



President Donald Trump talks to reporters in the Oval Office on Friday. ■ Video: [newsday.com/nation](https://www.newsday.com/nation)

Trump, Putin talk of Mueller, arms

No warning to avoid meddling in next election

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin discussed what Trump again dismissed as the "Russian Hoax" in their first known phone call since the release of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russia's extensive meddling during the 2016 election campaign. Putin chuckled about Mueller's conclusions, Trump said.

During their conversation on Friday, which the White House and Kremlin said lasted more than an hour, they also discussed a possible three-party arms control pact with China, North Korea's nuclear weapons program, Ukraine and the crisis in Venezuela, where Moscow is propping up the current government over the U.S.-backed opposition.

"We had a good conversation about many things," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

Trump said the two leaders

were considering a new nuclear agreement "where we make less and they make less. And maybe even where we get rid of some of the tremendous firepower that we have right now." He said they had discussed the possibility of including China in the deal and that China would "very much would like to be a part of" it.

But more interesting, perhaps, was what was left unsaid.

Trump said that, at no point, did he warn Putin not to meddle in the next election. And while he and Putin did discuss Mueller's findings, they appeared to gloss over Mueller's description of the extensive efforts Russia took to interfere in the 2016 election.

"We discussed it," Trump said of the report. "He actually sort of smiled when he said something to the effect that, 'It started off as a mountain and it ended up being a mouse,'" Trump said of Putin. "But he knew that because he knew there was no collusion whatsoever."

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders later said Trump didn't tell Putin not to meddle in the 2020 election because he's made that clear in the past.

"He doesn't need to do that every two seconds," she said.

Trump tweeted after the call that the two had discussed the "Russian Hoax" among other topics. "As I have always said, long before the Witch Hunt started, getting along with Russia, China, and everyone is a good thing, not a bad thing," he wrote.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer slammed Trump for failing to press Putin on the report's "extensive evidence that Russia hacked our elections," saying: "Trump's priorities are appalling and undermine democracy."

A Kremlin readout of the call said the two confirmed their mutual desire "to intensify dialogue in various fields, including on issues of strategic stability," but gave no details about a possible arms deal.

Trump said the two also spoke extensively about North Korea's nuclear weapons program. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un traveled to Russia last week to meet with Putin. The discussion happened hours before a report that North Korea had fired several short-range missiles from its eastern coast.

JOBLESS

At 3.6% in April; wages rise 3.2% year-over-year

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hiring accelerated and pay rose at a solid pace in April, setting the stage for healthy U.S. economic growth to endure despite fears of a slowdown earlier this year.

Employers added 263,000 jobs, with the unemployment rate dropping to a five-decade low of 3.6% from 3.8%, though that drop partly reflected an increase in the number of Americans who stopped looking for work. Average hourly pay rose 3.2% from 12 months earlier, matching March's year-over-year increase.

Friday's jobs report from the government showed that economic growth remains brisk enough to encourage strong hiring nearly a decade into the economy's recovery from the Great Recession. The economic expansion, which has fueled 103 straight months of hiring, is set to become the longest in history in July.

"All of the recession talk earlier in the spring was much ado

about nothing," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC.

Trump administration officials insisted that the job market's gains were a result of the president's tax cuts and deregulatory policies.

"We have entered a very strong and durable prosperity cycle," said Larry Kudlow, director of the White House's National Economic Council.

President Donald Trump has also pressed the Federal Reserve to cut short-term interest rates because inflation remains low. But most economists said the healthy jobs picture, against the backdrop of low inflation, would reinforce the Fed's current wait-and-see approach. The Fed raised rates four times last year but has signaled that it doesn't foresee any rate increases this year.

Investors welcomed the April jobs data by sending stock prices broadly higher. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed up 197 points, or 0.75%.

Jason Guggisberg, vice president of Adecco USA, a staffing firm that finds temporary and permanent hires for business clients, said companies are doing much more to attract workers. They are offering more perks — like free lunches

Report of N. Korea missiles

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Saturday fired several unidentified short-range projectiles into the sea off its eastern coast, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said, a likely sign of Pyongyang's growing frustration at stalled diplomatic talks with Washington meant to provide coveted sanctions relief in return for nuclear disarmament.

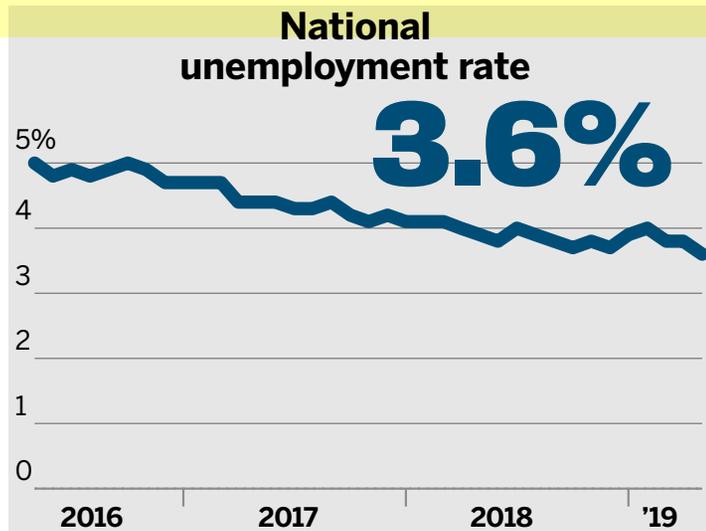
The South initially reported a single missile was fired, but later issued a statement that said "several projectiles" had been launched and that they flew up to 125 miles before splashing into the sea toward the northeast.

South Korea's military has bolstered its surveillance in

case there are additional weapons launches, and South Korean and U.S. authorities are analyzing the details. If it's confirmed that the North fired banned ballistic missiles, it will be the first such launch since the North's November 2017 test of an intercontinental ballistic missile. That year saw a string of increasingly powerful weapons tests from the North and a belligerent response from President Donald Trump that had many in the region fearing war.

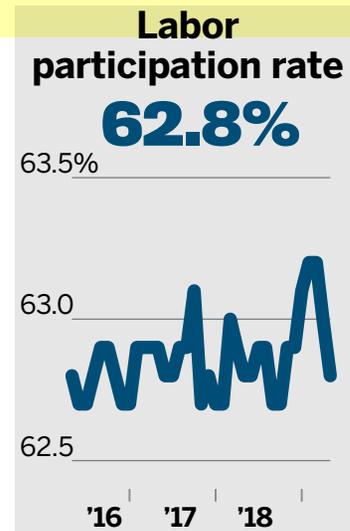
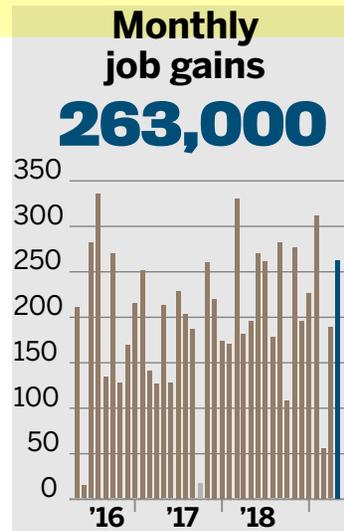
Japan's Defense Ministry said North Korean missiles have not reached anywhere near the country's coast and that Japan is not facing any security threat. — AP

RATE HITS 50-YEAR LOW



SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

NOTE: All chart data seasonally adjusted.



AP / NEWSDAY

or weekly happy hours — and allowing more flexible work schedules.

Some are also raising pay, though Guggisberg said many of them have to be persuaded to do so. Adecco often has to show its clients data about how many jobs are available in a given area and how few workers are actually searching for jobs.

“We are constantly having conversations with clients about supply and demand” and reminding them that most applicants have multiple job oppor-

tunities, he said. “Two years ago, I don’t know that I ever had that conversation.”

The brightening economic picture represents a sharp improvement from the start of the year. At the time, the government was enduring a partial shutdown, the stock market had plunged, trade tensions between the United States and China were flaring and the Fed had just raised short-term rates in December. Analysts worried that the economy might barely expand in the first three

months of the year and might even tip into recession in the ensuing months.

Yet the outlook soon brightened. Chairman Jerome Powell signaled that the Fed would put rate hikes on hold. Trade negotiations between the U.S. and China made some progress. The economic outlook in some other major economies improved. Share prices rebounded.

And in the end, the government reported that the U.S. economy grew at a 3.2% annual

rate in the January-March period — the strongest pace for a first quarter since 2015. That said, the growth was led mostly by factors that could prove temporary — a restocking of inventories in warehouses and on store shelves and a narrowing of the U.S. trade deficit. By contrast, consumer spending and business investment, which more closely reflect the economy’s underlying strength, were relatively weak.

But American households have become more confident

since the winter and are ramping up spending. Consumer spending surged in March by the most in nearly a decade. A likely factor is that steady job growth and solid wage increases have enlarged Americans’ paychecks.

Years of steady hiring have sharply lowered unemployment for a range of population groups. The unemployment rate for women fell last month to 3.1%, the lowest point since 1953. The rate for Latinos dropped to 4.2%, a record low since 1973, when the government began tracking the data.

For Asians, joblessness has matched a record low of 2.2%. And the unemployment rate for veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars dropped to 1.7%, also a record low.

Most of last month’s job growth occurred in services, which includes both higher-paying jobs in information technology and lower-paying temporary work. Manufacturers added just 4,000 jobs. Construction firms gained 33,000, mostly on public infrastructure projects.

Retailers, however, continued to cut jobs, shedding 12,000 in April, the third straight months of cuts. The sector has eliminated 49,000 jobs in the past year even as the economy has picked up.

Dems threaten to hold Barr in contempt

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee threatened Friday to hold Attorney General William Barr in contempt of Congress if he does not comply with a new Monday deadline for providing special counsel Robert Mueller’s full, unredacted report on his Russia probe and some underlying materials.

The new offer from House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) comes after the Justice Department missed the committee’s earlier deadline for the information. Nadler slightly narrowed his offer in a new letter to Barr, saying the committee would limit

its request for underlying materials to those directly cited in the report.

He also asked the department to work with Congress to seek a court order for secret grand jury materials, a request Barr has previously denied.

“The committee is prepared to make every realistic effort to reach an accommodation with the department,” Nadler wrote to Barr. “But if the department persists in its baseless refusal to comply with a validly issued subpoena, the committee will move to contempt proceedings and seek further legal recourse.”

Meanwhile, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) sent a letter to

Mueller on Friday that said the special counsel could provide testimony “if you would like” as to whether he felt Barr misrepresented Mueller’s views at a Senate hearing earlier this week.

Barr testified Wednesday that Mueller didn’t challenge the accuracy of a letter he wrote summarizing the principal conclusions of the special counsel’s report. Barr made that assertion despite a letter he received in March from Mueller complaining Barr’s summary didn’t fully capture the “context, nature and substance” of Mueller’s nearly 400-page report, which was released weeks later.

Graham said he was giving Mueller a chance to confirm that account, if he wants to, inviting

him to provide testimony “regarding any misrepresentation by the attorney general of the substance of that phone call.” Graham did not specify whether he wanted Mueller to appear in person.

It remains to be seen whether Mueller will come to Capitol Hill. During a brief Oval Office session with reporters Friday, Trump deferred to Barr about whether Mueller should testify, saying, “I don’t know. That’s up to the attorney general, who I think has done a fantastic job.”

Nadler’s contempt threat against Barr came one day after Barr skipped a Judiciary panel hearing on Mueller’s report amid a dispute over how Barr would be questioned. Nadler

said after that hearing that he would give the Justice Department one more chance to send the full report and then he would move forward with holding Barr in contempt. Nadler set a 9 a.m. Monday deadline for the Justice Department to respond to the latest offer.

Democrats have assailed Barr’s handling of the Mueller report and questioned the truthfulness of his statements to Congress. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Thursday said she believed Barr lied about his communications with Mueller in testimony last month, and that was a “crime.” Justice Department spokeswoman Kerri Kupec called Pelosi’s accusation “reckless, irresponsible and false.”