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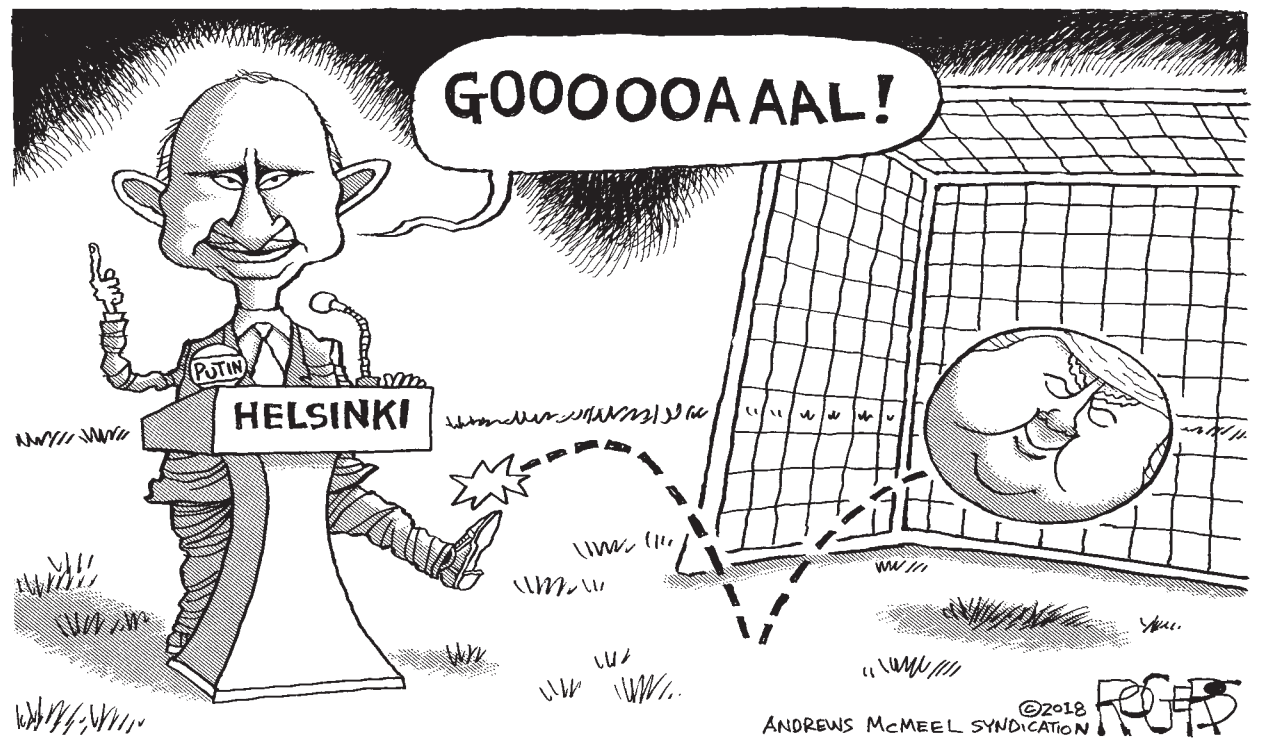


United States intelligence says Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Russian President Vladimir Putin denies it.

Q: Who do you believe?

- U.S. intelligence
- Vladimir Putin

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GUEST EDITORIAL

U.S. fiscal trajectory called 'unsustainable'

The Government Accountability Office has once again warned Congress the federal government's current fiscal trajectory is "unsustainable."

In a report submitted to Congress on June 21, the GAO notes the federal deficit has continued to grow every year in the last few years. In fiscal year 2015, the federal deficit was \$439 billion, in fiscal year 2016 it was \$587 billion, and in fiscal year 2017 it was \$666 billion.

Interest on the national debt, Social Security and Medicare spending have been projected by both the GAO and the Congressional Budget Office to continue to be the biggest drivers of government spending moving forward.

The GAO report cites projections by the CBO that "increased costs in Medicare, Social Security, and net interest will account for more than two-thirds of the approximately \$3 trillion increase in total federal spending over the next 10 years."

The aging population is sure to continue driving higher health-care-related spending for some time, absent policy changes of the sort Congress has yet to show any appetite for.

Meanwhile, the national debt, and the cost of interest on the debt, will continue to

Orange County (Calif.) Register

bloat and therefore further constrain future policymakers.

Practically, the GAO cites CBO estimates net interest costs in 2018 will be \$316 billion. If nothing is done to alter this trajectory, it is projected that by 2028 the federal government "will spend more on net interest than it will spend on either defense or nondefense discretionary outlays." And by 2046, net interest costs alone will rise to 21.6 percent of federal spending.

Will Congress do anything about it? There's no reason to believe so.

On June 20, the Senate couldn't even trim \$15 billion in spending authority. Only about \$1.1 billion in savings would've actually been realized, but that was apparently too difficult for the Senate.

As is often the case, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, said what needed to be said on this failure of the Senate to exercise a minute amount of responsibility. "It is time for Congress to grow up and acknowledge that government won't be able to do anyone any good or fund any politician's priority when it goes broke," said Paul.

Why doesn't Trump admit it?

Was Russia's effort to interfere in the 2016 election the most important issue on the table at President Trump's Helsinki summit with Vladimir Putin? No. But it's not an unimportant issue, either. So he knew it would play a big role in the Trump-Putin post-summit news conference.

There are all sorts of aspects to the Trump-Russia affair, but in light of special counsel Robert Mueller's decision to indict 12 Russian intelligence agents on the Friday before the Monday summit, the president also knew reporters would want to hear him specifically affirm Mueller's allegation the Russian agents hacked the Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton campaign.

When Trump was asked a simple, straightforward question — U.S. intelligence agencies say Russia interfered. Putin denies it. Who do you believe? — Trump would not give a simple, straightforward answer.

Instead, he started with misdirection. "You have groups that are wondering why the FBI never took the server," he said. "Why haven't they taken the server?"

Then Trump said his top intelligence officials came to him and "said they think it's Russia," meaning they believe Russia was behind the hacks. On the other hand, Trump said, "I have President Putin; he just said it's not Russia." Trump cast doubt on the U.S. agencies' conclusion: "I don't see any reason why it would be (Russia)," he said, "but I really do want to see the server." And finally: "So I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today."

The bottom line is Trump, the president of the United States, would not accept the U.S. government's assessment of the Russian effort and hinted he had at least as much, or more, faith in Putin's version of events.

So why did he do what he did? There have always been two parts to the Trump-Russia probe: the what-Russia-did part, which is the investigation into Russia's actions during the campaign, and the get-Trump part, which is the effort to use the investigation to remove him from office.

Trump's problem is he has always refused, or been unable, to separate the two. One is about national security and international relations, while the other is about Donald Trump.

Trump's approach doesn't work for the Trump-Russia probe. There's no reason he could not accept Russia tried to interfere in the election.

So in response to the "Who do you believe?" question in Helsinki, Trump could simply have said: "I believe the verdict of U.S. agencies. Russia did it. We've retaliated, and we'll do more. But my adversaries at home have turned this into a politically motivated crusade to cripple the president of the United States, and it's time to stop it."

Trump has gotten himself into similar messes before. In the past, he escaped by expressing (belated) faith in the intel agencies' Russia verdict. And on the day after he returned from Helsinki, he did it again, telling the press that "I accept" the Russia conclusion.

Will it work? We'll see. But how many more times will Trump do this? Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

COLUMNIST

BYRON YORK



How to destroy-it-yourself

While I was traveling, my contractor worked on my house. I was a little nervous about letting him do it all without supervision, but since I don't even know which end of a hammer is the one you pound in screws with, I'm not sure he needed any of my helpful advice anyway.

When I got home, I was pleasantly surprised to find he had done everything I had asked for — and more. For instance, I didn't ask him to leave a big pile of scrap lumber, pieces of dry-wall, empty paint cans and soda bottles on the front porch, but he did it for no extra charge! That's just the way he is. I'd like to call him and thank him, but the number I have for him is out of service.

One thing I thought I could tackle was painting. How hard can that be? Brush and can, meet window frame and cabinets. The big-box do-it-yourself stores make it look so easy. All the colors you can imagine! All the brushes, buckets, rollers and drop cloths! What could possibly go wrong?

But at the counter, they started asking questions. Did I want matte, flat, eggshell, satin, semi-gloss or glossy? What? No, I want paint. The kind that comes in a can. Why are you making this so hard?

The people behind me were getting restless and starting to make rude remarks.

"I guess some people don't watch many home improvement shows." "Some people can even screw up a man cave."

"Take your time. I didn't have anything else to do today but visit Mom in the hospital, take my kid to dance lessons, buy groceries, mow the lawn and pay bills. It's all good."

Some people are just so impatient. Painting calls for zen-like concentration and focus. One little mistake, and — see, that's just what I'm talking about. I shouldn't have left the open can on the floor in front of the door I was painting. I should have known my neighbor Ralph would barge in and start yelling about his property values going down because of all the trash on my front porch. The nearly full can of Sunrise Peach semi-gloss spewed across the drop cloth and all over the new kitchen floor.

"I'm trying to sell this house to finally get away from you and all your weird friends who show up at all kinds of hours and — oh, my God, what an ugly paint job," said Ralph. "Now I'll never unload my house. I've called the code inspector, and you'll be hearing from him soon!"

I always feel incompetent about home improvements. I go to friends' houses and they'll say things like, "Bob installed a new water heater when the old one went kablooie last week." Or "Gladys painted the kitchen over the weekend; doesn't it look great?"

How do they know how to do these things? Where was I when everybody learned how to do everything for themselves? What do I know about fixing a house? Sometimes I want to open the window and scream. Like right now. Except this stupid window won't open. That's funny, it opened before I painted it.

I have no idea what's wrong with it. I guess I'm gonna have to call a plumber and have it fixed.

Contact Jim Mullen at mullen.jim@gmail.com.

LIVIN' LA VIDA LACY

LACY GARRISON



You can get caught creepin'

Ever drive around just to browse other people's homes? Ross and I do this a lot actually. If I see a color or specific feature I like, I'll take a photo or even roll down my window to ask the homeowner for all the deets. Honestly, this has worked out a lot better for me than scrolling through Pinterest because local people will give out names, numbers along with any other info I may need.

Right now, my favorite street to drive down is Westwood Drive with all the lovely homes along the river. When I drive, I go slowly so I can properly check out door colors, landscaping and lighting. It's a great way for me to get ideas that may be feasible for my own home renovation.

Naturally, I was driving the other day and decided to slow to a stop. I've been eyeing this sunroom for weeks so I finally decided to whip out my phone and take a photo to show Hugh (our handyman). As I looked through my phone, I realized a lady was waving me down. In this moment, I realized I had two options. Either speed away or park and explain myself. I chose the latter as I enjoy this scenic route home once, sometimes twice a day.

After explaining that my husband and I are renovating, she wasn't creeped out at all. In fact, she gave me a tour of her home, shared renovation tips and discussed her own future projects for her 1940s house. I left with a new acquaintance, Mrs. Sandy. It's times like this I'm happy to be back home among such friendly and welcoming people.

This isn't the first time I've been caught creepin'. Last summer, Grandma and I were driving on West Sparta Street. She loved the color of the green craftsman house and had been trying to find a color swatch to match it (rather unsuccessfully). I convinced Grandma to park so I could jump out and take a close-up of the color. As I approached the house, the entire family was sitting on the side porch and I froze like a deer caught in headlights. After a quick explanation, the homeowners happily showed me through their home and we left with the names and brands of all the colors Grandma needed.

With all this being said, I'm sure you're wondering how far along we are with our renovations. We're going room by room with ours starting with the living room. It has been repainted, four can lights have been added to the ceiling along with new wider crown molding. Hugh has started restoring our fireplace while Scotty Walker worked his magic on a new white mantle. It's beautiful! Oh, and last week Hugh replaced two windows, removed two old heaters and covered the holes with oak from other parts of the house.

As I've mentioned before, it's seems painstakingly slow, but even just a coat of paint makes a world of difference and I'm so thankful for this home. The next room on the list is the dining room and my fingers are itching to order some lovely blue and white Schumacher wallpaper. Stay tuned for more updates!

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