It's on again: The 2018 Flag Day Fautasi Regatta

by Ansage Fausia
Samoa News Reporter

G overnor Lolo Matalasi Moliga has overturned the Flag Day Committee’s decision to cancel this year’s Flag Day activities such as the fautasi race and the Samoa cricket competition.

As a result, the Flag Day Committee and fautasi captains held a meeting this week and everyone is on board with the decision to allow the longboat competition to go on.

The fautasi race is set for Saturday morning, April 14th but if the weather is not favorable that day, the race will be postponed to Monday, April 16th.

As for cricket, the Committee is yet to decide whether they will move forward with the games. A senior official from the Office of Samoa Affairs told Samoa News that nothing has changed as far as the Committee’s decision to cancel the cricket games.

CABINET MEETING

The decision to cancel the fautasi race was presented by Secretary of Samoa Affairs, Mauga T. Aseuega during a Cabinet meeting last Saturday. Sources told Samoa News that the governor was unhappy when he heard about the Committee’s decision, and immediately advised Mauga that there must be a fautasi race for this year’s Flag Day celebration.

Lolo told his cabinet the fautasi race is one of the main reasons why our people look forward to Flag Day. He said if funding is the main reason why the Committee decided to cancel the race, they should remember that there are funds already allocated for Flag Day expenses, the fautasi race included.

The government told Mauga and the Committee that if the decision to cancel the race was something that all the villages with fautasi agreed to, then he will support the decision. However, it that isn’t the case, he recommends that the fautasi race be held.

MEETING WITH FAUTASI CAPTAINS

After hearing what Lolo had to say, Mauga called a special meeting with fautasi captains on Monday to discuss the issue. Not all skipper were in attendance but those who were, embraced the governor’s recommendation.

Soliai T. Fuiimano, on behalf of Manu’ule Tausala 1st, 2nd, did not attend this week’s meeting but during an initial meeting to discuss the cancellation of the fautasi race, Soliai said Nu’uuli would not be competing because their priority is to help families within the village, devastated by Tropical Storm Gita.

When told that there will be a fautasi race, Soliai said the decision has already been made and nothing has changed for Nu’uuli.

“Our village in Nu’uuli has already made a decision — that our two boats will not compete in this year’s fautasi race. “So now there will be a fautasi race, but nothing has changed as far as the village’s decision … because we believe our people are suffering and we need to save money to help them. Let us show the federal government that we care more for our people than spending money on social activities. Like what I said last week, we are leaders and we need to set good examples for our people to follow,” Soliai said.

Sources told Samoa News that Fagas has also decided that the Fealofani Samoa will not participate in this year’s fautasi race.

During last week’s meeting between the Committee and fautasi captains — before Lolo agreed to have the fautasi race — Mauga said it was the governor’s recommendation to cancel the race, because the government needs to save money to help families affected by Gita.

A representative from Leone told the meeting last week that their village council had already reached a decision, that the Taema II will not compete this year, because most of the families in the village were affected by Gita, and the village council has instructed the aumaga to help out with cleanup efforts.
Gun legislation passes Florida House, goes to governor

By CURT ANDERSON, BRENDAN FARRINGTON and JOSIE REPROPLOGE, Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Florida House passed a school safety bill Wednesday that includes new restrictions on rifle sales and a program to arm some teachers, sending the mea-
ure to the governor for his signature.

The vote of 67-50 reflected a mix of Republicans and Demo-
crats in support and opposition. The measure, a response to the shootings at a Parkland high school that left 17 dead, is supported by the victims’ families.

Andrew Pollack, who lost his 18-year-old daughter Meadow in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, and Ryan Petty, who lost his 14-year-old daughter Alaina, said there was enough good in the bill that it should pass.

“More needs to be done, and it’s important for the country to be united in the same way the 17 families united in support of this bill,” Pollack said after the vote. “My precious daughter Meadow’s life was taken, and there’s nothing I can do to change that, but make no mistake. I’m a father and I’m on a mission. I’m on a mission to make sure I’m the last dad to ever read a statement of this kind.”

Democratic Rep. Jared Moskowitz, a former Parkland city commissioner, ended the eight hours of debate with an emotional account of seeing the high school after the shooting, attending victims’ funerals and working with students and families while the House was forming the legislation. He broke down in tears after talking about how his 4-year-old son’s writing teacher lost his life and how he must walk away from his daughter in the attack.

“You don’t need to stand with me. I don’t need you to stand with me. I need you to stand with the families,” Moskowitz said.

Democratic Rep. Kristin Jacobs said she did not like the idea of arming teachers, but she voted yes. Republican Rep. Jay Faint said raising the minimum age to buy a rifle from 18 to 21 was unconstitutional, and he voted no.

“There is a cultural divide in this room, in this state and across the country. And there’s a bill before us that is not perfect,” said Jacobs, whose district includes Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.
The bill would raise the minimum age to buy rifles from 18 to 21 and create a waiting period on sales of the weapons.

School. The bill would raise the minimum age to buy a rifle from 18 to 21 and create a waiting period on sales of the weapons. Michael Sene made his ini-
tial appearance before District Court Judge Fitt Sunia yester-
day morning, and his prelimi-
nary examination (PX) is set for today.

His bail has been set at $50,000.

Sene is being represented by Assistant Public Defender Ryan Anderson while prosecuting the case is Assistant Attorney Gen-
eral Bianca Lherisson.

If he is able to post bond, Sene will be released on the condition that he make all of his court appearances, not leave or attempt to leave the territory, to his surrender all his travel documents to the government, and he must not have direct or indirect contact with the victim. If he encounters her in public, he must walk away from her peacefully.

THE CASE

The matter was reported to police on Nov. 2, 2017 by a local resident seeking assistance for a teenage girl who was poss-
sibly raped.

The victim — the teenage girl — told police that on Oct. 31, 2017 after class at ASCC, she went looking for her friend and she couldn’t find her, and that’s when she (the victim) hopped on a bus heading towards Leone and recognized the bus driver as Michael Sene, who she knew through her friend (the one she was looking for).

According to the victim, she allegedly asked the bus driver if he had seen her friend and the bus driver said no. She then sat down and began talking to the bus driver while the bus was heading to Leone.

The court affidavit states that Sene allegedly asked the victim if she could go with him to drop off other passengers, but she said no because her parents might look for her. Sene alleg-
edly told her that he would drop her off afterwards, but she con-
tinued to refuse.

However, she finally agreed to ride with Sene after he per-
sisted. After they passed her resi-
dence without stopping to drop her off, Sene allegedly told the victim to go to the back of the bus and stay there. He is alleged to have told her that he would drop her off later that night and that it was going to be fast.

According to the govern-
ment, Sene drove the bus straight to Nu’uuli, after the victim closed all the bus win-
dows, not stopping to pick up any passengers on the road. He allegedly took her into a shack in Nu’uuli.

Sene walked in first, called the victim to come in, and once she entered, he allegedly locked the door.

The victim told police that once they were inside the shack, Sene asked her if they could have sex but she said no because she has a boyfriend.

The government claims that after hearing the victim’s response, Sene allegedly grabbed her hands, pulled her closer to him, and told her they were going to make love — all the while, the victim says she continued to refuse and tried to push Sene away.

Later that night, Sene is alleged to have driven the victim home in his bus and dropped her off in front of a store close to her house.

Sene was pulled over by police on Nov. 3, 2017 and was eskorted to the Taluana substa-
tion for questioning.

Court documents say that during the interview with police, Sene echoed every-
ting the victim had shared with investigators. He allegedly told police he knew the victim through her friend and on Oct. 31st, he picked up the victim from ASCC and took her to his house in Nu’uuli and raped her.

He also allegedly told police that the victim refused to have sex intercourse with him, but he forced her to have sex with him because he really wanted to.

FILE - In this Feb. 19, 2018 file photo, Nicholas Cruz, accused of murdering 17 people in the Florida high school shooting, appears in court for a status hearing in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Cruz was formally charged Wednesday, March 7, with 17 counts of first-degree murder, which could mean a death sentence if he is convicted. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun-Sentinel via AP, Pool, File)
Once a rising star, Nashville ex-mayor freefalls with affair

**Employees wondering whether they’re going to get paid for it**

by Fili Sagapolu
ele
Samoa News Correspondent

Gov. Lolo Matalasi Moliga has directed all government offices, including semi-autonomous agencies to "fully participate" in the 2018 Flag Day Parade on Apr. 17th at the Veterans Memorial Stadium.

This is according to a March 2 memo, "Participation of all ASG departments in 2018 Flag Day Parade," from the Governor’s Chief of Staff, Fiu J. Saelua to ASG department directors and chief executive officers of semi autonomous agencies.

Such requirement — since the memo was released — doesn’t sit well with many government employees, who contacted Samoa News to comment. Some pointed to the impact faced by many families following Tropical Storm Gita while others argue that participation in the parade should be voluntary.

For ASG employees whose homes and personal property suffered major damage or were destroyed, where are these people going to get money to buy material for required uniforms to participate in the parade?" asked one long-time ASG employee.

Another employee added, "So the order from the Governor’s Office means storm-impacted ASG employees will have to choose — buy material for uniforms or use limited financial resources to buy necessities for the family."

"Do we take care of our families first — which is a priority — or comply with what the director will tell us to do? March in the parade with a uniform or get in trouble?" were questions raised by other employees.

"There must be exceptions to having to participate in the parade," said some of the employees, who all spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution from their directors or supervisors for speaking to the media.

In his memo, Fiu explained that the Governor “has officially directed all ASG departments and agencies, including semi-autonomous agencies to fully participate in the Flag Day Parade.”

Fiu informed cabinet members to "ensure all your department staff and employees are well-informed on this directive, including other related logistics such as uniforms to alleviate any confusion."

To assist Flag Day commentators and the Parade Committee logistics, cabinet members are requested to submit by Mar. 14th to both the Governor’s Office and the Parade Committee chairman, Motusa Tuaelina Nua, who is also the Health director: the total number of employees, and the names and total number of divisions within your department, according to the memo.

The biggest question raised by ASG employees that contacted Samoa News is whether government workers will get holiday pay for participating in the parade, since Flag Day is an official ASG holiday.

"I believe some of us will be raising this question with our supervisors," said two ASG employees.

Based on ASG’s 2018 calendar of events released during January’s cabinet meeting, Flag Day, which falls on a Tuesday, will be a one-day only event. In other Flag Day news, the fau-tasi race seems to be ‘on’ again, while the cricket league is still ‘off’ — not happening.

(See story else where in today’s Samoa News)
Message by Aleta Miller, Representative of the UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) based in Fiji, for International Women’s Day.

International Women’s Day, every 8 March, is a time for people in Samoa and across the Pacific region to celebrate the progress made towards gender equality.

It’s a day to commit ourselves to redouble our efforts to achieve equal access for Pacific women to education, employment, health, leadership, prosperity and other opportunities – and to realize the rights and benefits that women’s empowerment brings to women and girls, to their communities and nations.

We celebrate the courage and determination of women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their Pacific countries and communities, including our women leaders who make a daily impact in their families, villages, businesses, workplaces, marketplaces, cities and nations.

And we acknowledge the strong commitment by Pacific governments, community organizations and the dedicated and talented women activists and leaders, who are all working to advance gender equality across the Pacific region – to ensure women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men.

Although there is much to celebrate, 8 March is also a day to reflect and to recognize that we have a long journey ahead to realize empowerment, safety and equality for women in the Pacific.

Notable achievements to close the gap in gender equality in the Pacific include the fact that there are now more girls then ever enrolled in schools and graduating. There are more women running businesses, and women taking up senior professional roles. Another big achievement in recent years was the passing of legislation to protect women and girls from domestic violence.

Despite these gains, there is still a lot of work ahead. The Pacific still has the lowest global percentages of women in leadership roles including the world’s lowest overall average of women in parliament at only 15%. And although women are now more protected by domestic violence laws passed in 10 Pacific States between 2008 and 2014, still, the Pacific still has twice the global average of violence against women. Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights, which threatens to stop women achieving their potential and limits the development of their family, community and nation.

We have significant work to do to ensure women’s rights and improve gender equality across the Pacific region. Today I am heartened to see the commitment and dedication to this work in the Pacific continues to escalate with more new initiatives evolving to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

VAWG is a significant barrier for women and girls in completing education, taking up professional roles and realizing their goals. As such it is a key factor in closing the gender gap and improving the lives of not only women and girls, but their families, communities and nations.

And we know now that closing the gender gap is not only a basic human right, but it also makes the best economic sense. Research and statistics clearly indicate that improving gender equality not only improves the lives of women and girls but also generates significant economic benefits for nations and the Pacific region.

Global data indicates that if we invested equally into women and girls, the economy, the world economy could gain US$8 trillion dollars by 2025.

As Pacific nations move progressively towards closing the gap in gender equality and ensuring all our population – both women and men – are able to participate and contribute equally to community decisions and development, then we’ll see commensurate improvements in the Pacific’s overall development and the quality of life for our wonderful women and our girls.

Let us use this International Women’s Day to reflect on our progress in the Pacific but also to prepare for the ongoing challenges ahead. There is still much work to be done to come close to achieving gender equality for the women and men of the Pacific. The time is now, and we know now that closing the gender gap is not only a basic human right, but it also makes the best economic sense.
Washington, D.C. — Wednesday, March 7, 2018 — Congresswoman Aumua Amata welcomed the latest in an ongoing series of House/Senate Joint Hearings on veterans’ issues, this one a Veterans Service Organization presentation, and on Tuesday discussed health care and VA services with a visiting group representing the VFW of Hawai‘i.

“It was a pleasure to host these VFW representatives as they visited Washington, D.C. to discuss their concerns,” said Aumua Amata. “Veterans everywhere deserve the best in services from the VA, and it’s a major priority. Thank you to these VFW representatives for all they do, and thank you also to others who reached out to our office this week on behalf of our veterans, including the Wounded Warrior Project, Disabled American Veterans, and High Chief Igafo Maria Brown Va’a of our own VFW in American Samoa.”

The VFW group discussed access to health services in the Pacific with the Congresswoman and her staff. Among those attending the meeting were Robert Toelupe, George Bartlett, Jonathan Hoomanawani, Norbert Enos, Stanley Fernandez and Nickolas Young. At the Congresswoman’s request, plans are proceeding for a Committee hearing this year directed at examining the accessibility of services in American Samoa and the Pacific.

Congress continues to set the stage for ongoing upgrades, reforms and funding priorities for veterans, building on a series of veterans’ bills passed into law in the summer and fall of 2017. The latest Senate/House Joint Hearings serve as effective listening sessions as Congress gathers facts for the next steps forward.

“Young veterans in American Samoa often make the long flight to Honolulu for services, and veterans all over the Pacific have challenges in getting accessible care,” continued Congresswoman Amata. “I’m pleased that last week and this week, our House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees were able to combine for joint hearings on these matters. We continue to seek out better ways to give our veterans more options and access to services, and I’m encouraged by the attention Congress is paying to this important issue.”

Amata discusses health care with visiting VFW group

[photo: courtesy]
Wayne Moors weed eater, gift shop, magazine store was always my first 1980’s Pago visit... even before stops at Tepatasi (not Tumua Palace), The Bowling Alley, the Rainmaker Hotel Bar, and Evalani’s. Wayne & Mrs. Moors still rock in Nuualii, but the impact on me then, the Savaii FOB with no TV no vids, was definitely more intense.

In Hawai'i, recently back from our Cyclone Gita drama, I visited our local supermarket only to be blown away by the heaps of disaster survival magazines. How/why did these pop up? Are publishers seeing an economic opportunity in our wide spread national fear of natural and manmade disasters? Is it that smart phones and social media provide better coverage than we had in the old days... thus heightened awareness and fear?

Along these lines I was also sincerely impressed by a New Zealand (2008) TV disaster movie called “Aftershock”. This movie was so realistic that the NZ government had to continually warn viewers during broadcasts, that Wellington was still the Capitol and that an 8.2 earthquake and tidal wave did not kill 20,000 (Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds radio broadcast revisited).

“Aftershock” was such a well-researched, well written movie Cool Stuff whole heartedly suggests that American Samoa’s Governor, Lt Governor, Directors and Deputy Directors watch the film together, take notes and brainstorm if the film presents any valuable concepts to be implemented in the Territory’s proactive planning.

Since the Territory’s Hon. Congresswoman is now good mates with the NZ Government, she could probably get a Kiwi to pop up a DVD next week. Aftershock is so thought provoking every Coolio should do a family viewing, with ample servings of Aveina Store popcorn... cheap & yummy.

Cool Stuff failed horribly in one aspect of Cyclone Gita. While I borrowed a portable weather radio that also featured am/fm, I did not have shortwave. Staying with family in the Eastside, we all lost local radio early on... and a lot of valuable updates the stations are committed to providing.

Radio NZ and Radio Australia are the ‘go to’ back up on air resources when our 2AP’s lose antenna towers or electrical power. I foolishly left my shortwave portables in Tulaele, Apia and in Hawai’i.

Icom makes the absolute best tiny compact shortwave portables (the size of a candy bar or a pack of smokes). Cool Stuff did Cyclone Ofa & Val with an Icom R-1... now we are up to an IC-R6 (with discounted prices averaging $169... better and cheaper than the $300 R-1 back in 1990). My Tulaele, Apia home has a $24 tala (yup WST) portable shortwave radio I bought from a Chinese owned local Apia store. My medium sized portable cheapy is mainly to listen to cousin Corey Keil’s Radio Polynesia’s classic rock... but it will step up for NZ/Oz shortwave reception when the pisupo hits the fan.

Your kids will blah blah blah, how the Internet can do it all... but with no power, no Internet... a voice via old fashion imperfect shortwave radio is a wonderful comfort.

Cool Stuff reached out to Larry Fuss and Joey Cummings at KHJ to inquire how they will deal in the future with the issues they faced with Cyclone Gita. Their answers were far better than my ideas... so wait for some potential future good news direct from them and your favorite US federal government (as KHJ is a designated emergency broadcaster).

Great public/private territorial teamwork overall. Yes, some hiccups, but progress and chilled Vailima seem to be normalizing matters so we can all get ready for the next big one.
NINE SAMOANS AWAIT DEPORTATION FROM THE US

APIA, SAMOA — WEDNESDAY 07 MARCH 2018 — The Samoa Government has been informed by the United States government that nine people that have gone to jail trouble with the law there are to be deported from Samoa.

Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lusipolii Sailele Malielegaoi told Talasuma that they have been informed by the US State Department about those on the list to be deported to Samoa.

"Yes we have been informed about them (deportees) but there are processes in place that need to be addressed first before such action is taken," Tuilaepa explained.

Such processes include international protocols and having the deportees go through rehabilitation and security of the deportees locally.

"They need help and we need to find out if these people have families here, if not, then we have to find homes for them," Tuilaepa added.

He cited an incident that happened 15 years ago, where the US government deported a Samoan citizen without notifying the Samoa government, and the man was left at the airport. A police officer noticed the man walking around and approached him but the man did not know who and where his parents were from.

Some young men later beat him up when the deportee ignorantly broke the village evening curfew. The man was hospitalised weeks after the incident.

The Prime Minister said that the deportees need to be dealt with first especially information about the person and family.

"It is important to know information and everything about a deportee before he is sent back," said Tuilaepa.

"These are some of the many hurdles that need to be cleared first."

It is not known what offenses the deportees committed but this is not the first time Samoans have been deported from the United States.

As a result, three years ago, the Samoa Returnees Organization was specifically set up and is now working with the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration providing support and rehabilitation for the deportees, to adjust to life in Samoa.

The Samoa Returnees Organization also provides a safety network for deportees that have committed very serious crimes that require protection both for themselves and the community at large.

(Source: Talasuma-on-line) GOVT CALLED "HYPOCRITICAL"

A woman has called Prime Minister Tuilaepa Dr. Sa’ilele Malielegaio’s administration a bunch of hypocrites.

Taranaki Maihei, of Moto’otua, lives across a construction site. She is disappointed about the continuous hard labor on Sundays.

She has also questioned why Samoa amended its Constitution to entrench Samoan law as a Christian State when there are foreigners working on Sundays.

If the Prime Minister has declared Samoa to be a Christian country, then the Prime Minister must see to it that Samoa walks the talk,” she told the Samoa Observer.

"That includes all the Chinese and their heavy duty construction work on Sundays, which violates and disrespects Samoa’s observance of Sunday, our day of worship and our day to fellowship with our God. There are about three elders living right next to this construction site who are sick and are having to not only put up with this construction noise during the week, but now Sundays as well.

“This is downright rude and inconsiderate.

"The Government should consider proposing a law that prohibits hard labor on Sundays, reflecting that Samoa is a Christian State. They cannot say one thing and do another, that is hypocritical," said Maihei.

She noted that it is common knowledge that Sunday is observed and no hard labor is conducted.

"If a Samoan works hard labor on Sunday, that person will be ridiculed, yet it is ok for a foreman to come into Samoa and be allowed to work hard on Sunday."

"Do you see the hypocrisy in all of this?"

"I want the Government to fix this because it is a bad reflection on those who actually changed our Constitution and bad reflection on all Samoans."

"Calls to the construction company for a comment have not been returned as of press time. Maihei joins a growing number of concerned Samoans who expressed frustrations about Chinese companies working on Sunday.

Last year, Tuilaepa Sopoaga Grey, raised similar concerns.

She also accused the government leaders of being hypocritical and urged Samoa to wake up to what is happening.

"As a Christian country, our day of worship is on Sunday," she said.

"I have nothing against the government’s decision to make Samoa a Christian state. I fully support it.

"But what I find contradic- tory and hypocritical is when the Government changes the Constitution, yet allows for- eigners to disrupt our day of worship by continuing to do hard labor on Sundays."

"There are six days they can do their work, but at least spare us the Sunday so we can worship peacefully."The con- cerned citizen noted that Parlia- ment should have made a note about this when they amended the Constitution. She added per- haps it’s time for the Govern- ment to forbid any labor work on Sunday. "Again, it goes back to when the Government moved to legalizing Samoa as a Chris- tian state. Why is it that we are a Christian country, yet there are people who work hard labor on Sundays? These Asians clearly have no respect for our traditions."

Each and every Samoan knows that we don’t do any hard labor work; what makes them any different? They are visitors to our country, whether they are citizens or not, they should respect our traditions.

If our Prime Minister goes to church on Sundays, we should follow his examples." (Source: Samoa Observer)
**Back to school: West Virginia teachers return to classroom**

**By JOHN RABY, Associated Press**

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — At Stonewall Jackson Middle School in West Virginia, students filed past a sign that read “Welcome back, let’s roll.”

“It’s been nine school days without class. Students returned Wednesday to Stonewall Jackson and other schools across West Virginia, a day after the state’s teachers walked a 5 percent pay increase from their elected leaders. Their victory came after walking off the job in all 55 counties of this poor Appalachian mountain state to protest some of the lowest pay for their profession in the country.

Despite losing the school days, the teachers had support from parents and students. Never mind the difficulties

American Samoa Telecommunications Authority (ASTCA)

**EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

**MARKETING SPECIALIST**

**Department:** Marketing Department

**Duties and Responsibilities:**
- Assist in day to day operations which include graphic designs, social media, branding, etc.
- Maintain calendar of graphics work to ensure that graphics are produced on a timely manner
- Monitor branding on FB page to ensure that graphics are switched out accordingly to calendar
- Clearly articulate designs to align with marketing objectives, campaigns, products, promotions, etc.
- Interact with other roles in Marketing to execute plans
- Provide support to other Departments as needed
- Work closely with Graphics designer on upcoming projects
- Must ensure all ASTCA information is kept strictly confidential and must not be disclosed to other outside of the ASTCA Marketing Department
- Directly reports to Marketing Manger

**Skills and Specifications:**
- Bachelor’s degree in graphics design or 1-3 years experience in a work related field
- Experience with graphics design software
- Proficiency in Adobe Suite and Microsoft office applications
- Sound understanding of Marketing design and or principles
- Effective project management and interpersonal skills
- Self-motivated, creative, and a team player
- Good problem solving, organizing and coordinating skills

**Education and Qualifications:**
- Bachelor’s degree in graphics design or 1-3 years experience in a work related field
- Certificate in Graphics or Marketing

*An Equal Opportunity Employer*
Female candidates see early boost in Texas primary

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY, Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Predictions of a historic wave of female candidates on the ballot in November received an early boost after the nation’s first primary this week in Texas, with a record number of women advancing in congressional and state legislative races.

Most of those candidates are Democrats, a national trend fueled largely by frustration over the election of President Donald Trump and actions by his administration and Republicans in Congress on issues such as health care and immigration.

What this will mean in states like Texas, where Republicans dominate at all levels of government, remains to be seen. But for now, the candidates are seeking to make history and improve on lagging numbers of women in public office.

“These women have the wind at their back right now,” said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. “Who knows what will happen.”

Although women represent more than half the American population, they account for just a fifth of all U.S. representatives and senators, and one in four state lawmakers. Of Texas’ 36 congressional districts, just three are represented by women.

“A big part of the problem is that we haven’t had enough women running,” Walsh said. “This year is clearly a change on that front.”

In Texas, 50 women were on Tuesday’s primary ballot running for the U.S. House. By comparison, 33 women ran in Texas’ 2012 primaries for U.S. House, when there were also eight open seats, according to the center. That was thought to be the highest number of female candidates in U.S. House primaries in Texas before this year.

By early Wednesday, 14 women had advanced outright to the Nov. 6 general election. That number will grow to at least 17 after the congressional runoff elections in late May, and to as many as 26 depending on the outcomes of those races.

Three of the runoffs feature two women battling for the Democratic nomination.

Women could play a crucial role in the Democratic strategy to retake control of the U.S. House. Nationally, Democrats see opportunities in the 23 congressional districts held by Republicans that were won by Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. Three of those are in Texas, and at least one woman will be the Democratic nominee.

The nominees in the other two races won’t be decided until May. One of those is Gina Ortiz Jones, who advanced to the runoff for the 23rd Congressional District.

“We are underrepresented and disproportionately affected,” Ortiz Jones said in an interview Wednesday. “And folks are understanding that this is not a spectator sport and we all need to participate.”

In addition, two Democratic women are on track to make history as the first Latinas to represent Texas in Congress. Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia will be on the Novemver ballot seeking to represent two districts heavily favored for Democrats.

“Tonight, women spoke,” Garcia, a state senator running in the 29th Congressional District, said in her victory speech. “Tonight, we voted loud and clear, and we said that election can’t be bought and what matters is people.”

The numbers are even more impressive for the Texas Legislature, where just 20 percent of all current state lawmakers are women.

On the ballot in November will be at least 76 women, well above the general election record of 58 female state legislative candidates set two years ago, according to an AP analysis of election results and data collected by the Center for American Women and Politics. Of those, 35 are Democratic challengers to GOP incumbents.

Just 14 of the 76 candidates who have advanced so far are Republican women, but that includes nine incumbents.

A spokesman for the Republican State Legislative Committee, which works to elect GOP candidates at the state level, said the group was reviewing Tuesday’s election results but noted that Republicans held solid majorities in the Texas Legislature.

Democrats are eager to make gains in state legislative races after a considerable drop in their ranks during the presidency of Barack Obama. In most places, state legislatures play a key role in the redistricting process that sets boundaries for legislative and congressional districts. Both parties want to have an edge when that begins after the 2020 Census.

Since the 2016 election, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee has been aggressively working with state candidates across the country. Democrats have won 39 seats previously held by Republicans. Of those, 24 were won by women.

Senator Sylvia Garcia exits the polling station at the Montie Beach Community Center after voting Tuesday, March 6, 2018, in Houston. Texas Democrats turned out in force ahead of the first-in-the-nation primary Tuesday in what could be an early hint of a midterm election backlash against President Donald Trump, but their party remains a longshot to make much of a dent in Republican political dominance of the state. (Godofredo A. Vasquez/Houston Chronicle via AP)
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL PARTICIPANTS!
You Are All Winners!!!

1st Place
Michael Sun
South Pacific Academy

2nd Place
Kristine Marie Timoteo
Tafuna Elementary School

3rd Place
Hardrian Asofa'afetai Ulii
Alofau Elementary School

3rd Place
Pitifulo Sauvolelalele Senia
Leonte Makelii Elementary School

4th Place
Amber Leota
Manumalu Baptist Academy

Faapaliu Vili
Culleen Elementary School

Aumoa Ta'ala
Fagali'i Elementary School

Allyson Lalovimamo Liusamoa
Salesasoa Elementary School

Lilien Jonita Ve'e
Filifita Elementary School

Mirade Rachel Asiuta
Iakina Adventist Academy

Chistianne Florence Nu'usila
Kanoa Fou School

Troy Leota
Li'ileilele Elementary School

Mariafusitina Ludue Fenua
Laulii Elementary School

Wayne Arvin Aliliu
Afoalele Elementary School

Komoti Taupi
Lopohele Elementary School

Dora Amber Malila
Manu'a'e Tausala Elem. School

Tafailagi Tooleupe
Aua Elementary School

Josephine Elena Pereira
Hariat St. Francis Elem. School

Lisa Maria Martinez
Manu'alii Elementary School

Heavenly Aloe Tu'au
Manu'alii Elementary School

Lorieta Utugaleleli
Matatula Elementary School

Amazing Grace Mafeofono
Mt. Alava Elementary School

Ruta Sua
Olomua Elementary School

Cil-Darla Livi
Olosega Elementary School

Samantha Julia deSaulles
Pacific Horizons School

Malligi Latu
Pavai Elementary School

Danielle Magalasina
Samoa Baptist Academy

Ngaire Fuimaono
Siliaga Elementary School

Nafanua Nimo'a'i
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Paradise pizza
Le tama'i'ta'i na tulaga lua i lenei tauvaga i le tuauga sipela Kristina Timoteo mai le a'oga a Tafuna Elementary lea sa ia maunaia ia faisealaga lea lua ma ua tutu feitaasi mai ma sai o tisita sa latou fesosaoai e fa'atape le tuauga sipela i lenei tausaga - Mrs Leota mai le TecConne ma Talalea Carol Tautolo Samuelu o le McDonalds.

(atu: Leua Aiono Frost)

Le tama'i'ta'i na tulaga lua i lenei tauvaga i le tuauga sipela Kristina Timoteo mai le a'oga a Tafuna Elementary lea sa ia maunaia ia faisealaga lea lua ma ua tutu feitaasi mai ma sai o tisita sa latou fesosaoai e fa'atape le tuauga sipela i lenei tausaga - Mrs Leota mai le TecConne ma Talalea Carol Tautolo Samuelu o le McDonalds.
Amata le fa’amasinoaga autu o Elijah Leasau

tusia Auvae Fausia

O le vaiano nei lea na amata aiga ai le fa’amasinoaga autu o se ali’i o lo tu’uaia ea le malo i lona umia fa’asolitulafono o vaega ea le lau fa’asaina o le mariana, i le malo i se fa’aataua na tula’i mai i le 2 tauluga tahi ai.

O lo o tu’uaia ea le malo le ali’i o Leasau Leasau i le moliaga manafi i tula’i i le umia umia fa’asolitulafono o vaega o le lau fa’asaina o le mariana. Le ae le se aiga auta i le faalafalafa, i le faapita nga i le $10,000.

O le tama’ita’i i loa ia Christy Dunn mai le Ofisa o le Loia Sili o loo tula’i mo le malo, e le ali’i o Loia i le malo i ai se Loia fa’asaina. Le ula lotu aia i le fa’alaveva, e faa’iloa i le fa’alofa i le lau fa’asaina, e faa’aiu loa i aiga i le fa’afetai i lo outou sao ua mafai i le vaega e paka i le fa’alaveva, faa’aiu i le fa’afoeina le ta’ava o le lau fa’asaina.

Suesueina Fualaau Faasaina a le Ofisa Faamasinoaga ai le Ofisa o le Loia fa’afetai lai i loa lo lau fa’asaina o le malo i le lau fa’asaina. Le ula lotu aia i le fa’alaveva, le faa’aiu le fa’afetai i lo outou sao ua mafai i le vaega e paka i le fa’alaveva, faa’aiu i le fa’afoeina le ta’ava o le lau fa’asaina.

Amata le fa’amasinoaga autu o Elijah Leasau

Mama’i High. O nea lea uae foi’ai i Manu’a, ae ou nofo i Manu’a e fesofia a fesofia i loa fale malo i le talki o le rumsaga i le fesofia i le faapita nga i le $10,000.

Suzuki mani mafai loa i le vaega e paka i le fa’alaveva, faa’aiu i le fa’afoeina le ta’ava o le lau fa’asaina. Le ula lotu aia i le fa’alaveva, le faa’aiu le fa’afetai i lo outou sao ua mafai i le vaega e paka i le fa’alaveva, faa’aiu i le fa’afoeina le ta’ava o le lau fa’asaina.

Suesueina Fualaau Faasaina a le Ofisa Faamasinoaga ai le Ofisa o le Loia fa’afetai lai i loa lo lau fa’asaina. Le ula lotu aia i le fa’alaveva, le faa’aiu le fa’afetai i lo outou sao ua mafai i le vaega e paka i le fa’alaveva, faa’aiu i le fa’afoeina le ta’ava o le lau fa’asaina.
Democrats would reverse some tax cuts to fund infrastructure

By LISA MASCARO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For Senate Democrats, voting against the Republican tax cuts that President Donald Trump signed into law was not opposition enough. Now they have a plan to reverse some of the tax breaks for corporations and the wealthiest Americans and put the money instead toward a $1 trillion infrastructure package.

The proposal, unveiled Wednesday, is more campaign theme than actual legislative agenda, since Republicans hold the majority in Congress. It stands as an alternative to Trump’s approach to both taxes and spending as his infrastructure blueprint has stalled on Capitol Hill.

“We want to roll back the Republican tax giveaways to big corporations and the very wealthy and invest that money instead in job-creating infrastructure,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on Senate floor. “We say, take some of those tax breaks from the wealthiest Americans and put them into middle class jobs. Plain and simple.”

Republicans are counting on the new tax law to boost their standing with voters ahead of what is expected to be a grueling midterm election that could threaten their hold on the majority. It’s their chief legislative accomplishment since Trump became president, and Congress has not announced plans to consider the president’s infrastructure plan.

Americans had initially been cool to the $1.5 trillion GOP tax cut bill, which Republicans say will pay for itself with economic growth and Democrats warn will pile onto deficits. But it has gained favor since becoming law late last year. Some workers are seeing increased take-home pay, and some companies have granted bonuses or wage hikes.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell dismissed the proposal, and said it’s too far from what Democrats voted against the tax plan, as its benefits are “percolating through every corner of our economy.” “It repeals all these bonuses, pay raises, new jobs, and new investments,” McConnell said. “Talk about a non-starter.”

Trump’s infrastructure proposal has seen less interest in Congress. It relies mostly on private and local government funding, with about $200 billion in federal investment.

Democrats warn that the president’s proposal would result in “Trump toli’s” to pay for new roads, bridges and other infrastructure across the nation. “We have a much better plan,” Schumer said. “Democrat’s infrastructure legislation would generate revenue for their $1.022 trillion infrastructure plan by reversing some of the tax cuts.”

They would reinstate the top income tax rate of 39.6 percent on the highest-earning households, couples earning more than $600,000 a year, up from 37 percent under the GOP tax cuts bill.

The corporate rate, which was slashed from 35 percent to 21 percent under the GOP plan, would climb back to 25 percent under the Democratic proposal. Among other changes, the Democrats would restore the estate tax exemption at $11 million for couples, rather than double that, as became law under the GOP bill, and revive the alternative minimum tax. It would also eliminate the so-called carried interest loophole, which was left in place in the GOP bill and allows some investment managers to avoid their income tax at lower rates.

Democrats would put the fresh revenue to work making improvements to traditional infrastructure — roads, bridges, water and sewer systems — as well as new more modern investments in rural broadband, schools and airports.

In this March 6, 2018, photo, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of N.Y., speaks with reporters following weekly policy luncheons on Capitol Hill in Washington. Senate Democrats have a plan to reverse some of the tax breaks and put the money instead toward a $1 trillion infrastructure package. The proposal is more campaign theme than actual legislative agenda, since Republicans hold the majority in Congress.


(AP Photo/Cliff Owen)

Parents and teachers, along with students attending Special Education (SPED) at Matafao Elementary School are seen walking along the main road in Utulei following their visit to the Tauese P.F. Sunia Ocean Center.

[photo: Lusa Asoemo Frost]
Views of Trump’s trade adviser carry the day at White House

FILE - In this March 31, 2017, file photo, National Trade Council adviser Peter Navarro waits for President Donald Trump for an event in the Oval Office at the White House. Navarro signed on with the Trump campaign as a trade adviser, only to see his contrarian views marginalized when he arrived at the White House. Now Navarro and his protectionist trade policies are on the rise as his chief ideological rival, Gary Cohn, heads for the exit.

(AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File)

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the squabbling Trump White House, no insider is ever above rebuke and no one blacklisted beyond redemption. Trade adviser Peter Navarro, once barred from sending private emails and spotted skulking in West Wing hallways, has abruptly emerged from the chaos ascendant.

With his chief ideological rival, Gary Cohn, now headed for the exit, Navarro and his protectionist trade policies are taking center stage as President Donald Trump prepares to impose the steep tariffs on steel and aluminum imports that Navarro has long championed.

Navarro, a 68-year-old former economics professor whose ideas were once considered well outside the mainstream, joined the Trump campaign in 2016 after one of his books on China happened to catch the eye of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner during an internet search.

From the presidential campaign, Navarro made the leap to the new administration to head a new White House National Trade Council. But he was quickly sidelined by chief of staff John Kelly and closely managed by former staff secretary Rob Porter.

As alliances shifted and staffers departed, though, Navarro made his move, encouraging Trump to embrace a plan that many economists, though, Navarro made his move, encouraging Trump to embrace a plan that many economists, who certainly speak his mind and is not afraid to present ideas and data that are contrarian. And I think way more often than not, he makes a very persuasive case.”

Persuasive to like-minded Trump, perhaps, but not to many free-trade-loving Republicans. “I think he’s wrong on a lot of things,” said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch of Utah, who opposes the tariffs.

“We urge you to reconsider the idea of broad tariffs to avoid unintended negative consequences to the U.S. economy and its workers,” 107-House Republicans wrote in a letter to Trump on Wednesday.

A day away from the president’s expected official action, his spokeswoman did say Mexico, Canada or other countries may be spared under national security “carve-outs,” a possible move that could soften the tariff blow. But Navarro is still riding high.

Early in Trump’s term, Navarro at first was outmaneuvered by Cohn, the Goldman Sachs president-turned-Trump economic adviser.

In New Jersey, the state’s major utilities reported more than 300,000 customers without power by late Wednesday, with some left over from last week. Utilities across the Northeast also reported tens of thousands of homes and businesses without electricity.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning through Thursday for most of New England as the storm continued to make its way through. In Worcester, Massachusetts, public works crews late Wednesday had a hard time keeping up with the snow.

“It’s heavy. Well, it was so warm earlier that it just melted when it hit the ground now it’s heavy,” said Jesse Nadeau. “It’s the heaviest part of the storm right now for the next couple of hours. Heavy and wet.”

Residents on Mills Street dig out their car after a snowstorm dumped over a foot of snow around the area Wednesday, March 7, 2018, in Morristown, N.J. The storm carrying wind, rain and heavy snow was expected to continue into Wednesday night.

(Rob Karp/The Record via AP)

By KAREN MATTHEWS and DAVID PORTER, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The second major storm in less than a week moved up the East Coast early Thursday, dumping heavy snow and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses from Pennsylvania to New England.

Some places saw more than 2 feet of snow by late Wednesday. Montville, New Jersey, got more than 26 inches from the nor’easter. North Adams, Massachusetts, registered 24 inches and Skoogsborg, New York, got 26 inches.

Major cities along the Interstate 95 corridor saw much less. Philadelphia International Airport reported about 6 inches, while New York City’s Central Park saw less than 3 inches.

The storm made traveling treacherous. Thousands of flights across the region were canceled.

It was not much better on the ground. Members of the Northeastern University women’s basketball team pushed their bus back on course after it was stuck in the snow outside a practice facility in Philadelphia. The Huskies were in the city to compete in the 2018CAA Women’s Basketball Tournament. The team posted a video of the feat on its Twitter account.

Amtrak suspended service between New York City and Boston until at least 10 a.m. Thursday. New York City’s Metro-North commuter railroad suspended service on lines connecting the city to its northern suburbs and Connecticut because of downed trees. It was not immediately known when service would be restored.

“It’s kind of awful,” said New York University student Alessa Raiford, who put two layers of clothing on a pug named Jengo before taking him for a walk in slushy, sloppy Manhattan, where rain gave way to wet snow in the afternoon. “I’d rather that it be full-on snowing than rain and slush. It just makes it difficult.”

The storm was not predicted to be as severe as the nor’easter that toppled trees, inundated coastal communities and caused more than 2 million power outages from Virginia to Maine last Friday.

It still proved to be a headache for the tens of thousands of customers still in the dark from the earlier storm — and for the crews trying to restore power to them.

In North White Plains, New York, 10 people were taken to hospitals with symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning after running a generator inside a home, police said. All were expected to survive.

In Manchester Township, New Jersey, police said a teacher was struck by lightning while holding an umbrella on bus duty outside a school. The woman felt a tingling sensation but didn’t lose consciousness. She was taken to a hospital with minor injuries.

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Lawmakers, business brace for rollout of Trump’s tariff plan

By KEN THOMAS, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House says Mexico, Canada and other countries may be spared from President Donald Trump’s planned steel and aluminum tariffs under national security “ carve-outs,” a move that could soften the blow amid threats of retaliation by trading partners and dire economic warnings from lawmakers and business groups.

Press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters the example of flexibility, I think a “case by case” and “country by country” basis, a reversal from the policy articulated by the White House just days ago that there would be no exemptions from Trump’s plan.

The update came as congressional Republicans and business groups braced for the impact of expected tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum, appearing resigned to additional protectionist trade actions as Trump signaled upcoming economic battles with China. Trump was expected to announce the tariffs Thursday afternoon.

The looming departure of White House economic adviser Gary Cohn, the former Goldman Sachs executive who has opposed the promised tariffs, set off anxiety among business leaders and investors worried about a potential trade war.

“We urge you to reconsider the idea of broad tariffs to avoid unintended negative consequences to the U.S. economy and its workers,” 107 House Republicans wrote in a letter to Trump.

At the White House, officials were working to include language in the tariffs that would give Trump the flexibility to approve exemptions for certain countries.

“He’s already indicated a degree of flexibility, I think a very sensible, very balanced degree of flexibility,” Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross told CNBC. “We’re not trying to blow up the world.”

Trump signaled other trade actions could be in the works. In a tweet, he said the “U.S. is acting swiftly on Intellectual Property theft,” A White House official said Trump was referencing an ongoing investigation in China in which the U.S. trade representative is studying whether Chinese intellectual property rules are “unreasonable or discriminatory” to American business.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said an announcement on findings of the report — and possible retaliatory actions — was expected within the next three weeks.

Business leaders, meanwhile, continued to sound the alarm about the potential economic fallout from tariffs, with the president, who has vowed to use the tariffs as leverage in ongoing talks to revise the North American Free Trade Agreement, suggesting Canada and Mexico might be exempted from tariffs if they offer more favorable terms under NAFTA.

Lawmakers opposed to the tariffs, including House Speaker Paul Ryan and the Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, have suggested more narrowly focused approaches to target Chinese imports. But members of Congress have few tools at their disposal to counter the president, who has vowed to fulfill his campaign pledge.

“I don’t think the president is going to be easily deterred,” said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, who has suggested hearings on the tariffs.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., said Trump had listened to him and others who disagree with the direction of the trade policies. “I think him and others who disagree with the direction of the trade policies,” he said. “The priority is for the U.S. to do well, and I haven’t persuaded him,” Alexander said.

Republicans in Congress have lobbied administration officials to reconsider the plan and focus the trade actions on China, warning that allies such as Canada and members of the European Union would retaliate.

The EU said it was prepared to respond to any tariffs with counter-measures against U.S. products such as Harley-Davidson motorcycles, Levi’s jeans and bourbon. EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom said the EU was circu- lating among member states a list of U.S. goods to target with tariffs so it could respond quickly.

The president plans to rally Republicans in western Pennsyl- vania on Saturday in support of Rick Saccone, who faces Democrat Conor Lamb in a March 13 special House election. Trump has told associates the tariffs could be helpful to the GOP cause in the election in the heart of steel country.

Associated Press writers Zeke Miller, Matthew Daly and Alan Fram in Washington and Lorne Cook in Brussels contrib- uted to this report.

FILE - In this Jan. 23, 2018, file photo, White House chief economic adviser Gary Cohn, speaks to reporters during the daily press briefing in the Brady press briefing room at the White House, in Washington. Cohn is leaving the White House after breaking with President Donald Trump on trade policy. Cohn, the director of the National Economic Council, has been the leading internal opponent to Trump's planned tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum.

(AFP Photo/Mandel Ngan, AP)
O le va'aiga i matua uma sa aofia ma fa'aiga fa'aitasi ai ma le vasaeg o le fanau na mauaina fa'aiaga o le tulaga muamua se'ua o i le tulaga tolu i le tauraga sipela.
O lo'o ua foua fa'aiaga fa'aitasi i latou nei ona o se taumafiauga ua au a le fanau.

[ata: Leua Aiono Frost]
S. Korea leader sees more obstacles ahead to disarm N. Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea’s president said Thursday that many “critical moments” still lie ahead to end the nuclear crisis despite North Korea’s recent outreach to Seoul and Washington.

Moon Jae-in spoke before two senior Seoul officials left for the United States to brief officials about the outcome of their recent visit to North Korea.

The Seoul officials said North Korea offered talks with the United States over normalizing ties and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Seoul said the North also agreed to suspend nuclear and missile tests during such future talks.

Some experts question how sincere North Korea is about its reported offers, citing what they call its track record of using past disarmament talks to wrest aid and concessions while covertly continuing its bomb program.

According to the South Korean officials, North Korea said it has no reason to possess nuclear weapons as long as military threats against the country are removed and its security is guaranteed. That’s the same position North Korea has long maintained to justify its nuclear program or call for the withdrawal of 28,500 U.S. troops and a halt to annual U.S.-South Korean military drills as a condition for scrapping its nuclear program. The North sees the allies’ drills as an invasion rehearsal.

“We’ve overcome one critical moment. But there are many critical moments that we

(Continued on page 22)
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and his appointees have stocked federal agencies with ex-lobbyists and corporate lawyers who now help regulate the very industries from which they previously collected paychecks, despite promises to act as a brake to drain the swamp in Washington.

FILE - In this Feb. 22, 2018, file photo, White House counsel Don McGahn gestures while speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), at National Harbor, Md. As a candidate, Donald Trump pledged to drain the swamp in Washington. But as president, records show he and his appointees have stocked federal agencies with ex-lobbyists and corporate lawyers who now help regulate the very industries from which they collected paychecks. Records reviewed by The Associated Press show McGahn, has issued at least 24 ethics waivers to key administration officials at the White House and executive branch agencies.

One allows FBI Director Chris Wray “to participate in matters involving a confidential former client.” The three- sentence waiver gives no indication about what Wray’s conflict of interest might be or how it may violate Trump’s ethics order.

Asked about the waivers, Lindsay Walters, a White House spokeswoman, said, “In the interests of full transpar- ency and good governance, the posted waivers set forth the policy reasons for granting an exception to the pledge.”

Trump’s executive order on ethics supplanted a more stringent set of rules put in place by President Barack Obama in 2008. Nearly 70 waivers were issued to executive branch officials during Obama’s eight years, though those were generally more narrowly focused and offered a fuller legal explana- tion for why the waiver was granted.

Craig Holman, who lobbies in Washington for stricter govern- ment ethics and lobbying rules on behalf of the advocacy nonprofit Public Citizen, said he was initially optimistic when Trump issued his executive order.

He was as surprised and at the same time very hopeful that he was going to take his pledge “to drain the swamp” seriously, Holman said Wednesday. “It is now quite evident that the pledge was little more than campaign rhetoric. Not only are key provisions simply ignored and not enforced, when in cases where obvious conflicts of interest are brought into the limelight, the administration readily issues waivers from the ethics rules.”

An analysis by the AP shows that nearly half of the political appointees hired at the Environmental Protection Agency under Trump have strong industry ties. Of 59 EPA hires tracked by the AP over the last year, about a third worked as registered lobbyists or lawyers for chem- ical manufacturers, coal, natural gas, oil and jet fuel producers and other corporate clients that raise the very type of revolving-door conflicts of interests that Trump promised voters he would eliminate.

Most of those officials have signed ethics agreements saying they would not participate in actions involving their former clients while working at the EPA. At least three have gotten ethics waivers allowing them to do just that.

Erik Baptist, a top EPA lawyer, worked until 2016, as senior lawyer and registered federal lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, the national trade group for the oil and gas industry. According to disclosure reports, he lobbied Congress to pass legislation repealing the Renewable Fuel Standard, a program created more than a decade ago to set minimum production quotas for biofuels to be blended into gas- ofine, heating oil and jet fuel.

Baptist signed an ethics agreement pleading to recuse himself from any issues involving his former employer, including several lawsuits filed against the agency where he now works. But in August, McGahn granted him approval to advise EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on issues surrounding the renewable fuel law.

Pruitt wrote that he was exempting Baptist from the ethics pledge because “his deep understanding of the RFS program and the regulated industry, make him the ideal person to assist the administrator and his senior leadership team to make EPA and its renewable fuel programs more efficient and effective.”

Pruitt, a Republican who was closely aligned with the oil and gas industry as an elected official in his home state of Oklahoma, proposed modest cuts last summer to production quotas for biofuels that include ethanol. Despite promises from Trump to leave the Renewable Fuel Standard alone.

That triggered bipartisan out- rage among members of Congress from major corn-growing states, who threatened last fall to block Senate votes on the administration’s environmental nominees unless Pruitt backed down.

Jeffrey M. Sands previously worked as a top lobbyist for Syngenta, a major pesti- cide manufacturer, before he requested a waiver from the EPA, McGahn determined it was “in the public interest” to allow Sands to work as Pruitt’s senior adviser for agriculture.

Dennis “Lee” Forsgren, the deputy assistant administrator for helping oversee the EPA’s enforcement clean water regu- lations, was allowed to work on the EPA’s hurricane response efforts involving the Micco- sukee, a Native American tribe from Florida, even though he was a registered lobbyist up until 2016.

“All EPA employees get ethics briefings when they start and continually work with our ethics office regarding any potential conflicts they may encounter while employed here,” EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said when asked about the Tim and Lee Forsgren waivers. “However, that did not negatively impact the spirit of Trump’s execu- tive order.”

The Treasury Depart- ment asked McGahn for three waivers. Anthony Sayegh, appointed as the assistant sec- retary for legislative affairs, previously worked as a Fox News contributor. His waiver allows him to “participate in matters involving a potential conflict they may encounter while employed here,” EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said when asked about the Tim and Lee Forsgren waivers.

Brian Callahan, the depart- ment’s top lawyer at Treasury, was granted a waiver concerning issues involving his former position as general counsel with Cooper and Kirk PLLC. The law firm represents Fairholme Funds, which recently filed a lawsuit against the Treas- ury Department and the Fair Housing Finance Agency.

McGahn’s waiver allows Callahan to participate in discus- sions about policy decisions pertaining to a possible rewrite of the Homeownership Access to Veterans’ Equal Opportunity Act of 2004, as well as other issues involving veterans. “It’s a very, very close tie,” Wilcox said.

The Treasury Depart- ment got five waivers. The former law firm of Edward T. McCullen, the U.S. ambassador to Swit- zerland, represented Boeing. The Swiss government recently announced its intent to purchase military equipment and accept bids from American companies.

Another waiver, which was heavily redacted before release, allows communications director Heather Norby to work with employees from the Defense Department even though she used to work as a broadcast journalist for the network.

At the Pentagon, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Randy Schriver posed a waiver allowing him to “participate in any particular matter involving specific parties,” including his former client: the Japanese government.

What swamp? Lobbyists get ethics waivers to work for Trump

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   b. Assist in taking food orders and serving when necessary
   c. Stock supplies and reorder
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Application forms are to be picked up from the Front Desk at Tradewinds Hotel.
Rallies in Asia kick off International Women’s Day

By The Associated Press

Marches and demonstrations in Asia are kicking off rallies around the world to mark International Women’s Day.

Hundreds of women activists in pink and purple shirts protested Thursday in the Philippines against President Rodrigo Duterte, who they said is among the worst violators of women’s rights in Asia. Protest leaders sang and danced in a boisterous rally in downtown Manila’s Plaza Miranda. They handed red and white roses to mothers, sisters and widows of several drug suspects slain under Duterte’s deadly crackdown on illegal drugs. A rally for the rights of female workers was scheduled for later Thursday in central Seoul in South Korea, where a rapidly spreading #MeToo movement is galvanizing support for women’s issues.

Other events are planned across Asia, the Mideast, Europe and the Americas.

Reports: Syrian troops split rebel-held enclave near capital

By PHILIP ISSA, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian government forces seized vast swaths of territory including farmland in the opposition-held suburbs of Damascus on Wednesday, effectively dividing the besieged enclave in two and further squeezing rebels and tens of thousands of civilians trapped inside, state media and a war monitor reported.

The government, determined to wrest the eastern Ghouta suburbs from the control of rebels after seven years of war, has resorted to extreme levels of shelling and bombardment to clear the way for its troops to advance on the ground. Hundreds have been killed in the past two weeks, including dozens reported Wednesday.

Doctors and residents reported intense shelling and cases of suffocation and difficulty breathing, accusing the government of using chlorine gas Wednesday night. Hamza Hassan, a surgeon working at one of the hospitals in eastern Ghouta, said that staff was overwhelmed with chlorine odor and that he had treated 29 children with difficulties breathing.

Such reports, which have been recurrent in the past weeks, could not be independently confirmed. The government has repeatedly denied using chlorine gas.

Earlier on Wednesday, the state-affiliated al-Ikhbariya TV station broadcast live shots from the region, showing dense columns of smoke rising above the town as explosions and rockets could be heard flying overhead. Syria’s Central Military Media said troops took control of the town of Beit Sawa and most of Misraba, both rebel-held communities in the heart of the enclave.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that by nightfall, Syrian government troops and allied militias had seized half of the territory held by rebels in eastern Ghouta and split the enclave in two halves — a north and southern part.

By slicing the territory, the Syrian government succeeds in further squeezing rebels, making it more difficult for them to continue to hang on to the territory.

Dramatic videos released by the opposition’s Syrian Civil Defense on Wednesday showed rescuers digging away hard-packed rubble to rescue a dust-covered little boy and a baby girl in the town of Arbeen. The Britain-based Observatory, which monitors the war through a network of activists on the ground, said more than 50 people were killed in the bombardment Wednesday.

In Geneva, U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein denounced what he said were attempts by Syria’s government to justify indiscriminate, brutal attacks on hundreds of thousands of civilians by the need to combat a few hundred fighters in eastern Ghouta, calling it “legally and morally unsustainable.”

“When you are prepared to kill your own people, lying is easy too. Claims by the government of Syria that it is taking every measure to protect its civilian population are frankly ridiculous,” he said.

(Continued on page 21)
Breakfast in Goyang, South Korea, Thursday, March 8, 2018.

President Moon Jae-in speaks during the Korean National Prayer Breakfast in Goyang, South Korea, Thursday, March 8, 2018. Moon said that many “critical moments” still lie ahead to end the nuclear crisis despite North Korea’s recent outreach to Seoul and Washington. (Hwang Kwang-mo/Yonhap via AP)

Still to have gone through before reaching the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a permanent peace,” Moon said in a meeting with church leaders.

Moon still described the outcome of his envoy’s North Korea trip “a big step toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” but warned there were substantial hurdles before achieving that goal.

The meeting would mark the rivals’ third-ever summit talks since their summit talks since their border village in late April, when the South Korea-U.S. drills that Pyongyang had warned would breach its 2018 “unilateral commitment” to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Pyongyang’s security concerns should be addressed in return for the basic conditions for the improvement of inter-Korean relations,” Moon said. “A proper approach is needed for North Korea’s security concerns to be addressed.”

Moon added that despite the latest round of drills, the South Korean envoys had received an assurance from the North that there will be no military exercises during the Olympics.

Moon also mentioned that the talks might have resulted in a trip “a big step toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and a permanent peace,” Moon said in a meeting with church leaders.

“President Moon Jae-in has a strong support among the South Korean people,” Moon said in a meeting with church leaders.

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By HOPE YEN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Failed leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs during the Obama years put patients at a major hospital at risk, an internal probe finds — another blow to Secretary David Shulkin, who served at the VA then and is fighting to keep his job.

The 150-page report released Wednesday by the VA internal watchdog offers new details about the VA’s response to its preliminary finding last April of patient safety issues at the Washington, D.C., medical center.

Shulkin acknowledged to reporters that the problems were “systemic,” but said he was not aware of the issues at the Washington hospital. He pledged wide-scale change across the VA.

“Painting a grim picture of communications breakdowns, chaos and wasting spending at the government’s second largest department, the report found that at least three VA program offices directly under Shulkin’s watch knew of “serious, persistent deficiencies” when he was VA undersecretary of health from 2013 to 2015. But it stopped short of saying whether he was told about them.

Shulkin, who was elevated to VA secretary last year by President Donald Trump, told government investigators that he did “not recall” ever being notified of problems.

Among the changes he promised — unannounced audits of its more than 1,700 medical facilities from health experts in the private sector, immediate hiring to fill vacancies at local hospitals and plans in the coming months to streamline bureaucracy and improve communication.

Shulkin pointed specifically to VA medical centers in the New England, Arizona and Washington D.C. regions that needed improvements to address patient safety. “Not to act when you identify systemic failures I think would be negligent,” he said.

Shulkin has been struggling to keep a grip on his job since a blistering report by the inspector general last month concluded that he had violated ethics rules by improperly accepting Wimbledon tennis tickets and that his then chief of staff had doctored emails to justify his wife traveling to Europe with him at taxpayer expense.

He faces a rebellion among some VA staff and has issued a sharp warning to them: Get back in line or get out.

“I suspect that people are already saying this when Shulkin replaced the medical center’s director and pledged break new ground.”

Still, VA inspector general Michael Missal cautioned of potential problems without a stronger oversight across the VA network of more than 1,700 facilities.

Failed leadership at multiple levels within VA put patients and assets at the DC VA Medical Center at unnecessary risk and resulted in a breakdown of core services,” Missal said. “It created a climate of futility” at multiple levels.

No patient died as a result of equipment shortages that put patients at risk at a major veterans hospital in Washington — another blow to Secretary Shulkin — “Failed leadership” at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Washington, Wednesday, March 7, 2018, in response to a VA inspector general audit being released today. A new government investigation finds that Shulkin took no action to fix longstanding problems of dirty syringes and equipment shortages that put patients at risk at a major veterans hospital where he was undersecretary of health under the Obama administration, saying he was never told of problems reported to the VA offices under his watch.

The harsh report by the VA inspector general cites “failed leadership” and a “climate of complacency” at the center.

It revealed that needed improvements to the operations, and cited a “sense of futility” at multiple levels in bringing about improvements.

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Still, VA inspector general Michael Missal cautioned of potential problems without a stronger oversight across the VA network of more than 1,700 facilities.

“We're making changes at VA. We're going to continue to do everything we can to help veterans in this country,” said spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

The latest IG investigation found poor accounting procedures leading to taxpayer waste of at least $92 million in overpriced medical supplies, along with a threat of data breaches as races of patients’ sensitive health information sat in 1,300 unsecured boxes.

No patient died as a result of the patient safety issues at the Washington facility dating back to at least 2013, which resulted in costly hospitalizations, “prolonged suffering and possible amputation,” according to the latest IG report.

A VAPainting a grim picture of communications breakdowns, chaos and wasting spending at the government’s second largest department, the report found that at least three VA program offices directly under Shulkin’s watch knew of “serious, persistent deficiencies” when he was VA undersecretary of health from 2013 to 2015. But it stopped short of saying whether he was told about them.

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EU ready for a ‘stupid’ trade war if Trump slaps on tariffs

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press

The European Union says it’s ready to retaliate against the United States over President Donald Trump’s proposed tariffs on steel and aluminum — with counter-measures against iconic U.S. products like Harley Davidson motorcycles, Levi’s jeans and bourbon.

The EU threat and Trump’s insistence that the tariffs will go ahead escalate the risk of a trade war, in which countries try to punish each other by increasing taxes on traded goods. In the end, that tends to hurt all sides, experts say.

There was some hope that free trade proponents in the White House, like economic adviser Gary Cohn, would dissuade Trump from going ahead with the tariffs. But Cohn’s resignation Tuesday dealt a blow to that expectation.

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem said Wednesday that the EU is circulating among member states a list of U.S. goods to target with tariffs so that it can respond as quickly as possible.

The list so far includes U.S. steel and agricultural products, as well as other products like bourbon, peanut butter, cranberries and orange juice.

She did not say what level of tariffs the EU would set, leaving it unclear what the economic impact would be.

“This is basically a stupid process, the fact that we have to do this. But we have to do it,” Malmstroem said Thursday.

Trump last week said his government would levy penalties of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum, but did not say whether traditional allies like the EU and Canada would be exempt.

On Wednesday, Cabinet members suggested Canada and Mexico might escape and that the announcement was due at the end of this week.

Once Trump officially announces the tariffs, they would start almost immediately, experts say.

So the EU has moved ahead with preparations for the worst.

Malmstroem said the EU, the world’s biggest trading bloc, rejects Trump’s reasoning that the tariffs are backed by the WTO, whose verdicts have “weakened national security. “Moving away from WTO duties on traded goods, but also that the damage from a trade dispute will depend on whether the sides try to resolve their differences through the arbitration of the WTO, whose verdicts have so far always been accepted.,” Malmstroem said.

“Moving away from WTO dispute settlement means that retaliation can easily escalate and we might find ourselves in the middle of a trade war between the two most important trade regions in the world,” she said.

Malmstroem urged Washington to reconsider the tariffs, adding that the damage from a trade dispute will depend on whether the sides try to resolve their differences through the arbitration of the WTO, whose verdicts have so far always been accepted.

At that time, the EU compiled a list of items for retaliatory tariffs that included steel products, but also orange juice, apples, sunglasses, knitwear, motor boats and photocopying machines. It represented $2.2 billion in imports from the U.S. Bush withdrew the steel tariffs and the list was never acted upon.

 original WTO rules and that this means this case do not appear compatible with our World Trade Organisation rules and that this means the EU can activate safeguards to protect its own markets.

The WTO said Wednesday that, so far, 18 members — including China, Australia, Brazil, the EU, India, Japan, Norway and Russia — have expressed concerns about Trump’s proposed tariffs.

At the origin of the problem is overproduction by China, which has flooded world markets with steel and aluminum, driving prices down and intensifying pressure on producers in the U.S. and Europe. Nearly half the steel produced globally in December, for example, came from Chinese mills, according to the World Steel Association. China accounted for more steel production than the United States, Russia, Japan and 28 countries of the EU combined.

But the U.S. has already thrown up barriers to Chinese imports. As a result, China ranks only 11th in steel and fourth in aluminum imports to the United States. Trump’s tariffs appear far more likely to hurt a staunch ally, Canada, which has little of steel and aluminum to the U.S.

Chad Bow, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, estimated that Trump’s tariffs would cost Canada $3.2 billion a year and the EU $2.6 billion. By contrast, they would cost China only $689 million.

EU Council President Donald Tusk, who chairs summits of presidents and prime ministers, said the bloc’s leaders will discuss the issue at their next meeting on March 22-23.

He rejected Trump’s assertion in a tweet that the tariffs are “good and easy to win.” “The truth is quite the opposite: trade wars are bad and easy to lose,” said Tusk.

Fragiskos Papias, of the University of Kent’s business school, said that the damage from a trade dispute will depend on whether the sides try to resolve their differences through the arbitration of the WTO, whose verdicts have so far always been accepted.

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By BYLAVDIM ISACHENKOV, Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin lavished praise on President Donald Trump, but added that he was sorely disappointed with the U.S. political system eating itself “sorely disappointed with the U.S. political system.”

Putin said that he was so “sorely disappointed with the U.S. political system that it has been ‘eating itself.’”

Putin praised Trump, saying he was a “balanced” man, who easily gets into the gist of various issues and listens to hisinterlocutor.

“Is it possible to negotiate with him, to search for compromises,” Putin added.

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany in July. The Russian leader said he told her and the wife of the Italian premier “about Siberia and Kamchatka, about fishing and about bears of Kamchatka and Kurils Far East.” “I made some exaggerations,” the love-loving Russian leader said with a grin. “When you talk about fishing, you can’t help exaggerating.”

Asked jokingly by the interviewer if he was trying to recruit the women, the KGB veterans responded by saying: “No, I stopped dealing with that a long time ago.”

Putin added that he spent some time “looking for spies” during his KGB years. “He also noted that he spent some time searching for compromises,” Putin added. “I made some exaggerations,” he said with a smile.

He added with a smile: “But I liked doing that, it was my job for many years.”

Putin praised Putin, saying he was a “balanced” man, who easily gets into the gist of various issues and listens to his interlocutor.

“Is it possible to negotiate with him, to search for compromises,” Putin added. Putin also noted that he spent some time searching for spies during his KGB years. “He also noted that he spent some time searching for compromises,” Putin added.

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CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Jupiter’s poles are blanketed by geometric clusters of cyclones and its atmosphere is deeper than scientists suspected.

These are just some of the discoveries reported by four international research teams Wednesday, based on observations by NASA’s Juno spacecraft circling Jupiter.

One group uncovered a constellation of nine cyclones over Jupiter’s north pole and six over the south pole. The wind speeds exceed Category 5 hurricane strength in places, reaching 220 mph (350 kph).

The massive storms haven’t changed position much — or merged — since observations began. Team leader Alberto Adriani of Italy’s National Institute for Astrophysics in Rome was surprised to find such complex structures. Scientists thought they’d find something similar to the six-sided cloud system spinning over Saturn’s north pole. “We were wrong about it,” he said via email.

Instead, they found an octagon-shaped grouping over the north pole, with eight cyclones surrounding one in the middle, and a pentagon-shaped batch over the south pole. Each cyclone measures several thousand miles (kilometers) across.

“The fifth planet from our sun, gas giant Jupiter is by far the largest planet in our solar system. Launched in 2011, Juno has been orbiting Jupiter since 2016 and peering beneath the thick ammonia clouds. It’s only the second spacecraft to circle the planet; Galileo did it from 1995 to 2003.

Another of the studies in this week’s journal finds that Jupiter’s crisscrossing east-west jet streams actually penetrate thousands of miles (kilometers) beneath the visible cloud tops. Refined measurements of Jupiter’s uneven gravity field enabled the Weizmann Institute of Science’s Yohai Kaspi in Rehovot, Israel, and his colleagues to calculate the depth of the jet streams at about 3,000 kilometers, or 1,865 miles.

“The result is a surprise because this indicates that the atmosphere of Jupiter is massive and extends much deeper than we previously expected,” Kaspi said in an email.

By better understanding these strong jet streams and the gravity field, Kaspi said scientists can better decipher the core of Jupiter. A similar situation may be occurring at other big gas planets like Saturn, where the atmosphere could be even deeper than Jupiter’s, he said.

Jonathan Fortney of the University of California, Santa Cruz, who was not involved in the research, called the findings “extremely robust” and said they show “high-precision measurements of a planet’s gravitational field can be used to answer questions of deep planetary dynamics.”

Using similar techniques, Juno could help scientists determine the depth of Jupiter’s Great Red Spot, a colossal swirling storm, Fortney said in a companion article in the journal.

NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory researchers Glenn Orton and Fachreddin Tabatabavi, who both took part in the cyclone study, said all these new discoveries “show Jupiter from a new perspective” unseen before Juno. “We cannot say how many mysteries are left to uncover,” they wrote in an email.