

Groton Daily Independent

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605-225-3078 ~ 1-800-658-3463

Groton to host "Round of 16" game

Groton Area will be hosting a "Round of 16" Class B Girls Basketball game in the Arena on Thursday, March 1st at 7pm. Warner will be playing Ipswich.

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **Open**

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Missionary Mike Picconatto serving in Berlin, Germany to make presentations in Groton



Missionary Mike Picconatto will be coming to Groton next week to share his experiences with their work in Germany.

Mike Picconatto, born in 1973, is the son of a retired Air Force officer and a Kindergarten teacher. After growing up being transferred with his dad all over the country (including 3 years in England), Mike attended Minot State University studying Computer Science before he transferred to Crown College where studied Youth Ministry and met his wife Elissa.

Mike served for six years as the youth pastor at Maple Plain Community Church before the district asked him to serve as the Senior Pastor at Staples Alliance Church, where Mike, Elissa, and their 2 year old daughter Johannah moved in 2002. Ten years later the family of five (new additions Caleb and Joshua now in the ranks) moved to Berlin, Germany, where the family has spent the last 5 years learning the language and assisting a partner church in leadership, worship, and children's ministries, starting and running a ministry center, developing a gallery ministry to artists, assisting the start-up of a new ministry to refugees, and struggling through some of the very challenging lessons of cultural adaptation and failure.

Mike and Elissa are preparing to return to Berlin to help start a new church, based on many of the lessons they have learned and utilizing the unique networks they have developed into East German culture and the artist community during their first term.

Scholastic Book Fairs®

PAWS for BOOKS

BOOK FAIR

COME. STAY. READ. A GREAT TALE!

2018

"Paws for Books"
Scholastic Book Fair
When: Monday, March 5, 2018
3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Where: Groton Area Elementary School Library

Maintenance Supervisor Wanted:

Under the direction of the Facility Administrator, the Maintenance Supervisor oversees the daily operations of the Maintenance. Performs maintenance and repair of physical structures of buildings.

Day Shift C.N.A. Wanted

Sign-on Bonus
☆☆☆ **\$1,500 for CNAs** ☆☆☆
Contact Brynn Pickrel or Nellie Hatfield at 605-397-2365 or apply in person.
EOE/AA/M/F/V/D-Drug Free Workplace

GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER
1106 N. 2nd Street, Groton

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What was it that led you into the ministry field?

I felt called into the ministry when I was 12 years old at a missions conference in a small C&MA Church in North Little Rock, Arkansas. As I got older, I had a lot of experiences with youth ministry. After graduating from high school, I went to Crown College. I graduated with a degree in Youth Ministry, Bible and Theology, and Independent studies. My wife and I served at Maple Plain Community Church for six years (1996-2002), where I worked as the Youth Pastor. We then moved to Staples, Minnesota, where I served as Lead Pastor for 10 years (2002 - 2012). In 2012 we moved to Berlin, Germany, and just finished our first 5-year term in July, 2017. We will return to Berlin in July, 2018.

Do you do many of these presentations?

We have done quite a few! I have been in 21 churches since September. Every church is a little different, and I have spoken in churches, in schools, to Rotary groups, and have met with CRU students, FCA students, retirees, elementary students, geography classes, college students, those interested in missions, and have been involved in a lot of different activities as well - from dodgeball to bowling as well as the more traditional dinners, church services, and Q&A sessions.

What is the object of doing these presentations?

There are really two main purposes.

We serve as part of a denomination called the Christian & Missionary Alliance. There are close to 100 C&MA churches in Minnesota and Eastern North and South Dakota. When we visit the churches, we love to meet people in the churches and help build connections between the international work the churches support and people who are serving.

We also share about the work we are doing and other International Workers are doing, and ask people to continue to pray for the workers and continue to support the work financially.

How did you get hooked up with the Groton church that you are coming to Groton?

Because we serve with the C&MA, the connection was a pretty natural one. We heard they wanted an International Worker to come, and we are living in central Minnesota this year and I was able to come and share. I do know Pastor Jetto from when I served as a youth pastor, and he had some connections with students in my youth ministry.

What is it that you will be sharing with your audiences?

Pastor Jetto and the church have arranged a pretty diverse program for me.

I hope to share about the work we have been doing in Berlin. We had the unique opportunity to help a new church in Berlin and also be involved in running a ministry center/art gallery. We worked with artists, and hosted more than 20 exhibits in our space (17 of them under the name of Gallery2.) We really enjoyed the time we had to work with and invest in the artist and creative community in Berlin.

We also helped colleagues start a new ministry center to reach out to the large, mostly Syrian, refugee immigrants in Berlin.

In some settings, I will also be talking about the historical events that led to the need for church work to be started in Germany, the land in which the Reformation began.

What are some of the challenges in starting a missionary church in Germany?

Our first couple of years the largest challenge was language. We spent two years in language school.

The next several years the challenges are fairly broad. There are many aspects of culture we had to learn and adjust to.

In our church connections, we worked at connecting with families, creating programs that were mean-

Schedule

Sunday, March 4:

at Groton C&MA Church

Sunday School at 9:15 a.m.

Worship at 10:45 a.m.

Monday, March 5

Morning/early afternoon - sharing with the junior high Geography Class

3 p.m.: Coffee time at Rosewood Court

Tuesday, March 6

7 p.m.: Ice Cream social at C&MA Church with Q&A

Wednesday, March 7

7 p.m.: Children and Youth Ministry at C&MA Church

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ingful for the people attending, and helping answer questions about faith. Former East Germany is the most atheistic geographic region on planet Earth. Due to the impact of post-modernism and communism, 73-83% of people in former East Germany have no religious belief. Fewer than 2% of people in Belrin attend church. This creates some specific challenges, often just with an understanding of what faith is, and why church or God are relevant.

In our connection with artists and the gallery work we started, the challenges were different! We also had to learn a lot about how galleries work, what the art public is looking for, how to best support our artists, and how to exhibit and display their works. Our goal was always to create communication, so selection of artists with specific themes and stories to tell was a large part of our work.

What is your home town?

That's a tough question for me to answer! My dad is retired Air Force, and we moved every couple of years. I graduated from Minot High School, and attended Minot State University for several years before transferring to Crown College in St. Bonifacious, MN.

3rd ANNUAL FAMILY MATH NIGHT

Sponsored by OST and Groton Area Elementary School

When: MONDAY MARCH 5, 2018 from 5:00-7:00 PM

Where: ELEMENTARY COMMONS AREA

Many math games will be played and sent home for families to enjoy!

All students must be accompanied by an adult.

Door prizes will be given out.

Super Nachos and a drink will be provided for a FREE WILL DONATION

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Game Statistics Report TZ (Home) 62, Groton Varsity (Away) 54, 2/27/18

Game Statistics

Player	No.	2Pt	2PtA	2Pt%	3Pt	3PtA	3Pt%	FG	FGA	FG%	EFG%	FT	FTA	FT %	Pts	Layup	LayupA	Layup%
German	3	2	3	66.7%	1	5	20.0%	3	8	37.5%	43.8%	2	2	100.0%	9	2	2	100.0%
Greeley	11	5	7	71.4%	3	4	75.0%	8	11	72.7%	86.4%	4	6	66.7%	23	3	4	75.0%
Halseide	24	4	6	66.7%	0	3	0.0%	4	9	44.4%	44.4%	1	3	33.3%	9	3	3	100.0%
Iron Cloud	14	0	1	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%
LaBlanc	12	0	1	0.0%	0	3	0.0%	0	4	0.0%	0.0%	2	2	100.0%	2	0	0	0.0%
Owen	10	1	1	100.0%	0	2	0.0%	1	3	33.3%	33.3%	1	2	50.0%	3	1	1	100.0%
Pratt	21	8	13	61.5%	0	1	0.0%	8	14	57.1%	57.1%	0	0	0.0%	16	6	8	75.0%
Shepherd	22	0	2	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%
Unassigned		0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%
TZ Totals		20	34	58.8%	4	18	22.2%	24	52	46.2%	50.0%	10	15	66.7%	62	15	18	83.3%
Groton Varsity Totals		9	27	33.3%	10	34	29.4%	19	61	31.1%	39.3%	6	11	54.5%	54	9	13	69.2%
DeHoet	42	2	10	20.0%	2	4	50.0%	4	14	28.6%	35.7%	4	6	66.7%	14	2	5	40.0%
Diegel	55	2	4	50.0%	4	12	33.3%	6	16	37.5%	50.0%	0	0	0.0%	16	2	2	100.0%
Doeden	4	2	5	40.0%	2	3	66.7%	4	8	50.0%	62.5%	0	0	0.0%	10	2	3	66.7%
Keith	20	1	1	100.0%	1	3	33.3%	2	4	50.0%	62.5%	0	0	0.0%	5	1	1	100.0%
Kurtz	14	1	1	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	1	1	100.0%	100.0%	0	0	0.0%	2	1	1	100.0%
Lane	10	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%
Rintala	11	0	2	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0	3	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%
Shabazz	5	1	4	25.0%	1	8	12.5%	2	12	16.7%	20.8%	2	5	40.0%	7	1	1	100.0%
Sippel	3	0	0	0.0%	0	3	0.0%	0	3	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%

Player	No.	Paint Pt	Paint Att	TO Pts	OReb	DReb	Rebs	Ast	TO	Force TO	Dflc	Dflc Vic	Stl	Blk	Blk Vic	Chrg	Recov
German	3	4	3	2	1	3	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greeley	11	10	6	2	2	3	5	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Halseide	24	8	5	2	0	4	4	2	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Iron Cloud	14	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LaBlanc	12	0	1	0	0	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Owen	10	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pratt	21	14	11	0	2	4	6	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shepherd	22	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Unassigned		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TZ Totals		38	29	6	6	20	26	8	12	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	8

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Player	No.	Paint Pt	Paint Att	TO Pts	OReb	DReb	Rebs	Ast	TO	Force TO	Dflc	Dflc Vic	Stl	Blk	Blk Vic	Chrg	Recov
Groton Varsity Totals		18	21	6	12	25	37	13	14	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	7
DeHoet	42	4	9	0	5	10	15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Diegel	55	4	3	2	1	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Doeden	4	4	5	0	0	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Keith	20	2	1	0	3	4	7	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kurtz	14	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lane	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rintala	11	0	0	0	2	3	5	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Shabazz	5	2	2	2	1	2	3	7	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Sippel	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Pollard Grabs MVP Honors, Leading Wolves to NSIC/Sanford Health Tournament Crown

Sioux Falls, S.D. – The No. 9 Northern State University men’s basketball team sealed their first NSIC/Sanford Health Basketball Tournament Title since the 2004-05 season, defeating Southwest Minnesota State 81-75 on Tuesday evening from the Sanford Pentagon. The Wolves swept the NSIC championships winning the overall, north division, and tournament crowns. They are now 31-3 this season.

It was a team effort for the Wolves as five players scored in double figures in the win. Northern held control for a majority of the game, despite multiple SMSU comeback attempts. The Wolves led by as much as 20, midway through the second half riding their 10-point lead following the first 20 minutes of regulation. Southwest out-scored Northern in the second, 43-39, however it was not enough to overcome the first half deficit.

Northern shot 58.7 percent from the floor, 62.5 percent from the arc, and 68.0 percent from the foul line in the win. The knocked down a game high ten from beyond the arc, and added 16 assists, six blocks, and four steals. NSU out-rebounded SMSU 33-28 in the game, notching 11 second chance points off of eight offensive boards. In total the Wolves tallied 28 points in the paint, 13 points off the bench, ten points off turnovers, and four fast break points.

DJ Pollard led the team with 21 points in the game, shooting 70.0 percent from the floor. The senior hit 4-of-5 from the arc and added four rebounds and two assists. He was followed by Darin Peterka with 15 points, shooting 75.0 percent from both the floor and the 3-point line. Peterka added a team second best five rebounds, as well as three assists and one steal.

Gabe King tallied his second straight game in double figures, notching 13 points, with a team high six rebounds. King hit 5-of-9 from the floor and added two assists, one block, and one steal. Ian Smith notched 12 points, five rebounds, two steals, and a team leading five assists.

Logan Doyle led the team off the bench with 11 points, shooting 75.0 percent from the floor as well. Doyle notched five rebounds, and a team second best two blocks for the Wolves. Fellow ‘big’ man Carter Evans tallied a career game, as he scored the first points of the game for the Wolves and became the 54th member of the 1,000 point club. Evans finished the night with seven, as well as a team leading six rebounds and three blocks. Bo Fries grabbed the final two team points, on a fast break layup which gave Northern the 80-75 lead with just 31 seconds remaining.

Three Wolves were named to the all-tournament team following the win, in Ian Smith, Darin Peterka, and MVP DJ Pollard.

Northern wins an automatic bid to the NCAA Central Region Tournament with the win, and will await their opponent with the NCAA Selection Show which is set to air on NCAA.com at 9:30 p.m. (CT) on Sunday, March 4.

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Today in Weather History

February 28, 2007: Another late February strong low pressure area moving across the central plains spread heavy snow of 6 to 11 inches across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Many school and college classes were cancelled and many events were postponed. Road conditions became very poor with some accidents occurring along with ditched vehicles. The snow continued into the first day of March and ended between in the morning. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Aberdeen, 7 inches at Wilmot and Artichoke Lake, 8 inches at Conde, Watertown, and Milbank, 9 inches at Browns Valley and Wheaton, and 11 inches at Clark. This heavy snow event was followed by more snowfall along with blizzard conditions which developed across the area during the afternoon and evening of March 1st.

1792: Heavy snow collapsed the Ashley River Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina.

1900: A massive storm spread record snows from Kansas to New York State. Snow fell for over 24-hours in Toledo, Ohio. When it was all over, the 19 inches set a single storm record for the city. Topeka, Kansas reported 18.7 inches of snow in 24 hours to set their record for most snow in a 24-hour period. 36 inches of snow at Astoria, Illinois sets new state 24-hour snowfall record. Northfield, Vermont picked up 31 inches of snow. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17.5 inches at Springfield, Illinois and 43 inches at Rochester, New York. 60 inches fell in parts of the Adirondack Mountains of New York State.

1952 - An intense storm brought coastal sections of southeastern Massachusetts to a halt, stranding 3000 motorists on Lower Cape, and leaving ten thousand homes on the Cape without electricity. Winds gusting to 72 mph created mountainous snowdrifts of the 18 inches of snow which buried Nantucket and Hyannis. A barometric pressure reading of 29.02 inches was reported at the center of the storm. (The Weather Channel)

1962: Wilmington, North Carolina, reached a high temperature of 85 degrees. This is the warmest temperature on record during the month of February.

1987 - A powerful storm produced severe thunderstorms in Louisiana and Mississippi early in the day. About mid morning a monstrous tornado touched down near Moselle MS and grew to a width of two miles as it passed near Laurel MS. The tornado traveled a distance of 40 miles killing six persons, injuring 350 others, and causing 28.5 million dollars damage. The tornado swept homes right off their foundations, and tossed eighteen wheel trucks about like toys. Strong straight line winds associated with the powerful storm system gusted to 70 mph at Jonesboro AR and Carbondale IL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in California produced severe weather during the early morning hours. Strong thunderstorm winds, gusting to 74 mph, downed trees in the Sacramento area. Unseasonably mild weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S. The afternoon high of 71 degrees at Portland OR was a February record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in the southeast corner of the nation produced winds gusts to 58 mph at Fort Lauderdale FL, and a total of seven inches of rain. Heavy snow whitened parts of the Northern Plateau and the Northern Rockies, with ten inches reported at Marion MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Showers and thunderstorms over the Southern Plains Region capped a record wet February for parts of Oklahoma. Totals for the month ranged up to 9.11 inches at McCurtain, with 4.63 inches reported at Oklahoma City. Snow and sleet fell across northern Oklahoma, with four inches reported at Freedom and Jefferson. Snow also spread across southern Kansas into Missouri and Arkansas, with six inches of snow reported at Harrison AR. In Alaska, February temperatures at Nome averaged 21 degrees below normal, ranging from -38 degrees to 29 degrees during the month. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Wed Feb 28	Thu Mar 1	Fri Mar 2	Sat Mar 3	Sun Mar 4	Mon Mar 5	Tue Mar 6
29°F	29°F	36°F	39°F	40°F	30°F	26°F
6°F	11°F	26°F	28°F	24°F	14°F	9°F
SW 5 MPH	W 5 MPH	SE 17 MPH	SSE 14 MPH	ESE 11 MPH	NW 19 MPH	NW 19 MPH
				Precip 60%	Precip 70%	Precip 20%

Areas of Dense Fog Across Central/Northeast SD Wednesday, February 28th ~ 5am CST

JCT US 14/US 83 - Blunt - Feb 28 2018 - 05:03 AM CT



Jct 34/204 - Gann Valley - Feb 28 2018 04:52 AM CT



Jct 226/100 - NW 154 - North of highway 18 4316 - Feb 28 2018 05:13AM CT



Obs from SDDOT, Update from NWS Aberdeen, SD



Published on: 02/28/2018 at 5:34AM

Fog is affecting central and northeast South Dakota, as well as west central Minnesota. The fog is dense in spots, with visibility dropping to one-quarter mile or below at times. A Dense Fog Advisory is in effect through the morning hours. Those traveling this morning should be prepared for low visibility and reduced speeds. Roads may be icy and frosty in spots as well.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 29.7 F at 3:31 PM

Low Outside Temp: 1.4 F at 7:20 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 14.0 Mph at 1:45 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 59° in 1934

Record Low: -27° in 1962

Average High: 33°F

Average Low: 13°F

Average Precip in Feb: 0.55

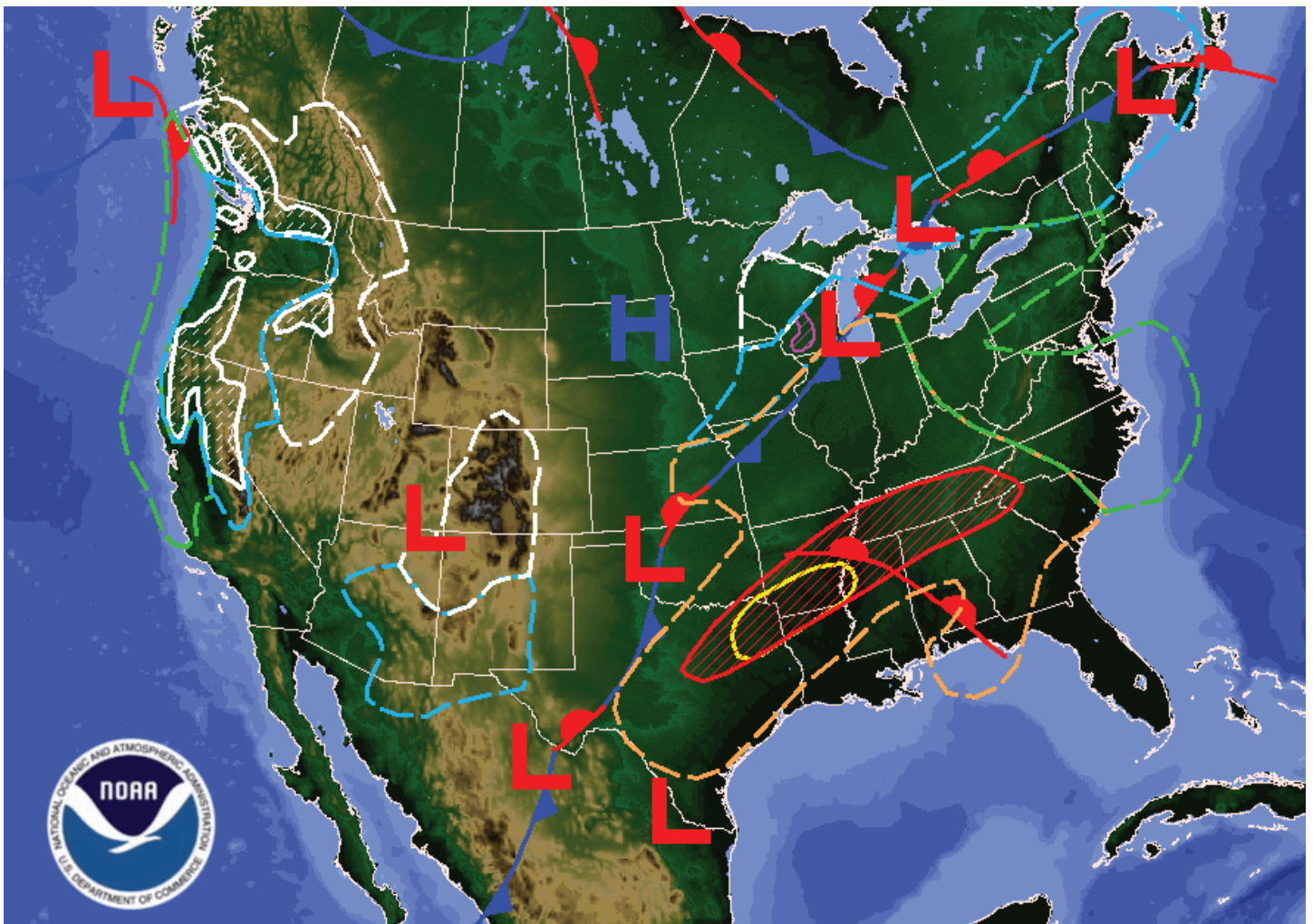
Precip to date in Feb: 0.57

Average Precip to date: 1.02

Precip Year to Date: 0.57

Sunset Tonight: 6:19 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:11 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Wed, Feb 28, 2018, issued 4:49 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain

Rain and T'Storms

Rain and Snow

Snow

Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)

Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)

Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)

Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)



DOES EVIL TROUBLE GOD?

"You know, Larry," he began in a soft voice, "I'm troubled by the fact that all of the horrible things I see on TV or hear over the radio when I travel don't bother me as much as they once did. What's happening to me?" he asked.

We all wonder, at one time or another, how a group of people can watch a person being beaten or robbed, or fall ill in a crowded mall or on a busy street corner, and no one responds. We see the ravages of war, watch people die on a battlefield, see disabled veterans trying to adjust to life with artificial limbs and seem to accept it as "normal" in today's culture. It seems as though the pain and suffering of others matter little to anyone except the one enduring the hardships.

The Psalmist who wrote Psalm 94 was troubled by the evil in the world. He looked around and saw people oppressed. He was aware of calloused leaders whose only concern was for themselves. He was troubled by the lack of concern for widows and children and asked, "God, if You created ears for people to hear, and eyes for people to see, why don't You hear the cries and see the suffering of those whom You created?" Do something, God!

So, has God, like us, become insensitive to the needs of people and the condition of the world? Does He not care about what is happening to His creation? Indeed He does.

Eventually "He will repay them and destroy them for their wickedness" for harming His creation, says the Psalmist. But until He does, we are responsible to bring His hope and healing to the suffering.

Prayer: Please, Lord, open our hearts and eyes to see those who are suffering and reach out to them in love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 94:3 & 23 Lord, how long will the wicked, How long will the wicked triumph? 23 He has brought on them their own iniquity, And shall cut them off in their own wickedness; The Lord our God shall cut them off.

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2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- 11/18/2017-3/31/2018 Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/28/2018 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 3/24/2018 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 4/13/2018 Elementary School Carnival, 5 p.m.
- 5/5/2018 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/28/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- 6/14/2018 Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 6/15/2018 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/16/2018 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2018 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/22/2018 Summer Fest (4th Sunday in July)
- 9/8/2018 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/6/2018 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/12/2018 Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2018 Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/10/2018 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

- Best Ball Golf Tourney
- SDSU Golf Tourney
- Sunflower Golf Tourney
- Santa Claus Day
- Fireman's Stag
- Tour of Homes
- Crazy Dayz/Open Houses
- School Events

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News from the Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL

Sanborn Central 67, Rutland 55
Sioux Falls Lincoln 80, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 63
Region 1A First Round
Aberdeen Roncalli 64, Webster 24
Milbank 57, Redfield/Doland 46
Tiospa Zina Tribal 62, Groton Area 54
Region 2A First Round
Flandreau 75, Flandreau Indian 57
Hamlin 69, Deuel 62
Region 3A First Round
Tri-Valley 60, Garretson 32
West Central 67, Baltic 62
Region 4A First Round
Dakota Valley 79, Canton 69
Elk Point-Jefferson 60, Lennox 58
Vermillion 60, Beresford 43
Region 5A First Round
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 55, McCook Central/Montrose 41
Parker 72, Wagner 32
Platte-Geddes 49, Parkston 39
Region 6A First Round
Crow Creek 88, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 43
McLaughlin 66, Mobridge-Pollock 57
Stanley County 69, Chamberlain 68
Region 7A First Round
Little Wound 71, Winner 55
Red Cloud 93, St. Francis Indian 48
Todd County 92, Bennett County 69
Region 8A First Round
Belle Fourche 79, Hill City 77
Rapid City Christian 69, Custer 57
St. Thomas More 76, Lead-Deadwood 29
Region 1B Quarterfinal
Britton-Hecla 62, Aberdeen Christian 60, OT
Clark/Willow Lake 72, Wilmot 25
Langford 60, Northwestern 47
Warner 0, Waverly-South Shore 0
Region 2B Quarterfinal
Leola/Frederick 46, Ipswich 41
Potter County 66, Faulkton 49
Sully Buttes 72, Eureka/Bowdle 27
Region 3B Quarterfinal
Castlewood 71, Iroquois 45

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DeSmet 58, Deubrook 43
Wolsey-Wessington 54, James Valley Christian 48
Region 4B Quarterfinal
Chester 54, Hanson 44
Colman-Egan 61, Elkton-Lake Benton 54
Ethan 68, Dell Rapids St. Mary 60
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 67, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 55
Region 5B Quarterfinal
Bridgewater-Emery 78, Gayville-Volin 44
Canistota 69, Freeman Academy/Marion 45
Irene-Wakonda 76, Freeman 41
Viborg-Hurley 59, Menno 41
Region 6B Quarterfinal
Colome 56, Scotland 53
Corsica/Stickney 76, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 56
Gregory 58, Avon 47
Kimball/White Lake 58, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 42
Region 7B Quarterfinal
Jones County 70, Kadoka Area 65
Lower Brule 71, Wall 39
Lyman 67, Oelrichs 56
White River 70, Philip 30
Region 8B Quarterfinal
Faith 73, Lemmon 37
Harding County 62, Newell 42
Takini 62, Bison 35
Timber Lake 62, Dupree 34

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

10-17-21-38-43, Mega Ball: 23, Megaplier: 3

(ten, seventeen, twenty-one, thirty-eight, forty-three; Mega Ball: twenty-three; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$222 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$293 million

Lawmaker: Capitol is a workplace and people should feel safe

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota lawmaker who feared for her safety in a recent confrontation with a colleague at the Capitol said Tuesday that she hopes Republican legislative leadership will take a “more serious look” at such allegations in the future.

GOP Rep. Lynne DiSanto said the Capitol is her workplace, and everybody should be able to come to work there and feel safe. State representatives started an investigation into Republican Rep. David Johnson’s conduct toward DiSanto but voted Monday to end it with her support.

"I would hope that as a caucus and that Republican leadership here in Pierre will, moving forward, take a more serious look at these type of allegations when they occur," said DiSanto, who has accepted an apology from Johnson.

The confrontation occurred last week on the House floor. The House speaker on Tuesday released security footage of the altercation.

The video that didn't have audio shows a heated one-minute verbal exchange between DiSanto and Johnson. Johnson approaches DiSanto several times during the confrontation, at times stepping away, before House Majority Leader Lee Qualm intervenes.

Johnson told the Argus Leader newspaper that he was glad the footage was shared so it could clear up some comments that were "blown out of proportion."

GOP Rep. Elizabeth May, who witnessed the incident, said the video is missing Johnson's profanity and "rage." DiSanto described his behavior as aggressive and frightening.

Speaker Mark Mickelson said in a statement that he shared the short clip to be as "transparent as possible." A Public Safety Department spokesman previously cited a public records law exemption to deny reporters the footage.

This story has been corrected to show that it was DiSanto who described Johnson's behavior as aggressive and frightening, not May.

Bill to end university collective bargaining fails in Senate

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A bill that would have ended collective bargaining at South Dakota's public universities has failed in the state Senate.

The chamber voted 18-16 Tuesday against the plan. It narrowly passed through the House and had Gov. Dennis Daugaard's support.

House Speaker Mark Mickelson, the bill's sponsor, has said it would save money and make the institutions more efficient.

But critics argued it would have made it harder for universities to recruit and keep faculty.

Alan Aldrich is state president of the Council of Higher Education, the faculty labor union. He says there's a "clear message" that if faculty want the rights to continue, they must be more active with union membership and participation.

Union contracts cover more than 1,300 staff members at the state's six public universities and at schools for the blind and deaf.

Lawmakers ask voters to make constitution harder to change

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota voters will decide in November if the state constitution should be harder to change.

The House of Representatives voted 55-9 Tuesday to send the constitutional amendment to the fall ballot. It asks voters to increase the majority vote threshold required for a constitutional change to 55 percent of the votes cast on the amendment.

Supporters say it's designed to add an additional safeguard for the state constitution. Republican Sen. Jim Bolin, its sponsor, told a Senate panel last month that it's a "legitimate and desirable method of protecting our fundamental political document."

Colorado, Florida and New Hampshire have thresholds ranging from 55 percent to two-thirds support required for voters to approve constitutional changes.

Democrats have opposed the push in South Dakota. Critics contend the amendment could hamper direct democracy in the state, which in 1898 became the first in the nation to adopt citizen initiatives.

Darrell Solberg, a volunteer with a coalition opposing restrictions on the ballot question process, said

lawmakers seem to be in a "power struggle to make it more difficult for the citizens to have input in the political process."

"I feel if the voters honestly understand that it is going to curtail some of their power and freedom, they will be against it," said Solberg, who is also co-chair of Represent South Dakota, a group attempting to pass a citizens' amendment that would install protections for ballot questions in the constitution.

Republicans have discussed changes to the ballot question system after the 2016 election season brought 10 questions and millions of dollars from out-of-state groups. A task force on the initiative process endorsed the amendment after Bolin proposed a similar measure during the 2017 legislative session that was set aside in committee.

The Legislature this year has proposed other measures that would make it more difficult for voters to pass citizens' initiatives and constitutional changes. A bill to restrict the flow of money from outside South Dakota into the state's ballot question campaigns is scheduled to be debated in a Senate committee on Wednesday.

Some have been shelved, including measures that would have ended voters' ability to bypass the Legislature to amend the state constitution and required ballot measure campaigns to collect signatures from a majority of state Senate districts when gathering names to qualify for the ballot.

Meanwhile, supporters of the new constitutional protections for ballot measures are competing against the lawmakers who would curtail them.

Represent South Dakota's amendment would prevent the Legislature from altering or rejecting laws approved by voters. The group's plan would also prevent lawmakers from changing the ballot question process without a public vote. It's slated to appear on the November ballot alongside the Legislature's proposal.

South Dakota Mines students conduct Rapid City energy audit

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — An energy audit by South Dakota School of Mines & Technology students has found Rapid City could save thousands of dollars by installing energy-efficient lighting in its administration center.

The four students studied energy usage at the City/School Administration Center in Rapid City over five months through a partnership with the city's sustainability committee and the school's community service program. They discovered that replacing old lighting technology could save the city almost \$10,000 annually.

Student Jamie Caffee told the Rapid City Journal that 2,000 light fixtures could be switched from incandescent and fluorescent-style lighting to LED technology. The lighting changes alone are estimated to save about \$9,400 annually and nearly \$200,000 based on the projected 16-year lifespan of LED lighting. The move could also result in a 75-ton reduction of yearly carbon dioxide emissions.

Caffee said the team also found an unnecessary amount of office equipment and inefficient heating and cooling systems, which are driving up energy usage.

"There is a heck of a lot of office equipment in this building, much more than an office building should have," he said.

Caffee said the building's remodeling over the years has created inefficiency in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

The students presented their findings at a city council meeting last week. They recommended that the upcoming move of the Rapid City Area Schools offices to another building could be a good time to implement the lighting fixes.

Ward 2 Alderman Ritchie Nordstrom said changes likely won't happen this first year.

"But I believe it deserves more scrutiny," he said. "I look forward to hearing more about this."

Sioux Falls police investigating nursing home death

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police say they're investigating a suspicious death reported last week at a Sioux Falls nursing home.

The Argus Leader says the incident happened on Thursday. Police Lt. Mike Colwill says a staff member at Southridge Healthcare heard what sounded like a body hitting the floor in the facility's locked dementia unit.

Colwill says the staff member found a 78-year-old man standing over an 83-year-old woman, who had a visible head injury. The woman was transported to a local hospital, where she was diagnosed with a skull fracture and brain injury.

The woman died in a hospice unit on Sunday. Autopsy results are expected within a month.

Colwill said the man had a history of assaulting staff and other residents, and he may face charges.

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

Senate panel rejects stricter law on texting while driving

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota Senate panel has rejected a bill that would have allowed authorities to pull over drivers for texting.

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 5-2 Tuesday to reject the bill, which would have made texting while driving a primary offense. Under current law, authorities must pull people over for an unrelated violation before they can be cited for texting.

House Democratic leader Spencer Hawley, the sponsor, says there's a "crisis" occurring with texting on South Dakota's roads.

Republican Sen. Stace Nelson, who opposed the bill, argued it would allow police officers to pull people over if they see something in a person's hand.

A violation of the law is a petty offense with a \$100 fine.

Ambulance calls spike in Mitchell last month

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — First responders in Mitchell were summoned to more than 200 requests for emergency services in January, an unprecedented number for one month.

Assistant Fire Chief Paul Morris says ambulance staff typically respond to about 150 calls each month. Morris says the call spike has not been analyzed to attribute it to anything specifically.

Morris tells The Daily Republic if the upward trend continues, the department would likely be over budget. The Mitchell Fire Department responded to approximately 585 calls in 2017, similar to the number of calls over the past two years.

Information from: The Daily Republic, <http://www.mitchellrepublic.com>

Rapid City Council votes to replace arena

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Council, voting after a marathon session, has approved a measure to replace the Don Barrett Arena with a new facility.

The vote late Monday night for a new arena was 9-1. The estimated cost of replacement is \$130 million.

KOTA-TV reports Mayor Steve Allender had argued a new arena, instead of a remodel, would bring better entertainment acts to the city and help boost the local economy.

Opponents of building a new facility can gather petition signatures for a public vote on the issue.

Information from: KOTA-TV, <http://www.kotatv.com>

Florida students return to 'picture of education in fear'

By KELLI KENNEDY, TERRY SPENCER and ROBERT RAY, Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — About 50 uniformed officers marched into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School early Wednesday, just one aspect of the heavy security as classes resumed for the first time since 17 students and teachers were killed by a troubled teenager with an AR-15, thrusting them into the center of the nation's gun debate.

The heavily armed police presence, designed to make the community feel secure, is also disturbing in itself, some students said.

"This is a picture of education in fear in this country. The NRA wants more people just like this, with that exact firearm to scare more people and sell more guns," said David Hogg, who has become a leading voice in the students' movement to control assault weapons. "I know one of those bullets could be shredding through me if I was misidentified as a school shooter," Hogg added.

Grief counselors are on campus as well "to provide a lot of love, a lot of understanding" and help students "ease back" into their school routines, Broward Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie said. Officers with therapy dogs also stood outside.

Wednesday's class schedule started with 4th period, so that students and teachers could return to the people they were with during the shooting. The freshman building where the massacre took place remains cordoned off.

Casey Sherman, a 17-year-old junior, thinks the schedule was a good idea so kids can "get it over with," and not worry about it all day. Up until 11:30 p.m. working on preparations for the March 14 national school walkout against gun violence, she said she's not afraid to be returning, "just nervous."

"We did go through a tragedy," said Sherman, who walked in holding hands with her boyfriend. "It was terrible but if you let it stop you ... it's not how you go down, it's how you get back up."

A long line of cars circled the school and dozens of television trucks and vehicles were camped out nearby as students, parents and staff were ushered through a security cordon, past a "Welcome Eagles" banner and a walkway lined with flowers, photographs and other memorials. Some were returning despite severe gun wounds, but even those who weren't hit by bullets spoke of emotional trauma.

Alexis Grogan, a 15-year-old sophomore, planned to wear a Stoneman Douglas color — maroon — on the first day back to class Wednesday, plus sneakers that say "MSD Strong, be positive, be passionate, be proud to be an eagle" and "2/14/18" in honor of those who died.

She feels nervous, like it might be too soon to go on as usual without slain friends like Luke Hoyer, who sat two seats behind her in Spanish. Still, the support from her fellow students, and their fight to strengthen gun control laws have buoyed her spirits.

"I am so proud of how the kids at my school have been fighting because we all want change to happen and, as we see the progression, it really shows us that people do care and they do hear what we have to say," Grogan said in a text message.

The victims' relatives kept up the pressure in Florida's capital Tuesday, with emotional testimony during a legislative hearing on a bill to raise the age limit to buy long guns from 18 to 21, and create a program allowing teachers to carry concealed weapons in their classrooms, if their school district allows it, they get law-enforcement training and are deputized by the local sheriff's office.

The Broward superintendent has spoken out firmly against the idea of arming teachers. Hogg also thinks the idea is misguided.

The House Appropriations Committee's 23-6 vote in favor of the bill Tuesday followed more than four hours of emotional discussion with the parents of some of the 17 killed, and nearly two weeks of activism by students on social media and in televised debates.

Gov. Rick Scott, who met with officials in Miami-Dade County on Tuesday, said at a news conference that he hopes a gun and school-safety bill is passed before Florida's annual legislative session ends on March 9. He had proposed measures that overlap with the Legislature's plan but did not include arming teachers. However, he declined to say Tuesday whether he would veto the sweeping package if it included

that provision.

The Senate's version of the school-safety bill was approved by a second committee on a 13-7 vote Tuesday evening. Sen. Bill Galvano, who is designated to become the next Senate president and is ushering through the bill, said the earliest it will be considered by the full Senate is Friday.

Marion Hammer, a lobbyist for the National Rifle Association and Unified Sportsmen of Florida, told the House Appropriations Committee that she supports tightening school security and keeping guns out of the hands of the mentally ill, but not the House bill's gun-ownership restrictions, which she later said would not have stopped the Parkland shooting.

"Part of what we need to do is make people understand that guns are not the problem," she said after the hearing. "So passing more laws dealing with guns as a solution to a problem that exists within the enforcement of laws is just kind of silly."

Max Schachter, father of 14-year-old victim Alex Schachter, said the bill the House committee eventually approved doesn't go far enough — but could have saved his son.

"If we would have had these measures in place, I would not have had to bury my son next to his mother a week and a half ago. ... I'm pleading for your help. I'm willing to compromise. Are you?" he asked.

Associated Press writers Brendan Farrington in Tallahassee and Curt Anderson in Miami contributed to this report.

Follow the AP's complete coverage of the Florida school shooting here: <https://apnews.com/tag/Floridaschoolshooting>

Hicks acknowledges 'white lies' for Trump, but not on Russia

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House communications director Hope Hicks acknowledged to a House intelligence panel that she has occasionally told "white lies" for President Donald Trump but has not lied about anything relevant to the Russia investigation, according to those present for Hicks' closed-door testimony.

Hicks was interviewed for nine hours Tuesday by the panel investigating Russia interference in the 2016 election and contact between Trump's campaign and Russia. One of Trump's closest aides, Hicks was his spokeswoman during the 2016 presidential campaign and is now White House communications director.

The top Democrat on the intelligence panel, California Rep. Adam Schiff, said after the meeting was over that Hicks answered questions about her role in Trump's campaign and answered some questions about the transition period between the election and the inauguration. But she would not answer any questions about events since Trump took the oath of office, similar to some other White House officials who have spoken to the committee. Schiff said Hicks did not assert any type of executive privilege, but just said she had been advised not to answer.

Hicks did answer a question about whether she had ever lied for her boss, saying she had told "white lies" for Trump on occasion, according to a person familiar with the testimony. The person, who declined to be named because the committee's interviews are not public, said Hicks told the panel she had not lied about anything substantive.

Republican Rep. Tom Rooney of Florida, a member of the intelligence panel who was in the interview, said Hicks' answer was completely unrelated to the Russia investigation.

"When specifically asked whether or not she was instructed to lie by the president, or the candidate, with regard to Russia, the investigation or our investigation, the answer to that question was no," Rooney said. "And that's our jurisdiction. Not whether or not he asked her to cancel a meeting for him, or something like that."

While the investigation is focused on Russian interference during the campaign, House investigators also had questions about her time in the White House, including her role in drafting a statement responding to news reports about a 2016 meeting between Trump campaign officials and Russians. That statement

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has been of particular interest to special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating matters related to the Russian meddling and potential obstruction of an ongoing federal inquiry.

The White House has said the president was involved in drafting the statement after news of the meeting broke last summer. The statement said the meeting primarily concerned a Russian adoption program, though emails released later showed that Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., enthusiastically agreed to the sit-down with a Russian lawyer and others after he was promised dirt on Trump's presidential rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton. Hicks was with the president on Air Force One while they were writing the initial statement.

"All of our questions about what went into that statement went unanswered," Schiff said.

As the interview wore on, Hicks and her lawyer relented on one area of questioning — the transition period between the election and the inauguration. She initially refused to answer all those questions, but Schiff said it became clear to the House lawmakers that she had answered questions about that time period in a separate interview with the Senate intelligence panel. That committee is also investigating the meddling and spoke to Hicks several months ago.

After House lawmakers argued that she should treat the two committees equally, Hicks and her lawyer conferred with the White House, Schiff said. She then began to answer some questions related to the transition. Schiff said Democrats had asked for a subpoena after she refused to answer questions, but Republicans had declined to issue one.

That marks a difference from the GOP response to former White House strategist Steve Bannon, who also refused to answer questions, including about the transition. Republicans subpoenaed him during his interview in January when he declined to answer, but Bannon has yet to fully cooperate, despite a return visit to the panel two weeks ago. The House is now considering whether to hold Bannon in contempt.

Rooney, who is one of the Republicans leading the Russia probe, said he didn't think Hicks should be subpoenaed, saying she was "very forthright and open to the questions that we've had."

Hicks arrived shortly after 10 a.m. through a rear entrance to the committee's interview space and did not answer shouted questions from reporters. In the hours before Hicks' arrival, Trump tweeted several times, quoting cable news commentators who said they hadn't seen evidence of collusion between Trump and Russia. One tweet encouraged investigations of Clinton. And a closing tweet simply said, "WITCH HUNT!"

Asked about Hicks' refusal to answer some questions, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that "we are cooperating because as the president has said repeatedly there is no collusion, and we're going to continue to cooperate, and hopefully they'll wrap this up soon."

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Graham, wary of politics in life, gets Capitol salute

By LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He felt stung by the politics that helped define his life — and resolved to keep a distance. But in death, the Rev. Billy Graham is getting a rare tribute from the nation's top political leaders under Capitol Rotunda.

President Donald Trump, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell are expected Wednesday to remember "America's pastor," who died a week earlier at age 99. Some 30 family members will accompany Graham's casket to Washington, where he befriended presidents of both parties and counseled others over seven decades.

Graham is lying in honor beneath the iconic dome Wednesday and Thursday, before a funeral Friday near his home in Charlotte, North Carolina. "If there is any American whose life and life's work deserves to be honored by laying in honor in the U.S. Capitol, it's Billy Graham," Ryan said.

Though he met every president since Harry Truman and counseled most, Graham grew wary of politics after Watergate. He was closest to Richard Nixon but later said he felt used by him.

Nonetheless, Graham ministered to other presidents until his health began to fail about 10 years ago.

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Former President Bill Clinton recalled seeing one of Graham's crusades as a child, a profound experience that became more amazing over his life. Graham counseled him as Arkansas governor, and later as president in the White House itself.

"In that little room, he was the same person I saw when I was 11 on that football field," Clinton said Tuesday after viewing the casket at Graham's home.

Former President George W. Bush and his wife, Laura, also visited Graham's home on Tuesday.

In Washington, Ryan said there had been no doubt that Graham would receive the honor of a public viewing in the Rotunda. He told reporters that almost immediately upon hearing of Graham's death he, Trump, McConnell and Rep. Patrick McHenry, who represents the Graham family's district, agreed it would happen.

Graham shares the honor with 11 presidents and other distinguished Americans, starting with Sen. Henry Clay of Kentucky in 1852 and, most recently, Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii in 2012, according to the House and the Architect of the Capitol.

Graham is only the fourth private person to lie in honor since 1998. The others are two U.S. Capitol Police officers who died in the line of duty in 1998 and civil rights hero Rosa Parks in 2005.

Trump met Graham at the pastor's 95th birthday party in 2013, but is closer to Franklin Graham Jr.

Follow Kellman at <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

White House downgrades Kushner's security clearance

By **ZEKE MILLER, JONATHAN LEMIRE and DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The security clearance of White House senior adviser and presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner has been downgraded, significantly reducing his access to classified information, according to two people informed of the decision.

Kushner had been operating with an interim clearance at the "top secret/sensitive compartmented information" level for more than a year. Now he is authorized to access information only at the lower "secret" level, according to a White House official and a person familiar with the decision, both of whom spoke on condition of anonymity. Neither source was authorized to discuss the decision publicly.

Tuesday's news set off rampant speculation among Trump allies that Kushner's days in the White House might be numbered. On the same day, the departure of a third Kushner ally in the West Wing in as many months was announced. And the selection of a Kushner ally to serve as Trump's 2020 campaign manager appeared to suggest the campaign could provide Kushner with a convenient place to land after his White House duties end.

Kushner lost his access to the nation's deepest secrets after chief of staff John Kelly ordered that White House officials with interim clearances pending since before June 1, 2017, be cut off if they hadn't received permanent clearances by last Friday. A White House official confirmed to The Associated Press that Kelly's order has been implemented.

President Donald Trump could have reversed Kelly's decision and unilaterally offered Kushner a clearance, but deferred to Kelly. Kushner is one of dozens of White House aides who have been working without permanent security clearances for the better part of a year.

His attorney told the AP that Kushner's ability to do his job won't be affected by any change to his clearance.

"Those involved in the process again have confirmed that there are dozens of people at Mr. Kushner's level whose process is delayed, that it is not uncommon for these clearance reviews to take this long in a new administration, and that the current backlogs are now being addressed," said Peter Mirijanian, a Kushner spokesman.

Kushner's portfolio once included the U.S. relationships with China and Japan and a host of domestic priorities, including infrastructure, trade and economic development. But his freewheeling reach in the

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foreign policy space — which was viewed as undermining Secretary of State Rex Tillerson — already had been curtailed somewhat under Kelly.

Still, Kushner is reportedly said to have reviewed the highly secret presidential daily brief and has been in the room for some of Trump's most consequential domestic and foreign policy decisions.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters Tuesday that she would not comment on individual security clearances but called Kushner "a valued member of the team, and he will continue to do the important work that he's been doing since he started in the administration."

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that officials in at least four countries had privately discussed ways they could manipulate Kushner by taking advantage of his complex business arrangements, financial difficulties and lack of foreign policy experience.

The nations included the United Arab Emirates, China, Israel and Mexico, the Post reported, citing current and former U.S. officials familiar with intelligence reports on the matter. The newspaper said it was unclear if any of those countries had acted on the discussions, but said Kushner's contacts with foreign government officials had raised concerns within the White House and were among the reasons Kushner had not yet been able to obtain a permanent security clearance.

Intelligence officials expressed concern that Kushner's business dealings were a topic of discussion in conversations he was having with foreign officials about foreign policy issues of interest to the U.S. government, a former intelligence official said.

The official, who spoke only on condition of anonymity to discuss Kushner's security clearance review, said there was a difference of opinion among intelligence officials about the significance.

Some believed Kushner knew his business dealings would likely come up in the conversations and was too naive or inexperienced to know how to exit the topic in light of his position as Trump's adviser, the official said. Others thought Kushner knew the topic would likely surface and used the opportunity while talking to the foreign officials to engage in conversations about his business interests.

Either way, intelligence officials were concerned because there were instances where the discussions either crossed the line or straddled the fence of what would be appropriate given his White House position, the official said.

The official said Kushner's conversations themselves were not surveilled, but details about what was discussed in meetings with the president's son-in-law came from surveillance conducted on certain foreign individuals abroad. According to the official, the information was known from the beginning of the FBI's background investigation work, which started after Kushner joined the White House. In some cases, the intelligence revealed discrepancies in the information Kushner disclosed on his security clearance application about foreign contacts, the official said.

Kushner's contacts with foreign officials also have been a part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, a former U.S. official told the AP. Mueller's team, in its interviews for the ongoing Russia probe, has asked people about the protocols Kushner used when he set up conversations with foreign leaders.

The Kushner Cos., for example, had attempted to raise money for its struggling 666 Fifth Avenue skyscraper in New York from a large Chinese insurer with ties to the ruling Communist Party. Those talks ended after lawmakers and government ethics experts expressed worry that China could be using a deal to curry favor with the White House.

Kushner stepped down as CEO of his family's real estate company to join his father-in-law's administration.

With a top-secret clearance, Kushner would have had access to information about covert operations and intelligence sources and methods. With a secret clearance, he would still have access to intelligence assessments, but not necessarily the information behind why the U.S. knows what is being shared with him.

The downgrade would mean that anyone giving top-secret material to Kushner could be accused of mishandling classified material, according to David Priess, who wrote a history of the President's Daily Brief, the highest-level intelligence document produced in the United States. Still, a president has the ultimate authority to classify or declassify information, so he could show the brief — covering hot spots around the globe, U.S. covert operations and intelligence about world leaders— "to whomever he damn well pleases," Priess tweeted.

The White House's handling of security clearances has come under intense scrutiny in the wake of revelations that former White House staff secretary Rob Porter had worked for more than a year with only interim clearance. Porter, whose job gave him constant access to the most sensitive of documents, had been accused of domestic abuse by his two ex-wives. The White House has repeatedly changed its timeline about who knew what and when about the allegations.

Kushner has been forced to repeatedly correct omissions in his "SF-86," the government-wide form used to apply for clearances, as well as his financial disclosure forms, which experts said could delay or even nix his chances of earning a clearance through the normal process.

—
Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writers Ken Thomas, Catherine Lucey and Jill Colvin in Washington contributed to this report.

Plenty of opinions, but few solutions to fix college hoops

By RALPH D. RUSSO, AP College Sports Writer

The cracked facade of NCAA hoops appears to be crumbling and while LeBron James, John Calipari and many agree that college basketball should be overhauled, there's no consensus on how to repair the system.

A federal investigation has alleged hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and kickbacks being funneled to influence recruits, an FBI probe that many fans believe reveals just a tiny slice of potential corruption in college sports.

In September, the Justice Department arrested 10 people, including four assistant coaches from Arizona, Southern California, Auburn and Oklahoma State. Payments of up to \$150,000, supplied by Adidas, were promised to at least three top high school recruits to attend two schools sponsored by the shoe company, according to federal prosecutors.

A report last week by Yahoo! Sports revealed documents showing dozens of prominent players, coaches and schools could be involved in — while likely not criminal behavior — breaking NCAA rules. All this looms over college basketball as March begins, the month when championship tournaments and brackets take center stage across America. The cash cow of college sports that brings in hundreds of millions of dollars to the NCAA annually.

The NCAA has already announced the formation of the commission on college basketball, headed by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to recommend changes.

"I don't know if there's any fixing the NCAA. I don't think there is," said James, who never played in college, jumping from high school to the NBA at a time when that had not yet been prohibited by the league.

"The NCAA is corrupt — we know that," the Cleveland Cavaliers superstar said.

Fingers point in several directions about the reasons for the problems, including the NCAA itself, the age limit to enter the NBA, paying college athletes. Here is a more in depth look at some of them:

THE NCAA IS THE SCHOOLS

CURRENTLY: The most common misconception about college sports' governing body is that it is an independent organization that governs the schools. The NCAA is a voluntary association of the schools and that membership ultimately determines the rules — like what payments to an athlete or his family members are allowable. NCAA President Mark Emmert is the face and voice of the association, but — unlike a commissioner of a professional league — he has very limited power beyond being a potential catalyst for change. Or protector of the status quo.

THE TALK: There are 351 schools that play Division I basketball from powerhouse Kentucky to tiny St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York. Priorities range far and wide and what an Atlantic Coast Conference school sees as a potential fix to the system, an Atlantic Sun school could see as a threat to what little competitive balance exists in D-I. The result is: Many of the potential remedies floated for corruption in college sports don't actually involve NCAA changes.

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ONE-AND-DONE

CURRENTLY: The NBA instituted a rule 12 years ago that prohibited players from entering the draft before they were at least 19 and a year removed from high school. The NCAA has no control over this rule. The NFL rule — which requires players be three years removed from high school — is also problematic, but high school aged football players are not generally as close as basketball players to being pro-ready.

THE TALK: There is much buzz about change. One option would be to let pro-ready high school seniors enter the NBA draft and make players who chose to attend college stay at least two years. The rule only impacts the top players. Since 2006, 66 one-and-done players have been NBA draft lottery picks — and that's after a record 11 in last year's draft.

And while age is a hot-button issue, several players who played two or more college seasons were listed in probe documents as potentially accepting impermissible payments, according to Yahoo.

When Pistons coach Stan Van Gundy slammed the NCAA recently as "maybe the worst organization in sports," he pivoted to point blame at the league where he works, even suggesting the one-and-done rule was racist in how it limits black athletes.

"I don't get it. You can get out of high school, you can turn 18, let's say, and go to work anywhere else," Van Gundy said.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said during the recent All-Star break his league is "conflicted" about one-and-done. The players' union and teams both benefit from players using a year of college to develop skills, mature and grow name recognition before they enter the NBA and start pressuring veteran players.

FARM SYSTEMS

CURRENTLY: The NBA and NFL essentially set up college sports to be a de facto farm system for professional teams and the people who defend college sports want no part of that.

THE TALK: James said the NBA should explore expanding its developmental G League to make it more like major league baseball's farm systems. He also wondered why the United States does not have an athlete development model more like what exists in Europe, where elite soccer players, for example, can get professional development outside of higher education.

"We have to figure out a way that we can shore up our farm league and if kids feel like they don't want to be a part of that NCAA program, then we have something here for them to be able to jump back on and not have to worry about going overseas," said James, who said he wants to meet with Silver to discuss his ideas.

PAYING ALL COLLEGE PLAYERS

CURRENTLY: Nixing the one-and-done rule would still leave some college players with value to agents, coaches and shoe companies. And the NCAA has no means to compensate players at full value. But facing pressure from antitrust lawsuits, NCAA schools changed rules in 2015 to allow athletic scholarships to include a cost-of-attendance stipend. Those payments range from about \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year.

THE TALK: Paying athletes akin to a salary is nonstarter for those in college sports, problematic because of tax issues and federal Title IX requirements. More importantly, schools could never pay an elite athlete enough to eliminate the potential for corruption.

"Whatever you pay them, there's somebody who can pay them more, the guys that they think will be pro prospects, because when they leave, they become a very hot commodity," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said.

COMPENSATION FOR THE BEST

CURRENTLY: The NCAA not only doesn't allow schools to pay players beyond the value of a scholarship, but also prohibits others from paying athletes for being athletes. This could be where a realistic solution lies. A federal judge ruled in 2014 the NCAA used the names, images and likenesses for athletes for years without proper compensation for things such as video games and merchandise.

THE TALK: "There may be something similar to the Olympic model," Golden State Warriors coach Steve

Kerr said. "It used to be the Olympians couldn't make a dime. Now you see Michael Phelps or Lindsay Vonn in commercials. They're still in the Olympics. Still doing great. People loved the Olympics. So, there's a way."

AGENTS

CURRENTLY: The NCAA's five wealthiest conferences — the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and Southeastern Conference — recently passed legislation allowing college hockey players to be represented by an agent before entering school. Similar allowances were already available to baseball players. In both those sports, major professional leagues draft high schoolers.

THE TALK: If the NCAA allowed athletes to have financial agreements and business dealings with agents and companies that wanted to capitalize on their fame and long-term earning potential, the current scandal might not be a scandal at all.

Calipari, whose Kentucky program has embraced and thrived with a foundation of NBA-bound players, said the NCAA needs to consider some way to provide advisers to basketball players. And as for providing money, the coach suggested the NBA Players' Association as a possible solution.

"Let their family get a loan from the Players Association," Calipari said. "What's the problem? For travel to the games in the NCAA Tournament and everything."

It would require a seismic shift in how the NCAA has long defined amateurism.

What used to be cheating would no longer be cheating.

AP sports writers Tom Withers in Cleveland, Janie McCauley in Oakland, California, Steve Megargee in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Associated Press freelance writer Jodie Valade in Charlotte, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <http://collegebasketball.ap.org> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Supreme Court hearing Minnesota polling place apparel case

By JESSICA GRESKO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Minnesota law that bars residents from wearing political clothing at the polls — from Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" hats to Democratic Party T-shirts and union buttons — is being debated at the Supreme Court.

Opponents say the law is overly broad. But Minnesota has defended it as a reasonable restriction that keeps order at polling places and prevents voter intimidation.

Other states have similar laws, so the case being argued before the justices Wednesday has the potential to have an impact beyond Minnesota.

The sides disagree about which states have laws like Minnesota's, which says a "political badge, political button or other political insignia may not be worn at or about the polling place on primary or election day." But both sides identify about 10 states with similar laws.

Minnesota elections officials have interpreted the state's law to mean voters can't wear anything to the polls with the name of a candidate or political party or supporting or opposing an issue on the ballot. They have said it also means voters can't wear clothing promoting a group with recognizable political views, such as the tea party, AFL-CIO or MoveOn.org. Other states have narrower laws banning "campaign" apparel, clothing that supports a specific candidate or ballot issue.

Attorney Daniel Rogan, who is arguing the case for Minnesota, says he doesn't know of anyone ever issued a fine allowed under the Minnesota law.

The case is Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Mansky, 16-1435.

Follow Jessica Gresko on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jessicagresko>

Trump campaign chief lends name to penny stock tied to felon

By JEFF HORWITZ, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The political strategist and online guru who was named President Donald Trump's 2020 campaign manager Tuesday has a close financial relationship with a penny-stock firm with a questionable history that includes longstanding ties to a convicted fraudster, according to an Associated Press investigation.

Brad Parscale, who played a key role in Trump's 2016 election victory, signed a \$10 million deal in August to sell his digital marketing company to CloudCommerce Inc. As part of the deal, Parscale currently serves as a member of California-based company's management team.

The company touts itself as "a global provider of cloud-driven e-commerce and mobile commerce solutions." But records reviewed by the AP raise questions about its current financial picture and its rocky past.

Cloud Commerce's operations have not turned a profit in nearly a decade, the records indicate. The company's most recent quarterly earnings showed it has spent more than \$19 million in investor money since its creation nearly two decades ago and has only \$107,000 in cash on hand.

And in 2006, a top executive at the company, which was operating under a different name at the time, was caught in an FBI bribery sting and later pleaded guilty to securities fraud. The company said the former executive no longer has any connection to the company, but documents reviewed by the AP indicate he has remained involved in CloudCommerce's major corporate decisions in recent years.

Parscale did not answer written questions from the AP about what he knew regarding CloudCommerce and its history when he sold his firm to the company and joined its board of directors.

A press release announcing Parscale's hiring as Trump's new campaign manager included Eric Trump calling him "an amazing talent" who has the Trump family's "complete trust."

The owner of an obscure web development firm before the 2016 presidential race, Parscale parlayed commercial website work for Trump family businesses into a role as the public face of Trump's highly successful digital campaign. He is considered an ally of Jared Kushner and has taken credit both for selling Trump on digital advertising and for the campaign's vital last-minute pivot to Michigan and Wisconsin.

"Brad was essential in bringing a disciplined technology and data-driven approach to how the 2016 campaign was run," Kushner, Trump's adviser and son-in-law, said in the campaign press release.

As part of the deal with CloudCommerce, the company acquired Parscale's web development company, including roughly 60 employees, many of his past clients and a web-hosting business that services some Trump family business websites.

CloudCommerce did not acquire Parscale's digital advertising business, however. That work has been transferred to another Parscale company based in Florida, which handles as much as \$1 million a month in digital advertising for the Trump campaign alone.

Parscale is on the payroll of five campaign and political advocacy organizations tied to Trump, lucrative work that made him central to Trump's campaign even before his appointment as campaign manager.

In addition, Parscale has hired Eric Trump's wife, Lara, a move that reflects his close relationship to the family and shields how much she is being paid from public disclosure because she works for a private company. According to the terms of her hiring last March, she was Giles-Parscale's liaison to the campaign, working out of Trump Tower.

Neither she nor Parscale responded to emailed questions about her current compensation.

When Parscale's CloudCommerce deal was originally announced last August, the price of CloudCommerce's shares surged.

"Big week for the parent company of my commercial business," Parscale tweeted, noting that its stock was up 500 percent. CloudCommerce is a penny stock, meaning its shares do not trade on a major stock exchange and can be bought for just pennies a share. Such stock often is thinly traded and prone to fluctuate due to speculation.

"I've got Fortune 500 companies calling," CloudCommerce chief executive Andrew Van Noy said in an interview before the AP raised questions about the company's history. Van Noy said the company hopes to do more work for the Trump Organization, though "any conversation with the family happens at the

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Brad level. I work with him daily.”

CloudCommerce’s financial filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission give varying descriptions of Van Noy’s business career before he joined the company in the spring of 2011. They said he ran a “boutique real estate private equity firm” through the end of 2008 and oversaw more than \$300 million of transactions during a roughly six-month stint at Morgan Stanley at the beginning of 2010.

But in a bankruptcy filing Van Noy made in Utah in August 2010, Van Noy said he was unemployed — and had earned less than \$9,000 in each of the last three years. Along with six-figure debts from unpaid credit cards and repossessed cars, he also faced two real-estate fraud lawsuits. A judge ruled against him in one case and Van Noy agreed to settle the other for the full amount of funds he was accused of misspending.

After the AP asked Van Noy to reconcile the conflicting filings, he hung up and then emailed a request for written questions, which he did not answer. He did not respond to subsequent phone calls and emails.

Created in 1999, CloudCommerce has repeatedly changed its name and lines of business, which have included health care, software and digital marketing. Past corporate names include Latinocare Management Corp., Roaming Messenger Inc. and Warp 9 Inc.

One constant throughout has been Jonathan Lei, the former chief executive of several CloudCommerce predecessors, including Roaming Messenger, which court records show he was running in 2006 when he and a fellow executive agreed to pay a \$1 million bribe to hedge fund managers who promised to buy Roaming Messenger stock on behalf of unwitting clients.

The hedge fund managers turned out to be undercover FBI agents. In a plea agreement to a single count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, Lei escaped any prison sentence by becoming a government cooperator. A judge sentenced him to five years of probation and a \$10,000 fine. The company itself was not charged.

As a condition of Lei’s probation, court records show he was barred from owning or involving himself with any publicly traded company during his probation. But securities filings in 2008 — during the period Lei was still under probation — showed he still owned over 25 percent of the company, which had been renamed Warp 9 Inc.

Lei maintained his public holding of company stock for years after his conviction. By the time CloudCommerce adopted its current name, however, his name was nowhere to be found in its annual reports.

Van Noy told the AP that Lei had not been involved in running the company for at least six years. But CloudCommerce emails with outside parties showed him actively involved in company affairs as recently as 2015 — and he continues to be included in internal communications regarding its business activities, according to a review of documents by the AP and two people familiar with the company who spoke on condition of anonymity due to concerns they could be sued over the disclosures.

CloudCommerce’s most recent disclosure of ownership shows that one of Lei’s relatives, Elaine Lei, owns 11.4 percent of CloudCommerce through a shell company located in Lake Tahoe, Nevada — a stake she received from Lei.

As recently as 2015, Lei himself also remained an investor through NewQuest Ventures LLC, another holding company, according to SEC filings. A person familiar with CloudCommerce provided the AP with documentation reflecting that Lei remains involved in the company’s major decisions, including acquisition targets.

Neither Lei responded to requests to comment sent to Jonathan Lei’s email address or a message left at Elaine Lei’s company in Nevada. Elaine Lei’s relation with Jonathan Lei is unclear, but Van Noy acknowledged the familial tie.

Regulators have raised questions about possible manipulation in CloudCommerce’s stock in the past. In June 2016, the company said it received an inquiry from the overseer of penny stocks on which it trades about online stock promotion activities that “coincided with higher than average trading volume and increases in the company’s stock price.” There have been no subsequent announcements about the inquiry by the OTC Markets Group, the company that runs the market on which CloudCommerce trades.

CloudCommerce denied any involvement in efforts to hype its stock, and the OTC Markets Group said

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it generally does not comment on specific companies.

An expert on penny stock trading said the details about CloudCommerce — including its history of losses, limited cash, the fraud once committed by Lei and discrepancies in its current chief executive's biography — raise concerns.

"There are sufficient red flags to give a responsible regulator reason to investigate," said Jacob Frenkel, a former senior counsel at the Securities and Exchange Commission who focused on penny stock fraud and is now in private practice. "What about this company isn't a red flag?"

Of the \$10 million sale price for Parscale's firm, \$9 million is described in company financial filings as the "stated value" of Parscale's preferred stock, meaning it is hypothetical and bears no relation to its current value. Calculating the value of Parscale's hosting firm before it was sold to CloudCommerce is difficult because it was privately held with no public disclosures about its clients, revenues or expenses.

Parscale is prohibited from selling his CloudCommerce stock for at least two years. The remaining \$1 million from the sale was supposed to be paid in cash by Jan. 1 for Parscale's web hosting business, but the company informed investors earlier this month that it will be paying Parscale in installments over the course of a year.

Frenkel, the former SEC enforcement attorney, said Parscale's two-year contractual limits on selling his shares would delay his ability to benefit from any rise in the company's stock.

"There are many examples in the small cap world where credible individuals are enticed into taking ownership, leadership or directorship roles in companies and come to regret that decision," Frenkel said.

GOP leaders move slowly on tighter gun laws

By LISA MASCARO and MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Paul Ryan on Tuesday showed little interest in stricter gun control proposals being floated in Congress, leaving the issue in the hands of wary Senate leaders and President Donald Trump, whose shifting views have left no clear strategy for legislative action.

As student survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting lobbied lawmakers for tougher gun laws, Ryan acknowledged "system failures" in Florida that he said Congress should review.

But GOP leaders did not promise votes on the matter and stopped short of offering solutions, beyond a pending bill aimed at increasing participation in the existing federal background check system. The bill uses new incentives and penalties to encourage better compliance with current law, but does not expand the pool of gun buyers required to undergo background checks before buying a gun.

Even as he endorsed the measure, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell downplayed its significance, saying it would not be a "panacea" for the rash of gun violence.

But McConnell said he wanted to "at least show some progress toward dealing with one element of the problem."

Republican leaders, who have majority control of the House and Senate, are reluctant to lead on legislation without knowing they have Trump's full support and can rely on his popularity with a core flank of the GOP electorate to shield them from political blowback.

But Trump, who is inviting lawmakers to the White House on Wednesday, has proven an inconsistent partner in such policy debate, including the issue of gun violence that has taken on fresh urgency since the Valentine's Day assault that left 17 dead.

One of Trump's top gun safety proposals after the Florida shooting — raising the age to purchase some rifles from 18 to 21 — receded after Trump lunched with leaders of the National Rifle Association last weekend. The idea had been promoted by TV personality Geraldo Rivera, who recently had dinner with Trump in Florida. But it was met with stiff resistance from the NRA.

Although Trump has been quiet about the idea in recent days, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that the president continues to support raising the minimum age and expects that to be a topic of discussion when he meets with lawmakers.

But Rivera, a Trump ally, scolded the president on Twitter for appearing to back away from the proposal.

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"Incredibly we're set to do nothing re gun control again," Rivera tweeted. "The only person in the country strong enough to stand up to #NRA @realDonaldTrump is apparently taking a pass after dropping modest reform of banning sales of semi automatics to kids not old enough to buy cigarettes & beer."

The Senate could vote this week on the legislation from Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Chris Murphy, D-Conn., to strengthen the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, though votes were not yet scheduled amid resistance from within the GOP ranks and demands by Democrats to vote on other measures.

The "Fix NICS" bill, similar to one approved last year in the House, would reward federal agencies and states that utilize the background check system, and penalize those that don't properly report required records used to determine whether someone can legally buy a gun. It was introduced last fall after the shooting of churchgoers in Texas. At the time, authorities acknowledged having failed to report the Texas gunman's domestic violence conviction to the database.

"Let's do what we can and build from there," Cornyn said.

But broader proposals were quickly circulating, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., urged the Senate to be more ambitious than the "tiny" bill.

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., are reviving their background check bill, which would expand reviews to include purchases online and at gun shows. It had failed after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut.

And Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., pushed a renewed bipartisan effort to block terror suspects on the federal no-fly list from buying guns.

"Let's not set our sights too narrow and squander this moment," said Schumer, who also met with students Tuesday.

Cornyn said he was dismayed that senators wanted to debate other ideas before taking up the background checks bill, and warned that a prolonged debate could result in no legislation being passed.

But even the "Fix NICS" bill faced resistance from some in the GOP, including leaders of the conservative House Freedom Caucus.

The House approved the bill late last year as part of a broader package that also expanded gun rights by requiring states to recognize conceal-carry permits issued by other states. Some House Republicans are resistant to separating the two issues, as is likely in the Senate.

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a Freedom Caucus leader, said it would "let bureaucrats take away an American's 2nd Amendment liberties without due process."

Ryan did not commit to passing the background check bill on its own and panned other bills, including stiffer background checks and an assault weapons ban.

"We shouldn't be banning guns for law-abiding citizens," Ryan told reporters. "We should be focusing on making sure that citizens who should not get guns in the first place don't get those guns."

One of Trump's proposals, to prohibit sales of bump stocks __ the devices that turn rifles into automatic-style weapons and were used in the Las Vegas mass shooting last fall __ is being considered by the Justice Department.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said top officials believe the hardware can be banned through the regulatory process. The approach is preferred by the NRA and could relieve Congress of pressure for legislative action.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Catherine Lucey and Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

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Judge sides with Trump on challenge to Mexico border wall

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A judge who was taunted by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign sided with the president Tuesday on a challenge to building a border wall with Mexico, removing what could have been a major obstacle to the signature campaign pledge.

U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel rejected arguments by the state of California and advocacy groups that the administration overreached by waiving laws requiring environmental and other reviews before construction can begin. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit said a 2005 law that gave the Homeland Security secretary broad authority to waive the reviews had expired.

"Big legal win today," Trump tweeted in response to the ruling. He didn't mention his prior remarks about the judge.

Trump berated Curiel during the campaign for his handling of fraud allegations against now-defunct Trump University, suggesting the Indiana-born judge's Mexican heritage reflected a bias.

Curiel mentioned his roots in his 101-page ruling Tuesday when he cited another native of the state, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote in another case that courts should not make policy judgments.

"The court cannot and does not consider whether the underlying decisions to construct border barriers are politically wise or prudent," Curiel wrote.

The lawsuit was the first major legal challenge to the wall under Trump and the latest legal challenge to fail over the years.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which sued along with the state of California and three advocacy groups, said it would appeal.

"They're giving unprecedented, sweeping power to an unelected agency chief to ignore dozens of laws and crash through hundreds of miles of spectacular borderlands," attorney Brian Segee said, referring to the head of Homeland Security. "This is unconstitutional and shouldn't be allowed to stand."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said, "We will evaluate all of our options and are prepared to do what is necessary to protect our people, our values, and our economy from federal overreach."

The Animal Legal Defense Fund said it may ask the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene. The Sierra Club said the environmental and other reviews are critical to protecting border communities, but the group didn't discuss its next step.

U.S. Justice Department spokesman Devin O'Malley welcomed the decision, saying Congress granted authority to build a wall without delay and that the administration is pleased it can continue "this important work vital to our nation's interests."

Homeland Security spokesman Tyler Houlton added, "Simply put, walls work."

The decision came days after construction began on a 30-foot (9.1-meter) high barrier in Calexico, California, the administration's first wall project outside of eight prototypes in San Diego that were completed in October.

The administration has issued three waivers since August, two to build in parts of California and one in part of New Mexico. President George W. Bush's administration issued the previous five waivers, allowing the government to quickly extend barriers to about one-third of the border.

The Center for Biological Diversity said in its lawsuit that the waiver authority cannot be interpreted to last forever. California argued that it expired in 2008, when Homeland Security satisfied congressional requirements at the time on how much wall to build.

Curiel wrote that the law certainly "is not a model of legislative precision" and that both sides made plausible arguments.

The judge declined to second-guess the administration's findings that waivers were issued in areas of "high illegal entry," a requirement set by Congress. The advocates argued that dramatic declines in border arrests undermined those findings.

During 2½ hours of arguments this month, the judge peppered both sides with questions about the law's

meaning. He showed strong interest in a requirement tacked on in late 2007 for Homeland Security to consult other federal agencies, state and local governments, Indian tribes and property owners to minimize the impact of construction, which challengers said the administration failed to do.

Curiel said in his ruling that the law's lack of specifics prevented him from concluding that the administration failed to properly consult others.

Trump is seeking \$18 billion to extend the wall as the White House and Congress are at an impasse. Earlier this month, the Senate rejected an administration-backed plan to link funding and sharp cuts to legal immigration to allowing young immigrants to stay in the country after they were temporarily shielded from deportation under an Obama-era program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

The wall prototypes in San Diego that were built to guide future designs and the wall replacement in Calexico were previously funded.

Curiel was pilloried by Trump over the Trump University lawsuits. The then-presumptive Republican presidential nominee called him a "hater" of Trump who should be ashamed, calling attention to the judge's Mexican ancestry and Trump's support for a border wall.

Trump settled the lawsuits for \$25 million after winning the election, without admitting wrongdoing.

Hope Hicks declines to answer some questions in Russia probe

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's longtime aide Hope Hicks declined to answer questions about her time in the White House during a nine-hour, closed-door interview with the House intelligence committee Tuesday, saying she was advised not to.

The panel is investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election and any contacts between Trump's campaign and Russia. As one of Trump's closest aides, Hicks is a key eyewitness to his actions over the past several years. She was his spokeswoman during the 2016 presidential campaign and is now White House communications director.

The top Democrat on the intelligence panel, California Rep. Adam Schiff, said after the meeting was over that Hicks answered questions about her role in Trump's campaign and answered some questions about the transition period between the election and the inauguration. But she would not answer any questions about events since Trump took the oath of office, similar to some other White House officials who have spoken to the committee. Schiff said Hicks did not assert any type of executive privilege, but just said she had been advised not to answer.

Hicks did answer a question about whether she had ever lied for her boss, saying she had told "white lies" for Trump on occasion, according to a person familiar with the testimony. The person, who declined to be named because the committee's interviews are not public, said Hicks told the panel she had not lied about anything substantive.

Republican Rep. Tom Rooney of Florida, a member of the intelligence panel who was in the interview, said Hicks' answer was completely unrelated to the Russia investigation.

"When specifically asked whether or not she was instructed to lie by the president, or the candidate, with regard to Russia, the investigation or our investigation, the answer to that question was no," Rooney said. "And that's our jurisdiction. Not whether or not he asked her to cancel a meeting for him, or something like that."

While the investigation is focused on Russian interference during the campaign, House investigators also had questions about her time in the White House, including her role in drafting a statement responding to news reports about a 2016 meeting between Trump campaign officials and Russians. That statement has been of particular interest to special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating matters related to the Russian meddling and potential obstruction of an ongoing federal inquiry.

The White House has said the president was involved in drafting the statement after news of the meeting broke last summer. The statement said the meeting primarily concerned a Russian adoption program, though emails released later showed that Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., enthusiastically agreed

to the sit-down with a Russian lawyer and others after he was promised dirt on Trump's presidential rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton. Hicks was with the president on Air Force One while they were writing the initial statement.

"All of our questions about what went into that statement went unanswered," Schiff said.

As the interview wore on, Hicks and her lawyer relented on one area of questioning — the transition period between the election and the inauguration. She initially refused to answer all those questions, but Schiff said it became clear to the House lawmakers that she had answered questions about that time period in a separate interview with the Senate intelligence panel. That committee is also investigating the meddling and spoke to Hicks several months ago.

After House lawmakers argued that she should treat the two committees equally, Hicks and her lawyer conferred with the White House, Schiff said. She then began to answer some questions related to the transition. Schiff said Democrats had asked for a subpoena after she refused to answer questions, but Republicans had declined to issue one.

That marks a difference from the GOP response to former White House strategist Steve Bannon, who also refused to answer questions, including about the transition. Republicans subpoenaed him during his interview in January when he declined to answer, but Bannon has yet to fully cooperate, despite a return visit to the panel two weeks ago. The House is now considering whether to hold Bannon in contempt.

Rooney, who is one of the Republicans leading the Russia probe, said he didn't think Hicks should be subpoenaed, saying she was "very forthright and open to the questions that we've had."

Hicks arrived shortly after 10 a.m. through a rear entrance to the committee's interview space and did not answer shouted questions from reporters. In the hours before Hicks' arrival, Trump tweeted several times, quoting cable news commentators who said they hadn't seen evidence of collusion between Trump and Russia. One tweet encouraged investigations of Clinton. And a closing tweet simply said, "WITCH HUNT!"

Asked about Hicks' refusal to answer some questions, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that "we are cooperating because as the president has said repeatedly there is no collusion, and we're going to continue to cooperate, and hopefully they'll wrap this up soon."

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Report: Inequality remains 50 years after Kerner Report

By RUSSELL CONTRERAS, Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Barriers to equality are posing threats to democracy in the U.S. as the country remains segregated along racial lines and child poverty worsens, says a study examining the nation 50 years after the release of the landmark 1968 Kerner Report.

The new report released Tuesday blames U.S. policymakers and elected officials, saying they're not doing enough to heed the warning on deepening poverty and inequality as highlighted by the Kerner Commission a half-century ago, and it lists a number of areas where the country has seen "a lack of or reversal of progress."

"Racial and ethnic inequality is growing worse. We're resegregating our housing and schools again," said former U.S. Sen. Fred Harris of Oklahoma, a co-editor of the new report and last surviving member of the original Kerner Commission created by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967. "There are few more people who are poor now than was true 50 years ago. Inequality of income is worse."

The new study titled "Healing Our Divided Society: Investing in America Fifty Years After the Kerner Report" says the percentage of people living in deep poverty — less than half of the federal poverty level — has increased since 1975. About 46 percent of people living in poverty in 2016 were classified as living in deep poverty — 16 percentage points higher than in 1975.

And although there has been progress for Hispanic homeownership since the Kerner Commission, the homeownership gap has widened for African-Americans, the report found. Three decades after the Fair

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Housing Act of 1968 passed, black homeownership rose by almost 6 percentage points. But those gains were wiped out from 2000 to 2015 when black homeownership fell 6 percentage points, the report says.

The report blames the black homeownership declines on the disproportionate effect the subprime crisis had on African-American families.

In addition, gains to end school segregation were reversed because of a lack of court oversight and housing discrimination. The court oversight allowed school districts to move away from desegregation plans and housing discrimination forced black and Latino families to move into largely minority neighborhoods.

In 1988, for example, about 44 percent of black students went to majority-white schools nationally. Only 20 percent of black students do so today, the report says.

The result of these gaps means that people of color and those struggling with poverty are confined to poor areas with inadequate housing, underfunded schools and law enforcement that views those residents with suspicion, the report said.

Those facts are bad for the whole country, and communities have a moral responsibility to address them now, said Harris, who now lives in Corrales, New Mexico.

The new report calls on the federal government and states to push for more spending on early childhood education and a \$15 minimum wage by 2024. It also demands more regulatory oversight over mortgage leaders to prevent predatory lending, community policing that works with nonprofits in minority neighborhoods and more job training programs in an era of automation and emerging technologies.

"We have to have a massive outcry against the state of our public policies," said the Rev. William J. Barber II, a Goldsboro, North Carolina pastor who is leading a multi-ethnic "Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival" next month in multiple states. "Systemic racism is something we don't talk about. We need to now."

The late President Johnson formed the original 11-member Kerner Commission as Detroit was engulfed in a raging riot in 1967. Five days of violence over racial tensions and police violence would leave 33 blacks and 10 whites dead, and more than 1,400 buildings burned. More than 7,000 people were arrested.

That summer, more than 150 cases of civil unrest erupted across the United States. Harris and other commission members toured riot-torn cities and interviewed black and Latino residents and white police officers.

The commission recommended that the federal government spend billions to attack structural racism in housing, education and employment. But Johnson, angry that the commission members didn't praise his anti-poverty programs, shelved the report and refused to meet with members.

Alan Curtis, president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation and co-editor of the new report, said this study's attention to systemic racism should be less startling to the nation given the extensive research that now calls the country's discriminatory housing and criminal justice systems into question.

Unlike the 1968 findings, the new report includes input from African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and women who are scholars and offer their own recommendations.

"The average American thinks we progressed a lot," said Kevin Washburn, a law professor at the University of New Mexico, a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and one of the people who shared his observations for the report. "But there are still some places where Native people live primitive lives. They don't have access to things such as good water, electricity and plumbing."

Like the 1968 report, the new study also calls out media organizations for their coverage of communities of color, saying they need to diversify and hire more black and Latino journalists.

News companies could become desensitized to inequality if they lack diverse newsrooms, and they might not view the issue as urgent or newsworthy, said journalist Gary Younge, who also gave input to the report.

"It turns out that sometimes 'dog bites man' really is the story," Younge said. "And we keep missing it."

This story has been corrected to show that the title of the study is "Healing Our Divided Society," not "Healing Out Divided Society."

Associated Press writer Russell Contreras is a member of the AP's race and ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/ruscontreras>.

Manafort's case saddled by side issues, disputes with judge

By ERIC TUCKER and CHAD DAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson was not amused.

A lawyer for Paul Manafort, the former campaign chairman for President Donald Trump, was trying to justify the multimillion-dollar value of his client's home as part of a bail package. Rather than producing tax assessment or property records, the lawyer submitted to the judge a printout from Zillow, the online real estate website.

"Zillow is actually considered to be pretty accurate, Your Honor," said Kevin Downing, Manafort's attorney. Jackson swatted that aside, insisting she needed "something, some piece of paper beyond just what I got."

On many days, the high-profile, high-stakes prosecution of Manafort — a case already outside the central election-meddling focus of special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation — is mired in side issues that have left the judge exasperated.

Whatever Manafort's strategy, his team's efforts appear largely reflective of the former international consultant's frustration with what he sees as an out-of-control prosecution — and a burdensome house arrest from which his attorneys, despite several attempts, have been unable to free him. The halting pace of the case in Washington is about to face another obstacle: With new charges filed in Virginia, Manafort is now going to have to balance a wholly separate case with a different judge and possibly another trial.

Lawyer Downing and Judge Jackson have clashed over the attorney's provocative public statements, Manafort's own ghostwritten opinion piece in Ukraine and even the format of the court filings submitted by the defense. There were also weeks of requests by Rick Gates, Manafort's recently flipped co-defendant, to attend his children's sporting events, disputes over his involvement in a friend's fundraiser and multiple defense lawyer substitutions.

"We've been dealing with the minutiae of bond and soccer practice and public relations and people changing their minds about where they want to live and unsettled questions concerning representation since October, and it's unacceptable," Jackson recently said, lamenting to lawyers that they hadn't yet set a trial date.

Separately, as the pre-trial doings proceed, Manafort is suing special counsel Mueller, accusing him of overstepping by indicting him for conduct "unmoored" from the Russian interference. Manafort is accused of acting as an unregistered foreign agent and orchestrating an international money laundering conspiracy to hide millions of dollars he earned from his foreign political work in eastern Europe.

Manafort spokesman Jason Maloni took more shots at the prosecution's fairness last week, suggesting its tactics violated Manafort's constitutional rights. And after Gates' guilty plea, Manafort himself waded into the debate despite Jackson's gag order, maintaining his innocence against "untrue piled-up charges."

Attacking the prosecution is common in cases like this, but former Justice Department prosecutor David Weinstein said judges shouldn't be antagonized.

"If you continue to thumb your nose at the system itself," he said, "that's going to have a negative effect on the way the judge treats any statements you make."

Downing did not return a message seeking comment. Maloni declined comment.

Tensions surfaced from the first court appearance last October, when Downing, a former Justice Department lawyer and an imposing courtroom presence with pinstripe suits and well-coiffed hair, exited the courthouse into a sea of news cameras to proclaim his client's innocence.

"There is no evidence," Downing declared in a message that echoed the president's own oft-repeated contention, "that Mr. Manafort or the Trump campaign colluded with the Russian government."

Among those who heard the message was the judge, who three days later scolded the lawyers.

"This is a criminal trial, and it is not a public relations campaign," she said in the first of a series of tense courtroom encounters. "So I want to make it clear, from this point on, that I expect counsel to do their talking in this courtroom and in their pleadings, and not on the courthouse steps."

Just weeks later, the issue arose again when prosecutors revealed that Manafort, from the confines of house arrest, had helped ghostwrite an opinion piece on his foreign consulting that was slated to be

published in an English-language newspaper in Ukraine. Compounding the problem, the government said one of Manafort's collaborators was believed to have ties to Russian intelligence.

Though prosecutors said Downing had assured them he'd take steps to prevent publication, the lawyer insisted his client had done nothing wrong. It's unfair that Manafort "must simply remain silent while his reputation is battered, and potential jurors in this district might be tainted," Downing argued.

The op-ed ultimately was published. Prosecutors, demonstrating their ability to monitor Manafort's actions, tracked each edit he made in a version of the piece they pulled from his email.

Jackson didn't hold Manafort in contempt but issued a stern warning: Don't do it again.

Gates also came close himself to running afoul of Jackson's gag order by appearing via video at a fundraiser organized by a friend who complained of an "unfair prosecution." Both defendants, Jackson said, needed to use more "common sense."

Besides adversarial run-ins, there have been curious struggles with document filing — random notes were submitted by Manafort as an appendage to one filing before being withdrawn — and instances in which the judge has said she's not even sure what defense lawyers are seeking.

Early in the case, Jackson scolded Downing for saying he had filed a bond review motion when he actually had not.

"Don't tell me if something says something it doesn't say," Jackson said.

But no issue has been more contentious, or drawn-out, than Manafort's bail package.

The lawyers have repeatedly tangled over the value of property Manafort has pledged to meet the \$10 million amount — and the lack of documentation the defense team has produced to support its arguments.

That's where the Zillow printout comes in. In December, Downing submitted it to justify the \$4.725 million estimated value for one of Manafort's homes.

Dismissing the adequacy of the document, Jackson observed, "If you had to sell it tomorrow or insure it tomorrow or refinance it tomorrow, you would get an appraisal, you wouldn't print out a page from Zillow."

Follow Eric Tucker and Chad Day on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/etuckerAP> and <https://twitter.com/ChadSDay>

Top intel official: US must do more to stop Russian meddling

By DEB RIECHMANN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. response to Russian meddling and disinformation campaigns has not been strong enough to deter Moscow's activities, a top intelligence official said Tuesday.

Adm. Mike Rogers, director of both the U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, said he's taken steps to respond to the threat, but that neither President Donald Trump nor Defense Secretary James Mattis has granted him any additional authorities to counter Russian efforts to sow discord in the United States.

"I've never been given any specific direction to take additional steps outside my authority. I have taken the steps within my authority, you know, trying to be a good, pro-active commander," Rogers said at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. "I have not been granted any additional authorities."

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders wouldn't discuss what authority Rogers was referencing, but said the president was looking at ways to prevent Russian meddling. "I can tell you that we are taking a number of steps to prevent this and we are looking at a variety of other ways that we're going to continue to implement over the coming weeks and months," Sanders said.

Rogers told Congress that he thinks a more aggressive response is needed, but that he doesn't set policy and doesn't want to tell the president what to do.

"I believe that President (Vladimir) Putin has clearly come to the conclusion that there's little price to pay and that therefore, 'I can continue this activity,'" Rogers said. "Clearly what we have done hasn't been enough."

Rogers' statements fueled Democrats on the committee.

"We're watching them intrude in our elections, spread misinformation, become more sophisticated ... and we're just, essentially, just sitting back and waiting," said Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the committee.

Rogers said he didn't fully agree with the characterization that the U.S. was just sitting back and waiting. But he said: "It's probably fair to say that we have not opted to engage in some of the same behaviors that we are seeing" from Russia.

Rogers said he doesn't have the day-to-day authority to try to deter Russian activities at their source. He said that authority is held by Trump and Mattis. "There are some things I have the authority to do and I'm acting on that authority."

He said U.S. sanctions and recent indictments of Russians have had some impact. But Rogers said: "It certainly hasn't generated the change in behavior that I think we all know we need."

Earlier this month, Democratic Sens. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Bill Nelson of Florida and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire sent a letter to Mattis urging him to order the U.S. Cyber Command to prepare to engage Russian cyber operators and disrupt Russian activities if they conduct any clandestine influence operations against the upcoming midterm elections.

Police called after brawl in dispute over Trump Panama hotel

By JEFF HORWITZ and JUAN ZAMORANO, Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Rival teams of security guards grappled in a stairwell Tuesday as a business dispute for control over the Trump luxury hotel in Panama mounted.

Cellphone video of the confrontation obtained by The Associated Press showed a security official working for President Donald Trump's family hotel business screaming "Out!" in Spanish as condo owners attempted to enter a room filled with computer equipment.

Men in suits wrestled in a stairway before a large man aligned with the Trump Hotel team slapped the phone out of the hand of the person recording the confrontation.

Panama City police responded to calls about the scuffle, which took place in an area belonging to a condo association that operates independently of the hotel but shares the building. One of Trump's guards was escorted by police off the property after the incident, though not arrested, according to officers on the scene.

The video was provided to the AP by a person opposed to Trump who spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for being drawn into current and future litigation over the property.

The minor brawl — it marked at least the fourth time the police have been called to the property in the last week — is part of a bitter fight over Trump Hotels' contract to manage a 70-story luxury high rise on Panama's waterfront. Led by Miami-based private equity fund Ithaca Capital, the owners of the condo-hotel units voted to remove Trump's name from the building and fire his hotel management company.

Ithaca's manager, Orestes Fintiklis, has alleged financial misconduct by Trump Hotels dating back years, and has said Trump's statements on immigration have rendered his brand toxic in Latin America.

Trump Hotels has refused to acknowledge its termination, citing a commitment by Fintiklis not to challenge Trump's contract when he bought 202 of the 369 hotel units at the property last year. When Fintiklis, who is also head of the hotel owners' association, invited a team of Marriott hotel executives to tour the property last year, Trump Hotel staff ran them off.

The dispute over whether the president's company can be fired has already led to legal complaints in Panama, the United States and private arbitration. But the arbitration has not progressed significantly in months, with the two sides deadlocked over the selection of the arbitration panel.

The already tense situation deteriorated last week after Fintiklis attempted to fire hotel managers loyal to Trump. According to two witnesses, private security blocked Fintiklis from delivering the pink slips, and refused to let him check into one of his firm's 202 hotel rooms or eat in the property's restaurant.

On Tuesday, Fintiklis' lawyer told the AP that Fintiklis was physically and verbally abused by "gorillas" working for Trump.

"We are going to ask for a police search," attorney Sarai Blaisdell told the AP.

Fintiklis himself filed a complaint with Panamanian police on Friday, alleging that he was blocked from his property and that he and others witnessed Trump staff shredding business records after hours, something Trump Organization general counsel Alan Garten flatly denied.

The Panamanian ministry said on Monday it was investigating Fintiklis' complaint that Trump is illegally refusing to vacate his property.

In a statement issued Monday, Trump Hotels accused Fintiklis of using a "rogue private security team" to "physically take over the management of the Hotel."

According to witnesses and the video obtained by AP, a room containing the hotels' closed circuit television system and various servers was a key point of conflict both over the weekend and on Tuesday. On Friday, Trump staff locked themselves inside the room — it is located on the condominium owners association's property — the condo association cut power to the room, inadvertently killing the hotel's phone and internet connection. Power was restored to those systems later Friday evening.

Separately, police escorted Panamanian labor ministry staff to the property on Tuesday. The purpose of their visit could not immediately be ascertained.

Horwitz reported from Washington.

Parents spooked by abuse in youth sports set more limits

By SALLY HO, Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — With Olympic prodigies having just dazzled audiences worldwide, parents in the U.S. are reconciling the thrill of the gold with their fears from recent sexual abuse scandals in elite youth sports.

Shannon Stabbert said her 6-year-old daughter wants to be a gymnast, but the Seattle mother decided to put her in a martial-arts program instead.

"I have no doubt she will be quite amazing at gymnastics," Stabbert said. "I just don't feel like it's a mentally, physically, emotionally healthy sport for girls."

High-profile cases of sexual abuse and other predatory behavior in gymnastics, swimming and other sports have jolted many parents who believe athletics can be an important part of their child's development. Some now feel compelled to be more cautious in monitoring their child's contact with coaches and other adults.

Experts say the spotty rules and certifications for coaches and glorification of sports culture can make children who feel pressure to achieve even more vulnerable. No longer a casual pastime, sports teams can leave kids as young as 5 in the care of undertrained, undersupervised coaches.

Emmett Gill, a professor at the University of Texas and expert on the personal development of student-athletes, said success often means children leave their communities to compete, which can leave them at more risk.

"It's clear that the coach's responsibility, and their permanent goal, is to win, and that can sacrifice protecting vulnerable children," Gill said. "We really have forgotten about that good, old neighborhood team. Now youth sports is a bunch of strangers on teams with the best athletes, with the purpose of winning."

One national organization trying to prevent abuse of young athletes is the U.S. Center for SafeSport, a Denver-based nonprofit that formed last year.

It launched following the initial allegations of sexual abuse against Larry Nassar, the disgraced sports doctor for USA Gymnastics who will spend his life in prison for sexually assaulting some of the nation's top gymnasts under the guise of medical treatment.

The U.S. Olympic Committee developed SafeSport, but it's now an independent organization that works with law enforcement to investigate abuse allegations for the 49 Olympic and Paralympic sports.

In addition to offering an online link for anonymous abuse reports, SafeSport also provides educational and training material for youth leagues nationwide. The goal is to prevent abuse altogether.

"We have got to get upstream and do more to educate athletes, to educate parents, to educate coaches

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and to educate sport administrators," SafeSport CEO Shellie Pfohl said. "I want every parent to know what questions they should be asking when they sign their child up."

Since its inception, SafeSport has received 470 reports of either emotional or physical abuse, including 165 reports this year and 222 active investigations overall. In some cases, the organization didn't have jurisdiction over a youth league to investigate an allegation.

Youth leagues outside Olympic and Paralympic sports don't have a national organization to investigate reports of physical abuse, harassment, hazing and other issues. Many of those leagues have spent years trying to mute overreaching parents through codes of conduct but now have to walk the line between input and child safety.

"There's a balance between appropriate parental involvement and engagement, meaning are there overzealous parents who may upset the team dynamic or be inappropriate in terms of their treatment of the coach or athletes, and balancing that with parental due diligence," Pfohl said. "We want parents to be empowered to not only ask these questions but to hold people accountable."

Gill, the expert on student-athlete development, urges all sports programs to create safety guidelines that clearly indicate the protocol for adults who suspect abuse. Though teachers and doctors must report it, coaches and volunteers do not.

"If we're really about youth development and character development, this is going to be in front — and the most important part — of our bylaws," Gill said.

Even the regulators are not immune. The chief safety officer of USA Swimming, Susan Woessner, announced last week that she was resigning after revealing she had kissed a coach accused of sexual abuse and later assisted in the governing body's investigation of him.

Sean Hutchison is under criminal investigation after Olympic swimmer Ariana Kukors said he abused her as a minor. Woessner said she wasn't in a relationship with Hutchison.

USA Swimming also issued a letter to parents saying it had failed members and its system was "not flawless" and vowing to "ensure that there is never a lapse of a support system again."

For many parents, they say they will look to set more boundaries and ask more questions.

"Sometimes you kind of wonder: Am I missing something as parent? Am I not looking? Am I not asking the right questions? Am I trusting too much?" said Lara Mae Chollette, a Seattle mother of three.

Chollette, who works in human resources, said she's also wondered lately whether parents should stay for lengthy practices. If someone else is watching her kids, she finds out the ages of the other siblings who may come along. Her husband also has made a rule against taking responsibility for another child for overnight trips.

As a coach herself of youth soccer and basketball, Chollette said she knows the schedules, other parents and how people come and go from the sports facilities, which is helpful.

"It's truly a commitment for us," Chollette said of attending every practice, game and trip. "We see it as an educational element for our kids. There are things in sports that a teacher can't teach. There are things in sports that life can't teach."

Associated Press writer Kurt Voigt contributed from Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Follow Sally Ho at https://twitter.com/_sallyho .

This story corrects the spelling of Sean Hutchison's last name.

Powell's bullish outlook on US economy rattles markets

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER, AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — New Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell delivered a message Tuesday that wasn't quite what Wall Street had expected: The U.S. economy is doing well, maybe even better than he thought late last year.

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Powell emphasized in his first Congressional testimony that the central bank plans to raise rates gradually. Nonetheless, his growing optimism about the economy rattled investors. Treasury yields climbed and stocks fell amid fresh speculation that the Fed would accelerate the pace of hikes in its benchmark policy rate this year. The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 299 points.

The Fed raised rates three times in 2017 and had projected in December that it would raise rates another three times this year. However, many private economists said they now expected the Fed will boost rates four times this year rather than three.

"My personal outlook for the economy has strengthened since December," Powell said when asked whether the Fed might boost its projection for rate hikes from three to four when it updates its outlook next month.

Powell would not say whether the Fed's projection for rate hikes would change. But he noted a number of ways that the economic outlook has improved since December, including stronger data on growth and inflation, the passage of a \$1.5 trillion tax cut in late December and an increase in government spending in a January budget deal.

Powell said that he would not speculate on whether the number of hikes would be boosted since any change will depend on the individual forecasts of each of the 15 members of the Fed's policy committee.

But private economists said they saw Powell's comments as a strong signal that the Fed will be raising its rate forecast at its next meeting in March.

Powell's comments came as he delivered the Fed's semi-annual monetary report to the House Financial Committee. He will appear before the Senate Banking Committee on Thursday.

His reception before the House panel stood in marked contrast to how the committee interacted with Janet Yellen. Republicans often challenged Yellen, a Democrat, during exchanges in which she was often interrupted by male lawmakers who dismissed her answers on a wide variety of topics.

A frequent flash-point was Yellen's objection to GOP-sponsored legislation to limit the Fed's independence by requiring the Fed to follow a specific monetary rule in setting interest-rate policies.

Powell, a Republican tapped by President Donald Trump in November when the president decided against giving Yellen a second term, expressed support in his opening statement for using various monetary formulas to help guide setting interest rates.

During a hearing that lasted more than three hours, Powell enjoyed a far more placid exchange with the GOP-controlled committee. A number of Democrats, however, sought to force Powell to criticize a range of Trump economic policies, from tax cuts the Democrats claimed would worsen income inequality, to huge budget deficits that are expected to make deficits climb toward \$1 trillion annually.

Powell, however, was adept at staying out of political controversies, frequently saying that the subjects he was being asked about were in the realm of policies controlled by Congress and the administration and not the Federal Reserve.

In his statement, Powell praised Yellen for the important contributions she made during her four years as the first woman to lead the Fed. He said the two had worked together to ensure "a smooth leadership transition and provide for continuity in monetary policy."

Referring to the wild swings in the stock market that occurred earlier this month, Powell said the Fed does "not see these developments as weighing heavily on the outlook for economic activity, the labor market and inflation."

Powell, who took office on Feb. 5, had been an investment banker before joining the Fed board in 2012.

Even with three hikes last year, the Fed's policy rate remains at a still-low 1.25 percent to 1.50 percent. But various market rates, including home mortgage rates, have begun rising in anticipation of further Fed rate increases.

In his comments, Powell did not express worries that the economy was starting to overheat, stressing instead a number of developments showing economic strength.

"The robust job market should continue to support growth in household incomes and consumer spending," Powell said.

Some economists have raised concerns that recent moves by the Trump administration and Congress to boost economic growth through tax cuts and spending increases could raise the risks of overheating and inflation.

But Powell said that the government's fiscal policy was now "more stimulative," which he said would help to boost chronically low inflation in recent years. He said that the Fed expected inflation to move up this year and then stabilize around the Fed's 2 percent target.

Cheers, protests as German court lets cities ban diesel cars

By **FRANK JORDANS** and **DAVID RISING**, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Handing environmentalists a landmark victory, a German court ruled Tuesday that cities can ban diesel cars and trucks to combat air pollution, a decision with far-reaching and costly implications in the country where the diesel engine was invented in the 1890s.

The ruling by the Federal Administrative Court stirred fears from motorists, auto dealers and other businesses worried about the financial impact. And Chancellor Angela Merkel's government scrambled to reassure drivers it would seek to prevent such drastic measures by pushing other ways to reduce urban pollution.

Diesel automobiles are a popular alternative to gasoline-powered ones in Germany, with about 9 million diesel cars and several million trucks, buses and other vehicles affected by the ruling.

Overall, 1 in 3 passenger cars in Germany, home to such automakers as Daimler, Volkswagen and BMW, are diesel-powered, though the cleanest, most modern models would probably still be allowed even if cities decided on a ban.

"It's a great day for clean air in Germany," said Juergen Resch, head of the group Environmental Action Germany, which had sued dozens of German cities for failing to meet legally binding emissions limits.

While diesel cars produce less carbon dioxide and tend to get better mileage than gas-powered vehicles, they emit higher levels of nitrogen oxides, or NOx, contributing to respiratory illnesses and 6,000 deaths annually, according to government figures.

Two German states had appealed lower court decisions that suggested bans on particularly dirty diesel cars would be effective. Germany's highest administrative court rejected that appeal Tuesday, effectively instructing two cities at the center of the case — Stuttgart and Duesseldorf — to consider bans as part of their clean air plans.

What comes next is an open question.

It's not clear whether cities will actually move to ban diesels. And if they do so, it remains to be seen whether automakers will be forced to upgrade exhaust and software systems or buy back vehicles; if the government will offer consumers incentives; or if owners will be left on their own, forced to bear the costs.

The Leipzig-based administrative court said cities won't be required to compensate drivers for being unable to use their diesel cars.

Speaking on behalf of automakers, Matthias Wissmann, president of the German Association of the Automotive Industry, stressed that the government could ease the uncertainty by not leaving it to cities to decide on a case-by-case basis.

"We hope it comes to sensible national regulations," he said.

European cities considering diesel bans like Copenhagen and Paris will be watching how the situation plays out in Germany as they make their own decisions.

Jeff Schuster, an analyst with the consulting firm LMC Automotive near Detroit, said diesel bans could spread to other polluted European cities. But he said the market in Europe, China and elsewhere was already headed in that direction because of the big push toward electric vehicles and the damage done by the Volkswagen diesel-emissions cheating scandal.

Diesels make up a smaller part of the American auto market, and so any bans in Europe would have little effect on the U.S., Schuster said. For the past two years in the U.S., only 2.7 percent of registered vehicles were diesel, according to Kelley Blue Book.

New diesel car sales in Germany were already declining in anticipation of the decision, and also because of the VW scandal. Used-car dealers fretted about what the ruling will mean for the vehicles on their lots.

"The prices as well as the demand are going down rapidly," said Marcel del Arbol, owner of R&M used car dealership in Frankfurt. "What happened today will bring the prices down even more.

German car companies dipped on the stock market following the ruling but mostly recovered, with Volkswagen down 0.9 percent at the end of the day, BMW down 0.06 percent and Daimler up 0.2 percent.

Analysts said the ruling might actually prove to be a boon for the economy if drivers choose to upgrade their engines or buy new models.

Merkel sought to downplay the prospect of widespread diesel driving bans, suggesting that many of the 70 German cities that regularly exceed pollution limits might be able to cut harmful emissions with other measures such as software upgrades in vehicles and converting bus and taxi fleets to electric power.

Experts, however, questioned whether bans can be avoided and accused the German government of ignoring the health problems caused by diesel for too long.

Fritz Kuhn, the Green Party mayor of Stuttgart, home to automakers Daimler and Porsche, accused the government of leaving it to cities to clean up the mess by failing to provide a nationwide solution.

Political leaders stressed that diesel owners shouldn't have to shoulder the full burden of a ban.

"The auto industry that caused the harmful emissions has to upgrade diesel engines at its expense," said Kai Wegner, a lawmaker who speaks for Merkel's party on urban issues.

The ruling alarmed groups representing small and medium-size companies. Diesels — first developed by Rudolf Diesel in Augsburg over a century ago — are a mainstay of many company fleets and are widely used by taxi companies and delivery services.

Berlin's Chamber of Commerce said companies in the capital would have to spend 240 million euros (\$295 million) to replace their fleets if diesel cars were banned — enough to drive many out of business.

Associated Press writers Kerstin Sopke in Leipzig, Christoph Noelting in Frankfurt and Tom Krisher in Detroit contributed to this report.

What's in the IV bag? Studies show safer option than saline

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE, AP Chief Medical Writer

New research calls into question what's in those IV bags that nearly every hospitalized patient gets. Using a different intravenous fluid instead of the usual saline greatly reduced the risk of death or kidney damage, two large studies found.

The difference could mean 50,000 to 70,000 fewer deaths and 100,000 fewer cases of kidney failure each year in the U.S., researchers estimate. Some doctors are hoping the results will persuade more hospitals to switch.

"We've been sounding the alarm for 20 years" about possible harms from saline, said Dr. John Kellum, a critical care specialist at the University of Pittsburgh. "It's purely inertia" that prevents a change, he said.

Kellum had no role in the studies, which were discussed Tuesday at a critical care conference in San Antonio and published by the New England Journal of Medicine. Federal grants helped pay for the work.

IVs are one of the most common things in health care. They are used to prevent dehydration, maintain blood pressure or give patients medicines or nutrients if they can't eat.

Saline — salt dissolved in water — has been the most widely used fluid in the U.S. for more than a century even as evidence has emerged that it can harm kidneys, especially when used a lot.

Other IV solutions called balanced fluids include saline but also contain potassium and other things that make them more like plasma, the clear part of blood. They're widely used in Europe and Australia.

The studies involved 28,000 patients at Vanderbilt University who were given IVs of saline or a balanced fluid. For every 100 people on balanced fluids, there was one fewer death or severe kidney problem.

Since there are about 30 million people hospitalized in the U.S. alone each year, "there are tens or hundreds of thousands of patients who would be spared death or severe kidney problems by using balanced

fluids instead of saline," said one study leader, Vanderbilt's Dr. Matthew Semler.

After seeing the results two months ago, Vanderbilt hospital officials decided to primarily use balanced fluids. The University of Pittsburgh also has largely switched to them, Kellum said.

The fluids cost about the same — a dollar or two per IV — and many suppliers make both types, so switching should not be hard or expensive, doctors said.

IV fluids have been in the news since Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico last fall, shutting down electricity to three plants owned by Baxter International, one of the biggest makers of these fluids. The shortage has eased, but some supply issues remain.

Marilynn Marchione can be followed on Twitter: @MMarchioneAP

Companies face mounting pressure to pick sides in gun debate

By DAMIAN J. TROISE, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As the gun debate heats up following the massacre at a Florida high school, companies are under growing pressure to pick a side: whether to stand by the National Rifle Association or walk away.

Metlife, Delta and more than a dozen others have decided to end benefits deals offered to the organization's members. Others, including FedEx, are staying put. The decision to stay or go for many companies involves walking a fine line that can impact their image for better or worse.

"How well can they position themselves so that they're being viewed as honest and supportive of what is a national crisis and not walking away from the Second Amendment?" said Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys, a consumer research firm.

The calls for boycotts have been cutting both ways, with gun rights and gun-control supporters threatening to take their dollars elsewhere, depending on a company's decision.

FedEx is the latest company to respond to consumer pressure, saying it will maintain its discount for NRA members and supports the right to own firearms, but does not believe civilians should own assault rifles.

That response shows the nuances many companies are dealing with in the current debate over guns. Several other companies have also affirmed support for gun rights, but decided to cut ties with the NRA over its positions.

Over the weekend, Delta said it would end its discount rates deal for NRA members' group travel and requested it be removed from the organization's website. But, it also said it continues to support the Second Amendment.

Delta's balancing act in particular sparked a harsh response from Georgia's Republican Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle. He threatened to use his position to derail the \$38 million-per-year sales tax exemption on jet fuel that would primarily benefit Delta Air Lines, calling it an attack on conservatives. Delta is based in Atlanta.

The NRA has also pushed back, calling the departure of its corporate partners a "shameful display of political and civic cowardice."

Other companies that have cut ties with the NRA include First National Bank of Omaha, Hertz, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Best Western, Wyndham, United Airlines, Chubb, and Starkey Hearing Technology. Still, many others have maintained their relationship, including FedEx and the less-well-known Hotel Planner and eHealth.

The decisions come during an uptick in consumer activism, fueled by social media empowering more people to voice their opinions and values. Companies have become more aware of public sentiment that can be amplified over Twitter and other platforms.

That activist consumer atmosphere — coupled with the Feb. 14 Parkland, Florida, school massacre and the always heated gun-control debate — make this a potentially tricky situation for companies looking to protect their image and bottom line.

"It's a different communication paradigm than it was five years ago and that's the thing," Passikoff said. "The sense of immediacy has increased."

The boycott movement is not just about image. Companies have to take into account their other con-

stituents, particularly shareholders and whether ties to the NRA will have any impact on their financial performance.

Elliot H. Lutzker, chair of the corporate law practice group at Davidoff Hutcher & Citron LLP, said the boycott movement may have little impact on companies financially. Several of the hospitality firms that have cut ties can figure out just how much of an impact cutting a discount benefit will have and act accordingly.

"It's really a question of fiduciary duty," he said.

The real power lies with credit cards and media companies, he said. Specifically in allowing or blocking purchases of firearms and NRA advertisements.

So far, credit card companies have resisted calls by some consumers to limit their cards' use to purchase guns. Visa said it strives to make its payment services available to everyone within the confines of national and international laws.

"We do not prohibit transactions on our network for the purchase or sale of lawful products and services, including guns in the United States," the company said in a statement. Other credit card companies did not respond to requests for comment.

Report: Anti-Semitic incidents soar by 57 percent in 2017

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, Associated Press

The Anti-Defamation League is reporting a 57 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. last year, the highest tally that the Jewish civil rights group has counted in more than two decades, according to data it released Tuesday.

The New York City-based organization found 1,986 anti-Semitic incidents last year, up from 1,267 in 2016. That's the highest total since 1994 and the largest single-year increase since the group began collecting this data in 1979.

The ADL said the sharp rise includes 952 vandalism incidents, an increase of 86 percent from 2016. The group also counted 1,015 incidents of harassment, a 41 percent increase from 2016.

ADL national director and CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said the "alarming" increase appears to be fueled by emboldened far-right extremists as well as the "divisive state of our national discourse."

"Less civility has led to more intolerance," he told The Associated Press.

Greenblatt also acknowledged that heightened awareness of the problem likely led to increased reporting of anti-Semitic incidents.

Anti-Semitic incidents at schools and on college campuses nearly doubled for the second year in a row, with 457 such incidents reported in non-Jewish schools last year, the ADL report says.

"We should see this as an alarm, a very loud alarm that should get the attention of all of us," Greenblatt said.

The ADL and other groups have reported a surge in the number of incidents in which far-right extremist groups have posted racist and anti-Semitic fliers on college campuses. ADL spokesman Todd Gutnick said the report's tally only counts incidents in which fliers had explicitly anti-Semitic messages.

The ADL also counted 19 anti-Semitic physical assaults last year, a 47 percent decrease from 2016.

The harassment incidents included 169 bomb threats against Jewish institutions, nearly all of them by two men. The ADL report said more than 150 bomb threats against Jewish community centers and day schools last year were allegedly made by an 18-year-old Israeli-American Jewish hacker, who was arrested in Israel last March. Separately, a former journalist from St. Louis pleaded guilty to making a string of fake bomb threats to Jewish organizations last year in the name of his ex-girlfriend in an effort to disrupt her life.

In a note about its methodology, the group said, "ADL is careful to not conflate general criticism of Israel or anti-Israel activism with anti-Semitism. However, Israel-related harassment of groups or individuals may be included when the harassment incorporates traditional anti-Jewish references, accusations and conspiracy theories. Also included are cases of picketing of Jewish religious or cultural institutions for purported support for Israel."

There were six incidents in which Jewish institutions were victims of vandalism and harassment for their

purported support of Israel, Gutnick said.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, of Ohev Sholom-The National Synagogue in Washington, said neo-Nazis in the U.S. are emboldened "in a way I have not seen in my lifetime."

"It's scary," said Herzfeld, whose synagogue received a bomb threat in April. "I think there is no question that it's on people's minds, and there is more of it out there."

The ADL is urging Congress to pass legislation to expand federal protections against bomb threats to religious institutions. The legislation, approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in December, awaits action in the Senate, the ADL said.

Greenblatt also urges "all public figures" to speak out against anti-Semitism "whether you're the president of the United States or the head of the local P.T.A."

President Donald Trump was widely criticized for saying there was "blame on both sides" after violence erupted in August at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where 32-year-old Heather Heyer was killed when a man drove his car into a crowd of demonstrators. Greenblatt said Trump's statements about the rally were a "serious failure of moral leadership" and a "low point" of his presidency.

"There's no question we would love to see the president call out anti-Semitism as consistently and clearly as he does other issues," Greenblatt said.

The ADL says it compiles its incident data from news reports and information provided by victims, law enforcement and "community leaders."

"We just don't report something we've heard. We call, we check and we verify," Greenblatt said.

This story has been corrected to reflect that the Anti-Defamation League counted a total of 169 bomb threats against Jewish institutions in 2017, not 163 as the ADL said in a summary of its report.

Columbine principal's advice is sought after Fla. shooting

By TERRY SPENCER, Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — After school shootings like the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, administrators reach out to former Columbine High principal Frank DeAngelis for advice, since there is no book to teach what he learned after gunmen killed 12 of his students and a teacher in 1999.

There should be no balloons at Stoneman Douglas' welcome-back ceremony, he told the school's administrator. The reason: Some balloons popped at Columbine's reopening, sending students diving for cover. Have substitutes on hand in case teachers need time to compose themselves. Change the sound of the fire alarm, which got pulled at both Columbine and Stoneman Douglas during the shootings, or it will cause some to panic.

DeAngelis, who has spoken to Stoneman Douglas' principal, said everyone must understand that the staff and students will never return to what they were before the shooting.

"It really is a marathon and not a sprint," he said in a phone interview from his Colorado home. "There are going to be days when everything seems to be getting back to where it might have been prior, but then something happens to hinder the healing process. One of things people asked me right after Columbine is 'When is it going to be back to normal?' I said it never really gets back to normal."

Stoneman Douglas' 3,200 students are scheduled to return Wednesday, two weeks after authorities say 19-year-old former student Nikolas Cruz opened fire on Valentine's Day, killing 14 students and three staff members. He is charged with 17 counts of murder and could face the death penalty.

School officials say they will have counselors at Stoneman Douglas indefinitely to help students and staff. Extra armed security will also be on campus through the end of the school year.

Megan Faberman, an 18-year-old senior who plans to study psychiatric neuroscience at the University of Central Florida, said at a rally outside Stoneman Douglas that she and her friends are going to walk "arm in arm into the school" to defy Cruz.

"We are not going to let him win," she said.

At Virginia Tech, where a gunman killed 32 people in April 2007, teachers and students were given "the

greatest flexibility possible" for determining how they wanted to move forward that semester, spokesman Mark Owczarski said.

When students returned to class, they were allowed to take whatever grade they had at the time of the shooting, accept a pass-fall mark or complete their courses in another semester. Numerous counselors were assigned to campus and given purple armbands so they were easily identifiable in case someone needed immediate help.

DeAngelis, who retired in 2014, said the survivors will deal with the tragedy in different ways.

"Some people needed to constantly talk about the experience and their feelings and where they are at any particular day and any particular moment," he said. "You had others who felt that 'The sooner I get back to teaching and get back to the activities I was involved with prior to the tragedy, it will help me move forward.' And then you had those people in between. For everyone, it is a challenge."

He said administrators and teachers need to recognize subtle signs of trauma among their colleagues.

"These teachers are there to help the kids, but a lot of times they are putting on a strong front, but they are hurting, too," he said. "It is important for administrators to keep an eye on their teachers, and the teachers need to help each other."

He said unexpected problems will arise. Many of the police officers who stormed Columbine to confront the shooters wore camouflage, so students were banned from wearing camouflage clothing because it disturbed others. History teachers had to be careful when showing videos about war because seeing and hearing gunfire traumatized students.

DeAngelis said Stoneman Douglas administrators will have to decide how to deal with spring rituals like prom and graduation, as those will create strong feelings of loss.

Survivors of other types of tragedies can sometimes choose whether they want to revisit the site of their anguish, but for students and teachers, that usually isn't an option. Stoneman Douglas students and staff will be reminded of their loss every school day, some of them for years, he said.

"When they walk down that hallway, it is going to bring them back to that day. They are going to see kids running out of that building. They are going to see kids with their hands up. They are going to hear gunshots," DeAngelis said. "They are going to relive that day in and day out, and that takes a toll on people."

Follow the AP's complete coverage of the Florida school shooting here: <https://apnews.com/tag/Floraschoolshooting> .

Russia-ordered 'pause' in Syria fails to ease suffering

By SARAH EL DEEB and ZEINA KARAM, Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A five-hour truce ordered by Syria's Russian allies to allow civilians to flee a besieged, opposition-held enclave near Damascus failed to result in aid deliveries or medical evacuations Tuesday, while deadly airstrikes and shelling continued in the region.

The U.N. and aid agencies criticized the unilateral arrangement for a daily "humanitarian pause" announced by Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying it gave no guarantees of safety for tens of thousands of residents of eastern Ghouta, where they have been trapped for weeks under intense attack by the Syrian government.

Russia ordered the daily truce, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. local time, to begin Tuesday. A so-called corridor through a crossing point manned by the Syrian military was set up through which residents could leave, but no civilians used it and many said they feared harassment or arrest if they go into government areas after years of living in the rebel-controlled area.

"Anyone would face a number of dangers at any moment if they step into Damascus, either by arrest or by questioning family members. ... We in Ghouta we have no way out," said Nemaat Mohsen, who lives in the town of Saqba in eastern Ghouta.

The enclave's residents also fear their region would meet the same fate as the eastern, rebel-held half of the city of Aleppo, where a similar Russian-ordered pause in 2016 called on residents to evacuate the

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area and for gunmen to lay down their arms. A full ground assault followed, finally bringing Aleppo under the control of forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"People are still in shelters. They didn't leave it because they have no confidence in the Russian and Syrian governments," said Firas Abdullah, an opposition activist from Douma, one of the largest towns in eastern Ghouta about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the center of Damascus.

Video from the Wafideen crossing point, near Douma, showed preparations to allow civilians to leave, including small buses waiting at a parking area and soldiers milling about. The sound of occasional shelling could be heard, and some appeared to be outgoing rockets from government areas. The site has been used for years as a crossing point between the rebel-controlled sector and Damascus under an informal wartime agreement.

A journalist for Syria's state-run Al-Ikhbariya TV said rebel-fired mortar shells had targeted the crossing, preventing civilians from leaving. Russian Gen. Viktor Pankov also told Russia's state news agency Tass that residents couldn't leave because of the rebel shelling. It was not possible to verify the reports.

Tass said Russian military police set up the humanitarian corridor with the Syrian troops, but there were no signs of anyone emerging.

The U.N. estimates that nearly 400,000 people live in dire conditions from the siege in eastern Ghouta, which has been under intense bombing by government forces for weeks.

The five-hour humanitarian truce ordered by Putin comes after a 30-day U.N. cease-fire unanimously approved Saturday by the Security Council failed to stop the carnage in eastern Ghouta, where more than 500 people have been killed since last week.

Residents and aid groups say such unilateral truces lack provisions for international monitoring and the consensus of all the parties involved.

Ingy Sedky, spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the humanitarian corridors must be planned and implemented with the consent of all sides.

"This is essential so that people can leave safely, if they chose to do so," she told The Associated Press from Damascus. "And for those who decide to leave, all measures should be taken to provide assistance, protection and shelter to them. And those who remain must be protected from any attacks."

Regional director Robert Mardini said it was impossible to bring a humanitarian convoy in five hours.

The U.N. coordinator for humanitarian affairs also said conditions were not conducive for any aid deliveries.

"We have reports this morning that there is continued fighting in eastern Ghouta, so clearly the situation on the ground is not such that, for example, convoys can go in or medical evacuations can come out," said Jens Laerke, speaking at a U.N. briefing in Geneva.

At least 34 people were killed Monday by airstrikes and shelling, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Airstrikes and shelling continued Tuesday, although at a lower scale, and at least three more people were killed, according to opposition activists. The state-run news agency SANA said 14 people, including children, were wounded by shells fired from eastern Ghouta into government-controlled areas in Damascus and its surroundings.

Civilians caught in the violence have mocked Putin's five-hour truce, saying it provides only a short period of calm. Mohammad Alloush of the Army of Islam, the largest insurgent group in Ghouta, said the Russia-ordered pauses circumvent the U.N. resolution and is aimed at displacing civilians rather than protecting them.

"The only ones who will leave are the occupiers and Assad's regime. We are the owners of the land," Alloush told the AP.

"If Russia is concerned about civilians in eastern Ghouta, it should halt its planes immediately from bombing towns and residences and should stop the regime of Assad from its war of extermination," he said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov retorted that those remarks raise questions about the insurgents' sincerity in honoring a U.N. cease-fire resolution. Speaking after talks with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Lavrov said the U.N. resolution specifically calls on all combatants not to put any obstacles in the way of those seeking to leave besieged areas.

Russia, whose military campaign in support of Assad has turned the tide of the war in the Syrian government's favor, accused the insurgents of preventing people from leaving, allegations the rebels deny.

Abu Ammar Dalwan, an Army of Islam member in Ghouta, said government shelling continued after the cease-fire, with helicopters seen overhead. He denied his group was shelling the Wafideen corridor.

Ghouta residents had decided to stay following years of violence, even though they had the option of leaving through tunnels that were operational until the recent assault began, Dalwan said.

He said that evacuating people under the threat of shelling amounted to a war crime.

"We want the international community to stop such a war crime," he added.

Associated Press writers Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow, Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Albert Aji in Damascus and Bassem Mroue in Beirut contributed.

Ford and Miami to form test bed for self-driving cars

By DEE-ANN DURBIN, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Ford Motor Co. is making Miami-Dade County its new test bed for self-driving vehicles.

The automaker and its partners — Domino's Pizza, ride-hailing company Lyft and delivery company Postmates — are starting pilot programs to see how consumers react to autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles. Self-driving startup and Ford partner Argo AI already has a fleet of cars in the area making the highly detailed maps that are necessary for self-driving. Ford also will establish its first-ever autonomous vehicle terminal in Miami, where it will learn how to service and deploy its test fleet.

More services will likely be introduced as the partnership goes on, including Chariot, an app-based shuttle service owned by Ford. It's all part of Ford's effort to find viable business models for fully autonomous vehicles and get them on the road by 2021.

"This is, I think, the future of any automotive company or mobility company. If a majority of the world's population is going to be living in cities, we need to understand how to move those people around," said John Kwant, Ford's vice president of city solutions, who inked the deal with Miami-Dade.

Ford isn't the first automaker to run test fleets of autonomous vehicles. General Motors Co. will start testing autonomous vehicles in New York City this year, while Nissan Motor Co. is launching an autonomous taxi service in Yokohama, Japan, next week. Technology companies like Waymo — a division of Google — are also testing self-driving vehicles on public roads in Phoenix, San Francisco and Singapore, among other cities.

But the partnership with a specific metropolitan is less common. Both sides envision a deep relationship where Ford can help Miami-Dade solve specific issues, like how to most efficiently move people from its suburbs to its downtown monorail, and Miami-Dade can offer solutions like dedicated lanes for automated vehicles or infrastructure projects like advanced traffic lights that can send signals to connected cars.

"We want to be on the forefront of this because we want to give our people choices," said Carlos Gimenez, the mayor of Miami-Dade County, which is home to 34 cities and 2.7 million people.

Sherif Marakby, Ford's vice president of autonomous vehicles and electrification, says the company also intends to work closely with local businesses. The company wants to learn, for example, how a florist might use an autonomous delivery vehicle.

"Autonomous vehicle technology is interesting, but it's a whole lot more interesting with a viable business model," he said.

The city of Miami is the fifth-most congested in the U.S., according to a recent traffic study by the consulting firm Inrix. After more than a century of selling people vehicles, Kwant says Ford now wants to figure out ways to move people more efficiently in order to cut down on that time in traffic.

Sam Abuelsamid, a senior research analyst with the consulting firm Navigant Research, says Ford and others must figure out how to make money on self-driving cars.

"If this does take off, if people do adopt automated vehicles and use them for ride-hailing, that's going to result in a decline in retail vehicle sales," Abuelsamid said. "They need to figure out, if we're going to

have a decline in the number of vehicles we sell to consumers, how do we keep our business stable?"

Kwant says the testing will also help Ford determine what its future self-driving vehicles need to look like and how they must perform.

"If you don't have steering wheels, how do you begin to use that package space? How do you begin to look different in terms of carrying more people?" he said.

Ford won't say how many vehicles it will have on the road in Miami-Dade, but says it will be Ford's largest test bed for autonomous vehicles by the end of this year.

All of the vehicles will have backup safety drivers. Domino's experimental vehicles aren't even technically autonomous; they're equipped to be, but for now they have actual drivers. The windows are blacked out so customers can experience how to get pizza from the car without dealing with a person.

Miami will give Ford new challenges. Previously, it tested Domino's cars in suburban Michigan, where parking wasn't an issue. But in busy Miami Beach, the cars will have to figure out where they can go to allow apartment-dwellers to safely retrieve their pizzas. An autonomous delivery vehicle from Postmates might have to switch between Spanish and English commands when it picks up a meal and delivers it to a customer. Self-driving Lyft vehicles will be tasked with mapping out the best places to wait for customers without causing more traffic headaches.

Kwant says Ford will announce more city partnerships as this year progresses. But Miami-Dade was a natural, since it has good weather, lots of different urban and suburban terrain and support from Gimenez and other government leaders.

Gimenez, who began talking to Ford in 2017 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, says he's not worried about consumer acceptance of self-driving cars. He thinks his community will embrace them as companies prove that shared autonomous vehicles can be cheaper and safer than regular ones.

Gimenez says self-driving vehicles also can potentially improve traffic flow without significant new investments in roadways. They can travel more closely together, for example, because they're always watching the car in front of them and can brake automatically.

"That's why I'm really high on this technology," he said.

Saudi military leaders replaced amid stalemated war in Yemen

By JON GAMBRELL, Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia replaced its military chief of staff and other defense officials early on Tuesday morning in a shake-up apparently aimed at overhauling its Defense Ministry during the stalemated and ruinous war in Yemen.

The kingdom also announced a new female deputy minister of labor and social development as it tries to broaden the role of women in the workplace.

Saudi Arabia made the announcement in a flurry of royal decrees carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency. As with many announcements in the ultraconservative Sunni kingdom, it was short on details.

King Salman "approved the document on developing the Ministry of Defense, including the vision and strategy of the ministry's developing program, the operational pattern targeting its development, the organizational structure, governance and human resources requirements," one statement said.

That restructuring was part of a "multi-year effort," Prince Faisal bin Farhan, a senior adviser at the Saudi Embassy in Washington, wrote on Twitter.

Prominent among the personnel changes was the firing of military chief of staff Gen. Abdulrahman bin Saleh al-Bunyan. Another announcement said the general would become a consultant to the royal court.

Al-Bunyan was replaced by Gen. Fayyadh bin Hamid al-Rwaili, who once had been the commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force, among the nation's premier military forces.

Also appointed as an assistant defense minister was Khaled bin Hussain al-Biyari, the CEO of the publicly traded mobile phone and internet service provider Saudi Telecom Co.

The decisions come as the Saudi-led coalition, chiefly backed by the United Arab Emirates, remains mired in a stalemate in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country. Over 10,000 people have been killed in the war

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in which Saudi-led forces back Yemen's internationally recognized government against Shiite rebels and their allies who are holding the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, and much of the north of the country.

The kingdom faces wide international criticism for its airstrikes killing civilians and striking markets, hospitals and other civilian targets. Aid groups also blame a Saudi-led blockade of Yemen for pushing the country to the brink of famine.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the heir to the throne after his father King Salman, is the Saudi defense minister and architect of the Yemen war. While the crown prince has burnished his reputation abroad with promises of business-friendly reforms and other pledges, his role in Yemen haunts that carefully considered public personae.

But the overhaul in the Saudi defense forces should not be seen only as a reaction to the Yemen war, said Becca Wasser, a Washington-based RAND Corp. analyst specializing in Gulf security who has traveled to Saudi Arabia in the past.

The war in Yemen functions "to push these reforms forward, but it's not the driver," Wasser told The Associated Press.

In general, Wasser said such an overhaul would include improving training and recruitment of troops, allocating better resources and changing a military's leadership to one willing to hear new ideas and make changes.

Also noticeable was an effort to include a "careful balancing" of appointments of others in the Al Saud royal family, said Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a research fellow at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University

"It seems the Saudi shake-up is more about moving forward with Mohammed bin Salman's attempt to put in place a new generation of leadership in tune with his vision to transform the structure of Saudi decision making," Ulrichsen told the AP.

The appointment of a woman in a ministerial position, Tamadhir bint Yosif al-Rammah as deputy minister of labor and social development, comes as the kingdom prepares to allow women to drive this year and pushes to have more women in Saudi workplaces.

Also appointed was Prince Turki bin Talal Al Saud as deputy governor of the Asir region. The prince's brother is billionaire Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, who recently was detained for months at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh as part of what the government described as an anti-corruption campaign.

As with the anti-corruption purge, Wasser said the military overhaul also fit into the consolidation of power by Crown Prince Mohammed.

"Reform is a tricky thing to do. To create change in a larger bureaucratic structure like a military is difficult. To create change in Saudi Arabia ... is incredibly difficult," she said. "It is not going to be easy and change is not going to happen tomorrow. This is much more of a long-term endeavor."

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellap . His work can be found at <http://apne.ws/2galNpz> .

Trump urges lawmakers to buck NRA every once in a while

By LISA MASCARO and MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump declared he's willing to take on the National Rifle Association over gun legislation, but Republicans who control Congress aren't so sure. They prefer to consider only modest changes to firearms limits in response to the mass shooting at a Florida high school.

Congress returned to work Monday without following Trump's lead on any of the major initiatives he has tossed into the debate since the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Despite public calls for stricter gun laws, Republican leaders have largely kept quiet after the shooting which left 17 dead and ushered in another phase in the gun debate, prompted in large part by the activism of the young survivors. Some students visited with lawmakers Monday.

Over the weekend, Trump spent time talking to Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, and

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the White House is inviting lawmakers from both parties for meetings this week. But Trump's ideas to arm many teachers, lift the minimum age for purchasing assault rifles to 21 and impose stricter background checks were falling flat.

"You guys, half of you are so afraid of the NRA," the president said Monday at a meeting with the nation's governors. "There's nothing to be afraid of. And you know what? If they're not with you, we have to fight them every once in a while. That's OK."

Instead, Senate Republicans are hoping to consider more modest legislation from Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Chris Murphy, D-Conn., to strengthen the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS. The "Fix NICS" bill, similar to one approved last year in the House, would penalize federal agencies that don't properly report required records used to determine whether someone can legally buy a gun.

Cornyn, the Senate's No. 2 Republican, questioned Trump's proposal to raise the age limit for assault weapons, noting that the minimum age to enlist in the military is 18.

"I'm not sure I understand the 21 age. I think there are better ways to address it than just an arbitrary age increase," he told The Washington Times.

Trump insisted Monday that sometimes political leaders need to buck the NRA, which builds its political power by major campaign spending and motivating gun rights supporters to vote. Though he did not mention increasing the minimum age for rifle purchases, he wants to toughen the Cornyn bill with stricter background checks, a change the NRA has opposed.

"We're going to strengthen it," Trump said. "We're going to make it more pertinent to what we're discussing."

Democrats have long pressed for more sweeping changes toward a universal background check system, including requiring inquiries for online and gun show purchases.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Monday that if all Congress can accomplish is passage of the "Fix NICS" bill "it would be an abject failure and a dereliction of our duty."

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., are reviving their background check bill, which failed earlier, including after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. Manchin said opponents at the time worried then-President Barack Obama would impose even stricter restrictions. "Well they're not having that fear right now with President Trump," he said.

At a minimum, Congress should approve universal background checks, Schumer said, denouncing "NRA-backed bills that make Republicans feel better without meaningfully addressing the issue of gun safety."

In the House, many Democrats want to reinstate an assault weapons ban that expired more than a decade ago.

But House Republican leaders believe it's up to the Senate to take the next steps, according to a top House GOP aide, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss legislative strategy.

The House passed legislation in December that included changes to the background-check system. It was part of a broader package that stalled in the Senate because it included expanded gun rights by requiring states to recognize conceal-carry permits issued by other states.

The House package also included a measure to study bump stocks, the devices that turn rifles into automatic-style weapons and were used in the Las Vegas assault last fall, the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.

In the Senate, Republican leaders see the best route to passage in separating the issues of background checks and state reciprocity measures. They were testing support Monday for quick consideration of the background checks bill, which was introduced last fall after the shooting of churchgoers in Texas. At the time, authorities acknowledged having failed to report the Texas gunman's domestic violence conviction to the National Criminal Information Center database.

"I'm for doing what's achievable," Cornyn told reporters.

But even the "Fix NICS" bill faced resistance from some in the GOP ranks.

Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky said the bill would encourage federal agencies "to

encroach upon constitutionally guaranteed rights without affording robust due-process protections.”

At the same time, some Republican lawmakers appeared willing to go further, particularly in outlawing bump stocks, which the Trump administration wants to do through administrative action as the NRA prefers, rather than legislation.

Rep. Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania said he supports a ban on bump stocks, whether it's done through legislation or a change in federal regulations.

“That's sort of simple stuff that we should get done for the American public,” he told The Associated Press.

Costello, who faces a stiff re-election challenge in a district that has been redrawn to favor Democrats, also supports the Fix NICS bill and a measure to raise age limits on purchases of certain assault weapons.

At the White House, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, one of two Democrats to address Trump publicly, expressed his concerns over the idea of arming teachers as a response to the school shootings. “We need a little less tweeting, a little more listening,” Inslee said.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Ken Thomas, Andrew Taylor and video producer Padmananda Rama contributed to this story.

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Supreme Court declines to decide fate of ‘Dreamers’ just yet

By JESSICA GRESKO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday rejected the Trump administration's highly unusual bid to bypass a federal appeals court and get the justices to intervene in the fate of a program that protects hundreds of thousands of young immigrants from deportation.

The announcement means the case affecting “Dreamers” will have to work its way through the lower courts before any Supreme Court ruling is possible. The case could also become moot if Congress takes action in the meantime. Right now, however, efforts to address the issue in Congress have hit a stalemate.

The Supreme Court's decision for now to stay out of the case on the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, wasn't surprising. It's highly unusual for the Supreme Court to hear a case before a lower appeals court has considered it.

But DACA supporters hailed the decision as a significant — if only temporary — win. Trump said the case would now be heard by an appeals court and “we'll see what happens from there.”

“You know, we tried to get it moved quickly because we'd like to help DACA. I think everybody in this room wants to help with DACA,” he said to visiting governors. “But the Supreme Court just ruled that it has to go through the normal channels.”

DACA has provided protection from deportation and work permits for about 800,000 young people who came to the U.S. as children and stayed illegally.

In September, Trump argued that President Barack Obama had exceeded his executive powers when he created the program. Trump announced he was ending the program effective March 5 and gave lawmakers until then to come up with a legislative fix.

But in recent weeks, federal judges in San Francisco and New York have made Trump's deadline temporarily moot for people who have sought and been granted renewals; the rulings do not extend to people who are applying for the first time. Judges issued injunctions ordering the administration to keep DACA in place while courts consider legal challenges to Trump's termination. As a result, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services resumed accepting and processing DACA renewals in January, just as it had before Trump's September announcement.

The Trump administration has not tried to block the injunctions that force it to continue operating the program. Though the March 5 date is now moot, Greisa Martinez, policy and advocacy director for United We Dream, said DACA supporters planned to demonstrate in Washington on that day in part to continue to pressure Congress to act.

The Senate two weeks ago blocked a bipartisan bill offering Dreamers potential citizenship and providing \$25 billion for President Donald Trump to build his proposed border wall with Mexico. A more conservative House proposal that sharply reduces legal immigration and imposes other restrictions has languished short of the GOP votes it would need to pass, leaving its fate in question.

The Supreme Court's announcement Monday that it wouldn't step in to the case now means the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit will likely be the first appeals court to weigh in on the topic, the step before the case would return to the Supreme Court.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who has led the multistate lawsuit in California to keep DACA in place, cheered the Supreme Court announcement Monday.

"It's a victory for all Dreamers, certainly a great victory for California," Becerra said during a phone call with reporters. "It's a victory for the rule of law and it's a victory for our economy."

The Ninth Circuit has set no date to hear arguments but has given lawyers dates by which they must file briefs that run through April. Andrew Pincus, an attorney who represents more than 100 businesses that intervened in support of DACA, said June is probably the earliest that the court would rule.

Trump on Monday didn't seem to hold out much hope of winning at the Ninth Circuit, criticizing the liberal-leaning court by saying "nothing's as bad as the Ninth Circuit."

"I mean, it's really sad when every single case filed against us is in the 9th Circuit we lose, we lose, we lose and then we do fine in the Supreme Court," he said.

Associated Press writers Elliot Spagat in San Diego and Jill Colvin, Mark Sherman and Alan Fram in Washington contributed to this report.

Dick's to stop selling assault-style rifles in its stores

NEW YORK (AP) — Dick's Sporting Goods will immediately end sales of assault-style rifles in its stores and won't sell guns to anyone under 21 years old following the school massacre in Parkland, Florida.

Dick's Chairman and CEO Edward Stack said on "Good Morning America" Wednesday that after the shooting the company "felt it needed to do something."

Stack says that the gunman, Nickolas Cruz, had purchased a gun at a Dick's store, but not the one used at the school shooting, even though all existing rules were followed. Stack says that the system that's in place won't stop sales to dangerous people and said lawmakers must do something.

Stack said Dick's is prepared for any potential backlash, but will not change its policies on gun sales.

In patriarchal Japan, saying 'Me Too' can be risky for women

By MARI YAMAGUCHI, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese women who say "Me too" do so at their own risk.

Online comments accused Rika Shiiki of lying and being a publicity hound when she tweeted that she lost business contracts after refusing to have sex with clients. Some said that by agreeing to dine with a man, she led him on.

"The comments I received were disproportionately negative," the 20-year-old university student and entrepreneur told a TV talk show in December. "We need to create a society where we can speak up. Otherwise sexual harassment and other misconduct will persist forever."

The #MeToo movement has not caught on in Japan, where speaking out often draws criticism rather than sympathy, even from other women.

In a patriarchal society where women have long taken the blame, many victims try to forget attacks and harassment instead of seeking support and justice, said Mari Miura, a political science professor at Sophia University in Tokyo.

"Japan lacks such a sisterhood," she said. "It's an exhausting and intimidating process. ... It's quite natural that victims feel reluctant to speak up."

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One woman, journalist Shiori Ito, went public last year. She held a news conference after prosecutors decided not to press charges against a prominent TV newsmen whom she had accused of raping her after he invited her to discuss job opportunities over dinner and drinks in 2015.

Many online comments criticized her for speaking out, looking too seductive and ruining the life of a prominent figure. Some women called her an embarrassment, she told The Associated Press.

The October release of Ito's book "Blackbox" detailing her ordeal came as the #MeToo phenomenon was making headlines in America. It prompted some discussion in Japan, but only a handful of other women came forward.

"Many people think Shiori's problem has nothing to do with them ... and that's why #MeToo isn't growing in Japan," said lawyer Yukiko Tsunoda, an expert on sex crimes. In Japan, sexually assaulted women are traditionally called "the flawed," she said.

Nearly three quarters of rape victims said they had never told anyone, and just over 4 percent had gone to police, according to a 2015 government survey. The study found that one in 15 Japanese women had been raped or forced to have sex.

Victims often shy away from going to court out of fear, privacy concerns or losing jobs, Tsunoda said.

Justice Ministry statistics show only one-third of rape cases go to court, and punishment is not severe. Of the 1,678 people tried for sexual assault in 2017, only 285, or 17 percent, were sentenced to prison for three years or longer. In November, Yokohama prosecutors, without saying why, dropped the case against six students from a leading university who had been arrested for the alleged gang-rape of a teenage female student after getting her drunk. The university expelled three of them.

Popular writer Haruka Ito, who goes by the pen name Ha-Chu, was criticized after revealing in December that she had faced sexual and other harassment by a senior male employee when both worked at Dentsu, Japan's largest advertising agency.

The alleged harasser, whom she identified by name, apologized in a statement and quit as head of his own company, though he denied the harassment was sexual.

Ha-chu said in a statement that she initially tried to endure and forget the ordeal, fearing that exposing it would hurt her image and cause problems for her former colleagues. After news of the journalist Ito's case and the #MeToo movement, "I decided to speak out," she said.

Conformist pressure in Japan discourages women from speaking out or saying "no" to many things, including unwanted sex, said Saori Ikeuchi, a former lawmaker and gender diversity activist.

That mindset has silenced virtually all of Japan's so-called "comfort women," who were sexually abused as prostitutes for the wartime military, while Japan has shown little sympathy to victims from Korea and elsewhere, she said.

Ito, the journalist, said that after she became dizzy and passed out in a restroom, her alleged attacker, Noriyuki Yamaguchi, took her to his hotel room and raped her while she was incapacitated.

The alleged assault was just the beginning of her ordeal, Ito said. The women's clinic she visited the next day lacked expertise on rape, and a rape victim support center refused to give her advice on the phone. Police required her to recount the ordeal repeatedly and to demonstrate it with a life-sized doll, she said.

Ito said it took three weeks to get police to accept her criminal complaint and start investigating. She held a news conference in May, announcing that she had requested a court-appointed citizens' panel to review the decision to drop the case. The inquest in September agreed with the decision not to indict.

Yamaguchi has denied any wrongdoing in published articles and on Facebook. Ito has filed a civil lawsuit against him, demanding 10 million yen (\$93,000) in compensation for her suffering from the alleged rape, and seeking any clues as to why he was let go and never arrested.

"I thought about how I could change the situation, and I had no choice but to speak out about my experience," she said.

A group of opposition lawmakers has started its own investigation, seeking to find if the charges were dropped because of Yamaguchi's connections to powerful political officials.

National Police Agency official Junichiro Kan told the lawmakers at a recent hearing that Ito's case was

properly handled. Police say they have tried to be more sensitive to the feelings of victims while guarding against wrongful accusations.

Mika Kobayashi, a rape victim, runs a self-help group that has exchanged thousands of #MeToo experiences, but only anonymously among themselves.

She said she was pushed into a car and raped on her way home in 2000. She reported the attack to police, but the attacker hasn't been found. She has since published books about her recovery from the ordeal, to raise public awareness.

Her focus is on providing support and understanding for victims, rather than being an activist.

"I used to think of myself as someone hiding a big secret, a sex assault victim and unclean," she said. "I'm so grateful I could connect with fellow victims. They gave me strength."

The knowledge that others also blamed themselves and lost self-esteem has helped her to heal slowly, Kobayashi said.

"I think it's also OK not to speak up," she said. "I respect any decision that makes a victim feel most comfortable."

Follow Mari Yamaguchi on Twitter at twitter.com/mariyamaguchi

Find her work at <https://www.apnews.com/search/mari%20yamaguchi>

Takata air bag recall made compulsory for Australia vehicles

By ROD McGUIRK, Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia on Wednesday issued a compulsory recall for all 2.7 million cars fitted with defective Takata air bags in an effort to lift the auto industry's mixed efforts to fix the fault blamed for at least 23 deaths around the world.

Vehicle suppliers must recall and replace all the air bags in Australia by the end of 2020, with priority given to the most dangerous because of their design, age or the level of humidity in their environment, Assistant Minister to the Treasurer Michael Sukkar said.

"Tragically there has been one death and one case of serious injury in Australia as a result of the deployment of these air bags and the government just doesn't want to see any more," Sukkar told reporters.

Takata's air bag problem has resulted in 100 million recalls worldwide and forced the Japanese company into bankruptcy protection. The Australian government said at least 23 deaths and more than 230 serious injuries had been associated with the air bag defects.

Sukkar said the problem was considered acute in northern Australia due to its humid and hot climate. Such conditions are a known factor in the air bag's dangers and the deaths have occurred mainly in the summer in the southern United States and in tropical Malaysia.

The chemical propellant in the air bag inflators can deteriorate in hot, humid conditions and burn too fast, blowing apart a metal canister and creating shrapnel.

While some manufacturers had recalled more than 80 percent of the air bags in Australia, some were as low as 36 percent.

Globally, many manufacturers have been slow to replace the potentially deadly inflators. A report by an independent monitor said that as of Sept. 15, 2017, automakers had replaced only 43 percent since Takata recalls began in 2001.

Under the compulsory recall order, the government will be able to name manufacturers who are falling behind from July. Failure to comply with the order carries a potential fine of 1.1 million Australian dollars (\$860,000) per breach.

"One of the concerns has been the divergence we've seen among manufacturers as to how actively they've sought to notify ... consumers with potential problems with their air bags," Sukkar said.

"As far as reluctance goes, again it's been very much a mixed bag. If you look at some of the manufacturers, they really use best endeavors. There are other manufacturers who didn't show the same diligence," he added.

Rod Sims, chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the consumer watchdog that recommended the recall, said some manufacturers within the voluntary recall have done a bad job.

"They've been slow to communicate, slow to get the parts in and slow to replace air bags and sometimes said things to consumers that were unfortunate, like: 'Come back in a year's time and, by the way, in the meantime don't drive the car,'" Sims said.

National Roads and Motorists' Association spokesman Peter Khoury, an Australian motorists advocate, said the compulsory recall was long overdue.

"This recall has been going on for a number of years, it's clearly too long and it is absolutely vital that we get these cars fixed by the deadline set by the Australian government at the end of 2020, but certainly preferably well before that," Khoury said.

"It has absolutely taken far too long to reach this stage. When you have air bags killing people globally, that is something that needs to be addressed immediately," he added.

Echo of Obamacare: Dems divided over vow to repeal tax law

By **STEVE PEOPLES** and **KEVIN FREKING**, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans spent much of the last decade firing up their base with a vow to repeal President Barack Obama's health care overhaul. But when it came to doing the deed, they found promises much easier than execution.

Democrats may be starting down the same path on taxes.

From New Mexico to New York, high-profile liberals are calling for the repeal of the Republican tax plan that President Donald Trump signed into law just two months ago. They're betting big that the message will resonate with voters in the midterm elections in November and provide the sort of clear, populist economic message some Democrats worry has been missing. But others, including red-state Democrats, are clearly queasy about the strategy, mindful that repealing a government benefit once it takes hold is far easier said than done — and not always popular.

When pressed, some leading Democrats conceded that they'd repeal only certain portions of the tax law despite the implication that they'd go further.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a 2016 presidential candidate who appeared last weekend in Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan as part of the "Repeal the Trump Tax" national tour, said "No" three times in an AP interview when asked whether he backed full repeal.

"I think what we have got to do is sit down and take a look at what kind of tax benefits would work best for small business, for working families and the middle class," Sanders said. "But what we must repeal completely is tax breaks that go to billionaires and to profitable large corporations that are in some cases are paying very little in taxes right now."

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who may seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020 and was also featured on the repeal tour, offered a more aggressive position.

"Repeal this tax bill," Garcetti said. "It was passed by, and for, the Washington crowd and their rich friends. Corporations and billionaires are doing just fine."

The messaging challenge comes as the Republican tax overhaul emerges as a central issue in this year's midterm elections. More than health care, guns, or immigration, Republicans and Democrats both have embraced the tax debate. Each side believes it has the winning argument in a battle that will decide the balance of power in Washington for the last two years of Trump's first term.

The conservative Koch brothers' political network has already begun spending millions of dollars on TV ads and grassroots events to help improve the plan's popularity.

While Trump and many conservative leaders cheered the tax overhaul, it was among the least popular pieces of legislation in modern history when it became law in December. Not a single Democrat in the House or Senate voted for the tax plan, which overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy, but included modest savings for many middle-class and lower-income Americans.

"I would urge Democrats to embrace repeal. It is a simple clean message. It also captures essentially

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what most Democrats feel about this bill: It's bad," said Nicole Gill, whose liberal group, Tax March, coordinated the ongoing "Repeal the Trump Tax" national tour, which in addition to Sanders and Garcetti has already featured appearances from House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Democratic National Committee Deputy Chairman Keith Ellison and at least 16 other members of Congress in recent weeks. The tour runs through mid-April.

Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who leads Senate Democrats' 2018 campaign efforts, encouraged all of his party's candidates, even the most vulnerable, to embrace their opposition to the tax law.

"Our members will be talking to these issues," Van Hollen said. "It doesn't matter if you're a red state or a blue state, the idea of running up the debt by \$1.5 trillion and cutting Medicare and Medicaid to pay for tax cuts for big corporations and the wealthy is not popular."

So far, at least, red-state Democrats are quick to say they would not repeal the law if given the chance, in what is a far more cautious approach than some party strategists and blue-state officials would like.

"I think there's a lot of good things in the tax bill. I just think they went a little too far on some things," said West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, who is running for re-election this fall in a state Trump won by 42 points.

Manchin, for example, said he wanted the corporate tax rate placed at 25 percent and he would not have voted to repeal the health coverage mandate.

"No, I wouldn't vote to repeal it. I'm not that type of a person," he said in an interview, adding that he had a similar philosophy on Obama's health care overhaul: Fix it, rather than repeal.

Democratic Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, a state Trump won by 20 points, said he understands that some constituents will benefit from the tax law. He said headlines about bonuses are "all positive" as far as he's concerned.

"There's portions of the tax bill that actually made sense," he said in an interview. "But the thing is, who pays for it? And it's our kids."

During the bill signing in December, Trump highlighted the corporate tax cut in particular, which was dropped from 35 percent to 21 percent. Companies such as Apple, Walmart, Cisco and Pepsi will save hundreds of millions of dollars and sent some of the savings to workers in the form of bonuses and pay increases, but much more went to corporate executives and other shareholders. The bill also lowered the tax rates for each income level and doubled the standard deduction.

Most Americans, but not all, will save money on their tax bills in the coming years, with wealthier taxpayers saving the most. The individual tax cuts will expire in 2025, while the business cuts are permanent.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, a Democrat elected three months ago, suggested that it didn't matter much whether Democrats promised outright repeal or major improvements as they campaign against the Republican tax law this fall.

"Whether you take an approach of repealing or taking a piece of legislation that you can improve upon — it's the same thing (with) the Affordable Care Act — nothing's perfect," Northam said.

Unclaimed bodies pile up as payments wither, overdoses rise

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, Associated Press

WORCESTER, Mass. (AP) — Who takes care of the unclaimed dead, the people who were homeless or estranged from family members, or who outlived all their kin, and left no assets behind?

The answer is usually funeral homes that get reimbursed by state or local governments for the cost of cremation or burial. But payments are not keeping up with ever-rising expenses in some places, like Massachusetts, meaning the number of funeral homes willing to shoulder the burden is dwindling. In at least one state, West Virginia, drug overdose victims have used up nearly all the money set aside for the unclaimed dead.

"These are human beings, someone's mother, father, sister, brother," said Peter Stefan, a funeral director in his 70s who buries dozens of unclaimed bodies a year in central Massachusetts. "What do you do with these people? If I leave this place this way, the poor won't have too many options."

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The \$1,110 reimbursement for funeral directors who bury the indigent and unclaimed in Massachusetts hasn't risen in 35 years. The total cost for their time, the casket, transportation of the corpse and a burial plot can be double that, they say.

Cremation is cheaper, but that's impossible if, as is required in some places including Massachusetts, funeral directors can't find kin to sign off. That leaves them scrambling to find discounts or covering some costs themselves.

"As long as you have two or three funeral homes that are willing to do this, it's not a problem," said Robert Lawler, a Boston funeral director who buries about 100 unclaimed bodies a year. "But what happens when we decide we can't do it anymore?"

Directors recently became eligible for an extra \$1,000 if they accept bodies from the Massachusetts medical examiner's office, which investigates suicides and suspicious and accidental deaths. But that accounts only for some bodies.

About 15 states provide some funding for unclaimed body burials or cremations, while the rest have pushed the cost to local governments, said Scott Gilligan, general counsel for the National Funeral Directors Association.

Ohio, for example, used to pay \$750 before shifting the burden to local governments. Now, some communities offer a set fee, while some smaller towns often won't even budget for it and funeral directors have to fight to just get paid \$350, Gilligan said.

"A lot of times, they just do it as good citizens," he said.

In West Virginia, there will soon be no money for the cremation or burial of the poor and unclaimed. The state fund that pays for them is set to run out of money at the end of this month because of drug overdose deaths, said Robert Kimes, executive director of the state funeral directors association.

Directors who bury the indigent and unclaimed from March on will have to try recouping money from the state later, but there's no guarantee, Kimes said. Lawmakers are considering lowering the \$1,250 payment to \$1,000 but doing away with some things funeral homes have to pay for, like a vault, to make the fund last longer, he said.

In northwestern Georgia's Floyd County, Coroner Gene Proctor last year was calling five or six funeral homes every time he had an unclaimed body before he could find one willing to bury it for the \$1,250 the county provided.

"I couldn't blame them because ... they're a business and they have to make money to survive, and here I am asking them to cost themselves money," said Proctor, who handled about 90 unclaimed sets of remains last year.

He recently persuaded the county to pass an ordinance that provides for the cremation of the unclaimed. Now, funeral homes get \$750, and every director in the county is stepping forward, he said.

In Massachusetts, Stefan wants lawmakers to require local health boards to approve cremation when relatives don't come forward within 30 days. He and his supporters, including Democratic state Senate President Harriette Chandler, say they believe it would make more funeral homes willing to help out with abandoned bodies.

Stefan, who arranged the burial of Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, is often the go-to funeral director for police, nursing homes and hospitals.

He smoked from a wooden pipe as he explained how the body of James Oram, 82, arrived at his Worcester funeral home hours after dying at a nursing home in January.

Oram's body spent about a month in an unfinished basement in a large refrigerator where Stefan can keep three bodies as he looks for relatives, money and burial space. Others are placed in caskets and stored in a room kept cold.

The body of one man who wanted to be buried at sea has been at Stefan's funeral home for more than a year. Nearby, hundreds of containers of cremated remains that were never picked up by relatives line rows of shelves; some date to the 1800s.

Stefan eventually discovered that Oram died with about \$2,000, money that paid for his burial instead of the state.

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On the unusually warm February day Oram was laid to rest, a funeral director read the 23rd Psalm as cemetery workers put his simple blue casket adorned with white and yellow flowers into the grave and covered it with dirt.

Stefan and the others looked at the grave of the man whose information in their possession fit on a single sheet: White. Male. Single. Factory Worker.

"These people were born, grew up, went to high school," Stefan said. "What happened in the middle? Who knows."

Follow Alanna Durkin Richer at <http://twitter.com/aedurkinricher>. Read more of her work at <http://bit.ly/2hIhzDb>.

Asian shares fall after US slide following Fed testimony

By YURI KAGEYAMA, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares slid in subdued trading Wednesday after the head of the U.S. Federal Reserve said that he's feeling more optimistic about the economy.

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 slipped 0.5 percent in morning trading to 22,287.97. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 was down 0.4 percent at 6,030.00. South Korea's Kospi lost 0.4 percent to 2,446.87. Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down nearly 1.0 percent at 30,970.23, while the Shanghai Composite index stood at 3,260.72, down nearly 1.0 percent.

THE FED: Testimony by Fed Chairman Jerome Powell before Congress was highly anticipated, and he gave encouraging words about the economic data that have arrived in recent weeks. But some investors speculated they could mean the central bank will get more aggressive in raising interest rates. The Fed raised its key policy interest rate three times last year and has signaled another three increases may be coming this year.

WALL STREET: The S&P 500 fell 35.32 points, or 1.3 percent, to 2,744.28. It had been bouncing between modest gains and losses, but the losses accelerated after Powell began answering questions on Capitol Hill. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 299.24, or 1.2 percent, to 25,410.03, and the Nasdaq composite fell 91.11, or 1.2 percent, to 7,330.35.

THE QUOTE: "While the majority of Fed chair Jerome Powell's testimony had been within the market's expectations, the strengthened 'personal outlook' from the Fed chair had certainly inspired bets for further hikes. U.S. markets responded in kind, providing weak leads for Asian equities into the end of the month," says Jingyi Pan, market strategist at IG in Singapore.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude slid 35 cents to \$62.66 a barrel. It fell 90 cents to \$63.01 per barrel Tuesday. Brent crude, the international standard, dropped 29 cents to \$66.23 per barrel.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 107.16 yen from 106.99 yen late Tuesday. The euro dipped to \$1.2227 from \$1.2331.

Follow Yuri Kageyama on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

Her work can be found at <https://www.apnews.com/search/yuri%20kageyama>

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 28, the 59th day of 2018. There are 306 days left in the year. The Jewish holiday Purim begins at sunset.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 28, 1993, a gun battle erupted at a religious compound near Waco, Texas, when Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents tried to arrest Branch Davidian leader David Koresh on weapons charges; four agents and six Davidians were killed as a 51-day standoff began.

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On this date:

In 1784, John Wesley, the co-founder of Methodism, chartered the first Methodist Church in the United States in Leesburg, Virginia.

In 1844, a 12-inch gun aboard the USS Princeton exploded as the ship was sailing on the Potomac River, killing Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur, Navy Secretary Thomas W. Gilmer and several others.

In 1861, the Territory of Colorado was organized.

In 1917, The Associated Press reported that the United States had obtained a diplomatic communication sent by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to a German official in Mexico proposing a German alliance with Mexico and Japan should the U.S. enter World War I. (Outrage over the telegram helped propel America into the conflict.)

In 1942, the heavy cruiser USS Houston and the Australian light cruiser HMAS Perth were attacked by Japanese forces during the World War II Battle of Sunda Strait; both were sunk shortly after midnight on March 1 with a total loss of more than 1,000 men.

In 1953, scientists James D. Watson and Francis H.C. Crick announced they had discovered the double-helix structure of DNA.

In 1958, a school bus clipped a truck near Prestonburg, Kentucky, and plunged down an embankment into the Big Sandy River; 22 children managed to escape, but 26 other children and the bus driver drowned.

In 1960, a day after defeating the Soviets at the Winter Games in Squaw Valley, California, the United States won its first Olympic hockey gold medal by defeating Czechoslovakia, 9-4.

In 1968, "Soul on Ice" by Eldridge Cleaver was published by McGraw-Hill.

In 1975, 42 people were killed in London's Underground when a train smashed into the end of a tunnel.

In 1988, the 15th Olympic Winter Games held its closing ceremony in Calgary, Canada.

In 1996, Britain's Princess Diana agreed to divorce Prince Charles. (Their 15-year marriage officially ended in August 1996; Diana died in a car crash in Paris a year after that.)

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush told a White House news conference the country was not recession-bound; Democratic candidate Barack Obama said the economy was "on the brink of a recession" and blamed economic policies espoused by Bush and Republican presidential contender John McCain. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told his Turkish counterpart that Turkey should end its offensive against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq as soon as possible. Mike Smith, lead singer for the British band the Dave Clark Five, died outside London at age 64.

Five years ago: Benedict XVI became the first pope in 600 years to resign, ending an eight-year pontificate. (Benedict was succeeded the following month by Pope Francis.) Bradley Manning, the Army private arrested in the biggest leak of classified information in U.S. history, pleaded guilty at Fort Meade, Maryland, to 10 charges involving illegal possession or distribution of classified material. (Manning, who later adopted the female identity Chelsea Manning, was sentenced to up to 35 years in prison after being convicted of additional charges in a court-martial, but had her sentence commuted in 2017 by President Barack Obama.)

One year ago: Heralding a "new chapter of American greatness," President Donald Trump issued a broad call for overhauling the nation's health care system and significantly boosting military spending in an hourlong speech to a joint session of Congress. Dozens of tornadoes began touching down in the upper Midwest and northern Arkansas, killing at least three people. Amazon's cloud-computing service, Amazon Web Services, experienced a five-hour outage in its eastern U.S. region, causing unprecedented and widespread problems for thousands of websites and apps.

(Stations: "Bobb'e J. Thompson" is correct)

Today's Birthdays: Architect Frank Gehry is 89. Actor Gavin MacLeod is 87. Singer Sam the Sham is 81. Actor-director-dancer Tommy Tune is 79. Hall of Fame auto racer Mario Andretti is 78. Actor Frank Bonner is 76. Actress Kelly Bishop is 74. Actress Stephanie Beacham is 71. Writer-director Mike Figgis is 70. Actress Mercedes Ruehl is 70. Actress Bernadette Peters is 70. Former Energy Secretary Steven Chu is 70. Actress Ilene Graff is 69. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman is 65. Comedian Gilbert Gottfried is 63. Basketball Hall of Famer Adrian Dantley is 63. Actor John Turturro is 61. Rock singer Cindy Wilson is 61. Actress Rae Dawn Chong is 57. Actress Maxine Bahns is 49. Actor Robert Sean Leonard is 49. Rock

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singer Pat Monahan is 49. Author Daniel Handler (aka "Lemony Snicket") is 48. Actress Tasha Smith is 47. Actor Rory Cochrane is 46. Actress Ali Larter is 42. Country singer Jason Aldean is 41. Actor Geoffrey Arend is 40. Actress Melanie Chandra (TV: "Code Black") is 34. Actress Michelle Horn is 31. Actress True O'Brien is 24. Actress Madisen Beaty is 23. Actress Quinn Shephard is 23. Actor Bobb'e J. Thompson is 22.

Thought for Today: "In science, all facts, no matter how trivial or banal, enjoy democratic equality." — Mary McCarthy, American author and critic (1912-1989).