

AP sources: EPA chief spent millions on security and travel

By MICHAEL BIESECKER
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WASHINGTON — Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt's concern with his safety came at a steep cost to taxpayers as his swollen security detail blew through overtime budgets and at times diverted officers away from investigating environmental crimes to protect him.

Altogether, the agency spent millions of dollars for a 20-member full-time security detail that is three times the size of his predecessor's part-time security contingent.

New details in Pruitt's expansive spending for security and travel emerged from agency sources and documents reviewed by The Associated Press. They come as the embattled EPA leader fends off allegations of profligate spending and ethical missteps that have imperiled his job.

Shortly after arriving in Washington, Pruitt demoted the career staff member heading his security detail and replaced him with EPA Senior Special Agent Pasquale "Nino" Perrotta, a former Secret Service agent who operates a private security company. An EPA official with direct knowledge of Pruitt's security spending



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File
Environmental Protection Agency Administrator and former Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt is seen on Capitol Hill in Washington in January 2017, at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

says Perrotta oversaw a rapid expansion of the EPA chief's security detail to accommodate guarding him day and night, even on family vacations and when Pruitt was home in Oklahoma.

The EPA official spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Perrotta also signed off on new procedures that let Pruitt fly first-class on commercial airliners, with the security chief typically sitting next to him with other security staff farther back in the plane. Pruitt's premium status gave him and his security chief access to VIP airport lounges.

The EPA official said there

are legitimate concerns about Pruitt's safety, given public opposition to his rollbacks of anti-pollution measures.

But Pruitt's ambitious domestic and international travel led to rapidly escalating costs, with the security detail racking up so much overtime that many hit annual salary caps of about \$160,000. The demands of providing 24-hour coverage even meant taking some investigators away from field work, such as when Pruitt traveled to California for a family vacation.

The EPA official said total security costs approached \$3 million when pay is added to travel expenses.



AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez
A U.S. flag is placed on a wildfire-ravaged property as rain comes down in the the Coffey Park area Friday in Santa Rosa, Calif.

Rain shuts Yosemite, threatens problems at tallest U.S. dam

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A fierce Northern California storm Friday shut down Yosemite National Park, threatened mudslides in wildfire-ravaged wine country and could present the first test of a partially repaired offshoot of the nation's tallest dam that nearly collapsed last year.

Recent heavy rainfall has led to problems for a state recovering from devastating wildfires, forcing people to flee their homes repeatedly for fear of debris flows tearing down hillsides stripped bare by flames. But the downpours also have provided relief as parts of California plunged back into drought less than a year after a historic dry stretch.

Rain was falling throughout much of Northern California on Friday, leading Yosemite National Park to ban all visitors as it expects flooding in its tourist-heavy valley. Visitors can no longer enter Yosemite Valley, and those already there will be asked to leave by 5 p.m.

The opener of the San

Francisco Giants-Los Angeles Dodgers weekend series was rained out, the first at the Giants ballpark in 12 years.

A couple of hundred miles northwest in wine country scorched during October wildfires, the National Weather Service predicted 4 to 6 inches of rainfall through Sunday.

The city of Santa Rosa, one of the hardest-hit burn areas, brought in extra firefighters and emergency personnel, fire department spokesman Paul Lowenthal said.

It's not the amount of rainfall worrying city officials but the rate at which it falls, he said. Workers have been monitoring hundreds of storm drains, especially those protecting neighborhoods destroyed by fire.

"When we start talking about half an inch of rain or more an hour, that's where we're more susceptible to mudslides and debris flow in and around our burn zones," Lowenthal said.

The weather service issued several flood warnings throughout Northern California ahead of the

expected "atmospheric river," a long plume of subtropical moisture stretching to areas near Lake Tahoe.

Some places in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco could see up to 8 inches of rain over a three-day period, leading forecasters to warn of possible flooding, mudslides and rockslides.

To the north, state officials warned this week that they may have to use the partially rebuilt spillway at Oroville Dam for the first time since repairs began on the badly damaged structure last summer.

Behind the dam, Lake Oroville has been filling up all winter, and more water was coming in than flowing out Friday. The water level was last at 793 feet and dropping. If it reaches about 830 feet, water managers say they will open the gates to the spillway.

In February 2017, a massive crater opened up in the 3,000-foot concrete chute that releases water from Lake Oroville, California's second-largest reservoir.

BRIEFLY

7 killed, scores wounded by Israeli fire in Gaza protest

KHUZAA, Gaza Strip (AP) — Thousands of Palestinians protested along Gaza's sealed border with Israel on Friday, engulfing the volatile area in black smoke from burning tires to try to block the view of Israeli snipers and cheering a Hamas strongman who pledged that the border fence will eventually fall.

Israeli troops opened fire from across the border, killing at least seven Palestinians and wounding 293 others — 25 of them seriously — in the second mass border protest in a week, Gaza health officials said. Hundreds more suffered other injuries, including tear gas inhalation, the officials said.

The deaths brought to at least 29 the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli fire since last week.

The latest casualties were bound to draw new criticism from rights groups that have branded Israel's open-fire orders on the border as unlawful, after Israel's defense minister warned that those approaching the fence were risking their lives.

The U.N. human rights office said Friday that it has indications that Israeli forces used "excessive force" against protesters last week, when 15 Palestinians were killed or later died of wounds sustained near the border.

U.S. takes aim at Putin's allies in Russia with new sanctions

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States punished dozens of Russian oligarchs and government officials on Friday with sanctions that took direct aim at President Vladimir Putin's inner circle, as President Donald Trump's administration tried to show he's not afraid to take tough action against Moscow.

Seven Russian tycoons, including aluminum magnate Oleg Deripaska, were targeted, along with 17 officials and a dozen Russian companies, the Treasury Department said. Senior Trump administration officials

cast it as part of a concerted, ongoing effort to push back on Putin, emphasizing that since Trump took office last year, the U.S. has punished 189 Russia-related people and entities with sanctions.

Rather than punishing Russia for one specific action, the new sanctions hit back at the Kremlin for its "ongoing and increasingly brazen pattern" of bad behavior, said the officials, who weren't authorized to comment by name and briefed reporters on condition of anonymity. The officials ticked through a list of complaints about Russia's actions beyond its borders, including its annexation of Crimea, backing of separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine, support for Syrian President Bashar Assad, and cyber-hacking.

Above all else, Russia's attempts to subvert Western democracy prompted the U.S. sanctions, officials said, in a direct nod to concerns that the U.S. president has failed to challenge Putin for alleged interference in the 2016 election that brought Trump to power.

Brazil's ex-President 'Lula' defies order to turn self in

SAO BERNARDO DO CAMPO, Brazil (AP) — Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva defied an order to turn himself in to police on Friday as he hunkered down with supporters at a metallurgical union that was the spiritual birthplace of his rise to power.

The once wildly popular leader, who rose from poverty to lead Latin America's largest nation, had until 5 p.m. local time to present himself to police in the city of Curitiba to begin serving a sentence of 12 years and one month for a corruption conviction.

At 5 p.m., however, da Silva remained inside the union building in the Sao Paulo suburb of Sao Bernardo do Campo, about 260 miles northeast of Curitiba. Party leaders said he was planning to address supporters.

Federal judge Sergio Moro, seen by many in Brazil as a crusader against endemic graft, ordered da Silva to turn present himself to police by Friday afternoon.

DAVIS SHOWS NORTHWEST

Carnival

April 11 - 15, 2018

Chamber of Commerce/Museum Parking Lot
WED 5 PM - CLOSING
\$3.75 A RIDE

BUY ALL DAY RIDE PASSES
FRI 4 PM - CLOSING \$27
SAT & SUN NOON - CLOSING \$27
\$3.75 PER RIDE BOOK OF 10 \$32

Sponsored by the
Main Street Cowboys

SAVE \$\$\$

THURS 4 PM - CLOSING
BUDDY DAY

Buy one armband at \$27
get second armband for \$13
Both people must be present at time of purchase.

UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

MEMBERSHIP DINNER

& ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, April 21, 2018
Hermiston Community Center
5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

"It's the Water... Powering Our Communities"

This year's theme celebrates the many benefits of hydropower in shaping our culture.

As always, attendance is free to UEC members. We hope you will join us!



UEC UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Featured Entertainment

Tim Behrens, brings to life the denizens of Blight, Idaho, the fictional home town of nationally renowned humor writer Patrick McManus.




Relay For Life of Umatilla & Morrow County Relay @ (roy) Raley

June 16, 2018 | 10 am - 10 pm | Roy Raley Park

Sign up online @ RelayForLife.org

Or contact: Carol Preston, Event Lead
541.379.6294 | relaypendleton@yahoo.com

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