

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 198 ~ 1 of 44



**The scenery is set and ready for the
81st Annual Carnival of Silver Skates.**

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

8:30pm- 12:15pm: MathCounts at Aberdeen Simmons Middle School

Thursday, January 24, 2019

4:00pm: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Northeast Conference @ Deuel High School

Friday, January 25, 2019

Lewis and Clark Debate at Yankton High School

Boys basketball at Clark (7th grade at 4 p.m., 8th grade game at 5 p.m., junior varsity at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game.)

Skating Rink Hours

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.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Governor to address nursing home funding crisis in S.D.

By: Bart Pfankuch

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit news organization. Find more in-depth reporting at www.sdnewswatch.org.

In her first budget address on Wednesday, Gov. Kristi Noem will discuss the under-funding of South Dakota nursing homes that has led to a recent wave of closures.

The governor's speech is part of a growing momentum toward reform of nursing home funding during the ongoing legislative session in Pierre.

Three nursing homes closed over the past three years and two more are slated for closure next month, causing a loss of jobs and putting a hardship on displaced elderly and disabled residents and their families.

Another 17 former Golden Living Centers in South Dakota are facing financial challenges and are being operated by a state-approved receivership created after the New Jersey firm running the homes went bankrupt last year.

Industry officials say more closures are likely unless South Dakota improves its payment rate under Medicaid, which pays for the care of about 55 percent of the patients in the state's roughly 110 nursing homes.

South Dakota has the lowest Medicaid reimbursement rate in the country, causing homes to lose \$35 a day for each Medicaid patient and resulting in a \$42 million overall annual funding shortfall for long-term care facilities across the state.

Randy Bury, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, which runs 32 senior care facilities in South Dakota including several nursing homes, said more homes are sure to close if state funding doesn't increase soon.

"It's not a risk of more closures, it's a certainty," said Bury, who became president of the society after its recent merger with Sanford Health. "It's simple math. If you're running a business and with over half of that business you're losing money every day, you can Band Aid and cost cut and everything, but over time you're going to end up in the red."

Kristin Wileman, a spokeswoman for the governor, confirmed in an email to News Watch on Tuesday that Noem "intends to address nursing home funding and larger model of care issues in her budget address."

Wileman did not provide specific details about what Noem will say or ideas she may put forward.

In a recent interview, however, Noem expressed a strong interest in helping nursing homes stay afloat. Noem said she was sad to see the recent closure of the nursing home in Bryant, S.D., the hometown of her husband, Bryon, where they have a strong family connections.

"People want their families to be cared for and cared for in their communities close to them so they can be with them," Noem said in an interview last month on WNAX Radio 570.

In that interview, Noem said the low Medicaid reimbursement rate is putting nursing homes at risk and

that low pay is negatively affecting the ability of nursing homes to recruit qualified employees.

"If a big population in those nursing homes is on Medicaid, they're losing money every day their doors are open," Noem said. "They can't recruit nurses and aides and doctors and professionals into those communities and pay them enough to be competitive."

Noem, who will give her first budget address at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, hinted that she would support legislation to improve the financial stability of nursing homes both in small towns and urban areas.

"It is a concern," Noem told the radio station. "It's something I'm seriously looking at what we can do to continue to keep those services in our smaller communities. But ... it's not unique to a certain size of town or community in our state."



Nursing home costs have risen as home health care options have grown. Those care options have kept elderly residents at home longer. Now those entering nursing homes have more serious medical conditions requiring constant care, industry officials say.

Patient care costs have risen

The recent nursing home closures in Bryant, Rosholt and Tripp and the pending home closures in Madison and Mobridge have shone a light on the financial vulnerability of long-term care facilities in South Dakota.

Bury acknowledged that to some people the \$181 per-day cost of care for a nursing home patient might seem high, and that he thought so, too, until he visited long-term care facilities.

Bury said that years ago nursing homes were more like clubhouses with mostly able-bodied residents. Now, he said, with greater patient access to health care and home care prior to arriving at a nursing home, residents come with more frequent and intensive medical needs that raise the cost far beyond providing room and board.

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"The same facility that my parents went into looked very different," he said. "Now, you see lots of people bed-bound, limited to a wheel chair and with serious medical conditions that take constant care."

The Certified Nursing Assistants who do much of the basic patient care in nursing homes are generally underpaid, leading to extremely high position turnover and difficulty in attracting qualified employees, said Mark Deak, executive director of the South Dakota Health Care Association.

The average wage for CNAs in South Dakota is \$12.47 an hour, or about \$26,000 a year, the 46th lowest in the nation.

"We think the world of the CNAs; they're really angels," Deak said. "They do the heavy lifting and they're there emotionally for the residents."

Meanwhile, the thin margin at many nursing homes has reduced the ability of ownership to improve facilities. Most nursing homes in South Dakota are 40 years old, while the average in the Midwest is only 12 years old.

Deak has been meeting with lawmakers and other officials in Pierre to convince them to support meaningful and immediate funding reform for long-term care facilities across the state.

"This is a crisis that could turn into a statewide disaster if something isn't done," said Deak, who was scheduled to meet with Gov. Noem to discuss the topic on Tuesday.

Deak said awareness of the nursing home funding problems has heightened across the state recently, in part due to the closure of several homes and due to reporting by South Dakota News Watch and other media.

Deak said that he has been encouraged by recent discussions with lawmakers and state officials that some form of legislation or a funding source to boost Medicaid reimbursements will be found this session.

"There's a lot of rumblings and it's on folks' minds and I'm very encouraged by appropriators I've spoken to," said Deak. "My hope is that they will muster the will and identify the resources to do that so they can help the folks who care for our elderly or disabled residents."

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Contact Pam Rohrbach



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South Dakota lowest in Medicaid funding

Nursing homes are essentially funded by two groups of patients, those who can pay full price on their own and lower-income patients whose care is paid for through the federal Medicaid and Medicare programs. Medicaid funding, which pays for more than half the nursing home residents in South Dakota, comes from both federal and state governments. South Dakota funds the program at the lowest per-patient rate in the nation, according to the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations.

Here is how the state compares in per-day funding to neighboring states and to the daily cost of patient care.

State	Per-day pay rate
North Dakota	\$270.71
Minnesota	\$246.24
Wyoming	\$186.89
Daily care cost	\$181.46
Nebraska	\$180.78
Montana	\$175.09
Iowa	\$174.37
South Dakota	\$146.38

Source: South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations

Several funding options available

Deak said early projections of a revenue surplus in state coffers in the coming fiscal year could provide an opportunity to raise the Medicaid pay rate. He also mentioned the possibility that the new revenues from sales taxes collected on online retail sales could be a source of funding for nursing homes.

Nursing homes and agencies that provide community services to people on Medicaid did receive a funding bump of about 2 percent over the past couple sessions, according to state Rep. Sue Peterson, R-Sioux Falls.

Peterson, who sits on the Joint Committee on Appropriations, said she is hopeful lawmakers can find a more permanent solution either by increasing funding for Medicaid providers or reducing regulations that remove flexibility from operators.

"We need to make sure we're doing it in a magnitude so it makes a difference," Peterson said. "It's a matter of not only doing something about it, but also doing the right thing with reimbursement rates and regulations or a combination of both."

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Peterson said that when former Gov. Dennis Daugaard implemented a 10 percent funding reduction for all state departments shortly after taking office, Medicaid funding never rose back to pre-cut levels.

Peterson said money could be allocated by the Legislature in one of three basic ways.

A standalone bill to increase funding could be filed by a lawmaker prior to the Jan. 30 individual bill filing deadline or through a committee by Jan. 31.

A funding amendment could also be added to an existing bill throughout the session.

Peterson said a funding mechanism could also be inserted to the general spending bill that will be crafted by the Joint Appropriations Committee that then requires the approval of both chambers.

Any increase in state Medicaid funding likely would be matched at some level by the federal government, she said.

Peterson said she has studied Medicaid funding during her legislative career and supports funding reform for Medicaid service providers.

"I am keenly in tune to the problem, and very much focused on doing something about it," she said. "I will use my position on the appropriations committee to try to right what is not right."

If Gov. Noem indicates her support for increased funding for nursing homes and community service providers, it increases the chance money will be found, Peterson said. "If the case is made and she supports it, we know it's more likely to be signed when it gets to her desk," she said.

Bury said he senses that lawmakers are beginning to understand the depth of the nursing care crisis in South Dakota and he remains optimistic funding reform will take place this session to provide more financial stability for homes well into the future.

"Nobody is asking the government to come in and provide the profit margin or flip the scenario," Bury said. "We're simply asking the government to pay its fair share."

About Bart Pfankuch

Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal. Bart has spent almost 30 years as a reporter and editor.

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Clark/Willow Lake girls win

Clark/Willow Lake came to town Tuesday evening where the Cyclones posted a 53-40 win over the Lady Tigers. Clark/Willow Lake led at the quarterstops at 12-11, 25-13 and 40-25.

Gracie Traphagen led the Tigers with eight points followed by Eliza Wanner and Jennie Doeden with six each, Miranda Hanson had five, Kaycie Hawkins four, Tadya Glover, Kenzie McInerney and Allyssa Locke with three each and Maddie Bjerke added two points. Doeden and Wanner each had nine rebounds.

Janae Kolden led the Cyclones with 18 points followed by Abbie Bratland with 16, Charity Kabwe six, Saylor Burke five, Jaycie Forbes three, Olivia Sass two and Chayla Vig and Allison Kannegieter with one apiece.

Groton made 40 percent of its field goals and was one of two from the line off of the Cyclone's 10 team fouls. Clark/Willow Lake made 12 of 19 free throws off of Groton Area's 14 team fouls. The Tigers had 16 turnovers while the Cyclones had eight.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals, Bahr Spray Foam, Blocker Construction, Doug Abeln Seed Company, James Valley Seed - Doug Jorgensen, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric, Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.; Northeast Chiropractic Clinic, Professional Management Services, Inc.; Sanford Health, Tyson DeHoet Trucking and Weber Landscaping. Make sure you tell them thank you and patronize them as well.

Groton Area won the JV game, 24-17. Caitlynn Barse led the Tigers w with six points followed by Gracie Traphagen with five, Allyssa Locke had four, Maddie Bjerke three and Trista Keith, Kenzie McInerney and Brooke Gengerke each had two points.



81st Annual

Carnival of Silver Skates

Sunday, January 27th—2:00 and 6:30

Groton Ice Rink—West Side of Groton, SD

Join us for a fun “Road Trip”!

Admission: 13 & older—\$3.00 / 6-12—\$2.00

Parking: Provided around the rink and on the ice or cozy up on the bleachers
(Ice parking begins at 10 am, then again at 4:30 pm)

**Check us out on Facebook at “Silver Skates”

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The city crew worked on putting up the scenery yesterday to allow time for everything to freeze down good before the impending wind. Working to put it up are Dan Sunne, Terry Herron, Dwight Zerr and Branden Abeln.

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Today in Weather History

January 23, 1969: Intermittent freezing rain on the 20th to the 22nd changed to snow on the 22nd which continued through the 24th. Snowfall of 2 to 6 inches fell across Minnesota and far northeast South Dakota. Blizzard conditions developed on the 23rd and 24th with 30 to 45 mph winds and temperatures dropping to below zero by the 24th. Most of the traffic was halted with many roads blocked from snow drifting. Some rural roads had been blocked for 3 to 4 weeks. Stranded motorists were common in the area. Some snowfall amounts included, 2 inches at Wilmot and Victor, 3 inches at Milbank and Artichoke Lake, and 4 inches at Clear Lake.

1556: An earthquake in Shaanxi, China kills an estimated 830,000 people. This estimated 8.0 to 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck in the middle of a densely populated area where many of the homes were a form of an earth shelter dwelling known as a yaodong. Much is known about this disaster as a scholar named Qin Keda survived the earthquake and recorded the details.

1812: A second major series of earthquakes was felt as part of the New Madrid Shocks of the winter of 1811-1812. Many observers reported that the January 23 shocks were as strong as the main earthquake on December 16th of the preceding year.

1916: Browning, Montana, saw the temperature plummet 100 degrees in 24 hours on January 23-24, from a relatively mild 44 to a bone-chilling 56 degrees below zero.

1969: An F4 tornado cut a 120-mile long path from Jefferson through Copiah, Simpson, Smith, Scott, and Newton Counties in Mississippi, killing 32 and injuring 241 others. Property damage was estimated at \$2 million. An inbound Delta Airlines aircraft reported a hook echo on its scope with this storm.

1780 - The coldest day of the coldest month of record in the northeastern U.S. A British Army thermometer in New York City registered a reading of 16 degrees below zero. During that infamous hard winter the harbor was frozen solid for five weeks, and the port was cut off from sea supply. (David Ludlum)

1971 - The temperature at Prospect Creek, AK, plunged to 80 degrees below zero, the coldest reading of record for the United States. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Strong winds ushered bitterly cold air into the north central U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northwest Lower Michigan ranged up to 17 inches in Leelanau County. Wind chill temperatures reached 70 degrees below zero at Sault Ste Marie MI and Hibbing MN. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

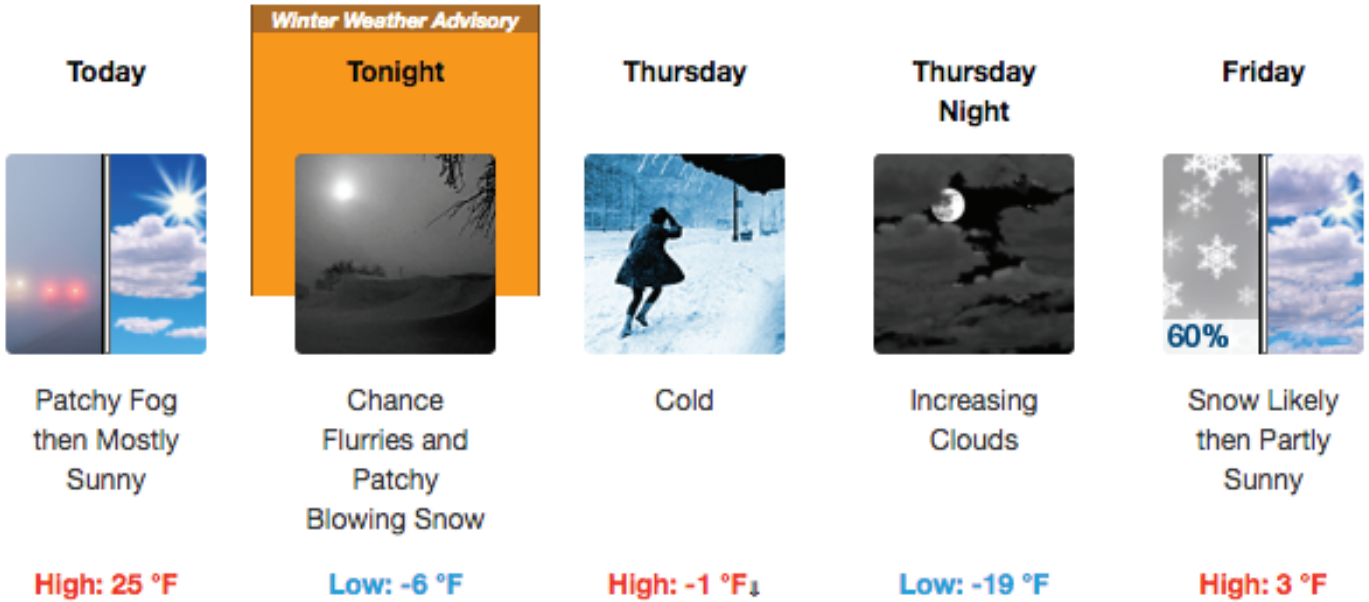
1988 - Northeastern Colorado experienced its most severe windstorm in years. A wind gust to 92 mph was recorded at Boulder CO before the anemometer blew away, and in the mountains, a wind gust to 120 mph was reported at Mines Peak. The high winds blew down a partially constructed viaduct east of Boulder, as nine unanchored concrete girders, each weighing forty-five tons, were blown off their supports. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to Wyoming, with 18 inches reported at the Shoshone National Forest, and 17 inches in the Yellowstone Park area. Gunnison CO, with a low of 19 degrees below zero, was the cold spot in the nation for the twelfth day in a row. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A Pacific cold front brought strong and gusty winds to the northwestern U.S. Winds in southeastern Idaho gusted to 62 mph at Burley. Strong winds also prevailed along the eastern slopes of the northern and central Rockies. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 74 mph in Goshen County. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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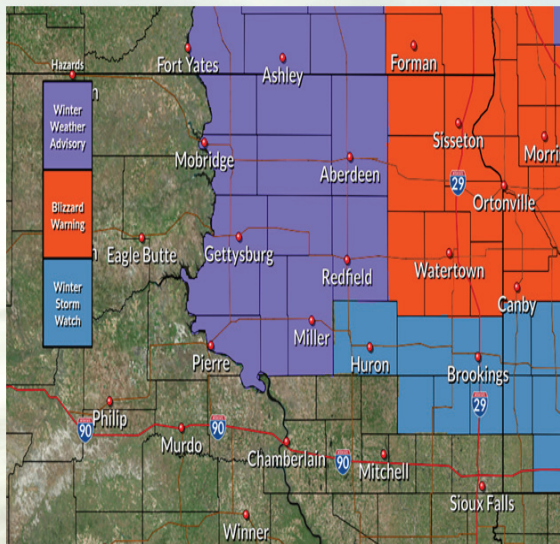
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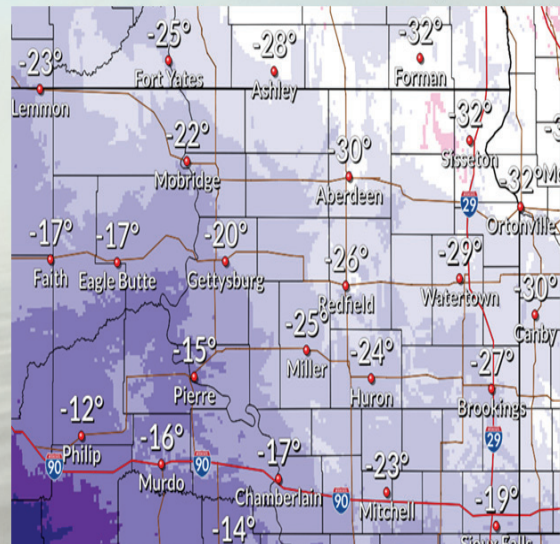
Significant Blowing Snow Expected Wed PM Through Thu AM

Strong winds will blow existing snow, leading to greatly reduced visibilities. *Blizzard Conditions will develop* across portions of northeastern SD and west central MN. Those in the country/outside of town will be most impacted. Arctic air and dangerous wind chills are expected by Thursday morning, and will last through Friday morning.

Current Headlines



Lowest Wind Chills Thursday



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 1/23/2019 4:01 AM Central

Published on: 01/23/2019 at 4:09AM

Cold air and strong, gusty winds will begin to impact the region this evening. Gusty northwest winds will cause blowing snow and restricted visibilities. As the winds and cold air combine, wind chills will fall into the -20s and -30s through the day Thursday, especially from the James Valley east.

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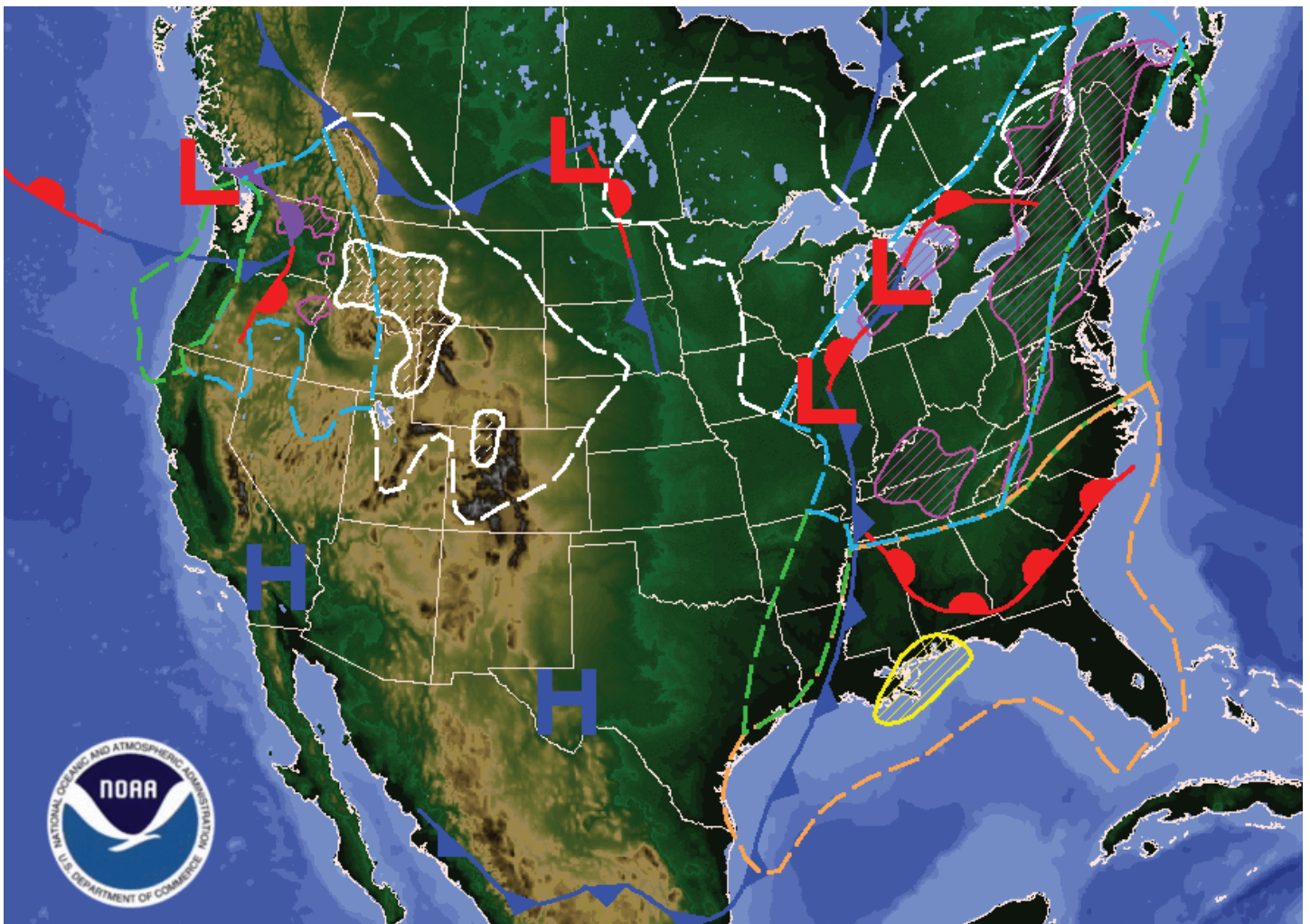
Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 17 °F at 4:08 PM
Low Outside Temp: -4 °F at 10:28 PM
High Gust: 16 mph at 5:29 PM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1981
Record Low: -34 in 1897
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.35
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.35
Precip Year to Date: 0.09
Sunset Tonight: 5:27 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Wed, Jan 23, 2019, issued 4:37 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow
Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)
Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)
Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)
Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

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FAITH AND FEAR

Fear often leads to defeat and disaster. It is a friend of inertia and instability. It supports dependency and will keep the most competent individual from taking the first step to achieve a lifelong goal. Fear is real, and many will allow it to stifle and suffocate their dreams.

What, then, is there to replace fear? Is it education? Could it be moving from one address to another? Might it be new friends? Can a different job or title replace a lack of self-confidence? Do our self-imposed limits cause our inner-being to retreat? Is there a defense for fear?

A king was being pursued by his enemies. He was weak, but they were strong. He stood by himself, and their numbers were staggering. But, he had something, one thing that they did not have: Faith. It was the part of the equation that made the difference.

Listen to him describe his situation: Though an army besieges me, my heart will not fear; though war breaks out against me, even then will I be confident. Faith calls upon Him who is invisible to accomplish things that are visible for us, through us and with us. Faith will turn horrible situations into outstanding conditions.

Confronted by overwhelming odds, David prayed, Do not turn me over to my enemies. He knew that his life was in God's hands and that God could do with him as He pleased. But, he did not lose faith in God. His trust was absolute. And in his darkest moment, his confidence shone brilliantly: Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart. Anyone who trusts in Him, will always win.

Prayer: Lord, as we wait for Your strength, guard us; do not let fear control us or the size of the enemy defeat us. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 27:3 Though an army besieges me, my heart will not fear; though war breaks out against me, even then will I be confident.

2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 03/17/2019 Groton American Legion Spring Fundraiser
- 04/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/27/2019 Fireman's Stag
- 05/04/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/27/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program Transit Fundraiser (Middle Thursday in June)
- 06/14/2019 SDSU Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 06/15/2019 Triathlon (Saturday before Father's Day)
- 06/21/2019 Best Ball Golf Tourney
- 07/04/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 07/14/2019 Summer Fest
- 08/22/2019 First Day of School
- 09/07/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/08/2019 Sunflower Classic at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/31/2019 Trunk or Treat/Halloween on Main
- 11/09/2019 Groton American Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/07/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course 2019 Holiday Party
- 12/07/2019 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services

News from the Associated Press

Gov. Kristi Noem to give budget address to Legislature

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is set to present her state budget proposal to the Legislature.

The Republican on Wednesday will give her first budget address as governor.

In her State of the State address earlier in January, Noem discussed priorities including mental health, fighting the methamphetamine epidemic and connecting more people to high-speed internet.

Noem has said the budget address will follow the outline she gave in the State of the State.

Lawmakers will reshape the current budget and approve the next one during the 2019 session .

5-year-old knocked unconscious after second-floor fall

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police say a 5-year-old girl was knocked unconscious after falling over a second-floor railing inside a Sioux Falls hotel.

Authorities say the girl, from Mitchell, was playing with a ball with other children in the hallway of the Ramada Inn Sunday when the ball went over the railing. Police spokesman Sam Clemens says that as the children were running after it, the girl was unable to slow down, flipped over the railing and fell to the first floor.

She was taken to the hospital, but Clemens says she was not seriously hurt.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Mega Millions

04-15-37-59-64, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 5

(four, fifteen, thirty-seven, fifty-nine, sixty-four; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$82 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$144 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL(equals)

Aberdeen Roncalli 48, Hamlin 31

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 64, Wessington Springs 48

Brandon Valley 71, Sioux Falls Washington 59

Canistota 57, Chester 39

Chamberlain 67, Madison 62

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Colman-Egan 64, Dell Rapids St. Mary 59, OT
DeSmet 73, Sioux Valley 65
Deuel 60, Elkton-Lake Benton 57
Ethan 69, Freeman Academy/Marion 53
Flandreau 59, Garretson 39
Gayville-Volin 54, Menno 42
Harrisburg 75, Huron 41
Herreid/Selby Area 54, Aberdeen Christian 53
Highmore-Harrold 68, James Valley Christian 54
Hill City 56, Philip 34
Hot Springs 56, Wall 50
Ipswich 63, Edmunds Central 15
Jones County 55, Lyman 41
Lake Preston 63, Florence/Henry 60
Leola/Frederick 64, Britton-Hecla 55
Lower Brule 54, St. Francis Indian 51
McCook Central/Montrose 69, Freeman 43
Mobridge-Pollock 55, McLaughlin 50
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 75, Wagner 56
Northwestern 52, Faulkton 43
Oelrichs 79, Sioux County, Neb. 60
Ortonville, Minn. 86, Milbank 55
Parker 75, Irene-Wakonda 49
Parkston 61, Platte-Geddes 52
Pine Ridge 86, Little Wound 63

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Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 58, Hanson 40

St. Thomas More 90, Spearfish 48

Sully Buttes 66, Stanley County 48

Tea Area 73, Sioux Falls Christian 50

Timber Lake 66, Harding County 47

Tri-Valley 75, Canton 60

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 78, Centerville 47

Watertown 54, Mitchell 28

Winner 75, Todd County 68

Wolsey-Wessington 65, Sunshine Bible Academy 45

Yankton 56, Brookings 42

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS(equals)

Dakota Valley vs. Spirit Lake, Iowa, ppd.

Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Lawton-Bronson, Iowa, ppd. to Feb 4th.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL(equals)

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 51, Wessington Springs 20

Avon 69, Burke 42

Belle Fourche 59, Lead-Deadwood 35

Bon Homme 32, Kimball/White Lake 31

Britton-Hecla 51, Leola/Frederick 32

Chamberlain 60, Madison 51

Clark/Willow Lake 53, Groton Area 40

Colman-Egan 64, Howard 57

Corsica/Stickney 67, Marty Indian 30

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DeSmet 58, Sioux Valley 36

Deubrook 50, Castlewood 45

Deuel 67, Elkton-Lake Benton 37

Faulkton 73, Northwestern 33

Hamlin 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 46

Hanson 53, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 40

Harrisburg 61, Huron 46

Ipswich 53, Edmunds Central 32

Irene-Wakonda 55, Parker 44

Langford 56, Great Plains Lutheran 37

Menno 56, Gayville-Volin 47

Milbank 50, Ortonville, Minn. 48

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 45, Wagner 33

Parkston 69, Platte-Geddes 36

Rapid City Christian 47, Edgemont 41

Sioux County, Neb. 61, Oelrichs 37

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 44, Sioux City, East, Iowa 35

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58, Mitchell 47

St. Francis Indian 69, Lower Brule 49

St. Thomas More 46, Spearfish 27

Sturgis Brown 53, Hill City 44

West Central 56, Vermillion 41

White River 89, Bennett County 23

Wolsey-Wessington 60, Sunshine Bible Academy 30

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS(equals)

Dakota Valley vs. Spirit Lake, Iowa, ppd.

Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Lawton-Bronson, Iowa, ppd. to Feb 4th.

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

Authorities ID 85-year-old woman killed in McCook Co. crash

SALEM, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have released the name of an 85-year-old woman who died after a collision in McCook County involving a minivan and a tractor.

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety on Tuesday identified the victim as Helene Eichacker of Salem.

Authorities say Eichacker was a passenger in a minivan that rear-ended the tractor on state Highway 38 a mile west of Salem shortly before 6 p.m. last Wednesday. She was flown to a Sioux Falls hospital, where she died Thursday.

The minivan driver was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital with serious injuries. The tractor driver was not hurt. The patrol says the tractor had its flashing rear lights on at the time of the crash.

South Dakota school district agrees confidential settlement

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Brookings School District has reached a confidential settlement in a federal lawsuit brought by a student who was expelled for harassing teachers.

The Argus Leader reports that South Dakota state law permits government entities such as school districts to keep the terms of certain settlements private.

Other states and the federal government forbid the practice since government institutions are public bodies and payments often include taxpayer dollars.

The former student was removed for threatening teachers at two Brookings facilities. A federal judge ruled that she was denied due process during her six-week ban from one of them, and that the district didn't adhere to its own policies regarding long-term suspensions.

South Dakota lawmakers have voted down bills in the last two legislative sessions that would have ended confidential settlements.

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

Prosecutors reach plea deal on murder accessory charge

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — An Allen man accused of lying to federal authorities and being an accessory to a slaying on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation last year is expected to change his plea to guilty this week.

The Rapid City Journal reports that in exchange for the plea, the U.S. Attorney's Office will drop the accessory charge for Nathaniel Waters.

The FBI says Waters lied about being inside his mobile home when it caught fire in October 2017. The body of his 24-year-old nephew, Ray Waters Jr., was later found inside the burned home.

An autopsy concluded that he died before the fire of injuries likely caused by an ax. A juvenile is charged with second-degree murder in the death.

Information from: Rapid City Journal, <http://www.rapidcityjournal.com>

Trump wants to deliver State of Union next week as planned

By JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is moving forward with plans for President Donald Trump to deliver his State of the Union speech next week in front of a joint session of Congress — despite a letter from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi requesting he delay it.

The White House sent an email to the House sergeant-at-arms asking to schedule a walk-through in anticipation of a Jan. 29 address, according to a White House official who was not authorized to discuss the planning by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

“Nancy Pelosi made the invitation to the president on the State of the Union. He accepted,” said White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders. “At this point, we’re moving forward.”

The move is the latest in a game of political brinkmanship between Trump and the House speaker as they remain locked in an increasingly personal standoff over Trump’s demand for border wall funding that has forced a partial government shutdown that is now in its second month.

The maneuvering began last week when Pelosi sent a letter to Trump suggesting that he either deliver the speech in writing or postpone it until after the partial government shutdown is resolved, citing security concerns. But the White House maintains Pelosi never formally rescinded her invitation, and is, in essence, calling her bluff.

“She has not canceled it. She asked us to postpone it,” White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said in an interview Tuesday with Fox News Channel.

“We have no announcement at this time,” he said, “but Nancy Pelosi does not dictate to the president when he will or will not have a conversation with the American people.”

At the same time, the White House is continuing to work on contingency plans to give Trump a backup in case the joint-session plans fall through. The president cannot speak in front of a joint session of Congress without both chambers’ explicit permission. A resolution needs to be agreed to by both chambers specifying the date and time for receiving an address from the president.

Officials have been considering a list of potential alternative venues, including a rally-style event, an Oval office address— as Pelosi previously suggested — a speech before the Senate chamber, and even a return visit to the U.S.-Mexico border as Trump is expected to continue to hammer the need for a barrier, according to two others familiar with the discussions.

Multiple versions are also being drafted to suit the final venue.

The Constitution states only that the president “shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union,” meaning the president can speak anywhere he chooses or give his update in writing. But a joint address in the House chamber, in front of lawmakers from both parties, the Supreme Court justices and invited guests, provides the kind of grand backdrop that is hard to mimic and that this president, especially, enjoys.

Still, North Carolina’s House Speaker Tim Moore wrote a letter inviting Trump to deliver the speech in the North Carolina House chamber. And Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield on Friday invited Trump to deliver the address at the state Capitol in Lansing instead.

Trump called Moore Monday evening, according to his office, and spoke by phone with Chatfield Tuesday morning, Chatfield tweeted.

“I understand you have other plans for #SOTU, but as we discussed, I look forward to hosting you in Michigan again soon,” Chatfield wrote.

Pelosi in her letter had cited the impact of the ongoing shutdown on the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Secret Service, questioning whether they could secure the speech given that they have been operating without funding.

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen responded by assuring that DHS and Secret Service were “fully prepared to support and secure the State of the Union.”

Asked about the letter by reporters Tuesday, Pelosi did not address the White House’s decision, saying only: “We just want people to get paid for their work.”

Senior White House staff had been in a morning huddle discussing the upcoming speech when news of Pelosi’s letter first broke on TV. The power play — which Trump countered by revoking Pelosi’s use of a military aircraft, thereby canceling a congressional delegation visit to Afghanistan — had put the status of

the marquee speech in limbo, leaving staff scrambling to figure out how to proceed.

"We'll keep you posted," Sanders had told reporters when asked for a status update Friday.

In their standoff, Trump has also accused Pelosi of behaving "irrationally," while Pelosi has refused to negotiate with Trump on border funding until he agrees to reopen the government.

In a tweet Sunday, Trump wrote that he was "still thinking about the State of the Union speech" and that there were "so many options - including doing it as per your written offer (made during the Shutdown, security is no problem), and my written acceptance."

"While a contract is a contract," he wrote, "I'll get back to you soon!"

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor and Catherine Lucey contributed to this report.

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AP sources: Trump, others agitated by Giuliani's performance

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rudy Giuliani's latest media blitz, which was filled with a dizzying array of misstatements and hurried clarifications, agitated President Donald Trump and some of his allies, who have raised the possibility that the outspoken presidential lawyer be at least temporarily sidelined from televised interviews.

Trump was frustrated with Giuliani, according to three White House officials and Republicans close to the White House who were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations. The president told advisers that he felt his lawyer had obscured what he believed was a public relations victory: the special counsel's rare public statement disputing portions of a BuzzFeed News story that Trump instructed his former attorney, Michael Cohen, to lie before Congress.

The president told confidants that Giuliani had "changed the headlines" for the worse and raised the possibility that Giuliani do fewer cable hits, at least for a while, according to the officials and Republicans.

Several of Trump's influential outside allies also have begun expressing reservations about Giuliani. Some members of this informal network of advisers, whom the president frequently calls from the White House residence, urged Trump in recent days to bench Giuliani — but most stopped short of suggesting he be fired, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the White House.

Trump has not expressed an inclination to dismiss Giuliani.

Rarely reluctant to appear before TV cameras or answer a reporter's call, Giuliani has spent nearly a year acting as a sort of human smokescreen for Trump. He has long played the role more of presidential spokesman than attorney, often unleashing public attacks on special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into possible contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia.

But a recent set of interviews, which were quickly pilloried across cable news, prompted increased concerns about both Trump's legal exposure and the effectiveness of his vocal attorney.

Frustration about Giuliani in the West Wing has long run rampant. The former New York City mayor, who frequently speaks directly to the president, is Trump's outside counsel and works in a different orbit than White House officials, who are still left to play damage control after some of Giuliani's wilder interviews.

Some of Trump's allies have suggested that Giuliani be barred from evening interviews because of concerns that he was going on TV after drinking, according to three Republicans close to the White House.

Giuliani has previously insisted he does not have an issue with drinking, denying to Politico last May that it affected his interviews. He added: "I may have a drink for dinner. I like to drink with cigars."

The latest furor began Sunday as Giuliani, wearing a suit, tie and New York Yankees World Series ring, appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" and dramatically altered the timeline regarding discussions about a Trump Tower in Moscow, now asserting they stretched until November 2016. That statement, which suggested that the Trump Organization was engaged in business dealings with Russia up to and beyond the election, ignited a firestorm and then an abrupt walk-back from Giuliani.

He issued a statement the next day saying his comments about the project "were hypothetical and not

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based on conversations I had with the President. My comments did not represent the actual timing or circumstances of any such discussions.”

Then, hours later in an interview with *The New Yorker*, Giuliani raised eyebrows again when he seemed to suggest he had listened to tapes of Trump and Cohen that had not previously been discussed.

“I shouldn’t have said tapes,” Giuliani said as he tried to backtrack. He then added that there were “No tapes. Well, I have listened to tapes, but none of them concern this.” He did not elaborate further.

The muddled interviews were a failed victory lap over the BuzzFeed story, which prompted a number of House Democrats to raise the possibility of impeaching Trump. But the special counsel, which rarely issues public responses, said that at least portions of the story were not accurate, leading both Giuliani and Trump to crow about media bias against the Republican president.

BuzzFeed has issued statements standing by its reporting. No other media outlet has confirmed the story. Giuliani did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

This is far from the first time Giuliani has been forced to issue a clarification, as he has frequently offered contradictory accounts of developments in the Russia investigation. Earlier this month, he was forced to clean up a remark in which he asserted that he only could vouch that the president had not colluded with Russia, rather than the whole campaign, a dramatic change of story.

“Rudy had done a very good job going on TV and fighting back and laying down a defense of the president,” said Sam Nunberg, a former Trump campaign official. “But now it’s time to get precise, you can’t be so loose anymore. He had a major slip.”

At times, Giuliani’s seemingly out-of-nowhere admissions in interviews have, in fact, been part of a strategy to get ahead of damaging news stories. Last May, Giuliani went on Sean Hannity’s Fox News show and acknowledged that Trump repaid Cohen for hush money payments to Stormy Daniels, the porn star alleging an affair with Trump, a statement viewed then as a misstep but later perceived as an effort to minimize revelations about possible campaign finance violations.

After struggling to find a cable-ready defender, Trump has been mostly appreciative of Giuliani’s attack-dog style — and, for a time, his broadsides against Mueller appeared to play a role in driving down the special counsel’s poll ratings. But at other times the president has expressed dismay at Giuliani’s scattershot style.

Part of his confusion is that while Giuliani frequently speaks to his client, the president’s legal team has had a difficult time corralling Trump for a lengthy debriefing about the facts of the case, particularly from events stemming before the presidency, according to one official and a Republican close to the White House.

Still, Giuliani is regarded as an important member of the legal team. A former federal prosecutor, he has also been the team’s public face and, even if not the primary author of letters and other documents to the Mueller team, he has nonetheless helped develop strategy. And TV networks have not shown any reluctance to book Giuliani, despite his unreliability, because of his rock-solid resume and the lack of any Trump surrogates willing to appear on a cable network that is not Fox News.

“I am afraid it will be on my gravestone. ‘Rudy Giuliani: He lied for Trump.’ Somehow, I don’t think that will be it,” Giuliani told *The New Yorker*. “But, if it is, so what do I care? I’ll be dead. I figure I can explain it to St. Peter.”

Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders did not respond to questions Tuesday about whether Trump still had confidence in Giuliani.

Tucker reported from Washington. Additional reporting contributed by David Bauder in New York.

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1 point away, Serena stunned by Pliskova at Australian Open

By HOWARD FENDRICH, AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Four times, Serena Williams was only one point — a single point — from closing out a victory in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

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On the first such chance, at 5-1, 40-30 in the third set, she turned her left ankle awkwardly. The owner of the best serve in the sport would lose every point she served the rest of the way.

And so it was that a startling reversal and result would follow Wednesday at Melbourne Park, with Williams dropping the last six games of a 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 loss to No. 7-seeded Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic.

"I can't say that I choked on those match points," Williams said. "She literally played her best tennis ever on those shots."

The 37-year-old American didn't call for a trainer during the match and later wouldn't blame the ankle for the way everything changed down the stretch, saying afterward that it "seems to be fine."

But instead of Williams moving closer to an eighth championship at the Australian Open and record-tying 24th Grand Slam title overall, it is Pliskova who will continue the pursuit of her first major trophy.

"I was almost in the locker room," Pliskova told the Rod Laver Arena crowd, "but now I'm standing here as the winner."

Normally, Williams is the one manufacturing a comeback. This time, it was surprising to see her let a sizable lead vanish. Only twice before in 380 Grand Slam matches had Williams lost after holding a match point, at the 2010 French Open and 1999 Australian Open.

In Thursday's semifinals, Pliskova will face No. 4-seeded Naomi Osaka, who advanced by beating No. 6 Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-1. The other women's semifinal will be two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova against unseeded American Danielle Collins.

In men's action Wednesday, No. 28 Lucas Pouille of France reached his first Grand Slam semifinal by beating 2016 Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic of Canada 7-6 (4), 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-4. Pouille, who is coached by two-time major champion Amelie Mauresmo, had been 0-5 for his career at the Australian Open until last week. His next opponent will be 14-time major champion Novak Djokovic, who moved on when 2014 U.S. Open finalist Kei Nishikori stopped playing while trailing 6-1, 4-1.

Nishikori was treated for leg problems by a trainer.

Williams' surprising departure scuttled what would have been a much-anticipated rematch against Osaka, who beat her in the chaotic U.S. Open final last September.

This defeat is the earliest in Australia for Williams since 2014, when she exited with a fourth-round loss to Ana Ivanovic. Since then? She won the tournament in 2015, lost in the final in 2016, and won again in 2017 while pregnant, before missing last year's edition a few months after the birth of her daughter.

As for chasing Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Slam trophies in singles, Williams said: "It hasn't happened yet, but I feel like it's going to happen."

The match against Pliskova was played under a stifling sun, with the temperature around 80 degrees (25 degrees Celsius). Williams — coming off an intense three-set victory over No. 1 Simona Halep in the fourth round — often stepped into the patches of shade behind each baseline.

She did not start well, not well at all. Her mistakes were mounting and deficit was growing.

In the first set alone, Williams made more than twice as many unforced errors as her opponent, 11-5, a pattern that would continue throughout. By the end, the margin was 37-15.

Looking increasingly frustrated, Williams would yell at herself after mistakes or gesture as if to say, "That's NOT how I should be hitting the ball!" Add it all up, and Pliskova led by a set and a break at 3-2 in the second.

Only then did Williams get going. From there, she immediately earned her first break point of the match and converted it to get to 3-all, beginning a run in which she claimed nine of 11 games.

"You don't really feel," Pliskova said, "like you're going to win this match."

Serving for the victory at 5-1, 40-30, Williams was called for a foot fault — reminiscent of an infamous such ruling at the U.S. Open a decade ago. During the ensuing point Wednesday, Williams twisted her left ankle and dumped a forehand into the net.

She grabbed at her foot afterward, then double-faulted and would go on to cede that game.

Not a big deal, right? She still had a sizable lead.

Except that three more match points would follow while Pliskova served, and she saved each one.

"There's nothing I did wrong on those match points. I didn't do anything wrong. I stayed aggressive," Williams said. "She just literally hit the lines on some of them."

Williams would again serve for the match at 5-3 — and again get broken. The owner of the most feared and respected serve in women's tennis was broken for a third time in a row at 5-all, and Pliskova was on her way.

"She got a little bit shaky in the end," Pliskova said. "So I took my chances. And I won."

Osaka will carry a 12-match Grand Slam winning streak into the semifinals.

The 21-year-old from Japan moved closer to a second consecutive major championship by parlaying her aggressive and powerful style into a 31-11 edge in winners against Svitolina.

"For me, right now, I just try to keep looking forward. So I'm not really satisfied. Like, I am happy that I'm here, but at the same time, I want to keep going," said Osaka, who never had been past the fourth round at the Australian Open. "There is more matches to win."

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

Democratic Mayor Pete Buttigieg joins 2020 presidential race

By SARA BURNETT, Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Democrat Pete Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana, says he's forming an exploratory committee for a 2020 presidential bid.

"The reality is there's no going back, and there's no such thing as 'again' in the real world. We can't look for greatness in the past," Buttigieg says in a video that includes before-and-after footage of South Bend, a Rust Belt city once described as "dying."

"Right now our country needs a fresh start," he says.

Buttigieg has touted his work to improve his city of 100,000 residents as he's prepared for a jump from local politics to a presidential campaign. He's also said Democrats could benefit from a new generation of leaders as they try to unseat President Donald Trump in 2020.

He's expected to travel to Iowa next week to meet with voters in the nation's first caucus state, followed by stops in New Hampshire.

Buttigieg is a Rhodes scholar who was first elected mayor of his hometown in 2011 at age 29, making him the youngest mayor of a U.S. city with at least 100,000 residents. A lieutenant in the Navy Reserve, he served a tour in Afghanistan in 2014.

Buttigieg raised his national profile with an unsuccessful 2017 run for Democratic National Committee chairman, saying the party needed a new start. He withdrew from the race before a vote when it became clear he didn't have the support to win.

Buttigieg has spent time in Iowa and other battleground states in recent years as he tried to build financial support and name recognition. He cracks that those who do know his name still aren't sure how to pronounce it. (It's BOO'-tah-juhj.) Most of the time he goes by "Mayor Pete."

Amid his campaign for a second term, Buttigieg came out as gay in a column in the local newspaper. He went on to win re-election with 80 percent of the vote. In 2018, three years to the day after the column ran, he married his husband, middle school teacher Chasten Glezman.

If he were to win the Democratic nomination, Buttigieg would be the first openly gay presidential nominee from a major political party.

Buttigieg announced in December that he wouldn't seek a third term as mayor, stoking speculation he would join a field of roughly two dozen candidates who may seek the Democratic nomination for president — most of them better known and with experience in higher office, and all of them older.

"I belong to a generation that is stepping forward right now," he says in the video released Wednesday. "We're the generation that lived through school shootings, that served in the wars after 9/11, and we're

the generation that stands to be the first to make less than our parents unless we do something different. We can't just polish off a system so broken. It is a season for boldness and a focus on the future." Buttigieg is releasing in February a book about his life and his tenure leading South Bend.

Unrest roils Venezuela amid new push to topple Maduro

By JOSHUA GOODMAN, Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's re-invigorated opposition faces a crucial test Wednesday as it seeks to fill streets nationwide with protesters in an appeal to the military and the poor to shift loyalties that until recently looked solidly behind President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government.

The protests have been called to coincide with a historic date for Venezuelans — the anniversary of the 1958 coup that overthrew military dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez. Government supporters are also expected to march in downtown Caracas in a rival show of strength.

The competing demonstrations will come after a whirlwind week that saw an uprising by a tiny military unit, fires set during protests in poor neighborhoods and the brief detention by security forces of the newly installed head of the opposition-controlled congress.

For much of the past two years, following a deadly crackdown on protests in 2017 and the failure of negotiations ahead of last May's boycotted presidential election, the coalition of opposition parties has been badly divided by strategy and ego battles as millions of desperate Venezuelans fled the country's hyperinflation and widespread food shortages. But buoyed by unprecedented international criticism of Maduro, anti-government forces have put aside their differences and are projecting a united front.

Their leader this time, taking the reins from a long list of better-known predecessors who have been exiled, outlawed or jailed, is Juan Guaido, the new president of the National Assembly who was dragged from an SUV just over a week ago by intelligence agents but quickly released amid an international outcry.

In the run-up to Wednesday's actions, the defiant 35-year-old lawmaker has crisscrossed Caracas attending outdoor assemblies known as "Open Cabildos" — for the revolutionary citizen councils held against Spanish colonial rule — pumping up crowds by arguing that Maduro must go for democracy to be restored.

Speaking on Monday from the roof of a college building, Guaido proclaimed with fist raised: "We are tired of this disaster. We know this isn't a fight of a single day but one that requires lots of resistance."

An enthusiastic crowd of students answered with shouts of "Freedom!" and "Get out, Maduro!"

Driving the crisis has been Maduro's decision to plow ahead in the face of international condemnation and take the presidential oath Jan. 10 for a second term widely considered illegitimate after his main opponents were banned from running against him.

Guaido has been targeting his message to Venezuela's military, the traditional arbiter of political disputes.

Maduro, who lacks the military pedigree of his mentor and predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez, has sought to shore up support from the armed forces by doling out key posts to top generals, including heading the PDVSA oil monopoly that is the source of virtually all of Venezuela's export earnings. He has also been playing commander in chief, appearing last week at a military command meeting wearing camouflage fatigues and receiving the blessing of the defense minister, Gen. Vladimir Padrino Lopez.

But beyond the public displays of loyalty from the top brass, a number of cracks have started to appear.

On Monday, Venezuelans awoke to news that a few dozen national guardsmen had taken captive a loyalist officer and seized a stockpile of assault rifles in a pre-dawn raid. The government quickly quelled the uprising, but residents in a nearby slum took to the streets to show their support for the mutineers by burning cars and throwing stones at security forces, who fired back with tear gas.

Disturbances continued into Tuesday, with small pockets of unrest in a few working-class neighborhoods where the government has traditionally enjoyed strong support. More violence was reported Tuesday night.

"People are tired of so much misery," said Carmen Marcano, holding up her shirt to show seven buckshot wounds suffered during the clashes in the Cotiza slum next to where the rebellious guardsmen were captured.

Retired Maj. Gen. Cliver Alcalá, a one-time aide to Chavez and now in exile, said the opposition's new-

found momentum has reverberated with the military's lower ranks, many of whom are suffering the same hardships as regular Venezuelan families.

"I am absolutely certain that right now, especially younger troops are asking themselves whether Maduro is their commander in chief or a usurper," Alcalá said. "As we say in the barracks, hunger is the only thing that can devour fear of the government."

The government has accused the opposition of inciting violence with the aim of provoking a bloodbath. Top socialist leaders have threatened to unleash on demonstrators menacing motorcycle gangs of pro-government die-hards known as "colectivos."

"I demand the full rigor of the law against the fascists," Maduro said Tuesday night while blaming "terrorists" allegedly linked to Guaidó's Popular Will party for a fire at a cultural center named for a pro-government lawmaker murdered in 2014.

He also accused U.S. Vice President Mike Pence of trying to foment unrest after Pence released a video pledging support, in Spanish, for the planned demonstrations.

Though intimidation has worked for the government in the past, it may not this time, said Dimitris Pantoulas, a Caracas-based political analyst. Discontent now appears to be more widespread and the ranks of security forces and government-allied groups have been thinned by the mass exodus of mostly young Venezuelans, he said.

"The government is resorting to its old tricks, but the people no longer believe them," Pantoulas said.

Associated Press writer Fabiola Sanchez contributed to this report.

Joshua Goodman on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/APjoshgoodman>

Week 5: Shutdown votes set up political test for Senate

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate leaders agreed to hold votes this week on dueling proposals to reopen shuttered federal agencies, forcing a political reckoning for senators grappling with the longest shutdown in U.S. history: Side with President Donald Trump or vote to temporarily end the shutdown and keep negotiating.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., set up the two showdown votes for Thursday, a day before some 800,000 federal workers are due to miss a second paycheck.

One vote will be on his own measure, which reflects Trump's offer to trade border wall funding for temporary protections for some immigrants. It was quickly rejected by Democrats. The second vote is set for a bill approved by the Democratic-controlled House reopening government through Feb. 8, with no wall money, to give bargainers time to talk.

In the Democratic-controlled House, Wednesday will bring more votes on legislation to reopen the government in line with Speaker Nancy Pelosi's demand to end the shutdown before negotiations begin. Pelosi has shown no sign of yielding and Democrats hold the upper hand in public opinion — polls show Trump gets most of the blame for the shutdown.

McConnell has rejected the House missives so far. And both Senate measures are expected to fall short of the 60 votes needed to pass, leaving little hope they represent the clear path out of the mess. But the plan represents the first test of Senate Republicans' resolve behind Trump's insistence that agencies remain closed until Congress approves \$5.7 billion to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. For Democrats, the votes will show whether there are any cracks in the so-far unified rejection of Trump's demand.

Democrats on Tuesday ridiculed McConnell's bill, which included temporarily extended protections for "Dreamer" immigrants but also harsh new curbs on Central Americans seeking safe haven in the U.S.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the GOP plan's immigration proposals were "even more radical" than their past positions.

"The president's proposal is just wrapping paper on the same partisan package and hostage taking

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tactics," offering to temporarily restore programs Trump himself tried to end in exchange for wall funding, Schumer said.

McConnell accused Democrats of preferring "political combat with the president" to resolving the partial federal shutdown, which stretched into its 33rd day Wednesday. He said Democrats were prepared to abandon federal workers, migrants and all Americans "just to extend this run of political theater so they can look like champions of the so-called resistance" against Trump.

The confrontational tone underscored that there remained no clear end in sight to the closure.

The upcoming vote on the Democratic plan marked a departure for McConnell, who had vowed to allow no votes on shutdown measures unless Trump would sign them.

The White House views its latest offer as a test of whether Democratic leaders can hold their members together in opposition, said a person familiar with White House thinking who was not authorized to speak publicly. The administration also wants to show they are willing to negotiate, hoping it will push more blame onto Democrats, who are opposing negotiations until the government reopens. Public polls show Trump is taking the brunt of the blame from voters so far.

"How long are they going to continue to be obstructionists and not solve the problem and not reopen the government?" White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said of Democrats.

One freshman, Democrat Rep. Elaine Luria of Virginia, a state that's home to many federal workers, was circulating a draft letter Tuesday urging Pelosi to propose a deal that would reopen the government and then consider border security legislation — including holding votes on Trump's demand for wall money — by the end of February. A similar effort was underway last week by a bipartisan group of senators.

McConnell's bill largely reflects the proposal Trump described to the nation in a brief address Saturday. It would reopen federal agencies, revamp immigration laws and provide \$5.7 billion to start building his prized border wall with Mexico — a project Democrats consider an ineffective, wasteful monument to a ridiculous Trump campaign promise.

The measure would provide a three-year extension of protections against deportation for 700,000 people covered by the Delayed Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. Democrats want far more to be protected — in negotiations last year Trump proposed extending the safeguards to 1.8 million people, including many who'd not yet applied — and want the program's coverage for so-called "Dreamers" to be permanent.

Trump initially tried terminating the Obama-era DACA program, which shields people brought to the U.S. illegally as children but has been blocked by federal judges.

The GOP bill would revive, for three years, protections for people from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua who fled natural disasters or violence in their countries. Trump has ended that Temporary Protected Status program for those and several other countries.

Republicans estimated the proposal would let 325,000 people remain in the U.S. But the GOP proposal contains new curbs, providing those protections only to those who are already in the U.S. legally and who earn at least 125 percent of the federal poverty limit.

The bill would also, for the first time, require minors seeking asylum from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador to process their applications at facilities the State Department is to establish in several Central American countries. Other new conditions include a limit of 15,000 of these minors who could be granted asylum. Currently, many asylum seekers apply as they're entering the U.S. and can remain here as judges decide their request, which can take several years.

As a sweetener, the Republican measure also contains \$12.7 billion for regions hit by hurricanes, wildfires and other disasters. The Democratic bill also includes the disaster aid.

One White House official said Trump was open to counter-offers from Democrats. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations, said Trump was also willing to use his proposed temporary extensions for "Dreamers" as a way to seek long-term deal.

The official said Trump would be willing to seek at least permanent legal status for "Dreamers," but probably not a path to citizenship.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaró, Jill Colvin, Catherine Lucey, Kevin Freking, Matthew Daly and Laurie Kellman contributed.

For AP's complete coverage of the U.S. government shutdown: <https://apnews.com/GovernmentShutdown>

Amid wall debate, pope says fear of migration makes us crazy

By NICOLE WINFIELD, Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis said Wednesday that fear of migration is “making us crazy” as he began a trip to Central America amid a standoff over President Donald Trump’s promised wall at the U.S.-Mexico border and a new caravan of migrants heading north.

Francis was asked by reporters about the proposed border wall Wednesday on the way to Panama, where he is looking to leave the sex abuse scandals buffeting his papacy behind. Francis responded: “It is the fear that makes us crazy.”

The Roman Catholic Church’s first Latin American pope and the son of Italian immigrants to Argentina, Francis has made the plight of migrants and refugees a cornerstone of his papacy. He is also expected to offer words of encouragement to young people gathered in Panama for World Youth Day, the church’s once-every-three-year pep rally that aims to invigorate the next generation of Catholics in their faith.

Panama Archbishop Jose Domingo Ulloa said Francis’ message is likely to resonate with young Central Americans who see their only future free of violence and poverty in migrating to the U.S. — “young people who often fall into the hands of drug traffickers and so many other realities that our young people face.”

The pope is expected to urge young people to create their own opportunities, while calling on governments do their share as well.

The visit is taking place as the U.S. government remains partly shut down in a standoff between the Trump administration and Democrats over funding for Trump’s promised border wall.

Francis famously has called for “bridges, not walls.” After celebrating Mass in 2016 on the Mexican side of the U.S. border, he denounced anyone who wants to build a wall to keep out migrants as “not Christian.”

Crowds are expected to be smaller than usual for this World Youth Day — only about 150,000 people had registered as of last week — but thousands more will certainly throng Francis’ main events, which include a vigil and a final Mass on Sunday. The Vatican conceded that the January date doesn’t suit school vacations in Europe or North America, both of which typically send huge numbers of pilgrims to World Youth Day gatherings.

Francis’ trip, the first in a year packed with foreign travel, comes at a critical moment in the papacy as the Catholic hierarchy globally is facing a crisis in credibility for covering up decades of cases of priests molesting young people.

The pope is expected to soon rule on the fate of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the high-powered U.S. archbishop accused of molesting minors and adults. And he is hosting church leaders at the Vatican next month on trying to chart a way forward for the global church.

Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti said there were no plans for Francis to meet with abuse survivors in Panama. Central America hasn’t yet seen the explosion of sex abuse cases that have shattered trust in the Catholic hierarchy in Chile, the U.S. and other parts of the world.

This is the first papal visit to Panama since St. John Paul II was there during a 1983 regional tour that famously included an unscheduled stop at the tomb of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. Romero had been gunned down by right-wing death squads three years earlier, at the start of El Salvador’s civil war, for having spoken out on behalf of the poor.

Salvadoran bishops had hoped Francis would follow suit and make a stop in El Salvador this time to pay his respects at Romero’s tomb since Francis canonized him in October. But the Vatican said a Salvador leg was never really in the cards.

Nevertheless, Gisotti said Romero would likely loom large at the Panama gathering, given he is such a point of reference for young Central American Catholics who grew up learning about his defense of the poor.

The Panama visit is also the first by a pope since the Vatican embassy played a crucial role during the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, when dictator Manuel Noriega took refuge there and requested asylum on Christmas Eve after four days on the run trying to escape U.S. troops.

Noriega eventually surrendered, bringing to an end one of the more unusual U.S. military operations: It involved U.S. troops blasting heavy metal and rock music — including Van Halen's "Panama" — at the embassy to try to force Noriega out.

Noriega, a onetime U.S. ally, eventually served a 17-year drug sentence in the United States. He died in 2017 after his final years were spent in a Panamanian prison for the murder of political opponents during his 1983-89 regime.

Pope Francis confirmed to reporters aboard the papal plane that he plans to go to Japan in November. The pope also said he wants to visit Iraq, but that local church leaders have told him that the security situation is not yet right.

This year, the pontiff has already scheduled trips to United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Bulgaria and Macedonia, and a trip to Madagascar is rumored.

Judge hearing testimony on 2020 census citizenship question

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — A federal trial began Tuesday for lawsuits challenging the Trump administration's addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 census, a plan that a different court blocked last week.

Former U.S. Census Bureau director John Thompson, the first plaintiffs' witness for the bench trial in Maryland, testified Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross disregarded "long established" Census Bureau protocols in adding the citizenship question. Thompson, who oversaw the bureau from 2013 through June 2017, said he doesn't think officials properly tested the question for the 2020 census.

"It's very problematic for me," Thompson said of Ross' decision.

The trial before U.S. District Judge George Hazel in Greenbelt, Maryland, began one week after a federal judge in New York barred the Trump administration from adding a citizenship question to the census for the first time since 1950. The Justice Department is appealing that ruling by U.S. District Judge Jesse M. Furman, who concluded Ross acted in an "arbitrary and capricious" manner before deciding to add the citizenship question.

A trial for a separate suit over the same issue, filed by the state of California, began in San Francisco on Jan. 7. A judge finished hearing testimony in that case on Jan. 14 and is scheduled to hear closing arguments Feb. 15.

The plaintiffs for the case being tried in Maryland include residents of Texas, Arizona, Nevada and Florida. Attorneys from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund also sued on behalf of more than two dozen organizations and individuals. The court agreed to consolidate the claims in December.

In a court filing, plaintiffs' attorneys say Ross communicated with former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions and other administration officials before issuing the March 2018 directive "to further the unconstitutional goal of diluting the political power of non-white immigrant communities." The Census Bureau's own analysis shows the citizenship question would lead to a lower response rate to the 2020 census by households with at least one non-citizen member, the lawyer said.

"Consistent with numerous other statements and actions of President Trump and Trump Administration officials, these efforts were driven by racial animus against non-white immigrants," they wrote.

The Census Bureau began collecting citizenship data through the annual American Community Survey in 2005. Ross decided to use the same wording from that "well-tested question" on the ACS for the citizenship question on the 2020 census, government lawyers said in a court filing.

"Secretary Ross carefully considered, but was ultimately unpersuaded by, concerns that including a citizenship question would reduce the self-response rate for non-citizens," they wrote.

Plaintiffs' attorneys had urged Judge Hazel to proceed with the Maryland trial as scheduled since the

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judge's ruling in the New York case could be reversed on appeal. The clock is ticking for all of the cases: The Census Bureau has said the "drop-dead" date for changes to the 2020 census questionnaire is June 30, 2019, according to the plaintiffs' lawyers.

Denise Hulett, an attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said the Los Angeles-based group's lawsuit is the only one to allege that the citizenship question on the 2020 census is a "product of a conspiracy that began in the early days of the Trump administration."

"It allows us to talk about the motives of a large group of people instead of the motives of just Secretary Ross," she said during a break in the trial.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. WHAT SENATORS ARE GRAPPLING WITH

Side with Trump or vote to temporarily end the longest shutdown in U.S. history and keep negotiating.

2. VENEZUELA BRACES FOR PROTESTS

The country's opposition faces a crucial test in an appeal to the military and the poor to shift loyalties that until recently looked solidly behind the socialist government.

3. WHO'S BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Tens of thousands of Los Angeles teachers plan to return to work after voting to ratify a deal, ending a six-day strike in the nation's second-largest district.

4. GIULIANI GRATING ON TRUMP, ALLIES

The presidential lawyer's latest scattershot media blitz raises the possibility that he may be at least temporarily sidelined from TV interviews, sources tell AP.

5. PONTIFF EMBARKS ON WORLD YOUTH DAY PILGRIMAGE

Pope Francis is looking to leave the sex abuse scandal buffeting his papacy behind as he heads to Panama amid a standoff over Trump's promised wall.

6. INDIANA DEMOCRAT JOINS 2020 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Pete Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, is forming an exploratory committee, AP learns.

7. NATURAL GAS FIELDS GIVE ISRAEL REGIONAL POLITICAL BOOST

Its newfound riches foster economic bonds with its neighbors, tighten relations with Arab allies, and build new bridges in a historically hostile region.

8. BREXIT AWAKENS OLD FEARS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Britain-EU divorce deal's intense focus on the future of the border between the North, part of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland revives painful memories of the bitter and bloody conflict and the fragile peace that has followed.

9. FALLING HOME SALES NOT HELPING MIDDLE-CLASS BUYERS

Despite a slowdown in price gains, more middle-income Americans are finding home ownership unaffordable, an AP analysis finds.

10. WHERE IT UNRAVELED FOR SERENA

One point from a comeback victory in the Australian Open quarterfinals, the 23-time Grand Slam champion injured her left ankle and eventually lost to Karolina Pliskova.

Families keep trying to cross border, wall or no wall

By NOMAAN MERCHANT, Associated Press

MCALLEN, Texas (AP) — Maria Orbelina Cortez says she fled El Salvador for the U.S. after her husband attacked her and knocked a pan of scalding oil onto her youngest son's head.

After quietly planning for months, she took the 3-year-old boy and his two brothers and headed north without telling her husband. As she spoke in the yard of a Catholic Charities shelter in South Texas, the boy played nearby. He had a hairless scar on top of his head in the shape of a jagged, capital "T."

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"I will always feel culpable," said Orbelina, 30. "Always."

President Donald Trump's push for a \$5.7 billion wall — a demand that triggered the longest government shutdown in history — is unlikely on its own to stop families with stories like Orbelina's, who are crossing the U.S.-Mexico border by the thousands each month.

The Trump administration wants to use that money to construct more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) of border wall. Most of those miles would likely go in South Texas, where more people cross illegally than anywhere else.

Congress has already funded 33 miles (53 kilometers) of new barrier construction here. But much of that new barrier will be built north of the Rio Grande, which carves a natural boundary between the U.S. and Mexico. That means migrants will still be able to reach American soil in front of the newly constructed barrier and request asylum.

The latest proposal Trump and Senate Republicans made to fund the wall includes provisions that could possibly be far more consequential than the wall, by making the already difficult task of winning asylum even harder.

Their bill would require all asylum claims to be in "the national interest" to be granted and allow more claims to be judged as frivolous. It would also require all Central American children arriving on their own to seek asylum in their countries of origin, not in the United States.

Trump did not describe those provisions in his speech Saturday announcing the proposal. But Greg Chen, director of government relations at the American Immigration Lawyers Association, said they amounted to "a historic change" and criticized the bill. Top Democrats have already said they won't support it.

Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities in the Rio Grande Valley, said the families at the organization's shelter sometimes resort to crossing the Rio Grande illegally out of desperation after being stopped at bridges.

"It is important that we secure our borders, that we keep our country safe from criminals," Pimentel said. She added that Trump "needs to meet the families that are not criminals. He needs to meet the children and the great number of families that are here asking for protection."

Deysi Yanira Centeno reached the border a month after fleeing El Salvador, where gangs threatened her 15-year-old daughter.

Centeno said a human smuggler told her crossing the Rio Grande would be easier than trying to enter the U.S. through a bridge, where customs agents often tell asylum seekers they have no room to process them. So she paid \$20 each for herself, her teenage daughter, and two children ages 11 and 7, to board a raft. She described how scared she was as it slowly moved across the river.

"In that moment you think about life and death," she said. "You think, 'Maybe it would have been better for me not to leave my country.'"

Others refuse to cross the river illegally, insisting they will only seek asylum at an official border crossing. Many of the border crossings in South Texas and elsewhere on the border turn away asylum seekers or accept very few daily, leading families to camp out at the bridges or wait in shelters in Mexico.

Esperanza Vargas, who fled Nicaragua with her 18-year-old son, waited for weeks next to the Mexican side of the bridge connecting Matamoros, Mexico, and Brownsville, Texas. Vargas and her son feared that they would be targeted in the government's ongoing conflict with paramilitary groups.

"You can't say we're a danger for the U.S. if we're here," Vargas said. "If we're here, it's because we want to do things the right way."

Trump administration officials argue many asylum seekers are making illegitimate claims to enter the U.S. for years while their cases are processed. Immigration courts last year denied asylum in about 65 percent of cases.

The administration has long fought to limit asylum protections. A federal judge in December struck down a policy change restricting asylum for victims of domestic violence. The Department of Homeland Security has also announced a plan to make all asylum seekers at the border wait in Mexico.

Most of the people who arrived at the border had taken several weeks to get there. Some admitted they hired smugglers to get them through Mexico. Others said they took buses on their own.

But the women waiting at Catholic Charities all said they had no choice.

Sitting in the yard of the shelter, wearing an ankle monitor, Orbelina said her husband would often attack her after coming home from a night of drinking. Sometimes he would hit their children too, she said.

She says she reported him to police in their town of Sonsonate, west of the capital of San Salvador. But her husband told police she had attacked him, and he wasn't arrested, she said.

It took six months to plan her escape, saving money and relying on her parents in California, who sent money as she moved through Mexico. She said she entered the U.S. through an official border crossing at Progreso, Texas.

She plans to join her parents and file for a divorce and a protection order.

"My hope is to work and to see my children grow up," Orbelina said. "I see them happy, but I know that at times they suffer."

Poll: Support for 'Medicare-for-all' fluctuates with details

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — "Medicare-for-all" makes a good first impression, but support plunges when people are asked if they'd pay higher taxes or put up with treatment delays to get it.

The survey, released Wednesday by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, comes as Democratic presidential hopefuls embrace the idea of a government-run health care system, considered outside the mainstream of their party until Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders made it the cornerstone of his 2016 campaign. President Donald Trump is opposed, saying "Medicare-for-all" would "eviscerate" the current program for seniors.

The poll found that Americans initially support "Medicare-for-all," 56 percent to 42 percent.

However, those numbers shifted dramatically when people were asked about the potential impact, pro and con.

Support increased when people learned "Medicare-for-all" would guarantee health insurance as a right (71 percent) and eliminate premiums and reduce out-of-pocket costs (67 percent).

But if they were told that a government-run system could lead to delays in getting care or higher taxes, support plunged to 26 percent and 37 percent, respectively.

"The issue that will really be fundamental would be the tax issue," said Robert Blendon, a professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health who reviewed the poll. He pointed out that state single-payer efforts in Vermont and Colorado failed because of concerns about the tax increases needed to put them in place.

There doesn't seem to be much disagreement that a single-payer system would require tax increases, since the government would take over premiums now paid by employers and individuals as it replaces the private health insurance industry. The question is how much.

Several independent studies have estimated that government spending on health care would increase dramatically, in the range of about \$25 trillion to \$35 trillion or more over a 10-year period. But a recent estimate from the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst suggests that it could be much lower. With significant cost savings, the government would need to raise about \$1.1 trillion from new revenue sources in the first year of the new program.

House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky., has asked the Congressional Budget Office for a comprehensive report on single-payer. The CBO is a nonpartisan outfit that analyzes the potential cost and impact of legislation. Its estimate that millions would be made uninsured by Republican bills to repeal the Affordable Care Act was key to the survival of President Barack Obama's health care law.

Mollyann Brodie, director of the Kaiser poll, said the big swings in approval and disapproval show that the debate over "Medicare-for-all" is in its infancy. "You immediately see that opinion is not set in stone on this issue," she said.

It's a key issue for Democrats going into the 2020 presidential election, but Republicans are solidly opposed.

"Any public debate about 'Medicare-for-all' will be a divisive issue for the country at large," Brodie said. The poll indicated widespread support for two other ideas advanced by Democrats as alternatives to a health care system fully run by the government.

Majorities across the political spectrum backed allowing people ages 50-64 to buy into Medicare, as well as allowing people who don't have health insurance on the job to buy into their state's Medicaid program.

Separately, another private survey out Wednesday finds the uninsured rate among U.S. adults rose to 13.7 percent in the last three months of 2018. The Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index found an increase of 2.8 percentage points since 2016, the year Trump was elected promising to repeal "Obamacare." That would translate to about 7 million more uninsured adults.

Government surveys have found that the uninsured rate has remained essentially stable under Trump.

The Kaiser Health Tracking Poll was conducted Jan. 9-14 and involved random calls to the cellphones and landlines of 1,190 adults. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Los Angeles teachers head back to school after reaching deal

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Tens of thousands of Los Angeles teachers planned to return to work Wednesday after voting to ratify a deal between their union and school officials, ending a six-day strike in the nation's second-largest district.

"I voted 'yes,' to approve," said second-grade teacher Wendy Perez. "I think the union negotiated in good faith, and I'd like to believe the district did too."

A crowd of teachers roared its approval after the tentative deal was announced at City Hall following a 21-hour bargaining session.

While all votes hadn't been counted by Tuesday night, union President Alex Caputo-Pearl said preliminary balloting showed educators overwhelmingly approving the proposal.

"A vast supermajority are voting 'yes'...therefore, ending the strike and heading back to schools tomorrow," he said.

Mayor Eric Garcetti, accompanied by leaders of United Teachers Los Angeles and the LA Unified School District, called it an "historic agreement" that will usher in a "new day" for public education in the city.

The deal came as teachers in Denver voted to go on strike as soon as next Monday. More than 5,000 educators would be affected. The main sticking point is increasing base pay and lessening teachers' reliance on one-time bonuses for having students with high test scores or working in a high-poverty school.

In Oakland, California, some teachers called in sick last week as part of an unofficial rally over their contract negotiations, which also hinge partly on a demand for smaller class sizes.

Teachers hoped to build on the "Red4Ed" movement that began last year in West Virginia and moved to Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado and Washington state. It spread from conservative states with "right to work" laws that limit the ability to strike to the more liberal West Coast with strong unions.

In Los Angeles, thousands of boisterous educators and their supporters cheered as the tentative contract agreement was announced earlier in the day.

The deal includes a 6 percent pay hike and a commitment to reduce class sizes over four years, according to statements from the district and the union.

It will also add more than 600 nursing positions over the next three school years, which pleased Perez. Teachers had complained that some schools only had a nurse on campus one day a week, she said.

"It was a matter of time before a student got very sick, with no nurse around," said Perez. "We've got kids with peanut allergies, asthma, diabetes. We need nurses."

Additional counselors and librarians are also part of the planned increase in support staff.

The new contract also eliminates a longstanding clause that gave the district authority over class sizes, officials said. Many schools will see a class size reduction of about four students in three years — though 90 high-needs campuses will see six fewer students per class during that time.

Those reductions were the main reason teacher Charles Pak voted to ratify — but he said he was happy with the deal as a whole.

“We got almost everything we asked for, just about,” said Pak, who teaches 8th grade English. “So I think the strike was positive overall.”

District Superintendent Austin Beutner said he was delighted the deal was reached. But he hinted that financial challenges remained.

“The issue has always been how do we pay for it?” Beutner said. “That issue does not go away now that we have a contract. We can’t solve 40 years of underinvestment in public education in just one week or just one contract.”

Under the agreement, the district, the union and the mayor’s office will work jointly to “advocate for increased county and state funding” for Los Angeles schools, according to the UTLA summary.

The district maintained that the union’s demands could bankrupt the school system, which is projecting a half-billion-dollar deficit this budget year and has billions obligated for pension payments and health coverage for retired teachers.

The Board of Education was expected to move quickly to ratify the deal, which would expire at the end of June 2022.

Kelly Maloney said students at the downtown Los Angeles high school where he teaches English told him they’re ready to return to normal after spending a week in large groups supervised by small numbers of substitute teachers.

“They’re bored,” he said of his 12th grade pupils. “Going back is going to be a big transition for everyone— students, administrators, teachers.”

Associated Press writers Brian Melley, John Antczak and John Rogers contributed to this report.

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Q&A: Impact of Supreme Court decision on transgender troops

By JESSICA GRESKO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sharply divided Supreme Court is allowing the Trump administration to go ahead with its plan to restrict military service by transgender men and women while court challenges continue.

The high court split 5-4 on Tuesday in issuing orders allowing the plan to take effect for now, with the court’s five conservatives greenlighting it and its four liberal members saying they wouldn’t have.

Some questions and answers about what the high court did:

Q: What’s the impact on transgender men and women currently serving in the military?

A: That depends on the individual’s circumstances. In short, though, the justices cleared the way for the Trump administration to require that transgender troops serve as members of their biological gender unless they began a gender transition under less restrictive Obama administration rules.

Until a few years ago service members could be discharged from the military for being transgender. That changed in 2016 when the Obama administration began allowing transgender men and women already serving in the military to undergo gender transition if they were diagnosed with gender dysphoria, distress associated with their biological gender.

The military has said more than 900 men and women have received that diagnosis. They can continue to serve after transitioning.

The Trump administration’s policy would essentially freeze that number, however. Once the policy takes effect, currently serving transgender troops who didn’t previously step forward and obtain a gender dysphoria diagnosis will have to serve in their biological gender. A 2016 survey estimated that about 1 percent of active-duty service members, about 9,000 men and women, identify as transgender.

Q: What's the impact on transgender men and women not yet in the military but who want to join?

A: Individuals who have transitioned from their biological gender won't be allowed to enlist under the Trump administration's policy. That's a shift. Under previous court orders, transgender individuals had been allowed to enlist in the military since Jan. 1, 2018. Still, advocacy groups had said that process was slow, with only a handful of individuals thought to have completed the process.

Q: What did the Supreme Court say in allowing the Trump administration's policy to take effect for now?

A: Not much. The order from the court was brief and procedural, with no elaboration from the justices.

Q: What happens next?

A: That's up to the Trump administration and courts. While the Trump administration has the go-ahead to implement its policy for now, it's unclear how quickly that will happen. Court challenges will continue, and the cases could eventually get back to the Supreme Court on the merits of the case, whether the Trump administration policy is legal. It's very unlikely, however, that would happen before the Supreme Court recesses for the summer in late June.

Q: Does the Supreme Court's action reflect anything about its current makeup?

A: Not necessarily. When Justice Anthony Kennedy retired last year and was replaced by Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the assumption was that the court would move to the right and become more conservative. But Kennedy biographer Frank Colucci said he doesn't think Tuesday's outcome would necessarily have been any different if Kennedy had remained on the court.

Kennedy was deferential to the authority of the president, particularly in the military context, Colucci said. As an appeals court judge in 1980 Kennedy wrote a decision upholding Navy regulations that resulted in the discharge of gay and lesbian sailors. Kennedy wrote that finding the regulations constitutional was "distinct from a statement that they are wise."

Not much is known about Kennedy's views on transgender issues. As a Supreme Court justice, he sided in 2016 with more conservative colleagues in agreeing to put on hold a ruling in favor of a transgender high school student challenging his school board's bathroom policy. But the court never reached a decision in the case after the Trump administration pulled back federal guidance advising schools to let transgender students use the bathroom of their chosen gender.

Los Angeles teachers approve contract, end strike

By **CHRISTOPHER WEBER** and **BRIAN MELLE**, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Teachers overwhelmingly approved a new contract Tuesday and planned to return to the classroom after a six-day strike over funding and staffing in the nation's second-largest school district.

Although all votes hadn't been counted, preliminary figures showed that a "vast supermajority" of some 30,000 educators voted in favor of the tentative deal, "therefore ending the strike and heading back to schools tomorrow," said Alex Caputo-Pearl, president of United Teachers Los Angeles.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, accompanied by leaders of the union and the Los Angeles Unified School District, announced the agreement at City Hall a few hours after a 21-hour bargaining session ended before dawn.

"This is a good agreement. It is a historic agreement," Garcetti said.

The deal was broadly described by officials at the news conference as including a 6 percent pay hike and a commitment to reduce class sizes over four years.

Specifics provided later by the district and the union included the addition of more than 600 nursing positions over the next three school years. Additional counselors and librarians were also part of the increase in support staff.

Marianne O'Brien said the need for additional support staff was one of the main reasons she walked

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picket lines.

"This is not just for teachers. It's also for counselors, nurses, psychologists and social workers," said O'Brien, who teaches 10th grade English.

The new contract also eliminates a longstanding clause that gave the district authority over class sizes, officials said. Grades 4 through 12 would be reduced by one student during each of the next two school years and two pupils in 2021-22.

Clashes over pay, class sizes and support-staff levels in the district with 640,000 students led to its first strike in 30 years and prompted the staffing of classrooms with substitute teachers and administrators.

The district maintained that the union's demands could bankrupt the school system, which is projecting a half-billion-dollar deficit this budget year and has billions obligated for pension payments and health coverage for retired teachers.

District Superintendent Austin Beutner said he was delighted the deal was reached. But he hinted that financial challenges remained.

"The issue has always been: How do we pay for it?" Beutner said. "That issue does not go away now that we have a contract. We can't solve 40 years of underinvestment in public education in just one week or just one contract."

Under the tentative agreement, the district, the union and the mayor's office will work jointly to "advocate for increased county and state funding" for Los Angeles schools, according to the UTLA summary.

The Board of Education was expected to move quickly to ratify the deal, which would expire at the end of June 2022.

The deal came as teachers in Denver voted to go on strike as soon as next Monday. More than 5,000 educators would be affected. The main sticking point is increasing base pay and lessening teachers' reliance on one-time bonuses for having students with high test scores or working in a high-poverty school.

In Oakland, California, some teachers called in sick last week as part of an unofficial rally over their contract negotiations, which also hinge partly on a demand for smaller class sizes.

Thousands of boisterous educators, many wearing red, and their supporters gathered on the steps outside City Hall where the tentative agreement was announced.

The crowd began cheering, blowing horns and chanting the initials of Caputo-Pearl as the smiling union leader emerged from the building and walked through the throng.

Joaquin Flores, a special education teacher, said he believed he would support the deal unless it weakened health care or didn't go far enough to reduce class size.

"It's almost like metaphoric," Flores said. "The sun's out. When we started, it was all rainy and cold. I feel like it's a new day."

Before teachers voted on the contract, Sharon Maloney said she was reluctant to support it without seeing details. She was skeptical that the district had made enough concessions on class size, health care benefits for new teachers or that the superintendent would spend enough of about \$2 billion in reserves.

"I suspect the motives of Beutner," Maloney said.

Teachers hoped to build on the "Red4Ed" movement that began last year in West Virginia and moved to Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado and Washington state. It spread from conservative states with "right to work" laws that limit the ability to strike to the more liberal West Coast with strong unions.

Associated Press writers John Antczak and John Rogers contributed to this report.

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What we know so far about Trump Tower project for Moscow By CHAD DAY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Confused about the business proposal to build a Trump Tower in Moscow? Join the club.

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President Donald Trump's lawyer-spokesman Rudy Giuliani and a disputed BuzzFeed News report have muddied the waters on exactly how long negotiations over the project went on. It's a key question because Trump was pursuing the deal during the 2016 campaign while he was publicly calling for easing U.S. sanctions on Russia and as Moscow was directing a large-scale operation aimed at swaying the election his way.

Here's what we know so far:

— September and October 2015: As a Trump Organization lawyer, Michael Cohen receives a proposal for a hotel, office and residential building in Russia that comes to be known as the Trump Tower Moscow project. One of Trump's numerous corporate entities then enters into a letter of intent on the project.

— Late 2015: Donald Trump Jr. and Ivanka Trump are copied on emails about the project. In one email, Ivanka Trump suggests an architect for the building.

— May 4-6, 2016: Felix Sater, an executive who had worked on and off for the Trump Organization, and Cohen discuss having Trump visit Russia after the Republican National Convention. They also discuss the possibility of Cohen meeting in mid-June with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Sater said Peskov had invited Cohen as his guest.

— Aug. 28, 2017: Cohen submits to Congress a two-page letter about the Trump Tower Moscow deal, saying the project ended in January 2016, that he only discussed it three times with Trump, that he never considered traveling to Russia or asking Trump to travel there, and that he did not recall having contact with the Russian government about the proposal. All of those statements were false, according to court papers.

— September and October 2017: Cohen says in prepared remarks to the Senate intelligence committee that the Moscow deal ended "before the Iowa caucus and months before the first primary." He says the same during testimony before the committee. Those statements turned out to be lies.

— Nov. 29, 2018: Cohen pleads guilty to lying to Congress. He says he briefed Trump and his family members on the Russia proposal through June 2016. Cohen says he lied to minimize the public understanding of Trump's Russia ties, to try to limit the various Russia investigations and to be consistent with Trump's "political messaging."

— Dec. 12, 2018: Cohen is sentenced to three years in prison.

— Jan. 17, 2019: BuzzFeed News, citing two unnamed law enforcement officials, reports that Trump directed Cohen to lie to Congress about the Trump Tower Moscow proposal. The report does not specify what Trump said to Cohen or when he said it.

— Jan. 18, 2019: In a rare public statement, a spokesman for special counsel Robert Mueller disputes the BuzzFeed report. "BuzzFeed's description of specific statements to the Special Counsel's Office, and characterization of documents and testimony obtained by this office, regarding Michael Cohen's Congressional testimony are not accurate," spokesman Peter Carr says in a statement. BuzzFeed stands by the story and asks for clarity from Mueller's team.

— Jan. 20-21, 2019: Giuliani suggests in TV interviews that Trump remembers conversations with Cohen about the project "up to as far as October, November," or right up until the election. That would have extended the timeline for the Russian business deal well beyond what the president has publicly acknowledged. Giuliani also leaves open the possibility that Trump and Cohen might have discussed Cohen's testimony. The next day, Giuliani walks back his comments, saying they "did not represent the actual timing or circumstances of any discussions." He says his comments were "hypothetical" and "not based on conversations" he had with the president.

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo, Eric Tucker and Michael Biesecker contributed to this report.

High court lets military implement transgender restrictions

By JESSICA GRESKO, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration can go ahead with its plan to restrict military service by transgender men and women while court challenges continue, the Supreme Court said Tuesday.

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The high court split 5-4 in allowing the plan to take effect, with the court's five conservatives greenlighting it and its four liberal members saying they would not have. The order from the court was brief and procedural, with no elaboration from the justices.

The court's decision clears the way for the Pentagon to bar enlistment by people who have undergone a gender transition. It will also allow the administration to require that military personnel serve as members of their biological gender unless they began a gender transition under less restrictive Obama administration rules.

The Trump administration has sought for more than a year to change the Obama-era rules and had urged the justices to take up cases about its transgender troop policy immediately, but the court declined for now.

Those cases will continue to move through lower courts and could eventually reach the Supreme Court again. The fact that five justices were willing to allow the policy to take effect for now, however, makes it more likely the Trump administration's policy will ultimately be upheld.

Both the Justice and Defense departments released statements saying they were pleased by the Supreme Court's action. The Pentagon said its policy on transgender troops is based on professional military judgment and necessary to "ensure the most lethal and combat effective fighting force." Justice Department spokeswoman Kerri Kupec said lower court rulings had forced the military to "maintain a prior policy that poses a risk to military effectiveness and lethality."

Before beginning to implement its policy the administration is expected to need to make a procedural filing in one case in Maryland challenging the plan. That request could be made this week.

Groups that sued over the Trump administration's policy said they ultimately hoped to win their lawsuits over the policy. Jennifer Levi, an attorney for GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders, said in a statement that the "Trump administration's cruel obsession with ridding our military of dedicated and capable service members because they happen to be transgender defies reason and cannot survive legal review."

Until a few years ago service members could be discharged from the military for being transgender. That changed under the Obama administration. The military announced in 2016 that transgender people already serving in the military would be allowed to serve openly. And the military set July 1, 2017, as the date when transgender individuals would be allowed to enlist.

But after President Donald Trump took office, the administration delayed the enlistment date, saying the issue needed further study. And in late July 2017 the president tweeted that the government would not allow "Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military." He later directed the military to return to its policy before the Obama administration changes.

Groups representing transgender individuals sued, and the Trump administration lost early rounds in those cases, with courts issuing nationwide injunctions barring the administration from altering course. The Supreme Court put those injunctions on hold Tuesday, allowing the Trump administration's policy to take effect.

The Trump administration's revised policy on transgender troops dates to March 2018. The policy generally bars transgender people from serving unless they do so "in their biological sex" and do not seek to undergo a gender transition. But it has an exception for transgender troops who relied on the Obama-era rules to begin the process of changing their gender.

Those individuals, who have been diagnosed with "gender dysphoria," a discomfort with their birth gender, can continue to serve after transitioning. The military has said that over 900 men and women had received that diagnosis. A 2016 survey estimated that about 1 percent of active duty service members, about 9,000 men and women, identify as transgender.

Associated Press reporter Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report.

Boys school shuts down amid fallout over Washington videos

By **BRUCE SCHREINER** and **JOHN MINCHILLO**, Associated Press

COVINGTON, Ky. (AP) — A Kentucky boys' school shut down its campus Tuesday as a precaution and

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a small protest was held outside their diocese as fallout continued over an encounter involving white teenagers, Native American marchers and a black religious sect outside the Lincoln Memorial last week.

President Donald Trump tweeted early Tuesday that the students at Covington Catholic High School "have become symbols of Fake News and how evil it can be" but he hopes the teens will use the attention for good, and "maybe even to bring people together."

The recorded images that initially generated outrage on social media were tightly focused on the students wearing "Make America Great Again" hats, who seemed to laugh derisively as they surrounded an elderly Native American beating a drum.

Later Tuesday, presidential press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the White House has reached out to the Kentucky students.

"We've reached out and voiced our support," Sanders said. She added that no one understands better than Trump when the media jumps to conclusions and "attacks you for something you may or may not have done." And if the president does invite the students from Covington Catholic High School to the White House, Sanders said, it will be sometime after the shutdown has concluded.

Longer videos from wider perspectives emerged later over the Martin Luther King holiday weekend. They revealed the drummer — Omaha Nation elder Nathan Phillips — had intervened between the boys and the religious sect. That came after the teens seemed to grow rowdier and the black street preacher who had been shouting racist statements against both groups escalated his rhetoric.

Soon, all sides were pointing fingers, giving their own accounts about feeling victimized and misunderstood.

"We just don't know what the volatility of the situation is with these people that react and they don't know the full story. And it's very scary," Jill Hamlin of Cincinnati, a chaperone for the boys as they attended an anti-abortion rally, told FOX News on Tuesday morning.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington said in a statement late Tuesday that local police alerted them a protest was planned. It said officials were advised to close school "due to threats of violence and the possibility of large crowds" adding they would reopen school when police "say it is safe to do so."

The diocese, which previously criticized the students' behavior, promised to begin its investigation of events this week.

"This is a very serious matter that has already permanently altered the lives of many people. It is important for us to gather the facts that will allow us to determine what corrective actions, if any, are appropriate."

The school and the diocese websites were taken offline.

The American Indian Movement Chapter of Indiana and Kentucky held a small protest outside the diocese office, with activists outnumbered by the media.

Albert Running Wolf, a Native American from Fort Thomas, Kentucky, referred to Nathan Phillips during the event as "an honorable man" who was trying to be a peacemaker, but ended up being verbally attacked. He said Phillips deserves an apology.

"It doesn't matter what color they were, what political factions they were. It was disrespect— straight-forward."

Protesters ended the rally on a street corner near the diocese by singing a song from the American Indian Movement while two Native Americans beat drums.

Kathleen Seither of Cold Spring, Kentucky, said she attended the rally in support of Native Americans, appalled by the students' behavior.

"They have embarrassed their school, their city, their parents, their state, their country." Seither said their actions are an example of "white male privilege, a product of everything in today's world including the president."

A smaller group supporting the teens converged closer to the diocese building.

Among them was Cincinnati resident Maureen Green, a former Catholic and mother of three whose sign read: "I stand with the boys. Facts not fiction." She said she thought the boys had been misrepresented and "railroaded" by some media accounts.

"I think these boys are learning a lot about how the world really works. It's a life lesson," she said.

Meanwhile, the school's principal, Robert Rowe, said school officials closed the campus as a safety precaution. Police cars blocked school entrances Tuesday afternoon.

Phillips, for his part, offered to visit the boys' campus for a dialogue on cultural appropriation, racism and the importance of listening to and respecting diverse cultures.

"Let's create space for the teaching of tolerance to happen," his statement said, according to The Cincinnati Enquirer. "I have faith that human beings can use a moment like this to find a way to gain understanding from one another."

Twitter, meanwhile, has suspended an account that helped the video go viral. Twitter prohibits the creation of "fake and misleading accounts," and the encounter once again demonstrated the power of social media to not just amplify but manipulate narratives, aided by bots and malicious actors out to shape public discourse.

A Twitter representative wrote in an email that "Deliberate attempts to manipulate the public conversation on Twitter by using misleading account information is a violation of the Twitter Rules." It didn't elaborate.

Newark operations resume after drone reports halt arrivals

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Flight arrivals at Newark Airport were briefly suspended Tuesday evening after a drone was spotted over another nearby airport, officials said, in the latest incident of the unmanned aircraft affecting commercial air travel.

At about 5 p.m., the Federal Aviation Administration received two reports from flights headed to Newark that they had spotted a drone about 3,500 feet (1,000 meters) over nearby Teterboro Airport. The administration said in a statement that arriving flights were held briefly but resumed after no further sightings were reported.

The airport, which serves New York City, said just after 7 p.m. that it was operating normally again. The FAA had no reports of delays at the airport on its website.

Brett Sosnik was on a United Airlines flight bound for Newark when the pilot told passengers that they would be circling in the air because of a drone spotted in Newark airspace. Sosnik, who was returning from the Bahamas, said his plane circled for about half an hour.

"I was looking around trying to find a drone in the air when we were closer to landing, but I didn't see anything," said Sosnik, a New York City resident who works in marketing. "There's got to be a way to combat that stuff and not have it affect huge airports with such a little piece of technology."

United Airlines spokesman Robert Einhorn said the impact on its operations "has been minimal so far."

London's Heathrow Airport briefly halted departing flights earlier this month after a reported drone sighting — just three weeks after multiple reports of drone sightings caused travel chaos at nearby Gatwick Airport.

In the U.S., unless the operator gets a waiver from the FAA, drones are not allowed within 5 miles (8 kilometers) of most airports, and are not supposed to fly above 400 feet (120 meters).

40 years after his "folly," Bogle's index funds reign

By STAN CHOE, AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Forty years ago, the thought of buying a stock index fund was ridiculed. Why would anyone be satisfied with an investment that promised nothing more than the same return as the market?

Later this year, however, U.S. stock index funds may for the first time control more in assets than mutual funds run by stock-picking managers trying to deliver better returns than an index like the S&P 500.

The surge in popularity for index funds is a product of their lower fees, better performance and the preaching of John Bogle, the founder of Vanguard Group, which launched the first index mutual fund for individual investors in 1976. Bogle died Jan. 16 at 89 after pushing for years to keep costs down and widen access to index funds.

Initially derided as "Bogle's folly," index funds have become the default way to invest for so many people

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that some critics now worry about unintended, market-distorting effects that could ultimately hurt investors and society.

U.S. stock index mutual funds and ETFs now control close to \$3.6 trillion, according to Morningstar. They've nearly erased the once-massive advantage held by actively managed funds, which currently have a total of \$3.77 trillion in assets.

Last year, investors pumped a net \$206.5 billion into U.S. stock index funds and pulled \$174.1 billion out of actively managed ones. Experts say sometime this year U.S. stock index funds will likely eclipse their rivals in assets. In other categories, such as bonds and foreign stocks, index funds have more catching up to do.

Yes, some actively managed funds do better than index funds every year: 36 percent did so in the 12 months through June, according to the most recent count by Morningstar. But it can be tough for investors to find the few who can do so repeatedly.

Consider an investor who wanted to put some money into the U.S. stock market a couple of years ago. She wanted to find a winner, so she looked only at the actively-managed mutual funds ranked in the top half of performance for one-year returns through September 2016.

If she picked one at random, though, she had less than a coin flip's chance of finding one able to repeat that top-half performance, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

That's not to say that fund managers aren't skilled at what they do. It's just that doing such work can be expensive, requiring lots of research and trading costs. Actively managed stock funds kept \$78 of every \$10,000 invested to cover their expenses in 2017, for example. Index funds, meanwhile, kept just \$7, according to the Investment Company Institute.

Because of that difference in expenses, actively managed funds need to perform that much better just to match the after-fee performance of index funds. That's a high hurdle.

The relentless rise in index funds' popularity, though, has raised concerns. Even Bogle acknowledged some recently. "Public policy cannot ignore this growing dominance, and consider its impact on the financial markets, corporate governance, and regulation," he wrote in the Wall Street Journal in November. "These will be major issues in the coming era."

Among the fears:

— The funds may grow to be too big, in the hands of too few companies.

A trio of companies dominates the index-fund industry: Vanguard, BlackRock and State Street Global Advisors. Critics question whether it's safe for the stock market to have so many dollars concentrated in so few hands, particularly on such issues as corporate governance.

A company's board must answer to its investors each year at annual meetings, where shareholders vote on CEO pay, environmental issues and other questions.

Supporters of index funds say they're long-term investors, and their interests are aligned with corporate-governance issues that promote long-term, sustainable returns.

— The funds will distort pricing.

An investor who puts \$100 into an S&P 500 fund today is effectively putting about \$3.70 into Microsoft and 3 cents into Campbell Soup, even if that investor thinks Campbell looks like a better buy. That's because indexes are weighted by the market size of companies, so the most valuable ones make up the biggest proportions of indexes and the index funds that track them.

But even though U.S. stock index funds may be on the precipice of controlling 50 percent of all fund investments, they control a smaller share of the overall market. Index funds and ETFs control just over 12 percent of the U.S. stock universe, BlackRock said in a 2017 report.

That leaves pension funds, hedge funds and others free to push up the stock prices of companies that deserve it and pull down prices for others.

A tipping point exists somewhere, where too much concentration in index funds would distort pricing, but analysts debate how far below 100 percent that number is.

"Absolutely, under such a scenario, chaos would result," said Ben Johnson, director of global ETF research

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at Morningstar. "I think it is ultimately something that will receive ever-greater scrutiny and rightfully so, but even with the growth of indexing, it is still a long way's off from being at that level."

— They may be riskier.

Owning an index fund means an investor experiences all the highs and lows of the index. While that feels good when markets are strong, as they've been for much of the past decade, it also exposes investors to the full fury of downdrafts, like the market experienced at the end of last year.

Many actively managed funds claim they'll hold up better than S&P 500 index funds during a down market. So do some index funds, of course, which say they follow indexes of less-volatile stocks.

In the end, researchers say what matters most in picking a fund may not be whether it follows an index or is run by a stock-picking manager, but how much in fees it charges. Having low expenses is one of the best predictors for success in investing.

It just so happens that index funds tend to have the lowest expenses.

Oscar nods honor 'Roma,' 'The Favourite,' 'Black Panther'

By JAKE COYLE, AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oscar voters on Tuesday showered Alfonso Cuarón's "Roma" and Yorgos Lanthimos' "The Favourite" with a leading 10 nominations for the 91st Academy Awards, while two dominant but contentious Hollywood forces — Netflix and Marvel — each scored their first best picture nomination.

Though many expected "A Star Is Born," Bradley Cooper's revival of one of Hollywood's most remade show business myths, to top the nominations, Cooper was surprisingly overlooked as director and the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences instead put its fullest support behind a pair of indies by international directors.

With the black-and-white, Spanish-language "Roma," Netflix scored its first best picture nomination, a prize the streaming giant has dearly sought. Marvel, too, joined the club with Ryan Coogler's "Black Panther," the first superhero movie ever nominated for best picture.

Cuarón tied the record for most decorated Oscar nominee ever for one film with four individual nods for "Roma," his deeply personal exhumation of his Mexico City childhood. Cuarón was nominated for direction, cinematography, original screenplay and best picture. Only Orson Welles ("Citizen Kane") and Warren Beatty (who did it twice with "Reds" and "Heaven Can Wait") have matched the four-nod feat.

Cuarón, previously a six-time nominee and winner for directing "Gravity," said by phone from London that the nominations for such a personal film were more meaningful to him, as was the attention for a film about a humble indigenous domestic worker (Yalitza Aparicio, who was nominated for best actress). He praised Netflix for its commitment to his film.

"Cinema needs the opportunity to be diverse," Cuarón said. "What mainstream cinema and the theatrical experience has lacked in general is diversity. And I'm talking about diversity in terms of stories and characters and ways of doing films."

Just as rewarded Tuesday was Lanthimos' period romp, which resounded most in the acting categories thanks to its trio of actresses: Olivia Colman in the best actress category, and Rachel Weisz and Emma Stone in supporting.

Along with "Roma," "Black Panther" and "The Favourite," the eight nominees for best picture were: Peter Farrelly's interracial road trip tale "Green Book," Spike Lee's white supremacist evisceration "BlacKkKlansman," the Freddie Mercury biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody," Adam McKay's highly critical Dick Cheney biopic "Vice" and "A Star Is Born," which still landed eight nominations, including best actress for Lady Gaga and best supporting actor for Sam Elliott.

"Black Panther," the year's biggest domestic box-office hit and a bona fide cultural event, finally cracked the category long kryptonite to superheroes. Despite the overwhelming popularity of comic book movies, they had previously been shunned from Hollywood's top honor to the consternation of some industry insiders. After "The Dark Knight" was snubbed in 2009, the academy expanded the best picture category from five to up to 10 nominees.

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The lush, big-budget craft of "Black Panther" was rewarded with seven total nominations, including Hannah Beachler and Jay Hart's production design, Ludwig Goransson's score, Ruth Carter's costume design and Kendrick Lamar and SZA's song "All the Stars." Beachler became the first African-American nominated for production design.

"To break down a wall like that, to be your ancestors' wildest dreams, to show other young women of color and boys and girls that you can do whatever you want no matter what struggles you have in your life — all of that. That's what it means to me," said Beachler, talking by phone from the Cincinnati set of Todd Haynes' latest.

There has likewise been resistance among some academy members to awarding Netflix films since the company typically bypasses movie theaters. Steven Spielberg has said Netflix films are more like TV movies and deserve an Emmy, not an Oscar. Netflix altered its policy for "Roma" and the Coen brothers' "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs" (which earned three unexpected nods), premiering them first in theaters before debuting them on Netflix. In turn, it was rewarded with a 15 nominations overall, second only to Disney's 17.

Three decades after landing a writing nod for 1989's "Do the Right Thing," Spike Lee was nominated for his first directing Oscar for "BlacKkKlansman."

"Thirty years is a long time, ain't it?" Lee said by phone Tuesday with a hearty laugh. The 61-year-old filmmaker lamented the oversight of his lead actor, John David Washington, whom he consoled with a prediction of future awards: "Young blood, you'll be here." But Lee took pride in his film's six nominations, and he likes his odds.

"BlacKkKlansman' is the dark horse — pun intended," said Lee, cackling. "You know what? That's fitting. I've always been an underdog, from the very beginning, from film school. That narrative has not changed. And I like that position."

The other directing nominees were Lanthimos, Cuarón, Pawel Pawlikowski ("Cold War") and McKay ("Vice") — a field that, a year after continued focus on gender inequality in Hollywood, included no female directors. Some had campaigned for Debra Granik ("Leave No Trace") or Chloe Zhao ("The Rider") to become the sixth woman ever nominated for best director.

The nominations, announced by Kumail Nanjani and Tracee Ellis Ross from the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Beverly Hills, California, included plenty of surprises. In a blockbuster year for documentaries, the Fred Rogers documentary "Won't You Be My Neighbor" was snubbed despite more than \$22 million in ticket sales (a huge sum for a doc). Instead the nominees were "Free Solo," "Hale County This Morning, This Evening," "Minding the Gap," "Of Fathers and Sons" and the Ruth Bader Ginsberg portrait "RBG."

The acting categories played out largely as expected with a few notable differences. Along with Lady Gaga, Colman and Aparicio, the best lead actress nominees were Glenn Close ("The Wife") and Melissa McCarthy ("Can You Ever Forgive Me?").

In best actor, the expected front runner Christian Bale was nominated for his transformation into Cheney in "Vice" (Bale's fourth Oscar nod), along with Cooper, Willem Dafoe ("At Eternity's Gate"), Rami Malek ("Bohemian Rhapsody") and Viggo Mortensen ("Green Book").

The nominees for best supporting actress were Amy Adams ("Vice"), Marina De Tavira ("Roma"), Regina King ("If Beale Street Could Talk"), along with Stone and Weisz. Tavira was something a surprise, likely unseating Claire Foy of "First Man."

But perhaps the biggest acting snub came in best supporting actor, where Timothée Chalamet, who broke through last year with "Call Me by Your Name," was left out for his drug addict turn in "Beautiful Boy." Nominated were previous winner Mahershala Ali ("Green Book"), Adam Driver ("BlacKkKlansman"), Richard E. Grant ("Can You Ever Forgive Me?") and Sam Rockwell ("Vice"), who won the trophy last year.

With nominees like "The Favourite," "Can You Ever Forgive Me," "Green Book" and "Bohemian Rhapsody," GLAAD president Sarah Kate Ellis called it "a banner year for LGBTQ inclusion."

Some Oscar regulars padded their career tallies. Joel and Ethan Coen notched their seventh screenwriting nomination. Close, never a winner, landed her seventh acting nod. Costume designer Sandy Powell

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received her 13th and 14th nominations, for "The Favourite" and "Mary Poppins Returns." But the nominees were also crowded with first-timers, including new performers (Aparicio) and veteran ones (Grant, Elliott, Colman, King). Paul Schrader, the 72-year-old "Taxi Driver" scribe, was nominated for his first Oscar for the script to his religious thriller "First Reformed."

The lead-up to Tuesday's nominations was rocky for both the film academy and some of the contending movies. Shortly after being announced as host, comedian Kevin Hart was forced to withdraw over years-old homophobic tweets that the comedian eventually apologized for. That has left the Oscars, one month before the Feb. 24 ceremony, without an emcee, and likely to stay that way.

Some film contenders, like "Green Book" and the Freddie Mercury biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody," have suffered waves of backlash, even as their awards have mounted. Before landing five nominations Tuesday, "Green Book" — which has been criticized for relying on racial tropes — won the top award from the Producers Guild, an honor that has been a reliable Oscar barometer. In the 10 years since the Oscars expanded its best-picture ballot, the PGA winner has gone on to win best picture eight times.

Last year's Oscar telecast was watched by a record low of 26.5 million viewers. This year will at least feature a number of popular nominees, including "Black Panther," "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "A Star Is Born." Just how many people have seen "Roma," though, remains a mystery. Netflix doesn't release box office receipts or streaming viewership.

It's also an unusually international crop of nominees. It's only the second time that directors from two foreign language films were nominated for best director (Cuaron and Poland's Pawlikowski). "Roma" is aiming to be the first foreign language film to win best picture. Some of that could potentially be attributed to a changing academy, which has greatly expanded its ranks in recent years to diversify its membership, including more overseas members.

Up for best foreign language film are "Roma," "Cold War," "Capernaum" (Lebanon), "Never Look Away" (Germany) and the Palme d'Or winner, "Shoplifters" (Japan).

A year after taking home best picture with "The Shape of Water," Fox Searchlight tied Netflix with 15 nominations, even as Searchlight and its parent studio, 20th Century Fox, are in the process of being acquired by the Walt Disney Co. If their releases counted under Disney, the new mega-studio would have dwarfed all studios with 37 nominations.

AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

For full coverage of the Oscars, visit: <https://apnews.com/AcademyAwards>

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2019. There are 342 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 23, 1845, Congress decided all national elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

On this date:

In 1368, China's Ming dynasty, which lasted nearly three centuries, began as Zhu Yuanzhang was formally acclaimed emperor following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty.

In 1789, Georgetown University was established in present-day Washington, D.C.

In 1932, New York Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1933, the 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the so-called "Lame Duck Amendment," was ratified as Missouri approved it.

In 1950, the Israeli Knesset approved a resolution affirming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

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In 1962, Jackie Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. Tony Bennett recorded "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" in New York for Columbia Records.

In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution, eliminating the poll tax in federal elections, was ratified as South Dakota became the 38th state to endorse it.

In 1968, North Korea seized the U.S. Navy intelligence ship USS Pueblo, commanded by Lloyd "Pete" Bucher, charging its crew with being on a spying mission; one sailor was killed and 82 were taken prisoner. (Cmdr. Bucher and his crew were released the following December after enduring 11 months of brutal captivity at the hands of the North Koreans.)

In 1978, rock musician Terry Kath, a key member of the group Chicago, accidentally shot himself to death following a party in Woodland Hills, California; he was 31.

In 1989, surrealist artist Salvador Dali died in his native Figueres, Spain, at age 84.

In 1998, a judge in Fairfax, Virginia, sentenced Aimal Khan Kasi (eye-MAHL' kahn KAH'-see) to death for an assault rifle attack outside CIA headquarters in 1993 that killed two men and wounded three other people. (Kasi was executed in November 2002.)

In 2005, former "Tonight Show" host Johnny Carson died in Los Angeles at age 79.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama quietly ended the Bush administration's ban on giving federal money to international groups that performed abortions or provided information on the option. New York Gov. David Paterson chose Democratic Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (KEHR'-sten JIL'-uh-brand) to fill the Senate seat vacated by Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Five years ago: Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered immediate actions to define the depth of trouble inside the nation's nuclear force, which had been rocked by disclosures about security lapses, poor discipline, weak morale and other problems. A fire at a seniors' home in L'Isle-Verte, Quebec, Canada, killed 32 people. Pop star Justin Bieber was arrested in Miami Beach, Florida, on charges of driving under the influence, resisting arrest and driving with an expired license. (Bieber later pleaded guilty to careless driving and resisting arrest under a deal that spared him jail time.)

One year ago: An early-morning shooting at a high school in Benton, Kentucky, left two 15-year-old students dead and more than a dozen others injured; authorities charged a 15-year-old classmate with murder and assault. LeBron James, at 33, became the youngest player in NBA history with 30,000 career points, reaching that mark during the Cleveland Cavaliers' 114-102 loss to the San Antonio Spurs; he was the seventh player to score that many points in his career. "The Shape of Water" led the way with 13 Academy Award nominations, including one for best picture.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Chita Rivera is 86. Actor-director Lou Antonio is 85. Jazz musician Gary Burton is 76. Actor Gil Gerard is 76. Actor Rutger Hauer is 75. Rhythm-and-blues singer Jerry Lawson is 75. Sen. Thomas R. Carper, D-Del., is 72. Singer Anita Pointer is 71. Actor Richard Dean Anderson is 69. Rock musician Bill Cunningham is 69. Rock singer Robin Zander (Cheap Trick) is 66. Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (vee-yah-ry-GOH'-sah) is 66. Princess Caroline of Monaco is 62. Singer Anita Baker is 61. Reggae musician Earl Falconer (UB40) is 60. Actor Boris McGiver is 57. Actress Gail O'Grady is 56. Actress Mariska Hargitay is 55. Rhythm-and-blues singer Marc Nelson is 48. TV host Norah O'Donnell is 45. Actress Tiffani Thiessen is 45. Rock musician Nick Harmer (Death Cab for Cutie) is 44. Actress Lindsey Kraft is 39. Christian rock musician Nick DePartee (Kutless) is 34. Singer-actress Rachel Crow is 21.

Thought for Today: "The trouble is that hardly anybody in America goes to bed angry at night." — George J. Stigler, American economist (1911-1991).