VOA NEWS

December 23, 2018

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

A partial U.S. government shutdown seems almost certain to drag through Christmas after the Senate adjourned on Saturday afternoon with no votes planned until at least December, 27.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said there would be a so-called pro forma set of meetings on Monday but those sessions usually last only a few minutes before adjourning.

McConnell said he could call the Senate back into session to vote on a proposed budget deal if one comes down.

"Senators will be notified when a vote is scheduled. And in the meantime, the discussions and the negotiations continue."

President Donald Trump met with Republican lawmakers at the White House. No progress has been made in the impasse over the president's request for $5 billion for a wall along the Mexican border.

About one quarter of the government ran out of funds early Saturday. More than 800,000 federal employees' jobs have been disrupted. More than half of those employees are required to work without pay.

New York state stepped up to make sure that one icon would not be affected by the government shutdown.

Julie Walker reports.

The iconic Statue of Liberty was supposed to be shut down but New York state will foot the $65,000-a-day bill to keep Lady Liberty open. But thousands of tourists like ???Catherine Sharp who just wants lawmakers and the president to do their jobs.

"I think it's pretty ridiculous that a bunch of adults can't come to terms in some sort of compromise to keep the country running."

Hundreds of thousands of federal workers will not be paid during the shutdown even if they have to work. In the past, they were repaid once the government opened.

Contract workers like cleaning crews for federal offices may not get paid at all.

I'm Julie Walker.

For more, visit our website voanews.com. This is VOA news.

The U.S. envoy to the global coalition fighting the Islamic State group has resigned.

As AP correspondent Ben Thomas reports, Brett McGurk is leaving to protest President Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria.

Just 11 days ago, Brett McGurk had said it would be "reckless" to consider the Islamic State group defeated and unwise to bring American forces home.

Yesterday, he submitted his resignation letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. In it, he said while the militants are now on the run, the premature withdrawal of the American forces from Syria would create the conditions that fist gave rise to the Islamic State group.

Ben Thomas, Washington.

At least 15 people were killed and dozens of others injured in two explosions in Somalia's capital Saturday.

Witnesses said the first blast was caused by a car bomb at a security check point near the national theater.

AP's Cara Anna reports the blasts were placed for maximum carnage.

Saturday is a business day in Somalia, so lawmakers, other officials, soldiers, even journalists - a high-profile journalist was among those killed - were basically going to work when the bomb went off. A second blast nearby also went off and then ambulances quickly rushed up to the scene.

The al-Qaeda-linked group, al-Shabab, has claimed responsibility for both bombings.

British police arrested a man and a woman on Saturday over the drones that crippled Gatwick Airport just days before Christmas.

As Lucy Fielder of Reuters reports, the drone operators shuttered the airport and stranded thousands of passengers for days.

Both drone operators were repeatedly flew onto the airfield, forcing the runways to shut for spells over three days, including all of first day, inflicting delays and cancellations on at least 120,000 would-be passengers, forcing many to camp out at the airport and to search in desperation for alternative routes to their holidays and Christmas family gatherings.

It was the most disruptive drone incursion that has happened at any major airport.

Gatwick has reopened. Jubilant passengers finally getting on board. But it warns that there will be knock-on disruption.

Lucy Fielder of Reuters.

Tensions erupted between French police and protesters Saturday at Paris's Champs-Élysées Avenue as yellow vest protests continued across the country though there were fewer demonstrators present than in previous weeks.

Police did clash with protesters who threw scooters and other debris at officers who responded with tear gas and water cannon.

In the French capital, police arrested 109 protesters, seven of whom are held in custody.

The protest began in the middle of last month to rally against fuel tax increases and subsequently against the liberal economic reform policy of President Emmanuel Macron.

The president was not in Paris on Saturday.

I'm David Byrd, VOA news.