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Inside Trump's war on investigators

DOGGED STRATEGY

Newly reported episodes reveal extent of his assault on probes encircling him

By MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT, MARK MAZZETTI, MAGGIE HABERMAN AND NICHOLAS FANDOS
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — As federal prosecutors in Manhattan gathered evidence late last year about President Donald Trump's role in silencing women with hush payments

during the 2016 campaign, Trump called Matthew Whitaker, his newly installed acting attorney general, with a question.

He asked whether Geoffrey Berman, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York and a Trump ally, could be put in charge of the widening investigation, according to several U.S. officials with direct knowledge of the call.

Whitaker, who had privately told associates that part of his role at the Justice Department was to "jump on a grenade" for Trump, knew he could not put Berman in charge

because Berman already had recused himself from the investigation. Trump then complained about Whitaker's inability to pull levers at the Justice Department that could make the president's many legal problems go away.

Trying to install a perceived loyalist atop a widening inquiry is a familiar tactic for Trump, who has been struggling to beat back the investigations that have consumed his presidency. His efforts have exposed him to accusations of obstruction of justice as Robert Mueller, the special counsel, finishes his

LOOK WHO'S CALLING: Trump breaks with tradition with surprise phone chats > A3

work investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Trump rages almost daily to his 58 million Twitter followers that Mueller is on a "witch hunt" and has adopted the language of Mafia bosses by calling those who cooperate with the special counsel "rats." His lawyer talks openly about a strategy to smear and discredit the special-counsel investigation. The

president's allies in Congress and the conservative media warn of an insidious plot inside the Justice Department and the FBI to subvert a democratically elected president.

An examination by The New York Times includes unreported episodes and shows the extent of an even more sustained and secretive assault by Trump on the machinery of federal law enforcement.

The story of Trump's attempts to defang the investigations has been voluminously reported. But fusing the strands reveals an extraordinary
See > **TRUMP, A3**

Flower, garden festival springing into bloom



MIKE SIEGEL / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Joel Pratt, of Nature Perfect Landscapes, puts finishing touches on a Chinese garden at the Northwest Flower & Garden Festival in Seattle. The festival opens Wednesday and runs through Sunday, with 20 creative display gardens, hundreds of vendors, seminars, a Plant Market and more.

ON THE WEB | Get your garden on: Learn more about the festival at st.news/gardenfest

State of the City: 'Strong, resilient'

DURKAN GIVES HER VIEW OF PAST YEAR'S PROGRESS

Seattle mayor touts snow response, new ORCA plan

By DANIEL BEEKMAN
Seattle Times staff reporter

In her second annual State of the City address Tuesday, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan touted Seattle's response to the recent downtown Highway 99 closure and to this month's record snowstorms.

The Durkan administration plowed busy streets, opened more than 500 emergency homeless-shelter beds and pumped out updates on social media, though critics said the city should have done more to deal with slippery sidewalks, which were particularly problematic for people with disabilities.

The mayor thanked Seattle employees who worked long hours and community members for helping each other, while acknowledging that "getting around on our sidewalks ... was just too hard." The city is working on snow-response improvements,
See > **DURKAN, A10**

Highlights

In her State of the City speech, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan:

- Touted the city's response to recent snowstorms while acknowledging that slippery sidewalks were a problem.
- Announced a pilot program that will provide more than 1,500 low-income residents with free transit passes.
- Said she would send the council legislation requiring all new buildings with parking to support electric-vehicle charging stations.
- Highlighted deals to build a new waterfront park and to have Seattle Center's arena renovated for hockey and concerts.

As Russians' discontent rises, villagers protest role as Moscow's trash dump

PROTESTS | Residents say they are fed up — the government pours cash into the capital while squeezing the struggling hinterlands.

By NEIL MACFARQUHAR
The New York Times

URDOMA, Russia — Russia's countryside and smaller cities have long been fertile ground for President Vladimir Putin and his message

of restoring bygone greatness, but even here, there are limits.

Plans to ship Moscow's garbage to the provinces — abetted by secrecy, trickery and bending the law — have set off widespread protests. Under-

lying this winter of Russian discontent are deepening economic woes and a popular view that the government pours money into the glittering capital while squeezing the struggling hinterlands.

It was only by chance that residents of Urdoma, 700 miles north-east of Moscow, learned last year of an enormous landfill project nearby,

when two local hunters stumbled onto workers felling lofty pine and birch trees to make way for it. The news galvanized Urdoma and dozens of other communities nestled among the forests of Arkhangelsk province, and hardened attitudes toward the government.

"All raw materials — oil, gas, diamonds, timber — it all comes from here and is sold abroad, while the profits go to Moscow," said Yuri Dezhin, a 41-year-old hunter living in a small trailer that protesters set up to monitor activity on the landfill
See > **RUSSIA, A4**

Eyman is charged with stealing chair from store; attorney says it was an accident

By LEWIS KAMB
Seattle Times staff reporter

Six days after store surveillance video captured anti-tax crusader Tim Eyman wheeling a chair out of an Office Depot in Lacey, city prosecutors on Tuesday filed a misdemeanor theft charge against him.

In response, Eyman's attorneys quickly issued a news release and statement from their client, contending the entire episode was an honest mistake caused partly by Eyman's receiving a phone call that distracted him after he returned to the store to pay for mer-

chandise and services.

"I did not, shortly after giving legislative testimony in Olympia, walk into an Office Depot in Lacey wearing a bright red 'Let The Voters Decide' t-shirt, smile for the cameras, and steal a \$70 chair just moments before



Tim Eyman

spending \$300 on 2 printers and after getting some life changing good news," Eyman said in the statement issued by the Puget Law Group. "The reason that doesn't make any sense is because it doesn't make any sense. It's ridiculous, it's insane, it's completely unbelievable."
See > **EYMAN, A10**

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