

# Facing calls for resignation, Acosta defends Epstein deal

By JILL COLVIN AND RICHARD LARDNER  
Associated Press



AP Photo/Alex Brandon

Labor Secretary Alex Acosta calls on a reporter to ask a question during a news conference at the Department of Labor on Wednesday in Washington.

WASHINGTON — Insisting he got the best deal he could at the time, Labor Secretary Alex Acosta on Wednesday defended his handling of a sex-trafficking case involving now-jailed financier Jeffrey Epstein as Acosta tried to stave off intensifying Democratic calls for his resignation.

“We believe that we proceeded appropriately,” Acosta told reporters at a news conference at Labor Department headquarters, where he retraced steps federal prosecutors took in the case a decade ago when he was U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida. Acosta said state authorities had planned to go after Epstein with charges that would have resulted in no jail time until his office intervened and pressed for tougher consequences.

“We did what we did because we wanted to see Epstein go to jail,” he said. “That was the focus.” He added: “Facts are important and facts are being overlooked.”

Acosta is being assailed for his part in the secret 2008 plea deal he signed that let Epstein avoid federal prosecution on charges that he molested teenage girls. But he was unapologetic Wednesday as he declared his office did the best it could under the circumstances.

The deal Acosta helped broker has come under new

and intense scrutiny after prosecutors in New York on Monday brought new child sex-trafficking charges alleging Epstein abused dozens of underage girls in the early 2000s, paying them hundreds of dollars in cash for massages, then molesting them at his homes in Florida and New York. Epstein has pleaded not guilty to the charges; if con-

victed he could be imprisoned for the rest of his life.

Acosta said he welcomed the new case, calling Epstein’s acts “despicable.” Earlier he defended himself on Twitter, crediting “new evidence and additional testimony” uncovered by prosecutors in New York for providing “an important opportunity to more fully

bring him to justice.”

Acosta has long made the case that it was better to use the threat of a federal indictment to force Epstein into a state guilty plea, with restitution to victims and registration as a sex offender, than it would have been to “roll the dice” and take Epstein to trial. But the result, to critics, was egregiously lenient.

Acosta’s office had gotten to the point of drafting an indictment that could have sent Epstein to federal prison for life. But it was never filed, leading to Epstein’s guilty plea to two state prostitution-related charges. Epstein served 13 months in a work-release program. He was also required to make payments to victims and register as a sex offender.

Pressed on whether he had regrets, Acosta repeatedly suggested that circumstances had changed in the years since the plea.

“We now have 12 years of knowledge and hindsight and we live in a very different world,” he said. “Today’s world treats victims very, very differently.”

Trump has, so far, also defended Acosta, praising his work as labor secretary and

saying he felt “very badly” for him “because I’ve known him as being somebody that works so hard and has done such a good job.” Still, he said, he would be looking at the circumstances of the case “very closely.”

Though Trump may have made the tagline “You’re fired!” famous on his reality show “The Apprentice,” he has shown a pattern of reluctance to fire even his most embattled aides. Trump, for instance, took months to dismiss Scott Pruitt as Environmental Protection Agency administrator despite a dizzying array of scandals, and allowed Jeff Sessions to remain as attorney general for more than a year even as he railed at and belittled him.

Trump typically gives his Cabinet secretaries the opportunity to defend themselves publicly in interviews and press conferences before deciding whether to pull the plug. And he encouraged Acosta to hold a press conference laying out his thinking and involvement in the plea deal, according to a senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

# ‘A floodier future’: Scientists say records will be broken

By WAYNE PARRY  
Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The federal government is warning Americans to brace for a “floodier” future.

Government scientists predict 40 places in the U.S. will experience higher than normal rates of so-called sunny day flooding this year because of rising sea levels and an abnormal El Niño weather system.

A report released Wednesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicts that sunny day flooding, also known as tidal flooding, will continue to increase.

“The future is already here, a floodier future,” said

William Sweet, a NOAA oceanographer and lead author of the study.

The report predicted that annual flood records will be broken again next year and for years and decades to come from sea-level rise.

“Flooding that decades ago usually happened only during a powerful or localized storm can now happen when a steady breeze or a change in coastal current overlaps with a high tide,” it read.

The nationwide average frequency of sunny day flooding in 2018 was five days a year, tying a record set in 2015.

But the East Coast averaged twice as much flooding. The agency says the level

of sunny day flooding in the U.S. has doubled since 2000.

Nationwide, the agency predicted, average sunny day flooding could reach 7 to 15 days a year by 2030, and 25 to 75 days a year by 2050.

“We cannot wait to act,” said Nicole LeBoeuf, acting director of NOAA’s Ocean Service. “This issue gets more urgent and complicated with every passing day.”

Global sea levels are rising at a rate of about 3 millimeters a year, or about an inch every eight years, according to Rutgers University researchers, who predict that by 2050, seas off New Jersey will rise by an additional 1.4 feet.

The study noted floods interfering with traffic in

northeast states, swamping septic systems in Florida and choking Delaware and Maryland coastal farms with saltwater over the past year.

Baltimore experienced 12 days of high-tide flooding from 1902 to 1936. Within the last 12 months, it experienced an additional 12 days.

Robert Kopp, a leading climate scientist with Rutgers University, who was not involved in the study, said it confirmed many well-established trends.

“It’s simple arithmetic: If you have higher sea level, you will have tides causing flooding,” he said. “We’re

not talking about disaster flooding. We’re talking about repetitive flooding that disrupts people’s lives on a daily basis. It’s sometimes called ‘nuisance flooding,’ but it has real impacts and costs.”

The report cited the disruption of commerce in downtown Annapolis, Maryland, where parking spaces are lost to flooding. A 2017 study put the price tag on lost economic activity at as much as \$172,000.

The water table has risen to ground level and degraded septic systems in the Miami region, and farmlands in the

Delmarva Peninsula in Delaware and Maryland have been damaged by salt water encroaching into planted areas.

High-tide flooding is causing problems including beach erosion, overwhelmed sewer and drinking water systems, closed roadways, disrupted harbor operations, degraded infrastructure and reduced property values — problems which “are nearly certain to get much worse this century,” the report read.

The report’s statistics cover May 2018 through April 2019.

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