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OPINION

Democracy Demands Probe on Foreign Influence

Serving as a check on the executive

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The first few days Donald Trump's presidency have seen what may be the beginning of the end of the Affordable Care Act, an average annual hike of \$500 for middle-class homeowners' mortgage insurance premiums, a hint at a re-invasion of Iraq and a shift in the Department of Justice's effort to protect voting rights.

Yet, the overwhelming cloud that hangs over the Trump Administration is the suggestion of Russian interference in the election. Investigators from six different US intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been examining possible links between Russian officials and Trump's presidential campaign.



This cloud hangs not only over Trump's presidency, but over American democracy itself. Preservation of the integrity of our democratic process depends upon the aggressive pursuit of the truth — and the full cooperation of President Trump and his advisors in that pursuit.

Media reports indicate that investigations into Trump's Russian ties began as far back as last spring — before the FBI received the notorious dossier alleging that Russian operatives held compromising information about Trump, and that there was a continuing exchange of information between the Russian Government and Trump associates.

Any concrete evidence in support of these allegations would be damaging to Trump's presidency. And failure to investigate them would be even more damaging to the nation itself.

Democracy, while a founding principle of the United States, has been a work in progress from the

days when only white, male — and in some states, Protestant Christian — property owners were permitted to vote. Gradually, over two centuries, the franchise was extended to non-landowners, Native Americans, women, and people of color.

We still are engaged in the business of expanding and protecting our democracy, fighting back racially-motivated voter suppression laws and contending with the anti-democratic effects of the Electoral College. Our goal must be a full and true democracy, where every citizen has an equal opportunity to be heard, without the corrupting influence of foreign agents working against American interests.

If a foreign government interfered to boost one candidate chances, it's not merely an affront to the losing candidate; it's an affront to every single honest, voting citizen. It's an affront to American democracy.

Because President Trump was elevated to office by the anachro-

nistic Electoral College, counter to the choice of a majority of voters, he owes the American people an exceptional level of deference. He should go to every length to demonstrate that his own conduct, at least, was above-board and beyond reproach. Any attempt to stonewall an investigation should be viewed with the utmost skepticism.

His public statements on Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin, have been contradictory at the very least. In 2013, 2014 and 2015, he said he had a relationship with Putin, had spoken with him and had gotten to know him. In the third Presidential debate, he said he'd never met him. In the second debate he said he has no dealings with Russia and no businesses there. But his son, Donald Trump Jr., said in 2008 that "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets." This confusion should raise serious questions.

President Trump appears to be engaged in a campaign of disinform-

ation about his election — claiming without evidence that he was denied a popular victory by millions of illegal votes. His apparent obsession extends to making repeated false statements about attendance at his inauguration. His preoccupation could complicate our intelligence agencies' attempts to ferret out the truth. It's our hope that he will see that any failure to cooperate or to encourage a full investigation would be crippling to the nation.

During the Inauguration ceremony on Jan. 20, much was made about the "peaceful transfer of power" that is and should be an example for the world. But that peaceful transition depends upon the strict balance of powers as outlined in the Constitution. It's up to our legislative and judicial branches to serve as a check on the executive, beginning with the investigation into foreign influence.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

A Plain-As-Day Lie About His Inauguration Crowd

The trouble with Trump's 'alternative facts'

BY PETER CERTO

About an hour after Donald Trump was sworn in, I was having lunch with my wife and our five-month-old. As we picked at our food outside my office in D.C.'s Dupont Circle neighborhood, groups of tourists trickled by in Trump regalia.

Early the next morning, as I dumped a pail of diapers in the trash can out front, I ran into a much different crowd: throngs of people wearing pink and carrying anti-Trump signs, passing through my neighborhood on their way to the Women's March.

It was scarcely 7am, yet already I'd seen more pink hats than I'd seen red ones the day before. Surprised — and still in my pajama pants — I scurried inside.

DC's Women's March alone attracted three times as many visitors as Trump's inauguration, crowd experts quoted by The New York Times estimate. According to ridership data from the DC Metro system, only one other event topped it: Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009.

This was obvious to anyone who lives here, and to anyone



who's seen aerial photos of the crowd.

Of course, whose crowd is bigger matters only a little more than whose hands are bigger, among other appendages Trump likes to size up. But sometimes he can't help himself.

At a moment you'd expect a new president to be busy with other things, Trump directed his press

The Trump administration, in short, used its inaugural press conference to tell bald-faced, easily falsifiable lies...

secretary to announce that his crowds had been "the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period." Any media outlet that told you differently, he said, was lying.

It was laughably untrue. But it wasn't a lie, Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway told NBC. It was just an "alternative fact."

If that doesn't set your Orwell alarm off, I don't know what will. Yet almost immediately, Trump's version of events started circulating through conservative news sites and social media outlets.

The Trump administration, in

short, used its inaugural press conference to tell bald-faced, easily falsifiable lies — and many Americans believed them. Aerial photos, crowd experts, Metro data, even TV ratings be damned — all that mattered were the "alternative facts" of the Trump team.

There's more at stake here than a "whose is bigger?" contest — including for millions of Trump

supporters. To see how, let me tell you something else about Trump's first day in office.

Shortly after announcing that "every decision" will be "made to benefit American workers and American families," Trump retreated to the Oval Office to sign his first directives as president.

The first raised mortgage fees for working families, including many who probably supported Trump. Another began the process of dismantling a health care law that's helped 20 million people get insurance.

Trump voters in red states could

be especially hard-hit.

From Florida to Pennsylvania, in fact, over 6 million people getting health insurance subsidies live in states that Trump won. Combined with the law's Medicaid expansion and protections for people with pre-existing conditions, that's helped deep-red states like Kentucky and West Virginia cut their uninsured rates by half.

But here's the question: If Trump can tell you your own eyes are lying about a simple aerial photograph of his inauguration, can he also convince you your mortgage fees didn't just go up? Or that you'll still have health

care after he axes your subsidy and gives your insurer permission to drop you?

Talk about "alternative facts." If those things slide, what else can he get away with?

Trump voters are famously skeptical of Washington. Of all people, I hope they'd agree that watching what a politician does tells you more than hearing what he says. If they shut their eyes now, they're going to get sucker punched.

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