VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Sarah Williams reporting.

U.S. President Donald Trump praised the Senate's early Saturday morning passage of an immense Republican tax overhaul bill. Trump spoke later Saturday at a Republican fundraiser in New York.

"So last night we passed, in the history of the country, the largest tax cuts and reform."

Earlier Saturday, Trump praised two top Senate Republicans, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, for securing enough votes for passage.

President Trump said Saturday the actions of former national security adviser Michael Flynn during Trump's transition to the White House "were lawful."

Trump tweeted between Republican fundraising events in New York, saying "I had to fire General Flynn because he lied to the vice president and the FBI. He has pled guilty to those lies. It is a shame because his actions during the transition were lawful. There was nothing to hide!"

Flynn pleaded guilty Friday to lying to federal agents, and he has agreed to cooperate with investigators examining allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and collusion between Moscow and the Trump campaign.

Earlier Saturday, in his first remarks since Flynn entered the guilty plea, Trump said there was "absolutely no collusion" between his presidential campaign and Russia.

Honduras has suspended some constitutional rights and imposed a 10-day curfew from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. in an effort to give security forces whatever powers they may need to control protests that have sprung up after last Sunday's disputed presidential election.

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U.S. defense chief Jim Mattis has met with Egypt's President Abdul Fattah el-Sissi in Cairo ahead of a counter-extremism conference focused on West Africa on Sunday.

During the meeting, Secretary Mattis offered condolences for the recent terrorist attack on a mosque in Bir al-Abed, Egypt, and recognized Egypt as a strategic defense partner with the United States.

Mattis noted Egypt's importance to the stability of the Middle East as well as Egypt's ongoing fight against terrorism and efforts to protect Egypt's borders.

A report on the meeting said the two leaders discussed a range of Middle East security issues and talked about a mutual desire to cooperate on terrorism and regional challenges.

Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh officially broke with his Houthi militia allies, calling on his supporters to rise up against them across the country. Arab media is reporting that the former President's supporters have gained control of key government installations in the capital. In a televised interview, Saleh also called for resuming relations with Saudi Arabia.

Edward Yeranian reports.

The former Yemeni president's break with the Houthis came after five days of bitter clashes around the capital, Sana'a, between his supporters and those of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia.

In a televised address, Saleh called for new relations with the Saudi-led coalition, which he and the Houthis have been battling for almost three years since March, 2015.

He says a new page must be opened in relations with Saudi Arabia and neighborly ties restored, putting an end to all the animosity that has taken place and that amicable relations can resume.

Edward Yeranian, for VOA news, Cairo.

Syrian state television said Syria intercepted at least two Israeli missiles early Saturday that targeted a "military position." Israel launched "several surface-to-surface missiles," state television said, adding that there were "material losses at the site."

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the missiles were probably Israeli and that the attack caused loud explosions.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said it was not immediately clear whether Syria operated the depot by or allies Iran or the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Israel has declined to comment.

The top U.S. general in Afghanistan said Saturday recently launched joint strikes against Taliban sources of revenue have destroyed more than $50 million worth of narcotics in southern Helmand province.

I'm Sarah Williams in Washington.

That's the latest world news from VOA.