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Officials preparing for election interference

Officials across the country are preparing for elections, and some have added preparing for federal interference to their agendas this year. CHRIS DAY/MEMPHIS COMMERCIAL APPEAL FILE

Agencies train staff on potential federal issues

Sarah D. Wire
USA TODAY

Scott McDonell's training slideshow for poll workers covers what to do in case of fire or flood. A few years ago, the clerk for Dane County – which is Wisconsin's second most populous county – added de-escalation training in case a voter became aggressive.

The Democrat said he is adding a new slide this year: "What to do if the FBI shows up at your office and what not to do."

And he isn't the only one. Multiple election officials told USA TODAY they are preparing in case the federal government interferes in the midterm elections.

Ahead of every local and state election, officials spend months planning for a variety of emergency scenarios and plotting out in detail how they will respond. This can include changing routes to get ballots to the counting location if there is traffic on election night, sending replacement machines to a polling location if some stop working, and safeguarding ballots if there is a flood or fire. Local police, fire departments and emergency management teams are involved.

President Donald Trump's threats of federal involvement in the midterm elections have alarmed many of the nation's thousands of election officials. For the first time, they are factoring in what they will do if National Guard troops or immigration officials are sent to polling sites, if federal agents demand access to ballots or election machines, or if the U.S. Postal Service stops delivering ballots once the polls close, regardless of state law.

The Trump administration has placed 2020 election deniers in powerful positions, has attempted to seize election materials in several swing states and has threatened to send federal authorities to polling locations.

"I'd do anything necessary to make sure we have honest elections. We have to have honest elections," Trump told reporters at the White House on May 12.

Kim Pytleski, the clerk for Oconto County, Wisconsin, doesn't expect such a rural area to be targeted. But if it is, the Republican wants poll workers to welcome federal authorities in and treat them like election observers. And then those workers should call her, she said.

See ELECTION, Page 5A

A guide to Memorial Day events in Fond du Lac County

Daphne Lemke
Fond du Lac Reporter
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

FOND DU LAC – Memorial Day this year is May 25, and some local communities have a little extra to celebrate while honoring fallen soldiers and veterans from the area.

Oakfield unveiled its veteran memorial May 16 after more than two years of planning and work dedicated to all the service men and women who were born, lived or buried in the township.

Fond du Lac's opening of the reconstructed Veterans Park is not far behind as crews finish up before the annual Memorial Day ceremony.

Here's what's going on in the Fond du Lac area for Memorial Day.

Fond du Lac Veterans Park has reason to celebrate May 22 and 25

The ribbon-cutting for Veterans Park, 190 S. Main St., is on track for 10 a.m. May 22, and county officials advise the park is still an active construction site until then.

On May 25, the annual parade will start at 10 a.m. from Rees and Main streets south to Main and Second streets. The Memorial Day ceremony will follow at 11:30 a.m. at Veterans Park.

Rienzi Cemetery hosts annual roll call

Rienzi Cemetery, N6101 County K, will host a reading of the Veterans Roll Call starting at 1:30 p.m. on the steps of the cemetery's historic Memorial Home. Volunteers will take turns reading the names of all known veterans buried at Rienzi.

See EVENTS, Page 5A

Virus official's credentials questioned

Eduardo Cuevas
USA TODAY

A federal official in the spotlight for helping lead the United States' ongoing hantavirus response is also getting attention for his resume as a urologist and his past comments on various health issues.

Adm. Brian Christine, an assistant health secretary and head of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, is a four-star uniformed officer leading over 5,000 public health professionals who respond to emerging health threats. He is also a licensed Alabama physician specializing in penile implants and men's health.

Christine has become a leading figure in the Trump administration's response to hantavirus that has sickened at least 10 people, killing three, from an outbreak on the MV Hondius cruise ship. In the United States, more than 40 people are being monitored for the Andes virus, a type of hantavirus, which derives from rodents. Experts have said the risk to the public is low.

Multiple news outlets have reported on Christine's skepticism about past federal health responses, including to

See QUESTIONED, Page 2A

Adm. Brian Christine, MD, the assistant secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, says the American response to hantavirus is "what [a] strong public health system looks like." DYLAN WIDGER/GETTY IMAGES

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