

Officials Looking into whether Shooting was Terror-Related; Suspected Shooter's Training in U.S. Began in 2017; White House says it won't Participate in Impeachment Hearing. Aired 8-9a ET

CNN New Day Saturday 8:00 AM EST

December 7, 2019 Saturday

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Section: NEWS; Domestic

Length: 6192 words

Byline: Amara Walker, Victor Blackwell, Natasha Chen, John Kirby, Kristen Holmes, David Sanger, Elie Honig, Jacqueline Howard

Guests: Elizabeth Holtzman, Ken Frydman, James Hoffa

Highlight: Three killed, at least eight injured at Naval Air Station Pensacola. Suspect was vetted when he entered the U.S. no red flags. White House calls inquiry "completely baseless" and a "reckless abuse of power."

Body

[08:00:00]

(BEGIN VIDEO)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: This is a dark day for a very great -- great place.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Four people are dead, including the shooter after an attack on the Pensacola naval base by a member of the Saudi military.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: FBI investigators are looking into whether the shooting was related to terrorism.

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I can tell you, it's a horrible thing that took place. We're getting to the bottom of it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: President Trump's legal team will not participate in House impeachment proceedings.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: A new letter from White House counsel, Pat Cipollone, all but tells House Democrats to get lost.

TRUMP: It's done by frankly, losers.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, sources say, hearing out all corners in the caucus on whether to include elements of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report in the final articles.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We do expect to lose some and that's why I said it's a conscious vote.

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(END VIDEO)

VICTOR BLACKWELL, CNN HOST: Good morning to you. I'm Victor Blackwell.

AMARA WALKER, CNN HOST: And I'm Amara Walker in for Christi Paul.

BLACKWELL: Let's start in Florida this morning. Investigators are looking into whether or not there is a link to terrorism in that shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola.

WALKER: Three people killed and several others were injured when a man started shooting in a classroom building. I want to get to CNN's Natasha Chen with the very latest. Natasha, are we expecting the FBI to release any more information today?

NATASHA CHEN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Well Amara, the FBI investigators told us they could be releasing more about the shooter today, but as of last night at a press conference, they would not confirm any details about the gunman nor about the victims. They said they wanted to follow protocol with waiting 24 hours after next of kin were notified.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

(Sirens sounding)

CHEN: Four people are dead including the shooter after an attack on a Pensacola naval base by a member of the Saudi military. Authorities are now working to determine the motive.

GOV. RON DESANTIS (R-FL): There's obviously going to be a lot of questions about this individual being a foreign national, being a part of the Saudi Air Force, and then to be here training on our soil.

CHEN: (Voice over) Two law enforcement sources tell CNN the shooter is identified as Mohammed Alshamrani. President Trump who has stood by the Saudi government in the past relayed a message from the King Salman of Saudi Arabia.

TRUMP: The king said the Saudi people are greatly angered by the barbaric actions of the shooter and that this person in no way, shape or form represents the feelings of the Saudi people who love the American people so much.

CHEN: Officials say Alshamrani was part of an aviation training program on base and that weapons are not allowed.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You can't bring a weapon on base.

CHEN: Eight others were injured in the attack that began just before 8:00 a.m. Eastern time in a classroom building on base. Among the wounded, two deputies from the Escambia County sheriff's office who exchanged gunfire with the shooter.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

CHIP SIMMONS, CHIEF DEPUTY WITH THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE: The two deputies that initially engaged the suspect, one was shot in the arm and one in the knee.

(END VIDEO)

CHEN: The FBI is leading the investigation and authorities caution it's still in the very early stages.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

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DAVID MORGAN, SHERIFF, ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA: This doesn't happen in Escambia County; it doesn't happen in Pensacola. It doesn't happen to our friends and neighbors who are members of the United States Navy, but it did and it has. And so for now, we're here to pick up the pieces.

(END VIDEO)

CHEN: And we hear that a holiday tree lighting that was supposed to happen today has been cancelled. That was going to be at an officer's club on base. Right now the base is open only to essential military personnel and families who live there. We understand from the naval air station Facebook page that they've also offered counseling services after this shooting. Amara and Victor, back to you.

WALKER: And Natasha, on that note, how are people coping? I mean from many accounts this is a very close knit military community and town. What are people saying?

CHEN: Absolutely. It is compared to, you know, a small city on base and one person that I spoke to yesterday whose family lives on base, she was able to get back home kind of in the late afternoon time but she did talk to me about how frightening that was in the morning hours especially because she said where the shooting happened, this classroom building was right near a library and a gas station, a mini mart. These are places where she says families would have been gassing up their cars in the morning, getting breakfast, going through their morning routines and she said that would have been within at least ear shot but within those few blocks.

And so that was particularly scary for her and the rest of her community who live on base and of course this is something they're going to be dealing with for a very long time.

WALKER: Yes, I bet. I'm sure the residents, the neighbors; all those in the community are still trying to process the news. Natasha Chen, I appreciate your reporting. Thank you.

BLACKWELL: Let's talk more and we'll start by saying good morning to CNN military and diplomatic analyst retired admiral John Kirby. And I want to start here because you lived there at Naval Air Station Pensacola. Tell us about it?

JOHN KIRBY, MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC ANALYST: It's a great base, a great place to live. I mean once we get sailors down to Pensacola, it's hard to get them to want to leave. It's such a wonderful community and they really do wrap their arms around the Navy.

[08:05:00]

We lived on base. We had two little kids, in fact, my son was born at the naval hospital just off the base and we lived in an area, no longer housing there but close to where this shooting occurred so Natasha's reporting is spot-on. This would have been an area that lots of families, people getting ready in the morning, that kind of thing would have been congregating because there are some commercial activities there -- gas station and a mini mart, all that kind of thing.

So it's a base that really does feel like a home and it kind of wraps itself around you and it's just a great community.

BLACKWELL: Admiral, I think that there are a lot of people who did not know that the U.S. trains so many foreign nationals. Tell us more about maybe the numbers of people who are here in the U.S. from other countries being trained by U.S. military.

KIRBY: Yes, there are thousands of foreign nationals who are going through various types of military training across the country at bases from all the services that do training. This one, naval aviation, is the core naval aviation training is at Pensacola. So the Saudi nationals we're talking about here are there to learn the systems, the weapons, the platforms, the aircraft, that their country is buying from the United States.

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I don't know exactly how many Saudis are at Pensacola. I would suspect dozens of them and it's not all pilots. Probably some air crew and technicians as well. It's really important -- this program is very important for our ability to make sure that they can operate the equipment they're buying from us safely and effectively and it's not just about being in their national interests that they're good at operating these aircraft but in our national security interests they're good at operating these aircraft so that they can conduct operations with the United States and with coalition partners in an efficient, effective manner. So it's very much in our interest that this program continue and that it not be denigrated by this one incident.

Now I suspect they'll look at the program, review security and the vetting and all that and I think that's appropriate; there's nothing wrong with that but I do think it's important for Americans to understand why these people are here and why it's important for our national security that they are.

BLACKWELL: Admiral, let me lean on your diplomatic credentials for a moment and I want you to listen to something that when Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said this, it really kind of jumped out at me. This is hours after the shooting there, and previously local officials did not want to identify anything about this suspected shooter. Here's what the governor said.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

DESANTIS: The government of Saudi Arabia needs to make things better for these victims, and I think that they are going to owe a debt here given that this is one of their individuals.

(END VIDEO)

BLACKWELL: Saying that the Saudis owe a debt. I mean, I'm -- I take this in the context, I'm not sure this is how he meant it but I'm thinking of the 9/11 families who have been working for, what, a decade and a half to sue the Saudi government. What was your take on that statement from the governor?

KIRBY: Yes. It really jumped out at me, too, Victor. I had almost the exact same reaction you did. I was A, struck by the fact he called out the Saudis out and I mean it was a call-out. It wasn't just like, I'm identifying this guy as a Saudi national, I'm calling out the government of Saudi Arabia. And then 2, this idea of a debt and the first thing that came to my mind was exactly the same thing - some sort of financial compensation maybe is what he's talking about. Obviously we don't know and he hasn't been asked to clarify what he's saying there.

The other thing that struck me about this was the difference between what Ron DeSantis said as well as Senator Rick Scott, Florida Senator Rick Scott, who said he wants a strong review of this program sort of calling out this idea of foreign nationals on American soil, and what President Trump did in reading verbatim what looked like the words of King Salman to the American people, almost acting as a press agent for the King of Saudi Arabia basically trying to alleviate any concerns about Saudi participation in this.

So it's really interesting, the tensions that might come out of this between the president who wants a very, very close, sometimes too close relationship with Saudi Arabia and some of his Republican supporters in Florida, who now have public constituencies at home who might be concerned about these Saudi nationals on their soil, so really interesting tension.

BLACKWELL: Yes. Saudi Arabia, the first trip the president as president heading overseas. They're protective of that relationship even after the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, the "Washington Post" columnist, who was a U.S. resident and we see again the president reading out the words of King Salman. Admiral John Kirby, always good to have you, sir.

KIRBY: Thank you. Very good to be with you, sir.

WALKER: And we do want to mention this to you. We just got this in exclusively from the uncle of the suspected shooter Mohammed Alshamrani. He spoke with CNN over the phone from Saudi Arabia. He said that he'd been in

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touch with his nephew as he had been in the United States for this flight training on the navy base and had seen nothing suspicious.

[08:10:00]

He said quote, there was nothing, nothing, that indicated he may carry out such an act. He also described Alshamrani, the suspected gunman who is also now dead, said his nephew was likable and mannered towards his family and the community. He said that he has his religion, his prayer, his honesty and commitments and that he was a likable kid and was exceptionally smart. The uncle also said that he does want the country to get to the truth, and that if this nephew was guilty of the crime he will be held accountable before God.

Breaking news this morning as well. An American held captive in Iran three years is coming home. Just ahead, hear what his wife is saying about his release.

BLACKWELL: Plus, the White House says it will not send anyone to the Hill to defend President Trump in the impeachment hearings. Why they say the entire thing is a waste of time.

WALKER: And a town in North Carolina cancels a Christmas parade featuring a Confederate group. Why officials were concerned it could have turned violent this year.

BLACKWELL: All right, more on the breaking news this morning. An American graduate student held in Iran since 2016 is coming home.

WALKER: Let's go now to CNN national correspondent Kristen Holmes in Washington. Kristin, what do we know about his release?

HOLMES: Well Amara, we actually just have a little bit of breaking news. We've gotten some fascinating details as how exactly this played out. So Xiyue Wang, a 38-year-old graduate student from Princeton who was doing research on history in Tehran was arrested back in 2016. Today they announced that he would be released.

So essentially what we learned is that a state department official met Xiyue Wang in Zurich but he was flown from Iran over to Zurich in a Swiss government plane. Now, he is not yet on American soil. Right now he is en route to a U.S. military base in Europe. They would not tell us which military base and not tell us why, but generally in cases like this, there is a waiting period, while they get a medical evaluation. They stop at an American facility to do a workup essentially before bringing them home.

So this is a really fascinating development to kind of see the inner workings, behind the scenes of how this happens but he has been arrested. He's been in Iran, for three years and his wife today speaking out about him coming home and this is what she had to say.

Our family is complete once again. Our son Jofan(ph) and I have waited three long years for this day, and it's hard to express in words how excited we are to be reunited with Xiyue. We are thankful to everyone who helped make this happen.

Now, one thing we haven't heard from the U.S. side of this is that it was a prisoner swap. We did hear that from the Iranian Foreign Minister on twitter who said that this was in exchange - Xiyue Wang in exchange for an Iranian S.T.E.M. cell scientist who had been arrested back in 2018. So we have reached out to the White House on that to try and get more details on that side. And I want to note one thing that's very, very important here.

This comes at a time where there is an enormous amount of tension between Iran and the United States. We know President Trump has enacted these severe sanctions as they try to get the Iranians to abandon their nuclear program and just earlier this week, our Barbara Starr was reporting that officials essentially said there was new information - new intelligence that there may be a possible Iranian threat to U.S. forces.

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So it's a tense time. We're going to have to see how exactly this changes the rhetoric between the two countries if it does at all. BLACKWELL: All right, Kristen Holmes getting us the latest -- some new details in the last few minutes. Thank you so much.

WALKER: All right, let's bring in CNN political and national security analyst David Sanger for more. He is also the national security correspondent for the "New York Times." First off, David, I want to get your take on what just happened. The fact that this prisoner swap happened during, as Kristen mentioned, heightened time of tensions with Iran. What do you make of that? You say that this is quite an unusual case?

DAVID SANGER, CNN POLITICAL AND NATIONAL SECURITY ANALYST: It is a bit of an unusual case, particularly interesting to note the White House announcement both from Secretary Pompeo and then the one from President Trump mentioned the release of Xiyue Wang and did not mention the prisoner swap. So they didn't talk at all about the fact the United States reciprocated with the case of a researcher who as you heard was working in the stem cell area, who was arrested, I think, at an airport last year.

The Iranian position through all of this as we've heard it from the Iranian Foreign Minister when he's been in New York has been, whenever these releases are going to happen, it's got to be on an equivalent basis. So this may be part of an effort by President Trump and others to show that he's willing to do a little bit of give as well. Remember, that they tried to set up a conversation with President Rouhani when he was at the U.N. in September and that failed.

But I'm not sure I'd over-read the fact that this particular swap happened, to say that we would be on other way to a better relationship.

WALKER: Sure thing. So we're learning a little bit more about Xiyue Wang and what he was doing in Iran and the case against him. Do you have any more details on him and also it doesn't seem like we know much regarding this Iranian scientist.

SANGER: Yes, he's an ethnic Chinese American citizen. He was working at Princeton, and he was doing research in a fairly abstruse area of a sort of historical studies of basically ancient history in Iran and he was in Iran doing his research in 2016 when he was taken. At first the Princeton officials tried to handle it very quietly for a while, because the thought was if they made a big deal of this in public, that it would just harden the Iranian position.

That began to change some. I think earlier this year they became a little more public. This was a big case for Robert O'Brien, who at the time was the hostage negotiator at the state department, is now, of course, the national security adviser.

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And it's interesting that when they did the swap today, they sent over Brian Hook, who's the U.S. Special Representative for Iran. That's a pretty high-level guide way for what is basically a swap of two researchers. WALKER: David Sanger, we're going to have to leave it there. Appreciate you joining us, sir. Thanks so much.

SANGER: Thank you.

BLACKWELL: So a woman's recovery is being called a miracle. Listen to this. Her heart stopped for almost six hours, and she survived. Why doctors say the thing that almost killed her also saved her life.

WALKER: The White House will not participate in the impeachment hearing process that is happening right now in the House. In fact, they have rejected an offer from Democrats to present any type of defense for President Trump during the judiciary hearings.

BLACKWELL: So in this strongly worded letter the White House counsel said adopting articles of impeachment would be a reckless abuse of power by House Democrats and constitute the most unjust highly partisan and unconstitutional attempt at impeachment in our nation's history.

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WALKER: Now Republicans on the committee are asking that the whistle-blower and Hunter Biden be called to testify.

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It is very unlikely that Chairman Jerry Nadler will approve that request. Nadler did ask his fellow Democrats to stay in Washington this weekend. It is believed they will hold mock hearings to prepare for next week.

BLACKWELL: Let's talk now with CNN legal analyst and former assistant U.S. attorney Elie Honig and Elizabeth Holtzman, former Democratic Congresswoman from New York and author of, "The Case for Impeaching Trump." Good morning to both of you.

ELIZABETH HOLTZMAN, FORMER DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSWOMAN AND AUTHOR: Elizabeth, let me start with you. We know moderate Democrats are a bit frustrated with leadership over potentially expanding the scope of their consideration. Maybe the Mueller report findings and drawing up these articles of impeachment. Your book "The Case for Impeaching Trump" was published in November of last year so do you think it's a mistake not to include anything beyond the Ukraine matter?

HOLTZMAN: Yes. I think it would be a mistake, although, you know, I'm still at a distance, and the members of the committee really have to, who have been digging into this deeply have the best feel. But my sense is that the, what the president did is so egregious, not just with regard to Ukraine, but what part of what's bad about his activities in Ukraine is that he's taken a sledgehammer to the Constitution by saying that Congress has no right to get information, and he's cut off his committee -- his administration from and ordered them and directed them not to cooperate with the committee in any way.

So documents haven't been turned over by the State Department, by the Office of Management and Budget, by the Defense Department about what happened. He's trying to deny not just Congress but the American people, the facts.

Congress tried to investigate the Mueller investigation. In other words, call witnesses such as the White House counsel, try to get documents, try to understand and show the American people what the report was about. The president took a sledgehammer to that. He's tried basically to put himself above the Constitution. Congress has the power to impeach. The sole power of impeachment and the president is obstructing that. That has to be, in my judgment, part of the articles of impeachment.

BLACKWELL: Well Elie, they can include that without reaching beyond what we've seen over the last month and half, two months about the Ukraine matter. Right? I mean they don't have to go back into - I guess the question is, what is the strategy behind reaching into the Mueller findings if it's not going to convince a single additional Republican, and it's already making some Democrats uneasy?

ELIE HONIG, CNN LEGAL ANALYST: I think that's exactly the right question to be asking, Victor. Look, the House Democrats have to decide, are we going to include the Mueller findings as its own independent article of impeachment or do we simply use it as background and context?

I think if they include it as its own article of impeachment that presents some real political difficulties. In fact, Manu Raju spoke a couple of Democratic Congressmen yesterday who suggested they might not vote for a Mueller-based article of impeachment and it's important people understand. Each article of impeachment rises or falls on its own. Some can pass, others may not but don't think Democrats want a scenario where some of their proposed articles of impeachment get voted down in the house. Even if the Democrats do not include Mueller as its own article of impeachment, they still can use it as necessary background to explain Ukraine. To explain essentially the president was on notice. He got a warning from Mueller and he went ahead and tried to do it again with Ukraine.

BLACKWELL: Elizabeth, let's focus on what we've heard from the minority leader. This is back in 2018 and from 21 years ago now Judiciary Chairman Jerry Nadler.

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(BEGIN VIDEO)

PELOSI: Impeachment is a very serious matter. It is - if it happens it has to be a bipartisan initiative.

JERRY NADLER, JUDICIARY CHAIRMAN: There must never be a narrowly- voted impeachment or an impeachment substantially supported by one of our major political parties and largely opposed by the other. Such an impeachment would lack legitimacy, would produce divisiveness and bitterness in our politics for years to come and will call into question the very legitimacy of our political institutions.

(END VIDEO) BLACKWELL: So Elizabeth, this is - this impeachment proceeding is exactly what Jerry Nadler described. Why does this not lack legitimacy?

HOLTZMAN: Well, first of all from a Constitutional point of view, it has complete legitimacy because the House of Representatives can vote for impeachment under its rules so it is legitimate.

[08:30:00]

It would be great if the Republicans would have an open mind about this. For example, they want -- they say they want the American people to know what's going on. Why haven't they called on the president to open up his administration and the files and show what's going on? Why is the president hiding these people, such as Pompeo and Mulvaney and others from coming forward?

So I'm very troubled about that. When we did impeachment in Watergate, we tried to open the process and everybody participated, but here it seems to be one side or the other. But the Democrats can't be held back by narrow partisanship on the side of the Republicans. It's sad, for me, because we're talking about the country. We're not talking about the party. We're talking about in Watergate, how Republicans joined with Democrats to put the country above party and that's what should be happening here but it's not. Still, Democrats have to go forward because we have a lawless president.

BLACKWELL: Elie, I've got to get to you very quickly on taxes. Justice Ginsburg issued a temporary hold on subpoenas. Actually the hold was actually on, following a lower court's ruling to hand over the president's taxes from two banks based on House subpoenas. It's only for a week. Tell us what happened here and what happens next?

HONIG: Yes, so this is what you said, Victor. It's a temporary hold and now we're in the process of the Supreme Court, I think they're just saying, preserve the status quo. Don't turn over those tax returns yet because we the Supreme Court need to decide if we are going to take a look at it and we should have an answer on that within a couple weeks I would imagine.

BLACKWELL: Too soon to call it a win or loss for the president?

HONIG: It's not - it's a procedural hold. It's premature to call it either a win or a loss for either side. Yes, you're right Victor.

BLACKWELL: All right. Elie Honig, Elizabeth Holtzman, good to have you both.

HONIG: Thank you.

HOLTZMAN: Thank you.

WALKER: From America's mayor to a potential target of a federal criminal investigation. We're going to look at how Rudy Giuliani became a central focus of the impeachment inquiry with his 1993 mayoral campaign press secretary. That's next.

[08:35:00]

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BLACKWELL: We're turning now to another prominent Republican politician with some growing legal headaches, Rudy Giuliani. Federal investigators are collecting information on his business dealings and witnesses in the impeachment inquiry say Giuliani was leader of a smear campaign against a U.S. Ambassador. He spent part of the week pursuing dirt on the Bidens in Ukraine and on the ambassador he helped oust, Marie Yovanovitch also an impeachment witness. Joining us now, former press secretary for Mayor Giuliani's 1993 campaign, Ken Friedman. He also wrote this op-ed in the "New York Times," "What Happened To Rudy Giuliani?" Ken, good morning to you.

KEN FRIEDMAN, "NEW YORK TIMES" CORRESPONDENT: Good morning.

BLACKWELL: So this is, I see here, it's a question. It's not a statement that follows with an explanation, what happened to Rudy Giuliani. But as you've watched the former mayor over the last several years, have you identified a point at which things shifted for the man who I guess still is for some known at America's mayor?

FRIEDMAN: Well, yes. I think when he went into business with Donald Trump. You saw a -- a severe change in his personality. He had a zealous need to make money, to be relevant, to be part of the political process. And you know right now he's making I think ill- advised decisions, like returning to the scene of the crime, Ukraine, to make a propagandist documentary. Almost as if he's playing, he and the president, are playing, "Catch Me If You Can." the president will not participate in the impeachment hearings and Rudy is off in the Ukraine doubling down.

BLACKWELL: You - you acknowledge in this op-ed and we've heard others suggest that what we're seeing is a diminishment, the result of the diminished faculties but you say this is not that?

FRIEDMAN: I don't necessarily see that. No, no. Because I've seen him, you know, cogent and not ranting and raving. I think there's a lot of drama and theatrics involved in his performance art, if you will. But the idea is to create chaos, exhaust everyone, and to disrupt the world, as he has said. I think he and trump are doing a good job at that.

BLACKWELL: Yes, you cite what Giuliani told the "New Yorker" earlier this year and I'm going to read it here. They quote him saying in a q&a, I'm afraid it will be on my grave stone. Rudy Giuliani he lied for Trump. Somehow I don't think that will be it, but if it is, so what do I care? I'll be dead.

Legacy obviously not a priority, but for those around him and people that you describe as "yes, Rudy's" what does it feel like to watch your old boss and maybe friend and mentor. I know about this photo you carried, take this turn?

FRIEDMAN: Well, it is affecting a lot of people's resumes I can tell you that. To tell people today you worked for Rudy Giuliani is to invite scorn from anybody who is under a certain age and didn't know what a terrific job he did as mayor cleaning up New York City, making it safer. Nobody wants to hear about that Rudy. They just want to know what's wrong with the man they see lying for Donald Trump today.

BLACKWELL: You carried this photograph of you and your wife and Giuliani who officiated your wedding in your wallet many years. You've now taken it out and placed it in a drawer. Do you regret your time working for his campaign?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, certainly not. We made a, a very, you know, broken city, you know, fixed. So, and I'm very proud of the work that Rudy did and the 20-year run that this city has had. I see a back-sliding today but that's another issue. No. I wouldn't trade that experience for anything, you know, in my career, or in my life.

[08:40:00]

I'm very proud of that time.

BLACKWELL: All right. You write "The Man I Worked for Are In 1993 is Not the Man Who Lies for Donald Trump." Ken Friedman. Thanks so much for being with us, giving a little insight and again, "What Happened to Rudy Giuliani?" still a question not a statement with an explanation there. I appreciate your insight.

FRIEDMAN: You're welcome. Thank you.

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WALKER: Some fascinating insight there. Working class voters helped propel President Trump to the White House in 2016 and now his Democratic rivals are campaigning to win back their support. Coming up, we speak with teamsters president James Hoffa about today's president's forum his group is hosting in Iowa.

WALKER: We are less than two months away from the Iowa caucuses and today 6 2020 Democratic contenders will take questions at a presidential forum there hosted by the teamsters union. It is among the largest unions in the country with 1.4 million members. The forum comes at the 2020 field competes for support among working class voters, many of whom broke for Trump in 2016. Joining me now is James Hoffa, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. James, I appreciate you joining us. Let's start with 2016, sir, if you don't mind because as we said, Democrats typically get the working class vote but in 2016 that wasn't the case. Many of your union and other union members voted Trump. So what happened in 2016 and what can Democrats take away from that?

JAMES HOFFA, PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS: Well what happened in '16 was that Donald Trump talked about their issues. He talked about issues like opening the mines, opening steel mills. He talked about putting people back to work. That was his issue and unfortunately, Hillary Clinton didn't talk about those issues; she talked about other things. So people heard something that resonated with them and I think that's a mistake that the Democrats made in '16 and they're not going to make that mistake this time. They're talking about bread and butter issues that talk about the things that affect working people every day who are out there. How do they make their lives better. That's what people want to know. What is in this for me?

There's a lot of talk about other issues, but when it comes right down to it, what about retirement security? What about am I going to have a better life? Am I going to have an opportunity. Will my kids have another opportunity to have a good job? That's what they want to hear and hopefully that will change what goes on with regard to the upcoming election.

WALKER: Just anecdotally, the teamsters you spoke with are they satisfied, for those who voted for President Trump in 2016, are they satisfied with him today? Did he deliver on his promises in their view?

HOFFA: Well, we have a good economy right now which is going to help in any race. The economy is good. We read about that we've got record unemployment, but I think there's other things that have to be brought into this. We talk about what's being done with regard our issues? We're teamsters. We have specific issues. Labor unions have certain issues. Are we being addressed? This administration could be doing a lot more to help working people and we got to make sure that we urge everybody, Democrats, Republicans, help working people, because that's what this is about.

WALKER: Tell us a little bit about the issues most important to you and your members.

HOFFA: Well, the issues we're going to be talking about today are retirement security, collective bargaining, letting people organize, grow our unions and most importantly, good trade agreements. We're talking about USMCA, which is a big issue right now. We've had major input on that. That's something that affects everybody, that creates jobs in America. We want to make sure we don't have a million jobs going across the border. We want to make sure we keep good jobs here in America so we will all have opportunities to live in this great land.

WALKER: So the teamsters have not officially endorsed anyone yet for 2020. What kind of influence does your union's endorsement have particularly amongst the teamsters? I ask you this, James, because back in 2016 the IBT endorsed Hillary Clinton. Right?

HOFFA: Yes.

WALKER: And, but a lot of your members still ended up voting for Trump?

HOFFA: That's true. Again, it goes back to the message. He messaged it better and this time I will say this. The Democratic candidates are really talking about labor. They've all put out white papers, all put out what we can do in income inequality, what we can do to stimulate the economy and get people in good jobs. And I will say that. They

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put out white papers with regard to what they can do with the Labor Department, what they could do with employment. That is because they're sensing the mistakes that were made in '16. So maybe we'll have a different result this time.

WALKER: And you think, I think you've said that you think that unions are going to determine this election?

HOFFA: I think the unions are going to play a very big role as they always do and they played a big role last time. Last time meaning the word is maybe 50% of the people voted for Trump. We don't know that but I didn't do polling on that but I know a lot of people did because they heard a message that was hope. We have to make sure there is a message of hope for workers out there.

WALKER: And do you feel like the Democrats are tuned in to the needs of the working class, especially this lineup of candidates that you will have today?

HOFFA: Absolutely. Every one of these candidates has filled out a questionnaire. We told them you have to participate in union activities. They've appeared at our union halls, they've walked picket lines. You've got to get more involved. You got to show that you really care and I think that's what we've done here and we're seeing a lot more activity with regard to labor unions and we're going to have a lot of candidates today that are going to be talking about unions and talking to union members right here in Cedar Rapids.

WALKER: All right, James Hoffa, I appreciate you joining us. Thank you very much.

HOFFA: Thank you.

WALKER: And, we'll be right back.

[08:50:00]

BLACKWELL: A British woman spent six hours in cardiac arrest after getting caught in a snowstorm last month but she made a full recovery.

WALKER: That's really unbelievable. Her doctors say that's because the freezing conditions that almost killed her likely also saved her life. CNN health reporter Jacqueline Howard explains.

JACQUELINE HOWARD, CNN HEALTH CORRESPONDENT: Victor and Amara, this is a really interesting case. Thirty-four-year-old Audrey Mash is now doing well after surviving a six-hour cardiac arrest. Last month she was mountain hiking with her husband in Spain when they were caught in a snowstorm. She suddenly collapsed. He immediately called emergency services.

ROHAN SCHOERMAN, AUDREY'S HUSBAND: I thought she was dead, because I was trying to feel for a pulse.

HOWARD: He was trying to feel for a pulse, but Audrey Mash's heartbeat slowed down due to severe hypothermia. Her body temperature got dangerously low. What's interesting is that hypothermia also might have been key in helping her body survive and later recover. It slowed her brain metabolism allowing the organ to cope better with lack of oxygen.

AUDREY SCHOEMAN: SURVIVED SIX-HOUR CARDIAC ARREST: It's like a miracle except I think it's all because of the doctors.

HOWARD: Most people whose body go through something similar risk brain damage. Audrey Mash is a rare and incredible case. Victor and Amara, back to you.

WALKER: You know that's the incredible part. She didn't get any brain damage. She wasn't breathing. Her heart stopped and - she's just fine.

BLACKWELL: Six hours. Six hours.

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WALKER: She's just fine. Back to normal, yes.

BLACKWELL: More news straight ahead.

WALKER: "Smerconish" is next. We'll see you again in one hour.

Load-Date: December 8, 2019

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