

World News Roundup

Politics

Committee's timing criticized

Democrats impeachment push 'unpatriotic': Trump

LONDON, Dec 3, (AP) — US President Donald Trump criticized Democrats at the opening of a NATO leaders' meeting Tuesday, calling the impeachment push by his rivals "unpatriotic" and "a bad thing for our country."

Trump, who commented while meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, is upset that Democrats scheduled an impeachment hearing while he is abroad.

The House Judiciary Committee has set a hearing on the constitutional grounds for Trump's possible impeachment on Wednesday just before he wraps up two days of meetings with NATO alliance members in London.

"I think it's very unpatriotic of the Democrats to put on a performance," Trump said. "I think it's a bad thing for our country."

Trump isn't the only one complaining. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, White House counsel Pat Cipollone and adviser Kellyanne Conway all have criticized the committee's timing.

Trump insists he's solely focused on scoring domestic and foreign policy wins, including making NATO members spend more on defense. But he's often appeared consumed by the day-to-day battle against impeachment.

"I'm not even thinking about it," Trump insisted anew Tuesday.

Before the trip to London, Trump slammed "Do Nothing Democrats" for scheduling the hearing during the NATO meeting as "Not nice!"

He also said that during the flight he had read a newly issued Republican-prepared report on impeachment that called his decision to hold up military aid to Ukraine "entirely prudent."

Democrats contend Trump abused his presidential powers by holding up the aid to pressure Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate meddling in the 2016 US presidential election and former Vice-President Joe Biden and his son, who had a seat on the board of Ukrainian energy company.

But Trump was adamant that the cloud of impeachment wasn't undercutting his negotiating position on the international stage.

"I know most of the leaders," Trump said. "I get along with them. It's a hoax. The impeachment is a hoax. It's turned out to be a hoax. It's done for purely political gain. They're going to see whether or not they can do something in 2020 because otherwise they're going to lose."

Report

The report, which the Intelligence panel will vote on Tuesday, also is expected to include evidence the Democrats say suggests obstruction of Congress, based on Trump's instructions for his administration to defy subpoenas for documents and testimony.

The next step comes when the Judiciary Committee gavel opens its own hearing with legal experts to assess the findings and consider potential articles of impeachment ahead of a possible vote by the full House by Christmas. That would presumably send it to the Senate for a trial in January.

The Democratic majority on the Intelligence Committee says its report, compiled after weeks of testimony from current and former diplomats and administration officials, will speak for itself in laying out the president's actions toward Ukraine.

Republicans pre-empted the report's public release with their own 123-page rebuttal.

In it, they claim there's no evidence Trump pressured Zelenskyy. Instead, they say Democrats just want to undo the 2016 election. Republicans dismiss witness testimony of a shadow diplomacy being run by Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, and they rely on the president's insistence that he was merely concerned about "corruption" in Ukraine — though the White House transcript of Trump's phone call with Zelenskyy never mentions the word.

"They are trying to impeach President Trump because some unelected bureaucrats chafed at an elected President's 'outside the beltway' approach to diplomacy," according to the report from Republican Reps Devin Nunes of California, Jim Jordan of Ohio and Michael McCaul of Texas.

Rep Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, appeared to be the only lawmaker who viewed the Democratic report Monday evening when it became available behind closed doors for members of the intelligence panel. He said it was "long."

Declined

Jordan declined to discuss details, but said it's the same "lame case" Democrats presented throughout impeachment hearings.

"The president did nothing wrong," Jordan said. "The facts are on our side."

Trump on Monday pointed to Zelenskyy's recent comments as proof he did nothing wrong. The Ukrainian president said in an interview he never talked to Trump "from the position of a quid pro quo," but he didn't say Trump did nothing wrong. In fact, he had strong criticism for Trump's actions in the Time magazine interview.

With Ukraine at war with Russia, he said, its partners "can't go blocking anything for us."

Schiff said the GOP response was intended for an audience of one, Trump, whose actions are "outside the law and constitution."

The finished Intelligence Committee report sets up the week's cascading actions.

Democrats could begin drafting articles of impeachment against the president in a matter of days, with voting in the Judiciary Committee next week.

Republicans on the committee, led by Rep Doug Collins of Georgia, plan to use procedural moves to stall the process and portray the inquiry as unfair to the president.

The White House declined an invitation to participate, with Counsel Pat Cipollone denouncing the proceedings as a "baseless and highly partisan inquiry" in a letter to Judiciary Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y.

Trump had previously suggested that he might be willing to offer written testimony under certain conditions, though aides suggested they did not anticipate Democrats would ever agree to them.

Cipollone's letter of nonparticipation applied only to the Wednesday hearing, and he demanded more information from Democrats on how they intended to conduct further hearings before Trump would decide whether to participate.

Nadler said Monday if the president really thought his call with Ukraine was "perfect," as he repeatedly says, he would "provide exculpatory information that refutes the overwhelming evidence of his abuse of power."



Pompeo



The 'President's Own', Marine Corps Band plays in the Grand Foyer during the 2019 Christmas preview at the White House on Dec 2 in Washington. (AP)

Education

15-year-olds still lag in math

US above average in reading, science

By Jeff Amy

American students may not be reading any better, but they're moving up in rankings of educational achievement worldwide because many of their peers in other countries are performing worse.

And while their math performance may not be declining, 15-year-olds in the United States still lag the scores of their peers in dozens of other countries.

Overall, the latest global snapshot of achievement shows American students scoring above average in reading and science, but below average in math.

The 2018 Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, shows several Asian school systems at the top. The best-performing across all three measures was a group of four Chinese provinces — Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. PISA seeks to test not only what students know, but whether they can apply that knowledge to solve problems.

About 600,000 15-year-old students in nearly 80 nations and educational systems took part in the two-hour computer-based test last year. The test is based on a 1,000-point scale.

Among the findings:

- In reading, the US average score was 505, above the international average of 487.

- In math, the US average score was 478, below the international average of 489.

- In science, the US average score was 502, above the international average of 489.

Average US scores didn't change significantly in any of those subjects since 2015. Average US scores are also basically unchanged since when the test was first given in 2000 for reading and in 2003 for math. American science scores are up since 2006, thanks to improvements in earlier years.

Across the globe, American students were significantly outperformed by their counterparts in eight jurisdictions in reading, by 30 jurisdictions in math and by 11 jurisdictions in math.

US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said in a statement that students need "the freedom to pursue different options and a more personalized educational experience". She has been promoting proposals for federal tax credits for donations made to groups offering scholarships for private schools, apprenticeships, school vouchers and greater reliance on privately run charter schools.

Education

"The bottom line is there has not been a single study that shows American education is improving enough," DeVos said. "Scores have flatlined for a decade. Worse yet, scores for our most vulnerable students continue to decline."

Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, told reporters Monday that the US, by holding steady in reading scores, rose in comparison with other countries.

"It's not exactly the way you want to improve your ranking, but nevertheless our ranking is improved," Carr said. However, she noted the US is "clearly struggling" in math.

Like recent results on another major nationwide test — the National Assessment of Educational Progress — US results showed the highest performing students were doing better in reading and math, while lower-performing students didn't improve.

"It's another red flag that this is something to think about," Carr said. Tom Loveless, an educational

researcher near Sacramento, California, said the Chinese provinces that were tested saw a substantial increase in their scores. It's not clear that that group of students is representative of China at large, with Carr repeatedly telling reporters Monday that the four large cities are more affluent than China as a whole. The Chinese region displaced the 2015 frontrunner, the Asian city-state of Singapore.

"It's the only country where they allow the national government to select the provinces that are tested," Loveless said. "It still makes it very difficult to interpret the Chinese scores."

Loveless describes the United States' overall performance as mediocre.

"The US is basically doing what it's done since PISA started, which is hanging around the middle of the pack," Loveless said.

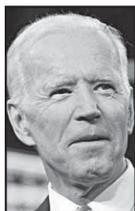
Others, though, are deeply concerned about US scores, especially in math. Marc Tucker, the founder of the National Center on Education and the Economy, said the United States must improve if it is to remain economically competitive with China.

"China is now poised to overtake the US as the world's largest economy. It is hard to see how the United States can compete with a far larger country that has a much better educated workforce that charges much less than we do for labor," Tucker said.

A mixture of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, the test is coordinated every three years by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD. Schools in each country are randomly selected, and OECD says the selection of schools is kept as inclusive as possible so that student samples are drawn from a broad range of backgrounds and abilities. (AP)



Gabriela Mauricio (right), a 14-year-old freshman, hugs her mother Meche Mauricio, after the two were reunited outside Waukesha South High School in Waukesha on Dec 2. Gunshots were exchanged between a student and a school resource officer inside Waukesha South High School, according to school officials. (AP)



Biden



Buttigieg

America

Hunter plans to plead guilty: For more than a year, California Rep. Duncan Hunter insisted that criminal charges against him and his wife were the result of a conspiracy of the "deep state" meant to drive the six-term Republican from office in the Democrat-dominated state.

But in a stunning turn of events, Hunter now says he plans to plead guilty to the misuse of campaign funds at a federal court hearing Tuesday in San Diego. Hunter, an early supporter of President Donald Trump, said in a TV interview that aired Monday that he is prepared to go to jail. He has not said exactly when he will resign.

The change in plea marks the second time this year a Republican congressman who was re-elected while indicted has later pleaded guilty to federal charges.

Hunter, 42, said a trial would be tough on his three children.

"I think it's time for them to live life outside the spotlight," he told San Diego TV station KUSI.

His wife Margaret Hunter also was charged in the case and in June accepted a plea deal that called for her to testify against her husband. The couple could have faced decades in prison before the plea deals. His wife faces up to five years in prison.

Federal prosecutors said the couple spent more than \$250,000 in campaign money for golf outings, family vacations to Italy and Hawaii, tequila shots and airline tickets for their pet rabbit.

Prosecutors also revealed Hunter spent some of the money on romantic relationships with lobbyists and congressional aides.

Hunter's departure will mark the end of a political dynasty in Southern California's most Republican district. He was elected in 2008 after his father represented the district for 28 years.

Until now, Hunter had resisted calls to resign, framing the charges as a political attack by prosecutors sympathetic to Democrat Hillary Clinton.

After his wife agreed to a plea deal, Hunter said "it's obvious that the Department of Justice went after her to get to me for political reasons." (AP)

'Buttigieg stole healthcare plan': US Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden said on Monday that his fast-rising rival Pete Buttigieg "stole" the former vice president's healthcare policy proposals, as the two battle for support in the early nominating state of Iowa.

Biden, among the leaders in the 16-member Democratic field for the right to take on Republican President Donald Trump in next year's election, is proposing expanding the Affordable Care Act. Popularly known as Obamacare, the

healthcare law was the signature domestic policy achievement of former Democratic president Barack Obama, whom Biden served as No. 2.

Biden would add a "public option," allowing individuals to opt into a government plan but preserving the existing role for private insurers.

Like Biden, Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, favors the public option and coined the phrase "Medicare for all who want it" to describe the concept.

"He stole it," Biden told reporters on his campaign bus in Iowa. Biden said he

would have been criticized if he had copied someone else's health plan.

"What would you have done to me? You'd have torn my ears off," he said.

A spokesman for Buttigieg's campaign declined to comment but pointed to statements by Buttigieg about "Medicare for all who want it" that pre-date Biden's current presidential campaign.

Biden was in Iowa for eight straight days of campaigning to thwart a slide in public opinion polls that has benefited Buttigieg, who leaped into first place in some recent surveys there. The Iowa caucus on Feb. 3 will

be Democrats' first nominating contest.

Polls show US Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are also in the running in Iowa. Both are pushing for a government-backed Medicare for All system that would provide federal health insurance coverage for all Americans based on the government-run Medicare program for Americans 65 and older.

Biden, who still enjoys a lead among Democrats in national polls, has largely avoided attacking Buttigieg.

Asked about the mayor by reporters on Sunday, Biden said: "Anything I say about Pete will be taken as being a criticism or a negative about Pete, and I don't have any negative feelings about Pete at all. I think he's a talented guy."

Buttigieg is expected back in Iowa to campaign on Friday. (RTRS)

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Wintry weather lingers: The snowstorm that never seems to end rocked coastal New England at the height of the morning commute, prompting schools to close and causing air travel havoc.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning Tuesday for coastal areas of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine and a winter weather advisory for southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The wintry weather that moved into New England on Sunday night has already dropped more than two feet of snow in some areas of central Massachusetts, and 16 inches in Somers, Connecticut.

The Boston area only had about four inches of snow, but the weather made for a messy commute.

In New Jersey, Jersey Central Power and Light is reporting 36,552 homes and businesses are without electricity Tuesday. (AP)



Benjamin Shoquette clears snow off his car outside his home on Dec 3 in Providence, R.I. The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning Tuesday for coastal areas of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine and a winter weather advisory for southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. (AP)