

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

## US strike on Syria is widely praised, but angers Russia

BEIRUT — World leaders rallied around the United States after it launched a missile strike early today on a Syrian air base in response to this week's chemical attack, while Russia condemned the move as "aggression" and suspended crucial coordination with Washington in Syria's congested skies.

The overnight missile attack, which marked the first time the U.S. has directly targeted Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces, was condemned by his allies in Russia and Iran but welcomed by the Syrian opposition and its supporters, who expressed hope it signaled a turning point in the devastating six-year-old civil war.

The bombing represents Trump's most dramatic military order since taking office and thrusts the U.S. administration deeper into the complex Syrian conflict. The Obama administration threatened to attack Assad's forces after previous chemical attacks, but never followed through.

About 60 U.S. Tomahawk missiles hit the Shayrat air base, a small installation with two runways, where aircraft often take off to bomb targets in northern and central Syria. The U.S. missiles hit at 3:45 a.m. today and targeted the base's airstrips, hangars, control tower and ammunition areas, U.S. officials said.

They were fired from two warships in the Mediterranean Sea, in retaliation for Tuesday's deadly chemical attack, which officials said used chlorine mixed with a nerve agent, possibly sarin.

Assad's office called the U.S. missile strike "reckless" and "irresponsible." The Syrian military said at least seven people were killed and nine wounded. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition monitor said the seven included a general and three soldiers.

The Kremlin said President Vladimir Putin believes the U.S. strike is an "aggression against a sovereign state in violation of international law."



## Senate confirms Trump pick Gorsuch to Supreme Court

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed Neil Gorsuch to become the newest associate justice on the Supreme Court today, elevating Donald Trump's nominee following a corrosive partisan confrontation that could have lasting impacts for the



Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Robert S. Price/U.S. Navy The USS Ross (DDG 71) fires a tomahawk land attack missile today from the Mediterranean Sea. The United States blasted a Syrian air base with a barrage of cruise missiles in fiery retaliation for this week's gruesome chemical weapons attack against civilians.

Senate and the court.

Vice President Mike Pence was presiding as the Senate voted 54-45 in favor of Gorsuch, a 49-year-old veteran of the 10th U.S. Circuit of Appeals in Denver whose rulings make him an intellectual heir to the late Justice Antonin Scalia, whose seat he will fill.

Gorsuch won support from 51 of the chambers' Republicans as well as three moderate Democrats up for re-election in states Trump won last fall: Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Joe Donnelly of Indiana. GOP Sen. Johnny Isakson of Georgia did not vote.

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, voted no.

The outcome was a major win for Trump, his biggest congressional victory to date, as well as for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who kept Scalia's seat open after the justice's death in February 2016. McConnell refused to hold hearings for President Barack Obama's nominee.

After he is sworn in, Gorsuch will restore the court's conservative voting majority that existed before Scalia's death.

Republicans exulted in the victory.

"He's an exceptional choice," McConnell said.

Democrats denounced the GOP's use of what both sides dubbed the "nuclear option" to put Gorsuch on the court, calling it an epic power grab that would further corrode politics in Congress, the courts and the United States. Many Republicans bemoaned reaching that point, too, but they blamed Democrats for pushing them to it.

"I believe it will make this body a more partisan place," Sen-

ate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on the Senate floor ahead of the vote. "It will make the cooling saucer of the Senate considerably hotter, and I believe it will make the Supreme Court a more partisan place."

## Pace of US hiring tumbles, yet jobless rate hits 10-year low

WASHINGTON — The U.S. jobs report for March report delivered a mixed message today as hiring fell to its slowest pace in nearly a year. Yet at the same time, the unemployment rate fell to its lowest level in nearly a decade.

Employers added just 98,000 jobs last month, the Labor Department said. It was barely half the previous month's gain and a potential sign of weakening growth. Yet most economists downplayed the drop, attributing much of it to a snowstorm that hit the Midwest and Northeast just as the government was compiling its hiring data.

The unemployment rate dropped to 4.5 percent, the lowest since May 2007, from 4.7 percent in February. The unusually low jobless rate suggested a much healthier picture.

Most economists had expected a drop-off in hiring in March after robust gains in both January and February, but the drop was worse than projected. Yet many analysts said the tepid figure was likely just a blip.

"It's very premature to conclude that there's been an interruption of what has been fantastic momentum in the labor market," said Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at Northern Trust.

## Demand booming on college campuses for creative writing

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Some credit the rise of social media. Others attribute it to a flourishing culture of self-expression. Whatever the reason, colleges across the United States are seeing a boom in demand for courses on creative writing.

Colleges are adding writing programs to accommodate interest in what has become the rarest of fields in the humanities — a sector that is growing, rather than losing students to science and technology.

The number of schools offering bachelor's degrees in creative writing has risen from three in 1975 to 733 today, according to the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, an industry group based at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

So what will these students do after graduating?

"Most of them are aware that this probably is not going to be their career. At least, I hope they're aware," said David Galef, director of the creative writing program at Montclair State University in New Jersey. "They're interested in doing something they feel is creative."

## Justice: It costs \$94.55 a day to keep an inmate in state prison

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— so any probation violation comes back before the judge, increasing the chances probation could be revoked.

"So the stakes are going to be quite high for you, do you understand that?" Judge Matyas asked.

Ehrlund, a father who was in a long-term relationship, said he had tried treatment for drinking before but would now take it more seriously.

"I learned my lesson," he told the court. "I decided to drink to take care of a problem. I realized that, obviously, that's not the way to do it."

## Justice reinvestment

Oregon, alarmed by the high cost of prison, has embraced justice reinvestment, a national drive to contain prison spending and reduce recidivism.

The state has relaxed sentences for drug and property crimes and provided grants to counties to supervise more felons locally. The hope is to slow the growth of the prison population and interrupt the behavioral patterns that trigger new crimes.

Clatsop County is among the top five in prison use for drug and property crimes since the justice reinvestment initiative began in 2013, and judges, prosecutors and probation officers are examining what changes — if any — should be made to improve sentencing orders and probation.

Ehrlund is the kind of felon justice reinvestment has the potential to intercept. But a close look at his case, based on court records and police reports, shows the discord between theory and real life. Bad choices felons make on probation often give police, prosecutors and judges few alternatives, frustrating the larger policy goals of criminal justice reform.

## Downward departure

Clatsop County's relatively high prison use for drug and property crimes is tied to the significant number of downward departure sentences like the one Ehrlund accepted.

The prosecutor's offer let-

ter to Ehrlund's attorney explained the trade-offs. Ehrlund was facing more than nine years in prison for theft if he went to trial and was convicted. If he pleaded guilty, prosecutors would agree to five years because he had no prior convictions for theft and the state wanted restitution for the \$20,500 in unemployment benefits.

The five-year sentence would not be imposed if Ehrlund paid back the money, refrained from drinking and obeyed the law while on probation.

While Ehrlund had to serve time in the county jail for the DUI, he avoided going to prison for theft, a deal that, on paper, looks like a bargain.

But some defense attorneys and probation officers are concerned that downward departure sentences can set felons up for failure, especially if they have drug or alcohol problems. Since the District Attorney's Office has a policy of no structured sanctions in downward departure agreements, probation officers are unable to manage felons who screw up by sending them to county jail or rehab, possibly staving off something worse.

Probation violations come back before the court, where long prison sentences are a judge's order away.

## Catch a ride

The Warrenton Police Department knew Ehrlund had his driver's license revoked. They also knew he would drive his burgundy Hummer in the early mornings to the Fred Meyer parking lot in Warrenton, where he would catch a ride to work.

On a morning last July, a Warrenton Police officer was waiting when Ehrlund pulled into the parking lot. He was arrested for felony driving with a revoked license, but since the county jail was full, he was cited and released.

Ehrlund, according to the police report, told the officer his partner would pick him up after work.

Prosecutors moved to revoke Ehrlund's probation, but before the court could weigh the new felony, he made

**'Those prison beds are pretty valuable. We need them. And there are people that deserve to be there. I don't think he's (Ehrlund) one of them.'**

Lt. Kristen Hanthorn

leader of the Sheriff's Office Parole and Probation Division

another, more serious, mistake.

## Iredale Inn

On an afternoon in December, a Warrenton Police officer and a Clatsop County Sheriff's Office deputy found Ehrlund in the parking lot behind the Iredale Inn in Warrenton. He was on his cellphone, leaning over the tailgate of his silver Dodge pickup, and he smelled of alcohol.

Ehrlund had been refused service at Rod's Bar and Grill because he was drunk, according to the deputy's report, and a witness had followed him on foot and watched him drive over to the Iredale Inn, where he was also refused service.

The Warrenton Police officer was only going to arrest Ehrlund for felony driving with a revoked license, since the officer had not seen Ehrlund drive. But the sheriff's deputy insisted on pursuing a felony drunken driving charge, aware that it might send Ehrlund to prison.

Ehrlund was given a breath test for alcohol when he was taken to the county jail by the Warrenton officer. On advice from a prosecutor, the sheriff's deputy told jail staff he did not want to know the result. The sheriff's deputy spoke with witnesses from the bars and had Ehrlund perform sobriety

tests at the jail, which he failed. The deputy then had Ehrlund take another breath test.

He blew a 0.18, more than twice the legal limit for driving.

## 70 months

When Ehrlund came back before Judge Matyas for a final time in February — a year after accepting the downward departure agreement on his theft convictions — his fate was already decided.

The 39-year-old admitted he violated probation and pleaded guilty to felony driving with a revoked license and felony drunken driving. He received 60 months — five years — in prison on the downward departure for theft and another 10 months in prison for the new convictions.

Matyas said Ehrlund would be eligible for an alternative incarceration program, which provides intense treatment in prison in exchange for early release. The judge also recommended that Ehrlund be evaluated for drug and alcohol treatment when he gets out on parole.

"Sounds like you'll be there long enough that you actually may be able to get into some programs that should help you when you get out," Matyas said.

**Volunteer Pick of the Week**

**Joanne**

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(More on <http://Petfinder.com/>)

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