ABC News [8/16/2019 3:31 PM, Don Thompson, AP, 2702K]
California and three other states on Friday filed the latest court challenge to new Trump administration rules blocking green cards for many immigrants who use public assistance including Medicaid, food stamps and housing vouchers.

Nearly half of Americans would be considered a burden if the same standards were applied to U.S. citizens, said California Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

"This Trump rule weaponizes nutrition, health care and housing," Becerra said, by potentially blocking legal immigrants from becoming citizens "if your child participates in something as basic as your neighborhood school lunch or nutrition program."

The lawsuit he filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco follows others this week including those by Washington and 12 other states and by two California counties. Joining California are Maine, Oregon and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia.

Thirteen immigrant advocacy and legal groups led by La Clínica de la Raza filed a separate lawsuit Friday in the same court, arguing the regulation was motivated by racial bias.

The lawsuits all contest one of Republican President Donald Trump’s most aggressive moves to restrict legal immigration. A spokesman for the White House declined comment while U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services did not respond to a request for comment.

The new rules set to take effect in October would broaden a range of programs that can disqualify immigrants from legal status if they are deemed to be a burden to the United States — what’s known as a "public charge."

Becerra, a Democrat, said working families across the country rely on similar safety net programs. The impact is particularly great in California, which has more than 10 million immigrants. Half of the state’s children have an immigrant parent, he said.

His lawsuit argues that the rule creates unnecessary new obstacles for immigrants who want to legally live in the United States. It also discourages them from using health, nutrition, housing and other programs for fear it will erode their chances of being granted lawful status.

"The whole point is to create anxiety and create that chilling effect," California’s Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, said at a news conference with Becerra, immigration advocates and services providers. "You already are seeing a decline in people that are getting

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supports that they're legally entitled to."

Newsom said Trump "has a particular problem with brown people — not even immigrants."

He later said he was "not going there" by following other Democrats who have called Trump a white supremacist, "but he says a lot of things that make a lot of people that do identify with that term very happy. The continued assault on the Hispanic community, it's not even any question; it's just self-evident."

Newsom pointed to the rule change as well as recent immigration raids in Mississippi and a mass shooting by a man who authorities believe targeted Mexicans at a Walmart store in the Texas border city of El Paso.

"Connect some dots," Newsom said. "Why is it even an open question, what's going on this country and what's going on with this administration, and what they're trying to do and who they're trying to blame."

Becerra's mother was born in Mexico, coming to the U.S. after marrying his father, and he said she likely would have been affected by the policy. However, the rules don't apply to U.S. citizens, even if the citizen is related to an immigrant who is affected.

Many immigrants are ineligible for public benefits because of their status, and an Associated Press analysis found low-income immigrants use Medicaid, food aid, cash assistance and Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, at a lower rate than comparable low-income native-born adults.

Trump's attempts to thwart illegal immigration have drawn the most attention, but the latest announcement Monday affects people who entered the United States legally and are seeking permanent status.

"We want to see people coming to this country who are self-sufficient," said Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of Citizenship and Immigration Services.

California leads latest lawsuit against Trump's 'public charge' immigration rule (FOX News)

FOX News [8/16/2019 7:41 PM, Bradford Betz, 10258K]

California and three other states filed a lawsuit Friday that challenges the Trump administration's so-called "public charge" rule, which strengthens federal officials' ability to deny green cards to immigrants who rely on government aid.

The lawsuit, filed in San Francisco federal court by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, follows other court challenges to the rule change this week including those by Washington and 12 other states and by two California counties. Joining California are Maine, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia.

The lawsuits contest President Trump's effort to ensure that immigrants who are granted permanent residency are self-sufficient. The new rules are set to take effect in October and will broaden a range of programs that can disqualify immigrants from legal status if they are deemed to be a burden to the United States, known as a "public charge."

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Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), told Fox News on Monday that the principle driving the new rules "is an old American value, and that's self-sufficient."

"It's a core principle – the American Dream itself – and it's one of the things that distinguishes, and it's central to the legal history of the U.S. back into the 1800s," he said.

Becerra, speaking at a press conference with California Gov. Gavin Newsom, immigration advocates and service providers on Friday, said nearly half of Americans would be considered a burden if the same standards were applied to U.S. citizens.

"This Trump rule weaponizes nutrition, health care, and housing," Becerra said, by potentially blocking legal immigrants from becoming citizens "if your child participates in something as basic as your neighborhood school lunch or nutrition program."

Becerra, a Democrat, said working families across the country rely on similar safety net programs. The impact is particularly great in California, which has more than 10 million immigrants. Half of the state's children have an immigrant parent, he said.

Though the new rules don't apply to U.S. citizens, Becerra said they might discourage citizens from participating if they have an immigrant in their family. Becerra's mother was born in Mexico, coming to the U.S. after marrying his father, and he said she likely would have been affected by the policy.

Trump's attempts to thwart illegal immigration have drawn the most attention, but the latest rule change affects people who entered the United States legally and are seeking permanent status.

"The whole point is to create anxiety and create that chilling effect," Newsom said. "You already are seeing a decline in people that are getting supports that they're legally entitled to."

California joins other states to sue Trump administration over new immigration rule (USA Today)

USA Today [8/16/2019 6:03 PM, Gabrielle Canon, 6620K]

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra said Friday they were taking legal action in a bid to block President Trump's new "public charge rule," a regulation that would allow the government to bar entry to any individual deemed likely to rely on Medicaid, food stamps or other public benefits.

The new Department of Homeland Security rule will also enable the government to deport immigrants or deny visa renewals for immigrants if they use such benefits.

The move marks the 56th lawsuit the state has filed against the Trump administration. Earlier this week, California vowed to take legal action to stymie federal officials' plans to change how the Endangered Species Act is implemented.

"I never thought I would start my week defending the bald eagle and end my week defending the statue of liberty," Newsom said at the state capitol, with representatives of state agencies, business associations, and immigrant advocacy organizations gathered

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around him.

California is not the first jurisdiction to challenge the "public charge" rule. Maine, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and the District of Columbia joined the complaint, filed in U.S. District Court on Friday, seeking to stop enactment of the new rule. The complaint asserts that the rule unfairly targets "marginalized populations, such as children, students, individuals with disabilities, older adults, and low-wage working families."

That followed a separate suit from 13 states filed earlier this week asserting that the new rule would add unlawful barriers to legal immigration, in violation of the equal protection guarantees of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution. The suit also argues the move interfere with states' rights.

'The right thing to do'

"Not everyone starts out life with millions gifted by daddy," Becerra said, taking aim at the Trump, whose father, Fred Trump, was a wealthy real-estate developer. California, Becerra said, was built on more "rags to riches stories."

After reciting the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, the attorney general accused the Trump administration of weaponizing essential aid programs that provide nutrition, healthcare, and housing services to working-class families, against legal immigrants.

California is the most populous state in the nation, with almost 40 million people. Becerra, who delivered his remarks in both English and Spanish, told reporters that as the state with the largest immigrant population — with close to 11 million foreign-born residents — California has the most to lose if the new regulations are enacted.

"We are going to fight against this rule in court not just because it is the right thing to do," he said, "but because it is an economic imperative to do," adding that the state was prepared to go "every step of the way" to protect immigrant families that are seen as the backbone and future of the state. Roughly half of all children in California have an immigrant parent, Becerra noted.

In the meantime, the attorney general urged residents to "know the facts and know your rights," insisting that those concerned seek out help from the many agencies and organizations working on immigration issues before going to private attorneys. He also implored religious leaders to soothe their community's fears and act as resources. "Let's not let folks panic," he said.

The new rule broadly changes criteria the Department of Homeland Security uses to evaluate green card applicants, making it harder for those who came to the U.S. legally to stay if they seek out or are likely to use benefits like food stamps, Medicaid, or Section 8 vouchers for housing.

'Reinforcing the ideals of self-sufficiency'

The Trump administration characterizes the rule change as an extension of current immigration law, and an increased effort to encourage "self-reliance" among residents of the United States

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"Through the public charge rule, President Trump's administration is reinforcing the ideals of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, ensuring that immigrants are able to support themselves and become successful here in America," acting Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Ken Cuccinelli said in a news conference about the change on Monday.

In California, officials said the move was a scare tactic to discourage participation public programs across the country. Though the changes aren't scheduled to go into effect until Oct. 15, Newsom said they have already had an impact on immigrants who are legally entitled to those services, but who are shying away from them over fears that it could affect their ability to remain in the country.

"The whole point of this is fear," the Democratic governor said, adding that the state has seen signs of decline in those seeking services and support they are entitled to.

The governor cast the new policy as in line with policies that separate migrant parents from their children at the U.S. border, families who must choose between ensuring their children have enough food and their desire to stay together in the US. "At the end of the day, it is a mother deciding whether or not to get benefits for her child or being separated from that child," he said.

Saying the new rule was a "punch to the gut," Newsom compared the policy to racist ones of the past, like the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese workers starting in the late 1800s and continuing for decades.

"Here we are generations later, having gone through that moment of extreme bigotry," he said.

California leads latest lawsuit over Trump immigration rule (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 12:38 PM, Don Thompson, AP, 337K]
California and three other states on Friday filed the latest court challenge to new Trump administration rules blocking green cards for many immigrants who use public assistance including Medicaid, food stamps and housing vouchers.

Nearly half of Americans would be considered a burden if the same standards were applied to U.S. citizens, said California Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

The lawsuit he filed in federal court in San Francisco follows others this week including those by Washington and 12 other states and by two California counties. Joining California are Maine, Oregon and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia.

The multiple lawsuits all contest one of the Republican administration's most aggressive moves to restrict legal immigration. Spokesmen for the White House and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The new rules set to take effect in October would broaden a range of programs that can disqualify immigrants from legal status if they are deemed to be a burden to the United States — what's known as a "public charge."

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Becerra said working families across the nation rely on similar safety net programs. The impact is particularly great in California, which has more than 10 million immigrants. Half of the state's children have an immigrant parent, he said.

His lawsuit argues that the rule creates unnecessary new obstacles for immigrants who want to legally live in the United States. It also discourages them from using health, nutrition, housing and other programs for fear it will erode their chances of being granted lawful status.

"This cruel policy would force working parents and families across the nation to forego basic necessities like food, housing, and health care out of fear. That is simply unacceptable," Becerra said in prepared remarks.

His mother was born in Mexico, coming to the U.S. after marrying his father, and likely would have been affected by the policy, he said. However, the rules don't apply to U.S. citizens, even if the citizen is related to an immigrant who is affected.

Many immigrants are ineligible for public benefits because of their immigration status, and an Associated Press analysis found low-income immigrants use Medicaid, food aid, cash assistance and Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, at a lower rate than comparable low-income native-born adults.

President Donald Trump's attempts to thwart illegal immigration have drawn the most attention, but the latest announcement Monday affects people who entered the United States legally and are seeking permanent status.

It is the administration's latest attempt to shift immigration policy from an emphasis on reuniting families to instead consider immigrants' skills. The rule calls for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to consider immigrants' use of public assistance along with other factors such as education, household income and health in determining whether to grant legal status.

"We want to see people coming to this country who are self-sufficient," Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of Citizenship and Immigration Services, said in announcing the administration would go ahead with the rule change.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said in a statement that immigrants built the nation and help power the economy.

"This latest move by the federal administration to demonize immigrants is personal for us, in a state where half of our children have at least one immigrant parent," Newsom said. "This new rule designed to create fear in immigrant families is cruel and threatens our public health."

The latest court challenge argues that the rule violates the Constitution's equal protection guarantee by disproportionately affecting immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. It says the rule is arbitrary and capricious because it punishes immigrants for using common public benefits programs. And it says the rule violates states' rights to protect their residents.

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San Francisco and Santa Clara counties similarly argue in their own lawsuit filed earlier this week in California that the rule would harm the health and well-being of their residents and undermine immigration laws that prioritize family unification.

On Wednesday, attorneys general in Washington and Virginia led a coalition of 13 states filing their own lawsuit. They were joined by Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico and Rhode Island.

Why trying to distinguish between useful and dangerous immigrants always backfires (Washington Post)

Washington Post [8/16/2019 6:00 AM, Faith Hillis, 9425K]

In his rollout of the Trump administration's new rulemaking it easier to deny green cards to immigrants for accessing public benefits, Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Ken Cuccinelli cited as a historical precedent the 1882 Immigration Act, which barred the admission of any "convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge." Critics of the new rule immediately protested that it, like these 19th century restrictions Cuccinelli cited, is immoral, cruel and discriminatory. But the historical record also points to an additional problem with the expansion of "public charge" restrictions: past efforts to distinguish between "useful" and "dangerous" immigrants have been utterly ineffective.

A century ago, the S.S. Buford set sail from New York, carrying almost 250 recently deported Russian radicals back to their homeland. The most famous passenger on the ship was Emma Goldman, the country's leading anarchist. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer saw the departure of the "Soviet Ark" as the final chapter in his efforts to rid America of Communist sympathizers, promising that another 3,000 deportations would soon follow. Like Cuccinelli, Palmer believed that the safety and prosperity of America depended on the ability of the federal government to identify and bar "troublesome" immigrants.

But Palmer was wrong. The departure of the Buford, which at first glance appeared to be a victory for the federal government, in fact demonstrated the abject failure of 40 years of American immigration policy and the folly of such restrictions.

In the 1880s, when the passengers of the Buford had begun to arrive in the U.S., the federal government started to take an interest in distinguishing between "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants — a task that had previously been managed by state and local governments. Eighteen-eighty-two, which witnessed the passage of the Immigration Act, also brought the Chinese Exclusion Act, which placed a moratorium on the entry of Chinese laborers.

At precisely the moment that the federal government assumed the task of excluding "undesirables," a massive wave of immigration from the Russian empire began. The vast majority of these migrants were Jews fleeing pogroms as well as economic privation. Unlike the Chinese, these Russian-Jewish immigrants were welcomed by American immigration officials and acquired an important role in the national mythos.

As victims of tsarist oppression, they personified the struggle for freedom against tyranny. Furthermore, their willingness to accept low-paying work in sweatshops and factories testified to their potential for enriching the national economy. In 1882, the New York Times described newly arrived Russian Jews as unusually "intelligent, healthy, industrious."

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At first, the romance between America and Russian-Jewish immigrants was mutual. Positive reports about the political and economic opportunities that existed in America — reinforced by financial remittances sent back home — circulated in even the most isolated shtetls. Goldman herself, who arrived in 1885, was smitten with her adoptive homeland, which she described as a new "promised land" for Russian Jews. She first found work as a seamstress and eventually saved enough money to open an ice cream shop.

However, Goldman's attitude soon soured when confronted by the harsh realities of immigrant life. She observed that immigrants toiled in squalid conditions no better than those they had fled in Russia, and she was appalled by the police brutality she witnessed at worker protests. Eventually, she began to frequent political meetings organized by German Marxist and anarchist emigres on New York's Lower East Side. Other immigrants followed suit, and by the late 1880s, Russian-Jewish neighborhoods boasted a dense network of radical clubs, newspapers and organizations.

The growing popularity of revolutionary ideas among Russian-Jewish workers prompted concern from both local officials and national politicians. Police disrupted radical meetings, and in 1903 Congress passed new laws expanding its power to deport anarchists.

These coercive efforts only radicalized the immigrant critics of the state, however. Convicted of inciting a riot after an incendiary speech she delivered in 1893, Goldman described her subsequent experience behind bars as a "crucible." She left prison more determined than ever "to fight for my ideals, against the whole world if need be."

The confrontation between Russian-Jewish radicals and the American state intensified during the First World War. Many immigrant radicals became devoted pacifists — a position that verged on treason in the midst of the patriotic fervor that accompanied the war. In June 1917, Goldman and her sometime lover, the fellow Russian-Jewish anarchist Alexander Berkman, were arrested and imprisoned for anti-conscription activism.

The repression of immigrant radicals grew even more pervasive after the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia that October. As many Russian-born immigrants cheered the revolution in their homeland, the U.S. government intensified its surveillance and repression of left-wing activism for fear that Bolshevism would seep into the United States. A 1918 law expanded the government's powers to deport radical aliens, and in 1919 Attorney General Palmer oversaw a series of raids that arrested 10,000 left-wing radicals. Hundreds of activists rounded up in these raids eventually found themselves on the Buford alongside Goldman and Berkman.

The effort of immigration officials to distinguish between "worthwhile" and "dangerous" immigrants had been an utter failure. Although many Russian-Jewish immigrants had assimilated into American society, many others like Goldman had emerged as trenchant critics of the capitalist state. There were no indications in the biographies of new arrivals to suggest who would become a "model" citizen, and who would become a revolutionary. The radicalization of these migrants had occurred in America — and state attempts to control immigrant dissent only intensified it.

The passengers aboard the Buford thus symbolized the failure of decades of immigration policy. As the boat launched its journey, it became even more clear that the government's

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belief that it could solve America's problems through exclusion and expulsion was wrongheaded. Soviet officials admitted some of the ship's passengers, including Goldman and Berkman, but refused others, echoing the U.S. government's claims that they were dangerous "bomb-throwers." Shortly after the arrival of the Buford, the Soviet regime closed Russia's borders. This ended Palmer's dream of solving America's domestic political challenges through mass deportation.

By 1921, both Goldman and Berkman had become disillusioned critics of the Communist dictatorship and were forced to flee Russia, becoming exiles for the third time. Together, the U.S. and Soviet Russia had rendered Goldman and her associates permanent nomads. But instead of extinguishing radical ideas, the exclusionary policies of these two states unwittingly facilitated the spread of revolutionary visions across borders.

Goldman used her new period of exile to write political lectures and a best-selling memoir that was hailed by the New York Times and New Yorker as one of the best books of the year. And appropriately enough, she used the immigration laws that had long tormented her to her advantage. She acquired British citizenship by entering a marriage of convenience with a Scottish anarchist, which allowed her to travel freely around Europe and continue her agitation.

In short, the story of the S.S. Buford lays bare the problems of using immigration policy to root out and exclude undesirable migrants. As the case of Emma Goldman and her compatriots shows, human experience is too complex to define in terms of utility to the state; today's "useful" migrant might turn into an impassioned dissident, or vice versa. It also reminds us that state interference and closed borders can produce unintended effects, radicalizing those victimized by state power and amplifying their voices. Immigration exclusion was bad policy in the 19th century, and it is bad policy today. In a globalized world, ideas and activism cannot be contained by borders.

States team up against W.House immigrant benefits rule (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 7:57 AM, AFP, 2034K]
A coalition of states sued US President Donald Trump's administration Friday over its new "public charge" rule that aims to deny permanent residency and citizenship to immigrants who claim welfare benefits.

The attorneys-general of California, Maine, Oregon, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit at a federal court in San Francisco stating that the rule is unconstitutional and disproportionately targets non-white immigrants.

"It's remarkable what this administration is up to — it's insidious beyond words and California will have none of it," California governor Gavin Newsom said at a news conference in Sacramento.

The new White House rule, which affects immigrants who receive food stamps, public health care and other assistance, threatens to set back the citizenship hopes of millions of mostly Hispanic migrants.

The lawsuit argues that it "stacks the deck" against marginalized people including children, the elderly and low-wage families.

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“The rule was motivated by intentional race- and national origin-based animus against individuals from what President Trump has referred to as ‘shit-hole countries’,” it states.

The White House announced Monday its new definition of the longstanding “public charge” law.

The term “public charge” in modern times has usually been defined as someone who is primarily dependent on the government.

The new criteria means 22 million non-citizen residents of the United States who are using public services such as food stamps and public health care will not be able to obtain green cards or US citizenship.

In addition, migrants will not be granted resident visas if they are deemed too poor and likely to need public assistance.

“To protect benefits for American citizens, immigrants must be financially self-sufficient,” Trump said in a White House statement.

The new standards would apply to non-citizen residents who use public services repeatedly after October 15, 2019.

California attorney-general Xavier Becerra, who filed the lawsuit, said: “This cruel policy would force working parents and families across the nation to forego basic necessities like food, housing, and healthcare out of fear.”

“That is simply unacceptable,” he added. “We will fight this unlawful rule every step of the way.”

California is home to more than 10 million immigrants — nearly a quarter of its population, and the largest immigrant population in the US.

Becerra said further lawsuits would be filed by other states as well as individuals and organizations.

They’re US citizens and shouldn’t fear deportation. But they’re carrying their passports anyway (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 12:05 PM, Catherine E. Shoichet, 6094K]
Alejandra Duran was devastated the day she decided it was time to get US passport cards for her children.

It wasn’t because they were planning to take a trip abroad.

Instead, the 42-year-old legal assistant in Tucson, Arizona, says she felt her children needed passports to protect themselves while going about their daily lives in the United States.

"I feel uncomfortable and I feel insecure because I have an accent," said Duran, a naturalized US citizen who was born in Mexico.

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She says all three of her children live in Arizona and were born in the United States, but she's still scared that if they get pulled over one day, authorities won't believe her and she'll need to prove it.

"With the new administration, that fear is bigger than it used to be before," she said. "I try to explain to my kids, that they have all the rights of citizens, even if they don't have blue eyes, that they're judging them for their color and they have the rights to be here."

Asked about such fears, Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Richard Rocha said in a statement that unfounded rumors are "being spread by those who oppose, or don't understand, immigration enforcement."

"Because of all the inaccuracies being broadcast, ICE understands how difficult it can be for the American public to sift through a multitude of misrepresentations to find the truth," he said. "The facts are: ICE does not conduct indiscriminate 'raids.' ICE officers know their intended targets before setting out to make any at-large arrests. Officers do not randomly ask people for proof of their immigration status. Most people ICE arrests throughout the country are apprehended after being released from a local jail following an arrest for a crime."

But Duran is not alone in sharing concerns that she and her family could someday be forced to prove they belong in the United States. As the Trump administration has broadened its efforts to crack down on illegal and legal immigration in recent weeks, a number of US citizens have taken to Twitter to share their concerns and talk about their plans to carry their passports.

Joey Reyes started carrying their passport last month while getting a driver's license renewed -- and hasn't stopped.

The 24-year-old theater producer and manager in New York City said the case of a teen in Texas who was held in ICE custody left them shaken.

"It's been so much on my mind lately," Reyes said, "I even woke up from a nightmare where I was being detained."

There's no way to quantify how widespread the practice of US citizens carrying their passports has become. Plenty of Americans are going about their business without carrying passports or other identifying documents. And there's no law stating that US citizens must carry identification with them in their daily lives.

But that anyone feels compelled to do it at all is a troubling sign of the times, said Carlos Guevara, a senior policy adviser on immigration at the advocacy group UnidosUS.

"It's sad to say we're having these types of conversations," he said, "but they're getting more frequent."

US citizens and immigration experts who spoke with CNN said a number of recent developments are making some people more inclined to carry their documents with them and fueling growing fears among immigrants and US citizens in their families.

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"It feels like something's shifting right now, in the past four weeks," Guevara said. Even events and policy changes that aren't directly aimed at them have made US citizens and legal residents feel vulnerable, he said.

Among them:

The case of 18-year-old Francisco Galicia, which drew national attention in July: The Texas-born teenager ended up in ICE custody for weeks after he and his brother were stopped at a US Customs and Border Protection checkpoint. Authorities said he was held because he had "provided conflicting reports regarding status of citizenship after being apprehended," and noted that "generally, situations including conflicting reports from the individual and multiple birth certificates can, and should, take more time to verify." Advocates claimed the case showed that authorities were overstepping as they stepped up immigration enforcement.

The administration's efforts to speed up deportations by expanding a process known as expedited removal: Under new guidelines, authorities can swiftly detain and deport undocumented immigrants anywhere in the US who cannot prove they've lived in the US continuously for two years or more. Advocates are challenging it in court. As a result of the policy change, lawyers say some immigrants have already started carrying around things like rent check receipts and tax returns going back years, afraid of run-ins with immigration authorities. "That's a big mental and emotional burden for someone to shoulder, to not be able to leave their house without all this documentation," Chicago-based immigration attorney Fiona McEntee told CNN.

Trump's widely publicized threats of ICE raids: While the number of people arrested by ICE in an operation last month was far lower than Trump had warned, tthe recent operation where nearly 700 undocumented workers were detained in Mississippi has made more Americans aware of efforts to increase immigration enforcement -- and the impact such enforcement can have on US citizens.

The administration's new public charge rule: The measure could dramatically cut the number of legal immigrants allowed to enter and stay in the US by making it easier to reject green card and visa applications. Under the rule, many green card and visa applicants could be turned down if they have low incomes or little education and have used benefits such as Medicaid, food stamps and housing vouchers because they'd be deemed more likely to need government assistance in the future.Concerns about US citizens ending up in immigration detention aren't new.

An investigation by the Los Angeles Times in 2018 found that ICE had released more than 1,400 people from custody since 2012 after investigating citizenship claims.

Matt Albence, now ICE's acting director, said in a statement to the newspaper at the time that the agency takes any assertions that a detained individual may be a US citizen very seriously.

"It is ICE policy to carefully and expeditiously investigate and analyze the potential U.S. citizenship of individuals encountered by ICE," he said.

ICE updates its records when errors are found, he said, and agents arrest only those they

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have probable cause to suspect are eligible for deportation.

The number of US citizens detained at any point is a fraction of the tens of thousands of people who are held in ICE custody daily. But advocates say even one US citizen detained is too many.

"These errors can have profound consequences, both for the people who are wrongly held and for the state and local agencies that hold them," the American Civil Liberties Union said in a report earlier this year. "As recent cases illustrate, U.S. citizens have been kept in jail away from their jobs and families, and they have faced the terror of being told they would soon be deported from their only home."

A recent analysis by the American Immigration Council, a Washington-based advocacy organization that's suing the government over its recent efforts to fast track deportations, noted that more US citizens are being questioned by ICE, describing it as a "striking change."

"In the first year after President Trump took office, ICE encountered 27,540 U.S. citizens. In comparison, during the last year of the Obama administration ICE encountered 5,940 U.S. citizens," the advocacy group said in a recent report, which it said was based on government statistics obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests.

ICE says the agency isn't able to confirm information released by other organizations or the methodology used for their analysis.

"This trend poses questions about the effectiveness of ICE's enforcement approach and whether certain U.S. citizens who may 'appear deportable' have become increasingly vulnerable to enforcement actions," the American Immigration Council's report says.

That's one more reason why Reyes -- the theater producer in New York -- has been reaching out to immediate family members and advising them to carry passports, too, even though all of them were born in the United States.

"In a sense, I felt like I was overreacting, but another part of me felt like I wasn't. It's just a matter of wanting to make sure that everyone is prepared as much as possible if anything ever happens," Reyes said. "It's something I wish I felt like I didn't need to be prepared for."

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

White House Mulled Ways to Block Migrant Children From Schools (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/17/2019 4:00 AM, Jennifer Jacobs and Justin Sink, 5350K]
Some top aides to President Donald Trump sought for months for a way to give states the power to block undocumented immigrant children from enrolling in public schools -- all part of the administration's efforts to stem illegal crossings at the southern U.S. border.

Trump senior adviser Stephen Miller had been a driving force behind the effort as early as 2017, pressing cabinet officials and members of the White House Domestic Policy Council repeatedly to devise a way to limit enrollment, according to several people familiar with the matter. The push was part of a menu of ideas on immigration that could be carried out without congressional approval.

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Ultimately, they abandoned the idea after being told repeatedly that any such effort ran afoul of a 1982 Supreme Court case guaranteeing access to public schools. But the consideration of denying hundreds of thousands of children access to education illustrates the breadth of the White House's push to crack down on undocumented immigrants.

The strategy echoed the aim of a new rule the administration announced earlier this week that could block immigrants from becoming legal permanent residents if they've used government benefits. Any immigrant who had used Medicaid, public housing assistance or food stamps for more than 12 months over a 36-month period can be denied permanent resident status under the new rule.

The so-called public charge rule has sparked outrage among Democrats, who say it's cruel. They have criticized Trump on a range of immigration policies, including a plan he announced last month to force Central American migrants to file for asylum in Guatemala instead of the U.S., a measure advocacy groups said would put their lives at risk. The debate over immigration is all but certain to play a central role in the 2020 elections.

A senior administration official, who requested anonymity when asked to comment on the story, dismissed accounts of Miller's initiative as gossip from disgruntled bureaucrats but declined to identify any specific inaccuracy. The official also said undocumented immigrants placed an enormous strain on social services, including school districts.

Starting in late 2017, Miller pressed hard to find a way to limit undocumented immigrants' access to public services, including education, according to the people.

That effort included consideration last year of a guidance memo issued by the Education Department that would tell states they had the option to refuse students with an undocumented status to attend public schools from kindergarten through high school. A memo was never issued.

Education Department spokeswoman Liz Hill said: "The memo wasn't issued because the secretary would never consider it."

The White House's push was dropped because members of the administration determined the plan could violate Plyler v. Doe, a 1982 Supreme Court case that prohibited states from denying free public education based on their immigration status.

The court, in a 5-4 ruling, said that denying migrant children an education would "foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our nation" and that punishing them for their parents' actions "does not comport with fundamental conceptions of justice."

Immigration activists said they were alarmed the White House would consider a policy change targeting migrant children.

"Such a radical policy change would be unlawful, unacceptable and un-American," said Frank Sharry, who runs the immigration advocacy group America's Voice. "The notion that we should punish little kids who go to school and pledge allegiance to our flag because Trump and Miller want to make America white again is incredibly cruel, dark and sinister."

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The president in May said he was concerned that abuse of the asylum system "strains our public school systems" and used funds that should go to American citizens.

"We're using the funds that should be going to them," Trump said. "And that shouldn't happen. And it's not going to happen in a very short period of time."

During the presidency of Barack Obama, immigration rights groups raised concern about that schools systems were making it too hard for children to enroll by imposing rigid documentation requirements. In response, the administration issued guidance to school administrators to be more flexible in the documents they accept.

The 2014 guidance said schools should accept utility bills or leases as substitute proof of residency after reports that some districts were demanding driver's licenses or Social Security cards that could be unattainable for those in the country illegally.

"Public school districts have an obligation to enroll students regardless of immigration status and without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin," then-Attorney General Eric Holder said in a statement at the time.

Congress also attempted to pass legislation in 1996 that would have allowed states to block public education benefits to undocumented children or charge tuition, but the effort failed when former President Bill Clinton threatened to veto the bill.

Around 725,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade students in U.S. public and private schools in 2014 were unauthorized to be in the country, according to a study by the Pew Research Center. That amounts to about 1.3% of total school enrollment.

The U.S. Census bureau said earlier this year that the cost spent by per pupil on elementary and secondary education was $12,201 annually, meaning spending on undocumented migrant students could exceed $8 billion annually.

Trump aides wanted to block illegal immigrant children from enrolling in public schools (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/17/2019 12:52 PM, Caitlin Yilek, 855K]
Top aides to President Trump tried to find a way to allow states to block illegal immigrant children from enrolling in public schools.

White House senior adviser Stephen Miller spearheaded the effort as early as 2017, pressuring Cabinet officials and other White House officials to try and find a way to limit the enrollment of illegal immigrant children, Bloomberg reported.

Miller wanted the Department of Education to issue a guidance memo telling states they could refuse to admit undocumented students from kindergarten through high school.

"The memo wasn't issued because the secretary would never consider it," Education Department spokeswoman Liz Hill said in a statement.

The push was abandoned after the aides were told it did not align with a 1982 Supreme Court case, Plyler v. Doe, guaranteeing access to public schools.

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About 725,000 undocumented students from kindergarten through high school were enrolled in public and private schools in 2014, according to a Pew Research Center study. Spending on the students could exceed $8 billion annually, according to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau earlier this year.

The strategy falls in line with the administration's efforts to crack down on illegal immigration. Earlier this week, the administration announced it could block immigrants from becoming permanent residents if they had used Medicaid, public housing assistance, or food stamps for more than 12 months over a three-year period.

Migrant smugglers feel the heat amid crackdown (Los Angeles Times)
Los Angeles Times [8/16/2019 7:00 AM, Patrick J. McDonnell, 3575K]
These are lean times for Hugo and others in his time-honored profession.

He hasn't worked regularly in weeks and is back in college studying accounting, which he took up after ditching criminal science as unsuitable considering his full-time gig.

"It's just too hard to do the job right now," said Hugo, who makes his living as a people smuggler, or coyote, guiding migrants on the often-perilous journey from Guatemala through Mexico to the U.S. border.

A crackdown by Mexican authorities — acting at the insistence of President Trump — has dramatically reduced the flow of Central American migrants this summer.

"The Mexicans put the National Guard on the roads, and those guys love their country," said Hugo, 31, who agreed to be interviewed on condition that his last name not be used. "It's not like the immigration guys, you can buy them for some pesos. But you can't buy the National Guard."

As a tiny cog in the illicit, multibillion-dollar people-smuggling industry, he offered a defense of a profession that he says has been unfairly maligned.

A small number of coyotes have given the trade a bad name, he said, by abandoning their charges or selling them to Mexican gangs that subject them to extortion.

But most colleagues, Hugo said, understand that they are in a competitive business, and that customer service is paramount.

Though some coyotes advertise on local radio or social media, boasting that they can facilitate the "American dream," migrants typically choose smugglers whom they have used before or who have been recommended by friends or relatives.

"This is a business based on trust," Hugo said. "People could denounce us, they could burn us. But they don't."

He started in the industry 11 years ago and in that time has earned enough to support his wife and two children in this sprawling agricultural hub, known for its production of onions and garlic — and is itself a major source of U.S.-bound migrants.

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Hugo, 31, wore shorts and sandals and spoke in the kitchen of his home, which doubles as a shop where his wife and sister sell colorful, handwoven garments favored by women here in Guatemala's western highlands. His sons, ages 2 and 7, came and went to cavort with their father.

Before the current crackdown, Hugo said, he made about two trips north each month, leading as many as 30 customers at a time.

He and his clients cross the largely unguarded Guatemalan-Mexican border in private cars or trucks, and then use Mexico's regional bus fleet to travel more than 1,000 miles to towns on Mexico's northern border. Migrants ride on the buses like other passengers.

The price of $1,800 per person — down from $2,200 in early 2019 because of intense competition — includes transport, food and overnight accommodation in hotels and safe houses during a journey that usually takes eight days.

Hugo offers no discount for children, who in recent years have been making the trip in rising numbers. Under U.S. law, traveling with children can spare migrant parents from long-term detention while waiting months or years for courts to rule on political asylum claims.

"The child is the treasure," Hugo said. "It's not the adult who takes the child, it's the other way around: The child takes the adult."

There are cheaper options with other smuggling operations. Before the Mexican enforcement buildup, migrants could pay $1,200 each to cram into the back of a tractor-trailer with up to 300 people, reaching the border in as little as three days — but at far greater risk.

On the other end of the spectrum are packages that cost up to $12,000 a person and include false documents, a flight to northern Mexico, transportation across the U.S. border and travel on to Los Angeles, Atlanta or other destinations.

In Hugo's case, he said he works for a smuggling boss, who pays him about $100 for each day he spends on the road. Crucially, his boss also coordinates with corrupt Mexican officials and border gangs in Mexico to facilitate a smooth passage.

He said bribes to Mexican immigration personnel generally run about $50 for each migrant, a problem the government has recently acknowledged, firing hundreds of agents suspected of corruption.

Gangs in Mexican border towns charge smugglers about $500 for each migrant.

As he approaches the U.S.-Mexico border, Hugo said, he alerts gang lookouts — who are posted along roads, watching for incoming groups of migrants — that he has permission from their leaders to enter their turf. Coyotes and lookouts communicate in code to shield their intent from authorities and others.

"I have 20 cajitas," Hugo might say.

Each cajita, or small box, represents a smuggled migrant.

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The border capos go by handles such Tlachuache, or possum. With their approval, Hugo checks his charges into hotels catering to the trade.

At that point, his journey north is over. Mexican coyotes deposit migrants at the Rio Grande and instruct them to give themselves up to U.S. Border Patrol agents to claim asylum.

As for the current enforcement buildup, Hugo said he's not angry with Trump or Mexican authorities. Periodic clampdowns come with the territory.

Instead, Hugo directs his ire at the thousands of Central Americans who began traveling in caravans last year, forgoing coyotes, and became political fodder for Trump.

"They drew a lot of attention, burned a lot of routes," Hugo said.

However, Hugo said he is confident that, eventually, pressure will ease — as it has during past Mexican enforcement spikes — and the cross-border traffic will resume.

In the meantime, he has been able to spend time with his family and rest his ailing back, chronically sore from years of road trips.

"For now, people are waiting to see what happens," Hugo said. "But eventually they won't be able to wait anymore, and they will have to go."

ACLU Due in Court Over Continuing Separation of Migrant Families (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/16/2019 10:00 AM, Erik Larson, 5350K]
Civil rights lawyers are due to square off in court against the Trump administration in a fight over whether hundreds of migrant families were improperly separated at the U.S. border with Mexico.

The American Civil Liberties Union said in a July 30 court filing that the administration is defying a judge's order by continuing to split up families seeking asylum in the U.S. On Friday, U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw is scheduled to hear preliminary arguments, though he's not likely to issue a ruling.

An injunction issued last year is at the center of the fight. It barred family separations except in cases where the parents had criminal records. But the ACLU says border officials are applying that standard too broadly, separating children from parents who committed minor offenses or had decades-old violations. The officials often don't provide sufficient details explaining each decision, the ACLU said.

The dispute is coming to a head a day after the Trump administration lost an appeal in a separate immigration case. It had argued that its obligation to detain children in safe and sanitary conditions doesn't necessarily mean it has to provide the kids with soap, towels, showers, dry clothing or toothbrushes.

The U.S. Court of Appeals in San Francisco on Thursday rejected the argument, ruling such necessities "are without doubt essential to the children's safety."

The ACLU is set to argue in San Diego that more than 900 children, including babies and

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toddlers, have been separated from their parents in the past year over the “most minor” of infractions, such as traffic violations, committed by their parents.

The U.S. hasn’t filed a formal response to the ACLU claim, but the government has repeatedly argued that its policy for separating children is based on a proper interpretation of the law, and that protecting the safety of children is a top concern.

Sabraw had left it to the government to determine whether a migrant’s criminal history made them unfit or presented a danger to their children, but said some types of criminal history might not justify detaining a parent separately.

Among the examples of violations the U.S. used to split up families cited by the ACLU were: Driving under the influence, marijuana possession and destruction of $5 worth of property. One parent was separated because of a 27-year-old drug-possession conviction, according to the ACLU.

The administration has repeatedly run afoul of the courts in its attempts to crack down on undocumented immigrants from Central America. Earlier in July, the Department of Homeland Security announced a new rule that would bar Central Americans from applying for asylum at the Mexican border if they hadn’t done so in another country that they traveled through.

The policy was blocked by a federal judge in San Francisco who called it “inconsistent with existing asylum laws.”

Claim: Migrant Children Molested in US-Funded Foster Care (US News & World Report)
US News & World Report [8/16/2019 6:11 PM, Juliet Linderman, Garance Burke, and Martha Mendoza, AP, 3196K]
This story is part of an ongoing joint investigation between The Associated Press and the PBS series FRONTLINE on the treatment of migrant children, which includes an upcoming film.

Dozens of families separated at the border as part of the Trump administration’s zero tolerance policy are preparing to sue the federal government, including several who say their young children were sexually, physically or emotionally abused in federally funded foster care.

A review of 38 legal claims obtained by The Associated Press — some of which have never been made public — shows taxpayers could be on the hook for more than $200 million in damages. More than 3,000 migrant children were taken from their parents at the border in recent years, and many more lawsuits are expected, potentially totaling in the billions.

The families — some in the U.S., others already deported to Central America — are represented by grassroots immigration clinics and nonprofit groups, along with some of the country’s most powerful law firms. They’re making claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act as a precursor to filing lawsuits. The FTCA allows individuals who suffer harm as a direct result of federal employees to sue the government.

"It’s the tip of the iceberg," said Erik Walsh, an attorney at Arnold & Porter, which has one of

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the world's leading pro bono programs.

The firm has filed 18 claims on behalf of nine families, totaling $54 million, and Walsh says dozens more are likely.

The government has six months to settle FTCA claims from the time they're filed. After that, the claimants are free to file federal lawsuits.

The departments of Justice and Homeland Security, both named in the claims, did not respond to requests for comment.

Health and Human Services — the agency responsible for the care of migrant children — said it couldn't comment on pending litigation, but that it serves children in a compassionate and organized manner through its Office of Refugee Resettlement.

"We treat the children in our care with dignity and respect," HHS spokesman Mark Weber said.

Last year, ORR cared for nearly 50,000 children who crossed the border by themselves, as well as children who were separated from their families under the zero tolerance policy.

The agency housed them in foster programs, residential shelters and detention camps around the country, sometimes making daily placements of as many as 500 new arrivals, from babies to teens.

The allegations of abuse and assaults in foster care raise fresh questions about the government's efforts to place younger children with families in lieu of larger shelters and packed detention facilities.

The legal claims, a recent federal court filing and HHS documents released by Congress earlier this year allege that children have suffered serious emotional trauma after being physically harmed or fondled by other children while in foster care.

Six of the claims for damages involve children who were in foster care. And one recent court filing refers to a migrant child being abused in foster care.

The records released by Congress show the Office of Refugee Resettlement referred at least seven foster care allegations of sexual abuse to the Justice Department in 2017 and 2018. Because some are anonymous to protect the children's privacy, it's unclear if some of the claims are duplicates.

Justice has not responded to repeated queries about those cases from members of Congress.

Three of the four incidents involving physical harm outlined in the FTCA claims occurred at Cayuga Centers in New York, the largest foster care placement for migrant children, housing up to 900 babies and children at a time.

In a statement on Friday, Cayuga Centers said it takes the safety of children in its care seriously and reports allegations of abuse to the proper local, state and federal authorities,

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including the New York State Office of Children Services, the New York Police Department and Office for Refugee Resettlement.

"Child protection is our number one priority. If a concern is raised about child safety in a foster home, it is investigated immediately. Our staff are all mandated reporters," the group said." Children are removed from a foster home immediately when an allegation is raised and if necessary, a foster home would be suspended until cleared following a thorough investigation."

One Guatemalan mother whose 5-year-old daughter was placed in Cayuga last year says her little girl still wakes up crying from what she endured at the foster home.

"Now she's scared each time we go out or when she sees a police car or someone in uniform," said the mother, who has filed a $6 million claim. "She says 'Mami, don't let them separate us again.'"

Families who spoke to the AP and FRONTLINE did so on the condition of anonymity over fears about their safety.

Another 5-year-old Guatemalan girl said a boy grabbed her chest and touched her inappropriately, both in her foster home and during daytime classes at a Safe Haven for Children New York foster program, according to a $3 million injury claim. The girl was moved to a new foster home but suffered verbal abuse from her foster parent's mother, who called her names and locked her alone in rooms as punishment, according to the claim.

A spokesman for Lutheran Social Services of New York, which oversees the Safe Haven foster program, declined to comment.

Two claims blame the government for wrongful deaths: one, seeking $20 million, was filed by the wife of a Honduran father who killed himself in a padded cell after officers pulled his 3-year-old son from his arms.

"The people making these policies intended this level of suffering, and that's what's unconscionable," said John Escamilla, who is representing the man's wife and two children.

He said he plans to file a federal lawsuit stemming from his FTCA claim as soon as Friday.

The government has not settled any family separation cases in the administrative claims stage. But one federal lawsuit is currently in litigation in Massachusetts, and in February, a judge approved a $125,000 settlement for a Honduran mom and her son, then 6, who had been detained for four months and threatened with separation under the Obama administration.

Aseem Mehta, a law student at the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School who worked on the case, said the settlement — the first of its kind — sends a clear message that such claims have legal standing.

"Our case is a benchmark," Mehta said. "The most important take away is these claims are viable, and courts will entertain them, and the Department of Homeland Security views them as meritorious; they don't settle cases unless they think there's liability they're exposed to."

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Janet Napolitano, who led Homeland Security from 2009 to 2013, said she recalled a number of tort claims were filed against the agency in her time but said family separations were rare. The Trump administration's failure to swiftly reunify families and children may have left the agency open to lawsuits, she added.

"There very well may be some vulnerability there," said Napolitano, now the president of the University of California.

Donald Trump Says 'Major' Consideration Given to Labeling Antifa an 'Organization of Terror' (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/17/2019 12:22 PM, Hannah Bleau, 2034K]
President Trump tweeted Saturday that "major consideration" is being given to labeling the violent far-left group Antifa an "organization of terror."

"Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an 'ORGANIZATION OF TERROR,'" Trump tweeted Saturday morning. "Portland is being watched very closely. Hopefully the Mayor will be able to properly do his job!"

Trump's tweet follows Portland bracing for clashes between "The End of Domestic Terrorism" organizers and Antifa counter-protesters Saturday. One of the organizers of the planned event, Joe Biggs, said it serves as a response to the violent Antifa protests that broke out in the city last month, which resulted in the hospitalization of journalist and editor of Quillette, Andy Ngo. Video showed violent Antifa protesters punching and kicking Ngo and throwing milkshakes.

Ngo was taken to the hospital and kept overnight due to a brain bleed:

"That group of Antifa there in Portland needs to be exposed for who they are," Biggs told the Associated Press Tuesday. "And guess what? They should be scared."

Earlier this month, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler sent out a warning to all who plan to "commit violence and spread hate" in the city, writing, "We. Don't. Want. You. Here. Stop using our beautiful city and our home to spread fear and disrupt our lives."

City police are prepared for any violent clashes Saturday and have many partner agencies on standby.

This is not the first time Trump has teased naming Antifa an "organization of terror."

He wrote last month:

Consideration is being given to declaring ANTIFA, the gutless Radical Left Wack Jobs who go around hitting (only non-fighters) people over the heads with baseball bats, a major Organization of Terror (along with MS-13 & others). Would make it easier for police to do their job!

Trump threatens to designate Antifa a terrorist organization ahead of expected Portland clashes (FOX News)

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FOX News [8/17/2019 10:57 AM, Alex Pappas, 10258K]
President Trump said “major consideration” is being given by his administration to designating the far-left antifa movement a terrorist organization, as the city of Portland, Ore., prepares for dueling protests between right-wing demonstrators and antifa on Saturday.

“Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an ‘ORGANIZATION OF TERROR,’” the president tweeted. “Portland is being watched very closely. Hopefully the Mayor will be able to properly do his job!”

In his tweet, the president did not mention the expected far-right groups that are expected to protest, like Proud Boys group, the white nationalist American Guard and the Three Percenters. Hate group watchdogs say the Daily Stormers, a neo-Nazi group, are also expected.

More than two dozen local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the Federal Protective Service, are in Portland to help police monitor the protests.

Ahead of the rally, Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler said Friday on Fox News’ "Outnumbered Overtime" said he’s confident “from a law enforcement perspective, we’re going to have all the tools and the resources and personnel we need.”

“We support people’s rights to demonstrate,” Wheeler said. “But we don’t care about who you are or your politics are. If you engage in violence in this city, you will be held accountable."

The self-described anti-fascists have vowed to confront the rally while leaders from the far-right urged their followers to turn out in large numbers to protest the arrests of six members of right-wing groups in the run-up to the event. Members of antifa often cover their faces with masks, making it harder to identify them.

Patriot Prayer’s Joey Gibson, who is not involved in this weekend’s event but organized similar rallies in 2017 and 2018 that erupted in clashes, surrendered Friday on an arrest warrant for felony rioting. He was at a confrontation that broke out on May 1 outside a bar where members of the antifa movement had gathered after a May Day demonstration.

In a video he livestreamed on Facebook, Gibson accused the police of playing politics by arresting him but not the masked demonstrators who beat up conservative blogger Andy Ngo at a June 29 rally that drew national attention to this small, liberal city.

"We receive criticism no matter what. It’s either too much, not enough, you arrested this group and not."

Authorities asked residents not to call 911 unless it’s a life-threatening emergency and to stay away from the heart of downtown. Some city streets will be closed Saturday, as well as a major bridge connecting the east and west sides of the city.

Schiff offers bill to make domestic terrorism a federal crime (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 3:22 PM, Tal Axelrod, 2806K]
Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, introduced

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legislation Friday that would make domestic terrorism a federal crime.

The Confronting the Threat of Domestic Terrorism Act would create a federal criminal statute that would cover domestic acts of terror committed by those without links to foreign organizations.

Schiff said the legislation was sparked by the recent mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, as well as attacks at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C.

Authorities believe the El Paso suspect warned of a “Hispanic invasion” and he reportedly told police he was targeting "Mexicans."

“The attack in El Paso by a white supremacist is only the most recent in a disturbing and growing trend of domestic terrorism, fueled by racism and hatred. The Confronting the Threat of Domestic Terrorism Act would for the first time create a domestic terrorism crime, and thus provide prosecutors with new tools to combat these devastating crimes,” Schiff said in a statement.

“When violence fueled by homegrown, hateful ideology poses a more immediate threat to the safety and security of Americans on American soil than an international terrorist organization, it’s time for our laws to catch up.”

Schiff’s bill includes numerous civil liberties protections to prevent misuse, including a requirement that the attorney general or a deputy certify that crimes committed were intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population or to influence government policy before charges may be brought.

The legislation also requires the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to compile a public report on the civil liberties implications of the statute within four years of passage and refrains from establishing a list of domestic terrorism organizations out of concerns over First Amendment violations.

Any person found to have violated the law or conspired to do so would be punished under U.S. Code 2332b, which outlines penalties for acts of “terrorism transcending national boundaries.”

Schiff’s bill comes amid growing calls to define domestic terrorism as a crime.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) proposed a new state law Thursday defining domestic terrorism as a crime punishable by up to life without parole. It would apply to anyone who kills people in mass attacks because of their race, religion or sexual orientation.

Churches are arming and training congregants in response to mass shootings: report (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 5:02 PM, Brooke Seipel, 2806K]
As public spaces and places of worship have become a target for mass shooters, some churches are preparing by arming and training their congregation, The Associated Press reported.

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The Fellowship of the Parks church in Fort Worth, Texas, and its sister campuses, for example, have partnered with the local company Sheepdog Defense Group to train volunteers at the church to respond to shootings, members told the AP.

In 1999, another church in the same city was subject to a mass shooting that left eight dead, including the shooter. And in 2017, a gunman opened fire at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, killing 26 people.

Doug Walker, the founder of the interdenominational Fellowship of the Parks church, told the AP it wasn't one specific mass shooting that inspired the partnership with Sheepdog Defense Group, but that the trend made him recognize his security team needed better training.

Through the program, congregants reportedly learn a variety of skills to become volunteer security guards, including handling guns, threat assessment, first aid, tactical skills and other first response techniques in a mass shooting situation.

"Ten years ago, this industry was not a thing," David Riggall, a Texas police officer and founder of Sheepdog Defense Group, told the AP. "I mean, sanctuary means a safe place."

Riggall became licensed to teach safety techniques after the 2012 shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., and incorporates spiritual teachings into his training.

In the Birmingham, Ala., area, David Youngstrom has set up a similar operation called Sheepdog Firearms. The organization's website says it offers an eight-hour church security course on "reload drills, concealment carry, weapon malfunction drills, shooting on the move drills, first aid and force-on-force drills in a response to an active shooter."

Youngstrom told the AP that about 40 different churches have used his training program.

Other organizations have popped up in recent years to offer de-escalation training and shooter response training in churches, though not all of them offer training with a firearm.

Gun control and gun violence have remained a national talking point, with the recent mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, reigniting the debate.

Lawmakers have argued that a universal background check bill currently stalled in the Senate should be passed when they return from their August break, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has signaled a willingness to consider some gun legislation this fall.

Push for 'red flag' laws, background checks gains steam in wake of mass shootings (FOX News)

FOX News [8/16/2019 2:42 PM, Benjamin Brown, 10258K]

The push for so-called "red flag" laws and stronger background checks is gaining steam amid apparent support from President Trump and Democrats in Congress in the wake of the two mass shootings in El Paso and Dayton, though it presents a delicate challenge for the president as he works to assure his supporters that he will "always uphold the Second Amendment."

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Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee on Friday announced the committee is returning early from recess, on Sept. 4, to consider several gun control bills, including the Extreme Risk Protection Order Act. The committee's chairman, Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., also scheduled a Sept. 25 hearing on "military-style assault weapons."

Trump has signaled his support for extreme risk laws, also known as Red Flag laws, as well as strengthening universal background checks.

"I support strong, meaningful background checks where people who are insane, mentally ill — where people like that should not have guns," Trump said Thursday before a rally in New Hampshire. During the rally, Trump assured the crowd of supporters that he will protect their right to own a gun, saying, "It's not the gun that pulls the trigger. It's the person that pulls the trigger."

Red flag laws allow family members and law enforcement to intervene when they notice warning signs of an individual — they can petition a court order that would temporarily remove guns from dangerous situations. But opponents argue implementing red flag laws could lead to a slippery slope and infringe on Second Amendment rights.

"With red flag laws, that's a gray area because I believe it could potentially be a very big misuse of power," Stephen Powell, administrator and training director of C2 Tactical, told Fox News. "The problem is the people who are wishing to do evil on our citizens they will always find a way to commit that evil."

Many Democrats on the 2020 campaign trail have called for going much farther than Trump, including proposing a federal gun buyback program to help reduce the estimated 400 million guns owned by civilians in America.

According to the latest Fox News Poll, an overwhelming and bipartisan majority of voters favor background checks on gun buyers and taking guns from people who are a danger to themselves or others, with two-thirds also supporting a ban on "assault weapons" — although that majority is largely driven by Democrats.

The National Rifle Association has expressed concerns about red flag laws. Catherine Mortensen, an NRA spokeswoman, told Fox News in a statement that "to safeguard the rights of law-abiding gun owners, Extreme Risk Protection Orders at a minimum must include strong due process protections, require treatment, and include penalties against those who make frivolous claims."

One proponent, Meagan Cahill, a senior policy researcher at RAND Corp., says while "universal background checks and red flags definitely have the potential to help curb gun violence and even to reduce mass shootings," there is a lack of data to show how effective these policies actually are.

"The problem of course is we don't have a lot of evidence on exactly what the effects of many gun control policies that have been proposed are," Cahill said, adding, however, that red flag laws and universal background checks are a good place to start.

While background checks have proven to be effective according to Cahill, "they are used in a limited fashion." For example, they are not required for private person-to-person gun

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sales, which could be seen as a potential loophole to avoid the screening process.

A licensed gun dealer in Arizona told Fox News of several instances in which, after denying someone for a gun purchase, they would say they're going to go to a gun show instead.

"We said, 'Hey man, let's just wait an extra five days just to see if we get a response.' And, the gentleman was like, 'you know what, F--k you guys, I'm not waiting I'm just going to buy one at the gun show,'" said the gun dealer, who requested to remain anonymous for fear of potential backlash to his business.

The gun dealer recalled another situation in which after, denying a person who had a medical marijuana card – because it is still considered illegal at the federal level – he was told, "You know what, there's a gun show Saturday I'm just going to go buy one at the gun show." He told Fox News "that's happened several times."

Alan Korwin, an expert on gun law and who has written 10 books on the subject, argues more legislation is not the answer.

"The presence of guns isn't why we're having murders," he said. "The fabric of society is unraveling all over the place. And the idea that you can fix that with a statute is crazy."

Korwin added, "We've always had lots of guns you used to buy guns mail order with no paperwork whatsoever. Why are people committing mass murder now? Nobody's asking that question … the answer is not paperwork. The answer is dealing with the psychosis in society that makes people want to go out and frenzied kill people they don't know."

As the push for stricter gun control laws ramps up, the conversation also tends to argue the case from a mental health perspective– with the claim, these mass shooters often suffer from some type of mental illness, a notion Dr. Arthur Evans from the American Psychological Association says is inaccurate.

"Using a blanket statement like people have mental illness — we know from the research, the FBI has shown, that's not the case. A study we've done at the APA … what we found is that there is no singular profile of a person who commits a mass shooting," Evans said.

While Evans argues against canvassing all people who commit mass shootings as mentally ill, he advocated for a change in how the country approaches mental health policy that targets "people who are not quite at that point of being in crisis but clearly need some kind of intervention."

"If you listen to the typical interview after one of these kinds of shootings, you often hear people say, 'Well I knew the person had some problems, things seemed to be off with this person, but I wasn't quite sure what was going on …,'" he said. "Those people don't meet the criteria for mental health diagnosis, but they clearly need some type of intervention and most mental health systems aren't set up to handle those type of individuals."

The Dickey Amendment, which according to the National Institutes of Health passed in the mid-90s in response to gun violence being treated as a public health issue, has hindered Congress from using federal funds for gun violence research.

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"It will be really helpful if the federal government can infuse more money into this area and really help fund research because it will help us better understand the policies that we have — both in terms of what are the effects on gun owners and what are the effects on violence, homicides, and suicides," Cahill said.

That could be changing as an omnibus spending bill in 2018 clarified that the amendment doesn't ban federally funded research on gun violence.

From a gun owner perspective, Powell acknowledges it's a "tricky situation."

"People that own firearms people who are in the firearm industry are all for the rule of law … but we also want to make sure we don't have our rights infringed as well, so there is a balance of power there and it's a tricky situation," he said.

U.S. House panel to cut recess short to consider gun measures (Reuters)
Reuters [8/16/2019 4:17 PM, David Morgan, 5436K]
The Democratic-led U.S. House Judiciary Committee said on Friday it will cut short its summer recess and meet on Sept. 4 to consider new gun control legislation in response to back-to-back mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio.

The panel will prepare a series of bills for consideration by the full House of Representatives, including a high-capacity magazine ban, a measure to prevent people convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes from purchasing firearms and a "red flag" bill to deny guns to those deemed to be a danger to themselves and others.

Lawmakers will also hold a Sept. 25 hearing on military-style assault weapons.

"El Pasoans want action and Congress has the power to end this horror," Representative Veronica Escobar said on Twitter. Escobar is a committee member whose district was stricken by an Aug. 3 mass shooting at a Walmart store, where a lone gunman with a military-style rifle killed 22 people.

The shootings in El Paso and Dayton killed a total of 31 people and propelled the wide availability of guns in the United States back to the forefront of political debate.

"For far too long, politicians in Washington have only offered thoughts and prayers in the wake of gun violence tragedies. Thoughts and prayers have never been enough. To keep our communities safe, we must act," Democratic Chairman Jerrold Nadler said in a statement.

The House passed legislation to expand background checks for gun buyers in February, and Democrats have sought to step up pressure on Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell to recall the Senate and hold votes on the measures. The full House and Senate are both on recess and scheduled to reconvene on Sept. 9.

"While we urge our Senate colleagues to act, Democrats in the House will continue to make good on our promise to work to keep our communities safe," Nadler said. "There is more that we can and must do to address the gun violence epidemic."

Separately, Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee,

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introduced legislation that would create a federal domestic terrorism crime, covering attacks like the one in El Paso.

[ME] Maine Real ID Law Rollout Causes Hiccups for Some Residents (US News & World Report)

US News & World Report [8/16/2019 11:14 AM, Staff, 3196K]

Maine's secretary of state is working to clear up confusion created by the state's rollout of two different types of driver's licenses and state identification cards.

The Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles in July began offering residents the option of driver's licenses and state identification cards that comply with the federal Real ID Act of 2005. This has caused some confusion for Maine residents who have tried to use identification that isn't Real ID compliant to do things like register to vote or purchase alcohol.

Secretary of State Matt Dunlap said identification that reads "Not valid for Real ID purposes" is still valid to complete these types of transactions, as well as others, such as picking up prescriptions. He said "several Mainers" have complained of having their IDs rejected when they were trying to do things as simple as cashing a check.

The Real ID Act was designed to establish "minimum security standards for license issuance and production," and to stop federal agencies from accepting identification that doesn't meet those standards, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's website. Maine was one of the last states to comply with the law.

The federal government will require Real ID-compliant identification for domestic air travel next year.

[NY] Why the N.Y.P.D.'s DNA Database Has Some People Worried (New York Times)

New York Times [8/16/2019 9:01 AM, Aaron Randle, 22840K]

The New York Police Department is ramping up the collection and storage of people's DNA, sometimes without their knowledge or consent.

There are 82,473 genetic profiles in the city's database, known as the Local DNA Index System — an increase of nearly 29 percent in the past two years, according to the Legal Aid Society.

The police say the database is effective in identifying criminals and solving crimes, but some New Yorkers are concerned that it violates privacy rights, my colleagues Jan Ransom and Ashley Southall reported.

The genetic database is just one of many in the country that operate with little if any oversight.

More than 31,000 of the profiles were derived from children and adults who were suspected, but not convicted, of crimes, the Legal Aid Society said.

"It's essentially saying, 'Give us your entire genome, even though we don't have any reason to believe you have committed a crime,'" said Erin E. Murphy, a New York University law professor who has written about DNA databases and DNA profiling.

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Eric Bellamy told my colleagues that he was shocked the police came to his home in 2016 — unannounced and without a warrant — and asked for his DNA in order to clear him of a crime.

Maurice Sylla said detectives who were seeking his DNA asked his niece intimidating questions about the family's immigration status. They had "no reason to invade my privacy," he said.

The Legal Aid Society said these tactics could erode good will between neighborhoods and a community's police officers.

The police are countering the criticisms by highlighting closed cases.

"We are not indiscriminately collecting DNA," said Dermot F. Shea, the department's chief of detectives.

The Brooklyn district attorney's office said DNA had helped solve 270 cases, including sexual assaults and homicides. The role of the database became a flash point in the trial of Chanel Lewis, the Brooklyn man convicted in April of murdering Karina Vetrano, a jogger in Queens.

Another man, Avery Bovell, was convicted in 2014 of raping a woman after his DNA was recovered from an object he touched during a separate robbery.

"Without having that resource, we would never have been able to identify one of the attackers in that case," said Rachel Singer, the chief of the forensic science unit in the Brooklyn district attorney's office.

[NY] Capitol Watch: Cuomo wants new law on domestic terrorism (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 11:53 AM, David Klepper, AP, 2613K]
In New York government news, Gov. Andrew Cuomo wants to create a new crime of domestic terrorism for mass shootings or other large-scale violent acts motivated by bias.

The Democrat says his proposal to lawmakers would cover acts like the recent mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, where authorities say the shooter targeted Mexicans.

Here's a look at the idea, and other stories making news:

DOMESTIC TERROR LAW: New York already has specific laws on terrorism, murder and hate crimes, but Cuomo says his proposal is needed because of a disturbing rise in homegrown violent extremism.

Cuomo cited the El Paso shooting, as well as mass shootings in recent years at synagogues, a gay nightclub in Orlando and an African-American church in South Carolina as evidence that violent extremists in the U.S. are a growing threat.

The proposed Hate Crimes Domestic Terrorism Act would apply to mass-casualty incidents resulting in death and injury that targeted victims based on their race, color, national origin,

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ancestry, gender, gender identity or expression, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation.

Those found guilty of the crime would be subject to sentences of life in prison without parole — the same penalty prescribed in the state's existing anti-terror law.

That law was written at a time when terrorism was considered primarily an external threat, Cuomo said.

"We have an enemy within, an American cancer, where one cell in the body politic attacks the other cells in the body," Cuomo said in a speech Thursday to members of the New York City Bar Association.

"It spreads in the hidden corners of the internet, and from the highest positions in the land, and it infects sick and hate-filled hearts. This new violent epidemic is hate-fueled American-on-American terrorism."

Top lawmakers have signed on to Cuomo's idea. The Legislature isn't scheduled to return to Albany until January.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE: More than 128,000 New Yorkers took advantage of the state's new paid family leave program in 2018, its first full year.

That's according to a new report on the initiative, which lawmakers approved in 2016 as a way to help workers care for a relative without going without a paycheck.

The program has been slowly phased-in in New York, and is funded by a payroll deduction that for most New Yorkers amounts to a few dollars per paycheck. Payments are capped at 55% of a worker's average weekly wage.

In 2019, workers may take up to 10 weeks of paid-leave to care for a new child or a family member with a serious health condition. Workers can also use the benefit to relieve the burden when a family member in the military is deployed overseas.

Most of those who have taken paid leave so far in New York make less than $60,000 a year, according to the state's analysis. More than 30% of claims were filed by individuals who earn less than $40,000 per year.

When the program is fully phased in in 2021 workers will be eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid leave capped at two-thirds of their average weekly wage.

Paid leave was a big priority for AARP. The organization's New York State Director, Beth Finkel, said the benefit gives "critical support" to people forced to juggle work with caring for a loved one. Finkel said New Yorkers provide the equivalent of an estimated $31 billion worth of care for family members each year.

"Family caregivers in the workforce are grateful that they no longer have to choose between their job and caring for a family member," Finkel said of the law.

[MD] Maryland recalls 8,000 out-of-compliance driver's licenses (Washington Post)

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Washington Post [8/16/2019 9:18 AM, Associated Press, 9425K]
Maryland's Motor Vehicle Administration has recalled driver's licenses of 8,000 residents who they say missed multiple deadlines to get their identification in compliance with federal requirements.

News outlets report the affected licenses were found not to meet amended requirements of the Real ID Act, a law that tightened security for state-issued IDs.

To avoid having licenses confiscated, drivers must bring documentation such as proof of identity, residency and social security to a DMV to get their license up to standards.

MVA says another 780,000 drivers are also out of compliance. They staggered deadlines to provide Motor Vehicle Departments relief, but the 8,000 recalled this week are part of the first group that was told to file documents then missed the deadline.

Officials say more than half of Marylanders remain compliant.

[VA] Virginia's Crime Commission kicks off hearings on mass shootings (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/18/2019 4:46 PM, Laura Vozzella, 9425K]
Virginia's Crime Commission will devote two days this week to mass shootings and other gun violence, issues vexing a state where 32 died in a university massacre a dozen years ago, where another 12 were cut down at a municipal complex in May and where an average of three more were lost to less sensational shootings every day in between.

Over day-long hearings Monday and Tuesday, the commission will hear from law enforcement officials, academics and activists. State delegates and senators will be there, too, presenting about 60 bills proposed for a special legislative session on guns that Republicans ended abruptly in July.

Gov. Ralph Northam (D) called the special session following a May 31 shooting at a Virginia Beach municipal complex. GOP House and Senate leaders adjourned after 90 minutes without taking up a single bill, promising to reconvene Nov. 18 — after pivotal state elections in which all 140 legislative seats are on the ballot.

GOP leaders said the crime commission, which is bipartisan but under Republican control, would use the time in between to study the legislation and make recommendations to the General Assembly. The hearings Monday and Tuesday will launch those studies — something Northam and some fellow Democrats say is unnecessary but perhaps not unhelpful to their cause.

"The time for studies and excuses is over — Virginians deserve action, and that is exactly what Governor Northam asked for when he called the legislature back in July. While the governor rejects the idea that his proposed gun safety measures need further study, he is confident that the Crime Commission hearing will once again show these common-sense measures to be just that — common-sense, bipartisan, and effective," Northam spokeswoman Alena Yarmosky said in an email. "These measures have already saved lives, where implemented."

Brian Moran, Northam's secretary of public safety and homeland security, said the

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commission hearing will put a spotlight on the issue, which only took on more urgency after mass shootings this month in El Paso and Dayton, Ohio.

“It does serve to delay, but we’ll use it as an opportunity to demonstrate that these are common-sense, constitutional and effective pieces of legislation,” Moran said.

Sen. Mark D. Obenshain (R-Rockingham), chairman of the commission, said he expects the panel to overcome “philosophical divides” to find solutions.

“There are those that are skeptical, but I’m here to tell you that it is my hope and expectation that we’re going to adopt meaningful proposals at the end of this process that are going to keep communities safe across Virginia,” he said.

But Lori Haas, senior director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, was bluntly pessimistic about the proceedings.

“It’s an absolute farce on the part of Republicans,” said Haas, whose daughter was wounded in the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre. “I personally have been advocating and presenting them with reports, and data, and research for 12 years. They were just looking for a way to kick the can down the road when all eyes were on them during the special session.”

Michael Kelly, spokesman for Attorney General Mark R. Herring (D), shared that view.

“We see this meeting as exactly what it is: a way for Republicans to pretend to be busy and responsive to Virginians’ demands for action on gun violence while they avoid doing the effective things that should be easy to support, like universal background checks, a red flag law, disarming domestic abusers and white supremacists, and restricting assault weapons, high capacity magazines, silencers, and bump stocks,” Kelly said in an email.

A spokeswoman for the National Rifle Association did not respond to a request for comment.

Philip Van Cleave, head of the pro-gun Virginia Citizens Defense League, said “it’s hard to anticipate” what will come out of the hearings but hopes his side can get its point across.

“There are things that can be done to make people safe, things like getting rid of gun-free zones,” he said.

Virginia Republicans have staunchly resisted gun-control measures in recent years, saying they favor increasing criminal penalties for gun violations instead and addressing mental-health issues.

House Majority Leader Todd Gilbert (R-Shenandoah) has proposed creating two state grant programs aimed at increasing law enforcement in violent urban neighborhoods and helping young people extract themselves from street gangs, with education and job training to start better lives.

Pressure on Republicans has mounted since President Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) signaled a willingness to act after back-to-back shootings in El

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Paso and Dayton, Ohio, which left 31 people dead and dozens more wounded.

In the aftermath, Trump tweeted, “Common sense things can be done that are good for everyone!” He later said he was confident he could rally Republicans around legislation to strengthen background checks. McConnell said the U.S. Senate could take up the measure when it returns from its August recess. He also mentioned considering “red flag” laws, which the Trump administration has endorsed and which have been enacted in 17 states.

Last week, Del. Tim Hugo (R-Fairfax) got on board with a so-called red flag bill proposed by Del. Jason S. Miyares (R-Virginia Beach), which would allow police to take a person into custody if that individual is deemed an imminent danger to themselves or others.

Haas and other gun-control advocates say it makes more sense to take guns away from individuals who are a danger than to lock up those people, noting that people who pose a danger often are simply violent, not mentally ill.

“Ultimately this reflects the stranglehold the gun lobby has on the Republicans,” Moran said. “They would rather incarcerate an individual than confiscate the firearm. They’re placing gun rights above an individual’s freedom.”

The commission has 13 members, seven of whom are either Democratic legislators or appointees of the Democratic governor and the attorney general. Only the members who are legislators get to vote on whether to recommend a certain piece of legislation to the General Assembly.

Of the nine commission members who are also legislators, six are Republicans, three Democrats.

One of the three, Sen. Janet D. Howell (D-Fairfax), will be absent as she recovers from a broken ankle and bypass surgery. She said she will be watching the live stream.

“I’m going to push and ask questions, and [I’m] hopeful we take in everything from both sides of the argument, and that we don’t let it just go in some black hole,” said Del. Charniele L. Herring (D-Alexandria), a commission member.

Monday’s hearing will run from 10 a.m. to 5:15 p.m., Tuesday’s from noon to 8 p.m. With dozens of speakers lined up, time will be strictly limited.

“I have an assault weapons ban bill that also deals with high-capacity magazines and silencers. And I will be allotted 180 seconds to present that important policy to Virginia, during what the Republicans promised would be a comprehensive study,” said Sen. Adam P. Ebbin (D-Alexandria). “And 180 seconds shows how serious they are.”

[FL] Florida deputy takes down ‘active shooter’ in grocery store (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 7:53 AM, Marina Pitofsky, 2806K]
A sheriff’s deputy shot an active shooter suspect in a Florida grocery store Thursday before anyone was hurt.

The Escambia County Sheriff’s Office responded to calls Thursday afternoon of a disturbance inside a Grocery Advantage Store in Pensacola, Fla., the office said in a

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statement Thursday on Facebook. A male suspect allegedly brought a handgun into the store and was firing at shoppers, but he did not hit anyone.

Deputies arrived at the store and "immediately thwarted the active shooter situation," according to the Thursday statement. Escambia County Sheriff's Office spokesman Maj. Andrew Hobbs confirmed to The Hill that "he was an active shooter."

When deputies arrived on the scene, the suspect approached them with the gun, Hobbs told The Hill. A deputy shot the man, and he was taken to a local hospital for multiple gunshot wounds.

No civilians or law enforcement officers were injured in the incident.

"As the Sheriff, I know I speak not only for the Sheriff's Office but all citizens of Escambia County, in thanking the fine men and women of the Escambia County Sheriff's Office for their professionalism and courage which is displayed every day but especially today in stopping this suspect." Escambia County Sheriff David Morgan said in the statement.

Officials did not immediately release the name of the alleged shooter or the state of his injuries.

Lee Gainey, a man who works across the street from the store, said shoppers and employees came running out of the store screaming that there was a shooter.

"It was fast," Gainey told the Pensacola News Journal. "It seemed like only 30 seconds after I saw the four cashiers running, the police were everywhere."

[OH] Self-described white nationalist with large arsenal arrested for threatening a Jewish center, police say (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/18/2019 4:36 PM, Morgan Krakow, 9425K]
A man stands with a rifle, shooting into the dark. Sirens and screams can be heard in the background of the video posted to Instagram.

"Police identified the Youngstown Jewish Family Community shooter as local white nationalist Seamus O'Rearedon," the caption says. The geolocation on the Instagram video was set to the Jewish Community Center of Youngstown, Ohio.

The attack never happened, but police say they apprehended the man who made the threats — a self-described white nationalist with a significant arsenal.

On Saturday, police arrested the alleged owner of the Instagram account, 20-year-old James Patrick Reardon, on charges of telecommunications harassment and aggravated menacing. The day before, authorities searched the New Middletown home of Reardon's parents, according to WFMJ, and seized a cache of weaponry, including knives, two assault rifles and a large amount of ammunition, as well as a gas mask and bulletproof armor.

"This is a person that has declared himself as a white nationalist. With the hate crimes and everything else going on, we want to make sure we did our part to make sure this person was taken off the streets very quickly," police chief Vince D'Egidio told WYTV.

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation said in a statement Reardon was being held on "local charges," and more details could not be released because it's "an ongoing investigation." Police in New Middletown did not respond to a request for comment.

The arrest comes less than a month after a shooting at an El Paso shopping center in which 22 people were killed and dozens were injured. Before the shooting, police believe, the alleged gunman posted a declaration touting racist ideals. Authorities are considering hate crime charges for that alleged shooter.

It has been less than a year since a gunman killed 11 people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh after posting anti-Semitic statements online. In April, a shooter opened fire at the Chabad of Poway near San Diego, killing one and wounding three others. He was charged with 109 federal hate crimes and civil rights violations — making it possible for him to face the death penalty, authorities said.

WFMJ reports Reardon took part in the 2017 Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally and was interviewed for a documentary about his views. In the video, the interviewee says he does not consider himself a neo-Nazi, but a member of the alt-right, saying that he wants "a homeland for white people."

Bonnie Deutsch Burdman, the director of community relations at the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation said Northeast Ohio has a "very close-knit, very vibrant Jewish community with a very vibrant and active Jewish community center." The JCC and Federation also have a Jewish nursing home, assisted living facility and family services division in addition to a large campus in Youngstown, Burdman said.

Andy Lipkin, the executive vice president of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, said his organization was made aware of posts from an account, with the username "ira_seamus," Reardon's alleged online pseudonym. They quickly got in touch with local law enforcement as well as leaders from the local synagogues.

"We take very seriously the need to be vigilant to ensure the safety of all members of the local Jewish community, as well as all members and guests of our Jewish Community Center and our other agencies," Lipkin said in a statement. "Security has become a vital part of the mission of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, a mission from which we will never waver."

Reardon is being held at the Mahoning County Jail. His bail was set a $250,000.

[OH] Ohio man accused of threatening to attack Jewish community center (FOX News)

FOX News [8/18/2019 8:04 PM, Talia Kaplan, 10258K]

An Ohio man has been arrested and charged with online harassment after he allegedly threatened to attack a Jewish community center, according to a local sheriff's office.

James Reardon, 20, was being held on a $250,000 bond on charges of aggravated menacing and telecommunications harassment, Sgt. Scott Wilson with the Mahoning County Sheriff's Office confirmed to Fox News on Sunday.

Reardon was arrested around 11:35 p.m. on Friday from his home in New Middletown,

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Ohio, about an hour and a half from Cleveland, in connection with the online threat to the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Youngstown, Wilson told Fox News.

New Middletown Police Chief Vincent D'Egidio said a video posted to Instagram last month showing a man shooting a semi-automatic rifle with sirens and screams in the background, with a caption and tag that indicated a threat to the JCC of Youngstown, WKBN-TV reported.

Investigators later linked the Instagram account to Reardon, the news station added.

The FBI's Violent Crimes Task Force executed a search warrant at Reardon's home on Friday and seized several semi-automatic weapons, dozens of rounds of ammunition, bulletproof armor and a gas mask, according to the television station.

Investigators also reportedly found what they described as anti-Semitic and white nationalist propaganda.

"With the hate crimes and everything else going on, we want to make sure we do our part to make sure we did our part to make sure this person was taken off the streets very quickly," D'Egidio said.

Extra security has been at the Jewish Community Center since the investigation started and will stay there "for some time," the television station reported, citing police.

"I want to stress that we know of no other threat to the Jewish Community or to any of our agencies at this point it time. Nonetheless, I have directed that we maintain the additional level of security for the near future," Andy Lipkin, the executive vice-president of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation said in a statement.

He added, "The positive result here is a clear example of the importance of monitoring social media to identify credible, hate-fueled threats before they are acted on."

It was not immediately known if the FBI will pursue federal charges.

[CO] Colorado city may require detention center disease reporting (San Francisco Chronicle)

San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 3:40 PM, Associated Press, 337K]

A Colorado city is considering whether to require detention center employees to promptly notify health officials of infectious disease outbreaks.

Aurora City Council members gave preliminary approval Thursday to requiring such notification within 48 hours of discovery.

Sentinel Colorado reports the proposal follows a spate of chickenpox and mumps outbreaks at a privately owned and operated federal immigration detention center in Aurora.

The facility had 15 reported cases of mumps and nine of chicken pox from the beginning of 2019 through mid-March.

Facility officials implemented a vaccination program after the outbreaks.

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The reporting proposal would apply to three other facilities if approved by the full City Council.

[AZ] Judge allows Tucson sanctuary city vote to go forward (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 8:27 PM, Associated Press, 337K]
A judge will allow Tucson voters to decide whether their town should become Arizona's first "sanctuary city."

Pima County Superior Court judge Douglas Metcalf on Friday threw out a lawsuit seeking to block the initiative from a November election.

The Arizona Daily Star reports three Tucson residents challenged signatures used to get the initiative on the ballot.

The Tucson City Council voted in 2012 to designate the city officially as an "immigrant-welcoming city," but officials say they never declared Tucson a sanctuary city. Tucson has no policies restricting police from enforcing federal immigration laws.

Supporters say the initiative would add protections from President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. Critics say it defies U.S. immigration law.

[WA] ICE attack: Dramatic video captures exchange of gunfire that left anti-ICE attacker dead (Washington Times)
Washington Times [8/16/2019 8:09 AM, Stephen Dinan, 452K] Video: HERE
Newly released video captures the moment when police confronted the man who attacked an ICE facility last month with a gun and incendiary devices, including the shots from local police that killed the attacker — and perhaps prevented a larger loss of life.

The footage was taken by employees of GEO Group, the private contractor that runs the Tacoma, Washington, detention facility for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It was attacked on July 13 by Willem Van Spronsen.

Van Spronsen timed the attack to the early hours of the morning, managing to ignite one car — which is on fire at the start of the video, then explodes into an even bigger conflagration about 23 seconds in. At 38 seconds the video captures voices shouting what sounds like commands, then four seconds later gunfire erupts, momentarily drowning out the shrill fire alarm.

Authorities have speculated that Van Spronsen was trying to ignite a propane tank on the property, perhaps to start a larger explosion that could have endangered the 1,300 ICE detainees, some 100 GEO Group employees and other ICE employees there at the time.

The video was captured by GEO Group employees whose shifts had ended. They were walking out of the building when they spotted Van Spronsen with a rifle and flares, which he was apparently using as fire starters.

The employees grabbed walkie-talkies and a video camera, and were able to get a

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notification to police, who responded.

Van Spronsen's attack has been labeled domestic terrorism. He produced a manifesto laying out his justification for violence against ICE, using some of the same language of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, such as the phrase "concentration camps" to describe holding facilities.

But GEO Group, which ran the facility Van Spronsen attacked, said the Northwest Detention Center was never overcrowded, nor did it house the children whose detention drew protests earlier this year.

"The outrageous and baseless accusations that have been leveled against our facilities have led to misplaced aggression and a dangerous environment for our employees, whose safety is our top priority," the company said.

Earlier this week another ICE office in San Antonio, Texas, was attacked, with a gunman shooting out a window in an office building where the agency's deportation operation is based. GEO Group also maintained an office there.

ICE tied the attack to a growing animosity, fed in part by politicians, at law enforcement officers carrying out their duties to adhere to immigration laws.

[WA] Video shows car set ablaze by alleged antifa shooter in attack on ICE detention center (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/16/2019 3:16 PM, Anna Giaritelli, 855K] Video: HERE
A private company that manages Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities and offices nationwide released new video that shows the moments after a self-described antifa supporter set ablaze a vehicle outside the agency's Tacoma, Washington, detention facility where more than 1,000 illegal immigrants were being held.

The GEO Group shared with the Washington Examiner a two-minute video that shows a car on fire outside the facility shortly after the attacker, Vashon Island resident Willem Van Spronsen, torched it outside the Northwest Detention Center July 13.

In the video, the car explodes and then Van Spronsen opened fire with an AR-15 on the building and hurled Molotov cocktails. He also attempted to blow up a propane tank on site before he was killed after pointing his rifle at police and ignoring commands.

Former acting ICE Director Tom Homan said Thursday the incident could have killed more than 1,300 people in custody as well as the 100 ICE personnel on site had it not been for local Tacoma law enforcement's quick response.

GEO spokesman Pablo Paez said in July the incident was a result of the "factually inaccurate portrayal of our facilities."

"Contrary to the images of other facilities on the news, our facilities have never been overcrowded, nor have they ever housed unaccompanied minors," said Paez. "The GEO Group's facilities, including the processing center in Tacoma, offer modern amenities with air conditioning, a bed for every individual, recreational activities, 24/7 medical care and

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access to legal services on the premises as we carry out our mission to provide the safest, most humane care possible."

[Mexico] New US Ambassador arrives in Mexico amid migration tensions (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 11:44 PM, Associated Press, 9425K]
New U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Christopher Landau has arrived in Mexico City to take up one of Washington's most important diplomatic posts, which has been empty for over a year.

Landau replaces Roberta Jacobson, the first woman to be the United States' envoy to Mexico. She resigned and retired in May 2018.

The North American neighbors are key commercial partners but Landau's arrival comes after months of tensions over immigration and trade.

Landau is a Harvard-educated lawyer who has argued nine cases before the Supreme Court and who clerked for Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas in the early 1990s.

Landau arrived in Mexico City on Friday morning. He told journalists at the airport that Mexico and the United States face "challenges" just as in all close relationships.

[Mexico] New US Ambassador arrives in Mexico with 'hand extended' (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [8/16/2019 2:32 PM, Peter Orsi, AP, 245K]
New U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Christopher Landau arrived in Mexico City on Friday to take up one of Washington's most important diplomatic posts, which had been vacant for over a year, amid a tricky time for relations between the North American neighbors.

Landau replaces Roberta Jacobson, the first woman to be the United States' envoy to Mexico, who resigned and retired in May 2018.

"I arrive with my hand extended. The United States wins when there is a prosperous and stable Mexico, and Mexico wins when there is a prosperous and stable United States," Landau said in brief remarks to journalists upon arriving at Mexico City's airport in the morning. He did not take questions.

The United States and Mexico have deep cultural, familial and economic ties. The United States buys about 80% of Mexican exports, some $358 billion last year, and in the first quarter of this year Mexico was the United States' No. 1 commercial partner for the first time, ahead of Canada and China.

But Landau's arrival comes after months of tensions over immigration and trade.

Mexico has cracked down a wave of mostly Central American migrants and asylum seekers moving through its territory after U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to slap tariffs on imports from its southern neighbor. The number of migrants encountered by U.S. authorities in July dropped below 100,000 for the first time in five months, according to U.S. government data released last week.

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A September deadline looms when the two countries are to evaluate progress on the issue.

The governments are also hoping for ratification of a trade deal with Canada that replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement. Mexico's Senate approved the agreement known as the USMCA in June, but U.S. lawmakers have yet to do so.

"Obviously there are challenges in the bilateral relationship, but they are the challenges ... of any relationship that is so close," Landau said.

"Our countries are partners, neighbors and friends," he added. "It is that way today, and always will be."

Antonio Garza, who was U.S. ambassador to Mexico from 2002 to 2009, said Landau will be tasked with working with Mexico on the same issues that are perennially core to the relationship: trade, immigration and security.

"I think to various degrees at different times there's more urgency attached to each of those," Garza said. "With that said, I don't think that there has ever been a more critical time in terms of urgency as relates to trade, immigration and security."

Landau is a Harvard-educated lawyer who has argued nine cases before the Supreme Court and who clerked for Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas in the early 1990s, according to a bio provided by the U.S. Embassy.

While he lacks diplomatic experience, he is the son of career diplomat George Landau, who was ambassador to Venezuela, Chile and Paraguay. The younger Landau was born in Madrid, attended the American School in Asuncion, Paraguay, and speaks Spanish fluently.

Garza said growing up around the foreign service and a familiarity with and affinity for Latin America will serve Landau well, along with his ties to Washington.

"I think that's an awfully strong skillset," Garza said. "One is the appreciation for the culture, second is the intellect and third is the relationship that he has both back at the White House and State (Department)."

Landau was confirmed as ambassador by the U.S. Senate on Aug. 1 and swore in to the post Aug. 12.

He is married and has two children.

[Mexico] Senate Dem seeks answers from DHS on reports of pregnant asylum seekers sent back to Mexico (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 1:32 PM, Rafael Bernal, 2806K]
Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) on Friday asked Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials to clarify reports that pregnant asylum-seekers have been forced to wait out their immigration cases in Mexican border cities.

Merkley wrote DHS Inspector General Joseph Cuffari, asking why six late-term pregnant women were included in the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program in May.

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Under the program, known colloquially as “Remain in Mexico,” non-Mexican migrants seeking asylum in the United States are sent back across the border to await results of their asylum claims in U.S. immigration courts.

The Trump administration implemented the program in January with the acquiescence, but not outright support, of the Mexican government, which agreed to take in the migrants rather than deport them back to their countries of origin.

DHS in March expanded the program from the California border to El Paso, Texas, where the pregnant women were reportedly included in MPP.

DHS officials did not immediately return a request for comment.

“Policies and practices targeting pregnant women at the border are horrific and these allegations must be immediately investigated,” wrote Merkley.

Under U.S. law, children born in American territory would be natural-born U.S. citizens. If the children of third-country nationals are born in Mexico, they are also entitled to Mexican citizenship.

While Ciudad Juárez, the Mexican border city across from El Paso, has some infrastructure to provide medical services, migrant shelters in the city are reportedly overbooked and unable to care for guests with specialized needs.

Asylum-seekers with special medical needs are exempt from MPP, but that exemption does not explicitly include pregnancy.

"It is beyond question that pregnant women, particularly those nearing full term, have known health issues," Merkley wrote.

And Ciudad Juárez is among the most dangerous cities in Mexico, host to more than 170 murders per month.

“Forcing pregnant women to wait alone in Mexico for their asylum hearings puts them at extreme risk of abuse and extortion. Moreover, it creates significant health risks for mothers and children facing imminent delivery dates when proper medical care is not available,” Merkley said.

[Mexico] U.S. Born Islamic Terrorist Wanted by FBI Arrested in Mexico (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/17/2019 10:09 AM, Ildefonso Ortiz and Brandon Darby, 2034K]
Mexican authorities arrested a man wanted in the United States by the FBI for his role in supporting Islamic terrorist organizations.

Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office (FGR) arrested Mohammed Azharuddin Chip this week at an immigration center in Huehuetan, Chiapas. Authorities detained him on an Interpol blue notice, according to information provided to Breitbart Texas by FGR. The wanted fugitive is in the process of being extradited to Washington D.C.

Mexican authorities searched for Azharuddin in connection with an FBI investigation into his

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role in publishing information on online forums connected to radical Islamic terrorism and Jihad. Mexican authorities did not reveal additional information related to the case or his ultimate destination. Mexican immigration authorities held him at their immigration center in Chiapas before they turned him over to the FGR to handle his extradition to Washington. It remains unclear how Azharuddin arrived in Mexico.

As Breitbart Texas reported, Chiapas is one of the areas where Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador deployed thousands of National Guard agents to curtail the number of Central American migrants moving north in route to the U.S. border. The mass deployment of troops came after U.S. President Donald Trump threatened Mexico with tariffs over AMLO's initial soft approach to immigration.

[Mexico] Mexico detains US 'Islamist' at migrant center (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 11:17 AM, AFP, 2034K]
Mexico said Friday it arrested a US citizen suspected of backing jihadist groups who was being housed at a migrant detention center and deported him to the United States.

The Mexican prosecutor general's office said the man was the target of an Interpol "blue notice," issued because the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) suspects him of "publishing support for violent jihad and radical Islam" online.

Interpol blue notices are issued "to collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime," according to the international police organization.

Mexican media reports named the man as Mohammed Azharuddin Chhipa.

He was arrested at a migrant detention center in the town of Huehuetan, in the southern state of Chiapas, near the Mexican-Guatemalan border, the federal prosecutor's office said in a statement.

Such centers are used to temporarily house undocumented migrants as Mexican immigration authorities process their cases.

The man was subjected to a hearing at the detention center and deported by plane to Washington on Friday, the prosecutor's office said.

[Mexico] Mexico to Deport U.S. Citizen Suspected of Supporting 'Violent Jihad' (US News & World Report)
US News & World Report [8/16/2019 3:20 PM, Diego Ore, Reuters, 3196K]
Mexican authorities arrested a U.S. citizen suspected of supporting militant Islamists in an example of Mexico's security cooperation with the United States even as the two neighbors grapple with sharp disagreements over trade and migration.

The unidentified American man sought by Interpol was under investigation for supporting terrorist groups and will be deported to the United States later on Friday, the Mexico's attorney general's office said in a statement.

The man was detained at a migrants office near Mexico's border with Guatemala in the town of Huehuetan with the help of officials from Mexico's National Migration Institute.

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The statement highlighted information from U.S. security officials stating that "the foreigner has probably expressed support for violent jihad and radical Islam on digital platforms."

Mexican authorities did not disclose when the arrest was made or any other details of the man's activities in the country.

The case comes as tens of thousands of mostly Central American migrants have been crossing through Mexico in an attempt to reach the United States, with President Donald Trump pressuring the Mexican government to do more to reduce the flow.

[Mexico] Mexico is busing asylum-seeking migrants to southern border (San Diego Union Tribune)
San Diego Union Tribune [8/17/2019 9:26 AM, Associated Press]
The Mexican government said Friday it is busing migrants who have applied for asylum in the United States to the southern Mexico state of Chiapas.

About 30,000 migrants have been sent back to northern Mexican border cities to await U.S. asylum hearings under a policy known as "Remain in Mexico" under which they have to wait for hearings months away. But few provisions have been made for them to be housed or seek legal representation, and many cities on the northern border are among the most dangerous in Mexico.

Mexico's National Immigration Institute said it is uses to move migrants south from Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros — two of the most dangerous cities on the northern border. Both cities are in northern Tamaulipas state across from Texas and are dominated by drug cartels.

The migrant agency said the goal of the busing is "to provide a safer alternative for those who do not want to remain on the U.S.-Mexico border." It did not say how many people had been taken by bus to Chiapas so far.

The Associated Press reported that in July, Mexico had begun busing some of the returned migrants out of Tamaulipas to the city of Monterrey, in neighboring Nuevo Leon state. Authorities said it was for their safety, but many were dropped off in that unfamiliar city in the middle of the night.

Officials gave no indication of how the migrants would return to the border from Monterrey for their court dates. That problem would be amplified for migrants bused to Chiapas, nearly all the way back to the Guatemala border.

[Guatemala] Trump wants border-bound asylum seekers to find refuge in Guatemala instead. Guatemala isn't ready. (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 7:00 AM, Kevin Sieff, 9425K]
As tens of thousands of Guatemalans try to make their way to the United States every month, a much smaller group of Central Americans escaping violence and persecution have ended their journey here, seeking refuge in a country from which others are fleeing.

Until recently, they were an aberration. That may soon change, and the prospects are not

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good.

Last month, the United States and Guatemala signed a “safe third country” agreement, with plans to send thousands of Central American asylum seekers to Guatemala — one of the poorest countries in the Americas. For the tiny refugee community already here, it was an absurd proposition — and one that turned their experiences into a litmus test for Guatemala’s capacity as a safe haven.

Some have struggled to feed themselves while they waited for legal status. Others endured frequent threats and watched as their neighbors were murdered or attacked.

“We arrived here more than a year ago, and we’re still waiting for help. We don’t have work permits. We are still waiting for the asylum people to get back to us,” said Carolina Chavez, 29. She fled to Guatemala last August with her husband, Cesar Arauz, 32, and their 3-year-old son, Jourhen, after being attacked by Nicaraguan security forces for participating in an anti-government protest.

In the past year, Guatemala has received 226 asylum claims. Of those, not a single one has been processed, according to the government. The country’s asylum agency has eight employees.

Between October 2018 and July, about 300,000 Salvadorans and Hondurans traveled through Guatemala on their way to the U.S. border, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. Even if only a fraction of them are sent to Guatemala to apply for refuge, it would increase the number of asylum applications here by a large multiple.

It is a challenge impoverished Guatemala is not prepared to handle, said Alejandro Giammattei, the country’s newly minted president-elect. “If we do not have the capacity for our own people, just imagine other people,” said Giammattei, who has been critical of the safe third country agreement.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) typically helps asylum seekers pay for their first three months of rent, but then they are left largely on their own. Without work permits — and even with them — they often fail to find jobs. That has left some homeless or only able to afford apartments in Guatemala City’s most dangerous neighborhoods, known as zonas rojas, or red zones.

Most of the asylum seekers interviewed by The Washington Post said they felt safer here than in their native countries. Those threatening them at home had not followed them to Guatemala, they said. But finding work and shelter — and receiving formal asylum status — was so difficult that they faced a range of new threats after arriving.

Most could think of only one solution: to leave Guatemala. In recent years, a large number of asylum seekers have abandoned their cases before they were resolved.

For several months, after their U.N. stipend ran out, Chavez and Arauz stayed in an unfinished apartment building without a door on the edge of Guatemala City. One night, their neighbor, who was also squatting in the building, was murdered. They could hear the screams through the wall.

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The couple moved out the next morning. Eventually, they found a room they could rent for about $100 per month. But to afford that expense, the family sometimes goes days without food.

“What we see here is that asylum seekers and refugees are basically ignored. They are not given what they need to live with any kind of dignity,” said Juan Luis Carbajal, who helps run the Ministry of Human Mobility, which works with UNHCR to provide for the country’s pool of asylum seekers.

One of the men who came to Carbajal’s organization was a Colombian man who was shot in Guatemala City — by associates of the gang he had fled back home, he claimed. Others have had to move every few months to evade threats of violence.

When he heard about the prospect that the United States would start sending thousands of asylum seekers here, Carbajal was aghast.

“The idea that these people can find refuge here is a lie,” he said. “Even with a small group of refugees, we’ve seen the government’s inability and unwillingness to help. What happens when that number skyrockets?”

Jose Antonio Guardado, 60, was the former interim mayor of a small municipality in El Salvador called Mejicanos. He says he refused to cave to the demands of local gangs — as a politician and when he worked at a microfinance organization. The gangs responded by killing members of his family, one by one. By 2016, two of his children had been murdered and another had been kidnapped and was never seen again.

“I knew I needed to leave, but I didn’t know where to go,” he said. “I’d seen the stories about how dangerous it is to migrate to the United States, all the people dying in the desert. So I decided to stay here.”

Since arriving here in 2017, Guardado has struggled to find a job that would help him afford food and rent. He and his son, Jahdiel, 23, who later joined him, were bombarded with threats, accused both by civilians and government officials in Guatemala of being members of MS-13, the very gang they fled.

“We’re going to kill all the Salvadorans,” a young man told Jahdiel when he was working the night shift last month, he said. Jahdiel works as a private security guard.

Eventually, Guardado found work selling cemetery plots. He and Jahdiel share a one-bedroom apartment on the edge of Guatemala City. Guardado writes an unpaid column for a local newspaper called “La Hora,” enumerating the ways in which Guatemala mistreats its tiny refugee community.

His most recent column, published on Aug. 3, ran with the headline: “The Government of Guatemala Violates the Human Rights of Migrants.” He addressed the safe third country deal and the promise that Guatemala would be able to handle the influx of asylum seekers.

“Migrants are not guinea pigs to be used as experiments,” he wrote.

Guardado often wears his refugee identification card around his neck, ready to show proof

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of his legal status to anyone who asks. He has been stopped multiple times by police, he said, who told him, “That thing isn’t valid here.”

The United Nations is concerned about how Guatemala’s refugee agency would handle a sudden surge of new cases.

“There is clearly a lot of work that remains to be done for Guatemala’s asylum system to be able to provide full protection and inclusion for asylum seekers. The related institutions have only had to deal with a very limited number of asylum seekers to date,” said Giovanni Bassu, UNHCR’s regional representative for Central America. “The country has, however, made progress in a number of areas, including granting asylum seekers the right to work.”

Officials at the Guatemalan asylum agency said they had not been informed about how the agency would adapt to a surge in cases.

“We do not have details of the agreement. The authorities have not yet informed us, therefore we do not know how it would work,” said Alejandra Mena, a spokeswoman for the agency.

Acting U.S. homeland security secretary Kevin McAleenan told The Post earlier this month that the agreement would be “a phased and measured approach to implementation that will not overwhelm Guatemalan resources and will be supported by U.S.-funded international organization capacity.”

One 31-year-old Honduran asylum seeker, who requested anonymity because he fears for his safety, described how he had bounced between sleeping on floors and shelters since fleeing, after receiving death threats from a Honduran gang in 2016.

His first landlord in Guatemala tried to sexually assault him, he said. After 14 months, he received a work permit, “but whenever I apply for a job, people look at me like, ‘Oh, you’re Honduran, you must be a gangster.’ ”

DHS officials have said the policy would begin with the return of single men, before single women and families are included in the plan. Privately, U.S. officials say they think that many Central Americans will choose to return home instead of applying for asylum in Guatemala.

“If the government can’t make it work for 400 people, how are they going to do it for 25,000?” said Carbajal.

[Guatemala] US says controversial migrant deal will happen despite incoming Guatemalan president’s opposition (ABC News)
ABC News [8/16/2019 4:08 PM, Conor Finnegan, 2702K]
While Guatemala’s newly elected president said he cannot implement a migration deal his predecessor signed with the Trump administration, the State Department said Friday the two countries are working to implement it.

The agreement would allow the U.S. to deport migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. to Guatemala if they passed through that country on their way to the southern U.S. border.

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It's a controversial deal that critics say is inhumane and illegal because Guatemala is not a safe or developed enough country to accept asylum seekers and does not have the legal infrastructure to process asylum claims. But for President Donald Trump, it is critical to his plans to prevent more migrants from reaching the U.S. border.

"In order to be a safe country, one has to be certified as such by an international body, and I do not think Guatemala fulfills the requirements to be a third safe country," said Guatemala's President-elect Alejandro Giammattei, according to an Associated Press report Wednesday.

Giammattei was elected in a runoff last weekend, but will not take office until next January. He told the AP his government does "not have the capacity for our own people," let alone migrants from neighboring El Salvador, Honduras or elsewhere.

But a State Department spokesperson told ABC News, "Both governments are working toward implementation of the July 26 agreement."

"We look forward to working with the Giammattei administration in areas of mutual interest, including addressing the underlying economic, security, and governance challenges that drive irregular migration," the spokesperson added.

Giammattei spoke by phone with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Thursday. A readout from Pompeo's spokesperson Morgan Ortagus made no mention of the deal, but said Pompeo "recognized our close partnership in addressing illegal migration" during the call.

The Guatemalan embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump had publicly pressured the current Guatemalan president, Jimmy Morales, to sign a deal in July, threatening a "ban" or tariffs after Morales was forced to back out of signing a similar deal the week prior because of political pressure and a legal challenge back home.

The deal is still not in effect yet and must first pass "several procedural steps in both governments to ratify and recognize" it, acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan told reporters in July, adding he thought it could be done in "several weeks" and be "up and running" in August.

Rather than moving to scrap the deal, however, Giammattei seems to be pushing the U.S. to make changes. He told the AP that annexes to the agreement are still being negotiated and members of his transition team should be involved in those talks.

Among the changes Giammattei hinted at is pressing the U.S. to provide more assistance to Guatemala. The Trump administration cut $370 million of funding earlier this year to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, blaming them for not doing enough to stop migration. Critics, including Republican lawmakers, said the cuts impeded Trump's stated goal, undermining U.S.-backed efforts in those countries to stem migration.

The deal would also have to be ratified by both countries' legislatures, he said, especially in Guatemala, where the country's highest court has already ruled that the legislature must weigh in.

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There has been widespread criticism of the deal in Guatemala, and U.S. refugee and human rights groups say such an agreement imperils migrants, given Guatemala's dangerous crime rate and gang violence and lack of a proper asylum system.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

[RI] Corrections officer steps down after plowing truck into anti-ICE protesters at detention facility (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/17/2019 3:08 PM, Hunter Lovell, 855K]
A Rhode Island private prison correctional officer has stepped down from his post after driving a truck into a crowd of protesters and injuring several people on Wednesday night.

Wyatt Detention Facility in Central Falls announced in a statement to WJAR-TV that Capt. Thomas Woodworth resigned on Friday following the incident, which is still "under active investigation by the Rhode Island State Police and under internal investigation by the Wyatt."

The Providence Journal reported that Woodworth has been placed on administrative leave.

Footage of the scene went viral on social media Wednesday night, and Jewish advocacy group Never Again Action, which has spoken out against the Trump administration's immigration laws, livestreamed the incident and uploaded video clips to Twitter. The organization alleged that a guard at the detention center was the driver of the vehicle.

That night, a group of protesters with Never Again Action blocked access to the parking lot of the detention facility, which coordinates with Immigration and Customs Enforcement to round up immigrants who have crossed the U.S. border illegally. The group purposely barricaded the parking lot so that guards could not leave or arrive for the night shift.

The footage appears to show a black truck honking at the group of protesters before plowing into the crowd as people screamed. Four activists were hospitalized and other protesters were pepper-sprayed by corrections officers who came to quell the incident, according to a statement by Never Again Action.

The advocacy group said it was relieved to know that Woodworth had stepped down but demanded that criminal charges be pressed against the officer and called for other guards who were involved to be held accountable.

"If these officers felt empowered to attack a group of protesters in front of the public and the media, imagine what kind of violence must be taking place inside the prison, out of sight, against vulnerable immigrants and people of color," the group said.

The Rhode Island attorney general's office on Thursday issued a statement that it is cooperating with state authorities to probe the incident.

"Once we have a full understanding of the relevant facts, we will determine how to proceed," the statement said. "Peaceful protest is a fundamental right of all Americans; it is unfortunate last night's situation unfolded as it did. We urge all to exercise restraint as our investigation proceeds."

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[RI] Rhode Island guard resigns after video shows truck driving into anti-ICE protesters (FOX News)

FOX News [8/17/2019 2:41 AM, Danielle Wallace, 10258K]

A Rhode Island correctional officer resigned Friday, one day after being placed on administrative leave following an incident in which a truck driver plowed the vehicle into a small crowd of anti-ICE protesters -- reportedly injuring two of them.

It remained unclear whether Capt. Thomas Woodworth -- who had worked at the Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility in Central Falls, a government facility operated by a private contractor -- was behind the wheel of the truck in the Wednesday incident. The operator holds contracts to detain illegal immigrants on behalf of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Providence Journal reported.

In a now-viral video posted on social media, a black pickup truck is seen advancing toward a group of protesters as they block the entranceway to the ICE facility. The truck stops briefly as protesters rise to their feet and move toward the vehicle, chanting “Shame!” and “The whole world is watching!”

The truck then suddenly moves forward while some protesters remain in its path. A female protester can be seen jumping on the back bed of the truck. A second video shows a group of detention officers approach the protesters after the confrontation with the truck driver. The officers reportedly told the crowd to back away before allegedly using pepper spray on them.

The Rhode Island State Police and facility officials are both investigating the incident, the Providence Journal reported.

The protest was organized by Never Again Action, a Jewish youth movement that compares current federal immigration policies, including immigrants being held at detention facilities, to the atrocities of the Holocaust. The group’s Twitter page has more than 53,000 followers.

The detention facility’s managers have not confirmed the identity of the driver, citing the ongoing investigation, the Journal reported.

Never Again Action, which claims Woodworth was the driver, issued a statement Friday after the officer’s resignation. In addition to the two injuries, the group also claims three people were treated for exposure to pepper spray, the Journal reported.

One of the protesters, Jerry Belair, 64, suffered a broken leg and internal bleeding and was being examined for a possible back injury, the organization told Boston’s WBZ-TV.

“We hope that will not be the end of an effort to hold him accountable for attempting to run over multiple Jewish youth and elders peacefully protesting,” Never Again Action’s statement said.

Never Again Action said about 300 protesters gathered at the detention center Wednesday, and about 30 of them were blocking the entrance when the truck first approached.

[RI] Officer resigns after 2 hurt by truck at immigration protest (San Francisco Chronicle)

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San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 5:34 PM, Associated Press, 2613K]
An officer at a detention center resigned Friday amid investigations into a truck that drove through a group protesting federal immigration policies.

The resignation of Capt. Thomas Woodworth from the Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility was announced in a brief statement from the center in Central Falls, Rhode Island, a day after it said Woodworth had been placed on administrative leave.

"The incident which occurred on August 14 remains under active investigation by the Rhode Island State Police and under internal investigation by the Wyatt," said Francis McMahon, a spokesman for the facility which is used by U.S. Customs and Enforcement.

Officials at the center have not explicitly said whether Woodworth was driving the truck, saying that was part of the overall investigation.

A phone number to seek comment from Woodworth couldn't be found, and it wasn't clear whether he had a lawyer to speak for him.

The Jewish youth movement Never Again Action said at least two people were injured, one seriously, Wednesday night after a pickup that protesters said was operated by a uniformed corrections officer drove up to an entrance blocked by demonstrators.

Video posted by the group showed the vehicle stopping before again moving forward.

Protesters surrounded the truck, screaming and chanting: "The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!"

Never Again Action said Jerry Belair, 64, of Warren, suffered a broken leg and internal bleeding and was being evaluated at a hospital for a possible back injury. It didn't identify the other person it said was injured by the truck but said three other demonstrators were treated after inhaling pepper spray they say prison personnel used to disperse the crowd.

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha, a Democrat, announced Thursday that his office and state police were investigating.

[PA] Uber Driver Convicted Of Raping Woman While She Was Unconscious Faces Deportation (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [8/16/2019 3:06 PM, Jason Hopkins, 785K]
A 27-year-old Uber driver was convicted Thursday of raping an intoxicated woman, and will likely be deported back to his home country of Egypt.

A Pennsylvania jury on Thursday found Ahmed Elgaafary — a former Uber driver — guilty of raping an unconscious person, indecent assault, sexual assault, and indecent assault without consent, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer. The 12-person panel deliberated for more than three hours before reaching their verdict.

Authorities say Elgaafary will be sentenced at a later date and will eventually removed from the U.S. The case dates back to a late-night Uber drive that took place in February in Chester County.

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A Pennsylvania woman ordered an Uber ride home after a night spent drinking copious amounts of alcohol at the Valley Forge Casino Resort. Instead of taking her straight home, her Uber driver, Elgaafary, veered his GMC Yukon to a dimly lit street and proceeded to rape her, Assistant District Attorney Vincent Robert Cocco argued near the end of the trial.

Instead of what would typically be a 15-minute ride home, the drive that night instead lasted 53 minutes. Not only did Elgaafary charge her for the extended drive, but he charged her an additional $150 after she threw up in his vehicle.

The woman — who says she drank two cocktails and several glasses of wine — does not recall anything after leaving the casino sometime after 2:00 a.m. When she awoke in her bedroom that morning, she felt something was wrong after noticing bruises on her thighs. She eventually visited a hospital and obtained a rape kit.

“She should have been safe,” Cocco argued to the jury Thursday, which was made up of eight women and four men. “He knew she was vulnerable. He knew she was alone. He knew she was too drunk.”

Elgaafary initially denied any sexual contact occurred when he was first approached by law enforcement about the incident. However, after results of the rape kit came back, he changed his story, claiming that the two had consensual sex. He claimed that he initially lied because he didn’t want his pregnant wife to know that he had cheated on her.

“He cheated on his wife,” Melissa Berlot McCafferty, Elgaafary’s lawyer, stated about his change in story. “He’s not a rapist. He’s not a criminal.” The defendant claimed that he was seduced by the woman during the Uber drive, leading to consensual sex between the two.

The jury ultimately sided with prosecutors after deliberating for several hours.

“Elgaafary, an Uber driver, was convicted today after a weeklong trial of raping an unconscious woman, who he was supposed to be driving home as part of his job,” Chester County District Attorney Thomas Hogan wrote Thursday. “The defendant will be sentenced at a later date and then deported.”

It’s not immediately clear if federal immigration authorities are planning to remove him from the country. A request for comment from the Daily Caller News Foundation was not returned by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in time for publication of this article.

[MD] Sanctuary County Will Work With ICE In Wake Of Alleged Child Rape By Illegal Aliens (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [8/16/2019 12:23 PM, Jason Hopkins, 785K]
Two illegal aliens have been arrested in Montgomery County, Maryland, for allegedly raping an 11-year-old girl. ICE has lodged detainers on both men.

County Executive Marc Elrich, a Democrat, signed a “sanctuary” executive order in June that prohibits local law enforcement from working with ICE.

Despite the executive order, Elrich says local police will notify federal immigration authorities when the two men are released from custody.

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Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich will allow ICE to be notified when two alleged child rapists are released from police custody, despite signing an executive order that effectively turned his county into a "sanctuary" for those living in the U.S. illegally.

"After determining that the suspects are undocumented immigrants, Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) requested that the County notify them if and when the two men are scheduled to be released from custody for any reason," said in a statement issued late Wednesday, according to Montgomery Community Media. "The County will do so."

The announcement comes after Montgomery County Police arrested Mauricio Barrera-Navidad, 29, and Carlos Palacios-Amaya, 28 — both residents of Montgomery County, Maryland — for allegedly raping an 11-year-old girl on multiple occasions.

Palacios-Amaya was introduced to the underage victim in September 2018 through her older brother. Palacios-Amaya then allegedly raped her several times throughout the following months. During one encounter, Palacios-Amaya used his cell phone to record the assault, with authorities discovering several images of the victim and Palacios-Amaya stored on the phone.

Berrera-Navidad allegedly raped the young girl in July 2018 during her brother's birthday party at a trailer park in Germantown, Maryland.

The victim eventually reported the rapes to a social worker in July.

An ICE spokesperson confirmed to the Daily Caller News Foundation that both Palacios-Amaya and Berrera-Navidad are Salvadorian nationals living in the country illegally. Palacios-Amaya was previously deported from the U.S. in 2014, but was somehow returned at an unknown time. Berrera-Navidad, according to ICE, was given a final order for removal by an immigration judge in December 2016.

ICE has lodged detainer requests for both individuals.

"Montgomery County is a welcoming community that values the diversity of communities that are made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and nations," Elrich, a Democrat, continued in his statement. "We believe that being a welcoming community to the people who live and work here creates a stronger relationship between communities and our law enforcement agencies, which make our communities safer."

Elrich, who called the alleged crime "horrible," said that Montgomery County officials will honor ICE's request and notify the agency when the pair are released from custody.

The county executive's statement comes less than a month after he signed "The Promoting Community Trust Executive Order," an executive order that effectively bars county law enforcement from working with federal immigration authorities. The order — made in defiance of the Trump administration's illegal immigration crackdown — prohibits county police officers from asking about a resident's immigration status and prohibits them from working with ICE.

While Elrich's Wednesday announcement appears to be a reversal of the sanctuary policy

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he signed in July, the county executive maintains that the policy has not changed.

“The new Promoting Community Trust Executive Order has not changed the County’s policy on cooperating with ICE requests for notification of the release of individuals charged with serious crimes,” Elrich said in his Wednesday statement.
Elrich in July, however, said during the signing of his executive order that immigration enforcement was the “sole responsibility” of the federal government. Additionally, the Montgomery County acting Police Chief Marcus Jones said in July that it has been longstanding policy to have “no direct contact” with ICE on immigration issues.

[NC] ICE arrests illegal immigrant accused of rape 2 months after he was released on bond (FOX News)
FOX News [8/17/2019 11:18 AM, Robert Gearty, 10258K]
A North Carolina sheriff has been accused by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials of ignoring an ICE detainer in the case of an illegal immigrant who was captured this month -- two months after he was released on bond in a rape case.

“By releasing a previously deported alien facing serious criminal charges, Mecklenburg County chose to release a serious public safety threat onto the streets of Charlotte where he was free to potentially harm others for nearly two months until his capture by ICE," the agency officials said Friday.

Charlotte police arrested Oscar Pacheco-Leonardo June 14 on rape and indecent liberties with a minor charges. Online records show Pacheco-Leonardo was accused of having sex with a child under the age of 13. He was due back in court in October.

ICE said it issued a detainer the next day but it wasn’t honored and the 33-year-old Honduran national was released June 16 by the Mecklenburg County Sheriff’s Office. The immigration enforcement agency said Pacheco-Leonardo reentered the U.S. illegally after being deported in 2006.

“This arrest is simply the latest in a continuing list of unlawfully present foreign nationals released from Mecklenburg County custody over the past nine months despite serious criminal charges that pose a clear threat to public safety,” ICE said.

ICE said the 48-hour detainer could have given the agency time to take custody of Pacheco-Leonardo to deport him.

Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden defended himself Friday at a news conference in which he took no questions, Fox 46 Charlotte reported.

McFadden said Pacheco-Leonardo was released after he put up $100,000 in bond set by a Mecklenburg judge in the rape case.

The sheriff said ICE could have sought a criminal arrest warrant for Pacheco-Leonardo for illegal re-entry but did not.

“The reasons for that decision have yet to be satisfactorily explained to me or to the public,” he said.

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He stopped honoring ICE detainers after being elected sheriff last fall.

[GA] Report: Illegal Workers Flee Georgia Food Plants After Mississippi ICE Raids (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/18/2019 7:41 PM, John Binder, 2034K]
This month, ICE agents conducted the largest workplace raid in more than a decade across five food processing plants in Mississippi, netting the arrests of 680 illegal aliens. That same day, though, ICE officials said they released about 300 of the illegal workers back into the U.S. on "humanitarian grounds." More than 200 of the illegal workers had prior criminal records and a federal criminal investigation is expected to result in convictions of the employers at the plants. The raids have already resulted in job fairs at some of the plants seeking to hire locals.

Those ICE raids, according to reports compiled by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC), spurred illegal workers in Hall County, Georgia — where numerous food processing plants are located — to flee their jobs in fear that they could be arrested for illegally working in the country.

Jerry Gonzalez with the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials told AJC that food processing plant workers fleeing their jobs following the Mississippi ICE raids proved that employers were illegally hiring illegal aliens:

Thursday's walk-out is evidence of the presence of undocumented workers in those plants, Gonzalez said. "Without a doubt there are undocumented workers in Georgia's agriculture industry. Even if they use E-Verify – the plants in Mississippi used E-Verify. That doesn't mean they're not using undocumented workers," he said. [Emphasis added]

Though it is unclear which food processing plants in Hall County saw their illegal workers flee following the ICE raids in Mississippi, the region is home to plants such as Koch Foods of Gainsville, Victory Foods, Koch Meat Inc., and Cargill Inc.

The Mississippi-based plant for Koch Foods was one of the five plants raided by ICE. The plant is not associated with the billionaire Koch brothers. Federal affidavits allege that Koch Foods has a long history of exploiting and hiring illegal workers.

As Breitbart News reported, only 11 employers and no businesses have been federally prosecuted for hiring illegal aliens in the last year despite there being nearly eight million illegal alien workers holding American jobs at companies in the U.S.

[MS] After Mississippi ICE raids, some affected children still are without a parent, official says (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 12:19 PM, Dianne Gallagher and Jason Hanna, 6094K]
Some children whose parents were detained in immigration raids in Mississippi last week still do not have at least one parent with them, a Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services spokeswoman said Thursday.

The department, acting on tips, verified this through home visits with the children, spokeswoman Lea Anne Brandon said.

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Citing privacy concerns, Brandon said she could not reveal the number of children still without at least one parent present.

There are "children in the area whose parents were detained that still do not have a parent with them" and who are being temporarily looked after by relatives, neighbors or family friends, Brandon said.

At least 680 undocumented immigrants were detained August 7 in raids at seven food processing plants across central Mississippi.

After being scheduled for proceedings before federal immigration courts, some workers -- many of whom are parents -- were allowed to return to their homes with GPS ankle monitors. More than 300 of the detainees had been released by August 8, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement said.

US officials have stressed that they went out of their way to release certain parents to ensure that children had at least one parent at home.

By the night of August 7, it was believed "that all children were with at least one of their parents," the office of Mike Hurst, US attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, said August 8.

If investigators "encountered two alien parents with minor children at home, HSI (Homeland Security Investigations) released one of the parents on humanitarian grounds and returned that individual to the place from which they were arrested," Hurst's office said last week.

"HSI similarly released any single alien parent with minor children at home on humanitarian grounds," the office said.

But some detainees, because of their immigration status, might have been afraid to tell federal authorities that they had children, Brandon said. Because the feds didn't know they had children at home, these parents might not have been released.

Instead, these parents might have asked a friend or a relative to take care of their children, Brandon said.

Bryan Cox, an ICE spokesman, said he was unable to address assertions that children were without at least one parent unless the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services released specific names.

He said the detentions of these parents should be seen in a light similar to arrests that have nothing to do with immigration.

"There are countless children in Mississippi who have a parent currently incarcerated due to their parent being arrested. The reality is, adults with children are arrested by law enforcement agencies in Mississippi every day -- and every arrest by any law enforcement agency, by definition, 'separates' a person from their family," Cox said.

"The use of sensationalist language applied to ICE arrests -- and only ICE arrests -- only

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fuels misinformation and is an unfair double standard," Cox said.

Hurst's office did not immediately reply to a request for comment about Brandon's assertion.

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services will have no official role in the raids' aftermath unless a child is turned over to foster care, Brandon said. As of now, the department does not have custody of any of the children affected by the raids, she said.

She said her department has recruited additional foster homes, just in case.

"It's easy for relatives and neighbors to care for these children in the short term, but when the absence turns into months or even years, depending on what happens, it's much more difficult," Brandon said. "This is a marathon, not a sprint, for our community.

"The goal is for the kids to be with their parents. If they aren't, they should be where the parents want them. But we know there are a lot of unknowns for these communities right now."

The August 7 raids had several effects on affected families, including the workers' children, some of whom didn't immediately have adults to go home to after school that day. Volunteers took some of them to a gym in the city of Forest that day, distributing donated food and drinks to them until the kids were reunited with family members that night.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement has stepped up worksite enforcement since President Donald Trump took office, conducting a number of large-scale raids at food-processing plants and gardening centers.

[MS] Feds: Mississippi Food Plants 'Willfully' Hired Illegal Aliens Over Americans (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 7:07 PM, John Binder, 2034K]
Multiple Mississippi food processing plants raided by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency last week "willfully" hired hundreds of illegal aliens over Americans, federal prosecutors say.

Last week, ICE agents conducted the largest workplace raid in more than a decade across seven food processing plants in Mississippi, netting the arrests of 680 illegal aliens. That same day, though, ICE officials said they released about 300 of the illegal workers back into the U.S. on "humanitarian grounds." More than 200 of the illegal workers had prior criminal records.

ICE officials and federal prosecutors have continued to say that the employers and owners at P H Food Inc., Koch Foods, A&B Inc., Peco Foods, and Pearl River Foods — the plants raided — are under criminal investigation for their involvement in hiring illegal aliens and thus they cannot comment further on specifics.

Federal affidavits released this week, though, provide insight into the illegal business operations occurring in plain sight for years at the various Mississippi plants where illegal aliens were regularly hired over Americans, some of which said they were never told to provide documents proving their legality.

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Prosecutors said the five food processing plants “willfully and unlawfully” hired hundreds of illegal aliens. Koch Foods, specifically, is detailed as having a long record of hiring illegal aliens for more than a decade. Between September 2002 and April 2019, the affidavits state, ICE agents arrested 144 illegal workers at Koch Foods — not including the illegal workers who slipped through the cracks.

At the A & B Inc. plant, an illegal worker told federal officials that he had never been asked for documentation of his immigration status or work authorization, prosecutors said.

Many of the illegal workers would arrive at the food processing plants wearing ankle monitors, indicating that they had been released by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) into the U.S. interior after crossing the southern border.

The affidavits allege that a woman in charge of the payroll for both P H Food Inc. and A & B Inc., as well as a worker who dealt with the payroll of two plants, were fully aware of the hundreds of illegal workers that were employed.

If convicted, the employers could be fined $3,000 and face up to six months in prison per illegal worker they hired.

As Breitbart News has reported, only 11 employers and no businesses have been federally prosecuted for hiring illegal aliens in the last year despite there being nearly eight million illegal alien workers holding American jobs at companies in the U.S.

The ICE raids at the five Mississippi plants have opened job opportunities and potential for wage hikes, as well as better working conditions, for Americans looking to fill the hundreds of now-open spots. Already, about 150 locals attended a job fair put on by Koch Foods.

[MS] More than 40 charged in federal court from Mississippi ICE raid, but no company officials (USA Today)
USA Today [8/17/2019 3:58 PM, Jimmie E. Gates and Luke Ramseth, Mississippi Clarion Ledger, 6620K]
Charges have been filed in federal court accusing more than 40 people detained in the recent Mississippi chicken processing plant raids of being in the United States illegally.

But more than a week after the raids, there are no records of company officials charged with knowingly hiring undocumented workers. This is despite information in federal search warrant affidavits suggesting company officials knew their workers were undocumented.

Some managers knew workers wore ankle monitors to work as they waited on immigration hearings, the warrants say. One of the chicken companies was aware its workers used fraudulent Social Security numbers, a confidential informant told investigators. A human resources employee revealed an employee was hired on two occasions, under two different identities.

When a Guatemalan man encountered law enforcement in Texas, he admitted he had worked at one of the plants, Koch Foods, and reportedly said the plant knew about his immigration status and that there were “a lot of illegals working there."

Authorities said since 2002 they have recorded about 350 encounters or arrests of

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undocumented immigrants around the country who acknowledged working at either Koch Foods or Peco Foods plants in Mississippi.

The initial wave of about 40 charges filed against workers this week includes an arrest warrant and a sworn affidavit by Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Brent Druery. It accuses each person of either illegally reentering or failing to depart the U.S.

For example, an arrest warrant for Cesar Berduo-Perez said he had three prior encounters with immigration officials — including one in November 2011, near Morton, Mississippi, and another in 2013, in Scott County. When agents raided Pearl River Foods in Carthage last week, they once again found Perez, who is from Mexico.

Perez was deported to Mexico each time, the court documents say. ICE databases revealed Perez never received permission to apply for readmission. Federal law states someone illegally reentering the country can be fined or imprisoned up to two years, or both. They also can be deported.

The new criminal complaints filed against workers stem from the Aug. 7 raids of seven Mississippi food processing plants, when immigration officials arrested 680 people suspected of living and working in the country without permission. Officials called it the largest immigration operation of its kind in more than a decade, and the largest single-state raid ever.

The approximately 380 people still in custody were shipped to detention facilities in southwest Mississippi and Louisiana, authorities said.

Will employers face consequences?

Mike Hurst, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, has said the investigation is ongoing. He hasn't said specifically whether criminal charges will be brought against companies and officials — but pointed to a track record that includes several similar prosecutions.

The search warrant affidavits suggest all five companies that operated the processing plants knowingly hired undocumented immigrants. Companies engaging in a "pattern and practice" of knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants can be fined as much as $3,000 for each person hired. Company officials can face up to six months in prison.

Sometimes investigators leaned on confidential informants, who talked with human resource managers and other company officials about what they knew.

In other cases, authorities gleaned information about company practices by questioning workers. For example, a Guatemalan employee working under an assumed identity said she was told during her job interview that it was OK to wear an ankle monitor, as long as it stayed charged. Another woman said she'd applied at one of the plants using an alternate identity and was "hired on the spot" for a three-month trial.

In addition, investigators found some employees had not been run through the legally-required federal E-Verify system, which scans an applicant's information through federal databases. (The system can't necessarily flag whether an applicant is using fake

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documents, however.)

Agents also said they learned some employees entering and leaving the plants did not match up with names of employees in the company's quarterly wage report filed with the state.

At PH Food in Morton, which employed about 240, an informant told agents nearly the whole staff was undocumented. The informant said the workers there used their real names, but fraudulent Social Security numbers. And the documents suggest PH officials knew, and leaned on a Louisiana payroll outsourcing firm to hide its activities. The same plant fired most of its remaining workers after last week's raids.

Lawyers and experts told the Associated Press that investigating management takes longer and is more challenging than detaining workers. "The employer says, 'I'm sorry, I didn't know they were unauthorized,'" explained Muzaffar Chishti, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute.

In addition, experts say the documents, computers and other items seized during the raids likely will take time to sift through.

Tracking undocumented immigrants

The search warrants also show how authorities connected undocumented immigrants to the companies where they worked, and how they got hired in the first place.

In some cases, authorities tracked the immigrants via their ankle monitors, after they had been arrested by Border Patrol elsewhere around the country. Using GPS, agents watched as one woman remained at a Peco Foods facility in Bay Springs for as long as 10 hours per day. They tracked her as she traveled to work from her home in Laurel. And they did the same with many others.

At Pearl River Foods in Carthage, investigators served a subpoena for a list of employees. An analysis showed "numerous employees were utilizing stolen (IDs) to gain employment," including Social Security numbers that didn't match assigned names, and Social Security numbers belonging to dead people.

Investigators also staked out the facilities themselves. At Pearl River Foods, for example, they watched vehicles going in and out, and found only eight of 26 license plates belonged to people listed as current employees by the company.

In another case, authorities tailed a van leaving the Peco Foods plant in Sebastopol. They pulled it over after it reportedly crossed a center line, and found its six occupants had "unlawfully entered" the country.

Other times, investigators simply talked to employees or former employees. One Guatemalan woman admitted she'd entered the country illegally last year, that she'd been employed by Peco for about nine months, and had been hired after paying $600 for a fake Tennessee ID card and other documents.

Similar cases in Mississippi

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Legal experts said there have been relatively few prosecutions of employers over hiring of undocumented workers over the years.

Under President Donald Trump, ICE has drastically increased immigration crackdowns including worksite enforcement actions, according to the Associated Press. But the amount of employers being charged has remained almost the same.

There are a few prominent recent examples from Mississippi, however.

Howard Industries, one of the state's largest employers, pleaded guilty to knowingly violating the federal criminal conspiracy law in its employment of illegal workers at the company's electrical transformer plant in Laurel, following an investigation by ICE and Homeland Security. Nearly 600 suspected undocumented workers were detained in the 2008 raid.

Howard Industries waived indictment and agreed to pay a criminal fine in the amount of $2.5 million. The company's former human resources manager, Jose Humberto Gonzalez, also pleaded to federal charges tied to hiring of undocumented workers. He was given a sentence of six-months of house arrest.

In another case, the U.S. Attorney's office filed a criminal complaint against the Country Club of Jackson citing immigration and Social Security violations. The complaint says the Country Club was knowingly employing illegal immigrants.

The case was settled, however, with the Country Club agreeing to pay a $214,500 fine, be audited by ICE and establish a training program to help employers detect fraudulent documents.

[IL] Feds allege that suburban Chicago's Koch Foods, whose Mississippi plant was raided by ICE, had history of 'knowingly hiring and employing illegal aliens' (Chicago Tribune)

Chicago Tribune [8/16/2019 8:44 AM, Jeff Amy, 1293K]

Koch Foods, the suburban Chicago poultry processor whose Mississippi plant was among seven raided last week in a sweep of workers allegedly living in the country illegally, had a history of "knowingly hiring and employing illegal aliens," according to allegations in an unsealed affidavit for a federal search warrant.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested 680 employees on Aug. 7 in the largest illegal immigration sting operation of the Trump administration. More than a third of those arrested worked at the Koch plant in Morton, Miss., ICE spokesman Bryan Cox said Friday.

The affidavit, which led a federal judge to authorize the raid, documented 144 previous ICE encounters or arrests between 2002 and 2019 of people who said they worked at Koch plants in Mississippi, including 21 people who were being electronically monitored after previous arrests for immigration violations.

"Koch Foods did not knowingly or willfully employ any unauthorized workers at the Morton facility," Koch spokesman Jim Gilliland said in an emailed statement Friday. "The search

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warrant affidavit includes allegations that various individuals worked under a false identity at the Koch Foods facility in Morton, Mississippi, but it does not include any specific allegation about any manager or supervisor knowing that a worker was unauthorized."

With 243 workers arrested, Park Ridge-based Koch Foods — one of the country's largest chicken processors — had the most employees detained by ICE in the sweep. While authorities have released 303 of the workers, 377 are in federal custody at facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi, Cox said. The agency could not determine how many of the Koch employees remain in detention.

More than 600 agents from ICE and Homeland Security Investigations descended on the seven Mississippi plants using multiple federal criminal search warrants. Other chicken processors caught up in the sweep include Peco Foods, Pearl River Foods and PH Food.

Six of seven Mississippi chicken processing plants raided were "willfully and unlawfully" employing people who lacked authorization to work in the United States, including workers wearing electronic monitoring bracelets at work for previous immigration violations, the affidavit alleges.

Federal investigators behind the biggest immigration raid in a decade relied on confidential informants inside the plants in addition to data from the monitoring bracelets to help make their case, according to the documents.

The sworn statements supported the search warrants that led a judge to authorize the raids, and aren't official charges, but give the first detailed look at the evidence involved in what officials have described as a yearlong investigation.

One woman told agents that a Spanish-speaking human resources employee at Koch Foods in Morton looked at two different IDs in three weeks, the affidavit alleges. Ana Santizo-Tapia of Guatemala also told agents that a Koch supervisor asked if she had an ankle bracelet. Told yes, "he said it was okay, but she needed to keep it charged," the affidavit alleges. The supervisor "stated that he knew 'they' were poor and came to the United States to work," the affidavit alleges.

Another Koch employee said she worked at one plant in Morton for 11 months under a false name, and then got a job at the town's second Koch plant under her real name after receiving valid U.S. documents, the affidavit alleges.

"The fact that persons may have worked at Koch Foods under a false identity does not establish that Koch Foods knew that any particular worker was unlawful, nor do the allegations in the warrant establish such knowledge," Gilliland said in the emailed statement. "To the contrary, Koch Foods had every reason to believe that it was in compliance with immigration laws at the Morton facility."

Koch, which has more than 1,000 employees at its Morton plant, did not operate its first shift on Aug. 7 — the day of the ICE raid — but has resumed full production, Gilliland said in a phone interview Friday.

On Monday, Koch held a Mississippi job fair to fill positions at its plants, but it was not in direct response to the ICE raid, Gilliland said. "We conduct job fairs all the time," Gilliland

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said. “But clearly, we needed to recruit employees as a result of what had happened.”

Koch Foods processes chickens for national restaurant chains, schools and other locations, and its products are sold in grocery stores under the Oven Cravers and Koch Foods brands. The ICE raid last week was not Koch’s first brush with federal authorities.

In 2018, Koch Foods agreed to pay $3.75 million to settle a lawsuit brought by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for alleged racial discrimination and sexual harassment at the Morton plant. According to the lawsuit, Koch allegedly subjected Hispanic and female employees to a “hostile work environment” and supervisors allegedly “touched and/or made sexually suggestive comments” to female Hispanic employees, among other allegations.

In 2007, Koch’s Fairfield, Ohio, plant was raided by U.S. immigration agents, resulting in the arrest of 161 alleged illegal immigrants. Koch reportedly paid a $536,046 fine for violating immigration laws in February 2010.

Launched as a one-room chicken deboning and cutting operation, Koch has grown into one of the largest poultry processors in the U.S. The privately owned company has more than 13,000 employees, with locations across Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee. Annual sales top $3 billion, according to reports.

The company’s low-profile owner, Joseph Grendys, 57, who grew up in a Chicago bungalow, is worth $2.5 billion, making him the 328th richest man in America, according to the 2018 Forbes 400 ranking.

Koch Foods is not affiliated with the Koch brothers or Koch Industries, the Kansas-based energy and manufacturing conglomerate.

[TX] Nigeria-bound passenger charged with assaulting ICE deportation officer who tried to handcuff him in Houston (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [8/16/2019 5:51 PM, Gabrielle Banks, 245K]
A Sugar Land man is facing federal prosecution after he was accused of assaulting one of two Immigration Customs Enforcement officers carrying out his deportation order at George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

Rather than being back in his native Nigeria, James Agbeze is back in federal custody.

Officials said he became combative on July 11 amid a verbal dispute over their use of handcuffs for an Atlanta-bound Delta flight. According to a sworn statement by an investigating officer at ICE, Agbeze punched an officer in the face, knocked him in the ribs and tore off part of his fingernail.

Agbeze, 53, was ordered into detention pending trial at Joe Corley Detention Center in Conroe, where he’d previously been held after a Harris County conviction and federal deportation proceedings. On Aug. 12, he was charged in the airport incident.

The federal public defender assigned to the assault case declined to comment. A spokesperson for ICE in Houston said he could not comment on a pending case.

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Agbeze came to the U.S. as a lawful resident in 2005, but lost his status following a 2013 conviction for aggregate theft by a Medicaid contractor, according to court documents. Agbeze appealed a 2017 deportation order. On June 18, the 5th U.S. Circuit denied his final appeal of the final removal order.

He was scheduled to travel for the first leg of his court-ordered journey with two ICE deportation officers, Justin Vedder and Eugene Ramirez, and then board a second flight from Atlanta to Nigeria.

Vedder told the captain as the trio boarded the Atlanta-bound flight that he and Ramirez were federal officers and they were armed, according to court documents. He told the pilot he didn't expect Agbeze to cause any trouble, although he added that Agbeze had been "verbally aggressive and argumentative."

At the assigned row, Agbeze refused to move from a middle to a window seat when the officers told him to do so, documents indicate. Officers attempted to handcuff him, and he raised his hands "in a threatening manner" and began screaming. The officers said he continued to resist. Agbeze allegedly struck Vedder in the jaw and ribcage. When the duo finally cuffed him, they removed Agbeze from the flight.

Vedder reported that part of his pinky nail was torn off in the scuffle. He also had cuts, scrapes, swelling, soreness on his face.

[CA] NFL players help bail out illegal immigrant in ICE detention in California (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 8:05 AM, Ryan Gaydos, 10258K]
NFL players Josh Norman and Demario Davis on Monday helped bail out an illegal immigrant who since May had been detained at a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement center.

Jose Bello, a 22-year-old California farmworker who came to the U.S. when he was 3, read a poem at a Kern County Board of Supervisors meeting in May criticizing the Trump administration's treatment of immigrants. Two days after reading the poem, he was placed into ICE custody on an outstanding DUI charge. He was held for three months because he couldn't pay a $50,000 bail.

Norman, a cornerback for the Washington Redskins, and Davis, a linebacker for the New Orleans Saints, contributed to Bello's bail money along with the New York Immigrant Freedom Fund and the National Bail Fund Network, according to The Washington Post.

"To me, it seemed like a dream," Bello told The Washington Post. "It's like something that you hear about in movies. I watch football, and I know how much attention and how famous those people are, so just the fact that they would look into helping me out, it was a great honor. I know who they are. I was shocked in a good way."

According to USA Today, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California filed a lawsuit alleging that Bello's First Amendment rights were violated and accused ICE of retaliation over Bello's poem.

Bello was first arrested by ICE officers in May 2018, according to Bakersfield.com. The

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agency alleged that Bello and his brother had criminal convictions when they were juveniles and were a part of a local gang. However, a federal immigration judge ordered Bello released in August 2018 on $10,000 bail.

Bello was then charged with DUI in January but was not detained, according to The Washington Post. ICE then detained him after he read the poem in May on the outstanding DUI charge.

“I just want to be a positive role model to my son,” Bello told Bakersfield.com. “I’m really pushing myself. I feel like I’ve come a long way, and if nobody else recognizes it, I do.”

Norman tweeted about Bello’s release Tuesday.

Norman and Davis are part of the NFL Players’ Coalition, which is dedicated to bringing attention to social justice initiatives.

Citizenship and Immigration Services

Guest worker visas are being denied at record rates (San Diego Union Tribune)
San Diego Union Tribune [8/19/2019 3:01 AM, Gustavo Solis]
Denial rates for high-skilled worker visas have quadrupled since 2015, a trend that makes it much harder for companies that rely on these workers to find and retain talent.

According to data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, denial rates for first-time H-1B visa applicants increased from 6 percent to 24 percent between fiscal years 2015 and 2018. And the trend is growing.

Through the first half of fiscal year 2019, USCIS denied 33 percent of initial H-1B visa applications, data shows.

H-1B visas are highly sought-after work visas for high-skilled workers like computer engineers and programmers. Each April, USCIS receives about 200,000 applications for only 85,000 visas. There are two types of H-1B visas — initial applications for new employees and continuing applications for renewals or employees who change jobs.

The reason behind this trend are new policies that the Trump administration introduced to protect American workers by preventing fraud. These new policies placed greater scrutiny on applications and raised the standards for awarding and renewing foreign worker visas, according to the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-partisan nonprofit that recently analyzed USCIS’s own data.

“We had been hearing that companies had experienced more denials, but until you put the numbers together, it became clear how large a change in policy there had been and how big of an impact it’s having,” said Stuart Anderson, the executive director for the National Foundation for American Policy.

Anderson said the denials hurt companies in two ways. First, it limits growth because companies cannot hire new employees. Second it jeopardizes quality control because experienced employees who are denied their visa renewal have to stop working.

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“And, on a personal level, it can really have a negative impact on an organization to lose people who have been working there for many years,” he added.

Some of the country’s most profitable and well-known companies have had more H-1B visa applications denied.

Microsoft, IBM, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Wal-Mart, Google, Amazon and Facebook all had their worker visa denial rates increase between 2015 and the first half of 2019, according to data from USCIS.

The two accounting firms saw their denial rates increase by 40 percent between that time. IBM experienced a 30 percent increase, JP Morgan Chase 13 percent, and both Wal-Mart and Microsoft saw a 12 percent increase in denial rates.
Google, Facebook and Apple also experienced an increase, albeit less dramatic. Their denial rates went from one percent in 2015 to about 5 percent in 2019, data shows.

Ron Hira, a professor at Howard University who has been looking at the H-1B visa program for years says this this the first time since the program began 30 years ago that the government is actually enforcing standards.

Hira pointed to a 2015 scandal in which Southern Cal Edison’s American IT workers were laid off and asked to train H-1B visa employees who took their jobs as an example of how the program is in need of reform.

“The H-1B program is rife with abuse and exploitation, but prior administrations – both GOP and Democratic – essentially rubber stamped petitions,” he said. “I’m sure employers don’t like the increased scrutiny but that doesn’t mean the government is doing anything wrong.”

Here in San Diego, Qualcomm had 17 guest worker visas denied in 2019. That is more than the company had denied between 2009 and 2017, data shows. Qualcomm is among the biggest employers of H-1B workers in California. The company routinely employs hundreds of foreign workers a year. Therefore the denial rates, while increasing, are much lower than the national average.

The company did not respond to a request for comment. Qualcomm has historically supported increasing the cap limit on worker visas, which was established in the 1990s.

Smaller tech companies in San Diego experienced significantly higher denial rates. On IT consulting firm, Vastek had 29 applications denied in 2019 and zero approved.

Other local companies like Sydata, Ellianse, and Sysintelli had denial rates above 50 percent. None of those companies responded to a request for comment.

San Diego-based immigration lawyer Jacob Sapochnick has seen the trend first-hand for the last two years.

“We’ve definitely seen more denials for small companies,” Sapochnick said. “Not just San Diego but across the states.”

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Specifically, IT consulting firms seem to be receiving greater scrutiny in their applications, Sapochnick added.

USCIS will question whether the company has enough work to justify the hiring or if the jobs being offered are complex enough to qualify as specialty occupations. Sapochnick has also heard from clients who receive on-site visits from USCIS agents asking questions about who is working there, what their job title is and how much money they earn.

In February 2018, USCIS published a policy memo outlining tougher standards specifically for companies that hire for "third-party workplaces" such as IT consulting companies.

"Based on the agency's experience administering the H-1B program, USCIS recognizes that significant employer violations — such as paying less than the required wage, benching employees (not paying workers the required wage while they wait for projects or work) and having employees perform non-specialty jobs — may be more likely to occur when petitioners place employees at third-party worksites," the memo states.

Sapochnick says each denial has real-world consequences.

One client was recently denied a continuing H-1B application. He had been with the same company in San Diego for eight years but had to go back to Bangladesh after his renewal was denied.

Fortunately, his employer helped him apply for a Green Card so he could be back after a year, Sapochnick added.

Asylum Officers Are Being Used As An Immigration Deterrent, Tjersland says (NPR)
NPR [8/16/2019 5:05 AM, Staff, 5041K] Audio HERE
NPR's Steve Inskeep talks to Charles Tjersland, asylum officer in U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, who says new immigration policy is harming migrants and his job's mission.

Doctors say new rule will mean sicker immigrants (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 5:13 AM, Sophia Tareen, AP, 2613K]
Diabetics skipping regular checkups. Young asthmatics not getting preventive care. A surge in expensive emergency room visits.

Doctors and public health experts warn of poor health and rising costs they say will come from sweeping Trump administration changes that would deny green cards to many immigrants who use Medicaid, as well as food stamps and other forms of public assistance. Some advocates say they're already seeing the fallout even before the complex 837-page rule takes effect in October.

President Donald Trump's administration trumpeted its aggressive approach this past week as a way to keep only self-sufficient immigrants in the country, but health experts argue it could force potentially millions of low-income migrants to choose between needed services and their bid to stay legally in the U.S.

"People are going to be sicker. They're not going to go get health care, or not until they

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have to go to an emergency room," said Lisa David, president and CEO of Public Health Solutions, New York's largest public health organization. "It's going to cost the system a lot of money."

Immigrants who want permanent legal status, commonly called a green card, have long been required to prove they won't be "a public charge." The Trump administration announced Monday that would redefine the term to mean those who are "more likely than not" to receive public benefits over a certain period. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will also now consider other factors, including income, education and English proficiency.

"We want to see people coming to this country who are self-sufficient," said Ken Cuccinelli, the agency's acting director. "That's a core principle of the American dream. It's deeply embedded in our history, and particularly our history related to legal immigration."

Two California counties and attorneys general in 13 states sued, saying the changes will increase public health risks.

There are signs that is already happening in cities including Chicago, Detroit and New York, immigrant advocates say.

Within hours of the announcement, a Minnesota immigration attorney said she received a flurry of calls from worried clients about whether to leave Medicaid. A Detroit nonprofit helping Latinos and immigrants with social services said its usually jam-packed lobby was empty the day after the rules were unveiled. New York's largest public health organization, Public Health Solutions, which serves a large immigrant population, reported a 20% drop in food stamps enrollment since the rule was first proposed in the fall.

There is precedent for such a chilling effect.

After 1996 welfare and immigration changes that limited public assistance for some immigrants, the use of benefits dropped steeply among U.S. citizen children and refugees, groups who were still eligible. Studies based on data following that change showed people disenrolled from Medicaid at rates ranging from 15% to 35%, according to Harvard University's François-Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights. And, it found, this came at a high cost: Asthma-related school absences in 1996 led to $719 million in lost parental productivity.

Federico Mason, who emigrated from Mexico over two decades ago, said he is worried about the new criteria because he is low-income and doesn't speak English well. The Chicago resident said he has no immediate plans to remove his 8- and 15-year-old sons, who are U.S. citizens, from Medicaid, but the new rule has made him more fearful about providing for his family and about applying for a green card.

"If one day I want to adjust my status, it will be more difficult because of these unfair policies that continue to discriminate against me," he said in Spanish.

Overall, non-citizen low-income immigrants use public benefits at a much lower rate than low-income U.S.-born citizens, but there's the possibility that millions of people could drop benefits out of fear or confusion. Estimates vary. It could be as high as 24 million people,

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according to the nonpartisan Fiscal Policy Institute, which includes in its count anyone in a family that has received food, health or housing support and where at least one person is a non-citizen.

Dr. Deanna Behrens, a pediatric critical-care physician in suburban Chicago who wrote public testimony opposing the rule change, said children are the most vulnerable.

She said non-citizen parents might hesitate to apply for their children who are U.S. citizens, mistakenly fearing that if their children get benefits it will destroy their own chances of getting a green card and tear their families apart. That will lead to people being unable to afford care for chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes, as well as preventative measures. Instead, they'll rely on far more costly emergency rooms.

"This has forced the immigrant families into an impossible choice," Behrens said.

Roughly 544,000 people apply for green cards annually, with about 382,000 falling into categories that would be subject to the new review, according to the government.

Esperanza Health Centers, which runs four Chicago-based clinics that serve low-income and largely immigrant populations, has seen an increase in the number of uninsured children. Since a draft of the new rule was released in the fall, the clinics report having 600 children without insurance, including those who have disenrolled from Medicaid. Typically, it's about 200, according to Jessica Boland, director of behavioral health.

"We're condemning people to having a much more unhealthy lifestyles because we believe that there is something awful about their request for what we think for most people is a right and not a privilege: health care," said Dr. Kenneth Davis, president and CEO of Mount Sinai Health System, which covers eight hospitals in New York.

Over a dozen major patient groups, including the March of Dimes and the American Heart Association, have written fierce opposition to the rule.

The issue is personal for Dr. Jasmine Saavedra, a pediatrician who works at an Esperanza clinic in a heavily Latino Chicago neighborhood.

She is convinced that if new Trump administration criteria were in effect for her parents three decades ago, she would have had a far different future. Her parents emigrated from Mexico in the 1980s unable to speak English and with little education. While working low-wage jobs, they relied on food stamps for a short time to get by.

Her mother later quit public assistance because of the stigma, but Saavedra said there were days when her mother wouldn't eat so her children could. She believes that helped her become a doctor and her two sisters become an accountant and a nurse.

"Maybe when certain people think about immigrant families, they do think of it as a burden on this country, the way people would tell my mom she was when she was receiving assistance," Saavedra said. "But my parents, with no education, not speaking this language, being impoverished with a little bit assistance when they could, got us out and they have three successful daughters."

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[MS] These poultry plants used E-Verify. They still hired hundreds of undocumented workers. (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 1:30 PM, Tracy Jan and Hannah Denham, 9425K]
Despite a state law requiring employers to use a federal system to check whether workers are legally eligible to work in the United States, five companies operating poultry plants in Mississippi that were raided by federal immigration authorities last week have for years managed to hire unauthorized immigrants, investigators say.

The raids, which ensnared 680 workers, exposed a weakness in the government's online E-Verify tool that President Trump promoted during his campaign, but which his own businesses did not broadly use until this year, after revelations that Trump's golf clubs have long employed undocumented immigrants.

The federal employment-verification system checks the personal information new hires submit against existing government records and flags any mismatches. But it doesn't detect when the new hire is using someone else's identification to elude the check — a significant weakness, say critics of the program.

"As soon as E-Verify went into effect, people realized they could still get a job by taking or borrowing other people's identities," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "E-Verify is easy to fool because it approves the document, not the worker."

Employers often turn a blind eye, he said, by knowingly hiring immigrants who borrowed relatives' Social Security numbers or used the identities of the deceased.

Nor do employers always use the E-Verify system — even when it's required by state law.

Only about half of new hires in Mississippi were screened through E-Verify in 2017, according to separate analyses by Cato and Pew.

"E-Verify has been sold as a silver-bullet fix to illegal immigration, but it has never been able to deliver," Nowrasteh said. "E-Verify is barely used half of the time in states where it's mandated, and punishments are rarely meted out to businesses who fail to comply. If conservative states like Mississippi won't enforce E-Verify, what hope is there in the rest of the country?"

In Mississippi, the companies — Koch Foods, Peco Foods, PH Food, A&B and Pearl River Foods — intentionally hired Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants who are not authorized to work in the United States "for the purpose of commercial advantage or private financial gain," according to search-warrant affidavits unsealed in federal court after the Aug. 7 raids.

Investigators allege that numerous employees at Pearl River Foods had submitted stolen names and Social Security numbers, including those belonging to the deceased.

At times, companies did not appear to have made an effort to check certain workers' information in the online E-Verify system, according to the affidavits.

Pearl River Foods employed 337 workers at its Carthage plant, but immigration authorities found 306 employees in the E-Verify search records, according to the affidavit. Pearl River

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Foods did not respond to requests for comment.

Immigration officials also allegedly found that the names of 25 PH Food employees had not been processed using E-Verify despite the company's having run 1,000 other names through the system.

Investigators found that PH Food in Morton and A&B in Pelahatchie, both owned by Huo You "Victor" Liang, "do not verify the authenticity of their documents," according to the affidavit. Neither does the Louisiana payroll company they use to verify employment records, PMI Resource, the affidavit said.

A woman who answered the phone at PMI Resource on Friday declined to comment.

At Peco Foods, a former employee acting as an informant recorded a conversation with a human resources employee at the Bay Springs plant that revealed that multiple employees were hired on two separate occasions under different identities, the affidavit said.

Peco Foods issued a statement on Aug. 7 when its plants in Bay Springs, Sebastopol and Canton were raided that the company was cooperating with federal authorities.

"We adhere strongly to all local, state and federal laws, including utilizing the government-based E-Verify program, which screens new hires through the Social Security Administration as well as the Department of Homeland Security for compliance," the statement said.

The company did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

At the Koch Foods plant in Morton that was raided last week, a Guatemalan woman told investigators that she first worked at the plant illegally, under a different identity, in 2017. A year later, when the Department of Homeland Security granted her permission to work, she asked a co-worker if she should talk to human resources about changing her employment documents to reflect her real name. Instead, she took her co-worker's advice to quit and reapply. She was hired the same day at a different Koch plant, with no questions about her identity.

Koch Foods spokesman Jim Gilliland told The Washington Post that the company never knowingly employed people who presented false documentation.

"Forms of identification can look completely authentic and jibe with the person who is sitting in front of us," Gilliland said. "So you take what you're given, and you enter that into the E-Verify system."

Nationally, 10 percent of U.S. employers are enrolled in E-Verify, which started more than 20 years ago. Eight states require nearly all employers to use the system: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Utah.

"E-Verify is popular among politicians because it doesn't work, but it makes the politician look like a tough immigration enforcer," Nowrasteh said. "Thus many will get the political benefits without forcing their districts to pay a heavy economic cost."

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A 2012 audit commissioned by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) division of the Department of Homeland Security, which maintains E-Verify, found that the system had erroneously cleared nearly half of unauthorized workers because of document fraud.

USCIS officials acknowledge the system's shortcomings and have started linking to photos from state driver's license databases in an effort to make it easier for employers to spot fraud.

If E-Verify were effective in weeding out unauthorized workers, Nowrasteh said, workplace raids wouldn't be necessary. The only effective long-term solution to illegal employment would be to allow more migrants to work legally in the United States, he said.

"Illegal immigrants are working in the United States because American employers and consumers demand the goods and services they supply," Nowrasteh said.

Mississippi House Minority Leader David Baria (D) said he and other legislators wanted to put "some teeth" in the state's 2008 E-Verify law so that employers would be held accountable for hiring unauthorized workers who slip through. But that never passed.

"In a vacuum, this sounds like a good idea to verify the immigration status of employees," Baria told The Post. "The law is not what it should be in terms of a deterrent effect for employers, nor is there accountability for employers who violate immigration laws."

Baria said Republicans who control the Mississippi legislature are "not inclined to go after big business because big business supports them financially."

Baria, Mississippi's 2018 Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate, lost the general election to Republican Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith. Hyde-Smith's campaign was a top recipient of donations from the National Chicken Council's political action committee, according to Federal Election Commission reports. Both Koch Foods and Peco Foods executives donate to the National Chicken Council's PAC.

As a presidential candidate, Trump had suggested mandating E-Verify nationwide as a solution to illegal immigration, claiming falsely that he used E-Verify across his properties. Last week, he promoted a different solution.

The ICE raids in Mississippi, he said, served as a "very good deterrent."

"I want people to know that if they come into the United States illegally, they're getting out," Trump said. "They're going to be brought out."

[TX] Immigrants applying for citizenship in Houston face high wait times (Houston Chronicle)

Houston Chronicle [8/16/2019 8:59 PM, Natalie Weber, 245K]

When Martín Alvarez and his mother-in-law, Altagracia Castaneda, found out their citizenship applications had been processed, and their interviews were scheduled near the end of August, they were pleasantly surprised.

"I thought it was going to take longer," Castaneda said in Spanish. "They said it was going

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to take a lot of time, and it could take up to two years. But it was one year."

National average processing times for citizenship have increased by 80 percent since fiscal year 2016: going from 5.6 months in that fiscal year, to 10.1 months as of March 2019. But in Houston, the median wait time is 14 months, and processing can take up to 25 months.

Naturalization applications spiked in 2016 and 2017, according to a report by Boundless Immigration, a Seattle-based technology company that helps immigrants obtain green cards and citizenship. However, the report said, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services — the government agency that oversees naturalization — has the lowest processing efficiency in a decade.

Why there's a backlog

"What we're seeing in the Trump years is you get this surge in volume and then the processing stays well below that," said Doug Rand, co-founder of Boundless Immigration.

Houston had the highest median processing times and the third-lowest backlog completion rate when compared with 86 other U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services field offices, the company's analysis found.

Rand said there doesn't seem to be a clear reason why certain field offices have higher wait times than others — it's not based on an urban-rural divide, he said, or the political leanings of a certain area.

"It may just be arbitrary," he said.

Citizenship and Immigration Services spokeswoman Jessica Collins has an answer for the longer wait times: They are due to the number of applicants.

"The truth is that while many factors relating to an individual's case can affect processing times, waits are often due to higher application rates rather than slow processing," she said. "That is why USCIS has implemented a range of process and operational reforms, hired additional staff and expanded its facilities to ensure its ability to adjudicate keeps pace with extraordinary demand for its services over recent years.

The agency strives to process applications as effectively and efficiently as possible while following laws, policies and regulations, she said.

Emma Ibarra, who serves as the American Immigration Lawyers Association liaison for the Houston field office, also said the high wait times are a result of an increased workload. The Houston field office alone serves 30 Texas counties.

"They basically have the same (amount) of officers, just handling way more applications," Ibarra said.

As the local field office works through the backlog, it is working to hire more officers and cross-train employees so they can handle various types of immigration cases, Ibarra said.

Anxiety in waiting

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Castaneda and Alvarez said waiting for their applications to be processed did not cause them a lot of anxiety. However, they have both said they will feel more secure in this country if they pass their citizenship exams and are approved for naturalization.

“I have various family members and they motivated me (to apply),” Alvarez, who is from Mexico, said in Spanish. “And at the same time, they pressured me, because they said that ‘Look, residents don’t have the same advantages as being a citizen, because being a resident, you don’t have anything certain in this country.’”

Castaneda said while she waited for her citizenship application to be processed, she delayed plans to visit two of her children, who live in Mexico.

“I had plans to travel,” she said in Spanish. “But I said ‘If the call to go answer the questions arrives, I can’t go. I have to wait to be able to carry out everything that I’ve been hoping for.’”

This isn’t the first time Citizenship and Immigration Services has seen a spike in applications — in 2007, almost 1.4 million petitions were filed, and by the following year, it had adjudicated more than 1.1 million cases.

In addition to impacting travel plans, waiting for citizenship can have negative effects on people who can’t receive certain medical benefits unless they are naturalized, Ibarra said.

“The long processing time causes them great hardship,” she said.

It can also impact social service organizations’ ability to advise new immigration cases, Jill Campbell, managing immigration attorney at BakerRipley said.

“Having a pending application can create some anxiety,” she said. “It also puts a strain on nonprofits.”

Other challenges

While wait times have gone up, it’s not the only challenge some immigrants may face while applying for citizenship, advocates said.

To become a citizen, a person must pass a civics test and a basic English test during their citizenship interview. However, if a person is 50 or older and has been a permanent resident for at least 20 years, or 55 or older, and a permanent resident for at least 15 years, they are exempt from the English language requirement, and may take the civics test in their native language, using a translator.

As a result, some immigrants may wait to apply for citizenship.

“That is the biggest reason why I don’t see some people apply sooner,” Ibarra said.

Both Alvarez and Castaneda said one of the reasons they delayed getting their citizenship was to become eligible to have the English requirement waived. Alvarez applied for citizenship in 2007, but failed his exam which was in English.

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“In my country, in my state, in my town, I wasn’t able to study, and with work, I was barely able to write Spanish,” he said. “It was very difficult for me to write the sentences in English. So, for this reason, I failed the citizenship exam, and I got discouraged.”

“Socioeconomics play an important role in how people can go through this process,” said Benito Juarez, who works in Houston’s Office of New Americans and Immigrant Communities. “For example, if you have an immigrant that came here and has a good job and was able to immediately learn the language or they already knew the language, it’s a lot easier.”

Gordon Quan, a Houston-based immigration attorney, said he’s also noticed an increased scrutiny of applications, which he said may contribute to longer wait times.

“In the past, we just looked at a good moral character for the last five years, if it was a normal case,” he said.

As a result, some people seeking citizenship may find their green cards jeopardized, Quan said.

“Now, if they find that anything has been done before that, that somewhat would disqualify a person, they’re going back onto those cases and trying to even revoke the person’s permanent resident visa,” he said.

Prospective citizens also face the challenge of paying for the application fees, which cost $725 per person.

Since his youth, Alvarez earned a living by painting cars, but the chemicals damaged his skin, and he is only able to work odd jobs from time to time. He and his wife rely on her job as a teacher to pay their bills and save enough funds for his application fee. Castaneda said her children helped her pay her fee.

“I work every now and then, but it’s not a salary, a check that I bring to my house like I brought before, when I was able to work the entire week,” he said. “So, that is part of the reason why it took me a little longer.”

Uneven workload

While Citizenship and Immigration Services is still working through a backlog of applications, it said it will realign its regional, district and field offices as part of its efforts to redistribute the workload.

By October 2019, the agency plans to realign its field offices under 16 district offices, instead of the current 24. There hasn’t been a reorganization 2006, which has caused the workload across the country to become uneven.

The organization also plans to use overtime, technology and redistribution of staff workloads to address the backlog. In fiscal year 2018, Citizenship and Immigration Services increased its staff by almost 1,300 positions — a 7 percent increase over staffing in fiscal year 2017. For fiscal year 2019, it has authorized an additional 884 positions.

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The caseload “skyrocketed under the Obama administration” more than doubling from 291,800 in September 2010 to nearly 700,000 by the beginning of 2017, said USCIS spokeswoman Jessica Collins.

“Despite a large workload, USCIS is completing more citizenship applications, more efficiently and effectively—outperforming itself as an agency,” she said.

As an example, she cited FY 2018 rates, saying the agency “exceeded a five-year high in both new oaths of citizenship and the number of applications processed.”

While aspiring citizens may face certain barriers in the application process, there are people willing to help them along the way.

“We’re here to overcome them,” Campbell, the managing immigration attorney for BakerRipley, said of the obstacles.

Bonding Against Adversity, another nonprofit group in Houston working to assist immigrants, helps people apply for citizenship. Earlier this month, Castaneda and Alvarez practiced for their exam during a citizenship class hosted by the organization.

Gloria Villarreal, a Mexican mother of two who became a citizen in July 2018, was also attending the class. But now she volunteers with Bonding Against Adversity, and offers encouragement to people as they go through the process she completed not too long ago.

“I really like to motivate them. I always give advice,” she said. “Are you scared? Perfect. I was too. But it’s normal, no?”

[TX] Immigration advocates say thousands of Houstonians at risk under ‘public charge’ rule (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [8/16/2019 5:07 PM, Greg Morago, 245K]
Houston immigration advocates met Friday to discuss the potential impact to the health and nutrition of thousands of Harris County families in light of the Trump administration’s new "public charge" rule.

On Monday the Department of Homeland Security issued the rule expanding the government’s ability to deny entry or green cards and visas to immigrants, based on their use of public services such as food stamps and Medicaid. The rule, already under legal challenge by a number of states, is set to take effect Oct. 15.

Representatives of Houston-area organizations that assist families in navigating immigration law and enrolling in public assistance programs met at the Houston Food Bank to outline the changes to federal policy they believe would penalize immigrants for using benefits they are legally entitled to receive. Many of the speakers said they feared the new "public charge" rule will result in individuals going without basic needs such as food, health care and shelter.

"Under this rule, children will go hungry, families will go without medical care," said Harris Country Commissioner Adrian Garcia. "Our neighbors are beginning to not go to the doctor.

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"They're not taking their children to the doctor. Pregnant women are not getting prenatal care they need. Our kids – citizen kids – will not be getting the health care and nutrition they need."

Garcia also called the "public charge" rule a "direct and ruthless attack against our immigrant children and families."

Melissa McChesney, policy health and wellness policy analyst for the Center for Public Policy Priorities, called the rule "hateful" and said it will result in both in confusion and anxiety for immigrant families who may opt out of services such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program out of fear. There will be an impact, she said, to local charities such as food banks and pantries, as more immigrant families decide to forego public assistance programs.

"Please do not drop off the public assistance programs that your families rely on," said Zenobia Lai, vice president of immigration legal services for Catholic Charities. She urged families who are collecting assistance not to panic and to "talk to an immigration lawyer."

Andrea Guttin, legal director for the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative, also urged families not to drop out of public benefits while they seek legal advice.

The rule change is part of a larger assault on low-income immigration families, said Kate Vickery, executive director of Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative. "This rule is about keeping families apart and keeping families separated," she said.

The Trump administration defended the new rule this week. Ken Cuccinelli, acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said the "public charge" rule clarifies existing law designed to ensure that immigrants do not become dependent on the government. A public charge refers to someone who relies on public assistance.

Earlier this week Cuccinelli interpreted the words on the bronze plaque at the Statue of Liberty for an NPR reporter: "Give me your tired and your poor who can sand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge."

Brian Greene, CEO of the Houston Food Bank, organized the panel Friday to address questions and concerns in the community over the new "public charge" rule.

Customs and Border Protection

Customs Computer Failure Snarls Passengers at U.S. Airports (New York Times)
New York Times [8/16/2019 9:21 PM, Christopher Mele, 22840K]
A nationwide customs service computer failure Friday afternoon left throngs of passengers bottlenecked at airports, waiting to be processed, United States Customs and Border Protection said.

The agency said in a statement that it was experiencing "a temporary outage" at various airports and that it was "taking immediate action to address the technology disruption."

It said officers were processing international travelers "using alternative procedures until

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systems are back online."

"Travelers at some ports of entry are experiencing longer than usual wait times and C.B.P. officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security," the statement said.

It was not immediately clear what had prompted the failure or when the system would return to normal but the agency said it had not detected any nefarious causes. The failure was affecting only incoming flights; departing flights were not affected.

A little after 6 p.m., Los Angeles International Airport said on Twitter that the system was "slowly getting back to normal" and that officers had processed a majority of waiting passengers.

Gordon Loesch, a reporter and anchor at WPXI in Pittsburgh, said on Twitter that he had been waiting on the tarmac in Chicago for about 30 minutes and that the pilot had announced that the plane could be waiting for a couple of hours because of the system failure.

"Passengers are getting concerned about missing connections and booking rooms for the night," he said on Twitter.

Ninis Samuel of Chicago said in a phone interview that he had landed at Kennedy Airport at 3:45 p.m. from Copenhagen, and that he was in line for Global Entry, a program that expedites the security processing of prescreened passengers.

What ordinarily was a five-minute wait had lasted 45 minutes, he said.

"Nothing's moving," he said. "I'm standing here with the crew. People are massed here like cattle."

Of the crowd, he said, "To my horizon line, you wouldn't believe it," adding, "I'm sure there are over 1,000 people here right now waiting in line."

He said in a text message that the airport had made no announcement about the delays: "Nope. Nothing. No info."

Around 5 p.m., he said he had gotten through Customs because officials were manually processing passengers and he was a participant in Global Entry.

Officers were processing passengers one at a time instead of passengers relying on self-service machines to move through customs.

He said other passengers were most likely looking at a wait of hours.

Passengers from Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle complained on Twitter about the backlog.

Customs and Border Protection computer outage leads to slowdown at international airports across the United States (Washington Post)

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Washington Post [8/16/2019 6:28 PM, Maria Sacchetti and Michael Laris, 9425K]
Long lines formed at international airports across the United States on Friday after U.S. Customs and Border Protection's computer system broke down and dramatically slowed the processing of thousands of people arriving from abroad, including U.S. citizens.

Officials say they would not stop processing passengers, but said they had to switch to a slower, alternative process.

It was not immediately clear how long people were having to wait, but reports on Twitter showed clogged terminals and extremely long lines.

"U.S. Customs and Border Protection is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry and is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the Department of Homeland Security agency said in a statement. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online. Travelers at some ports of entry are experiencing longer than usual wait times and CBP officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security."

Officials said all travelers were being screened against national security-related databases and there was no sign the outage was malicious.

Reports of frustration emerged on Twitter Friday afternoon, and Los Angeles International Airport said it dispatched its team of "Guest Experience Members to help at @CBP customs areas to help direct guests and provide other assistance."

"@CBP systems are experiencing an issue which appears to be impacting multiple airports including LAX," the airport said. "Officers are processing passengers manually so please check with your airline for the latest status of any flight impacts. More details as they become available."

Officials at Washington Dulles International Airport said they learned about the CBP outage at about 3:30 p.m. Friday, but they said the matter was resolved by 5 p.m.

"Processing procedures are beginning to return to normal," said Kristin Clarkson, a spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, the agency that runs Dulles. "Over about an hour and half period it was backed up. Those people will have to be processed. I'm not sure how long it will take."

At about 6 p.m. Friday, John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York tweeted that passengers were "being processed manually."

"Delays are expected," the tweet said.

Earlier in the day, JFK airport had tweeted that "CBP staffing changes" had also led to long waits in customs, and airport officials asked passengers for "patience and understanding."

CBP processes more than 350,000 incoming international air passengers and crew members on a typical day, according to its web site, and has experienced computer outages in the past.

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CBP reported outages on its Twitter account on Jan. 1, 2018, and on Jan. 2, 2017, which led to hours-long delays each time, and a 90-minute outage on Oct. 14, 2015.

After the 2017 outage, the Homeland Security Inspector General said “underlying issues,” such as “deficient” software maintenance, “might result in future outages.”

Customs airports systems reportedly down nationwide (Politico)
Politico [8/16/2019 5:53 PM, Stephanie Beasley, 2512K]
Several major airports across the United States are reporting outages of Customs and Border Protection’s computer systems used to process airline passengers, raising the specter of a nationwide outage.

JFK International Airport tweeted this afternoon that its agents were processing passengers more slowly because, "Customs systems are down right now nationwide."

Los Angeles International Airport also announced via Twitter that its CBP systems were experiencing an issue that appeared to be impacting several airports.

This evening, NBC News also tweeted that the problem is occurring at Washington Dulles International Airport as well.

"Officers are processing passengers manually so please check with your airline for the latest status of any flight impacts," LAX wrote.

A CBP spokesperson has confirmed that the agency’s computer systems are down at several airports, a situation that was creating long lines for many travelers on Friday evening.

CBP is experiencing a "temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry and is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the spokesperson wrote in an email to POLITICO.

"CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online," the statement continued.

Washington Dulles International, JFK International, and Los Angeles International are among the airports where processing of international travelers has slowed since the outage began this afternoon. LAX said its agents were processing passengers manually and that it also was deploying its team of "guest experience members" to help at Customs areas.

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport indicated that Customs systems are back up there, and backlogged passengers are being processed.

CBP said its agents would work to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining "the highest levels of security."

Entry to U.S. Slows as Customs Computer System Fails at Airports (Bloomberg)

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Bloomberg [8/16/2019 6:01 PM, Alan Levin, Ryan Beene, and Michaela Ross, 5350K]
Entry for people arriving at airports across the U.S. was slowed Friday when a Customs and Border Protection computer system failed on Friday, forcing the manual processing of passengers on a busy summer travel day.

Several major airports including those in New York, Los Angeles, Dallas and the Washington, D.C., area confirmed the outage, some of them reporting backups of passengers arriving from overseas.

Customs officers at Dulles International Airport near Washington haven't been able to process passengers arriving from outside the U.S. since 3:18 p.m. local time, said Micah Lillard, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

Passengers are being held in the international arrivals terminal and "the line is beginning to build," Lillard said.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the agency said in a tweet. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online."

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport said in a tweet late Friday afternoon that systems there were back in operation.

The failure is isolated to operations at airports, sparing other points of entry such as seaports or highway border crossings, and there is no indication of nefarious activity, according to the agency.

New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport and Los Angeles International Airport said in tweets that passengers are being processed manually, slowing the entries. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport said the problem stemmed from the Federal Inspection Services' system.

The Los Angeles airport authority has been aware of the outage since roughly 4:20 p.m. Eastern Time, said Fred Badlissi a spokesman for Los Angeles World Airports.

Videos posted on social media showed the waiting area to go through customs at Dulles packed with thousands of people.

Customs and Border Protection computer outage causing long lines airports (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 11:37 AM, UPI, 2034K]
A computer outage snarled immigration and customs processing at airports across the country Friday, creating long lines on a busy summer travel day.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection is investigating the cause of the outage, but officials said there was no sign that the system was intentionally taken offline. CBP said in a statement that travelers can expect longer than usual wait times at some airports.

"U.S. Customs and Border Protection is experiencing a temporary outage with its

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processing systems at various air ports of entry and is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the Department of Homeland Security agency posted on Twitter.

"CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online." That means processing manually, airports reported.

Many travelers took their frustration to Twitter. Traveler Jessica Gioglio said she and other travelers from London are trapped on an airplane.

"Landed at @BostonLogan from London 20+ minutes ago & we cannot leave the plane due to an issue with the computer systems at immigration," Gioglio said. "We're hearing it is a nationwide issue and not unique to Logan Airport so they have to process everyone manually."

System shutdown impacts US customs at airports nationwide (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 5:35 PM, Tal Axelrod, 2806K]
Air travelers across the country were struck with delays Friday due to a computer issue that prevented customs officials from processing new arrivals.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said it is taking "immediate action" to rectify the issue and is working to process travelers as quickly as possible.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption. CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online," the agency tweeted.

One traveler tweeted a video showing an area in Dulles International Airport packed with those waiting to be processed.

Newark Liberty Airport and Los Angeles International Airport both said they were affected by the CBP nationwide network outage and are manually processing passengers.

Customs and Border Protection Computer System Shut Down (NPR)
NPR [8/16/2019 5:27 PM, Richard Gonzales]
The computer systems of Customs and Border Protection are down at several major airports around the country.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," an agency statement said. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online."

The problem was initially reported at airports in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

"CBP officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security," said the agency.

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Customs and Border Protection computer outage leads to long lines at U.S. airports (CBS News)
CBS News [8/16/2019 7:41 PM, Caroline Linton, 3332K]
U.S. Customs and Border Protection is experiencing outages at processing systems at international airports across the country on Friday afternoon, leading to long lines and delays. Some of the airports affected included John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City, Dulles International Airport in Washington, D.C., George H.W. Bush International Airport in Houston and Los Angeles International Airport.

Within three hours, the agency said in a statement that the issue was being "slowly resolved," but they could not estimate a time that it would be back up.

"There is no indication the disruption was malicious in nature at this time," the agency said.

The agency said it would be using "alternative procedures" until the systems were back online. JFK Airport officials told CBS New York that agents were processing arriving flyers by hand. The airport said at 7 p.m. that the system was back online, but they were still delays due to the backlog.

Images and video shared to social media showed long lines at several major airports.

Computer outage for US Customs leading to long lines for international passengers at some airports (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 6:21 PM, Dave Alsup, Steve Almasy, and Geneva Sands, 6094K]
The US Customs and Border Protection computer system is down at some airports, creating long lines for arriving international travelers, the agency tweeted Friday afternoon.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various (airports) of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," it tweeted. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online.

"CBP officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security," it said in a second tweet.

Authorities do not think there is anything nefarious about the outage, a Customs official told CNN.

John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York tweeted that passengers were being processed manually for now.

A tweet from a woman at JFK showed a long line of passengers.

"People are growing frustrated. Nothing like landing after a 10 hour flight to this," Sarah Baird wrote.

The outage appears to have occurred around 3:30 p.m. ET.

Micah Lillard, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, said airport operations are running as normal.

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A tweet from Los Angeles International Airport said, "... please check with your airline for the latest status of any flight impacts."

There were similar outages in January 2017 and 2018.

CBP suffers massive power outage at airports across the country (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 6:27 PM, Vandana Rambaran, 10258K]
Travelers to the U.S. from overseas were experiencing delays in passing through customs at major airports on Friday, thanks to a technology outage affecting U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) stations.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the agency said on Twitter shortly after 5 p.m. ET. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online."

"CBP officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security."

Travelers at airports around the country -- including at Kennedy International Airport in New York, Dulles International Airport in Virginia, Charlotte Douglas and Raleigh-Durham International Airports in North Carolina and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in Georgia -- expressed frustration about significant delays and long lines at international arrivals halls even as CBP warned that "arriving travelers at some ports of entry are experiencing longer-than-usual wait times."

CBP said it was processing passengers manually.

One passenger at Dulles posted a video of masses of travelers waiting in snaking lines to reach immigration processing counters.

"Easily 5,000+ passengers in line at Dulles," she estimated.

A spokesman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority told Fox News that "about 3:30 p.m. EDT ... Customs and Border Protection was experiencing a nationwide computer issue affecting their ability to process arriving international passengers, including at Dulles International Airport ... Airport operations remain normal at this time."

Another passenger, one arriving at JFK, said "The system is allegedly down, including global entry. It's hot. No air. In a narrow hallway. People were backing up on the escalator and falling over each other."

Officials at Los Angeles International Airport tweeted Friday afternoon that CBP systems "are experiencing an issue which appears to be impacting multiple airports including LAX. Officers are processing passengers manually so please check with your airline for the latest status of any flight impacts."

Shortly after 6 p.m. ET, the airport tweeted that systems were slowly getting back to normal, and that officers had processed the majority of waiting passengers with no significant

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impacts to flights.

"Thank you for your patience."

U.S. Customs system shutdown causes major delays at airports nationwide (USA Today)
USA Today [8/16/2019 5:44 PM, Cydney Henderson, 6620K]
Travelers around the country are facing major delays at airports after the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's computer system went down nationwide Friday.

"CBP is experiencing a temporary outage with its processing systems at various air ports of entry & is taking immediate action to address the technology disruption," the agency tweeted Friday. "CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online."

John F. Kennedy International Airport confirmed on Twitter that they are affected by CBP's "system shutdown nationwide," requiring agents to process travelers manually until the computers come back online.

Dulles International Airport is also experiencing delays, Micah Lillard, a spokesperson from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, confirmed to USA TODAY.

"We learned at about 3:30 p.m. EDT that Customs and Border Protection was experiencing a nationwide computer issue affecting their ability to process arriving international passengers, including at Dulles," Lillard said in a statement.

Los Angeles International Airport shared a similar advisory to passengers: "@CBP systems are experiencing an issue which appears to be impacting multiple airports including LAX. Officers are processing passengers manually so please check with your airline for the latest status of any flight impacts. More details as they become available."

LAX said it's is deploying a team to "help direct guests and provide other assistance" in the customs area.

CBP did not immediately respond to USA TODAY's request for comment.

Frustrated passengers shared footage of massive crowds stalled in the customs lines on social media.

"Landed at JFK and machines are down at customs check point…I'm in the global entry line and the regular line has several hundred if not thousands in it," @Baird_S said.

User @BradPierce7 added, "JFK Airport Customs. Great work."

User @PatriotAndiH said she's been waiting at Dulles for "two hours and counting!"

"Stuck at Dulles customs system down," she added. "All US passport holders just waiting.... What happened to the old fashioned stamp?"

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Thousands of U.S. Travelers Delayed by Border Protection Computer Outage (US News & World Report)
US News & World Report [8/16/2019 5:37 PM, David Shepardson, Reuters, 3196K]
Thousands of travelers at U.S. airports faced delays late on Friday because of an nationwide outage of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) processing systems, officials said.

CBP said in a statement the outage was temporary and "officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until systems are back online. Travelers at some ports of entry are experiencing longer than usual wait times."

A Customs spokeswoman could not offer an estimate on when the system would be back up and running.

The computer issue is not impacting departures.

JFK Airport in New York said on Twitter that "the Customs computer system is down nationwide. The agents are processing people manually."

People at various U.S. airports posted videos on social media sites of lengthy lines at processing checkpoints and several airports warned of extensive delays.

On an average day, CBP processes around 358,000 air passengers and crew.

American Airlines spokesman Ross Feinstein said the airline was "aware of the outage and are in contact with U.S. Customs and Border Protection."

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said the outage had not caused any changes in flights.

This is not the first time the system has faced problems. The system was down for four hours on Jan. 2, 2017 as many travelers were returning from holiday trips.

A Homeland Security inspector general's office report issued in November 2017 found "inadequate CBP software capacity testing, leaving the potential for recurrence of processing errors."

The report also warned of "inadequate business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities to minimize the impact of system failures on the traveling public. Until such deficiencies are addressed, CBP lacks a means to minimize the possibility and impact of similar system outages in the future."

CBP told the inspector general in 2017 that as "CBP moves to a cloud computing environment, improved performance and lead testing to emulate a production environment will be included in the requirements."

Customs Computers Restored After Nationwide Failure at Airports (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/16/2019 6:57 PM, Alan Levin, Ryan Beene, and Michaela Ross, 5350K]
Entry for people arriving at airports across the U.S. began returning to normal Friday evening after a Customs and Border Protection computer system failed, forcing the manual

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processing of passengers on a busy summer travel day.

The system was being restored and passengers being processed, the agency said in a statement at 6:25 p.m. New York time. The failure was isolated to operations at airports, sparing other points of entry such as seaports or highway border crossings, according to the agency.

“CBP will continue to monitor the incident. There is no indication the disruption was malicious in nature at this time,” the agency said in a tweet.

Airports, including Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and Los Angeles International, said in tweets late Friday afternoon that systems there were back in operation and passengers were being processed.

Seattle’s airport said the problem stemmed from the Federal Inspection Services’ computer system.

Customs officers at Dulles International Airport near Washington lost the ability to process passengers arriving from outside the U.S. at 3:18 p.m. local time, said Micah Lillard, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

Passengers were being held in the International Arrivals terminal and “the line is beginning to build,” Lillard said.

Videos posted on social media showed the waiting area to go through customs at Dulles packed with thousands of people.

New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport and Los Angeles International said in tweets that passengers were being processed manually during the outage, slowing entries.

At LAX, Customs brought in additional agents, mitigating the disruption, said Heath Montgomery, a spokesman for the city’s airport authority.

Customs system back online after delays from nationwide outage (ABC News)
ABC News [8/16/2019 7:31 PM, Stephanie Ebbs, Sophie Tatum, Anne Flaherty, Christine Theodorou, and Mina Kaji, 2702K]
U.S. Customs and Border Protection computers were back online Friday after a "temporary outage" with its processing systems caused delays at numerous airports earlier in the day.

CBP spokesman Matt Leas said that “systems are back up and running and we’re processing passengers.”

A spokesman from Delta Airlines said the airline was no longer seeing delays as a result of the incident.

During the incident, CBP said travelers at some airports experienced longer wait times as officers tried to maintain security and process passengers. Many travelers took to social media to share videos of long lines at airports across the country.

“CBP officers continue to process international travelers using alternative procedures until

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systems are back online," a statement from CBP earlier in the day said. "Travelers at some ports of entry are experiencing longer than usual wait times and CBP officers are working to process travelers as quickly as possible while maintaining the highest levels of security."

A government official says there's no indication that this was a malicious attack on the network "at this time." A CBP official said only airports were affected Friday afternoon, not other ports of entry.

"There is no indication of nefarious activity at this time," a government official told ABC News.

The official added that "security-related" databases were still accessible and travelers were still being screened throughout the incident.

Customers posted pictures and videos showing long lines waiting to be processed through customs.

CBP Commissioner blasts Google employees' 'irresponsible' petition against agency (FOX News)

FOX News [8/17/2019 1:46 PM, Sam Dorman, 10258K]

Google employees were "absolutely irresponsible" in pushing a petition criticizing certain immigration agencies and urging the company to stop working with them, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) commissioner Mark Morgan said on Saturday.

According to Morgan, those employees were spreading lies. "What the truth is ... they're going to see that these families and children are receiving hot meals," he said, referring to his trip to a facility in El Paso, Texas.

"You're going to see children set in front of flat-screen TV's, watching cartoons. They're getting medical attention," he said while appearing on "Fox & Friends."

"That's the truth. This kind of rhetoric is irresponsible, reckless, and it's a lie!" Morgan added.

The petition, posted to Medium on Wednesday, won the support of 951 "Googlers" -- including engineers, managers, etc. -- and accused Morgan's agency of "human rights abuses."

"We demand that Google publicly commit not to support CBP, [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], or [Office of Refugee Resettlement] with any infrastructure, funding, or engineering resources, directly or indirectly, until they stop engaging in human rights abuses," the petition read.

It specifically pointed to CBP requesting bids for a cloud computing contract.

"The winning cloud provider will be streamlining CBP's infrastructure and facilitating its human rights abuses. It's time to stand together again and state clearly that we will not work on any such contract," the petition read.

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[FL] Border patrol arrests Cuban stowaway at Miami airport (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/17/2019 9:17 AM, UPI, 2034K]
Customs and Border Protection officers took into custody a 26-year-old Cuban national at the Miami International Airport early Friday after he arrived in the belly of a passenger plane from Havana.

The agency said a ramp agent confronted the man, identified as Yunier Garcia Duarte, while workers were taking off the plane's luggage after the carrier arrived at the airport. The worker contacted CBP and the stowaway was detained, a statement said.

"Individuals are taking extreme risks when they try to conceal themselves in confined spaces and CBP is trained and ready to respond with appropriate actions to prevent serious injuries or death whenever possible," Miami International Airport Port Director Christopher D. Maston said in a statement.

"Teams of CBP officers maintain a robust posture regarding the enforcement of our immigration laws while facilitating trade and travel at ports of entry statewide," Matson continued.

An attorney represented Garcia told WSVN-TV that the suspect has family in Atlanta and they were preparing to travel to Miami to see him.

According to aviation expert Wayne Black, cold temperatures and other factors make stowing away on an airplane dangerous.

"The stowaway took his life in his hands when he got on there," Black said. "The luggage can shift and things like that. Who knows what the oxygen level is … What happened with the stowaway from Cuba should not have happened."

[FL] Cuban man detained after found stowed away on Miami-bound flight (The Hill)
The Hill [8/17/2019 10:22 AM, John Bowden, 2806K]
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents apprehended a Cuban man who was discovered after stowing away on a flight to Miami International Airport early Friday morning.

A statement from CBP officials said that the unidentified 26-year-old man "attempted to evade detection in the belly of an aircraft" that landed at the Miami airport before being discovered by a baggage carrier.

"The man was refused entry and CBP officers processed the individual as a stowaway under Section 212(a)(6)(D) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)," read CBP's statement.

"Individuals are taking extreme risks when they try to conceal themselves in confined spaces and CBP is trained and ready to respond with appropriate actions to prevent serious injuries or death whenever possible," the airport's Port Director Christopher Maston added in the news release.

"Teams of CBP officers maintain a robust posture regarding the enforcement of our immigration laws while facilitating trade and travel at ports of entry statewide," he said.

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CBP officials added in the news release that Friday's capture was the 20th instance so far this year of an undocumented individual being detained after stowing away on a private transport.

The Trump administration reimposed restrictions on travel to Cuba earlier this year after the restrictions were previously relaxed under the Obama administration.

[FL] Man flew in plane's cargo hold from Havana to Miami: CBP (ABC News)
ABC News [8/16/2019 4:11 PM, Mina Kaji, Quinn Owen, and Chad Murray, 2702K]
A 26-year-old Cuban man who stowed away in the cargo hold of a flight from Havana to Miami was arrested Friday morning by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"CBP received reports of a possible stowaway shortly after midnight after a ramp agent encountered the man while offloading baggage," CBP spokesperson Keith E. Smith told ABC News in a statement.

The man "was taken into custody by U.S. Customs and Border Protection," Greg Chin, Communications Director for the Miami-Dade Aviation Department told ABC News Friday.

According to FlightRadar 24, the Swift Air flight took off from Havana on Thursday at 11:11 p.m. EST and landed in Miami at 11:51 p.m. EST. Swift Air did not respond to a request for comment.

Local ABC affiliate WPLG reported the pilot could be heard talking to air traffic control saying, "Apparently someone came over in the belly on our aircraft."

A controller responds, "You need assistance, where, what gate?"

"Police, Police," the pilot says. "Juliet 9.. apparently we just came in from Havana.. apparently we had a stowaway on the belly."

Social media video and images obtained by ABC show the alleged "stowaway." He was wearing jeans and a short-sleeved dark blue shirt and appeared to be unharmed.

"CBP's mission is to facilitate travel while maintaining the highest standards of security for those who live here and for those who come to visit," Smith said.

Customs agents on average process a million travelers a day at airports, seaports and border crossings across the country.

[FL] Cuban man, 26, arrested after stowing away on plane to Miami, CBP says (FOX News)
FOX News [8/17/2019 9:47 PM, Melissa Leon, 10258K]
A 26-year-old Cuban man was arrested at Miami International Airport early Friday after he was found in the cargo hold of a flight that had arrived from Havana, officials said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said in a statement that a ramp agent encountered the man while unloading luggage from the undercarriage of Swift Air Flight

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704. The agent called the police, as did the pilot of the aircraft.

"Police! Police! Juliet nine, Juliet niner. Apparently, we just came in from Havana," the pilot said, according to WSVN. "Apparently, we had a stowaway in the belly,

Cellphone video posted on Twitter showed airport workers surrounding the suspected stowaway. A guard can be heard telling the man to "back away from the aircraft," the station reported.

The man was refused entry and processed by CBP as a stowaway. Authorities in Cuba and the U.S. were investigating how he managed to get past airport security in Havana and get on board the aircraft.

"Individuals are taking extreme risks when they try to conceal themselves in confined spaces and CBP is trained and ready to respond with appropriate actions to prevent serious injuries or death whenever possible," Miami International Airport Port Director Christopher D. Maston said in a statement. "Teams of CBP officers maintain a robust posture regarding the enforcement of our immigration laws while facilitating trade and travel at ports of entry statewide."

An attorney for the stowaway identified him Friday as Yunier Garcia Duarte. The attorney told WSVN Duarte has family and friends in Atlanta who are planning to come to Miami to try and visit him.

[FL] Stowaway hiding in cargo hold of plane makes it from Cuba to Miami (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/16/2019 10:18 AM, Zachary Halaschak, 855K]
An unusual discovery was found in the cargo section of a flight from Cuba to Miami: a human being.

The 26-year-old stowaway was found after the plane from Havana landed at Miami International Airport early Friday morning. Witnesses said they heard what sounded like a dog in the cargo hold before the man responded, noting that he was not a dog and wanted water.

Video from moments after the discovery show crew members surrounding the man on the tarmac following the Swift Air flight's arrival.

"Came from Havana to Miami inside the planes belly where the bags go @OfficialJoelF [image link]"
— Jzlex (@Srt_lex) August 16, 2019

The man was taken into custody by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the incident is under investigation.

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[TX] 28 Migrants, Including Infant, Rescued After Abandoned in Border River by Smuggler (Breitbart)

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Breitbart [8/17/2019 11:12 AM, Bob Price, 2034K] Video: HERE
Del Rio Sector Border Patrol agents rescued 28 migrants, including 14 children, from the swiftly moving currents of the Rio Grande. Smugglers abandoned the migrants in the strong waist-deep currents during an illegal border crossing.

Marine Agents assigned to the Eagle Pass South Station came upon a group of 28 migrants in the Rio Grande border river that separates Texas and Mexico on August 15. A human smuggler led the group that included 14 children ranging in age from eight months to 17 years into the middle of the waist-deep swiftly moving currents. The smuggler abandoned them in the middle of the river, according to information provided to Breitbart Texas by Del Rio Sector Border Patrol officials.

Agents maneuvered their patrol boat into position and began pulling the migrants from the water. However, the strong currents swept several of the migrants downriver. A second patrol vessel moved into position and prosecuted the rescue of the other migrants, officials reported.

The agents transported the 28 migrants to the shore where Border Patrol EMTs evaluated their medical condition and other agents began processing. The agents identified the migrants as being Honduran nationals who entered the U.S. illegally.

“These individuals found themselves in a life-threating situation, which is unfortunate and far too common as smugglers continue to show no empathy for people they attempt to cross illegally into the United States,” Del Rio Sector Chief Patrol Agent Raul L. Ortiz said in a written statement. “Had our agents not been there to provide rescue efforts, the situation could have ended in tragedy.”

Del Rio Sector officials stated the river is extremely dangerous at this time due to the increased volume of water released from Amistad Dam. They stated the river is currently a “near flood stage.” The release of the water is “creating dangerous conditions for anyone attempting to cross the Rio Grande River.”

A few days earlier, marine agents operating in the same area rescued 12 more migrants — 6 adults and 6 minors. The minors included children ranging in age from 8 months to 12 years, Breitbart Texas reported.

In July, a Haitian migrant mother attempted to cross the river in the same area. The currents swept her two-year-old daughter from her arms. A search of the area did not result in the rescue or recovery of the child’s body.

So far this year, nearly two dozen migrants have been found dead in the Del Rio Sector — many from drowning. Several deaths involved children.

[TX] Inside the new Border Patrol tent facility for migrants in Tornillo, Texas (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 4:47 PM, Nicole Chavez, 6094K]
At the end of last year, nearly 3,000 children were being housed in rows of small brown tents on this site just a few yards from the southwest border with Mexico. The controversial temporary shelter for unaccompanied minors, which closed in January, was at the center of several protests. And the controversy wasn’t confined to that one facility.

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Following historically high numbers of border crossings in the spring, immigration officials have faced blistering criticism for squalid conditions at overcrowded facilities. For months, journalists sought access to observe the conditions of detainees for themselves, which was rarely granted.

This week, journalists were allowed to go into a new facility in the vicinity of where children were once held. It's one of six built to help accommodate the influx of migrants arriving to the US-Mexico border this year.

The 197,000-square-foot facility in the West Texas desert, which opened this week, has separate giant white tent buildings for single adult female and male detainees, which are hundreds of meters apart from one another.

CNN and other media outlets visited the facility in Tornillo on Thursday. Unlike most previous tours of detention facilities, reporters were allowed to film inside. But the agency imposed strict restrictions on journalists, not allowing the filming of detainee's faces and forbidding journalists from interviewing them.

The facility has the capacity to hold over 2,000 detainees, but when CNN went inside, there were only four women and about 20 men there. The migrants were from several countries including Guatemala, El Salvador and Brazil.

A handful of women and over a dozen men were sitting quietly on thin silver mats inside chain link pens.

Some detainees were wearing their own clothes, while others wore blue sweatshirts with gray sweatpants provided by Border Patrol.

The detainees were mostly quiet and talked among themselves. They were using fabric blankets, not the Mylar blankets that have been seen in other detention centers.

A mix of National Guard and Border Patrol agents were watching the migrants from wooden-raised decks between the pens and monitoring surveillance footage from separate rooms.

There were water bottles and chips in every room, as well as portable toilets equipped with large holes at the top and bottom of the doors so officers can see detainees at all times.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan, who was visiting the new facility, said that new temporary facilities like this one would help them prevent severe overcrowding. He also said that the number of arrests at the border, a measure of illegal crossings, has dipped in recent weeks.

The drop in arrests, along with faster transfers of migrants out of Border Patrol custody, have also helped reduce crowding that at one point resulted in standing-room only conditions in some locations.

There were nearly 72,000 arrests made in July along the southern border, down about 24% from 94,908 in June, according to the latest Border Patrol data.

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At the peak in June, Border Patrol had nearly 20,000 people in custody, according to McAleenan. That has been reduced to about 4,500, which includes 150 unaccompanied children along the Southern border, he said.

Children are moving through the process in less than 24 hours and single adults are under the 72 hours mark, according to McAleenan. That's way down from previous months, when migrants were spending weeks in custody at the border in jail-like stations before being either transferred to other federal government agencies for longer term detention or released.

"We have a dramatically improved situation," McAleenan said Thursday.

Congress passed a $4.6 billion emergency border funding bill at the end of June after months of pleading from Department of Homeland Security, which oversees Border Patrol and border facilities.

McAleenan said DHS has asked Congress for additional emergency supplemental funding to build a longer term facility for single adults.

"Congress did give us the funding and that's why we built this temporary facility for single adults, because if we have another surge we are going to need this capacity to temporarily house single adults," he said. "We needed this funding, we needed to provide additional capacity to manage this flow."

The facility was built in about 45 days. It has indoor shower facilities that are separate for female and male detainees. Gloria Chavez, interim El Paso Border Patrol sector chief, said detainees are required to log their belongings in plastic bags that are tagged with their names. After they are processed, detainees can place their clothes in a bag and request them to be washed at an in-site laundry facility.

Detainees have access to a phone that's installed between the chain link pens and make calls as they need to, Chavez said.

And while DHS has funding for the next four months, according to McAleenan, he says the situation still requires attention and he'll continue to engage with Congress.

"We remain very concerned that we can see significant increases again, over 2,000 (people) a day crossing the border," he said.

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[TX] Video inside new migrant detainee facility (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 3:41 PM, Staff, 6094K] Video: HERE
The Department of Homeland Security allowed CNN to restrictively film inside one of the six new facilities they built for migrants arriving to the US-Mexico border.

[TX] New temporary migrant holding facility opens this week at the border to relieve overcrowding amid 'immigration crisis' (FOX News)

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FOX News [8/16/2019 6:10 AM, Charlie Lapastora, 10258K]
As an influx of migrants apprehended at the border has triggered serious overcrowding, U.S. officials this week unveiled a “temporary” solution -- a new migrant holding facility for single adults at the Tornillo Port of Entry in Texas.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funded the project to build the short-term facility, otherwise known as a “soft side facility,” about a 45-minute drive southeast of El Paso. Acting DHS Secretary Kevin McAleenan, Acting Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Commissioner Mark Morgan and El Paso Sector Interim Chief Patrol Agent Gloria Chavez toured it on Thursday, just two days after it officially opened up this week. Chavez said the facility has given Border Patrol “significant relief.”

“I want you all to know how appreciative every single Border Patrol agent is of the work that has been done at our national level to support us out here in the field,” Chavez said. “It couldn’t have been done without the engagement of the acting secretary, the acting commissioner, and our chief, Carla Provost. Every day, they’re hearing us. They are listening to us, and they are pushing for the resources to come to our aid because we are in dire need in the field during this crisis situation.”

For Chavez, the facilities’ “number one priority" is care. She said the temporary holding facilities were designed to house apprehended migrants for a short period of time with a goal to move them out in 72 hours or less. The migrants are to be provided with three meals a day — two hot meals for breakfast and dinner, a cold lunch, and access to snacks if wanted, Chavez said, adding that they’d have access to medical care, restrooms, showers and laundry.

The treatment of detained migrants at many border facilities has sparked controversy.

The Border Network for Human Rights had a community event Thursday morning in front of El Paso’s Border Patrol headquarters to let McAleenan and Morgan know they weren’t welcome in El Paso “given (their) anti-immigrant agenda.”

The new facilities were split up into 20 “pods,” fenced-in areas where migrants are to be given sleeping bags and benches, with Border Patrol agents and the Texas National Guard keeping an eye on the areas.

“We needed this funding,” McAleenan said. “Without Mexico’s efforts, without the efforts the government of Guatemala is undertaking, that we’re expanding now into El Salvador and Honduras, we’re going to see a continued flow based on those fundamental gaps and our immigration laws that still exist. So, we need this capacity to be ready for any changes in this flow.”

In El Paso, as of July in fiscal year 2019, there has been a 137 percent increase of single adult apprehensions compared to the same timeframe last fiscal year (27,172 compared to 11,451). That was the biggest change in all of the southwest border sections.

“It wasn’t just a few weeks ago, we were (at) 19,000 in our detention facilities. Our capacity is about 4,500. They were overcrowded across the southwest border,” Morgan said. “And, we agree, it was the hardworking men and women of CBP and all our DHS partners who came together to put this together to alleviate that overcrowding.”

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The inspector general's office visited the Rio Grande Valley facilities specifically and afterward encouraged the DHS to "take immediate steps to alleviate dangerous overcrowding and prolonged detention of children and adults in the Rio Grande Valley."

It took approximately 45 days to complete the new facility, according to Border Patrol, and it started operations on Tuesday. In the two days it's been open, it's housed 32 migrants so far, but its capacity is 2,500 adults.

"Our community is still badly wounded (from the shooting at Walmart on Aug. 3), grieving, trying to heal, and this is a process that will likely go on for some time," the Border Network for Human Rights said in a statement.

"We were targeted because of our skin color and our language, because our values welcome the stranger, because we are where America meets the world — producing new, different, often beautiful things that make us rethink who we are and what it means to be American. Secretary McAleenan has been part of the problem. His agencies have dehumanized and abused migrants, forcing them into subhuman conditions without accountability or oversight. His rhetoric has distorted the reality of asylum seekers, telling Americans lies in the hope we will turn our backs on our values. And, the week after the shooting, as El Paso still mourned, immigrant communities trembled in fear, and Americans wondered what their government would do in response to the threat of radical right-wing white supremacist terrorism, Kevin McAleenan, as head of DHS, directed the largest workplace immigration raids in more than a decade. All of these actions show an utter disregard for the El Paso community, for the needs of immigrants and communities of color, for America's history and values."

Overcrowding numbers have been down from a peak in early June, but Morgan emphasized on more than one occasion on the tour that this was a temporary solution — and CBP needs more action on the national level.

"(It's) not just a United States immigration crisis but really a regional crisis shared by the United States, the government of Mexico, and the Northern Triangle countries," Morgan said. "This is not a durable, sustainable solution. We still need Congress to act."

"The crisis is not over," Chavez added. "And, everyday I am worried that we're going to go right back to it next week or tomorrow. But, that's OK because now we're better prepared, as you can see with the facility of this size."

[TX] A calm day on the Rio Grande brings relief to besieged Border Patrol agents (Washington Examiner)

Washington Examiner [8/18/2019 12:00 AM, Anna Giaritelli, 855K]

A Texas dirt road located a few hundred feet from the Rio Grande international boundary that for months has been one of the busiest illegal crossing spots on the entire 1,954-mile southwest border was silent this hot, lazy August afternoon.

"I see one footprint," says Chris Cabrera, an 18-year veteran Border Patrol agent who speaks on behalf of rank-and-file personnel as vice president of the National Border Patrol Council.

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In the spring and early summer, dozens of new footprints were molded into the uneven, beige dirt every hour. Cabrera had hoped to see some apprehensions here today since this part of Rincon Village (a heavily overgrown area by the river that once was home to a handful of houses) is where migrants normally appear.

The back roads he is driving down are about a mile south of Hidalgo County's Anzalduas Park. The roads are more like wide, unpaved trails, barely sufficient for one Border Patrol pickup truck to pass another agent's vehicle. They do not have names and won't come up in a search of Google Maps, but they sit just below the mile-long Anzalduas International Bridge, a legal entry point at which other asylum seekers will wait days or weeks to apply at instead of crossing through the river.

More than 300,000 people have been arrested this fiscal year (since Oct. 1) in the Rio Grande Valley Sector, one of nine regions the Border Patrol has divided the Mexico border into. For context, all eight other sectors have apprehended between 8,000 and 165,000 combined over the same period.

Rod Kise, the regional spokesman for Border Patrol's parent agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, explained that up to 70% of those arrests were made by agents stationed out of McAllen and the remainder was by agents based out of the Southeast Texas region's eight other stations.

Agents in the RGV sector are responsible for 118 miles of the border, which anyone will be quick to remind you is technically 277 miles because of how the river sharply curls around. Here in Rincon Village, Mexico is actually to the north because of those curves.

Migrants will climb out of the river and walk a half-mile down the main dirt road to a clearing where Border Patrol agents sit inside running government vehicles. A contracted coach bus and a Border Patrol van also sit nearby, just up a concrete embankment where the closest accessible road is located. They will drive larger groups of people to the McAllen Station for processing. The contracted buses were brought in here and in other border regions earlier this year because agents could not accommodate in their pickups and SUVs the dozens who had been arriving every hour.

Today, not a single person can be found in a 90-minute search of the area. It's quiet except for the sound of the occasional bird chirp.

The TV weatherman forecast the heat index for 111 degrees, Cabrera says, sitting inside his air-conditioned personal vehicle. He says the extreme heat is one of the two reasons he believes no one is crossing right now at 3:30 p.m. local time.

"This time of year, if [families and children] don't cross in the dark, they're gonna cross either really early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the sun starts to go down," Cabrera says. "But the weather in and of itself is not going to stop it."

Cabrera explains the Mexican government's deployment of military to the other side of the border from the Rio Grande Valley is why apprehensions were down in the first two weeks in August. Border Patrol would not share data to back up his statement.

"They're not allowing anybody to cross," he says, referring to Mexico's enhanced

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enforcement actions following President Trump's early summer threat to impose tariffs if the Mexicans did not prevent more people from traveling to the U.S.

Cabrera says because of the military, the cartels that control access to the river are blocking paying customers — migrants — from getting into the murky water. The cartel members work for transnational criminal organizations or massive international gangs that charge migrants money to go through land where they have staked their claim. As a result, they dictate when any person crosses the river.

"The cartels don't want the attention drawn to them because the military's close by, then nobody's crossing. And as soon as military moves on to bigger and better things (they move to a different area because a different area's getting hit), then the floodgates open right back up," says Cabrera, who names the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, and Cartel Del Noreste as the gangs playing for control of the border here.

With fewer people being processed and needing to be cared for, many of the regions 3,000 agents are free to return to their normal patrol tasks from the caretaker roles they've been forced to perform for detainees over past six months.

"The numbers are going down," says Kise. "That has relieved pressure on the agents because just a few months ago, we had 40-50% of our agents were involved in just processing. When that happens that takes away from the border security mission. You may see where a large family group would come across but then all of a sudden you hear [smugglers] running dope somewhere else because all these agents are dedicated to processing that family unit. When that happens and agents are overwhelmed, it's going to affect border security, because those agents have to be pulled from their primary mission, which is securing the border."

Kise said sector leadership has been "very good at transitioning with the flows." Cabrera thinks the majority of agents are back in the field this afternoon. Border Patrol would not share the percentage of local agents in the field.

It's a calm-after-the-storm sort of feeling that has descended on this place following months and months of crisis mode. Cabrera does not think it will last, but he is grateful agents are finally getting back to doing the job they were hired to do.

[TX] New Mexico company chosen to build border wall part in Texas (San Francisco Chronicle)

San Francisco Chronicle [8/19/2019 12:08 AM, Staff, 2613K]

An Albuquerque-based company has been awarded a more than $80 million contract to building a stretch of new border wall in Texas.

KVIA-TV in El Paso, Texas, reports Southwest Valley Constructors was recently chosen by U.S. Customs and Border Protection to build an 11-mile (17.7-kilometer) stretch in Hidalgo County, Texas.

Customs and Border Protection officials said the new portion will be similar to a previously constructed levee wall, built in the area in 2008. That piece included lights, cameras and other technology.

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Construction for the new portion of the border wall in Texas could start at the end of September.

The company said in a statement it has built past components of various border wall pieces across the American Southwest dating back to 2006.

[AZ] Child Rapist, Homicide Fugitive Arrested by Border Patrol (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 11:57 AM, Bob Price, 2034K]
Border Patrol agents arrested a previously deported Mexican child rapist who illegally re-entered the U.S. in Arizona. In a separate incident, Border Patrol agents in Texas arrested a French citizen wanted in his home country for murder.

Tucson Sector Border Patrol agents assigned to the Brian A. Terry Border Patrol Station arrested 37-year-old Carlos Blancas-Rojas for being in the U.S. illegally. A background check on the Mexican national revealed a conviction from a Washington state court for the Rape of a Child in 2008, according to Tucson Sector officials.

Further investigation uncovered an active warrant in Washington and two previous removals from the U.S. He now faces federal felony charges of illegal re-entry after removal as an aggravated felon. If convicted on the charge, he could face up to 20 years in federal prison.

Big Bend Sector Border Patrol agents apprehended a French man who is illegally present in the U.S. The man is wanted by Interpol on an active warrant for murder.

Sierra Blanca Border Patrol Station agents operating an inland border security checkpoint encountered the man on a bus. During an immigration interview, the agents discovered 30-year-old Marouana Bah, a French citizen, presented a passport that did not belong to him, Big Bend Sector Border Patrol officials stated. A biometric background investigation uncovered his true identity and the fact that he is not legally present in the United States. Further investigation uncovered an Interpol warrant for a murder charge from France.

Border Patrol agents turned the French fugitive over to Homeland Security Investigations in Boston who will carry out the investigation and work with French officials for the return of their citizen.

“This arrest highlights our law enforcement collaboration, including partnerships well beyond our borders. This wanted international fugitive attempted to remain in the U.S. illegally and was stopped by the diligent work of our Border Patrol agents,” Big Bend Sector Chief Patrol Agent Matthew J. Hudak said in a written statement.

[CA] CBP seizes 4 tons of marijuana hidden in shipment of jalapeños (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/18/2019 6:57 PM, Staff, 2034K]
Border agents seized nearly 4 tons of marijuana in a shipment of jalapeño peppers at the U.S-Mexico border, according to authorities.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a statement that it found the street drug “co-mingled” within a shipment of the peppers on Thursday at the Otay Mesa border crossing in San Diego, California.

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The seizure was made after a tractor-trailer driven by a 37-year-old Mexican citizen was referred to secondary inspection, during which a canine team alerted officers to its shipment.

CBP officers then discovered “a leafy-green substance,” which tested positive for marijuana, it said.

A total of 314 large wrapped packages of marijuana with a street value of $2.3 million were found on the truck within the shipment of jalapeño peppers.

“I am proud of the officers for seizing this significant marijuana load,” said Otay Mesa Port Director Rosa Hernandez. “Not only did they prevent the drugs from reaching our community, but they also prevented millions of dollars of potential profit from making it into the hands of a transnational criminal organization.”

Thursday’s confiscation comes days after some 10,642 pounds of marijuana was seized Aug. 13 at the facility in a shipment of plastic auto parts.

[CA] Hot cargo: US Customs seize 4 tons of marijuana hidden among peppers (Breitbart)

Breitbart [8/18/2019 9:17 PM, AFP, 2034K]

US Customs officers have seized nearly four tons of marijuana worth $2.3 million hidden in a consignment of jalapeno peppers.

A sniffer dog alerted officers to a trailer with a shipment of peppers in San Diego on the border with Mexico on Thursday, Customs and Border Protection said.

The CBP statement said “a 37-year-old male Mexican citizen entered the port of entry driving a tractor pulling a trailer with cargo manifested as jalapeno peppers.”

Officers at Otay Mesa cargo facility found 314 packages of marijuana weighing 7,560 pounds (3.4 tonnes) mixed among the jalapeno peppers.

“I am proud of the officers for seizing this significant marijuana load,” said Otay Mesa Port director Rosa Hernandez.

It was the second large haul of marijuana at the facility in days.

Officers seized 10,642 pounds of the drug in a shipment of plastic auto parts at Otay Mesa on Tuesday.

CBP has seized 113 tons (103 tonnes) of marijuana so far this year, along with 41 tons of cocaine and 27 tons of methamphetamine.

In July authorities seized nearly 20 tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of more than $1 billion from a ship at the port of Philadelphia in one of the largest drug busts in US history.

[CA] Nearly 4 tons of weed discovered inside shipment of jalapeños (CNN)

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CNN [8/18/2019 9:31 PM, Amanda Jackson and Artemis Moshtaghian, 6094K]
A shipment of jalapeños from Mexico to the US proved to be carrying more than just a spicy kick when Border Patrol agents found nearly 4 tons of marijuana hidden in the cargo.

The discovery was made Thursday when a truck driver was flagged for a secondary inspection at the Otay Mesa border crossing in California.
During the inspection, a K-9 team alerted officers to the peppers, according to a press release from US Customs and Border Protection. The federal agency didn't say why the driver, a 37-year-old male Mexican citizen, was initially flagged for a secondary inspection.

Inside the pallets of peppers officers discovered over 300 green packages that field-tested for marijuana. Officials estimate the seized drugs are worth $2.3 million.

"I am proud of the officers for seizing this significant marijuana load," said Otay Mesa Port Director Rosa Hernandez in the press release. "Not only did they prevent the drugs from reaching our community, they also prevented millions of dollars of potential profit from making it into the hands of a transnational criminal organization."

There was no word on potential criminal charges against the truck's driver.

Thursday's bust follows a seizure of more than 10,000 pounds of marijuana in a shipment of plastic auto parts that occurred August 13 at the same cargo facility.

Transportation Security Administration

[NY] Airport Security Worker Fired for Slipping 'Ugly' Note to Traveler (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/17/2019 3:45 PM, Katherine Rodriguez, 2034K]
An airport security worker in Rochester, New York, was fired after she slipped a passenger a note that said, "You ugly!!!"

Neal Strassner, 40, told the New York Post Friday that a female Transportation Security Administration (TSA) worker handed him a small, folded-up piece of paper with the note before he collected his things back in June.

"I didn't open it because I didn't care about it," he told the Post. "She turned around a few times asking, 'Are you going to open that?'"

He initially shrugged off the message when he received it and continued on to catch his flight to Kansas but called the airport later to complain.

Strassner, a Rochester native who travels frequently for his job as a technical coordinator, was headed to Wichita the morning of the late June incident.

When he first met with the supervisor at the airport, he thought the supervisor did not believe him.

"I called the airport and I tried to get the information and they said I had to talk to the county," Strassner told NBC News on Friday. "I called the county, and they said that was the only way I could get it."

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Strassner received a piece of CCTV footage from the county through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which showed the former worker tearing another piece of paper from a latex glove box.

The employee who gave him the note worked for VMD Corp., a government contractor based in Virginia working through the TSA.

Strassner said the company promised to get in touch with him about the incident by August 13. When he did not hear back by Thursday, Strassner uploaded the video to Reddit. The company responded in two hours.

TSA then announced that the employee was fired.

“TSA holds contractors to the highest ethical standards and has zero tolerance for this type of behavior,” the agency said in a statement. “This instance, which involved a contract employee, was investigated immediately upon receiving the complaint by the traveler. The employee has since been terminated by the contractor.”

Despite the incident, Strassner said he will still fly out of Greater Rochester International Airport.

[NY] New York airport worker fired for giving traveler ‘terrible’ note: ‘You ugly!!!’ (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 9:29 AM, Janine Puhak, 10258K]
A security guard contracted to work at Greater Rochester International Airport is out of a job after inexplicably handing a traveler a note that read “You ugly!!!” after the man passed through a screening checkpoint.

Earlier this week, surveillance video of the bizarre encounter hit Twitter, in a minute-long clip that has since been viewed over 2,200 times.

In late June, traveler Neal Strassner was passing through the New York air hub when an unnamed female security guard gave him a handwritten note on a small slip of cardboard that read “You ugly!!!,” Rochester First reports.

Strassner told the outlet that he passed through the checkpoint without issue, took the odd note from the worker and kept walking. She reportedly called after him, asking “You going to open the note?” he said.

Seconds later, she burst out laughing, as seen in the surveillance footage.

Strassner recently got a hold of the security clip through a Freedom of Information request.

The man claims the rude stunt didn’t upset him, but similar antics could easily offend others.

"You never really know where somebody is in their day or their head,” he told ABC 13. "The more you think about it, the more you realize it’s easier to smile than to do this."

Strassner thinks that the stunt was not an isolated incident.

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"At the end of the video I requested, she literally just takes a pen out of her pocket and starts writing another one," he said. "So, I know I wasn't the only guy that got one."

Social media commenters didn't find the woman's trick to be quite so funny and quickly condemned her actions as "terrible."

"What is wrong with people [?]" one user wondered. "I don't know if she needed to be fired but this is cruel, unprovoked, unprofessional, and appears to be a big game," another wrote. "I am pretty sure your tune would change if a waiter wrote you're ugly on the bill. I am sure you are a nice lady but enough with the sense of humor angle."

When contacted for comment, reps for the Transportation Security Administration told Fox News that the screener was fired for her actions, adding that the woman was working at the Rochester airport for a contractor and was not a federal employee.

"TSA holds contractors to the highest ethical standards and has zero tolerance for this type of behavior," the spokesperson said. "This instance, which involved a contract employee, was investigated immediately upon receiving the complaint by the traveler. The employee has since been terminated by the contractor."

[NY] Airport worker fired for giving passenger 'You ugly!' note (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 1:58 PM, Associated Press, 2613K]
An airport security worker in New York has been fired for handing a passenger a handwritten note that said "You ugly!!!"

The June incident came to light this week after passenger Neal Strassner obtained security video through a public records request and posted it to YouTube.

The video from Greater Rochester International Airport shows the worker handing Strassner the note after he passes through a metal detector.

Strassner says he didn't think much of it and continued toward his gate. That's when he says the woman yelled out: "You gonna open the note?"

Strassner says that when he did, the woman burst out laughing. He later complained to her supervisors.

The Transportation Security Administration says the woman worked for a contractor. The agency says it has "zero tolerance for this type of behavior."

[WA] TSA caught passenger with gun-shaped knife: 'On the fence about bringing a knife to a gun fight' (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 11:57 AM, Alexandra Deabler, 10258K]
Look… in that man's bag! It's a gun… no, it's a knife… no, it's both! And it's not allowed in a carry-on!

Last week, a passenger traveling through Washington's Paine Field airport tried to bring a knife, shaped like a gun, through a TSA security checkpoint.

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“Maybe this passenger was on the fence about bringing a knife to a gun fight,” the TSA quipped on its blog.

The 6-inch gun-shaped weapon was discovered on August 6 and taken from the passenger.

More information about the passenger who tried to bring on the knife was not immediately available, but TSA revealed on its blog that during the week of August 5 – 11, they screened 17.7 million passengers, and the most common weapons they discovered were firearms. During that week, TSA found 77 firearms in carry-on bags, 66 of which were loaded and 28 had a round chambered.

[WA] TSA pokes fun at attempt to get knife-shaped gun through security (USA Today)
USA Today [8/17/2019 1:22 PM, Staff, 6620K] Video: HERE
TSA agents may have been confused as how to classify this weapon when a passenger tried to bring a knife-shaped gun through airport security.

[CA] More people are flying but TSA lines at LAX are shorter. How did this happen? (Los Angeles Times)
Los Angeles Times [8/17/2019 4:00 AM, Hugo Martin, Ben Poston, 3575K]
Summer 2016 found airline passengers across the country fuming about airport security checkpoint lines that stretched for up to two hours.

The outrage was so widespread that the Twitter hashtag #Ihatethewait started trending. A few federal lawmakers demanded the resignation of the Transportation Security Administration chief, who apologized for the summer of waiting.

Since then, the number of passengers flying out of U.S. airports has increased 15%, but average wait times have barely inched higher, TSA data show.

And at most of the 30 largest airports, including Los Angeles International, average wait times have fallen significantly, according to three years of TSA data analyzed by The Times. At some of those major airports, average wait times have fallen as much as 66%, with LAX achieving a decline of about 40%, The Times’ analysis of more than 20,000 data points found.

But California’s other big airports haven’t been able to decrease average wait times since 2016, TSA data show. At San Francisco International, wait times rose considerably, while the screening queues at San Diego International grew slightly.

Keeping airport wait times from increasing — even in the face of record air travel numbers — has been a big worry for the TSA, airports and airlines, all of which benefit from keeping American travelers happy.

They’ve been able to pull this off by spending big on staffing, advanced screening technology and new facilities, pushing the TSA PreCheck expedited screening program as well as improving communications and cooperation.

L.A.’s notoriously jammed roadways may have even played a role in reducing the amount of

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time that travelers wait for security screening at LAX.

Passenger rights groups and veteran fliers have given the TSA and industry players credit for keeping wait times in check.

“They seem to be adopting the kind of staffing policies that fast-food restaurants use, which is to bring in more people on peak times,” said Paul Hudson, president of Flyers Rights, a nonprofit passenger advocacy group with more than 60,000 members. “I think they’ve finally improved.”

Richard and Gail Grenier of Yorba Linda recently flew out of LAX to Paris and noticed the TSA lines were a few minutes shorter than in the past.

“It wasn’t bad at all,” Richard Grenier said.

Karen Corcoran, a retiree from Huntington Beach who regularly flies out of LAX to vacation in the U.S. and abroad, said she has also noticed an improvement at TSA checkpoints. “I think it has gotten a little better over the years,” she said.

Among the findings from the analysis of TSA data from May 2016 to May 2019 were:

The average wait time at LAX dropped by nearly four minutes, to just under six minutes, at standard TSA checkpoints and fell by nearly one minute, to less than 90 seconds, in TSA PreCheck lines. The number of fliers screened at the airport rose 11.5% over the last three years. (LAX screens more passengers than any other U.S. airport even though Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta serves the most travelers overall; many of the flights at the Atlanta airport are connectors whose passengers were screened at another airport.)

The average wait time at Chicago O’Hare International Airport dropped by seven minutes, to under four minutes, in standard TSA lines and dropped to 90 seconds in TSA PreCheck lines. The lower wait times came despite a 10% increase in the number of passengers screened.

At San Francisco International, the average wait time rose nearly two minutes, to nearly 6½ minutes, in standard screening lanes, while the number of passengers screened at the airport rose 8.5%. San Francisco International is among more than 20 U.S. airports that rely on a private security firm to screen passengers. Through a TSA spokeswoman, the firm said the wait expansion is “negligible” considering the increase in passengers.

The average wait time at standard screening lanes at San Diego International Airport rose about half a minute, to just less than eight minutes, while the average wait time at TSA PreCheck rose by nearly a minute, to just over two minutes. San Diego International recorded a 22% jump in passenger screenings, one of the biggest among the nation’s busiest airports. The airport has launched a $3-billion expansion plan that will help the facility serve the 33 million passengers it is expected to serve by 2030.

Americans began to fly in huge numbers as the U.S. economy improved from the financial meltdown in 2008 and 2009, and lower fuel prices helped keep airfares relatively inexpensive. The number of passengers screened at U.S. airports jumped 15% to 72.3 million in May, compared with the same month in 2016, according to TSA data.

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Delta and American have each launched terminal expansion projects at LAX, with price tags of more than $1 billion each.

"Airlines today have a vested interest in getting the passenger through quickly," said John Pistole, a former TSA administrator who now is president of Anderson University in Indiana.

Keith Jeffries, LAX's federal security director, points to the addition of the 30 automated screening lanes and increased cooperation with airline and airport officials as primary reasons why wait times at LAX have been kept in check despite the rise in air passengers.

"It's everyone working together, communicating on a regular basis," he said.

One of the factors that is most frustrating about flying out of LAX — vehicular traffic — may also be helping to keep checkpoint wait times down, Jeffries said. LAX fliers know that traffic is often heavy and unpredictable, so they arrive at the airport extra early, which helps to flatten the spikes in passengers at the TSA checkpoints.

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“It meters itself,” he said. “It’s a gift and a curse.”

At Chicago O’Hare International, where the average wait time has dropped more than 60% over the last three years, the Chicago Department of Aviation opened a two-lane checkpoint at the international terminal in June to cut wait times and has begun using video analytics to monitor and respond to crowding in the terminals.

“It’s all about ensuring the right amount of people are on duty at the right time,” said Robert Spinden, O’Hare’s assistant federal security director. The department also recently added nine automated screening lanes throughout the airport, he said.

O’Hare’s neighboring airport, Chicago Midway International, had a big drop in wait times, but the main reason had to do with a 4% decline in passengers since 2016. It has been the only one among the nation’s 30 biggest airports to record a decline in passengers over the last three years.

TSA officials say the drop in air passengers at Chicago Midway has mostly been the result of the airport’s biggest carrier, Southwest Airlines, having trouble adding routes with its newest plane, the Boeing 737 Max. The latest model of the 737 has been grounded since March following two deadly crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia. Southwest Airlines had to park 34 of the jets and postpone deliveries of 41 other aircraft.

As a result, the average wait times at the standard TSA checkpoints at Midway International dropped by 8½ minutes, to a total average wait time of 6½ minutes, and dropped by a minute, to just under two minutes, for the TSA PreCheck lines.

At the airports where wait times have increased since summer 2016, many have lacked terminal space to add TSA checkpoints to absorb boosts in international and domestic travelers, TSA’s LaJoye said.

“The problem with capacity constraints is that you have no ability to add machines or add people,” he said.

The biggest rise in average wait times over the last three years took place at Florida’s Tampa International and Orlando International airports, and San Francisco International, according to the analysis.

At Tampa International, the average wait time jumped from just under three minutes in May 2016 to nearly six minutes in May 2019. At the same time, the number of passengers using the airport rose nearly 15% to more than 959,000 fliers in May.

Tampa International representatives said the airport is undergoing an expansion as part of a $2-billion overhaul that is designed to accommodate up to 34 million passengers a year.

“We are seeing record passenger numbers at Tampa International and our screening times are still lower than the national average at large hub airports,” Tampa International spokeswoman Janet Scherberger said.

In San Francisco, the international airport recently opened the doors to its new $2.5-billion Harvey Milk Terminal 1. The facility, which is still being built out, is expected to add several

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new gates to serve the airport's growing demand.

The average wait times at Orlando International rose slightly more than two minutes in May, to a wait time of nearly seven minutes, in the standard checkpoint lanes, compared with the same month in 2016, according to TSA data. That may be attributed to a jump in passenger traffic, especially international fliers. In May, Orlando International recorded the seventh consecutive month of double-digit increases in international traffic, with domestic arrivals and departures jumping 7% in that month.

"The TSA in Orlando is working with substantially fewer lanes due to space restrictions than at other airports with similar passenger volumes," said TSA spokeswoman Sari Koshetz. "And yet we have impressive wait times demonstrating that the TSA Orlando team is clearly motivated, efficient and effective while screening and keeping travelers safe every day."

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Temperatures pass 100 degrees in Southwest cities; flood warnings posted for Florida (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 8:48 AM, Janice Dean and Brandon Noriega, 10258K]
Excessive heat warnings and heat advisories remain in effect for a large portion of the Desert Southwest into California today where temperatures surpass 100 degrees for many big cities. The heat should break a little bit as we get into the weekend.

Meanwhile, severe thunderstorms will be possible from the central High Plains into the Mid Mississippi Valley. These storms could contain large hail, damaging winds, an isolated tornado and locally heavy rainfall, which could bring flooding concerns.

We also have flood watches and warnings posted for the West Coast of Florida with several batches of tropical moisture moving into the region.

[Editorial note: consult graphics at source link]

[VA] Residents affected by July flash floods can seek U.S. loans this weekend (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 2:07 PM, Rebecca Tan, 9425K]
Residents affected by the severe flooding that swept through Washington in early July can seek disaster relief loans from federal agencies in the coming days.

The United States Small Business Administration has opened three centers where residents of Arlington County, Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax County, Montgomery County and the District can apply for low-interest disaster loans. Homeowners can borrow up to $200,000; business and private nonprofit groups can borrow up to $2 million.

The center at the Arlington County Trades Center at 2700 S. Taylor St. and the center at the Tyson-Pimmit Regional Library at 7584 Leesburg Pike will be open Friday, Saturday and Monday. The one at Montgomery's Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, at 100 Edison Park Drive, will be open until Wednesday, but also is closed on Sunday.

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Loans applications can also be made online at DisasterLoan.sba.gov. The deadline to submit online applications for physical property damage is Oct. 7; for economic injury applications, it is May 7, 2020.

Representatives from various county agencies will be present at the three centers, to answer questions about cleaning, inspections, landlord-tenant relations, or other issues related to the flood, said Aaron Miller, director of Public Safety Communications and Emergency Management for Arlington County.

In July, Arlington declared a state of emergency in response to the floods, which brought widespread destruction to the region, prompting federal aid.

[FL] Fraud plagues disaster relief efforts (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 3:01 AM, Staff, 2613K]
As the scale and frequency of major disasters escalate, millions of dollars in federal, state and insurance payments intended for recovery efforts are being stolen by fraudsters taking advantage of chaos and the pipeline of aid flowing into the stricken areas.

Last year, Olanrewajua A. Beyioku, also known as "Papa Smith Morgan," was charged with wire fraud after allegedly devising a scheme to defraud the American Red Cross. The Gary, Indiana, resident used reference codes intended for nine households affected by Hurricane Harvey to obtain $3,600 in relief funds.

Beyioku was one of 3,300 identified cases of fraudulently collecting reference codes that resulted in a loss of more than $1.3 million to the Red Cross.

After Gulf Coast flooding in 2016, Renata Foreman of Independence, Louisiana, submitted false claims from multiple locations and made more than 50 fraudulent applications using stolen identities to obtain Disaster Unemployment Assistance funds from the Louisiana Workforce Commission. In March, Foreman, 39, was sentenced to 111 months in federal prison, and five years of supervised release for multiple counts of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft.

In West Virginia, one woman embezzled more than $18,000 in Federal Emergency Management Agency benefits for the June 2016 flood in Clay County. Pamela Taylor, 57, falsely claimed her primary residence was damaged from the flood when it was not. She has paid $18,000 in restitution and was sentenced in May to 10 months in prison, two months of home confinement and a $10,000 fine.

"As you can imagine, fraud follows the money," said U.S. Attorney Brandon Fremin, the executive director of the National Center for Disaster Fraud. "So when HUD (Housing and Urban Development) or FEMA or other federal agencies start to put money into those affected areas, that's when the bulk of the fraud seems to follow. The fraudsters know when the money arrives. So they know that it's now time for them to operate."

Losses to disaster fraud are estimated at 10% of disaster-related insurance payouts and FEMA spending, according to a report by the National White Collar Crime Center in West Virginia. More precise losses are difficult to quantify due to the challenges of identifying, reporting and prosecuting fraud.

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"It's next to impossible to actually determine how much fraud there is," said Richard Brody, a certified fraud examiner and professor of accounting at the University of New Mexico.

Disaster fraud comes in the form of identity theft, price gouging and fake claims made to insurance companies and the federal government, including FEMA. Contractor, charity and insurance fraud also can be prolific during times of disaster.

In the aftermath of a disaster, fraud against FEMA is commonly committed by submitting fraudulent claim applications for disaster relief benefits, often claiming damage that did not occur. In some cases, fraudsters impersonate FEMA or other federal officials to deceive affected individuals.

"There should be a red flag there that nobody from FEMA is going to ask you for a check," Fremin said. "That's a big red flag, and that should be a huge indicator that something is amiss."

Months after Hurricane Michael last October, residents of Panama City say fraudulent contractors flooded the Florida Panhandle days after the storm, persuading people to sign questionable contracts that ultimately set back their recovery.

Some residents say they signed over their insurance benefits believing a contractor would do the work they were hired to do, only to find months later the job was never done or that they were charged too much.

Hurricane Michael was a Category 5 storm that swamped the northwestern tip of the Panhandle near Panama City, a town of nearly 37,000, leaving behind shattered homes and ruined pavement along U.S. 98. Hundreds of toppled trees littered adjacent Mexico Beach, where neighborhoods and homes were reduced to foundation slabs.

"Bringing the physical structures back to the way they were, people recovering, that can take years," said Fredric Kerstein, a former Florida prosecutor. "When you've got two out of every three homes in your community that are destroyed, you're not going to have enough contractors to do the work properly, and that's part of the problem. That's why everything is delayed. Recovery is a long process."

On June 1, nearly eight months after Hurricane Michael, dozens of Panama City residents met at a tent structure serving as the temporary home of St. Dominic Catholic Church, which was destroyed in the storm.

Mass was not held that day. Instead, representatives from local law enforcement and insurance companies met with citizens and victims of disaster fraud. They included two locals, Ted Mahoney and Greg Dossie, who experienced drastically different outcomes.

In an interview at his home, which is still gutted, unrepaired and uninhabitable, Mahoney said he and his family are the victims of fraud.

In the hours before Michael, Mahoney waited out the storm in his house in Lynn Haven, just north of Panama City. His wife, Jennifer, and two children, Maria and Monica, left town to avoid the storm. He stayed, along with the family dog, Sadie.

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Although first forecast as a tropical storm, Michael rapidly intensified two days before landfall, an unusually accelerated pace that left the Panhandle little time to prepare.

When the storm barged in about noon Oct. 10, it hit hard and fast. The Category 5 wind speeds shattered windows, destroyed the power grid and hampered communication networks across Bay County and nearby areas. Downed trees and debris blocked roads, making them inaccessible.

The storm opened Mahoney's roof, allowing torrents of rain to pour into the house, damaging it throughout. Out in the yard, his dense trees were reduced to naked trunks and downed branches.

"We got through the storm," Mahoney said. "We lost the shingles. The structure withstood the storm marvelously, marvelously. But because we lost the shingles, water comes in and now you have inside water damage."

The roof has since been repaired, but inside, little else has been done, even though Mahoney said his insuror paid a contractor for repairs.

"In our situation, the contractor, unequivocally, black and white, claimed that work was done that was clearly not done," Mahoney said, citing among other things, drywall removal that was never completed.

Mahoney pays his children 5 cents for each used nail they find on the property, left behind by the contractor who gutted their home.

"In general, people are good, honest people, the people that we interact with in this area," Mahoney said. "So I think that the people expect, you know, if you say something, you're going to do it. So that's the expectation."

Dennis Rozier, who leads the Bay County Sheriff's Financial Crimes Division, said some contractors, many unlicensed, persuaded residents to sign an assignment of benefits, known as an AOB, which allows the contractors to file claims with insurance companies, make repairs and collect payments on the homeowner's behalf.

The Bay County Sheriff's Office, along with other state agencies, formed Citizens United Fighting Fraud, known as CUFF, a task force dedicated to catching unlicensed contractors operating after Hurricane Michael.

"I wanted to get the unlicensed contractors first," Rozier said.

The task force has arrested several unlicensed contractors in a series of sting operations.

"As (CUFF) started making a lot of arrests and word got out, a lot of these contractors got out of town," Rozier said. "We found it harder and harder to find them."

Dossie, a Panama City native, is familiar with disaster recovery. As a public adjuster, Dossie helps policy holders maximize their insurance claims. But despite his expertise, his personal recovery process has been as complicated as Mahoney's and those of other Panama City residents.

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The four modest houses on his property, which is where he grew up, are uninsured. When the storm hit, the roof and side walls blew off one house. A tree crashed through another.

In the house where Dossie lives, the concrete siding cracked and water seeped in. An 80-foot tree, slightly uprooted, looms threateningly. He said the money he received from FEMA isn't enough to restore his home or even cut down the leaning tree.

Dossie still lives in his home. He doesn't know when he will be able to repair it, even as he spends his days adjusting claims so others can get their homes fixed.

"What I think a lot of people have learned," Mahoney said, "is that there are folks that don't share those same ethics and they get bitten by that. Call it naivete. Call it whatever you want. They get bitten by that."

Dossie and Mahoney said they weren't prepared for the destruction and fraud following Hurricane Michael.

"People are thinking we're going to be back to normal, two, three, four, five years," Dossie said. "It's not going to happen. There's going to be a new normalcy. Neighborhoods are changing. Houses are being destroyed . the whole landscape is going to change."

The lack of experience and knowledge in dealing with post-disaster fraud meant many Panhandle residents didn't know the risks of signing over an assignment of benefits to dishonest contractors or how to deal with their insurance claims.

Many contractors either overcharged homeowners or collected down payments and vanished, leaving families stuck with a contract they couldn't get out of.

The National Center for Disaster Fraud in Baton Rouge was formed after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when fraudsters capitalized on the billions of dollars in federal disaster relief that poured into the devastated Gulf Coast. The center does not prosecute cases but instead reports fraud to state and federal jurisdictions. Since 2005, it has received more than 95,000 complaints relating to disaster fraud.

"Unfortunately, we expect to see (fraud) after just about every incident of disaster," said Fremin, who leads the national center.

Complaints are filed into a database maintained by the center to determine recurring fraud schemes and perpetrators.

"We want to make sure we get the best possible information that we can give to the potential investigator and, hopefully, to the prosecutor in order to make a successful investigation," Fremin said.

Many people, he said, didn't know the center existed in 2016 - even when an unnamed storm flooded at least 21 parishes in southern Louisiana and led to 13 deaths.

Since then, disaster fraud has become an important strategy for preventing post-disaster fraud, Fremin said. The center is in contact with every U.S. Attorney's Office and state

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attorneys general, and letters and emails are sent to areas expecting disasters, reminding them to contact the center with allegations of fraud.

"We want them to know that rather than spending time on the phone taking complaints, (we would rather) have them out on the street helping the people who need it most and allow us to take those complaints," Fremin said.

Still, it's difficult to identify and prosecute on local and federal levels.

"What good does it do if the local law enforcement and the local prosecutors don't know how to handle the problem?" asked Kerstein, who prosecuted disaster fraud cases after Hurricane Andrew hit Miami in 1992.

"It's very clear to me that when you're a department, a police department, a local prosecutor who has never experienced this kind of disaster before, and all of a sudden you're facing this - you need an education as well as the victims need an education."

Trey Hutt, president of Hutt Insurance Agency in Panama City, said homeowners who are diligent in chasing down contractors and communicating with their insurance company are better prepared to avoid fraud and get the best results.

"This is not a sprint, it's a marathon," Hutt said. "The speed with which you move is less important than the idea that you keep your wheels in motion."

David LeBlanc, who lives in southern Louisiana's Ascension Parish, was defrauded after an unnamed storm in 2016 left nearly 2 feet of flooding in his home. He said his contractor did not complete the work he was hired to do, and then placed two liens on LeBlanc's home, which prevents homeowners from receiving insurance payments.

The contractor, Matthew Morris, owner of Complete Construction Contractors, was arrested in February 2017 on multiple counts of contractor and insurance fraud. Morris has since been convicted, and his license was revoked after the Louisiana State Licensing Board discovered Morris had previous criminal convictions he did not disclose before applying for his license.

"I'm fully willing to accept blame in this," LeBlanc said. "That's a very deep contract, and I accepted his explanation that it was a standard contract when it turned out it wasn't exactly a standard contract."

LeBlanc navigated the process on his own, but victims of fraud in similar situations often are unsure of where to turn for help. The National Center for Disaster Fraud hotline and call center hopes to simplify that process for fraud victims.

"The problem with a lot of this is that the citizens don't know what constitutes illegal activity or what's a civil issue or what's just an inconvenience to them," said Rozier of the Bay County Sheriff's Office. "A lot of this is educating the citizens on what we can and can't do."

[LA] Louisiana seeks federal aid for Mississippi River flooding (San Francisco Chronicle)

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San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 2:12 PM, Associated Press, 337K]
Gov. John Bel Edwards is asking the Trump administration to issue a federal disaster declaration for Louisiana because of Mississippi River flooding.

The Democratic governor's office said Friday it sent a letter to FEMA seeking the designation that would give state and local agencies access to federal money to cover flood-related costs.

Edwards wrote that local levee districts and parishes, with state assistance, spent significantly for extra levees patrols and temporary repairs.

Louisiana is asking for federal hazard mitigation assistance statewide.

The state also is requesting federal aid to help cover debris removal, infrastructure repair and other emergency protective measures for 13 parishes impacted by the high river levels.

Those parishes are: Assumption, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Iberville, Ouachita, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, St. Martin, Terrebonne, and West Feliciana.

[MI] Michigan city reviews options to combat flooded streets (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 12:54 PM, Associated Press, 2613K]
One Michigan city is reviewing potential solutions to help alleviate flooding from Lake Erie onto its streets.

Starting in spring, high winds in Monroe have raised the lake's elevation several feet higher than normal on multiple occasions, according to Patrick Lewis, the city's director of engineering and public safety.

Lakes Erie and Ontario in June reached their highest points since record keeping began in 1918, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said. Corps hydrologist Keith Kompoltowicz said three months of abnormally wet weather have kept stream flows into the Great Lakes well above average.

Lewis noted that street flooding has been limited due to still backwaters from River Raisin and Plum Creek Bay. Though he said the city is lucky because wave action could have caused significant damage to homes and structures along the shoreline.

Some residents, meanwhile, are still experiencing flooding.

"The standing water elevation of the lake is at present higher than a number of roadway catch basin rims, resulting in constant standing water," Lewis told the Monroe News. "This is expected to be the case for at least the next few months, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers."

Parts of Interstate 75 that run through the city are seeing flooding and street closures, Lewis said.

Lewis said engineering staff will work to review potential long-term options within the next

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few months. He said the city's highest lake levels are expected to last through the end of the year.

[CO] Wildfire Outside Denver Forces Evacuation of Homes (US News & World Report)
US News & World Report [8/16/2019 10:38 AM, Associated Press, 3196K]
Firefighters have gained 50% containment on a wildfire that forced the evacuation of more than 300 homes in a rural area southwest of Denver.

The fire located in the Deer Creek Canyon Park area started about 4:45 p.m. Thursday. It has burned about 20 acres (8 hectares), but authorities report no homes have been lost.

More than 100 firefighters were fighting the fire.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

[CA] 'Jimmy Kimmel Live!' slapped with $395K fine for using emergency tone in skit (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/16/2019 10:08 AM, Tim Pearce, 855K]
A sketch by late-night host Jimmy Kimmel about the presidential alert system has resulted in a costly fine.

ABC, which is owned by the Walt Disney Company, will pay nearly $400,000 to the Federal Communications Commission for using the national alert tone in a "Jimmy Kimmel Live" skit last year.

On Thursday, the FCC announced the settlement, in which ABC agreed to pay $395,000 and committed to a compliance plan in order to avoid violations in the future. Several other companies were also hit with fines related to unsanctioned use of the tone.

Broadcasting the Emergency Alert System tone is banned by the FCC to prevent confusion, alert fatigue, and "false activation of the EAS by the operative data elements contained in the alert tones."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency issued a test "presidential alert" on Oct, 3, 2018. Kimmel mocked the new national alert system in a sketch that used the alert tone three times.

ABC said the tone was placed in the sketch because of a "misunderstanding that the use of the tone was permissible." Since its original airing, ABC has scrubbed the tone from the sketch.

AMC paid a $104,000 civil penalty after the EAS tone appeared in an episode of "The Walking Dead." Discovery's Animal Planet played the tone after an actual EAS alert was sent and picked up by equipment while filming an episode of "Lone Star Law." Discovery paid a $68,000 civil penalty for the slip.

Meruelo Radio Holdings paid a $67,000 civil penalty for using the tone in a radio promotion that aired dozens of times.

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[AK] More freak weather comes to Alaska, which has had an unprecedented summer (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 10:46 AM, Matthew Cappucci and Andrew Freedman, 9425K]
In southeast Alaska, the normally lush forests are falling prey to spruce bark beetles and hemlock sawflys, which are taking advantage of a lack of rainfall and higher than average temperatures. The dry weather has also forced cuts in hydropower production there, forcing a switch to more expensive and polluting diesel power generation.

In Anchorage, this summer has been the hottest and smokiest the city has ever recorded, with plumes from distant wildfires obscuring the skies and aggravating health problems. July was the state's warmest month on record, in keeping with the globe.

In western Alaska, there has been a multi-species mass mortality event, with washed up seals, walrus and birds, likely due in part to a total lack of sea ice and record warm ocean waters, according to Rick Thoman of the International Arctic Research Center.

On a call with reporters Thursday, Thoman said there have also been "dead non-spawned salmon in some places in significant numbers," coinciding with high river temperatures of 70 degrees or greater. The wildlife deaths are hitting close to home for many Alaskans, a state in which commercial fishing and hunting are a source of livelihood for many, and indigenous communities practice subsistence hunting.

Monday marked the warmest August day ever recorded in Anchorage. It also was the 43rd consecutive day the city of about 250,000 has reached 70 degrees — the longest such streak on record. The low Monday night didn't drop below 63 degrees in Anchorage — their warmest night on record. They tied that record again overnight Tuesday.

Just about every temperature record has fallen in a state that's running 6.2 degrees above normal since June. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday all hit 77 degrees in Anchorage, setting record high temperatures for the date, compared to the average high, which is 65 degrees.

And another period of record heat is on the way for this weekend.

The balmy weather sounds nice in theory, but for native Alaskans watching their landscape melt and burn, it's anything but. Nearly 2.5 million acres have burned in more than 600 wildfires this year in Alaska. This is not yet a record for the season, but according to Thoman, the 1991-2010 median-to-date is 681,000 acres.

The fires aren't confined to Alaska. Wildfires have been flaring all across the Arctic. In Greenland, wildfires continue to burn, while at least 13 million acres have already gone up in flames in Siberia. The cloud of smoke billowing from Siberia alone could cover the entire European Union, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

While the fires are raging, the ice is vanishing. Eastern Siberian sea ice is running at its second lowest coverage for the date on record. Across the entire Arctic, 2019 is also in second place for the lowest sea ice extent on record — running just behind the record-shattering 2012 melt season. Adjacent to Alaska, the Chukchi Sea is likely to become ice free by September. According to Thoman, there was no sea ice within 125 miles of the Alaska coastline as of Thursday, and the now-exposed ocean waters are gaining large

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amounts of heat energy from the sun that will be slow to dissipate in the fall and winter.

The warmer than average waters will reverberate into the cold season, since the fall freeze-up will be delayed, likely leading to an unusually mild fall and early-winter period.

“What happens in the Pacific and Arctic Oceans has a profound effect on Alaska’s temperature,” Thoman said.

A lack of fall and early winter ice will leave coastal communities vulnerable to erosion and storm surge flooding from powerful storms that typically buffet the state. Ecosystems within the Bering Sea are undergoing rapid changes that present challenges for the state’s massive seafood industry.

One unique aspect of this summer in Alaska has been the humidity, a characteristic not typically associated with life in the Frontier State.

The unusually warm waters have helped contribute to record high moisture levels in a number of Alaskan cities. Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Bethel recorded all-time record high atmospheric moisture contents Monday. Brian Brettschneider, An arctic climate researcher, noted on Twitter that on August 14, Anchorage’s atmosphere was more humid than that of Corpus Christi, Texas.

Daily lows in Alaska in July ranked higher than any other month since at least 1925 over a very broad area. “That’s due in significant part to comparatively high humidities observed across Alaska,” said Thoman.

An analysis of Anchorage’s temperature data for the past three months reveals that it has been more humid than any other three-month period in recorded history. The average dew point was nearly 55 degrees, at least three degrees higher than the previous record from 1979, and a 12 percent increase over the old record.

In fact, data indicates that since 1953, the air in Anchorage has become 20 percent more humid on average. The exceptionally warm air mass has brought with it noticeable humidity, but that doesn’t necessarily mean southern Alaska has seen more rain. In fact, they’re dry — the same high pressure dome that’s brought the heat and humidity has been deflecting most storm systems farther north.

The dome of heat that’s been hovering over Alaska is noticeable thousands of feet up in the atmosphere. The warmth has caused the atmosphere to expand vertically, just as a balloon would grow in volume if heated. The 500 millibar level — below which half of the atmosphere’s mass resides — has been running nearly 200 feet higher than normal since May.

[Editorial note: consult graphics at source link]

Secret Service

[MA] Salisbury police seek help identifying woman using counterfeit money (WHDH-TV)

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WHDH-TV [8/17/2019 12:08 PM, Melanie DaSilva, 82K] Video: HERE
Salisbury police are turning to the public for help identifying a woman who is using counterfeit money.

The department released photos of a woman at a cash register who passed three counterfeit $100 bills at a local business in Salisbury last month.

Police say she did the same in another nearby town.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Detective Forget.

[PA] $100 Bills Appeared To Be Raining From The Sky In Pennsylvania (B100Wobb)
B100Wobb [8/16/2019 11:05 AM, Bill Galluccio, 774K]
People in Lancaster, Pennsylvania were excited when what they believed were $100 bills began falling from the sky.

"We were like, 'Oh my gosh. Our prayers have been answered. Here comes the money! Raining from the sky,'" Ally Rohland, marketing coordinator at Horizon: Empower the Orphaned, told Fox 43.

Rohland and her coworkers ran outside to scoop up the cash that was littering the sidewalk.

They collected over a thousand dollars before they realized something wasn't quite right with the money.

"If you look closely, there's some marks here, and when you hold it up to the light, it obviously doesn't have the watermarks that our real bills do," Rohland's coworker, Jacob Keeler, explained.

It turns out the money was counterfeit, and police believe it may be tied to a robbery and drug deal that happened over the weekend.

Authorities say they chased one of the suspects across rooftops in the area and believe he may have dropped the fake money as he tried to escape capture.

The suspect, identified as Saladin Barnes, didn't get very far and was quickly apprehended by officers.

Officials say Barnes and another man, identified as Darien Springer, robbed a man and a woman and stole their car during a drug deal gone wrong.

They were both charged with robbery of a motor vehicle and receiving stolen property.

Barnes was also charged with illegal possession of a firearm and carrying a firearm without a license, while Springer was hit with charges of fleeing and driving under suspension.

[PA] Wyomissing gas-pump 'skimming' device linked to California-based debit-card cloning scheme (Reading Eagle)

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Reading Eagle [8/16/2019 12:15 PM, Steven Henshaw, 35K]
A covert wireless device discovered on a gas pump in Wyomissing turned out of the tentacles of a multistate identity-theft and bank-fraud ring that authorities allege operated out of California.

U.S. Attorney William M. McSwain, in announcing federal charges against seven defendants, lauded the cooperation of local and federal investigators as well as the U.S. Postal Service.

The indictment handed down in late June by a grand jury in Philadelphia specifically references work by Wyomissing Criminal Investigator Paul C. Baur IV to identify some of the suspects, all of whom face potential lengthy prison sentences and multimillion-dollar fines.

“As alleged in the indictment, this was a devious fraud utilizing technology to take advantage of victims who didn’t even see it coming,” McSwain said in a press release. “I want to thank the many agents and investigators who worked tirelessly to uncover this scheme and assist my office in bringing this indictment.”

The defendants, mostly European men living in California after immigrating from the Baltics, schemed to steal money from victims’ bank accounts by making fraudulent ATM withdrawals and money order purchases in multiple states, the indictment alleges. They set up shop in hotels while conducting their activities, including installing Bluetooth devices known as skimmers under the noses of nearby gas station operators.

Members of the group captured the victims’ debit card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs) from victims as they used their debit cards at gas stations to purchase gas, investigators said.

The case was investigated by the FBI Philadelphia Organized Crime Task Force, the Postal Inspection Service, the Secret Service and several local law enforcement agencies in Delaware and eastern Pennsylvania, including Wyomissing police.

The following were named in the indictment and are in custody: Hamlet Tantushyan, 35, and Verzh Movsisyan, 41, both of Glendale, Calif.; Armen Sahakyan, 41, of Burbank, Calif.; David Daldumyan, 29, of Van Nuys, Calif; Hrchya Gyulumyan, 39, of Sun Valley, Calif; Gevush Gabrielyan, 27, of North Hollywood, Calif; and Roman Gridjusko, 30, of Philadelphia.

Evidence obtained by Baur, who charged two of the suspects, was cited in the indictment of the seven defendants and was chronicled in Reading Eagle articles in December 2016 and February 2017.

According to Eagle archives and the indictment:

Within days of a skimming device being discovered in a gas pump at Friendly Food Market, 1000 N. Park Road, more than 60 customers who used debit cards to make purchases there reported their accounts had been compromised.

Baur put out an alert through a regional law enforcement network. He got a response from a

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detective in Newark, Del., who was investigating an organized group that carried out a similar fraud.

The detective said a skimming device had been found inside one of the gas pumps in that area.

After days or weeks of collecting the data, the suspect manufactured duplicate cards and used the clones to make multiple cash withdrawals at convenience stores and buy money orders from the postal service.

The Newark detective told Baur that he was investigating with the postal inspector in Delaware.

Baur collaborated with the inspector. He said they learned that Gridjusko had bought 20 postal money orders using debit cards that had been compromised and reported stolen.

The Wyomissing investigator later learned that police in Bensalem, Bucks County, had contact with Gridjusko on Nov. 27. Baur learned Gridjusko had rented a van that was spotted at the Friendly Food Market in mid-November 2016.

A photograph of Gridjusko, taken by Bensalem police, matched security camera footage from the Wyomissing store.

The Bensalem's officer's report said Gridjusko told him that he was returning to his native Estonia in the coming weeks.

Baur obtained an arrest warrant Dec. 8, 2016. Fearing that Gridjusko might be trying to flee to his homeland by way of Mexico, he notified U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which in turn tipped off Mexican authorities who stopped Gridjusko at the border and handed him over to U.S. authorities.

Over the next few months, cloned debit cards from several institutions continued to be used mostly by purchasing high-value money orders at post offices or making ATM withdrawals.

On Feb. 6, 2017, Baur was driving home from Philadelphia after a meeting with a postal inspector when he decided to take a detour through Bensalem, an immediate suburb. Financial institutions were reporting numerous cloned cards were being used at ATMs at Wawa stores in the Philadelphia area.

Baur pulled into a Wawa and by chance saw a man making multiple transactions at an ATM. He contacted Bensalem police who took the man into custody. The suspect was a Russian who was in this country illegally and two fake IDs on him.

Two days later, federal agents were notified someone was trying to buy high-value money orders at a Levitttown, Bucks County, post office. Employees had been alerted that cloned cards were being used to buy money orders at Philadelphia-area post offices.

An employee followed the person to a parking lot and photographed the car and its license plate. Agents learned the car was registered to a rental company and had a GPS tracking device. They tracked the car to a Bensalem hotel, where they learned he man who rented

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the car is from California and was renting a room.

Agents got a warrant and searched the room, where they found 176 cloned cards, $35,800 and nine postal money orders totaling $8,300.

In addition to being presented with video footage, at lest one undisclosed cooperating witness testified before the grand jury about he was recruited by the leaders in California after immigrating from the Baltics.

Baur was in his first year as a criminal investigator after 18 years as a patrolman and K-9 officer with the department when the skimming case was assigned to him.

He credited the store owner with diligently sifting through security video and providing key information, such as the driver's accent, that helped give investigators a running start after complaints from victims started coming in.

Baur's supervisor, Lt. Thomas Endy, cited Baur's diligence and tenacity in that and an unrelated homeowner scam case in nominating Baur for a prestigious award. Endy submitted two Eagle articles about those arrests to the American Society for Industrial Security's Schuylkill Valley Chapter, which named Baur its 2016 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

[DC] Man with knife in bulletproof vest taken into custody outside Israeli Embassy in DC (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/16/2019 2:39 PM, Caitlin Yilek, 855K]
A man in a bulletproof vest was taken into police custody Friday morning outside the Embassy of Israel in Washington, D.C., according to NBC News.

Secret Service, responding to a report of a suspicious person, found a man who told them he was carrying a knife and had left his car running near the embassy.

Police found a dog and a bullet inside his vehicle but no weapon. The man, who has not been identified, gave his knife to law enforcement.

A law enforcement official said the man did not threaten anyone verbally or with the knife. He is also not believed to have approached the security checkpoint at the embassy.

Secret Service closed the roads around the embassy until "the conclusion of the investigation."

The incident comes as the Israeli government barred Reps. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan from visiting the country. Both congresswomen have been critical of Israel. They were originally scheduled to visit this weekend.

The government then gave permission to Tlaib to visit her grandmother in the West Bank, if she vowed to not promote boycott activity against Israel during the trip, but Tlaib called the demands "oppressive" and said she would not be making the trip.

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[DC] Secret Service Clears Streets Near Israeli Embassy Following Reports of 'Suspicious Person, Vehicle' (Washington Free Beacon)
Washington Free Beacon [8/16/2019 11:10 AM, Adam Kredo]
The U.S. Secret Service confirmed Friday morning that it has shuttered the streets surrounding the Israeli embassy in downtown Washington, D.C. following reports "of a suspicious person and vehicle," a Secret Service spokesperson confirmed to the Washington Free Beacon.

"This morning at approximately 8:00 a.m. Secret Service Uniformed Division officers responded to the report of a suspicious person and vehicle near the Embassy of Israel," the official said. "Uniformed Division officers initiated road closures to vehicular and pedestrian traffic and MPD EOD responded to the scene and cleared the vehicle. Road closures remain in effect and will be lifted at the conclusion of the investigation."

Multiple sources confirmed early Friday that the streets had been shutdown and Secret Service was on the scene investigating.

The incident follows a week of controversy over a now suspended visit to Israel by Reps. Ilhan Omar (D., Minn.) and Rashida Tlaib (D., Mich.). The Israeli government denied both representatives entry to the country due to their support for the virulently anti-Semitic Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

Israel reversed its decision to block Tlaib from entering the country, authorizing Tlaib to visit on humanitarian grounds. Tlaib declined to visit.

It remains unclear if the incident is tied to the fallout over this decision. The Free Beacon will update this report as more information becomes available.

[DC] Man wearing bulletproof vest taken into custody outside Israeli Embassy in D.C. (NBC News)
NBC News [8/16/2019 1:01 PM, Pete Williams and Minyvonne Burke, 4138K]
A man wearing a bulletproof vest and armed with a knife was taken into custody Friday morning outside the Embassy of Israel in Washington, according to a law enforcement official.

Secret Service Uniformed Division officers responded to a report of a suspicious person and vehicle near the embassy at around 8 a.m., the agency said in a statement.

The man, who has not been identified, told Secret Service he had a knife on him and had left his car running nearby, the law enforcement official said.

Police checked the man's vehicle and found a dog inside and one bullet, but no weapon. The vehicle was eventually cleared. The man surrendered his knife to authorities.

According to the law enforcement official, the man apparently did not threaten anyone and did not brandish the knife. It's also believed that he did not approach an embassy security checkpoint.

The man will most likely undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

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Roads near the embassy were closed Friday morning. The Secret Service said closures "will be lifted at the conclusion of the investigation."

The incident follows Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announcing on Thursday that Reps. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan would not be allowed to visit the country. The pro-Palestinian Democratic congresswomen, who have both been outspoken critics of Israel, were scheduled to arrive on Sunday.

"Only a few days ago, we received their visitation plan, and it became clear that they were planning a campaign whose sole purpose was to strengthen the boycott and negate Israel's legitimacy," Netanyahu said in a statement, referring to the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, known as BDS.

The Prime Minister said "unlike all Democratic and Republican" lawmakers who have visited in the past, Omar and Tlaib avoided seeking a meeting with an Israeli official "in both the government and the opposition." Netanyahu said their visit was intended "to hurt Israel and increase its unrest against it."

An itinerary of Omar and Tlaib involved no meetings with Israeli or Palestinian officials, and instead showed they planned to meet exclusively with human rights organizations and NGOs from both sides to get a non-political assessment of the situation on the ground.

Omar said Netanyahu's decision was an "affront" and accused him of giving in to President Donald Trump, who tweeted earlier Thursday that it "would show great weakness" if Israel allowed the two congresswomen to enter the country.

Tlaib, who was born in the United States and has family who still live in a Palestinian village in the West Bank, said in a tweet on Thursday that the decision to bar her and Omar from visiting Israel was "a sign of weakness."

Israeli Interior Minister Aryeh Deri reversed course Friday, saying in a statement that Tlaib would be allowed in the country so she could visit with her grandmother. Tlaib rejected the offer, tweeting: "I have decided that visiting my grandmother under these oppressive conditions stands against everything I believe in."

[DC] Israel's embassy in Washington reopened (DEBKAfile)
DEBKAfile [8/16/2019 12:25 PM, Staff, 75K]
The security scare surrounding the US embassy in Washington on Friday was unfounded and so the US Secret Service has reopened the street leading to the compound after its brief closure. Staff are allowed to return to work.

[VA] After credit card skimmer found at James City bank, police warn residents to check bank statements (Virginia Gazette)
Virginia Gazette [8/16/2019 1:45 PM, Steve Roberts Jr, 6K]
n increasingly potent criminal trend has made its way to Williamsburg.

A device used to steal credit card information, called a skimmer, was found at the BayPort Credit Union in New Town on Aug. 10, according to James City County Police Department spokeswoman Stephanie Williams.

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Skimmers are used to capture debit and credit card data and personal identification numbers, according to the FBI.

The devices often encase the normal card slot on ATMs, gas pumps and other machines and are retrieved by scammers who then use the data to drain bank accounts, purchase things or sell on the Internet, according to the FBI.

In some instances, banks and their patrons have been bilked out of hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to an FBI news release.

The skimmers generally need to be physically retrieved to collect the data so scammers will return to an ATM to collect their devices, according to the FBI.

That's what happened at BayPort, according to Williams. Bank staff called police after a customer reported the ATM wouldn't accept their debit card, according to the bank's fraud and security supervisor Pearl King.

"We are continuing our investigation and conducting inspections on all our ATMs twice a day," King said. No customers have reported to the bank that they have been impacted as of Friday afternoon.

The banks president and CEO Jim Mears said the bank had spread the inspections practice to all of its branches.

Williams urged anyone who may have used the ATM before the skimmer was found to contact the bank and police.

FBI Norfolk spokeswoman Christina Pullen could not confirm or deny whether there was an investigation into the recent incidents, although Heilman said the 2017 case was transferred to the FBI.

Protect yourself: what to look for
When you buy a new smartphone, you may buy a case for it. Skimmers are similar to phone cases; they often slip right over a credit or debit card slot on a machine.

A good way to check on the slot is to wiggle it, according to Williams. Many credit card skimmers are simply taped onto an ATM or gas pump.

"If you just gently wiggle it and it moves, that's a good sign it probably has a skimmer on it," Williams said.

Another thing to look out for: does any part of the ATM slot cover any of the lettering on the machine such as a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation disclosure notice, Williams said.

Heilman and Williams both had a list of tips to protect yourself:

Look for pry marks, scratches or things out of the ordinary.

Protect your PIN.

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Check your bank and credit card statements for fraudulent charges.

Monitor and report all charges that seem out of the ordinary, sometimes scammers will check to see if an account works by withdrawing a small amount of money at first.

Use ATMs or gas pumps in places with security cameras.

Been affected?

If you are a BayPort customer and believe your information was compromised call 1-800-928-8801.

If you think you've been the victim of a crime, contact the Williamsburg Police Department at 220-2331 or the James City County Police Department at 253-1800.

[VA] Credit card skimmers? Here? Well, better watch it (Williamsburg Yorktown Daily)
Williamsburg Yorktown Daily [8/16/2019 8:00 PM, Alexa Doiron, 7K]
James City County Police are warning residents to keep an eye out for technology that can steal credit card information.

Authorities sent out an alert, saying police had found a skimmer at one of the local banks.

Stephanie Williams, spokeswoman for the police, said it was found at the Bayport Credit Union in New Town.

A skimmer is an inconspicuous device that is placed over a card reader on a machine that scans credit or debit cards, similar to ATM's and gas pumps. When they are placed on a machine, the criminal will come back after a few days to retrieve it and can then access the card information for all of the cards scanned through the device, authorities said.

Williams said it's important for people to know that if they notice a skimmer, they should immediately report it to police or financial institution. A skimmer only works if the person who placed it there is able to come back for it.

To avoid becoming a victim of a skimmer, police suggest taking a good look at a card reader to see if it appears to have been tampered with. Users should feel around the card reader to see if parts wiggle or move when gently pressed.

One sign is that some skimmers will cover the flashing indicator light on ATMs.

[NC] Police: Man and woman pass several counterfeit $50 bills at Walmart in Kitty Hawk (WTKR)
WTKR [8/16/2019 1:29 PM, Julia Varnier, 88K]
Police are looking for help in identifying two suspects that they say were passing out counterfeit bills.

On August 11, an unidentified black male and female went to the Walmart in Kitty Hawk and passed several counterfeit $50 bills.

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The subjects were seen leaving in a silver or light colored four door passenger car.

If you have any information about these people, please contact the Kitty Hawk Police Department at (252) 261-3895 or send a private message to the department's Facebook and someone will respond back to you.

All information is confidential and a cash reward may be available.

[IL] Police: Indiana woman used fake money at IHOP, Buffalo Wild Wings, Culver's and more (The Herald News)
The Herald News [8/16/2019 5:34 PM, Felix Sarver, 15K]
An Indiana woman was arrested after she allegedly used a fake $100 bill at several businesses in New Lenox, including IHOP, Jewel-Osco, Buffalo Wild Wings, Beggars Pizza and Culver's.

Shortly after 2:45 p.m. Aug. 7, police received a report of a fake $100 bill being used at the IHOP restaurant at 411 E. Lincoln Highway, New Lenox Deputy Police Chief Louis Alessandrini said.

An officer arrived and began investigating Catherine C. Spearman, 24, of Gary, Indiana, using the fake bill, Alessandrini said.

He said the bill was confirmed to be counterfeit, and she was taken to the New Lenox Police Department. The officer was able to see that the security strip was missing from the bill, he said.

The police learned Spearman also allegedly passed a fake $100 bill at Jewel-Osco, Buffalo Wild Wings, Beggars Pizza and Culver's, Alessandrini said.

"The counterfeit money was recovered from those locations," he said.

Alessandrini said video from those businesses allegedly showed Spearman tendering the fake money. The counterfeit bills all had the same serial number, he said.

Spearman was arrested and taken to the Will County jail. She was released at 6:15 p.m. Aug. 8 after posting 10% of her $12,000 bond.

Spearman faces five counts of felony forgery.

A judge ordered Spearman to have no contact with places she allegedly gave fake money to, court records said.

[IA] Clermont man charged for producing counterfeit money among other crimes (Kgan)
Kgan [8/16/2019 8:49 AM, Associated Press, 10K]
Authorities say they've found a home lab being used to make counterfeit cash in northeast Iowa.

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Fayette County deputies serving a search warrant at a Clermont residence say they found computers, printers, special paper and thousands of counterfeit bills in denominations of $5, $10, $20 and $50. They say they also found drug paraphernalia and prepaid credit cards.

Records say 33-year-old Jason Massman lives at the home and has been charged with ongoing criminal conduct, falsifying public documents and with other crimes. Court records don't list the name of an attorney who could comment for him.
The sheriff's office says counterfeit cash has shown up recently in several Fayette County communities.

[IA] Clermont man accused of passing counterfeit bills in northeast Iowa (Radio Iowa)
Radio Iowa [8/16/2019 12:37 PM, Darin Svenson, 2K]
A Clermont man is jailed after counterfeit money was discovered in several communities in northeast Iowa.

The Fayette County Sheriff's Department says 33-year-old Jason George Massman was charged with on-going criminal conduct, falsifying public documents, forgery, unlawful possession of prescription drugs and possession of drug paraphernalia. Authorities say the counterfeit bills could be in multiple counties in the northeast Iowa.

They're asking the public to examine any 100, 50, 20, ten or five dollar bills. Fayette County Sheriff Marty Fisher says the investigation is on-going and more arrests could be made.

[OR] Woman gets 40 days for passing fake bills at Corvallis businesses (Albany Democrat Herald)
Albany Democrat Herald [8/17/2019 9:00 AM, ANTHONY RIMEL Corvallis Gazette-Times, 12K]
A Corvallis woman was sentenced to 40 days in jail in Benton County Circuit Court on Friday for her role in a forgery scheme that targeted a dozen Corvallis businesses.

Michelle Ann Runyan, 34, pleaded guilty to two counts of possession of a forged instrument and two counts of forgery in the first degree in court.

Police initially arrested Jordan Earl Price, 36, of Corvallis, in April on more than 40 counts associated with making fake bills, making purchases with them at Corvallis businesses and taking change in real currency. Runyan was mentioned in initial police reports as aiding Price, but she was not charged until May.

"It was quite an unfortunate situation where quite a number of local businesses fell victim to them," said Benton County Deputy District Attorney Kevin Hashizume.

Runyan initially faced nearly two dozen charges, but most were dismissed as part of a plea deal that will also give her 18 months of probation and require her, with Price, to pay more than $1,700 in restitution to the affected businesses.

Runyan apologized for her role in the crimes in court.

"I'm embarrassed at the whole situation and sorry," she said.

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Judge Matthew Donohue ordered Runyan to report to the Benton County Jail Monday to begin her sentence.

Price pleaded guilty to charges in the incident in June and was sentenced to 26 months in prison.

Coast Guard

[MA] 5 rescued after boat overturns following river collision (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 3:25 PM, Associated Press, 337K]
Five people have escaped serious injury after their boat overturned following a collision with another vessel on the Merrimack River in northeastern Massachusetts.

Coast Guard officials say the 21-foot (6.4-meter) Jenna Marie capsized after colliding with the 58-foot (17.7-meter) Captain George just after 12 p.m. Saturday on the river between Salisbury and Newburyport. Both vessels were charter boats.

Authorities say nearby boaters pulled the five people from the water. One person suffered non-life-threatening injuries.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the crash. The Coast Guard is investigating.

The Eagle-Tribune reports local boaters have said the water at the river's mouth can become hazardous due to the current, tides, the wind and a sandbar. Boats have been known to strike the sandbar.

[NJ] Coast Guard rescues diver who disappeared exploring shipwreck off New Jersey (FOX News)
FOX News [8/18/2019 3:43 PM, Robert Gearty, 10258K]
The Coast Guard reported Sunday the rescue of a diver who disappeared as she and members of her dive team were exploring an underwater shipwreck off the New Jersey coast.

Rescue boats responded Saturday morning to a distress call from the Gypsy Blood, a commercial dive vessel, reporting the woman had vanished off Asbury Park.

The diver was found several hours later near Shark River Inlet.

"The boat crew located the missing diver approximately two miles southwest of the dive vessel after sighting her floating in the water with an orange inflatable surface marker buoy," the Coast Guard said in a news release.

She was not hurt.
"Diving is an inherently risky activity, which is why it is so important to be safe and prepared," Petty Officer 1st Class Dan Box said. "I'm happy to say that the missing diver rescued today was both prepared and experienced, which immensely helped this search to have a successful conclusion."

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[NJ] Diver missing after exploring shipwreck found, rescued (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/18/2019 10:26 AM, Staff, 337K]
The Coast Guard says a diver was rescued after she was reported missing by her dive group while exploring an underwater shipwreck in New Jersey over the weekend.

Officials say rescue crews responded to an 11:20 a.m. Saturday distress call from the commercial dive vessel Gypsy Blood saying the diver had gone missing near Shark River Inlet.

Authorities say a 29-foot response boat found the missing diver about two miles southwest of the dive vessel after sighting her floating in the water with an orange inflatable surface marker buoy.

Another vessel had also assisted, dispatching two divers to search underwater after arriving on scene.

An official said the missing diver "was both prepared and experienced" which "immensely helped" the search reach a successful conclusion.

[FL] The Coast Guard is searching for two firefighters who disappeared on a Florida fishing trip (CNN)
CNN [8/18/2019 2:33 PM, Amanda Jackson and Artemis Moshtaghian, 6094K]
Authorities say they have searched almost 5,000 square miles of ocean for two firefighters who disappeared after setting out from Port Canaveral, Florida, on a fishing trip.

Brian McCluney and Justin Walker were last seen Friday morning on surveillance video launching their boat into the water at the 300 Christopher Columbus boat ramp, according to the Coast Guard. Their destination was 8A Reef, an offshore fishing spot, the Coast Guard said.

Family members contacted the Coast Guard after the men didn't return Friday evening. Both men have been identified as firefighters -- McCluney with Jacksonville Fire and Rescue and Walker with Fairfax County, Virginia, Fire and Rescue.

The Coast Guard, along with multiple local and county agencies, started searching by boat and air on Friday night.

"I hoped that by daylight it would bring us something," McCluney's wife, Stephanie, told CNN affiliate WFTV on Saturday. "I understand it is like a needle in a haystack. But these two men are probably the most resourceful men."

The mens' boat belonged to McCluney's late father, who passed away last month, according to McCluney's brother Kevin. McCluney's wife told CNN affiliate WKMG that the boat has had mechanical problems in the past.

By Sunday, the Coast Guard said its boats and an airplane had searched an estimated 4,800 square miles -- as far north as the Georgia coast -- trying to locate the fishermen. More than a dozen good Samaritans with boats also have joined officials in the search effort.

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"Want to know about our bond with each other? These are the times that we come together to accomplish amazing things...we have about 11 boats with nearly 50 firefighters assisting @USCGSoutheast with search out of Vilano and Daytona beach this am," tweeted the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department.

As the search continues, the Coast Guard is asking for anyone with information to call 904-714-7558.

[FL] Coast Guard searching for firefighters who vanished in fishing trip off Florida (FOX News)
FOX News [8/18/2019 7:50 PM, Louis Casiano, 10258K]
The Coast Guard was continuing its search Sunday for two missing firefighters who failed to return from a boating trip off Florida's coast Friday.

Justin Walker and Brian McCluney left Port Canaveral -- 50 miles east of Orlando -- Friday morning in a 24-foot center console vessel to head toward the "8A" reef to fish, the Coast Guard said in a statement Saturday.

Family members notified officials when they didn't return by Friday evening.

The Coast Guard said reports of a similar boat 50 miles off Jacksonville turned out to be unrelated debris, Fox 30 noted.

As of Sunday, search crews had covered 4,800 square miles, the Coast Guard said in a Facebook post.

The search has been concentrated in the Gulf Stream area on water and air. Multiple agencies, as well as good Samaritans using their own boats, were participating.

Tampa Bay news outlet WFTS reported that Walker is employed as a master technician with the Fairfax, Va., fire department and McCluney works for the Jacksonville fire department, according to the International Association of Fire Fighters, which counts both men as members.

[LA] Coast Guard reports oil spill in south Louisiana (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 1:48 PM, Associated Press, 2613K]
An oil spill has been spotted near an estimated 200-foot (61-meter) by 600-foot (183-meter) area of marshland near Plaquemines Parish in southern Louisiana.

In a news release, the Coast Guard said late Thursday that OMI Environmental Solutions has put out about 300 feet (91 meters) of boom around the impacted area in Cox Bay, which is part of Breton Sound.

The Coast Guard says the owner of the flowline, Time Energy, reports the source of the leak has been secured. The company says it's working with the Coast Guard and state agencies to mitigate environmental damage.

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There's no reported impact on wildlife. The cause of the incident remains under investigation.

[LA] Coast Guard searching for man in Mississippi River (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 4:30 PM, Associated Press, 337K]
The Coast Guard is searching for a man in the Mississippi River in New Orleans.

News outlets report the Coast Guard received a report of a person entering the water at 9:03 a.m. Saturday.

The man, described as being in his mid-60s, was seen wearing pajamas with a white shirt.

Authorities say he entered the water from a walkway near the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas. Coast Guard officials are unsure if he fell into the water.

[CA] The Coast Guard found $1 million worth of marijuana floating off California (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 5:50 PM, Alisha Ebrahimji, 6094K]
The US Coast Guard said it and its partner agencies recovered 1,300 pounds of marijuana wrapped in plastic from the water near Santa Catalina Island, one of California's channel islands southwest of Los Angeles, this week.

The 43 bales were transferred to Customs and Border Protection, which estimated the value at $1 million.

A civilian "reported multiple bales of what the caller believed to be narcotics floating" in the sea, according to the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard said authorities don't know where the bales came from -- or who is responsible. The case is being investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and the Coast Guard Investigative Service.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Aidan Cooney, a Coast Guard spokesman, said that when contraband is turned over to Customs and Border Protection, it is usually documented, preserved as evidence in the case of a prosecution or investigation, and eventually destroyed.

The seizure is just one of many over the past month.

In July, the Coast Guard shared a video of personnel jumping onto a moving submarine carrying 17,000 pounds of cocaine in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

A few weeks later, the Coast Guard seized 26,000 pounds of cocaine worth $350 million in several operations in the eastern Pacific, including one that involved a high-speed chase with suspected drug smugglers.

Cooney said the Coast Guard has had 10 at-sea marijuana seizures weighing 5,745 pounds this year. Last year, there were 11 seizures totaling 5,872 pounds.

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The Coast Guard encourages anyone who sees suspicious activity on the water, signs of distress or hazards to navigation to report it.

CISA/Cybersecurity

A cyberattack could wreak destruction comparable to a nuclear weapon (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 9:02 AM, Jeremy Straub, 2613K]
People around the world may be worried about nuclear tensions rising, but I think they're missing the fact that a major cyberattack could be just as damaging – and hackers are already laying the groundwork.

With the U.S. and Russia pulling out of a key nuclear weapons pact – and beginning to develop new nuclear weapons – plus Iran tensions and North Korea again test-launching missiles, the global threat to civilization is high. Some fear a new nuclear arms race.

That threat is serious – but another could be as serious, and is less visible to the public. So far, most of the well-known hacking incidents, even those with foreign government backing, have done little more than steal data. Unfortunately, there are signs that hackers have placed malicious software inside U.S. power and water systems, where it's lying in wait, ready to be triggered. The U.S. military has also reportedly penetrated the computers that control Russian electrical systems.

Many intrusions already

As someone who studies cybersecurity and information warfare, I'm concerned that a cyberattack with widespread impact, an intrusion in one area that spreads to others or a combination of lots of smaller attacks, could cause significant damage, including mass injury and death rivaling the death toll of a nuclear weapon.

Unlike a nuclear weapon, which would vaporize people within 100 feet and kill almost everyone within a half-mile, the death toll from most cyberattacks would be slower. People might die from a lack of food, power or gas for heat or from car crashes resulting from a corrupted traffic light system. This could happen over a wide area, resulting in mass injury and even deaths.

This might sound alarmist, but look at what has been happening in recent years, in the U.S. and around the world.

In early 2016, hackers took control of a U.S. treatment plant for drinking water, and changed the chemical mixture used to purify the water. If changes had been made – and gone unnoticed – this could have led to poisonings, an unusable water supply and a lack of water.

In 2016 and 2017, hackers shut down major sections of the power grid in Ukraine. This attack was milder than it could have been, as no equipment was destroyed during it, despite the ability to do so. Officials think it was designed to send a message. In 2018, unknown cybercriminals gained access throughout the United Kingdom's electricity system; in 2019 a similar incursion may have penetrated the U.S. grid.

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In August 2017, a Saudi Arabian petrochemical plant was hit by hackers who tried to blow up equipment by taking control of the same types of electronics used in industrial facilities of all kinds throughout the world. Just a few months later, hackers shut down monitoring systems for oil and gas pipelines across the U.S. This primarily caused logistical problems – but it showed how an insecure contractor's systems could potentially cause problems for primary ones.

The FBI has even warned that hackers are targeting nuclear facilities. A compromised nuclear facility could result in the discharge of radioactive material, chemicals or even possibly a reactor meltdown. A cyberattack could cause an event similar to the incident in Chernobyl. That explosion, caused by inadvertent error, resulted in 50 deaths and evacuation of 120,000 and has left parts of the region uninhabitable for thousands of years into the future.

Mutual assured destruction

My concern is not intended to downplay the devastating and immediate effects of a nuclear attack. Rather, it's to point out that some of the international protections against nuclear conflicts don't exist for cyberattacks. For instance, the idea of "mutual assured destruction" suggests that no country should launch a nuclear weapon at another nuclear-armed nation: The launch would likely be detected, and the target nation would launch its own weapons in response, destroying both nations.

Cyberattackers have fewer inhibitions. For one thing, it's much easier to disguise the source of a digital incursion than it is to hide where a missile blasted off from. Further, cyberwarfare can start small, targeting even a single phone or laptop. Larger attacks might target businesses, such as banks or hotels, or a government agency. But those aren't enough to escalate a conflict to the nuclear scale.

Nuclear grade cyberattacks

There are three basic scenarios for how a nuclear grade cyberattack might develop. It could start modestly, with one country's intelligence service stealing, deleting or compromising another nation's military data. Successive rounds of retaliation could expand the scope of the attacks and the severity of the damage to civilian life.

In another situation, a nation or a terrorist organization could unleash a massively destructive cyberattack – targeting several electricity utilities, water treatment facilities or industrial plants at once, or in combination with each other to compound the damage.

Perhaps the most concerning possibility, though, is that it might happen by mistake. On several occasions, human and mechanical errors very nearly destroyed the world during the Cold War; something analogous could happen in the software and hardware of the digital realm.

Defending against disaster

Just as there is no way to completely protect against a nuclear attack, there are only ways to make devastating cyberattacks less likely.

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The first is that governments, businesses and regular people need to secure their systems to prevent outside intruders from finding their way in, and then exploiting their connections and access to dive deeper.

Critical systems, like those at public utilities, transportation companies and firms that use hazardous chemicals, need to be much more secure. One analysis found that only about one-fifth of companies that use computers to control industrial machinery in the U.S. even monitor their equipment to detect potential attacks – and that in 40% of the attacks they did catch, the intruder had been accessing the system for more than a year. Another survey found that nearly three-quarters of energy companies had experienced some sort of network intrusion in the previous year.

But all those systems can't be protected without skilled cybersecurity staffs to handle the work. At present, nearly a quarter of all cybersecurity jobs in the U.S. are vacant, with more positions opening up than there are people to fill them. One recruiter has expressed concern that even some of the jobs that are filled are held by people who aren't qualified to do them. The solution is more training and education, to teach people the skills they need to do cybersecurity work, and to keep existing workers up to date on the latest threats and defense strategies.

If the world is to hold off major cyberattacks – including some with the potential to be as damaging as a nuclear strike – it will be up to each person, each company, each government agency to work on its own and together to secure the vital systems on which people's lives depend.

Amazon: Facial recognition program for cops detects emotion (San Francisco Chronicle)

San Francisco Chronicle [8/16/2019 4:44 PM, Associated Press, 337K]

Amazon has announced its facial recognition program used by one Washington state police agency can now detect emotion, generating concerns from privacy advocates.

KING-TV reported Thursday that Amazon announced its Rekognition tool has been enhanced to detect basic emotions, including fear.

Officials say the American Civil Liberties Union is seeking a delay on police use of the product without regulation until the implications are discussed.

Amazon says Rekognition could be used to monitor unsafe online content and find missing persons on social media.

The ACLU says it tested the tool by comparing Congress members to a database of mug shots and found 28 false matches were returned.

Amazon says the ACLU did not use the tool correctly.

Amazon says the Washington County Sheriff's Office is the only agency using it.

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[GA] Judge blasts Georgia officials' handling of election system (San Francisco Chronicle)

San Francisco Chronicle [8/17/2019 8:26 AM, Kate Brumback, AP, 2613K]

Georgia election officials have for years ignored, downplayed and failed to address serious problems with the state's election management system and voting machines, a federal judge said in a scathing order this week.

U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg said those problems place a burden on citizens' rights to cast a vote and have it reliably counted. She called Georgia's voting system "antiquated, seriously flawed, and vulnerable to failure, breach, contamination, and attack."

Despite those findings, Totenberg ruled Thursday that Georgia voters will use that same election system this fall because of concerns about the state's capacity to make an interim switch while also implementing a new system.

Plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging Georgia's system had asked Totenberg to order an immediate switch to hand-marked paper ballots for special and municipal elections this fall. But she declined, citing worries about the state's capacity to manage an interim switch while also implementing a new system that is supposed to be in place for the March 24 presidential primaries.

"(T)he totality of evidence in this case reveals that the Secretary of State's efforts in monitoring the security of its voting systems have been lax at best — a clear indication that Georgia's computerized election system is vulnerable in actual use," Totenberg wrote in a 153-page ruling that devotes considerable space to chronicling those shortcomings.

Here are some of the concerns Totenberg identified:

Security experts in 2017 disclosed a gaping hole exposing personal data for 6.7 million Georgia voters, as well as passwords used by county officials to access election-staging files. That lapse at the Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, which managed the system for the secretary of state, still wasn't fixed six months after it was first reported to election authorities.

The relevant servers were wiped soon after the lawsuit was filed. Totenberg said officials' assertions that the servers "were simply 'repurposed ' and not intentionally destroyed or wiped is flatly not credible."

Election officials have refused to "fully acknowledge or remedy these circumstances and their broader ramifications for the voting system's security and reliability," Totenberg wrote. She also said election officials had shown "inconsistent candor" with her about this and other voting system security issues.

The Center for Elections Systems eventually became part of the secretary of state's office. Michael Barnes, who directed it at Kennesaw State remains in that role. But Barnes "could recall little or what expressly was done" after they received notification of the breach, Totenberg wrote.

Totenberg cited a brief filed by the Electronic Privacy Information Center that says "almost from their inception" the paperless electronic voting machines Georgia has used since 2002

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"have been plagued by warnings that the voting machines are unreliable, insecure, unverifiable."

"(W)hile Georgia election officials have effectively taken no steps to address these deficiencies with its DRE-based system — a litany of other states have abandoned the plagued machines in exchange for a more secure and reliable alternative voting method," Totenberg wrote.

Barnes testified last month that the state's election management system, which is used to build ballots, is housed on private computers not connected to the internet, saying the system is "air gapped." He also testified that he uses a "lockable" USB drive to transfer files between those computers and internet-connected computers.

Relying on testimony from cybersecurity experts, Totenberg wrote that using a USB drive in that way exposes the data to malware and leaves the entire election system vulnerable to contamination.

The state has a contract with election equipment company Election Systems & Software, which employs three people to design and configure Georgia's databases. They built all the ballots for last November's elections, Barnes testified.

They work from home on computers disconnected from the internet, Barnes testified. But Totenberg noted that Barnes couldn't say what physical security measures they have at their homes and that their computers are "outside the secure facilities that the Secretary of State maintains for ballot building."

Fortalice Solutions, a cybersecurity firm hired by the secretary of state's office to do risk assessments, identified 22 security risks in the networks it examined for an October 2017 report. In a subsequent Nov. 30, 2018, report Fortalice found that just three of those risks had been fixed and another three were in the process of being fixed.

Totenberg wrote that the record includes "scant" evidence of what "targeted remedial measures" state officials took following the November 2018 report.

Totenberg also wrote that the state never asked Fortalice or another expert "to conduct an actual cybersecurity review and analysis" of its election-related systems and databases.

Totenberg cited a "mountain of voter testimony showing that these vulnerabilities have a tangible impact" on voters' attempts to cast a ballot and have their vote counted.

The plaintiffs provided statements from 137 Georgia voters, two county poll workers and 15 poll watchers about problems during the November 2018 midterm election. Those included: self-casting ballots, malfunctioning voting machines, voter selections flipping to another candidate, and electronic pollbooks showing incorrect polling places or addresses for voters.

In an email to The Associated Press, Tess Hammock, spokeswoman for Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, said, "These conclusions are silly and unfounded. At the end of the day no judge should be susceptible to political Rhetoric."

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In a subsequent email she added that the secretary of state's office looks forward to implementing the new system.

Much of what Totenberg mentioned took place while now-Gov. Brian Kemp was secretary of state. Kemp spokeswoman Candice Broce didn't respond to emails seeking comment.

Lawyers for the state have argued that implementing a new election system resolves the problems of the old system.

State election officials testified that steps were taken to ensure the election management system's safety when it was transferred from Kennesaw State, and that they had acted to remedy vulnerabilities identified in risk assessments.

During a hearing last month, under questioning by a plaintiffs' attorney, Barnes said, "I feel confident in Georgia's voting system, yes."

[TX] Ransomware attack cripples at least 20 local Texas agencies, state government says (FOX News)
FOX News [8/17/2019 8:23 PM, Melissa Leon, 10258K]
At least 20 local government entities across Texas have been taken hostage by a coordinated ransomware attack, the Texas Department of Information Resources announced Friday.

The specific agencies and their jurisdictions were not disclosed, nor did the department say whether the cybercriminals had specified an amount to pay in ransom.

Ransomware is a type of malware, or malicious software, that locks a computer and all its data until a user pays a specified amount to regain control of the system. Attackers typically request payment in mostly untraceable digital currency such as Bitcoin. Once the ransom is paid, a key is given that unlocks the computer. Ransomware is spread unknowingly through infected websites and phishing, or spam, emails.

Texas DIR press secretary Elliot Sprehe told KUT Radio that the department was still gathering information about the attack.

"It looks like we found out earlier today, but we're not currently releasing who's impacted due to security concerns," he told the station Friday.

The Texas Military Department and Texas A&M University System's Cyberresponse and Security Operations Center are responding to the more "critically impacted" areas, the state's IT department said.

"DIR is fully committed to respond swiftly to this event and provide the necessary resources to bring these entities back online," it added.

Texas is not the first state to fall victim to ransomware attacks. It isn't uncommon for hackers to demand up to six-figure sums in order to get governments' computer systems back up and running, and it's also not unusual for towns to actually pay the ransom.

For example, CNBC reported in June that Baltimore had spent millions to regain access to

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its networks following ransomware attacks.

And in two Florida towns, hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent to obtain access to their local government networks again.

In Riviera Beach, Fla., the city paid $600,000 in ransom. Lake City, located west of Jacksonville, spent nearly half a million dollars to get its data unlocked.

The FBI estimates that more than 4,000 ransomware attacks have taken place every day since Jan. 1, 2016, marking a 300-percent increase over the roughly 1,000 estimated daily attacks in 2015.

[TX] Ransomware attack paralyzes 23 government computer systems in Texas (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [8/18/2019 5:04 PM, Steven Musil, 245K]
A coordinated ransomware attack took down systems operated by 23 entities in Texas on Friday, state authorities said Saturday. State agencies were working Saturday to restore the affected systems, the majority of which belong to small, local governments.

"At this time, the evidence gathered indicates the attacks came from one single threat actor," the Texas Department of Information Resources said in a statement Saturday. "Investigations into the origin of this attack are ongoing; however, response and recovery are the priority at this time."

Ransomware is malicious software that can lock up your files until you send hackers a ransom payment. It featured in the WannaCry attacks in May and the NotPetya attacks in 2017, both of which swept through hospitals, banks and governments in several countries.

The US Conference of Mayors said in July that there have been 22 ransomware attacks on city, county and state governments so far this year. Hackers paralyzed government computers in Albany, New York, in April. Then in June, hackers targeted two Florida cities: Lake City and Rivera Beach. The city councils in both Florida cities agreed to pay ransoms that added up to more than $1 million.

The identities of the affected agencies weren't revealed, nor was the size of the ransom, but authorities said systems operated by the state of Texas weren't affected. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security are assisting various Texas agencies in the investigation.

The DIR didn't immediately respond to a request for more information.

Terrorism Investigations

[NY] Man charged with placing false bomb in New York subway station has bail set at $200,000 (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/18/2019 8:18 PM, Associated Press, 9425K]
Bail was set at $200,000 Sunday for a homeless man from West Virginia who was charged with placing two devices that looked like pressure cookers in a New York City subway station.

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Larry Kenton Griffin II of Bruno, W.Va., appeared in Manhattan Criminal Court before Judge Keisha Espinal, who set the bail and ordered Griffin to return to court Friday.

A message seeking comment was left with Michael Croce, Griffin's attorney.

The court appearance came a day after Griffin's arrest and two days after Friday morning's commute was disrupted by a police investigation that began after two large cooking pots were spotted at Manhattan's Fulton subway station.

The incident inconvenienced thousands of commuters who use the subway lines that converge at the busy station next to the World Trade Center site, where a heavy police presence exists during every busy morning or evening commute since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Griffin, 26, was charged with two counts of placing a false bomb. He was arrested Saturday in the Bronx after photographs were distributed widely by law enforcement authorities.

A criminal complaint said Griffin knew the pots "would appear to be a bomb, destructive device, explosive and hazardous substance under circumstances in which it was likely to cause public alarm and inconvenience."

Guilty pleas in Mississippi bribery scheme: Four Louisiana men say they'll plead guilty to charges that they tried to bribe a Mississippi sheriff with $2,000 in casino chips, seeking lucrative jail contracts. Michael LeBlanc Sr. of Baton Rouge, Michael LeBlanc Jr. of Prairieville, Tawasky Ventroy of Opelousas and Jacque Jones of LaPlace have filed notices saying they will change their pleas. All are accused of scheming to win contracts to sell inmates phone service and commissary goods at a jail in Mississippi's Kemper County. The indictment also says the men paid former Mississippi Corrections Commissioner Christopher Epps $2,000 for help in getting contracts. Epps was convicted of taking more than $1.4 million in bribes and is serving a nearly 20-year prison sentence. U.S. District Judge Henry T. Wingate has set a plea hearing for Oct. 2 in Jackson. All four remain free on bail.

N.Y. police rescue woman from river: Two New York police officers rescued a 33-year-old woman who appeared to land in the Hudson River after a dispute with a boyfriend. Police said the rescue occurred near West 23rd Street about 8 a.m. Sunday after the woman tumbled into the water and appeared to be struggling. The Daily News and the New York Post quoted officers as saying the woman went into the water after her boyfriend rejected her. Officer Christopher Collins told the New York Post that the woman had drifted about 20 feet from a pier when he dropped his gun belt, bulletproof vest and shirt and jumped in. Collins then swam about 100 feet to grab the woman and pull her back to shore. Police said the woman was taken to Bellevue Hospital for treatment.

Shopping trip with handguns causes scare at Mo. Walmart: Two men with handguns in their waistbands alarmed shoppers when they entered a Walmart near Kansas City, Mo., but police said they were just buying ammunition for target practice. Police Sgt. Jake Becchina said the men were cooperative Sunday and were released because they hadn't violated Missouri law. Shopper Clennon Jones said that officers sped into the parking lot and that one jumped out with shotgun in hand. The Walmart store the men entered does not prohibit guns. Earlier this month, 22 people were killed in a shooting at a Walmart in El Paso.

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[NY] The man seen placing rice cookers around downtown New York is in custody, police say (CNN)
CNN [8/18/2019 9:33 AM, Brynn Gingras, Dakin Andone and Eric Levenson, 6094K]
The man who police say is seen on video dropping off rice cookers Friday in Manhattan was arrested and charged Saturday, according to an New York Police Department news release.

Larry Griffin, 26, has been charged with three counts of placing a false bomb, the release said.

Three rice cookers, initially described as suspicious devices, were discovered Friday morning in downtown Manhattan, prompting a brief scare and causing delays during the busy morning subway commute. All the devices were ultimately deemed safe. NYPD Sgt. Mary Frances O'Donnell told CNN that Griffin is implicated in all three rice cooker discoveries.

The first two suspicious appliances were found empty at the Fulton Street subway complex, NYPD Chief of Transit Edward Delatorre said Friday. A third empty rice cooker was found at West 16th Street and 7th Avenue, where it had been put out with the garbage.

Police video taken at the subway complex showed a white man in his 20s or 30s with dark hair and a shopping cart leaving two rice cookers at that scene, NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism John Miller said Friday.

"Obviously, we would like to speak to this person," Miller said, adding that he would not call the individual "a suspect."

"I don't know what the deliberate act is," he said, "whether it was to create fear and alarm on the part of the public, or whether he was discarding items he was no longer interested in."

Pressure cookers have previously been used in terrorist attacks, including in the 2016 bombing in New York's Chelsea neighborhood and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

[NY] Man arrested after rice cookers cause bomb scare in New York City (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [8/17/2019 9:50 AM, Staff, 855K]
Police have arrested a man in connection with three rice cookers that caused a bomb scare in New York City.

New York Police Department Chief of Detectives Dermot Shea tweeted a photo of the man Saturday morning.

"The below individual has been located and the investigation continues," he wrote.

The below individual has been located and the investigation continues. Thank you to all who called in tips as well as our federal partners who as ALWAYS stand by our side @NewYorkFBI @ATFNewYork @NYCTSubway @NYPDDCPI @NYPDnews pic.twitter.com/bmIldU8ahd

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— Chief Dermot F. Shea (@NYPDDetectives) August 17, 2019

The man was seen on video placing two rice cookers at the Fulton Street subway station and another at West 16th Street and 7th Avenue.

The subway station was evacuated Friday after two of the devices were found. The New York Police Department's Counterterrorism Bureau said the devices did not contain explosives.

Law enforcement told CNN they found the man unconscious early Saturday morning at a Bronx address, and he has been hospitalized. He was taken into custody on a warrant unrelated to Friday's scare and has not been charged in the incident.

"I don't know what the deliberate act is, whether it was to create fear and alarm on the part of the public, or whether he was discarding items he was no longer interested in," NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism John Miller said Friday.

Pressure cookers have been used in terrorist attacks in the U.S. the past several years. Two were used in the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, killing three people and injuring nearly 300 others. Dozens more were injured in a 2016 explosion in New York's Chelsea neighborhood.

National Security News

White House to Proceed With Ending Some Foreign Aid Payments (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/17/2019 3:36 PM, Justin Sink, 5350K]
The Trump administration will move forward within days with a plan to cancel certain foreign aid payments authorized by Congress, setting up a fight with lawmakers opposed to the move.

A senior administration official confirmed that the so-called rescissions package would be announced early next week.

Some of the funding being zeroed out was for projects like installing solar panels in the Caribbean and creating safe spaces in Ireland for people upset about Brexit, said the administration official, who declined to be identified discussing plans not yet made public.

Unspent funds for certain climate-related projects in Asia and Africa are also being targeted for elimination.

CNN reported Saturday that the move would take aim at funding for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as the United Nations for certain peace-keeping operations in the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

The official said that Congress during the Trump administration has funded State and USAID at about $12 billion above the president's budget requests, and that the rescission package would return some of that excess back to the budget.

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Republican lawmakers who are typically Trump allies, notably Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, this week urged the president to reconsider “in the strongest possible terms” after word of the possible rescissions was reported.

“We share your concern about our mounting national debt, which in itself creates security risks to the country,” Graham and Representative Hal Rogers of Kentucky said in a letter to Trump. “However, it has been reported that this proposal makes sweeping and indiscriminate cuts without regard to national security impacts.”

White House expected to move forward with plan to cancel foreign aid, teeing up fight with Congress (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 8:41 PM, Jennifer Hansler and Manu Raju, 6094K]
The Trump administration is expected to put forward a plan to cancel billions of dollars in foreign aid funding by the end of this week, a senior administration official told CNN on Friday, teeing up a fight between the White House and Congress over the rarely used and controversial move known as rescission.

Bipartisan lawmakers and foreign policy advocates have spoken out publicly against the move to cancel funds to the State Department and US Agency for International Development, warning about their impact on US foreign policy priorities. Behind the scenes, congressional appropriators from both parties and State Department officials have lobbied the White House to back off the planned cuts, which could be up to $4 billion. The Trump administration has sought to decrease what it believes is wasteful spending and make foreign aid more conditional on support for US policies. White House officials believe they have the authority to cancel the funds without congressional approval.

The official told CNN that the Office of Management and Budget was working to finalize some of the terms of the rescission package, but they expect it to be made public at the beginning of next week. The official said the rescission includes money to the United Nations -- including some peacekeeping funds -- funding for the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, and cultural programs.

The official said the rescission package will not totally zero out the funding in the accounts. CNN reported on Wednesday that projects spearheaded by Ivanka Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, as well as global health funding, would be spared from cancellation. The official said it should come as no surprise that President Donald Trump’s policy priorities would be exempt.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, a typically staunch supporter of the President, and Republican Rep. Hal Rogers wrote to Trump Friday to express their concern over the proposed cancellation.

"Not only do these cuts have the potential to undermine significant national security and anti-terrorism efforts of our diplomats and international partners overseas, but we fear such a rescission package could complicate the ability of the Administration and Congress to work constructively on future appropriations deals," the South Carolina senator and Kentucky representative wrote.

Graham is the chairman of the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Rogers is the ranking member of

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the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs of the House Appropriations Committee. The leaders from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee also urged the administration not to put forward a rescission package.

The White House pushed a foreign aid rescission package last year, but ultimately dropped the plan after widespread backlash, including from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo has not spoken out publicly against the rescission this year.

If the White House does move forward with the cuts, lawmakers will likely try to replenish the money in the next round of fiscal talks in the fall, something that could be a flashpoint ahead of the September 30 deadline to avoid another government shutdown.

The funds at risk of cancellation, which had been frozen by OMB several weeks ago, are partially available. A USAID spokesperson said Wednesday that "as of Friday, August 9, OMB has issued a new apportionment permitting the State Department and USAID to obligate funds from the covered accounts up to a ceiling of approximately two percent of the remaining unobligated funds each day."

"The State Department and USAID are working with relevant bureaus and posts to implement OMB's revised apportionment and expect to hear about next steps in the coming days," the spokesperson said.

Trump administration seeks permanent reauthorization of NSA phone data program nearing expiration (Washington Times)
Washington Times [8/16/2019 10:53 AM, Andrew Blake, 452K]
The White House sought this week to permanently reauthorize the U.S. National Security Agency's ability to collect the telephone records of Americans.

Daniel R. Coats, President Trump's outgoing director of national intelligence, made the request in a letter sent to lawmakers on the eve of his resignation taking effect Thursday.

Addressed to the top members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and first published by The New York Times, the letter recommended that Congress make permanent provisions of the USA Freedom Act set to expire in December, including language that allows the NSA to collect data about domestic telephone calls and texts.

Implemented following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the NSA's program for collecting domestic call detail records was operated in secret for more than a decade before being exposed in 2013 by Edward J. Snowden, a former intelligence contractor who leaked classified agency documents to the media.

The program was subsequently reformed under the USA Freedom Act in 2015, which effectively banned the NSA's warrantless, bulk collection of Americans' phone records and replaced it with a new, narrowly tailored mechanism that will sunset at the end of the year unless reauthorized.

Mr. Coats confirmed previous reports that the program was quietly put on hold prior to expiring, but he said that it is nonetheless worthy of being relaunched.

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"The National Security Agency has suspended the call detail records program that uses this authority and deleted the call detail records acquired under this authority. This decision was made after balancing the program's relative intelligence value, associated costs, and compliance and data integrity concerns caused by the unique complexities of using these company-generated business records for intelligence purposes," Mr. Coats wrote.

"However, as technology changes, our adversaries' tradecraft and communications habits will continue to evolve and adapt. In light of this dynamic environment, the Administration supports reauthorization of this provision as well," he added.

Questions about the status of the NSA's program emerged earlier this year after Luke Murry, a national security adviser to House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, California Republican, said during an interview that it had been quietly shelved several months earlier.

Bipartisan members of the House and Senate have since introduced proposals to officially terminate the program.

Mr. Coats, 76, represented Indiana in the U.S. Senate prior to serving as Mr. Trump's director of national intelligence. He announced last month that he would resign Aug. 15.

The letter was sent to the intelligence committee's chairman, Sen. Richard Burr, North Carolina Republican, and the panel's top Democrat, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, in addition to the Judiciary Committee's chair, Sen. Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican, and that panel's ranking Democrat, Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California.

A representative for Mr. Warner confirmed the senator received the letter but did not immediately comment on its content. Spokespeople for the other senators did not immediately respond to similar inquiries.

[Gibraltar] Iran's Oil Tanker Is Freed by Gibraltar: What Happens Next? (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/16/2019 8:30 AM, Alex Longley, Julian Lee , and Jonathan Browning, 5350K]
Gibraltar's decision to release Iran's Grace 1 oil tanker on Thursday sparked the ire of the U.S., even as it signaled a possible thawing in relations between the Persian Gulf state and the U.K.

While a court in the British territory ruled that the ship is free to sail -- following weeks of detention on suspicion of violating European sanctions -- the U.S. may yet seek to block this from happening. The Trump administration said it is gravely disappointed by the vessel's release and threatened sanctions against ports, banks and anyone else who does business with the ship or its crew. Here's the latest on what might happen to the Grace 1.

The Grace 1 is still anchored in Gibraltar, where it has been since July 4, vessel-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg show. Four crew members -- the captain, chief officer and two second mates -- have been released. The captain, from India, has no intention of going back aboard the ship, his lawyer said Thursday. Most of the remaining 25 to 30 members of the crew are still aboard, he said.

It appears to be. The vessel was detained last month holding 2.1 million barrels of crude from Iran, according to the Gibraltar government. It is still fully laden with a cargo size of

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that amount, tanker-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg show.

A Gibraltar government statement Friday said there was clear evidence the ship was originally bound for Syria and that Iran had provided assurance that this was no longer the case. “The evidence is clear and the facts speak louder than the self-serving political statements we are hearing today,” it said, without specifying which comments it referred to.

Both Iran and Gibraltar have said that preparations are being made to enable the ship to depart the port. That may run into several roadblocks though -- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted that any mariners who assist the vessel may jeopardize their ability to enter the U.S. in the future.

The U.S. could bring new proceedings to a court in Gibraltar under a mutual legal assistance agreement, Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said in an interview with the BBC on Friday. That could see the case return to a court in Gibraltar, which may result in the ship being stuck there again. In a statement Thursday, the chief minister said the U.S. had requested that such a procedure begin, though it wasn’t clear if that had happened yet.

It’s not immediately clear. The ship was originally detained because it was alleged that it was carrying crude to the Baniyas refinery, an entity that is listed in EU sanctions on Syria. The fact the crude it was carrying came from Iran was irrelevant as far as that original arrest was concerned.

Now that the Gibraltar government has accepted Iran’s assurances that the ship will not go to Syria, there are no grounds to detain it under the EU sanctions. Unlike the U.S., the European Union hasn’t reinstated sanctions aimed at Iran’s oil exports, so it’s difficult to see what grounds in European law there would be for rearresting the vessel based on the origin of its cargo.

In March, the U.S. issued an advisory to the maritime oil-shipping community on the subject of sanctions risks related to cargoes involving Iran and Syria. It advised that non-U.S. persons “may be subject to sanctions for knowingly conducting significant transactions for, or knowingly providing significant support to, certain Iran-related persons” on the U.S. sanctions list. This list might include the ultimate owners of the Grace 1, though the sanctions don’t appear to include the arrest of the vessel itself. While the ship is currently Iran-flagged, it remains something of a mystery who actually owns the tanker.

The U.S. has a policy of seeking to reduce Iranian oil exports to zero. As a result, a key pillar of President Trump’s foreign policy depends on preventing ships like the Grace 1 sailing from Iran to possible buyer destinations like Syria. However, despite U.S. sanctions on Iran, the Persian Gulf state continues to export some oil, including to China. A U.S. State Department spokeswoman said the vessel was assisting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which the U.S. named as a terrorist organization in April.

Shortly after the Grace 1 was detained, Iran seized a U.K.-flagged vessel, the Stena Impero, which it continues to hold. The U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office said in a statement Thursday that there was no link between Iran’s actions threatening shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and Gibraltar’s release of the Grace 1. Gibraltar was enforcing EU sanctions, while Iran’s actions were illegal, it said. There was no update on the status of the Stena Impero, a spokesman for the vessel’s owners and managers said Thursday.

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DHS-19-0135-K-000269

[Gibraltar] Iran says tanker freed by Gibraltar poised to set sail (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/15/2019 9:18 PM, AFP, 2034K]
A tanker carrying Iranian oil, released by Gibraltar authorities after being held since July 4, is preparing to set sail into the Mediterranean, a senior Iranian shipping official said Friday.

The ship's seizure, with the help of British Royal Marines, had triggered a sharp deterioration in relations between Tehran and London and the tit-for-tat detention by Iran of the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero.

The Grace 1 will be renamed and switch to the Iranian flag for its onward journey, the deputy head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organisation, Jalil Eslami, told state television.

"At the owner's request, the Grace 1 will depart for the Mediterranean after being reflagged under the Islamic Republic of Iran's flag and renamed as Adrian Darya for the voyage," Eslami said.

"The ship was of Russian origin and Panama-flagged and is carrying two million barrels of Iranian oil," he added.

Gibraltar's Supreme Court ordered the tanker released on Thursday after the British overseas territory received written assurances from Iran that the Grace 1 would not head to any country subject to European Union sanctions.

The ship had been detained on suspicion that its cargo was destined for the Banias oil refinery in Syria in breach of an EU embargo.

Hours before the court's ruling, the administration of US President Donald Trump, which has waged a campaign of "maximum pressure" against Iran, launched a last-minute legal move demanding that the Gibraltar authorities extend the vessel's detention.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted that the US attempt at "piracy" had failed, saying it showed the Trump administration's "contempt for the law".

Tehran and Washington have been at loggerheads since Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Iran last year and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions.

Following the Grace 1's release, Britain renewed its demand that Iran release the British-flagged tanker it seized in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19.

Tehran charged that Stena Impero was in violation of "international maritime rules" but the move was widely seen as retaliation for the detention of the Grace 1.

[Gibraltar] Iranian tanker at center of standoff with West leaves Gibraltar, shipping data shows (Reuters)
Reuters [8/18/2019 6:31 PM, Marco Trujillo, Jon Nazca, 5436K]
The Iranian tanker caught in a standoff between Tehran and the West left Gibraltar on Sunday night, shipping data showed, hours after the British territory rejected a U.S. request to detain the vessel further.

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British Royal Marines seized the tanker in Gibraltar in July on suspicion it was carrying oil to Syria, a close ally of Iran, in violation of European Union sanctions. That triggered a series of events that have heightened tensions on international oil shipping routes through the Gulf.

The Grace 1, renamed the Adrian Darya 1, left anchorage off Gibraltar around 11 p.m. (2100 GMT), Refinitiv shipping data showed. Its destination was not immediately clear.

Iran's ambassador to Britain, Hamid Baeidinejad, had written on Twitter earlier that the vessel was expected to leave on Sunday night, adding that two engineering teams had been flown to Gibraltar.

The tanker's detention ended last week, but a federal court in Washington on Friday issued a warrant for the seizure of the tanker, the oil it carries and nearly $1 million.

Gibraltar said on Sunday it could not comply with that request because it was bound by EU law.

"The EU sanctions regime against Iran – which is applicable in Gibraltar - is much narrower than that applicable in the U.S.," the government said in a statement.

"The Gibraltar Central Authority is unable to seek an Order of the Supreme Court of Gibraltar to provide the restraining assistance required by the United States of America."

Washington had attempted to detain the Grace 1 on the grounds that it had links to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which it has designated a terrorist organization.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday that "Iran would like to talk," attributing the willingness to economic conditions in the country, when asked on Sunday by reporters about the status of the tanker.

"We can do something very fast, but they don't quite know how to begin," Trump told reporters before boarding Air Force One in New Jersey.

Iran has denied the tanker was ever headed to Syria.

Tehran said it was ready to dispatch its naval fleet to escort the tanker if required.

"The era of hit and run is over ... if top authorities ask the navy, we are ready to escort out tanker Adrian," Iran's navy commander, Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi, was quoted as saying by Mehr news agency.

Earlier on Sunday, video and photographs showed the tanker flying the red, green and white flag of Iran and bearing its new name, painted in white, on the hull. Its previous name, 'Grace 1', had been painted over.

The initial impounding of the Grace 1 sparked a diplomatic row that escalated when Tehran seize a British-flagged oil tanker in the Gulf two weeks later. That tanker, the Stena Impero, is still detained.

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The two vessels have since become pawns in a bigger game, feeding into wider hostilities since the United States last year pulled out of an international agreement to curb Iran's nuclear program, and reimposed economic sanctions.

Iran has denounced U.S. efforts to set up an international maritime security coalition in the Gulf and insisted regional countries could protect the strategic waterway and work towards signing a non-aggression pact.

On a trip to Kuwait on Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet that "Iran's proposal for Regional Dialogue Forum and non-aggression pact trumps reliance on extraneous actors".

The Grace 1 had originally flown the Panamanian flag but Panama's Maritime Authority said in July that the vessel had been de-listed after an alert that indicated the ship had participated in or was linked to terrorism financing.

[Gibraltar] Iran tanker in limbo off Gibraltar as US issues warrant (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/17/2019 12:57 AM, Staff, 2034K]
A last-minute US warrant to seize an Iranian tanker preparing to leave Gibraltar after weeks of detention cast doubt over its departure on Saturday, prolonging a diplomatic spat between Tehran, London and Washington.

The US Justice Department alleged the ship was part of a scheme "to unlawfully access the US financial system to support illicit shipments to Syria from Iran by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," which Washington has designated a foreign terrorist organisation.

There was no immediate comment from Britain or Gibraltar, its overseas territory, over whether they would act on the warrant.

Gibraltar seized the ship on July 4 on suspicion it was transporting oil to Syria in breach of European sanctions, triggering a sharp deterioration in relations between Tehran and London. Iran has repeatedly denied this.

Iran subsequently detained the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero in what was seen as a tit-for-tat move.

On Thursday, Gibraltar's Supreme Court ordered the tanker released after the British overseas territory said it had received assurances from Iran that the Grace 1 would not head to any country subject to European Union sanctions.

Preparations are underway for the ship to set sail, with a new crew set to arrive to pilot the tanker and its 2.1 million barrels of oil.

But in a last-minute twist on Friday, the United States, which is at loggerheads with Iran, issued the warrant.

The warrant says the vessel and all the oil aboard are subject to forfeiture based on violations of a US law, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which revolves around any unusual or extraordinary threat from overseas to the national security, foreign

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policy or economy of the United States.

It also cites violations to bank fraud, money laundering and terrorism statutes.

The US move comes after it tried — and failed — to block the tanker's release on Thursday.

The July 4 seizure came amid surging tensions in the Gulf after several alleged Iranian attacks on smaller tankers.

The US — citing Tehran's threat to American allies — expanded its military presence in the region with a new aircraft carrier task force, missile batteries and strategic bombers.

Iran called the detention of the Grace 1 an "illegal interception" staged by the United States, while Washington cheered it as "excellent news."

Ties between Tehran and Washington are at a low point since US President Donald Trump withdrew last year from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Iran, reimposing crippling unilateral sanctions.

On Friday, Iranian officials said the tanker was preparing to set sail under an Iranian flag and would be renamed the Adrian Darya for the voyage.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted that the US attempt at "piracy" had failed, saying it showed Washington's "contempt for the law."

A source close to the case, who refused to be named, told the Gibraltar Chronicle daily that the ship was awaiting the arrival of a new crew before it would leave Gibraltar, and this was "unlikely" to be before Sunday.

The US State Department has threatened to issue a visa ban on anyone working on the ship.

Iran denied Friday it had made any promises about the ship's destination to secure the release.

"Iran has given no assurances over the Grace 1 not going to Syria to secure its release," a state media website quoted foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi as saying.

"The tanker's destination was not Syria… and even if it was, it did not concern anyone else."

But Gibraltar insisted it was.

"We have deprived the Assad regime in Syria of more than $140 million worth of crude oil," Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said.

[Gibraltar] Gibraltar rejects order from United States to seize Iranian oil tanker (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/18/2019 12:17 PM, UPI, 2034K]
Gibraltar on Sunday rejected a request by the United States to not release a detained Iranian oil tanker.

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A Gibraltar court ruled that it could not seek an order to continue restraining the Grace 1, citing differences between sanctions placed on Iran by U.S. President Donald Trump and those authorized in the European Union.

“The EU sanctions regime against Iran — which is applicable in Gibraltar — is much narrower than that applicable in the U.S.,” Gibraltar’s government said in a statement.

On Friday, the United States unsealed a seizure warrant and forfeiture complaint against the tanker alleging that all the crude oil on the vessel and $995,000 are subject to forfeiture, alleging it attempted to “access the U.S. financial system to support illicit shipments to Syria from Iran,” in violation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

Iran is also accused of bank fraud, money laundering and terrorism due to Iran’s oil industry’s involvement in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is designated a terrorist organization in the United States, but not in Gibraltar, Britain or the EU generally.

The British originally seized the ship over claims that it violated EU sanctions by transporting oil to Syria, but on Thursday struck a deal to return the tanker on the condition it not transport the 2.1 million barrels of crude oil on board to Syria.

Further complicating the status of the ship, the captain and crew quit, requiring the ship’s owner to provide replacements.

[Iran] US announces warrant to seize Iranian supertanker Grace 1 (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 11:17 AM, AFP, 2034K]
The US Justice Department unveiled a warrant Friday for the seizure of the Iranian oil supertanker Grace 1, one day after a Gibraltar judge allowed the release of the detained vessel.

The warrant says the vessel, all the oil aboard and $995,000 are subject to forfeiture based on violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), and bank fraud, money laundering, and terrorism forfeiture statutes.

[Iran] Iran Warns U.S. Against Targeting Oil Tanker Headed to Greece (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/19/2019 3:28 AM, Brian Wingfield and Arsalan Shahla, 5350K]
Iran warned the U.S. against targeting a supertanker carrying the Middle East country’s oil as the vessel departed Gibraltar after being seized last month by U.K. forces and held in the British territory.

The tanker, detained by the British on suspicion of hauling oil to Syria in violation of European sanctions, set sail from Gibraltar after being released late last week and is signaling Greece as its next destination.

“The U.S. surely can’t seize the Iranian tanker and, if it does, it would pose a threat to international maritime security,” Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said. Iran warned the U.S. via “diplomatic channels,” including Switzerland, against interfering with the tanker, formerly known as Grace 1, in international waters, Mousavi said at a news conference in Tehran. Swiss diplomats serve as interlocutors between the U.S. and Iran.

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The ship, renamed Adrian Darya 1, changed its intended destination on Monday to the Greek port of Kalamata, from its previous indication of the Mediterranean Sea, according to vessel-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg and data from MarineTraffic.com.

Gibraltar rejected an attempt by the U.S. to block the ship's release on Sunday. The territory's Supreme Court last week separately released the tanker over U.S. objections.

It remains to be seen what will happen to the vessel now. The U.S. said it was gravely disappointed with Britain after Gibraltar's release of the tanker, and it warned that ports, banks and anyone else who does business with the vessel or its crew might be subject to sanctions, according to two administration officials.

Kalamata is itself an unlikely final destination for the vessel. A port mainly serving pleasure craft like sailboats and cruise ships, Kalamata can't handle vessels with drafts greater than 8 meters (26 feet), Gyannoula Nikolaous, the acting harbor master, said by phone. The tanker laden with Iranian oil has a maximum draft -- a measurement of how low a vessel sits in the water when full -- of about 22 meters, according to ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg.

The waters off Kalamata could be a possible location for ship-to-ship cargo transfers, according to two vessel brokers without specific information about the tanker's plans. Tanker crews enter destinations into ship logs that get picked up by vessel-tracking satellites. The destinations can be altered multiple times on the same journey.

British forces seized the vessel on July 4 on suspicion that it was hauling Iranian crude to Syria. Iran has maintained that the detention was unlawful. The incident is one of several in recent months that have strained relations between Iran and the West, following the U.S. reinstatement of sanctions on the Persian Gulf state last year.

A new crew for the ship had been scheduled to arrive in Gibraltar on Sunday, Richard de la Rosa, managing director of the vessel's shipping agent Astralship, said. Iran previously said the ship would head to a port in the Mediterranean.

The vessel's status was "under way using engine" with speed of 7 knots as of 10:30 a.m. on Monday in Dubai, according to ship-tracking data. The tanker has an estimated time of arrival at Kalamata of Aug. 25.

[Iran] Iran tanker heads to Greece after release, Iran warns U.S against seizure attempt (Reuters)
Reuters [8/19/2019 1:42 AM, Staff, 5436K]
An Iranian tanker headed through the Mediterranean toward Greece on Monday after it was released from detention off Gibraltar, and Tehran said that any at U.S. move to seize the vessel again would have "heavy consequences".

The Grace 1, renamed the Adrian Darya 1, left anchorage off Gibraltar about 11 p.m. (2100 GMT) on Sunday. Refinitiv ship tracking data showed early on Monday that the vessel was heading to Kalamata in Greece.

The seizure of the tanker by British Royal Marines near

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Gibraltar in July 4 on suspicion it was carrying oil to Syria in violation of European Union sanctions led to a weeks-long stand-off between Tehran and the West. It also heightened tensions on international oil shipping routes through the Gulf.

Gibraltar, a British overseas territory, lifted the detention order on Thursday but the next day a federal court in Washington issued a warrant for the seizure of the tanker, the oil it carries and nearly $1 million.

Gibraltar said on Sunday it could not comply with that request because it was bound by EU law. Washington wanted to detain the Grace 1 on the grounds that it had links to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which it has designated a terrorist organization.

Greek authorities had no immediate comment on the situation.

Iran said on Monday any U.S. attempt to seize the tanker would have "heavy consequences".

Asked whether the United States could renew its seizure request after the tanker sailed from Gibraltar, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said: "Such an action, and even the talk of it...would endanger shipping safety in open seas."

"Iran has issued the necessary warnings through official channels, especially the Swiss embassy, to American officials not to commit such an error because it would have heavy consequences," Mousavi said in remarks broadcast on state television.

Switzerland represents U.S. interests in Iran, which has no diplomatic relations with the United States.

Separately, a senior Iranian lawmaker said a crisis in Iran's ties with Britain, which included Tehran's seizure of a British-flagged tanker last month, would not be over until the tanker reached its destination.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on July 19 seized the Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz waterway for alleged marine violations, two weeks after the Grace 1 was commandeered.

"Until the Iranian oil tanker arrives at its destination the British must help end the crisis," Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, a member of parliament's national security and foreign affairs committee, was quoted as saying by the semi-official ISNA news agency.

"This means that the crisis with Britain is not over. Britain has the primary responsibility for ending the oil tanker crisis," Falahatpisheh said.

Mousavi said that Tehran was waiting for a court decision on alleged maritime violations by the Stena Impero and he hoped the procedures would be completed as soon as possible.

Iran has denied its tanker was ever headed to Syria, a close ally of Tehran.

The two vessels have since become pawns in a bigger game, feeding into wider hostilities

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since the United States last year pulled out of an international agreement to curb Iran's nuclear program and reimposed economic sanctions.

[Iran] U.S. issues warrant to seize Iran oil tanker 'Grace 1' after Gibraltar judge orders its release (USA Today)

USA Today [8/17/2019 12:11 PM, Kim Hjelmgaard, 6620K]

The U.S. Justice Department issued a warrant to seize an Iranian oil tanker detained in Gibraltar, a day after a judge in the British overseas territory ordered its release.

The U.S. move late Friday deepens a weeks-long diplomatic dispute between Tehran and Washington. It also comes amid a standoff between the two countries after President Donald Trump withdrew from an international nuclear accord with Tehran and reimposed sanctions. Tensions in the Persian Gulf have been on the rise since.

The tanker "Grace 1" was seized last month in a British Royal Navy operation off the coast of Gibraltar. Authorities suspected it of violating European Union sanctions on oil shipments to Syria. Its seizure aggravated fears of a conflict in the Persian Gulf, where Iran claims control of the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway for oil shipments.

But despite a last-minute U.S. attempt on Thursday to keep the oil tanker detained in Gibraltar, a court there ordered its release. Gibraltar's Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said he had received "written assurances" from Iran that its tanker would not seek to travel to a destination that is subject to EU sanctions. "This assurance has the effect of ensuring that we have deprived the (President Bashar) Assad regime in Syria of more than one hundred and forty million dollars of valuable crude oil," he said.

The "Grace 1" was carrying 2.1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil.

It wasn't immediately clear if the tanker has tried to depart Gibraltar.

The warrant unsealed in the U.S. District Court in Washington alleges "all petroleum aboard it and $995,000.00 are subject to forfeiture based on violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), bank fraud statute, and money laundering statute, as well as separately the terrorism forfeiture statute."

Federal prosecutor Jessie Lui claimed Iran had used a "network of front companies" to launder money used to ship its oil abroad in violation of sanctions and that these companies had links to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, an organization with ties to Iran's military and economy that the U.S. has placed on a terrorism list.

There was no immediate response from Iran or the United Kingdom.

Tehran has called the impounding of "Grace 1" an "illegal interception."

Still, the attempted U.S. intervention Friday may further strain the situation in the Persian Gulf. After Gibraltar's detention of "Grace 1," Iran seized the British-flagged oil tanker "Stena Impero" as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz. The Islamic Republic is still holding the "Stena Impero," claiming it failed to stop after colliding with an Iranian fishing boat. Iran has also seized other foreign oil tankers and the U.S. blames Tehran for the downing of a U.S. surveillance drone as well as a series of sabotage attacks on ships

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operating in the Persian Gulf. Iran disputes claims it was involved.

The Trump administration late last month sanctioned Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, in a move that has narrowed the window for dialogue with Iran. It was a decision that came after weeks of heated rhetoric between the U.S. and Iran as Washington has attempted to squeeze the regime economically and isolate it diplomatically. European signatories to the nuclear deal brokered during President Barack Obama's administration, including Britain, have so far resisted pressure from Washington to abandon the landmark 2015 agreement that placed restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in return for easing sanctions on its key industries, such as oil.

"A successful U.S. seizure of the Grace 1 tanker in Gibraltar would further increase tensions between Iran and the Trump administration," said Rocky Weitz, the director of Maritime Studies at The Fletcher School of Tufts University.

Authorities in Gibraltar said they decided to release "Grace 1" to ease tensions. Legal action against the ship's crew and captain, an Indian national, were dropped.

New British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who enjoys a good relationship with Trump, has not indicated publicly whether he intends to back Washington's "maximum pressure" strategy over Iran that has stoked fears it could lead to military conflict. The two leaders will hold their first meeting since Johnson's elevation to prime minister on the sidelines of a Group of Seven summit in Biarritz, France, on Aug. 24-26.

The U.S. State Department has meanwhile threatened a visa ban or potential prevention of admission to the U.S. on anyone who assists the "Grace 1."

[Iran] US officials expecting Iran to launch rocket in coming days (CNN)
CNN [8/16/2019 7:26 PM, Barbara Starr and Ryan Browne, 6094K]
The US government is in possession of classified imagery that shows Iran is getting ready to launch a rocket as soon as next week that the Iranians claim will put a peaceful satellite into orbit, but that the US sees as furthering Tehran's missile development, multiple US officials tell CNN.

While Tehran claims the launch is for peaceful purposes, it's a program that utilizes the same technology that would be needed for an intercontinental ballistic missile -- the type that could someday strike the US.

Iranian missile launches are not barred under the 2015 nuclear deal that Tehran signed with the US, Russia, China, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and European Union. Iran is still largely, but not completely, adhering to the deal, which the US left in May 2018.

But a United Nations resolution passed when the parties forged the international deal calls upon Iran "not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology." The Trump administration has been highly critical that the nuclear deal did not address Iran's missile program, citing it as a reason for leaving the deal.

Images of increased activity

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Commercial images of the launch site provided to CNN by Planet Labs Inc. and the Middlebury Institute show increased activity around the area, including the presence of vehicles and shipping containers believed to be involved in the launch.

"It looks like they're getting ready for a launch," Dave Schmerler, a senior research associate at the Middlebury Institute's Center for Nonproliferation Studies, told CNN.

He said the presence of the large shipping containers indicates that "there's likely a rocket in the complex," saying that certain areas of the Spaceport complex tend to be void of activity unless a launch is forthcoming.

Schmerler told CNN that the rocket is likely not linked to Tehran's ballistic missile program, saying it was optimized for space launches and not for striking targets.

Nevertheless, several US defense and intelligence officials say Iran is improving the range and accuracy of all its missiles and that has sparked concern that US allies and American troops in the region could be targeted by Iranian missiles in the event of a conflict with Tehran.

Additional defenses

"They're looking at these programs as not only a way to capture technologies, but they're also using them in a way that they can actually reinforce some of their different military aspects that they're dealing with," CNN military analyst retired Air Force Col. Cedric Leighton said.

"They're trying to actually say, no matter what obstacles you put in our way, you're going to come in and you might sanction us, but those sanctions are going to be absolutely worthless because we are going to try and try again to make our weapon systems at least a regional factor, if not a global factor," he added.

In recent months the US military has deployed additional missile defense capabilities to the Middle East, including Patriot missile systems, moves the US says is in response to an increased threat from Iran and its regions proxies.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have regularly fired missiles at targets in Saudi Arabia, missiles the US says have been clandestinely supplied by Iran's government.

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[Afghanistan] Trump and senior aides discuss withdrawal from Afghanistan as talks with Taliban advance (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/16/2019 3:45 PM, Karen DeYoung, et al., 9425K]
U.S. negotiators have made significant advances in recent talks with the Taliban, and the two sides are close to announcing an agreement on an initial U.S. troop withdrawal, along with plans to start direct discussions between the militants and the Afghan government, according to American and foreign officials.

President Trump met Friday with Cabinet officials and other senior national security advisers for a briefing by Zalmay Khalilzad, the chief U.S. envoy to the talks. Attendees at

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the meeting, held at Trump's New Jersey golf resort, included Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Joseph F. Dunford Jr., CIA Director Gina Haspel and White House national security adviser John Bolton.

An initial withdrawal under the proposed deal would include roughly 5,000 of the 14,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. In exchange, the Taliban would agree to renounce al-Qaeda and to bar it from activities such as fundraising, recruiting, training and operational planning in areas under Taliban control.

A statement after the meeting offered no details, with Hogan Gidley, the principal deputy White House press secretary, saying only that "discussions centered around our ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan."

"The meeting went very well," Gidley said.

In an evening tweet, Trump called the meeting "very good" and wrote, "Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!"

Earlier, a White House official cautioned that it might not immediately result in a decision or an announcement.

In addition to the withdrawal, the agreement is expected to include a statement of Taliban willingness to sit down with representatives of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's government to develop a political framework for peace, something that has long been a sticking point in the U.S.-Taliban talks.

Last week, as technical experts wound up the latest round of U.S.-Taliban meetings in Doha, Qatar, Khalilzad traveled to Germany, which is in charge of shepherding the inter-Afghan negotiations, and to Oslo, where those discussions are likely to be held.

Throughout the U.S.-Taliban talks, critics in Kabul and Washington have questioned U.S. willingness to bypass the Afghan government in its eagerness to meet Trump's insistence on withdrawal.

The Taliban has not publicly expressed any change in its refusal to negotiate with Ghani. But U.S. officials have said throughout the months of negotiations that any phased withdrawal agreement would be explicitly linked to the start of inter-Afghan talks.

Once the agreement is announced, U.S. officials expect the two Afghan sides to move directly into talks. The pact is also expected to reference a cease-fire as part of the initial round of those negotiations, although it is unlikely to immediately halt the fighting, according to the officials, who spoke about the status of the closed-door negotiations on the condition of anonymity.

It is expected that the Afghan talks would develop a road map for Taliban inclusion in government and would address matters such as the role of women in Afghanistan and other social issues.

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Assuming the talks continue as outlined, discussions between the Afghan sides would also consider the extent to which the U.S. military could maintain a residual counterterrorism presence in Afghanistan, something that many in the administration and Congress think is imperative.

Following the initial U.S. withdrawal, however, the bulk of American troops would leave within about 18 months. Germany and Italy, which have sizable numbers of troops in Afghanistan under NATO auspices, would expect to time their own withdrawals to the U.S. departure, officials said.

After numerous reports of military progress or imminent peace throughout the 18-year war, all sides have cautioned that hopes of announcing a deal before the end of August could fall apart or be delayed. Khalilzad, who arrived in Washington late Monday, expects to return to Doha, where his Taliban counterparts will report on their own leadership consultations.

U.S. officials are hoping that the Afghan parties, once they have agreed to meet, will jointly call for a delay in Afghanistan's presidential election, scheduled for Sept. 28.

In public statements, Ghani — running for a new term — has rejected any delay, and last week he said the vote was "vital" to the nation. His chief challenger, former national security adviser Hanif Atmar, has dropped out of the race. Others among the 16 candidates challenging Ghani have said the election must be delayed whether or not a viable agreement is announced.

Some in Congress are also expected to object to the deal, questioning whether the Taliban, whose military position and control of territory is better than it has been since the start of the war in 2001, can be trusted to break relations with al-Qaeda. There are also concerns that dissent within Taliban ranks over any deal will prompt some fighters to join a growing Islamic State presence in Afghanistan.

Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), responding to initial reports of a deal, said in a statement that "to trust the Taliban to control al-Qaeda" and other militant groups in Afghanistan "as a replacement for a U.S. counterterrorism force would be a bigger mistake than Obama's Iranian nuclear deal."

"I hope President Trump and his team make sound and sustainable decisions about radical Islamist threats emanating from Afghanistan — the place where 9/11 originated," Graham said.

A White House official, speaking before the meeting, said Trump has been clear about wanting to bring U.S. troops home from Afghanistan and that remains his long-term priority.

In a tweet late Friday afternoon, the president posted a video clip from his Thursday night campaign rally in Manchester, N.H. "I'm the president of the United States of America; I'm not the president of the world," he told the crowd. Though he was bemoaning economic globalism, Trump could easily have been talking about his long-held opposition to America's foreign military entanglements.

Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, has long said he could conduct the mission with fewer troops. Miller wants to keep open Bagram air base, from

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which the United States launches strikes in Afghanistan's eastern mountains, people familiar with his thinking said. The military is also likely to want to maintain a robust presence at Kandahar Airfield, the largest U.S. base in the southern part of the country.

Since taking over in September 2018, Miller, a former Special Operations commander, has led an intense air campaign against the Taliban.

Some critics have expressed concern that the United States could be giving away much of its leverage by announcing a troop withdrawal up front, before progress in inter-Afghan negotiations has been achieved. Khalilzad, however, may be pressing ahead to avert a unilateral withdrawal announcement by Trump, who in December made a similar surprise announcement about pulling U.S. troops out of Syria, leading then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to resign.

Talks between the Taliban and Khalilzad officially began in October. The U.S. envoy has outlined the discussions as including four "pillars," or subject areas: the foreign troop withdrawal long demanded by the Taliban, assurances by the Taliban that it would take steps to ensure that no terrorist attack on the United States could again be launched from Afghanistan, a cease-fire, and inter-Afghan talks leading to a power-sharing agreement and peace.

An outline of an agreement on the first two was reached quickly. "Basically, they've been ready since early in the year," said a former senior administration official familiar with the issues and the negotiations. "They've been trying to use them as leverage on the other issues, and that's taken time."

More recently, "the bar has dropped significantly on what [Khalilzad] would accept," the former official said. Negotiators felt they were running out of time in the face of approaching Afghan elections and the ever-present fear that Trump would announce a withdrawal before a comprehensive agreement had been reached.

A number of contentious side issues also had to be dealt with. While the Taliban insisted that the country be referred to in documents as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the United States and Ghani adamantly resisted. The most likely compromise — which the Americans hope the Afghan government will accept — is a reference to Islamic Emirate as the name of the Taliban political party of the future.

In addition to talks on a residual U.S. presence, cease-fire discussions have not advanced. Ghani is said to be seeking at least a temporary stop to the fighting as part of an agreement, perhaps in exchange for the release of high-profile militants among the more than 10,000 Taliban prisoners the government is holding.

On both of those issues, remaining U.S. leverage may come down to how willing the Americans and the rest of the international community are to support Afghanistan after decades of upheaval and outright war.

The Taliban "say they don't want to be marginalized" by most of the world "as they were last time they were in power," the former official said. "They recognize they will need assistance from the international community to have some sort of sustainability."

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The question is “what are the types of things [the Taliban] would be willing to give,” including a continued U.S. military role in Afghanistan, “in exchange for that support.”

[Afghanistan] Trump Inches Toward Afghan Peace Plan to End Longest U.S. War (Bloomberg)

Bloomberg [8/16/2019 9:47 PM, Jennifer Jacobs and Nick Wadhams, 5350K]

President Donald Trump met his top national security advisers on Friday as his team prepares to unveil an Afghanistan peace agreement with the Taliban that would help bring an end to America’s longest war.

Among those discussing the matter with Trump at his resort in Bedminster, New Jersey, were Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton. The U.S. special envoy for the talks, Zalmay Khalilzad, will then present the plan to Taliban leaders in a new round of discussions in Qatar in the coming days, according to a person with knowledge of the discussions.

“Discussions centered around our ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan,” White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said in a statement. “The meeting went very well, and negotiations are proceeding.”

Khalilzad briefed analysts in Washington on the plan Friday. He has led the talks for months with the initial goal of cutting troop levels in exchange for guarantees from the Taliban not to allow terror groups such as Islamic State to infiltrate the country.

And on Friday night, Trump tweeted: “Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan. Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!”

Afghan authorities have been largely sidelined in the process and the Taliban have escalated attacks in Afghanistan as the negotiations continue. The Taliban have so far refused to hold talks with the authorities in Kabul until it first reaches a binding deal with the Trump administration on withdrawing foreign forces.

Endless Wars

Trump campaigned for the presidency on ending what he called endless wars and bringing American troops stationed overseas back home. But the fear that a rapid U.S. withdrawal might lead to chaos in Afghanistan has loomed over proposals to scale back. Even now, the Taliban control or contest about half the country’s territory, more than at any time since it was ousted in 2001 by an American-led invasion following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

In July, a report issued by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said Afghanistan’s army remains seriously shorthanded, and the problem may be worse than anyone fully understands because payrolls are inflated by police who have resigned, been fired or died, with their salaries diverted to a group of conspirators.

The meeting with Trump also included Defense Secretary Mark Esper and General Joe Dunford, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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'No Deadline'

Despite criticizing former President Barack Obama for telegraphing U.S. plans for troop draw-downs, Trump and his team have made no secret of their desire to get American soldiers out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible. In July, Pompeo was asked if the U.S. planned to reduce troops in Afghanistan before the 2020 presidential election.

"That's my directive from the President of the United States," Pompeo told David Rubenstein at the Economic Club of Washington. "He's been unambiguous: End the endless wars, draw down, reduce."

Pompeo later said there was "no deadline" for a troop withdrawal. The U.S. currently has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan, and defense officials suggested late last year the administration was planning to withdraw about half of them as an initial step.

Trump has also come under pressure from members of his own party to maintain some troops in the country to make sure Islamic State, al-Qaeda and other terror groups don't spread there.

"Any peace agreement which denies the U.S. a robust counter-terrorism capability in Afghanistan is not a peace deal," Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and a Trump ally, said in a statement on Friday. "A bad agreement puts the radical Islamist movement all over the world on steroids."

[Afghanistan] White House discussions on Afghan peace deal go 'very well: ' Trump spokesman (Breitbart)
Breitbart [8/16/2019 11:57 AM, AFP, 2034K]
The White House signaled progress Friday on preparations for a peace deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan, saying that discussions between President Donald Trump and top advisors went "very well."

Trump met at his Bedminster, New Jersey golf course with national security advisors including Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, the White House said.

Also present were national security point man John Bolton and the US special envoy for the talks with the guerrillas, Zalmay Khalilzad.

"Discussions centered around our ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. The meeting went very well, and negotiations are proceeding," deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley said in a statement.

[Afghanistan] Trump meets with national security team on Afghanistan peace plan (The Hill)
The Hill [8/16/2019 7:17 PM, Rebecca Kheel, 2806K]
President Trump met Friday with his national security team to discuss a pending peace agreement with the Taliban.

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In a statement after the meeting, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the meeting at Trump's resort in Bedminster, N.J., focused on "the status of negotiations for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan."

"Led by the president, we are working diligently on the path forward in Afghanistan," Pompeo said. "In continued close cooperation with the government of Afghanistan, we remain committed to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement, including a reduction in violence and a ceasefire, ensuring that Afghan soil is never again used to threaten the United States or her allies and bringing Afghans together to work towards peace."

A senior administration official told reporters before the meeting that Trump has "been pretty clear" about his desire to withdraw from Afghanistan.

After the meeting, Trump said he was looking to make a deal "if possible."

"Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan," Trump tweeted. "Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!"

Attendees also included Vice President Pence, national security adviser John Bolton, Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford, CIA Director Gina Haspel and special envoy for Afghan peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad, Pompeo said.

Khalilzad has been engaging in talks with the Taliban for months on a deal to end America's longest war that would see a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in exchange for Taliban assurances that it will not let terrorist groups use the country to launch attacks against the United States.

Finalization of a deal has been stymied by the Taliban's refusal of inter-Afghan talks that the United States has been pushing for.

The eighth round of talks took place in Qatar earlier this month and ended without an announcement of a deal. Khalilzad called the talks "productive" and said he would "consult on next steps" back in Washington.

The United States has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan on a dual mission of training, advising and assisting Afghan forces in their fight against the Taliban, and conducting counterterrorism missions against groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS.

Top Republican lawmakers have warned Trump against a full withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"To trust the Taliban to control Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other radical Islamist groups present in Afghanistan – as a replacement for a US counter-terrorism force – would be a bigger mistake than Obama's Iranian nuclear deal," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) tweeted Friday.

"Mr. President, learn from President Obama's mistakes," Graham added in another tweet. "A bad agreement puts the radical Islamist movement all over the world on steroids. Be smart, take your time, and listen to your national security team."

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[Afghanistan] Trump huddles with team amid Afghanistan concerns: 'Negotiations are proceeding' (FOX News)
FOX News [8/16/2019 1:05 PM, Adam Shaw and Alex Pappas, 10258K] Video: HERE
President Trump on Friday met with his top security officials about the way forward in Afghanistan -- possibly moving toward a phased withdrawal, something critics warn could lead to the Taliban taking hold of the country once again.

"Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan," the president tweeted.

Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is back in the U.S. from his negotiations with the Taliban. The two sides have been discussing an agreement in which the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, in return for the Taliban promising to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a haven for terrorists and Al Qaeda.

The meeting, held in Bedminster, N.J., included Trump's national security team of Khalilzad, Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford and National Security Adviser John Bolton.

"Discussions centered around our ongoing negotiations and eventual peace and reconciliation agreement with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan," White House Deputy Press Secretary Hogan Gidley said in a Friday evening statement. "The meeting went very well and negotiations are proceeding."

In a statement after the meeting, Pompeo said, "Led by the president, we are working diligently on the path forward in Afghanistan. In continued close cooperation with the government of Afghanistan, we remain committed to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement, including a reduction in violence and a ceasefire, ensuring that Afghan soil is never again used to threaten the United States or her allies, and bringing Afghans together to work towards peace."

The Washington Post reports that the proposed plan could cut the number of troops in the country from 14,000 to 8,000-9,000 – which would be nearly the same as when Trump took office in 2017.

However, a senior administration official told reporters that the meeting was "routine."

Trump announced a 4,000-troop increase in August 2017 as part of an effort to break the stalemate in the country. Trump ran his 2016 campaign partly on a platform of bringing troops home from foreign conflicts.

"Well, I don't want to say if they can be trusted or not," Trump said earlier this month when asked if the Taliban can be trusted. "Look, history, I would say, is not so good, but they don't like us much either. But we've brought them down; we've brought the number of soldiers down very substantially. They're coming down. We are talking to them. We have a lot of advantages making a deal with us."

The U.S. has pressed for a cease-fire and a framework for Afghan talks, but so far the insurgents have refused to recognize the Afghan government, dismissing it as a U.S. puppet.

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But there are fears that such a deal would hand the country over to the Taliban. The group has staged attacks on a near-daily basis since the negotiations began, targeting mainly troops and government officials, but which have also killed civilians.

“To trust the Taliban to control Al Qaeda, ISIS-K and other radical Islamist groups present in Afghanistan – as a replacement for a U.S. counter-terrorism force – would be a bigger mistake than [former President Barack] Obama’s Iranian nuclear deal,” Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said in a statement.

The U.S. invaded the country in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and plunged the country into an 18-year involvement – the longest in U.S. history. It has killed more than 2,000 American troops, injured more than 20,000 and cost nearly a trillion dollars since 2001.

The Taliban are at their strongest since the U.S.-led invasion toppled their five-year government in 2001 after the group had harbored Al Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden.

[Afghanistan] Trump Meets With National Security Team on Afghanistan (US News & World Report)
US News & World Report [8/16/2019 7:29 PM, Kevin Freking and Matthew Lee, AP, 3196K] Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other members of the national security team briefed President Donald Trump on Friday on the state of peace negotiations in Afghanistan, with Pompeo saying afterward that "led by the president, we are working diligently on the path forward."

Trump, who is spending most of the week at his golf club in New Jersey, has long been skeptical of the need to keep a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, where U.S. troops have been fighting since 2001. The war has taken more than 2,400 American lives.

Trump tweeted after the meeting: "Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!"

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said other participants in the meeting included Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. Also present were national security adviser John Bolton, Gen. Joe Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Zalmay Khalilzad, the envoy who has led the U.S. side in talks with the Taliban. Gidley said the meeting "went very well, and negotiations are proceeding."

The latest round of peace talks between the Taliban and the United States ended early Monday without final resolution. Both sides said they would consult with their leadership on the next steps toward a deal, which is intended to lead to direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Trump has complained that U.S. forces in Afghanistan serve as "policemen." That description irks Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who urged the president to listen to his national security team.

"American service members are not acting as policemen in Afghanistan," Graham said. "They are the front-line defense for America against the reemergence of radical Islamist

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groups who wish to attack the American homeland."

Pompeo released a statement after the meeting that touched on Graham's concern.

"In continued close cooperation with the government of Afghanistan, we remain committed to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement, including a reduction in violence and a ceasefire, ensuring that Afghan soil is never again used to threaten the United States or her allies, and bringing Afghans together to work towards peace," Pompeo said.

The U.S. and the Taliban appear to be closing in on an agreement under which U.S. forces would withdraw in exchange for guarantees that Afghanistan would not become a haven for other terrorist groups.

The U.S. has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan. They mainly advise and assist Afghan forces and conduct counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State group's Afghan affiliate and other extremist groups, including al-Qaida.

Khalilzad has prioritized getting the Taliban to agree to intra-Afghan talks and to a permanent cease-fire. But the Taliban have continued to sideline the Kabul government, which it dismisses as a U.S. puppet, and it has not agreed to a permanent cease-fire.

The Taliban have kept up a near-daily rate of deadly attacks, despite holding several rounds of talks with Khalilzad since his appointment almost a year ago. The Taliban now control roughly half of Afghanistan and are at their strongest since 2001, when the U.S.-led invasion toppled their government after it harbored al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army on Friday announced the latest round of troop rotations into Afghanistan. The 10th Mountain Division Combat Aviation Brigade from Fort Drum, New York, will deploy to Afghanistan later this year, and the 3rd Security Forces Assistance Brigade from Fort Hood, Texas, will go in to replace the 2nd SFAB, which does much of the training and advising of Afghan security forces around the country.

[Afghanistan] Trump gets update from aides on Afghan peace plan with troop pullout possible (Reuters)
Reuters [8/16/2019 7:44 PM, Steve Holland and Jonathan Landay, 5436K]
President Donald Trump was briefed on Friday by top national security advisers on the status of negotiations with the Taliban on a U.S. troop pullout from Afghanistan and the potential for a political settlement between the warring sides.

There was no indication that any conclusions were reached at the session, which took place in a secure conference room at Trump's golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

"Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan. Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!" Trump said in a tweet after the session.

Trump, who has repeatedly questioned the billions of dollars spent in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, has made no secret of his desire for a U.S. pullout from Afghanistan after 19 years of war triggered by the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

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But there are deep concerns among national security aides about negotiations led by U.S. special representative to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who updated Trump and others on the status of the talks.

A pullout has raised fears within the U.S. military and among some lawmakers that Afghanistan could plunge into a new civil war that could see a return of Taliban rule and give al Qaeda and other militants a sanctuary in which to expand and plot new attacks on U.S. and allied targets.

A U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said significant differences remained between the United States and the Taliban after an eighth round of talks ended in Qatar on Monday.

Some 14,000 U.S. troops remain engaged in America's longest war, training and advising Afghan security forces and conducting counterinsurgency operations against militant groups such as al Qaeda and Islamic State's local affiliate.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement issued after the meeting that the United States remains committed "achieving a comprehensive peace agreement, including a reduction in violence and a ceasefire" in Afghanistan.

Trump and Pompeo were joined for the talks by Vice President Mike Pence, national security adviser John Bolton, Defense Secretary Mike Esper, Joint Chiefs chairman General Joseph Dunford and CIA Director Gina Haspel.

"The meeting went very well, and negotiations are proceeding," the White House said in a statement.

The U.S. military presence dates to 2001 when then-President George W. Bush invaded in pursuit of al Qaeda and ousted the Taliban rulers who had given Osama bin Laden and his followers a safe haven in which they plotted the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, said any deal should allow the United States to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan to pursue such groups.

"Any peace agreement which denies the U.S. a robust counter-terrorism capability in Afghanistan is not a peace deal," he said in a statement. "Instead, it is paving the way for another attack on the American homeland and attacks against American interests around the world."

A senior administration official said a decision was not necessarily expected from the Bedminster meeting, but Trump "has been pretty clear that he wants to bring the troops home."

Both sides had raised expectations of being close to finalizing an agreement prior to convening the latest round of talks.

The U.S. defense official, however, said differences remained over U.S. demands that the insurgents publicly renounce ties to al Qaeda and other militant groups and agree to a nationwide ceasefire, the official said.

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Khalilzad also is seeking the Taliban's agreement to hold direct negotiations on a political settlement with Kabul government officials who would be part of a delegation that included opposition leaders and civil society representatives.

Taliban leaders to date have refused to hold official talks with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's government, which they denounce as a U.S. puppet.

[Afghanistan] Afghan fears mount that the U.S. is undercutting them in deal with the Taliban (Washington Post)
Washington Post [8/17/2019 12:40 PM, Pamela Constable, 9425K]
For months, Afghans have been waiting anxiously to see whether negotiations between U.S. officials and Taliban insurgents will lead to a lasting peace and a solid path to power-sharing or leave them bereft, facing revived conflict and a possible Taliban takeover.

Those concerns deepened Saturday as news spread that President Trump's top peace negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad, had presented him Friday with a nearly finished deal that would remove thousands of U.S. troops but had not locked in Taliban commitments to a cease-fire or political negotiations with Afghan officials.

President Ashraf Ghani, who has been left out of the U.S.-Taliban talks at the insistence of the insurgents, made no statements Saturday. His spokesman, Sediq Sediqqi, said Ghani had not yet been briefed on Friday's developments but that his government would work with U.S. officials to achieve a "dignified and sustainable peace."

Speaking at a news conference, Sediqqi noted that U.S. officials had assured Ghani that a U.S. troop withdrawal would be based on "conditions," meaning only if the Taliban hold to their commitments. He said that if the insurgents are ready to stop violence and turn to political activity, "this can be a good deal for the Afghan people."

Hours later, a bomb ripped through a crowded wedding hall in western Kabul, killing at least 38 people and wounding about 100, security officials said.

No group claimed responsibility for the blast, but it followed two recent bombing attacks in Kabul attributed to the Taliban. In one, a car bomb killed 45 people and injured 145. In the second, a bomb and gun attack on a political party's office left 20 dead and more than 50 injured.

Guests at the wedding posted photos on social media showing bloodstained floors and overturned chairs and tables. Others posted messages saying a suicide bomber posing as a guest had detonated explosives in the crowded hall. Multistory wedding halls in Kabul often host multiple weddings in one night with several thousand guests.

Sediqqi tweeted after midnight that he was "devastated" by the news and added: "How is it possible to train a human and ask him to blow himself up inside a wedding?!! Why this enmity against innocent humans?"

A variety of Afghans raised questions Saturday about the peace talks: Why had they been conducted in secret, and why was the Trump government in such a hurry to send U.S. forces home? What guarantees were there that the Taliban would sit down to talk with

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Afghan leaders and not sweep back into power once foreign forces leave?

“Nobody knows what has happened in these talks,” said Mohammed Arzam, 74, who was talking with friends outside a bakery. “Everyone wonders, could things go back to the way they were in Taliban time? Women were hit with hoses, and people lived like animals in cages. If the Americans go, what will stop them this time?’ ”

Raihana Azad, a legislator from rural Daikundi province, said Trump is hurrying to get the troops out “for the sake of his reelection, but it is a bad mistake.”

Azad added: “The Taliban cannot be trusted to hold up their side. The Americans came to help us build democracy and human rights. If they leave without a good peace deal, we will witness more horror.”

The key Taliban demand is that all U.S. military forces, now numbering about 14,000, will leave over an agreed period of time. The group’s stated goal is to become the dominant force in Afghan public life and replace the current democratic Islamic Republic with a theocratic Islamic Emirate.

The key American demands have been that the Taliban renounce their ties with al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups, agree to a cease-fire and participate in follow-up negotiations with Afghan leaders to design a shared new governing system.

The agreement described by U.S. officials Friday chiefly covers the removal of U.S. troops and the Taliban commitment to cut ties with other extremist groups. It mentions a cease-fire and intra-Afghan talks to follow after a deal is signed, but does not contain a detailed cease-fire agreement or make clear whether the Taliban has agreed to negotiate with Afghan officials.

Analysts said the most critical part of the peace process will be the intra-Afghan talks. If a U.S.-Taliban deal is struck in Qatar, those talks are slated to be held in Oslo soon, with the goal of mapping out a political transition. But they are expected to be difficult, and they could be either helped or hurt by plans for presidential elections in late September.

“Every major transition in our past history has been disastrous, with violence and war or military coups,” said Haroun Mir, an independent Kabul-based analyst. “This time we have a government in place, but the Taliban don’t accept our constitution, our elections or our system. If they renege on their agreement to negotiate, the U.S. can’t just send its troops back here.”

Several Afghans raised another concern: What if some hardened Taliban commanders do not go along with a cease-fire pledge or other compromises agreed to in Qatar? What if the religious militia is more fractured and less vertically controlled than it appears?

Unforeseen violence could exacerbate such problems. On Friday, a younger brother of Haibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme Taliban leader, was reportedly killed in a bombing attack at a mosque in Quetta, a city in southwestern Pakistan where key Taliban leaders have lived for years.

In Wardak province southwest of Kabul, where the Taliban controls numerous districts,

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legislator Hameeda Akbari said local Taliban commanders told her they would not accept concessions made by Taliban negotiators and that they suspect some U.S. forces will stay.

“We have deep concern that this so-called peace deal will bring a new era of crisis,” Akbari said. “Some Taliban foot soldiers believe their leaders are betraying them, and they may join other groups or form their own insurgency.”

Nasir Ahmad Faqiri, head of the Ghazni provincial council, said Afghans could not trust Taliban promises but that a well-designed peace process might draw the insurgents away from violence and into political life.

“Peace is the priority, but it must include the achievements of the past 18 years,” Faqiri said. “Many lives have been lost and much money spent to build a government and a republic. No one should give them away.”

[Russia] Russia’s Mystery Missile (New York Times)
New York Times [8/16/2019 10:01 AM, Staff, 22840K]
At least seven people were killed by a mysterious explosion in northern Russia, and U.S. officials believe it happened during the test of a prototype of a nuclear-propelled cruise missile. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has hailed the weapon as the centerpiece of Moscow’s arms race with the United States — but what will this mean for an arms race that both countries want to win?

[Editorial note: consult audio at source link]

[Russia] Russian health workers say they weren’t warned patients were coming from nuclear accident site (FOX News)
FOX News [8/18/2019 1:01 PM, Travis Fedschun, 10258K]
A mysterious and deadly explosion earlier this month at a naval weapons testing range in northwestern Russia has spawned numerous questions amid changing and conflicting information from authorities, including from health workers who treated those injured in the blast who say they weren’t informed about potential radiation risk.

The blast on Aug. 8 took place at a military shooting range in Nyonoksa, located in the far northern Arkhangelsk region.

Russia’s Defense Ministry initially said the blast killed two people and injured six, but the state-controlled nuclear agency, Rosatom, later disclosed the explosion killed five of its workers and injured three others. More than a week after the explosion, it’s still not clear what the final death toll is.

The Russian Defense Ministry initially said no radiation had been released, although the city administration in Severodvinsk -- a port city of 183,000 located about 12 miles away from the military testing range -- reported a brief rise in radiation levels. By Tuesday, Russia’s state weather agency Rosgidromet said that radiation levels had spiked by four to 16 times in the city.

Four male doctors and a medical worker at the Arkhangelsk Regional Clinical Hospital, located near Severodvinsk, told the Moscow Times the facility received three men to the

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hospital around 4:30 p.m. the day of the accident who were naked and wrapped in translucent plastic bags. Health care staff at the time were only told there had been an explosion hours earlier at a military site, the Moscow Times reported Friday.

“No one -- neither hospital directors, nor Health Ministry officials, nor regional officials or the governor -- notified staff that the patients were radioactive,” one of the clinic’s surgeons told The Moscow Times. “The hospital workers had their suspicions, but nobody told them to protect themselves.”

All five men who spoke to the newspaper did not treat the patients, but attended a briefing on Aug. 12 at the hospital. The Moscow Times reported all who attended the briefing all gave an "identical" version of events and were frustrated with not being made aware of potential risks.

“The staff is furious to say the least,” one of the doctors told The Moscow Times. “This is a public hospital. We weren’t prepared for this and other people could have been affected.”

A nurse at the hospital who gave only her first name, Viktoria, out of concern she said might face retribution, told the New York Times that doctors who worked on those injured in the blast discovered their scrubs were causing radiation meters to click and were later evacuated to Moscow.

“They didn’t tell us anything,” Viktoria told the New York Times. “Then they told us, ‘we will wash the walls and then everything will be all right.’”

Days after the blast, Russia’s TASS news agency reported the medics who treated victims of the explosion have been ordered back to Moscow for a medical examination. The medics have signed non-disclosure agreements about the nature of the accident, TASS said at the time.

Three of the doctors who spoke to the Moscow Times said one of the doctors flown to Moscow was found to have Caesium-137, a radioactive isotope, in their muscle tissue.

On Monday, Nyonoksa residents were asked to leave the village for several hours, causing new worries. The order was quickly rescinded by the military, who said they canceled the activities at the range that had warranted the initial evacuation order. Russian authorities have closed part of Dvina Bay to shipping for a month, an apparent attempt to keep outsiders from seeing an operation to recover the missile debris.

Neither the Defense Ministry nor Rosatom named the type of rocket that exploded during the test, saying only that it had liquid propellant, but the state-controlled nuclear agency said the explosion occurred while engineers were testing "a nuclear isotope power source" for a rocket.

U.S. defense officials and outside observers believe it was a missile Russia calls the 9M730 Burevestnik. The NATO alliance has designated it the SSC-X-9 Skyfall, which was first revealed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2018 along with other doomsday weapons.

During his 2018 state of the nation address, Putin unveiled the missile, along with other new

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weapons that he said made NATO's U.S.-led missile defense system "useless." The Russian leader claimed the nuclear-powered cruise missile had an unlimited range, flew at a high speed and was capable of maneuverability that would allow it to pierce any missile defense.

[China] Trump Says U.S. 'Talking' With China But Not Ready for a Deal (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [8/18/2019 6:13 PM, Hailey Waller , Jordan Yadoo , and Jennifer Jacobs, 5350K]
President Donald Trump said the U.S. is "doing very well with China, and talking!" but suggested he wasn't ready to sign a trade deal, hours after his top economic adviser laid out a potential timeline for the resumption of substantive discussions with Beijing.

Trump vowed that the U.S. was "poised for big growth" after various trade deals are reached. But speaking to reporters as he departed New Jersey for Washington on Sunday, Trump said China needs a trade agreement more than the U.S. given the relatively weak condition of the Asian nation's economy.

Trump made about 40 minutes of wide-ranging remarks after more than a week spent at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

The president tied trade negotiations with the ongoing situation in Hong Kong on-camera for the first time, saying that a deal between the U.S. and China would be harder if there's a violent conclusion to protests there because of concerns raised by U.S. lawmakers. He tweeted last week that "of course China wants to make a deal. Let them work humanely with Hong Kong first!"

Trump also pushed back on media reports this weekend that the Commerce Department is poised, as soon as Monday, to renew Huawei Technologies Co.'s temporary general license to buy supplies for the U.S. "Huawei is a company that we may not do business with at all," Trump said, calling the Chinese company a "national security threat."

"We'll see what happens. I'm making a decision tomorrow," Trump said.

FedEx Corp. is in more trouble in China, after Fujian province started an investigation into a package containing a gun that the company delivered to a firm in China. FedEx was already under investigation after Huawei said it misdirected some packages, and China has been preparing to add the U.S. company to a blacklist of so-called unreliable entities, people familiar with the matter have said.

White House economic director Larry Kudlow said earlier Sunday that recent phone calls between U.S. and Chinese trade negotiators had been "positive," potentially opening the door to further progress toward a deal.

More teleconference meetings with Chinese negotiators are planned over the next week to 10 days, the White House National Economic Council director said on "Fox News Sunday."

"If those deputies meetings pan out, as we hope they will, and we can have a substantive renewal of negotiations, then we are planning to have China come to the USA and meet with our principals to continue the negotiations and the talks," Kudlow added.

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Kudlow and Peter Navarro, Trump's trade adviser, made multiple appearances on Sunday talk shows to discuss the economy and China trade prospects after a tumultuous week in financial markets that included an 800-point dip in the Dow Jones Industrial Average on Wednesday, its worst rout of the year.

The state of the economy is key to Trump's re-election prospects in 2020; a downturn would dim the outlook for a president whose approval ratings have stayed stubbornly low. Major U.S. equity indexes, often referenced by Trump as a litmus test of his success, are essentially flat over the past 12 months.

"There's no recession on the horizon," Kudlow said on Fox. He added that there were no plans for additional fresh measures to boost the economy, and that the Trump administration would stay the course on its current agenda.

"Consumers are working, at higher wages," Kudlow said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "They are spending at a rapid pace. They're actually saving also while they're spending -- that's an ideal situation."

Navarro, on ABC's "This Week," predicted "a strong economy through 2020 and beyond."

On CNN, Navarro disputed that the U.S. had seen an inverted yield curve, often a forerunner of recession because it signals market expectations for weaker growth ahead.

"Technically we didn't have a yield curve inversion," he said on "State of the Union." "All we've had is a flat yield curve." And that, said Navarro, was "the result of a very strong Trump economy."

As the stock market was tumbling on Wednesday, Trump lashed out at Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell on Twitter, specifically citing the "CRAZY INVERTED YIELD CURVE."

Navarro once again criticized Powell and the Fed on Sunday. "The Federal Reserve chairman should look in the mirror and say 'I raised rates too fast,'" he said on CNN.

Additional Fed rate cuts beyond the quarter-point move in July will be a good thing, Navarro said, and a potential easing by the European Central Bank in September will help Europe's struggling economy.

U.S.-China trade tension boiled over this month after a brief detente. The U.S. declared it would expand tariffs on Chinese goods from September 1 and China responded with a boycott of American farm products and allowed its currency to weaken, signaling that this can help cushion the tariff blow. The U.S. then officially declared China a currency manipulator.

Navarro said the U.S. still has "significant structural issues" with China. Kudlow, while laying out a potential timetable for new meetings, provided no specifics on the as-yet unrevealed "positive news" out of recent discussions.

"President Trump has said, he's willing to negotiate. He's willing to make a deal. It's got to be the right deal to protect American interests," Kudlow said.

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At a time Trump is pursuing trade disputes with China, Europe and others, an NBC-Wall Street Journal poll released Sunday showed support for free trade among Americans is on the rise.

Almost two-thirds -- 64% -- see free trade as good for the U.S., an all-time high for the survey series and up 7 percentage points from the last time it was asked, in 2017. Only 27% believe it's bad, citing damage to key U.S. industries.

Kudlow, on Fox, discussed Trump's decision last week to delay some planned 10% tariffs on Chinese imports to December from September. The administration is giving companies time so they won't "jack up prices," he said.

Trump and his top aides have said repeatedly that Beijing, not U.S. companies or consumers, are bearing the brunt of the tariffs imposed on imports from China. Trump tweeted on Sunday that China is "eating" the tariffs.

Navarro rejected a study by researchers at the University of Chicago, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and elsewhere that found U.S. importers are shouldering the vast majority of price changes from the tariffs, versus China's 5%.

"That dog won't hunt," Navarro said. Tariffs "aren't hurting anyone in the United States."

One key measure of U.S. inflation increased in July, driven by costs of shelter, apparel and used cars, and gained the most in a decade in the past two months, the Labor Department reported this month. Economists say the boost in inflation shows the tariffs are gradually filtering through.

The tariff war has increased prices for goods, and U.S. companies are paying the higher levies, according to a survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The U.S. government collected $57 billion in customs duties in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, according to the Treasury Department.

At a rally in New Hampshire on Thursday Trump pushed the economic rationale behind his run for another term, saying even Americans who hate him "have no choice" but to vote for him or face a stock market collapse.

"You have no choice but to vote for me because your 401(k), everything is going to be down the tubes," Trump told the crowd in Manchester. "Whether you love me or hate me, you've got to vote for me."

The U.S. jobless rate has fallen under Trump, continuing its post-recession trend, and wages have started to tick higher. A breakdown of income numbers suggests wealthier Americans, who own stocks and have earnings from dividends, continue to benefit the most.

[China] U.S. Set to Give Huawei Another 90 Days to Buy From American Suppliers-Sources (New York Times)
New York Times [8/17/2019 12:51 AM, Keith Zhai and David Shepardson, Reuters, 22840K]

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The U.S. Commerce Department is expected to extend a reprieve given to Huawei Technologies that permits the Chinese firm to buy supplies from U.S. companies so that it can service existing customers, two sources familiar with the situation said.

The "temporary general license" will be extended for Huawei for 90 days, the sources said.

Commerce initially allowed Huawei to purchase some American-made goods in May shortly after blacklisting the company in a move aimed at minimizing disruption for its customers, many of which operate networks in rural America.

An extension will renew an agreement set to lapse on August 19, continuing the Chinese company's ability to maintain existing telecommunications networks and provide software updates to Huawei handsets.

The situation surrounding the license, which has become a key bargaining chip for the United States in its trade negotiations with China, remains fluid and the decision to continue the Huawei reprieve could change ahead of the Monday deadline, the sources said.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping are expected to discuss Huawei in a call this weekend, one of the sources said.

Huawei did not have an immediate comment. China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

When the Commerce Department blocked Huawei from buying U.S. goods earlier this year, it was seen as a major escalation in the trade war between the world's two top economies.

The U.S. government blacklisted Huawei alleging the Chinese company is involved in activities contrary to national security or foreign policy interests.

As an example, the blacklisting order cited a criminal case pending against the company in federal court, over allegations Huawei violated U.S. sanctions against Iran. Huawei has pleaded not guilty in the case.

The order noted that the indictment also accused Huawei of "deceptive and obstructive acts".

At the same time the United States says Huawei's smartphones and network equipment could be used by China to spy on Americans, allegations the company has repeatedly denied.

The world's largest telecommunications equipment maker is still prohibited from buying American parts and components to manufacture new products without additional special licenses.

Many Huawei suppliers have requested the special licenses to sell to the firm. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross told reporters late last month he had received more than 50 applications, and that he expected to receive more.

Out of $70 billion that Huawei spent buying components in 2018, some $11 billion went to

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U.S. firms including Qualcomm, Intel and Micron Technology.

The Commerce Department late on Friday declined to comment, referring to Ross's comments to CNBC television earlier this week in which he said the existing licenses were in effect until Monday.

Asked if they would be extended he said: "On Monday I'll be happy to update you."

[China] US expected to extend deadline for Huawei to buy from American suppliers: report (The Hill)
The Hill [8/17/2019 8:28 AM, John Bowden, 2806K]
The Trump administration is reportedly planning to extend a deadline marking the end of Chinese tech giant Huawei's ability to purchase from American companies after U.S. tech firms expressed their concerns with the ban.

Reuters reported Saturday that Huawei will receive a "temporary general license" that will allow U.S. firms to continue doing business with the company for 90 days even as the Trump administration accuses Huawei of violating U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Huawei purchased $70 billion worth of components last year, according to Reuters, including some $11 billion from U.S. firms.

The company's license was set to expire Monday. Tech companies had pressed the White House for months to extend the license and allow U.S. firms to continue to sell to Huawei, a major player in the global 5G mobile market which many companies are entering for the first time.

In a meeting with President Trump late last month, CEOs of Google, Intel, Cisco and other corporations urged the administration to ease the restrictions on Huawei, a move that has sparked criticism on Capitol Hill.

"The CEOs expressed strong support of the President's policies, including national security restrictions on United States telecom equipment purchases and sales to Huawei," a White House spokesperson said last month following the meeting.

"They requested timely licensing decisions from the Department of Commerce, and the President agreed. The group was also optimistic about United States 5G innovation and deployments," the spokesperson added.

Democrats have urged Trump, meanwhile, to stay firm and enforce his administration's restrictions.

"Huawei is one of few potent levers we have to make China play fair on trade," Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in July. "If President Trump backs off, as it appears he is doing, it will dramatically undercut our ability to change China's unfair trade practices."

[China] Exclusive: U.S. set to give Huawei another 90 days to buy from American suppliers - sources (Reuters)

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Reuters [8/17/2019 7:25 AM, Keith Zhai, David Shepardson, 5436K]
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[North Korea] N. Korean missile tests fly in the face of Bolton warnings (Washington Times)

Washington Times [8/16/2019 9:43 AM, Guy Taylor, 452K]

North Korea launched more projectiles into the sea Friday, just days after U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton warned that Pyongyang's recent wave of short-range missile tests have violated long-standing U.N. Security Council resolutions banning such tests.

Mr. Bolton made the assertion this week, saying U.S. officials had determined at least one of the North's recent launches was of a "KN-23" missile likely capable of striking "all of South Korea and parts of Japan."

While Mr. Bolton said the KN-23 and other launches did not technically violate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's 2018 promise to President Trump to halt all nuclear bomb, intermediate- and long-range ballistic missile tests, the national security adviser stressed the recent tests did "violate U.N. Security Council sanctions."

The comments, which came during an interview with Voice of America Wednesday and were a reiteration of previous assertions by Mr. Bolton, apparently fell on deaf ears in Pyongyang, where the Kim regime sped ahead with fresh tests Friday morning, according to South Korean officials.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said projectiles launched from the North's eastern coast flew about 143 miles before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. U.S. and South Korean forces were analyzing the launches but didn't immediately say whether the weapons were ballistic missiles or rocket artillery.

Separately on Friday, the North ramped up its criticism of South Korean President Moon Jae-in for continuing to hold military exercises with the U.S. and over his recent rosy comments on inter-Korean diplomacy.

In a televised speech Thursday, Mr. Moon had said momentum for dialogue remains alive despite the series of "worrying actions taken by North Korea recently."

A statement by an unidentified North Korean government spokesman Friday asserted that Pyongyang has no current plans to talk with Seoul.

The development mark the latest in tension that has surrounded annual U.S.-South Korea military drills being held this month — drills the North says are a rehearsal for invasion.

It remains to be seen whether the Trump administration's push for renewed nuclear talks with North Korea will gain traction any time soon. The talks have been essentially stalled

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since February when the two sides abruptly ended a major summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, with no far-reaching deal to end Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Mr. Trump said at the time that he had to walk away because Mr. Kim was demanding sweeping sanctions relief for only a limited commitment to destroy part of his arsenal, a characterization the North Korean's later disputed.

There were signs of diplomatic momentum in early July, when Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim held a surprise hand-shake meeting at a peace village along the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea. But the talks have yet to restart in any public fashion during the weeks since.

Mr. Kim's promise not to conduct nuclear bomb or ballistic missile tests, meanwhile, came during the first Trump-Kim summit, which was held in Singapore in June 2018.

[Taiwan] Trump Administration Approves F-16 Fighter Jet Sales to Taiwan (New York Times)

New York Times [8/16/2019 3:46 PM, Edward Wong, 22840K]

The $8 billion arms package, the single largest from the United States to Taiwan in many years, is certain to anger China and could complicate the trade war.

The Trump administration is moving forward with an $8 billion sale of F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, American officials said Friday. The move is certain to further anger China at a time when a long-running trade war between Washington and Beijing has upended relations between the world's two largest economies and contributed to stock market turmoil.

The State Department told Congress Thursday night, right after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had signed a memo approving the sale, officials said. Congress is not expected to object to the move. For weeks, lawmakers from both parties had accused the administration of delaying the sale to avoid jeopardizing trade negotiations or to use it as a bargaining chip.

But trade talks in Shanghai at the end of July led nowhere, and President Trump said earlier this month that the United States would impose a 10 percent tariff on an additional $300 billion worth of Chinese imports on Sept. 1. He then partly reversed himself over concerns about the impact on Americans. He decided on Aug. 13 that he would hold back on tariffs on consumer goods until after the start of the Christmas shopping season.

Mr. Trump's national security adviser, John R. Bolton, a foreign policy hawk, has been a longtime advocate of arms sales to Taiwan and has pushed for greater United States support for its government. Some analysts suggest China could retaliate by punishing American companies with sanctions, which it has done in the past.

On Friday, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, was asked at a news conference in Beijing about the potential sale of fighter jets, hours before the news emerged of Mr. Trump's final decision. She said the United States was violating China's sovereignty and interfering in its internal affairs by with arms sales to Taiwan.

She said that Beijing would take unspecified "countermeasures" and stressed that the United States would be responsible for the consequences.

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The sale of 66 jets to Taiwan would be the largest single arms package transaction between the United States and the democratic, self-governing island in years. The decision to proceed was first reported Friday by The Washington Post. Communist Party officials in Beijing have strongly objected to the package, which has been a longstanding request from Taiwan.

Chinese leaders have insisted for decades that they will reunify Taiwan with China. Taiwan has had de facto independence since 1949 and is supported by the United States.

As American administrations normalized diplomatic relations with China, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 to set guidelines for ties with Taiwan. The act says the United States government must "provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character."

The department gave informal notification of the sale on Thursday to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Once those committees tell the department to move ahead, which would probably happen within days or weeks, the agency would give formal notification to Congress and await any objections within 30 days.

Senator Jim Risch, Republican of Idaho and the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he welcomed the proposed sale. "These fighters are critical to improving Taiwan's ability to defend its sovereign airspace, which is under increasing pressure from the People's Republic of China," Mr. Risch said.

The State Department said Friday that it did not comment on arms sales before formal notification to Congress.

Members of Congress expect the entire process to take place without hitches because there is strong bipartisan support for Taiwan and for the United States to take a forceful stand against China.

Congressional officials told The New York Times in late July that trade negotiators had persuaded Mr. Trump to delay the F-16 jet sale. Lawmakers had expected Mr. Pompeo to give the congressional committees at least informal notification by mid-July, before Congress went into recess, but that did not happen.

The jets would be the fourth package of arms sales to Taiwan from the Trump administration. The first two packages totaled less than $2 billion. On July 8, the Trump administration told Congress it was moving ahead with a $2.2 billion package that consisted mainly of 108 M1A2 Abrams tanks.

In his first term, President Barack Obama approved two large packages worth a total of $12 billion, then moved on sales of less than $2 billion in 2015. President George W. Bush approved packages worth less than $5 billion total in his first term, then pushed through sales worth more than $10 billion in his second term.

All administrations have taken into account the timing of arms sales to Taiwan in order to avoid upsetting Beijing at critical moments.

"There is never a good time to sell arms to Taiwan, but this timing is probably the worst

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possible choice," said Evan S. Medeiros, professor in Asian studies at Georgetown University and senior Asia director on Mr. Obama's National Security Council. "Trade talks will stall, China will try to hit American companies hard and Chinese will see a conspiratorial link between U.S. support for Taiwan and Hong Kong."

The Chinese government has blamed the United States for the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, though Mr. Trump has not made any strong statements in support of the protesters. Mr. Bolton has forcefully warned Beijing against any potential crackdown. He and other senior foreign policy advisers have urged Mr. Trump to declare a similar position on humanitarian grounds. Lawmakers from both parties and policy experts have also called for the president to advocate human rights.

"President Trump should not be equivocating on this," said Kelly Magsamen, a senior Asia policy official in the Pentagon during the Obama administration. "He should be using the power of his office to press Xi Jinping to avoid a violent escalation. Instead, he's sending all the opposite signals and pretending he has no influence."

Mr. Trump's top foreign policy aides generally see China as the greatest strategic rival to the United States and advocate aggressive positions. Mr. Trump has a transactional view of China and is focused almost entirely on narrowing the trade deficit. He has said China and the United States are "strategic partners" and expresses admiration for Mr. Xi, saying they "will always be friends."

At the urging of officials concerned about the trade talks, the administration has refrained from enacting sanctions against Chinese officials deemed responsible for the detention of one million or more Muslims. Human rights advocates are pressing the administration to move ahead with those.

Presidential Tweets

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet1 [8/16/2019 8:36 AM] Thank you Rudy! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet2 [8/16/2019 8:47 AM] A great evening, with incredible people, in New Hampshire! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet3 [8/16/2019 11:57 AM] Thank you to my good friend Chuck Canterbury for 16 years of service to the Fraternal Order of Police and our great men and women in blue. You are an incredible patriot!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet4 [8/16/2019 11:58 AM] Congratulations to Patrick Yoes for his election as National President of the great Fraternal Order of Police. Together we will fight for our incredible Law Enforcement Officers!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump

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Tweet5 [8/16/2019 1:23 PM] Senator Jim Risch of the Great State of Idaho has been an incredible supporter of our Agenda! He is tough on Crime, Strong on Borders, and will continue to fight for our Second Amendment. Jim will never let you down. He has my Full and Complete Endorsement!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet6 [8/16/2019 6:26 PM] Israel was very respectful & nice to Rep. Rashida Tlaib, allowing her permission to visit her "grandmother." As soon as she was granted permission, she grandstanded & loudly proclaimed she would not visit Israel. Could this possibly have been a setup? Israel acted appropriately!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet7 [8/16/2019 6:37 PM] Rep. Tlaib wrote a letter to Israeli officials desperately wanting to visit her grandmother. Permission was quickly granted, whereupon Tlaib obnoxiously turned the approval down, a complete setup. The only real winner here is Tlaib's grandmother. She doesn't have to see her now!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet8 [8/16/2019 6:43 PM] Like it or not, Tlaib and Omar are fast becoming the face of the Democrat Party. Cortez (AOC) is fuming, not happy about this!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet9 [8/16/2019 6:52 PM] I donate 100% of my President's salary, $400,000, back to our Country, and feel very good about it! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet10 [8/16/2019 6:58 PM] Just completed a very good meeting on Afghanistan. Many on the opposite side of this 19 year war, and us, are looking to make a deal - if possible!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet11 [8/16/2019 7:04 PM] Having dinner tonight with Tim Cook of Apple. They will be spending vast sums of money in the U.S. Great!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet12 [8/16/2019 10:43 PM] Great time in New Hampshire last night. Placed was maxed out, totally packed, with thousands coming to the arena floor at start. Thousands more outside that were not allowed in per code. Energy was really great to see. We will win New Hampshire in 2020!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet13 [8/16/2019 10:44 PM] Look at the tremendous overflow at packed arena in New Hampshire last night. Sorry we couldn't get you in, will be back soon! [Editorial note: consult image at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet14 [8/16/2019 11:11 PM] Biggest crowd EVER, according to Arena people. Thousands outside trying to get in. Place was packed! Radical Left Dems & their Partner, LameStream Media, saying Arena empty. Check out pictures. Fake News. The Enemy of the People! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

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Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet15 [8/17/2019 10:04 AM] Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an "ORGANIZATION OF TERROR." Portland is being watched very closely. Hopefully the Mayor will be able to properly do his job!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet16 [8/17/2019 5:47 PM] Thank you to @SaraCarterDC. A great and legitimate reporter, as opposed to those at the Failing New York Times! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet17 [8/17/2019 5:49 PM] The Fake News Media HATES to see this! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet18 [8/17/2019 5:54 PM] Thank you! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet19 [8/17/2019 6:08 PM] Such a disgrace at the once great @nytimes! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet20 [8/18/2019 8:22 AM] The Failing New York Times, in one of the most devastating portrayals of bad journalism in history, got caught by a leaker that they are shifting from their Phony Russian Collusion Narrative (the Mueller Report & his testimony were a total disaster), to a Racism Witch Hunt....."Journalism" has reached a new low in the history of our Country. It is nothing more than an evil propaganda machine for the Democrat Party. The reporting is so false, biased and evil that it has now become a very sick joke...But the public is aware! #CROOKEDJOURNALISM

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet21 [8/18/2019 8:26 AM] With all that this Administration has accomplished, think what my Poll Numbers would be if we had an honest Media, which we do not!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet22 [8/18/2019 8:34 AM] MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet23 [8/18/2019 2:25 PM] Doing really well! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet24 [8/18/2019 2:27 PM] We are doing very well with China, and talking!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet25 [8/18/2019 3:15 PM] Juan Williams at @FoxNews is so pathetic, and yet when he met me in the Fox Building lobby, he couldn't have been nicer as he asked me to take a picture of him and me for his family. Yet he is always nasty and wrong!

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Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet26 [8/18/2019 3:24 PM] Our economy is the best in the world, by far. Lowest unemployment ever within almost all categories. Poised for big growth after trade deals are completed. Import prices down, China eating Tariffs. Helping targeted Farmers from big Tariff money coming in. Great future for USA!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet27 [8/18/2019 6:03 PM] House Democrats want to take action against Israel because it is fighting back against two (maybe four) people that have said unthinkably bad things about it & the Israeli people. Dems have such disdain for Israel! What happened? AOC Plus 4 is the new face of the Democrat Party!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet28 [8/18/2019 6:50 PM] Thank you @TedCruz, I couldn't agree more! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet29 [8/18/2019 7:57 PM] The New York Times will be out of business soon after I leave office, hopefully in 6 years. They have Zero credibility and are losing a fortune, even now, especially after their massive unfunded liability. I'm fairly certain they'll endorse me just to keep it all going!

{End of Report} **RETURN TO TOP**

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