

**Moscow meeting in June 2017 under scrutiny in Trump probe**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Earlier this year, a Russian-American lobbyist and another businessman discussed over coffee in Moscow an extraordinary meeting they had attended 12 months earlier: a gathering at Trump Tower with President Donald Trump’s son, his son-in-law and his then-campaign chairman.

The Moscow meeting in June, which has not been previously disclosed, is now under scrutiny by investigators who want to know why the two men met in the first place and whether there was some effort to get their stories straight about the Trump Tower meeting just weeks before it would become public, The Associated Press has learned.

Congressional investigators have questioned both men — lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin and Ike Kaveladze, a business associate of a Moscow-based developer and former Trump business partner — and obtained their text message communications, people familiar with the investigation told the AP.

Special counsel Robert Mueller’s team also has been investigating the 2016 Trump Tower meeting, which occurred weeks after Trump had clinched the Republican presidential nomination and which his son attended with the expectation of receiving damaging information about Democrat Hillary Clinton. A grand jury has already heard testimony about the meeting, which in addition to Donald Trump Jr., also included Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law, and his then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort.



Kushner

**GOP closer to big win with House tax vote; chance in Senate remains unclear**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans have stretched closer to delivering the first big legislative victory for President Donald Trump and their party, whisking a \$1.5 trillion overhaul of business and personal income taxes through the House. Thorny problems await in the Senate, though.

The House passage of the bill Thursday on a mostly party-line 227-205 vote also brought nearer the biggest revamp of the U.S. tax system in three decades.

But in the Senate, a similar measure received a politically awkward verdict from nonpartisan congressional analysts showing it would eventually produce higher taxes for low- and middle-income earners but deliver deep reductions for those better off.

The Senate bill was approved late Thursday by the Finance Committee and sent to the full Senate on a party-line 14-12 vote. Like the House measure, it would slash the corporate tax rate and reduce personal income tax rates for many.

But it adds a key feature not in the House version: repeal of the Affordable Care Act’s requirement that everyone in the U.S. have health insurance. Elimination of the so-called individual mandate under the Obama health care law would add an estimated \$338 billion in revenue over 10 years that the Senate tax-writers used for additional tax cuts.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has projected that repeal of the mandate would result in 13 million more uninsured people by 2027, making it a political risk for some lawmakers.

**U.S. puts Palestinians on notice: D.C. office may be shuttered**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration put the Palestinians on notice Friday that it will shutter their office in Washington unless they’ve entered serious peace talks with Israel, U.S. officials said, potentially giving President Donald Trump more leverage as he seeks an elusive Mideast peace deal.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has determined that the Palestinians ran afoul of an obscure provision in a U.S. law that says the Palestine Liberation Organization’s mission must close if the Palestinians try to get the International Criminal Court to prosecute Israelis for crimes against Palestinians. A State Department official said that in September, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas crossed that line by calling on the ICC to investigate and prosecute Israelis.

But the law leaves the president a way out, so Tillerson’s declaration doesn’t necessarily mean the office will close.

Trump now has 90 days to consider whether the Palestinians are in “direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel.” If Trump determines they are, the Palestinians can keep the office. The official said it was unclear whether the U.S. might close the office before the 90-day period expires, but said the mission remains open at least for now.

**Reverend Jesse Jackson discloses Parkinson’s disease diagnosis**

CHICAGO (AP) — The Rev. Jesse Jackson disclosed publicly Friday that he has been seeking outpatient care for two years for Parkinson’s disease and plans to “dedicate” himself to physical therapy to slow the progress of the disease.

In a letter to supporters, the 76-year-old civil rights icon said family and friends noticed a change in him about three years ago, and he could no longer ignore symptoms of the chronic neurological disorder that causes movement difficulties.

“Recognition of the effects of this disease on me has been painful, and I have been slow to grasp the gravity of it,” he wrote. “For me, a Parkinson’s diagnosis is not a stop sign but rather a signal that I must make lifestyle changes and dedicate myself to physical therapy.”

Jackson, who declined to be interviewed, also released a letter from Northwestern Medicine confirming his diagnosis and care.

He vowed to use his voice to help find a cure for the disease. About 60,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with Parkinson’s annually, according to the Parkinson’s Foundation.

It can start with tremors, and symptoms generally worsen over time. The exact cause is unknown. Treatments include medications, surgery and physical therapy.

**Franken apologizes to woman who says he kissed, groped her**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Minnesota Sen. Al Franken personally apologized to the woman who has accused him of forcibly kissing her and groping her during a 2006 USO tour, saying he remembers their encounter differently but is “ashamed that my actions ruined that experience for you.”

In a guest appearance Friday on ABC’s “The View,” Leeann Tweeden read a letter she received from the Democratic lawmaker in which he also discussed a photo showing him posing in a joking manner, smiling at the camera with his hands above her chest as she naps wearing a flak vest aboard a military plane.

Franken missed votes in the Senate Thursday afternoon and has not made any public appearances since the allegations came out.

Both had been performing for military personnel in

Afghanistan two years before the one-time “Saturday Night Live” comedian was elected to the Senate. Tweeden, a former Fox TV sports correspondent who now is a Los Angeles radio anchor, has said Franken had persisted in rehearsing a kiss and “aggressively stuck his tongue in my mouth.”

Franken told Tweeden in the letter he wanted to “apologize to you personally,” adding: “I don’t know what was in my head when I took that picture. But that doesn’t matter. There’s no excuse. I understand why you can feel violated by that photo. ... I have tremendous respect for your work for the USO. And I am ashamed that my actions ruined that experience for you. I am so sorry.”

Franken, 66, was the latest public figure to be caught in the deluge of revelations of sexual harassment and misconduct that have crushed careers, ruined reputations and prompted criminal investigations in Hollywood, business and beyond.

While Franken has repeatedly apologized, there were no signs the issue would go away any time soon. Fellow Democrats swiftly condemned his actions, mindful of the current climate as well as the prospect of political blowback in next year’s elections.

**Senior Chinese envoy in North Korea amid chill in ties**

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — The highest-level Chinese envoy to North Korea in two years held meetings in the country’s capital to try to improve relations that have soured over Beijing’s tightening of sanctions and expressions of support for President Donald Trump’s calls for more pressure on the North to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Song Tao’s official mission starting Friday is to brief North Korean officials on the outcome of China’s ruling Communist Party congress held last month. He is visiting as President Xi Jinping’s special envoy, according to Chinese and North Korean state media, but no other details about his itinerary or whether he will meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have been announced.

After arriving, Song met with Choe Ryong Hae, a vice chairman of the ruling party and one of the most senior leaders after Kim.

During their meeting on Friday, Song briefed Choe on the developments from the Communist Party congress and also gave him an unspecified gift for Kim, Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency said Saturday. The agency said Song also stressed the Communist Party’s stance to further build on the “traditional friendly relationship” between the countries and their ruling parties.

**Iraqi forces retake the country’s last Islamic State-held town**

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi forces backed by the U.S.-led coalition retook on Friday the last town in the country that was held by the Islamic State group, more than three years after the militants stormed nearly a third of Iraq’s territory, the Defense Ministry said.

At dawn, military units and local tribal fighters pushed into the western neighborhoods of Rawah in western Anbar province, and after just five hours of fighting they retook the town, according to Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, the ministry’s spokesman.

Iraq’s Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi congratulated his forces on retaking Rawah. In a statement released on Friday afternoon, Al-Abadi said Iraqi forces liberated Rawah in record time and were continuing operations to retake control of Iraq’s western desert and the border area with Syria.

Rawah, 175 miles northwest of Baghdad, lies along the Euphrates River Valley near the border town of Qaim that Iraqi forces retook from IS earlier this month.

U.S.-led coalition forces supported the operations to

retake Rawah and Qaim with intelligence, airstrikes and advisers, coalition spokesman Ryan Dillon said.

IS blitzed across Iraq’s north and west in the summer of 2014, capturing Iraq’s second-largest city of Mosul and advancing to the edges of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. Later that year the United States began a campaign of airstrikes against the militants that fueled Iraqi territorial gains, allowing the military to retake Mosul in July this year.

All that now remains of IS-held Iraq are patches of rural territory in the country’s vast western desert along the border with Syria.

**Montana congressman misled authorities on reporter’s assault**

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A Montana congressman misled investigators about his assault on a reporter the day before he was elected and claimed that the “liberal media” was “trying to make a story” out of it, according to documents released Friday.



Gianforte

U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte, a Republican, told an officer in the aftermath of the attack that Guardian newspaper reporter Ben Jacobs had grabbed him by the wrist and pulled both of them to the floor, according to notes from a Gallatin County sheriff’s officer who interviewed the politician the night of the attack.

Multiple witnesses contradicted that account, and Gianforte later pleaded guilty to misdemeanor assault. The attack occurred the day before his victory in a May 25 special election, by which time many voters already had cast ballots by mail.

More than 100 pages of documents, photos and audio from the investigation were released under a court order following requests from The Associated Press and other news organizations.

The documents include interviews with members of a Fox News crew who were in the room with Gianforte and Jacobs at the politician’s Bozeman campaign office. They said Gianforte became enraged over what he perceived as biased coverage before body-slammng Jacobs, throwing him to the ground and punching him.

Gianforte told Sgt. Scott Secor in an interview that Jacobs had interrupted as the Fox crew set up for an interview and “started interrogating in a very intensive way.”

**UN panel agrees to move ahead with debate on ‘killer robots’**

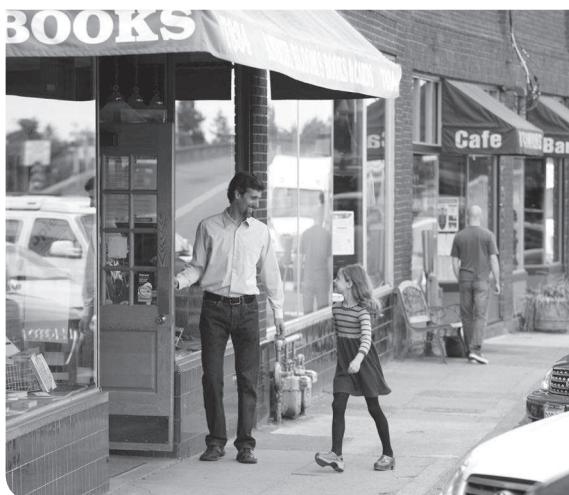
GENEVA (AP) — A U.N. panel agreed Friday to move ahead with talks to define and possibly set limits on weapons that can kill without human involvement, as human rights groups said governments are moving too slowly to keep up with advances in artificial intelligence that could put computers in control one day.

Advocacy groups warned about the threats posed by such “killer robots” and aired a chilling video illustrating their possible uses on the sidelines of the first formal U.N. meeting of government experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems this week. More than 80 countries took part.

Ambassador Amandeep Gill of India, who chaired the gathering, said participants plan to meet again in 2018. He said ideas discussed this week included the creation of legally binding instrument, a code of conduct, or a technology review process.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, an umbrella group of advocacy groups, says 22 countries support a ban of the weapons and the list is growing. Human Rights Watch, one of its members, called for an agreement to regulate them by the end of 2019 — admittedly a longshot.

The meeting falls under a 37-year old agreement that has set limits on the use of arms and explosives.



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