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Weekly Must-Reads in the Press, August 24, 2018

Here we are again with our weekly news update. We know that you are busy people, and you probably do have a lot of news to sift through, online, on social media, on news feeds. But we will bring you a weekly update of news we curate from major news sources that may be of interest to you. We may even be able to introduce you to some new news sources you will enjoy exploring.

So read these on your devices, or print them out for your morning coffee reading this weekend. (We do not expect you will read these all at once: this is slow news, not Facebook news. So explore, linger, and share with friends—we mean share the links with actual, physical, real friends!)

[Note to local interests: news and links to reports on local candidates Casten and Pritkger will be found by scrolling down to number 11, below.]

1. Keyboards all over the world are burning as emails and reports and editorials discuss the historic events of the last few days. We are at a turning point in the history of the Trump presidency and so, perhaps, of the nation. Understand that, as we will detail below, the *politics* of pursuing Donald Trump's legal responsibility for campaign law violations, and perhaps for foreknowledge of Russian meddling in the election, may mean that nothing will actually touch him. Or it may be the beginning of the end. That really will depend on how the special prosecutor and then Congress react to events as they unfold. [Note: If Trump is re-elected in 2020, he may never face charges, as the statute of limitations for these crimes will have expired.]

We will begin with a simple list of the Wednesday headlines in one of the nation's top newspapers covering events in the capital, *The Washington Post*. We urge our readers to click through. (*Note: the paywall for this paper is rather thin: it allows reading in Firefox and can be undone by restarting other browsers. We of course urge subscription to all newspapers, if that is within your means. Understand that in these times of fast-breaking news stories, TV and cable news do not allow careful analysis and detail, and so, paradoxically, they are often too fast in reporting to allow exploration, factual research, and considered judgment. Sometimes only reading can do that.*)

Here is page one in *The Post's* web edition: "[Cohen pleads guilty, implicates Trump in payoff scheme](#);" "[Manafort convicted on 8 counts; mistrial declared on 10 others](#)"; "[Manafort's verdict and Cohen's plea gave Trump his worst day of the Russia investigation so far](#)"; "[Trump's company approved \\$420,000 in payments to Cohen, relying on 'sham' invoices, prosecutors say](#)"; "[Cohen's claim about Trump may spark calls for impeachment but is unlikely to lead to charges](#)"; and, early Wednesday morning, summarizing a media blitz by Lanny Davis, "[Cohen lawyer Lanny Davis suggests his client has knowledge implicating Trump in 'criminal conspiracy' to hack Democratic emails.](#)"

A. On Friday, it was reported that "**Allen Weisselberg, chief financial officer for the Trump Organization, was one of the executives who helped arrange \$420,000 in payments to Donald Trump's longtime attorney Michael Cohen to help reimburse him for hush money he paid an adult-film star. Weisselberg, who got his start working for the president's father, was granted immunity** by federal investigators in New York in exchange for his truthful testimony about his role in the payments, according to people familiar with the discussions." [emphasis added] So reported *The Washington Post* this morning. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-organization-executive-allen-weisselberg-who-allegedly-helped-arrange-hush-money-reimbursement-to-cohen-granted-immunity/2018/08/24/404ebdf2-a7b1-11e8-97ce-cc9042272f07_story.html

As *The Post's* Aaron Blake explains the significance of this: "[T]he latest news is potentially even bigger than its predecessors. And that's because none of these other figures can likely hold a candle to Weisselberg when it comes to knowing about any skeletons in Trump's closet. We don't yet know the extent of what Weisselberg told investigators -- or even [whether any of it implicates Trump](#) -- but there is plenty of reason to believe this could be problematic for Trump." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/07/26/this-may-be-the-biggest-shoe-to-drop-from-the-trump-michael-cohen-tape>

B. We will begin our reporting on the earlier news this week with the facts of the Cohen case. First, the excellent summary in *The New York Times* on the day: "**Michael D. Cohen, President Trump's former lawyer, made the extraordinary admission in court on Tuesday that Mr. Trump had directed him to arrange payments to two women during the 2016 campaign to keep them from speaking publicly about affairs they said they had with Mr. Trump. Mr. Cohen acknowledged the illegal payments while pleading guilty to breaking campaign finance laws and other charges, a litany of crimes that revealed both his shadowy involvement in Mr. Trump's circle and his own corrupt business dealings.** [emphasis added]

“He told a judge in United States District Court in Manhattan that the payments to the women were made ‘in coordination with and at the direction of a candidate for federal office,’ **implicating the president in a federal crime.** [emphasis added]

“The plea represented a pivotal moment in the investigation into the president, and the scene in the Manhattan courtroom was striking. Mr. Cohen, a longtime lawyer for Mr. Trump — and loyal confidant — described in plain-spoken language how Mr. Trump worked with him to cover up a potential sex scandal that Mr. Trump feared would endanger his rising candidacy.”

The plea deal does not require Cohen to cooperate with Robert Mueller, the special prosecutor. But neither does it preclude it, and Mueller can recommend lenient sentencing for any substantial assistance in the Russia investigation (which is not part of this case; indeed Mueller handed the matter over to NY federal prosecutors since it did not fall in his investigative charge.)

Moreover, this case may have implications for Stephanie Clifford’s (aka “Stormy Daniels”) case accusing Trump of violating her NDA with him, and seeking to invalidate the contract. Says *The Times*: “One collateral effect of Mr. Cohen’s plea agreement is that it may allow Mr. Avenatti, Ms. Clifford’s lawyer, to proceed with a deposition of Mr. Trump in a lawsuit that Ms. Clifford filed accusing the president of breaking a nondisclosure agreement concerning their affair.”

Read the whole *New York Times* piece to get a full account of the charges in the federal case, which involves illegal payoffs to Clifford and, indirectly through a surrogate (AMI, publisher of *The National Inquirer*), to Karen MacDougal, both of whom have alleged affairs with Trump: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/nyregion/michael-cohen-plea-deal-trump.html> *Highly recommended reading

C. In another turn of events, Cohen’s lawyer, Lanny Davis, has said that Cohen has more knowledge of interest to the special prosecutor about Trump’s involvement in attempts to hack Democrats’s emails. “**Davis said Cohen’s knowledge reached beyond ‘the obvious possibility of a conspiracy to collude’ and included information on whether Trump participated in a ‘criminal conspiracy’ to hack into the emails of Democratic officials during the 2016 election.**” [emphasis added]

So reported *The Washington Post*, in an important interview with Davis, who had been making the rounds on media all Wednesday morning. They continue: “Davis noted, as have others, that what ‘Donald Trump and all of his henchmen miss when they say, “No collusion, no collusion, no collusion”’ is the issue of criminal conspiracy, which he distinguished from collusion. (For the record, Davis

said he thinks there was also collusion, meaning ‘active coordination between people in the Trump campaign and Russian government officials.’)... Davis said Cohen’s possible knowledge of criminal conspiracy was not limited to the [June 2016 meeting](#) at Trump Tower between Donald Trump Jr. and Kremlin-aligned lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya.... Davis told The Post that there were other instances, involving overt acts, about which Cohen had knowledge ‘of interest to Mr. Mueller.’” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/08/22/cohen-lawyer-lanny-davis-suggests-his-client-has-knowledge-implicating-trump-in-criminal-conspiracy-to-hack-democratic-emails/>

D. But what could this mean for the future of at Trump presidency? This is the beyond-the-news question about which pundits disagree, but we can only look to the best analyses possible at this time (journalism, we remind our readers, is [“the first draft of history”](#)). Let us try to get a broader perspective.

In a good analysis of what this could mean for Trump’s credibility before the public, *The Washington Post’s* Amber Phillips says, “Trump originally said he didn’t know about his longtime lawyer and fixer’s efforts to pay off women during the campaign who said they had affairs with the president. Later he said he wasn’t doing anything wrong. That lawyer, Michael Cohen, just pleaded guilty in New York court, saying that he not only paid off those women to help Trump win the election — a potential campaign finance violation — but that he did it ‘in coordination and at the direction of’ Trump.

“Rudy responds: ‘There is no allegation of any wrongdoing against the President in the government’s charges against Mr. Cohen. It is clear that, as the prosecutor noted, Mr. Cohen’s actions reflect a pattern of lies and dishonesty over a significant period of time.’”

Phillips points out: “In other words, **Trump maintains that he had nothing to do with anything unsavory or illegal; Cohen just pleaded guilty to doing those things because Trump told him to. Cohen has already released some tapes that appear to back up his version of events. Now he has testified that it happened.** [emphasis added] And it’s infinitely harder for Trump to logically claim he’s the one telling the truth when the other person faces jail time for telling a court his version of events.

“**This is a disaster for Trump,**’ said Cornell Law vice dean and legal analyst Jens David Ohlin.” [emphasis added] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/08/21/manafort-verdict-cohens-plea-gave-trump-his-worst-day-russia-investigation-so-far/>

But is it? First of all, Cohen’s lawyer, Davis, may just be hinting at great knowledge to get a better deal for his client. In a careful analysis of the Cohen matter, *The Washington Post* columnist Philip Bump **suggests that Cohen may be able to confirm certain elements of the Steele dossier**, which alleges that “Cohen... played ‘a key role in the secret TRUMP campaign/Kremlin relationship.’ The documents allege that Cohen stepped into the role of primary liaison with Russia in August 2016 after Paul Manafort resigned from the campaign.... Cohen, a report from October reads, ‘was heavily engaged in a cover up and damage limitation operation in the attempt to prevent the full details of [Trump’s] relationship with Russia being exposed.’”

But are any of these charges true? Bump says, “The fairest assumption is that the dossier’s allegations are more likely untrue than true. Cohen may not have any information about any link between the Trump campaign and Russia that’s more serious than what’s known publicly.” This story could disappear. Or it might not. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/08/22/what-might-michael-cohen-tell-robert-mueller/> **Highly recommended reading*

Moreover, it is unlikely that Trump’s supporters really care much about this, and are likely to see this as more Beltway nonsense. That Trump paid off a lover or two is nothing compared to other scandals they ignored. And, as *The Washington Post* [reported](#), Fox News downplayed Trump’s exposure in the Cohen matter and continued the narrative of the “witch hunt.” Fox’s followers have simply not got the view of the mainstream media. This in turn will mean Republican politicians will be loath to challenge Trump, or so it now stands.

Nonetheless, it was a close election, and *perhaps* if more people had known about both the Russian connections and the payoffs, it might have made a difference. That leads *Washington Post* commentator Max Boot to conclude, “Even buying the silence of his reputed playmates could by itself have been enough to swing an exceedingly close election decided by fewer than 80,000 votes in three states. Trump certainly would not have authorized the payments unless he thought it was politically imperative to do so. There is also considerable evidence, as [I previously argued](#), that Russia’s intervention on Trump’s behalf affected the outcome. **Even more than Nixon, Trump is now an illegitimate president whose election is tainted by fraud.**” [emphasis added]

All the same, Boot sees such deep fear among Republicans that little is likely to come of this under a Congress they control: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trump-is-now-an-illegitimate-president/2018/08/22/d1c9271c-a613-11e8-97ce-cc9042272f07_story.html

Remember too, this legal fact: Trump will not be indicted while in office, according to most experts. Here is a good analysis, and a reminder, from Adam Liptak and Jim Rutenberg, in Wednesday's *New York Times*: "When a lawyer tells prosecutors that his client directed him to commit a crime and pleads guilty to related crimes himself, an indictment of the client is very likely to follow. The nation is about to find out whether there is an exception to that general rule when the client is the president of the United States. Although there is no explicit prohibition in the Constitution against indicting a president, the Justice Department has long taken the position that sitting presidents are not subject to criminal prosecution...."

"Mr. Cohen admitted to arranging payments to women to buy their silence about what they said were affairs with Mr. Trump, and he said Mr. Trump instructed him to pay the money to influence the election.

"If all of that is true, Mr. Trump committed serious crimes. **'The plea, under oath, establishes that the president was a co-conspirator in the campaign violations to which Cohen pleaded guilty,'** said Philip Allen Lacovara, who served as counsel to special prosecutors investigating President Richard M. Nixon's role in the Watergate scandal." [emphasis added]

However, they report, "But under current Justice Department policy, Mr. Trump will not face prosecution at least until he leaves office. A middle ground and second option [urged by some legal experts](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/us/politics/cohen-trump-indicted.html) is to allow prosecutors to obtain an indictment but defer further proceedings until the president leaves office. The third option is impeachment, and prosecutors may present the evidence they have gathered to the House for its consideration." <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/us/politics/cohen-trump-indicted.html>

It keeps coming back to Congress. And to the passionate support of Republicans in and out of office. As *The New York Times* reported on the lack of real response from Congressional Republicans, "few Republicans believed the double-digit felony count would drastically reshape the political climate. Party strategists largely dismissed Mr. Manafort's conviction, viewing it as not directly related to Mr. Trump, and said voters had already concluded that the president agreed to pay off the actress, Stephanie Clifford, better known as Stormy Daniels." <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/us/politics/trump-cohen-impeachment.html>

E. So here we have **our final analysis, a savvy larger perspective from Renato Mariotti**, a former federal prosecutor who handled many obstruction cases, ran for attorney general in Illinois, and is a frequent commentator on Constitutional and legal issues relating to the Trump administration.

Writing in *Politico* on Wednesday, he points out that “[w]hat is most surprising about Tuesday’s events is that Cohen was not required to implicate Trump in order to plead guilty. The [charges prepared by prosecutors](#) did *not* state that Trump directed Cohen’s criminal activity.... **It’s not clear whether federal prosecutors knew in advance that Cohen would implicate Trump, but if they had any reason not to believe him, they were obligated not to permit Cohen to lie to the judge. Because they didn’t, we know that his statements were consistent with the other evidence in their possession.** [emphasis added]

“Don’t hold your breath waiting for Cohen to testify against Trump. His plea agreement with prosecutors doesn’t include a cooperation provision.” As for public perception, “the Trump disinformation campaign has worked. [Only 47 percent of Americans approve of Mueller’s investigation, and 66 percent want him to end it before the November election](#), which almost certainly will not happen.... One reason Trump’s strategy has worked well is that there is a widespread belief that the point of the Mueller investigation is to undercover ‘collusion’ with the Russians. But the term ‘collusion’ has no legal meaning in this context, and as a result, no one can agree on its meaning. When Mueller [charged Manafort with conspiring with a suspected Russian intelligence operative](#), his former business partner in Ukraine, I [might \[not? --Ed.\] have been the only person wondering](#) if that was ‘collusion.’

“Cohen’s statement Tuesday was powerful because it sidestepped the ‘collusion’ red herring. Cohen told the judge that Trump directed him to commit a serious crime, but the crime had nothing to do with Russia and the prosecutors in the courtroom did not work with Mueller. For that reason, Trump’s usual attacks wouldn’t work.”

At the same time, Mariotti concludes, “But in the end, what will matter is whether members of Congress believe obstruction of justice — or other crimes uncovered by Mueller — is a ‘high crime or misdemeanor’ that warrants impeachment. That matters because the Justice Department has [concluded that a sitting president cannot be indicted](#), even though that is an open question. Mueller will follow that guidance and submit a report to Congress instead of obtaining an indictment of Trump.... Trump’s team reportedly [believes](#) the fact that Trump won’t be indicted is their ace in the hole. It’s easy to see why — Trump’s disinformation strategy has convinced the Republican base that Mueller’s investigation is illegitimate, and Trump has good reason to believe that his base will stick with him no matter what Mueller uncovers. **The votes of 67 senators are required to remove a president from office, and at this time it is hard to imagine 19 Republican senators voting against Trump.** [emphasis added]

“That is what the survival of the Trump presidency comes down to. If Trump has 34 Republican votes in the Senate, he can pardon his friends and associates with impunity and he need not fear an indictment in the upper chamber until 2021 at the earliest. Even if Trump loses the 2020 election, he could step down and have Vice President Mike Pence pardon him before he leaves office. Any limits on Trump’s pardon power are untested.” **Highly recommended reading* <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/08/22/trump-was-winning-until-tuesday-219377>

To those of our readers who believe we are on the verge of ending the Trump presidency, or that we will win a decisive battle against Trumpism, we offer the following wise caution from Brain Klaas, fellow in global politics at the London School of Economics. He reminds us that, as he titles his *Washington Post* op-ed, **“Hooray for Mueller. But American democracy is still in danger”**

“Despite those glimmers of optimism that the president’s immoral and potentially illegal conduct matters, the trends that Trump has manipulated to his advantage imperil American democracy. It’s alarming that Trump’s approval ratings are significantly higher than Nixon’s even though he has behaved far worse. Between 30 percent and 40 percent of Americans are willing to support a racist bigot who lies routinely, lashes out at democratic institutions like a thin-skinned despot, has surrounded himself with people who turned out to be corrupt (and now convicted) criminals and may even be a criminal himself. There is no other functioning democracy in the world where such a statement holds true. Trump may finally have created a scandal that he can’t escape, but the dangerously authoritarian and cult-like reasoning that he has exploited for so long are a threat to American democracy that we cannot escape.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/08/22/hooray-for-mueller-but-american-democracy-is-still-in-danger/>

3. Also on Wednesday, in a dramatic coincidence that could have come from a hard-to-believe political movie, former Trump campaign chairman **Paul Manafort was convicted** on eight counts of bank and tax fraud. For the facts of the conviction, we point you to *The New York Times* summary here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/us/politics/paul-manafort-trial-verdict.html>

But for a sharp perspective on the legal and political implications for Trump and his presidency, we suggest **a very illuminating summary of the Manafort conviction’s real meaning**, here, in a *New York Times* essay by attorneys Noah Bookbinder, Barry Berke, and Norman L. Eisen. They say, “This is no ‘witch hunt.’ It instead is one of the most successful special counsel investigations in history. Coming alongside the guilty plea by Michael Cohen, the president’s former

lawyer, implicating the president in campaign finance violations, it was a very bad day for Mr. Trump.

“Mr. Manafort’s conviction cannot be diminished by arguing, as Mr. Trump and his coterie are fond of doing, that the misconduct was unrelated to the Trump campaign or Russian ‘collusion.’ On the contrary, **the trial evidence included Mr. Manafort’s close ties to pro-Russia forces and his desperate financial straits as he ‘volunteered’ his time for the next president.**” [emphasis added] There is, as other news outlets like *The Guardian* have [reported](#), a real relationship between the Manafort conviction and the Trump campaign ties to Russia.

The Times authors go on to say, “**The conviction also shows the caliber of the foe that President Trump is facing as he decides whether or not to sit for an interview with Mr. Mueller focusing on obstruction of justice.** [emphasis added] While we had already believed that Mr. Trump was unlikely to voluntarily sit for an interview, Tuesday’s verdict makes that interview even less probable. We should now prepare for a [potential extended legal battle](#) about the scope and power of a possible Mueller-issued subpoena for the president’s testimony. It is unknown whether Mr. Mueller will go that route. If he does, however, his win in the Manafort case sends Mr. Trump the message that the special counsel and his team have the will and the ability to win a battle over a subpoena....

“The conviction is also bad news for the president because it increases the pressure on Mr. Manafort to cooperate with investigators. He has a second trial coming shortly in Washington, D.C., which could add even more time to what will likely be a substantial sentence.... Nor can Mr. Manafort simply wait for a presidential pardon. Mr. Trump hinted at one in his inappropriate tweets while the jury was deliberating, and has otherwise signaled his readiness to use his pardon pen. But should Mr. Trump pardon him, Mr. Manafort should expect state attorneys general to pick up under applicable state laws the threads of corruption and tax fraud that Mr. Mueller has already woven together.” *Highly recommended reading* <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/opinion/guilty-verdict-paul-manafort.html>

4. On Thursday, as *The New York Times* reported, **Attorney General Jeff Sessions rebuked President Trump**, who, on Fox, “reiterated his longstanding objection to Mr. Sessions’s recusal from the Russia investigation and his insistence that he would have chosen another person for attorney general had he known someone else would oversee the inquiry.” But “Mr. Sessions warned the president not to intrude on federal law enforcement. ‘While I am attorney general, the actions of the Department of Justice will not be improperly influenced by political considerations.’” On Friday morning, Trump responded that in that case,

Sessions should look into violations by Democrats and his other political enemies. The war between the two is clearly escalating. Read the full story here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/23/us/politics/trump-flipping-cohen-manafort.html>.

5. As of Monday, **almost 250 former career and bipartisan intelligence officials had signed a letter protesting Trump's revocation of John Brennan's security clearance.** *The Washington Post* provides a list of all of their names and government positions here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/politics/brennan-cia-defenders/>

Last Friday, Jeffrey Smith, a former general counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency, wrote an important opinion piece in *The New York Times*, titled, "**Was It Illegal for Trump to Revoke Brennan's Security Clearance?**" His answer, simply, is, "I believe the president has grossly abused his authority and violated Mr. Brennan's First Amendment right to speak freely. The president's actions are therefore unconstitutional and demand a response from Congress...."

"It is hard to conclude that Mr. Trump's actions are anything other than a 'sanction' to punish and intimidate Mr. Brennan and others who dare to speak out. Fear of the state's unconstrained power is what Vladimir Putin and other autocrats use to govern. But fear is no way to govern a democracy.... I do not know whether Mr. Brennan or others who may have their security clearance revoked by the president will choose to litigate. But if they do, it will be up to the courts to decide whether the First Amendment still matters in the age of Trump." <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/opinion/illegal-trump-revoke-brennan-security-clearance.html>

In fact, **John Brennan has announced his intention to sue.** He believes that the revocation and the threat to others, some still employed in government, was an attack on those involved in the Russia investigation: "Speaking Sunday on NBC's 'Meet the Press,'" reported *The Washington Post*, "Brennan said he's been contacted by a number of lawyers about the possibility of an injunction in the wake of Trump's move to revoke his clearance and threaten nine others who have been critical of the president or are connected to Mueller's investigation, which Trump has called witch hunt." https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/brennan-gets-offers-for-legal-action-on-clearance-revocation/2018/08/20/e465a7ea-a430-11e8-ad6f-080770dcddc2_story.html Trump fired back, welcoming the lawsuit. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/dozens-more-former-us-officials-speak-out-against-trump-revoking-brennans-security-clearance/2018/08/20/b389978e-a45e-11e8-a656-943eefab5daf_story.html

A contrarian view from Jack Shafer in *Politico* reminds us that Brennan is not an entirely sympathetic figure, and his calling out of Trump after the Helsinki summit as “treasonous” was excessive. Shafer notes that at times Brennan sounds uncomfortably like Trump, and that “However low your opinion of the president has descended, it’s difficult to interpret Trump’s kowtowing as any sort of crime or a misdemeanor or even as an act of treason. And while we might very well learn from special prosecutor Robert S. Mueller III’s investigation that Trump is a Putin pocket-toy, it’s a tad unseemly—dare I say Trumpian again?—for our former top spy to toss such charges around without any proof. Brennan’s language has provided months and months of cheap entertainment for all of us who suspect the worst about the president.” If Brennan had intelligence about Trump and Russia, Shafer says, we might take the substance of his charges more seriously. But Brennan [has admitted](#) he does not. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/08/16/trump-john-brennan-feud-219368>

6. The damage to our democracy may be healed some day. But the damage to our environment, the planet where we must live, will endure unless radical change comes, and soon. **This week, the Trump administration announced its new environmental rules on coal.** These roll back Obama regulations aimed at cutting emissions from coal plants. As *The Washington Post* [put it](#), “The Obama rules, which have been halted by court challenges, would have increased federal regulation of emissions from the nation’s electrical grid and broadly promoted cleaner energy, including natural gas and solar and wind power.”

The New York Times reported that according to the EPA’s own analysis, “the supporting documents show that the E.P.A. expects it to allow far more pollutants into the atmosphere than the regulation it would supersede, the Clean Power Plan. The Trump administration has made deregulation a centerpiece of its political strategy, and the E.P.A. has led the charge. The proposed weakening of the rules on coal-burning plants follows a [plan to let cars emit more pollution](#). Transportation and the power sector are the two largest contributors of carbon emissions.

“The administration’s own analysis, however, revealed on Tuesday that the new rules could also lead to as many as 1,400 premature deaths annually by 2030 from an increase in the extremely fine particulate matter that is linked to heart and lung disease, up to 15,000 new cases of upper respiratory problems, a rise in bronchitis, and tens of thousands of missed school days. [emphasis added] Officials at the Environmental Protection Agency, which crafted the regulation, said that other rules governing pollution could be used to reduce those numbers.” The regulation would leave many other rules up to the states.” Under existing Obama-era rules, the EPA had “calculated that they would prevent between 1,500 and 3,600 premature deaths per year by

2030, and would reduce the number of school days missed by 180,000 annually.”
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/climate/epa-coal-pollution-deaths.html>

On Sunday, in a detailed investigation, *New York Times* reporter **Eric Lipton exposes the career of William Wherum, the new EPA administrator for air quality**. Lipton reports: “[A]s a corporate lawyer, William L. Wehrum worked for the better part of a decade to weaken air pollution rules by fighting the Environmental Protection Agency in court on behalf of chemical manufacturers, refineries, oil drillers and coal-burning power plants.

“Now, Mr. Wehrum is about to deliver one of the biggest victories yet for his industry clients — this time from inside the Trump administration as the government’s top air pollution official. On Tuesday, President Trump is [expected to propose](#) a vast rollback of regulations on emissions from coal plants, including many owned by members of a coal-burning trade association [that had retained Mr. Wehrum](#) and his firm as recently as last year to push for the changes. The proposal strikes at the heart of climate-change regulations adopted by the Obama administration to force change among polluting industries, and follows the relaxation of separate rules governing when power plants must upgrade air pollution equipment. Mr. Wehrum, who has led the E.P.A.’s clean air office [since November](#), also helped deliver the changes in several of those rules.”

How is this possible: a lawyer coming into a policy-making government position so soon after his employment by those he is regulating? Lipton explains, “Mr. Wehrum has been able to push his deregulatory agenda without running into ethics troubles because of a quirk in [federal ethics rules](#). The rules limit the activities of officials who join the government from industry — but they are less restrictive for lawyers than for officials who had worked as registered lobbyists. The end result is that the ethics rules [generally allow](#) Mr. Wehrum to help oversee the drafting of policies that broadly benefit the industries or clients he represented in recent years.”

Lipton makes Wherum’s background clear: “**Mr. Wehrum has represented major industrial companies like Koch Industries, the diversified conglomerate that sells everything from petrochemicals to asphalt, and Diageo, one of the world’s largest makers of spirits, including Smirnoff vodka and Baileys Irish Cream. His [clients have included](#) the industry’s largest trade associations: the American Petroleum Institute, the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, the Brick Industry Association and the Utility Air Regulatory Group, whose membership list features coal-burning electric utilities.** [emphasis added] Mr. Wehrum’s trip through the revolving door is hardly extraordinary in the Trump administration, where [dozens](#) of former lobbyists and industry lawyers now help oversee the same industries

they once represented, including [Andrew Wheeler, the acting agency administrator](#).” Coral Davenport contributed reporting. Kitty Bennett contributed research. The article has been reprinted in many news sites. Read the full investigative report, a great example of a newspaper doing its research, here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/us/politics/epa-coal-emissions-standards-william-wehrum.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>. **Highly recommended reading*

On Wednesday, *The New York Times* reported that “America’s ailing coal industry was buoyed on Tuesday when the Environmental Protection Agency [unveiled a proposal](#) to relax pollution regulations on coal-fired power plants. President Trump traveled to West Virginia to tout the planned measure, telling supporters, ‘We’re putting our great coal miners back to work.’ **Yet the reality on the ground for the nation’s coal industry remains bleak.** [emphasis added] Even the Trump administration’s own numbers suggest that its latest proposal won’t reverse the sharp decline of coal power, which has been crushed by competition from cheaper natural gas and renewable energy over the past decade.

“More than [200 coal plants have shut down since 2010](#), and another 40 plants have announced they will close in the years ahead, with virtually no new coal plants being built today.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/climate/trump-coal-industry.html>

7. Last Saturday, *The New York Times* reported, in a major scoop, that “The **White House counsel, Donald F. McGahn II, has cooperated extensively** in the special counsel investigation, sharing detailed accounts about the episodes at the heart of the inquiry into whether President Trump obstructed justice, including some that investigators would not have learned of otherwise, according to a dozen current and former White House officials and others briefed on the matter. [emphasis added] In at least three voluntary interviews with investigators that totaled 30 hours over the past nine months, Mr. McGahn described the president’s fury toward the Russia investigation and the ways in which he urged Mr. McGahn to respond to it. He provided the investigators examining whether Mr. Trump obstructed justice a clear view of the president’s most intimate moments with his lawyer.” *The Times* account “is based on interviews with current and former White House officials and others who have spoken to both men, all of whom requested anonymity to discuss a sensitive investigation.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/18/us/politics/don-mcgahn-mueller-investigation.html>

However, on Monday, *The Washington Post* reported, “**White House counsel Donald McGahn does not believe that he implicated President Trump in any legal wrongdoing** in extensive interviews he has given the special counsel, McGahn’s attorney told Trump’s legal team in recent days.” McGahn’s attorney stressed that “McGahn did not witness Trump engaged in any crime and would have resigned from his White House post if he had, according to people familiar with the conversations.” https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mcgahn-does-not-believe-he-implicated-trump-in-wrongdoing-in-special-counsel-interviews-his-attorney-tells-presidents-legal-team/2018/08/20/37209d28-a49f-11e8-a656-943eefab5daf_story.html

8. An article in *The Huffington Post* reported that “**The Democratic National Committee said Wednesday that it had blocked a ‘sophisticated attempt’ to access its file on tens of millions of voters.** Hackers attempted to access the file, which is hosted by Votebuilder, by creating a fake login page to try to get people’s usernames and passwords, a Democratic official said. The official said the party did not know who was behind the attempted attack and had contacted law enforcement, including the FBI, [according to CNN](https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/20/politics/dnc-phishing-attack/index.html), which first reported the incident.” No information was accessed. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dnc-phishing-attack_us_5b7db11be4b0cd327df92d57

9. A feel-good story in the media last week involved **a high school teacher who had run out of sick days needed to complete his cancer treatment.** As *The Washington Post* reported, “When news organizations covered how Florida educators flooded Robert Goodman, a teacher fighting colon cancer, with [donated sick and vacation days](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/health/wp/2018/08/20/florida-teachers-donate-sick-days-to-teacher-fighting-cancer/) so Goodman could take time off to complete treatment after he posted a plea for help on Facebook, the story was framed as a heartwarming tale. ‘Today’s #PositivePost is about this teacher who got the news he has cancer,’ [tweeted](https://twitter.com/amyoliver/status/1031111111111111111) a news anchor in Indianapolis. ‘[This is a wonderful story,](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/health/wp/2018/08/20/florida-teachers-donate-sick-days-to-teacher-fighting-cancer/)’ said Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.)” *Such a heart-warming demonstration of charity!*

“Au contraire,” says *Post* reporter Helaine Olen. “Yes, the donors were indeed generous. But that the story exists at all highlights the cruelty of our health-care and economic system.” Unfortunately, our teacher taught history, not chemistry, so he could not trade cash for sick days, as Walter White, in *Breaking Bad* might have done. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2018/08/20/a-florida-teachers-good-fortune-is-a-symptom-of-a-sick-system>

10. So that was *not* our heart-warmer closing story this week. But after last week, when our most popular link to click through involved a lost but affectionate squirrel (!), we feel we really must come up with a “ha-ha” to end our political ruminations. So here we go: AP reports “**Germany: No preparations made in case of alien landing.**” This is a classic example of a government asleep at the

switch: “The German government says it has made no preparations for the possibility that aliens might land in the European country. In a response to questions from opposition Green Party lawmaker Dieter Janecek, the government said “there are no protocols or plans for a possible first contact with alien life.” No word from the far-right German party, the NDP, if they will welcome these intergalactic immigrants. <https://apnews.com/b3105a7b6e394228aed9cb3259912b09>

Special follow-up: Last week we alerted readers to reports in *The New York Times* and other sources of the discovery of **levels of the pesticide glyphosate in oat cereals**. In the interests of science and truth, we this week report on some pushback against the science that the [Environmental Working Group](#) used in concluding that the levels found were unsafe. Now environmental reporter Susan Matthews of *Slate* argues that EWG exaggerates the actual danger, based on an unjustified lowering of the safe daily dose. She says, “The Environmental Protection Agency has done this [set a standard] for glyphosate, the chemical in the Monsanto weed killer Roundup that is at the center of the Environmental Working Group’s report. The EPA [threshold](#), which was set in 1993 (so no Trumpian interference to worry about), is 2 milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day (140 milligrams per day for the average adult). That’s the reference dose that’s considered safe to consume daily throughout a lifetime. None of the foods tested by EWG passes that threshold—they don’t even come close.” This is true. **The EPA threshold is 30 parts per million. EWG uses a standard of 160 parts per billion or 0.16 parts per million.**

“That’s an extreme difference. So why did EWG lower the threshold so dramatically? The explanation is published, once again, on the [EWG website](#). The organization arrived at its number by taking the state of California’s recommendation for a glyphosate threshold, already less than one-hundredth of the EPA threshold, and dividing it by 100 again. EWG justifies this second cut by relying on the [Food Quality Protection Act](#), which suggests that an additional tenfold margin should be applied to pesticides to account for the increased risk to children and infants. (The Food Quality Protection Act doesn’t mention glyphosate once, and it’s not clear its recommendation is meant to apply to the EPA standard for the chemical, which is set to factor in body weight.) Even if you apply that extra tenfold factor to the EPA threshold, all the foods tested would still be safe.” By the California standard, none of the tested products would trigger alarms. <https://slate.com/technology/2018/08/glyphosate-from-monsantos-weed-killer-roundup-in-breakfast-cereal-isnt-something-to-worry-about.html>

Support for this position comes also from pieces in [WebMD](#) and in [Health](#) magazine, which concludes that “When the numbers are converted, even the highest concentration found in the new EWG report—1,300 ppb, or 1.3 ppm—is still in line with what the FDA announced previously, and still lower than the EPA's (and California's) tolerable threshold.” [Note: Canada's threshold is 15 ppm or 15,000 ppb; Europe's is 20 ppm / 20,000 ppb; but in [Taiwan and Australia](#) it is closer to EWG, at 0.1 ppm / 100 ppb. The science behind such low levels is unclear.—Ed.]

Of course there are two factors to bear in mind when you hear about such scientific debate. First, scientific research and the recommendations of government bodies (and even the WHO's independent cancer research arm, the IRAC) can be influenced by pressure from huge companies like Monsanto, as was suggested in a recent trial seeking damages for an exposed worker. Second, as the WebMD article did say, the chemical may have other biological effects beyond cancer, and the thresholds do not get to the issue of a person's overall exposure to herbicides and pesticides in food. So one must make an informed decision based on a cautious reading of the evidence.

11. In local news, **Sean Casten**, candidate for US Representative for the IL 6th District, **debated Rep. Peter Roskam** in front of the *Chicago Tribune* editorial board on Wednesday. Their report is not detailed, and it eschews much discussion of the debated issues (beyond the Trump news of the day). But here is part of their summary: “The two candidates have debated before, most recently at a forum Fox-32 broadcast last month. That matchup showed they agree about almost nothing and are comfortable attacking each other. Wednesday's meeting was more subdued. They spent much of it locked in a wonky discussion about taxes, health care and immigration — topics on which they sharply disagree. Roskam helped write Republicans' federal tax overhaul last year and said the benefits of cuts for individuals and businesses are worth the costs. ‘We borrowed money to get a simpler and updated tax code,’ Roskam said, later adding: ‘The other thing that we get is a growing economy.’”

“There's a lot of words there, I disagree with almost all of them,’ Casten replied. He contends that giving companies tax breaks is no guarantee they'll create jobs. On health care, Casten criticized Republicans for ‘a complete dismantling’ of the [Affordable Care Act](#). Roskam countered that the ACA fell far short of what was promised.”

For his part, Casten promised to hold four town-hall meetings a year, if elected, charging, “[t]he last time you had a town hall, Lehman Brothers existed, Uber didn't, and America had never known a black president.” [http://](#)

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-met-peter-roskam-sean-casten-il6-tribune-20180821-story.html

The full one-hour session can be accessed here (you do not need a Facebook account to watch): <https://www.facebook.com/chicagotribune/videos/1814100282020641/UzpfSTE0ODg1NzYzODY6MzA2MDYxMTI5NDk5NDE0OjEwOjA6MTUzNTc4NTE5OT05MTE2MTY0OTU2MzgwMTEwMDg0/?id=1488576386>

There is also a report and a very brief video on the WGN-TV website: <https://wgntv.com/2018/08/22/roskam-and-casten-clash-over-taxes-health-care/>

12. **Casten released his first TV ad**, a 30-second spot responding forcefully to a Roskam attack ad: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qRpmrpbF24>

For more on this ad, see CapitolFax's report on the Roskam ad, the Casten statement in response, and a link to something Casten wrote a while back on the hostile takeover attempt:

<https://capitolfax.com/2018/08/08/roskam-calls-casten-shady-in-new-tv-ad/>

13. Another ad in Illinois made news this week, as *Politico* [reported](#). “In a boost to billionaire Democrat J.B. Pritzker’s gubernatorial bid, **[President] Obama went beyond his customary political comfort zone, leaning in hard by cutting his [first video](#) on behalf of a candidate in the 2018 midterm elections.**” [emphasis added] Watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY0Xthmu6Pw&feature=youtu.be>.

14. And in other Illinois news, a **new poll suggests a strong lead for J. B. Pritzker in the governor’s race**: “In the billionaire-versus-multimillionaire contest for Illinois governor, Democratic challenger J.B. Pritzker leads incumbent Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner by 16 points, [according to a new NBC News/Marist poll](#). Pritzker gets support from 46 percent of registered voters in the state, while Rauner gets 30 percent. Libertarian nominee Kash Jackson is at 6 percent in the poll, while fellow third-party candidate Sam McCann is at 4 percent.” <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/poll-democrat-leads-expensive-race-illinois-governor-n902616>

Best wishes, and Peace,
Mark
The Indivisible DuPage Research Team

***“Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—***

***Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few”***

—From "The Mask of Anarchy. Written on the Occasion of the [army] Massacre at Manchester [1819]", By British Romantic Poet Percy Shelley