

Irma’s roar gives way to grinding chorus of saws, generators

SWEETWATER, Fla. (AP) — A grinding chorus of chain saws and generators kicked in quickly after Hurricane Irma’s roar left Sweetwater, a small, mostly Spanish-speaking town west of Miami where streets were swamped, fences and trees fell, cars got stuck in floodwater and shed roofs bent like tin foil.

Adrian Ortiz, 28, was philosophical as he sat in his BMW on Monday, waiting rather ambitiously for a tow truck. He had tried to make a run home from his girlfriend’s house during the storm, but his sports car stalled after a few blocks as 6th street turned into a wind-whipped canal. He touched the carpet — still soggy.

“I decided to come to Sweetwater, and my car got full of sweet water,” he said with a shrug.

Electricity was out across the city, but the people were powered by coffee and little sandwiches, handed through “cafecito” windows that opened early. Residents with weary eyes struggled to clear tree branches and debris. City trucks with giant metal claws were handling the big stuff.

This community was spared from the storm surge, but the ground will likely remain saturated for a while. Ahead of the hurricane, the South Florida Water Management District fully opened flood gates to drain water from recent rainstorms into the oceans. Now the trillions of gallons of ocean water Irma dumped on its northward march is also flowing south.

Now it’s the heart of Miami-Dade County’s Nicaraguan community, and over 90 percent of the Miami suburb is Hispanic.

Jesus Castillo, 50, and his family who have lived in the neighborhood for about nine years. They were cleaning up flood muck and plant debris.

“My entire patio was underwater, and in the street it was two-to-three feet high,” Castillo said in Spanish.



Charles Trainor Jr./Miami Herald via AP

In this Sunday photo, boats block the Overseas Highway in the Florida Keys as Hurricane Irma passes.

Pendleton native rides out first hurricane safely — though classes canceled

East Oregonian

For a day or two, it looked like Ryan Lacey had gone from the frying pan the fire.

Hurricane Irma forced the Pendleton High School and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University sophomore to leave Daytona Beach, Florida for

Tallahassee, where he hunkered down to wait out the storm at a friend’s house.

But projections had shifted since the evacuation, and for a while, Lacey said it looked like the worst of the hurricane would pass right over the Florida state capital.

Luckily for Lacey, the eye of the hurricane bypassed Tallahassee and

the worst he dealt with on Sunday and Monday was a half-day without power, 40 mile-per-hour gusts and fallen tree branches.

Embry-Riddle canceled classes for a week to accommodate the evacuation and Lacey and his friends plan to return to campus Wednesday to resume classes.

Cuba’s decrepit buildings no match for Irma

HAVANA (AP) — The historic but often decrepit buildings of Havana and other colonial Cuban cities couldn’t stand up to Hurricane Irma’s winds and rainfall, collapsing and killing seven people in one of the highest death tolls from the storm’s passage through the Caribbean.

Authorities said Monday that three more people were killed by falling objects or drowning, pushing the death toll to 10 in Cuba and at least 24 others in the Caribbean. It was Cuba’s worst hurricane death toll since 16 died in Hurricane Dennis in 2005.

Most of Cuba’s grand old

buildings were confiscated from the wealthy and distributed to the poor and middle classes after a 1959 revolution that promised housing, health care and education as universal rights. But with state salaries of about \$25 a month and government agencies strapped for cash, most buildings have seen little maintenance in decades.

Tropical rain and sea spray have chewed into unpainted facades and seeped through unpatched roofs. Trees have sprouted from balconies. Iron rebar has rusted, sloughing off chunks of powdery concrete.

Damage wasn’t limited to Havana. More than 100 houses in a small town on Cuba’s coastline were destroyed in Matanzas

Province when Irma swept through the area, leaving hundreds of people homeless.

UN approves watered-down new sanctions against North Korea

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council on Monday unanimously approved new sanctions on North Korea but not the toughest-ever measures sought by the Trump administration to ban all oil imports and freeze international assets of the government and its leader, Kim Jong Un.

The resolution, responding to Pyongyang’s sixth and strongest nuclear

test explosion on Sept. 3, does ban North Korea from importing all natural gas liquids and condensates. It also bans all textile exports and prohibits any country from authorizing new work permits for North Korean workers — two key sources of hard currency for the northeast Asian nation.

As for energy, it caps Pyongyang’s imports of crude oil at the level of the last 12 months, and it limits the import of refined petroleum products to 2 million barrels a year.

The watered-down resolution does not include sanctions that the U.S. wanted on North Korea’s national airline and the army.

Nonetheless, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley told the council after the

vote that “these are by far the strongest measures ever imposed on North Korea.” But she stressed that “these steps only work if all nations implement them completely and aggressively.”

Haley noted that the council was meeting on the 16th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack.

In a clear message to North Korean threats to attack the U.S., she said: “We will never forget the lesson that those who have evil intentions must be confronted.”

“Today we are saying the world will never accept a nuclear armed North Korea,” she said. “We are done trying to prod the regime to do the right thing” and instead are taking steps to prevent it “from doing the wrong thing.”

Haley said the U.S. doesn’t take pleasure in strengthening sanctions and reiterated that the U.S. does not want war.

Catholic leaders decry Dems’ questioning of judicial pick

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roman Catholic leaders are objecting to Democratic senators’ line of questioning for one of President Donald Trump’s judicial nominees, arguing the focus on her faith is misplaced and runs counter to the Constitution’s prohibition on religious tests for political office.

The outcry stems from the questioning last week of Amy Coney Barrett, a Notre Dame law professor tapped to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Democrats focused on whether her personal views would override her legal judgment, especially with respect to the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., told Barrett that dogma and law are two different things and she was concerned “that the dogma lives loudly within you.”

MARIJUANA: Sales prices have fallen about 20 percent annually since legalization

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in May, the first where a marijuana-specific forecast was included. “While Oregon has now collected just over a year’s worth of taxes, there have been substantial changes during this time that complicate any analysis.”

For one thing, there have been policy and regulatory changes on the state level. Back in July 2015, when those 21 and older could first purchase marijuana legally in Oregon without a medical marijuana card, marijuana was initially taxed at a 25 percent rate.

There are also significant “upside and downside risks” when it comes to recreational marijuana, state economists say — meaning that the predictions economists make could greatly exceed or fall below expectations.

Among the downside risks: regulatory “changes” or “bottlenecks” that could prevent companies from being able to get licensed or get their products tested quickly.

Sales prices could also fall

sharply. Prices have fallen about 20 percent annually since legalization in Colorado and Washington, state economists say. And since recreational marijuana taxes are based on sales price, that could affect state revenues as well.

One risk that can be hard to assess: the chance that the federal government may change its policy toward recreational marijuana and either halt or curtail the business in states that have legalized the drug.

On the other hand, sales could increase if marijuana use becomes more conventional or “gains broader social acceptance,” and the state’s “seed-to-sale” tracking system could reduce black market sales.

And then there are the little things.

For example, the North American Industry Classification System, which the U.S., Canada and Mexico use to classify businesses so they can track economic data, has yet to catch up with the legal cannabis industry.

Under the system, a series of digits correspond to a

specific sector, but there’s no code for marijuana businesses.

“If you’re a place that makes edibles, you show up in bakeries and confectioneries, or whatever, so you’re in there with the cupcake shops,” state economist Mark McMullen told lawmakers Aug. 23. “And so it’s hard sometimes to pull these things out, but we’re starting to get numbers. Those numbers are growing rapidly, but they’re still relatively small.”

Beau Whitney, an Oregon-based economist and business consultant who has studied the recreational marijuana industry, says that he has petitioned Canada and Mexico — which have legalized medical marijuana on the federal level — to create a NAICS code that corresponds to marijuana.

State economist Josh Lehner says that his office — the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis — consults with state agencies, such as the liquor control commission and the revenue department, as well as private businesses, to get a sense of

where things may be headed.

Whitney said that’s a smart move.

“There’s just not a whole lot of historic data to draw upon, so they really need people in the industry to help them out, to let them know where the movement in the market is, what the consumption patterns are and all that,” Whitney said.

There’s not a profusion of data two years into legalization, but Oregon economists also have two other states, Colorado and Washington, to look to for a glimpse of things to come, says Lehner.

“We’re using them as a guide for what Oregon’s next two years look like,” Lehner said.

There are distinctions between states, though. For example, Oregon’s tax rate on marijuana is significantly lower than Washington’s. Our

neighbors to the north have a 37 percent excise tax on recreational marijuana, according to the Washington Department of Revenue.

If the legal marijuana industry keeps growing, some hope that peripheral companies could spring up to support companies that grow pot or produce pot products, in the way that craft brewing made Oregon a hotspot for brewing equipment and other products tangential to beer as the microbrew craze spread in other parts of the country, Lehner said.

Meanwhile, the state’s employment department is still trying to get a better sense of just how many people work in legal cannabis outfits, whether that’s tending to plants or making extracts.

Brian Rooney, a regional economist with the Oregon

Employment Department, says that in order to estimate cannabis employment, one can start with a broad range.

For the lower bound of the range, state employment economists can use information that businesses are required to report, per unemployment insurance law, to the government.

Using that data and industry classification recommendations from the U.S. Department of Labor, state employment economists believe that in Oregon, the lower bound for legal marijuana employment is about 3,500 people, as of late May.

On the higher bound of the range, the employment department uses the number of people with active permits from the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to work with marijuana, which as of late May numbered about 12,000.



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