OLYMPIA INDIVISIBLE

Research Report: August 19, 2017

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Summary: On July 26, two events targeting the LGBTQ community occurred. Trump, via Twitter, abruptly announced a ban on transgender people serving in the military, saying that American forces could not afford the “tremendous medical costs and disruption.” In addition, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced their stance that Title VII does not protect against sexual orientation discrimination.

Talking Points:

- Banning transgender individuals from serving in the military.
  - The Pentagon / Department of Defense has said they will not act unless they receive a direct order.
  - A Pentagon-commissioned, nonpartisan RAND Corporation study found that providing gender confirmation treatment to transgender service people would have a minimal impact on the military's combat readiness. Further, the report found it would cost between $2 and $8 million to provide gender confirmation services to transgender troops; while this amount sounds significant, $8 million is a mere 0.01% of the $598 billion that the US military spent during fiscal year 2015. In contrast, the military spends an annual $84 million on erectile dysfunction medications such as Viagra, 10x the annual cost of transgender medical care. 5 calls
  - Former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen has advocated for transgender troops to both serve openly and get necessary treatment. The implications of Trump’s announcement for the roughly 6,000 transgender troops currently serving are uncertain. 5 calls
  - Many military organizations in the world allow transgender persons to participate.
  - Five active duty transgender service members filed the first lawsuit Wednesday against President Donald Trump's directive to prohibit transgender individuals from serving in the armed forces. Attorneys for the service members have asked a federal court in Washington to block the directive immediately. CNN - Transgender service members sue over Trump ban

- DOJ’s stance on Title VII protections.
  - On August 8, Reps. David N. Cicilline, D-R.I., and Frank Pallone, D-N.J. led a group of about 60 lawmakers in urging the U.S. Department of Justice to rescind its recently adopted position that Title VII doesn’t protect against sexual orientation discrimination, saying the DOJ’s stance is contrary both to existing law and national ideals.

- Nine Republican House Representatives are currently sponsoring HR 2796, the Civil Rights Uniformity Act. This hateful bill would exclude transgender people from federal civil rights protections against gender discrimination.

Our MoCs:

- Senator Murray on Trump's transgender military ban: ‘This is not who we are' Kiro 7
- Senator Murray on Twitter: Proud to stand w/ LGBTQ+ leaders from Vancouver to Bellingham to Spokane against those who would turn back the clock on progress we've made.

To Do:

- Call Senator Cantwell asking her to object to any action that excludes transgender individuals from serving in the military, or allows discrimination against any members of our society, including LGBTQ members. Call Senator Murray to thank her for her support of the LBGTQ community.
- Call Denny Heck at 202-225-9740
  - Your script: Hi, my name is [NAME] and I’m a constituent from Olympia. I’m calling to ask Rep. Denny Heck to denounce Donald Trump’s recent Twitter announcement that the US military will no longer allow transgender troops to serve. Transgender Americans should have the right to serve
their country while receiving the gender confirmation therapy they need. It is unacceptable for Trump to strip them of these rights in a series of tweets.

- Ask Congressman Heck and ask him to oppose HR 2796, the Civil Rights Uniformity Act.
- Call the DOJ to object to their stance that Title VII doesn’t protect against sexual orientation discrimination
- Stress these issues during visits to the offices of our Members of Congress.
The Trump Administration continues to threaten discontinuing cost-sharing subsidy payments and waive the individual mandate — steps that would destabilize the insurance markets. One positive note, the Administration did make the cost-sharing payments for this month, but did not indicate whether they would continue to do so in the future. Regardless, their statements and (non)-actions have led to some insurers pulling out of Exchange markets and others to raise premiums by 20% or more. One researcher estimates that premium hikes may average 29% in 2018, largely due to the Administration’s actions (and inaction).

CBO Report: The nonpartisan office released a report Tuesday, in which it analyzed what would happen if the Trump administration announced this month that it would not pay cost-sharing reduction subsidies, which reduce copayments and deductibles for low-income Obamacare enrollees, in 2018.

The CBO found that eliminating cost subsidies would cause premiums for midlevel health plans to rise 20 percent in 2018 and 25 percent by 2025 as insurance plans would raise their premiums to offset the lost funding. However, eliminating the cost subsidies would also require the federal government to spend more on premium subsidy tax credits. Instead of saving money, eliminating cost subsidies would cost the government $194 billion more over the next decade.

The CBO report shows there aren’t really any upsides to ending the cost-sharing subsidies. There are only downsides: higher premiums, higher deficits, less competition.

Meanwhile, Senators Patty Murray and Lamar Alexander have indicated they want to move legislation to strengthen the insurance markets, in part by continuing cost-sharing subsidies.

ACTION: Call and/or fax Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell and thank them for their tireless work on behalf of us, their constituents. Thank Patty Murray for working with Senator Alexander and the Senate HELP committee to move legislation to support the insurance markets. Your calls really matter to them!

- Senator Patty Murray Phone: (253) 572-3636
- Senator Maria Cantrell Phone: (253) 572-2281

It appears that a majority of the members of the Senate HELP committee, including those listed below, may support Murray’s and Alexander’s bipartisanship. If you have time, contact these members to urge they support Committee leadership’s efforts to stabilize the insurance markets (see next page):
### Republicans
- **Lamar Alexander**, Tennessee, Chair (202) 224-4944
- **Susan Collins**, Maine (202) 224-2523
- **Lisa Murkowski**, Alaska (202) 224-6665

### Democrats
- **Patty Murray**, Washington, Ranking Member (253) 572-3636
- **Bob Casey Jr.**, Pennsylvania (202) 224-6324
- **Al Franken**, Minnesota (202) 224-5641
- **Michael Bennet**, Colorado (202) 224-5852
- **Sheldon Whitehouse**, Rhode Island (202) 224-2921
- **Tammy Baldwin**, Wisconsin (202) 224-5653
- **Chris Murphy**, Connecticut (202) 224-4041
- **Elizabeth Warren**, Massachusetts (202) 224-4543
- **Tim Kaine**, Virginia (202) 224-4024
- **Maggie Hassan**, New Hampshire (202) 224-3324
- **Bernie Sanders**, Vermont (202) 224-5141

### Articles:
- Indivisible Guide - What's Next for Health Care
- Indivisible Guide - August Recess Health Care Toolkit: Keep TrumpCare Dead
- Healthcare.gov - Cost Sharing Reduction
3. Indivisible Recommended Actions for this Week – Page 5

Hatred and Bigotry

- Be a strong ally against hatred and bigotry.
  - Over 900 events were organized last week in your communities to show that you stand against hatred and bigotry.
  - Join an emergency call on organizing against white supremacy. Sunday night, Indivisible is joining MoveOn, Color of Change, the Working Families Party, the Center for Popular Democracy, People's Action, #Resist, and other movement allies for an emergency Ready to Resist mass organizing call dedicated to a discussion of white supremacy and how to fight it. [Click here to RSVP for the call this Sunday, August 20 at 5 p.m. PT.]
  - Join Indivisible for an important Facebook Live on racial justice and allyship. You can join right from our Facebook page on Monday at 5:30pm PT.
  - Prioritize inclusivity in your group with our new resources. Start with the Introduction to Inclusion. Then, read the Inclusive Partnerships How To for more concrete steps.

- Climate Change: Catch Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Sequel with a friend. Use the code TRUTHTOPOWER for a buy one, get one free movie ticket from fandango.com.

To Do:

- Ask our MoCs to continue to take a stand against hate, and draw a bright line between themselves and white supremacy. [a new resource]
  - Demand that white supremacists be removed from the administration by co-sponsoring H Con Res 77, a resolution introduced by Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal to condemn hate groups and demand Trump fire staff that support white nationalism (think Stephen Miller)
  - Demand that Congress remove confederate statues from the Capitol building
  - Support efforts to censure Trump for his comments, asking them to call for hearings on white supremacy to investigate the extent of the problem.

- Ask your MoCs to require that the Countering Violent Extremism program retains its focus on white nationalism, that CVE grants are fully funded, and that a substantial portion of CVE grants are awarded to respond to the threat of white nationalism. We need a Department of Homeland Security that fights domestic terrorism on every front—including white nationalism—and they have to have the budget to do it. [Reuters - White House budget slashes 'countering violent extremism' grants. The House of Representatives just voted out a spending bill that allocates $1.6 billion as a down payment for the “huge wall” Trump promised at his 2016 campaign rallies. That first year of wall funding alone would cover the CVE program’s $50 million FY18 budget 32 times over.]

- Ask our MoCs to defund Trump’s hateful, anti-immigrant budget proposals. Ask your MoCs to #DefundHate every chance they get in the appropriations process. See our resource for more information about Trump’s mass deportation force, and some of the other things that money should be used for instead.

- Ask our MoCs to protect our immigrant friends and neighbors from deportation, by protecting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs. Ask your Senators to co-sponsor the bipartisan Durbin-Graham “DREAM Act” (S. 1615) and your Representative to support Rep. Gutierrez’s American Hope Act (H.R. 3591), and insist that they resist Trump’s multi-pronged legislative assault on immigrants.
Summary: Sinclair Broadcasting, a heavily right-wing leaning media company, has been working to acquire Tribune Media in order to expand its reach into households across the country. The Trump administration’s FCC Chairman (Ajit Pai) is allowing Sinclair to count just half of its UHF stations against the national limit expanding its reach to 72% of U.S. households.

Talking Points:
- Trump: Sinclair agreements gave Trump more access in swing states during the campaign.
- Sinclair requires stations, including KOMO, to air segments tilting to the right. You may want to boycott KOMO news.
- NYT - How a Conservative TV Giant Is Ridding Itself of Regulation
- Politico - Kushner: We struck deal with Sinclair for straighter coverage
- 5 Calls - Prevent the Expansion of Sinclair Broadcasting
- Sea Times - Sinclair requires stations, including KOMO, to air segments tilting to the right

To Do:
- Contact Senator Cantwell (who sits on the Commerce Committee) and thank her for her public concern about the Sinclair-Tribune Merger: Cantwell Leads Democratic Senators in Call for Scrutiny of Sinclair-Tribune Broadcasting Deal, Senate Hearings
- Contact Senators John Thun (202-224-2321) and Chuck Grassley (202-224-3744) the chairman of the Senate Commerce and Judiciary Committees, asking that they examine the pending Sinclair-Tribune Merger, expressing your concern that this is not in the best interest of American Democracy and would decrease competition and diversity in broadcasting.
- Call Ajit Pai, FCC Chairman 202-418-1000
  - Hi, my name is [NAME] and I’m a constituent from Olympia. I’m calling in opposition to the merger of Sinclair Broadcasting and Tribune Media. The merger will expand Sinclair’s reach beyond its legal audience cap of 39% to a massive 72% of US households. The FCC should not bend rules or roll back regulations in order to grow Sinclair’s pro-Trump, right wing messaging. Thank you so much for your time.--[IF LEAVING A MESSAGE: Please leave full address to ensure call is tallied.]
Summary:

- North Korea (NK) has been attempting to develop nuclear weapons and ICBMs since 1956, most earnestly since 1980. They tested their first nuclear weapon in 2006. They’ve been testing ICBMs since as early as 1998. They tested a missile that could possible reach the continental US in July 2017. In August 2017 the DIA concluded that NK had the capability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead and mount it on an ICBM. The US believes NK will have a nuclear missile capable of reaching the continental US in early 2018.
- North Korea desires nuclear ICBMs as a deterrence against invasion and attempts at regime change. Their stance and actions are considered rational by foreign policy experts. NYT - North Korea, Far From Crazy, Is All Too Rational
- For decades, the US has unsuccessfully been attempting to block or discourage the NK nuclear weapons program.
- In recent weeks public statements from Trump and NK have escalated tensions. The Atlantic - Why North Korea Walked Back Its Threat on Guam
- But Trump’s comments have been undercut by other administration officials. WaPo - Mattis and Tillerson move to clarify administration policy on North Korea

Talking Points:

- Cuts to the State Department make diplomacy harder and less effective.
- The War Powers Act (theoretically) prevents the use of military force without a Declaration of War, Authorization of Military Force, or "a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces."
- The President can launch a nuclear attack without congressional approval or consulting anyone in the military. The order is always legal and must be obeyed.

Our MoCs:

- Murray 2006 “We cannot accept a nuclear North Korea.”
- Cantwell 2017 “North Korea presents a real threat and we must work to find the best path to peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.”

To Do:

- Call MOCs and ask them to uphold the War Powers Act and demand congressional approval before any military force is used against North Korea.
- Call MOCs and ask them to oppose cuts to the state department.
- UNSURE: Call MOCs and support HR 669 and SB200 which requires congressional approval before the use of nuclear weapons. (Personally I don’t like this bill. I think it undercuts our nuclear deterrence strategy. I would be more in favor of the president needing the sign off of the Secretary of State and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.)
6. Mueller – Tell Trump He Can’t Fire Him; Action Plan if He is Fired

Summary:  The attacks on our democracy under Trump should worry you no matter what your political party. He has repeatedly acted as if the rules—and the law—don’t apply to him. Trump’s attempts to influence the Flynn investigation and his subsequent firing of Comey are a grave concern for people who care about the integrity of democratic institutions. But there is an even greater risk we must protect against: the firing of special counsel Robert Mueller.

Talking Points: (From Indivisible National) Indivisible Guide - Protecting Our Democracy

- Robert Mueller is the special counsel appointed by Deputy AG Rosenstein to investigate Russia’s interference in our election. He was appointed after then FBI Director Comey was fired by Trump. After public pressure to insulate the investigation from political interference, Rosenstein appointed Mueller to lead an independent investigation. Mueller is a Republican, respected by both sides of the aisle, who previously served as FBI director under Presidents George W. Bush and Obama.

- Firing Comey was obstruction of justice. Firing Mueller would be far worse—because the entire reason Mueller has this job is to protect the investigation from political interference. No one is above the law, including the President. When Nixon in the Saturday Night Massacre demanded the firing of Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor looking into Watergate, Congress and the American people recognized that for what it was—a turning point and a crisis that would later spell the end of the Nixon presidency. Since Mueller is leading the investigation in place of someone else who was already inappropriately fired, his firing would be especially concerning.

To Do:

- All Americans need to be clear that we will not stand for the firing of Mueller. Indivisible is teaming up with a coalition of groups to host emergency rallies in the event that Mueller is fired. If this occurs, we will all need to stand firm and make it clear that no one is above the law. Sign up to attend a rally here.

Senate Bills 1735 and 1741 Talking Points:

- The Special Counsel Independence Protection Act (S Bill 1735), introduced by Senators Graham (R-SC) and Booker (D-NY), and co-sponsored by Senators Whitehouse (D-RI) and Blumenthal (D-CN), would allow a special counsel to be fired only if a federal court first establishes that they had exhibited “misconduct, dereliction of duty, incapacity, conflict of interest, or other good cause for removal.”

- The Special Counsel Integrity Act (S Bill 1741), introduced the same day by Republican Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC), would do essentially the same thing, but allow the judicial review to take place retroactively too. So if Trump fired Mueller, a three-judge panel could reinstate the special counsel within 14 days

- NY Mag - Bill Limiting Trump’s Ability to Fire the Special Counsel Investigating Him
- The Hill - Senate bill would allow Mueller to challenge firing in court

To Do:

- Ask our MoCs to do what they can to prevent Mueller from getting fired.
- Ask our senators to support S bills 1735 and 1741.
Summary: The Trump administration and FCC Chairman Ajit Pai have joined forces with the biggest broadband providers to try to roll back our online rights. They want to destroy Net Neutrality — and we need to stop them.

- The FCC’s Net Neutrality rules keep the internet free and open — enabling anyone to share and access information of their choosing without interference from companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon. Net Neutrality is essential to education, economic opportunity, social movements and dissent.
- For over 10 years, people worked alongside public-interest organizations, civil rights groups, entrepreneurs and small-business owners to put Net Neutrality protections in place. In 2015, the fight for internet freedom ended in victory when the FCC reclassified broadband providers under Title II of the Communications Act, creating the legal foundation for real Net Neutrality.
- But now the Trump administration, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and the corporations backing them are doing all they can to reverse the historic Net Neutrality win.

Our MoCs:
- Senator Cantwell’s town hall on net neutrality: on FB live and loose notes
- Senator Cantwell recommended this John Oliver video about it: Time: 19:32 (less if you skip the goat)

To Do:
- Provide comment at the FCC website, clicking on “Express” on the right hand side to comment.
  - FCC Comments for Restoring Internet Freedom
  - Tips on commenting: How to write a meaningful FCC comment supporting net neutrality
- Thank Senator Cantwell for her efforts to protect net neutrality
8. Other Issues

a. Charlottesville - 10 Ways to Fight Hate
   • Articles:
     o SPLC - Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide

b. Climate Change – Scientific Report and Action
   • Articles:
     o WSJ - Climate Report’s Deadline Poses Test for Trump Administration
     o Vox - The climate report scientists are afraid Trump will censor, explained
     o NYT - Read the Draft of the Climate Change Report
     o Blue Letters - Action: Share the trailer for Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Sequel”, playing in Olympia from August 11 to August 17
     o WaPo - White House reviewing new report that finds strong link between climate change, human activity

c. Voter Suppression
   • Articles:
     o ACLU - Fighting Voter Suppression
     o ACLU - Federal Order Sanctioning Kris Kobach

d. National Flood Insurance Program – Union of Concerened Scientists
   • Articles:
     o The National Flood Insurance Program Must Be Improved: 5 Ways to Promote Climate Resilience

e. Immigration
   • Articles:
     o 5 Calls - Oppose The Raise Act’s Attack On Legal Immigration

f. Russia
   • Summary: Our AG Sessions is subpoenaing the press for their sources in his leaks investigation.
   • To Do:
     o The Hill - DOJ to Hold Meeting with Reporters on New Subpoena Guidelines
       o Contact Sessions here: https://www.justice.gov/doj/webform/your-message-department-justice
     o Or voice your concern to our senators.

g. Clean Water Rule – Submit a Public Comment
   • Articles:
     o Tell EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt – Don’t roll back clean water protections!
Late Issue Update

International

*Trump threatens North Korea:* Trump continued to threaten violence against North Korea, saying that the US military was “locked and loaded” and ready to deal with the North Korean threat. Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis tried to limit the danger of a US attack, making clear that the US would respond to a North Korean threat with overwhelming force, but to an attack, not a threat. Trump had appeared to threaten a pre-emptive nuclear strike (not a response to an attack) based on North Korean verbal threats (not to an attack). North Korea appeared to be trying to de-escalate the situation, though their actions are very hard to read.

Civil rights

*Charlottesville:* On August 11, twelve white supremacist, anti-Semitic hate groups descended on the college town of Charlottesville, Virginia in what they called “Unite the Right”. The groups used the town’s decision to relocate statues of confederate generals away from the center of town as a pretext for their action. A total of 500 people participated from these groups. On the 11th, they held a torchlight parade reminiscent of Nazi marches through the University of Virginia campus, and gave the Nazi salute. On Saturday, these groups clashed with hundreds of anti-hate group protesters in a brawl in Emancipation Square (the former Robert E. Lee Square, where Lee’s statue stands). Later that day, one of the white supremacists, a Nazi sympathizer, drove a car into a crowd, killing one and injuring many others, a tactic used by Muslim jihadi terrorists.

The white supremacists and their militia sympathizers were heavily armed with semi-automatic weapons, Mace and clubs. It is legal for them to display these weapons because of Virginia’s open carry law. Some of the counter-protesters were also armed, but to a much smaller degree. During this period, the white supremacists engaged in random violence, such as surrounding a group of protesters at a statue of Thomas Jefferson and macing and hitting them with clubs. They marched past a synagogue in town chanting “Seig Heil” and “blood and soil”, armed with semi-automatic weapons while giving the Nazi salute. A series of such incidents took place in Charlottesville during this period.

Police did not intervene in many of these incidents, with the exception of the brawl on the 12th and the aftermath of the car driven into a crowd of protesters They argued that the white supremacists were heavily armed (outgunning the police) and that they feared that too aggressive police intervention could have triggered a bloodbath.

A few days later, the town held a 10,000-person memorial for the woman who was killed and those injured.

*Trump’s reaction to Charlottesville:* Trump’s initial reaction to Charlottesville on August 13 was to declare that there were problems with both sides in Charlottesville. That resulted in angry responses, not only from the press and Democrats, but also from Republicans and business interests. On August 14, he came out with a prepared statement denouncing the KKK, neo-Nazis and other groups outright. This reduced the blowback from his initial statement. On August 14, at a press conference to talk about infrastructure, Trump reversed himself and said that there were good and bad people on both sides and that the violence was caused by both sides. He also said noted that the white supremacists had a permit. This triggered a public uproar. Trump appeared to be happy with the press conference. Most Republicans denounced bigotry, white supremacy, neo-Nazis and the KKK. Only a few, including Senators Corker and Flake and Graham and Ohio Governor Kasich specifically called out Trump for his treating white supremacists and those opposed to them as morally equivalent. The public uproar over Trump’s statements are continuing.

*Reaction of Trump business advisory groups:* After this press conference, Kenneth Frazier, the CEO of Merck (and an African-American) quit a Trump manufacturing advisory panel. This was followed by a few more members leaving. After Trump’s August 15 press conference, the entire group decided to disband, at which
point Trump ended two different business advisory panels. On August 18, Politico reported a new set of business resignations from a Commerce Department advisory board, with more than half of the 15-member Digital Economy Board of Advisors quitting. The board was set up to help the federal government navigate the digital economy. They include executives from Comcast, McKinsey Global Institute, Consumer Reports, the UC Berkeley law school among others.

**Counter-protesters in Boston:** The New York Times and Washington Post reported that in the wake of Charlottesville, a crowd estimated at 10,000 came to Boston to protest what was advertised as another white supremacist/alt-right rally. Not many of the white supremacists showed up. Police were focused on keeping both groups apart and were successful in that effort. A counter-protest of 1,000 people also took place in Portland, Oregon August 18. Additional counter-protests are expected August 19 in Chicago, New Orleans, Dallas and Houston.

**Steve Bannon fired:** On August 18, Steve Bannon was fired by Trump. It was reported by the Washington Post that General Kelly asked for his resignation, seeing him as undermining other staff. His interview with Robert Kuttner of the American Prospect this week appeared to be the last straw that led to his dismissal.

**Judge authorizes appeal of Trump rally suit:** Politico reported that a federal district court judge has authorized an appeal that could scuttle a lawsuit over violence at a Trump campaign rally. US District Court Judge David Hale granted a request from Trump’s legal team to appeal an earlier decision of his declining to throw out the case. The appeal will be heard by the Cincinnati-based 6th US Circuit Court of Appeals. The appeal is likely to keep the case frozen for months for months, if not a year or more.

**Health care**

**Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports impact of ending cost-sharing reduction payments:** The New York Times reported that the CBO analysis on ending ACA cost-sharing reduction payments estimated that if Trump carried out his threat to end the payments to insurance companies, premiums for the most popular health insurance plans would increase 20% in 2018 and federal budget deficits would increase by $194 billion in the next ten years. Premiums for silver plans would be 20% higher in 2018 and 25% higher by 2020, the CBO estimated. Terminating the subsidies would save the government $8 billion in 2018 and $118 billion through 2026, but the savings would be dwarfed by the increased costs of tax credits to subsidize premiums in ACA exchange markets. The deficit will increase because when premiums rise in ACA exchange markets, so do subsidies based on income, location and health insurance costs. Insurers in some states and local areas would withdraw from the market because of substantial uncertainty about the effects of the cutoff. The CBO estimated that 5% of the US population would have no insurers in the ACA exchange markets without the subsidies. In contrast, if the payments are made, less than ½ of 1% of people in the US would be in areas without insurers in the ACA exchange markets. The CBO estimated that the change would not result in much change in the number of the uninsured. It estimates that the number of uninsured people would be slightly higher in 2018 but slightly lower in 2020 and beyond.

Cost-sharing reduction payments reimburse insurers for required payments they make to reduce deductibles, co-payments and other out-of-pocket costs for low-income people covered under ACA exchange plans. The ACA requires insurers to make the payments, but a drafting oversight did not provide dedicated funding for the payments. About six million people are receiving the subsidies.

**Russia connection**

**Mueller seeking interviews with West Wing:** The New York Times reported that Mueller is in talks with the White House about interviewing current and former senior administration officials, including Reince Priebus and members of the communications team. Mueller has asked about specific meetings, who attended them and whether there are any notes, transcripts or documents about them. Among the issues Mueller wants to ask
officials about is Trump’s decision to fire James Comey as FBI director. No interviews have been scheduled so far.

Immigration

**Trump Administration ends Obama protection program for Central American minors:** The Trump Administration’s Department of Homeland Security ended an Obama-era program that granted Central American minors temporary legal residence in the US. This impacted 2,700 people who had won conditional approval to enter the US and nearly 1,500 minors already in the US under the program, who will not be allowed to renew their status. The program was created to respond to the spike in Central American unaccompanied minors who emigrated illegally to the US in 2014 trying to escape gang violence. That year, over 60,000 unaccompanied children and the same number of families entered the US illegally, flooding border patrol stations and creating even longer immigration court backlogs. The program allowed minors who failed to win refugee status the option of a two-year renewable parole from deportation if they had a parent already legally present in the US. The program was frozen in February.

**Sessions attacks Chicago for sanctuary city position, Chicago mayor responds:** Attorney General Sessions attacked Chicago for its policies on undocumented immigrants, trying to link them to the city’s increased crime rate. He also threatened to withhold federal police grants if the city does not change its policies. Chicago refuses to help detain and deport people in the US illegally. This came a week after the city sued the Justice Department over its plan to withdraw grants. Sessions praised Miami-Dade County for “complying with federal immigration law”. It is unconstitutional for the federal government to require local governments to act as an adjunct to federal law enforcement. It is legally unclear whether it can withhold discretionary funding to pressure local governments to take the same action.

Chicago Mayor Emmanuel (Obama’s former chief-of-staff) said: “In a week in which the Trump administration is being forced to answer questions about neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and the KKK, they could not have picked a worse time to resume their attack on the immigrants who see America as a beacon of hope. Chicago will continue to stand up proudly as a welcoming city, and we will not cave to the Trump administration’s pressure because they are wrong morally, wrong factually and wrong legally.” The city’s police chief stated that undocumented immigrants are not driving violence in Chicago. Rather, the problem stems from gang activity, the illegal weapons trade and the drug trade.

Budget

**Republicans may not have the votes for sharp spending cuts:** The Washington Post reported that congressional leaders appear to lack the votes to pass sharp spending cuts as the price for an increase in the debt limit. The White House has called on Congress to pass a clean debt limit bill by September 29, with no additional items attached. That would involve alienating extreme conservative House and Senate members who have demanded sharp spending cuts. Passing a clean bill would force congressional leaders to turn to Democrats to deliver the votes needed to avoid a US default. Such actions would risk significant anger by the Freedom Caucus members and other conservative members. There has been no serious effort to identify the specific cuts that could get the support of a majority of Republican members. Instead, many Republicans have speculated that Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell will work with Democrats on a package that could tie the debt limit to other bipartisan legislation, such as extending health coverage for low-income children (because the CHIP program that provides such coverage needs to be reauthorized this fall). Many Republicans expect that congressional leadership will rely on Democrats to pass a spending bill as well, because the same conservatives are demanding such draconian spending cuts as the price for their votes for a budget bill. The House has only 12 legislative days to pass a debt limit increase and a number of other must-pass priorities.

Environment
**Pruitt carrying out agenda in secret:** The New York Times reported that EPA administrator Pruitt is taking extraordinary measures to conceal his actions, as he works to dismantle EPA policies and even portions of the agency itself. He is taking action with a small group of political appointees with advice from industry lobbyists. He has limited access to the floor of the agency he works on. He has round-the-clock security. He makes major phone calls from other people’s offices rather than his own. He has stopped posting his appointments calendar and that of his top aides. He has evaded oversight from Congress. His aides asked career employees to make changes in a water quality rule without any records of the changes they were being ordered to make. They included eliminating the benefits of the rule in the analysis of the rule’s costs. He has moved to shut down data collection of emissions from oil and gas companies and taken down over 1,900 EPA webpages on topics such as climate change.

**Bloomberg funds NYU law center to help state attorneys general fight environmental rollbacks:** The NYU School of Law is launching a new center to help state attorneys general fight federal moves to roll back renewable energy, environmental protections and climate policies. The center will provide legal assistance on renewable energy, climate and environmental issues and will sponsor 10 lawyers on two-year fellowships to work directly on cases with state attorney generals. The center’s executive director will be David Hayes, who served as deputy secretary of the Interior in both the Clinton and Obama administrations. The Center is funded by a $6 million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable arm of former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. While the center will assist states regardless of party, Democratic attorneys general have been aggressive in challenging Trump Administration efforts to eliminate regulations and policies that were designed in the Obama Administration to reduce fossil fuel production and us in the US and restrict drilling and mining on federal lands and in federal waters.

**Trade**

**NAFTA talks begin:** The Washington Post reported that the effort to renegotiate NAFTA began August 16. The US seeks a major renegotiation that would result in the elimination of the US trade deficits with Mexico and Canada, while maintaining NAFTA’s advantages for agriculture. The US also seeks more manufacturing in North America and improving standards for workers. Canada and Mexico are interested in more modest changes to the agreement. Canada seeks new provisions on environmental protection and worker, women’s and indigenous rights. They also want to maintain the current dispute resolution procedure. Mexico seeks to end the negotiations before the end of 2017, given Mexico’s next presidential election July 1 of next year. Most trade negotiations take years to complete. The economies of the three countries are now tightly linked, especially in auto production, agriculture and natural resources. Mexico is negotiating a trade deal with the European Union, Canada is talking to China and both Mexico and Canada are pushing forward with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), even after the US has withdrawn from it. Mexico is exploring alternatives to the massive flows of grain and agricultural goods that flooded the Mexican market after NAFTA, focusing on Brazil and Argentina.

**Trump to launch investigation into China trade violations:** The Washington Post reported that the Trump Administration is launching an investigation into Chinese intellectual property violations that could result in severe trade penalties. Trump signed an executive memorandum directing his trade negotiator to determine whether to investigate China for harming intellectual property, innovation and technology. The measure would seek to address what the US business community has described as Chinese use of rules and practices to wall off its domestic market from foreign competition and to pressure US firms to part with product designs and trade secrets or to steal them. The investigation could take a year to complete. It has the capacity to alienate Chinese leadership.

**Voter targeting and voting rights**

**Ex-Trump aides hunt for untapped voters and proof of fraud:** The New York Times reported that a group of Trump’s former campaign aides is beginning an effort to identify and motivate new voters in areas that supported him in 2016 and to stop what they claim are illegal votes in Democratic areas, effectively trying to
suppress minority votes. They have created a group called Look Ahead America. The group is intended to identify disaffected rural and working-class people who do not vote or are not on the voter rolls, to register and motivate them ahead of future elections. The group also seeks to discourage or invalidate what they identify as “fraudulent” votes by deploying poll watchers with cameras and by using what it calls a forensic voter fraud investigation to identify votes cast in the names of deceased voters, by illegal immigrants or non-citizens. The group has been created by two people who ran Trump's 2016 voter data team. They are rolling out the idea in private meetings with potential donors and conservative activists. The group plans to use psychographic modeling of data from voter files and commercial sources to identify unregistered adults who fit the targeted demographic. It intends to contact these people using a combination of direct mail, phone calls and in-person visits from full-time field staffers. It intends to hire 12 people in Virginia working out of a small number of offices to start.