

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 28, 2019 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 233 ~ 1 of 49

Groton Area Schedule of Events

Thursday, February 28, 2019

Basketball: Girls Varsity Region 1A: High Seed (Host) #1 vs #4/#5 winner #2/#7 winner vs #3/#6 winner

Friday, March 1, 2019

Basketball: Boys Varsity Region 1A: High Seed (Host) #1 vs #4/#5 Winner #2/#7 Winner vs #3/#6 Winner
State Debate at Sioux Falls O'Gorman High School

Saturday, March 2, 2019

State Debate at Sioux Falls O'Gorman High School

Sunday, March 3, 2019

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

Bates Township

BATES TOWNSHIP ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

Bates Township will hold its annual meeting and election on Tuesday, March 5th, 2019 at the home of the Clerk, 14523 409th Ave, Conde.

Election of officers and business meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m.

We will be receiving bids for road maintenance and gravel. Please mail bids to

Betty Geist, Bates Township Clerk, 14523 409th Ave., Conde, SD 57434 prior to meeting date.

Betty Geist, Township Clerk

Help Wanted

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

- 1- Groton Care & Rehab Help Wanted Ad
- 1- Help Wanted
- 1- Bates Township Notice
- 2- Girls Region 1A Bracket
- 3- Boys Region 1A Bracket
- 4- GDILIVE.COM Tonight
- 5- 2019 football championships likely moving from Dakota Dome
- 5- Combined basketball tournaments may be eliminated
- 6- Activities association to consider girls' wrestling
- 7- Bowling Scores
- 7- There will be a school board election
- 8- First Track & Field Summit League Win For SDSU
- 9- Team Unity for Diegel
- 10- Today in Weather History
- 11- Weather Pages
- 13- Daily Devotional
- 14- 2019 Groton Events
- 15 - News from the Associated Press

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

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Region 1A Girls Basketball Tournament

Print Bracket

#1 Aberdeen Roncalli

Score:

Date: 2/28/19
Time: 7:00 PM
Site: Aberdeen Roncalli

Score:
Milbank

#4 Milbank

Score: 47

Date: 2/25/19
Time: 7:00 PM
Site: Milbank

Score: 30

#5 Tiospa Zina

#2 Redfield/Doland

Score: 59

Date: 2/25/19
Time: 7:00 PM
Site: Redfield

Score: 22

#7 Webster Area

#3 Groton Area

Score: 50

Date: 2/26/19
Time: 5:30 PM
Site: Groton

Score: 49

#6 Sisseton

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

School	Seed Pts.
Aberdeen Roncalli	42.895
Redfield/Doland	41.947
Groton Area	39.750
Milbank	39.722
Tiospa Zina	37.450
Sisseton	35.842
Webster Area	35.842

Redfield/Doland

Score:

Date: 2/28/19
Time: 7:00 PM
Site: Redfield

Score:
Groton Area

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

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Region 1A Boys Basketball Tournament

Print Bracket

#1 Tiospa Zina

Score:

Date: March 1, 2019

Time: 7:00

Site: Agency Village

Score:

Groton Area

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

#4 Groton Area

Score: 62

Date: Feb 26, 2019

Time: 8:00

Site: Groton

Score: 44

#5 Milbank

#2 Aberdeen Roncalli

Score: 74

Date: Feb 26, 2019

Time: 7:00

Site: Aberdeen Roncalli

Score: 52

#7 Webster Area

#3 Redfield/Doland

Score: 61

Date: Feb 26, 2019

Time: 7:00

Site: Redfield

Score: 60

#6 Sisseton

Aberdeen Roncalli

Score:

Date: March 1, 2019

Time: 7:00

Site: High Seed

Score:

Redfield/Doland

School	Seed Pts.
Tiospa Zina	44.000
Aberdeen Roncalli	43.400
Redfield/Doland	40.211
Groton Area	39.700
Milbank	39.579
Sisseton	39.444
Webster Area	37.316

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

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It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



Region 1A Game

Thursday, Feb. 28, 2019

7:00 p.m.

at Redfield

Broadcast Sponsored By:

Aberdeen Chrysler Center
Bahr Spray Foam
BK Custom T's & More
DeHoet Trucking
Groton American Legion
Groton Care & Rehab Center
Johnson Agency (JR)
Jungle Lanes & Lounge
Locke Electric
Lori's Pharmacy
Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass
Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
Olde Bank Cafe
Olson Development
Professional Management Services
TNTax Business Solutions
Truss Pros of Britton
Weber Landscaping

2019 football championships likely moving from Dakota Dome

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The 2019 championship football games will likely be played outside.

At its meeting Wednesday, the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association heard that renovations at the Dakota Dome at the University of South Dakota would mean that the state's high school championship football games would need to be moved to another venue.

SDHSAA Executive Director Daniel Swartos said the seating and bleachers on the west side of the dome were being taken out during the renovation, leaving 5,279 seats on the east side.

The games can attract more than 5,000 fans, Swartos said.

"It really is a function of what teams are involved in the actual games themselves," Swartos said.

Swartos explained that SDHSAA also hands out about 1,114 complimentary passes to football players, cheerleaders, coaches, administrators, officials, trainers and bus drivers. Another 151 passes go to corporate sponsors and the SDHSAA board and staff.

"We're looking at a perfect storm scenario," Swartos said, in which games held at the dome would mean turning away fans.

Staying at the dome would put pressure on the east side concourse facilities like restrooms and concessions, Swartos said.

"Those lines are already pretty long," said board member Jerry Rasmussen of Dakota Valley. "There are people who don't buy a ticket ahead of time and do want to come."

Swartos said one solution would be to reduce or revoke the student passes.

"I'm not willing to take the student passes," said board chairman Brian Maher of Sioux Falls. "They've earned those passes."

Another possibility, Swartos said, was holding the AA and AAA championship games at another location. That would put too much pressure on South Dakota Public Broadcasting, he said.

Swartos told the board that the SDHSAA staff had entered into preliminary negotiations with South Dakota State University for the use of Dana J. Dykehouse Stadium. SDSU has a home football game the same weekend as the high school football championships, so seven games would have to be played over two days, Nov. 14 and 15.

"We've got a handshake agreement that we can make this work," said SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand.

Maher noted that the association would need to renegotiate its contract with USD. The rental price for the dome is \$50,000.

The board gave Swartos permission to negotiate a change in the contract with USD as well as develop a contract with SDSU. The contract will be ready for the board's April meeting.

—30—

Combined basketball tournaments may be eliminated

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The basketball advisory committee of the South Dakota High School Activities Association has recommended eliminating the combined basketball tournaments for both the AA and A divisions.

The SDHSAA board of directors heard about the recommendation at its meeting on Wednesday. That proposal will now go to a meeting of the state's athletic directors before coming back to the SDHSAA board.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Jo Auch said both coaches and fans have complained about the

format that had both the AA boys' and girls' tournaments played in the same city at the same time. There has yet to be an A combined tournament.

"Has it been what's best for boys' and girls' basketball?" Auch asked.

Auch said with so many games on the combined tournament schedule, it became impossible for fans to see all the games. As an example, she said, a fan of boys' basketball could no longer see all the boys' games at the tournament.

Coaches said they missed the atmosphere of the old tournaments when the semi-final games were played in the evening instead of the afternoon.

Board member Steve Morford of Spearfish said there was more to consider than the objections of coaches.

"What do the students want?" Morford asked. "What do they like?"

Morford suggested contacting schools that have teams that are often in the tournaments to see what their students would prefer.

The basketball advisory committee also made a recommendation to have all AA schools play each other a minimum of one time a year. The proposed schedule would give the schools 17 games against AA opponents and five other games.

"There's no heartburn from us as to how that works," Auch said.

There was some heartburn from Todd Palmer, activities director for the Meade School District. He addressed the board during its open forum.

"It is going to have a great financial impact on our schools," Palmer said.

He said his school district would make seven trips across the state for basketball games. Those trips cost between \$3,500 to \$5,000 each.

—30—

Activities association to consider girls' wrestling

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association's wrestling advisory committee wants the organization to study the feasibility of adding girls' wrestling to the slate of sports that are offered in the state's schools.

"A lot of our bordering states are already there," said SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand.

He noted that North Dakota started with girls' wrestling exhibitions and had four brackets of female wrestlers at this year's state tournament.

Krogstrand said girls participate in many youth wrestling programs.

"There is a huge pool of untapped participants," Krogstrand said. "There's a number of girls who do it all through elementary school."

Many drop out of wrestling, Krogstrand said, because they have no opportunity to continue the sport in high school.

Girls' wrestling is not the only sport with an untapped pool of participants, according board member Steve Morford of Spearfish.

"There is a lot bigger picture than girls' wrestling," Morford said, referring to girls' softball. "They could meet a bigger need than girls' wrestling."

Board chairman Brian Maher of Sioux Falls suggested a survey of wrestling coaches, athletic directors and principals to gauge interest in offering the sport.

The advisory committee's recommendation to study the feasibility of girls' wrestling will next go to a meeting of the state's athletic directors.

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Groton Coffee Cup

Feb. 26 Team Standings: James Valley 24, Biker Chix 22, Kens 21, Ten Pins 13

High Games: Sam Bahr 185, 176; Joyce Walter 179; Vickie Kramp 176.

High Series: Sam Bahr 520, Vickie Kramp 455, Joyce Walter 450.

Conde National

Feb. 25 Team Standings: Pirates 24½, Tigers 20, Cubs 19, Braves 16½, Giants 16, Mets 12.

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 226, John Lowery 201, Dalton Locke 199.

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 597, Collin Cady 512, Dalton Locke 493.

Women's High Games: Joyce Walter 189, 179; Nancy Radke 168; Vickie Kramp 163.

Women's High Series: Joyce Walter 501, Sandy Hoops 431, Vickie Kramp 422.

School Board Election; No Groton City Council Election

The Groton Area School District will be having an election this year. Three positions were up for election: Clint Fjelstad, Deb Gengerke and Merle Harder. Merle Harder did not take out a petition, but Travis J. Harder and Tigh Flihs have taken out petitions. Patrons will vote for up to three candidates. The election will be held April 9, 2019.

Meanwhile, there will not be an election for the Groton City Council. Incumbents Karyn Babcock in Ward 3 and Shirley Wells in Ward 2 turned in petitions. They will serve for a two-year term.

Incumbents Jay Peterson in Ward 1 and David McGannon in Ward 2 did not take out petitions. The council will need to appoint someone for those positions and they will serve for a one-year term.

Mayor Scott Hanlon was the only one to submit a petition for the three-year mayor term.



First Track & Field Summit League Win For SDSU

Groton Area 2015 graduate, Landon Larson, competed in the Summit League Indoor Track & Field Meet, in Brookings over the weekend. The Men's team became the first SDSU team to win the Summit League title, it has been 28 years, since the team last won a conference title. Larson competed the 60m(6.86 pr 6.82) and 200m(21.5) dash with a 3rd and 4th place finish. The Jacks currently have the top three sprinters in the history of the school, for the indoor season, competing. Landon currently sits at #2 in the 60m dash and #3 in the 200m. Teammate Sam Zenner holds the top time in both events and Colby Hilton holds the other two positions. The team will begin travelling for the outdoor season at the end of March. Larson is pictured, first runner, last row, right hand side.

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Groton Area teammates hug each other after being pulled in the fourth quarter with a resounding 62-44 win over Milbank in the first round of region basketball competition held in the Arena. It was for Treyton Diegel (#55), the lone senior on the team, whose mom had surgery earlier in the week. Pictured are Cade Guthmiller, Jonathan Doeden, Brodyn DeHoet and Diegel in front. The photo below was taken at the Warner basketball game where Warner helped support the Becky Diegel family. (Above photo by Julianna Kosel. Below photo is a courtesy photo)



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Today in Weather History

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

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

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

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

2007: A severe storm, named Xynthia, blows into France, Portugal, and Spain, smashing sea walls, destroying homes, polluting farmland with saltwater and devastating the Atlantic coast's oyster farms. Winds reach to about 125 mph on the summits of the Pyrenees and up to nearly 100 mph along the Atlantic Coast. Wind speeds of 106 mph are measured atop the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The storm hits hardest in the Vendee and Charente-Maritime regions in southwestern France. The storm is blamed for 52 deaths in France. A Napoleonic sea wall collapsed off the coastal town of La'Aiguillon-sur-Mer. A mobile home park close to the sea wall was particularly hard hit.

1900 - A massive storm spread record snows from Kansas to New York State. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17.5 inches at Springfield IL and 43 inches at Rochester NY, with up to 60 inches in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. (David Ludlum)

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






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

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

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

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Decreasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy then Snow and Areas Fog	Snow and Fog then Slight Chance Snow	Mostly Cloudy	Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy
High: 17 °F	Low: 3 °F	High: 18 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 3 °F

More Snow And Cold Wind Chills on the Way

Snow Accumulations Tonight through Friday

Today

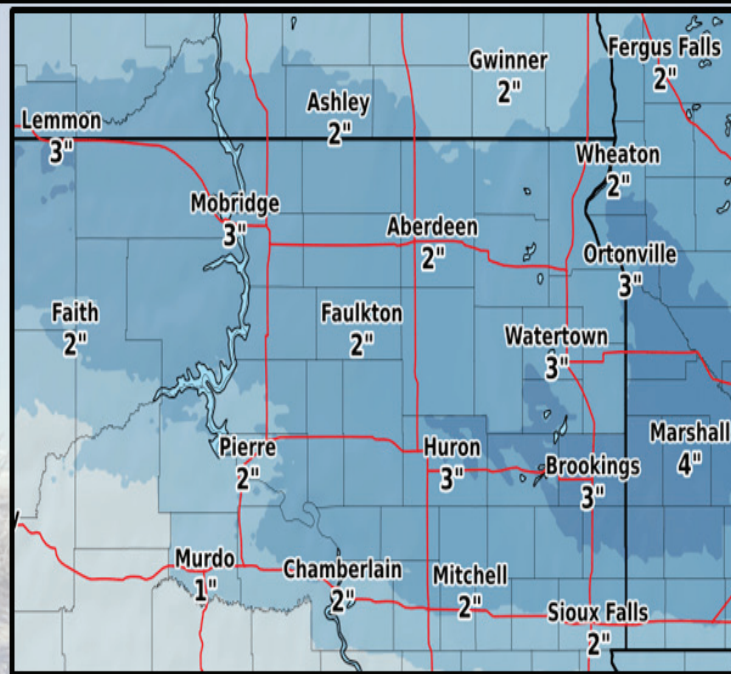
Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper teens to low 20s.

Tonight - Friday

Snow moves in tonight through Friday afternoon. Total accumulations of 2 to 3 inches.

Saturday - Sunday

Bitterly cold wind chills of -25 to -40F.



Updated: 2/28/2019 4:34 AM Central

Published on: 02/28/2019 at 4:39AM

More snow is on the way as the next system moves in tonight and continues through Friday afternoon. Generally, 2 to 3 inches is expected. Another round of light snow on Saturday morning could bring up to an inch for areas south of Pierre. Dangerously cold wind chills will surge back in Saturday night through Monday.

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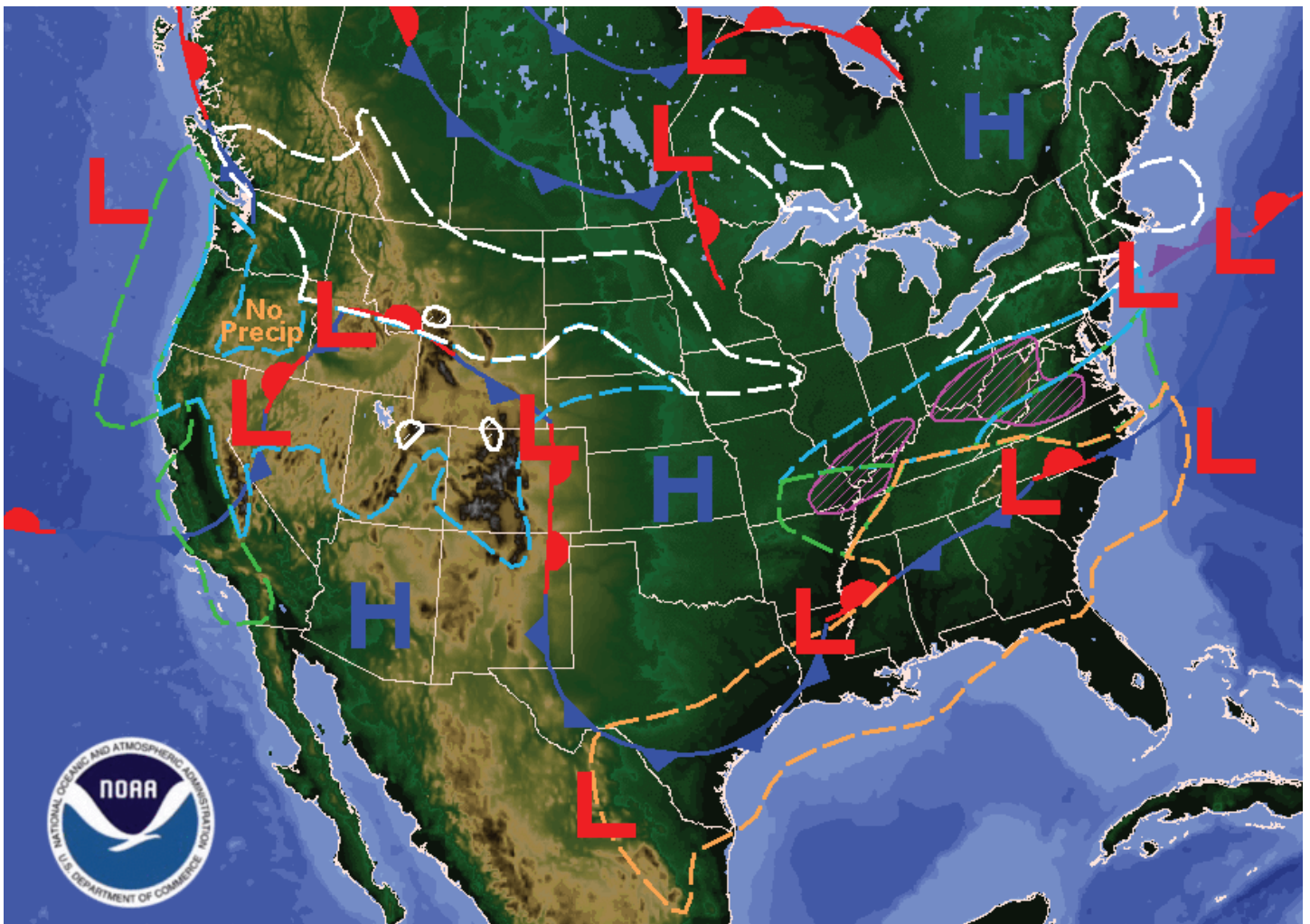
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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 6 °F at 4:31 PM
Low Outside Temp: -10 °F at 8:00 AM
High Gust: 19 mph at 3:39 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 59° in 1934
Record Low: -27° in 1962
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 13°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.52
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.99
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 6:19 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:12 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Thu, Feb 28, 2019, issued 4:32 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

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

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A CLEAR DISTINCTION

Many things in our lives need clarification if we want to be sure that others understand our positions or ideas. Some of them are easy to clarify, others a little more difficult. The Bible, however, is very clear on everything God wants us to do and know. There is one thing we should all agree on: its not the things in the Bible that present a problem that might keep us awake at night. Its the things in the Bible that we understand and dont apply to our lives each day.

Solomon, once again, reminds us that we are not for one moment to think that we are self-sufficient: Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. Once again we are reminded that first things must always be first: Fear the Lord, for that is where wisdom begins. Wisdom does not come from within - no matter how well educated we are.

Paul picked up this theme in Romans: ...test and approve what God's will is.... The one who thinks he is wise, who leans on his personal understanding and the understanding that comes from the worlds wisdom, is in danger. On the other hand, God honors and rewards those who are willing to admit they need His wisdom, and then follow it!

And the reward for those who seek and follow His wisdom? It will bring health to our bodies and nourishment to our bones. Following Gods wisdom will enable us to make good, ethical, profitable, wise, and sound decisions. Those who obey His laws and turn from evil will find themselves living a healthy, happy, wholesome, and fulfilling lifestyle!

Scripture constantly reminds us of the consequences of sin and unconfessed sin. And whatever it asks us to do is always in our best interests. Live right and find health and happiness.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for making lifes choices clear and simple to follow. With Your help we can succeed. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 3:7-8 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

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

News from the Associated Press

Former fire chief facing child porn possession sentencing

ST. LOUIS, Mo. (AP) — A former St. Louis fire chief will soon learn his sentence for possessing child pornography.

Jim Sideras is set to be sentenced Thursday morning on one count of possessing child pornography, a charge he pleaded guilty to last November. Nine other counts against Sideras were dismissed in a plea agreement with prosecutors.

The charge carries a maximum penalty of up to 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine. Sideras will be required to register as a sex offender.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash
07-09-10-19-34
(seven, nine, ten, nineteen, thirty-four)
Estimated jackpot: \$120,000

Lotto America
27-33-35-43-52, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 3
(twenty-seven, thirty-three, thirty-five, forty-three, fifty-two; Star Ball: one; ASB: three)
Estimated jackpot: \$15.83 million

Mega Millions
Estimated jackpot: \$267 million

Powerball
21-31-42-49-59, Powerball: 23, Power Play: 5
(twenty-one, thirty-one, forty-two, forty-nine, fifty-nine; Powerball: twenty-three; Power Play: five)
Estimated jackpot: \$322 million

Farm loan delinquencies highest in 9 years as prices slump

By ROXANA HEGEMAN, Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — The nation's farmers are struggling to pay back loans after years of low crop prices and export markets hit by President Donald Trump's tariffs, with a key government program showing the highest default rate in at least nine years.

Many agricultural loans come due around Jan. 1, in part to give producers enough time to sell crops and livestock and to give them more flexibility in timing interest payments for tax filing purposes.

"It is beginning to become a serious situation nationwide at least in the grain crops — those that produce corn, soybeans, wheat," said Allen Featherstone, head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Kansas State University.

While the federal government shutdown delayed reporting, January figures show an overall rise in delinquencies for those producers with direct loans from the Agriculture Department's Farm Service Agency.

Nationwide, 19.4 percent of FSA direct loans were delinquent in January, compared to 16.5 percent for the same month a year ago, said David Schemm, executive director of the Farm Service Agency in Kansas.

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During the past nine years, the agency's January delinquency rate hit a high of 18.8 percent in 2011 and fell to a low of 16.1 percent when crop prices were significantly better in 2015.

While those FSA direct loan delinquencies are high, the agency is a lender of last resort for riskier agricultural borrowers who don't qualify for commercial loans. Its delinquency rates typically drop in subsequent months as more farmers pay off overdue notes and refinance debt.

With today's low crop prices, it takes high yields to mitigate some of the losses and even a normal harvest or a crop failure could devastate a farm's bottom line. The high delinquency rates are caused by back-to-back years of low prices, with those producers who are in more financial trouble being ones who also had low yields, Featherstone said.

The situation now is not as bad as the farm credit crisis of the 1980s — a time of high interest rates and falling land prices that was marked by widespread farm foreclosures. At the height of that crisis in 1987, U.S. farmers filed 5,788 Chapter 12 bankruptcies. There were 498 in 2018.

Some fears are also surfacing in reports such as one this month from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, which said the outlook is pessimistic for the start of this year with respondents predicting a further decline in farm income. About 36 percent of farm lenders who responded said they had a lower rate of loan repayment from a year earlier.

Tom Giessel said he borrowed some operating money from his local bank last year and paid it off. Giessel, who raises wheat and corn on some 2,500 acres in western Kansas, said the only thing that kept the farm economy afloat in his area was that people had pretty good fall crop yields. Giessel, 66, said he had once gotten to the point where he didn't have to borrow his working capital and had a relatively new set of equipment, but he has had to borrow money for the last three years just to put in a crop.

"A lot of people are in denial about what is going on, but reality is going to set in or has set in already," Giessel said.

The February survey of rural bankers in parts of 10 Plains and Western states showed that nearly two-thirds of banks in the region raised loan collateral requirements on fears of a weakening farm income. The Rural Mainstreet survey showed nearly one-third of banks reported they rejected more farm loan applications for that reason.

Grain prices are down because farmers around the world have had above-average production for several years. But some nations' economies are not doing as well, decreasing demand for those crops, Featherstone said. Grain prices peaked in 2012 and prices have roughly fallen 36 percent since then for soybeans, 50 percent for corn and 48 percent for wheat.

When Trump imposed tariffs, China retaliated by stopping soybean purchases, closing the biggest U.S. market. While trade negotiations with China continue, many farmers fear it will take years for markets to recover — as it did when President Jimmy Carter imposed a grain embargo on the then-Soviet Union in 1980.

"The tariffs Trump is messing around with are not helpful at all — I don't think anybody knows the true effect," said Steve Morris, who farms near Hugoton in southwest Kansas.

Morris, who has been cutting back acreage in an effort to avoid borrowing money, said drought conditions last year in his area devastated his wheat yields. Trump has offered farmers subsidies to compensate for the tariffs but they are based on harvested bushels. Morris, 73, received a subsidy payment last year for his wheat crop of only \$268.

Many farmers are now scrambling to borrow money as spring planting nears.

Matt Ubel, a 36-year-old Kansas farmer who bought out his parents' farm in December 2016, said they have not been delinquent on their FSA loans, but acknowledged the payment was "a challenge to make last year."

"We have had trouble for several years getting operating loans," he said. "This year doesn't look any better."

A key factor in whether farmers receive loans is the value of their land.

Farmland values in parts of the Midwest and Plains regions largely held steady at the end of last year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. But slightly higher interest rates and an uptick in

the pace of farmland sales in states with higher concentrations of crop production could drive those land values down, it said.

"The big key in terms of whether or not we enter a financial crisis would be what would happen to land values," Featherstone said. "So far land values have gradually declined, so that has kind of prevented us from maybe entering a situation like we did in the 1980s."

Arizona woman sentenced in South Dakota for identity theft

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — An Arizona woman has been sentenced in South Dakota on a federal identity theft conviction.

The U.S. Attorney's Office says 31-year-old Lauren Montgomery, of Phoenix, used names, birth dates and Social Security numbers of other people to file bogus federal income tax returns and obtain fraudulent refunds.

Montgomery recently was sentenced to three years and five months in prison and \$105,605 in restitution.

Bill would create online ballot measure circulator directory

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota bill that would require people who collect signatures for ballot measure campaigns to be listed in an online directory is headed to the Senate floor.

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 7-1 Wednesday in favor of the bill. It would direct the secretary of state to establish a directory of signature gatherers listing information including their addresses, phone numbers and occupations. It also would require circulators to wear badges issued by the secretary of state.

Republican Rep. Jon Hansen, the sponsor, said the bill seeks to address ballot question groups bringing in paid out-of-state circulators. GOP lawmakers during recent sessions have sought changes to the ballot measure system due to concerns about outside influence.

"Our initiative and referendum process is supposed to be a process that's by South Dakotans for South Dakotans," Hansen said.

The bill would require signature collectors to apply to the secretary of state and be listed in the public directory before gathering names for a ballot measure. If circulators provide false information, the signatures they gathered would be invalid. Collecting signatures without wearing a badge would be a misdemeanor.

Hansen was among attorneys who represented a group last year that filed a successful legal challenge to keep a measure off the ballot that would have capped the price state agencies could pay for prescription drugs. A judge barred it from going to voters after the opposition campaign, South Dakotans Against the Deceptive Rx Ballot Issue, challenged the validity of thousands of signatures.

There was no opposition testimony during the Wednesday committee hearing. House Minority Leader Jamie Smith, who voted against the bill on the chamber's floor, said he doesn't appreciate nonresident circulators coming to South Dakota to push out-of-state issues, but he thinks the bill would make it more difficult for grassroots campaigns.

"It hinders just your average, everyday local activists from being able to do the job that they should be able to do," Smith said.

De Knudson, who was part of an unsuccessful campaign to get a measure on last year's ballot that would have had the top two primary finishers advance to the general election, regardless of party, said she doesn't think the bill would affect her ability to find circulators. The requirements are basic, she said.

"I believe that some potential circulators may not be comfortable with all of these requirements, but I myself am fine with them," she said.

Last year, lawmakers approved measures requiring signature gatherers to provide more information to voters and the secretary of state. The bill would roll back those provisions in favor of the badge and online directory.

Voters in the 2018 election approved a ballot question barring individuals and interests outside South Dakota from contributing to citizens' initiatives.

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South Dakota panel scraps bill to reduce early voting

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota Senate panel has scrapped a bill that would have cut the time allowed for early voting in the state by two weeks.

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 8-1 Wednesday against the bill. The measure would have reduced the absentee voting window from 46 days to 32 days.

House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, the bill's sponsor, says he believes the state needs a very informed electorate, and that requires cutting down the timeframe.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett and a series of county elections officials opposed the bill. Davison County Auditor Susan Kiepkke says it would have taken away rights currently afforded to voters.

The National Conference of State Legislatures says the average beginning point for early voting is 22 days before an election.

Bill rejected to offer driver's license materials in Spanish

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota representatives have shelved a bill that would have directed the state to offer driver's license applications and written tests in Spanish.

The House State Affairs Committee voted 9-4 Wednesday against the bill. Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba, the sponsor, says it would have helped address a workforce development problem in Sioux Falls and other areas.

Right now, the materials are only available in English under a state law dictating that English is the language of any official public document.

The measure would have instructed the Department of Public Safety to offer license and permit applications, test materials and written exams in Spanish. The agency opposed the bill.

Republican Rep. Kevin Jensen, an opponent, says nobody is being denied. He says if someone wants a driver's license, all they need is an interpreter.

Former tribal program secretary accused of embezzlement

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A former secretary of the Oglala Sioux Credit and Finance Office has pleaded not guilty to embezzlement.

Forty-one-year-old Helen Hernandez, of Pine Ridge, is accused of stealing more than \$1,000 from the tribal office in 2014 and 2015. She was indicted earlier this month.

The U.S. Attorney's Office says Hernandez faces up to five years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine and restitution if convicted.

South Dakota State has new offensive, defensive coordinators

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota State University football team has new offensive and defensive coordinators.

Head coach John Stiegelmeier has promoted offensive line coach Jason Eck to offensive coordinator. He'll continue coaching the offensive line.

Eck replaces Eric Eidsness, who recently accepted the offensive coordinator position at Northern Illinois. Jimmy Rogers and Brian Bergstrom will share the defensive coordinator duties during the 2019 season.

They'll replace Clint Brown, who has accepted the defensive coordinator position at Abilene Christian. Rogers has coached the team's linebackers since 2013 and also assisted with special teams. Bergstrom most recently coached the safeties for the Jackrabbits.

SDSU has made seven consecutive postseason appearances and advanced to the national semifinals in each of the past two years. The Jackrabbits finished third in the final Football Championship Subdivision polls.

Bill to allow guns in South Dakota Capitol moves forward

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota bill to allow people with enhanced concealed carry permits to bring guns into the state Capitol is headed to the House floor.

The House State Affairs Committee voted 8-4 Wednesday to endorse the legislation. It has already passed the Senate.

Republican Sen. Jim Stalzer, the sponsor, says other states haven't had issues with allowing guns in their Capitol buildings.

No members of the public testified against the bill. House Minority Leader Jamie Smith opposed the measure, saying he supports the Capitol's current safety system.

Stalzer's bill would require notifying security before carrying in the Capitol. It wouldn't extend to the Supreme Court chamber or access-controlled private offices.

Last year, 1,615 enhanced permits were issued. They come with requirements that include completing a training course.

California man pleads not guilty to robbing Sioux Falls bank

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A California man has pleaded not guilty in federal court to robbing a bank in South Dakota.

Thirty-six-year-old Terrell Brunston, of Palmdale, California, is accused of being part of an armed holdup at the First National Bank in Sioux Falls in November 2016.

The U.S. Attorney's Office says Brunston faces up to 25 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and restitution if convicted.

Soil moisture in good shape in South Dakota as spring nears

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Soil moisture supplies in South Dakota appear to be in good shape as spring planting season nears.

The federal Agriculture Department says in its monthly crop report that 86 percent of subsoil moisture supplies and 96 percent of topsoil moisture supplies are rated adequate to surplus.

The state's winter wheat crop is rated mostly in fair to good condition.

Rapid City police investigating fatal shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Rapid City police say a 17-year-old shooting victim has died.

Chief Karl Jegeris tweeted early Wednesday that a team of detectives has been working through the night on the city's first homicide of the year. Jegeris did not say whether a suspect was in custody.

Police say they received a call about 8 p.m. Tuesday from a person who was driving the victim to Rapid City Regional Hospital. Investigators learned the shooting happened in an alley in Rapid City. They say a single occupant of the vehicle was shot and seriously injured. The male teenager from Box Elder died at the hospital.

Johnson joins Democrats in opposing emergency declaration

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson is among 13 House Republicans who supported a Democratic effort to block President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration to fund a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The House's vote of 245-182 Tuesday fell well below the two-thirds majority that would be needed to override what would be the first veto of Trump's presidency.

The freshman Republican is the at-large member for South Dakota, a state that Trump carried by nearly 30 points in 2016. Johnson says he supports the president on border security and the wall, but feels an emergency declaration is the wrong approach to funding it.

The issue is now before the Republican-run Senate.

Experts: US anti-Huawei campaign likely exaggerated

By FRANK BAJAK, AP Cybersecurity Writer

Since last year, the U.S. has waged a vigorous diplomatic offensive against the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, claiming that any nation deploying its gear in next-generation wireless networks is giving Beijing a conduit for espionage or worse.

But security experts say the U.S. government is likely exaggerating that threat. Not only is the U.S. case short on specifics, they say, it glosses over the fact that the Chinese don't need secret access to Huawei routers to infiltrate global networks that already have notoriously poor security.

State-sponsored hackers have shown no preference for one manufacturer's technology over another, these experts say. Kremlin-backed hackers, for instance, adroitly exploit internet routers and other networking equipment made by companies that are not Russian.

If the Chinese want to disrupt global networks, "they will do so regardless of the type of equipment you are using," said Jan-Peter Kleinhans of the Berlin Neue Verantwortung Stiftung think tank.

One of the most common U.S. fears — that Huawei might install software "backdoors" in its equipment that Chinese intelligence could use to tap into, eavesdrop on or interrupt data transmissions -- strikes many experts as highly unlikely.

Priscilla Moriuchi, who retired from the U.S. National Security Agency in 2017 after running its Far East operations, said the risk of Huawei backdoors is "almost zero because of the chance that it would be discovered," thus exposing Huawei's complicity.

Moriuchi, now an analyst at the U.S. cybersecurity firm Recorded Future, said that she and other NSA employees were tasked with searching for Huawei hardware and software backdoors created by Chinese intelligence, but never found any.

She expects nations will exhibit a risk-tolerance threshold, with some excluding Huawei gear from network backbones and core functions while allowing it further out where cell towers and wireless handsets interact.

European allies have been reluctant to embrace a blanket anti-Huawei ban even as U.S. officials continue to cast the world's No. 1 telecom-equipment maker as little more than an untrustworthy surrogate for Beijing's intelligence services.

The top U.S. diplomat for cybersecurity policy, Robert Strayer, says Huawei is obliged to heed Chinese Communist Party orders by a 2017 intelligence law that "compels their citizens and their companies to participate in intelligence activities."

Strayer provided no specifics when pressed by reporters Tuesday as to how Huawei gear might pose more of a security threat than other manufacturers' switches, routers and wireless base stations. The diplomat spoke at Mobile World Congress, the world's largest wireless trade show, in Barcelona, Spain.

U.S. officials have also said next-generation wireless networks will be more vulnerable because more traffic will move from the network's core to its edge, a claim the chairman, Anand Prasad, and vice chair, Alf Zugenmaier, of the technology's security 3GPP standard committee both questioned.

The American rhetoric has included threats.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo suggested last week any use of Huawei equipment could jeopardize U.S. intelligence sharing and might even be a reason to locate military bases elsewhere. The remarks may have been targeted at NATO allies including Poland and the Czech Republic where Huawei has made significant inroads.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. National Security Council declined to comment or to provide any officials to address specifics. A State Department spokesman referred The Associated Press to a press statement on Strayer's remarks in Barcelona.

Huawei, founded in 1987 by a former military engineer, overtook Sweden's LM Ericsson in 2017 as the lead company in the market for wireless and internet switching gear. It says it supplies 45 of the world's top 50 phone companies and has contracts with 30 carriers to test so-called fifth-generation, or 5G, wire-

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less technology.

U.S. companies are not serious competitors in this market, having pulled back over the years. Huawei's major rivals are European — Ericsson and Finland's Nokia.

The U.S. has provided no evidence of China planting espionage backdoors in Huawei equipment despite a 2012 congressional report that led the U.S. government and top domestic wireless carriers to ban it and other Chinese manufacturers from their networks.

"The backdrop for this is essentially the rise of China as a tech power in a variety of domains" said Paul Triolo, tech lead at the Eurasia Group risk analysis consultancy. Now, he said, "there is a big campaign to paint Huawei as an irresponsible actor."

In January, U.S. prosecutors filed criminal charges against Huawei and one of its top executives, alleging the company stole trade secrets and lied to banks about embargo-busting company dealings with Iran. Canada earlier arrested that Huawei executive — who is also the daughter of the company's founder — at U.S. behest; she is currently awaiting extradition to the U.S. Huawei has denied wrongdoing.

The U.S. has also indicted alleged state-backed Chinese hackers it says are involved in rampant cybertheft of Western trade secrets.

One irony of the situation is that the U.S. has actually done what it accuses Huawei of doing. According to top-secret documents released in 2013 by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, the U.S. planted surveillance beacons in network devices and shipped them around the world.

The affected equipment included devices from Cisco Systems, a Silicon Valley company whose routers were blacklisted by Chinese authorities after the Snowden revelations.

Washington's closest ally has taken a different approach to any potential threats from Huawei. Britain's National Cyber Security Center (NCSC) long ago placed multiple restrictions on Huawei equipment, including disallowing it in any sensitive networks, agency director Ciaran Martin noted in a speech last week.

According to Kleinhans, who has studied the agency's practices, Huawei can't conduct any direct maintenance on mobile base stations in the U.K., and instead must allow local wireless carriers to handle the work. Those carriers can't use Chinese equipment to conduct any law enforcement wiretapping. The British agency also requires redundancy in critical networks and a variety of equipment suppliers to prevent overreliance on any single manufacturer.

In its annual review of Huawei's engineering practices published in July, the NCSC found "shortcomings" that "exposed new risks in the U.K. telecommunication networks." But none were deemed of medium or high priority.

Martin called the problems manageable and not reflective of Chinese hostility.

"With 5G, some equipment needs to be more trustworthy than ever. But probably not all," NCSC technical director Ian Levy wrote in a blog.

Like the British, German officials have indicated they'll reject a blanket Huawei 5G ban.

In December, the head of Germany's cyber-risk agency, Arne Schoenbohm, said "for such serious decisions as a ban, you need evidence."

Last week, the nation's Interior Ministry told The Associated Press "the direct exclusion of a particular manufacturer from the 5G expansion is at the time not legally possible and also not planned."

Frank Jordans in Berlin, Joe McDonald in Beijing and Kelvin Chan in Barcelona, Spain, contributed to this report.

No deal: Trump, Kim summit collapses over sanctions impasse

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, DEB RIECHMANN and FOSTER KLUG, Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Talks between President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un collapsed Thursday after the two sides failed to bridge a standoff over U.S. sanctions, a dispiriting end to high-stakes meetings meant to disarm a global nuclear threat.

Trump blamed the breakdown on North Korea's insistence that all the punishing sanctions the U.S. has

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imposed on Pyongyang be lifted without the North committing to eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

"Sometimes you have to walk," Trump explained at a closing news conference after the summit was abruptly cut short. He said there had been a proposed agreement that was "ready to be signed."

"I'd much rather do it right than do it fast," Trump said. "We're in position to do something very special."

Mere hours after both nations had seemed hopeful of a deal, the two leaders' motorcades roared away from the downtown Hanoi summit site within minutes of each other, their lunch canceled and a signing ceremony scuttled. The president's closing news conference was hurriedly moved up, and he departed for Washington more than two hours ahead of schedule.

The disintegration of talks came after Trump and Kim had appeared to be ready to inch toward normalizing relations between their still technically warring nations and as the American leader dampened expectations that their negotiations would yield an agreement by North Korea to take concrete steps toward ending a nuclear program that Pyongyang likely sees as its strongest security guarantee.

In something of a role reversal, Trump had deliberately ratcheted down some of the pressure on North Korea, abandoning his fiery rhetoric and declaring that he wanted the "right deal" over a rushed agreement. For his part, Kim, when asked whether he was ready to denuclearize, had said, "If I'm not willing to do that I won't be here right now."

The breakdown denied Trump a much-needed triumph amid growing domestic turmoil back home, including congressional testimony this week by his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen, who called Trump a "racist" and "conman" and claimed prior knowledge of foreign powers' efforts to help Trump win in 2016.

North Korea's state media made no immediate comment on the diplomatic impasse, and Kim remained in his locked-down hotel after leaving the summit venue. The North Korean leader was scheduled to meet with top Vietnamese leaders on Friday and leave Saturday on his armored train for the long return trip, through China, to North Korea.

Trump insisted his relations with Kim remained warm, but he did not commit to having a third summit with the North Korean leader, saying a possible next meeting "may not be for a long time." Though both he and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said significant progress had been made in Hanoi, the two sides appeared to be galaxies apart on an agreement that would live up to U.S. stated goals.

"Basically, they wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety, and we couldn't do that," Trump told reporters.

Kim, he explained, appeared willing to close his country's main nuclear facility, the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center, if the sanctions were lifted. But that would leave him with missiles, warheads and weapon systems, Pompeo said. There are also suspected hidden nuclear fuel production sites around the country.

"We couldn't quite get there today," Pompeo said, minimizing what seemed to be a chasm between the two sides.

Longstanding U.S. policy has insisted that U.S. sanctions on North Korea would not be lifted until that country committed to, if not concluded, complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. Trump declined to restate that goal Thursday, insisting he wanted flexibility in talks with Kim.

"I don't want to put myself in that position from the standpoint of negotiation," he said.

White House aides stressed that Trump stood strong, and some observers evoked the 1987 Reykjavik summit between Ronald Reagan and the Soviet Union's Mikhail Gorbachev, a meeting over nuclear weapons that ended without a deal but laid the groundwork for a future agreement.

The failure in Hanoi laid bare a risk in Trump's unpredictable negotiating style: Preferring one-on-one meetings with his foreign counterparts, his administration often eschews the staff-level work done in advance to assure a deal and envisions summits more as messaging opportunities than venues for hardline negotiation.

There was disappointment and alarm in South Korea, whose liberal leader has been a leading orchestrator of the nuclear diplomacy and who needs a breakthrough to restart lucrative engagement projects with the impoverished North. Yonhap news agency said that the clock on the Korean Peninsula's security situation has "turned back to zero" and diplomacy is now "at a crossroads."

The collapse was a dramatic turnaround from the optimism that surrounded the talks after the leaders'

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dinner Wednesday and that had prompted the White House to list a signing ceremony on Trump's official schedule for Thursday.

The two leaders had seemed to find a point of agreement when Kim, who fielded questions from American journalists for the first time, was asked if the U.S. may open a liaison office in North Korea. Trump declared it "not a bad idea," and Kim called it "welcomable." Such an office would mark the first U.S. presence in North Korea and a significant grant to a country that has long been deliberately starved of international recognition.

But questions persisted throughout the summit, including whether Kim was willing to make valuable concessions, what Trump would demand in the face of rising domestic turmoil and whether the meeting could yield far more concrete results than the leaders' first summit, a meeting in Singapore less than a year ago that was long on dramatic imagery but short on tangible results.

There had long been skepticism that Kim would be willing to give away the weapons his nation had spent decades developing and Pyongyang felt ensured its survival. But even after the summit ended, Trump praised Kim's commitment to continue a moratorium on missile testing.

Trump also said he believed the autocrat's claim that he had nothing to do with the 2017 death of Otto Warmbier, a American college student who died after being held in a North Korean prison.

"I don't believe that he would have allowed that to happen," Trump said. "He felt badly about it."

The declaration immediately called to mind other moments when Trump chose to believe autocrats over his own intelligence agencies, including siding with the Saudi royal family regarding the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and supporting Russia's Vladimir Putin's denials that he interfered with the 2016 election.

If the first Trump-Kim summit gave the reclusive nation's leader entree onto the international stage, the second appeared to grant him the legitimacy his family has long desired.

Kim, for the first time, affably parried with the international press without having to account for his government's long history of oppression. He secured Trump's support for the opening of a liaison office in Pyongyang, without offering any concessions of his own. Even without an agreement, Trump's backing for the step toward normalization provided the sort of recognition the international community has long denied Kim's government.

Experts worried that the darker side of Kim's leadership was being brushed aside in the rush to address the North's nuclear weapons program: the charges of massive human rights abuses; the prison camps filled with dissidents; a near complete absence of media, religious and speech freedoms; the famine in the 1990s that killed hundreds of thousands; and the executions of a slew of government and military officials, including his uncle and the alleged assassination order of his half-brother in a Malaysian airport.

Trump also has a history of cutting short foreign trips and walking out of meetings when he feels no progress is being made. That includes a notable episode this year when he walked out of a White House meeting with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer over a government shutdown, calling the negotiation "a total waste of time."

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin, Zeke Miller and Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

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Follow all of AP's summit coverage: <https://apnews.com/Trump-KimSummit>

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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. NO DEAL IN HANOI

Declaring "sometimes you have to walk," Trump did just that after nuclear disarmament talks with Kim Jong Un collapsed after the two sides failed to reach a deal due to a standoff over U.S. sanctions on North Korea.

2. HOW KIM MADE HISTORY

For what is almost certainly the first time, the North Korean leader actually answered an impromptu question from an American reporter.

3. COHEN ASSAILS TRUMP BEFORE CONGRESS

The president's former lawyer testifies that Trump used his inner circle to cover up politically damaging allegations about sex and lied throughout the 2016 election campaign about his business interests in Russia.

4. COHEN HEARING STOKES TOUCHY TOPIC OF IMPEACHMENT

For some Democrats, the outcome may — or may not — lead to grounds for impeachment. For others, impeachment cannot come fast enough, an AP Analysis finds.

5. PAKISTAN OFFERS 'PEACE GESTURE' TO INDIA

Hoping to defuse tensions with India over the disputed territory of Kashmir, Prime Minister Imran Khan says Pakistan will release an Indian pilot it captured.

6. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA RIVER FLOODS 2,000 BUILDINGS

The towns of Guerneville and Monte Rio were hardest hit by water pouring from the Russian River, but floodwaters are expected to begin receding.

7. KLOBUCHAR DEFENDS RECORD ON MEDICAL DEVICES REGULATION

The Minnesota senator and 2020 presidential hopeful has advocated for the medical device industry in ways that complicate her reputation as a consumer defender.

8. WHAT SECURITY EXPERTS SAY ABOUT HUAWEI

That the U.S. government is likely exaggerating the threat it says the Chinese telecom giant poses to the world's next-generation wireless networks.

9. 'STAR WARS' COMING TO DISNEY

Personal droids, custom lightsabers, space duels in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon are just some of the wonders parkgoers can expect at Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge.

10. TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

Nine years after Kobe Bryant did it to him, Dwyane Wade banked-in a game-winning, straightaway 3-pointer to help the Heat beat the Warriors.

The lunch that never was: Trump's North Korea summit falters

By DEB RIECHMANN and JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — The table was set, with flowers in vases and menus tucked inside white napkins. Water glasses were filled. Wicker fans provided a cool breeze.

But nobody came.

"Schedule change," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders announced.

That was the first indication something was up at President Donald Trump's two-day summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un.

But what did it mean for the prospects of denuclearizing?

Reporters and photographers assembled to record the leaders' lunchtime chitchat were hustled out of the room and eventually from building in anticipation of Trump's departure.

Speculation swirled.

Was Trump staging an exit as a negotiating tactic to put more pressure on Kim? Might the two leaders appear at a joint news conference to announce progress toward a deal?

Those theories soon proved meritless. Trump and Kim's motorcades left moments apart on diverging routes back to their hotels.

In a statement, Sanders said the summit was over. There was no deal.

The summit that had started amicably enough had collapsed.

"Sometimes you have to walk," Trump said at a closing news conference.

It was a dramatic reversal for a summit that had kicked off Wednesday with friendly greetings, laughter and lots of arm-touching by Trump at a luxury hotel in Hanoi.

When the talks resumed Thursday morning, Kim likened the scene of the two leaders, who had once denounced one another as "Little Rocket Man" and "deranged," sitting side by side to a "fantasy movie."

Trump reported that at dinner the night before, there were "a lot of great ideas being thrown around."

By lunchtime, not so much.

The two men met privately in the morning for about 35 minutes and then walked to an outdoor pool area, where they were joined by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his North Korean counterpart.

But it was humid and the air was sticky, so they moved to a glass-enclosed, air-conditioned room off the patio.

The four, plus two interpreters, spoke for about 70 minutes in what was described as an "informal" session.

Trump and Kim took a 15-minute break and then reconvened, this time with more officials.

At the start of that final meeting, journalists invited in for a photo opportunity witnessed something unheard of: Kim answering questions from foreign reporters — not just one, but several.

And then he shooed them away.

"If you would kindly give us more time between us, because you know one minute, even one minute's more precious to us," Kim said through a translator.

Next on the schedule was the lunch that never happened, followed by a signing ceremony for a joint agreement that was advertised on Trump's public schedule. But there was nothing to sign.

Instead, Air Force One took off two hours early. Trump was returning to Washington without a deal.

Colvin reported from Washington.

Follow all of AP's summit coverage: <https://apnews.com/Trump-KimSummit>

Analysis: Cohen hearing stokes touchy topic of impeachment

By LISA MASCARO and STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michael Cohen's testimony is just the beginning.

The House oversight hearing with President Donald Trump's former attorney, coming in advance of special counsel Robert Mueller's report, heralds what Democrats in Congress view as the long days ahead providing checks and balances on the Oval Office.

For some, the outcome may — or may not — lead to grounds for impeachment. For others, impeachment cannot come fast enough.

What is certain, though, is the mounting tension. As the hearings and investigations unfold, Democrats, particularly those running for the White House, may be speeding toward a moment when they have no choice but to consider the I-word.

Newly elected Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib, among the most outspoken lawmakers on impeachment, says that as the 2020 presidential candidates visit her Detroit-area district, "most residents are going to ask where they stand on this issue."

Voters are less concerned with Mueller's Russia investigation, Tlaib said, than with the day-to-day White House operations and "whether or not there's a crooked CEO in the Oval Office."

Hours into Cohen's testimony Wednesday, New Hampshire's statehouse Speaker Steve Shurtleff, a Democrat, said that impeaching the president was becoming a realistic option.

"They're putting a lot of meat on the bone," Shurtleff said in an interview. "It could be a one-two punch,"

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he said of the Cohen hearing and Mueller report. "I think it'll connect a lot of dots."

Trump allies have tried to use the prospect of impeachment as a political weapon. The president's former chief counselor, Steve Bannon, had warned before the 2018 elections that Democrats would impeach the president if they won control of Congress.

Republicans are taking up that mantle. At the start of the Cohen hearing, the top Republican on the panel, Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, said the only reason for the session was so Democrats could pursue impeachment. Another committee Republican, Rep. Chip Roy of Texas, called the hearing a "circus" not worth Americans' time. And newly elected Republican Rep. Carol Miller of West Virginia said the sole purpose was "discrediting the president."

"If it was not already obvious," Miller said, "there are members here with a singular goal in Congress to impeach President Trump."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has kept calls for impeachment at bay by insisting that Mueller first must be allowed to finish his work, which reports suggest could happen in the coming weeks, and present his findings publicly — though it's unclear whether the White House will allow its full release.

Pelosi says the House shouldn't pursue impeachment for political reasons, nor should it hold back for political reasons. Instead, she says lawmakers need to do their jobs as a co-equal branch of government and go wherever the facts lead.

"The American people expect us to hold the administration accountable," said Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I., a member of House leadership. "And if during the course of that we come upon sufficient evidence that warrants his removal, I think they expect us to do that."

But Democrats are not there yet, at all.

So far, the Democratic Party's potential 2020 class has tried to avoid the impeachment question altogether, fearful that calling for impeachment before the Mueller report is out could undermine the process and trigger a voter backlash.

Among them, only former Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke has directly called for Trump's impeachment. Others approached the Cohen hearing in more cautious and creative ways.

Sen. Kamala Harris of California, used the hearings as a fundraising opportunity. "Are you watching Michael Cohen testify before Congress today?" campaign manager Juan Rodriguez wrote. "There's a lot to unpack, but it's abundantly clear: if we are finally going to get to the truth, Congress must act to protect Robert Mueller from being fired before his findings in the Russia investigation are made public." He asked for donations of between \$10 and \$250.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts sent an email during the hearing promising, if she becomes president, not to pardon anyone implicated in the Trump investigations. She set down a challenge for others running to do same.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota tweeted that Cohen's testimony "is a big deal." Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey said in a brief chat that he wasn't watching the hearing but was "looking to digest it."

And Howard Schultz, the former Starbucks CEO considering an independent bid, said the testimony is "another stark reminder of President Trump's utter disregard for honesty and decency."

The liberal base is restive, though. A new group, By the People, launched a pledge drive urging members of both parties in Congress to show leadership by extending the legislative branch's oversight to the next step of impeachment.

"We already know Donald Trump has committed impeachable offenses," said Alexandra Flores-Quilty, a spokesperson for the group. "We can't wait any longer and want our representatives to move forward now."

So far only Tlaib and fellow newly elected Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota have signed on.

Another new Democrat, Rep. Joe Cunningham of South Carolina, said impeachment was not central to his campaign for office. "Our constituents back home sent me up here to do a job and focus on certain issues and that's not something I'm focused on right now," he said.

Surveys show impeachment has merit for some voters. In a January Washington Post-ABC News poll, about as many Americans said Congress should begin impeachment proceedings (40 percent) as said they

approved of the job Trump is doing as president (37 percent).

Billionaire liberal activist Tom Steyer, who has poured millions of dollars into a campaign calling for Trump's impeachment, said Cohen's testimony marked a turning point in the debate because it's clear Trump broke the law. His group is launching a TV ad over the next week to highlight that point.

"It ended the argument. It didn't end the fight," Steyer said in an interview.

Steyer says Democrats can only wait on the Mueller report for so long before they have to make their own decisions. His group is hosting town halls in the hometown districts of key House chairmen — including Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, who presided over the Wednesday's hearing.

But as the Oversight Committee chairman exited the hourslong sessions, Cummings told reporters the only people using the I-word were the Republicans.

"Not one person on our side mentioned the word impeachment," the chairman said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro has covered Congress since 2010. AP National Political Writer Steve Peoples has covered presidential politics for The Associated Press since 2011.

Associated Press writers Andrew Taylor and Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

Cohen's damning testimony about Trump alleges lie after lie

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL R. SISAK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a damning depiction of Donald Trump, the president's former lawyer cast him as a racist and a con man who used his inner circle to cover up politically damaging allegations about sex and who lied throughout the 2016 election campaign about his business interests in Russia.

A day after publicly testifying before the House's oversight committee, Michael Cohen is expected to continue testifying about his work with Trump and knowledge of the Trump business empire when he appears Thursday before the House intelligence committee, albeit behind closed doors.

Cohen, who previously pleaded guilty to lying to Congress, told lawmakers Wednesday that Trump had advance knowledge and embraced the news that emails damaging to Democratic rival Hillary Clinton would be released during the campaign. But he also said he had no "direct evidence" that Trump or his aides colluded with Russia to get him elected, the primary question of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation.

Cohen, shaking off incessant criticism from Republicans anxious to paint him as a felon and a liar, became the first Trump insider to pull back the curtain on a version of the inner workings of Trump's political and business operations. He likened the president to a "mobster" who demanded blind loyalty from underlings and expected them to lie on his behalf to conceal information and protect him — even if it meant breaking the law.

"I am not protecting Mr. Trump anymore," Cohen declared.

"My loyalty to Mr. Trump has cost me everything: my family's happiness, friendships, my law license, my company, my livelihood, my honor, my reputation and soon my freedom," Cohen said. "I will not sit back, say nothing and allow him to do the same to the country."

Cohen's matter-of-fact testimony about secret payments and lies unfolded as Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. At a Vietnam hotel and unable to ignore the drama thousands of miles away, Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying Cohen "did bad things unrelated to Trump" and "is lying in order to reduce his prison time."

Later, Trump, speaking at a press conference in Vietnam after the summit with Kim ended early, said he was a "little impressed" that Cohen told Congress there was "no collusion" between his presidential campaign and Russia.

Trump said Thursday he tried to watch as much of Cohen's marathon congressional hearing as he could. He slammed the hearing as "fake" and said it was a "terrible thing" for Democrats to hold it during the summit.

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In testimony that cut to the heart of federal investigations encircling the White House, Cohen said he arranged a hush money payment to a porn actress at Trump's behest and agreed to lie about it to the public and the first lady. Cohen said he had lied by claiming that Trump was "not knowledgeable" about the transaction even though Trump had directly arranged for his reimbursement. And he said he was left with the unmistakable impression Trump wanted him to lie to Congress about a Moscow real estate project, though the president never directly told him so.

In one revelation, Cohen said prosecutors in New York were investigating conversations Trump or his advisers had with him after his office and hotel room were raided by the FBI last April. Cohen said he could not discuss that conversation, the last contact he said he has had with the president or anyone acting on his behalf, because it remains under investigation.

The appearance marked the latest step in Cohen's evolution from legal fixer for the president — he once boasted he'd "take a bullet" for Trump — to a foe who has implicated him in federal campaign finance violations. The hearing proceeded along parallel tracks, with Democrats focusing on allegations against Trump while Republicans sought to undermine Cohen's credibility and the proceeding itself.

As Republicans blasted him as a convicted liar, a mostly unrattled Cohen sought to blunt the attacks by repeatedly acknowledging his own failings. He called himself a "fool," warned lawmakers of the perils of blind loyalty to a leader undeserving of it and pronounced himself ashamed of what he'd done to protect Trump.

Cohen is due to begin a three-year prison sentence in May, and he described himself as cooperative with multiple investigations in hopes of reducing his time behind bars. He is seen as a vital witness for federal prosecutors because of his proximity to the president during key episodes under investigation and their decade-long professional relationship.

The first of six Trump aides charged in the Trump-Russia investigation to testify publicly about crimes committed during the 2016 campaign and in the months that followed, Cohen also delivered biting personal commentary on a president he said never expected to win in the first place.

"He never expected to win the primary. He never expected to win the general election," Cohen said. "The campaign — for him — was always a marketing opportunity."

He recounted how Trump made him threaten schools he attended to not release his grades and SAT scores and denigrated blacks as "too stupid" to vote for him. He said Trump once confided to him that, despite his public explanation of a medical deferment from the Vietnam War because of bone spurs, he never had any intention of fighting there.

"I find it ironic, President Trump, that you are in Vietnam right now," Cohen said.

Cohen gave lawmakers his first-person account of how he arranged to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, who said they had sex with Trump. He described a February 2017 conversation with Trump in the Oval Office in which the president reassured him that reimbursement checks sent through Federal Express were coming but would take some time to get through the White House system.

He said the president spoke to him a year later to discuss the public messaging around the transaction and had even once put his wife, Melania Trump, on the phone so that Cohen could lie to her.

"Lying to the first lady is one of my biggest regrets," Cohen said. "She is a kind, good person. I respect her greatly, and she did not deserve that."

Federal prosecutors in New York have said Trump directed Cohen to arrange payments to buy the silence of the porn actress and the former Playboy model in the run-up to the 2016 campaign. Cohen has said he acted out of "blind loyalty."

He said he was presenting the committee with a copy of a check Trump wrote from his personal bank account after he became president to reimburse Cohen for the hush money payments. He offered up other exhibits as well, including examples of financial statements he said Trump had drawn up to show he was wealthier than he really was.

In an allegation relating to Mueller's probe, Cohen said he overheard Trump confidant Roger Stone telling the candidate in the summer of 2016 that WikiLeaks would dump damaging information about Clinton.

Trump put Stone on speakerphone as Stone relayed that he had communicated with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and that "within a couple of days, there would be a massive dump of emails that would damage Hillary Clinton's campaign," Cohen said. Damaging emails U.S. officials say were hacked by Russia were later released by WikiLeaks.

Trump responded by saying "wouldn't that be great," Cohen said.

Stone disputed that account Wednesday, and Barry Pollack, a lawyer for Assange, said Stone and Assange did not have the telephone call that Cohen described.

Cohen's claims that Trump had advance knowledge of the emails contradict the president's assertions that he was in the dark, and it is unclear how legally problematic that could be for Trump anyway. Mueller has not suggested that mere awareness of WikiLeaks' plans, as Stone is purported to have had, is by itself a crime.

Cohen also suggested Trump implicitly told him to lie about a Moscow real estate project. Cohen has admitted lying about the project, which he says Trump knew about as Cohen was negotiating with Russia during the campaign. Cohen said Trump did not directly tell him to lie, but "he would look me in the eye and tell me there's no business in Russia and then go out and lie to the American people by saying the same thing."

Cohen said he does not have direct evidence that Trump colluded with the Russian government during the election but he has "suspicions," including after a June 2016 meeting between the president's oldest son and a Kremlin-connected lawyer.

"I wouldn't use the word 'colluding.' Was there something odd about the back-and-forth praise with President Putin?" Cohen said. "Yes, but I'm not really sure I can answer that question in terms of collusion."

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Lisa Mascaró, Chad Day, Michael Balsamo and Colleen Long contributed to this report.

Follow all of AP's Trump Investigations coverage at <https://apnews.com/TrumpInvestigations>

In a summit first, Kim Jong Un takes US media questions

By ERIC TALMADGE, Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — So here's a bit of history made at President Donald Trump's summit with Kim Jong Un: for what is almost certainly the first time, the North Korean leader actually answered an impromptu question from an American reporter.

Then just a little bit later, as if to prove it wasn't a fluke, he did it again.

Looking confident and speaking in his typically gravelly voice, Kim didn't miss a beat when asked by a member of the White House press pool about his outlook on the summit, saying "It's too early to say. I won't make predictions. But I instinctively feel that a good outcome will be produced."

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which deals with North Korean affairs, couldn't confirm whether it was the first time Kim answered a question from a foreign journalist. But reporters didn't get opportunities to ask questions of Kim during his three summits with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and his four meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Kim ignored questions shouted at him during his first summit with Trump last June in Singapore. In an earlier brush with foreign media at the opening of a war museum in Pyongyang in 2013, questions were shouted at him but not answered.

The first journalist to get his response on Thursday was David Nakamura of the Washington Post. As a pool reporter, he was allowed close access to the leaders as the representative of the White House press corps.

"I asked Kim Jong Un if he felt confident he could get a deal with @realDonaldTrump," Nakamura tweeted. "He replied: 'It's too early to say. I would not say I'm pessimistic.'"

Soon after, as journalists were allowed to see the beginning of the final day of talks, Kim responded

to several more questions from American reporters in the White House pool — including The Associated Press, Reuters and Bloomberg. He said he thought it would be a good idea to open a U.S. liaison office in Pyongyang and said through the interpreter that he wouldn't be in Hanoi if he weren't willing to discuss denuclearization.

The interpreters — Yun-hyang Lee, who also translated for Trump at his first meeting with Kim in Singapore, and Sin Hye Yong, for Kim — played a key role in the exchanges.

Shouted or unapproved questions are usually simply not translated to begin with. But with Trump responding, it appeared natural for Kim to follow suit. The interpreters interpreted. And Kim jumped right in.

Kim's confident performance in Hanoi began as soon as he got off the train.

Despite the tight security that is the rule at summits, foreign media were allowed to get right up beside him as he got off his armored train at the Chinese border to switch to a limousine for the drive the rest of the way to Hanoi.

Talmadge is the AP's Pyongyang bureau chief. Follow him on Instagram and Twitter: @EricTalmadge

Follow all of AP's summit coverage: <https://apnews.com/Trump-KimSummit>

Closure of Pakistan air space snarls flights across Asia

By SAKCHAI LALIT, Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A temporary closure of air space over Pakistan snarled air traffic Thursday, especially between Asia and Europe, though some airlines adjusted by rerouting their flights.

In Bangkok, an important and busy hub for transcontinental flights, thousands of travelers were stranded. The closure of a main route for many flights to the Middle East and Europe was likely to be costly for airlines having to carry extra fuel and take longer journeys than usual.

Bangkok airport officials said over 4,000 travelers were affected. Those needing help were getting access to accommodations and alternative travel arrangements, they said, though some of those stranded complained they were getting no help at all.

The terminal was so crowded that the chief of Thailand's immigration police, Surachate Hakparn, tweeted a warning to "Please spare your time for your trip!"

The disruptions brought a month-long tropical holiday for a group of 25 Danish students unable to board a connecting flight in Bangkok to an unhappy end.

"The guard over there just said we have to go down to the basement to sleep. So we can't get any help or information," said Sara Bjerregaard Larsen, 21.

Thai Airways says it had rerouted flights to Europe outside Pakistani air space. Malaysia Airlines also said in a travel advisory on its web site that it was avoiding air space over Pakistan and northern India "until further notice."

The first available flight to London on Thai Airways, according to its booking website, was Thursday, March 7.

Pakistan aviation authorities said the country's air space would reopen as of midnight Thursday (1900 GMT). The government closed it Wednesday after Pakistan said its military had shot down two Indian warplanes and captured a pilot, escalating tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals.

India also suspended flights though some of its northern airports on Wednesday. Those facilities were back to normal on Thursday, but flights both to the U.S. and Europe out of New Delhi were affected.

A United flight from Newark, New Jersey, to New Delhi was rerouted through London and later canceled, and Air Canada canceled flights from Toronto and Vancouver to the Indian capital.

As of mid-morning Thursday, Chinese airlines had changed the routes of seven flights due to the closure of Pakistani airspace while foreign airlines were allowed to divert 40 flights through Chinese airspace, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said on its website.

Air China canceled its flight Thursday from Beijing to the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. According to an

employee of the airline's publicity office in Beijing, the status of other flights would be decided later.

The closing of Pakistan's airspace saw Gulf Arab airlines, which serve as a link between East and West in global travel, rapidly reshuffle their flights.

In the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, civil aviation authorities immediately halted their flights to Pakistan. Airlines in those countries include the long-haul carriers Etihad, Emirates and Gulf Air.

Saudi Arabian Airlines and Oman Air similarly cancelled flights to Pakistan. Pakistanis work in a variety of blue- and white-collar jobs across the Gulf Arab states.

Northern California river floods 2,000 buildings

By HAVEN DALEY and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ, Associated Press

GUERNEVILLE, Calif. (AP) — A Northern California river flooded 2,000 homes, businesses and other buildings and left two communities virtual islands after days of stormy weather, officials said Wednesday.

The towns of Guerneville and Monte Rio were hardest hit by water pouring from the Russian River, which topped 46 feet (13 meters) late Wednesday night, said Briana Khan, a Sonoma County spokeswoman.

The river frequently floods in rainy weather but it hadn't reached that level for 25 years and wasn't expected to recede again until late Thursday night.

About 3,500 people in two dozen communities along the river remained under evacuation orders.

Jeff Bridges didn't leave even though he said the water was 8 feet (2.44 meters) deep in some places. The co-owner of the R3 Hotel in Guerneville, said he and others who stayed behind were well-prepared to ride out the storm. He and employees moved computers, business records and furniture to second-floor room.

"As long as everybody is safe, dry and warm, it's all fine. You just ride it out," said Bridges, noting that this flood was the fourth he's experienced in 33 years.

He added: "People in Florida have hurricanes, people in Maine have blizzards; we have floods," he said. "It's the price we have to pay to live in paradise."

The river was one of several in Northern California that was engorged by days of rain from western U.S. storms that also dumped heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada, throughout the Pacific Northwest and into Montana, where Gov. Steve Bullock signed an emergency order to help keep up the supply of heating fuel amid frigid temperatures.

Two Amtrak trains together carrying nearly 300 passengers stopped and reversed directions because of an avalanche that closed railroad tracks in the Sierra Nevada.

In Idaho, the mountain town of Stanley became marooned Wednesday after all three highways leading to the town were closed because of drifting snow, avalanches and the risk of more slides.

Several areas in California set record-high rainfall totals in recent days, including nearby Santa Rosa, which had nearly 8 inches (20 centimeters) of rain in one day. The often-waterlogged Venado weather station 5 miles (8 kilometers) from Guerneville recorded more than 20 inches (50 centimeters) of rain in 48 hours.

Elsewhere in Northern California, dozens of people had to be rescued from cars stranded while motorists tried to drive through flooded roads. Nina Sheehan, who is visiting from North Carolina, had to abandon her rental SUV after it got stuck in a flooded hotel parking lot.

"We made a decision to take the rental car through the waist-high water and we got two thirds of the way and then the car stalled," she said. "Do not try to go through any water over a foot high because you never know what you're going to find."

Firefighters in Monte Rio worked through the night pulling people out of cars stuck in flooded roadways and getting people out of their homes as water approached, Fire Chief Steve Baxman told the Press-Democrat newspaper of Santa Rosa.

"We took 17 people out of cars and houses during the night. Too many people are driving into water," he said.

Rodriguez reported from San Francisco.

Klobuchar defends her record on regulating medical devices

AMY FORLITI of The Associated Press and SPENCER WOODMAN of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, The Associated Press and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — In her more than two terms as a U.S. senator representing Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar has built a reputation as an effective champion for consumer safety, sponsoring bills that improve swimming pool safety, ban lead in children's products and tackle the nation's opioid crisis.

"Consumers deserve products that have been tested and meet strong health and safety standards," her website declares.

But Klobuchar, who announced two weeks ago she will contend for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, has also forcefully advocated for the medical device industry — a huge employer in her home state — in ways that complicate her reputation as a consumer defender.

During her time in the Senate, Klobuchar has advanced proposals championed by the medical device industry that some consumer advocates claim would put patients' safety at risk, a review of her record by The Associated Press and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists found. Safety and regulatory concerns relating to medical devices have come under scrutiny since the AP, ICIJ and other media partners began publishing a series of investigative stories about the industry in late 2018.

Klobuchar has pushed the federal Food and Drug Administration to approve medical devices faster and called for a greater presence of industry-backed experts at the agency. Not all of her proposals became law, but bills she introduced called for reducing the use of randomized clinical trials for some devices and limiting the amount of information FDA reviewers can ask of companies when evaluating devices. Language in bills she sponsored to streamline device approvals and increase the influence of industry-recommended experts ultimately ended up in landmark legislation signed into law by President Barack Obama.

While many of her Democratic presidential rivals promote ambitious proposals for free health care and college tuition, Klobuchar's work on medical devices is a window into her narrower, often more moderate policy portfolio.

Klobuchar defends her record on regulating medical devices, telling the AP in a statement, "Patient and consumer rights have always been a major focus of mine."

This story was produced through a partnership between The Associated Press and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

Klobuchar did not make herself available for an interview for this story. Her statement highlights her efforts to speed up approvals of new devices, noting that approvals for many life-saving devices had languished for years.

"The legislation to improve the process was passed as part of a larger package of reforms, signed into law by President Obama, in response to slow-downs and workforce shortages at the FDA," Klobuchar said. "The legislation also included more funding for the FDA to hire medical experts to examine the safety of products that came before them for approval. The final legislation was supported by numerous patient safety groups."

Diana Zuckerman, president of the nonpartisan National Center for Health Research think tank, said that Klobuchar's legislative record has put the demands of the device industry above patient safety. It has also provided political cover that makes it easier for other progressive lawmakers to embrace pro-industry measures, Zuckerman said.

"When a liberal Democrat actively champions a position that harms patients, as Sen. Klobuchar has done on FDA legislation, it helps to persuade other liberal Democrats," Zuckerman said.

Dr. Margaret Hamburg, head of the FDA from May 2009 to April 2015, said Klobuchar worked on streamlining the process, but was also concerned about conflict of interest issues that could put consumers at risk — sponsoring legislation that required both medical device makers and drug companies to disclose payments they make to doctors and researchers.

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Hamburg said others in Congress expressed similar concern.

"There was a great deal of concern about making sure that American consumers were getting cutting-edge medical devices as soon or sooner than anyone else in the world, but also concern about ensuring the safety of those products," Hamburg said. "She was an advocate and supportive of a number of things that we were doing and she held our feet to the fire to make sure we were keeping our promises."

That a U.S. senator would work to advance the interests of a powerful home-state industry is not necessarily surprising.

She's obligated to support "job makers," said Larry Jacobs, a political scientist at the University of Minnesota. "Every presidential candidate is going to have issues that put them in sticky spots between the national political centers of the party and their constituents back home," he said.

"I think Sen. Klobuchar has been a very good representative of the state and a leader in Congress in being able to facilitate important conversations around medical devices," said Shaye Mandle, chief executive and president of the Medical Alley Association, which represents device makers and other health care businesses in Minnesota. "Most states don't have a medical device industry — every state has millions of patients that rely on medical technology."

THE POLITICS OF MEDICAL DEVICES

Medical devices provide clear benefits to millions of people, but a yearlong investigation by ICIJ, the AP and media partners in 36 countries has called into question whether the device industry has put patients in harm's way by rushing poorly tested products to market. Governments around the world, including the United States, hold even complex implants to a lower safety testing standard than most new drugs.

Many devices are implanted near vital organs or pressed against sensitive nerves. If they corrode or rupture, the results can be catastrophic. An entire generation of metal-on-metal artificial hips was discontinued after they were found to rot flesh and poison blood at high rates.

Minnesota is widely seen as the capital of the U.S. device industry. Medtronic, the world's largest medical device company, has its operational headquarters in Minneapolis. Klobuchar has developed relationships with the company's leadership — even inviting Medtronic's then-chief executive to be her guest at Obama's State of the Union address in 2011.

Hundreds of other device makers have offices in Minnesota and the industry employs nearly 30,000 people in the state. As a result, Democratic and Republican lawmakers from Minnesota have traditionally supported the industry's interests. Erik Paulsen, a Republican House member who was defeated in November, received more financial support from the device industry over the past 10 years than any other member of Congress.

Legislators from other states with device businesses have also gained reputations as friendly to the industry. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat also running for president, has been criticized for omitting medical devices from her tough stance on the pharmaceutical industry. Sen. Bob Casey, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, is a leading recipient of device industry money and has fought for years to repeal a long-delayed 2.3 percent tax on medical devices intended to help fund the Affordable Care Act. Klobuchar has also fought to repeal the tax.

Over the past 10 years, Klobuchar's Senate campaigns have received more than \$300,000 from the device industry, including corporations, unions, political action committees and individuals, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Among Democrats, only Casey received more money from the device industry during the period.

In a statement, Medtronic said its dealings with government officials are consistent with its mission to alleviate pain, restore health and extend life.

"Medtronic has engaged with Senator Klobuchar on a range of policy issues over the years," Medtronic said in its statement. "She listens to our positions as one of her constituents, advocates for them when she agrees, and doesn't when she disagrees."

There have been times when Klobuchar has spoken out against the industry. In 2016, after the Minneapolis Star Tribune revealed that Medtronic failed to disclose more than 1,000 reports of "adverse events" relating to its Infuse Bone Graft device, Klobuchar wrote Medtronic asking why the company didn't report

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the information sooner.

She also criticized a program that allowed device makers to report some patient injuries and product problems years after the fact.

After the newspaper reported more details about Infuse device problems last year, Klobuchar and fellow Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith wrote Medtronic about the company's "failure to quickly and accurately report data to the FDA."

REGULATORY FIGHTS

In 2010, halfway through Klobuchar's first Senate term, the device industry became alarmed about a looming report that it feared would lead to heightened regulation — and a slower, and more expensive, path to get new products to market.

After a series of device safety scandals, the FDA had commissioned the Institute of Medicine, a non-partisan group that advises federal authorities on health issues, to conduct an independent review of its fast-track device approval process.

The process allows companies to get approval for new devices based on "substantial equivalence" to previously approved products. It's how the vast majority of new medical devices are approved for the American public.

Already worried about a backlog in approvals, a prominent device trade group and its allies in Washington began pressing the FDA to ignore the Institute of Medicine's findings even before the institute finished its review. In a May 2010 letter, Klobuchar and Paulsen said they were concerned with the review and called for the FDA "to reject proposals that unduly burden small businesses and suppress the development of promising medical breakthroughs."

In July 2011, the Institute of Medicine concluded that the streamlined approval pathway was flawed and should be dismantled. The FDA quickly dismissed that recommendation.

Three months later, Klobuchar introduced legislation seeking to speed up medical device approvals by reducing the use of randomized and controlled clinical trials for some devices and limiting the amount of information medical device makers needed to provide to the FDA.

The consumer advocacy group Public Citizen denounced the bill, writing to Klobuchar that it would "weaken the already inadequate regulatory requirements for medical devices" and "would undoubtedly accelerate the rate of patient casualties."

The bill never left the Senate, but some key provisions that required the FDA to take a lighter approach with industry during device approvals and language that eased conflict of interest rules at the agency were ultimately included in the Senate's version of the landmark Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act, according to a press release from Klobuchar's office.

The senator characterized the changes as "common-sense reforms" that would give patients access to vital devices. Obama signed the legislation into law in 2012.

In 2016, Klobuchar introduced another bill aimed at easing device regulation. The Improving Medical Device Innovation Act would have required the FDA to explore alternatives for some device types to existing reporting requirements for patient injuries and device malfunctions "that will be least burdensome for device manufacturers." These reports are a primary way the FDA learns about dangerous devices once they are already on the market.

The bill also contained a provision to give device companies a voice in recommending which experts the FDA includes on panels reviewing their devices. "This is really noxious," said Dr. Peter Lurie, who held senior posts at the FDA from 2009 to 2017 and now heads the nonprofit watchdog group, the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "The last thing the agency needs is a bunch of self-interested input from sponsoring companies."

The Senate bill was never voted on but the provision regarding FDA expert panels lived on. In late 2016, Klobuchar joined an overwhelming majority of legislators to approve the 21st Century Cures Act. Signed into law by Obama, the measure seeks to accelerate product development for drugs and devices and strengthens the requirement that the FDA emphasize the "least burdensome means" for reviewing

medical devices.

Woodman reported from New York. Sydney P. Freeberg of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reported from St. Petersburg, Florida.

'Racist' labeling of Trump fuels tense moments in Congress

By TERRY TANG and DEEPTI HAJELA, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — From the start of Michael Cohen's congressional testimony Wednesday, President Donald Trump's views on race took center stage.

Trump's former attorney did not mince words, flat out calling his former boss "a racist" who believed "black people would never vote for him because they were too stupid."

"Mr. Trump is a racist. The country has seen Mr. Trump court white supremacists and bigots," Cohen said in his opening remarks.

Race and racism came up time and again during the televised hearing, which was chaired by an African-American man and saw several freshman lawmakers of color get in questioning.

Cohen, who previously pleaded guilty to lying to Congress, told the House Oversight Committee that he continued to work for Trump despite a history of racist comments.

Several Republican lawmakers, who maintained that Cohen is a perpetual liar who cannot be trusted, questioned Cohen's characterization.

"I've talked to the president over 300 times," said GOP Rep. Mark Meadows of North Carolina. "I've not heard one time a racist comment out of his mouth in private. So, how do you reconcile it? Do you have proof of those conversations?"

The NAACP said the testimony affirms what Trump has already demonstrated through unfair housing practices, birther accusations against Obama and a failure to call out white supremacists.

"Trump's presidency and entire career has been an affront to civil rights so nothing in Michael Cohen's testimony is surprising for a person that has historically racialized and stigmatized those around him," President and CEO Derrick Johnson said in a statement.

Cohen then pointed out that the Trump Organization has no black executives.

In perhaps the day's most heated exchange, Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan took issue, as did others before her, with Meadows bringing in Trump administration worker Lynne Patton, a black woman, to the hearing. Meadows referenced Patton, who works at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in his questioning. She would not work for someone who was racist, Meadows said.

When it was her turn for questioning, Tlaib said, "Just because someone has a person of color, a black person, working for them does not mean they aren't racist ... the fact someone would actually use a prop, a black woman in this chamber, in this committee, is alone racist in itself."

A visibly irate Meadows asked her statement be stricken from the record because it was a personal attack. Committee Chair Rep. Elijah Cummings asked Tlaib to clarify that she wasn't calling Meadows a racist. She denied doing that, but said bringing in Patton was a "racist act."

The episode quickly became fodder for social media, both in support of Tlaib's comments and in opposition. Many were outraged and accused Meadows of throwing out the "I have a black friend" argument to refute the idea that he is racist. He cited having nieces and nephews of color and his friendship with Cummings "that's not based on color."

Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., defended Meadows.

"Yet another display of reckless incivility by this new House Democrat majority," McCarthy tweeted. "My friend and colleague @RepMarkMeadows is one of the most decent people that I know and he showed tremendous class in the face of an absurd accusation from Rep. Tlaib."

Democratic Rep. Ayanna Pressley, the first African-American woman elected to Congress from Massachusetts, used her time with Cohen to circle back to the issue.

"Would you agree that someone could deny rental units to African-Americans, lead the birther move-

ment, refer to the diaspora as (expletive) countries, and refer to white supremacists as fine people have a black friend and still be racist?" she asked Cohen.

Cohen said "yes."

Associated Press national writer Errin Haines Whack in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

Cohen says Trump behaved 'much like a mobster would do'

By COLLEEN LONG, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He carried out the boss' wishes. He understood "the code." He was blindly loyal — but now he's considered a rat.

Donald Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen spoke at length Wednesday about his life in the president's inner circle, but the most vivid descriptor came in just six words. Trump ran his operation "much like a mobster would do," Cohen said.

In Cohen's scathing testimony at a House committee hearing, he repeatedly described Trump, the onetime head of a family business, like a mob boss minus the body count: quick to bully and expecting others to do his dirty work. Cohen described himself as a consigliere, telling lawmakers he did Trump's bidding for years, intimidating maybe 500 people and lying to scores, including the first lady. But Trump never directly told him to do it, he said.

"He doesn't give you questions, he doesn't give you orders," Cohen said. "He speaks in a code, and I understand the code because I've been around him for a decade."

Cohen is facing a three-year sentence for lying to Congress in 2017 and other charges. He came back to Capitol Hill this week, worrying for his family's safety, but claiming he would no longer lie for his former boss and was ready to spill.

Trump has denied the allegations against him and called Cohen a liar. Even as he's done so, he's used mob speak.

"Remember, Michael Cohen only became a 'Rat' after the FBI did something which was absolutely unthinkable & unheard of until the Witch Hunt was illegally started," Trump tweeted in December. "They BROKE INTO AN ATTORNEY'S OFFICE," he wrote, referring to the raid on Cohen's office that touched off the now-disbarred lawyer's eventual guilty plea.

During the hearing, Democratic Rep. Gerry Connolly even likened Cohen to Joe Valachi, an American gangster known as the "first rat" whose 1960s testimony before Congress led to the eventual dismantling of organized crime.

"This Congress historically has relied on all kinds of shady figures who turned," Connolly said.

It's hardly the first time Trump's orbit has drawn mob comparisons.

In his book "A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies and Leadership," former FBI director James Comey said he got the sinking feeling that Trump's operation functioned like the mob. Former acting FBI director Andrew McCabe spun a similar story, and a former agent and former federal prosecutor tweeted Wednesday that Trump's tactics as detailed by Cohen sure felt a lot like the mafia.

There's even a "Godfather: Part II" reference in the indictment by the special prosecutor investigating Trump's possible ties to Russia. Trump confidant Roger Stone told an associate to pull a "Frank Pentangeli" before a House committee, the indictment says. In the film, Pentangeli, an associate of mob boss Vito Corleone, lies to protect the family during congressional testimony.

Associated Press Writer Michael Balsamo contributed to this report.

Transgender troops tell Congress they excel in military

By JULIE WATSON, Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Transgender troops testifying for the first time to Congress on Wednesday said transitioning to another sex made them stronger, while Pentagon officials defended the Trump administration's desire to bar people like them from enlisting in the future.

Army Capt. Alivia Stehlik, an infantry officer and graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. and Ranger School, told lawmakers she became a more "effective soldier" after she transitioned from male to female in 2017.

"What is the value of having transgender people in the military? Based on my experience first as a combat arms officer and medical provider, the answer is unequivocally that my transition — and so many others — has dramatically increased the readiness and lethality of every branch of the armed forces," said Stehlik, who returned from a deployment to Afghanistan a month ago where she treated soldiers as a physical therapist.

With the ban now blocked by lawsuits, active-duty transgender service members were invited to testify at the hearing called by Democratic Rep. Jackie Speier, chairwoman of the military personnel subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

Speier said the ban is "discriminatory, unconstitutional and self-defeating" and said the Obama administration's 2016 lifting of the barrier to allow transgender people to serve has been an "unequivocal success."

She added that barring transgender people again "would cost us recruits at a time when so few Americans are willing to serve." She called the five transgender troops who testified Wednesday "exceptional, but also exceptionally normal."

Retired Air Force Gen. James N. Stewart, who is now performing the duties of the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, defended the Trump administration's policy, which is currently blocked by litigation.

He said current transgender troops will be allowed to continue to serve and other transgender people can join the military if they serve in their biological sex and have not been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, a condition under which people experience distress if they do not identify with their birth gender.

"It's not a ban on transgender individuals," he insisted.

Stewart added that "special accommodations" cannot be made for people with such a medical condition.

Maryland Democratic Rep. Anthony Brown said the same argument was used to keep blacks from integrating into the Army in 1948 and again in the 1990s to keep gay people from serving openly under the don't ask, don't tell policy, which was repealed by Congress in 2010.

He said barring people who have undergone treatment for gender dysphoria and transitioned to another sex is equivalent to banning transgender people.

"You're transgender and only if you agree not to transition, then you can serve, that's just like 'don't ask, don't tell,'" he said.

In the nearly three years since the U.S. military welcomed transgender people into the armed forces, they have largely served without incident. Some, like Army attack helicopter pilot Lindsey Muller, have earned prestigious medals or received other forms of recognition.

"Once you meet transgender people who have served in the different branches ... it's really hard to dismiss the fact that you will find Purple Heart recipients, Bronze Star winners, attack aviators, Navy SEALs," said Muller, who did not testify but is a plaintiff in one of four lawsuits challenging the ban. "We've been here, and we will continue to be here regardless. In what capacity is up to the administration."

President Donald Trump has argued that their presence is a burden and cited "tremendous medical costs" as a reason for the ban.

According to new data from the Defense Department provided to the House Armed Services Committee ahead of the hearing, the military has spent about \$8 million on transgender care since 2016. The military's annual health care budget tops \$50 billion.

An estimated 14,700 troops on active duty and in the Reserves identify as transgender but not all seek

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treatment.

Military chiefs testified before Congress last year that they found no problems with transgender troops on morale or unit cohesion. The five transgender troops who testified Wednesday said their medical transitions took anywhere from four weeks to four months and they did most of it on their own time. All were fit to return to deploying afterward.

They said recovery from pregnancy and shoulder surgery takes much longer.

The Defense Department treated 1,525 service members between July 1, 2016 and February 1, 2019, who were diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Currently about 1,071 are serving, including 20 senior officers.

The military spent about \$8 million on transgender care, including about \$5.8 million on psychotherapy and about \$2 million on surgeries mostly for breast reductions and hysterectomies. There were about 23,000 psychotherapy visits and about 160 surgeries.

Speier asked Pentagon officials to look into reports that the military requires weekly psychotherapy visits, over prescribing therapy.

Mississippi Rep. Trent Kelly, the committee's ranking Republican member, said not everyone can join the military because of its "stringent medical and behavioral health standards needed to maintain a ready and resilient force. However, it only makes sense that any individual who can meet these standards and is otherwise qualified should be allowed to serve."

This story corrects the date to 2017 when Army Capt. Alivia Stehlik transitioned from male to female.

'Racist,' 'con man': Cohen assails Trump before Congress

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL R. SISAK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a damning depiction of Donald Trump, the president's former lawyer on Wednesday cast him as a racist and a con man who used his inner circle to cover up politically damaging allegations about sex, and who lied throughout the 2016 election campaign about his business interests in Russia.

Michael Cohen, who previously pleaded guilty to lying to Congress, told lawmakers that Trump had advance knowledge and embraced the news that emails damaging to Hillary Clinton would be released during the campaign. But he also said he had no "direct evidence" that Trump or his aides colluded with Russia to get him elected, the primary question of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation.

Cohen, shaking off incessant criticism from Republicans anxious to paint him as a felon and liar, became the first Trump insider to pull back the curtain on a version of the inner workings of Trump's political and business operations. He likened the president to a "mobster" who demanded blind loyalty from underlings and expected them to lie on his behalf to conceal information and protect him — even if it meant breaking the law.

"I am not protecting Mr. Trump anymore," Cohen declared.

"My loyalty to Mr. Trump has cost me everything: my family's happiness, friendships, my law license, my company, my livelihood, my honor, my reputation, and soon my freedom," Cohen said. "I will not sit back say nothing and allow him to do the same to the country."

Cohen's matter-of-fact testimony about secret payments and lies unfolded as Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. At a Vietnam hotel and unable to ignore the drama thousands of miles away, Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying Cohen "did bad things unrelated to Trump" and "is lying in order to reduce his prison time."

In testimony that cut to the heart of federal investigations encircling the White House, Cohen said he arranged a hush money payment to a porn actress at the president's behest and agreed to lie about it to the public and the first lady. He said he had lied by claiming that Trump was "not knowledgeable" about the transaction even though the president had directly arranged for his reimbursement. And he said he was left with the unmistakable impression Trump wanted him to lie to Congress about a Moscow real estate project, though the president never directly told him so.

In one revelation, Cohen said prosecutors in New York were investigating conversations Trump or his

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advisers had with him after his office and hotel room were raided by the FBI last April. Cohen said he could not discuss that conversation, the last contact he said he has had with the president or anyone acting on his behalf, because it remains under investigation.

The appearance marked the latest step in Cohen's evolution from legal fixer for the president — he once boasted he'd "take a bullet" for Trump — to a foe who has implicated him in federal campaign finance violations. The hearing proceeded along parallel tracks, with Democrats focusing on allegations against Trump while Republicans sought to undermine Cohen's credibility and the proceeding itself.

As Republicans blasted him as a convicted liar, a mostly unrattled Cohen sought to blunt the attacks by repeatedly acknowledging his own failings. He called himself a "fool," warned lawmakers of the perils of blind loyalty to a leader undeserving of it and pronounced himself ashamed of what he'd done to protect Trump.

Cohen is due to begin a three-year prison sentence in May, and described himself as cooperative with multiple investigations in hopes of reducing his time behind bars. He is seen as a vital witness for federal prosecutors because of his proximity to the president during key episodes under investigation and their decade-long professional relationship.

The first of six Trump aides charged in the Trump-Russia investigation to testify publicly about crimes committed during the 2016 campaign and in the months that followed, Cohen also delivered biting personal commentary on a president he said never expected to win in the first place.

"He never expected to win the primary. He never expected to win the general election," Cohen said. "The campaign — for him — was always a marketing opportunity."

He recounted how Trump made him threaten schools he attended to not release his grades and SAT scores and denigrated blacks as "too stupid" to vote for him. He said Trump once confided to him that, despite his public explanation of a medical deferment from the Vietnam War because of bone spurs, he never had any intention of fighting there.

"I find it ironic, President Trump, that you are in Vietnam right now," Cohen said.

Cohen gave lawmakers his first-person account of how he arranged to buy the silence of a porn actress and a Playboy model who said they had sex with Trump. He described a February 2017 conversation with Trump in the Oval Office in which the president reassured him that reimbursement checks sent through Federal Express were coming but would take some time to get through the White House system.

He said the president spoke to him a year later to discuss the public messaging around the transaction, and had even once put his wife, Melania, on the phone so that Cohen could lie to her.

"Lying to the first lady is one of my biggest regrets," Cohen said. "She is a kind, good person. I respect her greatly, and she did not deserve that."

In an allegation relating to Mueller's probe, Cohen said he overheard Trump confidant Roger Stone telling the candidate in the summer of 2016 that WikiLeaks would dump damaging information about Clinton.

Trump put Stone on speakerphone as Stone relayed that he had communicated with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and that "within a couple of days, there would be a massive dump of emails that would damage Hillary Clinton's campaign," Cohen said. Damaging emails U.S. officials say were hacked by Russia were later released by WikiLeaks.

Trump responded by saying "wouldn't that be great," Cohen said.

Stone disputed that account Wednesday, and Barry Pollack, a lawyer for Assange, said Stone and Assange did not have the telephone call that Cohen described.

Cohen's claims that Trump had advance knowledge of the emails contradict the president's assertions that he was in the dark, and it is not clear how legally problematic that could be for Trump anyway. Mueller has not suggested that mere awareness of WikiLeaks' plans, as Stone is purported to have had, is by itself a crime.

Cohen also suggested Trump implicitly told him to lie about a Moscow real estate project. Cohen has admitted lying about the project, which he says Trump knew about as Cohen was negotiating with Russia during the campaign. Cohen said Trump did not directly tell him to lie, but "he would look me in the eye and tell me there's no business in Russia and then go out and lie to the American people by saying the

same thing.”

Cohen said he does not have direct evidence that Trump colluded with the Russian government during the election, but that he has “suspicions,” including after a June 2016 meeting between the president’s oldest son and a Kremlin-connected lawyer.

“I wouldn’t use the word ‘colluding.’ Was there something odd about the back-and-forth praise with President Putin?” Cohen said. “Yes, but I’m not really sure I can answer that question in terms of collusion.”

Federal prosecutors in New York have said Trump directed Cohen to arrange payments to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal in the run-up to the 2016 campaign. Cohen has said he acted out of “blind loyalty.”

He said he was presenting the committee with a copy of a check Trump wrote from his personal bank account after he became president to reimburse Cohen for the hush money payments. He offered up other exhibits as well, including examples of financial statements he said Trump had drawn up to show he was wealthier than he really was.

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Lisa Mascaró, Chad Day, Michael Balsamo and Colleen Long contributed to this report.

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New solutions for the old problem of illegal massage parlors

By PHILIP MARCELO, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — They’re nestled amid bustling downtowns and tucked into nondescript strip malls across quiet suburbs. Brothels posing as massage parlors and Asian spas have been part of the American landscape for decades, hidden in plain sight.

But the Florida prostitution sting that ensnared New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft last week is a reminder of the human trafficking and abuse taking place behind the darkened windows of many of these storefronts — and how challenging they are to address.

The case also highlights how police and prosecutors are increasingly using a broad range of approaches, including deeper investigations into wider criminal networks, crackdowns on online sites where johns trade detailed sex reviews and enforcement of stricter civil codes on the massage industry, anti-trafficking activists said.

“You’re fighting against a multibillion-dollar industry that’s very, very good at being strategic and keeping their business going,” said Stephanie Clark, executive director at Amirah, a nonprofit that runs a safe house for women escaping sex trafficking in Massachusetts, where illegal massage parlors have proliferated. “They are always 10 steps ahead.”

As many as 9,000 illegal massage parlors currently operate in more than 1,000 cities nationwide, fueling a roughly \$3 billion industry, according to the Polaris Project, a nonprofit that runs the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Most of the prostitutes are women from China and South Korea in their mid-30s to late 50s who have entered the country illegally, are deeply in debt and are drawn into sex work through a combination of lies, threats and other forms of coercion, the organization said.

The massage parlor in Jupiter, Florida where Kraft, a 77-year-old Massachusetts billionaire, was videotaped engaging in sex acts is typical of the model.

Tucked into a pedestrian strip mall in an affluent oceanside community, the Orchids of Asia Day Spa employed mostly Chinese immigrant women and was linked to at least nine other storefronts from Palm Beach to Orlando.

Authorities say the women averaged about 1,500 clients a year, were given no days off and were not allowed to leave the site, where many also lived. Palm Beach State Attorney Dave Aronberg described it as “modern-day slavery.”

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Eleven alleged owners and managers face a range of prostitution-related offenses. At least one, 49-year-old Lan Yun Ma, of Orlando, faces human trafficking charges. Hundreds of male customers, including Kraft, also face minor soliciting prostitution violations .

"We need to get beyond the whack-a-mole strategy of taking out one retail location at a time," said Bradley Myles, Polaris' CEO. "We need to see multi-state investigations that take a longer look, follow the money and build these organized crime cases."

Law enforcement officials in California, which is home to roughly a third of the nation's illegal massage parlors, as well as jurisdictions in Minnesota, Utah and Washington are also landing similar large cases, Myles said.

In Massachusetts, about half of the more than 50 people charged under the state's 8-year-old anti-human trafficking law were involved in illegal massage businesses or residential brothels, according to state Attorney General Maura Healey's office.

In one recent case, a 38-year-old woman was charged with running a lucrative human trafficking and money laundering operation across six Asian massage parlors in the suburbs north of Boston.

Prosecutors said Xiu J. Chen recruited Asian women from New York and arranged their appointments, transportation and housing, where they typically slept on mattresses on the floor. Chen was sentenced to five years in prison in December.

But in New York, another hub of the illegal massage parlor industry, major busts involving sex traffickers remain frustratingly elusive, despite police rolling out a new human trafficking strategy in 2017 promising to crack down on customers and traffickers rather than sex workers, said Chris Muller of Restore NYC, a nonprofit that works with immigrant sex trafficking survivors.

A silver lining is that authorities are helping connect more women with groups like Restore NYC that can help get them on a path to citizenship and break the grip of traffickers, who oftentimes hold their passports and immigration documents as collateral, he said.

New York police said they investigated 79 illegal massage parlors for nuisance violations in 2018, but didn't say how many of those storefronts were ultimately shutdown. Police data also shows prostitution arrests declined more than 60 percent from 2016 numbers while arrests of their customers rose nearly 180 percent.

New York is also among the places seeing growing support for decriminalizing and even legalizing sex work , as is the case in parts of Nevada and Europe. But anti-trafficking groups and local officials appear focused, for now, on more attainable legislative goals.

Delaware and North Carolina, for example, recently classified massage parlors as health businesses, making them subject to regular inspections and other sanitation and safety requirements. Lawmakers in Illinois, New Jersey, Texas and a dozen other states are also weighing stricter regulations on the massage industry this year.

In Massachusetts, Healey backs proposed legislation to close a loophole that authorities say has allowed illegal spas to operate as unregulated "bodyworks" operations, despite passage of statewide massage parlor requirements in recent years.

At the city and county level, codes limiting operating hours for massage parlors or banning features like buzzer-controlled front doors and back-door entrances have been used in recent years to shutter hundreds of storefronts in San Francisco, San Jose and other parts of California. But officials acknowledge these local measures often just push the industry into neighboring communities without those requirements.

Federal and state prosecutors, meanwhile, have gone after the johns who post Yelp-style reviews about their massage parlor experiences on online message boards.

In the Seattle-area, for example, authorities shut down a local site called The Review Board and charged dozens of people, including reviewers and massage parlor operators, on prostitution-related offenses in 2016.

Larger massage parlor boards like Rubmaps, however, continue to operate, complain anti-trafficking activists.

The Department of Justice said federal sex trafficking legislation enacted last year empowers states to go after problematic sites. It also highlighted recent cases in which federal prosecutors shut down prostitution-related websites and brought charges against their owners, including last year's takedown of the notorious escort listing website Backpage.com.

For former massage parlor sex worker Jasmine Grace Marino, the solution is simple: End the demand for paid sex.

The 38-year-old New Hampshire resident says she was pressured to work at sites in Connecticut and Maine in her 20s by her then-boyfriend, who eventually became her pimp. She walked away after five years, wrote a book about her experience and also runs Bags of Hope, a Boston-based ministry that helps women who have been trafficked or are dealing with addiction or homelessness.

"Men need to have these conversations," Marino said. "Look at Robert Kraft. Even being billionaire and winning all those championships, he's still not satisfied and has to fill that need illegally. Something is broken in there for these men."

Follow Philip Marcelo at www.twitter.com/philmarcelo

Walmart is getting rid of greeters; disabled workers worried

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM, Associated Press

As Walmart moves to phase out its familiar blue-vested "greeters" at some 1,000 stores nationwide, disabled workers who fill many of those jobs say they're being ill-treated by a chain that styles itself as community-minded and inclusive.

Walmart told greeters around the country last week that their positions would be eliminated on April 26 in favor of an expanded, more physically demanding "customer host" role. To qualify, they will need to be able to lift 25-pound (11-kilogram) packages, climb ladders and stand for long periods.

That came as a heavy blow to greeters with cerebral palsy, spina bifida and other physical disabilities. For them, a job at Walmart has provided needed income, served as a source of pride and offered a connection to the community. Now Walmart, America's largest private employer, is facing a backlash as customers rally around some of the chain's most visible and beloved employees.

Walmart says it is striving to place greeters in other jobs at the company, but workers with disabilities are worried.

Donny Fagnano, 56, who has worked at Walmart for more than 21 years, said he cried when a manager at the store in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, called him into the office last week and told him his job was going away.

"I like working," he said. "It's better than sitting at home."

Fagnano, who has spina bifida, said he was offered a severance package. He hopes to stay on at Walmart and clean bathrooms instead.

Theresa Sours, an 81-year-old greeter with heart failure, said she desperately needs her Walmart job to help pay for her medicine and mortgage. Sours, of Stuart, Florida, who's worked for the chain for more than 18 years, said her manager told her they had no other openings suited to her ability.

"I never thought they would do this. I feel like I'm thrown to the wolves," Sours said. Her sister-in-law, Cecilia Appleby, was even more blunt: "They've done her wrong. They've done her absolutely wrong. They just don't like the handicapped."

Walmart greeters have been around for decades, allowing the retail giant to put a friendly face at the front of its stores. Then, in 2016, Walmart began replacing greeters with hosts, with responsibilities that include not only welcoming customers but helping with returns, checking receipts to deter shoplifters and keeping the front of the store clean. Walmart and other chains have been redefining roles at stores as they compete with Amazon.

The effect of the greeter phase-out on disabled and elderly employees — who have traditionally gravitated toward the role as one they were well-suited to doing — largely escaped public notice until last

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week, when Walmart launched a second round of cuts.

As word spread, first on social media and then in local and national news outlets, outraged customers began calling Walmart to complain. Tens of thousands of people signed petitions. Facebook groups sprang up with names like "Team Adam" and "Save Lesley." A second-grade class in California wrote letters to Walmart's CEO on behalf of Adam Catlin, a disabled greeter in Pennsylvania whose mother had written an impassioned Facebook post about his plight. Walmart said it has offered another job to Catlin.

In Galena, Illinois, hundreds of customers plan to attend an "appreciation parade" for Ashley Powell on her last day of work as a greeter.

"I love it, and I think I've touched a lot of people," said Powell, 34, who has an intellectual disability. She once rescued a 3-year-old boy who'd wandered into the parking lot and led him back to his parents at checkout.

In Vancouver, Washington, John Combs, 42, who has cerebral palsy, was devastated and then angered by his impending job loss. It had taken his family five years to find him a job he could do, and he loved the work, coming up with nicknames for all his co-workers.

"What am I going to do, just sit here on my butt all day in this house? That's all I'm going to do?" Combs asked his sister and guardian, Rachel Wasser. "I do my job. I didn't do anything wrong."

Wasser urged the retailer to "give these people a fair shake. ... If you want to make your actions match your words, do it. Don't be a wolf in sheep's clothing."

With the U.S. unemployment rate for disabled people more than twice that for workers without disabilities, Walmart has long been seen as a destination for people like Combs. Advocacy groups worry the company is backsliding.

"It's the messaging that concerns me," said Gabrielle Sedor, chief operations officer at ANCOR, a trade group representing service providers. "Given that Walmart is such an international leader in the retail space, I'm concerned this decision might suggest to some people that the bottom line of the company is more important to the company than inclusive communities. We don't think those two are mutually exclusive."

The greeter issue has already prompted at least three complaints to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as well as a federal lawsuit in Utah alleging discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Under the federal law, employers must provide "reasonable" accommodations to workers with disabilities.

Walmart did not disclose how many disabled greeters could lose their jobs. The company said that after it made the change at more than 1,000 stores in 2016, 80 to 85 percent of all affected greeters found other roles at Walmart. It did not reveal how many of them were disabled.

Last week, Walmart told greeters they would have the customary 60 days to land other jobs at the company. Amid the uproar, the company has extended the deadline indefinitely for greeters with disabilities.

"We recognize that our associates with physical disabilities face a unique situation," Walmart spokesman Justin Rushing said in a statement. The extra time, he said, will give Walmart a chance to explore how to accommodate such employees.

Walmart said it has already made offers to some greeters, including those with physical disabilities, and expects to continue doing so in the coming weeks.

But some workers say they have been tacitly discouraged from applying for other jobs.

Mitchell Hartzell, 31, a full-time Walmart greeter in Hazel Green, Alabama, said his manager told him "they pretty much didn't have anything in that store for me to do" after his job winds down in April. He said he persisted, approaching several assistant managers to ask about openings, and found out about a vacant position at self-checkout. But it had already been promised to a greeter who doesn't use a wheelchair, he said.

"It seems like they don't want us anymore," said Hartzell, who has cerebral palsy.

Jay Melton, 40, who has worked as a greeter in Marion, North Carolina, for nearly 17 years, loves church, Tar Heels basketball and Walmart. His sister-in-law, Jamie Melton, said the job is what gets him out of bed.

"He doesn't have a lot of things he does himself that bring him joy," she said. Addressing Walmart, Melton

added: "When you cut a huge population of people out, and you have written a policy that declares they are no longer capable of doing what they have been doing, that is discrimination."

Contrasts abound for 2 black women in Chicago mayoral runoff

By CARYN ROUSSEAU and COREY WILLIAMS, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A political outsider who campaigned on reforming Chicago's police department after a white officer's fatal shooting of a black teenager said Wednesday that voters likely had the high-profile case on their minds when they advanced her to an April runoff for mayor, assuring for the first time a black woman will lead the nation's third-largest city.

Former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot's first-place finish in Tuesday's opening round of voting was somewhat surprising considering the 14-candidate field featured prominent state and local leaders and a member of the Daley family that had dominated Chicago politics for more than half a century.

But former Commerce Secretary and White House chief of staff William Daley, whose father and brother both served two-decade stints as mayor, didn't even make it to the runoff to succeed Rahm Emanuel, who isn't seeking a third term.

Instead, Lightfoot's outsider candidacy will be matched up against the ultimate insider, Toni Preckwinkle — a longtime member of the City Council who now holds the top job in Cook County. They are both black women who campaigned as progressives, but that's largely where the similarities end.

Lightfoot rose to prominence after she was appointed to lead the Police Accountability Task Force in the wake of the death of Laquan McDonald. The black teenager was shot 16 times and killed by white police officer Jason Van Dyke, who was convicted and sentenced to about seven years in prison.

"To do honor to Laquan McDonald's short and tragic life we have to make significant changes in the way our police department, in particular, addresses communities of color," Lightfoot told The Associated Press.

Currently, black women serve as mayor of seven major cities. New Orleans; Charlotte, North Carolina; San Francisco; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, have all elected black women leaders for the first time in recent years. Atlanta, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., are also led by black women.

"Welcome to the Sisterhood!! Two African-American Women Are Headed for Runoff in Chicago's Mayor Race," Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms tweeted Tuesday night.

Black women have had successful mayoral races in smaller cities, too. Karen Weaver was elected Flint, Michigan's mayor as the city reeled from a lead-tainted water crisis while under state control. The issue galvanized black voters behind a reform candidacy much in the same way the McDonald shooting helped promote Lightfoot's campaign.

"We lift each other up and share a common bond," Weaver said of fellow black female mayors.

But Marcus Pohlmann, a political science professor at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, says the fact two black women finished on top in a crowded race doesn't necessarily mean the racially divided city has suddenly undergone a "progressive breakthrough." Combined, the two candidates barely topped a third of the vote — 17.5 percent for Lightfoot and 16 percent for Preckwinkle. A third black candidate, Willie Wilson, finished fourth in the race with 10 percent.

"I call it a historic opportunity," Pohlmann said. "Once the city recognizes that a black woman can do the job it does break some ice, it does break that glass ceiling and opens the door for more women to seriously be considered."

Blacks make up about a third of Chicago's population. The city has only elected one black mayor, Harold Washington Jr., who was elected in 1983 and died months into his second term. Washington's predecessor, Jane Byrne, is the only woman to serve in the job.

"Organizers campaigned around issues of education, racial economic equity, police accountability, and really young black women have largely been at the forefront of those community organizing efforts," said Elizabeth Todd-Breland, assistant professor of history at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

The growing black sorority of city leadership is part of the momentum around black women as candidates and voters across the country, as a key constituency in the Democratic Party. Black women are again ex-

pected to impact the 2020 election, with a diverse field of candidates that includes California Democratic Sen. Kamala Harris, who could become the first female president and second African-American.

Preckwinkle now leads one of the largest counties in the country but started her career spending a decade as a high school history teacher. She then was elected a Chicago alderman and did economic development work during the 1980s when Washington served as mayor.

Preckwinkle fared well, in part, in predominantly black areas on the city's South Side. Lightfoot, who is openly gay, got much of her support from wealthier, predominantly white areas along the northern shores of Lake Michigan.

Todd-Breland said having two black women in the runoff to become mayor of a city known for its segregated neighborhoods is historically significant, "given both the city's history of racism and marginalization of African-Americans."

Both women are becoming role models for expanding other women's perspectives and opportunities, Pohlmann said.

"I look at it more as breaking down stereotypes than necessarily assume that a woman is going to do something differently," he said.

___ Williams reported from Detroit. Errin Haines Whack contributed to this report from Philadelphia. AP video producer Noreen Nasir contributed from Chicago.

Amid clouds of dust, border wall prototypes are demolished

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A jackhammer reduced prototypes of President Donald Trump's prized border wall into piles of rubble Wednesday, a quick ending to an experiment that turned into a spectacle at times.

The four concrete and four steel panels, spaced closely together steps from an existing barrier separating San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, instantly became powerful symbols associated with the president and one of his top priorities when they went up 16 months ago.

For Trump's allies, the towering models were a show of his commitment to border security and making good on a core campaign promise. For detractors, they were monuments to wasted taxpayer dollars and a misguided display of aggression toward Mexico and immigrants seeking a new home in the United States.

Within about two hours, a hydraulic jackhammer on an excavator leveled seven prototypes. Concrete slabs crashed in small clouds of dust, steel panels were knocked over, and an owl flew out of a steel tube atop one panel just before it thundered down. The last prototype standing took a little more time to destroy.

U.S. officials say elements of the prototypes have been melded into current border fence designs and they were no longer needed.

Public access to the prototypes was blocked from the San Diego side, turning an impoverished Tijuana neighborhood into a popular spot for journalists, anti-wall demonstrators and curious observers. People climbed piles of trash against a short border fence that has since been replaced to get a clear view from Mexico.

Artists projected light shows on the walls from Mexico, with one message reading "Refugees Welcome Here" next to an image of the Statue of Liberty and another showing a silhouette jumping on a trampoline with a caption that read, "Use in Case of Wall." Demonstrators craned their necks for a view when Trump toured the prototypes 11 months ago.

Removal of prototypes made way to extend a second-layer barrier of steel poles topped by a metal plate rising 30 feet (9.1 meters) from the ground, the same design being used elsewhere on the border. The new barrier vaguely resembles some of the steel prototypes but looks nothing like the solid concrete panels, which were widely panned because border agents couldn't see what was happening on the other side.

The nearly \$3 billion that Congress has provided for barriers during the first half of Trump's term requires that money be spent on designs that were in place before May 2017, effectively prohibiting the prototypes from being used and denying Trump bragging rights to say he built his wall. It's unclear if the restriction would apply to the billions of dollars that Trump wants to spend by declaring a national emergency on the

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nation's southern border, which the House of Representatives voted this week to block.

The eight prototypes, which cost \$300,000 to \$500,000 each to build, vary by slopes, thickness and curves. Bidding guidelines called for them to withstand at least an hour of punishment from a sledgehammer, pickaxe, torch, chisel or battery-operated tools and to prevent use of climbing aids such as grappling hooks.

The guidelines also required they be "aesthetically pleasing" from the U.S. side. One had two shades of blue with white trim. The others were gray, tan or brown — in sync with the desert.

The Department of Homeland Security redirected \$20 million from its budget in February 2017, a month after Trump took office, to pay for the prototypes and smaller mock-ups built farther from the border that have also been dismantled. Open bidding generated a wide range of ideas, some of them whimsical or far-fetched. One bidder wanted a wall large enough for a deck that would offer tourists scenic views of the desert.

Bidders met fierce criticism from wall opponents. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico said any Mexican companies that expressed interest were betraying their country.

The government rigorously tested the designs and, according to a summary from the Government Accountability Office, found that the concrete walls posed "extensive" construction challenges and the others posed "substantial" or "moderate" challenges. Six of the eight would require extensive changes to accommodate drainage.

A Customs and Border Protection report, first reported by KPBS of San Diego, showed that each prototype could be breached using several different techniques but the heavily redacted version that was made public did not say how long it took.

Ross Wilkin, a Border Patrol spokesman, noted that authorities never claimed the prototypes would be impenetrable and that they simply wanted to know how much time it took to crack each one.

The appeal to private industry for ideas was a new approach to building barriers and provided many lessons to guide construction, he said. Authorities learned that certain materials were unsuitable for quick repairs and that combining different surfaces, like bollards topped by plates, were more effective.

A steel model with vertical U-shaped indentations could be jammed with pieces of wood and become a ladder, Wilkin said. Prototypes with exposed fasteners — like screws or bolts — could be broken with the right tools.

"They were tested and evaluated," Wilkin said. "They're not required anymore. It's time for them to go."

The new barrier replaces a steel-mesh fence that runs more than 12 miles (19 kilometers) from the Pacific Ocean, which worked like a fortress when it was built a decade ago but is now regularly breached with powerful battery-operated saws recently made available in home improvement stores. It will then extend another mile or so over the prototype site. SLSCO Ltd. of Galveston, Texas, won the \$101 million contract in December and started work last week.

Work on replacing the first-layer barrier, also with steel bollards and metal plates up to 30 feet high, runs the same length as the second layer and is nearly finished.

Illegal crossings have fallen dramatically in San Diego over the last 25 years as the government erected barriers and added agents. In the Tijuana neighborhood near the prototypes, Guillermina Fernandez briefly turned her patio into an informal restaurant about 15 years ago, once serving 200 sandwiches on a single order from a smuggler who fed his customers.

Smugglers dug small holes under the old fence for migrants to pass. Campfires warmed them while waiting for an opening to dart past border agents.

"It looked like a party here," said Fernandez, 54, who, like some neighbors, built her shack of plywood scraps on squatted land that she and her husband later bought.

Residents complain that outsiders illegally dump trash on their dirt roads that lack street lights. They tout one benefit of the new wall: The poles allow the Border Patrol's bright lights to seep in and provide some visibility at night.

___ AP writer Jill Colvin in Washington and photographer Gregory Bull in San Diego contributed to this report.

Worries that China trade talks are stalling weigh on stocks

By **DAMIAN J. TROISE** and **ALEX VEIGA**, AP Business Writers

Major U.S. stock indexes closed mostly lower Wednesday after wavering for much of the day between small gains and losses.

The downbeat finish extended the market's mild losses from a day earlier. Even so, the benchmark S&P 500 index is on track to end the month with a gain of more than 3 percent, extending the market's rebound over the last two months after a steep slide late last year.

"The market has quickly recovered back to the three prior tops that it had within the downturn," said Tom Martin, senior portfolio manager with Globalt Investments.

Health care, communications and technology companies took the heaviest losses Wednesday, while financial, industrial and energy stocks notched gains.

The market had veered lower early in the day after comments from a key U.S. trade negotiator stoked doubt over how much progress was being made on resolving the trade war between the U.S. and China.

The news overshadowed a mix of corporate earnings reports. Weight Watchers plunged to its lowest point in nearly two years after issuing a dismal forecast. Best Buy surged on surprisingly good holiday sales.

All told, the S&P 500 index dropped 1.52 points, or 0.1 percent, to 2,792.38. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gave up 72.82 points, or 0.3 percent, to 25,985.16. The Nasdaq composite gained 5.21 points, or 0.1 percent, to 7,554.51.

Smaller companies fared better than the broader market. The Russell 2000 index picked up 3.57 points, or 0.2 percent, to 1,581.05. Major indexes in Europe declined.

Stocks headed broadly lower in early trading Wednesday after U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer told a panel of lawmakers that "much still needs to be done" before the U.S. and China can reach an agreement. China has offered to make major purchases of U.S. goods, such as soybeans and natural gas, in a bid to resolve the conflict, but Lighthizer said such steps wouldn't be enough.

"The issues on the table are too serious to be resolved with promises of additional purchases," he said. "We need new rules."

Lighthizer's comments are "creating market nervousness", said Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco.

Negotiations between Washington and Beijing continue under the threat of additional tariffs on Chinese goods that could escalate the conflict and make products even more costly for consumers and companies.

President Donald Trump has postponed increasing tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods that would have been effective March 2. He has not given a new date for the higher tariffs if negotiations falter.

The main sticking point for the U.S. centers on ending cyber theft of commercial secrets, limits on state support for Chinese companies, and an end to the forced transfer of technology.

Investors continued to size up the latest batch of corporate earnings reports.

Weight Watchers plunged 34.5 percent after the weight-loss program operator gave investors a surprisingly weak forecast. The company did not sign up as many subscribers as it hoped this winter and expects its profits to suffer.

CEO Mindy Grossman said the company hopes to pull in more subscribers this spring, with high-profile investor Oprah Winfrey playing a central role in its upcoming TV and digital marketing campaign.

Dean Foods slid 13.8 percent after the food and beverage company reported a wider-than-expected loss in the fourth quarter and suspended its dividend.

Best Buy notched the biggest gain in the S&P 500, vaulting 14.1 percent after reporting that its holiday sales bucked a downward trend for retailers.

The electronics retailer's profit beat forecasts, but more importantly a key retail sales measure continued growing during a tough quarter for the industry. The company also raised its quarterly dividend by 11 percent and its board of directors approved a \$3 billion stock buyback program.

Other retailers also rose. Nordstrom added 3.7 percent, while Kohl's gained 2.5 percent.

Palo Alto Networks climbed 8.2 percent after the cybersecurity company's fiscal profit surged past ana-

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lysts' forecasts. The company also announced a \$1 billion stock buyback program.

Energy stocks finished higher, helped by rising oil prices. Concho Resources added 2.7 percent.

U.S. crude climbed 2.6 percent to settle at \$56.94 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 1.8 percent to close at \$66.39 a barrel in London.

Bond prices fell. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note rose to 2.69 percent from 2.63 percent late Tuesday.

The dollar declined to 110.04 yen from 110.51 yen on Tuesday. The euro weakened to \$1.1370 from \$1.1395.

Gold fell 0.5 percent to \$1,321.20 an ounce. Silver dropped 1 percent to \$15.77 an ounce. Copper rose 0.4 percent to \$2.96 a pound.

In other energy futures trading, wholesale gasoline jumped 3 percent to \$1.63 a gallon. Heating oil rose 1.2 percent to \$2.02 a gallon. Natural gas gained 0.1 percent to \$2.80 per 1,000 cubic feet.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 28, the 59th day of 2019. There are 306 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 28, 1942, the heavy cruiser USS Houston and the Australian light cruiser HMAS Perth were attacked by Japanese forces during the World War II Battle of Sunda Strait; both were sunk shortly after midnight on March 1 with a total loss of more than 1,000 men.

On this date:

In 1844, a 12-inch gun aboard the USS Princeton exploded as the ship was sailing on the Potomac River, killing Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur, Navy Secretary Thomas W. Gilmer and several others.

In 1849, the California gold rush began in earnest as regular steamship service started bringing gold-seekers to San Francisco.

In 1911, President William Howard Taft nominated William H. Lewis to be the first black Assistant Attorney General of the United States.

In 1917, The Associated Press reported that the United States had obtained a diplomatic communication sent by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to a German official in Mexico proposing a German alliance with Mexico and Japan should the U.S. enter World War I. (Outrage over the telegram helped propel America into the conflict.)

In 1953, scientists James D. Watson and Francis H.C. Crick announced they had discovered the double-helix structure of DNA.

In 1958, a school bus clipped a truck near Prestonsburg, Kentucky, and plunged down an embankment into the Big Sandy River; 22 children managed to escape, but 26 other children and the bus driver drowned.

In 1975, 42 people were killed in London's Underground when a train smashed into the end of a tunnel.

In 1988, the 15th Olympic Winter Games held its closing ceremony in Calgary, Canada.

In 1993, a gun battle erupted at a religious compound near Waco, Texas, when Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents tried to arrest Branch Davidian leader David Koresh on weapons charges; four agents and six Davidians were killed as a 51-day standoff began.

In 1995, Denver International Airport opened after 16 months of delays and \$3.2 billion in budget overruns.

In 1996, Britain's Princess Diana agreed to divorce Prince Charles. (Their 15-year marriage officially ended in August 1996; Diana died in a car crash in Paris a year after that.)

In 2013, Benedict XVI became the first pope in 600 years to resign, ending an eight-year pontificate. (Benedict was succeeded the following month by Pope Francis.) Bradley Manning, the Army private arrested in the biggest leak of classified information in U.S. history, pleaded guilty at Fort Meade, Maryland, to 10 charges involving illegal possession or distribution of classified material. (Manning, who later adopted the female identity Chelsea Manning, was sentenced to up to 35 years in prison after being convicted of ad-

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ditional charges in a court-martial, but had her sentence commuted in 2017 by President Barack Obama.)

Ten years ago: Paul Harvey, the news commentator and talk-radio pioneer whose staccato style made him one of the nation's most familiar voices, died in Phoenix at age 90. Oakland Raiders linebacker Marquis Cooper, free-agent NFL defensive lineman Corey Smith and former South Florida player William Bleakley died when their boat overturned in rough seas off the coast of Florida.

Five years ago: Delivering a blunt warning to Moscow, President Barack Obama expressed deep concern over reported military activity inside Ukraine by Russia and warned "there will be costs" for any intervention.

One year ago: Walmart announced that it would no longer sell firearms and ammunition to people younger than 21 and would remove items resembling assault-style rifles from its website. Dick's Sporting Goods said it would stop selling assault-style rifles, and ban the sale of all guns to anyone under 21. Students and teachers returned under police guard to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as classes resumed for the first time since the shooting that killed 17 people. President Donald Trump called for substantial changes to the nation's gun laws, criticizing lawmakers for being fearful of the National Rifle Association. Political leaders paid tribute to the Rev. Billy Graham as his casket rested in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. West Virginia's House approved a 5 percent pay raise to end a week-long walkout by teachers. White House communications director Hope Hicks, one of President Donald Trump's most trusted aides, abruptly announced her resignation.

Today's Birthdays: Architect Frank Gehry is 90. Actor Gavin MacLeod is 88. Singer Sam the Sham is 82. Actor-director-dancer Tommy Tune is 80. Hall of Fame auto racer Mario Andretti is 79. Actor Frank Bonner is 77. Actress Kelly Bishop is 75. Actress Stephanie Beacham is 72. Writer-director Mike Figgis is 71. Actress Mercedes Ruehl is 71. Actress Bernadette Peters is 71. Former Energy Secretary Steven Chu is 71. Actress Ilene Graff is 70. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman is 66. Comedian Gilbert Gottfried is 64. Basketball Hall of Famer Adrian Dantley is 64. Actor John Turturro is 62. Rock singer Cindy Wilson is 62. Actress Rae Dawn Chong is 58. Actress Maxine Bahns is 50. Actor Robert Sean Leonard is 50. Rock singer Pat Monahan is 50. Author Daniel Handler (aka "Lemony Snicket") is 49. Actress Tasha Smith is 48. Actor Rory Cochrane is 47. Actress Ali Larter is 43. Country singer Jason Aldean is 42. Actor Geoffrey Arend is 41. Actress Melanie Chandra (TV: "Code Black") is 35. Actress Michelle Horn is 32. Actress True O'Brien is 25. Actress Madisen Beaty is 24. Actress Quinn Shephard is 24. Actor Bobb'e J. Thompson is 23.

Thought for Today: "Who will give me back those days when life had wings and flew just like a skylark in the sky." — Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, French actress and poet (1786-1859).

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