

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Area Schedule of Events

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

4:00pm: Basketball: Boys 7th/8th Game vs. Leola-Fredrick @ Groton Area High School (7th Grade @ 4pm; 8th grade @ 5pm)

6:30pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game (Rescheduled from 01-31-19) vs. Tiospa Zina @ Groton Area High School

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting at Groton Community Center

Wednesday, February 20, 2019

NAEP Testing at Groton Area School District

Thursday, February 21, 2019

4:00pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game vs. Deuel @ Groton Area High School (JV Girls game at 4pm, JV Boys game at 5pm, Varsity Girls game at 6:30pm, Varsity Boys game at 8pm)

Friday, February 22, 2019

Wrestling: Boys Varsity State @ Rapid City (Combined State Tourney (Class A & B))

6:30pm: Basketball: Girls Varsity Game (Rescheduled from 02-12-19) vs. Webster Area High School @ Groton Area High School

Saturday, February 23, 2019

Robotics at Harrisburg High School

Show Choir at Vermillion

Wrestling: Boys Varsity State @ Rapid City (Combined State Tourney (Class A & B))

- 1- Groton Care & Rehab Help Wanted Ad
- 1- Help Wanted
- 2- State Qualifier wrestlers photo
- 3- Dr. Holm's Column
- 4- Morton's 80th Birthday Card Shower
- 4- GDILIVE.COM tonight
- 5- Today in Weather History
- 6- Weather Pages
- 8- Daily Devotional
- 9- 2019 Groton Events
- 10 - News from the Associated Press

Help Wanted

Looking for a fun, part-time job? Groton Dairy Queen is now hiring. Stop in for an application. (0216.0316)

HELP WANTED

Director of Nursing



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

Contact Brynn Pickrel



GROTON
CARE & REHABILITATION CENTER

1106 North Second Street
605.397.2365

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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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Wyatt Locke, Dragr Monson and Grady O'Neill will represent Groton Area at the state wrestling tournament this weekend in Rapid City. (Photo by Wendy Monson)

The Astonishing, Life-Sustaining, Sacred Tear

By Richard P. Holm, MD

Washington Irving once said, "There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

Normal human tears are a biological wonder composed of a watery portion for providing the cornea hydration and nutrition; a mucous lubrication component for making a tear slimy; and a third thin outer layer of oil for slowing evaporation. Put together you have the astonishing, life-sustaining, curative, slippery and slow-to-evaporate human tear. Vision is completely dependent on tears because the cornea, for purposes of transparency, is designed without blood vessels and is kept alive only by the nutrition it receives from tears.

"Dry eye," is a condition related to issues involving the eye surface, including the loss of the effectiveness of tear film. Symptoms include pain, itching, burning, redness and mucous around the eye with fluctuating vision that interferes with recreation, reading and even driving. Paradoxically, watery eyes usually indicate a dry and inflamed eye with reactive, poor-quality tears.

The most common causes for dry eye are side effects from many medications. These include decongestants, antihistamines and meds used for acne, fluid excess, blood pressure or bladder spasm. Environmental causes include extensive reading, eye surgery, excessive computer use, contact-lenses, low humidity, wind or fans blowing on the face and a diet without enough oil or certain minerals and vitamins. Primary medical causes for dry eyes include immunologic conditions like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, scleroderma, low thyroid, Sjogren's syndrome, vitamin A deficiency and just plain aging. Dry eye affects twice as many women as men, and in the U.S. alone, we spend \$3.8 billion in health care dollars for this condition, with societal costs estimated at \$55 billion a year.

For treatment, we focus on situations causing symptoms and then find ways to avoid those situations. We can include in our diet enough fish, flaxseed or flaxseed oil, liver, carrots, broccoli and walnuts. Protective eyewear can help. Doctors treat some cases with surgery by plugging the tear ducts that drain tears away. Eye drops that reduce inflammation can help. Artificial tears are often prescribed, but as helpful as tears from a dropper may be, they are never as good as the real deal.

Nothing will ever compare to the value and the sacredness of a human tear.

For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow The Prairie Doc® on Facebook, featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming live and broadcast on SDPTV most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Tiospa Zina
Wambdi**



VS

Groton Area Tigers

Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019

8:00 p.m.

at the Groton Area Arena

**Makeup Game Tonight
8:00 p.m.
at Groton**

**Broadcast of this game is sponsored
by**

Allied Climate Professionals
Bahr Spray Foam
Blocker Construction
Doug Abeln Seed Company
James Valley Seed - Doug Jorgensen
John Sieh Agency
Locke Electric
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic
Professional Management Services, Inc.
Sanford Health
Tyson DeHoet Trucking
Weber Landscaping



**Card Shower
for**

**Darlene Morton's
80th Birthday
on Feb. 24, 2019**

Send to:

**320 Grant Ave. NE
Conde, SD 57434**

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Today in Weather History

February 19, 2000: Due to the extremely dry and windy conditions, a fire believed to be started by a discarded cigarette, burnt about 40 square miles of grassland between Kennebec and Lower Brule. The fire threatened a ranch but changed directions before anyone had to be evacuated.

February 19, 2008: An Arctic airmass along with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills during the evening and early morning hours to northeast South Dakota. Wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero. The winds diminished in the early morning hours of the 20th allowing air temperatures to fall to record or near record lows across northeast South Dakota. Ten new record lows, ranging from 23 to 30 degrees below zero, were set for February 20th. Several water pipes were broken in Aberdeen and Roslyn. In Roslyn, 225 people were without water for much of the day on the 20th as the water main broke during the night. Also, many vehicles did not start along with late school starts or closings.

1884: Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 people and causing three million dollars damage. The tornado outbreak hit Georgia and the Carolinas the hardest.

1888: Severe thunderstorms over southern Illinois spawned a violent tornado which touched down in Jefferson County and devastated the southeast half of Mount Vernon. The tornado killed 24 people, injured 80 others, and destroyed or damaged 300 homes and 50 businesses. Overturned wood stoves ignited many fires in the wreckage. This tornado currently stands as the 9th deadliest Illinois tornado on record. This event was one of the first disasters to which the American Red Cross responded.

1954 - High winds across the southern half of the Great Plains, gusting to 85 mph, caused the worst duststorms since the 1930s. Graders were needed in places to clear fence high dirt drifts. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm over the southern and central Rockies produced 28 inches of snow at Echo Lake CO, and two feet of snow at Gascon NM and Los Alamos NM. Mora County NM was declared a disaster area following the storm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Valdosta GA with more than five inches of rain, and the 24 hour rainfall total of 7.10 inches at Apalachicola FL more than doubled their previous 24 hour record for February. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)






1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought heavy snow to parts of Nebraska, with six inches reported at Loup City and Surprise. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A moist Pacific storm worked its way into New Mexico and southern Colorado. Up to 36 inches of snow blanketed the Wolf Creek and Red Mountain passes of southwest Colorado, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported around Trinidad. In New Mexico, the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains were blanketed with 9 to 28 inches of snow, and 50 to 60 mph wind gusts were reported from Taos to Albuquerque. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - Strong winds reaching as high as 40 mph with gusts to 53 mph topple the 48 year old National Christmas tree. The 42 foot tall Colorado blue spruce sat just south of the White House on the Ellipse. It was transplanted there from York, Pennsylvania in 1978. The Weather Doctor

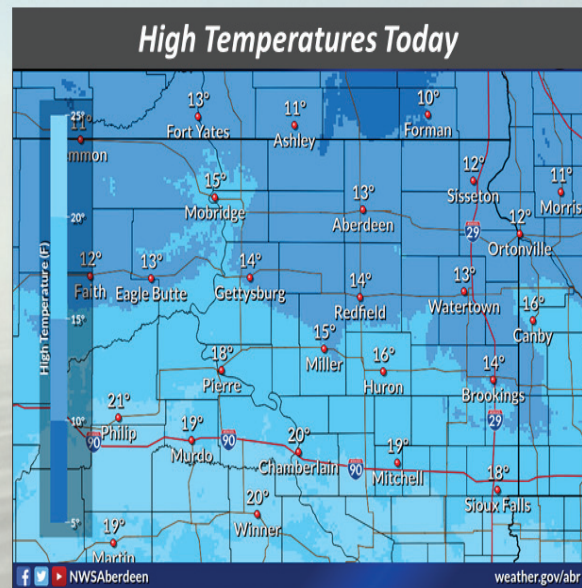
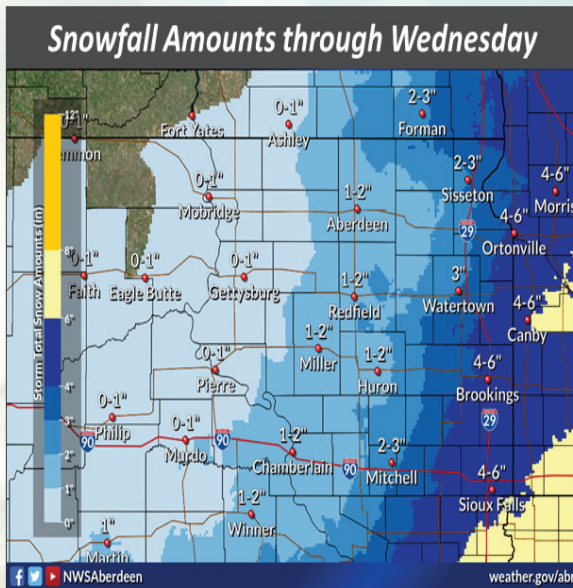
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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Dense Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Snow Likely	Snow Likely	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 13 °F	Low: 8 °F	High: 18 °F	Low: 3 °F	High: 18 °F

Below Normal Cold Temperatures Continue Today

Light, accumulating snow mainly along and east of the James River valley this afternoon through Wednesday



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 2/19/2019 5:49 AM Central

Published on: 02/19/2019 at 5:57AM

The below normal cold air is still in place today. Plus, there will be another round of mostly light snow moving up into central South Dakota by late this afternoon, spreading further north and east overnight and persisting well into Wednesday before ending. Most locations that end up seeing snowfall with this weather system will likely pick up an inch or two. But, if you live out on the Prairie Coteau or over into western Minnesota, snowfall totals could be a little bit higher, more like 3 to 5 inches. Wind speeds should behave, though, so travel-snarling blowing snow should not be much of an issue through Wednesday.

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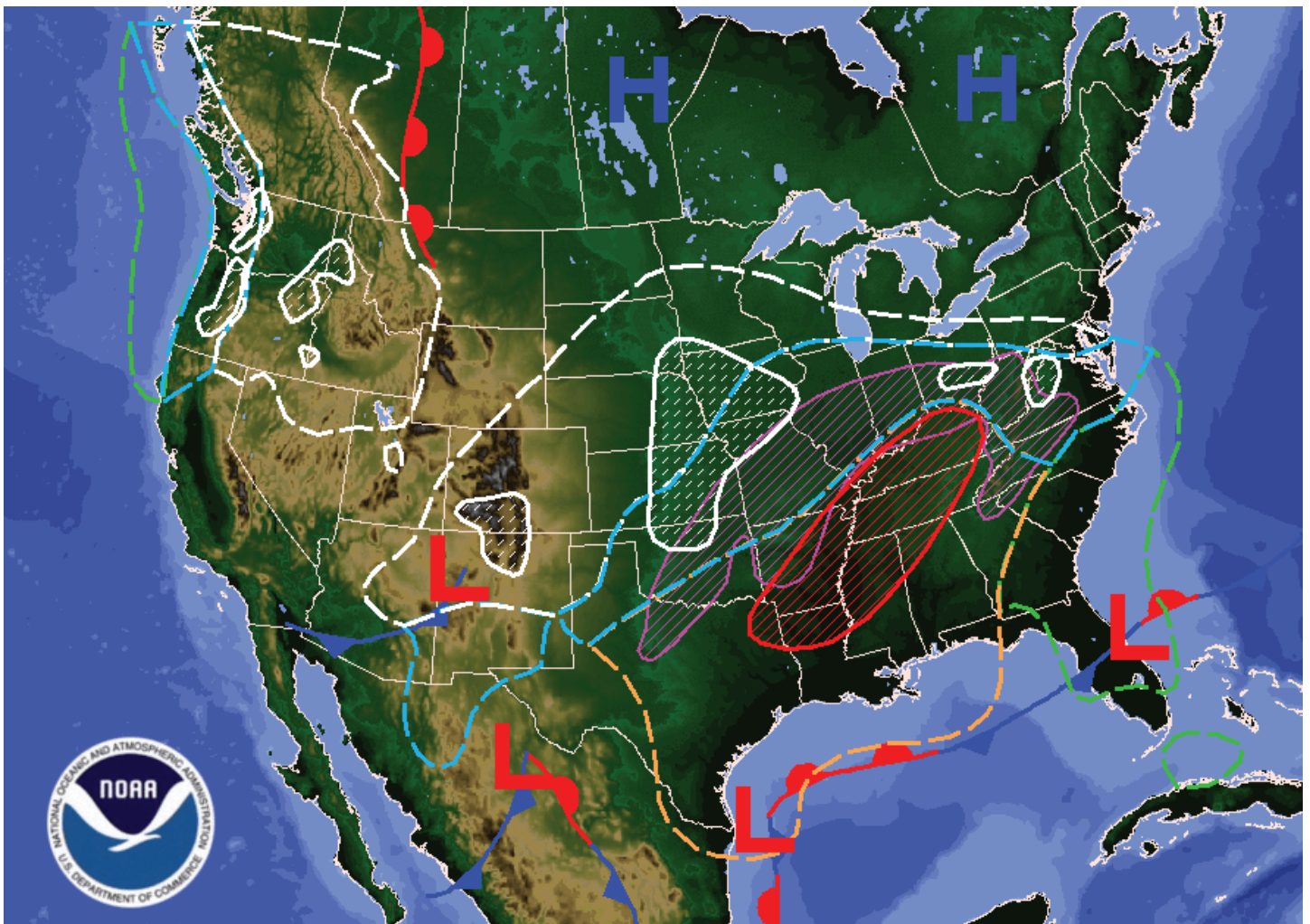
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 6 °F at 3:17 PM
Low Outside Temp: -6 °F at 7:22 AM
High Gust: 13 mph at 12:01 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 62° in 1930
Record Low: -34° in 1929
Average High: 29°F
Average Low: 9°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.31
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.78
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 6:06 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:28 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Tue, Feb 19, 2019, issued 4:50 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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A DESPERATE CALL

Larry, he said to get my complete attention, dont go next door and play with Richard. Hes not good for you to be around.

OK, Dad. I wont. (At least not while you're looking, I said to myself, under my breath.)

Not long after the warning, I heard his penetrating whistle that could be heard throughout the neighborhood. However, I was next door, on the roof of Richards garage with some other friends having a great time. But now, the good time was over. I looked down from the roof, and there was my Dad standing at the foot of the ladder. I knew I was busted. He spoke, I refused to obey, and the party was over.

How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? wrote Solomon. Or, if he was talking to me to-day it would mean, Larry, why were you so careless to allow yourself to drift into temptation. Dont you remember that I gave you a warning? Why didn't you follow my advice?

This verse contains a certain sadness: How long... We are all slow learners! We refuse to hear God. I warned you, didnt I? When will you ever grow-up and accept the wisdom I offered you? I offered you my best: My wisdom that will last a lifetime and you rejected it.

Rejecting Gods wisdom is very costly. In verse 25 there are some tragic words to describe the results of disobeying God: Since you rejected me when I called...and ignored my advice...and would not accept my rebuke, I will laugh at you." Gods grace has its limits. Hear Him today!

Prayer: Lord, how blest are those who hear Your Word, accept it and follow it. Rejecting His wisdom has its consequences. We must listen to You, Lord. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 1:22 How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?

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

Monday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Arlington 64, Dell Rapids St. Mary 50
Beresford 67, Garretson 50
Bon Homme 57, Irene-Wakonda 51
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 63, Mobridge-Pollock 48
Clark/Willow Lake 59, Aberdeen Roncalli 58
Crow Creek 70, Winner 67
Flandreau 69, Baltic 36
Flandreau Indian 55, Hamlin 54
Hanson 46, Mitchell Christian 33
Leola/Frederick 69, Florence/Henry 58
Madison 73, Milbank 42
McCook Central/Montrose 63, Tri-Valley 61
Miller 68, Stanley County 54
Parker 39, Chester 23
Potter County 79, Faulkton 63
Rapid City Christian 56, Faith 48
Red Cloud 71, Bennett County 44
Redfield/Doland 63, Sisseton 60
Sully Buttes 59, Aberdeen Christian 54, OT
Timber Lake 65, Newell 40
Tiospa Zina Tribal 52, Deuel 43
Waverly-South Shore 53, Waubay/Summit 41
West Central 73, Canton 37

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Beresford 40, Garretson 30
Flandreau 79, Baltic 31
Lennox 52, Elk Point-Jefferson 44
Milbank 56, Groton Area 18
Redfield/Doland 55, Sisseton 33
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 62, Watertown 46
Class B Region 1
Play-In
Great Plains Lutheran 56, Britton-Hecla 25
Northwestern 50, Wilmot 48
Waverly-South Shore 53, Aberdeen Christian 14
Class B Region 2
Play-In
Eureka/Bowdle 47, Sunshine Bible Academy 33
Potter County 56, Leola/Frederick 19
Class B Region 3
Play-In
Hitchcock-Tulare 57, Iroquois 17
James Valley Christian 41, Wolsey-Wessington 36

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Lake Preston 68, Wessington Springs 44
Class B Region 4
Play-In
Dell Rapids St. Mary 61, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 22
Mitchell Christian 36, Elkton-Lake Benton 23
Class B Region 5
Play-In
Alcester-Hudson 40, Centerville 21
Gayville-Volin 40, Freeman Academy/Marion 31
Class B Region 6
Play-In
Gregory 58, Colome 47
Scotland 52, Marty Indian 37
Class B Region 7
Play-In
Edgemont 47, Jones County 40
Lyman 60, Crazy Horse 28
Philip def. Oelrichs, forfeit
Class B Region 8
Play-In
Dupree 82, Takini 36
Harding County 45, Bison 34
Wakpala 86, Tiospaye Topa 67

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

Former Sioux Falls fire chief surrenders nursing license

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A former Sioux Falls fire chief who admitted possessing child pornography has agreed to surrender his nursing license.

The Argus Leader reports 59-year-old Jim Sideras agreed to waive a disciplinary hearing by the South Dakota Board of Nursing, and the board voted 6-0 this month to accept the surrender of his license.

It means Sideras will no longer be able to work as a nurse in South Dakota, and likely in other states. He has a master's degree in nursing from South Dakota State University.

Sideras last November pleaded guilty to possessing child porn in a deal with prosecutors. He faces up to 10 years in prison when he's sentenced Feb. 28.

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

Girl's Basketball Polls By The Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Prep Media Basketball Poll for the week of Feb. 18 is listed below, ranking the top-five teams, the team's record, points received and ranking in the previous poll. First-place votes are listed in parentheses.

Class AA

1. O'Gorman (20)	17-2	100	1
2. Brandon Valley	15-3	77	2
3. Lincoln	13-5	55	3

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4. Harrisburg 14-4 39 4
5. Brookings 12-4 24 5
Receiving votes: Stevens 4, Washington 1.

Class A

1. West Central (14) 17-0 94 1
2. Winner (6) 17-0 86 2
3. Lennox 15-3 52 3
4. SF Christian 15-4 44 5
5. St. Thomas More 14-4 7 RV
(tie) McCook Cen.-Montrose 16-3 7 4
Receiving votes: Vermillion 6, Beresford 2, Todd County 1, Hamlin 1.

Class B

1. Ethan (20) 19-0 100 1
2. Warner 18-2 71 2
3. De Smet 18-1 63 3
4. Corsica-Stickney 18-2 35 4
5. Faith 19-1 23 5
Receiving votes: Avon 5, Bridgewater-Emery 2, Freeman 1.

Boy's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press \

The South Dakota Prep Media Basketball Poll for the week of Feb. 18 is listed below, ranking the top-five teams, the team's record, points received and ranking in the previous poll. First-place votes are listed in parentheses.

Boys

Class AA

1. Lincoln (20) 15-1 100 1
2. O'Gorman 12-5 80 2
3. Yankton 13-4 58 4
4. Brandon Valley 13-5 38 3
5. Roosevelt 11-6 12 5
Receiving votes: Watertown 9, Stevens 3.

Class A

1. Tea Area (20) 18-1 100 1
2. SF Christian 15-2 79 2
3. St. Thomas More 15-2 56 3
4. Pine Ridge 16-3 41 4
5. Lennox 15-4 18 RV
Receiving votes: Tiospa Zina 3, Sioux Valley 2, Madison 1.

Class B

1. White River (15) 16-2 92 2
2. Clark2Willow Lake (4) 15-2 78 3
3. Bridgewater-Emery 16-4 48 4
4. Viborg-Hurley (1) 18-2 44 1

5. De Smet 15-2 36 5
Receiving votes: Jones County 2.

Schools consider bill collector for overdue lunch accounts

LEAD, S.D. (AP) — The Lead-Deadwood School District is considering turning delinquent lunch accounts over to a collection agency.

The Black Hills Pioneer reports that unpaid accounts total \$7,800. Superintendent Dan Leikvold figures the district will have a difficult time collecting about half of the amount.

Principals typically deal with the overdue accounts. The school board recently discussed enlisting the help of a bill collector to seek payments and to handle cases in small claims court. The board made no decision and is expected to continue discussing the idea at future meetings.

Information from: Black Hills Pioneer, <http://www.bhpioneer.com>

Senate debate of industrial hemp measure postponed

By JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The fate of a South Dakota industrial hemp bill with strong support in the Republican-controlled Legislature despite GOP Gov. Kristi Noem's disapproval will remain a mystery a little longer after debate scheduled for this week was postponed at the administration's request.

The measure to allow hemp cultivation in South Dakota was set for a Senate panel vote on Tuesday. The test would have decided whether the bill moved a step away from Noem's desk just days after she publicly asked again that lawmakers hold off this year.

But Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Gary Cammack said he deferred the bill hearing because the governor's office needed more time to put together a fiscal analysis. He said it may instead be debated on Feb. 28.

"I want to make sure that all sides of an issue can be heard," said Cammack, a bill co-sponsor. "I always reserve the right to, with new information, to change my mind. But if I was to vote right now I would vote to bring it forward."

The governor's office asked for the hearing to be postponed so that more information, including a fiscal note, could be put together and given to lawmakers, according to Noem spokeswoman Kristin Wileman.

The delay comes amid a public rift over the measure between supportive legislators, including top Republicans, and Noem, who has asked lawmakers during two press conferences to set aside the legislation this session — though she's stopped short of threatening a veto. Just days after Noem first made the first request, House lawmakers voted 65-2 to advance the bill to the Senate.

Supporters said there's an industry ready in South Dakota to start processing hemp products. Jarrod Otta, plant manager for Glanbia Nutritionals in Sioux Falls, told a House committee this month that the company has been contacted by two "very large customers" to process hemp protein.

House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, a co-sponsor, said getting a fiscal analysis is "prudent," but he doubted Noem's requests would affect senators' vote on the bill. The Republican from Platte has said previously that he would support overriding a potential veto from Noem but didn't think it would come to that.

Noem last week revived her appeal, saying South Dakota isn't ready for industrial hemp. The state doesn't have funds budgeted for areas including establishing a licensing program and having inspectors, she said. The governor also raised public safety worries, arguing the plant looks like marijuana and drug dogs will tip off on hemp like its recreational cousin.

"I believe if we move ahead with industrial hemp and we aren't prepared with it from a regulatory standpoint, from an enforcement standpoint, and if we don't have the equipment or the dollars to do this correctly, that we will be opening the door to allowing marijuana to be legalized in the state of South Dakota," Noem said.

Noem also said Thursday that there's equipment at the state lab that could test industrial hemp, but it can't indicate THC levels, so it wouldn't be helpful in determining if hemp has violated acceptable standards.

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The bill defines industrial hemp as containing no more than 0.3 percent THC.

The governor on Friday tweeted photos of the state health lab's drug locker "bursting at the seams." Legalizing the crop would flood the lab with more tests and strain law enforcement, she said. Noem tweeted again Sunday about hemp, questioning why South Dakota would move forward with something that could "jeopardize law enforcement, expand our drug epidemic, or threaten the livelihood of existing crops?"

Democratic Rep. Oren Lesmeister, the bill's sponsor, disputed Noem's claim that hemp looks exactly like marijuana, telling the Argus Leader that "standing in a field, there's a vast difference."

The 2018 federal farm bill legalized the cultivation of industrial hemp. In South Dakota, supporters anticipate that hemp planting wouldn't happen until 2020 under the bill.

The measure would require prospective growers to get a Department of Agriculture license and pass state and federal background checks.

Applicants who have been convicted of a felony drug crime in the previous 10 years would be disqualified. The bill would allow Agriculture Department employees to enter areas where hemp is grown, stored and processed to take samples and perform inspections.

School of Mines developing cutting-edge drone technology

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Students at the South Dakota School of Mines are working on drone technology that could potentially protect lives and impact the agriculture industry, according to officials at the science and engineering university.

The students have developed drones that fly together like a flock or swarm of birds without any manual control. Each drone measures 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) wide and has a thermal camera and sensors that detect nitrogen levels in fertilizer. Farmers would use the drones as a unit to more evenly disperse nutrients on fields, KOTA-TV reported.

"They actually work on the hardware and also the software that's going to make them more intelligent. So our students are actually doing cutting edge research with our faculty experts to take these drones to the next level," said Magesh Rajan, who leads the university's Electrical and Computer Engineering Department.

The university said the technology could also be used for cell tower work. Instead of sending a person to climb several hundred feet up to fix a problem, the drones could fly up and analyze what needed to be repaired, according to Electrical and Computer Engineering Assistant Professor Shankarachary Ragi.

He noted such inspections occur regularly, and that some of the work could be automated without creating safety concerns.

"I'm not saying we should not have any humans in the loop. But some of the activities, whatever can be automated," Ragi said.

Ragi said AT&T is interested in using the drones for the company's thousands of cell towers.

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

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Feb. 4

Port Yankton: Back on the agenda

The Port Yankton dream is back, and this time, it has an even more compelling argument to make in its favor.

That's not to say that having the Legislature give it the OK to put it before voters in 2020 is a slam dunk. And it sure doesn't mean that those who opposed the idea last year won't fight it again this winter.

But this time, there is a new component to it: devoting a majority of the revenue generated by the project to veterans' causes.

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Port Yankton is a proposed entertainment facility that would feature gambling, as well as a hotel and a convention center. The gambling component would be essential in order to generate sufficient revenue to make the project work.

The objective now is for local officials to get the state's voters to amend South Dakota's constitution and allow the issuance of one gaming license to a Yankton nonprofit entity, which would oversee the project.

The issue came before the Legislature last year and was promptly swatted down, thus killing any chance of putting the proposal before the voters last fall.

Officials with Yankton Area Progressive Growth (YAPG) then weighed their next move, which most figured would mean a statewide petition drive. It was announced that a poll would be conducted to gauge public sentiment on such a proposal.

But instead, a new legislative effort was introduced last week. It calls for two-thirds of the revenue to be devoted to veterans' causes, which would be determined by the Legislature. The remaining third would go toward local historical and tourism development.

This seems to be a shrewd move. South Dakota is a state that a) has a lot of veterans, and b) annually wrestles with tight budgets and limited revenue sources. Combining these facts into the Port Yankton proposal can't do anything but boost its prospects a bit.

The proposal would still also address the very real fact that a lot of money that people spend on gambling in this region is going to out-of-state casinos such as in Sioux City and Larchwood, Iowa, which both have gaming facilities literally on the border with South Dakota. That's revenue that leaves this state for good.

As stated above, the introduction of the veterans' element doesn't guarantee anything in Pierre. There are still some people who will simply see it as the expansion of gambling and will oppose it on those grounds. Also, interests with the Deadwood casinos and the tribal casinos will also probably fight it again out of fear that Port Yankton would cut into their revenues. And some will argue that Port Yankton supporters should gather signatures like the Deadwood people had to do three decades ago to get this matter on the ballot.

But earmarking a large chunk of the potential revenue to aid veterans' causes — and allowing the Legislature to determine how that would be done — gives this new proposal a little more allure, as Port Yankton would offer a benefit that Deadwood or the tribal casinos do not. (Deadwood revenue is designed to help in historic preservation, and the new Port Yankton proposal was reportedly crafted to resemble the Deadwood approach.)

Ultimately, it must be remembered that the proposal introduced last week in Pierre is not asking lawmakers to approve the nonprofit license for Port Yankton. Instead, it's simply asking them to put it on the ballot and let the people decide.

Whether this new revenue approach will be enough to change some minds is not known. But it does make it more intriguing and more beneficial to the state as a whole. And with that, anything is possible.

Madison Daily Leader, Madison, Feb. 14

Mid-session estimate is good news for S.D.

Establishing a budget for the state of South Dakota is quite a challenge. What makes it harder is that it's a moving target.

Consider the schedule, in reverse: The state fiscal year starts each July 1. The legislative session a few months earlier produces the budget. The governor makes the first proposal in early December. State agencies such as the Board of Regents or Department of Transportation prepare their budgets in the summer or fall before that in order to get them to the governor's office for consideration.

So those who prepare the original budgets are trying to predict all sorts of factors that will take place 12-24 months in the future. What is sales tax revenue going to be like? What will the demand be on prisons? Will federal funds come for roads, bridges and water systems? What will enrollments be in schools and universities?

All those factors are in flux through the process. Finally, the Legislature has to pass a budget.

The last variable to be established is an estimate of state tax revenue, which comes to the Legislature

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after more than half the session is complete. That day is today (Thursday).

The Joint Committee on Appropriations (on which District 8 Rep. Randy Gross sits) projects that state tax revenues will be slightly higher than they previously expected. It's good news for the budget process overall.

In fact, it's probably the best news. A big forecast change either way probably means the forecasting model isn't very good. A projection of a decline in revenues, even if it's slight, would squeeze many agencies and others who depend on state funding.

It appears as though there won't be any budget fireworks this session, which we appreciate. It helps solidify South Dakota's reputation for running its fiscal affairs appropriately.

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, Feb. 15

No good reason to restrict absentee voting

It's an enduring democratic principle to want as many people to vote who are inspired to vote, providing those ballots are cast legally.

Increasingly, that maxim stretches beyond those who enter a polling place on election day, extending to citizens who choose to submit their ballot through absentee or early voting.

More than 24 million votes were cast nationally in the weeks leading up to the 2018 midterm elections, up from about 13 million in 2014. In South Dakota, early voting accounted for 26 percent of all votes cast in 2018.

Whether this trend is a beacon of inclusive democracy or a threat to our way of life is a matter of perspective — or a measure of partisan politics.

Republican Lee Qualm, South Dakota's House majority leader, has sponsored a bill that would shorten the state's absentee voting period by about two weeks, meaning ballots could not be cast until the first Friday in October.

Qualm claims to be worried that the current system — in which absentee voting starts 46 days before election day — could prevent voters from gathering the most recent information before weighing in on candidates and ballot questions.

"I think it is about a better-informed electorate," he said.

As magnanimous as that sounds, this Republican-led bill aligns with GOP efforts across the country aimed at making the process of voting more restrictive.

In North Dakota, voters were not allowed to cast ballots last November without a residential address, widely viewed as a plan to disenfranchise Native American reservation voters, many of whom rely on post office boxes.

North Carolina's Republican-controlled legislature reduced the number of early voting locations for 2018, just two years after a federal appeals court tossed out a similar law.

And in Wisconsin, a federal judge blocked a Republican-backed law in January that was aimed at shrinking the state's early voting period to two weeks, arguing that it echoed a similar law struck down because it was enacted for partisan gain.

It makes sense for South Dakota Republicans, given their political stranglehold on the legislature and statewide offices, to want to preserve a more "traditional" voting process. The recent rise in absentee and early voting is viewed by some as open season for getting people to the polls who wouldn't otherwise participate, many of them minorities who tend to vote Democrat.

Add to that list young people, with voters 18 to 29 increasing their early voting numbers from 2014 to 2018 in nearly every state. One national poll showed that 66 percent of those young voters favored Democrats over Republicans.

In other words, it's not just about wanting to ensure that voters are fully informed, though that is a laudable goal. There's also a desire to preserve the status quo by maintaining a high percentage of citizens casting their votes the old-fashioned way — at the ballot box on election day.

That thinking overlooks military members, snowbirds, vacationers and nursing home residents who rely

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on absentee voting and are accustomed to the 46-day window. State and county election officials make it clear that a condensed voting period would create issues with staffing and possibly run afoul of federal guidelines for military and overseas voters.

The thought of Minnehaha County being even more stressed with vote counting than normal is enough to give everyone pause regarding House Bill 1178, which passed out of committee by an 11-2 vote.

Lawmakers should consider if there is actual harm in the current window and whether they have sufficient justification to change it. If there is evidence of voter fraud that someone wants to bring forth, that would add steam to their argument.

In the absence of that, the crux of their position is that they want to create a more restrictive system when it comes to casting a ballot in South Dakota, making it more difficult for some citizens to participate in the most intrinsic of democratic processes.

The only rational response to that would be: Why?

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. BERNIE SANDERS SAYS HE'S RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT IN 2020

The 77-year-old Vermont senator ran an insurgent but unsuccessful presidential campaign in 2016 that reshaped Democratic politics.

2. FASHION ICON KARL LAGERFELD DIES

Chanel's iconic couturier's accomplished designs as well as his trademark white ponytail, high starched collars and dark enigmatic glasses dominated high fashion for the last 50 years.

3. STATES SUE TO STOP EMERGENCY DECLARATION

Sixteen states file a lawsuit against the Trump administration's plan to fund a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, with California's attorney general saying the action violates the Constitution.

4. HONDA SHUTTERING UK FACTORY

The Japanese automaker says at least 3,500 jobs will be lost when the plant in western England closes in 2021, a fresh blow to the economy as Brexit looms on March 29.

5. JAILED CITGO EXECS IN LIMBO AMID VENEZUELA TURMOIL

Six executives from the Houston-based oil company, five of them Americans, have spent more than a year jailed in Venezuela on what their families say are trumped-up corruption charges.

6. TRUMP-KIM SUMMIT HOST HAS DEEP TIES TO PYONGYANG

A memorial to North Korean pilots who fought alongside communist forces in the Vietnam War speaks to the fraternal relationship the countries share as Hanoi gets ready to host the two leaders next week.

7. FUTURE RABBIS PLANT WITH PALESTINIANS, SOW RIFT WITH ISRAEL

In a stark departure from past programs focused on strengthening ties with Israel and Judaism, a new crop of young American rabbinical students are reaching out to the Palestinians.

8. AMERICANS SHOCKED BY IMPACT OF NEW TAX LAW

The law is delivering the promised tax cut to most Americans, but is also generally upending many familiar practices that determine what happens at filing time.

9. 'THE PHOTOGRAPH AND COMMENT WAS IMPROPER'

Roger Stone apologizes to the judge presiding over his criminal case for an Instagram post featuring a photo of her with what appears to be the crosshairs of a gun.

10. MORE THAN A DOZEN RESCUED FROM SEAWORLD RIDE

San Diego police say that around six gondolas stopped functioning after a big gust of wind tripped a circuit breaker on "Bayside Skyride."

Sen. Bernie Sanders says he's running for president in 2020

By JUANA SUMMERS, Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, whose insurgent 2016 presidential campaign re-shaped Democratic politics, announced Tuesday that he is running for president in 2020.

"Our campaign is not only about defeating Donald Trump," the 77-year-old self-described democratic socialist said in an email to supporters. "Our campaign is about transforming our country and creating a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice."

An enthusiastic progressive who embraces proposals ranging from Medicare for All to free college tuition, Sanders stunned the Democratic establishment in 2016 with his spirited challenge to Hillary Clinton. While she ultimately became the party's nominee, his campaign helped lay the groundwork for the leftward lurch that has dominated Democratic politics in the Trump era.

The question now for Sanders is whether he can stand out in a crowded field of Democratic presidential candidates who also embrace many of his policy ideas and are newer to the national political stage. That's far different from 2016, when he was Clinton's lone progressive adversary.

Still, there is no question that Sanders will be a formidable contender for the Democratic nomination. He won more than 13 million votes in 2016 and dozens of primaries and caucuses. He opens his campaign with a nationwide organization and a proven small-dollar fundraising effort.

"We're gonna win," Sanders told CBS.

He said he was going to launch "what I think is unprecedented in modern American history": a grass-roots movement "to lay the groundwork for transforming the economic and political life of this country."

Sanders described his new White House bid as a "continuation of what we did in 2016," noting that policies he advocated for then are now embraced by the Democratic Party.

"You know what's happened in over three years?" he said. "All of these ideas and many more are now part of the political mainstream."

Sanders could be well positioned to compete in the nation's first primary in neighboring New Hampshire, which he won by 22 points in 2016. But he won't have the state to himself.

Sen. Kamala Harris of California, another Democratic presidential contender, was in New Hampshire on Monday and said she'd compete for the state. She also appeared to take a dig at Sanders.

"The people of New Hampshire will tell me what's required to compete in New Hampshire," she told shoppers at a bookstore in Concord. "But I will tell you I'm not a democratic socialist."

Sen. Elizabeth Warren of nearby Massachusetts will be in New Hampshire on Friday.

One of the biggest questions surrounding Sanders' candidacy is how he'll compete against someone like Warren, who shares many of his policy goals. Warren has already launched her campaign and has planned an aggressive swing through the early primary states.

Shortly after announcing her exploratory committee, Warren hired Brendan Summers, who managed Sanders' 2016 Iowa campaign. Other staffers from Sanders' first bid also have said they would consider working for other candidates in 2020.

The crowded field includes a number of other candidates who will likely make strong appeals to the Democratic base including Harris and Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York. The field could also grow, with a number of high-profile Democrats still considering presidential bids, including former Vice President Joe Biden and former Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke.

While Sanders had been working to lay the groundwork for a second campaign for months, it was unclear whether he will be able to expand his appeal beyond his largely white base of supporters. In 2016, Sanders notably struggled to garner support from black voters, an issue that could become particularly pervasive during a primary race that could include several non-white candidates.

Last month, he joined Booker at an event in Columbia, South Carolina, marking the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. In 2016, Sanders lost the South Carolina primary, which features a heavily black electorate, by 47 points.

Sanders also faces different pressures in the #MeToo era. Some of his male staffers and supporters in 2016 were described as "Bernie bros" for their treatment of women.

In the run-up to Sanders' 2020 announcement, persistent allegations emerged of sexual harassment

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of women by male staffers during his 2016 campaign. Politico and The New York Times reported several allegations of unwanted sexual advances and pay inequity.

In an interview with CNN after the initial allegations surfaced, Sanders apologized but also noted he was "a little busy running around the country trying to make the case."

As additional allegations emerged, he offered a more unequivocal apology.

"What they experienced was absolutely unacceptable and certainly not what a progressive campaign — or any campaign — should be about," Sanders said Jan. 10 on Capitol Hill. "Every woman in this country who goes to work today or tomorrow has the right to make sure that she is working in an environment which is free of harassment, which is safe and is comfortable, and I will do my best to make that happen."

Chanel: Iconic couturier Karl Lagerfeld has died

By THOMAS ADAMSON, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Chanel's iconic couturier, Karl Lagerfeld, whose accomplished designs as well as trademark white ponytail, high starched collars and dark enigmatic glasses dominated high fashion for the past 50 years, has died. He was around 85 years old.

Such was the enigma surrounding the German-born designer that even his age was a point of mystery for decades, with reports he had two birth certificates, one dated 1933 and the other 1938. In 2013, Lagerfeld told French magazine "Paris Match" he was born in 1935, but in 2019 his assistant still didn't know the truth — telling AP he liked "to scramble the tracks on his year of birth — that's part of the character."

Chanel confirmed that Lagerfeld died early Tuesday.

Lagerfeld was of the most hardworking figures in the fashion world holding down the top design jobs at LVMH-owned luxury label Fendi from 1977, and Paris' family-owned power-house Chanel in 1983. Indeed, his indefatigable energy was notable: he lost around 90 pounds in his late 60s to fit into the latest slimline fashions.

Though he spent virtually his entire career at luxury labels catering to the very wealthy — including all of 20 years at Chloe — Lagerfeld's designs quickly trickled down to low-end retailers, giving him an almost unprecedented impact on the entire fashion industry.

At Chanel, he served up youthful designs that were always of the moment and sent out almost infinite variations on the house's classic skirt suit, ratcheting up the hemlines or smothering it in golden chains, stings of pearls or pricey accessories. They were always delivered with wit.

"Each season, they tell me (the Chanel designs) look younger. One day we'll all turn up like babies," he once told The Associated Press.

His outspoken and often stinging remarks on things as diverse as French politics and celebrity waistlines won him the nickname "Kaiser Karl" in the fashion media. Among the most acid comments included calling President Francois Hollande an "imbecile" who would be "disastrous" for France in Marie-Claire, and telling UK's The Sun that he didn't like the face of Pippa Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge's sister.

"She should only show her back," he advised.

Lagerfeld was also heavily criticized for sending out a negative message to women when he told France's Metro newspaper that signer Adele was "a little too fat."

Despite this, he did have an under-reported soft side. He was known to be very kind to his staff at Chanel and was famous for according journalists generously long interviews after each fashion show. He also shared his unmarried life in his Parisian mansion with a Siamese cat called Choupette.

"She is spoilt, much more than a child could be," he told AP in 2013, revealing also that he would take her to the vet every 10 days overcautiously.

Lagerfeld had little use for nostalgia and kept his gaze riveted toward the future. Well into his 70s, he was quick to embrace new technology: He famously had a collection of hundreds of iPods.

A photographer who shot ad campaigns for Chanel and his own eponymous label, Lagerfeld also collected art books and had a massive library and a bookstore as well as his own publishing house. He was also an impressive linguist switching between perfect French, English, Italian and his native German during

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interviews at post-catwalk celebrity media scrums.

Although he spent much of his life in the public eye, Lagerfeld remained a largely elusive figure. Even as he courted the spotlight, he made an apparently deliberate effort to hide what was going on behind his trademark dark shades.

"I am like a caricature of myself, and I like that," British Vogue quoted Lagerfeld as saying. "It is like a mask. And for me the Carnival of Venice lasts all year long."

After cutting his teeth at Paris-based label Chloe, Lagerfeld consolidated his reputation in the 1980s when he revived the flagging fortunes of the storied Paris haute couture label Chanel. There, he helped launch the careers of supermodels including Claudia Schiffer, Ines de la Fressange and Stella Tennant.

In a move that helped make his a household name, Lagerfeld designed a capsule collection for Swedish fast-fashion company H&M in 2004 and released a CD of his favorite music shortly after.

A weight-loss book he published in 2005 — "The Karl Lagerfeld Diet" — consolidated his status as a pop culture icon. In the book, Lagerfeld, said that it was his desire to fit into the slim-cut suits by then-Dior Homme designer Hedi Slimane that had motivated his dramatic transformation.

The son of an industrialist who made a fortune in condensed milk and his violinist wife, Lagerfeld was born into an affluent family in Hamburg, Germany.

Lagerfeld had artistic ambitions early on. In interviews, he variously said he wanted to become a cartoonist, a portraitist, an illustrator or a musician.

"My mother tried to instruct me on the piano. One day, she slammed the piano cover closed on my fingers and said, 'draw, it makes less noise,'" he was quoted as saying in the book "The World According to Karl."

At age 14, Lagerfeld came to Paris with his parents and went to school in the City of Light. His fashion career got off to a precocious start when, in 1954, a coat he designed won a contest by the International Wool Secretariat. His rival, Yves Saint Laurent, won that year's contest in the dress category.

Lagerfeld apprenticed at Balmain and in 1959 was hired at another Paris-based house, Patou, where he spent four years as artistic director. After a series of freelance jobs with labels including Rome-based Fendi, Lagerfeld took over the reins at Chloe, known for its romantic Parisian style.

Lagerfeld also started his own label, Karl Lagerfeld, which though less commercially successful than his other ventures, was widely seen as a sort of sketchpad where the designer worked through his audacious ideas.

In 1982, he took over at over Chanel, which had been dormant since the death of its founder, Coco Chanel, more than a decade earlier.

"When I took on Chanel, it was a sleeping beauty — not even a beautiful one," he said in the 2007 documentary "Lagerfeld Confidential." "She snored."

For his debut collection for the house, Lagerfeld injected a dose of raciness, sending out a translucent navy chiffon number that prompted scandalized headlines.

He never ceased to shake up the storied house, sending out a logo-emblazoned bikini so small the top looked like pasties on a string and another collection that dispensed entirely with bottoms, with the models wearing little jackets over opaque tights instead.

Lagerfeld was open about his homosexuality — he once said he announced it to his parents at age 13 — but kept his private life under wraps. Following his widely known relationship with a French aristocrat who died of AIDS in 1989, Lagerfeld insisted he prized his solitude above all.

"I hate when people say I'm 'solitaire' (or solitary.) Yes, I'm solitaire in the sense of a stone from Cartier, a big solitaire," Lagerfeld told The New York Times in an interview. "I have to be alone to do what I do. I like to be alone. I'm happy to be with people, but I'm sorry to say I like to be alone, because there's so much to do, to read, to think."

As much as he loved the spotlight, Lagerfeld was careful to obscure his real self.

"It's not that I lie, it's that I don't owe the truth to anyone," he told French Vogue in an interview.

Former AP fashion writer Jenny Barchfield provided biographical material for this story.

Thomas Adamson can be followed at www.twitter.com/ThomasAdamsonAP

Honda to shut plant in Brexit-shaken Britain

By KAORI HITOMI, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese carmaker Honda plans to close its car factory in western England in 2021, a fresh blow to the British economy as businesses struggle with the uncertainty associated with leaving the European Union next month.

The company announced the decision, which will imperil 3,500 jobs and possibly many more, at a news conference in Tokyo.

Honda's president and CEO, Takahiro Hachigo, said the decision was not related to Brexit, but was based on what made most sense for its global competitiveness in light of the need to accelerate its production of electric vehicles.

Still, experts say the uncertainty surrounding Brexit will likely have been a contributing factor in a decision like Honda's. There is still no clarity on what leaving the EU will mean. In a worst case it could lead to heavy tariffs and border checks, raising costs and slowing deliveries.

That comes at a time when the industry is already in serious flux, with manufacturers shifting to cleaner cars, coping with more tariffs and a slowing global economy.

"We still don't know what sort of changes Brexit will bring at this point," said Hachigo. "We have to wait until we have a better idea about the situation."

Hachigo said the company would begin discussions with affected workers at the factory in Swindon right away.

"I very much regret this," he said, adding that "this was the best choice under the circumstances."

Honda Motor Co. makes its popular Civic model at the factory, 115 kilometers (70 miles) west of London, with an output of 150,000 cars per year. Its restructuring is aimed at adjusting its operations to reflect stronger demand in Asia and North America, Hachigo said.

The next model of Civic to be sold in Britain will be exported from Japan, the company said.

Honda is also adjusting its operations in Turkey, where it makes 38,000 Civic sedans a year. It said it would continue operating there, however, and hold a "constructive dialogue" with local stakeholders.

British businesses are issuing increasingly urgent warnings about the damage being done by the lack of clarity surrounding Britain's divorce from the EU. The U.K. has yet to seal a deal laying out the divorce terms and establishing what trade rules will apply after Brexit.

In presenting the restructuring plan, Hachigo stressed that Honda was striving to adjust to a fast changing global industry. Technology is driving the change.

"We are facing increasingly severe competition from Chinese and Indian manufacturers," he said. "We have to move more quickly."

Japan and the EU have also struck a free trade deal, which makes a manufacturing presence in the EU less important. The U.K.'s decision to leave the bloc could create further uncertainty for Japanese companies in Britain.

Christian Stadler, a professor at Warwick Business School in England, said the loss of free entry into the European market from Britain undoes one of its top advantages as a manufacturing base.

Many businesses fear economic chaos if there isn't an agreement on the rules and conditions that will replace the 45 years of frictionless trade that came with being an EU member. The uncertainty has already led many firms to shift some operations abroad, stockpile goods or defer investment decisions.

Earlier this month, Japan's Nissan announced that it would not build a new SUV at its plant in Sunderland, England, as previously planned.

"Car manufacturers have repeatedly warned the government about the threat Brexit poses to British industry," Stadler said, noting that Jaguar Land Rover had also scaled back its operations.

"Honda faces the same challenges as fellow Japanese car maker Nissan. The global economy is slowing

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down, which has hit key markets such as the U.S. and China.”

L. Alan Winters, director of the U.K. Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex, said that the backdrop of Brexit means that the U.K. is less able to respond to challenges in the industry.

“Honda, like all other car manufacturers, has a major problem to solve and having a chaotic government that does not seem to care about industry makes it less inclined to try to solve them here,” he said, adding that it will be difficult for Britain to face the shock. “With Brexit sucking life out of the U.K. economy, it will be much more difficult to find new activities and jobs to compensate for the losses at Honda and elsewhere.”

The planned closure will hit Swindon hard. Beyond the jobs at the plant, the jobs of those who supply the plan will also be at risk, as the auto industry has proved to be a bellwether of the economy.

Local lawmakers described the news as devastating and unions pledged to fight for the jobs.

TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady put the blame squarely at Prime Minister Theresa May’s door, saying her refusal to rule out a Brexit without a deal has put thousands of jobs in jeopardy.

“Workers at Honda must not pay the price for the prime minister playing to the hardliners in her party and we urge Honda to sit down urgently with Unite to discuss a way forward for the plant,” O’Grady said.

Haruka Nuga in Tokyo, Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok and Danica Kirka in London contributed to this report.

N. Carolina elections board weighs re-doing marred election

By EMERY P. DALESIO, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The country’s last undecided congressional election was marred by falsified signatures, disappearing documents and blank ballots that were filled in by people hired by the Republican candidate, North Carolina elections officials said.

The state elections board could decide as early as Tuesday whether possibly criminal ballot fraud was unfortunate but tolerable, or whether to order a new election in the 9th congressional district.

A political operative hired by Republican Mark Harris led “a coordinated, unlawful and substantially resourced absentee ballot scheme” in last year’s general election in rural Bladen and Robeson counties, which are part of the congressional district, state elections director Kim Strach said Monday.

The operative, Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr., was called to testify Monday, but his attorney refused to put him on the stand without legal protection against prosecution for events he described. The board refused.

The first of what could be a days-long hearing produced Dowless’ workers testifying that they sometimes filled in votes on unfinished, unsealed mail-in ballots. But there was scant evidence that Harris knew about it or even benefited.

Harris narrowly leads Democrat Dan McCready in unofficial results. But the race wasn’t certified in November after rumors of Dowless’ operation focusing on mail-in ballots. The elections board is expected to either declare a winner or order a new election after the hearing.

Dowless was hired to produce votes for Harris and Bladen County Sheriff Jim McVickers, but his methods last year included paying people to visit potential voters who had received absentee ballots and getting them to hand over those ballots, whether completed or not, Dowless worker Lisa Britt testified.

It’s illegal in North Carolina for anyone other than a guardian or close family member to handle a voter’s ballot because of the risk that it could be altered before being counted.

While Dowless and Harris’ main campaign consultant were in constant contact, she didn’t have any indication Harris knew about the operation, Britt said.

“I think Mr. Harris was completely clueless as to what was going on,” Britt said.

Britt testified she collected about three dozen sometimes unfinished ballots and handed them to Dowless, who kept them at his home and office for days or longer before they were turned in, said Britt, whose mother was formerly married to Dowless. While the congressional and sheriff’s races were almost always marked by voters who turned in unsealed ballots, Britt said she would fill in down-ballot local races

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— favoring Republicans — to prevent local elections board workers from suspecting Dowless' activities.

In one case, Britt said she picked up the completed ballot of an elderly black woman. A week later, she was told to return the woman's ballot after a local black empowerment group complained to Dowless that she was a voter they'd recruited. Britt said she could not explain why Dowless would still have the ballot in his possession rather than turning it in to the local elections board.

Dowless paid local people like Britt \$125 for every 50 mail-in ballots they collected in Bladen and Robeson counties and turned in to him, Strach said.

The operation's scope allowed Dowless to collect nearly \$84,000 in consulting fees over five months leading into last year's general election, said Strach, adding that in addition to reviewing financial and phone records, investigators questioned 142 voters in the south-central North Carolina counties.

Four of the five members on the elections board — composed of three Democrats and two Republicans — would need to agree a new election is necessary.

If that doesn't happen, McCready's lawyers said state officials should send their findings to the Democrat-dominated U.S. House and let it decide whether Harris should be seated — arguing that the U.S. Constitution gives the House authority over the elections and qualifications of its members.

Follow Emery P. Dalesio on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/emerydalesio> . His work can be found at <https://apnews.com/search/emery%20dalesio> .

I owe how much? Americans shocked by impact of new tax law

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL, AP Personal Finance Writer

Wait, I owe the IRS?

The first tax filing season under the new federal tax law is proving to be surprising, confusing — and occasionally frightening — for some Americans, especially those accustomed to getting money back from the government.

Take Andy Kraft and Amy Elias of Portland, Oregon. The couple had grown comfortable getting a small refund each year, a few hundred dollars or more. Then they found out they owe \$10,160 this year.

"I will never forget the moment, I thought 'We look good' and then we added in the next W-2 and my jaw hit the floor," Kraft said. "There was no way I wanted to believe that what I was looking at was accurate."

President Trump promised a reduction in taxes with the new law. And by most measures, the majority of Americans will see one. The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center projected the tax law would reduce individual income taxes by about \$1,260 on average, although it benefits higher earners more.

Some people already saw the benefit in the form of bigger paychecks. That's because the law forced employers to change what they withheld. But the system is far from perfect, and many workers didn't have enough in taxes set aside. Now, the IRS wants that money.

In addition, the law also eliminated personal exemptions, increased child credits, limited popular deductions and generally upended many familiar practices that determine what happens at tax time. That has taxpayers feeling a bit unmoored.

"We were very comfortable with our tax law, it had basically been there since 1986, suddenly all these things that were very important to people changed ... it's all different," said Howard Gleckman, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center.

Kraft and Elias are able to pay their tax bill but he's still stunned. He even tried to reverse-engineer things to figure out where they went wrong, diving into page after page of IRS rules. He painstakingly put together all the numbers. The couple ultimately asked a CPA to verify the figures they were seeing on TurboTax. Crushing, they were correct.

The couple's effective tax rate was lower, but they still owed the government.

"I feel like I have reached a stage of grief of acceptance," he said. "In a twisted way I should have been paying this all year and now I just have to pay it in one lump sum."

A number of experts such as Gleckman are urging taxpayers to obsess less about their refund or what

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they owe when measuring the effect of the new tax law. These are just a sliver of your tax picture.

But the truth is, many Americans have come to rely on refunds. About three-quarters of U.S. taxpayers typically get one and they had averaged around \$2,800. For some low-income households it is the biggest cash infusion of the year.

The IRS reported Thursday that the average tax refund as of the second week of filing season was \$1,949, down 8.7 percent from the year earlier. The total number of refunds is down 16 percent.

Experts caution it is too early to draw conclusions about a tax season that ends in April. Plus, the number of returns — 27 million as of Feb. 8 — is down 10 percent from a year ago, due in part to the partial government shutdown. The picture will become much clearer as more filings are processed, refunds are issued and the IRS gets back up to full speed.

All the same, the initial results have surprised early filers and worried those who haven't yet tackled their taxes.

Part of the problem centers around how employees and employers adjusted (or didn't adjust) withholdings from paychecks to account for the law's changes. The government issued updated withholding guidelines to help employers determine how much to set aside from an employee's paycheck to cover taxes. Withhold too much and you get a refund at tax time; too little and you owe.

It is at best, an estimate. But it's an estimate that grew drastically more difficult to make under the new law.

The Government Accountability Office estimated in a report last summer that about 30 million workers had too little withheld from their paychecks, which made their take home pay bigger but increased their tax liability. That's about 3 million more workers than normal.

Few taxpayers appear to have heeded the IRS' advice to do a "paycheck checkup" to make sure they had the proper amount withheld. Payroll processor ADP, which is responsible for paying one out of every six Americans, said the vast majority of people in its system didn't update their withholdings last year.

Some taxpayers who did make adjustments found they couldn't get it quite right.

Kevin McCreanor of Milton, Georgia and his wife normally get a sizeable refund each year — it was more than \$12,000 last year. While they know waiting for a large refund isn't the best strategy financially, they like a refund and they put anything they get back toward their daughters' education. Their income, earned primarily from his wife's job in telecom, can vary greatly, so there was comfort in never facing a big bill.

The couple increased her paycheck withholdings to ensure the same but found they are only getting back \$519 this year. Their income and tax rate did increase, and McCreanor acknowledges there is probably more he could have done to prepare but he is very disappointed all the same.

Some surprises were welcome, however. Brian Goodell and his wife typically face a tax bill of anywhere from \$10,000 to \$15,000 each year. But this year the Tigard, Oregon, couple is getting a \$15,000 refund. They believe they got some benefit from the increased child tax credit. They also made more charitable donations and increased their withholdings. While Goodell isn't entirely sure why it worked out so well, he'll gladly take the refund.

Taxpayers can get a better sense of how they fared by looking at their tax liability or effective tax rate. This information is often available on the summary received from an accountant or tax preparation software. They can also look at the "total tax" on those summaries or form 1040. These are not perfect measures either, but provide some perspective.

And remember that getting a refund is not necessarily a good thing. Breaking even is really the best outcome from an economic point of view. If you get a refund, that means the government has been holding onto your money when you could have been using it.

Additionally, consider that taxes are rarely an equal comparison from year-to-year, said Eric Bronnenkant, the head of tax at Betterment and a CPA and certified financial planner. People's lives change in ways that can dramatically influence their taxes, such as marriages, divorces, kids, moving or job changes. The average taxpayer may not realize the full impact some of these changes might have.

"I am not surprised by the reaction people are having," Bronnenkant said. "I think for some people the

reaction is more justified than others.”

Memorial speaks to North Korea’s ties to summit host Vietnam

By HAU DINH and GRANT PECK, Associated Press

BAC GIANG, Vietnam (AP) — In a rice field in northern Vietnam, 14 headstones are an enduring symbol of the wartime friendship of Vietnam and North Korea. They mark the original burial ground of North Korean pilots who died while secretly fighting alongside Vietnamese comrades against U.S. Air Force and Navy planes during the Vietnam War.

The role of North Korea is a footnote in the sweeping history of that conflict, one that speaks mostly of the fraternal relations of two nations that separately fought bruising armed conflicts against the United States in the context of the Cold War. Decades later, the communist nations’ friendship is apparent as Vietnam gets ready to host the second summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un next week.

“When they died, Vietnamese people treated them the same as Vietnamese martyrs who sacrificed for the country,” Duong Van Dau, the caretaker of the memorial, said last week. On the high ground where the fallen pilots were interred, their tombs all face northeast, toward their homeland.

South Korea’s role in the war is much better known. From 1964 to 1973, Seoul deployed more than 300,000 military personnel to help the U.S. effort in South Vietnam against the communists.

By contrast, the North Korean air force contingent deployed near Hanoi in what was then called North Vietnam — the communist half of the war-torn Southeast Asian nation — had 200-400 personnel, including about 90 pilots over more than two years, according to postwar Vietnamese accounts.

In September 1966, according to Vietnamese historical documents obtained and translated by CIA analyst turned scholar Merle Pribbenow, Hanoi accepted an offer by Pyongyang to send three companies of pilots who would form a regiment equipped with 30 aircraft in total. They were to wear North Vietnamese uniforms and Vietnam would provide the aircraft, facilities and equipment.

It was timely assistance. Vietnam’s fleet of aging Russian-made MiG-17 fighters was taking heavy losses defending against the U.S. bombing campaign against North Vietnam, Operation Rolling Thunder. China and Russia provided material assistance, but the number of trained Vietnamese pilots was shrinking by attrition.

The first North Korean contingent, also destined to fly Mig-17s, were sent before the end of 1966 to Kep air base in Bac Giang province, 70 kilometers (40 miles) northeast of Hanoi, to aid in training and to carry out combat missions.

“The agreement was signed by the two governments, but we didn’t know anything about it. I did know that North Korea wanted to send pilots to Vietnam so that they could practice and gain experience with the aim of building its air force,” Vu Ngoc Dinh, one of the Vietnamese pilots who served alongside the Koreans, recalled in an interview with Istvan Toperczer, a Hungarian air force officer turned historian.

“The pilots were their best ones whose parents or relatives were working for the Politburo of the North Korean Central Party Committee,” Dinh is quoted saying in Toperczer’s book “MiG Aces of the Vietnam War.”

“They sent their pilots and commanders to Vietnam and we provided the hardware they required during their service,” Dinh said. “They kept everything secret, so we didn’t know their loss ratio, but the North Korean pilots claimed 26 American aircraft destroyed.”

“Although they fought very bravely in the aerial battles, they were generally too slow and too mechanical in their reactions when engaged, which is why so many of them were shot down by the Americans,” Dinh said. “They never followed flight instructions and regulations either.”

Dau, the cemetery caretaker, is also a war veteran. He joined the army and marched south in 1966 to fight for the communist side in South Vietnam. He was discharged three years later after getting shot in the knee in fighting just outside of Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City.

“For the North Korean pilots who fought to protect our country and died for our country, I salute them. Being a soldier myself, I have great compassion for them. I see them as my comrades, regardless of the

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nationality," Dau said.

In 2002, the remains of the pilots were repatriated from Vietnam to North Korea in a ceremony held by the military of both countries. But the headstones remain, lined up in two rows behind a memorial marker with an inscription in Vietnamese: "Here used to lie 14 North Korean comrades."

Since the repatriation, the number of visitors to the site has declined. But Dau said he would continue to care for the gated memorial to the fallen pilots.

Only in 2000-2001 was the participation of the North Korean pilots officially acknowledged by Hanoi and Pyongyang. Since then, there has been a trickle of additional details about North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, teased out mostly from Vietnamese memoirs and state press accounts and Eastern European diplomatic archives.

What has also emerged is a revisionist view of North Korea's assistance, which suggests Pyongyang would have been happy to see Hanoi fight to the last Vietnamese.

"Sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmire of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government did not want to open a new front in Korea if it could help it," wrote Balazs Szalontai, a Hungarian historian of North Korea. He alleges that North Korea's then-leader, Kim Il Sung, "had much to gain from keeping America bogged down in Vietnam" and for that reason went out of its way to sustain North Vietnam's struggle.

Conversely, "the very fact that North Korea's assistance to Hanoi was strongly motivated by self-interest also implied that Pyongyang would not take kindly to any steps that could potentially enable the U.S. to get off the Indochinese hook and refocus its attention on the Korean peninsula," he noted in an essay on nknews.org, a website with news and analysis about North Korea.

When Washington and Hanoi began peace talks in Paris in 1968, North Korean aid began to tail off sharply, and Pyongyang greeted the 1973 Paris Peace Accords coldly, Szalontai noted.

Peck reported from Bangkok.

Trump the pundit handicaps 2020 Democratic contenders

By ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Kamala Harris had the best campaign roll-out. Amy Klobuchar's snowy debut showed grit. Elizabeth Warren's opening campaign video was a bit odd. Take it from an unlikely armchair pundit sizing up the 2020 Democratic field: President Donald Trump.

In tweets, public remarks and private conversations, Trump is making clear he is closely following the campaign to challenge him on the ballot. Facing no serious primary opponent of his own — at least so far — Trump is establishing himself as an in-their-face observer of the Democratic Party's nominating process — and no one will be surprised to find that he's not being coy about weighing in.

Presidents traditionally ignore their potential opponents as long as possible to maintain their status as an incumbent floating above the contenders who are auditioning for a job they already inhabit.

Not Trump. He's eager to shape the debate, sow discord and help position himself for the general election. It's just one more norm to shatter, and a risky bet that his acerbic politics will work to his advantage once again.

This is the president whose 240-character blasts and penchant for insults made mincemeat of his 2016 Republican rivals. And Brad Parscale, Trump's campaign manager, said the president aims to use Twitter again this time to "define his potential opponent and impact the Democrat primary debate."

But often Trump's commentary reflects a peculiar sense of disengagement from the events of the day, as though he were a panelist on the cable news shows he records and watches, rather than their prime subject of discussion. He puts the armchair in armchair punditry. In an interview with The New York Times, Trump assessed Harris' campaign like a talk show regular, declaring her opening moves as having a "better crowd, better enthusiasm" than the other Democrats.

Crowd size was also at play last week when he held a rally in El Paso, Texas, that was countered a few blocks away by one led by former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, a potential 2020 candidate.

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"So we have let's say 35,000 people tonight, and he has 200 people, 300 people," Trump observed, wildly exaggerating both numbers. "Not too good. In fact, what I would do is, I would say, that may be the end of his presidential bid."

When Sen. Klobuchar announced her candidacy on a frigid day in her home state of Minnesota, Trump anointed her with a nickname of sorts, and a benign one at that: "By the end of her speech she looked like a Snowman(woman)!"

Inside the West Wing and in conversations with outside allies, Trump has been workshoping other attempts to imprint his new adversaries with lasting labels, according to two people on whom the president has tested out the nicknames. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations with the president. He is also testing out lines of attack in public rallies, exploring vulnerabilities he could use against them should they advance to the general election.

No candidate has drawn more commentary and criticism from Trump than Sen. Warren, the liberal Massachusetts Democrat. Warren's past claims of Native American heritage prompted Trump to brand her "Pocahontas" and he has shown no qualms about deploying racially charged barbs harking back to some of the nation's darkest abuses.

Wading into a Twitter frenzy over an Instagram video Warren posted after she announced her exploratory committee while sharing a beer with her husband at their kitchen table, Trump jeered: "Best line in the Elizabeth Warren beer catastrophe is, to her husband, 'Thank you for being here. I'm glad you're here' It's their house, he's supposed to be there!"

"If Elizabeth Warren, often referred to by me as Pocahontas, did this commercial from Bighorn or Wounded Knee instead of her kitchen, with her husband dressed in full Indian garb, it would have been a smash!" Trump tweeted.

Even in the midst of the partial government shutdown, those tweets mocking Warren were widely joked about by White House staff weary from the protracted closure, according to one aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations. The person said the president repeatedly ridiculed Warren's video in private conversations with aides and outside advisers.

Attention from Trump can drive up fundraising and elevate a candidate above a crowded field. But responding to attacks also distracts from a candidate's message.

Trump's rivals in the 2016 GOP primary learned that lesson as he bedeviled them with name-calling. Trump goaded Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida into making a thinly veiled insult of his manhood that quickly backfired, and weeks later he sucked Texas Sen. Ted Cruz into a brutal back-and-forth about an insult he had leveled at Cruz's wife.

"The president has an ability to use social media to define his opponents and influence the primary debate in a way no sitting president before him has," said former White House spokesman Raj Shah. "I expect him to take full advantage."

On Friday, hours after declaring a national emergency on the U.S.-Mexico border, Trump tweeted a video made by a supporter that featured the president's Democratic critics in Congress. Harris, Bernie Sanders and Cory Booker were shown sitting dourly during the State of the Union address, set to the R.E.M. ballad "Everybody Hurts."

The mocking video may have been taken down later in the day after a copyright complaint by the band, and re-cut using Trump-supporter Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." But the message to Trump's would-be 2020 rivals, and people girding for another wild presidential cycle, remained anchored to the lyrics of that R.E.M. song: "Hold on."

16 states sue Trump over emergency wall declaration

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California and 15 other states filed a lawsuit Monday against President Donald Trump's emergency declaration to fund a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra released a statement Monday saying the suit alleges the Trump administration's action violates the Constitution.

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"President Trump treats the rule of law with utter contempt," Becerra said. "He knows there is no border crisis, he knows his emergency declaration is unwarranted, and he admits that he will likely lose this case in court."

Joining California in filing the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Virginia. All the states involved in the lawsuit have Democratic attorneys general.

Trump declared a national emergency to fulfill his promise of completing the wall.

The move allows the president to bypass Congress to use money from the Pentagon and other budgets.

The states say diversion of military funding to wall-building will hurt their economies and deprive their military bases of needed upgrades. They say taking away funds from counter-drug efforts for the wall will also cause damage. California and New Mexico, the two Mexican border states in the lawsuit, say the wall will harm wildlife.

California has repeatedly challenged Trump in court.

"President Trump is manufacturing a crisis and declaring a made-up 'national emergency' in order to seize power and undermine the Constitution," said California Gov. Gavin Newsom in a statement. "This 'emergency' is a national disgrace."

Belles of the ball: Dem freshmen courted by 2020 hopefuls

By LAURIE KELLMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elizabeth Warren gave a nod to the first two Native Americans elected to Congress. Sen. Jeff Merkley got a moment on-camera with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. And virtually all of the Democrats who would be president have reached out to freshman Rep. Joe Cunningham in early-voting South Carolina.

Think of it as dancing with the freshman stars, 2020 edition.

Democrats hoping to defeat President Donald Trump are engaged in a furious courtship of congressional newcomers, a sign of the energy the freshmen bring to a party looking for a new generation of leaders, direction and know-how.

For the political suitors, there's credibility to be gained from the younger, more diverse and social media-savvy members of the biggest new class since Watergate. The freshmen, meanwhile, are finding mentors among the presidential dreamers, as well as aligned interests in their ranks on such issues as climate, health care and more.

But there is risk, too, for the belles of the early Democratic primary ball. Only weeks after their Washington debuts, the freshmen lawmakers are still developing from candidates into lawmakers and representatives, building voting records and raising money for their own re-election bids. And some have discovered the downside of their fame, having been embroiled in controversy due to their statements and proposals.

"If you are newly elected and you take your eye out the district and you're staring at the shiny bright object of a presidential campaign, you are making it harder to get re-elected," said former Rep. Steve Israel, the House Democrats' chief campaign strategist for four years. The attention may be flattering, Israel said, but his advice is to do the sometimes grueling constituent casework. "Keep your feet on the ground of your district, and not in the silver clouds of a presidential campaign."

But the presidential candidates are calling. And name-dropping in public. Some, such as former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his own \$110 million contribution to the midterm Democrats, have raised and spent big money that helped elect the newcomers. But as of yet, the 2020 candidates are making few if any explicit requests for commitments of support.

New York's Ocasio-Cortez is a close ally of Sen. Bernie Sanders, but she hasn't announced which presidential candidate she's backing now. Still, her dance card is fast filling up. Every presidential candidate except Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio has signed on to the so-called Green New Deal, a moonshot she is championing to combat climate change. Merkley of Oregon was there when Ocasio-Cortez headlined the GND unveiling in Washington at an unusually well-attended event for a statement-making resolution that

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won't become law. And a day after formally launching her presidential campaign, Warren gave Ocasio-Cortez a big nod in Iowa, home of the first presidential nominating caucus.

"It is terrific to see Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez come in and put a tremendous amount of energy behind this," Warren said in Davenport.

The House freshmen also are playing a role in Warren's struggle to move past her claim of Native American ancestry early in her career. Last fall before the historic midterm elections, Warren released a DNA test showing "high confidence" in her distant Native American ancestry, a move intended to put the issue behind her. But that caused significant unhappiness among some supporters. Trump kept the issue alive by repeatedly mocking Warren as "Pocahontas." Warren apologized twice over two weeks this year leading to her presidential announcement Feb. 9. Within days, she was back in Washington making an unannounced visit to a major Native American conference.

Freshman Rep. Deb Haaland of New Mexico, one of two Native Americans elected to Congress, introduced her. Warren noted that she and Haaland are working on legislation together on Native American issues.

"That 'Thank you' is especially heart-felt for my friend and colleague, Congresswoman Deb Haaland," Warren said in prepared remarks for the National Indian Women Honor Luncheon, where she introduced Cheryl Andrews-Maltais, the chairwoman of the Wampanoag Tribe of Massachusetts. The campaign said Warren was there to support her friend. "I also want to acknowledge another friend who made history this past year, Congresswoman Sharice Davids," a Kansan and Native American. Davids, she added, is "another barrier-breaking woman whose leadership is a deep inspiration to us all."

Sanders, the 2016 phenomenon who has not yet said he is running again, this month reached out to soothe Rep. Ilhan Omar after she tweeted that members of Congress support Israel because they are paid to do so. Omar "unequivocally" apologized, but it wasn't the first time the Minnesota Democrat had sparked charges of anti-Semitism. The controversy continued simmering the rest of last week.

"I talked to Ilhan last night to give her my personal support. We will stand by our Muslim brothers and sisters," Sanders said Thursday on a conference call hosted by Jim Zogby, co-chair of the DNC's Ethnic Council. The remark was first reported by Jewish Insider and confirmed with Sanders' office by The Associated Press.

Virtually every candidate has paid a visit to freshman Rep. Joe Cunningham. His victory over Katie Arrington, a Trump-supported Republican, flipped a House seat in a district the president won by nearly 13 percentage points in 2016.

Even before the November elections, many potential Democratic White House hopefuls reached out, such as New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker. Former Vice President Joe Biden endorsed Cunningham and campaigned with him. So did Montana Gov. Steve Bullock.

The parade of potentials has continued in the months since, though Cunningham has received no formal request for an endorsement, his spokeswoman said. Cunningham is widely viewed as aligned with former Texas Senate candidate Beto O'Rourke, in part because a key aide who helped Cunningham pull off his upset has signed up as O'Rourke's state director.

Similarly, freshmen Rep. Chris Pappas in first-in-the-nation New Hampshire says he's played something that sounds like a tour guide exceptionally early in the cycle. It helps that he is co-owner of the Puritan Backroom, a restaurant famous for chicken tenders that's been in his family for more than a century and is a frequent stop for presidential candidates of both parties.

"I've seen a few candidates," Pappas said in a phone call. "They want to get a sense of what's on people's minds."

AP Washington Bureau Chief Julie Pace and writers Elana Schor in Washington and Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

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

Jailed Citgo executives in limbo amid Venezuela turmoil

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JOHN L. MONE, Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A faint voice comes through the crackled phone line. On the other end, Tomeu Vadell, speaking from a military counterintelligence prison in Venezuela's capital, asks his daughters in Louisiana whether they've gone to church and says he plans to spend his Sunday doing pushups to keep his body and spirit intact.

The call ends abruptly after two minutes, leaving Cristina and Veronica Vadell wondering when they'll next hear from their dad, who along with five other executives from Houston-based Citgo has spent 15 months jailed in Venezuela on what their families say are trumped-up corruption charges.

"He always tells us they can take away his freedom but never his dignity," said 27-year-old Cristina, who has followed in her father's footsteps and is an oil engineer in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where she has lived most of her life.

As the Trump administration plunges ahead in its effort to unseat Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, the fate of the so-called Citgo Six — five of them, like Vadell, American citizens with deep roots in Louisiana and Texas — lies in the balance. As does that of the American company they worked for, which is a major prize in the power struggle between Maduro and a rival the U.S. recognizes as Venezuela's rightful leader: Juan Guaido.

Their families complain the men are being held in inhumane conditions, sharing overcrowded basement cells built for 22 people with nearly four times that number of inmates. They say the crowded conditions require the men to sometimes sleep on the floor and go without access to fresh air or sunlight for weeks.

Vadell's family says he has lost more than 60 pounds due to malnutrition. In a photo snapped clandestinely with a cellphone last month and provided to The Associated Press, he looks like a prisoner of war with sunken eyes and cheeks, a green army jumpsuit hanging from his gaunt frame.

Their case shows no sign of advancing. A preliminary hearing has been postponed 12 times for little apparent reason, leaving the families to question whether their loved ones are being held as pawns in a high-stakes political negotiation. The next hearing date is Wednesday.

"The situation, as volatile as it is now, brings more uncertainty," said Cristina Vadell. "We can't predict the future. We don't know what's going to happen. But I do know my father is staying strong for us and we aren't going to give up until we bring him home."

The families' saga began the weekend before Thanksgiving in 2017, when Vadell and the other executives got a call from Nelson Martinez, then head of Citgo's parent, Venezuela's state oil giant PDVSA, asking that they travel to Caracas for a last-minute budget meeting.

The group flew out on a corporate jet. They included Vadell, vice president of refining; Gustavo Cardenas, head of strategic shareholder relations as well as government and public affairs; Jorge Toledo, vice president of supply and marketing; Alirio Zambrano, vice president and general manager of Citgo's Corpus Christi refinery; Jose Luis Zambrano, vice president of shared services; and Jose Angel Pereira, the president of Citgo.

What happened next upended the families' serene lives. A group of armed and masked security agents rushed into a PDVSA conference room and arrested all six executives. Hours later, Maduro's attorney general appeared on state TV announcing charges of embezzlement stemming from a proposal to refinance some \$4 billion in Citgo bonds by offering up a 50 percent stake in the company as collateral.

"On Monday he left and he was supposed to come back Tuesday," said Vadell's wife, Dennyse. "He went into a meeting and never came back."

Then Maduro himself accused them of "treason," though they have not been charged with that crime.

The arrests kicked off a purge inside Venezuela's oil industry that a few days later saw Martinez, the PDVSA head, and a former oil minister among dozens others jailed. In Martinez's place, Asdrubal Chavez, a cousin of the late President Hugo Chavez and close ally of Maduro, was named Citgo president. In December, Martinez died in state custody, further alarming the families of the Citgo employees.

Citgo, which controls about 4 percent of U.S. refining capacity, has provided almost no support to the

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jailed executives despite an indemnity agreement that obligates it to act on the men's behalf, current Citgo employee said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of being punished by the company. In the ensuing months, Citgo also terminated their pay, the employee said.

"The only communication I had with Citgo when this happened was they called to tell me not to go to the media and that they were going to every house to pick up the company cars," said Maria Elena Cardenas, whose husband is among those jailed.

A battle is now raging at Citgo headquarters, the employee said, as a result of U.S. sanctions on PDVSA last month that effectively block American companies from buying Venezuelan oil, diverting any payments into an escrow account controlled by Guaido, who the U.S. and dozens of other countries recognize as Venezuela's interim president. Most of the employees loyal to Maduro have left, while any reference to PDVSA has been scrubbed from the company's facilities, along with portraits of South American independence hero Simon Bolivar.

Maduro has vowed to defend Citgo from seizure, saying it belongs to the Venezuelan people. His attorney general last week filed criminal charges against the new PDVSA and Citgo boards appointed by Guaido.

The U.S. is keeping a tight lid on whatever efforts it has undertaken to help the men.

American consular officials have been repeatedly denied access to them in jail because the Vienna Convention doesn't obligate Venezuela to recognize their dual American nationality. U.S. officials have raised concerns in diplomatic notes and meetings with the foreign ministry, said a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the case.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, when asked about the case in a Feb. 6 interview with Fox Business Network, said only that "anywhere there is an American who is wrongfully detained, in this case by the thug Maduro, the United States government is incredibly focused on obtaining their release."

Some family members wonder if the U.S. could be doing more.

Venezuelan human rights groups don't include the men among the almost 1,000 people classified as political prisoners, and the hushed approach contrasts with the very public diplomatic push that secured the release last year of Joshua Holt, a Utah man who was held for more than two years in a Caracas jail on weapons charges that were also seen as bogus. A Venezuelan official who regularly fielded U.S. complaints in the Holt case said Americans have been largely silent with regard to the Citgo employees. He spoke on the condition of anonymity because he isn't authorized to speak to the press.

"We are grateful for the people who continue to help us, but we're not convinced the U.S. government is taking these Americans into account when making policy toward Venezuela," said Veronica Vadell.

For Maria Elena Cardenas time is running out.

Her 18-year-old son, Sergio, suffers from a rare metabolic disease that has stunted his physical growth. Since his father's arrest, he has been having panic attacks and screaming at night. The two traveled to Caracas recently at great risk to Sergio's health for a two-hour jailhouse visit to calm the teen's nerves.

"He shouldn't be in jail. He should be home with his us, his family," the younger Cardenas said, his voice quivering with emotion. "He's the bravest person I've ever known. He's the greatest father in the world."

Associated Press writer Joshua Goodman reported this story from Caracas, Venezuela, and AP writer John L. Mone reported in Houston.

Official: Deputy AG Rosenstein expected to depart in March

By ERIC TUCKER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Justice Department official says Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein is expected to leave his position in the middle of next month.

The official was not authorized to discuss the move by name and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity on Monday night.

The White House is expected to name a replacement for Rosenstein this week.

Rosenstein's departure had been expected with the confirmation of William Barr as attorney general

last week.

Rosenstein has been on the job for nearly two years.

He oversaw special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation after then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself. Barr now oversees the remaining work in Mueller's investigation into potential coordination between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign and decide how much Congress and the public know about its conclusion.

W.Va. teachers' unions call for strike over education bill

By JOHN RABY, Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — West Virginia teachers' unions on Monday called a statewide strike over an education bill that they view as lacking their input and as retaliation for a walkout last year.

The strike is scheduled to start Tuesday, leaders of three unions for teachers and school service workers said at a news conference, almost a year to the day after teachers started a nine-day walkout.

"We are left with no other choice," said Fred Albert, president of the American Federation of Teachers' West Virginia chapter.

The 2018 walkout launched the national "Red4Ed" movement that included strikes in Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Washington state, and more recently, Los Angeles and Denver. Teachers in Oakland, California, have authorized a strike starting Thursday.

Now the movement has come full circle.

Both the state Senate and House of Delegates have approved separate and far different versions of the complex bill, but both call for creating the state's first charter schools. The unions believe charter schools will erode traditional public schools.

After the strike call, the Senate passed an amendment to its bill 18-16 Monday night. The unions have said lawmakers never asked for their insight into what has become a rushed process in the Senate.

West Virginia Education Association President Dale Lee said that upon watching the Senate's actions, "it appears that they are more interested in listening to the outside interests than they are the educators across West Virginia.

"We will work as closely as we can to get a resolution, but at this point, there doesn't seem to be a resolution."

Earlier Monday, Sen. Patricia Rucker, a Jefferson County Republican, moved to adopt the Senate's amended version before senators even had a chance to read changes to the bill, prompting Democrats to protest. The Senate later adjourned for more than an hour to enable senators to catch up.

"Why are we pushing it through with about 10 minutes of advance notice?" said Michael Romano, a Harrison County Democrat. "Here we are with no time to digest it."

Among other things, the Senate version would allow for up to seven charter schools statewide and provide for up to 1,000 education savings accounts for parents to pay for private school. The accounts would be for special needs students and those who have been bullied.

Proponents say the moves would give parents more school choices. Charter school laws have been enacted in 43 states and Washington, D.C.

The House version does not call for such savings accounts and would limit charter schools to one each in Cabell and Kanawha counties.

Like the House, the Senate has removed a clause that would invalidate the entire legislation if any part is struck down. It also removed language requiring teacher pay to be withheld during a strike as long as the school calendar is unaffected.

"We are watching this hour by hour," Albert said.

Sen. Craig Blair, a Berkeley County Republican, said the bill includes more than \$66 million to directly help teachers and school service workers.

"Change is never easy in West Virginia," he said. "This is the right thing to do. At this moment in time, this is exactly the right thing to do to get a better education outcome for our students."

Teachers won a 5 percent pay raise after last year's strike. The current legislation calls for similar raises.

Trump pleads with Venezuela's military to back Guaidó

By ZEKE MILLER, Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — President Donald Trump on Monday pleaded with Venezuela's military to support opposition leader Juan Guaidó and issued a dire warning if they continue to stand with President Nicolás Maduro's government.

"You will find no safe harbor, no easy exit and no way out. You will lose everything," Trump said in a speech at Florida International University in Miami before large American and Venezuelan flags.

Trump added: "We seek a peaceful transition of power, but all options are open."

The Venezuelan military could play a decisive role in the stalemate but has largely remained loyal to Maduro.

In remarks broadcast on state television, Maduro accused the U.S. president of speaking in an "almost Nazi style" and lashed out at Trump for thinking he can deliver orders to Venezuela's military.

"Who is the commander of the armed forces, Donald Trump from Miami?" Maduro said. "They think they're the owners of the country."

Trump said "a new day is coming in Latin America," as he sought to rally support among the largest Venezuelan community in the U.S. for Guaidó. The U.S. recognizes him as the country's rightful president and condemns Maduro's government and its socialist policies.

As the monthslong political crisis stretched on, the military has blocked the U.S. from moving tons of humanitarian aid airlifted in recent days to the Colombian border with Venezuela. The aid shipments have been meant in part to dramatize the hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine that are gripping Venezuela. Trump said of Maduro, "He would rather see his people starve than give them aid."

Critics say Maduro's re-election last year was fraudulent, making his second term illegal.

Venezuela's power struggle is headed to a potentially violent showdown Saturday, when Guaidó will try to run caravans of U.S. humanitarian aid across the Venezuelan border from Colombia. Maduro denies a humanitarian crisis exists, blaming the Trump administration for mounting a coup against him.

More than 2 million Venezuelans have fled the country in the last two years, most flooding across the border into Colombia, Brazil and Peru. Those left behind struggle to afford scarce supplies of food and medicine as inflation soars.

Maduro maintains support from Russia, China and Turkey, while Guaidó has won recognition from dozens of world leaders in Latin America and Europe, who are demanding that Maduro holds new elections or steps down.

So far, Maduro isn't budging. In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Maduro said Venezuela is ready to make an economic rebound once Trump removes his "infected hand" from the country that sits atop the world's largest petroleum reserves.

Trump urged the Venezuelan military to accept Guaidó's offer of amnesty and refrain from violence against those opposing Maduro's government. And he praised the Venezuelan opposition, saying of the people of Venezuela, "They are turning the page on dictatorship and there will be no going back."

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said earlier Monday that the U.S. "knows where military officials and their families have money hidden throughout the world."

South Florida is home to more than 100,000 Venezuelans and Venezuelan-Americans, the largest concentration in the country. Speaking in the presidential battleground state, Trump also sought to draw a contrast with the policies of progressive Democrats, which he brands as "socialist," as he gears up for re-election.

Trump said that "socialism has so completely ravaged" Venezuela "that even the world's largest reserves of oil are not enough to keep the lights on." He added: "This will never happen to us."

"Socialism promises prosperity, but it delivers poverty," he said.

Trump was introduced by first lady Melania Trump and joined by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Florida Sens. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott, who have all been outspoken in their criticism of Maduro's government. Trump also spoke of the socialist governments in Cuba and Nicaragua,

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which have large expatriate communities in the Miami area.

"Socialism is dying and liberty, prosperity and democracy are being reborn" throughout the hemisphere, Trump said, expressing hope that soon, "This will become the first free hemisphere in all of human history."

In Cuba, the foreign minister, Bruno Rodriguez, tweeted that he considered "offensive" Trump's speech and that it "confirms the threat of military aggression against Venezuela." He added, "Humanitarian aid is a pretext for a war."

Shortly after Trump ended his speech, he tweeted, "I ask every member of the Maduro regime: End this nightmare of poverty, hunger and death. LET YOUR PEOPLE GO. Set your country free! Now is the time for all Venezuelan Patriots to act together, as one united people. Nothing could be better for the future of Venezuela!"

Guaido addressed the crowd in a pre-recorded video released by the White House and thanked Trump and the state of Florida for their support.

"Now there is a debate between the democracy and dictatorship — one between life and death," Guaido said in Spanish. "Today this fight is existential."

Trump said the U.S. is "profoundly grateful" to dissidents and exiles who have protested and raised alarms about the actions of the Maduro government. But his administration has also come under criticism for not doing enough to grant asylum to those fleeing the country.

"President Trump is two-faced on the Venezuela issue," said Florida Democratic Party Chairwoman Terrie Rizzo. "He talks about fighting the Maduro regime, but his administration keeps deporting and detaining Venezuelans fleeing repression from the Maduro regime."

Trump had been spending the holiday weekend at his private club in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Associated Press writer Scott Smith in Caracas, Venezuela, contributed to this report.

3 children among 4 found dead after west Michigan shooting

SOLON TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — Authorities say three children and a woman were found dead of apparent gunshot wounds at a home in western Michigan.

Kent County Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young says authorities responded Monday to a property near Cedar Springs, a community about 30 miles (48 kilometers) north of Grand Rapids. She says someone discovered the bodies and called 911.

LaJoye-Young said the three children were elementary school-aged and younger but declined to provide further information about the victims' relationships to one another. She said authorities were still confirming the victims' identities.

LaJoye-Young called the scene "a horrific thing to be called to" and said "my heart goes out to the families involved here and the community."

Authorities don't believe there is a shooter at large. An investigation is ongoing.

Information from: WOOD-TV, <http://www.woodtv.com>

N Carolina elections head says ballots handled illegally

By EMERY P. DALESIO, Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A Republican operative conducted an illegal and well-funded ballot-harvesting operation, North Carolina's elections director said Monday, but the first session of a days-long hearing produced scant evidence that the GOP congressional candidate he worked for knew about it or even benefited.

The director's testimony came at the opening of a state elections board hearing into whether mail-in ballots were tampered with in the race for the state's 9th congressional district seat that saw Republican Mark Harris narrowly defeat Democrat Dan McCready.

The race wasn't certified, leaving the country's only congressional election without a declared winner. The elections board is expected to either declare a winner or order a new election after the hearing.

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"The evidence that we will provide today will show that a coordinated, unlawful and substantially resourced absentee ballot scheme operated in the 2018 general election" in rural Bladen and Robeson counties, which are part of the congressional district, state elections director Kim Strach said.

Harris held a slim lead over McCready in unofficial results following November's election, but the state elections board refused to certify the contest after allegations of potential ballot manipulation surfaced. There wasn't evidence presented Monday that the election irregularities were so widespread that it would overturn Harris' 905 vote lead. The hearing will continue Tuesday and could continue beyond then.

The investigation targeted a political operative working for Harris' campaign named Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr.

One witness, Kimberly Sue Robinson, said she turned over her signed, blank ballot to Dowless' workers in an unsealed envelope. She said she'd done the same thing in previous elections, trusting Dowless would make good choices. The registered Republican's vote was counted in November's election.

Dowless was hired to produce votes for Harris and Bladen County Sheriff Jim McVickers, but his methods last year included paying people to visit potential voters who had received absentee ballots and getting them to hand over those ballots, whether completed or not, Dowless worker Lisa Britt testified.

It's illegal in North Carolina for anyone other than a guardian or close family member to handle a voter's ballot.

Dowless was called to testify late Monday, but his attorney said he wouldn't do it without legal protection against prosecution for events he described. The board refused.

Britt testified she collected about three dozen sometimes unfinished ballots and handed them to Dowless, who kept them at his home and office for days or longer before they were turned in, said Britt, whose mother was formerly married to Dowless. While the congressional and sheriff's races were almost always marked by voters who turned in unsealed ballots, Britt said she would fill in down-ballot local races — favoring Republicans — to prevent local elections board workers from suspecting Dowless' activities.

"Most people aren't concerned with the school board or some of the other little people on there," Britt said.

While Dowless and Harris' main campaign consultant were in constant contact, she didn't have any indication Harris knew about the operation, Britt said.

"I think Mr. Harris was completely clueless as to what was going on," Britt said.

Britt's mother said she overheard a phone conversation in which Harris and Dowless before November's election discussed the Republican's strong showing. Sandra Dowless said Harris asked McCrae Dowless, the ex-husband who she lived with for six months last year, how he knew the Republican was running strongly.

"I know the people and I know how they vote," Sandra Dowless recounted her ex-husband as saying.

Strach said McCrae Dowless paid local people he recruited \$125 for every 50 mail-in ballots they collected in Bladen and Robeson counties and turned in to him. That means they could have been altered before being counted.

The operation's scope allowed Dowless to collect nearly \$84,000 in consulting fees over five months leading into last year's general election, said Strach, adding that in addition to reviewing financial and phone records investigators questioned 142 voters in the south-central North Carolina counties.

Harris received 679 mail-in ballots in Bladen and Robeson counties, compared to 652 for McCready, Strach said. But McCready's lawyers contend nearly 1,200 other mail-in ballots were sent to voters and never returned — enough to erase Harris' Election Day lead.

Strach was expected to touch on the unreturned ballots later in the hearing.

"It's not just about those that have been returned. It's potentially about those that haven't been returned," she said.

Dowless and Harris attended Monday's hearing. McCready did not.

Four of the five members on the elections board — composed of three Democrats and two Republicans — would need to agree a new election is necessary.

If that doesn't happen, McCready's lawyers said state officials should send their findings to the Democrat-

dominated U.S. House and let it decide whether Harris should be seated — arguing that the U.S. Constitution gives the House authority over the elections and qualifications of its members.

Follow Emery P. Dalesio on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/emerydalesio>. His work can be found at <https://apnews.com/search/emery%20dalesio>.

Sailor in iconic V-J Day Times Square kiss photo dies at 95

By The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The ecstatic sailor shown kissing a woman in Times Square celebrating the end of World War II died Sunday. George Mendonsa was 95.

Mendonsa fell and had a seizure at the assisted living facility in Middletown, Rhode Island, where he lived with his wife of 70 years, his daughter, Sharon Molleur, told The Providence Journal.

Mendonsa was shown kissing Greta Zimmer Friedman, a dental assistant in a nurse's uniform, on Aug. 14, 1945 — known as V-J Day, the day Japan surrendered to the United States. People spilled into the New York City streets to celebrate the news.

Mendonsa planted a kiss on Friedman, whom he had never met.

An iconic photo of the kiss by Alfred Eisenstaedt was first published in Life magazine and is called "V-J Day in Times Square," but is known to most as "The Kiss."

It became one of the most famous photographs of the 20th century.

Another photographer, Victor Jorgensen, who was in the Navy, also captured the moment in a similar photo. The moment has been shared widely and is often seen on posters.

Several people later claimed to be the kissing couple, and it was years before Mendonsa and Friedman were confirmed to be the couple.

Mendonsa served on a destroyer during the war and was on leave when the end of the war was announced.

When he was honored at the Rhode Island State House in 2015, Mendonsa spoke about the kiss. He said Friedman reminded him of nurses on a hospital ship that he saw care for wounded sailors.

"I saw what those nurses did that day and now back in Times Square the war ends, a few drinks, so I grabbed the nurse," Mendonsa said, WPRI-TV reported.

Friedman said in a 2005 interview with the Veterans History Project that it wasn't her choice to be kissed.

"The guy just came over and kissed or grabbed," she told the Library of Congress.

She added, "It was just somebody really celebrating. But it wasn't a romantic event."

Mendonsa died two days before his 96th birthday. The family has not yet made funeral arrangements.

Friedman fled Austria during the war as a 15-year-old girl. She died in 2016 at the age of 92 at a hospital in Richmond, Virginia, from complications of old age.

Israeli leaders' Nazi comments derail European summit

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Poland on Monday withdrew from a European summit in Jerusalem, derailing the meeting and embarrassing its Israeli hosts, to protest claims by Israel's acting foreign minister that Poles collaborated with the Nazis and "suckled anti-Semitism with their mothers' milk."

The abrupt cancellation marked a new low in a bitter and long-running conflict between Poland and Israel over how to characterize Polish actions toward its Jewish community during World War II.

It also was a diplomatic setback for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had touted the gathering as a milestone in his outreach to the emerging democracies of central and eastern Europe. Netanyahu has courted these countries to counter the criticism Israel typically faces in international forums.

Tuesday's meeting of the leaders of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic — known as the Visegrad group — was to be the first time the summit has been held outside of Europe.

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The gathering began to unravel last week when Netanyahu, during a visit to Warsaw, told reporters that "Poles cooperated with the Nazis." The comments infuriated his Polish hosts, who reject suggestions that their country collaborated with Hitler.

Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, announced Sunday that he was pulling out of the summit and that his foreign minister would go instead.

But Morawiecki canceled Polish participation altogether after the comments made by Israel's acting foreign minister, Israel Katz, that he denounced as "racist" and "absolutely unacceptable."

Katz, who was only appointed to the foreign minister's post on Sunday, made his remarks in a pair of TV interviews.

Noting that he himself is a child of Holocaust survivors, Katz said that "Poles collaborated with the Nazis, definitely." He then quoted the late former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who said that Poles "suckled anti-Semitism with their mothers' milk."

Israel's Foreign Ministry confirmed Monday that the summit had been called off, saying all four European countries had to be present.

Instead, a government official said that Netanyahu and the three remaining European leaders were expected to hold a series of bilateral meetings on Tuesday, along with a group news conference and joint lunch. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the schedule had still not been finalized.

Netanyahu, in a speech Monday to visiting Jewish American leaders, made no mention of the crisis.

Poland was the first country invaded and occupied by Adolf Hitler's regime and never had a collaborationist government. Members of Poland's resistance and government-in-exile struggled to warn the world about the mass killing of Jews, and thousands of Poles risked their lives to help Jews.

However, Holocaust researchers have collected ample evidence of Polish villagers who murdered Jews fleeing the Nazis, or Polish blackmailers who preyed on helpless Jews for financial gain. Many of Israel's founding generation, including Shamir, fled anti-Semitism in Poland or elsewhere in eastern Europe in their youths, and Shamir has said his father was murdered by Poles.

These dueling narratives have been a source of great tension between Israel and Poland, which otherwise have strong relations.

Last year, Poland and Israel were embroiled in a bitter dispute over a Polish law that made it a crime to blame the Polish nation for complicity in the Holocaust.

Israeli officials saw it as an attempt by Poland to suppress discussion of the killing of Jews by Poles during and after the wartime German occupation. Netanyahu faced criticism from historians in Israel for not opposing the law, which critics said distorted history.

Critics also have accused Netanyahu of cozying up too closely to other nationalistic leaders in eastern and central Europe who have promoted a distorted image of the Holocaust and turning a blind eye to anti-Semitism. These include the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, another participant at the Israeli-hosted gathering.

Lost in the diplomatic uproar was that Netanyahu was actually defending his close alliance with Poland and other eastern European leaders when he made the comments that offended the Poles.

In response to a question from The Associated Press during his two-day visit to Warsaw, Netanyahu said he has raised the issue of historical revisionism with the various leaders. He rejected the notion he was a partner to diminishing anyone's complicity in the genocide of Jews in World War II.

"I know the history. I don't starch it and I don't whitewash it," he said.

Netanyahu is seeking re-election in April, and it is possible both he and Katz are trying to gain favor with their nationalist base by standing up to Poland's criticism. Likewise, Poland's leaders are preparing for both national and European elections this year.

But Oded Eran, a former Israeli ambassador to the European Union, said the diplomatic cost clearly outweighed any domestic benefit.

"The abandonment or postponement of the Visegrad summit is a major blow to Netanyahu's foreign policy, which he has been developing for several years now," said Eran, a senior researcher at the Institute

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for National Security Studies think tank in Tel Aviv. "Any consolation he would get from a boost in the polls is completely outweighed by the damage he has done."

Jewish leaders in Poland issued a statement saying that Shamir's words about Polish anti-Semitism were "unjust" when he said them in 1989.

"They are even more unjust today, 30 years later, when so much has been done on both sides for a mutual understanding of our very difficult, but shared history," the statement added.

Jonathan Ornstein, head of the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, called on Katz to apologize or resign.

"As a proud Israeli and Polish citizen, I feel that Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz should apologize or resign after his offensive, xenophobic remarks about Poland. On his first day in office, no less. Truly Shameful," Ornstein said on Facebook.

Associated Press writers Aron Heller and Isabel DeBre in Jerusalem, Vanessa Gera in Warsaw and Karel Janicek in Prague contributed to this report.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 19, the 50th day of 2019. There are 315 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 19, 1968, the children's program "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," created by and starring Fred Rogers, made its network debut on National Educational Television, a forerunner of PBS, beginning a 31-season run.

On this date:

In 1473, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus was born in Torun, Poland.

In 1807, former Vice President Aaron Burr, accused of treason, was arrested in the Mississippi Territory, in present-day Alabama. (Burr was acquitted at trial.)

In 1846, the Texas state government was formally installed in Austin, with J. Pinckney Henderson taking the oath of office as governor.

In 1881, Kansas prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.

In 1934, a blizzard began inundating the northeastern United States, with the heaviest snowfall occurring in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

In 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the relocation and internment of people of Japanese ancestry, including U.S.-born citizens. Imperial Japanese warplanes raided the Australian city of Darwin; at least 243 people were killed.

In 1945, Operation Detachment began during World War II as some 30,000 U.S. Marines began landing on Iwo Jima, where they commenced a successful month-long battle to seize control of the island from Japanese forces.

In 1963, "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Friedan was first published by W.W. Norton & Co.

In 1986, the U.S. Senate approved, 83-11, the Genocide Convention, an international treaty outlawing "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group," nearly 37 years after the pact was first submitted for ratification.

In 1997, Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping), the last of China's major Communist revolutionaries, died at age 92.

In 2006, Israel halted the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars in tax money to the Palestinians after Hamas took control of the Palestinian parliament.

In 2008, an ailing Fidel Castro resigned the Cuban presidency after nearly a half-century in power; his brother Raul was later named to succeed him.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama made a quick visit to Canada, his first trip outside the U.S. since taking office; he reassured Prime Minister Stephen Harper that the U.S. was not cultivating a protectionist

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streak despite its economic difficulties. A jury in Moscow voted unanimously to acquit three men in the killing of investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, in Mexico for a North American summit, urged Ukraine to avoid violence against peaceful protesters or face consequences; shortly after Obama's remarks, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's office said he and opposition leaders had agreed on a truce. On Day 13 of the Sochi Games, Norway won the first Olympic mixed relay in biathlon and Ole Einar Bjoerndalen became the most decorated Winter Olympian ever with 13 medals. Ted Ligety won the giant slalom, becoming the first American man to win two Olympic gold medals in Alpine skiing.

One year ago: Syrian government forces began a bombing campaign in the northeastern suburbs of Damascus, the last major stronghold for rebels in the area of the capital; the campaign left hundreds dead. President Donald Trump endorsed Mitt Romney in Utah's Senate race, another sign that the two Republicans were burying the hatchet after a strained relationship. The U.S. women's Olympic hockey team reached the title game, shutting out Finland 5-0 in the semifinals. A French ice dancer at the Winter Olympics in South Korea suffered a wardrobe malfunction when her glittering emerald costume came unhooked at the neckline, exposing her left breast live on television; Gabriella Papadakis and her partner still managed to finish the program in second place.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Smokey Robinson is 79. Actress Carlin Glynn is 79. Former Sony Corp. Chairman Howard Stringer is 77. Singer Lou Christie is 76. Actor Michael Nader is 74. Rock musician Tony Iommi (Black Sabbath, Heaven and Hell) is 71. Actor Stephen Nichols is 68. Author Amy Tan is 67. Actor Jeff Daniels is 64. Rock singer-musician Dave Wakeling is 63. Talk show host Lorianne Crook is 62. Actor Ray Winstone is 62. Actor Leslie David Baker is 61. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is 60. Britain's Prince Andrew is 59. Tennis Hall of Famer Hana Mandlikova is 57. Singer Seal is 56. Actress Jessica Tuck is 56. Country musician Ralph McCauley (Wild Horses) is 55. Rock musician Jon Fishman (Phish) is 54. Actress Justine Bateman is 53. Actor Benicio Del Toro is 52. Actress Bellamy Young is 49. Rock musician Daniel Adair is 44. Pop singer-actress Haylie Duff is 34. Actress Arielle Kebbel is 34. Christian rock musician Seth Morrison (Skillet) is 31. Actor Luke Pasqualino is 29. Actress Victoria Justice is 26. Actor David (dah-VEED') Mazouz (TV: "Gotham") is 18. Actress Millie Bobby Brown is 15.

Thought for Today: "Look at everything as though you were seeing it for the first time or the last time. Then your time on earth will be filled with glory." — Betty Smith, American author (1896-1972).

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