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Trump abandons Kurdish allies

President defends decision to pull troops

By Robert Burns, Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Lee
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Monday cast his decision to abandon Kurdish fighters in Syria as fulfilling a campaign promise to withdraw from “endless war” in the Middle East, even as Republican critics and others said he was sacrificing a U.S. ally and undermining American credibility.

Trump declared U.S. troops would step aside for an expected Turkish attack on the Kurds, who have fought alongside Americans for years, but he then threatened to destroy the Kurds’ economy if they went too far.

Even Trump’s staunchest Republican congressional allies expressed outrage at the prospect of abandoning Syrian Kurds who had fought the Islamic State group with American arms and advice. It was the latest example of Trump’s approach to foreign policy that critics condemn as impulsive, that he sometimes reverses and that frequently is untethered to the advice of his national security aides.

“A catastrophic mistake,” said Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 House Republican leader. “Shot in the arm to the bad guys,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Trump said he understood criticism from fellow GOP leaders but disagreed. He said he could also name supporters, but he didn’t.

Pentagon and State Department officials held out the possibility of persuading Turkey to abandon its expected invasion. U.S. officials said they had seen no indication that Turkey had begun a military operation by late Monday.

Trump, in late afternoon remarks to reporters, appeared largely unconcerned at the prospect of Turkish forces attacking the Kurds, who include a faction he described as “natural enemies” of the Kurds.

“But I have told Turkey that if they do anything outside of what we would think is humane ... they could suffer the wrath of an extremely decimated economy,” Trump said.

In recent weeks, the U.S. and Turkey had reached an apparent accommodation of Turkish concerns about the presence of Kurdish fighters, seen in Turkey as a threat. American and Turkish soldiers had been conducting joint patrols in a zone along the border. As part of that work, barriers designed to protect the Kurds were dismantled amid assurances that Turkey would not invade.

Graham said Turkey’s NATO membership should be suspended if it attacks into northeastern Turkey, potentially annihilating Kurdish fighters who acted as a U.S. proxy army in a five-year fight to eliminate the Islamic State’s so-called caliphate. Graham, who had talked Trump out of a withdrawal from Syria last December, said letting Turkey invade would be a mistake of historic proportion and would “lead to ISIS reemergence.”

■ turn to **ABANDONED ALLIES**, page 2A



President Donald Trump



Rep. Liz Cheney



Sen. Lindsey Graham



Nebraska Commissioner of Education Matthew Blomstedt (left) smiles as a surprised Megan Helberg, an English teacher at Burwell Junior/Senior High School, reacts to the flood of media and officials as they enter her classroom during a surprise presentation of the Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year award Monday morning. Helberg’s mother, Sue McNeil, a former social studies teacher at Loup County Public Schools, won the same award 25 years ago.

Burwell English teacher named Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year

By Austin Koeller
austin.koeller@theindependent.com

BURWELL — In Megan Helberg’s English class at Burwell Junior/Senior High School, students are able to learn about the world in addition to reading and writing.

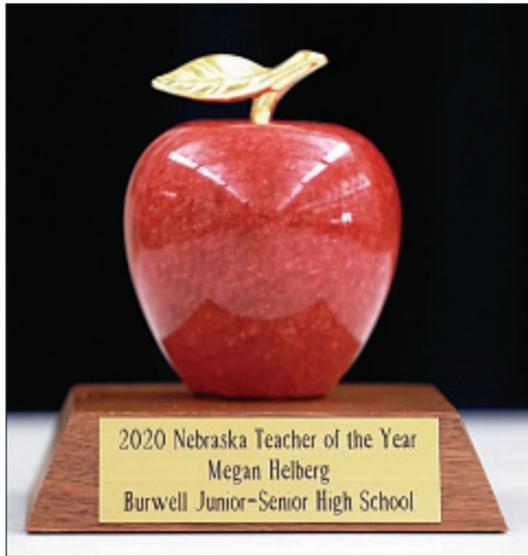
This school year, Helberg said she has had visitors in-person and via video chat from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Rwanda to teach students about historical topics such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide.

“I love to travel and learn new things about the world,” Helberg said. “I understand for many students in Burwell, travel is difficult and doesn’t happen all the time. I really believe fully in trying to bring

the world to Burwell and into my classroom by bringing in visitors from not just this country, but all over the world. We do video chats and read books that are multicultural to really help us learn about what is going on beyond the classroom walls.”

Helberg, an eighth-, 11th- and 12th-grade English teacher, was honored for her teaching Monday morning as she was named the Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year during a surprise award presentation at the school. The Nebraska Department of Education has awarded the award annually since 1972.

“I am feeling very surprised,” Helberg said on receiving the award. ■ turn to **TEACHER OF THE YEAR**, page 2A



This Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year award was given to Megan Helberg, a teacher at Burwell Junior/Senior High School.

Long-term fix to Nebraska-Wyoming irrigation tunnel could reach \$68 million



CASPER, Wyo. (AP) — The cost of long-term repairs to a failed irrigation tunnel serving farmers in eastern Wyoming and western Nebraska could reach \$68 million.

Goshen Irrigation District officials say they will seek more Wyoming state funding assistance once they’ve decided on a long-term solution. Meanwhile, the irrigation tunnel collapse in July raises doubts about two other aging tunnels in the system.

The failure of the century-old tunnel in July imperiled corn, sugar beets and other crops in a 150-square-mile area.

The Casper Star-Tribune reports that a \$4 million loan approved by the Wyoming State Loan and Investment Board on Thursday will repay \$4 million that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation lent the district for the temporary repairs.

Water blew out the sides of this irrigation canal after a tunnel collapsed and caused a backup.

Office of Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon



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