

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, December 12, 2019

5:00pm: Basketball: Girls 7th/8th Game at Tiospa Zina High School
Both 7th and 8th grade games will be played at 5 PM

Closing for Inventory

We will be closing at Noon
on Wednesday, Dec. 18th
for Inventory

We will be reopening for normal hours on
Thursday, Dec. 19th
Thank you for your patronage!

S & S Lumber

HARDWARE HANK

201 East Hwy 12 • 605/397-2361

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



Blowing out the sidewalks

The city has been busy blowing out the sidewalks along US12 and also did some snow removal at the cemetery.

CWD Detected in Harding, Meade and Tripp Counties

PIERRE, S.D. – Increased efforts to determine the presence of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in South Dakota have led to positive results out of Harding, Meade and Tripp counties. Thanks to the cooperation of hunters, these detections were obtained from samples provided through collection stations.

“While not the news we wanted to learn, we did expect to find CWD in new areas with the increased sampling and testing effort,” said GFP wildlife program administrator Chad Switzer. “From a disease surveillance standpoint, we are grateful for the cooperation from hunters in providing voluntary samples from their harvested deer, along with participating taxidermists and businesses that provided areas for sample collection stations,” he said.

One male mule deer from both Harding and Meade counties tested positive, while three male and one female white-tailed deer were positive from Tripp County.

“We understand hunters are anxious to obtain test results from samples provided,” said Switzer. “Hunters will be notified as soon as possible with either a not detected or positive result.”

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal brain disease of deer, elk, and moose caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. Animals in the later stages of infection with CWD may show progressive loss of weight and body condition, behavioral changes, excessive salivation, loss of muscle control and eventual death. Chronic wasting disease is always fatal for the afflicted animal. CWD poses serious problems for wildlife managers, and the implications of long-term management for free-ranging deer and elk is unknown.

The Game, Fish and Parks Commission recently created regulations for the transportation and disposal of deer and elk carcasses from other states and from hunting units within South Dakota’s confirmed CWD areas. The new regulations will not go into effect until 2020. For more information on CWD, visit gfp.sd.gov/chronic-wasting-disease or contact your local GFP office.

Rounds, Colleagues Urge Congressional Leadership to Fully Repeal "Cadillac Tax"

WASHINGTON—U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and U.S. Reps. Joe Courtney (D-Conn.) and Mike Kelly (R-Penn.) wrote to House and Senate leadership urging swift action of their legislation to repeal the "Cadillac Tax," a tax on high premium employer-sponsored health insurance. Legislation repealing the tax passed the House of Representatives overwhelmingly earlier this year. Identical legislation, introduced by Sens. Rounds and Heinrich (S. 684), has 63 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate.

In their bipartisan, bicameral letter, the Members wrote:

"The status quo creates uncertainty as employers, and employee representatives negotiate benefits packages that extend well into 2022, when the tax is currently set to go into effect. A fourth delay is not a viable option. The ongoing uncertainty is already threatening the quality of employer sponsored health insurance. The time is now to act in the best interest of the American people and repeal the Cadillac Tax."

Last week, more than 1,000 employers and stakeholders sent a similar letter, underscoring the breadth of support for repeal.

Full text of their letter:

We write regarding the urgent need to fully repeal the 40 percent excise tax on higher premium employer-provided health plans, commonly referred to as the Cadillac Tax. Failure to act will result in higher-deductibles and loss of coverage for American workers and their families.

Our legislation, the Middle-Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019, (S. 684/ H.R. 748) has 63 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate and passed the House with an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 419 to 6 in July.

The House vote, Senate support, and three implementation delays enacted by prior Congresses reflects an overwhelming consensus that the Cadillac Tax should be fully repealed. This punitive tax, if allowed to take effect, will raise health insurance costs for working Americans.

The status quo creates uncertainty as employers and employee representatives negotiate benefits packages that extend well into 2022, when the tax is currently set to go into effect. A fourth delay is not a viable option. The ongoing uncertainty is already threatening the quality of employer sponsored health insurance. The time is now to act in the best interest of the American people and repeal the Cadillac Tax.

According to polling by Fox News, Kaiser Health and Gallup, health care remains a top concern for American families. The American public demands that Congress act to address the growing crisis of health care affordability. Repealing the 40 percent tax has wide bipartisan support and is a worthwhile first step. Postponing repeal is no longer an option.

We look forward to working with you to secure lasting relief for America's working families. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site To Offer Accessible Topside Tours Of The Delta-01 Launch Control Facility

Cactus Flat, S.D. – The historic Delta-01 Launch Control Facility provides a remarkable opportunity to view the front line of the Cold War. However, it was built for two missile officers, and never meant for tourists. The standard public tour of Delta-01, offered since 2004, includes a descent to the underground control center which not accessible to visitors with mobility challenges due to the restrictive underground spaces.

Built to execute a nuclear war, the historic Delta-01 Launch Control provides a remarkable opportunity to view the front line of the Cold War. However, one result of the Cold War construction of the site is that it cannot be made fully accessible for modern audiences. The standard public tour of Delta-01, offered since 2004, is not accessible to visitors with mobility challenges due to the small size of the elevator and restrictive underground spaces.

For those visitors unable to safely experience the underground control center, beginning this month, the park will offer an accessible topside tour that focuses on the above ground structure and explores the underground launch control center virtually. This tour does not enter the elevator or go to the underground control center. In order to ensure staff availability and the best experience possible, this tour must be reserved at least five days in advance online or by calling 605-717-7629. Standard amenity fees apply and the minimum number of participants on the accessible tour is two visitors. The topside tour will be offered once weekly November through April, and in the summer season the tour will be offered twice weekly.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site strives to be inclusive and welcoming to all visitors. “The topside tour will allow those visitors unable to physically reach the underground control center to have a quality experience inside the historic building,” remarked Superintendent Eric Leonard.

The physical limitations unique to these facilities have led to an emphasis on programmatic access. Examples of this include the development of the replica Delta-01 blast door at the Visitor Center and the virtual tours of Delta-01 and the missile silo at Delta-09.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site’s headquarters and visitor center is located off of exit 131, Interstate 90. The park consists of three sites along a fifteen mile stretch of Interstate 90 in Western South Dakota. Authorized by Congress in 1999, Minuteman Missile National Historic Site preserves components of the Minuteman II intercontinental ballistic missile system, interpreting the deterrent value of the land-based portion of America’s nuclear defense during the Cold War era and commemorating the people and events associated with this recent period of American history. More information about the park can be found on the park’s website at or by phone at: 605-433-5552. Visit us on Facebook and Twitter.

Constitutional Carry States' Rights Act Introduced in the House Legislation was introduced in the Senate by Rounds earlier this year

WASHINGTON—U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) made the following statement after companion legislation to his Constitutional Carry States' Rights Act was introduced in the House of Representatives last week by Rep. Kevin Hern (R-Okla.):

"I thank Rep. Hern for introducing our Constitutional carry legislation in the House," said Rounds. "Our bill, which I introduced in the Senate earlier this year, would close federal loopholes in the Gun-Free School Zones Act to make sure individuals who choose to exercise their Second Amendment rights are treated the same way as those who possess concealed handguns with a permit. I look forward to working with Rep. Hern and our colleagues in Congress to advance our legislation that protects the Second Amendment rights of Americans."

Background:

The Constitutional Carry States' Rights Act that would close a loophole in the Gun-Free School Zones Act to give law-abiding citizens in states with Constitutional carry laws the same legal authority to possess a firearm as individuals in states that require a permit to carry a concealed weapon.

- Enacted in 1990, the Gun-Free School Zones Act makes it a federal crime to possess a firearm within 1000 feet of a school zone, with exceptions for law enforcement, school-sanctioned activities and individuals licensed by the state to possess a firearm, such as an individual with a concealed carry permit. Current federal law only makes exceptions if the individual is "licensed to do so by the State in which the school zone is located." The state must also verify the individual is eligible prior to issuing a license. Because of this specific requirement of state licensure, lawful individuals in states with Constitutional carry laws are not included in the exemption because they are able to carry without a specific state permit.

- Further, the current exemption does not apply to out-of-state individuals lawfully carrying a concealed weapon because the exemption is limited to people licensed in the state where the school zone is located.

- This legislation would close both of these loopholes. This would, in essence, return the federal law to what was in place before Constitutional carry was enacted in South Dakota and extend additional protections to law-abiding gun owners nationwide.

- Rounds introduced the Senate version of the bill in May 2019.

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Wind ...

Today



Cold

High: 7 °F

Tonight



Chance Snow

Low: 3 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny

High: 11 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

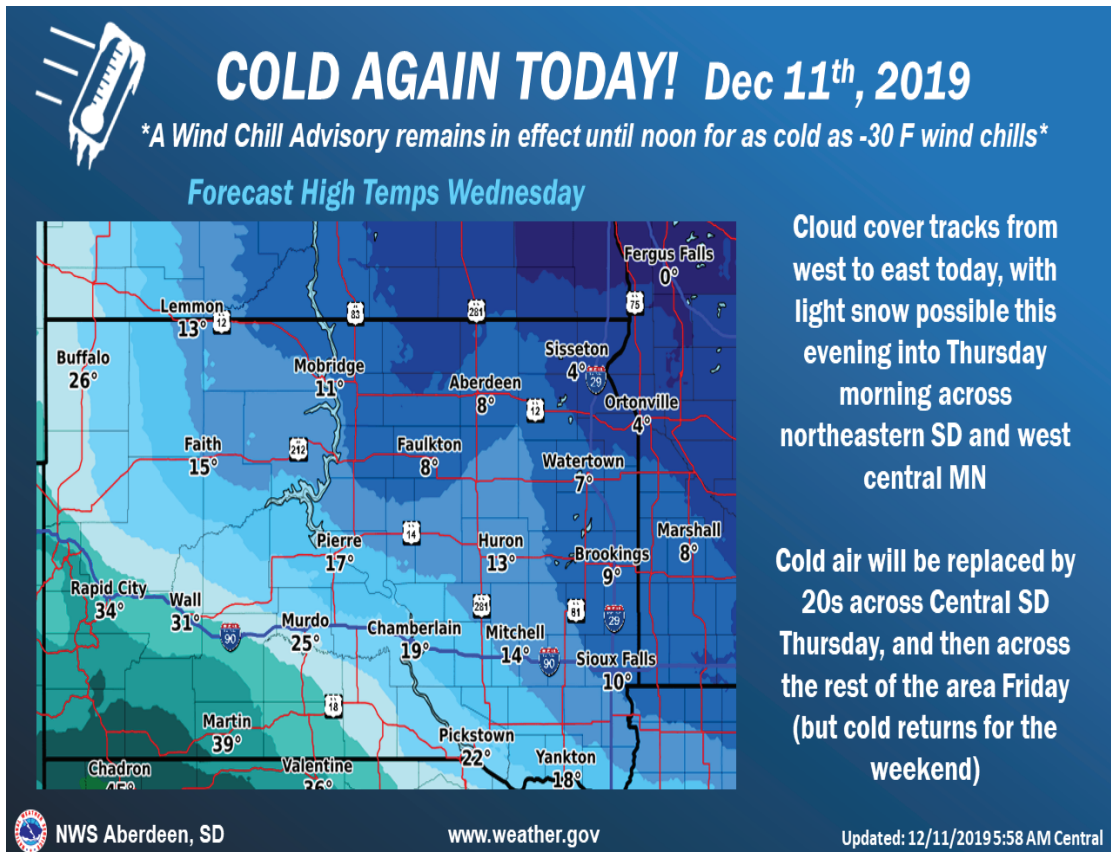
Low: 4 °F

Friday



Partly Sunny
then Slight
Chance Snow

High: 27 °F



Temperatures improve when compared to Tuesday, but they will still be quite cold today. Bundle up!

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Today in Weather History

December 11, 1965: Ice, up to 3 inches thick, with even more in some locations, accumulated from freezing rain on utility lines and trees in northern South Dakota, causing extensive damage. The damage was estimated at \$1 million each to telephone lines and power lines, with the highest losses in the northeast quarter of the state. The first accumulation of the glaze began as a thick rime due to dense fog and freezing temperatures before the 11th. Freezing rain, which started the afternoon of the 11th and continued into the 12th, formed a coating of ice over the heavy rime accumulation. The glaze remained for a week or more in most areas. In west central Minnesota, freezing drizzle and freezing rain at night on the 11th caused ice accumulations of 1/2 to 1 inch thick on roads, telephone, and electric wires, as well as tree limbs. Power and other services were disrupted over a broad area. Some services were out for up to four days.

December 11, 2004: High winds gusting to around 60 mph caused some spotty damage in northeast South Dakota. In Watertown, some trees were downed. One tree fell onto a house, causing some minor damage. In Milbank, two rail cars were blown down a railroad track and derailed.

1932 - Very cold weather prevailed along the West Coast. San Francisco received 0.8 inch of snow, and at the airport the temperature dipped to 20 degrees. At Sacramento CA, the mercury dipped to 17 degrees to establish an all-time record low for that location. Morning lows were below freezing from the 9th to the 15th at Sacramento, and the high on the 11th was just 34 degrees. The cold wave dealt severe damage to truck crops and orange groves in the Sacramento Valley. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Low pressure over southwestern Ontario, Canada, brought snow and gusty winds to the North Central U.S. Winds gusted to 62 mph at Riverton WY. Snow and high winds in eastern North Dakota reduced visibilities to less than one hundred feet at times. Warm weather prevailed across the Southern Plains Region. Half a dozen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Del Rio TX with a reading of 89 degrees. Laredo TX and Kingsville TX tied for honors as hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 92 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Arctic cold invaded the central and eastern U.S. Sault Ste Marie MI reported a record low of 14 degrees below zero, and International Falls MN was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 25 degrees below zero. Temperatures remained below zero all day over parts of eastern Upper Michigan and northern New England. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Strong Santa Ana winds developed across southern California and parts of central California. Winds in Kern County of central California gusted to 100 mph near Grapevine. The high winds reduced visibilities to near zero in the desert areas, closing major interstate highways east of Ontario CA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2008 - A rare snowstorm swept across parts of south Louisiana and Mississippi, blanketing the area with snow. Nearly 8 inches of snow fell over parts of Louisiana. These conditions caused schools and bridges to close and left thousands of residents without power (Associated Press). (NCDC)

2010 - The "Pineapple Express" - a meteorological event where southwest winds bring warm, moist air to the U.S. West Coast - produced record rainfall to the Pacific Northwest during December 11th-12th. Seattle experienced record daily rainfall two days in a row. The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport recorded 1.42 inches of rain on the 11th, breaking the old daily record of 1.32 inches set in 1955. The next day, 2.19 inches fell, breaking the daily record of 1.70 inches set in 1966. The Stillaguamish River in western Washington state reached 21.06 feet at Arlington, tying the record set in November 2006. Flood stage for the river is 14 feet. The storm system also brought record warmth to the area. On December 14th, the temperature at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport reached 57, breaking the old daily record of 55 set in 2004. (NCDC)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 14 °F at 12:09 AM

Low Temp: -6 °F at 7:52 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 12:11 AM

Day Rain: 0.00

Record High: 59° in 1939

Record Low: -22° in 1927

Average High: 26°F

Average Low: 7°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.18

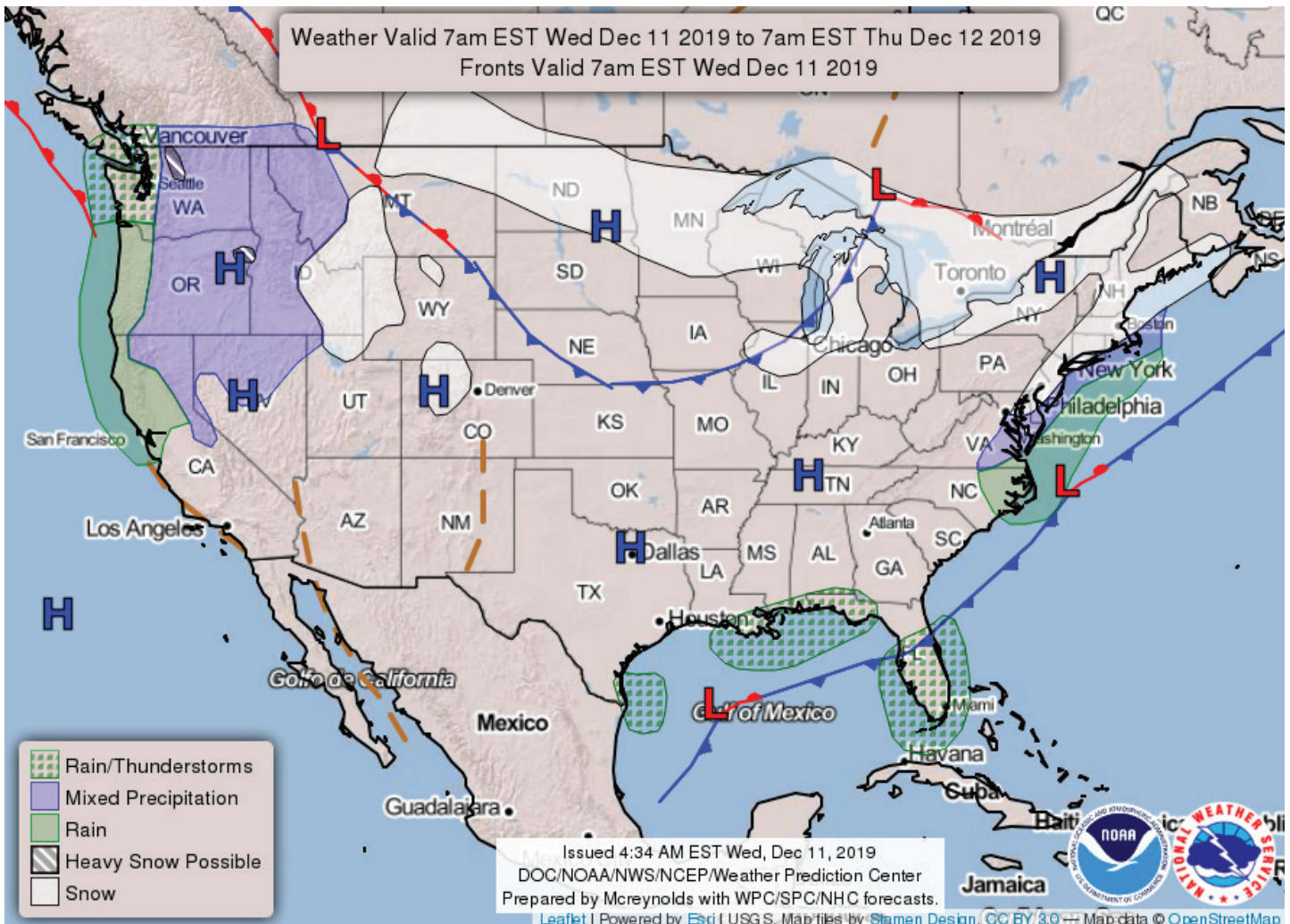
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11

Average Precip to date: 21.38

Precip Year to Date: 28.06

Sunset Tonight: 4:50 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04 a.m.





WHERE'S JESUS' PRESENT?

It was Christmas Eve. The tree was brightly decorated, the presents were wrapped with beautiful paper and colorful bows, the meal was over, and the family gathered together to read the Story of the Birth of Jesus, followed by a time of prayer. It was a family tradition.

"Now," said Dad, "let each one of us say a prayer and I will end our prayer-time before we go to bed."

After praying, Susie went to the tree and began to look at each present. She looked at the name on each of them very carefully. The family was curious but quiet.

Finally, Susie, looked at each member of the family and asked, "Where's the present for Jesus? What are we giving Him this year?"

Stunned, the family sat in silence. No one had thought about a gift for Jesus.

Paul has a suggestion for the best gift we could give Christ this Christmas. Writing to the Romans he said, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies – your entire self – to God... be a living and holy sacrifice to Him – the kind He will accept."

When we think of giving gifts this Christmas each of us would do well to think first of the gift God wants from us. We need to take Paul's words seriously, and give the most valuable gift – the gift of ourselves – to God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, trouble our hearts with the words of Paul this season, and carefully and prayerfully consider the gift You want most – surrendered lives! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

- 12/03/2019 – Christmas Open House 10am-4pm, James Valley Telecommunications
- 12/07/2019 – Santa Day 9am-12pm, Professional Management Services
- 12/07/2019 – Tour of Homes 4pm-7pm, Olive Grove Golf Course (Tickets available at Lori's Pharmacy, Groton Ford, Hair & Co (Aberdeen) and Vicki Walter (605) 380-0480)
- 12/19/2019 – Christmas Open House 10am-4pm, Wells Fargo Bank
- 12/20/2019 – Holiday Bake Sale & Open House 9am-4pm, Groton Community Transit
 - 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)

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Mega Millions

18-31-46-54-61, Mega Ball: 25, Megaplier: 2

(eighteen, thirty-one, forty-six, fifty-four, sixty-one; Mega Ball: twenty-five; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$314 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$140 million

Thistlewood's 3 lifts Colorado St. over S. Dakota St. 72-68

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — Nico Carvacho scored 12 points and grabbed 10 rebounds and Adam Thistlewood's go-ahead 3-pointer with 18 seconds left helped lift Colorado State to a 72-68 win over South Dakota State on Tuesday night.

The Jackrabbits led 68-67 on Matt Dentlinger's layup with 53 seconds left before Thistlewood hit his wide-open 3.

Kris Martin had three steals and scored 12 points, including a dunk with 4 seconds to go that sealed the win for the Rams (7-5). Kendle Moore added 10 points and Thistlewood finished with seven points.

Douglas Wilson scored 15 points, Noah Freidel added 12 and Alex Arians had 10 for South Dakota State (6-6), which has lost three straight.

The Rams host Colorado and the Jackrabbits host Nebraska Kearney, both on Friday.

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

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

WRESTLING

Redfield Triangular

Clark/Willow Lake 66, Britton-Hecla 0

Redfield Area 81, Britton-Hecla 0

Redfield Area 59, Clark/Willow Lake 15

Sioux Valley Quadrangular

Howard 43, Mount Vernon/Plankinton/Corsica 36

Marion/Freeman 38, Sioux Valley 33

Howard 59, Marion/Freeman 12

Mount Vernon/Plankinton/Corsica 60, Sioux Valley 15

Mount Vernon/Plankinton/Corsica 57, Marion/Freeman 24

Howard 58, Sioux Valley 18

NorthWestern Energy seeks to buy more of Colstrip coal plant

By AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — NorthWestern Energy said Tuesday it will seek regulatory permission to acquire part of Puget Sound Energy's share of the Colstrip Power Plant for \$1 as some utilities look to unload their coal-generated power.

The agreement would involve taking over the Washington state utility's 25% ownership interest in Colstrip's Unit 4 and also purchasing an interest in the separate Colstrip Transmission System for as much as \$3.75 million.

That would boost South Dakota-based NorthWestern's ownership interest in the power plant to 55% amid questions about the plant's future.

Customers' bills are not expected to increase, in part because NorthWestern will not have to buy as much higher-cost power on the open market during peak usage, officials said.

"Even with projected operating and maintenance costs factored in, purchasing more of Colstrip Unit 4 for only \$1 is by far the most affordable way to help close the gap in the capacity shortage facing our customers," John Hines, NorthWestern Energy vice president of supply, said in a statement.

NorthWestern purchased its 30% share of Colstrip 4 in 2008 for \$187 million and received permission from the Montana Public Service Commission to charge ratepayers \$407 million over 34 years.

Two of Colstrip's four units are scheduled to be shut down in the coming months as part of a legal settlement. Six companies own shares of the plant's two newer units, and four of those companies are making preparations for operations to cease as early as 2025.

Under Washington state law, Puget Sound Energy and another partial owner, Avista Corp., must stop using coal power by the end of 2025. PSE also owns 25% of Unit 3 and Avista owns 15% each of Units 3 and 4. NorthWestern, however, plans for the plant to continue operating past 2040.

NorthWestern said it will seek pre-approval from the Montana Public Service Commission early next year to acquire 185 megawatts of coal-fired power generation capacity. It will also seek approval to sell 90 megawatts of that production to Puget Sound Energy for five years.

After the five years end, NorthWestern would have the option of purchasing another 90 megawatts of capacity on the transmission line, officials said.

During the 2019 Legislature, NorthWestern sought lawmakers permission to purchase an additional share of Colstrip from an unnamed company for \$1 with the authorization to buy additional capacity on the power line for market price.

The bill was rejected amid complaints that it would have sidestepped the Montana Public Service Commission's ability to regulate the spending and costs that would be passed on to customers.

"We took that feedback and this is a better proposal than what was proposed during the Legislature," spokeswoman Jo Dee Black said Tuesday.

If NorthWestern had the additional 95 megawatts of power from Colstrip Unit 4 available last winter, its customers would have saved \$4 million over a four-day March cold snap during which the utility had to buy power on the spot market, Hines said. With the full 185 megawatts, customers would have saved \$8 million over that four-day stretch, he said.

NorthWestern Energy is still looking to make up for another estimated 400-megawatt capacity shortage by issuing requests for proposal for other power generation.

The company cannot comment on whether it is interested in purchasing more shares in the coal-fired plant unless a transaction is announced, Black said.

The utility will set aside about \$5 million in profit from selling power to Puget Sound Energy for environmental remediation and decommissioning costs when Unit 4 is retired, officials said.

Crews to use sound cannons to scare geese in Sioux Falls

Crews in Sioux Falls will use sound cannons to scare away geese starting this week. Sioux Falls Animal Control is trying to scare off thousands of geese migrating into the area, agency Supervisor Julie DeJong said.

The birds start searching for new open water areas as ponds and lakes in rural South Dakota freeze over. Geese flock to the Big Sioux River in Sioux Falls during the winter.

Crews will use sound cannons to scare geese from areas near the Sioux Falls Regional Airport, the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds and at a golf course. Flying geese can cause damage to airplanes by striking windshields or being sucked into engines.

This year, people around the fairgrounds will hear sounds similar to fireworks or shotguns, DeJong said. The sounds come from "crackle shells" and screamer pistols that officers will be using this year.

The cannons will go off several times a day to scare the estimated 6,000 to 8,000 geese that migrate into the Sioux Falls area each winter, DeJong said. That's a steep increase from the summer count of around 1,000 geese, the Argus Leader reported.

Past use of the sound cannons has been successful, with no bird strikes at Joe Foss Field so far this year, DeJong said.

Judge to rule Jan. 2 on ballot petition circulators law

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge in Aberdeen says he'll rule by Jan. 2 on a challenge to a state law that will require ballot petition circulators to register and be included in a directory.

The organization SD Voice is seeking an injunction to stop the law from taking effect next July. It requires petition circulators to apply with the secretary of state for an identification number, provide personal information and be included in a directory. SD Voice says the law is unconstitutional. Attorneys for the state say the law is aimed at preventing fraud.

Judge Charles Kornmann heard arguments from both sides this week. The Aberdeen American News reported that Kornmann said he had some concerns about the law, including that it added to invasion of privacy.

Kornmann plans to issue a decision by Jan. 2.

Sioux Falls police investigate fatal stabbing

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police are investigating a fatal stabbing.

Authorities say officers responded to residence about 12:30 Tuesday morning. They found two men with stab wounds.

Police say one of two died as a result of the inflicted injuries. Lt. Adam Petersen says the public is not in danger as a result of the crime.

Petersen says the other man's stab wounds are not believed to be life threatening. He declined to identify the men involved. He says the weapon used in the stabbing was a knife.

Sioux Falls superintendent is resigning

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The superintendent of South Dakota's largest school district is resigning.

Sioux Falls Superintendent Brian Maher says he'll step down at the end of June. Maher says there's a "shelf life" for superintendents and that he doesn't want to be the one who stayed too long. Maher has been a superintendent for 21 years, serving the last five years in Sioux Falls. He says there isn't one event or destination that contributed to his decision. He says it was simply time to go.

The Argus Leader reports that in the last two to three years, he spearheaded the charge to address overcrowded campuses by calling on voters to pass a historic \$190 million bond to build three new schools by 2024, two of which are expected to open by fall 2021, and renovate others.

Jersey City's mayor says gunmen targeted kosher market

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (AP) — The mayor of a New Jersey city said Wednesday that authorities believe gunmen targeted a kosher market during a furious shooting that killed six people and filled the streets with the sounds of heavy gunfire for hours just across the Hudson River from New York City.

Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop said in a tweet that a review of security cameras show the gunmen targeted the market. He said two officers one block away immediately responded and engaged with the gunmen. But Fulop did not elaborate further, and his public safety director had said Tuesday that terrorism wasn't suspected.

A police officer, three bystanders and two suspects all died in the violence Tuesday afternoon

The slain officer, Detective Joseph Seals, 40, was credited by his superiors with having led the department in the number of illegal guns removed from the streets in recent years, and might have been trying to stop an incident involving such weapons when he was cut down by gunfire that erupted near a cemetery, authorities said.

Jersey City Police Chief Michael Kelly said the officer was trying to stop some "bad guys" near the cemetery. The gunmen then drove a stolen rental van to another part of the city and engaged police in a lengthy shootout from inside the kosher market, where five more bodies were found.

"It's a really tough day for the city of Jersey City," Fulop said Tuesday. Seals "was one of the best officers for getting the most guns off the streets. He was a good cop."

Two other officers were wounded but were later released from the hospital, authorities said.

The bullets started flying early in the afternoon in the city of about 270,000. Seals, who worked for a unit called Cease Fire, was shot around 12:30 p.m. The gunmen then drove a stolen rental van to another part of the city and engaged police in a lengthy shootout.

Kelly said when police responded to the area of the kosher store, officers "were immediately engaged by high-power rifle fire."

A video shot by a witness shows a police officer on the ground by a car, apparently wounded. Another officer goes to him, helps him up and the two run around a corner as gunshots ring out. Seconds later, as a police cruiser pulls up in front of the store, about a dozen shots are heard in rapid succession.

"Our officers were under fire for hours," the chief said.

Inside the grocery store, police found the bodies of who they believed were the two gunmen and three other people who apparently happened to be there when the assailants rushed in, authorities said. Police said they were confident the bystanders were shot by the gunmen and not by police.

The kosher grocery is a central fixture in a growing community of Orthodox Jews who have been moving to Jersey City in recent years.

Chabad Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, who shops at the kosher store and attends a synagogue next door, said he spoke with the store owner, Moishe Ferencz.

"He told me he had just walked out of the store into the synagogue not five feet away just before this happened, and then he couldn't get back for hours," Schapiro said. "His wife was inside the store. He said, 'I hope my wife is safe.'"

The names of the victims inside the store were not immediately released, pending notification of relatives.

City Public Safety Director James Shea said earlier Tuesday that authorities believe the bloodshed was not an act of terrorism but that it was still under investigation.

The shooting spread fear through the neighborhood, and the nearby Sacred Heart School was put on lockdown as a precaution.

SWAT teams, state police and federal agents converged on the scene, and police blocked off the area, which in addition to the school and supermarket included a hair salon and other shops. Dozens of bystanders pressed against the police barrier to capture the action on their cellphones, some whooping when bursts of fire could be heard.

Video shot by residents recorded loud volleys of gunfire reverberating along one of the city's main streets and showed a long line of law enforcement officers pointing guns as they advanced, yelling to bystanders,

"Clear the street! Get out of the way!"

"It's like firecrackers going off," said Andy Patel, who works at a liquor store about three blocks away. "They were shooting like crazy. ... The cops were clearing everyone off the streets."

Police also removed what they described as a possible "incendiary device" from the rental vehicle and sent it for examination by a bomb squad. The results of that examination were not available Tuesday evening.

Seals had been on the Jersey City Police Department since 2006. In addition to his work with the illegal guns unit, he was cited for heroism in a Christmas Eve 2008 incident in which he and another officer burst through the window of a home and stopped a sexual assault that was being carried out against a 41-year-old woman.

Seventh grader Zamir Butler said his class was coming back inside from the playground at Sacred Heart, which sits across the street from the grocery store, when he heard the shots. At first he thought they were thunder, since it had rained earlier.

"Everybody was running up the stairs to get to safety in the classroom," he said. "A few of the kids were crying. They told us to stay behind the wall and stay down."

Rescuer describes horror of New Zealand's silent eruption

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WHAKATANE, New Zealand (AP) — The eruption was so silent that Lillani Hopkins didn't hear it over the hum of the boat's engines. She didn't turn around until her dad whacked her.

Then she saw it. Huge clouds of ash and steam shooting into the sky. She was so excited, she grabbed her phone out of her dad's bag and hit record. But then the plume stopped going up and started rolling out over the cliffs — and her awe turned to fear.

Just under the surface of the crater, pressure had been building for months. Now the super-heated water, about 150 degrees Celsius, or 300 Fahrenheit, burst out in a powerful spray. The blast also contained ash, rocks and a few boulders the size of exercise balls, but it was likely the scalding water that was most deadly.

There were 47 tourists on New Zealand's White Island at the time of Monday's eruption: 24 from Australia, nine from the U.S., five New Zealanders and others from Germany, Britain, China and Malaysia. Many had taken a day trip from the Royal Caribbean cruise ship Ovation of the Seas. Authorities believe 14 people were killed. Those who survived the blast had terrible burns and some ran into the sea screaming — a screaming that would not stop.

Three weeks earlier, New Zealand's seismic monitoring agency GeoNet had raised the alert level on the island from 1 to 2, on a scale where 5 is a major eruption. The agency had noted the water level in the crater lake had been rising since August and that over the previous few weeks there had been an increase in sulfur dioxide gas, which comes from magma deep in the volcano. Many people around the world have asked: How could the tours of the island continue in the face of such warning signs?

One answer may be that people in New Zealand are used to living on a giant seismic fault line that arcs around the Pacific Ocean. They ski on mountains that sometimes belch dark ash onto the snow, and take hikes past pools of boiling mud. They carry on working as minor earthquakes rattle cups from shelves. And they've toured White Island for decades, marveling as it steams and belches.

The country's tourism industry thrives on adventure spiced with a little danger. A 2 on the scale? White Island Tours, the island's sole tour operator, decided to carry on. Company chairman Paul Quinn issued a statement Wednesday saying that while many questions remain, its priority for now is helping those affected.

Lillani, a 22-year-old student who has studied volcanoes, had taken her dad, Geoff, a pastor, to the island for a 50th birthday present on Monday. Their group's two guides told them to wear hard hats. They gave them gas masks, which the guides said they could wear if they had trouble with their breathing.

The guides told them the sulfur dioxide and other gases on the island turn acidic when mixed with their saliva, and gave them candies to suck. Lillani has asthma and found she needed to wear the mask near the crater. Her dad noticed his throat getting sore.

As they walked around the island, Lillani was full of enthusiasm, and questions. She asked her guide:

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What do we do if it erupts? Strap on your mask and take shelter, he told her. Run to the shipping container that's over there for emergencies, it's full of supplies.

Aside from their two guides, Lillani and her dad were the only New Zealanders in their tour group. The others were from Asia, America, Europe. Some didn't speak much English. Lillani loved every moment on the island, which is also known by the Maori name Whakaari.

After 90 minutes, the group got back on the boat, and was just a couple of football fields away from the shore when the volcano erupted. The crew told them to get below deck. Then they asked for people with medical training, and Lillani and her dad, who had both trained in first aid, joined two doctors on deck. A dinghy ferried the injured aboard, 23 in all.

Lillani had never seen anything like it. Welts and burns that covered every inch of exposed skin. People's faces coated in gray paste, their eyes covered so they couldn't see, their tongues thickened so they couldn't talk. Some of them still screaming.

Passengers passed Lillani bottles of water. She rinsed out mouths, cleaned eyes and poured as much water on the burns as she could. The boat appeared to be filled with discarded gray rubber gloves. But they weren't gloves, they were husks of skin that had peeled away from people's bodies. Many were burned even under their clothes, and Lillani needed to cut them away.

As she poured water on some people's burns, it only seemed to make them worse. So other passengers began handing her their clothes to make cold compresses, some of them stripping down to their bras and underpants.

Lillani talked to the injured, asked them questions about their vacations, trying to distract them and keep them conscious. She began singing her church songs. She stopped for a moment, embarrassed that she wasn't much of a singer. Somebody grabbed her leg: Please keep going.

The boat was flying, trying to make the hourlong trip back to shore as quickly as possible. Halfway back, the coast guard met them and two paramedics jumped aboard. They gave some of the injured medication, but others were so severely burned the paramedics couldn't find their veins.

Many of the injured were asking about their loved ones. An elderly couple from Australia had become separated, the wife unable to move. So Lillani found the husband and led him by the hand back to her. He sat down and held her in his arms.

When they finally got back to shore, Lillani says all 23 of those she helped were still breathing. But she hasn't had any contact with them since and doesn't know if they all survived.

Thirty-nine people were taken from the island that day on Lillani's boat and in helicopters. Five were already dead or died soon after. A sixth person who was being treated for burns at an Auckland hospital died on Tuesday night. Thirty others remain hospitalized, with 25 in critical condition. New Zealand's burns units are working around the clock trying to keep those people alive, performing operations on them and skin grafts.

Lillani has just about finished her studies in geography and sociology at Waikato University and is looking forward to a career in teaching. She still loves volcanoes, she says, and being able to experience active ones is a privilege she hopes others will continue to be able to enjoy.

Saudi Aramco gains 10% in debut to clinch top seat at \$1.8T

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi Arabia's oil company Aramco gained 10% in its first moments on the stock market Wednesday in a dramatic debut that held until closing and pushed its value up to \$1.88 trillion, surpassing Apple as the largest listed company in the world.

Trading on the Saudi Tadawul stock exchange came after a mammoth \$25.6 billion initial public offering that set the record as the biggest ever in history, overtaking the \$25 billion raised by China's Alibaba in 2014.

Demand during the bookbuilding period for Aramco's IPO reached \$106 billion with most of that generated by Saudi investment.

Aramco, owned by the state, has sold a 1.5% stake in the company, pricing its shares before trading at

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32 Saudi riyals, or what is \$8.53.

At pre-trading auction earlier in the morning, bids for Aramco had already reached the 10% limit on stock price fluctuation allowed by Tadawul. That pushed the price of Aramco shares in opening moments to 35.2 riyals, or \$9.39 a share, where it held until closing at 3 p.m.

A stunning attack in September blamed on Iran struck Aramco's main processing facility. Still, the company remains attractive to many local investors. Aramco is worth more than the top five oil companies -- Exxon Mobil, Total, Royal Dutch Shell, Chevron and BP -- combined. It also has one of the lowest costs of production, estimated at around \$4 a barrel.

Internationally, however, investors have been spooked by the geopolitical risks associated with Aramco, as well as the Saudi crown prince's policies and the stain on the kingdom's reputation following the killing of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in Turkey last year.

Rather than float internationally, Aramco sold locally 0.5% of its shares to individual retail investors -- most of whom are Saudi nationals -- and 1% to institutional investors, most of which are Saudi and Gulf-based funds.

The retail portion was limited to Saudi citizens, residents of Saudi Arabia or nationals of Gulf Arab states.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman plans to use the money raised from the sale of a sliver of the kingdom's crown jewel to diversify the country's economy and fund major national projects that create jobs for millions of young Saudis entering the workforce.

What the 34-year-old prince had initially sought was a \$2 trillion valuation for Aramco and the sale of up to 5% of the company - on an international stock exchange as well as the Saudi market - that could raise \$100 billion.

Instead, potential buyers outside Saudi Arabia thought his \$2 trillion valuation was too high. With the gains made on Tadawul and a strong local push, the company moves closer to clinching that \$2 trillion mark without even listing internationally.

Less than a quarter of institutional investment generated in the IPO, or 23%, was raised from non-Saudi investors, according to lead adviser Samba Capital.

Saudi companies and government institutions raised 51% of the overall demand, with public and private funds contributing to the remaining 26%, Samba Capital said.

"They have had to launch the IPO on their own stock exchange as the valuation was unlikely to be achieved elsewhere," said John Colley, associate dean at Warwick Business School in the U.K.

He said the surging price on launch suggests that buying may be from those affiliated to the crown prince.

In the lead up to the flotation, there had been a strong push for Saudis, including princes and businessmen, to contribute to what's seen locally as a moment of national pride, and even duty.

A brief ceremony as trading started on Wednesday saw a countdown in Arabic, the sounding of a bell, a light show with music and applause all around. At the celebration at the Fairmont hotel in Riyadh, Aramco Chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan, described the sale as "a proud and historic moment for Saudi Aramco and our majority shareholder, the kingdom." He said it demonstrates further significant progress toward Saudi Arabia's transformation and economic growth.

Aramco, which has exclusive rights to produce and sell the kingdom's energy reserves, was founded in 1933 with America's Standard Oil Co. before becoming fully owned by Saudi Arabia four decades ago.

Strong demand for Aramco's stock has so far been mostly generated by Saudi funds, rather than the wider net of international investors the crown prince's economic diversification plan may need to succeed.

The sale of Aramco is a step toward raising new streams of capital for the government's Public Investment Fund, but it is only part of a much larger transformation needed to move the economy away from reliance on oil exports for revenue.

Zachary Cefaratti, chief executive officer of Dalma Capital which invested in Aramco through funds, said he anticipates the company could as early as Thursday become the first in the world valued at over \$2 trillion if another day of 10% gains are met.

To encourage Saudi citizens to buy and keep hold of Aramco stock, the company says it will pay a divi-

dend of at least \$75 billion in 2020. Individual Saudi investors who hold their shares for six months from the first day of trading can also receive up to 100 bonus shares, or one for every 10 held.

The government additionally encouraged Saudis by making it easier to access credit for stock purchases.

The result was that just over 5 million individuals, nearly all of them Saudi nationals out of a population of around 20 million citizens, generated subscriptions of \$13 billion.

With oil prices hovering around \$63 a barrel, the kingdom needs a breakeven oil price of \$87 a barrel to balance its budget and climb out of deficit, according to Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank.

One of the biggest expenditures is government salaries for the millions of Saudis that work in the public sector.

Aramco's flotation could help generate billions of dollars in capital to invest in job-creating projects that benefit private businesses and keep unemployment from rising beyond current levels of roughly 12%.

New Zealand volcano vents steam, delays recovery of bodies

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WHAKATANE, New Zealand (AP) — A New Zealand island volcano vented more steam and mud Wednesday, prompting authorities to delay plans to recover the bodies of victims from a deadly eruption two days ago.

Volcanic tremors on White Island were intensifying to a level not seen since an eruption in 2016, the GeoNet seismic monitoring agency said, calculating a 40% to 60% chance of another eruption within the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Australia was sending a military plane to bring some of the Australians injured in the eruption to Australia for specialist medical care. Authorities expected to transport 10 injured patients to New South Wales and Victoria states, beginning Thursday.

Six deaths have been confirmed in Monday's eruption, which sent a tower of steam and ash an estimated 12,000 feet (3,660 meters) into the air. The bodies of eight other people are believed to remain on the ash-covered island. And 30 people remain hospitalized, including 25 in critical condition. Many of the injured suffered severe burns and were being treated at hospital burn units around New Zealand.

GeoNet said in an early evening update that shallow magma within the volcano appeared to be driving the increased activity. It also said there was a low risk to the mainland. The volcano is about 50 kilometers (30 miles) off New Zealand's main North Island.

Police believe 47 visitors were on the island at the time of the eruption, 24 of them Australian, nine Americans, five New Zealanders and others from Germany, Britain, China and Malaysia. Many were passengers aboard the Royal Caribbean cruise ship Ovation of the Seas.

Survivors ran into the sea to escape the scalding steam and ash and emerged covered in burns, said those who first helped them. Geoff Hopkins watched the eruption from a boat after visiting the island and told the New Zealand Herald the eruption quickly turned menacing.

He told the paper that injured people transported on their boat were horrifically burned on their exposed skin and even under their clothes.

The first confirmed death was of a local man, Hayden Marshall-Inman, a guide who had shown tourists around the island. Former Whakatane Mayor Tony Bonne said Marshall-Inman was a keen fisherman and well-liked.

In the town touted as the gateway to White Island, the volcano has an almost mystical significance, its regular puffing a feature of the landscape. Whether the island, also known by its Maori name Whakaari, will ever host tourists again remains uncertain.

Many people were questioning why tourists were allowed to visit the island after seismic monitoring experts raised the volcano's alert level last month.

The island had been mined for sulfur until a 1914 accident in which at least 10 people were killed, and a landslide destroyed the miners' village and the mine itself. The island became a private scenic reserve in 1953.

Daily tours allow more than 10,000 people to visit every year.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

1. WHAT'S NEXT IN IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY Voting on two articles of impeachment against President Trump is expected in a matter of days by the Judiciary Committee and by Christmas in the full House.
2. 'THEY WERE SHOOTING LIKE CRAZY' Six people, including a police officer and three bystanders, were killed in a furious gun battle that filled the streets of Jersey City with the sound of heavy fire for hours.
3. RESCUER DESCRIBES HORROR OF NEW ZEALAND ERUPTION Lillani Hopkins describes the harrowing time she spent helping nearly two dozen badly burned after the deadly volcanic blast.
4. ARAMCO STARTS TRADING Saudi Arabia's oil company gains 10% in the first moments on the market, pushing its worth to \$1.88 trillion, making it the most valuable listed company in the world.
5. UK POLITICIANS CHASE UNDECIDED VOTERS ON EVE OF VOTE Political leaders are crisscrossing Britain in a final push for votes on the eve of the Brexit-dominated election.
6. 'LES MIS' ELICITS EMOTION IN HONG KONG The rousing tale of rebellion in 19th century France strikes a chord with audience members emotionally and physically drained after six months of protests.
7. DEMOCRATS DIVIDED ON FREE COLLEGE EDUCATION Pete Buttigieg, Joe Biden and Amy Klobuchar say the benefits should be targeted based on income, whereas Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren favor free college tuition for everyone.
8. CALIFORNIA WEIGHS CALLING THC A RISK TO MOMS-TO-BE A state panel is considering if the chemical in marijuana that produces a high should be declared a risk to pregnant women and require warnings.
9. NO CHRISTMAS TINSEL IN IRAQ Leaders of the Iraq's Christian community cancel this year's Christmas-related celebrations in solidarity with the country's protest movement.
10. GERRIT COLE LANDS RECORD DEAL WITH YANKEES New York lands the biggest prize of the free agent market, adding the ace to their rotation with a record \$324 million, nine-year contract.

Suu Kyi denies Myanmar genocide allegations at top UN court

By ALEKS FURTULA and LORNE COOK Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Myanmar's former pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday denied that her country's armed forces committed genocide against the Rohingya minority, telling the U.N.'s top court that the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Muslims was the unfortunate result of a battle with insurgents.

In a measured tone, Suu Kyi calmly refuted allegations that the army had killed civilians, raped women and torched houses in 2017 in what Myanmar's accusers describe as a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide that saw more than 700,000 Rohingya flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

She said the allegations stem from "an internal armed conflict started by coordinated and comprehensive armed attacks ... to which Myanmar's defense services responded. Tragically, this armed conflict led to the exodus of several hundred thousand Muslims."

Her appearance at the International Court of Justice was striking in that Suu Kyi was defending the very armed forces that had kept her under house arrest for about 15 years. She was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize in absentia for championing democracy and rights under Myanmar's then-ruling junta. A small group of her supporters gathered Wednesday outside The Hague-based court.

Suu Kyi told the court that the African nation of Gambia, which brought the legal action against Myanmar on behalf of the 57-country Organization of Islamic Cooperation, had provided "an incomplete and misleading factual picture" of what happened in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state in August 2017.

Gambia alleges that genocide was committed and is still ongoing. It has asked the world court to take action to stop the violence, including "all measures within its power to prevent all acts that amount to or contribute to the crime of genocide" in Myanmar.

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But Suu Kyi said developments in one of Myanmar's poorest regions are "complex and not easy to fathom." She detailed how the army responded on Aug. 25, 2017, to attacks by insurgents trained by Afghan and Pakistan extremists.

Addressing the court in her capacity as Myanmar's foreign minister, Suu Kyi insisted that the country's armed forces had tried "to reduce collateral damage" during fighting in 12 locations. While conceding that excessive force might have been used and that one helicopter may have killed "non-combatants," Suu Kyi said a Myanmar investigation is looking into what happened and should be allowed to finish its work.

"Can there be genocidal intent on the part of a state that actively investigates, prosecutes and punishes soldiers and officers who are accused of wrongdoing?" she asked the court.

Suu Kyi and Myanmar's legal team argued that the genocide convention does not apply to Myanmar. They invoked Croatia during the Balkans wars in the 1990s, saying that no genocide was deemed there when thousands of people were forced from their homes by fighting.

On Tuesday, Justice Minister Aboubacarr Tambadou urged the International Court of Justice to "tell Myanmar to stop these senseless killings, to stop these acts of barbarity that continue to shock our collective conscience, to stop this genocide of its own people."

Also Tuesday, the U.S. slapped economic sanctions on four Myanmar military officers suspected of human rights violations. It sanctioned Min Aung Hlaing, commander of Myanmar's armed forces, over allegations of serious rights abuses. Deputy commander Soe Win and two other military leaders, Than Oo and Aung Aung, were also targeted.

"There are credible claims of mass-scale rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by soldiers under Min Aung Hlaing's command," a U.S. statement said.

The court's hearings on Myanmar are scheduled to end Thursday.

Cook reported from Brussels.

UK political leaders chase undecided voters on eve of vote

By **DANICA KIRKA** and **JILL LAWLESS** undefined

LONDON (AP) — British political leaders rose early Wednesday to pursue undecided voters on the eve of a national election, zigzagging across the country in hopes that one last push will get the wavering to the polls.

Though opinion polls have consistently shown Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in the lead, surveys suggest the margin may be narrowing before Thursday's contest. All of the parties are nervous about the verdict of a volatile electorate weary after years of wrangling over Brexit, and increasingly willing to abandon long-held party loyalties.

All 650 seats in the House of Commons seats are up for grabs in the election, which is being held more than two years early in a bid to break the political impasse over Brexit.

Johnson has tried to focus minds on the potential of an uncertain result and a divided Parliament, which would endanger his plan to lead the U.K. out of the European Union on Jan. 31. He started his day before dawn, helping load milk and orange juice bottles onto a delivery vehicle in northern England.

"This could not be more critical, it could not be tighter — I just say to everybody the risk is very real that we could tomorrow be going into another hung parliament," he said. "That's more drift, more dither, more delay, more paralysis for this country."

The main opposition Labour Party said polls showed that momentum was moving in their direction. The party has tried to shift attention from Brexit and onto its plans to reverse years of public spending cuts by the Conservatives, who have been in power since 2010.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn campaigned in Scotland and urged people to elect a government that would "give real hope."

"In this city of Glasgow, which has some of the poorest people in this country, which has wards which contain the lowest life expectancy all across this country, they need an end to austerity," Corbyn said.

"They need a U.K. government that will invest all across the country."

For many voters, Thursday's election is an unpalatable choice. Both Johnson and Corbyn have personal approval ratings in negative territory, and both have been dogged by questions about their character.

Corbyn faces allegations that he has allowed anti-Semitism to spread in the left-of-center party, and is seen by some as a doctrinaire, old-school socialist.

Labour was embarrassed on Tuesday by the leak of a phone recording of the party's health spokesman suggesting that the party would lose Thursday's election because voters "can't stand Corbyn."

Jonathan Ashworth said his unguarded remarks were merely banter with a Conservative friend.

Johnson has been confronted with past offensive comments, broken promises and untruths. This week he was caught out making a ham-fisted and seemingly unsympathetic reaction to a picture of a 4-year-old boy lying on a hospital floor because no beds were available.

Johnson ally Michael Gove said Wednesday that the prime minister was deeply concerned with the boy's plight but had suffered "a single moment of absent-mindedness."

Follow AP's full coverage of Brexit and British politics at <https://www.apnews.com/Brexit>

Trump, allies aim to delegitimize impeachment from the start

By JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They're calling it a circus, a farce and even zany.

President Donald Trump and his Republican allies spent weeks trivializing the House impeachment inquiry ahead of Tuesday's historic unveiling of formal charges against the president.

Where Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton treated the prospect of impeachment as a serious threat to their presidencies, Trump's boosters have tried to brush off the whole thing. Believing that acquittal by the GOP-controlled Senate is all but certain, they're out to convince voters to punish the president's Democratic accusers — or at least tune out the Washington spectacle.

To that end, they have belittled the impeachment process with mockery, schoolyard taunts and an unyielding insistence that Trump did not a single thing wrong. They have stonewalled, refusing to allow witnesses to testify; protested by declining to send their own lawyers to hearings; and dished out the ultimate Trumpian insult: calling the proceedings boring.

In the process, the president and his allies have largely glossed over the substance of allegations of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, making light of what is likely to be only the third presidential impeachment in the nation's history.

It's a strategy borne of Trump's instincts and informed by the results of polling and focus groups. The president and his allies believe the effort has been effective, especially when it comes to keeping independent voters skeptical of the process. It is also a reflection of the country's increasingly polarized political environment.

"Why would we legitimize this process that the American people can't even follow, aren't digesting," White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said Monday when asked why the White House had chosen not to participate in the House proceedings. She equated cooperation to "colluding with an illegitimate process."

She showed her disdain for the effort by accusing Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., of "playing a game of Inspector Clouseau, Secret Squirrel" by waiting so long to unveil the articles of impeachment that were announced Tuesday.

GOP critics have been going all-out to find new ways to mock what Trump has long called a "witch hunt" and a "sham."

Sen. John Kennedy, R-Louisiana, compared the impeachment hearings to "the cantina bar scene in Star Wars. It's surreal." Secretary of State Mike Pompeo dismissed the "zaniness that's taking place on Capitol Hill." And Rep. Devin Nunes, the House intelligence committee's top Republican, called the House hearings "a show trial, a planned result of three years of political operations and dirty tricks."

But even if GOP legislators are more than willing to complain and erect parliamentary roadblocks, many

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lawmakers, particularly the senators who would serve as jurors in an eventual Senate trial, have been less comfortable defending the president's conduct.

Nor has that been a priority for White House aides, who have been firing off rapid response emails about procedural unfairness but have done little to engage on the substance of the charges.

During the early days of the inquiry there was tension between the West Wing and the president's outside allies, who felt the White House was doing too little to defend the president against the charges. Trump himself was initially unwilling to bring on new staff or set up a "war room," concerned that such a move would suggest he felt vulnerable or make him look guilty. Ultimately, Trump consented to the hiring of former Florida attorney general Pam Bondi and Republican strategist Tony Sayegh, a move that has helped to mollify some outside critics.

There also was a sense of confusion early on, as administration officials and allies struggled to keep up with rapidly unfolding news about Trump's attempts to get Ukraine to investigate political rival Joe Biden. Even some of the president's closest supporters were unclear about details of his interactions with the president of Ukraine.

With little clarity about what really had happened, Republicans took aim at the process, seeing it as an easy place to start. Once the scope became clearer, officials inside and outside the building began to refine their messaging, based in part on polling and focus group testing.

America First Policies, a nonprofit backing Trump's policies, for instance, conducted focus groups early in the process that focused specifically on independent voters who might be open to voting for Trump in 2020.

Kelly Sadler, a spokeswoman for the group, said the sessions turned up frustration with Congress over endless investigations and not perusing bread-and-butter issues. Many people, she said, felt the impeachment inquiry was highly partisan — a sentiment reflected in polling data — and felt the whole endeavor was a waste of time and money, especially given the quickly-approaching 2020 election.

The group has targeted its advertising to speak to those frustrations, which are also reflected in messaging from the American Action Network, which is tied to House GOP leadership and has spent millions on anti-impeachment ads.

As Republicans have pushed to delegitimize the House impeachment process, they also are professing great reverence for an expected Senate trial on friendlier turf. Trump sees a Senate trial as a forum where his allies will be able to publicly defend him and turn the tables on Democrats in dramatic Court TV fashion.

"It's pretty clear the president wants a trial," said White House spokesman Hogan Gidley. He offered a list of some of the witnesses Trump would like to call, including House intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff, the whistle blower whose complaint sparked the inquiry, as well as Biden and his son, Hunter, who had dealings in Ukraine.

"The president's eager to get his story out," Gidley said.

But Republicans in the Senate caution that Trump may not get the show he wants because Senate rules require a majority of senators to approve individual witnesses, and some are weary of creating a spectacle. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that no decisions have been made yet about the length or structure of a Senate trial.

"The Senate has two choices: It could go down the path of calling witnesses and basically having another trial or it could decide — and again 51 members could make that decision — that they have heard enough," he said.

Democrats' impeachment charges say Trump betrayed the nation

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats announced two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, declaring he "betrayed the nation" with his actions toward Ukraine as they pushed toward historic proceedings that are certain to help define his presidency and shape the 2020 election.

The specific charges aimed at removing the 45th president of the United States: abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

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Speaker Nancy Pelosi, flanked by the chairmen of impeachment inquiry committees at the U.S. Capitol, said they were upholding their solemn oath to defend the Constitution. Trump responded angrily on Twitter: "WITCH HUNT!"

Voting is expected in a matter of days by the Judiciary Committee, which begins deliberations Wednesday, and by Christmas in the full House. The charges, if approved, would then be sent to the Senate, where the Republican majority would be unlikely to convict Trump, but not without a potentially bitter trial just as voters in Iowa and other early presidential primary states begin making their choices.

In the formal articles announced Tuesday, the Democrats said Trump enlisted a foreign power in "corrupting" the U.S. election process and endangered national security by asking Ukraine to investigate his political rivals, including Democrat Joe Biden, while withholding U.S. military aid as leverage. That benefited Russia over the U.S. as America's ally fought Russian aggression, the Democrats said.

Trump then obstructed Congress by ordering current and former officials to defy House subpoenas for testimony and by blocking access to documents, the charges say.

By his conduct, Trump "demonstrated he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office," the nine-page impeachment resolution says.

"If we did not hold him accountable, he would continue to undermine our election," Pelosi said later at a forum sponsored by Politico. "Nothing less is at stake than the central point of our democracy - a free and fair election."

Trump tweeted that to impeach a president "who has done NOTHING wrong, is sheer Political Madness." He later headed to Pennsylvania for a reelection campaign rally, where he called the effort "impeachment lite" and promised it would lead to his reelection in 2020.

The outcome appears increasingly set as the House presses ahead toward impeachment as it has only three times in history against U.S. presidents, a test of the nation's system of checks and balances.

Democrats said they had a duty to act in what is now a strictly partisan undertaking, as Republicans stand with the president, because Trump has shown a pattern of behavior that, if left unchecked, poses risks to the democratic process.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., the Judiciary chairman, said the president "holds the ultimate public trust. When he betrays that trust and puts himself before country, he endangers the Constitution; he endangers our democracy; he endangers our national security."

"No one, not even the president, is above the law," he said, announcing the charges before a portrait of George Washington.

Chairman Adam Schiff of the Intelligence Committee said, "We stand here today because the president's abuse of power leaves us with no choice."

Trump's allies immediately plunged into the fight that will extend into the new year. White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham said Democrats are trying to "overthrow" the administration. Campaign manager Brad Parscale said Democrats "don't have a viable candidate for 2020 and they know it." The president's son, Eric, embraced his father's penchant for name calling, assailing Pelosi and "her swamp creatures."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said he would be "totally surprised" if there were 67 votes in the chamber to convict Trump, and signaled options for a swift trial. He said no decision had been made whether to call witnesses.

In drafting the charges against the president, Pelosi faced a legal and political challenge of balancing the views of her majority while hitting the Constitution's bar of "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

Some liberal lawmakers wanted more expansive charges encompassing the findings from special counsel Robert Mueller's probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election. Centrist Democrats preferred to keep the impeachment articles more focused on Trump's actions toward Ukraine as a clearer case.

The final resolution, slim in length yet broad in concept, attempted to find common ground by linking the Ukraine inquiry to the Mueller probe in two separate lines. It said the abuse of power was consistent with

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Trump's "previous invitations of foreign interference in United States elections" while the obstruction charge was consistent with his efforts to undermine U.S. government "investigations into foreign interference."

Democratic leaders say Trump put his political interests above those of the nation when he asked Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in a July phone call to investigate his rivals, including Democrat Joe Biden, and then withheld \$400 million in military aid as the U.S. ally faced an aggressive Russia. They say he then obstructed Congress by stonewalling the House investigation.

The articles say Trump "used the powers of the presidency in a manner that compromised the national security of the United States and undermined the integrity of the United States democratic process."

The first article, on abuse of power, says Trump "corruptly" solicited Ukraine to investigate his political rivals.

The second article, obstruction of Congress, says that Trump directed defiance of the House's ability to conduct its legal oversight like no other president "in the history of the republic."

Trump insisted in a new tweet that when he asked Ukraine's president "to do us a favor" with the investigations, "'us' is a reference to USA, not me!" Democrats, however, say Trump's meaning could not have been clearer in seeking political dirt on Biden, his possible opponent in the 2020 election.

Republicans stand with the president even if they don't fully address his actions. House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy said, the vote will be on impeachment not "whether a call is perfect."

While the impeachment is focused on the Ukraine matter, Trump's actions toward Russia continue underlie the debate. On Tuesday Trump met at the White House with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister just back from Paris efforts to revive peace talks with Ukraine.

At the same time, a top adviser to the Ukraine president, Andriy Yermak, disputed key impeachment testimony from U.S. Ambassador Gordon Sondland, telling Time magazine the two did not speak of the investigations Trump wanted during a Warsaw meeting.

The next steps are expected to come swiftly after months of investigation into the Ukraine matter and special counsel Mueller's two-year Russia probe.

In his report, Mueller said he could not determine that Trump's campaign conspired or coordinated with Russia in the 2016 election. But he said he could not exonerate Trump of obstructing justice and left it for Congress to determine.

Even as she pushed ahead with the impeachment proceeding, Pelosi announced an agreement with the White House on a new U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade deal, a top priority for the president as well as many centrist Democrats. It, too, could get a vote next week.

Associated Press writers Julie Pace, Alan Fram, Colleen Long, Laurie Kellman, Matthew Daly and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Israeli parliament starts dissolving itself for 3rd election

By ARON HELLER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli parliament began voting to dissolve itself on Wednesday and pave the path to an unprecedented third election within a year. The preliminary vote passed without objections. Barring a nearly unfathomable about-face, three more measures are expected to pass and call a new election for March 2, 2020.

If the bill isn't passed by a midnight deadline, new elections would automatically be set for March 10.

The move prolongs a political stalemate that has paralyzed the government and undermined many citizens' faith in the democratic process.

Both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his chief challenger Benny Gantz have for weeks insisted they want to avoid another costly election campaign that is expected to produce similar results. But neither has been willing to compromise on their core demands for a power-sharing agreement. Netanyahu's recent indictment on corruption charges has added a murky legal imbroglio to the saga.

Following September elections, both men failed during their officially mandated time to form a governing

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coalition on their own. Then, in a final three-week window, they could not join forces to avoid another vote.

Both sides said they were working until the last minute to find some way out of the deadlock. However, a breakthrough seemed highly unlikely.

Given Israel's divided state, and the deep mistrust between the opposing camps, there is no guarantee that another vote will break the loop of elections and instability that has rocked the country for the past year.

Another campaign, and the national holiday of Election Day, will cost the Israeli economy billions.

But there will be an even steeper price caused by nearly 18 months of caretaker governments that cannot carry out major legislation, make appointments or pass budgets, said Yohanan Plesner, president of the non-partisan Israel Democracy Institute.

"The entire decision-making apparatus has been stalled and that has ample implications across the board," he said. "Israelis are frustrated as a result of the fact that there is no decisive outcome. But there is also an understanding that we are in a very unique and unprecedented situation where a prime minister who is very popular within his own constituency is also being indicted with very severe crimes."

The most straightforward way out of the stalemate would be for Gantz's centrist Blue and White party to form a unity government with Netanyahu's Likud. Together, they control a solid majority in the 120-seat Knesset.

But Gantz's party refuses to sit with Netanyahu, who was indicted last month on charges of accepting bribes, fraud and breach of trust. Netanyahu, Israel's longest-ever serving leader, is desperately clinging to power to wage his legal battle from the favorable perch of prime minister. He has insisted on going first in any alternating leadership arrangement and has refused to drop his alliance with other nationalist and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties.

Gantz has said he would make a deal with a different leader of Likud. But Netanyahu has so far managed to fend off a burgeoning insurrection inside his party, with just one major figure, Gideon Saar, daring to openly challenge him.

"If I am elected head of Likud, I will lead it to victory," Saar announced Tuesday, citing polls that he was more likely to be able to build a stable coalition. "It is very clear, on the other hand, that if we keep the current course we will not get anywhere better than we have in the last two elections."

With all the other top Likud officials lining up behind him, Netanyahu is expected to beat Saar in any primary vote. The Likud announced Wednesday that it would hold its leadership vote on Dec. 26.

Netanyahu is not legally compelled to step down after being indicted, but Israeli law is fuzzy about whether he could be given authority to form a new government after the next election. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, who was harshly criticized by both sides throughout the lengthy process he took to press charges, will now be required to rule on that question as well before a likely court challenge.

Recent opinion polls have forecast a similar deadlock if new elections are held.

Hard-liner Avigdor Lieberman, a former Netanyahu ally, has emerged as a stubborn kingmaker, refusing to endorse either candidate while failing to coax them into a unity government.

The maverick politician, who takes a hard line against the Palestinians, has earned some newfound support in liberal circles by also taking a tough stand against ultra-Orthodox parties that hold great influence in Netanyahu's governments. But he's also taken lots of heat for the extended impasse.

"Voting for Lieberman is a sure path to a fourth election," wrote Matti Tuchfeld in the Israel Hayom daily. "Lieberman has turned into a one-man blocking majority. You can like him, agree with his opinions, you can love his zigzagging. No problem. But you have to know that a vote for him is a vote for continuing the political vacuum and a perpetual transition government."

Follow Aron Heller at www.twitter.com/aronhellerap

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The people sing: 'Les Mis' soothes, breaks Hong Kong hearts

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — For Hong Kong spectators mentally and physically drained from six months of pro-democracy protests that have convulsed the city, a rousing performance of "Les Miserables" proved almost too much to bear.

Audience members wept, dabbing their eyes with handkerchiefs, big tears rolling down their cheeks, as a Hong Kong theater troupe aiming to both comfort and re-energize emotionally battered spectators belted out the rousing musical based on Victor Hugo's classic tale of rebellion in 19th century France.

Audience members said images from the protests flashed through their minds as they soaked up the free outdoor performance on Tuesday night.

The crowd several hundred strong joined with the troupe in singing "Do You Hear the People Sing?" — the stirring lyrics eloquently putting to words what many Hong Kong protesters feel.

"It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!" they sang. "Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me?"

The amateur troupe, dressed in black, which has become the color of protest in Hong Kong, is made up of volunteers who responded to an online appeal for singers and musicians.

Singer Harriet Chung said their aim is to tour the show to all 18 of Hong Kong's districts. Tuesday's performance was the troupe's third, staged in a park in Tai Po in the New Territories that are north of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon and which butt up against mainland China.

"It is a very powerful work that everyone needs in such a time in Hong Kong," Chung said. "There's a lot of violence. There's a lot of injustice around. But this piece is about love and power and what you can do for love, for your ideals, for your ideas, so that is why we want to pass this message to everyone in Hong Kong."

With no costumes and minimalist lighting, the show lacks the big-ticket stagecraft of Hollywood, Broadway and London West End cousins but packs a powerful emotional punch in the febrile atmosphere of anti-government protest in Hong Kong.

Wiping away tears that welled behind his glasses, red-eyed spectator Herman Tang said the song "Bring Him Home" made him think of protesters who were trapped by a police siege of a university campus last month.

"Very moved," he said. "Some of the words in the song echo the current situation in Hong Kong."

Organizers made booklets of the lyrics, in Chinese and English, for spectators to download onto their cellphones so they could sing along. Audience members waved lit phones in the air during songs, creating a tapestry of lights. At the end, the troupe and the audience, accompanied by the orchestra, joined in a hair-raising rendition of "Glory to Hong Kong," an anonymously penned anthem that has become the protest movement's signature song.

Chung, the singer who works as a writer in her day job, said she's long been a fan of "Les Miserables," but that it strikes an especially deep chord now.

"It's like pictures after pictures of happenings in Hong Kong passing through my mind when I sing the lyrics. Sometimes it's heartbreaking. Sometimes it's heartwarming," she said. "There are pictures of protests, police violence, and the life we have lost, the brothers and sisters we lost in this movement, so it is a very emotional journey and I can feel that from the audience, too."

Spectators who came to the show worried that the protest movement is flagging as it enters a seventh month went away feeling energized and sounding recommitted to a long-haul struggle. The movement is pushing five key demands, including full elections for Hong Kong's legislature and leader and a probe of the city's police force, which has fired 26,000 tear-gas and rubber-baton rounds at protesters and arrested more than 6,000 people.

"When people unite together, there is power," said audience member Yan Chan. "We have energy and power to make Hong Kong better."

AP source: Yanks land ace Cole on record \$324M, 9-year deal

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The New York Yankees landed the biggest prize of the free agent market, adding Gerrit Cole to their rotation with a record \$324 million, nine-year contract on Tuesday night, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced.

Cole's deal established marks for pitchers in total dollars, topping the \$245 million, seven-year contract Stephen Strasburg finalized a day earlier to remain with the World Series champion Washington Nationals.

Its \$36 million average is a record for any player, beating the \$35.5 million in outfielder Mike Trout's \$426.5 million, 12-year deal with the Los Angeles Angels that started last season. Cole gets an even \$36 million annually and can opt out after the 2024 season. He also has a full no-trade provision.

Agent Scott Boras negotiated the deals for Cole and Strasburg.

A 29-year-old right-hander, Cole was baseball's most dominant pitcher for much of 2019 and helped the Houston Astros come within one win of their second World Series title in three seasons.

"Obviously, when you are talking about a player at the level of Gerrit Cole, in a lot of ways that's a game-changing type talent," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said earlier in the day. "This is a guy that's really hungry, really driven."

New York has not won the World Series since 2009 and sought an ace to head a rotation that already includes Luis Severino, Masahiro Tanaka, James Paxton and J.A. Happ or Domingo Germán, who may be suspended at the season's start under baseball's domestic violence policy.

General manager Brian Cashman executed the move out of his same playbook he used after the 2008 season, when he gave CC Sabathia a \$161 million, seven-year deal to lead a staff and establish a clubhouse presence.

Cole will compliment a young core of hitters that includes Aaron Judge, Gleyber Torres and Gary Sánchez, entering a window when New York thinks it can compete consistently for championships.

Cole was drafted by the Yankees in the first round with the 28th overall pick out of high school in 2008 but chose to go to UCLA, then was drafted first overall by Pittsburgh three years later. Traded after the 2017 season, he transformed his career in two seasons with the Astros.

After going 59-42 with a 3.50 ERA in five seasons with the Pirates, he blossomed under the analytics-focused staff of the Astros. He increased the usage of his four-seam fastball and curveball, virtually dropping his two-seam sinker while attacking the top of the strike zone more often.

He went 15-5 with a 2.88 ERA in 2018, then 20-5 with a 2.50 ERA a major league-high 326 strikeouts last season, finishing second to teammate Justin Verlander in AL Cy Young Award balloting. Just 4-5 in late May, he went 19-0 over his next 25 starts before losing the World Series opener. He won Game 5 and was available to pitch in Game 7 but was never used.

Cashman visited Cole and wife Amy in California last week, bringing along Boone, new pitching coach Matt Blake and special adviser Andy Pettitte.

"We're just trying to make sure that we educate the player and his family about our culture, everything, what we are," Cashman said.

Cashman said he realized the risk of a lengthy, marketplace-driven free agent contract. Outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury, who missed the last two seasons because of injuries, was released this month with one guaranteed season left in a \$153 million, seven-year contract.

But Cashman pointed to deals that worked, such as Derek Jeter's \$189 million contract that covered 2001-10, pitcher Mike Mussina's \$88.5 million agreement from 2001-06 and Sabathia's big deal.

"Clearly the longer the deals, the more risk you have," he said. "There's been examples where we've done long long-term deals and it's backfired and hasn't paid off. We've done long-term deals where we've had benefits."

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Takeaways: Democrats make case in articles of impeachment

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats unveiled two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump on Tuesday, setting up a historic vote in the days before Christmas. The articles charge the president with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress and argue that he is a “threat to national security and the Constitution.”

After internal debate in their caucus, Democrats opted to focus narrowly on Trump’s dealings with Ukraine, leaving out any direct mention of special counsel Robert Mueller’s report.

Takeaways from the articles of impeachment:

TWO ARTICLES

The two articles released by the House Judiciary Committee total nine pages. They are entirely focused on Trump’s efforts to have Ukraine investigate Democrats as the U.S. also withheld military aid to the country and denied Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy a White House meeting.

The first article, abuse of power, says Trump “used the powers of the presidency in a manner that compromised the national security of the United States and undermined the integrity of the United States democratic process.” It says he “corruptly” solicited Ukraine to investigate his political rival Joe Biden and a “discredited theory” about the interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The second article, obstruction of Congress, says that Trump “directed the unprecedented, categorical and indiscriminate defiance of subpoenas” issued by the House, and calls that behavior “offensive to, and subversive of” the Constitution. It lists subpoenas from Congress for documents and testimony that were ignored.

“In the history of the republic, no president has ever ordered the complete defiance of an impeachment inquiry or sought to obstruct and impede so comprehensively the ability of the House of Representatives to investigate “high crimes and misdemeanors,” the second article reads.

A CLEAN CASE

The articles make no explicit mention of special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation, even though Mueller said the president could not be exonerated on obstruction of justice and left the matter up to Congress. Some Democrats pushed for a third article drawing on Mueller’s findings, but more moderate Democrats — including freshmen from competitive districts — argued that focusing on Ukraine would make for a cleaner case.

The moderates won the day, though the Mueller investigation is referenced in both articles.

The first article charges that Trump’s abuse of power in the Ukraine matter is consistent with “previous invitations of foreign interference in United States elections.” The second article says his obstruction on Ukraine is consistent with his previous efforts to undermine “United States government investigations into foreign interference.”

Mueller’s investigation found that Russians interfered in the 2016 election, but said there was not enough evidence to prove the country conspired with Trump’s campaign. Mueller also examined several episodes in which Trump attempted to obstruct his investigation and said he could not exonerate the president on that point.

IMPEACHMENT BY CHRISTMAS

Democrats have moved swiftly from the start of the Ukraine investigation, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced in late September. In the weeks since, committees have interviewed witnesses behind closed doors, held public hearings and laid out a legal case for impeachment.

The inquiry was timed to end with a final vote in the days before lawmakers left for the holidays. And with the introduction of the two articles on Tuesday, they remain on schedule. A final House vote is expected next week, and lawmakers are expected to go home Dec. 20 after sending the impeachment articles to the Senate for a trial in January.

SENATE TRIAL

It is unclear what a Senate trial will look like or how long it will last. Senate Majority Leader Mitch Mc-

Connell suggested Tuesday that it will begin in the opening weeks of January, but said "no decisions have been made" about the length or structure. He said he would be "totally surprised" if there were enough votes to convict Trump but said the chamber is obligated to consider the charges.

McConnell said the trial will begin with arguments from impeachment managers — a handful of House members selected to make that chamber's case — and a response from the president's lawyers. After those opening arguments, the Senate will have to decide whether they want to call witnesses and hold a longer trial, or "decide they have heard enough" and move to hold a vote, he said.

"We don't have an answer yet on which direction we'll take," McConnell said.

No Christmas tinsel in Iraq, in solidarity with protesters

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — The Christmas tree in the middle of a central Baghdad plaza occupied by anti-government protesters is bare, save for portraits of those killed under fire from security forces. A tribute, the demonstrators explained, to a recent decision by Iraq's Christians to call off seasonal festivities to honor the losses.

Leaders of Iraq's Christians unanimously cancelled Christmas-related celebrations in solidarity with the protest movement — but the aims of their stance go deeper than tinsel and fairy lights. Slogans of a united Iraq free of sectarianism resonate deeply within the community, which since the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein has fearfully observed its diminishing influence amid growing Shiite-dominated politics shaping state affairs. The Christians have also left Iraq in huge numbers over the years, after being targeted by militant Sunni groups such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

On a recent visit to Tahrir Square, the epicenter of the protest movement, Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, patriarch of the Chaldean Church in Iraq, said he was moved.

"Now there you feel you are Iraqi," he said in an interview with The Associated Press. "A new Iraq is being born."

The protests erupted in Baghdad and the predominantly Shiite southern provinces on Oct. 1, when thousands of Iraqis first took to the streets calling for sweeping political reforms and the end of Iran's influence in Iraqi affairs. At least 400 have died at the hands of security forces and unidentified assailants firing live ammunition and tear gas to disperse the demonstrations.

"Morally and spiritually we cannot celebrate in such an atmosphere of tension ... it's not normal to celebrate our joy and happiness while others are dying. That doesn't work," said Sako. Chaldeans are the predominant Christian denomination in the country.

He called on the government and parliament to listen to the demands of the protesters and to find suitable solutions through dialogue. "The military solution is bad," he said.

Under the order of the church, holiday celebrations will be limited to prayers, and money budgeted for expensive street decorations and festivities for the community will be donated to funds supporting wounded protesters, Sako said.

Christmas decorations were forbidden within the fine interiors of Baghdad's Chaldean Patriarchate.

"We will have no other celebration, we cannot make a big feast when our country is in a critical situation," he added.

But Iraq's Christians support the leaderless protest movement for other reasons, said church officials.

Falling demographics capture their existential anxieties, explained Sako. Christians numbered around 1.5 million before the U.S. invasion 16 years ago, roughly 6% of the population. Today the Christian population is believed to be less than a third of that figure, though accurate estimates are hard to come by given the lack of census data in Iraq.

During the onslaught by the Islamic State group in 2014, Christians were forcibly displaced and fled fearing persecution from the extremists. Those who returned found their homes destroyed and their communities forever changed.

"We have suffered a lot," Sako said. "Since the collapse of the old regime many have been killed, others

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kidnapped, others threatened and left, and many homes and properties of Christians have been occupied by militias.”

“So the protesters are telling them (the government) we look for justice and stability and to be equal citizens. We ask for the same justice for ourselves,” he said.

Iraq’s particular brand of sectarian governance — called the “muhasasa” in Arabic — entitles political elites to govern based on consensus and informal agreements. But it has had the effect of empowering Shiite-majority parties over other sects.

“The main thing we have suffered from the sectarian system is marginalization,” said Albert Elias, 50, a Christian civil activist known in Tahrir Square for his book stall where he hands out Bibles for free.

“The politicians come and tell us we are qualified and loyal, but then no one gives us positions in the government so we can have a say,” he said.

“We see that in reality we mean nothing to them.”

In Tahrir Square, he sees a model of his ideal Iraq. Young students sometimes stop by and ask him questions about his faith, leading to impromptu lessons.

“Did you know Christians were the first Iraqis?” he said to one unsuspecting youth on a crisp December day. In under 30 minutes Elias recounted seven centuries worth of history, from St. Thomas the Apostle’s bringing of Christian teachings to what is now modern Iraq through to the Arab Islamic conquests.

But the spirit of the uprising, and the risks associated with protesting in the square, transcends religious affiliation, said Elias. “We are all suffering the same thing. We share with them the risk. We are here and we don’t know when someone will attack us with knives.”

Mysterious attacks perpetrated by unknown assailants have recently spurred paranoia and fear in the square. On Friday, 25 people, including three policemen were killed when gunmen fired live rounds from cars in Khilani Square, which is close to Tahrir Square. The day before, several stabbing incidents occurred as demonstrators supporting political parties and Iran-backed militias withdrew from the square.

Protesters largely blame Iran-backed militias for the violence.

In Baghdad’s Karada neighborhood, once a religiously mixed area and now predominately Shiite, trees covered in fake frost and stuffed Santas are still on display. But shoppers are more conservative in their choice of purchases compared to previous years, said Hakmat Dawood.

“We should not celebrate while the bloodshed continues,” he said.

Outside the mall stood a Christmas tree, wrapped in Iraq’s national flag.

AP Analysis: Trump faces narrow but consequential charges

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — The articles of impeachment offered up Tuesday against President Donald Trump are narrow, but consequential. They are also likely to be approved by Democrats alone.

The impending vote will thrust Trump into a club no president wants to join: only the third American leader to be impeached by the House of Representatives. He’s confronting his allegations without a hint of contrition, more eager to fight than accept blame for his actions.

House Democrats say Trump abused the American presidency for personal political gain by asking Ukraine for help investigating political rivals, including Joe Biden, the former vice president and current Democratic White House contender. And they charge he obstructed Congress by blocking access to documents and testimony, an article of impeachment aimed at reasserting the authority of a co-equal branch of government.

Some Democrats pushed for more, eager to seize the opportunity to hold Trump to account for a range of other actions, including evidence of obstruction of justice outlined in special counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation.

But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi held them off, determined to put forward only articles she believes can win the support of members who — like Pelosi herself — were reluctant to launch the impeachment

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proceedings in the first place.

"I wish it were not necessary," Pelosi said after the text of the articles of impeachment were made public. But she added: "We take an oath to protect and defend. If we did not do that, we would be, again, delinquent in our duties."

While she seems to have succeeded in persuading Democrats of that view, the process -- dozens of hours of public testimony from diplomats and other national security officials that left much of the evidence beyond dispute -- has so far done nothing to persuade Republicans to break with the president.

Broadening the charges would have only risked turning off Democrats, some particularly those moderates who won in House districts where Trump is popular.

"I think they made a calculation in the House that the evidence that had been presented recently with regards to Trump's actions involving Ukraine were concise, clear and accessible," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a Biden supporter. "Rather than charging a broad range of misconduct over many years, they stuck to one topic."

Though there are few historical comparisons, the Democrats' decision means Trump will face fewer articles of impeachment than any of his predecessors in trying to avoid the ultimate constitutional punishment for a president.

The House approved 11 charges against Andrew Johnson, the first president to be impeached in 1868. In 1974, lawmakers were set to vote on three articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon — abuse of power, obstruction of justice and contempt of Congress — but he resigned from office when it became clear the charges had bipartisan support.

Lawmakers voted on four articles against President Bill Clinton in 1994 after being presented with 11 possible impeachable offenses by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. But only two passed — exactly the kind of scenario Pelosi and other Democratic leaders hoped to avoid.

During the Clinton impeachment, the House backed charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, but a substantial number of Republicans helped to vote down the abuse of power and another charge of perjury.

While more moderate Democrats cheered Pelosi's decision to limit the scope of the impeachment articles, others bemoaned a missed opportunity to hold Trump to account for Mueller's findings. Mueller said Justice Department guidelines prevented bringing criminal charges against a sitting president, but he appeared to suggest there was another venue to take up the matter: Congress.

The articles unveiled Tuesday make no specific mention of Mueller's investigation, though there was an oblique reference in the obstruction of Congress charge, which states that Trump's actions in this matter are "consistent" with previous attempts "to undermine United States Government investigations into foreign interference in United States elections."

Corey Brettschneider, a professor of political science at Brown University and the author of "The Oath and the Office: A Guide to the Constitution for Future Presidents," called the absence of a specific Mueller-related article a "failure of constitutional duty."

Yet even that more limited scope seems unlikely to gain Republican votes, despite private concerns among some GOP lawmakers with Trump's actions. No Republicans, in the House or the Senate, voiced support for the articles on Tuesday, including those who are leaving Congress next year.

"My mind hasn't been changed," said Rep. Will Hurd, a moderate Republican from Texas who Democrats had hoped to persuade.

Pelosi spent months arguing that Democrats shouldn't proceed with impeachment unless they could bring some Republicans along with them. A strictly partisan process, she said, would be too damaging for the nation.

But as her party pushed closer to just that scenario, she said inaction would be more destructive.

"If we allow one president, any president, no matter who she or he may be, to go down this path, we are saying goodbye to the republic and hello to a president king," Pelosi said.

Editor's Note: Julie Pace has covered the White House and politics for the AP since 2007. Follow her at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

California considers calling THC in pot a risk to moms-to-be

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — More than three years after California voters broadly legalized marijuana, a state panel is considering if its potent, high-inducing chemical — THC — should be declared a risk to pregnant women and require warnings.

Studies have indicated that a rising number of mothers-to-be have turned to marijuana products for relief from morning sickness and headaches, though it's effectiveness has not been backed by science.

Cannabis industry officials say too little sound research is available on THC to support such a move and warn that it could make marijuana companies a target for lawsuits with unverified claims of injuries from pot use during pregnancy.

"That seems like an open-ended checkbook. How do we defend ourselves?" said Los Angeles dispensary owner Jerred Kiloh, who heads the United Cannabis Business Association, an industry group.

Lawyers looking for a quick buck will say "give us \$10,000 or we are going to take you into a long court case," he added.

The California Cannabis Industry Association echoed that fear, noting that pot's standing as an illegal drug at the federal level has choked off research by government agencies. Those studies are needed to determine if THC poses health risks for pregnant women.

"Good policy and consumer protections are based on facts and data," spokesman Josh Drayton said.

The meeting Wednesday of the obscure state Developmental and Reproductive Toxicant Identification Committee in Sacramento will focus on whether THC causes "reproductive toxicity." The panel is made up of scientists appointed by the governor.

An affirmative finding would make THC one of hundreds of chemicals judged to cause cancer or birth defects that the state requires to carry warning labels, such as arsenic and lead.

The review is being carried out under the umbrella of the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act, better known as Proposition 65. It requires warning labels for chemicals judged as dangerous and allows residents, advocacy groups and attorneys to sue on behalf of the state and collect a portion of civil penalties for failure to provide warnings.

The 1986 law has been credited with weeding out cancer-causing chemicals from products but also faulted for setting the stage for legal shakedowns.

Since 2009, the state has listed marijuana smoke as being known to cause cancer, similar to tobacco smoke.

"The expansion of Proposition 65 as it relates to cannabis is premature and lacks both the facts and the data that would justify this move," Drayton said.

The U.S. surgeon general warned in August that smoking marijuana is dangerous for pregnant women and their developing babies. Mainstream medicine advises against pot use in pregnancy because of studies suggesting it might cause premature birth, low birth weight or other health problems, but many of those studies were in animals or had findings that were open to dispute.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse is paying for several studies on marijuana use during pregnancy.

If the California panel declares pot a risk for pregnant women, it's not clear what the immediate impact would be on the state's legal pot industry.

Presumably, packaging would need to be changed over time to carry warning labels for pregnant women. But such requirements would likely take additional steps by agencies that oversee marijuana regulation and packaging.

Even products containing CBD, a trendy ingredient extracted from marijuana or hemp, can contain trace amounts of THC.

Report: Giuliani settles long divorce from his third wife

NEW YORK (AP) — Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his third wife have reached a settlement in a yearslong court battle that exposed details about their luxurious lifestyle, The New York Times reported on Tuesday.

Giuliani, 75, and his wife, Judith, put an end to their differences and “intend to remain friends in the years to come,” Judith Giuliani’s divorce attorney, Bernard E. Clair, told the newspaper.

An email and phone call left for Clair was not returned. It was not immediately clear who represented Rudy Giuliani.

The settlement comes more than year after Judith Giuliani filed divorce papers against her now former husband, the personal attorney to President Donald Trump.

The couple was married for 15 years. Their divorce settlement will remain confidential, the Times said. Throughout the divorce, details about the couple’s \$230,000 monthly budget became public, including six houses, 11 country club memberships and \$12,000 on Rudy Giuliani’s cigars.

Giuliani previously was married for 20 years to Donna Hanover. Before that, he was married for 14 years to his second cousin, Regina Peruggi. That marriage was later annulled.

Giuliani’s legal woes might not be over. Two of his close associates, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, were arrested in October at Dulles International Airport outside Washington while trying to board a flight to Europe with one-way tickets. They were indicted on charges of conspiracy, making false statements and falsification of records.

6 killed in New Jersey gunbattle, including police officer

By DAVID PORTER Associated Press

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (AP) — Six people, including a police officer and three bystanders, were killed in a furious gun battle Tuesday that filled the streets of Jersey City with the sound of heavy fire for hours, authorities said.

The dead included the two gunmen, Jersey City Police Chief Michael Kelly said.

The slain officer, Detective Joseph Seals, 40, was credited by his superiors with having led the department in the number of illegal guns removed from the streets in recent years, and might have been trying to stop an incident involving such weapons when he was cut down by gunfire that erupted near a cemetery, authorities said.

The shooting then continued at a kosher supermarket about a mile away, where five more bodies were found, Kelly said.

Authorities believe the Jewish market was targeted by the gunmen, Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop tweeted Tuesday night. Fulop, whose public safety director said earlier in the day that terrorism wasn’t suspected, did not elaborate on why authorities now believe the market was targeted.

Messages were left Tuesday night seeking comment on Fulop’s tweet.

“It’s a really tough day for the city of Jersey City,” Fulop said. Seals “was one of the best officers for getting the most guns off the streets. He was a good cop.”

Two other officers were wounded but were later released from the hospital, authorities said.

The bullets started flying early in the afternoon in the city of about 270,000 people, situated across the Hudson River from New York City. Seals, who worked for a unit called Cease Fire, was shot around 12:30 p.m. The gunmen then drove a stolen rental van to another part of the city and engaged police in a lengthy shootout.

Kelly said when police responded to the area of the kosher store, officers “were immediately engaged by high-power rifle fire.”

A video shot by a witness shows a police officer on the ground by a car, apparently wounded. Another officer goes to him, helps him up and the two run around a corner as gunshots ring out. Seconds later, as a police cruiser pulls up in front of the store, about a dozen shots are heard in rapid succession.

“Our officers were under fire for hours,” the chief said.

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Inside the grocery store, police found the bodies of who they believed were the two gunmen and three other people who apparently happened to be there when the assailants rushed in, authorities said. Police said they were confident the bystanders were shot by the gunmen and not by police.

The kosher grocery is a central fixture in a growing community of Orthodox Jews who have been moving to Jersey City in recent years.

Chabad Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, who shops at the kosher store and attends a synagogue next door, said he spoke with the store owner, Moishe Ferencz.

"He told me he had just walked out of the store into the synagogue not five feet away just before this happened, and then he couldn't get back for hours," Schapiro said. "His wife was inside the store. He said, 'I hope my wife is safe.'"

The names of the victims inside the store were not immediately released, pending notification of relatives.

City Public Safety Director James Shea said earlier Tuesday that authorities believe the bloodshed was not an act of terrorism but that it was still under investigation.

The shooting spread fear through the neighborhood, and the nearby Sacred Heart School was put on lockdown as a precaution.

SWAT teams, state police and federal agents converged on the scene, and police blocked off the area, which in addition to the school and supermarket included a hair salon and other shops. Dozens of bystanders pressed against the police barrier to capture the action on their cellphones, some whooping when bursts of fire could be heard.

Video shot by residents recorded loud volleys of gunfire reverberating along one of the city's main streets and showed a long line of law enforcement officers pointing guns as they advanced, yelling to bystanders, "Clear the street! Get out of the way!"

"It's like firecrackers going off," said Andy Patel, who works at a liquor store about three blocks away. "They were shooting like crazy. ... The cops were clearing everyone off the streets."

Police also removed what they described as a possible "incendiary device" from the rental vehicle and sent it for examination by a bomb squad. The results of that examination were not available Tuesday evening.

Seals had been on the Jersey City Police Department since 2006. In addition to his work with the illegal guns unit, he was cited for heroism in a Christmas Eve 2008 incident in which he and another officer burst through the window of a home and stopped a sexual assault that was being carried out against a 41-year-old woman.

Seventh grader Zamir Butler said his class was coming back inside from the playground at Sacred Heart, which sits across the street from the grocery store, when he heard the shots. At first he thought they were thunder, since it had rained earlier.

"Everybody was running up the stairs to get to safety in the classroom," he said. "A few of the kids were crying. They told us to stay behind the wall and stay down."

This story has been corrected to show that the spelling of the name of the rabbi who attends a synagogue next to the market is Moshe Schapiro, not Moshe Shapiro.

Associated Press writers Wayne Parry in Atlantic City; Deepti Hajela in Jersey City, Michael Catalini in Trenton, Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia and Michael Sisak and Shelley Acoca in New York contributed to this story.

Corruption allegations long dogged ex-Mexico security chief

By MARK STEVENSON and MARIA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's former security chief was dogged by so many allegations of corruption and wrongdoing for so long that some said it was only a matter of time before he would be arrested.

What amazed some was that it took so long, and that Genaro García Luna's arrest this week came on U.S. soil rather than in Mexico.

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García Luna, 51, who left the security post nearly a decade ago, was charged in federal court in New York with three counts of trafficking cocaine and one count of making false statements. He was arrested Monday outside Dallas and at his initial appearance Tuesday his bail hearing was set for Dec. 17. He moved to the U.S. in 2012 and has been living in Florida.

"This wasn't a surprise," said Samuel González, who served as Mexico's chief organized crime prosecutor in a prior administration. González said he turned down offers to work with García Luna in the 2000s, noting that "it wasn't a question of if, but rather when" Garcia Luna would be charged.

García Luna was public safety secretary in President Felipe Calderon's Cabinet from 2006 to 2012, playing a key role in setting the government's security strategy during some of the worst and most embarrassing moments of bloody drug war that resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 people and tens of thousands more missing.

As security chief he was widely feared and in charge of Mexico's federal police and the rest of the civilian security apparatus, giving him unrivaled access to intelligence about law enforcement operations and investigations that U.S. prosecutors say he shared with the Sinaloa cartel. Calderon's administration was criticized at the time by many who argued it was not as aggressive against the Sinaloa cartel as it was against the gang's rivals.

Before joining Calderon's government, García Luna led Mexico's equivalent of the FBI, the Federal Investigative Agency, under President Vicente Fox.

Author José Reveles called García Luna "the omnipotent cop of Vicente Fox and later Felipe Calderon," and the questions that have arisen about him are numerous.

Reveles said that in 2005, during the Fox administration, agents from the Federal Investigative Agency "were capturing Zetas (members of a rival cartel) and turning them over to the Sinaloa cartel." Anti-drug prosecutor Santiago Vasconcelos made that accusation public, but later died in a plane crash.

In December of that year, García Luna's agents detained French citizen Florence Cassez and held her illegally until they could stage a media event. She was paraded before TV cameras and forced to participate in a staged, televised reenactment of her capture. She was held for seven years on kidnapping charges, but was released and became a cause celebre in her homeland.

In 2008, banners began appearing across the country claiming García Luna was working for the Sinaloa cartel.

Reveles, who was then covering the congress and had access to documents, said that in 2008 Mexican lawmakers took closed-door testimony from federal agents that García Luna's convoy had been intercepted in the state of Morelos by members of the Beltran Lleyva cartel, which had broken from the Sinaloa cartel. The agents reported that García Luna was taken to meet with Arturo Beltran Lleyva, one of the cartel's leaders, Reveles said. García Luna denied all of it.

A 2011 Televisa telenovela called "The Team" that portrayed federal police as crime-fighting heroes was allegedly the brainchild of García Luna and financed with government money. The honest, well-trained and brave officers portrayed on the show were at odds with the public's longstanding perception of Mexico's police.

In 2012, arrested U.S. drug gang leader Édgar Valdez Villarreal, alias "La Barbie," claimed in an open letter that he had paid off García Luna.

Also in 2012, rifle drug corruption in the federal police force burst into the open when one federal officer opened fire on his colleagues at Mexico City's international airport.

And finally, in 2012, 14 Mexican agents under Garcia Luna's command opened fire on an SUV carrying two U.S. CIA agents near Mexico City after Mexican officials claimed their agents mistook the Americans' vehicle for one driven by gang members.

Despite all that, Mexico security analyst Alejandro Hope noted, the U.S. government apparently vetted Garcia Luna, praised the drug busts he carried out, and allowed him to live in the United States for about seven years before charging him.

"Why now?" Hope asked.

While the accusations have long been out there it was unclear whether the timing of the charges could

be explained by some unknown deal within the complex U.S.-Mexico relationship on drug trafficking or if it stemmed from testimony in the U.S. trial of notorious drug boss Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.

Guzmán was tried in New York in 2018. At his trial, former cartel member Jesus Zambada testified that he personally made at least \$6 million in hidden payments to García Luna on behalf of his older brother, cartel boss Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, in 2005-2007.

"I believe he enriched himself, but I don't know if it was from that (drug cartel bribes)," Hope said.

If so, it was extreme arrogance or stupidity, Hope said. He said there are a lot of ways a Cabinet secretary with budget authority and influence could enrich himself, but just one way that would be guaranteed to draw the ire of the U.S. government.

U.S. authorities said Tuesday that García Luna had amassed a fortune of millions, well beyond what a public servant could expect to earn.

González, the former prosecutor, said that "this issue was obvious."

He added, "you can't hide money that easily."

Guillermo Valdes, the former intelligence chief in Calderon's administration, expressed surprise at García Luna's arrest, saying, "The guy I knew and who I dealt with did his job."

But Valdes said the arrest would be an opportunity to clarify the allegations that have swirled round García Luna for years.

"If he was corrupt he should be punished, and if not his name should be cleared," Valdes said.

Associated Press writer Tom Hays in New York contributed to this report.

Photo of sick boy on floor roils British election campaign

By **KELVIN CHAN** and **MIKE CORDER** Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A photo of a sick boy sleeping on a hospital floor because no beds were available has become one of the defining images of Britain's bruising election campaign.

It forced Prime Minister Boris Johnson onto the defensive and ignited a fierce online debate over whether it was real or fake.

The boy, 4-year-old Jack Williment-Barr, had been admitted to Leeds General Infirmary last week with suspected pneumonia. He eventually was diagnosed with flu and tonsillitis and then discharged, but not before he was photographed lying on the floor cushioned by a coat with an oxygen mask nearby. A red coat served as a blanket.

The story was splashed across Monday's front page of the left-leaning national tabloid Daily Mirror, including the photo of Jack in his Spider-Man top under the headline, "Desperate."

The photo and subsequent posts swept through British social media like a firestorm, injecting an unpredictable and explosive jolt into the intensifying political war of information just days ahead of Thursday's election.

Jack's story came to national attention in a newspaper article critical of the Conservative Party's cuts to the U.K.'s national health service.

But then a Facebook post appeared, promoting a counternarrative.

"Very interesting. A good friend of mine is a senior nursing sister at Leeds Hospital," the post began, and went on to spin the tale that the photo of Jack was a setup for the cameras.

It soon was shared thousands of times. Disinformation experts noticed interesting similarities among the posts. For starters, Facebook and Twitter users shared the exact same language of the post by either copying and pasting the wording or taking screenshots of it.

They tried to bring it to the attention of "influencers" with big Twitter followings by tagging prominent users like former soccer stars Rio Ferdinand and Gary Lineker, as well as Johnson, in an apparent attempt to amplify the message, said Alastair Reid, digital editor at First Draft, a nonprofit group that investigates misinformation.

There also were attempts to tag British TV journalists Robert Peston and Laura Kuenssberg, who were

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duped hours earlier into sharing a separate fake story about a government minister's aide being punched that apparently was spread by Conservative party insiders, Reid said.

The post also was shared widely in public Facebook groups advocating for Brexit, the Conservative party's main cause at the election.

A woman whose Facebook account was used to publish a claim that the original story was fake told The Guardian newspaper that she had been hacked.

"I am not a nurse and I certainly don't know anyone in Leeds," the woman told the Guardian, which said it was withholding her name because she said she had received death threats. The newspaper said she tried to report the hack to a fraud advice service.

The Associated Press was unable to contact the woman or Jack's mother.

But whether or not the account was hacked, the big question was how the claim got "pushed into all these different groups and front of all these people, and who was spreading it? And that's something which at this stage is hard to identify," Reid said.

The only people who have that level of information are Facebook and Twitter, he added. Facebook didn't reply to a request for comment.

Twitter investigated the accounts that were involved in spreading the message and found no signs of platform manipulation or automated activity.

"We're committed to improving the health of the public conversation on our service, particularly during elections," Twitter said in a statement. "To this end, platform manipulation is strictly against the Twitter Rules. We will take aggressive enforcement action if we identify this behaviour on our service."

Reid called it "a concerted effort to put it in front of a very wide audience. But who exactly is doing that and whether or not that is coordinated is still not clear."

The episode highlights how easy it has become to elevate hot-button issues through social media. The combination of Britain's beloved National Health Service and a sick child may have been enough to arouse strong feelings across the country.

"Emotion is the currency of social media, whether it's outrage or whether it's love or whether it's humor. That's the fuel that powers a viral post," Reid said.

And with two days until a national election, at a time when trust has become a huge issue, "this plays into some of those existing narratives and people are taking advantage of that to sow misinformation," he said.

Britain's election laws were largely written before the dawn of the internet, with online campaigning and political messaging mostly unregulated and open to exploitation by a new generation of activists who grew up with the technology.

Similar loopholes were exploited by Russian trolls during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

The editor of The Yorkshire Post, which published the story that first appeared in the Yorkshire Evening Post, stood by its reporting and posted on his Twitter feed a response he wrote to a reader left bewildered by the claims and counterclaims.

"I do hope we are not too late to help people like her, so unfairly manipulated and discombobulated by cynical social media messaging driven by dark forces," editor James Mitchinson tweeted.

Matt Walsh, who researches digital political communication at the University of Cardiff, called the social media storm "the nadir" of the campaign.

"The issue here is that material is being put in the public domain through some very dark networks," he said. "False stories are getting out there and exploding in social media. And in the end, real, people are being affected."

Details of The Yorkshire Post's story were confirmed by a written statement issued by Dr. Yvette Oade, chief medical officer at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust that included an apology to Jack and his family.

Walsh said people slinging mud online before the election "may not be connected to the parties, but they are putting out misinformation in hopes of taking people in."

Associated Press writer Danica Kirka in London contributed.

Increased activity on New Zealand volcano stymies recovery

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WHAKATANE, New Zealand (AP) — Experts said geothermal activity on a New Zealand volcanic island increased significantly on Wednesday, dealing a blow to relatives waiting for crews to recover the bodies that remain there following a deadly eruption two days earlier.

Volcanic tremors rose in the morning, accompanied by an increase in the amount of steam and mud being released at White Island, the GeoNet seismic monitoring agency said.

"We interpret these signals as evidence of continued high gas pressures within the volcano," the agency said. "The situation remains highly uncertain as to future activity. Eruptions in the next 24 hours are still likely to occur."

Six deaths were confirmed after Monday's eruption. Five people died at the time of the blast or soon after, while a sixth person died Tuesday night at an Auckland hospital.

Another eight people are believed to have died, with their bodies remaining on the ash-covered island for now. And 30 people remain hospitalized, including 25 in critical condition. Many of the injured suffered severe burns.

Bruce Bird, an acting assistant police commissioner, said they were monitoring the situation hour by hour. "Safety for our staff is a huge priority for us," Bird said. "And we've got to get this right."

Bird said they had deployed a drone over the island to measure gas levels after strong winds had thwarted those attempts on Tuesday.

But helicopter pilot Mark Law said the delay was hard to understand and that if he was making the decision, he would leave immediately.

"It would take 20 minutes to get out there. We know where they are," he said, referring to the bodies. "Then we could bring them home."

Survivors from the Monday eruption ran into the sea to escape the scalding steam and ash and emerged covered in burns, said those who first helped them.

The tragedy will have an ongoing effect on the town of Whakatane, which road signs tout as the gateway to White Island. As well as being an important tourist draw for the 20,000 people who live here, the volcano has an almost mystical significance, its regular puffing a feature of the landscape.

Whether the island will ever host tourists again remains uncertain after the horrific tragedy that unfolded when the volcano exploded a little after 2 p.m. Monday.

Geoff Hopkins was in a boat offshore after visiting the island with his daughter, the tour a 50th birthday present for him. He told the New Zealand Herald the eruption at first looked beautiful but quickly turned menacing.

As injured people were transported onto their boat screaming in pain, Hopkins and his daughter Lillani poured fresh water onto them, cut them out of their clothes and tried to keep them calm.

He told the Herald they were horrifically burned on their exposed skin and faces, even under their clothes.

In all, police believe there were 47 visitors on the island at the time. They say 24 were Australian, nine were American and five were New Zealanders. Others were from Germany, Britain, China and Malaysia. Many were passengers aboard the Royal Caribbean cruise ship Ovation of the Seas.

The first confirmed death was of a local man, Hayden Marshall-Inman, a guide who had shown tourists around the island.

Former Whakatane Mayor Tony Bonne said Marshall-Inman was a keen fisherman and well-liked. He was so kind, Bonne said, that he would often leave extra money at the grocery store for those he knew were struggling to pay.

Many people were left questioning why tourists were still allowed to visit the island after seismic monitoring experts raised the volcano's alert level last month.

"These questions must be asked, and they must be answered," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in Parliament.

New Zealand's Deputy Police Commissioner John Tims said Tuesday that police were opening a criminal

investigation into the deaths that would accompany an investigation by health and safety regulators.

But hours later, police put out a statement saying that while they were investigating the deaths on behalf of the coroner, "To correct an earlier statement, it is too early to confirm whether there will also be a criminal investigation."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said 11 Australians are unaccounted for and 13 were hospitalized. Three Australians were suspected to be among the initial five confirmed dead, he told reporters in Sydney. "I fear there is worse news to come," Morrison said.

Relatives of a newlywed American couple say the husband and wife were severely burned. Barbara Barham told The Washington Post that her daughter Lauren Urey, 32, and son-in-law Matthew Urey, 36, from Richmond, Virginia, were on a honeymoon trip.

White Island, also known by the indigenous Maori name Whakaari, is the tip of an undersea volcano about 50 kilometers (30 kilometers) off New Zealand's main North Island.

New Zealand's GeoNet seismic monitoring agency had raised the volcano's alert level on Nov. 18 from 1 to 2 on a scale where 5 represents a major eruption, noting an increase in sulfur dioxide gas, which originates from magma. It also said volcanic tremors had increased from weak to moderate strength. It raised the alert level to 4 for a time after Monday's eruption but lowered it to 3 as the activity subsided.

At least 10 people were killed on the island in 1914 when it was being mined for sulfur. Part of a crater wall collapsed, and a landslide destroyed the miners' village and the mine itself.

The island became a private scenic reserve in 1953. Daily tours allow more than 10,000 people to visit every year.

"Tourism has been a growing market, and White Island has been an anchor for that," Bonne said. "It's something unique that pulls people from all around the world."

He said it was sad to think that might all now come to a stop.

Associated Press writer Rod McGuirk in Canberra, Australia, contributed to this report.

Testing tech ideas in public? San Francisco says get permit

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Tired of San Francisco streets being used as a testing ground for the latest delivery technology and transportation apps, city leaders are now requiring businesses to get permits before trying out new high-tech ideas in public.

Supporters of the legislation, which the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved Tuesday, say it is the first of its kind in the U.S. They say it's long overdue in a city that's a hub for major tech companies but is more accustomed to reacting to the sudden arrival of new technology — like hundreds of dockless electric scooters that appeared overnight last year.

The e-scooter trend has led to complaints from people in cities across the country.

The tech industry has showered San Francisco with high-paying jobs and cemented its reputation as a place for big ideas, but the success of home-grown companies Airbnb, Lyft and Uber has vexed some residents as streets have become more congested and the housing shortage has worsened.

"I support innovation and technology, but our residents are not guinea pigs, and our public infrastructure is not a free-for-all," said Norman Yee, president of the Board of Supervisors who introduced the legislation.

The Office of Emerging Technology will serve as a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs who want to test their products in San Francisco's public space. Companies will not be allowed to experiment unless the office declares the tech in question a "net public good."

It's not clear how criteria will be used to evaluate proposals, but companies that share data, ensure public safety and privacy when testing, and promote job creation would fare better than those that don't.

The office will have oversight over new technology launched on, above or below city property or on public right-of-ways, but the legislation does not spell out all the possible technologies the office would oversee.

Yee said hoverboards, delivery drones and data-gathering devices on sidewalks or other public infra-

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structure would be subject to regulation. He's even heard of a business that wants to promote low-tech pogo sticks as transportation. The concept makes him shudder.

"Can you imagine?" Yee said. "Let's put a stop to that before they drop 10,000 pogo sticks into the city."

Local officials have a duty to protect public infrastructure and to send the message that public space is "not the Wild West" for anyone with coding skills and a neat idea, said Aaron Klein, a fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, a public policy think tank.

"On the other hand, too much local control and too many hoops to jump through can be easily manipulated by vested interests to fight advancement," he said.

San Francisco political strategist Jon Golinger says it's time that City Hall took control after nearly a decade of political leaders allowing businesses free rein. The lenience made some people wealthy but didn't provide enough public good to a city with skyrocketing housing prices, growing homelessness and widening income inequality.

"It had a detrimental and lasting effect on the quality of life and the health of our city," he said.

For instance, San Francisco did not start regulating Airbnb until 2014, years after the company started advertising short-term rentals despite a city law that prohibited such stays. Officials also are tangling with Uber and Lyft over congestion, user data and driver pay, among other issues.

Transportation companies like those ride-hailing services are overseen by the state so could not be regulated by the city office, says Erica Maybaum, an aide to Yee. It also would not regulate a service like Airbnb because that involves a private platform and private properties, she said.

The Silicon Valley Leadership Group, founded by David Packard of Hewlett-Packard, objects to the permitting requirement, saying it would stifle innovation and burden business.

But the legislation has the backing of sf.citi, a tech association founded by angel investor Ron Conway, who's a longtime nemesis of advocates of stricter regulation.

"We believe that the supervisor's approach of working with — rather than against — industry to build legislation is the kind of leadership this city needs to be successful," said Jennifer Stojkovic, sf.citi's executive director.

Vikrum Aiyer, vice president of public policy at food delivery service Postmates and a member of the work group that crafted the legislation, said at a public hearing last month that the days of public-private head-butting are over.

"This is an era in which government needs to build empathy for technology, and technology companies must build more empathy for government," he said.

Yee came up with the idea for regulation nearly two years ago, after he successfully passed legislation requiring companies to get permits to test delivery robots. The idea gained more urgency after hundreds of dockless scooters appeared on city sidewalks in 2018, providing a fun ride for some but irritation for others forced to weave around them.

The city moved to ban the scooters until officials could regulate them.

Barr: FBI's Russia investigation based on 'bogus narrative'

By ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr leveled blistering criticism at how the Russia investigation was conducted, saying Tuesday that it was based on a "bogus narrative" that the Trump campaign might have conspired with Russia during the 2016 presidential election.

Barr spoke to NBC News one day after the release of a Justice Department inspector general report that found problems with the FBI's investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, but also concluded that there was a proper basis for opening the probe and that it was free of political bias.

Barr, a vocal defender of President Donald Trump, said he disagreed with the inspector general that the FBI had enough information to open the investigation and particularly to use surveillance on a former Trump campaign aide. He said that law enforcement officials involved in applying for those warrants had withheld from judges what he said was key exculpatory information that they had received.

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He also blamed the Obama administration for telling Russia not to interfere in the 2016 presidential election and not sharing the same warnings or concerns with the Trump campaign. The FBI discussed whether to give a so-called "defensive briefing" to the Trump campaign, but ultimately concluded that if someone in the campaign was working with Russians they could be tipped off and cover-up their potential criminal behavior, the report said.

"I think our nation was turned on its head for three years based on a completely bogus narrative that was largely fanned and hyped by an irresponsible press," Barr said.

He said he saw "gross abuses" in the process of obtaining the surveillance warrant and "inexplicable behavior that is intolerable."

He added: "The attorney general's primary responsibility is to protect against the abuse of the law enforcement and intelligence apparatus, and make sure it doesn't play an improper role in our political life. That's my responsibility, and I'm going to carry it out."

Barr's disparagement and dismissal of a key finding of the inspector general's report is likely to deepen the criticism from Democrats that he acts more like the president's personal lawyer than the attorney general. Barr has enthusiastically embraced Trump's political agenda and faced intense criticism after he cast special counsel Robert Mueller's report as a vindication for the president and launched a probe to investigate the investigators— something Trump has repeatedly said should happen.

During an appearance at a Wall Street Journal event in Washington, Barr said he thought the evidence used to open the Russia investigation was "very flimsy." He also criticized the FBI for not briefing the Trump campaign about its investigation and for withholding exculpatory information from the court that issued secret surveillance warrants.

The long-awaited report issued Monday rejected theories and criticism spread by Trump and his supporters, though it also found "serious performance failures" up the bureau's chain of command that Republicans are citing as evidence that Trump was targeted by an unfair investigation.

The review by Inspector General Michael Horowitz knocked down multiple lines of attack against the Russia investigation, finding that it was properly opened and that law enforcement leaders were not motivated by political bias. Contrary to the claims of Trump and other critics, it said that opposition research compiled by an ex-British spy named Christopher Steele had no bearing on the decision to open the investigation known as Crossfire Hurricane. And it rejected allegations that a former Trump campaign aide at the center of the probe was set up by the FBI.

Barr, echoing Trump's comments from earlier this month, suggested that Americans should wait for the findings of John Durham, the prosecutor Barr selected to investigate how intelligence was gathered in the Russia probe. Both Barr and Durham have rejected the inspector general's conclusion that there was sufficient evidence to open the FBI investigation.

Durham, in a brief statement Monday, suggested his own investigation would back up his disagreement.

"I think he will have a broader appreciation of all the facts and a determination can be made," Barr said of Durham. "I don't know what the motivations were and I'm not saying there was an improper motivation, but I think it is premature to rule definitively there wasn't."

The inspector general's report found that the FBI had an "authorized purpose" when it opened its investigation in July 2016 into whether the Trump campaign was coordinating with Russia to tip the election in his favor. The report said the FBI had cause to investigate a potential national security threat.

The inspector general identified 17 "significant inaccuracies or omissions" in applications for a warrant and later renewals from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to monitor the communications of former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page.

The research compiled by Steele, colloquially known as the Steele Dossier, which the FBI used as part of its application to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court was "garbage," Barr said.

"I think it was a gross abuse," he added.

The report also details that the FBI used an informant to set up and record a September 2016 meeting with a high-level Trump campaign official. The official wasn't identified by name, but was not a subject

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of the Russia investigation, the report said. While the information collected wasn't used during the Russia probe, it does lend support to the assertions by Trump and Barr that the Trump campaign was spied upon.

FBI Director Christopher Wray acknowledged in an interview with The Associated Press that the report had identified significant problems with how agents conducted the investigation and that it was "important" the inspector general found the investigation was properly opened and not affected by political bias.

Trump lashed out at Wray on Twitter, saying he would never be able to fix the FBI.

"I don't know what report current Director of the FBI Christopher Wray was reading, but it sure wasn't the one given to me," Trump tweeted. "With that kind of attitude, he will never be able to fix the FBI, which is badly broken despite having some of the greatest men & women working there!"

The tweet was a rare direct attack on Wray, who has largely been spared the public ire Trump vented at former FBI Director James Comey — whom he fired in May 2017 — and at Andrew McCabe, who temporarily replaced Comey but was later fired by the Justice Department. Wray inherited a year-old Russia investigation when he was installed in August 2017 and, by that point, the probe was already in the hands of Mueller.

NFL, NCAA football fuel Fox TV's win of the prime-time week

By **ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Fueled by both college and pro football, Fox won a rare title as champ of the broadcast week among networks.

Fox's Thursday night NFL airing of the Dallas Cowboys and Chicago Bears was the week's top show of any kind with 18.23 million viewers, and its broadcast of the Big 10 title game between Ohio State and Wisconsin on Saturday finished fourth for the week with 13.55 million viewers, the Nielsen company said Tuesday.

They were joined by the network's drama "911" in 15th and its surreal singing competition "The Masked Singer" in 17th to help give Fox a prime-time average of 7.85 million viewers compared 6.59 million for second-place CBS, the dominant network that has been knocked from its top spot recently because of NBC and Fox's nighttime football offerings.

Seven of the week's top 10 shows were either football games or their pregame shows.

CBS's perennial ratings generator "60 Minutes" was the week's top non-football show, in fifth place with more than 13 million viewers, and the network's "Young Sheldon" was the top scripted show in ninth with 8.39 million.

After Fox's 7.85 million average viewers and CBS's 6.59, NBC averaged 5.82 million viewers in prime time and ABC had 4.4. Univision was next up among broadcast networks with 1.26 million viewers, followed by ION television with 1.2 million, Next comes Telemundo had 1.14 million and the CW with 840,000.

Fox News Channel was the week's most popular cable network, averaging 2.86 million viewers in prime time. ESPN was second with 2.71 million. Hallmark had 1.83 million, MSNBC had 1.81 million and A&E had 1 million.

ABC's "World News Tonight" topped the evening newscasts with an average of 9 million viewers. NBC's "Nightly News" was second with 8.24 million and the "CBS Evening News" had 5.85 million viewers.

For the week of Dec. 2-8, the top 20 shows, their networks and viewerships:

1. NFL Football: Dallas at Chicago, Fox, 18.23 million.
2. NFL Football: Seattle at L.A. Rams, NBC, 17.88 million.
3. NFL Football: Minnesota at Seattle: ESPN, 14.56 million.
4. Big 10 Football Championship Game, Ohio State at Wisconsin, Fox, 13.55 million.
5. "60 Minutes," CBS, 13.03 million.
6. NFL Pregame Show, NBC: 12.87 million.
7. NFL Pregame Show, Fox: 10.83 million.
8. "Football Night in America, Pt. 3," NBC, 9.83 million.
9. "Young Sheldon," CBS, 8.39 million.

10. "The Voice," NBC, 8.03 million.
11. Big 10 Football Championship Pregame, Fox, 13.55 million.
12. "Blue Bloods" CBS, 7.33 million.
13. "NCIS," CBS, 7.18 million.
14. "Christmas at Rockefeller Center," NBC, 6.88 million.
15. "Survivor," CBS, 6.87 million.
16. "911," Fox, 6.82 million.
17. "God Friended Me" CBS, 6.8 million.
18. "The Masked Singer," Fox, .6.6 million
19. "Hawaii Five-0," CBS, 6.55 million.
20. "The Voice" (Tuesday), NBC, 6.44 million.

ABC is owned by The Walt Disney Co. CBS is owned by CBS Corp. CW is a joint venture of Warner Bros. Entertainment and CBS Corp. Fox is owned by Fox Corp. NBC and Telemundo are owned by Comcast Corp. ION Television is owned by ION Media Networks.

Pentagon orders review of international student vetting

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The Pentagon on Tuesday ordered a broad review of vetting procedures for international students who participate in training on U.S. military installations and demanded the process be strengthened, in direct reaction to last week's deadly shooting at a Pensacola Navy base by a Saudi aviation student.

The memo signed by Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist also suspends flight and other operational training for all Saudi Arabian students in U.S. military programs. It follows a decision by the U.S. Navy to halt flight training for more than 300 Saudi Arabian students at the Pensacola Naval Air Station and two other bases in Florida.

The FBI confirmed Tuesday that the 21-year-old Saudi Air Force officer who killed three U.S. sailors and injured eight other people at the Pensacola base on Friday legally bought the 9mm Glock pistol he used. Investigators are digging into whether 2nd Lt. Mohammed Alshamrani acted alone, amid reports he hosted a party earlier last week where he and others watched videos of mass shootings.

The incident has raised questions about how well international military students are screened before they attend training at American bases.

Norquist's memo says the review of the vetting must be completed in 10 days, and the flight restrictions will continue throughout the review and until they are lifted by senior leaders.

"As we reaffirm our commitment to these critical military partnerships, so must we assess the efficacy of our security procedures in light of the tragic loss of life on December 6," the memo says. "We will make every effort to ensure the safety of all personnel and their families on U.S. military installations."

U.S. officials said the flight restrictions were not triggered because there are indications of any broader problems or conspiracy fears related to Saudi students or the shooting. They said it was more because the shooting suggested some possible vetting problems associated with Saudi Arabia that will be reviewed.

Norquist in the memo directed the defense undersecretary for intelligence to "take immediate steps to strengthen personnel vetting" for international students and to review "policies and procedures for screening foreign students and granting access to our bases."

He said the U.S. is working closely with Saudi officials in the response to the shooting.

The Pentagon has said that about 850 Saudi students are currently in U.S. military training programs. U.S. officials told reporters on Tuesday that they aren't sure how many of those would see some type of flight or other restriction, but many will. Overall there are about 5,000 international students in U.S. programs, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details about the review and the memo.

Currently international military students go through screening by the State Department and the Depart-

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ment of Homeland Security. The U.S. mainly runs background and biometric checks on the students to determine if they are security risks.

The Navy's more limited flight training restriction for Saudi students was ordered Monday night, according to Commander Clay Doss, a Navy spokesman. He said said classroom training is starting again this week, and flight training for other U.S. and international students will resume.

The Navy's flight restriction affected 140 students at Pensacola Naval Air Station, where the shooting occurred, and 35 at nearby Whiting Field. Another 128 students at Naval Air Station Mayport, on the Atlantic seaboard, are also restricted. Doss said the stand-down is an effort to ensure the safety of the students, as they recover from the trauma of the shooting.

For the most part, military installation commanders have the authority to set their own security procedures, including base entry screenings and carry permits for guns. There is a baseline level of security that must be met, but commanders can make any of their procedures more stringent if they believe it's necessary.

Under Defense Department guidelines, commanders can authorize personnel to carry government-issued or personal firearms as long as they have been screened, they meet qualifications, follow specific handling and storage conditions, and receive permission in writing. The permission is usually good for at least 90 days, and must be routinely reviewed in order to be renewed.

Under the Pentagon guidelines released in 2016, personnel participating in official training programs can not be authorized to carry weapons unless approved by the administrator prior to the training.

The current security level across all Defense Department facilities is force protection condition Bravo and that status is noted at the entry of all installations, including the Pentagon.

U.S. Northern Command ordered an increase in defense-wide security from condition Alpha to Bravo in May 2015 due to concerns about threats from the Islamic State group. IS militants had a considerable hold on territory in Iraq and Syria and threatening western targets.

Condition Bravo is when there is an increased or more predictable threat of terrorism attack or hostile act, and that it is directed against Defense Department entities or personnel, according to the department. The levels go from Normal to FPCON Delta, which is the highest and applies when a terror attack has occurred or is anticipated.

Democrats, White House forge new North American trade deal

By **ANDREW TAYLOR** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats and the White House announced a deal Tuesday on a modified North American trade pact, handing President Donald Trump a major Capitol Hill win on the same day that impeachment charges were announced against him. Both sides hailed the deal as a win for American workers.

They said the revamped U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement was a significant improvement over the original North American Free Trade Agreement, with Democrats crowing about winning stronger provisions on enforcing the agreement while Republicans said it will help keep the economy humming along.

"There is no question of course that this trade agreement is much better than NAFTA," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in announcing the agreement, saying the pact is "infinitely better than what was initially proposed by the administration."

Trump said the revamped trade pact will "be great" for the United States.

"It will be the best and most important trade deal ever made by the USA. Good for everybody - Farmers, Manufacturers, Energy, Unions - tremendous support. Importantly, we will finally end our Country's worst Trade Deal, NAFTA!" the president said in a tweet.

The deal announcement came on the same morning that Democrats outlined impeachment charges against Trump. The trade pact is Trump's top Capitol Hill priority along with funding for his long-sought border fence.

Trump said it was no coincidence that Democrats announced they had come to an agreement shortly

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after laying out the two impeachment charges they will seek against him.

"They were very embarrassed by (impeachment), and that's why they brought up USMCA an hour after because they figure it will muffle it a little bit," Trump told reporters at the White House before departing for a campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

In Mexico City, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland joined Mexican officials to sign the updated version of the United States-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, or USMCA, at a ceremony in Mexico City's centuries-old National Palace.

Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard congratulated the negotiators for reaching a second set of agreements to answer U.S. concerns about labor rights in Mexico, and regional content.

"Mission accomplished!" Ebrard told the gathered officials.

Lighthizer praised the joint work of the Trump administration, Democrats, business and labor leaders to reach an agreement, calling it "nothing short of a miracle that we have all come together."

"This is a win-win-win agreement which will provide stability for working people in all three countries for years to come," Freeland said. "That is no small thing."

A U.S. House vote is likely before Congress adjourns for the year and the Senate is likely to vote in January or February. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the vote on the trade deal will likely occur after an expected impeachment trial in the Senate.

Pelosi was the key congressional force behind the deal, which updates the 25-year-old NAFTA accord that many Democrats — especially from manufacturing areas hit hard by trade-related job losses — have long lambasted.

She and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., forged a positive working relationship with Lighthizer, whom they credited with working in good faith.

"Thanks to President Trump's leadership, we have reached an historic agreement on the USMCA. After working with Republicans, Democrats, and many other stakeholders for the past two years we have created a deal that will benefit American workers, farmers, and ranchers for years to come," Lighthizer said. "This will be the model for American trade deals going forward."

NAFTA eliminated most tariffs and other trade barriers involving the United States, Mexico and Canada. Critics, including Trump, labor unions and many Democratic lawmakers, branded the pact a job killer for the United States because it encouraged factories to move south of the border, capitalize on low-wage Mexican workers and ship products back to the U.S. duty free.

Weeks of back-and-forth, closely monitored by Democratic labor allies such as the AFL-CIO, have brought the two sides together. Pelosi is a longtime free trade advocate and supported the original NAFTA in 1994. Trump has accused Pelosi of being incapable of passing the agreement because she is too wrapped up in impeachment.

The original NAFTA badly divided Democrats but the new pact is more protectionist and labor-friendly, and Pelosi is confident it won't divide the party, though some liberal activists took to social media to carp at the agreement.

"There is no denying that the trade rules in America will now be fairer because of our hard work and perseverance. Working people have created a new standard for future trade negotiations," said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. "President Trump may have opened this deal. But working people closed it."

Business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also chimed in to support the long-delayed agreement.

"This agreement has been the result of painstaking bipartisan negotiations over the past year, and would not have been possible if not for the willingness of President Trump to work patiently with Democrats to get something done that he knew was in the best interests of American workers, farmers and manufacturers," said Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, a former U.S. trade representative.

Republicans leaders and lawmakers have agitated for months for the accord but Pelosi has painstakingly worked to bring labor on board. Democrats see the pact as significantly better than NAFTA and Trumka's

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endorsement is likely to add to a strong vote by Democrats that have proven skeptical of trade agreements.

"I think the vote's going to be pretty good," said No. 2 House Democrat Steny Hoyer, D-Md., a veteran party whip. "There's a general agreement — not total agreement, it's not unanimity — that USMCA is better. It's an improvement. And to the extent that Trumka and labor comes out and says that this is an improvement, I think that that will be unifying."

The pact contains provisions designed to nudge manufacturing back to the United States. For example, it requires that 40% to 45% of cars eventually be made in countries that pay autoworkers at least \$16 an hour — that is, in the United States and Canada and not in Mexico.

The trade pact picked up some momentum after Mexico in April passed a labor-law overhaul required by USMCA. The reforms are meant to make it easier for Mexican workers to form independent unions and bargain for better pay and working conditions, narrowing the gap with the United States.

Democrats succeeded in tossing overboard a 10-year protection for manufacturers of new drugs, including so-called biologics, that had won reprieve from lower-cost competition in the original accord. But Pelosi lost out in a bid to repeal so-called Section 230, a provision in a 1996 law that gives social media companies like Facebook broad immunity from lawsuits over the content they publish on their platforms.

Conservative Pennsylvania GOP Sen. Pat Toomey offered a rare GOP voice against the accord, which he said veered to the left and "undermines the free flow of capital" from the U.S. to its trading partners.

"This is basically NAFTA with a few modernizations, and some restrictions on trade and an expiration date. If people think that's a huge improvement than I guess they'll be happy with it," Toomey told reporters. "If people think free trade is important, they'll presumably see it as the step backward that I see it as."

Toomey said Democrats had outmaneuvered the administration, an assessment that Pelosi shared.

"We ate their lunch," Pelosi told her Democratic colleagues in a closed-door meeting, according to an aide in the room.

Vice President Mike Pence, however, released a statement praising Trump's leadership and claiming Democrats "have finally acquiesced" in allowing a vote on the trade pact.

"From my perspective it's not as good as I had hoped," McConnell said, while No. 2 Senate Republican John Thune of South Dakota offered a mixed assessment as well, saying the changes agreed to by Pelosi and Lighthizer were "not favorable."

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly and Aamer Madhani in Washington and Mark Stevenson in Mexico City contributed to this story.

Adam Sandler on plunging into the Safdies' 'Uncut Gems'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

TORONTO (AP) — Adam Sandler was waiting to be thrown into a midtown fountain on Sixth Avenue for a scene in Josh and Benny Safdie's "Uncut Gems" when he noticed a familiar face on the sidewalk.

The Safdies like to capture as much authentic New York energy as possible in their films and frequently plant their cameras across the block for scenes like the one Sandler was about to shoot. So Sandler was hiding in a parked car, trying not to arouse any attention, when he called out to the passerby.

"I say, 'Lorne!' He looks in the car and gets in and talked to me for a minute," recalls Sandler of spotting his old "Saturday Night Live" boss, Lorne Michaels. "I said I'm doing this movie — I'm going to fill you in on the young and the hip — with the Safdie brothers."

"He goes, (here Sandler dons the requisite Michaels impression) 'I know the Safdie brothers. They grew up in my building,'" Sandler says, laughing and shaking his head. "I can never get anything over on Lorne. I thought I had one cool thing."

The central setting of "Uncut Gems" — the 47th St. diamond district — is just a short walk from the NBC studios at 30 Rockefeller Center where Sandler broke through in the early 1990s on "Saturday Night Live." As far as Sandler has traveled since then — and his latest will strike many as his greatest departure yet — the wild, chaotic, unhinged "Uncut Gems" is just a stone's throw from Sandler's beginnings.

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It's not that Sandler hasn't since proven his considerable dramatic range. Paul Thomas Anderson's "Punch-Drunk Love" revealed the sensitivity beneath the genial man-child persona of his comedies. And while Sandler has never strayed from stand-up or the broader comedies he's currently churning out for Netflix, he has consistently dipped his toe into drama every few years, including the James L. Brooks romantic comedy "Spanglish" (2004), Judd Apatow's meta comedy "Funny People" (2009) and Noah Baumbach's family drama "The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)" (2017).

But the scuzzy, frenetic neo-realism of the Safdie brothers is something else, entirely. In it, Sandler stars as Howard Ratner, a gemstone merchant and compulsive gambler whose wide web of debts, betrayals and schemes render his life a mad scramble. He's like a plate-spinner who drops every plate but keeps throwing up five more. His downfall, and perhaps his destiny, is perpetually and harrowingly close at hand.

The Safdies first sent Sandler their script in 2012.

"I kept hearing about the Safdie brothers and that they wanted to talk to me about a movie," says Sandler. "I didn't know their work, so I started with 'Good Time' (the Safdies' previous film, starring Robert Pattinson as a small-time hustler). I watched them all and I loved them. We would talk on the phone and then we met each other. I mean, we are very close. We talk all day, all night about everything. I love these guys.

"When I was making the movie, I just gave them 100% trust. I just felt like I wanted to be in their world."

For years if not decades, Sandler has consistently declined interviews with print journalists. But on the morning after "Uncut Gems" made its premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, he sat for an interview with The Associated Press alongside Josh and Benny. They had spent a late evening partying together and Sandler was regretting not eating after the premiere. "What a mistake," he said while the Safdies laughed.

Moments before the premiere of "Uncut Gems," one audience member hollered "An Oscar for the Sandman!" By the end of the movie, most in attendance agreed, too. Sandler's performance has been arguably the most acclaimed of the 53-year-old's career.

"Uncut Gems" is an especially intense experience. If you remember the loud, discombobulating drug-dealer scene in Anderson's "Boogie Nights," "Uncut Gems" runs at that high-pitched frenzy for its pretty much its entire length. For the Safdies, it's long been an obsession. Howard is based loosely on a boss of their father's boss. Though Pattinson once pursued the part and Jonah Hill was momentarily attached, the directors felt strongly about Sandler being right for it.

"We wanted Howard to be lovable. Likable is another question, but lovable is something real," Josh says. "We grew up idolizing him. The records, the movies. I just recently told Sandler I was crying watching 'The Wedding Singer' on a plane. You can just feel it in the actors opposite him. People just feel like they're involved in something ineffable."

Though separated by nearly two decades in age, the Brooklyn-born Sandler and the Queens-bred Safdies have become close, a friendship forged on basketball (they are equally dedicated Knicks fans), a shared sense of humor and a New Yorker's lack of pretense.

"Since we agreed to work together, which was pretty quick after we met, we have been nonstop 'Uncut Gems,'" Sandler says. "Morning, afternoon, night."

"I don't want it to end," says Josh.

They are simpatico in thinking, for example, that it's both hysterical and perfect that famed New York sports talk radio host Mike Francesa has a small role as a restaurateur-bookie in "Uncut Gems" — just one ingredient in the movie's strange brew of fiction and reality. (Former NBA star Kevin Garnett also plays himself.) Sandler's initial reticence was alleviated in part by the strong approval of Anderson, who shot part of Sandler's last stand-up special, "100% Fresh."

"When he saw 'Good Time,' he was like, 'Oh my God. Those guys,'" Sandler says. "These guys did something to Paul that stopped him in his tracks. When Paul saw this movie, he texted after: 'Still in the theater. Can't move.'"

Plunging into the cinematic world of the Safdies led Sandler into some unlikely places for a movie star with more than \$2 billion in box office to his name, and not only that fountain on Sixth Avenue. There's also a memorable scene in which Howard ends up naked in a car's trunk and a messy nightclub run-in

with Able Tesfaye, aka The Weeknd.

"Able was a very nice, gentle guy to me. He just wanted to be nice to me as a human being, not throw me on the ground," says Sandler. "We wanted Able ultimately to spit in my face."

"The way we approach violence in all our movies, when you see violence unfold in a non-organized way, it's really sloppy," says Josh. "I got punched in the face really badly once. I got knocked out. The only thing I remember from the moment is falling to the ground and seeing a little girl with her mother turn and yell. You kind of want to get at that feeling with violence."

The Safdies imagined Howard as an insatiable, larger-than-life figure, like porno publisher Al Goldstein or comedian Rodney Dangerfield. But they also say he changed over time, becoming a kind of living document that they funneled details from their lives into.

"Ultimately, he's a hyper romantic person. He's a gambler. All gamblers are really romantic people," says Josh. "You want to slap them around. Their romance gets sort of gross at that point. He's a mystical guy. He believes in things."

More than anything, that's what Sandler grabbed onto.

"I love when the guys told me he was a dreamer," Sandler says. "It's a case of: You see other people have stuff. No matter where you go, no matter what house you look in, you do think: How come they got that? They got it figured out in that house. I think he thinks everyone else has it right, and he's like: I want it right."

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Belichick says he was unaware of filming at Bengals' game

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick says neither he nor his coaching staff has watched any video footage shot by an in-house production team now at the center of an NFL investigation for inappropriately filming the Cincinnati Bengals' sideline at a recent game.

Belichick said during a conference call Tuesday he was not involved and had no knowledge of what took place during Sunday's Bengals-Browns game in Cleveland. Belichick said he wasn't informed of it until Monday afternoon.

"I personally have never viewed any video footage at all, anything that those production people have done, other than what's shown on public television or something like that," Belichick said.

In a statement posted on Twitter and the team website Monday night, the Patriots said a three-person crew producing a web series titled "Do Your Job" "inappropriately filmed the field from the press box" as part of a feature on the scouting department. The filming took place "without specific knowledge of league rules," the statement said.

An NFL spokesman declined comment. Bengals coach Zac Taylor confirmed during a news conference Monday that the league was investigating the crew's activities.

The incident could be addressed on Wednesday when NFL owners convene for their previously scheduled winter meeting in Irving, Texas.

The Patriots' statement said that while they were granted credentials for the crew from the Browns, "our failure to inform the Bengals and the league was an unintended oversight." When confronted, the team said the crew "immediately turned over all footage to the league and cooperated fully."

The Patriots said the purpose of the filming was for an illustration of the work team advance scouts do while on the road. The team says it accepts full responsibility for the crew's actions.

New England was fined \$250,000 and lost a first-round draft pick in 2007 for violating NFL rules against using video to steal signals in a scandal dubbed "Spygate". Belichick was also fined \$500,000.

Spygate fueled a distrust of the Patriots that persisted when the team was accused of illegally deflating the footballs used in the 2015 AFC championship game.

The punishment by the NFL in that case was also severe. Quarterback Tom Brady was suspended four

games, and the team was fined \$1 million and docked another first-round draft pick.

If the NFL does decide to discipline the Patriots for this latest incident, the previous Spygate episode suggests that it likely would be issued swiftly.

The Patriots were penalized for Spygate less than a week after the allegations first were reported in September 2007.

The Patriots (10-3) visit the Bengals (1-12) on Sunday.

AP Sports Writer Jimmy Golen contributed to this report.

Follow Kyle Hightower on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/khightower>

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

Newspaper criticizes film's take on Olympic bombing coverage

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — After a bomb exploded in a downtown Atlanta park midway through the 1996 Olympics, a security guard initially cast as a hero was recast as a villain virtually overnight. More than 20 years later, a movie to be released later this week, "Richard Jewell," explores the roles played by law enforcement and the media in the guard's ordeal.

Now the movie is drawing its own share of criticism.

Kevin Riley, the current editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, is disputing the film's depiction of the newspaper's reporting and decision-making processes, especially the portrayal of reporter Kathy Scruggs, who the movie implies traded sex with an FBI agent for a tip on the story.

In an op-ed, Riley wrote that there's no evidence Scruggs committed the breach of journalistic ethics implied in the movie and disputed implications that the newspaper's reporting was sloppy.

In an interview with The Associated Press, director Clint Eastwood dismissed the criticism of his movie, which is based on a 1997 Vanity Fair article by Marie Brenner, by saying the paper likely is looking to "rationalize" its actions.

Jewell's saga began on July 27, 1996, when he spotted an abandoned backpack during a concert in Centennial Olympic Park shortly before 1 a.m. and helped clear the area as federal agents determined it contained a bomb. The explosion about 20 minutes later killed 44-year-old Alice Hawthorne of Albany, Georgia, and injured 111 people, some of them seriously. A Turkish television cameraman died after suffering a heart attack while running to film the explosion's aftermath.

Jewell, who likely helped prevent many more casualties, was initially hailed as a hero but a few days later was reported to be the focus of the FBI investigation, and the public quickly turned on him.

The park reopened within days, the games continued and Jewell was publicly cleared three months later. But he grappled with the fallout for the rest of his life, and Atlanta lived with the fear and unease of a bomber still at large.

A new book, "The Suspect," attempts to bring clarity to the aftermath of the bombing. Its authors were in the thick of it: Kent Alexander was the U.S. attorney in Atlanta when the bombing happened and Kevin Salwen led The Wall Street Journal's southeastern section.

In the frantic days after the bombing, Scruggs confirmed with law enforcement sources that the FBI was focusing on Jewell. The paper published that information three days after the explosion and scores of reporters descended on the apartment complex where Jewell lived with his mother, leaving them feeling as if they were under siege for months.

Jewell had made clear his dream of working in law enforcement and was endlessly mocked as an overzealous but bumbling wannabe cop.

It's easy to say in hindsight that the investigation focused too heavily on Jewell, Alexander said. But some of Jewell's actions and tips from people who knew him raised serious questions, the former pro-

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ecutor said. There was also the memory of a police officer at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles who was celebrated for disarming a bomb until it emerged that he'd planted it.

Doubts about Jewell's guilt surfaced quickly, especially once it became clear he couldn't have made a 911 call reporting the bomb from a pay phone blocks away.

In late October 1996, Alexander took the unusual step of sending a letter to one of Jewell's attorneys saying Jewell was not a target of the investigation.

"His name had been so badly muddied and tarnished that it just seemed like we should do something, so I did," Alexander said.

That left authorities sifting through dozens of possible suspects — the actual bomber, anti-government extremist Eric Rudolph, not among them. Rudolph, who was behind two more bombs in Atlanta in early 1997 and another in Alabama in January 1998, was eventually captured in 2003 and pleaded guilty in 2005.

The media frenzy surrounding Jewell drew backlash, and the Journal-Constitution was criticized for the "voice of God" style in its initial story, which carried no attribution and left the origin of the information unclear.

Ron Martz, who shared a byline with Scruggs on the scoop, said questions and rumors swirled in the wake of the horrific attack and he saw it as a public service to let people know where the investigation stood.

Scruggs had solid sources and the story had been through several editors, Martz said. Editors even had him take the highly unusual step of reading the entire story to an FBI spokesman to confirm that the information was correct and to make sure it wouldn't jeopardize the investigation.

But Martz said he regrets not pushing for clearer attribution on the original story, which could have spared the paper much grief with the addition of just five words: "according to law enforcement sources."

Once he was effectively cleared, Jewell's lawyers filed libel suits against numerous news outlets. Most settled, but the Journal-Constitution didn't. The legal battle continued for more than a decade, beyond Jewell's death in 2007 at age 44. The courts ultimately ruled the newspaper's stories weren't libelous because they were substantially true when published.

Criticism of the newspaper, and particularly Scruggs, was devastating to her, Martz said.

"She felt very hurt by the way she was being portrayed and the fact that this was to be the shining moment of her career and people were going after her personally to get at her professionally," he said.

Scruggs was a "wild child," loud, foul-mouthed and often provocative, Martz said, but she was also relentless, hard-nosed and one of the best reporters he ever worked with. She died at 42 in 2001 from an overdose of prescription drugs.

Eastwood defended the depiction of Scruggs, saying he'd "read a lot of material" on her that seemed to "corroborate the fact that she was somewhat on the wild side." He also said the news media sometimes rushes because of competition to be first, and "they pull the trigger before they're dialed in."

In a letter sent Monday to Eastwood, a Warner Brothers lawyer and others, a lawyer for the newspaper demands a public statement that dramatization was used in the film's portrayal of events and characters, and asks that a "prominent disclaimer" to that effect be added to the film.

"It is highly ironic that a film purporting to tell a tragic story of how the reputation of an FBI suspect was grievously tarnished appears bent on a path to severely tarnish the reputation of the AJC," lawyer Martin Singer wrote.

Warner Brothers fired back, saying that the newspaper's claims are baseless, that the film seeks to confirm Jewell's innocence and restore his name.

"It is unfortunate and the ultimate irony that the Atlanta Journal Constitution, having been a part of the rush to judgment of Richard Jewell, is now trying to malign our filmmakers and cast," the studio wrote in a statement.

Associated Press reporter Marcela Isaza in Los Angeles contributed reporting.

This story has corrected the spelling of the movie title in the first paragraph.

Facebook rebuffs US AG over access to encrypted messages

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Facebook is rebuffing efforts by U.S. Attorney General William Barr to give authorities a way to read encrypted messages.

The heads of Facebook-owned WhatsApp and Messenger services told Barr and his U.K. and Australian counterparts that Facebook is moving forward with plans to enable end-to-end encryption on all of its messaging services. End-to-end encryption locks up messages so that not even Facebook can read their contents.

WhatsApp already uses end-to-end encryption. Facebook plans to extend that protection to Messenger and Instagram Direct.

Barr and other officials had asked the company in October to hold off. In a letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, they insisted that precluding access by law enforcement could hinder efforts to prevent or investigate crimes. The letter repeatedly emphasized the dangers of child sexual exploitation to justify their stance.

Barr reiterated his concerns in a speech Tuesday, calling the encryption fight "one of our highest priorities" and describing "an increasing number of horror stories about how people are dying, or being molested or whatever, but we cannot get in."

Law enforcement has long sought a way to read encrypted messages that's analogous to wiretaps for phone calls. Security experts, however, say that giving police such access makes messaging insecure for everyone by creating vulnerabilities that others can exploit.

In Facebook's response Monday to Barr and other authorities, Will Cathcart, head of WhatsApp, and Stan Chudnovsky, head of Messenger, said creating such a "backdoor" for law enforcement "would be a gift to criminals, hackers and repressive regimes, creating a way for them to enter our systems and leaving every person on our platforms more vulnerable to real life harm."

Facebook has said that people have the right to private conversations online and that companies are already able to respond to government agencies when they receive valid legal requests. Facebook's letter emphasized the many tools the company has built to try to detect criminal and other problematic activities using signals from unencrypted information.

Barr said at a Wall Street Journal event on Tuesday that there are benefits to encryption, such as to secure communications with a bank. But he said the growth of consumer apps with end-to-end encryption, like WhatsApp and Signal, have aided "terrorist organizations, drug cartels, child molesting rings and kiddie porn type rings."

His comments came on the same day that executives from Facebook and Apple were testifying about encryption at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

Apple's director of user privacy, Erik Neuenschwander, told senators in prepared remarks Tuesday that encryption not only protects an iPhone user's sensitive data, but is an important way of safeguarding financial and health data in an "increasingly interconnected future."

"We do not know of a way to deploy encryption that provides access only for the good guys without making it easier for the bad guys to break in," he said.

Apple resisted the government's efforts to gain access to an iPhone belonging to a perpetrator of a 2015 terrorist attack in San Bernardino, which killed 14 people. The company went to court to block an FBI demand for Apple to disable security measures that complicated efforts to guess the phone's passcode. The FBI eventually relented after it found another way of getting into the phone, but a longstanding fight between the tech industry and Justice Department over finding workarounds has flared up again under Barr.

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

Thousands rally around Holocaust survivor in Milan

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — A Holocaust survivor who has been put under police protection due to anti-Semitic threats was escorted Tuesday evening through the center of Milan by hundreds of Italian mayors and thousands of ordinary citizens behind a banner reading: "Hatred has no future."

"I have known hatred. I have known what it means to be a reject of the society to which I believed I belonged," Liliana Segre, an 89-year-old senator-for-life who survived Auschwitz as a child, told the crowd.

"I heard the words of hatred, hateful and insulting, and I saw with my eyes the realization of a ferocious program prepared from hatred," Segre said.

Segre said she now looks for hope in the eyes of school children when she tells her story, and in the eyes of mayors and ordinary citizens "who came here to shout, 'Enough hatred.'"

Segre was given a police escort last month after a stream of anti-Semitic posts and threats were aimed at her after she championed a new parliamentary panel against racism, discrimination, anti-Semitism and online hatred.

"Let's leave hatred to the anonymous ones at the keyboards," she said to cheers in front of City Hall.

Milan Mayor Giuseppe Sala told thousands in the crowd, including about 1,000 mayors, that such demonstrations would continue "until this climate of hatred changes."

The mayors, wearing sashes in the Italian green, white and red, were applauded as they entered the arched Galleria, and the crowd chanted "Liliana" when Segre met the mayors below the central glass dome.

Thousands of ordinary Italians joined the march or cheered from the sidelines, singing the anti-fascist anthem "Bella Ciao," as the march proceeded through the 19th century Galleria to the square in front of City Hall.

The march was organized by the Italian mayor's association and was meant to cut across party lines. But the role of League leader Matteo Salvini in fomenting anti-migrant and racist sentiment was recognized.

Bologna Mayor Virginio Merola told The Associated Press that rising racism in Italy could be traced to the country's long economic crisis along with the League's provocative rhetoric. Bologna is the largest city in Emilia-Romagna, a traditionally left-wing stronghold that faces tough regional elections next month, where Salvini is poised to make strong gains.

"There is too much racism, hatred and anti-Semitism in Europe, and Italy," Merola said. "We need to react and show citizens that the way to live together is through civil cohabitation."

Segre said the history of Italian Jews was represented in each of the 8,000 towns and cities in Italy "in the names of the streets, to the headstones, to the rare Jewish vestiges," that will remain when there are no more survivors to bear witness.

It was a reminder made more poignant by recent anti-Semitic incidents involving just such markers of Jewish life. The city council of Schio, north of Vicenza, last month blocked as "divisive" the town mayor's move to put up so-called stumbling stones to remember Schio's Holocaust victims. And vandals in Rome defaced street signs that had been rededicated to honor two Jewish female scholars and an anti-fascist professor. The streets had previously been named after anti-Semitic scientists.

Segre is backing a National Museum of Resistance, which was announced this week to be built in Milan. "It is a moral commitment to support and carry forward the memory," she said.

Bloomberg tells UN climate talks: You can count on the US

By FRANK JORDANS and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — New York billionaire and presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg led a high-powered charge against President Donald Trump's climate policies Tuesday, assuring activists, scientists and politicians from around the world that Americans are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions "even with a climate change denier in the White House."

Bloomberg, who launched his 2020 campaign less than three weeks ago, spoke during a trip to the U.N. global climate conference in Madrid, even as the official U.S. delegation at a booth nearby kept a low profile.

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Together with former Secretary of State John Kerry and former Vice President Al Gore, Bloomberg constituted a sort of shadow delegation at a time when Trump is moving to pull the United States out of the 2015 Paris climate accord.

As other Democratic candidates have done, Bloomberg vowed to immediately rejoin the pact if elected president.

"The first thing you do, Day One, is you say we're going back in," he said. "That's a no-brainer."

The former New York mayor has helped support and fund a private push to get U.S. states, cities and businesses to abide by the terms of the Paris accord.

He touted a report that said non-federal actors representing more than two-thirds of the U.S. economy are on course to cut the nation's emissions 37% by 2030 compared with 2005 levels. If the next administration joins in, that figure could rise to 49%, bringing the U.S. roughly in line with the Paris treaty, according to the report.

"Americans are willing to continue to work, even with a climate change denier in the White House," the 77-year-old businessman told a packed room.

The U.S. remains a party to the climate pact until Nov. 4, 2020 — the day after the U.S. presidential election.

Bloomberg, who has made climate change a central pillar of his bid for the nomination, also called for an end to U.S. subsidies and tax breaks for fossil fuels, which are one of the main sources of greenhouse gases.

Scientists say their use needs to end by the middle of the century if average temperatures on Earth are to rise no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100, the target set in the Paris agreement.

By taking aim at fossil fuel subsidies, Bloomberg is challenging both a powerful American industry and Trump, who has championed the extraction of oil, gas and coal.

According to a report by the International Monetary Fund, fossil fuel subsidies in the U.S. amounted to \$649 billion in 2015. Only China spent more tax money — \$1.4 trillion — to keep fossil fuel prices low that year.

The IMF report calculated that if prices for fossil fuels reflected their true cost, including the environmental damage they cause, consumption would drop so much that global carbon emissions would be 28% lower.

Bloomberg has long been an advocate of international efforts to curb global warming and until recently was the U.N.'s envoy for climate action. After the Trump administration stopped paying U.S. dues to the global body's climate office, Bloomberg's philanthropic organization stepped in to foot the bill. But his attendance at this year's summit stands out because of his presidential ambitions.

The Trump administration sent a low-level delegation to the talks, led by a career diplomat, Marcia Bernicat, former U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh.

Other prominent Americans attending the 12-day conference include Gore and Kerry, who said the absence of any high-profile representative from the White House at the talks "speaks for itself."

"It's an absence of leadership," Kerry said. "It's a tragedy."

Kerry, who as America's top diplomat at the time was key to negotiating the Paris accord, called on citizens to hold business and political leaders accountable in the fight against climate change.

Germany's environment minister, Svenja Schulze, welcomed the presence of rival American delegations. "We should keep showing that it's not just Trump, but that there is a lot happening in the United States on the issue of emissions reduction and climate action," she said.

One climate policy expert questioned the narrow focus of Bloomberg's report, however.

"The Paris agreement isn't only about reducing emissions," said Kevin M. Adams, a research fellow at the Stockholm Environment Institute. "It is also about managing the risks of living in a warming world, including the impacts we are already experiencing today, and providing finance to developing countries who have contributed so little to the problem but will be affected first and worst by climate change."

The talks in Madrid shifted into higher gear Tuesday as ministers arrived to tackle some of the thorny

political issues still on the table.

Despite growing awareness of climate change and warnings from scientists that drastic action is needed, only a few countries sent their prime ministers or presidents to negotiate, worrying some observers.

"It shows that there has not yet been an internalization of the emergency situation that we are in, that so few heads of state are coming to Madrid and ready to roll up their sleeves and do what it takes to actually respond to the science," said Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International.

Environmental activists are hoping the European Union will present an ambitious plan Wednesday on cutting emissions that will send a message of hope. Climate change has become a growing political issue in Europe, with mass protests by young people such as Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who is delivering a speech at the U.N. gathering on Wednesday.

American actor Harrison Ford said it is time to listen to those "who will inherit what we have wrought." "Their future has already been diminished by our past," he said at an event alongside Bloomberg.

AP journalist Bernat Armangue contributed to this report.

Follow AP's climate coverage at <https://www.apnews.com/Climate>

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U of Phoenix agrees to settle FTC case alleging deceptive ad

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The University of Phoenix and its parent company have agreed to pay \$50 million in cash and cancel \$141 million in student debt to settle allegations of deceptive advertisement brought by the Federal Trade Commission.

The deal, announced Tuesday, settles a dispute over an ad campaign the for-profit college unrolled in 2012 touting partnerships with companies including Microsoft, Twitter and Adobe. It suggested the school worked with those companies to create job opportunities for students, even though there was no such agreement, investigators found.

The Federal Trade Commission said the settlement is the largest the agency has ever obtained against a for-profit college.

"Students making important decisions about their education need the facts, not fantasy job opportunities that do not exist," said Andrew Smith, director of the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

The University of Phoenix said in a statement that much of the dispute focused on a single ad campaign that ran from 2012 to 2014. It said it agreed to the deal "to avoid any further distraction from serving students."

"The campaign occurred under prior ownership and concluded before the FTC's inquiry began. We continue to believe the University acted appropriately," the company said.

Apollo Education Group owns the University of Phoenix. The Arizona-based for-profit college chain has 55 campuses across the nation and teaches thousands of students through its online programs. It's the nation's largest recipient of GI Bill tuition benefits for military veterans.

Under the settlement, the University of Phoenix and Apollo will cancel all remaining debt for students who first enrolled between Oct. 1, 2012, and the end of 2016. Letters will be sent to borrowers saying they no longer owe payments to the school. The school is also barred from making false claims about its relationships with companies or employers.

The FTC says the \$50 million payment will be used to help consumers who were misled by the ads.

According to the FTC's complaint, the University of Phoenix created the 2012 ad campaign to distinguish itself from competitors as the chain's enrollment was falling. After conducting market research, investigators

found, the chain adopted an ad strategy tying the school to successful career outcomes. The campaign was called "Let's Get To Work!"

In one TV ad that aired in 2012, a frustrated driver weaves through a crowded parking lot looking for a space. As a narrator notes that the University of Phoenix works with companies "to create options for you," cars are suddenly lifted out of parking spaces and replaced with logos for companies including Microsoft and the American Red Cross.

Other TV, radio and internet ads boasted of similar ties with corporate partners including AT&T, Hitachi and Avis. In one 2013 radio ad, the University of Phoenix said companies including AT&T and Adobe were "helping us shape our curriculum to make sure today's classes help prepare you to pursue tomorrow's jobs." Investigators said that wasn't true.

Instead, many of the companies touted as corporate partners were actually part of the University of Phoenix's "Workforce Solutions" program that provided discounted tuition to their employees in exchange for the companies' help promoting the school.

Some companies that were asked to participate in the ads raised objections about the way they were being portrayed, investigators found. When approached to be part of the parking lot ad, for example, Staples officials said it falsely made it sound like they were helping guide the school's curriculum. The company ultimately did not participate.

Even some senior officials at the University of Phoenix took issue with the ads. In 2012, a senior vice president complained to the chief marketing officer that using Adobe in the parking lot ad was "smoke & mirrors," investigators found. "They are not a partner," the vice president wrote. "We may do business with them, but nothing academically."

The settlement was applauded by some education advocacy groups, including Veterans Education Success, which works to help military veterans. Carrie Wofford, the group's president, thanked the FTC for its work.

"The FTC's findings should shock every patriotic American," she said. "Enough is enough. It's time to stop the fleecing of America's veterans and service members by predatory colleges."

Lizzo claps back with gratitude after twerking controversy

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Lizzo is going to keep doing Lizzo after social media exploded with fat shaming over her exposed, thong-covered backside as she danced at a Los Angeles Lakers game while the team's cheerleaders performed to her hit "Juice."

The singer-rapper got up and twerked, revealing a cut out at the back of her short black T-shirt dress, and was shown on the stadium's huge television screens during Sunday night's game against the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Later, on Instagram, Lizzo addressed the controversy.

"Never ever let somebody stop you or shame you from being yourself," she said in a livestream. "This is who I've always been. Now everyone's lookin' at it, and your criticism can just remain your criticism. Your criticism has no effect on me."

She invited detractors who dragged her to kiss that particular body part that got so much attention, but she also got teary when talking about leaner times, when she was broke, sleeping in her car and nearly lost hope after her father's death. Now, she's filled with gratitude.

"Nothing really breaks my joy. I'm a really solid, grounded person, and I know that I'm shocking because you've never seen in a long time a body like mine doing whatever it wants to do and dressing the way that it dresses and moving the way that it moves," Lizzo said in the stream that lasted nearly nine minutes.

"But I don't ever want to censor myself because I'm suddenly famous, and I don't want to censor myself because everyone's looking at me now. I'm not going to quiet myself," she said. "I'm not going to shrink myself because somebody thinks that I'm not sexy to them."

Lizzo said she stood up and danced, exposing her thong, out of gratitude to the Laker Girls as they performed to her song. She added: "I'm blessed, and I want you to know that you're blessed."

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Lizzo is nominated for a leading eight Grammys at next month's Grammy awards.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 11, the 345th day of 2019. There are 20 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 11, 2001, in the first criminal indictment stemming from 9/11, federal prosecutors charged Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee), a French citizen of Moroccan descent, with conspiring to murder thousands in the suicide hijackings. (Moussaoui pleaded guilty to conspiracy in 2005 and was sentenced to life in prison.)

On this date:

In 1792, France's King Louis XVI went before the Convention to face charges of treason. (Louis was convicted and executed the following month.)

In 1816, Indiana became the 19th state.

In 1844, the first experimental use of an inhaled anesthetic in dentistry took place as Dr. Horace Wells of Hartford, Connecticut, under the influence of nitrous oxide, had a colleague extract one of his teeth.

In 1917, British Gen. Edmund Allenby entered Jerusalem two days after his forces expelled the Ottoman Turks.

In 1936, Britain's King Edward VIII abdicated the throne so he could marry American divorcee Wallis Warfield Simpson; his brother, Prince Albert, became King George VI.

In 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States; the U.S. responded in kind.

In 1972, Apollo 17's lunar module landed on the moon with astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt aboard; they became the last two men to date to step onto the lunar surface.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation creating a \$1.6 billion environmental "superfund" to pay for cleaning up chemical spills and toxic waste dumps. "Magnum P.I.," starring Tom Selleck, premiered on CBS.

In 1997, more than 150 countries agreed at a global warming conference in Kyoto, Japan, to control the Earth's greenhouse gases.

In 2004, doctors in Austria said that Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko had been poisoned with dioxin, which caused the severe disfigurement and partial paralysis of his face.

In 2008, former Nasdaq chairman Bernie Madoff was arrested, accused of running a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme that destroyed thousands of people's life savings and wrecked charities. (Madoff is serving a 150-year federal prison sentence.) The remains of missing Florida toddler Caylee Anthony were found six months after she disappeared. (Her mother, Casey Anthony, was acquitted of murder in her daughter's death.)

In 2017, chef Mario Batali stepped away from his restaurant empire and his cooking show "The Chew" as he conceded that reports of sexual misconduct "match up" to his behavior.

Ten years ago: Tiger Woods announced on his website that he was taking an indefinite leave from golf to try to save his five-year-old marriage to Elin (EE'-lihn) Nordegren. (However, the couple ended up divorcing in Aug. 2010.)

Five years ago: CIA Director John Brennan, responding to a U.S. Senate torture report, acknowledged that "abhorrent tactics" were used on terror detainees but said it was "unknown and unknowable" whether the harsh treatment yielded crucial intelligence that could have been gained in any other way. An outbreak of the mumps, a highly contagious illness more typically associated with children, continued to spread throughout the National Hockey League.

One year ago: A man who had been flagged as a possible extremist sprayed gunfire near the famous Christmas market in the French city of Strasbourg, killing three people and wounding 13 others; the suspect died in a shootout with police two days later. (A fourth person wounded in the attack later died.) A

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Virginia jury called for a sentence of life in prison plus 419 years for the man who killed a woman when he rammed his car into counterprotesters at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. (James Alex Fields Jr. received that sentence in July, 2019.) Time magazine recognized journalists, including slain Saudi columnist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee), as its 2018 Person of the Year.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jean-Louis Trintignant is 89. Actress Rita Moreno is 88. Pop singer David Gates (Bread) is 79. Actress Donna Mills is 79. Former Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., is 78. Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is 76. Gospel singer Paul Beasley is 75. Singer Brenda Lee is 75. Actress Lynda Day George is 75. Music producer Tony Brown is 73. Actress Teri Garr is 72. Movie director Susan Seidelman is 68. Actress Bess Armstrong is 66. Singer Jermaine Jackson is 65. Rock musician Mike Mesaros (The Smithereens) is 62. Rock musician Nikki Sixx (Motley Crue) is 61. Rock musician Darryl Jones (The Rolling Stones) is 58. Actor Ben Browder is 57. Singer-musician Justin Currie (Del Amitri) is 55. Rock musician David Schools (Hard Working Americans, Gov't Mule, Widespread Panic) is 55. Actor Gary Dourdan (DOOR'-dan) is 53. Actress-comedian Mo'Nique is 52. Actor Max Martini is 50. Rapper-actor Mos Def is 46. Actor Rider Strong is 40. Actress Xosha (ZOH'-shah) Roquemore is 35. Actress Karla Souza is 33. Actress Hailee Steinfeld is 23.

Thought for Today: "Every man has his dignity. I'm willing to forget mine, but at my own discretion and not when someone else tells me to." — Denis Diderot, French philosopher (1713-1784).

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