

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Nobel Peace Prize awarded to anti-nuclear campaign group

OSLO, Norway — The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to an organization seeking to eliminate nuclear weapons through an international treaty-based prohibition.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee today announced the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons as winner of the \$1.1 million prize.

The Geneva-based organization ICAN “has been a driving force in prevailing upon the world’s nations to pledge to cooperate ... in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons,” committee chairwoman Berit Reiss-Andersen said in the announcement.

She noted that similar prohibitions have been reached on chemical and biological weapons, land mines and cluster munitions.

“Nuclear weapons are even more destructive, but have not yet been made the object of a similar international legal prohibition,” she said.

US military halts exercises over Qatar crisis

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military has halted some exercises with its Gulf Arab allies over the ongoing diplomatic crisis targeting Qatar, trying to use its influence to end the monthslong dispute, authorities said today.

While offering few details, the acknowledgement by the U.S. military’s Central Command shows the concern it has over the conflict gripping the Gulf, home to the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet and crucial bases for its campaign against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, as well as the war in Afghanistan.

The Qatar crisis began June 5, when Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched an economic boycott while closing off the energy-rich nation’s land border and its air and sea routes. The quartet of Arab nations pointed to Qatar’s alleged support of extremists and overly warm ties to Iran. Qatar long has denied supporting extremists and shares a massive offshore natural gas field with Tehran that makes its citizens have the highest per-capita income in the world.

Initially, U.S. military officials said the boycott and dispute had no impact on their operations. Qatar is home to the massive al-Udeid Air Base, the forward headquarters of Central Command which oversees the U.S.-led coalition’s bombing campaign of the Islamic State group and manages a direct line to Russia to manage Syria’s crowded skies.

But as the dispute went on, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis traveled to Doha to offer his support. The Trump administration also agreed to an in-the-works sale of F-15 fighter jets to Qatar for \$12 billion.

AG’s religious objection order undercuts LGBT protections

WASHINGTON — In an order that undercuts federal protections for LGBT people, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a sweeping directive to agencies today to do as much as possible to accommodate those who claim their religious freedoms are being violated.

The guidance, an attempt to deliver on President Donald Trump’s pledge to his evangelical supporters that he would protect religious liberties, effectively lifts a burden from religious objectors to prove

that their beliefs about marriage or other topics are sincerely held.

Under the new policy, a claim of a violation of religious freedom would be enough to override many anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, women and others. The guidelines are so sweeping that experts on religious liberty are calling them a legal powder-keg that could prompt wide-ranging lawsuits against the government.

Religious liberty experts said they would have to see how the guidance would be applied by individual agencies, both in crafting regulations and deciding how to enforce them. But experts said the directive clearly tilted the balance very far in favor of people of faith who do not want to recognize same-sex marriage.

In issuing the memo, Sessions, a deeply devout Methodist from Alabama, is injecting the department into a thicket of highly charged legal questions that have repeatedly reached the U.S. Supreme Court, most notably in the 2014 Hobby Lobby case that said corporations with religious objections could opt out of a health law requirement to cover contraceptives for women.

Birth control: Trump expands opt-out for workplace insurance

WASHINGTON — President Trump is allowing more employers to opt out of providing no-cost birth control to women by claiming religious or moral objections, issuing new rules today that take another step in rolling back the Obama health care law.

The new policy is a long-expected revision to federal rules that require most companies to cover birth control as preventive care for women, at no additional cost. Preventive services are supposed to be free of charge to employees and their dependents under former President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act.

Trump’s religious and moral exemption is expected to galvanize both his opponents and religious conservatives that back him, but it’s likely to have a limited impact on America’s largely secular workplaces. Most women no longer pay for birth control, and advocates immediately announced plans to try to block the new rule in court.

The administration estimated that some 200 employers who have already voiced objections to the Obama-era policy would qualify for the expanded opt-out, and that 120,000 women would be affected. However, it’s unclear how major religious-affiliated employers such as Catholic hospitals and universities will respond.

Since contraception became a covered preventive benefit, the share of women employees paying their own money for birth control pills has plunged to under 4 percent, from 21 percent, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Doctors’ groups that were key to derailing Republican plans to repeal the health law outright expressed dismay over the administration’s move on birth control. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said the new policy could reverse the recent progress in lowering the nation’s rate of unintended pregnancies.

After accusations Hollywood asks: Is Harvey Weinstein done?

LOS ANGELES — Accepting the Golden Globe best actress award in 2012 for “The Iron Lady,” Meryl Streep took a moment to thank the almighty — “God, Harvey Weinstein.”

For decades, Weinstein has held a lofty position in Hollywood as one of the industry’s most powerful figures — an old-school, larger-than-life movie mogul who was never shy about throwing his weight around. “The Punisher. Old Testament, I guess,” Streep added that night to laughter and applause.

But Weinstein’s name — such a regular refrain on countless

Oscar nights — on Thursday rang out in a different way. In a bombshell expose, The New York Times reported that Weinstein had reached at least eight legal settlements with women over alleged harassment. With allegations levied by actresses including Ashley Judd and former employees at both the Weinstein Co. and Weinstein’s former company, Miramax, the report detailed decades of abuse.

The 65-year-old Weinstein, in a lengthy written statement, said he would take a leave of absence from his company. But many in Hollywood are wondering if Weinstein’s leave might be permanent. Is this, like the accusations that felled Bill Cosby and Roger Ailes, the end for the sharp-elbowed independent film pioneer whose editing-room meddling earned him the nickname “Harvey Scissorhands” and whose unprecedented run of Oscar glory made him a Hollywood deity?

“Harvey Weinstein’s career in Hollywood is likely over,” declared industry trade Variety.

Effort to restrict ‘bump stock’ draws unlikely supporters

WASHINGTON — The National Rifle Association has joined the Trump administration and top congressional Republicans in a swift and surprising embrace of a restriction on Americans’ guns, though a narrow one: to regulate the “bump stock” devices the Las Vegas shooter apparently used to horrifically lethal effect.

The devices, originally intended to help people with disabilities, fit over the stock and grip of a semi-automatic rifle and allow the weapon to fire continuously, some 400 to 800 rounds in a single minute. Bump stocks were found among the gunman’s weapons and explain why victims in Las Vegas heard what sounded like automatic-weapons fire as the shooter rained bullets from a casino high-rise, slaughtering 58 people in a concert below and wounding hundreds more.

Thursday’s sudden endorsements of controls came almost simultaneously from the NRA and the White House.

The NRA, which famously opposes virtually any hint of new restrictions, said in a statement: “The National Rifle Association is calling on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) to immediately review whether these devices comply with federal law. The NRA believes that devices designed to allow semi-automatic rifles to function like fully automatic rifles should be subject to additional regulations.”

Trump, during photo shoot, talks of ‘calm before the storm’

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump delivered a foreboding message Thursday night, telling reporters as he posed for photos with his senior military leaders that this might be “the calm before the storm.”

White House reporters were summoned suddenly Thursday evening and told the president had decided he wanted the press to document a dinner he was holding with the military leaders and their wives.

Reporters were led hastily to the grand State Dining Room, where they walked into a scene of the president, his highest-ranking military aides and their wives posing for a group photo. The cameras clicked and they smiled. A joke was made about someone’s face being tired. Live classical music played.

Then, Trump gestured to the reporters in the room.

“You guys know what this represents?” Trump asked. “Maybe it’s the calm before the storm. Could be the calm, the calm before the storm.”

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