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Subject: Morning Clips - Thursday, March 17, 2016

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## Morning Clips – Thursday, March 17, 2016

### Governor Nikki Haley News:

**The State:** Scoppe: When good people do good things in a bad way — it's still bad  
<http://www.thestate.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/cindi-ross-scoppe/article66462507.html>  
Cindi Ross Scoppe

THERE IS probably no legislator with a longer and deeper commitment to reforming the state Transportation Commission than House Speaker Jay Lucas. So it was more than a little jarring last month when Mr. Lucas introduced a bill and put it on the fast track to strip away the governor's authority to appoint the Transportation secretary and give it back to the Legislature's unaccountable, horse-trading commission. Turns out it was no mistake — but neither had Mr. Lucas gone native. Instead, he was trying to protect the Legislature from a lawsuit whose damage could be debilitating. Left unsaid, but hard not to read between the lines, was the idea that he was trying to preserve a constitutionally questionable maneuver that lawmakers might need to use again this year to maintain the governor's limited authority. The lawsuit stems from a 2007 law that claimed to reform the Transportation Department but didn't. It did allow the governor to appoint the transportation secretary, but only through June 2015, when that power would revert to the still-legislatively appointed Transportation Commission if the Legislature hadn't extended it.

**WIS:** State officials launching new foster care program  
<http://www.wistv.com/story/31490737/state-officials-launching-new-foster-care-program>  
Samantha Bleiweis

Governor Haley and the Department of Social Services are launching a new program to help recruit foster parents. The initiative is called Champions for Children. According to Governor Haley, 54 percent of foster children are not placed within their own county because there aren't enough foster families. "These children are vulnerable, they have been through a traumatic experience, but they are loveable. And they want a home, and they want a place they will feel protected." DSS Director Susan Alford says her department has worked to streamline the application process ever since the shortage of foster parents was identified. Governor Haley says the goal is to recruit about 1,500 more foster care families.

**The State:** Roads chief urges lawmakers to act on reforms this year  
<http://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/politics-columns-blogs/the-buzz/article66438412.html>

Cassie Cope

The head of the S.C. Department of Transportation said Wednesday that S.C. lawmakers should pass changes to the agency's structure before they go home in June. Transportation Secretary Christy Hall said she is concerned about the possibility of nothing happening to restructure the agency during the current legislative session. "Essentially, we have a cloud that's hanging over the agency," Hall said, adding there is uncertainty among employees about who is in charge and how the agency will operate if changes are made.

**Note:** Meanwhile Wednesday, House leaders sent a letter to Republican Gov. Nikki Haley outlining their plans to take up a Senate proposal to spend \$400 million on road repairs and change the structure of the state's roads agency. However, Haley warned Wednesday that if the House does not agree to the Senate's roads bill, "I strongly believe this bill will die. It will be on the House that they

are the ones that killed it.” Haley has said commissioners now are driven by “short-sighted regionalism and political horse trading.”

**Greenville News:** Speaker tells Haley House will not pursue gas tax hike

<http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/politics/2016/03/16/speaker-tells-haley-house-not-pursue-gas-tax-hike/81875604/>

Tim Smith

South Carolina's Legislature will not increase the state's gas tax this year, according to a letter from House Speaker Jay Lucas to Gov. Nikki Haley. Lucas, who last week criticized the Senate's roads bill as failing to address a long-term solution for infrastructure, told Haley Wednesday that House Republicans, who hold a majority in the chamber, will not insist on the House version of the roads bill, which would have effectively raised prices at the pump to fund road repairs.

**Note:** Haley talked to the House GOP Caucus this week, Lucas wrote, and shared his concern about a long-term solution. "Thank you for expressing a concern a vast majority of our caucus shares by recognizing that the Senate bill does not contain a sustainable funding solution," he wrote. "We also appreciate your pledge to work with us to quickly create a long-term sustainable funding model." Haley last year told lawmakers she would approve a 10-cent increase in the gas tax, last raised in 1987, but only if they also passed an income tax rate cut and reformed the way state highway commissioners are selected.

**The State:** Haley orders Richland councilman removed from seat

<http://www.thestate.com/news/local/article66404402.html>

John Monk

Gov. Nikki Haley on Wednesday removed Kelvin Washington from his seat on Richland County Council. In an executive order, Haley said she was declaring his Lower Richland council seat vacant because Washington had recently been convicted of failure to file state income tax returns for three years. Washington also was indicted Wednesday by a Richland County grand jury on felony driving under the influence with great bodily injury, according to 5th Circuit Solicitor Dan Johnson. Washington has been absent from the past two council meetings.

**WCIV:** Gov. Haley supports Ted Cruz after Marco Rubio drops out, will more follow?

<http://abcnews4.com/news/local/gov-haley-supports-ted-cruz-after-marco-rubio-drops-out-will-more-follow>

Lara Rolo

Governor Nikki Haley said Wednesday she hopes U.S. Senator Ted Cruz can take the win over Donald Trump. While she did not issue an official endorsement, she suggested Cruz is now her pick for the G-O-P ticket. "My hope and my prayer is that Sen Cruz can come through this," she said. Knotts believes Haley won't be the only politician to toss their support behind Cruz. "He's now become the anti-Trump candidate," Knotts said. With just three candidates left in the race for the Republican ticket, Knotts said the goal now will be to dethrone Trump. Cruz, he said, is someone the G-O-P can get behind.

## **S.C. General Assembly News:**

**Post and Courier:** South Carolina Senate discusses bill aimed at registering, tracking refugees

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20160316/PC1603/160319505>

Maya T. Prabhu

The state Senate spent two hours Wednesday debating a bill that would require refugees to register with the Department of Social Services in a public online database and be tracked by the State Law Enforcement Division. The bill also creates civil liability for organizations if a refugee from a country linked with terrorism and settled through their group causes harm. During the debate, a Charleston senator questioned why the Senate wasn't doing more to combat domestic terrorism by strengthening gun laws. There are several proposed amendments to the refugees bill. The debate will resume at 11

a.m. Thursday.

**Aiken Standard:** Refugee resettlement bill makes its way to South Carolina Senate

<http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20160317/AIK0101/160319537>

Christina Cleveland

The discussion of refugee resettlement in South Carolina has been brought back to the forefront as the S.C. Senate has taken up debate on a bill that would require refugees to register with the state. It follows calls from many Republicans, including governors, across the U.S. last fall to halt Syrian refugees allowed into the country following terrorist attacks in Paris and later, the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California. President Barack Obama had announced the U.S. would take in thousands of Syrians for resettlement amid its civil war. The bill, S.997, if passed, would require refugees to register with the Department of Social Services within 30 days of entering the state and for the information to be maintained by the department's database.

**WACH:** Sparks fly during Senate Refugee debate

<http://wach.com/news/local/sparks-fly-during-senate-refugee-debate>

Tara Petitt

Some state leaders say South Carolina is at war, and they are trying to do something about it. Lawmakers began a full debate Wednesday on a measure that would make it harder for terrorists to get into the state disguised as refugees. Currently, there are more than 80 refugees in South Carolina, and more than two hundred more are slated to come to the state this year through a federal relocation program. Some lawmakers are calling the measure an anti-terrorist bill, but members on the other side of the aisle call it offensive. Lawmakers will continue debate on the issue Thursday.

**Herald-Journal:** New SC bill would turn up the heat on arsonists

<http://www.goupstate.com/article/20160316/articles/160319764>

Daniel J. Gross

Area lawmakers and fire officials hope a return to tough arson penalties will deter people from committing such crimes. A bill that restructures the degrees of arson was unanimously approved by state legislators Wednesday and now goes to Gov. Nikki Haley's desk to be signed into law. The "clean-up bill" essentially changes arson laws back to the way they were prior to 2010, when the Omnibus Crime Reduction and Sentencing Reform Act was passed.

**Aiken Standard:** Taylor on FOIA bill: 'This is truly a people's bill'

<http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20160316/AIK0101/160319521>

Christina Cleveland

A bill improving government transparency approved by a S.C. Senate committee this week was met with some resistance, however, Rep. Bill Taylor, R-Aiken, is confident about its future. The bill that would reform South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee with a 17-1 vote Tuesday. "This is truly a people's bill," said Taylor, a champion for the FOIA bill. "This allows for citizens and the press, of course, to use the Freedom of Information Act as it should be used where they are able to have full transparency of government, be able to get information from government easily and inexpensively."

**Post and Courier:** South Carolina lawmakers look to rid state of 'tampon tax,' provide free products in state buildings

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20160316/PC1603/160319511>

Maya T. Prabhu

South Carolina lawmakers are considering targeting taxes that single out women's health care needs, with tampons being first on the list. A male legislator in the House of Representatives said the playing field has become so unfair that it's time the state provide the feminine hygiene product for free in all state buildings. Ashley Crary, associate director of government relations with the S.C. Coalition for Healthy Families, said she was glad to hear of McKnight's push and hoped a bill declaring feminine

products a necessity is introduced soon. Ashley Crary, associate director of government relations with the S.C. Coalition for Healthy Families, said she was glad to hear of McKnight's push and hoped a bill declaring feminine products a necessity is introduced soon.

**WIS:** Firefighters appeal to lawmakers on Fire Service Legislation Day

<http://www.wistv.com/story/31489582/firefighters-appeal-to-lawmakers-on-fire-service-legislation-day>

Samantha Bleiweis

Firefighters and service members honored Fire Service Legislation day Wednesday at the State House. South Carolina Firefighters' Association representatives spent time inside the State House not only appealing to lawmakers about the issues that matter to them, but to thank them for their hard work. "We try to bring in a nice contingent to say 'thank you' first, 'thank you for the work you've done at home.' We have 200 uniform firefighters, at least, meeting with our sit-in House members, first saying 'thank you for the work you're doing, but also the importance of what's ahead,'" said Kyle Minick, the Legislative Chair for the SC Firefighters' Association.

**Post and Courier:** Robert Ford files to return to the Statehouse; Democratic leader says don't support him

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20160316/PC1603/160319507>

Schuyler Kropf

Former Democratic state senator Robert Ford, who left the Statehouse under an ethics cloud and later pleaded guilty to misusing campaign donations, filed to return to office Wednesday. Immediately afterward, the head of the Charleston County Democratic Party had a message for local Dems: Don't vote for Ford. Ford last year was sentenced to probation for misdemeanor ethics violations. Nothing in his plea agreement prevents him from running again. He was sentenced to five years of probation and ordered to pay restitution. The charges stem largely from spending campaign donation money on himself, such as car payments, department store purchases, restaurants, novelty shops and other living expenses. He resigned from the Legislature in June 2013, prior to being indicted.

## **S.C. Politics News:**

**Associated Press:** Lt. Gov. joining call for Day of Service in South Carolina

[http://m.apnews.com/ap/db\\_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=2c4bAmd3](http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=2c4bAmd3)

SC State Wire

Lt. Gov. Henry McMaster is joining the next generation of state leaders in calling for a Day of Service in South Carolina. McMaster has scheduled a news conference at the Statehouse on Thursday. Joining him are representatives of the 2016 class of Leadership South Carolina. The class is organizing a statewide day of service to be held May 21. The idea is to reach out to other South Carolinians in the spirit of unity that followed last year's Charleston church shootings and last October's historic floods. The news conference will provide details of the effort in which people will be able to give back to the state by doing everything from picking up litter and checking on neighbors to helping with home repairs and other tasks.

**Washington Times:** Trey Gowdy puts limits on Democrats' access to Benghazi probe

[http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/mar/16/trey-gowdy-limits-democrats-access-to-benghazi-pro/?utm\\_source=RSS\\_Feed&utm\\_medium=RSS](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/mar/16/trey-gowdy-limits-democrats-access-to-benghazi-pro/?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS)

Stephen Dinan

Afraid Democrats will leak exculpatory parts of their investigation to try to help Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, Benghazi probe chairman Rep. Trey Gowdy said Wednesday he will impose new limits on the information to which Democrats will have access. The move marks the latest escalation as all sides prepare for what's likely to be a politically controversial report later this year on the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on the U.S. outpost in Benghazi, and the handling of it by Mrs. Clinton, then the secretary of state. Mr. Gowdy, South Carolina Republican, said as they try to wrap up their investigation he asked the top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, to promise not to

leak partial transcripts. He said the Maryland Democrat refused — forcing him to impose the new rules.

**Politico:** Benghazi panel devolves into partisan war over transcripts

<http://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/benghazi-transcripts-gowdy-220907>

Rachel Bade

The House Benghazi Committee on Wednesday night erupted in a partisan spat after Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C) sharply restricted the ability of Democrats to access witness transcripts and accused the minority party of planning to release them prematurely — a threat Gowdy says would cripple his probe.

Committee Democrats, under the lead of Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings, were enraged by the move and argued that Republicans are trying to cut them out while the majority party writes a partisan report.

**McClatchy DC:** Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland doesn't impress SC senators

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/congress/article66473077.html>

Vera Bergengruen

South Carolina Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott intend to join their colleagues in the Republican-controlled Senate to make things difficult for Merrick B. Garland, President Barack Obama's nominee to serve on the Supreme Court. "I believe that my duty is to the people of South Carolina; not to the president," Scott said in a statement soon after Obama announced his pick in a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House on Wednesday morning. "As a result, I will not consider any Supreme Court nominee until after the country has elected our next president in November and they have taken office in January 2017." "One thing I know for sure is that if the shoe was on the other foot, the Democratic leadership would not even entertain such an appointment coming from a Republican president," Graham said in his statement.

### **Opinion/Editorial:**

**The State:** At least brighten up the potholes

<http://www.thestate.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article66461772.html>

Letter

In our neighborhood we have axle-breaking, tire-shredding potholes that have taken over the roads. So far, help is not on the way. But never fear: The Department of Transportation has found the time and the money to paint bright yellow lane lines the length of Lakeshore Drive. If paint is within the budget, please just buy some bright neon green paint and circle all the potholes: That way we might be able to escape disappearing into the abyss.

**The State:** Schools need mental health counseling

<http://www.thestate.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article66461332.html>

Letter

The State Safe Schools Task Force did an excellent job of identifying policies and practices to make schools safer and more conducive to learning. I'd like to offer one more area that needs to be addressed: access to mental and behavioral health counseling and social work services. Many students experience challenges that require more intensive intervention than can be provided by a guidance counselor. The lack of intensive intervention services often leads to serious discipline problems, truancy, academic failure and worse. Stronger intervention services in schools would do much to prevent the problems that become roadblocks to student success and a positive learning environment.

**Post and Courier:** 'Watering down' academics in S.C.

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20160317/PC1002/160319495>

Letter

I understand what State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman is talking about in the March 15 front page article, but sometimes you really wonder when it is time to stop talking and getting quoted and quit while you are ahead — the “less said, the better.” Ms. Spearman’s comments include, “It’s not about watering down the grades,” and, “It’s about helping to level the playing field for our students as they compete for scholarships with students from other states.” What exactly do you think “watering down the grades” and “leveling the playing field” really means? It comes down to accommodating a trend in this country that everyone passes and that the best achievers do not count.

**The Herald:** Officials must curb violence at DJJ facility

<http://www.heraldonline.com/opinion/editorials/article66502267.html>

Editorial

South Carolinians should be dismayed that two of the chief state agencies dealing with at-risk juveniles are in crisis. The S.C. Department of Social Services has been inadequately staffed and unable to keep up with spiraling caseloads for years. Now, however, the spotlight is on the Department of Juvenile Justice, whose Broad River Road detention center in Columbia was the site last month of a riot involving dozens of inmates and causing thousands of dollars worth of damage.

**Post and Courier:** S.C. GOP should be proud of record turnout

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20160317/PC1002/160319494>

Letter

All South Carolinians should be proud of the record turnout of our citizens in both the Republican and Democratic primaries. Over a million of us voted and showed that civic participation is alive and well in our state. An overwhelming majority made it clear that we want a change in the direction of our country and a change in leadership. Statewide, 737,917 of our citizens voted in the Republican primary and only 368,886 in the Democratic primary, a difference of 369,031 people. This is a dramatic reversal from 2008 when 532,227 voted in the Democratic primary and 431,196 in the Republican primary.

**South Carolina News:**

**Associated Press:** 2 million BMWs shipped through the Port of Charleston

[http://m.apnews.com/ap/db\\_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=Y9xdxbmn](http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=Y9xdxbmn)

SC State Wire

BMW and the South Carolina Ports Authority are marking a milestone on the Charleston docks. Officials are scheduled to gather on Thursday as the two-millionth BMW manufactured at the company's plant in Greer for export is loaded onto a ship. BMW opened its plant in upstate South Carolina back in 1994. The company exported almost \$10 billion worth of vehicles from its South Carolina assembly plant last year, remaining the nation's leading vehicle exporter in terms of the value of the vehicles.

**WLTX:** Military Base Task Force Discuss Possible Cuts, Future Challenges

<http://www.wltx.com/news/military-base-task-force-discuss-possible-cuts-future-challenges/85722610>

The South Carolina Military Base Task Force discussed possible cuts to the military Wednesday morning. During the meeting, committee members also learned that McEntire Joint National Guard Base is still recovering from the floods. Brigadier General Van McCarty says the flood caused roof damage and mold which were just issues on top of the already much needed maintenance. The good thing is that the base has received about \$500,000 in active nature funding from the National Guard Bureau and could be getting an additional \$9 million if the state can come up with 25 percent of that.

**Local News:**

**Associated Press:** Lowcountry mayors want traffic cameras before beach season

[http://m.apnews.com/ap/db\\_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=mI9OqNog](http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268748/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=mI9OqNog)

SC State Wire

Officials in towns east of Charleston want traffic cameras installed before this summer's beach season. The mayors of Mount Pleasant, Isle of Palms and Sullivans Island have written Charleston County Council saying cameras can be used by beachgoers to get a better idea of travel times when roads get clogged. The Post and Courier of Charleston reports (<http://bit.ly/1pKooXK>) the council's finance committee, comprised of all council members, considers \$100,000 for the cameras on Thursday.

**Island Packet:** Hilton Head council may raise its pay

<http://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/article66498117.html>

Rebecca Lurye

Hilton Head Island Town Council members are considering giving themselves pay raises. Council voted unanimously Tuesday to direct the town manager to prepare an ordinance, increasing the amount they receive for attending meetings to \$50 per meeting —up from the current \$40. That raise would apply just to committee and business meetings, not regularly scheduled council meetings. It would increase the maximum pay for each council member between 4.1 percent and 7 percent.

**The Herald:** York County candidates line up for first day of filing

<http://www.heraldonline.com/news/politics-government/election/local-election/article66508197.html>

Bristow Marchant

Candidates lined up at the Voter Registration and Elections Office in York ahead of the noon opening of filing season, hoping to be the first to put their names down for June's primaries and ultimately November's general election. Wanda Hemphill, county elections director, set up a room off the building's main entrance to handle the expected traffic, and four candidates – two incumbents and two first-time candidates – made their runs official before the end of their lunch breaks.

**Aiken Standard:** Woodside named Southern Living 'Inspired Community'

<http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20160316/AIK0101/160319516>

Dan Brown

The word is out, as Southern Living magazine named Woodside, a gated golf community located on Aiken's south side, as a new member of the Southern Living Inspired Communities, a unique collection of residential developments scattered across seven Southern states that exemplify the Southern Living lifestyle. "We couldn't be more honored to announce Woodside's partnership with the Southern Living brand," said Lindsay Scavone, group marketing coordinator for Woodside Development. "The Woodside architecture, landscaping, use of outdoor space and sense of pride in the community were all major contributing factors to this achievement, though it would not have been at all possible if not for the unique charm, culture and vibrancy of Aiken itself."

**Sun News:** Broadway at the Beach construction continues as new attractions look to open

<http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/news/local/article66515172.html>

Emily Weaver

Construction continues at Broadway at the Beach as crews scurry to finish a transformation of the tourism destination's new entertainment and nightlife area in time for summer. The area is set to house the Grand Strand's first Dave & Buster's, a new American Tap House and an ever-evolving Oz nightclub. Plans for the square's makeover also include new homes for Broadway's long-serving attractions Broadway Louie's and Hard Rock Café Myrtle Beach. "Construction is well underway on many of the properties such as Hard Rock Cafe and American Tap House. Some properties, like OZ, have already opened, but no firm dates have been announced for any of the other properties yet," Gainer said.

**Herald-Journal:** Spartanburg County improves in health rankings

<http://www.goupstate.com/article/20160316/articles/160319766>

Chris Lavender

Spartanburg County residents' health and quality of life have steadily improved, according to a report released Wednesday. The 2016 County Health Rankings, published by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, measure and compare more than 30 factors that influence health, including education, housing, jobs, smoking and access to healthy food. The report examined the health and well-being of people living in nearly every county in the United States. In South Carolina, Spartanburg County ranked 15th out of 46 counties for health outcomes. In 2015, the county was 17th, and in 2014 it was 18th. The rankings represent how healthy a county is based on mortality and morbidity rates.

**Herald-Journal:** Spartanburg task force examines behavioral health needs

<http://www.goupstate.com/article/20160316/articles/160319762>

Alyssa Mulliger

The Spartanburg County Behavioral Health Taskforce held its first quarterly meeting of the year Wednesday to discuss focus areas, such as enhancing support services for veterans and addressing a lack of autism and postpartum depression resources. The task force is working with Upstate Warrior Solution and the Spartanburg Housing Authority to explore housing opportunities for veterans and their families. The group has hired a full-time peer case manager to address housing and homeless veterans issues with the \$25,000 it received from the county's Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Award. The task force also discussed expanding a mental health "warm line" and a reassurance line. A warm, or crisis, line is a safe and secure outlet for people working on their recovery or who feel they may be facing a crisis.

**Independent Mail:** People attend event at Clemson mosque seeking answers about Islam

<http://www.independentmail.com/news/people-turn-out-for-meeting-at-clemson-mosque-searching-for-answers-about-islam-2e1ebba1-35b4-6f06-e-372297871.html>

Charmaine Smith-Miles

mam Mohammad Mustafa invited the community into the mosque on Old Stone Church Road on Wednesday night to help "remove the distorting" ideas people have about Islam. For those who attended, he did that. About 20 people attended the first of eight community meetings that Mustafa and the Islamic Society of Clemson will host at the mosque. At the meetings, Mustafa, who has been the leader of the mosque since 2013, plans to talk about Islam and the Quran. He said he will also address some of the social aspects of the faith, what the Quran says about Jesus and the role of women in Islamic society. Some in the audience asked about terrorist organizations such as ISIS, and whether such groups are practicing Islam.

**WLTX:** Slightly Higher Lead Levels in Lexington, Orangeburg Area Water

<http://www.wltx.com/news/local/onyourside/slightly-higher-lead-levels-in-water-found-in-lexington-orangeburg-areas/85520293>

Alison Young and Mark Nichols

Since 2012, nearly 2,000 water systems across the U.S. have found elevated lead levels in tap water samples, a public health concern that requires them to notify customers and take action. Below you can see names of the local water system, the county it serves, the range of lead levels over 15 parts per billion in samples that triggered an action status, and total action-level tests over the period. Exceedance is the amount by which something, especially a pollutant, exceeds a standard or permissible measurement...

**National News:**

**Associated Press:** Cranking up pressure, Dems ready to bring Garland to Capitol

<http://bigstory.ap.org/urn:publicid:ap.org:c93d9749fdce4de49698da1034caefc9>

Alan Fram

With a name, face and judicial record finally fleshed out, President Barack Obama's pick for the

Supreme Court vacancy is ready to commence courtesy calls with senators that Democrats hope will ultimately put unbearable election-year pressure on Republicans refusing to consider any Obama nominee. Merrick Garland planned to visit two top Democrats on Thursday, a day after Obama nominated the 63-year-old appellate court judge and former prosecutor for the seat. The White House said that after a two-week Senate recess, Garland will meet with Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, who's been a chief focus of Democratic attacks for refusing to let his panel hold a hearing for anyone Obama selects, helping to doom the nomination. Declining to see Garland was Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who has led the GOP's near-solid blockade against a hearing or vote until the next president makes a choice.

**Associated Press:** GOP leaders grapple with grudgingly accepting Trump

<http://bigstory.ap.org/urn:publicid:ap.org:219374e149a146468666e7b01e78247b>

Julie Pace and Steve Peoples

Republican leaders are wavering between grudging acceptance and deep denial about Donald Trump's likely ascent to the GOP presidential nomination. With at least three more states in his win column, Trump is now the only candidate with a path to clinching the Republican nomination before the party's convention in July. But he still must do better in upcoming contests to get the necessary 1,237 delegates, leaving some opponents with a sliver of hope he can still be stopped. Trump cautions that his supporters would revolt if he falls just short in the delegate count and loses in a rules fight at the GOP convention.

**Associated Press:** Russian Air Force: Syria withdrawal to be complete in 3 days

<http://bigstory.ap.org/urn:publicid:ap.org:882b101de1024e63bd9525bb32c708e3>

The commander of the Russian Air Force says the withdrawal of the bulk of the Russian forces from Syria should be complete in two to three days. Col.-Gen. Viktor Bondarev said in an interview with the Komsomolskaya Pravda daily on Thursday that the Air Force aims to meet President Vladimir Putin's deadline and pull out in the next two to three days. Putin on Monday announced the withdrawal of most of the Russian forces from Syria to end a five-and-a-half-month campaign there.

**Associated Press:** DC subway shutdown ends, but systemic problems remain

<http://bigstory.ap.org/urn:publicid:ap.org:08a7faa1b77d4c4f80cf122fec816f2d>

Ben Nuckols and Jessica Gresko

Commuters in the nation's capital were able to return to their regular routines Thursday morning after an unprecedented daylong shutdown of the Washington subway system. Metro tweeted early Thursday morning that it has resumed service on all lines. Local television stations showed commuters walking into stations and waiting on platforms. But the problems that led to the closure won't be fixed so easily and will continue to cause headaches for riders, some of whom have already abandoned the aging system because of safety and reliability concerns.

**Associated Press:** Frank Sinatra Jr. dies of cardiac arrest while on tour

<http://bigstory.ap.org/urn:publicid:ap.org:87ce1e2088764f329fde170a6a57a176>

Andrew Dalton

Frank Sinatra Jr., who carried on his famous father's legacy with his own music career and whose kidnapping as a young man added a bizarre chapter to his father's legendary life, died Wednesday. He was 72. The younger Sinatra died unexpectedly of cardiac arrest while on tour in Daytona Beach, Florida, the Sinatra family said in a statement to The Associated Press.

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