

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

AG's recusal portends continued pressure on Russia meddling

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions may not have been clear about his contacts with Russian officials during the 2016 election, but this much is: The controversy over any Kremlin involvement in American politics is not going to fade away anytime soon.

Sessions on Thursday became the second high-ranking member of the Trump administration to take a hit over conversations with Russia's envoy to the U.S., recusing himself from any probe that examines communications between Trump aides and Moscow but facing down calls for his resignation. An early backer and key adviser for Trump's campaign, Sessions said his staff recommended that he step aside from a probe.

"I feel I should not be involved in investigating a campaign I had a role in," he said.

Sessions' action followed revelations that he twice spoke with the Russian ambassador and didn't say so when pressed, under oath, by Congress. Though he rejected any suggestion that he tried to mislead anyone, he did allow that he should have been more careful in his testimony.

"I should have slowed down and said, 'But I did meet one Russian official a couple of times,'" he said.

Russia's top diplomat in US in eye of political storm

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration's back-to-back controversies over its Russian ties now have at least one thing in common: Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.

Moscow's top diplomat is a Washington fixture with a sprawling network, and he has emerged as the central figure in the investigations into Trump advisers' connections with Russia. In a matter of weeks, contact with Kislyak led to the firing of a top adviser to the president and, on Thursday, prompted calls for the Attorney General Jeff Sessions to resign.

Separately, a White House official confirmed that Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and ousted national security adviser Michael Flynn met with Kislyak at Trump Tower in December for what the official called a brief courtesy meeting. Flynn was pushed out of the White House last month after officials said he misled Vice President Mike Pence about whether he and the ambassador had discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia in a phone call.

At issue Thursday were two meetings between Sessions and Kislyak — one in July and another in September, at the height of concern over Russia's involvement in hacking of Democratic officials' emails accounts. Intelligence officials have since concluded that Moscow ordered the hacks to tilt the election toward Trump. In his confirmation hearing, the Alabama Republican denied having contact with any Russian officials, neglecting to mention the meetings with Kislyak, which were first reported by the Washington Post.

The Russian Embassy did not respond to a request for comment.



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

Attorney General Jeff Sessions pauses during a news conference at the Justice Department in Washington on Thursday. Sessions said he will recuse himself from a federal investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Costco raises membership fees, misses earnings forecasts

ISSAQUAH, Wash — Costco Wholesale Corp. announced Thursday that it's raising its membership fees, as the warehouse club operator released quarterly results that fell short of Wall Street's expectations. Its shares fell more than 4 percent in after-hours trading.

Starting June 1, annual membership fees for individual, business and business add-on members in the U.S. and Canada will rise \$5 to \$60. Executive memberships in the U.S. and Canada will increase from \$110 to \$120. Overall, the fee increases will affect around 35 million members.

The Issaquah, Washington-based company reported fiscal second-quarter net income of \$515 million, or \$1.17 per share. The average estimate of 13 analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research had been for earnings of \$1.35 per share.

Costco posted revenue of \$29.77 billion in the period, which also did not meet Street forecasts. Seven analysts surveyed by Zacks expected \$29.99 billion.

Its stock was off \$7.30 to \$170.68 in after-market trading following the release of the earnings report.

Through the close of Thursday's regular trading session, its shares have climbed 11 percent since the beginning of the year, while the Standard & Poor's 500 index has increased more than 6 percent.

Feds kill wolf on private land with cyanide trap, accidentally

PORTLAND — Officials say a gray wolf was unintentionally killed in rural northeast Oregon by a cyanide device used by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Oregonian reports the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife and the USDA acknowledged the Sunday killing.

The male, 100-pound wolf was a member of the Shamrock Pack and believed to be less than 2 years old.

The federal government's Wildlife Services division was using a cyanide device known as an M-44 to kill coyotes and "prevent coyote-livestock conflict" on the private property in Wallowa County.

The often-questioned tool is a spring-activated device that is typically smeared with bait and shoots poison into the animal's mouth when it tugs on the trap.

Federal officials are reviewing the death.

Bakers take same-sex wedding cake fight to appeals court

PORTLAND — The case of the Oregon bakers who denied service to a same-sex couple several years ago has come before the state Court of Appeals.

The Oregonian reports Melissa and Aaron Klein argue that Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and the Bureau of Labor and Industries violated state and federal laws by forcing them to pay damages to the couple.

Lawyers for Sweet Cakes by Melissa also said the state violated the Kleins' rights as artists to free speech, their rights to religious freedom and their rights as defendants to a due process.

They argue the fine was excessive and that Avakian, who praised an LGBTQ advocacy group on Facebook before the hearing, should have recused himself.

If the Kleins are successful, their appeal could create a religious exemption to the 2007 Oregon Equality Act, which protects Oregonians from discrimination.

UO trustees OK 10.6 percent in-state tuition increase

EUGENE — Tuition at the University of Oregon is set to go up, as the Board of Trustees has passed a 10.6 percent tuition increase.

The Register-Guard reports that trustees on Thursday approved the 10.6 percent increase for in-state tuition and a 3 percent increase for out-of-state students for the 2017-18 school year with a 11-1 vote. Including fees, the cost of attendance next year will be \$11,931 for residents and \$34,611 for nonresidents.

About 40 students attended the meeting, calling on trustees to keep tuition lower. One student, Charlie Landeros, said growing up poor and Hispanic in Eugene, he never thought UO was attainable.

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