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Thousands gather for renewed Colombia protests, 3 dead after- Thursday marches



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Trump accuses impeachment witness of lying, defends use of Giuliani



FILE PHOTO: U.S. President Donald Trump adjusts his jacket during a tour of Apple's Mac Pro manufacturing plant in Austin, Texas, U.S., November 20, 2019. REUTERS/Tom Brenner

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump on Friday accused a witness in the Democratic-led impeachment inquiry of lying and offered an explanation for his controversial use of his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani on Ukraine policy, saying Giuliani's crime-fighting abilities were needed to deal with a corrupt country.

Trump made his remarks the day after the fifth and final scheduled day of public hearings in the U.S. House of Representatives inquiry, which threatens his presidency even as he seeks re-election in November 2020.

The Republican president took issue with testimony on Thursday by David Holmes, a U.S. embassy official in Ukraine. Holmes said under oath that at a Kiev restaurant he overheard a July 26 cellphone conversation in which Trump loudly pressed Gordon Sondland, the U.S. ambassador to the European Union, for details on whether Ukraine would carry out politically motivated investigations the president was seeking.

What comes next in the Trump impeachment inquiry? Former Trump aide calls Ukraine meddling theory fiction; Trump would welcome Senate trial
"I guarantee you that never took place," Trump told Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" program.

"That was a total phony deal," he added.

Trump appointed Sondland to the envoy post after the wealthy Oregon hotelier donated \$1 million to his inaugural committee. While Sondland in testimony described an

easygoing relationship between the two, Trump said on Friday he had spoken with him "a few times," adding, "I hardly know him, OK?"

In another development, Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton accused the White House of blocking his access to his personal Twitter account after he left his White House job in September. Bolton did not explain how the White House had accomplished this but in his first Twitter post since his departure asked if it had been done "out of fear of what I may say?"

Trump denied in the Fox interview that Bolton's access had been blocked by the White House. Testimony at the hearings put a spotlight on Trump's decision to give Giuliani, a private citizen with no formal job in his administration, an outsized role to shape American policy toward Ukraine rather than using the U.S. government's usual diplomatic and national security channels.

Bolton is among the various U.S. officials described as being alarmed at Giuliani's actions including pushing Ukraine to conduct two investigations that could harm Trump's political adversaries. Former White House Russia expert Fiona Hill recalled how Bolton called Giuliani "a hand grenade who's going to blow everybody up."

During the hearings, current and former White House officials and diplomats voiced alarm at Giuliani's activ-

ities.

Trump said Giuliani was the right person for the job. "He's like an iconic figure in this country for two reasons. He was the greatest mayor in the history of New York and he was the greatest crime fighter probably in the last 50 years," Trump said of Giuliani, who previously served as the mayor of the largest U.S. city and as a federal prosecutor

"He's also a friend of mine. He's a great person," Trump added. "... When you're dealing with a corrupt country - if Rudy Giuliani - he's got credentials because of his reputation. ... When Rudy Giuliani goes there and you hear it's a corrupt country, I mean, it means a lot."

Trump did not address what he actually told Giuliani to do. A focus of the inquiry is a July 25 telephone call in which Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to open two investigations.

One involved Joe Biden, a top contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the 2020 presidential election, and his son Hunter Biden, who had worked for Ukrainian energy company Burisma. Trump has accused Biden of corruption, but has not provided evidence. Biden has denied wrongdoing.



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Thousands gather for renewed Colombia protests, 3 dead after Thursday marches

BOGOTA (Reuters) - Colombians gathered for renewed protests on Friday as sporadic looting took place in several parts of the capital Bogota, after mass marches on Thursday ended in three deaths.

More than 250,000 people marched on Thursday to express growing discontent with President Ivan Duque's government, including over rumored economic reforms the president has denied and anger at what protesters say is a lack of government action to stop corruption and the murder of human rights activists.

Thousands gathered on Friday afternoon in Bogotá's Bolivar Plaza, after former leftist presidential candidate Gustavo Petro and others called for another demonstration following a spontaneous "cacerolazo" - a traditional expression of protest in which people bang pots and pans - the night before.

"We are here to keep protesting against the Duque government," said 25-year-old art student Katheryn Martinez, as she banged a pot with a fork in the plaza, accompanied by her father Arturo, 55.

"It's an inefficient government that kills children and doesn't acknowledge it," she said, referring to a recent bombing targeted at rebel dissidents that killed eight teenagers and led the former defense minister to resign.

The protests have coincided with demonstrations in other Latin American countries, including anti-austerity marches in Chile, protests over vote-tampering allegations in Bolivia that led President Evo Morales to resign and inflamed tensions in crisis-hit Nicaragua.

Details surrounding the three deaths in Valle del Cauca province were under investigation. Defense Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo told journalists earlier on Friday. "In the last few hours authorities have confirmed the death of two people in Buenaventura in the midst of disturbances and one more in Candelaria, both municipal-



A demonstrator throws a stone during a protest in Bogotá, Colombia, November 21, 2019. REUTERS/Luisa Gonzalez

ities of Valle," he said, adding that a group of people had intended to loot the Viva Buenaventura mall.

"As a result of the confrontation between vandals and security forces and in events that are the subject of investigation by the attorney general's office, two people were killed," he said.

Though the vast majority of marchers participated peacefully, 98 people were arrested, while 122 civilians and 151 members of the security forces were injured on Thursday, he said.

The authorities were conducting 11 preliminary investigations into misconduct by members of the security forces, Trujillo added, after images circulated on social media showed police treating protesters roughly, including a riot officer kicking a protester in the face. Commuters in Bogota and other cities faced long

delays on Friday as authorities tried to normalize mass transit service.

Dozens of Bogotá's bus stations were closed and police used tear gas in a least two parts of the city's working class south in an attempt to clear road blockades. Several supermarkets in the area were also looted and some protesters stole a public bus, according to local media reports.

Friday's protest was not supported by one union that helped lead Thursday's marches. The head of the General Work Confederacy (CGT) union on local radio warned against political "opportunism" associated with the marches. "We'll have to wait a few days to see when we are going to meet with the president," said Julio Roberto Gomez, referring to meetings promised by Duque in a brief speech late on Thursday night.

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Editor's Choice



Conservative leader Boris Johnson speaks to an audience during BBC Question Time election special in Sheffield, Britain November 22, 2019. Jeff Overs/BBC/Handout via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS



U.S. President Donald Trump participates in a listening session on youth vaping and the electronic cigarette epidemic inside the Cabinet Room at the White House in Washington



Masked university students dance during a protest against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government at the Central American University (UCA) in Managua



The top of the U.S. Capitol building is pictured on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., November 22, 2019. REUTERS/Loren Elliott



Soccer Football - Africa Under 23 Cup of Nations - Final - Egypt U23 v Ivory Coast U23 - Cairo International Stadium, Cairo, Egypt - November 22, 2019 Egypt fans celebrate their second goal REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh



Children on a school trip pose for a photo in front of the U.S. Capitol building on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., November 22, 2019. REUTERS/Loren Elliott



FILE PHOTO: Activists hold a banner as they take part in a rally in favor of legalizing abortion, in Buenos Aires, Argentina September 27, 2019. The banner reads: " Legal abortion so as not to die" and " Sexual education to decide." REUTERS/Agustin Marcarian/File Photo



A person gives food to a demonstrator during a protest against Chile's government, in Santiago, Chile November 22, 2019. REUTERS/Pablo Sanhueza

The people who deliver our packages to us may soon have some competition.

In January, the e-commerce giant Amazon announced that it had begun field-testing Amazon Scout, a robot that's been delivering packages to customers in Snohomish County, Washington. The United States Postal Service is also exploring ways to use delivery robots.

According to a post on the Amazon blog Day One, there are just six Scout robots in existence, and they only deliver during daylight hours on weekdays. An Amazon spokesperson who spoke with CNBC could not comment on the program beyond what's on the blog, so for now the future of the rollout remains murky.

Whatever plans Amazon has for Scout, it's only natural to wonder what effect widespread adoption would have on the delivery jobs that are currently being performed by human beings. Do these workers need to brace themselves for the possibility that they may soon be obsolete?

According to a 2018 report issued by the United States Postal Service's Office of the Inspector General, more Americans embrace the idea of robotic delivery than oppose it. Those who support it said robot delivery could offer greater flexibility to package recipients and reduce the risk of injury to delivery personnel. As far as the drawbacks, respondents cited job losses as a primary concern. However, postal delivery workers won't have to worry about being put out of jobs just yet.

According to "Autonomous Mobile Robots and the Postal Service," a 2018 report issued by the United States Postal Service's Office of the Inspector General, the use of autonomous mobile robots for last-mile delivery of mail "is too economically and technologically immature to be scalable in the short term, especially for independent robot delivery applications."



Amazon Robots Could Make The Deliveryman Extinct



Amazon's self-driving delivery device called "Scout."

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Diana Dawson, vice president of consulting for the research firm EnviroSell, said that job losses aren't the only problem to consider.

"[The Scout] probably cannot negotiate the many variables that are involved in home delivery, such as steps, rain and customers who are not there when the robot opens its lid," she said. "This would likely lead to a delay in delivery, which is a pain point for Amazon shoppers in particular."

Monica Eaton-Cardone is the owner and chief operating officer of the financial technology company Chargebacks911, which manages 200 million online transactions per month and has spent a lot of time studying delivery systems since the category can be rife for fraud. She said robot delivery faces several major hurdles.

"A few years ago, a robot named HitchBOT was hitchhiking throughout different cities in an experiment to test human psychology," she said. "HitchBOT was beheaded in Philadelphia. ... Will we treat an Amazon robot any better?"

As far as benefits, Eaton-Cardone cited cost reductions on Amazon's part as well as a possible increase in delivery speed. She also said it might unexpectedly ben-

efit infrastructure.



"Companies like Amazon wield immense power, both economically and politically," she said. "Our politicians might not prioritize the rebuilding of our sidewalks and streets when only humans were using them, but I have a feeling it'll become much more of a priority when Amazon's robots need to use them too." **"Industry-wide upheaval is inevitable, and a lot of good, hardworking men and women will lose their jobs."**

-Monica Eaton-Cardone, owner and chief operating officer of Chargebacks911

Amazon has explored the possibility of robotic delivery before.

The first vehicle the company intended to use was the Prime Air drone, which made its first delivery in December 2016. That program has since gone quiet, but it still has some advantages over Scout, namely speed. After all, impulse buyers might balk at a purchase that takes three days to reach them, but they might buy it if delivery only takes half an hour.

"A fast drone can fly at 50 miles per hour, over 10 times faster than Scout," said Nicholas Farhi, partner at the global consulting firm OC&C Strategy. "It will become quicker to have something delivered than to make a trip to the local store, unlocking a big new chunk of 'need it now,' low premeditation retail sales to delivery."



Jeff Harris, a partner at Harris Lowry Manton who specializes in product liability, catastrophic injury and wrongful death, said that those benefits aside, drone deliveries present drawbacks that may outweigh the advantages, all of them attributable to the lack of human decision-making.

"The biggest problem with delivery drones is going to be how to create separation between drones, so they don't crash into each other, potentially injuring people and causing property damage," he said.

Amazon Scout could encounter difficulties when negotiating sidewalks.

"When we walk down the street, we're constantly making a series of complex decisions," Harris said. "Programs like Amazon Scout will likely face the same challenges that automated vehicles are

currently experiencing because they encounter random, real-life situations that aren't preprogrammed and part of the algorithm."

While the physical risks of robotic delivery may be debatable, Harris said that it will almost certainly cost delivery workers their jobs.



The Amazon spokeswoman declined to provide specific statistics on recent job growth at fulfillment centers as automation has been added. Many companies make the case automation allows employees to focus on more complex tasks, so rather than costing jobs, it shifts jobs to new skill sets and creates opportunities for new job positions. Labor unions, meanwhile, have called this version of events "a fairy tale."

Eaton-Cardone said she is not ready to write off the human element just yet. There are things only human beings can do and which no amount of technology can replace.

"If a company is delivering a high-end product or an item with potential legal or health liabilities, then it might still make economic sense to have a human being oversee the delivery, answer questions, sign forms, and then try to secure future sales," she said. Eaton-Cardone also said that human beings provide more than just the ability to navigate complicated delivery instructions.

"Sometimes the kind words or a reassuring smile of an actual, real-life person makes all the difference in the world," she said. (Courtesy cnbc.com)

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Some Fear Undercount As Texas Decides Not To Spend Money On 2020 Census



Texas has experienced massive population growth in the past decade, but officials there have decided not to spend any money or make statewide plans for the 2020 census. (Photo/Facebook)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

You've got to spend money to make money. But that's not the way Texas, and a handful of other states, are looking at the 2020 census. Officials in Texas have decided not to spend any money or make statewide plans for the census, despite the fact that the state experienced massive population growth in the past decade.

With federal dollars at risk, the state's major cities, business leaders and even nonprofits say they are being forced to step in instead.

Across the country, states are spending millions on making sure they get a better head count of their residents. For example, California officials announced they are investing as much as \$154 million in the 2020 census.

But not all states are making investments, or even coming up with statewide plans to improve the count.

This year, Texas lawmakers failed to pass legislation that would have created

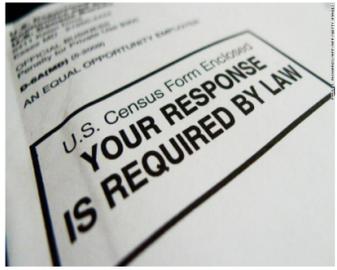
a statewide effort aimed at making sure all Texans are counted. Measures that would have ensured millions of dollars in funding for the census in Texas also failed.



"California is eating our lunch on the census," says Ann Beeson, the CEO of the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin. "And what that's going to mean is more representation and more dollars for California than Texas." Beeson said this is particularly concern-

ing because the state's population has continued to explode. In fact, many of the country's fastest-growing cities are in the Lone Star State.

By some estimates, Texas is set to gain three to four congressional seats after the census. But that's only if there's an accurate count, Beeson says.



"Texas is already at a high risk of an undercount," she says. "That is because we have a higher percentage of what are considered hard-to-count populations." That includes low-income populations, immigrant families and young children, Beeson says.

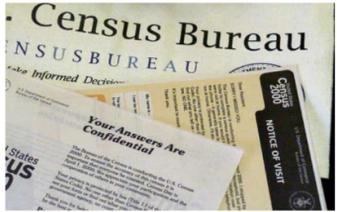
"We have a particularly high risk of an undercount of young children because we have so many," she says.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities estimates that a mere 1% undercount could cost Texas \$300 million in federal funding a year.

That's much-needed funding, Beeson says, that would pay for education, transportation and health care programs in the state.

In the absence of state action, though, local officials in Texas say it's up to them now to make sure people are getting counted.

"So much in the state of Texas relies on local government stepping up," says Bruce Elfant, the tax assessor and voter registrar for Travis County here in Austin.



Elfant is a member of the city's Complete Count Committee, which is a city-led group focused just on improving the census in Austin.

"This is a time where local government is going to have to step up again, and I am really proud of what we have here in Travis County," he says.

Elfant says school districts and other municipal government — as well as local businesses — plan to pitch in. In fact, he says the city plans to create a fund for the census. He says that fund will largely rely on money from the private sector.

And nonprofits say they are also gearing up to fill the gap left by state inaction, says Stephanie Swanson with the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of Texas.

"We realized that basically is going to be up to us," she says. "We will have to rely on our cities, and it will also fall on the shoulders of nonprofits and the community to get out the count."

Swanson says she and others are trying to get nonprofits across the state — and especially trusted community groups — to make this a priority.



But she says it's not going to be easy. "We have a lot of work that we have to do," Swanson says. "We are still in the initial phases, and I am not quite sure if that really has sunk in with the population here in Texas."

The biggest hurdle, she says, will be funding large-scale education programs. Texas has one of the largest immigrant populations in the country. That means talk of a possible citizenship question on

the census has large swaths of the state nervous about answering the census, even though that question will not be included.

"That's something that we are still struggling to find a good way to talk to people about," Swanson says. "We don't want to scare them, basically."

So far, the state's biggest cities, including Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin, all have citywide efforts. There are also various small towns and suburban counties.



Census 2020

Beeson says it's a good thing there are people starting to take this seriously. However, it would be ideal, she says, if state officials had a statewide plan to make sure that everyone here is counted. Beeson says many rural counties in Texas probably won't have the resources big cities do to make sure their residents are counted.

"As a proud Texan, that kind of makes me mad," Beeson says. "I feel like we kind of need to step up to the plate and really get on the ball and make sure that we are getting counted just like those Californians are getting counted." (Courtesy <https://www.npr.org/>)

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