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Chicken Soup
for the Soul.

Only surround
yourself with
people who lift
you higher.

-Oprah

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East
Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers
and aluminum cans.

Click on Ad to sign up!



Greenhouse Raffle

Prizes are:
Greenhouse (12'x7.5', 2 shelves, 2 outlets, light)
Hunting Blind (Hexigon with 6 shooting windows)
Free delivery within 20 miles
2 Dairy Queen \$50 Gift Cards

**Need not be present to win. \$10 Donation
Drawing to be held April 15th**

**Contact any Robotics member for a ticket or
call Jim Lane at 605/397-7013.**

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Lana's Annals

**Lana
Greenfield
District 2
State
Representative**

Had that happened, we would not have a balanced budget and would stand to lose our bond rating. This would have caused some serious problems. The fact was that the money had been appropriated for the pheasant habitat, so killing the bill was a doomed option. After all arguments were done, and all of the "cards were on the table," we successfully passed what should have been such an easy change. The only thing we did in between bills was to approve a legislative calendar for next year. Even that was somewhat debated. Maybe it was just the English teacher coming out in me (remember I taught this subject for 37 years), but as we had the debate about the days we would have session, I decided that a committee had worked hard to try to come up with a fair calendar, so protests became "Much Ado About Nothing," one of Shakespeare's plays, and it seemed to be a qualified thought at this moment in time.

I am happy with our accomplishments this year. The big winner was the nursing homes and community service providers, a priority of most of the members. Pro-life legislation also passed with flying colors, college students can speak freely anywhere on campus (HB1087) instead of having "safe zones" where one can express free speech. I will be monitoring this one, making certain the colleges are not punishing students for opinions that are contrary to some professors or any liberal radical groups that intend to silence others. If this new law is not followed, I would favor de-funding of certain campuses and/or programs where necessary. Never in my life would I have dreamed that such communistic thinking would occur on our South Dakota institutions of higher learning. Some of the others I mentioned last week as well such as the 2.5 per cent raises of our public school teachers and special education, permit less carry, and our proactive bills to prevent the state from incurring huge costs associated with rioting and destructive groups coming to protest the pipeline. Remember that many of these are paid

Greetings to all. This past week we finished our legislative business of the session. On Friday we reviewed two style and form vetoes, simply because HB1186, a repeal of the juvenile detention cost-sharing fund, and SB176, a pro- pheasant habitat bill, both had to add specific dates so that the year of enactment would be clear. In both cases, the effective date should have been June 28, 2019. These quickly passed the Senate, and HB1186 was no problem in the House. However, SB176 was quite the opposite. Some said that the bill(i.e. the date) created new language and should not be passed. The discord continued for the next 5 hours. Some anti-pheasant bill people still were interested in using this as an opportunity to kill the entire bill.

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Truss Pros

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New Starting Competitive Wages
Overtime Available

BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Comprehensive Health, Dental & Vision insurance
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- STD
- LTD
- 401k
- Holiday Pay
- Vacation Pay
- Paid Sick Leave
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To apply visit www.uslbn.com/careers or call Diane at 605-448-2929.

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protestors from other states so whoever is hiring them to hop a bus, carry a sign, and /or get arrested for an added bonus should be responsible for paying for any and all damages incurred. That is what these bills would accomplish. HB1103 will give added protection to machinery (lemon law bill) owners. Now they can get repairs done as requested within the year that the product was purchased.

As I finish this, my heart is sad that many of you are fighting huge battles: water has become the enemy and has destroyed some houses and livestock. It has destroyed our roads and bridges, plus has washed away good topsoil. To keep things in perspective, though, we have always faced challenges in our rural state, and we have always gotten through it. We do not need praise; we just get things done!

With that, I will sign out. Thank you for staying in touch, for your input and expertise on subjects about which I inquired, for your faith in my ability to do the right thing for our area and state. I am truly honored to be your representative.

Sincerely,
Rep. Lana Greenfield



**4255 6th Ave
SE, Aberdeen**

Hi, my name is Bary Keith, a Groton resident. I have just recently joined the Harr Motors sales team. I'm excited to start helping people get into the right vehicle for them. Right now, any vehicle purchased from me, until the end of April, will receive an Autostart at no charge. Give me a call (605-216-6952) or (605-725-8624) or stop out and see me at Harr Motors today!!!

THINKING ABOUT HEALTH

By Trudy Lieberman, Rural Health News Service

Drug company payments to doctors may influence prescription choices

Recently Peggy, an Indiana woman and reader of this column, sent me a lengthy email about her 94-year-old mother who is rapidly spending down her minimal savings to pay for prescription drugs.

Peggy didn't hold out much hope that prices would come down before it was too late for her mom. But she succeeded in lowering her mom's drug costs and what she learned along the way can be helpful to others strapped by high pharmaceutical bills.

Her mother is typical of many women in old age who have only a tiny financial cushion to absorb the continual price hikes imposed by the drug makers. She was raised during the Depression, didn't work much outside the home, lived in a condo her son bought, and then moved to an assisted living facility almost two years ago.

The facility's \$3,100 monthly fee plus drug copays bit into her savings, which totaled about \$30,000 when she moved to assisted living. Government benefits earned by Peggy's father who served in the Korean War, a very small pension from a former employer, and Social Security benefits cover all but about \$600 of the assisted living fee. The rest comes from her savings, which now are about half of what they were in 2017.

While most of her mother's drug copays and other out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses have been manageable, Peggy explained it was the \$313 copay for a three-month supply of a well-known, heavily advertised blood thinner a cardiologist had ordered that was the biggest culprit causing her mother's savings to shrink.

That was the price her mom was paying when she hit Medicare's infamous donut hole last year.

Peggy said every time her mom visited the physician, the doctor told her she was lucky to take the expensive blood thinner instead of the other "stuff" which he called "rat poison" implying a cheaper drug was inferior, even dangerous. Peggy said at every visit he told her that she was fortunate to be taking something better.

Then a family member discovered openpaymentsdata.cms.gov, a database maintained by the Medicare program that reveals the amounts of money pharmaceutical companies pay to doctors in speaking and consulting fees, in research fees and for food and drink expenses. Her mom's cardiologist had received nearly \$80,000.

Peggy had a bad feeling about the doctor and switched her mom to another physician who kept her on the high-priced drug for a couple months. Then she was diagnosed with anemia, taken off blood thinners and prescribed low-dose aspirin.

In the meantime, Peggy's husband had a heart attack and developed a blood clot. His doctor prescribed a low-cost blood thinner that's been on the market for years. She said he's doing just fine on the "rat poison" disparaged by her mother's first doctor. His cost: a \$6 copay every 30 days.

For a long time impartial medical experts have thought that the choice of drugs and devices may be related to payments doctors receive from drug and device companies.

Since 2014 the Physician Payments Sunshine Act requires drug and device makers to report to the government the payments they make to doctors. The Medicare database is a treasure trove of some 11 million payments to physicians.

The online publication ProPublica found that drug and device makers gave more than one billion to doctors and hospitals from August 2013 to the end of 2016. Some of them have received payments totaling millions of dollars.

However, the drug and device database may be one of health care's best-kept secrets.

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A study published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) found that only about 3 percent of respondents said they knew if their own doctor had received payments from the medical industry. Unlike Peggy's family they had no idea that Medicare's Open Payments database existed.

Most Americans don't readily switch doctors sometimes - even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the doctors performed badly. The Lown Institute, a Boston medical think tank, reporting on the BMJ study, concluded, "maybe we should be more open to switching doctors based on their relationship with industry."

Peggy had some advice of her own: "Do the research. Did the doctor receive money to push the drug? Ask questions? How much does the drug cost? Is it really a better alternative?"

Do you have an experience about health insurance you'd like to share or a question you'd like to ask? Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com.

Community Events

Monday, April 1, 2019

7:00pm: School Board Cracker Barrel, GHS Arena

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Cancelled: Varsity Track Meet @ Ipswich High School

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

Sunday, April 7, 2019

Pops Concert at Groton Area High School

2:00 PM and 7:00 PM

Silver Skates Annual Meeting

Does your child enjoy ice skating?

Do you like to see community traditions continue?

Do you have creative or organizational talents waiting to be shared with others?

Please join us for the Carnival of Silver Skates annual meeting on Wednesday, May 1 at 7:00 p.m. at the warming house.

NEVER DRIVE AROUND BARRICADES

Most flood fatalities
occur in vehicles

12 inches of fast-moving
water can sweep a car
off the road

ROAD
CLOSED



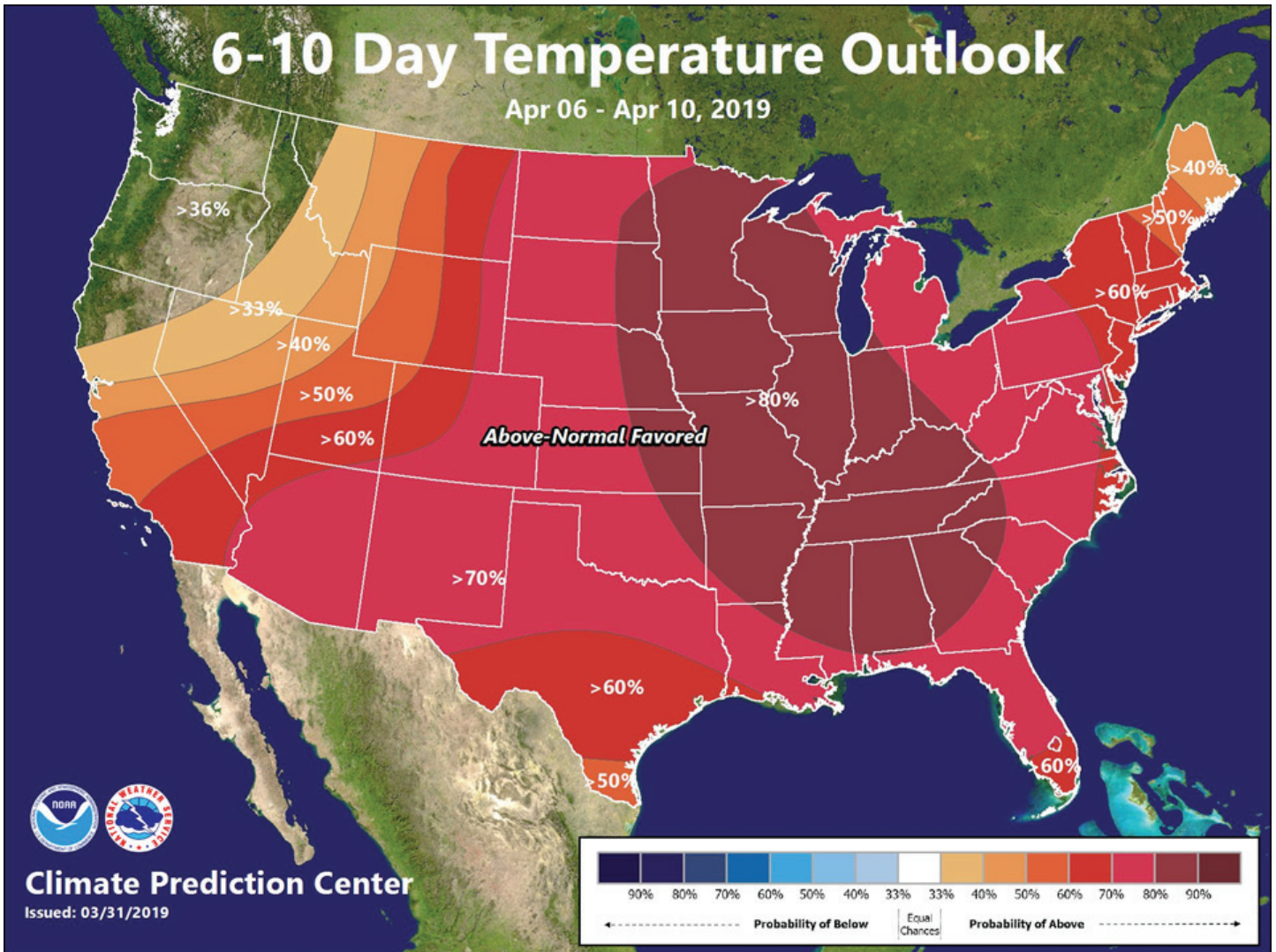
[weather.gov/flood](https://www.weather.gov/flood)

Published on: 03/31/2019 at 2:00AM

Do you know what lies beneath the water's surface? Turn around, don't drown!

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Widespread above average temperatures are forecast across the region beginning Friday April 5th. What's considered average for this April 5-10th time-frame across central/northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota? Highs in the low to mid 50s!

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Today in Weather History

April 1, 1960: Heavy snow of 4 to 10 inches fell in the eastern half of South Dakota. Some highways were closed mainly due to the difficulty of plowing the heavy, wet snow. Power and phone failures of short duration were caused by the snowfall in the Aberdeen area, which received 7.5 inches, setting the record for April 1st. Snow with high water content aggravated floods that were currently in progress on the James, Vermillion and Big Sioux Rivers.

April 1, 2011: Snowmelt flooding in March continued across much of central and northeast South Dakota as the rest of the snowpack melted into early April. Many roads along with many acres of crop and pastureland remained flooded. Roads, culverts, and bridges were damaged across the region. Several roads were washed out with many closed. Many homes were threatened with some surrounded by water. Rising lake levels in northeast South Dakota also threatened and flooded many homes. Many people had to use four-wheelers to get to their homes. A Presidential Disaster was declared for all counties due to the flooding damage. The total damage estimates, including March, were from 4.5 to 5 million dollars for the area. The flooding diminished across much of the area into May. The snowmelt flooding damaged many roads and highways, including U.S. Highway 81, throughout Hamlin County. Many roads were closed throughout the county. In the late evening of April 13th on U.S Highway 81, a car with four people inside went through a flooded area at a high rate of speed and ended up in the flooded ditch. They all got out with no injuries. The snowmelt runoff caused Lake Kampeska to rise to nearly 44 inches overfull. The lake flooded several roads and also threatened many homes. Sandbagging was done to hold off the rising lake. Waves and ice chunks did eventually do some damage to homes. Also, many boat lifts were damaged. Mud Creek near Rauville also went slightly above the flood stage of 9 feet to 9.64 feet for a couple of days in early April.

1875: The London Times published the first daily newspaper weather map. The first American newspaper weather map would be issued on 5/12/1876 in the New York Herald. Weather maps would first appear on a regular basis beginning on 5/9/1879 in the New York Daily Graphic.

1912 - A tornado with incredible velocity ripped into downtown Houston, TX, breaking the water table and giving the city its first natural waterspout. (The Weather Channel)

1923 - Residents in the eastern U.S. awoke on "April Fool's Day" to bitterly cold temperatures. The mercury plunged to -34 degrees at Bergland MI and to 16 degrees in Georgia. (David Ludlum)

1960: The first weather satellite, TIROS 1 (Television and Infra-Red Observation Satellite) began sending pictures back to Earth. The TIROS series would have little benefit to operational weather forecasters because the image quality was low and inconsistent. The most critical understanding achieved from the new technology was the discovery of the high degree of organization of large-scale weather systems, a fact never apparent from ground and aircraft observations.

1973: A tornado touches down near Brentsville, Virginia, then traveled to Fairfax hitting Woodson High School. This F2 tornado injured 37 and caused \$14 million in damage.

1987 - Forty-five cities across the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 37 degrees at Apalachicola FL, 34 degrees at Jacksonville FL, 30 degrees at Macon GA, and 22 degrees at Knoxville TN, were records for April. (The National Weather Summary)






1987 - A tornado touched down briefly during a snow squall on the south shore of White Fish Bay (six miles northwest of Bay Mills WI). A mobile home was unroofed and insulation was sucked from its walls. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A powerful spring storm produced 34 inches of snow at Rye CO, 22 inches at Timpas OK, 19 inches at Sharon Springs KS, and up to 35 inches in New Mexico. Severe thunderstorms associated with the same storm spawned a tornado which caused 2.5 million dollars damage at East Mountain TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)






1989 - Up to six inches of snow blanketed the Adirondacks of eastern New York State and the Saint Lawrence Valley of Vermont. Up to a foot of snow blanketed the Colorado Rockies. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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| Today | Tonight | Tuesday | Tuesday Night | Wednesday |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Patchy Fog then Cloudy | Mostly Cloudy | Partly Sunny | Mostly Clear | Sunny |
| High: 40 °F | Low: 26 °F | High: 47 °F | Low: 22 °F | High: 43 °F |

End of Week Warm Up

| Today | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Rain and Snow | | Rain and Snow south of Pierre | Rain and Snow north central | |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 38 to 44° | H: 44-54° L: 26-31° | H: 42-48° L: 21-31° | H: 46-57° L: 25-32° | H: 57-70° L: 32-38° |

A weak system will bring light rain and snow today mainly across central SD where up to an inch of snow may accumulate. Temperatures will warm up by the end of the week with 70 degree readings possible in south central SD on Friday.

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Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 47 °F at 3:49 PM

Low Outside Temp: 23 °F at 2:30 AM

High Gust: 29 mph at 10:48 AM

Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 80° in 1928

Record Low: 0° in 1899

Average High: 49°F

Average Low: 26°F

Average Precip in Mar.: 1.16

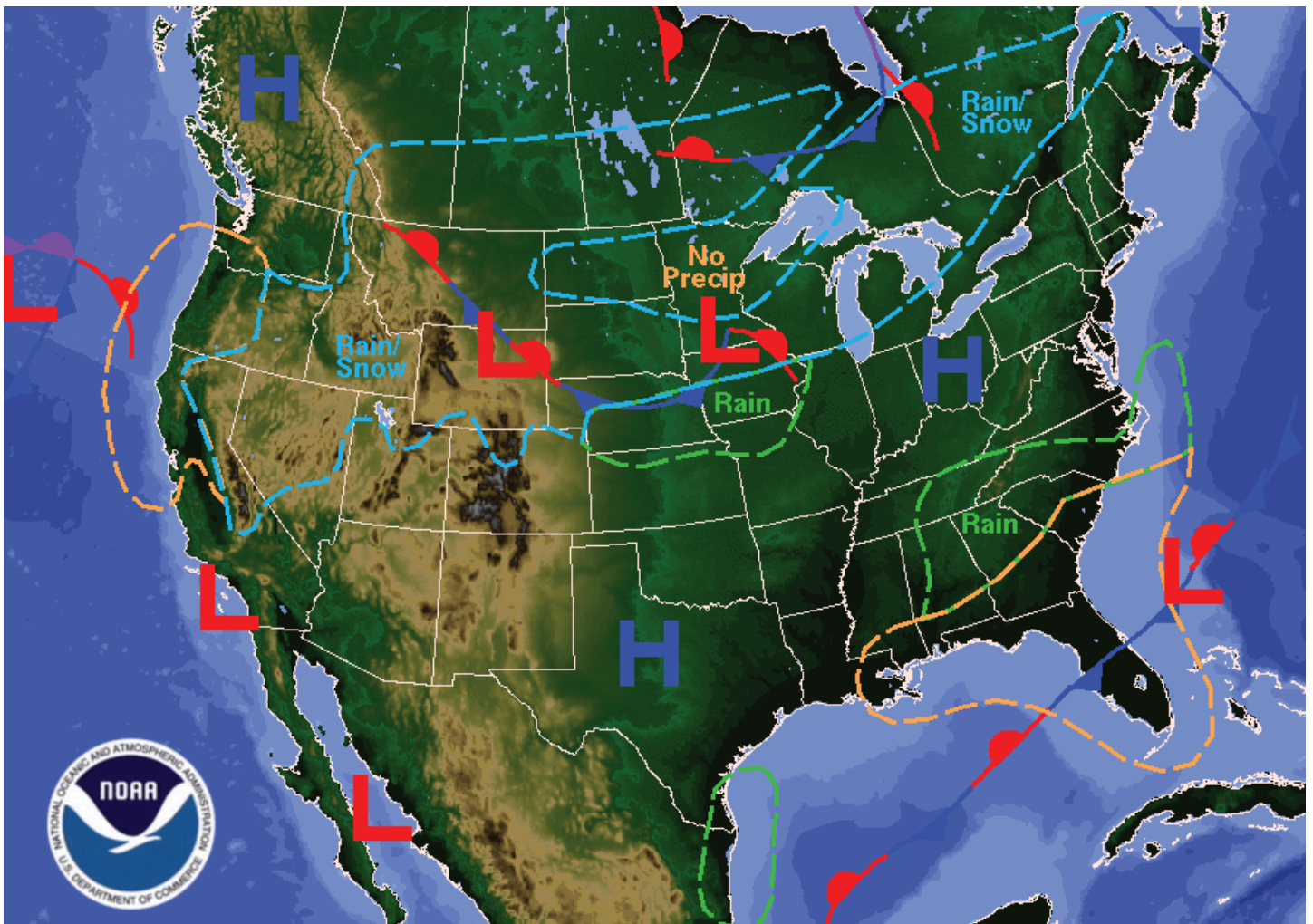
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.87

Average Precip to date: 2.18

Precip Year to Date: 3.06

Sunset Tonight: 8:02 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:13 a.m.



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Mon, Apr 01, 2019, issued 4:57 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

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

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COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Right choices are sometimes obvious, occasionally hidden, perhaps difficult, unfortunately painful, and every now and then, when least expected, pleasant and rewarding. However, one fact never changes: with every choice we make there is a consequence that comes with it. Sometimes when we make a choice, the results may surprise us or others. Nevertheless, there are always consequences that can be enjoyable or exciting, painful and perplexing.

Frequently the consequence of a choice is known at the time we make our decision. Other times it is wait and see. But we all know that payday will come someday.

In the ninth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon carefully compares and contrasts the differences between a woman who is wise, and a woman who is foolish or wicked. Both offer an invitation to a feast they have prepared. Both are inviting people to enjoy their company. Both are sitting in a place of prominence where they can be seen and heard, recognized and rewarded.

Wisdom, on the one hand, lacks nothing - it is complete, perfect, and readily available. Yet, wisdom must be pursued with lifelong diligence. It is a never-ending quest that eventually brings insight, will add joy, satisfaction, and ultimately, peace to life.

Folly, or wickedness, on the other hand appeals to the senses, and even a moment of ecstasy following a time of excitement. It is temporary, though enjoyable, and seems to gratify some basic need. Folly has no future and is short lived. It brings no lasting satisfaction. It will provide an interlude of escape, but ends in destruction and death.

Choices determine the outcome of life. Choose wisely. Choose Gods wisdom

Prayer: Father, our choices are eternal. May we choose wisely. May we choose life. May we choose You. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 9:1 and 3 Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars. She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/27/2019 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 03/17/2019 Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
- 04/13/2019 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/27/2019 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 05/04/2019 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/27/2019 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Program (Memorial Day)
- 06/13/2019 Transit Fundraiser (Thursday Mid-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
- 06/22-23/2019 Groton Junior Legion Tournament
- 06/29/2019 Groton U10/U12 Round Robin Tournament
- 07/04/2019 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
- 07/14/2019 Summer Fest/Car Show (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/18/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Tournament
- 07/21/2019 Granary Ice Cream Social & Family Music Fest
- 08/02/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Wine on Nine
- 08/09-11/2019 State Junior Legion Tournament in Groton
- 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
- 09/08/2019 Granary Living History Fall Festival
- 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 (Halloween)
- 11/09/2019 Legion Post #39 Turkey Shoot (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 12/07/2019 Olive Grove Golf Course Holiday Party
- 12/07/2019 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
- Bingo: every Wednesday, Labor Day-Memorial Day, 6:30pm at the Legion Post #39

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 4/4/2020 Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 4/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 5/2/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)

News from the Associated Press

Survey suggests more economic growth for Midwest, Plains

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A new report says a March survey of business supply managers is signaling solid economic growth over the next three to six months for nine Midwest and Plains states.

The report issued Monday says the Mid-America Business Conditions Index hit its highest level since August, 58.2, compared with 57.9 in February. The January figure was 56.0.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss oversees the survey, and he says even stronger growth was hampered by international trade disputes and the global economic slowdown.

The survey results are compiled into a collection of indexes ranging from zero to 100. Survey organizers say any score above 50 suggests growth. A score below that suggests decline.

The survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

3 killed in Cass County crash identified

TOWER CITY, N.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified three people killed in eastern North Dakota in a head-on collision followed by another crash.

The Highway Patrol says the driver of a van, 40-year-old Matthew Wipf and two passengers, 43-year-old Kathy Wipf and 46-year-old Dorothy Decker, were killed when a teenager driving an SUV crossed the center line on Cass County Highway 10 late Friday night. Two others in the van and the 16-year-old driver of the SUV were injured.

Shortly after head-on collision, a 37-year-old man from Utica, South Dakota, driving a pickup, crashed into the SUV. He wasn't hurt, but was arrested for drunken driving and possession of marijuana.

The Wipfs were from Tower City and Decker was from Ipswich, South Dakota.

6-year-old girl dies in fall from cliff near Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a 6-year-old girl is dead after falling from the top of Falling Rock west of Rapid City.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office says the girl's fall from the cliff apparently was an accident. It happened around noon Mountain time Sunday.

Authorities say the body is being held pending further investigation. No other details were immediately released.

South Dakota students learn about science jobs on field trip

ROSCOE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota high school students traveled to the Mississippi bayou to learn about careers with the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration.

About 11 students from Edmunds Central High School in Roscoe in March had the chance to see crocodiles, survey the marsh habitat and dissect a shark during a school field trip, the Aberdeen American News reported.

The six-day trip included time at the administration's Southeast Fisheries Science Center, lessons at the University of Southern Mississippi Marine Education Center, ship tours and habitat surveys.

The goal was to show students different careers in science, said Spencer Cody, a science teacher at the high school.

"My hope is that they expanded their horizons to different careers in science, that they consider other options than what they were already aware of," he said.

The administration is often associated with the National Weather Service, but it also manages fisheries and conducts a variety of research, Cody said. Students prepared reports about the administration's vari-

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ous careers, and then updated the papers after the trip with what they learned, he said.

Cody said he was inspired to start planning the trip after hearing about a program that brought scientists to classrooms to talk about their jobs.

"They were talking about how expensive that is, and I was like, 'Well, for the same price or cheaper we could bring some students from Edmunds Central down to the Gulf Coast and they could experience some of the science they do down there,'" he said, noting that a grant was used to cover the cost of the trip.

Junior Chandler Pullman said he enjoyed the experience and being able to see how the environments in Mississippi and South Dakota differ.

"I got plenty of pictures, memories and knowledge," he said.

Information from: Aberdeen American News, <http://www.aberdeennews.com>

Officials say rapper Nipsey Hussle shot and killed at 33

By MESFIN FEKADU and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nipsey Hussle, a respected rapper who earned a Grammy nomination this year for his major-label debut, was fatally shot outside his clothing store, authorities said. He was 33.

Police said Hussle was one of three men shot Sunday outside Marathon Clothing, his store in South Los Angeles; the other two were in stable condition. A large crowd gathered outside the store as night fell. Detectives were canvassing the area for witnesses and looking to see if any surveillance video captured the shooting, police Lt. Chris Ramirez said.

Mayor Eric Garcetti was among the many people expressing condolences.

"Our hearts are with the loved ones of Nipsey Hussle and everyone touched by this awful tragedy. L.A. is hurt deeply each time a young life is lost to senseless gun violence," Garcetti tweeted. "My Crisis Response Team is assisting the families coping with shock and grief."

Hussle, who had two children and was engaged to actress Lauren London, was an Eritrean-American whose real name was Ermias Asghedom.

"This doesn't make any sense! My spirit is shaken by this!," Rihanna wrote while posting photos of Hussle with his daughter and another with his fiance. "Dear God may His spirit Rest In Peace and May You grant divine comfort to all his loved ones! I'm so sorry this happened to you @nipseyhussle."

Hussle was born on Aug. 15, 1985, in the Crenshaw neighborhood of south Los Angeles. He said his first passion was music but getting resources was tough after leaving his mother's house at 14 to live with his grandmother. Hussle said he got involved in street life as he tried to support himself, and he joined the gang Rollin 60's Neighborhood Crips as a teenager.

"The culture of my area is the gang culture," he explained in a 2014 interview with VladTV. "So by being outside, being involved with hustling, being in the hood, doing things to try to get money, being young, you know riding your bike through the hood, getting shot at, your loved ones and homies that's your age getting killed, getting shot at ... it's like, we were just raised like if you with me and something goes now, I'm in it, whether I'm from the (expletive) or not ... So after a while it just be like you always in the middle of some (expletive), you might as well, you know what I mean ... be part of it. Or don't be a part of it and get the (expletive) out the way."

Music eventually happened for Hussle. He released a number of successful mixtapes that he sold out of the trunk of his car, helping him create a buzz and gain respect from rap purists and his peers. In 2010 he placed on hip-hop magazine XXL's "Freshman Class of 2010" — a coveted list for up-and-coming hip-hop acts — alongside J. Cole Big Sean, Wiz Khalifa, Jay Rock and others.

The proud West Coast rapper continued to build more hype for himself, scoring big when Jay-Z bought 100 copies of his 2013 mixtape "Crenshaw" for \$100 each, and sent him a \$10,000 check.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Hussle and rapper YG released the protest song "FDT," short for "(Expletive) Donald Trump." He later hit a new peak with "Victory Lap," his critically acclaimed major-label debut album on Atlantic Records that made several best-of lists last year, from Billboard magazine to

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Complex. The album debuted at No. 4 on Billboard's 200 albums charts and featured collaborations with Kendrick Lamar, Diddy, CeeLo Green and more.

At this year's Grammy Awards, "Victory Lap" was one of five nominees for best rap album in a year that hip-hop dominated the pop charts and streaming services and a number of top stars released projects, including Drake, Eminem and Kanye West. Cardi B's "Invasion of Privacy" won the honor last month, while the other nominees were Travis Scott, Pusha T and Mac Miller.

"It's my debut album so for my first one (to be nominated) out the gate, it's like, it was overwhelming a little bit. It was ... inspiring, humbling," he said in an interview with the Recording Academy on the red carpet of the 2019 Grammys, which he attended with this daughter.

Many celebrities were mourning his death on social media. NBA star Steph Curry tweeted, "God please cover and restore @NipseyHussle right now!!!"

Snoop Dogg posted a video of himself and Hussle together on Instagram, and posted a second clip sending prayers to the rapper's family.

"Prayers out to the whole family man. This (stuff has) got to stop man," he said in the second video.

Rapper Nas mourned Hussle's death on Instagram and wrote, "It's dangerous to be an MC. Dangerous to be a b-ball player. It's dangerous to have money. Dangerous To Be A Black Man."

"So much hatred. We live like our brothers and sisters in third world countries live. Right in America," Nas continued. "It's so deep rooted. It's not a easy fix. Hard to fix anything when kids are still living in poverty. I ain't shutting up though, Nipsey is a True voice. He will never be silenced."

Outside of music, Hussle said he wanted to provide hope and motivation to those who grew up in Crenshaw like him, and pay it forward. Forbes magazine reported in February that with business partner Dave Gross, the rapper had purchased the Crenshaw plaza where his Marathon Clothing store is located, and had plans to knock it down and "rebuild it as a six-story residential building atop a commercial plaza where a revamped Marathon store will be the anchor tenant."

"Watching Nipsey inspired me to invest and own in our communities," Emmy-nominated actress Issa Rae, also from Los Angeles, wrote on Twitter.

Fekadu reported from New York.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

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

1. 'I AM HAPPY'

A Vietnamese woman suspected in the killing of the Kim Jong Un's half brother pleads guilty to a lesser charge in a Malaysian court and could be freed next month.

2. WHAT SOME DEMOCRATS ARE SAYING ABOUT BIDEN

They're questioning whether the former vice president, accused by a Nevada politician for unwelcome contact, is too out of step to run a successful 2020 presidential campaign.

3. RAP LOSES A RISING STAR

Nipsey Hussle, the skilled and respected rapper who earned a Grammy nomination this year, is gunned down outside his L.A. clothing store, authorities say.

4. HAMAS MAINTAINS FIRM GRIP ON GAZA

Despite wars, protests and local unrest, the Islamic militant group's rule over the blockaded territory is stronger than ever, partly thanks to Israel.

5. SENATE SHOWDOWN VOTE ON DISASTER RELIEF LOOMS

Trump feels antipathy toward the U.S. territory's government, and Senate Republicans are rebuffing Democratic demands for more aid for hurricane-wracked Puerto Rico.

6. KAMALA HARRIS' CALL FOR REFORM COLLIDES WITH HER PAST

The White House hopeful vows to overhaul the criminal justice system, but AP finds that as an official in

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California's justice system she often opted for a careful approach or defended the status quo.

7. TURKISH PRESIDENT DEALT SETBACK

Recep Tayyip Erdogan declares victory in municipal elections but the opposition's success in key cities deals a significant blow to his party's dominance.

8. TRAVELERS CARRY THE DARNDDEST THINGS

A perfume bottle shaped like a grenade and a guitar shaped like a semi-automatic rifle are just some of the items showcased on the TSA's social media accounts.

9. A 'SYMBOL OF GREED'

A new biography of former first lady Barbara Bush finds that her disdain for the current president dates as least as far back as a 1990s diary entry.

10. SEC NO LONGER JUST A FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

With Auburn off to the Final Four, the conference earned at least \$32.1 million from the NCAA — just behind the Big Ten and ACC.

Biden says he doesn't believe he's acted inappropriately

By JULIE PACE and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Vice President Joe Biden on Sunday defended his interactions with women, saying he doesn't believe he's ever acted inappropriately. But a Nevada politician's assertion that Biden's kiss on the back of her head made her feel uncomfortable prompted some Democrats to question whether the 76-year-old is too out of step with his own party to run a successful 2020 presidential campaign.

The episode, recounted by Democrat Lucy Flores, highlighted an aspect of Biden's persona that has been publicly known for years: the affectionate whispers, hugs and shoulder squeezes he has long doled out to women, often on camera and at high-profile public events. In a moment of national reckoning over sexual harassment and the treatment of women by powerful men, some Democrats said Biden's actions have taken on a new light.

"It looks different in 2019," said Maria Cardona, a Democratic strategist. Cardona said that while Biden's behavior is not automatically disqualifying for the presidency, "it all depends on how he continues to respond to this. He has to acknowledge that his behavior made some women uncomfortable."

In a statement on Sunday, Biden said it was never his intention to make women feel discomfort and if he did so, "I will listen respectfully."

Several women who worked for Biden stepped forward over the weekend to vouch for his character. And Stephanie Carter, the wife of former Defense Secretary Ash Carter, disputed characterizations of her interactions with Biden during her husband's swearing-in ceremony. Pictures of the then-vice president whispering in Carter's ear and placing his hands on her shoulders ricocheted across the internet at the time.

"The Joe Biden in my picture is a close friend helping someone get through a big day, for which I will always be grateful," Carter wrote in a post on the website Medium.

Flores' account of the 2014 incident comes at a crucial moment for Biden. He's been wrestling for months with a final decision on whether to run for president, blowing through several self-imposed deadlines. Advisers are now eyeing an announcement later in April.

But the Democratic primary has sped on without him, with more than a dozen candidates in the race, including a record number of women and minorities. Veterans like Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders have shown surprising strength, while newer White House hopefuls like California Sen. Kamala Harris and Texan Beto O'Rourke have drawn big crowds and displayed early fundraising prowess.

Biden still leads most early polls, buoyed by broad name recognition and the goodwill he generated during eight years as President Barack Obama's No. 2. Given his experience and appeal with white working-class voters in Midwestern battleground states, he's also seen by some Democrats as the best-positioned candidate to defeat President Donald Trump.

Nancy Bobo, an Iowa activist who was among Obama's earliest supporters in the state, shares that view. She fears the episode with Flores suggests Democrats may try to tear down their most-qualified candidate.

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"I can just see what's coming at him," Bobo said. "And it's going to come at him from the Democrats."

None of Biden's potential rivals defended him following Flores' allegations. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren said she believed Flores and that Biden "needs to give an answer" about what occurred. New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said, "Lucy Flores felt demeaned, and that is never okay. If Vice President Biden becomes a candidate, this is a topic he'll have to engage on further." Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said, "I believe it's important to listen and take seriously any incident like this."

White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said Flores was "quite bold" to "go up against the highest levels of her political party" with the allegations and suggested that Biden should consider apologizing to Flores. Conway deflected questions about the numerous women who have accused Trump of sexual misconduct, allegations he denies.

Flores, a former Nevada state representative and the 2014 Democratic nominee for Nevada lieutenant governor, told The Associated Press on Sunday that she had been mulling coming forward for years. She said she approached New York Magazine about publishing her story and that the magazine had fact-checked her piece after she submitted it.

According to Flores, the incident with Biden occurred in 2014 as the two were waiting to take the stage during a rally in Las Vegas.

"I felt two hands on my shoulders. I froze. 'Why is the vice president of the United States touching me?'" she wrote. "He proceeded to plant a big slow kiss on the back of my head."

Biden spokesman Bill Russo said the former vice president doesn't remember kissing Flores.

The AP tried to contact several advisers and aides from Flores' 2014 campaign but was unable to obtain any independent verification of her account.

Flores, who endorsed Sanders in the 2016 campaign, said Biden's team has not been in touch with her since her story was published. She said she would be satisfied if Biden simply acknowledged the discomfort the episode caused her.

Biden has been warned by advisers that his past statements and actions, including his long history of hugging and showing affection to women, would face fresh scrutiny in the 2020 campaign. In some cases, Biden's policy positions, such as his support for the 1994 crime bill that is blamed for mass incarcerations of minorities, are out of step with a party that has shifted to the left. But at other moments, like when he touts his ability to forge compromises with Republicans, he can appear to be speaking about a political era that many Democrats believe no longer exists.

Karen Finney, a Democratic strategist who worked on Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign, said Biden's team needs to answer a key question before launching a White House bid: "Do they feel confident in their ability to understand this electorate and campaign in 2020, which is already different than 2016?"

Even before Flores made her allegations, some Democrats were wondering whether Biden was meant for this moment. His team was widely panned following reports that they were considering tapping a younger Democrat or a minority like 2018 Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams as a running mate early in the primary in an attempt to counteract questions about Biden's age.

While Biden's team denied that he was considering that step, Biden did float the idea to Abrams over a recent lunch, according to a Democrat with knowledge of the discussion. The Democrat was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and insisted on anonymity.

Democratic strategist Rebecca Katz said that while Flores' descriptions may feel familiar to those who have watched Biden hug and hold hands with women for years, she put the focus on the women who were on the receiving end of his affections.

"What Lucy Flores so bravely did is say, 'This is the way he made me feel,'" Katz said. "No one has ever done that before with Joe Biden."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writer Stephen Braun in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC> and Thomas Beaumont at <http://twitter.com/tombeaumont>

2nd suspect in killing of Kim Jong Nam given reduced charge

By EILEEN NG Associated Press

SHAH ALAM, Malaysia (AP) — Two years after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's half brother was killed, a Malaysian court on Monday told the only remaining suspect in custody that she would not face a murder charge, perhaps signaling the end of a case that had sparked international intrigue.

The move to reduce the charge against the Vietnamese woman, Doan Thi Huong, came three weeks after an even more stunning development in the case, when prosecutors unexpectedly dropped the murder charge against Huong's Indonesian co-defendant and immediately freed her.

The two women had been the only suspects in custody after four North Korean suspects fled Malaysia following the killing of Kim Jong Nam in a Kuala Lumpur airport terminal on the morning of Feb. 13, 2017.

Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow with the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, said the decision not to charge the two women with murder likely marked the end of the case.

"This is pretty much the end as the real culprits are apparently hiding behind the veil of diplomatic immunity and state-sponsored sanctuary," Oh said.

Huong and the Indonesian woman, Siti Aisyah, have said they thought they were participating in a prank for a TV show and did not know they actually had been taking part in a high-profile murder. The two were arrested and accused of smearing VX nerve agent on Kim's face.

Kim was the eldest son in the current generation of North Korea's ruling family. He had been living abroad for years but could have been seen as a threat to Kim Jong Un's rule.

Lawyers for the women have previously said they were pawns in a political assassination with clear links to the North Korean Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and that the prosecution failed to show the women had any intention to kill. Intent to kill is crucial to a murder charge under Malaysian law.

Malaysian officials have never officially accused North Korea and have made it clear they don't want the trial politicized.

The murder charge that Huong had faced carried the death penalty if she was convicted. Huong nodded Monday as a translator read the new charge to her: voluntarily causing injury with a dangerous weapon, VX nerve agent.

Oh said he believed it was a "friendly gesture to Vietnam while paying due respect to the judicial process." While Huong may not have had any premeditated intent to kill Kim, she did apply the VX on his face and has to account for it, he said.

High Court Judge Azmi Ariffin sentenced Huong to three years and four months in prison from the day she was arrested on Feb. 15, 2017. Huong's lawyer Hisyam Teh Poh Teik said his client is expected to be freed by the first week of May, after a one-third reduction in her sentence for good behavior.

"I am happy," Huong, 30, told reporters as she left the courtroom, adding that she thought it was a fair outcome.

While handing out a jail term short of the maximum 10 years the new charge carried, the judge told Huong she was "very, very lucky" and wished her "all the best." Vietnamese officials in the courtroom cheered when the decision was announced.

The move follows the Malaysian attorney general's decision to drop the murder case against Aisyah on March 11 following high-level lobbying from Indonesia's government. Huong sought to be acquitted after Aisyah was freed, but prosecutors rejected her request.

Prosecutor Iskandar Ahmad told the court that the attorney general offered the reduced charge to Huong following pleas from the Vietnamese government and her lawyers.

The original charge had alleged that the two women colluded with four North Koreans to murder Kim with VX nerve agent as he was passing through the airport.

A High Court judge last August found there was enough evidence to infer that Aisyah, Huong and the four North Koreans engaged in a "well-planned conspiracy" to kill Kim and called on the two women to

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present their defense.

Huong's lawyer told the court Monday that her guilty plea to the lesser charge showed she "has taken responsibility" for her actions. In asking for a lenient sentence, he also told the court that her move saved judicial time.

Hisyam had urged the judge to take into account Huong's honesty, her acceptance of responsibility and the acquittal of her co-defendant. "She is neither a criminal nor has the propensity to commit a crime," the lawyer said.

Huong, the youngest of five children, has a promising future with a degree in accounting, but she is also "naive and gullible," he said.

Hisyam said the four North Korean suspects still at large were the "real assassins."

They "exploited her weakness and manipulated her to carry out their evil designs under the camouflage of funny videos and pranks," he said.

The judge said he took into account the gravity of the offense and also the fact that Huong was remorseful and a first offender. He said the sentence "would serve the interest of justice."

Before the sentencing, Vietnam's ambassador to Malaysia, Le Quy Quynh, said he expected Huong to be freed immediately. After the sentencing, he said, "I am highly appreciative that she will be released very soon but I want to emphasize that she is a victim like the Indonesian."

Hisyam told reporters later that Huong wasn't being fairly treated compared to Aisyah, but that she pleaded guilty because she wanted to walk free as soon as possible.

Huong's father, Doan Van Thanh, who attended the hearing, said he was delighted that she will be soon be free.

As Huong was being escorted out of the court building, she shouted to reporters: "It's very good. I love you." She told reporters earlier that she wants to "sing and act" when she returns to Vietnam.

After shocking NY arrest, Avenatti faces court in California

SANTA ANA, Calif. (AP) — A week after Michael Avenatti's shocking arrest in New York, the attorney famous for representing porn star Stormy Daniels in legal battles against President Donald Trump will be back in federal court Monday to face fraud charges in California.

The brash lawyer faces a hearing in the Orange County city of Santa Ana on charges he fraudulently obtained \$4 million in bank loans and pocketed \$1.6 million that belonged to a client. Avenatti has long faced allegations from a former client and a former partner that he was hiding money to avoid paying what he owed.

Now, federal authorities are adding their voices to that chorus, with the specter of a long prison sentence that could be the downfall of a man who once considered challenging Trump in his re-election bid.

Avenatti, 48, is charged with wire and bank fraud. He was arrested last week in New York and released on \$300,000 bail on unrelated extortion charges. He has said he expects to be exonerated.

Federal prosecutors in New York allege that Avenatti tried to shake down Nike for millions of dollars so he wouldn't reveal allegations the apparel company paid off high school basketball players. He has denied the charge to reporters and began tweeting what he called evidence of the scandal the day after he was arrested.

In California, federal prosecutors said Avenatti filed bogus tax returns to fraudulently secure \$4 million in loans from a Mississippi bank and embezzled a client's settlement funds.

The U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles said Monday's hearing would likely focus on setting future court dates.

Avenatti is known for his outspoken challenge of Trump and lavish lifestyle, including renting a \$100,000-a-month home in upscale Newport Beach. He represented Daniels in her claim that Trump paid her to keep quiet about their alleged affair ahead of the 2016 election.

Avenatti's former law firm went through bankruptcy proceedings and was ordered to pay \$10 million to a former partner, who is still seeking to collect the money.

Hamas' grip on Gaza is tighter than ever, despite protests

By **KARIN LAUB** and **FARES AKRAM** Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Over the weekend, Gaza's Hamas rulers marked a year of bloody, weekly protests that have failed to break the Israeli blockade. Rocket attacks brought a wave of Israeli airstrikes and unprecedented protests broke out against the Islamic militants' increasingly unpopular rule.

And yet Hamas' control over Gaza is tighter than ever.

The militants' rule has been strengthened by an unlikely overlap of interests with Israel's right-wing government. Neither wants to see an independent state established in all the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, as the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And Hamas' refusal to give up power — the asking price of its West Bank-based Palestinian rival for reconciliation — aligns with Israel's long-standing policy of maintaining a separation between the West Bank and Gaza.

So even though Israel and Hamas have fought three wars and dozens of skirmishes, and even though Hamas remains committed to Israel's eventual destruction, the two are once again meeting with Egyptian mediators and working to keep things quiet.

Under an emerging arrangement, Hamas would halt rocket fire and keep border protests peaceful in exchange for Israel easing its border blockade and allowing \$30 million a month in Qatari aid into the territory. On Sunday, Israel reopened Gaza crossings to limited traffic.

Egypt has brokered short-lived deals in the past, and it is not clear if the current arrangements will last beyond Israel's April 9 election. In a close race, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has come under fire for what his challengers say is a Gaza policy that exposes Israel to Hamas blackmail.

For Gaza residents, open-ended Hamas rule is a bleak prospect. Gaza's 2 million people have endured rising poverty and unemployment, undrinkable ground water and frequent electricity outages since Israel and Egypt closed Gaza's borders after Hamas seized power in 2007.

In recent weeks, hundreds dared to protest Hamas policies, such as new tax hikes, chanting "We want to live." Many were jailed and beaten. Protester Amer Balousha, a 27-year-old unemployed law school graduate, said he and others were mistreated in Hamas detention but will not be deterred.

"If the situation does not improve, the protests will continue," he said.

HAMAS OVER ABBAS

Hamas has demonstrated that it prefers an understanding with Netanyahu over reconciling with its Palestinian rival, President Mahmoud Abbas.

A deal with Israel would help keep Hamas in power. By contrast, Abbas — who presides over autonomous enclaves in the Israeli-occupied West Bank — wants Hamas to hand control of Gaza to him, a demand the group has repeatedly rejected.

Hamas and Netanyahu both oppose Abbas' goal of Palestinian statehood in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, lands Israel captured in 1967. Hamas seeks to establish an Islamic state in the area encompassing Israel and the war-won lands, while a majority in Netanyahu's Cabinet and Likud Party reject a two-state solution along the 1967 lines.

Last month, Netanyahu was quoted as saying that those who oppose Palestinian statehood should back his policy of allowing Qatari aid into Gaza and maintaining the separation between the rival Palestinian governments.

"There is a great confluence of interests" between Israel and Hamas, said Tareq Baconi, an analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank. "Netanyahu prefers to deal with Hamas because clear dynamics have been established and Hamas will not seek a final resolution (of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) from Israel."

MANAGING THE CONFLICT

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars, most recently in 2014. In between, there have been repeated cross-border skirmishes and periods of calm brokered by Egypt, which has close security ties with Israel

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and controls part of the Gaza border.

Israel's stated reason for the blockade is to contain Hamas and prevent it from rearming, while rights groups denounce the restrictions as collective punishment.

Last summer, amid weekly mass protests along the frontier in which scores of Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire and thousands wounded, Egypt started new cease-fire talks. Hamas hoped they would lead to an easing of the blockade.

Early on, Israel consented to Qatari cash shipments and Hamas pledged to halt rocket fire, but then the talks stalled. In March, with Israel's election campaign heating up, Hamas sensed an opportunity to apply pressure on Netanyahu to resume negotiations, twice firing rockets into central Israel.

It worked. Two Hamas officials, speaking Sunday on condition of anonymity because of the delicate nature of the renewed truce talks, relished in the group's apparent leverage. But they also expressed concern any new deal could quickly unravel.

A NEW GAZA POLICY?

Netanyahu's main challenger, former army chief Benny Gantz, has said he would handle Gaza differently. His party's platform pledges a "powerful response to any provocation and violence," while improving the lives of Gaza civilians and driving a wedge between them and Hamas.

But the plan is short on specifics.

Gantz and two other ex-military chiefs in his team held top command roles in the last three wars with Hamas, exacting a heavy price for rocket fire but coming up against the limits of military action. A consensus has emerged in Israel that Hamas cannot be brought down by force, short of a bloody reoccupation of Gaza.

Yet any easing of the blockade, meant to bring relief to Gaza's residents, would also prolong Hamas rule.

ODD MAN OUT

Abbas has given up on reconciliation with Hamas after years of failed efforts. He has stepped up financial pressure on Gaza, including cutting in half salaries for tens of thousands of ex-civil servants who were replaced by Hamas in 2007 but remained on the Abbas government payroll.

Such cutbacks worsened Gaza's economic deterioration. But instead of stoking a popular uprising against Hamas, anger turned toward Abbas.

Abbas is also suspicious of multi-million-dollar Gaza development projects proposed by the U.N. and Qatar, with U.S. and Israeli backing. He fears it's a plot to turn the territory into a Palestinian mini-state and undercut Palestinian political claims to the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Baconi, the analyst, said that Abbas' policies are counterproductive, even if his concerns are understandable. "Putting more sanctions on Gaza or trying to break the Hamas government will further entrench the division," he said.

Laub reported from Ramallah, West Bank. Associated Press writer Mohammed Daraghmeh in Ramallah contributed reporting.

TSA's social media highlight weird stuff in travelers' bags

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — David Johnston stands over a table full of peculiar items confiscated at Dulles International Airport: A glittery clutch with brass knuckles as a clasp. A perfume bottle shaped like a grenade. A rusted circular saw blade. A pocket-sized pitchfork.

None of those are quite right. Then Johnston sees it: A guitar shaped like a semi-automatic rifle. Bingo. It will do nicely for the Transportation and Security Administration's social media accounts.

Johnston, TSA's social media director, is following in the footsteps of Curtis "Bob" Burns, who created

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unlikely internet buzz for the not-always-beloved agency by showcasing the weirdest stuff travelers pack in their carry-ons. He died suddenly in October at age 48.

Burns' work created a model for other federal agencies. The quirky photos combined with a hefty dose of dad humor helped lure in more than a million followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, who would then see important messages about the dos and don'ts of airline travel.

"How are we going to replace Bob? The reality is we can't," said Johnston. "We had a unique situation with him, but we can still be entertaining and help people as we find our way forward without him."

On the blog, Burns shared a weekly count of firearms that TSA officers found at checkpoints nationwide. He did a summary of knives and all matter of other bizarre and sometimes scary items that travelers had stuffed into their bags, pockets, purses or briefcases.

In one Instagram post, someone tried to bring on a glove with razors for fingers and Burns (naturally) made a "Nightmare on Elm Street" joke.

"It's safe to sleep on Elm Street again. Freddy lost his glove at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)."

The agency's Instagram account won three Webby awards last year, including the People's Voice Award for weird social content marketing. In his acceptance speech, Burns eyed the award, shook it and declared: "This Webby is carry-on approved!"

Johnston, who worked with Burns for about three years, and has been in government jobs for nearly a decade, has tried to keep it up all on his own, but it's been tough.

Johnston sent out a Valentine's Day post that showed off a throwing star, ax and double-edged dagger confiscated from a passenger's carry-on bag. ("Safe travels, you romantic fool!") And it was national puppy day recently, so that was an excuse for a photo of Cole, a big-eyed TSA explosives detection dog.

TSA is growing its social media staff — bringing in three more workers to expand its social media presence. The staff will continue to use fodder sent in by officers around the country, who seize all manner of unusual items people try to bring onboard. But it's hard to find people who have both the government know-how and a sense of humor that resonates.

Johnston said the thing that made Burns' posts so special was Burns himself. "When you look at his posts, you're seeing a window into his soul. It really was from his heart, he was a fun, happy guy."

Burns' sister-in-law, Candy Creech, said he had a dry sense of humor and a hefty dose of patriotism: He had served in the Gulf War. Burns had worked in airports before taking over social media and believed there was public negativity around TSA. He wanted to change that.

"And I think he felt he could change that by communicating with people in a way that wasn't scolding," she said. "He was one of a kind."

During a TSA Facebook live, "Ask Me Anything" episode last year, Burns said the success of the account was partly due to the shock value.

"People don't come to a government Instagram account and expect to see humor," Burns said, "And they also don't expect to see these crazy things that people are trying to bring on a plane."

At Dulles, in the prohibited items section, Johnston sees a few possibilities for TSA's YouTube series called "They Brought What?" including a large snow globe with big a white fairy imprisoned in some kind of liquid (It's creepy and it has liquid, so they can highlight the liquid restrictions.)

He passes over the four pairs of nunchucks (Yawn. You can't believe how many people bring those) and a handful of pocket knives. He stops at a large bullet from Afghanistan that has been altered to be a cigarette lighter and pen.

"The things people think of," he says. Turning more serious for a moment, Johnston notes the importance of showing off these items, especially to people who aren't well-traveled.

"The bottom line is our social media pages makes travelers better informed so they have a better experience and it frees up our officers to do what they need to do — look for the bad actors," he says.

China to regulate all fentanyl drugs as controlled substance

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By **SAM McNEIL and ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press**

BEIJING (AP) — China said Monday it would begin regulating all fentanyl-related drugs as a class of controlled substances, in a change U.S. officials had long advocated as a way to stem the flow of lethal opioids from China.

The sweeping change in the way China regulates drugs that mimic fentanyl takes effect May 1 and could help end the game of regulatory whack-a-mole with chemists who can manufacture novel opioids faster than they can be banned. It could also facilitate prosecutions of opioid merchants in China, who until now have skirted the law by manufacturing and exporting fentanyl variants that were technically legal in China.

"We firmly believe that listing the entire class of fentanyl substances will completely block the loopholes that enable law breakers to evade punishment by simply modifying one or several atoms, functional groups or other groups," said Liu Yuejin, vice-commissioner of China's National Narcotics Control Commission. "It will effectively prevent the massive abuse of fentanyl substances and illegal drug trafficking and smuggling activities, and contribute to global drug control with China's wisdom and power."

China already controls 25 variants of fentanyl, plus two precursors used to make the drug. Data from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration have shown that when China bans a variant of fentanyl, seizures of that analog in the U.S. fall.

U.S. officials have repeatedly pointed to China as the main source of synthetic opioids shipped into the country directly by mail or transported via Mexico. China on Monday again denied that claim.

"China's control over fentanyl drugs is very strict," Liu told reporters. "It cannot be the main source for the United States. The U.S. accusation lacks evidence and is contrary to the facts."

In 2017 and 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted the alleged kingpins of three opioid distribution networks in China. Liu chided U.S. officials for bringing cases against Chinese nationals without first informing their Chinese counterparts.

"Until now, we haven't found that the relevant people infringed on Chinese laws, the U.S. also has yet to present evidence showing that they have breached our laws," he said. "The two sides are still progressing with cooperative investigative work. The U.S., however, now takes some measures like indictments without informing us beforehand. This undermines the sound atmosphere of two sides' cooperation. We express regret for this."

Monday's announcement from China's Ministry of Public Security, National Health Commission and National Medical Products Administration makes good on a pledge Chinese President Xi Jinping made to President Donald Trump during the G-20 summit in Argentina late last year.

At the time, Trump said China's new regulations could be "a game changer" for the United States, where tens of thousands of people die annually from opioid overdoses.

Associated Press researcher Chen Si contributed to this report from Shanghai.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's exaggerations about the Russia probe

By **HOPE YEN, CALVIN WOODWARD and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is taking his interpretation of special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation well beyond the facts.

He says he's been fully exonerated based on a four-page summary of Mueller's nearly 400-page report and is casting himself as a victim of illegal practices by the FBI because the agency investigated him in the first place.

But Trump is overstating his case. The FBI has legal grounds to open a probe if investigators have information they believe could lead them to a crime, even if one is not ultimately found. And the summary released by Attorney General William Barr says Mueller did not reach a conclusion about whether Trump obstructed justice.

Nor was the Russia probe hatched by Democrats, as Trump asserts. He often cites a so-called dossier funded by the Democratic Party, but the probe's origins in fact were based on other evidence.

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Trump's claims came in a week of plentiful exaggerations and misstatements, seen most prominently in a speech to Michigan supporters in which he sought credit for all manner of things, including money to clean up the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative actually was already getting that money ; Trump had proposed slashing it.

Meanwhile, Democratic presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke misstated the length of U.S. involvement in the Iraq war.

A look at the political rhetoric and the facts:

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

TRUMP: "People were hurt so badly, so badly. Their lives have been ruined and over — you know, over something that should have never taken place, an investigation that should have never happened. There was no crime, as you know. You're only allowed to do this legally if there is a crime. There was no crime." — Fox News interview Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Trump is wrong to suggest that the FBI acted illegally by investigating him. The FBI does not need to know if, or have evidence that, a crime occurred before it begins an investigation.

In fact, many investigations that are properly conducted ultimately don't find evidence of any crime. The FBI is empowered to open an investigation if there's information it has received or uncovered that leads the bureau to think it might encounter a crime. Apart from that, the investigation into the Trump campaign was initially a counterintelligence investigation rather than a strictly criminal one, as agents sought to understand whether and why Russia was meddling in the 2016 election.

TRUMP: "The Russia witch hunt was a plan by those who lost the election to try and illegally regain power by framing innocent Americans. Many of them, they suffered, with an elaborate hoax." — rally Thursday in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

THE FACTS: He falsely suggests that the Russia investigation was started by Democrats after losing the 2016 election.

Trump typically points to a dossier of anti-Trump research partly financed by the Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton's campaign, which he incorrectly claims was the basis for the Russia probe. The dossier was initially financed by anti-Trump conservatives, and later by the Democrats.

The FBI's investigation actually began months before it received the dossier.

Last year, the Republican-controlled House Intelligence Committee found the Russia investigation was initiated after the FBI received information related to Trump campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos, not the dossier. Trump praised the committee's final report at the time.

TRUMP: "Everybody is asking how the phony and fraudulent investigation of the No Collusion, No Obstruction Trump Campaign began." — tweet Sunday.

TRUMP: "After three years of lies and smears and slander, the Russia hoax is finally dead. The collusion delusion is over. The special counsel completed its report and found no collusion and no obstruction. ...Total exoneration, complete vindication." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: Mueller did not vindicate Trump in "total" in the Russia probe, explicitly declining to clear him of obstruction.

Mueller's exact words in the report, as quoted by Barr, say: "While this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him."

The summary of principal conclusions by Barr notes Mueller did not "draw a conclusion — one way or the other — as to whether the examined conduct constituted obstruction," but rather set out evidence for both sides, leaving the question unanswered of whether Trump obstructed justice. Barr wrote in the summary that ultimately he decided as attorney general that the evidence developed by Mueller was "not sufficient" to establish, for the purposes of prosecution, that Trump committed obstruction.

Barr's summary also notes that Mueller did not find that the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 presidential election in Trump's favor. To establish a crime, Mueller must gen-

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erally meet a standard of proving an offense beyond a reasonable doubt. The summary did not clear the president of improper behavior regarding Russia but did not establish that "he was involved in an underlying crime related to Russian election interference," Mueller said in a passage from the report quoted by Barr.

The summary signed by Barr gave the bottom line only as he and his deputy saw it. Democrats are pushing for release of Mueller's full report. Barr is expected to release a public version of the document in the coming weeks.

TRUMP, speaking about allegations in a so-called dossier about contacts between Russia and the Trump campaign during the 2016 election: "It came out after the election and everybody had a big fat yawn. ...All of the sudden I hear, 'Were you involved with Russia? I say, 'Russia? What the hell does Russia have to do with my campaign?'" — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: Russia actually had plenty to do with Trump's campaign.

According to U.S. intelligence agencies and lengthy indictments brought by Mueller's team, Putin ordered a multipart influence campaign aimed at hurting Clinton's candidacy, undermining American democracy and helping Trump get elected.

That effort included the hacking of the Democratic National Committee, Clinton's campaign and other Democratic groups. Russian intelligence officers then coordinated the release of stolen emails and internal documents.

There were also plenty of people around Trump receptive to Russia's help, though Mueller's report ultimately did not find that those contacts amounted to a criminal conspiracy, according to Barr's summary.

In the middle of the campaign, Donald Trump Jr. met at Trump Tower with a Russian lawyer thinking he would be getting "dirt" on Clinton. Trump Jr. agreed to the meeting, which included Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner and Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, despite it being described to him as part of a Russian government effort to help his father.

TRUMP: "You look at all of the different things, Russia would've much rather had Hillary than Donald Trump. I can tell you that right now." — Fox News interview Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Not according to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Asked at a news conference with Trump in July whether he wanted Trump to win the 2016 election, Putin responded, "Yes, I did." Putin said he favored Trump "because he talked about bringing the U.S.-Russia relationship back to normal."

The Republican-led Senate intelligence committee last year said it agreed with the U.S. intelligence agencies' assessment that Russia intervened in the 2016 election to hurt the candidacy of Democrat Hillary Clinton and help Trump.

MIGRANT CHILDREN

TRUMP, on the care of migrant children apprehended at the border and the Dec. 8 death of Jakelin Caal Maquin, 7, of Guatemala: "I think that it's been very well stated that we've done a fantastic job. ... The father gave the child no water for a long period of time - he actually admitted blame." — to reporters Friday.

THE FACTS: That's a misrepresentation of the circumstances behind the girl's death as Trump seeks to steer any potential blame for it away from his administration.

An autopsy report released Friday found she died of a bacterial infection just more than a day after being apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol. The El Paso County Medical Examiner's office said Jakelin experienced a "rapidly progressive infection" that led to the failure of multiple organs.

Neither the autopsy report, nor accounts at the time by Customs and Border Protection, spoke of dehydration. The Border Protection timeline on her case said she was checked for medical problems upon her apprehension and: "The initial screening revealed no evidence of health issues." And through family lawyers, Nery Gilberto Caal Cuz said after his daughter's death that he had made sure she had food and water as they traveled through Mexico. He did not say her death was his fault.

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IRAQ WAR

O'ROURKE: "We will ensure that this country does not start yet another war before every peaceful, diplomatic, nonviolent alternative is explored and pursued, and those wars that we ask our fellow Americans, these service members, to fight on our behalf, 17 years and counting in Afghanistan, 27 years and counting in Iraq, let's bring these wars to a close." — remarks Saturday in El Paso.

THE FACTS: The U.S. has not been fighting in a military conflict in Iraq for "27 years and counting." The Iraq war started 16 years ago.

By O'Rourke's count, U.S. involvement would date back to 1992, in an apparent reference to Operation Desert Storm, which ended in February 1991. President George H.W. Bush launched that operation in response to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Bush declared a ceasefire in 1991.

There was no ongoing military conflict after 1991. In 2003, President George W. Bush, the elder Bush's son, authorized the invasion of Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition that toppled Saddam's government. Later known as the "Iraq War," that conflict was part of what the younger Bush described as a U.S. war against terrorism following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

GREAT LAKES

TRUMP: "I support the Great Lakes. Always have. They are beautiful. They are big, very deep, record deepness, right? And I'm going to get, in honor of my friends, full funding of \$300 million for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which you have been trying to get for over 30 years. So we will get it done." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: Trump's recent budget proposal sought to cut federal financing of that program by 90 percent. His comment actually meant that his administration would — presumably — give up its efforts over the last few years to cut the program, which has been receiving about \$300 million a year since 2010.

His assertion that this money has eluded supporters of the lakes for three decades is wrong.

The program is popular with lawmakers from both parties and it was unlikely that the Trump cut would prevail.

Also, the Great Lakes are not the world's deepest, or even among the 20 deepest .

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

TRUMP: "I have overridden my people. We're funding the Special Olympics." — remarks to reporters Thursday.

THE FACTS: In this instance, unlike in the Great Lakes matter, Trump is acknowledging that it was his administration that had proposed to cut the money, though by blaming "my people" he did not take direct responsibility.

In any event, spending is up to Congress, not him. What he means is that the White House is dropping its budget proposal to deny federal money for the games.

HEALTH CARE

TRUMP: "We will always protect patients with pre-existing conditions, always." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: He's not protecting health coverage for patients with pre-existing medical conditions. In fact, the Trump administration is pressing in court for full repeal of the Affordable Care Act — including provisions that protect people with pre-existing conditions from health insurance discrimination.

Trump and other Republicans say they'll have a plan to preserve those safeguards, but the White House has provided no details. And it's a stretch to think they could get a Republicans-only plan passed through Congress with the House under Democratic control.

President Barack Obama's health care law requires insurers to take all applicants, regardless of medical history, and patients with health problems pay the same standard premiums as healthy ones. Bills supported in 2017 by Trump and congressional Republicans to repeal the law could have pushed up costs for people with pre-existing conditions.

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TRUMP: "The Republican Party will become the party of great health care. ... Republicans want you to have an affordable plan that's just right for you." — Michigan rally.

TRUMP: "If the Supreme Court rules that Obamacare is out, we will have a plan that's far better than Obamacare." — remarks Wednesday to reporters.

THE FACTS: Republicans may aspire to great health care but they don't have a comprehensive plan for it. And there's no indication that the White House, executive branch agencies like Health and Human Services, and Republicans in Congress are working on one.

Trump's recent budget called for repealing "Obamacare" and setting hard limits on federal spending for Medicaid, which covers low-income people. Some Republicans argue that would be better, because the federal government would create a new program of health care grants to states. But when the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office analyzed similar proposals a couple of years ago, it estimated such changes would result in deep coverage losses, not to mention weaker insurance protections for people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Trump's budget also called for hundreds of billions of dollars in Medicare cuts to hospitals and other service providers, a nonstarter with lawmakers in Congress worried about re-election next year.

The Supreme Court has upheld the health care law twice in previous challenges. The five justices who first upheld it in 2012 are still on the court.

Congressional Republicans are generally trying to steer away from Obamacare spats. Some are trying to focus on areas where they might find common ground with Democrats and the president, such as reducing prescription drug costs.

AUTOS

TRUMP: "We are bringing a lot of those car companies back. ... They are pouring back in." —Michigan rally.

TRUMP: "We're opening up car plants in Michigan again for the first time in decades. They're coming in, really pouring in. ... And this has been happening pretty much since I've been president. It's really amazing what's going on ... We've brought back so much industry, so many car companies to Michigan, so we're very happy." — remarks Thursday while departing for Michigan.

THE FACTS: There is very little truth in those remarks.

The only automaker announcing plans to reopen a plant in Michigan is Fiat Chrysler, which is restarting an old engine plant to build three-row SUVs. It's been planning to do so since before Trump was elected. GM is even closing two Detroit-area factories: one that builds cars and another that builds transmissions.

Automakers have made announcements about new models being built in the state, but no other factories have been reopened. Ford stopped building the Focus compact car in the Detroit suburb of Wayne last year, but it's being replaced by the manufacture of a small pickup and a new SUV. That announcement was made in December 2016, before Trump took office.

GM, meantime, is closing factories in Ohio and Maryland.

Trump can plausibly claim that his policies have encouraged some activity in the domestic auto industry. Corporate tax cuts freed more money for investment, and potential tariff increases on imported vehicles are an incentive to build in the U.S.

But automakers have not been "pouring in" at all, as he persistently claims, and when expansion does happen, it's not all because of him.

Fiat Chrysler has been planning the SUVs for several years and has been looking at expansion in the Detroit area, where it has unused building space and an abundant, trainable automotive labor force.

Normally it takes at least three years for an automaker to plan a new vehicle, which is the case with the three-row Jeep Grand Cherokee and the larger Wagoneer and Grand Wagoneer SUVs that will fill the restarting Detroit-area plant and an existing one. Several years ago then-CEO Sergio Marchionne said the Wagoneer would be built in the Detroit area.

Detroit automakers usually build larger vehicles in the U.S. because the profit margins are high enough to cover the higher wages paid there versus Mexico or another lower-cost country.

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IMMIGRATION

TRUMP, on diversity visas: "They are giving us their worst people." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: That's false.

The diversity visa lottery program is run by the U.S. government, not foreign governments. Other countries do not get to sort through their populations looking for bad apples to put in for export to the U.S. Citizens of qualifying countries are the ones who decide to bid for visas under the program. Trump routinely blames foreign states.

The program requires applicants to have completed a high school education or have at least two years of experience in the last five years in a selection of fields. Out of that pool of people from certain countries who meet those conditions, the State Department randomly selects a much smaller pool of winners. Not all winners will have visas ultimately approved, because they still must compete for a smaller number of slots by getting their applications in quickly. Those who are ultimately offered visas still need to go through background checks, like other immigrants.

The lottery is extended to citizens of most countries, except about 20. The primary goal is to diversify the immigrant population by creating slots for underrepresented parts of the world.

JOBS

TRUMP: "We have created, since my election, 5.5 million new jobs. Nobody would have believed that was possible." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: His number is about right, but he's counting jobs created before he became president. And the progress does not defy belief. The economy created about 6 million jobs in the roughly two years before the election, then again in the roughly two years after.

VETERANS

TRUMP: "They've been trying to get VA Choice for over 40 years. Couldn't do it. I got it. We signed it six months ago." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: Not true. He's not the first president in 40 years to get Congress to pass a private-sector health program for veterans; he expanded it. Congress first approved the program in 2014 during the Obama administration. The program currently allows veterans to see doctors outside the VA system if they must wait more than 30 days for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles (65 kilometers) to a VA facility.

Now, starting in June, they are to have that option for a private doctor if their VA wait is only 20 days (28 for specialty care) or their drive is only 30 minutes.

TRUMP: "Instead of waiting online for one day, one week, two months ...now they go outside, they see a private doctor, we pay the bill, they get better quickly." — Michigan rally.

THE FACTS: Also not right. Veterans still must wait for weeks before they can get private care outside the VA system.

And the expanded Choice eligibility may do little to provide immediate help. That's because veterans often must wait even longer for an appointment in the private sector. Last year, then-Secretary David Shulkin said VA care is "often 40 percent better in terms of wait times" compared with the private sector. In 2018, 34 percent of all VA appointments were with outside physicians, down from 36 percent in 2017.

At a hearing Tuesday, the top health official at VA, Dr. Richard Stone, described the start of the expanded Choice program to "almost be a non-event," in part because wait times in the private sector are typically longer than at VA.

The VA also must resolve long-term financing because of congressional budget caps after the White House opposed new money to pay for the program. As a result, lawmakers could be forced later this year to limit the program or slash core VA or other domestic programs.

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Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Chad Day in Washington and Tom Krisher in Detroit contributed to this report.

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Michigan State coach Izzo joins Final Four first timers

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

Tom Izzo drew up the perfect play at the perfect moment, sending Michigan State past mighty Duke for a spot in the Final Four.

The trip is always emotional, but Izzo has done it before. This will be his eighth Final Four and a chance for a second national championship.

The other three Final Four coaches all will be the new kids at the dance.

Chris Beard's nomadic journey struck a vein of gold in his 12th coaching stop at Texas Tech, with a gritty pack of ball-hawking players grasping the program's first Final Four. Their opponent next Saturday in Minneapolis: Izzo's Spartans.

Virginia's Tony Bennett finally got over the hump in his 10th season with the Cavaliers, putting them in position for a different kind of history after last year's historic first-round flameout against No. 16 UMBC.

And Bruce Pearl found some gems at Auburn after an acrimonious split with Tennessee, guiding the Tigers to Minneapolis where they'll face Virginia despite the cloud of a federal investigation hanging over the program.

"I'm so happy for the people at Auburn who have been waiting forever to get their first Final Four," Pearl said.

Pearl was fired by Tennessee in 2011 and hit with a "show-cause" penalty by the NCAA for a string of violations and lying to investigators.

He landed at Auburn 2014 and the dark clouds followed.

Tigers assistant Chuck Person pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery and two players, Austin Wiley and Danjel Purifoy, were ruled ineligible last season as a result of the federal investigation. Just before this year's SEC tournament, assistant coach Ira Bowman was suspended indefinitely amid bribery allegations during his time at Pennsylvania.

Despite the off-court issues, The Tigers (30-9) shot their way into the Final Four for the first time by taking down blue bloods Kansas, North Carolina and Kentucky in succession.

"No matter how low we got this season, no matter how much adversity went through, we always believed this is where we could get to," said Auburn's Bryce Brown, who had 24 points in the Elite Eight win over Kentucky.

Beard was at Division II Angelo State just four years ago, the ABA's South Carolina Warriors three years before that. He took over a middling Texas Tech program in 2016 and turned it around by getting non-five-star players to buy into his defensive philosophies.

Texas Tech reached the Elite Eight for the first time in Beard's second season a year ago, but not much was expected from the Red Raiders this season after losing five of their top six scorers.

Picked to finish seventh in the preseason poll, Texas Tech was one of college basketball's biggest surprises, sharing the Big 12 regular-season championship with Kansas State to end Kansas' 14-year reign. After a hiccup against West Virginia in the conference tournament, Texas Tech (30-6) and the nation's most efficient defense shut down four straight NCAA Tournament opponents to reach the program's first Final Four.

"It is real. That defense is real," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said after the Red Raiders bounced the Zags from the Elite Eight.

So is Virginia's.

Using the same principles his father, Dick, ran at Wisconsin and Washington State, Cavaliers coach Tony

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Bennett runs a "pack line" defense that forces teams to the perimeter. As the name suggests, Virginia packs its defense into the paint, clogging driving lanes, help defenders already in place to fill the gaps in the defense.

Bennett needed a few years to cement the foundation of his defensive principles, but once he did, Virginia became one of the nation's top defenses.

The Cavaliers led the nation in scoring at 55 points per game this season and are fifth in KenPom's defensive efficiency. Virginia (33-3) shut down its first three opponents and survived an offensive onslaught by Purdue's Carsen Edwards to earn its first Final Four since 1984.

Bounced in a historic loss a year ago, the Cavaliers finally got Bennett the one piece missing from his resume.

"There was a burning desire to get these guys and our program to a Final Four and hopefully beyond," Tony Bennett said.

Now, Izzo.

The master of March may have pulled off the greatest coaching job of his career in the Elite Eight on Sunday, pulling the strings to knock top overall seed Duke and its fantastic freshmen from the bracket.

Izzo's game plan frustrated Zion Williamson, R.J. Barrett and the rest of the Blue Devils most of the day in Washington, D.C.

With the game on the line, Izzo drew up a play to free Kenny Goins for a wide-open 3-pointer. The senior guard knocked it down with 34 seconds left, the Spartans clamped down on defense and Cassius Winston broke free to dribble out the clock, practically running all the way to Minneapolis with the ball.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/MarchMadness> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_Top25

Venezuela's Maduro announces power rationing amid outages

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Sunday announced a 30-day plan to ration electricity following nationwide power cuts that have inflicted misery on millions of people and ignited protests, including one near the presidential palace in Caracas.

The rationing plan will help deal with the outages that have also cut off water supply and communications for days at a time, Maduro said in a speech on national television in which he also warned against any unrest in reaction to the blackouts.

Hours before Maduro's appeal for calm, protests broke out in neighborhoods in the capital and other cities following a call by opposition leader Juan Guaido to demonstrate against the government's failure to provide basic services. Many took to balconies and building windows to bang pots in protest and shout curses at Maduro. They also burned trash and blocked roads.

While police did not intervene in most cases, alleged government supporters known as "colectivos" appeared in some areas on motorbikes and threatened protesters, who quickly dispersed. The "colectivos" are sometimes armed and video posted on social media showed masked men as well as men firing shots in the streets.

In his speech, Maduro said "colectivos" and other pro-government groups should keep order as Venezuela grapples with the blackouts, which he has blamed on U.S.-led sabotage without offering clear evidence.

"We're confronting monsters who want to destroy Venezuela," said Maduro, who said the electricity rationing would balance generation and transmission with consumption, with the aim of ensuring water supply.

Guaido says years of government neglect, mismanagement and corruption have left the electrical grid in shambles.

"There is no sabotage," the leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly wrote on Twitter. "They brought the electrical system to a collapse because they are corrupt and now they can't resolve it because they are incapable."

Some of the protests on Sunday occurred near the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas, in a direct

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challenge to Maduro.

"No one can put up with this. We spend almost all day without electricity," said Karina Camacho, a 56-year-old housewife who was about to buy a chicken when electronic payment machines stopped working. "There's been no water since (last) Monday, you can't call by phone, we can't pay with cards or even eat."

The ongoing blackouts now mark another point of tension in a country paralyzed by political and economic turmoil, compounding a humanitarian crisis and deepening a prolonged standoff between two political parties vying for power.

Netblocks, a group monitoring internet censorship, said network data showed just 15 percent of Venezuela was online after the latest power cuts struck Sunday morning, while water supply, phone service and internet continued to be shaky and unreliable.

The United States and dozens of other countries support Guaidó's claim that Maduro's re-election last year was illegitimate. The U.S. has imposed oil sanctions and other economic penalties on Venezuela in an attempt to force him out of power, but he has yet to show signs of backing down.

The latest outage comes just weeks after Venezuela experienced nationwide blackouts on March 7 which shut down schools, offices and factories and paralyzed nearly every part of the oil-rich country of 31 million.

Associated Press writer Jorge Rueda contributed to this story.

Ukraine comedian leads presidential election, runoff likely

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Early results in Ukraine's presidential election showed a comedian with no political experience with a sizable lead over 38 rivals but far from a first-round victory, while the incumbent president and a former prime minister were close contenders to advance to the runoff.

The strong showing of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Sunday's voting appeared to reflect Ukrainians' desire for new blood in a political system awash in corruption and a new approach to trying to end the war with Russia-backed separatists in the country's east that has wracked the country for nearly five years.

With 20 percent of the polling station protocols counted, Zelenskyy had 30 percent, while incumbent President Petro Poroshenko was a distant second with about 17 percent and Yulia Tymoshenko with 13, the elections commission said early Monday. The results were closely in line with a major exit poll.

The top two candidates advance to a runoff on April 21. Final results in Sunday's first round are expected to be announced later Monday.

The election was shadowed by allegations of widespread vote buying. Police said they had received more than 2,100 complaints of violations on voting day alone in addition to hundreds of earlier voting fraud claims, including bribery attempts and removing ballots from polling places.

Zelenskyy stars in a TV sitcom about a teacher who becomes president after a video of him denouncing corruption goes viral and his supporters hold out hope that he can fight corruption in real life.

"This is only the first step to a great victory," Zelenskyy told reporters after the exit poll was announced.

"Zelenskyy has shown us on the screen what a real president should be like," said voter Tatiana Zinchenko, 30, who cast her ballot for the comedian. "He showed what the state leader should aspire for — fight corruption by deeds, not words, help the poor, control the oligarchs."

Campaign issues in the country of 42 million included Ukraine's endemic corruption, its struggling economy and a seemingly intractable conflict with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine that has killed 13,000 people since 2014.

Concern about the election's legitimacy have spiked in recent days after Ukraine's interior minister said his department was "showered" with hundreds of claims that supporters of Poroshenko and Tymoshenko had offered money in exchange for votes.

Like the popular character he plays, Zelenskyy, 41, made corruption a focus of his candidacy. He proposed a lifetime ban on holding public office for anyone convicted of graft. He also called for direct negotiations with Russia on ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

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"A new life, a normal life is starting," Zelenskiy said after casting his ballot in Kiev. "A life without corruption, without bribes."

His lack of political experience helped his popularity with voters amid broad disillusionment with the country's political elite.

Poroshenko said "I feel no kind of euphoria" after the exit poll results were announced.

"I critically and soberly understand the signal that society gave today to the acting authorities," he said.

It is not clear whether he would or could adjust his campaign enough to meet Zelenskiy's challenges over the next three weeks.

Poroshenko, 53, a confectionary tycoon when he was elected five years ago, pushed successfully for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be recognized as self-standing rather than a branch of the Russian church.

However, he saw approval of his governing sink amid Ukraine's economic woes and a sharp plunge in living standards. Poroshenko campaigned on promises to defeat the rebels in the east and to wrest back control of Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014 in a move that has drawn sanctions against Russia from the U.S. and the European Union.

Speaking at a polling station Sunday, the president echoed his campaign promises of taking Ukraine into the EU and NATO.

The president's priorities persuaded schoolteacher Andriy Hristenko, 46, to vote for him

"Poroshenko has done a lot. He created our own church, bravely fought with Moscow and is trying to open the way to the EU and NATO," Hristenko said.

Ukraine's former prime minister, Tymoshenko, shaped her message around the economic distress of millions in the country.

"Ukraine has sunk into poverty and corruption during the last five years, but every Ukrainian can put an end to it now," she said after voting Sunday.

During the campaign, Tymoshenko denounced price hikes introduced by Poroshenko as "economic genocide" and promised to reduce prices for household gas by 50 percent within a month of taking office.

"I don't need a bright future in 50 years," said Olha Suhay, a 58-year-old cook. "I want hot water and heating to cost less tomorrow."

A military embezzlement scheme that allegedly involved top Poroshenko associates as well as a factory controlled by the president dogged Poroshenko before the election. Ultra-right activists shadowed him throughout the campaign, demanding the jailing of the president's associates accused in the scandal.

Zelenskiy and Tymoshenko both used the alleged embezzlement to take hits at Poroshenko, who shot back at his rivals. He described them as puppets of a self-exiled billionaire businessman Igor Kolomoyskyi, charges that Zelenskiy and Tymoshenko denied.

Many political observers have described the presidential election as a battle between Poroshenko and Kolomoyskyi.

Both the president and the comedian relied on an arsenal of media outlets under their control to exchange blows. Just days before the election, the TV channel Kolomoyskyi owns aired a new season of the "Servant of the People" TV series in which Zelenskiy stars as Ukraine's leader.

"Kolomoyskyi has succeeded in creating a wide front against Poroshenko," said Vadim Karasyov, head of the Institute of Global Strategies, an independent Kiev-based think tank. "Ukraine has gone through two revolutions, but ended up with the same thing — the fight between the oligarchs for the power and resources."

AP journalists Mstyslav Chernov in Kiev, and Jim Heintz and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow, contributed to this report.

A previous version of this story removed Kolomoyskyi falling off Forbes' list of billionaires; the reference was to Poroshenko but an editing error applied it to Kolomoyskyi.

No AI in humor: R2-D2 walks into a bar, doesn't get the joke

By **SETH BORENSTEIN** AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A robot walks into a bar. It goes CLANG.

Alexa and Siri can tell jokes mined from a humor database, but they don't get them.

Linguists and computer scientists say this is something to consider on April Fools' Day: Humor is what makes humans special. When people try to teach machines what's funny, the results are at times laughable but not in the way intended.

"Artificial intelligence will never get jokes like humans do," said Kiki Hempelmann, a computational linguist who studies humor at Texas A&M University-Commerce. "In themselves, they have no need for humor. They miss completely context."

And when it comes to humor, the people who study it — sometimes until all laughs are beaten out of it — say context is key. Even expert linguists have trouble explaining humor, said Tristan Miller, a computer scientist and linguist at Darmstadt University of Technology in Germany.

"Creative language — and humor in particular — is one of the hardest areas for computational intelligence to grasp," said Miller, who has analyzed more than 10,000 puns and called it torture. "It's because it relies so much on real-world knowledge — background knowledge and commonsense knowledge. A computer doesn't have these real-world experiences to draw on. It only knows what you tell it and what it draws from."

Allison Bishop, a Columbia University computer scientist who also performs stand-up comedy, said computer learning looks for patterns, but comedy thrives on things hovering close to a pattern and veering off just a bit to be funny and edgy.

Humor, she said, "has to skate the edge of being cohesive enough and surprising enough."

For comedians that's job security. Bishop said her parents were happy when her brother became a full-time comedy writer because it meant he wouldn't be replaced by a machine.

"I like to believe that there is something very innately human about what makes something funny," Bishop said.

Oregon State University computer scientist Heather Knight created the comedy-performing robot Ginger to help her design machines that better interact with — and especially respond to — humans. She said it turns out people most appreciate a robot's self-effacing humor.

Ginger, which uses human-written jokes and stories, does a bit about Shakespeare and machines, asking, "If you prick me in my battery pack, do I not bleed alkaline fluid?" in a reference to "The Merchant of Venice."

Humor and artificial intelligence is a growing field for academics.

Some computers can generate and understand puns — the most basic humor — without help from humans because puns are based on different meanings of similar-sounding words. But they fall down after that, said Purdue University computer scientist Julia Rayz.

"They get them — sort of," Rayz said. "Even if we look at puns, most of the puns require huge amounts of background."

Still, with puns there is something mathematical that computers can grasp, Bishop said.

Rayz has spent 15 years trying to get computers to understand humor, and at times the results were, well, laughable. She recalled a time she gave the computer two different groups of sentences. Some were jokes. Some were not. The computer classified something as a joke that people thought wasn't a joke. When Rayz asked the computer why it thought it was a joke, its answer made sense technically. But the material still wasn't funny, nor memorable, she said.

IBM has created artificial intelligence that beat opponents in chess and "Jeopardy!" Its latest attempt, Project Debater, is more difficult because it is based on language and aims to win structured arguments with people, said principal investigator Noam Slonim, a former comedy writer for an Israeli version "Saturday Night Live."

Slonim put humor into the programming, figuring that an occasional one-liner could help in a debate.

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But it backfired during initial tests when the system made jokes at the wrong time or in the wrong way. Now, Project Debater is limited to one attempt at humor per debate, and that humor is often self-effacing.

"We know that humor — at least good humor — relies on nuance and on timing," Slonim said. "And these are very hard to decipher by an automatic system."

That's why humor may be key in future Turing Tests — the ultimate test of machine intelligence, which is to see if an independent evaluator can tell if it is interacting with a person or computer, Slonim said.

There's still "a very significant gap between what machines can do and what humans are doing," both in language and humor, Slonim said.

There are good reasons to have artificial intelligence try to learn to get humor, Darmstadt University's Miller said. It makes machines more relatable, especially if you can get them to understand sarcasm. That also may aid with automated translations of different languages, he said.

Texas A&M's Hempelmann isn't so sure that's a good idea.

"Teaching AI systems humor is dangerous because they may find it where it isn't and they may use it where it's inappropriate," Hempelmann said. "Maybe bad AI will start killing people because it thinks it is funny."

Comedian and computer scientist Bishop does have a joke about artificial intelligence: She says she agrees with all the experts warning us that someday AI is going to surpass human intelligence.

"I don't think it's because AI is getting smarter," Bishop jokes, then she adds: "If the AI gets that, I think we have a problem."

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears .

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Beyonce, 'Black Panther' win at 50th NAACP Image Awards

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Beyonce was named entertainer of the year at the 50th annual NAACP Image Awards that highlighted works by entertainers and writers of color.

After Beyonce accepted the award Saturday night, the superstar paid homage to the people who were nominated in the same category as her. She beat out Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James, Regina King, Chadwick Boseman and director Ryan Coogler.

"Regina King, I love you so much. You taught us patience, persistence and how to be masterful in your craft," she said. "Chadwick Boseman is teaching children to dream and to be seen as kings. LeBron James has taught us the strength of all forms, leading by example and providing education to our kids. Ryan Coogler tells our stories in a way that celebrates our history and proves we do have power."

Beyonce added: "I'm honored to be included among all of you, and to be a part of a vital and thriving community. Thank you to the NAACP."

Beyonce released a joint album last year with her husband, Jay-Z, called "Everything is Love." The prolific singer also paid tribute to historically black colleges and universities, as well as the dance troupes and step teams during her groundbreaking two-hour Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival performance. She also performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which is known as the national black anthem, at the festival and donated \$100,000 to four black universities shortly after her performance.

The awards ceremony aired live on TV One at the Dolby Theatre, the same venue that hosts the Academy Awards.

Jay-Z received the President's Award for the rapper's public service achievements. He was recognized for his efforts through his Shawn Carter Foundation and serving as co-founder of the REFORM Alliance.

The rapper executive produced the documentaries "Rest in Power: The Trayvon Martin Story" and "Time: The Kalief Browder Story," along with an animated documentary short called "The War on Drugs is an

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Epic Fail." That documentary highlighted the unfavorable treatment of black and Latino people when it comes to drug-related crimes.

Jay-Z quoted Abraham Lincoln after he accepted his award and dedicated his trophy to his 93-year-old grandmother Hattie White, saying: "She's so full of life." He also paid homage to the women in his life, including his wife, Beyonce, who smiled while her husband made his speech.

"It's not the amount of years in your life. It's the amount of life in your years," he said. "That quote embodies my beautiful grandmother."

"Black Panther" was awarded best motion picture. The Marvel blockbuster hit beat out "BlacKkKlansman," "Crazy Rich Asians," "If Beale Street Could Talk" and "The Hate U Give."

The superhero film was a cultural phenomenon. It earned \$700 million domestically during its theatrical run.

"Black Panther" won in several other categories, including best actor in a motion picture (Boseman), supporting actor in a motion picture (Michael B. Jordan) and directing in a motion picture (Coogler).

Jussie Smollett, who lost to "Grey's Anatomy" star Jessie Williams in the supporting actor in a drama series category, did not attend the awards.

It has been a tumultuous week for the "Empire" star after a felony case against him was dropped in Chicago. The handling of the case, which accused Smollett of falsely reporting to police that he was assaulted by two men in downtown Chicago on Jan. 29, has drawn widespread condemnation.

Actor-comedian Chris Rock took verbal jabs at Smollett before he presented outstanding comedy series to ABC's "black-ish."

"They said no Jussie Smollett jokes," Rock said. "Yeah, I know, but what a waste of light skin. Do you know what I could do with that light skin? That curly hair, my career would be out of here. I would be running Hollywood. What the hell was he thinking? You are known as 'Jessie' for now on. You don't even get the 'u' anymore. That 'u' was for respect. You ain't getting no respect from me."

In response to Rock's jokes, "black-ish" star Yara Shahidi made her stance in the Smollett controversy obvious.

"I stand with Jussie," Shahidi said before she handed the microphone to Marcus Scribner and ducked into her crowd of castmates including Anthony Anderson and Tracee Ellis Ross

Anderson returned as host of the show and won for best actor in a comedy series. He opened the awards speaking about "black excellence" in film, hoping his behavior wouldn't get him removed as host and made several jokes including one about Kanye West not being invited to cookouts.

Anderson brought his mother onstage with him and dedicated his award to "the woman who raised me in Watts (California) and pushed me to become an actor."

"Everything I do on screen is for you momma," Anderson said of his mother, who clutched his award. He also shouted out U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, who sat in the first row.

Waters received the NAACP Chairman's Award for public service. She spoke about young voters taking a stance at the polls, her thoughts on getting rid of the Electoral College and President Donald Trump's presidency.

"I still think he needs to be impeached," Waters said of Trump. "This president has defined himself as a liar."

Donald Glover, who won four Grammys this year, won for his directing on "Atlanta." On the music side, his alter-ego Childish Gambino's song "This is America" won for best music video.

Online: <http://www.naacpimageawards.net>

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Jonathan Landrum Jr. on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/MrLandrum31>

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Today in History By the Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 1, the 91st day of 2019. There are 274 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 1, 2003, American troops entered a hospital in Nasiriyah (nah-sih-REE'-uh), Iraq, and rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who had been held prisoner since her unit was ambushed on March 23.

On this date:

In 1789, the U.S. House of Representatives held its first full meeting in New York; Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania was elected the first House speaker.

In 1933, Nazi Germany staged a daylong national boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.

In 1945, American forces launched the amphibious invasion of Okinawa during World War II. (U.S. forces succeeded in capturing the Japanese island on June 22.)

In 1954, the United States Air Force Academy was established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed a measure banning cigarette advertising on radio and television, to take effect after Jan. 1, 1971.

In 1972, the first Major League Baseball players' strike began; it lasted 12 days.

In 1976, Apple Computer was founded by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne.

In 1983, tens of thousands of anti-nuclear demonstrators linked arms in a 14-mile human chain spanning three defense installations in rural England, including the Greenham Common U.S. Air Base.

In 1984, Marvin Gaye was shot to death by his father, Marvin Gay (cq), Sr. in Los Angeles, the day before the recording star's 45th birthday. (The elder Gay pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter, and received probation.)

In 1987, in his first speech on the AIDS epidemic, President Ronald Reagan told doctors in Philadelphia, "We've declared AIDS public health enemy no. 1."

In 1988, the scientific bestseller "A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes" by British physicist Stephen Hawking was first published in the United Kingdom and the United States by Bantam Books.

In 1992, the National Hockey League Players' Association went on its first-ever strike, which lasted 10 days.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama, in London for an economic crisis summit, sought to rally the world's top and emerging powers to help cope with a global downturn; chanting protesters clashed with riot police in the British capital. Sixteen people, most of them oil workers, were killed when a Super Puma helicopter crashed into the North Sea off Scotland's northeast coast. In a college baseball blowout, Eastern Kentucky was leading Kentucky State 49-1 when the teams stopped playing after five innings (they also agreed to cancel the second game of a scheduled double-header).

Five years ago: Mocking his critics, President Barack Obama boasted that 7.1 million people had signed up for his health care law, and said "the debate over repealing this law is over." Congress demanded answers from General Motors' new CEO, Mary Barra, on why the automaker had taken 10 years to recall cars with a faulty ignition switch linked at that time to 13 traffic deaths; Barra acknowledged that the company took too long to act.

One year ago: Writer and producer Steven Bochco, known for creating the groundbreaking TV police drama "Hill Street Blues," died after a battle with cancer; he was 74. Authorities said the SUV that had carried members of a large, free-spirited family to their deaths several days earlier may have been driven intentionally off a scenic California cliff; six adopted children were killed along with their parents.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Jane Powell is 90. Actor Don Hastings is 85. Baseball Hall of Famer Phil Niekro is 80. Actress Ali MacGraw is 80. Rhythm-and-blues singer Rudolph Isley is 80. Reggae singer Jimmy Cliff is 71. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito is 69. Rock musician Billy Currie (Ultravox) is 69. Actress Annette O'Toole is 67. Movie director Barry Sonnenfeld is 66. Singer Susan Boyle is 58. Actor Jose Zuniga is 57. Country singer Woody Lee is 51. Actress Jessica Collins is 48. Rapper-actor Method Man is 48. Movie directors Albert and Allen Hughes are 47. Political commentator Rachel Maddow is 46. Former tennis player

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Magdalena Maleeva is 44. Actor David Oyelowo (oh-YEHLOH'-oh) is 43. Actor JJ Field is 41. Singer Bijou Phillips is 39. Actor Sam Huntington is 37. Comedian-actor Taran Killam is 37. Actor Matt Lanter is 36. Actor Josh Zuckerman is 34. Country singer Hillary Scott (Lady Antebellum) is 33. Rock drummer Arejay Hale (Halestorm) is 32. Actor Asa Butterfield is 22. Actor Tyler Wladis is 9.

Thought for Today: "The only sin is mediocrity." — Martha Graham, American modern dance pioneer (born 1894, died this date in 1991).