

<http://wapo.st/2oOVfOC>

A BEN SCHRECKINGER SPECIAL -- "The Happy-Go-Lucky Jewish Group That Connects Trump and Putin: Chabad, a worldwide Jewish movement, is at the center of a web of ties between the Kremlin and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue": "Two decades ago, as the Russian president set about consolidating power on one side of the world, he embarked on a project to supplant his country's existing Jewish civil society and replace it with a parallel structure loyal to him. On the other side of the world, the brash Manhattan developer was working to get a piece of the massive flows of capital that were fleeing the former Soviet Union in search of stable assets in the West, especially real estate, and seeking partners in New York with ties to the region. Their respective ambitions led the two men -- along with Trump's future son-in-law Jared Kushner -- to build a set of close, overlapping relationships in a small world that intersects on Chabad, an international Hasidic movement most people have never heard of." <http://politi.co/2oOFTs>

GLENN THRUSH in the NYT, "To Charm Trump, Paul Manafort Sold Himself as an Affordable Outsider": "It began when he sent two succinct memos to Mr. Trump through Thomas J. Barrack Jr., a mutual friend. ... At the time, he had told [a] friend, who was also close to the campaign, that he was eager to get back into the game of presidential politics. Mr. Barrack, in turn, appended an effusive cover letter to the memos that described Mr. Manafort in terms that Mr. Trump would like, calling him 'the most experienced and lethal of managers' and 'a killer.' Mr. Manafort touted his overseas work, now the subject of investigations in the United States and Ukraine, as proof he was not part of the Washington establishment that Mr. Trump hated. 'I have managed Presidential campaigns around the world,' Mr. Manafort wrote. 'I have had no client relationships dealing with Washington since around 2005. I have avoided the political establishment in Washington since 2005.' 'I will not bring Washington baggage,' he added." <http://nyti.ms/2oSzXiH>

******* A message from Morgan Stanley:** Morgan Stanley helped raise the capital needed by innovative company All Aboard Florida to enhance Florida's infrastructure by developing the nation's first express, intercity rail, Brightline. The train, connecting cities across Southern Florida, is expected to cut down on travel time for residents and tourists, and could potentially add up to hundreds of millions in federal, state and local government tax revenue over the next several years.¹ Capital creates better connections for people, communities and cities. Learn more at morganstanley.com/brightline.

Capital creates change. *****

MEDIAWATCH -- JACK SHAFER, "Cable News Loves War": "Nobody projects network war delight better than CNN's Wolf Blitzer, whose metallic and nasal shrieking lands on virgin zones of mental irritation in these times. Blitzer, the king of the mundane observation and the champion of the generic question, was among the first to ride into virtual battle ... His show, which generally degenerates into that dinner party you can't wait to ditch, becomes even more unbearable when the main entrée is war. ... After 30 minutes of such exposure, you feel Blitzered, craving relief from vague, hangover-like head pain pulsing through your brain."

<http://politi.co/2nu6Mmc>

THE PLAYBOOK INTERVIEW: David Mandel

'Veep' executive producer and showrunner David Mandel began planning this season's storylines more than two years ago -- when a Donald Trump presidency wasn't on anyone's radar. But as season 6 premieres tonight at 10:30 p.m. on HBO, some of the show's storylines -- President Selina Meyer's loss, the role of the Russians -- seems as if the writers got together days after the election and rewrote the plot. "It's sort of one of this wonderful 'Veep coincidences' that seems timely, but I think ultimately we were simply following our 'Veep' storyline which is still about Washington, D.C. and what it is really like, and the hypocrisy and what the quest for power in some ways does to people in a funny way," Mandel said in a Playbook Interview. "We're either lucky, or we're witches. I'm not sure which." Only one joke -- about golden showers -- got nixed after the Russia dossier alleged similar behavior. "We took it out because you don't want to be doing a golden showers joke eight months later when it seems like it's old and it's hacky."

Mandel, who wrote with Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) on "Saturday Night Live" and assisted him in writing jokes for his two appearances at the White House Correspondents Association Dinner, is no newcomer to political comedy. But, he said Trump is changing his calculus going forward. "I think what he's doing and sort of on a daily basis definitely affects the stories we start to think about and it also affects the level of stupidity because we are just seeing things that a season ago we did a story about the president tweeting and getting into trouble. That story seems quaint at this point," Mandel said.

Excerpts from the interview: