

# A crush of crises all but buries the young Trump White House

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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Less than a month into his tenure, Donald Trump's White House is beset by a crush of crises.

Divisions, dysfunction and high-profile exits have left the young administration nearly paralyzed and allies wondering how it will reboot. The bold policy moves that marked Trump's first days in office have slowed to a crawl, a tacit admission that he and his team had not thoroughly prepared an agenda.

Nearly a week after the administration's travel ban was struck down by a federal court, the White House is still struggling to regroup and outline its next move on that signature issue. It's been six days since Trump — who promised unprecedented levels of immediate action — has announced a major new policy directive or legislative plan.

His team is riven by division and plagued by distractions. This week alone, controversy has forced out both his top national security aide and his pick for labor secretary.

"Another day in paradise," Trump quipped Wednesday after his meeting with retailers was interrupted by reporters' questions about links between his campaign staff and Russian officials.

Fellow Republicans have begun voicing their frustration and open anxiety that the Trump White House will derail their high hopes for legislative action.

Sen. John Thune of South Dakota demanded Wednesday that the White House "get past the launch stage."

"There are things we want to get done here, and we want to have a clear-eyed focus on our agenda, and this constant disruption and drumbeat with these questions that keep being raised is a distraction," said Thune.

Sen. John McCain of Arizona blasted the White House's approach to national security as "dysfunctional," asking: "Who is in charge? I don't know of anyone outside of the White House who knows."

Such criticism from allies is rare during what is often viewed as a honeymoon period for a new president. But Trump, an outsider who campaigned almost as much against his party as for it, has only a tiny reservoir of good will to protect him. His administration has made uneven attempts to work closely with



In this Jan. 28 file photo, President Donald Trump accompanied by, from second from left, Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, Vice President Mike Pence, White House press secretary Sean Spicer and then-National Security Adviser Michael Flynn speaks on the phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington.

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— Sen. John Thune, Republican, South Dakota

lawmakers and its own agencies.

Officials have begun trying to change some tactics, and some scenery, with the hope of steadying the ship. The White House announced Wednesday that Trump, who has often mentioned how much he loves adoring crowds and affirmation from his supporters, would hold a campaign-style rally in Florida on Saturday, the first of his term.

The event, according to White House press secretary Sean Spicer, was being "run by the campaign" and it is listed on Trump's largely dormant 2016 campaign website. No other details were offered.

To be sure, pinballing from one crisis to the next is not unprecedented, particularly for a White House still finding its footing. But the disruptions that have swirled

around Trump achieved hurricane force early and have not let up.

On Wednesday as his choice for labor secretary, fast food CEO Andy Puzder, withdrew his nomination while the administration continued to navigate the fallout from the forced resignation of national security adviser Michael Flynn. Flynn was ousted on the grounds that he misled the vice president about his contacts with a Russian ambassador.

Flynn's departure marked the return of an issue Trump is not likely to move past quickly. The president's relationship with Moscow will continue to be scrutinized and investigated, sometimes apparently fueled by leaks from within his own administration.

Trump on Wednesday blasted what he called "illegal leaked" information.

Not just leaks, but also legal woes, have derailed Trump's early efforts.

After the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected his immigration ban last week, Trump emphatically tweeted "SEE YOU IN COURT!" and the administration vowed that it would re-appeal the block and either revise its original executive order or

write a new one from scratch.

But confusion soon followed. After first indicating they would not take a temporary restraining order to the Supreme Court, administration staffers squabbled audibly, behind closed doors, over the accounts emerging in news reports.

When the dust settled, a new statement was printed out and handed to journalists, stating, "to clarify," that all options were on the table. But despite Trump's vow to have a plan in place by Tuesday, one has not emerged.

The collapse of the ban, which poured fuel on simmering staff rivalries, was followed by a period of stark inaction by a White House suddenly put on the defensive. Trump did sign legislation Tuesday that rolled back a financial regulation, but his administration has not issued any executive orders in days.

House Republicans have been nudging the White House to get behind Speaker Paul Ryan's tax overhaul, which includes a border adjustability plan of which Trump has been skeptical. GOP aides believed they were making progress, but the matter has been overshadowed by the flood of controversies.

## Puzder withdraws nomination to be labor secretary

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's nominee for labor secretary abruptly withdrew his nomination Wednesday after Senate Republicans balked at supporting him, in part over taxes he belatedly paid on a former housekeeper not authorized to work in the United States.

Fast-food executive Andrew Puzder issued a short statement abandoning the effort, saying he was "honored to have been considered by President Donald Trump to lead the Department of Labor."

White House spokesman Sean Spicer declined to comment on possible replacements, but said late Wednesday that the White House had seen the writing on the wall.

"We know how to count," he said.

Puzder's nomination became part of a streak of contentious confirmation battles and haphazard White House actions, including a botched rollout of Trump's executive order on refugees and the ouster of national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, who would have chaired Puzder's confirmation hearing Thursday, issued a terse statement saying the nominee would have made an "excellent" labor secretary, but "I respect his decision" to quit pursuing the post. Puzder spokesman George Thompson said his boss was a victim of "an unprecedented smear campaign."

What troubled majority Republicans most of all was Puzder's acknowledgment that he had not paid taxes on the housekeeper until after Trump nominated him to the Cabinet post Dec. 9 — five years after he had fired the worker.

Thompson said in an e-mail that Puzder informed the White House of the housekeeper matter "after the nomination." People interviewed during the transition period said they were not asked by Trump's team to provide vetting information, raising questions about the level of scrutiny.

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