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Death Notice: Wayne Cutler

Wayne Cutler, 95, of Claremont passed away Thursday, December 19, 2019 at Avantara Groton. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.



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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Elementary Christmas Program

Dec. 20, 2019

1 p.m.

It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Redfield
Pheasants** VS



Groton Area Tigers

8:00 p.m., Friday, Dec. 20, 2019
at Redfield

Broadcast Sponsored By

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Electric

Office: 397-2440
Cell: 397-7550
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Groton Area boys go 2-0 with win over Redfield

Groton Area went on a 13-point run late in the second quarter into the third quarter to post a 68-47 Northeast Conference win over Redfield. The game was played Thursday in Groton and was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals, Blocker Construction, Groton Dairy Queen, Jark Real Estate, John Sieh Agency, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc. and Tyson DeHoet Trucking.

Groton Area made it a clean sweep, winning the junior varsity game, 50-24, and the C game, 47-22.

Brodyn DeHoet scored 21 of his 24 points in the first half and he had six rebounds and six steals. He was also eight of 10 from the free throw line. Jonathan Doeden finished with 18 points, seven rebounds, two assists, two steals and two blocks. Kaden Kurtz scored all of his nine points in the second half and had two assists. Cade Guthmiller had nine points and three rebounds. Austin Jones finished with four points and two rebounds. Isaac Smith and Jayden Zak each had two points.

Groton Area made 19 of 33 two-pointers for 58 percent, five of 17 three-pointers for 29 percent, total field goals was 24 of 51 for 47 percent, 15 of 20 free throws for 75 percent, had 27 rebounds, seven turnovers, eight assists, 11 steals, 16 team fouls and two blocks.

Redfield was 18 of 50 from the field for 36 percent, five of 10 from the line for 50 percent, had 24 rebounds with Thomas Shantz having nine, 15 turnovers, four steals, 12 assists and 18 team fouls with Kolton Haider fouling out with 7:36 left in the game.

Jaxson Frankenstein led the Pheasants with 11 points followed by Isaac Suchor and Leyton Rohlfs with nine each and Dylan Stephens, Kolton Haider and Thomas Shantz each having six.

Those making three-pointers were Guthmiller with two, Doeden with one, DeHoet with two, Stephens with two, Haider with one, and Rohlfs with three.

Redfield is playing without three of their starters. That includes Max Baloun, an all-state player, who is out for the season due to a torn ACL. He is a senior.

Groton scorers in the C game were Jackson Cogley 2, Cole Simon 2, Wyatt Hearnen 12, Jordan Bjerke 3, Tate Larson 14, Kaleb Hanten 3, Jackson Bahr 4, Cade Larson 5, Jacob Zak 2.

Groton scorers in the junior varsity game were Lane Tietz 11, Jayden Zak 16, Isaac Smith 6, Tristan Traphagen 6, Wyatt Hearnen 4, Lucas Simon 4, Kannon Coats 2, Jackson Bahr 1.

- Paul Kosel

Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Cheetahs 14, Shih Tzus 13, Foxes 12, Chipmunks 8, Jackelopes 7, Coyotes 6

Men's High Games: Brad Waage 212, Tony Waage 200, Ron Beldon 191

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier 186, Dar Larson 178, Vicki Walter 174

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 557, Tony Waage 521, Roger Colestock 515

Women's High Series: Karen Spanier 469, Nicole Kassube 463, Darci Spanier 455

Noem Statement on RFS Final Rule

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem today issued the following statement on the Environmental Protection Agency’s ruling to establish the required renewable volumes under the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) program for 2020:

“President Trump made a promise to South Dakota farmers, and the rule the EPA announced today fails to hit that mark,” said Noem. “I appreciate the EPA’s efforts to bolster ethanol production across the country, but South Dakota producers deserve better. I will be communicating with EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler and President Trump on this issue.”

In a joint October letter sent to the EPA from Noem and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, Noem said that the agency’s proposed rules “demonstrate that EPA is oblivious to the harm it has caused.” In the past three years, the EPA has issued 85 small refinery waivers, representing a loss of over 4.3 billion gallons of biofuels.

“While this rule needs more work, I’m grateful to the administration for fighting for American farmers and ranchers. I am glad to see the EPA building off our win to permit year-round sales of E-15 in their work to develop an infrastructure program. Increased ethanol production is absolutely critical for South Dakota producers as recent years have seen lower commodity prices and unstable market conditions,” Noem concluded.

Noem currently serves as vice chair of the Governors’ Biofuels Coalition. Formerly serving as co-chair of the Congressional Biofuels Caucus, Noem has been a leading ethanol advocate. She has met on numerous occasions with President Trump and top administration officials on the topic.

Former NFL player hired as Northern’s new offensive coordinator

ABERDEEN, S.D. – A former NFL player has joined the coaching staff of Northern State University Football.

Isaac Fruechte has been hired as the new offensive coordinator for the Wolves. Fruechte comes to Northern from the University of Northern Iowa, where he served as the wide receivers coach and also worked to recruit all positions in Minnesota for the DI quarterfinal team.

Prior to UNI, Fruechte served as offensive coordination/quarterbacks coach for the University of Wisconsin La Crosse. There, he worked with UW-La Crosse’s former head coach, Mike Schmidt, who joined the NSU Wolves as head coach earlier this month.

“Hiring Coach Fruechte was a big priority for us because I know the kind of person and coach he is,” Schmidt said. “He brings unmatched energy and love for the game of football while also having a wealth of playing and coaching knowledge. Coaching is in his blood and he will be a tremendous mentor for our players.”

A native of Caledonia, Minnesota, Fruechte graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2014, where he played three seasons as a wide receiver, and served as a team captain his senior season. From 2015 to 2017, Fruechte played two and a half seasons as a wide receiver and special teams player for the Minnesota Vikings. In 2016, he also had a five-game stint as wide receiver and special teams player for the Detroit Lions, before returning to the Vikings.

“It is an honor and a privilege to be joining the coaching staff at Northern State University,” Fruechte said. “I am excited to work with Coach Schmidt to build on the strong foundation that is in place and get Wolves football to the level where we are consistently competing for NSIC Championships. Wolves Country is going to see an exciting offensive style that will maximize our players’ abilities and allow them to play fast and free.”

Fruechte played high school football for his father Carl, who has led Caledonia to five straight Minnesota State High School Championships, and Caledonia holds the longest active win streak in the country with 68 straight wins. Isaac help lead Caledonia to state football titles in 2007 and 2008.

Fruechte and his wife Kenzie, an elementary school teacher, will reside in Aberdeen.

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Believe
in the magic of
Christmas

*Merry
Christmas!*



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For we have seen
His star in the East
and have come to
worship Him.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

Warm wishes from

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There may be beauty in the season, but the reason reaches deep into our hearts!

Merry Christmas!



 **DAKOTA RISK MANAGEMENT**

Michelle and Craig

Doug Abeln Seed Company

Silent Night, Holy Night
Christ the Saviour was born for us

Merry Christmas!



Doug Abeln ~ 605/380-0200

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Today



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 26 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 17 °F↑

Saturday



Partly Sunny

High: 38 °F

Saturday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 23 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 39 °F



Early Morning Fog & Low Clouds – Sunny This Afternoon

Highs:

20s & Low 30s East River

30s & 40s West River

Tonight

Mild w/ Light West Winds. Windy
For Parts of I-29 North of
Watertown

This Weekend

Warm! Highs 30s & 40s

NWS Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 12/20/2019 4:58 AM Central

Early morning fog and clouds, but by mid-day most of the region will be sunny. Above average temperatures peak during the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

December 20, 1991: Light freezing drizzle and freezing rain developed over northern South Dakota from Timber Lake to Webster. Numerous car accidents were attributed to slippery conditions. The Aberdeen Police Department reported 24 accidents in Aberdeen, but only one resulted in an injury. Numerous businesses closed and schools were canceled.

December 20, 2008: Arctic air combined with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills to the central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota from the late afternoon of the 20th until the afternoon of the 21st. Wind chills of 35 below to 45 below zero were common across the area.

1836: A famous "sudden freeze" occurred in central Illinois. A cold front with 70 mph winds swept through around Noon, dropping the temperature from 40 degrees to near zero in a matter of minutes. Many settlers froze to death. Folklore told of chickens frozen in their tracks and men frozen to saddles. Ice in streams reportedly froze to six inches in a few hours.

1929: An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas on December 20 - 21st, 1929. The storm produced 26 inches of snow near Hillsboro, Texas, and 24 inches in 24 hours in Clifton.

1977: A "Once in a Lifetime" wind and dust storm struck the south end of the San Joaquin Valley in California. Winds reached 88 mph at Arvin before the anemometer broke, and gusts were estimated at 192 mph at Arvin by a U.S. Geological Survey. Meadows Field in Bakersfield recorded sustained 46 mph winds with a gust of 63 mph. The strong winds generated a wall of dust resembling a tidal wave that was 5,000 feet high over Arvin. Blowing sand stripped painted surfaces to bare metal and trapped people in vehicles for several hours. 70% of homes received structural damage in Arvin, Edison, and East Bakersfield. 120,000 Kern County customers lost power. Agriculture was impacted as 25 million tons of soil was loosened from grazing lands. Five people died, and damages totaled \$34 million.

These strong winds also spread a large fire through the Honda Canyon on Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California. This fire, which started from a power pole on Tranquillon Ridge being blown over, claimed the lives of Base Commander Colonel Joseph Turner, Fire Chief Billy Bell, and Assistant Fire Chief Eugene Cooper. Additionally, severe burns were experienced by Heavy Equipment Operator Clarence McCauley. He later died due to complications from the burns.

1984: Lili, a rare December hurricane, was officially declared a tropical system in the central Atlantic as a distinct eye type feature was apparent on satellite imagery. The hurricane peaked at sustained 80 mph winds and a pressure of 980 millibars or 28.94 inches of mercury, a very respectable Category 1 Hurricane in December.

2006: Severe Cyclone Bondo, the equivalent of a Category 4, approaches the Madagascar coast with sustained winds of 138 mph.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 35 °F at 2:11 PM

Low Temp: 14 °F at 5:22 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 3:51 PM

Day Rain: 0.00

Record High: 60° in 1893

Record Low: -29° in 1916

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.31

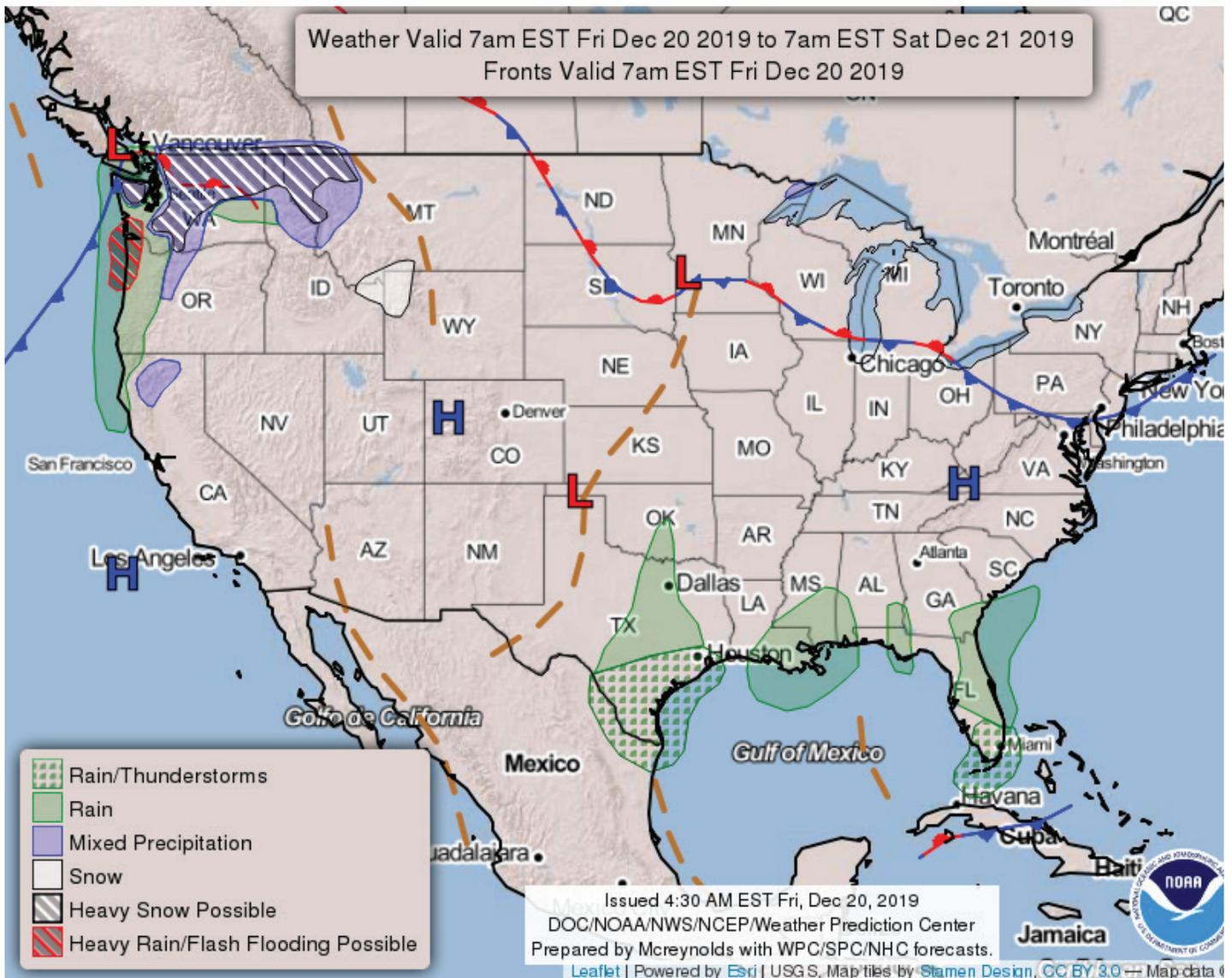
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11

Average Precip to date: 21.51

Precip Year to Date: 28.06

Sunset Tonight: 4:53 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10 a.m.



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THE JOY THAT COMES FROM CHRISTMAS

A young run-away girl collapsed on the streets of a large city at the beginning of the Christmas season. She was rushed to a hospital, placed in intensive care, and finally made it to a room where she made slow progress in regaining her health.

One evening a group of carolers stopped by her room and sang the beautiful songs that describe the birth of Jesus. After they sang, a young lady approached her bed and asked if she knew the Baby that they had been singing about.

Quietly, barely above a whisper, she said, "I heard about Him when I went to Sunday school. But don't remember too much about Him."

The young lady reminded her of the story and the meaning of the birth of Jesus and the plan of salvation. When she heard the story, she accepted the Lord as her Savior.

Finally, it was time for her to leave and a nurse said, "Well, now that you're better, it's time for you to leave."

Happily, she said, "Yes, but I'm not leaving alone. I'm taking Jesus with me. Do you know Jesus?"

"Oh, yes," replied the nurse, in a grumpy voice.

"Well, then," she asked, "why aren't you filled with joy like I am? If you truly know Jesus, you'll be happy all the time."

David said, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation!"

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we surrender our joy to the stress and strains of life. Come now and return the joy we once had when we accepted Christ as our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

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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)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 66, Leola/Frederick 54
Bridgewater-Emery 67, Menno 32
Canistota-Freeman 92, Freeman 29
Centerville 54, Avon 50
Colman-Egan 50, Garretson 41
Corsica/Stickney 55, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 48
Ethan 68, James Valley Christian 40
Faith 74, Bison 26
Faulkton 58, Herreid/Selby Area 51
Flandreau 46, Beresford 37
Gregory 62, Colome 21
Groton Area 68, Redfield 47
Hamlin 43, Deuel 38
Ipswich 55, Langford 51, OT
Kimball/White Lake 49, Mitchell Christian 45
Lennox 58, Madison 56, OT
McIntosh 51, Dupree 37
Milbank 52, Aberdeen Roncalli 50
Mitchell 51, Huron 23
Moorcroft, Wyo. 61, Edgemont 45
New Underwood 35, Hill City 21
North Central Co-Op 60, South Border, N.D. 46
Platte-Geddes 53, Burke 51
Rapid City Central 60, Spearfish 24
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 51, Sioux Falls Washington 46
Sioux Valley 86, Baltic 44
Stanley County 71, Philip 34
Timber Lake 56, Harding County 41
Vermillion 60, Irene-Wakonda 27
Wessington Springs 62, Hitchcock-Tulare 28
Lakota Nation Invitational=
Makosica Bracket=
Quarterfinal=
Crow Creek 64, Omaha Nation, Neb. 61
Red Cloud, Neb. 58, Todd County 48
Tiospa Zina Tribal 52, Pine Ridge 49
White River 52, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 50
Paha Sapa Bracket=
Consolation Quarterfinal=
Custer 62, Crazy Horse 35
Little Wound 64, Oelrichs 34
Lower Brule 83, Santee, Neb. 33
Marty Indian 50, St. Francis Indian 48

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GIRLS BASKETBAL

Aberdeen Christian 51, Leola/Frederick 39
Aberdeen Roncalli 62, Milbank 25
Arlington 49, Elkton-Lake Benton 34
Avon 51, Centerville 42
Corsica/Sticketney 66, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 30
DeSmet 67, Lake Preston 25
Dell Rapids St. Mary 56, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 38
Deubrook 46, Estelline/Hendricks 25
Douglas 61, Hot Springs 25
Dupree 60, McIntosh 20
Ethan 59, James Valley Christian 23
Florence/Henry 59, Waubay/Summit 42
Hamlin 77, Deuel 49
Harrisburg 71, Watertown 20
Highmore-Harrold 68, Potter County 48
Hill City 53, New Underwood 25
Hitchcock-Tulare 50, Wessington Springs 25
Kimball/White Lake 58, Mitchell Christian 34
Lemmon 46, Bison 22
Lennox 51, Madison 23
Moorcroft, Wyo. 44, Edgemont 21
Philip 61, Stanley County 26
Ponca, Neb. 53, Vermillion 44
Scotland 58, Bon Homme 31
Sioux Valley 56, Baltic 42
Winner 51, Burke 27
Lakota Nation Invitational=
Makosica Bracket=
Quarterfinal=
Crow Creek 64, Little Wound 40
Pine Ridge 71, Todd County 66
Red Cloud, Neb. 51, Custer 16
White River 50, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 38
Paha Sapa Bracket=
Consolation Quarterfinal=
Lower Brule 68, Santee, Neb. 51
Oelrichs 39, Marty Indian 37
Omaha Nation, Neb. 55, Tiospa Zina Tribal 46
St. Francis Indian 65, Crazy Horse 36

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

Noem says anti-meth campaign is leading people to get help

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem said Thursday the state's anti-meth campaign is doing more than just getting people talking about the drug. It's led to some people seeking treatment.

The Republican governor said 87 people have called meth addiction hotlines and 15 have been referred for treatment since the campaign was launched a month ago.

The campaign drew national attention and some mockery for a tagline that said "Meth: We're on it."

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Noem stood strongly behind the campaign, which is costing nearly \$1.4 million.

Noem said the campaign got a lot of people talking.

"We're certainly grateful that those folks are reaching out for help," she said.

South Dakota law enforcement made over 3,600 arrests for meth last year.

Noem joins chorus critical of final EPA ethanol rule

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem said Thursday she has asked President Donald Trump to make good on promises to the ethanol industry.

Noem, a Republican, told reporters she contacted the White House after the Environmental Protection Agency released its final renewable fuel standard. The agreement, which regulates how many gallons of ethanol will be added to the nation's gasoline supply, did not include language that Trump agreed to during meetings with industry officials and congressional members in September and October.

That language called for adding ethanol gallons back into the nation's gasoline supply to make up for exemptions that let some oil refineries avoid using it.

"We're going to make sure that the president is keeping his word and the EPA is following it," Noem said.

Roughly 40% of corn grown in the U.S. goes to ethanol refineries. The EPA rule may reduce demand for corn and the ethanol produced from it by allowing oil refineries to get exemptions from having to use ethanol.

The EPA's 85 exemptions of oil refineries for the 2016-2018 compliance years undercuts the renewable fuel volume by a total of 4 billion gallons, (15.1 billion liters) according to the Renewable Fuels Association.

Senate passes anti-robocalls bill; Trump expected to sign

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

The Senate approved a bill Thursday to crack down on robocalls, sending to President Donald Trump a measure meant to combat a persistent and costly problem for Americans.

The bill, which Trump is expected to sign, would stiffen enforcement and require that phone companies offer free consumer tools to identify and block scam calls. It also calls for tougher fines when individuals intentionally violate the law.

It echoes and builds on preventive measures that the Federal Communications Commission and state attorneys general have pushed for. It potentially speeds up steps the telecom industry is already taking to protect Americans from the billions of scam calls made each month.

Maureen Mahoney, policy analyst for Consumer Reports, said the measure was an important step, though "robocalls are not going to disappear overnight."

Robocalls have flooded Americans' phones because technology makes it cheap and easy to call people. Enforcement is difficult, with many scammers overseas. Even with additional enforcement powers provided in the bill, that's not likely to change, Mahoney said, which is why it's important to give consumers free tools that can stop calls.

The Senate passed the bill unanimously, on a voice vote, following House approval earlier this month.

The bill, called the Traced Act, requires phone companies to offer free call-blocking apps and verify that the number calling you is real. That's an issue because fraudsters fake numbers to look as though they're coming from the IRS or others to trick you.

The bill also gives the FCC more time to fine robocallers and lets the agency fine offenders without warning them first. The bill also pushes the agency to work with the Justice Department to go after criminals. Over the long term, that could act as a deterrent.

However, the final bill leaves out some protections that were in a previous version of a House bill, Mahoney notes. That version would have broadened the definition of what a robocall is and made it harder for companies like banks and cruise-ship vacation sellers to reach consumers.

The FCC has already told phone companies that they can block unwanted calls without getting custom-

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ers' permission first, which could help increase the use of phone-blocking apps. That order did not require the tools be made free, while the bill does. The agency has said it expected the deployment of a new phone-number system to begin this year. Many major phone companies have begun rolling it out, but to work well all carriers must adopt it.

The phone industry trade group, USTelecom, applauded the bill's passage, saying it "will supercharge" the fight against robocallers.

But experts expect that as phone companies put more tools in place to combat robocalls, scammers will adapt and try different techniques to reach victims.

Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

Supreme Court reversed meth conviction over brake light

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court has reversed a drug conviction after determining the defendant was stopped illegally in Deadwood.

In a decision issued Wednesday, the court wrote an officer stopped the man's vehicle because his brake light was emitting a white light.

Curtis Tenold was convicted of possessing and ingesting methamphetamine after police found evidence of the drug.

Tenold argued an officer didn't have any reason to stop him because his brake lights were properly working. The high court agreed, reversed the conviction and remanded the case back to a lower court.

Tribes: Oil companies should pay for pipeline spills

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers are proposing legislation that would require oil companies to pay for cleaning up any pipeline spills or leaks as plans are being made to construct the Keystone XL pipeline in the state.

The State-Tribal Relations Committee on Wednesday agreed to sponsor the bill in the 2020 legislative session at the request of South Dakota Native American tribes.

Crow Creek Tribal Chairman Lester Thompson Jr. said the bill would hold pipeline companies accountable.

"As a citizen of South Dakota, I really hate to see our local farmers, ranchers, tribal members, just the common citizen who doesn't make that big dollar like that company does, be hung with a bill for clean up that isn't their fault," Thompson said.

The bill would require companies to contribute to a state fund based on the pipeline's length with a cap of \$100 million, the Argus Leader reported.

Opponents of the Keystone XL pipeline point to a recent spill in northeastern North Dakota in raising concerns about management of the pipeline.

Crude began flowing through the \$5.2 billion pipeline in 2011. It's designed to carry crude oil across Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada and through North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri on the way to refineries in Patoka, Illinois and Cushing, Oklahoma.

Notre Dame Cathedral to miss first Christmas in centuries

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Notre Dame kept Christmas going even during two world wars — a beacon of hope amid the bloodshed.

Yet an accidental fire in peacetime finally stopped the Paris cathedral from celebrating Midnight Mass this year, for the first time in over two centuries.

As the lights stay dim in the once-invincible 855-year-old landmark, officials are trying hard to focus on the immediate task of keeping burned out Notre Dame's spirit alive in exile through service, song and prayer.

It has decamped its rector, famed statue, liturgy and Christmas celebrations to a new temporary home

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pending the restoration works, just under a mile away, at another Gothic church in Paris called Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.

And there it will remain, as works slowly progress to rebuild the cathedral after the April 15 fire destroyed its lead roof and spire and was moments away from engulfing its two stone towers.

"This is the first time since the French Revolution that there will be no midnight Mass (at Notre Dame)," cathedral rector Patrick Chauvet told The Associated Press.

There was even a Christmas service amid the carnage of World War I, Chauvet noted, "because the canons were there and the canons had to celebrate somewhere," referring to the cathedral's clergy. During World War II, when Paris was under Nazi occupation, "there was no problem." He said that to his knowledge, it was only closed for Christmas in the period after 1789, when the anti-Catholic French revolutionaries turned the monument into "a temple of reason."

Christmas-in-exile at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois this year will be a history-making moment.

"We have the opportunity to celebrate the Mass outside the walls, so to speak... but with some indicators that Notre Dame is connected to us," Chauvet said.

Those indicators include a wooden liturgical platform that has been constructed in the Saint-Germain church to resemble Notre Dame's own. A service will be led at midnight on Dec. 24 by Chauvet to a crowd of faithful, including many who would normally worship in the cathedral, accompanied by song from some of Notre Dame's now-itinerant choir.

The cathedral's iconic Gothic sculpture "The Virgin of Paris," from which some say Notre Dame owes its name, is also on display in the new annex.

The 14th-century masterpiece, which measures around two meters (six feet) and depicts Mary and baby Jesus, has come to embody the officials' message of hope following the fire.

"It's a miraculous virgin. Why? Because at the time of the fire, the vault of the cathedral completely crashed. There were stones everywhere, but she was spared. She could have naturally received the vault on her head and have been completely crushed," Chauvet said.

He recalled the moment on the night of the fire when he discovered it was saved, as he was holding hands with French President Emmanuel Macron on the cathedral's forecourt. Around midnight as the flames subsided, they were finally let inside to look. Chauvet pointed and exclaimed to Macron: "Look at the Virgin, she is there!"

He said later that Notre Dame's workmen on the ground implored him to not remove the statue from the cathedral, saying that during the restoration "we need it. She protects us."

Chauvet said having it nearby for Christmas is comforting.

"She lived very much in Notre Dame. She watched the pilgrims, all the 35,000 visitors a day ... It keeps us going," Chauvet said.

Another reason for hope: Since November, after months in the dark, the facade of the cathedral is being lit up after dusk for the first time since the fire. Tourists over the festive period can now see the famed gargoyles and stone statues at night in their full illuminated splendor from the adjacent bridges, although the forecourt is still closed.

Cathedral officials carefully chose Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois as the new temporary home because of its proximity to Notre Dame, just next to the Louvre, allowing ease of movement for clerics who lived near the cathedral. Also, because of its prestigious history.

It was once a royal church that boasted among its faithful French kings, in the days when they lived in the nearby Louvre Palace. The kings, Chauvet explained, would simply cross the esplanade to come and attend Mass.

Since September, the church has been welcoming the cathedral's flock each Sunday.

Though Notre Dame has moved liturgically to a new home, Notre Dame will always remain Paris' cathedral so long as the bishop's physical chair, or "cathedra" doesn't move.

Derived from the Greek word for "seat," a cathedral's entire identity technically boils down to the presence of a chair.

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"The cathedra is at the cathedral and so it remains Notre Dame Cathedral, which is the cathedral in the heart of Paris," Chauvet said.

It is not only the faithful who have been displaced since April's blaze.

Notre Dame was home to a vibrant 160-strong choir-school, which provided singers for each of the cathedral's some 1,000 annual services. Midnight Mass at Christmas was always a special event in the year: One of the rare times the entire choir sung together and used the cathedral's famed acoustics to their fullest.

Instead of disbanding, this now-homeless chorus of singers, ranging in age from 6 to 30, has too honed an upbeat message and decided to continue on in a divided form. Different sections of the choir put on concerts in churches, such as Saint-Eustache and Saint-Sulpice, in Paris and beyond. On Christmas Eve, its members will sing at various yuletide events, including at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, as well as, bizarrely, at the Russian Circus.

But don't mention the term choir-in-exile to one of the choir's directors, Henri Chalet.

"I'd rather use 'beyond the walls'... 'Exile' brings it back to sadness. Obviously, there is a lot of sadness and desolation for us to no longer be in our second home. But there is also a lot of hope because it is only a phase," Chalet said.

In the grand scheme of things, five or six years of restoration for an 855-year-old cathedral "is nothing at all," Chalet reasoned. Macron declared in the days after the blaze it would take a mere five years to restore the cathedral — a timeline many experts deem unrealistic.

Notre Dame choir singer Mathilde Ortscheidt, 29, left a little more space for melancholy as she regretted her absence at last year's Midnight Mass.

"To think that I was ill last Christmas...thinking that I would go again this year with no problem!" she said.

On the first rehearsal she attended after the blaze, she said she "felt such a pain and such sadness" because the cathedral was where she began as a singer.

For the singers, the unique acoustics produced by the cathedral's massive dimensions are sorely missed.

"When we balanced it right, it was the most beautiful feeling of just hearing it resonate through this enormous space," Ortscheidt said.

Despite having "to walk around a lot now," people have got used to the choir's new lifestyle, she said, and it was just a matter of time before there will be song in the cathedral once again.

In the meantime, "the important thing for us is that we keep on singing and doing the music. That's what brings us together."

Thomas Adamson can be followed on Twitter at https://twitter.com/ThomasAdamson_K

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Boeing's Starliner capsule makes launch debut, but hits snag

By **MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Boeing's new Starliner capsule ran into trouble in orbit Friday minutes after blasting off on its first test flight, a crucial dress rehearsal for next year's inaugural launch with astronauts.

Everything went flawlessly as the Atlas V rocket soared with the Starliner just before sunrise. But a half-hour into the flight, Boeing reported that the capsule's insertion into orbit was not normal.

Officials said flight controllers were looking into all their options and stressed that the capsule was in a stable orbit, at least for now.

The Starliner was supposed to reach the International Space Station on Saturday, but that now appeared to be in jeopardy.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below:

Boeing's new Starliner capsule rocketed toward the International Space Station on its first test flight Friday, a crucial dress rehearsal for next year's inaugural launch with astronauts.

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The Starliner carried Christmas treats and presents for the six space station residents, hundreds of tree seeds similar to those that flew to the moon on Apollo 14, the original air travel ID card belonging to Boeing's founder and a mannequin named Rosie in the commander's seat.

The test dummy — named after the bicep-flexing riveter of World War II — wore a red polka dot hair bandanna just like the original Rosie and Boeing's custom royal blue spacesuit.

"She's pretty tough. She's going to take the hit for us," said NASA's Mike Fincke, one of three astronauts who will fly on the next Starliner and, as test pilots, take the hit for future crews.

As the astronauts watched from nearby control centers, a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket carrying the capsule blasted off just before sunrise from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The rocket was visible for at least five minutes, its white contrail a brilliant contrast against the dark sky. Thousands of spectators jammed the area, eager to witness Starliner's premiere flight.

It was a one-day trip to the orbiting lab, putting the spacecraft on track for a docking Saturday morning.

This was Boeing's chance to catch up with SpaceX, NASA's other commercial crew provider that completed a similar demonstration last March. SpaceX has one last hurdle — a launch abort test — before carrying two NASA astronauts in its Dragon capsule, possibly by spring.

The U.S. needs competition like this, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said Thursday, to drive down launch costs, boost innovation and open space up to more people.

"We're moving into a new era," he said.

The space agency handed over station deliveries to private businesses, first cargo and then crews, in order to focus on getting astronauts back to the moon and on to Mars.

Commercial cargo ships took flight in 2012, starting with SpaceX. Crew capsules were more complicated to design and build, and parachute and other technical problems pushed the first launches from 2017 to now next year.

It's been nearly nine years since NASA astronauts have launched from the U.S. The last time was July 8, 2011, when Atlantis — now on display at Kennedy Space Center — made the final space shuttle flight.

Since then, NASA astronauts have traveled to and from the space station via Kazakhstan, courtesy of the Russian Space Agency. The Soyuz rides have cost NASA up to \$86 million apiece.

"We're back with a vengeance now," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said from Kennedy, where crowds gathered well before dawn.

Chris Ferguson commanded that last shuttle mission. Now a test pilot astronaut for Boeing and one of the Starliner's key developers, he's assigned to the first Starliner crew with Fincke and NASA astronaut Nicole Mann. A successful Starliner demo could see them launching by summer.

"This is an incredibly unique opportunity," Ferguson said on the eve of launch.

Mann juggled a mix of emotions: excitement, pride, stress and amazement.

"Really overwhelmed, but in a good way and really the best of ways," she said.

Built to accommodate seven, the white capsule with black and blue trim will typically carry four or five people. It's 16.5 feet (5 meters) tall with its attached service module and 15 feet (4.5 meters) in diameter.

Every Starliner system will be tested during the eight-day mission, from the vibrations and stresses of liftoff to the Dec. 28 touchdown at the Army's White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. Parachutes and air bags will soften the capsule's landing. Even the test dummy is packed with sensors.

Bridenstine said he's "very comfortable" with Boeing, despite the prolonged grounding of the company's 737 Max jets. The spacecraft and aircraft sides of the company are different, he noted. Boeing has long been involved in NASA's human spacecraft program, from Project Mercury to the shuttle and station programs.

Boeing began preliminary work on the Starliner in 2010, a year before Atlantis soared for the last time.

In 2014, Boeing and SpaceX made the final cut. Boeing got more than \$4 billion to develop and fly the Starliner, while SpaceX got \$2.6 billion for a crew-version of its Dragon cargo ship.

NASA wants to make sure every reasonable precaution is taken with the capsules, designed to be safer than NASA's old shuttles.

"We're talking about human spaceflight," Bridenstine cautioned. "It's not for the faint of heart. It never

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has been, and it's never going to be."

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Impeachment of Trump voted top 2019 news story in AP poll

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The drive by the Democratic-led House of Representatives to impeach President Donald Trump was the top news story of 2019, according to The Associated Press' annual poll.

Trump also figured in the second and third biggest stories of the year: the fallout over his immigration policies and the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into whether his election campaign coordinated with Russia.

But it was impeachment that was by far the top choice in the AP poll, a story that gained steam with each passing week after details emerged about a phone call in which Trump pressured the newly elected Ukrainian president to announce an investigation into his chief Democratic rival, former Vice President Joe Biden.

Congress held a series of nationally televised hearings during the inquiry, culminating with a party-line vote Wednesday evening to impeach an American president for the third time in U.S. history. The impeachment process laid bare the deep partisan divisions roiling American politics during the Trump presidency.

The selections for Associated Press story of the year were made by a panel of editors and managers from newspaper, TV station and AP newsrooms around the globe.

A year ago, the mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, — which killed 17 students and staff, and sparked nationwide student-led marches for gun control — was voted the top news story of 2018.

The first AP top-stories poll was conducted in 1936, when editors chose the abdication of Britain's King Edward VIII. Impeachment was also voted the top story of the year the last time it happened — in 1998 over the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Here are 2019's top 10 stories, in order:

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT: Led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrats moved to impeach the president based on allegations that he abused the power of his office by enlisting a foreign government to investigate a political rival. The articles of impeachment also accused Trump of obstructing Congress' oversight like "no president" in U.S. history. But Democrats failed in their bid for a bipartisan action -- no Republicans in Congress broke with the president. Trump and Republicans repeatedly mocked the process as a "sham" and insisted he did nothing wrong.

IMMIGRATION: The Trump administration carried out sweeping new immigration enforcement measures in the face of a crisis that saw record numbers of migrant families arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border. Several immigrant children died after being held in U.S. custody, children were found living in squalid conditions at cramped border facilities, and global outrage peaked after the publication of a photograph showing a drowned father and his toddler daughter in the Rio Grande across from Texas. Trump also successfully freed up billions of dollars in Pentagon funds to build his border wall and imposed new rules that has forced tens of thousands of asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their immigration cases play out in the U.S.

TRUMP-RUSSIA PROBE: After a two-year investigation, Mueller told Congress he did not find sufficient evidence to charge a criminal conspiracy between the Trump presidential campaign and Russia. However, Mueller testified that Trump was not cleared of obstructing justice. The investigation was opened by the FBI in July 2016 and taken over by Mueller in May 2017. He charged six Trump associates with various crimes as well as 25 Russians accused of interfering in the election. Mueller's congressional testimony and long-awaited report outlining Russian interference in the 2016 election were among the biggest moments of the year.

MASS SHOOTINGS: A Walmart store crowded with shoppers in El Paso, Texas, was targeted by a gunman who killed 22 people before his arrest. Police say the suspect posted anti-Hispanic writings online prior to

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the attack, and the massacre sent chills through Latino communities around the country. It was one of several mass shootings in the U.S. Targets included a garlic festival in Gilroy, California; the exterior of a bar in Dayton, Ohio, and a municipal building in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

OPIOIDS: State and local governments across the U.S. went to court seeking huge compensation from drug companies for the costs of the long-running opioid epidemic. One of the major firms, OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma, declared bankruptcy, seeking protection from its creditors as it sought to settle more than 2,700 lawsuits. The epidemic has killed more than 400,000 people in the U.S. since 2000.

CLIMATE CHANGE: The Trump administration began the process of withdrawing the United States from the Paris agreement to curb emissions, and marathon U.N. climate talks ended with no major breakthrough as large-scale polluters balked at intensifying the fight against global warming. Across the world, Greta Thunberg and other young activists called for tougher action as weather data indicated 2019 would likely be the second hottest year on record.

BREXIT: Throughout the year, Britain was deeply divided over its pending departure from European Union. Brexit supporter Boris Johnson became prime minister and soon lost key votes in Parliament and Supreme Court. But he succeeded in calling national elections, and his Conservative Party won a resounding victory -- seemingly assuring that the exit from the EU would indeed take place.

US-CHINA TRADE WAR: The world's two biggest economies skirmished repeatedly throughout the year in a tit-for-tat trade war. Just ahead of December's holiday season, the United States and China announced a limited deal, with the U.S. dropping plans to impose new tariffs and China agreeing to allow more U.S. agricultural imports. But the deal falls well short of the demands that Trump issued when he launched the trade war. Further negotiations will be needed to achieve a more significant agreement.

BOEING JETS GROUNDED: Air safety regulators worldwide grounded the Boeing 737 Max jet after one of the planes crashed in Ethiopia, killing 157 people. That occurred just five months after another 737 Max crashed off the coast of Indonesia, killing 189. In both crashes, investigators say, a faulty sensor caused a flight control system to push the nose of the plane down and pilots were unable to regain control. The grounding of the Max has cost Boeing and airlines billions of dollars; Boeing says it will temporarily stop producing the jet in January.

HONG KONG: Normally stable Hong Kong was wracked by months of massive and sometimes violent protests. The initial provocation was an extradition bill that many viewed as a sign of creeping Chinese control. But demands multiplied as residents sought to safeguard Hong Kong's freedoms. During months of clashes, riot police fired 26,000 tear-gas and rubber-baton rounds and arrested more than 6,100 people.

Other events that received top votes in the 2019 story of the year voting were the massacre at New Zealand mosques that killed 51 people; the Democratic presidential campaign; and the fire at the historic Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.

Amid citizenship law outcry, Indian authorities ban protest

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Police banned public gatherings in parts of the Indian capital and other cities for a third day Friday and cut internet services to try to stop growing protests against a new citizenship law that have so far left eight people dead and more than 1,200 others detained.

Thousands of protesters stood inside and on the steps of New Delhi's Jama Masjid, one of India's largest mosques, after Friday afternoon prayers, waving Indian flags and shouting slogans against the government and the citizenship law, which critics say threatens the secular nature of Indian democracy in favor of a Hindu state.

Police had banned a proposed march from the mosque to an area near India's Parliament, and a large number of officers were waiting outside the mosque.

About 10,000 people protested outside New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University, which was the site of weekend clashes in which students accused to police of using excessive force that sent dozens to hospitals.

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They launched a signature campaign demanding the new law be scrapped.

Violence erupted in several towns in northern Uttar Pradesh state where protesters set some police posts and vehicles on fire and hurled rocks at security forces. Police fired tear gas and used batons to disperse the protesters in Muzzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Feorzabad and Gorakhpur.

The state police chief O. P. Singh said more than 100 people had been arrested since Thursday.

The protests have targeted the new citizenship law, which 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.

Critics say it's a violation of the country's secular constitution and the latest effort by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist-led government to marginalize India's 200 million Muslims.

Modi has defended it as a humanitarian gesture.

The protests began last week at predominantly Muslim universities and communities and have spread across the country and now include a broad section of the Indian public.

A law banning the assembly of more than four people was in place in parts of the Indian capital as well as in several cities in northeastern Assam state and the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where a motorized rickshaw driver was killed during a protest in Lucknow.

A total of eight deaths have been reported so far, including five in Assam and two in southern Karnataka state.

Authorities erected roadblocks and turned areas around mosques in New Delhi, Lucknow and other Muslim-dominated areas into security fortresses to prevent widespread demonstrations after Friday prayers.

Police temporarily held 1,200 protesters in New Delhi alone on Thursday and hundreds of others were detained in other cities after they defied bans on assembly. Most protesters were released later in the day.

While some see the citizenship law as a slight against Muslims, others, including some Hindu conservatives in Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, fear it will encourage immigration to India, where public services for its 1.3 billion people are already highly strained.

"In effect, some of the BJP's own rank and file, the very people the party has sought to help, have come out against the law," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center.

Kugelman said that the government's failure to respond to the protests, except to accuse political opponents of orchestrating them, is "likely to galvanize the protesters even more."

The protests come amid an ongoing crackdown in Muslim-majority Kashmir, the restive Himalayan region stripped of its semi-autonomous status and demoted from a state into a federal territory last summer.

They also follow a contentious process in Assam meant to weed out foreigners in the country illegally. Nearly 2 million people were excluded from an official list of citizens, about half Hindu and half Muslim, and have been asked to prove their citizenship or else be considered foreign.

India is also building a detention center for some of the tens of thousands of people the courts are expected to ultimately determine have entered illegally. Modi's interior minister, Amit Shah, has pledged to roll out the process nationwide.

Critics say the process is a thinly veiled plot to deport millions of Muslims.

Associated Press Writer Sheikh Saaliq contributed to this report from New Delhi.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

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

1. BUTTIGIEG A TARGET AT LOS ANGELES DEBATE Elizabeth Warren attacked the centrist Indiana mayor's fundraising practices, while Amy Klobuchar challenged his limited governing experience.
2. PELOSI WIELDS 'POWER OF THE GAVEL' This week, the House speaker delivered a \$1.4 trillion government funding package, pushed through a bipartisan trade deal, passed her party's plan to lower

prescription drug costs — and impeached the president.

3. VATICAN TRIBUNAL OVERWHELMED BY CLERGY ABUSE CASES A record 1,000 cases have been reported in 2019, many of them from countries not been heard from before, AP learns

4. INDIA REELING FROM CITIZENSHIP LAW OUTCRY Police ban public gatherings in parts of New Delhi and other cities for a third day and cut internet services to try to stop growing protests against a new citizenship law.

5. EARLY PG&E BLACKOUTS FOREWARNED LATER PROBLEMS An AP review reveals persistent problems during four smaller shutoffs that California's largest utility did starting last year so power lines downed by strong winds wouldn't spark wildfires.

6. US WARY OF KIM'S 'CHRISTMAS SURPRISE' The United States is closely watching North Korea for signs of a possible missile launch or nuclear test in the coming days.

7. IRAQ PROTESTS TAKE TOLL ON ECONOMY Iraqi merchants and foreign investors are eyeing ongoing hostilities in the country with concern as anti-government protests enter a third month.

8. 'PROFOUNDLY IMMORAL' A major evangelical Christian magazine founded by the late Rev. Billy Graham published an editorial calling for Trump's removal from office.

9. HOW TOY RETAILERS HOPE TO LURE SHOPPERS A new generation of toy stores is hoping to grab a piece of the \$28 billion U.S. industry by emphasizing more hands-on experiences.

10. WHO WAS CROWNED MISS AMERICA Camille Schrier, a biochemist from Virginia, says she hopes to "break stereotypes" about what it means to win the pageant in 2020.

Pelosi: Power of gavel means Trump is 'impeached forever'

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nancy Pelosi promised as speaker she would "show the power of the gavel." This year, she laid it out for all to see.

The past week alone, the Democratic leader delivered a \$1.4 trillion government funding package to stop a shutdown, pushed through the bipartisan U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, and passed her party's plan to lower prescription drug costs. In between, she led a congressional delegation to Europe for the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge.

And on Wednesday, she impeached the president.

As the first year of Pelosi's second stint as speaker draws to a close — she is the only woman to hold the office, and the first speaker in 60 years to reclaim the gavel after losing it — the California Democrat took stock of whether she fulfilled her campaign trail promise.

"Donald Trump thinks so," Pelosi told The Associated Press during an interview Thursday at her office in the Capitol.

"He just got impeached. He'll be impeached forever. No matter what the Senate does. He's impeached forever because he violated our Constitution," she said.

"If I did nothing else, he saw the power of the gavel there," Pelosi told the AP. "And it wasn't me, it was all of our members making their own decision."

Not since an earlier era of leaders — like Sam Rayburn, whose name is on a building at the Capitol, or Newt Gingrich, who defined a political movement — has the House speaker wielded such influence.

"She has governed with force and authority," said Julian Zelizer, a professor of history and public policy at Princeton.

Zelizer said Pelosi has accomplished with Trump what others have not, which is to build a coalition strong enough to hold the president accountable, through impeachment, while also muscling through big bills. This, on top of what she did during her first term in the office.

"She is likely to go down in history as one of the most effective Speakers," he said.

Congress often runs toward a big year-end finish as lawmakers try to rack up accomplishments for the elections ahead. Lame-duck sessions, which this year is not, are often particularly robust as members capitalize on the narrow calendar window after the election but before the new Congress forms.

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Former Speaker Paul Ryan delivered the GOP's sweeping tax cuts package in December 2017. Former Speaker John Boehner tried to secure the fiscal cliff deal of taxing and spending at the end of 2012, and it was eventually approved at New Year's.

Pelosi's earlier term as speaker, from 2007-2011, saw Democrats approve the signature achievement of the Obama era, the Affordable Care Act, during Christmas in 2009, though most of the action by that stage in the legislative process had moved in the Senate.

She regained the gavel in January of this year, emerging from a contentious internal party election, after sweeping House Democrats to the majority in the 2018 midterm elections.

Pelosi's ability to steer the agenda is shaped in part by her decades in office. She immodestly calls herself a master legislator, but there's truth in the brag — she brings more legislative experience to her job than those immediate predecessors. Particularly during the start of Obama's first term, when her party controlled both chambers, she ushered health care, financial reform and other major items to passage in what historians say was the most productive session of Congress since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society years.

Critics contend Pelosi strong-armed bills through the House, resulting in 2010 Democratic midterm election losses that cost the party its majority and her the gavel.

Trump said Democrats are on a "suicide march" toward electoral defeat once again with impeachment. "Crazy Nancy Pelosi's House Democrats have branded themselves with an eternal mark of shame," Trump told a rally crowd in battleground Michigan on the night he was being impeached.

The Republican leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, said Pelosi's House isn't accomplishing much because she is wasting time on impeachment.

But she notes that it's McConnell who calls himself the "grim reaper" in his Senate graveyard of House-passed bills he refuses to bring forward for a vote.

"The time is not up," Pelosi said Thursday, a reminder that all those pieces of legislation carry over to 2020, because Congress runs in two-year cycles and this session doesn't conclude for another year.

"As the election approaches, we would not want these to be election issues, we would like them to be accomplished legislation," she said. "So they either pass the bills or pay a price for not passing bills."

The impeachment vote will be what history remembers most from this week. But passing the trade bill is a major win for both parties. And approving the government funding — Pelosi was negotiating the package in calls with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin during her weekend diplomacy paying tribute to World War II veterans in Europe — counts too. Last year at this time, the government was heading toward what would become the nation's longest-ever federal shutdown.

US watching North Korea for 'Christmas gift' missile launch

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is closely watching North Korea for signs of a possible missile launch or nuclear test in the coming days that officials are referring to as a "Christmas surprise."

A significant launch or test would mean the end of North Korea's self-imposed moratorium and raise tensions in the region. It would also be a major blow to one of the Trump administration's major foreign policy initiatives: the drive to get North Korea back to negotiations to eliminate its nuclear weapons and missiles.

Earlier this month, the North conducted what U.S. officials say was an engine test. North Korea described it as "crucial" and experts believe that it may have involved an engine for a space launch vehicle or long-range missile. Officials worry that it could be a prelude to the possible launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile in the coming days or weeks.

Any test involving an ICBM would have the most serious impact on the diplomatic effort because it would be considered a move by North Korea to acquire the ability to strike the United States, or, even worse, to show they already have it.

"North Korea has been advancing. It has been building new capabilities," said Anthony Wier, a former

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State Department official who tracks nuclear disarmament for the Friends Committee on National Legislation. "As long as that continues, they gain new capabilities to try new missiles to threaten us and our allies in new ways,"

The North Koreans warned of a possible "Christmas gift" in early December, saying the Trump administration was running out of time to salvage nuclear negotiations, and it was up to the U.S. to choose what "Christmas gift" it gets from the North.

Victor Cha, a Korea expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said a review of the possible launch sites in North Korea show that they are a "basically ready to go." He said the expected launch could be a test of a sea-based ballistic missile or a solid-fuel rocket.

Using solid fuel allows North Korea to more quickly fuel up a rocket, providing less lead time for the U.S. or others to prepare for a launch. Sea-based launches are also more difficult to locate and would give less warning or time for the U.S. to react.

Either one, he said, "would be a new type of problem that the U.S. would have to deal with."

Defense Secretary Mark Esper told reporters earlier this week that the U.S. has heard all the talk of a possible upcoming test around Christmas.

"I've been watching the Korean Peninsula for a quarter-century now. I'm familiar with their tactics, with their bluster," he said. "We need to get serious and sit down and have discussions about a political agreement that denuclearizes the peninsula. That is the best way forward and arguably the only way forward if we're going to do something constructive."

Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, the special U.S. envoy for North Korea, has also warned of a possible launch.

"We are fully aware of the strong potential for North Korea to conduct a major provocation in the days ahead," he said. "To say the least, such an action will be most unhelpful in achieving lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula."

At a meeting in Singapore in June 2018, Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued a joint statement that said the North "commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

But negotiations stalled this year after the U.S. rejected North Korean demands for broad sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of the North's nuclear capabilities at Kim's second summit with Trump last February.

Since then, Pyongyang's testing and rhetoric has escalated.

Since the Singapore summit, Cha said, Pyongyang has done more testing and grown their missile capabilities. "By most metrics, the Trump policy is not succeeding," he said.

According to the U.S. military, North Korea has launched more than 20 missiles this year. They've included new types of missiles as well as a submarine-launched ballistic missile, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

"The Trump administration and President Trump himself deserves some credit for allowing diplomacy," Wier said. "That's a good thing. Now is the time to empower real diplomacy."

North Korea conducted a torrent of missile tests in 2017. It flew two new intermediate-range missiles over Japan and threatened to fire those weapons toward the U.S. territory of Guam. It also tested three developmental ICBMs, including the Hwasong-15 that demonstrated potential range to reach deep into the U.S. mainland.

Those ICBM tests, however, showed no clear sign that the North had perfected the technology needed to ensure that a warhead could survive the harsh conditions of atmospheric re-entry. According to experts at 38 North, a website specializing in North Korea studies, all of the 2017 launches were on highly lofted trajectories and the missiles' reentry vehicles were not subjected to the thermal and mechanical stresses that would be created by a full-range flight.

Experts said North Korea needed additional flight tests to determine the reliability and accuracy of its ICBMs and establish a capable re-entry protection system.

Those 2017 tests triggered a sharp U.S. reaction. Trump said he would bring "fire and fury" on North

Korea and exchanged threats of total destruction with Kim, touching off fears of war on the Korean Peninsula. Kim subsequently suspended ICBM and nuclear tests, allowing Trump to brag about that as a foreign policy win. The North has not performed any known tests of ICBMs since the Hwasong-15 launch in November 2017.

Esper said the U.S. has a team on the Korean peninsula now that has reached out to the North and is asking for meetings. At the same time, he said the U.S. military remains at a high level of readiness.

Esper has visited Korea twice this year since being sworn in as defense chief. A key discussion point has been the reduction in U.S. military exercises with South Korea — a move by the Trump administration to appease North Korea and woo them to the negotiating table for denuclearization talks.

The U.S. has about 28,000 troops in South Korea.

Associated Press writer Ben Fox contributed to this report.

Buttigieg-Warren clash on campaign trail spills into debate

By **STEVE PEOPLES, KATHLEEN RONAYNE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE** Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The long-festering feud between Elizabeth Warren and Pete Buttigieg erupted Thursday night in a high-stakes debate that tested the strength of the Democratic Party's shrinking pool of presidential contenders just six weeks before primary voting begins.

Buttigieg, the 37-year-old mayor of South Bend, Indiana, has emerged as an unlikely presidential power player, gaining ground with a centrist message. Warren, the Massachusetts senator who has become his progressive foil, attacked Buttigieg's fundraising practices. And Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who is competing with Buttigieg for moderate voters, challenged his limited governing experience.

The debate came a day after a highly contentious vote to impeach President Donald Trump, which showed in dramatic relief how polarized the nation is over his presidency. With the Republican-controlled Senate likely to acquit him, the stakes are high for Democrats to select a challenger who can defeat Trump in November.

The forum highlighted the choice Democrats will have to make between progressive and moderate, older and younger, men and women and the issues that will sway the small but critical segment of voters who will determine the election. The candidates sharply disagreed about the role of money in politics, the value and meaning of experience and the direction of the American health care system.

In the most pointed exchange, Warren zeroed in on Buttigieg's recent private meeting with wealthy donors inside a California "wine cave," the details of which were recounted in a recent Associated Press story.

"Billionaires in wine caves should not pick the next president of the United States," she charged.

Buttigieg, who has surged into the top tier of the Democratic Party's 2020 primary in part because of his fundraising success, did not back down.

"We need to defeat Donald Trump," he responded, noting that Trump's reelection campaign has already accumulated hundreds of millions of dollars. "We shouldn't try to do it with one hand tied behind our back."

The focus on Buttigieg at the Los Angeles debate highlighted his strength in the Democratic Party's turbulent primary contest just 46 days before voting begins, with polls showing him at or near the lead in Iowa's kickoff caucus. But the confrontation also raised broader concerns about the direction of the race: Democrats are not close to unifying behind a message or messenger in their quest to deny Trump a second term.

In fact, as the debate revealed, the party is still consumed by a high-stakes tug-of-war between feuding factions that must ultimately come together in order to beat Trump. One side, led by Warren and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, is demanding transformational change to the U.S. economy and political system. The other, led by former Vice President Joe Biden, Buttigieg and Klobuchar, prefers a more cautious return to normalcy after Trump's turbulent reign.

Klobuchar repeatedly dinged Buttigieg as "mayor," noting that he lost his only statewide campaign in Indiana as well as his bid to become the Democratic National Committee chairman.

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"I have not denigrated your experience as a local official. I have been one," Klobuchar said. "I just think you should respect our experience when you look at how you evaluate someone who can get things done."

Buttigieg responded: "You actually did denigrate my experience, senator."

Biden, having seemingly regained his footing as the establishment favorite in the crowded contest, side-stepped any missteps or damaging attacks. But in the debate's final moments, he engaged in a heated exchange with Sanders over health care.

Sanders has proposed a "Medicare for All" single-payer system, which Biden dismissed as "unrealistic." Biden pushed a plan that he says would build on "Obamacare," but Sanders argued that Biden would just be keeping the status quo.

The focus of attention throughout the night, however, was Buttigieg.

The small-city mayor, who would be the first openly gay president, has grappled with questions about his ties to Wall Street and wealthy donors for several weeks. In recent days, he hosted wealthy donors at a California wine cave, disclosed consulting work for a big insurance company that preceded layoffs and released a list of wealthy bundlers.

His challenges with black voters are well documented, but suddenly, Buttigieg's corporate connections are beginning to alienate the party's progressive activists.

"I do not sell access to my time," Warren said of Buttigieg's aggressive fundraising schedule.

"As of when, Senator?" Buttigieg fired back, referring to Warren's reliance on wealthy donors before becoming a presidential candidate.

The feud softened by the time moderators posed their final question: Is there another candidate onstage whom you would like to ask forgiveness from or give a gift to?

Buttigieg said it would be a gift for anyone on stage to become president "compared to what we've got." And he called for unity once Democrats pick their nominee.

"Let's make sure there's not too much to ask forgiveness for by the time that day comes," he said.

When it was her turn, Warren's voice briefly quivered when she said she'd ask for forgiveness. Sometimes, she said, she gets "a little worked up" and "a little hot." But "I don't really mean to."

Democrats faced a silent challenge Thursday. For the first time this primary season, no black or Latino candidate appeared onstage. The omission was embarrassing, at best -- and politically dangerous, at worst -- as Democrats fight to convince people of color that they're not taking their vote for granted.

Asked what message the lack of diversity on the debate stage sends, Sanders tried to shift the conversation back to a discussion about climate change. Admonished by one of the moderators to stick to the question, Sanders countered that people of color will suffer "the most if we do not deal with climate change."

The only nonwhite candidate on stage, Andrew Yang, called it "both an honor and a disappointment" to be the only candidate of color on the debate stage. He said he missed California Sen. Kamala Harris, who folded her campaign this month, and New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, who failed to qualify for the debate. "I think Cory will be back," Yang predicted.

For most of the political world, Thursday's debate marks the informal conclusion of the first year of the 2020 presidential campaign.

It has been a turbulent season that began with more than 20 candidates and ends with just seven on stage. The infighting on display, however, and the relatively large number of candidates, could lead to a long, expensive and painful nomination fight ahead.

The next debate is scheduled for Jan. 14, just 20 days before voting begins in Iowa.

Peoples and Superville reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Michael R. Blood contributed to this report from Los Angeles.

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Tokyo Olympics say costs \$12.6B; Audit report says much more

By **STEPHEN WADE** and **MARI YAMAGUCHI** Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Tokyo Olympic organizers said Friday they are spending 1.35 trillion Japanese yen — about \$12.6 billion — to stage next year's games. Organizers said the expenditure is unchanged from a year ago, although robust sponsorship and ticket sales have generated a contingency fund of an extra \$300 million.

However, Japan's National Audit Board, in a 177-page report prepared for the national legislature, said next year's Olympics will cost much more than organizers say.

The audit lists an added \$9.7 billion (1.06 trillion yen) it says are Olympic-related costs that have not been included. In addition, the city of Tokyo has previously said it would spend another \$7.4 billion (810 trillion yen) on Olympic-related projects. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said at the time the spending was "for projects directly and indirectly related to the games."

She said this included building barrier-free facilities for Paralympic athletes, training programs for volunteers, and advertising and tourism plans.

Organizers argue that many of these costs are not tied directly to the Olympics.

The audit board, however, came up with similar findings a year ago.

"As in the previous year, their report did not classify the cost of these items and activities based on their direct relevance to the games," Tokyo organizers said in a statement to the Associated Press. "It aggregated a wide range of projects that could be seen as contributing to the games, including those that were implemented without regard to the games."

The respected Japanese financial newspaper Nikkei and the daily Asahi also calculated Olympic costs. They said spending was far above what organizers contend. They also placed overall spending at about 3 trillion yen, or about \$28 billion.

The audit board report urged more transparency.

"In order to disclose information to the public and gain their understanding about operations that the government should shoulder, the government Olympic and Paralympic office should disclose more by grasping the overall picture of the operations and costs," the audit said.

The only non-public money being spent to fund the Olympics is from the privately funded, \$5.6 billion operating budget. Revenue for this budget comes from sponsorships, ticket sales, and marketing — and from a contribution from the International Olympic Committee.

The rest is taxpayer money from the national government, the city of Tokyo, and other government bodies.

When Tokyo was awarded the Olympics in 2013, the bid committee projected total costs would be \$7.3 billion.

Organizers also reported this week that demand in Japan for Olympic tickets is about 20 times over supply. This has led to criticism on social media by Japanese upset they cannot get tickets to an Olympics they are funding through their taxes.

Tracking Olympic costs is always disputed amid arguments over what are — and what are not — Olympic expenditures. The IOC and local organizers usually claim a lower figure. In fact, the IOC has repeatedly emphasized how it has cut billions in Tokyo by having organizers use existing venues, or build temporary venues.

The Tokyo Olympics open on July 24 and close Aug. 9. They are followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 25 through Sept. 6.

The International Olympic Committee has been criticized for the rising costs of the Olympics, and the perception it forces host cities to build "white elephant" sports venues. In the last several years it has tried to re-brand itself, emphasizing the use of existing venues and giving host cities choices in how they organize.

In a study on Olympic spending done in 2016 by the University of Oxford, author Bent Flyvbjerg explained the Olympics and cost overruns.

"It's the most amazing thing that the Olympic games are the only type of mega-project to always exceed their budget," Flyvbjerg said in an interview.

"We think it's because they always have to be on time. There's no way you can move the opening dates.

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... So all you can do when problems begin — and problems always begin on projects of this size — it to throw more money at the project. And that's what you do at the Olympics."

This story has been corrected to show the contingency fund is of an extra \$300 million instead of \$30 million.

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Stephen Wade on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/StephenWadeAP>

Vatican tribunal now overwhelmed by clergy abuse cases

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican office responsible for processing clergy sex abuse complaints has seen a record 1,000 cases reported from around the world this year, including from countries it had not heard from before — suggesting that the worst may be yet to come in a crisis that has plagued the Catholic Church.

Nearly two decades after the Vatican assumed responsibility for reviewing all cases of abuse, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is today overwhelmed, struggling with a skeleton staff that hasn't grown at pace to meet the four-fold increase in the number of cases arriving in 2019 compared to a decade ago.

"I know cloning is against Catholic teaching, but if I could actually clone my officials and have them work three shifts a day or work seven days a week," they might make the necessary headway, said Monsignor John Kennedy, the head of the congregation's discipline section, which processes the cases.

"We're effectively seeing a tsunami of cases at the moment, particularly from countries where we never heard from (before)," Kennedy said, referring to allegations of abuse that occurred for the most part years or decades ago. Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Italy and Poland have joined the U.S. among the countries with the most cases arriving at the congregation, known as the CDF.

Kennedy spoke to The Associated Press and allowed an AP photographer and video journalists into the CDF's inner chambers -- the first time in the tribunal's history that visual news media have been given access. Even the Vatican's most secretive institution now feels the need to show some transparency as the church hierarchy seeks to rebuild trust with rank-and-file Catholics who have grown disillusioned with decades of clergy abuse and cover-up.

Pope Francis took a step towards showing greater transparency with his decision this week to abolish the so-called "pontifical secret" that governs the processing of abuse cases to increase cooperation with civil law enforcement.

But the CDF's struggles remain, and are emblematic of the overall dysfunction of the church's in-house legal system, which relies on bishops and religious superiors, some with no legal experience or qualified canon lawyers on staff, to investigate allegations of sexual abuse that even the most seasoned criminal prosecutors have difficulty parsing. The system itself is built on an inherent conflict of interest, with a bishop asked to weigh the claim of an unknown alleged victim against the word of a priest who he considers a spiritual son.

Despite promises of "zero tolerance" and accountability, the adoption of new laws and the creation of expert commissions, the Vatican finds itself still struggling to reckon with the problem of predator priests -- a scourge that first erupted publicly in Ireland and Australia in the 1990s, the U.S. in 2002, parts of Europe beginning in 2010 and Latin America last year.

"I suppose if I weren't a priest and if I had a child who were abused, I'd probably stop going to Mass," said Kennedy, who saw first-hand how the church in his native Ireland lost its credibility over the abuse scandal.

"I'd probably stop having anything to do with the church because I'd say, 'Well, if you can't look after children, well, why should I believe you?'"

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But he said the Vatican was committed to fighting abuse and just needed more time to process the cases. "We're going to look at it forensically and guarantee that the just outcome will be given," he said in an interview.

"It's not about winning people back, because faith is something that is very personal," he added. "But at least we give people the opportunity to say, 'Well, maybe give the church a second chance to hear the message.'"

Located in a mustard-colored palazzo just inside the Vatican gates, the CDF serves as the central processing center for abuse cases as well as an appeals court for accused priests under the church's canon law, a parallel legal system to civil law enforcement that dispenses ecclesial justice.

In the past, when the CDF was known as the Holy Office or the Sacred Roman and Universal Inquisition, such church punishments involved burnings at the stake for heretics and publishing lists of banned books that the faithful were forbidden to read.

Today, CDF justice tends more toward ordering errant priests to prayer, penance and prohibition from celebrating Mass in public. In fact the worst punishment handed down by the church's canon law, even for serial child rapists, is essentially being fired, or dismissed from the clerical state.

While priests sometimes consider defrockings to be equivalent to a death sentence, such seemingly minor sanctions for such heinous crimes have long outraged victims, whose lives are forever scarred by their abuse. But recourse to church justice is sometimes all the victims have, given the statutes of limitations for pursuing criminal charges or civil litigation have often long since passed by the time a survivor comes to terms with the trauma and decides to report the abuse to authorities — usually to prevent further harm.

"I wanted to make sure that this priest does not have access to any children," said Paul Peloquin, a Catholic clinical psychologist and abuse survivor who reported his abuser to the archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1990.

By then, church authorities had known for decades that the Rev. Earl Bierman groped young boys, and they had sent him off for therapy. But his bishops kept putting him back in ministry, where he is believed to have abused upwards of 70 children. A Kentucky jury convicted him in 1993 and sentenced him to 20 years in prison, where he died in 2005.

Peloquin, however, never received a reply to his initial complaint to his bishop.

"It just made me angry," said Peloquin, who now counsels victims from a faith-based perspective that emphasizes forgiveness in healing. "It seemed like they would have called me up right away and said, 'Let's hear about what you've got to say.'"

Because of cases like his, where the bishop ignored the victim, protected the pedophile and placed the church's reputation above all else, the CDF under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2001 persuaded Pope John Paul II to centralize the process.

The aim was to crack down on abusers and provide bishops and religious superiors with needed guidance to punish the priests rather than move them around from parish to parish, where they could abuse again. At no time has the Vatican ever mandated superiors report abusers to police, though it has insisted they cooperate with civil reporting laws.

The 2001 revision calls for bishops and religious superiors who receive an allegation to conduct a preliminary investigation, which in the U.S. is often done with the help of a lay review board.

If the bishop finds the claim has a semblance of truth, he sends the documentation to the CDF which tells the bishop how to proceed: via a full-blown canonical trial, a more expedited "administrative" procedure, or something else, including having the CDF itself take over the investigation.

Over the ensuing months and years, the bishop continues the investigation in consultation with the CDF. Eventually the bishop reaches a verdict and a sanction, up to and including dismissal from the clerical state, or laicization.

If the priest accepts the penalty, the case ends there. If he appeals, the case comes to the CDF for a final decision.

From 2004 to 2014 — roughly the years of Benedict's papacy with a year on each bookend — some

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848 priests were defrocked around the world and another 2,572 were sanctioned to lesser penalties, according to Vatican statistics.

The Vatican hasn't published updated statistics since then, but Benedict's get-tough defrocking approach has seemingly gone unmatched by Francis. The Jesuit pope appears more swayed by arguments that the church and society are better served if abusers remain in the priesthood, albeit out of active ministry with young people, so they are at least under surveillance by their superiors and not able to have access to children in other jobs.

The appeals are decided in an ivory damask-walled conference room on the first floor of the Palazzo Sant'Uffizio, the CDF headquarters a stones' throw from St. Peter's Square.

The room is dominated by a massive wooden crucifix on the wall that faces St. Peter's Basilica, and, in each corner of the room, a closed-circuit TV camera peering down on CDF staff.

The cameras record the debates on DVDs for the CDF's own archives and in case the pope ever wants to see what transpired.

It is wretched work, reading through case files filled with text messages of priests grooming their victims, psychological evaluations of pedophiles, and heart-numbing letters from men and women who were violated as children and are finally coming to terms with their traumas.

"There are times when I am pouring over cases that I want to get up and scream, that I want to pack up my things and leave the office and not come back," Kennedy told Catholic journalists in the U.S. earlier this year.

Nearly 20 years after the CDF assumed responsibility for the cases, it has processed 6,000 abuse cases, and at one point Francis lamented that it had a backlog of 2,000. But the CDF now must cope with the globalization of the scandal that in 2001 seemed to be largely confined to the English-speaking world.

Today, the CDF counts just 17 officials, with occasional help from other CDF staff, plus the superiors. Kennedy said he was planning to bring in a Brazilian, Polish and bilingual American canonist to help offset the expected departures of current CDF staff and to process cases from countries that are only now having a reckoning with abuse.

But there are still countries the CDF has never heard from — a scenario that suggests "either that they're all saints or we don't know about them yet," Kennedy told AP.

The implication is that victims are still cowed, and bishops are still covering up cases. A new Vatican law mandates all abuse and cover-up be reported to church officials, but there is no automatic penalty if anyone fails to do so.

Not even in the U.S., which has the most stringent reporting mechanisms in place, is there any way to ensure that bishops are forwarding allegations to the CDF as required.

"There has never been independent review of diocesan compliance with that law," said the Rev. James Connell, a canon lawyer who represents abuse survivors.

Walk into the Pontifical Gregorian University library, climb up the spiral staircase to the legal stacks and you'll find volume after volume of "Decisiones Seu Sententiae" — the Latin-language legal decisions from one of the Holy See's main tribunals, the Roman Rota.

The tomes contain hundreds of decrees of petitions to nullify Catholic marriages from around the world — the Vatican-stamped paperwork Catholics need to remarry in the church after divorcing.

But there is no such jurisprudence published for the Vatican's other main tribunal, the CDF. None of those rulings are ever published. And that is because until this past week, abuse cases were covered by the highest form of confidentiality in the church, the so-called "pontifical secret."

St. John Paul II decreed that abuse cases would be kept under such tight secrecy in 2001, and defenders argued it was the best way to protect the privacy of the victim, the reputation of the accused and the integrity of the process.

Critics said the pontifical secret was used to keep the scandal hidden, prevent police from acquiring internal documentation and silence victims. The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a scathing

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denunciation of the secrecy in 2014, and victims long complained how it retraumatized them:

Many were held to secrecy for decades by their abusers, only to have the church re-traumatize them by imposing secrecy on them when they finally found the courage to report the crime.

In announcing the abolition of the highest confidentiality in abuse cases, the Vatican said the reform would facilitate cooperation with civil law enforcement, since bishops would no longer be able to hide behind the pontifical secret to withhold documents.

The argument was striking, given that it amounted to an explicit admission that bishops had used the pontifical secret as an excuse to refuse cooperation when prosecutors, police or civil authorities demanded internal paperwork.

In more academic terms, the lack of published CDF jurisprudence means no bishop or religious superior has case law to refer to when he receives a new allegation that one of his priests has raped a child: He can't read up on how the Vatican or his brother bishops have handled a similar set of facts in the past, since none of the cases are published.

No seminarian studying canon law can cite case studies in preparing his thesis about how the Catholic Church has responded to the abuse scandal. No academic, journalist, victim or ordinary Catholic has any real idea how the Catholic Church has adjudicated these cases in any systematic way.

The Rev. D.G. Astigueta, a Jesuit canonist at the Gregorian, has said such institutional secrecy surrounding abuse case harms the development and practice of the church's own law.

"Canonical science doesn't only grow and develop from a reflection by experts or the production of new laws, but also by jurisprudence, the way of interpreting the law by judges and lawyers," he told a 2017 conference.

He called for greater transparency by the CDF so that today's canon lawyers, especially those studying in Rome, could have easy access to case files and thus have "teaching based not just on theory but practice."

He is not alone. For the past several years, Vatican-affiliated universities in Rome have hosted conferences on seeking a new equilibrium between the need to protect the integrity of the investigation while looking out in particular for the needs of the victims.

Three of the official speakers at Francis' big sex abuse summit in February called for a reform of the pontifical secret, and the Vatican's leading sex crimes investigator, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, was the primary driver behind the reform.

In another change to church law this year, Francis decreed that victims cannot be silenced, and have the right to learn the outcomes of their cases. But they are still largely kept out of the process, after making an initial complaint.

"They are that person who has been harmed. And it would seem to be natural justice that they should know what is being done what is being said in their absence," said Marie Collins, an Irish survivor who quit Francis' child protection commission in frustration in part over what she said was the CDF's intransigence and obsession with secrecy.

And the length of time the cases take benefits no one, she added.

The CDF is due to soon publish a step-by-step guidebook for bishops and religious superiors to refer to so they can process cases, and two researchers are currently hard at work in Kennedy's office, entering case details into a database so the CDF can generate a statistical analysis of the cases it has processed over the past two decades.

Kennedy said he needs more funding to complete the project, and said more transparency could be possible down the line.

"I think eventually we will get to the point of publishing jurisprudence, like the way the Roman Rota does," he said. The aim would be to redact names and revealing details, but show "the broad parameters of what it is that we do."

Iraq protests take toll on economy, vulnerable suffer most

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — With wisps of smoke still rising from the remnants of another night of violence, the workers came in the morning to salvage what merchandise they could from the torched warehouses in Baghdad's central commercial district.

Boxes upon boxes of clothes, cosmetics and household goods stored by traders in the country's most thriving market were hurled onto pick-up trucks to be taken away from Rasheed Street, a historic avenue that for weeks has been scene of ongoing violence between anti-government protesters and security forces.

Stores were shuttered across the once bustling thoroughfare, where the chatter of bargain-hunters has been replaced by an occasional volley of bullets.

"We are loading and leaving," said one merchant, Salah Redha. "My merchandise is worth over \$1.5 million. Half of it is gone and the other half destroyed ... who will compensate me?"

With Iraq's leaderless uprising now in its third month, the protracted street hostilities, internet outages, blocked roads and a general atmosphere of unease are posing risks to Iraq's economy. In particular, the unrest has set back the most fragile segment of the country's economy, the private sector, where business owners have faced losses from damage to merchandise and disruptions of markets and from consumers reeling in their spending out of fear for the future.

So far, the unrest has not significantly affected Iraq's main economic lifeline, oil, which brings in \$6-7 billion a month, up to 90% of the state's revenue. Oil exports have not faced disruptions, according to two senior oil ministry officials. Production has not been hurt by regular sit-ins blocking roads to major oil fields in the south, home to the vast majority of Iraq's oil resources.

But future investment is now in question, said Zaab Sethna, co-founder of Northern Gulf Partners, a frontier investment firm with experience in Iraq. Foreign investors have pulled out of deals in energy and other sectors, alarmed by the extent of Iranian influence in Iraq, highlighted by the heavy-handed security crackdown on demonstrations.

"We had an American backer ready to commit, to put money into Iraq, and they turned around and said, 'Look everything I am reading says this is a place the Iranians are taking over and I am not going to put my money there,'" he said.

Other investors have been worried by the slowness of talks on forming a new government after Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in the face of the protests. Political blocs are expected to name a new consensus-based candidate for the premiership this week.

Reform measures taken to retire key director-generals over the age of 60 has also caused anxieties for companies who have vested business relationships with bureaucrats. Ironically, the very issues raised by protesters on the street, including corruption, bureaucracy and lack of adequate public services, have long been a factor deterring investment, Sethna said.

Two industry officials who were in the middle of negotiating lucrative energy contracts said they have taken a step back — "until the dust settles," one said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to not derail future talks with the government.

Periodic road closures by protesters leading to Iraq's two main commodities ports in Umm Qasr and Khor al-Zubair have halted trade activity several times. To compensate, higher volumes of goods were imported through the border cross with Turkey in the north in late November. Hussein Ali, a potato trader, said delays at Umm Qasr cost him up to \$6,000 per container, so he opted for the northern land route. Customs from the ports are an important source of state revenue.

There are no figures to know exact economic losses suffered due to protests, because disruptions, when they occur, are often temporary or reliable data is hard to come by.

A military spokesperson for the prime minister, Maj. Gen. Abdul Karim Khalaf, said the protests had cost Iraq \$6 billion within the span of a month. This figure is unlikely, since it would require major setbacks in oil earnings, according to calculations by the Associated Press.

The impact has been indelible on Iraq's hobbled private sector.

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The World Bank has said developing this sector was key to diversifying the oil-dependent economy and creating much needed jobs. With poor regulations and high start-up costs, however, Iraqis have had little incentive to take the risks associated with entrepreneurship.

As a result, much of the sector remains informal and limited largely to cash-based retailers — who are highly sensitive to any disruptions.

“We have a huge informal sector that has no chance of joining the formal sector — they have no deeds, ownership, just conventions and understandings. If something goes wrong, you are dropped,” said Ahmed Tabaqchali, chief investment officer of AFC Iraq Fund.

At Shorja market, Baghdad’s main wholesale market, merchants said they have seen daily earnings drop since protests started in October in part because customers are buying less and in part because of the turmoil at Rasheed Street, where most store their merchandise.

In southern Iraq, a rising number of medium to small businesses owners are defaulting on monthly payments on bank loans, said an official in Iraq’s League of Private Banks, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.

Iraq’s growing ecommerce sector was decimated by widespread internet cuts imposed by authorities in October and November in a failed attempt to quell the protests, said Mujahid Waisi, an entrepreneur and founder of KAPITA, an incubator space set to launch early next year.

Even with the internet restored, “because most of those items are not essential, people fear making purchases because of the situation,” said Waisi. “They want to keep money in their hands.” Moreover, ecommerce startups are hesitant to promote their services online, fearing protesters will criticize them as unpatriotic, he added.

Many cash-strapped merchants have let go of workers because of the escalating crisis.

“It has been 25 days that I haven’t worked,” said Mohammed Hamid, a worker in Rasheed Street. He said the shopowner he worked for told him not even to come in — “how am I going to pay your ... weekly salary when I am closed?”

Key takeaways from Democratic presidential debate in L.A.

By **MICHAEL R. BLOOD** and **NICHOLAS RICCARDI** Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Democratic presidential candidates offered two very different debates during their final forum of 2019. In the first half, they spent much of their time making the case for their electability in a contest with President Donald Trump. The second half was filled with friction over money in politics, Afghanistan and experience.

MONEY TALKED

The candidates jostled cordially over the economy, climate change and foreign policy. But it was a wine cave that opened up the fault lines in the 2020 field.

That wine cave, highlighted in a recent Associated Press story, is where Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana, recently held a big-dollar Napa Valley fundraiser, and Sen. Elizabeth Warren — who along with Sen. Bernie Sanders has eschewed fundraisers in favor of small-dollar grassroots donations — slammed him for it. “Billionaires in wine caves should not pick the next president of the United States,” Warren said.

Buttigieg struck back, noting that he was the only person on the stage who was not a millionaire or billionaire. He said that if Warren donated to him he’d happily accept it even though she’s worth “ten times” what he is. He also added that Warren had only recently sworn off big money donations.

“These purity tests shrink the stakes of the most important election,” Buttigieg snapped.

It was an unusually sharp exchange between Warren and Buttigieg. The two have been sparring as Warren’s polling rise has stalled out and Buttigieg poached some of her support among college-educated whites.

And Warren was not the only one going after Buttigieg. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota hit him on another front, namely what she said was his lack of experience compared to her Senatorial colleagues on stage.

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Still, the divide is about more than Warren and Buttigieg. It's about the direction of the party — whether it should become staunchly populist, anti-corporate and solely small-dollar funded, or rely on traditional donors, experience and ideology.

IMPEACHMENT AS PROXY

The first question in the debate was about impeachment. But the answer from the Democratic candidates was about electability.

Most candidates had no answer to their party's biggest challenge — getting Trump's voters to abandon him over his conduct.

Warren talked about one of her favorite themes, "corruption" in Washington. Sanders talked about having to convince voters Trump lied to them about helping the working class. Klobuchar, a former prosecutor, laid out the case against Trump as if she were giving the opening statement in his Senate trial.

Buttigieg said the party can't "give into that sense of hopelessness" that the GOP-controlled Senate will simply acquit Trump because Republican voters aren't convinced. But Buttigieg didn't provide any other hope.

Only businessman Andrew Yang gave an explanation for why impeachment hasn't changed minds. "We have to stop being obsessed about impeachment, which strikes many Americans like a ball game where you know what the score will be."

Instead, Yang said, the party has to grapple with the issues that got Trump elected — the loss of good jobs.

BIDEN STEADY

Former Vice President Joe Biden has held steady throughout the Democratic race as one of the top two or three candidates by almost any measure. He has done that with debate performances described as flat, uneven, and uninspired.

He had a better night Thursday, even on a question about one of his views that causes fellow Democrats to groan: that he can work with Republicans once he beats Trump in November.

"If anyone has reason to be angry with the Republicans and not want to cooperate it's me, the way they've attacked me, my son, my family," Biden said, a reference to Trump's push to investigate his son Hunter that led to the president's impeachment. "I have no love. But the fact is we have to be able to get things done and when we can't convince them, we go out and beat them."

Unlike others on the stage, he said pointedly that he doesn't believe it'll be impossible to ever work together with the other party.

"If that's the case," Biden said, "we're dead as a country."

He came close to trouble by initially saying he would not commit to a running for a second term, then quickly said that would be presumptuous to presume a first one.

AMERICAN ROLE IN THE WORLD

Is the greatest danger to America's foreign interests and alliances coming from within the White House?

Democratic presidential candidates faulted Trump on multiple fronts for his failure to lead in key disputes and areas of international friction, including in the Middle East and China.

Buttigieg said Trump was "echoing the vocabulary" of dictators in his relentless attacks on the free press. Klobuchar said the president had "stood with dictators over innocents." And Tom Steyer warned against isolating the U.S. from China, saying the two nations needed to work together on climate change.

On Israel, Biden argued that Trump had played to fears and prejudices and stressed that a two-state solution was needed for peace to ever be achieved.

The former vice president said Washington must rebuild alliances "which Trump has demolished."

With China, "We have to be firm. We don't have to go to war," Biden said.

"We have to be clear, "This is as far as you go, China," he added.

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YANG'S PRO MOVES

In June, Yang was a political punchline. During the first few Democratic debates, the entrepreneur, who has never before run for office, looked lost onstage, struggling to be heard over the din of nine other candidates.

But on Thursday night, Yang looked like a pro.

When the candidates debated complex foreign policy, Yang talked about his family in Hong Kong, the horror of China's crackdown there and how to pressure them to respect human rights. When some candidates equivocated over whether nuclear energy should be used to combat climate change, Yang had the last word when he said: "We need to have everything on the table in a crisis situation."

And when a moderator noted that Yang was the only candidate of color on the stage, the technology entrepreneur rattled off statistics about the lack of African-American and Latino wealth and how that hampers those groups donating to politicians.

Then, like a crack politician, he brought it back to his campaign's theme — a guaranteed government income for all. That and Yang's unpolished demeanor has helped him raise the money and public support to make Thursday's stage while other more experienced politicians have fallen from competition.

In classic style, Yang began his closing statement with, "I know what you're thinking, America — how am I still on the same stage with them?"

WORD OF THE NIGHT

If there was a drinking game among debate watchers involving the word corruption, it might lead to a hazy morning.

Rivals for the 2020 nomination repeatedly framed President Donald Trump's administration as one infected with lawlessness and ethical blindness, arguing that voters should deny him a second term.

We've "seen the impact of corruption," Elizabeth Warren said early in the debate.

"We have a president who is running the most corrupt administration in the modern history of this country," said Bernie Sanders, echoing one of his familiar lines from the campaign trail.

The descriptions of a rogue administration came in response to a question on impeachment. Candidates each offered an indictment of how Trump's White House has crossed the nation's legal guardrails.

Joe Biden defended the impeachment vote as a necessity and said as a candidate "my job is to make the case he doesn't deserve to be president."

AP Exclusive: Early PG&E blackouts forewarned later problems

By **JUSTIN PRITCHARD** and **MICHAEL LIEDTKE** Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The state senators grilling the CEO of Pacific Gas & Electric Corp. were upset — like millions of other Californians, some spent days in the dark when the nation's largest utility shut off power during windstorms this fall.

The lawmakers demanded that the executive explain why blackouts intended to prevent downed power lines from sparking deadly wildfires caused so much trouble of their own.

The explanation CEO Bill Johnson offered the Capitol hearing room: Several smaller outages that PG&E triggered in the year before its debacle began in mid-October went well, giving his company misplaced confidence.

"I think we got a little complacent that we had figured it out," Johnson testified last month.

PG&E had not figured it out.

An Associated Press review shows widespread problems with the four "public safety power shutoffs" the utility started rolling out in 2018, a year before massive blackouts paralyzed much of California in recent months. Interviews and documents obtained under public records requests reveal persistent failures and broken promises that in some cases compromised public safety.

Even as PG&E assured regulators it was fixing the problems, the utility kept making many of the same

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mistakes, further undermining trust after its outdated equipment and negligence has been blamed for fires that killed nearly 130 people during 2017 and 2018.

Communication, a foundation of emergency management, was poor. PG&E's notifications of impending outages were haphazard at times, with some sent after the power was already out. Telecommunications companies, water providers and emergency managers did not always receive the early word they needed.

"We were surprised that PG&E provided no advanced warning to us," an official with the city of Oroville's drinking water provider wrote state regulators about a June outage.

PG&E made important information hard to get. It was slow to distribute electronic maps showing who would lose power, making it harder for emergency responders to know exactly where to send resources. The utility also balked at providing the addresses of medically needy customers to local officials who planned to check on them in person.

Breakdowns afflicted even basic technology. In a region that's home to Silicon Valley and its thousands of computer programmers and engineers, PG&E had not prepared the website where it posted outage updates for a crush of customers, so it crashed. Tech experts from the state had to intervene.

The sound quality of some calls PG&E hosted during shutoffs was so poor that emergency responders and legislators had a hard time understanding updates. Even then, not everyone was invited.

"In the future, AT&T requests that it and other communications providers be included on any conference calls providing real time information," the telecommunications giant protested to regulators after the June shutoff.

These and other early failures weren't widely recognized as harbingers of the issues that would overwhelm PG&E come mid-October, partly because the outages affected rural areas with less political and economic clout.

While the headline-making shutoffs affected more than 2 million people across much of PG&E's 70,000-square-mile service territory, the four initial blackouts affected tens of thousands in Northern California's Sierra Nevada foothills and famed wine valleys. They hit in October 2018 and then in June, September and early October of this year.

Among those who saw trouble building were regulators at the California Public Utilities Commission.

The first shutoff was chaotic and the next three were not going according to the guidelines regulators had passed. Commission staff met more frequently with PG&E starting in the spring, using advice and persuasion rather than mandating changes.

"We, as the state, never got to the point where we had complete confidence in PG&E's ability to execute," said Elizaveta Malashenko, the top California regulator overseeing blackouts.

Malashenko, deputy executive director of safety and enforcement policy, told the AP that the commission didn't act more aggressively because it has to balance punitive intervention with giving utilities a chance to self-correct.

"There needs to be some basic operational assumption that you can set up a conference call," Malashenko said.

Some critics faulted regulators for not doing enough.

The utilities commission, a sprawling bureaucracy with a complex rule-making process, was "not aggressive enough early in setting clear requirements and standards," said Melissa Kasnitz, legal director for the Center for Accessible Technology, which advocates for people with disabilities.

PG&E promised to fix a range of problems promptly, and an executive said it worked hard to deliver.

In many ways, that didn't happen. Not only did the problems continue throughout the smaller shutoffs, but they were replicated on a huge scale starting with the mid-October shutoffs.

The problems galled local officials, who vented deep frustration that a utility they often work closely with kept failing them.

After all, they are the ones dealing with a shutoff's consequences. They must dispatch ambulances, run jails and water plants, direct traffic through darkened intersections, set up community shelters and much more.

"It's almost as if it's intentional disregard of all the warnings we gave them," said Napa County Supervi-

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sor Diane Dillon, whose district north of San Francisco has experienced nearly every shutoff.

Sixteen million people — more than the population of nearly any U.S. state — depend on PG&E for power. The shutoffs were an inconvenience for some and extremely costly for others. For society's most frail, they brought questions of life and death.

Those who rely on medical devices in their homes were particularly vulnerable.

"PG&E did nothing to help us who depend on electricity to run our life support," recounted Grace Lin, a polio survivor who needs a ventilator to breathe and uses an electric wheelchair. "It's not like we could simply grind our teeth and tough it out by holding our breath."

Lin said she was confused by the notifications PG&E sent ahead of the first shutoff that affected her San Francisco Bay Area home on Oct. 9. The company website they referred to for updates was frozen. Lin considered herself lucky that she had the means to evacuate 20 miles away, to a quadriplegic friend's house that had electricity.

PG&E could identify "medical baseline" customers such as Lin based on billing records. Local officials working to identify everyone who might need help repeatedly asked PG&E to share its list, so no one was overlooked.

Regulators said PG&E promised it would release medical baseline addresses during a shutoff. Yet when each of the first four hit, PG&E insisted that locals sign a legal agreement not to disclose the addresses, causing delay and uncertainty that regulators said could risk lives.

On the eve of the first massive power outage, Malashenko of the utilities commission was urgently emailing company officials in frustration.

"This issue has been discussed many times over the last several months" yet "has once again become an issue with PG&E," she wrote on Oct. 8.

Malashenko said state officials also pushed PG&E to improve in other areas. Starting in April, they met at least weekly with PG&E, pointing out needed improvements and stressing that aspects of the utility's preparation was inadequate.

PG&E argued that the commission's own privacy rules meant it couldn't share the addresses without a non-disclosure agreement, spokesman Jeff Smith explained. Resolving the problem took an order that the commission's executive director sent three hours before the first massive blackouts began.

Other groups of vulnerable Californians endured shutoffs without the help they needed.

"A lot of them don't have support, a lot of them don't have family," Betty Briggs, 84, said of her elderly neighbors in the well-touristed Napa Valley town of Calistoga. "It makes it very difficult, and it puts them in danger."

Briggs can get around without help, but her husband requires 24-hour care due to dementia. He lives nearby at Cedars Care Home, where seven residents in their 80s and 90s experienced three shutoffs before mid-October.

The outages created anxiety for people reliant on routine, as well as practical problems.

Beds and wheelchair lifts require electricity. So does the heat and air conditioning. When the freezer got too warm, staff tossed 30 days of backup food.

Owner Irais Lopez still hasn't restocked fully.

"Now, we only buy small quantities," Lopez said, "because we don't know what will happen."

At PG&E's high-rise headquarters in downtown San Francisco, the emergency operations center springs to life with each shutoff.

Employees in different colored vests that distinguish their expertise cluster around banks of computer monitors showing real-time updates. Maps track wind speed and direction, as well as which circuits are down. Conversation hums in the background.

This is where decisions are made and answers can be found — and local officials said they felt they had little access to either.

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Fed up with communication gaps, one hard-hit county requested a presence at PG&E headquarters during the September shutoff. Regulators required that the utility hold seats in its emergency operations center for local representatives, but a lawyer for Sonoma County instead spent her day in a conference room several locked doors away.

"There was just a lack of understanding on behalf of PG&E of why local government needs timely information," said Petra Bruggisser, a deputy county counsel.

PG&E already had a shaky reputation in its Northern and central California territory.

The company spent three years in bankruptcy starting in 2001, after California's attempt to deregulate its power market went awry.

Maintenance failures led to a natural gas pipeline blast near San Francisco in 2010 that killed eight people. PG&E was found criminally liable and paid a \$1.6 billion fine.

In late 2017, its equipment was suspected of starting the Tubbs Fire that killed 22 people and destroyed more than 5,600 buildings.

The utility revealed in spring 2018 that it would start using power shutoffs when fire danger was high and extreme winds blew.

PG&E then began to explain what to expect, sending millions of emails to update its customer contact files, running advertising in multiple languages and holding hundreds of meetings with community leaders, public safety agencies and residents.

The California Public Utilities Commission started writing guidelines for how utilities should roll out "de-energization." The guidelines were published as a 176-page document in June.

By that point, PG&E had again filed for bankruptcy protection, crushed by liabilities for fires in 2017 and 2018, including the Camp Fire that nearly wiped out the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

The utility now has a market value of about \$6 billion — a drop of \$30 billion in just over two years — and is working with the state and a federal judge to emerge from bankruptcy by June 30.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he expects PG&E's entire 14-member board of directors, including Johnson, its CEO, to step down before the state will approve the utility's plan to regain its financial footing.

"PG&E's recent management of the public safety power shutoffs did not restore public confidence," the Democratic governor warned the company in a Dec. 13 letter. "Instead, PG&E caused extreme uncertainty and harm for Californians who rely on power for their health care and their livelihood."

PG&E said Johnson was not available for an interview. The utility's point man on the shutoffs told AP that he believes Johnson, while testifying before lawmakers last month, was referring to its ability to kill and safely restore power to an extremely complex electrical grid.

Sumeet Singh, a vice president who oversees PG&E's community wildfire safety program, listed a litany of ways the utility is investing in fixes that he said will lessen the need for future shutoffs. Those include trimming more vegetation near power lines and burying some lines in areas most at risk of igniting.

Singh also acknowledged that the utility had some struggles during the early shutoffs but that it strove to improve and disputed any characterization that it did not succeed in some ways. He cited how quickly the utility restored power as one improvement, along with the timeliness and accuracy of customer notifications.

"Did we hit the mark on every single improvement? No. Do we have more work to do? Yes," Singh said.

Power shutoffs are likely to be a feature of life in California for years to come. PG&E must invest billions in infrastructure upgrades, and communities are spreading into lands once populated by trees and brush.

Regulators promise to be watching closely.

"If we have an outcome that doesn't meet the public expectation and what we need to run as a state," said Malashenko of the utilities commission, "that means that we need to rethink our approach and try something different and drive to a better outcome."

In November, the commission launched an investigation into whether it should sanction PG&E for violating shutoff protocols.

PG&E said it will need to improve how it reacts after it shuts off the power.

"I think we thought the big event was turning off the power," Johnson told lawmakers. "And I think we

focused on that as the main event instead of the impact of that, right, on the people it affected.”

Pritchard reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press journalists Terence Chea and Eric Risberg in Calistoga and Adam Beam in Sacramento contributed to this report.

Contact Pritchard at <https://twitter.com/lalanewsman>.

Virginia biochemist Camille Schrier is crowned Miss America

By **SUSAN HAIGH** Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. (AP) — Organizers wanted to make it clear the 99th Miss America competition isn't your grandmother's beauty pageant, and their winner did just that on Thursday.

Virginia biochemist Camille Schrier won the crown just minutes after wowing the crowd with science. Dressed in a lab coat, she gave a colorful chemistry demonstration of the catalytic decomposition of hydrogen peroxide.

Schrier, a native of Pennsylvania, said she hopes to “break stereotypes about what it means to be a Miss America in 2020” by being a “woman of science” who is authentic to herself.

“I'm not the beauty queen,” she said. “I'm the brand ambassador for this organization and I'm more than just someone with a crown on my head.”

Victoria Hill of Georgia placed first runner-up.

No longer called contestants, the 51 women “candidates,” who hailed from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, competed for a \$50,000 scholarship and the “job” of Miss America, a one-year paid position they hope to use as a public platform for their “social impact initiative.”

For the second year in a row, women were not judged in a swimsuit or how they look in an evening gown. Instead, a series of interviews and talent demonstrations will determine who is best qualified to wear this year's crown.

“To make it relevant for these young women, it was important for us as a scholarship and service organization to make sure that we were reflective of this generation, meaning that you no longer had to be defined by some sort of ideal,” said Regina Hopper, president & CEO of the Miss America Organization.

Schrier, 24, who spoke on stage about having tackled an eating disorder, said she decided to compete for Miss America after the swimsuit competition was ditched, along with other changes that have been made to modernize the organization.

“I kind of figured that I would never get on that stage because I was a woman who did not want to get into a swimsuit on stage. And I didn't have a performing talent, which is really ironic now,” she said, adding how she's the first Miss America to win with a science experiment, a presentation she brings to schools.

Schrier is a cum laude graduate of Virginia Tech with dual bachelor of science degrees in bio chemistry and systems biology and she is currently studying to obtain a doctor of pharmacy degree. Her platform issue is drug safety.

Morgan Nichols, Miss South Carolina, had her own message on Thursday night. She walked down the red carpet wearing a billowing, long skirt topped by a plain white T-shirt that read: “Stronger.”

While Hopper acknowledges there has been some push-back from “old pageant” people who liked the old way of doing things, she said there's been greater interest in the competition since the roll-out of Miss America 2.0.

When asked on stage whether the Miss America organization should change even more and allow married women and women with children to participate, both Schrier and Hill said no. Schrier told reporters afterward that she believes the job would be too busy for a mother.

This year also marked the first time the multi-day event is being held at Mohegan Sun, a tribal casino and entertainment complex in suburban southeastern Connecticut. Miss America organizers announced plans this summer to leave Atlantic City, New Jersey — for the second time in its history.

Miss America also switched from ABC back to NBC to broadcast the glitzy finale to an estimated 4.5

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million viewers. And for the first time, preliminary events and the finale — held in Mohegan's 10,000-seat arena — are being streamed live on the NBC app.

"We've had many, many large events. This probably reaches the most people," said Jeff Hamilton, president and general manager of Mohegan Sun. "We're just really, really excited about it."

Miss America organizers and NBC have not yet agreed to a multi-year contract with the Connecticut casino. A decision is expected in the coming months.

Schrier succeeds 2019 Miss America Nia Franklin, a classically trained opera singer from New York.

The decision to drop the swimsuit competition did create great controversy and criticism of Miss America officials, including former board chair and former Fox News host Gretchen Carlson, who said in 2018 that Miss America would represent "a new generation of female leaders focused on scholarship, social impact, talent and empowerment." Carlson has since stepped down.

Atlantic City businessmen came up with the idea for a pageant in 1921 as a way to extend the summer tourism season beyond Labor Day weekend. It became synonymous with the New Jersey seaside resort but moved to Las Vegas in 2005, returning to Atlantic City in 2013.

AP FACT CHECK: Examining claims from 2020 Democratic debate

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seven Democratic presidential contenders tangled Thursday night in the last debate of the year, hard on the heels of President Donald Trump's impeachment.

How some of their claims compare with the facts:

BERNIE SANDERS, on Biden's proposed health care plan: "Under Joe's plan we retain essentially the status quo."

JOE BIDEN: "That's not true."

THE FACTS: It's not as simple as their lively exchange implies, but Biden is correct that his plan would go far beyond the "status quo."

Sanders' name is practically synonymous with "Medicare for All," a tax-financed, government-run system that would cover all U.S. residents while doing away with private insurance.

Biden, a former vice president, has proposed building on "Obamacare," adding a Medicare-like "public option" that any U.S. citizen or legal resident could opt for.

The U.S. has a hybrid health care system, that balanced between private coverage through employers, as well as government coverage through programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Biden would retain a mix of private and public coverage, so in a sense that's the "status quo."

But Biden's public option that anyone could join would be a momentous change to the system, helping to get millions more people insured and paying hospitals and doctors based on Medicare rates, which are lower than what private insurance pays.

It's a big enough change that the insurance industry is opposed, as are many other health industry players. So Bidentcare would not be the status quo.

SANDERS: "Today in America, we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any major country on Earth."

THE FACTS: The Vermont senator is exaggerating.

There are nearly 200 countries in the world, many with people living in extreme poverty that most Americans would struggle to fathom. Poverty is also a relative measure in which someone who is poor in one nation might look rather prosperous in another.

But the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development updated its child poverty report in 2018. The United States had an above-average level of child poverty, but it was not among the 42 nations listed in the report that had the highest levels. The United States still fared better than Russia, Chile, Spain, India, Turkey, Israel, Costa Rica, Brazil, South Africa and China.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak, Colleen Long and Cal Woodward contributed to this report.

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2 firefighters die, 3 hurt as wildfires ravage Australia

By TRISTAN LAVALETTE Associated Press

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Two volunteer firefighters died Thursday while battling wildfires ravaging Australia's most populous state, forcing Prime Minister Scott Morrison to cut short his family holiday as authorities braced for temperatures to soar in New South Wales at the weekend.

Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O'Dwyer, 36, were in a truck convoy fighting blazes southwest of Sydney when a tree fell and caused the vehicle to roll off the road. The two men, both fathers to 19-month-old children, died at the scene while three other firefighters were injured and taken to a hospital.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the injured firefighters were in stable condition.

Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spent the night consoling families of the victims.

"To not be coming home after their shift is a tremendous grief and I applaud the families and the loved ones for their remarkable comprehension of what's been unfolding," he told reporters.

"Both of these men were very well respected, they were very close, they're a close-knit brigade, they're a very community-focused brigade, work together, socialize together, they're very interactive together."

Morrison said the two firefighters were "bravely defending their communities with an unmatched spirit and a dedication that will forever set them apart amongst our most courageous Australians".

"Their sacrifice and service saving lives and saving properties will be forever remembered. I wish those injured all the best in their recovery," he added.

The Rural Fire Service said up to 40 houses could be destroyed southwest of Sydney.

Cooler conditions provided desperately needed relief Friday, but scorching temperatures are forecast at the weekend with Sydney's western suburbs tipped to reach 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit).

New South Wales declared a seven-day state of emergency Thursday as around 2,000 firefighters battle 100 wildfires across the state. Around 3 million hectares (7.4 million acres) of land has burnt nationwide during a torrid past few months, with six people killed and more than 800 homes destroyed.

The annual Australian fire season, which peaks during the Southern Hemisphere summer, started early after an unusually warm and dry winter.

The Bureau of Meteorology said Wednesday was the hottest day on record in Australia with an average of 41.9 Celsius (107.4 F), beating the landmark set a day earlier by one degree.

Adelaide, in the southeast, is currently in the midst of a heatwave peaking at a sizzling 46 Celsius (115 F) on Friday, while Melbourne was forecast at 44 Celsius (111 F), which would be the Victoria state capital's hottest since the devastating Black Saturday wildfires in 2009.

Melbourne on Friday was shrouded in smoke wafting from the New South Wales wildfires much like the haze that has often blanketed Sydney during the past month, making its iconic skyline barely visible.

The unprecedented conditions has reignited debate on whether Australia's conservative government has taken enough action on climate change. Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal and liquefied natural gas.

Protesters on Thursday camped outside Morrison's Sydney residence demanding urgent action on climate change.

Morrison has copped criticism for going on a family holiday in Hawaii during the wildfires crisis, but said he would cut short his vacation and return to Sydney on Saturday.

"I deeply regret any offence caused to any of the many Australians affected by the terrible bushfires by my taking leave with family at this time," Morrison said. "I have been receiving regular updates on the

bushfires disaster as well as the status of the search for and treatment of the victims of the White Island tragedy.”

In Nome, Alaska, review of rape ‘cold cases’ hits a wall

By VICTORIA MCKENZIE and WONG MAYE-E Associated Press

NOME, Alaska (AP) — The two cops — the cold case detective from Virginia and the evidence technician from Alaska — had a mission. Sift through more than a decade of grim stories from this small city set between the Bering Strait and Alaska’s western tundra.

Nome’s new police chief, another Virginia transplant, asked the two to untangle whether the city’s police department had failed hundreds of people — most of them Alaska Native women — who had reported they’d been sexually assaulted.

So they spent weeks inside the police station on the edge of town, squinting at computer screens and stacks of paper. What they found horrified them.

Again and again, the files showed, officers had failed to investigate rapes and other sexual crimes. In some cases, the two cops say, officers had never questioned the suspect.

In other cases, they say, dispatchers had taken distraught calls from women saying they’d been sexually assaulted, and no one from the department had bothered to go to talk to them.

“I’ve never seen anything like that in my career,” said the cold case investigator, Jerry Kennon.

The two cops had uncovered evidence confirming a pattern of inaction that a local group of sexual assault survivors had been protesting for years — a law enforcement failure that the Alaska chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union recently described as “a systemic, decades-long indifference to the safety of Alaska Native women.”

This story was produced through a partnership with National Native News with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

What has been happening in Nome isn’t an isolated episode in the struggle over sexual assault and institutional accountability. Many law enforcement agencies in small communities across the United States are facing questions about how aggressively they pursue reports of sexual violence.

In Nome, there was hope that the police department was starting on a new path after growing public outcry led to a turnover in leadership. Earlier this year, the city’s new police chief, Robert Estes, announced his staff would review 460 sexual assault cases going back almost a decade and a half. Separately, advocates succeeded in getting the city to create a commission to increase public oversight of the police department.

But as 2019 unfolded, the effort to review these cold cases and remake the police department was frustrated by bureaucratic snags and the agency’s short-handed staffing, Estes told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

At a city council meeting in September, Estes publicly questioned local officials’ willingness to do what it takes to protect public safety. He said his small agency was struggling to protect the city on a day-to-day basis — and it couldn’t continue the audit of older sexual assault cases.

“They are cold cases for now,” he said.

He told council members that something needed to be done to reverse his department’s “unsustainable” path.

“I’m not going to accept the risk,” he said. “I want to be here. I really do. If change doesn’t come quickly, I won’t be here.”

Two weeks later, he turned in his resignation.

NEW CHIEF IN TOWN

When Estes, a retired police officer and longtime Army Reservist, packed up his life in Virginia 15 months

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ago and moved to Nome, he took over a police department with a troubled reputation.

In 2013, a Nome police officer murdered a 19-year-old Alaska Native woman, Sonya Ivanoff, after picking her up in a police vehicle. A lawsuit claimed he'd sexually assaulted other women and that the police department knew he was a danger.

Throughout much of 2018, residents packed city council meetings to criticize the department's inaction on sexual violence and other issues.

Less than two weeks before Estes' arrival in September 2018, a former police dispatcher accused the department of failing to investigate her report that she'd been drugged and raped.

Soon after Estes arrived, a high school basketball coach from St. Michael, an Alaska Native village on the other side of the Norton Sound, went public with her complaint that police had failed to investigate her report she'd been raped during a visit to Nome in August.

Their complaints were open expressions of a problem that had been quietly playing out for years. Nome police data reviewed by the AP show that from 2008 through 2017, just 8% of calls about sexual assaults against adults led to arrests with charges filed.

As far back as 2015, a group of Alaska Native survivors of sexual and domestic violence circulated an email among community groups, tribal leaders and others, saying that many survivors' cases had been mishandled or not investigated at all. Some believed their complaints were dismissed due to racial bias.

For years, group members say, they tried one approach after another with police and city officials, but couldn't get answers to basic questions about police policy and training requirements.

In a recent letter to the ACLU, lawyers representing the city of Nome said city officials "reject the assertion that the Police Department disregarded and failed to investigate claims of sexual assault because of deliberate indifference to the civil rights of Alaska Native women. The Nome Police Department administers police services in a nondiscriminatory manner."

But nearly all of the roughly 100 sexual assault cold cases that Kennon and the department's evidence technician reviewed involved Alaska Native victims. Just over half of Nome's population is Alaska Native.

To help him lead Nome's embattled police force, Estes brought in three other police officers who'd also retired from his former employer — the Chesterfield County Police Department, which serves a swath of the Richmond, Virginia, suburbs.

Many Nome residents dubbed the four of them "the Virginia Boys." Some residents had their doubts, partly because Estes had been hired quickly without community input amid outrage over the public department's lack of transparency.

Estes said he understood coming in that building trust was crucial.

Jeanette Koelsch, a member of the Nome Eskimo Community's tribal council, was pleased that soon after Estes arrived, he appeared at the organization's annual meeting.

Koelsch told the AP she was concerned, though, when he suggested forming a group of women to address the problem of women getting assaulted downtown. His remarks also focused on things women could do to protect themselves from sexual violence — such as going out in groups and avoiding alcohol.

"It's about teaching consent," Koelsch said. "Maybe instead of creating a group of women to deal with a problem that men do, you should create a group of men to discuss" how they can prevent rape.

Estes said he wasn't bothered by the pointed questions he got at times at community gatherings.

Many people felt their voices had been ignored, he said, and it was clear there was "a lot of pain going on among a lot of people."

SMALL TOWNS, BIG ISSUES

When civil rights activist Tarana Burke founded #MeToo in 2006, she wanted to center the movement on women of color. But the voices of minorities, who often experience higher rates of sexual assault, were pushed to the margins as #MeToo became a larger social phenomenon in 2016.

Media reports and public debate have largely spotlighted high-profile cases involving politicians and celebrities, such as Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, who is scheduled to go to trial on criminal charges

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in New York in January.

Advocates against sexual violence say police and prosecutors in many small towns and rural counties still don't show enough commitment to investigating sexual assaults — and in some cases meet reports of rape with intense disbelief.

"From our perspective, #MeToo has definitely empowered survivors of sexual assault to come forward," Kelly Miller, the executive director of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, said. "But it's had little to no effect on the way the system responds."

In 2016, a sheriff in Idaho told a TV reporter that in his rural county "the majority of our rapes that are called in are actually consensual sex."

After an uproar, Bingham County Sheriff Craig Rowland apologized, saying he'd "misspoke." He said every sexual assault complaint that comes into his department gets thoroughly investigated.

Levette Kelly Johnson, executive director of the Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said law enforcement attitudes about rape vary from place to place. In some small communities, she said, sheriffs and police chiefs understand the issue and devote significant attention to combating sexual violence. But "what happens," she said, "when he retires or loses an election and someone else comes in and it's not a priority?"

In Nome, Alaska Native women leading efforts to improve police response understood this. They delivered a formal document to the city that pushed for lasting change, not just a personnel turnover. "We need policy," said Lisa Ellanna, a member of the survivor advocacy group. "Policy doesn't cost anything. . . It'll stay there, regardless of who comes in next, right?"

Experts on sexual violence say victims in rural areas often have limited access to medical, legal and psychological help. And living in places where "everybody knows everybody" can mean that survivors are less likely to come forward because they know it will be harder to keep their anonymity than in an urban area.

It can also mean police may know sexual violence suspects through family, school or other ties, complicating investigations and sometimes raising questions about objectivity.

Gretchen Small, a police officer in Nome from 2004 to 2006, said she was ordered to stop a sexual assault investigation involving a white suspect and a 14-year-old Alaska Native victim because a sergeant knew the man and said he didn't believe he would do such a thing.

"He doesn't do girls," the sergeant said, according to Small. "He only gets women at the bar drunk and takes them out in the tundra for sex. . . . He's a good guy."

FORCED OUT

Small reached out to tell her story after the AP published an investigation of the police department in September. She was hired in 2004 to replace Matthew Clay Owens, the Nome police officer who was sentenced to 101 years in prison for murdering Sonya Ivanoff.

Soon after she started, Small said, she learned that the department frequently failed to investigate sexual assault reports from Alaska Native women.

Small said Alaska Native women whose rapes went uninvestigated were vulnerable to further assaults. "You could just see it in their eyes after a failed case." They wouldn't bother to report the next time, she said.

"That's how deep the bias goes," she said. "Native women don't count."

Small told the AP that in one sexual assault case someone in the department falsified a police record to cover up the fact that an officer had failed to take action after an Alaska Native woman reported a man with a felony sexual assault record had tried to rape her.

Preston Stotts, a former Nome police sergeant who worked with Small during his 15 years at the department, told the AP that she was targeted and discriminated against because she was female — and was "basically forced off the department and out of that position because she wanted to actually freaking do some police work."

Small said that when she left the department in 2006 she wrote a letter to city council members informing them of her concerns. A police consultant interviewed her, but nothing came of her complaint, Small

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and Stotts told the AP.

Stotts said the department continued brushing off sexual assault cases after Small left the department — and kept doing so at least until he left in 2017.

'BEING VULNERABLE IS NOT A CRIME'

Small was troubled by how attitudes toward sexual violence were colored by whether the alleged victim had been drinking alcohol.

In one case, Small said, an Alaska Native woman told her that she had been drinking at a bar and then had awakened to find herself naked in a hotel room with several men. The woman, who suspected she'd been drugged, reported that one of the men told her that more than five men had raped her repeatedly while she was passed out, Small said.

When she went back to the police station to research suspects' names and addresses, Small told the AP, two fellow officers asked her what she was working on, then laughed and said the incident was "not rape. She was drunk."

When she pointed out that it was a crime to have sex with someone who was unconscious, she recalled, they "laughed and pointed to a stack of case files." When a victim has a history of drinking or promiscuity, they explained, the case would "never be acted upon."

Barbara Amarok, the former director of Nome's Bering Sea Women's Group, which helps women seeking safety from violence, told AP that there continues to be "a mindset — not just within law enforcement but within community members — that when things like this happen . . . it's an individual's fault. This individual acted in certain ways to allow this to happen."

In Nome, issues of shame and blame are often tied up with stereotypes about the consumption of alcohol and how those stereotypes are applied to Alaska Native residents. Some residents were angered two years ago when the city's tourism bureau published a photo of two women laying face down and unconscious on the bare ground, naked from the waist down — portraying them as eyesores rather than possible victims of sexual violence.

District Attorney John Earthman says majority of sexual crimes against adults in Nome involve "voluntary intoxication," and "some sort of sexual misconduct with a passed-out or otherwise unaware person." If the accused claims it was consensual, he said "you're going to have a tough time proving in a jury trial that they knew" the victim was incapacitated.

Prosecution experts agree that these are complicated cases, but say they are prosecutable.

"You really have to be interested in searching for the truth, take the time to actually speak to people, and not just minimize the case as not important, or just some drunk sex," said Jennifer Long, co-founder of AEquitas, a national organization that trains professionals on sexual violence investigation and litigation.

"What we know about victims is that there's an incredible level of self-blame for all of the activity — and being vulnerable is not a crime, although in these cases it certainly is used against the victim."

'EVERYBODY IS DUE JUSTICE'

Estes launched the audit of the city's sexual assault cases in early 2019. In his first weeks as police chief, he'd heard the concerns and decided his department needed to fathom the extent of the problem.

"One case or a hundred — if you're unable to properly investigate and case manage, that's a travesty," he told the AP recently. "Everybody is due justice. Period."

He turned to two employees — Kennon, the former cold case investigator from Virginia, and Paul Kosto, a former Alaska state trooper Estes had hired as an evidence tech. Kennon and Kosto set out to review 460 sexual assault cases going back 14 years.

Kosto said it quickly became clear the department hadn't provided officers with adequate training on collecting and preserving evidence and writing reports.

Kennon said he didn't think all officers were to blame. Some appeared to have done acceptable investigations.

The department sent an initial group of 76 case files to the district attorney's office to see whether there

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were grounds for prosecution. The DA's office rejected 57 of them, but sent 19 back with a request for more investigation.

Estes told the AP that he was "cautiously optimistic" over the spring and summer that things were moving in the right direction with the department.

But he was frustrated by his inability to do something about the department's staffing. The department has just over 20 employees, including dispatchers and support staff. That makes it hard to pursue in-depth investigations. And that often means there's only one officer on the street per shift — a dangerous situation, he said, for both officers and citizens.

Without enough staff to cover day-to-day demands, Estes said, he was forced to pull Kennon off the cold case review for several months.

Estes, Kennon and Kosto planned to resume the case audit in early September. The three of them say that before Kennon and Kosto could get started, the city's interim city manager at the time, John Handeland, began pushing to end the cold case audit for good.

City leaders wanted to treat the cold cases as "water under the bridge," Estes said.

In an email, Handeland declined comment.

'A PUBLIC EMERGENCY'

Estes went public with his concerns about his department's staffing and direction at a city council meeting on Sept. 23. At one point, he paused, overcome with emotion, and left the meeting room.

He returned with an apology for "losing it." He said the issue wasn't about him — the entire community was being hurt.

Estes submitted his resignation in early October. He told the AP recently that after the council meeting it became clear the city wasn't willing to act on his concerns.

"Maybe I didn't explain it the best way I could have," Estes said. But "it wasn't just me explaining the problems. There were other people within the city who knew — and know — that change is needed."

He's now back in Virginia, but he said he and his wife remain fond of Nome. "We've made lifelong friends," he said.

The city is conducting a search to hire Estes' replacement and now has a new city manager, Glenn Steckman, who has a track record as a local government administrator in the Lower 48 states. He told the AP that he is working with the police department to bring on additional investigative help, which would allow it to restart the cold case review in early 2020.

Meanwhile, the Alaska chapter of the ACLU has sent a letter informing the city that it is preparing a lawsuit on behalf of Clarice "Bun" Hardy, the former Nome police dispatcher who says she couldn't get her own department to investigate her rape report.

In a letter replying to the ACLU, lawyers for Nome's insurance agency asserted that Hardy has no case, because deciding whether to investigate a criminal complaint is a "discretionary" matter. "The City of Nome is sensitive to Ms. Hardy's situation, but disputes legal liability for the emotional distress and trauma that you describe in your letter," the lawyers wrote.

Sexual assault survivors and their advocates say the lawyers' letter felt like a gut punch to women who made the difficult decision to go public in 2018.

"Now what we're seeing is the people who did come forward, that laid themselves on the line, made themselves vulnerable — they are now being disrespected by the city," said Ellanna, a member of the survivors advocacy group who was recently appointed to the city's new public safety commission.

Koelsch, the Nome Eskimo Community tribal council member, said things are worse now than they were a year ago. Staffing woes and other turmoil at the police department, she said, have left many people fearful for their safety.

"Basically we have a public emergency on our hands," she said. When Estes came in as police chief, "I felt hopeful. I did. Because he did seem to be on the up-and-up."

"Now," she said, "I don't have any hope."

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For the women who have been fighting for change, the departure of Nome's police chief is another in a long line of setbacks. For them, so many of their days and nights are spent grappling with crises — sometimes in private, sometimes in public.

They get calls in the middle of the night because another woman has been raped, and go out to "support yet another person who may or may not even get their case brought to a DA," according to Darlene Trigg, a member of the survivors advocacy group. They take turns, too, going to public meetings and speaking out to keep issues of public safety and private pain on the community's agenda.

The burden of doing all this is exhausting, Trigg said, but it's the only way to make sure victims of sexual violence are supported and that the issue doesn't get pushed back onto the margins of public debate.

"It takes diligence and a constant eye," Trigg said. "If we're silent, all this will go to the wayside."

Michael Hudson in New York contributed to this story.

Evangelical magazine Christianity Today: Trump must go

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A major evangelical Christian magazine founded by the late Rev. Billy Graham on Thursday published an editorial calling for President Donald Trump's removal from office.

The editorial in Christianity Today -- coming one day after the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives made Trump the third president in American history to be impeached -- raised fresh questions about the durability of his support among the conservative evangelicals who have proven to be a critical component of his political base.

The magazine's editorial, written by editor-in-chief Mark Galli, envisions a message to those evangelical Christians who have remained stalwart Trump backers "in spite of his blackened moral record."

"Remember who you are and whom you serve," Galli's editorial states. "Consider how your justification of Mr. Trump influences your witness to your Lord and Savior. Consider what an unbelieving world will say if you continue to brush off Mr. Trump's immoral words and behavior in the cause of political expediency."

Galli's editorial recalls that the magazine was starkly critical of former President Bill Clinton's moral fiber during the Democrat's 1998 impeachment proceedings, calling Clinton "morally unable to lead."

"Unfortunately, the words that we applied to Mr. Clinton 20 years ago apply almost perfectly to our current president," the editorial stated.

At the core of its indictment of Trump is what Galli described as the "profoundly immoral" act of seeking the assistance of the Ukrainian government in a bid "to harass and discredit" a Democratic rival, former Vice President Joe Biden.

The magazine's editor-in-chief took no position about whether Trump should be removed from office through a Senate conviction or a defeat at the ballot box next year, calling that a matter of "prudential judgment."

Christianity Today was founded more than six decades ago by Graham, a leader of the modern evangelical movement who counseled multiple past presidents on matters of faith.

But those storied roots in the evangelical Christian community underscore the editorial's potentially limited ability to pry Trump's most ardent evangelical supporters from his side: One leader among pro-Trump Christians is Graham's son, Rev. Franklin Graham.

And Graham is hardly alone among the white evangelicals who have remained loyal to the president amid nearly three years of political tumult. A Pew Research Center survey in August found 77% of white evangelical Protestants approving of Trump's job performance.

The White House did not immediately return a request for comment on the editorial.

Jenna Ellis, a senior legal adviser to Trump, tweeted that the editorial is "shameful and constitutionally ignorant." "Pious 'Never Trumpers' who feel morally justified about this #impeachmentcircus are as morally reprehensible as Democrats," Ellis tweeted.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Impeachment trial plans in disarray as Congress heads home

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LAURIE KELLMAN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress has headed home for the holidays leaving plans and a possible timeline for President Donald Trump's impeachment trial in disarray.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi insisted Thursday that Senate Republicans must provide details on witnesses and testimony before she would send over the charges for Trump's trial. No deal, replied Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell after meeting with his Senate Democratic counterpart.

"We remain at an impasse," he said.

As darkness fell and lawmakers prepared to depart for the year, McConnell wondered from the Senate floor why in the world the Republicans should give ground to persuade House Democrats "to send us something we do not want."

McConnell and the Democrats' Senate leader, Chuck Schumer of New York, met for about 20 minutes in their first attempt to negotiate the contours of an agreement on running the rare Senate impeachment trial that was expected to start in January.

McConnell favors a swift trial, without the new witnesses Democrats want, and he holds a clear tactical advantage if he can keep his 53-member Senate majority united. Schumer, who also met privately with Pelosi, has to bet that GOP senators won't hold the line and Republicans will peel away as public pressure mounts for a fuller trial.

For the record, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said he had met with Trump and "he is demanding his day in court."

McConnell, who has drawn criticism for saying he won't be an impartial juror, said the Democrats were "too afraid" to send the charges to the Senate, where Trump would be expected to be acquitted by the Republican majority.

We'll see, he said, "whether the House Democrats ever work up the courage to take their accusations to trial."

Pelosi said that McConnell "says it's OK for the foreman of the jury to be in cahoots with the lawyers of the accused. That doesn't sound right to us."

Dismissing the idea that Democrats would hold off the proceeding indefinitely to prevent Trump from being acquitted, Schumer said there will almost certainly be a trial.

"There's an obligation under the Constitution to have a trial," Schumer told The Associated Press.

He noted that even the Democratic senators campaigning for the party's presidential nomination, with early state voting starting in February, are prepared to return to Washington to sit for the days-long proceedings. "The Constitution requires it," he said.

Wednesday night's House vote, almost entirely along party lines, made the president just the third in U.S. history to be impeached. The House impeached Trump on two charges — abusing his presidential power and obstructing Congress — stemming from his pressure on Ukraine to announce investigations of his political rival as Trump withheld U.S. aid.

Pelosi's procedural delay in taking the next step — apparently in search of leverage with Senate Republicans in locking in trial arrangements — threw a wrench into the expected timing.

"So far we haven't seen anything that looks fair to us," she had said Wednesday night. On Thursday at the Capitol, she said, "We'd like to see a fair process, but we'll see what they have and will be ready for whatever it is."

Trump mocked on Twitter: "Now the Do Nothing Party want to Do Nothing with the Articles."

Both parties said public opinion was with them after the House impeachment vote.

Trump claimed polling showed him leading all potential Democratic opponents for next fall's election.

Pelosi said, "We've been hearing from people all over the country. Seems like people have a spring in

their step because the president was held accountable for his reckless behavior.”

With elections in mind, Trump welcomed Democratic Rep. Jeff Van Drew into the GOP after the New Jersey freshman said he would be changing parties because he opposed impeachment.

Pelosi, pressed about next steps for impeachment, wouldn't say. She and her Democrats are insisting on more witnesses, testimony and documents than McConnell appears willing to provide before they name the House "managers" who would prosecute Trump in the Senate.

"The next thing will be when we see the process that is set forth in the Senate," Pelosi said. "Then we'll know the number of managers we may have to go forward and who we would choose."

Not yet.

On the Senate floor, McConnell described the House actions against Trump as "the most rushed, least thorough and most unfair impeachment inquiry in modern history."

Fighting back using McConnell's own words, Schumer said the Republican leader was plotting the "most rushed, least thorough and most unfair" impeachment trial in history by declining to agree to call witnesses, including former Trump national security adviser John Bolton, who declined to testify before the House.

"McConnell claimed the impeachment was motivated by partisan rage," said Schumer. "This from the man who said proudly, 'I am not impartial.'"

"What hypocrisy."

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Woman offers \$7K reward, hires plane in search of stolen dog

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A San Francisco woman is offering a \$7,000 reward and has hired a plane to fly over the city to search for her blue-eyed miniature Australian Shepherd stolen from outside a grocery store last weekend.

The plane, which cost an additional \$1,200 will flying a banner with the website she set up to find her her dog, Jackson, which was stolen Saturday outside a grocery store in the Bernal Heights neighborhood.

Emilie Talermo said Thursday she has been doing everything she can to find her 5-year-old dog.

"I am just one person and I really need help getting the word out there," Talermo said.

Surveillance video from the grocery store shows a man in a hoodie approaching the bench where Jackson was tied up.

Talermo and her friends have distributed thousands of flyers with the photo of the 28-pound (13-kilogram) dog with a white, black, and gray fur and bright blue eyes.

She set up a website, www.bringjacksonhome.com, where she's offering a \$7,000 reward, "no questions asked," and even opened an account for the sweet-faced dog on Tinder.

"He's always with me. It's a very real love," Talermo said, her voice breaking. "I just need help finding him."

She hired an airplane to fly a banner that will have the search website address on it and will circle over San Francisco and Oakland for two hours Friday. The plane was set to fly Thursday but had to be re-scheduled because of weather.

To help finance her search, Talermo launched a GoFundMe, where she has raised more than \$7,000 since Tuesday. She plans to donate the extra money to Rocket Dog Rescue.

Talermo said she got the 5-year-old Jackson in New York. They moved to Los Angeles and then to San Francisco.

"Those people I've met throughout the years know my love for this dog. I'm just blown away by everyone's support," she said.

Presidential hopefuls in Senate say impeachment comes first

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's decision to delay sending the impeachment articles to the Senate risks eating further into senators' final weeks of campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination before the first caucus in February.

The five senators affected seem unfazed by the delay. Impeachment comes first, they said.

"This impeachment proceeding is more important than anyone's schedule," Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar told reporters after an event in Santa Monica, California, on Thursday.

With just over six weeks remaining until the first-in-the-nation caucuses in Iowa, Democrats have precious little time remaining to make their mark on the electorate in the early primary states -- and those in the Senate are already preparing to spend two to three weeks in Washington and off the campaign trail in mid-January for the impeachment proceedings.

This could give candidates who don't have a day job -- like former Vice President Joe Biden and outgoing South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg -- an advantage in key early states, as other leading candidates, like Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, are stuck in Washington. Some of the senators' teams are already planning creative ways to keep their campaigns humming along in the states, while others who don't have to be in Washington, like former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, are strategizing how to take advantage of the time on the trail.

Pelosi said Thursday that before she will send the Republican-led Senate the articles of impeachment approved by the Democratic-led House, the GOP leaders must provide more detail about how they will handle the expected trial. Democrats requested more witnesses, testimony and documents than Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell appears willing to provide before they name the House managers who would prosecute Trump in the Senate.

Members of Congress left for the holidays Thursday night without any resolution to the standoff, which means that the earliest impeachment proceedings could begin in the Senate is the middle of the week of Jan. 6.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said he told the presidential hopefuls in the Senate that "this trial is your responsibility," and he dismissed any concerns they may have about their campaigns clashing with impeachment.

"There are benefits of running as a senator, and there are liabilities," he added.

While Klobuchar didn't weigh in directly on Pelosi's gambit, she suggested she supports the speaker's move in spirit.

"We should demand to hear from these witnesses that the president claims will exonerate him," she said.

On Wednesday night, another Democratic presidential candidate, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, also expressed support for Pelosi, calling her a "light worker during a very dark time."

"I know she has reasons to be skeptical when you have the person that's in charge of the Senate openly saying he's working in league with the president of the United States, the very person who's just impeached," he told reporters after an event in North Las Vegas.

And Booker dismissed questions over how the potential delay could affect his campaign, echoing comments made by nearly every senator running for president: that their day jobs come first.

"The president of the United States, a sitting president's just been impeached for the third time in our history," Booker said. "We all have to rise to this occasion. I, as a senator will do my job in the Senate."

Five senators remain in the Democratic presidential primary: Klobuchar, Booker, Warren, Sanders and Sen. Michael Bennet of Colorado. All of them have made similar commitments to prioritize their work in the Senate serving as jurors in impeachment proceedings over the Democratic primary.

As it stands, the Senate proceedings are expected to begin early in January, leaving candidates a week or two to hit the trail in earnest before the Iowa caucuses, scheduled for the first Monday in February. While the candidates are in D.C., their staffs are looking for creative ways to keep up enthusiasm for their campaigns in the states — including surrogate events, tele-town halls and even campaign events held via

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Skype.

If Pelosi and Schumer dig in to try to win concessions from Republicans and negotiations drag out beyond the holiday recess, it's possible the Senate proceedings could begin even later in January — potentially keeping the candidates in Washington until days before the primaries begin.

Jim Manley, a former top Democratic Senate aide, said he believes both sides will wrap up negotiations and get to the Senate proceedings as early as possible. But he warned Democrats that whenever impeachment begins in the Senate, it has to be their top priority.

"No matter what happens, the folks running for president are going to have to figure out a way to deal with it. I understand some may have concerns about not being able to campaign, but the reality is, as a sitting U.S. senator, there's nothing more important than being here for the proceedings," he said.

Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne in Santa Monica, Calif.; Michelle Price in North Las Vegas, Nev., and Laurie Kellman in Washington contributed to this report.

After impeachment, House bestows big trade victory on Trump

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One day after its historic impeachment votes, the Democratic-led House gave President Donald Trump an overwhelming bipartisan victory Thursday on a renegotiated trade agreement with Canada and Mexico.

By a 385-41 vote, the House approved a bill that puts in place terms of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

The legislation passed after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and her colleagues won key concessions from an administration anxious to pass the trade deal before next year's election season makes that task more difficult.

The deal is projected to have only a modest impact on the economy. But it gives lawmakers from both parties the chance to support an agreement sought by farmers, ranchers and business owners anxious to move past months of trade tensions that have complicated spending and hiring decisions.

The GOP-controlled Senate will probably take up the legislation when members return to Washington after the holidays and after dealing with impeachment.

Trump made tearing up the North American Free Trade Agreement a hallmark of his presidential run in 2016 as he tried to win over working-class voters in states such as Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

"Critics said it couldn't be done, but he made it happen. Another promise made, another promise kept," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

The agreement also won praise from Democrats who have routinely voted against prior trade agreements.

"Twenty-six years ago, I opposed NAFTA with every bone in my body," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga. "I never thought the day would come when we would have the opportunity to right some of the wrongs in that agreement."

Pelosi said the agreement was "light years" ahead of what the administration negotiated with Canada and Mexico. "We knew we could do better," Pelosi said.

The original NAFTA phased out nearly all tariffs on goods produced and traded within North America. It was extraordinary because it linked two wealthy, developed countries with a poor, developing country. Since then, trade with Canada and Mexico has increased more rapidly than trade with most other countries.

Democrats for years have charged that NAFTA led to massive losses of high-paying manufacturing jobs in the U.S. as companies moved production to low-wage Mexico. Trump distinguished himself from free-trade Republicans in the presidential primary with his NAFTA-bashing rhetoric, and his administration got Canada and Mexico to negotiate a rewrite.

The International Trade Commission projected in April that the agreement would boost the economy by \$68 billion and add 176,000 jobs six years after taking effect.

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Some of the biggest impacts would be felt in the U.S. automotive industry. The agreement aims to see more cars produced where workers earn an average of at least \$16 an hour.

The commission found that the new agreement would create 30,000 jobs in American auto parts plants. On the down side, the commission found the pact would increase the cost of pickup trucks and cars. That would hurt demand and reduce the number of jobs in factories that assemble cars by about 1,500.

Business and farm groups had been hitting the airwaves and the halls of Congress to get lawmakers to support the pact, putting pressure on Democrats to work with the administration even as labor unions remained wary that the new deal would be much of an improvement from NAFTA.

Trump, at times, seemed resigned to the assessment that the two sides would never reach a compromise. "She's incapable of moving it," Trump said a few weeks ago about Pelosi.

Behind the scenes, Trump's lead negotiator, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, was working with House Democrats on changes to address their concerns. The agreement includes a process that could lead to inspections of factories and facilities in Mexico that are not living up to labor obligations.

It also secures more than \$600 million for environmental problems in the NAFTA region. It scrapped giving pharmaceutical companies 10 years' protection from cheaper competition in a category of ultra-expensive drugs called biologics, which are used to fight such illnesses as cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes.

In the end, the AFL-CIO endorsed the pact, as did the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other major business groups.

Critics said they understood the renegotiated trade deal was an improvement over NAFTA, but still had problems with it.

"American jobs will still flow to other countries," said Rep. Bill Pascrell, D-N.J.

The deal gave Democrats a chance to show constituents they weren't focused solely on impeachment, particularly first-term lawmakers such as Reps. Kendra Horn, D-Okla., and Joe Cunningham, D-S.C. They represent districts won by Trump in 2016.

"I promised the people of the low country I'd come to Washington to work with Democrats and Republicans in Congress, the White House and anyone else necessary to find bipartisan, common-sense solutions to issues impacting our district," Cunningham said during debate. He called the bills' passage "a major step in that direction."

Republicans made clear that they weren't going to allow for an easy pivot after the harsh debate from the day before.

"The bipartisan nature of this deal that we are here discussing today cannot cover up what happened on this floor last night," said Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo.

Some Republicans also grumbled that Democrats took too long to get the agreement across the finish line, but many were quite happy with the result.

Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Pa., said the pact reminded him of when he would write a letter to Santa, and it would be answered with most of the presents he wanted on Christmas morning.

"This is certainly one of those times when the letter to Santa Claus actually got answered," Kelly said.

___ AP Economics Writer Paul Wiseman contributed to this report.

Trump celebrates Rep. Van Drew's switch from Democrat to GOP

By ZEKE MILLER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced Thursday that Rep. Jeff Van Drew, a New Jersey Democrat who broke with his party to vote against Trump's impeachment, is officially switching parties and becoming a Republican.

"Jeff will be joining the Republican Party," Trump announced during an Oval Office event with Van Drew, who broke the news to his staff over the weekend, prompting widespread resignations. "It's a big deal."

Van Drew on Wednesday broke with his party and voted against impeaching Trump — a move that bolstered GOP attempts to depict Democrats as divided on the matter. Republicans voted unanimously against it.

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"I believe that this is just a better fit for me," Van Drew said of his decision, promising Trump his "undying support."

"This is who I am, it's who I always was, but there was more tolerance of moderate Democrats, of Blue Dog Democrats, of conservative Democrats," said Van Drew, "and I think that's going away."

Trump, reveling in the decision, promised to return the favor and announced that he is endorsing Van Drew for reelection, calling him "a tremendous asset for the party."

Van Drew had been facing the possibility of an uphill Democratic primary, including a challenge from Brigid Harrison, a Montclair State University political science professor who is frequently quoted in local press and had secured the backing of top local Democrats, including the New Jersey senate president. Amy Kennedy, the wife of former Rhode Island Democratic Rep. Patrick Kennedy, is also considering a run.

Van Drew told reporters on the Hill after his White House meeting that he hoped the president's endorsement would be a boon, saying that, "in any primary, when you have a president supporting you, it is helpful, for sure."

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday that she had not discussed the move with Van Drew. Asked by reporters whether she had advice for him, she responded: "Nothing. Zero."

The 66-year-old Van Drew had been a conservative state senator before he joined Congress, bucking Democrats on issues including gun control and gay marriage. His district has become increasingly conservative, with Trump carrying it narrowly in 2016 after Barack Obama won it in 2008 and 2012.

Van Drew met last week with Trump, who praised the congressman Tuesday on Twitter.

"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!"

GOP House Leader Kevin McCarthy held the door open this week to Van Drew becoming a Republican and on Thursday encouraged other Democrats to join him.

"I've told him many times he's more than welcome to join the Republican Party," McCarthy said. Asked if he's offered Van Drew assistance in getting a committee assignment or hiring staff, McCarthy said, "I'll help him with whatever he needs."

Associated Press writers Alan Fram in Washington and Mike Catalini in New Jersey contributed to this report.

Canada court allows son of Russian spies to keep citizenship

By **ROB GILLIES** Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canada's Supreme Court ruled Thursday that the son of a Russian spy couple who lived clandestine lives in Canada and the United States can keep his Canadian citizenship.

Alexander Vavilov was born in Toronto, which would typically qualify him for Canadian citizenship. But authorities had ruled that Vavilov didn't qualify because his parents were part of a notorious Russian spy ring in North America that was broken up by the FBI in 2010.

The high court rejected that finding, meaning Vavilov can reside permanently in the country where his parents once lived clandestine lives as deeply embedded spies who were the models for the TV show "The Americans."

"With this victory comes the bitter realization of all the suffering I have had to endure to see my status as an ordinary Canadian restored," Vavilov said in a statement through his lawyer. "For the better part of a decade I was forced into exile from Canada. I was forced onto the public stage unwillingly and deprived of my ability to pursue a normal life."

"Having my citizenship finally respected brings me great joy," he added. "I hope my long and litigious fight through the courts will at least bring some certainty and inspiration to other Canadians that may be defending their rights like I have had to."

Vavilov's Toronto-based lawyer Hadayat Nazami, said his client plans to move back to Canada from Russia.

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"This is a rare case. Even if someone is born in Canada in the future who is a child of spies, we can't go around using citizenship laws to punish children when they have done nothing wrong,"

The Canadian government argued he wasn't entitled to citizenship and appealed to the Supreme Court to annul the passport granted to him by a lower court. The top court upheld that ruling.

Vavilov's supporters said a son shouldn't pay for the sins of his parents, while critics contend his claim to be a Canadian by birth was based on a fraud since he and his parents lived under stolen identities in the Toronto area and later Massachusetts as they collected intelligence for Moscow.

Canada, like the U.S., grants citizenship to anyone born within its territory with limited exceptions, such as the children of diplomats. The government argued that Vavilov's parents were employees or representatives of a foreign government and thus ineligible. Vavilov's lawyer argued that they were not official representatives and that all that matters in this case is their physical birthplace.

The parents came to Toronto in the 1980s and took the names Donald Heathfield and Tracey Ann Foley. They then gave birth to two sons — Timothy in 1990 and Alexander in 1994 — before moving to Paris in 1995 and then Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1999.

In 2010, the FBI arrested a ring of sleeper agents for Russia that it had been following for years in the United States. All 10, including the now well-known Anna Chapman, pleaded guilty and were returned to Russia in a swap.

The family's story became the inspiration for "The Americans."

An FBI agent who oversaw the arrest of the couple, Andrey Bezrukov and Elena Vavilova, and the other eight sleeper agents criticized the high court's decision.

"This is ridiculous. Their parents are convicted spies, both of whom assumed identities of deceased legitimate Canadian citizens for the purposes of infiltrating the United States under cover," said Richard DesLauriers. "To grant their sons legitimate status is a perversion of the law. Their parents were spies."

Prosecutors said the father met in 2004 with an employee of the U.S. government to discuss nuclear weapons research.

DesLauriers said in 2010 that Timothy Vavilov may have found out about his parents' secret life before they were arrested. But the brothers weren't charged.

Their lawyer said no evidence had ever surfaced suggesting the sons knew their parents were Russians or were spies.

Alexander Vavilov wanted to return to Canada for university but was denied. The government ruled Canada would no longer recognize him as Canadian because his parents were "employees or representatives of a foreign government."

After losing in a lower court, Vavilov won support from the Federal Court of Appeal, which ruled in 2017 that the law applies only to foreign government employees who benefit from diplomatic immunities or privileges. Vavilov was given his citizenship back.

In its decision, the Supreme Court said the citizenship registrar's decision was unreasonable. Although the registrar knew her interpretation of the provision was novel, she failed to provide a proper rationale, the court said.

Although it involves the same central issue, Timothy Vavilov's case proceeded separately through the courts and was not directly before the Supreme Court. However, in a decision last year, the Federal Court of Appeal said its 2017 ruling on Alexander Vavilov equally applied to his brother, making him a citizen.

Reports indicate Michigan man may be baby abducted in 1964

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — When a woman posing as a maternity-ward nurse snatched a newborn from its mother's arms more than 55 years ago, the case made headlines nationwide and led to a massive search by FBI agents and police.

The mystery seemed solved two years later, when police found an abandoned child who appeared to be the missing boy and returned him to the parents, who raised him as their own. But 47 years after he

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came home, DNA tests showed that he was not related.

Now recent media reports say a man living in rural Michigan may be the child of Chester and Dora Fronczak who was abducted on April 26, 1964, from a Chicago hospital.

An FBI statement issued this week confirmed that the investigation remains open and agents continue to pursue leads. But the statement stopped short of confirming the reports — first by Las Vegas television station KLAS and then by Chicago's WGN-TV.

The stations did not name the man or say where he lived in Michigan. And they did not elaborate about how he was identified as the kidnapped child, including whether DNA testing played a role.

"We can tell you the adult Paul Fronczak is living in Michigan and has been made aware of his real identity," a Dec. 12 report on KLAS said.

WGN went further in a report this week, saying it had spoken to the man.

The man, who asked not to be identified, became aware several months ago of evidence pointing to him and was trying to come to terms with the revelations, WGN reported.

In 1966, a boy was found abandoned in New Jersey, and law enforcement officials said at the time that he had ears shaped like those of the baby kidnapped in Chicago. The Fronczaks believed him to be their long-lost child.

"That's my baby. It's Paul," the mother was quoted as saying at the time.

But in another cruel twist for the family, genetic tests that were not available in the 1960s revealed in 2013 that it was not him.

If the recent reports are accurate, questions would quickly arise about whether the people who raised the man knew he had been kidnapped or were themselves involved in the abduction. It's unclear if anyone could still be subject to criminal charges.

Messages left at a telephone number Thursday for a Dora Fronczak in suburban Chicago were not returned. Messages for a Paul Fronczak in Nevada also were not returned.

"I'd like to know who I am, my birthday, how old I am? But more important: Is the real baby alive and still out there," Paul Fronczak said in 2014, according to WGN.

After the DNA test indicated the person she thought was her son was not him, Dora Fronczak still seemed haunted by the abduction and by the prospect of experiencing the anguish all over again.

"We went through this once, and we certainly don't want to go through this again," she said in a 2013 interview with the Chicago Sun-Times.

What happened was a parent's worst nightmare.

The kidnapper took the baby from his mother, telling her the newborn had to be returned to the nursery for an examination. That was the last time Dora Fronczak saw the child. The woman dressed in white never came back.

Fronczak, who was 28, had a stillborn son only the year before, her husband told reporters at the time.

The kidnapper fled the hospital with the baby in her arms and wrapped in a receiving blanket, police said, citing witnesses. She then got in a taxi bound for the southwest side of Chicago.

A week later, the FBI distributed an artist's rendition of the suspect, who newspapers referred to as "the mystery woman." Witnesses described her as around 40, standing 5-foot-4 with a ruddy complexion and black, graying hair.

At least one nurse who bore a resemblance was detained, then released after an hour of questioning.

More than 200 police officers, some with the drawing and a photo of the baby, went door to door in neighborhoods near where the taxi dropped the kidnapper off. The postmaster general even enlisted 175,000 mail carriers nationwide to help, asking them to report anything suspicious, including someone on their route suddenly having an unexplained baby.

The kidnapped boy's father, who worked as a machinist, told reporters his wife was so distraught that she had been sedated.

Chester Fronczak also issued a plea to the kidnapper to return the baby and, if she didn't do so immediately, to at least care for the child. At the father's behest, newspapers even ran a recipe for a baby formula with instructions to feed it to the newborn in 3-ounce portions every four hours.

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When the baby was abducted, police said blood type and ear shape were about the only leads they had because the boy had no blemishes or birthmarks. Some 10,000 babies were examined and tested by 1966 to see if they could be the boy.

The AP Corporate Archives contributed to this report.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mtarm>

Hezbollah-backed professor to form new government in Lebanon

By SARAH EL DEEB and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A former education minister backed by the militant Hezbollah group and its allies was selected Thursday as Lebanon's new prime minister to break a political impasse amid mass protests, although he almost immediately ran into opposition from demonstrators on the streets.

Hassan Diab, a professor at the American University of Beirut, was named by President Michel Aoun after a day of consultations with lawmakers in which he gained a simple majority in the 128-member parliament. He won support from 69 lawmakers, including the parliamentary bloc of the Shiite Hezbollah and Amal movements, as well as lawmakers affiliated with Aoun.

But Diab failed to get the support of Lebanon's major Sunni leaders, including former Prime Minister Saad Hariri. That is key because under the country's sectarian-based system, the premier must come from the Sunni community.

That also will make it difficult for him to form an inclusive Cabinet able to gain the international community's trust and unlock badly needed assistance for the tiny Mediterranean country that is facing its worst economic and financial crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

Friendly nations, including France, have made clear they will not support the heavily indebted nation before a reform-minded Cabinet is formed.

Demonstrators called the 60-year-old Diab part of the old ruling class that they oppose and continued their protests.

In his first public address, Diab said he would work quickly to form a government in consultations with political parties and representatives of the protest movement. He said he is committed to a reform plan and described the current situation as "critical and sensitive," requiring exceptional efforts and collaboration.

"We are facing a national crisis that doesn't allow for the luxury of personal and political battles but needs national unity," Diab said. He told the protesters he hears their "pain."

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale was traveling to Beirut, the most senior foreign diplomat to visit the country since the crisis. U.S. diplomats have said they support the quick formation of a government that can bring about reform.

Support from Iran-backed Hezbollah guarantees Diab a thorny path, potentially inviting criticism from Western and Gulf nations that had supported Hariri. The Shiite group is designated a terrorist organization by the U.S., some Gulf Arab countries and a few Latin American nations. The European Union considers only Hezbollah's military wing to be a terrorist group.

Maha Yahya, director of Carnegie Middle East, a Beirut-based think tank, said Diab arrives with no support from his community and no consensus at a time when Lebanon is facing an economic meltdown and needs international assistance.

"The problem is he is coming on as a weakened prime minister," she said.

Following Diab's appointment, protesters gathered in central Beirut's Martyrs' Square, the epicenter of the protests. They cast him as part of the class of politicians they oppose. Supporters of Hariri also began taking to the streets.

"I see the country is going to waste. With this kind of government, no one will deal with it, no Arab, no Europe and No U.S.," said Saeb Hujrat, a protester in Martyr Square. He held a large banner reading: "We want a government outside of the ruling class."

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For two months, the leaderless protests have been calling for a government made up of specialists that can work on dealing with the economic crisis. The protests have recently turned violent, with frequent clashes between security forces and protesters.

Supporters of Hezbollah and Amal also have attacked the protest camp site in Beirut several times. The most recent one came last weekend when they set cars on fire and threw stones and firecrackers at security forces for hours.

Diab gained attention after caretaker premier Hariri withdrew his name from consideration following weeks of haggling and deep divisions among the various factions over naming him again. Hariri resigned Oct. 29 in response to the unprecedented mass protests and as an already-dire economic crisis deteriorated quickly.

Hariri had insisted he would head a Cabinet made up of specialists to deal with the crisis. Hezbollah, which initially backed him, demanded a government including all major political factions.

Diab served as minister of education from 2011-14, when Hezbollah and its allies overturned a Cabinet headed by Hariri at the time.

Diab was in the U.K. when Lebanon's civil war broke out. There, he received undergraduate and graduate degrees in communications and computer engineering from the universities of Leeds Metropolitan, Surrey and Bath.

Author JK Rowling draws criticism for transgender comments

NEW YORK (AP) — J.K. Rowling is facing widespread criticism from the transgender community and other activists after tweeting support for a researcher who lost her job for stating that people cannot change their biological sex.

The researcher, Maya Forstater, had been a visiting fellow at the Centre for Global Development, which in March declined to renew her contract. A London judge this week upheld her dismissal, finding that her views of sexual identity were "absolutist," even if they violate someone's "dignity and/or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment."

On Thursday morning, Rowling tweeted a response that said: "Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill."

The "Harry Potter" author is otherwise known for her liberal political views and many on Twitter labeled her a TERF (Trans Exclusive Radical Feminist). Among those criticizing her was the Human Rights Campaign, which tweeted: "Trans women are women. Trans men are men. Non-binary people are non-binary. CC: JK Rowling."

A spokeswoman for Rowling said that the author would not have any further comment.

North America trade pact deals rare setback to Big Pharma

By PAUL WISEMAN, LINDA A. JOHNSON and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

A revamped North American trade deal nearing passage in Congress gives both the White House and Democrats a chance to claim victory and offers farmers and businesses clearer rules governing the vast flow of goods among the United States, Canada and Mexico.

But the pact leaves at least one surprising loser: the pharmaceutical industry, a near-invincible lobbying powerhouse in Washington.

To satisfy House Democrats, the Trump administration removed a provision that would have given the makers of ultra-expensive biologic drugs 10 years of protection from less expensive knockoffs. Democrats opposed what they called a giveaway to the industry that could have locked in inflated prices by stifling competition. Top examples of the injected drugs made from living cells include medications to fight cancer and immune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis.

"This is one of the first times we've actually seen pharma lose," said Rep. Earl Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat who leads a subcommittee on trade. "They have a remarkable track record because they are

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a huge political force. They spend lots of money on lobbying, on advertising, on campaign contributions. But we held firm, and we won on all counts.”

The removal of the provision also helped illustrate just how potent a political issue sky-high drug prices have become. It was a reminder, too, that President Donald Trump repeatedly pledged to work to lower drug prices.

Last week, drug manufacturers absorbed another — though likely only temporary — defeat when House Democrats passed legislation, along party lines, that would authorize Medicare to use its influence in the marketplace to negotiate lower prices from drug companies. The bill is thought to have no chance of passage, though, in the Republican-led Senate.

Yet the revamped U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, Trump’s rewrite of the 25-year-old North American Free Trade Act, seems set to clear Congress without the biologics protection that the drug industry had sought. The full House voted 385-41 on Thursday to approve it. The Senate isn’t likely to take it up until January.

“It’s not a mystery,” said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, an Illinois Democrat who helped negotiate with the administration. “If you poll the American people, the cost of pharmaceuticals is a really big deal. It’s at the top of the list.”

The trade agreement the administration reached last year with Mexico and Canada gave biologics 10 years of protection from cheaper near-copies known as biosimilars. Among the leading biologics are the anti-cancer drug Rituxan and Humira and Enbrel, which fight immune disorders.

The industry — and the Trump administration — had argued that manufacturers of biologics require years of protection to profit from their drugs before biosimilars should be allowed to cut into sales. Otherwise, they contend, brand-name drug companies and biotech startups that rely on money from venture capital firms would have little incentive to invest in developing new medicines.

“The announcement made today puts politics over patients,” the leading drug industry trade group, PhRMA, said in a statement last week. “Eliminating the biologics provision in the USMCA removes vital protections for innovators while doing nothing to help U.S. patients afford their medicines or access future treatments and cures.”

The industry also rejected the notion that the biologics provision would keep drug prices high and hurt consumers. Existing U.S. law, they noted, already gives makers of biologics 12 years’ protection, more than the proposed 10 years in the USMCA. But the provision the Democrats succeeded in removing would have forced Mexico to expand biologics’ monopoly from five years and Canada from eight, potentially hurting U.S. consumers who seek lower drug prices in those countries.

What’s more, Democrats argued, if Congress had expanded the biologics’ monopoly in the USMCA, it would have prevented lawmakers from ever scaling back that monopoly to, say, the seven years that the Obama administration had once proposed.

“We would have been locked in,” Schakowsky said.

For Big Pharma, the setback marked a sharp turnabout. Four years ago, the drug industry helped scuttle an Obama administration trade deal with 11 Pacific Rim countries, arguing that a provision establishing eight years of protection for biologics was not sufficient. Now the latest U.S. trade deal contains no biologics protections at all.

Back in 2006, the industry scored a major victory when it helped push legislation through Congress that added prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients but barred the government from negotiating lower prices. That restriction opened a “Pandora’s box” that paved the way for unsustainable price hikes, said Steve Brozak, an analyst at WBB Securities.

Drug makers began raising prices of existing drugs several times a year, sometimes totaling more than 20% annually. They also started launching biologics with list prices topping six figures a year. In May, U.S. regulators approved a one-time gene therapy, Zolgensma, with an eye-popping price of \$2.1 million per patient.

A backlash has been growing, especially after news reports and congressional hearings exposed stories of patients rationing medicine and even dying because they couldn’t afford insulin or other drugs.

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Drugmakers have "been on defense more than we've ever seen," said David Certner, legal counsel for AARP.

Last year, Certner noted, Congress dealt the industry two losses: First, by increasing the discounts that drug makers must give to seniors with high drug costs who have landed in a Medicare coverage gap. Then, months later, lawmakers rejected industry efforts to reverse that change.

And in January, the industry lost perhaps its biggest champion in Congress when Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, retired.

Trump has long promised to address drug prices. On Wednesday, the administration moved ahead with a plan to allow Americans to safely and legally gain access to lower-priced medicines from abroad. So far, most of Trump's drug-price initiatives have gone nowhere. His trade team negotiated biologics protections into the USMCA.

Facing public anger, Democratic resistance and the fact that Canada and Mexico had no reason to support the protections for biologics, the administration yielded. When it reached a deal with House Democrats on the USMCA last week, the biologics provision was out.

"Clearly, getting rid of the biologic provision was a step backwards," U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said Tuesday in an interview with the Fox Business Network. "And that was a compromise. You know, there are consequences of the Democrats' control of the House. And that was necessary. And I'm sorry about that."

Jeffrey Francer, general counsel for the Association for Accessible Medicines, which represents generic and biosimilar drug companies, put it another way: "The president decided not to fall on his sword for Big Pharma."

Johnson reported from Trenton, New Jersey.

GOP gives Trump unapologetic embrace over impeachment

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Majority Leader Mitch McConnell called on his Republican-led Senate Thursday to keep the impeached President Donald Trump in office, as the chamber edged toward a fray that spotlights the GOP's most unapologetic embrace yet of Trump.

"A political faction in the lower chamber has succumbed to partisan rage," said McConnell, R-Ky., a day after the Democratic-controlled House voted to impeach Trump, despite an extraordinary show of fealty by Republicans voting unanimously against the move. He added later: "The Senate must put this right. We must rise to the occasion."

The Senate seems certain to keep Trump in office with overwhelming GOP support in a trial likely to start in January. Coupled with House Republicans' solidarity Wednesday, that underscores a remarkable turnaround from four years ago, when many GOP lawmakers wanted nothing to do with the insurgent and inflammatory Trump campaign.

Now, the impeachment battle spotlights how firmly Republicans are tethered to a president whose loyalty from his party's core conservative voters is matched only by his opponents' loathing for him.

Trump boasted about GOP unity during the impeachment vote. "You've never seen a Republican Party, zero negative votes. Zero," he said Thursday. "That hasn't happened almost ever because the Republicans are not necessarily known for that."

Yet it's unclear what the political impact on GOP candidates will be.

Rep. Francis Rooney, R-Fla., uttered GOP blasphemy this fall when he said he was open to considering impeachment. He announced his retirement from Congress the next day. He ended up joining his colleagues in opposing impeachment Wednesday and said that vote further aligned his party to Trump.

"And that's not necessarily the Republican Party that I've been part of and been a funder for, for many years," he said. "This is a different era that we're in for Republicans, and I don't know where it's going to go."

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"They are who they are," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Thursday when asked about the lack of daylight between the president and his party's rank-and-file.

She also challenged GOP lawmakers' comments during Wednesday's debate comparing Trump's impeachment to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

"Something's strange there," she said. "Apart from the fact that they want to protect the president at the cost of the Constitution."

GOP solidarity behind Trump on impeachment contrasts with past battles over Trump priorities, such as his failed effort to repeal former President Barack Obama's health care law. Republicans strongly rallied behind him, but there were small but significant numbers of defectors.

In recent weeks, Trump's team has pointed to widespread GOP support for Trump as exemplifying the president's grip on his adoptive party and a cementing of the 2016 electoral realignment that sent Trump to the White House.

"I was not a Republican. Now I'm a Republican," said Jared Kushner, who was a Democrat before helping steer his father-in-law's surprise victory three years ago. "I think the Republican Party is growing now that people like me feel comfortable being part of it."

Just three months ago, initial revelations of a phone call in which Trump tried squeezing Ukraine's new president to announce an investigation into Democrats gave pause to some Republicans.

But now, "Trump is strong as a tank with Republicans," said Rep. Patrick McHenry of North Carolina, a member of the House GOP leadership.

While stopping short of abandoning him over Ukraine, several GOP lawmakers initially took a middle-ground position, saying they wanted to learn more about what happened.

So party leaders held numerous impeachment briefings for lawmakers. Those sessions were aimed at making sure they were "getting information to people," said No. 2 House GOP leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

GOP Rep. Will Hurd, a Texas moderate who's clashed with Trump over immigration and other issues, was closely watched as the House Ukraine investigation progressed.

Hurd, 42 and a former CIA agent, is not seeking reelection, leaving him freer than most Republicans to abandon Trump. But Hurd said last month that while Trump's actions were "inappropriate," he believed the president had committed no impeachable offense, making it harder for wavering moderate Republicans to defect.

In the short term, moderate Democrats from swing districts seem most at risk politically from the impeachment battle. Nearly all of them backed impeachment, which could be costly in next November's congressional elections. The most vulnerable include many of the 31 Democrats representing districts Trump won in 2016, most of whom are freshmen.

But Democrats and Trump's Republican critics said the House GOP's solid backing inextricably bound Republican lawmakers to Trump, ultimately inflicting a damaging blow.

"For some period of time, the brand is going to be the Trump brand, which is divisive, misogynistic and unethical," said Peter Wehner, a Trump critic and Republican who served in the White House for three Republican presidents. "The people who are going to increasingly define American politics going forward are the ones who find Donald Trump most toxic."

"They no longer have a governing philosophy. Their philosophy is whatever Trump says goes," said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich. "No matter what it is, no matter how crazy it is, no matter how outrageous it is."

With the impeachment vote coming just 11 months before the next presidential and congressional election, Republicans said they had no reason to fear any repercussions. Asked if it was risky for the GOP to unanimously align itself with Trump, Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., a member of House GOP leadership, said, "There is absolutely zero peril for the Republican Party to align itself with the Constitution."

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed.

Russia plans to file appeal against Olympic ban

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has signaled it will file an appeal against its four-year Olympic ban due to World Anti-Doping Agency sanctions which President Vladimir Putin on Thursday branded “unfair.”

The Russian anti-doping agency’s supervisory board voted Thursday to file an arbitration case with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Switzerland. WADA last week ruled Russia had manipulated doping laboratory data to cover up past offenses.

Putin said it was not fair to threaten Russia with more doping-related punishment, and that any sanctions should be on an individual basis. “I think it is not just unfair but not corresponding to common sense and law,” Putin said.

The case will likely be referred to CAS within the next 10-15 days, supervisory board chairman Alexander Ivlev said. After a panel of three CAS arbitrators is chosen, a verdict will be issued within three months.

“The ball will be in WADA’s court and the issue will be discussed in a legal context,” Ivlev said. “We consider the argumentation to be fairly strong and we will see how the issue develops.”

Thursday’s decision must be approved by another panel of Russian sports and anti-doping figures, but that seems a formality.

Most of the panel’s members, including the Russian Olympic Committee and Russian Paralympic Committee, have said they want an appeal. Sports officials are likely to have substantial influence over how the case is argued and the hiring of lawyers, rather than leaving it in the hands of Russian anti-doping agency CEO Yuri Ganus. He is a frequent critic of top officials and has said the appeal has little chance of success.

Senior political figures including Putin had also signaled they wanted an appeal filed.

“We need to wait calmly for the relevant rulings, including the arbitration court ruling and we’ll know what position we’re in,” Putin said Thursday. “Russian athletes have been training and will keep training for all competitions.”

The WADA sanctions, announced last week, ban the use of the Russian team name, flag or anthem at a range of major sports competitions over the next four years, including next year’s Olympics and the 2022 soccer World Cup.

However, Russian athletes will be allowed to compete as neutrals if they pass a vetting process which examines their history of drug testing, and possible involvement in cover-ups at the lab.

That has prompted anger from some Western athletes and organizations like the United States Anti-Doping Agency, which wanted a blanket ban on Russian athletes.

USADA chief executive Travis Tygart said he wasn’t surprised by Russia’s plans to appeal and said it was another example of the country refusing to take responsibility for its doping program.

“Yet again, they deny accountability and continue to waste precious and limited resources in an effort to weasel out of the consequences, all the while leaving clean athletes of the world without justice or clarity on their path forward,” Tygart said in a statement. “Let’s hope CAS has the independence and courage to see through these machinations and finally stand firm and take decisive action that puts in place a complete ban, which is allowed for and proportional to the intentional fraud, deception, and destruction of clean athletes and the Olympic values seen here.”

Putin added that WADA’s recommended four-year ban on Russia hosting major sports competitions would have little effect, pointing to the 2022 men’s volleyball world championships as an event Russia intends to keep.

WADA demands events are moved unless it’s “legally or practically impossible” to do so, which could create a loophole for event organizers who don’t want to break financial commitments.

That ban already doesn’t apply to next year’s European Championship soccer games in St. Petersburg or the 2021 Champions League final, both of which are exempt because they’re continental, not world, championships.

Russia handed over the lab’s doping data archive in January in return for having earlier sanctions lifted in 2018. WADA investigators found evidence that Russia was intensively editing the data in the weeks before the handover to remove signs of failed drug tests.

WADA said it found fake messages spliced into chat logs in an apparent attempt to smear former lab

director Grigory Rodchenkov, who's become a key witness for WADA since leaving Russia.

Russia has produced its own report arguing that any editing was the result of illicit changes made from abroad, or the instability of the lab software.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

What crackdown? Migrant smuggling business adapts, thrives

By MARIA VERZA and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

HERMOSILLO, Mexico (AP) — The heavy-set man swept through a curtain into the reserved area of a nightclub as his bodyguard stood nearby. In the darkness, he agreed to talk about his business: handling the income from smuggling migrants across a 375-mile stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"We control all the territory" along the frontier with Arizona, said the cartel money man, who asked to be identified only as Manuel. He spoke in the calm tones of a businessman discussing financial strategy rather than someone operating outside the law.

His organization, though he didn't name it explicitly: the Sinaloa cartel.

The hardening of U.S. and Mexican immigration policies has "complicated" the business because there are more security forces on both sides of the border, but Manuel isn't worried. Yes, there are fewer risking the journey and the out-of-pocket has mounted with the need to pay ever-escalating bribes. But the cartel also charges more. Conclusion: The money keeps flowing.

In a year of dramatic policy changes on both sides of the border, smuggling networks have adjusted: higher prices, some new workarounds, attractive "package deals" for every budget, as well as tried-and-true smuggling techniques that include well-trodden routes and generous bribes.

During six months of interviews by The Associated Press with migrants and smugglers along principal migration routes in Mexico and Central America, a picture emerged of a smuggling business that has learned to adapt and has thrived. In most cases, the migrants and their smugglers refused to be fully identified to speak about a shadowy enterprise that governments on both sides of the border have promised to crack down on.

The territory Manuel manages nets an average of \$1 million per month. But that's just a tiny piece of a multi-billion-dollar business that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates involves \$4 billion annually. The Mexican government has calculated it could be as high as \$6 billion.

The Mexican government says it is targeting migrant smuggling rings, but there has been little evidence in terms of prosecutions, much less convictions. While tighter security measures inside Mexico and new Trump administration policies aimed at curtailing the flow appear to have reduced the number of migrants attempting the journey, it has also convinced those set on going that they need to hire a professional.

"It's a business that you're not going to stop," Manuel said.

When the doors of the semi-trailer in southern Mexico swung open to the crowd of waiting migrants, the 26-year-old Honduran man wanted to turn around and leave with his wife and 4-year-old daughter.

The windowless metal box was not what a smuggler had promised some 310 miles to the south in Los Amates, Guatemala, near the border with Honduras. There, \$7,000 promised a care-free journey to the U.S. border aboard luxury buses with meals included.

Now he could only think of his daughter and the \$4,000 they had already paid and couldn't afford to lose.

"I risked my daughter because they told me that we weren't going to suffer, that we were going to come comfortably, eating well, but it was all a lie," said the man, who agreed to be identified only by his middle name, Jesús, out of fear for his family's safety. "On the journey it's another reality."

Since entering office, U.S. President Donald Trump has been moving hard to limit legal and illegal immigration, repeatedly decrying a "crisis" at the border. Images of caravans of thousands of Central American migrants traversing Mexico in late 2018 stoked his fury.

Earlier this year, he threatened crippling tariffs on all Mexican goods unless Mexico stepped up efforts

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to curb the flow of migrants. Mexico responded by deploying thousands of members of its newly formed National Guard along migration routes.

The U.S. then reached a series of bilateral agreements with Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador aimed at making it much more difficult for migrants crossing those countries to seek asylum in the U.S.

The impact has been swift: Total apprehensions and those deemed inadmissible at ports of entry at the southern border reached 977,509 migrants from October 2018 until the end of September, the highest number since 2007 — and a more than 87% increase since the same period a year earlier.

In turn, migrants were pushed “into mafia hands,” deciding that paying a smuggler was the only way to make it across the border, said Guillermo Valdés, a former Mexican intelligence director. Mexico’s immigration agency says it has identified 18 such smuggling networks operating in nine Mexican cities.

And the price of the journey has grown, often surpassing \$10,000 for those from Central America. But there are enticements, like the “package” deal: \$3,000 to \$6,000 to deliver an adult and a child across the border in hopes they’ll be picked up by U.S. Border Patrol and released into the U.S. to await their asylum cases.

That was Jesus’ plan — \$7,000 all-inclusive for his family of three.

He paid the initial \$4,000 installment and departed Honduras on Aug. 15 with instructions to take a series of buses across Guatemala to the border town of La Mesilla. There the family crossed into Mexico aboard a van with other migrants with only a cursory glance from a lone Mexican soldier.

That’s where Jesús’ dream turned into a nightmare as his family and about 150 other migrants, mostly families like his, were piled into the semi-trailer and the truck rumbled north.

The key to any successful journey is corruption.

A Salvadoran smuggler with a decade of experience summarized it this way: To have a safe and efficient trip, “you have to pay.” And with Guatemalan authorities checking people crossing the country on buses and thousands of National Guard members deployed across Mexico there are more people to pay.

“The National Guard has raised the prices,” said the smuggler, a former Salvadoran soldier who declined to give his name because of his involvement in an illegal activity.

“I only pay one person, but they have a chain,” he said. “I talk to Joe Blow, and that guy already understands everything. When someone passes the immigration checkpoints the light is green,” he said with a snap of his fingers.

When Jesus got to Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, a bottleneck in southern Mexico where authorities have focused enforcement efforts, five agents from the Attorney General’s Office stopped the truck. The migrants paid about \$35 per person to be allowed to continue. In a matter of minutes, the agents made more than \$5,000.

Two nights later Jesús and his family slept on the floor of a warehouse with nothing but crackers to feed their daughter. He counted some 500 migrants from around the world waiting there for the next leg of their journey to the border.

The Mexican government has denounced smuggling networks that use semi-trailers, often painted with the logos of legitimate companies to disguise their cargo, and where there’s a risk the migrants could suffocate.

They board the trucks in places known as “lanzaderos” — launching points — in southern Mexico and head north to Tamaulipas state bordering Texas, the shortest and cheapest route, where more than 50% of illegal crossings occur, according to the Mexican government.

Others travel in smaller trucks under tarps, aboard freight trains, on passenger buses or even airplanes with false documents provided by smugglers. The U.N. warned in May about growing air routes used by smugglers from many of the world’s principal airports. Sea routes also cropped up along the Pacific and Gulf coasts.

Except for official border crossings, nearly every mile of river, desert and mountain along the U.S.-Mexican

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border is under the control of Mexico's organized crime rings, which decide who can cross and how much they will pay.

The rules vary by territory depending on what cartel controls it, but there's a common denominator: A migrant rarely crosses the U.S. border without paying someone.

It's the end of a chain that begins in Central America or farther south, and even in Africa and Asia, in which specialized actors — smugglers, known locally as coyotes, their salesmen, truck drivers, lookouts, raft paddlers and guides — work together to get clients, identified by passwords, to the U.S. border.

"It's like the hands of a clock," said Manuel, the Sinaloa cartel money man. "All the pieces have to work together and right now you have to fix it (by paying) everybody."

The cartel rents its territory to local criminal rings and pays authorities to leave them alone. In the town of Nogales on the Arizona border, for example, the cartel pays \$25,000 a month each to the local, state and federal police forces and the National Guard, Manuel said. The army doesn't take the bribe but looks the other way in exchange for other favors, he said.

In response to a request for comment, the National Guard said that it has not received any complaints about its personnel taking bribes. The Mexican government said it is working to root out corruption in security agencies, as well as among its immigration enforcement apparatus.

Once at the border, there are an array of options: Walking two hours, three days or even seven days through the Arizona desert, or — the most expensive — walking through an official U.S. border crossing with a falsified document.

Such so-called "rented visas" — legitimate U.S.-issued visas that allow Mexican citizens to cross legally into the U.S. — are rented by the bearer for a fee.

"You find someone who looks similar" to the migrant, Manuel said, pay the fee and hope the document does the trick or the official is willing to take a bribe.

On the Texas border, Rio Grande towns like Miguel Aleman thrive on illegal cross-border traffic. Stash houses have proliferated in the town of 20,000 because "a lot of people don't have work and so they've rented their houses," said one resident, who declined to give her name for safety reasons.

"Everyone has gotten in on the business and it's generating a lot of money," she said.

Stash houses are scattered on the U.S. side of the border, as well, to warehouse migrants until their trips deeper into the U.S. can be organized, usually guided by U.S. citizens or Mexicans with U.S. visas. U.S. Border Patrol Chief Brian Hastings said nearly 3,000 migrants were found in stash houses on the U.S. side of the border during the last fiscal year.

When Jesús and his family arrived in Reynosa, just downriver from Miguel Aleman and across the border from Hidalgo, Texas, armed men stopped the truck. "I thought they were federal police because they had cones (set up) and were well armed," he said.

He was wrong.

They were from the local cartel and they explained to the migrants how things worked.

Reynosa, a hub of multinational assembly plants, has been in the firm grip of organized crime for years. It costs a migrant to enter and to exit. Jesús discovered his \$7,000 trip didn't include these fees.

First the armed men asked each migrant if they had the password that would allow them to enter for free. Without it, migrants had to pay \$25 to enter the city and \$500 to leave. The second fee included a crossing to the U.S.

Jesús also had to pay the \$3,000 balance for their trip.

"You pay off the trip or they kill you," he said.

Jesús and his family crossed the Rio Grande in an inflatable raft with 50 other migrants the night of Aug. 27. They had to walk about five hours in the dark before Border Patrol showed up and they could turn themselves in and request asylum.

A week later, U.S. authorities returned them to the Mexican border city of Matamoros, where hundreds

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of migrants are camped in deplorable conditions, to await their Dec. 2 court date.

The massive return of asylum seekers to Mexico — more than 55,000 this year — has meant more business opportunities for smugglers.

Some migrants, desperate to reach the U.S., agree to pay for another crossing despite the long odds, others try another part of the border and still others give up.

Jesús' wife decided to return to Honduras with their daughter because she thought it was too dangerous to remain in Mexico. Jesús headed for southern Mexico, where he felt safer, to await the court date.

In late November, Jesús was on his way to the border, this time with papers that allowed him to travel legally by bus. Even so, he was pulled off seven times by authorities.

He made it as far as the northern city of Monterrey where he learned that the cartel controlling Matamoros would require a payment of \$500 for him to enter the city and cross to his court date in Brownsville, Texas. He didn't have the money.

A day after he missed his Dec. 2 court date Jesús was looking for work in Monterrey — this time to raise the \$9,000 a smuggler wanted to bypass U.S. border security and get him to New York where he has relatives.

Being far from his daughter and wife was difficult, he said, "But I have to be strong and move ahead because in Honduras I owe a lot of money."

"Even so it's not a sure thing," he added. "There's a lot of Border Patrol at the border and there's no one here who will guarantee the trip."

The flow of migrants has continued to fall. In November, the most recent figures available, detentions at the U.S.-Mexico border were down nearly 5% from the previous month and almost 70% below the year's peak in May, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

But even as Mexico and the U.S. take credit for the drop, those living from the business aren't sweating it.

Manuel, the Sinaloa cartel man, said that on the U.S. side of the border there are places he has "arrangements and others where you have to risk your neck more," but "there's nothing you can't resolve."

The key, he said, was keeping control of the territory.

He explained that Altar, on the Arizona border, was a key jumping off point for migrants and drugs crossing the border. Most residents of the dusty sun-baked town of 10,000 live directly or indirectly from migrant smuggling.

A 28-year-old Honduran said he has been stuck there for five months. After arriving on a bus, he was talked into a \$5,000 smuggling deal. He paid the \$800 he had, then unable to pay the difference, he contemplated heading back to Honduras. But he'd have to pay an exit fee for that too.

Manuel explained that when a migrant can't pay, "You take advantage of the other business" — smuggling drugs.

"If they don't have money, you tell them, 'This counts for this much,' and they have to work," he said.

Even with Mexico claiming a crackdown on migrant smuggling, Manuel said he doesn't feel more pursued by authorities than before. The risk, he said, is the same as always.

"You're going to have more expenses, but nothing changes," he said. "The border is a business for everybody."

Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

US probes 4 automakers in new Takata air bag recall

TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The U.S. government's highway safety agency has launched an investigation into four automakers that have a potentially deadly type of Takata air bag inflator in their vehicles but have yet to recall them.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents posted Thursday that it is investi-

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gating Audi, Toyota, Honda and Mitsubishi in connection with a Takata recall involving 1.4 million inflators.

The inflators made by the now-bankrupt Takata have a distinct and separate problem that can cause them to blow apart a metal canister and spew shrapnel into people's faces and bodies. The problem killed a driver in Australia who was in an older 3-Series BMW, which has already recalled more than 116,000 vehicles.

The problem is so dangerous that in some cases BMW has told drivers to park their vehicles until repairs can be made.

The safety agency says in documents that Takata didn't provide details on the affected makes, models or model years of vehicles with the defective inflators. So it is telling the companies to recall them promptly.

The agency says that based on when the faulty inflators were produced, it's likely that the vehicles to be recalled came from the 1995 through 2000 model years.

In letters to all four automakers, NHTSA says they have five business days to notify the agency after finding out about a safety defect. "If your company has not yet gathered enough evidence to make a determination that the subject air bag inflators present an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety, reply with a detailed work plan including the benchmark dates required to make the determination," the agency wrote in letters to all four automakers dated Wednesday.

A Honda spokesman said Thursday it hasn't determined yet whether its vehicles are affected, but a decision should be made soon. Audi, Mitsubishi and Toyota said they are still investigating.

NHTSA has told the companies to respond by Jan. 17.

On Dec. 4, NHTSA posted documents from Takata and BMW detailing the problems. The documents said the Australian driver was killed, while another Australian driver and a driver in Cyprus were injured.

Unlike previous recalls, the Takata non-azide inflators do not use volatile ammonium nitrate to fill the air bags in a crash. But the air bag propellant can still deteriorate over time when exposed to moisture and explode too fast, blowing apart the inflator body. They also might not fully inflate to protect people in a crash.

Takata says in government documents that it made about 4.5 million of the inflators worldwide but only a portion are still in use because the vehicles are so old. The faulty inflators have problems with insufficient seals.

Jason Levine, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, a nonprofit advocacy group, said it's too early to tell if the automakers are dragging their feet on the recalls. But he says the investigation "highlights the need for aggressive oversight both by NHTSA and by the companies themselves in terms of when they get these reports to take them seriously and move more quickly."

Cars can stay in use for many years, so it's important to get them recalled, Levine said. "We need to recognize that just waiting these problems out is not going to solve the dangerous situations that defective parts can create," he said.

The recall is another in a long saga of problems with Takata inflators that sent the company into bankruptcy.

Nineteen automakers are recalling about 70 million inflators in what has become the largest string of automotive recalls in U.S. history. The company is recalling about 100 million inflators worldwide.

Most of the recalled inflators use ammonium nitrate to create a small explosion and inflate the air bags. But the chemical deteriorates when exposed to high temperatures and humidity and can burn too fast, blowing apart the canister designed to contain the explosion.

The remnants of Takata were purchased by Chinese-owned Key Safety Systems for \$1.6 billion (175 billion yen). A message was left seeking comment from the successor company, Joyson Safety Systems.

In the BMW recalls, the company is recommending that people stop driving certain 1999 323i and 328i sedans made from July of 1998 through January of 1999. Spokesman Oleg Satanovsky said those cars have inflators that were made at a Takata factory and are known to be faulty because they were manufactured before production improvements.

The company also is recalling another 34,000 323i and 328i sedans from 1999-2000 and 323Ci and 328Ci

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coupes from the 2000 model year. These cars were made from March of 1998 through March of 2000 and have inflators made at two Takata plants that could be defective. Satanovsky says these cars will be inspected and some could get new inflators.

A third group of cars, just over 74,000, is being recalled. This group includes 323i, 325i, 328i, 330i sedans from the 1999 through 2001 model years. They were produced from May 1999 through July of 2000 and may have had air bag inflators replaced by defective ones. They also will be inspected.

BMW is still developing a remedy for the problem, but the company intends to replace faulty inflators with new ones. The company says owners will be notified when parts are available.

APNewsBreak: Union files grievance on behalf of Ellsbury

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Major League Baseball Players Association has filed a grievance against the New York Yankees in an attempt to regain the remaining \$26 million due released outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury.

The grievance was disclosed to The Associated Press by a person familiar with the process who spoke on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made. Barring a settlement, the grievance will be heard by arbitrator Mark Irvings.

New York converted Ellsbury's \$153 million, seven-year contract to non-guaranteed, contending he violated the deal by getting unauthorized medical treatment, then released the 36-year-old outfielder on Nov. 20. The Yankees said he was treated by Dr. Viktor Bouquette of Progressive Medical Center in Atlanta without the team's permission.

Ellsbury contends any treatment he received without authorization was for a non-baseball-related injury or condition, which does not require the club's consent.

Ellsbury has not played since 2017 because of a variety of ailments. He is owed more than \$21.1 million for 2020 plus a \$5 million buyout of a \$21 million team option for 2021.

New York's projected payroll is just at the \$248 million threshold where the highest luxury tax rate starts. and Ellsbury accounts for roughly \$21.9 million of the Yankees' tax payroll. New York will pay 30% on the amount above \$208 million through \$228 million, 42% on the next \$20 million and 75% on the amount above \$248 million. If the Yankees exceed \$248 million, their top pick in the 2021 amateur draft would be moved back 10 places.

New York declined comment, as did Ellsbury's agent, Scott Boras.

Ellsbury hit .264 with 39 homers, 198 RBIs and 102 stolen bases in 520 games in six seasons with the Yankees. He injured a muscle in his right side early during spring training in 2018, developed a bad back and had surgery that Aug. 6 to repair a torn labrum in his left hip. He experienced plantar fasciitis in his right foot during his rehab program before spring training this year.

Irvings is expected to decide next month on the union's grievance against the Chicago Cubs over Kris Bryant. The third baseman debuted on April 17, 2015, leaving him one day shy of the service time needed to become a free agent after the 2020 season. Bryant contends he was held in the minors in a deliberate effort to delay his free-agent eligibility.

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

2019 Breakthrough Entertainer: A star-making year for Majors

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — How is a great actor made? For Jonathan Majors, the 30-year-old breakout star of "The Last Black Man in San Francisco," it started in drama school. It swelled with the discovery of August Wilson. It was provoked by teachers who pushed him to look deeper into himself and into everything around him. But it really began in the pews, listening to his mother, a Methodist pastor, preach.

"My mother's a wordsmith and she was the first person to call me a wordsmith," Majors says. "She was

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the first person to say, 'You have the gift of gab.' She ordained me a performer, a storyteller."

The education of Majors — where he came from, how he got here — is a point of interest because he so overwhelmingly burst on the scene in 2019, making him an easy choice for one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year. Majors' tender and soulful performance as Montgomery Allen in "The Last Black Man in San Francisco" has not only drawn widespread acclaim but brought the eager attention of Spike Lee, Jordan Peele, J.J. Abrams and Jay-Z — all of whom have cast him in upcoming projects.

All of this just two years after his professional debut, three years since his last semester at the Yale School of Drama.

"You just keep your head down," Majors says. "I find if I do get frustrated or antsy it's because I allow ambition to get in. It's something to be wary of for myself. If you trust the seed that's been put in you, a tree just grows. I feel fortunate that as it stands now, the tree in me is to make art and to be an actor."

Majors spoke on a recent trip to New York for the IFP Gotham Awards, where he was a nominee for breakthrough actor (as he also is the Film Independent Spirit Awards). It had to be a brief stay; his schedule is packed.

The day after, Majors would fly back to Atlanta to shoot the Peele-Abrams-produced HBO series "Lovecraft Country," in which he stars as a man traveling the Jim Crow South in search of his missing father. Earlier this year, he spent four months in Southeast Asia shooting Lee's Vietnam drama "Da 5 Bloods." He's also set to star in the Jay-Z produced western "The Harder They Fall."

It's not hard to see why. In even smaller parts, like his debut in the Gus Van Sant-produced ABC miniseries "When We Rise" or his Detroit gangster in "White Boy Rick," Majors exudes a singular presence. His characters suggest icebergs, with unseen depths.

In his shirt pocket, Majors carried a small notebook. It's a habit suggested by a formative drama teacher who instructed him to "write down everything." In it, he pens poetry, observations. He's in that way not so dissimilar from the Montgomery of "The Last Black Man in San Francisco."

The movie, directed by Joe Talbot, is a radiant and melancholic fable about one man's sense of displacement in a rapidly gentrifying San Francisco. It's based on the upbringing of Jimmy Fails, who plays a fictionalized version of himself, in his own big-screen debut. Majors plays his best friend and constant companion, a fishmonger and a playwright who draws from the dramas and characters around him.

Majors immediately identified with Mont, a sensitive, expressive, impassioned young artist, "a viewer of the world." Like Majors, Mont carries a sketchbook with him everywhere.

"The fact that he's a young black man and a common outcast was something I could relate to," he continues. "Growing up in Texas and having this need of expression — being called a wimp because I was emotional, getting picked on for blah blah blah. You take that. I took that like: 'It's fine. It's what it is. I survived.' But that became my fuel for my artistry. I saw that immediately with Mont."

Majors was born in California but raised around Texas. His father left at an early age. He calls his mother "my enabler and my protector." Early on, a teacher in an alternative education program exposed Majors to acting, which he continued at the North Carolina School of the Arts. There, in his second year, he played Cory Maxson in "Fences" and the full force of Wilson's work opened up to him. At Yale, he mounted all of Wilson's 10-play cycle.

There have been other seminal teachers along the way, including the actor and "Lackawanna Blues" playwright Ruben Santiago-Hudson. But Majors' continuing education is increasingly on the sets and stages he now finds himself — like Spike Lee's.

"He has a sweeping august that is his brand, his philosophy, and I got thrown into it at a very intense level," says Majors. "Out of the country, in Thailand, in Vietnam, four and half months, it's on. And I'm fool enough to be wearing a shirt that says Morehouse, so he's on me. 'Come on, Morehouse. Come on, Morehouse. You got it. Let's go.'

"And I'm like, 'All right. I got it now,'" says Majors, smiling. "I think it's the beginning of a great mentorship."

Facebook to tackle efforts to interfere with 2020 US census

By **BARBARA ORTUTAY** and **MAE ANDERSON** AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Facebook plans to clamp down on attempts to use its services to interfere with the 2020 U.S. census, including the posting of misleading information about when and how to participate, who can participate and what happens when people do.

Facebook and other social media companies have been trying to tackle misinformation on their services, especially ahead of next year's U.S. presidential elections. They already have similar policies around voter suppression, banning misleading information about when and where to vote, for instance.

Facebook said Thursday it will prohibit advertisements that portray taking part in the census as "useless or meaningless" or that encourage people not to participate. The company also said it will try to identify and remove misleading census posts before people see them. But it will also remove any posts it misses after the fact, using both technology and humans to spot violations. The company said it will begin enforcing the census policy in January.

The census, which happens every 10 years, is crucial to determining how many representatives a state gets in Congress and which states and cities get billions of dollars in federal funding for roads, health care, low-income programs and other projects. The results of the 2020 census also will be used to redraw electoral maps.

Civil rights leaders worry that misinformation that discourages immigrants and minorities from participating in the census or voting could lead to those populations being underrepresented in key government decisions for years. Misinformation could include warnings of deportation to discourage Latinos from participating, even though federal law prohibits the Census Bureau from sharing census data, including with law enforcement and immigration officials.

Rashad Robinson, president of civil rights group Color of Change, which has pushed Facebook to combat racism and misinformation, called Facebook's new policy "welcome progress." But Robinson said the policy "is only as good as its enforcement and transparency, which, to be clear, is an area that Facebook has failed in the past."

False and inaccurate information is already circulating online about the census. For example, posts in neighborhood chat groups warned that robbers were scamming their way into people's homes by asking to check residents' identification for the census. That was a hoax, but it left Census Bureau officials scrambling to get the posts removed from Facebook.

Facebook sometimes plays down misleading content rather than banning it outright, as it did with a faked video of Nancy Pelosi that went viral earlier this year. It can also "downrank" false or misleading posts — including videos — so that fewer people will see them. Such material can also be paired with fact checks produced by outside organizations, including The Associated Press.

But Facebook is defining misleading census posts as a violation of its community standards and thus subject to removal.

Google is also trying to prevent misinformation about the census from spreading. It set up a team to focus on preventing hoaxes and misleading information. It also expanded a YouTube policy to make it clear that misinformation about the census is prohibited on the site and will be taken down.

Facebook has long tried to steer clear of having to police its content, claiming it is a platform, not a publisher. But after revelations that that Russians bankrolled thousands of fake political ads during the 2016 elections, Facebook and other social networks faced intense pressure to ensure that doesn't happen again. It tightened political ad requirements including verifying political ad buyers and archiving all political ads for the public. But many have found ways to slip through the cracks of the system.

Facebook has been under fire for its policy of not fact checking political advertisements on its service, which critics say allows politicians to lie and then pay Facebook to amplify their lies. Facebook has said it wants to provide politicians with a "level playing field" for communication and not intervene when they speak, regardless of what they're saying.

But now that misleading information about the census is a violation of Facebook's terms, such posts will

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be removed even if they are coming from a politician. Facebook has a similar policy against interfering with voting.

Mae Anderson reported from New York. AP Technology Writer Rachel Lerman in San Francisco contributed to this story.

UK's Johnson unveils legislative plan to end Brexit deadlock

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister Boris Johnson signaled an end to Britain's era of Brexit deadlock Thursday, announcing a packed legislative program intended to take the U.K. out of the European Union on Jan. 31, overhaul everything from fishing to financial services and shore up the country's cash-starved public services.

The commanding House of Commons majority won by Johnson's Conservative Party in last week's general election all but guarantees he will be able to turn those promises into law, although with Brexit casting a shadow over the British economy, there's a question mark over how he will pay for it all.

In a speech delivered from a golden throne in Parliament by Queen Elizabeth II, Johnson opened the legislative floodgates after three years in which minority Conservative governments tried in vain to win legislators' backing for their Brexit plans.

"This is the moment to repay the trust of those who sent us here by delivering on the people's priorities," Johnson told lawmakers after the speech. "They want to move politics on and move the country on."

In less than 10 minutes, the monarch rattled through more than two dozen bills the government intends to pass in the coming year. The first will be the EU Withdrawal Agreement Bill, the law needed to make Brexit a reality, which is set to receive its first significant parliamentary vote on Friday.

The bill commits Britain to leaving the EU on Jan. 31 and to concluding trade talks with the bloc by the end of 2020. Trade experts and EU officials say striking a free trade deal within 11 months will be a struggle, but Johnson insists he won't agree to any more delays. That vow has set off alarm bells among businesses, who fear that means the country will face a "no-deal" Brexit at the start of 2021.

The government also plans to pass several other Brexit-related measures, including a new "points-based" immigration system that will be introduced after Brexit, when EU citizens will lose the automatic right to live and work in the U.K.

There are also plans to overhaul agriculture, fishing, trade and financial services after Brexit in ways that will have a huge — though still largely unknown — effect on the British economy.

Johnson also promised "an ambitious program of domestic reform," including a law committing the government to spend more on the overstretched National Health Service after a decade-long funding squeeze by previous Conservative governments.

There were tough-sounding announcements on law and order, including longer sentences for people convicted of terrorist offenses and other serious crimes.

The speech also promised to "prioritize investment in infrastructure," and Johnson hinted he might revive an idea he's floated before: a bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Engineers say spanning at least 12 miles (19 kilometers) of the deep and stormy Irish Sea would be difficult to impossible.

Asked by a Northern Ireland lawmaker in Parliament whether he planned to build the "Boris bridge," Johnson said: "Watch this space, and indeed ... watch that space between those islands."

Several of the measures are likely to prove contentious. The government said it would hold a sweeping review of defense and foreign policy, and set up a "Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission" that could lead to reform of institutions including the Supreme Court. The court angered the government by ruling in September that Johnson's decision to suspend Parliament was illegal.

Shami Chakrabarti, justice spokeswoman for the opposition Labour Party, called the proposal "vindictive revenge" and "another play from the Book of Trump."

The government also intends to pass a law protecting military veterans from "vexatious" prosecutions.

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The question of whether veterans who served decades ago in Northern Ireland should be open to criminal prosecution is hugely controversial.

Also proposed is a ban on public institutions taking part in "boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries and those who trade with them" without the government's approval. The move is aimed at universities that have boycotted Israel over its treatment of the Palestinians.

The government also promised to lessen regional inequality and bring greater unity to the United Kingdom, which is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But Brexit is making that more difficult. Scotland voted to remain in the EU in Britain's 2016 referendum, and last week most Scottish seats in Parliament were won by the anti-Brexit, pro-independence Scottish National Party.

SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon says Scotland should be able to hold a vote on independence, an option Scots rejected in a 2014 referendum that was billed as a "once-in-a-generation" event.

Sturgeon said she had formally written to the prime minister requesting the power to hold a new independence vote.

"The alternative is a future that we have rejected being imposed upon us," Sturgeon said in Edinburgh. "Scotland made it very clear last week it does not want a Tory government led by Boris Johnson taking us out of the European Union."

Johnson has said he will refuse, and the two sides look set for a slow-burning constitutional showdown.

The Queen's Speech was the centerpiece of the State Opening of Parliament, a blend of politics and pageantry that usually takes place about once a year. Britain saw its last state opening just two months ago, soon after Johnson took over as prime minister from Theresa May through a Conservative Party leadership contest and shortly before the early election that returned him to power.

The pomp was toned down for the queen's second visit this year. There were still officials with titles like Black Rod, scarlet-clad yeomen of the guard and lords in ermine-trimmed robes. But the 93-year-old monarch was driven from Buckingham Palace to Parliament in a car, rather than a horse-drawn carriage, and wore a pale blue dress and matching hat rather than robes and a diamond-studded crown.

Johnson will make his mark on the government more decisively in the new year, when he shakes up his Cabinet and the structure of government. Johnson's office confirmed that one ministry, the Department for Exiting the European Union, will be abolished after Britain leaves the bloc Jan. 31.

Anand Menon, director of political think-tank U.K. in a Changing Europe, said that, with his 80-strong majority in the 650-seat House of Commons, Johnson was in a "very, very strong position."

"It's been so long since we've seen an effective majority government that for the first few months of this one I think we'll just sit there going 'Wow, they're getting things done,'" Menon told the BBC.

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After ebullient 2019, Wall Street warns of slower road ahead

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a year of nirvana, investors may need to get ready for something a little more normal.

Markets are coming off a fabulous 2019, where stocks and bonds around the world climbed in concert. But for the next year — and decade, in fact — Wall Street is telling investors to set their expectations considerably lower.

It's not calling for another crash like the U.S. stock market suffered just over a decade ago. Or for another run like the last 10 years, where the S&P 500 returned more than 13% on an annualized basis. A gain less than half of that may be more likely, both for next year and annually for the coming decade.

"People need to have a more realistic expectation of what returns are going to be," said Greg Davis, chief investment officer at Vanguard. "That means investors who are saving for retirement or for college education will likely need to set aside more, because returns won't be as generous as what we've seen over the last decade."

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It's not because Wall Street sees the U.S. economy falling into a recession, at least not in 2020, even though that's been a recurring fear for much of the last decade. Much of Wall Street expects the economy to chug modestly higher next year.

Instead, it's a simple matter of math. Stocks and bonds don't have as much room to rise after their stellar 2019, analysts say. Starting points matter, and investments began this year at a low point after recession worries pounded markets in December 2018. U.S. stocks will start 2020, meanwhile, close to their highest levels ever.

Plus, one of the biggest reasons for this past year's stellar returns — a major about-face by the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates — can't happen again.

WHY WAS 2019 SO GOOD?

Coming into this year, the mood in markets was one of fear.

The S&P 500 had tumbled 19.8% between Sept. 20, 2018 and Dec. 24, 2018. Investors were worried that the Federal Reserve was raising interest rates too far and too fast and could cause a recession. President Donald Trump's trade war with China was also threatening economic growth.

But markets relaxed shortly after the calendar flipped, when Fed Chairman Jerome Powell pledged on Jan. 4 to be "patient." Investors took that to mean the Fed would stop raising interest rates. Later in the summer, the Fed would go even further and cut rates three times to shield the economy from the effects of trade tensions and slowing economies abroad.

They were the first rate cuts in more than a decade, and the sharp reversal in Fed policy helped relieve investors' anxiety about a potential recession. Lower rates make borrowing cheaper and help industries like housing and autos in particular, where customers typically have to borrow to buy.

Lower rates also mean bonds pay less in interest, which in turn makes the dividends paid by stocks more attractive to income-seeking investors. Low rates helped stock prices rise in 2019 even as profits fell for many big U.S. companies.

Along with the Fed, give credit for the resilient economy to U.S. households, which kept spending even when uncertainty about trade pushed CEOs to hold off on their own investments.

"The greatest asset in the economy is the consumer, and the U.S. consumer continues to be on strong footing," said Mike Dowdall, investment strategist at BMO Global Asset Management.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR 2020

Heading into 2020, the mood is much more giddy, but Wall Street is trying to rein in expectations.

Vanguard forecasts U.S. stocks will return 3.5% to 5.5% annually over the coming decade. Even toward the top end of that range, it's only half what the market has returned historically. Foreign stocks might offer a bit more, at roughly 7.5% annually, but U.S. bonds look set to offer only 2% or 3% annually over the next decade, according to Vanguard.

Of course, any prediction about where investments will end up is only a guess, no matter how educated. Many on Wall Street came into this year expecting only modest returns given all the worries about interest rates and a possible recession. Now, the S&P 500 is about to close out its second-best year of the last two decades.

But for bonds, the reasons for lower expected returns are easy to see. Bonds pay much less in interest than one or 10 years ago. The 10-year Treasury now has a yield of 1.93 %, versus 2.82% a year ago and 3.54 % a decade ago. For bonds to return more than their yields, rates will need to drop even lower.

Some banks along Wall Street have relatively healthy expectations for stocks in 2020 — but few if any are calling for a repeat of 2019's surge for the S&P 500, which was at 27.6% as of Thursday morning. Bank of America Merrill Lynch sees the index ending 2020 at 3,300, which would be a 3.2 % rise, for example. Goldman Sachs is more bullish, with a target of 3,400, but that would still be less than a quarter of this year's gain.

Stocks are more expensive than a year ago on a host of different measures. One of the most commonly used is how a stock's price compares to its profit over the preceding year. By that measure, the S&P 500 is trading at 20.9 times its earnings. That's more expensive than at the start of the year, when it was at

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16.5, or its average over the last two decades of 17.7, according to FactSet.

Low interest rates should help keep this price-earnings valuation high, analysts say. So will a U.S.-China trade conflict that's hopefully no longer ramping higher, analysts say. The diminished threat of a recession should keep investors willing to pay relatively high price-earnings ratios. But the threat of policy changes in Washington, D.C., could act as a counterweight.

"There is a lot of nervousness around the elections," said Lisa Thompson, equity portfolio manager at Capital Group. "The elections could provide some interesting opportunities for investors, particularly in the first half of the year."

She's the type of investor who sees volatile markets, where prices are swinging higher and lower, as "interesting opportunities" because she can use them to buy stocks she likes at lower prices.

President Trump has ushered in lower taxes and lighter regulations for businesses, which investors have seen as incontrovertible wins for investments regardless of their politics. Democrats running to unseat him, meanwhile, could reverse that momentum and target some industries in particular, such as health care. That could lead to big swings for stocks early in 2020 as Democratic candidates try to stand out in a winnowing field.

Even if the worst-case scenario were to come to pass, though, and the economy were to fall into a recession, many professional investors say they aren't worried about a crash like 2007-09 where stock investors lost more than half their savings. Investors have remained hesitant to plow their money into stocks, even after this decade-long run, which means fund managers say they don't see grossly overvalued markets as there were just over a decade ago.

"When the cycle does end, we don't see bubbles out there like in 2008, 2009," said Saira Malik, head of equities at Nuveen. "I think people are nervous."

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Dec. 20, the 354th day of 2019. There are 11 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 20, 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was completed as ownership of the territory was formally transferred from France to the United States.

On this date:

In 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union as all 169 delegates to a special convention in Charleston voted in favor of separation.

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was released from prison after serving nine months for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch.

In 1961, playwright-director Moss Hart, 57, died in Palm Springs, Calif.

In 1963, the Berlin Wall was opened for the first time to West Berliners, who were allowed one-day visits to relatives in the Eastern sector for the holidays.

In 1968, author John Steinbeck died in New York at age 66.

In 1978, former White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman was released from prison after serving 18 months for his role in the Watergate cover-up.

In 1987, more than 4,300 people were killed when the Dona Paz, a Philippine passenger ship, collided with the tanker Vector off Mindoro island.

In 1989, the United States launched Operation Just Cause, sending troops into Panama to topple the government of Gen. Manuel Noriega.

In 1995, an American Airlines Boeing 757 en route to Cali, Colombia, slammed into a mountain, killing all but four of the 163 people aboard. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, NATO began its peacekeeping mission, taking over from the United Nations.

In 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that homosexual couples were entitled to the same benefits and protections as wedded heterosexual couples.

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In 2002, Trent Lott resigned as Senate Republican leader two weeks after igniting a political firestorm with racially charged remarks. The nation's ten biggest brokerages agreed to pay \$1.44 billion and fundamentally change the way they did business to settle allegations they'd misled investors by hyping certain companies' stocks.

In 2005, a federal judge ruled that "intelligent design" could not be mentioned in biology classes in a Pennsylvania public school district, delivering a stinging attack on the Dover Area School Board.

Ten years ago: Relatives reported the death of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, 87, the spiritual father of Iran's reform movement. Actress Brittany Murphy, who'd starred in "Clueless" and "8 Mile," died at age 32. Character actor Arnold Stang died in Newton, Massachusetts, at age 91.

Five years ago: A gunman who'd announced online that he was planning to shoot two "pigs" in retaliation for the police chokehold death of Eric Garner ambushed two New York City officers in a patrol car; Ismaaiyl Brinsley shot Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu to death before running to a subway station and killing himself.

One year ago: President Donald Trump announced that Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who had differed with Trump on Syria, Afghanistan and ties to NATO, would retire at the end of February; in a resignation letter, Mattis said Trump deserved a defense chief "whose views are better aligned with yours." (Days later, Trump pushed Mattis out two months earlier than planned.) Trump declared that he would not sign a bill to keep funding the government because it failed to provide billions of dollars for his border wall with Mexico. The Trump administration announced that people seeking asylum at the U.S. border with Mexico would no longer be released into the United States and would instead be forced to wait in Mexico. Drones buzzing over the runway forced the shutdown of London's Gatwick Airport during one of the busiest times of the year.

Today's Birthdays: Original Mouseketeer Tommy Cole (TV: "The Mickey Mouse Club") is 78. Rhythm and blues singer-musician Walter "Wolfman" Washington is 76. Rock musician-music producer Bobby Colomby is 75. Rock musician Peter Criss is 74. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue is 73. Psychic/illusionist Uri Geller is 73. Producer Dick Wolf ("Law & Order") is 73. Rock musician Alan Parsons is 71. Actress Jenny Agutter is 67. Actor Michael Badalucco is 65. Actress Blanche Baker is 63. Rock singer Billy Bragg is 62. Rock singer-musician Mike Watt (The Secondmen, Minutemen, FIREHOSE) is 62. Actor Joel Gretsch is 56. Country singer Kris Tyler is 55. Rock singer Chris Robinson is 53. Actress Nicole deBoer is 49. Movie director Todd Phillips is 49. Singer David Cook ("American Idol") is 37. Actor Jonah Hill is 36. Actor Bob Morley is 35. Singer JoJo is 29. Actor Colin Woodell is 28.

Thought for Today: "All the mistakes I ever made were when I wanted to say 'No' and said 'Yes.'" — Moss Hart, American playwright and director (born 1904, died this date in 1961).

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