

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Manafort pleads guilty, will cooperate with special counsel

WASHINGTON — Former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort pleaded guilty today to two federal crimes after cutting a deal with prosecutors and agreeing to cooperate with the special counsel’s Russia probe.

The move allows Manafort to avoid a second criminal trial and ends his more than year-long fight against investigators in the Russia investigation.

Manafort was convicted last month of eight financial crimes in a separate trial in Virginia and faces 7 to 10 years in prison in that case.

Prosecutor Andrew Weissman said today in court that Manafort had struck a “cooperation agreement” and would plead guilty to charges related to his Ukrainian political consulting work.

Manafort’s attorney, Kevin Downing, said “He wanted to make sure that his family was able to remain safe and live a good life. He’s accepted responsibility. This is for conduct that dates back many years and everybody should remember that.”

The charges do not relate to Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which is the central issue in the special counsel’s investigation into possible contacts between Trump’s campaign and Russia.

Still, today’s move gives Mueller another successful conviction and a key cooperator in Manafort, who participated in a June 2016 Trump Tower meeting with a Russian lawyer that Donald Trump Jr. took despite it being described as part of a Russian government effort to aid his father’s campaign. A grand jury used by Mueller has heard testimony about the meeting.

“The president did nothing wrong,” said Rudy Giuliani, Trump’s attorney, in a statement. “Once again an investigation has concluded with a plea having nothing to do with President Trump or the Trump campaign.”

Kavanaugh denies allegation of sexual misconduct in school

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh today denied a sexual misconduct allegation from when he was in high school.

In a statement released by the White House, Kavanaugh said: “I categorically and unequivocally deny this allegation. I did not do this back in high school or at any time.”



High winds and storm surge hit Swansboro, N.C.

AP Photo/Tom Copeland

‘Uninvited brute’: Hurricane Florence pounds the Carolinas

WILMINGTON, N.C. — Hurricane Florence lumbered ashore in North Carolina with howling 90 mph winds and terrifying storm surge early today, splintering buildings and trapping hundreds of people in high water as it settled in for what could be a long and extraordinarily destructive drenching.

More than 60 people had to be pulled from a collapsing cinderblock motel at the height of the storm. Hundreds more had to be rescued elsewhere from rising waters. And others could only hope someone would come for them.

“WE ARE COMING TO GET YOU,” the city of New Bern tweeted around 2 a.m. “You may need to move up to the second story, or to your attic, but WE ARE COMING TO GET YOU.”

As Florence pounded away, it unloaded heavy rain, flattened trees, chewed away at roads and knocked out power to more than a half-million homes and businesses.

Ominously, forecasters said the onslaught on the North Carolina-South Carolina coast would last for hours and hours because the hurricane had come almost to a dead stop at just 3 mph as of midday.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said the hurricane was “wreaking havoc” on the coast and could wipe out entire communities as it makes its “violent grind across our state for days.” He called the rain an event that comes along only once every 1,000 years.

“Hurricane Florence is powerful, slow and relentless,” he said. “It’s an uninvited brute who doesn’t want to leave.”

There were no immediate reports of any deaths.

Kavanaugh’s statement comes after Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said she has notified federal investigators about information she received about the nominee but won’t disclose publicly.

The New Yorker reported the alleged incident took place at a party when Kavanaugh,

now 53, was attending Georgetown Preparatory School. The woman making the allegation attended a nearby school.

The magazine says the woman sent a letter about the allegation to Democrats. A Democratic aide and another person familiar with the letter confirmed today that the allegation is sexual in nature.

Rallying to Kavanaugh’s defense, 65 women who knew him in high school issued a letter, released by Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee, saying he has “always treated women with decency and respect.”

“We are women who have known Brett Kavanaugh for more than 35 years and knew him while he attended high school between 1979 and 1983,” wrote the women, who said most of them had attended all-girl high schools in the area. “For the entire time we have known Brett Kavanaugh, he has behaved honorably and treated women with respect.”

The Judiciary Committee, which has finished confirmation hearings for Kavanagh, is scheduled to vote next Thursday on whether to recommend that he be confirmed by the full Senate.

Officials work to pinpoint cause of ‘Armageddon’-like blasts

LAWRENCE, Mass. — Investigators worked today to pinpoint the cause of a series of dramatic natural gas explosions that killed a teenager who had just gotten his driver’s license and was sitting in his car, injured at least 25 others and left dozens of homes in smoldering ruins.

Authorities said an estimated 8,000 people were displaced at the height of Thursday’s post-explosion chaos in three towns north of Boston that were rocked by the disaster. Most were still waiting, shaken and exhausted, to be able to return to their homes.

The National Transportation Safety Board sent a team to help investigate, saying pipelines are within its jurisdiction.

The rapid-fire series of gas explosions that one official described as “Armageddon” ignited fires in 60 to 80 homes in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover, forcing entire neighborhoods to evacuate as crews scrambled to fight the flames and shut off the gas and electricity. Gas remained shut off today in most of the area, and the streets were eerily deserted.

Massachusetts State Police urged all residents with homes serviced by Columbia Gas in the three communities to evacuate, snarling traffic and causing widespread confusion as residents and local officials struggled to understand what was happening. Some 400 people spent the night in shelters, and school was canceled today as families waited to return to their homes.

Gov. Charlie Baker said state and local authorities were investigating but that it could take days or weeks before they turn up answers, acknowledging the “massive inconvenience” for those displaced by the explosions. He said hundreds of gas technicians were going house to house to ensure each was safe.

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