

## Trump says U.S. will deal with N. Korea 'very strongly'

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Monday vowed to "deal with" North Korea, calling it "a big, big problem" without mentioning the ballistic missile it test-fired over the weekend or any planned American response.

The Pentagon was more pointed in its assessment of the problem. A spokesman said technical advancements in North Korea's ballistic missile programs, demonstrated in the latest test-launch from a mobile launcher, pose a "clear, grave threat" to U.S. security.

That assessment reflected concern as well as frustration among U.S. officials, who see North Korea pushing ahead, in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions,

with development of missiles capable of striking U.S. territory with nuclear weapons.

"North Korea's unlawful weapons programs represent a clear, grave threat to our national security," a Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, said Monday. "North Korea openly states that its ballistic missiles are intended to deliver nuclear weapons to strike cities in the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan."

Trump has said he puts high priority on developing better defenses against such missiles, but his administration has not said how it will respond to Saturday's missile launch, short of condemning it as a dangerous provocation.

At a joint news conference

Monday at the White House with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Trump was not asked about the missile test, but he brought up North Korea when a reporter asked what are the "most important national security problems" facing the U.S.

"Obviously, North Korea is a big, big problem and we will deal with that very strongly," Trump said. He did not elaborate.

Trump indicated during the transition period after he won the November election that he would make missile defense a high priority, citing the threat posed by North Korea. But he has not yet defined a strategy for dealing with that. In a brief statement Saturday night prompted by North

Korea's missile test he said the U.S. will stand by Japan "100 percent."

Davis, the spokesman, said the U.S. tracked the flight of the missile launched on Saturday evening, U.S. time, and assessed that it traveled about 310 miles, before landing in the Sea of Japan. He said the missile appeared to be a land variant of a submarine-launched ballistic missile known outside of Korea as the KN-11.

Davis said the missile appeared to be powered by solid fuel, which represents a technological advancement from liquid-fuel missiles. The mobile launcher from which the missile was fired had not previously been seen in public, he said.

## AMBULANCE: Stayed around 40 mph through the slush

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Penninger said, would allow the ambulance to travel because it was an emergency vehicle.

Griffin and Williamson stepped up to handle the transport, loaded up the patient and left around 3:30 p.m., ready to take on the storm. Griffin is completing a bachelor's degree in community health at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande. She oversaw the care of the patient during the ride.

"There was foresight and there was planning," Griffin said.

A doctor instructed her to administer pain medication to the patient, who slept most of the way, and fire Capt. Mark Easley and Penninger, as well as Ciraulo, were in constant contact. Griffin also credited Umatilla County dispatchers for helping to relay messages and checking in to make sure they were doing OK on the road.

Williamson, a corrections officer at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, took the wheel. He said he has made similar runs in the past.

Similar, but nothing quite like this one.

"I definitely went through everything on this trip," he said.

Ice covered the freeway, and at times the ambulance's windshield. He said he stayed around 40 mph on the ambulance's studded tires through snow, rain and deep slush. He also gritted his teeth recalling speedsters in passenger vehicles and semitrailers flying by at 60 and even 70 mph.

The pair and the patient made it to Hood River, where Oregon State Police forced them off the interstate. The black ice and two crashes down the road made passage on the freeway impossible.

Griffin said she asked state police if would be possible to take the eastbound lanes.

The trooper who responded told her his car wasn't going anywhere, and it had chains on the tires.

By this point in the slow trip, the oxygen supply and pain medication were running low. Griffin and Williamson took the patient to Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, where she spent about an hour-and-a-half in a hospital bed with Williamson by her side. Griffin during the time drove to the Hood River Fire Department, which provided another oxygen bottle. The hospital and fire department also gave them food and water.

With I-84 out of the question, Griffin and Williamson found another way — skirt the eastern slope of Mount Hood on Highway 35, cross Government Pass and descend on Highway 26 to Gresham.

Williamson said he felt the ambulance start to slip a time or three, but he did not have

to put on tire chains. They arrived at Oregon Health & Science University at 1:07 a.m., Jan. 18. Throughout it all, they also said, the patient did not complain.

The made it back to Troutdale, where the Pendleton Fire Department picked up the tab for a rest at a hotel room. Griffin said they each got about four hours sleep before the drive home.

They made it back before 4 p.m., in time for Williamson to start his shift at the prison.

Pendleton Mayor John Turner at last week's city council meeting presented Griffin and Williamson with commendations for going above and beyond the call of duty. Ciraulo said Griffin and Williamson earned it with their display of tenacity and the professionalism.

"I'm just so proud of them," he said.

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## PERS: Approximate savings should the bills pass would be \$5-6 billion

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that cutting back on PERS benefits is the only option in order to prevent layoffs and further financial strain on local governments.

Others, such as Paul Kylo, the vice-chair of the Salem-Keizer school board, said that the cuts proposed in Senate Bills 559 and 560 would worsen districts' ability to recruit and retain talented people for positions that are already hard to hire for — such as math and science teachers.

Over the years, PERS has been divided into three generations, based on date of hire — Tier 1, Tier 2, and the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan.

Detractors say the proposed changes disproportionately affect current employees — many of whom are on the Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan — and disincentivize new employees from entering public service professions.

Knopp said that according to an actuary, the approximate savings should Senate Bills 559 and 560 be implemented, would be \$5 billion to \$6 billion.

But Bob Livingston, a Salem firefighter and president of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council, said Monday the actuary did not take into account a significant precedent: that more state workers than expected retire in years when the Legislature vows to take up reforms to the system. When that happens, more employees draw on retirement benefits.

Some witnesses testifying against the reforms also advocated for revenue increases.

The state faces two, somewhat interconnected financial problems: The nearly \$1.8 billion shortfall in the budget that lawmakers must address by midnight July 9; and the unfunded liability of PERS. Personnel costs make up a significant chunk of the state's costs every two-year budget cycle.

Business taxes are

another subject legislative committees are taking up this week, three months after the failure of Measure 97, a ballot measure that would have raised approximately \$3 billion per year by creating a gross sales receipts tax on certain corporations with more than \$25 million in annual sales in Oregon. Union groups publicly advocated in favor of the measure.

According to legislative leadership, unions and the state's business groups, which by and large have advocated in favor of cutting PERS, have started discussing possible common ground behind closed doors.

The Senate Workforce Committee convenes again Wednesday to discuss what Chair Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, calls a controversial topic — refinancing PERS. The committee will also discuss several "ideas" Knopp is working on, none of which were yet publicly available Monday evening as legislative concepts or bills.

## CRASH: Traffic began to flow again around 9:40 p.m.

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available at press time.

Several transmissions also reported fog and heavy smoke from fires at the Greenwood Resources tree farm a few miles east of Boardman limited visibility between Boardman and Hermiston. Some responders at the scene described the scene as a "white out" on the emergency scanner.

And the fires, according to transmissions, would burn for at least a day.

The Oregon Department of Transportation closed both directions of I-84 between mileposts 171 and 177.

George Murdock,

Umatilla County commissioner, said he was stuck in traffic for about an hour on the eastbound side near milepost 175 and saw an ambulance, police car and a fire engine roar by. He estimated he was about a hundred yards from the scene, but the thick smoke obliterated any clear view.

He also said breathing the smoke felt "toxic."

Traffic began to flow around 9:40 p.m., Murdock said, and he saw one car mangled under a semi. He also said he heard ambulances took six injured from the scene.

The East Oregonian will follow this story and provide more information Wednesday.

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## KOVACH: Only three people held the position in the 25 years before Kovach

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from Willamette University.

During the hiring process to replace the retiring Jon Peterson as superintendent, Kovach was one of three finalists for the position, which also featured Hermiston deputy superintendent Wade Smith and Pendleton assistant superintendent Tricia Mooney. Smith and Mooney have since taken positions as the Walla Walla Public Schools superintendent and Hermiston assistant superintendent, respectively.

Kovach's departure is a shake-up for a position that has long been a source of stability. In the 25 years before Kovach was hired, only three people held the superintendent position.

Kovach was in the midst of a three-year contract

which paid \$127,500 per year.

With his departure looming, Kovach planned to stay busy between now and July 1.

"Looking forward, I will continue to lead Pendleton School District through the spring and to give my best in serving its students," he said. "There is a lot of work to be done both in the classroom and at the district level. This includes completing a strategic plan mapping out the school district's future."

The board agreed to meet Feb. 20 to declare a superintendent vacancy and begin planning the process of finding Kovach's replacement.

Contact Antonio Sierra at [asierra@eastoregonian.com](mailto:asierra@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0836.

## BONDS: \$1.5 million will go toward creation of a festival street

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Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. Smith said local hoteliers had agreed to an additional \$1 per room per night tourism promotion assessment to be directed toward paying off the bonds. He said the original plan was \$1.75 million over 15 years, but he is in talks to see if they were willing to extend it to 20 years, which would raise an extra \$400,000.

Another \$1.5 million will go toward creation of a festival street on NE Second Street next to city hall. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the festival street committee hopes to have a final design to show the council during an April 10 work session. Those bonds will be paid for through the revenue coming into the Urban Renewal District.

Smith said \$1.7 million will go toward "smart" water meters that can be read remotely and alert ratepayers of leaks. \$1.5 million will help pay for new equipment at the recycled water treatment plant that will save the city the expense of draining solid waste from the lagoons. Bonds for both of those projects will be paid for by a series of three 5 percent water and sewer rate increases starting March 1.

On Monday night the council also approved an updated joint management agreement with Umatilla County for land that is outside city limits but inside the urban growth boundary.

They also approved a resolution joining other Oregon cities in requesting that the legislature create a new law restoring recreational immunity. The law protects landowners who offer up their land for free recreational use from lawsuits arising from injuries, but a recent Oregon Supreme Court ruling stated that the injured party can still sue employees. Since cities are obligated to protect their employees, cities such as Pendleton have closed some city parks to protect themselves, while Hermiston has stopped a planned skate park.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he visited Salem for Capital Day, and while he got a wonderful reception from local senators and representatives, he did not leave Salem "overly optimistic" that much movement will be made on the League of Oregon Cities' legislative priorities such as recreational immunity, property tax reform and PERS reform.

"It's an interesting place we're in as a state," he said. "There doesn't seem to be a lot of bipartisan movement for anything."

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