



Jokers on Capitol Hill

Vice President Joe Biden, right, shakes hands with William Peter Wyden, the son of Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., back right, during a mock swearing-in ceremony in the Old Senate Chamber on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, as the 115th Congress begins.

AP Photo/Alex Brandon

Quick decisions meant life or death in Southeastern storms

By JAY REEVES
Associated Press

As an apparent tornado bore down on them, seven people in a mobile home in southeast Alabama made a life-or-death decision: Three ran into one bathroom for shelter and four ran in the opposite direction to another room seeking safety.

The three, including Lawana Henrich, survived without a scratch, according to Coroner Robert Byrd. But a big hardwood tree that slammed into the mobile home killed the four others, including Henrich's daughter and sister, Byrd said.

The tree toppled over during a wave of severe weather that brought heavy rain and strong winds to the Southeast, and it couldn't have hit in a worse spot when it fell Monday night near Rehobeth, Alabama.

"It was dead center," Byrd said. "You think, 'What's the chance of four people being so close in one area?' But they were."

Those four, a woman in Georgia, and a man who drowned in the Florida Panhandle died as a line of severe thunderstorms moved across the Southeastern United States from Texas.

Teams of surveyors were headed out Tuesday to assess apparent tornado damage at three sites in southeastern Alabama and southwestern



Ryan Moore/WJAM-TV via AP

People examine a barn owned by the Miller family that was destroyed during a storm south of Mount Olive, Miss., Monday.

Georgia, said Mark Wool, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Tallahassee, Florida.

Wool said authorities believe a tornado is responsible for damage that left the four people dead in Alabama, but he said the weather service won't be able to say for sure until experts visit the site.

Byrd, coroner in Houston County, Alabama, said Michelle Lewis, 53, died along with her niece, 27-year-old Amanda Blair. Lewis was Henrich's sister and Blair was Henrich's daughter, Byrd said; both victims lived in the trailer where they died, he said.

Byrd said the storm also killed two family friends, Terina Brookshire, 51, of Hartford, Alabama, and Carla Lambart, 53, who was origi-

nally from Opp, Alabama.

Byrd said Henrich, her husband and another man survived without injuries. Lawana Henrich saw a weather alert on television and heard the roar of a storm, and then told the others to seek shelter, he said.

"She said it was just a matter of seconds when that tree fell," Byrd said.

In Florida, the Walton County Sheriff's Office said the body of William Patrick Corley, 70, was found Monday afternoon following flooding near the Shoal River in Mossy Head. Authorities said Corley's car was partially submerged and his body was floating face-down nearby.

The sheriff's office said Corley's death was under investigation, but no foul play was suspected.

Trump questions U.S. intelligence team

By STEVE PEOPLES
Associated Press

NEW YORK — His inauguration less than three weeks away, President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday raised new doubts about the nation's intelligence community, tweeting fresh criticism at the same officials who will help inform his most sensitive decisions once he takes office.

Trump charged on Twitter without evidence that the timing of an upcoming intelligence briefing on Russian interference in the 2016 election had been delayed. "Perhaps more time needed to build a case. Very strange!" he wrote, using quote marks around the word "intelligence."

Trump's jab, in line with repeated criticism of his nation's intelligence leaders,

sparked confusion among intelligence officials, who said there was no delay in the briefing schedule.

The fresh clash came as Trump took further steps to fill his Cabinet and key White House positions, with his attention shifting toward the challenges of governing.

Earlier Tuesday, he tapped as U.S. trade representative a former Reagan official who has condemned Republicans' commitment to free trade. Trump indicated that Robert Lighthizer, who is expected to take a hard line against China, would represent "the United States as we fight for good trade deals that put the American worker first."

The new administration's specific plans for crafting new trade deals, spokesman Sean Spicer said, "will come in time."

There were also ques-

tions about Trump's plans for repealing President Barack Obama's signature health care law, a move that could strip health insurance from millions of Americans. The issue was expected to be the focus as Vice President-elect Mike Pence and secretary of state pick Rex Tillerson meet with top Republicans on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

Pence issued a direct challenge to Washington Republicans Tuesday: "The president-elect has a very clear message to Capitol Hill. And that is, it's time to get to work."

Trump signaled he would not bless all of the GOP's priorities on Capitol Hill, openly questioning the timing of the House Republican push to gut an independent ethics board gathered.

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