

Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

"SINCE THERE IS
NOTHING SO WELL
WORTH HAVING AS
FRIENDS, NEVER
LOSE A CHANCE
TO MAKE THEM."

-FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI



CLOSED: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Upcoming COMMUNITY EVENTS

Swimming Pool Hours

Open Swim Daily: 1 p.m. to 4:50 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.

Fun Night is every Friday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.

Adult Water Aerobics: Monday through Thursday: 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 6:15 pm

Adult Lap Swim: Monday through Friday: 7 a.m. to 8 a.m.; Monday through Thursday: 5:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.; Friday-Sunday: 4:50 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

July 30 - Aug. 2

Amateur Districts in Groton

Thursday, Aug. 1

6:00 p.m.: Junior Legion hosts Northville, (DH)

August 5-18

State "B" Amateur Tournament at Mitchell

August 9-11

State Junior Legion Tourney in Groton

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Legion Post #39 beats Redfield in Regions, sets up championship game

Groton Post #39 handed Redfield its first loss of the regional tournament by posting an 8-6 win in the championship game of the regional. The win meant both teams have one loss and since it is a double elimination tournament, two two teams will have to play again for the rite to advance to the state tournament.

Redfield jumped out to a 5-1 first inning lead, but Groton closed to within one after three innings, 6-5. Groton took the lead in the sixth inning with some exciting action including a double steal at one point. Groton led, 7-6. A Redfield error allowed Larson to score giving Groton an extra insurance run as Redfield was the home team. Groton led, 8-6, going into the bottom of the seventh inning, but it was a one-two-three out and Groton won, 8-6.

Thanks to Meri Erickson for the following play-by-play action:

Groton is the visiting team
Shabazz starts out with a double
Blackmun strikes out for first out.
Morris hits a double to left center- Shabazz moves to third
Locke hits a double scoring Shabazz. Morris moves to third
Johnson singles - loading bases
Jones strikes out for 2nd out
Larson strikes out for 3rd out.
Groton up 1-0
Peyton Johnson is pitching for Groton
Redfield
First batter walks
Moves to 2nd on passed ball
Second batter walks
Double steal to advance runners on the pitch
Next batter strikes out for out one
Batter hits double scoring two
Runner advances to third on wild pitch
Batter hits double scoring runner
Batter hits single- putting runners on first and third
Batter reaches on error and runner scores on overthrow. Batter advances to third

Batter strikes out for second out
Batter walks
Batter flies out to centerfield for 3rd out
Redfield 5-1

Top of second
Thurston leads off with a single
Schroeder flies out to left for first out
Shabazz hits a single to center
Runners on first and second
Blackmun flies out to left for second out
Morris hits a double scoring Thurston and Shabazz.
Locke strikes out ending the inning
Redfield 5-3
Redfield

First batter grounds out to third for first out
Second batter hits a single to center
Batter hits single to left- runners on first and second
Batter hits RBI single
Runners on first and second
Now pitching for Groton is Chandler Larson
Double steal puts runners on second and third
Batter walks loading bases
Batter strikes out for second out
Batter strikes out for third out
Redfield 6-3.

Top of Third
Groton
Johnson with an infield hit
Johnson steals second
Jones hits single to left- advancing Johnson to third
Larson grounds out to shortstop- scores Johnson and moves Jones to second
Thurston hits single to center moving Jones to third
Schroeder strikes out for second out
Jones scores on a pick off error and Thurston moves to third
Shabazz flies out to deep center for third out
Redfield up 6-5
Bottom of third
Redfield
First batter hit by pitch
Second batter hits single to left center
Batter reaches on fielders choice. Runner out at third
Batter flies out to right for second out. Runners on first and third

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Batter walks- loading bases
Pitcher threw runner out at home for third out
Redfield 6-5

Top of Fourth
Groton
Blackmun strikes out for first out
Morris hits a double down third base line
Locke pops out to first base for second out
Johnson strikes out for third out
Redfield 6-5
Redfield
First batter singles
Batter flies out to left for first out
Batter flies out to center for second out
Batter hits single to right- advances runner to third
Batter pops up to catcher for third out
Redfield 6-5

Top of 5th
Groton
Jones grounds out to shortstop for first out
Larson flies out to center for second out
Thurston grounds out to pitcher for last out
Redfield 6-5
Bottom of 5th
Redfield
Batter reaches on error by first base
Batter pops out to second for first out
Batter steals second
Next batter grounds out to shortstop for second out. Runner advances to third
Batter flies out to center for final out
Redfield 6-5

Top of 6th
Groton
Schroeder grounds out to second for first out
Shabazz hits infield single
Shabazz steals second
Blackmun walks putting runners on first and second
Double steal putting runners on second and third
Morris is intentionally walked loading bases
Locke hits single scoring Shabazz. Bases loaded with one out
Johnson walks scoring Blackmun. Bases loaded- 1 out
Jones hits into a double play for outs two and three.
Groton 7-6
Bottom of 6th
Redfield
First batter strikes out
Second batter bunts to pitcher for second out
Third batter pops up to pitcher for third out
Groton 7-6

Top of 7th
Groton
Larson walks
Thurston bunts and is thrown out at first- Larson on second
Schroeder grounded out for 2nd out
Shabazz reaches on an error- Larson on third
Blackmun reaches on an error- scores Larson. Bases loaded- 2 outs
Morris is intentionally walked
That loaded bases
Locke flies out to center ending the inning
Groton 8-6
Bottom of 7th
Redfield
First batter pops up to pitcher for first out
Second batter pops up to catcher for second out
Third batter flies out to left center for final out
Groton wins 8-6

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Redfield beats Legion Post #39 in region title game

It was the third time these two teams met in the regional tournament with each team having a win under their belt. But this game was not only the rubber match, but the rite to advance to the state tournament.

Groton jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first inning, but Redfield came back and tied it at three after two innings. Redfield got two runs in the third inning to take a 5-3 lead and added two more runs in the fifth to take a 7-3 lead. Blackmun had an RIB single and then Wyatt Locke hit a triple in the sixth inning to score Korbin Blackmun and Alex Morris to make it 7-6. Redfield would answer in the bottom of the sixth with four runs to take an 11-6 lead. Groton had two more runs in the top of the seventh as the game ended with Redfield winning, 11-8.

Championship game Groton vs Redfield

Line-up

Pitcher- Peyton Johnson

Catcher- Alex Morris

1st base- Austin Jones

2nd base- Riley Thurston

3rd base- Wyatt Locke

Shortstop- Chandler Larson

Left field- Korbin Blackmun

Center field- Darien Shabazz

Right field- Garret Schroeder

Groton is the visiting team

Groton

Shabazz grounded out to pitcher for first out

Blackmun struck out and reached first on passed ball

Morris singles moving Blackmun to second

Locke reaches on an error scoring Blackmun. Morris is on second

Johnson hits a single scoring Morris and Locke. Advances to second on throw

Jones flies out to right- relay gets Johnson at second for third out.

Groton 3-0

Redfield

First batter hit by pitch

Second batter pops out to right for first out

Third batter pops out to center for second out

Batter gets on with infield hit. Runners on first and second

Runner on second moves to third on error

Batter walks loading bases

Batter hits single scoring two. Runners on first and second

Batter is hit by pitch

Bases loaded

Batter grounds out to second for third out.

Groton 3-2

Top of 2nd

Groton

Larson singles to left

Thurston gets on by fielders choice. Larson out at second for first out

Schroeder with a single- runners on first and second

Shabazz on by fielders choice. Thurston out at third for second out

Blackmun grounds out to third for out.

Groton 3-2

Bottom of 2

Redfield

First batter walks

Darien Shabazz goes in to pitch

Jones moves to center

Johnson goes to first

Runner advances to second on wild pitch

Batter reaches on infield single. Runners on first and second

Batter reaches on fielders choice. Runner out on third for first out

Batter hit by pitch- bases loaded

Batter walks scoring one

Batter strikes out for second out

Batter grounds out to shortstop for third out

Tied game 3-3

Top of 3rd

Groton

Morris reaches on an error

Locke singles moving Morris to second

Johnson strikes out for first out

Jones gets on by fielders choice- Locke out at second

Larson grounds to short- Jones out at second for

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third out

Tied 3-3

Bottom of 3rd

Redfield

First batter walks

Second batter strikes out for first out

Batter strikes out for second out

Runner steals second

Batter reaches on error in center field scoring one.

Runner on second

Batter reaches on centerfield error scoring one.

Runner on second

Batter grounds out to pitcher for third out

Redfield 5-3

Top of 4th

Groton

Thurston strikes out for first out

Schroeder grounds out to second base for out two

Shabazz has an infield hit

Blackmun hits infield single- runners on first and second

Morris hits to shortstop who throws out runner at second for third out

Redfield 5-3

Bottom of 4th

Redfield

First batter hits infield single

Second batter sacrifice bunt for first out

Batter strikes out for second out

Runner steals third

Batter strikes out for third out

Redfield 5-3

Top of 5

Groton

Locke grounds out to second for first out

Johnson singles to left

Jones gets on with fielders choice- Johnson out at second

Larson pops out to right field for third out

Redfield

First batter flies out to right field for out one

Second batter strikes out for out two

Batter hits single scoring one

Runner advances to second on wild pitch

Batter singles to right- runner scores

Runner scores

Batter walks- runners on first and second

Batter grounds out to shortstop for third out

Redfield 7-3

Top of 6

Groton

Thurston grounds out to first for first out

Schroeder grounds out to third for second out

Shabazz doubles to right

Blackmun singles- scoring Shabazz

Morris walks putting runners on first and second

Locke hits a triple scoring Blackmun and Morris

Johnson strikes out for third out

Redfield 7-6

Bottom of 6

First batter singles

Second batter bunted - out at first for out number one

Batter singles- runners on first and third

Runner steals second and runner on third scores on error

Batter strikes out for second out

Riley Thurston in to pitch

Shabazz to center

Jones to third

Locke to second

Batter intentionally walked

Batter hits single to score one

Runners on first and second

Batter walks

Batter singles scoring two

Runners on first and second

Batter grounds out to pitcher for third out

Redfield 11-6

Top of 7th

Groton

Jones leads off with a walk

Larson flies out to center

Jones goes to second on error

Thurston gets hit by pitch

Runners on first and second

Schroeder strikes out for second out

Jones steals third

Runners on first and third

Shabazz walks to load bases

2 outs

Blackmun singles scoring Jones and Thurston

Runners on first and second

2 outs

Morris strikes out for out 3

Redfield wins 11-8

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District 2B Amateur Baseball Tourney at Groton, SD

Winner's Bracket

This year fans will be able to bring in their own beer & wine and we are doing a gun raffle, with two winners to be chosen during the championship game August 2nd.



\$1 foul balls

**Loser of Game #5 = Representative #2

**Loser of Game #6 = Representative #1



Local teachers attend Teacher Swap Event in Sioux Falls

The following and photo above were on Kristi Anderson's Facebook Page: Some would say we've been at this too long...we are in a rut....step aside for a younger teacher....combined teaching years= 69..... still excites us to find books for our students to read...Sioux Falls Teacher Swap....where a large roomful of people happily fork over their own money to enrich learning for their students. Back to school 2019 ...here we come!

Featured above are Deb Winburn and Kristi Anderson.

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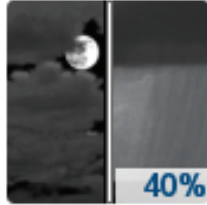
Today



Sunny

High: 87 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy
then Chance
Showers

Low: 66 °F

Sunday



Showers

High: 81 °F

Sunday
Night



Chance
T-storms then
Clear

Low: 60 °F

Monday



Sunny

High: 77 °F

Today



Increasing Clouds

HIGHS: upper 80s to 90°

Tonight - Sunday



Showers and thunderstorms
West of the James River, expanding across the entire area overnight.
Isolated strong to severe storms possible.
Pockets of Heavy Rain. Rainfall amounts up to 1" possible.

LOWS: mid 60s
HIGHS: upper 70s to mid 80s

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



weather.gov/abr

7/27/2019 1:56 AM
Published on: 07/26/2019 at 10:03PM

Dry today. Showers and thunderstorms over central South Dakota this evening will expand across eastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota overnight and continue through Sunday. Isolated strong to severe storms will be possible. Pockets of heavy rain are expected, with a few locations receiving rainfall amounts to around an inch.

Today in Weather History

July 27, 1999: Golf ball size hail and high winds destroyed hundreds of acres of crops on a farm southeast of Ipswich. Golf ball size hail and high winds caused extensive damage to the Richland Wesley Church and the pastor and associate pastor home. The hail poked numerous holes in the siding and shingles of the buildings and broke many windows. Several cars were damaged, and a large tree was also downed. An F1 tornado snapped large branches of an oak and drove them into the ground. The tornado knocked down approximately five headstones in a small cemetery and took a roof off a small outbuilding. It destroyed an empty grain bin, moved a grain auger 50 feet, and took off several large doors on a machine shed. The tornado also knocked down or snapped off numerous large trees in shelter belts and destroyed a barn and several outbuildings just north of Chelsea.

July 27, 2001: An F1 tornado damaged homes, public buildings, trees, and power lines in the town of Lennox, Lincoln County. The American Legion building had its entire front facade ripped off, and its windows shattered. Several vehicles near the building sustained significant damage from flying debris, and one was lifted and dropped partly onto another vehicle. Damage to homes included holes in permanent siding, several roofs heavily damaged, windows were broken, fences blew down, garages damaged including at least one destroyed. Damage to public buildings included the pump house at the water tower being destroyed, the roof at the water plant was damaged, flag poles next to the ambulance building were broken, and an overhead door at the fire station was torn off. A fire truck at the fire station was damaged, and the window air conditioner was blown out along with some ceiling tiles inside. Power was lost to much of the city for at least an hour and a half because of the downed power lines.

1819: A hurricane affected the coast from Louisiana to Alabama. New Orleans was on the fringe of the storm and suffered no severe damage. Ships at the Balize experienced a strong gale for 24 hours that only grounded three ships. Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne rose five to six feet during the storm, with farms along the lakes flooded by the storm tide. Forty-one lives were lost on the U.S. Man of War schooner Firebrand, a 150-ton gunship, while it lay off the west end of Cat Island. At least 43 people died in all.

1926: A destructive Category 4 hurricane struck Nassau during the evening hours on the 25th. The hurricane passed just east of Cape Canaveral early on the 28th and made landfall near present-day Edgewater, Florida.

1943: A "surprise," Category 2 Hurricane moved ashore near Galveston, Texas. Due to World War II, all news underwent censorship, including any weather reports making this the surprise storm. The hurricane killed 19 people and caused millions of dollars in damages. Of particular note, Lieutenant Colonel Joe Duckworth and Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair flew an AT-6 Texan into the eye of the hurricane, becoming the first flight into the eye of the storm.

1989: Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, Arizona experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is typically received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24-hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions.

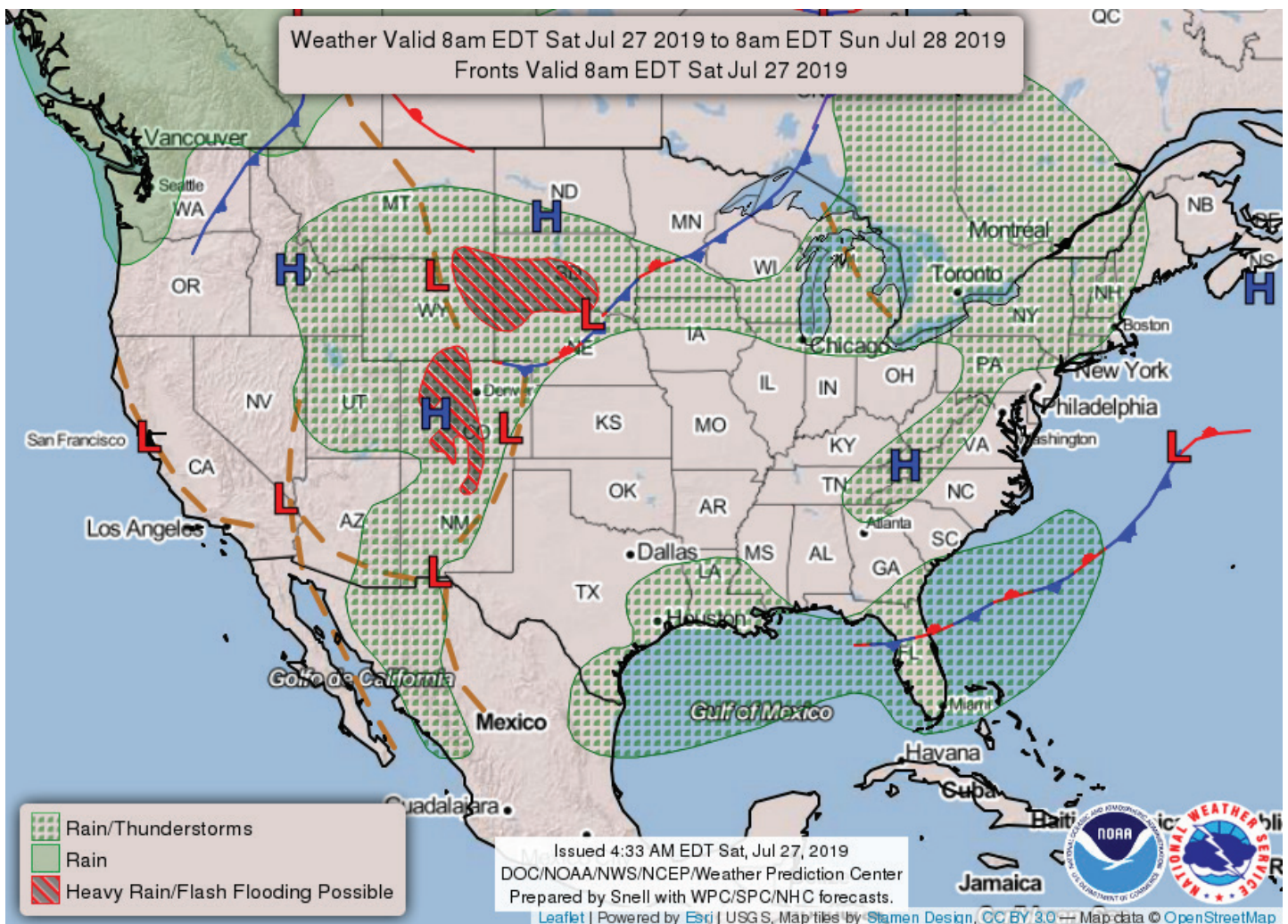
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 89 °F at 3:48 PM
Low Temp: 64 °F at 6:14 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 1:01 PM
Day Rain: 0.00

Record High: 110° in 1931
Record Low: 41° in 2013
Average High: 84°F
Average Low: 59°F
Average Precip in July.: 2.60
Precip to date in July.: 2.87
Average Precip to date: 13.44
Precip Year to Date: 15.59
Sunset Tonight: 9:08 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:13 a.m.



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THE COMMON BOND

Life, more often than not, seems to be determined by boundaries. While many are set for us by others, we often set them for ourselves. These boundaries separate the rich from the poor, educated from uneducated: railroad tracks that separate the impoverished from those living in mansions, hippies from the elite. If there is some way to establish a boundary to make one group better or different or weirder than another group - someone, sooner than later, will discover it.

Fortunately for us, God has no favorites nor does He recognize any boundaries. Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is Maker of them all, wrote Solomon. The Hebrew word for common conveys the meaning that everyone meets or stands together before God - their Creator and Sustainer.

We each have our own particular way of looking at others. We tend to look at them through various lenses. Sometimes we clump them together and label them by color or class or creed. Even though we are advised not to profile anyone for any reason, we do it automatically even though we have been warned against doing so. Right or wrong, it is a convenient way to classify someone and set them aside or reach out to them.

No doubt the way we see and respond to others has developed over the years. It depends on our education and the experiences we have had in life, as well as the influence of our family and friends. We like people who are like us and avoid people who are different from us. But, thank God He is not like us! He will not reject any person for any reason. He is the Maker of us all and His Son, our Redeemer and Savior said, that whoever believes in Me shall not perish but have eternal life! The whoever includes each of us. Thank God He has no boundaries.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your love that includes everyone. Thank You for making Your love and salvation available to everyone. Thank You for being all inclusive. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 22:2 Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is Maker of them all.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 08/07/2019 Storybook Land Theatre Performace at Granary Rural Cultural Center
- 09/07/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/08/2019 Sunflower Classic at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/19/2019 St. John's Lutheran Luncheon
- 09/20/2019 Presbygerian Luncheon
- 09/28/2019 Granary Living History Fall Festival
- 10/11/2019 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/12/2019 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 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 at the Legion Post #39

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/26/2020 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday in May)
- 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
Groton Hosting State B American Legion Baseball Tournament
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest

News from the Associated Press

Tribe at center of pipeline protests launches solar farm

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

CANNON BALL, N.D. (AP) — The American Indian tribe at the center of tumultuous protests against the Dakota Access pipeline unveiled a solar farm Friday that came about partly due to the tribe's fierce opposition to the oil pipeline's environmental impact.

Located just 3 miles (5 kilometers) from the pipeline, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's solar project is meant as a first step toward clean energy independence and a way to power all 12 of the reservation communities in North Dakota and South Dakota. It also shows that the protests that began in 2016 and ended in 2017 weren't for naught, even though the pipeline began carrying oil more than two years ago, said Cody Two Bears, the project leader and executive director of Indigenized Energy, which promotes energy within the Sioux Nation.

Two Bears said the solar project "pays tribute to everyone who's come to Standing Rock and all their hard work and tireless dedication toward protecting our people and land."

The project has 1,000 panels covering about three acres of wide-open prairie near Cannon Ball, with plans to expand to 10 acres.

A night of Native American dancing, music indigenous foods and gift giving was kicked off by actress Shailene Woodley, a loyal protester who was returning to the reservation for the first time in two years. She tearfully hugged and greeted dozens of people when she arrived at the solar farm and told the group afterward that they are "sharing their wisdom" with the rest of the world.

"This is the beginning of something incredibly massive that I don't think anyone of us can begin to fathom at this moment," she said.

Presidential hopeful and U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard rode into the farm on horseback.

Woodley visited the protest camp several times where thousands of people lived for months and sometimes clashed with law enforcement. More than 700 people were arrested during the protests.

Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes, an executive with the economic development entity of Nebraska's Winnebago Tribe, which began dabbling in solar energy a decade ago, said the national interest around the protests should translate into promotion of renewable energy.

"Tribes have always been strong advocates and set the marker to where we need to be on," Bledsoe Downes said. "If there's any good from what happened at the DAPL protest, I hope that it was a catalyst to that."

Numerous tribes have turned to solar power and other forms of green energy in the last decade as a way of creating jobs and cutting down on energy costs without harming the environment. Bledsoe Downes said the Winnebago Tribe is saving \$100,000 a year, money that "goes back into housing or down payment assistance or tribal roads or infrastructure costs or youth programming."

Several solar energy nonprofits joined forces to build the \$470,000 Standing Rock facility, and those organizations are billing it as the largest solar energy farm in North Dakota. It currently powers the Sioux Nation Community Center and Veterans Memorial Building.

Hayes Barnard, president of San Francisco-based GivePower Foundation, which made the largest donation of \$370,000, said the solar farm is a "testament to the tribe's steadfast commitment to going beyond protesting and inciting real change."

Westside Wesleyan rises from ashes 1 year after Bristol fire

By KELDA J.L. PHARRIS Aberdeen American News

ABDERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — It's been one year since the Westside Wesleyan congregation in Bristol lost its church in a fire.

Now, in its place, the outline of a new home for the congregation is taking shape in plywood and plank. The rebuild is well underway.

"We're getting things all sealed up if we can get the windows and doors in," said Lynn Lutz, Wesleyan Westside's pastor. "Should be on track. If they get it all sealed up, then weather isn't as much of a factor."

Lutz spoke earlier this month, a few days prior to the one-year anniversary of the fire, which took place around 8:30 a.m. on July 20, 2018. The church secretary was coming from the basement, noticed smoke, opened a window, then went to the office and was met with a flash of flame, according to American News archives.

"Everything was impacted as far as the physical contents. The origination of the fire was somewhere in my office; that sustained the bulk of it. I lost practically everything. Computers, records, books, music, all of those kinds of things. That's not the most important things," Lutz said.

Some things were admittedly irreplaceable, like records, resources and personal items. But no one was injured in the fire.

Another loss is a handful of parishioners who decided to change churches when Westside burned down. Lutz understands it's hard to not see those past baptisms, weddings and other touchstone moments once a church is gone. It can make it easier to act on a transition that was perhaps being pondered because of a move or a change in family.

"For the most part everybody is on board. We have had a few people leave. We're not as much a community church as we are a regional church. We draw from Aberdeen, Conde, Webster ..." he said.

Just prior to the fire, Lutz said there were plans in the works for an addition and improvements. The fire's timing was just before checks were to be cut for as much as \$400,000. Had the upgrades been made, they would have been a loss, too, he said.

"We were making plans and yet that all got sidetracked when we had the fire. We had to make a whole different set of plans," Lutz told Aberdeen American News.

The lurch was felt by even the youngest of parishioners, but sometimes they also meet challenges with the easiest optimism. Lutz, who'd been speaking solemnly, lightened his voice. A pleasant memory popped up, and he had to share about a recent Sunday school class. They were covering "the big picture."

"God sees the big picture, we only see a little bit. One kid ... happens to be the son of the man who's on my church board. He does building design. The little guy said, 'God had my daddy here so he could build us another church.' The kids understand, they see the big picture. It really was. While it was tragic, it really was a God thing," Lutz said.

He said having a fresh start with a new church will ultimately be a good thing. The new building will be one level and easily accessible by wheelchair or walker. It will also eliminate the hauling of groceries or other fellowship needs up and down from the basement.

True to Westside Wesleyan being a regional church, businesses and organizations have contributed to its construction, including donations raised during the Bergen Threshing Bee and a fundraising buffet at Pereboom's in Webster. Along with insurance, the \$850,000 cost for the new building should be largely covered and without the church taking on any debt.

Bristol itself has helped ease some of the strain of the past year. The community center has been serving as the interim church since the fire.

On the new structure, shingling has started with roughing in of plumbing and electrical next. It's projected to be open around October. To follow along with the progress visit the church's Facebook page.

BHSU football player's game plan to tackle leukemia

By DENNIS KNUCKLES Black Hills Pioneer

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — Brett Lamb has seen his whole world turn upside down in less than a year.

In 2018, Lamb, a red-shirt sophomore linebacker from San Antonio, Texas, was playing football at Black Hills State University where he played in 10 games, totaled 54 tackles with 19 assisted and seven tackles for loss, had 1.5 sacks, and had a season high nine tackles against CSU-Pueblo.

This spring he played in the Yellow Jackets spring football game in mid-April, and he was working out hard to get ready for the 2019 football season.

Then toward the end of May his life suddenly changed.

"I'd say the last week of May for about a week straight, everything was very achy. I was very sluggish and tired, lethargic feeling," Lamb said.

After a week he felt better but then took a turn for the worse, and he decided it was time to go see a doctor in mid-June.

"I got diagnosed with Pericarditis (an inflammation of the tissues around the heart that can build up with fluid) in Spearfish, and I was taking some medicine and I was doing fine," Lamb said.

More tests, including a CT scan, revealed his spleen had enlarged.

"On the 27th they called me to the Regional Health in Spearfish and my white blood count was around 39,000, and normally it should be between 5,000 and 10,000" he said. "The doctor continued testing, including for mono, Lyme disease, etc."

Lamb then took it upon himself to begin searching to see if he could find out what was going on with him.

"I was looking up stuff on the internet. I was scared. I was telling my roommates and my parents that I might have leukemia. This was about a week and a half before I was diagnosed with it. It was something I really didn't want to accept, because who the hell wants to accept a bad cancer?" Lamb said.

Sue Lamb, Brett's mother, said the family was in denial at first, when Brett told them he had been re-searching his symptoms online and thought he might have leukemia.

"Google is our friend, and Google is our enemy," Sue Lamb said. "We thought, Brett is an athlete and he incredibly disciplined and strong and he's not getting sick. It just made sense to us it was some kind of viral thing," she said.

Lamb said he went to Dallas on June 27 with his girlfriend for a short visit with his family.

"We drove 16 hours and we got there on the 28th and I didn't feel great. I was very pale. My parents were worried," he said. "Then on the 29th I wasn't feeling good and I kept telling them I might have leukemia and they didn't want to believe it."

On June 30, he woke up and saw little red dots on his ankles (Petechiae), a sign of broken blood vessels unable to be closed off, as his platelets were low.

"Right then my family and I knew I had to go to the hospital," Lamb said

The doctor in Dallas told Lamb he believed Lamb had leukemia, and they immediately transferred him to Baylor University Medical Center.

While at Baylor, doctors confirmed his Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) diagnosis and recommended he be transferred to Medical City Children's Hospital in Dallas, where because he was under the age of 25, he could be treated under the more aggressive Pediatric protocol.

After being transferred to Medical City Children's Hospital on July 1, the doctor told Lamb it was 100% certain that he had ALL.

"The results showed 95% of my blood had leukemia cells in it," he said. "Shortly after that they confirmed I tested positive for the Philadelphia chromosome (Ph+ALL) acute lymphocytic (or lymphoblastic) leukemia in the bone marrow where blood cells are made. It is more common in children than in adults."

Brett said he was shocked by the diagnosis and had a hard time, at first, accepting it.

Philadelphia chromosome is where chromosome No. 9 and chromosome No. 22, which are both proteins, split off and create a different protein, and that protein then accelerates the spread of leukemia

Leukemia is cancer of the body's blood-forming tissues, including the bone marrow and the lymphatic

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system.

Sue Lamb said the family was devastated when they heard the diagnosis.

"When we found out he had leukemia, our whole world turned upside down. We couldn't believe it," she said.

Lamb said the doctors had told him that their educated guess was he had contracted leukemia around the first week of April.

"I didn't have any symptoms at that time, so I didn't know I had it," Lamb said.

Sue Lamb said the family has no history of blood cancer or leukemia before Brett's diagnosis.

Brett is taking several medications daily, including a chemo pill, and he goes to the hospital and does chemotherapy treatment every Tuesday.

His friends in Spearfish were stunned of the news.

His roommate Hunter Stephens, and teammate with the Black Hills State University football team, said he was stunned when he heard the news about Brett being diagnosed with leukemia.

"It was definitely a shock for sure. I was thinking it was stuff right out of a movie, like when your best friend has leukemia, just like something out of a movie. Definitely took me a long time to let it sink in. But I know he's going to be fine at the end of this," Stephens said.

His other roommate and teammate Cody Hooker said, "Brett's a fighter. He's one of the strongest people I know and if there is anyone can do this and beat cancer, it's going to be him."

Lamb said he feels his treatments are working, but they do take a lot out of him.

"I think the treatments are better. I'm feeling better. Going through chemo isn't easy because there are so many different side effects, but it has brought my numbers down," said Brett. "I feel pretty weak and get tired easily, and have nausea. It's just hard to deal with it especially coming from working out all the time, and being active, to staying in the house because my immune system is all messed up."

The cycle of daily treatments is staggering.

"It's going to be pretty complex for the next 60 to 90 days because this is the most critical timeframe where they have to get the cancer into first stage remission, then they'll go back and kill it some more for the next stage of it," Sue Lamb said. "Then we'll know probably in the next four weeks if he's going to need a bone marrow transplant."

"Brett's cancer is complex, and he's under pediatric care, which means his body can tolerate higher doses of the chemo cocktail, and he's under a stronger regiment routine, but he's on a better track to having better numbers (for his white blood count and platelets)," she said.

Patients 25 and younger are treated as pediatrics.

The costs of these treatments are high, and his family does have insurance, but that doesn't cover all the out-of-pocket expenses.

"The chemo drugs we have are very expensive. It's \$1,450 co-pay for just one particular drug, for one month of pills. We have co-pay assistance for the first year, for this one drug, but other expenses as his treatment plan evolves will be very costly. We're dealing with it; we know it's going to be expensive," Sue Lamb said.

A Brett Lamb Donation Fund is set up at Wells Fargo, in Spearfish, as well as a GoFundMe account, where people can make donations to help the family defray some of the costs of the treatment.

John Reiners, Black Hills State University's head football coach, said plans are in the works to honor Brett this season.

Reiners said they are in the process of doing some things to honor Brett this fall.

"We are going to have stickers on our helmet. There's going to be white stickers with the No. 56 and an orange ribbon on it. They are going to be orange, because orange is the color of leukemia awareness. T-shirts and sweatshirts will be sold, and then at the very end all the proceeds from those sales will be donated to the charity of Brett's choice," Reiners said.

Through it all, Lamb has maintained his wry sense of humor

He was asked about reports that he is a good dancer. Lamb laughed a little bit and replied, "I've been

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told I'm a decent two-stepper, yes sir."

Lamb has been playing football since the age of 5.

He chose to play football at Black Hills State University because he wanted to branch out on his own, and BHSU made him feel welcome.

"It was more about the independence. I wanted to get away and do my own thing, and I wanted to go somewhere new," Lamb told the Black Hills Pioneer.

He attended summer camps at the university and he said he realized Spearfish was a small, family community, "and the coaches seemed like they really wanted me up there, and that meant a lot," Lamb said. "I love living up there, and I see myself living up there for a while after I graduate."

Lamb recalled telling his coach about his diagnosis, and he said Reiners was in shock.

"He couldn't believe it either. We cried and had a moment on the phone. He's been great through this. He has supported me and he has talked to me almost every single day," Lamb said.

Reiners said he was taken back when Brett told him his diagnosis.

"Obviously it is a lot of shock and then it is concern for Brett and his family. His life at the moment he found out he had leukemia changed things immensely," said Reiners. "Not only as a coach, but also as a father having a son the same age, you immediately go into parent mode. The biggest thing for me was, OK, are you getting the things you need? How are things down there, what do you need from us, that was my thing."

Lamb he has also talked to his teammates since his diagnosis.

"They are all in shock. I was working out with them over the summer," he said. "I talked to almost everybody and they said they are all praying for me and hoping the best for me and they are fighting with me to beat this."

Lamb said he appreciates all the support his family and friends have shown him.

"I've heard from quite a few people from Black Hills State, from some family and friends and teammates from Spearfish, a lot of friends and family from San Antonio and Dallas. It's been good to have a huge support group," he said.

Lamb said he plans to get his degree in business administration with a specialization in entrepreneurship, and he wants to once again wear the Green and Gold football uniform in the future.

"Yes sir, I plan to step on the football field again. That's my goal for right now," he said without hesitation.

Reiners said Brett told him the same thing.

"He has flat out told me, 'Coach, I'll be back in the spring. I'm going to be playing football again, and this is not going to beat me,' and I truly believe that," Reiners said.

Lamb said he still has a lot of living to do and he's not going to let leukemia keep him down.

"I have my whole life ahead of me, and dying isn't an option. I love my family, friends, coaches, and football team, and I don't want to let them down. I still have things I want to prove on the football field and personal goals I have yet to accomplish," said Lamb. "I want to be able to take off my helmet on my own terms, not because I am forced to from cancer. I'm going to fight this disease, and maybe someday my story will motivate others to overcome adversity in their own lives."

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

04-06-11-43-48, Mega Ball: 11, Megaplier: 3

(four, six, eleven, forty-three, forty-eight; Mega Ball: eleven; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$75 million

Economist: New Trump farm aid may be distributed more fairly

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The Trump administration's decision to base new handouts to farmers hit by the trade war with China on how many acres they've planted might be a fairer way to distribute the cash than the previous system of payments per bushel heavily skewed toward soybean growers, an agricultural economist said Friday.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced Thursday that the administration will pay another \$16 billion more in aid to farmers affected by the president's trade war with China. It comes after an \$11 billion bailout Trump gave farmers last year.

Scott Irwin, a University of Illinois agricultural economist, said the previous program heavily weighted toward payments to soybean growers and based on bushels, "didn't make any sense."

The new payments will shift from being calculated on a per-bushel rate to paying by acres planted and location. The payment rates range from \$15 to \$150 per acre on a county-by-county basis, and will be determined by how much each county has suffered from the retaliatory duties imposed by China, as well as previous tariffs put in place by the European Union and Turkey.

The payments are aimed at about two dozen crops, including soybeans, corn, canola, peanuts, cotton and wheat. Hog and dairy farmers also are included.

The bulk of the aid last year was aimed at soybean growers, among those hit hardest by China's retaliatory tariffs. The formula last year paid soybean farmers \$1.65 a bushel and corn growers only a penny per bushel.

"This year's program is probably weighted more fairly to other commodities," Irwin said.

Under the first round of aid last year, a review by The Associated Press showed that many large farming operations found legal ways around caps, with some collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars and one receiving nearly \$2.8 million.

North Dakota farmer Joe Ericson said the aid won't go far enough to make up for his losses due to the ongoing dispute.

"It'll help but it doesn't cover everything," said Ericson, who raises an equal amount of soybeans and corn on his 5,000-acre farm near the eastern North Dakota town of Wimbledon. "But I think I'll be better off than last year."

Ericson said he would have needed at least \$2 more a bushel on his soybeans to break even. This year, he and other farmers in the county will be paid \$55 per acre.

John Newton, the chief economist for the American Farm Bureau, said it's too early to determine the impact of the latest payout to farmers, but it will help them "service that mountain of debt" that has come from years of poor crop prices.

National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson said the latest bailout is welcomed and "desperately needed. But this sort of ad hoc policy is confusing and is really not a predictable policy for farmers to follow."

"Some farmers will probably be better off and some farmers will probably be worse off," Johnson said of the aid package. "Overall, it's far better that we have this than not have it."

Minnesota woman killed in South Dakota crash

BRANDON, S.D. (AP) — The Highway Patrol has identified the woman killed in a four-vehicle crash in eastern South Dakota.

Twenty-two-year-old Brooke Thompson, of Luverne, Minnesota died in the collision on Interstate 90 northwest of Brandon Tuesday.

Officials say charges are pending in the crash. The patrol says a Chevy Impala, Jeep Grand Cherokee and GMC Terrain were westbound and nearly stopped as traffic merged due to road construction. A box truck struck the Terrain and rear-ended the Jeep, then pushed the Impala into the grass median. Thompson

was driving the Jeep and died at the scene.

Two others suffered injuries and were taken to the hospital.

Trial set for Sioux Falls murder defendant

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Trial has been set for a Sioux Falls man accused in a fatal drug deal that left two men dead.

Thirty-six-year-old Manuel Frias is slated to go to trial for first-degree murder and other charges on July 29. Officials say the trial could last more than two weeks.

Prosecutors say Frias, Corey Zephier and Crystal Habben planned to rob Samuel Crockett during a drug deal in January 2018. Frias is accused of fatally shooting Crockett and Crockett killed Zephier during the hold up.

The 28-year-old Crockett died at a hospital. The 30-year-old Zephier died at the scene of the shooting. The Argus Leader says Habben pleaded guilty to being an accessory to a felony, was sent to prison and is now on parole.

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

Drug analysis taxes South Dakota crime lab

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Rapid City's forensic crime lab is trying to keep up with the high demand for drug evidence analysis.

The lab handles evidence from law enforcement throughout western South Dakota and last year had 1,414 requests for drug analysis, making 2018 the lab's busiest year ever.

Officials say the numbers are even higher this year. Forensic chemist Carolyn Angi tells KOTA-TV the lab used to get about 60 cases a month, but that has grown to about 100 a month.

The lab's director, Brendan Matthew, says increased cases of methamphetamine created a backlog of about two months in 2016, prompting the lab to hire another chemist. Matthew says they are very busy, but so far, have been able to keep up with the caseload.

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

Hong Kong police fire tear gas, clear protesters by force

By ALICE FUNG and KATIE TAM Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong police on Saturday fired tear gas, swung batons and forcefully cleared out protesters who defied warnings not to march in a neighborhood where last weekend a mob apparently targeting demonstrators brutally attacked people in a train station.

Protesters wearing all black streamed through the Yuen Long area, even though police refused to grant permission for the march, citing risks of confrontations between demonstrators and local residents.

By nightfall, protesters and police were once again facing off in the streets, as they've done previously during the summer-long pro-democracy protests in the Chinese territory. Demonstrators threw objects and ducked behind makeshift shields, and police officers shot plumes of tear gas into the air.

For the protesters, it was a show of defiance against both the police and the white-clad assailants who beat dozens of people July 21, including some demonstrators heading home after a mass protest.

Police said some of the attackers at the train station were connected to triad gangs and others were villagers who live in the area. Demonstrators accused law enforcement of not acting quickly enough to protect the victims and even colluding with the mob, an allegation that police have firmly denied.

The streets of Yuen Long became a sea of umbrellas as the march began Saturday afternoon. A symbol going back to the Occupy Central protests that shook Hong Kong in 2014, umbrellas have become tools to help protesters conceal their identities from police cameras as well as shields against tear gas and pepper

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spray. Some also wore masks.

"Hong Kong police know the law and break the law," protesters chanted as they made their way through the streets.

Max Chung Kin-ping, one of the rally's organizers, said there were 288,000 participants. The police had yet to release their turnout figure, which is generally lower than organizers' estimates.

Less than three hours after the start of the march, police fired tear gas to try to disperse crowds that had ignored authorities' appeals to leave the area. Police said in a statement that they were clearing out the protesters, who were "holding iron poles, self-made shields and even removing fences from roads."

Some protesters also endangered police officers' lives by surrounding and vandalizing an occupied police vehicle, the statement added.

As the demonstration rolled into the evening, officers in riot gear faced off with protesters using pieces of wood as shields. Live footage from broadcaster RTHK showed protesters on one street forcing back riot police by throwing umbrellas and waving rods at them. On another street, officers repeatedly raised warnings and fired tear gas at masked demonstrators who were standing their ground.

Soon afterward, many of the protesters dispersed, but others stayed put. A group of officers appeared with batons and held up banners that read, "Stop charging or we use force." At least one woman was knocked down when police used the rods.

Later in the evening, protesters encircled a smashed-up car. The windows of the car were shattered and its body was covered with posters denouncing the police. It was not immediately clear who owned the vehicle or who destroyed it.

By the waning hours of Saturday, some protesters remained in and around Yuen Long station. Police warned in a statement that they risked arrest.

"Police hereby reiterate that the protesters are participating in an unauthorized assembly and may be liable to a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment," the statement said.

Late Saturday night, police wearing heavy-duty helmets and wielding batons suddenly charged into the train station, where a few hundred protesters had taken refuge from the tear gas.

Some officers swung their batons directly at demonstrators, while others appeared to be urging their colleagues to hang back. For the second week in a row, blood was splattered on the station floor.

A few hours before the march started, a man was arrested in Yuen Long for injuring someone with a knife, police said.

Massive demonstrations began in Hong Kong early last month against an extradition bill that would have allowed suspects to face trial in mainland China, where critics say their rights would be compromised. The bill was eventually suspended, but protesters' demands have grown to include direct elections, the dissolution of the current legislature and an investigation into alleged police brutality.

A former British colony, Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997 under the framework of "one country, two systems." The arrangement promises the city certain democratic freedoms that are not afforded mainland citizens, but some residents say these liberties have been steadily eroded in recent years after the arrests of booksellers and democracy activists.

A distrust of China's Communist Party-led central government in Beijing has undergirded the protests this summer. After the march last weekend, a group of protesters vandalized Hong Kong's Liaison Office, which represents the mainland government. They spray-painted the building's surveillance cameras and threw eggs and black ink at the Chinese national emblem, an act that Beijing has vehemently condemned.

Some Yuen Long residents participated in Saturday's march, while others stood outside with signs warning protesters not to enter. For their part, demonstrators pasted calls for democracy on sticky notes around the area.

"After the violence (last Sunday), as a resident of Yuen Long, I think I have the responsibility to come out," said a 24-year-old man surnamed Man. "After all these protests in past months, the government still hasn't responded to us."

Associated Press writer Yanan Wang in Beijing and news assistants Nadia Lam, Phoebe Lai and Chanwoo

Bang in Hong Kong contributed to this report.

Police arrest Scottish rape suspect who may have faked death

SALINAS, Calif. (AP) — A Scottish man who authorities say faked his death off California's Carmel coast to avoid rape charges back home has been arrested, authorities announced Friday.

Kim Vincent Avis, 55, also known as Ken Gordon-Avis, was arrested in Colorado Springs, Colorado, last week and is being held by the U.S. Marshals Service, Cmdr. Kathy Pallozolo with the Monterey County Sheriff's Office said. The Associated Press has identified him as Kim Gordon.

Gordon's 17-year-old son reported that his father vanished Feb. 25 after going for a nighttime swim in treacherous waters in Monterey. Searchers found no trace of Gordon at Monastery Beach, sometimes dubbed "Mortuary Beach" for its deadly reputation.

After three days of intense searching, detectives began to suspect a hoax.

They say the son's account lacked crucial details, and he couldn't explain how the two got to California's central coast after traveling by air from Scotland to Los Angeles.

"There was a lack of detail," sheriff's Capt. John Thornburg said at the time. "The son, who reported it, couldn't even tell us where he went in under the water."

Gordon's son was returned to Scotland with the help of Monterey County Child Protective Services. He did not face charges for filing a false report.

Gordon, who is from the Edinburgh area, is wanted on 24 counts of rape in Scotland.

"When that came up, we start to wonder if this is a hoax, and he's trying to escape these charges out of Scotland," Thornburg said.

A spokesperson for Police Scotland told the BBC: "Police Scotland is aware of reports from the USA regarding Kim Gordon or Avis and is liaising with the relevant authorities."

Trump proposal seeks to crack down on food stamp 'loophole'

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Residents signing up for food stamps in Minnesota are provided a brochure about domestic violence, but it doesn't matter if they even read the pamphlet. The mere fact it was made available could allow them to qualify for government food aid if their earnings or savings exceed federal limits.

As odd as that might sound, it's not actually unusual.

Thirty-eight other states also have gotten around federal income or asset limits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by using federal welfare grants to produce materials informing food stamp applicants about other available social services. Illinois, for example, produced a flyer briefly listing 21 services, a website and email address and a telephone number for more information.

The tactic was encouraged by former President Barack Obama's administration as a way for states to route federal food aid to households that might not otherwise qualify under a strict enforcement of federal guidelines. Now President Donald Trump's administration is proposing to end the practice — potentially eliminating food stamps for more than 3 million of the nation's 36 million recipients.

The proposed rule change, outlined this past week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has highlighted the ideological clash between Trump's attempts to tighten government entitlement programs and efforts in some states to widen the social safety net.

It's also stirred outrage and uncertainty among some who stand to be affected.

"I think it's pretty rotten," said Lisa Vega, a single mother of two teenage boys in suburban Chicago who applied for food stamps last month after losing her job. Because she receives regular support payments from her ex-husband, Vega said her eligibility for food stamps likely hinges on the income eligibility exceptions that Trump's administration is trying to end.

"A lot of these politicians don't realize that us Americans out here are living paycheck to paycheck, one crisis away from being homeless," Vega said. "You're just going to take this kind of stuff away from us

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when we need it the most?"

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the proposed rule change is intended to close a "loophole" that states have misused to "effectively bypass important eligibility guidelines."

Current federal guidelines forbid people who make more than 130 percent of the poverty level from getting food stamps. But many states believe the cap is too restrictive, especially in cities with a high cost of living, prompting them to bypass the limits.

At issue is a federal policy that allows people who receive benefits through other government programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, to automatically qualify for the food aid program known as SNAP. The practice, called categorical eligibility, is intended partly to reduce duplicative paperwork. It has also allowed states to grant food stamps to more people.

In 2009, Obama's Agriculture Department sent a memo to its regional directors encouraging states to adopt what it termed as "broad-based categorical eligibility" for food stamps by providing applicants with a minimal TANF-funded benefit such as an informational pamphlet or telephone hotline. Among other things, Obama's administration said the expanded eligibility could help families stung by a weak economy and promote savings among low-income households.

Most states adopted the strategy. Thirty states and the District of Columbia are using income limits higher than the federal standard of \$1,316 monthly for an individual or \$2,252 for a family of three. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia have either waived asset limits entirely or set them above federal thresholds, according to the Agriculture Department.

The department's inspector general has raised concerns about the tactic. It also came under public scrutiny last year after self-described millionaire Rob Undersander testified before the Minnesota legislature that he and his wife had legally received about \$6,000 in food stamps over 19 months because his considerable assets and Individual Retirement Account withdrawals didn't count against his eligibility.

Undersander, who is a Trump supporter, told The Associated Press this week that he had been trying to make a point — not game the system — and praised Trump's administration for proposing to tighten eligibility standards.

"I think that states just found this loophole, and then I think they've been abusing a loophole," Undersander said.

Although Undersander failed to persuade Minnesota to change its policy, critics were more successful in Mississippi. On July 1, Mississippi implemented a state law prohibiting its Department of Human Services from using noncash benefits in other programs to trigger food stamp eligibility.

Under the Trump administration's proposed rule change, residents in all states would need to be authorized to receive at least \$50 a month in TANF benefits for a minimum of six months in order to automatically qualify for food stamps. Subsidies for childcare, employment and work-related transportation would still count. But the proposal would stop states from linking eligibility to the receipt of an informational brochure.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services has estimated that 12,000 of its roughly 400,000 food stamp recipients could be cut off if the federal government eliminates its ability to use a brochure as justification for offering food stamps to those earning up to 165% of the federal poverty level instead of the federal threshold of 130% of the poverty mark.

Similar estimates aren't available for all states.

Advocates for the poor say states' exceptions to federal guidelines have helped people gradually transition off food stamps when they get modest raises at work and have enabled seniors and the disabled to save money without going hungry. Advocates also say the eligibility exceptions have helped people such as Vega, whose income may be slightly above the federal threshold yet have little money left over after paying high housing and utility bills.

"I think the Trump administration is trying to make a lot of hay out of how this policy option functions in practice to draw a lot of skepticism about it," said Nolan Downey, an attorney at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law in Chicago who helped Vega apply for food stamps. "But I think if people have an understanding of what the outcome really was meant to be, it's something that seems a lot less dubious."

Follow David A. Lieb at: <http://twitter.com/DavidALieb>

Judge could order Georgia to make interim voting system fix

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia allowed its election system to grow “way too old and archaic” and now has a deep hole to dig out of to ensure that the constitutional right to vote is protected, according to U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg.

Now Totenberg is in the difficult position of having to decide whether the state, which plans to implement a new voting system statewide next year, must immediately abandon its outdated voting machines in favor of an interim solution for special and municipal elections to be held this fall.

Election integrity advocates and individual voters sued Georgia election officials in 2017 alleging that the touchscreen voting machines the state has used since 2002 are unsecure and vulnerable to hacking. They’ve asked Totenberg to order the state to immediately switch to hand-marked paper ballots.

But lawyers for state election officials and for Fulton County, the state’s most populous county that includes most of Atlanta, argued that the state is in the process of implementing a new system, and it would be too costly, burdensome and chaotic to use an interim system for elections this fall and then switch to the new permanent system next year.

A law passed this year and signed by Gov. Brian Kemp provides specifications for a new system in which voters make their selections on electronic machines that print out a paper record that is read and tallied by scanners. State officials have said it will be in place for the 2020 presidential election.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs argued Friday that the current system is so unsecure and vulnerable to manipulation that it cannot be relied upon, jeopardizing voters’ constitutional rights.

“We can’t sacrifice people’s right to vote just because Georgia has left this system in place for 20 years and it’s so far behind,” said lawyer Bruce Brown, who represents the Coalition for Good Governance and a group of voters.

Addressing concerns about an interim system being burdensome to implement, plaintiffs’ lawyers countered that the state put itself in this situation by neglecting the system for so long and ignoring warnings. Lawyer David Cross, who represents another group of voters, urged the judge to force the state to take responsibility.

“You are the last resort,” he told her.

Georgia’s voting system drew national scrutiny during the closely watched contest for governor last November in which Kemp, a Republican who was the state’s top election official at the time, narrowly defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams.

The plaintiffs had asked Totenberg in August to order Georgia to use hand-marked paper ballots for that election. While Totenberg expressed grave concerns about vulnerabilities in the voting system and scolded state officials for being slow to respond to evidence of those problems, she said a switch to paper ballots so close to the midterm election would be too chaotic. She warned state officials that further delay would be unacceptable.

But she seemed conflicted Friday at the conclusion of a two-day hearing.

“These are very difficult issues,” she said. “I’m going to wrestle with them the best that I can, but these are not simple issues.”

She recognized that the state had taken concrete steps since her warning last year, with lawmakers providing specifications for a new system, appropriating funds and beginning the procurement process. But she also said she wished the state had not let the situation become so dire and wondered what would happen if the state can’t meet its aggressive schedule for implementing the new system.

The request for proposals specifies that vendors must be able to distribute all voting machine equipment before March 31, which is a week after the state’s presidential primary election is set to be held on March 24. Bryan Tyson, a lawyer representing state election officials, told the judge the state plans to announce the new system it’s selected in “a matter of days.”

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Alex Halderman, a University of Michigan computer science and engineering professor, testified Friday that the state election system has major vulnerabilities and that the safest, most secure system would be hand-marked paper ballots with optical scanners at each precinct.

Four county election officials, three of whom will oversee elections this fall, testified that it would be hard to switch to hand-marked paper ballots in time for those elections. They cited difficulties getting enough equipment, as well as challenges training poll workers and educating voters. They also said they'd have trouble paying for the switch unless the state helps.

The two groups of plaintiffs agree that the whole system is flawed and has to go. They also believe the ballot-marking devices the state plans to implement have many of the same problems, and they've said they plan to challenge those once the state announces which vendor has won the contract. But they disagree about what the interim solution should be.

The plaintiffs represented by Brown are asking the state to use hand-marked paper ballots along with its existing election management system and to use the ballot scanners it currently uses for paper absentee and provisional ballots for all ballots.

The plaintiffs represented by Cross want the state to implement its new election management system in time for the fall elections and to use ballot scanners along with hand-marked paper ballots.

Totenberg did not say when she would rule.

Russian police crack down hard on Moscow election protest

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian police cracked down hard Saturday on demonstrators in central Moscow, beating some people and arresting hundreds of others protesting the exclusion of opposition candidates from the ballot for Moscow city council. Police also stormed into a TV station broadcasting the protest.

Police wrestled with protesters around the mayor's office, sometimes charging into the crowd with their batons raised. OVD-Info, an organization that monitors political arrests in Russia, said 638 people were detained. Moscow police earlier said 295 people had been taken in, but did not immediately give a final figure.

Along with the arrests, several opposition activists who wanted to run for the council were arrested throughout the city before the protest. Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition figure, was sentenced Wednesday to 30 days in jail for calling for the unauthorized gathering Saturday in the heart of the Russian capital.

The protesters, who police said numbered about 3,500, shouted slogans including "Russia will be free!" and "Who are you beating?" One young woman was seen bleeding heavily after being struck on the head.

Helmeted police barged into Navalny's video studio as it was conducting a YouTube broadcast of the protest and arrested program leader Vladimir Milonov. Police also searched Dozhd, an internet TV station that was covering the protest, and its editor in chief Alexandra Perepelova was ordered to undergo questioning at the Investigative Committee.

Before the protest, several opposition members were detained, including Ilya Yashin, Dmitry Gudkov and top Navalny associate Ivan Zhdanov.

There was no immediate information on what charges the detainees might face.

Once a local, low-key affair, the September vote for Moscow's city council has shaken up Russia's political scene as the Kremlin struggles with how to deal with strongly opposing views in its sprawling capital of 12.6 million.

The decision by electoral authorities to bar some opposition candidates from running for having allegedly insufficient signatures on their nominating petitions had already sparked several days of demonstrations even before Saturday's clashes in Moscow.

The city council, which has 45 seats, is responsible for a large municipal budget and is now controlled by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party. All of its seats, which have a five-year-term, are up for grabs in the Sept. 8 vote.

2 US teens jailed in Italy in policeman's killing

By GIADA ZAMPANO and FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Two American teenagers were jailed in Rome on Saturday as authorities carry out a murder investigation in the killing of an Italian police officer.

A detention order issued by prosecutors was shown on Italian state broadcaster RAI, naming the suspects as Gabriel Christian Natale Hjorth and Finnegan Lee Elder. The detention order didn't give their ages, but says they were both born in San Francisco in 2000. Police earlier said they were 19.

Prosecutors said in the order that Elder is the main suspect, accusing him of repeatedly stabbing Carabinieri paramilitary policeman Mario Cerciello Rega, 35, who was investigating the theft of a bag after a drug deal gone wrong in Rome. Natale Hjorth is accused of using his bare hands to strike the officer's partner, who wasn't seriously injured in the attack.

Both suspects were also being investigated for attempted extortion. Elder's lawyer, Francesco Codini, said his client exercised his right not to respond to questions during a detention hearing held Saturday in the Rome jail where the two teens are being kept. Natale Hjorth's lawyer wasn't immediately available for comment.

A judge at the detention hearing hasn't ruled if the suspects will be kept in custody beyond an initial three-day period.

An Italian investigator who spoke on condition of anonymity since the probe was ongoing said that the pair had snatched the bag of a drug dealer in Rome after the man apparently gave them "a different substance" instead of cocaine.

The Carabinieri said the Americans demanded a 100-euro (\$112) ransom and a gram of cocaine to return the bag. The alleged dealer called police, saying he had arranged a meeting with the thieves to get his bag and cellphone back. Police says there was a scuffle at the rendezvous site and the policeman was stabbed eight times, dying shortly afterward in the hospital.

The Carabinieri said video surveillance cameras and witnesses allowed them to quickly identify the two Americans and find them in a hotel near the scene of the slaying. Police said the two Americans were "ready to leave" Italy when they were found.

In a search of their hotel room, the Carabinieri said they found a long knife, possibly the one used to attack Cerciello Rega. Police said the knife had been hidden behind a panel in the room's ceiling. Police also said they found clothes the two apparently were wearing during the attack.

The Carabinieri statement said the two Americans admitted responsibility after being questioned by prosecutors and faced with "hard evidence."

AP Explains: How big a threat is an electromagnetic attack?

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When much of Venezuela was plunged into darkness after a massive blackout this week, President Nicolás Maduro blamed the power outage on an "electromagnetic attack" carried out by the U.S.

The claim was met with skepticism. Blackouts are a regrettably frequent part of life in Venezuela, where the electric grid has fallen into serious disrepair. And Maduro's administration provided no evidence of an electromagnetic attack.

"In Venezuela, it's a lot easier for him to say we did something to him than he did it to himself," said Sharon Burke, senior adviser at New America, a nonpartisan think tank, and former assistant secretary of defense for operational energy at the Department of Defense. "Their grid, it's decrepit. It's been in very poor shape. They've been starving their infrastructure for years."

Nevertheless, Maduro's claim has raised questions over what exactly is an electromagnetic attack, how likely is it to occur and what impact could it have.

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WHAT IS AN ELECTROMAGNETIC ATTACK?

The phrase "electromagnetic attack" can refer to different things, but in this context most likely refers to a high-altitude electromagnetic pulse generated when a nuclear weapon is detonated in space, about 30 kilometers above the Earth's surface. Once the weapon is detonated, an electromagnetic pulse can travel to the Earth's surface and disrupt a wide variety of technology systems from appliances to a nation's electric grid. Some characteristics of an electromagnetic pulse are similar to disturbances caused by solar flares.

There are also smaller electromagnetic pulse weapons that are being developed, but they would be unlikely to cause a power outage as large as the one Venezuela experienced, experts said.

The term electromagnetic attack also can refer cryptography, or an attack where the perpetrator is seeking secret keys or passwords, but that's more likely to be directed at portable electronic devices, not electric grids, said Shucheng Yu, an associate professor of electrical & computer engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology.

HAS ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE TECHNOLOGY EVER BEEN USED?

In the 1962, during the Cold War, the U.S. detonated a nuclear weapon above the atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean, and the experiment — known as Starfish Prime — knocked out power to traffic lights and telecommunications in parts of Honolulu, illuminating the sky and even leading hotels to host viewing parties, according to news reports.

Russia conducted a series of "high-altitude nuclear bursts" in 1961 and 1962 to test electromagnetic pulse impacts over Kazakhstan and destroyed that country's electrical grid, according to testimony to Congress from the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse Attack.

COULD VENEZUELA HAVE SUFFERED FROM AN ELECTROMAGNETIC ATTACK?

While several countries have capabilities to detonate a nuclear weapon and cause an electromagnetic pulse, it's unlikely that such a maneuver would escape the world's attention.

"If he's suggesting that the U.S. detonated a nuclear weapon above the atmosphere, you think that would happen without anyone noticing? I don't think so," Burke said of Maduro's claim. "You can't secretly detonate a nuclear weapon."

A senior U.S. administration official said Maduro is to blame for the latest blackout because his government has mismanaged the economy and is responsible for the destruction of his country's infrastructure. The official was not authorized to respond to questions about the blackout and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Unlike a cyberattack, which can be carried out by a hacker in a basement, generating an electromagnetic pulse requires a state-sponsored weapon.

"It's hard to imagine that actor being incentivized to pull off and conduct such an attack. It would be pretty aggressive to do that," said David Weinstein, chief security officer at Claroty, a security company that specializes in protecting infrastructure. "Also, the power fails easily in Venezuela anyway, so it's almost like a waste of the capability."

HOW MUCH OF A THREAT DOES AN ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE ATTACK POSE?

It depends on who you ask. While the technology to launch an electromagnetic attack exists, and the impacts could cause widespread damage to electronics, some security experts believe the likelihood of such an attack is low and the threat is overstated.

"If they want to knock out the grid, I was trying to think of 12 ways to do it, this wouldn't be high on the list," said Bill Hogan, professor of global energy policy at Harvard University. "The (U.S.) system is run very conservatively, there's a lot of redundancy, and you'd have to be pretty sophisticated to knock out a lot of it."

Others are convinced that an electromagnetic attack could wipe out vast swaths of the U.S. power grid for prolonged periods, potentially killing most Americans.

The Electric Power Research Institute, a think tank funded primarily by utilities, found in an April study that an electromagnetic pulse could trigger regional service interruptions but would not likely trigger a nationwide grid failure in the U.S.

But the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse Attack, which

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has been sounding the alarm on the possibility of this type of attack for years, said in 2017 Congressional testimony that a nuclear electromagnetic pulse attack would inflict massive widespread damage to the electric grid. An attack on the U.S., it warned, would inevitably lead to a widespread protracted blackout and thousands of electronic systems could be destroyed, risking millions of lives.

President Donald Trump called on the Secretary of Defense to conduct research to understand the effects of EMPs in an executive order in March, and called on the Secretary of State to work with allies to boost resilience to potential impacts to EMPs.

"I think it's a good thing that awareness has grown, and the potential risks and consequences have captured people's attention, but at the same time, the much more practical and frankly the threat that we're facing on a day-to-day basis is the cyber threat," Weinstein said.

Deb Riechmann in Washington contributed to this report.

AP FACT CHECK: Mueller's words twisted by Trump and more

By CALVIN WOODWARD and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump listened to Robert Mueller testify to Congress this past week, then misrepresented what the former special counsel said. Some partisans on both sides did much the same, whether to defend or condemn the president.

Trump seized on Mueller's testimony to claim anew that he was exonerated by the Russia investigation, which the president wasn't. He capped the week by wishing aloud that President Barack Obama had received some of the congressional scrutiny he's endured, ignoring the boatload of investigations, subpoenas and insults visited on the Democrat and his team.

Highlights from a week in review:

THE GENTLEMEN

TRUMP on Democrats: "All they want to do is impede, they want to investigate. They want to go fishing. ... We want to find out what happened with the last Democrat president. Let's look into Obama the way they've looked at me. Let's subpoena all of the records having to do with Hillary Clinton and all of the nonsense that went on with Clinton and her foundation and everything else. Could do that all day long. Frankly, the Republicans were gentlemen and women when we had the majority in the House. They didn't do subpoenas all day long. They didn't do what these people are doing. What they've done is a disgrace." — Oval Office remarks Friday.

THE FACTS: He's distorting recent history. Republicans made aggressive use of their investigative powers when they controlled one chamber or the other during the Obama years. Moreover, matters involving Hillary Clinton, her use of email as secretary of state, her conduct of foreign policy and the Clinton Foundation were very much part of their scrutiny. And they weren't notably polite about it.

Over a few months in 2016, House Republicans unleashed a barrage of subpoenas in what minority Democrats called a "desperate onslaught of frivolous attacks" against Clinton. In addition, Clinton was investigated by the FBI.

Earlier, a half-dozen GOP-led House committees conducted protracted investigations of the 2012 attacks on U.S. diplomats in Benghazi, Libya. Republican-led investigations of the 2009-2011 Operation Fast and Furious episode — a botched initiative against drug cartels that ended up putting guns in the hands of violent criminals — lasted into the Trump administration.

On the notion that Obama was treated with courtesy by GOP "gentlemen and women," Trump ignored an episode at Obama's 2013 speech to Congress that was shocking at the time.

"You lie!" Rep. Joe Wilson of South Carolina hollered at Obama. His outburst came when Obama attempted to assure lawmakers that his health care initiative would not provide coverage to people in the U.S. illegally.

Obama also faced persistent innuendo over the country of his birth. Trump himself was a leading voice raising baseless suspicions that Obama was born outside the U.S.

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NORTH KOREA

TRUMP: "We're getting the remains back." — Fox News interview Thursday.

THE FACTS: No remains of U.S. service members have been returned since last summer and the U.S. suspended efforts in May to get negotiations on the remains back on track in time to have more repatriated this year. It hopes more remains may be brought home next year.

The Pentagon's Defense POW-MIA Accounting Agency, which is responsible for recovering U.S. war remains and returning them to families, "has not received any new information from (North Korean) officials regarding the turn over or recovery of remains," spokesman Charles Prichard said this month.

He said his agency is "still working to communicate" with the North Korean army "as it is our intent to find common ground on resuming recovery missions" in 2020.

Last summer, in line with the first summit between Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un that June, the North turned over 55 boxes of what it said were the remains of an undetermined number of U.S. service members killed in the North during the 1950-53 war. So far, six Americans have been identified from the 55 boxes.

U.S. officials have said the North has suggested in recent years that it holds perhaps 200 sets of American war remains. Thousands more are unrecovered from battlefields and former POW camps.

The Pentagon estimates that 5,300 Americans were lost in North Korea.

MUELLER

TRUMP to his critics, in a fundraising letter from his 2020 campaign: "How many times do I have to be exonerated before they stop?" — during Mueller's testimony Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Trump has not been exonerated by Mueller at all. "No," Mueller said when asked during his Capitol Hill questioning whether he had cleared the president of criminal wrongdoing in the investigation that looked into the 2016 Trump campaign's relations with Russians and Russia's interference in the U.S. election.

In his report, Mueller said his team declined to make a prosecutorial judgment on whether to charge Trump, partly because of a Justice Department legal opinion that said sitting presidents shouldn't be indicted.

As a result, his detailed report factually laid out instances in which Trump might have obstructed justice, leaving it up to Congress to take up the matter.

As well, Mueller looked into a potential criminal conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign and said the investigation did not collect sufficient evidence to establish criminal charges on that front.

Following Mueller's testimony, Trump abruptly took a different stance on the special counsel's report. After months of claiming exoneration, and only hours after stating as much in the fundraising letter while the hearing unfolded, Trump incongruously flipped, saying "He didn't have the right to exonerate."

TRUMP, on why Mueller did not recommend charges: "He made his decision based on the facts, not based on some rule." — remarks to reporters Wednesday after the hearings.

THE FACTS: Mueller did not say that.

The special counsel said his team never reached a determination on charging Trump. At no point has he suggested that he made that decision because the facts themselves did not support charges.

The rule Trump refers to is the Justice Department legal opinion that says sitting presidents are immune from indictment — and that guidance did restrain the investigators, though it was not the only factor in play.

JOE BIDEN, Democratic presidential contender: "Mueller said there was enough evidence to bring charges against the president after he is president of the United States, when he is a private citizen ... that's a pretty compelling thing." — speaking to reporters in Dearborn, Michigan.

THE FACTS: Mueller did not say that, either. He deliberately drew no conclusions about whether he collected sufficient evidence to charge Trump with a crime.

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Mueller said that if prosecutors want to charge Trump once he is out of office, they would have that ability because obstacles to indicting a sitting president would be gone.

Even that came with a caveat, though. Mueller did not answer whether the statute of limitations might put Trump off limits to an indictment should he win re-election.

Biden spoke after being briefed on the hearings and prefaced his remark with a request to "correct me if I'm wrong."

Rep. JOHN RATCLIFFE, R-Texas, to Mueller: "You didn't follow the special counsel regulations. It clearly says, write a confidential report about decisions reached. Nowhere in here does it say write a report about decisions that weren't reached. You wrote 180 pages — 180 pages — about decisions that weren't reached, about potential crimes that weren't charged or decided. ...This report was not authorized under the law to be written." — hearing Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Mueller's report is lawful. Nothing in Justice Department regulations governing special counsels prevents Mueller from saying what he did in the report.

It is true that the regulations provide for the special counsel to submit a "confidential report" to the attorney general explaining his decisions to recommend for or against a prosecution. But it was Attorney General William Barr who made the decision to make the report public, which is his right.

Special counsels have wide latitude, and are not directed to avoid writing about "potential crimes that weren't charged or decided," as Ratcliffe put it.

Mueller felt constrained from bringing charges because of the apparent restriction on indicting sitting presidents. But his report left open the possibility that Congress could use the information in an impeachment proceeding or that Trump could be charged after he leaves office.

The factual investigation was conducted "in order to preserve the evidence when memories were fresh and documentary materials were available," the report said.

In a tweet, Neal Katyal, who drafted the Justice Department regulations, wrote: "Ratcliffe dead wrong about the Special Counsel regs. I drafted them in 1999. They absolutely don't forbid the Mueller Report. And they recognize the need for a Report 'both for historical purposes and to enhance accountability.'"

Rep. MIKE JOHNSON, R-La., addressing Mueller: "Millions of Americans today maintain genuine concerns about your work in large part because of the infamous and widely publicized bias of your investigating team members, which we now know included 14 Democrats and zero Republicans." — hearing Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Johnson echoes a widely repeated false claim by Trump that the Mueller probe was biased because the investigators were all a bunch of "angry Democrats." In fact, Mueller himself is a Republican.

Some have given money to Democratic candidates over the years. But Mueller could not have barred them from serving on that basis because regulations prohibit the consideration of political affiliation for personnel actions involving career attorneys. Mueller reported to Barr, and before him, then-Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who were both Trump appointees.

THE SQUAD

TRUMP, on Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York: "She called our country and our people garbage. She said garbage. That's worse than deplorable. Remember deplorable?" — remarks Tuesday at gathering of conservative youth.

THE FACTS: Ocasio-Cortez did not label people "garbage." She did use that term, somewhat indirectly, to describe the state of the country.

Arguing for a liberal agenda at a South by Southwest event in March, she said the U.S. shouldn't settle for centrist policies because they would produce only marginal improvement — "10% better" than the "garbage" of where the country is now.

Trump has been assailing Ocasio-Cortez and three other liberal Democratic women of color in the House for more than a week, ever since he posted tweets saying they should "go back" to their countries, though all are U.S. citizens and all but one was born in the U.S.

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VOTING FRAUD

TRUMP: "And when they're saying all of this stuff, and then those illegals get out and vote — because they vote anyway. Don't kid yourself, those numbers in California and numerous other states, they're rigged. You got people voting that shouldn't be voting. They vote many times, not just twice, not just three times. They vote — it's like a circle. They come back, they put a new hat on. They come back, they put a new shirt. And in many cases, they don't even do that. You know what's going on. It's a rigged deal." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Trump has produced no evidence of widespread voting fraud by people in the country illegally or by any group of people.

He tried, but the commission he appointed on voting fraud collapsed from infighting and from the refusal of states to cooperate when tapped for reams of personal voter data, like names, partial Social Security numbers and voting histories. Studies have found only isolated cases of voter fraud in recent U.S. elections and no evidence that election results were affected. Loyola Law School professor Justin Levitt found 31 cases of impersonation fraud, for example, in about 1 billion votes cast in elections from 2000 to 2014.

Trump has falsely claimed that 1 million fraudulent votes were cast in California and cited a Texas state government report that suggested 58,000 people in the country illegally may have cast a ballot at least once since 1996. But state elections officials subsequently acknowledged serious problems with the report, as tens of thousands on the list were actually U.S. citizens.

ECONOMY

TRUMP: "We have the best stock market numbers we've ever had ... Blue-collar workers went up proportionately more than anybody." — Fox News interview Thursday.

THE FACTS: Wealthier Americans have largely benefited from the stock market gains, not blue-collar workers.

The problem with Trump claiming the stock market has helped working-class Americans is that the richest 10% of the country controls 84% of stock market value, according to a Federal Reserve survey. Because they hold more stocks, wealthier Americans have inherently benefited more from the 19% gain in the Standard & Poor's index of 500 stocks so far this year. Only about half of U.S. families hold stocks, so plenty of people are getting little to no benefit from the stock market gains.

What Trump may be claiming with regard to the stock market is that working Americans are disproportionately benefiting in their 401(k) retirement savings.

Trump has said that 401(k) plans are up more than 50%. His data source is vague. But 401(k) balances have increased in large part due to routine contributions by workers and employers, not just stock market gains.

The Employee Benefit Research Institute shows that only one group of Americans has gotten an average annual 401(k) gain in excess of 50% during Trump's presidency. These are workers age 25 to 34 who have fewer than five years at their current employer. At that age, the gains largely came from the regular contributions instead of the stock market. And the percentage gains look large because the account levels are relatively small.

TRUMP: "We have the best economy we've ever had." — Fox News interview Thursday.

TRUMP: "We have the best economy in history." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: No matter how often he repeats this claim, which is a lot, the economy is nowhere near the best in the country's history.

In fact, in the late 1990s, growth topped 4% for four straight years, a level it has not reached on an annual basis under Trump. Growth reached 7.2% in 1984. The economy grew 2.9% in 2018 — the same pace it reached in 2015 under Obama — and simply hasn't hit historically high growth rates.

The economy is now in its 121st month of growth, making it the longest expansion in history. Most of that took place under Obama.

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TRUMP: "Most people working within U.S. ever!" — tweet Thursday.

TRUMP: "The most people working, almost 160 million, in the history of our country." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Yes, but that's only because of population growth.

A more relevant measure is the proportion of Americans with jobs, and that is still far below record highs.

According to Labor Department data, 60.6% of people in the United States 16 years and older were working in June. That's below the all-time high of 64.7% in April 2000, though higher than the 59.9% when Trump was inaugurated in January 2017.

TRUMP: "The best employment numbers in history." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: They are not the best ever.

The 3.7% unemployment rate in the latest report is not a record low. It's the lowest in 50 years. The rate was 3.5% in 1969 and 3.4% in 1968.

The U.S. also had lower rates than now in the early 1950s. And during three years of World War II, the annual rate was under 2%.

VETERANS

TRUMP, on his efforts to help veterans: "I got Choice." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: He is not the president who "got" the Veterans Choice program, which gives veterans the option to see private doctors outside the Department of Veterans Affairs medical system at government expense.

Obama got it. Congress approved the program in 2014, and Obama signed it into law. Trump expanded it.

NATO

TRUMP: "We're paying close to 100% on NATO." — remarks Tuesday.

THE FACTS: The U.S. isn't "paying close to 100%" of the price of protecting Europe.

NATO has a shared budget to which each member makes contributions based on the size of its economy. The United States, with the biggest economy, pays the biggest share, about 22%.

Four European members — Germany, France, Britain and Italy — combined pay nearly 44% of the total. The money, about \$3 billion, runs NATO's headquarters and covers certain other civilian and military costs.

Defending Europe involves far more than that fund. The primary cost of doing so would come from each member country's military budget, as the alliance operates under a mutual defense treaty.

The U.S. is the largest military spender, but others in the alliance have armed forces, too. The notion that almost all costs would fall to the U.S. is false. In fact, NATO's Article 5, calling for allies to act if one is attacked, has only been invoked once, and it was on behalf of the U.S., after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Associated Press writers Eric Tucker in Washington and Corey Williams in Dearborn, Michigan, contributed to this report.

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Despite calls to start over, US health system covers 90%

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's much-maligned health care system is covering 9 out of 10 people, a fact that hasn't stopped the 2020 presidential candidates from refighting battles about how to provide coverage, from Bernie Sanders' call for replacing private insurance with a government plan to President Donald Trump's pledge to erase the Affordable Care Act and start over.

The politicians are depicting a system in meltdown. The numbers point to a different story, not as dire

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and more nuanced.

Government surveys show that about 90% of the population has coverage, largely preserving gains from President Barack Obama's years. Independent experts estimate that more than half of the roughly 30 million uninsured people in the country are eligible for health insurance through existing programs.

Lack of coverage was a growing problem in 2010 when Democrats under Obama passed his health law. Now the bigger issue seems to be that many people with insurance are struggling to pay their deductibles and copays.

"We need to have a debate about coverage and cost, and we have seen less focus on cost than we have on coverage," said Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet. He is among the Democratic presidential candidates who favor building on the current system, not replacing it entirely, as does Sanders. "The cost issue is a huge issue for the country and for families," Bennet said.

A report this year by the Commonwealth Fund think tank in New York found fewer uninsured Americans than in 2010 but more who are "underinsured," a term that describes policyholders exposed to high out-of-pocket costs, when compared with their individual incomes. The report estimated 44 million Americans were underinsured in 2018, compared with 29 million in 2010 when the law was passed. That's about a 50% increase, with the greatest jump among people with employer coverage.

"When you have 90 percent of the American people covered and they are drowning in their health care bills, what they want to hear from politicians are plans that will address their health care costs, more than plans that will cover the remaining 10 percent," said Drew Altman, president of the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonpartisan research organization that tracks the health care system. "When Democrats talk about universal coverage more than health care costs, they are playing to the dreams of activists and progressives ... much less to the actual concerns of the 90 percent who have coverage today."

Sanders' office responds that the Vermont senator's "Medicare for All" plan would solve both the coverage and cost problems for individual Americans. Medical care would be provided with no deductibles or copays. No one would be uninsured or underinsured.

"The simple answer is that our health care system becomes more unmanageable for more and more Americans every year," Sanders spokesman Keane Bhatt said in a statement. "This is not a system that needs a few tweaks. This is a system that needs a complete overhaul."

But other countries that provide coverage for all and are held up by Sanders as models for the U.S. don't offer benefits as generous as he's proposing. If he is elected president, there's no way of telling how his plan would emerge from Congress, or even whether something like it could pass.

Four other 2020 Democrats are co-sponsors of Sanders' bill: Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Kamala Harris of California, and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Trump is talking about big changes. His administration is seeking to have federal courts declare the entire Obama-era health care law unconstitutional, jeopardizing coverage for 20 million people, jettisoning protections for patients with preexisting conditions, and upending the rest of the 970-page statute, now nearly 10 years old.

The president says there's nothing to worry about. Earlier this summer Trump told ABC News that he was working on a plan that would provide "phenomenal health care," protect people with preexisting conditions, and would be "less expensive than 'Obamacare' by a lot."

White House spokesman Judd Deere said in a statement that the Obama law was "sold and passed on a litany of broken promises" and now "Democrats are proposing even more radical government takeovers of our health care system."

As president-elect, Trump promised a health plan but never offered one upon taking office. Instead he backed bills from congressional Republicans, including one he called "mean" during a private meeting.

Trump says he might come out with his new plan within months, but that passing it would hinge on his getting reelected and Republicans winning back the House in 2020 while keeping control of the Senate.

That's a bit of political *deja vu*.

Republicans controlled Washington back in 2017 when Trump, then-Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., tried for months to repeal and replace the Obama law, only to fail. The repeal effort was widely seen as contributing to Republicans losing the House in 2018.

Since then, many GOP lawmakers have tried to avoid the issue altogether.

Economist Sara Collins of the Commonwealth Fund, who led the study about underinsured Americans, says cost and coverage problems are intertwined. Citing the Democrats' debate over Medicare for All, she says what's missing from that discussion is that "one doesn't have to go that far in order to improve the financial situation for millions of people — you can do that with much more targeted, incremental policies."

Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign on Iran faces key test

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran is at a crossroads.

His administration is trying to decide whether to risk stoking international tensions even more by ending one of the last remaining components of the 2015 nuclear deal. The U.S. faces a Thursday deadline to decide whether to extend or cancel sanctions waivers to foreign companies working on Iran's civilian nuclear program as permitted under the deal.

Ending the waivers would be the next logical step in the campaign and it's a move favored by Trump's allies in Congress who endorse a tough approach to Iran. But it also would escalate tensions with Iran and with some European allies, and two officials say a divided administration is likely to keep the waivers afloat with temporary extensions. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The mere fact that the administration is divided on the issue — it's already postponed an announcement twice, according to the officials — is the latest in a series of confusing signals that Trump has sent over Iran, causing confusion among supporters and critics of the president about just what he hopes to achieve in the standoff with the Islamic Republic.

Some fear the mixed messages could trigger open conflict amid a buildup of U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf region.

"It's always a problem when you don't have a coherent policy because you are vulnerable to manipulation and the mixed messages have created the environment for dangerous miscalculation," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Trump has simultaneously provoked an escalatory cycle with Iran while also making clear to Iran that he is averse to conflict."

The public face of the pressure campaign is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and he rejects suggestions the strategy is less than clear cut.

"America has a strategy which we are convinced will work," he said this past week. "We will deny Iran the wealth to foment terror around the world and build out their nuclear program."

Yet the administration's recent actions — which included an unusual mediation effort by Kentucky's anti-interventionist Sen. Rand Paul — have frustrated some of Trump's closest allies on Capitol Hill and elsewhere. Those actions also have led to unease in Europe and Asia, where the administration's attempt to rally support for a coalition to protect ships transiting the Gulf has drawn only lukewarm responses.

Trump withdrew last year from the 2015 deal that Iran signed with the U.S., France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China. The agreement lifted punishing economic sanctions in exchange for limits on the Iranian nuclear program. Critics in the United States believed it didn't do enough to thwart Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons and enabled Iran to rebuild its economy and continue funding militants throughout the Middle East.

Trump, who called it "the worst deal in history," began reinstating sanctions, and they have hobbled an already weak Iranian economy.

Iran responded by blowing through limits on its low-enriched uranium stockpiles and announcing plans to enrich uranium beyond levels permitted under the deal. Iran has taken increasingly provocative actions against ships in the Gulf, including the seizure of a British vessel, and the downing of a U.S. drone.

Sometime before Thursday, the administration will have to either cancel or extend waivers that allow

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European, Russian and Chinese companies to work in Iran's civilian nuclear facilities. The officials familiar with the "civil nuclear cooperation waivers" say a decision in principle has been made to let them expire but that they are likely to be extended for 90 more days to allow companies time to wind down their operations.

At the same time, Trump gave his blessing to Paul to meet last week with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who was in New York to attend a U.N. meeting. Officials familiar with the development said Paul raised the idea with Trump at a golf outing and the president nodded his assent.

Deal critics, including Republican Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, say the waivers should be revoked because they give Iran access to technology that could be used for weapons. In particular, they have targeted a waiver that allows conversion work at the once-secret Fordow site. The other facilities are the Bushehr nuclear power station, the Arak heavy water plant and the Tehran Research Reactor.

Deal supporters say the waivers give international experts a valuable window into Iran's atomic program that might otherwise not exist. They also say some of the work, particularly on nuclear isotopes that can be used in medicine at the Tehran reactor, is humanitarian in nature.

Trump has been coy about his plans. He said this past week that "it could go either way very easily. Very easily. And I'm OK either way it goes."

That vacillation has left administration hawks such as Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton in a quandary.

Bolton has long advocated military action against Iran with the goal of changing the Tehran government and, while Pompeo may agree, he is more sensitive to Trump's reluctance to military intervention, according to the officials.

"Pompeo is trying to reconcile contradictory impulses by focusing on the means rather than ends, which is sanctions," said Sadjadpour. "But rather than bringing clarity, Trump has brought further confusion by promoting the idea of Rand Paul as an envoy."

This has given Iran an opening that it is trying to exploit, he said.

"For years, the U.S. has tried to create fissures between hard-liners and moderates in Tehran and now Iran is trying to do the exact same thing in Washington."

South Sudan tries to protect wildlife after long conflict

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

BIRE KPATOUS GAME RESERVE, South Sudan (AP) — Charles Matthew secures his beret, slings a rifle over his shoulder and prepares a team for an overnight foot patrol in Bire Kpatous, one of South Sudan's game reserves that survived the country's civil war but are now increasingly threatened by poachers and encroaching human settlements.

Matthew, 45, said he's proud of his work after years of being a soldier and has learned a lot about wildlife. "I didn't even know the names of species like aardvark, pangolin, crocodile and chimpanzee," he said of his knowledge when he started as a ranger 14 years ago.

But he worries about the reserve: "When poachers come and are well-armed, we can't get there in time."

South Sudan is trying to rebuild its six national parks and 13 game reserves, which cover more than 13% of the country's terrain, following the five-year civil war that ended last year after killing nearly 400,000 people. A fragile peace deal still has key steps to carry out.

The fighting stripped the country of much wildlife and the parks are rudimentary, lacking lodges, visitors' centers and roads. There is no significant tourism; the parks department does not even keep statistics on the number of visitors.

"Given these challenges, the biodiversity of South Sudan is in peril," said DeeAnn Reeder, a conservationist and professor at Bucknell University who has done research there. She called conservation efforts "significant but relatively small in scale given the vastness of the country" that still has the potential for surprise. The documentation of forest elephants in South Sudan was a "very significant find."

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That biodiversity remains rich with more than 300 mammal species, including 11 primates. The country boasts one of Africa's greatest annual antelope migrations.

Now the biggest threat to the country's wildlife is poaching, the scourge that afflicts parks and reserves across Africa.

Bire Kpatous, near the Congo border and a convergence point for flora and fauna from Central and East Africa, has one of the region's "forgotten forests," as some conservationists call them. It is home to animals such as bongo antelopes, badger bats, African golden cats, forest elephants and forest buffalos.

The spread of unlicensed firearms, however, threatens to decimate wildlife while the resources to combat it are scarce. South Sudan's government allocated nearly \$6 million for the parks and reserves last year, a figure considered woefully inadequate by some local authorities.

Western Equatoria state, where Bire Kpatous is located, has just one car for the 184 rangers overseeing three game reserves and one national park.

Some donors are stepping up. South Sudan last month received a pledge of \$7.6 million from the United States Agency for International Development and another \$1.5 million from the Wildlife Conservation Society to protect the parks.

Insecurity remains a challenge as unrest from the civil war continues. Western Equatoria state's national park, Southern Park, has been almost completely cut off from rangers' patrols since opposition fighters occupied parts of it in 2015, said Jonathan Nyari, former state director for wildlife services.

Bire Kpatous is also threatened by encroaching human settlements. Residents already burn swaths of land surrounding the park to clear it for cultivation. Rangers are working to foster support for the parks among local residents, who sometimes go out on patrol with rangers.

"Whenever we patrol the forest we sleep separately. In case we're attacked by poachers at least one person might survive," said Masimino Pasquale, a resident working with the rangers.

Residents say they often hear gunshots in the park but are without transport to investigate, said Samuel Apollo, the community's chief.

Another resident and wildlife advocate, Philip Michael, said he was threatened with death last year by people who blamed him for not "allowing them to kill animals."

The Britain-based Fauna & Flora International is teaching rangers and community members how to use a GPS, set camera traps and establish sustainable practices. The group also is trying to help South Sudan develop conservation tourism as an alternative source of revenue for a country whose economy is almost entirely dependent on oil.

While progress is slow, several rangers said they are seeing more signs of animals during patrols than they did last year.

Local teacher Isaac Pisiru said he wants to organize field trips to the park so his students will learn the importance of protecting animals.

"If I don't teach them about protecting animals, people will start destroying them," he said. "It's important for children to see animals physically and not just in books."

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Supreme Court: Trump can use Pentagon funds for border wall

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump administration to tap billions of dollars in Pentagon funds to build sections of a border wall with Mexico.

The court's five conservative justices gave the administration the green light on Friday to begin work on four contracts it has awarded using Defense Department money. Funding for the projects had been frozen by lower courts while a lawsuit over the money proceeded. The court's four liberal justices wouldn't have allowed construction to start.

The justices' decision to lift the freeze on the money allows President Donald Trump to make progress

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on a major 2016 campaign promise heading into his race for a second term. Trump tweeted after the announcement: "Wow! Big VICTORY on the Wall. The United States Supreme Court overturns lower court injunction, allows Southern Border Wall to proceed. Big WIN for Border Security and the Rule of Law!"

The Supreme Court's action reverses the decision of a trial court, which initially froze the funds in May, and an appeals court, which kept that freeze in place earlier this month. The freeze had prevented the government from tapping approximately \$2.5 billion in Defense Department money to replace existing sections of barrier in Arizona, California and New Mexico with more robust fencing.

The case the Supreme Court ruled in began after the 35-day partial government shutdown that started in December of last year. Trump ended the shutdown in February after Congress gave him approximately \$1.4 billion in border wall funding. But the amount was far less than the \$5.7 billion he was seeking, and Trump then declared a national emergency to take cash from other government accounts to use to construct sections of wall.

The money Trump identified includes \$3.6 billion from military construction funds, \$2.5 billion in Defense Department money and \$600 million from the Treasury Department's asset forfeiture fund.

The case before the Supreme Court involved just the \$2.5 billion in Defense Department funds, which the administration says will be used to construct more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) of fencing. One project would replace 46 miles (74 kilometers) of barrier in New Mexico for \$789 million. Another would replace 63 miles (101 kilometers) in Arizona for \$646 million. The other two projects in California and Arizona are smaller.

The other funds were not at issue in the case. The Treasury Department funds have so far survived legal challenges, and Customs and Border Protection has earmarked the money for work in Texas' Rio Grande Valley but has not yet awarded contracts. Transfer of the \$3.6 billion in military construction funds is awaiting approval from the defense secretary.

The lawsuit at the Supreme Court was brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Sierra Club and Southern Border Communities Coalition. The justices who lifted the freeze on the money did not give a lengthy explanation for their decision. But they said among the reasons they were doing so was that the government had made a "sufficient showing at this stage" that those bringing the lawsuit don't have a right to challenge the decision to use the money.

Alexei Woltornist, a spokesman for the Justice Department, said in a statement, "We are pleased that the Supreme Court recognized that the lower courts should not have halted construction of walls on the southern border. We will continue to vigorously defend the Administration's efforts to protect our Nation."

ACLU lawyer Dror Ladin said after the court's announcement that the fight "is not over." The case will continue, but the Supreme Court's decision suggests an ultimate victory for the ACLU is unlikely. Even if the ACLU were to win, fencing will have already been built.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., issued a statement accusing Trump of trying to "undermine our military readiness and steal from our men and women in uniform to waste billions on a wasteful, ineffective wall that Congress on a bipartisan basis has repeatedly refused to fund." She said the Supreme Court's decision "undermines the Constitution and the law."

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York called the decision "deeply regrettable and nonsensical."

Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan would not have allowed construction to begin. Justice Stephen Breyer said he would have allowed the government to finalize the contracts for the segments but not begin construction while the lawsuit proceeded. The administration had argued that if it wasn't able to finalize the contracts by Sept. 30, then it would lose the ability to use the funds. The administration had asked for a decision quickly.

The Supreme Court is on break for the summer but does act on certain pressing items.

US, Guatemala sign agreement to restrict asylum cases

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration signed an agreement with Guatemala that will restrict asylum applications to the U.S. from Central America.

The “safe third country” agreement would require migrants, including Salvadorans and Hondurans, who cross into Guatemala on their way to the U.S. to apply for protections in Guatemala instead of at the U.S. border. It could potentially ease the crush of migrants overwhelming the U.S. immigration system, although many questions remain about how the agreement will be executed.

President Donald Trump on Friday heralded the concession as a win as he struggles to live up to his campaign promises on immigration.

“This is a very big day,” he said. “We have long been working with Guatemala and now we can do it the right way.”

He claimed that “this landmark agreement will put the coyotes and smugglers out of business.”

The announcement comes after a court in California blocked Trump’s most restrictive asylum effort to date, one that would effectively end protections at the southern border.

The two countries had been negotiating such an agreement for months, and Trump threatened Wednesday to place tariffs or other consequences on Guatemala if it didn’t reach a deal.

“We’ll either do tariffs or we’ll do something. We’re looking at something very severe with respect to Guatemala,” Trump had said.

But on Friday, Trump praised the Guatemalan government, saying now it has “a friend in the United States, instead of an enemy in the United States.”

Trump added that the agreement would protect “the rights of those with legitimate claims,” end “abuse” of the asylum system and curtail the crisis on the U.S. southern border.

He said that as part of the agreement, the U.S. would increase access to the H-2A visa program for temporary agricultural workers from Guatemala.

It’s not clear how the agreement will take effect. Guatemala’s Constitutional Court has granted three injunctions preventing its government from entering into a deal without approval of the country’s congress.

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales said via social media that the agreement allows the country to avoid “drastic sanctions ... many of them designed to strongly punish our economy, such as taxes on remittances that our brothers send daily, as well as the imposition of tariffs on our export goods and migratory restrictions.”

Earlier Friday, Morales questioned the concept of a “safe third country.”

“Where does that term exist?” he asked reporters. “It does not exist, it is a colloquial term. No agreement exists that is called ‘safe third country.’”

Human rights prosecutor Jordán Rodas said his team was studying the legality of the agreement and whether Interior Minister Enrique Degenhart had the authority to sign the compact.

Guatemala’s government put out a six-paragraph, Spanish-language statement Friday on Twitter. It does not call the agreement “safe third country” but “Cooperation Agreement for the Assessment of Protection Requests.”

The Guatemalan government said that in coming days its Labor Ministry “will start issuing work visas in the agriculture industry, which will allow Guatemalans to travel legally to the United States, to avoid being victims of criminal organizations, to work temporarily and then return to Guatemala, which will strengthen family unity.”

The same conditions driving Salvadorans and Hondurans to flee their country — gang violence, poverty, joblessness, a prolonged drought that has severely hit crop yields — are also present in Guatemala. Guatemala also lacks resources to adequately house, educate or provide opportunity to potential asylum seekers, observers say.

In Guatemala City, social and student organizations spoke out against the agreement in front of the Constitutional Court, on the grounds that the country is mired in poverty and unemployment and has no capacity to serve migrants. They called for a protest rally Saturday.

Advocacy groups condemned the move Friday, with Amnesty International saying "any attempts to force families and individuals fleeing their home countries to seek safety in Guatemala are outrageous."

"The Trump administration must abandon this cruel and illegal plan to shut doors to families and individuals trying to rebuild their lives in safety," said Charanya Krishnaswami, the group's advocacy director for the Americas.

Democratic Rep. Eliot Engel, the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said Trump's decision to sign the agreement was "cruel and immoral." "It is also illegal," he added. "Simply put, Guatemala is not a safe country for refugees and asylum seekers, as the law requires."

Homeland Security officials said they expected the agreement to be ratified in Guatemala and would begin implementing it sometime in August. Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan said it was part of a long-standing effort with Guatemala to address migration and combat smuggling. He cautioned against calling the country unsafe for refugees.

"It's risky to label an entire country as unsafe. We often paint Central America with a very broad brush," he said. "There are obviously places in Guatemala and in the U.S. that are dangerous, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have a full and fair process. That's what the statute is focused on. It doesn't mean safety from all risks."

Guatemalans accounted for 34% of Border Patrol arrests on the Mexican border from October to June, more than any other nationality. Hondurans were second at 30%, followed by Mexicans at 18% and Salvadorans at 10%.

Trump was asked if he expected to reach similar agreements with Honduras and El Salvador. He replied, "I do indeed."

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Luis Alonso and Jill Colvin in Washington, Elliot Spagat in San Diego, Peter Orsi in Mexico City and Sonny Figueroa in Guatemala City, Guatemala, contributed to this report.

Catholic charities tested by abuse scandals, border crisis

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For U.S. charities affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, the past year has tested the resilience of their fundraisers and the loyalty of their donors in unprecedented fashion. Even as many donors reacted in dismay to the church's extensive sex-abuse scandals, the charities faced new challenges trying to address the immigration crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border.

For the agencies with the most donors, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services, it's too early to gauge the overall financial impact of sex-abuse developments last year. Those included abuse allegations that led to former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick's ouster from the priesthood and a Pennsylvania grand jury report asserting that about 300 Roman Catholic priests had abused children at six of the state's dioceses over seven decades.

However, several local Catholic Charities affiliates report a drop in donations linked at least in part to the scandals.

In Pittsburgh, the largest diocese targeted by the Pennsylvania grand jury, local Catholic Charities executive director Susan Rauscher said donations were down this year, though she had no figures yet. The Rev. Nicholas Vaskov, a spokesman for the diocese, estimated that giving directly to the diocese had declined about 10% — due to churchgoers' unhappiness with a reorganization of parishes as well as dismay over sex abuse. Staff cuts have resulted.

Pittsburgh Bishop David Zubik, like some bishops elsewhere, has told donors that none of their gifts would be diverted to a new compensation fund for abuse victims; he said the fund would be financed largely through sale of properties.

In western New York's diocese of Buffalo, many angry parishioners have withheld donations as Bishop Richard J. Malone faced criticism for allowing priests accused of inappropriate conduct to remain in ministry.

Leaders of Buffalo's Catholic Charities affiliate worried about impact on their programs serving more

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than 150,000 people. So they offered a deal: Unlike past years, when gifts to its annual appeal were split between the charity and the diocese, donors this year could choose to direct their entire donation to the charity. More than 50% of donors picked that option.

"People are confused. ... They're upset with the Catholic church," said Dennis Walczyk, president of Catholic Charities of Buffalo. "But don't take it out on the people that really need help."

Despite the new approach, the annual appeal, which ended June 30, came up about \$1.7 million short of its \$11 million goal. Walczyk said the charities' programs would persevere, but the diocese warned it might have less money for schools, youth ministries and hospital chaplains.

Next door to the Buffalo diocese, the Catholic Charities affiliate in Rochester managed to boost contributions about 80% from 2016 to 2018 thanks to new fundraising initiatives. Yet the abuse crisis has cast a shadow there as well — Catholic Charities is among the defendants in a lawsuit alleging that a now-deceased priest sexually abused a child at a Catholic Charities facility in Rochester 50 years ago.

Catholic Charities USA, which oversees operations of its affiliates in dioceses nationwide, has recently issued urgent appeals for more donations to help address the needs of immigrants and refugees, notably along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"100% of your donation will help our agencies along the border ... and ensure that children are being treated with care and kindness," said an appeal last month. "Without additional funding, Catholic Charities agencies struggle to meet the growing needs of the migrant crisis."

Catholic Charities has not publicly provided any recent update on its overall donor support, although its CEO, Dominican Sister Donna Markham, sounded words of warning last year.

"Anybody who is working in Catholic organizations right now is being hit by the fallout from the abuse crisis," she told Catholic News Service. "We have been faced with some of our significant donors saying, 'No more money to Catholic Charities until the bishops straighten out this mess.'"

A national survey released in June by the Pew Research Center reinforced Markham's concerns; it reported that one-fourth of Catholics said they had reduced donations and scaled back Mass attendance because of the abuse crisis.

Among the many Catholic Charities affiliates grappling firsthand with the border crisis is the one in San Diego, which has struggled to obtain the funds needed to sustain its expanded services. It needs more legal staff to help asylum-seekers at their immigration court hearings, and more funds to buy tickets for migrants seeking to unite with family elsewhere in the country. Its new clientele includes not only recent arrivals from Mexico and Central America, but also asylum-seekers from Nigeria, Haiti and elsewhere who crossed over the Mexican border.

"Donors' support has not been sufficient," said the San Diego affiliate's executive director, Vino Pajanor. "Families still reside in churches or overcrowded homes. Children have school-related needs that are not currently being met."

Pajanor said donations to his organization dipped from \$2.3 million in the 2018 fiscal year to under \$2.2 million in the just-ended fiscal year, with a further drop projected for 2019-20. He suggested that factors behind the drop included the sex-abuse crisis and tax code changes affecting charitable deductions.

No U.S. city has been entangled longer in the abuse scandal than Boston, where articles by The Boston Globe in 2002 exposed extensive abuse and cover-ups. There has been simmering anger toward the Boston archdiocese among many area Catholics, but the regional Catholic Charities affiliate — which serves about 190,000 people — says donations have been steady enough to sustain basic programs.

"By and large, we've just hung in there," said Debbie Rambo, who has worked for the charity since 1978 and been its president for nine years.

Giving from individual donors has seesawed in recent years. It totaled \$9.3 million in the 2018 fiscal year, up from \$7.1 million in 2017 and down from just under \$10 million in 2016. The total for the just-finished 2019 fiscal year hasn't yet been calculated; Rambo said it will be up slightly from 2018.

"Catholics continue to support our work because they believe it's so important," said Rambo, citing programs that aided about 20,000 refugees and immigrants last year.

While Catholic Charities operates in the U.S., Catholic Relief Services focuses on foreign missions. It was formed to serve displaced people during World War II and now operates programs in more than 100 countries.

Its work is widely admired — and not directly connected to U.S. dioceses buffeted by the sex-abuse crisis — yet the scandals nonetheless have affected CRS.

One of its former board members, and a director of the CRS Foundation, was McCarrick, the former cardinal expelled from the priesthood in February for sexually abusing minors and seminarians. As allegations against him solidified last year, CRS issued a statement expressing dismay and severing ties with McCarrick.

CRS also said six of its former board members — five of them deceased — were named by the Pennsylvania grand jury as having played a role in allowing clergy sex abuse to continue. Going forward, CRS promised constant “revisiting” of its policies to prevent and address sexual misconduct.

CRS reported \$226.4 million in private contributions for the 2018 fiscal year, down from \$239.6 million in 2017. Its communications office declined to comment on any possible effect of the sex-abuse scandals.

Like Catholic Charities, CRS has been beefing up programs aimed at easing the immigration crisis. Among its priorities is addressing problems in Central America, such as gang violence and lack of jobs, so people don’t feel compelled to leave their homeland. In Mexico, CRS supports shelters that provide legal aid and trauma counseling to migrants.

Some prominent Catholics, including Washington Post columnist Marc Thiessen, have urged fellow Catholics to withhold money from their bishops’ fundraising drives as a way of demanding more accountability for the sex-abuse crisis. In an op-ed in March, Thiessen suggested that faithful Catholics instead steer their donations directly to “the many wonderful Catholic charities that help the poor and vulnerable.”

Taliban vows future Afghanistan won’t be terrorists’ hotbed

By **DEB RIECHMANN** and **KATHY GANNON** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — America’s longest war has come full circle.

The United States began bombing Afghanistan after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to root out al-Qaida fighters harbored by the Taliban. Now, more than 18 years later, preventing Afghanistan from being a launching pad for more attacks on America is at the heart of ongoing U.S. talks with the Taliban.

President Donald Trump’s envoy at the negotiating table says he’s satisfied with the Taliban’s commitment to prevent international terrorist organizations from using Afghanistan as a base to plot global attacks. There’s even talk that a negotiated settlement might result in the Taliban joining the U.S. to fight Islamic State militants, rivals whose footprint is growing in mountainous northern Afghanistan.

“The world needs to be sure that Afghanistan will not be a threat to the international community,” said the envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, who was born in Afghanistan and is a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan. “We are satisfied with the commitment that we have received (from the Taliban) on counterterrorism.”

Not everyone is convinced.

Some Afghans worry that Trump’s desire to pull American troops from Afghanistan will override doubts about the Taliban’s sincerity. Early in the talks, Hamdullah Mohib, national security adviser to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, said counting on the Taliban to control other militants could be like “having cats guard the milk.”

Rep. Michael Waltz, who did multiple combat tours in Afghanistan as a U.S. special forces officer, said he’s happy to see the Taliban are negotiating but does not see how Afghanistan can keep from becoming a hotbed for terrorists wanting to strike the United States.

“I have my doubts about the Taliban’s sincerity No. 1,” said Waltz, R-Fla. “But even if you buy into that ... how does the Taliban have the capability to enforce what a 300,000-man Afghan army, the United States forces and a coalition of armies around the world are continuing to struggle to do?”

Much is at stake.

The conflict in Afghanistan has cost more than 2,300 American lives and hundreds of billions in taxpayer

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dollars. The Taliban control roughly half the country, although not the cities. About 14,000 U.S. troops plus other NATO-led forces are still there. Senior intelligence officials have warned that a withdrawal could return Afghanistan to a time when the Taliban ruled a country that was an al-Qaida stronghold.

Despite nearly two decades of war, militant groups remain.

A U.N. Security Council report in April 2018 said al-Qaida was "closely allied with and embedded within the Taliban." The report said the Taliban, which have no history of conducting attacks outside Afghanistan, provide operating space for about 20 terrorist groups with thousands of fighters.

Bill Roggio, editor of the Long War Journal at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a conservative think tank in Washington, cites a video al-Qaida released in May that highlights its alliance with the Taliban and shows an image of militants fighting together under both al-Qaida and Taliban flags.

"The Taliban has not renounced al-Qaida nor is it likely to do so," Roggio said. "The two remain close allies. The Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden after 9/11 and was willing to sacrifice its control of the country. The Taliban has the upper hand now. There are no incentives to denounce its closest ally."

A U.S. intelligence official based in Kabul, the Afghan capital, told The Associated Press that the Islamic State group is an even bigger threat. The official, who discussed terrorist threats only on condition of anonymity, said recent IS attacks in Kabul are "practice runs" for more substantial ones in the future. The official said "one of the hopes of a negotiated settlement is that it will bring the Taliban into the government and into the fight against IS."

The Islamic State group has expanded into eastern Kunar Province, where the U.S. was forced to withdraw after several punishing attacks from the Taliban. That's one reason the U.S. wants to co-opt the Taliban: They clearly know the terrain and can take the fight to Islamic State forces.

Such an alignment is hardly unheard of. During the 1980s, the U.S. backed Islamic insurgents in Afghanistan as they battled to end the occupation of the former Soviet Union.

Khalilzad hasn't specifically said why he's satisfied with the Taliban's guarantee that it will prevent attacks from being plotted on Afghan soil. He says only that the "U.S. military withdrawal will be linked to the commitments the Taliban are making."

Suhail Shaheen, spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha, Qatar, said such guarantees will be written into law once U.S. and NATO troops leave the country.

"After withdrawal of foreign troops from the country and formation of a new Islamic government, legislation will be made that no one can use the soil of Afghanistan against U.S. and its allies," Shaheen said.

John Dempsey, senior adviser in the State Department's Bureau for South and Central Asia, said Khalilzad not only has been given assurances from the Taliban but also is discussing ways the U.S. will be able to verify them.

"He's not going into the discussions naively and taking them at their word," Dempsey said. "He's in discussions on putting in place verification and enforcement and implementation guarantees. We're not there yet."

CIA Director Gina Haspel was asked about verification at a Senate hearing this year.

"If there were an eventual peace agreement, a very robust monitoring regime would be critical and we would still need to retain the capability to act in our national interest if we needed to," Haspel said.

But Taliban spokesman Zabihullah told the AP that "neither the presence of American military nor intelligence is acceptable to us."

Dempsey said that by Sept. 1, the U.S. wants to resolve the issue about terrorist groups using Afghanistan to plot attacks and wants to draft a timeline for withdrawing troops. That agreement would allow more progress to be made in ongoing talks between the Taliban and Afghans. Women are especially fearful about the future because they were harshly repressed when the Taliban ruled the country from 1996 to 2001.

With deep ethnic fissures in the country and the Taliban's refusal — so far — to negotiate with the current Afghan government, which it sees as a puppet of the West, these Afghan-to-Afghan talks are expected to be even harder than the U.S. direct talks with the Taliban.

Gannon reported from Islamabad, Pakistan.

Myriad election systems complicate efforts to stop hackers

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Senate report on Russian interference in U.S. elections highlights one of the biggest challenges to preventing foreign intrusions in American democracy: the limited powers and ability of the federal government to protect elections run by state and local officials. That has given fuel to those who argue for a larger federal role.

The Senate Intelligence Committee on Thursday issued the first part of its report into Russian interference in the 2016 election, noting that Russian agents “exploited the seams” between federal government expertise and ill-equipped state and local election officials. The report also emphasized repeatedly that elections are controlled by states, not the federal government.

It called for the reinforcement of state oversight of elections — a view blasted as inadequate by Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat on the committee. He called on Congress to establish mandatory cybersecurity requirements across the country.

“We would not ask a local sheriff to go to war against the missiles, planes and tanks of the Russian Army,” Wyden wrote. “We shouldn’t ask a county election IT employee to fight a war against the full capabilities and vast resources of Russia’s cyber army. That approach failed in 2016 and it will fail again.”

As the 2020 elections loom, questions of who bears responsibility for securing the vote are becoming more dire — even as President Donald Trump has been largely silent on the subject, and the Republican-controlled Senate has refused to consider legislation by Wyden and others to fortify election security.

Tensions flared in August 2016, when then-Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson raised the possibility of designating the nation’s election system, comprising some 10,000 separate jurisdictions, as critical infrastructure to free up federal resources to support states. Some state officials decried it as a “federal takeover” of elections.

Concerns were compounded in September 2017 when Homeland Security officials notified election officials in 21 states that their systems had been targeted by Russians. Authorities have since said they believe all states were targeted to varying degrees.

Over the last two years, Homeland Security, the department tasked with securing elections, has been working to build up trust with wary state and local officials through increased communication, training and offers of cybersecurity support. Both sides say the relationship has improved greatly.

Homeland Security officials have been reluctant to weigh in on whether there should be more federal oversight and say they want to focus on their work assisting states.

But many cybersecurity experts say that more must be done. They support legislation stalled in Congress that would require states to have a voter-verified paper record of every ballot cast and require states to implement more rigorous audits of election results.

In 2018, 10 states had more than half of their jurisdictions still using machines without a paper trail, which experts warn are vulnerable to hacking. Just four states have laws requiring “risk-limiting” audits that use statistical methods to identify voting irregularities.

“There is no question that the authority resides with the states, but Congress not only has the right but an obligation to make sure federal elections are secure,” said Lawrence Norden, a voting technology expert with the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law.

Norden said, “There is a place for Congress to say that we want all Americans to trust in our elections and there are minimum standards that everyone should abide by.”

Defining those standards has proved difficult.

Senate Republicans have been uninterested in taking up election security legislation, saying the Trump administration has already made strides in protecting the vote and no additional federal funding is needed beyond the \$380 million in grants sent to states last year. They have also been responsive to concerns like those of Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill, who is wary of a bigger federal role in elections.

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"The most important feature to a good election security bill is to create one that provides necessary resources to the states without creating unfunded or underfunded mandates and strangling restrictions through federal overreach," Merrill, a Republican, told a congressional committee in February.

But Wyden and other lawmakers, including Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, say federal requirements are needed. Warren, a Democrat, released an election security plan last month as part of her presidential campaign that would essentially wrest control of federal elections from states.

Experts say it would be challenging to implement standardized equipment and massive protocol changes across the country, requiring a complete overhaul of how elections occur. They note that the decentralized system does provide certain advantages.

"If we were to federalize elections, we're not just going to flip a switch on that," said David Becker, founder of the Center for Election Innovation & Research, which works to improve election administration through research. "It would be a long-term, really expensive solution and it would create a new bureaucracy."

Trump has shown little interest in election security, and his interactions with Homeland Security mostly deal with immigration.

Trump has called 2016 election interference by the Russians a hoax, a claim that former special counsel Robert Mueller rejected in his congressional testimony Wednesday. Mueller also warned that Russia remains interested in interfering in U.S. elections, telling lawmakers: "They are doing it as we sit here."

California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said it was wrong to suggest that federal support for elections, especially when it comes to security, would be considered overstepping.

"We have no choice but to work together given the modern-day threats to our democracy," said Padilla, whose state has among the strictest cybersecurity enforcement for elections.

He thinks the federal government must play a role in developing best practices and guidelines to secure against cybersecurity attacks.

"Anyone who doesn't embrace partnership and best practices is guilty of malpractice," said Padilla, a Democrat.

Cassidy reported from Atlanta. Associated Press writers Elana Schor and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Colleen Long on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/ctlong1> and Christina Almeida Cassidy at http://twitter.com/AP_Christina.

Impeachment unsettled as Democrats enter post-Mueller moment

By **LISA MASCARO** and **MARY CLARE JALONICK** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Midway through the first year of their House majority, Democrats have yet to vote to impeach President Donald Trump. And maybe they never will.

The House recessed Friday for a six-week summer break without opening impeachment proceedings, the Democrats no closer to taking a vote than they were when they swept to power at the start of the year, a searing blow to liberals in the aftermath of former special counsel Robert Mueller's halting testimony on Capitol Hill.

Yet, the House Judiciary Committee filed a fresh lawsuit Friday, its lawyers arguing they need documents from the Trump administration as they pursue questions of impeachment. It mentions the word impeachment 76 times.

The committee chairman, Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York, said his panel is pressing ahead with investigating the president, with or without a formal House vote.

"I think too much has been made of the phrase impeachment inquiry," Nadler said Friday.

"We are using our full Article I powers to investigate the conduct of the president and to consider what remedies there are," he said, referring to the Constitution. "Among other things we will consider are obviously recommending articles of impeachment."

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The action underscores the tensions among a House majority that's trying to have it both ways, preserving the idea of impeachment while avoiding a potentially risky vote.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi brushed back criticism that she's "running out the clock," as about 100 Democrats in the 435-member House favor opening an impeachment inquiry, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

"We will proceed when we have what we need to proceed, not one day sooner," Pelosi said Friday during her weekly news conference.

"Everybody has the liberty and the luxury to espouse their own position," she said, "and to criticize me for trying to go down the path in the most determined positive way."

Pelosi said she has "no complaints" against those pushing for impeachment. Their advocacy, she said, "only gives me leverage."

With the House unable, or unwilling, to impeach Trump, it intensifies the pressure on the party to figure out how to defeat the president in the 2020 election.

House Democrats capped their 200th day in the majority with a long list of bills — on raising the minimum wage, strengthening immigration protections — that give voters a view of how their party would govern in the White House. An outside group started running ads, including on Fox News this week, to promote their agenda.

"These people are clowns," Trump said Friday in remarks at the White House. "The Democrats are clowns."

As if to shore up the left flank, Pelosi met earlier Friday with liberal firebrand Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York in an apparent easing of tensions with the "squad" of newcomers as they pursue shared goals.

Ocasio-Cortez's spokesman called it a "very positive and productive meeting about progressive priorities."

Pelosi said, "What we're advocating for is a progressive agenda for our country."

Yet no sooner had Pelosi stepped away from the podium than members of the Judiciary Committee stepped up to declare they were essentially well on their way to impeachment proceedings.

"This is an impeachment investigation," said Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Calif., "whether we should recommend articles of impeachment to our caucus."

Freshmen Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-Texas, said, "I think especially as folks go home, my hope is that, in addition to talking about all the important kitchen table things that we all came here to work on, that there is an honest discussion within our own communities about whether we can continue to tolerate a lawless president."

Asked whether he favored impeachment, Nadler took a long pause.

"We may decide to recommend articles of impeachment at some point, we may not, it remains to be seen," Nadler said.

The committee's court filing Friday was an effort to obtain secret grand jury material underlying Mueller's report.

The court petition is among a half-dozen legal actions the House is taking against the Trump administration as part of Pelosi's step-by-step strategy of building a case against the president. The Democrats contend that Trump is obstructing Congress's constitutional ability to conduct oversight of the executive branch by withholding documents and preventing witnesses from testifying.

Democrats, including Pelosi, often note that the third article of impeachment against Richard Nixon was his obstruction of Congress.

Next week, Nadler is expected to file a lawsuit to try to enforce a subpoena against Donald McGahn, the former White House counsel and a key Mueller witness. It challenges the administration's claim that its former employees have "absolute immunity" from testifying before Congress.

So in some ways the House is well on its way to impeachment without having to vote on it, as it conducts investigations and files lawsuits to build its case.

"Impeachment isn't a binary thing that you either are or you aren't," said Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon, D-Pa.

"What we've been saying and what we've been doing is starting a process where we're engaging in an investigation to see if we should recommend articles of impeachment," she said. "It's a process. We started

it some months ago in some ways.”

Catering to centrist Democrats, the dozens of lawmakers who helped secure the House majority, the strategy protects those who come from districts where Trump is popular and may not want to have to take a vote on impeachment. Yet it infuriates the liberal flank, the core of the party’s activists.

After Mueller testified, Pelosi assembled Democrats behind closed doors and offered the path forward.

Pelosi told them that if they wanted to come out publicly in favor of impeachment, to do it in a way that did not make it a moral imperative. The next morning, she delivered a similar message, telling lawmakers to say what they want about impeachment, but to do it in way that doesn’t challenge other Democrats’ views.

The comments were relayed by three people familiar with the private meetings. They were unauthorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Some Democrats grumbled that the investigations were becoming “endless,” according to one of the people.

But others say Democrats were elected to the House in large part because voters want them to stand up to Trump. If they don’t, they say their majority faces potential blowback in 2020.

“I think the ramifications are simply that we will have the ball and we fumbled it,” said Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn. “I think we need to do the appropriate thing regardless of the outcome.”

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Alan Fram and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

House panel asks court for Mueller grand jury material

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Judiciary Chairman Jerrold Nadler filed a petition in federal court Friday to obtain secret grand jury material underlying former special counsel Robert Mueller’s report, arguing the panel needs the information as it weighs whether to pursue impeachment of President Donald Trump.

The panel is also expected to file a lawsuit next week to try to enforce a subpoena against former White House counsel Donald McGahn, a key Mueller witness, if he doesn’t comply before then. That suit is expected to challenge the White House’s claim that former White House employees have “absolute immunity” from testifying before Congress.

The committee’s court battles are beginning as the House leaves for a six-week recess and Democrats are debating whether to impeach the Republican president. Around 100 House Democrats have said they favor starting the impeachment process, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said she wants to build the strongest case possible before making that decision, including by going to court to force witnesses to comply.

The Judiciary committee’s filing says the panel needs the information in order to determine whether to recommend articles of impeachment, partly an attempt to give the request more weight in the eyes of the court.

“To meaningfully consider whether to exercise this authority — as well as to exercise its other pressing legislative and oversight responsibilities — the Committee must obtain evidence and testimony in a timely manner,” the filing reads.

The move comes after Mueller’s testimony Wednesday to Congress saying he had not “exculpated” Trump. Democrats are trying to focus public attention on Mueller’s words and on his 448-page report’s contents, including several episodes in which Trump sought to influence the special counsel’s investigation into Russia election interference.

Mueller concluded that he could not exonerate Trump on obstruction of justice. He also concluded that there was no evidence of a criminal conspiracy between Trump’s campaign and Russia.

Nadler said ahead of the court filing that the grand jury information “is critically important for our ability to examine witnesses” like McGahn and for them to investigate the president.

It’s unclear what new information might be found in the grand jury transcripts. Many of the high-profile witnesses connected to the White House, for instance, appeared for voluntary questioning before Mueller’s team rather than before the grand jury.

Trump said later Friday that "all they want to do is impede." Democrats "want to investigate, they want to go fishing," Trump said.

The panel has struggled to bring in witnesses like McGahn who spoke extensively to Mueller because the White House has directed them to refuse to testify. Trump has said he will fight "all of the subpoenas."

Nadler said the committee is still negotiating with McGahn for documents and testimony, and the committee will file the lawsuit "in very short order" if he does not comply.

Associated Press writers Eric Tucker and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

For more of AP's coverage of the Trump investigation: <https://apnews.com/TrumpInvestigations>

US presses WTO to stop lenient trade treatment of China

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump pressed the World Trade Organization on Friday to stop letting China and other economies receive lenient treatment under global trade rules by calling themselves "developing" countries.

In a memo, Trump directed U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to "use all available means" to get the WTO to prevent countries from claiming developing country status if their economic strength means they don't need beneficial treatment.

Developing countries, supposedly not yet competitive with advanced economies such as the U.S., get more time to open their economies, more leeway to subsidize their exports and procedural advantages in WTO disputes. Countries can choose their own status, and other countries can challenge them.

Trump said the designation lets powerhouse China and others take "unfair" advantage of trade rules. If the U.S. decides the WTO has not made "substantial progress" after 90 days, it will seek unilaterally to stop treating those countries as developing economies.

In a tweet, Trump wrote that the "WTO is BROKEN when the world's RICHEST countries claim to be developing countries to avoid WTO rules and get special treatment. NO more!!! Today I directed the U.S. Trade Representative to take action so that countries stop CHEATING the system at the expense of the USA!"

His memo also asks Lighthizer to report back to the president in 60 days.

Despite claiming developing country status, China is the world's second-biggest economy and No. 1 exporter.

Among wealthy economies that claim developing status are Singapore, South Korea, Brunei, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

"China and too many other countries have continued to style themselves as developing countries, allowing them to enjoy the benefits that come with that status and seek weaker commitments than those made by other WTO Members," Trump's memo said, adding that "the status quo cannot continue."

But former WTO official Jennifer Hillman said that she doubts Trump's move will make much difference. Most of the more-generous deadlines developing countries got to open their economies have long since passed.

"While there may be a few places in the agreement that still give some small break to developing countries, they are not many," said Hillman, senior fellow on the Council on Foreign Relations. "The proposal to stop treating countries as developing countries for purposes of the WTO won't change much."

The U.S and China are locked in a trade war over American allegations that Beijing is using predatory practices, including outright cybertheft, to challenge U.S. technological dominance.

The Trump administration has complained that the Geneva-based WTO, which referees trade disputes, is ill-equipped to handle China's unique economy in which the government plays a major role and boundaries between state-owned and private companies can be blurry.

"The WTO is in desperate need of reform," Trump said.

Earlier this month, the administration blasted the organization for ruling that the United States had wrongly calculated the tariffs it imposed on China for unfairly subsidizing Chinese exports. The WTO decision could allow China to levy retaliatory tariffs on U.S. products.

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville and Matthew Lee contributed to this story

Judge weighs whether to force Georgia to use paper ballots

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia allowed its election system to grow “way too old and archaic” and now has a deep hole to dig out of to ensure that the constitutional right to vote is protected, U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg said Friday.

Now Totenberg is in the difficult position of having to decide whether the state, which plans to implement a new voting system statewide next year, must immediately abandon its outdated voting machines in favor of an interim solution for special and municipal elections to be held this fall.

Election integrity advocates and individual voters sued Georgia in 2017 alleging that the touchscreen voting machines the state has used since 2002 are unsecure and vulnerable to hacking. They’ve asked Totenberg to order the state to immediately switch to hand-marked paper ballots.

But lawyers for Fulton County, the state’s most populous county that includes most of Atlanta, and for state election officials argued that the state is in the process of implementing a new system, and it would be too costly, burdensome and chaotic to use an interim system for elections this fall and then switch to the new permanent system next year.

A law passed this year and signed by Gov. Brian Kemp provides specifications for a new system in which voters make their selections on electronic machines that print out a paper record that is read and tallied by scanners. State officials have said it will be in place for the 2020 presidential election.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs argued Friday that the current system is so unsecure and vulnerable to manipulation that it cannot be relied upon, jeopardizing voters’ constitutional rights.

“We can’t sacrifice people’s right to vote just because Georgia has left this system in place for 20 years and it’s so far behind,” said lawyer Bruce Brown, who represents the Coalition for Good Governance and a group of voters.

Addressing concerns about an interim system being burdensome to implement, plaintiffs’ lawyers countered that the state put itself in this situation by neglecting the system for so long and ignoring warnings. Lawyer David Cross, who represents another group of voters, urged the judge to force the state to take responsibility.

“You are the last resort,” he said.

Georgia’s voting system drew national scrutiny during the closely watched contest for governor last November in which Kemp, a Republican who was the state’s top election official at the time, narrowly defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams.

The plaintiffs had asked Totenberg in August to force Georgia to use hand-marked paper ballots for that election. While Totenberg expressed grave concerns about vulnerabilities in the voting system and scolded state officials for being slow to respond to evidence of those problems, she said a switch to paper ballots so close to the midterm election would be too chaotic. She warned state officials that further delay would be unacceptable.

But she seemed conflicted Friday at the conclusion of a two-day hearing.

“These are very difficult issues,” she said. “I’m going to wrestle with them the best that I can, but these are not simple issues.”

She recognized that the state had taken concrete steps since her warning last year, with lawmakers providing specifications for a new system, appropriating funds and beginning the procurement process. But she also said she wished the state had not let the situation become so dire and wondered what would happen if the state can’t meet its aggressive schedule for implementing the new system.

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The request for proposals specifies that vendors must be able to distribute all voting machine equipment before March 31, which is a week after the state's presidential primary election is set to be held on March 24. Bryan Tyson, a lawyer representing state election officials, told the judge the state plans to announce the new system it's selected in "a matter of days."

Alex Halderman, a University of Michigan computer science and engineering professor, testified Friday that the state election system's vulnerabilities and that the safest, most secure system would be hand-marked paper ballots with optical scanners at each precinct.

Four county election officials, three of whom will oversee elections this fall, testified that it would be difficult to switch to hand-marked paper ballots in time for those elections. They cited difficulties getting enough new equipment, as well as challenges training poll workers and educating voters. They also said they'd have trouble paying for the switch unless the state helps.

The two groups of plaintiffs agree that the whole system is flawed and has to go. They also believe the ballot-marking devices the state plans to implement have many of the same problems, and they plan to challenge those once the state announces which vendor has won the contract. But they disagree about what the interim solution should be.

The plaintiffs represented by Brown are asking the state to use hand-marked paper ballots along with its existing election management system and to use the ballot scanners it currently uses for paper absentee and provisional ballots for all ballots.

The plaintiffs represented by Cross want the state to implement its new election management system in time for the fall elections and to use ballot scanners along with paper ballots.

Totenberg did not say when she would rule.

As Trump expands deportation powers, immigrants prepare

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A sweeping expansion of deportation powers unveiled this week by the Trump administration has sent chills through immigrant communities and prompted some lawyers to advise migrants to gather up as much documentation as possible — pay stubs, apartment leases or even gym key tags — to prove they've been in the U.S.

But the uncertainty about how the policy might play out has created confusion and made it harder to give clear guidance to immigrants. Attorneys and immigrant rights groups gave conflicting advice about whether to carry these documents.

The new rules will allow immigration officers nationwide to deport anyone who has been here illegally for less than two years. Currently, authorities can only exercise such powers within 100 miles (161 kilometers) of the border and only target people who have been here less than two weeks.

Critics say the new policy will embolden Immigration Customs and Enforcement officers to indiscriminately round up immigrants, depriving them of a chance to make their cases before a judge or consult with a lawyer. Some have called it a "show me your papers" trope on a national scale, and roughly 300,000 immigrants living in the country illegally could be affected by the expansion, according to one estimate by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute.

Attorneys immediately began advising immigrants to start compiling documents that prove they had been in the country for at least two years — anything showing a consistent presence in the United States. But they don't have to necessarily carry it with them.

"We're operating absolutely blind at the moment," said David Leopold, an immigration attorney in Cleveland.

For years, immigrant rights groups have advised people without legal status to not carry any identification with a place of origin on it so it doesn't come back to hurt them in immigration court. Without the possibility of ever getting a day in court, questions loomed.

"Carry some limited amount of paperwork," said Houston-based immigration attorney Mana Yagani. "I would advise them to have a copy of that at a lawyer's office and at a friend that they trust."

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Still, others keep up the adage of to say and carry nothing.

"Don't carry anything and exercise your right to remain silent," said longtime Chicago activist Rosi Carrasco.

The National Immigrant Justice Center, based in Chicago, encouraged immigrants to create a safety plan, keeping key documents in a central location and giving trusted friends access, along with making plans to pick up children from school in an emergency.

The expansion, which is certain to face lawsuits, has already raised potential issues.

Critics worry the rules will give ICE officers free rein. They point to an instance in Kansas City earlier this week when federal immigration officers trying to arrest a Mexican man smashed a car window and dragged him from the vehicle in front of his girlfriend and two young children. He was quickly deported.

And they also cite the case of an 18-year-old American citizen from Dallas who was detained for more than three weeks after being apprehended at a Texas checkpoint where authorities are currently allowed to exercise expedited removals of people in the country illegally. He was arrested because authorities suspected he was in the country illegally.

The American Civil Liberties Union has vowed to sue, as has the American Immigration Council, which said the expansion threatens due process.

Trump administration officials touted the change as a way to deal with the lack of detention space as it grapples with a surge of migrants from Central America at the southern border. It is the latest in a series of tough measures the president has taken to crack down on immigration, including hardening of asylum rules and forcing migrants to wait in Mexico before coming into the U.S.

ICE Acting Director Matthew Albence called the expansion "an important tool to more efficiently remove illegal aliens encountered in the interior and alleviate resource constraints ICE faces with detention space and in immigration courts," according to a memo sent to all ICE employees Wednesday.

Albence said it was critical that the use of the expanded powers be applied consistently and well-documented. He said training would be required for any official before exercising the authority. He also offered more specific guidance, which ICE declined to make public.

For the time being, Antonio Gutierrez, 30, has prepared an emergency plan and retained an attorney. He's been living in the country illegally for nearly 20 years.

Gutierrez crossed the border from Mexico illegally when he was 11 but was rejected for protection from deportation in an Obama-era program for young people because he was charged with driving under the influence.

He gathered up papers, including letters from acquaintances and his rejection from the Obama program, in a safe spot at home in Chicago. While other members of his family have been able to get legal status to remain in the U.S., he hasn't.

"Being organized allows me a sense of safety," he said.

Advocates said they differed on whether it was necessary to physically have documents available at all times. To some, it's more important to talk to a lawyer and understand their legal rights.

This is an especially big challenge because the vast majority of immigrants don't have attorneys. Only 14 percent of immigrants who are detained have a lawyer when they go to court, according to a 2016 American Immigration Council study.

"We're really mindful of not wanting to create alarm unnecessarily," said Daniel Sharp, legal director at the Central American Resource Center in Los Angeles. "Our first advice to everyone is to get informed, obtain legal consultation and understand your right to remain silent, rather than carrying around a big stack of papers."

Elliot Spagat contributed to this report from San Diego.

Girls are bearing the brunt of a rise in US cyberbullying

By SALLY HO Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Rachel Whalen remembers feeling gutted in high school when a former friend would mock her online postings, threaten to unfollow or unfriend her on social media and post inside jokes about her to others online.

The cyberbullying was so distressing that Whalen said she contemplated suicide. Once she got help, she decided to limit her time on social media. It helps to take a break from it for perspective, said Whalen, now a 19-year-old college student in Utah.

There's a rise in cyberbullying nationwide, with three times as many girls reporting being harassed online or by text message than boys, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The U.S. Department of Education's research and data arm this month released its latest survey, which shows an uptick in online abuse, though the overall number of students who report being bullied stayed the same.

"There's just some pressure in that competitive atmosphere that is all about attention," Whalen said. "This social media acceptance — it just makes sense to me that it's more predominant amongst girls."

Many school systems that once had a hands-off approach to dealing with off-campus student behavior are now making cyberbullying rules, outlining punishments such as suspension or expulsion, according to Bryan Joffe, director of education and youth development at AASA, a national school superintendents association.

That change partly came along with broader cyberbullying laws, which have been adopted in states like Texas and California in recent years.

The survey showed about 20%, or one in five students, reported being bullied, ranging from rumors or being excluded to threats and physical attacks in the 2016-17 school year. That's unchanged from the previous survey done in 2014-15.

But in that two-year span, cyberbullying reports increased significantly, from 11.5% to 15.3%.

Broken down by gender, 21% of girls in middle and high school reported being bullied online or by text message in the 2016-17 school year, compared with less than 7% of boys.

That's up from the previous survey in 2014-15, the first time cyberbullying data was collected this specifically. Back then, about 16% of girls between 12 and 18 said they were bullied online, compared with 6% of boys.

The survey does not address who the aggressors are, though girls were more likely to note that their bullies were perceived to have the ability to influence others.

Lauren Paul, founder of the Kind Campaign, said 90% of the stories she hears while working in schools are of girls bullied by other girls. The California-based nonprofit launched a decade ago to focus on "girl against girl" bullying through free educational programming that reaches about 300 schools a year.

Paul recalls meeting one girl who was obsessive about her social media accounts because a group of girls excluded her if she did not get enough likes or follows in any given week. She went so far as to painstakingly create fake profiles just to meet her quota.

"Most of the time — if not almost all the time — it's about what's going on with other girls," Paul said. "It's this longing to be accepted by their female peers specifically and feeling broken if they don't."

Though Paul primarily hosts assemblies and workshop exercises at middle and high schools, she said there's been more demand to help younger and older students in recent years. The Kind Campaign has gotten more requests for elementary school presentations and now also regularly gets called to universities to work with sororities.

The latest national data may spark new conversations about "Mean Girls" behavior, Joffe said, referring to 2004 movie starring Lindsay Lohan.

"It's a school issue, but it's just a reflection of broader societal issues," Joffe said. "I'm not sure schools have any better answer than say, the Twitter company or Facebook. They're also trying to find answers to what to do about abuses online."

Some tech companies also are taking a stab at what seems like an intractable problem.

Instagram unveiled its latest feature this month that uses artificial intelligence to try to stop abuse. Users typing a potentially offensive comment on a photo or video will get a notification that reads: "Are you sure you want to post this?"

Many school districts, meanwhile, are beefing up social-emotional learning curriculum beyond just teaching children how to share and express their feelings in the early grades.

That's something Manuela Slye, a Seattle mother with three teenagers, says is a must to prevent cyberbullying. The president of the Seattle Council Parent Teacher Student Association called on her school district to expand its "soft skills" lessons through high school, as is done in a neighboring school district.

Seattle Public Schools is working to expand such offerings, though a district spokesman said there hasn't been a noted rise in cyberbullying among its students.

"There needs to be social-emotional development teaching before it goes to cyberbullying, before it goes to doing something online and anonymously, and before you have a problem with someone," Slye said.

Sally Ho covers philanthropy and education. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/_SallyHo

AP Source: Jay-Z pulls out of Woodstock 50 performance

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Jay-Z's got 99 problems but Woodstock isn't one: The rap king has pulled out of the 50th anniversary Woodstock festival just weeks before the troubled event is supposed to take place.

Jay-Z will no longer close the three-day festival scheduled for Aug. 16-18, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on Friday, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't allowed to discuss the plans publicly.

The news comes on the same day that John Fogerty, who performed at the original 1969 festival with Creedence Clearwater Revival, pulled out of the anniversary event.

Representatives for Woodstock 50 and festival co-founder Michael Lang said they had no comment about Jay-Z and Fogerty's decision to back out of the festival. Dead & Company will also not perform at Woodstock 50, a person familiar with the band's decision told the AP late Friday.

Woodstock 50 has faced a series of setbacks in the last few months, including permit denials and the loss of a financial partner and a production company. No venue has been publicly announced and tickets have yet to go on sale.

With Fogerty and rapper-actor Common by his side, Lang announced in March that Jay-Z, Dead & Company, the Killers, Miley Cyrus, Imagine Dragons and Chance the Rapper would perform at Woodstock 50. The festivities were supposed to take place across three main stages at Watkins Glen International racetrack in Watkins Glen, New York, about 115 miles (185 kilometers) northwest of the original site, but the venue pulled out.

Bloomberg reported Thursday that the event will now take place at the Merriweather Post Pavilion, an outdoor amphitheater that seats 19,000 in Columbia, Maryland, some 270 miles south of the original New York site. A representative for Woodstock 50 told the AP that she couldn't confirm the report and said the organizers had no further comment.

Bill Werde, the former editorial director of Billboard, said because of the location change artists can likely back out of performing.

"Most booking contracts are site specific, so with the move to Maryland I think in all probability these artists have easy-outs. And looking at the debacle that this festival has been, I would really be surprised if a lot these artists, if not all of them, didn't start exercising those outs," said Werde, who is also the director of the Bandier program for recorded and entertainment industries at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

Acts scheduled for Woodstock 50 include Robert Plant and The Sensational Space Shifters, David Crosby, Janelle Monae, Brandi Carlile, Country Joe McDonald, Halsey, the Lumineers and India.Arie. Werde said

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some of them may just wait for the festival to be canceled before going public. "From a management perspective, if you see this event imploding it is way more diplomatic to wait for (the organizers) to finally cancel it than sort of force the issue and announce your pull out," he said.

Though he's no longer performing at Woodstock 50, Fogerty will perform at Woodstock's original site in Bethel, New York, in a smaller anniversary event not connected to Woodstock 50. The 74-year-old will hit the stage at the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, which is holding its event during the same three-day weekend. Fogerty will close out the celebration on Aug. 18, while Ringo Starr will perform on Aug. 16 and Santana — also booked for the larger anniversary event — will perform on Aug. 17.

The Black Keys, originally scheduled to perform at Woodstock 50, announced in April that they had to cancel their performance due to a scheduling conflict.

The original Woodstock, a festival pushing the message of peace, love and music, was a seminal, groundbreaking event in 1969 that featured performances by Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, Joan Baez, the Who and other iconic acts.

"If you're a music fan and you appreciate the history of Woodstock as a cultural, pinnacle moment, even as a brand, it's hard not to be sad about this seemingly never-ending torrent of missteps and false hopes," Werde said.

"For the sake of the legacy of Woodstock, I kind of wish they would stop. It's like watching a boxer who just won't stay down when he really should."

Online:

<https://www.woodstock.com/lineup/>

Congressional inaction on vote security puts onus on states

By PAUL WEBER Associated Press

The death of a bill in Congress this week that would have bolstered election security systems puts more pressure on states to prevent cyberattacks from Russia that former special counsel Robert Mueller warned against this week. But many states are paralyzed by their own inaction.

State and local election officials want to replace aging or outdated equipment before the 2020 election, but many have said they lack the money to do so. In some states, recent legislative sessions produced little progress.

The issue took on greater urgency this week in Washington as Mueller bluntly told lawmakers about Russian meddling in American elections: "They're doing it as we sit here." Democrats passed a \$775 million spending measure to funnel more money to states for election security, but Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell blocked the bill. The Kentucky senator said the federal government is already doing enough to shore up voting systems and there's no need to spend an additional sum of money that size.

Texas is one state that illustrates the challenges in enacting significant election security.

A Texas bill this year would have required all voting machines to have paper trails by 2024, but those changes were included in a broader Republican package to crack down on ballot-box crime, such as making it a felony to put false information on a voter registration form.

Democrats slammed the provisions as an attempt to dissuade people from voting, at a time when tensions were already heightened over Texas elections officials wrongly calling into question the citizenship of nearly 100,000 voters. The bill failed, along with another that would have established a grant fund to help counties purchase voting machines that include paper trails.

"I'm not worried that the Russians are hacking into a machine that is not connected to the Internet. They can't do it," Democratic state Rep. Celia Isreal, a member of the Texas House elections committee. "But every election is run by the county in Texas, and our counties are strapped for resources."

The most urgent concern centers on the 12 states that use, either statewide or in certain local jurisdictions, electronic voting machines that do not produce a paper record so voters can verify their choices before they cast their ballot. Experts say these machines are vulnerable and that hackers could manipulate

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the outcome without detection.

Those states are Delaware, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Kansas, Kentucky, Indiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas.

Mueller's team indicted a dozen Russian intelligence agents last year on charges related to 2016 election meddling, including a notable hack of Illinois' voter registration database that stole information on thousands of voters.

States ever since have been trying to improve their election systems with a combination of state and federal funds. While \$380 million in federal funds were sent to states for election security, experts say this was more of a down payment and will not cover much of what needs to be done.

"We cannot survive having a lump sum of money once every 10 to 15 years," Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos said Friday. "We need ongoing sustainable funding in order to maintain this battle against bad actors like the Russians."

Last August, Vermont's online voter registration system successfully defended itself against a series of attempted cyber intrusions that were described in the Senate Intelligence report that was released Thursday.

"There is a gratification and a sense of relief," Condos said of his system successfully defending itself. "But there is also a concern going forward, 'Oh my god, what are we going to face next?'"

Louisiana has paperless voting machines across the state as it prepares for a 2019 election for governor and other statewide office holders.

Lawmakers previously had set aside \$2 million in a voting technology fund, as a down payment on a machine replacement expected to cost tens of millions of dollars. Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin had hoped millions more would be added this year, but the \$30 billion budget that goes into effect July 1 was enacted with far less money than officials wanted to properly improve voting systems.

A contract for the new voting machines hasn't been settled, and the secretary of state's office hasn't begun seeking vendors for the work, after a previous solicitation effort was derailed by allegations of improper bid handling.

Arizona is a state where hackers targeted the voter registration system in 2016. As 2020 approaches, Secretary of State Katie Hobbs believes the state is ready in the event of another attempted attack, but wishes she had more money.

"We don't know what the Russians or other foreign actors are going to come up with, but I do feel confident that we are prepared for that," Hobbs said. "That being said, we can always use more resources, so it is problematic that the Senate Republicans are blocking that."

Associated Press Writers Christina Almeida Cassidy, Melinda Deslatte, Wilson Ring and Jonathan J. Cooper contributed to this report.

North Carolina trial into partisan gerrymandering wraps up

By EMERY P. DALESIO Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A North Carolina trial that concluded Friday leaves state judges to decide whether they can identify when politicians go too far in drawing voting districts to their advantage, a judgment the U.S. Supreme Court refused to make.

A three-judge panel will likely spend weeks digesting testimony laid out over two weeks during which Democrats and their allies argued legislative districts violate the state constitution by so favoring Republicans that elections were largely predetermined.

"In 2002, the North Carolina Supreme Court said that every voter in North Carolina had the fundamental right to cast his and her ballot on equal terms," plaintiff's attorney Eddie Speas said at a news conference. "If you've been here the past two week, you've heard over and over and over that the voters of North Carolina do not have the right to cast their ballots on equal terms."

But lawyers for the lobbying group Common Cause, the state Democratic Party and more than 30 registered Democratic voters who sued over the legislative maps failed to show how judges or anyone else

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would know if maps drawn to partisan advantage have gone too far, Republican attorney Phil Strach said. "What exactly is a partisan gerrymander?" Strach wrote in prepared closing remarks. "The plaintiffs ask this court to 'fix' so-called gerrymandering but won't tell the court what gerrymandering is. The evidence is that there is nothing to fix. Democrats have the resources and the ability to slug it out with Republicans in the political process."

A ruling is expected in weeks or months. The losing side is expected to appeal the decision.

The trial came a month after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a separate case involving North Carolina's congressional map that it's not the job of federal courts to decide if boundaries are politically unfair. But Chief Justice John Roberts also wrote in the decision that state courts could play a role by applying standards set in state laws and constitutions to the question of gerrymandering, or arranging election districts in ways that gives one party an unfair advantage.

If the judges rule in favor of Democrats and their allies, they could order new district maps for next year's elections to the state's General Assembly. The lawmakers winning those elections will draw up maps after the 2020 census that are intended to last for the following decade, again influencing political power in the country's ninth-largest state.

The plaintiffs also want judges to define when partisan advantage goes too far and diminishes democracy.

A political scientist testifying for the Republican defendants said the North Carolina districts being challenged fall within the norms of redistricting, which almost always favor the interests of the majority party. The challenged districts are not such extreme outliers that judges should intervene, said University of Texas at Dallas professor Thomas Brunell.

A state constitutional requirement to keep counties as whole as possible when drawing legislative districts makes North Carolina redistricting more complicated than in most states, he said.

"There's a lot of stuff that goes on," said Brunell, who wrote a book arguing that voters would be more satisfied with Congress if electoral districts were less competitive and stuffed with like-minded voters who've picked winners.

Brigham Young University political scientist Michael Barber testified for Republicans that Democrats promote unintentional gerrymandering by clustering around cities in the largely rural state.

The lawsuit contends that 95 out of the 170 House and Senate districts drawn in 2017 violate the plaintiffs' free speech and association protections under the state constitution. They also say the boundaries violate a constitutional provision stating "all elections shall be free," because the maps are rigged to predetermine electoral outcomes and virtually ensure Republican control of the legislature.

A partisan gerrymandering lawsuit in Pennsylvania citing a similar provision in that state's constitution was successful.

Despite a large party fundraising advantage during the 2018 cycle and candidates in nearly every legislative race, Democrats could not win a majority in either the House or Senate, a failure Democrats and their allies blame on gerrymandering.

Among the evidence the judges will consider are uncovered computer records created by Tom Hofeller, a now-dead GOP redistricting guru who helped draw the 2017 legislative maps. Those files — collected by Hofeller's estranged daughter after his death and shared with Common Cause — "prove beyond a doubt that partisan gain was his singular objective," plaintiffs attorney Stanton Jones said last week.

Some of Hofeller's files ended up being used in separate litigation in New York challenging a plan by President Donald Trump's administration to include a citizenship question on the 2020 U.S. census.

The North Carolina lawsuit marks at least the eighth lawsuit challenging state election district maps since the current round of redistricting began in 2011. The lawsuits resulted in redrawing congressional lines in 2016 and legislative districts in 2017 — both to address racial bias.

US economy slowed to 2.1% growth rate in second quarter

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy slowed sharply in the April-June quarter even as consumers stepped up their spending.

The gross domestic product, the economy's total output of goods and services, grew at a 2.1% annual rate last quarter, down from a 3.1% gain in the first quarter, the Commerce Department estimated Friday.

But consumer spending, which drives about 70% of economic activity, accelerated to a sizzling 4.3% growth rate after a lackluster 1.1% annual gain in the January-March quarter, boosted in particular by auto sales. The resurgent strength in household spending was offset by a widening of the trade deficit and slower business inventory rebuilding.

Economists also noted that business capital investment fell in the April-June quarter for the first time in three years. That weakness likely reflects some reluctance by businesses to commit to projects because of uncertainty surrounding President Donald Trump's trade war with China.

Indeed, most analysts think the U.S. economy could slow through the rest of the year, reflecting global weakness and the trade war between the world's two largest economies.

This week, the International Monetary Fund downgraded its outlook for the world economy because of the trade conflict. China's own growth sank last quarter to its lowest level in at least 26 years after Trump raised his tariffs on Chinese imports to pressure Beijing over the tactics it's using to challenge U.S. technological dominance. Economists say China's slowdown might extend into next year, which would have global repercussions because many countries feed raw materials to Chinese factories.

Europe, too, is weakening in the face of global trade tensions — a concern that led the European Central Bank to signal that more economic stimulus could be coming soon.

The global weakness is a key reason why the Federal Reserve is widely expected to cut interest rates next week for the first time in more than a decade and to signal that it may further ease credit in the months ahead.

Sung Won Sohn, a business economist at Loyola Marymount University in California, noted the disparity between solid U.S. consumer spending and tepid corporate investment.

"Consumers and businesses are going their separate ways," Sohn said. "If the pattern continues, it is not a good sign for the economy because there would be fewer jobs. For this reason, the Federal Reserve will go ahead with an interest-rate cut next week."

Larry Kudlow, head of the president's National Economic Council, blamed last year's four rate increases by the Fed, rather than Trump's trade policies, for last quarter's drop in business investment.

"I don't think the trade factor is nearly as important as the monetary factor," Kudlow said in a CNBC interview Friday. "I am hoping that monetary policy makes the shift that investors are expecting."

Trump has been pressuring the Fed through a series of tweets to start cutting rates. Economists expect a quarter-point reduction in the federal funds rate, which influences many consumer and business loan rates, when the central bank meets next week.

Responding to Friday's GDP report, Trump tweeted, "Q2 Up 2.1%. Not bad considering we have the very heavy weight of the Federal Reserve anchor wrapped around our neck. Almost no inflation. USA is set to Zoom!"

Later, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office about the Fed, Trump said, "They acted too soon and too violently" in raising rates nine times since late 2015. Trump also complained about the Fed's efforts to lower its bond holdings, saying that was driving up rates as well.

Trump said without the Fed's tightening moves, growth would have been 4.5% in the second quarter instead of 2.1% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which along with other stock gauges has been setting record highs, would be 5,000 to 10,000 points higher.

"I am not a fan," Trump said of Fed Chairman Jerome Powell.

Asked if he felt the dollar was too high against other currencies, making it harder to export U.S. products, Trump said a strong dollar "is a beautiful thing in a way but it makes it very hard to compete."

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Kudlow told reporters earlier Friday that the administration had a White House meeting last week and ruled out intervening in currency markets to weaken the dollar. But in his comments with reporters, Trump seemed to still leave the door open to such a move which could violate commitments the United States has made with other major economies not to manipulate currencies to gain trade advantages.

On Friday, besides issuing its first of three estimates of growth in the April-June quarter, the government reported that by one measure, the economy grew more slowly in 2018 than it had previously estimated. As part of its annual revisions to GDP, the government downgraded its estimate for 2018 growth from 3% to 2.5%.

Trump had frequently boasted of the now-downgraded 3% fourth-quarter-over-fourth-quarter GDP figure for 2018 as evidence that his policies have invigorated the economy.

For the January-March quarter, a narrower trade deficit and a surge in business restocking had contributed 1.3 percentage points to the 3.1% annual gain. But economists had cautioned that this strength was likely to be temporary.

For the second half of this year, economists say they think GDP will grow at a modest annual rate of 2% or slightly lower, leading to growth for the full year of around 2.5%.

That would be a disappointment to the Trump administration which is forecasting that Trump's economic policies of tax cuts, deregulation and tougher trade enforcement will lift the U.S. economy to sustained gains in coming years of 3% or better. Trump often cites the economy's performance at his campaign rallies, saying his policies have lifted the economy out of a decade-long slowdown he blames on the wrongheaded policies pursued by the Obama administration.

While economists see the tax cut Trump pushed through Congress in late 2017 as a key factor boosting growth last year, they expect the impact of those cuts to fade this year. Most think it would leave the economy growing close to the annual average of 2.3% that has prevailed since this expansion began in June 2009.

The recovery this month became the longest in U.S. history, one month longer than the 10-year expansion of the 1990s. Still, the 2.3% average annual growth rate is the weakest for any recovery in the post-World War II period. Most economists say the tepid pace reflected the severity of the 2007-2009 recession as well as such long-term trends as the retirements of the baby boomers and slowing worker productivity.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, said he foresees annual GDP growth this year of 2.5% before a slowdown to 1.7% in 2020.

"The benefits of the 2017 tax cuts are largely played out," Zandi said. "I think going forward that recession risks are high, especially if something major goes off the rails such as a resurgence of the trade war or a bad exit by Britain from the European Union."

Face to face: Pelosi, AOC have own roles, centers of power

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two of the most recognizable women in Democratic politics put down their weapons, stood close and tweeted their unity to the world.

The photo of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was intended to "clear the air" between the two and among Democrats broadly after weeks of public griping. But during the 30-minute face-to-face meeting in Pelosi's soaring Capitol suite, they may well have recognized themselves in each other as key figures in the arc of Democratic politics.

"I don't think there ever was any hatchet" to bury, Pelosi told reporters just after the summit, described by two Democrats with knowledge of the meeting as being just between the two lawmakers.

Born a half century apart, the 30-year House veteran and the New York newcomer dubbed "AOC" share a commitment on stalwart issues like lower-cost health care and prescription drugs. They are political dynamos who consider it something of an honor to have been vilified by President Donald Trump and his GOP allies as the "crazy," "nervous," and un-American faces of the Democratic Party. And they're giving each other an education — sometimes in public — on how to tread a path that winds from the House to social media ahead of the 2020 elections.

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"In our caucus we have our differences," Pelosi said later. "Respect that instead of making a big issue of it."

Too late.

The pair had quarreled publicly over the clout of the freshmen who handed House control back to the Democrats — and returned the speakership to Pelosi, who is second in line to the presidency.

The San Francisco Democrat, 79, had noted that the so-called progressive squad of four women of color that includes Ocasio-Cortez is only four people strong among dozens of Democrats. Ocasio-Cortez, 29, openly criticized Pelosi, saying she felt Pelosi had been "outright disrespectful" by "the explicit singling out of newly elected women of color" for criticism. Pelosi had remarked that Ocasio-Cortez and a cohort of other progressives were just four votes in a large Democratic caucus.

Trump's racist tweets earlier this month urging the "squad" members to "go back" to where they came from ended up giving all Democratic factions something to unite against. All four squad members are U.S. citizens. Only one, Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, was born outside the U.S.

Democrats slammed the administration for days. And talk began to bubble on Capitol Hill about a reconciliatory meeting between Pelosi and Ocasio-Cortez, seen by some as a leader in the next generation of progressives.

On the first day of Congress' August recess, the pair met in Pelosi's second-floor suite just off the Rotunda. No refreshments or Pelosi's cherished chocolates were served in the one-on-one meeting, according to a Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the private meeting. The session gave both women victories to report as well as signals to send to their respective constituencies.

Pelosi tweeted out a photo of the pair grinning and arm-in-arm with an American flag behind them, suggesting unity.

"Today, Congresswoman @RepAOC and I sat down to discuss working together to meet the needs of our districts and our country, fairness in our economy and diversity in our country," the speaker wrote, tagging Ocasio-Cortez and naming some priorities of progressives and moderates alike.

Ocasio-Cortez spokesman Corbin Trent, meanwhile, suggested that his boss had Pelosi's ear and had delivered a key message with good results.

"It was a very positive and productive meeting about progressive priorities," he said, refusing to discuss specifics.

Ideologically much aligned on the government's power and duty to help struggling Americans, the lawmakers draw power from different sources. Pelosi, mother of five and grandmother of nine, gets hers from the Constitution. Ocasio-Cortez draws it from dragon-slaying a Democratic veteran in 2018, winning her seat as the most visible of House freshmen and, now, from a Twitter following of 4.9 million. And they've shown signs of raising each other's political games, from inside the House to the national political stage.

By example, Pelosi has urged Democrats to think pragmatically and treat their diverse opinions on such issues as climate change as assets.

Ocasio-Cortez, meanwhile, has taught classes to fellow House Democrats on how to use Twitter and Instagram to communicate to constituents in a politically effective way. And her following carries a promise — and a threat — to beam any news around the globe in an instant. Pelosi has said she marvels at the speed and reach of social media, which means she must reckon with liberal House Democrats in real time.

Both women have wielded power from their respective perches to vex Trump. Pelosi used her experience to force him to reopen the government last winter without money for the border wall he demanded — complete with a viral moment in which she clapped and smirked from behind him at the State of the Union address.

Ocasio-Cortez, meanwhile, has repeatedly burned Trump on his favorite medium, notably after his misfire on the racist tweets, "I don't have a Racist bone in my body!"

"You have a racist mind in your head, and a racist heart in your chest," Ocasio-Cortez tweeted back.

On Friday, both emerged from their meeting declaring unity.

Already, there were signs that Republicans were casting Ocasio-Cortez in a role played previously by Pelosi — as a fundraising foil and wrong-headed figure for voters to fear after she muscled through the

Affordable Care Act.

The Trump campaign tweeted out a video that opens with a composite of the four members of the squad, with Ocasio-Cortez's eyes covered by an animation of spectacles with swirly lenses.

"Meet the leaders of the Democratic Party," it says.

Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this story.

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

T-Mobile's \$26.5B Sprint deal OK'd despite competition fears

By TALI ARBEL and MARCY GORDON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators have approved T-Mobile's \$26.5 billion takeover of rival Sprint, despite fears of higher prices and job cuts, in a deal that would leave just three major cellphone companies in the country.

Friday's approval from the Justice Department and five state attorneys general comes after Sprint and T-Mobile agreed to conditions that would set up satellite-TV provider Dish as a smaller rival to Verizon, AT&T and the combined T-Mobile-Sprint company. The Justice Department's antitrust chief, Makan Delrahim, said the conditions set up Dish "as a disruptive force in wireless."

But attorneys general from other states and public-interest advocates say that Dish is hardly a replacement for Sprint as a stand-alone company and that the conditions fail to address the competitive harm the deal causes: higher prices, job losses and fewer choices for consumers.

"By signing off on this merger, the Justice Department has done nothing to remedy the short- and long-term harms the loss of an independent Sprint will create for U.S. wireless users," said S. Derek Turner, research director for the advocacy group Free Press.

A federal judge still must sign off on the approval, as the two companies' settlement with Justice includes conditions for them. The Federal Communications Commission is expected to also give the takeover its blessing.

Dish is paying \$5 billion for Sprint's prepaid cellphone brands including Boost and Virgin Mobile — about 9 million customers — and some spectrum, or airwaves for wireless service, from the two companies. Dish will also be able to rent T-Mobile's network for seven years while it builds its own.

Dish on Friday promised the FCC that it would build a nationwide network using next-generation "5G" technology by June 2023. But Dish is promising speeds that are only slightly higher than what's typical today, even though 5G promises the potential for blazing speeds.

The Trump administration has not been consistent in its approach to media and telecom mergers. While the government went to court to block AT&T's acquisition of Time Warner and then lost, the Justice Department allowed Disney to buy much of 21st Century Fox, a direct competitor, with only minor asset sales to get the deal done. Mergers between direct competitors have historically had a higher bar to clear at the Justice Department.

Sprint and T-Mobile combined would now approach the size of Verizon and AT&T. The companies have argued that bulking up will mean a better next-generation "5G" wireless network than either could build on its own. Sprint and T-Mobile have argued for over a year that having one big company to challenge AT&T and Verizon, rather than two smaller companies, will be better for U.S. consumers.

The two companies tried to combine during the Obama administration but regulators rebuffed them. They resumed talks on combining once President Donald Trump took office, hoping for more industry-friendly regulators. The companies appealed to Trump's desire for the U.S. to "win" a global 5G race with China.

Meanwhile, the FCC agreed in May to back the deal after T-Mobile promised to build out rural broadband and 5G to nearly all the country, sell its Boost prepaid brand and keep prices on hold for three years.

But attorneys general from 13 states and the District of Columbia — separate from the five states that approved the deal — have filed a lawsuit to block the deal. They say the promised benefits, such as better

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networks in rural areas and faster service overall, cannot be verified. They also worry that eliminating a major wireless company will immediately harm consumers by reducing competition and driving up prices for cellphone service.

"We have serious concerns that cobbling together this new fourth mobile player, with the government picking winners and losers, will not address the merger's harm to consumers, workers, and innovation," New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement.

T-Mobile CEO John Legere said Friday that he believes the deal can close by the end of the year and that the company will engage with the state attorneys general who oppose the deal.

Dish is largely a company with a declining satellite-TV business. It has no wireless business, but over the past decade it has spent more than \$21 billion accumulating a large stock of spectrum for wireless service. The wireless industry has long been skeptical of Dish's ambitions to actually build a wireless service, instead speculating that the company wanted to make money by selling its holdings to other companies.

Recon Analytics founder Roger Entner, a longtime telecom analyst, said the settlement was good for T-Mobile, AT&T and Verizon, as a weak competitor in Sprint is being replaced by an even weaker one in Dish.

Sprint, the current No. 4 wireless provider, has thousands of stores and other distribution points as well as a cellular network. Dish has none of that, although the settlement gives it the option of taking over some stores and cell sites that T-Mobile ditches over the next five years. Creating and maintaining a retail operation and network cost tens of billions of dollars, Entner said. He doubts that Dish could do that alone, as its core business is in deep decline, or that Dish could find a wealthier company to help it do so.

But New Street Research analysts say Dish could build a lower-cost network and provide cheaper plans for customers. Still, that could take years.

There are incentives built into the agreement that would keep Dish from sitting on spectrum assets rather than building them out into a network, Delrahim said. If the company doesn't live up to its promises, it will face billions of dollars in penalties.

George Slover, senior policy counsel for Consumer Reports, also said that the current structure of four competing providers works. He said it's not the same to diminish that while enabling a competitor that doesn't currently have the infrastructure.

"Dish might become a competing network at some point but it's not there now," he said.

The Communications Workers of America, a union that represents telecom workers, says that the deal will kill 30,000 jobs and weigh on workers' wages.

T-Mobile's stock jumped more than 5% Friday, while Sprint shares rose more than 7%. Dish shares added less than 1%. Verizon and AT&T shares also climbed. Japanese tech conglomerate SoftBank owns Sprint, while Germany's Deutsche Telekom owns T-Mobile. SoftBank will continue to own 27 percent of the new, bigger T-Mobile and will keep some influence, but it will not control the company.

Arbel reported from New York. AP Technology Writer Mae Anderson contributed to this report from New York.

2020 election to test if Dems can draw multiracial coalition

By **NICHOLAS RICCARDI** and **ERRIN HAINES WHACK** Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — When Barack Obama was on the ballot in 2008 and 2012, there was no question that Terrance Holmes would vote for the first black president. But as he helped fix cars this week at a repair shop on Detroit's west side, he recalled his ambivalence about the 2016 campaign.

"I just didn't feel no reason to" vote, said Holmes, who is black and holds a second job at an auto parts factory.

The 34-year-old feels differently now as another election season begins. He hasn't paid much attention to the early Democratic primary and didn't know that two high-profile black candidates are running. But he vowed to help vote President Donald Trump out of office in 2020, regardless of which Democrat emerges as his challenger.

The most important thing, Holmes said, is "to get Trump out."

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The upcoming presidential campaign offers a critical test for Democrats of whether they can ever again rely on the multiracial coalition that helped propel Obama to the White House twice. Young black voters like Holmes are critical to that effort, especially in states like Michigan, which Democrats lost by just over 10,000 votes in 2016, ceding a state that hadn't backed a Republican since 1988. Reclaiming it, along with Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, would put Democrats on a firmer path to the presidency.

Black voters are the base of the Democratic Party and its most consistent and loyal voting bloc. Black people voted in record numbers for Obama in 2008 and 2012 and overwhelmingly supported Hillary Clinton in 2016.

But nationally, the African American turnout rate dropped 7 percentage points in 2016 from its record high during Obama's 2012 reelection, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Other groups did not see a comparable decrease — white turnout increased slightly while Latinos held steady.

Bernard Fraga, a political science professor at Indiana University, wrote a book on turnout last year. He attributes the drop in black voter turnout to several factors, including Russian interference in the election, tactical errors by Clinton's Democratic presidential campaign and less enthusiasm for voting for someone other than Obama. But he said the most important thing Democratic candidates can do is prove to black voters that they'll work for their support.

"It's not one single thing, but what it points to is Democrats can't just take black turnout for granted," Fraga said.

Democrats insist they'll reverse the decline in 2020. They're already spending significant time in Michigan, holding their second set of presidential debates next week in Detroit. Many candidates were in town on Wednesday to address the NAACP's annual convention, where they outlined their agendas for black communities.

Several contenders are making explicit appeals to black voters and blasting their rivals as weak on issues related to civil rights. California Sen. Kamala Harris, one of the two leading black candidates in the contest, slammed former Vice President Joe Biden during the first debate for his opposition to busing in the 1970s. The other black candidate, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, is warning that the party needs a nominee who can turn out minorities who skipped 2016.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who won the support of many younger black Democrats during the 2016 primary, has stepped up his references to racial disparities. Other candidates speak regularly of criminal justice reform, the racial wealth gap and high mortality rates among pregnant black women.

Not to be outdone, Trump has attempted appeals to black voters. Even as he ignited a firestorm this month with racist tweets targeting four congresswomen of color, he frequently touts the black unemployment rate that has declined under his administration and his support of a criminal justice overhaul bill.

Activists worry that Democrats still aren't doing enough to appeal to a minority population that remains alienated and demoralized, with unemployment rates higher than that of whites and continuing cases of police killing unarmed black men.

"Candidates have to understand the fault lines that exist within the black electorate," said Adrienne Shropshire of BlackPAC, which works on turning out African American voters. "The Democratic underperformance that we've seen can be explained in many ways by millennial dissatisfaction."

Younger black voters, like young people overall, aren't as reliable as their older counterparts. But Michigan illustrates their importance.

Based on data from state voter records, Fraga estimates a 12% drop in black voter turnout in Michigan in 2016 compared with 2012, the steepest decline in African American voting performance in the nation along with neighboring Wisconsin. Fraga said the falloff was disproportionately among younger and male voters.

Democrats found some promising signs in Michigan last year. The party clinched the governor's mansion and attorney general's office and netted two House seats. Democratic groups say their internal data suggests some black voters who didn't participate in 2016 showed up to the polls in 2018. In Detroit, 28,000 more ballots were cast than in the prior midterm election of 2014.

Lavora Barnes, the chairwoman of Michigan's Democratic Party, said the party started contacting black voters shortly after the 2016 election, knowing it had to invest more in turning them out. It also has had

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to tailor a message to younger voters whose political awareness started with Obama's 2008 campaign.

"It is a very different world where you grew up with Barack Obama, and then you saw your country turn on you and elect Donald Trump," Barnes said. She tells younger black voters: "This is the moment you fight."

Democrats remain nervous about that fight. Priorities USA, a major Democratic campaign group, warns that it has found African Americans remain less motivated about 2020 than other Democratic voters.

Branden Snyder was the deputy field director of Democrats' 2016 Michigan campaign and now runs a group that tries to boost minority turnout in Detroit. He's also worried.

"The slice that isn't being engaged by the Democrats is non-college black men. The people who are talking about this are the RNC," Snyder said, referring to the Republican National Committee. "The RNC and Trump are coming and saying, 'The reason you're locked out of the economy, the reason mortality rates are high is not anything to do with structural racism — it's these immigrants.'"

That gets to the heart of the challenge facing Democrats — whether they should focus on racism and risk alienating some white voters or talk about pocketbook issues that may have a broader appeal even if it speaks less to the concerns of minorities.

Shropshire of BlackPAC urged candidates to talk about everything, "including how different parts of our country experience things differently."

But Ronald Lester, a Democratic pollster who has conducted dozens of focus groups with younger black men, said Democrats don't need to talk so much about racism to win over black voters.

"That doesn't get you anywhere because people are pessimistic of the ability of people in Washington to change racial attitudes," Lester said. "You have to talk about wages, job opportunities."

Riccardi reported from Denver. Associated Press writer Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Warren warns of economic trouble ahead. Is she right?

By **JOSH BOAK** and **ELANA SCHOR** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elizabeth Warren became a household name thanks to her prescient warning of what became a global financial crisis. Now she's staking her credentials on another forecast of fiscal trauma ahead.

But even economists who like her prescription are skeptical about her diagnosis.

The Democratic presidential candidate published an online essay this week saying that a rise in consumer and corporate debt is imperiling the longest expansion in U.S. history. "Whether it's this year or next year, the odds of another economic downturn are high — and growing," Warren wrote.

Her prediction could help her win over primary voters by tapping into anxieties about middle-class economic stability despite broad gains over the past decade. But Warren's opponents could seize on her warning to undermine her credibility should a crash fail to materialize before next year's election, and some economists sympathetic to her agenda say that — for the moment — her conclusion of a looming recession is overblown.

Warren rooted her concerns about the economy in a Federal Reserve report that found a 6.8% increase in household debt over the past decade, allowing the Massachusetts senator to write that American families are "taking on more debt than ever before." But that figure is not adjusted for inflation, nor is it adjusted for population growth — and the number of U.S. households has risen by 9.5% during the same period, meaning that Fed data also shows debt levels have fallen on a per capita basis.

"I don't see a huge bubble on the other side of household debt that is going to savage people's assets," said Josh Bivens, director of research at the liberal Economic Policy Institute.

Recessions are notoriously difficult to forecast. Warren first warned in 2003 about subprime mortgage lending, yet it was roughly five years later when the U.S. housing market fully collapsed. And although her dire forecast echoed in style some warnings made by Donald Trump during the 2016 campaign, Warren hasn't aligned with him in portraying her election to the White House as the only way to avert disaster.

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"I went through this back in the years before the 2008 crash, and no one wanted to listen. So, here we are again," Warren said in a brief interview on Capitol Hill this week. "I'm trying to point out where the warning signs are. I hope our regulators and Congress listen, make changes, and that the economy strengthens."

At this juncture, families can afford their debt because of low interest rates, and that minimizes the risks to the economy. Households are devoting less than 10% of their disposable income to debt service, down from roughly 13% in 2008, according to the Fed. This doesn't mean that Warren is wrong to conclude that families are burdened by student debt and child care costs, just that data suggests the debt produced by those expenses is unlikely to cause a downturn. Part of Warren's forecast hinges on a spike in interest rates that seems unlikely as most benchmark rates have declined since November.

Warren has assembled a litany of proposals aimed at bringing down household debt, through student loan forgiveness and affordable child care availability as well as a housing plan designed to lower rent costs. She touted her policy agenda — which has propelled her higher in the polls — as ways to avert her predicted crash.

Warren's warning of a downturn is a somewhat unique maneuver for a presidential candidate. Past White House hopefuls have waited for the downturns to start before capitalizing on them. Bill Clinton won the presidency in 1992, for example, on a post-recession message summed up by then-adviser James Carville's edict to focus on "the economy, stupid."

Warren also warned this week that an increase in corporate borrowing could crush the economy.

But Dean Baker, the co-founder of the liberal Center for Economic and Policy Research, said that the increase in corporate debt has corresponded with higher profits and manageably low interest rates.

"The idea that you're going to have this massive cascade of defaults — it's very hard to see," Baker said.

While the economy may not be entering into a recession, many economic forecasters say growth is still slowing because of global and demographic pressures. Evidence of slowing growth has already caused Fed officials to signal that they plan to cut interest rates at their meeting next week, a form of insurance meant to sustain growth. Trump has repeatedly called for the Fed to make even steeper cuts to improve his economic track record.

Michael Madowitz, an economist at the Center for American Progress, said that most predictions about recessions are wrong, not just those offered by politicians.

But he interpreted Warren's essay as a broader warning about how Trump's efforts to support growth by curbing regulations and attacking government institutions might eventually be destructive.

"It's hard to say what a debt-driven problem would look like until it happens," Madowitz said. "I think it's also reasonable to elevate concern at the moment given how politicized Trump has made apolitical economic institutions like the Fed. That's not a free lunch. It creates real risks, so it's more important than usual to think about what happens if things go bump in the night."

PM Boris Johnson's agenda raises UK election speculation

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — With Britain's departure from the European Union due in less than 100 days, new Prime Minister Boris Johnson is a man in a hurry. But he's not rushing off to Brussels.

The U.K. leader has no meetings scheduled with EU officials. Instead, he was in central England on Friday, talking about his promise to recruit 20,000 more police officers. In the coming days he'll speak on other aspects of a packed domestic agenda that looks suspiciously like an election platform.

Britain's next scheduled election is three years away, but signs suggest Johnson may be preparing for a snap poll within weeks or months to break the Brexit impasse that defeated his predecessor, Theresa May. She resigned after failing, three times, to get Parliament's backing for her divorce deal with the EU.

Johnson won a contest to replace her as Conservative leader and prime minister by promising that the U.K. will leave the 28-nation bloc on the scheduled date of Oct. 31, with or without a divorce deal.

But Tim Durrant, senior researcher at the Institute for Government, an independent think-tank, said

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Johnson "has exactly the same parliamentary arithmetic to deal with as May" — no overall House of Commons majority and a set of lawmakers who so far have rejected all attempts to leave the EU either with or without a divorce deal.

"He is clearly positioning himself as the person to get Brexit done, and the way to change the parliamentary arithmetic is to have an election," Durrant said.

Asked Friday if he would rule out calling an election, Johnson said: "Absolutely." But his predecessor, Theresa May, also insisted she would not hold a snap election — and then did, in 2017.

In the House of Commons on Thursday, Johnson said Britons had had multiple chances to vote recently, with two elections and an EU membership referendum in the past four years.

"The people of this country have voted in 2015, 2016 and 2017, and what they want to see is this Parliament delivering on the mandate that they gave us" to leave the EU, he said.

Laying out his priorities in his first Commons statement as prime minister, Johnson said he wanted Britain to leave the EU with a deal. But he also insisted the EU make major changes to May's spurned withdrawal agreement, including scrapping an insurance policy for the Irish border that has been rejected by U.K. lawmakers.

The EU, which has long said it will not change the agreement, called Johnson's stance combative and unhelpful.

Irish Deputy Prime Minister Simon Coveney said Friday that Johnson was putting himself on a "collision course" with the bloc.

"The approach that the British prime minister seems to now be taking is not going to be the basis of an agreement," he said. "And that's worrying for everybody."

"From a Brexit negotiating perspective, it was a very bad day yesterday."

From a British political perspective, however, there's a logic to Johnson's moves. University of Nottingham politics professor Steven Fielding said the prime minister was preparing to blame Brussels if the Brexit talks fail and Britain faces a disruptive no-deal exit.

"The most likely scenario is Boris goes off to Brussels, Brussels says no, Boris says 'Brussels is dictating to us. We want to do a deal but they won't let us do a deal,'" Fielding said. "Ramping all of that up and then saying, 'Come and support me on the road to our glorious Brexit' — and call an election."

Fielding said "it makes more sense for him to go to the country before Brexit than after" because of the potential upheaval that could follow a no-deal exit.

Economists warn that leaving the bloc without an agreement on terms would disrupt trade by imposing tariffs and customs checks between Britain and the bloc. The British government's financial watchdog says that could send the value of the pound plummeting and push the U.K. into recession.

British election campaigns last five weeks, so Johnson would have to act in September if he seeks a vote before Oct. 31.

A snap election needs to be backed by two-thirds of lawmakers in the House of Commons — a threshold that would likely be reached, since opposition parties are eager for one. Parliament does not return from summer break until Sept. 3, though lawmakers could be recalled early if needed.

An election could also be triggered if Parliament passes a no-confidence vote in the government, something that needs a simple majority of lawmakers. Johnson's minority government is vulnerable to such a challenge.

Johnson's first acts in office suggest he may well be laying the groundwork for a national vote. His senior adviser is Dominic Cummings, a formidable — and controversial — strategist who helped lead the Vote Leave campaign to victory in the 2016 EU membership referendum. The Conservatives have created dozens of campaign-style Facebook ads featuring the new leader.

And Johnson is making a plethora of promises that go well beyond Brexit: boosting police numbers, increasing school spending, improving internet speeds, even building electric planes.

Johnson has not given details of where the money would come from to pay for these plans, though he has threatened to withhold a payment of 39 billion pounds (\$49 billion) as part of a Brexit divorce bill that

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May agreed to if there is no deal.

Opponents say the money covers commitments the U.K. made while a member of the bloc, and must be paid in any event. European Union budget commissioner Guenther Oettinger was quoted Friday as telling the German daily Tagesspiegel that failure to pay "would threaten the credit standing of the United Kingdom."

Early elections can backfire, as May found out when she called a snap poll to strengthen her hand in Brexit talks, only to lose the Conservative Party majority in Parliament.

But Johnson has some advantages. The blustering populist is a better campaigner than the uncharismatic May. He faces an opposition Labour Party that's demoralized and divided over whether to go through with Brexit or support staying in the EU. And he appears far readier than the fiscally cautious May to make expensive-sounding promises.

Fielding said prime ministers like Johnson "who are appointed without an election usually try to go for an early election."

"He'll want to have his own mandate," Fielding said. It may be risky, but "he seems a bit of a gambler."

Follow AP's full coverage of Brexit at: <https://www.apnews.com/Brexit>

Heat, then hail: Weather and travel woes hit Britain, France

By NATASHA LIVINGSTONE Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The temperature's dropping but Europe's troubles aren't over: A record-busting heat wave gave way Friday to thunderstorms and hailstorms, bringing the Tour de France to a dramatic halt and causing trouble at British airports and beyond on one of the most hectic travel days of the year.

In addition, travelers at London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports faced delays because air traffic controllers grounded flights over a technical problem.

It marked the second day of travel disruptions in European capitals after one of the hottest days in memory, when many places in Western Europe saw temperatures soar beyond 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). Compounding that, the weekend is a big travel moment across Europe as families head off for their summer holidays now that schools have broken up for the academic year.

After several hours of flight restrictions over U.K. airspace Friday, the national air traffic controller NATS said it had fixed the technical issue and would be able to safely increase traffic flow.

"Weather is continuing to cause significant unrelated disruption across the country and more widely across Europe, which has further complicated today's operation," NATS said in a statement.

In France, suffocating heat turned into slippery storms Friday — including a hailstorm on the Tour de France route in the Alps that was so sudden and violent that organizers ordered a stop to the world's premier cycling event.

As riders careened down hairpin turns after mounting a 2,770-meter (9,000-foot) peak, a storm lashed the valley below. A snowplow worked desperately to clear the route of slush, but organizers deemed it too dangerous to continue.

Weather almost never stops the three-week race, and the decision came on a day of high-drama in which race leader Julian Alaphilippe lost his top spot and accompanying yellow jersey just ahead of Sunday's finale.

British rail commuters were also facing delays after the heat wave prompted Network Rail to impose speed restrictions in case the tracks buckled. Engineers from the company have been working to get the network back to normal after the track temperatures soared to up to 20 C (68 F) more than the air temperature.

"With the railway being made of metal and moving parts, the sustained high temperatures took their toll in places," said Phil James of Network Rail. "Everything was done to keep trains moving where possible, and last night hundreds of staff were out fixing the damage and repairing the railway ready for today."

Passengers using Eurostar services to and from Paris were also facing "severe disruption" due to overhead power line problems in the French capital, which on Thursday recorded its hottest day ever with the temperature rising to 42.6 C (108.7 F).

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Britain, along with much of Western Europe, endured potentially its highest temperature ever on Thursday. The country's weather service said a provisional temperature of 38.7 C (101.7 F) was recorded at Cambridge University Botanic Garden in eastern England, which if confirmed would be the highest ever recorded in the U.K. The existing record for the U.K. — 38.5 C (101.3 F) — was set in August 2003.

It said "quality control and analysis over the next few days" will determine whether the reading becomes official.

Authorities across Europe were looking to address the consequences of Thursday's soaring temperatures, as records that had stood — in some cases for decades — fell.

Europeans and tourists alike jumped into fountains, lakes, rivers or the sea to escape a suffocating heat wave rising up from the Sahara. Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands — all places where air conditioning is not typically installed in homes, cafes or stores — strained under the heat.

France faced a spike in fires in forests and farm fields that left a dozen firefighters injured, and a rise in drownings. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner linked the country's 60 drowning deaths so far this month indirectly to the current heat wave, noting a rise in people drowning in unguarded bodies of water as they seek relief from high temperatures, some of whom suffer thermal shock when they jump from hot air into cold water.

In Belgium, a 66-year-old woman died near her caravan close to the beach.

The woman was found by a neighbor late Thursday afternoon after she had apparently been basking in the blazing sun. The incident happened in Middelkerke on the Belgian coast as temperatures rose in the region to over 40 C (104 F).

Middelkerke police commissioner Frank Delva told The Associated Press that the death is "very clearly linked to the heat."

Emergency services rushed to the scene but could not resuscitate the woman.

Angela Charlton in Paris, Danica Kirka in London and Raf Casert in Brussels contributed to this story.

Mexican Americans faced racial terror from 1910-1920

By **RUSSELL CONTRERAS** and **CEDAR ATTANASIO** Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Twenty years ago, a knock on the door opened the past for Arlinda Valencia. A relative had come to pay his respects on the death of Valencia's father. He then revealed a shocking secret: The family was descended from survivors of a 1918 massacre along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In an account later confirmed by Valencia's 96-year-old great-uncle, the Texas Rangers and U.S. soldiers killed her great-grandfather and 14 other men and boys. The massacre that all but wiped the town of Porvenir, Texas, was part of a campaign of terror that largely targeted Mexican Americans.

"But the older people never said anything to us. Not a word," Valencia said. "We couldn't believe it."

As the U.S. prepares to mark the 100th anniversary of "Red Summer" — a period in 1919 when white mobs attacked and murdered African Americans in dozens of cities across the country — some historians and Latino activists say now is the time to acknowledge the terror experienced by Mexican Americans around the same period.

In towns, villages and cities in the West, Mexican Americans were subjected to torture, lynchings and other violence at the hands of white mobs and law enforcement agencies such as the Texas Rangers. Historians say that from 1910 to 1920, an estimated 5,000 people of Mexican descent were killed or vanished in the U.S.

Often the violence was so barbaric it attracted the attention of newspapers abroad and the fledgling NAACP.

Then, it was forgotten.

"When you talk about villages and small towns being wiped off the face of the earth ... that's what happened to Porvenir," said Valencia, 67, a leader of a teachers union in El Paso, Texas.

Monica Muñoz Martinez, the author of "The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas"

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and an American studies professor at Brown University, said Mexican American families often kept stories of violence from their children out of fear because the perpetrators and their offspring remained in key law enforcement positions or elected offices.

"Now there's a new generation that's saying, 'We need to make these histories public and we need a public reckoning,'" Martinez said.

As with attacks on African American men, the mob violence usually stemmed from rumors about a crime that was pinned on Mexican Americans with little or no evidence.

In 1910, a white mob in Rocksprings, Texas, lynched 20-year-old Antonio Rodríguez and burned the body after he was accused of killing a white woman. He never received a trial; instead, he was kidnapped from jail.

Four years later, Adolfo Padilla, jailed in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on suspicion of killing his wife, was seized by masked men and chopped into pieces.

In 1915, brothers Jose and Hilario Leon were beaten and hanged by two white Arizona police officers during an interrogation. Their bodies were left to rot in the desert gulch. The officers were later convicted of murder, but that was a rare outcome.

Mexican American families sometimes went to local and state authorities to complain and often suffered violent retribution, historians say.

It was the bloodshed in the ranching community of Porvenir that stirred the most outrage among Mexican American reformers and in the international press.

On the early morning of Jan. 28, 1918, the Texas Rangers and four local white ranchers surrounded Porvenir on the suspicion that villagers were sympathetic to bandits or cattle raiders. The men, with the help of a U.S. cavalry regiment, woke up the residents, seized 15 able-bodied men and boys and killed them.

"For perhaps ten seconds we couldn't hear anything, and then it seemed that every woman down there screamed at the same time," cavalry Pvt. Robert Keil later wrote. "We could also hear what sounded like praying, and, of course, the small children were screaming with fright."

The Army returned to the village days later and burned it to the ground.

A Texas legislative committee investigated, and Rep. J.T. Canales, the only Hispanic member of the legislature, called witnesses who told stories of terror. But defenders of the Rangers branded Canales delusional, the committee absolved the law enforcement agency, and Canales lost his bid for re-election in 1920.

Nine years later, he helped found the civil rights group the League of United Latin American Citizens, which exists today.

Recently, a group of academics, activists and journalists formed a group called Refusing to Forget to educate the public about violence against Mexican Americans and set up historical markers to memorialize the most brutal episodes.

John Moran Gonzalez, director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas, said the group has faced resistance from local historical societies. "They say things like, 'Why are you bringing this up now? Why are you inflaming racial tensions?'" Gonzalez said. "They are embarrassed."

Valencia eventually got a historical marker near the site of the Porvenir massacre, about a four-hour drive east of El Paso. Nothing remains of the village, and the bodies of those killed rest in shallow graves across the Rio Grande in Mexico.

In researching the massacre, Valencia found an affidavit by her great-grandmother describing the killing of her husband and her search for justice. But justice never came.

"She committed suicide," Valencia said.

Her surviving great-uncle, Juan Flores, who was 13 at the time of the massacre and would later describe how he found his father's mutilated body and other corpses, had nightmares for the rest of his life and eventually underwent shock treatment.

Flores hadn't told his immediate family of the massacre until Valencia asked him about it.

"Everyone just thought he was crazy," she said. "But he was living with a secret that was killing him from the inside."

Cedar Attanasio reported from El Paso, Texas, where he covers immigration. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/viaCedar>

Russell Contreras is a member of The Associated Press' race and ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/ruscontreras>

EDITOR'S NOTE: Hundreds of African Americans died at the hands of white mob violence during "Red Summer" but little is known nationally about this summer of violence 100 years later. As part of AP's coverage plans for Red Summer, we will take a multiplatform look at those who were attacked and killed by whites in cities and towns around the nation in a spate of violence: <https://www.apnews.com/RedSummer>

US officials: Iran test-launched a medium-range missile

By **ROBERT BURNS** and **DEB RIECHMANN** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran test-launched a medium-range ballistic missile inside its borders, U.S. officials said Friday, defying Trump administration demands that it curtail the weapon program and demonstrating its intent to further push back against U.S. sanctions.

The test came amid heightened tensions between Iran and the West, mainly over the safety of commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

A White House spokesman called the test launch an example of Iran "acting out" as a result of intense pressure from U.S. economic sanctions.

"You've seen their economy teetering on the verge of collapse for a while now. And when they're backed into a corner, they're acting out," said spokesman Hogan Gidley, who also said President Donald Trump wants to begin conversations with Iran's leaders.

Iran has responded to stepped-up U.S. economic sanctions with a variety of military moves, and the Shahab-3 missile test launch could be considered another signal from Tehran that it will not back down.

The U.S. officials who confirmed the missile launch spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

Tensions have mounted with Iran over a 2015 nuclear accord it reached with world powers. The deal eased sanctions in exchange for Iran curbing its nuclear program. Trump withdrew the United States from the accord last year, reinstating sanctions on Iran and adding new ones. Iran has openly exceeded the uranium enrichment levels set in the accord to try to pressure Europe into offsetting the economic pain of U.S. sanctions.

Trump insists that Iran must agree to limits on its ballistic missile program, but Iran thus far has refused.

Nations still party to the nuclear deal plan to meet in Vienna on Sunday to see to what extent the agreement can be saved. The European Union said the meeting of officials from China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany will be chaired by the EU.

Behnam Ben Taleblu, an expert on Iranian defense at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the Shahab-3 is a liquid-fueled, medium-range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear weapon.

"The Shahab-3 is the backbone of Iran's class of medium-range ballistic missiles," he said, adding that Iranian news outlets have previously called it one of the country's "Israel-hitting" missiles.

It is derived from a North Korean missile called the Nodong-A and can fly 1,150 to 2,000 kilometers, or up to 1,242 miles, depending on the variant.

"Iran's continued flight-testing has both political and military applications, functioning as a show of resolve against foreign adversaries and to improve the overall reliability of its missile force, which is the largest in the Middle East," he said. "As Iran continues to escalate in response to the maximum-pressure campaign, Washington should expect more missile launches."

Too many in Congo's Ebola outbreak are dying at home

By KRISTA LARSON Associated Press

BENI, Congo (AP) — Two-month-old Lahya Kathembo became an orphan in a day. Her mother succumbed to Ebola on a Saturday morning. By sunset her father was dead, too.

They had been sick for more than a week before health workers finally persuaded them to seek treatment, neighbors said. They believed their illness was the work of people jealous about their newborn daughter, a community organizer said, and sought the guidance of a traditional spiritual healer.

The Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo is ravaging Beni, a sprawling city of some 600,000, in large part because so many of the sick are choosing to stay at home. In doing so, they unknowingly infect caregivers and those who mourn them.

"People are waiting until the last minute to bring their family members and when they do it's complicated for us," says Mathieu Kanyama, head of health promotion at the Ebola treatment center in Beni run by the Alliance for International Medical Action, or ALIMA. "Here there are doctors, not magicians."

Nearly one year into the outbreak which has killed more than 1,700 and was declared a global health emergency this month, a rise in community deaths is fueling a resurgence of Ebola in Beni. During a two-week period in July alone, 30 people died at home.

Health teams are now going door-to-door with megaphones trying to get the message out.

"Behind every person who has died there is someone developing a fever," Dr. Gaston Tshapenda, who heads the Ebola response in Beni for Congo's health ministry, told his teams.

Many people still don't believe Ebola is real, health experts say, which stymies efforts to control the disease's spread.

Ebola symptoms are also similar to common killers like malaria and typhoid, so those afraid of going to a treatment center often try to self-medicate at home with paracetamol to reduce fever.

But Ebola, unlike those other illnesses, requires the patient to be kept in isolation and away from the comfort of family.

Dr. Maurice Kakule, who became one of this outbreak's first Ebola patients after he treated a sick woman at his clinic, is now trying to make it easier for those who are ill to get help in and around Beni, near the border with Uganda.

He and other survivors, who are now immune to the disease, run a motorcycle taxi ambulance. After receiving a phone call for help they go to homes, reassure the sick and take them for medical care without infecting others.

People's most common fear is that they will only leave an Ebola treatment center in a body bag, Kakule says.

"Some have heard of the problem of Ebola but there have been no survivors in their family," he said. "Since they had relatives die at a treatment center, they think people are killed there and that's why they categorically refuse to go."

They fear, too, that they will die alone, surrounded only by health care personnel covered in protective gear from head to toe.

To try to humanize the care of patients in isolation, ALIMA's Ebola treatment center in Beni places some patients in their own transparent room called a "CUBE," where they can see visitors from their beds. Others share a room with one other patient and a glass window where loved ones can gather.

While there is no licensed treatment for Ebola, patients in eastern Congo are able to take part in clinical trials. That's a welcome change from the 2014-2016 outbreak in West Africa when many patients entered Ebola centers never to come out alive again. More than 11,000 people died.

Still, the measures needed to keep Ebola from spreading remain difficult for many people to accept.

"We cannot be oblivious to the fact that when you're sick with Ebola you're put somewhere away from your family, with a 50% chance of dying alone from your loved ones," said Dr. Joanne Liu, president of Doctors Without Borders, which is helping to fight the outbreak. "I don't blame people for not finding this attractive, despite the fact that we have a clinical trial going on."

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The day after the deaths of baby Lahya's parents, a morgue team in protective clothing carried their carefully encased bodies to a truck for a funeral procession to a Muslim cemetery on the edge of town.

In the background was the sound of workers hammering away as they built more space at the nearby treatment center to accommodate the growing caseload.

Lahya developed a fever but has tested negative for Ebola. The infant with round cheeks and gold earrings is in an orphanage for now, while her 3-year-old sister is being cared for by neighbors who hope to raise them both.

But the sisters will have to wait a bit longer to be reunited — their adoptive father and former nanny both have tested positive for Ebola and are being treated.

The fateful decision to avoid treatment centers haunts survivors like Asifiwe Kavira, 24, who fell ill with Ebola along with eight of her relatives.

Health teams came to the house in Butembo, trying to persuade them to seek treatment. Most of the family, though, said they wanted to treat their fevers at home. After three days of negotiations, Kavira finally agreed to seek help, believing she was on the brink of death.

She would be the only one to survive.

Her mother, grandmother, brother and four other relatives all died at home. An older sister joined her at the treatment center, but medical care came too late.

"I tell people now that Ebola exists," Kavira says, "because that is how I lost my entire family."

Associated Press writers Al-Hadji Kudra Maliro in Beni, Congo and Maria Cheng in London contributed to this report.

Resumed federal executions raise death penalty's 2020 stakes

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The question to Michael Dukakis, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1988, was brutally personal.

"If Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?" Bernard Shaw, a CNN anchor, asked, referring to the Massachusetts governor's wife. Dukakis said he wouldn't favor it because "I don't see any evidence that it is a deterrent."

The technocratic, largely emotionless response in a debate mere weeks before the election marked the nadir of Democrats' politically agonized relationship to the death penalty — reinforcing in some voters' minds that the party was soft on crime. President George H.W. Bush went on to crush Dukakis, winning the Electoral College vote, 426-111.

Four years later, then-Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton projected the opposite message, defending the death penalty on a New Hampshire debate stage, then leaving the campaign trail to return to his home state and preside over the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally impaired black inmate who killed a police officer and another man.

In the decade that followed, though, many Democrats began to rethink their positions on capital punishment, moved by startling revelations of innocent people being sentenced to death row only to be eventually exonerated and even worries about wrongful executions.

In 2014, an Oklahoma execution was problematic enough that President Barack Obama mulled a moratorium on the federal death penalty. Though that never materialized, his party's national platform endorsed one two years later, and only one of the 24 Democrats seeking the White House in 2020, Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, has publicly supported preserving capital punishment in some form.

The issue took on unexpected urgency on Thursday when the Justice Department announced that it will begin executing federal death row inmates for the first time since 2003, again raising the political stakes on a topic that's rarely been a Democratic strength. And while the party is now much more unified in opposing it than a generation ago, the public is not, potentially casting a long policy shadow over the upcoming primary.

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Democratic strategist Mike Lavigne said that, despite the planned federal executions, he doesn't see the issue as a winner for Democrats because "there's not a lot of single-issue voters on the death penalty."

Still, several Democratic presidential candidates strongly criticized the move, setting up a stark contrast with President Donald Trump.

"Capital punishment is immoral and deeply flawed," Sen. Kamala Harris of California said on Twitter. "Too many innocent people have been put to death."

About 6 in 10 Americans favor the death penalty, according to the General Social Survey, conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. That's declined steadily since the 1990s, when nearly three-quarters were in favor.

Even California, the nation's largest blue state, rejected a capital punishment ban in 2016. Now-Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom used an executive order to declare a moratorium, but prosecutors in the state still sometimes seek the death penalty.

The first federal inmate is scheduled to be executed on Dec. 9, less than two months before the Democratic primary begins with the Iowa caucus, and four other prisoners are set to be put to death over the next six weeks.

Trump has repeatedly endorsed capital punishment for serious crimes, and that's likely to play well with his conservative base heading into 2020. Republican support for capital punishment has held steady at about 8 in 10 over the past two decades, while about half of Democrats now say they favor it compared to nearly two-thirds in the 1990s.

Pope Francis has declared the death penalty "inadmissible," but some Christians support it. Since 2015, the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 45,000-plus churches, has acknowledged that Christians differ in their capital punishment beliefs and affirming "the conscientious commitment of both streams of Christian ethical thought."

"Our weighing in on the topic is not for the purpose of helping or hurting any politician, but it's to provide a moral context for our leaders in both parties," Galen Carey, the association's vice president of government relations, said by phone.

When Dukakis and Clinton were running for president, there were roughly 300 new death sentences annually nationwide, as opposed to around 40 today. Yearly executions peaked at nearly 100 in 1999 and have declined steadily ever since.

"It's shocking that, at this point, the federal government would be taking what feels like a giant step backward," said Bee Moorhead, executive director of Texas Impact, a theological civil group that has organized interfaith religious calls to abolish the death penalty in the state that executes more inmates than any other. "It is in the mold of a bunch of other policies that are devoid of the concept of mercy in a way that this country is just not used to."

Bullock, the lone Democratic White House hopeful who supports it, says he backs the death penalty in some cases such as terrorism.

But former Vice President Joe Biden only this week shifted to calling for eliminating the federal death penalty after years of supporting it. His criminal justice plan also would encourage states to follow the federal government in ending capital punishment, 25 years after he helped pass tough crime legislation that expanded its use.

Many of the other Democratic White House hopefuls have opposed the death penalty as part of larger calls for reforming a criminal justice system they see as unfairly targeting minorities and the poor. People of color have accounted for 43% of total executions since 1976 and 55% of those currently on death row, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

In a statement, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker noted the death penalty is "fraught with biases against people of color, low-income individuals, and those with mental illness." Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar said, "A life sentence compared to a death penalty sentence depends on where you live, who your lawyer is and the color of your skin," and South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg tweeted, "Justice is not equally distributed in our country."

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Associated Press writers Elana Schor and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington, Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, and Sara Burnett in Chicago contributed to this report.

N. Korea says missile test was warning to South 'warmongers'

By FOSTER KLUG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea's test of a new missile is meant as a "solemn warning" over rival South Korea's weapons development and plans to hold military drills with the United States, Pyongyang said Friday as it continued its pressure campaign ahead of potential nuclear talks.

South Korea's military later said that the flight data of the weapon launched Thursday showed similarities to the Russian-made Iskander, a short-range, nuclear-capable missile. A North Korean version could likely reach all of South Korea — and the 28,500 U.S. forces stationed there — and would be extremely hard to intercept.

The North Korean statement was carried in state media and directed at "South Korean military warmongers." It appears to be part of broader efforts during recent weeks to make sure Pyongyang gets what it wants as U.S. and North Korean officials struggle to set up working-level talks after a recent meeting on the Korean border between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who supervised Thursday's test launch, and President Donald Trump seemed to provide a step forward in stalled nuclear negotiations.

Although the North had harsh words for South Korea, the statement stayed away from the kind of belligerent attacks on the United States that have marked past announcements, a possible signal that it's interested in keeping diplomacy alive.

It made clear, however, that North Korea is infuriated over Seoul's purchase of U.S.-made high-tech fighter jets and U.S.-South Korean plans to hold military drills this summer that the North says are rehearsals for an invasion and proof of the allies' hostility to Pyongyang.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo played down Thursday's launches and said in an interview with Bloomberg TV that working-level talks with North Korea could start "in a couple weeks."

"Everybody tries to get ready for negotiations and create leverage and create risk for the other side," Pompeo said of the launches.

The North Korean statement was gloating at times, saying the weapons test "must have given uneasiness and agony to some targeted forces enough as it intended." It also accused South Korea of introducing "ultramodern offensive weapons."

That's likely a reference to South Korea's purchase and ongoing deployment of U.S.-made F-35 fighter jets. Earlier this month, North Korea said it would develop and test "special weapons" to destroy the aircraft. In its biggest weapons purchase, South Korea is to buy 40 F-35 fighter jets from Lockheed Martin by 2021. The first two arrived in March and two others are to be delivered in coming weeks.

After watching the launches, Kim said the new weapons are hard to intercept because of their "low-altitude gliding and leaping flight orbit," the North's Korean Central News Agency reported Friday. He was quoted as saying the possession of "such a state-of-the-art weaponry system" is of "huge eventful significance" in bolstering his country's armed forces and guaranteeing national security.

A joint South Korean-U.S. analysis of the launches showed the North Korean weapons are of a new type of short-range ballistic missile that have a "similar flight feature" as the Iskander, which has been in the Russian arsenal for more than a decade, a South Korean defense official said, requesting anonymity because of department rules.

That missile is designed to fly at a flattened-out altitude of around 40 kilometers (25 miles) and make in-flight guidance adjustments. Both capabilities exploit weaknesses in the U.S. and South Korean missile defenses that are now in place, primarily Patriot missile batteries and the THAAD anti-missile defense system. The Iskander is also quicker to launch and harder to destroy on the ground, because of its solid fuel engine. Its advanced guidance system also makes it more accurate.

The South Korean defense official said both missiles flew 600 kilometers (370 miles) before landing off the North's east coast, revising an earlier estimate that one flew about 430 kilometers (270 miles) and the

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other 690 kilometers (430 miles).

Earlier Friday, the South Korean-U.S. combined forces command issued a statement saying the launches "were not a threat directed at (South Korea) or the U.S., and have no impact on our defense posture."

The launches were the first known weapons tests by North Korea since it fired three missiles into the sea in early May that many outside experts said strongly resembled the Iskander.

South Korea's Unification Ministry on Friday described the launches as provocative acts "not helpful to efforts to alleviate military tensions on the Korean Peninsula."

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus urged the North to stop provocations, saying the United States is committed to diplomatic engagement with North Korea. "We continue to press and hope for these working-level negotiations to move forward," she said.

North Korea is banned by U.N. Security Council resolutions from engaging in any launch using ballistic technology. While the North could face international condemnation over the latest launches, it's unlikely that the nation, already under 11 rounds of U.N. sanctions, will be hit with fresh punitive measures. The U.N. council has typically imposed new sanctions only when the North conducted long-range ballistic launches.

Annual military drills by Washington and Seoul have long been a source of frustration for North Korea. Last week, it said it may lift its 20-month suspension of nuclear and long-range missile tests in response. Seoul said Wednesday that North Korea was protesting the drills by refusing to accept its offer to send 50,000 tons of rice through an international agency.

North Korea also may be trying to get an upper hand ahead of a possible resumption of nuclear talks. Pyongyang wants widespread sanctions relief so it can revive its dilapidated economy. But U.S. officials demand North Korea first take significant steps toward disarmament before they will relinquish the leverage provided by the sanctions.

"North Korea appears to be thinking its diplomacy with the U.S. isn't proceeding in a way that they want. So they've fired missiles to get the table to turn in their favor," said analyst Kim Dae-young at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.

Klug reported from Tokyo.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 27, the 208th day of 2019. There are 157 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 27, 1909, during the first official test of the U.S. Army's first airplane, Orville Wright flew himself and a passenger, Lt. Frank Lahm, above Fort Myer, Va., for one hour and 12 minutes.

On this date:

In 1794, French revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre was overthrown and placed under arrest; he was executed the following day.

In 1861, Union Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan took command of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War.

In 1866, Cyrus W. Field finished laying out the first successful underwater telegraph cable between North America and Europe (a previous cable in 1858 burned out after only a few weeks' use).

In 1953, the Korean War armistice was signed at Panmunjom, ending three years of fighting.

In 1960, Vice President Richard M. Nixon was nominated for president on the first ballot at the Republican National Convention in Chicago.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to assess the causes of urban rioting, the same day black militant H. Rap Brown told a press conference in Washington that violence was "as American as cherry pie."

In 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted 27-11 to adopt the first of three articles of impeachment

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against President Richard Nixon, charging he had personally engaged in a course of conduct designed to obstruct justice in the Watergate case.

In 1976, Air Force veteran Ray Brennan became the first person to die of so-called "Legionnaire's Disease" following an American Legion convention in Philadelphia.

In 1980, on day 267 of the Iranian hostage crisis, the deposed Shah of Iran died at a military hospital outside Cairo, Egypt, at age 60.

In 1996, terror struck the Atlanta Olympics as a pipe bomb exploded at Centennial Olympic Park, directly killing one person and injuring 111. (Anti-government extremist Eric Rudolph later pleaded guilty to the bombing, exonerating security guard Richard Jewell, who had been wrongly suspected.)

In 2013, security forces and armed men clashed with supporters of Egypt's ousted president, Mohamed Morsi, killing at least 80 people.

In 2017, Sam Shepard, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Oscar-nominated actor and celebrated author whose plays chronicled the explosive fault lines of family and masculinity in the American West, died at his Kentucky home at the age of 73 from complications related to Lou Gehrig's disease.

Ten years ago: The presidents of Taiwan and China exchanged direct messages for the first time since the two sides split 60 years earlier. Football player Michael Vick, suspended for bankrolling a dogfighting operation, was reinstated by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

Five years ago: Italy's Vincenzo Nibali (vin-CHEN'-zoh nee-BAHL'-ee) won the Tour de France, becoming the first Italian to win cycling's greatest race in 16 years. Bernhard Langer ran away with the Senior British Open for his fourth senior major title, finishing a Champions Tour-record 13 strokes ahead of Scotland's Colin Montgomerie. Frank Thomas, Tom Glavine (GLA'-vihn) and Greg Maddux, and managers Bobby Cox, Joe Torre and Tony La Russa, were inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame.

One year ago: The White House announced that North Korea had returned the remains of what were believed to be U.S. servicemen killed during the Korean War, with a U.S. military plane making a rare trip into North Korea to retrieve 55 cases of remains. The Commerce Department reported that the U.S. economy surged in the second quarter at an annual growth rate of 4.1 percent, the fastest pace since 2014. Official results showed that former cricket star Imran Khan won in Pakistan's elections, but that he would have to seek out allies to form a coalition government. A federal judge ruled that the Justice Department doesn't have the authority to withhold grants to the city of Chicago because of its policies providing sanctuary to immigrants.

Today's Birthdays: TV producer Norman Lear is 97. Sportscaster Irv Cross is 80. Actor John Pleshette is 77. Actress-director Betty Thomas is 72. Olympic gold medal figure skater Peggy Fleming is 71. Singer Maureen McGovern is 70. Actress Janet Eilber is 68. Rock musician Tris Imboden (formerly with Chicago) is 68. Actress Roxanne Hart is 65. Country musician Duncan Cameron is 63. Comedian-actress-writer Carol Leifer is 63. Comedian Bill Engvall is 62. Jazz singer Karrin Allyson is 57. Country singer Stacy Dean Campbell is 52. Rock singer Juliana Hatfield is 52. Actor Julian McMahon is 51. Actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (NIH'-koh-lye KAH'-stur WAHL'-dah) is 49. Comedian Maya Rudolph is 47. Rock musician Abe Cunningham is 46. Singer-songwriter Pete Yorn is 45. Former MLB All-Star Alex Rodriguez is 44. Actor Seamus Dever is 43. Actress Martha Madison is 42. Actor Jonathan Rhys (rees) Meyers is 42. Actress/comedian Heidi Gardner is 36. Actor Blair Redford is 36. Actress Taylor Schilling is 35. MLB All-Star pitcher Max Scherzer is 35. Singer Cheyenne Kimball is 29. Golfer Jordan Spieth (speeth) is 26. Actress Alyvia Alyn Lind is 12.

Thought for Today: "The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority." — Ralph W. Sockman, American clergyman (1889-1970).