

World News Roundup



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump speak on the phone with children as they track Santa Claus' movements with the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Santa Tracker on Christmas Eve at the president's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida on Dec 24. (AP)

Holiday

US president 'busy' in Xmas

We want peace: Trump

PALM BEACH, Florida, Dec 25, (Agencies): On Christmas Eve, US President Donald Trump took calls from children, asking them what they wanted most from Santa, and revealing what was on his own wish list.

One boy wanted building blocks. Another wished for his grandma to get out of the hospital. And as for Trump — who has sent a series of combative tweets since arriving at his Florida vacation home — he said he wants "peace for the country."

"We've got prosperity — now we want peace," Trump told a child named Ryan, who called the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) to check on Santa's progress.

Every year on Christmas eve NORAD purports to track the flight of Santa and his reindeer-pulled sleigh, a tradition since 1955 when a department store misprinted a phone number, sending a flood of calls to a NORAD colonel, who played along.

Sitting in a gold chair beside first lady Melania Trump in an ornate, tapestried great room, the president enthusiastically chatted with youngsters and their parents. Reporters in the room could hear only the president's side of the conversation.

In his trademark brash style honed during a career in the New York real estate world, Trump predicted the kids would have the greatest Christmas ever.

"I'll make a prediction — Santa is going to treat you well. Really well. The best he's ever treated you," he told one child from Mississippi, throwing in an invitation to come to the Oval Office

sometime. Casper from Arlington, Virginia, was a child after Trump's own heart. "Building blocks! That's what I always liked too," the president exclaimed.

"I predict that Santa will bring you building blocks, so many you won't be able to use them all," he said.

As for Ryan, he told Trump he wanted his grandmother to come home from the hospital.

"That is great. That's better than asking for some toy or something," Trump said.

In related news, President Trump's first Christmas Eve in office was a busy one that unfolded like this: tweet against perceived adversaries, cheer US troops spending the holidays overseas, play golf, chat with children anxious to know when Santa will bring their presents, eat dinner with the family and attend a church service.

"Today and every day, we're incredibly thankful for you and for your families," Trump told the troops via video hook-up from his Florida estate, where he is spending the holidays with his family. "Your families have been tremendous. Always underappreciated, the military families. The greatest people on Earth."

Trump briefly addressed members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard stationed in Qatar, Kuwait and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and patrolling the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East.

Vice-President Mike Pence rallied US troops stationed in Afghanistan during a surprise visit last week.

Trump complimented each branch of the armed forces, starting with the Army's "Iron Brigade" combat team in Kuwait, which he said is performing a "vital mission" by partnering with the Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Saudi Arabian and Jordanian armies.



Trump

America

Flake 'run' possible:

Republican Sen Jeff Flake of Arizona says President Donald Trump is certain to face an independent challenge in the next presidential election, if not one from within the party. And Flake is not ruling out being that challenger.

Flake has been fiercely critical of Trump, even while supporting parts of his agenda, like the new tax cuts. Trump in turn has denounced the senator, who's not seeking re-election next year.

Flake says if Trump continues on his path, and if Democrats lean left, a "huge swath of voters" will be "looking for something else."

Asked on ABC's "This Week" whether he might run for president in 2020, Flake said "That's not in my plans" but "I don't rule anything out."

He says Republicans must marginalize the party's "ultra-nationalist" element. (AP)

UN budget cuts hailed:

The United States on Sunday applauded a \$285-million-cut in the UN core budget, saying it was "a big step in right direction."

The General Assembly adopted a budget of \$5.396 billion for 2018-2019, slightly below the \$5.4 billion that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had sought.

The United States is by far the largest contributor to the UN budget, providing for 22 percent of the core budget.

US Ambassador Nikki Haley said in a statement that "inefficiency and overspending" at the world body were "well known."

Haley said the budget negotiations had generated several "successes" with financial cutbacks and a reduction of the UN's "bloated management and support functions." (AFP)

'Give access to American':

A federal judge has ordered the Trump administration to give the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) access to an American suspected of fighting for Islamic State and held in secret US military detention in Iraq for more than three months.

In a ruling issued late on Saturday, US District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan denied a government request to dismiss an ACLU challenge to the unidentified man's detention, rejecting the claim that the organization has no standing in the matter.

Chutkan ruled that the Defense Department should provide the ACLU with "temporary, immediate and unmonitored access" to the man to determine if he wants the organization to pursue a habeas corpus petition on his behalf and provide him with legal advice.

Using such a petition, a person can ask a court to review the legality of their detention. The man surrendered in mid-September to US-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters pursuing an offensive

against Islamic State's former stronghold of Raqqa, in northeastern Syria. He was turned over to the US military, which classified him as an "enemy combatant," and transferred him to a secret location in Iraq, according to Chutkan's ruling.

Aside from two visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the detainee has had contact

only with US government officials, according to the ruling.

The judge pointed out that in a Nov. 30 brief, the Defense Department disclosed that in an interview with FBI agents, the detainee said that he felt that he wanted an attorney present. (RTRS)

'Trump pleased with Wray':

President Donald Trump has full confidence in his new FBI director despite a series of attacks on the impartiality of his soon-to-retire deputy, a White House adviser says.

Trump is "very pleased" with Director Chris Wray and "the changes that are taking place," legislative

affairs director Marc Short told "Fox News Sunday" as Trump continued to assail Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, who plans to retire from the bureau next year.

McCabe's supervision of the FBI's investigation into Hillary Clinton's email practices came under scrutiny because his wife's Virginia Senate campaign received contributions from Clinton-ally Terry McAuliffe's political action committee. The president and congressional Republicans have seized on that as a sign of anti-Trump bias in FBI leadership.

But, asked if Trump is telling Wray to "clean house," Short said only: "I think he has full confidence in Chris

Wray."

Trump's frequent and blistering attacks on the nation's premier law enforcement agency have proven a tough challenge for Wray, who took the reins in August after Trump fired James Comey as he was leading the bureau's probe into possible Trump campaign ties to Russia during the 2016 presidential election. Wray aggressively defended the bureau against Trump's claims that its reputation was "in tatters."

But it's less common for a deputy director to be in the spotlight.

McCabe, a lawyer by training, was a fast-rising leader within the FBI. (AP)

HILTON KUWAIT RESORT SHINES LIGHT ON THE MAGICAL FESTIVE SEASON



Hilton Kuwait Resort treated guests and visitors to a magical tree lighting ceremony at the Song Bird Café to officially celebrate the start of the festive holiday season. The lighting ceremony, which has become a special annual tradition at the resort, began with Christmas carols accompanied by canapés, traditional Christmas treats and drinks.

Excited guests were invited to start the countdown to Christmas by welcoming the arrival of Santa Claus, who appeared bringing gifts for the children, creating a truly festive ambiance.

Welcoming all to this joyful event, Florian Gruhl, Director of Operations of Hilton Kuwait Resort said: "The annual lighting of the Christmas tree at Hilton Kuwait Resort has become a wonderful tradition to mark the beginning of the Festive Season. It is a simple yet meaningful gesture to show our appreciation to our

valued guests and partners who have made 2017 a truly blessed year."

Hilton Kuwait Resort will be hosting a variety of festive promotions throughout the season.

Guests and visitors can celebrate Christmas Eve on the 24th December with friends, family and colleagues with a lavish dinner buffet at Teatro, including the season's special roasted Turkey, or make merry with Christmas Brunch on 25th December, complete with live festive music and fun activities for the kids.

To ring in the New Year with style, guests can enjoy an exquisite dinner buffet at Teatro on 31st December that will be sure to add some festive sparkle to the celebrations. Those looking to continue the festivities can also gather with their loved ones to celebrate New Year's Day at a unique brunch with something for all the family.



Taxes

'Recipe for disaster'

Dems seek boost from Trump tax plan 'fallout'

ATLANTA, Dec 25, (AP): A Democratic congressional candidate outside Philadelphia calls the Republican tax overhaul a "cynical bill" that will redistribute wealth upward.

One of her counterparts in California dismisses estimates of tax savings for most US households and says the legislation is "just putting money in the pocket of the wealthy." And in Kansas, a Democratic candidate for governor says it's "a recipe for disaster" that previews inevitable cuts to popular programs like Social Security and Medicare.

While Republicans celebrate a massive tax overhaul they say will goose the economy and increase workers' take-home pay up and down the income ladder, Democrats are aiming to turn the tax law into a cudgel in next year's fight to retake control of Congress and to dent GOP advantages in statehouses.

Democrats hope to use the tax plan, passed without a single Democratic vote, to stake their ground as the party of middle-class and working-class America. They hope Republican efforts to gut the 2010 health care law and President Donald Trump's unpopularity will help that cause.

"It's all a consistent message: This is not what you were promised," says Chrissy Houlahan, a Democratic candidate in the suburban Philadelphia district of Republican Rep Ryan Costello, who voted for the tax plan. He is one of Democrats' top GOP targets as they try to flip the 24 GOP-held seats necessary for a House majority.

Republicans acknowledge dismal polling for their approach but count on a turnaround in public opinion as tax cuts for many take effect.

A Wall-Street Journal/NBC News poll taken Dec 13-15 found just 17 percent of respondents expect to pay less in taxes, while a third thought they'd pay more.

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