The Race for The White House

20 SEPTEMBER, 2016

Skeptical of Russia, Clinton seen going toe-to-toe with Putin
Skeptical of Russia, Clinton seen going toe-to-toe with Putin
When Hillary Clinton attended her first major White House meeting on Russia in February 2009, the new secretary of state insisted that she wanted to play a leading role in President Barack Obama’s effort to “reset” U.S. relations with Moscow.

After blasts, Clinton, Trump trade charges on national security
Democrat Hillary Clinton on Monday accused Republican Donald Trump of aiding Islamic State recruitment, while Trump said she was weak on national security as bomb blasts in New York and New Jersey resonated on the U.S. presidential trail.

Czech president would cast ballot for Trump in U.S. vote
Czech President Milos Zeman would vote for Donald Trump if he were casting a ballot in the U.S. election in November, he said on Tuesday.

Clinton, Trump vie for world leaders’ attention in New York
With national security again a major U.S. election issue after bombings in New York and New Jersey, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump sought to burnish their foreign-policy credentials on Monday by meeting world leaders at the United Nations.

Japan PM stresses importance of TPP in Clinton meeting
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met U.S. Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on Monday and stressed it was important for the United States to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal that she opposes, Japanese officials said.

U.S. still grapples with powerful women, says Obama
U.S. society is uncomfortable with powerful women and that is why the United States has not yet elected a woman president, President Barack Obama said on Sunday.

POLL - Race tightens in projected U.S. Electoral College vote
An election analysis conducted in the Reuters/Ipsos States of the Nation project shows that the race has tightened considerably over the past few weeks, with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump projected to win Florida, an essential battleground state, if the election were held today.

BREAKINGVIEWS - Trump's economic plan built on typical hyperbole
Donald Trump’s new economic plan is built on typical hyperbole. The Republican White House nominee on Thursday said his proposals to cut taxes and red tape would boost annual U.S. GDP growth to 3.5 percent and create 25 million jobs over a decade. But there are a lot of big ifs.

Despite flaws, paperless voting machines remain widespread in U.S.
One in four registered voters in the United States live in areas that will use electronic voting machines that do not produce a paper backup in the November presidential election despite concerns that they are vulnerable to tampering and malfunctions, according to a Reuters analysis.
Skeptical of Russia, Clinton seen going toe-to-toe with Putin

By Warren Strobel and Matt Spetalnick

When Hillary Clinton attended her first major White House meeting on Russia in February 2009, the new secretary of state insisted that she wanted to play a leading role in President Barack Obama’s effort to “reset” U.S. relations with Moscow. But while Clinton became implementer-in-chief for one of Obama’s signature first-term initiatives, she was consistently more skeptical than most of his top aides about how far Russian leader Vladimir Putin was prepared to go in turning the page, according to current and former U.S. officials.

That stance is indicative of how she would go about dealing with Moscow if she is elected U.S. president on Nov. 8, aides to both Clinton and Obama told Reuters.

With U.S. relations with Moscow already plumbing post-Cold War lows, the aides and veteran Russia watchers said she would likely take a harder line than Obama or Republican nominee Donald Trump, who has praised Putin as a strong leader.

Dealing with Putin, who is flexing his geopolitical muscle from Ukraine to Syria to cyberspace, will be among Clinton’s biggest foreign policy challenges -- one made more daunting by the personal bad blood between them.

Jake Sullivan, a former top State Department aide and now senior Clinton campaign advisor, said Clinton could consider the shipping of lethal arms to Ukraine government forces and the creation of no-fly or safe zones in Syria. Obama has rejected both ideas.

While such moves could further stoke tensions and might even face resistance from some U.S. allies, Sullivan said in an interview with Reuters that Clinton could manage ties with Russia effectively because Putin would “respect her as U.S. president, her strength, her clarity, her predictability.”

According to current and former Clinton advisers, she could consider other policy moves such as stiffer sanctions against Russia over Ukraine and doing more to wean Russia’s neighbors off reliance on Moscow’s energy supplies.

Russia is watching warily.

“She is not perceived by many people as the Kremlin’s preferred candidate,” said Andrey Kortunov, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, a think tank close to the Russian Foreign Ministry.

“Many here believe that she would be tougher on Russia than Obama,” he
said. Clinton’s first fence-mending effort in March 2009 was not so much a show of strength than of diplomatic clumsiness. She handed Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov a red button that was supposed to have the word "reset" on it. Instead, it was labeled with the Russian word meaning "overcharged."

Clinton’s distrust of Putin deepened, mirrored by his growing list of grievances against her. By the time she prepared to leave the State Department in early 2013, former officials said, she wrote at least two confidential memos to Obama urging a more hard-nosed approach. At the time, many in the president’s inner circle were not convinced the reset had run its course, they said.

Since Clinton’s departure, Putin has reasserted Russia on the world stage, seizing Ukraine’s Crimea region and intervening militarily in Syria’s civil war. U.S. officials have linked the hacking of Democratic Party computers to the Russian government – which the Kremlin denies.

"NOT AS IF SHE WENT GRUMPILY"
Like most national security policies under Obama, the attempt to "reset" U.S.-Russian relations was managed from the White House by the president himself, along with aides from his 2008 campaign, including Russia specialist Michael McFaul.

"No one should pretend that this wasn’t an Obama-driven policy," said Philip Gordon, Clinton’s top Europe adviser at the State Department. "But it’s also not as if she went grumpily to the table and was told by the president ‘you’re doing it’ ... She thought it had logic."

McFaul, who later became ambassador to Russia, said in an interview that from the first White House meeting on Russia in early 2009 Clinton was skeptical of the prospects for transforming U.S.-Russian relations in a way that "some of us aspired to back then."

Two other officials backed up his account.

The first fruits of the reset were promising.

Putin had - temporarily, it turned out - stepped down as president, with the younger, reform-minded Dmitry Medvedev in his place.

Obama and Medvedev signed a new strategic nuclear arms control pact, cooperated to sanction Iran for its nuclear program and agreed to let U.S. troops and equipment transit Russia to support an American military "surge" in Afghanistan.

But after little more than two years, the "reset" ran out of steam. By mid-2011, it was clear that Putin was returning to the presidency.

A DECADE OF BROADSIDES

Clinton first met Putin at his residence outside Moscow in March 2010. She persuaded him to back tougher U.N. sanctions on Iran, according to two people with knowledge of the session.

In front of the TV cameras, however, Putin railed against U.S. trade and economic policies as Clinton watched.

Clinton and Putin have been exchanging broadsides for nearly a decade.

Putin, a former KGB agent, "doesn't have a soul," Clinton quipped on the eve of the 2008 New Hampshire presidential primary, riffing off of President George W. Bush’s comment seven years earlier that he had looked into Putin’s eyes and seen his soul.

The Russian leader retorted: "At a minimum, a head of state should have a head."

A U.S. official who was involved in Russia policymaking said Clinton sometimes chose her words poorly, inflaming Russian resentment over its perceived post-Cold War humiliation, a nationalist strain that Putin has long used to his advantage.

"She played into that," said the official, who requested anonymity. The most serious rift of Clinton’s tenure occurred in late 2011, as crowds filled the streets of Russian cities protesting parliamentary elections marred by allegations of voting fraud. Clinton, in a statement approved by the White House, called the election "neither free nor fair." Putin, who was preparing to retake the presidency, accused her of trying to foment a new Russian revolution. A steady slide in contacts between Clinton and the Russian leadership and in overall relations followed.

"Secretary Clinton’s views on Russia were always a little harder-edged than President Obama’s," said John Beyrle, Obama’s first ambassador to Moscow. That partly reflected a "splitting up of responsibilities," he said. Obama cooperated with Medvedev; Clinton grappled with Lavrov and Putin.

Some Russia watchers say Clinton's record was mixed.

"The reset was the right approach," said Thomas Graham, former Russia adviser under Bush’s Republican administration. But he faulted Clinton and Obama’s team for not doing more to "actively reach out to Putin and open lines of communication."

A file photo of then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (L) talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin during a meeting before the official dinner for the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Vladivostok September 8, 2012. REUTERS/Jim Watson/Pool
After blasts, Clinton, Trump trade charges on national security

By James Oliphant

Democrat Hillary Clinton on Monday accused Republican Donald Trump of aiding Islamic State recruitment, while Trump said she was weak on national security as bomb blasts in New York and New Jersey resonated on the U.S. presidential trail.

Both candidates for the Nov. 8 election tried to use the weekend attacks to flex their credentials to protect America as world leaders gathered in security-heightened New York for the annual United Nations General Assembly.

Clinton said Trump's rhetoric against what he calls "radical Islamic terrorism" was helping Islamic State recruit more fighters.

"We know that a lot of the rhetoric we've heard from Donald Trump has been seized on by terrorists, in particular ISIS, because they are looking to make this into a war against Islam rather than a war against jihadists," she told reporters in White Plains, New York. ISIS is an acronym used for Islamic State.

Trump fired back by saying Clinton bore some responsibility for the violence by not persuading President Barack Obama to leave a residual force of U.S. troops in Iraq when she was his secretary of state from 2009 to 2013.

Obama and the Iraqi government failed to reach agreement at the end of 2011 on extending a U.S.-Iraqi status of forces agreement, and most American troops were withdrawn.

Trump has sought to tie Clinton to the decisions of the Obama administration.

"Her attacks on me are all meant to deflect from her record of unleashing this monster," Trump told a large crowd in Fort Myers, Florida.

The campaigns weighed in after the bomb incidents and a stabbing attack at a mall in central Minnesota.

In the most serious incident, a bomb went off in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood on Saturday, injuring 29 people. An unexploded pressure-cooker bomb was found nearby.

Earlier that day, a pipe bomb went off in Seaside Park, New Jersey.

On Monday, an Afghanistan-born American suspected in some of the incidents was arrested in nearby Linden, New Jersey, after a gunbattle with police. Authorities had said earlier they wanted to question Ahmad Khan Rahami, a 28-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen, about the Chelsea and Seaside Park bombings. The incidents, just days after the 15th
The renewed focus on terrorism came as Clinton and Trump prepared for their first debate next Monday at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, east of the city.

With world leaders gathered in New York for the U.N. conclave, Clinton was expected to meet leaders of Japan, Egypt and Ukraine later on Monday, while Trump was expected to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

A U.S.-led coalition has been fighting Islamic State mainly through air strikes in Syria and Iraq.

Trump, who has based much of his campaign message on arguing that the United States is no longer safe and that he alone can protect the nation, told Fox News on Monday morning that he expected more attacks.

"I think this is something that maybe will ... happen more and more all over the country," he said.

*COUNCIL IN CHIEF TEST*

At a speech in Philadelphia on Monday, Clinton called for vigilance. "This is a fast-moving situation and a sobering reminder that we need steady leadership in a dangerous world," she said.

Trump seized on a government report that said 858 immigrants from countries with which the United States has national security concerns who were pegged for deportation were mistakenly granted citizenship. He said the report showed the need for tighter control over who gets into the United States.

"Immigration security is national security," Trump said in Fort Myers. Peter Feaver, a political science professor at Duke University who worked on the National Security Council under Republican President George W. Bush, said Clinton was trying to argue Trump did not pass the commander in chief test.

"When bad news happens, she wants to be able to say, this is why you need a steady hand on the tiller," Feaver said.

Czech president would cast ballot for Trump in U.S. vote

Czech President Milos Zeman would vote for Donald Trump if he were casting a ballot in the U.S. election in November, he said on Tuesday.

"I will not interfere in internal American politics. I will only say, if I were an American citizen, yes, I would vote for Donald Trump," he told idnes.cz, the website of daily newspaper Mlada Fronta Dnes. The outspoken Zeman has often ran counter to government policy on a number of issues and has even called for referendums on Czech membership of the European Union and NATO, although he has said he would back staying in both.

In August, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka said Democrat Hillary Clinton would be a better guarantee of security. Zeman said in the videotaped interview Clinton would continue the policies of President Barack Obama that he said were linked with several failures, adding "the entire Middle East has been put in disarray, festering wounds remain". Zeman is not the first in the region to throw his weight behind the Republican nominee. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has also said Trump’s migration and foreign policy plans were vital for Hungary and called those of Clinton “deadly”.

Czech Republic’s President Milos Zeman gets into a car upon his arrival at Moscow’s Vnukovo-3 airport to join the celebrations of the 70th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, May 8, 2015. REUTERS/Host Photo Agency/RIA Novosti
Clinton, Trump vie for world leaders' attention in New York

By James Oliphant

With national security again a major U.S. election issue after bombings in New York and New Jersey, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump sought to burnish their foreign-policy credentials on Monday by meeting world leaders at the United Nations.

For Clinton, the Democratic presidential nominee, it was a return to a role she knows well after she served as President Barack Obama's secretary of state for four years. Trump, the Republican nominee, is a newcomer to the global stage who is hurriedly trying to play catch-up.

In rapid succession, Clinton met briefly with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and then Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. Trump also met Sisi minutes after the Egyptian leader spoke with Clinton in the same Manhattan hotel. The meetings came on a day that started with Clinton suggesting Trump’s harsh rhetoric toward Muslims aids the Islamic State militant group’s recruiting efforts.

Security questions arose in each of Monday’s bilateral sessions, which took place as world leaders gathered for the U.N. General Assembly, with Clinton and Abe discussing concerns over North Korea and maritime issues involving China. Clinton and Trump both spoke with Sisi about working more closely with Egypt to combat the Islamic State threat. Trump’s campaign released a statement saying that Trump “highlighted how Egypt and the U.S. share a common enemy and the importance of working together in defeating radical Islamic terrorism.”

With Clinton, Sisi also discussed his goal of moving Egypt toward “a new civil society, a new modern country that upholds the rule of law and respects human rights and liberties.” Clinton and Poroshenko addressed Russian incursions into Ukrainian territory. Clinton started the session by saying Ukraine faces “very real problems and threats from Russian aggression” and that she was “anxious to know how we can be supportive.” The session also resonated because of Trump’s praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this month. Trump called Putin a stronger leader than Obama, rattling both Democrats and Republicans in Washington.

The evening was not without drama, starting with Clinton’s motorcade zooming through packed New York streets at rush hour and then quickly rushing from hotel to hotel.

Japan PM stresses importance of TPP in Clinton meeting

By David Brunnstrom

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met U.S. Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on Monday and stressed it was important for the United States to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal that she opposes, Japanese officials said.

Abe and Clinton met for about 15 minutes at Abe’s hotel in New York, where he is attending the United Nations General Assembly, the officials said. The meeting was held at Clinton’s request, they said.

The two stressed the importance of strengthening the U.S.-Japan security relationship and both outlined their known positions on the 12-nation TPP, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The pact has been agreed, but not ratified by the United States or Japan.

Clinton, the Democratic candidate in the Nov. 8 U.S. presidential election,
U.S. society is uncomfortable with powerful women and that is why the United States has not yet elected a woman president, President Barack Obama said on Sunday. Obama, who is eager to see fellow Democrat Hillary Clinton succeed him in office, told a fundraiser for her in New York that the election between his former secretary of state and Republican businessman Donald Trump should not be close.

However, political polarization in the country would make it tight, he said. The first African-American U.S. president then told the group of donors why he thought a woman had never held the office.

"There's a reason why we haven't had a woman president," he said. "We as a society still grapple with what it means to see powerful women. And it still troubles us in a lot of ways, unfairly. And that expresses itself in all sorts of ways."

Obama has often spoken about the role of strong women in his life, including his mother, grandmother, wife and daughters. Polls have tightened between Clinton, a former U.S. senator and first lady, and Trump, a real-estate tycoon.

"This should not be a close election, but it will be," Obama said. "And the reason it will be is not because of Hillary's flaws, but rather because, structurally, we've become a very polarized society," he said.

The president has not hidden his disdain for Trump, who was one of the leaders of the movement that questioned whether Obama was born in the United States. Trump conceded on Friday that Obama was U.S. born.

Obama told the donors that Trump was unlike the two candidates he faced in the 2008 and 2012 general elections.

"When I ran against John McCain, we had deep differences, but I couldn't say that he was not qualified to be president of the United States," Obama said of his 2008 opponent.

"I couldn't say that electing Mitt Romney would be an unmitigated disaster. This guy (Trump) is not qualified to be president."
An election analysis conducted in the Reuters/Ipsos States of the Nation project shows that the race has tightened considerably over the past few weeks, with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump projected to win Florida, an essential battleground state, if the election were held today.

The project, which is based on a weekly tracking poll of more than 15,000 Americans, shows that the 2016 presidential race could end in a photo finish on Nov. 8, with the major-party candidates running nearly even in the Electoral College, the body that ultimately selects the president. The States of the Nation project, which delivers a weekly tally of support for the candidates in every state, shows that the race has tightened in several traditional battlegrounds. Pennsylvania has been moved from a likely win for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton to a tossup; Ohio has been moved from a tossup to a likely win for Clinton. And Florida is now considered a likely win for the Republican nominee, with 50 percent support for Trump to 46 percent support for Clinton.

If the election were held today, the project estimates that Clinton has a 60 percent chance of winning by 18 electoral votes. Last week, the project estimated that Clinton had a 83 percent chance of winning the election.

In a separate national Reuters/Ipsos tracking poll, Clinton continues to lead Trump by 4 percentage points, and her recent bout with pneumonia doesn’t appear to have scared away her supporters. The national Sept. 9-15 tracking poll showed that 42 percent of likely voters supported Clinton while 38 percent backed Trump. Clinton, who has mostly led Trump in the poll since the Democratic and Republican national conventions ended in July, regained the advantage this week after her lead briefly faded in late August. Clinton has an advantage among minorities, women, people who make more than $75,000 a year, and those with moderate political leanings. Trump has an advantage with whites, men, avid churchgoers, and people who are nearing retirement age.

States of the Nation

**CLINTON**

45% of vote

Predicted winner

**TRUMP**

40% of vote

In this scenario: Currently, Reuters/Ipsos estimates overall turnout at around 60%, although that rate varies among different demographic groups. Minority turnout, for example, is expected to be about 43%, while about 59% of African-American women and 68% of White men are projected to cast ballots.

Clinton’s chance of winning is about 61%, by a margin of about 14 electoral votes.
Trump gets skewered, Clinton finds support at Emmy awards

By Piya Sinha-Roy

As the U.S. presidential election draws near, television’s stars didn’t hold back on their opinions at Sunday’s Emmy awards, some taking jabs at Republican nominee Donald Trump while others voiced support for Democratic hopeful Hillary Clinton. During his opening monologue, Emmy host Jimmy Kimmel called out producer Mark Burnett, the producer of reality series "The Apprentice" and "Celebrity Apprentice" which Donald Trump hosted, saying "who is to blame for the Trump phenomenon? That guy." "If Donald Trump gets elected and he builds that wall, the first person we are throwing over it is Mark Burnett," Kimmel said, setting the political tone of the show 50 days before America elects its next president. Burnett, who later accepted the best reality series Emmy for "The Voice," joked on stage that he had just received a call from Clinton criticizing Kimmel for giving Trump "free publicity on ABC." "I'm sure Donald was thrilled with him, I'm sure he's emailing Jimmy right now saying thanks for the free media," Burnett told reporters backstage. Trump, known for his rapid-fire responses on Twitter, had nothing to say about the Emmys. After winning best comedy actress for a fifth consecutive time for HBO's "Veep," Julia Louis-Dreyfus, who plays flawed U.S. president Selina Meyer on the show, said "I want to personally apologize for the current political climate." "I think that 'Veep' has torn down the wall between comedy and politics; our show started out as a political satire but it now feels like a sobering documentary," she said on stage. "Master of None" star Aziz Ansari, who penned an essay in June for the New York Times entitled "Why Trump Makes Me Scared for My Family," quipped on stage, "I've decided I'm going with Trump." "I'm recommending that we get rid of all Muslim and Mexican people from the ceremony. This would be so much easier at the Oscars," the Muslim actor joked, hinting at the controversy over the lack of diversity at film’s Oscar awards. "Mum, dad, you need to be escorted out immediately," he added. Backstage, "Transparent" creator Jill Soloway, who won best directing for a comedy series, criticized Trump for "other-izing people." "He blames Muslims and Mexicans for problems ... This is other -izing with a capital O. He needs to be called out every chance we get for being one of most dangerous monsters to ever approach our lifetimes," Soloway said. "Saturday Night Live" star Kate McKinnon won best supporting comedy actress and thanked Clinton, one of the people she plays, and got a loud cheer. In response, Clinton tweeted "Congratulations on your Emmy, Kate! Big fan of yours, too," with a photo of McKinnon in character as Clinton.

Weeks to go before the election. One out of every five likely voters said they do not support Clinton or Trump for president. In comparison, about one out of every 10 likely voters wouldn’t support Obama or Republican challenger Mitt Romney at a similar point in the 2012 presidential campaign. Respondents took the survey after video surfaced of Clinton nearly collapsing at a Sept. 11 memorial in New York on Sunday. Her campaign later said she had a non-contagious, bacterial form of pneumonia. The video sparked a renewed discussion about the health of both candidates. Trump, 70, would be the oldest president to take office, while Clinton, 68, would be the second oldest. Clinton and Trump candidates have since released details of their personal health. Clinton’s doctors said her physical exam was normal, apart from the pneumonia, and that she was in excellent mental condition. Trump released a note from his doctor saying that he was in "excellent physical health." Americans do not appear to be overly concerned with the health of either candidate. According to a separate question in the poll conducted this week, most American adults said the issue would make "no difference" to how they voted. A negligible percentage of Clinton supporters said concerns about her health made them "less likely" to vote for her. Clinton led all candidates in a four-way poll of likely voters that included Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party and Jill Stein of the Green Party. Seven percent of respondents supported Johnson, and 2 percent backed Stein. The Reuters/Ipsos poll is conducted online in English in all 50 states. The latest horserace poll surveyed 1,579 likely voters over the past week. The question on the candidates’ health surveyed 1,779 American adults from Sept. 12-16. Both polls had a credibility interval, a measure of accuracy, of 3 percentage points. National polls have produced varying measurements of support during the 2016 campaign for Clinton and Trump. The differences are partly due to the fact that some polls, like Reuters/Ipsos, try to include only likely voters, while others include all registered voters. The Reuters/Ipsos tracking poll gathers responses every day and reports results twice a week, so it often detects trends in sentiment before most other polls. Polling aggregators, which calculate averages of major polls, have shown that Clinton’s lead over Trump has been shrinking this month. The most recent individual polls put Clinton’s advantage at 1 or 2 percentage points.
ELECTIONS 2016

BREAKINGVIEWS

Trump's economic plan built on typical hyperbole

By Gina Chon

Donald Trump's new economic plan is built on typical hyperbole. The Republican White House nominee on Thursday said his proposals to cut taxes and red tape would boost annual U.S. GDP growth to 3.5 percent and create 25 million jobs over a decade. But there are a lot of big ifs.

In a speech at the Economic Club of New York, Trump recalled the decades after World War Two, when output growth averaged at least 3.5 percent a year. But aside from other differences, that period encompassed a surge in population with the baby boomers, who are now retiring, and robust growth abroad. Economists reckon growth could do better than the most recently reported 1.1 percent pace, but few see anything approaching 4 percent as feasible.

Trump claims big reductions in personal income-tax rates and business tax, which he plans to cut to 15 percent from 35 percent, will help stimulate growth. But it's not clear how the tax savings could be deployed to supercharge the economy to the extent he is expecting. Despite high levels of corporate profit, business investment has fallen in the last three quarters, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. He also reckons a rollback of emissions and other regulations, reducing the cost of using coal and other fossil fuels, will boost GDP, as will the reworking of trade deals. The overall calculus is that headline reductions in tax revenue totaling $4.4 trillion, presumably over the standard 10-year horizon, will fall to $2.6 trillion using what's known as dynamic scoring, a method of incorporating the expected boost to growth.

More than half that would be recouped thanks to looser regulations and the touted "America First" trade benefits. The rest, $800 billion, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. Trump's audience of financiers and corporate executives cheered his pitch in New York. But the huge potential cost of his plan only shrinks with assumptions that are characteristically heroic.

-- The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist. The opinions expressed are her own.
Despite flaws, paperless voting machines remain widespread in U.S.

By Andy Sullivan

One in four registered voters in the United States live in areas that will use electronic voting machines that do not produce a paper backup in the November presidential election despite concerns that they are vulnerable to tampering and malfunctions, according to a Reuters analysis.

The lack of a paper trail makes it impossible to independently verify that the aging touch-screen systems are accurate, security experts say, in a year when suspected Russian hackers have penetrated political groups and state voting systems and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said the election may be “rigged.”

Election officials insist the machines are reliable, but security experts say they are riddled with bugs and security holes that can result in votes being recorded incorrectly.

A Reuters analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Election Assistance Commission and the Verified Voting Foundation watchdog group found that 44 million registered voters, accounting for 25 percent of the total, live in jurisdictions that rely on paperless systems, including millions in contested states such as Georgia, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The picture has improved gradually since the 2008 presidential election, when 31 percent of U.S. voters lived in areas that used paperless touch-screen systems. In 2012, 27 percent lived in jurisdictions that used paperless systems.

“Clearly we still have a long way to go to ensure that all Americans have access to a form of voting technology they can trust,” said Alex Halderman, a University of Michigan computer-science professor who has helped to uncover security flaws on touch-screen systems.

Most of these machines are nearing the end of their expected life span, making them more vulnerable to problems. And Congress has not authorized money for upgrades since 2002, just after the disputed 2000 presidential recount battle in Florida highlighted flaws in aging punch-card and lever-voting systems.

In some states, a divide has emerged between poorer areas that continue to use paperless touch-screen systems and wealthier areas that have bought new optical scan systems that process paper ballots, which many experts say are a better way to ensure accurate elections.

In Virginia, for example, counties that...
still use touch-screen systems have a poverty rate of 23 percent, while those that have switched to optical-scan systems have an average poverty rate of 11 percent. "I would have liked to have had the new machines, but the county says we don't have the money," said Patsy Burchett, the top election official in rural Lee County, which has been hit hard by the decline of the coal and tobacco industries and is the poorest county in the state. "These machines are on their last legs," she said.

QUESTIONABLE RESULTS
U.S. election officials have known about the shortcomings of touch-screen systems since shortly after they were widely adopted in the early 2000s, when researchers showed that vote results could be manipulated with tools as simple as a magnet and a Palm Pilot-style handheld device. The systems have produced questionable results in some elections. In Florida, more than 18,000 iVotronic machines did not record a vote in a 2006 congressional race in which the margin of victory was less than 400 votes. In Fairfax County, Virginia, electronic machines subtracted one vote for every hundred cast for one candidate in a 2003 school-board race. More than 4,400 electronic ballots in Carteret County, North Carolina, were lost and never recovered in the 2004 presidential election. Since 2008, states such as Maryland have traded in their touch-screen machines for optical-scan systems. Others like California and Ohio have added printers to their touch-screen machines which produce a backup paper trail, while Washington and Colorado moved to mail-in ballots. Absentee balloting is also cutting into the use of paperless systems. In 2012, for example, roughly 1 in 10 voters who lived in areas that used paperless systems cast absentee ballots. Election officials say the touch-screen machines that remain in use are more secure now than they were a decade ago whether they are fitted with printers or not, thanks to extensive testing and better poll-worker training. They say that a hacking incident is unlikely because the machines are not connected to the Internet. "Voters should have confidence in whatever systems are being used in their jurisdiction because election officials have taken the necessary steps to secure these systems and ensure the integrity of the process," said Matthew Masterson, a commissioner with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. Although there has so far been no confirmed major incident of U.S. voting machines being hacked, security experts say that those aiming to manipulate votes could spread a virus through memory cards, with no Internet connection needed. The best way to stop that is to switch to paper-based systems, they say.

With 55 percent of all U.S. registered voters living in areas that use systems that are no longer in production, according to the Reuters analysis, election officials must rely on a dwindling supply of spare parts. Virginia Beach, Virginia, for example, pulled 32 of its 820 Accuvote TSX touch-screen machines in a 2014 election after residents complained that the machines were registering votes for candidates they didn't support. The city has since purchased a new optical-scan system. Lacking fresh federal funds, some states have opted to upgrade on their own. Louisiana aims to switch to an iPad-based system by 2019, while Los Angeles and Austin, Texas, are designing systems from scratch. Others see no reason to switch. In Georgia, Secretary of State Brian Kemp said he hasn't asked the state legislature for money to replace its fleet of paperless AccuVote TS touch-screen machines. "It's working just fine and all these so-called experts that are making these accusations about our system haven't seen it," he said.