

travel there and spread the good word of Jesus Christ.

He has been ministering to the impoverished people of Myanmar and the Yunnan province of China for over a decade. In these last 3 years, he helped build and staff 16 schools in northern Myanmar.

For years, Pastor John regularly crossed the border on his small motorcycle loaded with food and medicine, without incident. For some reason, this time, he was arrested and charged as a smuggler.

Since his arrest, Chinese officials have raided and threatened a number of Christian churches in several provinces. I urge the State Department to seek Pastor John's immediate release from Chinese custody and to stop further raids before other innocent individuals become casualties of aggressive religious persecution.

CONGRATULATING FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HORNETS

(Mr. BROWN of Maryland asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BROWN of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the Fairmont Heights Hornets for winning their first State basketball championship in 36 years.

After trailing by as much as 9 points, the Hornets, under the leadership of Coach Chuck Henry, won the 1A boys State title by a score of 65–52. The team of young scholars was resilient, played hard, and never panicked.

Credit is due to Coach Henry, who has taken his team to the State championship after only 2 years on the job. He is a role model, had high expectations for his students, and constantly pushed them to play better on the court and achieve more in the classroom. Throughout the season, Coach Henry never lost faith in his young team.

Mr. Speaker, the students on the winning Fairmont Heights team may not go on to play in the NCAA or the NBA, but the memories of this moment, the bonds they have built, and the lessons they have developed will stay with them for a lifetime.

Fairmont Heights High School has a proud legacy. When it opened its doors in 1950, it was only one of two high schools in the State of Maryland for African Americans. Now, nearly 70 years later, the school has made history again. This team has made Prince George's County and the entire Fourth Congressional District very proud.

Go, Hornets.

PROTECTING OUR BORDER

(Mr. ROTHFUS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, the past several days, I had my first-ever tour

of our southwest border. During my visit, I met with Border Patrol agents in New Mexico and Texas, as well as ranchers and business leaders on the border.

Border security was a significant issue in the last election, as Americans are concerned about the flow of illegal narcotics and aliens across the border. Although gaps in security remain, I saw an impressive array of assets, including drones and manned aircraft, walls, cameras, and other materiel.

More impressive, however, are the men and women who work for Customs and Border Protection, who, at no small risk to themselves, work to keep America secure. They are very encouraged lately as they see policy changes coming that will allow them to enforce our laws. Mr. Speaker, these individuals are literally on the front line defending our Nation and communities, and I thank them for their service.

I understand that there are job opportunities with Border Patrol. For those seeking a public service career doing something bigger than themselves, that is something to consider.

EQUAL PAY DAY

(Mrs. BEATTY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. Speaker, over 50 years ago, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act, landmark legislation which requires that men and women in the same workplace be given equal pay for equal work.

Unfortunately, equal pay for equal work has not become a reality. In fact, women are paid between 79 and 80 cents for every dollar that men are paid for doing the exact same job. In fact, it takes women until tomorrow, April 4, to earn what men were paid in the previous year.

For women of color, the gap is even wider. In 2015, African-American women made 65 cents for every dollar earned by their White male counterparts. For Hispanic women, it is even worse. They earn 58 cents for every dollar earned by their White male counterparts.

Women pay a huge price because of the wage gap. Today, families rely increasingly on women's wages to make ends meet; and with less take-home pay, women have less money to cover the everyday needs of their family.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to right the wrong. Let's pass the Paycheck Fairness Act and send it to the President's desk for signature.

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END COMMERCIAL WHALING

(Mr. GAETZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, our great ally Australia has long been the lead-

ing voice in the world to end commercial whaling. I rise to let them know that they are not alone and to announce the filing of bipartisan legislation to support an end to commercial whaling.

Another of our valued allies, Japan, unfortunately continues this depraved practice. In fact, the Japanese whaling fleet has just returned home, having killed 333 Antarctic minke whales.

Despite the global ban on commercial whaling, Japan continues the slaughter on the seas under a thinly veiled claim of research. Research into whales is important, but all available science shows that this research can be conducted with nonlethal testing and biopsies.

The Japan whale hunt isn't about research. It is about whale meat. In 2012, a Japanese minister even commented that the minke whale offers great flavor and aroma as sashimi. I think that is disgusting.

The Japanese whalers shoot the world's majestic mammals with exploding harpoons and electric lances. Death can often take hours.

Commercial and fake research hunting of whales must end. I thank Australia for its leadership. I ask Japan to be honest with the world and end this barbaric practice.

JOBS SHOULD BE JOB ONE

(Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, the consensus for this Friday's Bureau of Labor Statistics jobs report is that it will show the economy added about 178,000 new private sector jobs in March. That is a good number, though not as good as the March numbers in recent years.

As The New York Times put it: "Growth in the first 3 months of the Trump administration is looking much the way it did" in the growth under President Obama.

But because of the current administration's inaction on vital economic issues, like infrastructure spending, right now about one in three market experts now think that a near-term stock market correction may be in the cards.

Instead of doing the things we need to do to rev up the economy, this body has been spending time trying to make it harder for women to access contraceptives, gutting our right to privacy on the internet, and trying to take health care away from millions of Americans. That is no way, Mr. Speaker, to create jobs.

How about we do what the President said he wanted to do? Let's make the investments that we need now that will stimulate the creation of good jobs—good-paying jobs for Americans. That should be job number one for this Congress.

HAPPY 108TH BIRTHDAY TO MARY COFFEY

(Mr. OLSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, 100 years is a century. It is a really long time. 108 years of life is a blessing.

A young lady I work for in the Texas 22nd Congressional District, who lives in my hometown of Sugar Land, is such a blessing. Her name is Mary Coffey, and she celebrated her 108th birthday on March 20.

In a recent article in the Fort Bend Star, Mary described her keys to being blessed: Number one, trust Jesus and lead several Bible studies with your friends; number two, get plenty of exercise; number three, eat healthy; and number four is about personal hygiene, have jar after jar after jar of Pond's cold cream available when you need it most.

For 108 years, Mary has inspired all of us.

Happy 108th birthday, Mary. Let's go out; maybe go out dancing if you promise not to wear me out.

INVESTIGATION INTO RUSSIAN CONNECTIONS IS LONG OVERDUE

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, today The Washington Post reported that the United Arab Emirates arranged a secret meeting in January between Blackwater founder and major Trump contributor Erik Prince and a Russian close to President Vladimir Putin. The meeting was an apparent effort to establish a back-channel line of communication between Moscow and President-elect Donald Trump, according to U.S., European, and Arab officials.

Erik Prince, by the way, is the brother to Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education. The UAE's incentive to broker this meeting comes from the deteriorating relationship between them and Iran. They wanted to drive a wedge between Russia, Iran, and Syria. Agreement on that deal would need a handsome reward, like the easing of U.S. sanctions on the Russian Federation for its invasion of Ukraine.

Blackwater is the private security firm that became infamous for U.S. abuses in Iraq after a series of incidents, including one in 2007 in which the company's guards were charged and criminally convicted of killing civilians.

"Officials said Zayed and his brother, the UAE's national security adviser, coordinated the Seychelles meeting with Russian Government officials with the goal of establishing an unofficial back channel between Trump and Putin." The UAE at one point paid Erik Prince's firm a reported half a billion dollars to consult on defensive security.

An independent bipartisan commission to investigate Trump officials and Russian connections is long overdue.

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 3, 2017]

BLACKWATER FOUNDER HELD SECRET SEYCHELLES MEETING TO ESTABLISH TRUMP-PUTIN BACK CHANNEL

(By Adam Entous, Greg Miller, Kevin Sieff and Karen DeYoung)

The United Arab Emirates arranged a secret meeting in January between Blackwater founder Erik Prince and a Russian close to President Vladimir Putin as part of an apparent effort to establish a back-channel line of communication between Moscow and President-elect Donald Trump, according to U.S., European and Arab officials.

The meeting took place around Jan. 11—nine days before Trump's inauguration—in the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean, officials said. Though the full agenda remains unclear, the UAE agreed to broker the meeting in part to explore whether Russia could be persuaded to curtail its relationship with Iran, including in Syria, a Trump administration objective that would likely require major concessions to Moscow on U.S. sanctions.

Though Prince had no formal role with the Trump campaign or transition team, he presented himself as an unofficial envoy for Trump to high-ranking Emiratis involved in setting up his meeting with the Putin confidant, according to the officials, who did not identify the Russian.

Prince was an avid supporter of Trump who gave \$250,000 last year to support the GOP nominee's campaign, records show. He has ties to people in Trump's circle, including Stephen K. Bannon, now serving as the president's chief strategist and senior counselor. Prince's sister Betsy DeVos serves as education secretary in the Trump administration. And Prince was seen in the Trump transition offices in New York in December.

U.S. officials said the FBI has been scrutinizing the Seychelles meeting as part of a broader probe of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election and alleged contacts between associates of Putin and Trump. The FBI declined to comment.

The Seychelles encounter, which one official said spanned two days, adds to an expanding web of connections between Russia and Americans with ties to Trump—contacts that the White House has been reluctant to acknowledge or explain until they have been exposed by news organizations.

"We are not aware of any meetings and Erik Prince had no role in the transition," said Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary.

"Erik had no role on the transition team. This is a complete fabrication," said a spokesman for Prince in a statement. "The meeting had nothing to do with President Trump. Why is the so-called underresourced intelligence community messing around with surveillance of American citizens when they should be hunting terrorists?"

Prince is best known as the founder of Blackwater, a security firm that became a symbol of U.S. abuses in Iraq after a series of incidents including one in 2007 in which the company's guards were accused—and later criminally convicted—of killing civilians in a crowded Iraqi square. Prince sold the firm, which was subsequently rebranded, but has continued building a private paramilitary empire with contracts across the Middle East and Asia.

Prince would probably have been seen as too controversial to serve in any official capacity in the Trump transition or administration. But his ties to Trump advisers, experience with clandestine work and relation-

ship with the royal leaders of the Emirates—where he moved in 2010 amid mounting legal problems for his American business—would have positioned him as an ideal go-between.

The Seychelles meeting came after private discussions in New York involving high-ranking representatives of Trump, Moscow and the Emirates.

The White House has acknowledged that Michael T. Flynn, Trump's original national security adviser, and Trump adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner met with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak, in late November or early December in New York.

Flynn and Kushner were joined by Bannon for a separate meeting with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who made an undisclosed visit to New York later in December, according to the U.S., European and Arab officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

In an unusual breach of protocol, the UAE did not notify the Obama administration in advance of the visit, though officials found out because Zayed's name appeared on a flight manifest.

Officials said Zayed and his brother, the UAE's national security adviser, coordinated the Seychelles meeting with Russian government officials with the goal of establishing an unofficial back channel between Trump and Putin.

Officials said Zayed wanted to be helpful to both leaders who had talked about working more closely together, a policy objective long advocated by the crown prince. The UAE, which sees Iran as one of its main enemies, also shared the Trump team's interest in finding ways to drive a wedge between Moscow and Tehran.

Zayed met twice with Putin in 2016, according to Western officials, and urged the Russian leader to work more closely with the Emirates and Saudi Arabia—an effort to isolate Iran.

At the time of the Seychelles meeting and for weeks afterward, the UAE believed that Prince had the blessing of the new administration to act as its unofficial representative. The Russian participant was a person whom Zayed knew was close to Putin from his interactions with both men, the officials said.

When the Seychelles meeting took place, official contacts between members of the incoming Trump administration and the Russian government were under intense scrutiny, both from federal investigators and the press.

Less than a week before the Seychelles meeting, U.S. intelligence agencies released a report accusing Russia of intervening clandestinely during the 2016 election to help Trump win the White House.

The FBI was already investigating communications between Flynn and Kislyak. The Washington Post's David Ignatius first disclosed those communications on Jan. 12, around the time of the Seychelles meeting. Flynn was subsequently fired by Trump for misleading Vice President Pence and others about his discussions with Kislyak.

Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador in Washington, declined to comment.

Government officials in the Seychelles said they were not aware of any meetings between Trump and Putin associates in the country around Jan. 11. But they said luxury resorts on the island are ideal for clandestine gatherings like the one described by the U.S., European and Arab officials.

"I wouldn't be surprised at all," said Barry Faure, the Seychelles secretary of state for foreign affairs. "The Seychelles is the kind of place where you can have a good time away from the eyes of the media. That's even