

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 1 of 62

- [1- Community Pep Rally](#)
- [2- Good Luck Page](#)
- [3- Groton's Geek Squad and Galaxy in finals of Douglas Robotics Tournament](#)
- [4- Dr. Holm's Column: Language, Literature, Ethics, Music and Spirit](#)
- [5- Groton High School and Community's Blood Drive Brings in 56 Volunteers](#)
- [6- Volleyball Send-off Wednesday Morning](#)
- [7- Weather Pages](#)
- [10- Daily Devotional](#)
- [11- 2019 Groton Events](#)
- [12- News from the Associated Press](#)



"Joy doesn't just happen.
I HAVE TO PURSUE IT."

ELIZABETH MYERS

Chicken Soup
for the Soul

GHS COMMUNITY PEP RALLY

**Everyone is Invited
To Cheer On Our Volleyball Team
To The State Tournament!**



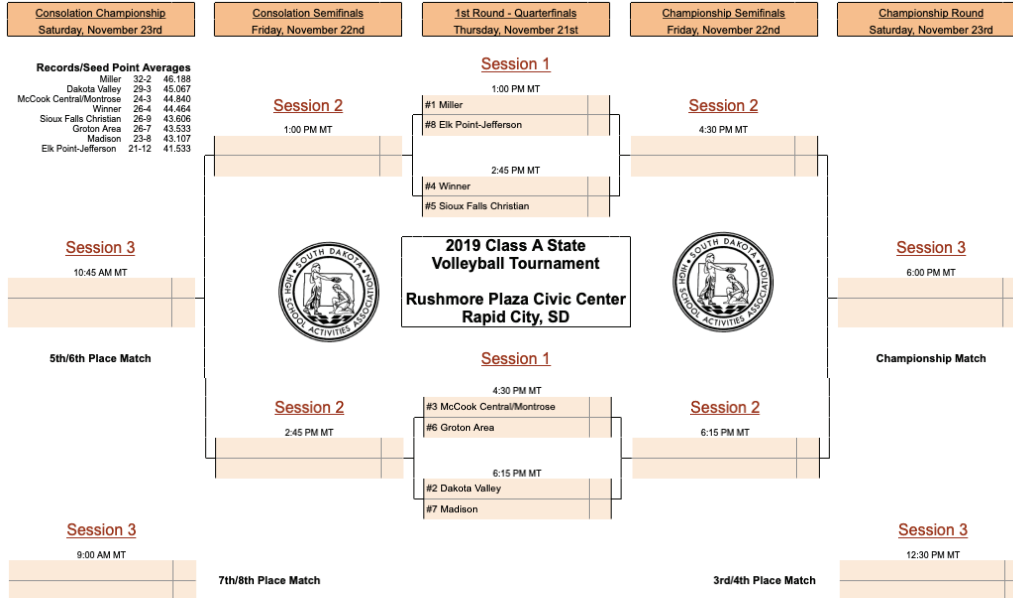
**Tuesday
Nov. 19, 3 p.m.**

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 2 of 62



at the State A Volleyball Tournament in Rapid City!
from these Groton Area Businesses...

- Aberdeen Chrysler Center
- Bahr Spray Foam
- Harr Motors – Bary Keith & Nick Olson
- BaseKamp Lodge
- BK Custom T's & More
- Blocker Construction
- Cheri's On Main
- Dakota Risk Management
- Doug Abeln Seed Company
- Fire Safety First
- Fliehs Sales & Service
- Frost Construction
- Full Circle Ag
- Greg Johnson Construction
- Groton American Legion Post #39
- Groton Daily Independent

- Groton Dairy Queen
- Groton Vet Clinic
- John Sieh Agency
- Justin Hanson Family
- Karma Salon & Boutique
- KR Body Shop, Andover
- McGannon Plumbing, Heating & Cooling
- Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass
- Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.
- Olive Grove Golf Course
- Olson Development
- Professional Management Services
- Spanier Harvesting & Trucking
- Subway
- Tyson DeHoet Trucking
- Weismantel Insurance Agency, Columbia
- Wells Fargo Bank

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 3 of 62

Groton's Geek Squad and Galaxy in finals of Douglas Robotics Tournament

The GT Robotics teams worked hard during the last week to improve their robots and driving skills to perform great at the Douglas Patriot Invite in Box Elder Saturday. Groton teams were competing against teams from Harrisburg, Mitchell, Lead-Deadwood, Box Elder, Spearfish and Gillette, WY.

We had two teams battling for top ranking in the qualifying matches. Gear Heads (Ethan Clark, Jackson Dinger, Axel Warrington) and Geek Squad (Nick Morris, Charlie Frost, Keegan Harry) stayed in the top four, all day, as they worked with their alliance partners to defeat their opponents.

After the teams had each competed three or four times, we had four GT Robotics teams ranked in the top eight of twenty teams. When the qualifying matches ended GT Robotics had teams ranked 2nd, 3rd, 6th and then 13th and 18th.

The elimination rounds were tough on us: G-Force (Travis Townsend, Tannor McGannon, Dan Feist, Garrett Schultz) tipped-over at the beginning of their driver control period of the semi-finals. Gear Heads had the minicomputer on their robot have a port fail which sent them and their alliance partner G.A.T. Wrenches (Noah Tullis, Corbin Reich, Adrian Knutson) to the pits for the day. During the finals match Galaxy's robot got stuck in their scoring zone and was not able to move.

One other great highlight was that our G-Force team won the Skills Challenge. This is like a free throw contest; the team competes against the clock to score the most points.

The next robotics tournament for Groton is in Canton, January 11th.

- Jim Lane GT Robotics

Rankings of GT Robotics teams at the end of qualifying rounds for the tournaments

Tournament Location		Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder
Number of teams in		18	21	20
Tourney and date		Oct 19	Nov 9	Nov 16
9050A	G-Force	8	13	6
9050B	Gear Heads	2	9	2
9050C	G.A.T. Wrenches	4	12	13
9050D	Geek Squad	10	14	3
9050E	Galaxy	15	20	18

How far did GT Robotics team get in elimination rounds (playoffs)?

Tournament		Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder
9050A	G-Force	Semi-Finals	Semi-Finals	Semi-Finals
9050B	Gear Heads	Finals	Semi-Finals	Qtr-Finals
9050C	G.A.T. Wrenches	Qtr-Finals	Qtr-Finals	Qtr-Finals
9050D	Geek Squad	Semi-Finals	Qtr-Finals	Finals
9050E	Galaxy		Qtr-Finals	Finals

Language, Literature, Ethics, Music and Spirit

A muddle and mixture of family and friends surrounded the dying elderly woman like she was a campfire. They came to honor and pay their respects; many generations, from all over the country. This group seemed well educated, well-read, and the intellectual discussions were tossed around in that room like a basketball. She had said, to all, that it was time. "Please stop the dialysis," she insisted, and, it was stopped. At first, she was almost holding court, but over the days, as she was slipping across to the other side, the hymns started filling the room, spilling out into the hospital halls, helping to carry her home. Tears of sadness, appreciation, joy and family love flowed freely the night she died.

Hers was a story about language, literature, ethics, music and spirit. Take away language and literature, and the appreciation she deserved for years of pushing for education and learning for her family and friends would have passed without notice. Take away ethics, and the patient wouldn't have known she could stop dialysis. Take away music and spiritual energy, and the family wouldn't have grasped the true depth and value of the woman or the connection and love they shared with her and each other. The humanities give us meaning, but, from where and why did they begin?

There is no record or hard evidence as to how or when Homo sapiens began speaking, but there are plenty of theories. The one I like the most asserts that, at first, we sang and drummed descriptive sounds while pantomiming hunting stories around the campfire until, over hundreds and thousands of years, words and lyrics evolved. Much later, words became literature when written down in a retrievable way, first on clay tablets, then, on papyrus, parchment, paper and, now, computers.

More than one linguistic expert has theorized that it was language which facilitated the Homo sapiens species to grow and dominate. When ethical words about a common virtue, or rule, convinced, inspired and unified large collections of tribes, these ancient groups became empowered. Words from The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," or the Code of Hammurabi, "A bag of barley is worth two shekels of silver," and even song lyrics like, "Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy)," have pushed civilization forward.

The history of humanity has been made bright by language, literature, ethics, music and spirit. Also bright was that room with the elderly dying patient and her loving and singing family and friends.

Richard P. Holm, MD is founder of The Prairie Doc® and author of "Life's Final Season, A Guide for Aging and Dying with Grace" available on Amazon. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Richard P. Holm, MD ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

Groton High School and Community's Blood Drive Brings in 56 Volunteers

Groton High School and community hosted a blood drive with Vitalant, formerly United Blood Services, on November 13 and 14 at the high school and community center which helped collect a total of 57 units of blood products for patients in need.

A total of 56 individuals volunteered to donate blood and 49 individuals were able to donate at the Vitalant blood drive on November 13 and 14. A total of eight donors also came forward to donate Power Red Cells (2RBC) which collects two units of red blood cells while returning platelets, plasma and a saline solution back to the donor.

Vitalant expressed their gratitude to Kathy Sundermeyer, who coordinated the community drive along with Rose Locke and Daryl Sundermeyer. Vitalant also expressed their gratitude to Brook Compton, who coordinated the high school drive, and FBLA which sponsored the blood drive.

Vitalant strives to keep a 5-day supply of every blood type on the shelf at all times to be able to meet the needs of patients across the region. Donations from O-negative donors, the universal blood type, are especially important this time of year due to increased accidents and trauma cases.

Vitalant is the only blood provider to nearly 70 hospitals across the region. The blood supply is dependent on selfless donations from volunteer donors to ensure the lifesaving needs of the region are met.

About 30 percent of Vitalant's blood supply goes to cancer patients across the region and one in seven people entering the hospital will need blood. Those relying on blood in the region receive that lifesaving blood from Vitalant.

Donors can make a convenient appointment to give blood at www.bloodhero.com or by calling 877-25-VITAL. With each donation, donors receive a free total cholesterol test and earn points in Vitalant's donor rewards program. The next blood drive at this location is planned to be held on: February 10, 2020.

Blood donation takes about an hour from check-in to refreshments. Donors can save about 20 minutes by completing their Health History Questionnaire the day they donate on www.vitalant.org



Mel Sombke was one of the many blood donors at the recent blood drive held in Groton. Sombke was one of eight who gave two units of red blood cells. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 6 of 62



*It's a police and
fire truck
send-off!*

*Show your support by
lining Main Street
(even in your pajamas!)
for the great send-off for the
Lady Tiger Volleyball Team
**Wed., Nov. 20th
7:10 am***

**Starting at the south end of Main Street
and going north to US12**



Rapid City, Here Comes Groton Area!

Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 7 of 62

Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 44 °F

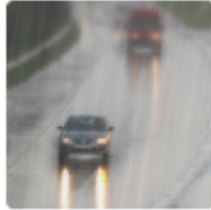
Tonight



Increasing
Clouds

Low: 31 °F

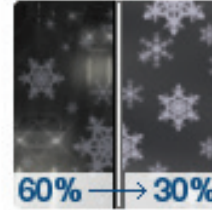
Wednesday



Chance
Drizzle

High: 42 °F

Wednesday
Night



Rain/Snow
Likely then
Chance Snow

Low: 23 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny

High: 32 °F

Today
40° in eastern SD
Mid 50s in central SD

Dry with Light Winds.
Lows tonight in the 30s.

Wednesday
40 to 45°

DRIZZLE

Cloudy
Drizzle and Light Rain,
Especially in the Afternoon.
Changing to Snow Late
Wednesday Night.

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
www.weather.gov/abr
Created: 11/19/2019 5:03 AM
Published on: 11/19/2019 at 12:07AM

Dry conditions are expected today and tonight. A low pressure system will bring drizzle and light rain on Wednesday, before changing over to light snow late Wednesday night. Minor snowfall amounts will be possible Thursday morning.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 8 of 62

Today in Weather History

November 19, 1981: A storm system moved from southeast Nebraska through Iowa on the 18th and spread rain and sleet as well as a few thunderstorms into southern Minnesota. Rain and sleet began changing over to snow during the afternoon on the 18th and continued through the 19th. The most substantial snowfall was in the Minneapolis area. The 10.4 inches of snow reported from the National Weather Service office in the Twin Cities was the heaviest snowfall recorded at the office since March 22nd, to the 23rd, 1965 when 13.6 inches fell. The storm knocked out power and phones to many in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Damage was also done to the Humber H. Humphrey Metrodome, where the weight of the heavy snow caused the newly inflated, fabric dome collapsed and ripped.

November 19, 1996: Widespread freezing rain spread a layer of ice across a large area before changing over to snow during November 19-20. Snowfall amounts were 1 to 3 inches in central South Dakota, 3 to 7 inches across north central South Dakota, 5 to 6 inches in west central Minnesota, and 4 to 12 inches across northeast South Dakota. Travel was difficult, and several schools were closed or delayed. Mail delivery was also slowed or postponed for a day or two. Several, mainly minor accidents, resulting in several minor injuries, occurred as a result of the ice and snow covered roads. Two Milbank buses slid into ditches. Strong north winds led to near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota on the 20th. Some snowfall totals included; 12.0 inches in Clear Lake and near Milbank; 10.1 inches near Mellette; 9.0 inches in Browns Valley; 8.3 inches near Big Stone City; 8.0 inches in Faulkton; and 7.0 inches in Britton and Conde.

1921: The Columbia Gorge ice storm finally came to an end. In Oregon, 54 inches of snow, sleet, and glaze blocked the Columbia River Highway at The Dalles. Apart from traffic on the river itself, all transportation between Walla Walla WA and Portland, OR came to a halt. Nine trains were stopped as railroads were blocked for several days.

1930: A rare, estimated F4 tornado struck the town of Bethany, Oklahoma. Between 9:30 am and 9:58 am CST, it moved north-northeast from 3 miles west of the Oklahoma City limits, and hit the eastern part of Bethany. About 110 homes and 700 other buildings, or about a fourth of the town, were damaged or destroyed. Near the end of the damage path, 3.5 miles northeast of Wiley Post Airfield, the tornado hit the Camel Creek School. Buildings blew apart just as the students were falling to the floor and looking for shelter, and five students and a teacher were killed. A total of 23 people were killed and another 150 injured, with 77 being seriously injured. Damage estimates were listed at \$500,000.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 9 of 62

Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 47 °F at 11:26 AM

Low Temp: 34 °F at 6:00 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 2:32 AM

Day Rain: 0.00

Record High: 75° in 1908

Record Low: -11° in 1914

Average High: 37°F

Average Low: 17°F

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.48

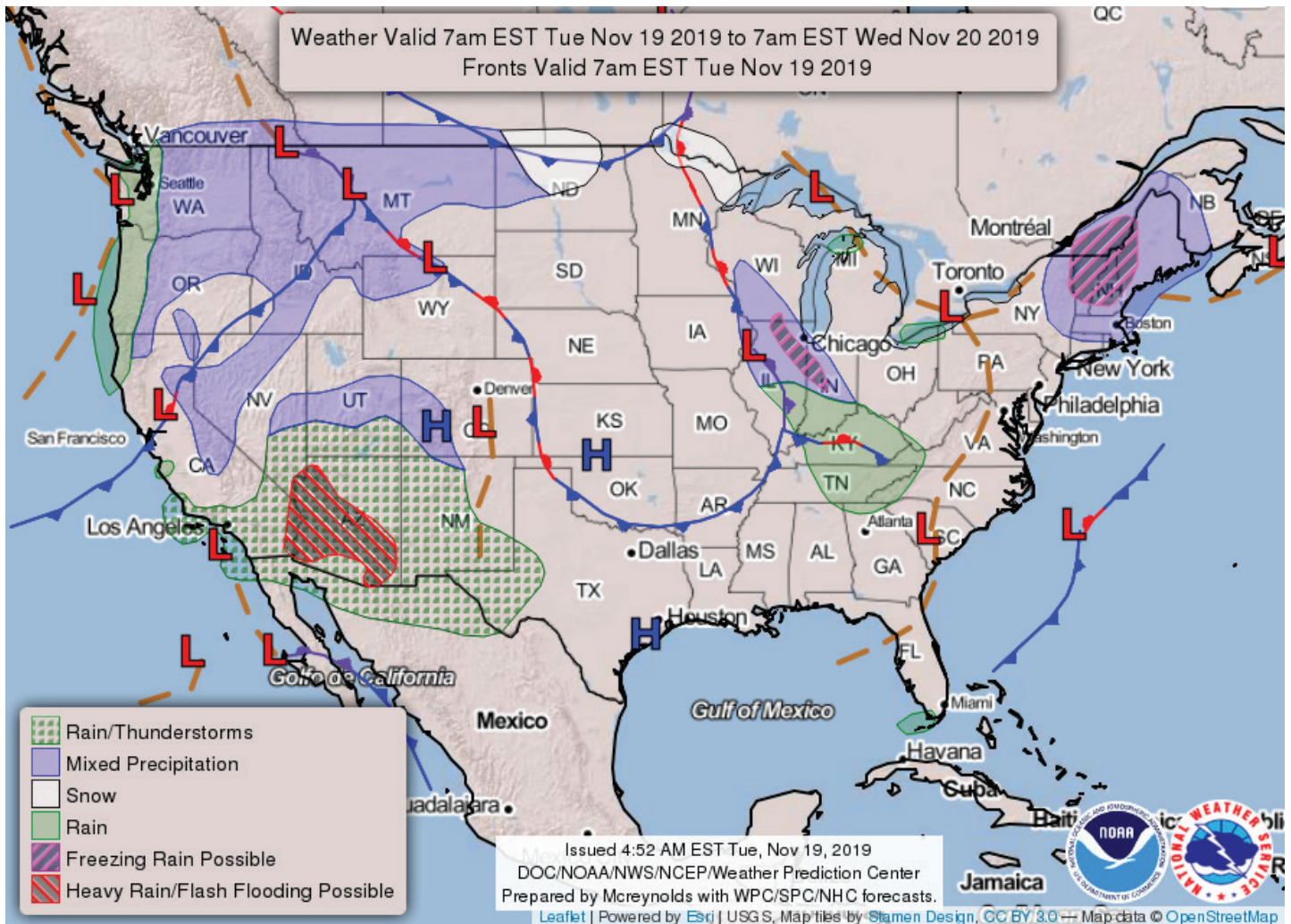
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 20.95

Precip Year to Date: 26.57

Sunset Tonight: 5:00 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 10 of 62



PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE?

A formal banquet for important individuals was scheduled in Washington. General Jimmy Doolittle decided to invite Charles Lindbergh, the famous pilot, to join the celebration. He wanted to recognize him for his outstanding accomplishments.

After a moment's thought, Lindbergh said to Doolittle, "It seems to me that life is full of so many worthwhile opportunities that I do not want to spend a lot of time celebrating the past."

Paul wisely said to his friends, "I choose to focus all my energies on one thing: I will forget the past... and look forward to serving You until the end of my race when I receive my prize: heaven!" Paul never looked at his past, only his future in Christ!

Too often we look at what we have done or where we have been and neglect to realize where we, as Christians, are going. We all have betrayed, disappointed and abandoned our Savior at one time or another. However, we must let go of the past. God has forgiven us, so we must stay focused on our relationship with Him today and do what we can do to serve Him faithfully and lovingly until He greets us in heaven.

Prayer: Help me, Savior, to realize that the past is gone and that the life I live now is to please You. Free us from our past and help us to live in the NOW! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Philippians 3:13-14 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 11 of 62

2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 09/07/2019 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/08/2019 Sunflower Classic at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/12/2019 St. John's Lutheran Luncheon
- 09/20/2019 Presbyterian 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, 10 a.m. Sharp (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, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 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, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/14/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

News from the Associated Press

Hagedorn carries South Dakota over SIU-Edwardsville 71-56

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Tyler Hagedorn tallied 13 points and 14 rebounds to lead South Dakota to a 71-56 win over Southern Illinois-Edwardsville on Monday night.

Tyler Peterson had 15 points for South Dakota, which earned its fifth consecutive victory to open the season. Stanley Umude added 14 points and seven rebounds. Triston Simpson had 12 points for the home team.

Zeke Moore had 15 points for the Cougars (2-3). Mike Adewunmi added 13 points and six rebounds. Brandon Jackson had 12 points.

South Dakota matches up against Arkansas on the road on Friday. Southern Illinois-Edwardsville matches up against Northern Illinois at home on Saturday.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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South Dakota man linked to Butina pleads in fraud case

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man who was linked to an admitted Russian covert agent agreed to plead guilty in a fraud scheme that authorities said bilked at least \$2.3 million from 78 people, according to a court filing Monday.

Businessman and conservative political operative Paul Erickson agreed to plead guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of money laundering. Each charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

An affidavit accused Erickson of promising returns of up to 150% while spending the money on personal expenses for Maria Butina, his former girlfriend. Butina was deported this year after admitting she sought to infiltrate conservative U.S. political groups and promote Russia's agenda.

The allegations against Erickson involved a variety of schemes that appeared unrelated to Butina's case. In February, Erickson pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of wire fraud and money laundering, a day after he was indicted, according to the South Dakota U.S. Attorney's Office.

Prosecutors said Erickson defrauded "many victims" from 1996 to August 2018. The indictment accused Erickson of concocting multiple schemes to carry out well over \$1 million in fraudulent transactions, including recruiting investors for a string of elder care homes; developing a wheelchair that allowed a person to use the bathroom from the chair; and home-building in North Dakota's booming oil fields.

Although some of the accusations go back 20 years, the affidavit said Erickson came to the attention of the FBI in 2016 when a woman selling land in the North Dakota oil patch told authorities that a group of investors had paid Erickson \$100,000 for the same land. The investigation led authorities to conclude Erickson ran the fraudulent schemes.

Prosecutors alleged Erickson made false representations to get people to invest in the schemes. His attorney, Clint Sargent, did not immediately reply to messages from The Associated Press on Monday for comment on the plea agreement.

The U.S. Attorney for South Dakota declined to comment.

Under the deal, prosecutors agreed to recommend a sentence within a guideline range, but that Erickson understands the court is not bound by any recommendation made by him or the government. Erickson may not withdraw his guilty plea if the court rejects any recommendation.

The judge also may order restitution to victims other than those covered by the conviction, the filing said. Erickson agreed to help the government in identifying, locating, returning and transferring assets

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 13 of 62

to pay any financial obligations imposed at sentencing. If no prison time is ordered, Erickson agreed that payment of any court-ordered financial obligations will be a condition of probation.

Butina pleaded guilty last December to trying to infiltrate conservative political groups as a Kremlin secret agent. Butina said in her plea agreement that she "sought to establish unofficial lines of communication with Americans having power and influence over U.S. politics" and that Erickson helped her as she tried to use his ties with the National Rifle Association to set up the back channels.

Erickson, described by one of his victims as a "charismatic gentleman," was national political director for Pat Buchanan's challenge to President George H. W. Bush in the 1992 Republican primary. He also was a media adviser to John Wayne Bobbitt, the Virginia man whose wife cut off his penis with a kitchen knife in 1993. And he joined with Jack Abramoff, a Washington lobbyist later imprisoned for corruption, in producing an anti-communist action movie.

South Dakota's governor defends 'Meth. I'm on it' campaign

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's new anti-meth campaign featuring people of different ages and races saying "Meth. I'm on it" is prompting online guffaws.

Gov. Kristi Noem on Monday launched the nearly half-million-dollar campaign to increase awareness of South Dakota's methamphetamine epidemic. The campaign includes a new TV ad, billboards, posters and a website.

The campaign's motto is superimposed over the state outline.

One Twitter user posted: "Surprising anti-meth campaign in South Dakota. With the theme 'Meth. I'm on it,' what could go wrong?"

Noem says South Dakota's meth problem is "growing at an alarming rate."

The Argus Leader reports a Minneapolis marketing agency created the campaign. South Dakota's Department of Social Services paid the agency nearly \$449,000 this fall, according to the state's finances website.

This story has been corrected to reflect that the slogan is "Meth. I'm on it," not "I'm on meth."

Coalition hopes to create Oceti Sakowin charter schools

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A coalition in South Dakota suggested to the State-Tribal Relations Committee that it pass legislation allowing Native Americans to create charter schools rooted in Oceti Sakowin language, culture and knowledge.

The South Dakota Education Equity Coalition recently presented the idea to the committee at the state Capitol in Pierre with hopes of getting legislative backing to create charter schools, which are publicly funded but privately operated by a group such as a nonprofit or university.

Sarah Pierce, one of the group leaders, said the schools would be a space where students can be "unapologetically Indian."

"They don't have to check their indigenoussness at the door," Pierce said. "We don't want our culture, spirituality, our language to be viewed as an elective."

South Dakota, along with North Dakota, Montana, Nebraska and Vermont, does not have legislation for such schools.

The coalition was formed in August, aimed at making charter schools that strike a balance between offering indigenous culture and academic rigor. But it's not just culture that Native Americans are looking to create space for in schools. They want better education.

Native American students, who comprise about 11% of the public school student population in South Dakota, perform worse on exams than white students, according to the 2018-19 school report cards.

The data shows that while 61% of white students in South Dakota met or exceeded the English language arts test score goal, only 23% of Native American students did. Native American students also did worse in science, 14% of them passed, compared to 53% of white students.

More generally, 95% of white students graduate from high school and 56% are college and career ready.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 14 of 62

That's compared to 66% and 13%, respectively, for Native Americans students.

Pierce, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the former director of Indian Education at Rapid City Area Schools, said some people live on reservations but send their children to city schools because they are more academically rigorous. Others live in cities but send their children to reservation schools to learn their language, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"Our design will hopefully have a great balance that won't lack in rigor or culture," Pierce said.

The 30-member coalition wants to open charter schools, rather than private ones, to ensure sustainable funding, though the schools may also use private money, Pierce said. She added that focusing on creating more options addresses the inequity between traditional public schools and charter schools.

"We're not intending to necessarily discredit the work that's being done within existing districts, only to create an alternative pathway," she said.

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

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Madison Daily Leader, Nov. 14

Vaping laws should be at federal level

Our country is coming to grips with the vaping crisis, and the only thing to address it legally is at the federal level.

We wrote about vaping in September, and the situation has gotten much worse since then. According to the Center for Disease Control, 2,051 cases of vaping-associated lung injuries have been reported through Nov. 5. All states have reported injuries, except Alaska. Thirty-nine deaths have been reported in 24 states.

A teenager in Michigan whose lungs had severe damage from vaping received a double lung transplant in October, in a procedure that doctors say saved his life.

Vaping is the process of using a battery-operated, hand-held vaporizer, which simulates some aspects of smoking without burning tobacco. The vaporizer heats a liquid, typically containing propylene glycol, glycerin, nicotine, flavorings and other additives.

Although vaping has been marketed as a safe alternative to adults hooked on cigarette smoking, vaping has become devastatingly popular among teenagers. In a recent survey, one third of the state's high school seniors reported using e-cigarettes in 2018. According to national data, 5 million children use e-cigarettes, compared with 8 million adults.

Some states are taking action to raise the legal age of buying vaping products, but in our opinion, that does little good. If products are legal in one state and not the next, the flow of products across state lines will be very easy. And purchases over by phone or online and delivered by mail or other carrier would be even easier.

No, only a change in federal law will make a difference. And while raising the age from 18 to 21 sounds like it would help only young adults, it actually would sharply reduce usage by younger teenagers, who today get them through legal purchases by older teenagers.

Congress isn't known for quick action on anything, but this could be an opportunity to do so, providing it doesn't turn into a Republican vs. Democrat issue. Quick action by Congress and the President to raise the legal age would be extremely good for our nation's health.

Aberdeen American News, Nov. 16

Enrollment numbers should inspire us to do better

Enrollment numbers at college campuses always are intriguing.

When those numbers go down, the spin doctors rise up. They usually point out that even though the overall numbers are down, there still is good news to report.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 15 of 62

Enrollment at South Dakota's six public universities was down about 3.4%, or 1,217 students, compared to last fall. Total headcount this fall was 34,520. Last fall it was 35,737.

In Aberdeen, there are 3,427 individual students taking courses at Northern State this fall, 66 fewer than last fall.

None of South Dakota's six public universities saw an increase in headcount enrollment.

Since those numbers emerged a couple of months ago, several experts weighed in about reasons for the decline, including:

- South Dakota's low unemployment rate and strong job market. Such numbers lure high school graduates into the full-time job market immediately.

- The state's need for more financial aid.

- High school students and their parents thinking ahead about student loan debt. Such debt has been crushing the souls of many college graduates and haunting some of them through retirement age.

- Technical schools becoming more and more attractive versus a college degree. Tech schools advertise themselves as having less costs, quicker routes to obtain a degree and less theory and more practical (time in the classroom vs. hands-on). Plus, tech schools say many employers are lining up to hire their graduates.

Of course, the benefits of having a college degree are many, say proponents: Endless earning potential, wider job opportunities and the college experience as a quality of life issue.

"We have to continue to bring more students to campus and the community," said Justin Fraase, NSU's director of communication and marketing, when the enrollment numbers were released at the end of September. "Of course, that's a challenge year after year, but it's one that we're up for."

We agree and like the can-do attitude of NSU officials. We also like the position NSU is in, with all the new buildings on campus.

There are new resident halls, athletic additions and the beautiful new Harvey C. Jewett IV Regional Science Education Center. NSU also is building a new on-campus football stadium and softball field.

"We still continue to feel optimistic," Fraase said. "We feel like we're in a really sweet place here in terms of facilities, in terms of programming, scholarships, all of these types of things. We've got a lot working in our favor."

Again, we agree with the optimism.

We also feel NSU should be selling itself as a place where you can graduate college debt-free or almost so via part-time jobs. NSU has examples of students who have done so in the past, and the college needs to put practices in place to teach students how to do so.

To us, too many colleges seem to show students only how to obtain loans, and not how to manage them. Students and their parents need better understanding about the consequences of student loans later in life if they are not paid back as soon as and as efficiently as possible.

We feel such an effort would make NSU a more attractive option. Show students how to work during their college years and the benefits of doing so, and if they do have to take out loans, help them formulate plans to pay them back quickly. Help them understand what it can mean years later if they take out a lot of loans now.

Through the last 15 years, NSU's enrollment peaked at 3,622 in fall 2012.

With all the millions of dollars invested in NSU in recent years to rebuild its campus, we expect to see its numbers stabilize and then trend up rather than down in the years ahead.

The same goes across town at Presentation College, where transitions and transformations are taking place, as well. Investments on the PC campus over the last few years have also reached into the millions of dollars.

PC and NSU have always been crown jewels of Aberdeen.

The pressure is on for campus leaders to keep those jewels safe, shiny and attractive — pressure that also needs to be put upon the shoulders of community leaders and all of us residents.

More hands make heavy loads lighter and produce more and better ideas on how to haul such heavy loads.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 16 of 62

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Nov. 11

Hunting numbers continue to fall

One of the big components of South Dakota's tourism industry has always been hunting. It has long been a popular outdoor sport for this state; in fact, South Dakota's pheasant hunting is renowned around the world.

But hunting numbers in South Dakota have seen better days, and the state is currently caught in a downward trend that mirrors what's happening to the sport across the nation.

The Rapid City Journal reported last week that the state sold 26,000 fewer hunting licenses this year, which has cost South Dakota about \$1 million in revenue.

An official with the Department of Game, Fish and Parks assigned some of the blame to a long winter and flooding, as well as a resulting decline in pheasant numbers. But the official also acknowledged the continuation of a downward trend in hunting participation.

According to an article last month in Outdoor Life, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that the number of hunters in the country had declined from an all-time high of 17 million hunters in 1982 to just 11.5 million in 2016. That latter figure represented just 4% of the national population.

Part of the problem is that hunting is big among baby boomers, but less so with subsequent generations, and as the boomers age and stop hunting, their numbers are not being replenished.

There's also a matter of shifting demographics. Population numbers are growing in urban areas, where hunting is less readily available, while the population is declining in rural areas where the sport is more accessible. And frankly, a majority of hunters have traditionally been Caucasians, but the nation's ethnic palette is growing far more diverse.

Meanwhile, programs to recruit new hunters have not always been effective. Among other reasons, the programs sometimes miss the mark. Outdoor Life noted that efforts to develop new hunters among kids — which would seem like a logical long-term investment — often don't pay off because kids need adult supervision and resources to hunt. (A better target, the periodical suggested, might be young adults, who are more financially stable and certainly more independent.)

The decline in hunters is a cause for concern, and not simply because it's costing the state revenue. Outdoor Life noted that the loss of hunters means the reduction of fees that are often used to fund conservation programs that are essential to boosting habitat that help bird numbers. So, in a perplexing piece of irony, a sport based on hunters stalking, say, pheasants also helps boost the populations of pheasants.

Unfortunately, this issue is likely to worsen, based on past trends and long-term projections. As the boomers age out of hunting, and with fewer people taking their place, a crash may be looming. And if that happens, it will hurt everyone and everything all the way around.

Land affected by Keystone pipeline leak bigger than thought

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A crude oil spill from the Keystone pipeline in eastern North Dakota has turned out to have affected almost 10 times the amount of land as first reported, a state regulator said Monday.

North Dakota environmental scientist Bill Suess said the leak reported on Oct. 29 is now estimated by state regulators to have affected about 209,100 square feet (19,426 square meters) of land near Edinburg. State regulators had said the leak affected about 22,500 square feet (2,090 square meters) of land.

Calgary, Alberta-based TC Energy, formerly known as TransCanada, estimated its pipeline leaked an estimated 383,000 gallons (1.4 million liters) of oil. Suess said that estimate has not changed.

The cause of the spill is still unknown. An affected portion of the pipe has been sent to a third-party laboratory for inspection, as required by federal regulators.

TC Energy said the pipeline returned to service on Nov. 10 after approval of a repair and restart plan by the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 17 of 62

The company has not given an estimate on the land that was affected, Suess said. The initial estimate by state regulators was "a quick and dirty look at it," he said. "We did have some surface expansion since then."

The company reported late Sunday that it had recovered about 337,550 gallons (1.2 million liters) of oil, along with 141,834 gallons (536,900 liters) of oily water, Suess said.

Cleanup crews and state regulators remained at the site on Monday. Some wetlands were affected, but not any sources of drinking water, he said.

TC Energy has said people were at the site working around the clock to clean up the spill. Suess said the cleanup work was cut to daylight hours on Monday.

The company has referred questions to its website but has not updated it in more than a week.

TC Energy has put up berms around the affected area and is excavating contaminated soil from the entire site, at depths of up to 6 feet (1.8 meters), Suess said. The oily soil is being stockpiled and will be taken to a landfill in Sawyer, North Dakota, he said.

"We really don't have any risk of anything spreading at this point," he said.

Crude began flowing through the \$5.2 billion pipeline in 2011. It's designed to carry crude oil across Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and through North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri on the way to refineries in Patoka, Illinois and Cushing, Oklahoma. It can handle about 23 million gallons (87 million liters) daily.

It is part of a system that also is to include the proposed \$8 billion Keystone XL pipeline designed to transport the oil from western Canada to terminals on the Gulf Coast.

The proposed Keystone XL pipeline has drawn opposition from people who fear it will cause environmental damage.

Noem: Trump OKs disaster declaration for SE South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem says President Donald Trump has approved a disaster declaration for southeastern South Dakota for September storm damage.

Noem on Monday called the declaration "good news for South Dakota communities," and said she was grateful to Trump "for responding so quickly."

Noem requested the declaration last month in a letter to Trump. Sioux Falls was struck by three tornadoes in September, and Madison and Mitchell were hit by severe flooding.

The declaration includes both individual and public assistance and covers the period of Sept. 9 to Sept. 26. Preliminary assessments total at least \$17 million in requested federal assistance.

South Dakota has now received four disaster declarations this year.

Officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency are now in South Dakota working on the first three disaster declarations.

Arrest made in attempted assault of 11-year-old

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police say they've arrested a man who entered a family's home and attempted to sexually assault an 11-year-old girl.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens said Monday the 26-year-old Sioux Falls man is being held on possible charges of burglary, attempted rape and sexual contact with a child.

The girl told police she woke up about 3:30 a.m. Sunday to find the man in her bedroom without a shirt or pants and that he began touching her leg. When she yelled and screamed, the man grabbed his pants and fled.

The girl's parents called police who developed a description of the suspect from a witness who saw him running from a house without a shirt. Officers tracked him down and arrested him shortly before 10 a.m.

Twins prospect Ryan Costello found dead

By The Associated Press undefined

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Minnesota Twins prospect Ryan Costello has been found dead in his

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 18 of 62

Auckland hotel room days after joining the Auckland Tuatara in the Australian Baseball League.

The 23-year-old third baseman died in his sleep, apparently of natural causes, on Monday morning, team officials said.

"The Tuatara express their deepest condolences to Ryan's family back home in the United States and to the whole Minnesota Twins organization," the club said in the statement.

The statement said Costello's teammates were "naturally devastated" by the news. Concerns were raised when Costello failed to report for training Monday morning, days ahead of the Tuatara's opening game of the 2019-2020 ABL season.

The Twins also said in a statement they are "deeply saddened" by Costello's death.

Costello was traded to Minnesota last year as part of a deal that sent Zach Duke to the Seattle Mariners.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, he played in the minor leagues for the Clinton Lumberjacks and later for the Fort Myers Miracle during their 2018 championship run.

In an interview with Twins Daily in October, 2018, Costello said his greatest strength is "my ability to stay positive through tough times and understand that it's part of the game and ups and downs are going to come."

He spoke of his desire to spend time with family after his first professional season in 2019.

"My dad has a bass boat and has had it since I was a kid," he told Twins Daily. "The first thing we do when I go home is go fishing."

"I've been home for seven days, I've been out fishing about four of those days. I live about five minutes from a river, the Connecticut River, so we go fishing on the river a lot."

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Nelson plans to retire from Senate next month

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — State Sen. Stace Nelson says he plans to step down next month following what he describes as the most frustrating year of his service in the Legislature.

The Fulton Republican says he's retiring Dec. 10 due to his health and his desire to spend more time with his family. Nelson, an outspoken member of the Legislature, is serving his second term representing District 19. He previously served two terms in the House.

He says he can't put into "polite words" the frustration he has had with state officials over flooding this year.

The Argus Leader reports Nelson says politicians have "refused to have our troops help those devastated by the flooding or provide emergency financial aid to communities hard hit twice this year."

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

Police surround last holdouts at Hong Kong university

By KEN MORITSUGU and ANDI JATMIKO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — About 100 anti-government protesters remained holed up at a Hong Kong university Tuesday, their choices dwindling along with their food supplies as they braced for the endgame in a police siege of the campus that entered its third day.

Police were waiting them out after 10 days of some of the most intense protests the city has seen in more than five months of often-violent unrest gripping the semi-autonomous Chinese city. Over the past day, more than 1,000 people were arrested and hundreds of injured treated at hospitals, authorities said.

The government has stood firm, rejecting most of the protesters' demands, even as they shut down major roads and trains during rush hour every day last week, turned several university campuses into fortresses and blocked a major road tunnel, which remained shut Tuesday.

In Beijing, the National People's Congress criticized the high court in Hong Kong for striking down a ban

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 19 of 62

on wearing face masks at the protests, in a decree that has potentially ominous implications for Hong Kong's vaunted rule of law and independent judiciary. China's Communist leaders have taken a tough line on the protests and said that restoring order is the city's highest priority.

Meanwhile, pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong was barred from leaving Hong Kong to go on a European speaking tour, after a court refused to change his bail conditions to let him travel.

Protesters have left all the universities except Hong Kong Polytechnic, where several hundred barricaded themselves and fought back police barrages of tear gas and water cannons with gasoline bombs, some launched from rooftop by catapult, and bows and arrows.

Those still at Polytechnic are the last holdouts. Surrounded, they now face arrest. Several groups have tried to escape, including one that slid down hoses from a footbridge to waiting motorcycles, but police said they intercepted 37, including the drivers, who were arrested for "assisting offenders."

About 600 had left by Tuesday morning, city leader Carrie Lam said, leaving an estimated 100 still inside. They milled about in small groups. They still had boxes of homemade gasoline bombs, but the mood was grim in the trash-strewn plazas, in contrast to the excitement as they prepared to take on police just a few days earlier.

One protester said he had no plan and was waiting for someone to come to help. Another said he wants to leave safely but without being charged. They would not give their full names out of fear of arrest.

"We will use whatever means to continue to persuade and arrange for these remaining protesters to leave the campus as soon as possible so that this whole operation could end in a peaceful manner," Lam told reporters after a weekly meeting with advisers.

Even as the latest bout of violence winds down, a fundamental divide suggests the protests are far from over.

City leaders say the violence must stop before meaningful dialogue can begin. The protesters say they need to keep escalating the violence to get the government to accept their demands.

The protests took off in June over a proposed extradition bill that would have allowed suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial. Activists saw the legislation as part of a continuing erosion of rights and freedoms that Hong Kong was promised it could keep when Britain returned its former colony to China in 1997.

Lam withdrew the bill after a few months, but protesters now want an independent investigation into police suppression of the demonstrations and fully democratic elections, among other demands.

About 200 of the 600 people who left Polytechnic were under 18 years old. The city agreed not to arrest them immediately, but Lam said they could face charges later.

Family members and teachers arrived sporadically Tuesday to pick up a few remaining protesters under 18, hugging their children before walking back to a police checkpoint where officers recorded names and other information before letting them go.

An ambulance team was allowed in to treat injured protesters, wrapping them in emergency blankets to keep them warm. Some left with the team, but others stayed, saying they didn't want to be arrested.

Other parents, holding a news conference, said their children dare not surrender because the government has labeled them as rioters even though some had just gotten trapped by the police siege.

They wore masks and refused to give their names, a sign of the fear that has developed in what has become a highly polarized city.

China hinted it might overrule the Hong Kong high court ruling that struck down a ban on face masks that was aimed at preventing protesters from hiding their identity and evading arrest.

A statement from the National People's Congress' Legislative Affairs Commission said the decision doesn't conform with the territory's constitution, known as the Basic Law, or decisions by the Congress.

"We are currently studying opinions and suggestions raised by some NPC deputies," the statement said. The announcement threatens to undercut Hong Kong's rule of law and independent courts — major selling points for its role as an Asian financial center.

Monday's ruling said the ban infringes on fundamental rights more than is reasonably necessary. The ban has been widely disregarded.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 20 of 62

The Japanese government said one of its citizens had been arrested near the Polytechnic campus. Japanese media identified him as Hikaru Ida, a student at Tokyo University of Agriculture. Officials did not say why he was arrested.

More than 1,100 people were arrested in the past day for offenses including rioting and possession of offensive weapons, police said at a daily press briefing. They found more than 3,900 gasoline bombs at another university campus that was the site last week of a violent standoff. Some 235 people were treated on Tuesday for protest-related injuries, according to hospital authority figures.

Hong Kong also got a new police chief, Chris Tang, who said his priorities would include rebutting accusations against police that he called "fake news" and reassuring the public about the force's mission.

"We have to maintain the law and order in Hong Kong and there is a massive scale of breaking of law in Hong Kong and there is a certain sector of the community that also condones those illegal activities," he told journalists.

Tang replaces a retiring chief and was approved by Beijing after being nominated by Lam's government.

Lam, asked whether she would seek help from Chinese troops based in Hong Kong, said her government remains confident it is able to cope with the situation.

Associated Press journalists Alice Fung and Dake Kang contributed to this report.

White House officials to kick off big Trump impeachment week

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two top national security aides who listened to President Donald Trump's July call with Ukraine's president are preparing to testify Tuesday at House impeachment hearings as the inquiry reaches deeper into the White House.

Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, an Army officer at the National Security Council, and Jennifer Williams, his counterpart at Vice President Mike Pence's office, say they had concerns as Trump spoke on July 25 with the newly elected Ukraine president about political investigations into Joe Biden.

After they appear Tuesday morning, the House will hear in the afternoon from former NSC official Timothy Morrison and Kurt Volker, the former Ukraine special envoy.

In all, nine current and former U.S. officials are testifying as the House's impeachment inquiry accelerates. Democrats say Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate his Democratic rivals as he withheld U.S. military aid Ukraine needed to resist Russian aggression may be grounds for removing the 45th president.

Trump says he did no such thing and the Democrats just want him gone.

Vindman and the other witnesses have testified in earlier, closed-door sessions. Their depositions have been publicly released, and they'll face direction questions from lawmakers on Tuesday.

"I did not think it was proper to demand that a foreign government investigate a U.S. citizen," said Vindman, a decorated Iraq War veteran. He said there was "no doubt" what Trump wanted from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

It wasn't the first time Vindman, a 20-year military officer, was alarmed over the administration's push to have Ukraine investigate Democrats, he testified.

Earlier, during an unsettling July 10 meeting at the White House, Ambassador Gordon Sondland told visiting Ukraine officials that they would need to "deliver" before next steps, which was a meeting Zelenskiy wanted with Trump, the officer testified.

"He was talking about the 2016 elections and an investigation into the Bidens and Burisma," Vindman testified, referring to the gas company in Ukraine where Hunter Biden served on the board.

"The Ukrainians would have to deliver an investigation into the Bidens," he said. "There was no ambiguity."

On both occasions, Vindman said, he took his concerns about the shifting Ukraine policy to the lead counsel at the NSC, John Eisenberg.

Williams, a longtime State Department official who is detailed to Pence's national security team, said she

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 21 of 62

too had concerns during the phone call, which the aides monitored as is standard practice.

When the White House produced a rough transcript later that day, she put it in the vice president's briefing materials. "I just don't know if he read it," Williams testified in a closed-door House interview.

Pence's role throughout the impeachment inquiry has been unclear, and the vice president's aide is sure to be questioned by lawmakers looking for answers.

Trump has already attacked Williams, associating her with "Never Trumpers," even though there is no indication the career State Department official has shown any partisanship.

The president wants to see a robust defense by his GOP allies on Capitol Hill, but so far so far Republicans have offered a changing strategy as the fast-moving probe spills into public view. They're expected to mount a more aggressive attack on the witnesses as they try to protect Trump.

In particular, Republicans are expected to try to undercut Vindman, suggesting he reported his concerns outside his chain of command, which would have been Morrison, not the NSC lawyer.

Under earlier questioning, Republicans wanted Vindman to disclose who else he may have spoken to about his concerns, as the GOP inch closer to publicly naming the still anonymous whistleblower whose report sparked the inquiry.

GOP Sen. Ron Johnson, who was deeply involved in other White House meetings about Ukraine, offered a sneak preview of this strategy late Monday when he compared Vindman, a Purple Heart veteran, to the "bureaucrats" who "never accepted Trump as legitimate."

"They react by leaking to the press and participating in the ongoing effort to sabotage his policies and, if possible, remove him from office." It is entirely possible that Vindman fits this profile, said Johnson, R-Wis.

The White House has instructed officials not to appear, and most have received congressional subpoenas to compel their testimony.

The witnesses are testifying under penalty of perjury, and Sondland already has had to amend his earlier account amid contradicting testimony from other current and former U.S. officials.

Sondland, the wealthy donor whose routine boasting about his proximity to Trump has brought the investigation to the president's doorstep, is set to testify Wednesday. Others have testified that he was part of a shadow diplomatic effort with the president's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, outside of official channels that raised alarms.

Morrison has referred to Burisma as a "bucket of issues" — the Bidens, Democrats, investigations — he had tried to "stay away" from.

Sondland met with a Zelenskiy aide on the sidelines of a Sept. 1 gathering in Warsaw, and Morrison, who was watching the encounter from across the room, testified that the ambassador told him moments later he pushed the Ukrainian for the Burisma investigation as a way for Ukraine to gain access to the military funds.

Volker provided investigators with a package of text messages with Sondland and another diplomat, William Taylor, the charge d'affaires in Ukraine, who grew alarmed at the linkage of the investigations to the aid.

Taylor, who testified publicly last week, called that "crazy."

A wealthy hotelier who donated \$1 million to Trump's inauguration, Sondland is the only person interviewed to date who had direct conversations with the president about the Ukraine situation.

Morrison said Sondland and Trump had spoken about five times between July 15 and Sept. 11 — the weeks that \$391 million in U.S. assistance was withheld from Ukraine before it was released.

Trump has said he barely knows Sondland.

The committee will also hear on Wednesday from Laura Cooper, a deputy assistant secretary of defense, and David Hale, a State Department official. On Thursday, David Holmes, a State Department official in Kyiv, and Fiona Hill, a former top NSC staff member for Europe and Russia, will appear.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Hope Yen in Washington and Bruce Schreiner in Louisville, Kentucky, contributed to this report.

What to watch on Day 3 of public Trump impeachment hearings

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They heard the July 25 phone call for themselves.

And now, Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman and adviser Jennifer Williams are set to tell Americans and the world about its content and their concerns as the lead witnesses in perhaps the most consequential week of the impeachment hearings against President Donald Trump.

They are the first two of nine witnesses called to testify before the House Intelligence Committee this week. The procession includes officials closest to Trump as lawmakers grind through their investigation of the 45th president.

Vindman and Williams were listening with others in the White House Situation Room and heard Trump pressure Ukraine's president to do him the "favor" of investigating Joe Biden and his son, all while the U.S. had placed a hold on aid to Ukraine.

What to watch as the marathon week of hearings opens at 9 a.m. EST Tuesday:

WHO'S UP FIRST

Vindman is a Soviet-era immigrant who came to the U.S. as a toddler and grew up to become a decorated soldier and a White House aide. Now, he is a 20-year Army officer assigned to the National Security Council at the white-hot center of the inquiry.

Vindman, 44, testified last month in closed session that he twice raised concerns about Trump and his European Union ambassador, Gordon Sondland, inappropriately pushing Ukrainian leaders to investigate the former vice president and his son.

"I have a deep appreciation for American values and ideals and the power of freedom. I am a patriot, and it is my sacred duty and honor to advance and defend our country, irrespective of party or politics," Vindman said in written remarks.

He earned the Purple Heart after being wounded in Iraq in 2004 leading infantrymen.

In October, Vindman attended his closed-door testimony wearing his Army service uniform, with a chest full of military ribbons and other commendations. The visual underscored Trump's conflict with the military and national security establishment.

Republicans are expressing concern about Vindman's "judgment" in handling his concern about the call.

JENNIFER WILLIAMS, WHOEVER THAT IS

Trump and the world are about to find out. Williams is Vice President Mike Pence's special adviser for Europe and Russia, on detail from the State Department.

On July 25, she was in the Situation Room taking notes as Trump spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy about potential 2020 rival Joe Biden's son Hunter, who sat on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

"It was President Trump who raised Burisma," Williams testified on Nov. 7. Later, she says that "I believed those references to be more political in nature and so that struck me as unusual."

The word Burisma does not appear in the rough transcript of the call released by the White House.

"Tell Jennifer Williams, whoever that is, to read BOTH transcripts of the presidential calls," Trump tweeted in part over the weekend. He called her a "Never Trumper."

ZELENSKIY FELT PRESSURED BEFORE THE CALL

The president and his allies have pointed to Zelenskyy's statement during a September press conference, shoulder-to-shoulder with Trump, in which the Ukrainian president said he didn't feel any pressure in the July 25 call.

But even before that call, Zelenskyy had reported feeling pressure from the Trump administration to investigate Biden, The Associated Press reported.

Zelenskyy was concerned Trump and associates were pressing him to take action that could affect the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 23 of 62

2020 election, two individuals said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the diplomatic and political sensitivity of the issue.

State Department officials in Kyiv and Washington were briefed on Zelenskiy's concerns at least three times, the two individuals said, and notes summarizing his worries were circulated within the department.

DOES TRUMP WEIGH IN?

He did last week, castigating the ambassador he fired, Marie Yovanovitch, on Twitter and giving weight to her account of being bullied out of her job by members of the administration.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi several times over the past few days has suggested that if Trump wants to testify — she mockingly explained the word “exculpatory” — he’s welcome to do so in person or in writing.

He hasn’t said he will do so. But Trump did tweet: “Even though I did nothing wrong, and don’t like giving credibility to this No Due Process Hoax, I like the idea & will, in order to get Congress focused again, strongly consider it!”

WHITE HOUSE VIEW

The administration is confident about the testimony of all the impeachment witnesses this week except for that of EU Ambassador Gordon Sondland on Wednesday, according to two White House officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal thinking.

Like all the witnesses, Sondland will testify under oath and penalty of perjury. Sondland already has had to amend his earlier account after contradicting testimony from others.

The White House is happy with the role of Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, as the committee’s Republican bulldog questioner. But privately these officials pointed to concerns in the White House about the performance of GOP counsel Steve Castor.

REPUBLICAN UNITY

The president’s allies have mostly stayed together so far during the hearings, but they are hopping between strategies for pushing back.

One argument against the inquiry is that witnesses, including the whistleblower and charge d’affaires William Taylor last week, are reporting the goings-on second- or third-hand. Look for whether they abandon that argument when Vindman and Williams testify.

Republicans now say the president is innocent because the military money was eventually released. In fact, it was released Sept. 11 after Congress began looking into the holdup.

LATER IN THE DAY

Testifying in a second session Tuesday are Kurt Volker, the former special envoy to Ukraine, and Tim Morrison, a former National Security Council aide who oversaw Europe and Russia Policy.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

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

Georgia at ‘turning point’? Debate signals Democratic hopes

By **BILL BARROW** Associated Press

PEACHTREE CORNERS, Ga. (AP) — Beth Moore would typically fit the mold of a Georgia Republican. She attended private school in the affluent, mostly white northern Atlanta suburbs, attended the University of Georgia, practices law and married a Republican.

But the 37-year-old is part of a class of 17 Democratic House freshmen in the state legislature, elected last year in an urban and suburban surge that nearly put Stacey Abrams in the governor’s mansion. Despite Abrams’ defeat, Moore believes that other Democratic victories, including hers, represent a “new

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 24 of 62

Georgia" that will be on display as 10 Democratic presidential candidates descend on the state this week for the Wednesday debate at actor Tyler Perry's Atlanta film complex.

"Georgia is at a turning point," Moore said. "We have enjoyed a lot of economic success over the years that has kept native-born Georgians here and has attracted new Georgians from all over the country and all over the world. Those years of success have led to a new voting bloc in the South that is hungry for change."

Indeed, growth and urbanization over recent decades has made Georgia's population younger, less native to the state and less white. That, combined with President Donald Trump's struggles among previously GOP-leaning white college graduates, has put Georgia on the cusp of presidential battleground status.

The question is how close.

"The road to the White House runs through Georgia," Democratic state Chairwoman Nikema Williams said matter-of-factly.

Republicans counter with skepticism, even as they acknowledge demographic trends.

"Only in the event of a landslide nationally does Donald Trump lose Georgia," said GOP pollster Whit Ayres, pointing to Trump's 5 percentage point win in Georgia in 2016. Arizona, Ayres said, is the likelier Sun Belt state to flip to Democrats, while Texas and Georgia are a tier below, still a few election cycles away from tilting.

The 2020 elections offer plenty of opportunities for the two sides to prove their case.

Besides the presidency, two U.S. Senate seats are on the ballot. Republican David Perdue, a staunch Trump ally, faces reelection for the first time. A special election will decide a successor to retiring Republican Johnny Isakson.

GOP Gov. Brian Kemp, who defeated Abrams, will appoint a successor to Isakson later this year. That pick is expected to run for the seat.

In the shifting Atlanta suburbs, Democrat Lucy McBath will seek a second term in a congressional district once represented by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, while the neighboring district will have a competitive fight to replace Republican Rob Woodall, who announced his retirement not long after surviving the 2018 midterms by fewer than 1,000 votes.

At the state level, the entire legislature will be on the ballot, with Democrats targeting 16 more Republican House districts with hopes of winning a majority — a result that would allow Democrats a stronger hand in redrawing congressional and legislative boundaries after the 2020 census.

Ryan Mahoney, a top outside adviser to Kemp, warned Democrats to be wary. He pointed to the same strong economy that Moore cited when she explained the metropolitan boom. Trump rubs some typically Republican suburbanites the wrong way, Mahoney said, but that's harder for Democrats to exploit with unemployment under 4%.

"The reality is a majority of Georgians are happy with a thriving economy and the overall direction of the state," Mahoney said.

He noted Kemp's rising poll numbers and a tenure with plenty to satisfy his conservative base. Kemp signed a restrictive abortion bill that incensed Democrats and elevated several freshman lawmakers like Moore. She referenced that law when framing Republicans as "a party that no longer represents the values" of districts like hers.

Kemp still declines to expand Medicaid insurance under Democrats' 2010 health care overhaul, instead offering a pending state-based plan he says will expand coverage.

But the governor has found some common ground with Democrats.

Moore and many of her fellow Democrats voted for a Kemp-GOP budget that included a teacher pay raise, and Democrats, sometimes begrudgingly, credit Kemp with filling state boards and judicial posts with a diverse slate.

As with any competitive electorate, Georgia's direction will turn on a combination of variables within an electorate that now exceeds 7 million registered voters.

In the governor's race, Abrams ran up a record midterm turnout among nonwhite voters, especially

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 25 of 62

among those who hadn't regularly voted. It was enough to exceed Hillary Clinton's 2016 vote total by about 46,000 votes. But it was still 55,000 short of Kemp's numbers and, looking ahead to 2020, about 166,000 short of Trump's haul of nearly 2.1 million.

And despite her gains in metro areas, Abrams lost considerable ground in Georgia's rural counties, with Kemp hitting 80% or higher in several counties that hadn't even given Trump such lopsided margins.

There's plenty of debate about whether Democrats' presidential fortunes depend on who they nominate.

Mahoney argued that Democrats abandon any shot if they nominate a progressive like Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders. Williams said it's more about doing the work to assemble a diverse coalition, regardless of ideology. And there's certainly a wild card if Abrams ends up as the nominee's running mate, a prospect she has said she's open to.

Democrats see a path to victory in new voter registrations — more than 300,000 since the 2018 election, thanks to the state's automatic registration law when residents apply for driver's licenses. Most of the new registrants are in urban counties where Abrams outpaced Kemp and Clinton led Trump.

Further, Democrats and advocacy groups are asking courts to order changes to some Georgia election procedures and block the Republican secretary of state from stripping thousands of "inactive" voters from the rolls.

Beyond the suburban swings, those irregular voters could hold keys for both parties.

Mahoney argued that Trump and Republicans have left plenty of votes on the table. "There's a wide swath out there that comes out only in elections with Donald Trump on the ticket," he said.

Moore, meanwhile, said she's looking for at least one more Democratic vote at home: her Republican husband. "He's not happy with them," she said, describing him as another suburban Republican disenchanted with Trump. "He's looking for an option."

Follow Bill Barrow on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BillBarrowAP>

Catch up on the 2020 election campaign with AP experts on our weekly politics podcast, "Ground Game."

Protesters force postponement of Lebanese parliament session

By HASSAN AMMAR and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Thousands of protesters rallying against the Lebanese political elite blocked roads in central Beirut on Tuesday, preventing lawmakers from reaching the parliament and forcing the postponement of a legislative session.

The session had been scheduled even though the country is still without a Cabinet following the prime minister's resignation amid unprecedented demonstrations that have gripped Lebanon since mid-October.

The protesters scuffled with riot police as they closed all roads leading to the parliament building in Beirut.

When one legislator headed toward the building and could not reach it and turned back, his bodyguards opened fire in the air to clear the way. No one was hurt in the shooting.

The protesters are questioning the constitutionality of a parliament session in the absence of a government. An earlier session last Tuesday was postponed amid the protests.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned his government on Oct. 29 in response to the protests, which erupted over proposed new taxes but have since snowballed into calls for the government to resign and for the entire political elite that has ruled Lebanon since the end of its 1975-90 civil war to step aside.

The political deadlock comes as Lebanon is passing through its worst economic and financial crisis in decades. The country, which suffers from widespread corruption, has one of the highest debts in the world, standing at \$86 billion, or 150 of the GDP.

Meanwhile, Lebanese banks reopened to customers on Tuesday after a week-long strike during which bank employees refused to come to work, fearing for their security amid random capital controls that have angered clients.

On Monday, the Banks Association declared formal controls, limiting withdrawals to \$1,000 per week,

and allowing transfers abroad only for "urgent matters."

However, most banks on Tuesday were allowing depositors to withdraw only \$500 from U.S. dollar accounts.

Heavy police and army reinforcements were deployed in downtown Beirut since late Monday to cordon off the area around the parliament.

Thousands of young protesters thronged around the parliament building, blocking the entrances and vowing to disrupt the session. Some protesters tried to break through the barbed wire, scuffling with riot police, while women protesters tried to form a live barrier between the two sides.

"We are here today because there is a parliament session that is anti-constitutional," said protester Rania al-Akhras, speaking in English and decrying the ineffectiveness of the legislators. "What they need to be doing is selecting a prime minister and a government."

Later Tuesday, the parliament's secretary-general, Adnan Daher, read a statement saying that the session has been postponed "until a new date is set." He added that current parliamentary committees will continue their work as there was no session on Tuesday to elect new committees.

President Michel Aoun has not set a date for consultations to select a new prime minister and there are deep divisions between the country's political powers over the shape of the future Cabinet.

Taliban say they freed US, Australian hostage for 3 Taliban

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The Taliban said they freed on Tuesday an American and an Australian hostage held since 2016 in exchange for three top Taliban figures who were released by the Kabul government and flown out of Afghanistan the previous day.

The hostages — American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks — were released in southern Zabul province, ending their more than three years in captivity.

According to a Taliban official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media, the release took place in the province's Naw Bahar district, a region largely under Taliban control.

The two hostages, both professors at the American University of Kabul, were handed over to U.S. forces and transported from the area in a U.S. helicopter.

Their freedom came hours after the Afghan government freed three Taliban prisoners and sent them to Qatar. They included Anas Haqqani, the younger brother of the Taliban's deputy Sirajuddin Haqqani, who also leads the fearsome Haqqani network.

It appears the Taliban had refused to hand over the two professors until they received proof their men had reached Qatar.

The American University of Afghanistan confirmed the release of the two professors, saying in a statement that its "community shares the relief of the families of Kevin and Timothy, and we look forward to providing all the support we can to Kevin and Tim and their families."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan also welcomed the release of the two professors, saying he appreciates "steps taken by all involved to make it possible." Pakistan wields some influence over the Taliban and has played a behind-the-scenes role in trying to restart peace talks.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani a week ago announced the "conditional release" of the three ranking Taliban figures, saying at a press event broadcast live on state television that it was a very hard decision he felt he had to make in the interest of the Afghan people.

King and Weeks, the two captives held by the Taliban were abducted in 2016 outside the American University in Kabul. The following year, the Taliban released two videos showing the captives. A January 2017 video showed them appearing pale and gaunt. In the later video, King and Weeks looked healthier and said a deadline for their release was set for June 16 that year.

Both said they are being treated well by the Taliban but that they remain prisoners and appealed to their governments to help set them free. It was impossible to know whether they were forced to speak.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 27 of 62

Subsequently, U.S. officials said that American forces had launched a rescue mission to free the two, but the captives were not found at the raided location.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien made separate calls to Ghani on Monday to discuss the prisoners' release, Ghani's spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said.

The release and swap were intended to try to restart talks to end Afghanistan's 18-year war and allow for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

The United States had been close to an agreement in September with the Taliban but a fresh wave of violence in the Afghan capital that killed a U.S. soldier brought talks and an impending deal to a grinding halt.

The agreement called for direct talks between the Taliban and Afghan government as well as other prominent Afghans to find a negotiated end to the war and set out a roadmap for what a post-war Afghanistan would look like.

Ghani in his discussions with Pompeo and O'Brien said he wanted a reduction in violence and an all-out cease-fire, his spokesman said.

According to a U.S. State Department statement Tuesday, Pompeo told Ghani the United States was "committed to work closely together to address violence if the President's decision does not produce the intended results."

Southern Zabul province, where the two professors were freed, is heavily controlled by the Taliban and vast parts of it have long been a no-go area for the government.

But according to the Taliban, an unofficial cease-fire is now being observed in three districts of the province — Shahjoy, Shahmatzo and Naw Bahar — possibly to facilitate the release of the two hostages.

Associated Press writers Abdul Khaliq in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan, and Tameem Akhgar in Kabul, Afghanistan, contributed to this report.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

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

1. WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS KICK OFF CRITICAL IMPEACHMENT WEEK

Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman and Jennifer Williams both say they had concerns as they heard President Trump speak with the newly elected Ukraine president on July 25 about political investigations into Joe Biden.

2. TALIBAN SAYS HOSTAGES FREED IN EXCHANGE

American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks, held since 2016, were let go for three top Taliban figures who were released by the Kabul government.

3. LAST HOLDOUTS SURROUNDED AT HONG KONG UNIVERSITY

About 100 anti-government protesters remain holed up at Polytechnic University, unsure what to do next as food supplies dwindle and a police siege of the campus enters its third day.

4. WHAT STATE IS EMERGING AS NEW BATTLEGROUND

As Democrats prepare for the next presidential debate in Atlanta, growth and urbanization over recent decades has made the state population younger, less native to the state and less white.

5. WHAT BALKAN NATION IS HELPING IN CYBER WARFARE FIGHT

An elite cyber team of U.S. service members is working alongside Montenegrin cyber defenders to counter malicious cyber actors on critical networks and platforms as part of preparation for possible such attacks during the U.S. presidential election in 2020.

6. HOSPITAL OVERHAULING PSYCHIATRIC WARDS

Some mental health advocates and officials say the changes have come at the expense of patient privacy and dignity, making mental health units feel more like prisons.

7. ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT ITSELF ENDANGERED

Signed into law by Richard Nixon, the act is controversial again, as the Trump administration presses changes that advocates say will mean less protection for more species, AP finds.

8. 'OUR COMMUNITY IS IN MOURNING'

A close-knit Hmong community is in shock after gunmen burst into a California backyard gathering and shot 10 men, killing four.

9. WHERE SCIENTISTS ARE SEEING SEA ICE MELT

Researchers from the University of Washington say climate change is taking a toll off Alaska's northwest coast.

10. CHIEFS HOLD OFF CHARGERS IN MEXICO CITY

Daniel Sorensen picks off Philip Rivers' fourth interception at the goal line with 18 seconds to play, and Kansas City stays on top of the AFC West with a 24-17 victory over Los Angeles.

Deadly attack leaves California Hmong community in shock

By **TERENCE CHEA** and **OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ** Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — A close-knit Hmong community was in shock after gunmen burst into a California backyard gathering and shot 10 men, killing four.

"We are right now just trying to figure out what to do, what are the next steps. How do we heal, how do we know what's going on," said Bobby Bliatout, a community leader.

Sunday evening's attack killed Xy Lee, a Hmong singer and musician whose videos on YouTube have been viewed millions of times.

Also killed were Phia Vang, 31; Kou Xiong, 38; and Kalaxang Thao, 40, all of Fresno, according to the coroner's office. Three others remained hospitalized in serious condition, Community Regional Medical Center said in a statement.

No motive or suspects were identified by police.

"Our community is in mourning, and we still don't know what's going on, or who are the suspects," said Pao Yang, CEO of the Fresno Center, a Hmong community group.

The Hmong are an ethnic group from Southeast Asia. Many fled after fighting alongside the United States during the Vietnam War.

There are about 300,000 Hmong living in the U.S., according to the 2017 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census. California has the nation's largest Hmong population and about 25,000 live in Fresno, comprising about 5% of the city's population of 525,000.

The gunmen targeted a house where about 16 men had gathered outside to watch football on television, police said.

At least two men armed with semi-automatic handguns walked through a side gate and without a word began firing randomly into the crowd before fleeing in the darkness, Police Chief Andrew Hall said.

The shooters did not speak, and no one reported getting a good look at them. Witnesses saw only flashes when the pistols were fired, Hall said.

Police were investigating whether the shooting was connected to a recent "disturbance" involving some of the people at the party, Hall said. He did not describe the incident other than to say it occurred within the last week.

Women and children inside the house weren't hit, Hall said.

The chief said at least 60 officers were investigating along with the FBI, Homeland Security and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

"We're coming for you," the chief said of the attackers.

While police hadn't found any gang connections to the victims, Hall also announced the establishment of an Asian gang task force because of concerns about the possibility of retaliation or more violence ahead of the Hmong New Year, which is celebrated the week after Christmas and draws thousands to Fresno.

There have been 11 violent incidents related to Asian gangs in the city this year, three of them in November, police said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 29 of 62

An Asian-American man was shot to death at a home earlier Sunday but police had not linked that killing to the party attack, Hall said.

The mass shooting in a quiet, working-class neighborhood erupted in the midst of a low-key family event, Hall said.

"This is truly a good group of people who were simply having a party," the chief said.

"It's very devastating, very," said Paula Yang, a friend of the homeowner, whose brother, Kou Xiong, died in the attack. "We don't know what to say to people, but we hope that the legal system will find justice."

She said the shooting has many in the community fearful.

"Even right now, families are gathering inside saying, what can we do to protect our home from this day forward?"

It was the third mass shooting in four days in California.

Last Thursday, a 16-year-old boy armed with a handgun killed two students and wounded three others at his high school in the Los Angeles suburb of Santa Clarita before killing himself.

On Saturday, a San Diego man in the midst of a divorce shot and killed his wife and three of their sons before killing himself. A fourth son was on life-support.

There have been eight mass killings in California so far this year, claiming the lives of 33 people, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University. That's a dramatic increase from previous years, with eight mass killings in the state for all of 2016-2018.

The increase mirrors the national trend in 2019. There have been 39 mass killings this year in the United States, compared with 25 in 2018, according to the database, which tracks homicides where four or more people are killed, not including the offender.

Rodriguez reported from San Francisco. Associated Press writer Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles and news researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York also contributed to this report.

US, Montenegro plot cyber warfare ahead of 2020 elections

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

PODGORICA, Montenegro (AP) — Deployed inside the sprawling communist-era army command headquarters in Montenegro's capital, an elite team of U.S. military cyber experts are plotting strategy in a fight against potential Russian and other cyberattacks ahead of the 2020 American and Montenegrin elections.

With its pristine rocky mountains, lush green forests and deep blue seas, the tiny Balkan state seems an unlikely location for waging global cyber warfare. But after the newest NATO nation was targeted by Russia-linked hackers and following a Moscow-backed coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016, the U.S. military dispatched their cyber experts to the Adriatic Sea nation.

Montenegro is in the Balkans, a strategic area where Russia has been seeking to restore its historic influence. The country of just over 600,000 people joined NATO in 2017, defying strong opposition from Moscow. It has proven to be a key Western ally in the volatile region that went through a devastating war in the 1990s.

Montenegrin Defense Minister Predrag Boskovic — careful not to mention Russia — said preventing cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns is key to protecting the Balkans from returning to the chaos of the war years in the 1990s, when tens of thousands of people died during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

"We have seen that the (2016) U.S. election had also faced certain hybrid and cyberattacks," Boskovic said in an interview. U.S. authorities accuse Russia of using hacking and social media campaigns to boost Donald Trump's presidential candidacy and sow discord among American voters.

"Americans can learn something from us about potential threats for their systems and networks because Montenegro was a real example of an all-out attack before the (2016) election and its NATO accession," Boskovic said.

One of the malicious software attacks targeted the Montenegrin Defense Ministry with a routine-looking

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 30 of 62

email. It appeared to be from a NATO-member country, but in fact came from hackers.

"Once an employee clicked on the attachment in the email, all of the computers in the network were compromised and they (the hackers) could read all the data that was communicated within the network," Boskovic said.

Russia's tactics in undermining the Balkan's Euro-Atlantic integration includes anti-Western propaganda designed to tarnish the image of European democracies. This, the Kremlin apparently hopes, will slow down the region's integration into the 28-nation European Union.

Russia's allies in the Balkans — Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs — have both ruled out joining NATO and boycotted the Western sanctions against Moscow over its policies in Ukraine. Pro-Russian propaganda in those areas depicts the West as the enemy of the Serbs.

Russian activity in the region risks exacerbating ethnic tensions and instability, but the U.S. response has been inconsistent. Trump, a frequent NATO critic, once questioned whether U.S. troops should defend Montenegro as part of the Western military alliance.

But, in a statement, the U.S. cyber command, or USCYBERCOM, has highlighted the partnership with Montenegro.

"The team's operations are part of efforts to persistently engage adversaries in cyberspace, working to protect critical infrastructure alongside valued partners and allies," the statement said. "These defense operations also generate insights into adversarial cyber threats to the upcoming U.S. and Montenegrin elections in 2020."

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said during a recent visit to Montenegro that as the result of the cooperation, the two countries have developed ways to counter the latest Russian malware.

This is the second time that cyber command has worked with Montenegro. It has also worked with North Macedonia, which will soon join NATO.

Russia has been accused of meddling in election campaigns worldwide, most recently in Britain. Moscow has repeatedly denied doing so.

In May, a court in Montenegro found 14 people, including two Russian military intelligence operatives, guilty of plotting a coup on election day in 2016 to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO. The two Russians, who allegedly coordinated the botched effort from neighboring Serbia, were tried in absentia and are believed to be in Russia. Moscow has denied involvement.

Montenegro and its allies have expressed fears that Moscow could try to meddle again in next year's elections.

But one of the convicted coup plotters and a leader of the pro-Russian opposition Democratic Front coalition insisted the incident was staged to help the long-ruling Montenegrin leader, Milo Djukanovic, stay in power.

Milan Knezevic, who remains free pending appeals on his 5-year prison sentence, said he now sees the talk about looming hybrid attacks from Russia "as a preparation of the (Montenegrin) regime for the 2020 elections."

"They need a new mantra and a new narrative in order to allegedly protect the Montenegrin state from the 'malign' Russian influence," he said at his party office, which was decorated with his photos with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I wouldn't rule out some kind of hybrid attacks on the election day," he added sarcastically.

AP Writers Jovana Gec and Predrag Milic contributed.

5 things to know about Pope Francis' visit to Thailand

BANGKOK (AP) — Pope Francis arrives in Thailand on Wednesday for the first visit here by the head of the Roman Catholic Church since St. John Paul II in 1984. Some things to know about the visit and the history of the church in Thailand:

IT'S A MORALE BOOSTER

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 31 of 62

Francis is certain to address some of the major social concerns he often highlights, but his visit is largely a morale-boosting exercise for the Catholic community. His video message ahead of his trip says he will meet Thai Catholics "to encourage them in their faith and in the contribution they make to the whole of society. They are Thais and must work for their homeland." He also said he wants to highlight the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in the service of the poor and peace.

CATHOLICISM HAS HISTORY IN THAILAND

Portuguese-sponsored Dominican missionaries came to Thailand — then called Siam — in 1567, and the church established a formal evangelizing mission in 1669 under the French-led Missions Étrangères de Paris, which would be the main Catholic presence in Southeast Asia for centuries. Catholicism was affected by Thailand's internal power struggles and colonialism in the region, particularly in World War II, when a nationalistic government sought to convert all Thais to Buddhists. Harmonious relations have been the rule since late King Bhumibol Adulyadej took the throne in 1946.

CATHOLICS TODAY

The predominantly Buddhist country has about 388,000 Catholics, 0.58% of its 69 million people. Essentially there are two Catholic communities in Thailand: urbanized residents of the capital whose children attend prestigious private schools and colleges run by the church, and less affluent members of ethnic minorities in the northeast and north. Many of the rural Catholic communities include descendants of refugees who fled persecution in Vietnam.

THE POPE'S FOCUS

Francis often tailors his messages to the venues where he speaks. He will speak publicly at two Masses, one of them at a stadium before a projected crowd of 50,000 where he will talk about human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children, both of which are longstanding issues in the region. Refugees are another relevant concern he may tackle.

The Rev. Bernardo Cervellera, editor-in-chief of the evangelical news service Asia News, said the pope may also express concerns about materialism, one of his frequent topics, and discuss with his Buddhist counterparts the related issue of secularization.

HIS MEETINGS

Francis will meet King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who was crown prince when he greeted St. John Paul II on the only previous papal visit to Thailand in 1984. He will also meet Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and the head of Thailand's Buddhist community, Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Maha Muneewong Ariyavongsagatayana.

His private meetings include an audience with 40 sick and disabled people at Bangkok's St. Louis Hospital, as well as a meeting with Jesuits working in Thailand. Pope Francis is the first pope from the Jesuit order and makes a point of such meetings during his travels.

US angers Palestinians with reversal on Israeli settlements

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration on Monday said it no longer considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be a violation of international law, reversing four decades of American policy and further undermining the Palestinians' effort to gain statehood.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the U.S. is repudiating the 1978 State Department legal opinion that held that civilian settlements in the occupied territories are "inconsistent with international law." Israeli leaders welcomed the decision while Palestinians and other nations warned that it undercut any chance of a broader peace deal.

Pompeo told reporters at the State Department that the Trump administration believes any legal questions about settlements should be resolved by Israeli courts and that declaring them a violation of international law distracts from larger efforts to negotiate a peace deal.

"Calling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law has not advanced the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 32 of 62

cause of peace," Pompeo said. "The hard truth is that there will never be a judicial resolution to the conflict, and arguments about who is right and who is wrong as a matter of international law will not bring peace."

The change reflects the administration's embrace of a hard-line Israeli view at the expense of the Palestinian quest for statehood. Similar actions have included President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the movement of the U.S. Embassy to that city and the closure of the Palestinian diplomatic office in Washington.

"The U.S. administration has lost its credibility to play any future role in the peace process," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The European Union warned of the potential repercussions in a statement following the announcement that did not mention the U.S.

"All settlement activity is illegal under international law and it erodes the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace," said the statement from the 28-nation bloc. "The EU calls on Israel to end all settlement activity, in line with its obligations as an occupying power."

Even though the decision is largely symbolic, it could give a boost to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is fighting for his political survival after failing to form a coalition government following recent elections.

It could also spell further trouble for the administration's peace plan, which is unlikely to gather much international support by endorsing a position contrary to the global consensus.

The Netanyahu government was dealt a blow on settlements just last week when the European Court of Justice ruled products made in Israeli settlements must be labeled as such.

The 1978 legal opinion on settlements is known as the Hansell Memorandum. It had been the basis for more than 40 years of carefully worded U.S. opposition to settlement construction that had varied in its tone and strength, depending on the president's position.

The international community overwhelmingly considers the settlements illegal based in part on the Fourth Geneva Convention, which bars an occupying power from transferring parts of its own civilian population to occupied territory.

In the final days of the Obama administration, the U.S. allowed the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution declaring the settlements a "flagrant violation" of international law.

Pompeo said that the U.S. would not take a position on the legality of specific settlements, that the new policy would not extend beyond the West Bank and that it would not create a precedent for other territorial disputes.

He also said the decision did not mean the administration was prejudging the status of the West Bank in any eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

For Netanyahu, the welcome boost comes at a time when he has been weakened domestically by mounting legal woes and two inconclusive elections this year.

Unable to secure a parliamentary majority, Netanyahu is now anxiously waiting to see if his chief rival, Benny Gantz, can put together a coalition. If Gantz fails, the country could be forced into a third election, with Netanyahu facing the distraction of a trial.

Netanyahu's office released a statement saying the policy shift "rights a historical wrong" concerning settlements.

"This policy reflects an historical truth - that the Jewish people are not foreign colonialists in Judea and Samaria," it said, using the Israeli terms for the West Bank.

Gantz, meanwhile, applauded Pompeo's "important statement, once again demonstrating its firm stance with Israel and its commitment to the security and future of the entire Middle East."

Pompeo dismissed suggestions that the decision would further isolate the U.S. or Israel in the international community, though Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi wrote on Twitter that the settlements hurt peace prospects. "We warn of the seriousness of the change in the U.S. position towards the settlements and its repercussions on all efforts to achieve peace," he said.

Shortly after Pompeo's announcement, the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem issued an advisory warning for Americans planning to travel in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, saying, "Individuals and groups op-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 33 of 62

posed to (Pompeo's) announcement may target U.S. government facilities, U.S. private interests, and U.S. citizens." It called on them "to maintain a high level of vigilance and take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness in light of the current environment."

Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war and quickly began settling the newly conquered territory.

Today, some 700,000 Israeli settlers live in the two areas, which are both claimed by the Palestinians for their state.

After the war, it immediately annexed east Jerusalem, home to the holy city's most important religious sites, in a move that is not internationally recognized.

But Israel has never annexed the West Bank, even as it has dotted the territory with scores of settlements and tiny settlement outposts.

While claiming the fate of the settlements is a subject for negotiations, it has steadily expanded them. Some major settlements have over 30,000 residents, resembling small cities and serving as suburbs of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

The Palestinians and most of the world say the settlements undermine hopes for a two-state solution by gobbling up land sought by the Palestinians.

Israel's settlement activities have also drawn attention to its treatment of Palestinians.

While Jewish settlers can freely enter Israel and vote in Israeli elections, West Bank Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law, require permits to enter Israel and do not have the right to vote in Israeli elections.

Associated Press writers Josef Federman and Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Mahomes, Chiefs hold off Chargers 24-17 in Mexico City

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Nearly everything about this Monday night game felt foreign to Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs, from the gasp-inducing altitude of raucous Azteca Stadium to the struggles of their powerhouse offense.

Mahomes loved the experience, but didn't love how his offense played. The Chiefs' defense picked it up time and again, culminating in the final pick that sent them all back home as winners.

"We kept that confidence all game long," Mahomes said. "We knew that someone was going to make a play to win the game."

Daniel Sorensen snared Philip Rivers' fourth interception at the goal line with 18 seconds to play, and the Chiefs stayed on top of the AFC West with a 24-17 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers.

Mahomes passed for 182 yards and hit Travis Kelce for his only touchdown, while LeSean McCoy and Darrel Williams rushed for touchdowns as the Chiefs (7-4) hung on to win the fourth regular-season NFL game played in Mexico despite being held to 310 yards of offense. They also survived a few problems with Azteca's grass field and a one-sided first half favoring the Chargers (4-7), who racked up 312 yards without a touchdown.

After throwing his second interception of the season in the first half, Mahomes led two sharp scoring drives in the third quarter with help from Kelce, who caught seven passes for 92 yards. Mahomes also led the Chiefs with 59 yards rushing while his defense — which had only six interceptions all season coming into Mexico City — held Los Angeles to eight points in the second half.

But the win still wasn't assured until Sorensen grabbed Rivers' underthrown pass to Austin Ekeler at the goal line to secure the Chiefs' 10th win over Los Angeles in 11 meetings.

"I was real proud of our defense for the job that they did," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "Four takeaways, so for the guys that intercepted the football and then helped create the turnovers, I'm proud of those guys."

Rivers passed for 353 yards during his first four-interception game since November 2016 for the Chargers, whose playoff hopes are nearly dead after five losses in seven games. Keenan Allen caught his first TD pass

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 34 of 62

since Week 3 in the third quarter, but the Chargers had three inept drives in the scoreless fourth quarter. On the Bolts' last gasp, Mike Williams made a spectacular 50-yard catch with 44 seconds to play. Los Angeles reached the Kansas City 14 before Rivers' final mistake.

"He went out and he gave it his all," Chargers coach Anthony Lynn said of Rivers. "He made some mistakes, and he understands that. But I thought he did some good things and put us in positions where we did move the ball down the field."

Rivers, who turns 38 next month, has thrown seven interceptions in the Chargers' last two games, giving him 14 this season — more than every quarterback in the NFL except Jameis Winston.

"It's a football game," Rivers said. "If you could just pick and choose and never throw them ever, I would choose to throw zero. But it's hurting us right now. I just need to cut them out."

One year after the NFL called off a game at Azteca Stadium on short notice because of poor field conditions, these teams played an entertaining game in the 7,200-foot elevation and on the Azteca grass, which yielded several significant divots from sharp stops or changes of direction.

The Rams and Chiefs were scheduled to play here last season, but severe damage to the turf field compelled the NFL to relocate the game to Los Angeles on six days' notice.

Azteca removed its hybrid turf and installed natural grass this year, and the field had been untouched since Club América's last home soccer game Nov. 2. The grounds crew came onto the field at halftime and during timeouts in the second half to attend to the worst spots.

The NFL and the stadium still threw an impressive party for 76,252 of Mexico's football-loving fans, who packed the arena and mostly supported the Chargers, the nominal home team.

Although the teams spent less than 48 hours in Mexico's capital city, the NFL has deep roots among fans around the country. Commissioner Roger Goodell met Monday with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador while the league and the federal government are considering extending the Mexico game series beyond its current deal through 2021.

But the Chargers trailed 10-9 at halftime despite outgaining Kansas City 312-109 and making five drives into Chiefs territory. Rivers threw two interceptions and Michael Badgley missed a 40-yard field goal attempt while making three others, wasting a defensive effort that included Rayshawn Jenkins picking off Mahomes.

Tyreek Hill left the field with a right hamstring injury after the Chiefs' second offensive series, although it didn't appear to be caused by the turf. The speedster watched the second half from the sideline.

Tyrann Mathieu's 35-yard interception return set up McCoy's 6-yard TD run for the game's first touchdown in the second quarter. After Williams scored on the Chiefs' opening drive of the second half, Mahomes hit Kelce with a picture-perfect 23-yard TD throw on the next drive.

Rivers and Allen answered with a TD connection late in the third quarter and a 2-point conversion. The two-time Pro Bowl receiver improbably hadn't caught a TD pass since Week 3.

INJURIES

Chiefs: Along with Hill, RB Damien Williams was lost to a rib injury and safety Jordan Lucas went out with a shoulder injury. ... Center Austin Reiter was evaluated for a concussion but returned.

Chargers: LT Russell Okung missed his second straight game with a groin injury. ... Allen went down hard on the final play of a drive in the second quarter but returned.

UP NEXT

Chiefs: A bye week followed by an important visit from the Oakland Raiders on Sunday, Dec. 1.

Chargers: After a bye week, a trip to face the Denver Broncos on Sunday, Dec. 1.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

House Dems set to choose leader of powerful Oversight panel

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As impeachment hearings resume on Capitol Hill, House Democrats are preparing to choose who will lead the powerful Oversight and Reform Committee — a key role in the ongoing impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump.

Three veteran lawmakers, including Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York, the acting chairwoman, are seeking to replace the late Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, who died last month.

Reps. Stephen Lynch of Massachusetts and Gerry Connolly of Virginia also are seeking the post.

The House Democratic Steering Committee will make a recommendation on Tuesday, with the full Democratic caucus set to vote Wednesday.

The committee has a broad portfolio, including oversight of the Trump administration's handling of the census and immigration matters, as well as investigations into Trump's business dealings and security clearances granted to White House officials.

Oversight also is one of three committees that have been leading the impeachment inquiry, although the most visible leader remains House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff of California.

Maloney, who lost out to Cummings as the committee's top Democrat nearly a decade ago, is seen as the front-runner. The panel's longest-serving Democrat, Maloney has led the committee on an acting basis since Cummings' Oct. 17 death and has won endorsements from the next two longest-serving Democrats, Washington, D.C., Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton and Rep. William Lacy Clay of Missouri.

Maloney, 73, is in her 14th term representing a district that includes much of Manhattan, including Trump Tower.

She declined to be interviewed, but said in a statement that she is "focused on discussing the chairmanship directly with my colleagues."

Connolly, 69, in his sixth term representing Northern Virginia, said he has "substantial support" for the chairman's post "and it's growing."

In a letter hand-delivered to House colleagues, Connolly said the Oversight election "is not a business as usual decision. The American people must see the main investigative body of Congress as a force for accountability that upholds our constitutional duty to conduct oversight of the executive. That was the legacy left by Elijah Cummings. That is the work that must continue."

Connolly, an outspoken Trump critic, said in an interview that Democrats "need to put the most capable team on the field we can," adding that he has "a demonstrated ability to lead, a firm commitment" to Oversight and experience as the chairman of the subcommittee on government operations.

Lynch, 64, in his 10th term representing suburban Boston, said he hopes to continue the work begun by Cummings and is "ready and eager to protect and defend the Constitution and the rule of law."

Lynch acknowledged in an interview that he faces an "uphill battle" against Maloney's seniority, but pointed out that he has served on the committee for 18 years and chairs the subcommittee on national security.

Maloney, who has served on Oversight since 1993, is best known for her years of advocacy for victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and famously wore a New York firefighter's jacket at the Capitol and even at the Met Gala until she could secure permanent authorization for a victims' fund. A measure making the 9/11 fund permanent was a rare example of a bipartisan bill signed into law earlier this year.

Maloney also serves on the House Financial Services Committee, reflecting the importance of the financial industry in her district. She was a key sponsor of a corporate transparency bill approved by the House last month. Maloney has agreed to give up her role leading a subcommittee on investor protection and capital markets if elected to head Oversight.

Could Haley's role in Trump administration taint a 2024 bid?

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — With the launch of her new memoir, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley has again ignited speculation that she may be gearing up for a possible bid for the White House, perhaps as early as 2024.

But even though the former South Carolina governor left the Trump administration on her own terms, a rarity in a White House that has seen its share of turmoil, some strategists say that in a post-Trump era, she could struggle to win back GOP traditionalists who aren't fans of the polarizing president.

"She gets credit for getting out without being too stained by the Trump administration," said Chip Felkel, a South Carolina-based Republican strategist. "Everybody seems to get stained by this guy, and they all get thrown aside when they aren't useful. ... She's really walking a fine line, a balancing act, and so far she's been successful, but she's got to be careful."

Haley has been navigating her way through that balancing act since the 2016 campaign cycle, when there was initially no love lost between then-Gov. Haley and then-candidate Donald Trump. When Haley called for the release of Trump's tax returns, and he called her an embarrassment to South Carolina, Haley's tweeted response of "Bless your heart" epitomized tongue-in-cheek Southern shade.

In her two years at the United Nations, Haley managed to tread a careful path of occasionally speaking out against Trump while not directly drawing his ire.

That balancing act came into view, Haley writes in her memoir, in clashes with then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and then-White House chief of staff John Kelly, who she alleges once tried to get her to join them in opposing some of Trump's policies, a move she called "offensive."

Conversely, Haley wrote that she was "deeply disturbed" by the president's comments that there were "very fine people on both sides" at the white nationalist rally and counterprotest in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, saying that she "was certain he didn't understand how damaging his remarks were."

At the end of 2018, she left on her own terms, a decision that spawned speculation — which Haley quickly squelched — that she might challenge her soon-to-be-former boss in 2020.

Since then, Haley has demurred when asked about politics, even in news cycles that floated the notion of Trump replacing Vice President Mike Pence with Haley on the 2020 ticket. She hit the speaking circuit, reportedly commanding as much as \$200,000 per appearance. Earlier this year, she joined the Boeing Co. board, founded a nonprofit and, in September, announced a return to her native South Carolina with the purchase of a home on Kiawah Island, a tony golf community near Charleston.

With Trump still the titular head of the Republican Party, Felkel said Haley remains well positioned with the constituency that sent her former boss to the White House, though any Republicans turned off by Trump's presidency may not know how to view her now.

"She's made the base really happy, and that serves her well in a primary, but she's angered and dismayed some independents and disaffected Republicans who saw her as someone who might get the party back to some sense of normalcy," Felkel said. "So what she gained might not last, might not be worth what she needs, when she really needs it."

Others saw the situation differently, arguing that Haley's loyalty to the administration when asked to serve will bode well for her as she seeks her own political successes.

"Nikki has remained her own person while serving the president," said Catherine Templeton, who served Gov. Haley as head of two state agencies. "No one, regardless of how they feel about Trump now or later, will begrudge loyalty and intelligent service. I just don't think it is an issue."

Time could also prove a hindrance. With presidential cycles having stretched from months to several years ahead of the election itself, the competition for attention in what have recently been massive candidate fields makes it difficult to maintain visibility and favor during an extended campaign season, warned GOP strategist Terry Sullivan.

"It's tough to stay the bright, new shiny object for an extended period of time, especially when the attention spans of voters are so short," said Sullivan, who managed Marco Rubio's 2016 Republican presidential bid. "She's working very hard to position herself as the Goldilocks candidate, where she's just pro-Trump

enough and loyal enough to the president that the supporters are for it, but just independent enough so that all the Never Trumpers can hang their hopes and dreams on her nomination."

Haley, who has launched a book tour and is making the media rounds to promote "With All Due Respect," was not made available for an interview with The Associated Press.

For Felkel, only the end of the Trump era — whether in 2020 or 2024 — will reveal Haley's political staying power.

"For Haley and for many others, when Trump is gone, whenever that is, we'll find out whether this thing has legs or whether it was a flash in the historical pan," he said.

Meg Kinnard can be reached at <http://twitter.com/MegKinnardAP>

US prison system long plagued by staffing crisis, violence

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For years, the federal Bureau of Prisons has been plagued by systematic failures, from massive staffing shortages to chronic violence. But the largest agency in the Justice Department has largely stayed out of the public view.

The death of billionaire financier Jeffrey Epstein and the revelation that he was able to kill himself while behind bars at one of the most secure jails in America has cast a spotlight on the agency, which has also been besieged by serious misconduct in recent years.

Staffing shortages at the agency — it employs more than 35,000 people and has an annual budget that exceeds \$7 billion — are so severe that guards often work overtime day after day or are forced to work mandatory double shifts. Violence leads to regular lockdowns at federal prison compounds across the U.S. And a congressional report released earlier this year found "bad behavior is ignored or covered up on a regular basis."

At the same time, the Bureau of Prisons will be responsible for carrying out the first federal executions in more than 15 years, the first of which is scheduled for Dec. 9.

The issues at the Bureau of Prisons are likely to take center stage Tuesday as the agency's new director appears before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Her appearance comes as federal prosecutors in New York prepare to charge two correctional officers who were responsible for guarding Epstein when he took his own life in August at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan. The city's medical examiner ruled Epstein's death a suicide.

The officers are suspected of failing to check on him every half-hour, as required, and of fabricating log entries to claim they had. Federal prosecutors offered the guards a plea bargain, but the officers declined the deal, according to people familiar with the case. The people insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the case publicly.

Officials at the Bureau of Prisons declined to comment, although they have said that they will make hiring and training their top priorities.

The falsification of records has been a problem throughout the federal prison system. Union officials have long argued that the reduction of staff is putting both guards and inmates in danger, but they've faced an uphill battle as society seems to turn a blind eye. The agency's director, Kathleen Hawk Sawyer, sent a memo to senior prison system officials that detailed how a review at facilities across the U.S. had found some staff members failed to perform required rounds and inmate counts but logged that they had done so anyway.

Across the board, the Bureau of Prisons has been down 4,000 jobs since 2017. Some officers are forced to work so much overtime that they skip going home between shift and sleep in their cars instead.

An Associated Press analysis of federal staffing found a sharp decline in correctional officers across the U.S. in the first two years of the Trump administration.

Between December 2016 and September 2018 — the date of the most recent data available from the federal Office of Personnel Management — the number of correctional officers fell more than 11%, from

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 38 of 62

19,082 to 16,898. That decline reversed a longtime trend. Before President Donald Trump took office, the number of federal correctional officers had continuously increased: there were 12.5% more officers at the end of 2016 compared to the beginning of 2012.

And while union officials have been sounding the alarm about the chronic understaffing, the system allows for the use of excessive overtime. There's nothing stopping guards who work multiple shifts per day and the staffing levels have reached a point where officers at some facilities, like the jail where Epstein took his own life, work mandatory overtime nearly every week.

"Some people just call in sick because they're afraid to get mandated. Because they're tired. They're exhausted. When you work so many hours you're not going to be alert," said Jose Rojas, a leader in the correctional officers' union. "Inmates see it and inmates are going to take advantage of it by assaulting other inmates because the officer is not going to be alert."

Both officers who were guarding Epstein were working overtime because of staffing shortages, people familiar with the matter said. One of the guards, who did not primarily work as a correctional officer, was working a fifth straight day of overtime. The other guard was working mandatory overtime, meaning a second eight-hour shift of the day. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they lacked authorization to discuss jail operations publicly.

The decline in officer numbers reflects a larger personnel loss in the Bureau of Prisons, which saw its overall workforce decline roughly 10 percent from the start of 2017 to late 2018, to 35,000 employees.

The AP analysis found that the Bureau of Prisons in 2017 and 2018 simply hadn't hired enough new correctional officers to replace departing or retiring employees. Staffing numbers fell the most among people with less than two years' experience, indicating few new employees were brought on after Trump took office.

By early 2018, there were only about 300 Bureau of Prisons correctional officers with less than a year of experience – compared with more than 2,200 employees with a year or less of experience in early 2017. In the three years' preceding Trump's presidency, the agency had an average of more than 2,000 of these rookie employees at any given time.

Figures from September 2018 showed the bureau had slightly ramped up some hiring and had 500 employees with less than a year of experience, but still had a long way to go to meet pre-Trump numbers.

Union officials have tried repeatedly to sound the alarm about the staffing crisis, meeting with lawmakers and even putting up billboards near a federal prison complex in Florida last year with a picture of a coffin and the message: "Budget cuts lead to deaths in federal prisons."

Aside from the chronic staffing issues, the agency has been plagued by violence for years.

In one of the most public cases, Boston mobster James "Whitey" Bulger was killed at a federal prison in West Virginia in October 2018, despite warnings from advocates, lawmakers and prison guards about dangerous conditions there. But even after the death of Bulger, one of the most notorious crime figures in American history, the public and lawmakers seemed uninterested.

In March, Hugh Hurwitz, then the director of the Bureau of Prisons, was summoned to Capitol Hill to testify about the management of the federal prison system. The hearing was sparsely attended and just one Democrat showed up.

Hurwitz made a passing mention of the killing during his opening statement, saying he was sure lawmakers would have questions about it. But he wasn't asked a single question about Bulger.

In late August, Attorney General William Barr removed Hurwitz as the agency's acting director and appointed Hawk Sawyer, who served in the role in the early 1990s, in his place.

Hurwitz had led the agency for about 15 months and was appointed as the acting director after Mark Inch, a former major general who oversaw the Army's correctional system, abruptly resigned as the agency's chief in May 2018. Inch, who now runs Florida's prison system, had the shortest tenure of any appointed Bureau of Prisons director.

Sisak reported from New York. Associated Press data journalist Riin Aljas contributed to this report.

Follow Balsamo on Twitter at www.twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1 and Sisak at www.twitter.com/mikesisak.

Butterfly on a bomb range: Endangered Species Act at work

By **SETH BORENSTEIN** AP Science Writer

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (AP) — In the unlikely setting of the world's most populated military installation, amid all the regimented chaos, you'll find the Endangered Species Act at work.

There, as a 400-pound explosive resounds in the distance, a tiny St. Francis Satyr butterfly flits among the splotchy leaves, ready to lay as many as 100 eggs. At one point, this brown and frankly dull-looking butterfly could be found in only one place on Earth: Fort Bragg's artillery range.

Now, thanks in great measure to the 46-year-old federal act, they are found in eight more places — though all of them are on other parts of the Army base. And if all goes well, biologists will have just seeded habitat No. 10.

One of Earth's rarest butterfly species, there are maybe 3,000 St. Francis Satyrs. There are never going to be enough of them to get off the endangered list, but they're not about to go extinct either. They are permanent patients of the bureaucratic conservation hospital ward.

In some ways, the tiny butterfly is an ideal example of the more than 1,600 U.S. species that have been protected by the Endangered Species Act. Alive, but not exactly doing that well.

To some experts, just having these creatures around means the 46-year-old law has done its job. More than 99.2% of the species protected by the act survive, The Associated Press has found. Only 11 species were declared extinct, and experts say all but a couple of them had already pretty much died out when they were listed.

On the other hand, only 39 U.S. species — about 2% of the overall number— have made it off the endangered list because of recovery, including such well-known successes as bald eagles, peregrine falcons and American alligators.

Most of the species on the endangered list are getting worse. And only 8% are getting better, according to a 2016 study by Jake Li, director for biodiversity at the Environmental Policy Innovation Center in Washington.

"Species will remain in the Endangered Species Act hospital indefinitely. And I don't think that's a failure of the Endangered Species Act itself," Li says.

The Endangered Species Act "is the safety net of last resort," says Gary Frazer, assistant director of ecological services at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the law. "We list species after all other vehicles of protection have failed."

The act was signed into law by Republican President Richard Nixon on Dec. 28, 1973. It had been passed overwhelmingly — the House voted 355 to 4 in favor and Senate approval was unanimous, margins that seem unthinkable today.

The law was designed to prevent species from going extinct and to protect their habitat. It instructed two federal agencies — the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service — to draw up a list of species endangered or threatened with extinction.

Under the law, it is unlawful to "harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect" endangered animals, and it also forbids the elimination of their habitats. At first, only animals were protected, but eventually plants were protected, too.

The law caused all sorts of environmental showdowns in the 1970s and 1980s — most notoriously, the fight over the construction of the Tellico Dam in Tennessee, which threatened the tiny snail darter fish. In the end, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the fish, but Congress exempted the dam from the law.

Now, the act is in contention once again. In September, President Donald Trump's administration changed the endangered species process in ways that some say weaken the law. Critics say one change would allow costs to industry to be taken into account when deciding how to protect species.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 40 of 62

Even putting that aside, the act has its costs. Another species found at Fort Bragg — the red-cockaded woodpecker — is a case in point.

In 2016, the last year with per-species spending estimates, the U.S. government spent \$25 million on the red-cockaded woodpecker, more than 100 times what it spent on the St. Francis Satyr butterfly. From 1998 to 2016, the federal government spent \$408 million on the woodpecker, making it one of the most expensive species on the endangered list.

The small woodpecker is a member of the original class of 1967. It may soon fly off the endangered list or, more likely, graduate to the less-protected threatened list.

"Something is going right," says Fort Bragg Endangered Species Branch Chief Jackie Britcher, holding a male woodpecker in her hands as a group of biologists stood under trees with giant nets to catch, count and band the birds.

The woodpeckers live only in longleaf pines, which have been disappearing across the Southeast for more than a century, due to development and suppression of fires. When naturally occurring fires were tamped down, other plants and brush would crowd them out.

Unlike other woodpeckers, these birds build their nests in live trees, sometimes taking as long as a decade to drill a cavity and make a home.

In the 1980s and 1990s, efforts to save the woodpecker and their trees set off a backlash among landowners who worried about interference on their private property.

"I've been run off the road. I've been shot at," says former Fish and Wildlife Service woodpecker official Julie Moore.

Army officials weren't happy either: They were being told they couldn't train in many places because of the woodpecker.

"We couldn't maneuver. We couldn't shoot because they were afraid the bird was going to blink out and go into extinction," says former top Fort Bragg planning official Mike Lynch.

By the 1980s, the red cockaded woodpecker population was below 10,000 nationwide, says Virginia Tech scientist Jeff Walters, a woodpecker expert. Biologists built boxes to serve as nests, attaching them to trees. The woodpeckers weren't interested.

Then Walters tried something different. He put the boxes inside the trees. The birds started living in them. Instead of prohibiting work on land the woodpecker needs, Fish and Wildlife Service officials allowed landowners to make some changes as long as they generally didn't hurt the bird.

Such "safe harbor" agreements "effectively laid out the welcome mat for endangered species" without burdening the landowner, says former assistant Interior Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Michael Bean, who wrote the seminal 1977 textbook on endangered species law.

Meanwhile, Army officials were convinced to start setting fires to burn away the scrub. Now about a third of the area burns every three years or so.

The result? When Britcher started, in 1983, there were fewer than 300 families — with about three birds per nest — on Fort Bragg, and the numbers were dropping. Now she counts 453 families on the base and 29 nearby. That's well over the goal the Army set for itself.

At least 15,000 of the woodpeckers thrive on bases across the Southeast, where they're best protected and counted regularly, Walters says.

The woodpecker is "an umbrella species" biologists say. What helps woodpeckers is good for the St. Francis Satyr butterfly and dozens of other vulnerable species.

And it helps soldiers, too, who now have greatly improved training lands, Lynch notes.

Lynch made that observation in the right field stands of the new Fayetteville, North Carolina, minor league baseball stadium. The name chosen by the community for the first-year team: the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. A community that once hated the bird has now embraced it as their own.

From 1998 to 2016, the federal government tallied \$20.5 billion in spending on individual species on the endangered list. That's based on an annual per-species spending report that the Fish and Wildlife Service

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 41 of 62

sends to Congress, but that tally is not comprehensive.

Over that period, more than \$7 billion went to two species of salmon alone. (Salmon are expensive, in part, because helping them involves removing dams.) Seven species, mostly fish, ate up more than half of the money expended under the act, according to the annual accounting figures.

About \$3 million was spent to save the St. Francis Satyr butterfly.

Nick Haddad — the world's leading expert on the St. Francis Satyr, a Michigan State University biology professor and author of the book "The Last Butterflies" — got permission to go to the butterfly's home, the artillery range.

He was expecting a moonscape. Instead, he says, "these are some of the most beautiful places in North Carolina, maybe the world."

Because no one was venturing into the woods there, no one was dismantling beaver dams. No one was snuffing out fires. Aside from lingering fragments of munitions, the landscape was much like North Carolina before it was altered by humans.

The picky butterfly thrives amid the chaos. It needs a habitat that is disturbed, but only a bit. It needs a little bit of water, but not a lot. It needs fire to burn away overgrown plants, but not so much as to burn its food.

The butterfly appears only twice a year for two weeks each time. When it does, Haddad rushes to Fort Bragg and joins a team of Army biologists to count the butterflies and improve their habitat. They install giant inflatable rubber bladders that mimic beaver dams; they produce the minor floods that the butterfly needs.

Haddad and his students also tromp through the swamp — on thin planks placed in the water so as not to destroy the delicate leaves the butterfly feeds on — as they count the insects.

"It couldn't be better than this," Haddad says, beaming as an egg-bearing butterfly takes flight. "When I see, every year, just a slight change in the right direction of the butterfly's conservation, let me tell you, that inspires me."

After years of criticisms from conservatives that the endangered species program isn't working and is too cumbersome for industry and landowners, President Donald Trump's administration has enacted 33 different reforms.

Among them: a change in the rules for species that are "threatened," the classification just below endangered. Instead of mandating, in most cases, that they get the same protection as endangered species, the new rules allow for variations.

That is better management, says the Fish and Wildlife Service's Frazer, adding, "It allows us to regulate really only those things that are important to conservation."

While Michael Bean, the former Interior Department official, calls the plan an "unfortunate step back, not catastrophic in its consequences," Noah Greenwald, endangered species director of the Center for Biological Diversity, characterizes the regulations as "a disaster."

Li says the exceptions will allow species to be harmed greatly when they move from the endangered category to threatened status — for example, the American burying beetle, which is in conflict with oil and gas interests.

The biggest problem, Li and others say, is that new species in trouble aren't being added to the list. At its current pace, this will be the second consecutive year that more species come off the endangered species list than are added — an unprecedented occurrence.

Meanwhile, scientists across the globe warn of the coming extinction of a million species in the decades ahead.

Nick Haddad is determined that the St. Francis Satyr butterfly won't be one of them.

Emily Dickinson called hope "the thing with feathers." For Haddad, it's about a thing with wings, the law that saved it and the Army officials who enforce that law.

"This is the thing that gives me hope," Haddad says. "That's where the Endangered Species Act had an

impact.”

AP data journalist Nicky Forster contributed to this report from New York.

This Associated Press series was produced in partnership with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Rancher gets life in prison in beating death of his fiancée

CRIPPLE CREEK, Colo. (AP) — A Colorado rancher was sentenced to life in prison without parole Monday shortly after a jury convicted him of beating his fiancée to death with a baseball bat and setting the woman’s remains on fire to hide the evidence.

Patrick Frazee was convicted of first-degree murder and other charges after the jury deliberated four hours. Less than an hour later, a judge sentenced him to the life term, plus 156 years, the mandatory sentence after prosecutors previously decided not to seek the death penalty.

“Your actions were vicious, senseless, without reason or explanation,” Judge Scott Sells told Frazee.

Prosecutors said Frazee, 33, killed Kelsey Berreth, a 29-year-old flight instructor and the mother of their 1-year-old, in her home. She was last seen with her infant daughter on a grocery store video on Thanksgiving Day 2018. Her body was never found.

Frazee showed no reaction to the verdict, while Berreth’s family sobbed and hugged one another.

With little physical evidence, prosecutors relied heavily on the testimony of Krystal Lee, a former nurse who has known Frazee for over a decade, and the location of Frazee’s and Berreth’s cellphones in the days after she disappeared.

Lee, who lives in Hansen, Idaho, testified that Frazee asked her to clean up the scene of the killing and that she watched him burn a plastic tote she believed contained Berreth’s body.

Lee acknowledged she took Berreth’s cellphone with her to Idaho at Frazee’s request to try to deceive investigators about Berreth’s whereabouts. She reached a plea deal with prosecutors for tampering with evidence and faces up to three years in prison.

Frazee’s lawyers used the plea deal to question how honest Lee was about what happened since she initially told authorities she did not know who Berreth was.

Lee said Frazee tried to convince her to kill Berreth several times before he called to tell her that he had a mess at Berreth’s home and he needed her to drive to Colorado to clean it up.

According to her account, Frazee covered Berreth’s eyes with a sweater and asked her to smell some candles before he started beating her while the couple’s 1-year-old daughter was in a storage room. Lee testified that Frazee said Berreth’s last words were “Please stop.”

Cheryl Berreth, Kelsey’s mother, said in a letter to the court that Frazee tortured her daughter to death and left her young granddaughter to “call out for mama in the middle of the night.”

“He not only killed our daughter — his child’s mother — but he chose a horrible death for her,” she said.

A partial human tooth was found on Frazee’s property where Lee says the bag was burned, but it did not have enough DNA to determine whom it belonged to. An expert testified that the burned plastic residue found next to a spot of oily dirt was consistent with a body being burned but acknowledged that motor oil could have left a similar stain.

Frazee’s lawyer, Adam Steigerwald, said no DNA evidence tied to Lee was found at Berreth’s home. Colorado Bureau of Investigation analyst Caitlin Rogers said that did not surprise her because the bleach that Lee said she used to clean up destroys DNA.

Lee showed investigators some small blood spots she said she purposefully left behind. Blood stains were also found between the slats of the home’s wood floor.

On the final day of testimony, jail inmate Jacob Bentley told the jury that Frazee asked him to kill Lee, her relatives and the case’s lead investigator while the two of them were housed near each other.

Prosecutors have not given a motive for the slaying. Berreth’s parents argue in a wrongful-death lawsuit

that they believe Frazee wanted full custody of the couple's daughter, who now lives with them.

Berreth was last seen at a supermarket with her daughter on Thanksgiving Day. Between then and Nov. 25, texts were sent between Berreth's and Frazee's phones about exchanging their daughter and Berreth purportedly wanting to break up.

The phones were in the same location when those texts were sent, prosecutors said. After Nov. 25, Berreth's phone started sending signals from Idaho.

Lee testified that she sent the last message from Berreth's phone to Frazee — "Do you even love me?" — after returning to Idaho.

Witnesses testified that Frazee accused Berreth of abusing their daughter. Investigators said there was no evidence of any abuse.

A man who said he considered Frazee to be like a stepson, Joseph Moore, testified that when he asked Frazee how Berreth was doing in April 2018, he told him that he had figured out a way to kill her and get away with it.

Moore said Frazee was puzzled after Berreth's disappearance garnered national attention.

"He's like, 'Man, if I had known it was going to blow up this big, I never would have ...' And he stopped. He did not finish that sentence."

Trump's weekend hospital visit draws a skeptical reaction

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lack of notice. Past failures to level with the American people. A tough week for the White House as public impeachment hearings got under way.

Add it all up, and President Donald Trump's unscheduled weekend visit to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center raised suspicions about his health, despite White House officials' insistence that the president was merely getting a head start on his annual physical.

For any president, a sudden trip to the hospital would raise questions. But such scrutiny was magnified with a president who has a history of exaggeration and playing loose with the facts, giving skeptics room to run with their own theories.

"The one thing you can be absolutely sure of is this was not routine and he didn't go up there for half his physical," tweeted Joe Lockhart, a press secretary under President Bill Clinton, who was himself impeached for perjury and obstruction. "What does it mean? It means that we just won't know what the medical issue was."

The president's medical appointment wasn't listed on his Saturday public schedule, and his last physical was just nine months ago. Press secretary Stephanie Grisham said the 73-year-old president was "anticipating a very busy 2020" and wanted to take advantage of "a free weekend" in Washington to begin portions of his routine checkup.

Grisham followed up Monday night tweeting a memorandum from the president's physician, U.S. Navy Cmdr. Sean Conley, who described Saturday's visit as a "routine, planned interim checkup as part of the regular, primary preventative care he received throughout the year."

Conley said that due to scheduling uncertainties, the trip was kept off the record. He said after a little more than an hour of examination, labs and discussion, the president visited with medical staff and the family of a soldier undergoing surgery.

"Despite some of the speculation, the President has not had any chest pain, nor was he evaluated or treated for any urgent or acute issues," Conley wrote.

Conley added that Trump consented to sharing his cholesterol level, now at 165, down from 196. A total below 170 is considered good.

Trump's 2018 and 2019 physicals were both announced ahead of time. Grisham said after the visit that the president had gotten "a quick exam and labs."

"The President remains healthy and energetic without complaints, as demonstrated by his repeated vigorous rally performances in front of thousands of Americans several times a week," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 44 of 62

But some weren't buying Grisham's explanation.

"The real Donald Trump is getting exposed for what he's done, and that's what's driving him to the doctor," Rahm Emanuel, a former Clinton aide and Chicago mayor, said Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, said it's reasonable for the press to be asking questions about the president's health. She said the country has a long history of presidents hiding physical ailments from the public.

Woodrow Wilson suffered a paralytic stroke in 1919 and the full details of his disability were kept from the public. Franklin D. Roosevelt won a fourth term despite severe hypertension that would contribute to his death 11 weeks into his term. Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in his first term, in 1955, and a reassessment of his medical records and public information four decades later found that the information released to the public was recast to serve the president's political interests ahead of his 1956 reelection campaign.

Jamieson noted that Trump was criticized for releasing only cursory details on his health prior to the election. The president's doctor, Harold N. Bornstein, wrote in December 2015 that Trump would "unequivocally" be the healthiest president in history and deemed the celebrity businessman's condition "astonishingly excellent." Bornstein later said he wrote the note in five minutes while a limo sent by the candidate waited outside his office.

Jamieson said there is a set of expectations about how a president's annual exam is handled, which includes the advance public notice that the Trump White House provided for his first two exams. She said the reasonable question is: "If this is routine, why was it not handled in a routine manner?"

Grisham said everything the White House has said about the Walter Reed visit is "true and accurate."

"Just because it was done a little differently doesn't mean anything is wrong," she said.

Trump and the White House have characterized the visit as "phase 1" of his annual physical. But the explanation raised questions simply because its handling was unusual.

First, annual physicals typically aren't performed in installments unless someone needs a special test not available at their doctor's office — something that shouldn't be an issue at a military hospital. Nor are they usually performed three months early; Trump's last physical was last February.

Conley said that primary preventative medical care is something that occurs continuously during the year and is not just a single annual event. "As such, I will continue to monitor the President's health, planning on a more comprehensive examination after the New Year."

Some lab tests might be performed every few months if a doctor suspects a problem, but otherwise blood tests such as a check of whether Trump's medication is keeping his high cholesterol in check normally would be performed at the one-year mark.

His prior physicals were scheduled in advance not only because that's how doctors schedule everyone's "wellness" check-ups — even VIPs — but because a presidential visit to a hospital prompts extra security concerns.

AP Medical Writer Luran Neergaard contributed to this report.

California sues e-cigarette maker Juul over ads, youth sales

By **MATTHEW PERRONE** AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — California on Monday sued the nation's biggest e-cigarette maker, alleging that Juul Labs deliberately marketed and sold its flavored nicotine products to teenagers.

The lawsuit from California's attorney general is the latest legal action against Juul, the multibillion-dollar vaping startup that has been widely blamed for helping spark the teen vaping craze.

California is the second state to sue the company, following a North Carolina lawsuit in May. Illinois, Massachusetts and several other states are also investigating the company.

A Juul spokesman said the company's intended customers are adult smokers, adding "we do not intend to attract underage users."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 45 of 62

Under intense pressure, the company has suspended its U.S. advertising and halted sales of all but two of its flavors, menthol and tobacco. Additionally, the company shuttered its social media accounts, tightened age verification for online sales and replaced its CEO.

San Francisco-based Juul is the best-selling e-cigarette brand in the U.S. controlling roughly two-thirds of the retail market.

The lawsuit from California Attorney General Xavier Becerra argues that Juul's past marketing efforts online and in major U.S. cities used bright colors and youthful models to attract underage users. Federal law bans sales to those under 18.

California officials said they are seeking money to help pay for anti-vaping advertisements.

"Juul ran big tobacco's playbook and the results were predictable — millions of teens and young Americans now use their product," said Becerra, at a Sacramento press conference announcing the lawsuit. "In California, we will not allow kids to be lured in by deceptive practices."

The lawsuit also alleges that Juul previously:

- failed to adequately verify customers' ages and identities on its website
- shipped products to users who gave fake names, such as "Beer Can"
- distributed free products at concerts and festivals that did not include a mandatory warning label

The lawsuit came as White House officials said President Donald Trump is backing away from a plan to remove most vaping flavors from the market. The officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly, said Trump is concerned the flavor ban could alienate voters he needs to win re-election.

"We're not going to wait for the federal government" Becerra said.

Underage vaping has reached what health officials call epidemic levels. In the latest government survey, 1 in 4 high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the previous month, despite federal law banning sales to those under 18.

E-cigarettes typically heat a solution that contains nicotine, which makes cigarettes and e-cigarettes addictive.

Associated Press writers Richard Lardner and Jonathan Lemire in New York contributed to this story

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDWriter

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Police: Home in California backyard shooting was targeted

By **TERENCE CHEA** and **OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ** Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Two men with semiautomatic handguns targeted a backyard gathering of family and friends in Fresno, spraying bullets that killed four men and wounded six other people before the assailants disappeared into the darkness, police said Monday.

Authorities did not identify any suspects or motive for the Sunday evening attack at the home of a Hmong family. The gunmen entered through an open gate on the side of the house and immediately began shooting randomly into a group of about 16 men gathered to watch football on television, Fresno Police Chief Andrew Hall said.

"It does not appear that they were targeting any individuals, and once they fired, they fled," Hall said. All the shooting occurred outside, and none of the women and children inside were harmed.

The shooters did not speak, and in the darkness no one reported getting a good look at them. Witnesses saw only flashes when the pistols were fired, Hall said.

Police were investigating whether the shooting was connected to a recent "disturbance" involving some of the people at the party, Hall said. He did not describe the incident other than to say it occurred within the last week.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 46 of 62

It was the third mass shooting in four days in California.

Last Thursday, a 16-year-old student at a high school in the Los Angeles suburb of Santa Clarita shot and killed two classmates and wounded three others before shooting himself in the head. He died the next day.

On Saturday, police in San Diego said a husband shot and killed his wife and three of their sons before killing himself. A fourth son was wounded and on life support.

The Fresno shooting occurred in a section of the city with a large Hmong population and claimed the lives of Xy Lee, 23; Phia Vang, 31; Kou Xiong, 38; and Kalaxang Thao, 40, all of Fresno, according to the coroner's office. Three others remained hospitalized Monday in serious condition, Community Regional Medical Center said in a statement.

Pao Yang, CEO of the Fresno Center, a Hmong community group, said two of the victims were well-known Hmong performers, including a man who sang for mental health clients monthly. He said community elders have reached out to the center for help in the wake of the violence.

"Our community is in mourning, and we still don't know what's going on, or who are the suspects," he said.

Xy Lee was an accomplished Hmong singer and musician, and his videos on YouTube have been viewed millions of times.

The Hmong are an ethnic group in the Southeastern Asian country of Laos who fought with the United States during the Vietnam War. Many came to the U.S. after the war. California has the nation's largest Hmong population and about 25,000 live in Fresno, comprising about 5 percent of the city's population of 525,000.

Hall announced the establishment of an Asian gang task force ahead of the Hmong New Year, which is celebrated the week after Christmas, out of concern about the possibility of more violence or retaliation.

There was no known gang connection to the weekend party, which was low-key. It "was not described as being out of control in any way. It was just a family event," Hall said.

Concepcion Soto, who has lived next door to the home where the shooting occurred for 12 years, said the family there was always friendly.

"They would have parties in their backyard, but they wouldn't play music. They would just drink and talk," she said. "They have been very good neighbors."

Calvin Gatson, who lives on the same block of single-family homes with manicured front yards described it as quiet during the week. On weekends, grandfathers can be seen playing with grandchildren in front yards, while other neighbors host outdoor gatherings.

He said the neighborhood generally is peaceful, though there have been three shootings since mid-September.

Choua Vang told the Fresno Bee that his neighbor's house was shot at last week and he feels unsafe outside after dark.

"We're thinking about moving out of the neighborhood," he said.

Rep. Jim Costa, a Democrat who represents the Fresno area in Congress, said he was saddened to hear of another shooting "this time in my own district." He said in a statement that "thoughts and prayers are not enough!" and urged the Senate to take up gun-control legislation.

There have been eight mass killings in California so far this year, claiming the lives of 33 people, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University. That's a dramatic increase from previous years, with eight mass killings in the state for all of 2016-2018.

The increase mirrors the national trend in 2019. There have been 39 mass killings this year in the United States, compared with 25 in 2018, according to the database, which tracks homicides where four or more people are killed, not including the offender.

Rodriguez reported from San Francisco. Associated Press writer Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles and news researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York also contributed to this report.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 47 of 62

All-time 'Jeopardy!' champs to vie for share of \$1.5 million

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The three top money winners in "Jeopardy!" history will vie for a share of \$1.5 million in January.

ABC and the quiz show's producer said Monday that Ken Jennings, Brad Rutter and James Holzhauer will compete in prime-time episodes on the network.

The first contestant to win three matches will receive \$1 million. Each runner-up will take home \$250,000. Alex Trebek will host the contest, titled "Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time" and debuting 8 p.m. Eastern on Jan. 7.

Rutter is the top all-time money winner with \$4.7 million, followed by Jennings with \$3.4 million and Holzhauer with \$2.7 million.

In a statement, Trebek said the three have proved they qualify as the "greatest," and now will compete to be "the best of the best."

Diplomat says of Trump Ukraine call: 'I remember it vividly'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ZEKE J. MILLER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The phone call State Department official David Holmes overheard between President Donald Trump and Ambassador Gordon Sondland lasted just two minutes. But it won't be easily forgotten.

"I've never seen anything like this," Holmes told Trump impeachment investigators, "someone calling the President from a mobile phone at a restaurant, and then having a conversation of this level of candor, colorful language. There's just so much about the call that was so remarkable that I remember it vividly."

Holmes' first-hand account of the conversation heard over lunch in Kyiv provides a key piece of the impeachment inquiry. He is among the only witnesses testifying so far to show Trump personally seeking investigations into Democrats and his potential 2020 rival Joe Biden that are central to the probe.

A transcript of Holmes' closed-door testimony was released Monday. Holmes, a political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, is scheduled to testify publicly Thursday.

The conversation between the president and the ambassador came one day after the July 25 call when Trump asked Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for a favor with the investigations. At the time, the Trump administration was withholding \$391 million in military aid to the ally in what Democrats say amounts to "bribery." Trump says he did nothing wrong. A whistleblower's complaint about it led the House to launch the impeachment inquiry.

Holmes joined Sondland and others during the lunch meeting and told investigators Trump was talking so loudly he could hear the president clearly on the ambassador's phone.

"I then heard President Trump ask, quote, 'So he's going to do the investigation?'" Holmes testified. "Ambassador Sondland replied that 'He's going to do it,' adding that President Zelenskyy will, quote, 'do anything you ask him to.'"

Holmes said he didn't take notes of the conversation he overheard between Trump and Sondland but remembers it "vividly."

Pressed during the closed-session interview if anyone helped him recall the details, Holmes said, "that wouldn't have been needed, sir, because, as I said, the event itself was so distinctive that I remember it very clearly."

A transcript was also released late Monday from an interview with David Hale, the State Department's No. 3 official.

Hale was questioned earlier this month about the abrupt removal of the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, who delivered chilling testimony last week about her ouster amid a "smear" campaign by Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani.

As the undersecretary of State for political affairs, Hale said he repeatedly pushed for a State Department statement defending the ambassador, who spent a 33-year career in the foreign service. But that effort failed.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 48 of 62

He said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "most likely would have been the person" to make the decision not to publicly support Yovanovitch.

Hale provided new information with call records showing Pompeo and Giuliani had been in touch twice, on March 28 and March 29, around the time of her ouster. Hale is set to testify publicly Wednesday.

The impeachment inquiry is bringing to light the oversized role Giuliani is playing in Trump's Ukraine policy, in what other diplomats have suggested amounts to a shadow diplomacy, outside of official channels.

Holmes said it became clear Giuliani was pursuing the investigations Trump wanted.

"Mr. Giuliani was promoting the investigations issue," Holmes testified. "I guess I would say that Giuliani was sort of meddling in Ukrainian affairs by asking them to open an investigation that would — could be perceived as meddling in U.S. politics."

After meetings in Kyiv, Holmes joined Sondland and others for lunch at an outside restaurant.

It was surprising, he testified, when Sondland called Trump even though "we generally assume that mobile communications in Ukraine are being monitored." He said at least two of the three — and maybe all three — mobile networks in Ukraine are owned by Russian companies.

"In my experience, generally, phone calls with the President are very sensitive and handled accordingly," he testified.

He asked Sondland about Trump's views on Ukraine. Sondland told him Trump does not "give a shit" about Ukraine, saying he only cares about "big stuff." Holmes noted Ukraine is, in fact, at war with Russia. But Sondland told Trump was more concerned with the "big stuff that matters to him, like this Biden investigation that Giuliani is pushing."

Holmes said, "I think the Ukrainians gradually came to understand that they were being asked to do something in exchange for the meeting and the security assistance hold being lifted."

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Iran downplays, demonizes protests amid internet shutdown

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran on Monday alternatively downplayed and demonized ongoing protests across the country that have killed at least five people and renewed pressure on the government as the country struggles under the weight of U.S. economic sanctions.

The full scale of the protests, which began shortly after a 50% increase in gas prices took effect early Friday, was unknown after Tehran shut down the internet over the weekend, blocking Iranians from sharing videos and information with the outside world. Before the shutdown late Saturday, some of the protest videos circulating online included sound of gunfire and appeared to show gravely wounded people.

State media and authorities have released little information and a government spokesman predicted during a news conference that the unrest would be over in two days. But the spokesman, Ali Rabiei, also said demonstrators had taken police officers and security forces hostage. He did not release any details.

The protests were prompted by widespread anger among the Iranian people, who have seen their savings evaporate amid scarce jobs and the collapse of the national currency, the rial, since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the nuclear deal over a year ago and imposed sanctions. The rial now trades at over 123,000 to \$1, compared to 32,000 to \$1 at the time the deal took effect.

Tehran's streets were emptier than usual Monday in what is a generally busy capital on a cold and rainy November day. Shops saw few customers as uniformed police and plainclothes security forces walked the streets. The all-volunteer force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, known as Basij, said it was helping maintain security.

Speaking to journalists, Rabiei said mask-wearing protesters were "exercising very high levels of violence very professionally," but insisted the protests would soon end.

"Today the situation was calmer — more than 80% compared to yesterday," the spokesman said. "Only some minor problems remain, and by tomorrow and the day after, there will remain no special riots."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 49 of 62

The head of the Basij, Gen. Gholamreza Soleimani, said protest leaders had been arrested, but he did not elaborate.

"The security forces have dealt with the protesters by practicing restraint and patience," the general said. "Destruction and disturbances have been done by rioters that we refer to as thugs and hoodlums."

Iran has sought to blame violence on those linked to Iran's late shah, ousted 40 years ago, and an exile group called the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq. The MEK calls for the overthrow of Iran's government and has the support of Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani.

President Hassan Rouhani, who pushed for the hike in gas prices as part of a promise to increase payments to Iran's poor, warned that authorities could track protesters by their license plates. During the unrest, demonstrators abandoned their cars on major highways, blocking traffic.

In a meeting with his Cabinet, Rouhani linked the gas hike to Iran's inability to export its crude oil abroad, according to a statement on the presidency's website.

"We have no other choice but to either raise taxes and make payments ... or we must export more oil," he said.

Meanwhile, the official death toll rose to five Monday as the state-run IRNA news agency reported that the violence has resulted in two more deaths in a Tehran suburb. Previously, officials acknowledged the death of a police officer in the city of Kermanshah, one killed in another suburb of Tehran and another in Sirjan, a city some 800 kilometers (500 miles) southeast of the capital.

In Washington, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. was "deeply concerned by reports of several fatalities."

"The Islamic Republic must cease violence against its own people and should immediately restore the ability of all Iranians to access a free and open Internet," Pompeo said. "The world is watching."

The semiofficial Fars news agency, close to the Guard, has put the total number of protesters at over 87,000, saying demonstrators ransacked about 100 banks and stores. Authorities arrested about 1,000 people, Fars reported, citing unnamed security officials for the information.

Iran's information and communications technology minister, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, told IRNA that officials hope the situation will normalize and allow the internet to be restored. However, the former Intelligence Ministry member told the news agency that "maintaining national security is very important."

The protests represent a political risk for Rouhani ahead of February parliamentary elections as the government struggles to keep the economy afloat.

Cheap gasoline is practically considered a birthright in Iran, home to the world's fourth-largest crude oil reserves despite decades of economic woes since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Gasoline in the country remains among the cheapest in the world, with the new prices jumping 50% to a minimum of 15,000 rials per liter. That's 12 cents a liter, or about 50 cents a gallon. A gallon of regular gasoline in the U.S. costs \$2.59 by comparison.

The protests come as demonstrations also strike Iraq and Lebanon, two nations key to Iran's regional influence. Iran's protests also appear leaderless and spontaneous, making it difficult for them to push for a lasting change in Iran, the Washington Institute for Near-East Policy said in an analysis. It said any traditional leadership likely would find itself targeted by security forces amid their crackdown.

"The demonstrators have no way to present organized demands, much less negotiate them with the authorities," the institute said early Tuesday. "It is difficult to see how such leaderless protests can produce significant political change."

Police chief: 3 people killed in Oklahoma Walmart shooting

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

DUNCAN, Oklahoma (AP) — Two men and a woman were fatally shot Monday morning outside a Walmart store in southwestern Oklahoma, and the shooter is among the dead, authorities said.

Two victims were shot inside a car and the third died in the parking lot just before 10 a.m. outside the store in Duncan, Police Chief Danny Ford said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 50 of 62

Authorities did not immediately describe a motivation for the shooting. Ford told The Associated Press that investigators believe the gunman shot the male and female victims and then turned the gun on himself.

Stephens County District Attorney Jason Hicks authorities said during the news conference Monday afternoon that there was never an active shooter inside the store and he described the shooting as an isolated incident. He did not further explain.

Hicks said the two victims had been inside the Walmart Money Center, which offers check-cashing, money orders, tax preparation and other services, before they were killed, but that the shooter did not enter the business.

Two bodies covered with sheets were visible in the parking lot Monday afternoon. One body was in the driver's seat of a red, two-door car. The other body was lying on the ground next to the vehicle.

Bullet holes were visible in the car's windshield. Police said in a Facebook post that a handgun was found at the scene. At the news conference, Ford described the gun as semi-automatic but said he had no further details. He said the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation was still processing the scene.

Ford said he believed nine shots were fired.

Authorities have not released the identities of those killed but did confirm the shooter was among the dead. Ford said all three knew each other but declined to describe their relationships or other identifying information pending notification of immediate family.

He said all three were dead when police arrived just minutes after the shooting.

Walmart spokeswoman LeMia Jenkins initially said no staff were involved. Jenkins later released a statement offering thoughts and prayers for the family of the woman killed in the shooting, who she said had been with the company for less than two months. Jenkins said the woman was at the Walmart during her free time and wasn't scheduled to work that day.

Duncan is a city of more than 22,000 residents located about 80 miles (130 kilometers) south of Oklahoma City. The Walmart is in a commercial center that includes a sporting goods store and a dollar store along U.S. Highway 81, the main road that passes through Duncan heading south toward Texas.

Aaron Helton, of Duncan, said he was parking outside the Walmart where he planned to buy groceries when he heard about nine gunshots.

"I arrived and there were three bodies," Helton said.

Helton was one of many nearby witnesses who fortunately was not hit by gunfire, Ford said. The closest person was in a vehicle three parking spaces away from where the victims sat, Ford said.

"We got radio of a lot of people dodging and running," Ford said. "There were people in the vicinity, for sure."

There were more than 100 vehicles in the parking lot about two hours after the shooting plus a steady stream of customers coming and going from Walmart, which remained open for business.

It was at least the third shooting at a Walmart in the U.S. this year. A Walmart store in El Paso, Texas, reopened Thursday after being closed since August, when a gunman opened fire in the busy store, killing 22. Just days before, two Walmart employees in Mississippi were killed by a man authorities described as a disgruntled Walmart worker.

The killings in Oklahoma come amid a spate of high-profile shootings across the U.S. A 16-year-old student at a high school in the city of Santa Clarita outside Los Angeles shot and killed two classmates and wounded three other teens Thursday before shooting himself in the head. He died the next day.

In New Jersey, players and spectators ran for cover Friday night when a gunman opened fire at a high school football game, wounding two people. And on Sunday, four people were killed and six wounded in Fresno, California, where police say two shooters sneaked into a backyard party and shot into a group of Hmong family and friends.

Associated Press reporter Cedar Attanasio in El Paso, Texas, contributed to this report.

Lawsuits by Michael Jackson accusers likely to be restored

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California appeals court appeared strongly inclined Monday to give new life to lawsuits filed by two men who accuse Michael Jackson of repeatedly molesting them when they were boys.

Three judges from the 2nd District Court of Appeal said in a tentative ruling that lawsuits from James Safechuck and Wade Robson against two corporate entities that Jackson owned should be reconsidered by the trial court that dismissed them in 2017.

Robson, 37, and Safechuck, 41, who became known to a broad audience when they aired their accusations earlier this year in the Emmy-winning HBO documentary "Leaving Neverland," sat together in a downtown Los Angeles courtroom during Monday's brief hearing.

Outside, their attorney Vince Finaldi said the decision was the right one, and they are pleased.

"All they've ever wanted is their day in court," Finaldi said.

The suits filed in 2013 that were dismissed because statutes of limitations had expired can be revived because of new state law signed last month by Gov. Gavin Newsom that gives those who say they were sexually abused until age 40, up from age 26, to file lawsuits. It also gives victims of all ages a three-year window to sue, starting Jan. 1.

The Associated Press does not typically name victims of sexual abuse, but Robson and Safechuck have repeatedly come forward and approved of the use of their names and faces.

The tentative decision does not revive the actual Jackson estate as a defendant. A 2015 decision throwing out that part of the lawsuit will stand. The remaining defendants are the two corporate entities, MJJ Productions, Inc., and MJJ Ventures, Inc.

Attorneys for Jackson's estate accepted that the cases must be returned to the trial court under the new legislation, but emphasized that the ruling is unrelated to the allegations they have long denounced as demonstrably false.

"This new law extends the time for genuine victims of abuse to file legal claims," Jackson estate attorney Howard L. Weitzman said in a statement. "The appellate court's tentative ruling is not on the merits of Robson and Safechuck's allegations and the court in no way said that these cases will go to trial. Neither does it reverse the 2015 rulings dismissing Robson and Safechuck's claims against the estate, which are final and no longer subject to any appeals. We are confident that the claims against Michael Jackson's corporate entities will, once again, be dismissed as has happened before."

Robson testified in Jackson's 2005 criminal trial, in which the singer was acquitted, that Jackson had never molested or mistreated him, and Safechuck once said the same to authorities investigating Jackson, who died in 2009.

The men and their attorneys have said that stress and trauma that persisted into adulthood finally led them to accept that they had been sexually abused and go public.

Jackson's estate is suing HBO over "Leaving Neverland," in which Robson and Safechuck gave director Dan Reed graphic accounts of what they said were hundreds of instances of sexual abuse by Jackson over several years. A federal judge has ruled that case should be handled in private arbitration.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>.

Warren's 'Medicare for All' plan reignites health care clash

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elizabeth Warren's proposal to gradually move the country to a government-funded health care system has further inflamed the debate over "Medicare for All," likely ensuring the issue will play a significant role in this week's Democratic presidential debate.

The Massachusetts senator announced Friday that her administration would immediately build on existing laws, including the Affordable Care Act, to expand access to health care while taking up to three years to fully implement Medicare for All. That attempt to thread the political needle has roiled her more

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 52 of 62

moderate rivals, who say she's waffling, while worrying some on the left, who see Warren's commitment to a single-payer system wavering.

The divide could complicate plans by Democrats to turn health care into a winning issue in 2020. The party successfully took back control of the House last year by championing programs that ensure that people with preexisting medical conditions keep their insurance coverage while arguing that Republicans want to weaken such provisions. But the Medicare for All debate is more delicate as advocates including Warren grapple with concerns that a new government-run system won't provide the same quality of coverage as private insurance — and would be prohibitively expensive.

"The Medicare for All proposal has turned out to be a real deal-breaker in who gets the Democratic nomination," said Robert Blendon, a Harvard University School of Public Health professor whose teaching responsibilities include courses on political strategy in health policy and public opinion polling. "This is not just another issue."

Warren's transition plan indicates she'd use her first 100 days as president to expand existing public health insurance options. That is closer to what has been supported by former Vice President Joe Biden and Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana. Both Democratic presidential candidates have criticized Medicare for All for wiping out private insurance — something they say many Americans aren't ready for.

Warren insists she's simply working to expand health insurance in the short term to people who don't have it while remaining committed to the full plan in the long run.

"My commitment to Medicare for All is all the way," Warren said while campaigning in Iowa over the weekend.

Still, the transition signified a step toward pragmatism and an acknowledgement that the government has ways to expand health insurance coverage before embracing a universal system — something that would be difficult for any president to get through Congress. Consider that current entitlements, such as Social Security and Medicare, were phased in over years, not all at once.

"If she's looked at it and decides the sensible thing to do in order to not cause too much disruption in employment situations and within the medical system is to gear up over three years, she's probably right," said Cindy Wolf, a customer service and shipping manager who attended the California state Democratic Convention on Saturday in Long Beach.

Still, the move may prove politically problematic for a candidate who has long decried others settling for consultant-driven campaigns seeking incremental changes at the expense of big ideas.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders is the original architect of Medicare for All and has made fighting for it the centerpiece of his 2020 White House bid. He tweeted following the release of Warren's transition plan: "In my first week as president, we will introduce Medicare for All legislation."

Campaigning in Nevada on Monday, California Sen. Kamala Harris said, "I believe that government should not be in a position of taking away people's choice."

"Especially on one of the most intimate and personal decisions people can make," Harris said, "which is about how to address their health care needs."

The criticism from others was far sharper. Top Biden adviser Kate Bedingfield dismissed Warren's plan as "trying to muddy the waters" by offering "a full program of flips and twists." Buttigieg spokeswoman Lis Smith said it was a "transparently political attempt to paper over a very serious policy problem."

It's easy to see the issue spilling into Wednesday's debate because Warren rode a steady summer climb in the polls to become one of the primary field's front-runners — but no longer seems to be rising. Polls recently show her support stabilizing, though not dipping, as focus on her Medicare for All ideas intensifies.

The last two debates featured Warren failing to answer direct questions on whether she would be forced to raise middle class taxes to pay for the universal health care system she envisions. That set up a plan released two-plus weeks ago in which Warren vowed to generate \$20-plus trillion in new government revenue without increasing taxes on the middle class — but that's been decried by critics who accuse Warren of underestimating how much Medicare for All would really cost.

And, though Warren never promised to begin working toward Medicare for All on Day 1 of her adminis-

tration, the release of the transition plan, which spelled out that the process will take years, has unsettled some.

Una Lee Jost, a lawyer who was holding "Bernie" signs in Chinese and English at the California Democratic Convention, called any lengthy transition to Medicare for All "a serious concern."

"We should have implemented this decades ago," she said.

Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne and Michael R. Blood in Long Beach, Calif., and Michelle Price in North Las Vegas, Nev., contributed to this report.

Prince Andrew's efforts to put scandal behind him backfire

By **DANICA KIRKA** Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Andrew's effort to put the Jeffrey Epstein scandal behind him may have instead done him irreparable harm.

While aides are trying to put the best face on his widely criticized interview with the BBC, royal watchers are asking whether he can survive the public relations disaster and remain a working member of the royal family.

The question facing Queen Elizabeth II and her advisers is how to protect the historic institution of the monarchy from the taint of a 21st-century sex-and-trafficking scandal and the repeated missteps of a prince who has been a magnet for bad publicity as he struggles to find a national role for himself.

"Prince Andrew, I think, really has to stay out of the limelight for the moment because there really, I think, is no coming back from the damage that was done ... at least, not in the near future," Kate Williams, a royal historian and professor at Reading University, told ITV News.

Andrew, the second son of Queen Elizabeth II, tried to end years of speculation about his role in the Epstein scandal by granting a no-holds barred interview to Emily Maitlis, the respected presenter of the BBC's Newsnight program. But the strategy backfired when the prince failed to show empathy for the young women who were exploited by Epstein even as he defended his friendship with the American financier who was a convicted sex offender.

Epstein died Aug. 10 in a New York prison while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. His death has been ruled a suicide by the city's medical examiner.

Maitlis, writing Monday in the Times of London, said planning for the interview began after Epstein's death. Andrew's management team knew they had a problem with the prince's well-documented ties to Epstein and that previous written statements by the prince denying any involvement by the prince in Epstein's crimes "perhaps lacked the conviction of a human voice behind them," she said.

"They feel that a Newsnight interview is the only way to clear the air. To put across his side of the story," Maitlis wrote, describing discussions with the prince's staff.

But when the 55-year-old prince got that chance in an interview broadcast Saturday night, he appeared awkward and overly legalistic.

While Andrew said he regretted staying at Epstein's Manhattan home in 2010, after Epstein had served a prison sentence for a sex crimes conviction, Andrew defended his previous friendship with the billionaire investor because of the contacts it provided when he was preparing for a role as Britain's special trade representative.

The prince denied sleeping with Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who says she was trafficked by Epstein and had sex with Andrew on three occasions, including twice when she was 17.

Andrew went on to say that an alleged sexual encounter in London with Giuffre couldn't have occurred on the day that she says it did because he spent the day with his daughter Princess Beatrice, taking her to a party at Pizza Express in the London suburb of Woking and then back to the family home. He also said Giuffre's description of him buying her drinks and sweating heavily as they danced together could not be correct because he doesn't drink and had a medical condition at the time that meant he could not sweat.

Those answers have been widely mocked on social media, with Twitter users sharing pizza jokes and

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 54 of 62

photos of an apparently sweaty Prince Andrew.

Nowhere during the almost one-hour interview, which took place inside Buckingham Palace, did the prince express sympathy for Epstein's victims.

One exchange in particular captured the coldness for which Andrew is being criticized.

Andrew: "Do I regret the fact that he has quite obviously conducted himself in a manner unbecoming? Yes."

Maitlis: "Unbecoming? He was a sex offender."

Andrew: "Yeah. I'm being polite."

Lisa Bloom, a Los Angeles-based attorney for five of Epstein's alleged victims, called the interview with the prince "deeply disappointing."

"He is entitled to deny allegations and defend himself," she said. "But where is his apology for being so closely associated with one of history's most prolific pedophiles?"

Attorney Gloria Allred called on the prince to voluntarily speak to the FBI about what he knows about Epstein. She made the comment during a news conference in Los Angeles about a new lawsuit filed against Epstein's estate by a woman identified only as Jane Doe 15.

While Andrew's older brother, Prince Charles, is heir to the British throne, he himself is only eighth in the line of succession. He served in the Royal Navy for more than 20 years, including during the 1982 war over the Falklands Islands, before retiring in 2001.

Civilian life has proved more problematic for the prince. He served as Britain's special trade representative from 2001 to 2011, but was forced to step down amid questions about his links to a son of the late Libyan dictator Col. Muammar Gaddafi. Andrew's marriage to the former Sarah Ferguson ended in divorce in 1996, but in 2010 a British newspaper reported that it had filmed his ex-wife offering to sell access to the prince.

Andrew's problem is also one of timing, according to celebrity expert Ellis Cashmore, author of "Kardashian Culture." The Epstein case was shaping up to be the biggest American female exploitation case of the #MeToo era since the movement was kicked off in 2017 by disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

"Epstein was the personification of #MeToo's evil," Cashmore said. "His apparent suicide robbed the movement of what looked certain to be colossal symbolic victory, so I sense there's hunt for a prominent public figure" to be held to account.

Cashmore said Britain's royal family has no realistic option now but to tell Andrew to maintain a dignified silence and hope interest in this case will dissipate. The problem, Cashmore said, is that if Andrew immediately cuts down on his public engagements, that could also backfire.

"The problem is that, when a public figure who is involved in a scandal, refuses to engage with the media, then it effectively gives us — the audience — license to think what we like and speculate wildly," he said. "The prospect of gossip on Andrew circulating in supermarkets, at work and on social media is a horrifying prospect for the royals. But I suspect that's exactly what's going to happen."

The BBC interview is especially problematic because it comes at the end of a difficult year for the royal family, said Pauline Maclaran, author of "Royal Fever: The British Monarchy in Consumer Culture."

Andrew's nephews, Prince William and Prince Harry, have helped reposition the royal family for the modern world, appearing more accessible as they speak about their own mental health issues to help others and their charities. But that image has been dented recently as Harry and his wife, the former U.S. television star Meghan Markle, spar with the press over privacy issues.

"It's definitely tainting the brand at the moment," Maclaran said of Andrew's Epstein interview. "The trouble is that, if he was trying to be sincere, he did the royal thing: He didn't show enough emotion. It doesn't cut it in the social media age."

Associated Press writer Brian Melley contributed from Los Angeles.

AP Exclusive: US officials knew of Ukraine's Trump anxiety

By **DESMOND BUTLER** and **MICHAEL BIESECKER** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. State Department officials were informed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was feeling pressure from the Trump administration to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden even before the July phone call that has led to impeachment hearings in Washington, two people with knowledge of the matter told The Associated Press.

In early May, officials at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, including then-Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, were told Zelenskyy was seeking advice on how to navigate the difficult position he was in, the two people told the AP. He was concerned President Donald Trump and associates were pressing him to take action that could affect the 2020 U.S. presidential race, the two individuals said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the diplomatic and political sensitivity of the issue.

State Department officials in Kyiv and Washington were briefed on Zelenskyy's concerns at least three times, the two sources said. Notes summarizing his worries were circulated within the department, they said.

The briefings and the notes show that U.S. officials knew early that Zelenskyy was feeling pressure to investigate Biden, even though the Ukrainian leader later denied it in a joint news conference with Trump in September.

Congressional Republicans have pointed to that public Zelenskyy statement to argue that he felt no pressure to open an investigation, and therefore the Democrats' allegations that led to the impeachment hearings are misplaced.

"Both presidents expressly have stated there was no pressure, no demand, no conditions, no blackmail, no corruption," one Republican lawmaker, John Ratcliffe of Texas, argued on the first day of public hearings last week.

The central allegation in the impeachment inquiry is that Trump, through his allies, demanded that Ukraine, which is fending off Russian aggression, launch an investigation that would benefit him politically in exchange for crucial military and strategic support.

Witnesses have detailed, in closed-door depositions and public impeachment hearings, that allies of Trump pressed Ukraine to investigate Biden and his son while withholding military aid and a coveted meeting between the newly elected Zelenskyy and Trump.

The U.S. briefings — and contemporaneous notes on Zelenskyy's early anxiety about Trump's interest in an investigation — suggest that Democrats have evidence in reach to contradict Republican arguments that Zelenskyy never felt pressure to investigate Biden.

The Associated Press reported last month about Zelenskyy's meeting on May 7 with two top aides, as well as Andriy Kobolyev, head of the state-owned natural gas company Naftogaz, and Amos Hochstein, an American who sits on the Ukrainian company's supervisory board. Ahead of the meeting, Hochstein told Yovanovitch, the U.S. ambassador, why he was being called in.

Zelenskyy's office has not replied to requests for comment about the May 7 meeting.

Notes circulated internally at the State Department indicated that Zelenskyy tried to mask the real purpose of his May 7 meeting — which was to talk about political problems with the White House — by saying it was about energy, the two people with knowledge of the matter said.

After the meeting with Zelenskyy, Hochstein separately briefed two U.S. Embassy officials, Suriya Jayanti and Joseph Pennington, about Zelenskyy's concerns, said the two people who spoke to the AP. Jayanti and Pennington took notes on the meeting, the people said.

Hochstein told the embassy officials about Zelenskyy's concerns and then traveled to Washington to update Yovanovitch on the meeting. The ambassador, who was facing a smear campaign, had just been called back to Washington, where she was informed that she no longer had the confidence of the president. She was relieved of her duties as ambassador on May 20.

Jayanti was also one of three witnesses to a phone call in which Trump discussed his interest in an investigation of Biden with his ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland. The call occurred while Sondland was having lunch with three embassy officials in Kyiv. David Holmes, political counsel at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, has already detailed to House investigators what he overheard. Jayanti and the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 56 of 62

third witness, Tara Maher, have not been interviewed.

Hochstein, a former diplomat who advised Biden on Ukraine matters during the Obama administration, has also not been questioned in the impeachment proceedings.

The Republican arguments about Zelenskyy's lack of concern stem from a Sept. 25 joint media appearance by the American and Ukrainian leaders in which Zelenskyy discussed the July call with Trump that effectively launched the impeachment inquiry.

The appearance came shortly after Trump released a rough transcript of the call.

"You heard that we had, I think, good phone call. It was normal. We spoke about many things. And I — so I think, and you read it, that nobody pushed — pushed me," Zelenskyy said in the appearance with Trump on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York.

"In other words, no pressure," Trump spoke up to add.

In the impeachment hearings, Democrats have countered that Zelenskyy's public comments came when he was trying to calm the waters with the U.S. president in the immediate wake of the transcript's release. The burgeoning scandal has brought further uncertainty for Ukraine with its most important Western partner as the country faces simmering conflict with Russia. Zelenskyy's May 7 meeting suggests that he had been concerned about U.S. support from the start.

Follow Associated Press investigative reporters Desmond Butler at <https://twitter.com/desmondbutler>, Michael Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck>

Trump backing off banning vaping flavors popular with teens

By **JONATHAN LEMIRE, MATTHEW PERRONE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Donald Trump boarded Air Force One to fly to a Kentucky campaign rally two weeks ago, a plan was in place for him to give final approval to a plan to ban most flavored e-cigarettes.

By the time Trump landed back at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington a few hours later, the plan was off. And its future is unclear.

For nearly two months, momentum had been building inside the White House to try to halt a youth vaping epidemic that experts feared was hurting as many as 5 million teenagers.

Both first lady Melania Trump and Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and senior adviser, pushed for the ban, which was also being championed internally by White House counselor Kellyanne Conway, who has taken the lead on some public health issues.

But as Trump sat surrounded by political advisers on the flights to and from Lexington, he grew reluctant to sign the ban, convinced it could alienate voters who would be financially or otherwise affected by a vaping ban, according to two White House and campaign officials not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

A news conference scheduled by Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar to announce the ban was canceled, while more meetings with industry leaders and lobbyists were proposed, according to the officials.

Trump tweeted last week that he'll be meeting with vaping industry representatives, medical professionals and others "to come up with an acceptable solution to the Vaping and E-cigarette dilemma." The White House has yet to announce a date for a meeting.

This month, Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale and others showed the president polling data indicating that e-cigarette users could abandon him if he followed through with the ban, the officials said.

Campaign aides also highlighted an aggressive social media campaign — #IVapeIVote — in which advocates claimed a ban would force the closure of vaping shops, eliminating jobs and sending users of electronic cigarettes back to traditional smokes. Parscale also pointed out the risk that a ban could have on e-cigarette users in key battleground states that Trump narrowly won in 2016.

Others in the West Wing, including Conway, have argued that a ban could be a winning issue with sub-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 57 of 62

urban voters, including mothers, who have fled the president in large numbers. Few would predict where Trump, who is known to abruptly change his mind, would end up since he recently has been consumed with other matters, notably televised impeachments hearings.

The vaping industry's largest trade group said Monday the administration was heading "in the right direction for adult smokers and their families."

"Bans don't work, they never have," Tony Abboud, executive director of the Vapor Technology Association, said in a statement.

Gregory Conley, president of the American Vaping Association, an advocacy organization, added that the government should put in place "sensible and targeted regulations" before it resorts to prohibition, which opponents of a ban said could lead to the creation of an underground market for e-cigarettes.

But Matt Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said Trump would be guilty of "terrible public policy" and "bad politics" if he backs down.

"This is one of the very few issues on which public views are unified," Myers said in a telephone interview. "There are a small number of vape shop owners who are loud and don't care. But there are millions more moms and dads who are deeply concerned."

Robin Koval, president and CEO of the Truth Initiative, a nonprofit, anti-tobacco organization, called on Trump to implement the original plan.

"The health of America's youth must come first and is not for sale or political gain," Koval said in a statement. The first lady opened the White House to a group of young people from the Truth Initiative in October to tell her about their experiences with vaping.

Trump's initial pledge Sept. 11 to ban virtually all flavored e-cigarettes stunned vaping proponents and was immediately embraced by anti-tobacco advocates. In an Oval Office appearance with the first lady and Azar, Trump said the government would act within weeks to protect children from fruit, candy, desert and other sweet vaping flavors, including mint and menthol.

The announcement followed a tweet two days earlier by Mrs. Trump expressing concern "about the growing epidemic of e-cigarette use in our children."

"We need to do all we can to protect the public from tobacco-related disease and death, and prevent e-cigarettes from becoming an on-ramp to nicotine addiction for a generation of youth," she said.

But within days, Trump tweeted that e-cigarettes might be a less-harmful alternative for smokers, a point long made by the industry. Meanwhile, vaping lobbyists, conservative groups and Republican lawmakers from key states warned Trump that a crackdown could cost him with voters.

The Vapor Technology Association launched ads and an online campaign promising to punish Trump and other politicians who support vaping restrictions. Conservative groups that have long promoted vaping as an alternative to smoking, including Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform, joined the criticism.

That group and others helped organize protests against banning flavors, including one outside the White House. Trump supporters also showed up at some of his campaign rallies holding signs expressing their opposition to a ban.

The industry warned some 15,000 to 19,000 vaping shops across the country - and jobs - could be wiped out if flavors were eliminated.

The administration was widely expected earlier this month to announce a scaled-back flavor ban that would exempt menthol, citing research that the flavor was not widely used by children. But no decision came.

Trump instead told reporters on Nov. 8 — four days after his political advisers buttonholed him on the Kentucky trip — he was considering new approaches to curbing teen use, including raising the minimum age for purchasing tobacco from 18 to 21.

Last week, Wisconsin Republican Sen. Ron Johnson sent Trump a letter warning against "unchecked government action that stifles innovation and restricts adults' freedom to choose safer alternatives to smoking."

Asked how disappointed the first lady would be if the president did not follow through with a ban, her spokeswoman, Stephanie Grisham, who also speaks for the president, said Mrs. Trump's priority is the

health and safety of children.

"She does not believe e-cigarettes or any nicotine products should be marketed or available to children," Grisham said.

Underage vaping has reached what health officials call epidemic levels. In the latest government survey, 1 in 4 high school students reported using e-cigarettes in the previous month.

Anticipating a ban on flavors, Juul Labs, the nation's largest e-cigarette maker, said this month it would stop selling its best-selling, mint-flavored nicotine pods.

Lemire reported from New York.

GAO: 60% of Superfund sites at higher risk in climate change

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The worsening wildfires, floods and hurricanes of climate change threaten at least 60% of U.S. Superfund sites, and efforts to strengthen the hazardous waste sites are stalling in some vulnerable regions as the Trump administration plays down the threat, a congressional watchdog agency says.

The Environmental Protection Agency responded to Monday's report of the Government Accountability Office by rejecting many of its findings. That includes dismissing GAO investigators' recommendation that the agency and Administrator Andrew Wheeler explicitly state that the EPA's mission includes dealing with climate change and its increased risk of disasters breaching Superfund sites.

Assistant EPA administrator Peter Wright largely avoided the words "climate change" in his formal response to the GAO and in a statement Monday. "The EPA strongly believes the Superfund program's existing processes and resources adequately ensure that risks and any effects of severe weather events, that may increase in intensity, duration, or frequency, are woven into risk response decisions at nonfederal NPL sites," Wright said.

The GAO report emphasizes the challenges for government agencies under President Donald Trump, who belittles the science of climate change.

Wheeler's highest-profile public remarks on the matter came in a March CBS interview, when Wheeler, a former coal lobbyist, called global heating "an important change" but not one of the agency's most pressing problems.

"Most of the threats from climate change are 50 to 75 years out," Wheeler said then, rejecting conclusions by scientists that damage to climate from fossil fuel emissions already is making natural disasters fiercer and more frequent.

The GAO review comes after a 2017 review by The Associated Press found that 2 million people in the U.S. live within a mile (1.6 kilometers) of 327 Superfund sites in areas prone to flooding or vulnerable to sea level rise caused by climate change. The AP analyzed national flood zone maps, census data and EPA records in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, which flooded more than a dozen Superfund sites in the Houston area, with breaches reported at two. At the time, an EPA spokesman derided AP's reporting as "fear-mongering."

GAO investigators looked at 1,571 Superfund sites — locations around the country contaminated by hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open or otherwise improperly managed. That number does not include Superfund sites owned by the Defense Department and other federal agencies.

At least 945 of the sites are in areas identified as at greater risk of floods, storm surge from major hurricanes, wildfires or sea-level rise of 3 feet (0.9 meters) or more, the GAO says.

Broken down, that includes 783 Superfund sites at greater risk of flooding under climate change, 234 Superfund sites at high or very high risk from wildfires and 187 sites vulnerable to storm surge from any Category 4 or 5 hurricane, the researchers said.

Senate Democrats asked for the Gao review. A dozen senior congressional Democrats on Monday urged the agency to follow the GAO recommendations.

"By refusing to address the worsening impacts of climate change — from flooding to wildfires to more frequent extreme weather events — at our nation's Superfund sites, this EPA is putting public health at

risk," Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the ranking Democrat on the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, said.

GAO investigators cited California's 150-year-old Iron Mountain mine, where Superfund operators daily prevent tons of toxic sludge from pouring into the Sacramento River system, source of one-fifth of the state's water.

One major wildfire last year overran the Iron Mountain Superfund site, nearly destroying its water-treatment system and risking a massive, poisonous explosion if flames reached the heart of the mine, the GAO said. Firefighters used special gear to stop the flames. Site operators have since swapped out PCB pipes carrying away the toxic waste for flame-resistant steel ones.

And east of Houston along the San Jacinto River, record rains under Hurricane Harvey dissolved part of a temporary cap on a 40-acre (16-hectare) Superfund site, exposing contaminated material. EPA testing there afterward found dioxin at more than 2,000 times the maximum recommended level.

Superfund sites in that coastal part of Texas "are incredibly vulnerable," said Jackie Young, head of the Texas Health and Environment Alliance advocacy group. While the EPA has since directed that the toxic waste at the damaged site be moved to higher ground, other Superfund sites in the area are still at risk, Young said.

"It's highly unacceptable that our communities and our first responders" in hurricanes and other disasters "may be exposed to contaminants someone left decades prior," Young said Friday.

The EPA's current five-year strategic plan does not include goals or strategies for handling growing risks under climate change, the GAO report said. The most recent previous five-year plan, under President Barack Obama, listed addressing climate change as one of four main strategic goals. Obama-era plans specifically addressed climate change's impact for Superfund sites, the investigators said.

The current EPA said in a statement Monday it recognizes the importance of making the toxic waste sites "resilient" against weather extremes. "The Agency has taken measures to include vulnerability analyses and adaption planning into Superfund activities," the EPA said.

A GAO review of climate-change-minded planning for keeping the arsenic, mercury, PCBs and other dangerous waste at Superfund sites away from the public and environment found big differences among the 10 EPA regions nationally.

Officials at four EPA regions were able to point to changes they'd made at Superfund sites to try to adapt to climate change, the report said. At the other EPA regions, however, officials said they had not looked at climate-change projection for flooding or rainfall to gauge risks at Superfund sites, investigators said.

In the EPA region covering Texas and four other south-central states — a region that includes the Gulf of Mexico and Houston and other oil and petrochemical hubs frequently battered by hurricanes — officials "told us that they do not include potential impacts of climate change effects or changes in the frequency of natural disasters into their assessments," the GAO investigators wrote.

In the Great Lakes states, meanwhile, regional EPA officials "told us that they do not have any formal direction on how to address risks from climate change and are waiting for EPA headquarters to provide information on how to do so," the report said.

New, old drugs may offer fresh ways to fight heart disease

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Novel drugs may offer fresh ways to reduce heart risks beyond the usual medicines to lower cholesterol and blood pressure.

One new study found that heart attack survivors benefited from a medicine long used to treat gout. Several experimental drugs also showed early promise for interfering with heart-harmful genes without modifying the genes themselves — in one case, with treatment just twice a year.

The research was featured at an American Heart Association conference ending Monday in Philadelphia. "There's a lot of excitement" about the new gene-targeting medicines, especially because they seem to last so long, said Dr. Karol Watson, of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 60 of 62

Scientists have been exploring gene therapy — altering DNA — to attack the root cause of many diseases. The new drugs essentially accomplish the same thing without tampering with genes, said the University of Pennsylvania's Dr. Daniel Rader, who has consulted for some makers of these drugs.

The medicines work by silencing or blocking messages that genes give to cells to make proteins that can do harm, such as allowing cholesterol to accumulate. The first few of these "RNA-interference" drugs recently were approved for other conditions, and research is also targeting heart disease.

Farthest along is inclisiran, tested in 1,561 people with heart disease from clogged arteries who still had high LDL, the bad form of cholesterol, despite taking standard drugs. They were given a shot of inclisiran or a dummy drug when they joined the study, three months later and then every six months.

The drug lowered LDL by 56% without serious side effects. More testing will show whether it also lowers heart attacks and other problems, not just cholesterol. Inclisiran's maker, The Medicines Company, plans to seek federal approval for it later this year.

Two other RNA interference drugs aim at a different target — triglycerides, another fat in the blood that's elevated in one quarter of Americans. Treatments include very low-fat diets, weight loss, fish oil and drugs, but doctors say more and better therapies are needed.

Each RNA interference drug was tested at various doses in 40 people. A single shot lowered triglycerides by 30% to 67%, and the benefit lasted for at least four months. The studies were just intended to show safety; Arrowhead Pharmaceuticals is developing both drugs.

Other research found new benefits from older drugs. AstraZeneca's Farxiga, originally developed to treat diabetes, also lowered the risk of heart problems in heart failure patients who did not have diabetes. Among 2,605 of such patients treated for 18 months, about 9% of those on Farxiga had worsening heart failure or heart-related death versus nearly 13% of those not given the drug. That worked out to a 27% lower risk, without extra serious side effects.

Surprising benefits also were seen in a Canadian study of the decades-old gout drug. The anti-inflammatory drug colchicine — sold as Colcrys, Mitigare and in generic form — was tested in 4,745 people who recently had a heart attack.

After about two years, colchicine users had a 23% lower risk of suffering a new heart attack, heart-related death, stroke, cardiac arrest or urgent need for an artery-opening procedure compared with a group given dummy pills. The benefit came mostly from preventing strokes and artery-opening procedures, and some heart doctors would rather have seen more difference in heart attacks and deaths.

Colchicine is being tested in several other studies, and more evidence is needed before using it routinely to lower heart risks, Dr. L. Kristin Newby of Duke University wrote in a commentary published with the study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Dr. Donald Lloyd-Jones, a Northwestern University cardiologist and program chief for the heart conference, was more supportive.

"When you have a safe drug that's easily available, it's going to be hard to hold this one back," he said.

Marilynn Marchione can be followed on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/MMarchioneAP>

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Nov. 19, the 323rd day of 2019. There are 42 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 19, 1969, Apollo 12 astronauts Charles Conrad and Alan Bean made the second manned landing on the moon.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 61 of 62

On this date:

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln dedicated a national cemetery at the site of the Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania.

In 1915, labor activist Joe Hill was executed by firing squad in Utah for the murders of Salt Lake City grocer John Morrison and his son, Arling.

In 1919, the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY') by a vote of 55 in favor, 39 against, short of the two-thirds majority needed for ratification.

In 1942, during World War II, Russian forces launched their winter offensive against the Germans along the Don front.

In 1959, Ford Motor Co. announced it was halting production of the unpopular Edsel.

In 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat became the first Arab leader to visit Israel.

In 1984, some 500 people died in a firestorm set off by a series of explosions at a petroleum storage plant on the edge of Mexico City.

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev met for the first time as they began their summit in Geneva.

In 1995, Polish President Lech Walesa (vah-WEN'-sah) was defeated in his bid for re-election.

In 1997, Iowa seamstress Bobbi McCaughey (mihk-KOY') gave birth to the world's first set of surviving septuplets, four boys and three girls.

In 2006, British authorities said they were investigating the apparent poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko (leet-vee-NYEHN'-koh), a former KGB agent who had been critical of the Russian government (Litvinenko died in London four days later of polonium poisoning).

In 2017, Charles Manson, the hippie cult leader behind the gruesome murders of actress Sharon Tate and six others in Los Angeles in 1969, died in a California hospital at the age of 83 after nearly a half-century in prison.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama wrapped up his weeklong Asia trip in South Korea, where he said the United States had begun talking with allies about fresh punishment against Iran for defying efforts to halt its nuclear weapons pursuits. President Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeeye) pledged to get tough on corruption and strengthen security in Afghanistan as he started a second five-year term. Artist Jeanne-Claude, who helped create various "wrapping" projects with her husband Christo, died in New York at age 74.

Five years ago: Defying Congress, President Barack Obama ordered sweeping changes in U.S. immigration policy possibly affecting as many as 5 million living illegally in the country. Film and theater director Mike Nichols, 83, died in New York.

One year ago: A federal judge in San Francisco temporarily barred the Trump administration from refusing asylum to immigrants who cross the southern border illegally. Nissan said the company's chairman, Carlos Ghosn (gohn), had been arrested for allegedly underreporting his income and misusing company funds. The Trump administration dropped its effort to bar CNN reporter Jim Acosta from the White House, but said he could have his credentials pulled again if he didn't follow guidelines governing the behavior of journalists. For the first time in NFL history, each team scored more than 50 points as the Los Angeles Rams outlasted the Kansas City Chiefs, 54-51; the game featured 14 touchdowns, included three by defensive players.

Today's Birthdays: Talk show host Larry King is 86. Former General Electric chief executive Jack Welch is 84. Talk show host Dick Cavett is 83. Broadcasting and sports mogul Ted Turner is 81. Former Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, is 80. Former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson is 78. Fashion designer Calvin Klein is 77. Sportscaster Ahmad Rashad is 70. Actor Robert Beltran is 66. Actress Kathleen Quinlan is 65. Actress Glynnis O'Connor is 64. Broadcast journalist Ann Curry is 63. Former NASA astronaut Eileen Collins is 63. Actress Allison Janney is 60. Rock musician Matt Sorum (Guns N' Roses, Velvet Revolver) is 59. Actress Meg Ryan is 58. Actress-director Jodie Foster is 57. Actress Terry Farrell is 56. TV chef Rocco DiSpirito is 53. Actor Jason Scott Lee is 53. Olympic gold medal runner Gail Devers is 53. Actress Erika Alexander is 50. Rock musician Travis McNabb is 50. Singer Tony Rich is 48. Actress Sandrine Holt is 47.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 62 of 62

Country singer Jason Albert (Heartland) is 46. Country singer Billy Currington is 46. Dancer-choreographer Savion Glover is 46. Country musician Chad Jeffers is 44. Rhythm-and-blues singer Tamika Scott (Xscape) is 44. Rhythm-and-blues singer Lil' Mo is 42. Olympic gold medal gymnast Kerri Strug is 42. Actor Reid Scott is 42. Movie director Barry Jenkins (Film: "Moonlight") is 40. Actress Katherine Kelly is 40. Neo-soul musician Browan Lollar (St. Paul & the Broken Bones) is 37. Actor Adam Driver is 36. Country singer Cam is 35. Actress Samantha Futerman is 32. NHL forward Patrick Kane is 31. Rapper Tyga is 30.

Thought for Today: "You can always tell gifted and highly intelligent people as they always turn to the past. Any young person who knows anything that happened before 1980, or 1990, or 2000 for that matter, is immediately someone who is intelligent, probably creative, maybe a writer. Nobody who is drawn to the past and learning about the past is not gifted." — Mike Nichols (film director, born in 1931, died on this date in 2014).

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Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 63 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 64 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 65 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 66 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 67 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 68 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 69 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 70 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 71 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 72 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 73 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 74 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 75 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 76 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 77 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 78 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 79 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 80 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 81 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 82 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 83 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 84 of 62

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 141 ~ 85 of 62