

# Politics



**"I screwed up."**

— Sean Spicer, admitting to CNN's S.E. Cupp on Thursday that he'd made mistakes during his tenure in the White House last year as President Trump's first press secretary

## WHITE HOUSE

# Trump pushes for voter ID laws to combat fraud

## But he dissolved his voter integrity commission

By **STEPHEN DINAN AND SALLY PERSONS**  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Trump pushed Americans on Thursday to demand ID at the polls as the solution to voter fraud, a day after dissolving his election integrity commission that he'd formed to investigate his own claims of massive fraud in the 2016 vote.

Mr. Trump, taking to Twitter, admitted to a rare defeat, saying Democratic-led states had blocked his commission from getting information, stymying the panel's work.

"They fought hard that the Commission not see their records or methods because they know that many people are voting illegally. System is rigged, must go to Voter I.D." Mr. Trump tweeted.

He has asked the Department of

Homeland Security Department to pick up where the commission left off, but it's unclear what that entails.

Tyler Q. Houlton, a spokesman for Homeland Security, signaled he didn't expect any big changes to the department's plans.

"At the president's direction, the department continues to work in support of state governments who are responsible for administering elections, with efforts focused on securing elections against those who seek to undermine the election system or its integrity," he said.

That seemed to contradict former commission Vice Chairman Kris Kobach, who on Wednesday had said he expected Homeland Security to pick up the work of the commission, using its databases to investigate how often noncitizens register to vote, or even cast ballots.

Mr. Houlton pointedly put distance between the department's efforts and Mr. Kobach, saying, "Mr. Kobach is not advising the department on this matter."

Democrats said the collapse of the

commission was a major blow to Mr. Trump, saying he was unable to find evidence that the 2016 election was marred by illegal voting.

"There has never been a shred of evidence to back up Donald Trump's outrageous claims of widespread voter fraud, and this commission was a distraction and waste of taxpayer dollars," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, California Democrat.

The commission, created in May, faced at least eight lawsuits, including one brought by Matthew Dunlap, the secretary of state in Maine and one of the panel's Democratic members. He said he joined because he wanted to make sure the commission heard other voices, but quickly discovered the panel was going the wrong direction — including not even sharing its work with commission members themselves.

"Everything was happening in a very secretive way and that gave rise to a lot of suspicions for people on the outside," Mr. Dunlap told The Washington Times, saying he decided to sue in October.

A judge ruled in his favor in December,

and weeks later Mr. Trump canceled the commission — leaving Mr. Dunlap to question the panel's motives in the first place.

"The most dangerous thing in public policy has always been someone who cares more about the result than the process," he said.

Republican commissioners said they were disappointed the panel was dissolved, but said they understood Mr. Trump's decision in light of the obstruction they faced in trying to get information.

"The obstacles and impediments used to hinder the work of the commission is evidence that there are many politicians and activists who want to prevent the American people from finding out the truth," said Hans von Spakovsky, senior legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation and one of the commissioners.

With the commission over and Homeland Security's future role questionable, Mr. Trump's push for voter ID is likely to garner the most attention.

Seventeen states had some form of

photo-ID requirement for voters as of last year, and 15 others required ID but it doesn't have to have a photo. The rest didn't require ID to vote, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Mr. von Spakovsky said the federal government could enact a law requiring ID for all federal elections, which states would have to enforce. But he said even if Congress could pass it, states such as New York and California would refuse to implement it.

J. Christian Adams, president of the Public Interest Legal Foundation and another commissioner, said voter ID wouldn't solve the problem of noncitizens voting. His organization has found thousands of self-admitted noncitizens who managed to register to vote at state motor vehicle bureaus.

"Most of the aliens getting on the rolls are getting there because they are getting state photo ID," he said. "The Motor Voter systems needs to be fixed because ineligible people are getting registered to vote when they are getting photo ID."

## HEALTH CARE

# Rules proposed to expand association health plans

## Self-employed, small businesses band together

By **TOM HOWELL JR.**  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Trump administration proposed regulations Thursday to allow people in similar lines of work to band together and purchase health plans across state lines, moving to make good on a key campaign promise from President Trump.

The Labor Department's rules, if finalized, would expand so-called association health plans, allowing self-employed individuals and small businesses to band together as if they were big corporations and qualify for plans that don't have to follow Obamacare's strict coverage requirements.

"This starts to create a parallel insurance market for small businesses and self-employed people that is less regulated than under the Affordable Care Act," said Larry Levitt, senior vice president at the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. "Association health plans could offer cheaper coverage that covers fewer benefits, which could prove attractive to healthy people."

During the presidential campaign Mr. Trump repeatedly pointed to allowing purchase of insurance across state lines as a major fix Obamacare needed.

But Democrats complained the new policy will undermine Obamacare's economics by allowing healthy people to buy less-robust health plans, hiking prices for older and sicker customers.

"Instead of working to make health care better and more affordable in the new year, the president is choosing to undermine Americans' health care to score political points," said Sen. Ron Wyden, Oregon Democrat.

The proposal would allow self-employed persons, even if they don't employ other people, to join large associations to purchase coverage while treating small businesses that join forces like members of the large-group insurer market. As a result, their plans do not have to comply with Obamacare's mandated slate of "essential" benefits.

People with pre-existing conditions could not be denied or charged more than healthy people, preserving a key tenet of the Affordable Care Act.

However, critics said the plans might be able to cherry-pick healthier customers by shaping what they choose to cover.

"You can't say, 'We don't accept anyone with cancer.' But you can say, 'We won't cover chemotherapy.' The net result is the same," said Timothy Jost, a law professor at Washington and Lee University who tracks the health care debate.

Republicans, though, praised Mr. Trump for the move, saying it would help an estimated 11 million Americans who don't have access to employer-based coverage and feel they cannot afford plans under Obamacare.

"Conservative health care reform is alive and well, and I will keep working with President Trump to build on this progress," said Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican who pushed for the idea as broader GOP attempts to repeal Obamacare faltered.

The White House said Mr. Trump had to act because too many counties have only one insurer to choose from in Obamacare's exchanges, while fewer workers at small businesses are getting insured through their employer, so new options were needed.

Republicans were supposed to solve these problems legislatively, but their seven-year push to repeal and replace Obamacare sputtered last year.

# PROTECT AMERICA

## By Working with the People of El Salvador

One of the great honors of my life was to represent the United States as ambassador to El Salvador. For five years, I ensured that the United States was a partner in El Salvador's success, not just because we were the big, influential country to the north, but because progress there helps preserve America's security.

Today I am concerned that the Trump Administration will undermine that security if it decides to deny Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to the 200,000 Salvadorans who have legally lived and worked in the United States for nearly 20 years.

Salvadorans, some of the greatest and hardest working people in the world, are working arduously to improve their country, which is rife with challenges. They face terrifying homicide rates—the highest in Latin America—brought on by pervasive drug trafficking, gang violence and extreme inequality. More than 40% of the population lives below the poverty line and the Salvadoran government struggles to create the conditions for success for its people. This toxic combination makes illegal, irregular migration to the United States an option of last resort for many, a reality that undermines our own security interests.

Americans value the rights of people everywhere to live free from persecution and fear for the safety of their families. We have a shared interest in helping Salvadorans stabilize their country.

So as a diplomat, I worked with Salvadorans to build a stronger shared future for our countries. We established opportunities for vulnerable youth in troubled communities. We trained police and judges to strengthen the rule of law. We provided job skills training and scholarships to create economic opportunity. We created task forces that today serve as global models in the fight against extortion and transnational crime.

These efforts are beginning to show promise, but now, the Trump Administration stands poised to undercut them. Despite significant progress, El Sal-

vador's economy is still the slowest growing in Central America. It simply cannot absorb the 200,000 people who will be forced to leave the United States if their TPS status is revoked. Not only will these individuals burden beleaguered Salvadoran social systems, but they also may displace current workers, leading to greater social instability and irregular migration back to the United States. This new wave of migrants will not be able to contribute to our economy like current TPS holders, who are fully vetted and have work permits.

## Ending TPS will not make America safer

- **200,000 law abiding Salvadoran** TPS workers supporting American communities
- **17 years legally** working and living in the country
- Already **vetted 11 times** by the US government

If the Trump administration ends their TPS, they could be sent back to the #1 murder capital in the world

As a diplomat, I never lost sight of my responsibility to preserve the interests of the United States. And as someone who was lucky enough to live in El Salvador, I admire the determination and resilience of the Salvadoran people in shaping their own path to stability.

The Trump Administration can continue to honor these shared objectives. This starts by preserving the connections we have built, and agreeing to continue TPS for the Salvadoran people living and working lawfully in the United States.

**Mari Carmen Aponte served as US ambassador to El Salvador from 2010-2016.**

