

Trump believes nuclear deal with North Korea possible

By **FOSTER KLUG**
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — President Donald Trump on Wednesday defended his work to settle a nuclear deal with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, saying he has given up nothing but his time during a June summit yet stands on the cusp of denuclearizing the North.

In a wide-ranging news conference on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, Trump told reporters that despite tough U.S. sanctions against the North staying in place, he believes that Kim wants to get a deal done because of their close ties.

“We have a very good relationship. He likes me, I like him, we get along,” Trump said. “He wants to make a deal and I’d like to make a deal.”

He wouldn’t put a time-frame, however, on when the two leaders might settle the standoff. “We’re not playing the time game,” he said.

It has lasted for decades, flummoxed a long line of U.S. and South Korean presidents and had many fearing war last year during a series

of increasingly powerful North Korean weapons tests that experts believe put the country close to a longtime goal of viably targeting any spot on the U.S. mainland.

Trump and his top diplomat, Mike Pompeo, are trying to get past the deadlock that has followed the Singapore summit. Pompeo is planning to visit Pyongyang next month to prepare for a second Kim-Trump summit. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Wednesday also said separately that he wants to meet with Kim though no details had been decided on yet.

Trump’s optimistic comments come amid widespread skepticism that Kim will actually relinquish an arsenal that Pyongyang likely sees as the only way to guarantee the Kim dynasty’s continued authoritarian rule.

Although Trump maintained that he’d given up nothing in his dealings with Kim, he has faced criticism for his decision during the Singapore summit to scrap annual U.S. military drills with ally South Korea. Critics called it a concession for the North, which has long



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer
President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference Wednesday in New York.

railed against the drills as invasion preparation and proof of U.S. hostility.

Trump said Wednesday that he’d long wanted to stop the drills, which had always been portrayed by the allies as defensive in nature, because of their high cost and said he could restart them if needed. “For the taxpayer, we’re saving a fortune,” Trump said.

Trump also made the stunning claim that former President Barack Obama told Trump that Obama was “very close” to going to war with the North.

“If I wasn’t elected,”

Trump said, “you’d be in a war.”

The State Department said Pompeo was invited by Kim to Pyongyang, the North’s capital, “to make further progress on the implementation” of agreements made during the Singapore summit and to set up another leaders’ meeting.

Pompeo met earlier Wednesday with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho at the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York. Pompeo said on Twitter that his meeting with Ri was “very positive.” There were no details imme-

diately available about what the diplomats discussed.

“Much work remains, but we will continue to move forward,” Pompeo said.

Also at the U.N. session, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said high-level diplomacy has “removed the shadow of war” that hung over the Korean Peninsula last year as Kim and Trump threatened each other with destruction during the run of North Korean weapons tests.

“Over the past year, something miraculous has taken place on the Korean Peninsula,” Moon said in an address to world leaders. “We have crossed the barriers of division and are tearing down the walls in our heart.”

Moon met with Kim in Pyongyang last week and has been the leading force behind the summitry. He and others hope another Trump-Kim summit will lead to disarmament progress.

Diplomacy has stalled following Kim’s vague promise at the Singapore summit to work toward “complete denuclearization” of the Korean Peninsula in exchange for U.S.

security guarantees.

At the heart of the impasse: a North Korean demand for a declaration to formally end the Korean War before it takes any major disarmament steps. That war ended in 1953 with a ceasefire, not a peace treaty.

Washington wants the North to first provide a list of the contents of its nuclear arsenal before agreeing to that war declaration, which could remove a big piece of diplomatic leverage over the North.

Also Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that dismantling an Iran nuclear accord would threaten global efforts to halt North Korea’s nuclear program.

Lavrov and others defended the 2015 Iran deal at a U.N. Security Council meeting chaired by Trump about non-proliferation. Trump pulled the U.S. out of the accord, arguing it wasn’t tough enough on Iran, and is threatening new sanctions.

Lavrov said dismantling the accord would “be counterproductive for the efforts underway now to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

SCOTUS nominee Kavanaugh facing prosecutor said to be unbound by politics

By **JACQUES BILLEAUD AND ANITA SNOW**
Associated Press

PHOENIX — A sex-crimes prosecutor tapped by Senate Republicans to question Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh about allegations of sexual assault could have a tough time in such a contentious political environment, Arizona attorneys who know her said Wednesday.

But her boss says Rachel Mitchell is a hard-hitting attorney, who is used to handling high-profile cases and is one of the few prosecutors in the country with a deep understanding of working with sexual abuse victims.

Mitchell, a Republican, was expected to question Kavanaugh and the first woman to accuse him of sexual misconduct at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Thursday. Christine Blasey Ford’s allegation that Kavanaugh drunkenly assaulted her when they were teenagers has raised a political storm in the #MeToo era and the GOP’s all-male presence on the panel made some want a woman to question Ford.

Mitchell is chief of the Special Victims Division in the Maricopa County attorney’s office in Phoenix. She supervises attorneys who handle cases involving child molestation, sexual assault and computer crimes against children in Arizona’s most populous county.

“She is about evidence-based approaches and isn’t an activist on one side or the other,” said Matt Long, a private Phoenix attorney who once worked for Mitchell and now handles sex abuse cases. “She is rare: a career prosecutor who is bound to issues rather than politics.”

But, he added: “There is nothing in this process to make me comfortable that this process is about fairness, truth and evidence.”

Arizona defense attorney David Michael Cantor said the choice of a long-time sex-crimes prosecutor to question Kavanaugh and his accuser was “ironic.”

“If she gives him a pass, if she doesn’t dig down and



Jack Kurtz / The Arizona Republic via AP, Pool
In this Oct. 27, 2004 photo, Rachel Mitchell makes an opening statement in the trial of Karl LeClaire at court in Mesa, Ariz. Senate Republicans are bringing Mitchell to handle questioning about allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Thursday in Washington.

get the guy to squirm, it could hurt her reputation,” said Cantor, who runs the Phoenix law firm DM Cantor. “But if she grills both of them equally, she’ll be a superstar.”

Mitchell has not responded to requests for comment sent through the county attorney’s office.

Since Ford came forward, allegations from two other women have emerged, but Republicans have not announced any plans to focus Thursday’s session on those claims. Kavanaugh has denied all the accusations.

Rick Romley, the former top county prosecutor in metro Phoenix who was once Mitchell’s boss, praised her for a career devoted to helping victims.

But he said that if Mitchell had asked him, he would have recommended she not take the assignment because an investigation hasn’t been conducted into the allegations and Mitchell hasn’t been given much time to prepare for the hearing.

“It’s a recipe for disaster,” Romley said.

He also noted that she’s not a politician and will now be in the spotlight: “It can throw your game off.”

Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery, Mitchell’s current boss, doesn’t share those concerns.

“She has been doing that her entire career,” Mont-

gomery said. “This is a different setting. But this isn’t much different than what she has had to work with.”

Mitchell was part of the team of prosecutors who pressed cases against Catholic priests in a sex abuse scandal about 15 years ago in Phoenix.

She also was among the prosecutors who examined some of the hundreds of sex-crime cases botched by then-Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s office over a three-year period ending in 2007 to determine whether any could be salvaged and taken to court.

Mitchell also has helped train psychologists, medical professionals, forensic interviewers and detectives in sex-crimes issues.

Montgomery said he wasn’t shocked when he got a call Saturday from two Judiciary Committee staffers inquiring about Mitchell’s background, availability and qualifications. He said it was the first time he heard about the possibility of her participating in the Kavanaugh hearing.

Montgomery said he didn’t talk with anyone in Washington about picking Mitchell for the job before that.

She is among a small number of prosecutors nationwide who deeply understands working with sexual abuse victims, so it isn’t sur-

prising her name popped up in connection with the Kavanaugh hearing, he said.

“This could have been nothing more than seeking someone with the right kind of professional qualifications, and they found them,” Montgomery added.

Mitchell “has been recognized in the legal community for her experience and objectivity,” committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, said in a statement Tuesday.

Mitchell helped create the first-ever sex-crimes protocol for the county attorney office’s that was introduced last year. It will ensure prosecutors have a guide “so that we can do the best we can for victims,” Mitchell told a local NPR station in January. “It’s always hard to know which victims were not victims or which people were not victims because your system worked,” Mitchell told Phoenix radio station KJZZ.

Tasha Menaker of the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual Violence said she worked with Mitchell for three years on the protocol and found her to be “very experienced, intelligent, detail oriented and very straightforward.”

Flu killed 80,000 people last winter in US

By **MIKE STOBBE**
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK — An estimated 80,000 Americans died of flu and its complications last winter — the disease’s highest death toll in at least four decades.

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert Redfield, revealed the total in an interview Tuesday night with The Associated Press.

Flu experts knew it was a very bad season, but at least one found the size of the estimate surprising.

“That’s huge,” said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccine expert. The tally was nearly twice as much as what health officials previously considered a bad year, he said.

In recent years, flu-related deaths have ranged from about 12,000 to 56,000, according to the CDC.

Last fall and winter, the U.S. went through one of the most severe flu seasons in recent memory. It was driven by a kind of flu that tends to put more people in the hospital and

cause more deaths, particularly among young children and the elderly.

The season peaked in early February and it was mostly over by the end of March.

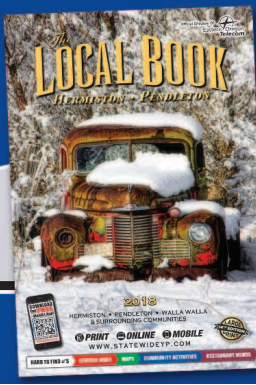
Making a bad year worse, the flu vaccine didn’t work very well. Experts nevertheless say vaccination is still worth it because it makes illnesses less severe and save lives.

“I’d like to see more people get vaccinated,” Redfield told the AP at an event in New York. “We lost 80,000 people last year to the flu.”

CDC officials do not have exact counts of how many people die from flu each year. Flu is so common that not all flu cases are reported, and flu is not always listed on death certificates. So the CDC uses statistical models, which are periodically revised, to make estimates.

Fatal complications from the flu can include pneumonia, stroke and heart attack.

CDC officials called the 80,000 figure preliminary, and it may be slightly revised. But they said it is not expected to go down.



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