

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

## Trump to face questions on Russia hacking, business ties

NEW YORK — The last time Donald Trump held a news conference, he was plunging into a heated general election campaign with Hillary Clinton and suggested Russia could help dig up some of his rival's emails.

Nearly six months and a presidential campaign victory later, Trump will finally step before reporters again today to face questions about what role he believes Russia played in the election year hacking of Democratic groups — interference the intelligence community says was intended to help the Republican defeat Clinton. Trump has challenged that assessment and has yet to say whether a full briefing with intelligence officials last week did anything to sway him.

A U.S. official told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the intelligence officials informed Trump about an unsubstantiated report that Russia had compromising personal and financial information about him. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because the official was not allowed to publicly discuss the matter.

Shortly after news reports were published about the briefing, Trump tweeted: "FAKE NEWS - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!"

A spokesman for President Vladimir Putin denied allegations today.

## Official: Trump briefed on potentially compromising report

WASHINGTON — Top intelligence officials last week told President-elect Donald Trump about an unsubstantiated report that Russia had compromising personal and financial information about him, a U.S. official says.

The briefing about the document was first reported by CNN. A summary of the allegations was separate from a classified assessment of Russia's suspected attempts to meddle in the U.S. presidential election. Trump and President Barack Obama were briefed on the intelligence community's findings last week.

Shortly after news reports were published about the briefing, Trump tweeted: "FAKE NEWS - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!"

And in Moscow, a spokesman for President Vladimir Putin denied the report. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov today dismissed it as a "complete fabrication and utter nonsense." He insisted that the Kremlin "does not engage in collecting compromising material."

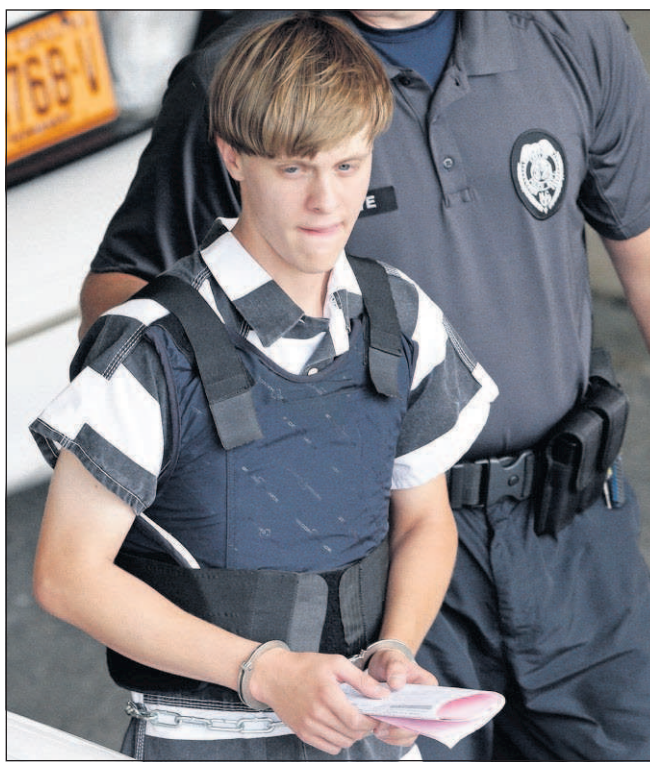
A U.S. official told The Associated Press on Tuesday that intelligence officials had informed Trump about an unsubstantiated report that Russia had compromising personal and financial information about him. The Trump was expected to hold a previously scheduled news conference today to discuss his future plans regarding his role with the Trump Organization. The official who discussed the briefing by intelligence figures spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not allowed to publicly discuss the matter.

## Russia friend and sanctions foe, Tillerson gets his hearing

WASHINGTON — Friend of Russia and foe of sanctions in his corporate life, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for secretary of state, Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, is an unorthodox choice for a Republican White House. He may feel perfectly at home in Trump's iconoclastic administration.

Likely to face pointed questions from both sides of the aisle at his Senate confirmation hearing today, Tillerson represents a break in a longstanding tradition of secretaries of state with extensive military, legislative, political or diplomatic experience. Yet his supporters, including former GOP grandees Condoleezza Rice and Robert Gates, point to the oil man's lengthy career as a senior executive in a mammoth multinational company as proof he has the management and negotiating skills to succeed as America's top diplomat.

Democrats and even traditional GOP hawks are expected to zero in on Tillerson's role in orchestrating business deals with Russia, which led to President Vladimir Putin awarding him the



AP Photo/Chuck Burton

**Charleston, S.C., shooting suspect Dylann Roof is escorted from the Cleveland County Courthouse in Shelby, N.C., in June. A federal jury has sentenced Roof to death for killing nine black church members in a racially motivated attack in 2015. A judge is verifying the sentence today.**

Order of Friendship in 2013. Exxon and its subsidiaries' activities in Iran and Iraq, and his environmental views are also likely to be covered, as are suspicions that Tillerson's focus will be driven by corporate interests at the expense of the nation's.

The severity of any challenge to Tillerson's nomination is unclear. Already, some leading Democrats who met privately with him have voiced relief at his views on Russia, climate change and trade, even if they appear not to mesh with those of the president-elect.

Russia is sure to be foremost on everyone's mind. With allegations of Russian interference in the presidential election roiling the nation, several lawmakers have spoken about scrutinizing his and Exxon's two-decade relationship with Putin and others in Moscow.

## Church families: Forgiving shooter doesn't mean sparing life

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Just because some of the families of the nine people killed and three people who survived a racist massacre in a Charleston church have forgiven the man convicted in the shootings doesn't mean they think his life should have been spared.

There are a broad range of feelings among the loved ones who were at Emanuel AME ranging from those who think there is no justification to taking a life anytime to those who believe the biblical Old Testament justice of an eye for an eye.

Dylann Roof will soon be off to federal death row, but the families he shattered when he entered Emanuel AME Church and fired 77 shots at the end of Bible study get one last chance to confront him today as U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel verifies the jury's sentence at a hearing.

It's the only chance for them to speak to Roof and the court directly, without having to answer specific questions.

The willingness to forgive dominated the news in the days after the June 17, 2015, shootings as victims' families and survivors offered Roof forgiveness at his bond hearing. But there are many like Melvin Graham who said forgiveness is still a work in progress and he will forever grieve the death of his sister Cynthia Hurd.

## Inmates face uncertainty on Guantanamo prison's anniversary

MIAMI — The looming presidency of Donald Trump has created a deep sense of uncertainty for inmates at Guantanamo on the 15th anniversary of the arrival of the first prisoners at the

U.S. base in Cuba.

Nineteen of the remaining 55 prisoners are cleared for release and could be freed in the final days of Barack Obama's presidency, part of an effort to shrink the prison since the administration couldn't close it on his watch.

But those left behind will face the future under Trump, who has said he wants to keep Guantanamo open and recently called on Obama to halt releases.

"There is a great deal of anxiety and fear," said Pardiss Kebraei, a lawyer with the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based organization that represents five prisoners.

That backdrop has given a feeling of urgency to anti-Guantanamo demonstrations scheduled for today's anniversary in London, Los Angeles and Washington, featuring activists in the orange prison jumpsuits that came to symbolize the detention center though now they are typically worn only by a handful of detainees who have violated detention center rules and are on "disciplinary status."

## Fierce battles leave hospital in Iraqi city of Mosul gutted

MOSUL, Iraq — After weeks of airstrikes and artillery fire, Mosul's al-Salam hospital is little more than a burnt-out shell. Retaken from the Islamic State group by Iraqi forces this month, the building's top floors were almost completely destroyed. The gardens around the complex are strewn with medical records and supplies. Bright blue hospital bedsheets hang from nearby trees.

The hospital in eastern Mosul was the scene of one of the most significant setbacks for Iraqi troops in the nearly 3-month operation to retake Iraq's second-largest city. On Dec. 6, after advancing too quickly, Iraqi forces found themselves surrounded by IS fighters in the hospital complex. Pummeled by wave upon wave of militant counterattacks, dozens were killed and wounded, according to Iraqi military and hospital officials, eventually forcing a withdrawal.

Some Iraqi army officers blamed the setback on insufficient air support by the U.S.-led coalition. Others faulted poor leadership and a lack of coordination among the many disparate Iraqi forces participating in the Mosul offensive, including tribal and militia fighters who maintain their own command structures.

Following the December withdrawal, Iraq's elite rapid-response unit joined the Iraqi army on Mosul's southeast front and the U.S.-led coalition increased its air campaign, despite an initial reluctance to use airstrikes against IS in the vicinity of the hospital.

Over the past month, coalition planes dropped 25 bombs on the hospital complex, according to a Pentagon statement provided to The Associated Press. After weeks of static front lines, the renewed air and ground assault brought Iraqi forces to the edge of the Tigris River. Since the Mosul operation was launched in October, Iraqi forces have slowly clawed back about a third of the city.

## North Korea is a bad trip if you're looking to get high

PYONGYANG, North Korea — North Korea has been getting some pretty high praise lately from the stoner world.

Marijuana news outlets including High Times, Merry Jane and Green Rush — along with British tabloids, which always love a good yarn — are hailing the North as a pothead paradise and maybe even the next Amsterdam of pot tourism. They've reported North Korean marijuana to be legal, abundant and mind-blowingly cheap, sold openly to Chinese and Russian tourists at a major market on the North's border for about \$3 a pound.

But seriously, North Korea? Baked?

The claim that marijuana is legal in North Korea is not true: The North Korean penal code lists it as a controlled substance in the same category as cocaine and heroin. And the person who would likely help any American charged with a crime in North Korea emphatically rejects the idea that the ban is not enforced.

"There should be no doubt that drugs, including marijuana, are illegal here," said Torkel Stiermlof, the Swedish ambassador. The United States has no diplomatic relations with the North, so Sweden's embassy acts as a middleman when U.S. citizens run afoul of North Korean laws.

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