



78°/64°
Thunderstorm

OBAMA'S 'MYTH-BUSTING' MISSION

Obama goes to Elkhart, Indiana, to undermine Republican arguments about the economy, working to persuade Democrats to embrace his policies ahead of the election. **NATIONAL, 4**



Southwest Journalist

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN ■ DOW JONES NEWS FUND CENTER FOR EDITING EXCELLENCE ■ SOUTHWESTJOURNALIST.COM ■ THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2016



Health policy rate hikes loom

Rural Texans could bear brunt with 60% jump

RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The largest health insurer in Texas wants to raise its rates on individual policies by an average of nearly 60 percent, a new sign that President Barack Obama's overhaul hasn't solved the problem of price spikes.

Texas isn't alone. Citing financial losses under the health care law, many insurers around the country are requesting bigger premium increases for 2017. That's to account for lower-than-hoped

enrollment, sicker-than-expected customers and problems with the government's financial backstop for insurance markets.

The national picture will take weeks to fill in. With data available for about half the states, premium increases appear to be sharper, but there are also huge differences between states and among insurers because health insurance is priced locally.

Earlier this week, North Carolina's largest insurer said it will seek an average increase of 18.8 percent.

A recent analysis of nine states by the consulting firm Avalere Health found that average premium increases for the most popular kind of plan ranged from 5 percent in Washington state to 44 percent in Vermont.

Millions of customers will be shielded from price hikes by government subsidies, typically more than 70 percent of the premium. People who don't have access to a workplace plan can buy a policy directly on the health law's marketplaces.

But many consumers aren't eli-

gible for the income-based subsidies and get no such protection. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas has about 603,000 individual policyholders and, unlike other insurers in the state,

"Regulators can request more information . . . but the federal government can't order Blue Cross Blue Shield to roll back the increases."

LARRY LEVITT

averaging from 57.3 percent to 59.4 percent across its individual market plans.

In a statement, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas said its request is based on strong financial prin-

ciples, science and data.

"It's also important to understand the magnitude of the losses (that was) experienced in the individual retail market over the past two years," the statement said. The company says it lost \$592 million last year and \$416 million in 2014.

Texas is the health care law's third-largest market, after Florida and California. Texas Department of Insurance

spokesman Ben Gonzalez said the Texas can withdraw approval if the request doesn't meet requirements and standards in Texas law.

Wichita Falls insurance broker Kelly Fristoe said the burden of premium increases will fall hardest on rural communities,

■ HEALTH, Page 2

2 dead in UCLA murder-suicide



L.A. police work at the scene of a murder-suicide at an engineering building on the UCLA campus Wednesday. After the campus was under

lockdown for about two hours, the police found two men dead in an office, along with a gun and what might have been a suicide note.

Police swarm campus to search for shooter

CHRISTOPHER WEBER
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A murder-suicide at a UCLA engineering building Wednesday drew hundreds of heavily armed officers who swarmed the campus, where students barricaded themselves in classrooms as best they could before being evacuated with their hands up.

About two hours after the first 911 call came in around 10 a.m., with the center of campus still saturated with officers, LA Police Chief Charlie Beck declared the threat over. Two men were dead in an office, and authorities found a gun and what might be a suicide note, he said.

Authorities did not identify the men,

MORE ONLINE

■ Check out swjournalist.com for more coverage of the UCLA murder-suicide, including a Storify and timeline of events

and a motive was not immediately clear.

The response to the shooting was overwhelming: Teams of officers in helmets and bulletproof vests, who were looking for victims and suspects, ran across the normally tranquil campus tucked in the city's bustling west side. Some with high-powered rifles yelled for bystanders to evacuate. Groups of officers stormed into buildings that had been locked down and

cleared hallways as police helicopters hovered overhead.

Advised by university text alerts to turn out the lights and lock the doors where they were, many students let friends and family know they were safe in social media posts. Some described frantic evacuation scenes while others wrote that their doors weren't locking and posted photos of photocopiers and foosball tables they used as barricades.

Those locked down inside classrooms described a nervous calm. Some said they had to rig the doors closed with whatever was at hand because they would not lock.

Umar Rehman, 21, was in a hall ad-

■ CAMPUS, Page 2

Ken Starr resigns

'I willingly do accept responsibility'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WACO — Ken Starr resigned as Baylor University's chancellor on Wednesday, a week after the former prosecutor who led the investigation of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal was removed as the school's president over its handling of sexual assault complaints against football players.

Starr, who will continue to teach at the law school, told ESPN's "Outside the Lines" in an interview broadcast Wednesday that he didn't know about the sexual assault allegations involving members of Baylor's vaunted football program until media reports first surfaced in 2015 during a player's trial.

"I didn't know about what was happening, but I have to, and I willingly do accept responsibility," said Starr, who was hired as president in 2010.

The school hired Philadelphia law firm Pepper Hamilton to investigate the matter last year. It released its findings last week, determining that under Starr's leadership, Baylor did little to respond to accusations of sexual assault involving football players over several years.

School regents came under fire for allowing Starr to stay on as chancellor for external fundraising. Starr told ESPN that he resigned the position Wednesday morning, effective immediately, "with sorrow" and "as a matter of conscience."

"We need to heal Baylor," Starr said. "We need to put this horrible situation behind us."

Baylor officials didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

The scandal has resulted in major



Starr

■ CAMPUS, Page 2

It's all about location when kids seek asylum

Texas applicants less likely to get approval at hearing

AMY TAXIN
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — For unaccompanied immigrant children seeking asylum in the U.S., where they apply seems to make a world of difference.

Youngsters whose applications are handled by the U.S. government's regional offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles are far more likely to win approval from asylum officers than those applying in Chicago or Houston, according to data obtained by The Associated Press under a Freedom of Information Act request.

The figures offer a snapshot of



Jonathan Lopez of Des Moines, Iowa, gathered paperwork needed for his asylum application, but his efforts were not strong enough. Jonathan's dad, Alejandro Lopez, right photo, a gardener, said he knew it would be an uphill battle for his teenage son to gain asylum after coming to the U.S. in 2014. Lopez, 18, will make a final plea to remain in February.

how the government is handling the huge surge over the past two years in the number of Central American children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border unac-

companied by adults. Tens of thousands of youngsters — many of them fleeing gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — have overflowed U.S. shel-

ters and further clogged the nation's overwhelmed immigration courts.

Under federal law, these children can apply to remain in the



PHOTOS BY CHARLIE NEIBERGALL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

country in a process that involves an interview with an asylum officer from one of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' eight regional offices. To win their cases, they must show that they have been persecuted or are in danger of persecution.

As of January, asylum officers had rendered decisions in the cases of nearly 5,800 such children who arrived since May 2014, according to the figures obtained by the AP.

Overall, 37 percent were granted asylum. The rate varied dramatically, however, from 86 percent at the San Francisco office, which handles applications for a swath of the Pacific Northwest, to 15 percent in Chicago, which covers 15 states from Ohio to Idaho.

Los Angeles, which covers parts of California and Nevada,

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL



JULIO CORTEZ / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton laughs with Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., at Omar's Cafe while campaigning Wednesday in Newark, N.J.



TED S. WARREN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally in Spokane, Wash., on May 7.

Clinton counts on California volunteers

MICHAEL R. BLOOD
Associated Press

BURBANK, California — Sue LaVaccare is fighting “the California complacency”, a well-documented tendency of voters to skip on election days.

And Southern California, a base of support for Hillary Clinton, has a notoriously uneven record when it comes to voter turnout.

“What I think is our biggest challenge,” LaVaccare, 47, a health care consultant and political fundraiser who is organizing volunteers for Clinton in the fiercely contested 28th Congressional District in Los Angeles County, says, “is getting her supporters to actually vote.”

While Clinton needs a mere 71 delegates from several states voting on June 7 to claim the Democratic nomination, the fight against rival Bernie Sanders in California has grown increasingly contentious as the Vermont senator gains in polling. Both campaigns are counting on unher-

alded volunteers like LaVaccare to rouse their supporters.

Underscoring the stakes, Clinton has had LaVaccare and other volunteers at work in the district for months. Hollywood for Hillary, as it's known, has grown into a small army of up to 400 people, whose members have gathered at least 15 times to make phone calls and are knocking on doors in places like Los Angeles' Silver Lake neighborhood.

Campaigns employ a host of ways to reach voters — ads can be sent to Facebook pages, for example. They typically stockpile data to suss out voter preferences that can range from registration information to details on their last shopping trip, which can be clues to political leanings.

“It becomes very critical to not only convince voters to be for you, but also to do everything you can to get them to go to the polls,” says veteran Democratic consultant Bill Carrick, who is not aligned with either Clinton or Sanders. “That's a big deal.”

Trump University documents disclosed

JULIE PACE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The strategies that Donald Trump's now-defunct educational company used to woo customers have plenty of echoes of the presumptive Republican nominee's current pitch to voters, based on newly disclosed court documents about Trump University.

Hillary Clinton leapt on the parallels Wednesday, using them to cast Trump as a “fraud” who peddles false promises to Americans but cares only about his personal gain.

“He is trying to scam America the way he scammed all those people at Trump U,” Clinton said during a campaign stop in Newark, New Jersey. “It's important that we recognize what he has done because that's usually a pretty good indicator of what he will do.”

The new details about Trump University were revealed in documents released Tuesday as part of a trio of lawsuits accusing the

businessman of fleecing students with unfulfilled promises to provide secrets of real estate success. Plaintiffs contend the organization gave seminars and classes across the country that constantly pressured customers to buy more and more but failed to deliver on promises of financial success.

Trump vigorously maintains that customers were overwhelmingly pleased with the offerings, and the documents do include testimony from several satisfied customers. His campaign released a video Wednesday featuring several people speaking positively about their experiences.

As Trump steamrolled through the GOP primary, some of those rivals raised Trump University as a liability for the businessman, and at least five different outside groups mentioned the business in attack ads.

A case against Trump University in San Diego is scheduled to go to trial shortly after the November presidential election.

Migrant children: West Coast courts are more lenient

Continued from Page 1

Arizona and Hawaii, granted asylum in 53 percent of its cases while only 16 percent were approved by Houston which handles Texas, Colorado, New Mexico and other states. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services had no explanation for the disparities. Children who are turned down get a second chance to plead their cases before an immigration judge. If they fail at that stage, they can be deported. Immigration lawyers

said most of those children are still awaiting decisions on their applications because it can take months or years for their cases to be heard in court. Asylum officers are expected to make decisions in line with federal court rulings on immigration, and the appeals courts on the West Coast are more liberal. Also, California has funded immigration attorneys for children since the surge.

“For us, it is a puzzle, and we do find it baffling,” said Lisa Koop

of the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago.

Immigration lawyers in liberal San Francisco said asylum officers there take their time and use child-friendly language during interviews to draw details out of traumatized youngsters who often are reluctant to share their pasts with strangers. Where unaccompanied children apply for asylum is dictated by where they live, and most of them have little or no control over that. They are placed by the U.S. government with relatives already living in this country.

Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, a nonprofit organization in San Antonio.

The data obtained by the AP shows that more than 10,000 unaccompanied children who arrived in the U.S. since May 2014

By the numbers

37 percent of about 5,800 migrant children have been granted asylum by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services since May 2014.

16 percent of asylum cases that the Houston office granted.

43 percent of girls' and **33** percent of boys' applications have been approved

In Southern California, Jhona-

than Rivas said he was nervous heading for his interview, but the officer seemed relaxed as she asked him open-ended questions through an interpreter. Over 90 minutes, Rivas recounted how gang members harassed him on his way home from church in El Salvador, pressed him to join the gang and killed his cousin and uncle. Two weeks later, Rivas learned he can remain in the U.S.

Starr now just law professor

Continued from Page 1

upheaval at the university, which emerged to become one of the top football programs nationally.

The same day Baylor released its report, the regents fired head coach Art Briles and sanctioned athletic director Ian McCaw, who resigned on Monday after the school hired Jim Grobe to coach the 2016 season.

Starr called Briles “a very powerful father figure” who “wants the best for these young men.” Starr said he wasn't consulted before Briles was fired.

The report said school administrators discouraged students from reporting or participating in student conduct reviews of sexual assault complaints, and that they even contributed to or accommodated a “hostile” environment

against the alleged victims. In one case, the actions of administrators “constituted retaliation against a complainant for reporting sexual assault,” the report said.

University leaders were also slow to enact federally-required student conduct processes, and they failed to identify and eliminate the hostile environment toward victims, the report found.

Starr told ESPN that he didn't think the school had a problem until the August 2015 conviction of football player Sam Ukwuachu, who sexually assaulted another student. But Tevin Elliott, another football player, was convicted of sexual assault in 2014, and multiple women have said they notified school officials.

Starr said he considered campus to be a safe place for students.

“It's not happening on campus, to the best of my knowledge,” Starr said. “They are off-campus parties. These are (the) venues where those bad things have happened.”

“It's not happening on campus, to the best of my knowledge. ... (Off-campus parties) are (the) venues where those bad things have happened.”

KEN STARR

Campus under lockdown

Continued from Page 1

acent to the building where the shooting took place, called Engineering IV. The buildings are connected by walkway bridges near the center of the 419-acre campus.

“We kept our eye on the door. We knew that somebody eventually could come to the door,” he said, acknowledging the terror he felt.

Those in the room devised a plan to hold the door closed using a belt and crowbar and demand ID from anyone who tried to get in. When they eventually got word that the building had been cleared, they walked out.

Tanya Alam, 19, also was in a classroom in the math sciences building with 20 other students. She said she saw an alert on her phone that warned of police activity near Engineering IV. Then, several minutes later, an alert said there was an active shooter.

“I let that sink in. Then, I realized there was a shooter on cam-

pus and Engineering IV is right here! So, I said it out loud,” she said.

The teacher's assistant told students to shut their laptops, turned out all the lights and switched off the projector. They were ordered to be quiet and got under their desks. Sitting on the ground, Alam cried.

Students were told to put their phones away, too, but, in the darkened room, the glow of screens illuminated many faces, she said.

“On one hand, yes, this is an emergency. But on the other hand when your mother is calling from miles away ...” Alam said, trailing off.

Their entire classroom was finally allowed to leave. Students were greeted by a phalanx of SWAT team members but were not searched.

SWAT officers cleared occupants one by one at the mathematical sciences building. One man walked out with his hands up and was told to get on his knees. An armed officer searched him and his backpack and then sent him on his way with his hands still in the air.

Classes were canceled Wednesday but would resume Thursday.



DAMIAN DOVARGANES / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Students walk near Los Angeles Metro Police officers who were securing the UCLA campus near the scene of a murder-suicide on Wednesday.



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Rallies for education in Croatia persist

ZAGREB, Croatia — More than 20,000 people rallied in Croatia to call for reform of the education system.

Rallies under the slogan “Croatia Can Do Better” were held Wednesday in the capital, Zagreb and around a dozen other towns.

Croatia has long planned an overhaul of its education system to bring it into line with the standards of other EU countries but has made little progress, although the country joined the European Union in 2013. The head of an expert team in charge of the overhaul recently resigned, complaining of pressure from the conservative government.

Protesters in Zagreb said that education is crucial for the country’s future. A student representative said students “don’t want to be hostages of an incompetent and irresponsible political elite.”

Mexican teachers have heads forcibly shaved

MEXICO CITY — A dissident faction of Mexico’s teachers’ union is under fire for publicly humiliating teachers and administrators who defied its strike of radical reforms.

Several school workers were seized in the southern town of Comitán on Tuesday. They were marched barefoot through town with signs hanging around their necks saying they were “traitors to the country.”

The hair was of several was forcibly cut while a crowd watched.

Education Secretary Aurelio Nuno says he’ll work with prosecutors to punish those responsible.

The leader of the faction appeared to defend the shaming on Tuesday, but as criticism mounted on Wednesday, he blamed it on government-planted infiltrators.

US says North Korea is ‘money laundering concern’

WASHINGTON — The United States proposed new restrictions to close off North Korea’s access to the international financial system and to prevent the country from using banks to launder money that could be used for its nuclear weapons program.

The Treasury Department declared North Korea a “primary money laundering concern.” U.S. banks are generally prohibited now from dealing with North Korea. The U.S. and South Korean militaries reported that North Korea conducted the latest in a series of failed ballistic missile launches on Tuesday.

China, however, remains North Korea’s biggest source of diplomatic support and economic help, but Beijing this year agreed to the new U.N. sanctions, and observers say trade exchanges between the two have declined dramatically.

No food in first aid convoy for Syrian town since 2012

BEIRUT — A humanitarian convoy reached a starved suburb of Syria’s capital for the first time since 2012 on Wednesday, but did not bring any food.

The joint U.N., International Committee of the Red Cross and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy that reached Daraya Wednesday contained medicines, vaccines, baby formula the ICRC said, but no food.

It was not clear why the shipment contained no food. The suburb last received aid in February, residents said.

The U.N. Security Council is set to meet Friday to discuss the possibility of starting humanitarian air drops to besieged areas.

Rain overflows Seine River banks in Paris

PARIS — Floods devastated regions across France on Wednesday. The Seine River overflowed its banks, one French town was evacuated, and travelers trapped on a submerged highway were rescued by soldiers.

Meteorologists said waters are expected to keep rising for days.

The French government pressed to rescue thousands of people trapped in homes or cars in provincial towns.

City authorities warned residents and visitors to be vigilant around river banks and said high river levels were expected to peak Friday.

Human rights question prompts China scolding

OTTAWA, Ontario — China’s visiting foreign minister publicly berated a Canadian journalist on Wednesday for asking a question about his country’s human rights record.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said it was “irresponsible” of a journalist from the web outlet IPolitics to ask about human rights and the jailing of a Canadian, Kevin Garratt, who is charged with espionage.

Wang appeared visibly angry as he delivered the scolding in the lobby of Global Affairs headquarters at a joint news conference with Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion.

“Your question is full of prejudice and against China. ... I don’t know where that comes from. This is totally unacceptable,” Wang said through a translator.

“Other people don’t know better than the Chinese people about the human rights condition in China and it is the Chinese people who are in the best situation, in the best position to have a say about China’s human rights situation,” he continued.

“So I would like to suggest to you that please don’t ask questions in such an irresponsible manner. We welcome goodwill suggestions but we reject groundless or unwarranted accusations.”

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Forced labor in India lingers

Country contains 40 percent of world’s modern slaves, according to global index

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India — Every day as Kamla dug through the mud and molded bricks for north Indian kiln, her two hungry children would cry out for food. The 200 rupees (\$3) she made for producing 1,000 bricks at a time wasn’t nearly enough to feed her family, and daughter, who died of malnutrition before she turned 4.

Kamla’s story, told to one of the many charities fighting forced labor in India, is common enough to explain how slavery persists in the country despite rapid development that has helped make India the world’s fastest-growing economy.

On Tuesday, the South Asian democracy topped a global slavery index counting some 18.35 million modern slaves — or 40 percent of a global total of 45.8 million.

The report, released by The Walk Free Foundation, included children and adults forced into labor, often to pay off a debt, as well as child brides, child soldiers and migrant workers in 167 countries.

“These poor and deprived people are forced to leave their homes because of poverty. This is clear reflection of the failure of the welfare state,” said Lenin Rghuvanshi of the People’s Vigilance Committee on Human Rights.

“Bonded labor is a contemporary type of slavery,” he said. “The government, which is supposed to provide them basic necessities, has failed them.”

Officials with the Indian Labor Ministry declined to comment on the slavery index report.

North Korea was found to have the highest per capita rate of modern slavery, with 4.37 percent of its population.

The problem of slavery in India has long been a cause for shame. Just last week, the chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee lambasted India’s record on human rights, asking how India could have so many slaves.

These poor and deprived people are forced to leave their homes because of poverty.

LENIN RGHUVANSHI

“I mean, seriously, do they have just zero prosecution abilities, zero law enforcement? I mean, how could this happen? It’s on that scale, it’s pretty incredible,” Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee said.

But child labor, the trafficking of sex workers, and bonded labor remains widespread, despite India’s rapid economic growth over the past decade. Laws meant to keep children in school and out of the workplace are routinely flouted, as millions are nevertheless forced into toxic jobs including rolling cigarettes, blowing glass, mining or dyeing leather.

Some activists blamed the government for maintaining a top-down economy where illegal labor can still flourish because of high unemployment and abject poverty in the countryside.

Amid rising criticism, the Indian government on Monday

published draft legislation to curb human trafficking without punishing victims. Still, some activists said the situation was improving in India thanks to public awareness, legal reforms and police-backed raids on factories employing workers illegally. Corker noted that India’s carpet industry used to employ 300,000 trafficked children just a decade ago, but that the number has come down to an estimated 5,000-10,000. India’s garment industry hub in the Indian capital has also eliminated child labor, but for those still mired in forced labor, the scourge can’t be ended soon enough. And with little recourse against abusive employers, they can only hope to be rescued by a charity intervening.

Radha, kidnapped from her family by a woman from her village and forced into bonded labor, told the People’s Vigilance Committee on Human Rights she was raped daily by the factory’s owner, and then was beaten when she tried to object.

“I was so scared,” she said. “I’m still in pain from the rapes.”

Longest tunnel in world opens

JAMEY KEATEN
Associated Press

GENEVA — European dignitaries on Wednesday opened the 35.4-mile Gotthard Railway Tunnel, a major engineering achievement deep under the Alps’ snow-capped peaks to improve trade and travel. It took 17 years to build at a cost of 12.2 billion Swiss francs (\$12 billion).

The Gotthard base tunnel is a record-setter eclipsing Japan’s 33.4-mile Seikan Tunnel as the world’s longest. It also runs deeper than any other tunnel — about 1.4 miles underground at its maximum depth.

The tube bores through the Gotthard massif that includes the 8,200-foot Piz Vatgira on the way to Italy. It is part of a broader, multi-tunnel project to shift the haulage of goods from roads to rails amid concerns that heavy trucks are destroying Switzerland’s pristine Alpine landscape. The thoroughfare aims to cut travel times, ease roadway traffic and reduce the air pollution spewed from trucks. Set to open for commercial service in December, the two-way tunnel can handle up to 260 freight trains and 65 passenger trains per day.

The tunnel runs between the Swiss town of Erstfeld in the north to the Italian-speaking town of Bodio in the south, cutting through Switzerland. The tunnel journey takes about 20 minutes for passenger trains.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, President Francois Hollande of France and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi all came for the celebration.

Swiss forces took no chances with security for the inauguration. Almost 2,000 additional Swiss troops were called, and air space restrictions were put over the tunnel area.



JASON FRANSON / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Resident Kenny Gibbons looks through his demolished backyard in Fort McMurray, Canada, on Wednesday. Gibbons’ house was just one of 2,400 structures destroyed by a wildfire in the city. Residents started to return to the city in northern Alberta on Wednesday, but officials have warned that they should not expect everything to be running normally right away.

Weeks after wildfire, residents of Canadian city return home

ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT MCMURRAY, Alberta — Residents who fled a massive wildfire at the start of May returned to their homes and property in this Canadian oil sands city Wednesday to begin cleaning up and seeing what’s left.

The fire destroyed 2,400 structures, or about 10 percent of the city, when it ripped through last month, forcing more than 80,000 residents to flee.

Officials expected thousands of evacuees to return to the city Wednesday, the first day of a staged re-entry. Residents in areas that were not damaged were asked to come first. Alberta Premier Rachel Notley said about 7,500 arrived in the city Wednesday.

One of Mike Maloney’s first

tasks was to mow the messy lawn in front of his home while his wife and three kids cleaned inside.

“It’s sad to see what did burn,” he said. “It’s tragic for those people. But I think, all in all, everybody will survive.”

Pilar Ramirez spent the night sleeping in the back of a truck in Anzac, Alberta about 40 minutes southeast of Fort McMurray.

People driving in on the only highway into the area found the forest on both sides blackened about half an hour out of town. The devastation is apparent from the road just inside city limits and a strong smell of smoke hangs in the air.

Billboards that read “Safe Resilient Together” and “We Are Here. We Are Strong” greeted people as they drove in. A huge Canadian flag hung between the extended

ladders of two fire trucks parked on a bridge over the road.

Bob Couture, director of emergency management for the regional emergency operations center, said everything has gone according to plan. The Red Cross was prepared to bus in as many as 2,000 residents who don’t own cars.

Returning residents were warned that it won’t be business as usual and to bring with them two weeks worth of food, water and prescription medication as crews continue to work to restore basic services.

Workers have been laboring to get critical businesses such as banks, grocery stores and pharmacies running again. Supplies of some items may be limited in the beginning, the government said, and some things may need to be



Farah Abdi Warsameh / ASSOCIATED PRESS
Men remove the body of a civilian killed in a bomb attack on a hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia on Wednesday. The rebel group al-Shabab has claimed responsibility.



Farah Abdi Warsameh / ASSOCIATED PRESS
Vehicles burn at the scene of a bomb attack in Mogadishu, Somalia on Wednesday. The attack took place on a hotel often frequented by government officials.

Somalian terrorists bomb hotel, kill 6

ABDI GULED
Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — Somalia’s Islamic extremist rebels, al-Shabab, stormed a hotel in the capital Wednesday evening, killing at least six people and taking a number of hostages, police said.

The scene at the Ambassador Hotel, frequented by government officials, appeared to be at a standoff overnight.

“At least two gunmen are still holed up inside the building now,”

police Capt. Mohamed Hussein said.

Two members of parliament were among the dead, he said, and part of the hotel burned.

The attack began when a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at the hotel’s gates. Fighters on foot then forced their way into the hotel.

The attack comes on the eve of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, during which extremists often step up attacks.

A body of a suspected extremist lay outside the hotel. Witness Yas-in Abdi said he saw security forces escorting people from the hotel.

Somalia’s elite forces used rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns to fight assailants who took positions on the hotel’s second floor.

The attack underlines challenges facing the Somali government and African Union forces that are struggling to secure the capital, which has seen a series of attacks

by al-Shabab.

An attack on another Mogadishu hotel and public garden in February killed at least nine civilians. A car bomb exploded outside a restaurant in the capital in April, killing at least five.

Also on Wednesday, the Pentagon said a U.S. drone strike on Friday targeted a senior military commander of al-Shabab in Somalia, Abdullahi Haji Da’ud. U.S. officials said they couldn’t confirm yet if he was killed.

Airport concerns persist



Sign at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada warns against trespassing.

JUSTIN PRITCHARD
Associated Press

While intruders routinely breach the security fences protecting runways and planes at U.S. airports, the federal Transportation Security Administration is not keeping up with the threat or doing enough to help airports identify their vulnerabilities, according to a government report.

Congress asked the U.S. Government Accountability Office to investigate how often people get past airport perimeter security, and whether the TSA could do more to help prevent incidents.

Using TSA data, the accountability office identified over 2,500 security incidents in each of the past three years at the nation's roughly 440 commercial airports.

Those incidents ranged from people jumping fences to reach jets and passenger terminals to workers who forgot their security badges piggy-backing with a colleague through checkpoints.

The new federal report focused on October 2008 through October 2015. The accountability office did not give specific numbers, but a chart summarizing security incidents showed they have ranged between about 2,200 and about 2,800 annually, with the past three federal fiscal years being higher than the previous four.

The report's authors were not confident in drawing conclusions about trends in the nature or severity of the incidents because of how TSA keeps its data.

Airports are supposed to report any security incident to the TSA, but the database where the TSA logs incidents is not set up for analysis.

TSA cannot say, for example, whether high-profile breaches at larger airports—such as a teenager who jumped a fence at the airport in San Jose, California, in 2014 and stowed away in the wheel well of a Hawaii-bound plane—might be a bigger security threat than breaches at regional airports.

That makes no sense to Rep. William Keating, D-Mass., one of the lawmakers who requested the study.

“That information should all be system wide and available,” he said. “But it's not there. And if it is there, it's not in a form that's useful to me as a congressman or to any official dealing with this.”

The TSA said it was addressing the report's data analysis recommendation, as well as five others the authors made.

TSA spokeswoman Lucy P. Martinez said in a written statement that the agency was working “to mitigate risks by identifying enhanced methods of increasing security” for the nation's airports.

Black Missouri drivers pulled over at high rates

SUMMER BALLENTINE
Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Missouri — Black drivers in Missouri were nearly 70 percent more likely than whites to get stopped by the police last year, marking a slight improvement from the year before but showing there still are significant racial disparities in such stops.

State Attorney General Chris Koster's office released a report Wednesday showing that black motorists were 69 percent more likely than whites to be pulled over, based on their proportionate share of the driving-age population.

That rate was 75 percent in 2014, which was the highest since data collection began in 2000.

Furthermore, police continue to arrest and search black and Hispanic drivers at rates “significantly high-

er than white drivers, even though white drivers are more frequently found to have contraband,” according to Koster's analysis.

The treatment of blacks by the police has gotten a lot of attention in Missouri and elsewhere since the August 2014 fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, by a white police officer in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson.

Koster cautioned that there are holes in the data and said in a statement that the “statistical disproportion does not prove that law enforcement officers are making vehicle stops based on the perceived race or ethnicity of the driver.”

For example, the data only deals with the driving-age population and not the population that actually drives. The disparities also

could be skewed if a major highway runs through a city or town, meaning police would likely pull over drivers from other cities or states.

Koster called on the Legislature to gather input from law enforcement, cities and others on how to improve the report and the data collected.

He said revisions could include strengthening penalties for departments that fail to report.

Fifteen agencies failed to meet the March 1 reporting deadline.

In Ferguson last year, blacks were again pulled over at a lower rate than the statewide average, but they were still more than four times as likely to be stopped as white drivers, according to the new data released by the attorney general's office.



DARRELL SAPP / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Plum High School teacher Jason Cooper leaves a preliminary court hearing in a Pittsburgh suburb in 2015.

Sex allegations rock high school

The Associated Press

PLUM, Pennsylvania — Two high school teachers in a Pittsburgh suburb have pleaded guilty to having sex with students, a third is awaiting trial and a fourth is charged with trying to intimidate one student victim by pointing her out in class.

Now, the atmosphere is so poisoned in the Plum Borough School District that the senior class president told the superintendent to stay away from the commencement ceremonies on Thursday.

“You don't deserve to be at my graduation,” Plum High School senior Sylvia Ankrom told Superintendent Timothy Glasspool at a school board meeting last week.

The school board has placed Glasspool and Ryan Kociela, principal of the 4,100-student district's only high school, on paid leave.

The new internal investigation is fueled by a scathing grand jury report released May 19 by the Allegheny County district attorney's office.

The grand jury determined employees were more concerned about upholding the district's image than investigating misconduct.

When two employees came to Glasspool in 2014 to report an obscene Twitter comment that claimed teacher Joseph Ruggieri was having sex with a student, the superintendent asked them if the report was a case of “CYA,” or “cover your ass,” the report said.

The county prosecutor convened the grand jury after teachers Ruggieri, 41, and Jason Cooper, 39, were charged last year with having sexual relationships with students. Both have since pleaded guilty, with Ruggieri serving two to five years in prison and Cooper 1 1/2 to three.

The grand jury also uncovered alleged wrongdoing by Michael Cinefra, 30, a former part-time teacher and coach, who is awaiting trial on charges he had sexual contact with a student under 16 and provided her with alcohol, among other allegations. He has denied wrongdoing, along with Drew Zoldak, 41, the teacher awaiting trial on charges he pointed out Ruggieri's victim in class.

Zoldak is accused of telling his class he missed work “because two men in suits from the district attorney's office were asking me hundreds of questions,” then pointing to the girl as the reason.

The grand jury investigated whether Glasspool, Kociela or any other district employees broke state law by not calling police or a child welfare hotline if they had “reasonable cause to suspect” teachers were having sex with students.

Obama touts economy

JOSH LEDERMAN
Associated Press

ELKHART, Indiana — President Barack Obama went on a “myth-busting” mission Wednesday aimed at undermining Republican arguments about the economy.

Obama came to this hardscrabble town in northern Indiana to illustrate how policies from the first days of his presidency helped to turn around the economy.

Yet his rally at a high school in Elkhart blurred the lines between governing and campaigning, marking the president's most aggressive and direct foray to date into the presidential campaign.

“The primary story that Republicans have been telling about the economy is not supported by the facts. It's just not,” Obama said.

When Obama came to Elkhart seven years ago on his first major presidential trip, the unemployment rate was soaring.

Though the economy has improved measurably, Republicans have been reluctant to give Obama credit.

As Obama returned to Indiana, GOP Gov. Mike Pence said the state had recovered “in spite of Obama's policies.”

And the Republican National Committee dismissed his visit as a “campaign trip” designed to help presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Obama and his aides have long signaled frustration that as the economy has improved, the public's perception of his decision-making hasn't tracked the same



PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Barack Obama gestures while speaking at Concord Community High School in Elkhart, Ind. Wednesday, June 1, 2016.

trajectory.

Obama said he had returned to Elkhart “precisely because this county votes Republican.”

Muslim girl to attend hijab-friendly school

WILSON RING
Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vermont — A Muslim high school student from Florida who hopes to become a Navy officer is going to attend Norwich University after the Vermont military school said it would allow her to wear her headscarf beneath her uniform.

Sana Hamze had initially hoped to attend The Citadel, but the Charleston, South Carolina, school would not change its uni-

form policy to accommodate her headscarf. The 17-year-old from Sunrise, Florida, said she chose Norwich, which touts itself as the nation's oldest private military college and the birthplace of ROTC, after the school agreed to her request.

Sana said Wednesday she was caught off guard by media attention that followed her efforts to attend a military college while staying true to her Muslim faith.

“My goal is still to go to Norwich

and be an officer, a naval officer. It doesn't change anything,” she said.

Sana's father, Nezar Hamze, said his daughter never sought publicity, but he felt she should publicly thank Norwich school for its decision.

“As a father I can't tell you the pressure that's off my shoulders that she's actually being accepted and they're letting her practice her faith,” said Nezar Hamze.

Norwich, located in the town

of Northfield, has a total on-campus student body of about 2,250. About two-thirds of students are in the Corps of Cadets, its military program, while the rest are civilians who don't participate in military training.

Norwich officials said privacy rules prevented them from confirming that Sana had agreed to attend, though she showed The Associated Press some correspondence from Norwich that confirmed her plans.

NATIONAL

Baby born in US with defects tied to Zika

A Honduran woman infected with Zika gave birth in New Jersey to a baby girl with birth defects caused by the virus, her doctor said Wednesday.

Dr. Abdulla Al-Khan, the director of maternal-fetal medicine and surgery at Hackensack University Medical Center, said the 31-year-old mother was diagnosed with Zika in her native Central American country, where the virus has spread. Al-Khan said the mother had an ultrasound last week that showed birth defects, including microcephaly, in which the baby's head is smaller than expected because the brain hasn't developed properly.

Al-Khan said the prognosis for babies born with microcephaly, which also can signal underlying brain damage, is “generally very poor.”

Ten countries have reported cases of microcephaly linked to Zika, which is spread primarily through mosquito bites and can also be transmitted through sex. The infant is the second born in the United States with birth defects from the mosquito-borne virus. The first was born in Hawaii to a woman who had lived in Brazil, where the Zika epidemic began in the Americas.

No charges for officers in shooting of black man

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota's U.S. attorney on Wednesday declined to file criminal civil rights charges against two white Minneapolis police officers in the November shooting death of a black man that sparked weeks of protests, citing insufficient evidence to support charges.

The two officers attempted to arrest Jamar Clark, 24, following a report that he was interfering with paramedics treating an assault victim. Clark was shot once in the head November 15 and died a day later.

A key issue was whether or not Clark was handcuffed when he was shot. The state's attorney, Andrew Luger, said at a news conference that evidence indicated Clark was not restrained at the time and added that his office “could not pursue this case based on a prosecution theory” that Clark was handcuffed.

The Justice Department is also reviewing how the city responded to the protests that followed Clark's death. One demonstration outside the 4th Precinct after the shooting included some skirmishes between officers and protesters.

Louisiana repeals century-old voter registration law

BATON ROUGE, Louisiana — Louisiana has repealed a century-old state law that required naturalized citizens to provide proof of their citizenship when they registered to vote.

Civil rights groups that sued last month to block the 142-year-old law's enforcement announced Wednesday that they will withdraw their federal lawsuit now that state lawmakers have removed it from the books.

Their suit claimed the old law discriminated against foreign-born, naturalized U.S. citizens by arbitrarily subjecting them to “heightened” voter registration requirements that didn't apply to native-born citizens.

The groups claimed many Louisiana residents wouldn't be able to vote in November's presidential and congressional elections if state and local officials continued to enforce the law.

The law's repeal was tucked into a broader elections bill that Gov. John Bel Edwards signed last Friday.

Teacher suspended for dubious test questions

MOBILE, Alabama — An Alabama teacher is on leave after giving middle school students a test with math questions about prostitutes, drugs and guns, a school official said Wednesday.

Rena Phillips, a spokeswoman for Mobile County's public schools, said the educator from Burns Middle School was placed on administrative leave after a parent complained. The teacher's name isn't being made public, Phillips said.

The 10-question quiz included questions about prostitution, drugs, drive-by shootings and spray paint graffiti. According to WALA-TV, one of the questions was: Leroy has 2 ounces of cocaine. If he sells an eight ball to Antonio for \$320 and 2 grams to Juan for \$85 per gram, what is the street value of the rest of his hold?

Phillips said the principal and a school police officer investigated after officials learned of the test Tuesday.

Redistricting forces GOP incumbents into primary

HOLLY SPRINGS, North Carolina

— North Carolina's hastily redrawn congressional districts have set up an unusual battle in the only U.S. House race nationwide pitting incumbents against each other.

Republicans Renee Ellmers and George Holding are vying to win over what's likely to be a small Election Day crowd after court-ordered redistricting upended their territories, along with the primary calendar.

Ellmers and Holding have each already spent more than \$1 million on the upcoming primary.

The state's General Assembly was forced to quickly redraw the state's congressional districts after a federal court ruled that two were unconstitutionally race-based. Ellmers' 2nd District shifted north and east, while Holding's 13th District moved to a different part of the state.

The last time incumbents faced each other in congressional primaries was 2012, when there were seven such races nationwide between Democrats and four between Republicans.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEXAS AND SOUTHWEST

Appeals court upholds Paxton's indictment

AUSTIN — A special prosecutor handling the criminal case against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton says an appeals court has upheld the indictment on securities fraud charges.

Special prosecutor Brian Wice said Wednesday night that the Dallas-based 5th Court of Appeals allowed the case against the state's top prosecutor to move forward. Paxton was indicted nearly a year ago on charges of defrauding wealthy investors in a tech startup.

His next and final chance of having the case dismissed rests with the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The Republican-dominated court threw out criminal charges against GOP former Texas Gov. Rick Perry earlier this year.

Paxton attorney Bill Mateja says the defense will decide soon whether to go to the state's highest criminal court.

Paxton has pleaded not guilty.

Ex-border cop's wife flees, facing smuggling charges

EL PASO — Federal authorities are seeking a border officer's wife who failed to show up to trial in El Paso, where she and her husband faced charges related to a human smuggling scheme.

Odet Corchado was arrested last July with her 54-year-old husband, Lawrence, a former U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer, and was scheduled to go on trial last week with him.

A jury convicted him of smuggling and bribery charges. A federal judge has revoked her \$10,000 bond and a warrant has been issued for her arrest for failing to appear in court, reported the El Paso Times.

She is accused of taking payments of about \$2,000 each to direct people into a line at border bridges where her husband worked so they could get into the U.S. without immigration paperwork.

Second ex-Tech player charged with burglary

LUBBOCK — Jail records show that a second Texas Tech football player who was kicked off the team last month has been charged with burglary.

Records show that 18-year-old Trace Keaton Ellison was arrested Wednesday on a charge of burglary of a habitation, a second-degree felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Jail records don't list attorney information for Ellison, who was released on \$5,000 bond. Details weren't immediately released.

Twenty-year-old Robert James Castaneda was arrested Friday on the same charge. He was released after paying \$5,000 bond.

Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury kicked Castaneda and Ellison off the team May 5 for "failure to uphold student-athlete expectations."

Teacher impregnated by student, 13, turns self in

HOUSTON — A Houston-area teacher accused of having a sexual relationship with a 13-year-old boy who impregnated her has surrendered at a Montgomery County jail.

Authorities in adjacent Harris County had issued an arrest warrant for 24-year-old Alexandria Vera, an English teacher in the Aldine School District. She met the boy last summer.

Sheriff's spokesman Brady Fitzgerald said Vera posted a \$100,000 bond and was released.

Court documents show the boy's parents didn't object to the relationship. Vera told a school district investigator they were "very supportive and excited" when she disclosed her pregnancy. The court document said she aborted the pregnancy after a child welfare investigator questioned her.

School officials said Vera has been removed from her job.

Teenage boy charged with brutal slaying of girlfriend

HOUSTON — A teenage boy has been charged with killing his 15-year-old girlfriend whose body was found stuffed in a cabinet under a sink at an abandoned Houston-area apartment complex, said Harris County prosecutors.

The Houston Chronicle reported records read in court Wednesday show the boy used his cellphone to record the sounds of Karen Perez resisting as she was being raped and fatally choked. Searchers found her body Monday. She was reported missing when she failed to return home from school Friday.

Prosecutors said the boy's father was accompanying him in a search for Perez in their Houston neighborhood when the teen told him she was not alive. The father then notified police.

Mexican doctors convicted in insurance fraud scheme

MCALLEN — Two physicians from a family medicine clinic in Mexico have been convicted of conspiracy to commit wire fraud in a nearly \$2.6 million insurance claim scheme, said federal prosecutors.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson said 59-year-old Dr. Mayolo Melchor and 61-year-old Dr. Bertha Hernandez-Melchor, of Reynosa, Mexico, pleaded guilty Wednesday in McAllen to conspiring with policyholders of the American Family Life Assurance Co. to prepare and submit fraudulent claim forms and accident reports.

Prosecutors said forms listing fake accidents and injuries were delivered to the doctors' clinic in Mexico, then faxed to AFLAC headquarters.

They face up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine at their August sentencing.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Jason Lucas; his wife, Eloise; and their daughter, Ava, paddle down Farm-to-Market 2759 to get to their home Wednesday in Booth, Texas. Residents are preparing for the effects of more rain expected to fall in the coming days.

MICHAEL CIAGLO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

To stay or to leave?

After floods, residents face decision

JUAN A. LOZANO
Associated Press

SIMONTON — In 18 years, Art Myrick says he's been ordered or asked to evacuate his home near the Brazos River about 20 times, but he didn't always do so and the house never flooded — until now.

Flooding comes with living in Simonton, a small town west of Houston. But since retiring four years ago, the 66-year-old has thought about moving to San Antonio, where he has land.

"We're gone. Getting too old to live with this," Myrick said while sitting on a cot Wednesday inside a Red Cross shelter in Brookshire.

Hundreds of residents remained evacuated from their homes as the Brazos River reached 54.7 feet in Fort Bend County, where Simonton is located, before finally beginning to slowly fall. But additional rain this week could mean it might take days or even weeks before the Brazos and other waterways drop to normal levels.

State climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon said the severe



BRANDON WADE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Homes along the Brazos River remained flooded Wednesday. Residents braced for more flooding as the river is expected to crest at record levels.

weather over the last year was exacerbated by El Niño, which is the natural warming of parts of the Pacific Ocean that changes weather worldwide.

The El Niño period is dissipating, but Nielsen-Gammon said the frequency of heavy rains likely will continue.

Elevated water levels could continue through the weekend as forecasts call for more rain. The National Weather Service has issued a flash flood watch for the greater Houston region, where 8 to 10 inches could fall through Friday in some isolated locations. The Austin area is expected to receive 3 to 6 inches through Friday,

while North Texas is forecast to receive 3 to 5 inches.

While Myrick said he's relocating, Barbara Leach, who lives in Rosenberg, said she's not going anywhere. The Brazos flooded the mobile home where she and her husband have lived for 41 years, but Leach, 78, said she enjoys it too much to leave.

"This is Mother Nature, and I don't think they could have prepared for this. I don't care how many dams or dikes or whatever they have," she said. "I'm not blaming anybody for it. That's the way the world is. People have been hit harder than we have. So we'll come out OK."

Big 12 head pushes for decisions

STEPHEN HAWKINS
AP Sports Writer

IRVING — Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said he's going to push conference leaders to make decisions one way or the other on the lingering issues of expansion, a football championship game and a league network by the end of the summer.

Athletic directors spent about 90 minutes during the league's spring meetings Wednesday in what were termed "philosophical discussions" about those topics.

The final decisions will be made by the 10-team league's board of directors made up of school presidents and chancellors.

That group, which includes three interim presidents, will join the conference meetings today and Friday and will have a significant amount of data to consider this week and into the summer.

Faculty athletic representatives deadlocked 5-5 regarding a change in a league rule that would have given former Texas Tech walk-on quarterback Baker Mayfield an extra season of eligibility at Oklahoma.

The conference also announced its television selections for the first three weeks of the season. Baylor's opening game, against Northwestern State, will be the first televised Big 12 game, airing Sept. 2 on FSN.

Big 12 Schools

- Baylor
- Iowa State
- Kansas
- Oklahoma
- Kansas State
- Oklahoma State
- Texas
- TCU
- Texas Tech
- West Virginia

Mascot animals, handlers make spirited teams

ERIC OLSON
AP College Football Writer

University of Texas announced that it has selected a new Bevo. Mascots like Bevo have long been part of college football's pageantry. Here's a look behind the scenes at four popular mascots: Bevo, Ralphie at University of Colorado, Cam the Ram at Colorado State University and Uga at University of Georgia.



Bevo

The new Bevo, known as Bevo XV, was selected from among 400-500 longhorn steers from across Texas and will make his home debut Sept. 4. Like his predecessors, Bevo XV is privately owned. He lives on a ranch near Austin, roams among his herd and dines on hay, grass and occasional "sweet feed" treats made of oats and molasses.

He'll be transported to games in a \$70,000 air-conditioned custom trailer and arrive at the stadium well before gates open. Four student handlers keep Bevo in place on the sidelines — a tough task considering Bevo XIV, who died of cancer in October, weighed 2,100 pounds and had a horn span of 80 inches from tip to tip.

In addition to home games, Bevo attends charity events, weddings and funerals. He also was on hand for President George W. Bush's inaugurations.



Ralphie

The 49-year tradition of a running Ralphie the buffalo leading the team onto the field is no small undertaking. She — yes, Ralphie is female — has 15 student handlers who train two hours a day, twice a week, lifting weights and doing speed work in addition to practice runs on other days.

There's a need for speed, considering Ralphie can cover 125 yards in 14 seconds.

Five "runners" hold lead ropes: the smallest, fastest in front; stronger runners in charge of steering in the middle; and a brakeman in back (not easy with a 1,200-pound buffalo). The other 10 handlers clear a path out front.

Ralphie V, entering her ninth year as mascot, lives on a ranch in the Denver area with her predecessor, Ralphie IV. Both buffaloes were donated by former media mogul Ted Turner.



Cam the Ram

Cam lives outside Fort Collins on a small farm owned by Kraig Peel, an associate professor in animal sciences who is in charge of about a dozen student handlers. Cam and his handlers run across the end zone after Rams touchdowns.

This Cam, No. 25, has been on the job for eight months. He's a manageable 230-240 pounds and 36-37 inches tall at the shoulder.

Peel is discriminating when he picks a ram to be Cam. "Structurally he's well-made, muscular (with) an attitude of pride, uprightness and just a boldness," he said.

Cam lives indoors in a deluxe horse stall and eats high-quality alfalfa and grain. Peel said Cam lives better than any sheep on the planet. "I tell people all the time that if I believed in reincarnation, I would want to come back as Cam," he said.

Severance pay from state halted

PAUL J. WEBER
Associated Press

State agencies must stop offering severance pay, Gov. Greg Abbott ordered Wednesday in light of reports that Attorney General Ken Paxton and Land Commissioner George P. Bush have quietly kept former employees on the payroll at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars to taxpayers.

Bush and Paxton, who have defended the arrangements as practical and legal, said they would comply even though the governor can't enforce such rules on other elected officials.

Abbott did not single out Paxton or Bush in a memo to agency leaders. But the directive essentially takes aim at how the two prominent Republicans continued paying former staffers long after they stopped coming to work, a fact that was revealed following investigations by The Dallas Morning News and Houston Chronicle.

The staffers included a former Paxton aide who left to help Republican Ted Cruz's presidential run and more than two dozen General Land Office employees whom Bush didn't retain after he took over in 2015. Bush's office has defended the settlement agreements, which amounted to at least \$383,000, as a way of sparing the state from potential lawsuits from fired employees.

Severance pay is not allowed in Texas government, but Paxton's office has said payments to former top aides were permissible under administrative leave policies. Abbott, however, made clear that such interpretations or workarounds going forward would not be allowed.

"The use of emergency leave, administrative leave or other mechanisms to continue paying state employees who have ceased to work will be prohibited," Abbott wrote.

Abbott said his order will remain in place until the issue is taken up next year by the Texas Legislature, which has already signaled a coming crackdown. Republican House Speaker Joe Straus told one of his committees Wednesday to delve into the issue before lawmakers return in 2017.

"The public should have confidence that state agencies are being cautious with taxpayer dollars," Straus wrote in a letter to the chair of the House General Investigating and Ethics Committee.

Bush spokeswoman Britany Eck said their agency will suspend the use of separation agreements until the Legislature provides clarification. On Tuesday, a left-leaning political group asked state investigators to look into whether the severance packages across state government were proper.



Abbott



Syrian refugees Abdullah Hamwi, wife Dania Rasheed and son Yazan Hamwi pose in Berlin, Germany.

“Until now I didn’t see anything good here. Everything is difficult, they want papers here, papers there; tell us to go here and go there — the treatment is bad, it’s not the life we used to live in Syria.” | Dania Rasheed



A growing number of

Syrian refugees

find themselves stuck in Europe while their families wait in Syria.

For many, legal travel back to Syria is out of the question.

KIRSTEN GRIESHABER
Associated Press

BERLIN — Nine months ago, after the Syrian army razed his neighborhood, Mohammed was desperate to make his way to Germany.

Now he is desperate to go back to Syria, where his wife and eight children are. But he fears the only way he can return is the same way he came — illegally.

Mohammed, a farm worker from the outskirts of Damascus, is one of at least hundreds of Syrian refugees who want to go home, but cannot.

While Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers get state assistance to go home, the German government and the International Organization for Migration say they can’t send Syrians back to a war zone. There aren’t even flights from Germany to Syria, and neighboring countries that initially took in the bulk of the Syrian refugees have all but closed their doors.

That leaves little hope for the dozens of Syrians per week who have requested departures since the beginning of this year, according to travel agents and case workers at migrants’ return programs.

“I came here only for the future of my children,” said Mohammed, who did not want to give his last name because he is afraid the Syrian regime will harm his family. “If they’re not here, it makes no sense for me to be here.”

Mohammed, 45, got asylum in March. But his wife calls him every day, crying and begging him to come back home. She doesn’t have any money to feed their seven daughters, and their only son, 12-year-old Marwan, quit school to sell vegetables.

He bought a plane ticket to Beirut in April, but German security didn’t let him on the plane. Two weeks ago, he tried to go to Athens, but was again stopped. He pulled two crumpled tickets slowly from the pocket of his oversized coat, a worthless reminder of his futile efforts. Covering his face with his hands, he said he will try until he finally finds a way out.

While nobody has exact figures, interviews with government officials, case workers, travel agents and dozens of refugees themselves show that the number of Syrians leaving Germany is growing steadily.

Alaa Hadroos, who runs the Golf Reisen travel agency in Berlin, said between five and 10 people come by his office every day asking him for ways out of Germany. At the beginning of the year, it was more like 20, but many have realized he can’t help them.

“We are getting here a lot of Syrian refugees who want to go home, but it is very, very hard for them to actually get there in any way,” he said.

Hadroos said most Syrians now try to hire traffickers to eventually make it back home.

Several migrants told the AP they had plane tickets to Athens from traffickers in Berlin, even though they had no valid travel documents because German authorities hadn’t yet returned their passports. While Berlin and Athens are part of Europe’s passport-free zone, the airlines still need valid documents.

More than 420,000 Syrian refugees came to Germany last year, and the majority will eventually receive asylum. But the country is so overwhelmed that it is taking months, if not years, to process the requests, let alone the hundreds of thousands of applications for family reunions.

A spokesman for the German Foreign Office said the government has increased the staff at embassies in the Middle East to speed up the visa process for Syrian family members. The capacity of the German embassy in the Lebanese capital of Beirut to issue visas has gone up from 5,000 a year in 2012 to 30,000. But because of war, Germany no longer has an embassy in Damascus, which makes it difficult for many Syrian families to even apply for visas.

Many Syrians say the long separation from their children and wives is unbearable. Others can’t cope with life in cramped shelters. And yet others say they are simply too homesick.

“They are more or less trapped in Germany,” said Silvia Kostner, the spokeswoman for Berlin’s Lageso office, which organizes voluntary returns for migrants. “Of course, they can try to get out through different ways — and some are doing exactly this because they’re missing their families so badly — but we can’t take on the responsibility to help these people travel back to a war zone.”

Syrian refugee Abdullah Hamwi, a textile merchant who sold caftans at the old market in the city of Aleppo before it was destroyed, said he initially settled in Istanbul. But he moved to Germany in 2014 with his wife and baby son, hoping for a good education and better future.

After half a year in a shelter with 400 other migrants, no asylum, no work and the same three pieces of bread, butter and jam for breakfast every morning, they say they’ve had enough. They complain that they stand in line for days to pick up pocket money.

“Until now I didn’t see anything good here,” said Hamwi’s wife, Dania Rasheed, embracing her pregnant belly. “Everything is difficult, they want papers here, papers there; tell us to go here and go there — the treatment is bad, it’s not the life we used to live in Syria.”

The young couple goes days without heat in the middle of winter. They get by on 330 euros (\$368) per month and said security staff enter their room day and night. Hamwi, a pale, skinny man with dark circles under his eyes, takes his wife to the bathroom because he fears the strangers around.

Such grievances are not likely to be resolved quickly in any big German city where thousands suffer from a housing shortage. Hamwi has already looked into the smuggler’s rate to get to Istanbul: 300 euros (\$335) per person for Berlin to Athens and another 1,500 euros (\$1,678) to get them all into Turkey.

“As soon as our daughter is born, we will find a way to get out of here and back to Istanbul,” Hamwi said. “At least there we can live in dignity and work — here we are not getting any respect.”

Spiro Hadad, a journalist, is one of those who have successfully made it home to Syria. After losing his house, he left Syria in June last year for Austria. But he soon became frustrated, among other things, that he could not bring his mother in, so he asked the human rights office in Austria to allow him back home.

They eventually gave him a ticket to Lebanon, whichlet him in even though he had left illegally through Turkey, because he showed his press card. Then he drove to Damascus.

“I lost everything in Syria and I tried to improve my conditions. Unfortunately, I lost much more,” he said. “Most people prefer to return because they can’t stand it.”



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Abdullah Hamwi talks to the Associated Press in Berlin, Germany on Tuesday, May 24, 2016. Abdullah Hamwi and his wife Dania Rasheed no longer believe they can build up a bright future for themselves in Germany.

“They are more or less trapped in Germany. Of course, they can try to get out through different ways — and some are doing exactly this because they’re missing their families so badly — but we can’t take on the responsibility to help these people travel back to a war zone.”

SILVIA KOSTNER




MARKUS SCHREIBER / ASSOCIATED PRESS

“We are getting here a lot of Syrian refugees who want to go home, but it is very, very hard for them to actually get there in any way”


ALAA HADROOS, TRAVEL AGENCY OWNER

SEVERAL MIGRANTS CONFIRMED TO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS THE FOLLOWING PLAN TO RETURN TO SYRIA:



 Buy plane tickets from traffickers in Berlin and fly to Athens. A number of migrants still do not have their passports or valid travel documents, the latter of which are required for airline travel in both Berlin and Athens.



 Hire traffickers to illegally walk them across the Greece - Turkey border, then continue the trek through Syria.

