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Russia expels 23 British diplomats as crisis over nerve toxin attack deepens

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia expelled 23 British diplomats on Saturday in a carefully calibrated retaliatory move against London, which has accused the Kremlin of orchestrating a nerve toxin attack on a former Russian double agent and his daughter in southern England.

Escalating a crisis in relations, Russia said it was also shutting down the activities of the British Council, which fosters cultural links between the two countries, and Britain's consulate-general in St. Petersburg.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said the 23 British diplomats had one week to leave the country.

The move followed Britain's decision on Wednesday to expel 23 Russian diplomats over the attack in the English city of Salisbury which left former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia Skripal, 33, critically ill in hospital.

Moscow announced the measures on the eve of a presidential election which incumbent Vladimir Putin should comfortably win. Putin has cast his country as a fortress besieged by hostile Western powers with him as its defender, and state media is likely to portray the anti-British move in that context.

The Foreign Ministry said Moscow's measures were a response to what it called Britain's "provocative actions and unsubstantiated accusations". It warned London it stood ready to take further measures in the event of more "unfriendly steps".

Relations between London and Moscow have crashed to a post-Cold War low over the Salis-

bury attack, the first known offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since World War Two.

British Prime Minister Theresa May said Britain would consider its next steps with its allies in the coming days.

"We will never tolerate a threat to the life of British citizens and others on British soil from the Russian Government. We can be reassured by the strong support we have received from our friends and allies around the world," May told her Conservative Party's spring forum in London.

The Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador, Laurie Bristow, to its headquarters on Saturday morning to inform him of the retaliatory measures.

Bristow told reporters afterwards that Britain had only expelled the Russian diplomats after Moscow had failed to explain how the nerve toxin had got to Salisbury.

Britain's foreign ministry said it had anticipated Russia's response and that its priority was to look after its staff in Russia and assist those returning home.

"Russia's response doesn't change the facts of the matter - the attempt-



Russian policemen walk outside the British embassy in Moscow

ed assassination of two people on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable," it said in a statement.

Britain's National Security Council is due to meet early next week to consider London's next steps.

A Russian policeman walks outside the British embassy in Moscow, Russia, March 17, 2018. REUTERS/David Mdzinarishvili

Russia's response was more robust than expected. The closure of the British Council's Moscow office will sever cultural ties, while that of the consulate-general in St Petersburg will end Britain's diplomatic presence in Russia's second city.

Russian news agencies cited politicians in Russia's upper house of parliament as welcoming the move to close the British Council, alleging it had been used as a cover by British spies.

The British Council said it was profoundly disappointed by Russia's decision and remained committed to developing long-term people-to-people links with Russia despite the closure.

Russia has complained that Britain has failed to provide any evidence of its involvement in the Salisbury attack and has said it is shocked and bemused by the allegations.

Britain has escalated a war of words with Russia over the incident in recent days.

On Friday, British Foreign Secretary Bo-

ris Johnson said it was overwhelmingly likely that Russian President Putin himself had made the decision to use a military-grade nerve toxin to strike down Skripal.

Britain, the United States, Germany and France have jointly called on Russia to explain the attack and U.S. President Donald Trump has said it looks as if the Russians were behind it.

Russia has said it is open to cooperation with Britain, but has refused Britain's demands to explain how Novichok, a nerve agent developed by the Soviet military, was used against the Skripals.

Skripal, a former colonel in the GRU who betrayed dozens of Russian agents to British intelligence, and his daughter have been critically ill since March 4, when they were found unconscious on a bench.

A British policeman was also poisoned when he went to help them and remains in a serious but stable condition.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told the Rossiya 24 TV channel on Saturday that the most likely source of the Novichok nerve toxin was Britain itself or the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Sweden or the United States.

Czech foreign minister rejects Russia's nerve toxin origin claim

Czech foreign minister rejects Russia's nerve toxin origin claim.

Swedish foreign minister rejects 'unacceptable and unfounded' Russia toxin claim

Thousands more Syrians flee their homes as two battles rage

BEIRUT (Reuters) - Thousands of civilians streamed out of their towns on Saturday to escape battles in the north and south of Syria, where two different offensives have prompted an exodus in recent days.

People walk with their belongings as they flee the rebel-held town of Hammouriyeh, in the village of Beit Sawa, eastern Ghouta, Syria March 15, 2018. REUTERS/Omar Sanadiki

A new wave of people fled a rebel pocket to army lines in eastern Ghouta near the capital Damascus, as rescuers and a monitor said air strikes pounded the besieged zone.

In the northern Afrin region, people fled as Turkish war planes struck the main town, Syrian Kurdish forces and the monitor said.

More than 150,000 people have left the town in the last few days, a senior Kurdish official said.

The two offensives - one by the Syrian army with Russia's support, the other led by Turkey with allied Syrian rebels - entered decisive phases this week. Both have shown how for-

eign backers and their Syrian allies are reshaping the map after the defeat of Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliphate last year.

Turkey launched the cross-border offensive in January against the Syrian Kurdish YPG fighters who control Afrin.

In its month-long assault, the Syrian military has marched into much of eastern Ghouta, the last major insurgent bastion around Damascus.

Troops splintered Ghouta into three besieged zones in one of the bloodiest offensives of the seven-year war.

Residents came out in their thousands this week for the first time, from the southern pocket around Hammouriyeh town.

State media said 30,000 more civilians reached army positions on Saturday, including some who started leaving the Harasta zone as well in a new outflow.

Men, women, and children walked along a dirt road, staggering under bags and suitcases, footage on state TV showed.

Many carried infants on their shoulders or pushed them in strollers.

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Climate change will squeeze insurance companies, Moody's says

By Collin Eaton

The economic aftermath of climate change has heightened liability risks for insurance companies as weather catastrophes such as Hurricane Harvey become more frequent and severe, Moody's Investors Service said in a new report.

The credit ratings agency said problems arising from the earth's warming climate, including larger financial losses, uncertainty in risk-modeling and pricing, lawsuits and the declining value of carbon-emitting energy assets, will overshadow opportunities for property and casualty insurance companies to sell more insurance products.

"Although catastrophic events have always been a key risk contributor to P&C insurers and reinsurers, the continued increase of insured property values along the coastlines and the increased frequency of weather-related catastrophic events will magnify the volatility for

these firms," Moody's said in a report released on Thursday.

The firm said insured losses from weather-related disasters have spiked over the last few decades, as floods, droughts, severe storms and wildfires increase amid the changing climate. Insurance company payouts reached about \$130 billion in 2017 in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, Irma and other catastrophes, up from about \$45 billion in 2016 and \$25 billion in 1990, according to data collected by Moody's.

The unpredictability of weather events stemming from climate change, the firm said, will make it increasingly difficult for insurance companies to model financial risks and put a price on policies.

"It becomes more likely that pricing trends will consistently lag actual loss experience, meaning the industry would be playing 'catch up' in raising premiums to match losses," Moody's said.



Homeowner Tracy Scoggins, second from left, tears up as she prays with Eight Days of Hope volunteers in her gutted kitchen Saturday, March 10, 2018 in Dickinson. Thousands of volunteers spread out across the Houston area to help more than 500 homeowners repair or rebuild their homes in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

Houston Auto Show revs up sales in February

Houston-area dealers sold 18,202 new vehicles in February, an increase of 7.4 percent from last year, according to the most recent TexAuto Facts Report published by Sugar Land-based InfoNation. The uptick was driven in large part by sales of pickup trucks and SUVs, which were up 19 percent year over year in February. Nearly three out of every four new vehicles sold in the Houston market were in these two segments. The average price of a vehicle sold in the Houston area last month was \$37,771. For trucks and SUVs, it was \$40,317. SEAT's global sales continue to post double digit growth. In

February, the company successfully maintained the sharp increase in sales at the beginning of the year with 39,900 vehicle deliveries, which is 25.9% higher than the same month in 2017. The year to date sales figures rose by 23.1% to reach a total of 78,800 units. SEAT is maintaining a very high growth rate in the brand's main markets. In January and February, Spain spearheaded deliveries with 17,100 vehicles sold (+18.1%), closely followed by Germany, which posted a 15.0% increase to stand at 13,700 units. Other exceptional markets were Switzerland (2,100; +27.8%), France (4,300; +26.8%), Austria (3,500; +18.5%), the United Kingdom (6,500; +17.2%) and Italy

(3,700; +12.1%). SEAT is also growing strongly outside Europe. Algeria remains the brand's fourth biggest market at the beginning of the year after selling 4,700 cars, and sales in Israel went up by 34.9% to stand at 2,100 cars. SEAT Vice-President for Sales and Marketing Wayne Griffiths highlighted that "there has been an outstanding increase in sales in the first two months of the year. We are one the fastest growing car brands in the industry and are gaining market share in strategic markets." Griffiths added that "the SEAT Arona is widely popular in the market, as are the Leon, Ibiza and Ateca. In addition, the launch of the new CUPRA brand will have a positive effect in order to conquer new customers in the future."



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A Snapshot Of The World



Weronika Michalska poses in Gdansk’s Old Town



Relatives of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa hold a news conference in Mexico City



Horse Racing - Cheltenham Festival



Horse Racing - Cheltenham Festival



People stand in Pennsylvania Station waiting for trains in the Manhattan borough of New York City



An elderly woman plays with a robot named NAO, manufactured by Softbank Robotics, in her retirement home in Bordeaux



Walter Schalka, Chief Executive Officer of Suzano Papel e Celulose S.A., attends a news conference in Sao Paulo



Elderly people play with a robot named NAO, manufactured by Softbank Robotics, in their retirement home in Bordeaux



A fire breaks at a New York recycling plant next to the tracks of the Long Island Rail Road in New York City

Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan announced Wednesday his office has filed a lawsuit against 21 drug manufacturers and distributors, four doctors and one pharmacist because of the opioid epidemic. All of them operate in Harris County.

The companies Purdue Pharma L.P., Cephalon Inc. and Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc. are three of the defendants and they are referred to in the lawsuit as manufacturers, distributors and sellers of opioids in Harris County and the rest of the United States.



Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan announces plans to file lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies and doctors.

The doctors the county is suing are: Gazelle Craig, Arun Shmma, Karin Sharma and Richard Arthur Evans. The lawsuit also lists pharmacist David Devido as one of the defendants. The lawsuit contends the “defendants knew that the use of opioids had the potential to cause addiction and other health maladies” and adds that “driven by profit, defendants engaged in a campaign of lies, half-truths, and deceptions to create a market that encouraged the over-prescribing and long-term use of opioids even though there was no scientific basis to support such use.” (Find the document of the lawsuit at the bottom of the story).

As for the impact the opioid epidemic has in Harris County, the lawsuit indicates that opioid prescribing rates in the county “historically have been above average and as high as 79.4 prescriptions per 100 persons.”

The lawsuit adds that “of the more than 33,000 opioid-related deaths in the United States in 2015, 2,588 were in Texas” and adds that “Harris County bore its share of this burden, with 318 (12.3%) of these deaths occurring in the county.”



“I would never say the pharmaceutical companies dropped the ball,” lawyer Tommy Fibich said. “The

Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan Sues 21 Manufacturers And Distributors, 4 Doctors, And 1 Pharmacist Operating In The Area

Harris County Sues Pharmaceutical Companies, Doctors For ‘Opioid Epidemic’

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

pharmaceutical companies blew up the ball, and kicked it out to the public, for it to explode.”

During a news conference held in downtown Houston, Ryan blamed pharmaceutical companies for promoting opioids too widely. Being addicted to painkillers, or opioids, is a serious health issue in Houston and nationwide. In October, President Trump even declared the opioid crisis a “national public health emergency, under federal law.” It’s the first presidential administration to do so.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, opioid prescribing has fueled the epidemic. It said nearly half of all U.S. opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription. And a recent government report said the US economy lost over 500 billion dollars from opioid abuse, in 2015.

When it comes to the question of who should pay for the losses, Harris County has said that the drug companies should; just like tobacco companies were made to pay for smoking-related health care and prevention.

“It’s exactly pharmaceutical’s tobacco moment,” said lawyer Tommy Fibich. He’s one of the several lawyers representing Harris County against the pharmaceutical companies mentioned in the lawsuit.

“These are the most addictive drugs on our planet. They knew that. They promoted them in a way that caused people to be addicted to them,” said Fibich. “The problem is the companies that manufactured opioids went against every statute in law designed to protect the consumer.”

Fibich said the regulations in place should have worked, but they weren’t enforced.



“The manufacturers and distributors, primarily, managed to disregard them. They did it with impunity. And everybody was making so much money that they were willing to do it and take the risk,” said Fibich.

The Harris County’s lawsuit is not the first of its kind. Lawsuits of this nature have been popping up across the country. Upshur County, in East

Texas, filed a similar lawsuit in September. Healthcare Distribution Alliance (HDA) is a national trade association that represents wholesale distributors, some of whom are involved in the lawsuit.

In a statement, HDA spokesman John Parker said:

“As distributors, we understand the tragic impact the opioid epidemic has on communities across the country. We are deeply engaged in the issue and are taking our own steps to be part of the solution – but we aren’t willing to be scapegoats.

Distributors are logistics companies that arrange for the safe and secure storage, transport, and delivery of medicines from manufacturers to pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and others based on prescriptions from licensed physicians. We don’t make medicines, market medicines, prescribe medicines, or dispense them to consumers.

Given our role, the idea that distributors are solely responsible for the number of opioid prescriptions written defies common sense and lacks understanding of how the pharmaceutical supply chain actually works and how it is regulated.



We are ready to have a serious conversation about solving a complex problem and are eager to work with political leaders and all stakeholders in finding forward-looking solutions.”

AmerisourceBergen, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, and Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., also involved in the suit, provided Houston Public Media with statements:

Janssen Pharmaceuticals: Responsibly used opioid-based pain medicines give doctors and patients important choices to help manage the debilitating effects of chronic pain. At the same time, we recognize opioid abuse and addiction is a serious public health issue that must be addressed. We believe the allegations in lawsuits against our company are both legally and factually unfounded. Janssen has acted in the best interests of patients and physicians with regard to its opioid pain medicines, which

are FDA-approved and carry FDA-mandated warnings about possible risks on every product label. According to independent surveillance data, Janssen opioid pain medicines consistently have some of the lowest rates of abuse among these medications, and since 2008 the volume of Janssen opioid products always has amounted to less than one percent of the total prescriptions written per year for opioid medications, including generics. Addressing opioid abuse will require collaboration among many stakeholders and we will continue to work with federal, state and local officials to support solutions.- William Foster, spokesperson, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

AmerisourceBergen: AmerisourceBergen and other wholesale drug distributors are responsible for getting FDA-approved drugs from pharmaceutical manufacturers to DEA-registered pharmacies, based on prescriptions written by licensed doctors and health care providers. Our role in doing so is quite widespread across different therapies, with the distribution of opioid-based products constituting less than two percent of our sales. We are dedicated to doing everything within our power as a distributor to mitigate the diversion of these drugs without interfering with clinical decisions made by doctors, who interact directly with patients and decide what treatments are most appropriate for their care. Beyond our reporting and immediate halting of tens of thousands of potentially suspicious orders, we refuse service to customers we deem as a diversion risk and provide daily reports to the DEA that detail the quantity, type, and the receiving pharmacy of every single order of these products that we distribute. We are committed to collaborating with all stakeholders, including in Texas, on ways to combat opioid abuse

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Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.: Teva is committed to the appropriate use of opioid medicines, and we recognize the critical public health issues impacting communities across the U.S. as a result of illegal drug use as well as the misuse and abuse of opioids that are available legally by prescription. To that end, we take a multi-faceted approach to this complex issue; we work to educate communities and healthcare providers on appropriate medicine

use and prescribing, we comply closely with all relevant federal and state regulations regarding these medicines, and, through our R&D pipeline, we are developing non-opioid treatments that have the potential to bring relief to patients in chronic pain. Teva offers extensive resources for prescribers, patients and pharmacists regarding the responsible pain management and prevention of prescription drug abuse. Teva also collaborates closely with other stakeholders, including providers and prescribers, regulators, public health officials and patient advocates, to understand how to prevent prescription drug abuse without sacrificing patients’ needed access to pain medicine.

Marc Fleming, Assistant Professor of Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy at the University of Houston College of Pharmacy, said while there is an issue in Harris County, there’s responsibility and blame all around.

“From a societal stand point, to the individual patients, to unscrupulous doctors that enable these patients with unethical prescribing of these medications,” said Fleming.



Marc Fleming, Assistant Professor of Pharmaceutical Health Outcomes and Policy at the University of Houston College of Pharmacy, said responsibility and blame reaches further than only the pharmaceutical companies.

Fleming also said there are many factors contributing to opioid abuse; one being lyrics to popular songs referencing prescription medication abuse.

“These medications are commonly talked about in some of these lyrics, and so forth.” said Fleming. “One of my concerns is that we have a generation of kids that has grown up very accustomed to taking medications. So there’s nothing taboo, for this generation, about taking a medication.”

Fleming said if damages are awarded to Harris County, it would be best spent in rehabilitation, and other alternatives to help pain management; like yoga and physical therapy.

“Does your insurance cover that? Typically not,” said Fleming. “How are you going to pay for that? These are things that are not being addressed.”

Lawyers say a trial date could come in the next year.(Courtesy www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news)

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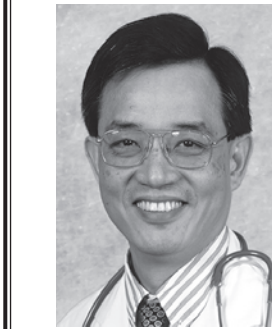
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Dr. Hwang is certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He earned his undergraduate and medical degree from the National Taiwan University College of Medicine in Taipei. He completed residency programs at National Taiwan University Hospital and St. Luke’s Hospital, Bethlehem, Penn. In addition, he earned a postgraduate degree of Master of Public Health in maternal and child health from the prestigious Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore, Md. He is a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Texas Medical Association and Harris County Medical Society.

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WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed Friday to decide if states should be able to collect taxes on internet sales, which would generate billions in revenue for local governments, but also raise the cost of online shopping for consumers.

Just over a quarter-century ago, the court ruled that a state could not force mail order catalog companies to collect sales taxes unless they had a physical presence in the state. Led by South Dakota, 36 states want the court to take another look at the issue, arguing that the 1992 decision was issued “before Amazon was even selling books out of Jeff Bezos’s garage.”

Part of the court’s logic was that it would be too difficult for mail order companies to compute the widely varying tax rates among, and even within, the 50 states.

But lawyers for South Dakota said that’s no longer an issue in the digital age. “Advances in computing have made it easy for retailers to collect different states’ sales taxes,” they wrote in a court brief.

Internet companies “can instantly tailor their marketing and overnight delivery of hundreds of thousands of products to individual customers based on their IP addresses. These companies can surely calculate sales tax from a zip code,” the state said.



U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C

The states also said the current ban on internet sales taxes puts brick-and-mortar retailers, who have to collect sales taxes, at a disadvantage.

Congress has considered a plan to allow states to collect taxes on purchases made by their residents through out-of-state companies, but no legislation has passed.

Lawyers for the states said they’re losing nearly \$34 billion a year because of the physical presence rule, though estimates from the federal Government Accountability Office said the figure is much smaller.

The case came to the Supreme Court after South Dakota passed an Internet tax law in 2016. Hoping to launch a legal battle that would lead the Supreme Court to reconsider its 1992 decision, the state sued out-of-state Internet retailers. Bound by the earlier ruling, the South Dakota supreme court ruled against the state

In response, the internet companies said col-

Supreme Court Agrees To Consider Internet Sales Taxes

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



Online sales reach their peak during Christmas holidays. The Supreme Court could rule that these internet sales could be subject to sales tax.

lecting taxes is vastly more complicated and expensive than it was in 1992, because the number of local taxing entities has more than doubled.



They noted that Amazon, the nation’s largest online retailer, now collects sales taxes for purchases made in every state, even though it has a physical presence in only a few. That’s proof that “the ‘problem’ of uncollected taxes,” the retailers involved in the case said in their court brief, “has proven to be largely self-correcting.”

They urged the Supreme Court to stay out of the fight while Congress is considering what to do. The court will hear the case this spring. While Amazon is not affected by the suit, other online retailers including Overstock.com, home goods company Wayfair and electronics retailer Newegg, are part of the case.

Overstock.com said in a statement Friday that it “looks forward to the opportunity to con-

vince the Supreme Court to confirm its prior rulings protecting the free flow of interstate commerce from overreaching state tax laws.”

The National Retail Federation, which represents both internet and brick-and-mortar sellers, said Friday it welcomed the Supreme Court’s decision to take the case.

“Unfortunately, antiquated sales tax collection rules have resulted in an uneven playing field that’s making it harder for Main Street retailers to compete in today’s digital economy. This is a basic question about fairness, which all of our members deserve whether they’re selling in stores or online,” federation president Matthew Shay said in a statement.

(Courtesy <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics>)

Related

U.S. Supreme Court to Review Bid to Collect Internet Sales Tax

The U.S. Supreme Court will consider freeing state and local governments to collect billions of dollars in sales taxes from online retailers, agreeing to revisit a 26-year-old ruling that has made much of the internet a tax-free zone.

Heading calls from traditional retailers and dozens of states, the justices said they’ll hear South Dakota’s contention that the 1992 ruling is obsolete in the e-commerce era and should be overturned.

State and local governments could have col-

lected up to \$13 billion more in 2017 if they’d been allowed to require sales tax payments from online merchants and other remote sellers, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office, Congress’s nonpartisan audit and research agency. Other estimates are even higher. All but five states impose sales taxes.

Online retailers Wayfair Inc., Overstock.com Inc. and Newegg Inc. are opposing South Dakota in the court fight. Each collects sales taxes from customers in only some states.

The case will also affect Amazon.com Inc., though the biggest online retailer isn’t directly involved. When selling its own inventory, Amazon charges sales tax in every state that imposes one, but about half of its sales involve goods owned by third-party merchants. For those items, the company says it’s up to the sellers to collect any taxes, and many don’t.

The court probably will hear arguments in April with a ruling by the end of its nine-month term in late June.



‘Physical Presence’

The high court’s 1992 Quill v. North Dakota ruling, which involved a mail-order company, said retailers can be forced to collect taxes only in states where the company has a “physical presence.” The court invoked the so-called dormant commerce clause, a judge-created legal doctrine that bars states from interfering with interstate commerce unless authorized by Congress.

South Dakota passed its law in 2016 with an eye toward overturning the Quill decision. It requires retailers with more than \$100,000 in annual sales in the state to pay a 4.5 percent tax on purchases. Soon after enacting the law, the state filed suit and asked the courts to declare the measure constitutional.

“States’ inability to effectively collect sales tax from internet sellers imposes crushing harm on state treasuries and brick-and-mortar retailers alike,” South Dakota said in its Supreme Court appeal.

Wayfair, Overstock and Newegg said the court should reject the appeal and leave it to Congress to set the rules for online taxes.

Expressing Doubts

“If Quill is overruled, the burdens will fall primarily on small and medium-size companies whose access to a national market will be stifled,” the companies argued. “Congress can address this issue in a balanced and comprehensive manner through legislation.”

Those supporting South Dakota at the high court include 35 other states, as well as lawmakers who say they’ve been trying for years to get Congress to address the issue.

Overturning Quill would mean “leveling the playing field for businesses who are employing people on Main Street,” Senator Heidi Heitkamp, a North Dakota Democrat, said in an interview. Heitkamp was North Dakota’s tax commissioner during its unsuccessful fight for taxing power in the Quill case.



The National Retail Federation, which represents both brick-and-mortar and Internet-only sellers, said it was encouraged by the court’s decision to get involved. “We are hopeful it will lead to a positive outcome that reflects the realities of 21st century commerce,” the trade group’s president, Matthew Shay, said in a statement.

Three current justices -- Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch and Anthony Kennedy -- have expressed doubts about Quill. Kennedy said in 2015 that Quill had produced a “startling revenue shortfall” in many states, as well as “unfairness” to local retailers and their customers.

“A case questionable even when decided, Quill now harms states to a degree far greater than could have been anticipated earlier,” Kennedy wrote. “It should be left in place only if a powerful showing can be made that its rationale is still correct.”

Gorsuch, the newest Supreme Court justice, suggested skepticism about Quill as an appeals court judge. And Thomas has said he would jettison the entire dormant commerce clause, saying “it has no basis in the Constitution and has proved unworkable in practice.”

Amazon backs a nationwide approach that would relieve retailers from dealing with a patchwork of state laws. Amazon once relied on the Quill ruling and didn’t collect sales tax at all; the company gradually changed its position as it built warehouses all over the country, giving it a greater physical presence in multiple states. The case is South Dakota v. Wayfair, 17-494. The case is South Dakota v. Wayfair. (Courtesy <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles>)

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劉德華加盟"拆彈 2""掃毒 2"

古天樂將與華仔飆戲 概念海報曝光開機在即

近日，香港環宇娛樂集團2018年度計劃曝光，正式宣布《掃毒2》與《拆彈專家2》兩部影片將全面啟動，而更讓人驚喜的是，天王劉德華不僅將與老搭檔導演邱禮濤攜手回歸《拆彈專家2》，劉德華也將以監制、主演身份加入《掃毒2》，《掃毒》中的古天樂也已確認回歸。據環宇娛樂透露，《掃毒2》將於2018年6月率先啟動，而《拆彈專家2》則將在2019年正式開機。

《掃毒2》和《拆彈專家2》的先導海報同時曝光。《掃毒2》的海報以白粉組成的左輪手槍為概念，在將要灰飛煙滅的白粉中，三位主演相互持槍頂頭的剪影十分明顯，熟悉《掃毒》的觀眾豈眼便能看出，這是影片中三兄弟的重場對峙戲，預示著兄弟爭分情節仍將回歸，而劉德華加盟後的角色信息尚未曝光，成為壹道謎題。

《拆彈專家2》則是延續了上壹部影片的海報風格，身著拆彈服的男主角並未曝光面部特征，但拆彈專家大步走向畫面充斥著緊張感，海報中顯眼的監制、主演劉德華，導演邱禮濤、環宇娛樂logo都坐實了上壹部的鐵三角合作將全數回歸。

此次兩部影片啟動第二部計劃，環宇娛樂力保影片無論在制作還是陣容上都更加豪華。《拆彈專家》中的監制、主演劉德華、導演邱禮濤、夢造者制作將如數回歸；而在《掃毒》中有精彩表演的古天樂已經確認回歸第二部，同時，也迎來了監制、主演劉德華、邱禮濤導演，應采兒及夢造者制作的加盟。據悉，《掃毒2》的制作費用將超過1.8億，在香港、菲律賓兩地選景拍攝，五年前的動作大戲毫無疑問全面升級。

香港環宇娛樂總經理林小強透露，兩部影片的故事都會大不壹樣，“《拆彈專家》與劉德華、邱禮濤導演、夢造者的合作都非常愉快，無論是《掃毒》還是《拆彈專家》我都堅信是非常優秀的作品，這個黃金鐵三角再度合作，會擦出更不壹樣的火花，為觀眾創造更好的作品。”

林小強也同時確認了古天樂的回歸，“《掃毒2》已經確定將在今年開機，故事仍然圍繞三位主演發生，古天樂已經確認了加盟，但會是壹個全新的角色。而《拆彈專家2》的故事也會完全不同，將比第壹集更緊張和精彩。”



張家輝自導自演

《低壓槽》定檔4.28

定檔海報驚悚暗黑 徐靜蕾何炅余男出演

張壹山新片

《畢業作品》定檔4.13



由張家輝自導自演，徐靜蕾、何炅、余男出演的警匪動作片《低壓槽》正式定檔4月28日，並曝光壹張定檔海報。以灰暗的城市夜色為背景，張家輝飾演的男主人公從天而降，冲破層層玻璃，預示穿透層層真相。

從此前曝光的先導預告和劇照來看，影片風格將十分暗黑，更偏向犯罪驚悚片的畫風。此次曝光的定檔海報也壹如既往的灰白黑暗，壹如片名帶給人壓抑之感。

《低壓槽》是張家輝繼《孟蘭神功》和《陀地驅魔人》之後執導的第三部作品，也成為了他首部得以在內地公映的導演作品。影片以孤城為背景，講述了張家輝飾演的警方臥底於秋，多次緝拿這座罪惡之城的罪犯。因為壹宗兒童綁架案，於秋的身份開始敗露，引來犯罪集團的追捕。為了堅持心中的正義，於秋不惜鋌而走險，與神秘集團老板展開壹場鬥智鬥勇的生死戰。



今日，由張壹山、丁丁主演的青春、冒險、愛情電影《畢業作品》發布了人物定檔海報。這次公布的海報中，灰黑色的背景給人壹種青春懸疑的感覺，張壹山側身回首，眼神中帶有些許堅毅，似乎正在搜索某個事件的真相。《畢業作品》中張壹山首次在大銀幕上飾演警校畢業生，對於久未在電影中露面的張壹山來說，這是壹部回歸之作。據悉影片正式定檔2018年4月13日上映。

電影《畢業作品》講述了警校學生殷浩（張壹山飾）與女友小暖（丁丁飾）為了完成畢業作品，登上了壹座與世隔絕的孤島，在拍攝紀錄片之外，殷浩也希望能夠與女友小暖有壹場“啪啪啪”的愛情之旅。然而他們卻意外地卷入了壹起離奇的命案中，面對重重險境，準法醫殷浩與小暖能否順利完成他們的畢業作品？他們的關係能否更進壹步？故事走向著實令觀眾

期待。

繼在眾多影視作品中成功飾演了警察角色之後，張壹山化身法醫專業學生殷浩，不僅探索技巧豐富，還有專業的法醫知識加身，時而沈著地分析案情，時而親自上陣查看屍體。置身於壹場歷經30年的神秘大火案中，殷浩探索力爆棚，壹步步抽絲剝繭，從紛雜的迷局中尋找線索，至於最終能否尋得真相，4月13日電影上映，將為大家揭曉謎底。

電影中，張壹山飾演的殷浩為打破“畢業就分手”的魔咒，進壹步鞏固和女友的戀愛關係，與丁丁飾演的小暖攜手踏上孤島，開啓追夢之旅。然而，小島上充滿糾葛與疑雲的懸案，卻讓女友小暖陷入了生死謎局之中。殷浩不僅要偵破案件，更需要保護女友的安全。

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張楊導演新作《貓貓果考試記》立項 《愛情公寓》要拍電影版 有望2019年上映



近日，國家新聞出版廣電總局電影局公布了關於2018年2月（中下旬）全國電影劇本（梗概）備案、立項公示的通知。據統計，2月份上中下旬電影備案各類影片總數量僅為179部，環比1月份的331部下跌45.9%。

在備案公示表中，我們發現了《岡仁波齊》導演張楊的新片《貓貓果考試記》，改編自熱門電視劇的電影《愛情公寓2019》，還有《拆彈專家》導演邱禮濤擔任編劇的新片《家和萬事驚》等等，根據我國元代古典戲劇名著《西廂記》改編的同名動畫片，也在備案公示中。

曾執導過《岡仁波齊》、《皮繩上的魂》的導演張楊，前壹陣子因為女粉絲的排聞事件，迅速成為眾人關注的焦點。不過張楊導演並沒有回應此事，反而不動聲色地籌備起了新片。

張楊的新作《貓貓果考試記》講述了大理貓貓果小學的學生曲洪銳參加學期考試，在觀察員許崧的陪伴下，以闖關的形式在古城和自然環境中完成壹系列任務，在這壹天的考試過程中，曲洪銳與其他同學、觀察員、

大理本地人、新大理人之間發生壹系列故事...

最近幾年癡迷在大理生活的張楊，在新片《貓貓果考試記》中，講述了壹個發生在大理的故事，除此之外，他還有紀錄片《大理的聲音》以及故事片《火山》都獲得立項，這三部新片都由和和影業操刀出品，可以並稱為張楊的“大理三部曲”。

《愛情公寓2019》改編自國產劇集《愛情公寓》，這部劇曾經捧紅過陳赫、婁藝瀟等眾多明星。該片的故事梗概為：“聖誕節將近，關谷神奇計劃在聖誕節當天向唐悠悠求婚，希望愛情公寓的各位兄弟姐妹前往日本助陣，然而，這次的旅行並不像他們想象般輕鬆順利。”

《愛情公寓》在推出四部系列電視劇後，劇版《愛情公寓5》已於去年下半年開機，主演陣容面臨大換血，預計2019年上映。這部《愛情公寓2019》也有可能和劇版互相呼應，既然片名中都出現了2019的字樣，預計也應該是在19年上映。不知道人設已崩潰的陳赫，能否有機會再說出那句

著名的“好男人就是我，我就是曾小賢”。

此外，本月備案公示中還有由《拆彈專家》導演邱禮濤、以及張達明擔任編劇的新片《家和萬事驚》，該片的故事梗概為“偉民壹家五口生活在壹間小公寓內，觀賞窗外的海景是全家人放松心情唯一的壹辦法。然而某天，這狹小的風景也被廣告牌遮擋！全家用盡壹切辦法，也不能令那廣告牌消失，壹家老小被逼上絕路。”

和奧斯卡獲獎影片《三塊廣告牌》類似，這部《家和萬事驚》也講述了壹個關於“廣告牌”的故事。邱禮濤導演最近作品數量猛漲，2017年就有他執導的《拆彈專家》、《原諒他77次》、《常在妳左右》、《失眠》等多部電影上映，從愛情片到恐怖片再到動作片，邱導涉獵十分廣泛。

值得壹提的是，在此次備案動畫電影名單中，出現了根據我國元代古典戲劇名著《西廂記》改編的同名影片。此前，《西廂記》曾經被翻拍成多部影視作品，但以動畫電影的形式呈現，還是第壹次。

王千源犯罪動作片《大人物》開機 網劇“心理罪”導演五百執導 包貝爾梅婷加盟

3月16日，由五百導演執導的犯罪動作電影《大人物》在東莞宣布開機，王千源搭檔包貝爾擔任主演，王迅、梅婷、周遊、屈菁菁等實力演員傾力加盟。在當天的開機儀式上，導演五百和主演王千源、包貝爾、王迅、屈菁菁等現身開機儀式，陣容亮眼，目前該片的故事劇情尚在保密中。

導演五百2009年執導首部喜劇微電影《賤男日記》，從而開啓了他的導演生涯，他此前曾執導過不少著名網劇，在2014年執導了

現象級網劇《心理罪》，2016年執導真人劇《畫江湖之不良人》被定義“2.5次元”；2016監制超級網劇《白夜追兇》等等，2017年執導網劇《古董局中局》。

王千源最近幾年演過不少犯罪類型的電影，他的角色多是亦正亦邪的形象，比如《破·局》中的邪魅反派陳昌民，《解救吾先生》中的綁匪華子等等。包貝爾2018年待映的新片不少，包括自導自演的《胖子行動隊》，以及參演的《武林怪獸》和《斷片之險途奪寶》。



顧長衛新片《遇見妳真好》曝全新特輯 張海宇勇救周楚濤 “愛虐”CP代言青春回憶



今日，由顧長衛執導的青春懷舊喜劇電影《遇見妳真好》曝光“偏愛虐著妳”特輯以及壹組劇照，該片主演張海宇、周楚濤活力出鏡，大談拍攝趣事。戲裏兩位角色壹個願打壹個願挨，戲外二人有愛互動，張海宇片場見義勇為，並大贊周楚濤“能夠碰到她是件特別幸運的事情。”

電影《遇見妳真好》由白客、藍盈瑩、張海宇、周楚濤、曹駿、王玉雯、蔣易、李晨暉主演，範明、蔣雯麗特別出演，電影將於3月29日與全國觀眾見面。

《遇見妳真好》改編自孔龍

的原創小說《飛火流星》，電影講述了“高四”紫荊復讀學校中的三重愛情趣事。

在今日曝光的“偏愛虐著妳”特輯中，張海宇飾演的謝倫是壹個投機取巧的體育生，對這個角色，張海宇的評價是：“吊兒郎當，精力過於旺盛，同時又非常善良。”在拍攝壹場跳河的戲份時，楚濤突遇險情，腳被繩子纏住，張海宇果敢沖去將她救起，這壹舉動讓楚濤感動不已。

周楚濤飾演的周小彌，是壹個文藝、癡狂、卻有些憂郁的女孩兒，楚濤私下其實是壹個樂觀開朗的人，盡管面對跳河的戲充

滿恐懼，但她依然完美演繹、滿分完成。張海宇誇贊她：“有的時候楚濤也會害怕，但她會忍著，就像有壹個男孩住在身體裏壹樣。”更是直言說：“能夠碰到她是件特別幸運的事情。”

張海宇和周楚濤兩人不僅戲內默契十足，戲外也嘻嘻哈哈、互相打趣。戲裏，謝倫陪著心儀的楚濤做過瘋狂浪漫的事；戲外，兩人的相處模式同樣屬於壹個願打壹個願挨。他們之間的有愛互動，與影片的宣傳語“春暖花開，青春萬歲”相得益彰，兩人又將在成片中擦出怎樣的青春火花？

美南報業電視傳媒集團與光聲電信集團(Phonoscope Global)聯手成立美南光聲電信傳媒集團



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2018德州东北同乡会年会暨春节联欢晚会（下）



全體理事登台，演唱「德州東北同鄉會」會歌「永遠的榮光」。



州議員 Gene Wu（右）代表德州州政府頒發賀狀。



國會議員 Al Green（右）親臨現場祝賀並致贈賀函，由德州東北同鄉會會長張玉誠（左）代表接受。



出席晚會的貴賓（左起）國會議員華裔助理譚秋晴女士，美國聯邦國會議員 Al Green，中國駐休士頓總領館商務參贊周振成，州議員 Gene Wu，國會議員 Pete Olson 代表張晶晶女士。



「恆豐銀行」代表由總經理張永男（右三）率領出席大會。



「美南銀行」公關經理莊韓婷女士（右一）與「上海聯誼會」理事長陳哲晴（右三）及畫家蔣瑞（左二）等人在晚宴上。

秦鴻鈞報導、攝影
本報記者



全體理事登台，演唱「德州東北同鄉會」會歌「永遠的榮光」。



國會議員 Al Green（右）向「德州東北同鄉會」會長張玉誠（左）握手致意。



兩位美麗的晚會主持人許涓涓（右），姜哈（左）。



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