

printed in our tourism marketing. But I guess this time you smelled something.”

Trump has dismissed the investigations of Russia's role in the election as “fake news” and a “witch hunt.”

The level of discretion surrounding the Seychelles meeting seems extraordinary given the frequency with which senior Trump advisers, including Flynn and Kushner, had interacted with Russian officials in the United States, including at the high-profile Trump Tower in New York.

Steven Simon, a National Security Council senior director for the Middle East and North Africa in the Obama White House, said: “The idea of using business cutouts, or individuals perceived to be close political leaders, as a tool of diplomacy is as old as the hills. These unofficial channels are desirable precisely because they are deniable; ideas can be tested without the risk of failure.”

Current and former U.S. officials said that while Prince refrained from playing a direct role in the Trump transition, his name surfaced so frequently in internal discussions that he seemed to function as an outside adviser whose opinions were valued on a range of issues, including plans for overhauling the U.S. intelligence community.

He appears to have particularly close ties to Bannon, appearing multiple times as a guest on Bannon's satellite radio program over the past year as well as in articles on the Breitbart Web site that Bannon ran before joining the Trump campaign.

In a July interview with Bannon, Prince said those seeking forceful U.S. leadership should “wait till January and hope Mr. Trump is elected.” And he lashed out at President Barack Obama, saying that because of his policies “the terrorists, the fascists, are winning.”

Days before the November election, Prince appeared on Bannon's program again, saying that he had “well-placed sources” in the New York City Police Department telling him they were preparing to make arrests in the investigation of former congressman Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) over allegations he exchanged sexually explicit texts with a minor. Flynn tweeted a link to the Breitbart report on the claim. No arrests occurred.

Prince went on to make a series of unfounded assertions that damaging material recovered from Weiner's computers would implicate Hillary Clinton and her close adviser, Huma Abedin, who was married to Weiner. He also called Abedin an “agent of influence very sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Prince and his family were major GOP donors in 2016. After the Republican convention, he contributed \$250,000 to Trump's campaign, the national party and a pro-Trump super PAC led by GOP mega-donor Rebekah Mercer. The Center for Responsive Politics reported that the family gave more than \$2.7 million to GOP candidates and super PACs, including about \$2.7 million from his sister, DeVos, and her husband.

Prince's father, Edgar Prince, built his fortune through an auto-parts company. Betsy married Richard DeVos Jr., heir to the Amway fortune.

Erik Prince has had lucrative contracts with the UAE government, which at one point paid his firm a reported \$529 million to help bring in foreign fighters to help assemble an internal paramilitary force capable of carrying out secret operations and protecting Emirati installations from terrorist attacks.

The Trump administration and the UAE appear to share a similar preoccupation with Iran. Current and former officials said that Trump advisers were focused throughout the transition period on exploring ways to get Moscow to break ranks with Tehran.

“Separating Russia from Iran was a common theme,” said a former intelligence official in the Obama administration who met with Trump transition officials. “It didn't seem very well thought out. It seemed a little premature. They clearly had a very specific policy position, which I found odd given that they hadn't even taken the reins and explored with experts in the U.S. government the pros and cons of that approach.”

Michael McFaul, former U.S. ambassador to Russia, said he also had discussions with people close to the Trump administration about the prospects of drawing Russia away from Iran. “When I would hear this, I would think, ‘Yeah that's great for you guys, but why would Putin ever do that?’” McFaul said. “There is no interest in Russia ever doing that. They have a long relationship with Iran. They're allied with Iran in fighting in Syria. They sell weapons to Iran. Iran is an important strategic partner for Russia in the Middle East.”

Following the New York meeting between the Emiratis and Trump aides, Zayed was approached by Prince, who said he was authorized to act as an unofficial surrogate for the president-elect, according to the officials. He wanted Zayed to set up a meeting with a Putin associate. Zayed agreed and proposed the Seychelles as the meeting place because of the privacy it would afford both sides. “He wanted to be helpful,” one official said of Zayed.

Wealthy Russians and Emirati royalty have a particularly large footprint on the islands. Signs advertising deep-sea fishing trips are posted in Cyrillic. Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov owns North Island, where Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, went on their honeymoon in 2011. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, president of the UAE, built a hilltop palace for himself with views across the chain of islands.

The Emiratis have given hundreds of millions of dollars to the Seychelles in recent years for causes including public health and affordable housing. But when the Emirati royal family visits, they are rarely seen.

“The jeep comes to their private jet on the tarmac and they disappear,” said one Seychellois official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he did not want to be seen as criticizing the Emiratis.

Zayed, the crown prince, owns a share of the Seychelles Four Seasons, a collection of private villas scattered on a lush hillside on the main island's southern shore, overlooking the Indian Ocean, according to officials in the Seychelles. The hotel is tucked away on a private beach, far from the nearest public road.

Current and former U.S. officials who have worked closely with Zayed, who is often referred to as MBZ, say it would be out of character for him to arrange the Jan. 11 meeting without getting a green light in advance from top aides to Trump and Putin, if not the leaders themselves. “MBZ is very cautious,” said an American businessman who knows Zayed. “There had to be a nod.”

The Seychelles meeting was deemed productive by the UAE and Russia but the idea of arranging additional meetings between Prince and Putin's associates was dropped, officials said. Even unofficial contacts between Trump and Putin associates had become too politically risky, officials said.

Sieff reported from the Seychelles. Julie Tate, Devlin Barrett, Matea Gold, Tom Hamburger and Rosalind S. Helderman contributed to this report.

HONORING CHIEF CLINT GREENWOOD

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, early this morning, Precinct 3 Assistant Chief Clint Greenwood put on his uniform, secured his badge over his heart, and he headed off to work.

As he arrived at the courthouse at 7 a.m., shots suddenly rang out. After the smoke cleared, Chief Greenwood was shot in the neck. His fellow officers rushed to his aid, and he was airlifted to a nearby Houston hospital, but it was too late. Texas lost another one of its finest men in blue.

The suspect is still at large, but not for long. As the investigation develops, it is still unclear if Deputy Chief Greenwood was specifically targeted or if he was ambushed because he wore the uniform. Law enforcement will do everything in their power to find and apprehend the murderous outlaw.

Chief Greenwood dedicated 30 years of his life to the law. I knew Clint when I worked as a judge in Houston, Texas. He was a prosecutor. He was a defense lawyer. He worked for the sheriff's department, and now more recently as a member of the constable's office. He was of strong character and a proud Texas lawman.

Texas prays for Chief Greenwood's family and the Harris County, Texas, constable's office. Our men and women who wear the badge are the best we have. They protect and serve our communities. Chief Greenwood's life may be gone, but his memory serves as a reminder of all those who give their lives for the thin blue line. Back the blue, Mr. Speaker. Back the blue.

And that is just the way it is.

ELECTRIC UTILITY TRANSMISSION LINES IN NATIONAL FORESTS

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, tonight I am pleased to announce the Electric Reliability and Forest Protection Act of 2017, cosponsored by my colleague Representative SCHRADER of Washington.

Thousands of miles of electric utility transmission lines run through our national forests, key infrastructure that literally keeps the lights on across the West. Unfortunately, existing Forest Service rules hinder effective removal of hazardous trees and safe management of transmission rights-of-way. In too many cases, the inability to address hazards in a timely fashion results in blackouts, damaged infrastructure, and even forest fires, something we have too much of in the West, as you know. This all could be prevented if electric utilities were allowed to remove the dangers in a timely fashion.

This bill will reform that broken system by streamlining the process for

utilities to receive Forest Service approval for long-term transmission maintenance plans, allowing them to take immediate action to remove hazardous trees as soon as they are identified, before they cause a fire.

This is a widely supported rule by rural communities, rural electric cooperatives, and many others. It is a good bipartisan effort. Let's get it done.

THE SMITH FAMILY ACHIEVED THE AMERICAN DREAM THROUGH HARD WORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BERGMAN). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, last month I had the privilege of meeting Lisa and Chad Smith and their charming son Jamil during a visit to Newland, North Carolina, in the Fifth District.

The Smiths are the proprietors of Forage Soaps, which began in 2014 with a \$50 purchase of supplies and a trip to the Avery County Farmers Market to sell their first batch of wild-crafted soaps made in their kitchen. Wild-crafted refers to plants collected from their natural or indigenous habitat. The Smiths handpicked these botanicals fresh from the trail with minimal environmental impact to ensure long-term sustainability.

Well, that first batch turned into a second batch and a third batch, and so on. As they continued to make soap, they bought better equipment and invested in larger orders of supplies. Word spread about their soap, and before they knew it, the Smiths were receiving invitations to attend craft and artisan shows. They were invited to put their soap in several local galleries, and it wasn't long before they were filling their first wholesale order.

Today their business includes a retail location that also functions as their studio as well as several small satellite locations and an online store. Chad works for Mountain Electric Cooperative full time, and Lisa has a master's degree in organic chemistry and biology. She has been making soap for more than 20 years.

The Smiths adopted Jamil when he was 18 months old. They were told he would never be able to speak and may never be able to walk. Today he does both and is attending school and thriving with their loving care. He even helps out with the business, where he loves to mix oils and wild-craft herbs. Their older children help with deliveries and during special events, while their grandchildren like to come on weekends to help stock shelves and run the cash register. It is truly a family affair.

Lisa likes to say she and Chad built their business one bar of soap at a time. They didn't take out business loans or expect to be an overnight suc-

cess. Instead, they started small and grew a little bit at a time, working long, hard hours, and eventually reinvesting in their business.

The Smiths are living proof that one can achieve the American Dream through hard work. It is an honor to represent them in Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GAETZ).

THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

I rise to speak on an issue important to so many Floridians, and that is the Florida Everglades. The Everglades are Florida. They are as iconic as the Blue Angels, the space shuttle, and even the orange. No one in Florida is unaffected by the fate of the Everglades. This is why I join my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in encouraging President Trump to remain focused on Everglades restoration.

Congress has invested in these projects before, and the Everglades ecosystem is improving as a result. But there is debate about how to proceed. In short, the question is: Should the government buy more Everglades land?

I say no. Forty-two percent of the land in south Florida is already owned by the government. We should get the government out of the real estate business, not deeper into it.

Instead of a land buy, we must finish the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. Since 2000, this plan has enjoyed bipartisan support. Taxpayer dollars go toward important environmental work. The plan respects private property rights, doesn't harm agricultural communities who play a critical role in Florida's economies, and advances the cause of restoration.

Florida's Everglades are a national treasure. We can't afford to lose them. Finishing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan will ensure that our river of grass will be around for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I take particular pride in thanking both Congressmen ROONEYS from my State for their outstanding leadership.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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CONFIRMATION OF NEIL GORSUCH TO THE SUPREME COURT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to come to the floor this evening to coanchor the Congressional Black Caucus hour about the present nominee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch.

I am very pleased that my good friend from Texas, Representative SHEILA JACKSON LEE, a distinguished

member of the Judiciary Committee, has agreed to coanchor this hour with me.

Mr. Speaker, I am chair of the working group for the Congressional Black Caucus that looks at nominees for Federal courts. So, I have buried myself in the record of Neil Gorsuch and wrote the testimony that we submitted to the Senate.

What I will do is speak for a few minutes generally about the nominee, and then I will go to my good friend from Texas. I am very pleased that another good friend, Mr. DON PAYNE, Jr., is here from the State of New Jersey, and we will hear from him as well.

Now, just as the Congress has been polarized so has the court been polarized, if you look at the liberal and conservative blocks in that way. But, of course, since the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, there has been a 4-4 split. Justice Anthony Kennedy, who is still a Member of the Court is not always a predictable conservative, though he tends to vote with the conservatives.

What has happened in the Senate is entirely predictable, at least today. In an unprecedented move, the Senate refused to hear from or even meet the nominee of President Obama. There was almost a full year, yet the Senate refused to take up that nominee.

What happened today was not payback. If you listened to the testimony, you would see that there are good reasons why the Senate Democrats today decided to filibuster Judge Gorsuch.

I want to begin because I am speaking for the Congressional Black Caucus with his views as they affect African-Americans and, by definition, others who depend upon the antidiscrimination laws and the Constitution of the United States.

There is more than enough in the record on race related matters from Judge Gorsuch's 10th Circuit service to oppose his nomination. But let me focus for a moment on his pre-court service, which seems to have predicted what he would do in the court of appeals.

He was a principal deputy to the principal who had jurisdiction over the Civil Rights Division. We have to pay attention to the fact that the inspector general, during Judge Gorsuch's time in the Justice Department, found that the Civil Rights Division, where he had some oversight, had been politicized in order to stifle civil rights enforcement. As you might imagine, the Congressional Black Caucus had to pay attention to that finding by a neutral investigator.

We also are very concerned about how Gorsuch is a Justice Department Official treated a Georgia election law. As we know, election laws from the South—of course, there has been a historic decision that has made the Voting Rights Act far less effective than it was—but certainly during most of the time of the Act, Southern states had to go through the Justice Department to