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‘I have seen enough death’: Sugar Land father fights execution of son who had rest of family killed



Inside C5

Southern DAILY

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13 Russians charged with meddling to help Trump in election

Eric Tucker,

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thirteen Russians and three Russian companies were charged Friday with an elaborate plot to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election through social media propaganda aimed at helping Republican Donald Trump and harming the prospects of his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, prosecutors announced Friday. The indictment, brought by the office of special counsel Robert Mueller, represents the most direct allegation to date of illegal Russian meddling during the election. It says Russians created bogus Internet postings, posed online as American political activists and fraudulently purchased advertisements — all with the goal of swaying political opinion during the bitterly contested race. The intent of the meddling, the indictment says, was to “sow discord in the U.S. political system, including the 2016 presidential election.” U.S. Intel Warns of Russia Meddling in 2018 Midterm Elections The countries top intelligence officials Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats warned Congress... Dan Coats, director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, director of National Intelligence This year’s meeting at Capitol Hill overlaps with an ongoing investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller to figure out whether or not Trump and his associates were involved with Russia’s hacking of the

2016 election. The indictment arises from Mueller’s investigation into Russian interference in the election and whether there was improper coordination between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin. The charges are similar to the assessment of the U.S. intelligence community, which months after the election described a Russian government effort to meddle in the election on Trump’s behalf. The Russians’ “strategic goal” was to sow discord, the indictment says. By early-to-mid 2016, their efforts “included” supporting Trump’s campaign and disparaging Democrat Clinton. The charges say that Russians also communicated with “unwitting individuals” associated with the Trump campaign and other political activists to coordinate activities. Trump himself has been reluctant to acknowledge the meddling. His spokeswoman, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said Friday that Trump had been briefed on the indictment but there was no other immediate comment. The charges are the latest allegations arising from Mueller’s probe and represent the first criminal case against Russians. Before Friday, four people, including Trump’s former national security adviser and former campaign chairman, had been charged. According to the indictment, the Inter-



FILE PHOTO: Russian businessman Prigozhin looks on before a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow

net Research Agency, a Russian troll farm, started interfering as early as 2014 in U.S. politics, extending to the 2016 presidential election. The defendants, “posing as U.S. persons and creating false U.S. personas,” operated social media groups designed to attract U.S. audiences by stealing U.S. identities and falsely claiming to be U.S. activists. “Over time, these social media

accounts became defendants’ means to reach significant numbers of Americans for purposes of interfering with the U.S. political system,” the indictment reads. The defendants are charged with conspiring “to obstruct the lawful functions of the United States government through fraud and deceit,” including by making expenditures in connection

with the 2016 election, failing to register as foreign agents carrying out political activities and obtaining visas through false and fraudulent statements. Some of the Russians traveled to the United States “under false pretenses” to collect intelligence, and they also used computer infrastructure based partly in the United States to hide the Russian origins of their work.

FBI failed to act on tip accused Florida gunman wanted to kill New Orleans

PARKLAND, Fla. (Reuters) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation on Friday said it mishandled a January tip that the 19-year-old accused of killing 17 people in Florida had guns and the potential to carry out a school shooting. A person close to accused gunman Nikolas Cruz called an FBI tip line on Jan. 5 to report concerns about him, the FBI said in a statement. “The caller provided information about Cruz’s gun ownership, desire to kill people, erratic behavior, and disturbing social media posts, as well as the potential of him conducting a school shooting,” it said. The tip appeared unrelated to a previously reported YouTube comment in which a person named Nikolas Cruz said, “I’m going to be a professional school shooter.” The FBI has acknowledged getting that tip as well but failing to connect it to Cruz, who is accused of carrying out the massacre at a high school in Parkland, Florida on Wednesday with an AR-15-style assault rifle.

“Under established protocols, the information provided by the caller should have been assessed as a potential threat to life,” the FBI said in its statement. “The information then should have been forwarded to the FBI Miami field office, where appropriate investigative steps would have been taken. We have determined that these protocols were not followed.” The second-deadliest shooting at a public school in U.S. history also raised concerns about potential failures in school security and stirred the ongoing U.S. debate about gun rights, which are protected by the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. “We are still investigating the facts,” FBI Director Christopher Wray said in the statement. “We have spoken with victims and families, and deeply regret the additional pain this causes all those affected by this horrific tragedy.” Leaders including U.S. President Donald Trump have linked mental illness to Wednesday’s violence, suggesting that it was the public’s responsibility to warn officials of such dangers.



Mourners leave the funeral for Alyssa Aldaheff, 14, one of the victims of the school shooting, in North Fort Lauderdale

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The Norovirus has popped up in Pyeongchang, South Korea, threatening to wreak havoc on the Winter Olympics. Things could get ugly fast for one simple reason: The dreaded stomach virus is very contagious. Also known as the “winter vomiting bug,” norovirus is spread — prepare yourself — through the “fecal-oral route,” which means that a person gets infected by ingesting the stool or vomit of an infected



The biggest problem with the virus showing up at Olympics venues is just how contagious it is. (Photo/Getty Images)

person, often through food or touching contaminated surfaces. Just before the games began, dozens of security guards at Olympic sites started to experience norovirus symptoms, which typically include nausea, diarrhea, stomach pain, and vomiting. They then had to be taken to the hospital, according to the BBC. Another 1,200 guards were pulled from Olympic sites by midweek and were being held in their rooms while getting tested for the virus, the Associated Press reported. Event organizers had to bring in 900 members of the military as replacements. By Thursday last week, a day before the opening ceremonies, the disease was still spreading, with the official tally of confirmed cases rising to 128. As of today, there were 199 confirmed norovirus cases. People with the virus typically have uncontrollable bouts of vomiting and diarrhea. This clears the body of norovirus quickly — usually within one to three days. But it also helps spread the bug to others. And one person infected can mean many more falling ill. To be more precise, we can look to a number called the “R nought,” or R0. Most

Highly Contagious Stomach Virus Could Infect Many More

Norovirus Has Hit The Winter Olympics -- More Than 199 People Have Fallen Sick

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

Ebola — and one person with norovirus infection can sicken up to 3.7 others.

One caveat when talking about the R0: It's never final. The number can change with every outbreak, and even the R0 for individual viruses can vary wildly depending on the context. As infectious diseases epidemiologist David Fisman has told me, the factors that go into determining the R0 include how many contacts a sick person is likely to make, the number of transmissions that are possible per contact, and how long those people shed the virus and potentially infect others. "Any one of these factors is going to be influenced by social norms, how people interact, how much infrastructure — like sewage treatment or clean water — is available in a place, and how cases are managed," Fisman said. The number is also influenced by population density, vaccination levels, and access to treatments. For norovirus, the R0 will vary depending on whether the outbreak is contained in one place (like a hospital or cruise ship) or spread more widely. In Olympic venues, where lots of people are in close contact and sharing food, there's a significant risk of spread. Since the outbreak started, organizers have been ramping up hygiene inspections and passing around hand sanitizer like it's Olympic swag. So far, no athletes have fallen ill. And Team USA has already reported it's taking extra precautions, like hand washing. The team members will also be staying at a special compound, and not Olympic Village, with their own cooks and food. Still, 199 confirmed cases at an R0 of 3.7 could mean another 700 sick people before the outbreak ends. (Courtesy <https://www.vox.com>)

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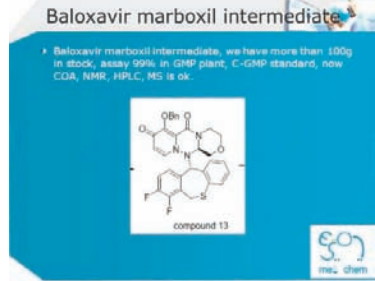
[Even If The Drug Lives Up To Its Claim, It May Not Be Avail-](#)

[able In The U.S. For Another Year](#)

New Drug Promises To Kill Flu Virus In One Day



The drug, which has received preliminary approval in Japan, works three times as fast as currently-available treatments. A Japanese pharmaceutical company has developed a pill it says can kill the flu virus in a day, good news for Americans who are experiencing a widespread outbreak of the infection this winter. But Baloxavir, a flu drug co-developed by Shionogi & Co. and Swiss healthcare company Roche Holding AG (OTC:RH-HBF), won't be available in the United States before next winter. The drug has received preliminary approval in Japan and its developers plan to file for regulatory review in the United States and Europe later this year, per Bloomberg. In trials, a single dose of Baloxavir killed the flu virus within 24 hours, three times as fast as Roche's currently-available treatment, Tamiflu. A Tamiflu treatment cycle requires 10 doses over five days.



Killing the virus quicker would not only help infected patients heal faster but also reduce the threat of contagion, The Wall Street Journal reported. Victims can spread the flu from the day before they exhibit symptoms until about seven days after. The flu was widespread in every state except state except Oregon and Hawaii during the week that ended Feb. 3, according to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And based on the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) mortality data, slightly more than 10 percent of deaths that occurred during the week ending January 20 were due to pneumonia and influenza, a number considered above the epidemic threshold. Although the CDC still recommends getting a flu shot — the flu season lasts until about May — studies in Canada indicate this year's formulation is only 17 percent effective against H3N2, the strain causing widespread illness in the United States.



“While our flu vaccines are far from perfect, they are the best way to prevent getting sick from the flu and it is not too late to get one,” CDC Director Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald said in January. There are other flu remedies in the pipeline, as well. Pimodivir, a medication under development by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson (NYSE:JNJ), has been given fast-track designation from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration because of its potential to address an unmet medical need, per Bloomberg. The drug, which works by preventing targeted genes in the flu virus from reproducing, is expected to enter late-stage studies early this year. Johnson & Johnson also is working to develop a universal flu vaccine that works against multiple strains in the same shot. (Courtesy <https://www.bizjournals.com>)

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A Snapshot Of The World



Social media photo of Pollack, a victim of the school shooting in Parkland



Mourners depart the funeral for Alyssa Aldaheff, 14, one of the victims of the school shooting in North Lauderdale



Freestyle Skiing - Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics - Women's Aerials Finals - Phoenix Snow Park - Pyeongchang, South Korea - February 16, 2018 - Xu Mengtao of China crashes.



Members of the Parkland Soccer Club depart the funeral for Alyssa Aldaheff, 14, one of the victims of the school shooting in North Fort Lauderdale



Medals Ceremony - Luge - Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games - Team Relay - Medals Plaza - Pyeongchang, South Korea - February 16, 2018 - Gold medalists Natalie Geisenberger, Johannes Ludwig, Tobias Wendl and Tobias Arlt of Germany, silver medalists Alex Gough, Sam Edney, Tristan Walker and Justin Snith of Canada, bronze medalists Madeleine Egle, David Gleirscher, Peter Penz and Georg Fischler of Austria on the podium.



People dressed in traditional Korean clothes play a game as they celebrate Lunar New Year among ice sculptures in Pyeongchang



Thierry Neuville headed a clean sweep of the top three places for Hyundai at Rally Sweden on Friday, February 16. The Belgian driver fended off Andreas Mikkelsen by 4.9sec after a tough day in the forests of Sweden and Norway. Hayden Paddon surged up the order late on to claim third, 12.1sec off the lead.



A friend of Meadow Pollack weeps at then end of her funeral ceremony two days after a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland



Ski Jumping - Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics - Men's Large Hill Individual Qualifications - Alpensia Ski Jumping Centre - Pyeongchang, South Korea - February 16, 2018 -

The Chinese New Year, Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, as it's been called since the 20th century, remains the most important social and economic holiday in China, and today is celebrated by Chinese people and people of other cultures and ethnic origins all around the world.

This most happy, joyful and ancient of all holiday for Chinese all started out of fear, according to centuries-old legend. While the origins of the New Year celebration varies from teller to teller, all legends include the story of a terrible mythical monster who preyed all the villagers of the land. The lion-like monster's name was Nian (年) which is also the Chinese word for "year." The stories also all include a wise old man who counsels the villagers to scare off the evil Nian by making loud noises with drums and firecrackers and hanging red paper cutouts and scrolls on their doors because, for some reason, the Nian was very fearful of the color red. As legend has it, the villagers took the old man's advice and the Nian was conquered. So on the anniversary of the date, the Chinese recognize the "passing of the Nian" known in Chinese as guo nian (過年), which is shared with the new year celebrations.



Today, Chinese New Year is celebrated in China and in countries and territories with significant Chinese populations, including Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Mauritius, The Philippines and China Towns all over the world.

Based On The Lunar Calendar

The date of Chinese New Year changes each year because it is based on the lunar calendar. While the western Gregorian calendar is based on the earth's orbit around the sun, China and most Asian countries use the lunar calendar that is based on the moon's orbit around the earth. Chinese New Year always falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice. Other Asian countries such as Korea, Japan and Vietnam also celebrate new year using the lunar calendar.

Originally tied to the lunar-solar Chinese calendar, the holiday was a time to honor household and heavenly deities as well as ancestors. It was also a time to bring family together for feasting. With the popular adoption in China of the Western calendar in 1912, the Chinese joined in celebrating January 1 as New Year's Day.

Ancient History Of Asian Culture Will Come Alive At The 22nd Annual Texas International Lunar Festival

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

新年快樂
Happy Chinese New Year

China, however, continues to celebrate the traditional Chinese New Year, although in a shorter version with a new name—the Spring Festival. Significantly, younger generations of Chinese now observe the holiday in a very different manner from their ancestors. For some young people, the holiday has evolved from an opportunity to renew family ties to a chance for relaxation from work.



Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner (center) joined Southern News Chairman Wea H. Lee and participants in the 21st Annual Texas International Lunar Festival in 2017.

Chinese History Comes Alive
Today, the spirit of the traditional Chinese New Year lives on in the 22nd Annual Texas International Lunar Festival (www.texaslunarfest.net), the largest celebration of Asian culture in the south central part of the United States, being



Lunar Festival Dragon Dance in the 1920's in the U.S.

held this year on Saturday, February 24, 2018, in front of the Southern News Group Building in Southwest Houston, located at 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, Texas 77072.

This year's Festival will have an international theme highlighting the many countries and cultures of the world and will include cultural displays, international food and vendor booths, international entertainment, acrobats, lion dances, martial arts demonstrations, music and dancing by international performers, carnival rides, games and door prizes for every age group. The festival's activities are carefully selected to complement this great and exciting celebration with lively international entertainment that reflects the many diverse groups living here in the Houston community.



You will even find zesty traditional German dancing at the 22nd Annual Texas International Lunar Festival!

We not only celebrate an important part of Asia but also include International performances. In the Chinese lunar calendar a different animal or mythological beast represents every year in a twelve year cycle. The year of 2018 is the year of the Dog.

At the annual Texas Lunar Festival, we celebrate the impressive qualities of every culture while celebrating the Asian Lunar New Year. For the past 21 years, community leaders and volunteers have worked hard to promote the remarkable diversity and impressive leadership of the greater Asian community while fostering friendship among nearly every culture.

Thanks to the remarkable success of previous festivals, we have expanded this year's festival! Our commitment to cultural diversity and the promise of a stronger tomorrow starts at our festival. The success of previous festivals has proven our dedication and enthusiasm to expand above and beyond our former festivals.



Thousands of citizens across the great State of Texas visit our festival every year. From the exciting entertainment to the remarkable cuisine, the Texas Lunar Festival not only celebrates Houston...but every culture across our beautiful planet.

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We have initiated and been the driving force behind many community projects, programs and events that include the Texas Lunar New Year Festival, the McDonald's Education Workshops, the Texas African Summit, the ITC Education Institute and have aired many more educational, cultural and business-related television programs on our digital television station, STV 15.3, as well as having hosted over 200 international business related meetings and events at our International Trade Center.



The 22nd Annual Texas International Lunar Festival is being hosted by Southern News Group, Chinese New Year Festival Inc., International Trade Center, International Management District, and STV 15.3.

For more information please contact Jennifer Lopez at 281-983-8152 or jenniferitc@gmail.com

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‘I have seen enough death’: Sugar Land father fights execution of son who had rest of family killed

By Keri Blakinger

Even after the shooting, Kent Whitaker didn't recognize the signs — the repeated threats, the questionable burglary, the targets.

In the end, however, it all added up to one thing: His oldest son had finally made good on his sinister plans to kill his family.

But Whitaker didn't realize all that until much later — after the funerals of his wife and youngest son. After the days and nights of grief. After he'd already forgiven a killer he thought he didn't know. Fifteen years later, that forgiveness is what propels

him forward as he rails against the impending execution of his oldest son — the troubled man behind the 2003 murder-for-hire plot that left Whitaker a widower and grieving father.

Now sitting on Texas death row, that son, Thomas “Bart” Whitaker, 38, is slated for execution Feb. 22. Barring a last-minute stay, he will be the fourth man put to death in the Lone Star State this year.

“I have seen enough death — I don't want to see any more,” his father told the Chronicle recently. “I'm going to have the last living member of my direct family taken from me by the State of Texas in the name of justice, and I just don't want that.” His best shot at keeping his son out of the death chamber may be a petition pending before the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

“There is only one person on Earth who is intimate with the murderous attack, the lives and deaths of the other victims, and the life of



Kent Whitaker, father of Bart Whitaker, a Sugar Land man who is on death row for arranging the murders of his family members in 2003, talks about his efforts for clemency in the case, Saturday, Feb. 10, 2018

Thomas Whitaker — Mr. Whitaker's father, Kent. Kent was there,” Bart's attorneys wrote in their petition to the board.

“For the rest of us, the case against commutation to a life sentence seems clear. We can't forgive; we have no sympathy. But clemency is not about something so simple as sympathy or as formidable as forgiveness.” The clemency petition tells the story of a changed man, a prisoner who's helped fellow inmates and

worked to make life behind bars just a little less harsh. Dozens of letters from teachers, pen pals, family, fellow prisoners and even death row guards bolstered the appeal to the parole board, and Kent won a face-to-face meeting Tuesday with the parole board chair.

“Texas is proud of being a victims' rights state,” Kent said. “I just want the board to acknowledge that victims' rights means something even when the victim is asking for mercy instead of vengeance.” To the men who helped put him in prison in the first place, however, Bart Whitaker is beyond hope.

Fort Bend County District Attorney John Healey called him a “master manipulator of reality.” Marshall Slot, the former Sugar Land detective who probed the case 15 years ago, concurred.

“There's no definitive definition of a sociopath,” Slot said. “It's someone who uses people as pieces in a game. And that's what Bart is.”

The outburst of violence on Dec. 10, 2003 shocked the tony Sugar Lakes subdivision. Apparently motivated by the lure of a \$1 million inheritance, Bart recruited two friends to help carry

out the murder of his entire family during a faked robbery.

His 51-year-old mother, Patricia Whitaker, and 19-year-old brother, Kevin, died in the attack. Kent and Bart were wounded, but survived.

The killings took place just after a celebratory dinner marking Bart's supposed graduation from Sam Houston State University — a milestone that never happened. Before the ruse of a dinner, Bart had arranged for two friends to wait at the family home for a burglary set-up. When the family of four returned home from the restaurant, gunman Chris Brashear opened fire then fled in a car driven by neighbor Steve Champagne. At the outset, the case baffled police. But then, authorities learned — after reading an article in the Houston Chronicle, Slot said — that Bart was no longer enrolled in college. He'd been out on academic probation. Days later, an acquaintance came forward with details about a past plot, offering eerily similar details that mirrored the actual crime. But still, police didn't have enough to arrest anyone.

They didn't even have enough to fully convince Kent, still reeling from the loss of his wife and youngest son.

“I didn't know who was telling the truth,” he said. But in the meantime, he wasn't about to abandon his son.

Growing up, Bart was a good kid, according to his father. He made good grades in school, went to church and played sports. In his teens, he had a few brushes with trouble. At one point, he burglarized his high school, rappelling in through the ceiling in what Slot described as a “Mission Impossible-style burglary.”

Looking back, his father suspects there were undiagnosed mental health problems at play — issues he believes still haven't been fully evaluated. “There was something

we didn't see,” Kent said.

But he doesn't know what he could have done differently. At the time, it seemed like teenagers being teenagers.

In 2000, however, unbeknownst to his family, Bart recruited two friends to help in a death plot eventually called off when one co-conspirator activated the alarm system at the Whitaker residence. The true intent of the aborted break-in didn't emerge until years later.

In 2001, while attending Baylor University, Bart tried soliciting two friends there to kill his family. But Waco police got word of the plot, and tipped off authorities in Sugar Land. “They determined that it was a misunderstanding and there was nothing to it,” Kent said. “That made more sense to me than that our son was planning to kill us.” Then, months after police zeroed in on Bart as the primary suspect in his family's slaying, he stole money from his father and fled to Mexico. Authorities captured him in Monterrey in 2005. In the courtroom wranglings that followed, Brashear pleaded guilty to murder and took a life sentence, while Champagne took a 15-year plea deal. Over the protestations of his father and entire extended family, Bart was sentenced to death. “It was a very, very tough decision — but in a way it wasn't. Because what he did was just so damn bad,” said former Fort Bend prosecutor Jeff Strange. “You can't pick and choose because he's a nice-looking white kid.” Kent has long argued the harsh sentence was overreach, especially since his son wasn't the shooter.

“I think they made a mistake,” he said. Still, if legal options fail, Kent will be there to watch his son's last minutes.

“I know that Bart will be judged fairly and that God understands him completely,” he said, “whereas nobody down here does.”

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