

More evacuations as Hurricane Harvey bears down on Texas

HOUSTON (AP) — Harvey intensified into a hurricane Thursday and steered for the Texas coast with the potential for up to 3 feet of rain, 125 mph winds and 12-foot storm surges in what could be the fiercest hurricane to hit the United States in almost a dozen years.

Forecasters labeled Harvey a “life-threatening storm” that posed a “grave risk.” Millions of people braced for a prolonged battering that could swamp dozens of counties more than 100 miles inland.

Landfall was predicted for late Friday or early Saturday between Port O’Connor and Matagorda Bay, a 30-mile stretch of coastline about 70 miles northeast of Corpus Christi.

Harvey grew quickly Thursday from a tropical depression into a Category 1 hurricane. Fueled by warm Gulf waters, it was projected to become a major Category 3 hurricane. The last storm of that category to hit the U.S. was Hurricane Wilma in October 2005 in Florida.

Superstorm Sandy, which pummeled New York and New Jersey in 2012, never had the high winds and had lost tropical status by the time it struck. But it was devastating without formally being called a major hurricane.

Hurricane Harvey likely to boost gas prices for U.S. drivers

Hurricane Harvey is expected to hit a refinery-rich stretch of the Gulf Coast and U.S. drivers could soon see the impact at the gas pump.

Some refineries are expected to shut down until the storm passes, possibly disrupting gas supplies.

Wholesale gasoline futures rose Thursday 5 cents, or 3 percent, to \$1.66 per gallon, and experts say that will quickly show up on service-station signs.

“Starting (Thursday night) you could start to see the Harvey effect being factored into gas prices,” said Patrick DeHaan, an analyst with GasBuddy. “The good news is this isn’t Hurricane Katrina.”

That Gulf storm in August 2005 caused about a 40-cent increase overnight, DeHaan said. We might not know the full impact of Harvey until Monday, when refineries have had a chance to assess damage, which could be caused by flooding or power outages, he said.

“We’ll see retail prices move up in every nook and cranny of the country through this very uncertain weekend,” said Tom Kloza, an analyst with the Oil Price Information Service.

Kloza said an increase of 5 to 15 cents per gallon was most likely but a spike of up to 25 cents by Labor Day was possible if the hurricane hits a refining center.

Massachusetts hospital worker claims record lottery jackpot

BRAINTREE, Mass. (AP) — A 53-year-old Massachusetts hospital worker stepped forward Thursday to claim the biggest undivided lottery jackpot in U.S. history — a \$758.7 million Powerball prize — after breaking the news to her employer the way the rest of us only dream of: “I called and told them I will not be coming back.”

“The first thing I want to do is just sit back and relax,” Mavis L. Wanczyk told reporters at a news conference.

Wanczyk chose to take a lump-sum payment of \$480 million, or \$336 million after taxes, lottery officials said. Winners who take a gradual payout stand to get more money spread out over several decades.



Jim Gilbert, owner of the Saltwater Saloon and J&T One Stop, boards up a window at his home in Magnolia, Texas, Thursday. Gilbert and his wife plan to stay through Hurricane Harvey and watch the storm.

Even after paying taxes on the winnings, Wanczyk is worth more than some small countries such as Micronesia, which has a gross domestic product of \$322 million, or the Pacific islands of Palau, with a GDP of \$293 million, according to 2016 figures from the World Bank.

The previous evening, she recalled, she was leaving work with a firefighter and remarked, “It’s never going to be me. It’s just a pipe dream that I’ve always had.”

Kushner’s Mideast peace push met with Palestinian skepticism

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Presidential adviser Jared Kushner met with Israeli and Palestinian leaders on Thursday to try to jumpstart moribund peace talks, but after months without progress the Mideast envoy faces growing skepticism on the Palestinian side.

With no clear vision for peace outlined by the administration and domestic issues distracting President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, expectations for the new peace push are low.

The Palestinians initially welcomed Trump’s election, but they have since grown impatient with what they say is a failure by the U.S. president to present a roadmap for peace. Specifically, they are seeking a halt to Israeli settlement construction on occupied lands, and an American commitment to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as part of a peace deal with Israel.

“If the U.S. team doesn’t bring answers to our questions this time, we are going to look into our options because the status quo is not working for our interests,” said Ahmad Majdalani, an aide to Abbas.

It was not clear whether Kushner offered any clarity during his three-hour meeting with Abbas. Nabil Abu Rdeneh, Abbas’ spokesman, called the meeting “positive,” without discussing details, and said the Palestinian leader had reiterated his desire for an American commitment to a Palestinian state.

White House slams GOP Sen. Corker for criticizing Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) The White House is slamming Tennessee Sen. Bob Corker for questioning President Donald Trump’s competence.

Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders was asked about Corker’s comments during a press briefing Thursday.

She says, “I think that’s a ridiculous and outrageous claim and doesn’t dignify a response from this podium.”

Corker, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, last

week delivered a stinging rebuke of Trump after the president said “both sides” were to blame for the violence in Charlottesville.

Corker said Trump had not shown the stability or competence required for an American president to succeed and had recently “not demonstrated that he understands the character of this nation.”

Trump has been ramping up attacks on Republicans in recent days, blaming them for his stalled legislative agenda.

UN humanitarian chief says needs far outstrip donations

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The growing need for food, medicine and shelter by millions of people facing conflicts and crises around the world is far outstripping the increased generosity of donors, the United Nations’ outgoing humanitarian chief warns.

Stephen O’Brien, who is stepping down Aug. 31 as undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs and the world body’s emergency relief coordinator, said in an interview this week that “we have to get to the root causes to try to reduce needs.”

Equally, he said, the United Nations needs to intensify donations, especially from its 193 member states.

The United Nations has appealed for \$23.5 billion to help over 102 million people in 38 countries this year but has received only \$8.1 billion, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The appeals range from about \$10 million for Mozambique, where an earthquake hit in June, to \$3.34 billion for conflict-torn Syria.

California death penalty measure survives

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A voter-approved measure to speed up executions in California was upheld Thursday by the state Supreme Court, but justices rejected arguments that a provision setting a five-year limit on appeals was mandatory, raising doubts that the law will succeed in accelerating death sentences.

“What happened here is that the Supreme Court of California has kicked the can down the road,” said Franklin Zimring, an expert in capital punishment at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

The highly anticipated ruling concerned Proposition 66, a push to “mend not end” capital punishment in California.

Condemned inmates in California currently languish for decades and are more likely to die of natural causes than from lethal injection. There are nearly 750 inmates on death row and only 13 have been executed since 1978 — the last in 2006.



House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wis. rubs his head as he takes a question while meeting with Boeing workers Thursday in Everett, Wash.

Trump attacks GOP leaders over debt ceiling ‘mess’

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fanning the flames of GOP discord, President Donald Trump accused Republican congressional leaders Thursday of botching efforts to avoid an unprecedented default on the national debt. “Could have been so easy—now a mess!” Trump tweeted.

The president’s sharp words underscored the perilous state of play as Congress heads into the fall without a clear plan to take care of its most important piece of business: If it does not increase the nation’s \$19.9 trillion borrowing limit, the government could be unable to pay its bills, jarring financial markets and leading to other harsh consequences.

Trump unleashed his latest criticism of the GOP’s congressional leadership in a series of morning tweets that also included a rebuke of Majority Leader Mitch McConnell for his inability to get the Senate to repeal the Obama health care law. The harsh posts were fresh evidence of the president’s fraying relations with fellow Republicans just when the White House and Capitol Hill most need to be working in sync.

Critiquing GOP legislative strategy, Trump tweeted that he had asked McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan to attach the legislation increasing the borrowing limit — a toxic vote for many Republicans — to popular military veterans’ legislation that he recently signed. The idea was floated in July but never gained steam in Congress.

Trump said that because legislators didn’t follow that strategy, “now we have a big deal with Dems holding them up (as usual) on Debt Ceiling approval.”

Republicans control both Congress and the White House, placing the burden on them to ensure the government doesn’t default. In the past, Democrats largely provided the votes for debt limit increases.

The Treasury Department has said the debt ceiling needs to be raised by Sept. 29 to avoid potential default on government obligations including Social Security and interest payments.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, playing down Trump’s notion of a debt limit “mess,” said flatly that Congress would “pass legislation to make sure that we pay our debts.”

“I’m not worried that’s not going to get done because it’s going to get done,” he said during an appearance in Washington state.

McConnell likewise said earlier in the week that there

was “zero chance, no chance, we won’t raise the debt ceiling.”

The president’s latest broadsides against members of his own party came one day after the White House and McConnell issued statements pledging to work together.

After Trump’s latest incendiary tweets, both sides tried again Thursday to tamp down talk of escalating tensions.

Ryan, speaking to Boeing employees in suburban Seattle, said he and Trump have “different speaking styles,” but they are in “constant contact” on the policy agenda.

“For me it’s really important the president succeeds, because if he succeeds then the country succeeds,” Ryan said.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders insisted the president’s relationships with GOP leaders “are fine.”

For all of that conciliatory talk, the evidence of mounting friction between the president and the Republican party is growing.

Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake said in an interview with Georgia Public Broadcasting on Wednesday that the president was “inviting” a 2020 presidential primary challenge because he was only cultivating the GOP base of voters. Trump has labeled Flake as “weak” and “toxic” on Twitter.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican who has been critical of the president, told MSNBC this week it was “too difficult to say” if Trump would be the party’s presidential nominee in 2020.

The growing rift between congressional Republicans and Trump could make it more difficult for the White House to advance its agenda.

The White House and congressional Republicans have yet to engage in serious negotiations to address the debt ceiling or stopgap legislation needed to avert a government shutdown when the fiscal year ends on Sept. 30.

Trump is expected to hold meetings with congressional leaders after the Labor Day holiday.

Asked about the debt ceiling, Sanders put the onus on Congress to resolve the matter: “It’s our job to inform Congress of the debt ceiling and it’s their job to raise it.”

She added that the White House was looking for a “clean” debt ceiling bill — without any legislative add-ons. But tea party Republicans and outside conservative groups are demanding spending cuts as the price for increasing the borrowing limit.

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