
OLYMPIA INDIVISIBLE

Research Report: November 11, 2017

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1. The Trump Tax Scam is Bad for You

Information from Indivisible.org

Summary: The Trump Tax Scam gives most of its benefits to the wealthiest 1% and corporations, by repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax, phasing out the estate tax, cutting the corporate rate, and limiting the rate on pass through income. But the Tax Scam also repeals popular deductions that help the middle class, like the medical deduction, student loan interest deduction, and the State and Local Tax deduction.

Talking Points:

- Students and Teachers - the Trump Tax Scam repeals a significant list of credits and deductions that currently help students and teachers:
 - The \$250 deduction for teachers' out-of-pocket expenses, like supplies for their classroom. Note that corporations can continue deducting supplies as a business expense.
 - The student loan interest deduction. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities estimates this will increase the cost of student loans for borrowers by \$13 billion.
- Homeowners and State Taxpayers
 - The Tax Scam repeals the deduction for state taxes, both income tax and property tax. Eliminating this deduction would increase the taxes of those in high-tax states and it would pressure states to cut taxes—jeopardizing funding for schools, roads, and other services. Many current homeowners with high property taxes, large mortgages, and high state income tax would see a net tax increase under the Trump Tax Scam. The capital gain exclusion on residences would be extended from two years to five years.
- Veterans
 - The Tax Scam would eliminate the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which is designed to encourage employers to hire more people from certain target groups—[including unemployed and/or disabled veterans](#). According to the Paralyzed Veterans of America, "[nearly 300,000 veterans benefitted from The Work Opportunity Tax Credit between 2013 and 2015](#)" alone.
- The Elderly and Patients
 - Each year, nearly 9 million Americans claim a deduction on their taxes for their medical expenses, only available to people who spend 10% or more of their income on medical expenses. This benefits people who have very high medical expenses. The Tax Scam repeals this deduction, meaning these 9 million people—75% of whom are 50 or older, and 70% of whom have annual incomes of \$75,000 or below—would see drastic increases in their taxes.
- Charities
 - The Tax Scam does away with itemized deductions (only the top 6% or so will itemize), which means that most people will no longer claim charitable giving as an itemized deduction. Charities expect this will lead to a [major reduction](#) in how much people give to vital programs.
- Hurricane And Flood Victims
 - One of the things that victims of hurricanes and floods can do if they suffer a loss when their home is destroyed or seriously damaged is take a casualty loss deduction to help cover reconstruction costs. The Tax Scam eliminates this deduction.
- Workers Who Move
 - The Tax Scam eliminates the moving-expense deduction, which will make it more costly for a family to move to pursue more attractive jobs in a new area.

Our MoCs:

- [VIDEO: Senator Murray Statement on GOP Tax Cut Plan—A Giveaway to the Wealthy That Will Hurt Millions of Families in WA State, Nationwide](#)

- [Cantwell - As Republicans Prepare Tax Plan, They Have Failed to Commit to Sparing Programs Millions of Americans Rely on for Retirement](#)

To Do:

- Call our MoCs and ask them to continue to fight against a tax bill that benefits the wealthiest 1% and corporations.

Additional Information:

- The House committee is expected to continue to mark up the bill through November 9. A floor vote is expected in the House next week.
- Some middle-class taxpayers would pay higher taxes under Republican tax bill: The Washington Post and New York Times reported that the Joint Committee on Taxation analysis of the Republican tax bill found that, on average, families earning between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year and between \$200,000 and \$500,000 would pay more in individual income taxes in 2023 and beyond (mostly due to loss of deductibility of state and local taxes and the limits on the mortgage deduction included in the bill).
- The House tax bill would reduce revenues by \$2 trillion over 10 years, creating a problem for Senate Republicans, because the budget resolution which allows them to pass the bill under reconciliation rules (with only 50 votes in the Senate) limits the deficit increase to \$1.5 trillion over 10 years.
- Tax bill includes provisions on abortion, allows ministers to support candidates, makes it harder for immigrants to receive refundable tax credits, allows beneficiaries of estates to pay no capital gains taxes
- The House Republican tax plan was released November 3. The Senate plan is to be released this coming week. The House bill mark-up began Nov 6th and is to be complete by Thursday with a vote soon after. Few members of Congress have even had the time to know what is in the bill.
- The bill would increase taxes in people in Democratic states, those with more robust state services. That is because it would eliminate the deductibility of state and local income and sales taxes, which would hit taxpayers in these states more. It would also tax the increase in endowment fund value for many colleges, especially private schools that cost more.
- The plan will require dramatic cuts in domestic spending (\$660 billion over a decade), even bigger cuts in entitlements (an estimated \$1 trillion from Medicare and \$500 billion from Medicaid, while increasing the deficit sharply (by an estimated \$2.2 trillion over 10 years).
- The Senate Finance Committee will begin its markup the week of November 13. Ryan has told members he wants the House to approve a tax bill by Thanksgiving. The plan is to pass the bill in both Houses by the end of 2017.

2. Health Insurance Mandate

Summary: Republicans may add provision ending health insurance mandate to tax bill, as suggested by Kevin Brady, Paul Ryan and Trump. Trump says if they don't, he will issue an executive order that will weaken the requirement that taxpayers demonstrate proof of insurance.

Talking Points:

- The current penalty for not having coverage is \$695 per adult and \$347.50 per child — up to \$2,085 per family — or 2.5 percent of family income, whichever is greater. Roughly 6.5 million taxpayers paid a fine for being uninsured in 2015, according to the IRS. The fine in 2015 was \$470 per adult.
- The CBO said that such a step would increase the number of people who are uninsured by 15 million in 2026. The CBO also estimated that premiums for people buying insurance would increase by about 20 percent, because people who are younger and healthier would be more inclined to go without coverage. It would save \$338 billion in federal subsidies over the next ten years.
- States will be allowed to impose Medicaid work requirements: Seema Verma, who heads the Health and Human Services Department's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said that the government will give states broader leeway in running their Medicaid programs and allow them to impose work requirements on enrollees.

Our MoCs:

- Our MoCs have a long-standing history of opposing repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), including eliminating individual mandates.

To Do:

- Call our MoCs and thank them for their previous efforts to oppose the repeal and replacement of the ACA. Ask them to oppose the effort to weaken the individual mandate in the House or Senate Republican tax bills or by executive order. Ask them to oppose work requirements for Medicaid recipients.

3. Protecting Our Democracy: Tell Trump He Can't Fire Mueller

[Information from Indivisible.org](http://Indivisible.org)

Summary: Former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort has been indicted on several charges, including conspiracy against the US. Manafort's associate Rick Gates has also been indicted, and Trump campaign foreign policy advisor George Papadopoulos has pled guilty to lying to the FBI about his communications with Russia. Indivisible

Talking Points:

- This development is the latest evidence that Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation continues to get closer to the truth. That means he is even more at risk of being fired by Donald Trump.
- Donald Trump has repeatedly acted as if the rules—and the law—don't apply to him, which is an attack on our democracy. That's why Indivisible has been calling for impeachment hearings for violations already committed, including obstruction of justice—Trump fired James Comey.
- The Senate Intelligence Committee made clear on October 4 that they will not be investigating Trump's obstruction of justice attempts - they're looking to Mueller. We must protect Mueller.
- Firing Comey created a constitutional crisis. Firing Mueller would be a crisis times ten.
- Firing Comey was obstruction of justice, pure and simple. But 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, especially not the President of the United States.
- How to protect the investigation as it unfolds:
 - **All Americans need to be clear that we will not stand for this.** Indivisible is teaming up with a coalition of groups to host emergency rallies in the event that Mueller is fired.
 - **Ask Congress to prevent Mueller from getting fired.** Our elected officials need to speak out and make clear that firing Mueller would be a red line that Trump must not cross.
 - **Senators can co-sponsor** legislation to protect against a Mueller firing: [S. 1735](#) led by Senators Graham and Booker, and [S. 1741](#) led by Senators Coons and Tillis. **Representatives in the House can co-sponsor** [H.R. 3771](#), led by Representatives Jones and Conyers.

Our MoCs:

- Our MoCs are not co-sponsors of the above bills.
- Sen. Murray said special prosecutor Mueller must “follow the facts where they may lead – without threats or intimidation, and with all the resources he needs” until the public gets a full explanation.
- From Senator Cantwell's Twitter: “Mueller's investigation, as well as Congressional investigations, must continue & the justice system must act.”

To Do: Call our MoCs

- **Script:** Hi! I'm a constituent from [part of state] and I'm calling to urge [MoC] to use every tool in the toolbox to prevent Trump from firing Special Counsel Mueller. I'm concerned he may do that, launching a constitutional crisis. Will [MoC] speak out and tell the President that firing Mueller would be a red line he must not cross. I'd like to see [MoC] issue a clear statement on this, and co-sponsor [H.R. 3771/S. 1735 or S. 1741] to show [his/her] support for protecting Mueller and the investigation.
- Write post cards and call John McCain, Bob Corker, Ben Sasse and Jeff Flake to ask them to work to keep the focus of the Senate investigations on the Russian efforts to undermine our democracy. While the Congress has the authority to do any investigations it wants, the threat to future elections comes from Russian election meddling and nothing should undermine congressional efforts to investigate what they have done, what they could do and how to counter it.

Additional Information:

- Mueller has indicted former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and his former campaign deputy Rick Gates and campaign aide George Papadopoulos has plead guilty to lying to the FBI and Sam, Sam Clovis, has come before the grand jury and is cooperating with Mueller. Senate Majority Leader McConnell says there is no need for bills to protect Mueller, though the odds Trump will fire him grow week by week. Some Republican conservatives are insisting Mueller recuse himself, based on flimsy arguments. Meanwhile fully 58% of Americans say they approve of Mueller's handling of the investigation while only 28% disapprove and 49% think Trump committed a crime.
- The Mueller investigation is gaining steam: Mueller has revealed a new Manafort link to Russian organized crime; he has enough evidence to indict Michael Flynn and his son, NBC reported; he is investigating the June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between Donald Jr., Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner with a Russian lawyer (and many other participants) who said she had damaging information on Hillary Clinton; Mueller is also looking at records related to the effort to develop a Trump Tower in Moscow in 2015. Carter Page has admitted meeting with high-level Russian officials and reporting on it to the Trump campaign. Wilbur Ross, Commerce Secretary, has major investments in a firm owned by Putin's son-in-law. Meanwhile, the Senate Intelligence Committee is looking at the efforts by Trump surrogates to take out parts of the Republican platform in 2016 that Russia objected to.
- Republican congressional committees have turned their focus away from Russia and to how the FBI treated the Clinton emails (trying to harm the reputation of the FBI) and to a claim that the purchase of a Canadian uranium company by a Russian firm somehow is linked to Hillary Clinton (the evidence so far says she was not involved). These are efforts to distract from the increasing intensity of the Mueller investigation. The Senate Intelligence Committee is continuing its work, but it, like other congressional investigations, are set to complete their work by early next year, without having answered whether there was collusion between the Russians and the Trump campaign.

4. Support Expanded Background Checks for Gun Purchase

Information from 5calls.org

Summary: In light of recent mass shootings in Las Vegas, Texas, and other cities across the country, it is clearer than ever that our approach to gun policy and gun violence must change. One such necessary change is to close background check loopholes. Currently, background checks are mandatory for commercial gun sales but not for purchases made through private sellers, at gun shows, or online. [5calls](http://5calls.org)

Talking Points:

- To fix this serious problem, Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) introduced the Background Check Expansion Act, along with 31 Democrat co-sponsors.
- Senator Murray is one of the 31 Democrats who is co-sponsoring the bill. The bill number is S. 2009 and is found here: [Senate Bill 2009](#)
- The bill makes background checks nearly universal.
- The bill would close the "gun show loophole" by mandating that all sellers run potential buyer information through the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).
- It would also require a licensed firearms dealer run a NICS check on buyers purchasing a gun from a private seller. The bill maintains some exceptions for law enforcement officials, loans for hunting and sporting events, or for immediate self-defense.
- Sen. Murphy has been working to pass the expansion of background checks since 20 Newtown children were killed in his state. While he acknowledges the tough hurdles such legislation faces, especially from the NRA, public support for expanded background check has risen to **90%**. Two of the 5 deadliest mass shootings in modern U.S. history happened in the span of 35 days this fall.
- Murphy, a Democrat and vocal advocate for gun control, blasted lawmakers for failing to pass laws that could prevent tragedies like the recent mass killing in Texas.
- Ironically, a federal budget amendment blocks federal funding from being spent on any study that might 'advocate or promote gun control.'

Our MoCs: Happily, Gun Owners of American graded each of our MoCs with an F on how pro-gun they were.

- **Denny Heck:** Was one of the House members who joined Rep. John Lewis to stage a sit-in on the floor of the House in June 2016. That sit-in demanded a vote on gun-control legislation.
- **Sen. Murray:** Is co-sponsoring S. 2009
- **Sen. Cantwell:** Has not signed onto S. 2009 however, she previously circulated a petition asking that people sign to denounce McConnell and Senate Republicans who voted against two commonsense gun reform measures.

WHAT TO DO:

- Call Sen. Murray to thank her for co-sponsoring S. 2009.
 - Script: I'm calling to express my support for S. 2009, the Background Check Expansion Act. Closing loopholes that allow the wrong people to buy guns is a necessary step Congress must take to strengthen our current gun policies and protect Americans from the rampant gun violence devastating our country.
- Sign Sen. Cantwell's petition located at: [Senator Cantwell's Petition](#)
- Call Rep. Heck to thank him for joining the 2016 sit-in at the House, and ask him to speak publicly and often in support of gun control.

5. Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR)

Summary: In the U.S. Senate, opponents of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are having trouble getting the word out. Sen. Maria Cantwell lamented that the refuge drilling proposal isn't drawing public outrage like it did more than a decade ago. [Alaska Public Media - Arctic drilling foes find public passion has cooled](#)

Talking Points:

- Arctic refuge drilling may be tucked into the tax cut plan.
- Cantwell's appeal for attention seems a far cry from 2005, when anti-drilling voters jammed **Congressional phone lines** and **knocked on doors** in the districts of wavering House members. This week, the **Congressional Budget Office** determined lease sales in the ANWR would meet the revenue target of \$1 billion for the federal treasury within 10 years. The proposal calls for a 50-50 revenue split with the state, so Alaska would also get a billion dollars in the first decade from lease sales in the refuge. The 19.6-million acre refuge in northeastern Alaska is one of the most pristine areas of the United States and is home to polar bears, caribou, migratory birds and other wildlife.
- Murkowski, a Republican, introduced legislation that would create an oil and gas exploration program on the refuge's coastal plain, letting prospectors build any roads and other infrastructure they deemed necessary inside the refuge to carry out their operations. The Trump administration and congressional Republicans are pushing to revive the drilling plan as a way to help pay for proposed tax cuts promised by Trump.
- The scientists said drilling on the coastal plain would be particularly harmful because it contains a "unique compression" of habitats supporting animals like polar bears, grizzly bears and wolverines, representing "the greatest wildlife diversity of any protected area above the Arctic Circle." [VOA News - Scientists Decry Arctic Oil Expansion in Letter to US Senators](#)
- The U.S. Geological Survey estimates the area on the Prudhoe Bay in Northern Alaska has up to 12 billion barrels of recoverable crude, and Republicans, who now control Congress and the White House, have long wanted to open a portion of the refuge called the 1002 area.
- The wildlife refuge has been the focus of a political fight for more than three decades. President Bill Clinton vetoed a GOP plan to allow drilling in the refuge in 1995, and Democrats led by Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state defeated a similar GOP plan in 2005. [WA PO - Alaska lawmaker sees financial boon in refuge drilling](#)
- Taxpayers for Common Sense, a fiscal watchdog group, says the drilling legislation is likely to generate about \$100 million for U.S. taxpayers — one-tenth the amount Murkowski and the Congressional Budget Office predict.

Our MoCs:

- In a Reuters interview, Cantwell praised scientists for spelling out why drilling would be so harmful to the refuge and said she would work to oppose the legislation.
- [Cantwell To GOP: Kill Your Dishonest Plan To Drill In The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge - Senator points to flimsy economic rationale, irreparable environmental damage to pristine arctic ecosystem](#)

To Do:

- Thank Senator Cantwell for speaking out against drilling in the ANWR.
- Ask Senator Murray and Congressman Heck to oppose any legislation allowing drilling in the ANWR.

6. Support Transparency in Election Ad Funding

From [Jen Hofman's Americans of Conscience Action](#)

Summary: Supporting transparency in election ad funding concerns Senate bill 1989 and House Resolution 4077.

- Television and radio have long been required to disclose the purchasers and content of all who purchase advertisements on their stations. Internet companies have not.
- [S 1989](#) and [HR 4077](#) would be the first to hold internet ads to the same transparency requirements.
 - S 1989 co-sponsors are Senators McCain (R-AZ) and Warner (D-VA)
 - HR 4077 co-sponsors are [Representatives Kilmer](#) [D-WA-6] and Coffman (R-CO-6)

Talking Points:

- SB 1989 was introduced on October 19 and was assigned to Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
- The chair of the Senate committee, which has jurisdiction over the legislation, hinted the bill may be too much of a quick fix, before it's been fully determined what effect — if any — Russian online advertising had on the 2016 election's outcome.
- More info on [Twitter](#)
- [Business Insider - McCain, Democrats introduce first major legislation targeting Facebook ads since Russia intervened in the 2016 elections](#)

Our MoCs:

- No information found.

To Do:

- Call MOCs
 - Script: Hi. I'm from [ZIP] and I'm calling about transparency in internet ads. S. 1989 (Senate)/ H.R. 4077 (House) protects voters with the same requirements that TV and radio have adhered to for years. Especially in the wake of last year's election, I would like [name] to co-sponsor this bill and bring more transparency to groups that fund US political ads. Thank you.

7. Protected Status for Central Americans and Haitians Removed by DHS

Summary: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that it would remove protections for 2,500 Nicaraguans and give them 14 months to leave the US or find another legal status that would allow them to stay. DHS said it needs more time to determine whether 57,000 Hondurans still qualify for the protections and will decide in six months.

Talking Points:

- The next groups waiting for a DHS decision are 50,000 Haitians and over 200,000 Salvadorians would be eligible for deportation. The Administration must decide whether the protections will be removed for Haitians before Thanksgiving. It has until early January to decide whether the protections will be removed for the Salvadorians.
- The groups with temporary protected status have nearly 275,000 US-born children. Many of these people have lived and worked in the US for over 20 years. If these individuals lose their protections but defy orders to leave, it would not be difficult for immigration enforcement agents to find them. The provisional nature of their immigration status requires them to maintain current records with DHS and the agency has their addresses, phone numbers and other personal information.

To Do:

- Call our MoCs to urge them to oppose this action regarding the Nicaraguans here on temporary protected status.

8. National Parks Fee Increase

Summary: The National Park Service plan to raise entrance fees at Olympic and Mt. Rainier National Parks (and 15 other popular national parks around the country) from \$25 to \$70 per vehicle during the busiest times at each park.

Talking Points:

- The annual Federal Lands pass will not increase in cost from the current \$80.
- This proposed increase would raise an estimated \$70 million toward the \$11 billion maintenance backlog. This is taking place at the same time as the Trump budget proposes a \$400 million budget cut for the national parks.
- The money for maintenance is sorely needed, but it should come from the general federal budget rather than from such dramatic increases in user fees. These increases are particularly a problem in Western Washington, the only urban area so close to parks facing these sharp increases. This increase would make access to the parks unaffordable for many, especially in our area.

Our MoCs:

- [Cantwell, Murray to Trump Administration: National Parks Are For All Americans— Not Just the Wealthy - Senators Challenge Secretary Zinke’s Decision to Increase Visitor Fees for Most Popular National Parks](#)

To Do:

- Make comments on the National Park Service comment page through November 23. The link to that page is at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?documentID=83652>
- Thank Senators Cantwell and Murray for speaking out against this fee increase. Ask them to support increased funding for national park maintenance.

9. Steve Bradbury Helped Torture Happen and Now Trump Rewards Him

Information from Indivisible.org

Summary: Torture is a crime and betrays our values as Americans. Nonetheless, the Bush administration carried out torture with impunity in the years after 9/11. Now, President Trump wants to give a cushy federal job to one of the lawyers responsible for that torture. This really isn't surprising from the president who claims "torture works" (it doesn't) and said he wants to do things that are "unthinkable almost" to people detained by the US in the name of national security. [Indivisible](http://Indivisible.org)

Talking Points:

- **Congress has an opportunity to reject Trump's torture fantasies.** Trump has nominated Steven Bradbury—a key player in the U.S. torture regime—to serve as General Counsel in the Department of Transportation.
- From 2005 to 2009, Bradbury was the acting head of the Office of Legal Counsel in the Justice Dept. This office issues legal opinions to guide the government's executive branch. He is most infamous for writing memos that amounted to permission slips for the U.S. government to use torture, providing legal cover, finding a way to justify what the Bush administration wanted to do—even though it was illegal.
- **The specifics are disgusting,** and included waterboarding, extreme sleep deprivation and painful stress positions like shackling them to the ceiling (even if they had broken feet).
- **This is the last person that we need serving as a high-ranking federal attorney while Trump is president.** The Senate already rejected his appointment to a different post back in 2008, based on his responsibility for the torture program. He has never expressed any remorse or regret.
- Senators McCain and Feinstein introduced legislation in 2015 to strengthen the ban on torture, and 78 senators from both parties voted it through. It would be a massive hypocrisy for the Senate to now confirm the lawyer who helped create the torture program in the first place.
- Senate will vote on Steven Bradbury to be General Counsel of the Department of Transportation on Monday, November 13th.

Our MoCs: No information available.

To Do:

- Call our Senators on Monday, November 13th and ask them to oppose Steven Bradbury's nomination.
- **Script:** Hi, my name is [name] and I'm a constituent calling from [part of state]. I'm calling to ask Senator [name] to oppose the nomination of Steven Bradbury as General Counsel of the Department of Transportation. Mr. Bradbury was a key author of the torture memos while he served at the Office of Legal Counsel, and has already been blocked by the Senate in a previous appointment for that reason. Torture is illegal in all circumstances, but Mr. Bradbury has shown no remorse or regret. We can't have him serving as a top lawyer for Trump, who has also expressed support for torture.

10. Oppose Anti-LGBTQ Jeff Mateer for Federal Judgeship

Information from 5calls.org

Summary: Donald Trump has nominated Texas Assistant Attorney General Jeff Mateer for a lifetime judgeship on the US District Court for the Eastern District of Texas. Despite being a constitutional lawyer, Mateer has repeatedly insisted that the separation of church and state should not exist.

Talking Points:

- He has worked for the First Liberty Institute, a conservative legal defense foundation that often pursues cases involving disputes over religious liberties. He has compared the treatment of Christians in America to that of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, calling the Obama administration “totalitarian”.
- He also has a history of hostility towards the LGBTQ+ community. In 2015, he described transgender children as part of “Satan’s plan” and has likened same-sex marriage and polyamory to people “marrying their pets”. Mateer is also an active proponent of conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ individuals, despite extensive evidence that this “therapy” is ineffective and dangerous.
- Trump's nomination of Mateer to a lifetime judgeship is an attack on both the separation of church and state and on LGBTQ+ individuals who remain vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. Mateer is an anti-civil rights, anti-First Amendment judge who has admitted outright to discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Trump has already withdrawn a directive allowing transgender students to use the bathrooms of their choice, and banned transgender military recruits. Appointing Mateer to this judgeship would further undermine the rights and protections that LGBTQ+ people and their allies have fought for years to secure.

Our MoCs: No information available

To Do:

- Call our Senators
- Script: Hi, my name is [NAME] and I’m a constituent from []. I'm calling to ask Senator [] to oppose the nomination of Jeff Mateer for the US District Court for the Eastern District of Texas. Mateer has said he discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation and that he does not believe in the constitutional mandate of separation of church and state. He is an appalling choice for a lifetime judgeship.

11. Other Issues

A. Economy

Trump announces nomination of Jerome Powell for Federal Reserve chair to replace Janet Yellen Trump announced the nomination of Jerome Powell for Federal Reserve chair to succeed Janet Yellen, whose term expires in February. Powell joined the Fed's Board of Governors in 2012 and was re-nominated in 2014. He is expected to continue Yellen's gradual approach to raising interest rates. Despite Trump's interest in financial deregulation, Powell supports the current more energetic approach to bank regulation. Powell is a Republican who worked in George H.W. Bush's Treasury Department and has a background in investment banking and private equity. He was trained as a lawyer rather than an economist. Powell is seen as the safe pick and the easiest to confirm.

B. Environment and Energy

- EPA's new science advisors include regulated industry representative and state government from conservative states:** The Washington Post reported that EPA administrator Scott Pruitt appointed 66 new scientific advisors to three of the EPA's scientific committees, many of whom hail from industry or state government, and are far more conservative views than their predecessors. Two of the new chairs — Texas' top toxicologist Michael Honeycutt, who will helm the [Scientific Advisory Board](#) (SAB), and consultant Louis Anthony Cox, who will chair the [Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee](#) (CASAC), have harshly criticized the way the EPA has conducted science in the past. Under [a new policy](#) Pruitt instituted this week, scientists receiving EPA funding cannot serve as the agency's advisers. Seven advisers stepped down rather than relinquish their grants, agency officials said, while two opted to forego the federal money to continue serving.
- Until recently people serving on the board were the top scientists in their field, and often these are often the people who were funded by federal agencies. By systematically excluding those scientists, Pruitt has eliminated many of the top scientists in many fields. These panels are different from policymaking bodies, where a diversity of policy perspectives is critical. They are supposed to be guiding by the science, irrespective of policy positions.
- While Pruitt said the appointments to the Scientific Advisory Board and its clean air panel, along with the even-larger [Board of Scientific Counselors](#) (BOSC), would bring new perspectives to the agency, a number of the new appointees hail from industries that the EPA regulates, including the French oil giant Total, Phillips 66, the utility Southern Co., Dow Chemical and Procter & Gamble. One current executive from the American Chemistry Council industry group, Kimberly White, will join the Scientific Advisory Board, while a former senior toxicologist for the chemical industry, Richard Becker, will serve on BOSC's Chemical Safety for Sustainability Subcommittee.
- Pruitt nearly halved the number of university scientists and tripled the number of industry and consulting firm scientists on the Scientific Advisory Board.
- EPA climate change report finds "no convincing alternative explanation" for climate change:** The National Climate Assessment, released every four years, found that it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century. "For the warming over the last century, there is no convincing alternative explanation supported by the extent of the observational evidence." The report details climate-related damage across the United States that is already unfolding as a result of 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit of global warming since 1900.
- The United States is already experiencing more extreme heat and rainfall events and more large wildfires in the West. More than 25 coastal U.S. cities are already experiencing more flooding, according to the report. It states that seas could rise by between 1 and 4 feet by the year 2100, and perhaps even more than that if Antarctica proves to be unstable, as is feared. The report says that a rise of over eight feet is

“physically possible” with high levels of greenhouse-gas emissions but that there’s no way right now to predict how likely it is to happen.

- When it comes to rapidly escalating levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the report states that there is no climate analog for this century at any time in at least the last 50 million years. The report warns of the unpredictable changes that scientists cannot foresee that could involve tipping points or fast changes in the climate system. These could switch the climate into “new states that are very different from those experienced in the recent past.” The authors caution that current climate models are more likely to underestimate future warming than overestimate it. While climate models have accurately predicted the past few decades of warming, they struggle to describe warmer climates that occurred millions of years ago. Models suggest that these climates should be *colder* than archaeological and climatic evidence tells us that they were, which means that they may fail to capture how warm Earth can get. There may be tipping points in the climate system that researchers may not fully understand.
- Modern climate change is primarily caused by the release of carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere, which prevent the sun’s heat from escaping back into space. Over the past several decades, this heat has accumulated in the atmosphere and oceans. Now, the United States sets many more extreme heat records than extreme cold records; it sees more intense heat waves and weaker, briefer cold snaps. That heat is shrinking the ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica and in other glaciers on land and causing the oceans to expand. The report includes forecasts of how much the sea level will rise around the world. The sea level worldwide has risen by about seven or eight inches since 1900, with three of those inches coming in the last 25 years. The oceans are almost certain to rise one to four feet by 2100. If some of the fastest scenarios for the melting of the Antarctic come to pass, then the sea could rise as much as eight feet.
- The report also warns of “compound extremes”, the risk of multiple unusual weather conditions coming to pass at the same time. For instance, scorching heat and a lack of rain during the same summer will intensify a drought and increase the chance of wildfires far more than either one would alone. If excess rain falls on waterlogged ground, then the chance of a devastating flood also rises. It’s hard for scientists to predict how the various extremes of climate change will overlap with each other.
- **Projected 3 degrees C of warming would leave many world cities underwater:** The Guardian reported that if UN warnings that the world is on course for 3 degrees C of global warming come to pass, many cities will be inundated. They would include Shanghai, Shenzhen, Alexandria and much of the Nile Delta, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Osaka, Bangkok, and Miami (and the southern third of Florida).
- **Ozone hole is shrinking; smallest since 1988:** The Washington Post reported that the ozone hole is shrinking and has shrunk to its smallest peak since 1988, NASA scientists said. The largest the hole became this year was about 7.6 million square miles wide, about two and a half times the size of the United States, in September. But it was still 1.3 million square miles smaller than last year, scientists said, and has shrunk more since September. Warmer-than-usual weather conditions in the stratosphere are to thank for the shrinkage since 2016, as the warmer air helped fend off chemicals like chlorine and bromine that eat away at the ozone layer, scientists said. The hole's overall reduction can be traced to global efforts since the mid-1980s to ban the emission of ozone-depleting chemicals.

C. International

- **Trump to meet Putin on sidelines of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vietnam:** The Washington Post reported that Trump said in Japan that he is likely to meet with Putin during a regional summit in Da Nang, Vietnam later this week. He said he wants Putin’s help on North Korea.
- **Saudi King and his son arrest major figures in power play:** Robin Wright reported in the New Yorker that King Salman of Saudi Arabia and his powerful son launched an unprecedented purge of their own family over the weekend. The major targets were royal brethren who controlled money, the media, or the

military. They had the tacit support of Trump. Among the dozens arrested were eleven senior princes, several current or former ministers, the owners of three major television stations, the head of the most important military branch, and one of the wealthiest men in the world, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, who has been a major shareholder in Citibank, Twentieth Century Fox, Apple, Twitter, and Lyft and owns the Savoy Hotel in London.

- The purge's mastermind is Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (known as MBS), who has had a quick rise since he was appointed by his father to be defense minister, at the age of twenty-nine, in 2015. He has grabbed all the major economic, political, security, and royal court portfolios. In June, he was key to ousting the former Crown Prince, Prince Nayef, a senior royal and the closest US ally inside the monarchy, to become next in line to the throne. Nayef is still under house arrest.
- On November 4, King Salman created a new Anti-Corruption Commission and put MBS in charge. The arrests, in a late-night blitz, soon followed. The arrests are an attempt to consolidate MBS's powers, possibly in the run-up to a move by the aged and ailing king to step aside, experts say. The father-and-son duo have already created a whole new royal family that bypassed hundreds of other princes.
- MBS is also empowered to seize assets and issue travel bans. All members of the Saudi royal family were also barred from leaving the country. Ibn Saud, the founding king of modern Saudi Arabia, had more than forty sons and even more daughters. Their children and grand-children are now [estimated](#) to number between 6-15,000.
- Saudi Arabia also appears to have had a hand in the weekend resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, as part of a regional power play. Hariri made the announcement from Riyadh on a Saudi station. He cited a [threat](#) to his life and meddling in Lebanese politics by Iran and Hezbollah. His father, who was also a Prime Minister, made a fortune off construction in Saudi Arabia. He was assassinated in 2005. It was reported that Saudi Arabia summoned him and had him resign and that it was a Saudi decision about how to deal with Iran and Hezbollah.
- ***Spanish judge jails eight Catalan ministers before trial and issues arrest warrant for former Catalan prime minister:*** The New York Times reported that a judge from Spain's national court November 2 ordered prison without bail for eight of the region's separatist leaders pending trial. Spain's attorney general is seeking to prosecute 20 Catalan separatists. The attorney general wants the separatist leaders to be prosecuted on charges of rebellion and sedition, as well as the misuse of public funds to organize an independence referendum on Oct. 1 that was declared illegal by the Spanish government and courts. If found guilty of rebellion, they could face up to 30 years in prison. After a hearing for nine of the politicians on Thursday, Judge Lamela sent eight of them to prison, judging them a flight risk. Among those jailed was Oriol Junqueras, who was the deputy to former Catalan Prime Minister Puigdemont in the Catalan government as well as the leader of one of the main separatist parties.
- An exception was made for Santi Villa, who resigned from the Catalan regional government a day before lawmakers declared independence. Mr. Villa could leave custody if he posts bail of \$52,000, pending a full trial. Separately, a judge from the Spanish Supreme Court postponed the hearings of five Catalans who have parliamentary immunity until next week, after their lawyers requested more time to prepare their case. The most prominent among the lawmakers is Carme Forcadell, who read out the declaration of independence last week as president of the Catalan Parliament.
- The Guardian reported that a Spanish judge has issued a European arrest warrant for Catalonia's ousted president, Carles Puigdemont. He had flown to Brussels early last week with a four of his deposed ministers after Spanish authorities removed him and his cabinet from office for [pushing ahead with the declaration](#) despite repeated warnings that it was illegal.
- The Washington Post reported that deposed Catalan president Carles Puigdemont turned himself in to Belgian authorities over the weekend and appeared at a 10-hour court hearing on November 5. He and four other Catalan separatist politicians were released pending a ruling on whether the court will execute the European warrant issued by Spain for the arrest of Puigdemont and his ministers on charges of

sedition, rebellion and misuse of public funds in the staging of last month's independence referendum in Catalonia.

D. Politics

- Democrats win in Virginia, New Jersey, Maine and in Washington state:** The November 7 election showed the effect of an anti-Trump vote in, swing states, suburbs, and among women. In Virginia, Democratic Lt. Governor Ralph Northam beat Republican Ed Gillespie by over nine percentage points, six percentage points above the polling averages in the race. This was after Gillespie, a George Bush advisor and lobbyist, used Trump-style anti-immigrant ads to try to turn out Trump voters. Turn-out was very high for both parties, but Democratic turn-out in suburban and urban areas and among women, minorities and young people swamped Republican turn-out. The Democrats also elected the Democrat Justin Fairfax as Lt. Governor, the first African-American elected to statewide office since 1989 and the Democratic Attorney General Mark Herring won reelection. In the state House of Delegates, where Democrats held only 34 seats out of 100, they picked up 14 seats solidly and six more seats are in play, with four in which recounts are expected. Most of these are in suburban districts, especially around DC. Among the winners in Danica Roem, the first transgender person elected to a state legislature, who defeated longtime incumbent Bob Marshall who had proudly claimed he was homophobe-in-chief.
- In New Jersey, Democrat Phil Murphy will succeed Chris Christie as governor, winning 55-42% over his Republican opponent. Christie now has the lowest approval rating of any governor ever polled, in the low teens. Democrats will hold both the state Senate and state Assembly, giving them unified state government control. Murphy, a former ambassador to Germany who has worked at Goldman Sachs, has promised to push New Jersey in a progressive direction, vowing to [legalize and tax marijuana](#), institute a \$15 minimum wage, tighten the state's already strict gun-control laws, and ramp up funding for education, public-worker pensions, and transportation, while protecting undocumented immigrants and fighting the agenda of President Trump. However, New Jersey faces the second most difficult fiscal position in the US, with an inadequate tax base, aging infrastructure and public pensions with only one-third their promised funding.
- In Maine, voters passed an initiative opting into the ACA Medicaid expansion which their conservative Republican governor, Paul LePage had refused to do. But on November 8, LePage said he will refuse to implement the expansion until the legislature determines how to fund it, which he has the power to do.
- In Washington, State Senate candidate Manka Dhingra appears to have won in the 45th District race with 55% of the vote. Because votes will be counted for a number of days more, this is not certain, but the margin is large enough that her victory is likely. This is important because if it holds up it will give the Democrats unified control of the House, Senate and Governor. However, it will only be by a one-vote margin in both the House and Senate and all seats will be up for reelection in 2018. Still, there are a wide range of initiatives that have been blocked by the State Senate, and many of them could be enacted as a result of this change.
- Poll shows Trump with very low approval:** The Washington Post-ABC News Poll results show that only 37% of Americans approve of how Trump is handling his job. This is 14% below the lowest of any president since polling began at this time in their term (Carter at 51%). His disapproval rating is at 59% with 50% saying they strongly disapprove. This is 16% any president at this time in their term (Clinton at 41%).
- He is the only president dating back to Harry S. Truman whose approval rating at this point in his presidency is net negative — by 22 points. The next worst recorded in that time was Bill Clinton, who had a net positive of 11 points by this time in his presidency. Meanwhile, 65 percent say he has accomplished “not much” or “little or nothing.” This is up from 56 percent last spring. Forty-three percent of all Americans give him the lowest possible rating, saying he has accomplished “little or nothing.”

- The new CNN poll shows Trump with a new low approval rating of 36%. That poll shows 58% of adults disapproving of how he is handling his job, with 48% with strong disapproval.
- ***Poll shows voters favor Democrats by widest margin since 2006:*** Voters say they prefer Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives over Republicans by the widest margin in over a decade, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll. A 51% majority of registered voters say that if the election were held today, they would vote for or lean toward the Democratic candidate in their congressional district, while 40% say they would choose the Republican. That is the biggest spread in a Post-ABC survey since October 2006, just weeks before a midterm in which Democrats won back control of the House and Senate amid deep dissatisfaction with then-President George W. Bush and the Iraq War. Democrats tend to have a 3-5% advantage in the generic polling, even in years they lose by a large margin, But this is a far larger margin than that.
- The poll does not measure likely voters, normal this far from an election. The key item in determining who wins in an off-year election like 2018 is voter turnout. This has been a major problem for Democrats in recent off-year elections, with minority and young voters turning out in much smaller numbers than in presidential election years.

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