



In this Feb. 13 file photo, Mike Flynn arrives for a news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

Trump transition knew Flynn might register as a foreign agent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's transition team learned before the inauguration that incoming National Security Adviser Michael Flynn might register with the government as a foreign agent, White House officials acknowledged Friday.

The disclosure suggests that Trump transition lawyers did not view Flynn's lobbying work for a Turkish businessman as a liability for an official who serves as the president's closest adviser on security and international affairs. It also raises new questions about whether Trump's transition team, and later his White House lawyers, fully vetted Flynn.

Flynn's registration this week with the Justice Department disclosed lobbying by him and his firm that may have benefited the government of Turkey.

Trump fired Flynn last month on other grounds — that he misled Vice President Mike Pence and other White House officials about his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. Flynn's registration comes amid intense scrutiny over his and other Trump associates' potential contacts with Russia. The FBI is investigating, as are House and Senate intelligence committees.

Flynn registered with the Justice Department on Tuesday, citing \$530,000 worth of lobbying. His work on behalf of a company owned by Turkish businessman Ekim Alptekin occurred at the same time he was advising Trump's presidential campaign.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Trump had not been aware Flynn might register as a foreign agent. He said Flynn's lawyer had raised the possible filing with the transition team, but Trump's attorneys responded that it was a personal matter and not something they would consult on.

"It's a business matter, it's not something that would be appropriate for a government entity to give someone guidance on when they should file as an individual," Spicer said. He dismissed questions about whether Flynn's work should have raised red flags for the new administration, saying the retired Army lieutenant general had "impeccable credentials."

Among those told of Flynn's lobbying work during the transition was Don McGahn, a campaign lawyer who has gone on to become White House counsel, according to a person with direct knowledge of the conversations between Flynn's representatives and the transition team.

A White House official said McGahn and others were not aware of the details of Flynn's work. It's not clear why the Trump advisers did not seek additional information once Flynn's lawyers raised the potential filing.

According to the person with knowledge of the discussions, Flynn's representatives had a second conversation with Trump lawyers after the inauguration and made clear the national security adviser would indeed be registering with the Justice Department. The White House official said the counsel's office had no recollection of that second discussion.

Both the White House official and person with knowledge of the discussions insisted on anonymity in

"It's not something that would be appropriate for a government agency to give someone guidance on."

— Sean Spicer, White House Press Secretary

order to disclose the private conversations.

In the filings with the Justice Department's Foreign Agent Registration Unit, Flynn and his firm, Flynn Intel Group, Inc., acknowledged that his work for Alptekin's company "could be construed to have principally benefited the Republic of Turkey." The lobbying on behalf of Inovo BV, a Dutch-based company owned by Alptekin, occurred from August through November.

Flynn's filing said that he and his firm were not certain whether Turkey's government was involved in Inovo's hiring of them as lobbyists. The firm said it was aware, however, that Alptekin "consulted with officials of the Republic of Turkey regarding potential work by Flynn Intel Group."

The firm also acknowledged that Alptekin introduced Flynn to two senior Turkish government officials in September, but it identified them only by their titles. The officials included in the meeting were Turkey's minister of foreign affairs, Mevlut Cavusoglu, and Turkish Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, who is President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law.

In an interview with the AP, Alptekin said Flynn and his firm filed the registration under pressure from Justice Department officials. Alptekin said he disagreed with the decision to register. He also said he had asked for some of his money back.

In an interview Thursday with Fox News, Vice President Pence said he was unaware of Flynn's foreign agent work until this week, but called the disclosure "an affirmation of the president's decision to ask Gen. Flynn to resign."

In November, Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, sent Pence a letter warning about conflicts created by Flynn's lobbying work.

"If the vice president had heeded my warnings, it's clear now he could have prevented the problems that occurred with Lt. Gen. Flynn," Cummings said Friday.

After Flynn joined the administration, he agreed not to lobby for five years after leaving government service and never to represent foreign governments. It appears that his work wouldn't violate the pledge because it occurred before he joined the administration. The pledge bars Flynn from ever doing the same type of work again in his lifetime.

Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, U.S. citizens who lobby on behalf of foreign governments or political entities must disclose their work to the Justice Department. Willfully failing to register is a felony, though the department rarely files criminal charges in such cases. It routinely works with lobbying firms to help them by registering and disclosing their work.

Jobs report no longer phony, Trump says, now that it's his

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is embracing government numbers he once maligned as "phony" as he tries to take credit for the latest U.S. jobs report.

The new administration on Friday promoted Labor Department statistics that show U.S. employers added 235,000 jobs in February. The unemployment rate dipped to 4.7 percent from 4.8 percent.

"Great news for American workers: economy added 235,000 new jobs, unemployment rate drops to 4.7% in first report for @POTUS Trump," tweeted White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer. "Not a bad way to start day 50 of this administration," he later said.

What a difference from last year's presidential campaign, when Trump repeatedly assailed the report's legitimacy.

Back then, candidate Trump denounced "phony unemployment numbers" he claimed had been invented to make the Democrats look good.

"Don't believe those phony numbers when you hear 4.9 and 5 percent unemployment. The number's probably 28, 29, as high as 35," he said last February, on the day of the New Hampshire presidential primary.

"The 5 percent figure is one of the biggest hoaxes in modern politics," he said.

That's last year's 5 percent, not the new numbers reported on his watch.

Asked about the apparent disconnect, Spicer offered a smile and a quip: "I talked to the president prior to this, and he said to quote him very clearly: 'They may have been phony in the past, but it's very real now.'"

During a speech at the Detroit Economic club last year, Trump pointed to figures that show one in five American households do not have a single member in the labor force. He failed to mention the one in five includes children, young people in school and senior citizens who are retired.

Though the jobless report has been



White House press secretary Sean Spicer holds up a Trump Administration document to "repeal and replace Obamacare" as he talks to the media at the White House in Washington, Friday.

criticized by others for omitting people who aren't actively searching for work, it provides a benchmark that is similar to most other nations.

While business and consumer confidence have risen since the presidential election, economists also say it's too soon for Trump to be taking credit for jobs.

"No new economic policies have yet been enacted," said Scott Anderson, chief economist at Bank of the West. Instead, he pointed to an unusually mild winter that likely boosted hiring by construction firms.

Cold weather in February typically shuts down work sites across much of the country. But last month was the second-warmest February since 1895, helping construction firms add the most new jobs in a decade.

A survey of small businesses shows that their optimism is up since the election, reaching the highest level in 12 years in January, according to the National Federation of Independent Business. Other measures also show greater business confidence.

But many of the corporate announcements of new jobs that Trump has promoted — by ExxonMobil,

Intel and Ford, for example — will take place over many years and were already planned before the election.

Trump and Republicans have been quick to claim credit nonetheless.

"The February jobs report exceeded expectations by 50,000 jobs," said the Republican National Committee in an email, "another sign President Donald Trump's pro-growth agenda is spurring businesses to hire 'aggressively.'"

Spicer, meanwhile, may have jumped the gun with his tweets. A 1985 rule bars executive branch officials from commenting publicly on economic data until at least an hour after its release. Jason Furman, President Barack Obama's top economic adviser, said on Twitter that the rule was intended to prevent White House officials, some of whom see the report a day early, from immediately spinning the data.

Spicer downplayed that mini-controversy, saying he didn't think happily touting news that had been widely reported was "exactly a market disruption."

"I apologize if we were a little excited and we're so glad to see so many fellow Americans back to work."

Judge not ready to rule on new travel ban

By LISA BAUMANN

Associated Press

SEATTLE — A federal judge in Seattle who issued the order temporarily halting nationwide implementation of President Donald Trump's initial travel ban said Friday that because of procedural reasons he won't immediately rule on whether his restraining order applies to the new travel ban.

U.S. District Judge James Robart said in an order that motions or a complaint over the revised ban need to be filed before he can make a decision. The states of Washington and Minnesota, as well as the Justice Department, have only so far filed notices.

The U.S. Justice Department said in a filing this week that the original order had been revoked and that the court's restraining order does not limit the government's ability to immediately begin enforcing the new order.



Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson speaks at a news conference about the state's response to President Trump's revised travel ban Thursday in Seattle.

The states of Washington and Minnesota in a response notice argue that sections of the new order have the same effect as the original one and that the federal government can't unilaterally decide to change a court's previous ruling.

Trump's revised ban blocks new visas for people from six predominantly

Muslim countries including Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen.

It also temporarily shuts down the U.S. refugee program. Unlike the original order, the new one says current visa holders won't be affected, and it removes language that would give priority to religious minorities.

Washington was the first state to sue over the original ban, which resulted in Robart stopping its implementation around the country. The lawsuit says the initial travel ban was unconstitutional and hurt the state's businesses and universities.

Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said earlier this week that the revised travel ban has "the same illegal motivations as the original."

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Thursday the administration believed the revised travel ban will stand up to legal scrutiny.

On Twitter Friday, the Washington state Attorney General's Office said Ferguson is reviewing Robart's Friday's order with his legal team to determine next steps.

The revised travel ban is scheduled to go into effect Thursday.

BRIEFLY

Attorney general seeks resignations of 46 U.S. attorneys

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Jeff Sessions is seeking the resignations of 46 United States attorneys who were holdovers from the Obama administration, the Justice Department said Friday.

Many of the federal prosecutors who were nominated by former President Barack Obama have already left their positions, but the nearly four dozen who stayed on in the first weeks of the Trump administration have been asked to leave "in order to ensure a uniform transition," Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores said.

"Until the new U.S. attorneys are confirmed, the dedicated career prosecutors in our U.S. attorney's offices will continue the great work of the department in investigating, prosecuting and deterring the most violent offenders," she said in a statement.

By Friday evening, U.S. attorneys around the country — including in New Jersey, Rhode Island, Minnesota and Arkansas — had publicly announced their resignations.

It's fairly customary for the 93 U.S. attorneys to leave their positions after a new president is in office, but the

departures are not automatic and don't necessarily happen all at once.

The action Friday was similar to one taken in 1993 by then-Attorney General Janet Reno, who soon after taking office sought the resignations of the U.S. attorneys appointed by President George H.W. Bush. At the time, Sessions was the U.S. attorney in Alabama.

Conservatives want health bill changes, House leaders resist

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservative Republicans demanded tougher changes Friday in insurance requirements and Medicaid than the House GOP health care bill proposes and warned they'd oppose the legislation if it isn't reshaped. The White House signaled an openness to negotiate, but there was resistance from House leaders.

Less than two weeks before the GOP's showpiece legislation is slated to hit the House floor, the discord underscored the challenge facing top Republicans trying to garner votes for legislation scrapping former President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

It also raised questions about whether congressional leaders reluctant to make changes were lagging behind a White House more

willing to cut deals. And it illustrated anew the strained relationship between GOP leaders and some conservatives, even as the party tries to deliver one of its highest profile goals.

"If that's the best that they can do, then perhaps they have a different whip count than I have," said Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., head of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, suggesting the legislation lacked enough votes to pass.

One conservative priority is quickly halting the extra money Obama's law gives states to expand the federal-state Medicaid program for 70 million low-income people. The GOP bill would end that additional funding in 2020 except for recipients already in the program, but conservatives want to accelerate that to 2018 to save money.

At the White House, spokesman Sean Spicer suggested President Donald Trump was flexible.

"If someone's got an idea that can make this legislation more accessible, give more choice to the American people, drive down costs, make it more patient-centered, he wants to listen," Spicer said, noting Trump is "willing to listen to different individuals."

about the Medicaid date but added, "Right now the date that's in the bill is what the president supports."