VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

U.S. federal investigators began probing Saturday the theft and crash of a passenger airliner late Friday near Seattle, Washington.

Authorities say Horizon Air employee Richard Russell stole one of the company's planes with no passengers or crew aboard at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

He took off and performed stunts in the aircraft before crashing it on the nearby sparsely populated Ketron Island.

Brad Tilden is the CEO of Alaska Air Group, Horizon's parent company. "He was a ... background check. There is a couple of different criminal background check we run on our employees. ... He worked a shift yesterday. We believe he was in uniform."

The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI are working the case.

Officials have ruled out any link to terrorism in the incident.

A key supporter of President Donald Trump, New York Republican Congressman Chris Collins, has suspended his re-election campaign.

As AP's Julie Walker reports, Collins is fighting charges of insider trading.

In a statement, the Republican congressman says, "After extensive discussions with my family and friends over the last few days, I've decided it's in the best interests of my constituents, the Republican Party and President Trump's agenda to suspend my campaign for re-election."

Chris Collins was indicted Wednesday on charges he used insider information about a biotech company to make illicit stock trades.

At the time, he vowed to remain on the ballot and denied any wrongdoing. Now he says he'll finish his term as he fights the charges.

The state Republican Party has yet to announce a replacement candidate for Collins' House seat.

Julie Walker, New York.

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Government and police officials here in Washington say they are confident the city can manage this weekend's planned white nationalist rally without violence.

The "Unite the Right" rally will take place Sunday afternoon in Lafayette Park in front of the White House. At least two counter rallies are planned for the same park. Police have vowed to keep the two sides separate.

One year ago, the first "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, devolved into chaos and violence resulting in the death of a counter protester.

Earlier Saturday, President Donald Trump tweeted that he condemns all acts of racism and violence. Trump was widely criticized for his response to last year's rally and riot.

A last-minute technical problem Saturday delayed NASA's unprecedented flight to the sun.

The launch countdown was halted with one minute, 55 seconds remaining, because of a helium-pressure problem.

Rice Space Institute Director David Alexander says there is a small window for NASA to try to launch the Parker solar probe. "Of course, we are disappointed. We wanted to see this research instrument get on the way ..."

Rocket maker United Launch Alliance said it would try again Sunday, provided the helium-pressure issue can be resolved quickly.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has warned that his country can trade in currencies other than the dollar because of the ongoing crisis between the Turkish lira and the U.S. currency.

Speaking to supporters Saturday, Erdoğan said Turkey can easily trade with other countries, including China, Russia and Iran.

He said, "I'm calling on those in America again. Shame on you, shame on you. You are exchanging your strategic partner in NATO for a pastor."

The Turkish lira lost 14 percent of its value to the dollar on Friday.

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to increase tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum if Turkey does not release a U.S. pastor who is under house arrest.

A suicide blast in southwestern Pakistan injured at least six people Saturday, including three Chinese engineers. Meanwhile, unknown gunmen killed three policemen in a northern region that borders China.

Authorities in Baluchistan province confirmed a team of Chinese workers was returning from a mining project when the bomber detonated his explosives-laden vehicle near their bus.

Separately, Pakistani officials in the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region, which borders China, said that a group of heavily armed "terrorists" assaulted a police post early Saturday and killed at least three security personnel.

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