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Two women sue Jeffrey Epstein's estate for \$100 million over alleged sex abuse



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Trump White House tries to assuage farmer unrest over biofuel policy: sources

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump's administration has been scrambling to stem the tide of rising anger in Farm Belt states after its decision this month to allow numerous oil refiners to mix less ethanol into their gasoline, sources told Reuters on Tuesday.

Trump held a two-hour meeting on Monday with members of his cabinet after hearing blowback from farmers after the decision to grant exemptions from the nation's biofuel laws to 31 refineries, two sources familiar with the discussions said.

It was unclear what actions Trump would be able to take to appease angry farmers. Reversing the waivers is not an option, the sources said, but the administration is trying to find other ways to boost ethanol demand.

Refiners are required to blend biofuels into the nation's gasoline pool or buy credits to fund those who can. Corn farmers and ethanol producers lobbied to cut dramatically the number of exemptions from these rules, which have hit a record under the Trump administration.

Farmers bearing the brunt of Trump's trade with China say his support of the hardship waivers has destroyed ethanol demand. Refiners, especially smaller companies, have argued the biofuel laws are costly and overly burdensome. Trump's expansion of the waiver program has saved the oil industry billions of dollars in compliance costs. On Tuesday, the EPA said in a statement that there was "zero evidence" that the refinery waivers have hurt demand for ethanol, which biofuels producers dispute.

The nation's largest ethanol producer, POET, announced on Tuesday that it was cutting production at its plants and blamed the hardship waivers for the move.

"POET made strategic decisions to support President Trump's goal of boosting the farm economy. However, these goals are contradicted by bailouts to oil companies. The result is pain for Midwest farmers and the reduction of hundreds of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity across Indiana," said POET President and COO Jeff Lautt.

Monday's meeting included representatives from the U.S. Departments of Energy and Agriculture, as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the sources said. The White House declined to comment.

Prior to Trump's term, just a few smaller refineries were granted relief from this requirement. Trump's administration has vastly expanded those waivers, including granting relief to facilities run by oil giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron Corp. Trump personally



FILE PHOTO: U.S. and Iowa state flags are seen next to a corn field in Grand Mound, Iowa, United States, in this August 16, 2015 file photo. REUTERS/Jim Young/Files/File Photo

directed the EPA to grant the most recent waivers, sources told Reuters.

"Not only is the government not keeping its word, but it's also screwing the farmer when we have low prices for (corn)," said Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican, on a weekly call he holds to discuss agricultural issues.

The EPA granted the exemptions just as Democratic candidates hoping to challenge Trump in 2020 visited the Iowa State Fair, where they sought to position themselves as fighters for ethanol.

Iowa is the nation's largest producer of corn and ethanol; President Barack Obama won the state handily twice before it swung heavily to Trump in

2016.

Kelly Nieuwenhuis, a third-generation corn and soybean farmer from O'Brien County in Iowa, a deeply Republican part of the state, said he voted for Trump in 2016 but his support for the president is waning. "I have talked to a bunch of farmers in the past few days, and they are fed up. They are not going to vote for Elizabeth Warren, but they said they are not going to vote for Trump, so they will sit this out," Nieuwenhuis said.

Trump delivered on a long-sought change lifting a summer ban on higher ethanol blends of gasoline, but farmers and ethanol producers say the refining exemptions have negated any benefits from that move.

Trump looking at possible U.S. payroll, capital gains tax cuts

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump on Tuesday said his administration was looking to cut U.S. taxes on wages and on profits from selling assets such as stocks, but that he was not talking about doing anything imminently.

Speaking to reporters during a White House visit by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Trump said "I've been thinking about payroll taxes for a long time."

The Washington Post has reported the administration is considering a temporary payroll tax cut to boost the U.S. economy,

which has recently shown signs of slowing down in the near future. Millions of U.S. workers pay payroll taxes on their earnings to finance the Medicare health insurance program for the elderly and Social Security, which provides income payments for retirees.

Trump, though, said he believes the country is "very far from recession," and that the White House has weighed tax cuts for a while. At the end of 2017, Trump signed a massive tax overhaul passed by the Republican-led Congress and has since promised to follow up with another

round of major changes.

Still, trade tensions with China have stoked concerns that the U.S. economy is heading for a downturn, which could dampen Trump's prospects for re-election in 2020.

Trump said he would not need the approval of Congress to link the tax on profits from asset sales, known as capital gains, to inflation. According to tax code experts, investors would pay far less capital gains tax under an inflation index.

"I'm not talking about doing anything at this moment, but indexing is something that a lot of people have liked for a long time. And it's something that would be very easy to do," he said. "It is something I am certainly thinking about."

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Three more women sue Epstein's estate over alleged abuse

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Three women on Tuesday sued the estate of Jeffrey Epstein, saying they were sexually abused by the financier, both before and after the widely criticized 2007 plea deal that allowed him to avoid federal prosecution for sex crimes.

FILE PHOTO: U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein appears in a photograph taken for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' sex offender registry March 28, 2017 and obtained by Reuters July 10, 2019. New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services/Handout/File Photo via REUTERS

The lawsuits, filed in Manhattan federal court, bring to at least five the total number of civil cases against Epstein's estate since his apparent suicide in jail on Aug. 10.

Two of the women, "Katlyn Doe" and "Lisa Doe," met Epstein when they were 17, and the third, "Priscilla Doe," when she was 20, according to the lawsuits. All said Epstein used a "vast enterprise" of associates to recruit them, subject them to unwanted sex acts and keep them under his control.

All three said the abuse continued after Epstein reached a deal with federal prosecutors in Florida in 2007. The deal allowed him to plead guilty to state prostitution charges and spend 13 months in a county jail, during which he was allowed to leave during the day on work release. The lawsuits said Epstein had Katlyn and Priscilla flown to Florida so he could continue to abuse them even while he was on work release from jail. He made Katlyn feel dependent by promising to pay for medical treatment she needed, according to her lawsuit.

He exerted control over Lisa and Priscilla by promising, falsely, to advance their dance careers, their lawsuits said.

The lawsuit by Katlyn alleges that in 2013, Epstein forced her to marry one of his associates who needed the arrangement to become a legal

resident of the United States.

In addition to Epstein's estate, the lawsuits target several corporate entities he allegedly controlled. A lawyer for the executors of the estate could not immediately be reached for comment.

Epstein was arrested on July 6 and pleaded not guilty to charges of sex trafficking involving dozens of underage girls as young as 14. He died on Aug. 10 in his jail cell at age 66, and an autopsy report released on Friday concluded he hanged himself. Two days before, Epstein had signed a will placing all of his property, worth more than \$577 million, in a trust called The 1953 Trust after the year of his birth, according to a copy of the document seen by Reuters.

The will was filed on Thursday in Superior Court of the U.S. Virgin Islands, where Epstein was domiciled, according to a stamp on the document and a statement sent to Reuters on behalf of Epstein's estate.

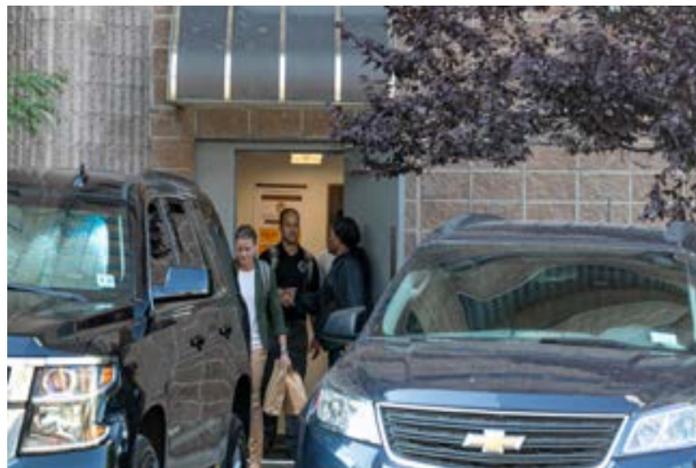
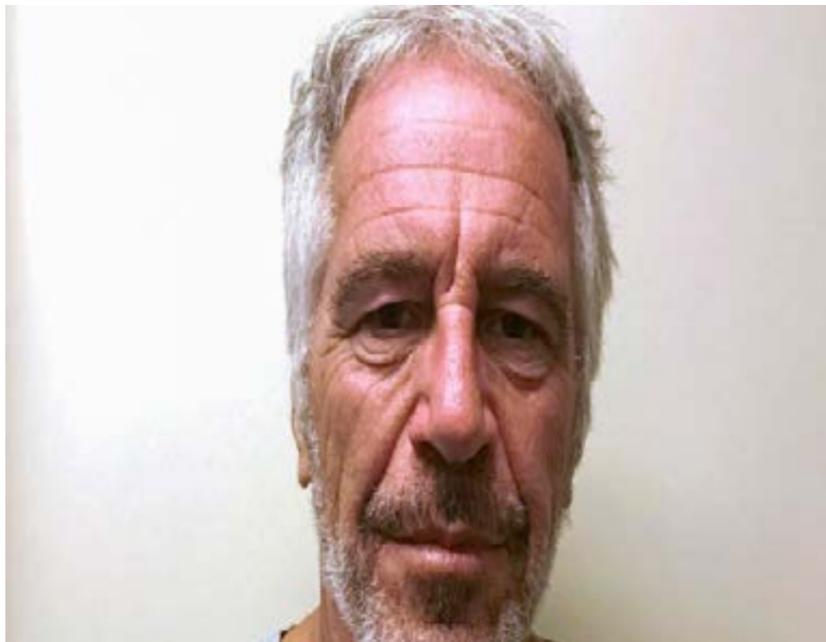
According to the petition to the court, Epstein's personal property included some \$56 million in cash, \$18 million in planes, cars and boats, and nearly \$200 million in hedge funds and private equity investments.

Epstein's death at the jail triggered multiple investigations and had prompted U.S. Attorney General William Barr to criticize "serious irregularities" at the facility, and to remove the acting chief of the federal Bureau of Prisons.

Epstein, a registered sex offender, once socialized with U.S. President Donald Trump and former President Bill Clinton.

His 2007 non-prosecution agreement was criticized as too lenient. Former U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta, who oversaw the deal as U.S. Attorney in Florida, resigned from his post after Epstein's arrest.

Barr has said that an investigation of Epstein's crimes, including possible co-conspirators, is continuing.



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Editor's Choice



Migrants jump off the Spanish rescue ship Open Arms, close to the Italian shore in Lampedusa



Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam holds a news conference in Hong Kong



The Air Force Thunderbirds demonstrated their precision flying during the 2019 Sioux Falls Airshow in Sioux Falls South Dakota



German Chancellor Merkel meets Iceland's PM Jakobsdottir in Reykjavik



Evelyn Hernandez, who was sentenced to 30 years in prison for a suspected abortion, embraces her lawyer Bertha Deleon after being absolved at a hearing in Ciudad Delgado



U.S. Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar react as they discuss travel restrictions to Palestine and Israel during a news conference in St Paul



Counter-protesters spray string on a demonstrator after a Proud Boys rally in Portland, Oregon



Athletics - Diamond League - Birmingham Grand Prix - Alexander Stadium, Birmingham, Britain - August 18, 2019 Bahamas' Shaunae Miller-Uibo celebrates winning the women's 200 metres final Action Images via Reuters/Jason Cairnduff TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

Houston Store Will Be Located In The Galleria Mall

Life After Liquidation: Toys R Us Stores Will Be Back This Holiday Season, But Now With A Tech Partner



The first two Toys R Us locations are slated to open before the holidays. One will be at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston. The other will be at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

Overview

Toys R Us is opening two permanent stores in November — at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston and at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

The stores are product of a joint venture between software retailer b8ta and Tru Kids, the company that is helping to manage the brand names left in the wake of Toys R Us' liquidation last year.

The partnership with b8ta gives Tru Kids a negotiating tool as it tries to woo back brands that felt burned by the Toys R Us bankruptcy to sell in its stores.

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

This holiday season, some shoppers will once again be able to shop in a Toys R Us store.

The retailer will open two permanent stores in November — at Simon Property Group's Galleria mall in Houston and at Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield's Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, New Jersey.

The stores are product of a joint venture between software retailer b8ta and Tru Kids, the company that is helping to manage the brand names left in the wake of Toys R Us' liquidation last year.

After the company shuttered its 800 U.S. stores, lenders including Solus Alternative Asset Management and the Angelo

Gordon investment firm took control of the company's Toys R Us, Babies R Us and Geoffrey brand names.

The revived Toys R Us brand is hoping to avoid past wrongs. Critics have pointed to several factors that led to Toys R Us' downfall: crippling debt load, competition from Amazon, overconfidence, failure to invest in stores and the rise of big-box retailers like Walmart that slashed toy prices to help lure shoppers. Toys R Us, like many retailers, struggled to revamp its enormous business as quickly as the retail landscape was changing around it.



"I don't think there's many times where you can take such a great storied brand as Toys R Us and get a chance to repaint the canvas," said Richard Barry, president of Tru Kids and the former chief merchandising officer of Toys R Us.

The company hopes to open 10 stores around the U.S. in 2020, possibly including a larger flagship in New York or California. The new stores will be smaller, spanning 6,500 to 10,000 square feet, compared with the 40,000 they used to take up.

"While we have a smaller footprint, we believe we will present a super exciting set of experiences in the store and products," said Barry.

B8ta, which has more than a dozen of its own stores in malls around the country, including the new Hudson Yards in New York, will help take care of those experiences. Its in-house technology platform, which is also powering pop-up marketplaces within some Macy's stores, will work with the toy brands to help them create their own mini shops within the spaces. B8ta also says it will contribute its retail as a service platform to help

those brands simultaneously grow online sales.

Toys R Us infamously relaunched its website during its crucial — and ultimately failed — 2017 holiday season in bankruptcy that subsequently forced its liquidation.



A B8ta retail outlet.

B8ta will also be giving Tru Kids access to data and analytics to track things like foot traffic in and out of the stores to allow the company to make smarter decisions, according to Phillip Raub, b8ta co-founder and president. "This year is going to be an opportunity for us to test and learn."

The partnership with b8ta gives Tru Kids a negotiating tool as it tries to woo back brands to sell in its stores. Part of what made Toys R Us unique was its access to the best and sometimes exclusive products. But the relationship between toy brands and the retailer was frayed in its liquidation, which led to companies big and small losing money in the process. Barry said talks with toy and entertainment companies have been "very positive."

He added the brands are giving the company "credit for innovation," and they like getting a chance to control their own brand experience in the stores.

The new Toys R Us will be announcing the brands that are going to be sold in its stores in "short order," Barry said.

While toys will be available for purchase, all sales will go directly to manufacturers, without Tru Kids acting as a middleman. Instead, the company will make money from manufacturers paying a fee to sell goods in Toys R Us loca-

tions.



"We're Back..."

"We don't make any money off of the sale of the goods," Phillip Raub told Business Insider.

Raub is the cofounder and president of b8ta, an experiential retailer that entered into a joint venture with Tru Kids to open the Toys R Us stores. The new Toys R Us stores will follow b8ta's business model, marketing themselves as an appealing spot for manufacturers by offering tech, data, and insights, as well as high-traffic locations in malls and other busy urban centers.

"What b8ta is bringing to the table is going to be our b8ta business model, really thinking kind of more subscription based, placement within the stores, being able to provide rich data analytics for makers," Raub said.

Customers will be able to see and interact with every toy for sale in the store, which will be from both big-name brands and smaller companies. Kiosks available in stores will allow customers to order from a wider assortment of products online.

Tru Kids and b8ta plan to open 10 more Toys R Us locations in 2020 with a slightly larger format of around 10,000 square feet. Richard Barry, the CEO of Tru Kids Brands and Toys R Us' former chief marketing officer, said the company was anticipating it could take "some education" for customers to get used to the new format.

"But we believe that the new elements of the store that we've added are so overwhelmingly positive that customers are going to love it," Barry added. (Courtesy



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The Veterans Affairs Department Is 'Hardwiring' Customer Service Into Every Service It Provides



Overview

The VA Is On A Mission To Improve The Veteran Experience

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

Since its inception in 1930, the Veterans Affairs Department has delivered health care and other services to tens of millions of veterans and their loved ones, caring for those who have "borne the battle" in defense of the nation.

Yet in its storied history, VA has never emphasized customer experience like it has in recent years, building on the instantiation of a Veteran Experience wing at the close of the Obama administration to—as of mid-May—literally codifying veterans experience principles into VA's core values.

In an interview May 21 with Nextgov, Dr. Lynda Davis, chief veterans experience officer at VA, described the rule as a watershed moment across the government, noting it was perhaps the first time a federal agency essentially baked customer experience into its mission.

"In order to keep the secretary's com-

mitment to customer service, we had to hardwire this customer service culture into everything we are doing," Davis said. "That means permanently that VA will be considering customer service as foundational to its operations and policy."

Policy doctrines and rules are mere words, but VA has spent the better part of four years implementing a wide range

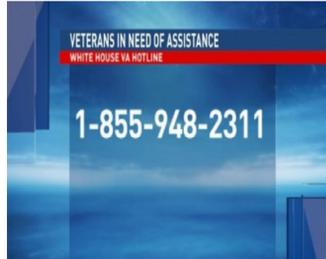
of changes designed in direct response to veteran feedback. Davis said the agency created a human-centered design analysis of the "moments that matter" to tens of thousands of veterans across their distinct healthcare journeys, locating areas where VA performed well along with pain points for veterans. Perhaps counterintuitively, some of VA's large-scale changes were in response to seemingly minor problems encountered by vets. For example, the VA has partnered with outside veteran organizations to provide volunteer personnel at the more than 100 VA medical centers across the country. Called the Red Coat Ambassador Program, volunteers wearing easy-to-see red coats will be the first people many veterans see upon entering VA facilities, and they "are there, ready to engage as non-employee companions to help make sure someone coming into a hospital knows how to find their way around," Davis said. The program was a result of analysis data suggesting some veterans often think VA medical centers can be confusing, daunting or stressful places to visit.



The navigation guide is a physical embodiment of VA's digital navigation improvements, which included the relaunch of va.gov in November. The website is a single point portal for every veteran service. In a similar effort, VA created the White House VA Hotline in June 2017 to connect veterans with customer service agents 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. As of May 14, agents answered more than 250,000 calls from the hotline, which Davis said will serve a model for call centers moving forward.

"It gets back to ease of navigation," Davis said. Whether it's through websites, contact centers or physically literally walking into the building.

VA has also provided "Own the Moment" training to more than 50,000 frontline Veterans Health Administration employees covering effectiveness, ease and invoking positive emotion. Davis said the training borrowed from best practices in business, industry and health care, culminating in an actual curriculum.



"What we do in Our the Moment training is make sure every single person is trained in how to do customer service, and then with the call center or website, make sure they know how to help vets get additional access to info and services," Davis said.

VA is also improving the way it solicits feedback from veterans, allowing real-time responses from veterans through its Signals program. Any vet who uses VHA outpatient services is given the option to sign up for receiving a voluntary survey through email. That feedback is then shared with relevant parties, such as hospital directors, "so we know how veterans feel in near real-time," Davis said. So far, VA has received more than 3 million feedback responses through Signals,

allowing the department new dimensions of qualitative and quantitative sentiment data. And those taking the surveys have reported elevated levels of trust, Davis said—up to 88 percent—or four times higher than the public's overall trust in government.



Meanwhile, Davis—who reports directly to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie—has maintained a modest staff size of approximately 120 employees, wide-ranging in expertise and focusing on everything from data analytics to community-based support. VA is also a close White House partner, where it is a leading agency for contact center modernization. While VA is happy to partner with outside organizations and employs numerous contractors, especially in technology, the brunt of the customer experience culture change is happening with VA employees at the helm.

"We start with, 'What does the customer want,' and we design what the customer wants and the behaviors we have to have," Davis said. "Then we design training and curriculums around the employees themselves. The 'train your trainer' model cannot be sustained if you're only using outside contractors, and we believe it is best to have employees develop content, own it, agree with it and buy into it." (Courtesy <https://www.nextgov.com>)

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