



REMARKS

PRESS BRIEFING BY
PRESS SECRETARY
KAROLINE LEAVITT,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF
STEPHEN MILLER,
NATIONAL ECONOMIC
COUNCIL DIRECTOR
KEVIN HASSETT, AND

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR MIKE WALTZ

February 20, 2025

1:05 P.M. EST

MS. LEAVITT: Hello. Good afternoon, everybody. I brought some heavy hitters in here with me today.

Today marks one month of President Trump's return to the Oval Office, and there is no denying this administration is off to a historic start. The President has already signed 73 executive orders. That is more than double the number signed by Joe Biden and more than quadruple the number signed by Barack Obama over the same period.

These executive orders have ended burdensome regulations; sealed the border; unleashed our domestic energy sector; eliminated divisive DEI from our federal government; stopped the weaponization of government; cut waste, fraud, and abuse; reinstituted "America First" trade and foreign policies; and ultimately restored common sense.

The President also signed the Laken Riley Act into law, which ensures ICE will

detain illegal aliens arrested or charged with theft or violence.

As of today, the Senate has already confirmed 18 Cabinet-level nominees, which is more than at this point under the Obama administration in 2009 and more than double the pace of the Biden administration in 2021.

And today, we expect Kash Patel to be confirmed as the next director of the FBI.

We are proud to announce that the president will host his first official Cabinet meeting here at the White House next Wednesday, February 26th.

In just four weeks, President Trump has already hosted the leaders of Israel, Japan, Jordan, and India. And next Monday, the President will host France's President, Emmanuel Macron, and on Thursday, the UK Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, will visit the White House as well.

As you all know, over the past month, the President has taken questions from the press — all of you — nearly every single day, sometimes on multiple different occasions in the same day, on any topic any of you wish to talk about.

President Trump set the tone on this approach immediately when he took more than 12 times the questions in his first few hours in office as Joe Biden did in his entire first week.

Yesterday, we hosted a local media row here at the White House with television and radio stations from across the country that reached up to 60 million viewers and listeners.

In our ongoing pursuit of transparency, on this one-month celebration, I am

thrilled to bring three of my colleagues and our policy experts here at the White House to further recap this incredible first month of accomplishments in greater detail.

We have Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Homeland Security Advisor Stephen Miller; the Director of the National Economic Council, Kevin Hassett; and our National Security Advisor, Mike Waltz.

I will hand it over to them. They will deliver brief remarks on the accomplishments of this administration in the first month, and then we will open it up to Q and A. When we open up the Q and A portion, I do ask, for the sake of efficiency in this room, that you direct your question to the principal you seek an answer from. And I will call on you in this room.

But first I will let them roll through their remarks. And first up, I'll turn it over to Stephen Miller.

MR. MILLER: Thank you. It's great to be back.

And I want to just thank you all for joining today our one-month celebration of the most historic opening to a presidency in American history. No president comes close to what Donald Trump has achieved over just the last 30 days.

He has packed eight years of transformative action restoring this nation, restoring our laws, restoring fairness, restoring economic opportunity, restoring national security in just one month. No one in this country has ever seen anything like it.

And when you look at the consequentiality and the significance and the transformative nature of the actions he's taking, it truly defies description. For

example, in just one area, this nation has been plagued and crippled by illegal discrimination: diversity, equity, and inclusion policies. It strangled our economy. It has undermined public safety. It has made every aspect of life more difficult, more painful, and less safe.

He has ended all DEI across the federal government. He has terminated all federal workers involved in promulgating these unlawful policies. He has ended diversity, equity, and inclusion in all federal contracting. He has restored merit as the cornerstone of all federal policy; restored the full, fair, impartial enforcement of our federal civil rights laws for the first time in generations; and he has cracked down on individuals across this government and nonprofits who have engaged in illegal racial discrimination against the American people.

This includes making clear to every educational institution in this country that ending diversity, equity, and inclusion, ending unlawful race discrimination is a precondition of receiving federal funds.

He has also saved women's sports by ending the participation of men in women's sports. He has ended radical gender ideology across the entire federal government, and he's pressured the private sector to also end and combat radical gender ideology. He's reestablished the scientific and biological truth that there are only two sexes in this country — male and female — that those are biologically based determinations. They are not based and can never be based on gender identity.

That includes rooting out of the Department of Defense all DEI policies, all critical race theory, all gender madness, and once again having a military that is focused solely and exclusively on readiness, preparedness, and lethality.

As I'm sure Kevin will talk about more, of course, he has undertaken a historic

cost-cutting effort across the federal government, launching the first-ever Department of Government Efficiency, uncovering corruption on a scale that we never thought imaginable, terminating every single federal worker that we — that we have found to be engaged in the corruption and theft and the waste of taxpayer dollars, and already saving \$50 billion in a single year, which over a 10-year period would be \$500 billion. Just think about how vast and enormous that sum is.

Of course, as you all know, he has renamed the Gulf of Mexico to its correct and proper name: the Gulf of America. He has renamed Mount Denali into Mount McKinley, part of a historic effort to restore patriotism and national pride all across this land.

He has ended the weaponization of the federal government, restored the Department of Justice to its true mission of combating threats to this nation and keeping the American people safe.

He has ended all federal censorship of free speech. This has been one of the greatest crises that has plagued this nation. Years and years and years, the federal government violating the First Amendment to take away Americans' right of free speech — President Trump has ended that. And he has demanded that all federal workers, all law enforcement cease any effort to intimidate the rights of Americans or to police their speech.

He has also restored the death penalty at the Department of Justice, including for illegal aliens who commit murder, including for those who murder cops, and including for all of those who threaten Americans with heinous acts of violence. The death penalty is back. Law and order is back. The streets are being made safe once again.

On the public health front, he has launched the nation's first-ever commission — the MAHA Commission — Make America Healthy Again, following the historic confirmation of RFK Jr., to finally uncover the true root causes of the public health crisis in this country, the childhood disease epidemic in this country, the spiraling rates of pediatric cancer and devastating childhood sickness.

He has finally created a situation where the federal health — health agencies in this country will be focused on preventing disease, on keeping children from getting sick in the first place, not sentencing them to a lifetime in and out of hospitals, suffering needlessly, when we can find ways to prevent this epidemic of illness.

Then, of course, on homeland security. Today, it is officially the law of the land at the conclusion of the congressional notification process that six Mexican cartels and two transnational gangs — Tren de Aragua, or TDA, and MS-13 — so eight organizations in total — are now formally designated as foreign terrorist organizations, which means that every single member of those organizations who operates on U.S. soil is now, as a legal matter, a terrorist, and they will be treated as terrorists.

This is a sea change in U.S. policy. And this means the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, along with the rest of U.S. law enforcement and the Department of Defense, are now operating in a legal reality where these cartels are recognized as terrorists, and there will be a whole-of-government effort to remove these terrorists from our soil and to degrade their ability to threaten or undermine any American security or sovereignty interests.

Border crossings since the day he took office are down 95 percent. I think it's

almost impossible to even describe the scale and scope of that achievement. President Trump, within days of taking office, cut border crossings 95 percent.

And those few who have dared to cross are being either prosecuted or deported. They're either facing significant jail time for trafficking, smuggling, harboring, aiding, impeding, or they're being immediately removed from our soil. Either way, at the end of the process, they are going home.

He has reimplemented Remain in Mexico, and he has obtained historic cooperation from foreign countries all around the world in accepting their deportees back.

And he has used the United States military to fully seal the southern border with a historic deployment of both active duty and National Guard troops, resumed the building of infrastructure. He has opened up Guantanamo Bay, and he's using military aircraft to carry out deportations all across this country.

And ICE is joining with ATF, DEA, and FBI to carry out the largest deportation operation in American history. The criminals are going home. The border is sealed shut. America is safe, sovereign, proud, and free. We are a nation that everyone in the world understands all across this planet: You do not come here illegally. You will not get in. You will go to jail. You will go home. You will not succeed.

This is the biggest and most successful change in any area of law enforcement that this nation has ever seen, and he did it in under one month.

Thank you.

MR. HASSETT: Should I go?

MS. LEAVITT: Yes, yes.

MR. HASSETT: Well, thank you, Karoline. Thank you, Stephen.

You know, one of the things that President Trump cares most about is job creation. And it was about seven years ago I had the honor of joining you in this room for the first time, and it looks like we've created a lot more jobs in the last month. Look at how many people are here. I — my estimate is about 180 but — but I didn't count.

So, thank you. It's really an honor to be back here. I think that I just want to go over a few things and then hand it off to Mike.

The first thing is that the President has told us to prioritize fighting inflation, and he had to do that because, as you know, President Biden let inflation get completely out of control. And he did it with policies that made no sense. They made no sense.

You know, a lot of times, you people say to us — our friends, the journalists — you know, "Why are you doing that?" But — but, you know, I like to think, "Why did they do that? Why did they spend so much money and then — why did the Fed print so much money so that we had inflation as high as we've ever seen since Jimmy Carter? So, why did they do that?"

So, we're addressing inflation. We didn't have to address it in the first term, because it was always in the 1s, almost always. But we're going to get it back there.

And how are we doing it? Well, we're doing it with a plan that President Trump

and I and others have talked about in the Oval that involves, like, every level of fighting inflation.

First, the macroeconomic level. We're cutting spending. We're cutting spending in negotiations with people on the Hill. We're cutting spending with the advice of our IT consultant, Elon Musk. And then we're also looking into supply-side things, like restoring Trump's tax cuts, maybe even expensing new factories so that there is an explosion of supply. If you have an explosion of supply and a reduction in government demand, then inflation goes way down.

And then, one of the things that you want to say is "Well, when are you going to see it?" Well, the first thing that you'll see when the markets believe that we're going to get inflation under control is that the 10-year Treasury rate goes down, because that's how they think about future expected inflation.

And so, we're still going to see some memory of Biden's inflation. It's not going to go away in a month. But the 10-year Treasury before the last Consumer Price Index had dropped about 40 basis points. Forty basis points because markets were optimistic about our ability to fight inflation.

Forty basis points is kind of not a fun thing to say. I — economists talk that way. I apologize. But the way to think about it is, for a typical mortgage, if that affects the mortgage rate, then it's going to save a typical family buying a house about a thousand bucks a year, and that's just in our first month.

Okay. The second thing we've done is we've had a lot of trade talks. In fact, I was just meeting a minister from Mexico with Howard Lutnick just a couple of hours ago. And we're talking about reciprocal trade, and we're also talking about the fentanyl crisis.

And so, reciprocal trade is about our government treating other governments the way they treat us. We want trade to be fair. It turns out that Americans have been disadvantaged by foreign governments over and over, and President Trump wants it to stop. And the fact that struck me as most noticeable, when I started to look at what President Trump was asking us to do, is that last year — last year — we have data — U.S. companies paid \$370 billion in taxes to foreign governments — \$370 billion. Last year, foreign multinationals paid us \$57 billion in taxes.

We have one quarter of world GDP. They have three quarters of world GDP. And we're paying \$370. They're paying \$57. This is not reciprocal. We're going to try — or we're going to fix it.

The other thing that we've done is we've had an all-of-the-above energy approach that's led by Doug Burgum and Chris and a really large team — EPA — and we've already made so many actions that are going to affect the price of energy and lower inflation.

We've opened up 625 million acres to energy exploration. We've cut 50 years of red tape that makes it so you can't have permits. And we've even made it so that when you go home, if you get a new one, then you can take a shower or flush a toilet or read under a light bulb. We're doing that too.

So — so, finally, let's just think about, like, the facts that we can see right now that we think are awesome. So, guess what? Small-business optimism is — has gone — gone up by the most ever since President Trump came in. ISM, which is the measure of what's going on in manufacturing, it's expanding again for the first time in years. CEO confidence is the highest it's been in years. And the reason — the reason people are thinking this is that our policies give people cause for optimism.

And then I want to reiterate what Stephen Miller said, because it's so important — and it's so important for financial markets to start to digest this — that if, say, the Treasury secretary or the — any Cabinet secretary, with Elon Musk, is able to find some savings — say, \$100 billion — well, in CBO land, that's actually, like, about 10 times that or maybe 12 times that over a 10-year window.

And so, when you're thinking about the negotiations right now over reconciliation and thinking about, well, \$4 trillion, \$5 trillion, well, those numbers, in terms of the savings, are going to end up being small because of all the waste that we're finding.

And so, we're incredibly optimistic about the future of inflation and the future of our economy. And we're optimistic because we're making so much progress so far, and we already see it in market prices.

And, with that, I'll hand it off to Mike.

MR. WALTZ: All right. Thanks, Kevin.

Well, good afternoon. What a month and what a sea change in our — in our foreign policy. In addition to what we're doing on the border and restoring American sovereignty, in addition to what we're doing in our economy and the job creation and the inflation reduction, we are bringing the world back to where it was at the end of President Trump's first term, which is a world of peace, prosperity, and — and looking forward and getting us out of the chaos that we've just seen over the last four years.

So, over the last month, just to name a few, I had the honor of sitting in the Oval Office as President Trump spoke with President Putin and then immediately

spoke with President Zelenskyy, and both of them said only President Trump could bring both sides to the table, and only President Trump could stop the horrific fighting that has been going on now for the better part of four years and that only President Trump could drive the world back to peace. Both of those leaders said that in back-to-back calls.

And, of course, we just had our historic talks mediated by our — our good friends and partners, Saudi Arabia — we give great thanks to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for hosting — and sat down for the first time in years with the Russians and talked about a path forward with peace.

On top of that and one of the things that led to that was a tremendous co- — confidence-building measure that we had with the release of Marc Fogel. I'll remind everyone, the last time that we had an American released from the Russians, either we gave up a deadly spy; pressured our allies to give up a lethal killer; or we released, under the Biden administration, the world's most notorious arms dealer, Viktor Bout, who, by the way, had one of his main clients for arms the cartels in — in Mexico and Central America.

We gave up none of that. This was released as a confidence-building measure, working with our great Middle East Envoy, Steve Witkoff, and our secretary of State as a first step towards opening these talks and then moving forward towards peace.

On top of that, we've secured, just in a month, the return of a dozen — 12 — American hostages from Russia, from Bulgaria, from Venezuela, the Taliban, and Hamas. Excuse me, that's from Belarus, not Bulgaria.

We also had — for the first time in quite some time, we took out a senior leader of ISIS, an international financier and recruiter that the military had been trying

to take out for quite some time and — and wasn't able to do so, frankly, because of a bureaucratic approval process. President Trump said, "Take him out." And that ISIS financier and leader is no longer on this Earth.

We've also taken action to eliminate other terrorist organizations in the Middle East. We drove — before the President was even in office, he started talking consequences for people that would hold Americans.

Heretofore, there's been nothing but upside. You take an American, you get some better deal. You take another one, maybe you get a better deal. No more. There is now nothing but downside for taking Americans illegally, either as hostages or illegal detainees.

And when President Trump sent a very clear message across the Middle East, but particularly to Hamas, that there would be all hell to pay, we suddenly saw a breakthrough. And now we just saw the release of yet another group of hostages. There have been dozens now, including two Americans that we've seen once again reunited with their families.

As part of the talks with King Abdullah, he offered — and — and I think the entire world has graciously accepted — to take 2,000 sick children, cancer patients, and others out of Gaza. As a humanitarian — as a humanitarian gesture, 2,000 Gazans will come out of that hellhole that it is, that wasteland that Gaza is right now, with unexploded ordnance, with debris everywhere, with no sewage, with no water. And — and President Trump has — has put forward a plan to deal with the practical reality that is 1.8 million Gazans now — now truly suffering.

And then, you know, just to bring it back to our own hemisphere, we've seen literally, in the last month — after years of national security experts, the generals in charge, and others testifying and ringing the alarm bells about — about the

Chinese Communist Party's presence in our own hemisphere, particularly in the Panama Canal, we're seeing the leadership of Panama step away from the Belt and Road program, move away from China and back towards the United States, and even enter into talks and — and other negotiations about addressing the ports on either side of the canal.

And then, finally, last but not least, we've had four world leaders in the White House, in the Oval Office. We've had the prime minister of Japan, the prime minister of India, the king of — of Jordan, and, of course, the prime minister of Israel just in the last four weeks. And next week, we'll have the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and we'll have the president of France, Macron.

So, President Trump is on what we call Trump warp speed. We are all — we are all honored to be really serving under — under his leadership and his vision. And truly, you know, when we all say — and the President himself say — says, he is a president of peace. He is a president focused on restoring stability. I think the entire world saw what the world would look like without strong American leadership in the last four years.

And it's truly been an honor to get us back to where we were and back on track under President Trump's leadership.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you, Mike.

MR. WALTZ: Mm-hmm.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you. Thank you, everybody. I'm sure you're very eager to ask questions of these very smart people working very hard on behalf of the president.

We do have somebody in our new media seat today. We have John Stoll, who is the head of news at X. As you all know — you're all on X — it's home to hundreds of millions of users, a large contingent of independent journalists and news organizations across geographies and political spectrums. And at the same time, X remains the go-to platform for many legacy news outlets. And I know, as I mentioned, many of the reporters in this room use X to attract eyeballs to your work.

Prior to joining X, John spent two decades in journalism, including several years as an editor at The Wall Street Journal. We are excited to have him in the briefing room today.

John, we'll let you kick it off. And as I said at the top, please direct your question to the individual up here who you'd like an answer from.

John, why don't you begin.

Q All right. Thank you very much. I am sitting in for a thriving ecosystem of journalists, independent and — and emerging news organizations who do depend on X for publicity, for a business model. And so, I look forward to seeing many of them in this seat in months and years to come.

I also thank you, Karoline, for opening this seat up to new media. It — it really is a testament not only to your open-mindedness but also to innovation that you'd actually think about, you know, folks that are not traditionally credentialed to be in this room to be in this room and to not only have a question but also to witness — you know, this is at a very important intersection of power and the free press.

And so, just the ability to witness this and — and be part of it, it brings

everybody's game up. So, thank you for that.

I think this is for Mike Waltz. My question is about Ukraine.

MR. WALTZ: Sure.

Q For about more than 10 years, I've been fascinated, like all — like many, with what's going on. I was in Northern Europe working out of the Baltics when Crimea was annexed and was — a lot — a lot of this came on Twitter. The platform used to be known as Twitter. Was — a lot of European leaders would — would talk about their disappointment and — and solidarity with Ukraine, but when it came to actually doing something, it felt like they were passing a hot potato and sent it over the Atlantic.

I wonder how much of what we're seeing right now out of the administration and President Trump is a call to Europe and the European leaders and allies that we've traditionally had to pick up that hot potato and — and start doing something a little bit more concrete to win and preserve the peace in Ukraine.

The second question I have is — it — it's related — is there's been some — a lot of speculation that President Trump and the administration might be manipulated by Pre- — by Vladimir Putin. I wonder if you can just talk a little bit about the administration's posture —

MR. WALTZ: Yeah.

Q — and your confidence in the competence of this administration to d- — go toe to toe with Vladimir Putin.

MR. WALTZ: Well, if there's an- — I'll take the I- — second question first. If

there's anybody in this world that can go toe to toe with Putin, that could go toe to toe with Xi, that could go toe to toe with Kim Jong Un — and we could keep going down the list — it's Donald J. Trump. He is the dealmaker in chief. There is no question that he is the commander in chief.

And I, for one — and I think all Americans and around the world should have no doubt about his ability to not only handle Putin but to handle the complexity of driving this war to an end.

And then on your first piece on Europe, I'll take you back to 2014. You're right. There was a lot of hand-wringing in Europe and not a lot of action. There was also a lot of hand-wringing here in Washington under the Obama administration and not a lot of action. They literally threw blankets at the problem.

And so, I'll remind everyone that Putin had, you know, some type of conflict, invasion, or issue with their neighbor under President Bush, with Georgia; under President Obama, with Ukraine in 2014; not under President Trump, 45; and again with President Biden in 2022. The war should have been deterred. The war should have never happened, and I have no doubt it would not have happened under President Trump and will stop under President — President Trump again.

But I just want to push back on this notion of our European allies not being consulted as we've entered into this process. I already mentioned the immediate phone call President Trump made to President Zelenskyy. He has talked to President Macron of France repeatedly last week. President Macron convened European leaders and then is coming here on Monday. Prime Minister Starmer is coming next Thursday.

We've also — I've talked to every one of my national security — national security advisor counterparts across — across the spectrum in Europe. I've talked to Secretary-General Rutte, the — the leader of NATO, the secretary-general of NATO. We have repeatedly — oh, by the way, we had half our Cabinet — seven Cabinet officials, including the vice president, at the Munich Security Conference, all engaging, all listening, and all making sure our allies were heard.

However, we've also made it clear for years — decades, even — that it is unacceptable that the United States and the United States taxpayer continues to bear the burden not only of the cost of the war in Ukraine but of the defense of — of Europe. We fully support our NATO Allies. We fully support the Article 5 commitment. But it's time for our European allies to step up.

And one of the things that Secretary-General Rutte said on our call was this last couple of weeks have been a real wake-up call. And I asked him, "What have you been missing the last couple of years?"

The fact that we are going to enter into a NATO summit this June with a third of our NATO Allies still not meeting the 2 percent minimum, a commitment they made a decade ago — literally a decade ago — with a war on their doorstep — the largest war that they're all extremely concerned about — but yet it's "Well, somebody else needs to pay. We've got other domestic priorities." It's unacceptable. President Trump has made that clear.

And the minimum needs to be met. We need to be at 100 percent in — this June at the NATO summit. And then let's talk about exceeding it, which what — is what President Trump has been talking about, with 5 percent of GDP.

Europe needs to step up for their own defense as a partner. And we can be friends and allies and have those tough conversations.

MS. LEAVITT: Great. Peter.

Q Thank you, Karoline. I have a Ukraine one and a DOGE one. Who can talk DOGE?

MS. LEAVITT: Stephen, go ahead.

Q Well, so — so, Stephen, we're hearing about these DOGE dividend checks that would be 20 percent back to taxpayers, 20 percent to pay down the debt. Sixty percent is left. Who gets that?

MR. MILLER: Well, the way that it works is when you achieve savings, you can either return it to taxpayers, you can return it to our debtors, or it can be cycled into next year's budget, and then it just lowers the overall baseline for next year. So, in other words, you can just transfer it into the next fiscal window and then lower the overall spending level. And that means that you can achieve a permanent savings that way, and that reduces the deficit.

Q And when is it that people might see those checks?

MR. MILLER: Well, this is all going to be worked on through the reconciliation process with Congress that's going underway right now, as you've seen. The Senate is moving a bill. The House is moving a bill. The president has great confidence in both chambers to deliver on his priorities.

I would just take this opportunity to note that President Trump has made a historic commitment to the working class of this country to fight for a major tax relief and major price relief. And cutting spending, as DOGE is doing, and cutting taxes is the key to delivering on both of those promises. And President

Trump is resolutely committed to doing both.

Q Thank you. And on Ukraine. I guess, this is for Mike.

MR. WALTZ: Sure.

Q After the president's post on Truth Social yesterday, need to know: Who does he think is more responsible for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Putin or Zelenskyy?

MR. WALTZ: Well, look, his — his goal, Peter, is to bring this war to an end, period. And there has been ongoing fighting on both sides. It is World War I-style trench warfare.

His frustration with President Zelenskyy is — that you've heard — is multifold. One, there needs to be a deep appreciation for what the American people, what the American taxpayer, what President Trump did in — in his first term, and what we've done since. So, some of the rhetoric coming out of Kyiv, frankly, and — and insults to President Trump were unacceptable. Number one.

Number two, our own secretary of Treasury personally made the trip to offer the Ukrainians what is — can only be described as a historic opportunity — that is for America to coinvest with Ukraine in their minerals, in their resources, to truly grow the pie.

So, case in point, there's a foundry that processes aluminum in Ukraine. It's — it's been damaged. It's not at its current capacity. If that is restored, it would account for America's entire imports of aluminum for an entire year — that one foundry.

There are tremendous resources there. Not only is that long-term security for Ukraine, not only do we help them grow the pie with investments, but, you know, we do have an obligation to the American taxpayer in helping them recoup the hundreds of billions that ha- — that have occurred.

So, you know, rather than enter — enter into some constructive conversations about what that deal should be going forward, we got a lot of rhetoric in the media that was — that was incredibly unfortunate.

And I could just tell you, Peter, you know, as a veteran, as somebody who's been in combat, this war is horrific. And I think we've lost sight of that, of the literally thousands of people that are dying a day, families that are going without the next generation.

And I find it kind of, you know, frankly, ridiculous. So many people in Washington that were just demanding, pounding the table for a ceasefire in Gaza are suddenly aghast that the president would demand one and both sides come to the table when it talks to — when it comes to Ukraine, a war that has been arguably far greater in — in scope and scale and far more dangerous in terms of global escalation to U.S. security.

Q And I do have one for Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Sure.

Q Does President Trump have a bet with Trudeau about this USA-Canada hockey game tonight? (Laughter.) And when there is a big hockey game on, is the president watching for the goals or for the fights?

MS. LEAVITT: (Laughs.) Probably both. I think he's watching for the United

States to win tonight. I know he talked to the USA hockey team this morning. He talked to the players after their morning practice, around 10 o'clock. And I also spoke to some folks from that team after. They were jubilant over President Trump's comments to the team. I believe they're going to put out a video of that call.

So, he looks forward to watching the game tonight, and we look forward to the United States beating our soon-to-be 51st state, Canada. (Laughter.)

Bloomberg, go ahead.

Q My question is for Mike Waltz. Can you give us a readout of Kellogg's meeting with Zelenskyy that just wrapped up? And, in particular, Zelenskyy publicly rejected this deal about the rare earth minerals. Where — where does that stand?

MR. WALTZ: Well, we're going to continue to have — he needs to come back to the table, and we're going to continue to have discussions about where that deal is going.

Again, we have an obligation to the taxpayer. I think this is an opportunity. The president thinks this is an opportunity for Ukraine going forward. There can be, in my view, nothing better for Ukraine's future and for their security than — than to have the United States invested in their prosperity long-term. And then a key piece of this has also been security guarantees.

Look, the — the reality that we're talking about here is: Is it in Ukraine's interest? Is it in Europe's interest? It certainly isn't in Russia's interest or in the American people's interest for this war to grind on forever and ever and ever.

So, a key part of his conversation was helping President Zelenskyy understand this war needs to come to an end. This kind of open-ended mantra that we've had under the Biden administration, that's over. And I think a lot of people are having a hard time accepting that.

And then the other piece is there's been discussions from Prime Minister Starmer and also President Macron about European-led security guarantees. We welcome that. We've been asking Europe to step up and secure its own prosperity, safety, and security. So, we certainly welcome that.

And we certainly welcome more European assistance. As I told my counterparts, "Come to the table with more, if — if you want a bigger seat at the table." And we've been asking for that for quite some time.

Q And has Russia pushed for sanctions in your talks with them? And have you consulted with international partners and allies about potentially rolling back sanctions in these negotiations to end the war?

MR. WALTZ: Those — the talks with — with our Russian counterparts — both with my counterpart, the national security advisor; Secretary Rubio's counterpart, the Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Lavrov — you know, it — it really were — was quite broad, focused on what is the goals for our broader relationship, but very clear that the fighting has to stop to get to any of those brighter goals.

And as a first step, we're just going to do some commonsense things, like restore the — the ability of both of our embassies to function.

And, again, you know, this is — this was common sense. In — in foreign policy world, they call it "shuttle diplomacy." We have to talk to both sides in order to

get to both sides to the table, and both sides have said only President Trump could do that.

MS. LEAVITT: Diana.

Q Thank you. And my question is for Mike Waltz. (Laughter.)

MR. WALTZ: All right.

Q The president has called Zelenskyy a dictator. Does he view Putin as a dictator?

And does he want Zelenskyy out of power? I know he's called for elections.

And then, thirdly, the head of the Defense Committee in Ukraine's parliament just has claimed that the U.S. has stopped selling weapons to Ukraine. Is that true?

MR. WALTZ: Well, most of our weapons that have gone to Ukraine have been part of a drawdown authority, where we've literally taken them out of our stocks and then, eventually, through appropriations, started buying them again to refill our stocks.

I'll, you know, just state that there has been a lag in a lot of that process. So, many of our stocks, as we look at our operations around the world, are becoming more depleted. That's one of the reasons many people have had a lot of concern about: When does this end? How much is it going to take? How many lives will be lost? How much will we be — how much will we spend?

As a member of Congress, we repeatedly asked the Biden administration those

questions, and we never got a satisfactory answer.

Look, President Trump is obviously very frustrated right now with President Zelenskyy — the fact that — that he hasn't come to the table, that he hasn't been willing to take this opportunity that we have offered. I think he eventually will get to that point, and I hope so very quickly.

But President Trump is — as we made clear to our Russian counterparts, and I want to make clear today — he's focused on stopping the fighting and moving forward. And we could argue all day long about what's happened in the past.

MS. LEAVITT: Reagan.

Q Thanks. I have a question for Stephen —

(Cross-talk.)

Q — and a question for Mike.

MS. LEAVITT: Excuse me, I just called on Reagan. Reagan, go ahead.

Q I have a question for Stephen and a question for Mike.

MS. LEAVITT: Sure.

Q Stephen, I can start with you. There have been reports —

MR. MILLER: Thank you.

Q — that Trump is unhappy with the rate of deportations and he wants them to

be higher. Is the president happy with the rate of deportations, and are there any plans to speed up the process?

MR. MILLER: Well, first of all, we all appreciate the encouragement from the media to deport as many illegal aliens as humanly possible. So, thank you.

And I will promise you that the full might of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, and every element and instrument of national power will be used to remove, with speed, all criminal illegals from the soil of the United States of America, to enforce final removal orders, and to ensure that this country is for American citizens and those who legally belong in this country.

We inherited an ICE that was completely shuttered. We inherited a Department of Homeland Security whose sole mission was to resettle illegal aliens within the United States of America.

In 30 days, the president sealed the border shut, declared the cartels to be terrorist organizations, has increased ICE deportations to levels not seen in decades, and we are shortly on the verge of achieving a pace and speed of deportations this country has never before seen.

Thank you.

Q And Mike.

MR. WALTZ: Mm-hmm.

Q There have been reports that there's some underground opposition to Trump's pick for Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Elbridge Colby. Have you

or anyone from the administration been personally lobbying senators to support Elbridge Colby?

MR. WALTZ: Look, I've worked with Bridge Co- — Colby in the past. He has the president's full support to be the Undersecretary of policy, which will be a critical policy arm for Secretary Hegseth going forward that will implement a lot of these policies.

And — and really, that's — that's been the extent of it. I think there's been a lot of kind of, you know, breathless — I don't know — back-and-forth in the — in the press, but we're full speed ahead to get the president's team in place so we can implement his America First policy.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you. Mike has spoken pretty extensively. Does anybody have questions for Stephen or for Mr. Hassett?

Q I do.

MS. LEAVITT: Nobody wants to talk about the economy? (Laughter.)

(Cross-talk.)

MS. LEAVITT: Sure.

Q IRS.

MS. LEAVITT: IRS. Okay. Go ahead.

Q And this would be for either one of you. So, we have reported, several other outlets have reported that about 3,500 people are due to be — lose their jobs at

the IRS by the end of the week. If the goal of these spending cuts across the federal government has been to reduce the debt, why impose some of the deepest cuts we've seen so far at the agency responsible for raising revenue for the federal government?

MR. HASSETT: Well, I think our objective is to make sure that the employees that we pay are being productive and effective. And there are many, many — more than 100,000 people working to collect taxes, and not all of them are fully occupied. And the Treasury secretary is studying the matter and feels like 3,500 is a small number and probably can get bigger, especially as we improve the IT at the IRS.

And so — so, I think that it's absolutely something that is on the table for good reasons. And the point is that — don't just talk about the IRS. Talk about all of government, that there are so many places — I live in D.C.; you maybe live in D.C. — where you never — there — nobody — nobody is going into the buildings. People aren't commuting because nobody is doing their job. We look back and we see that there are all these people doing two jobs while they're getting a government payroll — on the payroll.

So, the point is, we're fixing that, and the IRS is a small part of that picture.

Q So, you're saying that everybody who's being let go was doing a bad job?

MR. HASSETT: I'm saying that we're studying every agency and deciding who to let go and why, and we're doing so very rationally with a lot of support from analysis.

Q Because we're being told by a lot of people who have been let go at other agencies that they were told they were being dismissed because of poor performance, when, in some cases, they haven't even had a performance review

yet because they've only been on the job a couple of months.

MR. HASSETT: Yeah, I've never seen a person who was laid off for poor performance say that they were performing poorly. (Laughter.) Okay?

Q Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Good point. Sure, Kaitlan.

Q I have a question. I'll start with you, Kevin Hassett. Thank you for being here. And then I've got a question for Mr. Waltz.

On these potential checks that you might send out from DOGE, is there a concern, as you're thinking through this, that they could be inflationary?

MR. HASSETT: Oh, absolutely not, because imagine if we don't spend government money and we give it back to people, then the — you know, if they spend it all, then you're even. But they're probably going to save a lot of it, in which case, you're reducing inflation.

Q Okay. So, you're not —

MR. HASSETT: And also, when the government spends a lot, that's what creates inflation. We learned that from Joe Biden. And so, if we reduce government spending, then that's — you know, reduces inflation. And if you give people money, then they're going to save a bunch of it. And — and when they save it, then that also reduces demand and reduces inflation.

Q Okay. So, you're not worried about it.

MR. HASSETT: No, I'm not.

Q And, Mr. Waltz, to follow up on Peter's question, you wrote in an op-ed in the fall of 2023 that, quote, "Putin is to blame, certainly, like al Qaeda was to blame for 9/11."

MR. WALTZ: Mm-hmm.

Q Do you still feel that way now, or do you share the president's assessment, as he says Ukraine is to blame for the start of this war?

MR. WALTZ: Well, it shouldn't surprise you that I share the president's assessment on all kinds of issues. What I wrote as a Member of Congress is — was as a former Member of Congress.

Look, what I share the president's assessment on is that the war has to end. And what comes with that? What comes with that should be, at some point, elections. What comes with that should be peace. What comes with that is prosperity that we've just offered in this natural resources and economic partnership arrangement: an end to the killing and European security and security for the world. The President is not only determined to do that in Europe, he's determined to do it in the Middle East.

And just a few months ago, we had an administration that had tried for 15 months, week after week, sitting with you here, and couldn't get us to a ceasefire, couldn't get our hostages out. Now we're at that point. We're back to the maximum pressure on Iran.

And we will — we have just begun, and we will drive towards a ceasefire and all of those other steps. I'm not going to pre-negotiate or get ahead of the sequencing of all of that. It's a very delicate situation.

But this is a president of peace. And who here would argue against peace?

Q Okay. So, you do share that assessment.

And can I follow up. In 2017 —

MS. LEAVITT: No. Go ahead, Jordan.

Q — then-President Trump —

MS. LEAVITT: Go ahead, Jordan.

Q Can I just follow up really quickly?

Q Thank you. So —

MS. LEAVITT: You just had two questions, Kaitlan.

Q May I — can I just —

MS. LEAVITT: Jordan, go ahead.

Q Mr. — Mr. Hassett —

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you.

Q I have an important follow-up for Mike Waltz.

MS. LEAVITT: Jordan, go ahead. Go ahead.

Q So, Mr. Hassett, you were speaking about tariff revenue, and you also addressed a question about the R- — IRS. President Trump has spoken about replacing income tax with tariff revenue, especially with all this waste, fraud, and abuse that we're seeing cut. Is that a possibility?

MR. HASSETT: Absolutely. And, in fact, if you think about the China tariff revenue that we're estimating is coming in from the 10 percent that we just added, plus the de minimis thing, that it's between \$500 billion and a trillion dollars over 10 years, is our estimate. And that's something that is outside of the reductions that markets are seeing through the negotiations up on the Hill.

And so, we expect that the tariff revenue is actually going to make it much easier for Republicans to pass a bill, and that was the President's plan all along.

Thank you.

Q And I — I have a question for Stephen Miller about DOGE. So, you — you spoke about DOGE. You said roughly \$50 billion is set to be cut in a year of waste, fraud, and abuse by unelected bureaucrats. We're hearing this ironic narrative from the President's critics and the left-wing media that Elon Musk is an unelected bureaucrat, and he's doing all this terrible stuff. Isn't one of DOGE's objectives to get — get rid of the federal bureaucracy, the — the deep state? And also, who was running the White House when Joe Biden was in office —

MR. MILLER: (Laughs.)

Q — because I don't know a single person who believes it was Joe Biden?

MR. MILLER: Yes. You're — you're tempting me to say — (laughs) — some very harsh things about some of our media friends. The — yes, it is true that many of the people in this room, for four years, failed to cover the fact that Joe Biden was mentally incompetent and was not running the country.

It is also true that many people in this room who have used this talking point that Elon is not elected fail to understand how government works. So, I'm glad for the opportunity for a brief civics lesson.

A president is elected by the whole American people. He's the only official in the entire government that is elected by the entire nation. Right? Judges are appointed. Members of Congress are elected at the district or state level. Just one man.

And the Constitution, Article Two, has a clause, known as the vesting clause, and it says, "The executive power shall be vested in a president," singular. The whole will of democracy is imbued into the elected president. That president then appoints staff to then impose that democratic will onto the government.

The threat to democracy — indeed, the existential threat to democracy — is the unelected bureaucracy of lifetime, tenured civil servants who believe they answer to no one, who believe they can do whatever they want without consequence, who believe they can set their own agenda no matter what Americans vote for.

So, Americans vote for radical FBI reform, and FBI agents say they don't want to change. Or Americans vote for radical reform in our energy policies, but EPA bureaucrats say they don't want to change. Or Americans vote to end DEI — racist DEI policies, and lawyers in the Department of Justice say they don't want to change.

What President Trump is doing is he is removing federal bureaucrats who are defying democracy by failing to implement his lawful orders, which are the will of the whole American people.

Thank you.

Q Thanks, Stephen. Can I follow up?

Q Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you very much, everybody. I'm looking at the clock. We've almost had an hour of time.

(Cross-talk.)

LEAVITT: I know a couple of these individuals have a meeting to get to at 2:00 p.m. So, you're welcome to follow up with my team for further questions. We're going to let these guys get back to running the United States government.

And we will see you all later. President Trump will be speaking at 3 o'clock at the Black History Month reception.

So, thank you. It's good to see you. We'll see you in a bit. Thanks.

Q Are you going to the Black History Month reception, Mr. Miller?

Q Stephen, on the fraud. Should we expect indictments?

Q What is your reaction to Mitch McConnell's retirement?

Q Are there indictments coming for all the fraud we've found?

MR. MILLER: I'd love to follow up with you. Just set up a time with Karoline.

Q Okay. Thank you.

END 1:56 P.M. EST

[News](#)

[Administration](#)

[Issues](#)

[Contact](#)

[Visit](#)

THE WHITE HOUSE

1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

THE WHITE HOUSE

WH.GOV

Copyright

Privacy