

# Groton Daily Independent

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Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

“ WITH THE PAST, I HAVE NOTHING TO DO; NOR WITH THE FUTURE. I LIVE NOW. ”

-RALPH WALDO EMERSON

It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



Waubay/  
Summit VS



**Groton Area Tigers**

7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019  
Groton Area Arena

## Tuesday, December 17, 2019

GBB hosts Waubay-Summit  
Combined 7th/8th Grade game 4:30 p.m.  
Junior Varsity game at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game  
7:00 p.m.: City Council Meeting at Groton Community Center

## Thursday, December 19, 2019

Boys Basketball hosts Redfield - JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game  
7 p.m.: City Council Meeting at Groton Community Center

## Friday, December 20, 2019

Debate at Brookings High School (Brookings Bell Tournament)  
End of Second Quarter

Elementary Christmas Concert at 1 p.m. at GHS Gym

School Dismisses for Christmas Vacation at 2 p.m.

Girls Basketball at Redfield

Combined 7th/8th Grade game 5 p.m.

Junior varsity game at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game

## Saturday, December 21, 2019

Debate at Brookings High School (Brookings Bell Tournament) Brookings Bell

9:00am: Wrestling: Varsity Tournament at Madison

10:00am: Wrestling: Boys 7th/8th Tournament at Watertown HS Arena

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## GT Robotics showed themselves worthy at Minnesota tourney



**G.A.T. Wrenches Left side. Left to Right – Corbin Reich and Tannor McGannon.**

(Courtesy Photo)



**Geek Squad with Judges Award – Nick Morris and Charlie Frost.** (Courtesy Photo)

Since a Rapid City robotics tournament was canceled, GT Robotics chartered new territory, literally, and traveled to a Ramsey, Minnesota tournament instead on Dec. 14. Coach Jim Lane said, "My robotists would have had nearly two months in the middle of the season with no competition, so I looked into other competitive options with less travel. Those ideas didn't pan out, so off we went to the PACT Charter School's VRC Tournament, the Ramsey Rumble." GT robotists were obviously ready for the new challenge. G-Force and G.A.T. Wrenches started the day by winning their first two matches.

At the end of the qualifying matches, not one of the 32 participating teams was undefeated. "There were a lot of good teams at the tournament," Lane said. Groton had three teams in the top 11. G.A.T. Wrenches (Corbin Reich, Tannor McGannon) was Groton's highest ranked team with a record of six wins and two losses. Tannor is normally a member of G-Force but helped Corbin for the day since he'd have otherwise been alone. They made some vital adjustments first thing in the morning that helped their robot tremendously. G-Force (Travis Townsend, Garrett Schultz) ended the day with a record of five wins, two losses and one tie. They started with four wins and a tie until they were defeated by G.A.T. Wrenches. G-Force finished a rebuild the morning of the tournament. Galaxy (River Pardick, Jace Kroll, Isaac Higgins) finished with five wins and three losses, after starting the day with three losses. Most of the day, they combatted the issue of overheating motors by chilling the robot outside between matches. By the end of the day, they figured out the cause of the problem and fixed it.

Geek Squad, the youngest team (Nick Morris, Charlie Frost) ended the qualifying matches with a record of four wins and four losses. The Gear Heads (Ethan Morris, Jack Dinger, Axel Warrington) also rebuilt their robot after the prior tournament and will need to look at design options and decide where to go from here with their robot. They ended the day with a record of no wins, seven losses and one tie. Redesign? Adjustments? Stay tuned and we will see.

"I was very happy to see four of the teams advance to the elimination rounds. There were 10 alliances selected. So, 20 of the 33 teams made it to the elimination rounds,

while 12 were done for the day," Lane said. Groton's teams did not fare well in elimination rounds. All but G.A.T. Wrenches lost in the first round. G.A.T. Wrenches tied in their first quarter-final match and then

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**Gear Heads Right side. Left to right – Axel Warrington, Jack Dinger, Ethan Clark.** (Courtesy Photo)



**Left to right G.A.T. Wrenches - Tannor McGannon and Corbin Reich, Galaxy – River Pardick and Jace Kroll.** (Courtesy Photo)

lost the rematch.

G-Force and Geek Squad were in a four-way tie for second place in the Skills Competition (like a throw-free contest).

Geek Squad was honored with the Judges Award. The Judges Award is presented to a team the judges determine is deserving of special recognition. Judges consider a number of criteria for this award, such as exemplary effort and perseverance at the event or team accomplishments throughout the season that may not fit under existing awards but are nonetheless deserving of special recognition.

“The Ramsey people were wonderful tournament hosts, and it was a great tournament,” Lane shared. “The Ramsey coaches and tournament officials were amazed we would travel so far, four and a half hours. But, here in South Dakota, our closest tournament is two and a half hours away. I received several compliments on how nice Groton’s robotists were. Way to go boys!”

GT Robotics’ next competition will be Jan. 11 in Canton.



**G-Force Right side. Left to right - Garrett Schultz and Travis Townsend.** (Courtesy Photo)

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

Tournament Location		Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder	Ramsey
Number of teams in		18	21	20	33
Tourney and date		Oct 19	Nov 9	Nov 16	Dec 14
9050A	G-Force	8	13	6	10
9050B	Gear Heads	2	9	2	30
9050C	G.A.T. Wrenches	4	12	13	6
9050D	Geek Squad	10	14	3	17
9050E	Galaxy	15	20	18	11

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

Tournament		Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder	Ramsey
9050A	G-Force	Semi-Finals	Semi-Finals	Semi-Finals	1 <sup>st</sup> round
9050B	Gear Heads	Finals	Semi-Finals	Qtr-Finals	
9050C	G.A.T. Wrenches	Qtr-Finals	Qtr-Finals	Qtr-Finals	Qtr-Finals
9050D	Geek Squad	Semi-Finals	Qtr-Finals	Finals	1 <sup>st</sup> round
9050E	Galaxy		Qtr-Finals	Finals	1 <sup>st</sup> round

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda  
 December 17, 2019 – 7:00pm  
 Groton Community Center

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1  
 (Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. November Finance Report
5. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
6. 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of Ordinance #732 – 2020 Salary Ordinance
7. Adjournment

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The Groton C&MA Church held its Christmas program Sunday evening. In case you missed it, you can view it under the video archives at [397news.com](http://397news.com).



Seth Holmstrom from Pipestone System gave the Angel Tree lady, Tina Kosel, a bunch of jackets for the Angel Tree. Pipestone System manages Elm Valley Farms at the Hutterville Colony. He said that the organizations wanted to do something to help out for the Christmas season.

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Today



Becoming  
Cloudy

High: 22 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 3 °F

Wednesday



Partly Sunny

High: 23 °F

Wednesday  
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 10 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny

High: 26 °F

## DRY through the week!

Tuesday



14 to 33°, warmest  
over central SD &  
coldest across west  
central MN

Wednesday



16 to 38°, warmest  
over central SD & coldest  
across west central MN  
Decreasing Clouds

Thursday



20s, except near 30°  
along and west of the  
Missouri River  
Becoming Cloudy

Friday



20s, except low 30s  
along and west of the  
Missouri River

12/16/2019 12:28 PM

Dry weather should continue through the week. Temperatures will top out mainly in the 20s each day. Slightly warmer readings will be west of the Missouri River, with slightly cooler readings lingering across far northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

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## Today in Weather History

December 17, 1993: A prolonged period of snow occurred from December 15th through the 19th over the western half of South Dakota. Several accidents leading to injuries occurred due to ice on the 15th, and many vehicles slid into ditches. Snowfall amounts were 4 to 10 inches. McIntosh received three inches of snow; Timber Lake, Murdo, and Selby received five inches of snow; and six inches accumulated at McLaughlin. Eagle Butte recorded seven inches of new snow.

December 17, 1903: Wilbur and Orville Wright made four brief flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina with their first powered aircraft on this day. After having success with their 5-foot biplane kite, the brothers realized the weather conditions in Dayton were not ideal for their flying experiments. They wrote the Weather Bureau in Washington, D.C. requesting a list of suitable places on the east coast where winds were constant. Below is the response the Wright Brothers received from Joseph Doshier, who staffed the Weather Bureau office, wrote in August of 1900 regarding the suitability of Kitty Hawk.

December 17, 1924: From the Monthly Weather Review, "a severe glaze storm occurred in west-central Illinois on December 17 and 18, the area of great destruction embracing a territory about 75 miles in width and 170 miles in length. In the affected area, trees were badly damaged, wires broken, and thousands of electric poles went down. Electric services were paralyzed, and it required weeks to restore operation and months to permanently rebuild the lines.

The street railway company and the Illinois Traction System resumed complete operation 17 days after the storm. Electric light service was completely restored January 10. The ice had practically disappeared from the trees and wires by January 4, but on January 20, there was still considerable ice on the ground.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. lost 8,000 poles and the Illinois Bell Telephone Co. about 23,000. The total damage to wire service in Illinois probably equaled or exceeded \$5,000,000." If the loss of business, the damage to trees and possible injury to winter grains, the storm may be considered one of the most disastrous of its kind in the history of Illinois."

1884 - A three week blockade of snow began at Portland, OR. A record December total of 34 inches was received. (David Ludlum)

1924 - A severe icestorm struck central Illinois. It coated the ground with nearly two inches of glaze at Springfield. The storm caused 21 million dollars damage along with much hardship. Ice was on the trees until the 4th of January, and electricity was not restored until January 10th. (David Ludlum)

1929 - An icestorm in western New York State resulted in much damage and hardship. A Buffalo report stated, "one was kept awake by the breaking limbs, which snapped off with a report much louder than a rifle shot." (17th-18th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the southwestern U.S. brought heavy rain and heavy snow to parts of California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico. Charleston NV was blanketed with 12 inches of snow. Lake Havasu City AZ was drenched with 2.26 inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Squalls brought locally heavy snow to the southeastern shores of Lake Michigan. Totals in Michigan ranged up to 14 inches at Harvey. Totals in Ohio ranged up to 16 inches at Chardon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-one cities from Kentucky to Pennsylvania reported record low temperatures for the date, including Columbus OH with a reading of 12 degrees below zero. Heavy snow continued in the Colorado Rockies. Vail received 65 inches of snow between the 14th and the 18th of December. Steamboat Springs was buried under 74 inches, and reported a total of 108 inches of snow between the 10th and the 18th of the month. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002 - Thunderstorms preceding a strong cold front pushed into the U.S. Mississippi Valley, producing severe weather and tornadoes. Three people were killed in Missouri and Arkansas with more than 40 injuries (Associated Press).

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 25 °F at 11:26 AM**

**Low Temp: 14 °F at 8:06 AM**

**Wind: 13 mph at 7:38 PM**

**Day Rain: 0.00**

**Record High: 53° in 1939**

**Record Low: -32° in 1916**

**Average High: 25°F**

**Average Low: 5°F**

**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.27**

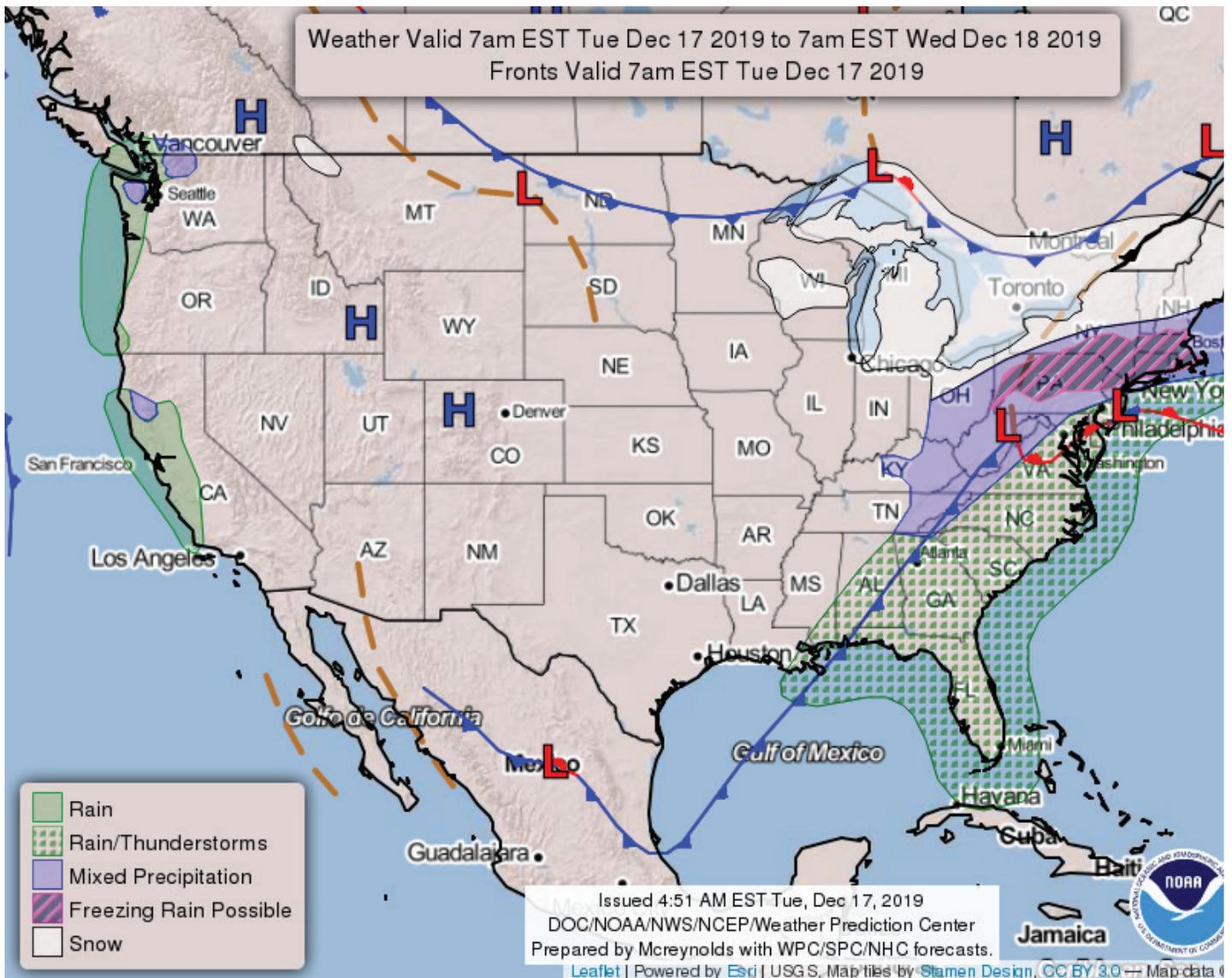
**Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11**

**Average Precip to date: 21.47**

**Precip Year to Date: 28.06**

**Sunset Tonight: 4:52 p.m.**

**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09 a.m.**



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## NEVER QUIT!

"Don't let this be you!" said a coach to his football team after a difficult loss. He was pointing to a picture of a player sitting in front of his locker. His helmet was between his feet. His elbows were on his knees and his head was between his hands with a look of sadness in his eyes. Under his helmet were the words, "I quit!"

As we look into the manger this Christmas, we can rejoice together and say, "Thank You, God, that You didn't quit – that You never gave up!"

Whenever we think of the eternal love that God has for us, we often forget about the disappointments He must have endured. Imagine, if you can, what must have entered into His mind and heart when Adam and Eve rejected His plan and the path before them. Consider, if you will, the many agreements He made with people who promised to obey Him and then abandoned their word when they thought He was out of sight. We will never know the grief He suffered because of the hope He had that people would love Him and be obedient to Him.

But, He never gave up. He never quit. Finally, John wrote, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world!"

All of us have suffered many losses in life. None, however, can ever be compared to God's losses. But He refused to give up even though it cost the life of His one and only Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your unfailing love and determination to rescue us. We are overwhelmed when we think that You would sacrifice Your Son for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

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## 2019 Groton SD Community Events

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)
- 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.
- 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)  
Groton Hosting State B American Legion Baseball Tournament
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/14/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

## News from the Associated Press

### Report: 5th straight year with under 30 executions in US

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fewer than 30 people were executed in the United States and under 50 new death sentences were imposed for the fifth straight year, part of a continuing decline in capital punishment that saw only a few states carry out executions, a new report issued Tuesday said.

But even as death row populations were dropping in most of the 29 states that still have the death penalty, the Trump administration tried to restart executions on the federal level and a more conservative Supreme Court appeared less willing to grant death-row inmates last-minute reprieves.

“The death penalty is disappearing from whole regions of the country and eroding in others, but the death penalty is persisting among outlier jurisdictions,” said Robert Dunham, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, which produced the look at the death penalty in 2019.

Twenty of the 22 executions in 2019 took place in five Southern states, led by Texas with 9, the center said. The others are Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. Missouri and South Dakota each executed one inmate.

Elsewhere in the country, New Hampshire became the 21st state to abolish the death penalty, while California Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed a formal moratorium on executions in a state with the largest death row population, although the last execution in California took place nearly 14 years ago.

Also for the fifth straight year, no state west of Texas carried out an execution. There are now 32 states that either have no death penalty or have not executed anyone in more than a decade.

But at the federal level, where the last execution took place in 2003, Attorney General William Barr announced in July that federal executions would resume beginning in December. President Donald Trump has long been a proponent of the death penalty.

“The Justice Department upholds the rule of law — and we owe it to the victims and their families to carry forward the sentence imposed by our justice system,” Barr said at the time.

A federal judge put a hold on the scheduled executions, and the Supreme Court turned away the administration’s plea to begin conducting lethal injection executions at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Barr’s push for new executions showed that the administration “is going to be out of step with the American public and what is happening in most of the states around the country,” Dunham said. The Death Penalty Information Center takes no position on capital punishment, but is critical of the manner in which it has been administered.

The justices would not allow federal executions in 2019, but the court otherwise signaled its impatience with last-minute efforts to keep inmates from being put to death.

“Last-minute stays should be the extreme exception, not the norm, and ‘the last-minute nature of an application’ that ‘could have been brought’ earlier, or ‘an applicant’s attempt at manipulation,’ ‘may be grounds for denial of a stay,’” Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in clearing the way for Missouri to execute an inmate with an unusual medical condition. The court’s five conservative justices were in the majority, its four liberals, in dissent.

While Texas continues to be the leader in carrying out executions, the number of new death sentences there has dropped markedly in recent years, with just four for the year. Florida and Ohio each had six inmates newly sentenced to death, among the 33 death sentences recorded so far this year. Several capital sentencing proceedings are ongoing and could change the final number, the report said.

Overall, death sentences are down more than 80 percent from the 1990s, Dunham said. Fewer jurisdictions are seeking capital punishment and juries are more willing to sentence defendants to life terms with no chance of parole, he said.

But even with the decrease, some of the sentences were troublesome, the report said. One example it cited was Tiffany Moss, who was sentenced to death in Georgia for starving her stepdaughter to death.

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The judge allowed Moss to represent herself at trial, despite evidence that she had brain damage that affected her judgment and decision-making, the report said. Moss did not make an opening statement, closing argument or call witnesses.

## Monday's Scores By The Associated Press

### BOYS BASKETBALL=

Dell Rapids 55, Baltic 35  
Elkton-Lake Benton 62, Castlewood 59  
Estelline/Hendricks 46, Centerville 30  
Florence/Henry 55, Waverly-South Shore 49  
Kimball/White Lake 38, Freeman 32  
Mobridge-Pollock 76, Aberdeen Roncalli 35  
Vermillion 72, Bridgewater-Emery 50  
Webster 69, Deubrook 41

### GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 43, Britton-Hecla 37  
Castlewood 52, Elkton-Lake Benton 19  
DeSmet 47, Wolsey-Wessington 37  
Deubrook 48, Webster 16  
Estelline/Hendricks 35, Centerville 23  
Faulkton 58, Redfield 34  
Irene-Wakonda 62, Bon Homme 47  
Tri-State, N.D. 61, Great Plains Lutheran 39

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## South Dakota governor plans revision of riot-boosting laws

By **STEPHEN GROVES** undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is planning to have another try at so-called riot-boosting laws next year, despite previously drawing criticism for supporting such laws ahead of protests related to the Keystone XL pipeline.

The Republican governor has written to lawmakers with proposed changes to laws passed earlier this year that were later blocked by a federal judge. The state eventually settled a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union by agreeing not to enforce parts of the laws.

Noem is proposing changes in the law to repeal parts that the judge deemed unconstitutional and change the definition of "incitement to riot" to meet constitutional protections of free speech, according to her memo. It would charge people with "incitement to riot" if they "urge" three or more people to force or violence. The proposed law defines "urging" as "instigating, inciting, directing, threatening, or other similar conduct," but excludes oral and written advocacy that does not urge force or violence.

Noem drew criticism from Native American tribes in the state for pushing the laws last year ahead of expected protests on Keystone XL pipeline construction. The Oglala Sioux Tribe banned her from tribal lands after Noem signed the legislation.

Noem cast her proposals as a way to protect protesters in a secure environment, "free from the few violent criminals who would seek to abuse their rights." Noem's letter also said that "riot boosting is still in effect and enforceable" even though parts of the law were knocked down as part of the settlement.

The ACLU issued a letter to lawmakers in response to the memo, arguing that the laws have "serious constitutional shortcomings." The group also said that the memo has "several misleading and inaccurate

claims" about the extent of the legal settlement and the state's ability to enforce riot boosting.

Rep. Shawn Bordeaux, a Democrat from Mission who is the chair of the State-Tribal Relations Committee, said Noem's renewed efforts at putting riot-boosting prosecution on the books would continue to sour her relationship with the tribes in the state. "We're not going to sit idly by and watch the state violate our constitutional rights," he said.

Noem said she is seeking input from legislators on the changes.

## Construction company put on probation for fatal collapse

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A construction company was sentenced Monday to a year of probation in the death of a worker during a 2016 building collapse in downtown Sioux Falls.

U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier ordered Hultgren Construction to serve a year of probation or until the company is fully dissolved. The judge noted that the company itself was charged with violating the Occupational Safety and Health Act and not any of the officials who owned Hultgren.

"This court has very little it can do at this point," Schreier said.

The collapse happened Dec. 2, 2016, as employees were removing a load-bearing wall between the former Copper Lounge building and Skelly's Pub. Hultgren Construction employee Ethan McMahon was killed and an upstairs resident was trapped for hours after the building collapsed.

Attorney Mark O'Leary, representing Hultgren Construction, told the judge that the company exists "in name only" and would cease existing by early next year, depending on the outcome of a pending legal matter and the company's bankruptcy, the Argus Leader reported.

Insurers for the company said earlier this year they will pay more than \$4 million to settle lawsuits.

## State, tribe to develop Dakota Access pipeline spill plan

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota will work with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to help develop a response plan for a potential spill of the Dakota Access pipeline, a state official said Monday.

State Emergency Services Director Cody Schulz said tribal leaders recently requested a response plan and resources to prepare for a spill near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in the south-central part of the state.

Schulz told a committee of state and tribal leaders headed by Gov. Doug Burgum that his agency would be happy to either "participate or facilitate" a training exercise. The state also would work with the tribe to obtain federal grant money for planning and equipment.

Standing Rock Chairman Mike Faith, who sits on the panel, said oil spill response training would be "awesome" and that he appreciates the state's effort to work collaboratively with the tribe.

The cooperation comes as Texas-based Energy Transfer wants to double the capacity of the line to as much as 1.1 million barrels daily to meet growing demand for oil shipments from North Dakota.

The \$3.8 billion pipeline was subject to prolonged protests and hundreds of arrests during its construction in North Dakota in late 2016 and early 2017 because it crosses beneath the Missouri River, just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The tribe draws its water from the river and fears pollution. Energy Transfer insists the pipeline and its expansion are safe.

The pipeline has been moving North Dakota oil through South Dakota and Iowa to Illinois for about three years.

Schulz said in an interview that the state has limited resources and personnel to deal with a major spill of the pipeline at present. The state is pursuing more resources and currently works with private contractors and industry for spill cleanup.

Schulz, who also serves on the Morton County Commission, said the prolonged protests cost the county about \$38 million for law enforcement, infrastructure repair, cleanup and legal costs. The state reimbursed the county for most of the cost.

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Schulz said his agency participated with railroad officials and others during an exercise to coordinate a plan if a train derailed and spilled oil in the Missouri River near Bismarck.

Burgum told the panel Monday that any response plan should include an actual simulation of a spill response, including deploying equipment such as booms to contain a spill on the river.

The Republican governor said pipelines are designed not to leak but that the state should "prepare for the worse" if they do.

## South Dakota boys basketball poll

The South Dakota Prep Media Basketball Poll for the week of Dec. 16 is listed below, ranking the top-five teams, the team's record, points received and ranking in the previous poll. First-place votes are listed in parentheses.

### Boys

#### Class AA

1. Yankton (7);2-0;39;2
2. Brandon Valley (1);2-0;30;3
3. Roosevelt;1-0;25;4
4. Huron;1-0;16;5
5. O'Gorman;1-1;10;1

#### Class A

1. St. Thomas More (7);2-0;39;1
2. SF Christian (1);2-0;29;2
3. Dell Rapids;1-0;22;3
4. Crow Creek;2-0;9;RV
5. Lennox;1-1;8;4

Receiving votes: Sioux Valley 7, Red Cloud 3, Dakota Valley 2, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 1.

#### Class B

1. De Smet (5);1-0;37;1
2. Viborg-Hurley (2);1-0;33;2
3. Sully Buttes (1);0-0;20;4
4. White River;1-0;14;3
5. Dell Rapids St. Mary;1-0;11;5

Receiving votes: Aberdeen Christian 4, Canistota 1.

### Girls

#### Class AA

1. Lincoln (5);2-0;37;1
2. O'Gorman (3);1-0;34;2
3. Stevens;2-0;25;3
4. Washington;1-0;12;4
5. Harrisburg;1-0;6;RV

Receiving votes: Brandon Valley 5, Yankton 1.

#### Class A

1. Winner (5);1-0;37;T-1
2. Lennox (3);2-0;35;T-1
3. St. Thomas More;1-0;24;3
4. West Central;0-0;10;5
5. McCook Central/Montrose;1-0;9;RV

Receiving votes: Mount Vernon/Plankinton 3, Aberdeen Roncalli 1, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 1.

#### Class B

1. Corsica-Stickney (7);1-0;39;1

2. Castlewood (1);1-0;26;2
  3. De Smet;1-0;23;3
  4. White River;1-0;19;4
  5. Ethan;1-0;10;5
- Receiving votes: Bridgewater-Emery 3.

## Higher gold prices spur new interest in Black Hills mining

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Higher gold prices are generating new interest in drilling in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

At least five companies are currently drilling for gold in the mountainous region, which extends from western South Dakota into Wyoming. After being under \$1,400 per ounce for several years, the price for gold has climbed above that level in recent months.

F3 Gold, of Minneapolis, is funding an environmental assessment it hopes will lead to the approval of its plan to drill on Black Hills Forest Service land near Silver City South Dakota, which about 15 miles west of the state's second-largest city, Rapid City.

"When a down market hits, the exploration sector is the first one to suffer," said Rob Bergmann, an F3 Gold partner. "When the market comes back up, then the money finally starts funneling down into the exploration sector."

Another factor driving exploration interest in the Black Hills is its well-known history as a gold-producing region, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Nelson Baker, president and CEO of Mineral Mountain Resources in Vancouver, Canada, said, "We look at the Black Hills as actually pretty largely under-explored. The potential to find other Homestake-style deposit is definitely real."

The former Homestake Mine near Lead became the largest and deepest gold mine in North America and generated 40 million ounces of gold during its 126-year life. In 2002, it closed and became an underground research facility. Homestake's origins were in the Black Hills gold rush of the 1870s.

Baker's company, Mineral Mountain, has a drilling rig located in the forested mountains near the central Black Hills hamlet of Rochford, about 20 miles south of the Homestake Mine on land Mineral Mountain has acquired.

Exploratory companies such as Mineral Mountain do not usually develop their own mines. They sell their drilling information or partner with larger mining companies.

Mark Bowron, Hull professor in the Mining Engineering and Management Department at the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, said the environmental ramifications from exploratory drilling are minimal.

"They get permits, they have to comply with the regulations of the DENR, they have to plug the holes, a drill pad occupies a space about the size of this office," Bowron said, referencing a faculty office at Mines, "and it has to be reclaimed."

Lilias Jarding, of the Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, said she and other activists who are against exploratory drilling are considering the future.

"What we're concerned about is protecting water in the Black Hills," Jarding said, "and if there's exploration that can lead to mining, and mining has never been friendly to water."

## State prison inmate dies of illness

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Corrections says a 46-year-old state prison inmate has died following an illness. Corrections officials weren't specific about what caused the death of Michael Rich on Sunday. He died in the Jameson Annex at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls. Rich was serving a 15-year sentence with one year suspended for aggravated assault in Meade County.

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## Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

### Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Dec. 10

#### Budget woes and revenue solutions

Perhaps money really doesn't make the world go around — with apologies to "Cabaret" — but it sure does help keep the wheels of government moving.

The Yankton area has been able to see some examples of that in everyday application.

Last week, for instance, Gov. Kristi Noem proposed a fiscal year 2021 budget of more than \$4.9 billion that nonetheless confronts some tremendous hardships due to this year's storms and the poor agricultural economy. She proposed no funding increases for education, Medicaid providers and state employees. A lot could change between now and the end of the upcoming legislative session in March, but the bottom line is that the state is strapped for cash again.

Meanwhile, the Yankton School District is prepared to pursue an opt-out from the property tax freeze as it tries to cope with its own tight finances. The opt-out would be for four years and \$1.85 million annually. (It doesn't necessarily have to be for all four years if the situation improves.) This comes after the state has come up short a few times in the past decade with its funding obligations and, as noted above, is proposing to do so again.

Yankton County is also struggling financially in dealing with its road and bridge issues. (It's one reason why the recent disaster declaration for the September flooding came as relief in more ways than one.) Still, the county faces difficult choices ahead as it tries to use what funds it has in the most prudent manner possible.

The one outlier in all this appears to be the City of Yankton, which is enjoying a good year in terms of revenue, much to the surprise of many. After an up-and-down year in 2018 and in the face of bad weather and that ag economy, the city budgeted for zero growth in 2019, but has instead seen solid monthly revenue returns. The October report, whose numbers aren't final due to a new state system for processing such information, indicated a month of healthy growth, which, again was somewhat unexpected. Based on cash on hand, this year's October report (which actually covers the last half of September and the first half of October) could be up 8% from the same period a year ago.

So, what's going on in Yankton? It's hard to pinpoint.

City officials said it may be that someone who was supposed to pay a fee or tax previously did so now, thus producing a bump. But that wouldn't account for the healthy monthly trend.

Elsewhere, there's no denying that a lot of construction is going, particularly at Mount Marty College, which is speeding ahead on its fieldhouse. (A new resident hall will soon be added to this mix, which will further bolster the impact.)

Also, it's quite possible that the September flooding itself may have produced an impact, as people cleaning up flooded properties likely had to purchase supplies and materials to commence those repairs.

The latter two items point to what is desperately needed elsewhere: new revenue growth. In Yankton's case, construction projects are projects of expansion, and that helps feed the coffers.

Obviously, that's a lot easier said than done, especially when applied to the other, aforementioned governing entities, particularly the school district, whose own financial health is heavily tied to growth elsewhere.

But at the state and county levels, revenue growth is an issue that can be addressed directly, albeit controversially in some places.

Should South Dakota look at hemp as a new cash crop? Could expanded gambling be a way of luring more money into the state? Would a small summertime sales-tax bump help the state reap more rewards from its tourism trade? In a worst-case scenario, is an income tax something that should be examined?

As for the county, would more aggressive development help feed coffers that are badly in need of filling? This gets into the issue not only of CAFOs but also other industries that could be open to coming to this county. Also, how big of a door would it be to open if a natural gas line came into the county? That

could be a real game-changer.

These are not easy questions, and they could lead to difficult, contentious answers.

But when one is painfully hamstrung by finite funds, the best solution is to expand that base. It may mean thinking outside the proverbial box, but it's better than hacking away muscle and bone just to make ends meet.

## **Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, Dec. 13** **Time to stop ignoring deaf education issues**

Ignored.

It's a fitting way to describe the status of many deaf and hard-of-hearing children in South Dakota, whose unique educational needs have been compromised at every turn by state leaders seeking a more convenient and affordable path.

An Argus Leader investigation detailed a systematic lack of leadership and accountability among lawmakers, educators and government officials, forcing hundreds of families to scramble for educational opportunities that children with disabilities are guaranteed under federal law.

Of course, that's where it gets complicated. Loopholes and rationalizations abound. Frustration mounts. As time passes without progress, the silence is deafening.

Children with other disabilities don't always qualify for offerings at the South Dakota School for the Deaf, a once-thriving Sioux Falls institution now housed in a former bank building in a commercial area not far from a strip club.

Those who are enrolled don't always receive high-quality services, and certainly not the level of attention the school provided in its heyday as a residential campus. There's an increased reliance on outreach programs with school districts, many of which lack the trained staff or resources to help deaf students thrive.

The South Dakota Board of Regents was tasked with supervising the residential School for the Deaf campus, which was established in 1880 in central Sioux Falls and written into the state constitution.

When challenges arose, which they often did, including declining enrollment and allegations of verbal and sexual harassment involving an administrator, the default reaction was to dial back services and save money.

The only way to reverse that trend would have been for powerful people in Pierre to declare that the needs of the state's deaf community were worth the financial commitment, and to fight for legislation toward that end. That leadership never came.

In fact, former Democratic legislator Dan Ahlers told the Argus Leader he was urged to "let it go" when he worked with parents and lawmakers to shed light on disturbing trends in deaf education and explore solutions.

"What I learned right away was there was a lot of pressure coming from around the office to not get involved," said Ahlers, who is running for U.S. Senate in 2020.

Lawmakers' willful inaction has been emboldened by complexities in how federal guidelines are interpreted and carried out.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 mandated that public schools provide services for disabled children that emulate as closely as possible the educational experience of non-disabled students.

That led to many of the School for the Deaf students shifting to more of an outreach program to local school districts, but specialized services did not always follow. Sign language interpreters are expensive, and the lone deaf education degree program was phased out in 2016 by Augustana University.

There's hope that a new advisory council for the South Dakota School for the Deaf will shed light on these issues, and a 2018 law known as the Language Equity and Acquisition for Deaf Kids law awaits meaningful action from the South Dakota Department of Education.

So far, though, calls for reform have been stymied by the fact it's too easy for those in power to pass the

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buck through a maze of what one attorney for disabled rights called a “uniquely confusing and muddled” system.

For the estimated 600 deaf and hard-of-hearing kids in South Dakota, the future depends on state leaders finding the intestinal fortitude to fight through that tangled web, ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members of their citizenry no longer feel ignored.

## **Aberdeen American News, Dec. 14**

### **From about \$41K to \$58K for governor’s daughter**

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem made one thing clear in her recent annual budget address.

Money is tight.

Extremely tight.

For the first time since 2016, school districts won’t be receiving an increase in state aid to raise teacher salaries under Noem’s proposed 2021 budget. That’s even though the Legislature approved a half-cent increase in the state sales tax in 2016 that was, in part, specifically designated to boost South Dakota’s shabby teacher pay. Noem asked state agencies to tighten their belts as we head into a financially difficult year.

Also in her Dec. 2 budget address, Noem said there will be no inflationary increase for Medicaid providers and no raises for state employees.

All of the bad news left some leaders of state agencies nervous, elderly scared, state employees mad and education leaders panicked.

We assume Noem spent a significant amount of time crafting her budget proposal and considered how it would work and what was right and responsible to ask of the state’s departments, employees, beneficiaries and taxpayers.

But as all this planning was going on, so was something else. Someone else in state government was getting ahead.

That would be Kennedy Noem, the governor’s daughter, who now works for her mother as a policy analyst.

In 2018, Kennedy was hired as part of her mother’s transition team. She was still a senior at South Dakota State University at the time, preparing for a December graduation.

Her starting salary was \$40,700. That’s not outlandish, but it’s more than most working South Dakotans make.

According to a South Dakota News Watch analysis of 2017 wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics within the U.S. Department of Labor done earlier this year, roughly 21% of employed South Dakota residents — about 87,000 people — make under \$30,000 a year; 41% of employed South Dakota residents — about 169,400 people — make under \$35,000 a year; and 71% of employed South Dakota residents — about 292,000 people — make under \$40,000 a year.

On Jan. 5, 2019, when Kennedy started her gig as a policy analyst — different from being a member of the transition team — her salary was increased to \$50,000 a year.

Then, in July, along with all other state employees, she got a 2.5% salary boost, taking her annual wage to \$51,250.

According to South Dakota’s transparency website, Open SD, Kennedy is now making \$57,912 a year.

So she has gone from making \$40,700 to \$57,912 annually in a little more than a year. That is an increase of a little more than 42%. That’s a big jump.

From July to now, her salary has gone up roughly 13%.

The governor has defended the increase and explained that Kennedy’s duties have expanded. But the news still hasn’t landed well with many in South Dakota, especially given the recent budget proposal.

Certainly promotions merit raises. But most people can only dream of such big raises in such a modest amount of time.

Especially when many in South Dakota are doing more work for the same pay they had a year ago.

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Or two years ago. Or three. And especially when the governor's budget plan ignores the purpose of the half-cent sales tax increase from just a few years ago.

Kristi Noem has every right to hire family members. It's a longstanding, if regrettable, tradition in state government. Her son-in-law, Kyle Peters, earns \$59,194 yearly working for the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

And she's not plowing any new ground.

Former Gov. Dennis Daugaard's son, Chris, was hired as an initiative and utility analyst at the state Public Utilities Commission. And his son-in-law, Tony Venhuizen, became Daugaard's communications director and, later, chief of staff. Before that, Mike Rounds had family members who worked for the state.

All of that is fine, per state law. So were Kennedy Noem's raises, for that matter. We hope she's worth every penny.

But when word of her pay increases leaked, it was bound look somewhere between tone deaf and flat-out bad in wake of the governor's inability to find money for so many other worthy agencies and people in the state.

## Man reaches plea deal in fatal Sioux Falls shooting

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A man accused of shooting and killing a man in a downtown Sioux Falls alley has pleaded guilty in exchange for a lighter sentence.

The Argus Leader reports 28-year-old Heriberto Perez-Torres pleaded guilty to first-degree manslaughter and possession of a controlled substance on Friday.

As part of a plea bargain, Judge Natalie Damgaard capped Perez-Torres' potential sentence at 25 years in the January death of 37-year-old Jeremy Flynn.

Sentencing is set for next month.

A court affidavit says the Torres was dating Flynn's ex-girlfriend. Torres told police he went to meet Flynn and that the two began to fight and wrestled over a handgun.

The affidavit says Torres told police he punched Flynn in the groin, shot him, dropped the gun and drove away.

## Indian students decry police as citizenship protests grow

By EMILY SCHMALL and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian student protests that turned into violent clashes with police galvanized nationwide opposition on Tuesday to a new law that provides a path to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants who entered the country illegally from several neighboring countries.

Police fired tear gas in the Seelampur area of New Delhi to push back protesters who burned a police booth and two motorbikes after throwing stones and swarming barricades.

Roads leading to the Muslim-majority neighborhood were strewn with stones, tear gas canisters and shards of broken glass.

"We are protesting against the new citizenship law. They are saying if you don't have any proof (of citizenship) ... they will send us out of India," said 15-year-old Mohammad Shehzad.

Protests against the law were also reported in the states of West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka and elsewhere. On Sunday, a march by students at New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University descended into chaos when demonstrators set three buses on fire. Police responded with rubber bullets and tear gas. Videos showed officers running after unarmed protesters and beating them with wooden sticks.

Hanjala Mojibi, an English major at the predominantly Muslim school, said that when he and others saw police enter the campus, they walked toward them with their hands up to indicate their protest was nonviolent.

"The police made all 15 of us kneel and started beating us. They used lots of abusive words. One of them removed my prescription glasses, threw (them) on the ground, broke them and told me to look

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down," Mojibi said at a news conference in tears.

Simultaneously on Sunday, police stormed Aligarh Muslim University in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh firing tear gas and injuring five people who were participating in a student-led demonstration, university spokesman Rahat Abrar said.

Shahid Hussain, a 25-year-old history major, said police broke the windows of his dormitory and lobbed a tear gas canister inside. He said after fleeing the building to escape the fumes, police pushed him against a tree and beat him with sticks.

Police spokesman Sunil Bainsla denied the account, calling the allegations of police brutality "lies."

The police response to Sunday's protests has drawn widespread condemnation. It also has sparked a broader movement against the Citizenship Amendment Act, with demonstrations erupting across the country.

The new law applies to Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities who are in India illegally but can demonstrate religious persecution in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does not apply to Muslims.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has described the law as a humanitarian gesture.

While it was being debated in Parliament last week, Home Minister Amit Shah said it was "not even .001% against minorities. It is against infiltrators." Modi told an election rally in eastern Jharkhand state on Tuesday, "No Indian citizen will be affected by the amended citizenship act."

Speaking about Sunday's protests, he accused the opposition Congress party of using students for political purposes. "The decisions made by the government should be discussed and any voice should be raised in a democratic manner. This government understands your concerns but some people use your shoulder for firing a gun," he said.

Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi met President Ram Nath Kovind as the head of an opposition delegation and asked that the citizenship law be withdrawn.

Talking to reporters, Gandhi said she fears "the situation may spread further."

"I think you all have seen that the Modi government seems to have no compassion when it comes to shutting down people's voices and implementing legislation," she said. Critics of the government say the law is intended to help the ruling party transform a multicultural and secular India into a Hindu "rastra," or distinctly Hindu state and further marginalize India's 200 million Muslims.

India is 80% Hindu and 14% Muslim, which means it has one of the largest Muslim populations of any country in the world.

Police spokesman M.S. Randhawa said 10 people were arrested during Sunday's protest at Jamia Millia Islamia University from Jamia Nagar, a Muslim neighborhood near the university.

"We found out that the arrested men had instigated the crowds and were also responsible for vandalizing public property," Randhawa said.

Students said police lobbed tear gas shells inside the campus, broke down the doors of the library and yanked students out to assault them. Dozens of students were taken to hospitals for treatment.

Police have denied the allegations and said they acted with restraint.

The citizenship law follows a contentious citizenship registry process in northeastern India's Assam state intended to weed out people who immigrated to the country illegally.

Nearly 2 million people in Assam were excluded from the list, about half Hindu and half Muslim, and have been asked to prove their citizenship or else be considered foreign. India is constructing a detention center for some of the tens of thousands of people the courts are expected to ultimately determine came to the country illegally.

Home Minister Shah has pledged to roll it out the program nationwide, promising to rid India of "infiltrators."

The Citizenship Amendment Act could provide protection and a fast track to naturalization for many of the Hindus left off Assam's citizenship list, while explicitly leaving out Muslims.

The backlash to the law came as an unprecedented crackdown continued in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-

majority area, which was stripped of special constitutional protections and its statehood in August. Since then, movement and communications have been restricted.

"Our country is not just for Hindus," said Chanda Yadav, 20, a Hindi literature student who was participating in a sit-in Monday at Jamia Millia Islamia University. "I feel it is my moral right to protest against something which divides us as a community."

Associated Press writer Chonchui Ngashangva contributed to this report.

## **Pope abolishes 'pontifical secret' in clergy sex abuse cases**

**By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press**

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis has abolished the "pontifical secret" used in clergy sexual abuse cases, after mounting criticism that the high degree of confidentiality has been used to protect pedophiles, silence victims and keep law enforcement from investigating crimes.

In a new document, Francis decreed that information in abuse cases must be protected by church leaders to ensure its "security, integrity and confidentiality." But he said "pontifical secret" no longer applies to abuse-related accusations, trials and decisions under the Catholic Church's canon law.

The Vatican's leading sex crimes investigator, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, called the reform an "epochal decision" that will facilitate coordination with civil law enforcement and open up lines of communication with victims.

While documentation from the church's in-house legal proceedings will still not become public, Scicluna said, the reform now removes any excuse to not cooperate with legitimate legal requests from civil law enforcement authorities.

Prominent Irish survivor Marie Collins said the reform was "excellent news" that abuse survivors and their advocates had been pressing for. "At last a real and positive change," she tweeted.

Francis also raised from 14 to 18 the cutoff age below which the Vatican considers pornographic images to be child pornography.

The new laws were issued Tuesday, Francis' 83rd birthday, as he struggles to respond to the global explosion of the abuse scandal, his own missteps and demands for greater transparency and accountability from victims, law enforcement and ordinary Catholics alike.

The new norms are the latest amendment to the Catholic Church's in-house canon law — a parallel legal code that metes out ecclesial justice for crimes against the faith — in this case relating to the sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable people by priests, bishops or cardinals. In this legal system, the worst punishment a priest can incur is being defrocked, or dismissed from the clerical state.

Pope Benedict XVI had decreed in 2001 that these cases must be dealt with under "pontifical secret," the highest form of secrecy in the church. The Vatican had long insisted that such confidentiality was necessary to protect the privacy of the victim, the reputation of the accused and the integrity of the canonical process.

However, such secrecy also served to keep the scandal hidden, prevent law enforcement from accessing documents and silence victims, many of whom often believed that "pontifical secret" prevented them from going to the police to report their priestly abusers.

While the Vatican has long tried to insist this was not the case, it also never mandated that bishops and religious superiors report sex crimes to police, and in the past has encouraged bishops not to do so.

According to the new instruction, which was signed by the Vatican secretary of state but authorized by the pope, the Vatican still doesn't mandate reporting the crimes to police, saying religious superiors are obliged to do so where civil reporting laws require it.

But it goes further than the Vatican has gone before, saying: "Office confidentiality shall not prevent the fulfillment of the obligations laid down in all places by civil laws, including any reporting obligations, and the execution of enforceable requests of civil judicial authorities."

The Vatican has been under increasing pressure to cooperate more with law enforcement, and its fail-

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ure to do so has resulted in unprecedented raids in recent years on diocesan chanceries by police from Belgium to Texas and Chile.

But even under the penalty of subpoenas and raids, bishops have sometimes felt compelled to withhold canonical proceedings given the "pontifical secret," unless given permission to hand documents over by the Vatican. The new law makes that explicit permission no longer required.

"The freedom of information to statutory authorities and to victims is something that is being facilitated by this new law," Scicluna told Vatican media.

The Vatican in May issued another law explicitly saying victims cannot be silenced and have a right to learn the outcome of canonical trials. The new document repeats that, and expands the point by saying not only the victim, but any witnesses or the person who lodged the accusation cannot be compelled to silence.

Individual scandals, national inquiries, grand jury investigations, U.N. denunciations and increasingly costly civil litigation have devastated the Catholic hierarchy's credibility across the globe, and Francis' own failures and missteps have emboldened his critics.

In February, he summoned the presidents of bishops conferences from around the globe to a four-day summit on preventing abuse, where several speakers called for a reform of the pontifical secret. Francis himself said he intended to raise the age for which pornography was considered child porn.

The Vatican's editorial director, Andrea Tornielli, said the new law is a "historical" follow-up to the February summit and a sign of openness and transparency.

"The breadth of Pope Francis' decision is evident: the well-being of children and young people must always come before any protection of a secret, even the 'pontifical secret,'" he said in a statement.

Also Tuesday, Francis accepted the resignation of the Vatican's ambassador to France, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, who is accused of making unwanted sexual advances to young men.

Ventura turned 75 last week, the mandatory retirement age for bishops, but the fact that his resignation was announced on the same day as Francis' abuse reforms didn't seem to be a coincidence.

## Tributes, standing ovation at 'Rise of Skywalker' premiere

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Audiences rose to their feet giving the latest "Star Wars" film a standing ovation after the credits rolled at the ending of the franchise's third trilogy.

Cheers often erupted with enthusiasm throughout while viewing "The Rise of Skywalker" on Monday night. After the screening, the film was met with a slew of positive reviews after director J.J. Abrams told the audience before the film played that he was "mostly terrified" to show the movie, which ran for nearly 2 ½ hours.

Seated in the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood were Mark Hamill, who played Luke Skywalker, and director Steven Spielberg, who Abrams specifically thanked.

Comedian-actor Seth Green, who attended the world premiere with his wife, Clare Grant, said he enjoyed watching how the latest film closed the final chapter of the Skywalker saga.

"I loved it," Green said. "I'm going to be unpacking this for a while. It's dense, it's deep, it's full of awesome stuff. To me, it's a satisfying finale of this saga."

Fans turned the premiere into a living tribute to various eras of the space epic franchise, with some dressing up like Hamill's Luke and Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia from the 1977 original film with others opting for the look of the characters' mother, Queen Amidala, and many donning the armor of Stormtroopers, bounty hunters and Darth Vader.

"It was everything I'd hope it would be and more," said Dwayne Smith, who went to the premiere with his wife, Shannon, and son Kayden. Both father and son were wearing black First Order costumes.

"The twists, turns and nostalgia. It was emotional," Smith said during the premiere's after party. "It had action. It had everything. If you're on the fence from the last film, you'll be happy that it's back on track."

Attendees were treated to a blue carpet spectacle that included appearances by the droids C-3PO and

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R2-D2, and Chewbacca stepping out of a black sport utility vehicle and posing for photographers with long arms stretched in the air.

Guests included Harrison Ford and actors made famous by the newest trilogy: Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac and Kelly Marie Tran.

The premiere was the first time anyone outside a select group saw the ninth film in the core "Star Wars" story. "Rise of Skywalker" arrives in theaters Friday. Attendees had a chance to walk past an exhibit lined with numerous photos from previous films including a portrait with the late Fisher and her daughter Billie Lourd, another photo with Mark Hamill hugging Fisher and several Stormtrooper uniforms.

Few films have captured the popular imagination like 1977's "Star Wars," which has sparked three film trilogies, TV shows, toys and more. "The Rise of Skywalker" is one of the year's most-anticipated releases, in part because filmmakers have promised a conclusion to the story of the Skywalker clan that includes Luke, Leia and their father Anakin, who became Darth Vader.

Disney paid more than \$4 billion to acquire the "Star Wars" franchise in 2012 and the recent trilogy started by Abrams in 2015 with "The Force Awakens." While it returned beloved characters from the original trilogy to the big screen for the first time since 1983, the story has focused on a new generation of characters played by Ridley, Adam Driver, Boyega and others.

Fans remain divided on 2017's "The Last Jedi," which showed a late-in-life Skywalker as a bitter recluse who cut himself off from his friends and broader conflicts embroiling the fictional far, far away galaxy.

Disney has not yet announced film plans post-"Rise of Skywalker." Work on a trilogy set outside the Skywalker story has been halted, and no new stand-alone films have been announced since the poor showing of 2018's "Solo: A Star Wars Story."

Regardless of the reception to "Rise of Skywalker," Disney has already delivered Star Wars fans two wins in 2019. Its theme parks in Florida and California opened massive Star Wars-themed expansions this year where guests are essentially transported to a distant planet. The company's new streaming service, Disney Plus, also debuted the first live-action "Star Wars" television series in "The Mandalorian," which introduced a popular new character: Baby Yoda.

## 3 dead as suspected twisters, other storms batter the South

By JAY REEVES and JANET McCONNAUGHEY undefined

Three people are confirmed dead and a dozen more injured as a powerful storm front packing suspected tornadoes smashed into buildings, downed trees and left a trail of destruction around the Deep South on Monday, authorities said.

One person was reported killed in a suspected tornado strike on a Louisiana home, and two others were reported dead after another storm hit around a community about 55 miles (90 kilometers) west of the north Alabama city of Huntsville.

Lawrence County Coroner Scott Norwood in Alabama said the two people killed were husband and wife. Authorities said the injured people included a 7-year-old-child who was taken to a hospital in Birmingham. Authorities did not release names of the victims.

The area was filled with debris and downed trees when first responders arrived.

"It was total chaos," Norwood told reporters. "We had to make due the best we could."

The storms prompted numerous tornado watches and warnings Monday. Some cities opened shelters as a cold front collided with warmer air over northern Gulf Coast states and temperatures were expected to plunge. The National Weather Service said the severe weather threat could last into Tuesday.

The Louisiana death was attributed to an apparent tornado that struck a residential area in Vernon Parish. Details were not immediately available, said Chief Deputy Calvin Turner. He said authorities feared others could be hurt, since crews were still trying to reach hard-hit areas.

In nearby Alexandria, Louisiana, about 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of New Orleans, crews cleared roads and restored power late into the night, working in a chilly mist.

Children in a church school were moved to the church before the tornado ripped off the school's roof,

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said Cpl. Wade Bourgeois, spokesman for the Alexandria Police Department. Among the hardest-hit spots was the Johnny Downs Sports Complex, which he said may have suffered "total damage." The complex includes five full-sized soccer fields, more than 10 smaller ones, and eight baseball diamonds.

"Fortunately we have no reports of any deaths or serious injuries," he said of the Alexandria area.

Surveying damage with her family, Alexandria resident Summer Evans said there was a lot of devastation.

"It's bad. There's animals out, houses tore down," she said. "The barns are gone. You can't even find some of the properties. Houses that used to be here, you can't even find them anymore."

Meteorologist Donald Jones of the National Weather Service office in Lake Charles said it appeared the twister that hit part of Alexandria also struck near the town of DeRidder on an "absolutely ridiculous" path estimated at 63 miles (101 kilometers) long.

"I don't know what our records for the longest total in this area is, but that's got to be pretty damn close to it," he said.

Three people were injured, at least one of them very seriously, by an apparent tornado that hit Amite County, Mississippi, Monday afternoon, county emergency director Grant McCurley said.

Some houses were destroyed and others severely damaged, he said. The number wasn't known Monday night because crews couldn't get to them all — downed trees tangled with power lines blocked county roads and state highways.

McCurley said damage was spread across the county, which adjoins the southeast Louisiana state line.

Four counties eastward, seven women were taken to a hospital from a heavily damaged group home in Sumrall, Mississippi. Injuries were minor, Sheriff Danny Rigel told WJTV. Damage on the men's side of the Douglas Graham Group Home was less severe than on the women's side, Lamar County emergency management director James Smith told WDAM-TV.

That tornado cell sprang up in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana and went through Washington Parish on its way into Mississippi, said meteorologist Phil Grigsby of the National Weather Service office in Slidell.

The Storm Prediction Center reported two other people suffered minor injuries from flying debris after storms moved into Mississippi, and multiple trees fell atop homes and vehicles in Edwards, east of Vicksburg.

In Guntown, Mississippi, near Tupelo and about 260 miles (420 kilometers) north-northeast of Amite County, an apparent tornado destroyed a church and damaged dozens of homes.

Pastor Carl Estes searched through the debris of Lighthouse Baptist Church for books, photos or any other salvageable items, the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal reported. The storm flattened the building, which Estes said was empty at the time.

Church member Shane Keith told the newspaper he rushed here after the storm and found pews tossed around the hillside.

"I wanted to cry, I really did" Keith said. "I mean, I just got baptized last year and this means a lot to me, this place right here."

Mississippi State Sen. Chad McMahn of Guntown said he toured a subdivision where an estimated 35 homes had been damaged.

As the storm system pushed into Alabama on Monday evening it toppled trees and power lines and kicked up more suspected tornadoes. The Colbert County Emergency Management Agency said buildings were damaged in the Colbert Heights area and that multiple roads were blocked.

School systems in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi dismissed students early and canceled afternoon events and activities.

Tornadoes in December aren't unusual. Monday was the 19th anniversary of a Southeastern tornado outbreak that produced a twister that killed 11 people in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Storms on Dec. 1, 2018, spawned more than two dozen tornadoes in the Midwest.

Reeves reported from Birmingham, Alabama, and McConnaughey reported from New Orleans. AP video journalist Stacey Plaisance contributed from Alexandria. AP writer Jeff Amy contributed from Atlanta.

## Party-switching NJ congressman will need Trump help in 2020

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The political fate of party-switching Rep. Jeff Van Drew may well hinge on how forcefully he is backed by President Donald Trump, whose impeachment the New Jersey lawmaker is refusing to support.

With the House set for a near party-line vote impeaching Trump this week, the longtime Democrat told his staff two days ago that he will become a Republican, a former aide said Monday. Underscoring the partisan animosity that the impeachment fight has spawned, at least six of Van Drew's top aides promptly quit.

Now, the 66-year-old former state legislator, who's been a political powerhouse in his southern New Jersey district, must figure out how to survive a race in which local Democrats now despise him and Republicans don't want him elbowing them aside.

His race will also test the electoral impact of his party switch on the face of the impeachment showdown, which has sharply divided the two parties. In recent years, congressional party switchers have had mixed records extending their careers.

Trump met with Van Drew last week and has complimented him on Twitter for his "honesty." With impeachment on the horizon, Trump praised the congressman again early Tuesday.

"Congressman Jeff Van Drew is very popular in our great and very united Republican Party," the president wrote. "It was a tribute to him that he was able to win his heavily Republican district as a Democrat. People like that are not easily replaceable!"

One rival for the GOP nomination for the seat says he's been told that Trump will endorse Van Drew. While there's been no word on whether Trump will help Van Drew win the GOP nod in next June's primary or aid him during next November's general election, analysts say Trump's backing will be crucial.

"Whatever trouble in the Republican primary Jeff Van Drew might have goes away when Donald Trump throws his arm around the guy," said Ben Dworkin, director of the nonpartisan Rowan Institute for Public Policy & Citizenship in Glassboro, New Jersey.

Van Drew's general election prospects will depend on factors including how liberal the Democratic presidential nominee and the Democrat seeking the House seat are. His district has become increasingly conservative, with Trump carrying it narrowly in 2016 after Barack Obama won it in 2008 and 2012.

"I think Van Drew would be the early favorite, assuming Trump helps him get the nomination," said Patrick Murray, director of the nonpartisan Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Van Drew did not return phone calls and text messages seeking comment.

Van Drew's defection to the GOP got a thumbs-up Monday from Cheryl McCleary as she waited tables at a luncheonette in Surf City, on New Jersey's Long Beach Island.

"I appreciate the fact that he's staying true to his conscience," said McCleary, an independent voter. "If you feel like you're not in touch with your party on key issues, it's a good thing to switch."

Van Drew's decision came after a poll by his campaign showed that by 2-1 margins, voters in his district preferred alternatives to him in the primary and general election. The poll was provided by a senior Democratic aide.

"This is a guy who cut and ran away from the Democratic Party to protect his own skin," said David Richter, former CEO of a global construction firm who's seeking the GOP nomination.

Richter said local GOP officials have told him Trump will back Van Drew, but says he thinks he can still defeat him.

"Anybody who runs on the Republican side is against the impeachment. I'm against the impeachment," Richter said. "That's not enough. You also have to be someone who has integrity. You also have to be someone who stood up for Republican principles their whole lives."

Van Drew, a former dentist, was a conservative state senator before he joined Congress, bucking Democrats on issues including gun control and gay marriage.

In his first year in Congress, Van Drew was among a handful of Democrats who voted against Nancy

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Pelosi, D-Calif., becoming speaker. He and Minnesota Rep. Collin Peterson were the only two Democrats who voted in October against starting the impeachment inquiry, and both were expected to oppose impeachment this week, with perhaps a handful of others.

Overall, Van Drew has voted with Trump 7% of the time, according to the data tracking website fivethirtyeight.com. That's one of the higher scores among House Democrats and far beneath the lowest loyalty score for any Republican, which was 35%.

New Jersey Democrats were already bidding him good riddance.

"It's certainly not a profiles in courage award that he gets," Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., said in an interview. He said he believed Van Drew was switching because his anti-impeachment vote would have cost him the Democratic Party's endorsement next year.

"Congressman Van Drew has long voted against core Democratic values," Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said in a tweet. "Betraying our party by siding with Donald Trump is the final straw."

Montclair State University political science Professor Brigid Harrison, who declared Monday that she would seek the Democratic nomination for Van Drew's seat, called Van Drew "a blind pawn for Donald Trump."

After Republicans captured the House majority in 1994, five Democrats switched to the GOP, including two who lost their next elections. But Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana joined the GOP leadership and became a committee chairman while Georgia Rep. Nathan Deal was elected governor.

"They were more than happy for us to leave," former Rep. Mike Parker of Mississippi said of his former Democratic colleagues in an interview.

In 1999, five House Democrats backed impeaching President Bill Clinton. Three of them eventually switched to the GOP.

Among the most recent party switchers was Rep. Parker Griffith, D-Ala., who joined the GOP in 2009. He lost the Republican nomination for his seat the following year.

Conservative Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan left the GOP and became an independent this year after saying he was open to impeaching Trump. His prospects for reelection next year are unclear.

Associated Press writers Michael Catalini in Trenton and Wayne Parry in Surf City, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

## 10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

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

1. AMID IMPEACHMENT, CONGRESSMAN SWITCHES PARTIES New Jersey Rep. Jeff Van Drew, one of the few Democrats opposing President Trump's ouster, tells aides he will become a Republican.

2. HOW THESE UPRISINGS ARE DIFFERENT FROM ARAB SPRING While the 2011 protests were directed at long-ruling autocrats, the current economically driven unrest is directed at corrupt political elites who have failed to provide basic services.

3. BOEING GETS FAA MESSAGE The grounded 737 Max jet won't be approved to fly anytime soon, prompting the aviation giant to suspend production on the fleet indefinitely starting in January.

4. YELLOW MEANS 'SHOP,' BLUE MEANS 'STOP' Protesters in Hong Kong are using their spending power to punish businesses they deem hostile to their cause, using color-coded apps to label stores and help guide consumers.

5. SOUTHERN FRESHWATER MUSSEL DIE-OFF RAISES CONCERNS Infectious disease may be to blame and scientists are working quickly to find a culprit because if all the mussels die, the rivers will never be the same.

6. BRITISH LEADER MAKES NO DEAL BREXIT CLAIM Boris Johnson says Britain will strike a new trade deal with the European Union by the end of next year or leave without one.

7. 'IT WAS TOTAL CHAOS' Three people are dead and a dozen more injured as suspected tornadoes smash into buildings, down trees and leave a trail of destruction in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

8. EXECUTIONS ON THE DECLINE IN US A new report finds a continuing decline in capital punishment in America, with less than 30 such cases for the fifth straight year.

9. BREES SETS NFL ALL-TIME TD MARK The New Orleans Saints' quarterback passes Peyton Manning to become the league's career leader in touchdown passes in a 34-7 win over Indianapolis.

10. 'THE RISE OF SKYWALKER' A HIT PREMIERE Audiences enthusiastically greet the latest "Star Wars" film, rising in a standing ovation as the credits on the closing chapter in the franchise's third trilogy rolled.

## Trump conservative critics launch PAC to fight reelection

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A small group of President Donald Trump's fiercest conservative critics, including the husband of the president's own chief adviser, is launching a super PAC designed to fight Trump's reelection and punish congressional Republicans deemed his "enablers."

The new organization, known as the Lincoln Project, represents a formal step forward for the so-called Never Trump movement, which has been limited largely to social media commentary and cable news attacks through the first three years of Trump's presidency. Organizers report fundraising commitments exceeding \$1 million to begin, although they hope to raise and spend much more to fund a months-long advertising campaign in a handful of 2020 battleground states to persuade disaffected Republican voters to break from Trump's GOP.

The mission, as outlined in a website that launched Tuesday coinciding with a New York Times opinion piece, is simple: "Defeat President Trump and Trumpism at the ballot box."

The group is led by a seven-person advisory council that features some of the GOP's most vocal Trump critics. Most, but not all, have already left the Republican Party to protest Trump's rise.

The principals include former John McCain adviser Steve Schmidt, former Ohio Gov. John Kasich adviser John Weaver, former New Hampshire GOP chair Jennifer Horn, veteran Republican operative Rick Wilson and George Conway, a conservative attorney and husband of Trump's chief counselor Kellyanne Conway.

In an interview, George Conway said that he encouraged the new super PAC to involve Anonymous, an unnamed Trump administration official who authored a recent book warning the public against Trump's reelection. The rest of the group ultimately decided not to take Conway's suggestion.

"I think the more the merrier," George Conway told The Associated Press. "And I hope maybe he — he or she, I don't know who Anonymous is — will come out someday and join the effort. Because everyone who believes as we do that Donald Trump is a cancer on the presidency and on the Constitution needs to help and join this effort."

The inception of the Lincoln Project is significant, but to say it represents a minority of Trump's Republican Party would be an understatement. Roughly 9 in 10 Republican voters approved of the president's job performance and have all year, according to Gallup. And with very few exceptions, Trump has the public backing of virtually every Republican member of Congress.

Yet recent elections suggest that Trump's party is losing ground with educated voters and women, particularly in America's suburbs, which have traditionally leaned Republican. This new group hopes to push those voters further toward the Democrats.

It is very much a work in progress, despite Tuesday's official launch. While the core players don't yet have titles, day-to-day operations will be led by Horn and Reed Galen, a veteran Republican operative who worked for McCain but left the GOP after Trump's nomination in 2016.

The group begins as a super PAC, which means it can raise and spend unlimited sums of money and must disclose its donors.

"You're seeing a shift from talk into action," said Galen, describing the launch as "a big turning point for the political season and for the president's reelection."

Specifically, the group plans to focus on blocking Trump's reelection and defeating Trump-allied Senate candidates in a handful of key 2020 battlegrounds. To do so, it's targeting a narrow but important slice of the electorate: disaffected Republicans and Republican-leaning independents.

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While there is no concrete road map, Weaver said the organizers plan to fight the president's reelection in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin along with Arizona and North Carolina. Their Senate efforts likely would focus on Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Maine and possibly Kansas and Kentucky.

Weaver said the group is already reviewing scripts for new ads, which are expected to begin running early next year.

"This is organic, and we're going to be flexible," he said. "We have to go out and prove ourselves and prove that we can be efficient and effective."

Meanwhile, George Conway, who formally left the GOP last year, said he likely would serve in a "cheerleader" capacity for the new organization because of his limited political experience.

"I'm not a fundraiser or political consultant, but if I could help in that way and learn how to do that — even to raise a nickel or two — I'll do it because it's important," he said. "For this, I think I can make an exception."

He suggested the Lincoln Project would pay particular attention to Congress' impeachment proceedings.

"If he's not removed by the Senate, he needs to be removed at the ballot box," he said of Trump. "The people in Congress who are enabling him, either actively or passively, they, too, are violating their oaths of office. ... And they need to be removed, too."

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

## **Boeing gets FAA message, will halt Max production in January**

**By TOM KRISHER AP Business Writer**

The message to Boeing Co. from the Federal Aviation Administration was clear: The grounded 737 Max won't get approval to fly again anytime soon. So the company had little choice but to idle the giant factory where the plane is made.

Boeing announced Monday that it will suspend production of the Max starting sometime in January, with no specific date for when the Renton, Washington, plant will be restarted.

The company said it won't lay off any of the factory's 12,000 workers "at this time," and many could be diverted to plants elsewhere in the Seattle region. Some could also be assigned to work on the 400 jets that Boeing has built since the Max was grounded in March but couldn't be delivered.

Boeing's decision is a recognition that it will take longer than the company expected to get the planes back in the air, said Richard Aboulafia, an aircraft industry analyst at the Teal Group.

"If they had gotten some information quietly, behind the scenes, from the FAA that things were looking good for January or February, they wouldn't have done this," he said.

The Max is Boeing's most important jet, but it has been grounded since March after crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia that killed a total of 346 people.

The FAA told the company last week that it had unrealistic expectations for getting the plane back into service. Boeing has missed several estimates for the plane's return date.

The agency has not given a specific date for approving the Max's return, but FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson has said it will be done on the agency's timetable, not Boeing's.

The FAA said Monday it wouldn't comment on Boeing's business decisions, and that it has no set time frame for when work to recertify the Max to fly will be completed.

Even if no employees are laid off, ceasing production still will cut into the nation's economic output because of Boeing's huge footprint in the U.S. manufacturing sector. Through October of this year, the U.S. aerospace industry's factory output has fallen 17% compared with the same period last year, to \$106.4 billion, in part due to previous 737 Max production cuts.

Aboulafia said the shutdown would probably hinder the economy in the coming months and could worsen the nation's trade balance. "This is the country's biggest single manufactured export product," he said.

In a statement, Boeing said it will determine later when production can resume, based largely on approval from government regulators.

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"We believe this decision is least disruptive to maintaining long-term production system and supply chain health," the company said.

Investigators have found that flight control software designed to stop an aerodynamic stall was a major factor in the crashes, and Boeing is updating the software, making it less aggressive. But regulators have yet to approve the changes.

The long-term grounding has put Boeing in a difficult position, said Joe Schwieterman a DePaul University professor who is an aviation expert. The plant shutdown will help Boeing conserve cash, but it also will disrupt the network of about 900 companies that supply parts for the Max and other 737 models, Schwieterman said.

The shutdown will cost the company economies of scale gained by producing large numbers of planes. But by continuing to produce the grounded jets, Boeing was forced to store them on the ground as they depreciate because they can't be delivered.

"The airlines certainly aren't going to pay for planes until they're ready for flight. So Boeing is really between a rock and a hard place here," Schwieterman said.

Boeing will likely face some tough negotiations with suppliers about what level of payments it will provide during the production hiatus. The company will want to avoid any layoffs or shutdowns by suppliers that would keep it from quickly restarting production once its safety is approved. Shares in French supplier Safran were down 3.4% in Paris.

"It's really in Boeing's interest to identify who needs payments to keep workers and capabilities in place for when the ramp up eventually happens," Aboulaflia said.

Even before the production halt, airlines were delaying the dates for when they expect the Max to fly passengers. Last week American Airlines removed the Max from its schedule until April 7, a month later than previously announced. Southwest Airlines' pilots union also doesn't expect the Max to fly until at least April.

Jeff Windau, industrials analyst for Edward Jones, said the 400 planes that Boeing has built but can't deliver likely were a major factor in the decision to halt production. This comes "both in consideration of storage space and how efficiently can you get them delivered once the plane is ready to return to service," he said.

Boeing has made progress on some FAA requirements to get the Max back in service, Windau said, but he still views the production halt as a negative for the company.

"The flight control system is complex and there are still unknowns with the timing of regulator reviews and approvals," Windau wrote in an email. He also wrote that it may be difficult to restart an idled factory once production ramps back up.

Boeing already is having cash flow issues. In October, the company reported that free cash flow went from \$4.1 billion a year ago to a negative \$2.9 billion in the third quarter, worse than analysts had expected.

The Chicago-based company also faces about 150 lawsuits from relatives of crash victims, and it has set up a \$100 million fund to aid families.

The 737 Max crisis has meanwhile helped Boeing's main competitor, Europe's Airbus, which saw deliveries surge 28% during the first half of the year. Boeing deliveries fell 37%.

Airbus declined to comment Tuesday, but has said in the past that Boeing's crashes have not affected its sales strategy. Its shares were steady in Paris.

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AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber in Washington contributed to this report.

## Brees sets NFL all-time TD mark as Saints crush Colts 34-7

By **BRETT MARTEL AP Sports Writer**

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Drew Brees trotted along the sideline holding his helmet and a Hall of Fame-bound ball in his left hand while using his right hand to wave and blow kisses to an adoring Superdome crowd.

Another milestone, another memory, for an undersized and once underestimated player who has broken

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just about every significant record a quarterback can break — and doesn't look anywhere near done at age 40.

Brees became the NFL's all-time leader in touchdown passes, throwing for four scores to lead the New Orleans Saints to a 34-7 victory over the Indianapolis Colts on Monday night.

"It was special, everything about the night," Brees said. "It just kind of makes your whole life and career flash before your eyes, because I never thought I'd have a chance to be part of something like this."

The scoring strike that broke Peyton Manning's record of 539 career touchdown passes came in the third quarter, when Brees hit tight end Josh Hill for a 5-yard score. Brees' next pass in the game was the 541st scoring toss of his career, a 28-yarder to reserve QB and utility player Taysom Hill that put the Saints up 34-0.

"He's done that to a lot of defenses," Colts coach Frank Reich said. "When he gets like that. I don't know that anybody can stop him."

Now in his 19th season, the 6-foot Brees — a 2001 second-round draft choice — came into the game already holding NFL records for completions with 6,792 and yards passing with 72,577. He built on those numbers while also setting a record for completion percentage in a game. He completed 29 of 30 passes — 96.7% — for 307 yards before being relieved by Teddy Bridgewater in the fourth quarter. That broke the mark Philip Rivers had held since completing 28 of 29 (96.6%) against Arizona last season.

"He had a hot hand, obviously," Saints coach Sean Payton said. "Guys were making plays, but that's awfully difficult to do."

The victory kept the Saints (11-3), who'd already won the NFC South, in the running with Seattle (11-3), San Francisco (11-3) and Green Bay (11-3) for one of the top two seeds in the NFC playoffs.

"There's a lot at stake right now relative to these games when you look at the top of the NFC," Payton said. "It's about winning and winning and winning and trying to give yourself the best chance in the postseason."

The Colts (6-8) were eliminated from playoff contention after losing their fourth straight and sixth out of seven.

They were also left struggled to explain their lack of competitiveness in a game they needed to win.

"I wish I knew all the answers," Colts linebacker Darius Leonard said. "I hate losing more than I love winning."

Jacoby Brissett struggled at times with accuracy and finished 18 of 34 for 165 yards against a Saints defense looking for redemption after allowing 48 points in a loss to the 49ers a week earlier.

Meanwhile, Colts defenders had no answer for Michael Thomas, who caught 12 passes for 128 yards, including a 15-yard touchdown. Thomas' eighth game this season with at least 10 catches give him 133 for the season, which is also the fourth-highest single-season total in NFL history.

With four more catches, Thomas will pass Antonio Brown and Julio Jones for second most in a season. He needs 11 to eclipse Marvin Harrison's record of 143 from 2002.

Tre'Quan Smith caught a 21-yard touchdown pass for New Orleans.

Jordan Wilkins scored the Colts' lone TD on a 1-yard run in the fourth quarter.

## FLUID RECORD

While Brees holds the career touchdown pass record for now, the Patriots' Tom Brady is only three behind at 538.

"It's a fluid record," Payton said. "There's still another quarterback in New England, so that will go back and forth as long as those two are playing."

The next-closest active player is Rivers with 395.

Brees wasn't about to underestimate Brady's ability to keep pace.

"He's such a stud. He's got a lot of rings and records," Brees said of Brady. "He's awesome."

## HAILING HILL

Brees said the ball with which he threw his record-breaking TD would go to the Pro Football Hall of Fame and also sounded particularly pleased by who caught it.

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"I love the fact it was Josh Hill," Brees said, noting that Hill made the team as an undrafted rookie in 2013 and has been reliable both on offense and special teams ever since.

"The epitome of a great teammate, kind of an unsung hero," Brees said. "He's done an unbelievable job. I have so much trust and confidence in him."

## INJURIES

Colts: Reserve safety Rolan Milligan left the game with a foot injury in the first half. Cornerback Quincy Wilson left with a shoulder injury.

Saints: Right guard Larry Warford needed help to the sideline with a left knee injury early in the third quarter. Defensive back C.J. Gardner Johnson left the game with a concussion in the fourth quarter.

## UP NEXT

Colts: Host Carolina on Sunday.

Saints: Visit Tennessee on Sunday.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Newtown celebrates football title, but continues to grieve

By PAT EATON-ROBB AP Sports Writer

On the seventh anniversary of the massacre that killed Tricia Pinto's son Jack at Sandy Hook Elementary School, she found herself celebrating the state football championship by the team of her other son, Ben.

Ben Pinto plays linebacker for the Newtown High School Nighthawks, who won the Class LL state championship 13-7 on a 36-yard touchdown pass Saturday from Jack Street to Riley Ward as time expired. The title was the first for Newtown since 1992.

"It's always so difficult to explain what it feels like to hold grief in your heart while celebrating these precious moments," Tricia Pinto said Monday. "Our grief sometimes gets lost in this story of survival. That's not our story. Our story is of loss and of love."

Reporters were warned in advance not to ask players about the tragedy, in which a gunman killed 20 students and six educators on Dec. 14, 2012. Players and coaches didn't publicly address it. There was some talk before the game about perhaps not playing or trying to get the date moved.

Pinto was not the only affected player. Jack Street was a fourth grader at Sandy Hook in 2012. Everyone on the team, everyone in the town, was affected in some way, said Lorrie Rodrigue, Newtown's school superintendent.

"We knew obviously there would be challenges, obviously emotional challenges on that date," she said. "So we did, the principal and the athletic director, we consulted not only the team, but the family of loss who plays just to make sure we heard their voices. They wanted to play."

Football has been a part of the Pinto family's healing process since the shooting. Jack Pinto was buried in the jersey of his favorite player, New York Giants receiver Victor Cruz, who later came to the family's home, visiting and playing video games with Ben and his friends.

Cruz, now retired from the league and working as an ESPN NFL analyst, said about 1,000 people sent him the video clip of Newtown's winning pass, and it brings goosebumps to his skin as he watches it over and over.

"For football to be able to be that kind of escape for them, to provide that moment for them, it's just incredible," he said. "I just want to congratulate them and Ben and the whole town for staying strong. I just remember how strong they were. And this is a testament to how strong they actually are."

But Tricia Pinto said she wants it understood that while they celebrate the win for Ben and his team, it does little to offset the pain of what happened. Their grief is ever present, she said.

"That heaviness in our hearts always returns," she said. "To be honest, as the weekend came and went, we're just missing Jack," she said.

As for Ben, she said, he would just like to be able to be normal. But he does appreciate the town's support.

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"I come off the field, I look into the crowd and I can barely see an empty seat," Ben Pinto told Hearst Connecticut Media shortly after the final play. "Knowing that we have the whole town just right there behind us, it's unbelievable."

The town is making arrangements to hold some type of event to celebrate the championship, said Dan Rosenthal, Newtown's first selectman. But, that he said, should not be linked to what happened seven years ago.

"For our community, 12-14 will always be about what was lost and not what was won," he said. "But what those boys accomplished, in a game that just happened to be played on 12-14. It was amazing."

## **\$1.4T spending package crammed with unrelated provisions**

By **ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — House leaders on Monday unveiled a \$1.4 trillion government-wide spending package that's carrying an unusually large load of unrelated provisions catching a ride on the last train out of Congress this year.

A House vote is slated for Tuesday on the sprawling package, some 2,313 pages long, as lawmakers wrap up reams of unfinished work — and vote on impeaching President Donald Trump.

The legislation would forestall a government shutdown this weekend and give Trump steady funding for his U.S.-Mexico border fence. The year-end package is anchored by a \$1.4 trillion spending measure that caps a difficult, months-long battle over spending priorities.

The mammoth measure takes a split-the-differences approach that's a product of divided power in Washington, offering lawmakers of all stripes plenty to vote for — and against. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., was a driving force, along with administration pragmatists such as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who negotiated the summertime budget deal that it implements.

Trump hasn't said for sure that he'll sign the measure. He invariably has second thoughts, but he's not interested in another government shutdown and has always bowed to Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., when they've teamed up on compromise spending packages.

Retired coal miners and labor union opponents of Obama-era taxes on high-cost health plans came away with big wins in weekend negotiations by top congressional leaders and the Trump White House. The bill would also increase the age nationwide for purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21, and offers business-friendly provisions on export financing, flood insurance and immigrant workers.

The roster of add-ons grew over the weekend to include permanent repeal of a tax on high-cost "Cadillac" health insurance benefits and finance health care and pension benefits for about 100,000 retired union coal miners threatened by the insolvency of their pension fund. A tax on medical devices and health insurance plans would also be repealed permanently.

The deficit tab for the package grew as well — almost \$400 billion over 10 years to repeal the three so-called "Obamacare" taxes alone — with a companion package to extend several business-friendly tax breaks still under negotiation. The Obama-era taxes have previously been suspended on a piecemeal basis.

The legislation is laced with provisions reflecting divided power in Washington. Republicans maintained the status quo on several abortion-related battles and on funding for Trump's border wall. Democrats controlling the House succeeded in winning a 3.1 percent raise for federal civilian employees and the first installment of funding on gun violence research after more than two decades of gun lobby opposition.

The sweeping legislation, introduced as two packages for political and tactical purposes, is part of a major final burst of legislation that's passing Congress this week despite bitter partisan divisions and Wednesday's likely impeachment of Trump. Thursday promises a vote on a major rewrite of the North American Free Trade Agreement, while the Senate is about to send Trump the annual defense policy bill for the 59th year in a row.

The core of the spending bill is formed by the 12 annual agency appropriations bills passed by Congress each year. It fills in the details of a bipartisan framework from July that delivered about \$100 billion in agency spending increases over the coming two years instead of automatic spending cuts that would

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have sharply slashed the Pentagon and domestic agencies.

The increase in the tobacco purchasing age to 21 also applies to e-cigarettes and vaping devices and gained momentum after McConnell signed on.

Other add-ons include a variety of provisions sought by business and labor interests and their lobbyists in Washington.

For business, there's a seven-year extension of the charter of the Export-Import Bank, which helps finance transactions benefiting U.S. exporters, as well as a renewal of the government's terrorism risk insurance program. The financially troubled government flood insurance program would be extended through September, as would several visa programs for both skilled and seasonal workers.

Labor won repeal of the so-called Cadillac tax, a 40% tax on high-cost employer health plans, which was originally intended to curb rapidly growing health care spending. But it disproportionately affected high-end plans won under union contracts, and Democratic labor allies had previously succeeded in temporary repeals.

Democrats controlling the House won increased funding for early childhood education and a variety of other domestic programs. They also won higher Medicaid funding for the cash-poor government of Puerto Rico, which is struggling to recover from hurricane devastation and a resulting economic downturn.

While Republicans touted defense hikes and Democrats reeled off numerous increases for domestic programs, most of the provisions of the spending bill enjoy bipartisan support, including increases for medical research, combating the opioid epidemic, and Head Start and childcare grants to states.

Democrats also secured \$425 million for states to upgrade their election systems, and they boosted the U.S. Census budget \$1.4 billion above Trump's request. They won smaller increases for the Environmental Protection Agency, renewable energy programs and affordable housing.

"We are scaling up funding for priorities that will make our country safer and stronger and help hard-working families get ahead," said House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey, D-N.Y.

The outcome in the latest chapter in the longstanding battle over Trump's border wall awards Trump with \$1.4 billion for new barriers — equal to last year's appropriation — while preserving Trump's ability to use his budget powers to tap other accounts for several times that amount. That's a blow for liberal opponents of the wall but an acceptable trade-off for pragmatic-minded Democrats who wanted to gain \$27 billion in increases for domestic programs and avert the threat of simply funding the government on autopilot.

Because dozens of Democrats might vote against the border wall, Pelosi is pairing money for the Department of Homeland Security with the almost \$700 billion Pentagon budget, which is guaranteed to win GOP votes to offset Democratic defections.

The coal miners' pension provision, opposed by House GOP conservatives like Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., had the backing of Trump and powerful Senate GOP Leader McConnell and Trump. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., was a dogged force behind the scenes and said the other leaders rolled the House GOP leader, who also lost a behind-the-scenes battle with Pelosi on parochial California issues.

"Something had to be done and we finally got Mitch McConnell to sign onto the bill," Manchin said. "But we could not move McCarthy. Then finally we just had to move forward and they did it."

## Money talks: Hong Kong protesters weaponizing spending power

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — The Hong Kong protesters formed a line, patiently waiting their turn to buy sweet milk and tea drinks from a store that advertised ardent support for their cause with a banner declaring, "If you set off a nuclear blast, we'll stick by you."

For quicker service, they could have quenched their thirsts at an adjacent store that also sells bubble tea. It had no customers.

Which is exactly as the protesters intended.

Digging in for the long haul against Hong Kong's government, protesters are expanding their struggle

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from the streets to their wallets, weaponizing their spending power to punish businesses they deem hostile to their cause. The aim: to drive some firms under in the deepening recession gripping the crisis-hit city.

Guiding the consumer choices of tech-savvy protesters are apps that increasingly are color-coding businesses — everything from dentistry clinics and toy stores to dumpling restaurants and sex shops — into two categories: yellow for protest-friendly, blue for suspected opponents.

"Blue! blue!" protesters yelled outside the bubble tea shop they shunned during a rally this month that marked the half-year milestone for their movement.

The protests started in June to voice opposition to now-withdrawn extradition legislation and have morphed into what demonstrators say is a full-blown fight to safeguard Hong Kong's freedoms, unique among China's cities. Months of clashes with riot police who have fired 26,000 tear-gas and rubber-baton rounds and arrested more than 6,100 people are radicalizing legions of youths, upending the city's economy, and splitting families, work colleagues, friends and citizens into two entrenched camps.

Even employees of the supposedly "blue" bubble tea store, wearing face masks like many of the demonstrators, advised them not to shop there, saying the company wasn't sympathetic to the protest movement.

"It stands for the police," protester Natasha Chan said, clutching a grapefruit and lemon tea purchased instead from the "yellow" Happy Holidays drinks store next door. "We chose not to shop from the blue side."

Protesters believe that by boycotting supposedly pro-establishment businesses, they can help shift the balance of power and wealth in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Much of the city's \$345 billion economy and political influence are concentrated in the hands of magnates and enterprises linked to or supportive of mainland China and its Communist Party-led government — the ultimate boss of Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam.

Protesters also say that shopping "yellow" is another way to make their voices heard in the absence of direct elections for government leaders. Protesting with their wallets also enables people who can't always join street rallies, including those who fear being fired by pro-China employers, to otherwise contribute to the movement.

Before marching in the rally for the half-year milestone, accountant Nakata Law lined up for 15 minutes to support a snack shop that has donated to the protesters' cause, buying its steamed dumplings and gluey rice pancakes. A poster on the Jar Gor eatery says: "Support Yellow. This store has been rated as a true Hong Konger merchant."

"Most of the economy is controlled by China," Law said. "The citizens' view is that if we do not have our own economic circle in Hong Kong, we cannot support our protests to keep carrying on."

In the opposing camp, Phyllis Li, a systems analyst who believes protest violence has gotten out of hand, says she now deliberately chooses to eat at restaurants that protesters boycott "because it is not fair to them."

"And because it's safe for us, too, because they don't go," she said.

Anecdotal evidence suggests protester boycotts are biting the bottom lines of some targeted businesses. Passenger traffic on Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway dropped by a quarter in October and November. Transport disruption from protests caused some of the plunge. But some protesters are also refusing to use the network they suspect of colluding with police.

Edith Leung, an architectural assistant, says she hasn't ridden the MTR since August, taking buses instead. Some protesters say they're so determined not to commute by train, they're getting up early to leave extra time for lengthier bus journeys.

"Sometimes we feel like it's just a drop in the ocean," Leung said. "But when more people do it, we become the ocean."

But some businesses finding themselves on the "blue" side of the city's hardening divide say they're being unfairly targeted.

Martin Khan says the Capital Cafe he runs with his brother on Hong Kong Island has lost half of its customers since accusations appeared online suggesting that they oppose the movement.

Khan says not only is that untrue, but that the "blue" tag apps have assigned to their eatery is based on unfounded suspicions of a supposed link between them and a singer, Alan Tam, who has spoken publicly

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in support of police. Their cafe used to serve a toast, with melted cheese and shavings of black truffle, that they named after Tam, but has now removed it from the menu.

"Honestly, we have no connection with him," Khan said. "It's really not fair."

The developer of one of the apps, which uses crowd-sourced information to distinguish supposed blue businesses from yellow ones, says he fears he is contributing to a politically motivated witch hunt — like those the Communist Party has unleashed repeatedly across the border in mainland China.

"I'm very, very worried," said the developer, Chi Ho Leung. "It's like the Cultural Revolution."

His app, Hong Kong Shops, lists 1,700 stores, divided largely into yellow and blue. But Leung said he has neither the money nor time to verify the accuracy of information he found online about the businesses' supposed pro- or anti-protest leanings. He says stores can email him to request a change of color if they feel they've been inaccurately categorized.

But his app also invites users to name and shame stores they feel aren't supportive, offering categorizations including "deep blue" for businesses suspected of supporting police abuses and gray for those "selling out the people."

Leung says that because commercial rents are so expensive in Hong Kong, his hope is that boycotted stores may not survive the recession.

Although users say they regard the apps only as rough guides and not bibles, they're building the act of protest shopping into daily habits. It is just one example of how the protest movement is altering the fabric of Hong Kong life and awakening citizens politically, even if it hasn't succeeded in making Beijing and Hong Kong leaders bend to calls for full democracy and other demands.

Franklin Lau, who works in public relations, says he now uses blue/yellow apps and other online pointers, including Facebook posts, on a regular basis. He says he wants to "draw a line" between himself and any business that opposes the protests. He also wants to avoid the stigma that protesters are attaching to those who still shop "blue."

"If you say, 'Well, I had a meal in a blue restaurant just now' ... you tend not to like share (that) news with your friend," Lau said. "You don't want to have any association or connection with them."

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Associated Press news assistants Nadia Lam and Carol Mang contributed to this report.

## Democrats lay out case for Wednesday Trump impeachment vote

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats laid out their impeachment case against President Donald Trump on Monday, a sweeping report accusing him of betraying the nation and deserving to be ousted, as key lawmakers began to signal where they stand ahead of this week's landmark votes.

What Democrats once hoped would be a bipartisan act — only the third time in U.S. history the House will be voting to impeach a president — is now on track to be a starkly partisan roll call Wednesday. No Republicans are breaking with the president, and almost all Democrats are expected to approve the charges against him.

A raucous town hall Monday in the Detroit suburbs put on display the nation's wrenching debate over the unconventional president and the prospect of removing him from office. Freshman Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin was both heckled and celebrated as she announced her support for impeachment.

"There's certainly a lot of controversy about this," Slotkin acknowledged to the crowd of 400. "But there just has to be a moment where you use the letter of the law for what it's intended."

Trump faces two articles of impeachment brought by Democrats. They say he abused the power of his office by pressuring Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 election and obstructed Congress by aggressively trying to block the House investigation from its oversight duties as part of the nation's system of checks and balances.

The president "betrayed the Nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections," says the 650-page report from the House Judiciary Committee. He withheld military

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aid from the ally as leverage, the report says, and "Trump, by such conduct, has demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office."

The report says the president then engaged in an unprecedented attempt to block the investigation and "cover up" his misconduct. "In the history of the Republic, no President has ever ordered the complete defiance of an impeachment inquiry," it says.

Trump, tweeting from the sidelines after instructing the White House not to participate in the House inquiry, insisted he has done nothing wrong. He is promoting lawyer Rudy Giuliani's investigation of Biden and a widely debunked theory that it was actually Ukraine not Russia that interfered in the 2016 election, a conspiracy-laden idea that other most other Republicans are actively avoiding. "He knows what he's doing," Trump said of Giuliani at the White House.

Sticking to the language he has relied on for months, he tweeted Monday, "The Impeachment Hoax is the greatest con job in the history of American politics!"

As the House prepares for Wednesday's vote, more than a dozen Democrats announced they would be voting for impeachment. A handful or even fewer are expected to break ranks as Speaker Nancy Pelosi marches the majority toward a vote she hoped to avoid having Democrats take on their own.

One freshman Democrat, Rep. Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey, saw five staff members resign Monday after he said he would vote against impeachment and indicated he was switching parties to become a Republican. Another Democrat, Rep. Collin Peterson, a Minnesota centrist, has not decided how he will vote, his spokeswoman said.

As the House was detailing its case against the nation's 45th president, attention was turning to the Senate where the top Democrat, Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, called anew for fresh evidence and testimony from key White House officials for the Senate impeachment trial.

"What is President Trump hiding?" Schumer said Monday.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is hoping to avoid a drawn-out spectacle in his chamber, though Trump, a former reality TV show host, has signaled that is what he prefers as he seeks vindication. Republicans, who hold the majority, are expected to acquit Trump of the charges during a trial starting in January.

In a letter to McConnell, Schumer proposed hearing testimony from former national security adviser John Bolton, acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and two others as part of a detailed offer he made to Republicans as an opening offer for negotiations.

Several Senate Republicans rejected that idea late Monday, saying the House should have gone to court to force those witnesses to testify over the White House's objections if Democrats wanted to hear from them. "We don't need to clean up their sloppy job," said Iowa GOP Sen. Joni Ernst.

"The House can't decide not to go to court, send us a half-baked case and then say now, 'You make something out of it,'" said Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo.

Democrats want to hear from Bolton, who once labeled the alternative foreign policy orchestrated by Trump lawyer Giuliani a "drug deal" he wanted no part of. Bolton left the White House in September. The Democrats also want to hear from Mulvaney, who has acknowledged the military aid to Ukraine was being held up, as well as two other White House officials who defied House subpoenas to testify. The aid was later released as Congress raised questions about the holdup.

McConnell is facing criticism for saying he's taking his "cues" from the White House as he assures Trump there will not be the 67 votes needed in the Senate to convict the president. Democrats complain that he and other Republicans are not operating as impartial jurors.

The GOP leader is planning to meet soon with Schumer to discuss the contours of next month's trial, McConnell's office said.

The report released Monday by the House Judiciary Committee, a historic marker like those produced during impeachment proceedings for Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, formally lays the groundwork for the vote.

It outlines the panel's findings and includes those from the Intelligence Committee's months-long inves-

tigation that was sparked by a still-anonymous government whistleblower's complaint about Trump's July phone call with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. It also includes Republican rebuttals.

The House Rules Committee will meet Tuesday in what is expected to be a marathon session to set the parameters for Wednesday's debate.

Associated Press writers Laurie Kellman, Alan Fram and Darlene Superville in Washington, David Eggert in Rochester, Mich., and Steve Karnowski in Minnesota contributed to this report.

## Across India, opposition building against citizenship law

By EMILY SCHMALL and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Thousands of university students flooded the streets of India's capital, while a southern state government led a march and demonstrators held a silent protest in the northeast on Monday against a new law giving citizenship to non-Muslims who entered India illegally to flee religious persecution in neighboring countries.

The protests in New Delhi followed a night of violent clashes between police and demonstrators at Jamia Millia Islamia University. People who student organizers said were not students set three buses on fire and police stormed the university library, firing tear gas at students crouched under desks.

Members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party said opposition parties were using the students as pawns.

Modi's government says the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which was approved by Parliament last week, will make India a safe haven for Hindus and other religious minorities in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. But critics say the legislation, which for the first time conditions Indian citizenship on religion, violates the secular constitution of the world's largest democracy.

At Jamia Millia Islamia University on Monday, thousands stood outside the locked-down campus. Inside, hundreds of students took part in a peaceful sit-in, holding placards denouncing the injuries of dozens of students the night before.

Mujeeb Ahmad, a 21-year-old Arabic major, returned to campus Monday to join the sit-in and retrieve the book bag he lost fleeing the library, where he had been studying for exams.

"We thought we were safe in the library," he said, adding that he and others had locked the library doors from the inside. Policemen broke them down, and at least one officer fired tear gas, he said, holding up an empty canister he said he picked up from the library floor.

About 2,000 people including students and families with young children gathered at New Delhi's iconic India Gate memorial to protest the Citizenship Amendment Act and reports of students demonstrating against the law who were beaten by police at several university campuses. Priyanka Gandhi, a leader of the opposition Congress party, participated at a sit-in at India Gate for two hours. Police stood on the sidelines of the demonstration.

The law's passage has triggered protests across India, but Assam, the center of a decades-old movement against illegal immigrants, has seen the highest toll.

Assam police officials say officers have fatally shot five protesters in the state capital of Gauhati while attempting to restore order to a city that has been engulfed in demonstrations since last week. About 1,500 people have been arrested for violence including arson and vandalism, police spokesman G.P. Singh said, adding that authorities were reviewing surveillance videos and anticipated making more arrests.

Schools remain closed through Dec. 22, the government has blocked internet service statewide and a curfew has been imposed from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. Foreign journalists are not permitted to travel to India's northeastern region, including Assam, without a permit.

Municipal workers were clearing the city of burned tires and other debris on Monday and some businesses had reopened as the All Assam Students Union, which has spearheaded Assam's anti-immigration movement for decades, led a silent protest. The group and its followers fear an influx of migrants will dilute native Assamese culture and political sway.

The citizenship law follows a contentious citizenship registry process in Assam intended to weed out people who immigrated illegally. Home Minister Amit Shah has pledged to roll it out nationwide, promising to rid India of "infiltrators."

Nearly 2 million people in Assam were excluded from the list, about half Hindu and half Muslim, and have been asked to prove their citizenship or else be considered foreign. India is constructing a detention center for some of the tens of thousands of people the courts are expected to ultimately determine came to the country illegally.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill could provide protection and a fast track to naturalization for many of the Hindus left off Assam's citizenship list.

Bangladesh has repeatedly said that it would not accept anyone India determines to be a foreigner, but on Sunday, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said it has asked the Modi government for details on Bangladeshis living illegally in India so that they could be repatriated.

Momen made the comment amid concern that people were being pushed into Bangladesh from the Indian state of West Bengal.

Authorities in Bangladesh say at least 329 people were arrested on charges of trespassing from India last month and failing to prove they are Bangladeshis.

Momen said if they are determined to be non-Bangladeshi they will be sent back to India.

Associated Press writers Wasbir Hussain in Gauhati, India, and Julhas Alam in Dhaka, Bangladesh, contributed to this report.

## Hallmark's flip-flop on same-sex ads backfires

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Hallmark Channel's decision to pull, then reinstate a commercial that featured a same-sex couple kissing shows how controversy can generate more publicity than simply ignoring it.

The company also didn't help matters by reversing its decision following the backlash.

"It's hard to keep everyone happy, but flip-flopping doesn't help," said Allen Adamson, co-founder of the marketing consultancy Metaforce. "These are difficult issues to navigate but when you're going to make a call one way or another, make sure you understand the ramifications. You only want to pull the Band-Aid off once."

The debacle ultimately made a winner out of Zola, the wedding-planning website whose ads a conservative advocacy group didn't want shown on Hallmark.

"For Zola, this is Christmas times 100," said Laura Ries, president of marketing firm Ries and Ries. "Nobody ever heard of Zola, and now everybody knows it and loves it."

Paul Argenti, Dartmouth College professor of corporate communication, added that the debacle "shows you if you know who you are, what you're doing and stand by your beliefs, you'll be better off in the end."

The Hallmark Channel, owned by Hallmark Cards Inc., is Crown Media Family Networks' flagship cable channel. It is known for family-friendly programming, particularly made-for-TV Christmas-themed movies.

That reputation prompted Hallmark to pull four Zola ads with same-sex couples after getting a complaint from a conservative group with a stated mission to "fight against indecency." Hallmark allowed two ads with opposite-sex couples from Zola, though Zola pulled those after the same-sex ads were nixed.

In one of the pulled ads, two brides stand at the altar and wonder aloud whether their wedding would be going more smoothly if they had used a wedding-planning site like Zola. The lighthearted ad ends with the two brides sharing a quick kiss on the altar.

In an interview over the weekend, Hallmark spokeswoman Molly Biwer said the company felt "it was in the best interest of the brand to pull them and not continue to generate controversy."

Instead, Hallmark faced criticism on Twitter from celebrities, including Ellen DeGeneres and William Shatner. "Isn't it almost 2020? What are you thinking?" DeGeneres tweeted.

Hallmark was also mocked on "Saturday Night Live." Netflix tweeted stills from a TV show and movie

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that it labeled "Titles Featuring Lesbians Joyfully Existing And Also It's Christmas Can We Just Let People Love Who They Love."

By Sunday, Hallmark had reversed its decision. In a statement, Hallmark Cards CEO Mike Perry said Crown Media was "agonizing" over the decision. "Said simply, they believe this was the wrong decision," he said.

That, in turn, prompted calls for a boycott of the Hallmark Channel by the group that made the original complaint, One Million Moms. It accused Hallmark of caving to the LGBTQ community and portrayed the reversal as a betrayal to conservatives.

Hallmark Cards, the Kansas City, Missouri, enterprise started in 1910, has moved quickly before to respond to any flare-ups, such as when it removed a gift wrap from circulation after one person complained of seeing a swastika in its pattern. In March, it cut ties with actress Lori Loughlin, one of the so-called "Christmas Queens" who star in its holiday movies, after her arrest in a college admissions scam put the family-friendly network and extended Hallmark brand in uncomfortable proximity to a national scandal.

The group behind the latest complaint, One Million Moms, is an offshoot of the conservative American Family Association. It has tried to implement many boycotts, including one in 2008 targeting Hallmark Cards when it started selling same-sex wedding cards. It has also tried to start boycotts against Target, "Toy Story 4" and other entities it deems to be LGBTQ friendly.

Adamson said Hallmark's backlash was different from what exercise bike maker Peloton recently faced over its tone-deaf ad. That ad, widely mocked on social media, showed a man giving a reluctant wife a Peloton bike for Christmas. Ryan Reynold's Aviation Gin quickly capitalized on the debacle, showing the same actress out with friends trying to get over a split.

"The Peloton was painful for the company, but not a reflection of management values," Adamson said. "In Hallmark's case, this decision was initially and now a reflection of what they stand for. You really want to not change that story. If you believe and stand for something, that should be your North Star."

Bill Pearce, assistant dean at the University of California, Berkeley's business school, said Hallmark was ahead of the same-sex wedding issue when it introduced same-sex greeting cards in 2008, before gay marriage was legalized.

"Any goodwill engendered from the LGBTQ community is squandered and I don't think they made any friends on the other side of the issue either," Pearce said. "It's a classic blunder by indecision."

## Vulnerable Democrats fall in line behind Trump impeachment

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Utah Democrat Ben McAdams stepped into a small town city council chamber just outside Salt Lake City and took a deep breath.

"I will vote yes," McAdams told reporters.

With a tight smile, the congressman made clear, in the heart of ruby-red Utah, that he will vote to impeach President Donald Trump.

The scene played out across the nation's polarized landscape Monday as at least 31 of the most vulnerable House Democrats climbed off the fence and into the ranks of lawmakers who will vote for formal abuse and obstruction charges against Trump this week.

Trump faces two articles of impeachment brought by Democrats. One says he abused the power of the presidency by pressuring Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden. The other says he obstructed Congress by trying to block the House investigation and its oversight duties, thus thwarting the nation's system of checks and balances.

The president "betrayed the Nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections," says the 650-page report from the House Judiciary Committee accompanying the charges. Trump withheld military aid from the ally as leverage, the report says, and that "Trump, by such conduct, has demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office."

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The House vote means Trump is on the brink of becoming only the third impeached president in American history.

The votes are crucibles for the Democrats who flipped competitive districts in 2016 and stand for their own reelections next November. At stake is the Democratic-controlled House, with Speaker Nancy Pelosi at its helm.

These Democrats have been reluctant at best to back impeachment, and one is poised to leave the party over it. Rep. Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey, who opposes impeachment, lost at least six staff members Monday after he told them he was switching parties to become a Republican.

With the stakes so high, Monday's announcements on impeachment from the Democrats were tightly controlled, yet in some cases raucously received.

McAdams' consisted of a press conference, a statement and no questions.

"I will vote yes, knowing full well the Senate will likely acquit the President in a display of partisan theater that Republicans and Democrats in Washington perform disturbingly well," he said.

The scene was different in battleground Michigan, where Rep. Elissa Slotkin was both heckled and applauded as she declared that she'll vote for both articles. Her experience as a former intelligence officer, she said, won out over questions about her political future.

"There just has to be some decisions that are beyond the political calculus. It may be that voters decide in 2020 that they don't want me as their representative. I hope that's not the case," Slotkin said at a rowdy town hall in her Detroit-area swing district. Her state is a special focus of Trump's. Vice President Mike Pence is taking a bus tour across Michigan this week, ending at Trump's rally Wednesday in Battle Creek.

But with much of the attention turning to the Senate trial, the House Democrats already were pivoting to emphasize their work on issues close to home.

"I support the Articles of Impeachment," said Rep. Joe Cunningham, D-S.C., whose Charleston-area district supported Trump by double digits. His next sentence: "This process has not distracted me from delivering real results for the people of the Lowcountry." He noted that the House has passed legislation to lower prescription drugs and ban offshore drilling.

Impeachment is sensitive in Virginia, too. Rep. Abigail Spanberger, a former CIA officer, long insisted on focusing on issues other than impeachment. Then a whistleblower report on Trump's July 25 phone call with Ukraine's president revealed a pressure campaign to benefit him politically. Spanberger and fellow Virginian Elaine Luria signed an op-ed calling for an impeachment inquiry.

"I am driven by facts and evidence to protect the integrity of our democracy," Spanberger, who represents a Richmond-area district, said Monday when announcing she would vote for both articles.

Back out West over the weekend, Rep. Katie Porter spoke to a Tustin, California, town hall meeting for 12 minutes without mentioning impeachment. But it was the first question she was asked to answer, thanks to question cards drawn by lottery.

Porter laughed, saying, "I didn't see this one coming."

When she said she planned to vote yes, many in the audience burst into applause and stood up. A couple of boos were heard, but the room soon grew quiet again, and she said, "This is a sad occasion."

"We understand this is a very grave action we are taking," she added.

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Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina; Amy Taxin in Tustin, California; Dave Eggert in Rochester, Michigan; and Lindsay Whitehurst in Murray, Utah, contributed to this report.

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

## Hate sign or silly game? Military academies probe hand signs

By MARY ESCH Associated Press

When is OK not okay?

Some West Point cadets and U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen flashed what looked like a sideways OK finger gesture during a live television broadcast over the weekend at the Army-Navy football game. Now military officials are probing their intentions. Was it an affirmation? An innocent made-you-look "circle game?" Or a sinister white supremacy signal?

Screenshots and clips of the hand gestures captured by cameras at Saturday's game in Philadelphia went viral on social media. Some Twitter users condemned the gesture as a "white power" sign. Others called it the "gotcha" or "circle game" popular with children, where someone flashes an upside-down OK sign below his waist and punches in the shoulder anyone who looks at it.

The circle game, around for generations, was featured in the early 2000s sitcom "Malcolm in the Middle" and has made a resurgence as a photobomb prank in sports team photos--along the same line as "bunny ears" fingers. In more recent years, it became an internet meme in a online game of "gotcha."

But the Anti-Defamation League said the gesture, with the thumb and forefinger touched in a circle and the other fingers outstretched, has also been appropriated as a signal for white supremacy. That started as a hoax perpetuated on the online message board 4chan. The original idea was to take an innocent and common gesture and arbitrarily transform it into something that would enrage liberals.

The campaign was so successful, the gesture came to be used semi-sincerely by Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klansmen and other white nationalists to signal sympathizers in public places.

Brenton Tarrant, the white supremacist accused of killing 50 people at two New Zealand mosques, flashed the sign to reporters at a court hearing last March.

Mini-scandals involving the hand gesture have become regular media fodder. In 2018, the U.S. Coast Guard suspended an officer who appeared to be making the hand sign during a Hurricane Florence television broadcast. A high school in a Chicago suburb yanked all copies of its yearbook from distribution amid concerns about a photo in which students displayed the gesture. The Chicago Cubs last May banned a fan from games after he flashed the symbol behind a broadcaster.

The true intentions of the cadets and midshipmen who were recorded making the gesture while smiling and laughing during Saturday's game are unclear.

Heidi Beirich, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's intelligence project which investigates hate groups and extremism, said it was important that the military schools investigate to find out the context for the students and future active-duty military members using the symbol.

"Do the investigation, find out if it was harmless or not," she said.

"If these people are influenced by white supremacy, they can't be allowed to continue in the military."

There have been longstanding concerns about white supremacists in the military. In 2008, an FBI report found white supremacist leaders were making a concerted effort to recruit active-duty soldiers and recent combat veterans. A Military Times poll in 2017 found more than 30% of service members saw white nationalism as a significant threat to national security.

The Pentagon reaffirmed military policies forbidding extremist advocacy in 2017, after the Anti-Defamation League reported a Marine staff sergeant was the leader of the white supremacist group Vanguard at the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Against the backdrop of concerns about hate groups in the military, both the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, said they have appointed officers to investigate the motivations behind the hand signals flashed by their students.

Lt. Col. James Sink, professor of military science at Arizona State University and a 2000 graduate of West Point, said it may turn out the actions were innocent, if ill-advised.

"Honestly, it looks to me like they're playing the game we used to call the circle game," Sink said Monday. "I think the Army's done a lot since the 1990s when I came in to rid our ranks of white supremacists."

Oren Segal, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism, said people should let

the investigation run its course and not jump to conclusions about the motivations behind the students' gestures.

Segal said even if the motivations turn out to be innocent, the public discussion generated is a victory for white supremacists.

"This was started as a way to troll the media, to think something as simple as an OK symbol is representative of hate," Segal said. "Every time there's a public discussion like this, white supremacists who use this symbol for nefarious purposes are celebrating the fact that people are talking about them."

"If nothing else, the public scrutiny of this latest controversy demonstrates these gray areas that extremism and hate operate in," Segal said. "It's an area that makes use of pop culture, day-to-day symbols, and tries to co-opt them for hate."

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Associated Press writer Deepti Hajela in New York City contributed to this report.

## Mississippi man freed months after court rules racial bias

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Miss. (AP) — A Mississippi man whose murder conviction was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court for racial bias was released from custody Monday for the first time in 22 years.

Curtis Flowers walked out of the regional jail in the central town of Louisville hours after a judge set his bond at \$250,000. A person who wanted to remain anonymous posted \$25,000, the 10% needed to secure Flowers' release, said his attorney Rob McDuff.

At the bond hearing earlier Monday in the city of Winona, Circuit Judge Joseph Loper ordered Flowers to wear an electronic monitor while waiting for the district attorney's office to decide whether to try him a seventh time or drop the charges. Flowers also must check in once a week with a court clerk, McDuff said. He said attorneys would file papers asking the judge to dismiss the charges.

Flowers was accompanied from the jail Monday by his attorneys and two sisters, Priscilla Ward and Charita Baskin. The siblings said they were going home to fry some fish for dinner and hang out together.

"It's been rough," Flowers said. "Taking it one day at a time, keeping God first — that's how I got through it."

When asked another question, Flowers sighed, smiled and tossed his hands in the air.

"I'm so excited right now, I can't even think straight," he said with a laugh.

Flowers was convicted four times in connection with a quadruple slaying in Winona in 1996: twice for individual slayings and twice for all four killings. Two other trials involving all four deaths ended in mistrials.

Each of the convictions was overturned, but Flowers has remained in jail because the original murder indictment is still active.

During his sixth trial in 2010, Flowers was sentenced to death. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned that conviction in June, finding that prosecutors had shown an unconstitutional pattern of excluding African American jurors in the trials of Flowers, who is black.

After the Supreme Court ruling, Flowers was moved off death row at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman and taken to the Louisville jail.

During the bond hearing, Loper said it was "troubling" that prosecutors had not responded to a previous defense motion to drop the charges against Flowers. He said if prosecutors do not respond, "the state will reap the whirlwind" from him.

Assistant District Attorney William Hopper left the hearing without speaking to news reporters. He declined to comment when asked if the district attorney's office would try Flowers again.

Supporters who were among the more than 150 people packing the wooden pews of the 1970s-era courtroom hugged Flowers after the judge announced his decision. His father, Archie Lee Flowers, choked back tears. He said the first thing he would do when his son was released, was pray.

The elder Flowers said he frequently visited his son in prison, where they sang and prayed together. He said he has always believed in his son's innocence.

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Four people were shot to death on July 16, 1996, in the Tardy Furniture store in the north Mississippi city of Winona. They were owner Bertha Tardy, 59, and three employees: 45-year-old Carmen Rigby, 42-year-old Robert Golden and 16-year-old Derrick "Bobo" Stewart.

A daughter of Tardy was in court Monday. She sat across the aisle and one row back from Flowers' daughter, Crystal Ghoston, who sat in the front row.

Ghoston, 26, told The Associated Press that she had seen her father only once since he was imprisoned: about 10 years ago, and even then she could only talk to him through a reinforced window. She said they wrote letters to each other and spoke on the phone every few weeks, and that he talked about meeting her 2-year-old daughter, who calls him "Paw-Paw."

"We're so much alike," Ghoston said. "We laugh all the time on the phone."

Ghoston, of Grenada, Mississippi, said after her father's release, they will take their first-ever photo together.

Winona sits near the crossroads of Interstate 55, the major north-south artery in Mississippi, and U.S. Highway 82, which runs east to west. It about a half-hour's drive from the flatlands of the Mississippi Delta. Among its 4,300 residents, about 48% are black and 44% are white. Census Bureau figures show that about 30% live in poverty.

In mid-November, four black voters and a branch of the NAACP filed a federal lawsuit asking a judge to permanently order Evans and his assistants to stop using peremptory challenges to remove African American residents as potential jurors because of their race.

The lawsuit cites an analysis of jury strikes by Evans from 1992 to 2017 by American Public Media's "In the Dark" podcast. It found Evans' office used peremptory strikes, which lawyers typically don't have to explain, to remove 50% of eligible black jurors, but only 11% of eligible white jurors. The analysis was performed as part of a series of episodes questioning Flowers' conviction in his sixth trial.

Follow Emily Wagster Pettus on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/EWagsterPettus>

## Democratic leaders push to end labor dispute and save debate

By **BILL BARROW** and **KATHLEEN RONAYNE** Associated Press

Democratic officials are pushing for an end to a labor dispute that threatens the party's sixth presidential primary debate, scheduled for Thursday on a California university campus.

Xochitl Hinojosa, the Democratic National Committee's communications director and a lead debate organizer for DNC Chairman Tom Perez, said Monday that Perez "spent the entire weekend" urging stakeholders to engage in good-faith, mediated negotiations. He's seeking a resolution to the dispute between the food services company Sodexo and about 150 of its employees who work on the Loyola Marymount University campus that is scheduled to host the debate.

"As a former labor secretary who handled several labor disputes, he understands the importance of getting the parties back to the table, and expects that to happen promptly," Hinojosa said.

The seven candidates who have qualified for the debate have all said they would not attend a Loyola debate if the dispute persists, and at least nine candidates in the Democratic race have expressed solidarity with the UNITE HERE Local 11 amid collective bargaining that involves disagreements over wages and health care benefits.

The DNC is not looking for an alternate debate site.

A local union leader said talks with Sodexo could resume Tuesday.

"We want to thank the nine candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination who have expressed their support for Sodexo workers at Loyola Marymount University fighting for a fair contract," said Susan Minato, co-president of the local. "We look forward to continuing negotiations with Sodexo on Tuesday or sooner in hopes of reaching an agreement before Thursday's debate."

Sodexo spokesman Enrico Dinges said in an email that the company is "100% committed" to reaching an agreement and remains at the bargaining table.

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"We have been negotiating in good faith with the Unite Here Local 11 since December of last year with a goal to reach a new collective bargaining agreement that is equitable for everyone, including our employees, and we still intend to achieve such an agreement," he said.

UNITE HERE attracted immediate attention last week with its promise to picket Thursday's debate, prompting quick statements from Perez and presidential candidates. Progressive Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont were the first to say they'd boycott the debate. Former Vice President Joe Biden; Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota; South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg; entrepreneur Andrew Yang; and billionaire activist Tom Steyer followed suit.

Organized labor remains a pillar of Democrats' general election coalition, and it could play a decisive role in some early primary and caucus states, especially Nevada and California.

The local said it represents about 150 food service workers on the Loyola campus. The university said it is not a party to the dispute because it contracts with Sodexo, which employs the workers. The union said it has been in negotiations with Sodexo since March. This isn't the first time a labor dispute has complicated Democrats' plans this cycle. Houston was among the finalists for the party's 2020 nominating convention. But a lengthy contract dispute between Mayor Sylvester Turner and the Houston firefighters' union hurt the city's bid, with Perez ultimately choosing Milwaukee.

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

## 25 years later, Mariah Carey's Christmas original is No.1

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Christmas has come early for Mariah Carey: the pop star's original holiday classic, "All I Want for Christmas Is You," has reached the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart 25 years after its release.

Billboard announced that the song topped this week's chart, giving Carey her 19th No. 1 of her career. She is only behind the Beatles, who have had 20 songs top the Hot 100 chart.

Each holiday season Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" begins to climb the Billboard charts as its popularity resurfaces. Last year the song hit a peak at No. 3 and set a new one-day streaming record on Spotify.

"All I Want for Christmas Is You" is the first holiday to top the Hot 100 chart since "The Chipmunk Song" in 1958-59.

The song is from Carey's 1994 album, "Merry Christmas," which is currently No. 1 on the Billboard R&B albums chart. Carey wrapped her All I Want for Christmas Is You Tour on Sunday at New York's Madison Square Garden.

## UK's Boris Johnson talks with Trump, welcomes new lawmakers

By GREGORY KATZ undefined

LONDON (AP) — Britain's new political landscape began to take shape Monday as triumphant Prime Minister Boris Johnson talked trade with President Donald Trump and gave a pep talk to his new Conservative Party lawmakers.

The incoming class of new Conservative legislators was so big — 109 lawmakers — that organizers had to procure an extra 50 bottles of wine for the evening event, British tabloids said.

Lawmakers from all parties will be sworn in on Tuesday, the first day of the new session in Parliament.

Johnson's Conservatives received a larger-than-expected majority in last week's national election, galvanizing his efforts to secure parliamentary approval for his Brexit divorce deal with the European Union. Many of them are coming from parts of the country that for decades were strongholds of the opposition Labour Party. Overall, the Conservatives now have 365 of the House of Commons' 650 seats.

Buoyed by the decisive win, Johnson plans to move fast on his campaign mantra to "get Brexit done."

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That means ensuring a Brexit withdrawal agreement bill is passed in time for the U.K. to complete its historic departure from the European Union by the Jan. 31 deadline.

Johnson spokesman James Slack said the government will introduce the EU withdrawal bill on Friday. It will be up to the speaker of the House of Commons to determine if Parliament holds its first major vote on the bill that same day or waits until early January after the Christmas recess.

The Brexit divorce bill is expected to receive strong support in Parliament due to the Conservatives' new strong majority.

Johnson's Downing Street office said Trump, a Brexit supporter who has praised Johnson in the past, congratulated Johnson again when they spoke Monday. It said the two leaders look forward to "continued cooperation on issues such as security and trade, including the negotiation of an ambitious free trade agreement."

If the Brexit bill passes and Britain leaves the EU on time, the country will enter a transition period when EU rules and regulations would still apply in the country and people and goods would still be able to pass freely between the U.K. and the 27 remaining EU members.

Negotiators for the British government and the EU would then start trade talks with an eye toward reaching a comprehensive post-Brexit agreement.

Queen Elizabeth II will formally open Parliament on Thursday with a speech outlining the government's legislative program. The pomp and ceremony surrounding the queen's speech will be less lavish than usual because she last opened Parliament just two months ago for a session cut short by an early election.

Downing Street made two personnel announcements Monday evening: Simon Hart was named Wales Secretary and Nicky Morgan was given a place in the House of Lords so that she could remain as Culture Secretary despite having left the House of Commons.

Other tweaks were expected but key figures are remaining in their posts.

There was a first-day-of-school feeling Monday as scores of new lawmakers arrived at Parliament in London. Commons staff offered tea, coffee and cookies — and tours of the labyrinthine building — to the new arrivals. One room was set aside for "valuing everyone" sessions. A report released earlier this year found that bullying and harassment were rife in Parliament and urged reforms.

Incoming lawmakers took to Twitter to chronicle their first day at work.

The new representative for Bury in northwest England, Christian Wakeford, tweeted: "Reality with a bump, 5:33 train down to #Westminster not a morning person at all but couldn't be happier to be on this train."

Newcastle-under-Lyme lawmaker Aaron Bell shared an image of himself smiling in front of the Palace of Westminster: "Good morning Newcastle. A new dawn has broken, has it not?"

There was no such giddiness on the Labour side, which saw its worst result since 1935 in the vote Thursday, winning only 203 seats. The party is gearing up for a bruising leadership contest, which is expected to formally begin in early January. The goal is to have a replacement for leader Jeremy Corbyn in place by the end of March.

Corbyn has apologized for the party's dismal performance and has agreed to step down when a new leader is chosen.

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Jill Lawless and Danica Kirka in London contributed.

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

## 9 die in wintry crashes in several Midwestern states

BONNE TERRE, Mo. (AP) — At least nine people have died in weather-related crashes in several Midwestern states amid a storm that dumped nearly a foot of snow in places, forced schools to close and snarled traffic, authorities said.

The wintry weather was part of a storm system that hit parts of the Midwest and was expected to extend into the Northeast through Tuesday, the National Weather Service said.

In Missouri, the storm dumped 3 to 9 inches (7.6 to 22.9 centimeters) of snow across of the state. Much of Missouri was under either a winter weather advisory or winter storm warning Monday.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol said three people were killed Sunday night when a driver lost control and overturned on U.S. 67 in St. Francois County in the eastern part of the state. A motorist who was stranded after a previous crash and two good Samaritans who were trying to help were struck.

And in mid-Missouri's Callaway County, an 18-year-old was killed when his vehicle went off the side of Missouri 94 and overturned.

The patrol also said in a tweet Sunday night that it had responded to 525 calls from stranded motorists and to nearly 560 other traffic crashes. The University of Missouri was starting classes late Monday because of the storm.

In Nebraska, a crash Sunday on Interstate 80 northeast of Lincoln left three passengers ages 10, 15 and 19 dead. The crash happened when the driver of an eastbound sport utility vehicle lost control amid slick conditions, struck another eastbound vehicle before veering into the median, rolling and entering the westbound lanes. The SUV was then hit by a car and a pickup truck, according to the Nebraska State Patrol.

In Kansas, the storm brought up to 11 inches (27.9 centimeters) of snow. The Kansas Department of Transportation said multiple roads are partially or completely snow covered. A 21-year-old man died Sunday when a pickup truck in which he was riding overturned on an icy Wichita road.

Weather also is believed to be a factor in a Monday collision between an SUV and a pickup truck that killed a woman and her adult son along a road east of Indianapolis following a night of snowfall, police said. Fifty-four-year-old Amy Cox and her 24-year-old son, Isaac Cox, of New Palestine, were pronounced dead at the scene.

At St. Louis Lambert International Airport, about 20 departing flights and 20 arriving flights were canceled as of 6 a.m. Monday due to the winter storm. Lambert said in a tweet that crews worked through night and the landing strips were in good condition.

The storm also closed the University of Missouri and Emporia State University in Kansas.

## Once affordable, Phoenix rents among fastest rising in US

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Aspen Day-Flynn and her boyfriend, Travis Tolin, were thinking of moving back to her native Washington state this fall when their Phoenix landlord helped give them the push.

The monthly rent on their two-bedroom house jumped from \$1,000 to \$1,500 because the owner planned to renovate.

"It really pushed us out the door faster," said Day-Flynn, a 23-year-old hairstylist.

She and Tolin, a 25-year-old tattoo artist, found an apartment that's similar in size to their 986-square-foot (110-square-yard) Phoenix house for \$1,600 in Ballard, outside downtown Seattle. While it's among the priciest U.S. areas to live, the couple is earning more money there.

Phoenix long has been considered an inexpensive place to live, but that may be changing. Even some middle-class people are struggling to make ends meet as the desert city experiences some of the nation's fastest-rising rents, jumping as much as 7% over the past year.

The metro areas of Miami; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Raleigh-Durham and Charlotte, North Carolina, as well as Washington, D.C.; Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado, are among others with rapidly soaring rents.

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Now the fifth-largest city in the U.S., Phoenix has become a victim of its own success as Californians seek cheaper housing and snowbirds fleeing winter weather buy homes or rent apartments that sit empty during the scorching summers.

Advocates say more initiatives are needed to create affordable housing, like a nonprofit financial institution that provides loans to build apartments for working families along the city's light rail.

Better funding of the state's housing trust fund also would help, said Joan Serviss of the nonprofit Arizona Housing Coalition. The fund that once provided \$40 million to help with housing issues was capped at \$2.5 million after the recession. She said that although state lawmakers this year approved a one-time injection of \$15 million, it's far from enough.

While it's more expensive to live in Seattle, San Francisco and other cities known for a housing crisis and homelessness, Phoenix rents are outpacing salaries.

A worker in Arizona's capital must earn nearly \$20 an hour to afford an average two-bedroom apartment, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. The nonprofit says the average Arizona renter now earns about \$17 an hour. The state's minimum wage is \$11.

"We are one of the least affordable places in the United States" for housing, said Mark Stapp, executive director of Arizona State University's master's degree program in real estate development. "It's not only a social issue, it's an economic issue. Employees need places where they can afford to live."

Tenants have few options, with Arizona law largely favoring landlords. Rent control, like the 7% cap in annual increases that Oregon lawmakers approved this year, seems unlikely in a state largely controlled by Republicans.

A new luxury apartment complex with a pool and gym facing Phoenix's light rail asks about \$1,600 a month for a one-bedroom apartment and \$2,330 for three bedrooms. Older single-family homes for rent nearby include an 890-square-foot (99-square-yard) historic house with two bedrooms priced at \$2,300.

A \$600 studio can still be found to the west or the south, but in older buildings without amenities.

Metro Phoenix has hovered near the top of several commercial real estate databases for fastest-growing rents over the previous year.

Yardi Matrix ranked metro Phoenix No. 4 nationally, with a 6.1% increase in apartment rents over a year. REIS by Moody's Analytics put it at No. 2, saying monthly average rents in the Phoenix market surged 7% from the third quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2019. Only metro Miami saw a larger jump, at 7.5%, while the nationwide increase was just over 4%.

Home prices also are rising.

September figures from S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller Indices showed metro Phoenix leading the way — at 5.8% — in the highest year-over-year gains for home prices among 20 markets nationwide, followed by the Las Vegas area with 4.7% and Charlotte, North Carolina, with 4.6%.

Evictions are also up, with courts issuing nearly 44,000 eviction judgments last year, slightly more than 2017, an Arizona Republic study found.

Carisa McAuliffe, her boyfriend and her two sons were evicted in September from a two-bedroom Phoenix apartment less than a month after withholding their \$1,400 rent to protest problems like bed bugs.

McAuliffe, 37, said in her native California, tenants sometimes don't pay to persuade landlords to fix problems. She didn't know Arizona landlords can quickly evict tenants who withhold rent for any reason.

McAuliffe left her computer security job to sort things out. She and her boyfriend, who buys and sells cars, are staying with friends while the boys, ages 2 and 5, live with their grandmother.

Phoenix, like many other places, faces a shortage of affordable housing going back a decade to the Great Recession. Overall, the city's housing supply is at about 4.7% — the national average, according to REIS.

Thomas Egan, president and CEO of the Phoenix housing nonprofit FSL, said the state needs about 165,000 affordable units costing renters less than 30 percent of their income. Just 2,000 units were built this year, he said.

Nationally, housing inventory has been tight since the recession, said Andrew Aurand of the Low Income Housing Coalition. He said there are fewer units available in coastal cities and metro areas with fast-rising rents like Phoenix, where people can spend more than a third or even half their earnings on housing.

Phoenix nonprofit development organizations like Chicanos Por la Causa pick up some slack, managing about 2,300 affordable and market rate units.

Native American Connections just opened a 64-unit development downtown where income, unit size and number of occupants are used to calculate rents ranging from a \$440 studio for a lower-earning person to a \$940 three-bedroom apartment for a family earning slightly more, CEO Diana Yazzie Devine said.

"It's no secret that Phoenix is facing an affordable housing crisis," U.S. Rep. Ruben Gallego posted on Facebook.

The Arizona Democrat said the new building ensures that individuals and families who work and attend school downtown can afford to live there, too.

Scott VanSoest, who manages a complex for the Foundation for Senior Living, which helps provide affordable housing for older people, said Phoenix used to be affordable "but now rents are out of control."

Linda Stanley pays \$236 of her \$820 monthly disability check to live there.

"If I didn't qualify to live here by being disabled, I'd be homeless now," she said.

## AP Exclusive: Thousands of Ohio absentee applications denied

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Thousands of Ohio voters were held up or stymied in their efforts to get absentee ballots for last year's general election because of missing or mismatched signatures on their ballot applications, an Associated Press review has found.

The signature requirement on such applications is a largely overlooked and spottily tracked step in Ohio's voting process, which has shifted increasingly to mail-in ballots since early, no-fault absentee voting was instituted in 2005.

To supporters, the requirement is a useful form of protection against voter fraud and provides an extra layer of security necessary for absentee balloting.

To detractors, it's a recipe for disenfranchisement — a cumbersome addition to an already stringent voter identification system.

Susan Barnard, of Dayton in Montgomery County, said her 78-year-old husband, Leslie, who has cancer, missed a chance to vote last year because of a delay related to the signature requirement.

"We had planned a cruise last fall to give him something to look forward to," said Barnard, 73. "It fell at the time of the election, and we were going to vote the absentee ballot. We got right down to the wire and we didn't have one for him, and so he did not vote because of that."

She said he had hoped to vote in the election, which included races for governor, state Supreme Court and Congress. Barnard suspects her husband simply forgot to sign his ballot application.

Figures provided to the AP through public information requests to Ohio's 88 county boards of elections show 21 counties rejected more than 6,500 absentee ballot applications because a signature was either missing or didn't match what was on file. That requirement is not for the ballot itself, which faces a different battery of requirements, but merely for an application requesting one. Another five counties reported rejecting about 850 applications combined, for various reasons that the boards didn't specify.

The few counties that tracked what happened to applications after they were rejected said issues were largely addressed before or on Election Day.

Twelve responding counties recorded encountering no signature issues with the absentee applications. The remaining responding counties said they didn't track how many applications they rejected.

It's a statistic conspicuously absent from all the official data collected by the state, making it all but impossible to compare the issue across years or multiple states.

Signatures and other verification requirements are there to safeguard Ohio's elections, said state Rep. John Becker, a southwestern Ohio Republican. He said if a voter fails to sign the application form, "that's on them."

"I'm a big believer in personal responsibility," Becker said. "You've got the form in front of you. If you forget to sign it, there are consequences."

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But Jen Miller, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, said the AP analysis highlights a largely unexamined step in a process her organization already views as inefficient and subject to uneven enforcement.

"So a person can register to vote online, but if you go online to request an absentee ballot, a form is mailed to you that you have to mail back," Miller said. Her organization supports allowing people to request absentee ballots online.

In 2018, 31% of Ohio voters cast ballots before Election Day, either in person or by mail, according to AP Elections Research. That's typical for a midterm election in Ohio. Nationwide, a little less than 40% of the electorate cast ballots before Election Day in 2018.

Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose advocated as a state lawmaker for Ohio to allow voters to apply for absentee ballots online. A version of legislation he first proposed in 2013 is now before Ohio's Legislature.

"While Ohio has long been a national leader in early voting, there is certainly more that can be done to prevent issues like these from occurring," LaRose said. "Election integrity and voter access can certainly coexist, so let's work together to modernize the process so we can improve the antiquated system currently in place."

LaRose's predecessor mailed absentee ballot applications to 6.6 million of Ohio's 8 million registered voters in 2018. And state law actually says a request for an absentee ballot "need not be in any particular form" — meaning it could conceivably arrive on a cocktail napkin or the back of an envelope.

Still, the signature requirement is one of eight or nine pieces of information, depending on the type of election, that a successful request must contain.

Three states — Oregon, Washington and Colorado — conduct all-mail elections, eliminating the ballot application process by automatically mailing a ballot to every registered voter before Election Day.

Miller said Ohio has not shown the political will to move in this direction, but her organization is pushing establishment of a permanent absentee list for those voters who meet certain criteria that require help, such as illness, permanent disability or illiteracy. Seven states and the District of Columbia have just such a system.

## Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 17, the 351st day of 2019. There are 14 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 17, 1992, President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (muhl-ROO'-nee) and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (sah-LEE'-nuhs deh gohr-TAHR'-ee) signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in separate ceremonies. (After President Donald Trump demanded a new deal, the three countries signed a replacement agreement in 2018; it awaits approval by lawmakers.)

On this date:

In 1777, France recognized American independence.

In 1865, Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 8, known as the "Unfinished" because only two movements had been completed, was first performed publicly in Vienna 37 years after the composer's death.

In 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright of Dayton, Ohio, conducted the first successful manned powered-airplane flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, using their experimental craft, the Wright Flyer.

In 1938, German chemists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann discovered nuclear fission by splitting the nuclei of uranium into lighter elements.

In 1944, the U.S. War Department announced it was ending its policy of excluding people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast.

In 1969, the U.S. Air Force closed its Project "Blue Book" by concluding there was no evidence of extraterrestrial spaceships behind thousands of UFO sightings. An estimated 50 million TV viewers watched

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singer Tiny Tim marry his fiancée, Miss Vicky, on NBC's "Tonight Show."

In 1975, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was sentenced in Sacramento, Calif. to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford. (She was paroled in Aug. 2009.)

In 1979, Arthur McDuffie, a black insurance executive, was fatally injured after leading police on a chase with his motorcycle in Miami. (Four white police officers accused of beating McDuffie were later acquitted, sparking riots.)

In 1994, North Korea shot down a U.S. Army helicopter which had strayed north of the demilitarized zone. The co-pilot, Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon, was killed; the pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Hall, was captured and held for nearly two weeks.

In 2000, President-elect George W. Bush named Stanford professor Condoleezza Rice his national security adviser and Alberto Gonzales to the White House counsel's job, the same day Bush was named Time magazine's Person of the Year.

In 2007, Iran received its first nuclear fuel from Russia, paving the way for the startup of its reactor.

In 2011, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il died after more than a decade of iron rule; he was 69, according to official records, but some reports indicated he was 70.

Ten years ago: Large pieces of a climate deal fell into place on the next-to-last day of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Cincinnati Bengals receiver Chris Henry, 26, died a day after falling out of the back of a pickup truck in Charlotte, North Carolina. Academy Award-winning actress Jennifer Jones, 90, died in Malibu, California.

Five years ago: The United States and Cuba restored diplomatic relations, sweeping away one of the last vestiges of the Cold War. Sony Pictures canceled the Dec. 25 release of "The Interview," a black comedy about a plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, after hackers threatened terrorist attacks and the largest multiplex chains in North America pulled the film. Veteran broadcast journalist Richard C. Hottelet, 97, the last of the original "Murrow's Boys," died in Wilton, Connecticut.

One year ago: Actress and director Penny Marshall, who starred in the sitcom "Laverne & Shirley" before directing film comedies such as "Big" and "A League of Their Own," died in her Los Angeles home at the age of 75 due to complications from diabetes. CBS announced that former CEO Les Moonves would not receive his \$120 million severance package after the board of directors found he had violated company policy and was uncooperative with an investigation of sexual misconduct allegations. A report from the Senate intelligence committee found that Russia's political disinformation campaign on U.S. social media was more far-reaching than originally thought, with troll farms working to discourage black voters and "blur the lines between reality and fiction" to help elect Donald Trump. Google announced that it would build a new office complex in New York City, in the tech industry's latest major expansion beyond the Seattle-San Francisco corridor.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl is 89. Pope Francis is 83. Singer-actor Tommy Steele is 83. Actor Bernard Hill is 75. Actor Ernie Hudson is 74. Political commentator Chris Matthews is 74. Comedian-actor Eugene Levy is 73. Actress Marilyn Hasset is 72. Actor Wes Studi is 72. Pop musician Jim Bonfanti (The Raspberries) is 71. Actor Joel Brooks is 70. Rock singer Paul Rodgers is 70. Rhythm-and-blues singer Wanda Hutchinson Vaughn (The Emotions) is 68. Actor Bill Pullman is 66. Actor Barry Livingston is 66. Country singer Sharon White is 66. Producer-director-writer Peter Farrelly is 63. Rock musician Mike Mills (R.E.M.) is 61. Pop singer Sarah Dallin (Bananarama) is 58. Country musician Tim Chewing is 57. Country singer Tracy Byrd is 53. Country musician Duane Propes is 53. Actress Laurie Holden is 50. DJ Homicide (Sugar Ray) is 49. Actor Sean Patrick Thomas is 49. Actress Claire Forlani is 48. Pop-rock musician Eddie Fisher (OneRepublic) is 46. Actress Sarah Paulson is 45. Actress Marissa Ribisi is 45. Actor Giovanni Ribisi is 45. Actress Milla Jovovich (YO'-vuh-vich) is 44. Singer Bree Sharp is 44. Singer-songwriter Ben Goldwasser (MGMT) is 37. Rock singer Mikky Ekko is 36. Actress Shannon Woodward is 35. Actress Emma Bell is 33. Actress Vanessa Zima is 33. Rock musician Taylor York (Paramore) is 30. Actor Graham Rogers is 29. Actor-singer Nat Wolff is 25.

Thought for Today: "A life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things." — "Poor Richard's Almanack."

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