



## INTERNATIONAL

### Afghan President Urges Taliban To Talk Peace, Offering Political Recognition

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani opened an international conference Wednesday in Kabul with a substantial overture to his government's longtime antagonist: If the Taliban comes to the negotiating table and recognizes Ghani's government, the Afghan leader would in turn offer the insurgent group a role as a legitimate political party and release Taliban prisoners. "We are making this offer without preconditions in order to lead to a peace agreement," Ghani said at the Kabul Process conference, according to Reuters. The peace conference, which is in its second iteration, drew representatives from more than 20 countries and international organizations — but not the Taliban. "Taliban leaders and all members, the decision is in your hands," Ghani told conference attendees Wednesday, as Germany's Deutsche Welle reports. "Accept peace, come to the negotiating table and let us build this country together." The remarks are something of an about-face from Ghani's message at the conference last year, which had conveyed a much more hard-line tone toward the Islamist group. Now Ghani is urging reconciliation, and says he's prepared to offer concessions to achieve it. Some of the incentives listed by Ghani in return for a cease-fire include an official Taliban office in the capital and Afghan passports for the group's members. The president also offered the possibility of involving the Taliban in a review of the country's constitution, and making an effort toward lifting sanctions against the group. It's far from certain the Taliban would accept such an offer. Just two days before Ghani's comments, the group issued a statement calling for direct talks with the United States, not the Afghan government. "It must now be established by America and her allies that the Afghan issue cannot be solved militarily," the Taliban said Monday, referring to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the title by which it ruled the country before the group's ouster shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. "America must henceforth focus on a peaceful strategy for Afghanistan instead of war," the statement continued. "Military strategies which have repeatedly been tested in Afghanistan over the past seventeen years will only intensify and prolong the war. And this is not in the interest of anyone." The competing statements come just a month after the Taliban launched two high-profile, deadly attacks in Kabul. In the first, Islamist gunmen laid siege to a luxury hotel, battling security forces for more than 13 hours and killing at least 18 people. A suicide bombing less than a week later killed at least 103 people and wounded 235 more when an ambulance full of explosives detonated at a checkpoint near government buildings. Still, Reuters reports that Ghani, who has been backed by a recently escalated military effort by the U.S., said he would not "pre-judge" any group interested in pursuing peace — and according to The Associated Press, he vowed to "consider the Taliban's view in the peace talks."



### **North Korea Reportedly Sending Missile, Chemical Weapons Parts To Syria**

North Korea has reportedly sent ballistic missile and chemical weapons components to Syria in violation of United Nations sanctions, according to a draft of a new report authored by U.N. experts that has been viewed by several news organizations. According to the 200-page report, expected to go public in mid-March, U.N. investigators say the items include acid-resistant tiles, valves and thermometers, according to The New York Times. The transfers reportedly date back as far as 2008. The Times reports, "North Korean missile technicians have also been spotted working at known chemical weapons and missile facilities inside Syria, according to the report, which was written by a panel of experts who looked at North Korea's compliance with United Nations sanctions." The Associated Press says the "investigations into Pyongyang's transfer of prohibited ballistic missile, conventional arms and dual use goods found more than 40 previously unreported shipments to Syria between 2012 and 2017." "North Korea has a sordid history of supplying rogue states like Syria with weapons of mass destruction technology for cash," Andrew C. Weber, a former top Pentagon nonproliferation official told The Washington Post. "Given its large and growing arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and missile delivery systems, this is extremely dangerous." The AP reports: "According to an unidentified member state, the North's Ryonhap-2 Corporation was involved that year in a Syrian ballistic missile program, the 'maneuverable re-entry vehicle (MARV) Scud D (MD) project,' the report said. "More recently, it said the August 2016 visit by a technical delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — the country's official name — 'involved the transfer to Syria of special resistance valves and thermometers known for use in chemical weapons programs.' "

### **Slovak police raid houses owned by alleged Italian mafia**

Slovak police on Thursday raided houses linked to alleged members of the Italian mafia in connection with the slaying of an investigative journalist and his girlfriend. Slovakia's national police chief Tibor Gaspar told reporters in the eastern city of Kosice that seven men were detained in the raids in the towns of Michalovce and Trebisov. Gaspar says they were detained as "suspects" with approval from the state prosecution. The men ranged from 26 to 62 years old. Only their first names were given. The bodies of 27-year-old Jan Kuciak and his girlfriend, Martina Kusnirova, were found Sunday evening in their house in Velka Maca, east of the capital, Bratislava. They had both been shot. Kuciak's last, unfinished story was about the activities of the Italian 'Ndrangheta organized crime syndicate in Slovakia. Slovak media reported that one of those detained Thursday was Antonino Vadala, an Italian who did business with at least two officials close to Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico. Those officials — a senior adviser to Fico and the secretary of the country's security council — resigned from their government posts Wednesday. Experts from the FBI and Britain's Scotland Yard have now joined other foreign agencies — including the Czech and Italian police and Europol — who are helping Slovak authorities investigate the killings, Interior Minister Robert Kalinak said. In a potential problem for Fico's coalition government, the chairman of a junior partner demanded Thursday that Kalinak resign. Bela Bugar of the Most-Hid party of mostly ethnic Hungarians says that would increase public trust in the investigation.



## NATIONAL

### Top Democrat Says Election Will Decide DACA's Fate

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., has long led the push to provide a permanent legal status for "DREAMers" — young adults in the United States illegally who were brought to the country as children. Durbin was in the mix on multiple bipartisan deals in recent months, as the clock ticked toward a March 5 expiration of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which President Trump decided in September 2017 to end. But with Congress still gridlocked on DACA and the Supreme Court refusing to intervene in two federal cases negating that deadline, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat seems to be throwing in the towel. "This election, the election of new members to the House and Senate, will decide the fate of this issue," Durbin told NPR's All Things Considered on Wednesday. Earlier this week, the Supreme Court rejected a Trump administration request that it take up DACA. Two lower courts have blocked the government from ending the DACA program. With the cases likely to take months, if not more than a year, to possibly make their way back to the highest court, DACA will remain in place for the extended future. Until the lower courts had blocked DACA's expiration, Congress had been working to make DACA permanent by the March 5 deadline. While the program itself enjoys broad support among Democrats and Republicans, Trump and GOP leaders had insisted that any measure making it permanent also include money for a border wall, as well as restrictions on future legal immigration. Two weeks ago, multiple immigration measures were brought to the Senate floor for votes, but all failed to earn the 60 votes needed to stay alive. Two narrow measures came close, but President Trump tanked their chances by threatening to veto any immigration measure that did not include his legal immigration demands. Trump's preferred measure got less support than anything else the Senate voted on that week. "We learned something during the course of this [debate], and it was unsettling," Durbin told NPR. "We learned what the president's real priorities were. The president said, 'Let's help these young people. We need to do something to fix DACA.' And yet given that opportunity, he rejected it. It turns out this debate wasn't about a wall, it was about a new immigration policy in America; it was about rejecting the notion that we are a nation of immigrants." Durbin was one of the lawmakers in the Oval Office when Trump used vulgar language to refer to African countries during a meeting about a bipartisan DACA fix. Anger over that statement — and over Trump's refusal to consider a narrow DACA bill — led to a brief partial federal government shutdown, when Democrats voted down a short-term spending bill.

### Where Redistricting Fights Stand Across The Country

Even as Democrats and Republicans spend 2018 vying to win key races around the country, a larger legal battle underway this year could reshape the American political map — literally. By June, the U.S. Supreme Court is likely to decide three major redistricting cases — out of Wisconsin, Maryland and Texas — that will lay some of the foundation for what the maps will look like, not just this year, but after the 2020 census that could affect control of Congress for the next decade. With Democrats out of power in the House for nearly a decade now, party activists are anxious to change that — and Republicans are trying to hold the line. Major partisan fights are

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underway in almost two dozen states, at the ballot box and in the courts. Political groups are already raising millions of dollars and waging all-out campaigns, from one led by President Barack Obama's former attorney general, Eric Holder (the National Democratic Redistricting Committee) to a Republican one that crashed a recent Holder breakfast with reporters to hand out leaflets (the Republican State Leadership Committee). Democrats like Holder believe some dozen to two dozen congressional seats are at stake and argue that Republicans have "used technology to gerrymander to unprecedented levels" and that "African Americans and Latinos are the most adversely affected." Republicans, on the other hand, say they won the right to draw districts how they see fit after winning legislative and governors' races across the country over the past decade or so. They also argue the courts should not interfere with the states' rights to draw those districts and that they are not racially gerrymandering, but doing so politically. And, they say, the Constitution gives them the right to do that. It wasn't until 1964 that the U.S. Supreme Court determined that districts need to be drawn to be of equal population "as nearly as is practicable." The idea was that an individual's vote should be counted — and represented — equally in the House of Representatives. Justice John Marshall Harlan concluded in the court's majority opinion: "While it may not be possible to draw congressional districts with mathematical precision, that is no excuse for ignoring our Constitution's plain objective of making equal representation for equal numbers of people the fundamental goal for the House of Representatives. That is the high standard of justice and common sense which the Founders set for us."

### **Uber Launches Service To Get People To The Doctor's Office**

Uber wants to get you from your home to your doctor's office — and you won't even need to open the Uber app. The company announced Thursday that it's teaming up with health care organizations to provide transportation for patients going to and from medical appointments. The rides can be scheduled for patients through doctor's offices, by receptionists or other staffers. And they can be booked for immediate pickup or up to 30 days in advance. That means patients without a smartphone — who wouldn't be able to use Uber otherwise — can become Uber customers. Instead of operating through an app, Uber Health will send its passengers' ride information through an SMS text message. The company also plans to introduce the option for passengers to receive a call with trip details to their landline instead. Drivers will still use the Uber smartphone app to pick up these passengers. "Transportation barriers are the greatest for vulnerable populations," says Chris Weber, the general manager of Uber Health. "This service will provide reliable, comfortable transportation for patients." Transportation is, indeed, a barrier to good health care. Affordable access to a vehicle is consistently associated with increased access to medical care, according to a study. Around 3.6 million Americans miss doctor's appointments or delay medical care due to a lack of transportation every year, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. To meet the medical privacy standards outlined in the federal HIPAA law, drivers won't know which of their passengers are using Uber Health. Like a typical Uber ride, only a passenger's name, pickup and drop-off addresses will be given to the driver. So Uber drivers won't be able to opt into the health service the same way that they opt into Uber Eats, a food delivery service.



## STATE

### Foster Care Advocates Commend Wisconsin Assembly, Senate For Legislative Action

Advocates of an improved foster care system in Wisconsin say legislative approval of a series of bills could help a strained situation across the state. State Rep. Steve Doyle, D-Onalaska, who co-chairs Assembly Speaker Robin Vos' Task Force on Foster Care said one of the negatives of the statewide opioid addiction crisis is that it has created another crisis for foster care in Wisconsin. "What we're dealing with today, with the drug situation and the mental health situation, calls for a different type of foster parent, different type of social worker," he said. The state Assembly passed a package of 13 bills designed to aid reunification and keep children out of foster care, and provide new state funding for programs that support families and foster parents to cope with rising costs. The state Senate has passed 11 of the 13 bills. The bills that have been approved are awaiting Gov. Scott Walker's signature. The increased pressures of La Crosse County's foster care program mirror the rise in opioid addiction, said Lila Barlow, supervisor of the La Crosse County Permanency Resource Unit. She said in 2010, there were 120 foster children in La Crosse County. By last year, that number had grown to 180 children in foster care. There are currently just 107 foster homes in La Crosse County, but she said the county could use as many as 140 foster homes to meet the existing demand. Barlow said La Crosse County has placed 48 percent of children who qualify for out-of-home placement with other family members and has had to find space for children in other counties, something that is very costly. Barlow said the legislative changes should help the system, especially in giving foster parents more information about the behavioral history of the child they are caring for — one of the bills would allow health care providers to disclose information about a child's mental health treatment to foster care agencies. "One of the biggest things that we really looked at is having the information for mental health accessible to our foster parents. Kids coming into care have issues," she said. "To have them go into a home and the foster parents not able to know what's going on. It's like saying to someone, 'Please take care of this child, we're going to tie both of your hands behind your back.'" Maxine Jacobs, of La Crosse, has been a foster parent since 1977. She said in the last 15 years, she's noticed the problems of foster children coming from birth families with drug and alcohol addiction or issues with mental health are a lot more complex than they used to be. Jacobs said the new bills will mean increased education for foster parents and a larger effort to keep children with their birth families — efforts that could improve the lives of at-risk children. "Each movement is a trauma for that child. Each time it's a loss," Jacobs said. "Anytime we can put bills forth in the state of Wisconsin that prevents those activities, we will help increase the odds of success for that child." The bills that weren't approved by the state Senate would have provided free higher education tuition for foster children and create a study to measure the appropriate number of foster cases that social workers should handle.

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## Wisconsin DNR Awards \$1M Stewardship Grant To Help Rebuild Saxon Harbor

After being devastated by flooding in the summer of 2016, Iron County has now received stewardship funding to help rebuild. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources awarded Iron County a \$1 million grant to repair damages at Saxon Harbor, says James Yach, the secretary's northern region director. "It's a driver for that economy to provide angling and boating recreation opportunities on Lake Superior, but it also serves as a refuge ... for Lake Superior," said Yach. "It has significant functional value because, if the seas get bad, ships or boats can take safe haven in that harbor." Heavy rains from summer flooding in 2016 turned the Oronto Creek into a rushing river that destroyed the harbor's marina and campground. Iron County Forest Administrator Eric Peterson said the grant will help the county pay for its portion of roughly \$10 to \$11 million in damages. "Every day we're getting closer. We're making progress. Some days we have a couple steps back, but we keep pushing ahead," he said. "As of right now, we're still on our target of opening in spring of '19." Peterson said they plan to rebuild the marina with fewer than the 91 boat slips that previously existed in order to accommodate larger boats. "We had quite a few narrow boat slips in Saxon Harbor before the storm, and the trend in boating today is bigger and better and wider and faster," he said. "We're trying to react to that, too, as we're redesigning this." Peterson said projects at the marina and campground are expected to go out for bids this spring pending approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Saxon Harbor generates revenue for the county, Peterson said, noting around 2,000 people use the marina and campground in a single weekend during the busy season. "It's a destination point for many, many people, not only locals, but for people all over Wisconsin and the Great Lakes region," he said. Plans have also been finalized by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to rebuild the road and bridge at Saxon Harbor. Dredging of federal channels at the harbor is set to begin in May. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers set aside \$1.375 million last summer for work there.

## WEATHER

- **Tonight:** Mostly clear, with a low around 23. Northwest wind around 6 mph becoming calm in the evening.
- **Friday:** Mostly sunny, with a high near 47. Light and variable wind.
- **Friday Night:** Partly cloudy, with a low around 30. Southeast wind 5 to 9 mph.
- **Saturday:** Sunny, with a high near 54. Southeast wind 9 to 14 mph.
- **Saturday Night:** Partly cloudy, with a low around 34. Southeast wind 9 to 11 mph.
- **Sunday:** Partly sunny, with a high near 56. Southeast wind 10 to 15 mph.
- **Sunday Night:** A 50 percent chance of rain. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 40. Southeast wind around 14 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.
- **Monday:** Rain likely. Cloudy, with a high near 45. Southeast wind 11 to 14 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph. Chance of precipitation is 70%.
- **Monday Night:** A chance of rain and snow before 4am, then a chance of snow. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 29. South wind 8 to 11 mph becoming west after midnight. Chance of precipitation is 50%.
- **Tuesday:** Rain and snow likely, becoming all snow after 5pm. Cloudy, with a high near 38. Northwest wind 9 to 11 mph. Chance of precipitation is 60%.



## SPORTS

### Russia's Olympic Committee Reinstated After Doping Scandal

After a major doping scandal limited Russia's participation at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, the country's Olympic committee has been formally reinstated by the International Olympic Committee. This comes after the IOC said remaining test results from Russians who competed in the games came back negative. In December, the IOC announced that Russia's Olympic committee was suspended because of the state-sponsored cheating. As NPR's Bill Chappell has reported, their athletes could still compete – but under the title of "Olympic Athlete from Russia." Their uniforms bore the Olympic symbol and they carried the Olympic Flag at the opening ceremony. One hundred and sixty-eight took part in the games as neutral athletes. There was some speculation that Russia might be reinstated in time for the closing ceremony, allowing the athletes to march under the Russian flag. The country's Olympic committee paid some \$15 million in fines. But two Russian athletes failed doping tests — curling bronze medalist Alexander Krushelnickii, whose mixed-doubles medal was stripped, and bobsledder Nadezhda Sergeeva. As Bill reported, the IOC said the failed tests and other factors "prevented the IOC from even considering lifting the suspension for the closing ceremony." Now that all final results are in, the IOC says that Russia's suspension is "automatically lifted with immediate effect." "We must turn this page," said Russian President Vladimir Putin at a ceremony for Olympians on Wednesday, according to The Associated Press. "We must draw relevant conclusions for ourselves, but I hope that international organizations also will eventually understand that sports must be kept away from problems unrelated to it." The IOC's decision to ban Russia was prompted by a report from the World Anti-Doping agency led by law professor Richard McLaren. "Released in two phases, the McLaren report concluded that Russia's scheme involved more than 1,000 Russian athletes and that it also included plans both for manipulating doping controls and for covering up the system," Bill reported. Figure skater Alina Zagitova won the only individual gold medal by an athlete from Russia at this year's games. Head here for Bill's account of that medal ceremony, where the Olympic anthem played instead of the Russian one.

### Hockey

STOUGHTON

0

WAUKESHA NORTH CO-OP

5

MONONA GROVE

0

VERONA

10

BELOIT MEMORIAL CO-OP

5

JANESVILLE CO-OP

6

BARABOO CO-OP

2

REEDSBURG CO-OP

5



## COMMERCIALS

Male voice "Hi, my name's John. I'm about to take a deep breath and try to read the following out loud, in one go, without stopping. [Takes a deep breath.]

"If like me you've noticed you run out of breath doing things like playing with your kids, you've probably thought about quitting smoking, but doing it alone can be tough. That's why I'm going to contact a local 'Stop Smoking' adviser, who'll give me one-to-one support and advice to make sure I quit for good... [runs out of breath, then inhales deeply] ...so I'll no longer run out of breath carrying out simple tasks like this one.

"To find a 'Stop Smoking' adviser who'll give you the best chance of quitting for good, visit [www.smokefree.org](http://www.smokefree.org)."

### Shell V Power 'Sing'

[Motor starts and revs, followed by opera singing]

Shell V-Power. Make your engine sing.