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Post-Harvey dredging work nears completion at Houston Ship Channel



Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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U.S. visa applicants to be asked for social media history - State Department

(Reuters) - In a broad expansion of the information gathered from applicants for U.S. visas, the federal government is proposing to collect social media identities from nearly everyone who seeks entry into the United States, according to a State Department filing on Friday.

The proposal, which must be approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), would require most immigrant and non-immigrant visa applicants to list on a federal application form all of the social media identities they have used in the past five years.

The information will be used to vet and identify them, according to the proposals, which would affect about 14.7 million people annually.

Previously, under rules instituted in May of 2017, consular officials were instructed to collect social media identifiers only when they determined "that such information is required to confirm identity or conduct more rigorous national security vetting," a State Department official said at the time.

The State Department said then that the tighter vetting would apply only to those

"who have been determined to warrant additional scrutiny in connection with terrorism or other national security-related visa ineligibilities."

The new proposal was published in the Federal Register on Friday. The public has 60 days to comment on the revised procedures before the OMB approves or rejects them.

The proposals support President Donald Trump's promise to institute "extreme vetting" of foreigners entering the United States in order to prevent terrorism.

If approved, the measures also will require applicants to submit five years of previously used telephone numbers, email addresses and their international travel history.

They will be asked if they have been deported or removed from any country and whether family members have been involved in terrorist activities, the department said.

The department said it intends not to routinely ask most diplomatic and official visa applicants for the additional information.



Silhouette of mobile user is seen next to a screen projection of Apple logo in this picture illustration

Russia, in spy rift riposte, expels 59 diplomats from 23 countries

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia expelled 59 diplomats from 23 countries on Friday and said it reserved the right to take action against four other nations in a worsening standoff with the West over the poisoning of a former Russian spy and his daughter in Britain.

Russia said it was responding to what it called the baseless demands for scores of its own diplomats to leave a slew of mostly Western countries that have joined London and Washington in censuring Moscow over the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia.

A day earlier, Moscow ordered the expulsion of 60 U.S. diplomats and the closing of the U.S. consulate in St Petersburg, Russia's second city, in retaliation for the biggest ejection of diplomats since the Cold War.

Preparations appeared to be under way on Friday to close the St Petersburg mission down, with a removals truck making repeated journeys to and from the consulate which took delivery of a large pizza order for its staff.

Russia's response to expulsion of diplomats is 'regrettable', says Britain

Russia summoned senior envoys on Friday from most of the other countries that have expelled Russian diplomats and told them it was expelling a commensurate number of theirs.

Russia has already retaliated in kind against Britain for ejecting 23 diplomats over the first known use of a military-grade nerve agent on European soil since World War Two. British ambassador Laurie Bristow was summoned again on Friday.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Bristow had been told London had just one month to cut its diplomatic contingent in Russia to the same size as the Russian mission in Britain.

A spokeswoman for the British Foreign Office did not say how many British diplomats would be affected, but said Russia's response was regrettable and Moscow was in flagrant breach of international law over the killing of the former spy.

The poisoning, in southern England, has united much of the West in taking action against what it regards as the hostile policies of President Vladimir Putin. This includes the United States under President Donald Trump, who Putin had hoped would improve ties. Russia rejects Britain's accusation it stood behind the attack and has cast the allegations as part of an elaborate Western plot to sabotage East-West relations and isolate Moscow.

The hospital where she is being treated said on Thursday that Yulia Skripal was getting better after spending three weeks in a critical condition due to the nerve toxin attack. Her father remains in a critical but stable condition. The BBC, citing sources, reported on Friday that Yulia was "conscious and talking".

During the course of Friday, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned senior embassy officials from Australia, Albania, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, Croatia, Ukraine, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, and



Irish Ambassador to Russia Adrian McDaid arrives to the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow

Finland, Norway, Sweden, Canada and the Czech Republic.

The Russian foreign ministry building is reflected in an ambassadors' car in Moscow, Russia March 30, 2018. REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

All were seen arriving in their official cars at the Foreign Ministry's gothic building in

Moscow.

"They (the diplomats) were handed protest notes and told that in response to the unwarranted demands of the relevant states on expelling Russian diplomats ... that the Russian side declares the corresponding number of staff working in those countries' embassies in the Russian Federation persona non grata," the ministry said in a statement.

Post-Harvey dredging work nears completion at Houston Ship Channel

By Andrea Rumbaugh

The Houston Ship Channel, still feeling minor effects from mud washed into the waterway during Hurricane Harvey, should be back to its full depth in a month or two.

One small stretch of the ship channel is still undergoing dredging to return to its 45-foot operating depth.

"It takes a long time to move mud out of the ship channel," said Steven Nerheim, director of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Houston-Galveston Vessel Traffic Service.

Nerheim gave his annual "State of the Waterway" address to the West Gulf Maritime Association on Wednesday.

In that address, he confirmed that Houston remained the No. 1 Port for imports and exports. Houston ranked No. 2, behind the Port of South Louisiana, for total tons of cargo in 2016, the most recent data available.

"That gap is small and closing," he said.



Tankers: Ships carrying liquid products

Average transits per day: 40

Pictured: An oil tanker piloted by Capt. Kristi Taylor



The General Patton dredge. Photo provided by the dredge owner.

Oil heads to monthly gain, driven by geopolitical risks

By Heather Leighton

The prospect of flaring geopolitical tensions and falling U.S. oil stockpiles are helping lift crude again, after a five-month winning streak was broken in February. Futures in New York are up 5 percent in March, recouping last month's losses. U.S. President Donald Trump picking two Iran hawks for his national security team has spurred speculation that sanctions may be reimposed on the OPEC member, curbing its oil exports.

The signals coming from the world's biggest oil market are less

uniformly bullish. U.S. crude production rose every week in March as drillers deployed more rigs. Prices declined on Wednesday after a government report showed U.S. crude inventories increased more than analysts expected, although that was offset by drops in product stockpiles.

"The latest weekly inventory report was not bearish," said PVM Oil Associates analyst Tamas Varga. West Texas Intermediate for May delivery rose as much as 47 cents to \$64.85 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, and was at \$64.47 at 11:54 a.m. in London. Total volume traded was about 41

percent below the 100-day average.

Brent for May settlement, which expires Thursday, slipped 8 cents to \$69.45 a barrel on the London-based ICE Futures Europe exchange. The more-active June contract fell 10 cents to \$68.66. The global benchmark traded at a \$4.96 premium to WTI. The European bourse along with Nymex will be closed on Friday for the Good Friday holiday.

Yuan-denominated oil futures on the Shanghai International Energy Exchange lost 1.8 percent to 406.8 yuan a barrel.



John Bolton, named National Security Adviser by President Donald Trump. Bolton is known for his hawkish views on international relations.

A Snapshot Of The World



Dmitry Kudryavtsev, a former officer of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry, teaches children how to evacuate from a burning building during a free lesson on fire response in Krasnoyarsk



Irish Ambassador to Russia Adrian McDaid gets into a car while leaving the Russian foreign ministry building in Moscow



Actor and comedian Bill Cosby arrives for a pretrial hearing at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown, Pennsylvania



German Ambassador to Russia Ruediger von Fritsch leaves the Russian foreign ministry building in Moscow



A model presents a creation by designer Salty Jofimar during Indonesia Fashion Week in Jakarta



Pope Francis blesses oils on Holy Thursday during Chrism mass



Freya Gordon, aged 10, poses for a photograph with a butterfly during an event to launch the Sensational Butterflies exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London



Detained Reuters journalist Wa Lone is escorted by police after a court hearing in Yangon



A General Electric (GE.N) Propulsion Test Platform plane takes off near Victorville

The Astrodome To Receive Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Marker

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



The Astrodome will be designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark. The iconic Astrodome is now in line for a dramatic \$105 million transformation.

The Astrodome will be designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark — the highest honor the state can bestow on a historic structure.

The marker will finally and officially tell the story of the “Eighth Wonder of the World” and, officials hope, create a snapshot destination.

“The Dome has never had an actual historical marker,” said Mike Vance, a member of the Harris County Historical Commission, which is the local arm of the Texas Historical Commission.

The state agency approved the stadium’s designation in January among 172 new historical markers across Texas for 2018.

The Astrodome’s Colorful Past



1) October 1963: Harris County commissioners check out stadium seats for the to-be-completed domed stadium (Astrodome). commissioner Philip Sayers, County Judge Bill Elliott, commissioners W. Kyle Chapman, E.A. (Squatty) Lyons and V.V. (Red) Ramsey. 2) Start of construction on Astrodome, March 27, 1963. Concrete was poured for a foundation footing Wednesday morning at a ceremony formally starting construction of the domed stadium. About 20 members of the Houston consular corps were guests at the ceremony. They put mementos from their countries into a capsule embedded in the concrete. Officials from the city of Houston, Harris County, Chamber of Commerce, and Houston Sports Association (HSA) were also at the cornerstone ceremony.



1) Excavation work for the Harris County

Domed Stadium, May 30, 1963. 2) Astrodome construction, circa late 1964.



A crowd of spellbound onlookers peers 212 feet upward to the top of the steel framework of Harris County’s domed stadium (Astrodome). The steel work was “topped out” Friday, Nov 1, 1963, by contractors, H.A. Lott, Inc., and Johnson, Drake & Piper, Inc. The next step, say the contractors, is putting the plastic covering on the dome. The aluminum skin will be added to the sides in a later stage of construction.



March 1964: Former County Judge Roy Hofheinz, National League President Warren Giles, and astronaut Alan Shepard join news media to view the now open interior of the Harris County Domed Stadium (Astrodome) free of the support towers which held the dome up until the structural steel framing was in place. Removal of the 37 four-ton steel towers started Feb. 4 at the rate of two a day when weather permitted.



The Dome in 1964: Downtown Houston in the distance.

At its opening, the Astrodome embodied the height of innovation. The building was the world’s largest domed structure and the biggest air-conditioned stadium as well as the first ballpark with artificial turf, luxury suites and an animated scoreboard.

“The Astrodome is the most important building we’ve ever had in our city’s history,” said Vance, a professional historian and program director for The Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park. “It’s the most recognized and the most influential building that we’ve ever had. ... It absolutely changed architecture and engineering around the world.”

The stadium opened on April 9, 1965, to a sold-out crowd of more than 47,000 for an exhibition baseball game between the Astros and the New York Yankees. The historical marker dedication, which will be scheduled soon, comes near the Dome’s 53rd birthday.

The Astrodome received its strongest protection with a 2017 state antiquities landmark designation, giving the stadium special safeguards against demolition and requiring clearance from the Texas Historical Commission for any alterations.

Becoming a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark adds another measure of protection.

This week 55 years ago construction started on the Astrodome



The new Astrodome hosted all levels of sports and entertainment events.

“It’s a higher standard you have to reach to qualify for that kind of marker,” Vance said. “That means that it’s a building and it has to be intact in the judgment of the Texas Historical Commission — and the Dome, thankfully, is.”

In addition, the sign’s unveiling will be “something tangible and visible,” unlike the antiquities designation, Vance said.

Preservation and renovation of the Astrodome has been a long-held priority for Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. The county is spending \$105 million to renovate the stadium. Construction is expected to begin in October.

“Judge Emmett has been supportive of the Astros and the county historical society’s efforts in putting a marker at the Astrodome from the very beginning,” said Joe Stinebaker, a spokesman for the county executive. “He has said repeatedly that The Alamo and the Astrodome are probably the two most recognizably historic buildings in the state of Texas — and if the Astrodome doesn’t deserve a historical marker, what does?”

The Astros organization, whose history is intertwined with the Astrodome, is paying the state about \$2,000 for the marker.



The Astrodome Conservancy also is planning a public event at the stadium. Previously, the organization announced a bash for April 9, but details are expected to be released next week.

“We are hoping to create a real party atmosphere to celebrate the history of the Astrodome and look forward to a bright future,” said Beth Wiedower Jackson, the conservancy’s executive director.

The Dome has not housed a professional sports team since the Astros moved to Minute Maid Park in 2000. NRG Stadium opened in the Dome complex two years later to serve as the home of the National Football League’s Houston Texans.

The Houston fire marshal’s office declared the massive building unfit for occupancy in 2009.

The county spends about \$170,000 a year to maintain the Dome in NRG Park, located on South Loop 610 between Kirby and Fannin — largely for electricity bills and flood insurance. The renovation costs will be paid from the county’s general fund, largely made up of property tax revenue, hotel occupancy taxes and parking revenue, county officials have said. (Courtesy chron.com)

America works: The U.S. unemployment rate is at a 17-year low and layoffs are near the lowest level in 50 years. Jobless claims fall 12,000 to 215,000 and hit lowest level since 1973

U.S. filings for unemployment benefits unexpectedly fell last week to the lowest level since January 1973, further evidence that the labor market remains tight, Labor Department figures showed Thursday.

The numbers: The rate of layoffs in the U.S. fell again in late March and dropped to the lowest level since 1973. Initial U.S. jobless claims declined by 12,000 to 215,000 in the seven days ended March 24, the government said Thursday. Economists surveyed by MarketWatch had forecast claims to total 230,000.

Jobless claims decreased by 12k to 215k (est. 230k). Continuing claims rose by 35k to 1.87m in week ended March 17 (data reported with one-week lag)

Four-week average of initial claims, a less-volatile measure than the weekly figure, fell to 224,500 from the prior week's 225,000

The more stable monthly average of claims dipped by 500 to 224,500.

The number of people already collecting unemployment benefits, known as continuing claims, rose by 35,000 to 1.87 million.

Economists surveyed by MarketWatch had forecast claims to total 230,000.



What happened: Jobless claims are at the lowest level since January 1973. They fell throughout most of the country last week, with the biggest declines coming in the biggest states: California, Texas, New York, New Jersey and Virginia.

The more stable monthly average of claims dipped by 500 to 224,500.

The number of people already collecting unemployment benefits, known as

Rapid Hiring, Low Unemployment Reflect Strong Labor Market

U.S. Jobless Claims Decline To Lowest Level Since January 1973

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



America works: The U.S. unemployment rate is at a 17-year low and layoffs are near the lowest level in 50 years. Jobless claims fall 12,000 to 215,000 and hit lowest level since 1973

continuing claims, rose by 35,000 to 1.87 million.

Economists surveyed by MarketWatch had forecast claims to total 230,000.

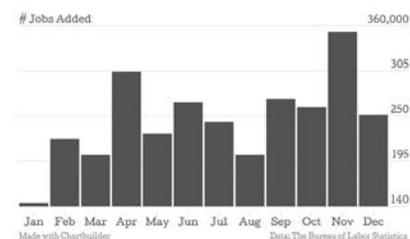
The latest report contains the annual benchmark revisions that go back five years to 2013. The Labor Department undertakes the process each year to make sure the claims report is as accurate as possible.

The revisions erased the previous low in jobless claims, a reading of 210,000 last month that would have been the lowest since 1969.

But no matter. Layoffs in the U.S. is extremely low, as reflected by a 4.1% unemployment rate that is the smallest

in 17 years.

Most companies have enough trouble finding skilled workers to fill open jobs that they are reluctant to see veteran employees go for any reason.



Big picture: The labor market is so strong that it's even drawing back in people who've been out of the work-

force for years. And it doesn't show any sign of letting up.

The economy added 313,000 new jobs in February and economists predict another solid gain of around 200,000 in March. The March employment report will be issued at the end of next week.

Market reaction: The Dow Jones Industrial Average DJIA, +1.65% and Standard & Poor's SPX, +1.78% rose in Thursday trading.

Which would explain why there is still relatively little upward pressure on prices and salaries. And, means that the Fed may be throwing sand in the gears by increasing rates and cutting supply. Paradoxically, they may also be increasing

inflation. When almost everyone is a debtor, (and the Federal Government is the biggest debtor of all) the cost of money is an ongoing expense item; to be rolled into pricing along with everything else. We look to be on track for an inflationary recession; and with regulatory restraints being eased by lack of enforcement, it will not be mild or short-term. (Courtesy <https://www.marketwatch.com>)

Key Takeaways

Claims at the lowest level in 45 years underscore a persistent shortage of qualified workers that has made employers reluctant to fire staff. Applications for jobless benefits below the 300,000 tally are typically considered consistent with a healthy labor market.



U.S. Unemployment Claims Decline To Lowest Level Since January 1973.

Other aspects of the job market remain robust, with payrolls continuing to exceed expectations and an unemployment rate near the lowest since late 2000. Steady employment will help to sustain consumer spending, the biggest part of the economy.

The report reflects the annual revision to seasonal adjustment factors for initial and continuing claims from 2013 to present. (Courtesy www.bloomberg.com)

Additional Highlights

*Prior week's reading was revised to 227,000 from 229,000

*Unemployment rate among people eligible for benefits held at 1.3 percent

*Colorado, Maine and Hawaii estimated initial claims last week, according to the Labor Department (Courtesy <https://www.marketwatch.com>)