

Serving on corporate board while in Congress? That's allowed

By **RICHARD LARDNER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The indictment of Rep. Chris Collins on insider trading charges is drawing new attention to the freedom members of Congress have to serve on corporate boards or to buy and sell stock in industries they're responsible for overseeing.

Collins, a New York Republican and a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, was arrested Wednesday and charged with conspiracy, securities fraud, wire fraud and making false statements to the FBI. Parallel charges were filed against two other people, including Collins' son.

Collins has denied any wrongdoing stemming from his involvement with Innate Immunotherapeutics Limited, a biotechnology company based in Sydney, Australia. He was Innate's largest shareholder, holding nearly 17 percent of its shares. He also was a member of the company's board of directors — an arrangement that itself isn't a violation of the law. Yet it's a connection that can create the potential for conflicts of interest.

Members of Congress are not prohibited from serving on corporate boards as long as they don't receive compensation for doing so.

The thinking behind this exception, which doesn't extend to top-level executive branch officials, is to ensure that lawmakers aren't prevented from accepting positions on the boards of charities or other philanthropic organizations, according to Craig Holman of the nonpartisan advocacy group Public Citizen.

Holman, who lobbies in Washington for stricter government ethics and lobbying rules, noted that lawmakers are often privy to sensitive information before it becomes public. That makes the opportunity for insider trading "very prevalent," he said.

"My own office was stunned" by Collins' position, said Holman. "Really, they can sit on a board of directors?"

Government ethics lawyer Kathleen Clark said another downside of permitting members of Congress to be on corporate boards is that they may feel a sense of loyalty to the business, spurring them to share information with the company they obtained through government service.

Clark, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis, also challenged the notion that service on noncommercial organizations is inherently altruistic and doesn't come with potential conflicts of interest. Even nonprofits can have an interest in seeing particular legislation passed, she said.

"In almost every situation, the ethics standards members of Congress impose on themselves are more lax than what they require of high-level executive branch officials," Clark said.

For now, Army suspends immigrant discharges

By **MARTHA MENDOZA**
and **GARANACE BURKE**
Associated Press

The U.S. Army has stopped discharging immigrant recruits who enlisted seeking a path to citizenship — at least temporarily.

A memo spells out orders to high-ranking Army officials to stop processing discharges of men and women who enlisted in the special immigrant program.

"Effective immediately, you will suspend processing of all involuntary separation actions," read the memo signed July 20 by Marshall Williams, acting assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

The disclosure comes one month after a report that dozens of immigrant enlistees were being discharged or had their contracts cancelled. Some said they were given no reason for their discharge. Others said the Army informed them they'd been labeled as security risks because they have relatives abroad or because the Defense Department had not completed background checks on them.

In a statement Thursday, Army Lt. Col. Nina L. Hill said they were stopping the discharges in order to review the administrative separation process. The decision could impact hundreds of enlistees.

"We continue to abide by all requirements to include completing a thorough background investigation" on all recruits, she said.



AP Photo/Mike Knaak

A Pakistani recruit, 22, who was recently discharged from the Army, holds an American flag.

The Army has reversed one discharge, for Brazilian reservist Lucas Calixto, 28, who had sued. Nonetheless, discharges of other immigrant enlistees continued. Attorneys sought to bring a class-action lawsuit last week to offer protections to a broader group of reservists and recruits in the program, demanding that prior discharges be revoked and that further separations be halted.

A judge's order references the July 20 memo, and asks the Army to clarify how it impacts the discharge status of Calixto and other plaintiffs. As part of the memo, Williams also instructed Army officials to recommend whether the military should issue fur-

ther guidance related to the program.

Margaret Stock, an Alaska-based immigration attorney and a retired Army Reserve lieutenant colonel who helped create the immigrant recruitment program, said Wednesday the memo proves there was a policy.

"It's an admission by the Army that they've improperly discharged hundreds of soldiers," she said. "The next step should be go back and rescind the people who were improperly discharged."

Discharged recruits and reservists reached Thursday said their discharges were still in place as far as they knew.

One Pakistani man caught by surprise by his discharge

said he was filing for asylum. He asked that his name be withheld because he fears he might be forced to return to Pakistan, where he could face danger as a former U.S. Army enlistee.

The reversal comes as the Defense Department has attempted to strengthen security requirements for the program, through which historically immigrants vowed to risk their lives for the promise of U.S. citizenship.

President George W. Bush ordered "expedited naturalization" for immigrant soldiers after 9/11 in an effort to swell military ranks. Seven years later the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, known as MAVNI,

became an official recruiting program.

It came under fire from conservatives when President Barack Obama added DACA recipients — young immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children — to the list of eligible enlistees. In response, the military layered on additional security clearances for recruits to pass before heading to boot camp.

The Trump Administration added even more hurdles, creating a backlog within the Defense Department. Last fall, hundreds of recruits still in the enlistment process had their contracts canceled.

Government attorneys called the recruitment program an "elevated security risk" in another case involving 17 foreign-born military recruits who enlisted through the program but have not been able to clear additional security requirements. Some recruits had falsified their background records and were connected to state-sponsored intelligence agencies, the court filing said.

Eligible recruits are required to have legal status in the U.S., such as a student visa, before enlisting. More than 5,000 immigrants were recruited into the program in 2016, and an estimated 10,000 are currently serving. Nearly 110,000 members of the Armed Forces have gained citizenship by serving in the U.S. military since Sept. 11, 2001, according to the Defense Department.

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Russian PM strongly warns US against ramping up sanctions

MOSCOW — Russia's prime minister sternly warned the United States against ramping up sanctions, saying today that Moscow would retaliate with economic, political and unspecified "other" means.

The tough message from Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev marked what the Kremlin sees as a red line, reflecting growing dismay with announced U.S. sanctions that have sent the Russian ruble plummeting to its lowest level in two years.

The U.S. State Department said Wednesday that Washington would impose new sanctions this month after determining this week that Moscow used a military grade nerve agent in March to poison an ex-Russian spy in England.

Russia has strongly denied involvement in the poisonings of Sergei Skripal and his adult daughter.

The sanctions will include the presumed denial of export licenses for Russia to purchase many items with national security implications, according to the State Department.

New sanctions proposals in the U.S. Congress include legislation targeting Russia's state-controlled banks and freezing their operations in dollars — a move that would deal a heavy blow to the Russian economy.

Medvedev warned the U.S. that such a move would cross a red line.

"If something like a ban on bank operations or currency use follows, it will amount to a declaration of economic war," the Russian prime minister said.

Russia-U.S. ties have sunk to their lowest level since Cold War times amid tensions over Ukraine, the war in Syria and the allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Appeals court tells EPA to stop pesticide sales

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court has ruled that the Trump administration endangered public health by keeping a widely used pesticide on the market despite extensive scientific evidence that even tiny levels of exposure can harm babies' brains.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco on Thursday ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to remove chlorpyrifos from sale in the United States within 60 days.

A coalition of farmworkers and environmental groups sued last year after then-EPA chief Scott Pruitt reversed an Obama-era effort to ban chlorpyrifos, which is widely sprayed on citrus fruit, apples and other crops.

The attorneys general for several states including California, New York and Massachusetts joined the case against EPA.

In a split decision, the court said Thursday that Pruitt, a Republican forced to resign earlier this summer amid ethics scandals, vio-

lated federal law by ignoring the conclusions of agency scientists that chlorpyrifos is harmful.

"The panel held that there was no justification for the EPA's decision in its 2017 order to maintain a tolerance for chlorpyrifos in the face of scientific evidence that its residue on food causes neurodevelopmental damage to children," Judge Jed S. Rakoff wrote in the court's opinion.

Michael Abboud, spokesman for acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, said the agency was reviewing the decision, but it had been unable to "fully evaluate the pesticide using the best available, transparent science."

EPA could potentially appeal to the Supreme Court since one member of the three-judge panel dissented from the majority ruling.

Meet the newest citizens: first lady's parents

NEW YORK — First lady Melania Trump's parents were sworn in as U.S. citizens on Thursday, completing a legal path to citizenship that their son-in-law has suggested eliminating.

Viktor and Amalija Knavs, both in their 70s, took the citizenship oath at a private ceremony in New York City. The Slovenian immigrants, a former car dealer and textile factory worker, had been living in the U.S. as

permanent residents.

Lawyer Michael Wildes said the Knaves applied for citizenship on their own and didn't get any special treatment.

He confirmed that Melania Trump sponsored their green cards. Her husband, President Donald Trump, has proposed ending most family-based immigration, which he refers to as "chain migration."

"This golden experiment, these doors that are in America, remain hinged open to beautiful people as they have today," Wildes said after the ceremony.

Amid a bitter debate over immigration — particularly the Trump administration's separation of children from families crossing the border illegally — Wildes said the Knaves' attaining citizenship was "an example of it going right."

Melania Trump's spokeswoman, Stephanie Grisham,

declined to comment. She said the first lady's parents "are not part of the administration and deserve privacy."

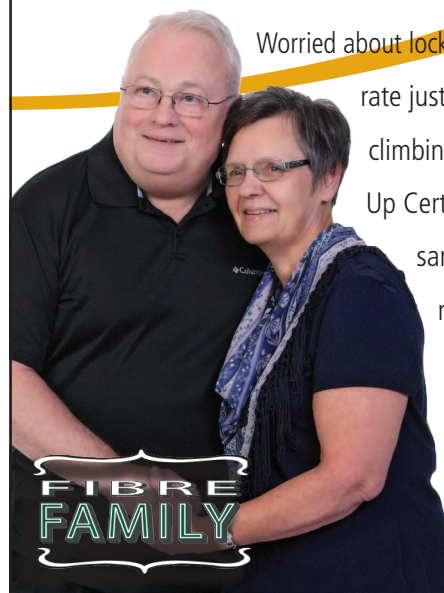
Along with targeting illegal immigration, President Donald Trump has proposed sharply curbing legal immigration.

The Republican president proposed replacing most family-based immigration with a skills-based system after an attempted bombing by a Bangladeshi immigrant in New York last December.

He also called for eliminating a visa lottery program for people from countries under-represented in the U.S.

The plan, which Trump reiterated last week at a Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania rally, would limit immigrants like his wife to sponsoring only their spouses and underage children to join them in the U.S. — not their parents, adult children or siblings.

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