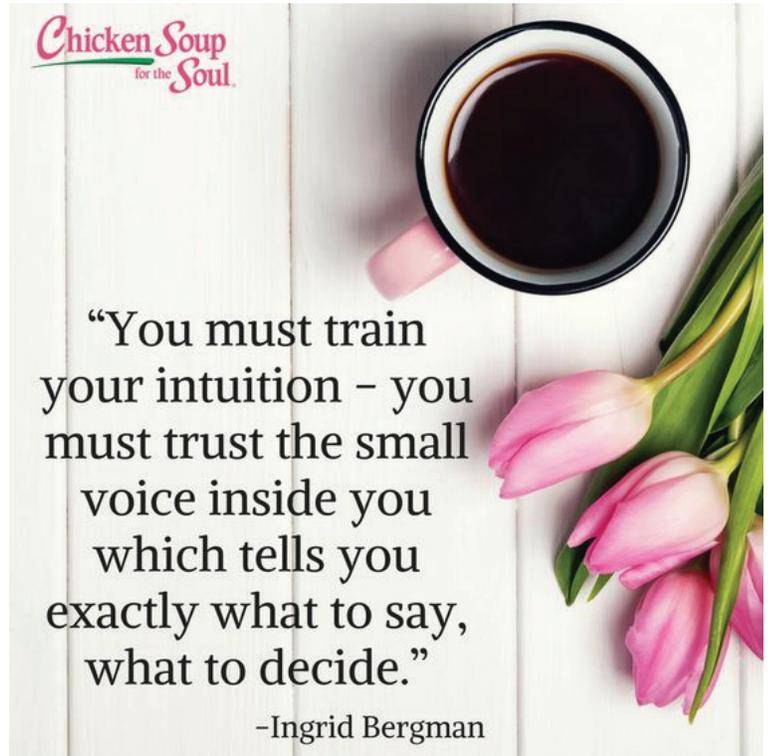


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- 2- Truss Pros is Hiring
- 3- Keith joins Harr Motors
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**Click on Ad to sign up!**



## 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.**

**OPEN:** Re-cycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## BLIZZARD WARNING

Issue Date: 5:25 AM Thu, Apr 11, 2019

Expiration: 1:00 PM Fri, Apr 12, 2019

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 1 PM CDT FRIDAY...

\* WHAT...Blizzard conditions. Additional snow accumulations of 9 to 14 inches. Winds gusting as high as 45 mph.

\* WHERE...McPherson, Brown and Edmunds Counties.

\* WHEN...Until 1 PM CDT Friday.

\* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Areas of blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute. Gusty winds could bring down tree branches.

A Blizzard Warning means severe winter weather conditions are expected or occurring. Falling and blowing snow with strong winds and poor visibilities are likely. This will lead to whiteout conditions, making travel extremely dangerous. Do not travel. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle.

The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

# NOW HIRING!

## Truss Pros

10954 424th Avenue | Britton, SD 57430

Looking for assemblers - both shifts

\* New Starting Wage - \$15/hr day shift and  
\$16/hr night shift  
Overtime Available

### BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Comprehensive Health, Dental & Vision insurance
- Life Insurance
- Short-term Disability and Long-term Disability
- 401k
- Holiday Pay
- Vacation Pay
- Paid Sick Leave
- Referral Bonuses

To apply visit [www.uslhm.com/careers](http://www.uslhm.com/careers) or call Diane at 605-448-2929.

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## Community Events

Due to the impending weather ALL storm spotter classes for Brown County have been cancelled. A new date will be determined after WINTER is OVER...

- \* No Aberdeen paper today
- \* No School in Groton Area today
- \* Junior High Track meet at Sisseton for today is cancelled
- \* NSU Indoor track meet for today is cancelled.
- \* The KG Roundup scheduled for tomorrow is rescheduled for April 30th.
- \* The Girls Golf Meet at Milbank scheduled for Monday is cancelled.
- \* Varsity track meets scheduled for Tuesday at Webster and Deuel are cancelled.
- \* Tuff Tigers Awards has been rescheduled for Thursday, April 18.

Come and go Bridal shower for Emily Kern, bride to be of Nathan Skadsen, Sunday, April 28 2019 2-5 pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church



 **HARR**  
Motors

**4255 6th Ave**

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!!!

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Gov. Noem Orders Thursday Closure Of State Offices In 54 Counties

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Kristi Noem has ordered the Thursday closure of state government offices in the same 54 counties that were closed Wednesday.

Counties part of the closure order are: Aurora, Beadle, Bennett, Bon Homme, Brookings, Brown, Brule, Buffalo, Butte, Charles Mix, Clark, Codington, Custer, Davison, Day, Deuel, Dewey, Douglas, Edmunds, Faulk, Grant, Gregory, Haakon, Hamlin, Hand, Hanson, Hughes, Hutchinson, Hyde, Jackson, Jerauld, Jones, Kingsbury, Lake, Lawrence, Lyman, Marshall, McCook, Meade, Mellette, Miner, Moody, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, Potter, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Todd, Tripp, Turner and Walworth.

State government offices were closed in 52 of those counties Wednesday morning. State offices in Butte and Lawrence counties were closed during the day.

Only essential personnel within state offices in the 54 counties should report to their work stations after the closure.

Heavy snow and high winds leading to blizzard conditions have been part of this storm. Driving conditions also has been adversely impacted. People are urged to stay home and not travel unless absolutely necessary.

State officials are monitoring the storm closely and will determine when offices will re-open.

**Groton City Notice**  
**Sump Pumps must  
be discharged  
OUTSIDE!**



**Failure to comply will result in fines.**

**Hiring High Schoolers!**

If you are 16 or older and need a summer job, the Groton Rehabilitation Center has the job for you!

During the summer, you can work inside and get some experience for a CNA career in the future!

We are an equal employment opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status or any other characteristic protected by law.



1106 N 2nd Street ~ Groton, SD ~ 605-397-2365

**Groton Area's**

# KG



**has been rescheduled to**

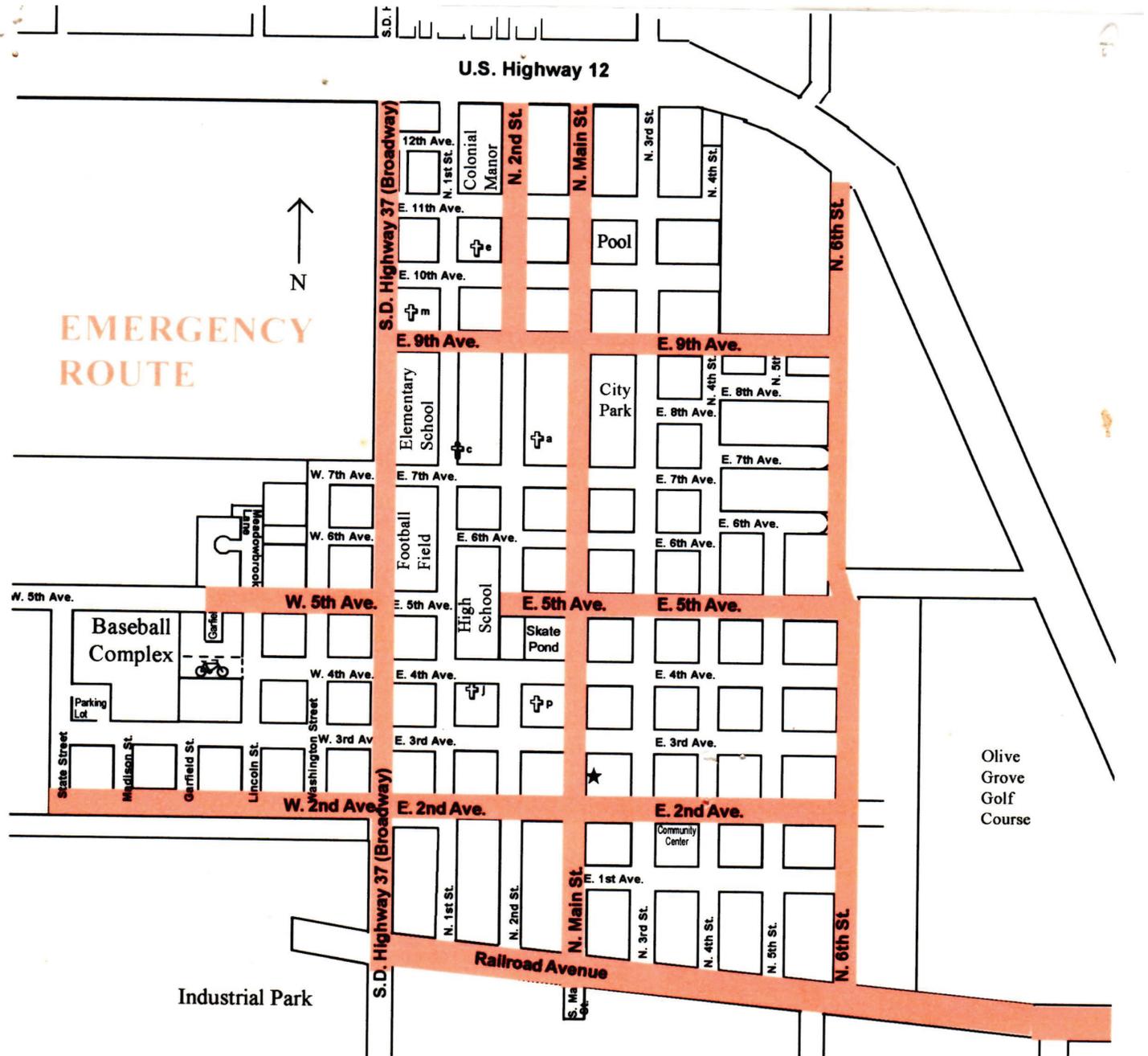
**April 30th**

**All scheduled times will stay the same. Please contact Heidi Krueger at the elementary school to confirm this new date.**

**605/397-2317**

## City plan for snow removal on streets

The upcoming blizzard will create challenges for the City of Groton Street Department. According to Terry Herron, Street Superintendent, many of the roads in Groton are very soft and snow removal on those streets may not be done. Attempting to remove snow on soft roads can cause major damage to the streets. It is also recommended to stay off those streets as much as possible. The city will keep the emergency routes open which is shown on the map below.



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## Today in Weather History

April 11, 1993: Heavy wet snow fell over a portion of northeast South Dakota, mainly east of Aberdeen and north of Watertown. The snowfall began on the 10th and carried into the 11th. 2 to 6 inches were reported across the area. However, 8 inches were reported near Summit and 7 inches near Sisseton.

April 11, 2007: A large upper-level low-pressure area wrapped snow into far northeast South Dakota. Snow covered and slushy roads resulted from the heavy wet snow making travel tough. Some schools and events postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Sisseton and Milbank, 7 inches at Castlewood, 8 inches at Bryant, 9 inches at Toronto and Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Summit.

April 11, 2008: An intense area of low pressure moving northeast across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow and strong winds to parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 3 to 16 inches combined with north winds of 30 to 45 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with blizzard conditions and heavy drifting affecting much of the area. A few thunderstorms also occurred, bringing rapid snowfall rates to some areas. Many vehicles went into the ditch with many other accidents occurring. Most roads became nearly impassable with no travel advised for parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota. There were many people stranded to wait out the storm. Also, many schools and businesses were closed on Friday the 11th. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Faulkton, Ree Heights, Kidder, and Hayti, 7 inches at Garden City, Castlewood, Miller, Britton, and near Stephan, 9 inches at Waubay, Bryant, and Roy Lake, 10 inches at Big Stone City and Milbank, 11 inches at Wilmot, Watertown, and Victor, 15 inches at Summit, and 16 inches at Clear Lake.

1965: Severe thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest spawned fifty-one tornadoes killing over 250 people and causing more than 200 million dollars damage. Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were hardest hit in the "Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak". Although no F5's were officially reported, at least 22 were rated as F3 or F4. This is the third deadliest day for tornadoes on record, behind the Super Outbreak of 4/3/1974, and the outbreak that included the Tri-State Tornado of 3/18/1925. Dr. Ted Fujita discovered suction vortices during the Palm Sunday tornado outbreak. It had been believed the reason why tornadoes could hit one house and leave another across the street completely unscathed was because the whole tornado would "jump" from one house to another. However, the actual reason is because most of the destruction is caused by suction vortices: small, intense mini-tornadoes within the main tornado.

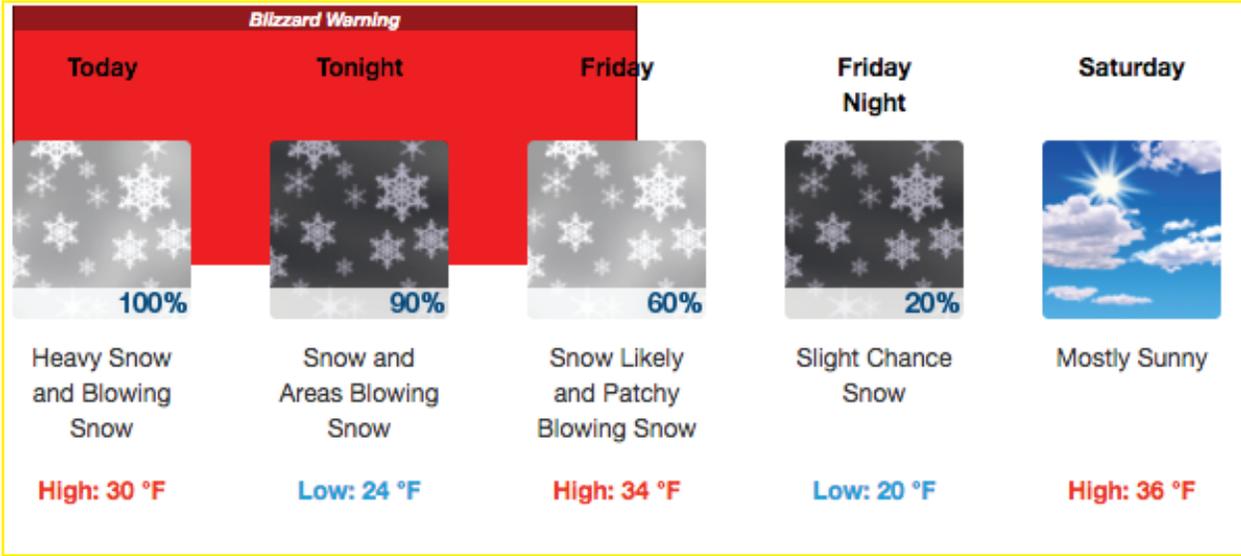
1988: Sixteen cities in the western U.S., nine in California, reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 95 degrees at Sacramento and 96 degrees at Bakersfield, California were the warmest of record for so early in the season.

1989: Forty-four cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 25 degrees at Conway Arkansas, 29 degrees at Dallas/Fort Worth Texas, and 22 degrees at Ozark Arkansas, were April records. Lows of 26 degrees at Hot Springs Arkansas and 31 degrees at Shreveport Louisiana equaled April records.

2012: The deluge began around 3:30 a.m. Over the next few hours, fast-moving hailstones pummeled the area north of Amarillo, Tex., which had lately been sitting in dust due to a lack of precipitation, according to the news organization. The hail mixed with melting hail turning the dust to mud and the mix create four-foot high mounds that shut down a major highway for the next 18 hours.

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## Blizzard Continues!

- ✓ 8 to 18" of additional snow expected today into Friday. Heaviest over eastern SD and western MN.
- ✓ Prepare for intense snowfall rates of an inch or two per hour.

- ✓ Wind gusts of 45 to 55 mph today.
- ✓ Whiteout Conditions are expected.
- ✓ Monitor Road Conditions



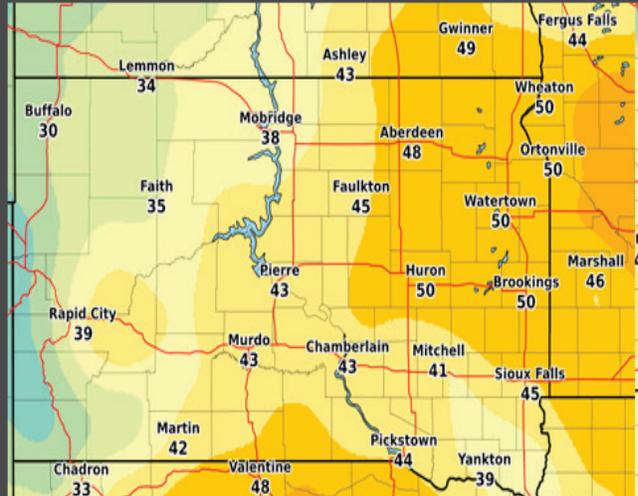
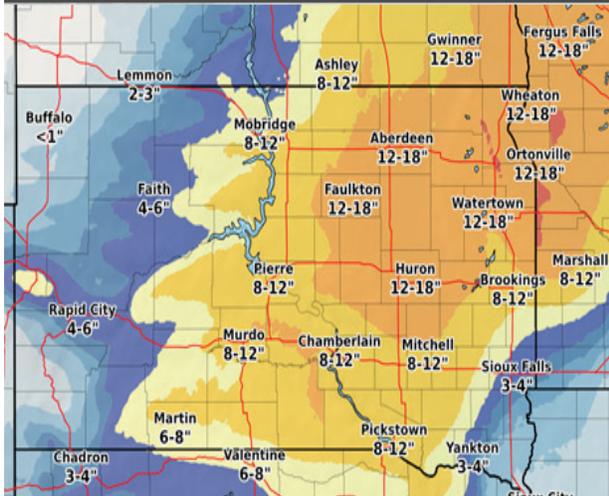
SD... <https://www.safetravelusa.com/sd/>  
 MN... <https://hb.511mn.org>



### Additional Snow Today through Tonight



### Highest Wind Gusts Today



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
 OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)  
 Updated: 4/11/2019 5:55 AM Central

Published on: 04/11/2019 at 7:00AM

Blizzard conditions will continue across the area today into Friday morning. Parts of Interstate 29 and 90 are closed. No travel is advised on several roadways. SD...<https://www.safetravelusa.com/sd/> MN...<https://hb.511mn.org>

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## Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 30 °F at 7:57 AM

Low Outside Temp: 27 °F at 9:53 AM

High Gust: 25 mph at 12:05 AM

Precip:

## Today's Info

Record High: 86° in 1910

Record Low: 8° in 1939

Average High: 55°F

Average Low: 30°F

Average Precip in April.: 0.47

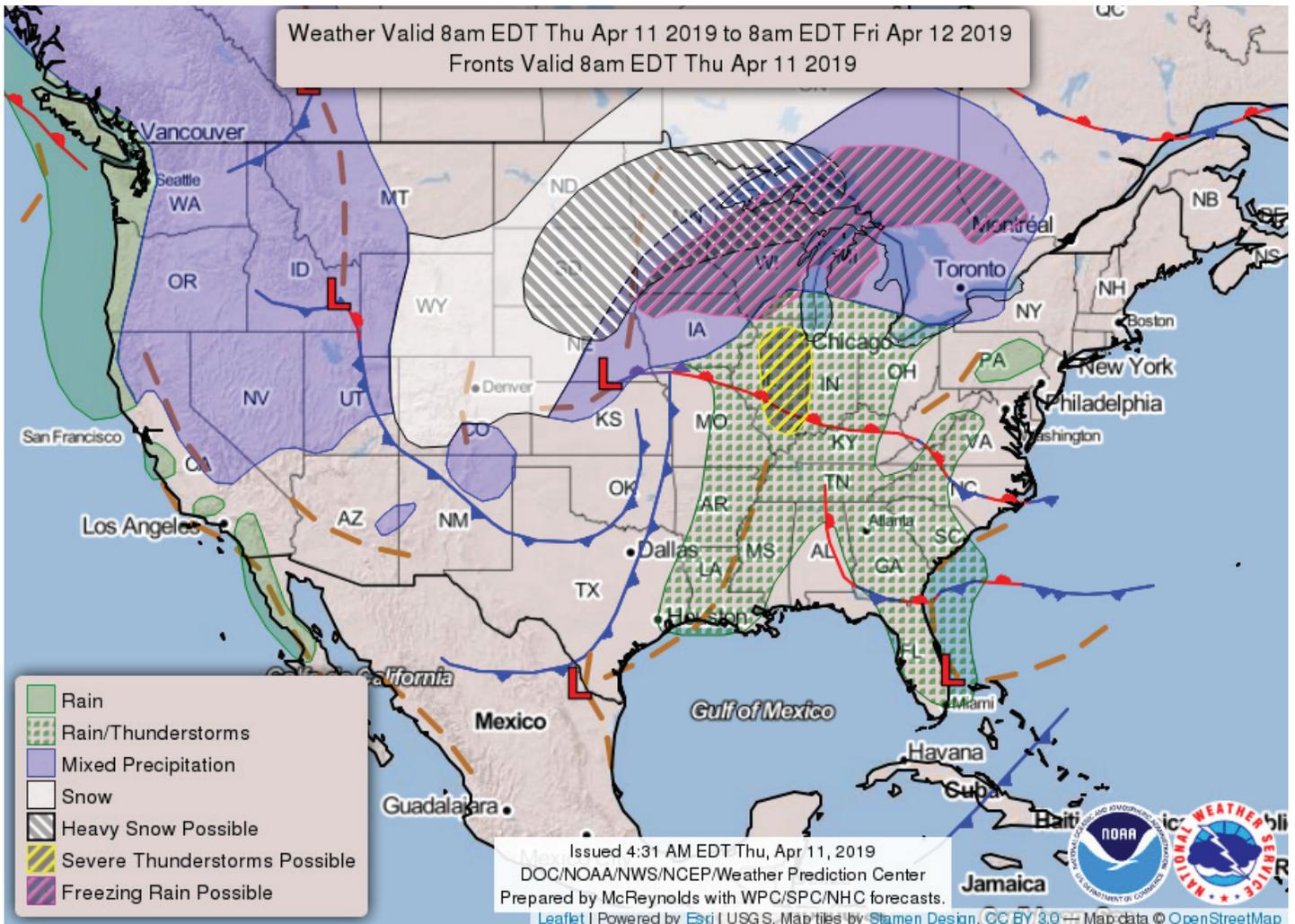
Precip to date in April.: 0.87

Average Precip to date: 2.65

Precip Year to Date: 3.06

Sunset Tonight: 8:15 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:54 a.m.



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## DOUBLE STANDARDS

There is a theme throughout the Old Testament that needs constant attention: God will not tolerate business practices that are dishonest, false, or even questionable. It has its roots in the Law, is emphasized by the prophets, and has a place of prominence in Wisdom Literature.

In Biblical times the phrase dishonest scales was used and meant scales of deceit. Also used was the phrase a just weight or an accurate or perfect stone. Merchants used stones as measures in place of coins and conducted their businesses by using balances and weighted stones. It was common knowledge that merchants had two sets of stones: one for selling and one for purchasing goods. When purchasing products for selling, they would use the heavier stone to gain an advantage over the person who was selling them goods to be resold. When selling their product to others, they would use the lighter stone, which resulted in the customer getting much less than what was paid for. Each stone was labeled, so the merchant knew he had the advantage.

Doing business like this was an abomination to the Lord, was unacceptable to Him, and one He would not tolerate. On the other hand, an accurate weight found favor with Him.

This comes as no surprise to His faithful. God will honor and bless those whose life is consistent with His ways, His Word, and in agreement with His teachings. He will favor them.

Remember, the lives of those who profess to be His followers are always under His surveillance. He will honor their faithfulness to Him for the way they honor and treat others.

Prayer: Convict us, Lord, when we are less than honest in any of our ways. May we live lives that honor You. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 11:1 The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him.

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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

### **The Latest: Snow, ice making Midwest travel dangerous**

**By The Associated Press**

The Latest on severe weather impacting the central U.S. (all times local):

6:45 a.m.

A powerful spring snow storm sweeping across the Midwest has made travel hazardous across Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota.

As much as 18 inches of snow has fallen in parts of South Dakota, where Gov. Kristi Noem closed state offices in much of the state Thursday amid heavy snow and strong winds.

Whiteout conditions have been reported in western Nebraska, where the Department of Transportation reported several highway closures Thursday morning.

Schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul are among hundreds of closed schools in Minnesota, where as much as 2 feet (0.61 meters) of snow is expected in the southwest part of the state by Friday. The Minnesota State Patrol says it has responded to more 200 crashes statewide since Wednesday.

The blizzard is part of a storm system known as a "bomb cyclone" that's slowly churning through the central U.S. for the second time in a month.

12 a.m.

A storm system known as a "bomb cyclone" churned through the U.S. interior for the second time in a month, unleashing a blizzard that struck the Upper Midwest and creating hazardous fire conditions farther south.

The storm knocked out power Wednesday to thousands of homes and businesses in South Dakota, disrupted air and ground travel from Colorado to Minnesota and threatened to swell rivers in the Midwest that flooded after March's drenching.

National Weather Service Forecaster David Roth said both storms are what is known as a "bomb cyclone," a weather phenomenon that entails a rapid drop in air pressure and a storm strengthening explosively.

Forecasters said this week's storm will swell rivers again, though likely not to the levels seen last month.

### **Blizzard closes government offices, schools, courts**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has closed state offices in most state counties for a second day as blizzard conditions crippled travel.

Noem on Thursday added two more counties to the closure list, shuttering 54 of South Dakota's 66 counties. Only essential personnel were told to report to work in those counties. Heavy snow and high winds are making travel dangerous.

As much as 18 inches of snow has fallen in parts of South Dakota, including Dupree and Mud Butte. The storm canceled schools, including those in Rapid City, circuit courts and the Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

The storm system knocked out power to thousands of homes and businesses in South Dakota Wednesday, disrupted air and ground travel from Colorado to Minnesota and threatened to swell rivers in the Midwest that flooded last month.

### **Bomb cyclone storm cuts power, disrupts travel in central US**

**By BLAKE NICHOLSON Associated Press**

A storm system known as a "bomb cyclone" slowly churned through the U.S. interior Thursday for the second time in a month, unleashing a blizzard that struck the Upper Midwest and creating hazardous fire conditions farther south.

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The storm knocked out power Wednesday to thousands of homes and businesses in South Dakota, disrupted air and ground travel from Colorado to Minnesota and threatened to swell rivers in the Midwest that flooded after March's drenching.

Both storms are known as a "bomb cyclone," a weather phenomenon that entails a rapid drop in air pressure and a storm strengthening explosively, said David Roth, a forecaster at the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

The latest storm's impacts are likely to be similar to last month's storm, Roth said. That blast dropped heavy snow and led to massive flooding in the Midwest that caused billions of dollars in damage in Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa and South Dakota.

"Hopefully this time it will be a slow snowmelt," Roth said.

Particularly hard hit by the storm were eastern South Dakota and southwestern Minnesota, where up to 2 ½ feet (0.61 meters) of snow was expected to fall, the National Weather Service said. Winds in excess of 50 mph (80.46 kph) also were expected, creating life-threatening conditions.

"We're calling it historic because of the widespread heavy snow. We will set some records," said Mike Connelly, a weather service meteorologist in Aberdeen, South Dakota.

Transportation officials closed Interstate 29 from east central South Dakota to the North Dakota border, as well as a 270-mile (434-kilometer) section of Interstate 90 between Rapid City and Mitchell, South Dakota.

Numerous traffic crashes were reported in northeastern South Dakota, and the storm knocked out power to thousands of homes and businesses in Sioux Falls.

Officials in Colorado closed a 150-mile (241-kilometer) stretch of Interstate 76 from just northeast of Denver to the Nebraska border, and Gov. Jared Polis activated the National Guard in case troops are needed to rescue stranded motorists. Denver Public Schools announced delayed starts Thursday for some campuses due to weather.

About half of the daily flights at Denver International Airport were canceled on Wednesday.

Multiple crashes in Minnesota along a snowy stretch of Interstate 35 prompted officials to close about 10 miles (16 kilometers) of the highway about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Minneapolis.

In Nebraska, the State Patrol was sending additional troopers into the state's panhandle, and officials closed Interstate 80 in that region.

"This storm is going to be dangerous," Patrol Maj. Russ Stanczyk said.

An unusual but not rare weather phenomenon known as "thunder snow" — snow accompanied by thunder and lightning — was reported in central South Dakota.

"It's essentially a thunderstorm, but it's cold enough for snow," Connelly said.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem closed state government offices in 52 counties. Numerous schools around the state closed, along with several Black Hills National Forest offices in western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts extended five weather-related executive orders until May 15 to help communities gain fast access to the state's emergency resources. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said "the National Guard stands ready" to rescue any stranded motorists.

The weather service posted an ice storm warning into Friday morning for a portion of southern Minnesota, saying up to 3/4ths of an inch of ice could accumulate on power lines, leading to outages.

Strong winds associated with the weather system were creating dangerous wildfire and travel conditions in New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. The weather service issued a high wind warning for the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles.

Winds in excess of 50 mph (80.46 kph) were combining with low humidity and an unstable atmosphere to create critical fire conditions in the three states. Forecasters in New Mexico said the winds also would make travel difficult on north-south oriented roads such as Interstate 25. In southern New Mexico, the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range closed Wednesday because of the high winds.

Forecasters said this week's storm will swell rivers again, though likely not to the levels seen last month due to the absence of a wet snowpack on frozen ground this time around.

Even moderate rises in the Missouri River will push more water into drenched Fremont County in south-

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western Iowa, Emergency Manager Mike Crecelius said. Last month's flooding swamped 455 houses and thousands of acres of farmland in his region.

"The problem is that we're not getting any time for the water to recede and things to dry out, so the levees can't be fixed; houses can't be fixed; crops can't be planted," he said.

Associated Press writers Nicholson in Bismarck, North Dakota; Colleen Slevin and Dan Elliott in Denver; Margery Beck in Omaha, Nebraska; Grant Schulte in Lincoln, Nebraska; Tim Talley in Oklahoma City; and Steve Karnowski in St. Paul, Minnesota, contributed to this story.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash

21-24-25-32-34

(twenty-one, twenty-four, twenty-five, thirty-two, thirty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$252,000

Lotto America

01-14-16-24-50, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 3

(one, fourteen, sixteen, twenty-four, fifty; Star Ball: two; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$17.85 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$140 million

Powerball

12-21-23-39-67, Powerball: 6, Power Play: 4

(twelve, twenty-one, twenty-three, thirty-nine, sixty-seven; Powerball: six; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$84 million

## Reports critical of children's home in reacting to runaway

ROCKERVILLE, S.D. (AP) — Reports from two regulatory agencies are critical of how staff at the Black Hill's Children's Home responded after a young girl fled from the facility, a runaway who remains missing and is feared dead.

The government reports say the Children's Home staff should have called 911 immediately after 9-year-old Serenity Dennard disappeared Feb. 3, instead of waiting an hour and 41 minutes.

The reviews by the state Department of Social Services and the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services say the home doesn't have a sufficient emergency preparedness plan and initially conducted a disorganized search for Dennard. Much of the facility's funding comes from Medicaid.

The Rapid City Journal reported the agencies also said staff failed to conduct training or drills for runaways, fell into complacency after previous attempted runaways and did not follow the facility's policy regarding lost children on campus.

Dennard has not been found despite exhaustive searches of the rocky and forested area around the home, which is between Keystone and Rockerville. The day Dennard ran away, low temperatures in the area were around zero degrees, prompting authorities to say the girl's survival was unlikely if she remained outside because she was not dressed for such weather.

Bill Colson, executive director of the home's parent organization, the nonprofit Children's Home Society, said all of the corrective actions required by the reports have been implemented.

"Obviously, we regret that Serenity got away from us, we absolutely do," Colson said. "But I think it's important to keep in mind that this agency's been around since 1893, and we've served thousands and thousands of kids, and we do it safely. This time, it didn't work out the way we had hoped, but we're

working to be better.”

The federal report noted the Children’s Home had a Lost Child on Campus policy that dated back to 1999, and one of the steps in the policy was notification of law enforcement.

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

## **Sudanese officials say army forced president to step down**

**By MAGGIE MICHAEL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press**

CAIRO (AP) — Tens of thousands of Sudanese marched toward the center of the capital Khartoum on Thursday, cheering, singing and dancing in celebration as two senior officials said the military had forced longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir to step down after 30 years in power.

The circumstances of al-Bashir’s apparent ouster after months of intensifying protests against his rule were not clear, however, and his whereabouts were unknown. The military told the nation to expect an “important statement” soon in an announcement on state TV in the morning.

Word of al-Bashir’s removal comes just over a week after Algeria’s President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in power for 20 years, resigned in response to similar demonstrations. The mass protests bear striking resemblances to the popular uprisings in 2011 that swept across several Arab nations and ousted leaders in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen.

The developments raised speculation that, behind the scenes, the military aimed to install one of its one in place of al-Bashir. Organizers of the protests that have drawn tens of thousands into the streets reject that, seeing it as a way for the armed forces to keep the power that it has held under al-Bashir. Instead, they demand a civilian transitional government.

One main organizer, the Sudanese Professionals Association, said the protest leaders were in talks with the military over the transition. Sarah Abdel-Jaleel, a spokeswoman for the association, told The Associated Press they will not accept a military coup and insist on an “unconditional stepping down of al-Bashir and his regime.”

Meanwhile, the movement called on protesters to keep up the pressure by continuing their main sit-in outside the military’s headquarters in Khartoum. “We are not leaving. We urge the revolutionaries not to leave the sit-in,” the association said, warning against attempts to “reproduce the old regime.”

Two officials in high positions in Sudan’s government and military, told the AP that the military was in talks about a transitional government after forcing al-Bashir to step down. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

In an apparent concession to a demand of the protesters, the National Security and Intelligence Service said in a statement that all political detainees would be released. It did not indicate when the release would take place.

Sudan’s protests initially erupted last December with rallies against a worsening economy, but quickly escalated into calls for an end to embattled al-Bashir’s rule. They gained new momentum last week after Bouteflika’s resignation.

As the Khartoum sit-in surged in size, the government responded with an increased crackdown. Security forces tried repeatedly to break up the sit-in since Saturday, in violence that killed at least 22 people.

Early Thursday morning, the military deployed to secure key sites and installations around Khartoum, witnesses said. Armored vehicles and tanks were parked in the streets and near bridges over the Nile River, they said, as well as in the vicinity of the military headquarters where the sit-in is taking place. The witnesses spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals. There were also unconfirmed reports that the airport in the Sudanese capital had been closed.

Ahead of the expected army statement, Sudanese radio played military marches and patriotic music. State TV ceased regular broadcasts, showing only the statement promising the statement and urging the public to “wait for it.”

Thousands waited at the sit-in as crowds of protesters moved through the city converging on the site.

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The marchers waved flags, flashed "V for victory:" signs and sang and danced. Some rode on the roofs of cars, moving slowly and honking horns in celebration.

But the hours without an army statement raised fears among protesters that the military was seeking to keep its control.

"Is there an attempt to get around the anger of the Sudanese people after they failed to end the protests by violence? If so, the revolution will continue," said Mariam al-Mahdi, of the opposition Umma Party.

Al-Bashir came to power in a 1989 coup, leading an alliance of the military and Islamist hard-liners. Since then, the military has stuck by him, even as he was forced to allow the separation of South Sudan and as he became a pariah in many countries, wanted by the international war crimes tribunal for atrocities in Darfur.

The protests that erupted in December have been the biggest challenge to his rule. Security forces responded from the start with a fierce crackdown that killed dozens. Al-Bashir banned unauthorized public gatherings and granted sweeping powers to the police since imposing a state of emergency in February. Security forces have used tear gas, rubber bullets, live ammunition and batons against demonstrators.

The military, however, has seemed more equivocal, stating its support the country's "leadership" and pledging to protect its "achievements" — without mentioning al-Bashir by name. Army troops have not tried to stop protests and, in some cases, appeared to offer a measure of protection for the demonstrators.

Some in the protest movement have seen that as a willingness in the military to drop al-Bashir.

## UK arrests WikiLeaks' Assange at Ecuador embassy in London

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British police arrested WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London on Thursday, after the South American nation decided to revoke the political asylum that had given him sanctuary for almost seven years.

London police said they were invited into the embassy by Ecuador's ambassador. Assange took refuge in the embassy in 2012 after he was released on bail while facing extradition to Sweden on sexual assault allegations that have since been dropped.

Assange has been under U.S. Justice Department scrutiny for years for Wikileaks' role in publishing thousands of government secrets and was an important figure in the special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe as investigators examined how WikiLeaks obtained emails stolen from Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and Democratic groups.

Ecuador's president, Lenin Moreno, said his government made a "sovereign decision" to revoke Assange's political asylum due to "repeated violations to international conventions and daily-life."

"Today I announce that that the discourteous and aggressive behavior of Mr. Julian Assange, the hostile and threatening declarations of its allied organization, against Ecuador, and especially the transgression of international treaties, have led the situation to a point where the asylum of Mr. Assange is unsustainable and no longer viable," Moreno said in a video released on Twitter.

Video posted online by Ruptly, a news service of Russia Today, showed several men in suits carrying Assange out of the embassy building and loading him into a police van while uniformed British police officers formed a passageway. Assange sported a full beard and slicked-back grey hair.

His lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, said in tweet that he had been arrested for breaching his bail conditions and in relation to a U.S. extradition request.

Prosecutors in the Eastern District of Virginia have inadvertently disclosed the existence of a sealed criminal complaint against Assange, though no details have been publicly announced.

WikiLeaks quickly drew attention to U.S. interest in Assange.

"Powerful actors, including CIA, are engaged in a sophisticated effort to de-humanise, de-legitimize and imprison him," said in a tweet over a photo of Assange's smiling face.

Assange had not come out of the embassy for almost seven years because he feared arrest and extradition to the United States for publishing thousands of classified military and diplomatic cables through

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WikiLeaks. Although Sweden has dropped the sexual assault case that first led to Assange's arrest in Britain, U.K. authorities said he would be rearrested if he ever left the embassy because he skipped bail in the original case.

London's Metropolitan Police Service said Assange was taken into "custody at a central London police station where he will remain, before being presented before Westminster Magistrates' Court as soon as is possible."

His arrest came a day after WikiLeaks accused the Ecuador's government of an "extensive spying operation" against Assange.

WikiLeaks claims that meetings with lawyers and a doctor inside the embassy over the past year were secretly filmed.

WikiLeaks said in a tweeted statement that Ecuador illegally terminated Assange's political asylum "in violation of international law."

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt thanked Moreno for breaking the impasse, saying on Twitter that Assange "is no hero and no one is above the law."

## 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. ASSANGE ARRESTED IN LONDON

Police say they've arrested the WikiLeaks founder at the Ecuadorian embassy on a court warrant dating to 2012.

### 2. MAY FACES PARLIAMENT AFTER BREXIT EXTENSION

A clearly frustrated European Union gives Britain until Halloween to find a way out of its Brexit quagmire, but the path toward divorce from the bloc remains unclear.

### 3. SUDANESE OFFICIALS SAY ARMY FORCED PRESIDENT TO STEP DOWN

Tens of thousands of joyous Sudanese are making their way to the capital Khartoum as officials say the military has forced longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir to step down after 30 years in power.

### 4. AN INITIATIVE THEY BOTH 'CAN SHARE'

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi tells the AP that Trump is interested in working with Democrats on an infrastructure package.

### 5. 'I THINK SPYING DID OCCUR' AGAINST TRUMP CAMPAIGN

Attorney General William Barr's comment before a Senate panel gives a boost to the president and his supporters who insist he was unfairly targeted by the FBI.

### 6. WHERE TRUMP AIDES ARE AT ODDS OVER IMMIGRATION POLICY

Stephen Miller's renewed push to bring about tougher policies at the U.S.-Mexico border sets up a face-off with Jared Kushner, who has been working on his own immigration plan.

### 7. POLLS OPEN IN INDIA

The lengthy voting process for nearly a billion Indians is seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party.

### 8. 'BOMB CYCLONE' POISED TO STRIKE INTERIOR US

The powerful storm system is bearing down on South Dakota and Minnesota, where up to 2 1/2 feet of snow and winds in excess of 50 mph are expected.

### 9. WHAT ROYAL PALACE IS KEEPING SECRET

Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, say they have decided to keep plans around their baby's arrival private.

### 10. HOW YOU CAN WATCH EVERY SHOT OF THE MASTERS

The website for golf's first major is working to capture all of the tournament's 20,000-plus shots on camera for online viewers.

## Miller vs. Kushner: Power players at odds over immigration

By JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump rails against an influx of migrants at the border, two of his most influential White House power players are at odds over the future of his immigration policy.

Fresh off orchestrating a shake-up at the Department of Homeland Security, an ascendant Stephen Miller is making a renewed push to impose tougher policies at the border. That's setting up a face-off with senior adviser and presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner, who has been quietly working on his own immigration reform package for months.

Their divergent approaches to the president's signature campaign issue speak to more than the ideological gulf between the two men: They echo a long-standing philosophical divide within the West Wing over how to best position the president ahead of his re-election campaign.

Miller, the mastermind of the president's Muslim travel ban and other hardline immigration policies, has long been the combative ideologue, urging Trump to take ever-more-drastic action to stanch the border flow. Kushner, whose faith in his own careful dealmaking power rivals Miller's zeal, has spent months meeting with lawmakers and interest groups, trying to put together a package of legal immigration and border security changes that Republicans can rally around heading into the 2020 presidential election.

The resulting parallel tracks — one bent on implementing ever-stricter policies and another meant to forge a more palatable and unifying legislative package — have created uncertainty and confusion both inside the administration and on Capitol Hill about where Trump is headed.

The conflict came into focus during a recent White House meeting when Trump effectively knighted Miller, saying the aide would oversee immigration going forward. But Kushner had already been tasked by the president with coming up with a legal immigration plan, which Trump was briefed on this week.

"We'll talk to you about it soon," Trump said Wednesday of Kushner's plan, labeling it "very exciting, very important for the country."

Despite the aides' differing approaches, administration officials insist there is no ill will between Kushner and Miller, who have worked together over the years at the White House and on Trump's campaign. The two are among the last remaining members of Trump's tightknit 2016 team to still work at the White House and have been longtime collaborators, co-writing speeches, including the president's convention address.

But for all that, the two hold fundamentally different views on immigration and notions on how Trump ought to govern.

Miller, the unrelenting hard-liner, sees illegal and legal immigration as existential threats to national security and the American worker, and views Trump as a generational voice willing to make dramatic changes. Kushner, a former Democratic-leaning real estate developer, sees a broken immigration system as another intractable Washington problem that could be solved with the right deal.

That leaves them working at cross purposes at times.

After Trump threatened to shut down the southern border two weeks ago, Kushner was among those whom Homeland Security officials worked with to get the president to back off. Indeed, Kushner is seen within the department as someone who accepts the realities of legal limitations and can be trusted to calm Trump down, not spin him up, as they feel Miller tends to do on immigration, according to three administration officials with knowledge of the dynamic. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss internal deliberations.

Senior administration officials have tried to paint Miller and Kushner's efforts as complementary — Miller addressing the day-to-day crisis at the border while Kushner looking at longer-term solutions.

"President Trump alone sets immigration policy that's designed to solve the humanitarian crisis at our border, prevent illegal entry into our country and protect the American people - there's no daylight between the president's team as they work to implement that agenda," spokesman Hogan Gidley said in a statement.

Trump on Wednesday also challenged the notion that anyone was running his immigration policy other than him.

Asked by reporters whether he had considered tapping Miller to lead Homeland Security, Trump said:

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"Stephen is an excellent guy. He's wonderful person." But, he added, "Frankly, there's only one person that's running it. You know who that is? It's me."

But former officials said the absence of clear lines of authority and the recent purge of senior leadership at Homeland Security could create confusion, leaving the agency to implement whichever viewpoint wins the day.

"To whom are we listening? Who's setting the priorities?" said David Lapan, the department's former press secretary.

Thad Bingel a former senior Homeland Security official, who helped shepherd outgoing Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen through her confirmation process, echoed those concerns, saying that when it's not clear who's in charge at the White House, departments and subagencies "spin their wheels a lot trying to satisfy multiple masters."

Raising the stakes further is that Kushner is no mere White House aide — he's the president's son-in-law and has proven capable of forcing staff turnover at the highest level. He was instrumental in the departure of two chiefs of staff and the president's former chief strategist.

Kushner's latest efforts on immigration date to early January, when Trump asked him to pursue a deal with lawmakers that would win the president more money for his border wall during the government shutdown.

While White House officials caution that the plan has yet to be finalized, aides said it would include "merit based" changes to the legal immigration system as well as proposals on border security that could include modernizing ports of entry and changing the way the country detains and removes people who enter the country illegally.

As part of that effort, Kushner has convened a series of informal listening sessions with almost 50 groups, including anti-immigration advocates, business and conservative groups coming together to talk through ideas. It was the same playbook he used last year on criminal justice reform, which culminated in the only major piece of bipartisan legislation the president has signed.

During those meetings, Kushner was been careful not to tip his hat on his personal views. But participants say they expect the plan to include significant changes, including increases in employment-based green cards. While protections for the hundreds of thousands of so-called Dreamers brought to the country illegally as children were a major point of discussion, a senior administration official said Dreamers are not currently part of the plan.

Jessica Vaughn, director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for lower immigration levels, cautioned that unveiling a major plan now would be a distraction from the immediate border crisis.

"The timing couldn't be worse," she said. "It's just the wrong time to be getting into a battle over this when the priority should be on fixing the border crisis and getting our enforcement on track."

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Associated Press writer Colleen Long contributed to this report.

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Follow Colvin and Miller Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj> and <https://twitter.com/zekejmilller>

## Mnuchin postpones decision on handing over Trump tax returns

By ANDREW TAYLOR and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Treasury Department has missed a deadline to deliver President Donald Trump's tax returns to the House Ways and Means Committee chairman.

In a letter to committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., on Wednesday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said his department hasn't decided whether to comply with the demand and said Treasury will consult with the Justice Department and "carefully" review the request further. Neal asked for Trump's returns a week ago.

"The legal implications of this request could affect protections for all Americans against politically-motivated disclosures of personal tax information, regardless of which party is in power," Mnuchin wrote.

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He said Treasury respects lawmakers' oversight duties and would make sure taxpayer protections would be "scrupulously observed, consistent with my statutory responsibilities" as the department reviews the request.

Earlier Wednesday, Trump weighed in, telling reporters that he won't agree to release his returns while he is under audit.

Trump said, "I would love to give them, but I'm not going to do it while I'm under audit." The IRS says there's no rule against subjects of an audit from publicly releasing their tax filings.

Neal asked the IRS last Wednesday to turn over six years of the president's tax returns within a week. Trump has broken with decades of presidential precedent by not voluntarily releasing his returns to the public.

Trump's position has long been that he is under audit and therefore could not release his returns. But in recent weeks, he has added to the argument, saying publicly and privately that the American people elected him without seeing his taxes and would do so again.

"Remember, I got elected last time — the same exact issue," Trump said. "Frankly, the people don't care."

The president has told those close to him that the attempt to get his returns were an invasion of his privacy and a further example of the Democratic-led "witch hunt" — which he has called special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation — meant to damage him.

Trump has repeatedly asked aides about the status of the House request and has inquired about the "loyalty" of the top officials at the IRS, according to one outside adviser who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Democrats didn't expect the department to comply, but they haven't sketched out their next steps. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich., speaking before Mnuchin's response was delivered, said it may take Neal a couple of days to issue his own response. House Democrats are at a party retreat in the Virginia suburbs of Washington.

Neal has adopted a methodical approach to seeking Trump's returns. He has the option of eventually seeking to subpoena the records or to go to court if Treasury does not comply, but it's not clear he'll adopt a more confrontational approach just yet.

Neal's initial letter, sent a week ago, didn't lay out any consequences for the IRS if it didn't comply, and a spokesman said a likely course would be a second, more insistent, letter.

"We intend to follow through with this," Neal said Wednesday. "I'll let you know fast."

The request for Trump's tax filings is but one of many oversight efforts launched by Democrats after taking back the House in last fall's midterms. Neal is relying on a 1920s-era law that says the IRS "shall furnish" any tax return requested by the chairmen of key House and Senate committees.

Mnuchin told lawmakers that his department will "follow the law," but he hasn't shared the department's interpretation of the statute.

The White House did not respond to questions as to whether the president asked Mnuchin or the IRS head to intervene. The president's outside attorney also did not respond to a request for comment.

## **Barr says he thinks 'spying' occurred against Trump campaign**

**By ERIC TUCKER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr declared he thinks "spying did occur" against Donald Trump's presidential campaign, suggesting the origins of the Russia investigation may have been mishandled, in remarks that aligned him with the president at a time when Barr's independence is under scrutiny.

Barr, appearing before a Senate panel on Wednesday, did not say what "spying" may have taken place but seemed to be alluding to a surveillance warrant the FBI obtained on a former Trump associate. He later said he wasn't sure there had been improper surveillance but wanted to make sure proper procedures were followed. Still, his remarks give a boost to Trump and his supporters who insist his 2016 campaign

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was unfairly targeted by the FBI.

Barr was testifying for a second day at congressional budget hearings that were dominated by questions about special counsel Robert Mueller's Trump-Russia investigation. His statements further inflamed Democrats already frustrated by Barr's handling of the Mueller report, including his release of a four-page summary letter last month that they say paints the special counsel's findings in an overly favorable way for the president. The attorney general said he expects to release a redacted version of Mueller's report on Russian interference in the campaign next week.

In an interview with The Associated Press, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she didn't trust Barr and suggested his statements undermined his credibility as America's chief law enforcement officer.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York tweeted that Barr's comments "directly contradict" what the Justice Department previously has said. And intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff of California said Barr's comments were sure to please Trump, but strike "another destructive blow to our democratic institutions."

Republicans, meanwhile, praised Barr's testimony. North Carolina Rep. Mark Meadows, a Trump confidant who has raised concerns about Justice Department conduct, tweeted that Barr's willingness to step in is "massive." The attorney general said he would investigate the origins and conduct of the early days of the Russia investigation, a probe separate from an existing inspector general inquiry.

At the Capitol hearing, senators appeared taken aback by his use of the word "spying." Asked by Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz if he wanted to rephrase his language, Barr suggested he intended no nefarious connotations but simply wanted to make sure there was "no unauthorized surveillance."

"Is that more appropriate in your mind?" he asked Schatz.

Barr is an experienced public figure who chooses his words carefully, and it's not clear if he realized what a political storm he'd create in using the word "spying." While it could be used to describe lawful and necessary intelligence collection activities, for Trump and his supporters the word has an inherently negative meaning, and Barr's use of it tapped into a White House narrative of law enforcement misconduct.

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said on Fox Business Network that "people were wiretapped. People were looked into and spied upon. That should be a serious question that the American people should demand answers for and quite frankly so should Congress."

Trump himself, who has repeatedly called the investigation of his campaign a "witch hunt," said on Wednesday, "It was started illegally. Everything about it was crooked. Every single thing about it. There were dirty cops."

Though Barr said at his January confirmation hearing that he didn't believe Mueller would be involved in a witch hunt, he struck a different tone Wednesday and said it "depends on where you're sitting."

"If you are somebody who's being falsely accused of something, you would tend to view the investigation as a witch hunt," he said.

The spying discussion started when Barr was asked by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, about his plans to review his department's actions in investigating Trump. Barr explained that he considered spying on a political campaign to be a "big deal," invoking the surveillance of anti-war protesters during the Vietnam War.

Asked by Shaheen if he was suggesting "spying" had occurred, Barr replied "spying did occur. Yes, I think spying did occur. The question is whether it was predicated, adequately predicated," meaning whether it was legally justified.

Barr later said that although he did not have specific evidence of wrongdoing, "I do have questions about it."

"I feel I have an obligation to make sure that government power was not abused," he said.

Asked again about spying at the end of the hearing, Barr tempered his tone. "I am not saying improper surveillance occurred. I am saying I am concerned about it, and I am looking into it," he said.

Barr may have been referring to a surveillance warrant the FBI obtained in the fall of 2016 to monitor the communications of former Trump campaign aide Carter Page, who has not been charged with any wrongdoing. The warrant was obtained after Page had left the campaign and was renewed several times.

Critics of the Russia investigation have seized on the fact that the warrant application cited Democratic-funded opposition research, done by a former British spy, into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

Barr's statement that he expected to release a redacted version of Mueller's nearly 400-page report next week marked a slight change from the estimate he gave Tuesday, when he said the release would be within a week.

Though he said the document will be redacted to withhold negative information about peripheral figures in the investigation, he said that would not apply to Trump, an officeholder and someone central to the probe.

Meanwhile, Trump falsely claimed again Wednesday that the Mueller report had found "no obstruction." While Barr's letter said the special counsel did not find a criminal conspiracy between Russia and Trump associates during the 2016 election, it also said Mueller had presented evidence on both sides of the obstruction question and ultimately did not reach a conclusion on it.

Barr said he did not believe Mueller's evidence was sufficient to prove that Trump had obstructed justice.

Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## AP Interview: Pelosi seeking 'common ground' with Trump

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — One day last week, amid spiraling fallout over special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi dialed up the president and requested a meeting.

She talked to President Donald Trump about working together on an infrastructure package.

It was the first phone call between the two since the testy days of the government shutdown earlier this year, and it seemed productive. They are planning to meet, she told The Associated Press in a Wednesday interview.

So goes the relationship between Washington's two power centers — one in the White House, where Trump is slapping almost hourly at the investigations into his administration and running headlong into a climactic moment of his presidency, the other on Capitol Hill, where Pelosi is deliberately steering her gavel toward her party's goals.

As the two cross the 100-day mark of the era of divided government, theirs is a relationship like almost none other in Washington.

Even as Trump derides Democrats as "unhinged" and claims they are a party taken over by "socialists," he pulls his punches with Pelosi. And while Pelosi criticizes Trump as "unfit" for office — and hasn't fully closed the door on impeachment — she wants to work with him on shared priorities.

She says 80 percent of their conversations, including the talk last Thursday, are about infrastructure. They're trying, she said, to find areas of "common ground."

Launching an infrastructure investment program is the kind of big bipartisan undertaking that seems all but impossible in times like these.

The Trump administration's "infrastructure week" became a punchline around Washington when it fizzled amid the White House's often shifting priorities. Trump promised on election night a \$1 trillion investment in new roads and other projects but has never come close to achieving it. Democrats scoff at the \$200 billion requests he's made in his budget proposals as meager. Pelosi called it a "nonstarter."

But infrastructure — like the effort on lowering prescription drug costs — is the kind of initiative that could benefit both of them as they head toward the 2020 campaign season. They could change the subject from the ongoing investigations that pose risks for both parties, and they could show voters they can deliver with building projects that improve communities and create jobs even at a time of divided government, with Democrats controlling the House and Republicans controlling the Senate.

"We want dirt to fly," Pelosi said.

After her talks with Trump, Pelosi thinks the president may be willing to do more than he's put on the table. Trump's latest budget proposed \$200 billion in federal dollars that could be leveraged with private

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capital to cover the difference.

"I don't think the president is wedded to that proposal," she said. "It's too small."

Most of their phone call last week revolved around infrastructure, and she said the intention is to "get a dollar figure" as a starting point for the discussions.

Asked about infrastructure, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell also left open the possibility of a fresh bipartisan effort.

"We've all been talking about infrastructure, including the president, for a couple of years now," McConnell told Fox News on Wednesday. "We need some straight talk from both sides on how we're going to pay for it."

The day after Trump and Pelosi spoke, Trump went to California to visit the southern border, where he is trying to build a long-promised border wall with Mexico after Democrats thwarted his demand for more wall funds during the shutdown.

That afternoon, House Democrats filed a lawsuit challenging Trump's national emergency declaration, which he invoked to circumvent Congress and to use military construction money to pay for the border wall.

"It's so very self-evident that the president is very different from every other person that anybody ever served with," Pelosi said in the AP interview Wednesday.

"He is not only unique, he's ... what would be the word?" she said, trailing off. "To be president of the United States is to have a very special personality. But there are shared values about commitment to our Constitution, to the vision of our founders to the Constitution of the United States. I don't see those features yet in this president."

Follow Mascaro on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/lisamascaro>

## UK's May faces Parliament after EU grants Brexit extension

By **RAF CASERT, JILL LAWLESS and GREGORY KATZ** Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A clearly frustrated European Union has given Britain a few more months to find a way out of its Brexit quagmire. Now it's up to Britain's squabbling politicians to work out if they can meet the new Halloween deadline.

Prime Minister Theresa May is expected to brief Parliament Thursday on the results of the emergency EU summit that ended in the early hours with the bloc agreeing an extension to the country's departure until Oct. 31.

However, her path toward actually taking Britain out of the EU remains unclear.

She is blocked by a strong faction in her own Conservative Party that hates her withdrawal deal and hopes to oust her, and talks aimed at winning support from the opposition Labour Party are moving forward slowly, if at all.

May's own authority has been gravely compromised by the long Brexit ordeal and she has promised to step down once Britain leaves the bloc — if efforts to get rid of her more quickly do not bear fruit.

Faced with so much uncertainty, EU leaders whose talks went well after midnight agreed on a new Oct. 31 cutoff date. If no extension was granted, then Britain faced the prospect of crashing out of the EU this Friday with no deal, a scenario that in Parliament worry would lead to a deep recession as tariffs are imposed on U.K. exports and other restrictions on trade are imposed.

"Please, do not waste this time," European Council President Donald Tusk pleaded. He said the EU was giving Britain six more months "to find the best possible solution" to its Brexit impasse.

Like many things related to Brexit, the extension was a messy compromise. May came to an emergency summit in Brussels seeking to postpone Britain's departure from the EU until June 30. Some European leaders favored a longer extension, while French President Emmanuel Macron was wary of anything but a very short delay.

Leaders of the 27 remaining EU member states met for more than six hours over a dinner of scallop and cod before settling on the end of October, with the possibility of an earlier Brexit if Britain ratifies a

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withdrawal agreement.

May said the possibility of leaving before the deadline was a key request of hers.

"I continue to believe we need to leave the EU, with a deal, as soon as possible," she told reporters.

She noted that if U.K. lawmakers back her Brexit deal, Britain could still leave by June 30 — the Brexit deadline she had requested from the bloc — and possibly as soon as May 22, which would release Britain from having to participate in elections for the European Parliament.

May spoke to the 27 EU leaders for just over an hour, before they met for dinner without her to decide Britain's fate. In contrast to some testy recent summits, there were signs of warmth, even humor. May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were filmed laughing over a tablet bearing an image showing the two of them speaking to their respective Parliaments on Wednesday while wearing similar blue jackets.

While many leaders said they were inclined to grant a Brexit delay, Macron expressed reservations, warning as he arrived at the summit that "nothing is decided."

Afterward, the French president said he was satisfied with the outcome.

"We did the best possible compromise to preserve the unity of the 27 (other EU members) because we have left the United Kingdom more time to deliver a deal," Macron said.

Tusk said that during the extension Britain "will continue its sincere cooperation as a full member state, with all its rights, and as a close friend and trusted ally in the future."

Several months have passed since May and the EU struck a deal laying out the terms of Britain's departure and the outline of future relations. All that was needed was ratification by the British and European Parliaments.

But U.K. lawmakers rejected it — three times. As Britain's departure date of March 29 approached with no resolution in sight, the EU gave Britain until Friday to approve a withdrawal plan, change course and seek a further delay to Brexit, or crash out of the EU with no deal to cushion the shock.

Economists and business leaders have warned that a 'no-deal' Brexit would lead to huge disruptions in trade and travel, with tariffs and customs checks causing gridlock at British ports and possible shortages of goods.

The Confederation of British Industry said the Brexit extension means an "imminent economic crisis" has been averted for now.

After all, all options from a 'no-deal' Brexit to a general election to no Brexit at all remain on the table.

May has previously said that "as prime minister" she could not agree to let Britain stay in the EU beyond June 30, and has promised to step down once Brexit is delivered. Many Conservative Party lawmakers want a new leader to take charge of the next stage of Brexit. But they can't force her out until the end of the year, after she survived a no-confidence vote in December.

Several days of talks between May's Conservative government and the main opposition Labour Party aimed at finding a compromise have failed to produce a breakthrough. Labour favors a softer Brexit than the government has proposed, and wants to retain a close economic relationship with the bloc. The two sides said they would resume their discussions Thursday.

Pro-EU politicians said the next few months should be used to hold a new referendum on whether to leave the EU or remain. Scottish National Party Nicola Sturgeon said in a tweet after the extension was granted that the British people should be allowed to "decide if they still want to leave."

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said the time had come for Britain to decide what it wants.

"We're giving them a very long time to take a decision," he said.

"You know, the European Union is not a prison. Nobody has to stay but it is also a home and we are not going to kick anyone out."

As to the symbolic end date? He said it was not on the minds of the EU leaders.

"As I learned this evening, Halloween is not a holiday widely celebrated across the European Union," Varadkar said.

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Katz reported from London. Associated Press writers Mike Corder and Angela Charlton in Brussels and

Danica Kirka in London, and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this report.

## India votes in 1st phase of long polls seen as test for Modi

By EMILY SCHMALL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least one person was killed on the first day of polling in India's general elections, which are seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

A local leader of Andhra Pradesh state's ruling Telugu Desam party who police identified as Sidda Bhaskara Reddy was killed in a confrontation with supporters of a regional opposition party, YSR Congress. Violent clashes were also reported elsewhere in the state, where voters are casting ballots for 25 members of India's lower house of Parliament, the Lok Sabha, and 175 state assembly seats.

Outside of Andhra Pradesh, voting was taking place in 17 other Indian states and two Union Territories Thursday in the first of a seven-phase election staged over six weeks.

With 900 million of India's 1.3 people registered to vote, it is the world's largest democratic exercise. Over the course of the election, 543 Lok Sabha seats will be decided from about a million polling stations across India.

With Modi as their frontman, the BJP won a clear majority in 2014 elections. Under the leadership of political dynasty scion Rahul Gandhi, India's National Congress party, which ruled the country for about half a century since the 1947 independence, has struggled to coalesce India's many opposition parties into a coherent effort that could go head-to-head with the BJP. Surveys show the ruling party projected to come out first again in this year's polls, though with a smaller mandate.

Supporters of Modi say the tea seller's son from Gujarat state has improved the nation's standing in the world. India's economy has continued to grow under Modi, jostling with the United Kingdom for the fifth-largest in the world.

"I vote for the progress of my country," said businessman Manish Kumar after casting his ballot for the BJP in the Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh state.

Tapan Shome, an accountant, said he and his wife voted "to make India a good, prosperous country."

But India's growth hasn't meant a better employment outlook in the country, where an estimated 1 million people join the labor pool each month. According to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy, employment contracted in the year following a 2016 demonetization program to remove most of India's banknotes from circulation by 3.5 million jobs.

And Modi's critics say his party's Hindu nationalism has aggravated religious tensions and violence against Muslims and other minorities in constitutionally secular India.

Since a suicide bombing in disputed Kashmir killed 40 Indian paramilitary forces in February, the BJP campaign has played up the threat of Muslim-majority Pakistan.

Voting also began Thursday for two parliamentary seats in Kashmir, a Himalayan region split between India and Pakistan and claimed by both in its entirety, amid tight security and calls for a by Muslim separatists who say the polls are an illegitimate exercise. Armed police and paramilitary soldiers in riot gear guarded polling stations and nearby roads.

In the northern Baramulla area, many people said they came out to vote only to express their disapproval of the BJP, calling it an "anti-Muslim" and "anti-Kashmiri" organization. The BJP's election manifesto promised to scrap decades-old special rights for Kashmiris under India's Constitution that prevent outsiders from buying property in the territory.

"I didn't want to vote but then there's an imminent threat by politicians like Modi who are up in arms against Kashmiris," said Abdul Qayoom, a voter in Baramulla town. "They've taken our rights, now they want to dispossess us from our land. We want to stop people like Modi."

The voting follows a sweeping crackdown with police arresting hundreds of Kashmiri leaders and activists. Authorities also banned the movement of civilian vehicles on a key highway to keep it open exclusively for military and paramilitary convoys two days a week during India's general election.

The first round Thursday could prove important for the BJP, which won only 32 of 91 seats in 2014 elections. It is seeking to improve its tally this time.

Voting concludes on May 19 and counting is scheduled for May 23.

Associated Press writers Omer Farooq in Hyderabad, India, Aijaz Hussain in Srinagar, India and Shonal Ganguly in New Delhi contributed to this report.

## Ex-Obama counsel expects charges in Mueller-related probe

By ERIC TUCKER and CHAD DAY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Obama administration White House counsel Greg Craig expects to be charged in a foreign lobbying investigation spun off from special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe, his lawyers said.

"Mr. Craig is not guilty of any charge and the government's stubborn insistence on prosecuting Mr. Craig is a misguided abuse of prosecutorial discretion," the attorneys, William Taylor and William Murphy, said in a statement Wednesday.

The investigation into Craig comes as the Justice Department is cracking down on unregistered foreign lobbying and consulting. Federal prosecutors in New York have been investigating two prominent Washington lobbying firms in a similar probe, and Justice Department officials in Washington have been increasingly willing to prosecute people who they believe intentionally conceal their lobbying work from the federal government.

The scrutiny of Craig stems from an investigation of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and his work on behalf of a pro-Russian political party in Ukraine. If filed, the charges would come about three months after Craig's former law firm agreed to pay more than \$4.6 million and publicly acknowledge that it failed to register with the government for its work for the Ukraine.

The civil settlement with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP laid much of the blame for the firm's conduct on Craig, who was a senior partner.

Craig's lawyers did not say why they expect him to be charged. They said federal prosecutors in New York had declined charges, but they expected an indictment to be brought by the U.S. Attorney's office in Washington at the request of the Justice Department's national security division.

The lawyers' assertion could not be confirmed Wednesday evening. Spokesmen for the Justice Department and the U.S. Attorney's office declined to comment.

Craig is a prominent Washington attorney and was the first White House counsel to former President Barack Obama. In private practice, his clients have included former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards and James Cartwright, the former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was charged in a leaks investigation.

The work that drew the Justice Department's attention occurred in 2012 when Craig and Skadden were hired by the Ukrainian government to compile a report on the prosecution of Yulia Tymoshenko, a former Ukrainian prime minister. Tymoshenko was a political opponent of then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who was a longtime Manafort patron.

The report was billed as independent, and while critical in some ways of Tymoshenko's trial, critics have said it whitewashed a politically motivated prosecution.

In its settlement earlier this year, Skadden acknowledged it participated in a public relations campaign for the report and should have registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, because of it. The firm also acknowledged it had been paid \$4.6 million for the report and not just \$12,000, as the Ukrainian government had said at the time.

The settlement painted an unflattering picture of Craig's conduct.

In 2012 and 2013, the firm's work attracted the attention of the Justice Department, which sought to determine whether the firm should register under FARA. But according to the settlement, a senior partner matching Craig's description made several "false and misleading" statements to the government, allowing

the firm to avoid registration.

In the statement Wednesday, Craig's lawyers denied that he lied to the government or his firm. They acknowledged that Craig spoke to reporters about the report but denied it was part of a public relations campaign that would run afoul of FARA.

"Mr. Craig repeatedly refused requests that he participate in Ukraine's media and lobbying campaign to promote the Tymoshenko Report," they wrote.

They said he spoke to reporters at The New York Times about the report to "make certain that the Times would accurately summarize the report's criticisms of the Tymoshenko trial and not rely on misinformation from Ukraine and its representatives."

FARA is a decades-old law meant to allow Americans to know when foreign entities are trying to influence public opinion or policymakers. The law, enacted in 1938 to unmask Nazi propaganda in the United States, requires people to disclose to the Justice Department when they advocate, lobby or perform public relations work in the U.S. on behalf of a foreign government or political entity.

In the last few years, the Justice Department has brought several high-profile prosecutions involving FARA. That includes a case against Manafort, who was recently sentenced to more than seven years in prison.

## Ribbon cutting a last act for ousted Trump DHS officials

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kirstjen Nielsen and other longtime civil servants stood outside the Department of Homeland Security's new headquarters Wednesday in the breezy sunshine — a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a building they'd never work in.

Nielsen, homeland security secretary for a few more hours, stood smiling next to her replacement. Both held giant gold scissors, and on a count of three, they sliced through the blue ribbon together. If there were bad feelings or awkwardness, they weren't on display. The event felt more like a graduation than the bloodbath orchestrated by the White House this week to axe the agency's leadership.

Nielsen, for her part, seemed relaxed as she stepped to the podium to address her employees one last time. She spoke of their accomplishments together and cracked a joke about how construction took so long she almost didn't see the new headquarters, erected at the site of an old federal psychiatric hospital.

"But I just made it," she said.

Nielsen resigned Sunday, ending a tumultuous tenure at the helm of a sprawling department of 240,000 people responsible for border security, disaster relief, cyber security, counterterrorism and other missions. She finally had enough after the most recent tangle with President Donald Trump and his aides over the increase of Central American migrants crossing the Southern border, and Trump's growing frustration.

The resignation was fueled partly because Trump had suddenly withdrawn the nomination of Immigration and Customs Enforcement leader Ron Vitiello without telling anyone, and wanted to shake up leadership, people familiar with the matter said. The people weren't authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Vitiello was there Wednesday, sitting on the end of the front row of white folding chairs, shortly after sending a letter to his employees saying his last day at ICE was Friday, capping more than three decades of border work.

Nielsen was introduced at the podium by Claire Grady, acting deputy secretary and civil servant of more than 28 years. She was next in line to become secretary but had been forced to resign when Trump decided to name Kevin McAleenan, the head of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, as acting secretary. Both women got standing ovations. Both were leaving after Wednesday.

McAleenan, sat on the other side of the row of folding chairs, next to Transportation Security Administration head David Pekoske, who was taking Grady's place. Outgoing Secret Service Director Randolph "Tex" Alles, ousted by Trump for personal reasons, sat there too.

Dozens of other employees gathered on the grass behind the folding chairs, in the shadow of a stately brick building, one of the original structures of the old St. Elizabeth's facility — the first federally run

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psychiatric facility, where John Hinckley Jr., the man who shot President Ronald Reagan, was once held. Nielsen, who pushed for the new headquarters, told her employees she was grateful and proud of their work. She told them to stay positive, even during tough times.

"Working at DHS is a calling," Nielsen said. "It is not for everyone. It takes courage, commitment, grit, innovation and hard work."

She walked over to the front doors and handed scissors to McAleenan, Grady and Pekoske. After the ribbon was cut, they all posed for a photo before heading inside the doors. Nielsen later swore McAleenan in as the new acting secretary.

In McAleenan's absence, chief operating officer John Sanders will run Customs and Border Protection. It wasn't entirely clear who would assume the top positions at the agencies now left open. Lee Francis Cissna, the head of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, still has his job, though the White House was eyeing him, too.

Meanwhile, as congressional leaders fretted over the lack of permanent leadership at Homeland Security, Trump on Wednesday reminded everyone who was in charge of immigration policy around here: him.

Asked by reporters whether he had considered tapping his influential aide, Stephen Miller, to lead the Department of Homeland Security given Miller's focus on the issue, Trump was ready with praise — but not a promotion.

"Stephen is an excellent guy. He's wonderful person. ... He's a brilliant man," Trump said as he departed for Texas. But "frankly, there's only one person that's running it," Trump said. "You know who that is? It's me."

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

## **Barr says 'I think spying did occur' against Trump campaign**

**By ERIC TUCKER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr declared Wednesday he thinks "spying did occur" against Donald Trump's presidential campaign, suggesting the origins of the Russia investigation may have been mishandled in remarks that aligned him with the president at a time when Barr's independence is under scrutiny.

Barr, appearing before a Senate panel, did not say what "spying" may have taken place but seemed to be alluding to a surveillance warrant the FBI obtained on a former Trump associate. He later said he wasn't sure there had been improper surveillance but wanted to make sure proper procedures were followed. Still, his remarks give a boost to Trump and his supporters who insist his 2016 campaign was unfairly targeted by the FBI.

Barr was testifying for a second day at congressional budget hearings that were dominated by questions about special counsel Robert Mueller's Trump-Russia investigation. His statements further inflamed Democrats already frustrated by Barr's handling of the Mueller report, including his release of a four-page summary letter last month that they say paints the special counsel's findings in an overly favorable way for the president. The attorney general said he expects to release a redacted version of Mueller's report on Russian interference in the campaign next week.

In an interview with The Associated Press, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she didn't trust Barr and suggested his statements undermined his credibility as America's chief law enforcement officer.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York tweeted that Barr's comments "directly contradict" what the Justice Department previously has said. And intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff of California said Barr's comments were sure to please Trump, but strike "another destructive blow to our democratic institutions."

Republicans, meanwhile, praised Barr's testimony. North Carolina Rep. Mark Meadows, a Trump confidant who has raised concerns about Justice Department conduct, tweeted that Barr's willingness to step in is

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"massive." The attorney general said he would investigate the origins and conduct of the early days of the Russia investigation, a probe separate from an existing inspector general inquiry.

At the Capitol hearing, senators appeared taken aback by his use of the word "spying." Asked by Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz if he wanted to rephrase his language, Barr suggested he intended no nefarious connotations but simply wanted to make sure there was "no unauthorized surveillance."

"Is that more appropriate in your mind?" he asked Schatz.

Barr is an experienced public figure who chooses his words carefully, and it's not clear if he realized what a political storm he'd create in using the word "spying." While it could be used to describe lawful and necessary intelligence collection activities, for Trump and his supporters the word has an inherently negative meaning, and Barr's use of it tapped into a White House narrative of law enforcement misconduct.

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said on Fox Business Network that "people were wiretapped. People were looked into and spied upon. That should be a serious question that the American people should demand answers for and quite frankly so should Congress."

Trump himself, who has repeatedly called the investigation of his campaign a "witch hunt," said on Wednesday, "It was started illegally. Everything about it was crooked. Every single thing about it. There were dirty cops."

Though Barr said at his January confirmation hearing that he didn't believe Mueller would be involved in a witch hunt, he struck a different tone Wednesday and said it "depends on where you're sitting."

"If you are somebody who's being falsely accused of something, you would tend to view the investigation as a witch hunt," he said.

The spying discussion started when Barr was asked by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, about his plans to review his department's actions in investigating Trump. Barr explained that he considered spying on a political campaign to be a "big deal," invoking the surveillance of anti-war protesters during the Vietnam War.

Asked by Shaheen if he was suggesting "spying" had occurred, Barr replied "spying did occur. Yes, I think spying did occur. The question is whether it was predicated, adequately predicated," meaning whether it was legally justified.

Barr later said that although he did not have specific evidence of wrongdoing, "I do have questions about it."

"I feel I have an obligation to make sure that government power was not abused," he said.

Asked again about spying at the end of the hearing, Barr tempered his tone. "I am not saying improper surveillance occurred. I am saying I am concerned about it, and I am looking into it," he said.

Barr may have been referring to a surveillance warrant the FBI obtained in the fall of 2016 to monitor the communications of former Trump campaign aide Carter Page, who has not been charged with any wrongdoing. The warrant was obtained after Page had left the campaign and was renewed several times. Critics of the Russia investigation have seized on the fact that the warrant application cited Democratic-funded opposition research, done by a former British spy, into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

Barr's statement that he expected to release a redacted version of Mueller's nearly 400-page report next week marked a slight change from the estimate he gave Tuesday, when he said the release would be within a week.

Though he said the document will be redacted to withhold negative information about peripheral figures in the investigation, he said that would not apply to Trump, an officeholder and someone central to the probe.

Meanwhile, Trump falsely claimed again Wednesday that the Mueller report had found "no obstruction." While Barr's letter said the special counsel did not find a criminal conspiracy between Russia and Trump associates during the 2016 election, it also said Mueller had presented evidence on both sides of the obstruction question and ultimately did not reach a conclusion on it.

Barr said he did not believe Mueller's evidence was sufficient to prove that Trump had obstructed justice.

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Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

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This story has been corrected to show that Barr said he wanted to make sure there was "no unauthorized surveillance," not "no authorized surveillance."

## Australian election May 18 to be fought on refugees, economy

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's prime minister on Thursday called a May 18 election that will be fought on issues including climate change, asylum seekers and economic management.

"We live in the best country in the world," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told reporters after advising the governor-general to authorize the election.

"But to secure your future, the road ahead depends on a strong economy. And that's why there is so much at stake at this election," he added.

Morrison's conservative coalition is seeking a third three-year term. But Morrison is the third prime minister to lead a divided government in that time and only took the helm in late August.

Opinion polls suggest his reign will become one of the shortest in the 118-year history of Australian prime ministers on election day. The polls suggest center-left opposition leader Bill Shorten will become the eighth prime minister since the country plunged into an extraordinary period of political instability in 2007.

The election pits Shorten, a former labor union leader who has presented himself as the alternative prime minister for the past six years, and Morrison, a leader who the Australian public is still getting to know.

Shorten said in his first news conference since the election was called that his government will take "real action on climate change" and reduce inequality in Australian society if his Labor Party wins power.

"Australians face a real and vital choice at this election. Do you want Labor's energy, versus the government's tiredness? Labor's focus on the future, versus being stuck in the past?" Shorten said.

Morrison is seen as the architect of Australia's tough refugee policy that has all but stopped the people-smuggling traffic of boats from Southeast Asian ports since 2014. The policy has been condemned by human rights groups as an abrogation of Australia's responsibilities as a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention.

Morrison's first job in Prime Minister Tony Abbott's newly elected coalition government in 2013 was as minister for immigration and border protection. He oversaw the secretive military-run Operation Sovereign Borders.

Asylum seekers from the Middle East, Africa and Asia would typically disable or sink their boats when intercepted by patrol ships in waters north of Australia so that the Australian crews would have to rescue them rather than turn the boats away. Under the new regime, the asylum seekers were placed in motorized life boats that were towed back to Indonesia. The life boats had just enough fuel to reach the Indonesian coast. The Indonesian government complained the policy was an affront to Indonesian sovereignty.

The government has also maintained a policy adopted in the final months of a Labor government in 2013 of sending boat arrivals to camps on the Pacific island nations of Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Those who attempt to reach Australia by boat are told they will never be allowed to settle there.

Morrison remains proud of virtually stopping people-smuggler boat traffic. He has a trophy shaped like a people-smuggler's boat in his office inscribed with "I Stopped These."

Labor has promised to maintain the policy of banishing boat arrivals to the islands. But Labor says it would give priority to finding permanent homes for the asylum seekers who have languished in island camps for years.

The conservative coalition argues that the boats would start coming again because a Labor government would soften the regime. The government introduced temporary protection visas for boat arrivals so that refugees face potential deportation every three years if the circumstances that they fled in their homelands improve. Labor would give refugees permanent visas so that they have the certainty to plan their lives.

Climate change policy is a political battlefield in a country that is the world's largest exporter of coal and liquefied natural gas and has been one of the world's worst greenhouse gas emitters on a per capita basis

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because of its heavily reliance on coal-fired power generation.

Disagreement over energy policy has been a factor in the last six changes of prime minister.

Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard introduced a carbon tax in 2012. Conservative Prime Minister Tony Abbott scrapped it two years later.

The coalition is torn between lawmakers who want polluters to pay for their greenhouse gas emissions and those who reject any measures that would increase household power bills.

The government aims to reduce Australian greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% below 2005 levels by 2030.

Labor has promised a more ambitious target of a 45% reduction in the same time frame.

Action on climate change was a major priority for votes when conservative Prime Minister John Howard's reign ended after more than 11 years at an election in 2007.

Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd immediately signed up to the U.N.'s 1997 Kyoto Protocol on reducing emissions. Australia and the United States had been the only industrialized countries to hold out.

Climate change dropped down the list of Australian priorities after the global financial crisis hit.

But after Australians sweltered through a record hot summer and grappled with devastating drought, global warming has become a high-priority issue for voters again.

The government warns that Labor's emissions reduction plan would wreck the economy.

The coalition also argues that Labor would further damage the economy with its policy of reducing tax breaks for landlords as real estate prices fall in Australia's largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne.

Morrison boasts that the conservative administration Prime Minister Howard led delivered 10 annual surplus budgets and paid off all federal government debt before the government changed at the 2007 election.

Rudd had planned a budget surplus in his government's first fiscal year, but the global financial crisis struck.

Many economists congratulate Rudd for keeping the Australian economy out of recession through stimulus spending. The coalition has accused Labor of spending too much and sinking Australia too deep in debt.

But debt has continued to mount since the conservatives regained the reins in 2013. But opinion polls suggest voters consider the conservatives to be better economic managers.

The government brought forward its annual budget blueprint by a month to April 2 and revealed a plan to balance Australia's books in the next fiscal year for the first time in 12 years.

Labor also promised to deliver a surplus budget in the year starting July 1, but it has yet to detail how it will achieve this goal.

Labor has also promised to spend an additional AU\$2.3 billion (\$1.6 billion) over four years on covering treatment costs of cancer patients. It's an attractive offer with half Australia's population expected to be diagnosed with some form of the disease in their lifetimes.

The conservatives have largely taken credit for Australia's remarkable run of 28 years of economic growth since its last recession under Labor's rule.

Morrison hopes that voters will look to him to deliver a sequel to the Howard years when a mining boom delivered ever-increasing budget surpluses.

## Trick or treat? EU, UK agree to delay Brexit until Halloween

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — As if Brexit hadn't spooked Britain and the European Union enough over the past three years, the two sides agreed early Thursday to extend the deadline to Halloween.

The new, Oct. 31 cutoff date averts a precipitous and potentially calamitous Brexit that had been scheduled for Friday.

"Please, do not waste this time," European Council President Donald Tusk pleaded. He said the EU was giving Britain six more months "to find the best possible solution" to its Brexit impasse.

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Like many things related to Brexit, the extension was a messy compromise. May came to an emergency summit in Brussels seeking to postpone Britain's departure from the EU until June 30. Some European leaders favored a longer extension, while French President Emmanuel Macron was wary of anything but a very short delay.

Leaders of the 27 remaining EU member states met for more than six hours over a dinner of scallop and cod before settling on the end of October, with the possibility of an earlier Brexit if Britain ratifies a withdrawal agreement.

May said the possibility of leaving before the deadline was a key request of hers.

"I continue to believe we need to leave the EU, with a deal, as soon as possible," she told reporters.

She noted that if U.K. lawmakers back her Brexit deal, Britain could still leave by June 30 — the Brexit deadline she had requested from the bloc — and possibly as soon as May 22, which would release Britain from having to participate in elections for the European Parliament.

May spoke to the 27 EU leaders for just over an hour, before they met for dinner without her to decide Britain's fate. In contrast to some testy recent summits, there were signs of warmth, even humor. May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were filmed laughing over a tablet bearing an image showing the two of them speaking to their respective Parliaments on Wednesday while wearing similar blue jackets.

While many leaders said they were inclined to grant a Brexit delay, Macron expressed reservations, warning as he arrived at the summit that "nothing is decided."

Afterward, the French president said he was satisfied with the outcome.

"We did the best possible compromise to preserve the unity of the 27 (other EU members) because we have left the United Kingdom more time to deliver a deal," Macron said.

Tusk said that during the extension Britain "will continue its sincere cooperation as a full member state, with all its rights, and as a close friend and trusted ally in the future."

Several months have passed since May and the EU struck a deal laying out the terms of Britain's departure and the outline of future relations. All that was needed was ratification by the British and European Parliaments.

But U.K. lawmakers rejected it — three times. As Britain's departure date of March 29 approached with no resolution in sight, the EU gave Britain until Friday to approve a withdrawal plan, change course and seek a further delay to Brexit, or crash out of the EU with no deal to cushion the shock.

Economists and business leaders have warned that a no-deal Brexit would lead to huge disruptions in trade and travel, with tariffs and customs checks causing gridlock at British ports and possible shortages of goods.

A disorderly Brexit would hurt EU nations, as well as Britain, and all want to avoid it — but there's little agreement about how.

May's future, meanwhile, is uncertain.

She has previously said that "as prime minister" she could not agree to let Britain stay in the EU beyond June 30, and she has also promised to step down once Brexit is delivered. Many Conservative Party lawmakers would like her to quit now and let a new leader take charge of the next stage of Brexit. But they can't force her out until the end of the year, after she survived a no-confidence vote in December.

Every British initiative to get a deal has floundered so far. Several days of talks between May's Conservative government and the main opposition Labour Party aimed at finding a compromise have failed to produce a breakthrough. Labour favors a softer Brexit than the government has proposed, and wants to retain a close economic relationship with the bloc. The two sides said they would resume their discussions Thursday.

Now, the battle begins in Britain over what to do with the extra time.

All options from a no-deal Brexit to a general election to no Brexit at all remain on the table.

Pro-EU politicians said the next few months should be used to hold a new referendum on whether to leave the EU or remain. Labour lawmaker Mary Creagh tweeted that Parliament must move swiftly to break the Brexit deadlock with a confirmatory ballot on PM's deal."

Pro-Brexit lawmakers said it was time to replace May with another Conservative leader — preferably a

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hard-core Brexiteer.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said the time had come for Britain to decide what it wants.

"We're giving them a very long time to take a decision," he said.

"You know, the European Union is not a prison. Nobody has to stay but it is also a home and we are not going to kick anyone out."

As to the symbolic end date? He said it was not on the minds of the EU leaders.

"As I learned this evening, Halloween is not a holiday widely celebrated across the European Union," Varadkar said.

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Associated Press writers Mike Corder and Angela Charlton in Brussels, Danica Kirka in London and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this report.

National Enquirer parent explores possible sale of tabloid

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The supermarket tabloid under fire for paying hush money to a former Playboy model to help Donald Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign is on the auction block.

The parent of the National Enquirer said Wednesday that it is exploring a possible sale as part of a "strategic" review of its tabloid business. The decision by American Media comes after the tabloid said it paid \$150,000 to keep Karen McDougal quiet about an alleged affair with Trump and being accused by Amazon chief Jeff Bezos of blackmail.

American Media said it was considering a sale so it could focus more on other parts of its business, including its teen brand and broadcast platforms.

"Because of this focus, we feel the future opportunities with the tabloids can be best exploited by a different ownership," said American Media CEO David Pecker in a statement.

Pecker is a longtime Trump ally who helped bury potentially embarrassing stories about the future president over the years by paying hush money in a tabloid practice called "catch-and-kill." The Associated Press reported last year that Pecker kept a safe that held documents on hush money payments and killed stories, including records on ones involving Trump.

In August, the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan agreed not to prosecute American Media in exchange for the company's cooperation in its investigation of campaign violations. That probe eventually led to a three-year prison term for Trump's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen for campaign violations among other charges.

American Media came under fire this year from Amazon founder Bezos for what he said were threats to publish explicit photos of him following a January story on him that included lurid texts exchanged with his mistress, former TV anchor Lauren Sanchez.

Bezos said the tabloid promised not to publish the photos if he stopped his private investigators from trying to find out how the tabloid obtained the texts. Bezos took to social media to accuse the National Enquirer of blackmailing him.

An American Media attorney denied that the tabloid committed blackmail, but the attack from Bezos threatened potentially big legal costs and at a bad time for American Media. The company is struggling under a heavy debt load after years of borrowing to buy other publications.

The Bezos attack also threatened to upend American Media's non-prosecution agreement with federal prosecutors. The Associated Press reported in February that prosecutors were looking into whether the publisher violated terms of the deal, which included a promise not to break any laws in the future.

American Media is controlled by its biggest investor, a hedge fund called Chatham Asset Management. A phone message seeking comment from Chatham was not immediately returned.

In addition to the National Enquirer, American Media said it was also considering selling two other brands, Globe and National Examiner.

American Media owns news, celebrity and sports publications such as Us Weekly, Star, OK!, In Touch, Life & Style, Men's Journal, Muscle & Fitness, Snowboarder and Surfer.

## Cod, shrimp and iPad jokes \_ backstage at the Brexit summit

By RAF CASERT and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Angela Merkel and Theresa May laughed at their matching jackets. European presidents and prime ministers haggled about Britain's future over a cod-and-shrimp dinner. Then after digesting their iced macadamia nut dessert, they decided to extend Brexit until the stroke of midnight on Halloween.

It's all in a day's work at the EU, where regional rivals get together for high-power dinner parties and decide the continent's future by talking, talking and talking some more until no one has an argument left to disagree.

A tense diplomatic ballet played out all day Wednesday in the European Quarter of Brussels, culminating in an emergency EU Brexit summit that dragged into the early hours of Thursday, with Britain's future hanging in the balance .

The backdoor politicking began hours beforehand: The Dutch prime minister played messenger between ally May and harder-line EU leaders. The French and German leaders, playing bad cop-good cop , had their own huddle. A mini-club of North Sea countries gathered elsewhere.

It's the only way the EU can ever come to the necessary consensus, and often seems baffling to outsiders — but the EU has elevated it into an art.

The summit itself appeared to get off to a relaxed start. Three of the European leaders took off their jackets while they gathered around a round table decorated with pink roses and carnations.

Germany's Merkel then walked over to Britain's May, tablet computer at the ready. The two leaders intently looked at the screen before sharing a hearty laugh.

So what did Europe's most powerful women — often on opposite sides of the painful, protracted Brexit debate — find so funny? The leading theory: It had something to do with their matching jackets, the brilliant blue of the EU flag.

May then took the floor, pleading with her peers to extend Brexit again, speaking for just over an hour before she was effectively ejected so the remaining EU members could debate whether the prime minister made a convincing case.

It was a special kind of European dinner party: EU leaders each had their turn to talk in between bites and sips. After 27 speeches, they kept talking, until they reached an agreement on extending Brexit until Oct. 31.

On the menu du jour: warm scallop salad, cod with shrimp and mini-mushroom arancini rice balls, followed by iced macadamia nut parfait for dessert.

As usual at EU meetings, the menu carried political undertones. Tension erupted between French and British fishermen earlier this year over scallop-fishing rights, while cod has been a source of dispute for decades.

May meanwhile had dinner off-campus — asparagus for starter, roast lamb and fruit to cleanse the palate.

Even before she arrived in Brussels, May was already being treated like a bit of an EU outcast. The official summit brochure with leaders' photographs relegated the head of the British government to the level of "Guest."

There was action in the streets of Brussels, too: Anti-Brexit protesters staged a rally, while Greenpeace strung a giant banner on an EU building reading "Blah Blah Brexit — Stop climate Chaos."

Some of Wednesday's summit drama began well before European Council President Donald Tusk officially opened the evening meeting in the multicolored main room in the Europa building, an architectural gem looking like a Grecian urn sitting in a glass box.

Earlier in the day, Belgium hosted six other nations close to the U.K. — Netherlands, Spain, France, Germany, Ireland and Denmark — at the neoclassical Egmont Palace across town, amid mountains of marble and gilded chandeliers, to plot strategy.

But not everyone liked this idea. Rumors quickly surfaced that the special "mini-summit" was a plot to set out tough terms for Britain's new extension and put the other EU leaders before a fait-accompli. Quickly

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diplomats had to play down the meeting, saying it was just to “coordinate” plans in case of a no-deal.

Sometimes it can get to be just too much.

At a 2016 summit when Britain was yet again the troublemaker, Merkel walked out of the building and went to a French fry shack close by, for a healthy dose of the Belgian delight.

## LA prepares to mourn en masse for slain rapper Nipsey Hussle

By JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The city of Los Angeles is no stranger to epic street gatherings for everything from sports victory parades to televised car chases.

But on Thursday it will host a much more somber — although likely equally large — affair when it lays to rest one of its native sons, rapper Nipsey Hussle.

Following a “Celebration of Life” at the same 21,000-seat arena where pop superstar Michael Jackson was memorialized 10 years ago, Hussle’s body will be taken on a 25-mile funeral procession through many of the mean streets where he was raised and that he was trying to uplift when he was shot to death outside his Marathon Clothing store last month.

Thousands are expected to turn out as the hearse carrying Hussle’s coffin from the Staples Center travels deep into the neighborhood where the deadly Rodney King race riot began in 1992 and on past the property where Hussle had planned to turn an aging strip mall into new businesses and affordable homes. Finally, it will arrive at a funeral home in the city’s hard-scrabble Crenshaw district, where the rapper was born Ermias Ashgedom on Aug. 15, 1985.

“I definitely plan to be out there and paying my final respects,” said Glauz Diego who, although he didn’t follow Hussle’s music closely, was proud to meet him when the rapper stopped by the offices of the Los Angeles Community Coalition where Diego is one of the executives. The rapper had come to meet with local officials to discuss ways to improve the community.

Although he was little known outside the hip-hop world before his death, the run-up to his funeral has drawn comparisons to that of Michael Jackson’s.

As with Jackson’s, free tickets to Thursday’s memorial were snapped up immediately, and the thousands who couldn’t get them were urged to stay away lest they gridlock downtown.

Instead, they’ve been urged to line the route that will wind through South Los Angeles and into the Watts neighborhood, where Venus and Serena Williams emerged from modest public courts to become tennis superstars.

The Los Angeles Department of Transportation plans to implement “rolling street closures” as the procession progresses, increasing the likelihood of traffic jams all over town.

Southern California, with its car culture and seemingly endless labyrinth of freeways and boulevards, has seen such turnouts before, including lengthy funeral processions for former President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan. And that’s not to mention the cheering crowds that gathered for a distinctly different event, former football great O.J. Simpson’s two-hour freeway chase in 1994 before he surrendered on murder charges he was eventually cleared of.

But this one is different in that, unlike the others, Hussle was not a household name before his death. Although beloved in South LA for never leaving the community even after he began to gather wealth rapping about it in mix-tapes like “Bullets Ain’t Got No Name,” he’d only released one album, last year’s Grammy-nominated “Victory Lap.”

Still, there’s a reason people have responded the way they did, said USC Professor David Schonfeld, an expert of why and how people grieve: Even people who didn’t know him quickly heard he was a good person doing good things.

“We do make assumptions that if we do the right thing and are careful these events won’t befall us,” he said.

When they do people are often compelled to come together to grieve.

“People want to come together to support each other,” he said. “That’s really what makes us a community.”

## Bill banning abortions after heartbeat sent to Ohio governor

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — No topic seemed off limits, including tales of back alleys and coat hangers, as abortion-rights supporters in Ohio fought perhaps the last battle over a twice-vetoed heartbeat abortion ban, which Gov. Mike DeWine has said he will sign.

After nearly 10 years of fighting, Democrats let loose during the run-up to final House and Senate approval Wednesday with lessons from slavery, predictions of economic harm, references to the book of Genesis, and testimonials about their own rapes. Faith groups brandished banners and made pleas for religious tolerance. An advocate for reproductive rights threatened Republicans with the loss of young voters' support in 2020.

Opponents vowed to sue.

Ohio's closely divided politics have slowed the progress of the so-called heartbeat bill as it has caught momentum elsewhere, forcing years of debate in the state where the movement originated.

Five other states have now passed similar bans, two of which have been blocked by the courts. Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, who took office in January, has said he will sign the bill, after former GOP Gov. John Kasich vetoed it twice.

State Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan, a Democrat from a storied Youngstown political family, shed tears during the debate, exasperated at a bill she said would harm Ohio and its future.

"I'm concerned that we will have companies that will choose not to locate here due to our oppressive laws. I'm concerned that doctors will leave the state of Ohio," she said. "I'm concerned that our kids are going to leave, that we're going to lose a large amount of young people who don't want to live in an oppressive atmosphere."

Opponents' protests did nothing to budge a largely closed-mouthed GOP majority on the committee. They appeared confident that prohibiting pregnancy termination once a fetal heartbeat is detected is the best thing for the unborn, for women and for the state. Republicans dominated an 11-7 party-line vote that sent the bill to the full House, where it's scheduled for a vote Wednesday.

State Rep. Candice Keller, a Middletown Republican, called the legislation "the most compassionate bill we've ever passed."

Keller rejected suggestions that everyone knows someone who has had, or will need, an abortion; that women will continue to have abortions, only unsafely; even that reproductive rights are about women rather than the men who impregnate them and the male doctors who abort those pregnancies.

"If we are really about empowering the women of Ohio and empowering the women of this country, we will begin to tell the truth about the abortion industry and the enormous amount of profit that is made on the backs of women," she said.

During floor debate Wednesday, two female representatives who said they had been raped, slammed the bill for not making exceptions for rape and incest. Another female lawmaker said her great-grandmother bled to death in a bath tub trying self-administer an abortion.

House Health Committee Chairman Derek Merrin criticized those who say abortion drives down health care costs.

His conscience, he said, tells him abortion is wrong.

"My heart, Mr. Speaker, tells me it's wrong. My understanding of the law and of the constitution tells me it's wrong. And in the spirit of fairness, equality, and justice, I know it's wrong," Merrin said.

Prohibiting abortions at the first detectable heartbeat means prohibiting virtually all abortions, said Dr. Michael Cackovic, a specialist in maternal fetal medicine at Ohio State University Medical Center. He said current standard practice, which involves transvaginal ultrasound, can reliably detect a heartbeat five to six weeks into pregnancy.

"Essentially, that's three to four weeks after conception, or one to two weeks after a missed period," he said.

Cackovic said the heartbeat prohibition would require women who want an abortion to determine they're pregnant using an over-the-counter pregnancy test and to race to have the procedure between four and five weeks into pregnancy.

"You're going to be doing more procedures and subjecting women to more procedures and medications to get abortions, because they're rushing between that four and five weeks to get it accomplished," he said. About a third of all pregnancies end in miscarriage, he said, so the law also would force many women who don't want to be pregnant to get abortions needlessly, when they might naturally have miscarried.

State Rep. Beth Liston, a Dublin Democrat and a pediatrician, said proponents' hopes of challenging the viability standard upheld in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision aren't grounded in science. She said she favors the idea from Genesis that breath begins life.

"Simply put, you need lungs and a brain to live, and there's no technology in the world that will change that," she said.

The House's 56-39 vote sent the bill to the Ohio Senate, which agreed to House changes 18-13 before sending the bill to DeWine, a Republican who took office in January.

The earliest bans on heartbeat abortion, in Iowa and North Carolina, have been blocked by the courts. Three more states — Mississippi, Kentucky and Georgia — have more recently passed bills amid growing national momentum. The Georgia bill has not yet been signed by the governor.

Associated Press writers David Crary in New York and Andrew Welsh-Huggins in Columbus contributed to this report.

## Science fact: Astronomers reveal first image of a black hole

By **SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Humanity got its first glimpse Wednesday of the cosmic place of no return: a black hole.

And it's as hot, as violent and as beautiful as science fiction imagined.

In a breakthrough that thrilled the world of astrophysics and stirred talk of a Nobel Prize, scientists released the first image ever made of a black hole, revealing a fiery doughnut-shaped object in a galaxy 53 million light-years from Earth.

"Science fiction has become science fact," University of Waterloo theoretical physicist Avery Broderick, one of the leaders of the research team of about 200 scientists from 20 countries, declared as the colorized orange-and-black picture was unveiled.

The image, assembled from data gathered by eight radio telescopes around the world, shows light and gas swirling around the lip of a supermassive black hole, a monster of the universe whose existence was theorized by Einstein more than a century ago but confirmed only indirectly over the decades.

Supermassive black holes are situated at the center of most galaxies, including ours, and are so dense that nothing, not even light, can escape their gravitational pull. Light gets bent and twisted around by gravity in a bizarre funhouse effect as it gets sucked into the abyss along with superheated gas and dust.

The new image confirmed yet another piece of Einstein's general theory of relativity. Einstein even predicted the object's neatly symmetrical shape.

"We have seen what we thought was unseeable. We have seen and taken a picture of a black hole," announced Sheperd Doeleman of Harvard, leader of the project.

Jessica Dempsey, another co-discoverer and deputy director of the East Asian Observatory in Hawaii, said the fiery circle reminded her of the flaming Eye of Sauron from the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Three years ago, scientists using an extraordinarily sensitive observing system heard the sound of two much smaller black holes merging to create a gravitational wave, as Einstein predicted. The new image, published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters* and announced around the world, adds light to that sound.

Outside scientists suggested the achievement could be worthy of a Nobel, just like the gravitational wave discovery.

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"I think it looks very convincing," said Andrea Ghez, director of the UCLA Galactic Center Group, who wasn't part of the discovery team.

The picture was made with equipment that detects wavelengths invisible to the human eye, so astronomers added color to convey the ferocious heat of the gas and dust, glowing at a temperature of perhaps millions of degrees. But if a person were to somehow get close to this black hole, it might not look quite like that, astronomers said.

The black hole is about 6 billion times the mass of our sun and is in a galaxy called M87. Its "event horizon" — the precipice, or point of no return where light and matter get sucked inexorably into the hole — is as big as our entire solar system.

Black holes are the "most extreme environment in the known universe," Broderick said, a violent, churning place of "gravity run amok." Unlike smaller black holes, which come from collapsed stars, supermassive black holes are mysterious in origin.

Despite decades of study, there are a few holdouts who deny black holes exist, and this work shows that they do, said Boston University astronomer professor Alan Marscher, a co-discoverer.

The project cost \$50 million to \$60 million, with \$28 million of that coming from the National Science Foundation. The same team has gathered even more data on a black hole in the center of our own Milky Way galaxy, but scientists said the object is so jumpy they don't have a good picture yet.

Myth says a black hole would rip a person apart, but scientists said that because of the particular forces exerted by an object as big as the one in M87, someone could fall into it and not be torn to pieces. But the person would never be heard from or seen again.

Black holes are "like the walls of a prison. Once you cross it, you will never be able to get out and you will never be able to communicate," said astronomer Avi Loeb, who is director of the Black Hole Initiative at Harvard but was not involved in the discovery.

The telescope data was gathered two years ago, over four days when the weather had to be just right all around the world. Completing the image was an enormous undertaking, involving an international team of scientists, supercomputers and hundreds of terabytes of data.

When scientists initially put all that data into the first picture, what they saw looked so much like what they expected they didn't believe it at first.

"We've been hunting this for a long time," Dempsey said. "We've been getting closer and closer with better technology."

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Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears .

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## Mnuchin puts off decision on providing Trump tax returns

By **ANDREW TAYLOR** and **JONATHAN LEMIRE** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin says the department hasn't decided whether to comply with a demand by a key House Democrat to deliver President Donald Trump's tax returns and won't meet a Wednesday deadline to provide them.

In a letter to House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., who asked for Trump's returns a week ago, Mnuchin said Treasury will consult with the Justice Department and "carefully" review the request further.

"The legal implications of this request could affect protections for all Americans against politically-motivated disclosures of personal tax information, regardless of which party is in power," Mnuchin wrote.

He said Treasury respects lawmakers' oversight duties and would make sure taxpayer protections would be "scrupulously observed, consistent with my statutory responsibilities" as the department reviews the request.

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Neal said in a statement that he "will consult with counsel and determine the appropriate response to the commissioner in the coming days." Under the law, the IRS commissioner is required to provide access to any taxpayer's returns when directed by the chairmen of the House or Senate tax-writing committees.

Mnuchin said Neal's request raised important questions of "constitutional scope of congressional investigative authority, the legitimacy of the asserted legislative purpose, and the constitutional rights of American citizens."

He quoted Capitol Hill Republicans in calling the request "Nixonian" and warned that it could set a precedent for disclosing personal tax information for political purposes.

Earlier Wednesday, Trump weighed in, telling reporters that he won't agree to release his returns while he is under audit.

Trump said, "I would love to give them, but I'm not going to do it while I'm under audit." The IRS says there's no rule against subjects of an audit from publicly releasing their tax filings.

Neal asked the IRS last Wednesday to turn over six years of the president's tax returns within a week. Trump has broken with decades of presidential precedent by not voluntarily releasing his returns to the public.

Trump's position has long been that he is under audit and therefore could not release his returns. But in recent weeks, he has added to the argument, saying publicly and privately that the American people elected him without seeing his taxes and would do so again.

"Remember, I got elected last time — the same exact issue," Trump said. "Frankly, the people don't care."

The president has told those close to him that the attempt to get his returns were an invasion of his privacy and a further example of the Democratic-led "witch hunt" — which he has called special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation — meant to damage him.

Trump has repeatedly asked aides about the status of the House request and has inquired about the "loyalty" of the top officials at the IRS, according to one outside adviser who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Democrats didn't expect the department to comply, but they haven't sketched out their next steps. Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich., speaking before Mnuchin's response was delivered, said it may take Neal a couple of days to issue his own response. House Democrats are at a party retreat in the Virginia suburbs of Washington.

"We're not going to fold on this. We feel like this is clearly important to our oversight responsibilities," Kildee said. "The law says pretty clearly that the chairman can order a return. It doesn't say 'for everybody except the president.'"

Neal has adopted a methodical approach to seeking Trump's returns. He has the option of eventually seeking to subpoena the records or to go to court if Treasury does not comply, but it's not clear he'll adopt a more confrontational approach just yet.

Neal's initial letter, sent a week ago, didn't lay out any consequences for the IRS if it didn't comply, and a spokesman said a likely course would be a second, more insistent, letter.

"We intend to follow through with this," Neal said Wednesday, speaking before Mnuchin got back to him. "I'll let you know fast."

The request for Trump's tax filings is but one of many oversight efforts launched by Democrats after taking back the House in last fall's midterms. Neal is relying on a 1920s-era law that says the IRS "shall furnish" any tax return requested by the chairmen of key House and Senate committees.

Mnuchin told lawmakers that his department will "follow the law."

The White House did not respond to questions as to whether the president asked Mnuchin or the IRS head to intervene. The president's outside attorney also did not respond to a request for comment.

## Democrats want feds to target the 'black box' of AI bias

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Congress is starting to show interest in prying open the "black box" of tech companies' artificial intelligence with oversight that parallels how the federal government checks under car hoods and audits banks.

One proposal introduced Wednesday and co-sponsored by a Democratic presidential candidate, Sen. Cory Booker, would require big companies to test the "algorithmic accountability" of their high-risk AI systems, such as technology that detects faces or makes important decisions based on your most sensitive personal data.

"Computers are increasingly involved in so many of the key decisions Americans make with respect to their daily lives — whether somebody can buy a home, get a job or even go to jail," Sen. Ron Wyden said in an interview with The Associated Press. The Oregon Democrat is co-sponsoring the bill.

"When the companies really go into this, they're going to be looking for bias in their systems," Wyden said. "I think they're going to be finding a lot."

The Democrats' proposal is the first of its kind, and may face an uphill battle in the Republican-led Senate. But it reflects growing — and bipartisan — scrutiny of the largely unregulated data economy — everything from social media feeds, online data brokerages, financial algorithms and self-driving software that are increasingly impacting daily life. A bipartisan Senate bill introduced last month would require companies to notify people before using facial recognition software on them, while also requiring third-party testing to check for bias problems.

Academic studies and real-life examples have unearthed facial recognition systems that misidentify darker-skinned women, computerized lending tools that charge higher interest rates to Latino and black borrowers, and job recruitment tools that favor men in industries where they already dominate.

"There's this myth that algorithms are these neutral, objective things," said Aaron Rieke, managing director at advocacy group Upturn. "Machine learning picks up patterns in society — who does what, who buys what, or who has what job. Those are patterns shaped by issues we've been struggling with for decades."

President Donald Trump's administration is also taking notice and has made the development of "safe and trustworthy" algorithms a major objective of the White House's new AI initiative. But it would do so mostly by strengthening an existing industry-driven process of creating technological standards.

"There's a need for greater transparency and data comparability," and for detecting and reducing bias in these systems, said Commerce Undersecretary Walter Copan, who directs the National Institute of Standards and Technology. "Consumers are essentially flying blind."

Dozens of facial recognition developers, including brand-name companies like Microsoft, last year submitted their proprietary algorithms to Copan's agency so that they could be evaluated and compared against each other. The results showed significant gains in accuracy over previous years.

But Wyden said the voluntary standards are not enough.

"Self-regulation clearly has failed here," he said.

In a bolder move from the Trump administration, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has charged Facebook with allowing landlords and real estate brokers to systematically exclude groups such as non-Christians, immigrants and minorities from seeing ads for houses and apartments.

Booker, in a statement about his bill, said that while HUD's Facebook action is an important step, it's necessary to dig deeper to address the "pernicious ways" discrimination operates on tech platforms, sometimes unintentionally.

Booker said biased algorithms are causing the same kind of discriminatory real estate practices that sought to steer his New Jersey parents and other black couples away from certain U.S. neighborhoods in the late 1960s. This time, he said, it's harder to detect and fight.

The bill he and Wyden have introduced would enable the Federal Trade Commission to set and enforce new rules for companies to check for accuracy, bias and potential privacy or security concerns in their automated systems, and correct them if problems are found. It exempts smaller companies that make less than \$50 million a year, unless they are data brokers with information on at least 1 million consumers.

New York Democratic Rep. Yvette Clarke, who is introducing a companion bill in the House, said the goal is to fix problems, not just to assess them. She said it makes sense to give the FTC authority to regularly monitor how these systems are performing because it "has the finger on the pulse of what's happening to consumers."

But a think tank backed by major tech companies including Google and Amazon called the bill a misfire, arguing it unfairly singles out algorithms and could discourage the pursuit of AI.

"If a certain decision carries a high risk of harming consumers, it should make no difference whether an algorithm or a person makes that decision," Daniel Castro, vice president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, said in a statement. "To hold algorithms to a higher standard than human decisions implies that automated decisions are inherently less trustworthy or more dangerous than human ones, which is not the case."

Castro also said it unfairly targets big companies and would hurt the product development process if a company needs to conduct a new assessment for every minor software update.

## Trump signs orders making it harder to block pipelines

By **DARLENE SUPERVILLE** and **KEVIN FREKING** Associated Press

CROSBY, Texas (AP) — President Donald Trump's support for shifting more power to states on Wednesday faded next to his affinity for oil and gas production, as he aimed to make it harder for states to block pipelines and other energy projects due to environmental concerns.

At the urging of business groups, Trump signed two executive orders designed to speed up oil and gas pipeline projects. The action came after officials in Washington state and New York used the permitting process to stop new energy projects in recent years, prompting complaints from Republican members of Congress and the fossil fuel industry.

"Too often badly needed energy infrastructure is being held back by special interest groups, entrenched bureaucracies and radical activists," Trump complained before signing the orders.

The Trump administration insisted it was not trying to take power away from the states but, rather, trying to make sure that state actions follow the intent of the Clean Water Act. Under a section of the law, companies must get certification from the state before moving ahead with an energy project.

Washington state blocked the building of a coal terminal in 2017, saying there were too many major harmful effects including air pollution, rail safety and vehicle traffic.

New York regulators stopped a natural gas pipeline, saying it failed to meet standards to protect streams, wetlands and other water resources.

Less than a week ago, nearly a dozen business groups told Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler that the environmental review and permitting process for energy projects "has become a target for environmental activists and states that oppose the production and use of fossil fuels."

The groups said in an April 5 letter that individual states shouldn't be able to use provisions of the Clean Water Act "to dictate national policy, thereby harming other states and the national interest and damaging cooperative federalism."

Trump singled out New York for his harshest criticism, saying "obstruction" by the state "was hurting the country."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, D-N.Y., called Trump's executive order a gross overreach that would undermine his state's ability to protect water quality and the environment.

"States must have a role in the process for siting energy infrastructure like pipelines, and any efforts to curb this right to protect our residents will be fought tooth and nail," Cuomo said.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a candidate for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, issued a joint statement with the state's attorney general, Bob Ferguson, calling the executive orders "an unprecedented assault on the right and obligation of every state to protect their waters and their communities."

"We intend to challenge any attempt by the administration to illegally constrain Washington's authority to protect our state's natural resources," the governor and attorney general said.

One of Trump's executive orders calls for the EPA to consult with states, tribes and others before issuing new guidance and rules for states on how to comply with the Clean Water Act.

The order also directs the transportation secretary to propose a rule allowing liquefied natural gas to be shipped in approved rail tank cars, and directs the labor secretary to review whether investment fund managers who invest based on social goals are fulfilling their responsibility to maximize shareholder returns.

Environmental groups described Trump's order as an effort to short-circuit a state's ability to review complicated projects. The environmental group Center for Biological Diversity said the orders would mark the fourth time Trump has used executive actions to streamline permits for fossil-fuel infrastructure.

"Trump's developing an addiction to executive orders that rubber-stamp these climate-killing projects," said Brett Hartl, the center's government affairs director.

Trump has linked growing gas and oil production in the U.S. with the creation of jobs and a reduction in fuel prices for consumers. He signed the orders while visiting the International Union of Operating Engineers International Training and Education Center, a union-run facility northeast of Houston.

Trade groups representing the oil and gas industry applauded the orders and said greater access to natural gas benefits families and the environment.

"When states say 'no' to the development of natural gas pipelines, they force utilities to curb safe and affordable service and refuse access to new customers, including new businesses," said Karen Harbert, president and CEO at the American Gas Association.

The second executive order is designed to ease the process for energy projects that cross international borders.

Currently, the secretary of state has the authority to issue permits for cross-border infrastructure such as pipelines. The executive order clarifies that the president will make the decision on whether to issue such permits.

The move follows Trump's decision last month to issue a new presidential permit for the long-stalled Keystone XL oil pipeline — two years after he first approved it and more than a decade after it was first proposed.

Trump signed the orders in between campaign fundraisers in San Antonio and Houston that were expected to net at least \$6 million for Trump's re-election effort and the Republican Party.

Freking reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Richard Lardner and Matthew Daly in Washington contributed to this report.

## Brain scans may reveal concussion damage in living athletes

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer**

Researchers may be closing in on a way to check athletes while they're alive for signs of a degenerative brain disease that's been linked to frequent head blows. Experimental scans found higher levels of an abnormal protein tied to the disease in a study of former National Football League players who were having mood and thinking problems.

It's the first time a major study has tested these scans for detecting chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, which is only diagnosed now after death, with brain autopsies.

Doctors are searching for a way to tell when players, veterans or others with concussions or other head injuries are at risk for permanent damage. It's too soon to know if the scans will enable that — so far they only show that these athletes are different as a group; they can't be used to say a particular player does or does not have CTE.

"We're not there yet," said Boston University neuroscientist Robert Stern. "It is not ready to be used for individual diagnosis in the clinic."

He led the study, published Wednesday by the New England Journal of Medicine.

"It's an encouraging advance. It looks like they have detected CTE in living players," said Dr. Gil Rabinovici, a neurologist and imaging expert at the University of California, San Francisco, who is doing other

research using the scans.

"It's hugely important to be able to detect the disease in living people" to know how common it is and to research treatments, he said.

The study was done in Massachusetts and Arizona and involved 26 former NFL players with thinking, mood or behavior problems, and 31 similarly aged men without these symptoms or head injuries.

They were given positron emission tomography, or PET scans, in which a radioactive tracer is injected that binds to various substances and makes them visible on the scans. Several of these tracers are used now to look for a protein called beta amyloid in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. An experimental tracer that doctors are testing binds to another protein, tau, which is the key one that's been implicated in CTE.

Men in the study had both types of tracers. Tau levels were higher in the players compared to the others, but their amyloid levels were similar, confirming that CTE is a different disease than Alzheimer's.

Researchers also saw a relationship to years of play.

"The more years of play in tackle football across all levels, the greater the amount of tau detected," Stern said.

However, there was no relationship between tau levels and the severity of mood and thinking symptoms. Researchers think the study may have been too small to detect a difference or that tau may not be the only factor involved.

"There's a lot more work to be done to develop a diagnostic" tool using these scans, said Dr. Michael Weiner an imaging expert at UCSF who is involved in other CTE research.

Government grants and Avid Radiopharmaceuticals, which makes the tracers, funded the study. Some authors work or consult for the company.

A larger study of former NFL and college football players is underway; first results are expected early next year.

Mike Adamle, a former running back for the Chicago Bears and sports announcer, has been told he has symptoms consistent with CTE, and has been evaluated by Stern at the Boston research center though he was not part of the current study.

"I had more than a few" concussions, Adamle said. "If you were running, everybody kind of led with their head. Back then, it was a test of your macho man stuff."

The illness has been devastating, said his wife, Kim. "He couldn't remember his lunch or he couldn't remember his lines on the air," and lost multiple jobs, she said.

If a test could have shown he was at risk and given him a chance to consider quitting play, "I would have definitely taken note," Mike Adamle said.

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Marilynn Marchione can be followed on Twitter: @MMarchioneAP

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## Lawyer: Challenge to NYC's vaccination order in the works

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City's effort to halt a measles outbreak by ordering mandatory vaccinations in one Brooklyn neighborhood is facing opposition, with lawyers for parents opposed to vaccinations promising to file a lawsuit challenging the order by Friday.

But city health officials say they have struck the right balance with the unusual order, and they hope a mixture of outreach and prodding will overcome resistance to vaccines in a slice of the predominantly Orthodox Jewish community hardest hit by the disease.

"The measles vaccine is highly effective," Dr. Herminia Palacio, the city's deputy mayor for health and human services, said Wednesday. "Measles is highly contagious. That combination means this is the right

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time for this measure.”

Palacio spoke a day after she joined Mayor Bill de Blasio and other officials in announcing the vaccine order affecting four ZIP codes in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and threatening possible fines of up to \$1,000 for noncompliance.

Civil rights attorney Michael Sussman called the order “an overreach of authority” and said a lawsuit challenging it will be filed this week.

Sussman also represented a group of parents in suburban Rockland County who challenged the county executive’s order barring unvaccinated children from indoor public spaces. A state judge sided with the parents and issued a preliminary injunction against the emergency order last week.

New York City and Rockland County are both struggling to contain a measles outbreak that has mainly affected Orthodox Jewish families.

Some 285 measles cases have been identified in New York City since last fall, compared with two in all of 2017. There have been 168 cases reported in Rockland since the fall.

De Blasio said Tuesday that he was confident New York City’s vaccination order would survive any legal challenge.

“This is a public health emergency,” the Democratic mayor said. “And the reason the city government is empowered in a public health emergency is to save lives.”

Authorities will carry out the order by interviewing Williamsburg residents who have been diagnosed with measles and then interviewing everyone who those people have come in contact with.

“These are skills that we practice every day,” Palacio said. “It’s not just that they know what questions to ask. They actually do know how to work with people. They have experience gaining people’s trust.”

The health officials will try to persuade any unvaccinated person who has been exposed to measles to get the vaccine. People who refuse the vaccine or who refuse to get their children vaccinated could be fined, though de Blasio said he hoped to avoid levying any fines.

“Our goal is not to fine anyone,” de Blasio said. “Our goal is to get people vaccinated. But we’re also trying to help everyone understand there is urgency here.”

The city believes an estimated 1,800 children in Williamsburg were not immunized as of December.

Health officials have made robocalls urging vaccination to more than 30,000 Williamsburg households and have stocked health care providers in the community with an ample supply of vaccine, Palacio said.

Officials said their efforts have paid off with 8,000 additional vaccinations in affected neighborhoods compared with the prior year. But they said they were taking additional steps to control the outbreak in advance of Passover, when some families may travel overseas to areas in Israel or Europe that are experiencing measles outbreaks.

Doctors who practice in Brooklyn’s Orthodox Jewish communities say only a small number of people refuse inoculations outright because they believe erroneously that vaccines are harmful or that they violate Jewish law, but factors including large families may have helped the outbreak spread.

“There is an element of anti-vaccine supporters and sympathizers who do not want to get shots. It’s a very small minority,” said Dr. Jay Begun, a pediatrician in Williamsburg.

But Begun said a larger number may delay the first measles-mumps-rubella vaccine until 2 years of age instead of the recommended 1 year, vastly increasing the number of unvaccinated children who can be infected.

“Once you delay it a few months, you exponentially increase the vector for infection,” said Begun, who said families of eight to 10 children are typical in his practice. “You have a larger pool of babies. The delay it is what’s fueling this outbreak.”

Begun said he believes the city’s vaccination order will be effective. “I think it will help in getting the community covered,” he said.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, officials in Westchester County just north of New York City announced that measles has been confirmed in eight children who were apparently exposed to the highly contagious virus while visiting Rockland County or Brooklyn. Six of the children are siblings.

## Red Cross regains entry to Venezuela jails, military prisons

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The International Committee of the Red Cross has regained access to prisons in Venezuela, including highly guarded military facilities where dozens of inmates considered political prisoners are being held, as President Nicolas Maduro seeks to counter mounting criticism of his government's human rights record.

The fact that the visits include military prisons, which hadn't been previously reported, was confirmed to The Associated Press by a human rights lawyer and family members of those detained.

International Red Cross President Peter Maurer met with Maduro Tuesday night as he wraps up a five-day visit to Venezuela, where the Geneva-based group is among international organizations trying to carve out a space to deliver badly needed humanitarian aid and technical assistance free of the winner-take-all politics contributing to the country's turmoil.

Critics say the prison visits, which were coordinated directly with the socialist government with little input from its opponents, have the effect of legitimizing Maduro's rule at a time he's face mounting pressure from the U.S. and dozens of allies to resign.

But others say it's a glimmer of hope in an otherwise grim outlook for the country, opening normally thin-skinned authorities to scrutiny — albeit of a confidential nature — and that along with renewed engagement with international actors like the World Food Program and Pan American Health Organization possibly pave the way for political dialogue. It will also allow for closer tracking of a humanitarian crisis expected to worsen under the impact of U.S. financial sanctions

Red Cross representatives visit prisons every year in more than 100 countries, following an established protocol allowing it to verify conditions of confinement and hold private conversations with inmates in which they can voice complaints and send messages to loved ones.

But the group had been denied access in Venezuela at least since 2012.

The renewed visits in Venezuela began March 11 when a Red Cross delegation visited a model prison in Caracas, the Simon Bolivar Center for the Formation of New Men. Eighty-seven foreigners are being held.

But more significant was the visit two weeks later to the military-run Ramo Verde prison outside Caracas, which holds 69 people the opposition considers political prisoners.

Sandra Hernandez, whose husband, Sgt. Luis Figueroa, has been jailed at Ramo Verde since January for leading a military uprising against Maduro, was present last week when a white vehicle emblazoned with the international Red Cross' logo pulled up to the prison entrance.

She was there for her once-a-week visit, delivering basic staples — pasta, rice and cheese — that have become harder to afford since she was fired from her \$7-a-month job as a teacher in what she said was retaliation for her husband's opposition to the government.

She said that if not for remittances sent by a relative in Spain, her husband could starve on the scant rations provided by prison authorities.

While her husband told her he wasn't among the small group of prisoners allowed to speak with the Red Cross representatives, she was hopeful the visit would help improve dire conditions for all inmates, many of whom she said are suffering from lack of medical attention and claim to have been tortured. The AP was unable to independently verify those claims.

"It's very important they talk to prisoners and see firsthand what's happening inside," she said.

Maurer on Wednesday described the visits as an "all-detainee" approach that focuses on helping authorities address the biggest needs but not focusing on individual prisoners or issuing public admonishments. He declined to comment on the visits to military facilities.

"We have this access because we respect the principle of confidentiality which means we visit, we make confidential reports to authorities, we make recommendations and we follow up on those reports," he told journalists in Caracas. "We are not in the business of denunciation."

Prisons Minister Iris Varela has said the visit to the civilian facility, and others to come, were part of an

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effort to share with the world Venezuela's positive experience rehabilitating inmates.

Left unsaid by both sides was that the Red Cross had also secured access to military detention facilities.

The majority of people held at the Ramo Verde are military personnel accused of plotting to overthrow Maduro. Many more, including five oil executives with U.S. passports, are being held in the basement jail of the military counterintelligence headquarters in the capital.

"This is an important first step, but make no mistake, it's also an attempt by Maduro to gain legitimacy with the international community," said Alfredo Romero, a human rights lawyer who was told of the Red Cross visit by prison workers when trying to visit clients at Ramo Verde. "It's not in itself going to change the government's willingness to improve conditions."

A senior government official played down the significance of the Red Cross visits, describing them as part of a broader push to work more closely with several international agencies. The official spoke on condition of anonymity due to lack of authorization to discuss those talks publicly.

Maurer said his organization is tripling its budget this year in Venezuela to around \$24 million, focusing its efforts on rehabilitating hospitals, increasing water supplies, training the armed forces in international humanitarian law and visiting detainees among other activities. He said the work would be concentrated in Caracas, southern Bolivar state and the restive border region with Colombia.

The international Red Cross' sister organization, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, recently said it had received a waiver from Maduro to deliver aid to some 650,000 people in Venezuela beginning this month. Maduro has long denied a humanitarian crisis, considering aid offers a "Trojan horse" to pave the way for a foreign military intervention.

Similarly, opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who is recognized by 50 nations as Venezuela's rightful leader, has tried to control the distribution of U.S.-supplied aid in a bid to weaken Maduro's grip on power.

In another attempt to counter growing criticism, Maduro last month welcomed a delegation sent by the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights. He previously had called such visits a politically biased threat to Venezuela's sovereignty.

"Venezuela is not a typical case where we would have expected to develop major programs," Maurer said. "But we think that there are some clear humanitarian disruptions to address and that it is important to step up to the plate."

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Associated Press writer Joshua Goodman reported this story in Caracas and AP writer Jamey Keaten reported from Geneva.

## Asian shares fall as Fed minutes show data may tweak stance

By ANNABELLE LIANG Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Asian markets retreated Thursday on news that most U.S. Federal Reserve officials believed the central bank would leave interest rates unchanged for the rest of the year. But several said their views could shift with incoming data.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 shed 0.3% to 21,627.87 and the Kospi in South Korea gave up 0.2% to 2,220.29. Hong Kong's Hang Seng was down 0.8% at 29,890.18 and the Shanghai Composite index fell 1% to 3,210.60.

Australia's S&P ASX 200 sank 0.5% to 6,192.90. Shares fell in Taiwan and Indonesia but rose in Singapore.

The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) released minutes from a meeting in March on Wednesday. There were no major surprises. It showed that most officials believed that the central bank would leave its key policy rate unchanged for the rest of the year.

This was in line with the outcome of the March 19-20 meeting, where the Fed trimmed its 2019 rate hikes outlook from two to none.

In the minutes, several Fed officials also said that they may feel differently, depending on the data that surfaces.

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Weaker growth and lower inflation expectations could prompt the Fed to cut rates, while stronger growth and rising inflation expectations could warrant a rate hike.

An indication of flexibility caused Asian markets to open in a "slightly soft mood," said Selena Ling, chief economist at OCBC Bank.

"The FOMC minutes suggested that rates could head in either direction from here, but members generally favor being patient for the remainder of the year," she added in an interview.

China reported inflation figures in March on Thursday that met market expectations. The country's producer price index rose 0.4% in March from a year ago, according to National Bureau of Statistics. This was up from February's 0.1% increase. Its consumer price index picked up 2.3% in March from a year earlier, as compared to a 1.5% gain in the previous month.

Over on Wall Street, strong gains by technology companies and small-company stocks lifted indexes, while utilities lagged. The broad S&P 500 index climbed 0.3% to 2,888.21. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was less than 0.1% higher at 26,157.16 and the Nasdaq composite jumped 0.7% to 7,964.24. The Russell 2000 index of smaller-company stocks rebounded 1.4% to 1,581.55.

ENERGY: Benchmark U.S. crude dropped 31 cents to \$64.30 per barrel. It added 63 cents to settle at \$64.61 per barrel on Wednesday. Brent crude shed 27 cents to \$71.46 per barrel. The contract gained \$1.12 to \$71.73 per barrel in London.

CURRENCIES: The dollar strengthened to 111.04 yen from 111 yen late Wednesday. The euro rose to \$1.1275 from \$1.1273.

AP Business Writers Alex Veiga and Damian J. Troise contributed to this report.

## Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 11, the 101st day of 2019. There are 264 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 11, 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany.

On this date:

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a crowd outside the White House, saying, "We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart." (It was the last public address Lincoln would deliver.)

In 1921, Iowa became the first state to impose a cigarette tax, at 2 cents a package.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers played in an exhibition against the New York Yankees at Ebbets Field, four days before his regular-season debut that broke baseball's color line. (The Dodgers won, 14-6.)

In 1951, President Harry S. Truman relieved Gen. Douglas MacArthur of his commands in the Far East.

In 1961, former SS officer Adolf Eichmann went on trial in Israel, charged with crimes against humanity for his role in the Nazi Holocaust. (Eichmann was convicted and executed.)

In 1966, Frank Sinatra recorded the song "Strangers in the Night" for his label, Reprise (rih-PREEZ') Records.

In 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which included the Fair Housing Act, a week after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1970, Apollo 13, with astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert, blasted off on its ill-fated mission to the moon.

In 1974, Palestinian gunmen killed 16 civilians, mostly women and children, in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona.

In 1980, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued regulations specifically prohibiting sexual harassment of workers by supervisors.

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In 1981, President Ronald Reagan returned to the White House from the hospital, 12 days after he was wounded in an assassination attempt. Race-related rioting erupted in the Brixton district of south London.

In 2002, U.S. Rep. James A. Traficant Jr., D-Ohio, was convicted of taking bribes and kickbacks from businessmen and his own staff. (Traficant was later expelled from Congress and sentenced to eight years in prison; he was released in September 2009.)

Ten years ago: A 16-nation Asian summit in Bangkok, Thailand, was canceled after demonstrators stormed the venue. Boston University won its fifth NCAA hockey championship, defeating Miami (Ohio) 4-3 in overtime. Susan Boyle, a middle-aged volunteer church worker, wowed judges and audiences alike with her soaring rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical "Les Miserables" on the British TV show "Britain's Got Talent."

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, in a fiery speech at civil rights activist Al Sharpton's National Action Network conference, accused the GOP of using voting restrictions to keep voters from the polls and of jeopardizing 50 years of expanded ballot box access for millions of black Americans and other minorities. White House budget director Sylvia Mathews Burwell was named by President Obama to succeed Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. In a rare diplomatic rebuke, the United States blocked Iran's controversial pick for envoy to the United Nations, Hamid Aboutalebi, a member of the group responsible for the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

One year ago: House Speaker Paul Ryan announced that he would retire rather than seek another term in Congress. California Gov. Jerry Brown accepted President Donald Trump's call to send the National Guard to the Mexican border but said the troops would have nothing to do with immigration enforcement. Pope Francis admitted he made "grave errors" in judgment in Chile's sex abuse scandal; during a January visit to Chile, Francis had strongly defended Bishop Juan Barros despite accusations by victims that Barros had witnessed and ignored their abuse. A military transport plane crashed just after takeoff in Algeria, killing 257 people in the worst aviation disaster in the history of the North African country. Mitzi Shore, owner of the Los Angeles club the Comedy Store, died at the age of 87.

Today's Birthdays: Ethel Kennedy is 91. Actor Joel Grey is 87. Actress Louise Lasser is 80. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Ellen Goodman is 78. Movie writer-director John Milius is 75. Actor Peter Riegert is 72. Movie director Carl Franklin is 70. Actor Bill Irwin is 69. Country singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale is 62. Songwriter-producer Daryl Simmons is 62. Rock musician Nigel Pulsford is 58. Actor Lucky Vanous is 58. Country singer Steve Azar is 55. Singer Lisa Stansfield is 53. Montana Gov. Steve Bullock is 53. Actor Johnny Messner is 50. Rock musician Dylan Keefe (Marcy Playground) is 49. Actor Vicellous (vy-SAY'-luhs) Shannon is 48. Rapper David Banner is 45. Actress Tricia Helfer is 45. Rock musician Chris Gaylor (The All-American Rejects) is 40. Actress Kelli Garner is 35. Singer Joss Stone is 32. Actress-dancer Kaitlyn Jenkins is 27.

Thought for Today: "If we were to wake up some morning and find that everyone was the same race, creed, and color, we would find some other causes for prejudice by noon." — George Aiken, U.S. Senator (1892-1984).