

Groton Daily Independent

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The baseball fence makes a good snow fence as the snow drifts are higher than the fence on West Third Avenue.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

- 2- Skating Rink opens today
- 2- Groton Area Schedule of Events
- 2- GROW SD Supporting Homeless Count January 22, 2019
- 2- Help Wanted Ads
- 3- GHS November Students of the Month
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Skating Rink Opens Today

Open Monday - Thursday: 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday: 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Thursday, January 3, 2019

School Resumes

6:00pm: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Triangular vs. Redfield-Doland, Webster Area High School @ Webster Area High School

Friday, January 4, 2019

4:00pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Double Header vs. Hamlin @ Hamlin High School (JV Girls game at 4pm, Boys C game at 4pm, JV Boys game at 5:15pm, Varsity Girls game at 6:30pm, Varsity Boys game at 8pm)

5:00pm: Wrestling: Boys JH Tournament vs. Milbank @ Milbank High School

Saturday, January 5, 2019

Robotics at Canton High School

10:00am: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Tournament @ Miller High School

11:00am: Basketball: Girls Varsity Classic vs. Wolsey-Wessington @ Redfield Jr-Sr High School

3:30pm: Basketball: Boys Varsity Classic vs. Viborg-Hurley @ Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls

Sunday, January 6, 2019

2:00pm- 6:00pm: Open Gym at GHS Arena (Grades JK-8 2pm - 4pm; Grades 6-12 4pm - 6pm)

Monday, January 7, 2019

5:15pm: Boys Basketball at Webster Area High School (C game at 5:15 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity games)

6:00pm: Wrestling: Boys JH Tournament vs. TBA @ Groton Area High School

7:00pm: City Council meeting at Groton Community Center

Tuesday, January 8, 2019

6:30pm: Girls Basketball vs. Waubay-Summit at Waubay.

Homecare Services Caregivers

Flexible, part time positions available in the Groton area. Home Care Services is looking for friendly dependable people to provide care and companionship for elderly and disabled people in their homes. You will be assisting our clients with personal care needs, meal preparations, light housekeeping, errands and other tasks. If you have a passion for helping others and need a flexible schedule, please call our office at (605) 225-1076 or 1-800-899-2578. (1218.0101)

Front Porch Manager Wanted

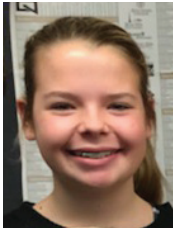
Immediate opening for Restaurant General Manager at The Front Porch Bar & Grill in Langford SD. Hiring bonus available! Salary DOE. Must be 21 years old. Contact Suzie Easthouse at (605) 493-6570 or email resume by to langfordfrontporch@venture-comm.net. (1227.0111)

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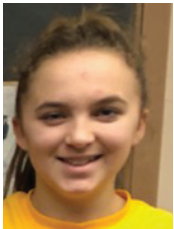
GHS November Students of the Month

The student council is sponsoring Student of the Month. Each month the faculty select students who show outstanding academic achievement. These students receive certificates and have an end of the year recognition with the principal. Students of the Month for November are Elizabeth Fliehs, Ashlyn Sperry, Caleb Hanten, Allyssa Locke, Erin Unzen, KaSandra Pappas and Emily Thompson.



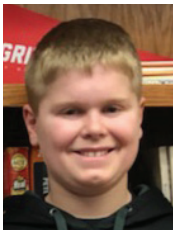
Elizabeth Fliehs, sixth grader, is the daughter of Jeff and Bridget Fliehs, Groton. Her siblings are Madeline, Zach and Sophia.

Elizabeth's activities include basketball, volleyball, soccer, softball, golf and ice skating. She has earned 200 AR points and has placed in MathCounts. She is interested in volleyball, soccer and basketball. Her favorite subject is math. She plans to attend SDSU to be a doctor. Her role models are her Grandma Val and Grandma Sharon.



Ashlyn Sperry, seventh grader, is the daughter of Ryan and Amanda Sperry, Aberdeen. She has one sibling, Owen.

Ashlyn is involved in volleyball, dance and stats. She has been on the honor roll and her interests are riding horse and spending time with family. Math is her favorite subject and she plans to be a veterinarian or a horse trainer. Her role model is her mom.



Caleb Hanten, eighth grader, is the son of Cody and Sarah Hanten, Groton. Siblings are Alexis, Teagan and Gavin.

Caleb's activities include baseball, football, basketball, track, band and choir. His accomplishments include being involved in the Northwestern Music Festival, Honor Band, Principal's Honor Roll and seventh grade student of the month. His interests include hunting, fishing, family and sports. Physical Education is his favorite subject and his role model is his dad.



Allyssa Locke, freshman, is the daughter of Matt and Tammy Locke, Groton. Siblings are Jerica, Sydney and Mason.

Allyssa's activities include basketball, volleyball, soccer, softball and dance. Her accomplishments include being chosen Students of the Month in past years, 4.0 honor roll, hustle award for varsity soccer, Spirit of Okoboji Award at church camp. She is interested in piano, hanging out with friends and family, going to the lake and watching Netflix. English is her favorite subject and her role models are her mom and aunt Jacque.



Erin Unzen, sophomore, is the daughter of Jake and Tiffany Unzen, Groton. Siblings are Haley, Megan and Nathan.

Erin's activities include volleyball, FBLA, FCCLA and Student Council. Her accomplishments include honor roll, 4.0 GPA and previous student of the month. She is interested in Netflix, reading, volleyball, hiking, walking and baking. English is her favorite subject. She plans to attend USD for dental hygiene and her role model is her mom.



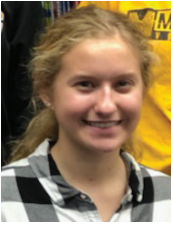
KaSandra Pappas, junior, is the daughter of Valerie and Kelly Pappas, Groton. Siblings are sisters Johnna Hepola, Shannon, Keri and Samantha Pappas.

KaSandra's activities include debate and student congress. Her accomplishments include many awards in oral interp and band, being accepted into Honor Band, quarter finalist for state debate two years in a row and being on the honor roll. Her interests are sleeping, watching movies, hanging out with friends and family and occasionally reading. Chem II is her favorite subject and she plans to go to college and eventually go on to med school.

Her role model is Keri Pappas.

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Emily Thompson, senior, is the daughter of Lee and Jennifer Thompson, Groton. Her brother is James.

Emily's activities include FCCLA, track, cross country, band, and jazz band. Her accomplishments include being on the 4.0 honor roll, all-state band, North Area Honor Band, Concordia Honor Band, holds the school record in pole vault and made it to state in cross country. She is interested in nutrition and running. Chemistry and math are her favorite subjects. Emily plans to attend SDSU for nutrition and dietetics and her role model is her grandma Vivianne

Schaeffer.

Hunter Schaller update:

Today has been an emotional day, along with the last few days. We have showed Hunter some videos sent in, and his response to watching is something that I wish I could find the words to describe. Looking at him, it's the same old, big hearted boy. Tears filling his face, along with ours. This was also a continuous reaction when FaceTiming Cheyenne Joyce Schaller and Arielle Cameron today, Hunter telling them to "come home", "love you". Once again the tears down his face, and pouring down ours.

Hunter even was talking a fair amount today, but along with the "I love you" that we can't hear enough of there is also the questions that come out of his mouth that are hard to answer. Today he asked "what happened?" "Is everyone okay?", we proceeded to tell him, he's okay and Marshall is doing good. He began to cry. Some words are harder to understand than others.

It's hard cause at times like this He is calm, coming to more and more, but throughout the days we still see some very agitated moments with him being frustrated. This is where nurses then have to give him medications to calm him, so his brain does not become too over stimulated.

We are very blessed and excited to see pieces of the Hunter we know. But the journey ahead is still long. As good as this day was, the days aren't always like this. What seems to be One step forward, two steps back, some days. But we have no doubt that we continue to be the lucky ones out of all this and that God is just giving us glimpse of the destination of this journey!

Keeps those prayers coming, we keep a constant reminder to Hunter that he has more people than he can imagine on his side, God's side, praying for him.

#allforhunt #huntingforabiggerreason

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Today in Weather History

January 3, 1997: A powerful area of low pressure and deep Arctic high pressure brought almost all winter elements to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota from the afternoon of the 3rd to the morning of the 5th. The storm began with widespread freezing rain, mainly over northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota, where significant accumulations of ice occurred on roads, trees, and power lines. Late in the evening of the 3rd, the freezing rain changed to sleet and then snow, with substantial snowfall accumulations of 6 to as much as 27 inches by late on the 4th. As the Arctic high pressure pushed in through the morning and afternoon of the 4th, northwest winds increased to 25 to 45 mph gusting to 55 mph creating widespread blizzard conditions, drifts up to 20 feet, and wind chills from 40 to 70 below. The massive accumulation of ice and snow across parts of central and mainly across northeast South Dakota resulted in the roof collapse of over 150, mostly rural, buildings. The roofs collapsed onto farm machinery and livestock with a lot of the machinery damaged and a lot of animals injured or killed. The collapse of so many buildings from snow and ice was believed to be the first in this area. On most other buildings, the snow had to be shoveled or blown off. One man was killed in west central Minnesota as he was trying to shovel snow off the roof of a building. One roof collapse near Lake Poinsett, seven west of Estelline, killed four horses, damaged a boat, and flattened a car. The significant snow drifts buried a few homes during the storm. Many power outages also occurred across parts of central and northeast South Dakota as power lines and poles were downed from the heavy ice accumulation. Some people were without power for several days in the extreme cold conditions. The cities of Miranda, Rockham, Zell, Garden City, Bryant, Vienna, Glenham, Hazel as well as other cities were without power for many hours. Some of the communities were out of power for up to 2 days.

In Aberdeen, heavy snow blocking a furnace exhaust vent sent three family members to the hospital for carbon monoxide poisoning. Also, in Aberdeen, the snowmobile club, the drift busters, were called upon for the first time in several years to deliver medicine, take patients to the hospital, and carry essential workers to work and home. Emergencies were challenging to respond to, making many hours to short distances. Throughout central and northeast South Dakota, many businesses and grocery stores were closed. Interstates 29 and 90 were both closed for a few days along with most state highways. The rest of the roads were either blocked by huge drifts or had one-lane traffic. Snow plows were called off the streets until conditions improved and when they did start to clear the roads, they worked 12 to 18 hour days. Many vehicles went into the ditch, with mainly minor injuries. Some people had to be rescued. Travelers and truckers were stranded for several days until the roads opened. When Interstate-29 reopened, there was a logjam of vehicles for 3 miles. One Watertown policeman said he has never seen a logjam as bad as this in 28 years. Area airports were closed or flights were canceled or delayed. The mail was delayed for several days, most activities were canceled or postponed, and many schools closed on the 6th. The heavy snowfall from this storm brought the widespread snowpack up to 2 to 5 feet. For the winter season so far, the area had record snowfall and recorded cold. Some of the snowfall amounts include 6 inches at McLaughlin, 8 inches 22 SSW Keldron and 4 NW Onida, 9 inches at Pollock, Timber Lake, Highmore, Mobridge, and Kennebec, 10 inches at Castlewood, Clear Lake, Miller, Fort Thompson, and Clark. Snowfall amounts of 1 to over 2 feet include, 12 inches at Eureka, and Redfield, 13 inches at Selby and Aberdeen, 14 inches at Pierre and Roscoe, 15 inches at Ortonville MN, 16 inches at Mellette and Browns Valley, MN 18 inches at Faulkton and 1 ENE Stephan, 20 inches at Webster, 22 inches at Britton, 24 inches at Sisseton, 26 inches 10 NW Britton, and 27 inches at Wheaton.

1883: A remarkably brilliant meteor display occurred on the night of January 3rd. The phenomenon was observed at stations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. This meteor was described as having resembled a large, bright ball of fire.

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Today



Sunny

High: 39 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 19 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 39 °F

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy

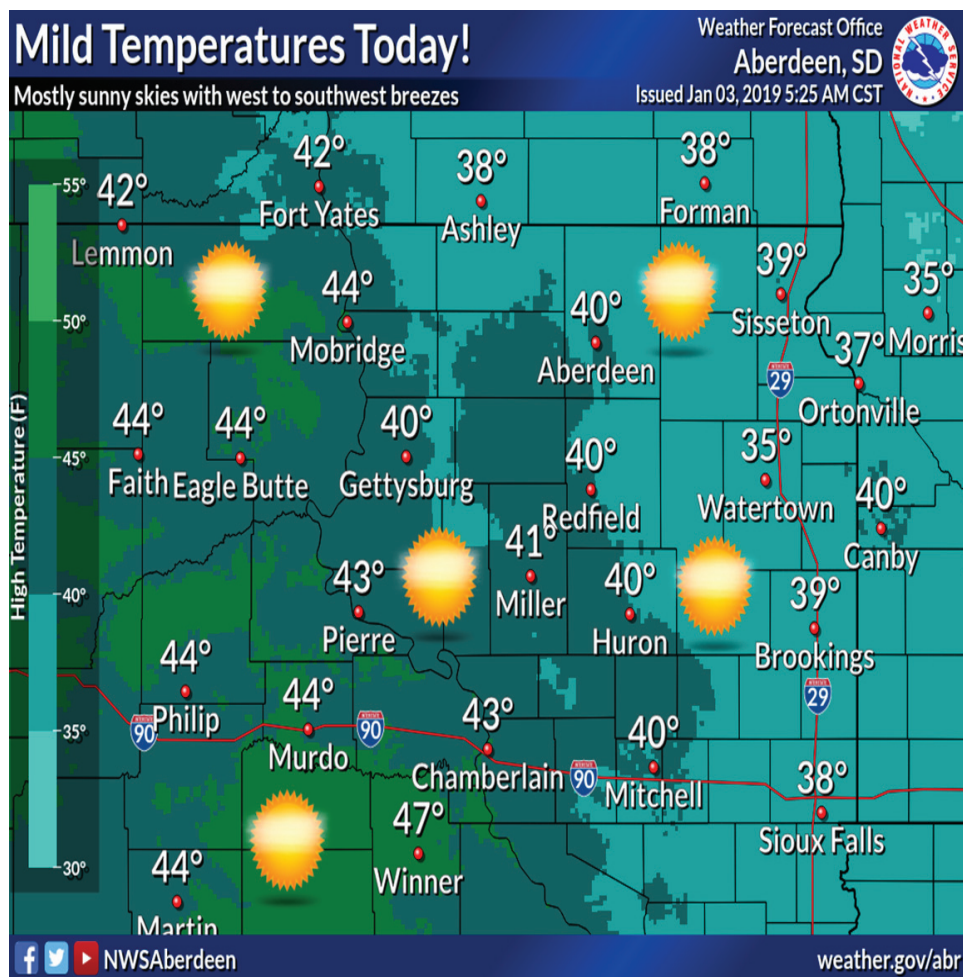
Low: 23 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 35 °F



Mild air will stream across the region for the next couple days, with well above normal temperatures. Snow will melt a little across the area today! Mostly sunny skies can be expected with highs rising into the 30s and 40s. Enjoy!

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 27 °F at 3:07 PM

Low Outside Temp: 0 °F at 12:11 AM

High Gust: 27 mph at 12:01 AM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 51° in 1962

Record Low: -34° in 2012

Average High: 22°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.04

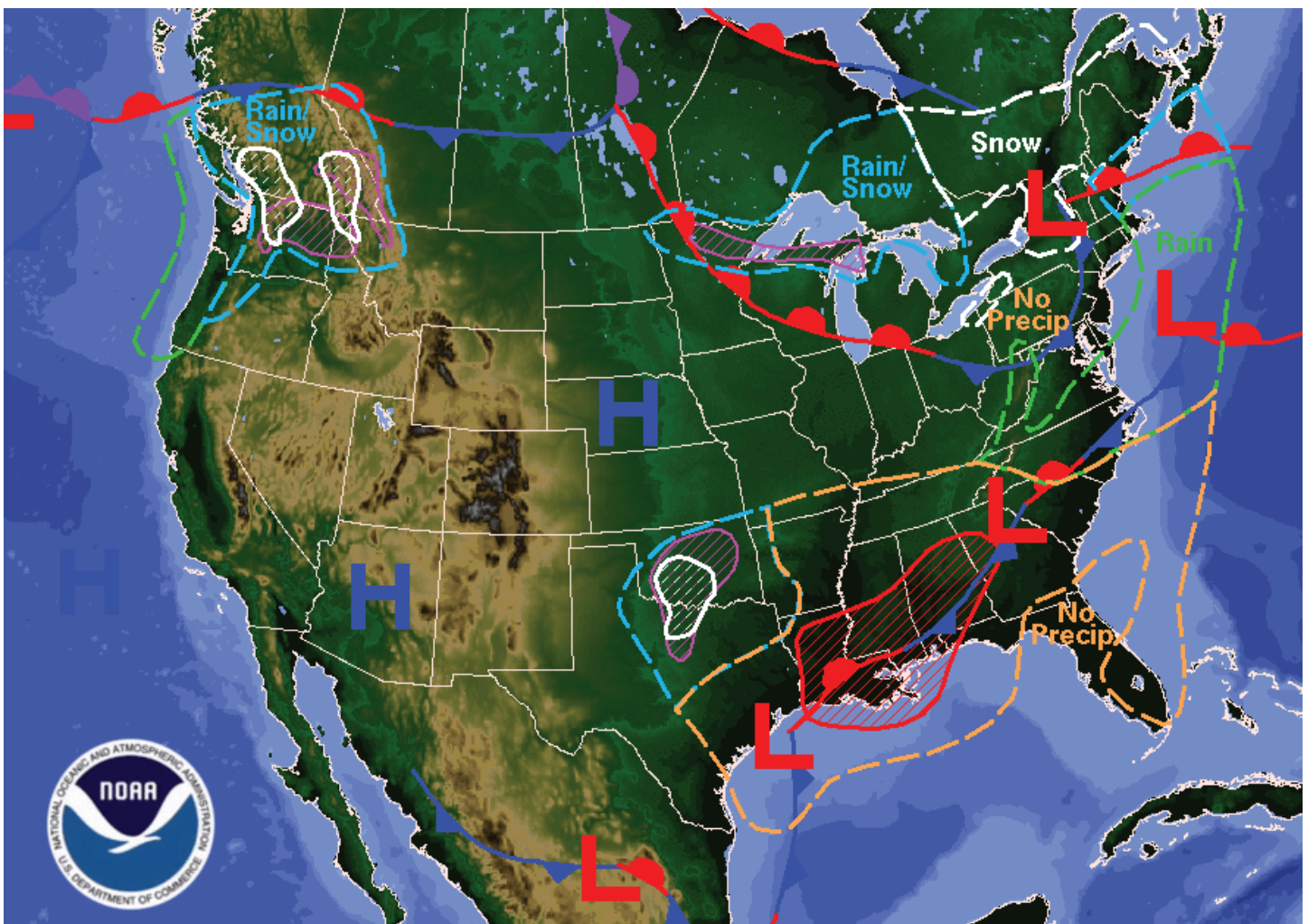
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.04

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:03 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:14 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Jan 03, 2019, issued 4:44 AM EST

DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center

Prepared by McCreynolds 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)

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FLAWLESS

Flawless: Having no faults, flaws or defects; having no imperfections; something that has nothing that can in any way diminish its value. Seeing something flawless or holding an object that is flawless, or knowing of something that is flawless, is rare. Yet, most of us own or have access to something that is flawless.

David said, The words of the Lord are flawless. Why? If we are to depend on them and believe in them, and live by them, they must be flawless.

His promises must be flawless. They are not like the records of athletes that are made only to be broken by someone who is faster, stronger or wiser. If the words of God could be replaced by someone else's words, we would not be able to trust Him or have faith in Him.

His promises must not only be flawless; they must be fruitful. Someone has counted more than 30,000 promises in the Bible. That number is far beyond what anyone can ever claim or need. As long as we live, we will never come to the end of them because He has promised to meet our every need, every day that we live.

His promises must not only be flawless and fruitful; they must be forceful. If God makes a promise, He will be able to complete it. Always remember that He has all of the power that brought the universe into existence at His disposal. If He said it, it is as good as done.

His promises must not only be flawless, fruitful and forceful - they must be fulfilling. Because He created us, He knows what we need before we need it.

Prayer: How grateful we are Father, to know that we can depend on Your flawless Word to meet our every need. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 12:6 And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.

2018 Groton SD Community Events

- Groton Lion's Club Bingo- Wednesday Nights 6:30pm at the Groton Legion (Year Round)
- Nov./Dec./Jan./Feb./Mar. Groton Lion's Club Wheel of Meat- Saturday Nights 7pm at the Groton Legion (Fall/Winter Months)
- 1/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 4/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 5/4/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 5/27/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program at the Cemetery, Lunch to follow at the American Legion (Memorial Day)
- Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- SDSU Golf at Olive Grove
- 6/15/2019 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 7/4/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 7/14/2019 Summer Fest
- 9/7/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching 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)
- 12/01/2018 Olive Grove Golf Course 2018 Holiday Party
- 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

Leads pursued in fatal interstate shooting

HARTFORD, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say investigators are pursuing more than 90 leads in the mysterious death of a South Dakota woman who was shot in her car along an interstate in Missouri with her two children in the backseat.

Nearly three weeks after Melissa Peskey was killed on a rural stretch of I-70 near Boonville, the Missouri State Highway Patrol continues to investigate, but has publicly provided few details about the death of the Hartford real estate agent.

The Argus Leader reports Sgt. Scott White won't say whether the children, ages 5 and 11, have provided any clues about their mother's death. Authorities have not disclosed whether the vehicle was in motion at the time of the shooting, what type of weapon was involved or whether Peskey may have been targeted.

Authorities continue to solicit leads on social media.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash
07-19-25-28-34
(seven, nineteen, twenty-five, twenty-eight, thirty-four)
Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America
06-10-18-19-41, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 2
(six, ten, eighteen, nineteen, forty-one; Star Ball: six; ASB: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$13.12 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Powerball
08-12-42-46-56, Powerball: 12, Power Play: 2
(eight, twelve, forty-two, forty-six, fifty-six; Powerball: twelve; Power Play: two)
Estimated jackpot: \$53 million

Kelley's late layup pushes South Dakota past Denver 71-70

DENVER (AP) — Cody Kelley scored the game-winning layup with seven seconds left to give South Dakota a 71-70 victory over Denver on Wednesday night.

South Dakota's Brandon Armstrong hit a 3-pointer to tie the game at 55 with about 10 minutes to play. The Coyotes led until Ronnie Harrell Jr. made the second of two free throws to put Denver up 70-69 with 21 seconds left. Kelley then drove the lane, pumped once and scored off the glass. Harrell missed a jumper with three seconds remaining.

Triston Simpson scored 20 points and Trey Burch-Manning had 18 to lead South Dakota (7-8, 1-1 Summit League). The duo made seven of the Coyotes' 12 3-pointers. Kelley finished with five points, five rebounds

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and four assists.

Joe Rosga scored 19 points and Ade Murkey had 17 for Denver (5-12, 0-3), which shot 50 percent from the field but just 3 of 10 from long range.

Pro wrestling interviewer 'Mean Gene' Okerlund dies

By JEFF BAENEN, Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Eugene "Mean Gene" Okerlund, whose deadpan interviews of pro wrestling superstars like "Macho Man" Randy Savage, The Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan made him a ringside fixture in his own right, has died. He was 76.

World Wrestling Entertainment announced Okerlund's death on its website Wednesday. Okerlund's son, Tor Okerlund, told The Associated Press that his father died early Wednesday at a hospital in Sarasota, Florida, near his home in Osprey, Florida, with his wife, Jeanne, by his side.

Tor Okerlund said his father, who had undergone three kidney transplants, fell a few weeks ago "and it just kind of went from bad to worse."

Okerlund started as an interviewer in the Minneapolis-based American Wrestling Association. He moved to WWE — then the World Wrestling Federation — in 1984 and hosted several shows, including "All-American Wrestling," "Tuesday Night Titans" and "Prime Time Wrestling." Besides being the company's lead locker room interviewer, he also provided ringside commentary.

Former wrestler and ex-Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, who wrestled as "The Body," dubbed Okerlund "Mean Gene."

Ventura told the Minneapolis Star Tribune on Wednesday that in an interview he "laughingly called him 'the Mean Gene Hot Air Machine,' and the 'Mean Gene' stuck."

Ventura called Okerlund "the best at what he did, the best straight man interviewer in wrestling history."

"You only had to tell him once" how to pitch and sell a wrestling story, Ventura told the AP about Okerlund's knack for salesmanship. "He's like a carnival barker. ... He was the best salesman. And he never did retakes. ... Ninety percent of the time if there was a screw-up on an interview, it was not because of Gene. That's how good he was."

A native of Sisseton, South Dakota, Okerlund was known for his natty attire and mustache. He was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2006.

Okerlund also could sing and performed the national anthem at the first WrestleMania in 1985. He sang "Tutti Frutti" later that year on the WWF's "The Wrestling Album."

"He really was the ultimate, the consummate entertainer," his son said.

In a 2015 interview with the Star Tribune, Okerlund credited the late pro wrestling pioneer Verne Gagne for his start.

Okerlund worked in sales at the television station where Gagne's AWA was based and had experience in radio. Gagne approached Okerlund in the hallway when the regular interviewer could not make a taping in the early 1970s, Okerlund recalled.

"I said, 'Verne, I know zero about wrestling.' He said, 'Do you have a suit and tie? That's all you need.' There were a few bucks involved, so I dived in," Okerlund said.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

TigerSwan loses bid for attorney fees in North Dakota case

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A North Dakota judge has refused to award attorney fees to a North Carolina security company that won a court case in the wake of protests over the Dakota Access oil pipeline.

North Dakota's Private Investigative and Security Board sued TigerSwan in 2017, alleging the company that handled security for the pipeline developer illegally operated without a state license.

Judge John Grinsteiner dismissed the case, and TigerSwan sought reimbursement for at least \$165,000

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in attorney fees. Grinsteiner last month rejected the request, saying the board's case wasn't frivolous even though the board lost.

TigerSwan hasn't decided whether to appeal.

The board has appealed the dismissal of its case to the state Supreme Court and also is seeking up to \$2 million in fines against TigerSwan through an administrative complaint .

Sioux Falls elderly dancing troupe takes final bow

By MAKENZIE L. HUBER, Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Eight women strutted into the room dressed in matching sequined hats and ties, turning the Luther Manor cafeteria into a stage.

The residents filling the space quieted, and nurses stopped in the hallway to watch.

The women danced to "My Kind of Town" by Frank Sinatra. Then they changed into technicolor gypsy outfits, polka dot dresses, checkered racing skirts and sequined Navy uniforms to accompany each classic song they performed.

They call themselves the "Dancing Divas."

Rhinestone "Diva" pins proclaim them as exclusive members of the performance group, with dancers ranging in age from 74 to 81 — though they danced with a skill belying their age.

Their performance at Luther Manor on Dec. 14 was their final show, a culmination of 11 years as a group performing at nursing homes within a 50-mile radius of Sioux Falls and a rigorous three-day-a-week training schedule.

The group was more than a hobby to group founder Joanna Salmon, 75. It was showcasing their skills as performers.

"If I do something, I expect it to be great," said Salmon, who choreographs the dances and picks out music. "It can't be garbage. If I do something for the public, I'm going to make it the best I can."

Performance is in Salmon's blood. She started performing as a child with her family. She was part of "The Browns," which included herself and nine brothers and sisters who performed at venues across the Midwest. When she was 13, she started teaching dance at her sister's studio until she was 31 and moved to Los Angeles with her husband.

When she moved back to Sioux Falls after 2005, she decided to start the "Dancing Divas." Salmon picked the original 15 from a line dancing class, the Argus Leader reported.

Melva Hilmo taught the line dancing class and is the youngest group member at 74 years old. She's committed to the group and has had a passion for dancing since she learned to dance around the kitchen table as a child.

"Even when I broke my foot, I came and supported the girls at the performances," Hilmo said.

Marilee Smith, 81, is the oldest dancer. The Dancing Divas group has let her enjoy dancing again. She would go jitterbugging with her husband when they were young, but he doesn't dance anymore.

"It's an important thing in my life right now," Smith said. "I'm going to miss it so much — the girls, and I'm just going to miss the performing too."

The three women's favorite part of the performance is interacting with audience members after the show.

Salmon remembers one performance when she spoke with a woman who was smiling throughout the whole show. When Salmon asked why she was smiling, she said it was because she'd be blind by the same time next year when the Dancing Divas would perform at the nursing home again. This was the last time she'd be able to see the group's flamboyant costumes and watch them dance.

While Frank Petereit isn't a dancer, he's also part of the group. The 88-year-old has been entertaining the audience with his harmonica, jokes and poetry while the divas change costumes for about two years.

"I enjoy doing something, and I enjoy playing the harmonica," Petereit said. "I'm honored to be part of the group. It's a blessing for me."

He's considering going solo now that the Dancing Divas are over.

Salmon doesn't have any plans just yet, but she's "going to do something."

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Whatever it'll be next, dancing will always be part of her life, she said. Salmon has a 90-year-old sister who will still try to get up and dance whenever she hears a tune. She expects the same future for herself. "I've spent my whole life dancing," Salmon said. "It is my life."

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

1 arrest following road rage incident in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police say road rage led to the arrest of a Sioux Falls man.

Authorities say a conflict between two motorists caused a passenger in one of the vehicles to display a gun Tuesday in Sioux Falls. KELO-TV reports the 21-year-old driver of the other car called police who tracked the vehicle in which a passenger reportedly had a gun. Officers searched that passenger and found bullets, but no gun. He was arrested on an outstanding warrant.

Information from: KELO-TV, <http://www.keloland.com>

Sanford Health, Good Samaritan Society merger complete

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The senior care provider Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society and medical and health insurance provider Sanford Health have officially combined.

The society membership and the board of the Dakotas-based health network approved a merger last June. It later received regulatory approval, and the two nonprofits announced Wednesday that the affiliation is complete.

The combined operation has 45 hospitals, nearly 300 clinics and more than 200 senior care locations in 26 states and nine countries, employing nearly 50,000 people.

Survey suggests improving business conditions in Midwest

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Business conditions improved last month in nine Midwest and Plains states despite shortages of skilled workers, according to a monthly survey report issued Wednesday.

The Mid-America Business Conditions Index rose to 55.2 in December from 54.1 in November, the report said. The October reading was 54.9. Survey organizers say any score above 50 suggests growth.

"The regional economy continues to expand at a positive pace," said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey. "However, as in recent months, shortages of skilled workers remain an impediment to even stronger growth. Furthermore, supply managers are reporting negative impacts from tariffs and trade skirmishes."

The December employment index sank to 50.0 from 57.5 in November.

"Overall manufacturing employment growth in the region over the past 12 months has been very healthy at 2.3 percent, compared (with) a lower 2.2 percent for the U.S," Goss said. "I expect this gap to close in the months ahead as regional job growth slows faster than national manufacturing job growth."

The survey results are compiled into a collection of indexes ranging from zero to 100, with a score above 50 suggesting growth. A score below that suggests decline. The survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Looking ahead six months, the December index for economic optimism fell to a still solid 54.1 from November's 55.5.

"However, I expect business confidence to depend heavily on the Fed's interest rate policies and trade talks with China," Goss said. More than 43 percent of supply managers who responded to the survey expected profits for their companies to improve in 2019, he said.

The regional trade numbers turned sharply lower last month. The index for new export orders slumped to 48.1 from November's 51.8, and the import index plummeted to 41.1 from 54.3 in November.

"Despite higher tariffs on imported goods, healthy regional growth boosted imports for the month," Goss said.

Midwest economy: December state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months.

Here are the state-by-state results for December:

Arkansas: The state's overall index fell to 50.5 last month from November's 53.9. Index components were new orders at 51.8, production or sales at 50.7, delivery lead time at 62.0, inventories at 42.7 and employment at 45.3. Arkansas' job market has been the weakest in the nine-state region over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry in Arkansas will be outside of manufacturing and in business services and the lagging industry to be natural gas drillers," he said.

Iowa: Iowa's overall index rose to 53.5 in December from 52.8 in November. Index components were new orders at 52.4, production or sales at 51.5, delivery lead time at 63.0, employment at 52.4 and inventories at 48.3. Iowa's job market has been the strongest in the nine-state region over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Iowa will be metal producers and the lagging industry to be slaughterhouses," he said.

Kansas: The state's overall index sank below growth neutral, hitting 49.7 last month compared with 51.6 in November. Index components were new orders at 51.2, production or sales at 49.9, delivery lead time at 61.0, employment at 44.6 and inventories at 42.0. Kansas' job market has been strong and improving over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Kansas will be the aircraft and aircraft parts industry. This industry, however, will count on an improving trade picture," he said. The state's 2019 lagging industry is expected to be slaughterhouses.

Minnesota: Minnesota's overall index climbed to 55.5 in December from 53.9 in November. Index components were new orders at 57.2, production or sales at 52.5, delivery lead time at 70.3, inventories at 44.2 and employment at 53.4. Minnesota's job market has been very healthy and improving over the past 12 months, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Minnesota will be manufacturers of medical equipment and supplies. I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be transportation equipment producers," he said.

Missouri: The state's overall index declined to 53.9 from 54.7 in November. Index components were new orders at 54.6, production or sales at 54.4, delivery lead time at 66.5, inventories at 45.8 and employment at 48.1. Missouri's job market has been very healthy and improving over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Missouri will be transportation equipment manufacturers, excluding vehicle producers. I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be motor vehicle manufacturers," he said.

Nebraska: Nebraska's overall index dipped below growth neutral to 49.7 in December from November's 51.3. Index components were new orders at 51.3, production or sales at 50.1, delivery lead time at 61.2, inventories at 42.2 and employment at 44.8. Nebraska's job market has been healthy and stable over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Nebraska will be machinery manufacturing, depending on (the) Chinese trade deal. I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be printing" and publishing.

North Dakota: The state's overall index plunged 5 points to hit 52.6 last month, compared with 57.6 in November. Index components were new orders at 53.5, production or sales at 52.9, delivery lead time at 64.7, employment at 47.0 and inventories at 44.6. North Dakota's job market has been solid and improving over the past 12 months, Goss said. He expects the state's leading industry in 2019 will be machinery manufacturers, depending on the Chinese trade deal. "I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be energy, including drilling and mining," he said.

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Oklahoma: Oklahoma's overall index rose to 56.4 from 55.9 in November. Index components were new orders at 56.7, production or sales at 57.1, delivery lead time at 69.8, inventories at 48.1 and employment at 50.3. Oklahoma's job market has been healthy and improving over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for Oklahoma will be metal producers. I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be energy, including drillers and mining," he said.

South Dakota: The state's overall index climbed to a regional high of 63.1 in December from November's 55.6. Index components were new orders at 62.3, production or sales at 64.4, delivery lead time at 78.7, inventories at 54.2 and employment at 56.0. South Dakota's job market has been healthy and improving rapidly over the past year, Goss said. "For 2019, I expect that the leading industry for South Dakota will be finance and banking. I expect the state's 2019 lagging industry to be mining and drilling," he said.

Pelosi poised to become House speaker, making history again

By LISA MASCARO, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nancy Pelosi knew this moment would come, even if others had their doubts — or worked to stop her.

Pelosi is poised to be elected Thursday as House speaker, the only woman who has held the office and now one of few elected officials who will be returning to it. The last time a speaker regained the gavel was more than a half-century ago.

The California Democrat has spent her political career being underestimated, only to prove the naysayers wrong. In this case, it was by winning back the Democratic majority and amassing the votes for the speaker's job.

"None of us is indispensable," Pelosi told The Associated Press on the campaign trail last fall, "but I do know that I'm very good at what I do."

In accepting the gavel, Pelosi will give a nod to the new era of divided government with a pledge to "reach across the aisle in this chamber and across the divisions in this great nation," according to excerpts of her prepared remarks Thursday.

"The floor of this House must be America's Town Hall: where the people will see our debates and where their voices will be heard and affect our decisions," she says.

In previewing Democratic priorities, she talks about lowering health care costs, investing in green infrastructure and "restoring integrity" to government.

"We must be champions of the middle class and all those who aspire to it — because the middle class is the backbone of democracy," she says.

Pelosi remains a highly polarizing figure, vilified by Republicans as a San Francisco liberal and a caricature of big government. But she is also a mother of five and a grandmother of nine who has shattered glass ceilings to become one of the most powerful politicians of the 21st century.

With President Donald Trump in the White House and Republicans still controlling the Senate, Pelosi's return to the speaker's office to lead a Democratic majority with its biggest freshmen class since Watergate shakes up the dynamic in Washington even beyond the new era of divided government.

Pelosi is one of the few congressional leaders who seem to understand Trump, both being children from famous families now primed for deal-making. Trump appreciates strong characters, and, in perhaps a sign of respect, she is one of the few congressional leaders in Washington he has not given a nickname.

Pelosi's return to the speaker's office was not guaranteed. A core group of rank-and-file Democrats has hungered for new leadership, saying it's time for a new generation to take the helm. They tired of the Republican attack ads featuring Pelosi that are constantly run against them back home, and they worried she would be a drag on efforts to keep the majority in the next election. They enlisted some of the newcomers from the freshmen class to their ranks to try to stop her from regaining the gavel.

But one by one, Pelosi peeled away the skeptics, flipping "no" votes to the "yes" column, sometimes in a matter of days. Some were given lead positions on their legislative priorities, even a gavel of their own to chair special panels.

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And Pelosi gave a little, too, promising, at 78, to serve no more than four years in leadership, making way for the next generation.

It's unclear what the final tally will be when votes for speaker are counted Thursday as the first act of the new Democratic majority.

"She'll be more than fine," said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the incoming chairman of the Democratic caucus.

Jeffries said when he told his family that, because of his new position, he may be the one to put Pelosi's name forward during the nomination proceeding, his youngest son said to him, "Don't blow the moment, Dad."

Follow Mascaro on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/lisamascaro>

China lands spacecraft on 'dark' side of moon in world first

By KEN MORITSUGU, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's burgeoning space program achieved a first on Thursday: a landing on the so-called dark side of the moon.

Three nations — the United States, the former Soviet Union and more recently China — have sent spacecraft to the near side of the moon, which faces Earth, but this landing is the first-ever on the far side.

The China National Space Administration said the 10:26 a.m. touchdown of the Chang'e 4 craft has "opened up a new chapter in human lunar exploration."

A photo taken at 11:40 a.m. and sent back by Chang'e 4 shows a small crater and a barren surface that appears to be illuminated by a light from the lunar explorer. Its name comes from that of a Chinese goddess who, according to legend, has lived on the moon for millennia.

The landing highlights China's growing ambitions to rival the U.S., Russia and Europe in space, and more broadly, to cement the nation's position as a regional and global power.

"The space dream is part of the dream to make China stronger," President Xi Jinping said in 2013, shortly after becoming China's leader.

In year-end wrap-ups, Chinese media and officials hailed the Dec. 8 launch of Chang'e 4 as one of the nation's major achievements in 2018. The landing on Thursday was announced to the public by state broadcaster CCTV at the top of the noon news.

"On the whole, China's space technology still lags behind the West, but with the landing on the far side of the moon, we have raced to the front," said Hou Xiyun, a professor at Nanjing University's school of astronomy and space science.

He added that China has Mars, Jupiter and asteroids in its sights: "There's no doubt that our nation will go farther and farther."

In 2013, Chang'e 3, the predecessor craft to the current mission, made the first moon landing since the former Soviet Union's Luna 24 in 1976. The United States is the only country that has successfully sent a person to the moon, though China is considering a crewed mission too.

For now, it plans to send a Chang'e 5 probe to the moon next year and have it return to Earth with samples — also not done since the Soviet mission in 1976.

The moon's far side isn't always dark but is sometimes called the dark side because it faces away from Earth and is relatively unknown. It has a different composition than the near side, where previous missions have landed.

Chang'e 4, a combined lander and rover, will make astronomical observations and probe the structure and mineral composition of the terrain above and below the surface.

"The far side of the moon is a rare quiet place that is free from interference from radio signals from Earth," mission spokesman Yu Guobin said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. "This probe can fill the gap of low-frequency observation in radio astronomy and will provide important information for studying the origin of stars and nebula evolution."

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One challenge of operating on the far side of the moon is communicating with Earth. China launched a relay satellite in May so that Chang'e 4 can send back information.

China conducted its first crewed space mission in 2003, becoming only the third country to do so after Russia and the U.S. It has put a pair of space stations into orbit and plans to launch a Mars rover in the mid-2020s. Its space program suffered a rare setback last year with the failed launch of its Long March 5 rocket.

Wu Weiren, the chief designer of the China Lunar Exploration Project, called the landing a trailblazing milestone.

"Building a space power is a dream that we persistently pursue," he said in an interview with CCTV at the Beijing Aerospace Flight and Control Center. "And we're gradually realizing it."

Associated Press writer Yanan Wang and researcher Shanshan Wang contributed to this story.

After shutdown talks go nowhere, officials to try again

By LISA MASCARO and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No one budged at President Donald Trump's closed-door meeting with congressional leaders, so the partial government shutdown persisted over his demand for billions of dollars to build a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico. They'll all try again Friday.

In public, Trump renewed his dire warnings of rapists and others at the border. But when pressed in private Wednesday by Democrats asking why he wouldn't end the shutdown, he responded at one point, "I would look foolish if I did that." A White House official, one of two people who described that exchange only on condition of anonymity, said the president had been trying to explain that it would be foolish not to pay for border security.

In one big shift, the new Congress will convene Thursday with Democrats taking majority control of the House, and Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said they'd quickly pass legislation to re-open the government — without funds for the border wall.

"Nothing for the wall," Pelosi said in an interview to air Thursday on NBC's "Today" show. "We can go through the back and forth. No. How many more times can we say no?"

But the White House has rejected the Democratic package, and Republicans who control the Senate are hesitant to take it up without Trump on board. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell called it a "total nonstarter." Trump said ahead of his White House session with the congressional leaders that the partial shutdown will last "as long as it takes" to get the funding he wants.

"Could be a long time or could be quickly," Trump said during lengthy public comments at a Cabinet meeting, his first public appearance of the new year. Meanwhile, the shutdown dragged through a second week, closing some parks and leaving hundreds of thousands of federal employees without pay.

Democrats said they asked Trump directly during Wednesday's private meeting held in the Situation Room why he wouldn't consider their package of bills. One measure would open most of the shuttered government departments at funding levels already agreed to by all sides. The other would provide temporary funding for Homeland Security, through Feb. 8, allowing talks to continue over border security.

"I said, Mr. President, Give me one good reason why you should continue your shutdown," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said afterward. "He could not give a good answer."

Trump's response about looking foolish was confirmed by a White House official and another person familiar with the exchange, neither of whom was authorized to describe the exchange by name. Trump had campaigned saying Mexico would pay for the wall, but Mexico has refused.

At another point Wednesday, Trump told Pelosi that, as a "good Catholic," she should support the wall because Vatican City has a wall, according to a congressional aide. Trump has mentioned the Vatican's centuries-old fortifications before, including at the earlier Cabinet meeting. But Democrats have said they don't want medieval barriers, and Pelosi has called Trump's proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border immoral.

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"I remain ready and willing to work with Democrats," Trump tweeted after the meeting. "Let's get it done!"

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said that there's no need to prolong the shutdown and that he was disappointed the talks did not produce a resolution. He complained that Democrats interrupted Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen as she was trying to describe a dreadful situation at the border.

Nielsen, participating in the meeting by teleconference, had data about unaccompanied minors crossing the border and a spike in illegal crossings, and she tried to make the case to the group that current funding levels won't suffice, according to the White House.

"We were hopeful that we could get more of a negotiation," said McCarthy.

He said the leaders plan to return to the White House Friday to continue negotiations. White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said on Fox that Pelosi will be "more able to negotiate" once she is elected speaker, as expected Thursday.

The two sides have traded offers, but their talks broke down ahead of the holidays. On Wednesday, Trump also rejected his own administration's offer to accept \$2.5 billion for the wall. That proposal was made when Vice President Mike Pence and other top officials met at the start of the shutdown with Schumer, who left saying they remained far apart. On Wednesday Trump repeatedly pushed for the \$5.6 billion he has demanded.

Making his case ahead of the private afternoon session, Trump said the current border is "like a sieve" and noted the tear gas "flying" overnight to deter arrivals.

"If they knew they couldn't come through, they wouldn't even start," he said at the meeting, joined by Cabinet secretaries and top advisers, including Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

With no negotiations over the holidays, Trump complained he had been "lonely" at the White House, having skipped his getaway to Mar-a-Lago in Florida. He claimed his only companions were the "machine gunners," referring to security personnel, and "they don't wave, they don't smile." He also criticized Pelosi for visiting Hawaii.

At the Capitol on Wednesday, Pelosi said she hoped Republicans and the White House "are hearing what we have offered" to end the shutdown.

The partial government shutdown began on Dec. 22. Funding for the wall has been the sticking point in passing essential spending bills for several government departments.

Pelosi said Tuesday that Democrats would take action to "end the Trump Shutdown" by passing the legislation Thursday to reopen government.

"Senate Republicans have already supported this legislation, and if they reject it now, they will be fully complicit in chaos and destruction of the President's third shutdown of his term," she said in a letter to colleagues on Tuesday. "We are giving the Republicans the opportunity to take yes for an answer," she wrote in a letter to colleagues.

Administration officials said Trump was in no rush for a resolution to the impasse, believing he has public opinion and his base of supporters on his side. Trump himself contended it's the Democrats who see the shutdown fight as "an election point."

The Democratic package to end the shutdown would include one bill to temporarily fund the Department of Homeland Security at current levels — with \$1.3 billion for border security, far less than Trump has said he wants for the wall — through Feb. 8 as talks would continue.

It would also include a separate measure to fund the departments of Agriculture, Interior, Housing and Urban Development and others closed by the partial shutdown. That measure would provide money through the remainder of the fiscal year, to Sept. 30.

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Kevin Freking and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

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NASA: Icy object past Pluto looks like reddish snowman

By MARCIA DUNN, AP Aerospace Writer

LAUREL, Md. (AP) — A NASA spacecraft 4 billion miles from Earth yielded its first close-up pictures Wednesday of the most distant celestial object ever explored, depicting what looks like a reddish snowman.

Ultima Thule, as the small, icy object has been dubbed, was found to consist of two fused-together spheres, one of them three times bigger than the other, extending about 21 miles (33 kilometers) in length.

NASA's New Horizons, the spacecraft that sent back pictures of Pluto 3½ years ago, swept past the ancient, mysterious object early on New Year's Day. It is 1 billion miles (1.6 billion kilometers) beyond Pluto.

On Tuesday, based on early, fuzzy images taken the day before, scientists said Ultima Thule resembled a bowling pin. But when better, closer pictures arrived, a new consensus emerged Wednesday.

"The bowling pin is gone. It's a snowman!" lead scientist Alan Stern informed the world from Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory, home to Mission Control in Laurel. The bowling pin image is "so 2018," joked Stern, who is with the Southwest Research Institute.

The celestial body was nicknamed Ultima Thule — meaning "beyond the known world" — before scientists could say for sure whether it was one object or two. With the arrival of the photos, they are now calling the bigger sphere Ultima and the smaller one Thule.

Thule is estimated to be 9 miles (14 kilometers) across, while Ultima is thought to be 12 miles (19 kilometers).

Scientist Jeff Moore of NASA's Ames Research Center said the two spheres formed when icy, pebble-size pieces coalesced in space billions of years ago. Then the spheres spiraled closer to each other until they gently touched — as slowly as parking a car here on Earth at just a mile or two per hour — and stuck together.

Despite the slender connection point, the two lobes are "soundly bound" together, according to Moore.

Scientists have ascertained that the object takes about 15 hours to make a full rotation. If it were spinning fast — say, one rotation every three or four hours — the two spheres would rip apart.

Stern noted that the team has received less than 1 percent of all the data stored aboard New Horizons. It will take nearly two years to get it all.

The two-lobed object is what is known as a "contact binary." It is the first contact binary NASA has ever explored. Having formed 4.5 billion years ago, when the solar system taking shape, it is also the most primitive object seen up close like this.

About the size of a city, Ultima Thule has a mottled appearance and is the color of dull brick, probably because of the effects of radiation bombarding the icy surface, with brighter and darker regions.

Both spheres are similar in color, while the barely perceptible neck connecting the two lobes is noticeably less red, probably because of particles falling down the steep slopes into that area.

So far, no moons or rings have been detected, and there were no obvious impact craters in the latest photos, though there were a few apparent "divots" and suggestions of hills and ridges, scientists said. Better images should yield definitive answers in the days and weeks ahead.

Clues about the surface composition of Ultima Thule should start rolling in by Thursday. Scientists believe the icy exterior is probably a mix of water, methane and nitrogen, among other things.

The snowman picture was taken a half-hour before the spacecraft's closest approach early Tuesday, from a distance of about 18,000 miles (28,000 kilometers).

Scientists consider Ultima Thule an exquisite time machine that should provide clues to the origins of our solar system.

It's neither a comet nor an asteroid, according to Stern, but rather "a primordial planetesimal." Unlike comets and other objects that have been altered by the sun over time, Ultima Thule is in its pure, original state: It's been in the deep-freeze Kuiper Belt on the fringes of our solar system from the beginning.

"This thing was born somewhere between 99 percent and 99.9 percent of the way back to T-zero (liftoff) in our solar system, really amazing," Stern said. He added: "We've never seen anything like this before. It's not fish or fowl. It's something that's completely different."

Still, he said, when all the data comes in, "there are going to be mysteries of Ultima Thule that we can't

figure out."

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Sanders allies contrite, defiant amid harassment allegations

By STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and his chief lieutenants are offering contrition and defiance as they face allegations of sexual harassment that plagued his last presidential campaign and now threaten to derail a second White House bid before it begins.

Hours after a New York Times report detailed allegations of unwanted sexual advances and pay inequity on his first campaign, Sanders apologized late Wednesday "to any woman who felt that she was not treated appropriately."

"Of course, if I run again, we will do better next time," Sanders told CNN.

Yet there were immediate signs that the allegations, which did not directly involve Sanders, could hurt the self-described democratic socialist's 2020 ambitions in the midst of the #MeToo era. In the wake of the report, some Democratic activists and operatives complained about the aggressive culture during the first campaign when male staffers and supporters were sometimes labeled "Bernie bros."

"I'm not the least bit surprised," National Organization for Women President Toni Van Pelt told The Associated Press, noting she was forced to block Sanders' supporters from her social media feed in 2016. "To me, it was really clear this was the way they were running the campaign."

She blamed Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump, at least in part, on Sanders and his supporters.

"It wasn't just Trump, it wasn't just the Russians, it was also the sexist people that ran his campaign," Van Pelt said.

The timing could not be worse for Sanders, who is gearing up for a second presidential bid. His senior adviser told the AP last month that Sanders would run a "much bigger" operation and would start out as a front-runner if he ultimately decided to run.

Yet the 2020 Democratic field would have little in common with that of 2016, in which Sanders emerged as the anti-establishment alternative to Clinton.

Should he run again, the 77-year-old would enter a crowded field that features multiple prominent liberal women. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren has already launched a presidential exploratory committee. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, who has been a central figure in Washington's reckoning with the #MeToo era, is considering a presidential run. Sen. Kamala Harris of California could also be a leading contender.

Even before the Times' story was published, Politico reported that more than two dozen former campaign workers and volunteers had requested a meeting with Sanders to discuss sexual violence and harassment that occurred during the 2016 campaign.

The Times detailed one situation in which a campaign surrogate touched a strategist's hair in a "sexual way," among other unwanted advances. The Times also reported that in some cases, women were expected to sleep in the same quarters as men they didn't know. Others discovered examples of men who were paid significantly more for doing similar jobs.

Sanders' wife, Jane O'Meara Sanders, said the meeting with concerned former staff and volunteers would take place in a matter of days, although it had not yet been scheduled as of late Wednesday.

"The fact is if somebody didn't feel safe in any way, it was a failure. I, we apologize profusely. This is not acceptable," she told the AP. "Of course things happen in our society. The question is, 'How do you handle them?' We're committed to working with the people that have experienced this to do better all the time. Not just to do better now. And we'll have to do better later. We'll try to change the culture of our country."

O'Meara Sanders said she and her husband became aware of the allegations only after the campaign was over. They subsequently implemented a series of safeguards on his 2018 Senate re-election campaign,

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which included mandatory staff training, strict guidelines and the creation of a complaint hotline run by a third party.

"We didn't hear specific things during the campaign. We heard some of them after the campaign. We've heard others just now that were never reported," O'Meara Sanders said. "We were, as you can imagine, out on the road and you do delegate. But we do think at the top level, people did the best they possibly could."

Sen. Sanders noted the 2016 campaign grew from just a handful of employees to roughly 1,200 workers in just a few months.

"I am not going to sit here and tell you we did everything right in terms of human resources," he told CNN.

There was no immediate indication that Sanders was backing away from another presidential run.

When asked about her husband's 2020 aspirations, O'Meara Sanders said the new situation would have no impact on their plans.

RoseAnn DeMoro, executive director of the National Nurses United and a chief Sanders ally, suggested the revelations might help his political future by forcing an important conversation and stronger anti-harassment policies.

"This is Bernie Sanders. This is someone who believes from the bottom of his heart in equality. He does. I think he'll be the best president in the history of America on equality," DeMoro said. "I'm hopefully going to be part of organizing every woman in this country for Bernie in 2020."

Nina Turner, who leads the Sanders' political arm, Our Revolution, noted that none of the women who alleged misconduct said Sanders had any direct knowledge.

"This is hurtful, this moment is heavy — as well it should be when people are coming out saying they were mistreated in the campaign based on their gender," Turner said in an interview. "But hopefully if he does run again, this will give him the opportunity to change that."

"The vast majority of the people who supported him will continue to support him," she added.

But on the ground in South Carolina, a key state on the presidential primary calendar where Clinton beat Sanders in 2016, Democratic state Sen. Marlon Kimpson said people were already decidedly "less enthusiastic" about Sanders heading into 2020.

Kimpson said the state's Democratic primary voters — most are women — would want to hear directly from Sanders about what he knew about the allegations and when.

"In this day and age, the allegations of sexual harassment have to be taken very seriously and action must be taken swiftly to send a message to your campaign that this behavior will not be tolerated," Kimpson said. "This will be a material issue in people making up their minds if he's talking the talk and walking the walk."

Van Pelt, of the National Organization for Women, cast the blame on Sanders whether he had direct knowledge of misconduct or not.

"If he didn't know," she said, "he has no business being in office."

Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina, and Juana Summers in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump reclaims spotlight with long, rambling Cabinet meeting

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Home alone no more, President Donald Trump had a lot to share when he convened a rambling Cabinet meeting on Day 12 of the government shutdown.

The president, eager for company after a lonely stretch in a near-empty White House, zigzagged for more than 90 minutes from his demands for a southern border wall to his thoughts on Kanye West and his decision to pull troops out of Syria — all while a mock movie poster with his photograph and the words "SANCTIONS ARE COMING, NOVEMBER 4" sat, without explanation, in the middle of the grand Cabinet

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Room table.

It was Trump's first public appearance in nearly a week, after being holed up in the White House for Christmas and New Year's. Trump had been scheduled to spend the holidays with his family at his private Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, but canceled the trip to wait out the partial government shutdown that began Dec. 22.

"You know, I was in the White House all by myself for six, seven days. It was very lonely. My family was down in Florida," Trump recounted. He described channel-flipping and watching a different network — PBS — to fill the time.

"I felt I should be here just in case people wanted to come and negotiate the border security," Trump explained.

Later, he talked about his Christmas "all alone," with no one around except for the "machine gunners."

"I was all by myself in the White House — it's a big, big house — except for all the guys out on the lawn with machine guns," Trump said, referencing the Secret Service and military personnel who guard the White House year-round.

"I was waving to them. ... These are great people. And they don't play games. They don't, like, wave. They don't even smile," he said. "I was hoping that maybe somebody would come back and negotiate. But they didn't do that."

It had indeed been a slow holiday stretch, minus a flurry of presidential tweets. The White House did not send out a formal public schedule; the doors to the White House press shop were often locked; and West Wing offices sat dark as Christmas and New Year's ticked by.

While some White House staffers were out for the holidays, others were prevented from reporting to work because of the partial government shutdown that is now affecting hundreds of thousands of federal workers.

According to the plan filed by the deputy White House chief of staff for operations with the budget office before the shutdown, more than 1,000 of 1,759 staff members in the Executive Office of the President were expected to be placed on furlough. That includes 156 of 359 White House Office staff, 18 of 19 of those who work in the Office of the Vice President, and all 58 National Security Council staffers.

But senior aides, as well as many Cabinet members, were back at work Wednesday and in the room as the president held court on the shutdown and much, much more. The shutdown, he said, will last "as long as it takes." On his decision to pull out of Syria, he explained, "We're talking about sand and death." And as for his favorite rapper, Trump enthused: "Even Kanye West came out today and said great things about Trump."

He also took a shot at his former defense secretary Jim Mattis, who resigned last month, saying he wasn't happy with the job Mattis had done in Afghanistan.

"I mean, I wish him well," said Trump, "But, as you know, President Obama fired him and, essentially, so did I. I want results."

As the meeting stretched past the hour mark, Cabinet secretaries shifted in their seats as they took their turns speaking. At one point, Energy Secretary Rick Perry appeared to be playing mock piano on the arm of Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon's chair.

"It's going to be a very exciting year. I think it's going to be a very good year. Some people think it'll be controversial and tough and it probably will, but we're going to get it done," Trump said.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

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Nuns in India tell AP of enduring abuse in Catholic church

By TIM SULLIVAN, Associated Press

KURAVILANGAD, India (AP) — The stories spill out in the sitting rooms of Catholic convents, where portraits of Jesus keep watch and fans spin quietly overhead. They spill out in church meeting halls bathed in fluorescent lights, and over cups of cheap instant coffee in convent kitchens. Always, the stories come haltingly, quietly. Sometimes, the nuns speak at little more than a whisper.

Across India, the nuns talk of priests who pushed into their bedrooms and of priests who pressured them to turn close friendships into sex. They talk about being groped and kissed, of hands pressed against them by men they were raised to believe were representatives of Jesus Christ.

"He was drunk," said one nun, beginning her story. "You don't know how to say no," said another.

At its most grim, the nuns speak of repeated rapes, and of a Catholic hierarchy that did little to protect them.

The Vatican has long been aware of nuns sexually abused by priests and bishops in Asia, Europe, South America and Africa, but it has done very little to stop it, The Associated Press reported last year.

Now, the AP has investigated the situation in a single country — India — and uncovered a decades-long history of nuns enduring sexual abuse from within the church. Nuns described in detail the sexual pressure they endured from priests, and nearly two dozen other people — nuns, former nuns and priests, and others — said they had direct knowledge of such incidents.

Still, the scale of the problem in India remains unclear, cloaked by a powerful culture of silence. Many nuns believe abuse is commonplace, insisting most sisters can at least tell of fending off a priest's sexual advances. Some believe it is rare. Almost none, though, talk about it readily, and most speak only on the condition they not be identified.

But this summer, one Indian nun forced the issue into the open.

When repeated complaints to church officials brought no response, the 44-year-old nun filed a police complaint against the bishop who oversees her religious order, accusing him of raping her 13 times over two years. Soon after, a group of her fellow nuns launched a two-week public protest in India's Catholic heartland, demanding the bishop's arrest.

It was an unprecedented action, dividing India's Catholic community. Inside the accuser's convent in rural Kerala state, she and the nuns who support her are now pariahs, isolated from the other sisters, many of whom insist the bishop is innocent. The protesting nuns get hate mail and avoid going out.

"Some people are accusing us of working against the church, of being against the church. They say, 'You are worshipping Satan,'" said one supporter, Sister Josephine Villoonnickal. "But we need to stand up for the truth."

Villoonnickal has been a nun for 23 years, joining when she was a teenager. She scoffs at the idea that she wants to harm the church.

"We want to die as sisters," she said.

Some nuns' accounts date back decades — like that of the sister, barely out of her teens, who was teaching in a Catholic school in the early 1990s.

It was exhausting work, and she was looking forward to the chance to reflect on what had led her — happily — to convent life.

"We have kind of a retreat before we renew our vows," she said, sitting in the painfully neat sitting room of her big-city convent, where doilies cover most every surface, chairs are lined up in rows and the blare of horns drifts in through open windows. "We take one week off and we go for prayers and silence."

She had traveled to a New Delhi retreat center, a collection of concrete buildings where she gathered with other young nuns. A priest was there to lead the sisters in reflection.

The nun, who like others interviewed for this story spoke on condition she not be identified, is a strong and forceful woman who has spent years working with India's poor and dispossessed, from battered wives to evicted families.

But when she talks about the retreat her voice grows quiet, as if she's afraid to be overheard in the

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empty room: "I felt this person, maybe he had some thoughts, some attraction."

He was in his 60s. She was four decades younger.

One night, the priest went to a neighborhood party. He came back late, after 9:30 p.m., and knocked at her room.

"I need to meet you," he said when she cracked open the door, insisting he wanted to discuss her spiritual life. She could smell the alcohol.

"You're not stable. I'm not ready to meet you," she told him.

But the priest forced open the door. He tried to kiss her. He grabbed at her body, groping wherever he could.

Weeping, she pushed him back enough to slam the door and lock it.

It wasn't rape. She knows it could have been so much worse. But decades later she still reels at the memory, and this tough woman, for a few moments, looks like a scared young girl: "It was such a terrifying experience."

Afterward she quietly told her mother superior, who allowed her to avoid other meetings with the priest. She also wrote an anonymous letter to church officials, which she thinks may have led to the priest being re-assigned.

But nothing was said aloud. There were no public reprimands, no warnings to the many nuns the priest would work with through his long career.

She was too afraid to challenge him openly.

"I couldn't imagine taking that stand. It was too scary," she said. "For me it was risking my own vocation." So the fierce nun remained silent.

Catholic history is filled with women who became martyrs to their own purity: Saint Agatha had her breasts torn off for refusing to marry; Saint Lucy was burned alive and stabbed in the throat for defending her virginity; Saint Maria Goretti was 11 years old when she was killed by a man who tried to rape her.

"It is a sin!" Maria is said to have cried out. "God does not want it!"

But for a nun, fighting off a priest's advances means pinballing through centuries-old sexual and clerical traditions. Celibacy is a cornerstone of Catholic religious life, as is sexual purity among nuns. Many nuns say a sister who admits to a sexual experience — even if it's forced — faces the risk of isolation within her order, and possibly even expulsion.

"You're not sure if you'll be kept in your congregation, because so much is about your vow of chastity," said Sister Shalini Mulackal, a New Delhi-based theologian. "That fear is there for the young ones to disclose what has happened to them."

At the same time, priests are seen as living representatives of Christ, with obedience to them another Catholic cornerstone.

Then there is the isolation of young women struggling to find their way in new communities after leaving their homes.

Caught at this intersection of sexual taboo, Catholic hierarchy and loneliness, sisters can be left at the mercy of predatory priests.

"There's a lot of emotion bottled up and when a little tenderness is shown by somebody it can be so easy for you to cross boundaries," said Sister Dorothy Fernandes, who has spent years working with the urban poor in eastern India. "It can be hard to tell what is love and what is exploitation."

It's particularly hard for sisters from Kerala, a deeply conservative region long the birthplace of most Indian nuns. Sex is rarely mentioned openly in small-town Kerala, boys and girls are largely kept apart, and a visible bra strap can be a minor crisis for a young woman.

"Once you grow up, once you get your first menstruation, you are not encouraged to speak normally to a boy. And the boys also vice-versa," said a nun from Kerala, a cheerful woman with sparkly glass earrings and an easy smile. She remembers the misery of Sunday mass as an adolescent, when boys would stand outside the church to watch girls filing in, eyes crawling over their young figures. "We have

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a terrible taboo about sex."

That naivety, she said, can be costly.

Like the time she was a novice nun, still in her teens, and an older priest came to the Catholic center where she worked. He was from Goa, a coastal region and former Portuguese colony.

She shook her head: "I was in charge of visitors, and we had this bad habit of being hospitable."

At one point, she brought the priest's laundry to his small room, where he was sitting. As she set down the clothes, he grabbed her and began to kiss her.

At first, she had no idea what was happening.

"The kissing was all coming here," she said, gesturing at her chest.

The confusion of that day is still clear on her face: "I was young. He was from Goa. I am from Kerala. In my mind I was trying to figure out: 'Is this the way that Goans kiss?'"

She quickly understood what was happening but couldn't escape his fierce grip. She also could not call out for help: "I cannot shout! He's a priest."

"I didn't want to offend him. I didn't want to make him feel bad," she said.

So she pushed herself away from him until she could slip out the door.

She quietly told a senior nun to not send novices to the priest's room. But, like the nun who fought the drunken priest, she made no official complaint.

A complaint against a priest means leveling an accusation against someone higher in the church hierarchy. It can mean getting pulled into a tangle of malicious rumors and church politics. It means risking your reputation, and the reputation of your order.

In the church, even some of those who doubt there is widespread abuse of nuns say the silence can be enveloping.

Archbishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, a New Delhi-based church leader, calls incidents of abuse "kind of sporadic. Once here, once there."

But "many people don't want to talk," he continued. "They may talk in the community, but they don't want to bring it to the public, to the court."

Speaking up can also risk financial troubles, since many congregations of nuns are financially subservient to priests and bishops.

The silence is magnified in India by demographics, religious politics and a deep-seated belief that women have little value.

There are roughly 18 million Catholics in India, but that's a small minority in this largely Hindu nation of 1.3 billion. Speaking up could tarnish the image of their church, many nuns worry, and feed criticism by Hindu hardliners.

"Even we, as religious sisters, even we try to keep it quiet," said Mulackal, the theologian. "A woman who goes through this experience, she just wants to hide it and pretend everything is OK."

The rapes, the nun says, happened in Room 20 of a small convent at the end of a one-lane road in rural Kerala.

Set amid rows of banana and rubber trees near the little town of Kuravilangad, the sisters at the St. Francis Mission Home spend their days in prayer or caring for the aged. In the garden, a statue of the Virgin Mary overlooks a decorative fish pond the size of a child's wading pool. The pond is covered in green scum.

The rapist, she says, was the most powerful man in this tiny small world: Bishop Franco Mulakkal.

Smart and ambitious, Mulakkal had risen from small-town Kerala to become a bishop in north India, overseeing a sprawling Catholic community. He was also the official patron of her community of 81 sisters, the Missionaries of Jesus, wielding immense influence over its budgets and job assignments.

The nun is a friendly woman with jet black hair known for her quiet confidence. Every few months, she says, Mulakkal would visit the St. Francis convent and summon her. Then, according to a letter she wrote to church officials, he raped her.

The letter says the first rape happened on May 5, 2014. The last time was Sept. 23, 2016. The dates are recorded in the convent's visitor logs.

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Mulakkal angrily denies the accusations, telling reporters the charges were “baseless and concocted” and accusing the sister of trying to blackmail him into giving her a better job.

“I am going through painful agony,” said Mulakkal, who was jailed for three weeks and released on bail in October. “I tell everyone to pray to God: Let the truth prevail.”

Catholicism envelopes this part of Kerala. Towns are marked by their cathedrals, convents and roadside shrines, where the Virgin watches passing traffic or St. George slays the dragon. Businesses proclaim their owners’ faith: St. Mary’s Furniture and Bed Center; Ave Maria Electronics; Jesus Oil Industries.

Around here, many see Mulakkal as a martyr.

A string of supporters visited him in jail, and crowds greeted him when he returned home, a ring of policemen holding back people who showered him with flower petals. “Hearty Welcome!” a banner proclaimed.

But at the St. Francis convent, one group of nuns watched news reports about that welcome with dismay. While the sister leveling the accusations against Mulakkal does not speak publicly, a half-dozen nuns cluster around her, offering support and speaking on her behalf.

“Nobody came to see sister, but so many people came to wait in line to meet Bishop Franco in jail,” said Villoonnickal, the nun, who moved back to Kerala to support the woman she calls “our survivor sister.”

That sister was the second of five children in a Kerala family. Her father was in the army. Her mother died when she was in high school. Wracked with grief, she was sent to stay with a cousin - a priest - living in north India. Inspired by her time with him, she became a nun in 1994, working in her early years as a teacher.

She knew Mulakkal, of course. Everyone in the Missionaries of Jesus knows him. But the two were never close, the accuser’s friends say, and had no consensual sexual relationship.

It was about fear.

“The bishop is such a powerful person and standing against him, where will she go?” asked Villoonnickal. “If she went home what will happen to her?”

“Many times she was telling him to stop. But each time he was forcing himself on her,” she continued.

Eventually, they say, she told some sisters what was happening. Then she says she repeatedly complained to church authorities. When nothing happened, she went to the police.

She also went to confession.

There, according to the other nuns, she was told she had to resist the bishop.

“Even if you have to die, don’t submit yourself.” the priest told her in confession, according to Villoonnickal. “Be courageous.”

Catholic authorities have said little about the case, with India’s Catholic Bishops’ Conference saying in an October statement that it has no jurisdiction over individual bishops, and that the investigation and court case, which could take many years, must run their course.

“Silence should in no way be construed as siding with either of the two parties,” the group said. “We request prayers for the Church at this difficult time.”

In Malayalam, the language of Kerala, sisters who leave the convent are sometimes marked as “Madhili Chadi” — Wall Jumpers. It’s a mocking term for the sexually frustrated and is often used for nuns and priests who have fled religious life.

Those who stay get respect. They have communities that embrace them. Their lives have direction, purpose. Those who leave often find themselves adrift in India, searching for new identities and spurned by families and friends. The events that knit families together — weddings, funerals, reunions — are suddenly off-limits. The emotional toll can be immense.

Speaking up about the church’s troubles, many nuns say, could end with them forced from their convents, cut off in many ways from what they’ve always known.

“It’s a fear of being isolated if I speak the truth,” said the nun who fought off the drunken priest. “If you do that, you have to go against your own community, your own religious superiors.”

The result is an engulfing silence. Silence is the armor that sisters use to protect themselves and the lives they have created, even if it also means struggling with their memories, and protecting the men who

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abused them.

In the end, most say nothing.

"I didn't tell anybody," said the nun who escaped the priest kissing her chest, and who waited many years to talk about what had happened to her. "So you understand how these things are covered up."

No deal to end shutdown; Trump says 'could be a long time'

By LISA MASCARO and CATHERINE LUCEY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No one budged at President Donald Trump's closed-door meeting with congressional leaders Wednesday, so the partial government shutdown persisted through Day 12 over his demand for billions of dollars to build a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico. They'll all try again Friday.

In public, Trump renewed his dire warnings of rapists and others at the border. But when pressed in private by Democrats asking why he wouldn't end the shutdown, he responded at one point, "I would look foolish if I did that." A White House official, one of two people who described that exchange only on condition of anonymity, said the president had been trying to explain that it would be foolish not to pay for border security.

In one big shift, the new Congress will convene Thursday with Democrats taking majority control of the House, and Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said they'd quickly pass legislation to re-open the government — without funds for the border wall.

"Nothing for the wall," Pelosi said in an interview with NBC's "Today" show set to air Thursday. "We can go through the back and forth. No. How many more times can we say no?"

But the White House has rejected the Democratic package, and Republicans who control the Senate are hesitant to take it up without Trump on board. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell called it a "total nonstarter." Trump said ahead of his White House session with the congressional leaders that the partial shutdown will last "as long as it takes" to get the funding he wants.

"Could be a long time or could be quickly," Trump said during lengthy public comments at a Cabinet meeting, his first public appearance of the new year. Meanwhile, the shutdown dragged through a second week, closing some parks and leaving hundreds of thousands of federal employees without pay.

Democrats said they asked Trump directly during Wednesday's private meeting held in the Situation Room why he wouldn't consider their package of bills. One measure would open most of the shuttered government departments at funding levels already agreed to by all sides. The other would provide temporary funding for Homeland Security, through Feb. 8, allowing talks to continue over border security.

"I said, Mr. President, Give me one good reason why you should continue your shutdown," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said afterward. "He could not give a good answer."

Trump's response about looking foolish was confirmed by a White House official and another person familiar with the exchange, neither of whom was authorized to describe the exchange by name. Trump had campaigned saying Mexico would pay for the wall, but Mexico has refused.

At another point Wednesday, Trump told Pelosi that, as a "good Catholic" she should support the wall because Vatican City has a wall, according to a congressional aide. Trump has mentioned the Vatican's centuries-old fortifications before, including at the earlier Cabinet meeting. But Democrats have said they don't want medieval barriers, and Pelosi has called Trump's proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border immoral.

"I remain ready and willing to work with Democrats," Trump tweeted after the meeting. "Let's get it done!"

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said that there's no need to prolong the shutdown and that he was disappointed the talks did not produce a resolution. He complained that Democrats interrupted Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen as she was trying to describe a dreadful situation at the border.

Nielsen, participating in the meeting by teleconference, had data about unaccompanied minors crossing the border and a spike in illegal crossings, and she tried to make the case to the group that current funding levels won't suffice, according to the White House.

"We were hopeful that we could get more of a negotiation," said McCarthy.

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He said the leaders plan to return to the White House Friday to continue negotiations. White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said on Fox that Pelosi will be "more able to negotiate" once she is elected speaker, as expected Thursday.

The two sides have traded offers, but their talks broke down ahead of the holidays. On Wednesday, Trump also rejected his own administration's offer to accept \$2.5 billion for the wall. That proposal was made when Vice President Mike Pence and other top officials met at the start of the shutdown with Schumer, who left saying they remained far apart. On Wednesday Trump repeatedly pushed for the \$5.6 billion he has demanded.

Making his case ahead of the private afternoon session, Trump said the current border is "like a sieve" and noted the tear gas "flying" overnight to deter arrivals.

"If they knew they couldn't come through, they wouldn't even start," he said at the meeting, joined by Cabinet secretaries and top advisers, including Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

With no negotiations over the holidays, Trump complained he had been "lonely" at the White House, having skipped his getaway to Mar-a-Lago in Florida. He claimed his only companions were the "machine gunners," referring to security personnel, and "they don't wave, they don't smile." He also criticized Pelosi for visiting Hawaii.

At the Capitol on Wednesday, Pelosi said she hoped Republicans and the White House "are hearing what we have offered" to end the shutdown.

The partial government shutdown began on Dec. 22. Funding for the wall has been the sticking point in passing essential spending bills for several government departments.

Pelosi said Tuesday that Democrats would take action to "end the Trump Shutdown" by passing the legislation Thursday to reopen government.

"Senate Republicans have already supported this legislation, and if they reject it now, they will be fully complicit in chaos and destruction of the President's third shutdown of his term," she said in a letter to colleagues on Tuesday. "We are giving the Republicans the opportunity to take yes for an answer," she wrote in a letter to colleagues.

Administration officials said Trump was in no rush for a resolution to the impasse, believing he has public opinion and his base of supporters on his side. Trump himself contended it's the Democrats who see the shutdown fight as "an election point."

The Democratic package to end the shutdown would include one bill to temporarily fund the Department of Homeland Security at current levels — with \$1.3 billion for border security, far less than Trump has said he wants for the wall — through Feb. 8 as talks would continue.

It would also include a separate measure to fund the departments of Agriculture, Interior, Housing and Urban Development and others closed by the partial shutdown. That measure would provide money through the remainder of the fiscal year, to Sept. 30.

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Kevin Freking and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Asia shares mixed, Shanghai gains after Apple sales warning

By ANNABELLE LIANG, Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Asian markets were mixed on Thursday after tumbling more than 1 percent on the first trading day of 2019. Apple downgraded its sales projections, citing slowing Chinese growth, hitting technology shares in South Korea and Taiwan. The Japanese yen, seen as a relatively safe asset, strengthened against the dollar, euro and several other Asian and European currencies.

KEEPING SCORE: South Korea's Kospi lost 0.2 percent to 2,007.06 and Taiwan's benchmark fell 0.5 percent. The Shanghai Composite index was flat at 2,465.36, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 0.3 percent at 25,058.69. Australia's S&P-ASX 200 rebounded 1.4 percent to 5,632.80. Shares fell in Taiwan and Singapore but rose in Indonesia and the Philippines. Japan's markets were closed.

WALL STREET: A turbulent day on Wall Street saw stocks plunging before recovering and finishing

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slightly higher. Surveys by the China's government and a major business magazine that showed Chinese manufacturing had slowed in December weighed on sentiment. Still, the broad S&P 500 index added 0.1 percent to 2,510.03 on Wednesday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which lost 398 points in the first few minutes of trading, closed 0.1 percent higher at 23,346.24. The Nasdaq composite rose 0.5 percent to 6,665.94. The Dow future contract was down 1.4 percent early Thursday and that for the S&P 500 lost 1.3 percent.

APPLE RELEASE: Apple CEO Tim Cook said in a letter to shareholders released after markets closed on Wednesday that he expects the tech giant's revenue for the October-December quarter to fall below internal and analysts' projections. Apple now expects revenue of \$84 billion for the quarter, about 9 percent lower than the \$91.3 billion estimate from analysts polled by FactSet. The official results will be released on Jan. 29. Cook attributed most of the revenue drop to China, where the economy has been slowing and where U.S. tariffs have been raised on more than \$200 billion in goods, although the iPhone hasn't been affected directly so far. The company's shares fell 7.6 percent to \$146 in after-hours trading.

ANALYST'S TAKE: "A flight to safety following the series of aggravating releases since the turn of the year saw the rush into the yen this morning. Doubling down on Asia markets for a second day today would be the latest downward revision in Q1 guidance from tech giant, Apple," Jingyi Pan of IG said in a market commentary. "The already shaky foundation for Apple owing to the likelihood of the company's products being enlisted into the tariffs scuffle saw their latest move to lower revenue outlook packing a punch for share prices," she added.

ENERGY: Oil prices, which have fallen about 40 percent since last October, settled after jumping at the start of the year. Benchmark U.S. crude shed 83 cents to \$45.71 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract jumped 2.5 percent to \$46.54 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, lost 43 cents to \$54.48 per barrel. It added 2.1 percent to \$54.91 per barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar weakened to 107.16 yen from 108.86 late Wednesday. The euro rose to \$1.1366 from \$1.1344.

Border clash was at least 2nd use of tear gas since November

By DANIEL OCHOA DE OLZA and JULIE WATSON, Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Just after people raised their glasses to ring in the New Year, about 150 migrants gathered at a section of border wall in Tijuana to try to cross into the United States, many of them asylum seekers fed up with the long wait to have their claims processed.

On the other side, U.S. Border Patrol agents wearing camouflage and night-vision goggles and carrying assault-style rifles yelled, "Don't jump. It's dangerous. Get back!" in Spanish. American activists accompanying the migrants shouted at agents in English not to fire tear gas because children were present.

Several migrants tried to climb the metal wall, prompting agents to fire the first volley of tear gas. When migrants approached the wall again, authorities fired a second round and then a third.

The migrants fled, screaming, crying and coughing. One mother was hysterical after briefly losing her children in the thick smoke and darkness.

"The children were crying," said Jose Fajardo Anariba, 16, from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. "They couldn't tolerate it."

Tuesday's confrontation was at least the second time in a little over a month that U.S. authorities have fired tear gas into Tijuana. The action drew sharp criticism from politicians and activists on both sides of the border and raised questions about the use of force against migrants.

Instead of offering the asylum seekers protection, "border agents are firing tear gas at vulnerable families with children," Andrea Guerrero, head of the advocacy group, Alliance San Diego, said in a statement.

At a Cabinet meeting Wednesday at the White House, President Donald Trump said the clash showed that "people tried to charge the border and couldn't." With a complete wall, no one could enter unless

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that person was a "champion pole vaulter."

He described the border as being "like a sieve" and noted that the tear gas was "flying" to deter the migrants and added that it's "very tough" to keep immigrants out.

Trump was making his case for \$5.6 billion from Congress for a wall at the border and vowing that the partial government shutdown now in its 12th day will last "as long as it takes" to get the money.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said tear gas, pepper spray and smoke were used to target rock throwers, not the migrants who were trying to cross. The agency said it could not help small children who were being passed over the concertina wire from getting hurt because of the rocks being thrown.

Several teenagers, wrapped in heavy jackets, blankets and rubber mats, were also put over the concertina wire.

An Associated Press photographer saw rocks thrown only after U.S. agents fired the tear gas. Customs and Border Protection said the incident would be reviewed to ensure compliance with the agency's use-of-force policy.

The agency said 25 migrants were detained while others crawled back into Mexico through a hole under the fence. An AP photographer saw migrants put their hands up or behind their heads once they crossed the border as agents approached.

Anariba said he would try to climb the border wall again. His mother was killed in Honduras, and he has nothing in his homeland, he said.

Since a caravan of Central Americans arrived in Tijuana last month after walking, hitchhiking and taking buses across Mexico, daily apprehensions in the San Diego sector have jumped about 45 percent. Agents are now detaining about 150 migrants a day, compared with about 105 daily in 2018, authorities said.

Many of the migrants are waiting in Tijuana for a chance to apply for asylum in the U.S., but there was a backlog of more than 3,000 names at the San Diego crossing before the caravan's arrival.

A few have found jobs in Mexico and tried to settle there. But thousands are still camped in a concert hall in Tijuana, growing increasingly frustrated at the long wait to apply for asylum.

On Nov. 26, U.S. agents launched tear gas across the border after some migrants tried to breach the border following a peaceful march in Tijuana. The march was to demand U.S. authorities accelerate the asylum process.

U.S. officials are processing fewer than 100 claims a day at the San Diego crossing, the nation's busiest.

Use of force by Customs and Border Protection has declined from a high during the 2013 budget year, when firearms were used 45 times compared with 14 times during the first 11 months of 2018, government statistics show. Since then officers have been trained to use less lethal methods such as batons, pepper spray and tear gas.

The data includes Border Patrol agents who patrol between the ports of entry and officers who police border crossings. The latest figures, which do not include this month's incidents, also show a dramatic drop in the use of less-lethal methods compared with 2013.

Watson reported from San Diego. Associated Press Writer Colleen Long in Washington also contributed to this report.

Apple drops iPhone bombshell on already reeling stock market

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Apple acknowledged that demand for iPhones is waning, confirming investor fears that the company's most profitable product has lost some of its luster.

The reckoning came in a letter from Apple CEO Tim Cook to the company's shareholders released after the stock market closed Wednesday.

Cook said Apple's revenue for the October-December quarter — including the crucial holiday shopping season — will fall well below the company's earlier projections and those of analysts, whose estimates sway the stock market.

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Apple now expects revenue of \$84 billion for the period. Analysts polled by FactSet had expected Apple's revenue to be about 9 percent higher — \$91.3 billion. The official results are scheduled to be released Jan. 29.

Cook traced most of the revenue drop to China, where the economy has been slowing and Apple has faced tougher competition from home-team smartphone makers such as Huawei and Xiaomi. President Donald Trump has also raised new tensions between the U.S. and China by imposing tariffs on more than \$200 billion in goods, although so far the iPhone hasn't been affected directly.

China's "economy began to slow there for the second half," Cook said during an interview with CNBC on Wednesday afternoon. "The trade tensions between the United States and China put additional pressure on their economy."

Cook also acknowledged that consumers in other markets aren't buying as many of the latest iPhones, released last fall, as Apple had anticipated — a factor that could stem from a starting price of \$1,000 for Apple's top-of-the-line iPhones.

Apple's stock plunged 7 percent to \$146.40 in Wednesday's extended trading. The shares had already fallen 32 percent from their peak in early October when investors still had high hopes for the new iPhone models. Apple's troubles may have ripple effects on other technology companies, given investors have been bailing on the industry in recent months. The tech-driven Nasdaq composite index now stands 18 percent down from its record closing high reached in August.

Now, Apple must try to find a way to win back Wall Street's confidence and reverse a steep decline that has erased \$350 billion in shareholder wealth in just three months.

"This is Apple's darkest day during the Cook era," Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives said. "No one expected China to just fall off a cliff like this."

While President Donald Trump's trade war with China isn't helping Apple and other U.S. technology companies, Ives believes Apple miscalculated by continuing to roll out high-priced phones in China, creating an opening for rivals with less costly alternatives that still worked well.

The price gap is one reason Huawei surpassed Apple in smartphone sales from April through September last year to seize the No. 2 spot behind industry leader Samsung, according to the research firm International Data Corp.

"The question now is will Apple change its strategy or stick to its hubris," Ives said.

To help boost iPhone sales, Cook said Apple will expand its financing plans and build upon its recent efforts to make it easier to trade in older models at its stores.

But outsiders will find it harder to see how that's working out. In November, Apple unexpectedly announced that it would no longer disclose how many iPhones it ships each quarter, ending a long-running practice. Wall Street immediately interpreted the move as an attempt to mask a slow but steady downturn in sales.

Apple said at the time that it wanted to reduce investor focus on its iPhone division and instead highlight other promising areas of its business, including its services division that sells subscriptions for music streaming, collects app-related commissions and repairs malfunctioning devices.

But the company now expects its annual revenue to fall 5 percent from the previous year's level. That reversal of fortune could reinforce fears of a global economic slowdown.

New GOP rivalry? Romney bolts into Washington, blasts Trump

By KEVIN FREKING, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mitt Romney, the 2012 GOP presidential nominee and incoming Utah senator, has quickly set himself apart from other Republicans in the new Congress with a blistering attack on President Donald Trump's leadership and character.

Romney put to rest expectations that he would take his time getting his footing in Washington. Instead, in a Washington Post column published two days before Romney was sworn into office, he said Trump's "conduct over the past two years, particularly his actions last month, is evidence that the president has

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not risen to the mantle of the office.”

Trump, in a Twitter response, said he hoped Romney wouldn’t follow in the footsteps of Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., who often criticized Trump and paid the price, opting to retire rather than risk defeat in a GOP primary in 2018.

“Would much prefer that Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things where he can be helpful,” Trump tweeted. “I won big, and he didn’t. He should be happy for all Republicans. Be a TEAM player & WIN!”

Romney’s remarks prompted swift backlash from allies of the president in the Republican Party — including his own niece, Ronna McDaniel, the chairwoman of the Republican National Committee.

McDaniel retweeted Trump’s remarks about Romney and added that the president is constantly “attacked and obstructed” by the media and Democrats.

“For an incoming Republican freshman senator to attack” Trump @realdonaldtrump as their first act feeds into what the Democrats and media want and is disappointing and unproductive,” McDaniel tweeted.

GOP Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky said the 2020 election hopes of many Republicans in the Senate and House will be tied to Trump. He said that the criticisms were bad for the Republican Party and made it harder to get things done in the Senate.

“I don’t think the president deserves a new senator coming in attacking his character,” Paul said.

Romney will be sworn in as a senator on Thursday.

By taking on Trump so early in his Senate career, Romney could be picking up where Flake and Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., another retiring senator, left off.

Their retirements left some wondering whether any other Republicans would be willing to publicly criticize the president. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., noted that almost half the Senate Republicans are up for re-election in 2020 and some may feel the need to push back against Trump.

“They just saw what happened in 2018,” Durbin said, referring to Republicans losing the House majority in November. “I think, once they do polling back home, not all of them but many of them will find that independence is being rewarded.”

Romney has had his public run-ins with the president before and tried to prevent him from winning the GOP nomination in 2016. In one speech, Romney said there was plenty of evidence that Trump was “a con man, a fake.” In that same speech, he said, “Dishonesty is Donald Trump’s hallmark.”

But after the presidential election, Romney eased off the criticism and interviewed to become Trump’s secretary of state. Trump picked former Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, who lasted about 14 months before Trump fired him.

During his Senate campaign, Romney insisted that he would agree with Trump on some issues and not be shy about disagreeing with him on others. Romney appears to have more room with GOP voters in Utah to take on the president. More than half the voters in the state, 64 percent, would like to see Romney confront the president, according to data from AP VoteCast, a survey of midterm voters.

Romney, in his opinion column, credited Trump for cutting corporate taxes, stripping out what he described as excessive regulation and appointing conservative judges. But he said policies and appointments are only part of being a president.

A president, Romney wrote, must also demonstrate honesty and integrity and elevate the national discourse.

“With the nation so divided, resentful and angry, presidential leadership in qualities of character is indispensable. And it is in this province where the incumbent’s shortfall has been most glaring,” Romney wrote.

Trump said during a Cabinet meeting Wednesday that he was surprised by Romney’s comments. “People are very upset with what he did,” Trump said. He also referenced Romney’s 2012 election loss to President Barack Obama.

“If he fought the way he fights me, I’m telling you, he would have won the election,” Trump said.

Romney later told CNN that there “are places where we agree on a whole series of policy fronts, but there are places that I think the president can, if you will, elevate his game and do a better job to help

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bring us together as a nation.”

Asked if we would endorse Trump for president in 2020, Romney said, “I’m going to wait and see what the alternatives are.”

Romney ruled out another run himself: “You may have heard, I ran before,” he said.

Some Trump critics within the GOP are hopeful that Romney’s comments are a sign of more to come from Republicans. Conservative commentator Bill Kristol tweeted that Romney’s words confirmed that “Trump’s dominance over the GOP, pretty complete until now, can no longer be taken for granted.”

“For now at least Mitt Romney has become the leader of the Republican Resistance to Trump,” Kristol said.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Follow Kevin Freking on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/APKFreking>

Michigan man held for spying in Russia was frequent visitor

By COREY WILLIAMS, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — As a staff sergeant with the Marines in Iraq, Paul Whelan enjoyed fine cigars and showed an affinity for Russia — even spending two weeks of military leave in Moscow and St. Petersburg instead of at home in the U.S. with family and friends.

The 48-year-old Detroit-area man had an account on a Russian social media site, where he posted festive notes on the country’s national holidays.

Now, he’s under arrest there on espionage allegations.

Whelan has visited Russia since at least 2007 and was there again for a friend’s wedding, showing other guests around, said his twin brother, David Whelan. He was due to return home on Jan. 6, the brother said.

U.S. officials are seeking answers about Paul Whelan’s arrest on spying charges. The Russian Federal Security Service, or FSB, said Whelan was caught “during an espionage operation,” but gave no details.

U.S. Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman Jr. visited Whelan on Wednesday in Moscow’s Lefortovo Prison, the State Department said.

“Ambassador Huntsman expressed his support for Mr. Whelan and offered the embassy’s assistance,” it said.

He also spoke by phone with Whelan’s family, the statement added, but did not disclose any details “due to privacy considerations for Mr. Whelan and his family.”

According to what appears to be Paul Whelan’s profile on the popular Russian social media platform VKontakte, he posted “God save President Trump” — flanked by flag emojis — on Inauguration Day in 2016. A 2010 post referred to then-President Barack Obama as a “moron.”

Another photo showed Whelan wearing a T-shirt of the Moscow soccer club Spartak. In March 2014, around the time of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Whelan suggested that “Putin can have Alaska, as long as he takes Sarah Palin, too!” And a photo posted in August shows Whelan attending a security conference organized by the U.S. State Department.

David Whelan disputes Russia’s allegation that his brother is a spy.

Former CIA agent John Sipher agrees, saying Paul Whelan’s spotty military career would keep U.S. intelligence from hiring him for sensitive operations.

“He absolutely does not fit the profile of someone we would use in a place like Moscow,” said Sipher, who once ran the agency’s Russia operations in Moscow. “Due to the oppressive level of counterintelligence scrutiny in Moscow, we do not put people without diplomatic immunity in harm’s way. Nor do we handle low-level intelligence collection operations in a place like Moscow.”

Paul Whelan attended high school in Ann Arbor, west of Detroit, and joined the Marine Corps Reserves in 1994. A decade later, he was made a staff sergeant and was deployed twice to Iraq, in 2004 and 2006.

His last duty assignment was with the Marine Air Control Group 38 Headquarters, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing; Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, California. He specialized in administrative posts.

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While stationed in Iraq, Whelan was part of something called the Lamplighter's Club, a group of service members who got together to enjoy good cigars.

"It's one of the unique pleasures that anyone can take advantage of, as everyone should take advantage of a fine cigar once in a while," Whelan said in a 2007 interview posted on the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing page of the Marine Corps website.

Whelan also was part of "The Rest and Recuperation Leave Program," which authorized 15 days of leave to service members on yearlong deployments to Iraq, according to another 2007 story on the website. The military paid for the travel and most service members chose to return home, but others could travel abroad.

Whelan spent his two weeks in Russia, saying in the interview that the leave program "gives those of us who are single an opportunity to travel throughout the world wherever we want to go and experience the diversity of culture."

During his military career, Whelan received awards that included the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, but he ran afoul of the military and was convicted in 2008 on larceny-related charges at a special court-martial. Whelan saw his rank stripped, was demoted to private and discharged for bad conduct.

He went on to start Kingsmead Arsenal, an online firearms business, from his Novi, Michigan, home, and worked for Troy, Michigan-based temporary staffing firm Kelly Services until 2017.

Whelan testified in a 2013 deposition in a federal court case involving Kelly Services that he worked as senior manager of global security and investigations for the company.

He was hired in 2017 by Auburn Hills, Michigan-based BorgWarner and currently is the auto parts supplier's global security director.

"He is responsible for overseeing security at our facilities in Auburn Hills, Michigan, and at other company locations around the world," company spokeswoman Kathy Graham said Tuesday in a statement.

She said BorgWarner does not have any facilities in Russia.

Associated Press writers Deb Riechmann, Robert Burns and Maria Danilova in Washington, Jim Heintz in Moscow and AP News Researcher Jennifer Farrar in New York contributed.

Young immigrants seeking refuge from abuse face denials

By **AMY TAXIN and DEEPTI HAJELA, Associated Press**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Some immigrant youth looking to start over in the United States after fleeing abusive homes are seeing their applications for green cards rejected because the Trump administration says they're too old.

A U.S. government program in place since 1990 has let young immigrants subject to abuse, abandonment or neglect by a parent seek a court-appointed guardian and a green card to stay in the country.

While applicants must file paperwork before age 21, the Trump administration has said some are too old to qualify once they turn 18, prompting a flurry of denial notices over the past year in New York, Texas and California and additional questions of applicants in New Jersey.

Immigrant advocates have filed lawsuits in New York and California and said hundreds of young people could be affected by the change.

"This administration is literally going after some of the most vulnerable people trying to seek relief," said Mary Tanagho Ross, an appellate staff attorney at Los Angeles-based Public Counsel's immigrant rights project.

The Trump administration has been pushing to harden the U.S. border and slash immigration with a series of steps targeting Central American children who arrive on the border alone or with relatives. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions sought to make it tougher for young immigrants fleeing gangs or domestic violence to win asylum — though some guidance he issued on such cases was recently blocked by a federal judge. And the U.S. government has been slower to release immigrant children caught on

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the border to family in the country.

The program is the best chance for many of the thousands of young immigrants arriving on the border to be allowed to stay in the U.S. Under U.S. law, they can apply for green cards once a designated court in the U.S. state where they live assigns them a guardian and declares they are eligible to apply.

A now-22-year-old woman in Northern California, who requested anonymity out of fear the U.S. government will retaliate against her for speaking out, fled her Mexican immigrant parents' home in high school after her father repeatedly beat her.

She was taken in by a teacher, who helped her get started in college and took care of her when she was diagnosed with cancer. When a judge formally named the teacher her legal guardian it was a huge relief, she said. But she later learned the U.S. government wouldn't accept the court's order for her green card application. She dropped to the floor and sobbed, she said.

"I just couldn't believe I was going to have to try to defend myself again," she said. "I don't refer to her by her name or that she's my guardian — I just call her mom."

More than 50,000 young immigrants have obtained green cards by qualifying for special immigrant juvenile status since 2010. The overwhelming majority of applications have been approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, making the program a safer bet for many immigrant children seeking refuge in the United States than pleading a case before an immigration officer or judge for asylum.

Applications to the program have surged in recent years, rising more than three-fold between the 2014 and 2017 fiscal years, federal data shows. During that time, the number of denials also increased, with 2,000 applications rejected over the past two fiscal years — more than all of the previous seven years combined.

The change was most notable in the nine months ending in June 2018, when one in five applications that were decided were denied, the data shows. About 7 percent of application decisions in the 2017 fiscal year and 4 percent of decisions in the 2016 fiscal year were denials.

The U.S. government started reviewing applications at a centralized location in late 2016 to improve efficiency. The following year, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services sought legal guidance from the agency's Office of Chief Counsel for cases involving immigrant children who turned 18 before their paperwork had been completed and determined that a state court order is only valid if that court has the authority to reunite children with their parents, which many don't, according to agency officials.

As a result, 260 cases were denied, they said, adding that the agency may have previously approved some cases that it should not have.

USCIS officials said they could not comment on pending litigation, but said the agency "continues to ensure that children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected receive the humanitarian benefits they are eligible for."

Beth Krause, supervising attorney of the immigrant youth project at Legal Aid in New York, said the federal immigration agency doesn't have the authority to question state law, which in New York expressly allows courts to issue guardianship orders to cover this age group.

"USCIS changed their policy and they changed their policy in a way that is arbitrary and capricious because it doesn't comport with the federal statute" that says young people have until age 21, said Krause, who is representing young immigrants in the New York filing. "They're getting it wrong."

In California, a federal judge has blocked the U.S. government from denying the young immigrants' cases for now. The state enacted a law several years ago expressly allowing probate courts to issue orders for immigrants who are between 18 and 21 so they can apply to participate in the federal program.

In response to the Trump administration's changes, immigrant advocates said they are also changing how they try to help these young applicants. Often, attorneys are looking into alternative ways to get these youth on stable legal footing in the United States, for example, applying for asylum in addition to special immigrant juvenile status, said Priya Konings, deputy director of legal services at Kids in Need of Defense.

"It is just creating extra work for us — which is fine — but overburdening an already almost broken system," Konings said. "It's incredibly obvious that the administration is targeting immigrants at large,

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particularly unaccompanied minors, and they're doing it on every front."

Hajela reported from New York.

Netflix criticized for yanking comedian's episode in Saudi

By MARK KENNEDY, AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Netflix faced criticism Wednesday from human rights groups for pulling an episode in Saudi Arabia of comedian Hasan Minhaj's "Patriot Act" series that criticized the kingdom's powerful crown prince.

The American comedian used his second episode, released Oct. 28, to criticize Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the killing of writer Jamal Khashoggi and the Saudi-led coalition at war in Yemen.

Human rights group Amnesty International said Saudi Arabia's censorship of Netflix is "further proof of a relentless crackdown on freedom of expression." PEN America, the literary and human rights organization, said the move "legitimizes repression." Netflix said it was simply complying with a local law.

Khashoggi, who wrote critically of the crown prince in columns for the newspaper, was killed and dismembered by Saudi agents inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last year. The U.S. Senate has said it believes the crown prince is responsible for the grisly killing, despite insistence by the kingdom that he had no knowledge of the operation.

"It blows my mind that it took the killing of a Washington Post journalist for everyone to go: 'Oh I guess he's not really a reformer,'" Minhaj said in the episode.

Netflix, in a statement Wednesday, said the episode was removed from the kingdom as a result of a legal request from authorities and not due to its content.

"We strongly support artistic freedom worldwide and removed this episode only in Saudi Arabia after we had received a valid legal demand from the government — and to comply with local law," the streaming giant said.

Minhaj, a former correspondent with "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central, told The Associated Press this summer that his Netflix show would fuse his personal narrative as a first-generation Indian-American with the current political and social backdrop to examine deep issues confronting the world.

In the roughly 18-minute now-censored "Patriot Act" monologue, Minhaj also mentions the ruling Al Saud family and its vast wealth, saying: "Saudi Arabia is crazy. One giant family controls everything."

In a tweet, Minhaj mocked the censorship attempt, pointing out that the episode banned from the kingdom is available elsewhere online.

"Clearly, the best way to stop people from watching something is to ban it, make it trend online, and then leave it up on YouTube," he tweeted.

The Saudi-led coalition's airstrikes in Yemen have also come under intense scrutiny since Khashoggi's killing. The war, which began in March 2015, has killed thousands of civilians and pushed millions to the brink of famine.

The Financial Times first reported that Netflix yanked the episode. The episode had been available in Saudi Arabia since late October but was pulled in December after the legal request. Only the second episode has been pulled and it is available to subscribers elsewhere.

The kingdom's Communication and Information Technology Commission said the episode was in violation of Article 6, Paragraph 1 of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law in Saudi Arabia. Officials at the commission could not be immediately reached for comment.

But Samah Hadid at Amnesty International said "Netflix is in danger of facilitating the kingdom's zero-tolerance policy on freedom of expression and assisting the authorities in denying people's right to freely access information."

And Summer Lopez, PEN America's senior director of Free Expression Programs, said the request by the kingdom was "part of Saudi Arabia's standard playbook of repression."

"While Netflix may see no option but to comply, they should be transparent about those decisions and

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accompany any such action with a clear statement opposing the imposition of censorship," Lopez said. "Powerful global corporations are in a unique and important position to push back against requests to censor speech, and failing to do so legitimizes repression."

The Saudi cyber-crime law states that "production, preparation, transmission, or storage of material impinging on public order, religious values, public morals, and privacy, through the information network or computers" is a crime punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine, according to rights group Amnesty International.

Saudi prosecutors have used the broadly worded law to imprison rights activists, poets and others who have expressed views deemed critical of the government or its policies on social media.

Since Prince Mohammed was named heir to the throne in mid-2017, dozens of writers, activists and moderate clerics have been jailed.

Among those detained since May of last year are women's rights activists who had long pushed for more freedoms, including the right to drive before it became legal in June.

Several people with knowledge of their arrest have told The Associated Press that some of the women detained have been subjected to caning, electrocution, and others were also sexually assaulted.

Netflix's streaming service expanded into Saudi Arabia three years ago. The company doesn't give subscriber numbers for any country besides the U.S. but the number of customers it has in Saudi Arabia accounts for an extremely small fraction of its 137 million worldwide subscribers.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Netflix's 'Bird Box' success gets Hollywood clucking

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE, AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Netflix said 45 million subscriber accounts worldwide watched the Sandra Bullock thriller "Bird Box" during its first seven days on the service, the biggest first-week success of any movie made for the company's nearly 12-year-old streaming service.

Netflix, which typically refuses to provide viewership numbers, made the rare disclosure in a recent tweet as movie producers, writers, actors and investors continue to size up a company that has already reshaped the way the world watches video.

The first-week audience means nearly one-third of Netflix's 137 million subscribers watched the movie from Dec. 21 through Dec. 27 — a holiday-season stretch when many people aren't working and have more free time. Had 45 million people actually gone to a theater in the U.S. to watch "Bird Box," it would have translated to about \$400 million in box-office revenue, based on average ticket prices.

But people were watching the movie on a service for which they already had paid and had the luxury of doing so without leaving their homes. That makes watching "Bird Box" more comparable to watching a television program, Wedbush Securities analyst Michael Pachter said.

By that yardstick, the viewership for "Bird Box" is less impressive. For instance, the Super Bowl typically attracts 100 million to 110 million viewers in the U.S. alone. The annual telecast of the Academy Awards has drawn a U.S. audience of 26 million to 40 million in recent years. And those totals are for a single day, not a week.

Television viewership and theatrical box-office numbers are typically calculated by third-party firms, unlike the "Bird Box" figure released by Netflix. The Los Gatos, California, company has steadfastly refused to divulge its viewership because it regards the data as a competitive advantage in deciding what programs will attract subscribers. All Netflix will say about its "Bird Box" number is that it counted only accounts that watched at least 70 percent of the movie. Multiple viewers sharing a single account are counted once.

Netflix so far has made its biggest splash with highly acclaimed TV series such as "House of Cards," "Stranger Things," and "The Crown." "Bird Box" is the latest example of the company's resolve to become a bigger player in movies, too.

To pull it off, Netflix is borrowing billions of dollars to pay for original movies and TV series. But beyond

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money, Netflix needs to appease directors and actors who want their work to also be seen in movie theaters, both for their larger screens and for award consideration. That's why Netflix has been arranging for films like "Bird Box," "Roma," and "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" to have limited runs in theaters first.

That's a strategy that Amazon had already been following, enabling its "Manchester By The Sea" to win Academy Awards for best actor and original screenplay in 2017. An ESPN documentary, "O.J.: Made In America," also won an Oscar in 2017 after appearing in theaters before its debut on the TV network.

By breaking tradition and disclosing viewership numbers for "Bird Box," Netflix cleverly created even more buzz, Pachter said. "They are masters at getting attention and they knew revealing the numbers would get the media to write about it," he said.

That, in turn, gets the attention of movie producers and directors, as well as luring back investors who had sold off Netflix in recent weeks as part of a broader sell-off of tech stocks. The company's stock closed Wednesday unchanged at \$267.66, but has dropped 37 percent from its peak in June — a slump that has wiped out nearly \$70 billion in shareholder wealth.

Netflix quickly found itself grappling with another problem Wednesday as it acknowledged censoring an episode from its "Patriot Act" series in Saudi Arabia to comply with laws in that country.

6 die in Denmark's worst train accident since 1988

By JAN M. OLSEN, Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Six passengers were killed when a Danish train sustained damage while crossing a bridge that was closed to cars because of high wind Wednesday, and authorities investigated if falling cargo from a freight train caused Denmark's deadliest railway accident in 30 years.

Authorities said the two trains were traveling in opposite directions on the bridge linking s Denmark's islands. Aerial TV footage showed a front side of the passenger train ripped open. Photos showed crates of beer on the freight train and a tarpaulin on top torn in pieces.

Jesper Nielsen told Denmark's TV2 he was riding on the passenger train and it "was out on the bridge when there was a huge 'bang' ... very quickly thereafter, the train braked."

The rail operator, Danish Railways, told Denmark's TV2 the victims were passengers on a train going from the city of Odense, on the central Danish island of Funen, to the capital of Copenhagen when the accident took place about 8 a.m.

Police declined to comment directly on a report from Denmark's TV2 channel that a large freight container had likely fallen off the cargo train.

"It is much too early to speculate as to what might have caused it," chief police investigator Joergen Andersen told reporters. "It has been a pretty serious accident."

The accident, in which 16 people were injured, took place on a road-and-rail bridge, part of the Storebaelt system of bridges and a tunnel that link the Danish islands of Zealand and Funen. The system was closed to cars overnight because of strong winds but trains were allowed to continue using it.

Police spokesman Lars Braemhoej said one possible cause of the "considerable damage" on the passenger train was getting struck by cargo from the freight train, but noted that authorities "do not know precisely what caused the accident."

Kasper Elbjoern, spokesman for the Danish brewery group Carlsberg, confirmed that a freight train transporting its cargo was involved in the accident.

Police urged passengers to contact relatives and tell them if they were safe and urged people not to share photos or videos of the accident.

Flemming Jensen, the CEO of state-owned Danish Railways, said police and the Danish Accident Investigation Board were investigating. He said the operator "will contribute everything that we can to the investigation."

Bo Haaning of the Danish Accident Investigation Board was quoted as saying it could take months before the cause of the accident could be determined.

The government agency responsible for Danish railways said on Twitter that no further trains would

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cross the Storebaelt link on Wednesday, adding it was aiming to allow train crossings to resume Thursday. Road traffic resumed Wednesday with a 50 kph (31 mph) speed limit.

"Ordinary Danes on their way to work or heading home from the Christmas holidays have had their lives smashed," Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen said as he issued his condolences.

Denmark's Queen Margrethe said the "terrible accident ... touches me deeply."

In 1988, eight people were killed and 72 injured when a train derailed because of high speed near Soroe, west of Copenhagen.

Denmark's worst train accident occurred in 1919, when an express train collided with a stopped train in Copenhagen due to a dispatcher error. A total of 40 people were killed and some 60 were injured.

This story has been corrected to show that the English spelling of the island is Funen.

'Ear Hustle' host is freed, but prison podcast will go on

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ, Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — In California, inmates typically are granted parole by doing good deeds or showing they have been rehabilitated by becoming pastors, drug counselors or youth advocates. For Walter "Earlone" Woods, the path to freedom was podcasting.

Woods, 47, was recently released from San Quentin State Prison after California Gov. Jerry Brown commuted his 31-years-to-life sentence for attempted armed robbery. Brown cited Woods' leadership in helping other inmates and his work at "Ear Hustle," a podcast he co-hosts and co-produces that documents everyday life inside the prison.

Woods has since been hired as a full-time producer for the often funny and at times heart-wrenching podcast, which has been a smashing success since its launch in 2017. The show's roughly 30 episodes have been downloaded 20 million times by fans all over the world.

Listeners have praised "Ear Hustle" online as "eye-opening" and "incredibly humanizing." For Woods, one of the most meaningful reviews came from the governor's office when they called with the good news.

"The one thing that the lady said, you know, she told me, 'We love the podcast in this office,'" Woods told The Associated Press of the commutation call from Brown's office. "I don't know if the governor listens, but people in his office listen. People really like what we do."

During their podcast, Woods and fellow creator and outside co-host, prison volunteer Nigel Poor, give listeners a peek into the hardships and small joys of men incarcerated at the medium-security facility.

In interviews with the hosts, inmates discuss struggles such as finding a compatible cellmate to share a 5- by 10-foot (1.5- by 3-meter) cell, share why they take care of frogs or black widow spiders as if they were pets, or describe the impact of solitary confinement or being on death row.

Woods, an affable man with a quick smile and a sharp sense of humor, helps listeners understand prison life, while Poor brings an outsider's perspective, asking insightful questions that at times push inmates to reflect on what put them behind bars.

The podcast offers listeners an intimate look into lives society doesn't spend much time thinking about, said Woods, who spent 21 years behind bars.

"People get to see the car chases. They get to see the trial. But they don't know what happens after you get to prison," Woods said. "We've been able to really humanize people, and people realize that those in prison are just people who made dumb decisions."

Brown agreed, and in his commutation letter, issued the day before Thanksgiving, the governor said Woods "has clearly shown that he is no longer the man he was when he committed this crime."

"He has set a positive example for his peers and, through his podcast, has shared meaningful stories from those inside prison," Brown wrote.

The podcast project started after Poor, a San Francisco Bay Area artist who has volunteered at San Quentin since 2011, approached Woods.

In 2016, Poor saw Public Radio Exchange's Radiotopia network was sponsoring a podcast talent contest,

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and she asked Lt. Sam Robinson, San Quentin's spokesman, for permission to enter. Another co-creator, Antwan Williams, who is serving 15 years for armed robbery, came on board to do its sound design.

Their pitch beat more than 1,500 contestants from 53 countries, and they received the backing of a group of radio professionals, Poor said.

"Everyone was shocked when we won, especially the prison. Lt. Robinson told me he let us enter because he never thought we would win," she said, laughing.

"Ear Hustle," — eavesdropping, in prison slang — has found international success, with fans sending cards and letters from as far as New Zealand, Qatar in the Middle East, and Mauritius in East Africa. The free show also can be accessed in prisons throughout California and the United Kingdom. New episodes are posted every couple of weeks.

Julie Shapiro, Radiotopia executive producer, describes the podcast as a "roller coaster of emotions" that challenges what people understand about life in prison.

"People don't expect to have something in common with those telling their stories from prison, but the details of their lives resonate with listeners because they hear these men encounter daily life in some of the same ways that we do," Shapiro said.

The outpouring of love and appreciation for the show has grown since Woods announced on a Nov. 24 episode that Brown commuted his sentence.

The first thing Woods did after walking through the prison gates on Nov. 30 was take in the view of the San Francisco Bay and of the ocean "as far as the eye can see." An episode featured his first moments as a free man.

Since then, he's been noticing new styles, like women everywhere in yoga pants, and people walking through the streets with their heads bowed. He quickly realized they were looking at their smartphones, which didn't exist when he started his sentence in 1997.

Woods has also spent time people-watching at a high-end department store, visited Disneyland and recently made eggs for the first time in two decades.

The fourth season of "Ear Hustle," which will be released this summer, will feature stories of his re-entry to society and interviews with other inmates released after long sentences. He and Poor also plan to visit maximum-security prisons and tell the stories of prisoners there.

"There's a lot of people that's in there that should be out," Woods said. "I created a podcast, but I'm not the exception."

Israeli settlement activity appears to surge in Trump era

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — With little resistance from a friendly White House, Israel has launched a new settlement push in the West Bank since President Donald Trump took office, laying the groundwork for what could be the largest construction binge in years, according to data obtained by The Associated Press.

The figures, gathered from official government sources by the anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now, show an increase in building in 2018 and a sharp spike in planning for future construction.

This trend, highlighted last week when an Israeli committee advanced plans for thousands more settlement homes on war-won lands, has only deepened Palestinian mistrust of the Trump administration as it says it is preparing to roll out a Mideast peace plan. Each new settlement expansion further diminishes the chances of setting up a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Both supporters and opponents of settlements confirm a change in atmosphere since early 2017, when Trump took over from Barack Obama, whose administration had tried to rein in construction.

"The feeling of the (Israeli) government is everything is allowed, that the time to do things is now because the (U.S.) administration is the most pro-settlement you can ever have," said Hagit Ofra of Peace Now's Settlement Watch program.

Peace Now uses several measurements of settlement activity. These include "plans," or the bureaucratic stages of preparing a project, including initial proposals; "tenders," when bids are solicited from contrac-

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tors to do large projects; and “construction starts,” when the building actually begins.

Each of these figures tells a different story. While construction starts give a snapshot of the current level of settlement activity, they reflect decisions made years ago. In contrast, the planning and tender stages are seen as forward-looking indicators of a government’s intentions.

The data compiled by Peace Now showed a drop in construction starts during Trump’s first year in office, to 1,643 units in 2017 from 3,066 units the previous year. This drop appears to reflect the lingering effect of reduced planning during the final two years of the Obama administration.

But the data for the first nine months of 2018 indicate the beginning of a Trump effect, with construction starts 20 percent higher than the same period a year earlier.

These trends are even more evident when looking at the planning process. In 2017, plans were advanced to build 6,712 new settlement homes, roughly 2.5 times the 2016 level.

In 2018, plans for an additional 5,618 units were advanced, nearly half of which were processed last week alone. Together, these numbers are the highest level of planning seen since 2013. At that time, Israel pushed forward settlement construction to counter criticism of its release of Palestinian prisoners as part of then-Secretary of State John Kerry’s peace efforts.

A United Nations spokesman reiterated in response to a question on the topic at a Wednesday news briefing that the world body has called for a halt to all settlement activity. A 2016 U.N. Security Council resolution condemned them as a “flagrant violation” of international law.

The biggest surge in settlement activity during the Trump era is in tenders— large projects that are ready to be launched.

In 2017, 3,154 tenders were issued, up from just 42 during Obama’s final year in office. In 2018, that number rose to over 3,800, the highest number by far since Peace Now started compiling the data in 2002. This sets the stage for a huge jump in construction in the near future.

“There’s definitely a change of atmosphere. There’s definitely a change of winds,” said Oded Revivi, mayor of Efrat, a major settlement near Jerusalem, and the chief foreign envoy of the Yesha settlement council.

Revivi said that Obama pressured Israel into greatly curtailing settlement activity. Now, he said, Israel is trying to make up for lost time.

“Basically what you’re seeing now is the statistics are trying to catch up to the needs that were built up during the eight years of the Obama administration, when everything was in a standstill,” Revivi said.

White House Mideast envoy Jason Greenblatt’s office declined comment, and State Department officials were not immediately available for comment due to the government shutdown.

The Palestinians and most of the international community consider Israeli settlements to be illegal and obstacles to peace. Over 400,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank, in addition to 200,000 in east Jerusalem. The Palestinians seek both areas, captured by Israel in 1967, as parts of their state.

For decades, a string of U.S. presidents, both Republican and Democrat, condemned settlement construction.

Things quickly changed when Trump took office. Trump refused to condemn settlement construction and surrounded himself with advisers — including his son-in-law Jared Kushner and Ambassador to Israel David Friedman — who are Orthodox Jews with close ties to settlements. Trump at times has asked Israel to show restraint, but his administration has remained largely silent as Israel has pressed ahead with its construction efforts over the past two years.

This has been welcome news to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose outgoing coalition is dominated by religious and nationalist settlement sympathizers. Favored to win re-election in April, Netanyahu has said he expects his next government to look very similar.

Israel never annexed the West Bank, meaning the Israeli military remains the sovereign there. Construction in the West Bank requires approval from COGAT, a Defense Ministry body that oversees civilian affairs in the territory.

Plans are submitted by the government to COGAT’s Higher Planning Council, which decides if they meet legal criteria.

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COGAT routinely portrays decisions on new settlement activity as a technical matter, playing down the political impact. In a statement, COGAT said it acts in accordance with planning and building laws in the West Bank.

Critics say COGAT routinely promotes settlement expansion and development at the expense of Palestinian communities in the 60 percent of the West Bank that is under full Israeli control. Palestinians have varying degrees of autonomy, including over building permits, in the remaining areas of the West Bank, where most Palestinians live.

The offices of Avigdor Lieberman, who served as defense minister in 2017 and 2018, and his deputy, Eli Ben-Dahan, did not respond to requests for comment. Both are strong supporters of the settlements and settlers themselves.

The settlement surge has added to the Palestinians' distrust of the White House. The Palestinians cut off ties with the administration over a year ago after Trump recognized contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital. President Mahmoud Abbas has said he will reject any peace plan the Trump team presents.

Abbas' spokesman, Nabil Abu Rdeneh, said U.S. "silence and lack of condemnation and pressure" have given a "green light" to the Israeli government to step up settlement activity.

Sports betting will be no home run for state budgets

By WAYNE PARRY and GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — The race to legalize sports betting is on now that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed it in all 50 states, but will it provide enough extra tax revenue to make much of a difference for schools, roads or pension debt?

Don't bet on it.

Just look to the states that capitalized immediately after the court's ruling last spring and to Nevada, which previously had an effective monopoly on sports gambling. Even though the market is still developing, the returns to date have been modest.

In Nevada, revenue from sports betting has accounted for roughly one half of 1 percent of the entire state budget.

"Everything I've seen so far suggests that this would not be what one would consider to be a pot of gold," said Ohio state Sen. John Eklund, a Republican who introduced legislation to legalize sports betting in his state.

Delaware, Mississippi, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and West Virginia legalized sports betting last year after the Supreme Court decision, as did the District of Columbia. Although New Mexico has not passed a sports betting law, the Santa Ana Star Casino & Hotel started taking bets in October through a tribal gambling compact.

Lawmakers in Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Virginia already have filed bills to allow sports betting, and those who track the industry expect a total of 30 states to consider similar ones this year.

The expected stampede of states seeking to legalize it has parallels to the growing trend toward legalizing recreational marijuana, which 10 states have done and others are considering.

As with marijuana, lawmakers say they are motivated in large part because sports betting has been a black market activity outside Nevada. Legalizing it would allow states to impose regulations and take in at least some money.

"I keep telling them this is not like a craps table or a slot machine," said Mark Sickles, a Democratic state lawmaker in Virginia who has sponsored a bill that would place a 15 percent tax on sports betting in the state. "My main purpose is to take something that's currently being done illegally and get some tax revenue from it."

Revenue from legalized pot makes up just a small portion of state revenue, even in the states with the most mature markets — about 2 percent in Colorado and a little over 1 percent in Washington, according to a May report from Moody's Investors Service. That's still a far larger portion of revenue than even the most optimistic projections for sports betting.

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New Jersey was the first state to legalize sports betting after the Supreme Court decision last May.

The state's gambling industry took in \$928 million worth of sports bets since the first one was taken on June 14 through the end of November. From that, the state received less than \$8 million in tax revenue.

Even if the state meets its projection of \$25 million in sports betting tax revenue for a full year, that would amount to well under one 10th of 1 percent of the state's \$37.4 billion budget.

Former New Jersey state Sen. Raymond Lesniak began the effort to legalize sports betting there 10 years ago with what at the time seemed like a quixotic lawsuit against the federal government. He said sports gambling was not supposed to be a big moneymaker for the state.

"It wasn't intended to do that," he said. "I was driven by the fact that the Atlantic City casino industry was dying and the horse racing industry was on life support. It needed an injection of new money and new people that would come, fill up rooms, eat in restaurants, spend money."

Lesniak expects sports betting to eventually generate over \$100 million in taxes for the state once all New Jersey's casinos and racetracks have sports books up and running for a full year. That would be 10 times the level of tax revenue being generated right now, when many sports betting operations in New Jersey are in their infancy.

Yet experts say sports betting revenue in New Jersey and elsewhere is likely to be diluted as more and more states jump into the game.

New Jersey's market is being squeezed on one side by Pennsylvania, which recently began offering sports betting, and on the other by New York, which is likely to pursue legalization this year.

For perspective, New Jersey's casino revenue at the end of 2006, when Pennsylvania opened its first casino, was \$5.2 billion. A decade later, that number had been cut in half and Pennsylvania had more casinos.

The states that have launched sports betting this year expect they will bring in tax revenue that ranges from about \$5 million in Mississippi and West Virginia to \$25 million in New Jersey. In each state, hitting those targets would account for just a fraction of 1 percent of state spending.

Even Rhode Island, which has the highest sports betting tax rate at 51 percent, estimates it will take in \$23.5 million a year, or a quarter of 1 percent of the state's budget.

Those revenue projections are in line with expectations from the municipal ratings firm Moody's Investor Service. Baye Larsen, who analyzes state finances at Moody's, expects sports betting to account for a "very, very small slice" of state revenue and will do little if anything to help cover their rising pension, Medicaid, education or infrastructure needs.

Instead, some lawmakers said they will try to direct the money to specific projects. A bill in Missouri, for example, would send some of the revenue to the capital improvement fund of the state Veterans Commission, while some of New Jersey's online sports betting revenue is targeted to an Atlantic City promotion campaign.

"Legalized sports gambling is not a way to raise revenue for the government; it is not a mechanism to create jobs," said Minnesota state Rep. Patrick Garofalo, a Republican. "It's a high-volume, low-margin business."

Associated Press writer Regina Garcia Cano in Las Vegas contributed to this report.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Tops on House Democrats' to-do list: Try to end shutdown

By LISA MASCARO, AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats are sweeping into power this week on a campaign promise of improving government for ordinary Americans. But first, they'll have to get government reopened from the partial shutdown.

As the Congress gavels in for the 116th session the early votes will be the usual ones — establishing the House rules and electing the House speaker, presumably California Democrat Nancy Pelosi. But the new

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majority will quickly pivot Thursday to a pair of bills to fund the parts of the government that have been shuttered in the dispute over money for President Donald Trump's border wall with Mexico.

It's a cold opening for the new majority, setting up an early confrontation with the Republican-led Senate and the White House and testing the House Democrats' ability to make good on their campaign pledge to focus on kitchen-table issues in the new era of divided government.

"Our first order of business will be to end the reckless Trump shutdown and reopen the government," Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the incoming caucus chairman, said in an interview. Then, he said, "we will turn our attention to bringing our democracy to life and returning our government to the people."

So far, House Democrats appear largely unified in their plan to vote to reopen government without the money Trump is demanding to build the border wall.

Jeffries said that while Trump wants to "waste millions in taxpayer dollars on a medieval border wall," Democrats are drawing "a line in the sand" against the spending they say won't make the border any safer.

"The partisanship, rancor and dysfunction of the Trump shutdown is exactly what voters rebuked in November," said Rep.-elect Joe Neguse of Colorado, a new leader of the freshmen class, in the Democrats' weekly address. "And that is why on Jan. 3rd, when the new Democratic House majority arrives, we will bring the hope, vision and goals of effective governance back to the forefront."

But with Trump dug in over the \$5 billion he wants to build the wall, the shutdown could drag on. Senate Republicans are reluctant to consider the House bills unless they know the president is on board.

The first signal Trump has given that he may be willing to talk about the wall impasse came Tuesday, when he tweeted, "Let's make a deal?" He's invited Democratic and Republican congressional leaders to a White House meeting Wednesday on border security.

Democrats are eager to move forward in the House on multiple fronts.

They're set to approve a rules package on Thursday that sets a new tone for governing. For example, it requires that legislation first be considered in committees before bills are brought to the floor for votes. It bans lawmakers from serving on corporate boards. And it recognizes the diversity of the new freshmen class by easing a century-old rule against wearing hats on the chamber floor to allow Rep.-elect Ilhan Omar, a Muslim-American from Minnesota, to wear a head scarf.

By early next week, House Democrats are expected to consider a resolution to defend the Affordable Care Act in legal proceedings after a Texas judge ruled it largely unconstitutional in a legal challenge brought by Republican attorneys general from several states.

H.R. 1, the first bill of the new House majority, is a good-government package that tackles campaign finance reforms and other issues. It will begin making its way through the newly bolstered committee process.

And they will continue their oversight of the Trump administration and Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Incoming Rules Committee Chairman Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., insists the new majority can "walk and chew gum" at the same time.

Still, corralling a large House majority has never been easy, and Democrats are ushering in the largest class since the Watergate era. Republicans under retiring Speaker Paul Ryan all but gave up trying to the muscle the conservative House Freedom Caucus in line. It was the Freedom Caucus leaders who urged Trump to fight for the border wall money and reject legislation that would have prevented the shutdown days before Christmas.

Pelosi is expected to regain the gavel Thursday, securing the votes to become speaker even after some new and returning lawmakers signaled they wanted new leadership. She would be the first woman to hold, then return, to the office.

But divisions remain, rearing up even before the newly elected members are sworn into office, as many are eager for change and ready to confront Trump.

Rep.-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York has been critical of the leader's plans to create a Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. She prefers a panel that focuses on renewable energy investments and

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whose members refuse campaign donations from oil and other fossil fuel industries.

"A weak committee misses the point & endangers people," she wrote on Twitter.

Ocasio-Cortez and others, including Rep. Ro Khanna of California, are opposing the rules package over a budgeting provision that allows objections to legislation that increases the deficit. Many progressives worry it could halt bills on health care or other investments. "It is terrible economics," Khanna said on Twitter.

Republican Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California, the incoming minority leader, panned the Democratic effort to reopen government without wall money.

"As my mother used to say, 'This too shall pass,'" Jeffries said. "We will get past this shutdown and there will be ample opportunity for us to communicate with the American people and get things done on their behalf."

Follow on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/lisamascaro>

Why slowing economies could prod US and China to reach deal

By PAUL WISEMAN and JOE MCDONALD, AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration and China are facing growing pressure to blink in their six-month stare-down over trade because of jittery markets and portents of economic weakness.

The import taxes the two sides have imposed on hundreds of billions of each other's goods — and the threat of more to come — have heightened anxiety on each side of the Pacific. The longer their trade war lasts, the longer companies and consumers will feel the pain of higher-priced imports and exports.

Their conflict is occurring against the backdrop of a slowdown in China and an expected U.S. slump that a prolonged trade war could worsen — a fear that's weighing on financial markets. Yet those very pressures, analysts say, give the two countries a stronger incentive to make peace.

"The U.S. and China now have a strong shared interest in striking a deal in order to halt the downward spiral in business and investor confidence, which have taken a beating in both their economies," said Eswar Prasad, professor of trade policy at Cornell University.

The economic threats, agreed Wang Yong, an international relations specialist at Peking University, "might be conducive to negotiations" by nudging Beijing toward market-oriented changes long sought by the United States.

Still, it will hardly be easy to bridge the complex differences between the world's top two economies. They range from President Donald Trump's insistence that China buy more U.S. products to widespread assertions that Beijing steals trade secrets from foreign companies operating in China.

Negotiations between the two nations are expected to resume next week. Gao Feng, a spokesman for China's Commerce Ministry, said last week that the two sides have "made specific arrangements for face-to-face meetings" and are talking by phone. Gao offered no details, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative declined to confirm the talks.

The world is watching anxiously. China and the United States, the two largest economies, are the "main engines of the world," noted Song Lifang, an economist at Renmin University in Beijing. That makes their dispute "a matter not only for the two countries but for the world," he added.

The dispute is "a major factor" in a slowdown in global growth, Song said, and a settlement would "help in arresting the decline of the economies of the two countries and of the world."

Trump has long complained about America's gaping trade deficit with China: The gap between what Americans sold and what they bought from China in 2017 amounted to \$336 billion and will likely be higher in 2018. But the dispute goes far deeper than lopsided exports and imports. It's fundamentally a high-stakes conflict over the economy of the future.

The U.S. accuses China of deploying predatory tactics in a drive to surpass America's technological supremacy. A report in March by the U.S. Trade Representative accused China of hacking into U.S. companies' computer networks to steal secrets and coercing American companies to hand over technology as the price of admission to the Chinese market.

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To try to compel China to reform its ways, Washington has imposed tariffs on \$250 billion in Chinese imports; Beijing has counterpunched by taxing \$110 billion in U.S. goods. Trump had been set to raise the tariffs on most of the Chinese goods on Jan. 1. But he and President Xi Jinping agreed to a 90-day cease-fire to try to resolve their differences.

Since then, the case for peace has strengthened as economic risks in the U.S. and China have grown and financial markets have reeled. For 2018, the Dow Jones Industrial Average — America's highest-profile stock market benchmark — fell nearly 6 percent, its worst performance since 2008. China's Shanghai Composite Index sank nearly 25 percent.

On top of concerns about collateral damage from the U.S.-China trade war, investors in the U.S. markets are worrying about rising interest rates and a wobbly U.S. real estate market. Fears are growing that the second-longest economic expansion in U.S. history could slide to a halt next year or in 2020. Cutting a deal with Beijing could help at least reduce the threat.

China's economy has been decelerating since the government pulled back on bank lending a year ago to try to curb a run-up in debt. The International Monetary Fund estimates that China's economy grew about 6.6 percent in 2018, down from 6.9 percent in 2017. But heavy government spending masked weakness in private-sector activity. In December, factory activity shrank for the first time in more than two years.

Auto sales in China plunged 16 percent in November from a year earlier. It was the fourth month of contraction, and it put annual sales in the world's biggest auto market on track to contract for the first time in three decades.

Despite its softening economy, China will likely find it difficult to comply with U.S. demands to slow its economic ambitions. Those ambitions cut to the heart to China's drive to become the world's 21st century economic superpower.

"It is difficult to solve the trade dispute immediately because the U.S. demands are too high, especially demands for changes in China's economic and social systems, which it is difficult for China to accept," said Song, the economist at Renmin University.

Wendy Cutler, a former U.S. trade negotiator, said the U.S. likely can't realistically settle for anything less than an agreement by Beijing to reform how it does business.

"There are certainly compelling reasons for both sides to reach a deal and avoid further tariff increases," said Cutler, now vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "However, these reasons can only take you so far... Without a strong deal that addresses structural issues, it sets the administration up for critics to say, 'You took us into a trade war for this?'"

McDonald reported from Beijing.

Follow Paul Wiseman on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/PaulWisemanAP>

US fires tear gas across Mexico border to stop migrants

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — U.S. authorities fired tear gas into Mexico during the first hours of the new year to repel about 150 migrants who tried to breach the border fence in Tijuana.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a statement later Tuesday that the gas was used to target rock throwers apart from the migrants who were trying to cross.

"No agents witnessed any of the migrants at the fence line, including children, experiencing effects of the chemical agents, which were targeted at the rock throwers further away," the statement said.

An Associated Press photographer saw at least three volleys of gas launched onto the Mexican side of the border near Tijuana's beach that affected the migrants, including women and children, as well as journalists. The AP saw rocks thrown only after U.S. agents fired the tear gas.

The agency said agents saw "toddler sized children" being passed over concertina wire with difficulty. It said its agents could not assist the children because of the rocks being thrown. Agents responded with smoke, pepper spray and tear gas, it said. The AP journalist also saw plastic pellets fired by U.S. agents.

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The agency said 25 migrants were detained while others crawled back into Mexico through a hole under the fence.

Customs and Border Protection said that under its use of force policy the incident would be reviewed by its Office of Professional Responsibility.

Migrants who spoke with AP said they arrived in Tijuana last month with the caravan from Honduras.

The caravan, which left Honduras in mid-October, grew to more than 6,000 members during its month-and-a-half trek north. It has been a constant target of President Donald Trump, who referred to it frequently in the run-up to U.S. mid-term elections in November.

Many of the migrants are waiting in Tijuana for a chance to apply for asylum in the U.S., but there was a backlog before the caravan's arrival and the wait is expected to be many months. Others have found jobs in Mexico and tried to settle there.

In a previous incident, U.S. agents launched tear gas across the border after some migrants tried to breach the border following a peaceful march in Tijuana on Nov. 26. Hundreds of migrants who were downwind of the gas were affected.

Trump is currently locked in a fight with congressional Democrats over funding for the border wall that he wants to build. The stalemate has led to a partial government shutdown.

Could Tesla price cuts mean demand is slowing?

By TOM KRISHER, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Tesla made about 9,300 more vehicles than it delivered last year, raising concerns among industry analysts that inventory is growing as demand for the company's electric cars may be starting to wane.

If demand falls, they say, the company will enter a new phase of its business. Like other automakers, Tesla will have to either cut production or reduce prices to raise sales. A drop in demand could also curtail the company's earnings and jeopardize CEO Elon Musk's promise to post sustained quarterly profits.

On Wednesday, Tesla did cut prices, knocking \$2,000 off each of its three models. The company said the cuts will help customers deal with the loss of a \$7,500 federal tax credit, which was reduced to \$3,750 this month for Tesla buyers and will gradually go to zero by the end of 2019.

"They have for a long time had more demand than supply," Gartner analyst Michael Ramsey said. "It's becoming apparent that that dynamic is changing."

Tesla reported that it produced 254,530 cars and SUVs last year and delivered 245,240.

The company's deliveries for the full year matched Wall Street estimates, but its figures for the fourth quarter didn't reach expectations. Tesla said it delivered 90,700 vehicles from October through December. Analysts polled by data provider FactSet expected 92,000.

Jeff Schuster, a senior vice president at the forecasting firm LMC Automotive, said demand for Tesla's lower-priced Model 3 has been artificially high for the past six months as the company overcame production problems at its Fremont, California, factory.

"You've had these inflated months because of delayed deliveries," Schuster said. "We're probably getting to that point where we're getting to equilibrium and consumers aren't necessarily waiting for vehicles."

Last year, Tesla reported that about 420,000 buyers had put down \$1,000 deposits to join the Model 3 waiting list.

LMC predicts that Tesla U.S. sales will rise in 2019 because it's the first full year on the market for the Model 3. It anticipates sales to then fall by about 10,000 in 2020.

Losing the tax credit will hit those who have been holding out for the \$35,000 version of the Model 3, Schuster said. At present, Tesla is selling only versions that cost more than \$45,000. Under federal law, buyers get the full tax credit until a manufacturer reaches 200,000 in sales since the start of 2010. Tesla hit 200,000 in July but the full credit continued for vehicles delivered by Dec. 31. It was cut in half on Jan. 1 and will go away by the end of the year.

"You've had your early adopters, those early followers have already come in" to buy, Schuster said. "Now

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you're trying to appeal to the mainstream market. I think that will have an impact on overall demand."

At the same time, inventory appears to be swelling. The company parked hundreds of cars at lots and Tesla stores all over the country at the end of last year, which could indicate excess stock. Tesla wouldn't give inventory numbers but said it has lower stocks than its two biggest competitors, BMW and Mercedes.

The Associated Press found one lot on the north side of Chicago where Tesla was storing dozens of vehicles in late December, and Mark Spiegel, a hedge fund manager who bets against Tesla stock, said other lots were full across the country.

Tesla said it sometimes stores vehicles on lots as they're being shipped to company dealerships across the nation. The lot in Chicago has fewer cars on it today, the company said. "Our inventory levels remain the smallest in the automotive industry," the company said Wednesday.

Tesla also says Model 3 sales should grow worldwide as it expands distribution and begins to offer leases. Deliveries in Europe and China will start in February, and a right-hand-drive version is coming later in the year, the company said.

In addition, inventory dropped in the fourth quarter as Tesla "delivered a few thousand vehicles more than produced."

Tesla said it had about 3,000 vehicles in transit to customers at year's end. But even with that number, Schuster said production still exceeded deliveries, which doesn't fit Tesla's business model of building cars when they are ordered by customers. Still, even at 9,300, Tesla's inventory is smaller than other automakers that have to stock dealerships, Schuster said.

This story has been corrected to show that the federal tax credit will gradually go to zero by the end of 2019, not 2018.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 3, the third day of 2019. There are 362 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 3, 1977, Apple Computer was incorporated in Cupertino, California, by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Mike Makkula Jr.

On this date:

In 1521, Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Leo X.

In 1777, Gen. George Washington's army routed the British in the Battle of Princeton, New Jersey.

In 1868, Japan's Meiji (may-jee) Restoration re-established the authority of the emperor and heralded the fall of the military rulers known as shoguns; the upheaval paved the way for Japan's drive toward becoming a modern power.

In 1938, the March of Dimes campaign to fight polio was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who himself had been afflicted with the crippling disease.

In 1958, the first six members of the newly formed U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held their first meeting at the White House.

In 1959, Alaska became the 49th state as President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a proclamation.

In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced the United States was formally terminating diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba.

In 1967, Jack Ruby, the man who shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, died in a Dallas hospital.

In 1980, conservationist Joy Adamson, author of "Born Free," was killed in northern Kenya by a former employee.

In 1993, President George H.W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the START II missile-reduction treaty in Moscow. (However, the agreement ultimately fell apart.)

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In 2008, Illinois Sen. Barack Obama won Democratic caucuses in Iowa, while Mike Huckabee won the Republican caucuses.

In 2013, students from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, reconvened at a different building in the town of Monroe about three weeks after the massacre that had claimed the lives of 20 first-graders and six educators. The new 113th Congress opened for business, with House Speaker John Boehner re-elected to his post despite a mini-revolt in Republican ranks.

Ten years ago: After seven days of pummeling the Gaza Strip from the air, Israel launched a ground offensive; Hamas vowed that Gaza would be a "graveyard" for the Israelis. Veteran actor Pat Hingle died in Carolina Beach, N.C., at age 84.

Five years ago: The secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court ruled again that the National Security Agency could keep collecting every American's telephone records every day. Phil Everly, who with his brother Don formed an influential harmony duo, died in Burbank, California, at age 74. No. 12 Clemson rallied to beat No. 7 Ohio State 40-35 in the Orange Bowl.

One year ago: President Donald Trump signed an executive order disbanding the controversial voter fraud commission he had set up to investigate the 2016 presidential election after alleging without evidence that voting fraud cost him the popular vote; the White House blamed the decision to end the panel on more than a dozen states that refused to cooperate. A brutal winter storm delivered a rare blast of snow and ice to the coastal Southeast, giving parts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina their heaviest snowfall in nearly three decades.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dabney Coleman is 87. Journalist-author Betty Rollin is 83. Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Hull is 80. Singer-songwriter-producer Van Dyke Parks is 76. Musician Stephen Stills is 74. Rock musician John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin) is 73. Actress Victoria Principal is 69. Actor-director Mel Gibson is 63. Actress Shannon Sturges is 51. Actor John Ales is 50. Jazz musician James Carter is 50. Contemporary Christian singer Nichole Nordeman is 47. Musician Thomas Bangalter (Daft Punk) is 44. Actor Jason Marsden is 44. Actress Danica McKellar is 44. Actor Nicholas Gonzalez is 43. Singer Kimberley Locke (TV: "American Idol") is 41. Actress Kate Levering is 40. NFL quarterback Eli Manning is 38. Actress Nicole Beharie is 34. Pop musician Mark Pontius (Foster the People) is 34. Rhythm-and-blues singer Lloyd is 33. Pop-rock musician Nash Overstreet (Hot Chelle (shel) Rae) is 33. Actor Alex D. Linz is 30.

Thought for Today: "The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one comes from a strong will, and the other from a strong won't." — Henry Ward Beecher, American clergyman (1813-1887).