WILMERHALE

June 20, 2019

[redacted]

Via Email

[redacted]
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Transcript of May 21, 2019 Interview with Secretary Tillerson

[redacted]

We appreciate the opportunity to review the transcript of Secretary Tillerson's May 21, 2019 interview and the Committee's efforts to correct the transcription errors that we and Secretary Tillerson have previously identified. We also appreciate the Committee's commitment to treat as confidential the portions of the transcript identified by Secretary Tillerson and the State Department.

In reviewing the version of the transcript shared with us this morning, however, it appears that certain clarifications we provided on June 10 were not included. In keeping with the spirit of Secretary Tillerson's decision to meet voluntarily with the bipartisan leadership of the Committee and its staff—without the benefit of his files or personal staff from his tenure as Secretary of State—we would ask that any public record reflect the following clarifications, which we believe would more accurately reflect his views. If the transcript cannot be modified, appending our letter to any public release of the transcript would address our concerns:

- Page 30, line 22: Delete "honest" and insert "candid"
- Page 41, lines 21-23: Delete "I promise you my predecessors didn't meet with those people." Insert "I understand that my predecessors rarely met with those people."
- Page 42, line 24: Delete "input" and insert "input, we did and many senior people stepped forward to help with the process"
- Page 50, line 19: Delete "when the red lines were drawn" and insert "when the red lines were drawn by the prior Administration"
- Page 54, line 2: Delete "No." Insert "Only in my debrief with the President as to how the meeting had gone."

- Page 58, lines 19-20: Delete "And Sergey understood, and whoever the guest is, I just tell them look, you don't have to respond" and insert "I always tell the guest before going out in front of the cameras for the photo shoot, you don't have to respond"
- Page 66, line 13: Delete "No." Insert "Not that I can recall."
- Page 75, line 4: Delete "No." Insert "Not to my recollection."
- Page 77, lines 21-22: Delete "an agreement around Syria." Insert "a joint statement of commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict."
- Page 80, lines 13-14: Delete "Emir of Qatar abdicated" and insert "then-Emir of Qatar was ousted"
- Page 81, lines 8-9: Delete "The Qatari Emir is a very forward looking leader. His wife, Sheikha Moussa, is a very forward looking leader." Insert "The Father Emir and his son, the current Emir, are both very forward looking leaders. The Father Emir's wife Sheikha Moussa, is a very forward looking leader."
- Page 81, line 21: Delete "Bahrain" and insert "a lesser extent in Bahrain"
- Page 89, line 9: Delete "No." Insert "Not that I can recall."
- Page 89, line 16: Delete "he's not always involved" and insert "he had some involvement in"
- Page 89, line 21: Delete "No" and insert "Not that I can recall"
- Page 110, line 13: Delete "with him and --" and insert "with him and on a couple of occasions White House Chief of Staff Kelly would join for part of the discussion."
- Page 117, line 10: Delete "No" and insert "Not that I can recall"
- Page 138, line 11: Delete "Did not have—didn't directly participate" and insert "I do not recall participating"

Secretary Tillerson appreciates the cooperative and bipartisan manner in which the Committee has approached his interview and is hopeful that his testimony is useful to the Committee as it carries on its important work. If our request is in any way problematic, we would appreciate the opportunity to raise our concerns directly with the Chairman and Ranking Member.

Very sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: REX TILLERSON

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, commencing at 11:37 a.m.

Appearances:

For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL

SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF

DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL

DEMOCRATIC STAFF 1

DEMOCRATIC STAFF 2

SR. REPUBLICAN COUNSEL

REPUBLICAN COUNSEL

For REX TILLERSON:

WITNESS' COUNSEL 1

WITNESS' COUNSEL 2

WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE AND DORR LLP

1875 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW

WASHINGTON, DC 20006

For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

STATE DEPARTMENT COUNSEL

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you, again, sir, for coming in. We sincerely appreciate it.

This is a transcribed interview of Rex Tillerson conducted by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The interview was requested by Chairman Eliot Engel as part of the committee's oversight of foreign policy in the Trump administration.

Sir, could you please state your full name and spell your last name for the record?

Mr. Tillerson. Rex Wayne Tillerson, T-i-l-l-e-r-s-o-n.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you.

I am senior counsel for the Committee on Foreign Affairs, majority staff. I want to thank you again for coming in for today's interview, and we particularly appreciate that you've come to speak with us voluntarily.

At this time I'll ask additional staff in the room to please introduce themselves as well.

Sr. Democratic Staff. Senior professional staff member for the majority staff on House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Democratic Staff 1. I am with the majority.

Sr. Republican Counsel. Senior counsel for Ranking Member Michael McCaul.

Republican Counsel. I'm the Republican counsel with the committee.

State Department Counsel. I am an attorney at the U.S. Department of State.

Witness' Counsel 1. WilmerHale, counsel for Mr. Tillerson.

Witness' Counsel 2. WilmerHale, counsel for Mr. Tillerson.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. So I'd just like to go through a couple of ground rules before we get started. The way that the interview will proceed is as follows.

The majority staff will direct the questioning, which will be divided in sections based on either themes or geographical regions, with questions in each segment proceeding in roughly chronological order.

In order to maintain pace and flow, we will not be dividing time strictly between majority and minority staff. Rather, as agreed with my counterpart, majority staff may ask questions that relate to particular topics as they arise. Our hope is that this is going to create a more natural conversational flow to the discussion today.

During the interview we will do our best to limit the number of people who are directing questions at you. That said, from time to time followup or clarifying questions may be useful, and if that's the case, you may hear things posed by people around the table.

I would note that there is, in addition to your personal counsel who have identified themselves, an attorney from the State Department's Office of Legal Adviser. As agreed, agency counsel is here solely because of your preferences as the former Secretary of State.

And just to clarify, sir, do you understand that agency counsel represents the State Department and not you personally?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. And you have chosen to have agency counsel in the room today?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you.

We want to ensure that the presence of agency counsel does not interfere with the terms of the interview that were agreed between your attorneys and the committee. We also want to honor the wishes of both yourself and the chairman for a respectful and

orderly interview that allows the committee to carry out its constitutional obligation of providing legitimate independent oversight.

Accordingly, agency counsel will be expected to abide by the following ground rules. Agency counsel will generally not be expected to speak or answer questions during the interview. If agency counsel believes that a question calls for an answer that can only be answered in a classified setting, he may note that for the record. And if you agree, sir, that question would then be asked and answered in a secure facility in a separate session at the end of the day.

If in a specific instance agency counsel believes it is necessary, he may note for the record that the State Department believes that the question calls for an answer over which the White House may assert executive privilege.

Please note that even if such a statement is made, you, sir, do have a First Amendment right to answer the question if you choose to do so. Please be mindful, however, that classified information obviously can only be disclosed in an appropriate setting.

The White House has not indicated to the committee that the President intends to invoke or has invoked executive privilege, and there are no civil or criminal penalties associated with providing information that the White House may or may not believe is covered by executive privilege.

There are stenographers here taking down everything that I say and everything you say to make a written record of the interview. For the record to be clear, please wait until I finish each question before you begin your answer, and I will wait for your response before beginning the next question. And the same goes for any staff who may wish to ask followup questions.

The stenographer cannot record nonverbal answers, such as shaking your head, so

it is important that you answer each question with an audible, verbal answer.

Does that all make sense?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you.

We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner possible, so we're going to take our time. If you have any questions or you do not understand any of our questions, please just let us know and we'll be happy to rephrase or clarify.

Do you understand?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you.

If I ask you about conversations or events in the past and you are unable to recall the exact words or details, we would ask that you please describe the substance of those conversations or events to the best of your recollection. If you recall only a part of a conversation or event, you should give us your best recollection of those events or parts of conversations that you do recall.

Do you understand, sir?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. As agreed with your team, we have planned breaks at regular intervals throughout the day. That said, if you need to take a break, please just let us know and we'd be happy to accommodate you. However, to the extent that there is a pending question, we would just ask that you would finish answering that question before we take a break.

One final thing. Although you are here voluntarily and we will not swear you in, you are required by law to answer questions from Congress truthfully. This also applies

to questions posed by congressional staff in an interview.

Do you understand?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. If at any time you knowingly make false statements, you could be subject to criminal prosecution.

Do you understand?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Is there any reason that you are unable to provide truthful answers in today's interview?

Mr. Tillerson. No.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Please note that if you wish to assert a privilege yourself over any statement today, you should clearly state the specific privilege being asserted and the reason for the assertion at the time that the question is asked.

Do you understand?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. If at any time, as we had discussed with your counsel, you would prefer to go off the record to clarify something, [redacted], if you could just give us a hand signal and we'll go with that.

Sir, do you have any questions before we begin?

Mr. Tillerson. No.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you very much.

Mr. Secretary, before we begin our questioning, I believe you have some remarks that you would say like to share.

Mr. Tillerson. Yes. Thank you.

So I do want to thank Chairman Engel and Ranking Member McCaul for inviting

me here today and for taking the time out of their schedule to meet with me personally previous to this.

I also want to thank the staff, for welcoming me here this morning. I appreciate the work that they do and the rest of the committee staff have done over the past few weeks to make for a productive discussion today.

I've always viewed this committee as playing an important role in American foreign policy. Your work helps reinforce the Department's principal goals: advancing the security and economic prosperity of our people, protecting Americans, both at home and abroad, and advancing American values around the world.

I'm grateful for the productive working relationship we had during my tenure as Secretary, and I'm hopeful that our past relationship can frame our discussion today.

I'm deeply appreciative of the opportunity I had to serve our country as Secretary of State. When I was first approached about the position by President Trump, I was just a few months shy of retirement, and, frankly, I was looking forward to spending the next chapter of my life on my family's ranch with my wife and our four sons and daughter-in-laws and a house full of grandkids.

The position is not one that I sought, but I welcomed the opportunity to serve my country. In retrospect, the experience was both humbling and inspiring, and it will always be the great honor of my life. I'm grateful to President Trump for nominating me and to the Senate for confirming me.

I believe I discharged the duties of my office in a manner that respected both the interest of the United States and the Office of the President. It is no secret that President Trump and I disagreed on some aspects of United States foreign policy, and I'm sure you'll ask me about some of those today.

But at bottom President Trump and I shared a common goal: to secure and

advance America's place in the world and to promote and protect American values. Those American values -- freedom, democracy, individual liberty, and human dignity -- are the North Star that guided every action I took at the State Department. They are the true essence of American foreign policy throughout the ages.

Although the policies used to advance those values may change from administration to administration or from Secretary to Secretary, the values remain the same. I want to commend Secretary Pompeo for his efforts to advance them during his tenure as Secretary.

One of the key ways both President Trump and I sought to advance those values was by seeking cooperation and accountability from our partners on the world stage. To me, America first never meant America alone. We value our friends, allies, and partners, and recognize the strength that comes from our multilateral alliances, which have developed over decades and have served as a positive, stabilizing force in the world for generations.

At the same time, we also sought to reintroduce balance to those relationships, for example, by reminding our NATO partners of their obligations or by reorienting our trading relationships.

My tenure was all the more meaningful because of the talent and dedication of the career foreign service officers, the civil servants, and the diplomats at the State Department.

American diplomacy is not a one-man job. It is possible only through the tireless efforts of the State Department personnel, many of whom have devoted their entire professional lives to serving our country and advancing our interests abroad.

The unflagging professionalism, commitment, and patriotism of the men and women of the State Department inspired me every day of my tenure, and I have nothing

but respect for the people who translate our values into action day in and day out.

That is why one of my goals as Secretary was to ensure that the Department was organized to enable them to succeed so that their work could contribute most effectively to the State Department's mission.

As you know, I'm here today voluntarily in response to your request for my testimony. I chose to come back to Washington to speak with you today on a bipartisan basis because I understand and appreciate the critical role that the congressional oversight of the executive branch plays in our constitutional system.

That role is especially important with respect to foreign affairs, where our position is strengthened when the world knows we speak with one voice in protecting America's interests abroad.

I intend to answer each of your questions today to the best of my ability, but I ask you to forgive me if my memory is foggy or incomplete at times. I did not review my State Department files in preparation for today, nor did I speak with any of my former staff, other than State Department lawyers.

And as you can imagine, given the breadth and volume of matters that the State Department handles, I may not remember all the details of every issue that arose during my tenure. I want you to understand that if I make a mistake, it is unintentional. If I learn at a later date that I misspoke today, it would be my goal to ensure the record is corrected.

I also respectfully ask that you honor my obligations to the President and current and future diplomats. I owe them discretion about personal conversations and our Nation's benefits when other countries, our diplomats, and our President can be confident that sensitive and candid discussions will remain confidential when appropriate.

This may require me to answer some questions at a higher level of generality given our transcribed format, but I hope to be able to address all your areas of interest satisfactorily.

My time in government is over, but I hope my testimony today will help you as you continue to do the critical work of this committee, and I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Thank you, sir.

EXAMINATION

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q So we'd like to start at the beginning, sir. If you could, tell us how were you first contacted about becoming Secretary of State.

A It was in December of 2016, so post the election. Several people on the President's transition staff had been trying to contact me at ExxonMobil, and I was not taking those calls, as was my practice generally. But Vice President-elect Pence then called, and my assistant came in and told me the Vice President-elect was on the phone. I said: Well, I will take that call.

And Vice President Pence just said a number of people have told the President that he should spend a little time talking with you because of your position, your role in the world. You know all the heads -- you know many of the heads of state of countries that are important. You have a perspective on the current state of our relationships and affairs, and would you be willing to come up and just talk to the President about that?

And so I told him that I would. I had had conversations with previous Presidents. And so I said I will come up, but I'm not coming through the gold-gilded lobby of the Trump Tower because that was the revolving door of everybody that was interviewing for a job. I said, you know, I'll come up if you can get me in discreetly. So I went up through a residential entrance, and that was the first time I met President-elect Trump.

Q Did Vice President Pence mention which people he had spoken to about his interest?

A I don't recall. I don't recall him mentioning anyone specifically in that telephone conversation. It was a pretty brief conversation.

Q And you mentioned he had talked about your experience in a number of countries. Did he mention any countries in particular?

A No. Just, you know, he knew the ExxonMobil footprint around the world, so it was just that.

Q Did you consult with anybody else before agreeing to go up and meet with the President-elect?

A No. Well, other than my own internal ExxonMobil advisers to make sure I was -- what I was doing was proper.

Q And when -- do you recall roughly when that first meeting was with the President-elect?

A I don't. I'd have to go back and look at a calendar. It was, you know, I want to say like the first week of December, somewhere in that timeframe.

Q And you mentioned this, so you met with him at Trump Tower and they had provided a discreet way for you to access the facility.

A Uh-huh.

Q Can you describe for us, please, the scene in that meeting?

A We met in the President's office in Trump Tower. There were three other people present for the meeting.

Q Could you tell us who those were, please?

A Reince Priebus, Jared Kushner, and Steve Bannon.

And we had just -- after some kind of introductions, because we had never met, I just started to walk around the globe like I would do in briefing anyone that would ask me that. And we just went from one region to the next. And I described to the President my assessment of what the current U.S. relationship was in the region, what I viewed to be the biggest challenges confronting the country, where I believed -- and where I believed we had certain strengths to address those and where we were going to have challenges.

And, you know, I kind of summed it all up at the end by giving the President a

general assessment of where I thought U.S. foreign policy and relationships stood at that point. But I was fairly optimistic in my assessment that, while they were in pretty bad condition in a number of locations, that those could all be turned around.

Q Do you recall which regions you would have talked about?

A All. I mean, I went through Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, Asia, Southeast Asia. So, you know, all the places that I knew -- that I had knowledge about. And I had traveled extensively for the last 20 years of my career and spent a lot of time in a lot of different countries.

Q What was the particular focus, if I could go through those, with respect to Europe?

A It was -- I talked to him a little bit about the challenges of the -- in the EU, that, you know, he needed to understand that in Europe, yes, you're dealing with individual sovereign nations, but that in a lot of issues that would govern foreign policy and areas that you needed to build alliances and common action with the Europeans. He needed to understand that while a particular leader of one country, member of the EU, might say, yes, I agree, if they couldn't effect that through the body of the EU then it was hard -- it would be hard to get things done, but that, you know, within Europe the relationships were pretty good.

We talked about the challenges that had been created by the Russian sanctions for the Europeans because it was -- it had had a greater effect on them than it had on most American businesses.

We then -- I think we -- and I may not have gone through these in this order, but I think I started in Europe. Then we kind of moved into Central Asia and talked about Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and how -- and the regions surrounding the transition area to Afghanistan, and the threat of terrorism that emanated from that region and the

threat it posed to both Europe, but to Russia and to us. And then we kind of moved into the Middle East.

Q Uh-huh. If I could just pause you for a moment just on the Europe stuff. Did the President or did anyone else in the room have any particular reactions to your explanation regarding the challenges of dealing with the EU?

A They mostly just listened. You know, I think they were just listening. I don't remember them -- there weren't a whole lot of questions. I just kind of talked. I mean, on occasion they probably asked a clarifying question, but I don't remember.

Q Okay.

A I mean, there wasn't a lot of back and forth over it. They were just listening to my assessments.

Q Okay. Were there any particular areas out of what you've just described that you do recall clarifying questions on or areas that they were particularly interested in?

A No. I think, you know, occasionally they would ask about ExxonMobil's business in a particular part of the world. I think I told them we were the largest taxpayer in Saudi Arabia. They found that interesting, you know.

So just -- I think so they understood the basis upon which I was making my assessments, that had been there a long time, we had relationships with the senior part of the government, including heads of state.

And then my assessments were coming from many years of having dealt with a lot of these leaders and having spent a lot of time with them, both across the table from a business standpoint, but also in their homes in a more informal setting where they tended to kind of really talk more openly and frankly about things they were worried about.

Q And were there any particular leaders that you emphasized that sort of

relationship with or where there was curiosity about that relationship?

A Well, in each region you tended to talk about who -- who had the most influence in the region, you know. So in the Middle East we talked about the historical role of the Saudis, but also what a great partner the UAE had been.

And, you know, we'd go to Asia, we'd talk about, you know, my view of certain leaders in Asia, whether it be Japan, South Korea, China, and my general experience of dealing with those cultures and those people and that government. And they're all different.

Q Right.

A Some, you know, some are very welcoming of foreign investment and some were very hard to deal with.

And so I shared with him kind of a view of, you know, you'll find these countries are very open and they want American involvement, and these countries are going to tend to push back on you more.

Q What did -- how did he describe for you what the role of Secretary of State would be in a Trump administration?

A You mean in that meeting or --

Q In that meeting, please.

A Well, so I talked for about an hour, I think, an hour maybe 15 minutes, and kind of concluded and wrapped up.

And at that point he went into a bit of a sales pitch and asked me to be the Secretary of State, and I was stunned. In fact, Steve Bannon looked at me and he said: You're surprised. And I said: Well, yeah, I got a job. And, you know, the President said: Yeah, but you're going to retire soon, aren't you?

So we ended up talking through that. We didn't -- he didn't talk a whole lot in that

meeting about the role. I mean, he just -- I knew what the Secretary of State is, and I assumed he knew what the Secretary of State was, so -- and he had had a lot of people in front of the cameras that he was interviewing for Secretary of State. I knew that because I follow the current events, so that's why I was surprised because I thought he had -- he was working his way down a short list. He kind of knew who he wanted.

And as for the discussion at that point after he made his pitch, I said: Well, look, this would be very complicated for me because I don't know that I can get a clean break from ExxonMobil. I mean, I understood enough about what was going to be required. And I said: This is something I'll have to discuss with the board. It's something I need to discuss with my family, obviously.

And he said: Well, can you -- when can you give me an answer? And I think our meeting was on a Monday, if I remember right. And I said: Well, I'll try to give you an answer by the end of the week. And he said: Okay, great. And that was kind of it.

And I went home and began the process of talking with the directors of ExxonMobil, and they were all extraordinarily supportive of me doing this. And I'm grateful to them for everything they did to make my departure as workable as we could given that it was not an easy one.

Q Did you have any further contact with the transition team between that first meeting and ultimately accepting the position?

A The only contact I had was when I contacted Reince Priebus. I said: Reince, I have three questions I need to ask the President before I can answer -- or give him an answer. And Reince said: Okay, shoot. I said: No, I'm not going to ask them to you. I need to ask them to the President face to face, and I need to hear him answer those. And so Reince said: Okay, well, let me get back to you.

And so then they called me back and wanted to -- and said: Can you come up on

Saturday to the residence? So I went back up to New York to the residence and met with the President in his private residence Saturday morning and we had a further conversation.

I asked the questions. Based on his answers, I told him: Well, based upon your answers I have nothing -- I have no reasons other than selfish reasons to tell you no. And so that's when I accepted it. And that was the only contact I had with anybody prior to giving him that answer.

Q What were those three questions?

A I'd rather not share those.

Q That's fair.

And did you accept immediately at the end of that meeting?

A Well, yeah. That's when I said to him: I have no reason not to say yes. And so he looked at me -- I have no reason not to accept. He looked at me and he said: So is that a yes? And I said: Yes. He said: Can we shake on it? We shook hands. And he said: Thank you.

Q So what happened next?

A I went back home and started a very exhaustive process, first, of working with the ExxonMobil board and management to facilitate my leaving. We had to immediately then freeze everything and I had to disengage.

And then I think my next contact, they had someone from transition contact me just to let me know: I'll be your contact. Well, obviously we need to get paperwork started for security clearances, background checks, disclosure.

So while I was working on my separation from ExxonMobil with the team of people over here, I set up a separate team of people to help me respond to all the questionnaires that were -- you've seen them. They're pretty exhaustive.

And for someone like me, when they say list every country you visited since you were 18 years old and all the meetings you had, that was very hard to do, because as a matter of record retention, I never retained any records longer than 5 years. So it was quite a chore to put that together.

So that was what I spent most of the next 2 or 3 weeks doing, was just starting the process of filling paperwork out.

Q Do you recall who that person was on the transition team?

A I don't.

Q Okay. As you started working your way towards the Senate confirmation process, who was your point of contact for that process and how did that work?

A Well, they assigned a sherpa to me, and I don't remember exactly when that person was assigned. It was sometime right before Christmas, because at that point they began to send me just general briefing documents so I could begin to read on my own time. And then we'd begin to set up.

And I think I came up, I think I actually came up and had a meeting with the transition team so they could walk me through just, look, here's the process, here's the steps we'll go through, just so I could understand what the process was.

Q Do you recall who would have been in that meeting?

A No, there were, I want to say three or four or five people. I don't remember though. I think my sherpa was in the meeting with me.

Q And who was the sherpa?

A Margaret Peterlin was my sherpa.

But then I went back home to have the holidays with my family, and we worked through the holidays and actually began setting up briefing calls with various experts on topics so that I had a better -- a broader understanding of some issues that would

not -- that I didn't, you know -- I wouldn't have had any reason to know a lot of the background on certain things.

And those were generally done with telephone calls, sitting in my study at the ranch on speakerphone, and I would ask questions. They would give me briefings, and, you know, we'd spend a couple hours at a time on different people getting on the phone to talk to me about different topics.

A lot of those were people from think tanks. A lot of people, they were former diplomats, people that served in State Department and retired but were really expert on a particular area, just beginning to help me broaden my aperture on what I didn't know, which was a lot.

Q Do you recall anyone in particular who had helped with any of those?

A I recall a few names, but I don't recall all of them.

Q Anything you recall would be helpful, sir.

A Well, we got Elliott Abrams on the phone to talk to me about Israel and the Palestinian situation and the history of how things had evolved within the Palestinian areas, and it was quite interesting. And then I had -- they sent me a lot of stuff to read.

And in those -- you know, I could talk with people that had really dealt with a long time about, well, why did certain things fail in the past. You know, at this point now I'm in the full steep learning curve just trying to understand the history of what had been tried and failed and what had succeeded and why things fell apart and why things didn't fall apart.

So it's just an education for me. I mean, it was somebody different for each different part of the world. Obviously, they're reaching out to people that -- a lot of them had worked in bureaus at the State Department in the past, and they were helping brief me on, you know, anything from trade to economic policy. I mean, just full gamut.

Q Right. And were there any particular countries or particular themes that the White House emphasized you really need to go deep on this, or was it really just that spread?

A No. I was really just managed by my confirmation team. They put together the agenda and we hit the whole world. So, I mean, there wasn't any particular area that got more or less attention, you know. It was more a function of how big were my gaps. So if we spent more time on something, it's because I knew less about that.

Q And that would have been largely directed by Margaret Peterlin. Is that right?

A Well, she coordinated it and then -- but the people that -- they had different people come in for the briefings.

Q Okay. Whether it be during the transition or sort of early in your tenure, what input did you expect to have in filling senior positions at the State Department?

A I expected to get to name all of the senior positions, the under secretary positions and the deputies, that I would get to name those. And, obviously, I said to the President: Obviously you have to nominate those. But that -- I expected that unless there was some compelling reason why they were unacceptable, that they would be accepted and we would try to move them through the process. That was my understanding.

Q And did you put forward particular names whether during the transition or early on?

A I don't think I put any names forward until after -- I don't remember if it was after I was confirmed or after -- I was pretty far along in the process before we started doing that. We started accumulating names. Some were mine, people that I knew, and others were names that were suggested to me to consider.

And I did begin meeting with a few people during transition that I didn't know. And so it started a bit of an interview process just so I could begin to whittle the list down.

And, obviously, I concentrated on the most senior positions first, you know, deputy secretary, under secretary for P, you know, the key roles that you'd really like to get filled as quickly as possible. So that -- that's really when the process started.

Q And with whom did you meet during that sort of interview process as you described it?

A Well, I don't know that it's helpful to those individuals to be naming people I met with and weren't ultimately selected or may have ultimately been rejected. I don't think it's useful to do that.

Q That's fair.

As you went through that process, and sort of based on your expectation that you were going to be, you know, able to fill those positions again unless there was a real strong reason not to, how did that end up playing out?

A Well, not like I had hoped. It was very difficult to get people through the vetting process. It was difficult -- oftentimes people were rejected by the White House Office of Personnel for, you know, reasons that they had.

Q Did they share those reasons with you?

A Sometimes.

Q Did they seem like sufficient reasons from your perspective?

A Not from my perspective. But, you know, again, the President is the ultimate authority on it, so --

Q Without naming a particular individual, can you give an example of some of the reasons that they found disqualifying?

A Well, you know, if people signed the "Never Trump" letter, that would oftentimes disqualify them. If they had tweeted something or retweeted something that the White House office thought was inappropriate, then that might disqualify them. If they had a spouse that might have supported the other candidate, that would disqualify them. So, you know, it was just things like that.

Q Had you ever had any conversations, either with the President or the transition team, about sort of whether those sorts of criteria would go into personnel decisions, or was this surprising?

A It was a bit surprising. But it became established pretty early on, so all of a sudden, well, I realized, okay, now I've got the ground rules.

And that spread pretty widely within town. People began to understand that. And the unfortunate effect of that is a lot of people then contacted me and said: Hey, I just -- you can take my name off the list of consideration. It discouraged them from being considered.

Q Did you reach back to the White House to sort of reflect your perspective on what was going on?

A Uh-huh, yes.

Q Who -- with whom did you speak to pass on that feedback?

A Well, the --

[Discussion off the record.]

State Department Counsel. So we're back on the record. I just want to raise a concern that the State Department believes that that question calls for an answer that raises a potential executive privilege concern.

Mr. Tillerson. What I was going to say to you is, I'm not -- I don't think it's relevant to name names. Obviously, I worked with the Office of Personnel Management, the

White House, and because the process was managed by them. And that's who it all went back to.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Did you eventually come to a place, sir, where you felt that the process was working a little more smoothly and where you were able to get key positions filled with folks that you wanted?

A It never did work smoothly, never got to that place.

Q Is there anything else on the sort of staffing question that you think would be important for us to know?

A Only whatever you're interested in.

Q Okay.

There were, during your tenure, as you know, and possibly as a result of this, you know, some pretty major positions that did remain unfilled or that didn't have nominees. Specifically, there were never nominees put forward for the ambassadorships in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, under secretaries for civilian security, democracy, and human rights, economic and business affairs. Belatedly, there was a nominee for the under secretary for public diplomacy and a nominee for international security.

Did any particular role that wasn't filled cause you specific concern or make it more difficult for you to do your job?

A Well, obviously, first, the way we dealt with it is we identified career individuals within the State Department to step into those roles in an acting capacity.

And let me first say, and I said this on the record many times to the -- this committee and to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well, that I appreciated these people stepping up, that they were doing a superb job.

I never felt like I was hindered in any way from carrying out my responsibilities as

Secretary of State just by the mere fact that we had someone in an acting role as opposed to someone in the confirmed role. The people were competent, capable, always had me prepared. They traveled with me. So no issue with that.

Having said that, I also, I think, publicly acknowledged the challenges for someone in an acting role, you know, because everyone knows that it's an acting role. It's not -- you know, they're not in the confirmed position. So it was my desire to get those filled as quickly as possible.

I'd have to look at the list that you specifically mentioned, because in the case of Pakistan we had an ambassador in Pakistan. Ambassador Hale was there. And I think at some of those others we had people in place. They were due to rotate out.

And in that particular case, I contacted Ambassador Hale and asked him if he would be willing to extend another year for us because we were in the middle of some very sensitive discussions with Pakistan, and he agreed to do that.

So that -- we dealt with each position as necessary. Yes, we had -- we would love -- I would love to see those other positions filled, and we had names that were in the process. And at certain points in time people were progressing their own paperwork, you know, for financial disclosure or for security clearance.

Sometimes something came up in the process that caused them to have to withdraw, and that was a very slow, excruciating process because of big backlog. And we might have had someone in the system for 6 weeks to 2 months and then all of a sudden they got pulled. Well, you go back and you start all over.

Q Right.

A And none of the disclosures, clearance process were working very efficiently. And that's not a criticism of the agency. They had a lot of them to do. But it was excruciatingly slow, and we did express that concern, and we did attempt to contact them

and try to get them to prioritize certain individuals.

And then sometimes people had agreed to take the position, but then it took so long that they had to make a commitment to their previous employer that they either were going to stay or they really were -- and just, you know, they were left in a position where they -- not knowing they had to withdraw and stay where they were.

So the whole -- the fact that the process moved so slowly had a lot of unintended consequences that contributed, you know, contributed to the fact that things stayed open for a long time.

Q Just briefly, sir, just want to touch on the hiring freeze.

A Uh-huh.

Q Was that your idea?

A Yes.

Q And what were the terms there that -- for how long it was to be in place and what was your goal to accomplish during that period?

A Well, it was all part of the overall assessment of the State Department that played out in the budget process, but also played out in thinking about a redesign. And my approach is always in these things was to look at historical metrics.

And so I did a 10-year lookback and tried to understand how had the staffing at the State Department changed over time. And, of course, that 10 years then incorporated the last couple of years of the Bush administration and 8 years of the Obama administration.

And staffing had grown quite a bit during that period of time. And the question around the whys and wherefores of that were not entirely clear. And as I knew what we were trying to do with the budget process, the budget had also gone up similarly across the last 8 years pretty dramatically from something in the mid-$30 billion range -- I don't

remember the numbers -- but it had gone up to the mid-$50 billion range, and no real clear explanation for why that had happened.

Q And so this was partially to allow you to make that evaluation?

A Yeah. So what I said is, I don't know what the answer is going to be, but my instincts tell me if we're going to be more efficient and effective and we're going to do some restructuring, we're probably going to end up with surplus head count. That was my experience in every other reorganization I'd ever done.

And rather than just kind of stumble along as we were and come to that point where then you suddenly realize, okay, we've got 1,000 too many people and you just have to take the axe to it, that's a very painful way of dealing with it. And I had been through that once before.

So I had seen this done previously in reorgs, and so I said let's just freeze the hiring until we -- can we get our arms around this better. And let's let natural attrition begin the process of taking us down to a different level.

Now, in putting the freeze in place we also then put in place a mechanism for waivers. And we communicated that, brought it to everyone's attention, and we said: Look, if you have a position, you need to fill it, if you can't fill it with a redeployment, you need to fill it with a hire, send it to us, we'll look at it, and we'll grant the waiver. And I think during that year we granted more than 1,000 waivers.

Part of the purpose in doing that, though, was more than just managing the head count. It was to start a process of having people in the State Department really think about their piece of the organization and the human resources they had, and when positions became open cause them to ask themselves: Do I really need that? Is that the highest priority? How would I do it differently?

And you had people start thinking about, you know, we could do this differently

right now. And so it was really an early -- and I -- again, this is a -- this is all an approach I had seen used in previous reorgs of very large organizations and it proved to be very effective.

Q Certainly.

A It's all part of getting the whole organization to think about we've got to get ourselves positioned for the 21st century because the world has changed faster than we in the State Department have changed.

Q That's all very helpful, sir. Thank you.

I'd like to talk for a moment about Margaret Peterlin. You mentioned that she was your sherpa during the confirmation process. Did you have any input into either her role during the confirmation or her role that she ultimately assumed when you were at the Department?

A Well, I asked her to be my chief of staff at the Department, but I had never met her before getting in the confirmation process. So she was assigned to me by the transition team, and that's how I came to know her. I did not know her previously.

Q She was largely seen as playing something of a gatekeeper function within the Department. Was that at your direction?

A I think that's what most chiefs of staff do.

Q Did you ever get feedback from other folks in the Department regarding how that was perceived?

A I heard that there were concerns about access to me, so I tried to address those, and we did take steps to address those, given my time availability. So I think – and I understand, and this was true in my prior private sector role, people always wanted access to the chairman's office. I had a gatekeeper there because otherwise I couldn't get my work done.

So, yes, it was a role that I asked her to play. We talked about, though, how to do that.

And then the most, you know, the kind of the key people that were helping me day in and day out, the under secretaries, they had – they really had access whenever they wanted it. They just needed to, you know, get on the schedule so I was there, because I wasn't there a lot. I was gone a lot.

But we also used the twice-a-week staff meetings so that a lot of people that – you know, because a lot of them were in acting roles – to communicate, get them, if they had issues, to identify them. And then if it was one that needed more fulsome discussion, you know, we'd get them on the calendar so we could sit down.

I also had a process of what we called signals checks, and we'd do those two or three times a week when I was in town. And that's where bureaus, desk officers, people that were implementing certain policies would come in and they'd have, you know, 30, 45 minutes, whatever they needed, to kind of bring up to date where were they and if they -- and they needed decision or guidance, you know, where to go, we had the opportunity to do that.

So I think as time went by we tried to address that access issue using various mechanisms like that.

And then I had -- I went down to the cafeteria when I was in town and arranged for luncheons with career foreign service, civil service people.

I told them I wanted to meet people that were kind of in the 10- to 15-year point of their career, because they are the most honest with you. And my objective was to hear from them as to what were their frustrations, what was working, if I could wave that magic wand and fix something for them, what would it be. And that was all part of my process of understanding the redesign as well.

Q Okay.

How about Brian Hook? How were you first introduced to Mr. Hook?

A I think Ms. Peterlin introduced me to him the first time.

Q And what was the context in which he was presented? What was the role that she envisioned for him?

A Well, he was interested in serving and had put his name in the hat, along with a lot of people. I mean, we had a lot of people that, you know, wanted to make sure they got their name in the hat, so to speak, to serve as a political in the new administration in State Department. He had worked in prior administrations.

And so he had an interest in a particular role.

Q And what was that, sir?

A Well, I'd rather not share that with you because he didn't ultimately get it -- and that was my decision, not his --

Q Okay.

A -- or anyone else's.

But after I had a chance to meet with him on multiple occasions and kind of understand his breadth of capability, I was redesigning the Office of Policy Planning inside the State Department, and I was going about it utilizing a process that I was familiar with in developing strategies and tactics in the private sector. And I replicated that process in the State Department.

And I knew the current Office of Policy Planning didn't work that way. And I said: Look, I'm going to -- I need to start fresh because I'm going to teach some people a whole different way of how you develop strategies. And that's --

Q What was --

A And so in meeting with Brian, he seemed the most open to that. He was

excited by the approach I was talking about. And so I asked him to be director of policy planning and that's the role he ended up in.

Q What did that mean substantively? What was his substantive portfolio? Understanding the different sort of --

A Yeah.

Q -- procedural structure that you described, what substantively was Mr. Hook tasked with?

A I would tell him policy areas that I needed to -- we needed to develop strategies and tactics around.

And then we took a significant office on the 7th floor kind of adjacent to mine, and we more or less gutted the office, and we set up a few cubicles and we covered it with white boards.

And the way I develop strategies is I get the team of experts around me in a room for sometimes 4 to 6 hours and we whiteboard. We just kind of whiteboard the issue to death. Everybody puts everything up and we ask -- pose questions. Everybody puts -- and then -- so his role was to look at all of that and, okay, now try to put it together and make sense of it. Now, he also was our --

Q If I could ask you on that, how did you staff those cubes? Who was in those whiteboard sessions?

A We -- well, we would get the bureau, you know, so if it was a North Korea or if it was a Venezuela issue, we'd get the bureau out of P that had the responsibility for that, and desk officers, whoever, you know, who were the best people to come in and participate in that.

And, of course, the under secretary for P would be there. And so it was the team. And then Brian Hook would be there and myself. And then, you know, if he had

somebody -- he had a pretty small staff himself, but he had some staff people to help kind of pull all this together.

His role was also critical in the National Security Council process that we put in place with General McMaster.

Q And so that came into -- that was after Mr. Flynn's departure that that process --

A Yes.

Q -- established itself?

A Yep.

Q Okay. And could you briefly just tell us what that role was?

A Well, I've obviously described it to others that I wanted to reinstitute what I call the Baker-Scowcroft model of the relationship between State and National Security Council. I had shared that with a couple of others, Cabinet members, and they agreed. And that was a departure from the way the prior administration had done things, which is fine. Every President should have what they want.

The prior administration was very National Security Council-centric with the agencies being -- having a lesser role, so to speak. We wanted to reinstate the role, traditional role of the agencies and State in the formulation of the policy.

Q And Mr. Hook was sort of tasked with making that happen?

A Well, he was -- so he became the guy that would support me in doing that.

But we put the process in place after General McMaster was appointed by the President. Then we sat down. He came over to State for a couple sessions, and he agreed that we should reinstate that.

And so that required kind of a restructuring of the National Security Council staff itself, because, again, under the prior administration they had staffed the National

Security Council up dramatically because of the role it was playing.

Q Of course.

A So we needed to get the National Security Council right-sized, and we needed to get the resources that were over at the National Security Council back into the agencies where they could support the agencies in the new way we were going to develop policy.

And so that's what reinstituted the coordination committee function, the Deputies Committee function, the PCs. We went back to a very structured process around how we formulated policy, developed strategies, options, tactics, and ultimately how those got presented to the President for his endorsement.

Q Did you work with Bill Todd while you were there?

A Yes.

Q What was his role?

A Well, he was acting -- he was in two different acting roles, I think, during the time I was there. When I left, my recollection is he was acting M when I left.

Q How about Lisa Kenna?

A She was the ExecSec. She was in the ExecSec office when I arrived, and I think after a few months of getting to know her -- and the current ExecSec was ready to move on -- I elevated her to ExecSec.

Q And were there particular tasks that you asked either of them to perform as you were starting to sort of structure things the way you preferred?

A Well, other than they, you know, they sat in staff meetings too so they knew what we were trying to do. We were trying to bring a greater discipline to the way people sent things up to the Secretary for either action decisions or information, whether it be through action memos, whether -- when they sent up information through info

memos, because there was a -- a large amount of things would come up and sometimes they were incomplete, which resulted in a lot of recycle, because I ask a lot of questions, or they had actionable attachments that were coming up here to the Hill or they were going to a foreign government and they needed to be redone.

And so we were -- she, after working directly for me in the ExecSec office attached to mine, she began to understand and get it. And so her job was to get the bureaus to try to get it right the first time.

Q Right.

A And so rather than to come all the way to me to be kickbacked because they were incomplete, she would intercept it and try to improve the quality of it so that we had less and less of that.

And over time we did. I mean, we had less and less of it and things -- so, again, that was really what I was asking her to do, is let's try to make this a much more efficient process for everybody.

Q As part of that process, many of the delegations of authority that would have, you know, vested some responsibility in those below your office were repealed. What was the thinking behind that, and how did that impact that process?

A You know, one of the first things you ask when you get to a new organization is: How are decisions made? Who has the authority to make them? And how do you hold them accountable? No one could answer that question when I arrived at State.

There was no delegation authority guide. There had been massive delegation of authorities throughout the Department. And, again, this is just the way the prior Secretary chose to run things.

I couldn't function that way. And several attempts were made to map that out and we were getting nowhere.

So I said: I know how to fix this. I rescinded all delegations of authority to the entire Department, all were rescinded with a secretarial directive, followed by an immediate redelegation of authorities.

My delegation of authority guide delegated to the under secretaries, and I think in some cases to the -- their deputies, certain authorities with the -- authority to redelegate those one time.

Previously, those authorities had been delegated with the authority to redelegate them as many times as they wanted. And what I discovered was we had people pretty far down the organization that had authorities of the Secretary of State with no oversight or check. And I discovered that because some reports got sent up here, and I got very angry phone calls from people up here. That's how I found out about it.

Q Were there any particular reports that you recall?

A I don't remember the one that generated a call from a certain Congresswoman, and she was quite upset with me, and I said: I will look into it. And the first thing I said when I called the chief of staff, I said: What is this report they're talking about, and how is it it went to the Hill and I didn't see it, and it went under my signature?

Q And you don't recall the subject matter?

A I don't remember the subject. But that's how it all started.

So then we redelegated, and then we brought some people in, and I said: Now, you know, the objective here is to make this clear so that people can work more efficiently and effectively.

So they then brought in the delegations that they wanted to make, and I set a provision in there that if you need to delegate more than once, bring it in, we'll look at it.

So we had -- there was a line-by-line item. I would get these notebooks like this, I mean, they were like 2 or 3 inches thick, that we would do it kind of as they would work

through them. We worked through them with the legal staff and with M, and I think A in some occasions was involved because of contracting and whatnot.

So we redelegated all those authorities. We documented them in a delegation of authority guide. And I told M: You have to maintain a log of who has what authorities.

What was interesting about this whole exercise, after we got this started and I was having these luncheons with these 10- and 15-year people and I discovered this, I asked them, I said: So when you get to a new desk, how do you know what your authority is?

They all kind of look around the table at one another, and they say: Well, you just kind of figure it out.

I said: What do you mean you just kind of figure it out? They said: Well, you ask around and you try to find out from the person before you.

I thought: This is nuts. I mean, this is crazy. You couldn't run a corner gas station that way.

Q That's very helpful, sir.

We have two quick topics that we'd like to get to, mindful of the fact that we're approaching lunch.

The administration's 2018 budget proposed cutting the State Department by 31 percent. How was that figure arrived at?

[12:37 p.m.]

Mr. Tillerson. Well, we did a, you know, a process within the State Department kind of bottoms up; and I brought in a budget director to help me with that.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Who was that?

A Bill Inglee. Bill had done this previously and I persuaded him to come out of retirement to help me and he did a great job.

But we would then submit our budget to OMB. They would give us one back. It was different, obviously; and then we would engage in a process with them with trying to persuade them why we liked our number better than theirs.

Q Do you recall what level of reduction there would have been in your initial numbers?

A Not specifically. You know, as I said, we were starting with, like, a 55, 50 -- mid 50s number was I think the last budget that was approved before we came in. When I looked at budget trends and I looked at what I thought the opportunity was to make improvements, I think originally I was looking for something in the 40s; but I don't remember the number. Obviously we were passed back --

Q And what you were passed back was considerably higher in terms of what the reduction would have been?

A Yeah, yeah, reduction. Yeah, I think we were passed back something in the 30s. But, you know, once the President says that's it, then that's what you take and you figure out how do you, okay, you know, how do you want to get the mission accomplished and then my job is to come up here and explain how we thought we could get the mission accomplished with that budget.

Q Was there any back and forth with OMB when they first came forward with, you know, that larger cut?

A Yes. And I think I -- I don't remember it being in the first budget cycle because that happened pretty quickly after I got on board but I know in the second budget cycle there is an appeals process within OMB that the Vice President chairs and I took it all the way to that level to try to get some monies restored and --

Q And what was your --

A We got a little bit, but we didn't get much.

Q What was your argument to that appeals process?

A Well, I felt like we would eventually be able to get to a more sustainable budget that would be much less than where we were but that we needed to do that in a thoughtful way in coordination with the redesign that we were working on, as well as the second project that we never got to do that I had in mind which was designing the Embassy of the future, and there were going to be significant savings if we could design the Embassy of the future and I had pretty clear vision of what I wanted to do there.

And that with the flexibility that you have in appropriations and in funding to carry monies forward and certain programs that are all -- that are appropriated, funded on a multi-year basis, that the actual funds available to us in that coming year were higher than the budget number because of carry forward.

And so, we were -- we could get close to what I really wanted in the budget. So, the real problem was not going to be in 2017. The real problem was going to come in 2018 or '19 when we started running out of the ability to carry funds forward.

Q Right.

A And I -- my argument to OMB was, look, here's my glide path. I had a chart. I said here's where I think we can get to but you need to give me a couple of years to do

some things and, you know, give us a sustainable glide path that we can manage this without kind of turning the whole apple cart over.

And so that was my approach to the budgeting question and, you know, obviously the -- at the end of the day, though, the decision is made and you do the best you can with it.

Q You mentioned the redesign. I believe our minority colleagues had a question or series of questions they'd like to ask on that.

A Sure.

EXAMINATION

BY SR. REPUBLICAN COUNSEL:

Q Yes, sir. Mr. Secretary, when you came into the Department, you inherited a structure that included at the time you came in over 60 special envoys.

A Seventy-two.

Q Seventy-two.

A I remember it.

Q Many of which had direct reporting chains to the Office of the Secretary and I was just wondering if you could elucidate for us how you viewed that structure and what you would have hoped -- how you would have addressed that structure in any full redesign effort. Did it help you at the Department, et cetera?

A Yeah, and you're right. Each of those had their own staff that ranged anywhere from 10 people to 30-plus people. Some of those are congressionally mandated; and so the first thing I asked be done was, all right, put them in the two buckets for me, what's congressionally mandated, and what do I have the flexibility to restructure?

My view was from an organizational standpoint -- and this comes from I have a

great interest in organizational design -- have all my life -- that you look at the mission of that special envoy, which is obviously very focused and narrow, but that same mission exists over at a bureau somewhere. And my question was always, well, if the special envoy has this role and this mission, what are the people in the bureau doing? And not that they're doing nothing, but you immediately set up this confusion.

And the second thing is then when the embassies who are the actual implementers of our policies and our efforts in areas of influence, the embassy is where it really happens. Where does the embassy look to to get its guidance? Does it go to the bureau? Does it go to the special envoy? Well, the special envoy can't possibly cover all these embassies. That's what the bureaus do.

So, my idea was to take the ones that were not congressionally mandated, fold them back into the relevant bureaus, along with their staff, and have the bureaus start developing the policies, the programs, the efforts of whether it was on anti-Semitism or whatever it might be. And when that was developed, you deploy that to the embassies, you know, through the P Bureau. You deploy it to the embassies, and everybody's got a consistent approach. Everybody knows exactly what the message is, what we're trying to achieve, and they apply it in the country that they have the expertise in. But they don't get it coming from two different places and I -- we could see that was happening. And in doing that, we thought we realized some savings for sure.

And then on the mandated envoys, because you're right, they are all reporting to the Secretary which means they weren't getting any of the Secretary's time. I promise you my predecessors didn't meet with those people. There's no way they had time to, which is a terrible disservice to them. So, now they're just kind of out, doing their own thing.

So, the ones that are mandated by Congress I've shifted back over within the

bureaus as well. They still existed as required. So, they got that special emphasis but there was closer coordination then with what the bureaus were doing around that issue and that was just -- I mean, all you had to do is look at an organizational chart and say that can't possibly work and it didn't. It wasn't.

Q And when you decided to look at redesigning the Department, what would you identify as your biggest obstacles to that effort, whether it's structural, personality, some other entity? What hindered you the most in your effort?

A The same thing that hinders every big organization or redesign, private sector, public sector, nonprofit. The most senior people resist the change because they don't want anybody moving their cheese. They got the least to gain from it. They're near the end of their career. They just want to leave things like they are. They've achieved this level of success. They've got to where they are. Just leave me alone until I can retire. Don't change anything.

That's why we staffed the teams with people in the 10- to 15-year range. They're the ones that have the greatest to benefit. They got 20 more years of their career left. If they'll design and fix the problems, they'll be the beneficiaries of it.

That was true in the ExxonMobil reorganizations I participated in. That was true in the reorganizations of the Boy Scouts I participated in. And it's not a knock on anybody. It's just human nature. I mean, I'm an old guy. Okay. So, I understand you've been around for 35 years and you've gotten to this level of senior foreign service and you don't want anything to change, because I got it just the way I want it. Just leave me alone, you know.

That's very normal human behavior but you just got to -- you just got to set that aside, not that we don't need the input, because that's a lot of years of experience and we would have -- that's why it would involve the senior people to say, well, look, think

back over your career. What changed that helped, and what changed that made it worse? But ultimately the only people these -- only way these things work and are sustainable is when the organization buys in and they own it.

And I told the organization, look, I'm a temporary guy. I'm here for 4 years max. I'll be long gone. You'll be here for the rest of your life. Why don't you help -- why don't you let me help you fix it? And you know what's wrong with it. I don't know what's wrong with it. You know what's wrong with it. Let's fix it.

Sr. Republican Counsel. Thank you.

Mr. Tillerson. That was my approach.

Sr. Democratic Staff. We have one last topic in this management and operations bucket --

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Very quickly and I want to be respectful of lunch.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q During your tenure, sir, access by the press was reduced, compared to some of your predecessors; and this included effectively cancelling the daily press brief.

Two-part question: Whose decision was this?

A Mine.

Q Did the White House have any role in that?

A No.

Q Or any reaction to it?

A No.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. I think that does it for this session.

Sr. Democratic Staff. Thank you.

[Recess.]

[1:22 p.m.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Ready when you are, sir. Back on the record.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for accommodating us in terms of moving this up a little bit.

We'd like to turn at this point to Russia. Obviously that is one of the most consequential relationships during any administration. Either during the transition or early in your tenure as Secretary, did anyone ever pass you a plan or sort of a roadmap regarding policy changes in the US Russia relationship?

A Not that I can recall.

Q And as you'll note, sir, I believe one of those was mentioned in the Mueller report and it was stated that that had gone from a Mr. Kirill Dmitriev to Mr. Kushner who I believe was said that that was passed to you. Do you have any recollection of that?

A I don't recall ever receiving any such report as described in the Mueller report or any other.

Q Okay. And no other sort of here's what we should do on Russia proposals from anyone else?

A No.

Q Nothing from the Trump family, the organization?

A No.

Witness' Counsel 1. Mr. Tillerson, maybe it would be helpful if you talked to him about how the Russia portions of your confirmation testimony were developed.

Mr. Tillerson. Well, if you go to my confirmation hearings, all of my responses to any question about Russia were my own; and they were based upon my long tenure of working with the Russian Federation Government which began in the late 1997, my long

acquaintance with President Putin, which began in 1999, and many -- and the fact that I lived in Moscow for a couple of years back and forth.

So, I had a very clear-eyed view of my own around the relationship as it existed when this administration took office. And also I think both on the record in that confirmation hearing but even some public comments I had made perhaps prior to that that, you know, the view, that the relationship was probably at its worst point since the end of the Cold War, that it was not good for the two countries, the US or Russia nor was it good for the rest of the world for the two most powerful nuclear nations in the world to have such a poor relationship.

My view was we could spend a lot of time relitigating past failures. The Russians and President Putin certainly had this view of where the US had failed to meet its commitments to Russia in the post-Soviet breakup years. We certainly have a long list of issues with things that we believe Russia has done that are not in the best interest of international order and but we just have to start with where we start and so the approach was to be clear with them as to what obstacles were standing in the way of the relationship as we saw it and try to come to some agreement on areas of mutual interest that we could be -- we could start working together to build a foundation of some level of trust between us, because the trust had been by and large shattered.

And you have nowhere to go if you have zero trust. There's nowhere to go. You had -- as thin as it might be, you had to begin to put something in place on which you can begin to develop that relationship that is viewed by both sides as being beneficial.

That was the framing of the Russian situation when during my confirmation and afterwards, and that by and large is the way I framed it to the President as well. It was not inconsistent with his very broad comments during the campaign about we should have better relations with Russia. I absolutely agreed with that.

And you could talk yourself into all kind of reasons why you can't do it, because of all the bad things they had done; but if that's where you stand, then the relationship, absent any action, will by its very nature continue to deteriorate. And I shared that with President Putin in the first meeting I had with him as Secretary of State. I said the relationship is the worst it's been since the Cold War but I looked him in the eye and I said but it can get worse and we can't let that happen.

Q And did you feel like you were empowered by the White House to put those views into action? You referenced that it fit into the broad view of what the President had said during the campaign but obviously you had this depth of experience and, you know, the sort of the views that you said you yourself laid out in this testimony. Did you feel empowered by the White House to act on that in terms of shaping Russia policies?

A Well, as I would, you know, talk with the President in my normal meetings with him on any particular foreign policy issue, Russia was no different than any of the others and I would lay out to the President, you know, here are -- here are steps that we're taking. Here are steps I'd like to take. Obviously we had to do a lot of pivoting because things continued to unfold in that relationship.

If you'll recall, early on in the -- this administration we inherited the fallout of the actions taken by the Obama administration near the end of their term to expel Russians from certain properties.

Q The response to the election interference?

A Yes, yeah. And the -- they had been expelled. The Russians to that point had not responded but I fully expected them to do so.

Q Were you involved in conversations at the time of those -- of those sort of sanctions being put in place and how to manage?

A During the Obama administration?

Q This would have been I think during the transition?

A No. During transition, I took a -- I took a posture during transition preconfirmation that I deliberately asked that they not send me things that were forward-looking or send me things that would involve decisions we might make in the future. I just wanted to be briefed on get me up to date on where things currently stand. I want to speak from my own knowledge, because in the event I'm not confirmed, I didn't need to know all that stuff.

And so that was just the way I viewed it. I didn't want to overcomplicate my confirmation by starting to have to think about things that I really hadn't been -- I wouldn't have been fully briefed on, quite frankly.

So, so, no, I deliberately did not take part in conversations about future policy or evolving policies during my confirmation prep.

Q You mentioned sort of building, you know, rebuilding trust, even though it may be thin. Were there key relationships that you felt were essential to starting that process once you became Secretary?

A Well, it was clearly my relationship with Foreign Minister Lavrov. It starts there. I had a longstanding relationship with President Putin. So, you know, we didn't have to be introduced. He didn't have to figure out how I operated. He didn't have to figure out how I'd think. So, I had hoped that at least we could accelerate the process because there wasn't going to be a lot of courtship necessary. They already knew me.

Q Were there other individuals who you felt were seen as speaking for the administration with the Russians in addition to yourself?

A Not -- not that I'm aware of, other than normal Sec Defense or mil-to-mil communications that were going on around certain military operations for deconfliction reasons but, otherwise, I'm not aware of anyone else that was kind of on the lead on this

thing. I viewed it that it was mine to get the process started; and that was why one of my early trips was to Moscow to meet with Putin to try fill him in and to convey to him, look, this is how we see it.

Q This would have been briefly -- just before your confirmation, sir, but if you happen to have any recollection of this. On January 28th, 2017, President Trump had an hour- long phone call with President Putin. It was a couple of days after the inauguration.

Did you participate in that call?

A Not that I recall. Again, preconfirmation, I didn't want to appear presumptuous with anyone.

Q Uh-huh.

A And I knew my confirmation was going to be close. I mean, I had told the President I may be your toughest confirmation to achieve. So, I was trying to be very, very respectful of the process and I thought it was -- was not helpful for me to start getting engaged in things before I was confirmed.

Q And so you were confirmed just a few days later. Did you get a readout of that call after you were confirmed?

A I don't -- I really don't remember whether I did or not.

Q Was there a normal practice by which, once you were confirmed, folks would have given you briefings on calls that took place during the transition?

A I really don't remember, I mean, to tell you the truth because then we dove in and we were working and obviously on all the calls after that, I was there with the President, sitting with him on the call, or I was on the call via another line, unless I was somewhere and we just -- we didn't have access to secured communications but I don't remember being -- I just don't -- I'll just be honest. I don't remember, quite frankly.

Q That's fair, sir.

A As you say, I think it was only a week. I was confirmed a week after inauguration. So, I guess I was missing whatever happened that first week.

Q I think -- well, let me put it this way. Do you recall, sir, when would have been the first of those calls that you would have participated in after you were confirmed?

A Oh, I don't remember. There were a lot of calls in those early days because a new President, everybody was calling to congratulate him and, you know, he was returning calls to people. We were -- the State Department were helping to --

Q Right.

A -- facilitate certain calls. So, there were a lot of phone calls that first month, you know, some of which had substance to them and some of which, you know, were nothing more than just good relationship building.

Q On April 3rd, so this would have been after your confirmation, the President spoke to President Putin in the wake of a terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg. Do you recall participating in that discussion?

A Just vaguely.

Q Do you recall who else may have been in the room?

State Department Counsel. If I could interject a concern that we think we may be getting into an area where there could be potential Executive privilege concerns.

SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Without asking you, sir, specifically what may have been said to or by the President for purposes of this question, do you recall who else would have been in the room on that April --

A I don't even recall if I was in the room. I mean, I may have been -- I may have dialed in from the State Department. I may have been somewhere else in the world

and dialed in. There were so many calls. Sometimes I -- sometimes I was sitting there side by side with the President. Sometimes I was on the call from another location. So, I don't remember.

Q But you don't have a specific recollection of a call regarding the terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg.

A I recall that the President made that call to express our condolences, which we did with all Governments when there was a tragic event like that that would happen.

Q Do you recall if anything else was raised in that conversation or if it was just condolences?

A I don't recall.

Q Okay. A related topic but just to keep it chronological, the next day, April 4th was the chemical attack in Syria. Did you have a view following that attack of Russia's culpability, whether actual or moral, for those strikes?

A Well, I -- I expressed a view about Russia's role in Syria relative to the chemical weapons before the chemical weapons conference in -- I can't remember exactly where it was. I mean, it was -- I attended. I gave a speech; and in that speech, which was publicly available, I did hold the Russians accountable. The Russians were -- had committed themselves under the accord in Syria that they would ensure that all the Syrian chem -- this was back when the red lines were drawn -- that all the chemical weapons would be gathered up in Syria and they would be destroyed and that Russia would ensure that that happened.

And so I did call the Russians out for the fact. I said, well, either the -- either you were incompetent and the Syrians fooled you or you were untruthful and that was basically the way I characterized it to them.

Q Was there any response within the interagency to you doing that, sort of

mixing the issues of Russia and Syria with respect to those attacks?

A Mixing in what way? I'm not -- I'm not sure.

Q Insofar as --

A They were connected.

Q Certainly.

A The weapons and Syria.

Q Of course they were.

Was there any -- was there any pushback, saying this is about the Syrians; let's keep this focused on the Syrians?

A No.

Q Okay.

A Not at all.

Q I think we'll move past that. We may circle back there in a moment.

On April 12th, 2017, you had a conversation of about 2 hours or so with President Putin.

A Is this the Moscow trip?

Q That's right.

A Yeah, okay.

Q Can you tell us generally what was discussed there?

A At a very high level, it was a lengthy meeting, as you point out; but as I indicated earlier, it was the first opportunity for a representative of the Trump administration at a high level to talk directly to President Putin and express our assessment of our current relationship, what a lot of contributing factors were to what had happened, how it had deteriorated from our standpoint. And there was a -- it was a give-and-take kind of a meeting which was typical the way my meetings with him would

go.

He then expressed his view of what had contributed to the deteriorating relationship and a lot of this was really stuff that had happened a long time ago way back to the post-Soviet transition and, you know, promises he viewed that had been made by previous Presidents and promises not kept and so we -- it was -- I think it was an important discussion to let everybody get that out on the table.

And that was when, though, we kind of said, well, you know, we could spend the rest of this administration's time relitigating the past or we can just say, look, we are where we are. What do you want to do now? That's exactly how I said it to him. I set this over there. I said we are where we are. What do you want to do now? And I said I have some ideas on what we should do, and then we talked about that.

And then there was no decisions made in that. It was merely an opportunity to try and say to him, we want to start from here. We don't know where you left it with the last guys, but we want to start from here. And then I had a follow-on discussion that same evening for about an hour and a half or so with Foreign Minister Lavrov so we could continue kind of his impressions of how it had gone and my view of how it had gone. And we committed to a follow-up discussion after I left.

The essence was we agreed we needed to make an effort and what that looked like and how we wanted to do it, we would work out.

Q So, so is that the answer you received to what do you want to do?

A I don't --

Q So, you had said that you posed the question. You said you had sort of, you know, as you had presented it to me, and said we are where we are, you know. President Putin, what do you want to do? What was his response to that?

A Well, again, I'm going to keep it at a high level because obviously this

relationship is still being managed by others but I would just say President Putin acknowledged that it wasn't good that our countries had poor relations. He agreed that wasn't good for them, it wasn't good for the world, and expressed a desire to find a way to improve that. I'm not saying those were his words; but I'm summarizing, because it was a much more lengthy response than that.

But that was basically what we needed to hear is that he was ready to authorize Minister Lavrov to work with me and see if we could chart a course forward where we could begin to deal with the obstacles in the relationship and so that's what we set about to do.

Q Was there a discussion during that meeting of Russia's interference in the 2016 election?

A I brought it up as one of the obstacles. I said there's a lot of obstacles to this relationship, and that was one of them.

Q And in essence did you raise that as a factual statement, or was it a question as to whether or not they could interfere with the election?

A It was a factual statement. I just said, look, the interference in the election is a huge obstacle. It's created significant problems and challenges in us moving forward. There were other obstacles, you know, the taking of Crimea, the invasion of East Ukraine. There were a list of obstacles we went through; but, yes, the election interference was specifically mentioned as creating huge challenges for us here in Washington.

Q Had you received any direction from the White House prior to that meeting about whether or how to frame election interference?

A No.

Q Did anybody talk to you about it afterwards, that particular topic?

A No.

Q From the White House?

A No.

Q Did you specifically -- did you specifically express an expectation about how they would conduct themselves in the future in that regard?

A I don't -- you know, I can't recall all the specifics. I do recall that, in bringing it up, I said to him obviously that has to stop. I said it just has to stop. It's not -- it's not helping and I think I may have said I'm not sure what you thought you were going to accomplish with it but my assessment is you didn't accomplish much.

Q What response --

A I think that's the way I said it.

Q Sorry, sir, for talking over you.

So, what response did you get from President Putin when you said that?

A Again, I don't remember the specifics 'cause it's all through translators for one thing but or interpreters but, you know, obviously he took his position on it which he's made publicly before. So, that's about what I expected, you know. I wasn't expecting mea culpas. I wasn't expecting him to prostrate himself and say you got me but it was important.

And, listen, again, I've known this guy a long time; I've dealt with him a long time; and one thing I know he respects is people speaking the truth to him. Whether he acknowledges that truth or not, that's his choice; but he respects people who speak the truth to him and that they stick with it. That's what he respects.

Q And just for the benefit of the record, sir, you said that he had repeated what had been his public position on that before. Could you just summarize that for us?

A Well, he denied it. I mean, that's a summary for you. He denied it.

Q Did you believe those denials?

A Of course not.

Q Did you challenge him on it in the room?

A There wasn't any point in that. You know, I'm not sure where you're going with this; but there wasn't any point in that. I mean, we -- I stated our view. He stated his. You know, this is what -- this is exactly to the point I was making to him. We could spend a lot of time relitigating the past and we would never deal with this and it will just get worse.

Q That's completely fair, sir. Thank you.

About a month or so later on May 10th, there were two meetings that took place. One was at the State Department with Foreign Minister Lavrov and later that day there was a meeting in the Oval Office that involved Mr. Lavrov and Ambassador Kislyak. I'd like to start with that morning meeting at the State Department, if I could.

Do you recall that meeting?

Democratic Staff 1. This is a member of the Committee staff. She helped to organize the room. I just wanted to make sure.

Yeah, could we do it later? Yeah.

[Discussion off the record.]

SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Just to repeat the question, sir, May 10th, 2017, you had a meeting at the State Department with Foreign Minister Lavrov. Do you recall that meeting?

A Yeah, but, I mean, vaguely; but I do recall the meeting and the purpose and all that.

Q Could you describe for us, please, what the purpose was and which topics --

A Well, this was a reciprocal visit by him, since I had gone to Moscow and obviously I had invited him to come visit me in Washington. So, he was coming with a

reciprocal visit and we had exchanged a number of documents back and forth since my Moscow trip that were outlining the framework for dealing with these obstacles and we had kind of two levels of lists.

We had a list that became known as the irritants. I don't remember if they labeled it that or we labeled it that and it included a lot of things like the seizure -- the expulsion, the seizure of their properties, them harassing our diplomats in Moscow, things they had done to us, things we had done to them.

And I want to say there were, I don't recall, ten to twelve items on the list and I tasked then Acting Deputy Secretary of State Tom Shannon to lead the working group with their Russian counterparts to work on that list of irritants. How can we start taking some of these things off the table? Because they're just irritating. And then the hiring --

Q Sir, just to be specific, did that happen, did that tasking get started on the irritants happen after that April meeting with President Putin or after the May meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov?

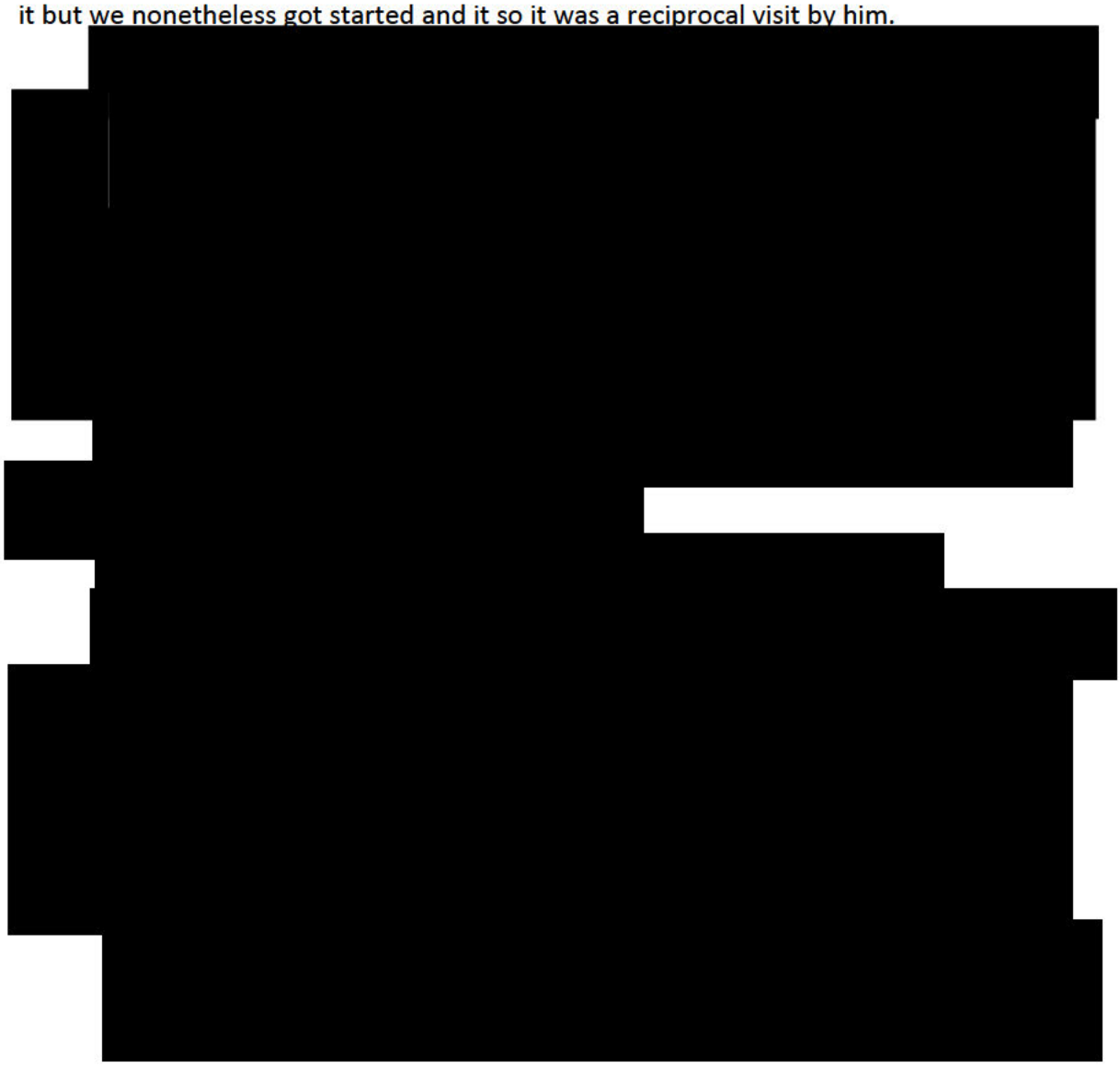
A Well, I might have had my timing wrong but I think we actually -- I think Lavrov and I started talking about this before I ever went to Moscow and I think we began to -- it was in an exchange of documents before we actually met. I think we started formulating that list and it -- we kept refining it and I don't remember exactly when the first meetings of the teams occurred because they would meet at a different time than we would meet.

The second list then were the higher level issues around INF treaty violations, challenges in Syria that were to be dealt with at my level, at Lavrov's level; and it was a shorter list.

So, we were trying to exchange views on: Again, how do we put this thin layer of trust back in place? What could we -- can we build a little trust by getting some of these

irritants off the list? You know, we'll do this if you'll do that and then use that as a means to identify the one area over here in the big ticket items that we could begin to work in a cooperative way because there was an outcome that was in our mutual interest. We're not starting from the same place but we can vision, if we end up here, we'd both be okay with that and that was the I'll call it the major issues list.

So, Lavrov came over. So and, as I said, we had exchanged a couple of documents. We were trying to memorialize this process. They wanted it to be a lot more formal about it. I wanted to be a little less formal because I wasn't sure of their commitment to it but we nonetheless got started and it so it was a reciprocal visit by him.



SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Sir, at that May 10th meeting at the State Department with Foreign Minister Lavrov, there was a short press availability with the two of you. There was a question posed from the press that sought your reactions and the Foreign Minister's reactions to the firing of FBI Director James Comey which had taken place the day before.

Do you recall that?

A Was this walking out of the treaty room when we greet them in front of the flags and shake hands and I say I want to welcome Foreign Minister Lavrov of Russia to the State Department? It's not a press avail. It's a photo op. And then the press always yells things. And Sergey understood, and whoever the guest is, I just tell them look, you don't have to respond. If you want to respond, I mean, that's your choice, because you're a sovereign. I'm a sovereign. And if I feel I need to respond to something, I will; but don't feel like you have to respond to anything. That was the standing conversation I had with every leader before we walked out in front of those cameras to do the handshake?

So, I don't -- I guess is that what you're referring to?

Q Yeah, that is what I was referring to.

A So I wouldn't characterize it as a press avail --

Q I think that's perfectly fair, sir.

But do you recall that interaction?

A I don't.

Q Okay. Do you recall whether you and Foreign Minister Lavrov had any discussion of Mr. Comey during your meeting at the State Department?

A No, not to my recollection. I don't know why we would have had.

Q Okay. Later that day was the meeting in the Oval Office --

State Department Counsel. So Counsel, here I do want to interject a concern. If you're going to ask specific questions about a meeting that took place in the Oval Office, we would have a concern that this could get into an Executive privilege area.

[Discussion off the record.]

SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q As I said, sir, you know, later that day there was a meeting between President Trump, Ambassador Kislyak, Foreign Minister Lavrov, and others in the Oval Office. Prior to that meeting, was there any prep that you engaged in at the State Department ahead of the meeting?

A Not formally to my recollection. [redacted]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Understood. And I apologize if it was inartful. I actually just wanted to clarify. When you referred to prep, sir, you then referenced a conversation with the President. Was there prep at the State Department for you prior to going into that meeting?

A With Lavrov or the --

Q The one at the White House.

A Not that I can recall and I don't know why there would have been.

Q Okay. Would there normally have been prep prior to a meeting with sort of the ambassador and the Foreign Minister --

A Not if it's just a courtesy meeting and there's no agenda and there's no issues of substance to be discussed. If there were -- if there were things that had just happened, that the other party might bring up to the President, we would typically alert him to that so he wouldn't be surprised. Or similarly, if there was something that had happened like a tragedy, it'd be good form for the President to acknowledge that --

So but typically that'd be the extent of all the -- all that we would do for a courtesy meeting. I call them courtesy meetings.

Q And you don't recall anything specific with respect to this meeting.

A I don't.

Q Do you recall who attended the meeting, sir?

A Well, myself, Minister Lavrov, I can't remember if chief of staff, if the White House Chief of Staff was there or not. I don't remember. I remember, you know, again, this was going to be a stand up, shake hands, and leave kind of a meeting. I don't remember if anyone else went with me or not.

Q Do you recall if there was anyone else from the White House or the NSC that

was present?

A Well, again, I don't recall. Normally the White House Chief of Staff would be there, but I just don't remember.

Q Did the Vice President attend?

A Not that I can recall.

Q Was there a notetaker in the room?

A Not that I can recall. Again, it was -- it was just a courtesy meeting. So, there wouldn't have been.

Q There was a notetaker in the morning meeting that you had at the State Department with Foreign Minister Lavrov?

A I don't recall everyone who attended that meeting, but typically there would have been, yeah. In a meeting where we're having that kind of substantive exchange, there were several. He had several people on his side of the table and I had several on my side and so, yeah, we would have had a notetaker.

Q Okay. And you noted you may not recall everyone who was at that meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov that morning but: Do you recall anyone in particular who was there?

A Well, I'm sure my chief of staff was there. That was kind of a standing attendee. I would assume the policy planning director was there. That would be normal in the State Department. I don't remember if Ambassador Shannon was there or not because I don't remember if he was in town at that time or not. Normally he would have attended. I just -- I don't remember who all we had on that side of the table at that point. We had a lot of, as we've pointed out previously, we had a lot of acting people in roles at that time. So, we didn't have all the positions filled but we probably had, you know, a handful of people on our side of the table. He had a handful of people on his side.

Q But you don't recall any of those same folks coming with you to the White House afterwards?

A No, I -- the chief of staff, my chief of staff may have accompanied me over to the White House but didn't go into the meeting at the Oval. She would have stayed back.

Q Do you recall what was discussed at a high level, sir, in that Oval Office meeting?

State Department Counsel. Again, Counsel, I think here you're getting into communications involving the President; and I think that would raise an executive privilege concern for us.

Mr. Tillerson. Yeah, I think out of respect to the privacy of the President's office and his conversations with another foreign leader, I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment or talk about that.

SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL

Q You had mentioned that it was expected to be a meet-and-greet. Did it stay at that meet-and-greet kind of non-substantive level?

A Well, again, I don't want to comment on the specific points or conversations that may have occurred.

Q How did you feel? What was your opinion about President Trump's understanding of US/Russia relations?

A I'm not sure I understand the question. You have to be more specific.

Q What level of sort of detail or sophistication -- obviously you yourself had had a lengthy history of dealing with Russia and understanding that relationship from your private sector perch. How would you characterize the President's understanding of the nature and complexity of the US relationship with Russia?

A Well, I believe, like all of us, when you come into something new, there's

a -- there's a steep learning curve. I think he was learning a lot along the way, you know, and just like I had a deep understanding of Russia because I spent so much time there. There were other parts of the world I didn't have a deep understanding of and I had to build a steep learning curve. So I think that's what the President was doing. He was having to learn along the way and not unlike most Presidents when they come in.

Q What were your reactions to the sort of manner in which he interacted with some of the participation, some of the folks who had participated there? But obviously those relationships would happen in a number of meetings.

So, say, for example, the way that he interacted generally with Foreign Minister Lavrov, as compared to, say. The way that you would have done it?

A Well, you said interacted with him and others.

Q Let's start with Foreign Minister Lavrov. What do you think about the way that the President interacted with Foreign Minister Lavrov?

A The President was -- anytime anyone came to the Oval, the President was very welcoming of them. He was very cordial and he wanted them to feel welcome and he would talk about this is a special place at the White House. This is a special room. So many people have come through.

He was very proud. He was very proud to have them in his office and he made -- and I sat in on a lot of those visits of heads of state or prime ministers or of the occasion whether we would kind of make an exception and take someone at my level in as a courtesy and he treated all of them pretty much the same. I mean, he was very welcoming to them. He was very proud of the Oval Office. He very proud that he was in the White House and he liked to -- he liked to talk about it to them, what a historic place it was.

So, I didn't -- I didn't see him differentiate and whether it was a friend, an ally, or

an adversary or someone who we were having difficult relationships with, he always would welcome them I think in a very cordial, friendly way. That's just his style.

Q So, there was significant reporting around that meeting; and without going into too much of the detail of what's there, large portions of what was purportedly discussed in that meeting eventually leaked to the press.

Do you recall that?

A I recall there were articles written about it, but I don't recall specifics.

Q [redacted]

Q There was reporting afterwards that because a lot of this material had made its way to the press that there was a sharp curtailment within the White House of readouts of the President's meetings. Did that process change happen, to your knowledge?

State Department Counsel. Counsel, again, if you're asking about a process change that took place at the White House? I think that gets into an area that we think would be a potential executive privilege concern.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q To be clear, we are not asking, sir, for anything that was said to or by the President.

A You have to ask the White House whether they changed the process or not. I don't recall they changed it.

Q So you did not notice any change in your ability to get readouts of meetings of that sort following this Oval Office --

A If you're talking about readouts available to me, I don't recall anything

changing. I didn't know if you were talking about readouts to the press.

Q No, not to the press. Specifically with respect to making sure that Department officials, you have responsibility for foreign policy were kept properly informed of meetings of this sort. Did you notice any change in the ability to access that information after this?

A I'm not sure I would know how to tell.

Q In terms of your own recordkeeping from this meeting -- first of all, do you recall if you created or if anyone created on your behalf a record of this meeting?

A Not that I recall.

Q Do you recall whether or not your own recordkeeping practices changed or if anyone ever spoke to you about recordkeeping after these sort of reports were leaked to the press?

A No.

Q Sir, on May 31, 2017 it was reported that the administration was considering returning to the Russians two diplomatic compounds that were seized at the end of the Obama administration as a response to Russian interference in our elections. Do you recall discussions about returning those compounds?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell us a little bit about what the thinking was on that topic?

A Well, this came out of those discussions of this process we put in place that was being led by Ambassador Shannon on our side, and his counterparts on the Russian side. I recall I said we were going to try to find things we could take off the list of irritants. And for a lot of reasons that I can't discuss, because they are classified, the group had done a pretty good assessment. And it was their recommendation that we find a way to give them access back to properties that they owned. These were properties that they

were the property of the Russian Federation Government. They were not properties they were leasing. They would be returned with conditions. And we had to be mindful, you know, of the conventions, that govern diplomatic properties in foreign countries, and that we were sure that we were not violating any of those conventions.

And so we had come to a point that under the right agreement from the Russians we could return I think one of the properties, I don't know if it was one or two. We put those conditions forward to them and my recollection is they didn't like the conditions and said, well, you can't do that to us, that violates, blah, blah, blah.

Q What were the conditions?

A We were going to restrict how the Russians could access the properties, when they could access them, how they could move their people about. And I want to be careful because I don't want to get into classified.

Q I understand.

A But in any event, there were restrictions that the Russians felt were unacceptable. And at that point, the return kind of stopped, the discussion about it stopped because they weren't happy with where it was going.

Q So ultimately the reason that it didn't happen is that the conditions were not acceptable and the process just sort of died?

A That's my recollection.

Q Okay. I'd like to turn to July 7, 2017, sir. This was a meeting in Hamburg, between President Putin and President Trump that you also attended. What did you do to prepare for that meeting, sir?

A Prepare myself?

Q Yes sir, at first.

A Well, it was really a looking at where we had progressed with these two

efforts that I described, the list of irritants, there were some irritants, but this was now an opportunity to try to take a step on the major issues and I shared a couple of examples. I can't give you the comprehensive list but -- so looking at that list, all that I really had hoped we would accomplish in that first meeting, because that meeting was to be again an introductory meeting of the two Presidents. They had never met before.

So it was supposed to be a fairly short meeting, but I did want to pick up for the benefit of our President and President Putin where we were in this effort to try to put this thin layer of trust in place and get President Putin's reaction, and also to table one of the major issues that I thought we ought to focus on, it being perhaps the first one we could try to make some progress on. So my preparation was around that major issue and I did a fair amount of prep for it.

Q Was there paper prepared as part of the ordinary course of that?

A I'm sure there was, yeah.

Q And who would have been involved in your preparation, sir?

A Well, the bureau, the policy planning documents would have come from people. There were -- and these involved issues that weren't necessarily in the Russian Bureau. So again, I want to be mindful of classified information. So yeah there was -- I had done a lot of prep to get ready to see if we could start with one of these major issues.

Q And did you also have a prep session with the President prior to departing?

A I briefed him. I don't know if it was prior to departing or after we got to Hamburg, because we had a lot of bi-lats during that, and so I don't remember exactly the sequence, but I did share with him I thought this is what we ought to try to achieve in this first meeting and he was fine with it.

Q Who traveled with you to that meeting?

A To the meeting itself?

Q To the meeting or -- either on the trip -- so two separate questions, if you don't mind, sir. Who accompanied you on the trip? And then who specifically went into the meeting?

A Oh, I'm sure I can't remember everybody that came on the trip because since it was a G-20 we had people from different bureaus who were meeting with different counterparts.

Q To the best of your ability.

A To the meeting itself it was just the President, myself, and the interpreter.

Q Was there anybody in the room that took notes at that meeting?

A No.

Q Was that normal practice in your experience?

A It's the way the Russians preferred it for -- it was supposed to be a courtesy meeting. And we decided we were okay with that because I think originally scheduled to be like a 30 minute meeting, and when you build in an interpreter's time, you end up with about a 15 to 20 minute meeting.

And so we went in to all -- we were really only going to get introductory first time they'd ever met. Let them get a sense of one another for relation reasons and then I was going to table this one idea of -- and Lavrov and I had talked about this ahead of time too and he agreed, let's see if we can work in that area, but we wanted to get in front of two heads of is a state face to face so they both could look at one another and say, yeah, we're going to try to do something here.

And so that's the reason we didn't have -- we didn't feel the need for any and they didn't feel the need for any.

Q And that was something I think you had said that they had requested because --

A My recollection is when we were finalizing who was going to come, they wanted to go with a principal, plus one.

Q And was there -- when there was a decision made that there wouldn't be note takers in the meeting, was there any consultation with the legal advisers' office on that?

A I think that all happened, like, shortly before the meeting.

Q But if I can clarify, you believe that there were consultations before the meeting?

A No, I'm saying the request for plus one was made pretty shortly before the meeting was scheduled to take place. And I think we kind of huddled up around this, there were -- you know, we had NSC members on the trip. Their Russian adviser was there and we kind of huddled up and talked about it, and said okay, fine, this is going to be a short meeting and that I could provide a readout of it afterwards.

Q Okay. Do you recall who from NSC would have been part of that conversation?

A Well at that time the Russian adviser, I believe was Fiona Hill.

Q Was there anybody from NSC legal that would have been part of that conversation?

A Not that I recall.

Q And there was a subsequent proposal as you said, that was made in there as well. You made reference to putting one idea on the table. Did that play in in any way to the decision as to whether or not there needed to be a note taker, because it would be sort of a step beyond a meet and great at that point?

A I'm not sure. I don't understand your question.

Q As I understood it, sir, the decision to not bring a note taker to the meeting

was both sort of something that happened right beforehand, it sounded like at the request of the Russians, but that some of the thinking that went into why you ultimately determined that there didn't need to be a note taker was because it was as you had said it was going to be just a meet and greet?

A Yes, short meeting.

Q But that ultimately there was a substantive proposal that was put forward, knowing that there was going to be --

A Are you asking -- are you telling me there was a subsequent proposal put forward or are you asking me?

Q I think I'd heard you say that, sir.

A No. Then I --

Q Let me ask it this way.

A I -- misspoke or you didn't understand what I was saying.

Q Okay.

A We had a list of the big items that Lavrov and I were discussing. We picked one item off that list to put it forward as the one we ought to concentrate on. All we were looking for was a nod of the head of the two leaders looking at one another saying yes, let's let our people work on that, that's it.

Q Okay. So there wasn't an in-depth discussion of the issue --

A There was no intention of going beyond that when we went into the meeting.

Q That's helpful. Thank you.

Did it go beyond that when you met in the meeting?

A Well, the meeting went on much longer than the scheduled 30 minutes. So obviously the discussion was longer, lengthier. And on the issue that we proposed,

President Putin had a great deal of interest in it. And he had clearly done a lot of thinking about it.

And so he started talking a lot about it. And there was a pretty lengthy discussion about our views of that situation. Which was helpful in framing how we would get started.

So, yeah, it ended up, they ended up going deeper on it than we thought they would at the time. Or that Lavrov and I agreed they would. And I don't want -- I'm not pointing blame at anybody, I think, you know, the two leaders get into the room, they get to do what they want to do. So --

State Department Counsel. So Counsel, if I could just interject here. You haven't asked this question, but just if you were going to pursue a question about substance at this point there might be some classification concerns.

Mr. Tillerson. Yes, there will be.

State Department Counsel. Also to the extent we're talking about a meeting involving the President, again just to raise the executive privilege concern.

Sr. Democratic Staff. If I could just jump in to do a quick follow up to what has already been discussed. [redacted] And then this meeting in Hamburg were designed to be courtesy calls, or meet and greets, or a way to sort of ease into a relationship. Is that similar to how you proposed and managed the President's engagements with other foreign leaders?

And can you say more about the thinking of about needing to sort of cautiously ease into a relationship here, especially given what you just said that despite your efforts to keep it to a short meet and greet that the meeting went into substance and became much more involved.

Mr. Tillerson. Well, I think in broad terms the approach went --

Witness' Counsel 1. Excuse me for one second. I think somebody new is in the room who is not introduced. And I wanted to make sure --

Democratic Staff 2. I'm sorry. I'm with the democratic side, on the majority staff.

Mr. Tillerson. I think as a general approach, yes. It would have been the same with anyone. But having said that, each leader would be dealt with as an individual and the country. And it might change depending upon whether the President perhaps did know him previously or had more familiarity.

So you know, we would take an approach that was tailored to have a positive first meeting of the new President of the United States with this head of state. You know, what's going to give us the best -- we start off on a good foot. So what's going to create this, the most positive conditions.

And so -- but all of the -- the first meeting was always typically short, it tended to be short. It tended not to get into too much depth on issues, but rather an opportunity to get a sense of one another, but an opportunity to say, look, here's kind of my priorities in our relationship, this is kind of how I see the priorities, and let the other part respond. And that's just kind of a good way to get started. And it's helpful to the respective teams then, to know, okay the two seem to have mutual agreement working on this and this is going to take some more time.

Sr. Democratic Staff. Could you say that a little more about how you felt that this meeting in Hamburg that you had wanted to keep as a meet and greet and short went longer and potentially went into more substance that you had envisioned? What was your feeling about that?

Mr. Tillerson. Well, without getting into the specifics, because again I want to be careful -- you know, there are pluses and minuses in each of those meetings obviously,

but. In general, I was encouraged that President Putin had obviously come very prepared to talk about this particular subject and I assume that's because Lavrov and I agreed this is the one we think we ought to try to concentrate on. And so he came very prepared. And he came prepared with this is how I see it, this is where I think we can do things, you know.

And so on the one hand I was thinking, good, you know. Because he's lining up with kind of some of the things we wanted to do. So there was a good discussion around that for the benefit of our President and to understand, you know, the corners of what we were trying to do and what some of the challenges were. And what it really did is it laid a much firmer foundation then after that meeting for the various agencies that needed to now start trying to act on some of that.

It gave us really a head start, a running start into that to have that kind of discussion. So quite frankly, while I wasn't expecting it, because of the way it turned out, it was -- I was glad that we were able to get that much -- that far. I really didn't expect to.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q You said that President Putin struck you as being quite prepared. Did you similarly feel President Trump was prepared as well for that meeting?

A Well, we didn't undertake that kind of preparation for the President because we didn't expect that that's the way it was going to go now. As it played out, the President engaged with his views. He asked me on several occasions, you know, what did I think about what was being discussed. And I offered that view, because we'd done a lot of thinking about it, obviously.

So it was just a good kind of free form discussion around the issue. It was all I think helpful in going forward.

Q So at a press conference following that, sir, you said that there had been a

discussion of cyber threats. So obviously the fact of that is not itself something that was considered classified. Is that -- was that the bulk of the conversation --

A No.

Q -- to your recollection?

A No.

Q You also said in the press conference that there was a robust and lengthy conversation regarding Russian interference in the 2016 election. Did that take place?

A Yes.

Q Who raised the issue?

A Again, I don't want to comment on the specifics in the meeting. I think in the press avail I confirmed the President raised it, but you'd have to go back and look. But the President did raise it, I can tell you that.

Q There was reporting afterwards asserting that President Putin denied interfering in the election, which you said he had also made a similar denial in your meeting with him previously. But then in this instance, President Trump replied and he has said this publicly a number of times and said, I believe you, I believe that you didn't interfere in the election. Is that true?

A You mean --

Q Is it true that the President --

A You mean that the President said that publicly?

Q Let's start with that. He has said that publicly, have you seen those --

A It’s just that you stated that as a fact, so I can't deny the fact.

Q To your recollection, was a similar statement made in this meeting?

A I don't recall.

Q Did the President, to your recollection discuss or refer in any way to his

businesses or his family's businesses during this meeting?

A I don't recall that coming up at all. I mean I would say no recollection of that.

Q Do you recall that ever coming up in his meeting with foreign leaders?

A Never with me around, never when I was there.

Q Sir, the administration said in response to certain inquiries regarding whether notes were taken, which you indicated that they hadn't been, that you gave a fulsome readout of the meeting immediately afterwards to other U.S. officials in a private setting, as well as a readout to the press. That was the Department's statement on that. Do you recall giving a readout of this meeting after it concluded?

A Yes.

Q To whom did you give the readout, sir?

A We went immediately to the SCIF and gave the readout to the National Security Advisor, Fiona Hill. My policy planning director Brian Hook and then my chief of staff was there I think that was the only three people. I can't remember if there was another person there or not.

Q Okay. Did you prepare any notes?

A I just gave them a download while it was fresh in my mind.

Q Do you know whether there was a written summary prepared by somebody else in that meeting?

A I don't know.

Q So it was never shown to you?

A Not that I can recall.

Q Okay. There was a lot of reporting around the fact that at the conclusion of the meeting the President allegedly took the translator's notes away from her. Do you

recall reading that reporting?

A I recall -- I don't recall reading it, but I remember hearing about it.

Q Okay. Do you recall seeing that happen?

A No, I did not see that happen.

Q Okay. Do you recall ever seeing the President confiscate records from a translator or a note taker, either during or after the conclusion of any meeting --

Witness' Counsel 1. Counsel, there's like 16 questions in there. If you could break it down.

State Department Counsel. Confiscate?

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Take.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Do you ever recall the President taking notes from a meeting away from the person who had created those notes?

A Never.

Q Thank you, sir.

Sir, before we leave Russia I just wanted to ask you whether there were any other significant interactions that you were a part of significant meetings involving the President and Russia that you feel that the committee should know about?

A Well, the only other -- I don't know that you'd be able to qualify it as a meeting. The only other interaction that I had with the President and President Putin was in Vietnam, during the I guess it was the ASEAN meeting. And we were negotiating an agreement around Syria. And we had been -- we kept passing documents back and forth at the Lavrov level. And we were stuck on some language. And we had a bilateral between the two Presidents on the agenda, but it was on hold -- I mean by both of us, we said if we can't get this agreement in place, there is no reason to meet. And we agreed

and they agreed.

At the last minute while the heads of state were at the departure luncheon, Lavrov called me and asked if he could come over to my hotel. And I said, sure. He came over and he said, we accept your language. I said, okay.

We initialed the agreement. He says, now, we have to go see our Presidents. I said, okay. And we drove out to the location where they were. And they were in the middle of a luncheon. And we both had to go in and whisper in their ears. And so there was a very, very, brief -- it wasn't even a formal meeting, it was just a very, very brief I think shaking of the hands I'm very glad we got this done and that was about it.

Q And that was the luncheon they were already attending together?

A All of the ASEAN heads of state were there, being hosted by the President of Vietnam.

Q If I could go back just briefly on Hamburg because you had mentioned a luncheon. There was also reporting on the fact that President Trump and President Putin did have a second conversation at dinner that evening in Hamburg that had not previously been reported. Do you recall that dinner?

A Well, I'm aware of the dinner because it is standard at G-20s, the host country has a dinner for the heads of state and their spouses. So yes, I knew he was going to go that dinner. I think I was at another dinner while that one was going on.

Q So you didn't attend that?

A No. To my knowledge, there were no pluses. I think typically the layout is the head of state, their spouse are positioned around the table, and then they will have a few interpreters between people who might need them, rather than have 20 times 20 interpreters to handle everybody, they kind of position the interpreters because it's supposed to be just a cordial evening of, you know, a get together.

Q Do you know whether the State Department sent its own interpreter to that meeting?

A I don't know.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Unless anybody has anything else on Russia?

Witness' Counsel 1. Why don't we take a break?

[Recess.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Sir, thank you again for your time.

We'd like to move now to the Middle East.

One of, I think, sort of the pivotal moments in your tenure was the Qatar blockade which began in spring of 2017, and we would like to sort of walk through that with you in some detail.

But as a scene setter, I was hoping that you might be able to just sort of give us your take on sort of what the underlying dispute there was and how you see it as having come about, and then we will walk through specific details?

A Well, it is a fairly complex set of issues that date back many, many years, perhaps as far back as 20 years, that are, I think began -- they just all finally kind of came to a head and bubbled up in these past couple of years.

And they go all the way back to the time when the Emir of Qatar abdicated and left the country and was succeeded by his son, who is now the Father Emir, and the then beginnings of Qatar becoming economically independent because of the development of their natural gas reserves and their development as the world's largest LNG exporter, which made them very independent, and it gave them resources to have greater influence in the region than they had previously had.

And I don't want to get into some specifics because it's -- some of it is sensitive, but there have been some longstanding issues between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the leadership in Qatar since over that period of time that have bubbled up from time to time. There have been issues between the leadership of the UAE and Qatar from time to time that bubble up.

And some of them are directly -- are direct issues around country-to-country relationships, between them, and some of them are issues related to regional issues and

the Qataris beginning to take a more active role in foreign affairs in the region than they had taken previously. Because with this newfound wealth they had, they had the ability now to do things -- in lots of ways a very positive way -- to play a role that they had not previously played. And I think so sometimes that could lead to a conflict of views among the parties.

So it really, I think, was a culmination of just a lot of things that were building up over a period of time, you know, the Qataris creating Al Jazeera network. They had the wealth to do that, so they did. The Qatari Emir is a very forward looking leader. His wife, Sheikha Al-Anoud, is a very forward looking leader. And so they were pretty reform-minded for their people in a positive way, and that creates pressures for others in the region.

So there's a whole host of things. And I don't think you can put your finger on any one and say, that was it. I think it was the accumulation of a lot of things.

And then the Father Emir decides to step aside and relinquish power to his son, Tamim. And I think there comes this moment when some of the leaders of the region conclude: This is our best time to try to now exact some change that they want on Qatar. And so that was the beginning of the blockade.

And I don't want to suggest that I know more than I know, but I know a few things from having done a significant amount of business in Qatar for a long time, and in the region. We had significant business interest in Saudi Arabia, significant business interest in the UAE, in Qatar, in Egypt, Bahrain.

So been around there a long time. And so you observe things, you hear things, you see things. So I think it was -- I don't think you can attribute it to any one thing. I think it just kind of came to a head at that moment in time.

Q And a lot of that, it sounds like, sir, is based on your prior experience at

Exxon?

A All of it based on my time at ExxonMobil where ExxonMobil was the largest investor in Saudi Arabia, foreign investor, the largest investor in Qatar, significant investor in the UAE. And so a lot of time with their leadership.

Q As you were observing those dynamics while you were at Exxon and, as you said, they are complicated, what did you observe the U.S. role in that sort of complicated regional relationship to have been?

A Well, I think -- and you have got to -- you have to put all that in the backdrop of what was happening in Iraq, and then subsequently in Syria, because it really begun -- you have to go all the way back to the Iraq war and the decision to go into Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein. You'll recall that certain events around that resulted in the Saudis asking the U.S. to move the Central Command, which was previously located in Saudi Arabia.

Qatar offered to be the host of Central Command. I think the UAE also offered to be the host of Central Command. Qatar ultimately ended up being the host of CENTCOM.

And so being in all of these countries you want to make sure that as a businessperson first that you are not doing anything that adds or subtracts from what the U.S. is trying to do because of your business relationships. And it didn't, none of it really affected our holdings anywhere when I was at ExxonMobil.

And I think, by and large, the view within the region of the U.S. was all positive. The important -- I recognize the importance of the region militarily and to our national security and to the economic and energy security of the world was the U.S. presence in the Gulf.

As I am sure you can appreciate, one of the great threats that has always concerned a number of leaders is the security of the Hormuz Straits because so much of

the oil supply travels through the Hormuz. And even in my time at Exxon we would do scenario planning around what would happen if the straits were closed on an action of anyone.

So there was -- we paid a lot of attention to it or I paid a lot of attention to it for those reasons as well. And we spent a lot of time talking to leaders, just what's your perspective, how would you all deal with it, what would we do?

Q Right.

A So I had a view of how important that region is to the U.S. and therefore how important our presence in the region was to security in the region. And then that played into how we were dealing with the situation in Iraq and then later with the emergence of ISIS.

Q So is it fair to say that certainly during your time at Exxon that you observed and you felt that it was important that, given that security interest, that the U.S. not be seen as sort of taking sides in those complicated regional dynamics?

A Yes. And for the most part that's the way it always was. I think when the Saudis requested that the U.S. relocate CENTCOM, I wasn't party to that, other than I just would hear the Saudi version of what went on. My understanding was it was a very respectful conversation that occurred. And the U.S. said: We understand. And the Saudis wanted to move because they were concerned about internal stability and their ability to protect the U.S. assets that were in Saudi Arabia. And so it was all done in a very, you know, satisfactory manner for all.

So, yes, that's kind of the way I saw this. There are always these differences that occur in any set of countries that are neighbors.

Q Right.

A Europeans have their set of issues, Southeast Asia have their set. So you

always know those are there. But I think the U.S., by and large, was viewed as being evenhanded with everybody.

Q And that was important from your perspective?

A Oh, yeah. I think it was important from a U.S. interest, national security, and it was important from a business perspective. A lot of American business investment in the region. And it was good for the stability of U.S. economic interest as well.

Q So to move to the time period around the blockade, in early May of 2017, May 2nd, so this was a couple of weeks now before the Riyadh summit, you met with the Saudi foreign minister at the State Department. Do you recall whether during that meeting he brought anything to your attention about sort of regional conflicts between our Gulf allies?

A Not that I recall. Not in that meeting.

Q A couple of weeks later on May 20th, 2017, you were in Riyadh with the President in advance of the Middle East summit. And you again gave public remarks with the Saudi Foreign Minister. This is the night before the President's speech. Did he say anything to you or did anyone else say anything to you on that same topic, regional tensions, something might be changing?

A No.

Q So that same night as we understand it, so on or about May 20th, 2017, there was apparently a private dinner that was hosted between Steve Bannon, Jared Kushner, and the rulers of Saudi Arabia and UAE, respectively. Were you aware of that dinner?

A No.

Q We understand that as part of that dinner the leaders of Saudi and UAE did lay out for Mr. Kushner and Mr. Bannon their plans for the blockade. That wasn't

something that you had heard previously?

A No.

Q And to clarify, sir, not prior to when I just said it?

A Correct.

Q Okay.

What's your reaction to a meeting of that sort having taken place without your knowledge?

A You mean now?

Q Yes.

A Today?

Q Well --

A It makes me angry.

Q Why is that?

A Because I didn't have a say. The State Department's views were never expressed.

Q Were there ever any other incidents -- and we will come back to Qatar in a moment -- did you ever have any other incidents where you felt like important decisions were made without the State Department's views being expressed?

A Well, I don't know that a decision was made in the example you gave, just said an event occurred. So I don't know.

Q Or at least crucial things being discussed without the State Department participating with respect to foreign policy.

A There were later -- not later from then -- but as time went by, one of the challenges I think that everyone had -- has had to learn to deal with was the role, the unique situation with the President's son-in-law and daughter being part the White House

advisory team. That's, you know, it's unusual. I don't recall it ever being the case before, not that there's anything wrong with it.

But there was not a real clear understanding of the role, responsibilities, authorities, and whatnot, which made it challenging for everyone, I think, in terms of how to deal with any activities that might be undertaken by others that were not defined within the national security process itself.

So it was just part of the challenge of how to get things done.

Q When you first came on board, what was Mr. Kushner's role described to you as? What did people tell you he was going to be doing?

A No one really described what he was going to be doing. I just knew what his title was.

Q And what was that title?

A Adviser to the President, I think, senior adviser to the President, something like that.

Q Did that -- I don't mean this question sarcastically -- but did that provide you any particular clarity on --

A No. I mean, every President has a cadre of advisers around so, so, I mean -- you don't know what that means. I didn't know what it meant.

Q Were there -- well, to come back, we will revisit that in a bit. But then to come back to Qatar's situation, as I said, we understand that there was this private dinner the night before in which the plans for the blockade were articulated to Mr. Kushner and Mr. Bannon. And you said that you weren't aware of that until this conversation.

The next day, May 21st, there was the meeting of the GCC countries. At one of the events there the Qatari Foreign Minister had expected to be seated at your table along with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and UAE. At least at the beginning of the

event, as we understand it, that wasn't the case, and that he was actually seated by the kitchen, which was perceived as a sign of disrespect.

Were you aware of that?

A Well, this is the big kind of banquet dinner where there are several hundred people there. We had seen the table seating chart for the table I was going to be sitting at and it did indicate he was going to be at the table. When I got there, he wasn't at the table. And so I was going around just greeting everyone.

And I just kind of asked, you know, if he was going to be there. And there was a – not really an answer, I can't remember now, he's coming or, you know, I don't know, or he's decided to sit with somebody. I don't remember the answer exactly. But my recollection is eventually he did come join us at the table.

Q Okay. At the time did you attribute any significance to that?

A Well, I need to be a little careful here. And, again, I didn't know anything about this other meeting you're talking about until you raised it. You said it occurred, so I'll just have to take your word. I don't know whether it occurred or not.

Q It was represented to us. Obviously we weren't there either.

A So I don't know whether it was just somebody's -- a story somebody's got or it really happened.

But I began to get an inkling that something was going on involving the Qataris in one of the sessions because of the way the session had been conducted and the way the Emir had been treated in the meeting. I didn't know exactly what was going on. I just realized, I was kind of looking around the table at people trying to figure out: What is this, what is going on around here? And -- but nothing -- but that was it.

And so then at the dinner that evening there was -- I did kind of pause for a moment, I wondered, okay, that's two things now. There's something going on, but I

don't know what.

Q And without going too far into things that you said you need to be careful, when you say the way that they were -- that the Qataris were being treated, treated by whom?

A It was in a session which was -- you know there's a chair of the -- the President of the GCC, then there's the host country government, and they tend to conduct the sessions.

So again, I don't want to get into details because that was a private session, a closed door session --

Q I understand.

A -- not open to anyone but the heads of states and I think there plus twos in that meeting.

Q So during the speech on the 24th, President Trump praised Qatar, which he said, as you indicated, hosts U.S. Central Command, and he called them a crucial strategic partner.

Sr. Democratic Staff. That was the speech on the 21st.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Yes, that was on the 21st. I'm sorry if I mumbled there. It was the 21st. Do you agree with that statement that they are a crucial strategic partner?

A Yes.

Q Did you agree with it at the time that the speech was written?

A Yes.

Q Do you recall any controversy over that point being included in the speech?

A No.

Q And then, other than the incident that you had alluded to, prior to leaving

the summit did you have any other indications that anything might be amiss between our allies or that anything might be coming that was sort of a departure from what you expected?

A No.

Q So 2 days later, on May 23rd, back in D.C., there was a conference that was hosted by the Hudson Institute and the title was "Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood's Affiliates: a New U.S. Administration Considers New Policies."

Were you aware of this conference?

A No.

Q Were you aware that there were any new policies towards Qatar that were being developed?

A No.

Q Are you familiar with a guy named Elliott Broidy?

A Only what I have read in the newspapers.

Q And if you could just roughly summarize that for us.

A Well, he's not always involved in Middle Eastern activities. My recollection is he's a businessman. But I've never, to my knowledge, I've never met him. I really don't know much about him.

Q So at the time he was the deputy finance chair of the Republican National Committee. Did you ever interact with him in that capacity?

A No.

Q He was also working as an unregistered lobbyist for the United Arab Emirates at the time and he was reportedly paid about $2.7 million to arrange these conferences which were heavily critical of Qatar. Were you aware of that?

A No.

Q The funds for this, as has also been reported, apparently came from a gentleman named George Nader, which is a name I assume you are familiar with as well?

A I'm familiar with the name. I don't know him personally.

Q Ultimately, the panel went forward. Former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates spoke on the panel. Another individual who spoke on the panel was a former defense official named Mary Beth Long. Are you familiar with her at all?

A The name seems familiar, but I don't recall that I know her.

Q Our understanding is that after the panel Mr. Broidy apparently determined that she had not been sufficiently critical of Qatar in her presentation and that Mr. Broidy reached out to the head of the Hudson Institute and told them don't pay her. Is any of that familiar to you at all?

A No.

Q Would you attribute any significance to a gentleman in Mr. Broidy's position -- again, this is all just reported -- having taken actions of that sort --

A I don't know anything about the conference or the individuals you're talking about.

Q Okay, sir. Thank you.

On June 3rd, the Qatar news agency was hacked. Do you recall that?

A Vaguely.

Q As part of that hack, there were a number of statements that were posed that have since, it seems, been demonstrated to be false that were supposedly attributable to the Emir of Qatar. Does that sound familiar to you?

A Yes.

Q What do you recall about that?

A Well, I'm not -- I think I may have been traveling when it all happened. I'm

not sure. So what I recall is after the fact on reflection on it.

Q Okay.

A Which is that those were false. And I recall having conversations with Qatari leadership about it by telephone and they assured me they were false.

Q And did you have any reason to doubt the sincerity of their statement?

A No, no.

Q So 2 days later, on June 5th, the UAE and Saudi Arabia launched a blockade of Qatar. Where were you when you found out about this, do you recall?

A Australia.

Q And what was the purpose of that trip? Tell us about that.

A We were having the Australian diplomatic and security dialogue. So myself, Secretary Mattis, and our counterparts were meeting in Australia.

Q So tell us, if you would, about how you found out, how you reacted, and what you did afterwards?

A Well, I think at some point during one of the bilats we were having, I don't remember if it was -- who slipped the message to me, but someone slipped me a message, and it just was a very short note to the effect about a blockade. And I slipped it to Secretary Mattis. And I think we waited for the next scheduled break and then we went out and made some calls to find out what was going on.

Q And do you remember who you called?

A I think I called back to the State Department. I don't remember, it may have been the ExecSec actually called back for me. And then Jim made some contacts and we rehuddled.

[3:15 p.m.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q And Jim there is Secretary Mattis?

A Secretary Mattis. Then we kind of rehuddled. What we wanted to do is confirm that the reporting was accurate, because it was -- at that point it was now in the open source reporting.

And so we were seeing that, but we really wanted to find, well, is that accurate or is that what's really happening? And we were able to confirm what was really happening, so --

Q What'd you do next?

A Well, we finished up our session. We had a press avail shortly after that, and I commented -- I made a comment on it in the press avail, and I think Secretary Mattis may have made one as well.

Q Did you -- so you didn't have any prior notice, I think as we have established, that this was going to happen?

A No.

Q How did you feel about that?

A Well, I was surprised.

Q Would you, especially given, you know, the recency of the Riyadh summit, would you have expected that your allies would have told you that this was coming?

A I would have hoped they would have. Certainly at the time, I think both Secretary Mattis and I both felt, given the significant footprint of our Defense Department assets and my role, that someone would have called us and told us.

Q Did you reach out to your foreign counterparts?

A We did at some point, but I don't remember exactly when, given the time differences of where we were, you know. But, yeah, eventually we did.

Q And what was the substance of those conversations to the best of your

recollection?

A Well, in terms of the blockading countries, they all had their song sheet pretty well aligned, so the message was very consistent that they were giving to me. I spoke directly with the Emir of Qatar to get his reaction to it.

And at that point the most productive thing that I felt I could do given where I was at the time was to just ask all the parties to not escalate this further, you know. I didn't have enough information to know if something had really set this off or an event that hadn't been reported.

So at that point I just urged all the parties to be calm, let's deescalate this thing, don't escalate, because that's obviously the most dangerous situation at the moment is somebody decides they're going to dial this thing up. And fortunately no one did.

And so when I got back to Washington then I was able to get a more thorough understanding of what was going on and a lot of phone calls with all the parties, and then had a lot of discussions with the Emir of Qatar to ensure that they just, you know, hold fast, don't do anything provocative in response. And they did not do anything provocative.

The actions got worse, though, by the blockading parties. They escalated things. And we were unsuccessful in getting them to stop doing that.

Q Did you ever express concern or surprise to either Saudi Arabia or UAE that you hadn't had prior notice of this?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell us about those conversations?

A Well, they were in the phone calls, you know, to my counterparts that, you know, was this something you were surprised by, did you know this was going to happen, you know. So, yes, we did have those conversations.

[Recess.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q So to come back where we had left off, sir, at this point I think you had said you had returned to the United States and begun making calls to your foreign counterparts, having advised your Qatari counterparts not to do anything that could escalate the situation, and that you had reached out to your counterparts in both Saudi Arabia and UAE.

I think where we had left off was, you know, you expressing surprise to them that you hadn't received prior notice that this was going to happen. Did I get that correct?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell us a little bit about those conversations?

A Well, I can't recall the -- all the specifics. I actually spoke to all four of the blockading parties, so --

Q And just for the record, we know those, but the other two being Egypt and Bahrain?

A Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt. I spoke to my counterparts in all four of the countries and pretty much same message, asked them not to escalate also.

You know, I was trying to persuade them that this was very detrimental to their own security in the region, threatened the future of the GCC, would create challenges for the U.S. interest in the region, including our current war against ISIS.

So, you know, trying to begin to lay out some points to them that hopefully they would consider, give consideration to, and try -- and then ask -- trying to then understand what, you know, what's going on.

Q Did any of them indicate to you that they had had contact with anyone in

the administration and told people that this was going to happen?

A No.

Q Neither UAE nor Saudi Arabia represented that they had spoken to anyone else?

A No.

Q On June 6th, President Trump tweeted what many understood to be support for the blockade. And he said: "During my recent trip to the Middle East, I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar -- look!"

Do you recall there having been any such discussions during the summit?

A No.

Q He also tweeted that perhaps the blockade will be the beginning of the end of the horror of terrorism. Did any of those conversations take place between our allies at the summit, to your knowledge?

A Not to my knowledge.

Q There was no specific focus on Qatar?

A No.

Q How did you react to that tweet, especially given the conversations that you had been having?

A Well, again, I want to be mindful and respectful of private conversations I had with the President. But I did talk with the President about those views that he had expressed and, you know, what was the basis for those, what prompted it. And kind of got an answer from him so that I could understand how to start trying to unpack this thing and try to repair it and get it back to, you know, get the parties back together.

So, you know, I did talk with him. And then after that I did a number of followups internally with agencies, various agencies, to get the latest information we had on the

activities of certain parties in the region, and so that I could at least test the veracity of the claims that were being made by the blockading countries.

And I don't remember at what point in here the blockading country issued their list of 15 demands. The timing of that is just -- I don't recall, and all of this is unfolding. But tried to get the best information we had on the basis, or, as I say, the veracity of those, the claims that were underlying those demands.

Q So after that tweet and presumably after your conversations with the President, on June 9th you gave remarks in the Treaty Room in which you said: "We call on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt to ease the blockade against Qatar. There are humanitarian consequences to this blockade."

Tell us a little bit, if you could, about the process by which it was determined that you would make those remarks.

A Well, again, I want to be a little mindful of internal discussions with the White House, but it was discussed. The President and I had many conversations about the allegations that were being made about Qatar and how to substantiate those allegations.

And because my own early assessment was while some of the -- I understood what was -- I understood what was behind the allegation, but the characterization of it and the actual actions that were behind it were very different from what had been said to others, to the President in particular.

Q And when you say things that had been said to the President, do you know by whom?

State Department Counsel. Again here, Counsel, I think we're --

Mr. Tillerson. I can't say. Yeah, I'll have to, yeah, pass on that. But --

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q But fair to say, if I could, and correct me if I've misunderstood this, that you believe that what was happening was being characterized to the President in a way that you did not personally agree with. Is that correct?

A That's correct.

Q Please continue.

A And so, again, what I -- we did a lot of work not just in the State Department but working with other agencies, to try to get to the bottom of what was substantive in those allegations and what was not substantive and what was -- what would give rise to us having serious concerns about Qatar. And also so that I was better equipped to then talk to the blockading parties about the, you know, the seriousness of their claims and whether they were with foundation or not.

Q Right.

A So, yes, those remarks were made at the State Department, again, in an effort to just keep this issue kind of in front of everybody with the message that everybody needs to bring this down a level.

And I think that -- I think those remarks were prompted by some ongoing escalation on the part of the blockading parties. This was when they had closed the borders. You had families that had been separated, you know, Qataris were married to Saudis, Saudis are married to Qataris. Suddenly the families are being pulled apart and sent home.

Q Right, obviously very difficult.

A So it was -- that was the nature when I talk about humanitarian reasons, along with a potential interruption of food supplies and whatnot.

So those remarks were made in response to that next escalation step that was taken by the blockading parties.

Q So your remarks obviously were intended to lower the temperature. That same evening, President Trump gave remarks in the Rose Garden publicly in which he said: "The nation of Qatar, unfortunately, has historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level, and in the wake of that conference nations came together and spoke to me about confronting Qatar over its behavior."

And he said: "We have a decision to make. I decided, along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, our great generals, and military people, the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding and its extremist ideology in terms of funding," close quote.

Were you aware that the President was going to make those remarks?

A Yes.

Q When did you become aware that that was going to happen?

A Well, sometime that day. You know, normally we would get an opportunity to take a look at remarks and comment on those and provide our own input to them. So my recollection is I had seen those remarks ahead of time.

Q Was that before or after your remarks in the Treaty Room?

A That I don't recall.

Q Did you feel that your remarks and his remarks were inconsistent with one another in any way?

A No. No, I don't believe they were. I think, again, I was -- as you read the remarks you attributed to me -- my efforts were, again, trying to get the blockading parties to, you know, stop what you're doing. This is, you know, this is not -- this is harming so many of your own people.

Q Right.

A And I made phone calls, again, with -- there was a lot of telephone calls being made during all this to keep it -- try to keep it tamped down.

The statements around funding of terrorism, I do know what the origins of those were, and I can't comment on them for -- because they're -- I think they need to be protected.

Q But do you believe that characterization as the President made his remarks in the Rose Garden was accurate?

A I would probably not have characterized it quite that way. I think, you know, if the assertion is someone is making large or significant levels of support to terrorism, then that means there must be -- either they are terrorists themselves or they must be contributing to a terrorist organization.

I know what was being referred to by the blockading parties when they made that assertion. That organization was not so designated as a terrorist organization at that time, nor is it today, to my knowledge. So I do know -- I mean, I know that's what was being asserted.

It is true that the Qataris provided support to that organization, but I also am aware of the nature of that support and, in my view, I would never have characterized it as to pay for terrorist actions or activities.

Now, you know, I realize some people might say: Well, if you give a dollar to somebody to feed themselves and they take a dollar and buy a weapon with it, you just supported terrorism. Okay. So I get the nexus.

[Discussion off the record.]

Sr. Democratic Counsel. What was Jared Kushner's position on the blockade?

State Department Counsel. Here you're asking for the view of a Presidential adviser, and I would register some concern.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q I think we have questions regarding whether he was acting as Presidential

adviser or in his personal capacity, so if you could bear that in mind, sir, as you answer the question, I would appreciate that.

A Well, I only recall us talking about it one time, and I certainly put forward my view that that was not -- what was going on wasn't helpful and that there were a lot of questions around the list of 15 demands that, you know, arose from certain allegations.

And I think he, you know, he was more of a view that he thought the blockading countries had, you know, had good reason to do what they were doing. So it's just one of those things where we took a slightly different view of it.

Q To your knowledge, was he communicating with any of your counterparts about this topic?

A I don't know.

Q Did he -- I think we've established that he never told you about the dinner that he had on the evening of May 20th with Mr. Bannon and the leaders of UAE and Saudi. Did he ever tell you or tell anyone at the State Department that shortly before this time his family was seeking the help of a Qatari sovereign wealth fund to refinance a property that they owned at 666 5th Avenue in New York?

A You said did he or did anyone?

Q Did he ever tell you or tell anyone at the State Department, to your knowledge, that those discussions about getting the Qataris to refinance that building were happening?

A Not to my knowledge.

Q Were you aware of it through any other channels?

A I think there were newspaper articles written about it at some point, but that I don't even know that -- recall the timing of those.

Q So we understand from public reporting that his family met with the Qatari

Finance Minister at the St. Regis Hotel in New York City during the week of April 24th, so a few weeks before the summit and just a few weeks, as a result, before the blockade. Did it give you any concern that he was seeking funding from a sovereign partner at a time when a crisis like this was involved -- was evolving that involved one of those partners?

Witness' Counsel 1. Counsel, just for clarification, what is the sourcing that you're referring to, and does it say that Mr. Kushner was seeking funding or that his family was seeking funding?

Sr. Democratic Counsel. So the sourcing is from a variety of places, AP, Washington Post. To clarify, the sourcing that we're aware of from the media says that the meeting on April 24th at the St. Regis Hotel was attended by his father Charles Kushner, not by Jared himself.

Witness' Counsel 1. Okay. Well, the way you phrased the question to Secretary Tillerson was did it disturb you that he was -- you know, and so I want to be clear --

Sr. Democratic Counsel. I appreciate the clarification and that was unintentional.

Witness' Counsel 1. Okay.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Were you concerned, sir, that Mr. Kushner's family was seeking significant funding from Qatar at the same time as he was involved in decisions of this magnitude that involved Qatar?

A Well, there's a lot in that question, so let me try to unpack it for you.

Your question assumes that I was aware that he was involved in decisions around Qatar. I'm unaware of that.

Q Okay.

A As to the timing -- and all I remember about the newspaper article and I -- at the time, it wasn't clear to me the timing of events as to when the Kushner family

business had sought this financing and when it had been declined. I didn't know whether that was something that happened even prior to the President taking office.

Q Our understanding is that it --

A Yeah. I'm just telling you at the time I don't remember that I spent a lot of time trying to, okay, let me put the puzzle together, pieces of the puzzle together.

Q Okay.

A I was really consumed with dealing with the situation itself. I just remember reading the news reports about -- and I think, as counsel has pointed out, I remember it being that the family had sought this financing from the Qataris and they had declined to do a deal. That's about all I remember about it.

Q Our understanding of the timeline is that there was a significant approach by the family to the Qataris on or about April 24th, that there was the summit around May 20th, and that there was the blockade in early June, and that prior to the summit we believe the Qataris had declined to provide that financing.

So you have a request for financing, declining the financing, the summit, and then the blockade.

Sitting here today, does that sequencing trouble you in any way?

A I don't have enough details to really opine on it. I mean, you could just as easily say: Look, an independent business sought something from the Qataris. They declined. Over here this independent set of circumstances occurred.

I don't have any means or reason to connect any of those. I have no basis on which to connect them.

Q Did you ever have conversations within the State Department about the ways in which Mr. Kushner's family's finances might intersect with foreign policy?

A Not that I can recall.

Q Were there any conversations within the Department -- same topic -- about concerns regarding how the President's businesses might intersect with foreign policy decisions?

A Not that I can recall.

Q I'd like to move, if we could, to Saudi Arabia, staying in the region.

How -- actually, stay on the same topic. One of the aspects of the relationship with Saudi Arabia during the Trump administration that's received considerable attention is the personal relationship between Jared Kushner and Mohammad Bin Salman. Can you talk to us about your understanding of that relationship?

A I don't have a particularly unique understanding of it, other than, you know, I know the two met often. I don't know when they first met. And so I don't know how you -- I'm not sure how to characterize the, quote, relationship, other than it was there -- I was certainly aware that there was a lot of communication between the two of them. I was aware of occasional trips that had been taken by Mr. Kushner to the Kingdom to visit the Crown Prince.

Some of that, I think, was in the context leading up to the first overseas state visit by the President to Riyadh and the summit on Islamic terrorism.

So I'm aware of all of that. But beyond that, I don't have any special knowledge of any other, quote, aspects of the relationship.

Sr. Democratic Staff. To follow up on this, though, in a more formal sense, did you have any knowledge that, you know, papers were being prepared to inform Mr. Kushner's engagements with Saudi interlocutors that there were readouts coming to appropriate officials in the NEA Bureau, anymore sort of formal policy exchanges about this?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes. There was a comprehensive document that had been worked on -- I'm sorry, my memory fails me -- by one of the Saudi officials who was working with

the Crown Prince on a comprehensive strategic relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia that was both economic and defense related.

And at some point, and I don't remember the exact timing, Mr. Kushner contacted me and said: You know, I'd like for you to meet with this person so they can review -- this is what we've been working on for some time, so you could take a look at that.

And I did. We met, along with -- I had some of the -- my -- obviously the State Department staff there. And it was a fairly -- I want to say it was in a notebook about maybe an inch and a half thick. So it had a lot of -- it had a lot of charts and things in it.

So we reviewed it and I gave -- we had a discussion about it. I gave him some feedback on my views of it. And that made a couple of cycles, because I remember meeting with him a couple of times.

And this was something that, as I understood it, Mr. Kushner had started working on sometime back -- I didn't know exactly when -- with the President's knowledge, and it was all kind of, again, supposed to culminate in this trip by the President that would lead to the signing of a lot of agreements.

And, in fact, on that trip that's -- there were a number of business contracts that were signed between American companies and Saudi entities. There were some agreements on weapon sales that were put in place and whatnot.

So there were other aspects of that plan that were to come later, and I, to be frank with you, I don't even recall the specifics of those. But it was a -- you know, this was kind of a roadmap for the future of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and joint involvement.

So, yeah, I do, that's what I recall.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Do you know with whom Mr. Kushner had been working on this?

A On the Saudi side?

Q On the U.S. side. Was anyone assisting him?

A Well, I'm sure there were other White House staff, but I don't recall, you know, who that would -- I don't recall who it was.

Q But to your knowledge, nobody at -- when you first saw that, when he brought that document to you, was that the first that you became aware of its existence?

A Well, no, I became aware of it, I think Mr. Kushner actually mentioned it to me that they were working on this and that this individual was going to be coming to Washington and was I going to be in town that week and we'd really like for him to come over and sit down with me and take me through it. So that's about what I can recall about the sequence.

Q Was anybody at the State Department, to your knowledge, in NEA or elsewhere, involved either at the initial stage or after it was brought to you?

A Yeah, that I don't know. I just don't recall. I don't remember.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

Q And we've had concerning reports lately that Mr. Kushner has traveled to the Middle East with virtually no assistance or input of his ability from the embassy. Was that something that you experienced? You know, obviously you said that there was this exchange about a broader framework that he had worked on to develop and inform the Saudi-U.S. relationship.

Did you ever experience anything of the nature of this trip I just mentioned where diplomatic engagement occurred, whether or not it was related to that framework, but it was outside the scope of your knowledge or didn't involve preparation by the State Department?

A Yes.

Q Could you say a little more about that?

A In Saudi Arabia particularly?

Q Or other examples that I think are similar in nature.

A Yeah. There were -- on occasion the President's senior adviser would make trips abroad and usually, you know, kind of was in charge of his own agenda.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. And just to clarify, you mean Mr. Kushner?

Mr. Tillerson. Yes. Yeah. Yes. And typically not a lot of coordination with the embassy.

Sr. Democratic Staff. Did you ever raise this phenomenon with Mr. Kushner or --

Mr. Tillerson. I did.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q What were those conversations like?

A He said he would try to do better.

Q Did he?

A Not much changed.

Q How did that impact your job?

A Well, I think -- you know, I alluded earlier to the fact that it's always challenging if everyone isn't kind of working from the same playbook.

And certainly there -- and let me be clear -- there are occasions, and it's certainly the President's prerogative, to have individuals undertake special assignments in a very compartmentalized way. Not using -- I'm trying not to use the word "compartmentalize" relative to --

Q Not a term of art.

A Right. But in a way that, for whatever reasons, they prefer to have it carried out by an individual that way, and it's the President's prerogative to do that.

But it -- yeah, it presents special challenges to everyone if others who are trying to

effect foreign policy with a country and move the agenda forward are not fully aware of other conversations that are going on that might be causing your counterparty in that country to take certain actions or behave a certain way and you're not clear as to why, why did they do that.

Q Did you ever find yourself in one of those situations where Mr. Kushner had had a meeting or had a conversation that you weren't aware of and it caught you off guard?

A Yes.

Q Could you be specific about that?

A Well, I'll give you just one example and then maybe we can --

Q Yes, sir.

A -- leave it at the one example. But Mexico was a situation that that occurred on a number of occasions. And I mention this one because I think it was -- some of the elements of it were reported publicly that the Foreign Secretary of Mexico was engaged with Mr. Kushner on a fairly -- unbeknownst to me -- a fairly comprehensive plan of action.

And the Foreign Secretary came to town -- unbeknownst to me -- and I happened to be having a business dinner at a restaurant in town. And the owner of the restaurant, proprietor of the restaurant came around and said: Oh, Mr. Secretary, you might be interested to know the Foreign Secretary of Mexico is seated at a table near the back and in case you want to go by and say hello to him. Very innocent on his part.

And so I did. I walked back. And Mr. Kushner, and I don't remember who else was at the table, and the Foreign Secretary were at the table having dinner. And I could see the color go out of the face of the Foreign Secretary of Mexico as I very -- I smiled big, and I said: Welcome to Washington. And I said: I don’t want to interrupt what y’all are

doing. I said: Give me a call next time you're coming to town. And I left it at that.

As it turned out later, the Foreign Secretary was operating on the assumption that everything he was talking to Mr. Kushner about had been run through the State Department and that I was fully on board with it. And he was rather shocked to find out that when he started telling me all these things that were news to me, I told him this is the first time I'm hearing of it. And I don't know that any of those things were discussing ultimately happened because there was a change of government in Mexico as well.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

Q You said that you raised concerns about this phenomenon with Mr. Kushner and he said he would try to do better. Did you raise it with others, other key players in the administration or the President himself. Given that it was presenting these sort of unexpected moments that interrupted your own diplomatic efforts?

A Yes, I did.

Q Can you say more about those conversations?

A Well --

State Department Counsel. Well, you know, you're asking a very general question. I think if the answer is going to veer towards talking with the President or his senior-most advisers, we'd have a concern about executive privilege at that point.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Let's try it this way, if I could. Just factually, did you discuss it with the President?

State Department Counsel. Again, you know, I think, Counsel, you're getting into an area where we would have some concerns about potential executive privilege.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Up to you, sir.

A I think I'd like to leave it there.

Q Okay. Are there others with whom you discussed it that you would feel comfortable saying who those people were?

A Well, you know, within the State Department people were encountering some of these same things, so in private they would bring it to my attention. I don't think it's useful to name those individuals in particular. They're still trying to do their jobs, you know, and their jobs are not easy to do. So I think -- hopefully that's sufficient to give you a sense of how things were operating.

Q I think that's fine. Thank you.

[Discussion off the record.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q So we'd like to talk a little bit, sir, again, without getting into necessarily the substance of any particular conversations about, sir, your impressions about the way that the process worked for the President to get information and how he reacted to things.

How often did you interact with the President in a given week, say?

A Well, daily, and oftentimes multiple times daily, and oftentimes I was at the White House most of the day.

Q And were those standing meetings?

A I had standing meetings on 2 days a week where I had an hour on his calendar, and then on 1 day a week myself and another Cabinet secretary would have lunch with he and the Vice President if we were all in town.

[Discussion off the record.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q And to clarify, sir, you know, one of the things that this committee has jurisdiction over and that we're quite interested in is the sort of the general functioning of the foreign policy apparatus and ensuring that, you know, the diplomats who are funded

by the taxpayers and who are sort of trained or being, you know, appropriately utilized, making sure that that information and that skill is funneling its way up as intended.

Who would normally -- forgive me. You had said that you would have meetings with the President and a Cabinet secretary. Was that someone different each time or was it always the same Cabinet secretary?

A Same Cabinet secretary and I would meet with -- like I say, these were the kind of standing Friday lunches.

Q Okay. And which secretary was that?

A Secretary Mattis and myself.

Q Would anyone else normally accompany you to these?

A No, not normally. Sometimes the Vice President's chief of staff would come with him and --

Q Was that Nick Ayers?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Anybody else?

A Not normally.

Q Would there typically have been notetakers in these meetings?

A No. These were opportunities to have a very informal discussion with the President and Vice President about particular issues that we were working jointly on, and also give them an opportunity in a very informal way to, you know, ask more questions or ask us things that maybe didn't normally come up in our normal time we were together.

So just -- it was just extra time to have with the two of them together to talk about issues that -- and Secretary Mattis and I generally -- you know, we would kind of agree ahead of time that this would be an issue both of us were interested in, so in terms of what we were bringing to the discussion, this would be what we would bring. And then

obviously whatever is on the President and Vice President's mind, they would bring that up.

Q So you've described the President publicly, and I'll quote here, as “a man who is pretty undisciplined, doesn't like to read things, doesn't read briefing reports, doesn't like to get into the details of lots of things.”

Was that something -- first of all, do you stand by that characterization?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell us a little bit about sort of specific examples in which you experienced that?

A Well, you can probably --

Q To the extent you are able.

A You can probably list several yourself. I mean, it's -- I don't think I was stating anything that most people that spent time observing the President and the way he, you know, the way he handles his own affairs would find any of that surprising.

And it was not stated in any sort of a critical or pejorative way. It was just a description of this is how he operates. And the task for the rest of us was to learn how to operate in a way that supported him given that that's his style. It wasn't our job to try to change the way he does things. Our job was to try to understand: Okay, given that that's the way he likes to operate, how can we support that?

Q And so what did you do to adapt to that?

A Well, I learned to be much more concise with what I wanted to bring in front of him. Early days I came in with way too much information.

And so I got very -- it caused me to have to get very, very focused on, you know, what's the most important thing I want him to remember about this discussion.

And so sometimes I would use material that I would put in front of him or other

times I just tried to be very concise with the points I wanted to make, because I knew he was going to want to talk about a lot of other things that weren't -- that I didn't know were on the agenda. So it was also trying to make sure that I used the time I had with him well.

So, you know, and I had to adapt to the fact that it wasn't going to be useful to give him something and say this is, you know, this is an article worth reading or this is a brief. And, again, it's not a criticism. That's just not what he was going to do.

So it was, you know, how to help him understand the issues and the elements of the issues given the style in which he likes to operate.

Q You've also said that the President often approaches issues -- and, again, this was in the same interview that you gave -- that the President approaches issues by saying, quote: "Look, this is what I believe and you can try to convince me otherwise, but most of the time you're not going to do that" -- seeming to imply that before you went into these meetings the President had made up his mind before he heard what you were going to say. Do you still stand by that?

A Yeah. I think again that was -- maybe that's a style as well. I've dealt with other individuals that kind of operate that way. They say: Okay, take your best shot, see if you can convince me I'm wrong, you know. So --

Q Given the complexity of issues and the fact that there's this whole State Department apparatus designed to help synthesize the best information to get it to decisionmakers, did that attitude of "I've already made up my mind but you can try to convince me," did it pose particular challenges for you and did you find ways to work around it?

A Well, I mean, let me answer it this way. It did not discourage or deter me from taking what we believed to be the best -- our best view.

So even if going in I knew this was contrary to where the President's starting point was, it never -- I never -- it never deterred me or anyone at the State Department, to my knowledge, from putting forth the best view we thought we could put together and the best recommendation and make our points, and fully recognizing, understanding, and accepting that the President is the decisionmaker.

So our job, though, is to the extent we can, make sure he's at least had access to it and seen the counterpoints or the alternatives or the options and then let him decide.

So it really -- again, it as a style -- I see it's a style question. And so my job was to find a way to work with that style. And I spent my whole life having to learn to work with people's styles. It's just what you do.

Q Did you ever run into a situation where that style and that sort of resistance to receiving the information that the Department had produced led to the President making a decision that you didn't believe was the correct one?

A Look, it's well documented, I even said it in my opening statement, that the President and I had differences on policy. I think that was my responsibility, to bring my view of things to him from my perspective, my own experience over the years, as well as what I could -- the knowledge I could try to get from my State Department colleagues around all the issues and bring that to him.

And as I said, even if I knew it was contrary to where he was starting from, I think what's important is that that process occurred.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

Q Do you feel that that deliberative process, though -- I mean, you've said two things, one, that you tried to move to this sort of Scowcroft model of interagency deliberations, where there would be a more sort of formalized system, but you also said that you had to make things more concise to be sort of successful in your presentation of

issues to the President.

So both of those suggest an impact on the space for deliberation. Did you feel that you had ample room to deliberate issues with other advisers as decisions went up to the President --

A Well, the short answer is yes, and I think it's -- but I think it's important to think about why do you go through this process of the Scowcroft-Baker model that I described. Yes, it ultimately is to culminate in a recommendation to be put forth before the President for a decision.

But the real value of that model is the alignment it creates among all the agencies, that as we go through developing that, everybody has brought their perspective to the creation of this recommendation.

And it has been sent back oftentimes. It would be sent back to the coordinating committee with questions from the PC to go back and relook at this, develop another alternative to this. And it's really that process that brings the agencies into better alignment once a decision is made.

And so I think none of that was ever, I think, inhibited, again, or deterred by the manner in which the President chooses to make his decisions.

When we did bring that to a conclusion and we would take then a conclusion to the President, then what the approach I took when it was me that would take it to him is I tried to get it very concise and compact.

He didn't need to see the 150 pages of stuff behind it. What he needed to know is, you know, this is the basic policy framework, this is the basic strategy, do you endorse that.

And once we had that, everything else then just goes back into the hands of the agencies with all the work that everybody had done together to execute and implement.

And so to that extent, you know, I'm sure other Presidents operated differently and probably like to read all 150 pages and get into the nitty-gritty of it, and that's great. It's just not the way this President operates. But once we had a decision from him it didn't get in the way then of the agencies going to execute.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q So, sir, in that same interview, you said publicly that you frequently had to say to the President: "I understand what you want to do, but you can't do it that way, it violates the law."

How many times did that happen?

A Well, let me try to answer it this way, and first, I'm going to just say right upfront, the President never asked me to violate the law, okay. So I want to be clear, that that statement doesn't get misinterpreted by anyone.

A lot of these -- a lot of the early issues had to do with immigration policy, actions, implementation. And, you know, I shared the President's endpoint objective. It was how do you want to get it done, you know. And he was -- oftentimes wanted to do it: Boom, you know, this is it. Let's issue this.

And I'm not a lawyer, so let me be clear on that, too, I'm not a lawyer, so it wasn't fair of me to be giving him legal advice. But I knew a bit about immigration laws. And so on occasion I would have to say to him: Well, we can't do it that way. And I think I said, you know: It's going to get challenged in the court and you're going to lose, you know, so --

Q Had you consulted with State Department lawyers on these things or this was, as you said, your personal reaction?

A These were in conversations that we would have when we were talking about where he was trying to go with something.

Yes, on any of these things I'd been briefed, you know, because immigration was an area that I really had to learn a lot about because I didn't know a lot.

And, again, I would say in the context of that, the President was on a steep learning curve. I mean, he didn't know a lot of the legal aspects of the immigration laws or certainly other aspects of how the government operates within the congressional law-making system and oversight. And so, you know, these were early days when he was doing a lot of learning on it.

He's very -- you know, he was very action oriented: Get it done, get it done, get it done. And so just sometimes you had to say: We can't do that. And in some cases he'd say: Well, that's, you know, that's crazy. And that's when I would say: Well, it may be crazy, but -- and I agree with you, we should go to Congress and get it changed.

And that's still my view. I mean, I hope eventually somebody gets around to dealing with immigration law, because it's a mess.

But I want to give you, contextually that's kind of what was -- what I meant when I said that.

Q Did that incident arise in areas other than immigration?

A Well, I remember on occasion when we would talk about treaties or -- and I don't want to give you -- get any more specific at this point. I could try to give you one example.

[redacted]

Q Yep.

A I just -- I would just say I think, as a broad comment, as I characterized, you know, I think, you know, the President was on a steep learning curve around what governs certain activities. Quite frankly, I was, too. And a lot of times it would come up kind of in that context.

[Discussion off the record.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q During your tenure, did the President ever refer to his personal or family business in conversations related to foreign policy?

A No.

Q Did he ever give you any reason to believe that those things were considerations in his decisionmaking?

A No.

Q So as you've said, you obviously had your differences of opinion with the President on a number of occasions. There was widespread reporting in October of 2017 regarding particularly expressive language that you had allegedly used to describe him at one point. We don't want in any way to focus on the salacious aspects of that comment, but I assume you recall --

Witness' Counsel 1. We should probably then move on, I think, from that topic.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. We're not going to talk about the substance of the comment.

Witness' Counsel 1. Okay.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. But do you recall what I'm referring to, sir?

Mr. Tillerson. I recall the reports.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. Okay. Do you recall, whatever was said or was not said --

Witness' Counsel 1. We really should move on.

Sr. Democratic Counsel. -- whether that was with respect to a particular subject matter?

Witness' Counsel 1. We're ready to move on.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Happily.

There was a press conference that was given in response to that afterwards. Were you asked to do that in October of 2017?

A No. I did that on my own.

Q Okay.

There has been sort of a lot of reporting and observation that the President seems to be drawn to and have an affinity for what are perceived as authoritarian figures, such as President Putin or President Duterte.

In a February 6th, 2017, interview the President said to Bill O'Reilly, in response to President Putin being characterized as a killer, he said, quote: There are a lot of killers. You think our country is so innocent?

What was your reaction to that statement?

A I don't know that I recall hearing it, so I don't know how to react to it. I mean, you're reading it to me.

Q That's fine. Do you have any thoughts on the general observation -- this is something that's just sort of been part of the public discussion -- many have said that the President does feel positively inclined towards individuals that he considers to be strong leaders. Do you agree with that?

A Well, you're -- maybe you're going to have to describe to me the strong leader.

Q I think the strong leader --

A -- because people might -- some people might consider one person to be a strong leader and another would consider them to be a weak leader.

Q That's an entirely fair point, sir. I think the concern is largely around leaders in countries that the United States would typically consider to be authoritarian, such as President Putin in Russia or President Duterte.

Do you agree that President Trump has exhibited an affinity for leaders that some may consider to be authoritarian?

A Well, what is an affinity for? I'm just struggling with what it is you're trying to connect here.

Q There have been concerns that while historical bipartisan practice may have been to condemn anti-democratic movements in other countries, that it has been reacted to by President Trump as saying this is simply a demonstration of strength and something that we should support.

Did you ever have an experience like that?

A You'd have to give me a specific example. I mean, I'm -- or a specific quote or something.

[Discussion off the record.]

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Shifting topics, sir. On July 24th, 2017, President Trump gave a speech to the Boy Scouts, an institution with which you are closely associated. Can you describe what your personal reaction to that speech was?

A Well, I thought it was a little too political of a speech for that group of young men.

Q Did you communicate those concerns to anybody?

A You know, I don't recall. I think I may have had a conversation with the

White House chief of staff. But, you know, the President has the right to say whatever he wants to.

Q Two days after the speech there was a question that I think was shouted at you in the same fashion that we had discussed earlier, possibly in a sort of initial photo op with a foreign leader.

A Uh-huh.

Q And in response, the questioner asked, you know, your plans for the future, and you replied that you had planned to remain Secretary, quote, "as long as the President lets me." This was 2 days after that Boy Scouts speech. Do you recall saying that?

A Not precisely, but, yeah, I probably would have said that.

Q What were you feeling at that time? Why did you say that?

A Because it was true. I was there to serve as long as the President wanted me to serve.

Q Did you think about resigning after that speech?

A No.

Q On August 12th, 2017, White nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, marched through the town, chanting racist slogans and clashing with counterprotesters. Ultimately one of those White nationalists attacked and killed 32-year-old Heather Heyer. He was later convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

What was your personal response to those attacks?

A Well, the only time I remember it coming up to me was in an interview, I don't remember which news show it was, but I was on, and I was asked about it.

Q I think that was probably a couple of weeks later, would have been Chris Wallace on FOX News. Does that sound possible?

A Could be.

Q So in that interview you were asked about the President's response to the attacks, and you said, quote: We express America's values from the State Department. We represent the American people. We represent America's values, our commitment to freedom, our commitment to equal treatment of people the world over, and that message has never changed.

First of all, for you personally, what are America's values?

[4:29 p.m.]

Mr. Tillerson. Well, I think I articulated them in my opening statement, you know, around freedom, human dignity, the rights of individuals. So that hasn't changed. And as I said, I think those values have been unchanged through the ages, through the decades. They have been tested many times.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC COUNSEL:

Q Mr. Wallace, after you said that went on to ask you in essence whether those values that you mentioned were the same as the President's and your response was the, quote, "The President speaks for himself," which is a careful phrasing. Why did you phrase that the way you did?

A Because it's true, the President speaks for himself.

Q You also said that you and the President, quote, "did not have a common value system." Can you describe for us the President's value system as you understand it?

A No, I can't.

Q If you made the public statement that you don't have a common value system, then presumably you had some assumption of what his was. Certainly you would know your own.

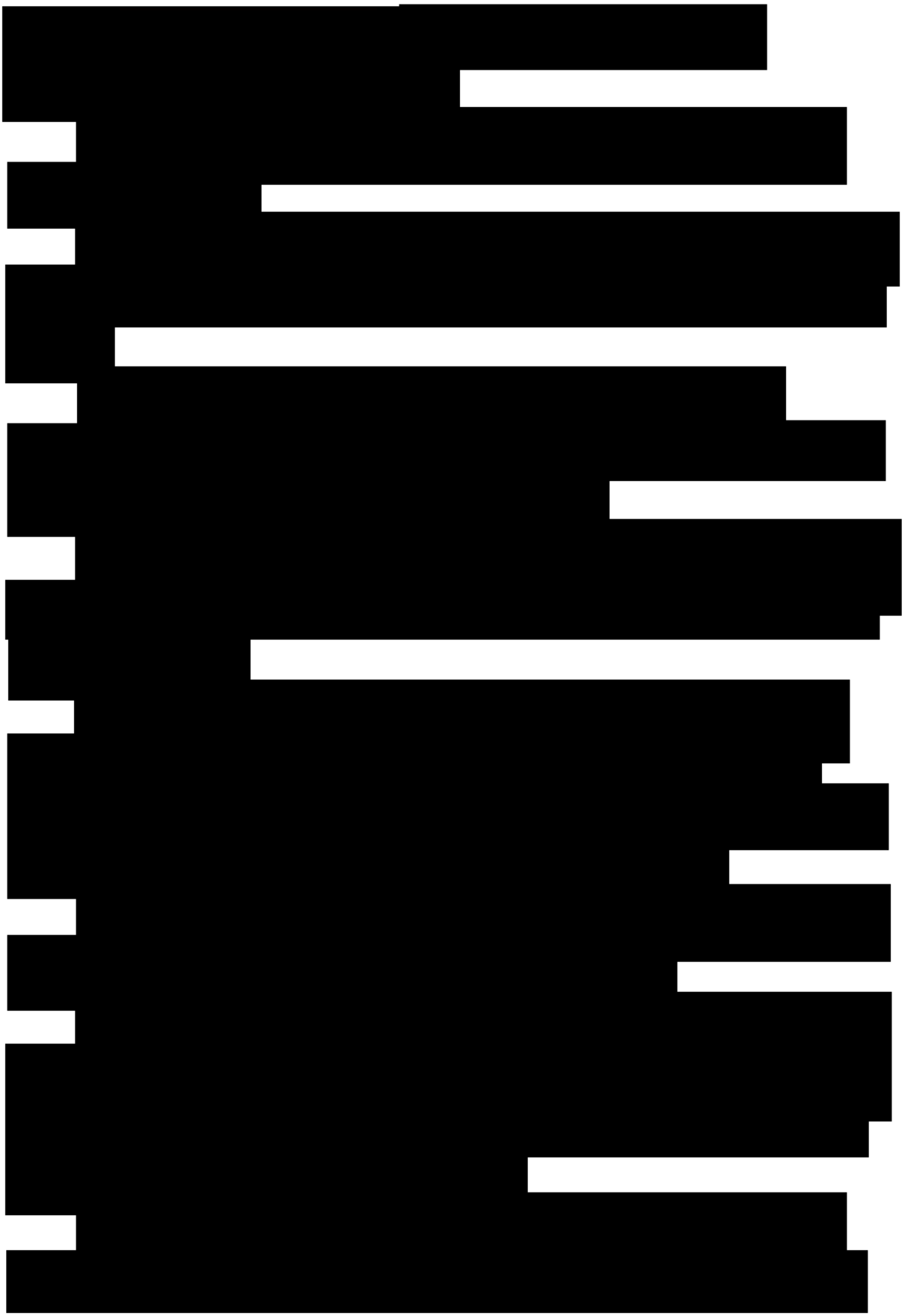
Witness' Counsel 1. Counsel, again, he's answered the question. He told you he can't tell you the answer to that. So we really -- you have a lot of topics to get through.

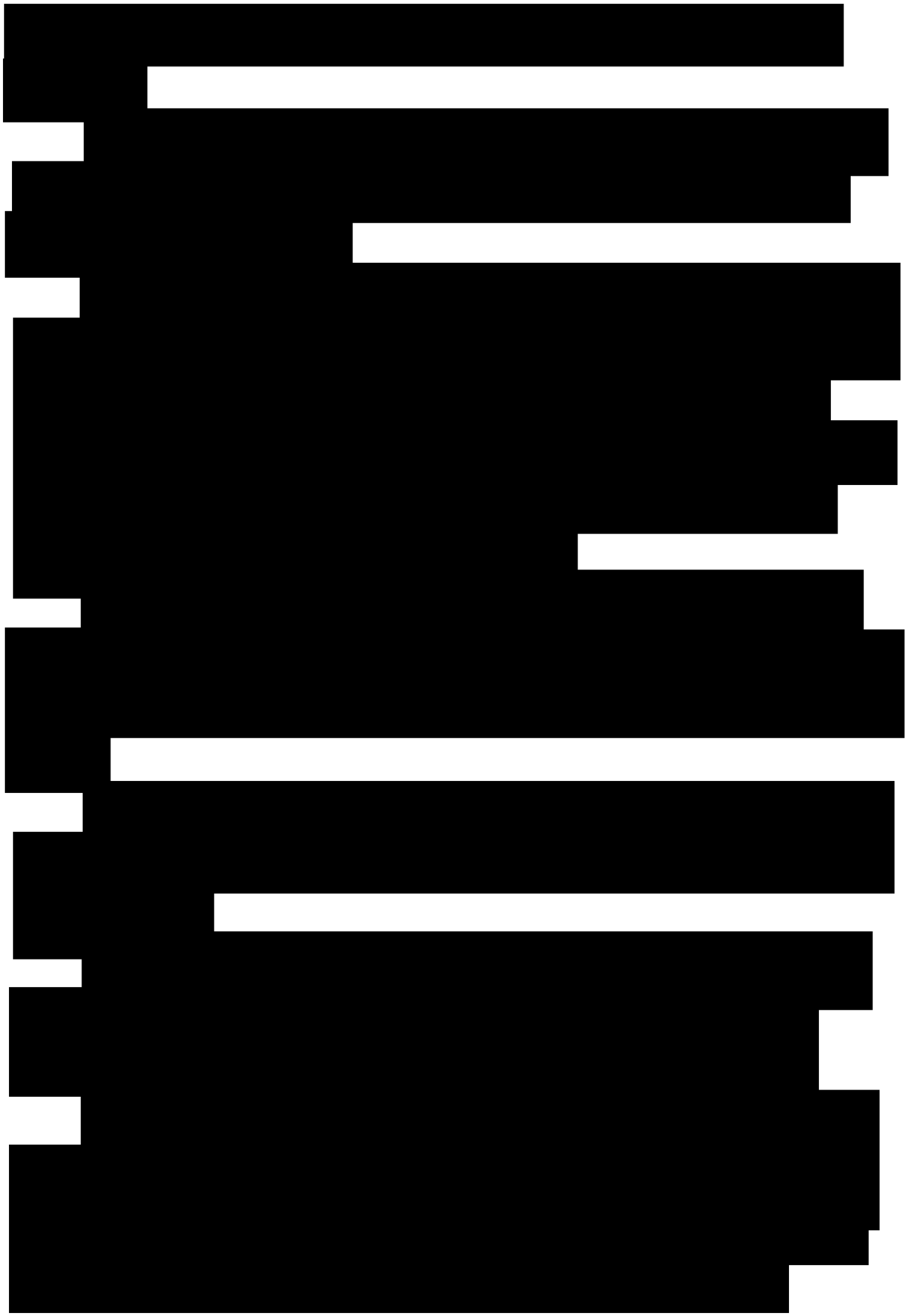
[Discussion off the record.]

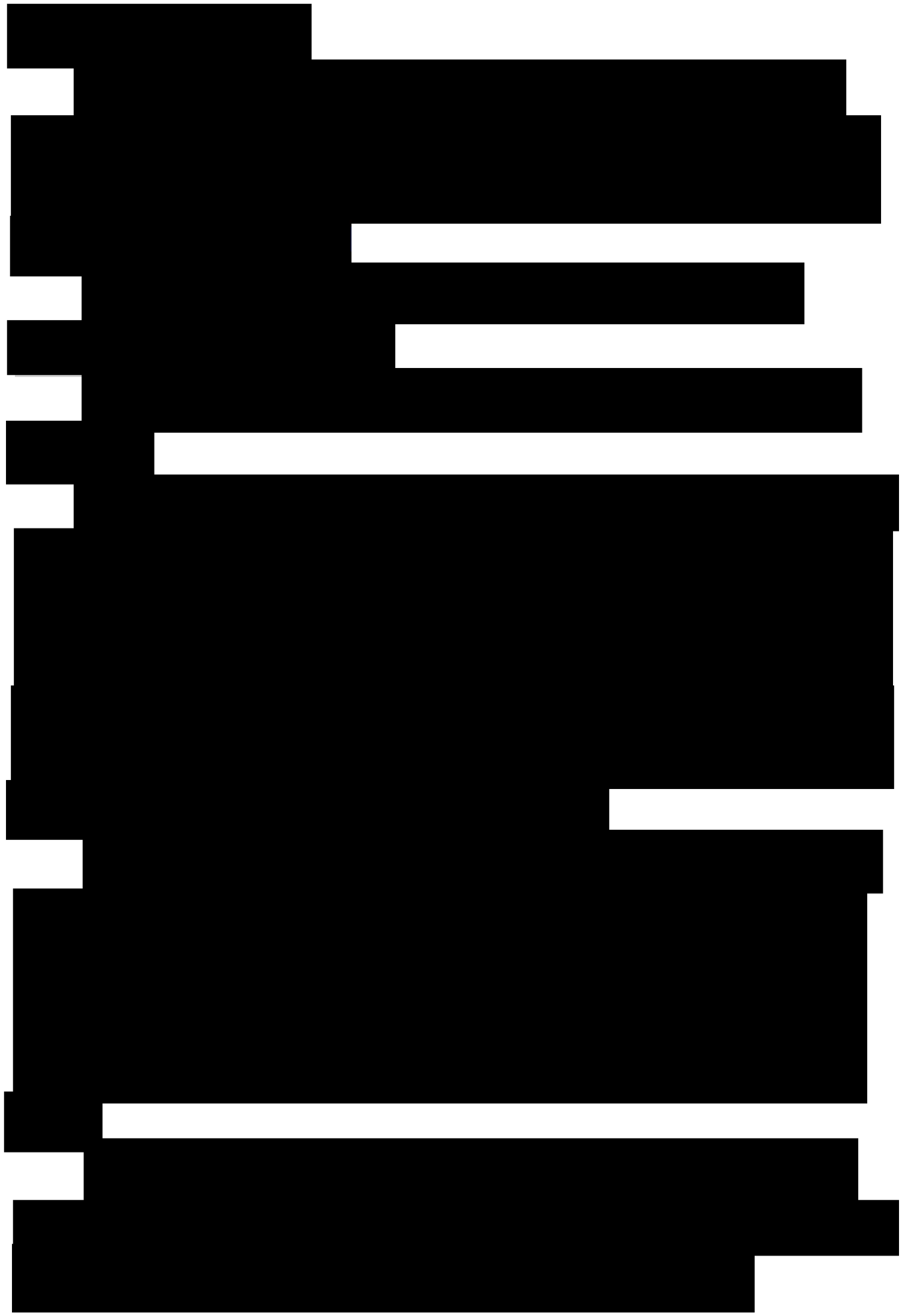
BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

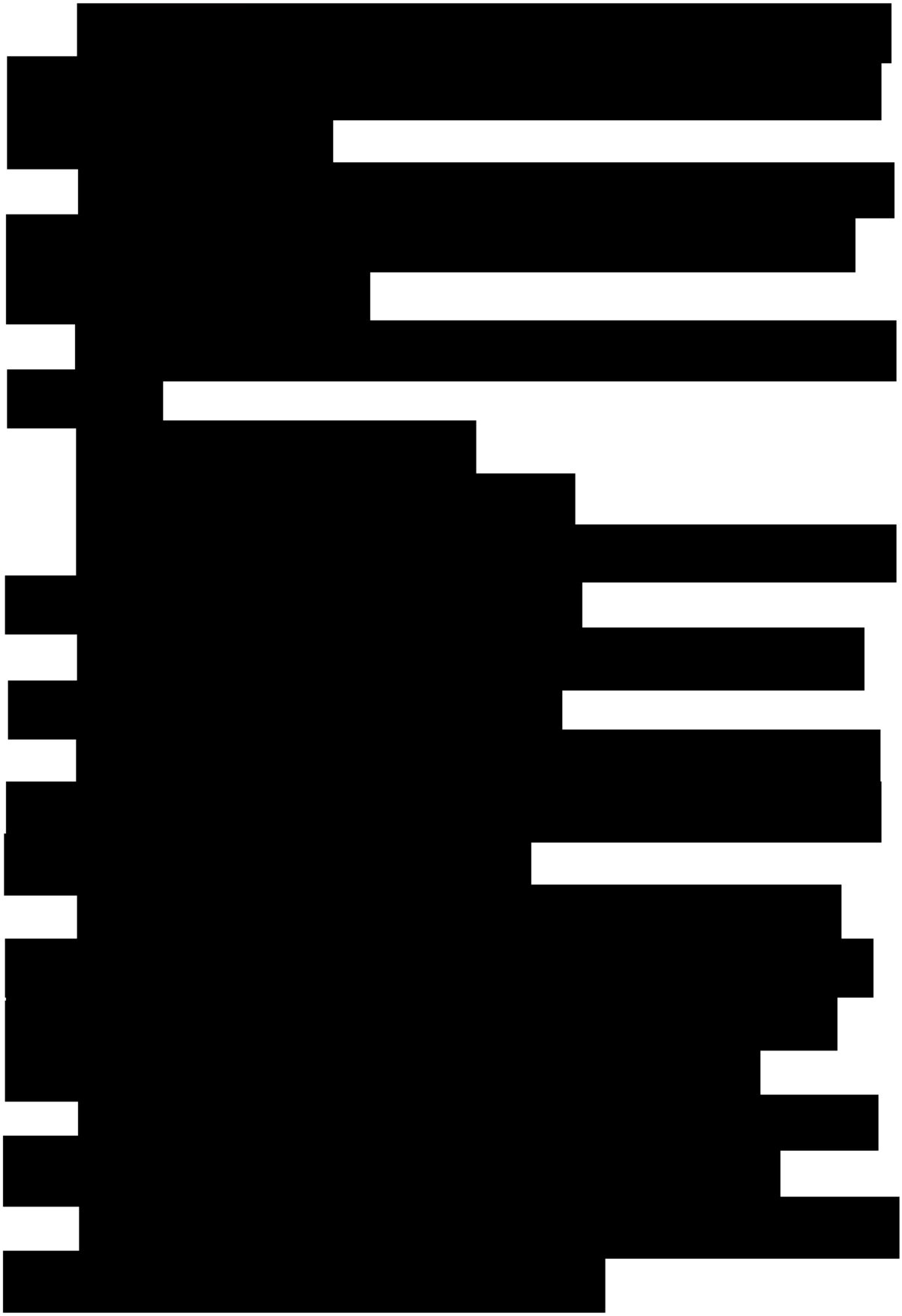
Q Thanks again for being here today. And we have just a few more questions and topics to address with you before we close for the day.

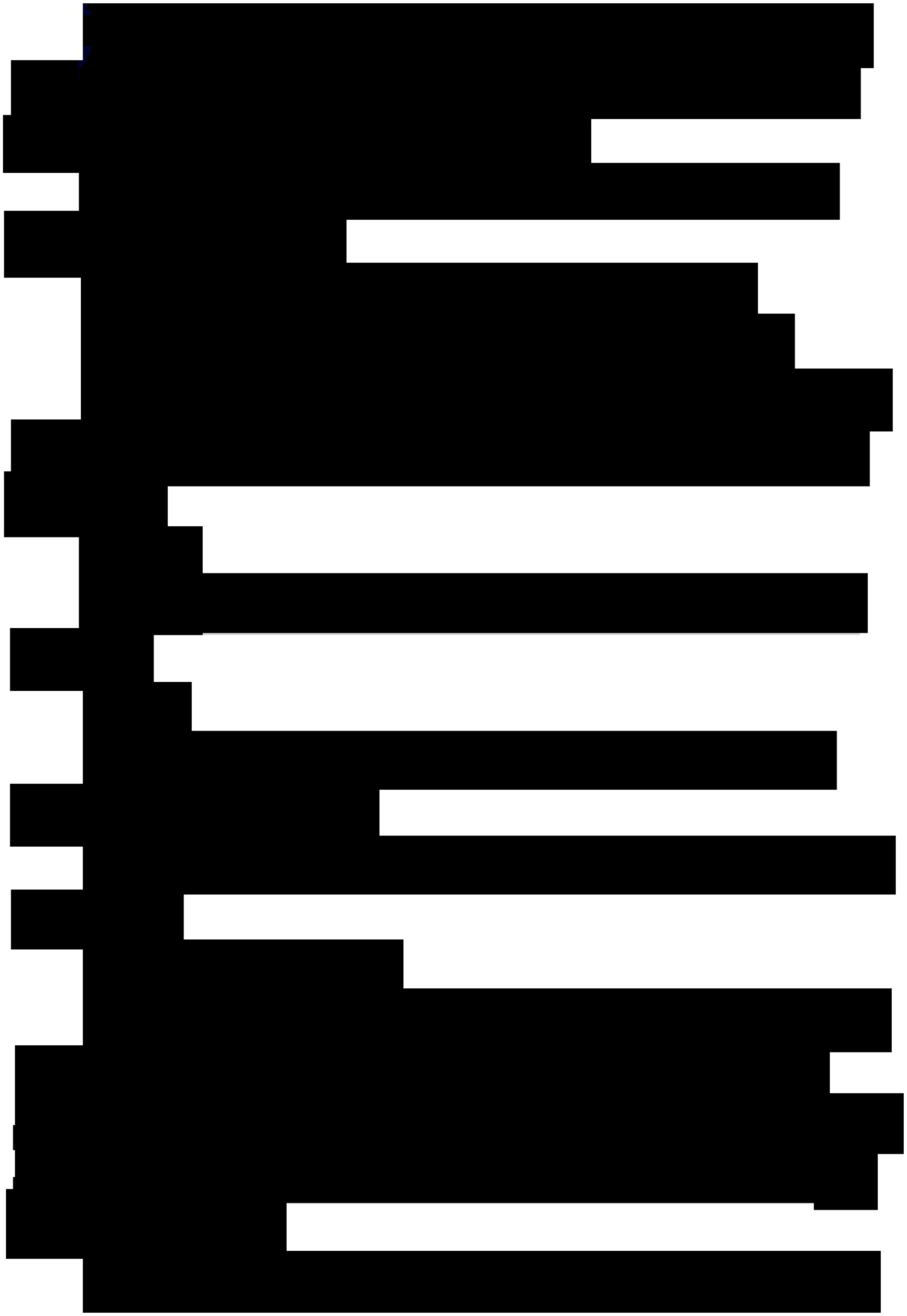
[redacted]

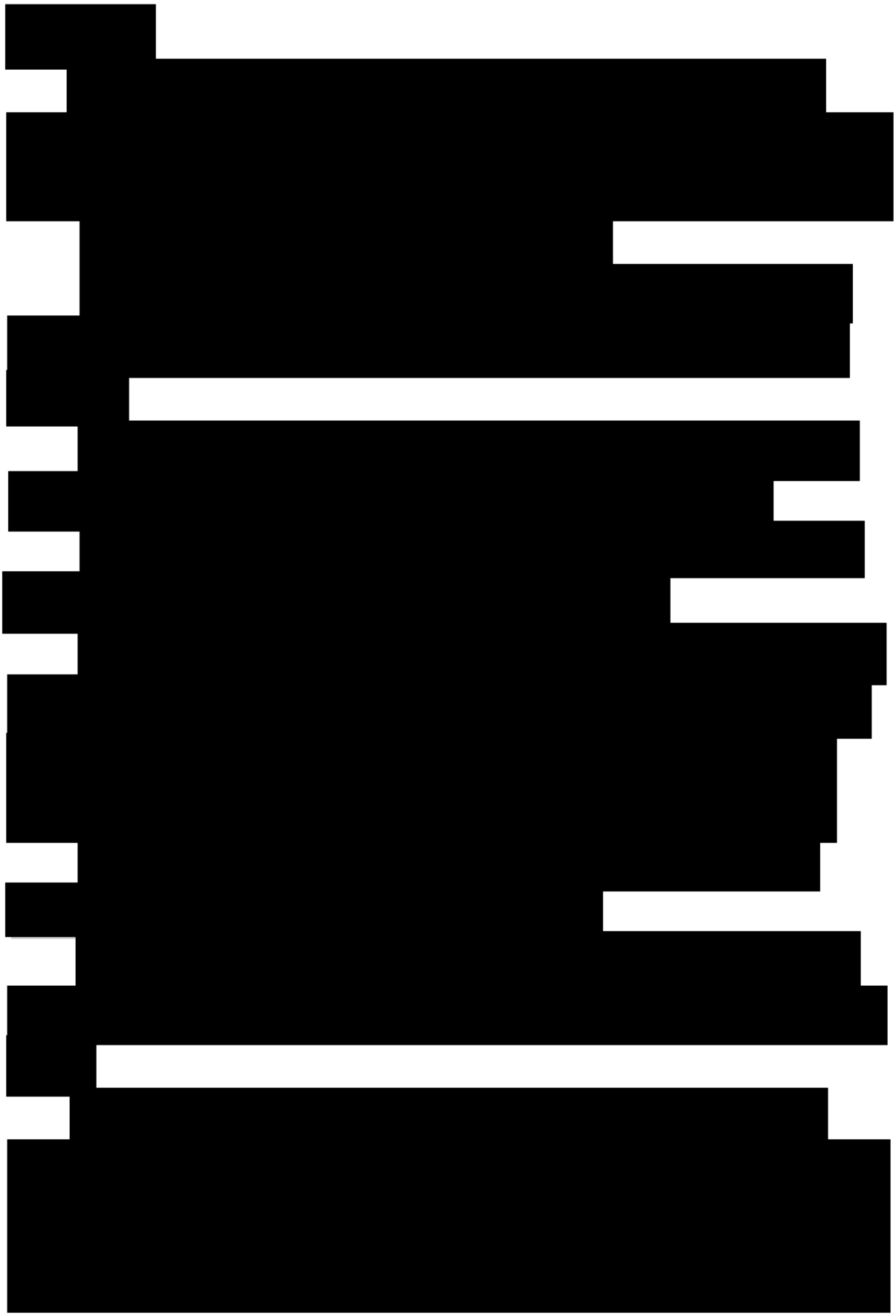


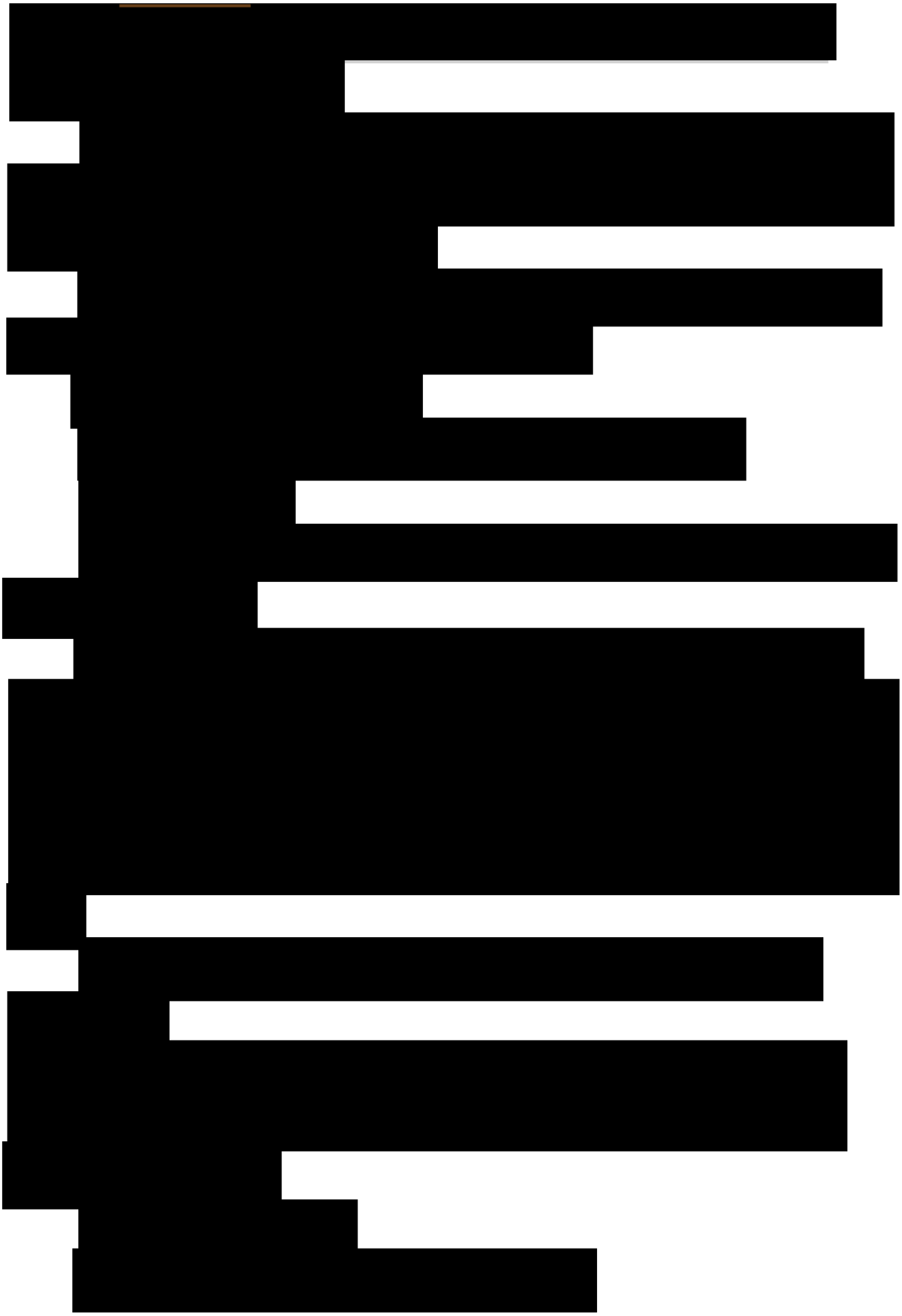


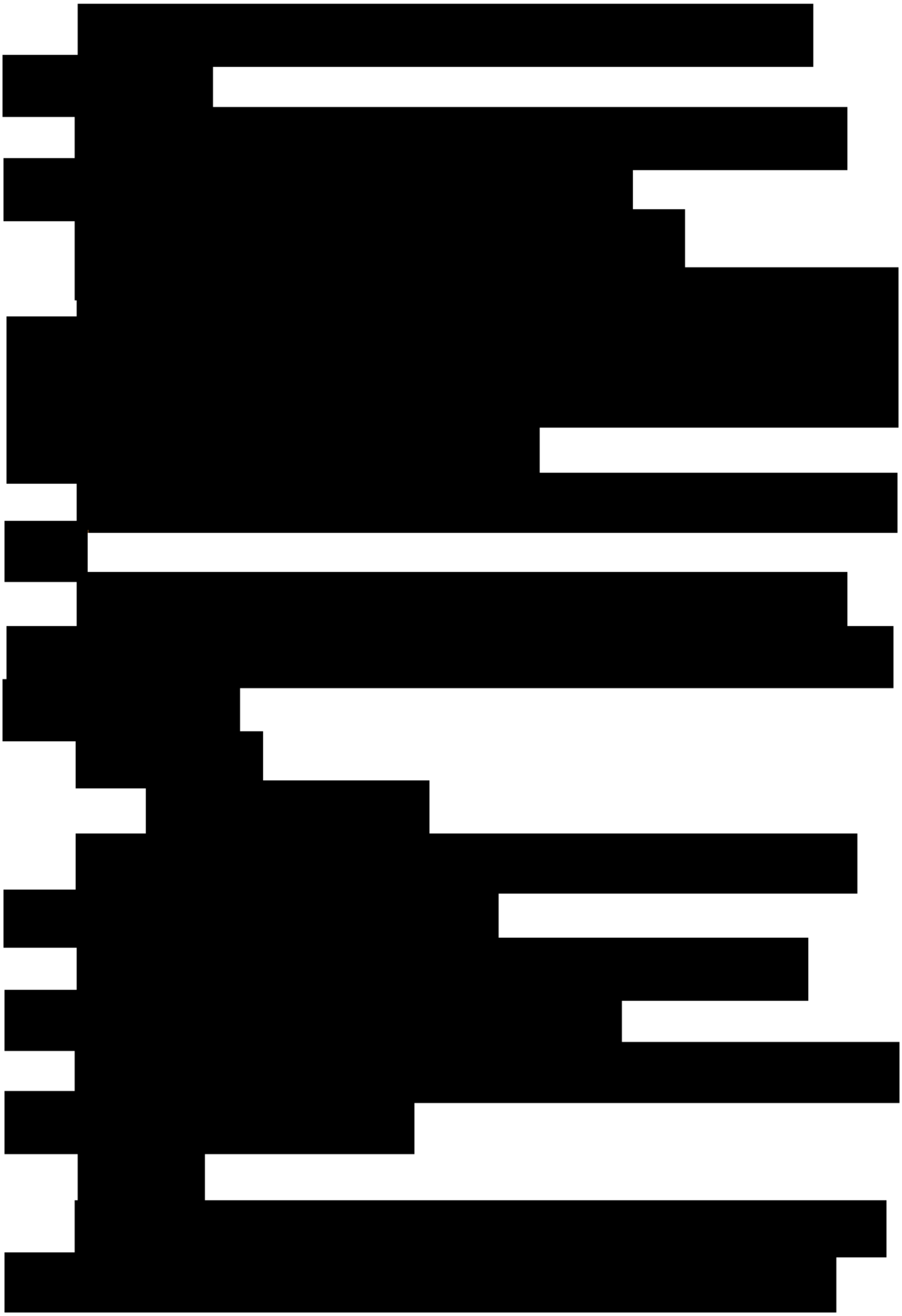












[redacted]

Q Let's pivot briefly to treaties and international agreements. Again with limited time we will try to keep this to top line questions.

But at the outset of your tenure how did you understand the administration's general policy approach to be toward treaties and international agreement given that so many of these obviously fell under your rubric as Secretary of State?

A Well, the President during his campaign spoke directly to certain treaties and agreements that he thought were not serving American interests well. So on certain specific treaties I think it is a matter of public record as to his views and his intentions on some of those when he was campaigning for the Presidency.

But I don't -- I didn't -- I don't want to suggest that I in any way tried to extrapolate something broader then when he was very specific on a particular agreement, treaty, that somehow he didn't like any of them, you know. I didn't -- I kind of took those, okay, he obviously feels this way about this one, he feels that way about that one, that's all I know at this point. I didn't extrapolate anything from it.

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

Q Okay. So then maybe another way to characterize that is that you approached each treaty or international agreement sort of on a case-by-case basis?

A On its own merits. Right.

Q Okay. Who else in the national security team had the most influence, generally speaking, and we can also get into more specific treaties if that's more helpful to answer the question, but generally speaking on the deliberations around these treaties and international agreements that had been publicly referenced by the President during the campaign and already identified as subjects of scrutiny for the new administration?

A Influence within the National Security Council or influence on the President?

Q Well, I would appreciate if you could answer both.

State Department Counsel. Just, ma'am, both of these questions would get into areas where I think we would have some concerns about executive privilege, given you are asking about Presidential advisers.

Witness' Counsel 1. You are asking about individuals or are you asking about foreign policies --

BY SR. DEMOCRATIC STAFF:

Q Well, I was asking about individuals, but I think in terms of --

A Well, I mean and I just say this with all candor, it was always my view that when I went to that table of the National Security Council, if the President appointed you as a member of National Security Council we were all in equal in standing, that's why you were there.

You were there to bring your agency's perspective on it as well as your personal perspective. I didn't view as anyone being superior to the other. And so I think the process, as I viewed it, it may have come up with not always the perfect result or whatever, but it -- we honored the process of hearing all views and I think that's what was important.

So I can't assign anyone as being more influential than the other, other than to say this person is very good at constructing their arguments, they come well prepared and they are persuasive. So they are more influential than the person who comes in and says I have nothing to add. So it kind of boils down to that. Nothing in particular stands out to me that says, you know, man, you really had to within this person over or you were going to lose today. It never functioned that way in my view.

Q Okay. Depending on how much time is remaining we can potentially visit

some more specific questions on treaties, but I want to also be able to touch briefly on some human rights and humanitarian, and refugee issues before our time runs out.

So beginning with human rights, early in your tenure the State Department released its annual human rights report in March 2017. In what some news reports describe as, the quote, break with long standing tradition only rarely breached. You did not attend the roll out ceremony for this. Can you describe for us your thinking in making that decision?

A I don't recall if I had a conflict, had another commitment. I just don't remember the circumstances around it.

Q Do you recall a response to that decision from outside groups or from officials within the Department who had expected you to attend and then didn't either?

A Well, I don't recall, they may have expected in planning for it that I was going to be there. But to my knowledge, my recollection, it's not like they had my chair there and I didn't show up. My recollection is it wasn't on my schedule because of -- or some other reason. I remember the press making quite a to do about it.

Q Okay. In May of that year, May 21, 2017, in an interview with you on Fox News, Chris Wallace noted, quote, “not a mention of human rights, not a mention of women's rights” in the President's speech earlier that day to the Arab Islamic American summit. While continued with you, quote, “you say he wants to speak concretely and frankly about these things. He's not doing that today.”

Can you characterize your understanding of where advocacy or public comment around human rights issues factored in to the administration's general foreign policy framework?

A I think it was dealt with in a way that is not inconsistent with the past. I will say, you know, I gave a townhall on a couple of occasions in the State Department and

spoke about this issue of human rights and our advocacy which is never not present, but I also said, look, I am a realist.

And oftentimes if I want to start a process by which an unsavory regime starts to either change its way or start its way out, oftentimes that's not the place to start with to ultimately achieve a better environment for human rights, human dignity for their people.

I am interested in achieving the result. And sometimes going in and just pounding the table over that issue, they just shut down. They just ignore you. They say just go away. You are of no use to me.

So as I look at engagement with other countries around the world, and I said this to the State Department, those values travel with us as a mantle everywhere we go. The fact that you don't begin every meeting articulating those, or start every conversation with a counterpart with those doesn't mean they don't know they are ever present. And it depends on what it is you are trying to achieve and how do you want to create the best conditions to achieve success.

And success is when you have achieved conditions on the ground that delivers those human rights to people, talking about it does nothing for them. Delivering them does. And I was interested in delivering them.

Q Do you recall situations where you feel like your efforts and the administration's efforts were able to reach the concrete deliverables?

A We have a lot of work in progress in countries. I wish I could tell you we had success. I think we struggled with the same challenges previous administrations did. I can't point to a lot of success on their part. One of their greatest disappointments of mine was the situation in Myanmar. And after a lot of hard work, including going there, I didn't feel like I was able to move the needle one bit and it was extremely disappointing to me.

Q Okay, thank you. You made a speech also in May 2017 to employees, I think basically laying out some of what you just laid out for us now about balancing interests and values. And reportedly, Brian Hook, the policy planning director who you have spoken of previously, that speech prompted a memo to you on this topic and specifically seemed to emphasize that the United States should engage in human rights issues with adversaries, but not with allies.

Can you speak to that approach and the deliberation or the development of that thinking in the Department?

A I don't -- I don't remember that.

Q Okay. You don't remember the specific memo?

A No.

Q Or you don't remember the concept?

A I don't remember the specific memo.

Q Do you have any recollection of the concept of --

A No.

Q -- using human rights more of a tool against adversaries as opposed to engaging with allies?

A Well, it, it's always been used as a tool. But in one location it might be a hammer, and in another it might be a set of pliers, and another it might be a screwdriver, and another it might be a chain saw.

Q Fair enough, great.

Okay. Well, let me move to refugee and humanitarian issues.

Mr. Secretary, on March 6, 2017, President Trump issued a Presidential memorandum to you, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Attorney General on, quote "implementing immediate heightened screening and settings of applications. For

he says in other immigration benefits ensuring enforcement of all laws for entry into the United States and increasing transparency among departments and agencies of the Federal Government and for the American people." That's a mouth full.

Specifically, the EO ordered you to report on the estimated long term costs of U.S. refugee admissions program and recommend ways to curtail those costs. And also to report on the estimated number of refugees who could be deported in countries of first asylum for the same cost as their resettlement in the United States.

To what extent did you have visibility into the drafting and preparation of this executive order? To what extent did the State Department analysis help inform?

A Did not have -- didn't directly participate in the drafting of the executive order. Did participate in kind of a broader discussion around the issue and in some consultation with consular affairs, I wanted to understand the practicalities of our ability to implement. And that was basically what I wanted to do. Be sure that others understood that this will take us some doing, because we are changing from the way consular affairs currently deals with applicants. And so, you know, just recognize we will do the best we can, if this is where you want to go.

So I think that's my recollection is those are the issues that we were most concerned about was just our ability to actually effect it, to put it into effect.

Q So is it fair to say then the nature of the discussions you had prior to that Presidential memorandum being issued were on how to manage its potential impacts? You didn't speak to the substance of what the memorandum was setting out to achieve.

A Well, we wanted to understand what he was trying to achieve so we would help him achieve it.

Q And what was your understanding at that time of what you think he was trying to achieve?

A I will speak broadly to that. My general interpretation and whether I agreed with the tactic of how to achieve it, this is where I have spoken previously. I shared the President's objective on most everything. We have a lot of differences over tactically how to get there.

So broadly on immigration I think the President was saying, we have an immigration law and we are going to enforce it and I agreed with that. And what I encountered in a number of areas was we had immigration laws and people were not enforcing them. They were using the flexibility within the law to grant waivers and they were doing it quite liberally with very little criteria. And I thought that was wrong.

I went back and I would read these laws. And I to try to put myself in the place of the Congress at the time they wrote that. I said well what were they trying to do? And concluded that people had decided they were going to do something different than what those immigration laws said they were supposed to do. And I think that's the way the President viewed it too.

Now the immigration laws are imperfect and there is a great debate going on today about it, as it should. And I was constantly conveying to the people in the Congress and up here on the Hill, if you don't like what we're doing fix the problem. Fix the problem, and it can be fixed. This can be fixed.

Q Could you speak briefly to the top line conclusions that you issued in response to this Presidential memorandum, specifically on the --

A I can't recall -- I mean I can recall the issues around execution. We were going to go have to put together some training modules that we could push out to Consular Affairs so consular officers out there knew here is what's changed, here is the new procedure.

We were going to have to provide them some additional resources and in all

likelihood because this was a much more comprehensive vetting obligation on their part. And so at that point we were really focused on how do we get them what they need so they can comply with the President's directive.

Q Okay. Let me just pivot to one last question. It's concerning refugee admissions. From the day of President Trump's inauguration through December 31, 2017, data shows that the United States accepted approximately 29,000 refugees, and that this was the lowest number accepted in an equivalent timeframe since at least 2002. And additionally, during your tenure there was an annual cap of 45,000 refugee admission visas, accepted by the President. This was the lowest cap since Congress created the refugee admissions program in 1980.

To what extent were you involved in shaping, and analyzing, and helping to inform the decision to cap refugee visas?

A We had the opportunity to give our input on kind of what we thought was an appropriate level, given the conflicts around the world we were dealing with. And we tried to express a view on what are the alternatives for refugees seeking asylum here. Where else -- where are they going to end up? So it was really to try to provide some perspective and inform people on both the practicalities of the number and how -- and then again back to how we would implement it.

I don't recall what the number had been -- I know -- I know in the prior administration they had raised the cap significantly for a couple of years above what it had been historically, is my recollection. And I think I did look at the prior historical trends of the cap to see, okay, had we operated kind of at this level before. And as much as anything that was to give me a sense -- of getting back to our ability to implement and execute.

And I don't remember all the specific numbers, but I do remember there had been

an uptick in the last year or 2 from the prior administration. And that the cap that was set was significantly lower, was actually I think more in line with historical trends than the more recent couple of years, but I may -- I may not be remembering that right.

Q Did the downturn both in the refugee visa cap and also the actual number of admissions into the United States, did it concern you? You mentioned that one of your most sort of concerted diplomatic efforts was around the situation in Burma, obviously Syria probably occupied a lot of your time. How did you see the impact of those downturns in refugee visas and admissions on other diplomatic engagements that you were pursuing related to conflict stabilization, solving humanitarian crisis?

A I think obviously some our friends and allies were disappointed at the level that had been set. But having said that, all -- everyone understood that the way you solve this problem is to stabilize the areas these people are leaving and changing the conditions that are causing them to leave. And if anything, it motivated me more to get on with our stabilization efforts in Syria, the cease-fire agreements, the deconfliction agreements, the deescalation agreements, some of which were in the works when we arrived, some which we expanded, and change the reason why these people are leaving.

Opening the aperture -- I could argue opening the aperture up wider, was that going to solve the problem? No, it is not going to solve the problem. So I was more, you know, I was more -- I was more concerned about how do we change the conditions on the ground that are causing people to flee. Let's get to the problem. And yes, I knew the lower level was viewed with a lot of concern by some of our friends and allies and they expressed that to me.

Q How do you feel you were able to make progress on the other end of the spectrum, you said focusing on stabilization in the area --

A I think we made a lot of progress as -- as success to defeat ISIS continued to

play out, we had a very good plan, rapid stabilization in liberated areas, I had sent additional State Department and USAID assets into northern Syria to work with UN agencies and other NGOs to quickly provide a security fence around cities that were liberated.

Get the power up and running, get the hospitals working, and try to get the schools back in order. Those were our priorities. And we said if we can get those three things in place, power, schools, hospitals, what we learn is the people would go home, even if their home was leveled, they would go back. And so I think we had a significant amount of success in becoming rapidly -- and this was really -- we learned this in Mosul is where we first kind of tested it. And it proved to be very successful there. We took the model on to Syria and as we were having success there the people on the ground were asking can you send us more assets and ultimately working with DOD they were able to take on more people on the ground that they could assure me they could protect.

And so I think it -- I think it was having a very positive thing. I think the cease-fire agreement we had in place around Darar in southern Syria in concert with the Jordanians and the Russians stemmed the flow of refugees out of that area. In fact, some people began to go back home from Jordan.

So, you know, that's where we were really putting our maximum efforts was how do we create conditions to get the people either to stay put or ultimately go back and try to resume their lives in an area that may be devastated but they have got to get started and that was where we were focused.

Sr. Democratic Staff. Before we close, I wanted to also check with my minority colleagues to see if there are any last topics or issues that you would like to --

Republican Counsel. I appreciate Secretary Tillerson's candor and openness.

Sr. Democratic Staff. But also for you, it is the last call, if there are any issues that

we haven't covered with you today that you think are important for the committee to know and if your counsel will let you.

Mr. Tillerson. Well, no, I just would close by saying as said in my statement, I really do -- I was sincere when I said I appreciate recognizing the important role of congressional oversight, it is fundamental to our Constitution, it is fundamental to our balance of power and our checks and balances.

And that's why when I received word that I was on a subpoena list I asked to reach out and tell them they don't need to do that. I am very happy to come up and try to be helpful in any way that I can. I appreciate that you all have been respectful of times I have had to reserve my answers for reasons I stated in my statement. I respect that the President and I had tough conversations. And I respect the need for the President to have private conversations. I respect the very hard work and oftentimes dangerous work that people in the State Department are doing today and I hope nothing I said today in any way jeopardizes any of their efforts because I certainly didn't want to. And I have nothing but just great admiration for what they do for this country every day.

Sr. Democratic Staff. As do we and the chairman. And I know the chairman communicated this to you but he really takes the oversight responsibilities seriously and has been very grateful for the cooperative spirit that you have shown in coming to meet with us today and giving us so much of your time. And we hope we can continue to build than as we conduct responsible effective oversight. So with that --

[Whereupon, at 5:23 p.m., the interview was concluded.]