

When the going gets tough, Trump goes it alone

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AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File

In this Sept. 21 file photo, President Donald Trump listens during a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Palace Hotel during the United Nations General Assembly, in New York.

WASHINGTON— His staff hollowing out and his agenda languishing, President Donald Trump is increasingly flying solo.

Always improvisational, the president exercised his penchant for going it alone in a big way this week: first, by ordering sweeping tariffs opposed by foreign allies and by many in his own party, then hours later delivering the stunning news that he'll meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

An on-the-spot decision with global ramifications, Trump's agreement to sit down with Kim came after a meeting with a South Korean delegation and took some of his top aides by surprise.

The president has long considered himself his own best consultant, saying during the presidential campaign: "I'm speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I've said a lot of things."

Trump has told confidants recently that he wants to be less reliant on his staff, believing they often give

bad advice, and that he plans to follow his own instincts, which he credits with his stunning election, according to two people who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about private conversations.

Trump's latest unilateral moves come at a moment of vulnerability for the president. Top staffers are heading for the exits, the Russia investigation continues to loom and Trump is facing growing questions about a lawsuit filed by a porn actress who claims her affair with the

president was hushed up.

The White House pushed back against the notion that Trump's decision to meet with Kim was made in haste, with spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders saying, "This has been part of an ongoing campaign that's been going for over a year."

White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said Trump takes input from a "diverse set of viewpoints," but added that "he knows it was his name on the ballot and he controls timing, content and tone."

Advisers argue that tales of Trump's freelancing are exaggerated and that in many cases — as with tariffs — he is following through on long-stated promises. Still, the president's decisions, as well as his proclivity for off-the-cuff announcements, frequently leave aides and allies guessing.

News that the president would accept a meeting never taken by a sitting U.S. president came from an unlikely source Thursday evening: a last-minute press statement by a South Korean official standing in the dark on the White House driveway.

With reality-show flair, Trump built suspense for the announcement by making an impromptu visit to the White House briefing room.

The South Korean official, Chung Eui-yong, spoke with Trump on Thursday after meeting with national security adviser H.R. McMaster and others. Trump asked Chung about a recent meeting with the North Korean dictator. The South Korean official relayed that Kim wanted to meet with Trump — and the president immediately accepted, according to a White House official, who

was not authorized to discuss the meeting and was speaking on condition of anonymity.

Trump then asked Chung to announce it to the White House press, but Chung wanted first to check in with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, the official said. Moon granted permission, prompting Trump to make his first known foray into the White House briefing room to inform reporters that the South Koreans would soon be making a major announcement.

"Great progress being made," Trump later tweeted, adding: "Meeting being planned!"

This was not the only recent moment where Trump opted to trust his gut and go it alone.

Determined to keep what he viewed as a crucial campaign promise, Trump forged forward with a plan to order new tariffs this week. In the process, he saw his top economic adviser, Gary Cohn, head for the exit and faced his most public condemnation to date from Republican lawmakers.

Trump let advisers Cohn and Peter Navarro, who stood on opposite sides of

the issue, debate tariffs for weeks, at times contentiously. At another point, during a meeting with steel and aluminum executives, Trump urged Cohn to engage in a debate with U.S. Steel CEO Dave Burritt, according to two people familiar with the exchange and not authorized to discuss it publicly.

Cohn announced his departure as it became clear Trump would move ahead with the tariffs.

In recent days, Trump told advisers that his experience in business gave him an edge in deciding what to do on tariffs. He told aides that he has been proclaiming for 30 years that the United States needed a more protectionist approach, according to two White House officials not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

The president also boasted to outside advisers that he knew the tariffs issue better than his advisers and suggested that the move could help him lock up Rust Belt states like Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan again, according to a person familiar with the president's thinking but not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations.

BRIEFLY

Tillerson says 'talks,' but no 'negotiations' with NKorea

DJIBOUTI (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson drew a distinction Friday between "talks" with North Korea and "negotiations," arguing that President Donald Trump's willingness to chat with Kim Jong Un shouldn't be construed as anything more than that.

The stunning announcement that Trump had agreed to a meeting with the North Korean leader raised questions about what had changed after months of Tillerson and other Trump officials insisting the conditions weren't right for negotiations with Pyongyang. Tillerson said that Trump has been open to mere talks and a meeting with Kim "for some time," and had decided on Thursday that "the time was right."

"In the president's judgment, that time has arrived now," Tillerson told reporters in Djibouti during a trip to Africa.

Tillerson did not define the precise difference between talks and negotiations, and it was unclear what there was for the two countries — still technically at war — would have to discuss if not a deal to address concerns about the North's nuclear weapons program. Ostensibly, they could hold preliminary conversations to see if there's enough common ground and good will to proceed to formal negotiations.

Explaining Trump's decision-making about the meeting, Tillerson said that the U.S. had witnessed a shift from North Korea that became apparent when a South Korean delegation visited Pyongyang, then traveled to Washington to brief U.S. officials on the rare meeting.

He said the dispatch from that meeting



Daryn Slover/Sun Journal via AP

Amber Cox shovels the porch roof at her home in Auburn, Maine, Thursday. The second major storm in less than a week is moving up the East Coast, dumping heavy snow and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses from Pennsylvania to New England.

"was the most forward-leaning report that we've had, in terms of Kim Jong Un's not just willingness but his strong desire for talks.

Florida governor signs gun bill 3 weeks after attack

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed a far-reaching school-safety bill Friday that places new restrictions on guns, cementing his state's break with

the National Rifle Association and decades of Republican thinking on gun control in the aftermath of the Parkland high school attack.

Just hours later, the NRA responded with a federal lawsuit seeking to block a provision of the new legislation.

Surrounded by family members of the 17 people killed in the shooting just over three weeks ago, the GOP governor said the bill balances "our individual rights with need for public safety."

"It's an example to the entire country that government can and has moved fast," said Scott, whose state has been ruled for 20 years by gun-friendly Republican lawmakers.

Tony Montalto, whose daughter Gina was killed in the shooting, read a statement from victims' families: "When it comes to preventing future acts of horrific school violence, this is the beginning of the journey. We have paid a terrible price for this progress."

The bill fell short of achieving the ban on assault-style weapons sought by survivors. The gunman who opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School used such a weapon, an AR-15 rifle.

Nevertheless, the bill raises the minimum age to buy rifles from 18 to 21, extends a three-day waiting period for handgun purchases to include long guns and bans bump stocks, which allow guns to mimic fully automatic fire. It also creates a so-called guardian program enabling some teachers and other school employees to carry guns."

3 hostages, gunman found dead in Calif. veterans home

YOUNTVILLE, Calif. (AP) — Three workers for a program that treats veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder were found dead Friday along with the suspect who took them hostage in a standoff at the largest veterans home in the U.S., officials said.

The bodies of the four were discovered nearly eight hours after the gunman slipped into an employee going-away party in a building where combat veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan receive treatment, said California Highway Patrol Assistant Chief Chris Childs.

EOTEC: City may also partner with county on Theater Lane water system

Continued from 1A

sealing the rest from Highland Avenue to Highway 395 (the county is receiving \$1.5 million from ODOT to help fund the project).

- The city pays one half of the cost of building office/conference room/storage space for the Umatilla County Fair, up to \$250,000, after which it will sign a 50-year lease for the space with the fair, at no cost to the fair.

- The county pays an annual contribution of \$75,000 per year for operations through 2022 and an additional \$160,574 in 2018 for expected operational losses.

- The county pays \$105,000 to cover its half of construction budget overruns.

- The county pays \$595,000 by June 1 to provide half of the cost VenuWorks estimates for fully equipping the facility.

- The county agrees to loan the city up to \$500,000 for EOTEC if needed in the future.

- The fair lease increases from \$10,000 annually to \$100,000 annually for the use of the fairgrounds for six weeks out of the year.

Councilors will be asked Monday to consider approving the agreement, which can be found in full in the meeting's agenda packet at www.hermiston.or.us/meetings. There will be opportunity for public comment. Afterward the

council will consider creation of a five-person advisory board for EOTEC that would make recommendations to the council.

The city will also consider a second agreement with the county, for a joint project creating a new water storage tank and distribution system serving the northeast quadrant of Hermiston.

In a memo, assistant city manager Mark Morgan wrote that the area has the most land available for housing development and is the proposed site of a future new elementary school off Theater Lane, and yet has issues with water system pressure that makes developing the area expensive.

He said developers have helped pay for a "piecemeal" approach to adding capacity, but the proposed \$4,549,575 project would be more efficient and would lower cost for future housing developments and a new elementary school. The added water storage would also help in emergency preparedness, as right now the system only allows for 18 hours worth of water to be stored during peak summer demand — a problem during a lengthy power outage.

While the city would initially need to take out a loan to get the project started immediately, the project would ultimately be paid for by Lamb Weston's payments in lieu of property taxes. The company received a 15-year enterprise zone exemption

from property taxes on a \$250 million expansion outside Hermiston and will instead pay \$1 million per year split between the city and county. The county has agreed to contribute the first \$2 million of its share to the water project, as large employers such as Lamb Weston have cited a lack of housing for workers as a major barrier to more economic development in

the west end of the county.

Prior to the city council's regular meeting at 7 p.m., the council will meet at 6 p.m. for a tour of the nearly completed Harkenrider Center and the newly remodeled Carnegie Library next door.

Larry Fetter, parks and recreation director, said the Harkenrider Center building should be completed in mid to late April, but the senior

center won't be able to start operating out of it until around August. That's because after completion of the building the city will tear out the street and parking lot areas surrounding the center to create one large, single-level parking lot that will serve the senior center, library and Carnegie building. Work on that will continue throughout the summer while inside the Harkenrider Center the

seniors will have the stoves, refrigerators, freezers, commercial dishwasher and other equipment they raised money for assembled and installed in the building.

"That's going to take a lot of time," he said.

The tour of the Carnegie building will show off the remodel the city has been working on in the building's basement, which will be used for city staff.

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