

Zinke defends plan to raise park fees amid flap over travel

WASHINGTON (AP) — Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke bristled Tuesday under questioning by Democrats about his travel spending as the Trump administration seeks deep cuts to conservation programs and fee increases at national parks.

Zinke testified before a Senate committee about the agency's proposed \$11.7 billion budget for 2019.

He has proposed doubling entry fees during peak seasons at some of the nation's most popular national parks to help make up for an \$11 billion backlog in needed maintenance.

The former Navy SEAL flashed with anger when the Energy and Natural Resources Committee's ranking Democrat pressed him on whether he could justify increasing access fees for working Americans when he has been spending taxpayer money on chartered airplane flights.

"Well, first, insults and innuendos are misleading. I never took a private jet anywhere," Zinke said, adding that all flights he had taken on private planes were on aircraft driven by propellers, not jet engines.

Zinke also referenced a report last week that the Interior Department is spending nearly \$139,000 to upgrade three sets of doors in his office.

"I resent the fact of your insults, I resent the fact they're misleading, I resent the fact of the doors," Zinke said to Cantwell.



At left, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson steps away from the podium after speaking at the State Department. At right, President Donald Trump speaks to reporters before boarding Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House.



AP Photos/Andrew Harnik

Trump axes Tillerson, names Pompeo chief U.S. Diplomat

By JOSH LEDERMAN & ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump unceremoniously dumped Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Tuesday — via Twitter — and picked CIA Director Mike Pompeo to shift from America's spy chief to its top diplomat.

The plans to oust Tillerson had been drawn up months ago, but the timing caught even senior White House officials unawares. The firing was just the latest in an exodus of administration officials, including those in Trump's inner circle, with the president already setting records for staff turnover and several other Cabinet secretaries facing ethics investigations.

However, Trump emphatically rejected talk of chaos in his year-old administration as he nears a pivotal moment on the international stage with his planned meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. He declared Tuesday, "I'm really at a point where we're getting very close to having the Cabinet and other things that I want."

He said he was nominating the CIA's deputy director, Gina Haspel, to take over for Pompeo at the intelligence agency. If confirmed, Haspel would be the CIA's first female director.

As for Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil CEO whom Trump picked as his administration's top Cabinet official, the president said simply, "we disagreed on things."

No doubt that was true, one prime example being the agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear efforts. Trump's change puts Pompeo, an ardent foe of the Iran nuclear deal, in charge of U.S. diplomacy as the president decides whether to withdraw the U.S. from the agreement.

"We were not really thinking the same," said Trump.

Public policy aside, in the view of current and former White House officials, Tillerson's "moron" comment to senior administration officials last summer — and the subsequent revelation in the press — permanently eroded trust between the two men and it was only a matter of time before Tillerson would be pushed out.

Tillerson himself, his voice occasionally quavering, gave brief farewell remarks at the State Department, thanking department staff and diplomats around the world — but not mentioning Trump except to say that he'd spoken by phone to the president Tuesday while Trump was on Air Force One, hours after the tweeted firing.

The gulf that separated the two men was illustrated one last time by conflicting stories on the circumstances of the firing.

Trump kept the timing of an unusually close circle that included Chief of Staff John Kelly and Vice President Mike Pence, officials said. Pompeo was brought into the White House Friday after returning from an overseas trip and was offered the job formally by phone Saturday.

Kelly was given the task of phoning Tillerson, who was in Africa, but the nature of their conversation was up for dispute. White House officials said Kelly told Tillerson that Trump wanted a change and he should step down. Tillerson, the White House said, asked that Trump wait until he returned to the U.S., and he shortened his trip to Africa — where much of his mission revolved around softening the impact of Trump's recent reported criticisms.

Trump considers ousting his VA secretary

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is considering ousting embattled Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, who has faced an insurgency within his department and fresh allegations that he used a member of his security detail to run personal errands.

Trump has floated the notion of moving Energy Secretary Rick Perry to the VA to right the ship, believing Shulkin has become a distraction, according to two sources familiar with White House discussions. The sources were not authorized to discuss internal deliberations.

Shulkin has faced several investigations over his travel and leadership of the department, but until now has received praise from the president for his work to turn it around. The news comes after Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson Tuesday.

Trump raised the idea with Perry on Monday but did not offer the job to him, according to one White House official. Trump has been angry with Shulkin, the official said, but is known to float staffing changes without always following through.

Shulkin did not respond to requests for comment via phone and text message. He has been holding on to his job by a thread since a bruising internal report found ethics violations in connection with his trip to Europe with his wife last summer.

The VA inspector general also is looking into a complaint by a member of Shulkin's 24-7 security detail that he was asked to accompany the secretary to a Home Depot and carry furniture items into his home, according to two people familiar with the allegation who requested anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON & EVENING

Table with 24 columns (12 PM to 11:30 PM) and rows for various channels (FOX, CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS) listing programs like 'Paid Program', 'The Talk', 'The Doctors', 'The Wendy Williams Show', etc.

MARCH 14, 2018

Large table with 24 columns (12 PM to 11:30 PM) and rows for various channels (A&E, AMC, ANPL, CMT, CNBC, CNN, DISC, DISN, ESPN, ESPN2, FOC, FNC, FREE, FOX, GOLF, GSN, HALL, HGTV, HIST, LIFE, NICK, ROOT, SPIKE, SYFY, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, UNI, USA, WE, WGN, HBO, HBO2, HBO3, MAX, STARZ, SHOW, STZENC) listing programs like 'You Do?', 'A Few Good Men', 'Pit Bull Parolees', etc.

WEDNESDAY LATE NIGHT & THURSDAY MORNING

Table with 24 columns (12 AM to 11:30 PM) and rows for various channels (FOX, CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS) listing programs like '11:35 AM', 'The Late Show', 'The Tonight Show', 'Jimmy Kimmel', etc.