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Event Calendar

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Date	Event	Location/Time	Other Information
9-13 Apr 2018	LEIU/IALEIA Training Event	Marriott Hotel, 700 West Convention Way Anaheim, CA 92801 (714) 750-8000	http://www.ialeia.org/2018_conference.php

Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	02/22 New unit opens in King Co. courthouse
SOURCE	http://komonews.com/news/local/new-king-county-unit-will-work-to-take-guns-from-potentially-dangerous-people
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - It's been two years in the making, but now Ellie's Place on the fourth floor of the King County Courthouse is officially open for business.</p> <p>Named after the official courthouse dog that passed away in 2015, Ellie's place will house three programs including one that is very timely, the Regional Domestic Violence Firearms Unit.</p> <p>The unit will consist of 12 people, including officers from the Seattle Police Department, deputies from the King County Sheriff's Office, victim advocates and deputy prosecutors that are trained in weapons retrieval.</p> <p>In 2016, voters passed a statewide initiative allowing anyone who has evidence that a person who owns guns may pose a threat to others, could have those weapons taken away temporarily by a court order.</p> <p>It's known as the Extreme Risk Protection Order or ERPO for short.</p> <p>"If an individual's made threats, if an individual has been volatile, destroyed property, if he's harmed animals, if he has a history of assaultive behavior, it's evidence a judge can use for an ERPO," said Anne Levinson, a retired Seattle Municipal Court Judge was instrumental in getting Ellie's Place up and running.</p> <p>Ellie's Place will also house the Children's Justice Center, where children and their families who've been victims of violence can come into a family-friendly setting for forensic interviews and legal assistance in getting an ERPO.</p> <p>"There's not another one like it in the entire country and we've already seen they are increasing the number of guns recovered from the most dangerous hands," said Renee Hopkins, CEO of the Alliance for Gun Responsibility, the group that backed the ERPO initiative.</p> <p>But, it took a \$1 million appropriation, shared between King County and the City of Seattle, and hundreds of volunteer hours to get Ellie's Place operational.</p> <p>Ellie's Place will also benefit smaller cities like Bothell in King County, that couldn't afford the resources of the firearms retrieval unit.</p> <p>Not all counties and cities in the state are wealthy enough to do the same.</p> <p>"These are great ideas, but they are unfunded mandates and they are being placed on departments with more unfunded mandates, it's just making it very problematic," said Bothell Police Chief Carol Cummings.</p> <p>No state monies are being set aside for ERPO's and their enforcement.</p> <p>It's up to each individual law enforcement agency to figure out how it's going to comply with these court orders, which can be very risky to execute.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Teacher dismissed earlier school threat
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/student-threat-of-garfield-high-shooting-dismissed-by-teacher/
GIST	<p>Earlier this month, a Garfield High School student told classmates he planned to pull the school's fire alarm and, once the students were outside, he would begin shooting them, according to Seattle police. The boy said he was joking, but he told another student he would be at the top of his "kill list."</p> <p>That student told a teacher, who "nervously laughed," and disregarded the information, police reported. The teacher never mentioned the alleged threat to other staff.</p> <p>It wasn't until the student reported a different threat, this time from an image on Snapchat, to another teacher that the school contacted police, who arrested the boy Feb. 16 for investigation of harassment.</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools leaders are concerned by reports that the initial tip at Garfield wasn't reported by the teacher as it should have been, district spokeswoman Kim Schmanke said in a statement.</p> <p>"Thankfully, students courageously brought this up again with school leadership," she said. "... We are so proud of the students for making sure school leaders received this tip directly."</p> <p>It's unclear what, if any, repercussions the teacher who failed to report the initial tip could face. She submitted a letter of resignation Friday, the same day the student was arrested. It also wasn't immediately clear whether her resignation had anything to do with the incident.</p> <p>The Garfield incident comes amid a focus on school safety in the wake of the Parkland, Florida, high-school shooting, where 17 people were killed by a gunman. The FBI said last week that it failed to act on an earlier tip about the alleged shooter, Nikolas Cruz, related to his threats and erratic behavior.</p> <p>Since the Parkland shooting, schools across the nation have reported dozens of incidents involving threats of violence on campus, CNN reported.</p> <p>After he allegedly made the initial comments, the accused Garfield student told classmates to add him on Snapchat, so they would have warning if he planned to shoot anyone, according to Seattle police. On Friday, two days after the deadly school shooting in Florida, he posted an image of a revolver with a student's face coming out of a barrel.</p> <p>The classmate once again reported the incident, this time with a screenshot of the Snapchat image, to other school staff. Police arrested the student for investigation of harassment.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Police drones w/disaster response plan
SOURCE	https://www.policeone.com/2018-guide-drones/articles/471474006-Why-drones-should-be-part-of-every-PDs-disaster-response-plan/
GIST	<p>Drones were a vital part of response and recovery in Daytona Beach following Hurricane Irma, the catastrophic hurricane that tore through Florida in September 2017. It was the first time the Daytona Beach Police Department (DBPD) utilized drones, also known as unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), in a disaster response.</p> <p>"They're a tool we can deploy when we need a bird's eye view of a critical situation," said Anthony Galante, a criminal justice faculty member at American Military University and assistant professor in the UAS program at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. He is an 11-year veteran officer at DBPD and was one of the primary officers involved in the development of the department's new UAS program.</p> <p>Galante explained that the UAS program is not designed to replace personnel support, but when manned police helicopters are kept in the neighboring state and carry a price tag of \$1.4 million, drones are an</p>

attractive alternative. DBPD’s drones were launched out of the trunk of a car at \$1,200 a piece; they were flying less than 24 hours after the hurricane passed.

DRONES PERFORM MANY TASKS DURING DISASTER RESPONSE

Instantaneous air support proved indispensable to the DBPD with their drones serving a dual-purpose:

- Streamlining the response time of first responders;
- Collecting information necessary for the recovery process.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the priority for first responders was to reach those who needed help. Downed power lines, unstable infrastructure and road blocks were both difficult and time-consuming to navigate from ground-level, but drones were able to increase response time significantly by identifying the quickest and safest routes.

“Our first responders have to be safe to help the community,” said Galante. “We had the ability to tell public works where to clear the roads so first responders didn’t have to find other ways around blocked bridges or hazards in the road.”

In addition, pictures and videos captured by the drones were essential when working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the recovery process. Following natural disasters like Hurricane Irma, FEMA manages the federal funding necessary for rebuilding what is destroyed. However, they require evidence of the state of infrastructure before a storm hits.

In anticipation of this, the DBPD deployed their drones in the days before Irma’s advance to collect images of the city’s critical infrastructure. The day after the hurricane passed, they repeated the process. With two sets of images that demonstrated comparable timeframes, FEMA was able to turn around the funds at a much faster rate.

“FEMA just needs proof so they can justify handing out the money,” said Galante. “Pre-hurricane assessment is key to letting people in the community get back to normal quicker.”

Galante hopes that the UAS program has set a precedent for future disaster response preparations, but as drones are a relatively new technology, there are still a number of challenges to iron out. The greatest concern is crowded airspace.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

As DBPD officers discovered, there may be a number of different organizations attempting to conduct post-disaster assessments from the air. Alongside the DBPD were drones from Florida Power and Light assessing their downed power lines, as well as low-flying National Guard and Black Hawk helicopters.

“It was a little bit hectic because everybody was out doing their own thing with no communication,” said Galante. “In the future, it all needs to be coordinated in one spot, preferably with the local Emergency Operations Center.”

He stressed that if departments plan on integrating drones into a public safety role, they must also involve the community in the process. That includes educating people on the dangers of flying their own drones illegally in a conflicted airspace. Maintaining transparency is also crucial to ensuring the public is at ease with exactly what a UAS program will and won’t entail.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Russia’s long disinformation experience
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/08179ea58dd7425c837c26c04f877f9d/Putin-is-heir-to-Russia's-long-disinformation-experience
GIST	MOSCOW (AP) — Vladimir Putin doesn’t tweet and he claims he doesn’t have a smartphone. At first

sight, the Russian president's reluctance to adopt the hyperconnected world's technology might seem at odds with the widespread belief that he signed off on a campaign to undermine the United States via social media.

But he has something likely more important than gadgets — long experience in the KGB and its post-Soviet successor.

From the czarist secret police to the present, Russian operatives have adroitly exploited humans' biases and their capacity to believe the unlikely. The elaborate campaign of bogus identities and inflammatory statements alleged in last week's U.S. indictment of 13 Russians used new technology and platforms, but drew on a century-old spirit.

An early and especially notorious example was the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a pamphlet that purported to be the minutes of a secret meeting of Jewish leaders to plot world domination. First appearing in 1903, its origins are open to debate, but many scholars suggest it was commissioned by Okhranka, the czarist secret police, and spread by them to argue against growing calls for modernizing Russia.

The hoax was spread abroad by Russians fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent civil war, and penetrated the United States — the newspaper of industrialist Henry Ford printed them. Although long recognized as fictional, the text remains foundational in anti-Semitism.

“Active measures” of Soviet disinformation could range from the elaborately clandestine to the almost childishly obvious. One of the latter was in 1984, when the national Olympic committees of many African and Asian countries received letters purportedly from the Ku Klux Klan saying their athletes would be attacked if they came to the Los Angeles Games.

The CIA noted that the letters contained errors that native English speakers were unlikely to make and misspelled the group as “Ku-Klux Klan.” In addition, the CIA said, no African or Asian countries allied with the Soviet Union were targeted. Nonetheless, Soviet media wrote about the letters, a common multiplier strategy.

In an elaborate initiative that stretched tendrils through several countries, the KGB went after a dead man, Pope Pius XII. The Kremlin, disturbed by the Vatican's firm anti-communist stance, aimed to discredit the church's moral authority by portraying Pius XII as a Nazi sympathizer.

According to Ion Pacepa, who headed the Romanian secret service before defecting, a top KGB general wrote the outline of a play attacking the pope and had compiled Vatican documents that had been spirited away by Romanian agents.

Eight decades after the Elders of Zion seeped into the public mind, one of the KGB's most effective disinformation campaigns began. The first move was modest: a letter by an allegedly knowledgeable U.S. scientist in 1983 to a little-read newspaper in India claiming AIDS was the result of Pentagon biological-weapon experiments.

The article attracted little attention — the paper was generally regarded as a Soviet mouthpiece — but resurfaced two years later when Russia's widely read Literaturnaya Gazeta used it as a “source” for a story contending AIDS was U.S.-created. Then a Russia-born East German doctor was brought into the process; he and colleagues produced a pamphlet detailing a theory about U.S. experiments on homosexual prisoners. Because the doctor had a good reputation and included verifiable facts in his writings, they gained considerable acceptance.

In 1992, Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the Russian foreign intelligence reportedly admitted that the disinformation, codenamed “Operation Infektion,” was initiated by the KGB.

Primakov himself became a victim in 1999, when he was seen as a credible electoral challenger to Putin, who was then prime minister and preparing to run for president for the first time. A Sunday night

commentary program by Sergei Dorenko, one of Russia's most aggressive and roguish broadcasters, featured grisly footage of someone undergoing a hip operation purportedly similar to one that Primakov was facing. His poll ratings soon plunged and he abandoned his bid.

The genesis of the segment is unclear, but perhaps significantly, it aired on a TV channel that was majority-owned by the state and effectively controlled by notorious oligarch Boris Berezovsky, who at the time was a Putin supporter.

Although the connections between Russian TV and intelligence agencies is speculative, state broadcasters in the Putin era are noted for exaggerated or outright false reports that apparently serve Russian interests.

Notable recent cases include the 2014 claim that Ukrainian armed forces had crucified a child in the city of Slavyansk after soldiers regained control of it from pro-Russia rebels. No evidence supporting the claim was found.

As tensions over a stream of asylum-seekers roiled Germany, Russia's state Channel One broadcast extensively about the supposed sexual assault of a teenage ethnic Russian girl by immigrants, suggesting that police were covering up the crime.

Perhaps more humorously, state channels have obediently gone along with Putin's "action man" appearances, in which he engages in manly feats that sometimes are later shown to have been staged — including his alleged discovery of ancient Greek pottery while scuba diving and shooting a tiger that purportedly was about to spring upon a group of cameramen.

Putin may not know how to use the tools, but he understands how their messages are received.

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HEADLINE	02/22 FBI vows: rebuild trust after botched tip
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/b58501fdb7a74c45b5ad892db46f1d25/FBI-says-it's-trying-to-rebuild-trust-after-botched-tip
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — A senior FBI official acknowledged Thursday that the nation's top law enforcement agency has lost public trust after the revelation that it failed to investigate a potentially life-saving tip before the Florida school shooting, a mistake he suggested was the result of bad judgment.</p> <p>David Bowdich, the FBI's acting deputy director, said he personally visited the FBI's West Virginia call center this week as part of a review of why a warning that the suspect, Nikolas Cruz, had access to guns and a "desire to kill" was not referred to agents in Florida for further investigation.</p> <p>"People make judgments out on the street every day. Every now and then those judgments may not have been the best judgments based on the information they had at the time," Bowdich said, adding that the bureau is still trying to determine exactly what went wrong.</p> <p>The comments, the FBI's most extensive so far regarding the missed tip, came as the bureau faced a fresh wave of politically charged criticism, this time from the National Rifle Association, whose leaders seized on the failure as a chance to discredit the FBI's broader work. The FBI is facing unprecedented criticism from President Donald Trump and other Republicans, who have accused it of partisan bias in its investigations of both Hillary Clinton and Trump ties to Russia.</p> <p>Trump himself raged at the FBI for what he perceived to be a fixation on the Russia investigation at the cost of failing to deter the attack. And Florida Republican Gov. Rick Scott, a Trump ally, called for FBI Director Christopher Wray to resign.</p> <p>Wayne LaPierre, NRA executive vice president and CEO, joined the chorus Thursday, telling a cheering crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference that "even the FBI is not free of its own corruption</p>

and its own unethical agents. ... what's hard to understand is why no one at the FBI stood up and called BS on its rogue leadership.”

Bowdich, who spoke at a news conference about the Justice Department's efforts to crack down on fraud targeting older people, would not address the criticism directly, but said the greatest threat to the FBI is losing public trust.

“We are doing everything we can to regain that from those that we lost it from but also to maintain it from the many that we still have that trust and confidence from,” he said.

As for the botched tip, Bowdich said, the FBI has protocols in place that apparently went unfollowed.

The call was one of about 765,000 the call center receives each year in addition to at least 750,000 internet tips, most of which do not yield investigative leads. The FBI was mining its “holdings” to make sure it didn't miss any tips similar to the one about Cruz.

“I'm not making excuses,” Bowdich said. “Because what happened was truly a tragedy.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Las Vegas airport lets people dump pot
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/4eac3fb5c2584e36b08442f4380bad2a/Forgot-about-that-joint?-Vegas-airport-lets-people-dump-pot
GIST	<p>LAS VEGAS (AP) — What happens in Vegas really can stay in Vegas.</p> <p>Tourists catching a flight out of Sin City can now dump their leftover legal marijuana in metal containers set up at the airport.</p> <p>The 10 green bins dubbed “amnesty boxes” prevent federal transportation agents from finding pot on passengers during security screenings. The drug is legal in Nevada but still banned by the U.S. government.</p> <p>The containers were installed last week following a county ban on marijuana possession and advertising at McCarran International Airport, aiming to keep it in compliance with federal law. They are bolted to the ground and designed so marijuana and prescription drugs can only be dropped in, not taken out.</p> <p>“The amnesty boxes are offered as a way to help people comply with this ordinance,” airport spokeswoman Christine Crews said in an email.</p> <p>Transportation Security Administration agents normally hand over marijuana-related cases to local law enforcement. Las Vegas police Officer Aden Ocampo-Gomez said no citations have been issued stemming from the airport's ban on marijuana possession and advertising, passed in September.</p> <p>The boxes are something travelers may have seen before — at least two airports in Colorado, where recreational marijuana is also legal, offer amnesty boxes.</p> <p>But they're likely to be a bigger draw at the Las Vegas airport, which saw 48.5 million passengers last year. Legal sales of recreational marijuana began in the state on July 1, and they have exceeded expectations.</p> <p>That's despite a ban on consuming it in public, including the Las Vegas Strip, hotels and casinos. Those 21 and older with a valid ID can buy up to an ounce of pot and use it only in private homes.</p> <p>The airport boxes display Clark County's ordinance and are clearly marked, with a black, bold font stating: “Disposal for Prescription and Recreational Drugs.” They contrast sharply with nearby trash cans.</p>

	<p>A contractor, not police, will initially empty the boxes multiple times per week and then adjust the schedule as usage patterns develop.</p> <p>Crews said the county aviation department plans to install 20 bins but could add more. In addition to the boxes placed Friday outside the airport, three were set up at the nearby car rental facility.</p> <p>The remaining seven bins will be installed at smaller area airports and other department-owned properties.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 'March for our lives' expect huge turnout
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/organizers-plan-for-500000-attendees-at-march-for-our-lives-rally-in-washington/2018/02/22/a9ff1992-17f9-11e8-8ac5-8416111ace0_story.html?hpid=hp_rhp-top-table-main_marchforourlives-340pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.e940503eb870
GIST	<p>Organizers of a rally against mass shootings planned for next month in Washington are expecting up to 500,000 attendees, according to an event permit application.</p> <p>The application filed this week with the National Park Service indicates the “March for Our Lives” will be March 24, although a location hasn’t been determined. The rally, organized by survivors of last week’s school massacre in Parkland, Fla., will have “sister marches” in other major cities, organizers said.</p> <p>The event will include “student speakers, musical performers, guest speakers and video tributes,” according to the permit application, with 14 Jumbotrons and 2,000 chairs.</p> <p>Mike Litterst, a spokesman for the National Park Service, said that organizers initially proposed holding the event on the Mall but are looking at moving the rally to another location in Washington after the request conflicted with a film crew’s permit.</p> <p>Litterst said a march away from federal property would require a permit from D.C. police. A D.C. police spokesman said organizers have applied for an event permit with the city, but details about that application weren’t available Thursday.</p> <p>The National Park Service permit application was filed by Deena Katz, identified by the Miami Herald as the co-executive producer of “Dancing With the Stars,” who was brought in by students to plan the event. Organizers have secured nearly \$2 million in donations via a GoFundMe page, along with donations from Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and George and Amal Clooney.</p> <p>“March For Our Lives is created by students across the country who will no longer risk their lives waiting for someone else to take action to stop the epidemic of mass school shootings that has become all too familiar,” the permit application read. “In the tragic wake of the seventeen lives brutally cut short in Florida, politicians are telling us that now is not the time to talk about guns. March For Our Lives believes the time is now.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 USCIS changes mission statement
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/22/us-citizenship-and-immigration-services-drops-nati/
GIST	The federal agency that oversees legal immigration to the U.S. has removed the words “nation of immigrants” from its mission statement, as the Trump administration moves to put Americans as the top priority.

The new statement reads: “U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation’s lawful immigration system, safeguarding its integrity and promise by efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits while protecting Americans, securing the homeland, and honoring our values.”

Francis Cissna, director of USCIS, said the new statement better reflects the agency’s duty to Americans.

“The American people, through Congress, have entrusted USCIS with the stewardship of our legal immigration programs that allow foreign nationals to visit, work, live, and seek refuge in the United States. We are also responsible for ensuring that those who naturalize are dedicated to this country, share our values, assimilate into our communities, and understand their responsibility to help preserve our freedom and liberty,” he said in a statement.

The change was first reported by the Intercept.

USCIS’s mission has always been complicated. During the Obama administration some agency leaders called immigrants their “customers,” drawing a rebuke from congressional Republicans who said their customers were American taxpayers and voters.

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HEADLINE	02/22 ICE subpoenas SCL customer info
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SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/2018/02/immigration-officials-subpoena-city-light-customer-info
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GIST	<p>In late January, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement approached Seattle City Light with an administrative subpoena, demanding information on a particular customer location, including phone numbers and information on related accounts. The request set off alarm bells among department officials who quickly took the matter to the Mayor’s Office.</p> <p>ICE’s letter was vague, said City Light spokesperson Scott Thomsen, and did not specify why the officials wanted the information. And so, on Valentine’s Day two weeks later, City Light’s legal counsel, Mary Doherty, declined to comply.</p> <p>“Seattle City Light is requesting additional information from you (or a member of your agency) before responding to the subpoena for subscriber information,” she wrote in response. “Accordingly, please provide a written confirmation. . . that the information sought by the subject subpoena is relevant or material to an ongoing investigation. . . with respect to any controlled substance; a suspicion that the subject of the subpoena is involved in a crime; and a reasonable belief that the records sought could help determine whether a suspected crime has occurred.”</p> <p>So far, ICE has not responded to the letter. In an email, a spokesperson declined to comment on an open investigation.</p> <p>According to Thomsen, City Light has occasionally received requests for information from law enforcement agencies and complied. But the law enforcement officials have always explained why they needed the information. Or, they have obtained a judicial subpoena. In the latter cases, “it’s already been through a legal process and a judge has said, ‘Yes, you’re entitled to this,’” Thomsen explained. “This is a different scenario than we’ve dealt with in the past.” ICE’s administrative subpoenas do not go through court.</p> <p>Days after the subpoena was delivered, Mayor Jenny Durkan issued new protocols for all departments if contacted by ICE. Durkan was elected, in part, on her promises to stand up to the Trump administration and to keep Seattle a so-called “sanctuary city.”</p> <p>But recent news that the Washington Department of Licensing was providing information to ICE has seeded fear that, even in places that purport to shield immigrants from ICE, there are significant gaps in the system.</p>
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	<p>The City Light subpoena further showed the need for a clear process was not just a hypothetical.</p> <p>Durkan’s directive kicks off a deep dive into “what information is collected and distributed [by the city], whether that information is necessary to collect, and the need for individual departmental protocols.”</p> <p>In the meantime, as that is being collected, Durkan has mandated that department heads must refer any request for “access to non-public areas in City buildings and venues” and “actions seeking data or information (written or oral) about City employees, residents or workers” to her office.</p> <p>When City Light received the request from ICE, the department did just that, meeting with Durkan’s legal counsel Ian Warner and others in the mayor’s office to help draft the response. Stephanie Formas, a spokesperson for Durkan, told Crosscut, “This is why the directive was created.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 WSP responds to hundreds of crashes
SOURCE	http://mynorthwest.com/907344/snow-ice-snarl-commute/
GIST	<p>Hundreds of crashes were reported in the hours during and after a storm that brought snow and ice to Western Washington.</p> <p>Trooper Heather Axtman says state patrol responded to 185 crashes in 24 hours in Snohomish, Skagit, Island, and Whatcom counties.</p> <p>Trooper Brooke Bova reported there were 110 crashes from 10 p.m. Wednesday to 10 a.m. Thursday in Pierce and Thurston counties.</p> <p>Trooper Rick Johnson reported the state patrol responded to 20 crashes in King County overnight. That didn’t include the Thursday morning commute.</p> <p>Trooper Will Finn reported the state patrol responded to 14 crashes in 12 hours — 5 p.m. to 5 a.m.</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Transportation said crews have been out all night treating roads.</p> <p>All of the weather stations in the Seattle area at 6 a.m. reported temperatures below freezing, according to the National Weather Service. Thursday’s high wasn’t expected to hit 40 degrees.</p> <p>Though much of Seattle received a trace to 1 inch of snow, the South Sound area got up to 4 inches of snow.</p> <p>According to the National Weather Service, Lakewood received at least 3 inches of snow. West Federal Way and Northwest Tacoma received between 2.5 inches and 3 inches of snow.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 South, Midwest flash flood evacuations
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2018/02/22/Hundreds-evacuate-deadly-flash-flooding-in-South-Midwest/7411519309471/?utm_source=fp&utm_campaign=ls&utm_medium=2
GIST	<p>Feb. 22 (UPI) -- Hundreds of people in the South and Midwest have evacuated their neighborhoods, due to snow-melt floodwaters that have so far led to the deaths of three people.</p> <p>The floods were brought on by heavy rains in some parts and fast-melting snow in others, forecasters said. Emergency responders are performing water rescues from Texas to Michigan, where roads are shut down, schools are being canceled and some homes are turning into islands.</p>

Lansing, Mich., declared a state of emergency Wednesday ahead of expected flooding. City officials there recommended that those living in flood zones to evacuate by early Thursday afternoon.

"While the rain has stopped, we are expecting significant flooding in certain areas of the city," said Lansing Mayor Andy Schor. "Declaring a State of Emergency allows us to have all hands-on deck to proactively provide the necessary information and resources to protect our residents."

A state of emergency was also declared in Clare County, Mich.

In Will County, Ill., a woman was found dead Tuesday after her car rolled into a rain-soaked ditch and became submerged. Wednesday, two died -- including an Oklahoma man whose vehicle was swept off a bridge in Adair County, and a 1-year-old toddler drowned in a back yard in Montalm County.

In Chicago, residents near the Illinois River were told to evacuate at least through Thursday.

In Dallas, residents near White Rock Creek needed rescue as water levels quickly rose late Tuesday -- and many roads were flooded in the Wylie area.

Rescue crews also were searching for occupants of a white car that was swept down the Trinity River Wednesday. The search was later suspended due to the river's current strength. Power outages in Texas totaled more than 21,000 as of Thursday morning.

In Arkansas, more than a dozen students were rescued Wednesday after their school bus ran off the road and became stuck in rising waters.

Rescuers in Indiana used boats to help residents escape flooding in Elkhart County. A tweet from the state's transportation department warned drivers to not go through barricades.

In the town of Wyoming, Mich., a train derailed due to a washed-out track, injuring two.

Forecasters say flash flooding will persist in many areas through the end of the week. Also, they said snow accumulations and ice will cover the central Plains, Midwest and Great Lakes on Thursday and Friday.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Current system gun background checks
SOURCE	http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/02/22/how-do-gun-background-checks-work-look-at-current-system.html
GIST	<p>In the wake of the mass shooting at a Florida high school earlier this month, President Trump is seemingly open to strengthening federal background checks for gun purchases.</p> <p>"While discussions are ongoing and revisions are being considered, the president is supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said Sunday. Sanders said the president has spoken to Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn, R-Texas, about a bill to "improve federal compliance with criminal background check legislation."</p> <p>Trump has said on social media he wants to "be strongly pushing comprehensive background checks with an emphasis on Mental Health." He's also said tackling background checks is an issue that needs both Republican and Democratic support.</p> <p>During an emotional listening session at the White House this week with parents and students impacted by school violence, Trump promised to be "very strong on background checks."</p> <p>Here's a look at how the federal background check system currently works, and what experts and activists</p>

have to say about it.

What happens when you want to purchase a gun?

In order to purchase a gun from a federal firearms licensed dealer (FFL), a consumer must provide identification and pass a federal background check using the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' [4473 form](#).

The first page of the document requires basic information, including the buyer's full name, address, sex, birthday and ethnicity. A Social Security number is encouraged, but not required.

The form also asks the buyer about criminal background, immigration status and mental health — information that could result in a consumer being denied. Those questions include:

- *Have you ever been convicted in any court of a felony, or any other crime for which the judge could have imprisoned you for more than one year, even if you received a shorter sentence including probation?*
- *Are you an unlawful user of, or addicted to, marijuana or any depressant, stimulant, narcotic drug or any other controlled substance?*
- *Have you been discharged from the Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions?*
- *Have you ever been convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence?*

Lying on the federal form is a felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, an ATF spokesperson confirmed to Fox News. That penalty is also listed at the top of the form.

Once the form is completed, the dealer will submit it to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) online or by phone. Then, almost immediately, the licensed seller will know how to continue with the sale:

Proceed: If NICS indicates the seller can proceed, then the sale can continue.

Canceled or Denied: Should NICS mark the form as “canceled” or “denied,” the seller cannot legally sell the firearm to the buyer. Michael Smith, the vice president of marketing and media for [Upstate Armory Group](#), a firearm dealer in Simpsonville, S.C., told Fox News he generally provides the customer with contact information for a local lawyer who handles restoration of firearm rights in case the failed background check is erroneous. There have been times police have arrived at the gun shop to arrest the customer who legally cannot purchase a gun, Smith said.

Delayed: If the background check elicits a “delayed” response from NICS, the seller cannot complete the transaction for at least three business days. Unless a specific “denied” designation is issued, the seller will be able to complete the transaction with the customer after that period elapses, under federal law. Even before a 4473 form is filled out, Robbie Wheaton, vice president of the [Wheaton Arms Inc.](#) gun shop in Piedmont, S.C., said he takes note of the customer. If a customer seems to be intoxicated or “shady” – talking, for instance, about a cheating spouse – dealers don't have to sell that person a gun.

“As a federal firearms licensee, we have the right to be able to refuse the transfer of firearms to someone,” Wheaton told Fox News. “A shop has a final right to say ‘no’ based on a person's behavior whether they will sell a firearm to them or not.”

Smith praised the background check system, as it can flag other discrepancies for sellers, such as an age issue.

South Carolina law, for example, prohibits anyone under the age of 18 from purchasing a long gun (such as an AR-15) and anyone under 21 from buying a pistol, handgun or other firearm, he said. The background check can prevent sellers, particularly at hectic gun shows, from accidentally selling a firearm to someone who isn't of age, Smith said.

Why do I have to complete the background check?

Thanks to the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, the FBI [created the NICS](#) in 1998. The system is

<p>Return to Top</p>	<p>supposed to instantaneously let a firearms dealer know whether a buyer is legally allowed to purchase the gun.</p> <p>According to the FBI, more than 230 million checks have been made by cashiers prior to a purchase and more than 1.3 million denials have been issued since the system was put in place.</p> <p>Is this process the same in every state?</p> <p>No.</p> <p>In South Carolina, for example, consumers who already have a concealed weapons permit do not need to go through a background check in order to purchase a firearm in the state, multiple dealers in the Palmetto State told Fox News.</p> <p>Also, state laws may be superseded by federal law. The 4473 form asks consumers about marijuana use. Those who use the drug, in states where recreational or medicinal use is legal, will be denied a firearm, Wheaton said.</p> <p>In Hawaii, after the first legal medicinal marijuana dispensary opened in the state in 2017, local law enforcement agencies asked users who are also gun owners to turn in their firearms within 30 days, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Cinemark theaters ban big bags
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cinemark-bans-big-bags-in-its-movie-theaters-citing-security-concerns/
GIST	<p>Cinemark, the nation's third-largest movie theater chain says starting Thursday, filmgoers need to leave large bags behind.</p> <p>The company cited the safety and security of its customers and employees in announcing the policy, which exempts medical and diaper bags, on its website. "Any bags or packages measuring larger than 12" x 12" x 6" will not be permitted into the theater," the company said, adding that it retains the right to inspect customers' bags.</p> <p>Word of the policy prompted an outcry among some consumers, who clearly viewed the ban as an effort to curb customers from bringing their own popcorn and candy into theaters.</p> <p>Cinemark operates 533 theaters across the United States and in Latin America, according to its website.</p> <p>The company's ban comes amid ongoing mass shootings in the United States, which include one in July 2012 in which 12 people were killed and 17 injured at a Cinemark-owned movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. Victims of that shooting unsuccessfully sued the theater chain, arguing the company should have done more security-wise to prevent the attack.</p> <p>After the lawsuit, attorneys for Cinemark asked for the victims to pay nearly \$700,000 in legal fees. The company's lawyers told a judge they needed the money to cover the costs of preserving evidence, retrieving and copying records, travel and other expenses, according to court documents. The company later dropped that request after victims agreed not to appeal the verdict, the Denver Post reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Cheers, boos, and tense exchanges
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/22/us/florida-shooting-day-of-gun-confrontation/index.html
GIST	Tallahassee, Florida (CNN)From the nation's capital to the hallways of the Florida capital, parents and students confronted lawmakers Wednesday to demand gun reform after a massacre at a high school in

Parkland.

Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where a gunman killed 17 people last week, are leading calls to demand a change in gun laws.

In Washington, those affected by mass shootings shared stories of loss and heartbreak during a meeting with President Donald Trump. Hundreds of miles away, at a town hall hosted by CNN in Florida, student survivors and parents who lost their children last week defiantly questioned lawmakers and a spokeswoman for the National Rifle Association.

The words of Stoneman Douglas students who survived the shooting echoed through the hallways of the state Capitol in Tallahassee, where they called for a ban on weapons like the one used to kill their friends and teachers.

As the debate over gun reform continues, Trump plans to meet with state and local officials Thursday to discuss school safety.

At the town hall in Sunrise, students and parents were angry and frustrated, and they wanted answers. They questioned the NRA's spokeswoman, and Sens. Marco Rubio, Bill Nelson and Rep. Ted Deutch during the event Wednesday night.

"Why do we have to speak out at the (state) Capitol? Why do we have to march on Washington, just to save innocent lives?" senior Ryan Deitsch asked, his voice rising with each question.

Fred Guttenberg, whose daughter, Jaime, was killed last week, had harsh words for Rubio, a Republican from Florida.

"Sen. Rubio, I want to like you. Here's the problem. ... Your comments this week and those of our President have been pathetically weak," he said to cheers.

Students and parents put Rubio in the hot seat, asking him the majority of the questions.

Cameron Kasky, a junior who survived the massacre at Stoneman Douglas High School, asked Rubio to turn down campaign contributions from the NRA.

Rubio said he supports the Second Amendment, but he also stood for school safety. He did not say whether he would turn down an NRA contribution.

NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch was asked what the group was doing to prevent more school shootings. She said states should hand over information on people who shouldn't own guns to a national background check system.

"I don't believe this insane monster should have ever been able to obtain a firearm," Loesch said. Loesch said the system to buy firearms is flawed as some in the crowd yelled, "You're a murderer."

Avery Anger, 14, hid in a closet during the shooting. She said she's unsure whether the town hall answered her questions.

"It was more of a debate than a discussion," she said. She entered the town hall with one question -- "is it going to be safe for me to go back to school?"

"I don't feel like they answered the question," she said.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School parent Meredith Barry said she was dissatisfied with the "grandstanding" from lawmakers.

"No one answered 'yes' or 'no' to anything and that's all these students want to know -- will it be safe for them to go back to school?" she said.

In Washington, survivors and those affected by mass shootings gathered to talk to Trump at the White House.

Andrew Pollack, whose daughter was one of the 17 people killed in the Parkland shooting, said it's time for action.

"Never, ever will I see my kid. I want it to sink in. It's eternity. My beautiful daughter, I'm never going to see again," Pollack said.

"How many schools, how many children have to get shot? It stops here with this administration and me. I'm not going to sleep until it is fixed. And Mr. President, we'll fix it."

Trump suggested that part of the solution to preventing school shootings is having armed, trained teachers on campus.

None of the politicians at the town hall agreed with him.

"I think it is a terrible idea," said Nelson, a Democrat.

The event at the White House included survivors from Stoneman Douglas, and families affected by the shootings at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School.

In Tallahassee, Stoneman Douglas students who survived the shooting gathered to demand gun reform. They warned politicians they'll vote out lawmakers who vote against the measure.

"We're angry, we're pissed, we're ready for action," said Spencer Blum, who survived the school shooting last week. "We want change, we're gonna get change."

Stoneman Douglas students said they left the state Capitol feeling hopeful and encouraged by the lawmakers and activists who addressed them. But they were disappointed by the lack of commitment.

"You need to change something before your daughters are the victims," sophomore Bailey Feuerman told Gov. Rick Scott.

Stoneman Douglas student Delaney Tarr said she wants action, not just words.

"We've had enough thoughts and prayers," she said.

As students rallied outside the Capitol, thousands of teens from across the state walked out in support. In a sign of solidarity nationwide, students in Washington, Phoenix, Minneapolis, Colorado and Illinois walked out of class to demand gun reform as well.

It's not yet clear what effect Wednesday will have on legislation. The teens suffered a blow Tuesday, when state lawmakers voted 71-36 against a measure to consider a ban on semiautomatic weapons.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Xanax, Valium next drug crisis?
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2018/02/22/Xanax-Valium-looking-like-Americas-next-drug-crisis/4661519355404/?utm_source=fp&utm_campaign=ts_hn&utm_medium=13
GIST	THURSDAY, Feb. 22, 2018 -- America is well aware of its opioid epidemic, but there's a hidden crisis brewing with prescription sedatives such as Xanax and Valium, a new review warns.

Known as benzodiazepines, overdose deaths involving these medications have increased exponentially over the past decade, in lockstep with a steady growth in prescriptions for the drugs, the review authors found.

Use of these drugs has become too casual in modern society, said review author Dr. Anna Lembke. She's an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences with the Stanford University School of Medicine.

"These are highly addictive and potentially lethal drugs, and many people don't know that," Lembke said. "Sadly, most physicians are also unaware of this and blithely prescribe them without educating their patients about the risk of addiction."

Benzodiazepines are prescribed to treat a variety of conditions, including anxiety, insomnia and seizures.

Prescriptions for benzodiazepines increased by 67 percent between 1996 and 2013, from 8.1 million to 13.5 million. The quantities of drugs obtained with these prescriptions more than tripled during that same period, the researchers said.

As a result, more people are becoming addicted to benzodiazepines and falling victim to overdose. Overdoses involving the drugs multiplied sevenfold between 1999 and 2015, increasing from 1,135 to 8,791 deaths.

"Just like with opioids, people overestimate the benefits and underestimate the risks of benzodiazepines," Lembke said. "They are effective for a panic attack or severe insomnia, but when taken daily long-term, people develop tolerance and dependence. They stop working and they can even make anxiety and insomnia worse."

Many overdose deaths involve people taking a benzodiazepine with another substance, such as opioids or alcohol, the review authors added.

Despite this, rates of prescribing benzodiazepine with opioids has nearly doubled, increasing from 9 percent in 2001 to 17 percent in 2013, the study found.

The review was published Feb. 22 in the New England Journal of Medicine.

One expert said the trend is a recipe for trouble.

"It is important to acknowledge the risks involved in the overuse/misuse of benzodiazepines, especially when combined with other medications or alcohol," said Bruce Goldman. He is director of substance abuse services at Zucker Hillside Hospital, in Glen Oaks, N.Y.

"While we have learned that there are more effective treatments for chronic anxiety than the long-term reliance on benzodiazepines, many people have now been dependent upon them for years," Goldman said.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Oregon bans guns for domestic abusers
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2018/02/23/Oregon-bans-firearms-for-domestic-abusers/2311519371692/?utm_source=fp&utm_campaign=ts_tn_us&utm_medium=1
GIST	Feb. 23 (UPI) -- Oregon's legislature on Thursday passed a bill to close a loophole that allowed some people convicted of stalking or domestic abuse from owning firearms. House Bill 4145 closes what was sometimes referred to as the "boyfriend loophole" or the "intimate partner loophole." Current law in Oregon allows people convicted of stalking or domestic abuse to buy

	<p>firearms if they were never married to or lived with their victim. This bill expands the firearms ban to all people convicted of the two crimes.</p> <p>The bill passed the state senate 16-13 with one Democrat and all Republicans voting against it, the Oregonian reported.</p> <p>Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said she will sign the bill into law.</p> <p>"Closing the 'Intimate Partner Loophole' is an important step to keep Oregonians safer, and to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Passing this bill was a priority for me this session, but we know there's more that must be done," Brown said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 China paper: US should learn from China
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-guns/chinese-paper-says-u-s-should-learn-from-china-restrict-guns-protect-rights-idUSKCN1G703W
GIST	<p>SHANGHAI (Reuters) - The United States should learn from China and “genuinely” protect human rights by restricting gun ownership, an editorial in a widely read state-run Chinese newspaper said on Friday.</p> <p>The editorial in the Global Times newspaper was published after a massacre at a high school in Florida last week, in which 17 students and staff were killed, reignited a long-running debate about gun control in the United States.</p> <p>“Washington has been pointing an accusing finger at other countries over human rights ... However, more Americans have been killed by gunfire in the country than American soldiers being killed in all U.S. wars,” the Global Times said.</p> <p>“Gun ownership in China is strictly regulated, which helps reduce gun-related crimes and deaths. The U.S. should learn from China and genuinely protect human rights,” it said.</p> <p>Human rights have long been a source of tension between the world’s two largest economies, especially since 1989, when the United States imposed sanctions on China after a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators around Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.</p> <p>China rejects criticism of its rights record, pointing to its success at helping millions escape poverty, and regularly attempts to deflect the issue by calling attention to its critics’ own problems.</p> <p>However, the ruling Communist Party brooks no political dissent and President Xi Jinping’s administration has seen a sweeping crackdown on rights lawyers and activists.</p> <p>The Global Times, a hawkish news outlet run by the ruling Communist Party’s top propaganda organ, the People’s Daily, called it “inhuman” to turn a blind eye to gun violence after the shooting at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.</p> <p>Gun violence is rare in China because private gun ownership is restricted.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Drugs, alcohol, suicide killing more
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/drugs-alcohol-suicide-killing-more-americans-ever-n850266
GIST	<p>“Despair deaths” from drugs, alcohol and suicide have reached new peaks in the U.S. and are not just killing whites, but spiking in communities of color, as well, according to a new report released Thursday.</p>

More than 142,000 Americans died from drug or alcohol overdoses and from suicide in 2016, an 11 percent increase over 2015, the report from the Trust for America's Health and the Well Being Trust finds.

"These 142,000 'despair deaths' in 2016 add to the more than one million Americans who died from drugs, alcohol or suicide in the previous decade," the report reads.

While the increased deaths from opioid overdoses and suicide are well documented, the team that wrote the report say their analysis shows some troubling differences.

"We had been seeing increases in these trends among these individuals who are dying from drugs, alcohol and suicide," said Ben Miller, a clinical psychologist at the Well Being Trust.

"But between 2015 and 2016 the racial differences popped out. We saw literally a 39 percent increase in deaths of people of color due to drug overdose," added Miller, formerly of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

The report found that suicide rates went up 10 percent among blacks from 2015 to 2016 and rose 9 percent among Latinos.

"While drug overdoses were still highest among whites in 2016, there were disproportionately large increases in drug deaths among racial/ethnic minority groups, particularly among black Americans," the report reads.

"In the previous decade, blacks had relatively low drug overdose rates — averaging 35 percent lower than whites between 2006 and 2015. However, between 2015 and 2016, blacks experienced an alarming increase — of 39 percent — in drug-related deaths."

The opioid abuse epidemic is so bad that it has hit overall U.S. life expectancy. Life expectancy falls when people start dying at younger ages, and that's what's happening in the U.S. with opioid overdoses.

The National Center for Health Statistics has found that 63,600 people died of drug overdoses in 2016, and that in turn drove down overall U.S. life expectancy for the second year in a row.

Suicide rates have also soared. Sometimes, the causes are clear: just this week Puerto Rico health authorities reported that at least 103 people have committed suicide in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which devastated the island territory on Sept. 20.

The trends are related, Miller said.

"When we talk about deaths from alcohol, drugs and suicide, we recognize that there is a relationship there — that we can't just look at the issue of suicide in isolation without tackling drugs and alcohol because the data show that they are related," he said.

And now the epidemic has engulfed Latinos and other minorities across the U.S., the new report finds.

"Latinos and Asian Americans also historically have had relatively low rates of opioid and synthetic opioid drug overdoses and saw disproportionately large increases between 2015 and 2016," it reads.

"Latinos saw opioid death rates increase 35 percent and synthetic opioids death rates increase 183 percent between 2015 and 2016. Asians saw opioid deaths rates increase 41 percent and synthetic opioids death rates increase 140 percent between 2015 and 2016."

If deaths continue to increase at the same rate, more than 2 million people could be dying from drug overdoses, suicide and alcohol abuse over the next decade, the report projects.

“The substantial rise in deaths in 2016 puts the country past the ‘worst case scenario’ projection trajectory,” it says. “This would mean more than 287,700 individuals could die from these three causes in the year 2025, double the current number who died in 2016.”

Miller says the country needs a comprehensive approach to treating pain — both physical pain and mental distress.

“People will continue to die until we come up with a systematic approach to take care of them,” he said.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Syria civil war raging 7 years
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/mideast/syria-s-civil-war-has-been-raging-7-years-what-n849851
GIST	<p>“Beyond imagination.”</p> <p>That is how the U.N. has described the onslaught by forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on the rebel enclave of eastern Ghouta, which is located in a so-called "de-escalation zone."</p> <p>The intensifying bombing campaign around 10 miles from the country’s capital has killed and wounded hundreds in just a few days.</p> <p>Idlib, a city in the northwest of the country where many people from Aleppo were relocated to after a rebel-held area there fell in Dec. 2016, is also bracing for a major government attack.</p> <p>It has been almost seven years since pro-democracy protests exploded into a full-fledged civil war in Syria, and the conflict has changed direction many times since then.</p> <p>NBC News takes a look at what is driving a war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced millions into exile.</p> <p>What is happening in eastern Ghouta?</p> <p>The intensity of bombing in eastern Ghouta — the Associated Press reported Tuesday that airstrikes were coming at a rate of one per minute — has horrified observers.</p> <p>The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor estimates that more than 250 have been killed in the Russia-backed assault since Sunday night.</p> <p>Some 400,000 men, women and children are estimated to remain in the last rebel stronghold close to Damascus, Assad’s seat of power. Thousands of hard-line Islamist fighters are living among the civilians.</p> <p>“The airstrikes, the rockets, the artillery and the bombing haven't stopped in three days,” said one doctor in the enclave who asked to be identified only by his first name, Sakher.</p> <p>“We are lacking everything — no medicine, medical equipment and not enough doctors," the orthopedic surgeon told NBC News in a telephone interview Wednesday. "But there is also not enough food. Those who survive the bombing will not survive for a long time because lack of food.”</p> <p>Eastern Ghouta was among the first communities to rise up against the government in 2011. It was also the site of a sarin gas attack that killed some 1,500 people on August 21, 2013, which was widely believed to have been ordered by the Assad regime.</p> <p>More recently, homes, schools and hospitals have been driven underground in an attempt to escape attacks in the area.</p> <p>While government strikes have intensified since Sunday, the area has been under siege since 2013.</p>

In recent days, pro-Assad forces have been seen massing close to the rebellious Damascus suburb, suggesting that a full onslaught is imminent.

Who is Bashar al-Assad?

The second son of longtime dictator President Hafez al-Assad was not originally destined to become Syria's strongman, but the death of older brother Basil in a car accident in 1994 put him in line to replace his father.

When the seemingly mild-mannered ophthalmologist came to power in June 2000, he and his glamorous U.K.-born wife Asma were welcomed in the West as probable reformers in a region beset by sclerotic dictatorships.

Assad, a member of the minority Shiite-linked Alawite sect, originally delivered, promising economic and political reforms. He briefly tolerated the country's first independent newspaper in decades.

This flirtation with reform soon ended, and by the time the Arab Spring swept the region in 2011 Assad viciously put down the largely Sunni-Muslim opposition movement.

Thousands have been detained by the government's notorious security agencies, with thousands tortured and missing, according to rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, which has conducted meticulous investigations into the widespread abuses.

Which militant groups are Assad fighting?

The vast majority of those killed since the start of the conflict have died at the hands of Assad's military, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria, a network of opposition activists.

But "terrorists" are the purported target of the government's offensives.

The Free Syrian Army, founded by former members of the Syrian military, was once considered the main opposition group. But the FSA's power and standing has diminished dramatically since it first emerged as an apparently moderate rebel group.

According to a recent report by U.N. experts, Syria's powerful Nusra Front is one of the "strongest and largest al-Qaeda affiliates" in the world and is a dominant force in Syria's Hay'at Tahrir al Sham coalition. The group, known as HTS, boasts between 7,000 and 11,000 fighters.

HTS is entrenched in Idlib province in the northeast of the country. The Army of Islam group is based in Douma in eastern Ghouta, as are conservative Ahrar al-Sham and Faylaq al-Rahman groups. From bases close to the Damascus, the groups are able to shell the capital, killing and wounding civilians.

Who else is involved in this conflict?

The complex, multi-front war has involved supporters of the regime, like Russia, Iran and Tehran-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah, and regional powers seeking to unseat Assad, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey.

The United States and other Western powers opposed to Assad have also gotten involved in the fight to defeat Islamic State extremists. The group was last year ousted from most of the parts of the country they had controlled.

Israel, Syria's southern neighbor, has also become involved, bombing Hezbollah supply lines as well as Syrian and Iranian targets.

"With the fight against ISIS in eastern Syria all but over, the regime could turn its attention and manpower to other areas outside its control," according to the International Crisis Group, an international organization aimed at preventing and resolving deadly conflict.

Is the regime using banned weapons?

Rescue workers, aid groups and the U.S. have accused Assad's forces of using banned agents against civilians.

The deadliest of these attacks was when sarin killed some 1,500 people in eastern Ghouta in 2013. The Assad regime denies it uses chemical weapons.

Syrian forces are also accused of dropping thousands of “barrel bombs” on civilian populations.

These crudely made weapons — large containers that can be packed with gasoline, nails and chunks of steel — are typically thrown out of helicopters and are a relatively cheap form of aerial warfare. They are also indiscriminate.

What about Idlib?

Idlib is “a humanitarian catastrophe waiting to happen,” according to the International Crisis Group.

Syrian and Russian aircraft have been bombing towns in the area, home to an estimated 2 million including opposition supporters, hardened jihadis and rebels from Aleppo's eastern neighborhoods that fell to the government in December 2016. Fighters and civilians were allowed to leave the city under a deal with the government.

Now Russian-backed troops are advancing on the enclave. The largest remaining rebel stronghold is controlled by the al Qaeda-linked HTS alliance, which Russia, Iran and the West have vowed to defeat.

Residents have "reason to fear falling under regime control again," according to Crisis Group. "Prior experience, such as the Aleppo siege in 2016 — suggest that such an attack will be accompanied by a ferocious bombing campaign."

The region is close to the border with Turkey and is of intense interest to that country, which has already taken in millions of Syrian refugees and fears more fighting will trigger another exodus.

Turkey is also focused on U.S.-backed YPG Kurdish forces, who are allies to separatist PKK fighters and viewed as a security threat, in Afrin.

And Afrin?

In Afrin and elsewhere in Syria, Kurdish YPG fighters and the government have largely avoided direct confrontation, although they are not strictly allies.

In recent days, however, pro-government fighters have entered Afrin, which is 50 miles north of Idlib, to help the Kurds fight approaching Turkish soldiers.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday promised that the “besieging of the Afrin city center will start rapidly in the coming days.”

That means the complex Syrian war just became even messier.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Shooting survivors endure new assault
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/shooting-survivors-endure-assault-online-trolls-53284098?cid=clicksource_79_2_hero_headlines_bsq_hed
GIST	One student was teased about being a "brown, bald lesbian." Another was the target of conspiracy theorists who claimed he was really an actor. When a group of teens posed for a photo, they were accused of lapping up attention from the news cameras and "partying like rock stars."

Just days after watching their classmates die, survivors of the Florida school shooting came under a different kind of assault, this time from online trolls who threatened the students as they seek tighter gun laws.

In the face of such attacks, the students have been undeterred, confronting the trolls head-on in television interviews and on social media.

"They see us as a threat. And honestly, that's kind of entertaining to me. And I love it because it means what we are doing is working. We are changing the world," student David Hogg told MSNBC on Wednesday at a rally outside the Florida Capitol.

Some conservatives have suggested that the teens are being used as political pawns, but the most vicious of the trolls go well beyond that, into personal attacks and baseless accusations.

Hogg was the subject of perhaps the most outlandish conspiracy to surface since the Feb. 14 attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High that killed 17 people. He was accused of being an actor who was never at the school.

The theory gained momentum in part because Hogg was interviewed by a news reporter last year while on vacation in California. During the trip, he was a witness to a friend's confrontation with a lifeguard. President Donald Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., liked a tweet linking to a story suggesting Hogg was not a survivor of the attack.

But Hogg is no actor. He recorded a harrowing video of terrified students huddled in a darkened room on the day of the shooting. His classmates responded to the trolls with biting sarcasm.

Hogg "is smart, funny, and diligent, but my favorite thing about him is undoubtedly that he's actually a 26-year-old felon from California," tweeted classmate Cameron Kasky. Another troll had cast Hogg as a 26-year-old man who was arrested for drugs in South Carolina.

Others latched on to Hogg's comment that his dad previously worked for the FBI as a means to discredit him. The FBI has acknowledged that agents received a tip about suspect Nikolas Cruz but failed to investigate it.

The students who endured trolling also include Emma Gonzalez, whose short haircut and skin color drew derision, and Kasky, who complained on Twitter about receiving graphic death threats on Facebook.

Critics also assailed the students for the photos that were taken with a CBS reporter. Trolls compared the images to promotional portraits and said the smiling teens were "laughing uproariously."

Hoax claims and online vitriol have long plagued the survivors of mass shootings and families of the dead. But many of the Stoneman Douglas students faced a new layer of scrutiny after they pivoted from survivors to gun-control activists.

University of Maryland professor Danielle Citron, who studies online harassment, said such internet mobs are meant "to silence and to intimidate" and to "shut down a social movement in its tracks." But Citron said the younger generation, who are steeped in social media, can be resilient.

These young people have grown up with social media and are familiar with its vitriol, as well as its power.

"My Twitter following has tripled over the past day," Hogg told MSNBC. "I think that's in part because of these trolls. So for that, I'm honestly kind of thankful."

University of Illinois at Chicago communications professor Steve Jones said conventional advice is not to engage with trolls. But he said he would not presume to tell the students what to do, especially after what

they witnessed.

"They've been through one of the most horrible things imaginable and whatever they're doing in response to it is itself an act of bravery," said Jones, who studies online behavior.

Piero Guerra, a 16-year-old junior, who considered himself a gun-rights supporter before the shooting, said he can understand why some people are angry with the students' efforts.

"But my main goal is that they see our perspective as well," Guerra said. "It's kind of hard to tell people to be respectful on the internet because it's never going to happen."

YouTube removed a trending conspiracy video titled "David Hogg Can't Remember His Lines," which showed Hogg stopping to collect his thoughts and repeating answers to questions about the shooting, but many similar videos are still available.

YouTube said in a statement that hoax videos targeting families involved in major tragedies violate its harassment policy and will be removed.

Hogg's mom, Rebecca Boldrick, said the online harassment has scared her son, but also made him more determined. Her 14-year-old daughter also survived the shooting.

"I've always said to (my children), 'You have to be the change you want to see in the world,'" she said.

Lenny Pozner, whose 6-year-old son died in the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre, has sought to debunk conspiracy theories claiming mass shootings were staged by the government as part of an anti-gun agenda. He is still harassed online, more than five years later.

Pozner said he's now advocating for laws that would treat victims of mass-casualty events as a protected class "so that this kind of targeting would be considered hate speech and a crime."

"But I'm glad people are not still deluding themselves with saying, 'Just ignore the trolls and they'll go away.' Because they have not gone away," Pozner said. "The trolls just get bigger and faster."

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HEADLINE	02/22 World leaders urge Syria ceasefire
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/german-leader-calls-iran-russia-end-syria-violence-53268954?
GIST	<p>World leaders called Thursday for an urgent cease-fire in Syria as government forces pounded the opposition-controlled eastern suburbs of the capital in a crushing campaign that has left hundreds of people dead in recent days.</p> <p>The U.N. Security Council heard a briefing from U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock on what he called "the humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes" in the rebel-held suburbs known as eastern Ghouta.</p> <p>Sweden and Kuwait were seeking a vote on a resolution ordering a 30-day cease-fire to allow relief agencies to deliver aid and evacuate the critically sick and wounded from besieged areas to receive medical care.</p> <p>But Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, who called Thursday's meeting, put forward last-minute amendments, saying the proposed resolution was "simply unrealistic."</p> <p>Russia's amendments would rule out an immediate cease-fire and instead demand that all parties "stop hostilities as soon as possible," and "work for an immediate and unconditional de-escalation of violence"</p>

	and 30-day "humanitarian pause."
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HEADLINE	02/23 Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/af-pak-officials-inaugurate-long-awaited-gas-pipeline-53297112?
GIST	<p>Afghanistan's president and Pakistan's prime minister launched a 1,814 kilometer (1,130 mile) gas pipeline on Friday that will feed Turkmenistan gas to Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan and eventually to India.</p> <p>The first part of the inauguration took place in Turkmenistan, on the border with Afghanistan's western province of Herat, followed by a ceremony in Afghanistan. The launch was shown live on Afghan television.</p> <p>Heavy security will guard the pipeline construction through war-weary Afghanistan, said Jelani Farhad, spokesman for the Herat provincial governor's office.</p> <p>"It's a golden day for Afghanistan today," Farhad said. "It will help our economy and create thousands of jobs."</p> <p>The long awaited pipeline project, which is known by the acronym TAPI, is expected to take two years to complete, but it has been several years in the planning.</p> <p>The United States has advocated the pipeline as a source of much needed gas to all three countries over an alternative pipeline, which is also being negotiated, bringing gas from Iran through Pakistan and into India.</p> <p>The TAPI pipeline is a rare show of cooperation between often hostile neighbors Pakistan and India as well as the often contentious neighbors Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi attended the ceremonies along with a representative of the Indian government.</p> <p>Security has been a leading concern leading up to the inauguration but Farhad said Afghanistan has devised a detailed security plan to protect the pipeline construction as well as the pipeline.</p> <p>Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told the AP in a telephone interview that the religious movement was ready to guarantee the pipeline's security. "We are ready to protect TAPI. It is good and important and vital for the economy of Afghanistan," he said, noting the pipeline had been under consideration during the Taliban rule that ended in 2001.</p> <p>Afghan President Ashraf Ghani told the gathering that the pipeline is a message to future generations.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Group: Turkey strikes not avoiding civilians
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rights-group-turkey-avoiding-civilians-syria-strikes-53297707?
GIST	<p>Human Rights Watch is criticizing the way Turkey is conducting its offensive in northern Syria, saying it has failed to take necessary precautions to avoid civilian casualties.</p> <p>The New York-based group cites three attacks in the Afrin region in late January that it says killed a total of 26 civilians, including 17 children.</p> <p>In a statement Friday, it called on Turkey to thoroughly investigate these strikes and make the findings public.</p>

Turkey launched an air and ground offensive in the Kurdish-controlled region on Jan. 20, saying it aims to clear Afrin of Syrian Kurdish militia which Turkey considers to be an offshoot of its own outlawed Kurdish rebels fighting within Turkey.

According to several estimates around 120 civilians have been killed so far in the offensive. Turkey denies hitting civilians.

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HEADLINE 02/23 Myanmar bulldozes Rohingya villages

SOURCE http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/myanmar-bulldozes-left-rohingya-muslim-villages-53295583?cid=clicksource_76_2_hero_headlines_headlines_hed

GIST First, their villages were burned to the ground. Now, Myanmar's government is using bulldozers to literally erase them from the earth — in a vast operation rights groups say is destroying crucial evidence of mass atrocities against the nation's ethnic Rohingya Muslim minority.

Satellite images of Myanmar's troubled Rakhine state, released to The Associated Press by Colorado-based DigitalGlobe on Friday, show that dozens of empty villages and hamlets have been completely leveled by authorities in recent weeks — far more than previously reported. The villages were all set ablaze in the wake of violence last August, when a brutal clearance operation by security forces drove hundreds of thousands of Rohingya into exile in Bangladesh.

While Myanmar's government claims it's simply trying to rebuild a devastated region, the operation has raised deep concern among human rights advocates, who say the government is destroying what amounts to scores of crime scenes before any credible investigation takes place. The operation has also horrified the Rohingya, who believe the government is intentionally eviscerating the dwindling remnants of their culture to make it nearly impossible for them to return.

One displaced Rohingya woman, whose village was among those razed, said she recently visited her former home in Myin Hlut and was shocked by what she saw. Most houses had been torched last year, but now, "everything is gone, not even the trees are left," the woman, named Zubairia, told AP by telephone. "They just bulldozed everything ... I could hardly recognize it."

The 18-year-old said other homes in the same area that had been abandoned but not damaged were also flattened. "All the memories that I had there are gone," she said. "They've been erased."

Myanmar's armed forces are accused not just of burning Muslim villages with the help of Buddhist mobs, but of carrying out massacres, rapes and widespread looting. The latest crisis in Rakhine state began in August after Rohingya insurgents launched a series of unprecedented attacks on security posts.

Aerial photographs of leveled villages in northern Rakhine State were first made public Feb. 9 when the European Union's ambassador to Myanmar, Kristian Schmidt, posted images taken from an aircraft of what he described as a "vast bulldozed area" south of the town of Maungdaw.

Satellite imagery from DigitalGlobe indicates at least 28 villages or hamlets were leveled by bulldozers and other machinery in a 30-mile (50-kilometer) radius around Maungdaw between December and February; on some of the cleared areas, construction crews had erected new buildings or housing structures and helipads. A similar analysis by Human Rights Watch on Friday said at least 55 villages have been affected so far.

The images offer an important window into what is effectively a part of Myanmar that is largely sealed off to the outside world. Myanmar bars independent media access to the state.

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HEADLINE	02/23 UN reveals South Sudan abuses
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/gang-rapes-beheadings-reveals-south-sudan-abuses-53297527?cid=clicksource_76_2_hero_headlines_bsq_hed
GIST	<p>The witness accounts remain appalling. One South Sudanese man returned home after hiding from government soldiers to find they had blinded his mother, gouging out her eyes with spears.</p> <p>She had tried to defend her 17-year-old daughter from being raped by more than a dozen soldiers and didn't succeed. Seventeen soldiers then raped her. The family's father was beheaded.</p> <p>The latest report on human rights abuses in South Sudan's five-year civil war, released on Friday by a United Nations commission, includes that horrific day in Pagak town and many others as the team collects evidence in the hopes of one day finding justice.</p> <p>"I did not expect to be confronted with so much ritual humiliation and degradation deliberately done for multiple reasons. The suffering and cruelty was worse than anyone could have imagined," Andrew Clapham, a commission member and international law professor, told The Associated Press.</p> <p>One South Sudanese woman told the commission that her 12-year-old son was forced to have sex with his grandmother to stay alive, the report says.</p> <p>The findings, with "sufficient evidence" against both President Salva Kiir's government forces and rebels, identify more than 40 senior military officials, including three state governors, "who may bear individual responsibility for war crimes."</p> <p>The report will be presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva next month. They also will be made available to judicial mechanisms such as a hybrid court for South Sudan, which long has been urged by the international community but has never appeared.</p> <p>Untold tens of thousands have been killed in South Sudan since the conflict erupted in December 2013, just two years after independence from Sudan. More than two million people have fled the country, the largest refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide 24 years ago. Millions who remain at home face hunger.</p> <p>The new U.N. report is an account of the gang-rapes, castrations, ethnic violence and other abuses that have left much of the impoverished East African nation in despair, while international frustration with the warring sides grows. An attempt at a cease-fire in late December was violated within hours. Disgusted, the United States announced a largely symbolic arms embargo and urged the U.N. Security Council to do the same.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Rivers rising as rains persist
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/US/rivers-rise-rain-persists-weekend/story?
GIST	<p>An active jet stream with several low pressure systems moving through will affect 20 states with the threat of ice and snow on the cold side and flooding rain on the warm side right into the weekend!</p> <p>Winter weather advisories for ice and snow are in effect across the Plains and Midwest and flood watches and warnings call for heavy rain from the Southern Mississippi Valley to the Ohio Valley, from Texas to Michigan to New York.</p> <p>...Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan are all watching for flooding as several rivers are in major flood stage and will be rising over the next several days; rivers and streams in the South from Texas to Mississippi are also being watched.</p> <p>Rain and snow are expected to continue in the Northeast through this afternoon before moving out this</p>

	<p>evening — Binghamton to Boston will see some snow today (light accumulation) and areas south, including NYC, will see plain rain.</p> <p>In the South, a stalled system will continue to pump moisture across the Lower and Mid-Mississippi Valley tonight with rounds of heavy rain and potential flooding from Northwest Texas to Kentucky.</p> <p>Another system coming out of the Rockies will move across the Northern Plains and Upper Midwest bringing a blast of snow and ice from Omaha to Minneapolis for a treacherous evening commute.</p> <p>On Friday morning, snow will continue to move through the Upper Midwest, including Wisconsin and Michigan, before the system progresses into Canada and moves out.</p> <p>Also, on Friday, the rounds of heavy rain and flooding continue for the same water-logged areas from the Mid-Mississippi to Ohio Valley, flood watches remain in effect from Little Rock to Memphis to Cincinnati to Pittsburgh as the rain in these spots just refuses to let up due to the stuck pattern.</p> <p>On Saturday, a new storm system emerges from the Rockies with more unsettled weather for the Plains, Midwest, and South.</p> <p>On the warm side of the system, severe weather is forecast from west of Dallas to Little Rock to Nashville on Saturday afternoon.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Sheriff: armed deputy waited; did nothing
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/US/fla-school-officer-waited-building-minutes-killings-happened/story?id=53288339&cid=clicksource_4380645_1_hero_headlines_bsq_hed
GIST	<p>A Marjory Stoneman Douglas school resource officer has been suspended without pay after Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel said video shows him taking up a defensive position during the shooting but never entering the school.</p> <p>Israel announced Thursday that the decision to suspend Deputy Scot Peterson was made after reviewing video from the shooting and taking statements from witnesses and Peterson himself, Israel said.</p> <p>“He should have went in, addressed the killer, killed the killer,” Israel said.</p> <p>Peterson was armed and on campus during the shooting, Israel said. Since he met the requirements for retirement, Peterson opted to resign after he was told he was being suspended, Israel said.</p> <p>Israel said that the video shows Peterson arrived at the west side of Building 12, where most of the killing happened. He then took up a position but "never went in."</p> <p>The video shows that Peterson remained outside the building for upward of four minutes during the shooting, which lasted about six minutes, Israel said. Aside from getting "on his radio," Peterson did "nothing" while standing outside the building, Israel said.</p> <p>When the shooting started, Peterson was in an office dealing with a "school-related issue," Israel said.</p> <p>When asked by reporters to describe how the video made him feel, Israel responded, "sick to my stomach" and "devastated."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 FBI admits ‘mistake made’ on tip
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SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbis-deputy-director-admits-there-was-a-mistake-made-regarding-tip-on-florida-shooter/
GIST	<p>The FBI's acting deputy director on Thursday admitted that there was a "mistake made" within the agency when it received a tip regarding concerns about the Florida school shooter.</p> <p>During a press conference, David Bowdich was asked about the missed tip, and he said that Attorney General Jeff Sessions and FBI Director Christopher Wray immediately ordered a full-scale review of the agency's public access line, which is based in West Virginia. The call center, Bowdich told reporters, sends leads back to FBI field offices "throughout the country."</p> <p>"In this case, we were conducting full scale review, but I will tell you Monday, I went out there myself and with my team, and it is a professional operation," he said. "Now let me be clear, there was a mistake made, we know that, but it is our job to make sure that we do everything in our power to ensure that does not happen again."</p> <p>Bowdich talked about the volume of calls, noting that last year, the FBI received about 765,000 calls, in addition to 750,000 internet tips. Many of those, he said, "turn into leads," but most -- 9 out of 10 -- do not. "It is not easy work," he said. "I'm not making excuses because what happened is a tragedy."</p> <p>This comes after the FBI said in a statement last week that it had received a tip about Nikolas Cruz, the suspected Florida school shooter, in January 2018 but failed to investigate the report. A person close to Cruz contacted the FBI's Public Access Line on January 5, reporting Cruz's gun ownership, his desire to kill others, erratic behavior and disturbing social media posts, the statement said.</p> <p>"Under established protocols, the information provided by the caller should have been assessed as a potential threat to life. The information then should have been forwarded to the FBI Miami Field Office, where appropriate investigative steps would have been taken," the statement said.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/22 Colorado DOT shuts computers in attack
SOURCE	https://securityboulevard.com/2018/02/colorado-department-of-transportation-shut-down-2k-computers-after-ransomware-attack/
GIST	<p>Colorado's Department of Transportation (DOT) shut down more than 2,000 computers after its network suffered a ransomware attack.</p> <p>First thing in the morning on 21 February, the DOT discovered that ransomware had struck all employee computers running Windows and protected by McAfee anti-virus software. It immediately launched an investigation into what had happened. To contain the damages, the Department also decide to take more than 2,000 computers offline. Such a move forced employees to resort back to using pen and paper.</p> <p>Amy Ford, a CDOT spokeswoman, told The Dever Post that the attack didn't affect the Department's more important systems:</p> <p>"No one is back online. What we're doing is working offline. All our critical services are still online — cameras, variable message boards, CoTrip, alerts on traffic. They are running on separate systems. The message I'm sharing (with employees) is CDOT operated for a long time without computers so we'll use pen and paper."</p> <p>The Colorado Department of Transportation fortunately had data backups in place prior to the attack, so it won't be meeting the attackers' demands of submitting Bitcoins as ransom.</p>

	<p>Officials at the CDOT and security software providers are currently working to remove the ransomware from the Department’s systems.</p> <p>Brandi Simmons, a spokeswoman for the Colorado Governor’s Office of Information Technology, said that SamSam was behind the attack. A family of ransomware known for targeting the healthcare industry, SamSam made headlines earlier in 2018 when it struck Hancock Regional Hospital’s network. That medical center ultimately paid \$55,000 in ransom to restore its systems.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Fake Facebook profiles spread spyware
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/hackers-spread-android-spyware-facebook-using-fake-profiles/
GIST	<p>The Android spyware was used to steal personal data of victims – The campaign also shows why users should never use their real photos on Facebook.</p> <p>There are almost 2 billion monthly active users on the social media giant Facebook and that makes it one of the most lucrative targets for hackers and cybercriminals. Recently, the researchers at Czech IT security researchers at Avast reported a sophisticated campaign in which attackers used Facebook and Facebook messenger to trick users into installing a highly sophisticated Android spyware.</p> <p>The scam was reported to Avast by one of their customers informing about receiving messages on their Facebook messenger carrying strange looking links sent by unknown profiles going by the names of Alona, Christina, and Rita using images of attractive women.</p> <p>Upon analyzing the scam, researchers quickly identified that the profiles used in the scam were fake, stolen images from real people and used without their knowledge or consent. The women lured the victim to click on the link and install the latest version of Kik Messenger app on their device in order to continue their “flirty conversations”.</p> <p>However, the link only disguised as the Kik Messenger app, in reality, it would take victims to a “very convincing” phishing website and which hosted the malicious version of Kik Messenger app. Once installed, the spyware app would steal personal data from the device.</p> <p>Dubbed Tempting Cedar Spyware by Avast researchers, the attack aims at stealing personal data from victims Android devices including photos, contacts list, SMS, call logs, victims’ location and recording surrounding sounds including call conversations.</p> <p>According to Avast, the operation has been targeting Android users since 2015 and so far it has hunted hundreds of victims in the Middle East. The most targeted victims were from Israel while a small number of victims were identified in China, France, Germany and the United States.</p> <p>Based on the evidence such as login activity, IP addresses, Middle Eastern time zones, registrant data of domains used by hackers to distribute malware, Avast researchers believe that this campaign is being run from Lebanon. However, at the time of publishing this article, it was unclear if the Tempting Cedar Spyware campaign is still targeting users or it has been shut down.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Mirai variant creates proxy servers
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/omg-mirai-variant-creates-proxy/
GIST	<p>Yet another new Mirai variant has reared its head, aimed at turning internet of things (IoT) devices into proxy servers.</p> <p>The FortiGuard Labs team encountered the botnet, which it dubbed OMG. The variant adds and removes</p>

some configurations that can be found in the original Mirai code – but it also keeps Mirai’s original modules, including the attack, killer and scanner modules.

“This means that it can also do what the original Mirai could, i.e. kill processes (related to telnet, ssh, http by checking open ports and other processes related to other bots), telnet brute-force login to spread and DOS attack,” FortiGuard researchers said in an analysis.

However, the proxy function is OMG’s main purpose. Cybercriminals use proxies to add anonymity when carrying out hacking and other malicious activities. FortiGuard pointed out in an analysis that one way to earn money with proxy servers is to sell access to them to other cybercriminals, which is what OMG was built for.

For the proxy to work properly, OMG’s authors added a firewall rule to allow traffic on the generated ports; two strings containing the command for adding and removing a firewall rule to enable this were added to the configuration table. After enabling the firewall rule to allow traffic to pass through the randomly generated HTTP and SOCKS ports, it sets up 3proxy with predefined configuration embedded in its code, FortiGuard explained.

Though this is the first time a modified Mirai variant has been spotted to be capable of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, as well as setting up proxy servers on vulnerable IoT devices, it’s unlikely that OMG will be the last elaboration on the Mirai theme.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Claim: malvertising trending down
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/malvertising-wanes-in-q4/
GIST	<p>Despite another increase in year-over-year malvertising detections, research shows the numbers are trending down.</p> <p>According to RiskIQ’s Q4 Malvertising Roundup, the company scanned nearly 10% fewer incidents than the quarter before. This decrease has become a pattern: The Q3 report showed a massive decrease in malvertising beginning in the second half of 2017.</p> <p>Even so, thanks to high numbers of incidents in the first half of the year, overall malvertising in 2017 increased 2.8% against 2016.</p> <p>“Threat actors perform malvertising in all kinds of ways – phishing, scams, exploit kits, and malware – sometimes even via a drive-by-download, where the target user doesn’t have to click on a malicious link; the ad downloads the infection from the iFrame without their knowledge,” said RiskIQ researchers in a blog. “Sometimes, the ad will download software, which collects information on the user’s computer, or adbots that add to a wide-ranging fraudulent ad network. Ransomware is also a malvertising method, encrypting the unfortunate victim’s files and charging money to get them unencrypted.”</p> <p>The fluctuation in volume of bad ads detected may indicate a change in attacker tactics. For instance, malvertising incidents containing malware decreased by a notable 67.5% in the fourth quarter, and there was a precipitous drop in advertisements using phishing techniques for the second quarter in a row. There were, however, small increases in scam advertising, which reversed a two-quarter trend.</p> <p>“Malvertising is so nefarious because it’s a direct attack on the lifeblood of the internet as we know it,” said RiskIQ researchers. “Digital media marketing is what funds the ‘free’ websites we all enjoy online, and the success of the internet and all the people that rely on it is inextricably linked to its success. According to a report compiled by eMarketer, worldwide paid media market, which accelerates every year, is at \$542 billion—lower than eMarketer’s previous forecast.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Annabelle ransomware wreak user horror
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/annabelle-ransomware-a-horror-show-for-users/article/746141/
GIST	<p>Horror fans know the consequences of an encounter with the evil doll Annabelle – users should similarly beware of the same-named ransomware, which possesses a bag of evil tricks to wreak havoc on an infected computer.</p> <p>Though built on Stupid Ransomware and easily decryptable, Annabelle can disable Windows Defender and turn off the firewall, encrypt files and shut down some security programs, such as Process Explorer and Chrome, according to a report from Bleeping Computer. If that's not enough it attempts to spread via USB drives, disables some programs and, just to prove it's every bit as evil as its movie counterpart, Annabelle overwrites a computer's master boot record with a boot loader.</p> <p>The report attributes the ransomware find to a researcher named Bart and credits MalwareHunterTeam with teasing out the source code to watch Annabelle automatically start when a user logs in to Windows then shut down programs. After that it configures entries in the Image File Execution registry so that users can't launch programs. From there it attempts to spread through autoru.inf files, though the report notes that technique doesn't work as well on newer Windows iterations.</p> <p>But if it's successful, it will reboot the infected computer and on login display a lock screen that offers contact information for the developer.</p> <p>When first run, Annabelle will configure itself to start automatically when you login to Windows. It then terminates a variety of programs such as Process Hacker, Process Explorer, Msconfig, Task Manager, Chrome, and more.</p> <p>It then configures Image File Execution registry entries to make it so you cannot launch a variety of programs such as the ones listed above and others such as Notepad++, Notepad, Internet Explorer, Chrome, Opera, bcdedit, and many more.</p> <p>The ransomware will then try to spread itself using autoru.inf files. This method is fairly useless when it comes to newer versions of Windows that do not support an autoplay feature.</p> <p>It will then reboot the computer and when the user logs in, it will display the lock screen shown at the top of this article. The lock screen has a credits button that when clicked shows the below screen that states a developer named iCoreX0812 made the program and a way to contact them on Discord.</p> <p>As a finishing touch, the developer decided to also run a program that replaces the master boot record of the infected computer so that it shows a "props" screen when the computer restarts. But Annabelle is not quite done, as a parting gift, the ransomware overwrites the master boot record.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Interpol warns IoT devices at risk
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/interpol-warns-iot-devices-at-risk/article/746147/
GIST	<p>Cyberattacks against IoT devices have grown markedly over the past two years, prompting a warning from Interpol that nearly any IoT device – from refrigerators to smart phones - is vulnerable to attack.</p> <p>As attacks proliferate, law enforcement struggles to keep up, according to a report in the Express.</p> <p>"Attacks on IoT devices such as internet connected fridges, TVs, smart home devices etc. are down to flaws in the software running on them, and attacks will continue to happen until those flaws are dealt with. Good practices by vendors around configuration and authentication need to be initiated or matured to prevent this in future," said Adam Brown, manager - security solutions, at Synopsis. "The famous Mirai botnet attack of late 2016, which saw the likes of Twitter, Netflix and others knocked out of service, was</p>

<p>Return to Top</p>	<p>made possible because of the use of default credentials in IoT devices – a flaw in the design.”</p> <p>Brown said he "would love to see certification for IoT devices become commonplace so that consumers can know that the devices are cyber safe, much in the same way that if you buy a toy with a CE mark you know it has been through a process of assessment and it won't, for example, poison anyone because it has lead in its paint.”</p> <p>A device that is certified “will be less likely to lend itself to a hacker to steal from you, use you as a place to attack others from, or use your electricity to mine cryptocurrencies for themselves.”</p> <p>Interpol recently drew 43 investigators and digital forensics pros from 23 countries together for its Digital Security Challenge – one in which a cyberattack is launched from a hacked IoT device, a webcam.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Critical flaws Mi-Cam baby monitors
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/50000-baby-monitors-can-be-hacked-vendor-is-awol/
GIST	<p>Hacking baby monitors is nothing new but the fact that there are thousands of vulnerable baby monitors out there is a big concern. Recently, the IT security researchers at Austrian firm SEC Consult have discovered a set of critical vulnerabilities in Mi-Cam baby monitors which allow hackers to take full control of these devices and spy on children.</p> <p>Mi-Cam baby monitors are manufactured by a Chinese firm MiSafes and are equipped with Internet-connected video monitoring system along with 720P HD quality camera. These monitors allow parents to keep an eye on kids through Android and iOS devices, However, currently, these devices are vulnerable and other than parents, hackers can also spy on kids and perform a number of other tasks including “unauthenticated access and hijacking of arbitrary video baby monitors.”</p> <p>According to researchers, there are total six vulnerabilities out of which one lets attackers breach the device’s security on Mi-Cam Android app without the need for client SSL certificate or password. The only thing an attacker has to do is use a proxy server in order to intercept communication between the monitor and smartphone.</p> <p>Currently, over 52,000 video baby monitors and user accounts are vulnerable but despite informing MiSafes on several occasions since December 2017, there has been no response from the company, therefore, the critical security flaws still exist in the affected product. The researchers strictly advise that users should stop using these baby monitors as there is no update available otherwise they might be the victim of non-stop hacking attempts.</p> <p>Remember, Internet-connected (IoT) devices are highly vulnerable and not only allow hackers to scare kids but also let pedophiles can keep an eye on vulnerable children or in some cases record footages and sold on the dark web. Therefore, if you are using a baby monitor for your child make sure it is properly secured.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Anatomy of an attack on industrial IoT
SOURCE	http://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities---threats/anatomy-of-an-attack-on-the-industrial-iot-/a/d-id/1331097
GIST	<p>We like to think that cyberattacks are focused primarily on stealing credit card numbers and that attackers don't know much about the control systems that run critical infrastructure. Unfortunately, that's just wishful thinking. In 2017, we saw an increasing number of threat actors bypass existing network perimeter security controls to perform sophisticated reconnaissance of industrial process control networks (PCNs). They then moved beyond reconnaissance to infiltrate PCNs and disrupt production.</p>

Here's how a knowledgeable outsider can shut down an industrial process using a published industrial control system (ICS) vulnerability in a way that is very difficult to detect.

Ambient gas detectors identify releases of small amounts of toxic flammable gases. It is common to locate many such detectors in a processing area, and to configure both alarms and automatic process shutdowns on multiple simultaneous detection signals.

In December 2015, ICS-CERT published advisory ICSA-15-309-02, which provided details on vulnerabilities affecting specific ambient gas detectors. According to the ICS-CERT advisory, "Successful exploitation of these vulnerabilities could allow a remote attacker to gain unauthenticated access to the device, potentially allowing configuration changes, as well as the initiation of calibration or test processes." The advisory noted that "an attacker with low skill would be able to exploit these vulnerabilities."

Now, let's examine industrial Internet of Things (IoT) devices and their vulnerabilities through the eyes of an attacker. The attacker has performed reconnaissance against an industrial facility, probing its cyber defenses. During her reconnaissance, she obtained access and visibility to a dozen gas detectors. Due to the Web server interface vulnerability identified in the ICS-CERT advisory, she can bypass the authentication process and make configuration changes to the device, such as altering detection ranges and alarm limits. This access enables her to generate alarms at will.

Armed with this access and knowledge, she decides to launch an attack aimed at shutting down production by tricking operators into taking drastic action for a condition that does not exist.

In the initial phase of her attack, she decides that she doesn't want to make all sensors alarm at once. Instead, she selects four or five sensors that seem associated by their names (West Side First Level, West Side Second Level), and initiates an alarm by lowering the alarm threshold.

The detectors generate false alarms that appear to an operator as a serious leak. However, the operator has no way of knowing the alarms are false. The operator responds to the situation in a variety of ways, such as lowering the production rate, lowering pressure, or even shutting down part of the process. Evacuation of operations and maintenance personnel in the affected area is ordered. Responders suit up and try to verify the sensor readings using hand-held gas detectors, but they find nothing. The physical process examination is thorough and time consuming. Since multiple gas detector alarms sounded simultaneously, operators take the situation seriously because they cannot attribute it to a single sensor failure.

In the meantime, the attacker covers her tracks, restoring the manipulated detectors to their initial values. By the time the investigator reviews the configuration of the detectors, there is nothing amiss. After an exhaustive yet futile leak search, the process is restarted, but with additional personnel stationed in the area with leak detectors, which is both expensive and disruptive to production.

The attacker is patient. Two weeks later, she strikes again, choosing different sensors. The attacker is smart enough to select sensors based on wind direction — easy to determine from weather.com — this time, on the south side. The response to this second incident may require a much more detailed plant inspection, involving hundreds of hours and a significant production outage looking for a leak that isn't there. The hours to investigate the false gas leak and the loss of production can result in a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars per attack.

This attack underscores the importance of assessing all known ICS vulnerabilities and prioritizing them based on risk and consequences. Industrial teams must remediate or mitigate high-priority vulnerabilities as quickly as possible. For example, the ICS-CERT advisory I reference in the example recommends implementing a firmware upgrade to remediate the device vulnerability.

Before applying system updates, though, asset owners must consider potential impacts. ICSs are highly proprietary, complex systems, implemented with very specific hardware configurations and operating

system versions. Due to precise configuration specifications for automation systems, software or configuration changes can cause malfunctions that negatively affect process reliability and safety. ICS upgrades or patches must receive thorough testing by both the system vendor and asset owners, or automation engineers prior to implementation. Due to concerns over uptime requirements, asset owners in plants must plan and schedule updates months in advance. ICS upgrades and patching are a major effort for plant staff.

New vulnerabilities appear daily. Effectively managing the ever-increasing number of vulnerabilities that can affect ICSs is critical to industrial cybersecurity. Most companies struggle to keep up with the myriad ICS alerts and advisories issued each month. In fact, far too often, ICS vulnerabilities are unseen or ignored, leaving many plants at risk.

In 2017, the WannaCry and NotPetya attacks made ransomware a household name, and it seemed no business or consumer data safe. Beyond those global incidents, countless cyberattacks threatened consumer privacy, worldwide commerce and even infrastructure in some regions.

Plant managers need to make sure that their facilities have vulnerability management programs in place for continuous assessment of ICSs. Current remediation and mitigation states must be tracked and managed systematically to obtain a clear understanding of industrial risk. The downside for companies that fail to recognize and address these serious risks is that they face potentially disastrous consequences that may negatively affect plant safety, reliability, and the company's bottom line.

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HEADLINE	02/22 IRS warns spike in W-2 phishing emails
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SOURCE	http://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/irs-warns-of-spike-in-w-2-phishing-emails-/d/d-id/1331108
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GIST	<p>The IRS Online Fraud Detection & Prevention Center (OFDP), which monitors for IRS-related phishing attacks, said it has detected an increase in compromised emails, starting in January 2017. It says cybercriminals are aiming for mass data theft in addition to targeting individual taxpayers.</p> <p>Their most common tactic is impersonating an executive with a compromised email, which is sent to a human resource professional within the same business to request W-2 information. OFDP officials say this is one of several new variations of phishing campaigns targeting W-2 data, an sign of criminals' growing interest in sensitive tax information.</p> <p>Businesses are urged to limit the number of employees who handle wire transfers, adopt multifactor authentication to verify requests for W-2 information, and use verbal confirmation for data change requests. Those hit with these attacks should report data loss to the IRS, state tax agencies, and the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center. Suspected phishing emails should also be reported to the IRS.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Cybercriminals use stolen corporate IDs
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SOURCE	http://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities---threats/criminals-obtain-code-signing-certificates-using-stolen-corporate-ids-/d/d-id/1331113
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GIST	<p>Malware authors have for some time been using code-signing certificates for their malicious payloads so they can sneak past enterprise anti-malware tools. But contrary to popular belief, not all of the certificates that are being used to distribute malware are stolen from their legitimate owners.</p>
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	<p>New research by Recorded Future shows that a growing number of code-signing certificates in the cyber underground are actually being created on demand for specific buyers by Dark Web vendors using stolen corporate identities. Each certificate is unique to the buyer and is usually delivered within two- to four days.</p>
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The certificates, available for prices ranging from \$299 to \$1,599, are being issued by reputable companies such as Symantec, Comodo, and Thawte, and are proving very effective at malware obfuscation, Recorded Future said in a report this week.

"We do not have information on what percentage of all certificates circulating in the Dark Web were obtained using compromised corporate credentials," says Andrei Barysevich, director of advance collection at Recorded Future. "However, considering the malicious intent of hackers when utilizing such certificates, it is safe to assume that a high proportion of them were obtained fraudulently."

The use of code-signing certificates to distribute malware is not new. But more malware authors have recently begun resorting to the tactic as a way to distribute malware.

Organizations use code-signing certificates to authenticate their software and protect it against tampering. The certificates give users a way to verify the identity of the publisher and the integrity of the code. Malware that has been digitally signed with a valid code-signing certificate can be hard to spot. Most anti-malware tools and browsers assume the payload can be trusted because it is from a trusted publisher.

Security vendor Venafi last October reported that a six-month investigation it had conducted showed a thriving market for code signing certificates on the Dark Web.

The research, conducted for Venafi by the Cyber Security Research Institute, showed such certificates to be more expensive even than stolen US passports, credit cards, and even handguns. Venafi found that stolen code-signing certificates can fetch up to \$1,200 in underground markets and are being used in a wide range of malicious activity including man-in-the-middle attacks, malware obfuscation, website spoofing, and data exfiltration.

Recorded Future says its investigation shows cybercriminals are currently offering new code-signing certificates and domain-name registration services with SSL certificates. The vendors of these services register the counterfeit certificates using stolen information belonging to legitimate organizations. There is little indication that impacted companies are aware their identity data is being used to illegally obtain code-signing certificate for use by malware authors.

Recorded Future researchers first observed a Dark Web vendor selling such certificates in 2015. Since then, they have seen at least three new actors selling code-signing certificates obtained from major CAs using stolen corporate credentials. One of the vendors has moved on to other activities while the remaining two are currently continuing to sell counterfeit certificates primarily to Russian threat actors.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Oh, Snap! Tweet erases \$1.3B value
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-22/snap-royalty-kylie-jenner-erased-a-billion-dollars-in-one-tweet
GIST	<p>Snap Inc.'s flagship platform has lost some luster, at least according to one social-media influencer in the Kardashian-Jenner clan.</p> <p>The Snapchat parent's shares sank as much as 7.2 percent Thursday, wiping out \$1.3 billion in market value, on the heels of a tweet from Kylie Jenner, who said she doesn't open the app anymore. Whether it's the demands of her newfound motherhood, or the recent app redesign, the testament drew similar replies from her 24.5 million followers. Wall Street analysts too, have begun to notice, citing recent user engagement trends noticed since the platform's redesign.</p> <p>Citigroup analyst Mark May downgraded the stock to sell from neutral earlier this week after seeing a "significant jump" in negative reviews of the app's redesign. He expects the reviews could cause user engagement to fall, hurting financial results.</p>

	<p>Meanwhile, as the app takes criticism, Chief Executive Evan Spiegel may become one of the highest paid executives in the U.S. After the company's IPO last March, Spiegel got a \$636.6 million stock grant that will be payable through 2020.</p> <p>"Still love you tho snap," Jenner hedged in a later tweet.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Intel delayed notification on chip flaws
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-intel/intel-did-not-tell-u-s-cyber-officials-about-chip-flaws-until-made-public-idUSKCN1G62PS
GIST	<p>(Reuters) - Intel Corp did not inform U.S. cyber security officials of the so-called Meltdown and Spectre chip security flaws until they leaked to the public, six months after Alphabet Inc notified the chipmaker of the problems, according to letters sent by tech companies to lawmakers on Thursday.</p> <p>Current and former U.S. government officials have raised concerns that the government was not informed of the flaws before they became public because the flaws potentially held national security implications. Intel said it did not think the flaws needed to be shared with U.S. authorities as hackers had not exploited the vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Intel did not tell the United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team, better known as US-CERT, about Meltdown and Spectre until Jan. 3, after reports on them in online technology site The Register had begun to circulate.</p> <p>US-CERT, which issues warnings about cyber security problems to the public and private sector, did not respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Details of when the chip flaws were disclosed were detailed in letters sent by Intel, Alphabet and Apple Inc on Thursday in response to questions from Representative Greg Walden, an Oregon Republican who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee. The letters were seen by Reuters.</p> <p>Alphabet said that security researchers at its Google Project Zero informed chipmakers Intel, Advanced Micro Devices Inc and SoftBank Group Corp-owned ARM Holdings of the problems in June.</p> <p>It gave the chipmakers 90 days to fix the issues before public disclosing them, standard practice in the cyber security industry intended to give the targets of bugs time to fix them before hackers can take advantage of the flaws.</p> <p>Alphabet said it left the decision of whether to inform government officials of the security flaws up to the chipmakers, which is its standard practice.</p> <p>Intel said it did not inform government officials because there was "no indication that any of these vulnerabilities had been exploited by malicious actors," according to its letter.</p> <p>Intel also said it did not perform an analysis of whether the flaws might harm critical infrastructure because it did not think it could affect industrial control systems. But Intel said that it did inform other technology companies that use its chips of the issue, according to its letter.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Lawsuits refiled: maintain net neutrality
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-internet/states-refile-lawsuits-to-block-repeal-of-u-s-net-neutrality-idUSKCN1G62F8
GIST	WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A coalition of 22 state attorneys general and the District of Columbia on

	<p>Thursday refiled legal challenges intended to block the Trump administration's repeal of landmark rules designed to ensure a free and open internet from taking effect.</p> <p>The Federal Communications Commission officially published its order overturning the net neutrality rules in the Federal Register on Thursday, a procedural step that allows for the filing of legal challenges.</p> <p>The states, along with web browser developer Mozilla Corp and video-sharing website Vimeo Inc (IAC.O), had filed petitions preserving their right to sue in January, but agreed to withdraw them last Friday and wait for the FCC's publication.</p> <p>The Republican-led FCC in December voted 3-2 to overturn rules barring service providers from blocking, slowing access to or charging more for certain content on the internet.</p> <p>"Repealing net neutrality will allow internet service providers to put corporate profits over consumers by controlling what we see, do, and say online," said New York's attorney general, Eric Schneiderman, who is leading the coalition, whose members also include California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.</p> <p>The attorneys general argue that the FCC cannot make "arbitrary and capricious" changes to existing policies and that it misinterpreted and disregarded "critical record evidence on industry practices and harm to consumers and businesses."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 ISIS-linked militants eye Philippines
SOURCE	https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/isil-linked-militants-seeking-new-base-in-philippines-1.707396
GIST	<p>Months after being expelled from the southern Philippine city of Marawi, extremists are waging a fresh and deadly bid to capture territory in the same region, the military warned on Friday.</p> <p>The gunmen have mustered a force of about 200 and fought a series of skirmishes with the security forces this year after government forces retook Marawi in October, said Colonel Romeo Brawner.</p> <p>"They have not abandoned their objective to create a caliphate in South-East Asia," said Col Brawner, a senior commander for a military task force that has since been protecting Marawi.</p> <p>"Mindanao is the most fertile ground," he said, referring to the Philippine's southern region. "Our countrymen are more vulnerable [to recruitment]."</p> <p>Struggling with widespread poverty and armed Muslim insurgencies seeking independence or self-rule, Mindanao must improve poor supervision of madrasas where most young gunmen are recruited, he added.</p> <p>He said the armed forces were retooling to meet the challenge of the extremist Maute group, which occupied Marawi over five months and has pledged allegiance to ISIL.</p> <p>Gunmen who escaped during the early days of the US-backed operation to recapture Marawi are leading the recruitment effort, flush with cash, guns and jewellery looted from the city's banks and private homes, Col Brawner said.</p> <p>The recruits are mostly locals, but an unspecified number of Indonesians, some with bomb-making skills, have recently arrived there, he said.</p> <p>Mindanao military officials said Maute gunmen murdered three traders in the town of Piagapo, near</p>

	<p>Marawi, in November.</p> <p>The military killed three extremists in Pantar, another neighbouring town, on February 8, while police last month arrested three suspects over the Piagapo merchant killings.</p> <p>The military also reported skirmishes with Maute gunmen in the towns of Masiu and Pagayawan near Marawi last month.</p> <p>The renewed fighting came after Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and other political leaders in the Mindanao region warned of a potential repeat of the siege of Marawi which killed more than 1,100 people.</p> <p>Mr Duterte has imposed martial law over Mindanao until the end of the year in an effort to curb the militants' activities.</p> <p>Ebrahim Murad, head of the Philippines' main Muslim insurgent group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which signed a peace treaty with Manila in 2014, also warned on Tuesday that extremists were recruiting and could seize another city.</p> <p>Murad said the 10,000-member Moro Islamic Liberation Front was battling pro-ISIL groups for influence in schools as the extremists worked to infiltrate madrasas and secular universities.</p> <p>At the same time ISIL gunmen were making their way into the southern Philippines from Malaysia and Indonesia, he added, but gave no estimates.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Putin ally behind mercenaries in Syria
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/putin-ally-said-to-be-in-touch-with-kremlin-assad-before-his-mercenaries-attacked-us-troops/ar-BBJtGXQ?li=BBnb7Kz&ocid=HPCDHP
GIST	<p>A Russian oligarch believed to control the Russian mercenaries who attacked U.S. troops and their allies in Syria this month was in close touch with Kremlin and Syrian officials in the days and weeks before and after the assault, according to U.S. intelligence reports.</p> <p>In intercepted communications in late January, the oligarch, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, told a senior Syrian official that he had “secured permission” from an unspecified Russian minister to move forward with a “fast and strong” initiative that would take place in early February.</p> <p>Prigozhin made front-page headlines last week when he was indicted by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III for bankrolling and guiding a long-running Russian scheme to conduct “information warfare” during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.</p> <p>Subscribe to the Post Most newsletter: Today’s most popular stories on The Washington Post</p> <p>He is known to have close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, forged when he was a restaurateur in St. Petersburg and expanded through what became Prigozhin’s wide-ranging business empire, including extensive contracts with Russia’s Defense Ministry.</p> <p>Among his various enterprises, U.S. intelligence believes that Prigozhin also “almost certainly” controls Russian mercenaries fighting in Syria on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad. The mercenaries, employed by a company called Wagner, comprise ultranationalist Russians and military veterans, some of whom also fought in the Ukraine conflict, according to Russian news reports.</p> <p>The intelligence reports provide additional information about an incident that remains only murkily described by all concerned, with the Pentagon providing few details and the Russians offering changing accounts.</p>

U.S. intelligence agencies declined to comment on the reports.

What is clear, however, is that the attack marked the biggest direct challenge to the U.S. military presence in eastern Syria since U.S. Special Operations forces began deploying there in 2015 in support of their Syrian allies in the fight against the Islamic State. The episode also raises questions about ongoing U.S. cooperation in Syria with Russia, Assad's primary backer in a civil war that increasingly has overlapped with the United States' campaign against the Islamic State.

A senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive issue, described the episode as "worrisome." The official added that "it's striking how the Russians themselves have been quick to distance themselves" from what he described as an operation "under Syrian command and in response to Syrian directive."

"I think [the Russians] realize just how damaging it could be to any further cooperation," the official said.

U.S. and Russian-backed Assad forces are now separated by only a few miles in parts of eastern Syria, along a "deconfliction" line that restricts the former to the eastern side of the Euphrates River and the latter to the western side. In recent years, U.S. and Russian military officers have maintained near-daily telephone contact to ensure their aircraft and forces don't run into each other.

'Perplexing' attack

The recent incident took place on the night of Feb. 7-8, when a headquarters base of U.S. troops and their Syrian allies, located near a strategic oil field several miles east of the river close to the town of Deir al-Zour, was attacked by 300 to 500 "pro-regime" forces.

The Americans quickly mobilized a ferocious response, including AC-130 gunships, jet warplanes and Apache attack helicopters. After three hours, the attacking force retreated, leaving behind what the U.S. military said was about 100 dead attackers. No casualties were reported among the Americans and their allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The Pentagon, in statements since the attack, has repeatedly said it is still investigating and has reached no conclusion on the identities of the attackers. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis called the incident "perplexing" and said "I cannot give any explanation" as to why a "pro-regime" force would cross the river and fire on a known SDF and U.S. headquarters.

The Russian government has strenuously denied involvement. At the time, the Russian Defense Ministry said only that a "pro-government militia unit" had been conducting "surveillance and research" into the activities of a militant group, presumably the Islamic State, that had been firing mortars at government positions. The militia had no intention of attacking the SDF base, Russia said. Instead, it charged, the U.S. military had conducted an unprovoked attack against the militia.

It also said the militia had not informed "the Russian operational group" about its surveillance plans, according to a statement carried by the Russian news agency Tass.

A report in the Russian Kommersant newspaper quoted a military official saying that the Russian military command in Syria viewed the incident as "dangerous amateurism."

But as stories began to spread in both the Russian and U.S. news media that most of the dead were Russian mercenaries, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said last week that five Russian citizens might have been killed.

In a new statement Tuesday, the ministry acknowledged that "several dozen" Russians were killed or wounded in the attack and that the wounded had been "provided assistance to return to Russia . . . where they are undergoing medical treatment at a number of hospitals."

“Russian service members did not take part in any capacity and Russian military equipment was not used,” the statement said. It referred instead to “Russian citizens” who arrived in Syria “of their own free will and for different reasons.” The ministry, it said, “does not have the authority to assess the validity and legality of Their decisions.” Russia has acknowledged that many of the attackers, who also included regular Syrian army troops and militias, were mercenaries.

'Good surprise'

The intercepted communications show not only that was Prigozhin personally involved in planning the attack but that he had discussed it with senior Syrian officials, including Minister of Presidential Affairs Mansour Fadlallah Azzam.

In a Jan. 24 exchange, Prigozhin said he had secured permission from an unspecified Russian minister the day before to move forward with a “fast and strong” initiative and was awaiting a decision by the Syrian government.

On Jan. 30, Prigozhin “indicated he had a ‘good surprise’ ” for Assad “that would come between 6 and 9 February.” According to one intelligence report, he also was assured by Azzam that he would be paid for his work.

The reports indicated an increased tempo of communications between Prigozhin and Kremlin officials during the same period, including Putin chief of staff Anton Vayno and deputy chief of staff Vladimir Ostrovenko, but the content of those talks is not known. The communications continued until Feb. 5 and resumed the day after the attack.

U.S. Special Forces at the base and overhead reconnaissance had seen the attack force mobilizing west of the river at least a week before the attack, according to Mattis and Lt. Gen. Jeffrey L. Harrigian, commander of U.S. Air Forces Central Command. They notified the Russians at that time and warned that the base would defend itself. Asked in a briefing with reporters last week to characterize the conversations, Harrigian said only that they “remained professional.”

On the night of the attack, Mattis said, “the Russians profess that they were not aware when we called about that force that had crossed, and it came closer. They were notified when the firing began,” and the Americans were told “there were no Russians there.”

When the attackers, using tanks and artillery, began firing in their direction, Harrigian said, the Americans struck back.

Asked Sunday as he returned from a trip to Europe whether the Russian government was responsible for its citizens fighting under contract in Syria, Mattis told reporters aboard his aircraft: “I’d prefer not to answer that right now. I need more information to understand and answer that authoritatively.”

The Syrian government has repeatedly threatened to use force to ensure the departure of U.S. troops from Syria. Russia, even as it has formed an uneasy partnership with the United States to avoid confrontation, also has condemned the U.S. presence as “illegal,” because the United States, unlike Russia, has not secured permission from the Syrian government.

According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Prigozhin owns a Russian company called Evro Polis, which, according to the Russian news site Fontanka, struck a deal in 2016 with the Syrian government to receive a 25 percent share of oil and natural gas produced on territory recaptured from the Islamic State. Most of those fields are on the eastern side of the Euphrates, where SDF fighters, accompanied by U.S. forces, have been advancing on the militants.

The Prigozhin-linked mercenary company Wagner apparently provides the ground forces to help achieve that goal, working under contract with the Syrian government.

	<p>The use of Wagner for operations such as the one in early February shows how integral private mercenary groups are to the Russian military effort in Syria and elsewhere, while giving the Kremlin “a thin patina of deniability,” said Michael Carpenter, a former Pentagon and White House official who worked on Russia policy in the Obama administration.</p> <p>“More importantly,” he said, “it allows Russian forces to take on the U.S.-backed SDF in a way that regular Russian forces wouldn’t dare do for fear of escalation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Parents: 100+ girls missing after attack
SOURCE	http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/02/22/101-nigerian-girls-missing-after-boko-haram-attack-parents-say.html
GIST	<p>MAIDUGURI, Nigeria – More than 100 girls are still missing three days after suspected Boko Haram extremists attacked their school in northern Nigeria, parents said Thursday, as fears grew that they may have been kidnapped like those from Chibok town nearly four years ago.</p> <p>The announcement came after government officials in Yobe state acknowledged that some 50 young women remained unaccounted for in the Monday evening attack on the village of Dapchi. There have been a number of conflicting reports, in part because of limited access to the area.</p> <p>One parent, Bashir Manzo, told The Associated Press that the parents compiled a list of 101 missing children and presented it to the governor.</p> <p>The state governor, Ibrahim Gaidam, "told us the girls have not been found and we should continue to pray for their safe return," another parent, Rabiou Sani, told the AP.</p> <p>Boko Haram horrified the world when it abducted 276 girls from a boarding school in Chibok almost four years ago. While some escaped and many others were released as part of negotiations, about 100 remain with their captors. The extremist group has kidnapped thousands of people over the years.</p> <p>Boko Haram fighters invaded Dapchi on Monday evening, forcing residents, including students of Government Girls Secondary school, to flee into the bushes. Police and the state ministry of education initially denied claims that students were seized.</p> <p>Student Aishatu Abdullahi was among those who escaped on foot and spent the night hiding in an abandoned house. "They were shooting guns and everyone was confused," she told reporters. "We saw some people pushing some of the students to enter their vehicles."</p> <p>Nigeria's government has repeatedly claimed in the past year that Boko Haram has been defeated, but the group continues to carry out deadly suicide bombings and other attacks.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Military: drone strike kills 4 al-Shabab
SOURCE	http://www.foxnews.com/us/2018/02/22/us-military-says-drone-strike-in-somalia-kills-4-extremists.html
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU, Somalia – The United States military for the second straight day is announcing a drone strike that killed al-Shabab extremists in Somalia.</p> <p>The U.S. Africa Command says the strike on Wednesday killed four "terrorists" near Jamaame in Lower Juba region in the south. The statement says the U.S. assesses no civilians were killed.</p>

	<p>The U.S. on Wednesday said a drone strike killed three al-Shabab extremists near Jilib town in Middle Juba region earlier this week.</p> <p>This latest U.S. drone strike is the fifth this year in Somalia.</p> <p>The U.S. carried out more than 30 drone strikes last year in the Horn of Africa nation after President Donald Trump approved expanded military efforts against al-Shabab.</p> <p>The extremist group is blamed for the October truck bombing in the capital, Mogadishu, that killed 512 people.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 UK: online couple jailed in bomb plot
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/online-dating-couple-jailed-uk-inspired-bomb-plot-53277893?
GIST	<p>A man and woman who met on a Muslim dating website were handed prison sentences Thursday for plotting an Islamic State-inspired bomb attack in Britain.</p> <p>Prosecutors say Munir Mohammed, an asylum-seeker from Sudan, and London pharmacist Rowaida El-Hassan met on SingleMuslim.com and bonded over their shared extremist views, exchanging videos of beheadings and other extremist material.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Mohammed volunteered to carry out an attack during Facebook exchanges with a man he believed to be an Islamic State group commander.</p> <p>He was arrested in December 2016, and police found bomb-making instructions and two of the three components for the explosive TATP at his home.</p> <p>Last month, a jury at London's Central Criminal Court found the couple guilty of preparing terrorist acts.</p> <p>Judge Michael Topolski sentenced 37-year-old Mohammed Thursday to life with no chance of parole for 14 years. El-Hassan, 32, was jailed for 12 years, plus five years on probation.</p> <p>The judge said Mohammed had decided to make an explosive device — either "an ordinary bomb" or one containing the poison ricin. He said Mohammed drew in El-Hassan until she "became an enthusiastic and encouraging partner."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 France: army kills jihadists in Mali
SOURCE	http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/02/23/french-army-says-several-jihadis-killed-in-mali-operation.html
GIST	<p>PARIS – France's armed forces spokesman says that French soldiers killed "around 10" jihadis last week in Mali during an operation near the Niger border.</p> <p>In comments to the AP Friday, Colonel Eric Steiger said the operation that took place on Saturday against "armed terrorists" in the northeast of the country came three days after another operation in Mali near the Algerian border killed several "enemy combatants" from "a different terrorist group."</p> <p>Two members of a French counterterrorism force in Mali were killed Wednesday after their armored vehicle was hit by an explosive device.</p> <p>On Friday, the European Union pledged an additional 50 million euros (\$61 million) to a joint</p>

	counterterror force in West Africa's vast Sahel region — which includes Mali — that has fallen prey to extremists.
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	02/22 Claim: CBP hasn't verified e-passport data
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/us-border-patrol-hasnt-validated-e-passport-data-for-years/
GIST	<p>PASSPORTS, LIKE ANY physical ID, can be altered and forged. That's partly why for the last 11 years the United States has put RFID chips in the back panel of its passports, creating so-called e-Passports. The chip stores your passport information—like name, date of birth, passport number, your photo, and even a biometric identifier—for quick, machine-readable border checks. And while e-Passports also store a cryptographic signature to prevent tampering or forgeries, it turns out that despite having over a decade to do so, US Customs and Border Protection hasn't deployed the software needed to actually verify it.</p> <p>This means that since as far back as 2006, a skilled hacker could alter the data on an e-Passport chip—like the name, photo, or expiration date—without fear that signature verification would alert a border agent to the changes. That could theoretically be enough to slip into countries that allow all-electronic border checks, or even to get past a border patrol agent into the US.</p> <p>"The idea of these things is that they're supposed to provide some additional electronic security over a standard passport, which can be forged using traditional techniques," says Matthew Green, a cryptographer at Johns Hopkins University. "The digital signature would provide that guarantee. But if it's not checked it doesn't."</p> <p>A letter to CBP on Thursday from senators Ron Wyden of Oregon and Claire McCaskill of Missouri highlights this crucial shortcoming. More than 100 countries now offer passports that come with a digital chip, and fewer than half of those include the capability to verify the integrity of data using a digital signature. But Wyden and McCaskill stress that while the US demands that countries in the Visa Waiver program put a chip in their passports, it has failed to fully realize its own e-Passport program.</p> <p>"CBP does not have the software necessary to authenticate the information stored on the e-Passport chips," the two Senators wrote. "Specifically, CBP cannot verify the digital signatures stored on the e-Passport, which means that CBP is unable to determine if the data stored on the smart chips has been tampered with or forged."</p> <p>The situation appears particularly shameful given that the US led the promotion of e-Passports around the world. "I had assumed that they would verify this," says Martijn Grooten, a security researcher for the information and testing platform Virus Bulletin. "It may cause some grumbles among countries in the Visa Waiver program: The US has demanded they offer e-Passports, and then only implemented the system partially themselves. It is a bit embarrassing."</p> <p>Even worse, DHS and CBP have known about the problem for at least eight years; the Government Accountability Office issued a report in 2010 detailing the need to implement signature verification for e-Passports. "DHS does not have the capability to fully verify the digital signatures because it ... has not implemented the system functionality necessary to perform the verification." GAO concluded at the time. "The additional security against forgery and counterfeiting that could be provided by the inclusion of computer chips on e-passports issued by the United States and foreign countries ... is not fully realized."</p> <p>Nearly a decade later, the DHS Inspector General's list of ongoing projects requiring oversight still doesn't include rolling out the software for signature verification. US Customs and Border Protection did not return WIRED's requests for comment.</p> <p>The holdup doesn't surprise longtime border security observers. "If you look at DHS's track record on</p>

	taking proposals from the RDT&E stage through validation and deployment, it's a horrible track record," says Patrick Eddington, a homeland security and civil liberties policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "DHS and its components spend a huge amount of their time and money on big-ticket projects that generally have a much higher level of congressional interest than this particular e-Passport issue."
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HEADLINE	02/22 Russia's new stealth fighter in Syria
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/22/russia-tests-new-su-57-stealth-fighter-over-war-we/
GIST	<p>Russia's most advanced combat warplane, the Su-57 stealth fighter, appears to have begun trial missions over the war-weary Syrian skies.</p> <p>On Thursday, unverified video footage posted on social media by Syrian political activists showed a pair of new Su-57s being escorted by more conventional Su-35 fighter jets and four Su-25 strike aircraft.</p> <p>The single-seat, twin-engine planes were allegedly filmed nearby Russia's Khmeimim Air Base near the southeastern city of Latakia along the Mediterranean coastline and employ state-of-the-art stealth technology to avoid radar detection. They were developed to challenge the U.S. F-22 Raptor — and have been called the "F-22 killer."</p> <p>While the new aircraft made its maiden flight last December, military analysts reacted with surprise to Thursday's sighting, which neither Russian or Syrian officials have officially confirmed.</p> <p>News sites supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad, however, were quick to welcome the additional firepower to the seven-year-old conflict, which has devastated the Middle Eastern country.</p> <p>Earlier this month deputy Russian Defense Minister Yuri Borisov, was quoted as saying, "We are buying Su-57 jets for combat trials. The first stage of state trials has been concluded. ... As you might imagine ... many test flights must be carried out."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Severed foot identified to Wash. man
SOURCE	http://mynorthwest.com/907674/severed-foot-found-on-beach-belonged-to-washington-man/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — Authorities say a severed foot in a running shoe found on a Vancouver Island beach belonged to a Washington man.</p> <p>The Seattle Times reports Kitsap County authorities reported 79-year-old Stanley Okumoto missing Sept. 19. His partial remains were found in November along a beach near Neah Bay, about a mile from where his car was found by authorities.</p> <p>A tibia and fibula attached to a left human foot with a white ankle sock in a black running shoe was found in December on a Vancouver Island beach in the hamlet of Jordan River.</p> <p>The Sooke Royal Canadian Mounted Police sent the leg to the coroners' service. The News Mirror of Sooke, British Columbia, reports it was confirmed, after DNA testing, that the foot and leg belonged to Okumoto.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Audit: Social Security underpaid \$131M
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/social-security-underpays-thousands-of-widows-and-widowers/

<p>GIST</p>	<p>A vast majority (82 percent) of beneficiaries entitled to receive survivor benefits and their own benefits weren't informed of an option to claim a larger benefit. That's according to a recent audit report issued by the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General. The audit estimated that the Social Security Administration (SSA) underpaid about \$131.8 million to 9,224 widows and widowers who were age 70 and older.</p> <p>When Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, it ended the "file-and-suspend" claiming strategy that activated a spouse's monthly benefit while the other spouse suspended his or her benefit, allowing it to increase the longer it was delayed (up to age 70). Congress believed that provision to be a loophole that was giving married couples more in benefits than they should receive.</p> <p>But another claiming strategy, known as "filing a restricted application" for survivor benefits, wasn't affected and is still allowed. Based on the results of the audit, the SSA is failing to inform widowers and widowers to consider filing for it. Here's how it works:</p> <p>Typically, when claiming Social Security retirement benefits, your application covers all benefits for which you're eligible. That's unless you specifically request to limit the scope of the application, which is known as filing a "restricted application."</p> <p>When a widow chooses to file a restricted application, she's electing to initially claim her survivor benefits and delay applying for her own benefits until age 70. Remember, when you delay claiming your own benefit, your benefit payment increases by 8 percent annually from full retirement age (65 to 67, depending on when you were born) up to age 70. Survivor benefits do not increase.</p> <p>When a widow files a restricted application to initially claim survivor benefits at full retirement age, she would initially receive a survivor benefit. But doing this preserves her right to claim the increased retirement benefits of her own at age 70, which can be substantially more and which she would continue to receive for life. The problem is, if she isn't informed of this strategy, she wouldn't know about it.</p> <p>The SSA Inspector General's report identified 13,555 widows and widowers who were entitled to claim survivor and retirement benefits before age 70. In a random sample of this group, it found that 82 percent could have gotten a higher monthly benefit if they had claimed survivor benefits and delayed claiming their own retirement benefits until age 70. The audit also found no evidence that SSA employees informed the people about their option to delay their retirement benefits to age 70, which is required.</p> <p>The additional benefits can be substantial. The report cited a widow who turned 70 in August 2015, whose combined Social Security retirement and survivor benefits through September 2017 totaled \$39,708. If she had been informed of her option to delay her retirement benefits to age 70 and elected it, she would have received benefits totaling \$52,708. In this specific case, the SSA underpaid the widow \$13,000.</p> <p>As a living spouse, you're also still eligible to use the restricted application strategy, if you were 62 by Jan. 1, 2016. When you turn 66, you can file the restricted application to activate spousal benefits if your spouse has also activated his benefit and is receiving his own Social Security payment. When the spouse receiving spousal benefits turns 70, she can then activate her own benefit, which may be larger, resulting in a higher lifetime income.</p>
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<p>HEADLINE</p>	<p>02/22 Lawmakers fast-track PRA exemption bill</p>
<p>SOURCE</p>	<p>http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/wa-lawmakers-fast-track-public-records-exemption-bill/281-522281624</p>
<p>GIST</p>	<p>A day after Washington lawmakers introduced a bill to exempt themselves from the state's voter-approved Public Records Act, they held an informal work session on the measure a day before both the Senate and House are set to take final votes to pass it out of the Legislature.</p>

Even lawmakers on the committee noted that many of them were still trying to sort through the bill, which has been put on a legislative fast track as the Legislature is in the midst of appealing a Jan. 19 ruling of a superior court judge who sided with media groups, led by the Associated Press, who had argued lawmakers had illegally been withholding documents like daily calendars, emails, and text messages.

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Chris Lanese ruled that state representatives and senators and their offices are agencies and fully subject to public disclosure requirements that cover other local and state elected officials and state agencies.

The new bill, SB 6617, argues "the legislature, like the judiciary, is a branch of the government rather than an "agency" of the state..."

Besides AP, the groups involved in the lawsuit are public radio's Northwest News Network, KING-TV, KIRO 7, Allied Daily Newspapers of Washington, The Spokesman-Review, the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association, Sound Publishing, Tacoma News Inc. and The Seattle Times.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Who behind unwanted Amazon packages?
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/national/article/Amazon-unwanted-packages-12632303.php
GIST	<p>Waves of products shipped from Amazon.com and its partners -- including sex toys -- have been showing up on the doorsteps of people who didn't order them, and the Seattle-based retailer says it doesn't know what to make of the phenomenon.</p> <p>The scheme, which is called "brushing," may have originated in the last decade in China, where one online retailer admitted in May 2016 that it sent orders to unwitting "customers" in order to boost its ratings.</p> <p>Forbes reported on this practice last November, saying a Chinese company had been mailing unwanted hair ties via the U.S. Postal Service to a woman in Pennsylvania.</p> <p>But the scheme really took off after the first of the year when Amazon became the retailer of choice, according to press reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student unions at colleges across Canada reported receiving everything from Wi-Fi devices to sex toys; • A couple in Massachusetts started receiving packages in October and were still receiving them this month; • A senior citizen in Florida became alarmed when she began receiving such things as phone chargers and ear buds; • A woman in Pittsburgh launched into action when she received a \$25 sex toy, among other items, and got the police involved when she felt Amazon failed to take her concerns seriously; • A sex toy was also the impetus to file a police report for a Minnesota couple who began receiving parcels for their college-age daughter. <p>Some theorize that the buyer or buyers, whoever they may be, are trying to game the reviewing system -- either Amazon's or someone else's -- by purchasing goods from their own stores on Amazon, then sending them to random recipients, who then become unwitting but "verified" buyers who leave glowing reviews.</p> <p>Amazon has thus far denied that its review system can be manipulated this way, but the company also has failed to explain why packages are being sent to people who are concerned with what the practice means for their privacy.</p> <p>It's "part of some bad behavior that we are investigating," an Amazon spokesperson told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>"We are investigating inquiries from consumers who have received unsolicited packages as this would</p>

	<p>violate our policies," Amazon said in a statement. "We have confirmed the sellers involved did not receive names or shipping addresses from Amazon."</p> <p>Until the mystery is solved, at least one recipient of the unwanted parcels is showing a sense of humor about it.</p> <p>"I've seen all these other reports now, and all of these other people are saying they got these really cool gadgets," the woman from Pittsburgh told The Daily Beast. "I'm like, 'Why didn't I get one of those?' At least send me the Bluetooth speaker to go along with the cord."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Deputy Australian PM resigns
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/22/asia/australia-barnaby-joyce-resign-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce said Friday he will resign following weeks of controversy after he announced he was expecting a baby with a former staff member.</p> <p>Earlier in February, Joyce had admitted to the affair, confirming long-running rumors, but refused to resign saying it was a private matter.</p> <p>Then on Thursday, the National Party said it had received a separate, formal complaint against its leader, accusing him of sexual harassment, Australia's national broadcaster ABC reported.</p> <p>CNN contacted the National Party but didn't receive an immediate response. The Nationals govern in a coalition agreement with the Liberal Party led by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.</p> <p>Speaking to journalists, he said he was resigning from his role as leader of the National Party, to put aside "this current cacophony of issues" and avoid further harassment of his family and partner.</p> <p>"(It has been an) incredible privilege, that I'm so humbled by, to have been the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Diseased streets of San Francisco
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/san-francisco-needles-garbage-american-carnage/2018/02/22/id/844984/
GIST	<p>Downtown San Francisco is littered with a dangerous mix of drug needles, garbage, and feces — an "unacceptable" condition that rivals some slums in developing countries, an NBC affiliate reported Thursday.</p> <p>The investigation surveyed 153 blocks of the city – a more than 20-mile stretch that includes popular tourist spots like Union Square and major hotel chains, as well as City Hall, schools, playgrounds and a police station, NBC Bay Area reported.</p> <p>The NBC affiliate said it spent three days on its survey, discovering trash on every one of the blocks surveyed. While some streets were littered with items as small as a candy wrapper, the vast majority of trash found included large heaps of garbage, food, and discarded junk.</p> <p>The investigation also found 100 drug needles and more than 300 piles of feces throughout downtown, the outlet reported.</p> <p>Dr. Lee Riley, an infectious disease expert at University of California, Berkeley, told the news outlet said the investigation's results shows parts of San Francisco might be dirtier than the slums in some developing</p>

	<p>countries.</p> <p>"The contamination is . . . much greater than communities in Brazil or Kenya or India," he told the affiliate.</p> <p>City supervisor Hillary Ronen called the findings "unacceptable" — and blamed the problem on a lack of funding to deal with the city's homeless population.</p> <p>"We're losing conventions in San Francisco," she told the affiliate. "All of this is happening because we aren't addressing the root cause, which is we need more temporary beds for street homelessness."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Study: alcohol, coffee for longevity
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/02/22/alcohol-and-coffee-can-help-you-live-past-90-study-says/364878002/
GIST	<p>A study out of the University of California-Irvine has revealed that consumption of moderate amounts of alcohol and coffee is linked to living a longer life.</p> <p>Re-read that last sentence. There are no typos. There are no jokes.</p> <p>The key word is "moderate," of course. The study, called "The 90+ Study," started in 2003 and examined "the oldest-old" age group — about 1,700 nonagenarians — to determine what is key to living to your 90th birthday and beyond.</p> <p>The study has found, among other things, that people "who drank moderate amounts of alcohol or coffee lived longer than those who abstained," and that "people who were overweight in their 70s lived longer than normal or underweight people did."</p> <p>"I have no explanation for it, but I do firmly believe that modest drinking improves longevity," Claudia Kawas, a key researcher for the study, recently said at the American Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Austin, according to the Independent.</p> <p>The research found that subjects who drank two glasses of beer or wine every day decreased their chances of a premature death by 18%, and those who drank two cups of coffee a day decreased their chances by 10%.</p> <p>But don't go planning your happy hours just yet — you should still exercise. This same research found regular exercise — as well as keeping busy with a regular hobby — is also key to living a longer life.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Iran hints at seaborne reactors
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-report/iran-hints-at-seaborne-reactors-while-respecting-nuclear-deal-idUSKCN1G625G
GIST	<p>VIENNA (Reuters) - Iran has fired a diplomatic warning shot at Washington by raising the prospect of building nuclear reactors for ships while staying within the limits set by its atomic deal with major powers, a U.N. nuclear watchdog report showed on Thursday.</p> <p>U.S. President Donald Trump has long railed against the 2015 nuclear deal for reasons including its limited duration and the fact it does not cover Iran's ballistic missile program. He has threatened to pull out unless European allies help "fix" the agreement with a follow-up accord.</p> <p>Since Trump took office more than a year ago, Iran has stayed within limits on items including its stock of</p>

low-enriched uranium imposed by the deal, which also lifted painful international economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

A quarterly report on Iran by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, which is policing the deal's restrictions, showed that Iran remained compliant, but also that it had informed the agency of a "decision that has been taken to construct naval nuclear propulsion in future".

Iran has raised that prospect in public statements before. In 2016, President Hassan Rouhani ordered the start of planning on the development of nuclear marine propulsion in reaction to what he called U.S. violations of the nuclear deal.

Rouhani was alluding to the lack of economic benefit to Iran from the deal because many companies including big Western banks continue to shun the country for fear of breaching separate U.S. financial sanctions that stayed in place after other sanctions were rescinded.

Analysts have said Iran is many years or decades away from having naval nuclear capacity. But mentioning it evokes both projecting military might and potentially enriching uranium beyond the limit of 3.67 percent purity imposed by the deal.

A senior diplomat said it was not clear from Iran's statement to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) whether it was referring to those previous statements, but they appeared to be a reaction to Trump's comments.

"Formally there is no clarity on this. But informally yes, why now? So obviously there is a link ... to the possibility that the JCPOA's future is questioned," the senior diplomat said, referring to the 2015 deal by its full name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Iran's notification on marine propulsion could cover a range of intentions over any period of time, meaning there was no cause for concern, the senior diplomat said.

Iran has yet to respond to the IAEA's request for "further clarifications and amplifications", the report said, adding that if Iran had reached a concrete decision to build new facilities for marine propulsion it must provide design information.

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HEADLINE 02/22 Driver intentionally crashes into ER

SOURCE <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mayor-driver-intentionally-crashed-into-er-lit-self-aflame/>

GIST MIDDLETOWN, Conn. -- Authorities say a driver intentionally crashed into a Connecticut hospital emergency room with his car and then set himself on fire.

Middletown Mayor Dan Drew says the driver had multiple gasoline containers in the vehicle when he crashed through an entrance to Middlesex Hospital Thursday morning. Drew says the man's motives aren't known.

The driver was airlifted to Bridgeport Hospital's burn unit in critical condition, reports CBS affiliate WFSB. No one else was hurt.

Authorities say the driver is a man in his 20s who is known to Middletown police. The Connecticut State Police Bomb Squad responded and the hospital went into "emergency operations mode," reports WFSB.

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HEADLINE 02/22 City, county influx false 911 calls

SOURCE <http://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2018/02/22/apple-elm-grove-911-accidental/>

GIST	<p>ELK GROVE (CBS13) – Emergency dispatchers in Elk Grove and Sacramento County are seeing an influx of false alarm 911 calls flooding their emergency communication centers.</p> <p>The source of the accidental calls is the Apple distribution site in Elk Grove.</p> <p>“We’ve been seeing these calls for the last four months from Apple,” said police dispatcher Jamie Hudson.</p> <p>Dispatchers say the calls started back in October of 2017, and typically there’s no one on the other line.</p> <p>“We’re able to see quickly where the call is coming from, so when we get one from Apple, the address will come up with their location,” said Hudson.</p> <p>On average, Elk Grove Police say they’ve received 20 accidental 911 calls a day from Apple, roughly 1,600 calls since October. Hudson says the calls take valuable seconds away from calls that could be real life-and-death emergencies.</p> <p>“The times when it’s greatly impacting us is when we have other emergencies happening and we may have a dispatcher on another 911 call that may have to put that call on hold to triage the incoming call,” he said.</p> <p>The calls are all coming from an Apple repair and refurbishing center off Laguna Boulevard.</p> <p>The Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department Communication Center is also getting these calls — 47 since January 1. Dispatchers there say they sometimes hear technicians working in the background.</p> <p>“To them, it sounds like people talking about Apple, or devices or generally about maintenance and repairs,” said Sgt. Shaun Hampton with the Sheriff’s department.</p> <p>Apple hasn’t confirmed which of their devices is actually causing these calls: the iPhone or Apple watch, but both devices can be triggered easily. With just a touch of a button, SOS comes on and 911 is called.</p> <p>“It could potentially have an impact on the services we provide,” said Sgt. Hampton.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/22 Springfield student arrested ‘SHS’ school threat
SOURCE	http://www.whio.com/news/springfield-other-districts-investigate-vague-school-shooting-threat/OfbIN7mzAZd1WqB2SigqDJ/
GIST	<p>SPRINGFIELD — UPDATE @ 10:30 p.m: After a Springfield High School student was arrested on Thursday due to viral threats posted on Facebook about a school shooting, Superintendent Dr. Robert Hill released a statement about student safety.</p> <p>“As I have stated many times and as I will continue to reiterate, student and staff safety is of the utmost importance in our district. Threats, whether written, posted on-line, or verbalized to others, will be thoroughly and immediately investigated. Anyone involved in making threats will face serious disciplinary action and additional consequences to the maximum extent of the law”, said Hill.</p> <p>Hill also said school will remain in session, but urges students to be diligent in reporting anything that “feels out of place”.</p> <p>A Springfield High School student was arrested Thursday after police said she posted a Facebook threat about a school shooting that went viral, causing districts across Clark County and the country to take precautions.</p>

Authorities declined to name the 16-year-old, a junior, but Clark County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Travis Russell said she was charged with felony inducing panic in juvenile court.

Police Chief Lee Graf both declined to comment on the motives behind the post. The Facebook post was taken down soon after it was posted, Graf said, but it had already gone viral.

The sheriff's office and Springfield Police Division executed a search warrant at a home on Tibbetts Avenue around the same time, he said, and seized electronics that the student might have used to make the post.

Anyone who threatens the safety of children in Springfield will face consequences, Graf said.

The girl arrested for allegedly making threats at Springfield High School is 16 years old, Clark County Sheriff Chief Deputy Travis Russell said during a press conference Thursday afternoon. She is being charged with inducing panic, a second degree felony, and could face several years in prison if convicted.

When police got word of the threat they executed a search warrant and searched the school before classes started, officials said.

"You can't be dismissive when you get these types of threats," Russel said.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office made an arrest Thursday in correlation to the 'S.H.S.' school threat circulating on social media.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Bellingham police 'SHS' school threat
SOURCE	http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article201531399.html
GIST	<p>Bellingham Police and school officials are assuring the public that a social media post by "Ray Andres," who threatened a school shooting at SHS, wasn't about a local school and was likely a hoax.</p> <p>Bellingham School District has been hearing from nervous students, parents and staff about the post, Superintendent Greg Baker said.</p> <p>The post reads that "Yes SHS is the school I want" and "I will not begin telling people what my name is, but I will bring a gun to school Tomorrow, so be prepared to hear shoots (sic)."</p> <p>"We encourage staff and families to reassure students that this post is a hoax, and that their safety is our top priority," Baker said, adding that Bellingham Police investigated and determined there was no credible threat. "We understand that this post comes at a particularly sensitive time for students in the wake of the shooting last week in Parkland, Florida."</p> <p>The post, which has been widely reported, has caused widespread concern. It likely originated in another state, possibly Ohio, the BPD said.</p> <p>"There is no indication the post was specifically referring to schools in Bellingham," BPD said on its Facebook page, "and several news articles indicate the post referenced a school in Ohio."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 'SHS' viral school threat hoax message
SOURCE	http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2018/02/shs_school_threat_hoax_message.html
GIST	Law enforcement and education officials around the country are on alert after a viral social media post threatened violence against a school dubbed only "SHS."

The vague threat traces back to a Facebook user calling himself "Ray Andres." In the first message, the poster says "Yes, SHS is the school I want." That's followed by another post saying "I will not begin telling people what my name is, but I will bring a gun to school Tomorrow, so be prepared to hear gunshots."

The common initials - SHS - had law enforcement across the country on alert, including some in Alabama.

The source of the threat appears to originate from Springfield, Ohio, according to law enforcement, and is believed to be referring to Springfield High School. Springfield officials were made aware of the threat Monday night and beefed up their presence at local schools.

Law enforcement in Springfield said they do not believe the threat to be credible.

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HEADLINE	02/22 DOJ crackdown background check liars
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/22/us/politics/gun-background-checks-prosecutions.html
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GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Justice Department plans to ask United States attorneys to prioritize the prosecutions of prospective gun buyers who lie on federal background check forms, according to two law enforcement officials briefed on the decision.</p>
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The request, part of a larger set of recommendations by the Justice Department expected to be announced in the coming days, would essentially enforce existing laws that govern gun purchases. It allows the Trump administration to take action on gun-related violence without riling opponents of more restrictive gun policies.

A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment.

The directive comes as the Trump administration weighs responses to the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., last week, in which 17 people were killed.

But the renewed emphasis on background checks would not have stopped the suspect in that shooting, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, who legally purchased several firearms — including an AK-47 within the past month.

Thousands of prospective gun buyers are denied firearm purchases every year through the F.B.I.'s National Instant Criminal Background Check System. Prospective buyers must fill out a six-page application, including whether they have ever been convicted of or indicted in a crime, which would disqualify them from purchasing a firearm.

The buyer can be approved, denied or issued a delay for the purchase. Under the third option, the firearms dealer must wait three days while the F.B.I. determines whether the prospective buyer's application is truthful and whether that person is eligible to buy a gun. If firearms dealers do not hear back from the bureau during the waiting period, they are legally allowed to sell the gun.

While lying on the background forms is a felony, it is a crime that has rarely, if ever, been prosecuted.

Thousands of prospective gun buyers are denied firearms purchasers annually, but between 2008 and 2015, fewer than 32 cases a year were even considered for prosecution, according to the Justice Department's inspector general.

The new directive is expected to be welcomed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which is responsible for policing background check violations. But it is unclear whether federal prosecutors offices will share the enthusiasm, and whether there will be any recourse if the

	guidance is not heeded.
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HEADLINE	02/22 Missouri gov. indicted over nude photo
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/22/eric-greitens-missouri-governor-indicted-over-nude/
GIST	<p>The governor of Missouri was indicted Thursday on a felony charge that accuses him of taking a nude photo of a woman without her consent, a move that Gov. Eric Greitens called a “misguided political decision” and his lawyer denounced as virtually without precedent.</p> <p>Mr. Greitens was charged with invasion of privacy by a City of St. Louis grand jury Thursday, causing Democratic lawmakers to demand that Mr. Greitens resign or face impeachment and prompting Republican lawmakers to launch their own probe.</p> <p>Circuit Attorney Kimberly M. Gardner said in a brief statement that the incident took place March 21, 2015, almost 20 months before Mr. Greitens, who is married with two children, was elected.</p> <p>According to the indictment, the image involved a “state of full or partial nudity without the knowledge and consent . . . in a place where a person would have a reasonable expectation of privacy.”</p> <p>Ms. Gardner said the photo became a first-degree invasion of privacy and a felony because the suspect “transmitted the image contained in the photograph in a manner that allows access to that image via a computer.” Missouri punishes first-degree invasion of privacy with up to four years in prison.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Columbine effect in mass shootings
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/22/eric-harris-and-dylan-klebold-columbine-high-school/
GIST	<p>LITTLETON, Colo. — Policymakers seeking to counter the rise of U.S. mass shootings after Parkland, Florida, are looking at everything from gun laws to mental health, but there is no obvious legislative fix for the Columbine effect.</p> <p>The 1999 Columbine High School massacre gave rise to a fascination with the two teenage killers and mass shootings in general, spawning a social media subculture and inspiring dozens of disturbed young men to seek fame and vengeance by emulating their deadly heroes.</p> <p>“Columbine was not the first modern school shooting, but it put school shootings on the map,” said Jeff Kass, author of the 2009 book “Columbine: A True Crime Story.” “In that sense, it’s a really tough and sad thing to say, but I think Columbine opened the door not only for these school shooters, but the adult mass shooters as well.”</p> <p>Psychologist Peter Langman keeps updated on his SchoolShooters.info website a diagram of U.S. mass shooters who credited Columbine as an influence. So far, the count is 33.</p> <p>That doesn’t include people who were foiled before they could carry out their plots, such as John David LaDue, who “idolized” the Columbine killers but was arrested shortly before his planned 2014 attack on his Minnesota high school.</p> <p>The phenomenon is so pervasive that analysts say the word “copycat” doesn’t quite cut it. It’s more like a contagion.</p> <p>“Whether or not they even know it, Columbine established that a mass shooting is an avenue for you to get</p>

revenge or get your message across,” said Mr. Kass. “Whatever your sort of purpose is along those lines, Columbine planted the seed.”

Why Columbine? It wasn't the first. Eleven months earlier, 15-year-old Kip Kinkel fatally shot two students and injured 25 at his high school in Springfield, Oregon, after he was expelled.

Columbine also wasn't the deadliest school shooting, even in 1999. The Columbine gunmen killed 13 before taking their own lives, but the 1966 University of Texas tower shooter killed 14, including an unborn child, in addition to his wife and mother the night before.

No mass shooting drew more media coverage than Columbine, however, and much of it centered on the teenage perpetrators.

Fueling the Columbine lore were reports that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were seeking to right wrongs after being bullied, a narrative that has since been widely disputed but struck a nerve with teens feeling ostracized and tormented by their classmates.

Mr. Langman pointed out that Harris said he was an Adolf Hitler admirer who viewed others as “inferior beings.” Under his black trenchcoat, he wore a T-shirt on the day of the attack with the words “natural selection.”

“Columbine is perceived by many as an uprising of the oppressed,” said Mr. Langman. “But that's not how [Harris] was looking at the attack. He wrote about wanting to get rid of all the stupid, inferior people, but because of how it was portrayed in the media, about two bullied kids, that perception is still very much alive.”

Researchers have since identified Harris as a cold-blooded psychopath. Klebold was more complicated: a depressed follower subject to fits of rage. He may have been psychotic, Mr. Langman said.

Then there is the role of chat rooms. After Columbine faded from the headlines, online communities kept the mystique alive by introducing new groups of teens interested in mass shootings to the massacre in Jefferson County, Colorado.

A study released this year by Finnish researchers Jenni Raitanen and Atte Oksanen found that subculture participants could be divided into four subgroups: researchers, fangirls, Columbiners and copycats. The copycats, the study says, is “the only subgroup explicitly interested in replicating the acts.”

At the same time, nearly all were influenced by Columbine: “The common denominator among almost all our interviewees named Columbine as one of the most important shootings for them,” said the study, “Global Online Subculture Surrounding School Shootings,” published in the American Behavioral Scientist journal.

Why? “Because [Harris] and [Klebold] are easy to relate to,” said one participant. “I'm sure in real life they were nerdy, geeky and not as cool as they pass themselves off as but many people, kids especially, can see themselves as either them or friends of theirs. They like the same music, play the same games.”

The Texas tower shooter was a 25-year-old married former Marine and Kinkel was a scrawny 15-year-old, but the Columbine shooters were seen as “cool,” said Adam Lankford, an associate criminology professor at the University of Alabama.

“And the fact that there were two of them, I think it makes them a little more attractive,” Mr. Lankford said. “The Virginia Tech shooter has been cited as a source of inspiration by some, but certainly by fewer, and if you're dealing with as your market of consumers a lot of people who are lonely or socially awkward, they're going to be attracted to people who seem like them but less socially awkward. Cooler.”

Therein lies the problem for lawmakers: You can restrict firearms, toughen background checks and pour

<p>Return to Top</p>	<p>funding into mental health care, but how do you fight what someone might think is cool?</p> <p>The Columbine effect’s silver lining is that would-be shooters leave a trail. Their fascination with the 1999 attack is often known to others who can avert disaster if they bring their concerns to authorities.</p> <p>Of course, the Parkland gunman was reported to the FBI, to no avail.</p> <p>“People reported and it didn’t do any good, but that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t do it,” said Mr. Kass, the author.</p> <p>While people need to be encouraged to speak up, authorities need to do a better job of listening and reacting when people report such behavior, said Mr. Langman, author of the 2015 book “School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators.”</p> <p>“I get calls by people who are afraid for their lives, and people don’t listen to them,” said Mr. Langman. “Parents and students often run into resistance. The schools are afraid of being sued. The people they’re reporting haven’t broken any laws. There are all these barriers that get in the way.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 WSP issued 878 E-DUI tickets 2018
SOURCE	http://mynorthwest.com/907528/troopers-issue-more-than-800-tickets-for-e-dui-in-2018/
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A state law that makes it a crime to drive while using electronic devices has resulted in hundreds of tickets being issued since Jan. 1.</p> <p>The law, titled the Driving Under the Influence of Electronics Act, went into effect in June but law enforcement officers did not start issuing citations until the new year.</p> <p>Washington State Patrol spokesman James Prouty told The Spokesman-Review that troopers in January made 1,677 E-DUI stops statewide and doled out 878 tickets.</p> <p>An E-DUI is defined as use of a personal electronic device while driving a motor vehicle on a public highway. A person who does so is guilty of a traffic infraction and must pay a fine. A first offense is \$136; a second within five years is \$234.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Seattle: guilty plea ‘black bloc’ protester
SOURCE	http://mynorthwest.com/907913/man-guilty-of-throwing-gas-filled-bottles-at-seattle-police/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — A Wisconsin man has pleaded guilty to federal charges that he threw gasoline-filled beer bottles at Seattle police during a May Day demonstration in 2016.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Seattle says 33-year-old Wil Casey Floyd, of Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, entered the plea Thursday to unlawful possession of a destructive device. He admitted he threw five unlit bottles at police as he participated in a so-called “black bloc” of protesters.</p> <p>One officer suffered leg burns after a flash-bang grenade ignited gasoline from a bottle that shattered at his feet.</p> <p>Floyd then dropped a bag he was carrying and quickly changed his appearance to avoid detection. Investigators used videos of the events to identify him. He was arrested in April 2017.</p> <p>Prosecutors agreed to recommend no more than three years and one month in prison when he is sentenced in June, but he could face up to 10 years.</p>

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HEADLINE	02/22 Montenegro: embassy attacker ex-soldier
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/montenegro-police-working-identify-attacker-us-embassy-53268258?
GIST	<p>The man who hurled a bomb into the U.S. Embassy compound in Montenegro's capital, and then killed himself, was an ex-soldier apparently decorated by former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic after NATO's bombing of Serbia and Montenegro in 1999, authorities said Thursday.</p> <p>A police official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the ongoing investigation, said the man was 43-year-old Dalibor Jaukovic, who was identified by a close relative.</p> <p>At a news conference, police formally identified the suspect by his initials D.J., in line with what the police official said earlier. The man had no criminal record and the attack wasn't an act of terrorism, police said.</p> <p>Police added they were investigating his motives and whether he had acted alone. They said security was beefed up around all foreign embassies in Montenegro.</p> <p>"Measures are being taken together with the FBI agents to check the social networks this individual has used," senior police official Enis Bakovic said.</p> <p>Photos posted on Jaukovic's Facebook profile include a plaque honoring his contribution in the fight against NATO during the bombing. The plaque appears to be personally signed by Milosevic. In a Facebook post in May, Jaukovic said "no to NATO."</p> <p>Police said in a statement earlier that an assailant threw a bomb into the embassy yard and then killed himself by activating another one around midnight Wednesday.</p> <p>The blast created a crater but caused no other material damage to the embassy property, the statement said. The embassy said Thursday all staff are safe and accounted for after the incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Argentina: cocaine seized Russia embassy
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/argentina-arrests-cocaine-seized-russian-embassy-53279456?cid=clicksource_76_4_article%20roll_articleroll_hed
GIST	<p>Argentine officials say that a police officer and a Russian diplomatic official were arrested after authorities seized a large cocaine shipment at the Russian embassy in Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Security Minister Patricia Bullrich said Thursday that 860 pounds (389 kilograms) of the drug were hidden inside diplomatic luggage that was seized in 2016.</p> <p>Authorities arrested the suspects Wednesday after conducting a joint, yearlong Argentine-Russian investigation after the Russian ambassador to the South American country reported that the luggage was found at an annex building of the embassy.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 New law targets prohibited gun buyers
SOURCE	http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/investigations/police-use-new-law-to-target-prohibited-gun-buyers/281-522272874

When William Price walked into a Puyallup gun store last year, he did what thousands of people with criminal records in Washington do each year: he tried to buy a gun.

Video from closed-circuit cameras inside the Sportsman's Warehouse shows Price filling out a federal firearms purchase form, and swearing that he's eligible to buy a gun.

But five years ago, Price signed paperwork in court acknowledging that he lost his rights to own a firearm when he was convicted of a robbery in which he pointed "a small handgun at the victim."

Price's case was the start of a wave of prosecutions in Washington State, stemming from a new law passed last year that cracks down on "prohibited" gun buyers who lie about their criminal backgrounds and attempt to purchase guns from federally licensed firearms dealers.

KING 5 and public radio's Northwest News Network reported that up to 4,000 prohibited buyers fail background checks each year at Washington gun stores. It's rare, however, that police and prosecutors follow up on those cases.

"After seeing [your] story, I began to wonder if we could do more," Puyallup Police Captain Ryan Portmann told KING 5's Chris Ingalls.

Portmann assigned a detective to investigate William Price's attempted purchase of a handgun on March 27 of last year. It was the police department in Price's town, Puyallup, that had conducted the background when it received a request from the sporting goods store.

"To be frank, we weren't processing our [denied purchases] at that time. They would come into records, we would confirm that a person couldn't lawfully possess a firearm, and then we'd kind of let the ball drop there," Portmann said.

The law that took effect last July taps the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to review all denied gun purchases and report the most serious ones to the appropriate police agency. WASPC typically notifies an agency if a person with a serious criminal record tries to buy a gun, or if a person fails background checks at multiple gun stores. WASPC has sent 300 alerts to police agencies since last summer, including 97 notifications that people with active protective orders against them have tried to purchase a gun.

It was with the powers granted under the new law that the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office charged Timothy Smythe with the attempted purchases of AR-15 rifles at two different gun stores in the Bremerton area. Smythe has a robbery conviction from Hawaii. Last month he pleaded guilty to "false swearing" for lying on the purchase form about his criminal record.

Timothy Smythe attempts to purchase an AR-15 rifle at Sportsman's Warehouse in Silverdale. He admitted to trying twice to buy a firearm within a matter of days, but he failed background checks because of his robbery conviction.

This month, Lacey police charged Daniel Legeer, who has a theft conviction, with unlawful possession of a firearm. Legeer was caught after he returned to a pawn shop in November to pay back the loan he'd taken out on the weapon. The pawn shop was required to run a background check and, in doing so, found out about Legeer's criminal past.

Puyallup police have set up a workflow for the investigations that allows a detective to review a case in about eight hours. But they've also noticed a problem with the law when it comes to trying to charge prohibited buyers with felony violations: it does not specify which charge should be filed against violators. Without that guidance, prosecutors have opted to charge misdemeanors.

Portmann says it's disappointing that some buyers with serious criminal histories, like Price, aren't facing felonies.

"A person with a violent history, I think the punishment should fit the crime if they're going to try to purchase a firearm," Portmann said.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Illegal fishing 'highly organized threat'
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/maritime-security/illegal-fishing-widespread-often-highly-organized-security-threat/
GIST	<p>Illegal fishing is a threat to international security as well as to the environment, notes an expert on surveillance technology, and high-tech tracking of illicit trawlers along with choking off supply chains is essential to reining in the threat.</p> <p>Retired British Royal Navy Cdr. Peter Horn of the Pew Charitable Trusts, writing for the Maritime Foundation, said that "with as much as 26 million tons of seafood taken illegally from our seas each year – that's one in every five fish sold – IUU fishing is more than just a danger to the environment."</p> <p>Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, wrote the director of the Ending Illegal Fishing project, is "a widespread, often highly organized, security threat that can limit the ability of nations to feed, employ and safeguard their citizens."</p> <p>"Up to \$23.5 billion a year is potentially lost in the global market due to IUU fishing, robbing law-abiding fishers of their economic security and livelihoods," he said. "Laws preventing IUU fishing and related crimes have little or no effect without robust governance, including proper implementation and enforcement. In other words, efforts to end illegal fishing should be designed and executed in a way that is integrated, comprehensive, and aligned with the views of all key players."</p> <p>"But while robust governance is necessary for a successful battle against IUU fishing, it is only one part of the solution. Success will also require the creation and implementation of international agreements and policies, cooperation among enforcement authorities, advanced technological solutions, engagement with the seafood industry, and, above all, strong leadership by policymakers and law enforcement officials, including a willingness to share information and resources to drive change."</p> <p>Interpol launched Project Scale in 2013 with the support of 190 countries to established an international alert system for suspects associated with fisheries crimes.</p> <p>Separately, technology such as the Oversea Ocean Monitor facilitates integration of satellite tracking data and imagery data "with details about a vessel's history, licences, ownership, risk index and more."</p> <p>The app uses algorithms "to identify patterns of fishing and generate alerts when suspicious activity – such as a vessel fishing inside a marine reserve or a known illegal operator demonstrating signs of fishing in a banned area – is detected."</p> <p>"Analysts can quickly share reliable information on suspected offenders with port officials and enforcement authorities, who in turn can stop the crime or confront the suspects when they come into port," said Horn, who compared IUU fishing to "an arms race."</p> <p>"While new solutions are being deployed, unscrupulous operators are looking for novel ways to plunder from the world's oceans. It is vital for everyone to take responsibility – governments, fisheries, international authorities and consumers all have an important role to play in curbing this destructive practice. Over the past few years, front-runners such as Chile and the United Kingdom have emerged, emphasizing the significance of marine protected areas, as well as the critical tools and technology that are necessary to monitor them."</p> <p>The United States, he said, "has also taken critical steps to engage the seafood industry and identify market</p>

levers that will help bring about effective change along the supply chain.”

“What’s most important is strong leadership across all these areas of work, accompanied by a willingness to share information and resources – that is what will win the battle against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing,” Horn added.

The U.S. Coast Guard is tasked with ensuring illegal foreign fishing vessels don’t encroach on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as well as enforcing international agreements against IUU fishing.

In a November Center for Strategic & International Studies and National Geographic report, authors Gregory B. Poling and Conor Cronin called illegal fishing “a nontraditional security threat, and one that is underappreciated by most of the policy community in the United States and abroad.”

“IUU fishing supports, both directly and indirectly, nonstate actors engaged in organized crime, piracy, and armed insurgency and terrorism. It has become a part of the portfolio of illegal criminal organizations, thereby supporting both directly and indirectly their other illicit activities,” said the report, underscoring that “the connection between IUU fishing and human trafficking has been widely documented and, while reliable statistics are impossible to come by, the scale of the problem is clearly enormous.” This includes forced-labor crews kept out at sea for months in modern-day slavery.

Lanchas spotted by the Coast Guard near the U.S.-Mexico border in the Gulf of Mexico are sometimes not just hauling illegal fish but also narcotics.

Earlier this month, one of the 20-30 feet long Mexican fishing boats was intercepted illegally fishing in federal waters off southern Texas; five sharks and 94 red snapper fish were seized from the boat. The Coast Guard Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi has detected nearly four dozen lanchas north of the U.S.-Mexico Maritime Border since Sept. 1; 17 of the boats were interdicted.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Road rage behind killing postal driver
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tony-mosby-donnie-ferrell-arrested-deadly-shooting-postal-worker-texas/
GIST	<p>DALLAS -- An arrest has been made in the shooting death of a United States Postal Service worker in Texas, CBS Dallas/Fort Worth reports. According to police, 25-year-old Donnie Ferrell was arrested Wednesday night. He's currently being held without bond.</p> <p>Tony Mosby, 58, was shot and killed early Monday morning while driving along Interstate 30 in Dallas.</p> <p>Upon their arrival, officers located Mosby inside the 18-wheeler, which was parked in the eastbound lanes of the highway.</p> <p>"On behalf of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to the Mosby family for the tragic loss of their loved one," said Thomas Noyes, inspector in charge of the Fort Worth Division. "The cooperation among federal and local law enforcement agencies in this matter is a prime example of how we work best when we work together."</p> <p>"With this arrest, we take a crucial step towards ensuring that the person allegedly responsible for this senseless murder is brought to justice," added U.S. attorney Nealy Cox.</p> <p>According to the arrest affidavit, road rage prompted Ferrell to allegedly shoot Mosby. Authorities say Ferrell became angry after Mosby made a hand gesture while passing him on the freeway.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>

Because Mosby was a Federal employee, the resources of the U.S. Postal Inspectors and the FBI were added to help Dallas Police investigate the case.

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HEADLINE 02/22 Poulsbo officer charged w/drugs, theft

SOURCE <http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/poulsbo-police-officer-charged-with-drugs-theft/281-522361325>

GIST A Poulsbo police officer was charged Wednesday with theft and felony drug possession after she confessed to repeatedly taking narcotics left in city hall’s prescription drug take-back box, according to court documents.

Stacey Lee Smaaladen, 49, of Poulsbo, told Bremerton police investigators she took the drugs to supplement her own legally prescribed medications, which she took for pain from injuries, including back surgery. She joined the department in 1995.

In the interview, Smaaladen agreed that taking the drugs amounted to theft.

A search of her bag found morphine, tramadol (both of which are narcotic painkillers) and several other prescription pills that had not been prescribed to her, according to court documents.

Smaaladen gave a testimonial for the Bothell clinic where she received her back surgery, which was posted in September. In it, she describes the frustration of not being able to go on calls with her fellow officers because of her severe back pain but said her recovery from the surgery allowed her to resume duty and ride horses.

“When I had the sheet of paper ... that signed me off to come back to full duty and gave that to my deputy chief – that was really good,” Smaaladen said, according to the Spine Institute Northwest website.

The thefts came to light in October when a city employee reviewed surveillance footage and saw Smaaladen in the lobby at city hall, after business hours, and believed her activity was suspicious, according to charging documents.

The employee reviewed footage from other days and found Smaaladen at the drop box almost every night, sometimes in uniform, sometimes in plain clothes. On one occasion she had brought her dog with her, according to documents.

In the footage, Smaaladen was seen using what appeared to be a key to open the box, and other times she used what appeared to be a coat hanger to fish out drugs. She later told investigators she took the key to the lockbox from the police department.

After reviewing several days of video, the employee reported the observations to Police Chief Dan Schoonmaker, who contacted Bremerton Police and requested a criminal investigation.

“Smaaladen acknowledged several times during the interview that she knew it was wrong and that she felt guilty,” an investigator wrote. “She said she was trying to ‘wean’ herself off of the medications and was working with her doctor to do so as well.”

Schoonmaker said such conduct could not be tolerated but said he and Smaaladen’s coworkers would support her as her case went through the criminal justice system. He described her as an “otherwise exceptional police officer.”

She was placed on administrative leave Nov. 3. Any disciplinary action would take place after the criminal case and an internal investigation.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Backlog untested rape kits larger
SOURCE	http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/fight-for-funding-to-clear-backlog-of-untested-rape-kits/281-522363405
GIST	<p>The KING 5 Investigators first revealed the problem of thousands of untested rape kits statewide, years ago. It turns out the backlog is even larger than originally thought, and a group of bipartisan lawmakers is currently fighting for funding in this year's supplemental budget.</p> <p>"It's a very real problem, and I believe Washington state is trying so hard to get ahead of this," said Captain Monica Alexander of Washington State Patrol. The agency's state crime lab is currently working to reduce the backlog of sexual assault kits.</p> <p>Law enforcement initially estimated the number of untested kits at around 6,000, but it's now believed that number could be closer to 10,000.</p> <p>"When you have a backlog of this many kits, it's going to take us awhile to dig us out of it," said Alexander who works with the Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Task Force, known as SAFE, to examine solutions for what many victims deem a broken system.</p> <p>The group is made of lawmakers, law enforcement, lab professionals, and survivors of sexual assault, who know first-hand the pain of waiting.</p> <p>"What I've learned is how these survivors have to endure this for years and years and years. The fear they live in," said Alexander who attends SAFE Task Force meetings and conferences. "I've talked to women who have waited 14 years and 15 years and 20 years," she continued.</p> <p>Of the original rape kit backlog, WSP says 928 kits have been completely tested. Nearly 2,000 more kits are pending testing; more than 2,900 have been sent out to Sorenson lab hired to help the state. However, that's still a fraction of the grand total of kits.</p> <p>"We don't have the lab staff on board to test enough kits every month," said Rep. Tina Orwall, D-Des Moines.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Police were warned repeatedly on Cruz
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/02/23/florida-school-shooting-sheriff-got-18-calls-cruzs-violence-threats-guns/366165002/
GIST	<p>PARKLAND, Fla. — Broward County deputies received at least 18 calls warning them about Nikolas Cruz from 2008 to 2017, including concerns that he "planned to shoot up the school" and other threats and acts of violence before he was accused of killing 17 people at a high school.</p> <p>The warnings, made by concerned people close to Cruz, came in phone calls to the Broward County Sheriff's Office, records show. At least five callers mentioned concern over his access to weapons, according to the documents. None of those warnings led to direct intervention.</p> <p>In February 2016, neighbors told police that they were worried he "planned to shoot up the school" after seeing alarming pictures on Instagram showing Cruz brandishing guns.</p> <p>About two months later, an unidentified caller told police that Cruz had been collecting guns and knives. The caller was "concerned (Cruz) will kill himself one day and believes he could be a school shooter in the making," according to call details released by the Sheriff's Office.</p>

A second cousin asked police to take away Cruz's guns after his mom died Nov. 1. "Nikolas is reported to have rifles and it is requested that (deputies) recover these weapons," the dispatcher noted from the call.

The new details add to the growing list of red flags missed by law enforcement officials, including the FBI, in the months leading up to last week's mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The FBI is reviewing why a tip last month called into the agency about Cruz's desire to kill people was not forwarded to Miami agents for investigation.

The Sheriff's Office has since opened two internal affairs investigations looking into whether its deputies followed the department's standards after receiving two phone calls.

After the November call from a relative to the sheriff's office, deputies referred the caller to the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office. Cruz, 19, had moved in with a family in Lake Worth after his mother died.

But deputies there never investigated a potential threat at the new address, according to incident reports obtained by USA TODAY NETWORK — FLORIDA.

In late November, Palm Beach County deputies responded to a battery call after Cruz punched Rock Deschamps, the 22-year-old son of Roxcane Deschamps, who took him in after his mother died. Rock Deschamps told deputies he didn't want to press charges.

In 2008, Broward deputies received their first call involving Cruz, 10 at the time, after a boy threw a rock at him and Cruz retaliated, records show.

The violent incidents became more frequent in Cruz's adolescence.

In 2012, his mother called police after Cruz hit her with a "plastic hose from the vacuum cleaner," according to a summary of the call.

The summary noted the "matter resolved. No report initiated."

The next year Cruz's mother called again after he threw her against the wall because she took away his Xbox game system.

A counselor at Henderson Behavioral Health responded and advised that involuntary commitment wasn't warranted. Cruz "punched the wall because she took away his Xbox" another time, according to a summary of a call to deputies.

"Deputy responded. No crime identified by deputy," the dispatcher noted.

Friends and relatives said Cruz — diagnosed with depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and autism — had a long history of violent outbursts.

"He'd lose his temper, hit walls, throw things," said Paul Gold, a former boyfriend of Roxcane Deschamps who had known Cruz for eight years and drove him to his mother's funeral. "Not the kind of kid who'd you'd put a gun in his hand."

Deputies also were told Cruz could be a danger to himself. On Sept. 28, 2016, deputies and social workers were called to Stoneman Douglas High School after receiving reports that Cruz had attempted suicide by drinking gasoline a week earlier and was cutting himself.

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HEADLINE | **02/23 Japan: arrests in 'embassy' shooting**

SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japanese-men-nabbed-shooting-defacto-nkorean-embassy-53296213?
GIST	<p>Police said they arrested two Japanese men believed to be right-wing activists for shooting early Friday at North Korea's de facto embassy in Tokyo.</p> <p>The men fired several shots at the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, a pro-North Korean group representing ethnic Koreans in Japan, Tokyo metropolitan police said.</p> <p>The men, aged 46 and 56, drove by in a vehicle and one of them fired several shots, police said. The gate was damaged but nobody was injured.</p> <p>The motive was not known. Japanese media reports said the two men have staged protests criticizing the pro-North Korean group, also known as Chongryon.</p> <p>Patrolling police rushed to the closely monitored building and arrested the two on the spot, confiscating a gun, police said. The two men face allegations of damaging a building and could also face allegations of violating gun control laws.</p> <p>Tokyo has no diplomatic ties with North Korea. Tens of thousands of pro-North ethnic Koreans live in Japan and still have relatives in North Korea.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Police questioned Cruz in Nov on threat
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-florida-school-massacre-questioned-november-threat-shoot/story?id=53280690
GIST	<p>The suspected gunman in the Florida school massacre was questioned by a police officer in November after a woman he was living with at the time called 911 to report he had threatened to use a gun on her 22-year-old son, according to records obtained by ABC News.</p> <p>The report from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office is just the latest in a string of red flags concerning Nikolas Cruz' volatility that law enforcement, school officials and mental health experts were notified of prior the Valentine's Day attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland that left 17 people dead, including 14 students.</p> <p>The Palm Beach County Sheriff's offense report from Nov. 29 shows that a woman who initially took Cruz in after his mother's death in November, called 911 to complain that Cruz had gotten into an altercation with her son in her Lantana, Florida, home and threatened to get a gun and come back.</p> <p>"[He] bought a gun from Dicks last week and is now going to pick it up," the woman told a 911 dispatcher, according to a log of the call contained in the report.</p> <p>"[He] bought tons of ammo...[and] has used a gun against [people] before," the dispatcher's log states. "He has put the gun to others heads in the past."</p> <p>While the name of the 911 caller was redacted in the report, ABC News has learned that, at the time, Cruz was living with Roxanne Deschamps, a family friend who took him and his younger brother in after their 68-year-old adoptive mother, Lynda Cruz, contracted pneumonia and died on Nov. 1.</p> <p>After police arrived at Deschamps' home just after 3 p.m., her son told an officer that he had gotten into a physical altercation with Cruz, who became "upset and began punching walls and breaking items inside the home."</p> <p>The son said Cruz punched him in the left side of his jaw as he attempted to calm Cruz down, according to the report. He told the officer he punched Cruz back in "self-defense" and attempted to restrain him before</p>

	<p>Cruz bolted from the residence, the report says.</p> <p>The officer found Cruz in a nearby park and described the 19-year-old as being “nervous and calm,” according to the report. Cruz told the officer he had become upset and punched a wall after losing a picture of his late mother.</p> <p>“He said he was sorry for losing his temper,” according to the officer’s report.</p> <p>There were no references to guns in the officer’s narrative, but the dispatch notes indicate that Cruz told police there were guns inside the home.</p> <p>Ultimately, the son told police he did not want Cruz arrested and signed a "refusal to prosecute" form, according to the officer's report. But the son expressed that he wanted Cruz to leave the residence until he calmed down, according to the report.</p> <p>He said Cruz "has been going through a lot with his loss" and he “did not want him to go to jail” the report states.</p> <p>The officer’s report concludes that the son and Cruz hugged to reconcile their differences, and the case was cleared with no arrest or charges filed.</p> <p>Cruz moved out of Deschamps' home around the time of the altercation and went to live with James and Kimberly Snead, the parents of a friend.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 France keeps Islamic scholar in prison
SOURCE	http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/02/22/french-court-keeps-islamic-scholar-tariq-ramadan-in-prison.html
GIST	<p>PARIS – A court has rejected a release request by a prominent Islamic scholar incarcerated this month on preliminary rape charges.</p> <p>A judicial official said that Tariq Ramadan, who was briefly hospitalized recently, refused to leave his prison cell to be present for Thursday's ruling on his request to be released for medical reasons.</p> <p>The official said that the appeals court, after a medical evaluation, considered that his state of health did not exclude his incarceration. The official, not authorized to speak publicly, asked not to be identified.</p> <p>The 55-year-old Swiss scholar is facing preliminary rape charges in two cases. The first allegedly took place in 2009 and the other allegedly in 2012.</p> <p>Ramadan denies any wrongdoing and has filed a lawsuit claiming the allegations are false.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Man threatens Bangor with ‘explosives’
SOURCE	http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/man-claiming-to-be-wearing-explosives-detained-at-bangor-gate/281-522128900
GIST	<p>All gates at Naval Base Kitsap Bangor and one Bremerton gate are closed after a man tried to enter the installation without authorization and told to base security he was in possession of explosive devices.</p> <p>Authorities asked people who live near the base or are on base to take safety precautions.</p> <p>Authorities have established a security boundary, including areas west of Highway 3, east of Clear Creek</p>

Road, north of Mountain View Road and south of NW Peterson Road.

People in that area should shelter in place or evacuate until further notice, according to a statement from the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office.

Those sheltering in place should stay away from windows, according to the statement.

Around 9 a.m., a man driving a black SUV attempted to enter Bangor through Trident's vehicle inspection gate. The driver claimed to be wearing an improvised explosive device on his body and had another elsewhere in his vehicle, according to a statement from the base.

He was detained by base security and a bomb squad was called to inspect the packages.

"The size of the package in the vehicle was estimated to potentially have a large blast radius," Washington State Patrol Lt. Robert Brazas said.

As such, officials decided to close off access to the base.

State Route 308 is now closed from State Route 3 to Bangor, including all off-ramps to the base.

"In an abundance of caution, we have closed down the area that would have been how big the blast radius would be," Brazas said.

Bremerton's Naval gate is currently closed. All traffic is advised to use Charleston gate.

The Navy is "working on a response" to the incident and will reopen the gates as soon as possible, said Navy Region Northwest spokesman Sean Hughes.

Bangor's Trident, Trigger and OA gates were closed around 9 a.m. this morning, preventing all inbound and outbound traffic from going through the gates.

There was a training exercise scheduled at Bangor this morning, with a planned gate closure at Trident gate from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Keyport's gate was closed about 20 minutes later and reopened around 11:30 a.m. The U.S. Naval Undersea Museum, located just along the fence line of the installation, is closed as well.

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HEADLINE	02/22 DOJ targets elder scams
SOURCE	http://abcnews.go.com/US/texas-woman-brought-tears-doj-targets-elder-scams/story?
GIST	<p>A Texas woman was brought to tears at the Justice Department Thursday, as she recalled how her 82-year-old grandmother committed suicide after being scammed out of her life's savings.</p> <p>"These individuals preyed on her and on her good heart. What should have been some of the best years and the last chapter of her life was taken from her. She was robbed in every sense," said Angela Stancik of Houston, her voice cracking as attorney general Jeff Sessions, acting FBI deputy director David Bowdich and other top U.S. officials listened beside her.</p> <p>Stancik came to Washington to highlight what Bowdich called a "serious and growing threat" across the United States: the theft of millions of dollars from America's seniors, who are targeted and tricked by fraudsters around the world.</p> <p>"That has happened far too often in this country. It is a despicable crime these people are doing. They laugh about their ability to defraud people," Sessions said at a news conference in Washington.</p>

In the past year, more than 200 people have been charged inside the United States for committing elder fraud schemes and dozens more have faced civil actions, according to Sessions.

"These defendants allegedly robbed more than one million Americans of more than half a billion dollars," Sessions said.

Stancik pleaded with the public to "say something to anyone" if they suspect they are being victimized or know someone who is.

Her family didn't realize that their beloved grandmother had been ensnared by a big scam until 10 days before Jones killed herself in 2010.

"When she realized that she had been defrauded, she was extremely devastated, she felt humiliated, and she had literally lost everything," Stancik said, holding back tears. "It pains me to say this, but she took her life because of this incident. The events leading to my grandmother's death have scarred my family and left us all in shock. The pain and the loss from her tragic death surrounds us all daily."

Pretending to represent a sweepstakes, scammers told Jones that she had won a big prize, and all she had to do was send in money to cover taxes and fees.

In many cases, scammers send letters in "attention-grabbing envelopes designed to lead a person to believe they actually won," said Guy Cottrell, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's chief inspector. Millions of such letters are sent around the world, according to Cottrell.

"However, no prize is ever delivered. No prize ever existed," he said. And "once the scammer starts, the demands are relentless. ... These fraudsters don't limit themselves to just lies anymore. Their efforts to keep victims in line become increasingly ruthless. They don't hesitate to threaten, coerce or resort to psychological intimidation."

Jones ultimately sent all of her money to scammers - she later had to borrow money from family members, took out all of her life insurance, and then tragically committed suicide.

She had \$69 in her bank account when she died.

Last month, the Justice Department ordered all 94 U.S. Attorneys' offices across the country to each designate an "elder justice coordinator," charged with trying to "customize" a strategy to protect seniors in their districts, according to Sessions. Since then, the Justice Department's Consumer Protection Branch, along with U.S. Attorneys' offices, have filed cases against more than 40 defendants for their alleged role in defrauding hundreds of thousands of Americans, Sessions said.

And over the past week alone, more than 100 inspectors from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service executed search warrants in 14 locations across the country, according to Cottrell.

Now, the Justice Department is going after not just the scammers themselves but also what authorities called the "enablers," the people who help write text for the letters, the people who help print the letter, and the people who provide mailing lists for scammers to target.

The FBI and its partners are targeting a "wide range of crimes" against seniors, including Ponzi schemes, romance and lottery scams, and mass-marketing schemes, according to Bowdich.

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HEADLINE 02/22 Beverly Hills hotel swatting incident

SOURCE <http://ktla.com/2018/02/22/police-swat-officers-called-to-peninsula-beverly-hills-hotel/>

<p>GIST</p>	<p>Police and SWAT officers were called to the Peninsula Beverly Hills Hotel Thursday morning to investigate a report of a man being held hostage, which investigators later determined to be a "swatting" incident.</p> <p>The call came in just after 6 a.m. from a man who said he was being kept in a room by several armed men, Beverly Hills Police Department Sgt. T. Adams said.</p> <p>Aerial video from Sky5 showed a large response from authorities, including SWAT officers, outside the hotel in the 9800 block of South Santa Monica Boulevard at about 6:45 a.m.</p> <p>One officer could be seen standing in the doorway leading to a hotel courtyard with a rifle in hand.</p> <p>Commuters and pedestrians were asked to avoid the area due to police activity, the Police Department stated in a news alert.</p> <p>Authorities were not able to confirm any of the details given by the caller and were unable to make contact with any victim, Adams said, adding that no armed men were found inside the hotel.</p> <p>Police later determined the incident was the result of a dispute and whoever made the call was likely "swatting," Lt. Moreno said.</p> <p>It was unclear if police were able to locate the initial caller.</p>
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