

From: Moore, Camlin <CamlinMoore@gov.sc.gov>
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Subject: Clips – Saturday, December 17, 2016

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General Assembly News:

Post and Courier: Smarter corruption: How Lost Trust evolved into 'Capitol Gains'

http://www.postandcourier.com/news/smarter-corruption-how-lost-trust-evolved-into-capitol-gains/article_1bf64526-c3bd-11e6-b224-c3715a17f65a.html

Tony Bartelme and Doug Pardue

Corruption at the Statehouse used to have a surprising transparency: Cigar-chomping lobbyists openly prowled the chambers with credit cards, dishing them out to lawmakers with back slaps and suggestions to have a nice dinner somewhere. One Lowcountry legislator bragged that he would trade his vote for a couple of suits and five or six shirts. Another from the Midlands said he'd give up his for a set of golf clubs. Operation Lost Trust in 1990 would end much of this type of vote-selling, at least the kind that took place in plain view. But as last week's indictments of a powerful Charleston lawmaker showed, prosecutors believe other forms of graft and influence-peddling have taken its place – schemes that are more difficult to pierce. Where cash once was transferred in brown bags and envelopes, now prosecutors say money moves through a murky system of legislative caucuses, political action committees, campaign accounts and private businesses. And instead of petty cash and free shirts, enormous sums are at stake.

NOTE: Gov. Nikki Haley fell into an ethical gray area. When she was a lawmaker, Wilbur Smith Associates, a Columbia engineering company, paid her \$48,000 to find new business. In a 2012 House Ethics Committee hearing, she was accused of failing to report that money in economic disclosures. A company executive said in the hearing that Haley was unsuccessful in bringing the company new business during that time. And Haley's attorney said at the hearing that she wasn't required by state law to report the work. The committee then cleared her of all charges.

The State: Companies say they weren't trying to buy SC legislator's influence

<http://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/article121440107.html>

Avery G. Wilks

Three private companies and a tourism agency named in the 30-count indictment of state Rep. Jim Merrill say their payments to the Berkeley County Republican were not meant to buy his influence in the S.C. Legislature. But a government watchdog cautioned that is the only answer the groups can give without risking being charged under S.C. anti-bribery laws. Prosecutors say Merrill used his position in the S.C. House to illegally pocket at least \$1.3 million, much of it from the three companies and the tourism agency. But those groups say they paid the now-suspended legislator for his public relations and marketing expertise.

Post and Courier: Rep. Jim Merrill took bus company payments while promoting school fleet privatization

http://www.postandcourier.com/news/rep-jim-merrill-took-bus-company-payments-while-promoting-school/article_c188b6f4-c3a4-11e6-8d48-9b4b934dc59e.html

Paul Bowers

When Berkeley County Republican state Rep. Jim Merrill introduced a bill in 2012 to privatize the state school bus fleet, the bus management company Student Transportation of America was quietly paying him to help promote its services. The bill came at a time when school leaders around the state — and lawmakers on both sides of the aisle — were reckoning with one of the oldest, most polluting,

least reliable bus fleets in the country. It also came at a time when STA says it was paying Merrill, who runs consulting firm Geechie Communications, at least \$3,000 a month to help write business proposals to school districts across the Southeast. Merrill made his connection in church, according to STA. In a prepared statement, the company said unspecified employees of the company crossed paths with the lawmaker sometime after the company's CEO, Denis Gallagher, bought a house on Daniel Island in 2006. Merrill also lives on Daniel Island.

The State: Should SC teachers express religious views?

<http://www.thestate.com/news/local/article121423926.html>

Cassie Cope

S.C. House members filed bills this week ahead of the legislative session that starts next month. Those proposals would: Allow teachers to express religious viewpoints; S.C. independence Day; Ban tormenting law enforcement dogs, horses; and Illegal immigration unit.

WLTX: Freshman Rep. Pre-files New Bathroom Bill

<http://www.wltx.com/news/local/freshman-rep-pre-files-new-bathroom-bill/371925159>

A new bathroom bill is being proposed in the South Carolina House of Representatives, as freshman Rep. Steven Long pre-filed legislation Thursday. The bill would prohibit local governments from enacting laws to require a public place to let a transgender person use a multi-occupancy bathroom of their choice. Long said his main focus is to protect businesses from government power on how their operations are run when it comes to bathroom policies. "A local government or municipality or some other entity could not force a business owner to do something different than what they wanted to do," Long said. Last year, Sen. Lee Bright, who lost his seat in the election, filed the bathroom bill that saw major push-back at the subcommittee level.

WACH: Upstate Rep prefiles bill that would allow teachers to carry guns

<http://wach.com/news/local/upstate-rep-prefiles-bill-that-would-allow-teachers-to-carry-guns>

Matthew Stevens

An Upstate lawmaker has pre-filed a bill that would allow certain teachers or school employees to be armed at public schools. State Rep. Joshua Putnam pre-filed the "Jacob Hall School Protection Act" Thursday. The bill is named after the six-year-old boy that was killed in the Townville school shooting earlier this year. In his bill, Putnam declares he wants to give all public schools the option to have armed employees inside the school at all times for the purpose of confronting an active shooter or other imminent threat. However, a school's principal or district superintendent can elect not to have any of their staff armed. If a district does want certain staff members armed, they must receive training from SLED to receive a public school concealed weapons permit (PSCWP). Putnam's version would allow a school principal or superintendent to revoke a PSCWP at any time without reason and the proposal would not include private schools.

SC Delegation News:

McClatchy DC: Federal money for Charleston port shows that the future relies on deeper water

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/article121345818.html>

Matthew Schofield

It may be the most important seven feet in recent South Carolina history. These seven feet – of dirt, sand and a shellfish sediment called coquina – could very well be the difference between a bright shiny future for the state, and a cloudy, uncertain one. When Congress recently approved the federal half of funding for deepening the Port of Charleston, and gave the green light for the Army Corps of Engineers to go ahead with the project, it was not simply a sign that the port could thrive in the future, but that it would survive. The water must be deeper to load and unload a new generation of bigger ships. On June 26, the Panama Canal finished a decade-long expansion project that allows these bigger ships to pass through its locks. The size of the canal, for its first 102 years, set the standard for cargo ship size, the so-called Panamax size.

NOTE: So, Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., said that the meaning, on one level, was pretty simple: "It means bigger ships." But it's more than that. "There is a winnowing of ports coming with this," Sanford said. "There will be fewer and fewer ports of call. This deepening project means that Charleston will be one of those. It means Charleston stays competitive in its ability to handle freight. It means the corresponding jobs that go with that will stay in South Carolina. The reality in shipping today is that it is us vs. other places, and this means it's going to be us."

SC Political News:

Associated Press: Trump wants SC Rep. Mick Mulvaney to be his budget director

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ee549fa8e0124d2a8def514e5e6f2bf1/trump-salutes-supporters-florida-names-budget-director>

As he prepared for the final stop on his postelection "thank you" tour, President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday announced his pick for White House budget director, a tough-on-spending conservative congressman who advocates balancing the federal books. South Carolina Rep. Mick Mulvaney, elected in the 2010 tea party wave and a founder of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, is a "very high-energy leader with deep convictions for how to responsibly manage our nation's finances and save our country from drowning in red ink," Trump said in a statement. Trump said that with Mulvaney on his team, his administration will make "smart choices" and "renew the American taxpayer's trust in how their money is spent." The announcement came hours before Trump's rally at a football stadium in Mobile, Alabama, and he tweeted: "THANK YOU ALABAMA AND THE SOUTH. Biggest of all crowds expected, see you there!"

Post and Courier: Mick Mulvaney to be named next director of Office of Management and Budget

http://www.postandcourier.com/news/mick-mulvaney-to-be-named-next-director-of-office-of/article_037b3c36-c3db-11e6-b86d-9b5ea285a4f3.html

Emma Dumain

South Carolina congressman Mick Mulvaney has been named President-elect Donald Trump's budget director, making him the second state Republican to get a top-tier spot in the administration. Mulvaney, who represents portions of the Upstate, follows Gov. Nikki Haley's pick as ambassador to the United Nations. His formal title would be director of the Office of Management and Budget. The announcement was first reported by the McClatchy News Service. It was confirmed by The Post and Courier from a source in New York familiar with the transition team that's based in Manhattan's Trump Tower. Mulvaney was re-elected to a fourth term in November, overwhelmingly defeating Fran Person, a well-funded Democrat with backing from the national party and his former boss, Vice President Joe Biden.

Post and Courier: Scholars, citing history, warn against Trump

http://www.postandcourier.com/news/scholars-citing-history-warn-against-trump/article_28616bc6-c2fd-11e6-886e-c36d34de6a65.html

Adam Parker

More than 1,200 historians affiliated with hundreds of colleges and universities across the U.S. — including eight scholars at the College of Charleston, two at The Citadel and one at Clemson University — have signed a public statement expressing "concern and alarm" over the First Amendment implications of the election of Donald Trump. "On the eve of a new administration whose key players have traded in hateful rhetoric and emboldened the harassment of various targets, we urge Americans to be vigilant against a mass violation of civil rights and liberties that could result if such troubling developments continue unchecked," the scholars write. The call to vigilance was co-signed by College of Charleston professors Mari Crabtree, Adam Dombay, Rachel Donaldson, Jon Hale, George Hopkins, Tammy Ingram, W. Scott Poole and John White; Citadel professors Ivy Farr McIntyre and Kerry Taylor; and Clemson professor Elizabeth L. Jemison.

NC Gov. Roy Cooper News:

Associated Press: Protesters rip GOP for taking away next governor's 'power'

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/299bbb2a54cf4b0da7243b6f17d156f5/cooper-democrats-decide-whats-next-after-gop-power-grab>

Protesters say the North Carolina legislature's actions limiting the next governor's influence before he even takes office were unconstitutional power grabs by GOP legislators unhappy their candidate didn't win re-election. "We voted for a new governor and they're choosing to come and ... take away the power," said Caren Parker of Carrboro, among the crowd who demonstrated this week against the Republican-controlled General Assembly, leading to more than 50 arrests. So what's next for Gov. -elect Roy Cooper and other fellow Democrats now that a special session is over that passed laws designed to weaken them? Lawsuits and more demonstrations are likely, although it's unclear how effective those will be.

Dylann Roof Case:

Post and Courier: As focus turns to death penalty, Dylann Roof silences his most passionate advocate

http://www.postandcourier.com/church_shooting/as-focus-turns-to-death-penalty-dylann-roof-silences-his/article_65814590-c2d9-11e6-89e2-b37c564f1ee6.html

Andrew Knapp

Attorneys like David Bruck dedicate their lives to whittling away at a centuries-old ingredient of American justice: punishment by death. Years of legal wrangling have moved the needle slightly in their favor. While never outlawing the ultimate punishment, courts gradually created more rights for people fighting the death penalty. For his part, Bruck has spent decades prodding the nation's highest court into adopting new rules while working to spare defendants — many in South Carolina — from the electric chair or lethal injection. He rarely passes on a chance to help save someone's life. But his latest opportunity was ripped away by the very person he wanted to save: Dylann Roof. If all goes according to Roof's plan, the high school dropout and self-avowed "white nationalist" will replace one of the most brilliant minds in capital defense. He will represent himself in the most crucial phase of his trial after the new year: sentencing. That's when the 12 jurors who convicted the white man last week of gunning down nine black churchgoers in a fit of racial hatred decide whether he should die for his crimes or spend the rest of his life in prison.

Post and Courier: Dylann Roof won't present mental health evidence in penalty phase of trial

http://www.postandcourier.com/church_shooting/dylann-roof-won-t-present-mental-health-evidence-in-penalty/article_2fb1811c-c3e9-11e6-8614-67d7b6615f21.html

Jennifer Berry Hawes

One day after his conviction for killing nine worshipers at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church, Dylann Roof informed a federal judge in a handwritten note Friday that he won't present mental health evidence during the penalty phase of his trial, set to begin Jan. 3. His attorneys had hoped to present such evidence in an effort to spare him a death sentence. But Roof, who has resumed representing himself, penned a two-sentence letter on lined notebook paper to U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel that reads, "I, Dylann Roof, withdraw the notice relating to presenting mental health mitigation through expert testimony. I will not be calling mental health experts or presenting mental health evidence." In July, Roof's defense attorneys indicated that they planned to present testimony and documentation of a "mental disease or defect or any other mental condition." However, that was before Roof opted to act as his own attorney, taking the reins of his defense after his conviction mid-day Thursday.

Washington Post: Death would be too easy for Dylann Roof

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/death-would-be-too-easy-for-dylann-roof/2016/12/16/0e426e8e-c3cf-11e6-8422-eac61c0ef74d_story.html?utm_term=.635e079b76b1

Opinion: Kathleen Parker

In the parable of the sower, a farmer sprinkles seeds upon four different types of terrain, one of which

is rocky, where seeds fail to thrive. As interpreted by scholars, the rock refers to the human heart that's made of stone and therefore resistant to the seed (the Word of God), and therefore lost to salvation.

This was the topic of Bible study at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church the night white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine African American parishioners as they closed their eyes in prayer. Roof can be seen as a parable within a parable, his heart a stone and he, impervious to the love and fellowship offered him by strangers. After a federal jury found him guilty Thursday on all 33 counts, including hate crimes, Roof's salvation is very much in question. To anyone following the trial, the verdict came as no surprise. Roof had confessed to the massacre, video captured him entering and leaving the church, and two survivors identified him as the shooter. Roof's attorney began his opening statement by acknowledging his client's guilt. The purpose of the trial was essentially to determine whether Roof should live out his days in prison or be executed.

Hurricane Matthew Recovery:

Island Packet: Hilton Head mayor says these are council's 2017 priorities; they say, not so fast
<http://www.islandpacket.com/news/politics-government/article121407698.html>

Teresa Moss

In recently published statements, Hilton Head Island Mayor David Bennett said the Town Council had "agreed" on a list of priorities for 2017, though a majority of council members say nothing was finalized. Some council members also contend that the list, which includes items such as the town's "visioning process," lacks one important priority — the Hurricane Matthew recovery. Bennett said Friday the list is an overview of discussions the council had during its annual workshop earlier this month. He said the purpose of publishing the list was to encourage the public's help in setting priorities for the the upcoming year. No official list was created during the workshop, which occurs annually. But Bennett said Friday he believed the list was a "consensus" of the council, based on conversations during the workshop. Council member David Ames agreed when contacted Friday.

Opinion/Editorial:

Sun News: S.C. education superintendent should be appointed <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/opinion/editorials/article121125183.html>

Editorial Board

Molly Spearman, South Carolina's elected superintendent of education, has no illusions about her job being on the state ballot and, in fact, she supports making the position appointive and part of the governor's cabinet. Spearman, a former legislator and before that a classroom music teacher and assistant principal, has joined Gov. Nikki Haley in urging legislators to support legislation setting up a statewide referendum. The S.C. Constitution makes the education superintendent elective, so voters' approval is necessary to change the position to appointive. In 2014, S.C. voters approved amending the constitution to take the adjutant general off the ballot. South Carolina continues to popularly elect more positions than other states. The commissioner of agriculture, for example, is still elected. Only 13 states elect a superintendent of education. For one example, Illinois made its "superintendent of public instruction" appointive with approval of an updated constitution following a 1970 constitutional convention.

Post and Courier: Trump makes some 'bizzaro' Cabinet picks

http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/trump-makes-some-bizzaro-cabinet-picks/article_0dc4751e-c2e5-11e6-a809-334f9f935920.html

Opinion

As low as my expectations might be for the Donald Trump presidency, he finds new ways to drop the bar even lower. Take his cabinet nominees. Please. They aren't all bad. Retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, the president-elect's choice for secretary of defense, comes well-recommended by old guard defense experts like Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) and turns out to be nowhere near as nutty as

his nickname implies. And it's hard to dislike the bipartisan appeal of Gov. Nikki Haley (R-S.C.), although Trump's choice to name her U.N. ambassador is a puzzlement. She has little experience in foreign relations but she opposes President Obama's Iran nuclear deal, so maybe that's good enough for Trump. But some of Trump's other choices illustrate how dramatically an election can swing our government's executive branch into a Bizarro World version of its former self -- like the fictional planet in DC comics where everything is the reverse of life on Earth. This is particularly true when government appointees don't seem to care very much for government.

South Carolina News:

Herald-Journal: Heroin deaths on the rise in South Carolina

<http://www.goupstate.com/news/20161216/heroin-deaths-on-rise-in-south-carolina?rssfeed=true>

Daniel J. Gross

Miranda Gilbert always hoped her fiancé would get better. But despite 10 weeks of rehab and several months of sobriety, Zachary Wenk couldn't get the better of his heroin addiction. The 30-year-old Spartanburg man died Nov. 19 of an overdose inside his home. "He always made everybody laugh. ... He was just so much fun to be around," Gilbert said. Wenk's death is one of a growing number across the country linked to drug overdoses. Since 2010, heroin-related overdoses have more than quadrupled in the United States, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In South Carolina alone, heroin deaths were up 57.1 percent from 2014-2015, according to the CDC. Wenk's toxicology report is still being completed, but there have already been five other fatal heroin overdoses in Spartanburg County this year, said Spartanburg County Coroner Rusty Clevenger. There was just one fatal heroin overdose in 2015.

Aiken Standard: Georgia Secretary of State dissolves LLC seeking \$192K from Scuttle's Island investors http://www.aikenstandard.com/news/georgia-secretary-of-state-dissolves-llc-seeking-k-from-scuttle/article_9aa58ba2-c3b3-11e6-9f31-7fe6672b09b2.html

Michael Smith

A Georgia company claiming \$192,000 in unpaid debts from investors of the failed Scuttle's Island water park in North Augusta has had its licensing revoked, documents obtained by the Aiken Standard show. T-Factor LLC, of 10 Shadowbrook Circle in Augusta, was issued a certificate of administrative dissolution/revocation last week by Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp. Notice of intent to involuntarily dissolve the LLC was sent Sept. 21 and took effect Dec. 7 when the business failed to file its registration documents within 60 days of the notice, records show. T-Factor LLC also is listed as a creditor in an involuntary Chapter 7 petition filed in October against Cedar Rock Holdings LLC, the investment team behind Scuttle's Island.

Local News:

The Herald: Lancaster man jailed 1,339 days gets 7 years in prison for 2012 slaying

<http://www.heraldonline.com/news/local/crime/article121336978.html>

Andrew Dys

A Lancaster man jailed and awaiting trial for four years was sentenced to seven years in prison for a 2012 slaying in which a man's body was left on the side of the road, according to court officials and court records. Melvin Sowell Jr., 28, was charged with murder in 2012 for the death of Michael Catoe, 25. Sowell, who had been waiting in jail for 1,339 days, pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and obstruction of justice late Thursday, said his lawyer, Mike Lifsey, 6th Circuit Public Defender. Sowell received credit for the more than four years in jail and will likely be released in less than three years.

The Herald: After 13 years, Lancaster murder case ends with accused man getting time served

<http://www.heraldonline.com/news/local/crime/article121335938.html>

Andrew Dys

A South Carolina man who was charged with murder in the 2003 shooting death of his cousin and waited 13 years for the case to go to court walked out of the courthouse Thursday after he pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and was sentenced to time served, his lawyer said. William Demon Pate was sentenced to probation after making the plea almost 13 years to the day in a case where James Smith was killed, said Mark Grier, 6th Circuit assistant public defender. A five-year sentence for the manslaughter was suspended, court records show. Grier said Pate was overcharged with murder after the shooting on Dec. 20, 2003. Police said at the time that Pate was in the back seat handling the gun when it went off. Pate, now 37, also pleaded guilty to a drug charge Thursday that was included in the time served sentence, online court records show.

Post and Courier: Provost Connie Book called the incident "a point of failure" for The Citadel — and a very public one.

http://www.postandcourier.com/news/one-year-after-cadets-don-white-hoods-the-citadel-recommits/article_fbade82-c16c-11e6-88b0-d3c3f7e4aafd.html

Deanna Pan

Images of cadets wearing white, pointed pillowcases over their heads flooded social media and national news outlets last December, provoking a flurry of criticism from alumni, civil rights activists and three Democratic presidential candidates. The episode — six months after a white supremacist gunned down nine black worshipers at Emanuel AME Church — was regarded as another stain on the pre-Civil War college's turbulent history with race and gender. The Citadel's oft-repeated mission is to develop "principled leaders" who exemplify the college's core values of honor, duty and respect. Cadets dressed similarly to Klansmen (while allegedly cracking jokes about white supremacy) were clearly at odds with those values. Fourteen cadets were disciplined as a result.

Sun News: Coastal Carolina University renovating dorms, dealing with overtime rules

<http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/news/local/article121448457.html>

Christian Boschult

The Coastal Carolina Board of Trustees met on Friday and voted to approve renovations to one of the school's residence halls, and were updated on how the school could implement new federal overtime rules. The \$3.8 million renovations to Ingle Hall will begin in the summer of 2018 and take a year to complete. This is the first renovation to the building, which first opened to house students in 1996. According to T. Rein Mungo, Director of Facilities, Planning and Management, the work will include upgrades to the building's HVAC system, electrical upgrades to improve bathroom fans as well as safety and security improvements. The building will not be occupied during the work, which Chief Financial Officer Stacie Bowie said is part of the university's 20-year maintenance plan. "We address each of our buildings as maintenance becomes necessary," she said. There were some concerns during the vote that the price tag for the renovations could change based on inflation or changes in the construction market, but Bowie said it would no problem to come back to the board to request more funding if necessary.

President-elect Trump News:

Associated Press: Obama, rapping Putin, says US could strike back on cyber

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/77a13b25a1f04f20a4d94b8e35e3ea38/obama-rapping-putin-says-us-could-strike-back-cyber>

President Barack Obama has put Russia's Vladimir Putin on notice that the U.S. could use offensive cyber muscle to retaliate for interference in the U.S. presidential election, his strongest suggestion to date that Putin had been well aware of campaign email hacking. "Whatever they do to us, we can potentially do to them," Obama declared Friday. Caught in the middle of a post-election controversy over Russian hacking, Obama strongly defended his administration's response, including his refusal before the voting to ascribe motive to the meddling or to discuss now what effect it might have had. U.S. intelligence assessments say it was aimed at least in part on helping Donald Trump defeat Hillary Clinton, and some Democrats say it may well have tipped the results in his favor. Though

Obama avoided criticizing President-elect Trump by name, he called out Republicans who he said fail even now to acknowledge the seriousness of Russia's involvement in U.S. elections.

Associated Press: Trump's Cabinet selections signal a bold shift after Obama

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c8fa53c195ec4477b06cfcfb6adc308f/trumps-cabinet-selections-signal-bold-shift-after-obama>

Propelled by populist energy, President-elect Donald Trump's candidacy broke long-standing conventions and his incoming Cabinet embodies a sharp turn from the outgoing Obama administration. Trump, a Republican who pledged major changes after eight years of a Democratic White House, has assembled nominees for a Cabinet that includes many business executives who have never served in government, and military leaders are in line to oversee defense and homeland security. In one case, Trump has named someone who once called for dismantling the agency he'd lead. A change of political parties at the White House almost always brings policy adjustments. But Trump's Cabinet expects to carry the outsider flair of his campaign, a role reversal compared with more conventional teams under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama that were heavy on former lawmakers, governors and veterans of past administrations.

Associated Press: With Ivanka Trump, the role of first daughter may evolve

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/4d7e53c282a24478a4b66ee36a46bb7b/ivanka-trump-role-first-daughter-may-change>

With Ivanka Trump, the typically minor role of a first daughter could get a major makeover. She was a key player in her father's winning campaign, and people are closely watching the next moves by President-elect Donald Trump's 35-year-old daughter. She's attended her father's transition meetings with high-profile figures, including the Japanese prime minister and technology leaders, and has indicated her interest in working on policy issues such as child care. The Trump Organization executive vice president also owns her own company that sells clothes and jewelry. While three of Donald Trump's adult children are viewed as close advisers, he often highlights Ivanka and has made clear that he'd love to have her with him when he moves into the White House.

National News:

McClatchy DC: Government extends healthcare deadline as record numbers sign up, Obama says

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/article121456937.html>

Brian Murphy

The federal government Friday extended the deadline to get health insurance that starts on Jan. 1, citing "extraordinary demand" on the Healthcare.gov website. Dec. 19 is the new deadline to sign up for coverage that begins Jan. 1. The old deadline was Dec. 15. The marketplace is one of the tenets of the Affordable Care Act, one of President Barack Obama's signature domestic achievements during his eight years in office. Obama said Thursday was "the biggest day ever" for people signing up through the website. President-elect Donald Trump campaigned on repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act — often called Obamacare. In his first interview after the election with "60 Minutes," Trump seemed to soften his stance, acknowledging there are parts of the law that he likes, such as allowing patients with preexisting conditions to keep coverage and allowing young adults to remain on their parents' insurance plans until age 26. At a rally on Friday, Trump said his administration would repeal Obamacare and have "all sorts of reforms that work for you and your family."

Untied Nations News:

Associated Press: Deal reached that could restart Aleppo evacuation

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/440d4b592e624ac89db2009a9724d36e/evacuation-people-east-aleppo-still-suspended>

An agreement was reached Saturday to allow "humanitarian cases" to leave two besieged

government-held Shiite villages in northwestern Syria, a step that would allow the resumption of civilian and rebel evacuations from eastern Aleppo which were suspended a day earlier, Hezbollah's media arm and a monitoring group said. The opposition's Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the evacuation of some 4,000 people, including wounded, from the villages of Foua and Kfarya was expected to start Saturday. It later reported that 29 buses were heading toward the two villages to start the evacuation process, adding that insurgents in the area rejected allowing 4,000 people to leave and saying they will only allow 400 people to be evacuated. It was not immediately clear whether the alleged evacuation limits set by the insurgents in the two villages would undermine evacuation efforts in Aleppo.

World News:

Associated Press: Iran calls for P5+1 meeting over US sanctions extension

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/eb1b9fd3206f491389b91f7bf6225748/iran-calls-p51-meeting-over-us-sanctions-extension>

Iran's Foreign Minister in a letter to the European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has called for a joint commission meeting on the nuclear deal over the extension of U.S. sanctions against Iran. Iran's official IRNA news agency is reporting Saturday that Mohammad Javad Zarif has requested that Mogherini inform all P5+1 nation members to hold a joint commission meeting over extension of U.S. sanctions against Iran. American lawmakers voted to extend some sanctions against Iran for another 10 years and although President Barack Obama declined to sign the act it still became law. Iran believes the U.S. has violated the nuclear deal by renewing the Iran Sanctions Act, which eased sanctions in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear program.

Associated Press: China says 'appropriately handling' US Navy drone issue

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/8ffa14457f18482d900a5a0ef856473e/china-smooth-resolution-expected-us-navy-drone-issue>

China said Saturday that its military was in contact with its American counterparts on "appropriately handling" the Chinese navy's seizure of a U.S. Navy unmanned underwater glider, one of the most serious incidents between the two militaries in years. The one-sentence comment by the foreign ministry offered no details on what discussions were underway or why China on Thursday seized the drone, which, according to the Pentagon, was being operated by civilian contractors to conduct oceanic research. The U.S. said it issued a formal diplomatic complaint over the seizure and demanded the drone's return. "According to (our) understanding, the U.S. and Chinese sides are working on appropriately handling this matter through channels between the two militaries," the foreign ministry told The Associated Press in a faxed statement. China's defense ministry did not immediately respond to questions on the issue.

Associated Press: Frontex: 350,000 migrants arrived in EU this year so far

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c13e35bd3a7f4d2eb41d5b767809af92/frontex-350000-migrants-arrived-eu-year-so-far>

The head of the European Union border control agency says that about 350,000 migrants have arrived in the EU so far this year. Fabrice Leggeri, executive director of the Frontex border agency, was quoted Saturday by German daily Ruhr-Nachrichten as saying about 180,000 people arrived via Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean, while 170,000 reached the continent across the central Mediterranean route from Libya and Egypt. That's a sharp decline from 2015, when more than 1 million people arrived. Leggeri said a deal between the EU and Turkey reduced the number of migrants coming from the East, but migration from northern Africa rose 30 percent. The International Organization of Migration said Friday that 4,812 people died on the Mediterranean this year so far. That about 1,200 more than last year between January to the end of November.

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Camlin Moore

Cell: 803-206-8236

Office: 803-734-8044