



President Donald Trump blows a whistle to start a race for the annual White House Easter Egg Roll on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Monday.



Mikhail Klimentyev, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP
President Donald Trump, right, and Russia President Vladimir Putin talk during the family photo session in November 2017 at the APEC Summit in Danang.

U.S. opens door to possible Trump-Putin White House meeting

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration opened the door to a potential White House meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday, raising the possibility of an Oval Office welcome for Putin for the first time in more than a decade even as relations between the two powers have deteriorated.

The Kremlin said Monday that Trump had invited the Russian leader to the White House when they spoke by telephone last month. White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders responded that the White House was among “a number of potential venues” discussed. Both sides said they hadn’t started preparations for such a visit.

If it happens, Putin would be getting the honor of an Oval Office tete-a-tete for the first time since he met President George W. Bush at the White House in 2005. Alarms rang in diplomatic and foreign policy circles over the prospect that Trump might offer Putin that venue without confronting him about Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election or allegations that Russia masterminded the March 4 nerve agent attack on a former Russian double agent.

“It would confer a certain normalization of relations and we’re certainly not in a normal space,” said Alina Polyakova, a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution. “Nothing about this is normal.”

Much has happened since Trump and Putin spoke in the March 20 phone call. Trump said afterward he hoped to meet with Putin “in

the not too distant future” to discuss the nuclear arms race and other matters. But their call was followed by reports that Trump had been warned in briefing materials not to congratulate the Russian president on his re-election but did so anyway.

Since the call, two dozen countries, including the U.S. and many European Union nations, and NATO expelled more than 150 Russian diplomats in solidarity with Britain over the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, the former spy, and his daughter Yulia. Moscow has denied any involvement in the nerve attack and retaliated by expelling the same number of diplomats from each nation.

Putin’s foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, told reporters Monday that when the two leaders spoke by phone, “Trump suggested to have the first meeting in Washington, in the White House,” calling it a “quite interesting and positive idea.”

Ushakov voiced hope that tensions resulting from the diplomatic expulsions wouldn’t derail discussions about a summit.

Trump has said maintaining a strong personal relationship with Putin is in the U.S. interest and has signaled to allies that he trusts his own instincts in dealing with the Russian president.

A White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe private discussions, said Trump raised the possibility of a White House meeting in a “casual, open-ended” fashion during the call. The official reiterated that no extensive preparations had taken place.

Trump pushes GOP to use ‘nuclear option’ on border

By JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Trump administration officials said Monday they’re crafting a new legislative package aimed at closing immigration “loopholes,” hours after the president called on Republicans in Congress to immediately pass a border bill using the “Nuclear Option if necessary” to muscle it through.

“Border Patrol Agents (and ICE) are GREAT, but the weak Dem laws don’t allow them to do their job. Act now Congress, our country is being stolen!” President Donald Trump wrote in a series of sometimes-misleading tweets, fired off after returning from a holiday weekend spent in Florida with several immigration hardliners.

Trump also declared protections for so-called Dreamer immigrants “dead,” claimed the U.S. has “no effective border laws” and warned Mexico to halt the passage of “caravans” of illegal immigrants or risk retribution.

“They must stop the big drug and people flows, or I will stop their cash cow, NAFTA. NEED WALL!” he wrote.

Trump has been seething over immigration since realizing the major spending bill he signed last month barely funds the “big, beautiful” border wall he has promised his supporters. The \$1.3 trillion funding package included \$1.6 billion in border wall spending, but much of that money can be used only to repair existing segments, not to build new sections.

Among the measures the administration is pursuing: ending special safeguards that prevent the immediate deportation of children arrested at the border and traveling alone. Under current law, unaccompanied children from countries that don’t border the U.S. would be placed under the supervision of the Department of Health and Human Services and undergo often-lengthy deportation proceedings before an immigration judge instead of being deported.

The administration is also pushing Congress to terminate a 1997 court settlement that requires the government to release children from custody to parents, adult relatives or other caretakers as their cases make their way through immigration court. Officials complain that many children never show up at their hearings.

The proposals appear the same as those included on a White House immigration wish list that was released in October but failed to gain traction during negotiations over the border wall. Such proposals are likely to face opposition from moderate Republicans and Democrats going into the midterm elections. But Trump appears intent on ensuring the issues remain at the forefront of public conversation, even though the omnibus was widely seen as the last major legislation likely passed this year.

In his Easter weekend tweets and comments, Trump continued to blame Democrats for killing the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program despite the fact that he was the one who moved to end the program. He also claimed DACA, which has provided temporary protection from deportation and work permits to hundreds of thousands of young people, is luring people to cross the border illegally, even though the program — and most proposals to replace it — have never been open to new arrivals.

Trump spent much of the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago club, having meals with his

family, watching cable news shows and rubbing elbows with conservative commentators including Fox News host Sean Hannity, according to several club members. Also spotted at the club: championship golfer Dustin Johnson, MyPillow maker Michael J. Lindell, boxing promoter Don King and former New York Police Commissioner Bernie Kerik.

Staffers with Trump over the holiday included policy adviser Stephen Miller, one of the chief architects of the administration’s anti-immigration policies, but not his chief of staff John Kelly or his elder daughter, Ivanka, both considered more moderate influences.

Trump’s past calls to use the “nuclear option” — changing the Senate rules to require a simple majority of 51 votes to override a rule instead of 60 — have been repeatedly dismissed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who argues Republicans will welcome the filibuster if they return to being the Senate minority. The current split is 51-49 favoring Republicans.

Notably, Trump’s favored DACA solution mustered only 39 votes in the Senate, meaning it couldn’t have passed even if the Senate did approve the changes.

EPA to ease back emissions standards

The Associated Press

Environmental regulators announced on Monday they will ease emissions standards for cars and trucks, saying that a timeline put in place by President Barack Obama was not appropriate and set standards “too high.”

The Environmental Protection Agency said it completed a review that will affect vehicles for model years 2022-2025 but it did not specify details on new standards, which it said would be forthcoming. Current regulations from the EPA require the fleet of new vehicles to get 36 miles per gallon in real-world driving by 2025. That’s about 10 mpg over the existing standard.

The agency said in its decision that the regulation set under the Obama administration “presents challenges for auto manufacturers due to feasibility and practicability, raises potential concerns related to automobile safety, and results in significant additional costs on consumers, especially low-income consumers.”

The EPA, in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, will work to come up with new standards.

Automakers applauded Monday’s decision, arguing that the current requirements would have cost the industry billions of dollars and raised vehicle prices due to the cost of developing the

necessary technology.

“This was the right decision, and we support the Administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards,” said Gloria Bergquist, vice president, communications and public affairs for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, in a statement. “We appreciate that the Administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans.”

Environmentalists, meanwhile, warned the proposed rollbacks will make U.S. cars more expensive to fill up.

“No one in America is eager to buy a car that gets worse gas mileage and spews more pollution from its tailpipe,” said Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund. “Designing and building cleaner, more cost-efficient cars is what helped automakers bounce back from the depths of the recession and will be key to America’s global competitiveness in the years ahead.”

Any change is likely to set up a lengthy legal showdown with California, which has the power to set its own pollution and gas mileage standards and doesn’t want them to change. About a dozen other states follow California’s rules, and together they account for more than one-third of the vehicles sold in the U.S.

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