

## Groton Area Schedule of Events

### Friday, February 8, 2019

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg High School  
Faculty Inservice - No School

Doubleheader Basketball with Warner in Groton. (7th Grade boys @ 4pm; 8th Grade boys @ 5pm Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5 p.m., Varsity girls at 6:30 p.m. followed by Varsity boys game.)

### Saturday, February 9, 2019

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg High School  
Robotics at Douglas High School

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

2:00pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Double Header vs. Moberidge-Pollock Schools @ Moberidge-Pollock High School (JV Girls & JV Boys games at 2pm (Both at same time) Varsity Girls at 3:30pm Varsity Boys at 5:30pm)

### Sunday, February 10, 2019

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

### Monday, February 11, 2019

5:00pm: School Board Meeting

5:15pm: Basketball: Boys C Game vs. Aberdeen Roncalli @ Aberdeen Roncalli High School followed by JV and varsity

### Tuesday, February 12, 2019

6:30pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game vs. Webster Area High School @ Groton Area High School

### Thursday, February 14, 2019

LifeTouch Pictures Groton Area Elementary School, Groton Area High School

4:00pm: Basketball: Boys 7th/8th Game vs. Redfield-Doland @ Redfield Jr-Sr High School(7th Grade @ 4pm; 8th Grade @ 5pm)

6:30pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game @ Milbank

6:30pm: Basketball: Boys Varsity Game @ Langford

- 2- GDILIVE.COM - Warner
- 3- GDILIVE.COM - Moberidge-Pollock
- 3- Groton Care & Rehab Help Wanted Ads
- 4- Thinking About Health Column
- 6- SD News Watch: Thousands of SD Children are trapped in poverty
- 12- Today in Weather History
- 13-14 Weather Pages
- 15- Daily Devotional
- 16- 2019 Groton Events
- 17- News from the Associated Press

## 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.

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## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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It's Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Warner  
Monarchs**



**VS**

**Groton Area Tigers**

Friday, Feb. 8, 2019

Girls Game at 6:30 p.m., Boys Game at 8:00 p.m.  
at Groton Area Arena

**Broadcast Sponsored by**

**Allied Climate Professionals**

**Bahr Spray Foam**

**Blocker Construction**

**Doug Abeln Seed Company**

**James Valley Seed - Doug Jorgensen**

**John Sieh Agency**

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**Professional Management Services, Inc.**

**Sanford Health**

**Tyson DeHoet Trucking**

**Weber Landscaping**

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It's Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Mobridge-  
Pollock Tigers**



**VS**

**Groton Area Tigers**

Saturday, Feb. 9, 2019

Girls Game at 3:30 p.m., Boys Game at 5:00 p.m.  
at the Mobridge-Pollock Arena

Broadcast of this game is sponsored by

**Aberdeen**  
**Chrysler Center**

901 Auto Plaza Drive  
Aberdeen, SD

**800.874.9173**

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## Cook/ Dietary Aide

Flexible schedule  
and new wage  
scale.

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**HELP  
WANTED**

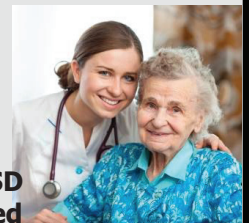


**GROTON**  
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

1106 North Second Street  
605.397.2365

## HELP WANTED

### Director of Nursing



Current RN licensure in SD  
BSN/MSN degree preferred  
Sign on bonus available  
Full benefits included.

Contact Brynn Pickrel



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## THINKING ABOUT HEALTH

### Health care, other income issues combine to complicate life for retirees

By Trudy Lieberman, Rural Health News Service

Not long ago, the news site ProPublica published an important story about employers who, in their quest for a younger and cheaper workforce, were pushing out “older” workers – often those in their early 50s. Crunching data from the Urban Institute, reporters found that 28 percent of stable, long-time employees sustain at least one damaging layoff between turning 50 and leaving the workforce for retirement.

While the story was about the financial impacts on laid-off workers’ savings and retirement, it was also about a lot more. It was also about health care – the kind those workers would be able to afford during their forced early retirement and then during their more traditional retirement after age 65.

Health coverage presents a short- and a long-term problem. While some of those laid off workers might be offered insurance for a limited time, paying the high coinsurance, deductibles, and copays – not to mention surprise bills from out-of-network providers – is challenging when salary disappears or is reduced.

The Commonwealth Fund, a New York City philanthropic organization, presented some troubling study results last fall. The Fund teamed up with researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health and the New York Times and looked at a sample of seriously ill people. Even with insurance, more than one-third of respondents had used up all or most of their savings while sick. High deductibles, copayments, and treatments their insurance did not cover caused them to deplete their savings.

“What’s staggering here is there is no way people could know what they would be in for,” said Harvard professor Robert Blendon. “They don’t know what their insurance covers. The consequences for people are quite extraordinary.”

People in the Commonwealth Fund study who exhausted their savings because of illness face more financial hurdles as they approach Medicare age.

“Most households with workers nearing retirement won’t be able to maintain their living standard in retirement, based on our analysis of government statistics,” says Teresa Ghilarducci, professor of economics and retirement at The New School in New York City.

Ghilarducci runs The New School’s Retirement Equity Lab, which recently blogged about other disturbing news. Changes in the job market over the past 30 years have reduced older workers’ bargaining power. The Equity Lab found that older workers most likely would have to take money out of their 401(k) plans before retirement simply to meet living expenses. What’s more, many will have to find a new job, but that job will pay on average 25 percent less.

The Equity Lab reported if workers now between ages 50 and 60 retire at age 62, projections indicate that 8.5 million will be impoverished.

What happens when those tossed out of work early reach Medicare age? Many readers of these columns have told me they are just hanging on until they turn 65 when Medicare will pay their medical bills.

What they don’t realize is that in the early 2000s Congress passed legislation to make Medicare ben-

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eficiaries pay more for their benefits. It was part of the "more skin in the game" approach to controlling medical costs.

Rather than taking strong measures to curb health care inflation, Congress decided that beneficiaries who had to dig more deeply into their own pockets to pay medical bills would not use as many services. That was the theory, at least.

The 2003 law that gave seniors the drug benefit also called for income-related premiums for Medicare Part B, the benefits that pay for doctors and outpatient services. The Affordable Care Act required income-related premiums for the drug benefit. The higher the income, the more you pay.

Now single people with gross incomes over \$85,000 and couples with incomes over \$170,000 pay higher premiums. Only wealthier beneficiaries are paying the higher premiums right now, but proposals keep popping up that would require people with incomes as low as \$40,000 to pay a larger share of their monthly premiums for Medicare.

At the same time, good pension plans that would provide monthly payments in retirement have disappeared in favor of 401(k) plans, retirement savings plans that let workers save part of their paychecks before taxes are withheld. "For people approaching retirement now, the median account balance in a 401(k) is only \$15,000 for those 55 to 64," Ghilarducci told me.

The shifts in the country's financial security arrangements and health coverage resulted from major policy changes the public knew little about. It will take major policy changes to reverse what is happening.

"There will be a lot of downward mobility," Ghilarducci predicts. "It can invite a political backlash that we haven't seen in generations."

How has your family been affected? Write to Trudy at [trudy.lieberman@gmail.com](mailto:trudy.lieberman@gmail.com).





## **Thousands of South Dakota children are trapped in poverty**

**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](http://www.sdnewswatch.org).

More than 40,000 South Dakota children, from infants to teenagers, live in families with incomes low enough to qualify for the federal food stamp program, creating challenges for a fruitful childhood and a prosperous adult life.

The number of children in South Dakota families receiving aid in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program rose by 47 percent from 2007 to 2017.

Even with some recent improvements, the number of children living on food stamps is on a significant long-term rise in South Dakota.

Studies show that people who grow up in poverty can face educational, social and health challenges in childhood and adulthood.

About 42,265 children lived on food stamps last year. The number of children on food stamps in South Dakota spiked to nearly 50,000 during and after the Great Recession of 2008. But as the rest of the state and nation have mostly bounced back, the food stamp data show that lower-income families have been largely left out of the economic recovery.

"When the recession hit, it just pushed them all into that abyss and they could no longer make ends meet," said Matt Gassen, CEO of Feeding South Dakota, the largest charity food provider in the state. "There's an even bigger portion of those who didn't make it out of poverty and are still behind."

The jump in food stamp enrollment since the mid-2000s came as other child poverty indicators also ticked upward in the state, according to a recent report compiled by South Dakota KIDS COUNT, an outreach center at the University of South Dakota.

The review showed an increase in eligibility in the National School Lunch Program for low-income students and a significant rise in the number of children in families qualifying for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program during that period.

The income, wage and government assistance data from South Dakota mirrors a national trend over the past decade in which childhood poverty increased. Between 2005 and 2017, 46 of 50 states saw a jump in the percentage of children in families that received some type of public assistance. In 2005, fewer than one in five American children lived in a family receiving public assistance, while last year that figure had risen to one in four, about 18.6 million children in all, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Despite some recent improvements, the nation continues to grapple with helping what researchers recently called a "stubbornly high" number of children in poverty.



**George Rokusek, western operations manager for Feeding South Dakota, stands among food products that will be placed into bags that fit into backpacks of needy children. Rokusek said the backpack program foods are chosen specifically so children of working parents can easily prepare and consume them without adult assistance.** Photo:

Bart Pfankuch

## Small gains, but poverty still nags

The most recent enrollment numbers for SNAP show slight declines in South Dakota. Enrollment in the SNAP program has dropped slightly in each of the past five years in South Dakota, according to Tia Kafka, spokeswoman for the Department of Social Services that administers the federal food stamps program.

Federal data show that 40,882 South Dakota households qualified for SNAP benefits in 2018, compared to 41,982 in 2017 and 42,705 in 2016. The number of children 17 or younger in those families fell accordingly during that time period, from 46,184 in 2016 to 42,265 last year.

Meanwhile, Gov. Kristi Noem said during her budget address in January that the state saw a drop last year in the number of people receiving benefits under some programs supported by the Medicaid program funded the state and federal governments.

Yet major challenges remain for thousands of families with children in South Dakota.

In an email to News Watch, Kafka said the SNAP program "helps families stretch limited budgets, improves nutrition and reduces the risk of diet-related health problems."

Individuals and families qualify for food stamp benefits based if their gross income is under 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. A single person would qualify with an annual income of \$15,800 or less, while a family of four qualifies with a total annual income of \$32,640 or less.

Participants also cannot have bank accounts above \$2,250 but can have a home and vehicle.

About two-thirds of SNAP recipients in South Dakota are children, elderly or disabled. The monthly benefits, which are based on nutritional need guidelines and family size, cannot be used to buy alcohol, tobacco, dry goods or household items, pet supplies, vitamins or medicines or take-out foods. In 2018, about \$11 million a month in food stamps were issued in South Dakota, or roughly \$130 million for the year, with an average payment of about \$275 per family per month.

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The premise behind food stamps is that obtaining nutritional food is critical to the viability of families and children, Kafka said. "Balanced nutrition is certainly important to child well-being, including physical health and cognitive development," she wrote.

Georgia Christensen of Sioux Falls wants to welcome her new baby into a stable environment and couldn't do that without aid from SNAP and other government programs.

Christensen has a learning disability that makes it tough to hold a job; she said she lost her \$11-an-hour position cleaning offices last year because her boss said she moved too slowly. Her husband is also out of work.

Together, they are raising a teenage girl and have a baby due this month. Christensen said she isn't sure how the family would get by without her \$252 monthly food stamp allotment and the \$741 monthly disability payment she receives from Social Security.

"It helps my family to get food because sometimes we don't have the money to grocery shop," said Christensen, who uses her food stamps all at once and tries to scrimp, plan meals for the month and visit local food pantries if necessary. "We run out towards the end of the month. It's a struggle, and I do worry."

Christensen, 34, was born in Winner, S.D., and grew up in Nebraska where she dropped out of high school at 16 and later returned to South Dakota. Her mother was on food stamps while she was growing up, she said.

"I don't think people understand what it's like to need food stamps," she said. "Some people say that you guys are just living off the government or are too lazy to work, and that's not true. There's some people who can't work or are disabled and they need the benefits."

Christensen has no savings and receives medical benefits through Medicaid. She said her hopes for the future are limited by her inability to land and hold down a good job. "What I hope for in life," she said, "is I hope that we can make it."

## ENROLLMENT IN FOOD STAMP PROGRAM AMONG S.D. CHILDREN

Despite some recent improvements, the number of children living on food stamps is on a long-term rise in South Dakota. While the numbers spiked during the Great Recession, this chart shows that low-income families have not fully participated in the recovery.

Age	2007	2012	2017	10-year inc.
0-4	11,539	17,863	14,411	25%
5-13	13,699	24,502	22,763	66%
14-17	4,457	6,788	6,565	47%
Total	29,695	49,153	43,739	47%

Source: South Dakota KIDS COUNT



## Effects of poverty wide-ranging

A variety of studies by universities and child advocacy groups show evidence that children face numerous challenges when their family lives below the federal poverty line.

Studies over the years have indicated that children in low-income or food-challenged families do worse in school, are prone to sleep disorders, have a tendency toward anxiety, are less likely to participate in organized sports or recreational activities and receive lower quality child care at home or at centers outside the home. As they grow up, children raised in poverty have a higher rate of criminal activity, a lower rate of degree attainment, earn lower wages later in life and can be prone to obesity due to difficulty in affording healthier food.

Children in low-income families face a host of challenges not endured by those from wealthier families, according to a study released last month by the National Center for Children in Poverty, which is part of the Columbia University school of public health.

"Children are also more likely to suffer the material hardships associated with living in poverty: the anxiety, depression and constant stress of being financially vulnerable leaves a lasting mark on children as they grow to adulthood, affecting earning potential and health outcomes," wrote Heather Koball, director of family economic security for the group.

The study contained some good news on poverty trends. The center found that the number of poor children has declined slightly over the past few years.

On the positive side, the group found that overall the number of poor children fell from 44.9 percent of the population, or 33.2 million children, in 2010 to 41.2 percent, or 29.8 million children, in 2016.

The number of children living in "deep poverty," or at only 50 percent of the national poverty income threshold, fell by about 2 million from 2010 to 2016, the group reported.

However, some findings from the group painted a bleaker picture, including that child poverty numbers remain "stubbornly high" across the country. The group found that the younger a child is, the more likely they are to live in poverty. The group reported that children whose parents work full time and have college degrees are less likely to live in poverty. The report also indicated that poverty rates among children had not fallen significantly in many minority communities, including Native Americans.

Gassen, of Feeding South Dakota, said some people have a misimpression of what poor people in the state look like.

"Poverty doesn't look like a ghetto or a Third World country in South Dakota; it's here and it's everywhere," Gassen said. "It could be the child at the playground, the neighbor coming home from work or the parents and child you sit next to in church on Sundays."

Gassen said his group – which distributed 13.6 million pounds of food to needy people in fiscal 2017 — has seen a steady increase in the demand for nutritional food for low-income adults and children in South Dakota in recent years.

The need among children spikes during summer and holiday breaks when children aren't being fed at school. To help low-income children, the group distributed about 191,000 bags of food that fit into backpacks and can easily be made without adult supervision, up from roughly 182,000 given out the prior year.

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The recent federal government shutdown sent a scare through food stamp recipients and charities that provide food.

During the shutdown, the government issued February food stamp allotments in late January, about three weeks earlier than usual.

As a result, fears have risen that there may be a food stamp gap in late February and early March that causes a rush on pantries and desperation among families.

If another shutdown occurs soon, things will get even tighter for families on SNAP as they try to balance food needs and availability of benefits, said George Rokusek, western operations manager for Feeding South Dakota.

"They'll be in uncharted waters if that happens," Rokusek said. "Nobody knows if those March [SNAP] funds will come through and that's a very scary thing."

**Lisa Henley of Summerset, S.D., received a cart full of food from the Feeding South Dakota pantry in Rapid City recently. Henley, 39, is a mother of two who enrolled in the food stamp program after she broke her wrist and lost her job as a waitress.**

Photo: Bart Pfankuch



## Low wages, disabilities hold families back

Cathy Brechtelsbauer of Sioux Falls, state coordinator for Bread for the World, a group that fights hunger, said low-income families in South Dakota were hit hard by the Great Recession of 2008 and continue to be hurt by stagnant wages that haven't kept up with inflation.

"This whole time since that recession, we've never seen a great recovery among the lower incomes," Brechtelsbauer said. "People have gotten jobs, but it's not like incomes have picked up at that lower range."

A recent News Watch analysis of wages in South Dakota showed that the state has the third-lowest average wage in the nation and that a great number of state residents who are employed full time are struggling to get by. According to federal Department of Labor data from 2017, roughly 21 percent of em-

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ployed South Dakota residents, about 87,000 people, make under \$30,000 a year; 41 percent of employed South Dakota residents, about 169,400 people, make under \$35,000 a year, and 71 percent of employed South Dakota residents, about 292,000 people, make under \$40,000 a year.

"People are working but the wages are still hardly covering their expenses," Brechtelsbauer said.

Lisa Henley's two children are well aware that their family is on government assistance, and the realization for them is painful.

The stress and stigma of poverty rise to the surface when they go to school and notice how their peers dress or when they sleep over at a friend's home and see the abundance of technology, toys and food not present in their own home.

Her 9-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son know that their mother is just getting by and that their daily meals are provided through food stamps and trips to food pantries, she said.

"It affects them a lot," said Henley, 39, who lives in Summerset in southwestern Meade County. "It's hard for me and them when I have to tell them, 'Sorry, honey, I can't afford that right now.'"

Henley has recently worked as a waitress and pizza shop employee but became unemployed when she slipped in the shower and broke her wrist.

"It's a wage issue but it's also a 'people don't want to work' issue," Henley said of the high SNAP numbers in South Dakota.

Even when she worked both jobs, Henley made so little that she qualified for the federal food stamps program. She receives about \$400 a month in SNAP benefits, which helps but doesn't provide full food stability. "Things cost so much that it never goes far enough," she said.

Henley visits charity food pantries from Rapid City to Sturgis to stock up on staples when food stamps fall short. On a recent day, she visited the Rapid City food bank run by Feeding South Dakota, which allows clients to get a cart full of goods once every two months.

She gathered up bread and English muffins, fruits, frozen meats and a bag of nearly outdated chocolate truffles.

"We'll eat just about whatever we can get, wherever we can get it," she said.



## 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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## Today in Weather History

February 8, 2000: A very warm airmass was over central and northeast South Dakota where record highs were set in Aberdeen, Pierre, and Sisseton. Aberdeen rose to 62 degrees, Sisseton rose to 53 degrees, and Pierre rose to a warm 69 degrees.

1956: From February 1-8, heavy snow fell over the Panhandle of Texas. Snowfall amounts include 43 inches in Vega, 24 inches in Hereford, and 14 inches in Amarillo. This storm caused 23 deaths and numerous injuries. It snowed continuously for 92 hours in some locations.

1968: The highest 1-day snow at the Savannah Airport in South Carolina occurs on this date when 3.6 inches of snow fell.

1989: Mammoth traffic jams in Los Angeles area as freak snow struck California. Snow was reported from the beaches of Malibu to the desert around Palm Springs.

2013: A nor'easter produced heavy snowfall over the New England states. Total snowfall in Boston, Massachusetts, reached 24.9 inches, the fifth-highest total ever recorded in the city. New York City officially recorded 11.4 inches of snow at Central Park, and Portland, Maine, set a record of 31.9 inches. Hamden, Connecticut recorded the highest snowfall of the storm at 40 inches. Many surrounding cities picked up at least 1 foot. In addition to the significant snowfall totals, hurricane-force wind gusts were recorded, reaching 102 mph in Nova Scotia, 89 mph at Mount Desert Rock, Maine, and 84 mph off the coast of Cutchunk, Massachusetts. Boston experienced a storm surge of 4.2 ft. The storm affected Atlantic Canada after hitting the Northeastern United States.

1835 - A severe cold wave gripped the southeastern U.S. The mercury dipped to 8 above at Jacksonville FL, and to zero at Savannah GA. Orange trees were killed to the roots. (David Ludlum)

1936 - The temperature at Denver CO plunged to a record 30 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1985 - Blue Canyon, CA, set a 24-hour February snowfall record by receiving 42 inches of snow from February 7th-8th.

1987 - A powerful storm produced blizzard conditions in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 86 mph at Janesville WI and Cleveland OH received 12 inches of snow. North winds of 50 to 70 mph raised the water level of southern Lake Michigan two feet, and produced waves 12 to 18 feet high, causing seven million dollars damage along the Chicago area shoreline. It was the most damage caused by shoreline flooding and erosion in the history of the city of Chicago. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. Hibbing MN reported a morning low of 30 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm over California produced snow from the beaches of Malibu to the desert canyons around Palm Springs, and the snow created mammoth traffic jams in the Los Angeles Basin. Sixteen cities in the western U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Marysville CA reported an all-time record low reading of 21 degrees above zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

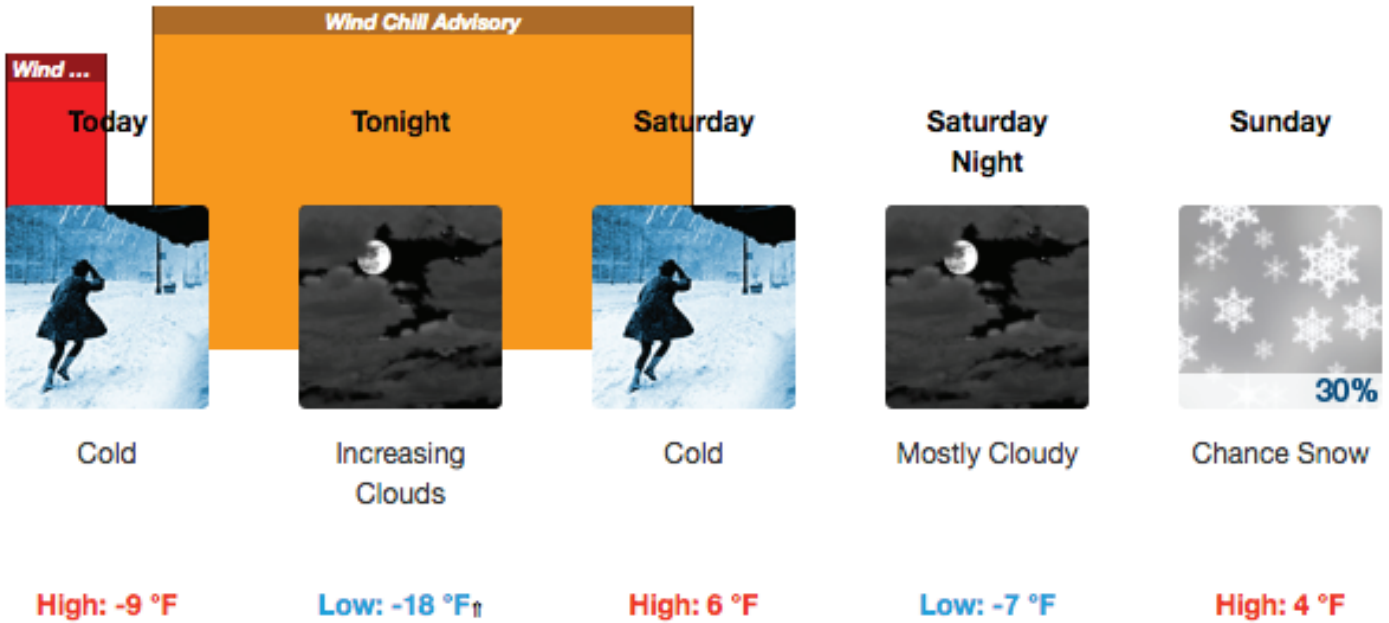
1990 - Unseasonably mild weather prevailed across the south central and eastern U.S. Twenty-two cities, including five in Michigan, reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 53 degrees at Flint MI surpassed their previous record by ten degrees, and the high of 66 degrees at Burlington IA exceeded their old record by eight degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2009 - Snow falls at levels above elevations of 11,000 feet on the Big Island's Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The Weather Doctor



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### Bitterly Cold to Dangerous Wind Chills into Saturday Morning!

Although wind chills improve this afternoon, they will drop again tonight.

Frostbite possible in 10 minutes or less this Morning & in 30 minutes or less for portions of this afternoon into Saturday Morning

#### EXTREME COLD

NWS Aberdeen, SD  
Updated: 2/8/2019 5:22 AM Central

#### Lowest Wind Chills this Morning

#### Lowest Wind Chills Saturday Morning

Published on: 02/08/2019 at 5:30AM

Bitterly Cold to Dangerous Wind Chills will improve during the later morning to afternoon hours, before Wind Chills fall again tonight into Saturday morning.



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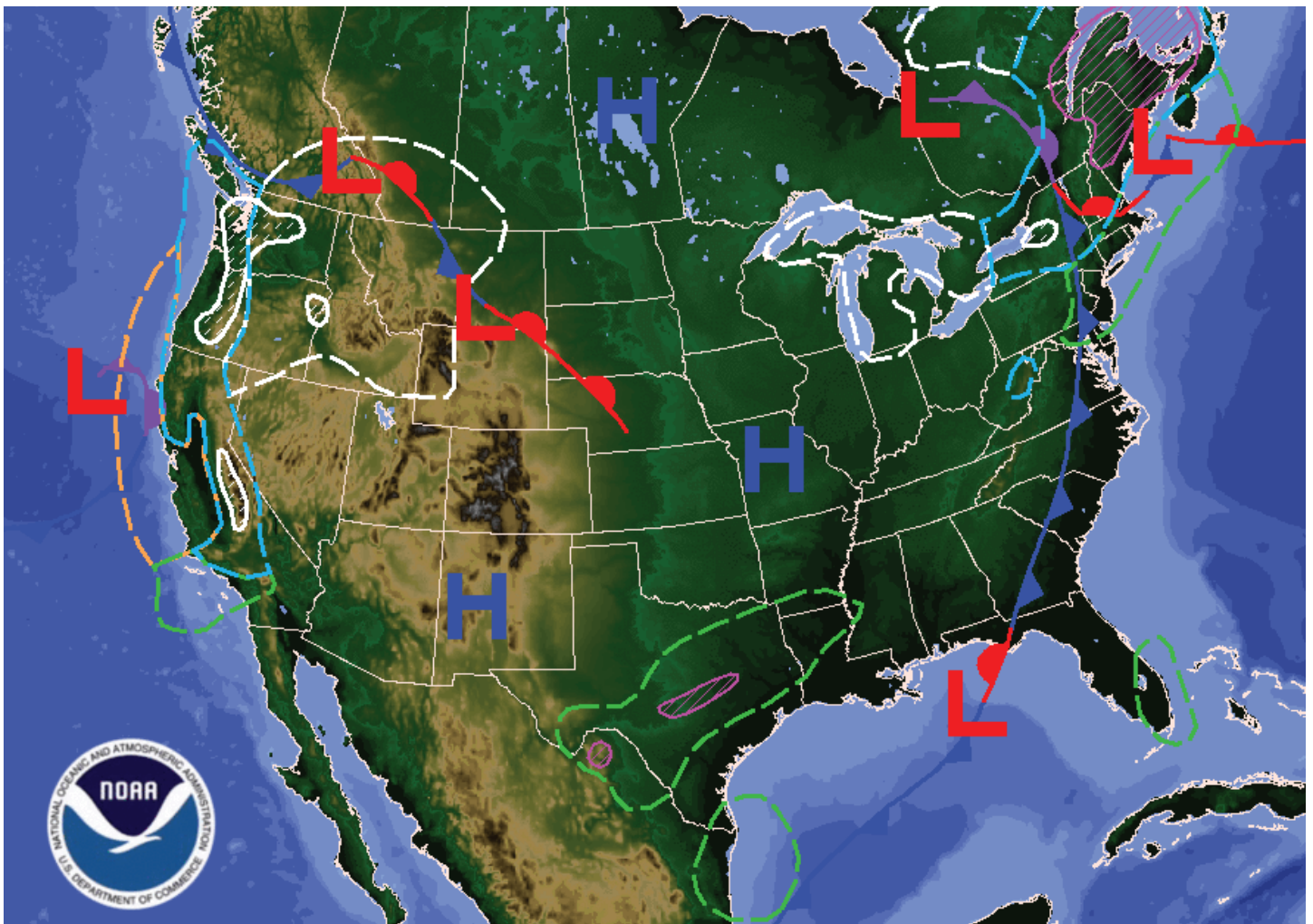
## Yesterday's Weather

**High Outside Temp: -3 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Low Outside Temp: -12 °F at 10:28 PM**  
**High Gust: 32 mph at 10:36 AM**

**Precip:**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 62 in 2000**  
**Record Low: -46 in 1895**  
**Average High: 26°F**  
**Average Low: 5°F**  
**Average Precip in Feb.: 0.11**  
**Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.58**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.09**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:51 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44 a.m.**



### Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Feb 08, 2019, issued 4:54 AM EST  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

**Rain**  
**Rain and T'Storms**  
**Rain and Snow**  
**Snow**

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

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## HUMILITY

A visitor to a monastery asked the monk who greeted him the main ministry of his order.

Offering the visitor a gracious smile he said, "Well, when it comes to learning and teaching, we cannot compare to the Jesuits. When it comes to good works, we certainly cannot match the Franciscans. And when it comes to preaching we are far below the Dominicans. But when it comes to humility we are at the top of the list."

The apostle Peter is well known for his boldness for his Lord. Yet he once wrote, "You young men...serve each other with humility, for God sets Himself against the proud, but He shows favor to the humble."

We often think that position and status are the marks of greatness. It is normal to want recognition for the things that we do. But here Peter reminds us that in the final analysis, we must remember that God's recognition and approval count more than all of the human praise we may ever get.

In His own time God will honor and bless us for what we do to honor and bless Him. It is not the things that we do to draw attention to ourselves that matter to God. It is what we do that draws attention to His love that reflects His goodness and grace, mercy and salvation. In the end, it's all about Him!

Prayer: Lord, let us look for every opportunity to let others know that You are the "main attraction" in our lives. May what we do point others to Christ our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: 1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

## 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
- 06/13/2019 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

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News from the  Associated Press

## Thursday's Scores By The Associated Press

### BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

#### POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

Aberdeen Central vs. Brookings, ppd.  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian vs. Freeman Academy/Marion, ppd.  
Arlington vs. Dell Rapids St. Mary, ppd.  
Clark/Willow Lake vs. Aberdeen Roncalli, ppd.  
Colman-Egan vs. Lake Preston, ppd.  
Corsica/Stickney vs. Freeman, ppd.  
Douglas vs. Hill City, ppd.  
Dupree vs. Jones County, ccd.  
Elkton-Lake Benton vs. Deubrook, ppd.  
Ethan vs. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, ppd. to Feb 8th.  
Faith vs. Rapid City Christian, ppd.  
Hulett, Wyo. vs. Edgemont, ppd.  
Ipswich vs. Sunshine Bible Academy, ccd.  
Langford vs. Castlewood, ccd.  
Lemmon vs. Flasher, N.D., ppd. to Feb 16th.  
Luverne, Minn. vs. Flandreau Indian, ppd.  
McLaughlin vs. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, ppd.  
Potter County vs. Faulkton, ppd. to Feb 18th.  
Santee, Neb. vs. Takini, ccd.  
Sioux Falls Christian vs. Western Christian, Iowa, ccd.  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt vs. Mitchell, ppd.  
Stanley County vs. White River, ppd.  
Wolsey-Wessington vs. DeSmet, ppd. to Feb 22nd.

### GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

#### POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

Andes Central/Dakota Christian vs. Freeman Academy/Marion, ppd.  
Britton-Hecla vs. Milbank, ccd.  
Brookings vs. Aberdeen Central, ppd.  
Clark/Willow Lake vs. Aberdeen Roncalli, ppd.  
Crazy Horse vs. Bison, ppd. to Feb 16th.  
Edgemont vs. Hulett, Wyo., ppd.  
Edmunds Central vs. Herreid/Selby Area, ppd. to Feb 9th.  
Great Plains Lutheran vs. Florence/Henry, ppd.  
Kadoka Area vs. Todd County, ppd. to Feb 15th.  
Parkston vs. Freeman, ppd.  
Santee, Neb. vs. Takini, ccd.  
Sturgis Brown vs. Douglas, ppd.  
Tiospa Zina Tribal vs. Deuel, ppd. to Feb 11th.

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

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## Winter storm closes schools, highways in Upper Midwest

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A wintry mix of snow, sleet and gusty winds caused power outages and forced the closure of schools and interstate highways Thursday in parts of the Upper Midwest.

In North Dakota, Grand Fork and Cass county courthouses and offices closed Thursday as well as North Dakota State University and dozens of other schools.

Snowplows were pulled from highways in eastern North Dakota on Thursday evening, but are expected to resume plowing early Friday, state transportation officials said.

A foot of snow has fallen in Fargo, the National Weather Service reported. In western Minnesota, Ada has received 11 inches (27.9 centimeters) while Mahanomen reports 8 inches (20 centimeters). In north-central South Dakota, Eureka reported just over 10 inches (25 centimeters).

The North Dakota Department of Transportation has closed sections of interstates and highways because of blizzard conditions that are making parts impassable. Interstate 29 northbound and southbound from Fargo to Grand Forks are closed.

Interstate 94 eastbound lanes from Jamestown to Fargo and I-94 westbound lanes from Fargo to Valley City are shut down as well. Highway 13 from I-29 to Wahpeton is closed in both directions.

Motorists who disobey a road closure may be fined up to \$250.

The Highway Patrol has advised against travel in eastern North Dakota due to heavy snow and blowing snow, which is creating near zero visibility and hazardous driving conditions.

The MATBUS public bus system serving Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota pulled its vehicles off the road Thursday around noon due to deteriorating travel conditions.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for the eastern edges of the Dakotas and western Minnesota. That region was bracing for up to a foot of snow and wind chills as low as minus 40 (negative 40 Celsius).

In Wisconsin, freezing rain and snow snarled the morning commute, closed schools and left 5,300 We Energies customers without power.

Minneapolis declared a snow emergency, triggering parking rules so plows can clear the streets.

## Omaha rallies to edge South Dakota 107-102 in OT

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Zach Jackson tossed in 27 points, Mitchell Hahn hit a big 3-pointer and scored 21 and KJ Robinson added 20 points and seven assists to help Omaha rally past South Dakota 107-102 in overtime on Thursday night at neutral-site Sanford Pentagon.

Omaha took a 40-33 lead into halftime, but the Coyotes battled back and took an 82-77 lead on two Triston Simpson free throws with 47 seconds left in regulation. Jackson nailed a 3-pointer with 29 seconds to go to pull the Mavericks (14-9, 8-2 Summit League) within 83-82. Simpson made two more free throws before Hahn scored on a layup to keep it a one-point game. Simpson sank two foul shots with 15 seconds left, but Hahn buried a 3-pointer with 6 seconds remaining to send the game to overtime tied at 87.

Matt Pile scored six points of his 11 points for Omaha in the extra period and his 3-point play with 2:27 remaining gave the Mavericks a 95-90 lead. The Coyotes (9-14, 3-7) would get no closer.

Stanley Umude finished with 24 points and 10 rebounds for his second career double-double for South Dakota. Simpson also scored 24, sinking 11 of his 13 foul shots.

The two teams combined for 57 fouls and 82 free throws.

## Indicted political operative appeared in unlikely places

By JAMES NORD and DAVE KOLPACK, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Paul Erickson, the boyfriend of admitted Russian covert agent Maria Butina accused this week of fraud, has turned up in the unlikeliest of places — from landing a top spot on Pat Buchanan's 1992 presidential campaign to representing a man involved in one of the most salacious trials of the 1990s.

From his youth in Vermillion, South Dakota, Erickson parlayed a network of contacts with the College



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Republicans into an odyssey of business and political adventures on the fringes of celebrity over more than two decades.

He was national political director for Buchanan's insurgent bid to topple President George H. W. Bush in the 1992 Republican primary. He was a media adviser to John Wayne Bobbitt, the Virginia man whose wife cut off his penis with a kitchen knife in 1993. He joined with Jack Abramoff, a Washington lobbyist later imprisoned for corruption, in producing an anti-communist action movie. And he represented the African dictator Mobutu Sese Seko when the president of then Zaire wanted to enter the United States.

Erickson has also said that he was in Israel in 1982 when its troops temporarily occupied southern Lebanon. The next year, he claimed that he helped supply tents, boots, camels, mules to fighters combatting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Along the way, Erickson also left a trail of aggrieved associates from his business dealings back in the Dakotas.

Erickson, 57, pleaded not guilty this week to 11 counts of wire fraud and money laundering in business schemes that stretched from 1996 through August 2018, according to federal prosecutors in South Dakota. Butina pleaded guilty in December for trying to infiltrate conservative political groups as a Kremlin secret agent, a case that was separate from special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

"Paul is a very charismatic gentleman," said Daniel Bielfeldt, an aggrieved investor. "I just think the whole thing is sad because he is a very intelligent person and to use his talents to deceive people is wrong. He could have earned a lot more money doing the right thing."

The fraud indictment was filed after Erickson got caught up in the firestorm over Butina's work seeking to use contacts in the National Rifle Association to pursue back channels to American conservatives during the 2016 campaign.

Prosecutors now accuse Erickson of concocting schemes to carry out well over \$1 million in fraudulent transactions using company names such as Investing with Dignity, a business purportedly developing a wheelchair that allowed a person to use the bathroom from the chair and Compass Care, which he said developed assisted living homes for elderly people.

It's unclear why Erickson's indictment came Tuesday, after more than 20 years of alleged wrongdoing. The U.S. Attorney's Office in South Dakota declined to comment about the investigation. The charges carry a penalty of up to 20 years per count.

Erickson's Sioux Falls lawyer, Clint Sargent, said he is "anxious to let the criminal justice process play out and believes a story different from the government's will emerge." When Butina entered her plea in December, attorney William Hurd said Erickson "has done nothing to harm our country and never would." It's not clear if Erickson will face charges in that case.

Those who've met Erickson have been guarded in what they say about him since he popped up as a figure in Butina's case.

One of those who view him as an unsavory character is South Dakota Republican lawmaker Lee Schoenbeck, whose experience with Erickson goes back to their time in the College Republicans. Erickson landed a job on Jim Abdnor's 1980 campaign that ousted George McGovern from the U.S. Senate, but Erickson didn't ever show up for work, Schoenbeck said.

"I've just always known him as a fraud," Schoenbeck said.

Former South Dakota House Speaker Harvey Krautschun, who was a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor in 2002, said Erickson was an acquaintance who worked on the campaign. Krautschun said Erickson was "on fire" for politics, but he never felt there was anything unsavory about Erickson at the time.

"He ate and slept and breathed politics," Krautschun said. "If there was a thing known as political blood, he had it."

Erickson transferred from the University of South Dakota to Yale University, serving as national treasurer of the College Republicans while there. He graduated in 1984 and got a law degree in 1988 from the University of Virginia and was executive producer of Abramoff's movie brainchild, "Red Scorpion," starring

Dolph Lundgren.

Erickson worked in 1992 for Buchanan's campaign at a time when many established Republican operatives shied away from trying to unseat the sitting president of the United States. As Bobbitt's media adviser, Erickson booked an international tour in which the man whose penis was lopped off and reattached sold shirts and steak knives, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Public records in South Dakota include at least seven court judgments for more than \$421,000 against Erickson or his companies since 2003, according to the Rapid City Journal. Several of the court cases that produced the judgments include evidence of Erickson writing bad checks to creditors.

Bielfeldt and his son, Daniel, developers from Brookings, South Dakota, sued Erickson in 2015. They had been persuaded by Erickson in 2009 to invest a combined \$30,000 in a company called Dignity Medical Inc.

The Bielfeldts reached a \$30,000 settlement with Erickson and received their first check for \$10,000 but the other checks bounced, the Journal reported. The Bielfeldts eventually won a judgment against Erickson in January 2017 for about \$41,000.

Conservative syndicated writer L. Brent Bozell III sued Erickson in 2007. Bozell said in the lawsuit that he had been persuaded to invest \$200,000 in Compass Care, which Erickson founded in 1996. Bozell sued for breach of contract and won a \$190,000 judgment in 2008, but it's not clear if he received the money.

Court documents in the lawsuits by the Bielfeldts and Bozell show that Erickson predicted returns ranging from 25 to 100 percent.

In another lawsuit, Erickson was ordered in 2003 to pay more than \$115,417 to Bluestem Capital Partners, the venture capital firm of Steve Kirby, who is a Republican former lieutenant governor of South Dakota. Court documents show Bluestem had lent Erickson money for Compass Care that he failed to pay back in time, the Journal reported. Kirby did not return a phone message left Thursday by The Associated Press.

Casey Phillips, now a political strategist and consultant in Virginia, said he met Erickson in the early 2000s while he was a College Republican in South Dakota. Erickson was always "hanging around" and was quick to try to help or share a lesson. The two have kept in touch, Phillips said, but he never met Butina. Erickson sent him a birthday card in October.

"Paul Erickson is a great guy to have a beer with," Phillips said. "It looks like he charmed his way into trouble, and I feel terrible for him and for anyone he hurt along the way."

Kolpack reported from Fargo, North Dakota.

## John Dingell, longest serving member of Congress, dies at 92

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Dubbed "Big John" for his imposing 6-foot-3 frame and sometimes intimidating manner, former Rep. John Dingell bolstered that reputation with the head of a 500-pound wild boar that greeted visitors to his Washington office. The story behind it also helped: The Michigan Democrat is said to have felled the animal with a pistol as it charged him during a hunting trip in Soviet Georgia.

Yet the congressman — whose nearly six decades in the U.S. House made him the longest serving member of Congress in American history — was hard to typecast. An avid sportsman and hunter, he loved classical music and ballet. His first date with his wife, Debbie, whom he affectionately introduced as "the lovely Deborah," was a performance of the American Ballet Theater.

He mastered legislative deal-making, but was fiercely protective of the auto industry back home in Detroit and a longtime supporter of universal health care. Dingell also was a dogged pursuer of government waste and fraud, helping take down two top presidential aides while chairman of a powerful investigative panel.

"He taught me how to shoot a rifle. I remember he said shooting a rifle is a lot like legislating," former Ohio Rep. Dennis Eckhart told The Associated Press in 2009. "You have to be very, very sure of your target, and then when you get your chance, don't miss."

Dingell, who died Thursday at age 92, served in the House with every president from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Barack Obama. Elected in 1955, following the sudden death of his congressman father, he had

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a front-row seat for the passage of landmark legislation including Medicare, the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act, all of which he supported, as well as the Clean Air Act, which he was accused of stalling to help auto interests. His hometown, the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, was home to a Ford Motor Co. factory that was once the largest in the world.

Yet one of his proudest moments came in 2010, when he sat next to Obama as the historic \$938 billion health care overhaul was signed into law. Taking up his father's cause, Dingell had introduced a universal health care coverage bill during each of his terms.

"Presidents come and presidents go," former President Bill Clinton said in 2005, when Dingell celebrated 50 years in Congress. "John Dingell goes on forever."

Dingell died at his home in Dearborn, said his wife, U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell.

"He was a lion of the United States Congress and a loving son, father, husband, grandfather and friend," her office said in a statement. "He will be remembered for his decades of public service to the people of Southeast Michigan, his razor sharp wit and a lifetime of dedication to improving the lives of all who walk this earth."

For 14 years he chaired the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, which oversees industries from banking and energy to health care and the environment. He also led its investigative arm, which produced several high-profile cases.

His investigations led to the resignation of former Stanford University President Donald Kennedy after the California school misused hundreds of millions of dollars in federal research funds, and the criminal conviction of one of President Ronald Reagan's top advisers, Michael Deaver, for lying under oath. His investigations also led to the resignation of Reagan's first environmental protection chief and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch's mother, Anne Gorsuch Burford. She stepped down after being cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to share subpoenaed documents with a House subcommittee investigating a Superfund toxic waste program.

"I've gotten more death threats around here than I can remember," Dingell told the AP in a 1995 interview. "It used to bother my wife, but oversight was something we did uniquely well."

His critics called him overpowering and intimidating, and his Washington office was decorated with big game trophies. And he often used his dry wit to amuse his friends and sting opponents. Even when hospitalized in 2003, following an operation to open a blocked artery, he maintained his humor. "I'm happy to inform the Republican leadership that I fully intend to be present to vote against their harmful and shameless tax giveaway package," he said from the hospital.

Born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on July 8, 1926, John David Dingell Jr. grew up in Michigan, where his father was elected to Congress as a "New Deal" Democrat in 1932. After a brief stint in the Army near the end of World War II, the younger Dingell earned his bachelor's and law degrees from Georgetown University.

Following the sudden death of his father in September 1955, Dingell, then a 29-year-old attorney, won a special election to succeed him. But the newly elected politician was no stranger to the Capitol.

Alongside his congressman father, Dingell was serving as a page on the House floor when President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan on Dec. 8, 1941. He supervised elevator operators while in college, and when he became the longest-serving U.S. House member in history in 2009, he recalled entering the chamber for the first time — as a 6-year-old — and being in awe of the East door.

"I had never been in a place like this. I was a working-class kid from a Polish neighborhood in Detroit, and this was quite an event for me," Dingell told Time magazine at the time. "I've only begun in later years to appreciate what it all meant."

Dingell won more than two dozen elections during his career, at first representing a Detroit district but eventually shifting because of redistricting to various southeastern Michigan communities. He became the longest-serving member of Congress on June 7, 2013, when he surpassed the former record holder, the late West Virginia Sen. Robert Byrd.

"The length of time is really quite unimportant," Dingell told the AP in an interview in 2009. "It's what

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I have done with that time.”

Dingell, at age 87, announced in early 2014 that he would not run for a 30th full term because he could not have lived up to his own standards. Continuing the family tradition, his wife, Debbie, successfully ran for her husband’s seat in 2014.

“I don’t want people to be sorry for me. ... I don’t want to be going out feet-first, and I don’t want to do less than an adequate job,” said Dingell, who by that time was using a cane or motorized cart to get around the Capitol.

Dingell suffered a heart attack four years later, in September 2018 at age 92. He was hospitalized but was soon “cracking jokes as usual,” his wife said at the time.

An autobiography, “The Dean: The Best Seat in the House,” written with David Bender, was published in December. Forewords were written by former President George H.W. Bush, who had died only a few days before its publication, and former Vice President Joe Biden.

Dingell had more than 250,000 followers on Twitter, an outlet for the outspoken Democrat’s wry takes and quick wit. In January, he noted the negative 7-degree temperature in Hell, Michigan, and retweeted a tweet from the Detroit Free Press that said the “Detroit Lions are going to win the Super Bowl” now that Hell had frozen over.

Along with his wife, Dingell is survived by two daughters, two sons, one of whom served 15 years in the Michigan Legislature, and several grandchildren.

## Princess’s run for prime minister shocks Thai politics

By GRANT PECK, Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The older sister of the king of Thailand said Friday she will run for prime minister in elections next month, upending the palace’s decades-long tradition of eschewing politics and setting up a surprise contest with the leading military-backed candidate.

Princess Ubolratana Mahidol’s nomination by the opposition Thai Raksa Chart Party marks a shock realignment of Thai politics. The party is linked to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who hardcore royalists have long dismissed as opposed in spirit to the monarchy.

The nomination pits the princess against current Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the preferred candidate of the military, considered one of Thailand’s most royalist institutions.

Prayuth, who led the 2014 military coup that ousted Thailand’s last elected government, on Friday also accepted his nomination as candidate for prime minister by the Palang Pracharat Party, widely seen as a proxy for the military.

Prayuth had been considered the front-runner for the March 24 polls because changes in the constitution and election rules implemented by his government make it difficult for political parties without military backing to capture the prime minister’s post.

But Ubolratana’s de facto alliance with the powerful political machine of exiled Thaksin — whose comeback the military has made every effort to block — puts Prayuth’s supporters in an extremely awkward position. It will be difficult to block her political rise because she will be seen as a representative of the monarchy — the nation’s most revered and respected institution.

Thailand also has a draconian lese majeste law which punishes defamation of the immediate royal family with up to 15 years in prison. While it does not technically apply to Ubolratana, who lost her highest royal titles when she married an American more than four decades ago, its scope has been widened in recent years to almost anything that sullies the royal institution, making criticism of the princess highly problematical.

“This is a game changer,” said Allen Hicken, a political scientist at the University of Michigan specializing in Southeast Asian studies. “In the event Thaksin-aligned parties win the election, it makes it very difficult for the military and royalists to contest, protest, or seek to overturn the result.”

Ubolratana was not present when her name was registered with the Election Commission by the Thai Raksa Chart Party. Its leader, Preechapol Pongpanit, said its executive committee “agrees that Princess



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Ubolratana, who is intelligent and capable, is the most appropriate name." She made no known public appearances Friday.

"From my point of view, I think she understands Thai politics. She understands democracy," he told reporters.

She later issued a statement on Instagram saying she has "no special privileges above the Thai people under the constitution."

"This act of mine, I have done out of sincerity and intention to sacrifice in this request to lead the country to prosperity," she said.

Palace officials could not be reached for comment.

Because Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, the king and his immediate circle are not supposed to involve themselves directly in politics.

Parliament has had members who were distant relatives of the monarch. Ubolratana falls into a gray area, as she is commonly called and treated as a princess.

Just hours after she was registered as a candidate, another political party supporting Prayuth filed an objection with the Election Commission, arguing that the action broke rules banning the use of the royal institution as part of a political campaign. Several other complaints followed, mostly from conservative royalists, exposing a possible vulnerability in her plans.

Ubolratana, 67, is the first-born of four children of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit, with the current king the second-born.

She was virtually disowned by her father in 1972 when she married American Peter Jensen, who was a fellow student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They settled in the United States where they had three children. They later divorced and she moved back permanently to Thailand in 2001.

Since then she has thrown herself into charity work, especially her "To Be No. 1" foundation to fight youth drug abuse. She also frequently promotes Thai tourism and movies at international forums. In general, like most of the royal family, she publicly kept herself aloof from Thailand's recent political turmoil.

For most of Bhumibol's reign from 1946 to his death in 2016, the revered and humble monarch was a stabilizing force in Thai politics. But the election of Thaksin, a telecommunications tycoon, in 2001 was transformative for Thailand.

His populist policies delivered unmatched electoral majorities, but he was resented by the traditional ruling class, including royalists and the military. Violent street protests and two military coups have marked the years since. Thaksin went in exile in 2008 to avoid serving jail time on a corruption conviction he insists was politically motivated.

His well-funded political machine returned his allies to power twice, and his maneuvering is seen as the key element in arranging for Ubolratana's selection by a Thaksin-affiliated party.

Most observers of Thai politics agree that Thaksin aggressively pursued good relations with Ubolratana's brother, current King Maha Vajiralongkorn, and friendship with the princess herself. These links were formed as royalists and others loyal to Bhumibol accused Thaksin of showing disrespect for the throne, and even of harboring secret republican tendencies.

Thai Raksa Chart Party chief Preechapol brushed aside questions about Thaksin.

"I don't think that Khun (Mr.) Thaksin will be involved about this," he said. "I don't think it's appropriate to talk about a third person."

When Vajiralongkorn ascended to the throne, conventional wisdom saw him as tightening his grip on power by allying himself closely with the military.

The surprise entry of his sister Ubolratana into politics — assumed to be with the king's approval — raises questions about whether the long-lasting partnership of the palace with the army is in jeopardy.

"Assuming that this is proceeding with the blessing of the king, this suggests that the crown is trying to chart its own course through Thailand's turbulent political waters, placing some distance between itself and the military," Hicken said.

He acknowledged, however, that it is too soon to tell what end result the king has in mind.



Associated Press writer Kaweewit Kaewjinda contributed to this report.

## How Virginia Gov. survives scandal by staying out of sight

By ALAN SUDERMAN, Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — He promised to start an honest conversation about race and how to heal the lingering wounds of Virginia's painful past. Then he disappeared.

For the past week, Gov. Ralph Northam has defied widespread calls for his resignation after a racist yearbook picture and a bungled response upended his career. The 59-year-old Democrat has hired a crisis communications firm, used underground tunnels at the Capitol to stay out of sight and unveiled no strategy for how he might govern effectively over the next three years.

His best hope of survival in the short term might be the eruption of two other controversies that have since hit the two men next in line to succeed him, both Democrats. The party might be loath to oust the three for fear of handing the governor's office over to the Republican legislative leader who is next in line.

But Northam's long-term plans are still a mystery. The uncertainty has led opponents to pile on, left his staff rudderless and prompted supporters to urge him to act quickly.

"I'm not privy to any plans, but I suspect he will step up and lead," said Republican Sen. Richard Stuart, a close friend who talks to the governor daily. Asked when that might be, Stuart said: "Soon, I hope."

Northam has come under pressure from nearly the entire Democratic establishment to resign after the discovery of a photo on his profile page in the Eastern Virginia Medical School yearbook of someone in blackface standing next to a person in a Ku Klux Klan hood and robe.

The governor initially said he was in the photo without saying which costume he was wearing. At a surreal news conference the next day, he reversed course and said he was convinced he wasn't in the picture. But he said he once wore blackface when performing as Michael Jackson at a dance competition in 1984.

At that same news conference last Saturday, he said he owed it to the people of Virginia to start a discussion about race and discrimination and listen to the pain he had caused. "I believe this moment can be the first small step to open a discussion about these difficult issues," he said.

In the days since, Northam's administration has tried to inch its way back to normalcy while some of his top staff and advisers wonder if such a thing will ever be possible.

The governor quietly signed legislation approving a huge incentive package for Amazon to build a headquarters in Virginia. Under normal circumstances, such a legacy-making achievement would be celebrated with a grand bill-signing on the Capitol steps or at some other landmark.

His budget staff continues to negotiate a high-stakes tax overhaul with Republican leaders of the General Assembly — minus, of course, the normal leverage the governor would have.

"He doesn't have the same political capital he had," said Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne.

At an anti-abortion rally Thursday, opponents gloated over Northam's troubles. The yearbook picture became public after an uproar over the governor's defense of loosening restrictions on late-term abortions.

"I'm a pastor. I believe in divine retribution," said E.W. Jackson, the Republican who lost to Northam in the 2013 race for lieutenant governor.

Influential black lawmakers said they have not heard from Northam since the weekend.

"I'm willing to talk to anybody about honest conversations about how we move forward," said Del. Lamont Bagby, chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus. He added, though, that his caucus hadn't changed its mind about demanding Northam resign.

Some Northam supporters are scrambling to show that the governor still has backing among members of his party.

Michael McShane, a Charlottesville Democratic consultant, said several Northam gubernatorial campaign volunteers have been calling around to gauge Democrats' support of the governor and found that there are still many who want him to stay in office. "We think the process is moving too rapidly," McShane said.

The pressure on Northam to resign has lessened considerably since two other scandals erupted: A col-

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lege professor has accused Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax of sexual assault, and Attorney General Mark Herring admitted wearing blackface for a party in college in 1980.

Herring, who a week ago called on Northam to resign, issued a statement Wednesday, saying, "In the days ahead, honest conversations and discussions will make it clear whether I can or should continue to serve as attorney general."

More than a day later, he had yet to make a public appearance.

## 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. WHO WAS THE TARGET OF THREATS BY TABLOID

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos says he was the target of "extortion and blackmail" by the publisher of the National Enquirer, which he said threatened to publish revealing personal photos of him.

### 2. VIRGINIA DEMOCRATS BRACE FOR POLITICAL FALLOUT OF SCANDAL

The political crisis in Virginia threatens to turn a state that has trended Democratic back into a battleground, a development that could complicate the party's effort to defeat President Donald Trump next year.

### 3. HOW NEAR IS CONGRESS TO A DEAL ON BORDER SECURITY

Congressional bargainers seem close to clinching a border security agreement that would avert a fresh government shutdown.

### 4. JOHN DINGELL KNOWN FOR DRY WIT

The longest-serving Congress member, who has passed away, caught people by surprise with musings on Twitter which kept him au courant.

### 5. OIL WORKERS FLEE VENEZUELA FOR A BETTER LIFE

Thousands of Venezuelan oil workers are fleeing poverty wages and dangerous working conditions, taking lucrative jobs in far-flung parts of the world.

### 6. WHITE HOUSE RELEASE REPORT ON OBAMA-CARE

A new White House report says changes made to the Affordable Care Act under President Donald Trump didn't amount to "sabotage."

### 7. WHITAKER PREPARES TO FACE CONGRESS

Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker is testifying before Congress for the first time, with Democrats eager to press him on his interactions with President Donald Trump and his oversight of the special counsel's Russia investigation.

### 8. DESCENDANTS FROM THE LAST U.S. SLAVE SHIP GATHER

Relatives of the 110 people who were kidnapped in West Africa, shipped to the U.S. on a bet and sold into slavery are organizing a get-together called the "Spirit of Our Ancestors" festival, set for Feb. 9.

### 9. LONG LINES TO BUY MEAT ILLUSTRATE IRAN'S ECONOMIC WOES

Iran faces several economic struggles as it marks the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution with inflation continuing to rise as its currency depreciates.

### 10. BASEBALL HALL OF FAMER FRANK ROBINSON DIES

Frank Robinson was the first black manager in Major League Baseball and the only player to earn the MVP award in both leagues. He was 83.

## Supreme Court blocks Louisiana abortion clinic law

By MARK SHERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A divided Supreme Court stopped Louisiana from enforcing new regulations on abortion clinics in a test of the conservative court's views on abortion rights.

The justices said by a 5-4 vote late Thursday that they will not allow the state to put into effect a law that requires abortion providers to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

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Chief Justice John Roberts joined the court's four liberals in putting a hold on the law, pending a full review of the case.

President Donald Trump's two Supreme Court appointees, Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, were among the four conservative members of the court who would have allowed the law to take effect.

Kavanaugh wrote a dissenting opinion in which he said the court's action was premature because the state had made clear it would allow abortion providers an additional 45 days to obtain admitting privileges before it started enforcing the law.

If the doctors succeed, they can continue performing abortions, he said. If they fail, they could return to court, Kavanaugh said.

The law is very similar to a Texas measure the justices struck down three years ago. Roberts dissented in that case.

But the composition of the court has changed since then, with Kavanaugh replacing Justice Anthony Kennedy, who voted to strike down the Texas law. Trump had pledged during the campaign to appoint "pro-life" justices, and abortion opponents are hoping the more conservative bench will be more open to upholding abortion restrictions.

Louisiana abortion providers and a district judge who initially heard the case said one or maybe two of the state's three abortion clinics would have to close under the new law. There would be at most two doctors who could meet its requirements, they said.

But the federal appeals court in New Orleans rejected those claims, doubting that any clinics would have to close and saying the doctors had not tried hard enough to establish relationships with local hospitals.

In January, the full appeals court voted 9-6 not to get involved in the case, setting up the Supreme Court appeal.

The law had been scheduled to take effect Monday, but Justice Samuel Alito delayed the effective date at least through Thursday to give the justices more time. He and Justice Clarence Thomas were the other dissenters Thursday.

The justices could decide this spring whether to add the case to their calendar for the term that begins in October.

The case is *June Medical Services v. Gee*.

## Bezos tells of Enquirer threats to publish revealing pics

By **MICHAEL BALSAMO** and **ZEKE MILLER**, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos says he was the target of "extortion and blackmail" by the publisher of the National Enquirer, which he said threatened to publish revealing personal photos of him unless he stopped investigating how the tabloid obtained his private exchanges with his mistress.

Bezos, who is also owner of The Washington Post, detailed his interactions with American Media Inc., or AMI, in an extraordinary blog post Thursday on Medium.com. The billionaire did not say the tabloid was seeking money — instead, he said, the Enquirer wanted him to make a public statement that the tabloid's coverage was not politically motivated.

Bezos' accusations add another twist to a high-profile clash between the world's richest man and the leader of America's best-known tabloid, a strong backer of President Donald Trump. Bezos' investigators have suggested the Enquirer's coverage of his affair — which included the release of risqué texts — was driven by dirty politics.

"Of course I don't want personal photos published, but I also won't participate in their well-known practice of blackmail, political favors, political attacks, and corruption," Bezos wrote of AMI, in explaining his decision to go public. "I prefer to stand up, roll this log over, and see what crawls out."

A spokesman and an attorney for AMI did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

But the company has admitted in the past that it engaged in what's known as "catch-and-kill" practices to help Trump become president. Trump has been highly critical of Bezos and the Post's coverage of the White House.

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The Bezos affair became public when the Enquirer published a Jan. 9 story about his relationship with Lauren Sanchez, a former TV anchor who is also married. Bezos then hired a team of private investigators to find out how the tabloid got the texts and photos the two exchanged.

Several days ago, someone at AMI told Bezos' team that the company's CEO David Pecker was "apoplectic" about the investigation, Bezos said. AMI later approached Bezos' representatives with an offer.

"They said they had more of my text messages and photos that they would publish if we didn't stop our investigation," Bezos wrote.

Bezos wrote that this week, the tabloid's editor, Dylan Howard, emailed an attorney for Bezos' longtime security consultant to describe photos the Enquirer "obtained during our newsgathering." The photos include a "below the belt selfie" of Bezos, photos of him in tight boxer-briefs and wearing only a towel, and several revealing photos of Sanchez, according to the emails Bezos released.

According to the emails, an attorney for AMI offered a formal deal Wednesday: The tabloid wouldn't post the photos if Bezos and his investigators would release a public statement "affirming that they have no knowledge or basis" to suggest the Enquirer's coverage was "politically motivated or influenced by political forces."

Bezos said he decided to publish the emails sent to his team "rather than capitulate to extortion and blackmail," despite the "personal cost and embarrassment they threaten."

It does not appear that AMI demanded any money from Bezos — only that he call off his investigation and issue a statement saying the coverage wasn't political.

In its Jan. 9 story, the Enquirer said reporters followed Bezos and Sanchez "across five states and 40,000 miles" and "tailed them in private jets, swanky limos, helicopter rides, romantic hikes, five-star hotel hide-aways, intimate dinner dates and 'quality time' in hidden love nests."

It reported that Bezos sent "sleazy text messages and gushing love notes" to Sanchez, months before Bezos announced he was splitting up with his wife, MacKenzie. The story carries the bylines of Howard and two reporters.

But Bezos was suspicious about how the tabloid could have possibly gotten access to his private exchanges.

Bezos usually stays out of the public eye, frequently delegating announcements and public Amazon business updates to his executives. He doesn't even speak on the company's quarterly financial earnings call with analysts.

His personal investigators, led by his longtime security consultant, Gavin de Becker, concluded that Bezos' phone wasn't hacked. Instead, they've been focusing on Sanchez's brother, according to a person familiar with the matter.

De Becker and his team suspect Michael Sanchez, a talent manager who touts his support of Trump and is an acquaintance of Trump allies Roger Stone and Carter Page, may have provided the information to the Enquirer, the person said. The person wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Sanchez, who is also his sister's manager, has declined to speak with The Associated Press on the record and did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Thursday. In a tweet, he said de Becker "spreads fake, unhinged conservative conspiracy theories" and "dog whistle" smears."

AMI's relationship with Trump has gotten the company into hot water in the past. It admitted to "catch-and-kill" practices as part of a deal with federal prosecutors, who agreed to not pursue charges against the company.

AMI acknowledged secretly assisting Trump's campaign by paying \$150,000 to a Playboy model for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with the then-candidate. The company then intentionally suppressed the story until after the 2016 election.

In September, the Justice Department agreed to a non-prosecution agreement with AMI, which requires the company and some top executives, including Pecker and Howard, to cooperate with authorities.

De Becker is now trying to find a way that federal prosecutors in Manhattan — where the non-prosecution



agreement was signed — could investigate the text message scandal, the person familiar with the matter said, though it wasn't immediately clear what, if any, crime the prosecutors would be asked to look into.

It is a federal crime to threaten to injure someone's reputation in exchange for money or a "thing of value," though federal courts haven't made it directly clear whether a public statement, like the one demanded by AMI, could be considered something of value.

Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor and professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, said the allegations potentially put prosecutors in an awkward position because of the deal they had already cut with AMI.

"It shows how complicated and dangerous it is to make an agreement with National Enquirer," Levenson said. "They may have to cooperate, but they're continuing in their ongoing battle with Bezos and others."

But Levenson said it was too difficult to tell if the case amounted to blackmail or extortion without additional context and some prosecutors may be reluctant to charge someone for threatening another with embarrassing material.

Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Brian Melley in Los Angeles and Rachel Lerman in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Frank Robinson, baseball's fearsome trailblazer, dies at 83

By DAVID GINSBURG and BEN WALKER, AP Sports Writers

Crowding the plate, fearsome and fearless, Frank Robinson hammered his way into the Hall of Fame.

His legacy, however, was cemented that day in 1975 when he simply stood in the dugout at old Cleveland Stadium — the first black manager in Major League Baseball.

Robinson, the only player to earn the MVP award in both leagues and a Triple Crown winner, died Thursday at 83. He had been in failing health and in hospice care at his home in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles. MLB said he was with family and friends at the time.

"Frank Robinson's resume in our game is without parallel, a trailblazer in every sense, whose impact spanned generations," Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

Robinson hit 586 home runs — he was fourth on the career list behind only Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth and Willie Mays when he retired and now ranks 10th. An MVP with Cincinnati and Baltimore, he led the Orioles to their first World Series championship in 1966.

"Frank Robinson and I were more than baseball buddies. We were friends. Frank was a hard-nosed baseball player who did things on the field that people said could never be done," Aaron posted on Twitter.

"Baseball will miss a tremendous human being," he said.

An All-Star outfielder in 12 seasons and a first-ballot selection to Cooperstown, Robinson also was a Rookie of the Year, a Gold Glove outfielder and a bruising runner.

But his place in the sport's history extended far beyond the batter's box and basepaths.

Robinson fulfilled his quest to become the first African-American manager in the big leagues when he was hired by the Cleveland Indians. His impact was immediate and memorable.

The Indians opened at home that year and Robinson, still active, batted himself second as the designated hitter. In the first inning, he homered off Doc Medich and the crowd went crazy, cheering the whole April afternoon as Cleveland beat the Yankees.

The Reds, Orioles and Indians have retired his No. 20 and honored him with statues at their stadiums.

Robinson later managed San Francisco, Baltimore and Montreal. He became the first manager of the Washington Nationals after the franchise moved from Montreal for the 2005 season — the Nationals put him in their Ring of Honor.

More than half the major league teams have had black managers since his debut with Cleveland.

Robinson later spent several years working as an executive for MLB and for a time oversaw the annual Civil Rights Game. He advocated for more minorities throughout baseball and worked with former Commissioner Bud Selig to develop the Selig Rule, directing teams to interview at least one minority candidate

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before hiring a new manager.

For all he did on and off the field, Robinson was presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George W. Bush in 2005.

"Frank Robinson's wife, Barbara Ann Cole, once said, "He believes in rules and he respects the game. He reveres the game,"" Bush said in a statement. "When I presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005, I noted that 'Baseball fans across America will tell you the feeling is returned. In the game we love, few names will ever command as much respect and esteem as the name of Frank Robinson.'"

Brooks Robinson, a fellow first-ballot Hall of Famer, said he spoke to his Baltimore teammate and long-time friend a few days ago.

"He was the best player I ever played with," he said.

Hall of Fame manager Joe Torre played against and worked with Frank Robinson for years.

"He was a tough nut," Torre recalled at the owners' meetings in Orlando, Florida. "He never lost that feistiness, which puts a smile on your face ... He was always that guy that commanded a lot of respect and he had a presence about him."

Born Aug. 21, 1935, in Beaumont, Texas, Robinson attended McClymonds High School in Oakland, California, and was a basketball teammate of future NBA great Bill Russell. But it was on the diamond, rather than court, where fame awaited Robinson.

"We all know we lost one of the Greats," tweeted Russell, also the first black coach in the NBA.

Starting out in an era when Mays, Aaron, Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams were the big hitters, Robinson more than held his own over 21 seasons — if anything, many who watched Robinson felt he never got his full due as an all-time great. He finished with 1,812 RBIs and hit .294 — he played in the World Series five times, and homered in each of them.

Robinson was the only player to hit a ball completely out of old Memorial Stadium in Baltimore and once connected for grand slams in consecutive innings of a game. But he didn't just slug away, as evidenced by a .389 on-base average boosted by 1,420 walks against 1,532 strikeouts. Extremely alert on the bases, he had 204 steals.

Robinson played the game with grace, yet was known as a fierce competitor who combined hard work with natural talent. He planted himself near the plate, yielding to no pitcher, and didn't seem to care about being brushed back or getting hit by a pitch 198 times.

"Pitchers did me a favor when they knocked me down," Robinson said. "It made me more determined. I wouldn't let that pitcher get me out."

And opposing pitchers noticed.

"Frank Robinson might have been the best I ever saw at turning his anger into runs. He challenged you physically as soon as he stepped into the batter's box, with half his body hanging over the plate," Hall ace Bob Gibson once wrote.

"As a rule, I'm reluctant to express admiration for hitters, but I make an exception for Frank Robinson," Gibson wrote.

Robinson carried a similar philosophy as a baserunner, unapologetically sliding spikes high whenever necessary.

"The baselines belong to the runner, and whenever I was running the bases, I always slid hard," Robinson declared.

Robinson broke in with a bang as a 20-year-old big leaguer. He tied the first-year record with 38 home runs for Cincinnati in 1956, scored a league-high 122 times and was voted NL Rookie of the Year.

Robinson was the 1961 NL MVP after batting .323 with 37 homers and 124 RBIs for the pennant-winning Reds, and reached career highs in runs (134) and RBIs (136) in 1962.

All-time hits leader Pete Rose joined the Reds the next year.

"He had a huge influence on me when I first came up in '63," Rose told The Associated Press by phone. "Frank was a really aggressive, hard-nosed player, and it rubbed off on everybody. Frank was the one who took me under his wings, so to speak. ... Frank consistently talked to me about playing the game

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the right way," he said.

Robinson was an All-Star, too, in 1965, but Reds owner Bill DeWitt decided Robinson was an old-ish 30 and it was time to make a move.

That December, Robinson was the centerpiece in what would ultimately be one of the most lopsided trades in baseball history, going to Baltimore for pitchers Milt Pappas and Jack Baldschun and outfielder Dick Simpson.

Robinson became an instant hit with the Orioles in 1966 as the unanimous AL MVP and a Triple Crown winner.

On May 8, he became the only player ever to hit a home run completely out of Baltimore's home park, Memorial Stadium. The drive came against Cleveland ace Luis Tiant, and the spot where the ball sailed over the left-field wall was marked by a flag that read "HERE" that remained in place until the Orioles left for Camden Yards in 1991.

Robinson batted .316 with 49 home runs and 122 RBIs during his first season in Birdland. He then homered in the first inning of the 1966 World Series opener at Dodger Stadium and capped off the four-game sweep of Los Angeles with another homer off Don Drysdale in a 1-0 win in Game 4.

Robinson hit two home runs against Rose and the Reds to help win another crown for the Orioles in 1970.

All told, Robinson was an All-Star in five of his six seasons with Baltimore, reaching the World Series four times and batting .300 with 179 home runs. The cap on his Cooperstown plaque carries on O's logo.

Pappas went 30-29 over two-plus seasons with the Reds, Baldschun won one game in 51 appearances over two years with Cincinnati and Simpson hit five home runs as a part-time outfielder for the Reds during two mediocre seasons.

Robinson was traded to the Dodgers before the 1972 season. He played for the California Angels in 1973 and was dealt to Cleveland late in the 1974 season.

His managerial debut came 28 years after Jackie Robinson broke the MLB color barrier as a player.

"Every time I put on this uniform, I think of Jackie Robinson," Frank Robinson said as he began his new role.

Jackie Robinson's widow, Rachel, and daughter Sharon paid tribute.

"Frank Robinson was a dear friend and realized one of Jack's great hopes, becoming baseball's first African-American manager. He was remarkable and made us all feel proud for his many contributions to baseball and to society," they said together in a statement.

Robinson had coached for the Orioles and worked in their front office when he became their manager in 1988 after the team opened at 0-6. Things didn't get much better right away as Baltimore went on to lose its first 21 games and finished 54-107. The next season, the O's went 87-75 and Robinson was voted AL Manager of the Year.

Tough and demanding, he went 1,065-1,176 overall as a big league manager.

A no-nonsense guy, Robinson also had a sharp wit. That served him well in Baltimore where, in addition to being a star right fielder, he was the judge for the team's Kangaroo Court, assessing playful fines for missing signs, uniform mishaps and other things he deemed as infractions.

At the time, the Orioles had a batboy named Jay Mazzone, whose hands were amputated when he was 2 after a burning accident. Mazzone capably did his job for years with metal hooks and became good friends with Robinson.

Some players, though, initially weren't sure how to treat the teen.

"Frank Robinson broke the ice," Mazzone said. "He was running his Kangaroo Court and calling a vote among the players, whether to fine somebody or not."

"It was either thumbs up or thumbs down," he recalled. "After the vote, he said, 'Jay, you're fined for not voting.' Everybody laughed. After that, I was treated just like everybody else."

Survivors include his wife, Barbara, and daughter Nichelle.

There was no immediate word on funeral arrangements. The family said in lieu of flowers, contributions in Robinson's memory could be made to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, or the National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, D.C.

AP Sports Writer Joe Kay and AP Baseball Writer Ronald Blum contributed to this report.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/MLB> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Long lines to buy meat illustrate Iran's economic woes

By NASSER KARIMI, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — In the frigid air of a Tehran winter, a mother of two stands in a long line of shoppers waiting for the chance to buy discounted meat at a store supported by Iran's government.

"Yesterday, after nearly two hours in the line, the shopkeeper said: 'It is finished, try another day,'" Zahra Akrami said recently. "And now I am here again."

Her struggle represents the economic paradox that faces Iran as it marks the 40th anniversary of its Islamic Revolution.

Despite holding some of the world's largest proven deposits of oil and natural gas, Iran has seen a return to long lines for food — a sight once seen during the 1980s, when it was at war with Iraq. Inflation continues to rise as its currency, the rial, depreciates. University graduates are unable to find jobs.

Part of the economic challenges stem from the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions that had been lifted under the nuclear deal Iran struck with world powers. Those sanctions have returned after President Donald Trump decided to pull America out of the accord.

But other problems persist, some dating back to policies instituted after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

That revolt wouldn't have been possible without impoverished Iranians rising up against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. His land reforms saw poorer rural residents move to the cities and become fresh recruits for the revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's calls for supporting the poor struck a populist tone among the struggling masses, as well as with the leftists who helped overthrow a regime that spent billions on U.S. weapons.

Immediately after the revolution, Iran nationalized its oil industry, its main source of hard currency. Its new leaders also seized industries tied to the shah or companies of those who fled the country. Shiite charitable trusts, known as bonyads, also amassed vast holdings, as has Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Today, economists consider Iran's a "transition" economy, meaning it is shifting from state control to being driven by a free market. However, some firms that moved into private ownership have seen the businesses collapse, leaving workers without pensions and fueling some sporadic protests.

"No week comes to an end without the closure of 10 to 50 companies," said Masoud Khansari, the head of Tehran's Chamber of Commerce. "Last year, 800 out of 1,500 contractor companies in the oil sector collapsed."

Iran's oil industry never fully recovered from a strike that paralyzed it before the shah's departure. Prior to the revolution, Iran pumped about 6 million barrels of oil a day. In January, it pumped 2.7 million.

There are bright spots. Iran's per capita income has more than doubled since the revolution to \$4,838 in 2018. Iran has more than 100,000 locally trained doctors and 18,000 medical centers, and it produces 95 percent of its own medicine, according to government statistics. Life expectancy is around 75, as opposed to about 57 before the revolution. Nearly every Iranian can read.

But for the average person, the only numbers they really care about are those at the cash register at neighborhood grocery stores.

"Unfortunately, high prices have become crippling for people," lawmaker Mohammad Reza Sabaghian said. "Some goods have seen up to a 200 percent increase in prices."

Staples like meat have grown more expensive. Lamb has reached to nearly \$5 a pound, up from \$3. Chicken is 70 cents a pound, up from 40 cents.

Analysts suspect part of the problem may be the U.S. sanctions. As the rial falls, livestock breeders likely want the hard currency they can get selling the meat in neighboring countries. Iran produces nearly 90



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percent of its domestic demand for meat, but it imports related items like medicine and corn.

The meat crisis has become a cudgel for government hard-liners who are eager to weaken the administration of President Hassan Rouhani, a relatively moderate cleric within the theocracy. State television repeatedly broadcasts stories about long lines at government-subsidized grocery stores, with those waiting criticizing Rouhani's administration.

"The bones of the people are shattering under pressure of poverty," said Kazem Sedighi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In a dig at Rouhani, Sedighi added: "Economic problems exist, but some officials are careless about the problems."

Part of Rouhani's problem is Washington and the sanctions it restored in November. Germany, France and Britain, which have worked to preserve the nuclear deal, announced earlier this month that they have established a new system so their companies can continue trading with Iran without incurring U.S. penalties for doing so.

However, that system has yet to come into effect, and the strains on Iran are clear. Efforts to import government-subsidized meat from abroad through the military saw a cargo plane crash in January, killing 15 people.

Yet the lines at stores continue daily.

"Every day, the radio and TV are reporting about the trial of those officials who took public funds for themselves, but there's no change in our life," said Assad Azari, a 63-year-old retired teacher and father of three waiting in line. "We poor people shouldn't have to wait hours for two kilos (4.4 pounds) of budget meat."

## Virginia Dems brace for 2020 political fallout from scandal

By BILL BARROW, Associated Press

The political crisis in Virginia threatens to turn a state that has trended Democratic back into a battleground, a development that could complicate the party's effort to defeat President Donald Trump next year.

Three of the state's top Democrats are engulfed in a scandal that has shaken the state government. Gov. Ralph Northam and Attorney General Mark Herring have admitted wearing blackface as young men in the 1980s. Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, meanwhile, has been accused of sexually assaulting a woman in 2004, an allegation he denies.

The men are resisting calls for their resignation.

Virginia's increasingly diverse and urban population has fueled Democratic victories at the state and presidential level for a decade. But Democrats are anxious that the dizzying developments could suddenly halt their progress. The prospect of losing Virginia's 13 electoral votes would spread Democrats thin as they try to win back upper Midwest states that voted for Trump while making a push in GOP-leaning states like Georgia and Arizona.

"This doesn't change the blue direction of the state long-term, but this certainly complicates things for Democrats in the immediate future," said Virginia native Carolyn Fiddler, a top operative at the DailyKos website, a force in liberal politics nationally. "Everyone, presidential candidates, Democratic candidates here and everywhere, are going to have to wrestle with this."

Josh Schwerin, who worked for Northam's predecessor, Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe, said, "Voters could take this out on Democrats ... less as an ideological shift but more as an issue of repercussions for genuine political scandal."

The president himself gleefully agreed, predicting in a tweet Thursday that he will reclaim a state he lost by 5 percentage points to Hillary Clinton in 2016. "Democrats at the top are killing the Great State of Virginia," he tweeted Thursday. "If the three failing pols were Republicans, far stronger action would be taken. Virginia will come back HOME (Republican) in 2020!"

Trump's taunt ignores his own history of sexual assault allegations and his contorted relationship with race, including when he insisted after a 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that there

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were “very fine people on both sides” of an encounter that left a counterprotester dead.

Virginia’s booming population — particularly around Washington — has given Democrats sweeping gains in recent cycles. President Barack Obama twice won the state after four decades of GOP dominance. In 2016, Clinton held on despite losing nearly every other battleground state, a sign of the state’s overall shift to Democrats. The party flipped state legislative seats across Virginia in 2017, while Northam, Fairfax and Herring won with surprising ease. In 2018, Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine coasted to re-election while Democratic congressional nominees ousted three GOP incumbents.

But that momentum abruptly stopped last week with the disclosure of a picture from Northam’s medical school yearbook showing one young man in blackface and another in Klan regalia. Northam initially signaled that he was in the picture. He recanted a day later but admitted using blackface in the same timeframe to dress as pop icon Michael Jackson.

As the situation unfolds, the risk for Democrats isn’t so much that legions of Virginia voters move to Republicans — a party that nominated an open Confederate sympathizer to challenge Kaine last year — or suddenly embrace Trump. But there are questions about how committed and enthusiastic that growing Democratic electorate would be if Northam, Fairfax and Herring remained in office.

AP VoteCast data, analyzing the 2018 midterm electorate, shows that black voters cast about 17 percent of Virginia ballots in November, with about 9 out of 10 of those backing Democratic congressional candidates. Women, meanwhile, made up 52 percent of the Virginia electorate and sided with Democrats by a margin of 20 percentage points. If those advantages shrank, while Trump was able to stoke GOP turnout, the state could suddenly return to tossup status.

Democrats in Richmond and in Washington say the next moves may largely depend on what black state legislative leaders push for. They remain publicly noncommittal.

The situation is complicated by the racial politics of the three Virginia officials at the center of the scandal. Northam and Herring are white men approaching 60. Fairfax is a 39-year-old black man who just days ago was viewed as Northam’s heir apparent — either via the 2021 election or when Northam heeded calls to step down.

Democrats like Zac Petkanas, an operative who specializes in opposition research and offensives against Trump, say any solution must involve the resignations of all three Virginia leaders. They don’t want to hand control to the Republican next in line, but they want to avoid the optics of elevating, even for a short time, a lieutenant governor accused of sexual assault or having that same official — the lone black man among the three — be the only one to give up his post.

“The Democratic Party has made it clear we will not tolerate racism or the way some men have treated women,” Petkanas said. “They just have to do it in a smart way that respects voters’ wishes that Democrats be in charge.”

Fiddler added, “What I do know is that if Ralph Northam is still governor, then that means we’re still talking about this — and that (yearbook) picture is ready made for television and direct mail.”

There are recent examples of controversies resulting in upsets that go against a state’s fundamental bent. Heavily Republican Alabama elected Democrat Doug Jones to the U.S. Senate over a Republican nominee accused of sexually pursuing teenage girls when he was in his 30s. Louisiana chose Democrat John Bel Edwards as governor in 2015 over then-Sen. David Vitter, a Republican who’d previously been identified as a client of a high-end Washington, D.C., brothel.

If anything spares Democrats, pollster Zac McCrary said, it’s Trump himself, along with Virginians’ general satisfaction with the direction of their state government.

“If Ralph Northam or one of these others was on the ballot,” he said, “they might have a problem. ... But it’s much too alarmist (to say) that enduring this significant pain and embarrassment in February will have long-term ramifications nearly a year from now and beyond in an environment where Trump still blocks out the sun every day.”

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Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

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Follow Bill Barrow on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BillBarrowAP>

## Oil workers flee Venezuela's crisis for a better life

By **SCOTT SMITH, Associated Press**

PUNTO FIJO, Venezuela (AP) — Nieves Ribullen, a Venezuelan oil worker sick of struggling to get by as his country falls apart, is betting it all on far-away Iraq's Kurdish region to give his family a better life.

Over the years he's watched dozens of co-workers abandon poverty wages and dangerous working conditions at the rundown complex of refineries in Punto Fijo on Venezuela's Caribbean coast for jobs in far-flung places like Kuwait, Angola and Chile.

Now it's his turn. Leaving his wife and three children behind, he'll soon ship out to Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region, where he expects to earn more than \$3,500 a month — a fortune compared to the less than \$20 he brings home monthly in increasingly unstable Venezuela.

"I only earn enough to buy a kilo (2 pounds) of meat and one chicken each month," Ribullen said. "We're in chaos."

Opposition leader Juan Guaido has rallied support from distraught Venezuelans and roughly 40 countries that now recognize him as Venezuela's rightful president.

But the accelerating exodus of oil workers means that Venezuela's crude production — already at a seven-decade low — is unlikely to rebound anytime soon, even if recently-imposed U.S. sanctions are lifted and a business-friendly government replaces the increasingly wobbly President Nicolas Maduro.

Venezuela was once one of the world's top five oil exporters, pumping 3.5 million barrels a day in 1998 when President Hugo Chavez was elected and launched Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. Today, the state-run oil company PDVSA produces less than a third of that. Critics blame corruption and years of mismanagement by the socialist government.

Even worse, production is about to sink even further due to fresh sanctions by the Trump administration targeting PDVSA and its Houston-based subsidiary Citgo with the aim of depriving Maduro of more than \$11 billion in exports this year.

Despite the short-term pain they will bring Venezuela, Guaido said the sanctions are a critical part of stopping Maduro from consolidating power in what he calls a "dictatorship."

Venezuela's oil workers began flooding out in 2003, shortly after Chavez fired thousands of them — many by name on national television — for launching a strike that paralyzed output. The oil workers accused Chavez of riding roughshod over the nation's democratic institutions, while Chavez said the picketers were plotting a coup.

Tomas Paez, a professor at Central University of Venezuela who studies the Venezuelan exile community, estimates that 30,000 oil workers fled in the initial wave, many banned from working in the country's oil industry.

He said it's difficult to gauge how many more have left as Venezuela's economic problems have worsened under Maduro, but from the tar sands of northern Canada to the deserts of Kuwait, Venezuelan roughnecks now live in more than 90 oil-producing countries.

"Let's say, where there is oil, there is a Venezuelan," Paez said.

Many have made new lives in their adopted countries with no plans to return to a gutted Venezuela. And with each new departure, fewer remain behind with the know-how to pump the world's most abundant oil reserves, once the economic backbone of a thriving country.

"We are losing man hours, hours of training, millions and millions of hours that we can't calculate," said union leader Ivan Freites, secretary of the Federation of Professionals and Technicians of Oil Workers of Venezuela. "It's impossible to recover our trained personnel working abroad."

In a recent speech laying out the economic plan for his second six-year term, Maduro vowed to catapult Venezuela's production to 5 million barrels a day. But he provided few details other than promising to take charge personally and root out corruption.

The embattled president retains support from powerful allies, including Russia and China, which are

both heavily invested in Venezuela's oilfields. Maduro's hand-picked head of the PDVSA, Maj. Gen. Manuel Quevedo, did not respond to requests for comment by The Associated Press.

While the most-talented engineers left long ago — many contributing to a production boom in neighboring Colombia — there's still demand for labor throughout the industry.

"We're still in a talent-short market, especially with people willing to go into hardship locations — like Kurdistan," said Dane Groeneveld, CEO at California-based PTS Advance, an oil industry recruiter, using the popular name for Iraq's Kurdish region.

"It's those people who are now getting picked up by national oil companies around the world," Groeneveld added.

The 43-year-old Ribullen said he was thinking of his family when he made the decision to go to Iraq's oil-rich Kurdish region — which is semi-autonomous from the central government in Baghdad — and leave them behind until he's saved enough to send them to Chile or the United States. His youngest, 9-year-old Isaak, cuddled up next to him on the couch of their living room.

"He doesn't want me to go," said Ribullen. "It's difficult for us."

He recalled starting work at PDVSA 16 years ago, when he made enough money to buy a Toyota and take his family to the Caribbean island of Aruba on vacation every year. Now, the car is long gone and it's been seven years since the last family vacation.

Sometimes after his night shift he's forced to stand in line for hours at the market to buy food for his family. He blames Chavez and Maduro for destroying his country.

Conditions are dangerous at the refinery, where Ribullen says workers clock in every day with memories of a massive explosion that killed dozens of workers in 2012. Workers don't have company-issued hardhats, boots or gloves.

Once in Iraq's Kurdish region, he'll join dozens of other Venezuelan roughnecks who live and work on a remote compound.

"The situation forces me to look for opportunities somewhere else," he said. "We're leaving this in God's hands, asking that he'll protect us."

Follow Scott Smith on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ScottSmithAP> .

## Democrats and GOP square off over Trump's tax returns

By **MARCY GORDON, AP Business Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Democrats now controlling the House and holding the legal key to seeking President Donald Trump's tax returns, Republican lawmakers are invoking privacy in defending Trump's flank.

At an oversight hearing Thursday, lawmakers examined proposals to compel presidents and presidential candidates to make years of their tax returns public. And they discussed the authority under current law for the head of the House Ways and Means Committee — now Democratic Rep. Richard Neal — to make a written request for any tax returns to the Treasury secretary.

The law says the Treasury chief "shall furnish" the requested information to members of the committee for them to examine behind closed doors.

Republicans accused the Democrats of using powers in the tax law to mount a political witch hunt for Trump's tax returns.

"In reality, this is all about weaponizing our tax laws to attack a political foe," Rep. Jackie Walorski of Indiana said at the hearing by the Ways and Means oversight subcommittee.

Getting Trump's returns has been high on the Democrats' list of priorities since they won control of the House in November's midterm elections, but asking for them will probably set off a huge legal battle with his administration.

The Democrats tried and failed several times to obtain Trump's returns as the minority party in Congress, seeking to shed light on his complex financial dealings and potential conflicts of interest. Their newly energized leftward wing is pushing Neal to set the quest in motion, and fast.



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Thursday's hearing appeared to set the table for the move by examining the legal foundations.

"A strong case is being built," William Tranghese, an aide to Neal, told The Associated Press this week. He said Neal is consulting with lawyers for the House "to determine the appropriate legal steps to go forward with this unprecedented request."

Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., chairman of the oversight subcommittee, said the American public is intensely interested in the subject. "We ask the question: Does the public have a need to know that a person seeking or holding the highest office in our country obeys the tax laws?"

George Yin, a professor of law and taxation at University of Virginia Law School, testified to the panel that he doesn't see any "wiggle room" in the law for the Treasury secretary to refuse Neal's request for Trump's returns.

If the Trump administration refused the request, "We would be in uncharted territory," Yin said.

The legal battle that could ensue over Trump's tax filings would be unprecedented. It could take years to resolve, possibly stretching beyond the 2020 presidential election.

Rep. Mike Kelly of Pennsylvania, the subcommittee's senior Republican, accused the Democrats of gearing up to obtain the president's returns — and release them.

"Congress is prohibited by law from examining and making public the private tax returns of Americans for political purposes," said Kelly. "Such an abuse of power would open a Pandora's box. It would set a very dangerous precedent."

The tax returns of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, other lawmakers or federal employees could be in jeopardy, he warned.

But Bill Pascrell, D-N.J., insisted that no one, including the president, is above the law. "The law is on our side," he said.

At a news conference Thursday, Pelosi said the public "overwhelmingly" wants to see Trump's tax returns, but the move cannot be made in haste.

"It's not just a question of sending a letter; you have to do it in a very careful way. And the chairman of the committee (Neal) will be doing that," the Democrats' leader said.

The hearing came two days after Trump faced a divided Congress in his State of the Union address, imploring the Democrats to step away from "ridiculous partisan investigations."

The subcommittee also examined a proposal that would require all presidents, vice presidents and candidates for those offices to make public 10 years of tax returns. It's part of House Democrats' comprehensive election and ethics reform package — their first major bill for the new Congress this year. The legislation also would make it easier for citizens to register and vote, and ban executive-branch officials from lobbying their old agency for two years after they leave government.

While the ethics bill includes a range of reforms, some Democrats have made clear that one of their chief targets is Trump. Some elements of the bill have bipartisan support, but the overall package is unlikely to advance in the Republican-controlled Senate.

If the administration mounted a legal challenge over Trump's returns, "I assume that there would be a court case that would go on for a period of time," Neal, D-Mass., said just after the November election.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin "will review any request with the Treasury general counsel for legality," the department has said. Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani has suggested the Democrats could have a hard time proving their demand was intended for pursuing legitimate congressional oversight and was not a political scavenger hunt.

Trump broke with decades of tradition for presidential candidates by refusing to release his income tax filings during his 2016 campaign. He has said he won't release them because he is being audited, even though IRS officials have said taxpayers under audit are free to release their returns. Trump claimed at a news conference following the November elections that the filings are too complex for people to understand.

Democrats want to dive in and explore numerous questions about Trump's personal financial webs. Among them: whether there are conflicts of interest between his companies and his presidential actions; what are the sources of his income and to whom he might be beholden as a result; whether he's properly

paid taxes; and whether he benefited from the sweeping Republican-written tax law enacted in late 2017.

## Alabama executes Muslim inmate who wanted imam present

By KIM CHANDLER, Associated Press

ATMORE, Ala. (AP) — A Muslim inmate who filed a legal challenge because Alabama wouldn't let his Islamic spiritual adviser be present in the execution chamber was put to death Thursday after the nation's highest court cleared the way.

Dominique Ray, 42, was pronounced dead at 10:12 p.m. of a lethal injection at the state prison in Atmore.

Ray had argued Alabama's execution procedure favors Christian inmates because a Christian chaplain employed by the prison typically remains in the execution chamber during a lethal injection, but the state would not let his imam be there in the room.

Attorneys for the state said only prison employees are allowed in the chamber for security reasons.

Ray's imam, Yusef Maisonet, watched the execution from an adjoining witness room, after visiting with Ray over the past two days. There was no Christian chaplain in the chamber, a concession the state agreed to make.

Strapped to a gurney in the death chamber, Ray was asked by the warden if he had any final words. The inmate said an Islamic statement of his faith in Arabic.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Wednesday had stayed the execution over the religious arguments, but the U.S. Supreme Court allowed it to proceed in a 5-4 decision Thursday evening. Justices cited the fact that Ray did not raise the challenge until Jan. 28 as a reason for the decision.

Justice Elena Kagan wrote in a dissent that she considered the decision to let the execution go forward "profoundly wrong."

Other states generally allow spiritual advisers to accompany condemned inmates up to the execution chamber but not into it, said Robert Dunham, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, which studies capital punishment in the United States.

Dunham said he did not know of any other state where the execution protocol calls for a Christian chaplain to be present in the execution chamber.

Alabama Corrections Commissioner Jeff Dunn said this is the first time the state has had an objection to the chaplain's presence. He said the state will review procedures to determine if something needs to be changed.

Ray was sentenced to death for the 1995 rape and murder of a 15-year-old girl. Tiffany Harville disappeared from her Selma home on July 15, 1995, and her decomposing body was found one month later in a cotton field.

It was Alabama's first execution of the year.

Ray was convicted in 1999 after another man, Marcus Owden, confessed to his role in the crime and implicated Ray. Owden told police that they had picked the girl up for a night out on the town and then raped her. Owden said that Ray cut the girl's throat. Owden pleaded guilty to murder, testified against Ray and is serving a life sentence without parole.

A jury recommended the death penalty for Ray by an 11-1 vote.

Ray's attorneys had also asked in legal filings to stay the execution on other grounds. Lawyers said it was not disclosed to the defense team that records from a state psychiatric facility suggested Owden suffered from schizophrenia and delusions. The Supreme Court also rejected the request.

Spencer Hahn, one of Ray's attorneys, said he was appalled that Ray received unequal treatment at his death because he was a member of a religious minority,

"Domineque was a devout Muslim and a human being. He was a son, a father, a brother. He wanted equal treatment in his last moments," Hahn wrote in a statement.

Ray's legal team said his first name was Domineque. The prison system used a different spelling, citing court records.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall issued a statement saying he was pleased the court let the

execution proceed.

"For 20 years, Domineque Ray has successfully eluded execution for the barbaric murder of a 15-year-old Selma girl. ...Tonight, Ray's long-delayed appointment with justice is finally met," Marshall said.

## **Former Rep. Dingell, US's longest-serving lawmaker, dies**

**By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER and DAVID EGGERT, Associated Press**

DETROIT (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. John Dingell, the longest-serving member of Congress in American history and a master of legislative deal-making who was fiercely protective of Detroit's auto industry, has died. The Michigan Democrat was 92.

Dingell, who served in the U.S. House for 59 years before retiring in 2014, died Thursday at his home in Dearborn, said his wife, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell.

"He was a lion of the United States Congress and a loving son, father, husband, grandfather and friend," her office said in a statement. "He will be remembered for his decades of public service to the people of Southeast Michigan, his razor sharp wit and a lifetime of dedication to improving the lives of all who walk this earth."

Dubbed "Big John" for his imposing 6-foot-3 frame and sometimes intimidating manner, a reputation bolstered by the wild game heads decorating his Washington office, Dingell served with every president from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Barack Obama.

He was a longtime supporter of universal health care, a cause he adopted from his late father, whom he replaced in Congress in 1955. He also was known as a dogged pursuer of government waste and fraud, and even helped take down two top presidential aides while leading the investigative arm of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee, which he chaired for 14 years.

"I've gotten more death threats around here than I can remember," Dingell told The Associated Press in a 1995 interview. "It used to bother my wife, but oversight was something we did uniquely well."

Dingell had a front-row seat for the passage of landmark legislation he supported, including Medicare, the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act, but also for the Clean Air Act, which he was accused of stalling to help auto interests. His hometown, the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, was home to a Ford Motor Co. factory that was once the largest in the world.

Yet one of his proudest moments came in 2010, when he sat next to Obama as the \$938 billion health care overhaul was signed into law. Dingell had introduced a universal health care coverage bill in each of his terms.

"Presidents come and presidents go," former President Bill Clinton said in 2005, when Dingell celebrated 50 years in Congress. "John Dingell goes on forever."

Tributes poured in from current and former politicians in both parties.

"Today, we have lost a beloved pillar of the Congress and one of the greatest legislators in American history," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement. "John Dingell leaves a towering legacy of unshakable strength, boundless energy and transformative leadership."

Former President George W. Bush said he was fortunate to speak to Dingell Thursday afternoon.

"I thanked him for his service to our country and for being an example to those who have followed him into the public arena," Bush said in statement. "He was a fine gentleman who showed great respect for our country and her people."

Former President Barack Obama issued a statement saying Dingell's life "reminds us that change does not always come with a flash, but instead with steady, determined effort. Over the course of the longest congressional career in history, John led the charge on so much of the progress we take for granted today."

Dingell's investigations helped lead to the criminal conviction of one of President Ronald Reagan's top advisers, Michael Deaver, for lying under oath, and to the resignation of Reagan's first environmental protection chief and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch's mother, Anne Gorsuch Burford. She stepped down after refusing to share subpoenaed documents with a House subcommittee investigating a Superfund toxic waste program.

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Another probe led to the resignation of former Stanford University President Donald Kennedy after the school misused hundreds of millions of dollars in federal research funds.

Dingell often used his dry wit to amuse his friends and sting opponents. Even when hospitalized in 2003, following an operation to open a blocked artery, he maintained his humor: "I'm happy to inform the Republican leadership that I fully intend to be present to vote against their harmful and shameless tax giveaway package," he said from the hospital.

Critics called him overpowering and intimidating, a reputation boosted by the head of a 500-pound wild boar that looked at visitors to his Washington office. The story behind it? Dingell is said to have felled the animal with a pistol as it charged him during a hunting trip in Soviet Georgia.

The avid hunter and sportsman also loved classical music and ballet. His first date with his wife, Debbie, a former prominent Democratic activist whom he affectionately introduced as "the lovely Deborah," was a performance of the American Ballet Theater.

"He taught me how to shoot a rifle," former Ohio Rep. Dennis Eckhart told the AP in 2009. "I remember he said shooting a rifle is a lot like legislating. ... You have to be very, very sure of your target, and then when you get your chance, don't miss."

Born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on July 8, 1926, John David Dingell Jr. grew up in Michigan, where his father was elected to Congress as a "New Deal" Democrat in 1932. After a brief stint in the Army near the end of World War II, the younger Dingell earned his bachelor's and law degrees from Georgetown University.

Following the sudden death of his father in September 1955, Dingell — then a 29-year-old attorney — won a special election to succeed him.

The newly elected politician was no stranger to the Capitol. Dingell was serving as a page on the House floor when President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan on Dec. 8, 1941. In college, he supervised the building's elevator operators.

And when he became the longest-serving U.S. House member in history in 2009, Dingell recalled entering the chamber for the first time as a 6-year-old and being in awe of the East door.

"I had never been in a place like this. I was a working-class kid from a Polish neighborhood in Detroit, and this was quite an event for me," Dingell told Time magazine at the time. "I've only begun in later years to appreciate what it all meant."

Dingell won more than two dozen elections during his career, at first representing a Detroit district but eventually shifting because of redistricting to various southeastern Michigan communities. He became the longest-serving member of Congress on June 7, 2013, when he surpassed the former record holder, the late West Virginia Sen. Robert Byrd.

"The length of time is really quite unimportant," Dingell told the AP in an interview in 2009. "It's what I have done with that time."

Dingell, at age 87, announced in early 2014 that he would not run for a 30th full term because he could not have lived up to his own standards. Continuing the family tradition, his wife, Debbie, successfully ran for her husband's seat in 2014.

"I don't want people to be sorry for me. ... I don't want to be going out feet-first, and I don't want to do less than an adequate job," said Dingell, who by that time was using a cane or motorized cart to get around the Capitol.

Dingell suffered a heart attack four years later, in September 2018 at age 92. He was hospitalized but was soon "cracking jokes as usual," his wife said at the time.

An autobiography, "The Dean: The Best Seat in the House," was written with David Bender and published in December. Forewords were written by former President George H.W. Bush, who died only a few days before its publication, and former Vice President Joe Biden.

Dingell had more than 250,000 followers on Twitter, which was an outlet for the outspoken Democrat's wry takes and quick wit. In January, he noted the negative 7-degree temperature in Hell, Michigan, and retweeted a tweet from the Detroit Free Press that said the "Detroit Lions are going to win the Super



Bowl" now that Hell had frozen over.

Along with his wife, Dingell is survived by two daughters, two sons, one of whom served 15 years in the Michigan Legislature, and several grandchildren.

Eggert reported from Lansing, Michigan.

See AP's complete coverage of John Dingell here: <https://bit.ly/2RPjDJW>

## Bezos says Enquirer threatened to publish revealing pics

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos said Thursday he was the target of "extortion and blackmail" by the publisher of the National Enquirer, which he said threatened to publish revealing personal photos of him unless he stopped investigating how the tabloid obtained his private exchanges with his mistress.

Bezos, who is also owner of The Washington Post, detailed his interactions with American Media Inc., or AMI, in an extraordinary blog post Thursday on Medium.com. The billionaire did not say the tabloid was seeking money — instead, he said, the Enquirer wanted him to make a public statement that the tabloid's coverage was not politically motivated.

Bezos' accusations add another twist to a high-profile clash between the world's richest man and the leader of America's best-known tabloid, a strong backer of President Donald Trump. Bezos' investigators have suggested the Enquirer's coverage of his affair — which included the release of risque texts — was driven by dirty politics.

"Of course I don't want personal photos published, but I also won't participate in their well-known practice of blackmail, political favors, political attacks, and corruption," Bezos wrote of AMI, in explaining his decision to go public. "I prefer to stand up, roll this log over, and see what crawls out."

A spokesman and an attorney for AMI did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

But the company has admitted in the past that it engaged in what's known as "catch-and-kill" practices to help Trump become president. Trump has been highly critical of Bezos and the Post's coverage of the White House.

The Bezos affair became public when the Enquirer published a Jan. 9 story about his relationship with Lauren Sanchez, a former TV anchor who is also married. Bezos then hired a team of private investigators to find out how the tabloid got the texts and photos the two exchanged.

Several days ago, someone at AMI told Bezos' team that the company's CEO David Pecker was "apoplectic" about the investigation, Bezos said. AMI later approached Bezos' representatives with an offer.

"They said they had more of my text messages and photos that they would publish if we didn't stop our investigation," Bezos wrote.

Bezos wrote that this week, the tabloid's editor, Dylan Howard, emailed an attorney for Bezos' longtime security consultant to describe photos the Enquirer "obtained during our newsgathering." The photos include a "below the belt selfie" of Bezos, photos of him in tight boxer-briefs and wearing only a towel, and several revealing photos of Sanchez, according to the emails Bezos released.

According to the emails, an attorney for AMI offered a formal deal Wednesday: The tabloid wouldn't post the photos if Bezos and his investigators would release a public statement "affirming that they have no knowledge or basis" to suggest the Enquirer's coverage was "politically motivated or influenced by political forces."

Bezos said he decided to publish the emails sent to his team "rather than capitulate to extortion and blackmail," despite the "personal cost and embarrassment they threaten."

It does not appear that AMI demanded any money from Bezos — only that he call off his investigation and issue a statement saying the coverage wasn't political.

In its Jan. 9 story, the Enquirer said reporters followed Bezos and Sanchez "across five states and 40,000 miles" and "tailed them in private jets, swanky limos, helicopter rides, romantic hikes, five-star hotel hide-

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aways, intimate dinner dates and 'quality time' in hidden love nests."

It reported that Bezos sent "sleazy text messages and gushing love notes" to Sanchez, months before Bezos announced he was splitting up with his wife, MacKenzie. The story carries the bylines of Howard and two reporters.

But Bezos was suspicious about how the tabloid could have possibly gotten access to his private exchanges.

Bezos usually stays out of the public eye, frequently delegating announcements and public Amazon business updates to his executives. He doesn't even speak on the company's quarterly financial earnings call with analysts.

His personal investigators, led by his longtime security consultant, Gavin de Becker, concluded that Bezos' phone wasn't hacked. Instead, they've been focusing on Sanchez's brother, according to a person familiar with the matter.

De Becker and his team suspect Michael Sanchez, a talent manager who touts his support of Trump and is an acquaintance of Trump allies Roger Stone and Carter Page, may have provided the information to the Enquirer, the person said. The person wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Sanchez, who is also his sister's manager, has declined to speak with The Associated Press on the record and did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Thursday. In a tweet, he said de Becker "spreads fake, unhinged conservative conspiracy theories" and "'dog whistle' smears."

AMI's relationship with Trump has gotten the company into hot water in the past. It admitted to "catch-and-kill" practices as part of a deal with federal prosecutors, who agreed to not pursue charges against the company.

AMI acknowledged secretly assisting Trump's campaign by paying \$150,000 to a Playboy model for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with the then-candidate. The company then intentionally suppressed the story until after the 2016 election.

In September, the Justice Department agreed to a non-prosecution agreement with AMI, which requires the company and some top executives, including Pecker and Howard, to cooperate with authorities.

De Becker is now trying to find a way that federal prosecutors in Manhattan — where the non-prosecution agreement was signed — could investigate the text message scandal, the person familiar with the matter said, though it wasn't immediately clear what, if any, crime the prosecutors would be asked to look into.

It is a federal crime to threaten to injure someone's reputation in exchange for money or a "thing of value," though federal courts haven't made it directly clear whether a public statement, like the one demanded by AMI, could be considered something of value.

Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor and professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, said the allegations potentially put prosecutors in an awkward position because of the deal they had already cut with AMI.

"It shows how complicated and dangerous it is to make an agreement with National Enquirer," Levenson said. "They may have to cooperate, but they're continuing in their ongoing battle with Bezos and others."

But Levenson said it was too difficult to tell if the case amounted to blackmail or extortion without additional context and some prosecutors may be reluctant to charge someone for threatening another with embarrassing material.

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Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Brian Melley in Los Angeles and Rachel Lerman in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Supreme Court blocks Louisiana abortion clinic law

By MARK SHERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A divided Supreme Court stopped Louisiana from enforcing new regulations on abortion clinics in a test of the conservative court's views on abortion rights.

The justices said by a 5-4 vote late Thursday that they will not allow the state to put into effect a law that requires abortion providers to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

Chief Justice John Roberts joined the court's four liberals in putting a hold on the law, pending a full review of the case.

President Donald Trump's two Supreme Court appointees, Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, were among the four conservative members of the court who would have allowed the law to take effect.

Kavanaugh wrote a dissenting opinion in which he said the court's action was premature because the state had made clear it would allow abortion providers an additional 45 days to obtain admitting privileges before it started enforcing the law.

If the doctors succeed, they can continue performing abortions, he said. If they fail, they could return to court, Kavanaugh said.

The law is very similar to a Texas measure the justices struck down three years ago. Roberts dissented in that case.

But the composition of the court has changed since then, with Kavanaugh replacing Justice Anthony Kennedy, who voted to strike down the Texas law. Trump had pledged during the campaign to appoint "pro-life" justices, and abortion opponents are hoping the more conservative bench will be more open to upholding abortion restrictions.

Louisiana abortion providers and a district judge who initially heard the case said one or maybe two of the state's three abortion clinics would have to close under the new law. There would be at most two doctors who could meet its requirements, they said.

But the federal appeals court in New Orleans rejected those claims, doubting that any clinics would have to close and saying the doctors had not tried hard enough to establish relationships with local hospitals.

In January, the full appeals court voted 9-6 not to get involved in the case, setting up the Supreme Court appeal.

The law had been scheduled to take effect Monday, but Justice Samuel Alito delayed the effective date at least through Thursday to give the justices more time. He and Justice Clarence Thomas were the other dissenters Thursday.

The justices could decide this spring whether to add the case to their calendar for the term that begins in October.

The case is *June Medical Services v. Gee*.

## Parkland attack fueled big shift in America's gun politics

By LISA MARIE PANE, Associated Press

Last year's shooting at a Florida high school sparked a movement among a younger generation angered by gun violence and set the stage for a significant shift in America's gun politics.

Thousands of student protesters took to the streets and inspired hashtags such as #NeverAgain and #Enough. They also mobilized to register a new generation of voters.

Candidates were emboldened too. Many of them confronted the issue in the midterm elections and were rewarded with victory over incumbents supported by the National Rifle Association. That helped Democrats take back control of the House.

As the one-year anniversary of the shooting approaches, the legacy of the massacre remains an ever-present force in the nation's politics and gun laws.

"What we've seen here is a tectonic shift in our politics on the guns issue," said Peter Ambler, executive director of Giffords, the gun violence prevention group founded by former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. These

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people "didn't get elected despite their advocacy for safer gun laws. They got elected because of their advocacy for safer gun laws. They made that a core part of their message to the American people."

The political landscape began to change just days after a former student shot and killed 17 students and adults at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

At the state level, a surge of gun-control measures were enacted, including increasing the minimum age for purchasing a firearm and requiring waiting periods. The number of states with so-called "red flag" laws — which allow temporary confiscation of weapons from people deemed a safety risk — doubled.

At the federal level, for the first time in modern history, gun-control groups outspent the powerful NRA on the 2018 midterm elections. The new Democratic majority in the House this week held its first hearing on gun control in a decade.

Even under GOP-control of both chambers during President Donald Trump's first two years in office, some of the gun industry's top priorities — easing restrictions on firearm suppressors and making it easier to carry concealed firearms over state borders — stalled.

Still, with one of the most gun-friendly presidents in the White House, the U.S. Supreme Court now has a majority of justices who are viewed as ardent supporters of the Second Amendment, a shift that is likely to have a lasting effect on gun rights.

The most prominent shift occurred in Florida, a state that has long welcomed guns and has a strong NRA presence. Lawmakers raised the gun-purchasing age and imposed a three-day waiting period.

The Parkland attack came just a few months after two other gun tragedies: the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history that killed 59 people at an outdoor concert in Las Vegas and the slayings of 26 churchgoers in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

In the wake of those massacres, the NRA's influence waned. Trump directed the Justice Department to ban bump stocks, the device used by the Las Vegas gunman that allowed his rifles to mimic fully automatic weaponry.

The NRA also faced boycotts from corporate America, with some financial firms refusing to do business with gunmakers and some retailers pulling firearms and ammunition off shelves. A federal investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election widened to include suspicions that agents sought to court NRA officials and funnel money through the group.

The NRA has cast itself as being in financial distress because of deep-pocketed liberal opposition to guns and what it calls "toxic lies" in news reports. Last summer, the organization raised its annual dues for the second time in two years.

Parkland "definitely marked a turning point," said Adam Winkler, a professor at the University of California Los Angeles School of Law and gun rights expert. "There is no doubt that the energy, the enthusiasm, the mobilization of these students was very influential. It did affect a lot of people across the country."

But, he said, the NRA "remains a powerhouse," and it's too early to suggest that gun groups' troubles are insurmountable.

"No one ever made a lot of money betting against the NRA," he said.

NRA spokeswoman Jennifer Baker questioned whether the influence of gun-rights advocates has waned, noting that Florida elected a governor backed by the NRA and a majority of the organization's legislative candidates won last year.

Despite the Democratic gains in Washington, proposals for gun restrictions still face long odds. Any action taken by the House will fail to gain traction in the Senate or be signed into law by the president, she said.

"They exploit these high-profile tragedies to sensationalize. They exploit them to play on people's emotions instead of doing their jobs to address the underlying issues that are really causing these" shootings, Baker said.

Erich Pratt, executive director of Gun Owners of America, said the industry is accustomed to people believing the latest shooting will bring the gun industry to its knees.

"They said that in 2013 after the Sandy Hook shooting, and they absolutely said that again last year," Pratt said. With the exception of Florida, the blue states got bluer and the red states got redder and ex-



panded gun rights, he said.

Polls show that gun control is not a top priority for Americans, he said.

"I don't think the needle has moved at all," Pratt said.

## Facility where incapacitated woman gave birth to shut down

By TERRY TANG, Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A long-term care facility in Arizona where an incapacitated woman was raped and later gave birth announced Thursday that it would shut down operations.

Officials with Hacienda HealthCare said its board of directors determined it's not sustainable to keep operating its intermediate care facility in Phoenix. It serves infants, children and young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities who require a high level of medical care.

Hacienda officials said they were working with state agencies to develop a plan to move 37 patients to other centers. Its skilled nursing facility will stay open.

"We will continue to work with these agencies in the weeks and months ahead to ensure an appropriate and safe transition moving forward," the provider said in a statement. "The care of our patients remains our top priority and we will do everything in our power to ensure a smooth transition for them and their families."

State regulators, meanwhile, called the decision "disturbing news" and not in the best interest of patients.

"We encourage Hacienda to work with the state to find a path forward," the Arizona Department of Economic Security said in a statement. "State agencies are exhausting all efforts to bring this to a conclusion that is beneficial to the patients, some of whom have been at this facility nearly their entire lives."

The state had ordered Hacienda to hire a third-party management team to oversee daily operations after the revelation that an incapacitated woman who lived at the facility since age 3 gave birth on Dec. 29. But Hacienda and the outside party could not come to a long-term agreement.

Authorities have charged Nathan Sutherland, a former licensed nurse, with sexually assaulting the 29-year-old victim. They determined his DNA matched a sample taken from the newborn boy.

Sutherland, 36, pleaded not guilty earlier this week to sexual assault and vulnerable adult abuse.

## Former NY Times editor acknowledges sourcing errors in book

By HILLEL ITALIE, AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The former executive editor of The New York Times acknowledged Thursday that her new book, "Merchants of Truth," contains some sourcing errors and said she would correct them.

In an email Thursday to The Associated Press, Jill Abramson wrote that some page numbers in sourcing notes needed to be fixed and some sources "should have been cited as quotations in the text."

"The notes don't match up with the right pages in a few cases, and this was unintentional and will be promptly corrected. The language is too close in some cases and should have been cited as quotations in the text. This, too, will be fixed," she wrote.

A Twitter thread posted Wednesday by Vice correspondent Michael C. Moynihan listed several examples of passages in Abramson's book that closely resembled the work of other publications, including Time Out and The New Yorker.

"I wouldn't want even a misplaced comma so I will promptly fix these footnotes and quotations as I have corrected other material that Vice contested," Abramson wrote, noting that Vice had previously pointed out factual mistakes.

"The book is over 500 pages. All of the ideas in the book are original, all the opinions are mine. The passages in question involve facts that should have been perfectly cited in my footnotes and weren't."

Abramson had defended herself by saying that her book includes extensive endnotes, including web links to sources. It is widely believed that an outside source should be credited in the body of the work if there is a close similarity.

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Abramson's book, which is subtitled "The Business of News and the Fight for Facts," was published this week by Simon & Schuster. It is a critique of the media that focuses on two leading newspapers, the Times and The Washington Post, along with Vice and fellow digital company BuzzFeed.

"In writing 'Merchants of Truth,' I tried above all to accurately and properly give attribution to the many hundreds of sources that were part of my research," she wrote to the AP. "My book has 70 pages of footnotes and 100 source citations in the Vice chapters alone, including The New Yorker, the Columbia Journalism Review, The Ryerson Review of Journalism and a masters' thesis, the sources from which Mr. Moynihan says I plagiarized."

"Merchants of Truth" faults Vice for sexism and hypocrisy among other criticisms, and Vice in turn has taken on Abramson.

"Never thought in my wildest dreams that the former exec editor of NYT would school @Vice on how to do irony," Vice co-founder Suroosh Alvi tweeted Wednesday. "Imagine plagiarizing for a book on ethics — riddled with factual errors — and then calling it 'Merchants of Truth.' Hats off to you @JillAbramson!"

Abramson is a longtime journalist whose reporting has appeared in the Times and the Wall Street Journal, among other publications, and whose previous books include "Strange Justice," co-written with Jane Mayer. In 2011, she made history as the first woman to be the Times' executive editor, but was fired three years later amid repeated clashes with colleagues. She currently teaches creative writing at Harvard University.

## South hopeful, wary, but nuke talks crucial for Korean ties

By KIM TONG-HYUNG, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Koreans, always deeply divided over how best to deal with their often-belligerent northern neighbor, are reacting with both hope and wariness to President Donald Trump's announcement that he will hold a second nuclear disarmament summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

But for liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is eager to push ahead with ambitious plans for engagement with North Korea, a breakthrough in Vietnam is crucial. Moon served as diplomatic middleman between the U.S. and North Korea following the North's increasingly powerful string of weapons tests and Trump's threats of military action in 2017.

A year of mostly fruitless diplomacy has led to serious doubts about Kim's sincerity and Trump's ability to force North Korea to significantly reduce the threat its nuclear weapons pose to the region and world.

"Denuclearization will be difficult because North Korea wants to keep nuclear weapons, and the United States wants them all gone," Lee Sang-won, a 68-year-old retiree, said Thursday at a bustling Seoul train station.

Trump announced the Feb. 27-28 summit during his State of the Union address earlier this week, as millions of South Koreans made visits to their hometowns during Lunar New Year holidays.

On Thursday, Trump's special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, held a second day of talks with officials in Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, to hammer out summit logistics and an agenda. Biegun is expected to come to South Korea to brief officials as early as Friday. Moon's office said Wednesday that Seoul hopes Trump and Kim will make "concrete and substantial progress" in their talks in Vietnam, but few other details were released.

At Seoul Station, broadcasts of Trump's summit announcement drew crowds in front of large TV screens. Trump, Kim and nuclear weapons were also likely subjects of heated political discussions at holiday dinner tables across the country. South Korea is split along generational and ideological lines on how to handle the North.

A wave of optimism greeted the diplomatic developments of 2018, which included three summits between Kim and Moon as well as the first Trump-Kim summit in Singapore, but South Koreans may have become much more skeptical in recent months. In a December poll of some 1,000 people by Gallup Korea, 45 percent of respondents said they do not believe Kim will keep his denuclearization promises, compared to 38 percent who said they trust Kim. The margin of error was 3.1 percentage points.

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Despite the hype of Trump's first meeting with Kim, the highly orchestrated one-day meeting in Singapore only produced a vague aspirational vow about a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula without describing when and how it would occur.

North Korea has since insisted that U.S.-led sanctions against the country should be lifted before there's any progress in nuclear negotiations, and Kim has yet to convincingly show that he'll voluntarily relinquish an arsenal he may see as his strongest guarantee of survival.

As skepticism mounts, the South Korean president wants to maintain an impression that things are moving toward North Korean denuclearization. Moon is trying to keep Washington hard-liners at bay and create more space for inter-Korean reconciliation, which he says is crucial for resolving the nuclear standoff.

The Koreans in past months have discussed reconnecting railways and roads across their border, resuming operations at a jointly run factory park in the North Korean border town of Kaesong and restarting South Korean tours to the North's Diamond Mountain resort.

But tough sanctions have limited what they can do, with Washington insisting on keeping up economic pressure until North Korea takes stronger steps toward irreversibly and verifiably relinquishing its nuclear weapons.

Some in South Korea hope that Kim will be ready to make meaningful concessions in Vietnam that Trump could then respond to by partially easing the sanctions on the North to allow more inter-Korean cooperation.

One potential deal could see North Korea agreeing to dismantle key parts of its Nyongbyon nuclear complex, freeze its nuclear program and allow in inspectors in exchange for the United States granting sanctions exemptions for inter-Korean activities at Kaesong and Diamond Mountain, said Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Dongguk University.

Ahead of his visit to the Koreas, Bigeun said last week that Kim had committed to "the dismantlement and destruction of North Korea's plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities" during a September summit with Moon and at a meeting with the U.S. secretary of state in October.

"In Singapore, Trump and Kim were chased by time and they couldn't even get to the main subject," said Koh, who is also a policy adviser to Moon. "This time they will at least have to agree on what the early steps of the denuclearization process would be. They can't let another summit be called a failure."

Shin Beomchul, a senior analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said a key point of the summit will be whether North Korea agrees to accept inspectors to verify its activities to dismantle its nuclear facilities.

"If both sides agree on the declaration, verification and dismantling of the Nyongbyon nuclear facility, we can say that it was a successful summit," Shin said.

There's also speculation about a possible four-way meeting, also including Moon and Chinese President Xi Jinping, to declare a formal end to the Korean War, which stopped with an armistice and left the peninsula still technically at war.

Both Koreas have endorsed an end-of-war declaration as a trust-building measure that could move nuclear diplomacy forward. But Washington has insisted that North Korea needs to first take more concrete steps toward denuclearization.

While such a declaration wouldn't imply a legally binding peace treaty, experts say it could create political momentum that would make it easier for North Korea to steer the discussions toward a peace regime and security concessions.

## From Gucci to Prada, fashion fails evoke racist imagery

By COLLEEN BARRY, AP Fashion Writer

MILAN (AP) — Luxury fashion is all about breaking codes, creating a new, irresistible message that captivates consumers. But some of the globe's top brands have raised eyebrows with designs that have racist connotations.

The latest instance of that was Italian fashion designer Gucci, which produced a black wool balaclava sweater with an oversized collar that pulls over the chin and nose. It includes a slit where the mouth is,

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ringed with what look like giant red lips. Its similarity to blackface prompted an instant backlash from the public and forced the company to apologize publicly late Wednesday.

And it's not just the fashion labels. Adidas on Thursday apologized and announced it was removing a running shoe from its collection celebrating Black History Month. It did so after critics slammed the company on social media for including the all-white shoe in a collection Adidas said was inspired by the Harlem Renaissance.

Gucci also withdrew its offending garment from sale on websites and stores, and said the incident would be "a powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond."

But the question persists: How can fashion houses that thrive on detail miss such critical social cues?

Prada similarly withdrew a monkey bag charm that recalled blackface in December, saying it "abhors racist imagery." And Dolce & Gabbana issued a video apology after one of the designers made insulting remarks about the Chinese in a private chat discussing the questionable depiction of a Chinese model in a campaign.

"Luxury brands used to be able to get away with provocative and eccentric ads that push the boundaries of our society and culture in the name of being creative and cutting edge," said Qing Wang, a professor of marketing at Warwick Business School.

"However, a long list of recent incidents have caused public outrage, suggesting that era is now gone or that luxury brands have lost touch with public sentiment. What used to be considered "creativity" has now turned into "bad taste" or even "racist," he said.

He cited other fashion fails that evoked stereotypes, including Dolce & Gabbana's "slave sandal" in its spring/summer 2016 collection and a recent Burberry campaign for the Chinese New Year that was compared to Asian horror films.

While many of these incidents have caused immediate social media backlashes, the longer-term impact will take time to measure, and will depend on the brands' reaction and future sensitivity.

Dolce & Gabbana was forced to cancel its Shanghai runway show after the insulting remarks were publicized, top Asian influencers backed out of campaigns and Chinese websites dropped their line — a warning sign from a region responsible for 30 percent of all global luxury sales.

The blackface images have particular resonance in the United States at a time when the governor of Virginia and his attorney general have been caught up in a scandal over blackface incidents from their college days in the 1980s. The offensive depictions are reminiscent of traveling minstrels from the 19th Century, who would paint their faces black to portray African characters in a ridiculous and mocking fashion, spreading racial stereotypes along the way.

Italian sociologist Michele Sorice at Rome's Luiss university says that the evocation of blackface by Italian fashion houses signals "a mixture of good faith, and ignorance." He noted that Italian society still wasn't fully aware of the racial charge in some words and images.

"I imagine that they don't truly think they are racist," Sorice said. "I think they didn't have the instruments to understand that these images are archetypes that were used to contrast the concept of blackness and make them ridiculous. I think that many simply don't know. It is a cultural issue."

Paolo Cillo, a marketing professor at Milan's Bocconi University, said the designer's intent may have been taken out of context and amplified, and she credited Gucci with acting swiftly to quell the controversy.

"I wouldn't stigmatize fashion," Cillo said, comparing fashion designer process to artistic pursuits like filmmaking, painting or music. "There are artists in the world of culture that did more outrageous things and no one ever said a thing. There is a perception that fashion is ephemeral, or commercial. But from my point of view, it is not. It reflects the times, like all other artistic forms."

While the fashion world has been at the forefront of addressing sexual norms — Gucci has been redefining genderless dress codes under Alessandro Michele — it has lagged behind other industries in taking on social issues such as racial tolerance, climate change or women's empowerment, according to Larry Chiagouris, a marketing professor at Pace University.

"It is not clear why this is," Chiagouris said, "but the evidence clearly points to the fashion industry's



need ... to catch up with the rest of the world.”

Nicole Winfield contributed from Rome.

## Trump-GOP meeting boosts optimism about reaching border deal

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump appears to be taking a more positive view of Capitol Hill talks on border security, according to negotiators who struck a distinctly optimistic tone after a White House meeting with a top Republican on the broad parameters of a potential bipartisan agreement.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby of Alabama said Thursday’s session in the Oval Office was “the most positive meeting I’ve had in a long time” and that the president was “very reasonable.”

Down Pennsylvania Avenue at the Capitol, the mood among negotiators was distinctly upbeat, with participants in the talks between the Democratic-controlled House and GOP-held Senate predicting a deal could come as early as this weekend.

There’s a Feb. 15 deadline to enact the measure or a stopgap spending bill to avert another partial government shutdown, which neither side wants to reprise. Republicans are especially eager to avoid another shutdown after they got scalded by the last one.

Trump had previously called the talks a “waste of time,” and he’s threatened to declare a national emergency to bypass Congress and build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. But Shelby said Trump during their meeting “urged me to get to yes” on an agreement.

Publicly on Thursday Trump took a wait-and-see approach.

“I certainly hear that they are working on something and both sides are moving along,” Trump said. “We’ll see what happens. We need border security. We have to have it, it’s not an option. Let’s see what happens.”

The White House is committed to letting the negotiations play out, with some saying they are “cautiously optimistic” about getting a deal they could live with, said a senior administration official who lacked authorization to publicly discuss internal deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The new openness comes after Trump delivered a well-received State of the Union speech in which he preached the value of bipartisanship.

Despite the newfound optimism, Trump continues to threaten to declare a national emergency to circumvent Congress if lawmakers fail to reach a deal he can stomach.

Still, Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., a close ally of Trump, said Thursday that the deal could be a good starting place — suggesting Trump could take additional action if needed to secure more wall funding without congressional approval.

“I would recommend that this will probably be a good down payment and what else is lacking, the delta between what you want and what you get, there are other ways to do it, and I expect the president to go it alone in some fashion,” Graham told reporters.

Shelby said he and Trump didn’t discuss whether Trump still might use an emergency declaration even if there’s a deal, saying: “The president’s got constitutional powers. ... I would think he wouldn’t, but I don’t know what the situation” will be.

Beyond the border security negotiations, the measure is likely to contain seven appropriations bills funding domestic agencies and the foreign aid budget, as well as disaster aid for victims of last year’s hurricanes and western wildfires.

“I’m hopeful,” said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. “I do like the idea of getting all of last year’s work finished, and I hope that’s where it ends up.”

Any move by Trump to fund a border barrier by executive fiat, however, would roil many Republicans on Capitol Hill, raising the likelihood that both House and Senate could pass legislation to reverse him. Trump could veto any such measure, but he’s also certain to face a challenge in the courts.

“If Congress won’t participate or won’t go along, we’ll figure out a way to do it with executive authority,”

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Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney said on Fox News Channel's "Hannity" on Wednesday. Mulvaney said that the administration has identified well more than \$5.7 billion to transfer to wall construction, saying they would try to avoid legal obstacles.

"Find the money that we can spend with the lowest threat of litigation, and then move from that pot of money to the next pot that maybe brings a little bit more threat of litigation," Mulvaney said.

It's clear that Trump won't get anything close to the \$5.7 billion he's demanded for wall construction, just as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., will have to depart from her view that there shouldn't be any wall funding at all.

Last year, a bipartisan Senate panel approved \$1.6 billion for 65 miles of pedestrian fencing in Texas — in line with Trump's official request. The negotiations aren't likely to veer very far from that figure, aides involved in the talks said, and newly empowered House Democrats were looking to restrict use of the money.

A key negotiator, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said details on nettlesome border wall issues haven't been worked out. Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., another participant, said both sides are showing flexibility, including Democrats who insisted during the recently-ended 35-day shutdown on no wall funding at all.

"They are not opposed to barriers," Blunt said about Democrats. "And the president, I think, has embraced the idea that there may actually be something better than a concrete wall would have been anyway."

Pelosi told reporters Thursday that she was hopeful of an agreement that would "protect our borders as we protect our values."

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., another negotiator, acknowledged that Democrats could possibly lose votes on any final deal and that it's "unrealistic" to think there would be no funding at all for any physical barriers.

"Like in any negotiation — if the Republicans and the White House are saying they need barriers, wall, whatever you want to call it, and that is an absolute objective, and we're saying we want some other things — like in anything else, it's a trade off," she said.

Among the things Democrats are battling against are higher levels of funding for detention beds to hold migrants crossing into the U.S. illegally.

This story has been corrected to reflect the White House meeting was between Trump and Shelby, not between Trump, Shelby and additional Republican lawmakers.

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Catherine Lucey and Jill Colvin contributed from Washington.

## Democrats seek Green New Deal to address climate change

By MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats launched a sweeping plan Thursday to transform the U.S. economy to combat climate change and create thousands of jobs in renewable energy, signaling its likely elevation as a central campaign issue in 2020 despite President Donald Trump's failure to mention climate change in his State of the Union address.

At least six senators running for president or considering White House bids backed the Green New Deal put forth by freshman Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and veteran Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts. The nonbinding resolution calls for a "10-year national mobilization" on the scale of the original New Deal to shift the economy away from fossil fuels such as oil and coal and replace them with renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. It sets a goal to meet "100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable and zero-emission energy sources," including nuclear power.

"Our energy future will not be found in the dark of a mine but in the light of the sun," Markey said at a Capitol news conference.

The plan goes far beyond energy to urge national health care coverage and job guarantees, as well as high-quality education and affordable housing. The resolution urges elimination of fossil fuels pollution and greenhouse gas emissions "as much as technologically feasible" in a range of economic sectors and calls

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for “upgrading all existing buildings in the United States” to be energy-efficient.

Markey predicted more Democrats would sign on as the plan gets better known and said some Republicans may back it. More than 80 percent of registered voters supported the concept of a Green New Deal in a December poll by Yale and George Mason universities.

“This is now a voting issue across the country,” Markey said. “The green generation has risen up and they are saying they want this issue solved” as one of the top two or three issues in the 2020 election. A coalition of labor, economic justice, racial justice, indigenous, and environmental organizations immediately announced their support.

While setting lofty goals, the plan does not explicitly call for eliminating the use of fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, a nod to pragmatism that may disappoint some of Ocasio-Cortez’s strongest backers.

Even so, the Green New Deal is more ambitious than the Clean Power Plan proposed by former President Barack Obama to impose emissions limits on coal-fired power plants. Trump, who has expressed doubts about climate change, scrapped Obama’s plan as a job killer.

While Democrats did not specify a price tag, some Republicans predict it would cost in the trillions of dollars. GOP lawmakers denounced the plan as a radical proposal that would drive the economy off a cliff and lead to a huge tax increase.

“The Green New Deal is a raw deal for the American taxpayer,” said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Barrasso called the plan “a socialist manifesto that lays out a laundry list of government giveaways, including guaranteed food, housing, college and economic security even for those who refuse to work.”

Ocasio-Cortez said the plan’s scope was its strength, saying “small, incremental policy solutions are not enough” to repel climate change, which she called an “existential threat” to the planet. Far from overreach, the plan addresses a sense of growing frustration by young people and others who “don’t feel we’re being ambitious enough” to address a potentially cataclysmic danger, she said.

With a whiff of presidential politics and a rock-star freshman in attendance, Democrats drew an unusually large crowd for the Green New Deal unveiling. The outdoor event was attended by more journalists and activists than lawmakers. It was a notable gathering for a proposal that is not a bill, but only guidance for any legislation on climate change Congress develops.

The measure is supported by at least six senators with their eyes on the White House: Cory Booker of New Jersey, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Kamala Harris of California, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota.

None of the six attended the news conference, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said hours earlier she hadn’t read the proposal. Pelosi did not explicitly endorse it, but welcomed “the enthusiasm” of its backers.

“I welcome the Green New Deal and any other proposals” to address climate change, Pelosi said, adding that she also wants to hear from a new House committee on climate change. Pelosi said the panel will “spearhead Democrats’ work” on climate issues.

Ocasio-Cortez said Pelosi invited her to join the climate panel but she declined, saying she wants to focus on the Green New Deal and other committee assignments.

The resolution introduced Thursday marks the first legislative language attached to the Green New Deal, a concept that until now has been loosely defined as a call for action to head off catastrophic climate change and create jobs.

Answering critics who call the plan unrealistic, Ocasio-Cortez said that when President John F. Kennedy wanted to go to the moon by the end of the 1960s, “people said it was impossible.” She compared the plan to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal and Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society.

While focusing on renewable energy, Ocasio-Cortez said the plan would include existing nuclear power plants but block new nuclear plants. Nuclear power does not emit greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming.

Asked how the plan would be paid for, Ocasio-Cortez said it would be “the same way we paid for the original New Deal, World War II, the bank bailouts, tax cuts for the rich and decades of war — with public money appropriated by Congress.”

She called the plan an “investment” that would produce more than it costs in new infrastructure, jobs and avoided health care costs.

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman and Elana Schor contributed to this story.

## Germany to Facebook: Stop forcing users to share their data

By DAVID RISING and BARBARA ORTUTAY, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Facebook is pushing back against a German ruling that could make it harder for the company to combine data from all the services it runs in order to target ads even more precisely.

Thursday’s ruling, though aimed at current practices, hints at potential troubles ahead if Facebook follows through with plans to integrate the messaging functions of WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger as early as next year.

German antitrust authorities ruled Thursday that Facebook was exploiting its dominance in social media to force users to share data from other Facebook-owned services like WhatsApp and Instagram, as well as third-party websites through the “Like” and “Share” buttons.

The Federal Cartel Office, or Bundeskartellamt, isn’t contesting Facebook’s use of customer data to target ads on the main Facebook service. Rather, the ruling said Facebook should have to get permission separately before using customer data from other apps and websites to do so.

Facebook said it would appeal.

The company currently collects data on users’ activities on Facebook and the other apps it owns, along with third-party websites. So, what someone views, likes or shares on Instagram — or the broader web — could be used to show that person an ad on Facebook.

Facebook also has been moving to further integrate WhatsApp and Instagram into its main service after initially promising to keep both as stand-alone companies when it bought them.

Although Facebook hasn’t given many details on its plans to integrate messaging, CEO Mark Zuckerberg said recently that the idea is to help users message one another more easily, without having to worry about who’s on which service. The company also said it would encrypt all the messaging services, something it does by default only with WhatsApp.

But critics have raised another possible reason — the threat of antitrust crackdowns. Essentially, if Facebook combines its messaging services so that they are different in name and design only, it will be much more difficult, if not impossible, to then separate out and spin off Instagram and WhatsApp as separate companies.

Combining the three services also lets Facebook build more complete data profiles on all of its users. Already, businesses can already target Facebook and Instagram users together with the same ad campaign, and ads are likely coming to WhatsApp eventually.

Then there’s competition from other messaging services, such as Apple’s or Google’s. Users are more likely to stay within Facebook’s properties if they can easily message their friends across different services, rather than having to switch between Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram.

Privacy attorney Scott Vernick said he expects the integration plans to draw regulatory scrutiny, particularly in Europe. That’s because of Facebook’s promises that it would keep the companies separate when it bought Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014. WhatsApp’s founders quit the company over disagreements about user privacy.

“There is a high chance for antitrust concerns, as well as those over how user data is collected and used,” Vernick said.

There are also worries that Facebook could build deeper profiles, such as by linking phone numbers to real-life identities, he added. Facebook doesn’t require users to add their phone number, but WhatsApp is generally used with phone numbers. Between the two, Facebook gets more data.

In ruling that Facebook was a “dominant company,” the Cartel Office said it was subject to “special obligations under competition law” and “must take into account that Facebook users practically cannot



switch to other social networks.”

“The only choice the user has is either to accept the comprehensive combination of data or to refrain from using the social network,” it said in its judgment. “In such a difficult situation the user’s choice cannot be referred to as voluntary consent.”

The office said many users were not aware that Facebook is able to “collect an almost unlimited amount of any type of user data from third-party sources.”

Facebook said German authorities underestimated the competition Facebook has in Germany from YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter and others. The company said it had been cooperating with the Cartel Office since 2016 and would “defend these important arguments in court.”

Regardless of whether the German ruling — which would only apply in Germany — sticks, Vernick said the European data protection commission is already looking closely at Facebook’s integration plans and the data it collects across all its services and beyond.

Ortutay reported from New York.

## **Fish pass mirror test, but does it mean they’re self-aware?**

**By MALCOLM RITTER, AP Science Writer**

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists report that a fish can pass a standard test of recognizing itself in a mirror — and they raise a question about what that means.

Does this decades-old test, designed to show self-awareness in animals, really do that?

Since the mirror test was introduced in 1970, scientists have found that relatively few animals can pass it. Most humans can by age 18 to 24 months, and so can chimps and orangutans, says the test’s inventor, evolutionary psychologist Gordon Gallup Jr. of Albany College in New York.

Outside of ape species, many researchers say there’s also good evidence for passing the test in bottle-nose dolphins, Asian elephants and European magpies, although Gallup is skeptical of those results.

The test exposes animals to a mirror and looks for reactions that indicate some recognition of themselves. For example, do the animals do unusual things to see if the image copies them? Do they appear to use the mirror to explore their own bodies? And if researchers mark an animal in a place the creature can observe only in the mirror, does the animal try to remove it?

Passing the test suggests an animal can “become the object of its own attention,” and if it does, it should be able to use its own experience to infer what others know, want or intend to do, said Gallup, who did not participate in the fish study.

The new paper released Thursday by PLOS Biology subjected up to 10 fish to various parts of the test.

Alex Jordan, who’s at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Konstanz, Germany, and colleagues observed a reef-dwelling species called the cleaner wrasse doing odd behaviors like swimming upside-down by the mirror. When four fish were injected with a tag that left a visible brown mark under their throats, three scraped that part of their bodies against a rock or the sandy bottom of the tank, as if trying to remove it.

In all, the researchers concluded that the fish had passed the test.

But Jordan says his fish could have succeeded without possessing true self-awareness.

They may have matched the reflection to parts of their own bodies, but he said that less-sophisticated mental talent doesn’t require self-awareness, which includes talents like distinguishing their own bodies from those of other fish or recognizing their own territory or possessions. Nor does it imply self-consciousness, which means thinking about oneself and one’s own behavior in relation to how others act, he said in an email.

Gallup said he believes the experimental procedure was flawed, so the fish can’t really be said to have passed the test.

Frans de Waal, an expert on ape and monkey behavior at Emory University’s Yerkes National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, said he found the fish results to be inconclusive.

In a journal commentary, de Waal also said it’s better to think of different animals having varying de-

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degrees of self-awareness, rather than considering it an all-or-nothing trait possessed by just a few species. "To explore self-awareness further we should stop looking at responses to the mirror as the litmus test" and turn to other means of evaluation, he said.

The Associated Press Health & Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **AP Exclusive: George Michael's art collection up for auction**

LONDON (AP) — A trove of art collected by singer George Michael before his death in 2016 is going up for auction in London.

Christie's is selling the star's collection, including pieces by Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas — members of the "Young British Artists" generation who, like Michael, shook up Britain's creative scene in the 1980s and '90s.

Christie's contemporary art expert, Cristian Albu, said Friday that the collection is "a portrait of Britain in the 1990s."

More than 200 works are on offer, including Hirst's "The Incomplete Truth," a glass case enclosing a dove preserved in formaldehyde, which has an estimated price of 1 million to 1.5 million pounds (\$1,280,000 to \$1,920,000).

The sale takes place March 14, with some lots being sold in an online auction running March 8-15.

## **Bezos tells of Enquirer threats to publish revealing pics**

**By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos says he was the target of "extortion and blackmail" by the publisher of the National Enquirer, which he said threatened to publish revealing personal photos of him unless he stopped investigating how the tabloid obtained his private exchanges with his mistress.

Bezos, who is also owner of The Washington Post, detailed his interactions with American Media Inc., or AMI, in an extraordinary blog post Thursday on Medium.com. The billionaire did not say the tabloid was seeking money — instead, he said, the Enquirer wanted him to make a public statement that the tabloid's coverage was not politically motivated.

Bezos' accusations add another twist to a high-profile clash between the world's richest man and the leader of America's best-known tabloid, a strong backer of President Donald Trump. Bezos' investigators have suggested the Enquirer's coverage of his affair — which included the release of risqué texts — was driven by dirty politics.

"Of course I don't want personal photos published, but I also won't participate in their well-known practice of blackmail, political favors, political attacks, and corruption," Bezos wrote of AMI, in explaining his decision to go public. "I prefer to stand up, roll this log over, and see what crawls out."

A spokesman and an attorney for AMI did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

But the company has admitted in the past that it engaged in what's known as "catch-and-kill" practices to help Trump become president. Trump has been highly critical of Bezos and the Post's coverage of the White House.

The Bezos affair became public when the Enquirer published a Jan. 9 story about his relationship with Lauren Sanchez, a former TV anchor who is also married. Bezos then hired a team of private investigators to find out how the tabloid got the texts and photos the two exchanged.

Several days ago, someone at AMI told Bezos' team that the company's CEO David Pecker was "apoplectic" about the investigation, Bezos said. AMI later approached Bezos' representatives with an offer.

"They said they had more of my text messages and photos that they would publish if we didn't stop our investigation," Bezos wrote.

Bezos wrote that this week, the tabloid's editor, Dylan Howard, emailed an attorney for Bezos' longtime security consultant to describe photos the Enquirer "obtained during our newsgathering." The photos in-

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clude a "below the belt selfie" of Bezos, photos of him in tight boxer-briefs and wearing only a towel, and several revealing photos of Sanchez, according to the emails Bezos released.

According to the emails, an attorney for AMI offered a formal deal Wednesday: The tabloid wouldn't post the photos if Bezos and his investigators would release a public statement "affirming that they have no knowledge or basis" to suggest the Enquirer's coverage was "politically motivated or influenced by political forces."

Bezos said he decided to publish the emails sent to his team "rather than capitulate to extortion and blackmail," despite the "personal cost and embarrassment they threaten."

It does not appear that AMI demanded any money from Bezos — only that he call off his investigation and issue a statement saying the coverage wasn't political.

In its Jan. 9 story, the Enquirer said reporters followed Bezos and Sanchez "across five states and 40,000 miles" and "tailed them in private jets, swanky limos, helicopter rides, romantic hikes, five-star hotel hide-aways, intimate dinner dates and 'quality time' in hidden love nests."

It reported that Bezos sent "sleazy text messages and gushing love notes" to Sanchez, months before Bezos announced he was splitting up with his wife, MacKenzie. The story carries the bylines of Howard and two reporters.

But Bezos was suspicious about how the tabloid could have possibly gotten access to his private exchanges.

Bezos usually stays out of the public eye, frequently delegating announcements and public Amazon business updates to his executives. He doesn't even speak on the company's quarterly financial earnings call with analysts.

His personal investigators, led by his longtime security consultant, Gavin de Becker, concluded that Bezos' phone wasn't hacked. Instead, they've been focusing on Sanchez's brother, according to a person familiar with the matter.

De Becker and his team suspect Michael Sanchez, a talent manager who touts his support of Trump and is an acquaintance of Trump allies Roger Stone and Carter Page, may have provided the information to the Enquirer, the person said. The person wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Sanchez, who is also his sister's manager, has declined to speak with The Associated Press on the record and did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Thursday. In a tweet, he said de Becker "spreads fake, unhinged conservative conspiracy theories" and "'dog whistle' smears."

AMI's relationship with Trump has gotten the company into hot water in the past. It admitted to "catch-and-kill" practices as part of a deal with federal prosecutors, who agreed to not pursue charges against the company.

AMI acknowledged secretly assisting Trump's campaign by paying \$150,000 to a Playboy model for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with the then-candidate. The company then intentionally suppressed the story until after the 2016 election.

In September, the Justice Department agreed to a non-prosecution agreement with AMI, which requires the company and some top executives, including Pecker and Howard, to cooperate with authorities.

De Becker is now trying to find a way that federal prosecutors in Manhattan — where the non-prosecution agreement was signed — could investigate the text message scandal, the person familiar with the matter said, though it wasn't immediately clear what, if any, crime the prosecutors would be asked to look into.

It is a federal crime to threaten to injure someone's reputation in exchange for money or a "thing of value," though federal courts haven't made it directly clear whether a public statement, like the one demanded by AMI, could be considered something of value.

Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor and professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, said the allegations potentially put prosecutors in an awkward position because of the deal they had already cut with AMI.

"It shows how complicated and dangerous it is to make an agreement with National Enquirer," Levenson

said. "They may have to cooperate, but they're continuing in their ongoing battle with Bezos and others."

But Levenson said it was too difficult to tell if the case amounted to blackmail or extortion without additional context and some prosecutors may be reluctant to charge someone for threatening another with embarrassing material.

Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Brian Melley in Los Angeles and Rachel Lerman in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Asian stocks fall after Trump says no plans for Xi meeting

By ANNABELLE LIANG, Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Asian markets tumbled on Friday after President Donald Trump said he doesn't plan to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping before a tariffs truce ends in March.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng, reopening after a Lunar New Year break, gave up 0.8 percent to 27,757.40. The Kospi in South Korea declined 1.2 percent to 2,177.04 and Australia's S&P ASX 200 was down 0.4 percent at 6,067.60.

Stocks fell in the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore but rose in Malaysia. Markets in China and Taiwan were closed.

On Thursday, Trump did not dismiss the possibility of meeting Xi in the next month or so. But he shook his head and said no when reporters asked if the meeting would take place before March 2. That marks the end of a 90-day tariffs truce mooted after Trump and Xi met in December.

Unless American and Chinese negotiators come to a new agreement, the U.S. is expected to raise import taxes from 10 percent to 25 percent for \$200 billion in Chinese goods. The trade dispute between the world's two largest economies, which has cooled in recent months, has weighed on the outlook of businesses and the global economy.

"The worries surround the uncertainties of a resolution to the likelihood of further tariffs in this on-again, off-again confidence with regards to a deal," Jingyi Pan of IG said in a market commentary.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Stephen Mnuchin and trade representative Robert Lighthizer will lead a delegation to Beijing next week for the next round of trade talks. Officials have reported little progress on contentious issues but remain hopeful that a deal will be struck.

Japan's Nikkei 225 index was 1.6 percent lower at 20,413.91. On Friday, Japanese electronics and entertainment company Sony announced its first 100 billion yen (\$911.2 million) share buyback for 2.36 percent of its Tokyo-listed stock. Its shares were up by 5 percent in early trading.

WALL STREET: Stocks closed lower on Thursday following a sell-off by technology companies, health care stocks and banks. Twitter plunged almost 10 percent after issuing a weak forecast. The broad S&P 500 index shed 0.9 percent to 2,706.05. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.9 percent lower at 25,169.53 and the Nasdaq composite slid 1.2 percent to 7,288.35. The Russell 2000 index of smaller company stocks dropped 0.8 percent to 1,505.63.

ENERGY: U.S. crude lost 29 cents to \$52.35 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It dropped \$1.37 to settle at \$52.64 per barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, retreated 23 cents to \$61.40 per barrel. It fell \$1.06 to close at \$61.63 per barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar weakened to 109.76 yen from 109.82 yen late Thursday. The euro eased to \$1.1339 from \$1.1341.



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## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 8, the 39th day of 2019. There are 326 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Feb. 8, 1587, Mary, Queen of Scots was beheaded at Fotheringhay Castle in England after she was implicated in a plot to murder her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I.

On this date:

In 1693, a charter was granted for the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg in the Virginia Colony.

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Roanoke Island, North Carolina, ended in victory for Union forces led by Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside.

In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War, a conflict over control of Manchuria and Korea, began as Japanese forces attacked Port Arthur.

In 1910, the Boy Scouts of America was incorporated.

In 1922, President Warren G. Harding had a radio installed in the White House.

In 1924, the first execution by gas in the United States took place at the Nevada State Prison in Carson City as Gee Jon, a Chinese immigrant convicted of murder, was put to death.

In 1952, Queen Elizabeth II proclaimed her accession to the British throne following the death of her father, King George VI.

In 1965, Eastern Air Lines Flight 663, a DC-7, crashed shortly after takeoff from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport; all 84 people on board were killed. The Supremes' record "Stop! In the Name of Love!" was released by Motown.

In 1968, three college students were killed in a confrontation between demonstrators and highway patrolmen at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg in the wake of protests over a whites-only bowling alley. The science-fiction film "Planet of the Apes," starring Charlton Heston, had its world premiere in New York (it went into general release the following April.)

In 1989, 144 people were killed when an American-chartered Boeing 707 filled with Italian tourists slammed into a fog-covered mountain in the Azores.

In 1992, the XVI Olympic Winter Games opened in Albertville, France.

In 1993, General Motors sued NBC, alleging that "Dateline NBC" had rigged two car-truck crashes to show that 1973-to-87 GM pickups were prone to fires in side impact crashes. (NBC settled the lawsuit the following day and apologized for its "unscientific demonstration.")

Ten years ago: Robert Plant and Alison Krauss won five Grammys, including album of the year, for "Raising Sand." R&B singer Chris Brown was arrested on suspicion of making a criminal threat (he was later sentenced to five years of probation for beating his longtime girlfriend, singer Rihanna). The NFC rallied to a 30-21 victory over the AFC in the Pro Bowl.

Five years ago: In an assertion of same-sex marriage rights, Attorney General Eric Holder announced that same-sex spouses could not be compelled to testify against each other, should be eligible to file for bankruptcy jointly and were entitled to the same rights and privileges as federal prison inmates in opposite-sex marriages. On the first day of medal competition at the Sochi Winter Olympics, Sven Kramer of the Netherlands led a clean sweep by the Dutch in the men's 5,000-meter speed skating while in slopestyle's Olympic debut, U.S. snowboarder Sage Kotsenburg won the first gold medal of the games.

One year ago: The federal government stumbled into a shutdown that would end by morning, its second in less than a month, as rogue Senate Republicans blocked a speedy vote on a massive, bipartisan, budget-busting spending deal. For the second time in a week, the Dow Jones industrials plunged by more than 1,000 points as a sell-off in the stock market deepened. Hundreds of thousands lined the streets of Philadelphia as the Eagles celebrated their Super Bowl victory with a parade.

Today's Birthdays: Composer-conductor John Williams is 87. Newscaster Ted Koppel is 79. Actor Nick Nolte is 78. Comedian Robert Klein is 77. Actor-rock musician Creed Bratton is 76. Singer Ron Tyson is

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71. Actress Brooke Adams is 70. Actress Mary Steenburgen is 66. Author John Grisham is 64. Retired NBA All-Star and College Basketball Hall of Famer Marques Johnson is 63. Actor Henry Czerny is 60. The former president of the Philippines, Benigno Aquino III, is 59. Rock singer Vince Neil (Motley Crue) is 58. Rock singer-musician Sammy Llanas (YAH'-nus) (The BoDeans) is 58. Former Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa P. Jackson is 57. Movie producer Toby Emmerich is 56. Actress Missy Yager is 51. Actress Mary McCormack is 50. Rock musician Keith Nelson is 50. Basketball Hall of Famer Alonzo Mourning is 49. Actress Susan Misner is 48. Dance musician Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo (Daft Punk) is 45. Actor Seth Green is 45. Actor Josh Morrow is 45. Rock musician Phoenix (Linkin Park) is 42. Actor William Jackson Harper is 39. Actor Jim Parrack is 38. Folk singer-musician Joey Ryan (Milk Carton Kids) is 37. Actress-comedian Cecily Strong is 35. Rock musician Jeremy Davis is 34. Hip-hop artist Anderson. Paak is 33. Rock musician Max Grahn (Carolina Liar) is 31. Actor Ryan Pinkston is 31. Professional surfer Bethany Hamilton is 29. Actress Karle Warren is 27.

Thought for Today: "If each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, or joys, or base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own... how much kinder, how much gentler he would be." — William Allen White, American journalist (1868-1944).