

BRIEFLY

Franken apologizes, sees long fight ahead for trust

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Al Franken apologized Monday to “everyone who has counted on me to be a champion for women” as the Minnesota Democrat fought to bolster his support with his first Capitol public appearance since being drawn into a wave of sexual harassment accusations buffeting Congress.

Franken spoke as lawmakers began returning from an extraordinary weeklong Thanksgiving break that saw sexually tinged problems engulf two other legislators as well: Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Joe Barton, R-Texas. Those revelations were on top of allegations that Alabama Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore sexually assaulted a 14-year-old girl and sought romantic relationships with other teenagers when he was in his 30s four decades ago, which he has denied.

With harassment charges bringing down big names in the worlds of entertainment and journalism, Congress was adding widespread complaints about how it handles such incidents to its pile of year-end work.

In a brief appearance before reporters, Franken stopped short of specifying how his memory differs from four women’s accounts of separate incidents in which he allegedly initiated improper sexual contact. He said he recalls “differently” one woman’s allegation that he forcibly kissed her but provided no detail, and said he doesn’t remember three other times women assert he grabbed their buttocks, citing “tens of thousands” of people he meets annually.

“But I feel that you have to respect, you know, women’s experience,” he said.

Conservative group linked to false Moore accusation

NEW YORK (AP) — A conservative group known for undercover investigations has been linked to a woman who falsely told *The Washington Post* that Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore impregnated her as a teenager, the newspaper reported.

Moore has been accused of multiple instances of sexual misconduct. But the *Post* determined that one accuser who approached the newspaper earlier in the month, identified as Jaime Phillips, made up a fake story likely designed to embarrass the newspaper.

The *Post* published a story Monday about its dealings with Phillips. Earlier in the day, reporters from the newspaper saw Phillips walking into the New York offices of Project Veritas, a conservative group with a long track record of targeting Democratic groups and major media outlets, often by hiding their identities and using hidden cameras.

“We don’t comment on investigations real or imagined, or imagined stings,” conservative activist and Project Veritas leader James O’Keefe told *The Associated Press* Monday evening.

O’Keefe released an unrelated video that he said exposed liberal bias at the newspaper hours after the *Post* story was initially published.

Meghan Markle to wed Prince Harry

LONDON (AP) — She is an entertainment figure in her own right, and an outspoken woman comfortable talking about her background and her passions. American actress Meghan Markle will be a new type of royal when she weds Prince Harry in the spring.

In some ways, Markle — a mixed-race American raised in California, and a divorcee — makes a surprising addition to Britain’s monarchy.

Markle, best known for her role as an ambitious paralegal in the hit U.S. legal drama “*Suits*,” surprised many when she shared her feelings for Harry in a September cover story for *Vanity Fair*.



A view of the Mount Agung volcano erupting in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia, Monday. The volcano on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali erupted for the second time in a week on Saturday, disrupting international flights even as authorities said the island remains safe.

AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati

Indonesia volcano forces mass evacuation, shuts Bali airport

KARANGASEM, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian authorities ordered 100,000 people to flee Monday from an erupting volcano on Bali that forced the island’s international airport to close, stranding large numbers of travelers.

Mount Agung has been hurling clouds of white and dark gray ash about 9,800 feet into the atmosphere since the weekend and lava is welling up in the crater, sometimes reflected as a reddish-yellow glow in the ash plumes. Its explosions can be heard about 7 1/2 miles away.

Videos released by the National Disaster Mitigation Agency showed a mudflow of volcanic debris and water

known as a lahar moving down the volcano’s slopes. It said lahars could increase because it is rainy season and warned people to stay away from rivers.

The agency raised the volcano’s alert to the highest level early Monday and expanded the danger zone to 6 miles in places from the previous 7 1/2 kilometers. It said a larger eruption is possible.

The volcano’s last major eruption in 1963 killed about 1,100 people.

Spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho told a news conference in Jakarta that the extension of the danger zone affects 22 villages and about 90,000 to 100,000 people.

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