

Trump declares Jerusalem Israeli capital

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump shattered decades of unwavering U.S. neutrality on Jerusalem Wednesday, declaring the sorely divided holy city as Israel's capital and sparking frustrated Palestinians to cry out that he had destroyed already-fragile Mideast hopes for peace.

Defying dire, worldwide warnings, Trump insisted that after repeated peace failures it was past time for a new approach, starting with what he said was his decision merely based on reality to recognize Jerusalem as the seat of Israel's government. He also said the United States would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, though he set no timetable.

"We cannot solve our problems by making the same failed assumptions and repeating the same failed strategies of the past," Trump said, brushing aside the appeals for caution from around the world.

Harsh objections came from a wide array of presidents and prime ministers. From the Middle East to Europe and beyond, leaders cautioned Trump that any sudden change on an issue as sensitive as Jerusalem not only risks blowing up the new Arab-Israeli peace initiative led by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, but could lead to new violence in the region.

No government beyond Israel spoke up in praise of Trump or suggested it would follow his lead.

Israelis and Palestinians reacted in starkly different terms. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed Trump's announcement as an "important step toward peace," and Israeli opposition leaders echoed his praise. But Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Trump's shift serves extremist groups that want religious war and signals U.S. withdrawal from being a peace mediator. Protesters in Gaza burned American and Israeli flags.

Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is a powerfully symbolic statement about a city that houses many of the world's holiest sites. Trump cited several: the Western Wall that surrounded the Jews' ancient Temple, the Stations of the Cross that depict Jesus along his crucifixion path, the al-Asqa Mosque where Muslims say their Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven.



President Donald Trump holds up a proclamation to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, Wednesday in Washington.

AP Photo/Evan Vucci



Palestinian burn a poster of the U.S. President Donald Trump during a protest in Bethlehem, West Bank, Wednesday.

AP Photo/Nasser Shiyoukhi

And there are major ramifications over who should control the territory. The United States has never endorsed the Jewish state's claim of sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem and has seen the city's future as indelibly linked to the "deal of the century" between Israel and the Palestinians that Trump believes he can reach. Beyond Kushner, Trump has dispatched other top emissaries to the region in recent months in hopes

of advancing new negotiations.

Trump said he wasn't delivering any verdict about where an Israeli-Palestinian border should lie. Instead, he described his Jerusalem declaration as recognizing the reality that most of Israel's government already operates from the city, and he suggested the U.S. ally should be rewarded for creating a successful democracy where "people of all faiths are free to live and worship."

"be alert to the possibility of political unrest, violence, demonstrations, and criminal activities."

There was little in Trump's statement to encourage the Palestinians. Although he recited the longstanding U.S. position that Jerusalem's borders must still be worked out through negotiation, he made no recognition of the Palestinian claims to east Jerusalem.

For the first time, Trump did appear to endorse the concept of an independent Palestine existing alongside Israel. Yet even that idea appeared conditional, as he said he'd promote the "two-state solution" if both sides agreed. Netanyahu's government is dominated by hardliners who oppose Palestinian independence.

Trump made no reference to signing a waiver that officially delays any move of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but the White House confirmed he signed the waiver Wednesday. It means there will be no embassy move for at least another six months. Establishing a Jerusalem embassy was a major campaign promise of Trump's and one that officials said he focused on in discussions with top advisers in recent weeks.

On Wednesday he focused on his directive to the State Department to begin a process of moving the embassy as required by U.S. law, however many years that might take. After his speech, he signed a proclamation to that effect.

In Germany, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said work will begin immediately to identify a site.

A non-governmental expert on the Middle East who consults regularly with the White House said the Trump administration had opted against an earlier plan of converting the existing U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem to an embassy. Instead, it's looking to construct an entirely new facility, said the individual, who wasn't authorized to disclose private conversations with U.S. officials and requested anonymity.

In making his decision, Trump overruled more cautious counsel from Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis, who voiced concern about endangering U.S. diplomats and troops in Muslim countries, according to officials briefed on internal administration deliberations. Those officials were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We cannot solve our problems ... by repeating the same failed strategies of the past."

— Donald Trump, President of the United States

"Today we finally acknowledge the obvious," he said, emphasizing that he wouldn't follow past presidents who tiptoed around Jerusalem out of diplomatic caution.

U.S. embassies and consulates around the world were put on high alert. Across the Middle East and Europe, they issued warnings to Americans to watch out for violent protests. In Jordan, home to a large Palestinian population, the U.S. said it would close its embassy to the public Thursday and urged children of diplomats there to stay home from school.

Later Wednesday, the State Department issued an updated "Worldwide Caution" to U.S. citizens abroad, advising travelers to

BRIEFLY

Bel-Air wildfire joins the siege across Southern California

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A wildfire erupted in Los Angeles' exclusive Bel-Air section Wednesday as yet another part of Southern California found itself under siege from an outbreak of wind-whipped blazes that have consumed multimillion-dollar houses and tract homes alike.

Hundreds of homes across the L.A. metropolitan area and beyond were feared destroyed since Monday, but firefighters were only slowly managing to make their way into some of the hard-hit areas for an accurate count.

As many as five fires have closed highways, schools and museums, shut down production of TV series and cast a hazardous haze over the region. About 200,000 people were under evacuation orders. No deaths and only a few injuries were reported.

From the beachside city of Ventura, where rows of homes were leveled, to the rugged foothills north of Los Angeles, where stable owners had to evacuate horses in trailers, to Bel-Air, where the rich and famous have sweeping views of L.A. below, fierce Santa Ana winds sweeping in from the desert fanned the flames and fears.

"God willing, this will slow down so the firefighters can do their job," said Maurice Kaboud, who ignored an evacuation order and stood in his backyard with a garden hose at the ready.

Air tankers that were grounded most of Tuesday because of high winds went up on Wednesday, dropping flame retardant. Firefighters rushed to attack the fires before the winds picked up again.

They were expected to gust as high as 80 mph overnight into Thursday, possibly creating unprecedented fire danger.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection uses a color-coded wind index in its forecasts. Tomorrow's forecast is purple, the most extreme conditions, which has never been used before, director Ken Pimlott said.

'Silence Breakers' named Time's Person of the Year

NEW YORK (AP) — The "Silence Breakers" — those who have shared their stories about sexual assault and harassment — have been named Time magazine's Person of the Year.

Numerous women have spoken out publicly since October about sexual misconduct by dozens of high-profile men in entertainment, media, business and sports. Time praised those who have given "voice to open secrets, for moving whisper networks onto social networks, for pushing us all to stop accepting the unacceptable." The magazine's cover features Ashley Judd, Taylor Swift, Susan Fowler and others who



AP Photo/Reed Saxon

Maurice Kaboud makes a phone call after a wildfire threatened his home in the Bel Air district of Los Angeles Wednesday. When firefighters told Kaboud to evacuate, he decided to stay and protect his home. He stood in the backyard of his multimillion-dollar home as the Skirball fire raged nearby.

say they have been harassed.

Time's announcement was made Wednesday on NBC's "Today" show, where longtime host Matt Lauer was fired last week amid harassment allegations. "Today" host Savannah Guthrie acknowledged Wednesday that this year's winner hits "close to home" and mentioned Lauer by name.

Women who spoke out, initially against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and then others, helped to spawn the #MeToo movement, with millions of people telling stories of sexual misconduct on social media.

As Franken's support collapses, Democrats expect resignation

WASHINGTON (AP) — His once-promising political career in shambles, Minnesota Sen. Al Franken appeared on the verge of resigning after fellow Democrats led by female senators abandoned him Wednesday over the mounting allegations of sexual misconduct that are roiling Capitol Hill.

A majority of the Senate's Democrats called on the two-term lawmaker to get out after another woman emerged Wednesday saying he forcibly tried to kiss her in 2006. That brought to at least seven the number of women accusing him of sexual impropriety.

Franken, the former comedian who made his name on "Saturday Night Live," scheduled an announcement for Thursday. No topic was specified, but Democratic senators said they expected their liberal colleague to resign.

"Enough is enough," said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York. "We need to draw

a line in the sand and say none of it is OK, none of it is acceptable, and we, as elected leaders, should absolutely be held to a higher standard."

Gillibrand was the first to call for Franken's resignation on Wednesday, but a torrent of Democrats quickly followed.

Congress seems on track to avert government shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite incendiary words from President Donald Trump, Congress seemed on track Wednesday to approving legislation that would avert a partial government shutdown over the weekend as all sides seemed ready to avert a confrontation — for now.

Increasingly confident House leaders planned a Thursday vote on a bill that would keep federal agencies functioning through Dec. 22, and Senate approval was expected to follow. Even the head of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, whose members have been threatening to oppose the measure, predicted passage.

"No one wants a shutdown, including Freedom Caucus members," Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., told reporters.

The moderated tone reflected a sense within both parties that though major differences remain over spending, immigration, health care and other issues, this was no time for a headline-grabbing government closure.

Republicans want the public focus to be on the party's prized \$1.5 trillion tax bill, which they hope to enact by Christmas. They also have no interest in a shutdown that

would raise questions about their ability to govern.

While many Democrats seemed likely to oppose the measure, enough were expected to support it in the Senate to allow its passage there. They know they'd still have leverage on subsequent bills needed to keep the government running.

House votes to kill Dem's resolution to impeach Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House overwhelmingly voted Wednesday to kill a resolution from a liberal Democratic lawmaker to impeach President Donald Trump as most Democrats joined Republicans in opposing the move.

Rep. Al Green, D-Texas, said Trump had associated his presidency with causes rooted in bigotry and racism. To back his claim accusing Trump of high misdemeanors, Green cited incidents such as Trump's blaming both sides for violence at a deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and his recent sharing of hateful, anti-Muslim videos posted online by a fringe British extremist group.

After his resolution was read aloud, the House voted 364-58 to table the resolution.

All the no votes came from Democrats, and four Democratic lawmakers voted present. In all, 126 Democrats joined Republicans in voting to table Green's effort in the GOP-led House.

President Putin announces bid for 2018 re-election

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday he would seek re-election next year in a race he is poised to win easily, putting him on track to become the nation's longest-serving ruler since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

Putin's approval ratings regularly top 80 percent, making him all but certain to win the March election by a broad margin. While few doubted the 65-year-old leader would run, the delay in his declaring so fueled some conspiracy theories and was seen as the Kremlin's political maneuvering.

The 65-year-old Russian leader's potential rivals include several luckless candidates from past contests and a notable newcomer — TV host Ksenia Sobchak, 36, the daughter of Putin's one-time boss.

The president chose to make his re-election announcement at the GAZ automobile factory in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. The factory is a symbol of Russian's industrial might, and Putin found an enthusiastic audience in the blue-collar workers who make up the core of his base.

"I couldn't find a better place and moment," he said to massive applause at the plant. "Thank you for your support. I will run for president."