

The Washington Post

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The Daily 202

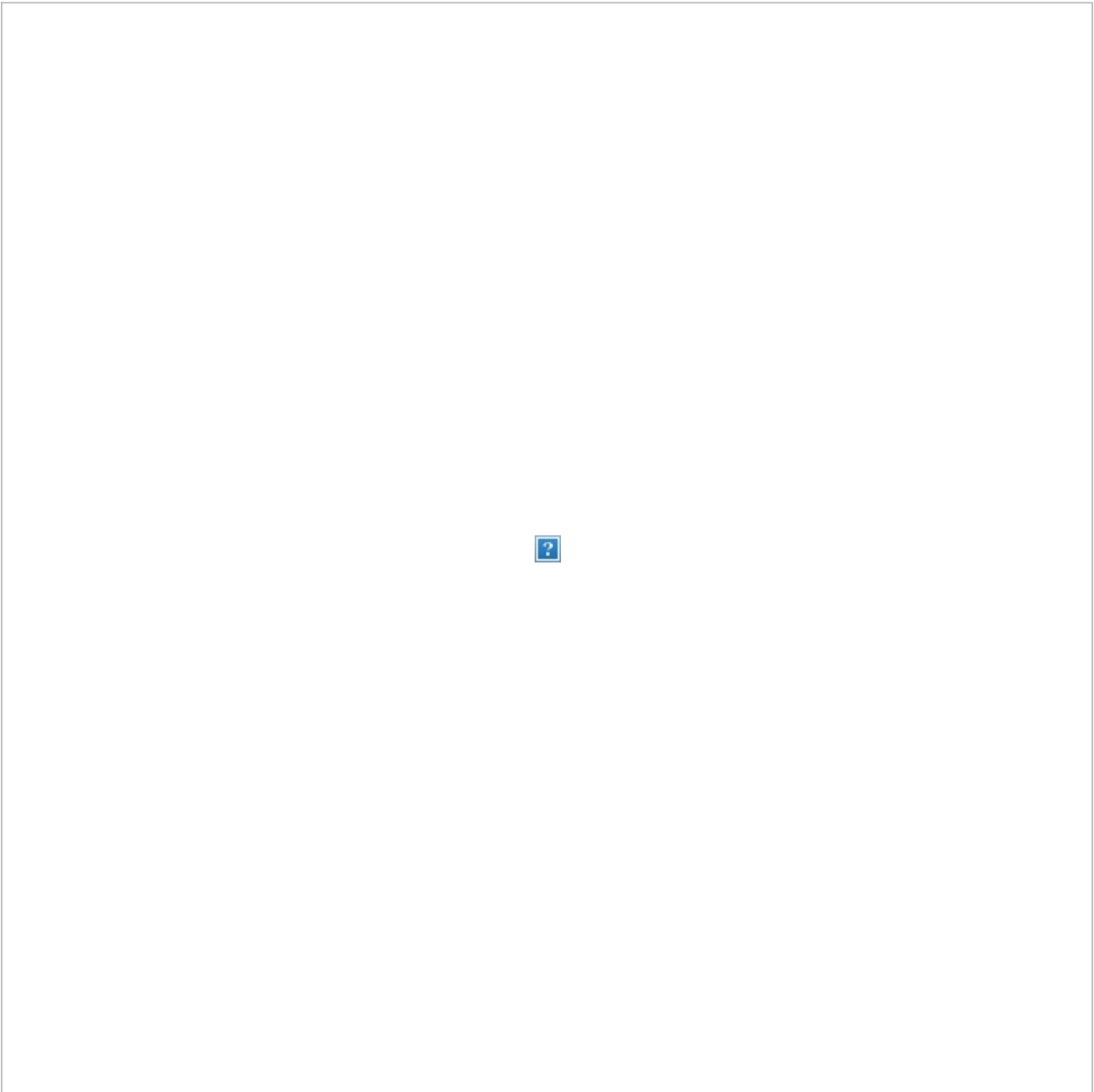


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Trump is the Sharpie president



Trump appears to show Sharpie-altered hurricane map



BY JAMES HOHMANN

with Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA: The pen may be mightier than the sword, but the Sharpie is not mightier than the storm.

A White House official says it was President Trump himself who used the black Sharpie to doctor an official government map, which he then displayed during an Oval Office briefing, to falsely add Alabama into Hurricane Dorian's potential pathway.

"No one else writes like that on a map with a black Sharpie," the White House official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, told my colleagues [Toluse Olorunnipa](#) and [Josh Dawsey](#).

It was a botched attempt at saving face after the president mistakenly claimed over the weekend that the state was at risk long after it was in the clear. Rather than own the small mistake and move on – we all make mistakes – Trump has turned this into a five-day story. He's tweeted nine times and posted five maps about the subject. Last night, he even directed the National Security Council to release a 225-word statement from a rear admiral defending him.

-- The Sharpie has long been one of Trump's blunt instruments of choice, but this week it's become a symbol of Trumpism just as potent as the MAGA hat. It's louder, bolder and less delicate than the classier and more conventionally elegant pens that have historically occupied the White House. Just like Trump.

-- His Sharpie squiggles on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration map are worth more than 1,000 words. Trump seems unable to admit mistakes, no matter how trivial, because he appears to see such concessions as a sign of weakness. He becomes easily distracted by detritus at the expense of tackling the existential challenges facing our country, from climate change to the national debt.

"I know it's a minor episode, but I hope that doctored map makes its way into the

Smithsonian someday. Like Washington's uniform or Jefferson's desk, Trump's bogus map embodies the man," writes [columnist Eugene Robinson](#). "As smooth moves go, it was lamer than trying to forge a \$100 bill by taking a Monopoly \$1 bill and writing a couple of extra zeros on it."

-- Forcing senior aides to contort themselves in defense of his false statements is a feature, not a bug, of the Trump administration. This dates to Sean Spicer's monologue on crowd sizes after the inauguration, which set the tone for everything that's followed. Aides have tried to substantiate Trump's specious claims that he was wiretapped, that millions of votes were illegally cast by undocumented immigrants and that Middle Easterners had joined the caravans approaching the southern border. He said that right before the midterm elections during the same speeches in which he claimed that a plan was in the works to cut middle-class taxes by 10 percent. It hadn't been, but then staff scrambled to make it seem like an idea that was actually under consideration. [The list](#) goes on and on.

"Even when Trump mistakenly tweeted the nonsensical word 'covfefe' late one night, the president, instead of owning up to a typo or errant message, later sent Spicer to declare, 'I think the president and a small group of people know exactly what he meant,'" recalls [the AP's Jonathan Lemire](#).

As Trump put it in 2016, "I think apologizing's a great thing, but you have to be wrong. I will absolutely apologize, sometime in the hopefully distant future, *if* I'm ever wrong."

Or, as George Orwell wrote in "1984," $2+2=5$.



Trump demurs when asked about hurricane map

-- Trump has a notorious history of struggling to let certain things go once he becomes fixated on them. In April 1988, Spy magazine [mockingly](#) referred to Trump as a “short-fingered vulgarian” in a satirical advertisement for “The Art of the Deal,” which was on the bestseller list at the time. The co-founder of that magazine was Graydon Carter, who would go on to lead Vanity Fair for a quarter of a century. In October 2015, Carter said that the insult still got under Trump’s skin. “To this day,

I receive the occasional envelope from Trump,” [he wrote](#). “There is always a photo of him — generally a tear sheet from a magazine. On all of them he has circled his hand in gold Sharpie in a valiant effort to highlight the length of his fingers. I almost feel sorry for the poor fellow because, to me, the fingers still look abnormally stubby.”

-- Yesterday afternoon, Trump beckoned Fox News correspondent John Roberts to the Oval Office after a 3 p.m. live shot to make the case that he was correct about Dorian – because Alabama had been in the potential path early on – and to complain about anchor Shepard Smith’s coverage on his show, according to internal Fox emails leaked to [CNN’s Jake Tapper](#).

“It has been well documented by now that Trump hyperactively tries to create his own reality,” [Philip Bump notes](#). “The Washington Post’s exhaustive database of Trump’s falsehoods, misrepresentations and lies are largely a compendium of times Trump has tried to make himself seem more important, his work more exceptional and his enemies more toxic than they actually are. Maintaining that house of cards means constantly working to bolster its foundation: the idea, constantly fostered by Trump, that his assertions are unassailable. ...

“In late 2017, Trump gave Senate candidate Roy Moore of Alabama a pass on allegations that Moore had groped a child in the 1970s while excoriating then-Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) for less serious charges ... because Franken admitted to having acted inappropriately,” Bump adds. “The admission itself allowed Trump to cast Franken as hopelessly guilty, while Moore’s denial gave him cover to shrug at the allegations. Franken had cracked open a door. Trump, facing far more questions, is fervent about keeping his own door nailed shut.”





President Trump uses a Sharpie to sign an order withdrawing the United States from the Arms Trade Treaty as he speaks at the National Rifle Association annual convention in April at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. He then tossed the pen into the crowd. (Tannen Maury/EPA-EFE/Rex)

-- Sharpies have played a starring role in several of the most memorable moments from this epoch. In [his tell-all book](#), former West Wing communications aide Cliff Sims recounts in detail a private huddle in which he and Keith Schiller, the president's longtime bodyguard and confidant, helped Trump draw up an enemies list with a Sharpie on White House stationery. "We're going to get rid of all the

snakes, even the bottom-feeders,” Trump told the men, according to Sims’s account in “[Team of Vipers](#),” released in January.

During a listening session after the massacre last year at a high school in Parkland, Fla., Trump held a note card in his hand with a basic reminder of emotional empathy. “[I hear you](#)” was written out in Sharpie.

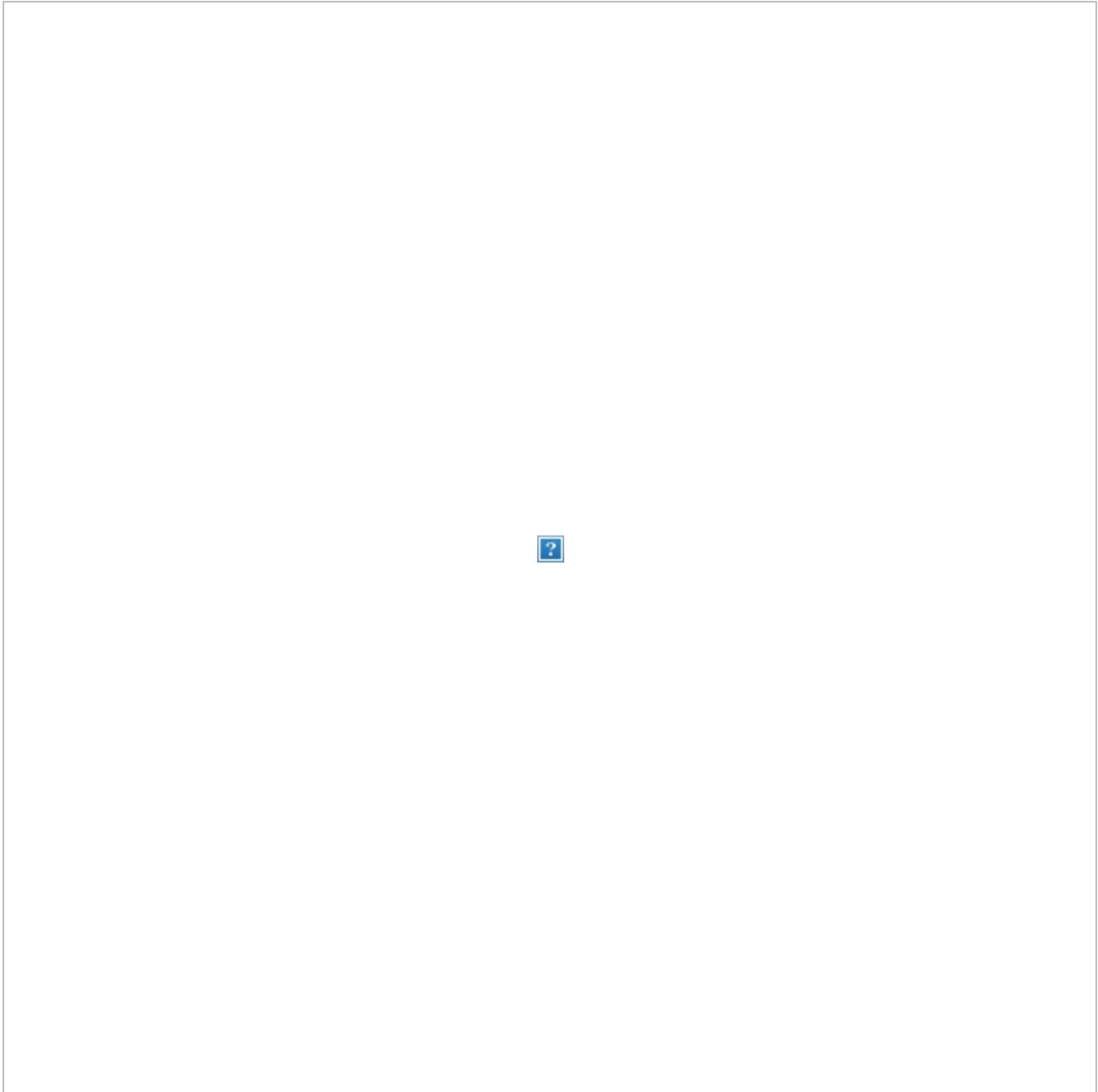
When an outbreak of tornados killed 23 people in Alabama this March, Trump visited the state. He used his Sharpie to [sign several Bibles](#) at a Baptist church that had been converted into [a relief center](#).

Two days before he became president, Trump tweeted a picture of himself holding a legal pad at Mar-a-Lago while looking earnestly into a camera. He [wrote](#) that it was an image of himself composing his inaugural address. He was upset at that time about stories on which aides were drafting the speech, and he wanted to insist that he wrote it himself. In that picture, Trump is holding a closed Sharpie. The pad looks brand new.

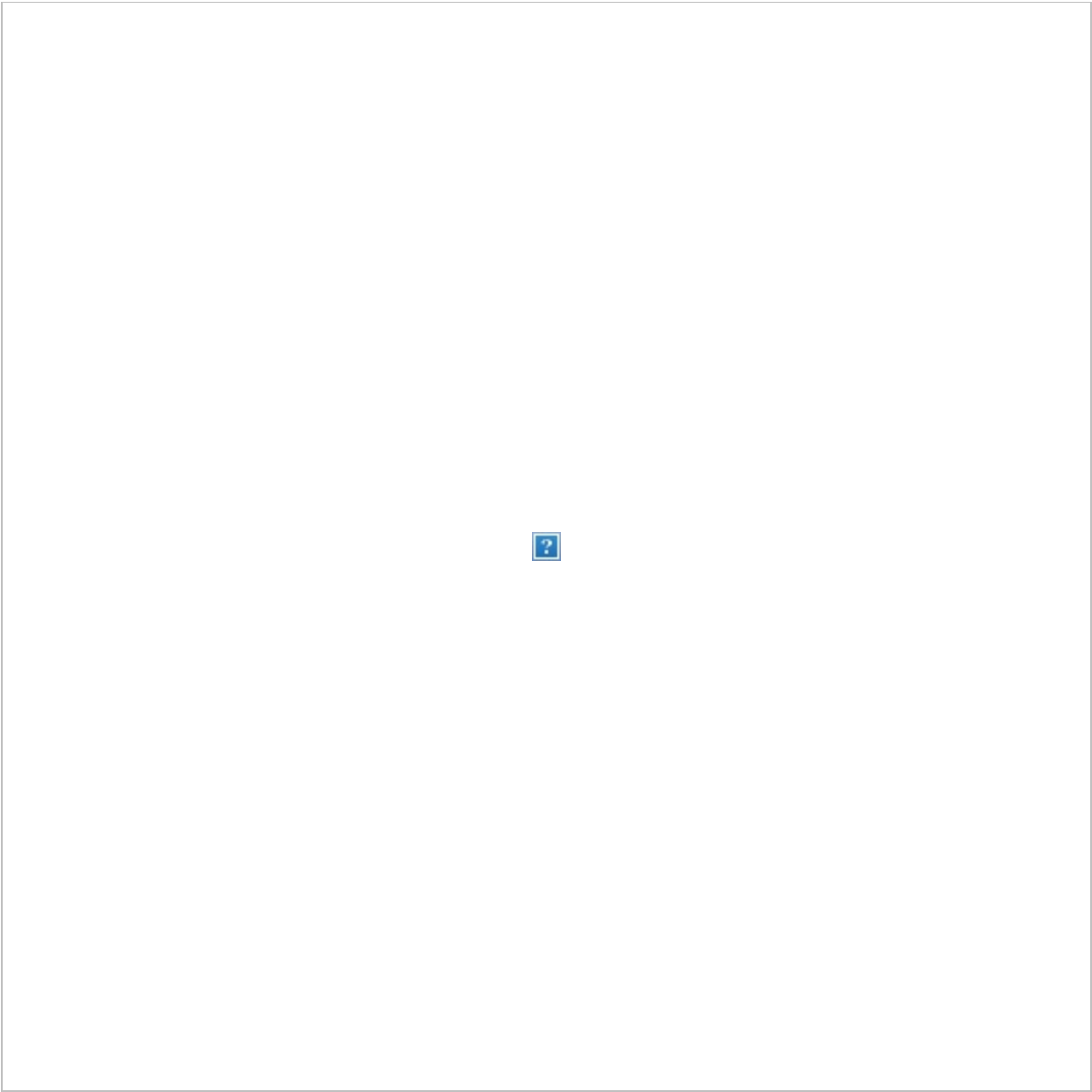
An auction house [sold](#) a doodle this spring that Trump once drew in gold Sharpie of the Manhattan skyline. In it, Trump Tower [dominates](#) neighboring skyscrapers. In real life, it doesn’t. Trump has long claimed that the building he named after himself has 68 stories. In fact, it has 58.

When Trump started using Twitter, he didn’t post the tweets himself. He’d write them down in Sharpie on a piece of paper, and a 20-something staffer named Justin McConney would type them up. Eventually, Trump got an Android phone and started typing his own tweets one night in February 2013. “The moment I found out Trump could tweet himself was comparable to the moment in ‘Jurassic Park’ when Dr. Grant realized that velociraptors could open doors,” McConney told [Politico](#) last year. “I was like, ‘Oh no.’”

-- Here are some of the funniest memes and other reactions on social media to what has been facetiously dubbed Sharpiegate:

































And an apropos word of the day:



-- But, but, but: There are good reasons not to laugh about Trump doctoring a government weather map. “The nation’s meteorologists saw the extended presidential eruption as an unhelpful diversion from a serious threat,” [Politico’s Nancy Cook reports](#). “There is a potentially life-threatening hurricane headed for the Carolinas, and any distraction from making people aware of the potential consequences is not doing anyone a favor,’ said Dan Sobien, president of the National Weather Service Employees Organization. ‘This is a distraction from what the official government message should be right now.’ Sobien said the union

representing the National Weather Service has fielded numerous calls over the past 24 hours from managers from the weather service, private-sector businesses and union members asking how the National Weather Service can stop the president from continuing to repeat confusing information — or worse, undermining the fact-based reports from the Miami-based hurricane forecasters.” ([Here's why Trump's Sharpie-ing was possibly a crime.](#))

-- Other political figures have used Sharpies in unusual ways, as well. For example, Jill Biden was against her husband running for president in 2004. She [fumed](#) as Joe Biden spent hours in their living room listening to a group of Democrats explain how he could beat George W. Bush. “I was sitting at the pool in my swimsuit,” the future second lady wrote in her memoir, “[Where the Light Enters](#),” released in May. “My temper got the best of me. I decided I needed to contribute to this conversation. As I walked through the kitchen, a Sharpie caught my eye. I drew NO on my stomach in big letters, and marched through the room in my bikini.”



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WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING:



'We're hoping for the best': South Carolina residents battle through Hurricane Dorian

-- Eastern North Carolina, southeast Virginia and the southern Delmarva Peninsula will take a blast from Dorian's heavy rain, strong winds and storm surge through this morning and afternoon. [Jason Samenow and Andrew Freedman report](#): "Several locations along the North Carolina Outer Banks had already reported wind gusts up to 95 mph as the eyewall, the hurricane's zone of

the most severe weather surrounding its center, passed over early Friday. The center or eye of the storm was passing near Cape Hatteras at 8 a.m. ... By Friday night and Saturday morning the accelerating storm will blow by extreme eastern Massachusetts, including Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and parts of Cape Cod, unleashing several hours of wind-swept rain and high seas."

-- In the Bahamas, residents are still waiting for relief amid the bodies of victims. [Anthony Faiola reports](#): "The body is wearing shorts, its legs now bent at impossible angles, its face frozen in a bloated grimace, under what's left of a collapsed cement roof. A man who knew him says his name was Sebely, and he was seeking shelter anywhere he could find it, just as hundreds of other poor residents in this town did when Hurricane Dorian struck. 'Six days! Six days and that body's still here!' shouted Charite Alouivor, 55, a carpenter of Haitian descent. 'Where are they? Where is the help? Where is the water? Where is the food? Where is the government? Why are there bodies still here?' ... On Thursday, teams in hazmat suits were scouring Marsh Harbour, performing the grim, grueling duty of digging through the rubble for remains. ... Officials raised the number of confirmed deaths to 30 but expect the toll will keep climbing."

-- The U.S. economy added 130,000 jobs in August, as hiring slowed sharply amid concerns that the economy is deteriorating. ([Heather Long](#))

-- The attorneys general of eight states, plus D.C., are investigating Facebook for possible antitrust violations. New York Attorney General Letitia James released a statement this morning to announce that a bipartisan coalition is looking into the social media company. The probe also includes the attorneys general of Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and Tennessee. James said they're focused on "Facebook's dominance in the industry and the potential anticompetitive conduct stemming from that dominance." ([Taylor Telford](#))



Robert Mugabe attends a United Nations conference in 2009. (Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images)

-- Robert Mugabe, the former Zimbabwean president who helped liberate and then destroyed his country during 37 years in power, died at 95. Glenn Frankel, who earned the 1989 Pulitzer Prize as our southern African bureau chief and was based in Harare, has an excellent [obituary](#): “Mugabe, who had displayed physical decline over recent years, had been receiving hospital treatment in Singapore since April ... Mugabe was forced to resign as Zimbabwe’s leader days

after the army staged a coup in November 2017. At the time, he was world's oldest head of state and one of Africa's longest-serving leaders. ... Mugabe's fall marked the end of one of the last surviving 'Big Men' of the continent, the onetime revolutionary leaders who inherited the security apparatus of their former colonial rulers and used an iron fist to enrich themselves and repress their citizens. Mugabe emerged from the bush in 1980 and took power in what was once white-minority-ruled Southern Rhodesia after a protracted civil war. He pledged pragmatism and reconciliation. But after a promising start, the country once known as the breadbasket of southern Africa descended into a nightmare of widespread unemployment, hyperinflation, hunger and disease.

“Mugabe and his cronies unleashed gangs of armed thugs to beat up, torture and kill their political foes, while suffocating Zimbabwe's fledgling democratic institutions. The regime used food aid as a way to reward supporters and starve opponents. Epidemics of AIDS and cholera ravaged rural areas, and the country's once-thriving commercial farms were gutted. ... Mugabe blamed those ills and more on a long list of enemies, foreign and domestic, while portraying himself as a beleaguered African hero. He conjured a paranoid vision of a major conspiracy, led by white farmers and businessmen and their black political puppets and funded by evil governments in London and Washington. But Mugabe's downfall came not at the hands of foreign enemies but from his once-loyal generals. They rebelled against his attempt to install his mercurial wife, Grace Mugabe, as his successor, and placed him under house arrest.”



Former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz speaks at Purdue University. (Michael Conroy/AP)

-- Former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz will not run for president. From [Greg Jaffe and Michael Scherer](#): “Schultz’s decision, after spending months away from public life because of health issues, will come as a relief to Democratic leaders, who feared an independent candidacy by a self-funded billionaire would hobble their eventual nominee. Despite growing frustration with the country’s politics, his aborted run serves as a cautionary tale about the resiliency of the

country's two-party political system. In a three-page letter to supporters Schultz outlined his reasons for abandoning his presidential bid and sketched his plans for the future. Moderate voters, who he had hoped would have been his constituency, have 'largely tuned out of political life,' he wrote, and many other potential supporters would not back him because of their concern that he would aid Trump's reelection."



How Trump's impulses keep undercutting his political agenda

THE DOMESTIC AGENDA:

-- The Trump administration unveiled a plan that would remake the U.S. housing market by privatizing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two massive government-controlled companies that back half of the nation's mortgages.

[Renaë Merle reports](#): "The long-awaited plan from the Treasury Department features nearly 50 proposals, including many technical changes to financial regulations, and is aimed at shrinking the government's role in the housing market. The cornerstone of the plan would resolve the fates of the Federal National Mortgage Association and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, which 11 years ago this week were put into government conservatorship during the global financial crisis. ... Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac play a critical part in the housing market, buying mortgages from lenders, then packaging them into securities to sell to investors. The government seized control of both companies in 2008 as the housing market unraveled and the firms' losses piled up. ...

"While Democrats and Republicans support ending government control of the companies, several other plans have stalled in Congress. President Barack Obama's administration shied away from the topic, fearful that a wrong move could disrupt the housing market and the availability of 30-year mortgages. A senior Treasury Department official said that while the administration's plan was extensive, the changes are designed to be 'incremental and realistic.' ... **Most of the Trump administration's proposals require action by Congress, but the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), the regulator for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, could take some actions on its own. The agency is run by Mark Calabria, formerly Vice President Pence's chief economist.** Calabria, without congressional approval, could end the government conservatorship of the companies and do away with a requirement that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac send most of their profits to the Treasury Department, for example."

-- The Trump administration has been slowly implementing its new policy that

replaces in-person interpreters with informational videos at immigration hearings, a switch that's causing delays and confusion in different cities. [From the San Francisco Chronicle](#): “So far, the policy has been rolled out to courts in just four cities: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami and New York. ... Judges and attorneys observing the courts say the change has mostly served to delay proceedings, by adding lengthy steps and information that is not necessary for all migrants to hear. ... Judges in courts that have made the change are required to play either a Spanish-dubbed or English-language video for immigrants who do not have attorneys representing them. The 20-minute video runs through a lengthy list of technical legal advisories. Videos in other languages are not yet available, but the Justice Department has plans to introduce them.”

-- The Trump administration violated federal law when it used money from entrance fees to keep the nation's national parks open during the government shutdown earlier this year, the Government Accountability Office concluded.

[From Politico](#): “GAO said the Interior Department moved money between accounts without authorization from Congress, in violation of federal law. The agency must report the violation to Congress, identify the officials responsible for it and explain steps it will take to prevent similar violations. It said any subsequent actions in the future would be ‘knowing and willful violations,’ subjecting officials to penalties. ... Congressional Democrats, who released the GAO opinion Thursday, said the opinion showed the administration clearly violated the law and pushed for consequences. ... Then acting Secretary David Bernhardt issued a directive on Jan. 5, 2019, to tap into the entrance fees to address maintenance and sanitation issues that had developed at national parks remaining open during the shutdown.”

-- A Department of Justice staffer is accused of using social media to weed out Trump critics from the process for awarding grants to organizations that assist crime victims. [From The Daily Beast](#): “A public employees union filed a complaint to the DOJ's Inspector General against Office for Victims of Crime

director Darlene Hutchinson Biehl—who leads the division that compensates crime victims and gives grants to local governments, nonprofits, and other crime organizations. In an Aug. 16 complaint, the union alleged that Biehl was selecting peer reviewers—or experts hired by the department to ensure grants are given in a fair manner—based on their political views displayed on social media. More specifically, Biehl is accused of looking on platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn to see if a peer reviewer’s immigration views lined up with the Trump administration or if the peer reviewer supported prostitution legalization. The union reportedly asked the Inspector General to look into the matter in the complaint.”

-- The top official at the MD Anderson Cancer Center is being considered for the top job at the Food and Drug Administration. [Laurie McGinley reports:](#)

Stephen Hahn, “a radiation oncologist and researcher, met with Trump on Wednesday to discuss being nominated as commissioner of the agency. An administration official said that Trump has not made a decision on the FDA job, but that Hahn ‘is a strong candidate.’ He has emerged as the chief rival to Norman E. ‘Ned’ Sharpless, who was tapped as acting FDA chief after Commissioner Scott Gottlieb resigned in March.”

-- Trump will challenge California’s authority to set its own automobile gas mileage standards. [From the AP:](#) “The Environmental Protection Agency was preparing paperwork for the White House for the move, meant to help the administration set a single, less rigorous mileage standard enforceable nationwide, according to the official, who is familiar with the regulatory process and spoke on condition of anonymity because the plan has not been made public. ... The Trump plan would have to be posted in the Federal Register and would be subject to public comment. His administration has tried to ease or remove scores of environmental regulations that it regards as unnecessary and burdensome. The tougher mileage standards were a key part of the Obama administration’s efforts to reduce climate-changing fossil fuel emissions.”

-- “Nobody saved the coal industry,” complained the president of United Mine Works of America. From CNN: “Cecil Roberts said at an event in Washington that his message to Trump and others running for president in 2020 is: ‘Coal’s not back.’ ... He said coal-fired plants are closing all over the country, calling it a ‘harsh reality.’ Trump held a rally in West Virginia in August 2018 where he touted his administration’s proposal to allow states to set their own emissions standards for coal-fueled power plants. He declared at the time, ‘We are back. The coal industry is back.’ ... Roberts said Trump cutting back some of the Obama-era regulations that limited coal-fired power plant emissions ‘perhaps kept the coal industry ... in existence’ but that plants are still closing ‘dramatically’ and the market keeps shrinking. He said coal mining jobs will continue to be lost because of what he called bad public policy, and ‘eventually there will be no market here or only the strongest companies will survive.’”

-- Despite a decade-plus of economic growth, Americans have slowed down their business formation, a trend that poses a risk to the economy. From the AP: “Business formation has long been one of the primary ways in which Americans have built wealth. When fewer new companies are established, fewer Americans tend to prosper over time. In addition, smaller companies account for roughly 85% of all hiring, making them an entry point for most workers into the workforce. Even with the unemployment rate at a near-record-low of 3.7%, a decline in the creation of new companies means there are fewer companies competing for workers, a trend that generally slows pay growth. The pace of pay growth has stalled for the past five months even as hiring has remained healthy.”

-- Tensions between Trump and Pence are growing as the 2020 race gets closer, according to Yahoo News: “On the surface, Trump and Pence insist they have a great relationship and are working closer than ever to win reelection in 2020. ... But behind the scenes, tensions have been mounting among Trump, Pence and their top advisers ever since the GOP’s resounding losses in the 2018

midterms. In the weeks afterward, Trump asked aides about replacing Pence on the ticket, and he asked again for their thoughts on Pence during his August vacation at his golf course in Bedminster, N.J., according to Trump advisers ... The relationship between their political teams has soured greatly in the past year, according to a dozen Trump and Pence aides and Republican advisers familiar with the dynamic. In particular, rumors that [Jared] Kushner and Ivanka Trump wanted to consider replacements for Pence — specifically trying to find a woman running mate to help win back the suburbs in 2020 — have worried the vice president's camp, according to Trump and Pence campaign advisers who spoke on background for this story.”

-- Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) said that lawmakers should discuss fixing Social Security “behind closed doors.” [Felicia Sonmez reports](#): “‘So it’s, you know, a broader discussion for another day,’ she added. ‘But I do think, as various parties and members of Congress, we need to sit down behind closed doors so we’re not being scrutinized by this group or the other, and just have an open and honest conversation about what are some of the ideas that we have for maintaining Social Security in the future.’ ... The advocacy organization Social Security Works accused Ernst of seeking to ‘cut our earned benefits in secret.’”



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson meets with Pence on Thursday at 10 Downing Street in London. (Peter Summers/Pool/AP)

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson continued his push for an early general election that he hopes could deliver him Brexit by the end of October, despite a number of stinging defeats in Parliament. [Kevin Sullivan and Karla Adam report](#): “Johnson cast his quest to bust Britain out of the European Union in

defiant and populist terms, saying he would 'rather be dead in a ditch' than seek any further delays to Brexit. He said he didn't want to see 'the powers of the British people handed over to Brussels, so we can be kept incarcerated in the E.U.' That echoed the populist — and successful — appeal to British voters to 'take back control' of Britain that led to the passage of Brexit in a 2016 national referendum."

-- Johnson took a wrecking ball to the government – and got hit himself, writes Dan Balz: "Everything appears more difficult than when Johnson had so breezily proclaimed himself a candidate for the leadership post and even in his early days as prime minister. It all hit a wall when Johnson came in contact with Parliamentary opposition and the internal revolt among his own members. As with Trump, the predictions come easily, but the execution comes harder. Johnson underestimated the ability of his opponents in Parliament to move swiftly to seize the agenda from the government. He might have thought that [Labour Party leader Jeremy] Corbyn, who has been calling for an election for many months, would bite into that apple. His miscalculations have left him empty-handed, but not necessarily without options or resources. Trump has repeatedly challenged the institutions of the American political system, seeking to weaken or delegitimize any that threaten his power or him personally. In his short time as prime minister, Johnson has gone even further, tearing at the underpinnings of democratic government in what has become an all-out war."

-- Johnson's statements about the state of Brexit negotiations bear little relationship to reality, E.U. lawmakers claim. From Michael Birnbaum: "Perhaps it's for domestic use. But everybody reads the British papers,' said Anne Mulder, a Dutch lawmaker who leads Brexit planning in his country's parliament. 'He's totally unrealistic. He's saying if you don't do what I say, I'll commit suicide. There are no negotiations with this government.'"

-- But the prime minister got a friendly assist from Pence, who met with him at 10 Downing Street and suggested a post-Brexit trade deal that could

increase trade between the U.K. and the U.S. Other than that, Pence stayed away from conversations regarding the tumult engulfing Johnson. [From the AP](#): “Pence largely stuck to script, delivering greetings from Trump and saying the president had asked him to assure Johnson that ‘the United States supports the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union.’ ... The exchange glossed over the long and arduous process involved in negotiating a free trade deal, although Johnson did make note that ‘you guys are pretty tough negotiators.’ ... Johnson did press for the removal of U.S. trade barriers on British products including lamb and beef and haggis, a Scottish dish made with the lungs of sheep. He also mentioned trade barriers to shower trays — ‘would you believe it?’ — a term for the flooring of showers.”

-- Pence and his extensive security detail raised eyebrows as they traveled through the famously peaceful Iceland. [Rebecca Tan reports](#): “During the visit Wednesday, U.S. security personnel — who had to be given special permission to bear arms — trailed the vice president through the city. When Pence met with Icelandic officials, snipers were seen perched on the rooftops of nearby buildings, the AP wrote. ‘The scale of Pence’s visit, not least the security arrangements, are greater than ever seen in Iceland before,’ added RUV, the country’s national broadcasting service. ... The country’s president, Gudni Thorlacius Johannesson, has been spotted, among other things, visiting a popular geothermal bath and ‘plogging’ (picking up rubbish while jogging) around the presidential residence on his own.”

-- Is Trump strong-arming Ukraine’s new president for political gain? That’s the question that [The Washington Post’s editorial board is asking this morning](#): “Ukraine’s neophyte president, Volodymyr Zelensky, took a big step this week toward proving that he will be, as he promised, the most pro-reform president in Ukraine’s history. That ought to be cause for celebration in Washington ... Yet Mr. Zelensky has so far failed to win the backing of President Trump. Not only has Mr.

Trump refused to grant the Ukrainian leader a White House visit, but also he has suspended the delivery of \$250 million in U.S. military aid to a country still fighting Russian aggression in its eastern provinces. ...

“Some suspect Mr. Trump is once again catering to Mr. Putin, who is dedicated to undermining Ukrainian democracy and independence. But we’re reliably told that the president has a second and more venal agenda: He is attempting to force Mr. Zelensky to intervene in the 2020 U.S. presidential election by launching an investigation of [Joe Biden]. Mr. Trump is not just soliciting Ukraine’s help with his presidential campaign; he is using U.S. military aid the country desperately needs in an attempt to extort it. The strong-arming of Mr. Zelensky was openly reported to the New York Times last month by Mr. Trump’s personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, who said he had met in Madrid with a close associate of the Ukrainian leader and urged that the new government restart an investigation of Mr. Biden and his son. ... The Biden case, which has already been investigated by Ukrainian authorities, is bogus on its face.”

-- During a private meeting, two top State Department officials voiced alarm about America’s loss of diplomatic clout on the eve of the annual U.N.

General Assembly. [From Foreign Policy](#): “John Sullivan, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, and David Hale, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, touched on those issues during a closed-door town hall meeting on Aug. 29 with IO staffers. But they expressed particular concern about China’s strategic goal of deepening its influence in the U.N. and other international organizations. The coming months will be ‘key times’ for the bureau to promote U.S. national security interests in international institutions with the upcoming U.N. General Assembly, Hale said, according to an account of the meeting relayed to Foreign Policy. ‘It’s only gotten harder as we face the increasing attempts, campaigns, by China to gain greater and greater influence over these organizations,’ he said.”

-- Trump will replace his Middle East envoy and the man in charge of the

administration's peace plan, Jason Greenblatt, with Avi Berkowitz, a deputy assistant to the president who graduated from law school just three years ago who has risen because of his closeness with Jared Kushner. Former Middle East envoy Martin Indyk reacted to the news on Twitter, calling the replacement "a considerable downgrade in the position." ([New York Magazine](#))

-- Iran will no longer honor the 2015 nuclear agreement's limits on research. [From the Times](#): "Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, conveyed the country's latest step in a letter to Federica Mogherini, the top foreign policy official of the European Union, who has been trying to save the nuclear deal from unraveling. ... The letter described the step as a response to the American sanctions and to what the Iranians called the inability of Britain, France and Germany, all parties to the accord, to fulfill their commitments under the agreement to provide Iran with economic relief. No further details were provided but a more substantive announcement was expected on Friday or Saturday from Iran's Atomic Energy Organization in Tehran. President Hassan Rouhani of Iran had earlier signaled that the country's atomic energy agency had been 'ordered to immediately start what is needed in the field of research and development, and abandon all the commitments that were in place,' according to Iranian news accounts. But Mr. Zarif's letter was the first official word that such a step had been carried out."

-- Markets soared yesterday after the U.S. and China announced plans to resume trade talks in October. [David J. Lynch and Gerry Shih report](#): "The Dow Jones industrial average jumped nearly 400 points, or 1.4 percent, to close at 26,728. The broader Standard & Poor's 500-stock index rose 1.3 percent, while the technology-heavy Nasdaq jumped 1.8 percent. Businesses that have suffered from President Trump's imposition of tariffs on more than \$550 billion worth of Chinese goods welcomed word that the two sides are heading back to the bargaining table. 'We urge the administration to end this trade war and come to an agreement that results in a complete rollback of the existing tariffs,' said Matthew Shay, chief

executive of the National Retail Federation. ‘This trade war has gone on far too long, and the harmful consequences for American business and consumers continues to grow.’”

-- For \$9.50 an hour, American workers are producing tear gas in potentially dangerous conditions that is being used against pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong. [From BuzzFeed News](#): “Hundreds of [Nonlethal Technologies’] tear gas canisters have ended up on the streets of Hong Kong, where police have used them to crack down on pro-democracy protests ... Nonlethal Technologies is run by a father–son duo whose family has been in the tear gas business for at least three generations. While the pair control much of the sales and operations, [we] spoke with a half dozen former employees — most of whom had each spent at least a decade working at the factory. [An] investigation based on a review of federal inspection records, court documents, and interviews with former employees found the company relies on American workers who are paid low wages to assemble products with hazardous materials and few safety measures to protect them. Employees described aging equipment that caught fire and injuries and severe irritation caused by working long hours with chemicals. After one of its buildings burned down, the company declined to rebuild the facility, instead shifting more of the production into shipping containers. ... Yet while its American workers are paid very little to work in potentially dangerous conditions, its shipments continue — largely to foreign governments who reap the benefits of its products, employees said, including Turkey, Bahrain, and Egypt during the height of the Arab Spring.”

-- An obscure law professor outmaneuvered Italy’s Trump and became prime minister – twice. [Chico Harlan and Stefano Pitrelli report from Florence](#): “The government Italians are calling Conte II, sworn in Thursday morning at the presidential palace in Rome, was possible only because of [Giuseppe] Conte’s transformation. After arriving in politics as a virtual unknown a little more than a year ago, Conte survived a topsy-turvy summer of backroom machinations,

outmaneuvered powerful nationalist Matteo Salvini and emerged in the eyes of some Italians as a low-key, sober alternative to the boisterous personalities who have often dominated Italian politics. Italian newspapers have noted another aspect of Conte's political transformation: Initially the nominal head of a government dominated by the far right, he'll now lead a coalition — between the Five Star Movement and the Democratic Party — that is likely to skew more to the left.”



Vaping-related illnesses on the rise, health officials warn

DANGERS AND DIVISIONS IN AMERICA:

-- A contaminant found in marijuana vaping products has been linked to deadly lung illnesses. [Lena H. Sun reports](#): “The chemical is an oil derived from vitamin E. Investigators at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found the oil in cannabis products in samples collected from patients who fell ill across the United States. ... That same chemical was also found in nearly all cannabis samples from patients who fell ill in New York in recent weeks, a state health department spokeswoman said. While this is the first common element found in samples from across the country, health officials said it is too early to know whether this is causing the injuries. ... The FDA also told state officials Wednesday that its lab tests found nothing unusual in nicotine products that had been collected from sick patients, according to another person who took part in the call. The investigation has been particularly challenging for health authorities. ‘We don’t know what we’re looking for,’ an official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is leading the investigation, said last week.”

-- A jury delivered a mixed verdict in the trial to determine responsibility for the warehouse fire that killed 36 people during a nighttime concert almost three years ago in Oakland. The trial has been closely watched in California, where sky-high housing costs have forced residents to find unconventional ways to live. [Scott Wilson reports](#): “After a three-month trial and jury deliberations that ran another five weeks, Max Harris was acquitted on all 36 counts, one for each of the victims who died trying to escape a sudden fire that burned through an artist collective known as the Ghost Ship. The jury could not come up with a verdict for Derick Almendra, who managed the warehouse where about two dozen artists lived and worked. ... Testimony over months was alternately technical, delving into fire codes and safety requirements, to aching emotional as parents recalled from the stand final text messages from children unable to escape the Dec. 2, 2016, fire. Prosecutors argued that the two men were responsible for the deaths by failing to

keep the warehouse up to fire code, endangering all of those who attended the concert. Defense attorneys suggested the fire was started intentionally — its official cause has never been determined — and that city officials knew about the dangerous conditions but failed to act.”

-- An early investigation of the boat fire off the coast of Southern California suggests there were serious safety deficiencies aboard the vessel. [From the Los Angeles Times](#):

The deficiencies include “the lack of a ‘roaming night watchman’ who is required to be awake and alert passengers in the event of a fire or other dangers, according to several law enforcement sources familiar with the inquiry. The probe also has raised questions about whether the crew was adequately trained and whether passengers received a complete safety briefing ... Investigators have so far interviewed surviving crew members and others connected to the worst maritime disaster in recent California history, which killed 34 people. ... Authorities have not suggested the fire and fatalities were the result of any criminal wrongdoing, but prosecutors from the U.S. attorney’s office in Los Angeles were at the scene on Thursday preparing to assist investigators and keep tabs on the unfolding inquiry.”

-- Members of the boat’s crew say they raced to save the 34 sleeping divers from the flames, but it was too late. [From BuzzFeed News](#):

“The lead investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Jennifer Homendy, relayed what the crew had said they witnessed, providing the first official glimpse into the initial ‘harrowing’ moments as flames overtook the 75-foot-long boat. ... The crew member who was awakened by the bang told investigators that when he opened the door of the wheelhouse, he saw flames erupting from the galley area. ‘He tried to get down a ladder, and flames had engulfed the ladder,’ Homendy said. Scrambling, the other crew members jumped from the bridge of the boat to the main deck. One person broke their leg doing so. They then rushed to the galley’s double doors to try and reach the passengers below, but the fire was

already too intense, Homendy said. At around 3:15 a.m., the captain made a frantic mayday call to authorities, telling them that the boat was engulfed, 33 people couldn't escape, and 'there's no escape hatch for any of the people on board,' Homendy said."

-- More bad news for the Golden State: A fast-moving brush fire that erupted near Murrieta, Calif., grew to 1,974 acres and prompted more evacuation orders. [From the L.A. Times](#): "More than 500 firefighters have been assigned to the Tenaja fire in Riverside County, which was at 10% containment as of 6 p.m. Thursday. The fire started about 4 p.m. Wednesday near Tenaja and Clinton Keith roads on a day marked by thunderstorms in the region. It burned all the way down to the Copper Canyon neighborhood in Murrieta overnight, but crews stopped the flames before any homes were damaged, said Capt. Fernando Herrera, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. 'The fire probably came within a couple thousand feet of homes,' he said."

-- An American Airlines mechanic was arrested on a sabotage charge after being accused of disabling a navigation system on a flight with 150 people aboard before it was scheduled to take off earlier this summer. [From the Miami Herald](#): "The reason, according to a criminal complaint affidavit filed in Miami federal court: Abdul-Majeed Marouf Ahmed Alani, a veteran employee, was upset over stalled union contract negotiations. None of the passengers and crew on the flight to Nassau were injured because the tampering with the so-called air data module caused an error alert as the pilots powered up the plane's engines on the runway July 17, according to a criminal complaint affidavit filed in Miami federal court. As a result, flight No. 2834 was aborted and taken out of service for routine maintenance at America's hangar at MIA, which is when the tampering with the ADM system was discovered during an inspection."

-- The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette donated the prize money it received after winning a Pulitzer for its coverage of the Tree of Life shooting to the

congregation to help repair its bullet-riddled temple. “We wish Tree of Life to have this gift – the newspaper’s cash award for the Pulitzer Prize for spot news – as a sign of this bond and this service. We give it as a modest contribution toward the repair and rebuilding of the congregation’s physical plant,” said the newspaper’s executive editor, Keith Burris, when presenting the \$15,000 check to Rabbi Jeffrey Myers and Samuel Schachner, president of the congregation. ([Post-Gazette](#))

-- Authorities suspect that a Lubbock, Tex., man made and sold the gun used in the West Texas shooting. [From the Wall Street Journal](#): “The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has been trying to piece together how Seth Aaron Ator was able to purchase the AR-15-style rifle he used to kill seven people and wound 22 before police shot and killed him. Ator, 36 years old, was prohibited under federal law from owning a firearm because a court had previously found him mentally unfit, law-enforcement officials previously said. ... It is unclear whether the man knew Ator was a prohibited person when selling him the rifle. If the gun dealer did in fact know that Ator was barred from buying guns, he could be charged with a federal crime. But authorities are also looking into whether the man was illegally selling guns. While private gun sales are legal under federal law, it is a crime to be in the business of manufacturing or selling guns without a license. Law-enforcement officials suspect the man was buying various gun parts to build his own guns and then reselling them. It has become increasingly popular for people to build AR-style rifles at home with parts purchased online.”

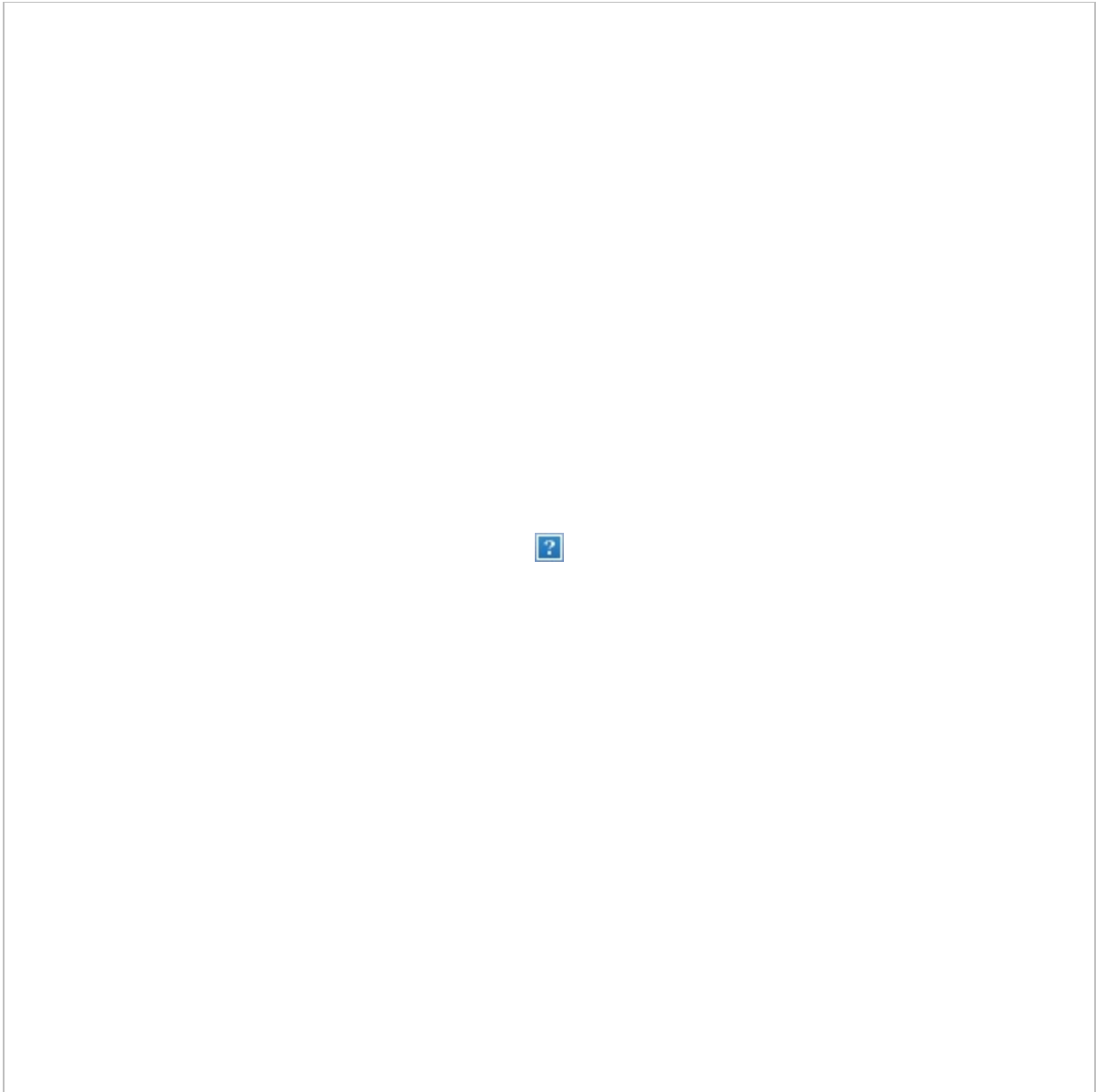
-- Twitter said a tweet falsely tying the Odessa gunman to 2020 candidate Beto O’Rourke doesn’t break its rules. [Isaac Stanley-Becker reports](#): “The original tweet, posted Sunday, read: ‘The Odessa Shooter’s name is Seth Ator, a Democrat Socialist who had a Beto sticker on his truck.’ ‘No,’ said Oscar Villarreal, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, when asked whether those assertions held water. The claim, which was retweeted more than 11,000 times by Thursday evening, appears to have been significantly amplified by bot

accounts, said Nir Hauser, a co-founder of a firm called VineSight, which uses artificial intelligence to track misinformation. ... On Thursday, a representative said the company would leave the original post, as well as the [retweet] from [Trump surrogate Anthony Shaffer], untouched. ... That stance incensed O'Rourke's campaign manager, Jen O'Malley Dillon, who on Tuesday said on Twitter that social media companies weren't doing enough to root out misinformation."

-- O'Rourke pushed back against critics of his mandatory gun buyback proposal, including Meghan McCain, who said forcing Americans to sell their rifles would prompt violence. O'Rourke accused McCain of almost giving people "permission to be violent." [From the Daily Beast](#): "When someone says, 'If you do this, then this will happen,' O'Rourke said, 'almost as though that's a natural response or maybe even something that should happen or deserves to happen. When I think the response should be, 'We're doing nothing now and we're seeing people slaughtered in their schools, at work, at a Walmart, in a synagogue, in a church, at a concert. There is violence right now and it is horrifying and it is terrifying and it is terrorizing.' We should be worried about that kind of violence right now.' McCain responded Thursday on Twitter by saying: 'Beto is the only man in all of Texas who would revise 'Come and Take It' to 'Please, Come and Take It.''"

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

The White House press secretary went after CNN after it mistakenly mislabeled a graph. CNN's communications team hit back:



James Comey threw shade at Trump for the altered hurricane graphic:



Democratic members of Congress also seized on the Sharpie donnybrook:





A Cook Political Report editor noted that perhaps gaffes are not enough to bring a candidate down:





A 2020 candidate took the bus:



The New York Post, Mayor Bill de Blasio's hometown paper, decided another 2020 candidate is New York City's favorite mayor:



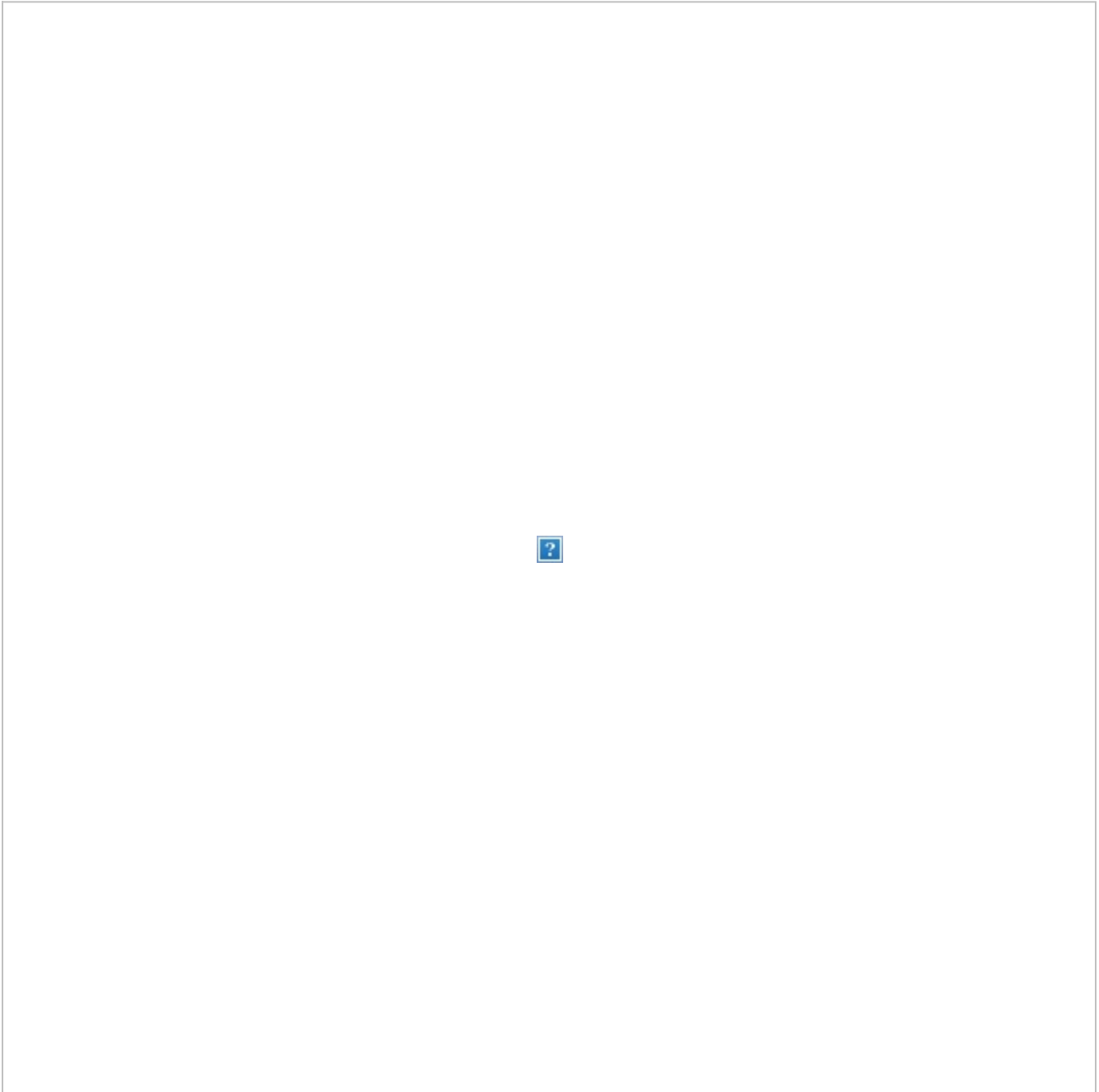
And Minnesota now has a First Pup:



QUOTE OF THE DAY: "I probably shouldn't say this, but I won it by 43 points. That's a lot ... Probably helped you getting this award today, that you come from West Virginia," Trump to basketball legend and West Virginia native Jerry West when presenting him with a Medal of Freedom. (Colby Itkowitz)

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

Mayor Pete stopped by Stephen Colbert's show during his New York swing:



Colbert took a few seconds off politics to talk about how seemingly impossible it is to get a Popeye's fried chicken sandwich:



Seth Meyers tried to break down Trump's hurricane graphic fiasco:



Hasan Minhaj examined the "impending doom" of a recession:



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