

# Doubts emerge about pick for intelligence chief

By ERIC TUCKER, MARY CLARE JALONICK and DEB RIECHMANN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's pick for national intelligence director has been mayor of a small Texas city, a federal prosecutor and a member of Congress.

But questions were already emerging Monday about whether those qualifications are adequate for the position as the nation confronts threats that include foreign election interference, North Korea's nuclear ambitions and the risk of war with Iran.

Rep. John Ratcliffe's dearth of relevant experience — a departure from the decades of intelligence and foreign policy bona fides of past position holders — may especially matter at a time when current and former government officials expect Russia to interfere in the 2020 presidential election just as it did in unprecedented fashion when Trump first ran.

"Ratcliffe comes to the job with the least national security experience and the most partisan political experience of any previous director of national intelligence," said Mike Morell, a former acting CIA director who now hosts the "Intelligence Matters" podcast.

The director of national intelligence has oversight of the nation's 17 intelligence agencies. If confirmed, Ratcliffe would be the principal intelligence adviser to Trump, who has appeared determined to surround himself with vocal protectors and defenders even in national security positions that haven't historically been perceived as overtly partisan.

It is unclear, for instance, what experience he will bring in helping thwart foreign government efforts to interfere in American politics. Also unknown is whether skepticism he has voiced in Congress about special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation into ties between Russia and the Trump campaign will affect his response to any foreign influence or cyberattacks on campaigns.

Ratcliffe, who was among the most aggressive Republican questioners of Mueller at public hearings last week, would replace outgoing director Dan Coats at a time of broader reshuffling within the



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats.

national security leadership structure.

The selection comes two months after Trump empowered another ally, Attorney General William Barr, to declassify intelligence collected by other agencies, including the CIA, as part of the Russia investigation. Ratcliffe has made clear his skepticism of that investigation and his belief that Trump was treated improperly by investigators, saying in a talk show appearance Sunday that it was time to move on from discussion of impeachment.

"It's a moment when Donald Trump can deepen his personal stranglehold over the intelligence function and knock out any voices of dissent to his particular world view," said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland. "That's a scary thing for the country."

Coats, who will step down next month, was publicly steadfast about his conviction that Russia had interfered in the election even in the face of the president's ambivalence. He appeared to scoff when told in an interview last year that Trump had invited Putin to Washington.

In his resignation letter, he cited as an accomplishment the appointment of an election security executive "to support the whole-of-government effort to address threats against our election."

Tensions with Trump notwithstanding, Coats did bring to the job decades of Washington experience, including lengthy stints as an Indiana congressman and U.S. ambassador to Germany. His predecessor in the Obama administration, James Clapper, spent



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

Rep. John Ratcliffe, R-Texas, questions former special counsel Robert Mueller as he testifies to the House Intelligence Committee.

decades in the military and in intelligence, including as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Ratcliffe does not have equivalent credentials, though his supporters are likely to point to his experience as a terrorism prosecutor and federal prosecutor, as well as his recent membership on the House intelligence committee, which he joined in January.

First elected to Congress in 2014, Ratcliffe's experience as top federal prosecutor in east Texas gave him instant clout when Republicans ran the Judiciary panel. He was one of the main questioners when Republicans hauled in Justice Department officials to question them about whether they were biased against Trump in the early days of the FBI's Russia probe.

Rep. Devin Nunes, the top Republican on the House's intelligence committee, tweeted that Ratcliffe "understands the intricacies of the intelligence community as well as civil liberties."

It's unclear whether concerns about his credentials will trip up the confirmation process. Confirmation takes a simple 51-vote majority, under new rules in the Senate, but that leaves slim room for error with Republicans holding a 53-seat majority.

Sen. Richard Burr, the top Republican on the Senate intelligence committee, said Monday that he would move swiftly to push the nomination through his Republican-led panel, even though the Senate's top Democrat, Charles Schumer of New York, warned

## SEN. WYDEN STATEMENT

"Congressman Ratcliffe is the most partisan and least-qualified individual ever nominated to serve as Director of National Intelligence," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"The sum total of his qualifications appears to be his record of promoting Donald Trump's conspiracy theories about the investigation into Russian interference and calling for prosecution of Trump's political enemies. Furthermore, he has endorsed widespread government surveillance and shown little concern for Americans' rights, except for those of Donald Trump and his close associates," Wyden said.

"Confirming this individual would amount to an endorsement of this administration's drive to politicize our intelligence agencies. This is a dangerous time, and America needs the most qualified and objective individuals possible to lead our intelligence agencies. Anything less risks American lives."

that it would be a big mistake "if Senate Republicans elevate such a partisan player to a position requiring intelligence expertise & non-partisanship."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell issued a statement Sunday that praised Coats but pointedly noted: "The U.S. intelligence community works best when it is led by professionals who protect its work from political or analytical bias and who deliver unvarnished hard truths to political leaders in both the executive and legislative branches. Very often the news these briefings bring is unpleasant, but it is essential that we be confronted with the facts. Dan Coats was such a leader."

Even before Mueller testified, Trump had his eye on Ratcliffe, who had already established himself as an outspoken defender of the president and raised Trump-backed questions about the conduct of the intelligence community in the Russia probe. But two officials said his aggressive questioning of the former special counsel cemented the president's view that he was the right person for the job.

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

### US officials: Afghan soldier kills 2 American troops

WASHINGTON — An Afghan soldier shot and killed two American service members in Afghanistan, U.S. officials said Monday.

U.S. Central Command confirmed that two U.S. troops were killed, but provided no details. It said additional information is being withheld until 24 hours after notification of next of kin is complete.

The Afghan soldier was wounded and is in custody, officials said. The shooting took place in Kandahar in the country's south.

The U.S. formally ended its Afghan combat mission in 2014, but still provides extensive air and other support to local forces battling both the Taliban and an affiliate of the Islamic State group.

U.S. and allied forces have faced increasing insider attacks in recent years. In November, Brent Taylor, the mayor of North Ogden, Utah, and a major in the Utah National Guard, was killed by an Afghan soldier in Kabul. The last six months have seen the Taliban carry out near-daily attacks, mainly targeting Afghan security forces.

### Trump signs Sept. 11 victims' compensation fund extension

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a bill Monday ensuring that a victims' compensation fund helping those

impacted by the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks never runs out of money, ending years of legislative gridlock as the number of first responders dying of Ground Zero-related illnesses mounted.

Appearing in the Rose Garden with more than 60 first responders from the 2001 terrorist attacks, Trump signed into law an extension of the fund through 2092, essentially making it permanent.

The \$7.4 billion fund had been rapidly depleting, and administrators recently cut benefit payments by up to 70%. The bill passed Congress on a bipartisan basis but only after delays by some Republicans exposed the legislative branch to brutal criticism from activists, including the comedian Jon Stewart.

Dozens of first responders, many gravely ill, would repeatedly travel to Washington to lobby lawmakers to extend the funding every time it needed to be reauthorized. Though their ranks shrank, as emergency workers died of cancers and other diseases linked to the toxic fumes from the World Trade Center rubble, the fate of the funding had never been permanently guaranteed.

### Diplomats recommit to saving Iran deal, oppose US sanctions

VIENNA — Diplomats from Iran and five world powers recommitted Sunday to salvaging a major nuclear deal amid mounting tensions between the West and Tehran since the U.S. withdrew from the

accord and reimposed sanctions.

Representatives of Iran, Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and the European Union met in Vienna to discuss the 2015 agreement that restricts the Iranian nuclear program.

Iran is pressuring the European parties to the deal to offset the sanctions U.S. President Donald Trump reinstated after pulling out. The country recently surpassed the amount of low-enriched uranium it is allowed to stockpile and started enriching uranium past a 3.67% limit permitted, to

4.5%, saying the actions could be reversed if the Europeans came up with incentives that compensated for the impact of the sanctions on the Iranian economy.

The Europeans urged Iran to come back to full compliance and Iran urged the European Union, France, Britain and Germany to implement their part of the deal. All sides expressed strong opposition against the unilateral imposition of sanctions by the U.S. They also voiced support for China's efforts to maintain normal trade and oil relations with Iran.

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## SEVEN-DAY FORECAST FOR ASTORIA

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
<b>70 56</b>	<b>72 56</b>	<b>72 58</b>	<b>72 57</b>	<b>72 56</b>	<b>73 58</b>	<b>72 59</b>
Partly sunny	Clouds and sun	Thickening clouds	Mostly cloudy	Partly sunny and nice	Sunny	Partly sunny

## ALMANAC

Astoria through Sunday

**Temperatures**

High/low ..... 70/50

Normal high/low ..... 68/54

Record high ..... 82 in 2003

Record low ..... 45 in 2008

**Precipitation**

Sunday ..... 0.00"

Month to date ..... 1.62"

Normal month to date ..... 0.96"

Year to date ..... 24.49"

Normal year to date ..... 36.87"

## UNDER THE SKY

**Tonight's Sky:** Arcturus, the leading star of Bootes, the herdsman, is in the west tonight.

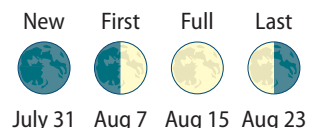
## SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today ..... 5:55 a.m.

Sunset tonight ..... 8:49 p.m.

Moonrise today ..... 4:04 a.m.

Moonset today ..... 8:02 p.m.



## TODAY'S TIDES

Astoria / Port Docks	Time	High (ft.)	Time	Low (ft.)
1:24 p.m.	6.5	7:03 a.m.	-1.2	
none		6:46 p.m.	2.5	
<b>Cape Disappointment</b>	1:00 p.m.	6.1	6:07 a.m.	-1.5
none		5:51 p.m.	2.5	
<b>Hammond</b>	1:12 p.m.	6.6	6:29 a.m.	-1.5
none		6:16 p.m.	2.5	
<b>Warrenton</b>	1:19 p.m.	6.9	6:47 a.m.	-1.1
none		6:30 p.m.	2.7	
<b>Knappa</b>	12:15 a.m.	8.6	8:04 a.m.	-1.0
2:01 p.m.	6.8	7:47 p.m.	2.2	
<b>Depoe Bay</b>	12:15 p.m.	6.6	5:38 a.m.	-1.5
11:20 p.m.	9.1	5:20 p.m.	2.8	

## NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today Hi/Lo/W	Wed. Hi/Lo/W
Atlanta	89/72/t	91/73/pc
Boston	93/75/s	88/72/t
Chicago	78/61/pc	78/60/s
Dallas	97/75/s	98/77/pc
Denver	95/66/t	95/63/pc
Honolulu	89/78/pc	89/78/pc
Houston	90/77/t	91/74/t
Los Angeles	85/65/pc	84/64/pc
Miami	91/77/t	91/79/c
New York City	92/75/pc	86/72/t
Phoenix	102/80/c	95/83/t
San Francisco	70/56/pc	71/57/pc
Wash., DC	94/74/s	89/73/t

Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, l-ice.

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## REGIONAL FORECAST

