

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Angel Tree Thanks You All

I would really really like to thank everybody very much this year. It has just warmed my heart with the donations and lots of gifts for the children to have a great Christmas. I have never been called the Angel lady for the children before, but that just melts my heart. I am so overwhelmed with my heart so full of love for these children that will have the best Christmas that they will have. And to the lady that gave me the biggest hug and thanked be for doing this every year. This is my 14th year doing it and it is the best time of the year for me giving back. I have also gotten my daughters involved with buying gifts also and they love helping me out. And I would like to thank my two friends that helped me with little things here and there. And the two businesses that host my trees every year. I love living in a little community like this.

Thanks a lot!

The Angel lady with
a big heart for Children
Tina Kosel



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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Did you know Premium E30 . . .

- ✓ Has a 94 Octane Rating ...
...Higher than Premium
- ✓ Maintains or Increases fuel mileage, on average
- ✓ \$3 - \$5 Per Tank Fuel Savings
- ✓ No Check Engine Lights
- ✓ No Mechanical Issues
- ✓ Increased Horsepower

Results are based on test by Glacial Lakes Energy



We are Challenging
You to try
Premium E30 in
your non-flex
fuel vehicle

Fill Up with

Premium E30 as you travel
this holiday season



Glacial Lakes
Energy, LLC
Corn ♡ Ethanol ♡ Feed
Watertown & Mina, SD

We're building a solid foundation so we can
wish you a *Merry Christmas!*



Residential ~ Ag & Commercial ~ General Contractor
New Construction and Remodeling ~ Concrete Basements ~ Flatwork & Foundations
Greg Johnson Construction, Inc.

Greg Johnson, Owner

Business: 605/492-3143 ~ Cell: 605/216-3143 ~ Bristol, SD

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Groton Kindergarten Students



Arther Eichler, son of Collin and Emily Eichler, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? Presents, kids being good.



Aryanna Lilly, daughter of Katie Lilly and Derek Pfitzer, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? I like presents and I love Santa.

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Brody Zimmerman, son of Jarrett and Amands Zimmerman, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Jesus birth and Santa comes with toys.



Calvin Locken, son of Chad and Britt Locken, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? It is a holiday. People get to take a day off. Even grown ups get a day off and you get presents.

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Colton Pullan, son of Jason and Danielle Pullan, Columbia. What Christmas means to me: Get candy and presents, see grandma and grandpa at Christmas.



Dane Kampa, son of Chad and Katie Kampa, Groton. What Christmas means to me: Presents and you get candy in your stockings, but if your naughty you might get coal- So you really want to be good!

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Deylon Johnson, son of Matt and Tanya Johnson, Groton. What Christmas means to me: Presents and Christmas Tree.



Elise Pharis, daughter of Kevin and Kara Pharis, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Grandpa getting better, Santa comes down the Chimney.

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Greyson Warrington, son of Jason and Robyn Warrington, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Snow, Santa, reindeer and a sleigh.



Gunner Osterman, son of Loren and Katie Osterman, Conde. What does Christmas mean to me? Having presents, spending time with my family.

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Hank Flihs, son of Tigh and Adrienne Flihs, Claremont. What does Christmas mean to me? Get presents, family invites you to their house, we get to have Santa come over.



Huntley Overacker, son of Jesse and Jaymie Overacker, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? I get presents and to eat candy canes and you go outside to play in the snow.

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Jack Schuelke, son of Austin and Deb Schuelke, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Get presents, Santa comes and brings presents.



Jernie Weig, daughter of Jade and Julie Weig, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Being proud, we get presents, Santa gets cookies.

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Kacie McComsey, daughter of Jason and Christina McComsey, Conde. What does Christmas mean to me? It snows outside and you get presents from Santa.



Kaelee Morehouse, daughter of Justin and Amanda Morehouse, Andover. What does Christmas mean to me? I get presents and put up Christmas trees.

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Matias DeLoera, son of Joel and Marilu DeLoera, Andover. What does Christmas mean to me? Celebrate and eat.



Rowan Hanson, daughter of Justin and Chelsea Hanson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? You get presents and candy in your stockings, and family gets to come over

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Taylor Thompson, daughter of Mark and June Thompson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa Claus brings us presents.



Willow Cowan, daughter of Joshua and Malerie Cowan, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Christmas tree of my own, gingerbread men and Santa.

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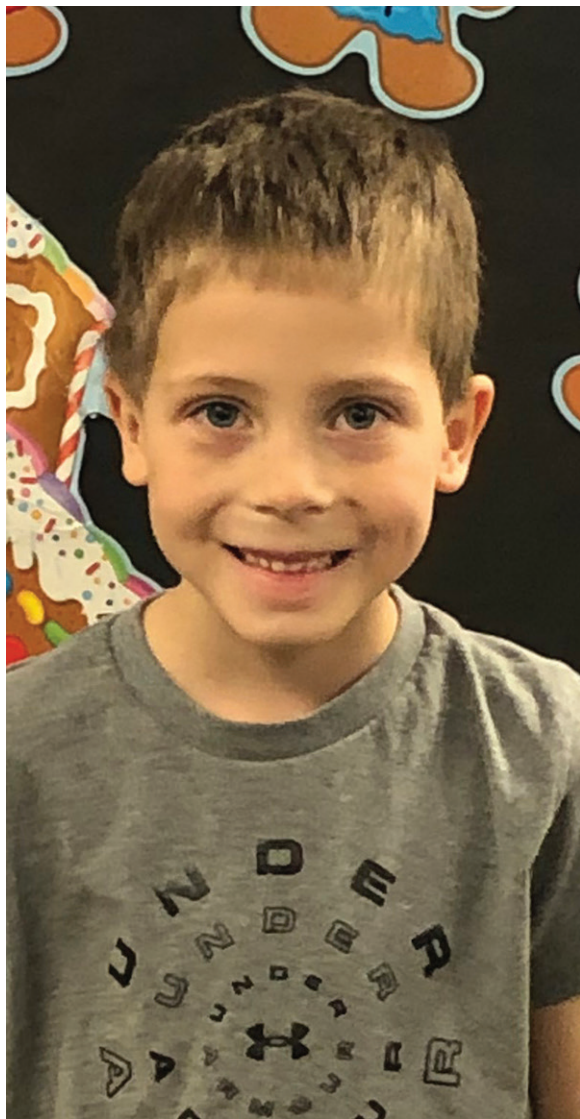
Weston Kettner, son of Alex and Kendra Kettner, Columbia What does Christmas mean to me? Opening presents.



TJ Feist, son of Tracy Feist, Aberdeen. What does Christmas mean to me? To get presents

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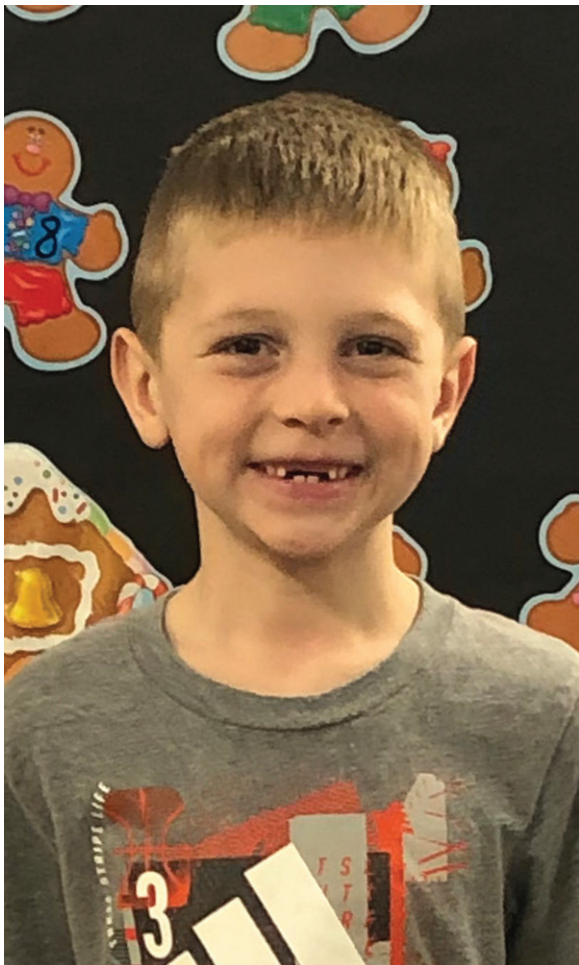
Titan Johnson, son of TJ and Samantha Johnson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? You visit family and get presents.



Taylor Fliehs, daughter of Trey and Becah Fliehs, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Having Christmas dinner with my family.

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Tanner Frost, son of Chris and Samantha Frost, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? It's fun opening presents and I hope Santa gives me a dirt bike.



Shealee Gilchrist, daughter of Grant and Jen Gilchrist, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? Spending the holiday with my family.

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Ryan Hanson, daughter of Justin and Chelsea Hanson, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? It means family and playing with them.



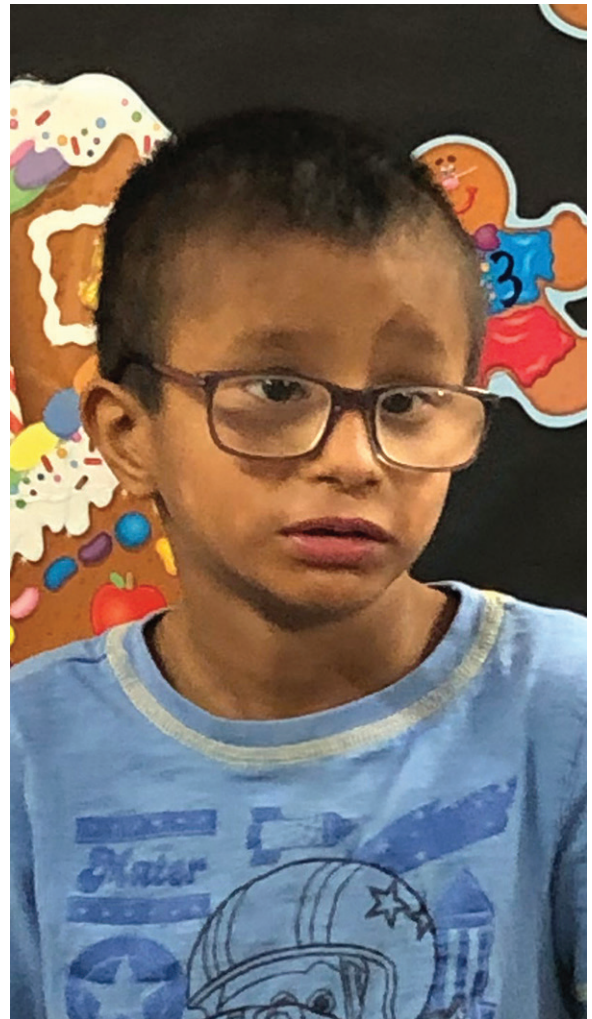
Ruby Dosch, daughter of Kelsie and Ehresmann and Jeremy Dosch, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? Opening presents with grandma and grandpa and my cousins.

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Rosalyn Block, daughter of Hope Block, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa brings presents and we get to open them.



Riley Lufkins, son of Angela Odland, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? toys.

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Micah Krause, son of Pat and Kayla Krause, Groton. What does Christmas means to me? You give presents, it's all about sharing and being on the "good list" and not on the "naughty list.



Lilianna Brunson, daughter of Joey and Andrea Brunson, Groton. What does Christmas means to me? Presents, Santa and the elves.

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Lennox Locke, daughter of Spencer and Kellie Locke and Victoria Locke, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Santa his reindeer and gingerbread houses.



Kayson Hofer, son of Mark and Jen Hofer, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? Is about sharing and caring and having good food.

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Kaylee Sippel, daughter of John and Lisa Sippel, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Open presents and eat turkey



Jordy Frasier, daughter of Joran and Nikki Frasier, Columbia What does Christmas mean to me? It makes my family feel good.

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Jacob Morehouse, son of Jesse and Julie Morehouse, Andover. What does Christmas means to me? Is you have gifts and be nice. You have cookies out for Santa



Jackson Helvig, son of Aaron and Jill Helvig, Aberdeen. What does Christmas mean to me? Love and Santa loves me.

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Hudson McGannon, son of Sarah Sigdestad and Travis McGannon, Bristol. What does Christmas mean to me? Is you celebrate a happy Christmas.



Gideon Rix, son of Grant and Tracy Rix, Groton. What does Christmas means to me? Is just happiness and spending time with your family.

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Emma Woizeschke, daughter of Scott and Nicole Woizeschke, Bath. What does Christmas mean to me? Is be nice to people and others and to celebrate the day Jesus was born.



Devon Locke, daughter of Mitchell and Heidi Locke, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Happiness.

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Cierra Lier-Sauer, daughter of Jayde Lier and Nick Saur, Conde. What does Christmas means to me? You open the presents and decorate the Christmas tree.



Boston Kurth, son of Travis and Debra Kurth, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Presents and the Christmas tree.

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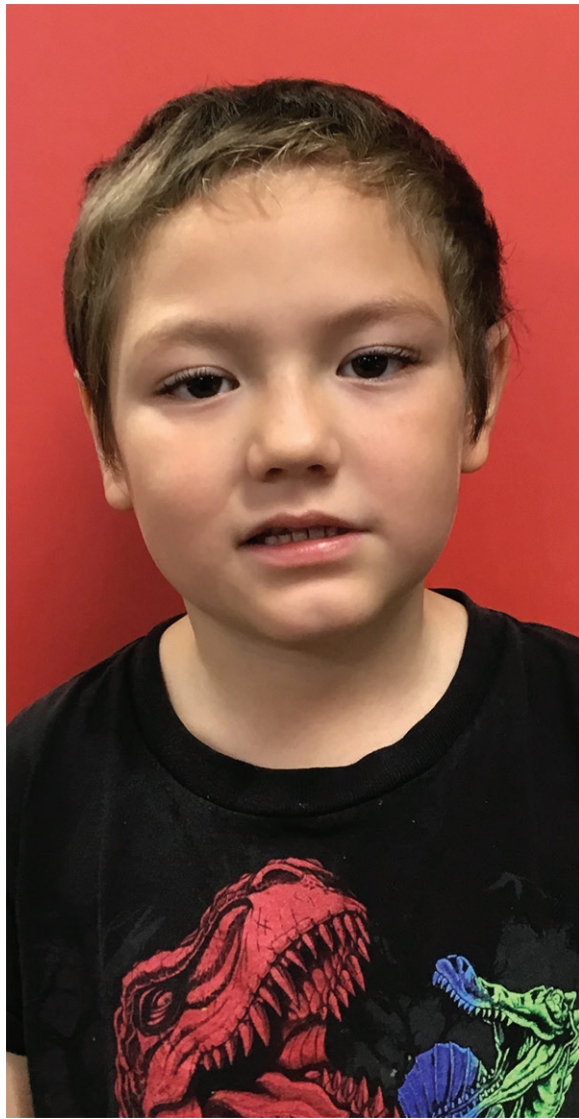
Blakely Stiegelmeier, daughter of Jordan and Whitney Stiegelmeier, Columbia . What does Christmas mean to me? Jesus was born and presents



Adam Fliehs, son of Richard and Heather Fliehs, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me? Caring and sharing and being nice. It's not all just about presents. It's about being kind.

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Jaxson Barrera, son of Beltran and Tasha Barrera, Groton. What does Christmas mean to me Playing outside.



Avery Knipping, daughter of Tori Knipping and Cody Roettle, Columbia. What does Christmas mean to me? That I love my family.

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The angel said to them,
"Do not be afraid. I bring
you good news that will
cause great joy for all the
people. Today in the town
of David a Savior has been
born to you; he is the Mes-
siah, the Lord. This will be
a sign to you: You will find
a baby wrapped in cloths
and lying in a manger."

*From all of us at Lori's Pharmacy in Groton,
we wish you a very blessed Christmas!*

DPS Officials Urge Safe Driving During Christmas Week

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota's Department of Public Safety reminds people that a safe Christmas holiday begins when they get behind the wheel.

The Highway Patrol and the Office of Highway Safety urge drivers to be careful when driving for Christmas, whether it is across town or across the state. With more people on the road for the holiday, Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. Rick Miller says it is important everyone watches out for each other.

"It is easy with so many things going on to forget about staying safe while driving," he says. "But one mistake – getting distracted by your electronic devices, drinking and then driving, not wearing your seatbelt or not slowing down – can lead to a regrettable Christmas for many."

This year's Christmas holiday reporting period for motor vehicle traffic crashes covers 30 hours, from 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 24, through midnight, Wednesday, Dec. 25. During last year's 102-hour long reporting period, there were 173 reported traffic crashes resulting in 48 injuries and two deaths. Of the two fatalities, one was a pedestrian and the other was a pickup driver who was ejected after not wearing a seatbelt.

"It always comes down to this – making the holiday season memorable for the right reason," says Miller. "That doesn't mean just the drivers, but also making sure the passengers, especially children, are properly restrained."

South Dakota's deadliest Christmas holiday period was in 1976 when 10 people died from injuries received in five crashes. The last fatality-free Christmas Holiday weekend occurred in 2015.

The Highway Patrol and the Office of Highway Safety are part of the Department of Public Safety.

Senior Meals Suggested Donation Going Up

Area IV Senior Meals will be increasing its suggested donation amount to \$4.50 per meal, beginning on Jan. 1.

The change is effective at Senior Meal locations in Brown, Campbell, Corson, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Marshall, McPherson, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Sully and Walworth.

The donation amount is a suggestion only. Participants can still decide what they pay.

The increase is the first of its kind in more than eight years.

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**This
Afternoon**



Cloudy

High: 29 °F

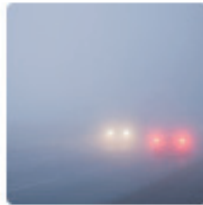
Tonight



Cloudy then
Patchy Fog

Low: 20 °F

Tuesday



Patchy Fog

High: 29 °F

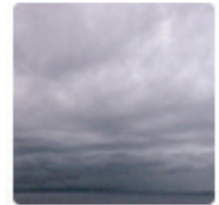
**Tuesday
Night**



Patchy Fog
then Cloudy

Low: 21 °F

**Christmas
Day**



Cloudy

High: 28 °F

COOLER (ALTHOUGH STILL SEASONALLY MILD)

WEAK MID WEEK SYSTEM

Monday



Mostly Cloudy

Highs: 30s

Tuesday



Mostly Cloudy

Highs: 30s

Wednesday



Cloudy
Light Drizzle &
Light Snow Late

Highs: 20s

www.weather.gov

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Graphic Created
12/23/2019 3:41 AM



A cold front has moved through, but temperatures really haven't cooled much and won't really change much over the next few days. We will have to contend with a weak system mid-week, which could bring some light drizzle and snow accumulations, however there is quite a bit of uncertainty as to how this system will develop and affect the region.

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Today in Weather History

December 23, 1987: Five to sixteen inches of snow fell in 24 hours in east-central and southeast South Dakota from the morning of the 23rd through the morning of the 24th. Some of the more significant amounts measured were 9 inches at Huron, 10 inches at Mitchell, Platte and Brookings, twelve inches at Chamberlain, and sixteen inches at Alpena. Heavy snow also fell in southwestern Minnesota, with Big Stone and Traverse Counties in the west-central portion of the state missing out on the heaviest snow. Considerable blowing and drifting snow hampered removal, particularly in South Dakota, due to reduced visibilities. Snowfall amounts also included three inches at Castlewood, five inches at Clear Lake, and six inches at Bryant.

December 23, 1996: Blizzard conditions developed across northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota in the late afternoon of the 23rd and continued into the late evening. Visibilities were frequently below one-quarter of a mile. Two to six inches of new snowfall combined with the already significant snow cover and north winds of 20 to 40 mph to cause widespread blizzard conditions and heavy drifting on area roads. Travel was significantly impacted if not impossible, and one fatality resulted from a head-on collision. Some snowfall amounts in Minnesota included 5 inches at Artichoke Lake and 6 inches at Wheaton and Browns Valley. In South Dakota, 7 inches fell at Britton, Webster, and Clear Lake, with 6 inches at Sisseton and 5 inches at Summit.

1921: An estimated F3 tornado struck the town of Clarkedale, Arkansas, killing six and injuring 60 others. Four people died in the destruction of the Banks and Danner store, where 50 people were doing their Christmas shopping.

1924: A storm producing winds of 70 mph caused extensive damage to Sydney, Australia during the evening hours.

1998: A major ice storm struck central and southeast Virginia and much of North Carolina beginning on Wednesday, December 23, and lasting until Christmas Day morning. Icy conditions caused injuries from slips and falls and numerous vehicle accidents. Ice accumulations of up to an inch brought down trees and power lines. Outages were so widespread with 400,000 customers were without power on Christmas Eve. Some people were without power for up to ten days.

1811 - A cold storm hit Long Island sound with a foot of snow, gale force winds, and temperatures near zero. During the storm many ships were wrecked, and in some cases entire crews perished. (David Ludlum)

1955 - The barometric pressure dipped to 28.97 inches (981 millibars) at Boise ID, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A major winter storm struck Colorado producing heavy snow and blizzard conditions. A record two feet of snow was reported at Stapleton Airport in Denver, which was shut down for 33 hours. Up to 44 inches of snow fell in the foothills surrounding Denver. The storm hurt the ski industry as skiers were unable to make it out of Denver to the slopes, and the closed airport became a campground for vacationers. (23rd-25th) (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1983 - The temperature plunged to 50 degrees below zero at Williston ND to equal their all-time record. Minneapolis MN reported an afternoon high of 17 degrees below zero, and that evening strong northerly winds produced wind chill readings of 100 degrees below zero in North Dakota. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - A winter storm brought heavy snow to the Central Rockies, and also spread a blanket of snow across the Middle Missouri Valley in time for Christmas. Snow and high winds created near blizzard conditions in Wyoming. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to 25 inches at Casper, with four feet of snow reported at the Hogadon Ski Resort on Casper Mountain. The Wolf Creek Ski Resort in Colorado received 26 inches of snow. Totals in the Middle Missouri Valley ranged up to 16 inches at Alpena SD, with 14 inches at Harrison NE. Strong winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the southwestern U.S. Canyon winds gusting to 100 mph created ground blizzards in Utah. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 39 °F at 2:31 PM

Low Temp: 24 °F at 8:19 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 11:48 AM

Day Rain: 0.00

Record High: 54° in 1893

Record Low: -34° in 1983

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.36

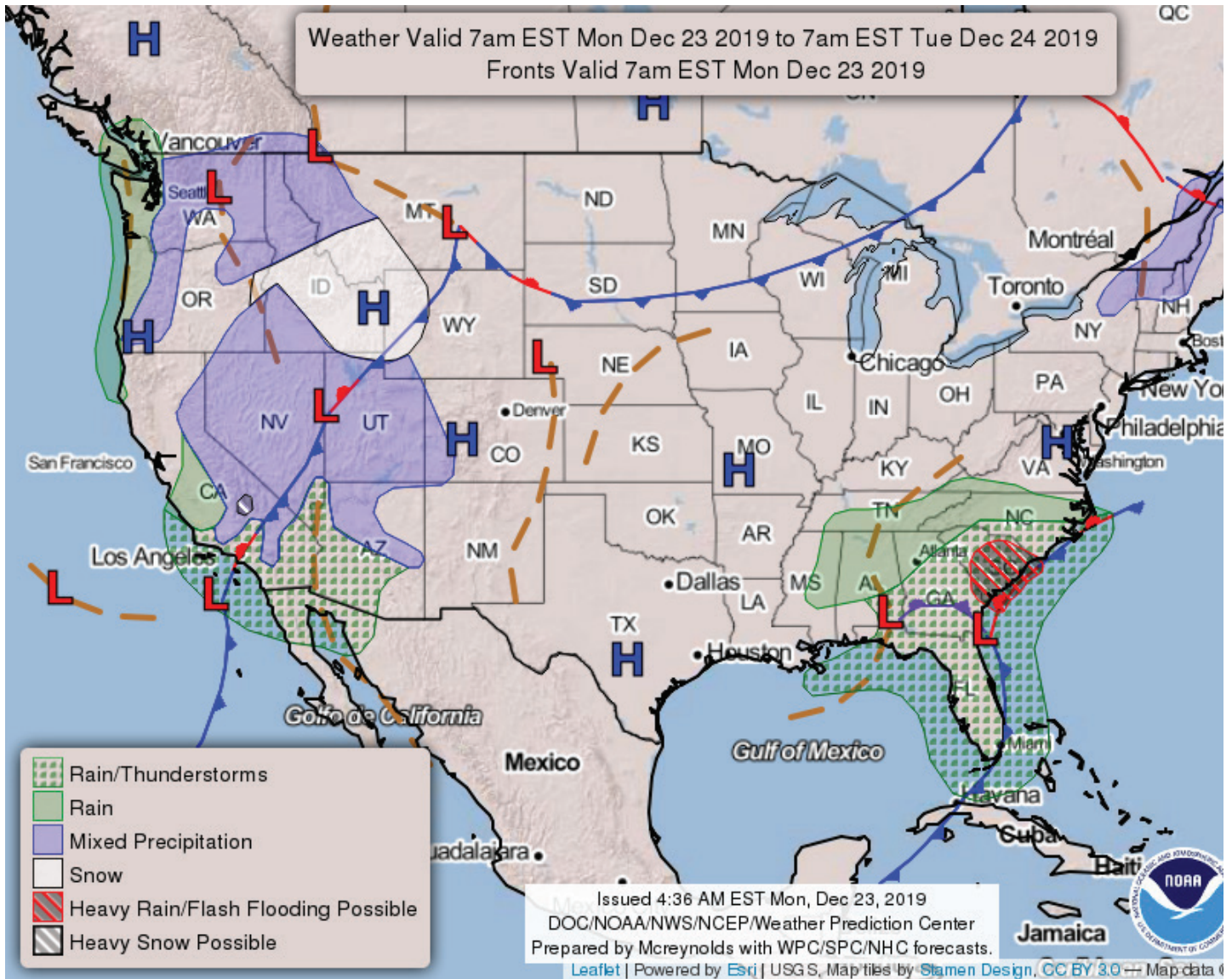
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.11

Average Precip to date: 21.56

Precip Year to Date: 28.06

Sunset Tonight: 4:54 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.





THE ANGEL'S VISIT TO MARY

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think of what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and He will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And though the angel left her, she was not alone.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Your presence and the peace and protection that is ours when we are obedient to Your voice. Give us Your courage to be faithful to Your plan to fulfill Your purpose for our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 1:26-38 Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and will name him Jesus.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

12/19/2019 – Christmas Open House 10am-4pm, Wells Fargo Bank

12/20/2019 – Holiday Bake Sale & Open House 9am-4pm, Groton Community Transit

- Bingo: every Wednesday at the Legion Post #39

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/26/2020 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

• 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m. Sharp (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)

- 04/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)

- 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.

- 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Saturday in May)

- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)

- 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS

- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)

Groton Hosting State B American Legion Baseball Tournament

- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show

- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Sat. after Labor Day)

- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest

- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)

• 11/14/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

News from the Associated Press

Sanford Health program aimed at those out of the workforce

ST. JOHNS, S.D. (AP) — Sanford Health has launched a new pilot program to attract employees who have been out of the workforce for some time.

The program it calls "returnship" is aimed at finding enough employees in a region where unemployment is low. Current positions are in marketing and communications, finances and human resources, all based in St. Johns.

The 12-week program comes with extra mentoring and coaching.

"I think it kind of gives both sides of the equation a chance to try things out," said Brad Schoenfelder, a senior executive director.

Schoenfelder described the ideal returnship candidate as someone out of the workforce for 24 months or longer and a degreed professional with an established work history, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

2 companies pay off school district lunch debt

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Two South Dakota companies have paid off all lunch debt in the Pierre School District. Karber Construction and American Trust Insurance have eliminated a negative balance of about \$2,300 in students' meal accounts.

Mandy Karber says that as a small business, they were simply looking for a way to give back. She says it's typical of the Pierre community where there are a lot of people willing to help out. according to the Argus Leader.

American Trust Insurance says it raised about \$1,000 with an employee giving campaign.

District business manager Darla Mayer says school officials are grateful for the generous individuals and businesses.

Hardnett's 3 lifts UMKC over South Dakota 78-75

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Jahshire Hardnett hit a 3-pointer with 2 seconds remaining for his only points of the game and Missouri-Kansas City slipped past South Dakota 78-75 on Sunday.

Jordan Giles made 1 of 2 free throws with 19 seconds to go to put the Kangaroos (7-7) up 75-73, but Ty Chisom answered with a jumper pull South Dakota even and set the stage for Hardnett.

Giles topped UMKC with 25 points on 10-of-11 shooting from the floor. Brandon McKissic hit 9 of his 11 shots and scored 19, while Rob Whitfield hit three 3-pointers and scored 15. UMKC shot 63% from the floor (31 of 49) and hit 6 of 13 from distance.

Tyler Hagedorn topped the Coyotes (9-5) with 29 points and nine rebounds. Cody Kelley hit three 3-pointers and scored 15, while Tyler Peterson added 11 points. South Dakota shot 49% overall (26 of 53) and sank 5 of 13 from distance.

No. 5 South Carolina defeats No. 25 South Dakota 73-60

By PETE IACOBELLI AP Sports Writer

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina coach Dawn Staley has discovered the perfect role for reserve LeLe Grissett, one the transformed guard seems to be taking to more and more with each game.

Grissett scored 17 points — her third straight game in double figures — to lead the fifth-ranked Gamecocks to a 73-60 win over No. 25 South Dakota on Sunday.

The 6-foot-2 junior came to South Carolina as a forward, but has since been moved to the backcourt where her size, strength and talent present matchup problems.

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"Coming off the bench is a perfect position for her because she changes the complexion of the game defensively," Staley said. "Now she's changing the complexion offensively. You want to see a player grow in that way."

Grissett's surge has helped the Gamecocks win six straight heading into a long break before Southeastern Conference play starts next month.

Grissett said she's become more comfortable as a guard, urged on at every practice and film session by her teammates.

"They've just kept pushing me every practice and in games they push me and tell me to keep my head up," said Grissett, who had only once scored in double figures in South Carolina's first 10 games before her recent run.

The Gamecocks (12-1) took control midway through the opening period and while South Dakota (11-2) never let things get out of hand, it could not make a significant dent in the double-digit deficit.

As it did in beating Purdue and Duke by a combined 79 points the past two outings, South Carolina used speed and defense to keep the Coyotes on their heels.

Freshman Zia Cooke added 13 points for the Gamecocks while another newcomer, Aliyah Boston, had a team-leading nine rebounds and five of her team's six blocks. It was the third game this season in which the 6-5 Boston has blocked five or more shots.

South Carolina took control early with a 25-7 surge that spanned the first and second quarters. The run included a right-handed, three-quarter court-length heave — officially measured at 71 feet — from Tyasha Harris that swished home to close the opening quarter.

Ciara Duffy finished with a game-high 20 points for South Dakota before fouling out in the final quarter. The team's second-leading scorer coming in, Hannah Sjerven, was held to five points in 17 minutes because of foul trouble.

The Coyotes came in No. 10 nationally in scoring at 82 points per game. They were held to their fewest points this season.

South Dakota coach Dawn Plitzuweit said her team played hard and didn't cave in under South Carolina's pressure. She's confident the tough nonconference schedule will serve her team well when Summit League play begins next week.

"It was set up to be very challenging," Plitzuweit said. "The styles that we've seen and the competitive teams that we played will help us."

THE BIG PICTURE

South Dakota: The Coyotes, the preseason pick to win the Summit League, entered the AP Top 25 this week and will likely drop out despite losing to a top-5 opponent. Still, South Dakota is a good bet to make its second straight NCAA Tournament.

South Carolina: The Gamecocks have been strong against Top 25 opponents and showed that once more. South Carolina improved to 3-1 this season against ranked teams, beating Maryland and Baylor last month. Its lone loss came to Indiana.

BEAT THE CLOCK

The Gamecocks had buzzer-beating baskets in each of the first three quarters. Harris' long-distance bomb got it started. Then Cooke and Destanni Henderson made much shorter shots that went in after the buzzer sounded in the second and third quarters.

"Three shots the end of the quarter I thought were fairly well defended," South Dakota's Plitzuweit said. "They hit shots and that's a credit to them."

SWEATING IT UP

In their last game before Christmas, both the South Carolina and South Dakota benches broke out their best (or maybe worst) holiday-themed sweaters. Staley, a Philadelphia native, broke out her green Eagles sweater that lit up around the word "Touchdown."

Plitzuweit of South Dakota chose a more traditional style with reindeer on hers.

UP NEXT

South Dakota will have a week off before starting Summit League play at Western Illinois on Dec. 29.

South Carolina gets more than a week off before opening its Southeastern Conference season Jan. 2 at home against No. 14 Kentucky.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/Womenscollegbasketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Rapid City real estate agent faces prison for tax evasion

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid City real estate agent faces up to five years in prison after pleading guilty to tax evasion.

The Rapid City Journal reports Joseph Bennington also must pay more than \$124,000 in restitution to the IRS after not reporting \$1.209,333 in income between 2008-2017.

Court documents say Bennington didn't file a tax return for that year and admitted to cashing checks instead of depositing them into a bank account to keep the IRS from being able to track his income.

Court records show Bennington is scheduled for sentencing on April 27.

GOP governors grapple with whether to accept refugees or not

By GRANT SCHULTE and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — An executive order by President Donald Trump giving states the right to refuse to take refugees is putting Republican governors in an uncomfortable position.

They're caught between immigration hardliners who want to shut the door and some Christian evangelicals who believe helping refugees is a moral obligation. Others say refugees are vital to fill jobs and keep rural communities afloat.

More than 30 governors have agreed to accept refugees, but about a dozen Republican governors have stayed silent as they face a decision that must be made by Jan. 21 so resettlement agencies can secure federal funding in time to plan where to place refugees.

Trump's executive order requires governors to publicly say they will accept refugees. They cannot automatically come to their states, even if cities and counties welcome them. So far, no one has opted to shut out refugees.

A North Dakota county voted this month to accept no more than 25 refugees next year, after initially signaling it would be the first to ban them.

Trump issued the order in September after slashing the number of refugees allowed into the United States in 2020 to a historic low of 18,000. The reduction is part of the administration's efforts to reduce both legal and illegal immigration.

With his order, Trump again thrust states and local governments into immigration policy, willingly or not. It has caused heated debates and raucous meetings in several states, including North Dakota to Wisconsin.

Trump says his administration acted to respect communities that believe they do not have enough jobs to support refugees. Refugees can move anywhere in the U.S. after their initial resettlement at their own expense.

Republican governors in Nebraska, West Virginia, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Arizona, Iowa and Oklahoma have consented to accepting refugees in 2020. Vermont's Republican governor said he intends to accept refugees.

Others have not taken a public stance. They include the Republican governors of Georgia and Missouri, along with Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, the state that took in the largest number of refugees this year.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, the nation's most populous state that resettles many refugees, also has not consented yet, but his office said he plans to do so.

In 2015, governors from 31 states — nearly all with Republican governors, including Abbott — tried to shut out Syrians, citing terrorism fears. But they didn't have the legal authority at the time.

Now that they do, some governors have struggled with the decision.

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Faith-based groups have led an aggressive campaign urging them to keep accepting refugees, while immigration hardliners have criticized Republicans who have not used their new authority to put the brakes on refugees coming into their states.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, who tried to turn away Syrians in 2015, spent weeks reviewing his options. He gave his consent Thursday in an open letter to Trump co-signed by Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, praising the president for strengthening the vetting process.

"Thanks to your leadership, Americans can be confident once again in the screening process for refugees entering the United States," the governors said in the letter.

Hatim Ido, a former U.S. Army translator and member of the persecuted Yazidi community who fled Iraq, was relieved to know Nebraska's doors are still open. Ido hopes his two sisters in Iraq will be able to join him someday in Lincoln.

"I'm really concerned about them," said Ido, a graduate student who became a U.S. citizen last year. "I understand (government officials) need to be very careful. I just wish there was a process in place so we could bring them here."

Administration officials say refugee applicants are subject to the strictest, most comprehensive background checks for any group seeking to come to the U.S.

Fraud detection and national security officers now come overseas with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services teams who are processing refugees.

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb made the distinction that opening the door to refugees does not mean he's going soft on illegal immigration.

A federal judge last year permanently blocked Indiana from trying to turn away Syrians under an order that Vice President Mike Pence championed as governor.

"These are NOT illegal or unlawful immigrants but individuals who have gone through all the proper channels," Holcomb wrote in his consent letter.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey announced his consent the same day this month that 300 evangelicals signed a letter urging him to keep letting refugees resettle "as an exercise of our Christian faith."

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said faith leaders reached out to him, too.

"I appreciate Oklahoma churches who have assisted these individuals," he wrote in his consent letter.

Tennessee's consent did not sit well with legislative leaders who sued the federal government over the resettlement program.

"Our personal preference would have been to exercise the option to hit the pause button on accepting additional refugees in our state," House Speaker Cameron Sexton and Lt. Gov. Randy McNally said in a joint statement.

Gov. Bill Lee, who talks often about his Christian faith, said he had to follow his heart.

"My commitment to these ideals is based on my faith, personally visiting refugee camps on multiple continents, and my years of experience ministering to refugees here in Tennessee," he wrote in his consent letter.

More than 80 local governments have written letters welcoming refugees. Many are rural towns in conservative states that have come to rely on young refugees to revitalize their economies.

"We need workers, big time," said Nebraska Sen. John McCollister, a Republican who is sometimes at odds with his party. Refugees "bring a lot of enthusiasm, and they're some of our best entrepreneurs. They add a lot to the economy of Nebraska."

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert asked for more refugees in a letter to Trump last month. The Republican said Utah has the resources and space and that welcoming refugees is part of the culture in a state where members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints found refuge generations ago.

"It's been striking to see the breadth of bipartisan support for refugee resettlement in the states, with a number of governors writing very strong letters of support," said Mark Greenberg, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute and a former official in the U.S. Health and Human Services Department, which includes refugee resettlement. He left in 2017.

Holly Johnson, who coordinates the Tennessee Office for Refugees within the Catholic Charities, is not surprised. Employers are "chasing down resettlement agencies because they know refugees work hard," she said.

Three resettlement groups have sued to block Trump's order.

Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon does not plan to weigh in for now, his spokesman Michael Pearlman said, noting the state has not had a refugee resettlement program for decades.

GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Arkansas is determining which communities may be interested in accepting refugees, looking at financial costs and verifying security checks but that no final decision has been made.

"I am committed to ensure that refugees brought to Arkansas have a real chance to settle and become self-sufficient," he said.

Watson reported from San Diego. Anita Snow in Phoenix; Jonathan Mattise in Nashville, Tennessee; Mead Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming; Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City; Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City; David Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri; Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Ben Nadler in Atlanta; Anthony Izaguirre in Charleston, West Virginia; Paul Weber in Austin, Texas; and Don Thompson in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Boeing CEO resigns after two deadly 737 Max crashes

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg resigned Monday over the deadly 737 Max debacle that has plunged the aircraft maker into crisis and damaged its reputation as one of the stalwarts of American industry.

The company's board said a change in leadership was needed to restore confidence in Boeing as it works to repair relationships with regulators and others in the wake of two 737 Max crashes that killed 346 people in all.

The Max was grounded worldwide after the two disasters — one in October 2018 off the coast of Indonesia, the other in 2019 in Ethiopia. Boeing has come under fierce criticism on Capitol Hill and elsewhere over the design and rollout of the jetliner and has been unable to get approval from regulators to put the plane back in the air.

Last week, the crisis inside the company deepened when Boeing announced it will suspend production of the Max in January. And in another stinging setback for the aerospace giant, Boeing's new Starliner space capsule went off course Friday during a bungled unmanned test flight to the International Space Station.

Boeing said Muilenburg will depart immediately and the board's current chairman, David Calhoun, will take over as CEO on Jan. 13. The company declined to make Calhoun or other executives available for comment.

Investigators say that in both crashes, a faulty sensor caused the plane's new automated MCAS flight-control system to push the nose of the plane down, and the pilots were unable to regain control.

Ababu Amha, who lost his wife, a flight attendant, in the second crash, involving an Ethiopian Airlines aircraft, welcomed Muilenburg's departure.

"This is something that we have been asking and struggling for quite some time," he said. "The CEO reluctantly and deliberately kept the aircraft in service after the Lion Air crash. The Ethiopian Airlines crash was a preventable accident."

The resignation, however, is not enough, Amha said: "They should further be held accountable for their actions because what they did was a crime."

Muilenburg was faulted for Boeing's initial response to the first accident, in which he and the company seemed to suggest the pilots were at fault. Criticism of Muilenburg increased in recent months as news reports and congressional investigations disclosed internal documents that revealed concern within Boeing's ranks about key design features on the Max, especially the new flight-control system.

In late October, lawmakers and relatives of passengers who died called on the CEO to quit.

Earlier this month, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration expressed concern that Boeing was

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pushing for an unrealistically quick return of the grounded Max. The shutdown in production is likely to ripple through the U.S. economy and Boeing's vast network of 900 companies that make engines, bodies and other parts for the Max.

With Boeing in turmoil, sales at Airbus, its top rival, surged 28% during the first half of the year.

Board member Lawrence Kellner, a former United Airlines CEO, will become non-executive chairman of the board. In a statement, Kellner said Calhoun has "deep industry experience and a proven track record of strong leadership, and he recognizes the challenges we must confront. The board and I look forward to working with him and the rest of the Boeing team to ensure that today marks a new way forward for our company."

The crashes and the decisions that were made leading up to those tragedies have shaken Boeing.

"The company appears to have known about safety issues for quite some time. This indicates that there might be more fundamental cultural issues at the company," said Tim Hubbard, a professor of management at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

"Furthermore, the recent failure of a rocket test launch indicates that the company might not be as innovative as they once were. Increasing innovativeness and changing the culture of a company the size of Boeing is challenging. One way to jump-start changes at Boeing could be new leadership."

Trading of Boeing stock was halted before the announcement, but it had jumped 3% after the opening bell.

Muilenburg's departure was long overdue, said Robert Clifford, a Chicago lawyer representing several people who are suing Boeing after losing relatives in the Ethiopia crash.

"Mr. Muilenburg and other Boeing leaders deliberately put the desire for a heightened stock price and profits over safety by allowing the 737 Max 8 to stay in service" after the first crash, involving a Lion Air flight, Clifford said. Boeing directors, he said, deserve no praise for ousting Muilenburg now.

Elias Meseret in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and David Koenig in Dallas contributed.

Biden's new endorsement reflects battle for Latino support

By **BILL BARROW** Associated Press

Joe Biden's presidential bid got a boost Monday from one of the leading Latinos in Congress, with the chairman of the Hispanic Caucus' political arm endorsing the former vice president as Democrats' best hope to defeat President Donald Trump.

"People realize it's a matter of life and death for certain communities," Rep. Tony Cárdenas, D-Calif., told The Associated Press in an interview, explaining the necessity of halting Trump's populist nationalism, hard-line immigration policies and xenophobic rhetoric that the California congressman called cruel.

Cárdenas' is the chairman of Bold PAC, the political arm of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

His announcement follows presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' weekend of mass rallies with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a freshman congresswoman from New York who has become a face of the progressive movement and a key supporter for the Vermont senator's second White House bid.

The dueling surrogates highlight a fierce battle for the Hispanic vote between Sanders and Biden, whose campaigns each see the two candidates as the leading contenders. Biden leads the field among Democratic voters who are non-white, a group that includes Democratic voters who are Hispanic, with Sanders not far behind, according to national polling. Another top national contender, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, draws less support from non-white voters. There are few recent national polls with a sufficient sample of Hispanic Democratic voters to analyze them independently.

The dynamics also demonstrate the starkly different approaches that Biden and Sanders take to the larger campaign. Biden is capitalizing on his 36-year Senate career and two terms as Barack Obama's vice president to corral Democratic power players across the party's various demographic slices. Cárdenas joins four other Hispanic caucus members who've already backed Biden, a show of establishment support in contrast to some Latino activists who've battered Biden over the Obama administration's deportation

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record. Sanders, true to his long Capitol Hill tenure as an outsider and democratic socialist, eschews the establishment with promises of a political revolution, just as he did when he finished as runner-up for Democrats' 2016 nomination.

Together, it's an argument on politics and policy at the crux of Democrats' 2020 nominating fight.

Sanders and his supporters like Ocasio-Cortez argue that existing political structures cannot help working-class Americans, immigrants or anyone else. That argument, they insist, can draw enough new, irregular voters to defeat Trump in November.

"We need to be honest here," retorted Texas Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, a Biden supporter whose congressional district includes part of the U.S.-Mexico border. "If Joe Biden loses the primary, Democrats will lose in 2020."

It's impossible for polling almost a year ahead of a general election to affirm that view, but the contention echoes Biden's consistent arguments about Electoral College math.

Texas Rep. Filemon Vela, also a border-district congressman who backs Biden, was not so absolute. But he said Biden is best positioned for a general election on immigration because of his plans to roll back Trump's immigration restrictions and boost the asylum process, while stopping short of decriminalizing all border crossings. Sanders supports making all border crossings civil offenses, rather than criminal, a position first pushed by the lone Hispanic presidential candidate and former Obama housing secretary Julian Castro.

"In some swing states, that might not go over well," Vela said, even as he, Gonzalez and Cárdenas said the distinction is more important to political pundits than to Hispanic voters.

Said Cárdenas: "There is activist language and there are litmus tests; and there are hard-working people around the country who just want fairness."

He added another key plank of Biden's case: that meaningful change, from reversing Trump's migrant family separation policy to expanding health care coverage, requires not only winning in November but then achieving some semblance of consensus in Congress.

Hispanic voters are a rapidly growing portion of the U.S. population and electorate, though they have consistently had lower election-participation rates than African Americans and non-Hispanic whites. At the least, Hispanics will play key roles in the Nevada caucus (third in the Democratic nominating process) and the Texas and California primaries, the two largest sources of delegates on the March 3 Super Tuesday slate.

Sanders leads Biden among younger voters generally, according to national polling, and Biden aides say that could carry over to Hispanics. The variable is seemingly on display when comparing Biden's campaign crowds with those like Ocasio-Cortez drew this weekend in California and Nevada.

Immigrants-rights advocates picketed outside Biden's Philadelphia campaign headquarters shortly after its opening. Castro used Democratic debates to challenge Biden on why he didn't stop more deportations when he was vice president.

Last month, members of the Movimiento Cosecha, which describes itself as an immigrant-led group pushing for "permanent, protection and respect" for immigrants, confronted Biden during a campaign event in South Carolina. One of them, Carlos Rojas, asked Biden to answer for deportations under Obama and to commit to an outright moratorium on all deportations — a position Sanders supports. Biden declined. After Rojas pressed him, Biden said, "You should vote for Trump."

Gonzalez called it "ridiculous" to question Biden's commitment to immigrants, but said the skepticism demonstrates that the Latino community vote is not monolithic, with a range of national origins and philosophical differences.

Vela agreed, adding that Sanders' rallies and Ocasio-Cortez's social media following shouldn't obscure Biden's standing among the "traditionalist Democrats" he said constitute the majority of Hispanic voters. Vela recalled an unplanned campaign stop he made recently with Biden at La Tierra, an iconic restaurant in San Antonio, Texas, after a campaign event with several hundred people.

"He went table to table," Vela said, "people getting up, 'Joe Biden is here' and 'There's Joe Biden.' The response was overwhelming."

Klobuchar to complete tour of all 99 Iowa counties

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

Democrat Amy Klobuchar — running for president as a person who can win even in conservative, rural areas — says she will become the first major 2020 candidate to have visited all 99 Iowa counties after stops scheduled for Friday in the leadoff caucus state.

The Minnesota senator, who wrapped up a four-day bus tour Monday that stopped in 27 counties, said Monday she will complete the statewide tour with visits to three counties in northwest Iowa on Friday, followed by a block party in Des Moines to celebrate. She has other stops planned in Iowa on Saturday.

Klobuchar argues she is the best candidate to take on President Donald Trump in 2020 because she has a history of winning across Minnesota, including in Republican areas, by going to places where Democrats don't typically campaign. Her campaign — which has focused heavily on Iowa — says hitting all 99 counties proves her mantra that she would be a president "for all of America."

"Amy believes that for Democrats to win big, our party needs to bring people together around an optimistic, unifying agenda to get things done and improve people's lives," said Lauren Dillon, the campaign's Iowa director. "Her approach to campaigning -- not leaving any town or community behind -- gets to the core of the kind of public servant she is and how she will lead as President."

Interest in Klobuchar's campaign has grown in recent months, thanks in part to strong debate performances, though in polling she still trails the top candidates for the Democratic nomination: former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Klobuchar had pledged to visit all 99 counties before the Feb. 3 caucus, but stepped up her schedule to complete the visits before the end of the year because of an expected impeachment trial in the Senate next month that will cut into campaign time for the senators running. The three-term senator says she will be in Washington for the trial, and will find ways to campaign around that schedule or have surrogates including her husband and daughter and elected officials supporting her campaign do so.

Visiting all 99 counties in Iowa is known as doing a "Full Grassley," after Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, who made it a point of pride, and is a feat other presidential candidates have touted over the years. This election cycle, the first to complete it was former Maryland Rep. John Delaney, who has not hit Democratic National Committee thresholds to qualify for the debate stage since summer, when those requirements were lower. Klobuchar's count includes public and private meetings with voters.

Baba Ram Dass, spiritual guru and LSD pioneer, dies at 88

MAUI, Hawaii (AP) — Baba Ram Dass, the 1960s counterculture spiritual leader who experimented with LSD and traveled to India to find enlightenment, returning to share it with Americans, has died. He was 88.

Dass' foundation, Love Serve Remember, announced late Sunday that the author and spiritual leader died peacefully at his home earlier in the day. No cause of death was given.

He had suffered a severe stroke in 1997 that left him paralyzed on the right side and, for a time, unable to speak. More recently, he underwent hip surgery after he was injured in a fall in November 2008, according to his website.

"I had really thought about checking out, but your love and your prayers convinced me not to do it. ... It's just beautiful," he told followers in a videotaped message at the time from his hospital bed in Hawaii.

Over the years, Ram Dass — born Richard Alpert — associated with the likes of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg. He wrote about his experiences with drugs, set up projects to help prisoners and those facing terminal illness and sought to enlighten others about the universal struggle with aging.

But he was best known for the 1971 "Be Here Now," written after his trip to India. The spiritual primer found its way into thousands of backpacks around the world.

"I want to share with you the parts of the internal journey that never get written up in the mass media ...," he wrote. "I'm not interested in what you read in the Saturday Evening Post about LSD. This is the story of what goes on inside a human being who is undergoing all these experiences."

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Among his other books were "How Can I Help?" and "Compassion in Action" and "Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying."

"In the 60s, I was an uncle for a movement," he told The Associated Press in 1998. "I was always showing people where they could go. I went east, and then there was a big movement east."

Now, he said, "the baby boomers are getting old — and I'm learning how to get old for them. That's my role."

The Boston-born son of a prominent attorney, Ram Dass entered the public sphere in the early 1960s as a young Harvard psychology professor. Alpert, as he was then known, earned a doctorate at Stanford University.

He and Leary, a Harvard colleague, began a series of experiments with hallucinogenic mushrooms and LSD, giving the drugs to prisoners, philosophers and students to study their effects.

Ram Dass later wrote that he tried psilocybin, the compound found in hallucinogenic mushrooms, in Leary's living room.

"I peered into the semidarkness and recognized none other than myself in cap and gown and hood," he wrote. "It was as if that part of me, which was a Harvard professor, had separated or dissociated itself from me."

The experiments got him and Leary kicked out of Harvard in 1963.

"It was a little too sensational," Ram Dass said in 1998. "We were the starters of it."

He and Leary retreated to an upstate New York mansion that drew Beat Generation figures Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac.

By the late 1960s, LSD and other hallucinogens had become part of pop culture and a rite of passage for many young Americans.

But Alpert eventually sought a way to reach a state of enlightenment without drugs. Following Ginsberg's advice, he headed to India in 1967, where he met the man who became his guru, Neem Karoli Baba.

There, his guru introduced him to yoga, meditation, Buddhism and Sufism, and gave him the name Ram Dass, Hindi for "servant of God." (He is often called Baba Ram Dass; "baba" is an honorary title.)

Ram Dass wrote "Be Here Now" when he returned to the United States. Around the same time, he told The New York Times that he had turned away from drugs, saying: "I don't want to break the law, since that leads to fear and paranoia."

In 1974, Ram Dass founded the Hanuman Foundation, which set up programs such as the Prison Ashram Project to introduce inmates to spirituality. He also helped create the Seva Foundation, which works to prevent blindness and helps community groups in developing countries. His Love Serve Remember Foundation is dedication to preserving his teachings and those of Neem Karoli Baba.

Ram Dass lived for many years in the quiet town of San Anselmo, Calif., about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of San Francisco, surrounded by the markers of his life straddling East and West: Japanese prints and statues of Buddha, seashells from the South Pacific and a well-used player piano.

In later years, he moved to Woodside, California. More recently, he was based in Maui.

He said his 1997 stroke brought physical and spiritual suffering, but that he came to see the suffering as a source of insight that he could share with others facing their own battles with illness and aging.

"It's brought out new aspects of myself and aspects of my relationship to the world," he said in 1998. "The stroke has gotten me into a stage of life — this is a stage close to death, a stage which is inward."

After regaining his speech, Ram Dass returned to the lecture circuit, starting by touring Northern California sharing tales of what he called his state of "heavy grace."

"All illnesses are part of the passing show," he told the San Francisco Chronicle in 2004. "You are not just your body. You are the witness of your body."

Online: <http://www.ramdass.org>

Champagne and shoes: Luxury stores adapt to changing shopper

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — To get that monogram tote bag by Louis Vuitton or leather Flash Trek sneakers by Gucci, the go-to place had been luxury department stores.

Not anymore.

Now, there are far more options to access exclusive labels. You can buy them at online sites like Net-a-Porter. Or get them barely used through sites like Fashionphile and The RealReal. You can even rent an entire rotating wardrobe through companies like Rent the Runway.

"The consumer is king. And they can buy luxury brands in different places," says Steve Sadove, former CEO and chairman of Saks Fifth Avenue and now senior adviser at MasterCard.

The new entrants have disrupted the luxury sector by creating different channels to attain the seemingly unattainable. For luxury department stores that once had a lock on where the well-heeled could shop, that has forced them to reimagine their approach. They now offer new services as well as food and alcohol to lure back customers who were once exclusively theirs.

At Nordstrom's women's flagship in Manhattan, for instance, customers sip champagne and nibble on small bites while trying on shoes. Recognizing the growing popularity of second-hand sites, Neiman Marcus is rolling out shops where customers can sell their designer belongings as part of a partnership with Fashionphile, an online resale accessories company. And as part of a \$250 million renovation of its flagship store in Manhattan, Saks Fifth Avenue has dedicated its main floor to luxury handbags that's staffed with 50 handbag style advisers, in addition to sales associates.

Meanwhile, brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton are opening more of their own stores and expanding online. Robert Burke, a luxury consultant, says they are trying to control their future as they watch their products get discounted on resale sites.

Joseph Aquino, president of real estate services firm JAACRES, sees luxury's future with fewer stores that focus on "less product" and "higher prices."

In one sense, traditional luxury stores are no different than other brick-and-mortar retailers that must now fiercely compete with online rivals. But the exclusivity they used to command by catering to a niche market of wealthy spenders is beginning to erode, especially among the new-moneyed set of shoppers in their 20s through their 40s who can afford high-end merchandise but may still be looking for a deal.

Millennials and Generation Z accounted for 47% of luxury consumers in 2018 and for 33% of all luxury sales worldwide in 2018, according to a study by consulting firm Bain & Co. Together, however, they contributed to virtually all of the market's growth, compared with 85% in 2017.

Overall, the global market for personal luxury goods is healthy, buoyed by a strong economy and the spending power of China. The sector reached a record high of \$286.53 billion (260 billion euros) in 2018 — a 6% increase from the year before, according to Bain. Jewelry in particular has been one of the top luxury growth categories.

In the U.S., luxury sales excluding jewelry have fallen 1.9 % through November compared to a 3.4% increase in overall retail sales excluding autos and gas, says MasterCard SpendingPulse, which tracks sales across all types of payments. That's in part because of store closures and a drop in international tourists.

Luxury shoppers like Sabina Gill present challenges to luxury department stores.

The 42-year-old banker from Manhattan says she's doubled her annual spending on jewelry and clothing to \$20,000 in the last few years. But while she used to shop at places like Saks and Bergdorf Goodman, now she's spending most of the money on sites like The RealReal or Net-a-Porter. If she buys at Saks, she uses the retailer's online personal shopping service.

"E-commerce gives you a wider playing field versus going to the store," Gill said.

The fragmented luxury market has hurt retailers like Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom. Sales at stores open at least a year at Neiman Marcus fell in its latest fiscal third quarter as it was forced to heavily discount. The drop, reported in June, reversed six straight quarters of increases. The privately-held retailer hasn't publicly reported sales since then.

Nordstrom department stores saw net sales down 4.1% even while its more price-sensitive Nordstrom

Rack stores had a 1.2% increase in the latest quarter ended Nov. 2.

Neiman Marcus decided to invest in a minority stake in Fashionphile earlier this year after its own survey showed half its customers buy or sell pre-owned luxury items. Geoffroy van Raemdonck, CEO of Neiman Marcus, says the luxury business used to be about the product; now, it's more about the services.

Nearly 30 Nordstrom stores now have Rent the Runway drop-offs as part of a partnership with the rental service. The new women's flagship store in New York also features seven eating and beverage spots — the most of any Nordstrom store.

"Clearly, shopping is much more about an experience," said Jamie Nordstrom, president of Nordstrom stores and the great-grandson of the company's founder. "It's not just about getting through their lists. They want to bump into something new, something they didn't come into find. I think great stores do that well."

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

Diplomats visit American jailed in Russia on spying charges

MOSCOW (AP) — A U.S. diplomat on Monday visited an American jailed in Moscow for nearly a year on spying charges and said he is in good condition mentally.

Paul Whelan was arrested at a Moscow hotel at the end of last year and charged with espionage. He faces 20 years in prison if convicted, but the case has yet to go to trial.

American officials have complained about the delay and say investigators have produced no evidence against Whelan, a Michigan resident who also holds Canadian, British and Irish citizenship.

Diplomats from those three countries visited him Monday along with Bart Gorman, the US deputy chief of mission.

"Paul seems to be in reasonably good spirits" Gorman said. However, he said that Whelan's repeated requests to telephone his parents have gone unanswered.

"We call on the Russian government to allow Paul to make a phone call to his mother and father for Christmas and the New Year," Gorman said.

Looking down on a decade: Satellite images tell the stories

By The Associated Press undefined

There has been no shortage of big news over the last decade. Spanning the globe, some stories were expected while others caught the world off guard. Some were so massive they were visible from space, captured through state-of-the-art imaging satellites belonging to technology company and imagery provider Maxar Technologies. Together, The Associated Press and Maxar assembled a selection of the most striking images.

HURRICANES

2017 was the year America's hurricane luck ran out.

For much of the decade that began in 2010, hurricanes with winds of 111 mph or more flirted with Florida and other parts the United States, but never made landfall. In fact, not one major hurricane hit the U.S. between 2006 and 2016. Colorado State University hurricane scientist Phil Klotzbach called it "an amazing streak of luck."

Then came 2017. Three powerful hurricanes — Harvey, Irma and Maria — slammed into different parts of the country, causing \$265 billion damage in four weeks.

"We set an alarming number of hurricane records in 2017," MIT hurricane scientist Kerry Emanuel said.

Harvey parked itself over Houston and unleashed a downpour. It killed 68 people and set a U.S. record for amount of rain recorded from a storm: 60.58 inches. Harvey's \$120 billion in damages ranks as the second-costliest U.S. storm behind only Katrina in 2005.

Hurricane Irma came next and stayed at maximum Category 5 strength for the longest time ever re-

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corded. Irma was the second-strongest storm recorded in the Atlantic, and it devastated the Caribbean and plowed into Florida. Irma's \$50 billion in damages ranks fifth.

The most devastating came last: Hurricane Maria leveled parts of Puerto Rico. Experts still can't agree on how many people died, with some estimates in the thousands. Maria was America's third-costliest storm at \$90 billion.

BP OIL SPILL

America's biggest offshore oil spill began with an explosion that killed 11 people. It happened April 20, 2010, on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, which was extracting oil for BP. The rig sank two days later on the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. For 87 excruciating days, oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico as people including oil engineers, a Nobel winning scientist and actor Kevin Costner came up with plans to plug the leak that left a bathtub-like ring of coagulated oil on the seafloor.

A team of scientists calculated that 172 million gallons spilled into the Gulf. BP said the number was closer to 100 million gallons, and a federal judge ruled that 134 million gallons had spilled. The case languished in court until April 2016, when a federal judge approved a \$20 billion settlement, ruling that BP had been "grossly negligent."

By then, the surface of the Gulf of Mexico had no visible scars. Beaches and marshes looked oil-free and back to normal.

However, scientists noticed an increase in dolphin deaths, which had averaged 63 a year before the spill. After the spill, they hit 335 in 2011 and averaged 200 a year for five years. Biologists also reported far fewer numbers of endangered Kemp Ripley sea turtles for years after.

GLACIAL MELTING

Earth's glaciers have shrunk by about 3,860 billion tons (3,500 billion metric tons) this decade, according to research by Michael Zemp at the World Glacier Monitoring Service. That's about 924 trillion gallons of melted ice and snow — enough to cover the United States in water 14 inches (35.6 centimeters) deep.

Glaciers in Greenland, including the Petermann, started the decade losing about 54 billion tons (51 billion metric tons) of ice a year. It slowed to about 37 billion tons (34 billion metric tons) in 2018 before speeding up again in 2019. Glaciers in the Southern Andes lost about 37 billion tons (34 billion metric tons) a year in the early part of the decade, and by 2018 they were losing nearly 47 billion tons (42.5 billion metric tons) a year.

"The last decade has been devastating for Earth's glaciers and ice sheets, and unlike anything modern humanity has seen before," ice scientist Twila Moon of the National Snow and Ice Data Center said in an email. "Communities have lost drinking, agriculture and hydropower resources as small glaciers have in some instances completely disappeared. Sea level rise from ice loss across the globe has increased flooding, coastal erosion, and health and safety problems, impacting people's lives, communities, and economies."

ROHINGYA EXODUS

In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched a brutal, sweeping crackdown against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority, burning villages, methodically raping women and girls, and killing thousands, including children. Human-rights groups have described the assault as a calculated campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide designed to drive the Rohingya from the Buddhist-majority country.

The bloodshed forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh, where traumatized survivors crowded onto a stretch of low, rolling hills that would be transformed into the world's largest refugee camp.

That is where they have languished for more than two years in cramped, squalid conditions amid a maze of bamboo-and-tarp shelters that do little to protect them from monsoon rains and stifling heat. Along with fury and fear, a sense of futility swept through the camps as the survivors' pleas for justice went unheeded despite an international outcry over Myanmar's actions.

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In November, the Rohingya were given reason to hope: Myanmar was accused of genocide at the United Nations' highest court. In December, Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi appeared before the International Court of Justice to defend her nation's army from the allegations, arguing that the Rohingya people's exodus was the unfortunate result of a battle with insurgents.

The African nation of Gambia brought the case against Myanmar on behalf of the 57-country Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

WILDFIRES

Looking down from space on Nov. 9, 2018, the outskirts of Paradise, California, glowed like burning coal. Hundreds of homes appeared as tiny embers. Entire neighborhoods blazed like bonfires.

The scope of the worst wildfire in California history hits home when seen from 300 miles above Earth. What happened in Paradise has become a cautionary tale about the kind of devastation that is possible when erratic winds carry sparks across a warming planet.

Eighty-five people died. Some perished in cars on roads so choked by traffic they couldn't outrun the flames. Roughly 19,000 homes, businesses and other buildings were destroyed.

The state's largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric Co., was blamed for the fire — one of dozens of blazes its equipment has caused in recent years — and forced into bankruptcy. A grim new reality emerged: widespread preemptive blackouts to stop power lines from sparking new blazes. Lawmakers approved hundreds of millions of dollars for firefighting and aggressive brush clearing to protect communities.

The fire has not led to limits on construction in especially fire-prone rural and mountainous terrain, where homes are more affordable. During a severe state housing shortage, a new Paradise is rising from the ashes.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP

The Islamic State group emerged in 2014 during chaotic conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The militants seized towns and cities, quickly gaining control of one-third of both countries. IS created what no other extremist group had before: a so-called Islamic caliphate, with the Syrian city of Raqqa as its capital. Thousands of foreign fighters converged there, and the militants ruled over the local population with a mix of terror and rewards. They levied taxes and extorted the local population. They smuggled oil and collected ransoms, making IS one of the richest militant groups to ever exist.

The group also plotted and executed attacks in the West. It produced thousands of slick online propaganda videos and recruited supporters around the world.

In response to the threat, a military campaign by a U.S.-led international coalition slowly chipped away at the group's territory. The militants made their last stand in March 2019 in a tiny Syrian village on the border with Iraq.

Even though IS has lost most of its territory, the group remains a threat in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and beyond. Its shadowy leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was killed in a U.S. airstrike on his hideout in Syria in October. But a successor was named, and pledges of allegiance came in from militants in Asia and Africa. Thousands of IS supporters and family members from all over the world, including children, are imprisoned in Syria.

ARAB SPRING PROTESTS

A young Tunisian fruit vendor, frustrated at what he said was a system that trapped him and others in dire poverty, set himself on fire in December 2010. His death spurred calls for demonstrations throughout the region and started a movement that spread through social media and satellite TV.

People took to the streets with varying degrees of success, and the months that followed became known as "The Arab Spring." Protests reached fever pitch in Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen.

Calls for basic human rights, the departure of autocratic leaders and a way out of the poverty and unemployment for much of the region's youth were central to demonstrators' demands. But the movements

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were decentralized and lacked clear leadership. Still, they generated enough momentum to topple longtime presidents Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia.

In Libya, Sudan and Yemen, the uprisings laid bare existing divisions in society that sparked civil wars that continue to this day. In Egypt, pro-democracy demonstrators saw their gains reversed by a military-backed government that brutally suppressed dissent. In Syria, the government's attempt to quash the protests led to years of civil war that devastated much of the country, claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and uprooted millions. Tunisia remains the movement's tentative success story, with a peaceful post-uprising transition and democratic elections.

Almost 10 years later, the region is experiencing a second wave of protests in countries that missed out the first time around. Earlier this year, demonstrations in Sudan and Algeria pushed out presidents after decades in power. In Iraq and Lebanon, protesters are calling for an overhaul of the political system.

JAPAN EARTHQUAKE - FUKUSHIMA

A magnitude 9.0 earthquake and giant tsunami struck the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in Japan on March 11, 2011, causing its key cooling systems to fail, resulting in the meltdown of three reactors and spreading radiation into surrounding communities and out at sea.

Concerns about radiation at one point displaced about 160,000 people, splitting many families and communities. More than 40,000 still have not been allowed back.

The plant has since been stabilized and is being decommissioned, and officials say that could take decades. Removing the estimated 800 tons of melted debris and cleaning up the complex is an unprecedented challenge, some experts say. If or when the task can be done remains in question.

The scrutiny that followed revealed poor risk management practices by the government and plant operators and shed light on the lack of safety measures, prompting the public's distrust and contributing to widespread anti-nuclear sentiment. Japan temporarily shut down all reactors for safety checks and introduced stricter safety standards. The approvals take time, and a handful of reactors have since been restarted.

The Fukushima disaster has chilled the nuclear industry around the world. In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe still promotes nuclear energy as a key component of the nation's energy mix, but the government had to largely abandon plans for nuclear plant exports and business overseas.

CHINA EXPANSION - SOUTH CHINA SEA

Across the sprawling and strategic South China Sea, nearly 70 disputed islands, reefs and atolls are occupied by five claimants. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia have built airstrips, harbors, barracks and other infrastructure for both civilian and military use. Only China has created new islands by piling sand and concrete atop coral reefs.

That has upset the balance of power in the region, strengthening China's claim to the entire waterway. It also has further harmed the fragile environment already threatened by overfishing, pollution and the harvesting of giant clams by Chinese fishermen.

Starting in 2013, China began dredging sand on a massive scale to build its seven new island outposts, creating 3,200 acres (1,295 hectares) of dry land.

Fiery Cross Reef is among the most extensively developed, boasting large facilities for aircraft, missile batteries and marine forces. Whether or not these islands make a difference remains to be seen, however. Not only are they exposed to the marine environment, but as Japan learned in World War II, holding and supplying remote marine outposts during a conflict can be a tricky proposition, particularly in a region where Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, the U.S. and others have shown a willingness to defend their own interests; territorial, economic and otherwise.

McConnell not ruling out witnesses in impeachment trial

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Monday that he was not ruling out calling witnesses in President Donald Trump's impeachment trial — but indicated he was in no hurry to seek new testimony either — as lawmakers remain at an impasse over the form of the trial by the GOP-controlled Senate.

The House voted Wednesday to impeach Trump, who became only the third president in U.S. history to be formally charged with "high crimes and misdemeanors." But the Senate trial may be held up until lawmakers can agree on how to proceed. Minority Leader Chuck Schumer is demanding trial witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton.

McConnell, who has all-but-promised a swift acquittal of the president, has resisted making any guarantees, and has cautioned Trump against seeking the testimony of witnesses he desires for fear of elongating the trial. Instead, he appears to have secured GOP support for his plans to impose a framework drawn from the 1999 impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton.

"We haven't ruled out witnesses," McConnell said Monday in an interview with "Fox and Friends." "We've said let's handle this case just like we did with President Clinton. Fair is fair."

That trial featured a 100-0 vote on arrangements that established two weeks of presentations and argument before a partisan tally in which then-minority Republicans called a limited number of witnesses. But Democrats now would need Republican votes to secure witness testimony — and Republicans believe they have the votes to eventually block those requests.

In a letter Monday to all Senators, Schumer argued that the circumstances in the Trump trial are different from that of Clinton, who was impeached after a lengthy independent counsel investigation in which witnesses had already testified numerous times under oath. Schumer rejected the Clinton model, saying waiting until after the presentations to decide on witnesses would "foreclose the possibility of obtaining such evidence because it will be too late."

Schumer also demanded that the Senate, in addition to receiving testimony, also compel the Trump administration to turn over documents and emails relevant to the case, including the decision to withhold military assistance from Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the White House is projecting confidence that it will prevail in a constitutional spat with Democrats. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has delayed sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate in hopes of giving Schumer more leverage in talks with McConnell. But the White House believes Pelosi won't be able to hold out much longer.

"She will yield. There's no way she can hold this position," Marc Short, the chief of staff to Vice President Mike Pence, said Sunday. "We think her case is going nowhere."

The impasse between the Senate leaders leaves open the possibility of a protracted delay until the articles are delivered.

Schumer told reporters in New York on Sunday that "the Senate is yearning to give President Trump due process, which means that documents and witnesses should come forward. What is a trial with no witnesses and no documents. It's a sham trial."

Trump has called the holdup "unfair" and claimed that Democrats were violating the Constitution, as the delay threatened to prolong the pain of impeachment and cast uncertainty on the timing of the vote Trump is set to claim as vindication.

"Pelosi gives us the most unfair trial in the history of the U.S. Congress, and now she is crying for fairness in the Senate, and breaking all rules while doing so," Trump tweeted Monday from his private club in Palm Beach, Fla., where he is on a more than two-week holiday vacation. "She lost Congress once, she will do it again!"

Short called Pelosi's delay unacceptable, saying she's "trampling" Trump's rights to "rush this through, and now we're going to hold it up to demand a longer process in the Senate with more witnesses."

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"If her case is so air-tight ... why does she need more witnesses to make her case?" Short said.

White House officials have also taken to highlighting Democrats' arguments that removing Trump was an "urgent" matter before the House impeachment vote, as they seek to put pressure on Pelosi to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate.

A close Trump ally, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said Pelosi would fail in her quest "to get Mitch McConnell to bend to her will to shape the trial." Graham is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and was a House manager, comparable to a prosecutor, during the Senate's impeachment trial of Clinton.

"She'll eventually send the articles because public opinion will crush the Democrats," said Graham. Asked whether he expected witnesses in the Senate, he replied: "No, I don't."

At one point, Trump had demanded the testimony of witnesses of his own, like Democrats Joe Biden and his son Hunter, and the intelligence community whistleblower whose summer complaint sparked the impeachment probe. But he has since relented after concerted lobbying by McConnell and other Senate Republicans who pushed him to accept the swift acquittal from the Senate and not to risk injecting uncertainty into the process by calling witnesses.

The Senate's second-ranking Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, said his party is looking for a signal from McConnell that he hasn't ruled out new witnesses and documents. But Durbin acknowledged that Democrats may not have much leverage in pushing a deal.

He criticized both Republican and Democratic senators who have already announced how they will vote in the trial, saying the Constitution requires senators to act as impartial jurors. Republicans hold a 53-vote majority in the Senate.

"The leverage is our hope that four Republican senators will stand up, as 20 years ago, we saw in the impeachment of Bill Clinton, and say, this is much bigger than our current political squabbles," Durbin said.

The Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate to convict in an impeachment trial — and Republicans have expressed confidence that they have more than enough votes to keep Trump in office.

Short spoke on "Fox News Sunday," Durbin appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," and Graham was on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures."

AP Radio Correspondent Julie Walker in New York and AP writer Hope Yen in Washington contributed to this report.

Saudis sentence 5 to death for Jamal Khashoggi's killing

By ABDULLAH AL-SHIHRI and AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — A court in Saudi Arabia sentenced five people to death Monday for the killing of Washington Post columnist and royal family critic Jamal Khashoggi, whose grisly slaying in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul drew international condemnation and cast a cloud of suspicion over Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Three other people were found guilty by Riyadh's criminal court of covering up the crime and were sentenced to a combined 24 years in prison, according to a statement read by the Saudi attorney general's office on state TV.

In all, 11 people were put on trial in Saudi Arabia over the killing. The names of those found guilty were not made public by the government. Executions in the kingdom are carried out by beheading, sometimes in public. All the verdicts can be appealed.

A small number of diplomats, including from Turkey, as well as members of Khashoggi's family were allowed to attend the nine court sessions, though independent media were barred.

While the case in Saudi Arabia has largely concluded, questions linger outside Riyadh about the crown prince's culpability in the slaying.

Agnes Callamard, who investigated the killing for the United Nations, reacted by tweeting that the verdicts are a "mockery" and that the masterminds behind the crime "have barely been touched by the investigation and the trial." Amnesty International called the outcome "a whitewash which brings neither

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justice nor truth.”

Khashoggi, who was a resident of the U.S., had walked into his country’s consulate on Oct. 2, 2018, for an appointment to pick up documents that would allow him to marry his Turkish fiancée. He never walked out, and his body has not been found.

A team of 15 Saudi agents had flown to Turkey to meet Khashoggi inside the consulate. They included a forensic doctor, intelligence and security officers and individuals who worked for the crown prince’s office, according to Callamard’s independent investigation. Turkish officials allege Khashoggi was killed and then dismembered with a bone saw.

The slaying stunned Saudi Arabia’s Western allies and immediately raised questions about how the high-level operation could have been carried out without the knowledge of Prince Mohammed — even as the kingdom insists the crown prince had nothing to do with the killing.

In an interview in September with CBS’ “60 Minutes”, Prince Mohammed said: “I take full responsibility as a leader in Saudi Arabia.” But he reiterated that he had no knowledge of the operation, saying he could not keep such close track of the country’s millions of employees.

The prince’s father, King Salman, ordered a shake-up of top security posts after the killing.

Turkey, a rival of Saudi Arabia, has used the killing on its soil to pressure the kingdom. Turkey, which had demanded the suspects be tried there, apparently had the Saudi Consulate bugged and has shared audio of the killing with the C.I.A., among others.

Saudi Arabia initially offered shifting accounts about Khashoggi’s disappearance. As international pressure mounted because of the Turkish leaks, the kingdom eventually settled on the explanation that he was killed by rogue officials in a brawl.

The trial concluded the killing was not premeditated, according to Shaalan al-Shaalan, a spokesperson from the Saudi attorney general’s office.

The 101-page report released this year by Callamard, the U.N. special rapporteur for extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, included details from the audio Turkish authorities shared with her. She reported hearing Saudi agents waiting for Khashoggi to arrive and one of them asking how they would carry out the body.

Not to worry, the doctor said. “Joints will be separated. It is not a problem,” he said in the audio. “If we take plastic bags and cut it into pieces, it will be finished. We will wrap each of them.”

Khashoggi had spent the last year of his life in exile in the U.S. writing in the Post about human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. At a time when Prince Mohammed’s social reforms were being widely hailed in the West, Khashoggi’s columns criticized the parallel crackdown on dissent the prince was overseeing. Numerous critics of the Saudi crown prince are in prison and face trial on national security charges.

In Washington, Congress has said it believes Prince Mohammed is “responsible for the murder.” President Donald Trump has condemned the killing but has stood by the 34-year-old crown prince and defended U.S.-Saudi ties. Washington has sanctioned 17 Saudis suspected of being involved.

Among those sanctioned is Saud al-Qahtani, a hawkish former adviser to the crown prince. The Saudi attorney general’s office said Monday that al-Qahtani was investigated and had no proven involvement in the killing.

Meanwhile, Ahmed al-Asiri, also a former adviser to the crown prince who was deputy head of intelligence, was tried and released because of insufficient evidence, the attorney general’s office said.

The court also ordered the release of Saudi Arabia’s consul-general in Istanbul at the time, Mohammed al-Otaibi. He is among those sanctioned by the U.S. over his “involvement in gross violations of human rights.” The U.S. State Department has also issued travel bans against his immediate family.

In Turkey, Yasin Aktay, a member of Turkey’s ruling party and a friend of Khashoggi’s, criticized the verdict, saying the Saudi court had failed to bring the real perpetrators to justice.

“The prosecutor sentenced five hit men to death but did not touch those who were behind the five,” Aktay said.

Although Khashoggi’s killing tarnished Prince Mohammed’s reputation in the West, he is hugely popular at home, especially among young Saudis happy with the social changes he has ushered in. Some American

executives who had stayed away because of the backlash over the slaying have resumed doing business with the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia over the past months has opened the previously closed-off country to tourists and travelers from around the world as part of a push to boost the economy and change perceptions of the kingdom.

— Batrawy reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writer Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

Giuliani pals leveraged GOP access to seek Ukraine gas deal

By **DESMOND BUTLER** and **MICHAEL BIESECKER** Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a back corner of the swank H Bar in Houston, near a huge photo of Brigitte Bardot with a dangling cigarette and a deck of cards, two Russian-speaking men offered a Ukrainian gas executive what seemed like an outrageous business proposal.

Andrew Favorov, the No. 2 at Ukraine's state-run gas company Naftogaz, says he sat on a red leather bench seat and listened wide-eyed as the men boasted of their connections to President Donald Trump and proposed a deal to sell large quantities of liquefied natural gas from Texas to Ukraine.

But first, Favorov says, they told him they would have to remove two obstacles: Favorov's boss and the U.S. ambassador in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital.

Favorov says he hardly took the proposal at the early March meeting seriously. The men, who sported open shirts showing off thick gold chains at a conference where most wore business attire, had zero experience in the gas business. And it wasn't plausible to Favorov that they would be able to oust his boss, never mind remove a U.S. ambassador.

What he didn't know as he sipped whiskey that evening was that high-ranking officials in the Ukrainian government were already taking steps to topple his boss, Naftogaz CEO Andriy Kobolyev. And two months later, Trump recalled U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, a career diplomat with a reputation as an anti-corruption crusader.

The gas deal sought by Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman never came to pass. But their efforts to profit from contacts with GOP luminaries are now part of a broad federal criminal investigation into the two men and their close associate, Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal attorney.

The Associated Press reported some details in October of the brash pitch that Parnas and Fruman made to Favorov in Houston. But in a recent series of interviews with the AP in Kyiv, Favorov painted a more complete picture of his dealings with Giuliani's associates.

His tale, corroborated by interviews with other key witnesses, reveals that the pair continued to pursue a deal for months. The campaign culminated in May, at a meeting at the Trump International Hotel in Washington that included a lobbyist with deep ties to U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry and a Republican fundraiser from Texas close to Donald Trump Jr. Three people with direct knowledge of that meeting described it to the AP on condition of anonymity because some of the players are under federal investigation.

The maneuvering over Naftogaz came at the same time that Giuliani, with the help of Parnas and Fruman, were trying to get Yovanovitch out of the way and persuade Ukraine's leaders to announce an investigation into former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter's work with Burisma, a rival Ukrainian gas company.

To achieve those ends, they sought to eliminate the safeguards put in place over the last decade at the urging of American and European diplomats to help insulate Naftogaz from the corruption rife in Ukraine.

The story illustrates an essential backdrop of both the impeachment drama roiling U.S. politics and the criminal investigation of Giuliani and his associates: the decades-long tug of war between Russia and the West over Ukraine, in which geopolitical influence, natural resources and corruption are major themes.

Yovanovitch is now a key witness in the impeachment inquiry, and federal prosecutors investigating Giuliani have interviewed both Favorov and Kobolyev. Parnas and Fruman were arrested Oct. 9 at an airport outside Washington carrying one-way tickets to Europe and are charged with conspiracy, making false statements and falsification of records in a case centered on alleged campaign finance violations. Fruman's

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lawyer did not respond to requests for comment and Parnas' lawyer did not immediately answer written questions posed by AP.

It was about seven years ago that Favorov says he first crossed paths with Fruman, who owned the luxurious Otrada Hotel in Odessa, a Ukrainian city famous for its opulent Black Sea resorts. Favorov, who ran a gas trading company, was there for a retreat and became friendly with the hotel owner, and the two men have kept in sporadic touch ever since.

After Naftogaz announced early this year that Favorov had been appointed its No. 2, he says Fruman, who had emigrated to the United States years earlier, called to chat about the U.S. natural gas business and tout his connections to the Trump administration. Favorov, a dual U.S.-Russian citizen based in Kyiv, had heard that his acquaintance was involved in Republican politics in Florida. Favorov recalls suggesting they meet up at an energy industry conference he was attending in Houston.

"Good," he says Fruman told him. "I want to introduce you to someone."

THE PITCH

Favorov flew to Houston in March to attend the CERAWEEK conference, the most important annual gathering for the U.S. energy industry, ready to pitch Ukraine as a destination for the glut of cheap U.S. liquefied natural gas unleashed by the fracking boom. He was particularly eager for a dinner meeting Fruman had arranged with Harry Sargeant III, a billionaire who had made his fortune in oil and shipping, including transporting jet fuel for the U.S. military in Iraq.

For decades, natural gas has been the essential commodity in Ukraine's struggle for independence from its former Soviet-era masters in Moscow. Russia controls one of the world's largest supplies of natural gas, which Ukraine and much of Europe rely upon.

With Western help, Ukraine has been working to wean itself from dependence on Russia, something that became more important in 2014, when Russian troops invaded and annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea. For the last five years, war has raged between the Ukrainian government and Russian-backed separatists in the country's eastern region.

As part of the efforts to improve Kyiv's leverage with Moscow, Naftogaz built enormous capacity to store natural gas, just as the gas boom in the United States has left Texas producers with so little storage capacity that they're burning off their excess. In response, the industry has been frantically expanding its infrastructure along the Gulf Coast to compress natural gas into its super-chilled, liquefied form for export overseas in specially built supertankers.

Perry, in a keynote address at the CERAWEEK 2019 conference, predicted that U.S. capacity to export natural gas would expand 150% this year. The energy secretary had traveled to Kyiv a few months earlier and met with key Ukrainian officials and business leaders, including Favorov.

So as Favorov sat with Parnas, Fruman and Sargeant at the Houston restaurant Vic and Anthony's talking about the potential money to be made exporting liquefied natural gas from the U.S. to Ukraine, he says he presumed Sargeant was brought in because he could move the product. Ukraine had an annual deficit of gas supplies equivalent to about 100 shiploads and, as Ukraine's state-owned gas distributor, Naftogaz would be the country's biggest potential buyer.

Favorov says he came away from the meeting with the impression that Sargeant was evaluating opportunities, but he says Sargeant did not propose any specific business deals at the meeting.

Chris Kise, Sargeant's lawyer, said in an email to AP that the billionaire had no specific business in mind when he attended the dinner and doesn't currently own ships that can move liquefied natural gas.

"At the dinner, Mr. Sargeant simply provided broad industry guidance and his expert view on the challenges presented by operating in foreign markets," Kise said. "Mr. Sargeant has no business with Mr. Parnas or Fruman, and no business in Ukraine."

It didn't take long, Favorov says, for Parnas and Fruman to follow up.

SHIPLOADS OF GAS

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After the dinner, Favorov walked to H Bar, the watering hole off the lobby of the posh Post Oak Hotel and shared drinks with Parnas and Fruma. The room was teeming with oil and gas executives smoking cigars.

Parnas and Fruman were fixated on Ukraine's need for the 100 shiploads of gas raised at the earlier meeting and told Favorov they could broker a deal to provide that massive amount. They claimed to have the full backing of the Trump administration and repeatedly dropped Giuliani's name, Favorov recalls.

But they would need a more compliant CEO at the top of Naftogaz to get the deal done, he says Parnas and Fruman told him. They alleged Favorov's boss was a puppet of George Soros, wielding a common trope against the billionaire hedge-funder and Democratic Party mega-donor who has backed pro-democracy and anti-corruption initiatives in Eastern Europe. Soros, who is Jewish, emigrated to the U.S. from Hungary after surviving the Holocaust.

"You're a Republican, right?" Parnas asked. Favorov says he nodded and told Parnas he considers himself a moderate Republican "of which there are about 15 to 20 left in the world."

"Then you're our man," Parnas replied.

Favorov recalls the two men also casually informed him that Trump would soon be removing Yovanovitch, who was a key backer of the anti-corruption efforts at Naftogaz.

The AP previously reported that Sargeant was involved in this conversation, based on accounts of two people who were briefed on the meeting by Favorov shortly afterward. But Favorov and Sargeant both say the Florida billionaire did not participate in conversations related to replacing the Naftogaz board or the ambassador, though he was at the H Bar at the time.

"Mr. Sargeant was neither part of nor aware of any plan involving any board members of Naftogaz or the U.S. Ambassador," Sargeant's lawyer said in the email.

For his part, Favorov says he was stunned by the proposals and told Parnas and Fruman that he was on Kobolyev's team and wanted no part of unseating him. He left the bar, but not abruptly.

"The strategy was to smile and move along," he said.

But he had not heard the last of them.

In the subsequent weeks, Fruman bombarded Favorov with texts on WhatsApp, an encrypted messaging app. Favorov says he had reason to play along, as their boasts of connections in high places began to match events around him.

The two men had established a company, Global Energy Producers, which prosecutors later said was a shell through which they made illegal political contributions to groups that support Trump. And Parnas' Instagram account was peppered with photos of him with powerful people, including at a private dinner at the White House.

They had introduced Favorov to Sargeant, which gave them even more credibility, and they were name-dropping Giuliani just as the former New York mayor was popping up in Kyiv, making corruption allegations against Hunter Biden. And Kobolyev's leadership of Naftogaz was indeed in a precarious position at the very moment that the two men were plotting to replace him.

At the beginning of the year, then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, an oligarch who had come into power after his Moscow-friendly predecessor was toppled in 2014, was putting the squeeze on Kobolyev. Poroshenko was in a tough reelection campaign and his commitment to reform was fading. He began taking steps to roll back the independence of Naftogaz.

The U.S. State Department and other Western allies had pressed for reforms at the state-owned company to increase transparency and accountability. A key step was the establishment of an independent supervisory board with members appointed by Western institutions, including the U.S. government, which appointed executives to help serve as a bulwark against corruption.

But under Ukrainian law, state-run companies are required to pay any dividends demanded by the government under penalty of incarceration of the CEO. Early in the year, Poroshenko demanded that Naftogaz pay a crippling dividend that drained it of cash, straining the company's ability to pay its bills.

In January, Poroshenko's government took steps to remove the authority of Naftogaz's supervisory board to appoint key executives, including the CEO. In the same period, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman

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repeatedly pressured Kobolyev to forgive hundreds of millions of dollars of debt owed to the company by oligarch Dmitry Firtash, according to two people familiar with Groysman's demands.

Firtash, a Ukrainian who made a fortune in the fertilizer and titanium industries, is closely aligned with Russian President Vladimir Putin and served as a middleman for the Russian natural gas giant Gazprom. He now lives in Vienna, Austria, where he has for years been fighting extradition to the United States on federal bribery and racketeering charges.

Yovanovitch, the U.S. ambassador, immediately moved to defend the independence of the Naftogaz leadership. In a letter to Groysman, she warned that limiting the authority of the supervisory board would sap Western confidence in Ukraine and put aid at risk.

"Such a conflict would serve Russia's interests at a time when the international community has resolutely supported Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression," she wrote.

Soon after, Giuliani began throwing his weight around in Kyiv. He was "almost unmissable" in mid-March during a "campaign of slander" against Yovanovitch, according to testimony by George Kent, the senior U.S. State Department official in charge of Ukraine, in a deposition for the House Intelligence Committee.

Favorov says he began to see his Houston dinner partners in a new light.

"We had this dynamic in Ukraine where Andriy (Kobolyev) was barely hanging on and Maria Yovanovitch was protecting him and I am receiving offers from private citizens to become the CEO of the company," he says.

"The guy says he's going to remove Yovanovitch in March and then she's removed in May? It certainly gets your attention," he says.

Giuliani has publicly acknowledged pushing to get Yovanovitch replaced. In a text exchange with the AP on Sunday, however, Giuliani said he had no interest in efforts by Parnas and Fruman to land a gas deal. "I had no involvement in a deal. Not a partner, not an advisor," Giuliani wrote.

NEW LEADERSHIP

The dynamic in Ukraine changed on April 21. Poroshenko lost his reelection bid to Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a Ukrainian television personality who pledged to root out corruption in Kyiv.

Some of the pressure on Kobolyev was lifted, but Naftogaz was still having serious cash flow problems, so Kobolyev and Favorov flew to Washington to ask for help with funding and discuss the possibility of importing more American natural gas to Ukraine.

At the White House, they told the National Security Council's top Russia hand, Fiona Hill, about the pressure that Kobolyev was coming under from Parnas and Fruman, according to Hill's testimony to the House Intelligence Committee.

Hill told the committee she presumed the two men wielded influence because they said they were working on behalf of Giuliani and, by extension, Trump. And she noted that the former New York City mayor was pushing for a package of issues in Ukraine, "including what seemed to be the business interests of his own associates.

Despite these concerns, Favorov met twice with Parnas and Fruman during the trip to Washington and Kobolyev joined him for one of the meetings, according to multiple people with direct knowledge of the meetings.

The first meeting was on April 30 at the Capital Grille, a steak house on Pennsylvania Avenue frequented by lobbyists. It included a representative of Sargeant's company and an independent businessman. At the meeting, Favorov pitched his ideas for sending American LNG to Ukraine.

Kise, Sargeant's lawyer, characterized the meeting as a "social lunch."

"The employee and the businessman almost entirely listened to the others in attendance discuss macro issues of energy supply to Ukraine, and also numerous meetings that the others in attendance had with officials in Washington," he said.

The second was the following evening at the Trump International Hotel, according to three people with direct knowledge of the meeting. After Favorov and Kobolyev arrived, their hosts introduced them to Jeff Miller, a former top political adviser to Energy Secretary Perry, and Tommy Hicks Jr., co-chairman of the

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Republican National Committee and a friend of Trump Jr. Neither Sargeant nor his employee attended this meeting.

Miller, who had been campaign manager and chief strategist for Perry's failed 2012 presidential campaign, is now vice finance chair for the 2020 Republican National Convention. He is a prominent energy lobbyist, representing a range of companies in oil and gas extraction, refining and transport. He was a frequent VIP visitor to the Energy Department while Perry was secretary, according to entry logs.

Hicks, whom Parnas introduced as "the money guy," is a private equity investor from Dallas whose portfolio includes companies that provide hydraulic fracturing equipment for oil and gas extraction.

The men sipped cocktails and smoked cigars at an outside area of the Trump hotel, while talk of the potential gas deal got more specific. They discussed gas quantities and pricing, according to the individuals with knowledge of the meeting. But the Naftogaz officials noted a major logistical hurdle: The gas would have to be shipped to Poland and then moved by pipeline to Ukraine. To sell the quantities that were being discussed, the existing pipelines would need to be expanded.

Parnas and Fruman, the people said, claimed to have a connection to the CEO of the company that manages the pipeline between Poland and Ukraine, and could take care of the bottleneck.

Hicks did not respond to repeated requests for comment for this story. But Parnas posted a photo on Facebook of himself and Fruman having breakfast at the Beverly Hills Polo Lounge with Hicks and Trump Jr. in May 2018.

A person with direct knowledge of Miller's account says he came to the meeting only because Parnas said he would be introduced to potential new clients. But, that person said, Miller doesn't represent foreign companies and excused himself when he learned Kobolyev and Favorov were from Ukraine. The person spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Some of the attendees left the meeting at the Trump hotel dubious that Parnas and Fruman would be able to deliver on the pipeline, according to the people with knowledge.

PERRY GOES TO POLAND

Just as before, Parnas and Fruman's predictions began to come true.

Later in May, soon after Yovanovitch was recalled from Kyiv, Perry led the U.S. delegation to the inauguration of Ukraine's new president. After the ceremony, the energy secretary handed Zelenskiy a list of names of possible energy advisers to the new government.

According to a source with direct knowledge of the exchange, Perry also suggested replacing members of the Naftogaz supervisory board with people from his list, which included Michael Bleyzer, one of the secretary's longtime political donors from Texas. Bleyzer and his partner Alex Cranberg later won a huge gas contract in Ukraine.

In statements provided to the AP through an Energy Department spokeswoman, Perry confirmed he gave Zelenskiy a list of proposed advisers that included Bleyzer, but denied discussing any management changes at Naftogaz.

After Perry's visit, there was a sudden spike in interest in the gas pipeline bottleneck through Eastern Europe. In late August, a U.S. delegation led by Vice President Mike Pence arrived in Warsaw to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the start of World War II. But a top diplomatic priority of the trip was expediting U.S. natural gas exports to Eastern Europe.

During the trip, Perry signed a memorandum of cooperation with his Polish and Ukrainian counterparts pledging to build the infrastructure needed to accommodate the shipment of huge amounts of natural gas. And Pence, in a meeting with Polish President Andrej Duda, "commended Poland's efforts to increase its energy supply through partnerships with U.S. companies producing liquefied natural gas."

An Energy Department spokeswoman said the agreement signed in Warsaw was a continuation of U.S. policy dating back to prior administrations to engage with Ukraine on regional security matters.

"Secretary Perry advocated for the diversity of supply, suppliers and supply routes across the world as it is in the best interest of the United States and our allies to do so," Hynes said.

It was another piece of Parnas and Fruman's puzzle that appeared to fall into place.

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But during that time, an anonymous whistleblower complaint about Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate the Bidens was making its way around Washington, and scrutiny turned to Giuliani, Parnas and Fruman.

The dream of their gas deal died when Parnas and Fruman were arrested in October on campaign finance charges.

Prosecutors allege that Parnas and Fruman ran money from Russia through their company, Global Energy Producers, and used it to make huge political donations to groups supporting Trump's 2020 reelection bid. In a court hearing last week, federal prosecutors accused Parnas of attempting to hide a \$1 million wire transfer that they said came from Firtash, the indicted Ukrainian oligarch with close ties to the Kremlin. When Parnas and Fruman were arrested boarding a plane in October, prosecutors say their ultimate destination was Vienna, where Firtash lives.

Reflecting on it all from Kyiv, Favorov says the increased U.S. government focus on expanding Polish pipeline capacity and boosting LNG imports to Ukraine serves the longtime foreign policy goals of both Ukraine and the United States to diversify gas distribution in the region and undermine Russian monopolies.

"But I'm thinking, did Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman really play a role in advancing and shaping U.S. policy?" he asked.

Biesecker reported from Washington.

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New construction seen at missile-related site in North Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A new satellite image of a factory where North Korea makes military equipment used to launch long-range missiles shows the construction of a new structure.

The release of several images from Planet Labs comes amid concern that North Korea could launch a rocket or missile as it seeks concessions in stalled nuclear negotiations with the United States.

North Korea has warned that what "Christmas gift" it gives the U.S. depends on what action Washington takes.

One of the satellite images taken on Dec. 19 shows the completion of a new structure at the March 16 Factory near Pyongyang, where North Korea is believed to be developing and manufacturing vehicles used as mobile launchers for long-range ballistic missiles.

Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia nonproliferation program at the Middlebury Institute, said in an email that the construction seemed to be an expansion of the factory, which would be "big news."

North Korea used what appeared to be vehicles imported from China during its three flight tests of the Hwasong-14 and -15 intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2017, Lewis said. An increased capacity to produce mobile launchers would potentially help expand North Korea's ICBM force and improve its survivability during nuclear conflict.

"As far as I know, North Korea only imported eight of those vehicles," Lewis said about the vehicles the North used during the 2017 tests.

"I would think North Korea would want 50-100 such systems. ... This would probably be some mix of ICBMs we have seen and the new system that North Korea claims is under development."

Nuclear talks between the U.S. and North Korea have been stalled since a February summit between leaders Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un fell apart.

Earlier this month, North Korea carried out two major tests at its long-range rocket launch and missile engine testing site in the country's northwest. Experts believe it tested a new engine for either an ICBM or a satellite launch vehicle.

The other images released by Planet Labs show that site before and after the Dec. 7 test.

Gender gap opens among Hispanics who could be key in 2020

By **NICHOLAS RICCARDI** Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Yolanda Avila and Andres Pico are friends who sit next to each other on the Colorado Springs' city council. But politically the two couldn't be further apart — Avila is a durable Democrat and Pico an unflinching Republican.

It's a split that's common across the country, as Hispanics are divided along gender lines. Overall, Latinos are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, but Hispanic men are more likely than Hispanic women to vote Republican.

Last year, as about two-thirds of Latinos backed Democrats, Hispanic women were 9 percentage points more likely to vote for them than Hispanic men, according to AP VoteCast, a national survey of more than 115,000 midterm voters, including 7,738 Latinos. Though Hispanics started from a more Democratic baseline — 61% of men still backed that party's candidates in 2018 — the gender divide in the group was comparable to the split among white men and women.

Data from Pew Research Center shows the gap has widened since 2012.

"You do see the Latino population reflect the same divides as among the U.S. population as a whole," said Mark Hugo Lopez of the Pew Hispanic Center. "All these pieces begin to tell a story of integration."

The emerging divide highlights the complexity of what is now the nation's largest minority group before a presidential election where immigration and identity will be core issues.

President Donald Trump is hoping that his inroads among Hispanics will help him win the pivotal swing state of Florida, and possibly provide enough support to threaten Democrats in states like New Mexico and Nevada. Still, the gender gap has traditionally helped Democrats because women are more likely to vote than men, so that party benefits more from its disproportionate support among women.

Over the past two decades, immigrants from Latin America have increasingly been women, often bringing children north, sometimes trying to rejoin partners who left earlier, when Latin American immigration to the United States was predominantly male. Newer arrivals in the country are more likely to vote Democratic when they attain citizenship.

Additionally, Hispanic women have become more likely to earn college degrees than their male counterparts.

"Latinas have a much more positive relationship with U.S. institutions like schools," said Jessica Lavariega Monforti, a dean at California Lutheran University who has studied the Latino gender gap and noted Hispanic men have higher rates of incarceration. "For Latino men in particular, and for a lesser extent Latinas, this is about wrapping yourself up in American identity, wrapping yourself in the flag," she said of men supporting the GOP.

Trump, and his alpha-male projection of masculinity, also has appeal. "There is a certain 'manliness' that comes with being part of the Republican Party" now, Monforti said.

In Las Vegas, Jesus Marquez, a Trump-supporting talk radio host, says he notices that people backing the president who call into his Spanish-language show lean male. He said there's been considerable social pressure for Latinos of all genders not to admit to backing Trump.

"Males might be a little more outspoken on that," Marquez said.

Jacqueline Armendariz, a Democratic organizer, has seen the gender gap among Latinos firsthand while working for an abortion rights group along the Texas border. The group was almost all Hispanic women. "A man can feel the luxury of feeling that's not related to their own life-and-death situation," Armendariz said of abortion rights.

Armendariz noted that, in today's polarized political world, voters are constantly being forced to choose sides. "Is machismo a factor? Maybe," she said. "For that to translate into what we see in voting data right now doesn't surprise me."

The split is evident among the handful of elected Hispanic officials in Colorado Springs, a conservative

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city 70 miles south of Denver. The three elected Republicans in the county are all men — Pico, county commissioner Longinos Gonzalez and a state legislator, Dave Williams. Avila, for whom Armendariz once worked, is the only Democrat and only woman.

Pico, 68, has considered himself a Republican ever since he joined the military decades ago. "I always found conservatives would find a way to solve a problem and Democrats would find a way to feel good about it," the retired Naval flight officer said.

He stayed in Colorado Springs after his final deployment and worked as a defense contractor before retiring and joining the city council as what he called "my hobby." In contrast, Avila grew up in Colorado Springs, where her father was stationed in one of the many military facilities that give the city its conservative slant, but her family was Democratic.

"I've always felt the Democratic Party did look after the poor, the struggling and was more inclusive in every area," Avila said.

Unlike what happens in Washington, Avila and Pico's differing political views don't lead to many conflicts on the nonpartisan city council. But Pico is supportive of gun rights, opposed to abortion rights, skeptical of climate change and backs Trump while Avila supports gun control and abortion rights, believes in climate change and opposes Trump.

Trump's restrictive immigration policy has become a national flashpoint, though it doesn't seem to have affected his support among Latinos — roughly a third of them have backed the Republican through his administration, about the same rate as during previous decades.

To Pico, there's nothing wrong with being tough on illegal immigration. "There's an awful lot of legal immigrants who dislike illegal immigration," said Pico, whose family has been in the United States for several generations. "Conservatives, including Hispanics, are opposed to illegal immigration."

Avila notes that Trump has also tried to restrict legal immigration and denigrated "unskilled" immigrants and Latinos repeatedly over the past several years. She has a fresher family connection to the trauma of immigration and racism than Pico — in the 1930s, Avila's father, a U.S. citizen, was deported from Kansas to Mexico at age 18 during a U.S. government roundup of hundreds of thousands of immigrants and citizens of Mexican descent alike.

Avila's father rebuilt his life in Mexico and started a family, but when he received a letter drafting him into the U.S. Army to fight in World War II he agreed to return with his new wife and children. Now Avila is horrified by images of immigrant children caged under the Trump administration. "My heart bleeds for the immigrants," she said.

Though she knows many Latino Republicans, Avila says that, intellectually, "it's hard to understand" how Hispanics can back Trump's party. At the same time, she speaks warmly of Pico and acknowledges they are driven by differing ideals on some issues.

"Just like I'm so true to my values, Andy is, too," Avila said.

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

India's main opposition party stages protest against new law

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's main opposition party staged a silent protest in the capital on Monday against a contentious new citizenship law, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi defended the legislation and accused the opposition of pushing the country into a "fear psychosis."

About 2,000 people joined the protest at the Raj Ghat, a memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, where the Congress party demanded "protection for the constitution and the rights of people enshrined in it."

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to India's streets to call for the revocation of the law, which critics say is the latest effort by Modi's government to marginalize the country's 200 million Muslims.

The law allows Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities who are in India illegally to become citizens if they can show they were persecuted because of their religion in Muslim-majority Bangladesh,

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Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does not apply to Muslims.

Monday's protest was led by opposition Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi along with other senior leaders, including former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The leaders read out the preamble to the constitution at the protest site.

The party's former president, Rahul Gandhi, had urged young people in New Delhi to join the protest. "It's not good enough just to feel Indian. At times like these it's critical to show that you're Indian & won't allow to be destroyed by hatred," Gandhi tweeted on Monday.

Other protests were held across the country on Monday, including in the southern cities of Bangalore and Kochi, where thousands came out on the streets against the law.

Twenty-three people have been killed nationwide since the citizenship law was passed in Parliament earlier this month in protests that represent the first major roadblock for Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda since his party's landslide reelection earlier this year.

Most of the deaths have occurred in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where 20% of the state's 200 million people are Muslim. The state government is controlled by Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party.

Police also seized some shops in the town of Muzaffarnagar in the state. The crackdown, which began Sunday, came after the state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, vowed Friday to "take revenge" against people who damaged public property during the protests by seizing their assets.

The Uttar Pradesh government's spokesman, Shalabh Mani Tripathi, said authorities were "working as per directives of the Supreme Court, which has asked that the damages to public property should be compensated by rioters."

He did not say how the owners of the shops were identified as offenders.

Authorities across India have taken a hard-line approach to quell the protests. They've evoked a British colonial-era law banning public gatherings, and internet access has been blocked at times in some states. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has asked broadcasters across the country to refrain from using content that could inflame further violence.

The communication shutdown has mostly affected New Delhi, the eastern state of West Bengal, the northern city of Aligarh and the entire northeastern state of Assam.

Undeterred, protesters have continued to rally throughout the country.

Protests against the law 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 in August.

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

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

On Sunday, Modi denied the existence of a detention center, accusing the Congress party of spreading fear that Indian Muslims would be jailed there. He also contradicted Shah, saying that there had been no discussion yet of whether to execute a nationwide citizens registry.

The protests against the law began in Assam, the center of a decades-old movement against migrants, before spreading to predominantly Muslim universities and then nationwide. _____

Associated Press writer Biswajeet Banerjee in Lucknow, India, contributed to this report.

To battle opioid crisis, some track overdoses in real time

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Drug overdose patients rushed to some emergency rooms in New York's Hudson Valley are asked a series of questions: Do you have stable housing? Do you have food? Times and location

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of overdoses are noted, too.

The information is entered into a new overdose-tracking system that provides near real-time glimpses into the ravages of the opioid-fueled drug crisis. The Hudson Valley Interlink Analytic System is among a number of surveillance systems being adopted around the country by police, government agencies and community groups. While the number of drug overdose deaths appears to have fallen nationally in 2018 for the first time in nearly three decades, the overdose death rate remains about seven times higher than a generation ago.

If there's a spike in overdoses, the system will send text alerts to health administrators and community workers. And system users can see what drugs are being abused for faster and focused responses to the ever-evolving problem.

"We can't get ahead of a situation that's already passed. This kind of information has to be given almost instantaneously or else the narcotics that we're trying to track have already been sold, and they're already on to the next batch," said Sgt. Julio Fernandez of the New York National Guard's Counterdrug Task Force, which helped usher in the system.

The Hudson Valley system was adopted earlier this year by two hospitals north of New York City serving areas hard-hit by drug abuse: St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital in Newburgh and Ellenville Regional Hospital. Administrators say nearby Catskill Regional Medical Center is ready to enter information and that Orange Regional Medical Center in Middletown will begin data entry next month. Administrators are talking to other hospitals in the region about signing up.

When a patient comes in, a nurse or another worker enters data about the overdose and the drug. Patients retain their legally required anonymity, but system users can still glean general information about the age, gender and housing status of people in trouble.

The idea is to "get that information out there as efficiently and as quickly as we can," said Daniel Maughan, a senior vice president at St. Luke's.

The data has helped track the rise of fentanyl being laced into cocaine, Fernandez said. Dawn Wilkin, director of prevention services at Catholic Charities of Orange, Sullivan, & Ulster, said the system has guided workers on where to conduct needle cleanup within days, instead of waiting a week or more.

Wilkin said there have been no text alerts to warn of a spike in overdoses sent out yet, likely due in part to a drop in overdoses locally.

Participation by patients is voluntary. If someone is unresponsive or unwilling to answer questions, workers enter the data that's available. Kathy Sheehan, director of emergency and trauma services at St. Luke's, said many patients cooperate, though there are just as many others who are not willing to speak.

"They're private," she said, "they're maybe afraid of the repercussions."

Around the country, workers on the front lines of the opioid crisis are looking to speedier data access as part of their prevention strategy.

In northeastern Minnesota, a pilot system involving six hospitals uses information from case reports submitted by emergency room staff to quickly provide health officials with warnings about overdose clusters or unusual symptoms. The Minnesota Drug Overdose and Substance Use Surveillance Activity system also analyzes blood or urine samples from a subset of patients to be able to detect patient exposure to fentanyl or other substances.

In Michigan, the System for Opioid Overdose Surveillance processes data from medical examiners and from EMS encounters in which overdose-reversing naloxone was administered. The system maintained by the University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center sends out reports to county health departments and other users.

The most ubiquitous surveillance system is the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program, or ODMAP. The system allows first responders and others to enter data on suspected overdoses, including locations, times, naloxone dosages, victim ages and suspected drugs. The system designed by the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program in the Washington/Baltimore area sends out spike alerts to police and other agencies. Launched as a pilot in January 2017, it is now in 48 states.

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Officials in Oneida County using ODMAP in upstate New York last month were able to marshal forces after receiving a spike alert notification for 21 overdose reports and four fatalities suspected to be associated with heroin within 15 days.

The Hudson Valley system gathers much of the same data as ODMAP, though Wilkin said it also collects information on patients' housing and transportation status to give system users additional insights into the social conditions of people fighting addictions.

The Hudson Valley groups had been logging local overdose data on to a shared Google Document before health-care IT consultant Marisa Barbieri volunteered to create the current system. She designed a dashboard to give users an at-a-glance look overdose trends. She hopes to add a feature to warn where deadly batches of drugs are headed next, similar to how meteorologists track of deadly storms.

"We need to be able to predict when a cluster is forming," she said. "I don't want to see on the news that 12 people died. I want a system to be watching."

Saudi Arabia cuts loose with bevy of models and a rave

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DIRIYAH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Supermodels and social media mavens, their makeup artists and hair stylists in tow, posed at a concert in leather pants, chunky sweaters and trendy black combat boots. What was unusual about these Instagram posts was that they were all deliberately tagged in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The bevy of Instagram stars, former Victoria's Secret models, including Alessandra Ambrosio, and Hollywood actors like Ryan Phillippe, Ed Westwick and Wilmer Valderrama were invited to Saudi Arabia over the weekend to promote the kingdom's most eye-popping effort yet at showcasing the dramatic changes taking hold in this country, where more than half of its 20 million citizens are under 25 years old.

The efforts are aimed at boosting the economy while polishing Saudi Arabia's image abroad and appealing to the young. It's a staggering pivot from just three years ago, when religious police would storm restaurants playing music and harass women in malls for showing their face or wearing red nail polish.

Now, the kingdom has movie theaters and concerts. Women are allowed to drive and travel without male permission, and they can sit with men, unsegregated at restaurants. The kingdom began issuing tourist visas this year. Female visitors are not required to wear the conservative black-flowing robe known as the abaya and headscarves in public.

At Riyadh airport, a booth welcomes tourists with pamphlets on etiquette in Saudi Arabia, labeled "Our Code of Conduct."

"Both men and women are asked to dress modestly in public, avoiding tight fitting clothing," it explains. "Women should cover their shoulders and knees in public."

Apparently, not all the V.I.P. guests flown to Saudi Arabia on private jets got the memo — some opted for stomach-baring bralettes under open coats.

The blast of glossy social media posts helped draw attention to the visit's purpose — to promote MDL Beast, a three-day musical extravaganza in Riyadh that drew more than 130,000 visitors on its first day alone, according to the General Entertainment Authority. Ticket prices started at just 75 riyals (\$20), but organizers were eager to ensure a big turnout so tickets were also handed out for free to some government employees.

More than 70 world-renowned DJs were invited to perform across five stages to the backdrop of surreal performances — including one with a woman in a skintight sky blue leotard writhing from a hot air balloon over a crowd of young Saudi men.

Men and women cut loose and danced at the unprecedented rave-like event. Thousands waited for hours to get in.

A popular social media account, Diet Prada, named and shamed some of the celebrities present, accusing them of allegedly accepting six-figure sums for attendance and geo-tagged posts to "rehabilitate the image of Saudi Arabia."

Earlier this year, hip-hop star Nicki Minaj pulled out of performing in the kingdom over concerns about

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women's rights, gay rights and freedom of expression.

When asked by The Associated Press, the entertainment authority that licensed MDL Beast said some people had been compensated for promoting the event, but denied such high sums were paid to individuals.

While the social changes ushered in by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have been sweeping, so too is his crackdown on criticism and political expression. The prince has overseen the country's war in Yemen, which has led to the world's worst humanitarian crisis, and the arrest of women's rights activists, clerics and writers.

He's also drawn international condemnation for the killing of Saudi writer and Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey, slaughtered by Saudi agents inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul last year.

The incident tarnished Prince Mohammed's international image though his popularity is undeniable at home.

"The changes are really incredible and, God willing, we are heading toward even more," said Mona Hassan, a mother out with her grown daughters at a family-friendly carnival in Diriyah, near Riyadh. "We are with Mohammed bin Salman wherever he takes us and whatever happens."

The fully veiled Hassan said she wasn't raised on this kind of entertainment, but has no problem with her kids enjoying it.

Saad al-Otaibi, who traveled 300 kilometers (186 miles) from al-Duwaidmi to attend the Diriyah festival, wanted to ensure it was family-friendly and affordable before bringing his wife and kids.

"All the changes are positive, not negative," he said. "But one comment is that the prices are expensive," he said, repeating a refrain others have quipped about on Twitter.

The Diriyah festival, which opened a month ago, has included sporting events like the world's heavy-weight boxing championship.

Families skated on an ice-rink, ziplined across the park, ride on a Ferris wheel and played galactic bowling. At the other end of the site, a younger crowd of Saudi elites smoked shisha — the bubbling waterpipe — and dined at pop-up restaurants where prices range from \$100 to \$1,200 a person for a meal.

Couples sat on park benches under the stars, listening to a Saudi musician playing the oud, a stringed instrument popular in the Middle East.

"No one could have imagined everything that's happening," said Abdullah Abulkheir, a 28-year-old Saudi visiting Diriyah. "We never thought we could reach this point in 30 years' time. It's been a huge transformation in a short period of time."

Not all are happy with the crown prince's style of governance or the changes. Yet Saudi clerics, many of whom had spoken out in the past against these changes, appear unwilling or unable to publicly criticize the moves. Those who dared have been detained and their social media accounts shuttered. In this absolute monarchy, the king holds final say on major decisions.

Only one major incident has so far marred the festivities. Last month, a Yemeni man stabbed two Spanish dancers and a guard at a live show in Riyadh. State media reported this week that he had allegedly acted on the orders of a senior al-Qaida leader in Yemen, according to evidence submitted during his trial.

Still, it's clear most Saudis are ready for the changes.

"I don't feel like I need to travel abroad like before because everything is here now," Sarah Muteiri, 28, said. "We want these things and more."

Follow Aya Batrawy on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ayaelb>.

Going west, migrants wander through Bosnia in Balkan winter

By MANU BRABO Associated Press

BIHAC, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Bosnia's notorious Vucjak camp may have closed down after an international outcry, but the plight of migrants stranded in the country while trying to reach Western Europe is far from over.

The tent camp near the northwestern town of Bihac stood on a former landfill and near a mine field,

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becoming a symbol of migrant suffering as they travel through the Balkans. The camp was flattened earlier this month, its residents transferred to other parts of Bosnia. Yet they are making their way back to Bihac because it is closest the place they want to get to — Bosnia's neighbor, European Union member Croatia.

In Bihac, migrants look for abandoned buildings or factories, or stay in the town's migrant center if they are lucky. They camp among bare walls, waiting for a warm meal from aid groups.

With the winter settling in, migrants want to hurry toward Croatia before the weather gets even worse. But this is not easy — they have to go over a mountain pass and police often turn them back.

They call it the "Game" — a cat-and-mouse chase with Croatia's border patrols over the mountain tracks. Sometimes migrants try several times before they manage to cross, sometimes it takes weeks, even months.

It's toughest for families with small children. Babies can't stop crying. Parents bring the children as close to the fire as possible to keep them warm, but they are tired and the cold nonetheless bites at their tiny faces.

A family from Syria and a couple from India paused briefly this month before moving on in sub-freezing temperatures, loaded with personal belongings and carrying children. The women, Fatima, 24, from Syria, and Nishademi, 22, from India, are tired and scared.

Elsewhere near the border, at an abandoned house, a group of young men are camping as they prepare to set off along a snowy road toward Croatia. Many wear only sneakers and have to wrap themselves in blankets.

About 20 migrants from Afghanistan eventually went toward Croatia, but half of them gave up along the way and returned. The snow had fallen overnight and it became too cold.

Inside the houses by the border, old, dirty mattresses serve as temporary beds for those who come by. Volunteers bring firewood and garbage is everywhere, testifying to the groups who have passed this way in the past.

Sometimes, young migrants play in the snow. Many are just children, often encouraged to leave home by their parents, who choose to send them on perilous journeys across the world rather than have them live lives without hope in their countries.

Bosnian authorities say there are several thousand people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia who are staying in the country while on their way toward wealthy EU nations.

Bosnia's border police say they don't have enough manpower to stop the flow — the impoverished country is struggling to accommodate the newcomers.

But with nowhere to go in Bosnia's harsh winter, some migrants opt to wait. They go back to the previous country they passed through, Serbia, to spend the winter, ready to try their luck again next spring.

US soldier is killed in Afghanistan; Taliban claim attack

RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — An American service member was killed in combat Monday in Afghanistan, the U.S. military said, without providing further details, while the Taliban claimed they were behind a roadside bombing in northern Kunduz province that killed the U.S. soldier.

The latest fatality brings the number of U.S. deaths in Afghanistan this year to 20. There have also been three non-combat deaths in 2019. More than 2,400 Americans have died in the nearly 18-year conflict.

The Taliban now control or hold sway over practically half of Afghanistan but continue to stage near-daily attacks targeting Afghan and U.S. forces, as well as government officials — even as they hold peace talks with a U.S. envoy tasked with negotiating an end to what has become America's longest war. Scores of Afghan civilians are also killed in the crossfire or by roadside bombs planted by militants.

Monday's U.S. military statement did not identify the U.S. soldier or say where in Afghanistan the service member was killed. It said that in accordance with U.S. Department of Defense policy, names of service member killed in action are being withheld for 24 hours, until the notification of the family is completed.

Last month, two U.S. service members were killed in Afghanistan when their helicopter crashed in eastern Logar province. The Taliban also claimed responsibility for that crash, saying they had downed the

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helicopter, causing many fatalities. The U.S. military dismissed the Taliban claim as false.

Shortly after the U.S. military statement on Monday, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that the U.S. soldier was killed in the Chardara district in northern Kunduz province where U.S. and Afghan forces were carrying out a joint raid. Mujahid said the insurgents had planted roadside bomb that killed the service member. He even tweeted a purported photo ID of the slain U.S. soldier, without saying how it was obtained.

The U.S. military would not immediately comment on the tweet or the Taliban claim.

The Taliban have a strong presence in Kunduz province and are completely in control of several of the province's districts. The provincial capital, the city of Kunduz, briefly fell to the Taliban in 2015, before the insurgents withdrew in the face of a NATO-backed Afghan offensive. The city is a strategic crossroads with easy access to much of northern Afghanistan as well as the country's capital, Kabul, about 200 miles (335 kilometers) away.

The following year, 2016, the Taliban pushed back into the city center, briefly raising their flag before gradually being driven out again. In August this year they launched another attempt to overrun the city but were repelled.

Washington's peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been trying to hammer out a peace agreement with the Taliban for over a year. The U.S. wants the deal to include a promise from the Taliban that Afghanistan would not be used as a base by any terrorist group.

Earlier this month, Khalilzad met with Taliban representatives in Qatar, where the insurgents maintain a political office, as the talks between the two sides resumed after a three-month halt by President Donald Trump following a particularly deadly wave of Taliban attacks, including a Kabul suicide bombing that killed an American soldier.

The Qatar meeting focused on getting a Taliban promise to reduce violence, with a permanent cease-fire being the eventual goal.

Khalilzad is trying to lay the groundwork for negotiations between Afghans on both sides of the protracted conflict but the Taliban refuse to talk directly with the Kabul government.

Meanwhile, a bomb went off on Monday morning at the funeral of a village elder in eastern Laghman province, killing at least three civilians and wounding seven, according to Asadullah Dawlatzai, the provincial governor's spokesman. He said the explosion took place in the district of Dawlat Shah.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but the spokesman blamed the Taliban.

Inside impeachment: How an 'urgent' tip became 'high crimes'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The night before the whistleblower complaint that launched President Donald Trump's impeachment was made public, Democrats and Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee crammed into the same room to get a first look at the document.

For Democrats, it was an instant bombshell, a "jaw-hit-the-floor sort of moment," one lawmaker said. Another described sneaking peeks at Republican colleagues to see whether they were having a similar reaction.

But the Democrats in the room didn't get the reaction they were hoping for from Republicans. And through nearly three months of closed-door depositions, powerful public hearings, and procedural posturing, they never would.

The House's drive toward impeachment ended last week with a party-line vote. Not a single Republican turned against the Republican president, and his grip on the GOP appeared tighter than ever heading into a Senate trial.

There were brief moments when that outcome seemed less certain.

A series of text messages from Kurt Volker, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, stirred anxieties in both parties about work being done by Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer, in the Eastern European country. And one by one, State Department officials, including the ousted U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, willingly

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defied Trump's orders and provided investigators new details about the scheme.

Even White House advisers conceded they were losing ground in the early days of the impeachment investigation. The administration's public arguments amounted solely to Trump's protestations that he had done nothing wrong and that the process was unfair.

But by the time lawmakers streamed into the House chamber last Wednesday to vote on impeachment for just the third time in American history, each side was more hardened in its belief that it was in the right.

This account of how they got there is based on interviews with 21 people directly involved in the matter. Several insisted on anonymity to describe private conversations.

It was 7:37 p.m. on a Friday, and most of official Washington had gone home. But Adam Schiff had a subpoena to announce.

In a cryptic statement, released without warning on Sept. 13, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee revealed that a whistleblower complaint was being withheld from Congress by the acting director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire.

Schiff, D-Calif., gave no details, but said it was a "matter of urgent concern." Under the law, Democrats said, the administration had no choice but to turn it over.

Even before Schiff's subpoena, some members of the House Democratic caucus were agitating for Trump's impeachment. Despite House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's warnings that they did not yet have an "ironclad case," the tally of those in favor of a formal investigation had slowly ticked up.

"I feel like we're struggling to justify not moving forward," Rep. Val Demings, D-Fla., told Pelosi on a private Democratic caucus conference call in April, just days after special counsel Robert Mueller issued his findings in the Russia investigation. Mueller said Trump could not be exonerated on obstruction of justice and left it to Congress to decide what to do.

By early September, a group of Democratic House members was so frustrated by the lack of action on impeachment that they were preparing to hold a news conference to challenge Pelosi publicly, according to one lawmaker involved in the effort. They only called off the drastic step when the Ukraine developments emerged and Pelosi signaled she was going to start an inquiry.

In truth, Pelosi had already quietly signed off on stepped-up investigations into Trump. The House Judiciary Committee chairman, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, for example, insisted in August that his committee was in "formal impeachment proceedings." But it wasn't clear whether the effort was genuinely impeachment or just an attempt to appease some of the more liberal members of the committee.

Besides, without Pelosi's public and explicit backing, the impeachment push was going nowhere.

By summer, Democratic investigators had taken note of Giuliani's direct dealings with Ukrainian officials, which he discussed frequently in the media.

The former New York City mayor had for months openly disparaged the American ambassador to Kyiv. All the while, Giuliani promoted uncorroborated corruption allegations against Democrat Joe Biden, the former vice president and current White House candidate whose son Hunter had served on the board of a Ukrainian energy company, Burisma.

On the morning of Sept. 9, three House committees announced an investigation into whether Giuliani was trying to "manipulate the Ukrainian justice system" to help Trump and "target a possible political opponent." That same afternoon, the House Intelligence Committee received notification about the whistleblower complaint.

In the days that followed, Schiff's staff exchanged letters with Maguire, the intelligence chief, and talked to him directly about the complaint. Democrats decided to go public when it became clear that Maguire wasn't willing to provide the complaint, according to committee aides.

In the complaint, the whistleblower, who worked at the CIA and been detailed to the White House, raised concerns about Giuliani's dealings with Ukraine. The person specifically flagged a July 25 phone call Trump had with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

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The central charge, to the committee Democrats, was stunning: that Trump had sought help from Ukraine investigating Democrats, including Biden, ahead of Trump's reelection bid, and made a White House visit for Zelenskiy contingent upon Ukraine's willingness to "play ball." Later, other witnesses would testify that Trump held back military assistance from Ukraine as leverage.

Pelosi, D-Calif., would speak with Trump about the matter hours before launching the impeachment inquiry. He insisted his call with Zelenskiy was "perfect" — a line he would repeat numerous times throughout the investigation.

The speaker vehemently disagreed.

"I was just stunned that the president of United States would engage in such an activity and not even admit that it was wrong," Pelosi would later tell the AP the day after the impeachment vote. "He had to know it was wrong."

That afternoon in September, she soberly announced that the House was plunging into an impeachment investigation of the president of the United States.

"The actions taken by the president," she said, "have seriously violated the Constitution."

As the whistleblower complaint upended Washington, even some of the president's most ardent allies were on edge.

What had Trump said in the call with Zelenskiy? Who was involved? What had Giuliani been doing abroad? And what had Trump done behind closed doors?

Amid the uncertainty, the White House's response was muddled. There was little coordinating, no direction offered beyond what Trump doled out on Twitter.

The president himself was irate. For all his criticism of Pelosi, Trump and his advisers have long had grudging respect for her command of the Democratic caucus. They knew she wouldn't have started the investigation unless she had the votes to impeach.

Yet some in Trump's orbit argued to him that impeachment would virtually assure his reelection, proving to Americans once and for all that Democrats were motivated by little more than their opposition to his presidency.

Trump, however, wasn't among them. He raged to allies about the all-but-certain stain impeachment would leave on his legacy, not to mention the wall-to-wall news cycles of criticism.

As was often the case in the Trump White House, his team turned on each other at times. Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney complained he was being shut out of the process. Mulvaney's allies worried that White House counsel Pat Cipollone was angling for his job.

Mulvaney, who had carried out the summertime order to withhold military aid to Ukraine, quickly became a figure of central interest to impeachment investigators. Ordered by the White House to defy a subpoena, Mulvaney briefly considered legal action against the House, but abandoned that idea days later. Democrats still want him as a witness in the Senate's upcoming impeachment trial.

Amid the early chaos, the White House made a decision: It would release a rough transcript of Trump's July 25 call with Zelenskiy, the one that had spurred the whistleblower complaint. Cipollone and Attorney General William Barr were among those who urged Trump to make the transcript public as a way of bolstering the president's case that he did nothing wrong.

The transcript was sprinkled with references to Biden and the Democratic National Committee. Trump said Zelenskiy: "I would like you to do us a favor, though."

There was an implicit, if unsaid, directive from Pelosi to her Democrats: Don't mess this up. There was a sense that Democrats had stumbled by appearing enthusiastic about impeachment, and Pelosi wanted it handled in a somber, serious way.

She put one of her most trusted chairmen, Schiff, in charge of the impeachment investigation. The two consulted often about how to proceed, meeting with other committee heads at least once a week in her office.

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From the outset, lawmakers and aides knew that they would have to do the investigation quickly. The goal was always an impeachment vote by Christmas.

They rapidly called in witnesses for private depositions — 17 in all, with 12 eventually testifying in public — who told a largely consistent story of an irregular diplomatic channel in Ukraine as Giuliani became involved and Trump pushed for the investigations of Democrats.

Volker, the Ukraine special envoy, was up first for a closed-door deposition in early October. He brought with him a cache of text messages with other diplomats that plainly revealed that the officials were scrambling to clean up as Giuliani and Trump pushed Ukraine to announce the investigations. The texts gave investigators names of other potential witnesses and a sequence of events.

Democratic lawmakers privately debated whether the committee should release Volker's texts publicly. One lawmaker urged staff to put them out immediately, before the White House try to classify them retroactively.

The impact of the texts was "seismic," another lawmaker said. In one of the texts, the top official in Ukraine at the time, William Taylor, said it was "crazy" to withhold military aid from Ukraine for help with a political campaign.

Volker would eventually testify publicly, one of several officials to appear during five days of televised hearings. Lawmakers and aides believed that the decision by Marie Yovanovitch, the former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, to defy Trump's orders and testify emboldened other witnesses to appear.

In the public hearings, the witnesses at times seemed made for TV. White House aide Alexander Vindman came in full military uniform to describe his discomfort as he listened into Trump's call. Trump's envoy to the European Union, Gordon Sondland repeatedly described the administration's dealings with Ukraine as a quid pro quo — one thing in exchange for another. Former White House aide Fiona Hill described a "domestic political errand" that had upended Ukraine policy.

To bolster their case, Republicans moved one of Trump's most ardent defenders, Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, onto the House Intelligence Committee temporarily.

At first, Trump resisted the notion of a "war room" to organize on impeachment. There were few substantive reasons for that decision, other than Trump not wanting to give Democrats the satisfaction of knowing he was concerned.

But White House advisers knew they needed more defenses; congressional Republicans, after all, were telling them so.

By the time public hearings began, the White House was on steadier footing, ready to launch the same kind of online assault it had perfected during the contentious confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

On Nov. 13, the morning of the first open hearing, Mulvaney, Cipollone and senior adviser Jared Kushner walked over to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building to work alongside the nine members of the White House research staff.

As the Intelligence Committee gaveled into session, the research team launched its opening salvo. One, two, ten emails came in quick succession, blasting Democrats and trying to undercut the witness testimony by highlighting their closed-door comments.

The initial flurry was described internally as "shock and awe." It was meant as a signal to Trump's Republican allies that it was time to fight back.

Trump's allies on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue were now working in tandem. Jeff Freeland, the White House's point man on the Hill for the hearings, provided guidance to the war room on what Republican lawmakers needed during the hearings.

By the afternoon of the first hearing, the White House believed for the first time it was making progress. Some of the same Republican lawmakers who had been vocally critical of the West Wing effort were using the White House's talking points in their questions of witnesses.

After two weeks of public hearings, not a single Republican was publicly or privately committed to im-

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peaching Trump. That wasn't an accident.

The top Republican vote-counter, Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, was waging a careful campaign to unify Republicans in Trump's defense, keeping in close contact with members. Weekly impeachment meetings had begun in early October, and they quickly drew a crowd, with Republicans gathering to hear presentations from key lawmakers and Trump allies such as Sens. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin.

Meanwhile, a handful of Democrats were wavering on impeachment, but far from enough to hold off a vote.

Two articles of impeachment seemed sure to pass — abuse of power for soliciting election help from Ukraine, and obstruction of Congress for rebuffing subpoenas for testimony and documents.

But some of the more liberal members of the House Judiciary Committee tasked with drafting the articles wanted a third, based on Mueller's report. This was the time, they argued, to hold Trump accountable for all of his worst perceived offenses.

But several moderate Democrats opposed the idea, arguing that Ukraine was a cleaner case: Trump had asked a foreign leader to help investigate a Trump political rival and then the president had blocked Congress' efforts to investigate that.

A group of them — the same freshmen who had written an op-ed that helped tip the scales in favor of impeachment — called Pelosi while she was on a trip to Spain to make the argument for fewer articles.

The articles were introduced later that week. There were only two.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2019, Trump was impeached for what Democrats considered "high crimes and misdemeanors" as laid out in the Constitution.

The House voted 230-197 on the first charge, 229-198 on the second, with one Democrat voting "present" each time.

The articles are expected to eventually head to the Senate for a trial, where he is nearly certain to be acquitted. But Pelosi is waiting to send them, for now, to try and gain leverage for what Democrats consider a fair trial.

Addressing a rally in Battle Creek, Michigan, as the impeachment votes were cast, Trump called the Democrats' actions "depraved" and a "mark of shame." He said it didn't even feel like he was being impeached.

"He's impeached forever because he violated our Constitution," Pelosi told the AP. "He gave us no choice."

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo, Lisa Mascaró, Laurie Kellman, Jonathan Lemire and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Buzz over Venezuela's Guaidó fades as Maduro holds firm

By SCOTT SMITH Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Tour operator Alejandro Palacios joined hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans protesting in the streets early this year, wanting to believe that things would finally change in the country as upstart opposition leader Juan Guaidó rallied international support and promised a swift end to President Nicolás Maduro's rule.

To Palacios, Guaidó seemed different from the string of past opposition leaders who had challenged Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez, over 20 years of increasingly authoritarian socialist rule.

The United States and dozens of nations had thrown their support behind the youthful congressional leader, recognizing him as the country's legitimate president, arguing that Maduro's re-election was invalidated by fraud and a ban on most opponents.

And there seemed to be signs that the military might heed Guaidó's repeated calls for soldiers to abandon Maduro. A few joined him in the streets in a quickly quelled uprising. The U.S. and other nations sent caravans of aid to Venezuela's borders to be distributed by Guaidó's backers, and they were put in charge of many Venezuelan embassies and assets abroad.

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Then February turned to March, and the months marched by. No international aid made it through Maduro's blockade. The military stayed loyal. Even the nation's catastrophic economy began to improve slightly. Maduro remains in power.

"Here we are today, like nothing ever happened," said a disillusioned Palacios, 26, who has watched many relatives pack up and leave in desperation while he stayed behind to care for his parents living on a government pension constantly shrinking under the world's highest inflation.

Palacios no longer answers the opposition leader's call to protest, nor do most of the others who once filled the streets.

Cracks have even appeared in Guaidó's base of support in the National Assembly, the only major institution controlled by the opposition. His re-election as congressional president is no longer assured and legislators' official terms expire in a few months.

Throughout, the 36-year-old Guaidó has admitted no mistakes, and neither he nor his backers in Washington have offered a fresh strategy to rescue their floundering battle to unseat Maduro. The Trump administration has continued to pile economic and travel sanctions onto members of Maduro's inner circle, but so far with little effect.

"We're up against a dictatorship," Guaidó said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I think that is central."

Guaidó said he remains focused on winning over the military, the linchpin of support for Maduro, and he dismissed the idea of further negotiations with the socialist administration — talks his side says Maduro has used to defuse protests without making concessions.

He also said he favors boycotting legislative elections in 2020 as long as the electoral board running the vote remains packed with Maduro loyalists.

Still, Guaidó insists his domestic and international support will only grow.

Guaidó, the hand-picked successor to then-detained opposition leader Leopoldo López, leaped onto the stage last January at a dark moment in the once-wealthy nation's history. Despite sitting atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, gasoline shortages plague the nation, most homes don't have reliable drinking water or electricity and there are shortages of food, medicine and spare parts.

Roughly 4.5 million people have left the country, figures that rival mass migration from war-torn Syria.

Seizing on the nation's desperation, Guaidó drew masses into the streets 11 months ago when he claimed to be Venezuela's legitimate interim president after congress declared Maduro's re-election illegal.

The bold move overnight turned Guaidó into the nation's most-popular politician since Chavez burst onto the political scene in the early 1990s. More than 60% of Venezuelans viewed him favorably in February, according to Caracas-based polling firm Datanalisis, with many believing he would rid them of Maduro within three months.

"Guaido became the outsider that people were looking for to face Maduro," said Datanalisis' president Luis Vicente Leon. "A kind of hope formed around him."

Today that support has sunk by 20 percentage points, said Leon, a sign that Venezuelans are starting to think that removing Maduro from power may be impossible.

Maduro, whose approval ratings in the other polls have dipped closer to 10%, has proven more resilient than many expected.

Venezuela's oil production has inched up for the second consecutive month after crashing to a seven-decade low under U.S. sanctions, and shoppers are increasingly pulling U.S. dollars from their wallets — a sign the economy is bouncing back, or at least stabilizing, due in part to an easing of currency controls that the government had earlier resisted.

Maduro also appeals to many Venezuelans who still mistrust an opposition seen as corrupt and elitist and who honor the memory of Chavez, who died before the economic collapse hit home.

Vice President Delcy Rodríguez declared the "attempted coup d'état" led by President Donald Trump a failure as she spoke last week to the National Constituent Assembly, a body the government created to bypass the opposition-dominated congress.

"They don't understand what's happening within Venezuela," Rodríguez said. "They follow Hollywood

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scripts but don't have an ending our political project."

Maduro has agreed to several rounds of negotiations over the years, including some sponsored by the Vatican and the government of Norway that raised hopes of a breakthrough to the political crisis, only to have them fall apart.

Accelerating the opposition's downfall have been revelations of corruption.

The National Assembly that Guaidó heads has suspended seven opposition lawmakers — three of them from Guaidó's Popular Will party — who are accused of lobbying on behalf of businessmen who were under investigation both in Venezuela and the U.S. for allegedly defrauding Maduro's landmark food subsidy program.

In January, the National Assembly must decide whether to extend Guaidó's tenure, and he said he is confident he has the backing to be re-elected as assembly president. Analysts say appointing any alternative would be devastating for the opposition.

Adding to his obstacles, Maduro's government has stepped up its campaign to undermine the opposition, offering large bribes to lawmakers to vote against Guaidó, Elliott Abrams, the U.S. special envoy to Venezuela, told reporters in Washington on Friday.

Maduro's government also recently charged four opposition lawmakers with treason and rebellion, bringing to roughly 32 the number of legislators who have been detained, forced into exile or had their constitutional immunity from prosecution revoked. Opposition leaders said a special police force on Friday detained lawmaker Gilber Caro, in what Guaidó called a "kidnapping."

U.S. diplomats say Guaidó continues to have their full support, and they plan to further increase diplomatic and economic pressure on Maduro to hold new elections. They are urging European leaders to follow the U.S. example.

"The Maduro regime fears free elections," Abrams said. "So pressure is needed to get the free elections that can bring Venezuela out of the repression and poverty that have been the hallmark of the Maduro for years."

Palacios, whose faith in Guaidó has long since faded, said he hopes somebody steps forward to lead Venezuela out of its crisis.

He has turned his back on Guaidó's call for more street protests and instead has buried himself in running his business, which caters to the few remaining adventure tourists. He is also caring for his parents and ailing grandmother, who suffers Parkinson's disease and struggles to find medicine she needs.

"Sadly, you can't make any plans for the future because there's no economic stability," said Palacios, dismayed by the opposition's fading show of strength. "I'm annoyed. It's just more of the same."

Scott Smith on Twitter: @ScottSmithAP

Australia's PM defends climate stance amid wildfire disaster

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Australia's embattled Prime Minister defended his government's climate policy Monday, as authorities warned the wildfires crisis ravaging the country's most populous state could fester for months.

Around 200 wildfires were burning in four states, with New South Wales accounting for more than half of them, including 60 fires not contained.

The disaster has led to renewed criticism that Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government has not taken enough action on climate change.

Morrison rejected calls to downsize Australia's lucrative coal industry. Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal and liquefied natural gas.

"I am not going to write off the jobs of thousands of Australians by walking away from traditional industries," he told Channel Seven.

Morrison made the rounds on several Australian television networks Monday morning in the aftermath of his much criticized family vacation to Hawaii during the wildfires crisis.

He eventually cut short his holiday and returned to Sydney over the weekend before visiting evacuation and emergency control centers and the families of two firefighters killed battling blazes last Thursday southwest of Sydney.

"We all make decisions. You do as a parent, I do as a parent. We'll seek to balance our work life responsibilities and we all try to get that right," Morrison told Channel Seven.

More than 3 million hectares (7.4 million acres) of land has burned nationwide during a torrid past few months, with nine people killed and more than 900 homes destroyed. Almost 800 homes have burned in New South Wales, which last week was paralyzed by a seven-day state of emergency amid catastrophic conditions.

There will be desperately needed relief this week for New South Wales, with cooler conditions forecast.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, however, painted a bleak long-term picture.

"We've got to keep in mind that we're not expecting any rainfall to make any meaningful difference to these fires until January or February," he said.

"That's still a way to go. We're still talking four to six weeks at best before we start to see a meaningful reprieve in the weather."

Morrison's coalition government won a surprise third term in May. Among its pledges was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% by 2030 — a modest figure compared to the center-left opposition's pledge of 45%.

Morrison on Monday insisted Australia would meet its emission targets.

"I'm going to maintain the course of responsible management, responsibly addressing the changes of climate change and responsibly ensuring that we can grow our economy in what is a very tough climate at the moment," he said.

13 wounded in shooting at Chicago memorial for slain person

CHICAGO (AP) — One person has been charged in connection with a shooting early Sunday at a house party that left 13 people wounded, four of them critically, Chicago police said.

The shooting stemmed from a dispute at the memorial party, Chief of Patrol Fred Waller said at a news conference. He said shots were first fired just after 12:30 a.m. The party was being held in honor of someone who was killed in April.

Chicago police announced Sunday evening that Marciano White, 37, was charged with unlawful use of a weapon by a felon. White was arrested a short distance from where the party was being held, authorities said.

The victims range in age from 16 to 48 and suffered "different and various gunshot wounds to their bodies." Waller said police recovered a revolver.

"It looked like they were just shooting randomly at people as they exited the party," Waller said.

Waller did not provide details on the person who was being memorialized, including that person's identity. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who visited victims on Sunday, said the party was celebrating the birthday of a person who had been killed.

Waller described three different shooting scenes at the residential location in the city's Englewood neighborhood, a predominantly low-income stretch of the city roughly 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of downtown that has high crime. The shooting started inside, then more shots were fired as people began spilling out of the house. Shots were also fired at a third place nearby, Waller said.

He described the shooting as an "isolated incident."

The shooting comes as the city has been on the verge of closing out 2019 with sizable drops in shootings and homicides for the third straight year. Through roughly mid-December, about 475 people were killed, compared with 549 in 2018, which is a 14% drop. In 2016, the number of homicides was roughly 750, according to Chicago police data.

The declines happened citywide, including in historically high-crime areas. Still, Chicago still has more

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violent crime than New York and Los Angeles. Both cities had about 1,800 shooting victims combined, while Chicago has had about 2,500 this year, according to the Chicago Tribune, which tracks shootings.

Police have credited Chicago's drop in crime to the use of technology used to predict where shootings might occur, while experts also credit anti-violence programs that offer jobs and gang conflict mediation.

Lightfoot, who met with victims at the University of Chicago Hospital, urged those with information about the shooting to come forward, even if they want to do so anonymously.

"It's a terrible tragedy and frankly an incredible act of cowardice," she told reporters. "People in that house know what happened and we've urged them to overcome their fears and come forward with information."

This story has been corrected to reflect that 13 people were wounded, not killed.

Evangelical tussling over anti-Trump editorial escalates

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

As the political clamor caused by a top Christian magazine's call to remove President Donald Trump from office continues to reverberate, more than 100 conservative evangelicals closed ranks further around Trump on Sunday.

In a letter to the president of Christianity Today magazine, the group of evangelicals chided Editor-in-Chief Mark Galli for penning an anti-Trump editorial, published Thursday, that they portrayed as a dig at their characters as well as the president's.

"Your editorial offensively questioned the spiritual integrity and Christian witness of tens-of-millions of believers who take seriously their civic and moral obligations," the evangelicals wrote to the magazine's president, Timothy Dalrymple.

The new offensive from the group of prominent evangelicals, including multiple members of Trump's evangelical advisory board, signals a lingering awareness by the president's backers that any meaningful crack in his longtime support from that segment of the Christian community could prove perilous for his reelection hopes. Though no groundswell of new anti-Trump sentiment emerged among evangelicals in the wake of Christianity Today's editorial, the president fired off scathing tweets Friday accusing the establishment magazine -- founded by the late Rev. Billy Graham in 1956 -- of becoming a captive of the left.

The letter to the magazine's president sent on Sunday also included a veiled warning that Christianity Today could lose readership or advertising revenue as a result of the editorial, which cites Trump's impeachment last week.

Citing Galli's past characterization of himself as an "elite" evangelical, the letter's authors told Dalrymple that "it's up to your publication to decide whether or not your magazine intends to be a voice of evangelicals like those represented by the signatories below, and it is up to us and those Evangelicals like us to decide if we should subscribe to, advertise in and read your publication online and in print, but historically, we have been your readers."

Among the signatories of the letter are George Wood, chairman of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship; Rev. Tim Hill of the Church of God; former Arkansas governor and GOP presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee; and former Minnesota GOP Rep. Michele Bachmann.

Galli told CBS' "Face the Nation" on Sunday that he views the chances of Trump leaving office, either through a reelection loss or post-impeachment conviction by the Senate, as "probably fairly slim at this point." The editor-in-chief defended his editorial as less of a "political judgment" than a call for fellow evangelicals to examine their tolerance of Trump's "moral character" in exchange for his embrace of conservative policies high on their agenda.

"We're not looking for saints. We do have private sins, ongoing patterns of behavior that reveal themselves in our private life that we're all trying to work on," Galli said Sunday. "But a president has certain responsibilities as a public figure to display a certain level of public character and public morality."

Galli referred comment on Sunday's evangelical letter to Dalrymple, who on Sunday published his own strongly worded defense of the magazine's anti-Trump commentary.

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Countering Trump's suggestion that the magazine had shifted to favor liberals, Dalrymple wrote that the publication is in fact "theologically conservative" and "does not endorse candidates."

"Out of love for Jesus and his church, not for political partisanship or intellectual elitism, this is why we feel compelled to say that the alliance of American evangelicalism with this presidency has wrought enormous damage to Christian witness," Dalrymple wrote.

Asked about the editorial's indictment of Trump by "Fox News Sunday," Marc Short – chief of staff to Vice President Mike Pence, himself a prominent evangelical Christian – cited some of the policy positions that have helped endear the president to many in that voting bloc.

"For a lot of us who are celebrating the birth of our Savior this week, the way that we look at it is that this president has helped to save thousands of similar unplanned pregnancies," Short said Sunday, adding that "no president has been a greater ally to Israel than this president."

Roughly 8 in 10 white evangelical Protestants say they approve of the way Trump is handling his job, according to a December poll from The AP-NORC Center.

The Trump campaign is planning a Jan. 3 event in Miami called "Evangelicals for Trump."

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

This story has been corrected by deleting a reference to Samuel Rodriguez as among those who signed a letter Sunday, which he was not.

Actor Kevin Costner returns to Iowa to support Buttigieg

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

INDIANOLA, Iowa (AP) — "Field of Dreams" actor Kevin Costner returned to Iowa on Sunday to go to bat for Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, pitching the small-town mayor as someone worth listening to in the crowded lineup of White House hopefuls.

"Whether your road leads you to Pete, like mine has, that's for you to judge," Costner, a self-described independent, told more than 1,000 people in the high school gymnasium of Indianola, a town of about 16,000 people located south of Des Moines. "When Pete speaks of unity, it's the kind of unity I've been waiting and hoping to hear about."

Costner, whose 1989 film offered a mixture of baseball and fantasy amid Iowa cornfields, also noted the status of the state's caucuses as the first voting in the selection of a Democratic nominee.

"That power, that awesome responsibility, originates here on the ground in Iowa," said Costner, speaking in a low voice from a lectern and looking casual in jeans and a wind-breaker. "What you do with your vote is put those first seeds in the ground and see what grows next year."

It was Buttigieg, not Costner, who brought up "Field of Dreams." In a nod to his audience, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, didn't quote the movie's most famous line — "If you build it, he will come" — but a more crowd-pleasing bit of dialogue: "Is this heaven? No, it's Iowa." The candidate thanked the star for making "Iowa as heavenly as it can be on a December day."

Among those turning out to see the director and star of the films "Dances with Wolves" and "Open Range" and the lead in the current Paramount channel series "Yellowstone" was 76-year-old retiree Martha Cunningham. "I'd have come to see Pete. But seeing Kevin Costner, that's extra!" she said.

The appearance of celebrity endorsers marks a new phase in the Iowa campaign as the caucuses loom Feb. 3. Earlier this month, actress Rosario Dawson campaigned with her boyfriend, Cory Booker, the New Jersey senator and Buttigieg rival. Days later, former Olympic ice skater Michelle Kwan was spinning with children at a downtown Des Moines ice rink touting her pick in the 2020 Democratic field, former Vice President Joe Biden.

Croatia's presidential contest heads to Jan. 5 runoff vote

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Croatia's conservative president will face a liberal former prime minister in a runoff election early next month after no candidate won an outright majority in a first round of voting Sunday, near-complete results showed.

The vote was held just days before Croatia takes over the European Union's presidency for the first time. The governing conservatives are hoping to keep their grip on power ahead of assuming the EU chairmanship.

Left-wing former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic led the field with nearly 30% of the votes in preliminary returns. President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic had almost 27%, the state election authorities said after counting almost all ballots.

Right-wing singer Miroslav Skoro was in third place with around 24%.

Some 3.8 million voters in the EU's newest member country chose from among 11 candidates in Sunday's election, but only the top three finishers had been considered serious contenders.

Milanovic and Grabar Kitarovic now will face each other in a second round of voting Jan. 5.

Although the incumbent finished second in the first round, analysts said Grabar Kitarovic could be considered a favorite in the runoff because other right-leaning challengers would no longer be in contention.

Addressing supporters, Grabar Kitarovic called for all those on the right to unite behind her candidacy in the second round. She described the first round as a "10 on 1 battle."

"Unlike Mr. Milanovic, I had a tough fellow-candidate at my political specter," Grabar Kitarovic said. "Now, we must all gather together and go for a victory!"

Milanovic, too, said he can win and called for a "civilized civic match" and not a battle, referring to traditionally deep divisions in Croatia between the political left and right.

"We are going to the second round, not a war," he said. "Let the better one of us win and I believe I am better."

Croatia's presidency is largely ceremonial. The office holder formally commands the army and represents the country abroad.

But retaining the post is important for the ruling Croatian Democratic Union party, known as HDZ, as Croatia prepares for its six-month term in the EU presidency. The job will include overseeing Britain's departure from the bloc, expected to take place Jan. 31, and the start of post-Brexit trade talks.

Grabar Kitarovic started off her campaign looking strong but her position weakened after a series of gaffes. The 51-year-old incumbent is known for flirting with the extreme right while seeking also to portray herself as a peoples' president.

Milanovic promised during the campaign to turn Croatia into a "normal," tolerant country.

Although Croatia has recovered since the devastating 1991-95 war that followed the breakup of former Yugoslavia, it still is one of the poorest nations in the EU and corruption is believed to be widespread.

The nation of 4.2 million people is best known for its stunning Adriatic Sea coast, which includes over 1,000 islands and picturesque coastal towns such as the medieval walled city of Dubrovnik.

Critics blasted the government for setting the election date three days before Christmas, a time when many people travel abroad. The governing HDZ party, they said, counted on the support from Croats who live abroad and normally flock home for the holidays.

Analysts said the strong showing by the right-wing Skoro party signaled that the governing HDZ had lost some support among party followers ahead of a parliamentary election set for next year.

Police: Gunmen opened fire on crowd in Baltimore, injuring 7

BALTIMORE (AP) — Two shooters opened fire on a crowd outside a hookah lounge in Baltimore early Sunday, wounding seven people, including at least three teenagers, police said.

The unidentified suspects, one armed with a rifle and the other with a handgun, began shooting around 1:45 a.m., The Baltimore Sun reported. Police said they don't have a motive for the attack and were

searching for the suspects.

"The criminals are just brazen," said Police Col. Richard Worley. "This guy gets out of a car with a rifle, not even a handgun, walks up the street and just opens fire on a line of people."

Responding officers found four victims, ages 17, 18, 20 and 27, with gunshot wounds, police said. The wounded were taken to hospitals for treatment.

Another three people, including a 17-year-old, sought medical attention at area hospitals, according to police and media reports.

Worley said the victims have not spoken to police about potential suspects, whose car was recovered after it was set on fire.

"We have no idea why they opened fire on a whole line of people," he said.

Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young said in a statement that teams of officers would be working "nonstop" to bring the suspects to justice.

"The level of violence late into this weekend is completely unacceptable," he said.

The city also saw two fatal shootings on Saturday. One of the victims was a woman who was shot inside a beauty salon, according to the newspaper.

Baltimore is experiencing one of its most violent years on record, with more than 330 homicides so far. That's up from 309 total in 2018. The city has also seen more than 1,310 commercial robberies and carjackings.

White House predicts Pelosi to 'yield' on impeachment delay

By HOPE YEN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House argued Sunday that Speaker Nancy Pelosi has put herself in an untenable position by stalling House-passed articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump in hopes of shaping the upcoming Senate trial.

The House voted Wednesday to impeach Trump, who became only the third president in U.S. history to be formally charged with "high crimes and misdemeanors." Pelosi has declined to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate until Republicans provide details on witnesses and testimony, forestalling a trial that is likely to result in Trump's acquittal on charges of obstruction of Congress and abuse of power.

Meanwhile, an influential senator and key Trump ally predicted that the drive for new testimony by Pelosi, D-Calif. and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., would be for naught.

"She will yield. There's no way she can hold this position," said Marc Short, the chief of staff to Vice President Mike Pence. "We think her case is going nowhere."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Schumer have been at an impasse over the issue of new testimony, leaving open the possibility of a protracted delay until the articles are delivered. Trump complained Saturday that the holdup was "unfair" and claimed that Democrats were violating the Constitution, as the delay threatened to prolong the pain of impeachment and cast uncertainty on the timing of the vote Trump is set to claim as vindication.

Schumer told reporters in New York that "the Senate is yearning to give President Trump due process, which means that documents and witnesses should come forward.. What is a trial with no witnesses and no documents. It's a sham trial."

Short called Pelosi's delay unacceptable, saying she's "trampling" Trump's rights to "rush this through, and now we're going to hold it up to demand a longer process in the Senate with more witnesses."

"If her case is so air-tight ... why does she need more witnesses to make her case?" Short said.

White House officials have highlighted Democrats' arguments that removing Trump was an "urgent" matter before the House impeachment vote, as they seek to put pressure on Pelosi to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate.

McConnell has all but promised an easy acquittal of the president, and he appears to have secured Republican support for his plans to impose a framework drawn from the 1999 impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. That trial featured a 100-0 vote on arrangements that established two weeks of presentations and

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argument before a partisan tally in which then-minority Republicans called a limited number of witnesses. That has sparked a fight with Pelosi and Schumer, who are demanding trial witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton.

A close Trump ally, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said Pelosi would fail in her quest "to get Mitch McConnell to bend to her will to shape the trial." Graham is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and was a House manager, comparable to a prosecutor, during the Senate's impeachment trial of Clinton. "She'll eventually send the articles because public opinion will crush the Democrats," said Graham. Asked whether he expected witnesses in the Senate, he replied: "No, I don't."

At one point, Trump had demanded the testimony of witnesses of his own, like Democrats Joe Biden and his son Hunter, and the intelligence community whistleblower whose summer complaint sparked the impeachment probe. But he has since relented after concerted lobbying by McConnell and other Senate Republicans who pushed him to accept the swift acquittal from the Senate and not to risk injecting uncertainty into the process by calling witnesses.

The Senate's second-ranking Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, said his party is looking for a signal from McConnell that he hasn't ruled out new witnesses and documents. But Durbin acknowledged that Democrats may not have much leverage in pushing a deal.

He criticized both Republican and Democratic senators who have already announced how they will vote in the trial, saying the Constitution requires senators to act as impartial jurors. Republicans hold a 53-vote majority in the Senate.

"The leverage is our hope that four Republican senators will stand up, as 20 years ago, we saw in the impeachment of Bill Clinton, and say, this is much bigger than our current political squabbles," Durbin said.

The Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate to convict in an impeachment trial — and Republicans have expressed confidence that they have more than enough votes to keep Trump in office.

Short spoke on "Fox News Sunday," Durbin appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," and Graham was on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures."

AP Radio Correspondent Julie Walker in New York contributed to this report.

Banksy takes politically charged Nativity scene to Bethlehem

By MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — The mysterious street artist known as Banksy has displayed a politically charged Nativity scene in Bethlehem, the town revered as Jesus' birthplace, just in time for the busy Christmas season.

The artwork, named "Scar of Bethlehem," depicts the birth of Jesus under Israel's West Bank separation barrier with a bullet hole shaped like a star. The piece is displayed at the "Walled Off Hotel," a Palestinian guesthouse in Bethlehem that was designed by Banksy and is filled with his artwork.

Wisam Salsaa, the hotel manager, said the British artist recently sent the new piece to the hotel.

"We see there is a scar," he said. "A hole on the wall marks the wall and the life in Bethlehem."

The hotel, which overlooks the separation barrier, sarcastically boasts "the worst view in the world." Since its opening in 2017, it has become a popular tourist draw.

"Banksy is trying to remind the world that people of Bethlehem, where Christmas was started, are not celebrating Christmas like the rest of the world," he said.

Israel built the barrier in the early 2000s in what it said was a move to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers in the West Bank from reaching Israel. The Palestinians consider the barrier illegal and call it an Israeli land grab, noting that it has engulfed large chunks of the West Bank onto the Israeli "side."

Bethlehem has been affected especially hard by the barrier, which surrounds large parts of the city.

Tourists flocked to the hotel Sunday to see the Nativity scene and other works by Banksy as part of their visit to the city during the peak Christmas season.

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Rafael Edelmuller, a 37-year-old tourist from London, said he was looking forward to seeing the art after seeing most of Banksy's work in Amsterdam and London.

"So we saw the Church of Nativity and then the second thing that we wanted to see was the wall with the Banksy hotel and the artwork," Edelmuller said.

The British street artist, who carefully protects his anonymity, is believed to have made several past appearances in the Palestinian territories.

In one work, a mural of a girl pulled upward by balloons was painted on the separation barrier facing the hotel. Banksy also is believed to have sneaked into the Gaza Strip to draw four murals there. One was painted on a remaining piece of a building destroyed during the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza's ruling Hamas militant group and featured the Greek goddess Niobe cowering against the rubble of a destroyed house.

Associated Press writer Imad Isseid in Bethlehem, West Bank, contributed to this report.

Afghan president appears to win new term in initial results

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghan President Ashraf Ghani appears to have narrowly won a second term, according to preliminary results from September's balloting that were announced Sunday, although his main challenger rejected the outcome as illegitimate.

If the outcome stands despite the complaints of ballot fraud, it could give Ghani the authority he has sought to demand a leading role in peace talks with the Taliban in the country devastated by decades of war.

In a nationally televised address from the presidential palace later in the day, Ghani claimed victory over his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, who serves as Afghanistan's chief executive in a fragile national unity government.

"We will connect and unite all Afghans," Ghani said. "We will end the crisis and all divisions by building a responsible government."

Ghani and his government have been sidelined during this year's direct talks between the U.S. and the Taliban. Washington wants to withdraw its thousands of combat troops and end 18 years of fighting in Afghanistan, America's longest war.

Ghani won 923,868 votes, or 50.64% in the Sept. 28 balloting, according to the the long overdue preliminary results announced by Hawa Alam Nuristani, head of the Independent Election Commission.

She said Abdullah won 720,990 votes. Although she did not give a specific percentage for him at her news conference in Kabul, he appears to have received 39.52%.

The results have been repeatedly delayed amid accusations of misconduct and technical problems, and Nuristani did not say when final results would be announced.

Abdullah rejected the outcome in a televised speech and also claimed victory, saying the election commission had sided with those who committed ballot fraud.

"There is no doubt based on the clean vote of the people that we are the winner of the election," Abdullah said.

He said that what he called "the important stage of the election process" still remains: for the Electoral Complaints Commission to look into separating legitimate ballots from fraudulent ones.

"The damage from fraud and suicide bombing is the same," Abdullah added.

The U.S. State Department said it recognized that the announcement from the election commission "is preliminary, and Afghanistan's Electoral Complaints Commission will need to adjudicate any complaints filed by the candidates."

"We look forward to the final certified results when they are announced," according to the statement from the State Department.

The U.N. secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, said the com-

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mission "has an obligation to adjudicate any complaints it receives transparently and thoroughly so the election process may conclude in a credible manner," and that "all candidates have the chance to raise any concerns they may have."

A decision on whether a second round of voting is needed won't be made until final results are released. A runoff is required if no candidate wins more than 50%.

In November, the election commission tried to launch a recount but Abdullah halted the attempt, saying he would not let his observers participate. He eventually allowed the recount to go forward this month.

Thousands of his supporters had rallied in November to protest what they called falsified ballots, and a controversial recount seemed set to favor Ghani.

Afghanistan's 2014 election was mired in accusations of widespread fraud, leading to a political stalemate. The U.S. eventually cobbled together a unity government between Ghani and Abdullah, the two leading contenders, but their partnership has been fraught with bickering and division.

There was no immediate comment from the Taliban who refuse to negotiate with the Kabul government. Ghani has been demanding a cease-fire before engaging in talks, something the Taliban have steadfastly refused.

The Taliban control or hold sway in over half the country and stage near-daily attacks on Afghan government forces and officials or those seen as allied with the government, also killing scores of civilians in the process.

AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed.

Tesco halts work at Chinese factory over prison labor claim

By GREGORY KATZ Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K.-based grocery chain Tesco said it halted production at a factory in China on Sunday after a British newspaper reported the factory used forced labor to produce charity Christmas cards for the supermarket.

Tesco said it also launched an investigation of the Chinese supplier it hired to make the holiday cards, Zhejiang Yunguang Printing, after the Sunday Times raised questions about the factory's labor practices.

The newspaper said the potentially problematic province of the cards came to light when a 6-year-old girl in south London found a card in her box already had a message written inside.

It read: "We are foreign prisoners in Shanghai Qinqpu prison China forced to work against our will. Please help us and notify human rights organization."

The writer asked whoever received the note to contact Peter Humphrey, a former British journalist who was detained in China while working as a corporate investigator and spent time at the same Shanghai prison.

The London girl's father, Ben Widdicombe, said Sunday they at first thought the message was a "prank." "On reflection, we realized it was actually potentially quite a serious thing," Widdicombe said. "So I felt very shocked, but also a responsibility to pass it on to Peter Humphrey as the author asked me to do."

He said the message was eye opening: "It hits home there are injustices in the world and difficult situations that we know about and read about each and every day."

Widdicombe said finding the message shortly before Christmas was poignant and that he told his daughter, Florence, what it might mean.

"We explained that the person who wrote it was a prisoner in China and that the person felt the prison guards were being mean, making them do work, they felt really sad," the father said.

Humphrey told the BBC he thinks he knows who wrote the message. He said he won't identify the person for fear the inmate would face retribution.

Humphrey said he was "pretty sure" it was put inside the card by a group of prisoners as a collective request for help.

Tesco said it was "shocked" by the discovery and would never allow prison labor in its supply chain.

The company says it donates 300,000 pounds (\$390,000) annually to the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK and Diabetes UK from the sale of its Christmas cards.

Boeing capsule returns to Earth after aborted space mission

By **MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Boeing safely landed its crew capsule in the New Mexico desert Sunday after an aborted flight to the International Space Station that could hold up the company's effort to launch astronauts for NASA next year.

The Starliner descended into the Army's White Sands Missile Range in the frigid predawn darkness, ending a two-day demo that should have lasted more than a week. A trio of red, white and blue parachutes popped open and airbags also inflated around the spacecraft to ease the impact.

"We pinpointed it," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said at a post-landing briefing.

The successful return capped a rocky start to a mission that was supposed to include a docking with the space station. Managers will review all the data before deciding whether to do another test flight or go straight to flying astronauts, said NASA's Steve Stich.

After seeing this first test flight cut short and the space station docking canceled because of an improperly set clock on the capsule, Boeing employees were relieved to get the Starliner back.

Recovery teams cheered as they watched the capsule drift down through the air and make a bull's-eye landing. The touchdown was broadcast live on NASA TV; infrared cameras painted the descending capsule in a ghostly white.

As the sun rose, close-up views showed the large white and black capsule upright — with hardly any scorch marks from re-entry — next to a U.S. flag waving from a recovery vehicle. The astronauts assigned to the first Starliner crew — two from NASA and one from Boeing — were part of the welcoming committee.

"A beautiful soft landing," said NASA astronaut Mike Fincke. "Can't wait to try it out."

It was the first American-made capsule designed for astronauts to make a ground landing after returning from orbit. NASA's early crew capsules — Mercury, Gemini and Apollo — all had splashdowns. SpaceX's Dragon capsule, which made its orbital debut last winter with a test dummy, also aims for the ocean at mission's end.

Minutes after touchdown, top NASA and Boeing officials poured into Mission Control in Houston to congratulate the team. The newly returned Starliner also got a personalized name: Calypso, after Jacques Cousteau's boat.

The capsule's first trip to space began with a smooth rocket ride from Cape Canaveral on Friday. But barely a half hour into the flight, it failed to fire its thrusters to give chase to the space station and ended up in the wrong orbit.

The problem was with the Starliner's internal clock: It did not sync up with the Atlas V rocket and was off by 11 hours, according to Boeing's Jim Chilton.

The capsule burned so much fuel trying to orient itself in orbit that there wasn't enough left for a space station rendezvous. Flight controllers tried to correct the problem, but between the spacecraft's position and a gap in communications, their signals did not get through. They later managed to reset the clock.

Boeing is still trying to figure out how the timing error occurred. The mission lasted nearly 50 hours and included 33 orbits around the Earth, about 100 orbits fewer than planned.

A test dummy named Rosie the Rocketeer — after Rosie the Riveter from World War II — rode in the commander's seat. Also returning were holiday presents, clothes and food that should have been delivered to the space station crew.

Even though not all goals were met including a station docking, "in my eyes, it was a huge success," said Boeing flight director Richard Jones.

There were no parachute problems this time. Last month, only two parachutes deployed during an atmospheric test because workers failed to connect a pin in the rigging.

"We didn't do everything we wanted to do, but we don't see anything wrong with this spaceship right

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now," despite the timing error, Chilton said. He apologized to the six space station residents for not delivering their Christmas presents.

Boeing had been shooting for its first astronaut launch in the first half of 2020. This capsule is supposed to be recycled for the second flight with crew; each Starliner is built to fly in space 10 times.

The capsule will return to Florida's Kennedy Space Center in two weeks for inspections and refurbishments. "We've got a lot of learning in front of us," Bridenstine said. "But we have enough information and data to where we can keep moving forward in a very positive way.

Despite its own setbacks, SpaceX remains in the lead in NASA's commercial crew program.

SpaceX's Dragon crew capsule successfully completed its first orbital demo last March. While the flight to the space station went well, the capsule exploded a month later on a test stand at Cape Canaveral.

If a launch abort test goes well next month, SpaceX could start launching NASA astronauts by spring and end a nearly nine-year gap in flying people from Cape Canaveral.

As its space shuttle program was winding down, NASA looked to private industry to take over cargo and crew deliveries to the space station. SpaceX kicked off supply runs in 2012. Two years later, NASA hired SpaceX and Boeing to ferry astronauts to the orbiting lab.

SpaceX got \$2.6 billion under NASA's commercial crew program, while Boeing received more than \$4 billion.

The goal was to launch NASA astronauts by 2017.

Because of delays, NASA is looking to buy another two seats on Russian rockets in 2020 and 2021 to guarantee a continuing U.S. presence on the space station. Even when private companies are regularly carrying up astronauts for NASA, the space agency always will reserve a seat for a Russian in exchange for a free U.S. seat on a Soyuz.

Over the years, these Soyuz rides have cost NASA up to \$86 million apiece, with the tab totaling in the billions.

A recent audit by NASA's inspector general found a Starliner seat will cost slightly more than that, with a Dragon seat going for just over half the price.

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Notre Dame fire wakes the world up to dangers of lead dust

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — It took a blaze that nearly destroyed Paris' most famous cathedral to reveal a gap in global safety regulations for lead, a toxic building material found across many historic cities.

After the Notre Dame fire in April spewed dozens of tons of toxic lead-dust into the atmosphere in just a few hours, Paris authorities discovered a problem with the city's public safety regulations: There was no threshold for them to gauge how dangerous the potentially-deadly pollution was from the dust that settled on the ground.

Since then, The Associated Press has found this regulatory gap extends far beyond France. Officials in other historic European capitals such as Rome and London, as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the World Health Organization also have no such outdoor lead dust hazard guidelines.

The reason, they say, is that although there are lead regulations, no one contemplated a conflagration on a lead-laden building the scale of Notre Dame — whose spire towered nearly 100 meters (330 feet) high.

Poisoning from lead dust can cause permanent loss to cognitive ability, seizures, coma, or death — and exposure is of greatest risk to pregnant mothers and to young children, who can easily transfer toxic dust into their mouths.

After 250 tons of lead on Notre Dame's spire and roof was engulfed in flames in central Paris on April 15 and authorities alerted Parisians to an environmental health risk, they were forced to cobble together disparate and incomplete research to set a makeshift safety level in an attempt reassure the public.

"When the Notre Dame fire happened, we didn't have any threshold for what represented dangerous

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lead levels outdoors," Anne Souyris, the Paris City Hall deputy mayor in charge of public health, told the AP. "It was a wake-up call ... the amount of lead that was burned in Notre Dame was unprecedented."

Officials were surprised to discover that while safety guidelines exist in France for lead levels inside buildings and schools, as well as in paint, soil and air pollution, there were zero hazard guidelines for lead accumulations in public spaces, such as dust on the ground.

The inherent danger and the regulatory gap for lead dust became impossible to ignore for French officials as it collected as a toxic film on the cobblestones of Paris' Ile-de-la-Cite following the fire.

"The authorities basically tried to create safety guidelines after the fire by piecing together a mixture of old fragments of data and reports," Souyris said. "But there was really nothing official ... we simply didn't realize that lead outside might be a problem."

On July 18 — three months after the inferno — Paris' Regional Health Agency (ARS) said it designated 5,000 micrograms per square meter (4,180 mcg per square yard) as a concerning level for lead dust in public spaces. It also acknowledged there was an "absence of regulatory thresholds ... regarding the presence of lead in dust deposited on roads."

AP learned from health officials that this figure was compiled by using incomplete data, including a French Culture Ministry report assessing lead levels in Paris monuments.

Some media outlets reported that registered levels of lead contamination in locations surrounding the fire-damaged cathedral ranged between 500 and 800 times the official safe levels.

But health officials told the AP that Paris still does not have any official regulatory threshold.

The World Health Organization told AP it also has no outdoor safety guidelines for lead dust and has no "immediate" intention to create any.

New legislation for hazard safety in Britain following the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire also did not cover lead-dust hazards. The U.K. Environment Ministry told AP it doesn't "have a specific threshold for unsafe lead dust levels in the U.K. in public places." It said the hazard focus after Grenfell, an apartment building constructed in the 1970s, "was more on asbestos than lead due to the age of the building."

In the U.S., where many buildings were constructed after lead hazards were widely recognized, the Environmental Protection Agency has no lead dust hazard standards for outdoor public spaces.

Lead is ubiquitous in Paris' 19th-century architecture — in roofs, gilded balconies, floors and terraces — and not just in its most famous cathedral. In 1853, Napoleon III chose Baron Haussmann to carry out a near-total renovation of Parisian boulevards and parks in an era that used lead prolifically — designs that still dominate the city.

French officials say there are so few guidelines on lead dust levels because it was not a problem they had to confront until the unprecedented Notre Dame fire.

It took four months for the city to complete a deep-clean operation of the sidewalks even as tourists, residents and merchants walked streets around the cathedral daily.

Paris City Hall issued a new action plan this fall to address lead — including cleaning and testing in places that host children, increased monitoring of children with high levels of lead in their blood and an independent epidemiological study of lead health impacts in a city that has used the toxic element since the Middle Ages.

"Paris is a beautifully preserved city," Souyris said. "But we realize we have also beautifully preserved its lead."

Experts say Paris' rare status as a highly conserved historic city makes it a particular danger spot for lead.

"Preservation does make Paris unusual," said Neil M. Donahue, a chemistry professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Incineration of one of the most famous roofs in the world may be especially dramatic, but there is no alchemy in this world. Lead will remain lead forever."

The fire in Paris' spiritual heart increased awareness among authorities and the public to the dangers of lead.

In June, Paris' Regional Health Agency advised that all pregnant women and children under 7 years old living near the site take a test for lead levels.

The agency said 12 children in the surrounding areas tested positive for elevated lead levels in their blood

since the fire. None have been hospitalized or prescribed medication, but officials said it was impossible to predict the long-term health consequences of the fire.

One child's lead exposure came from a source other than the cathedral: the lead balcony of his family's apartment. But it illustrates how the fire awakened Parisians to the dangers of lead. It's unlikely the child would have been tested at all without the catastrophe.

Despite the lead fallout from the fire, experts say tourists should not alter travel plans to one of the most visited cities in the world.

But toxic lead dust remains a problem inside the burned-out cathedral, after tons of molten and airborne lead contaminated its interior. The inside clean-up is a delicate and painstaking process, complicated by French President Emmanuel Macron's five-year timeline for the restoration to be completed — a deadline many experts say is unrealistic.

Aline Magnien, director of the Historic Monuments Research Laboratory, recently dispatched her team of scientists to figure out how to remove the toxic lead from inside the UNESCO world heritage site, which is over 850 years old, without damaging it.

"It's a race against the clock," she said. "The lead is a real problem. The cathedral is exceptionally precious. And we don't have the luxury of time."

Follow Thomas Adamson on Twitter: @ThomasAdamson_K

Associated Press writers Giada Zampano in Rome, Ciaran Giles in Madrid, Frank Jordans in Berlin, David Caruso in New York and Daria Litvinova in Moscow contributed to this report

GOP governors grapple with whether to accept refugees or not

By GRANT SCHULTE and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — An executive order by President Donald Trump giving states the right to refuse to take refugees is putting Republican governors in an uncomfortable position.

They're caught between immigration hardliners who want to shut the door and some Christian evangelicals who believe helping refugees is a moral obligation. Others say refugees are vital to fill jobs and keep rural communities afloat.

More than 30 governors have agreed to accept refugees, but about a dozen Republican governors have stayed silent as they face a decision that must be made by Jan. 21 so resettlement agencies can secure federal funding in time to plan where to place refugees.

Trump's executive order requires governors to publicly say they will accept refugees. They cannot automatically come to their states, even if cities and counties welcome them. So far, no one has opted to shut out refugees.

A North Dakota county voted this month to accept no more than 25 refugees next year, after initially signaling it would be the first to ban them.

Trump issued the order in September after slashing the number of refugees allowed into the United States in 2020 to a historic low of 18,000. The reduction is part of the administration's efforts to reduce both legal and illegal immigration.

With his order, Trump again thrust states and local governments into immigration policy, willingly or not. It has caused heated debates and raucous meetings in several states, including North Dakota to Wisconsin.

Trump says his administration acted to respect communities that believe they do not have enough jobs to support refugees. Refugees can move anywhere in the U.S. after their initial resettlement at their own expense.

Republican governors in Nebraska, West Virginia, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Arizona, Iowa and Oklahoma have consented to accepting refugees in 2020. Vermont's Republican governor said he intends to accept refugees.

Others have not taken a public stance. They include the Republican governors of Georgia and Missouri,

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along with Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, the state that took in the largest number of refugees this year.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, the nation's most populous state that resettles many refugees, also has not consented yet, but his office said he plans to do so.

In 2015, governors from 31 states — nearly all with Republican governors, including Abbott — tried to shut out Syrians, citing terrorism fears. But they didn't have the legal authority at the time.

Now that they do, some governors have struggled with the decision.

Faith-based groups have led an aggressive campaign urging them to keep accepting refugees, while immigration hardliners have criticized Republicans who have not used their new authority to put the brakes on refugees coming into their states.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, who tried to turn away Syrians in 2015, spent weeks reviewing his options.

He gave his consent Thursday in an open letter to Trump co-signed by Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, praising the president for strengthening the vetting process.

"Thanks to your leadership, Americans can be confident once again in the screening process for refugees entering the United States," the governors said in the letter.

Hatim Ido, a former U.S. Army translator and member of the persecuted Yazidi community who fled Iraq, was relieved to know Nebraska's doors are still open. Ido hopes his two sisters in Iraq will be able to join him someday in Lincoln.

"I'm really concerned about them," said Ido, a graduate student who became a U.S. citizen last year. "I understand (government officials) need to be very careful. I just wish there was a process in place so we could bring them here."

Administration officials say refugee applicants are subject to the strictest, most comprehensive background checks for any group seeking to come to the U.S.

Fraud detection and national security officers now come overseas with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services teams who are processing refugees.

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb made the distinction that opening the door to refugees does not mean he's going soft on illegal immigration.

A federal judge last year permanently blocked Indiana from trying to turn away Syrians under an order that Vice President Mike Pence championed as governor.

"These are NOT illegal or unlawful immigrants but individuals who have gone through all the proper channels," Holcomb wrote in his consent letter.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey announced his consent the same day this month that 300 evangelicals signed a letter urging him to keep letting refugees resettle "as an exercise of our Christian faith."

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said faith leaders reached out to him, too.

"I appreciate Oklahoma churches who have assisted these individuals," he wrote in his consent letter.

Tennessee's consent did not sit well with legislative leaders who sued the federal government over the resettlement program.

"Our personal preference would have been to exercise the option to hit the pause button on accepting additional refugees in our state," House Speaker Cameron Sexton and Lt. Gov. Randy McNally said in a joint statement.

Gov. Bill Lee, who talks often about his Christian faith, said he had to follow his heart.

"My commitment to these ideals is based on my faith, personally visiting refugee camps on multiple continents, and my years of experience ministering to refugees here in Tennessee," he wrote in his consent letter.

More than 80 local governments have written letters welcoming refugees. Many are rural towns in conservative states that have come to rely on young refugees to revitalize their economies.

"We need workers, big time," said Nebraska Sen. John McCollister, a Republican who is sometimes at odds with his party. Refugees "bring a lot of enthusiasm, and they're some of our best entrepreneurs. They add a lot to the economy of Nebraska."

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert asked for more refugees in a letter to Trump last month. The Republican said Utah has the resources and space and that welcoming refugees is part of the culture in a state where

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members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints found refuge generations ago.

"It's been striking to see the breadth of bipartisan support for refugee resettlement in the states, with a number of governors writing very strong letters of support," said Mark Greenberg, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute and a former official in the U.S. Health and Human Services Department, which includes refugee resettlement. He left in 2017.

Holly Johnson, who coordinates the Tennessee Office for Refugees within the Catholic Charities, is not surprised. Employers are "chasing down resettlement agencies because they know refugees work hard," she said.

Three resettlement groups have sued to block Trump's order.

Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon does not plan to weigh in for now, his spokesman Michael Pearlman said, noting the state has not had a refugee resettlement program for decades.

GOP Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Arkansas is determining which communities may be interested in accepting refugees, looking at financial costs and verifying security checks but that no final decision has been made.

"I am committed to ensure that refugees brought to Arkansas have a real chance to settle and become self-sufficient," he said.

Watson reported from San Diego. Anita Snow in Phoenix; Jonathan Mattise in Nashville, Tennessee; Mead Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming; Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City; Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City; David Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri; Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Ben Nadler in Atlanta; Anthony Izaguirre in Charleston, West Virginia; Paul Weber in Austin, Texas; and Don Thompson in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Clashes erupt at Hong Kong rally to support China's Uighurs

HONG KONG (AP) — Clashes broke out Sunday between Hong Kong police and protesters at a rally in support of China's Uighur minority.

Police arrested two protesters who were attempting to burn a Chinese flag at the rally, which was attended by several hundred people.

Some were holding signs emblazoned with the blue and white flag of the independence movement in the northwestern Chinese territory of Xinjiang.

China has been accused of a mass crackdown against Uighurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, with reports of millions being held in heavily secured, prison-like camps.

Chinese diplomats have claimed that China holds no political prisoners and insist the centers provide vocational education as a bulwark against religious extremism.

Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese territory, has been in the grip of a pro-democracy movement for the past six months, with many protesters finding common cause with human rights movements elsewhere in China and beyond.

Scientists struggle to save seagrass from coastal pollution

By MICHAEL CASEY and ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

DURHAM, N.H. (AP) — Peering over the side of his skiff anchored in the middle of New Hampshire's Great Bay, Fred Short liked what he saw.

Just below the surface, the 69-year-old marine ecologist noticed beds of bright green seagrass swaying in the waist-deep water. It was the latest sign that these plants with ribbon-like strands, which had declined up to 80% since the 1990s, were starting to bounce back with improved water quality. Seven rivers carry pollution from 52 communities in New Hampshire and Maine into the 1,020-square-mile (2,650-square-kilometer) bay.

"It actually looks better than it did last year at this time and better than has in many years," said Short, a noted seagrass expert who coordinates the monitoring of 135 sites around the world from his University

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of New Hampshire lab.

"You see here," he said, glancing into the water. "It's nearly 100% cover. You look to the bottom. You can't see the mud. You just see eelgrass. That is as dense as it gets. That's a really good sign."

Seagrass beds in New Hampshire and along shorelines around the world are important because they have been found to provide food and shelter for fish, shellfish and sea turtles. They also blunt the impacts of ocean acidification, reduce coastal erosion and keep the water clean by filtering out excessive nutrients.

Their comeback in the Great Bay gives hope for recovery elsewhere.

The more than 70 species of seagrasses are among the most poorly protected but widespread coastal habitats — more than 116,000 square miles (300,000 square kilometers) have been mapped, though there could be 10 times that. They are found along coastlines around the world except Antarctica's.

Seagrasses, which cover less than 0.2% of the world's oceans, store twice as much carbon in a given area as temperate and tropical forests, a study by the United Nations-affiliated Blue Carbon Initiative found. But seagrass meadows in many places are imperiled by coastal development, overfishing, runoff from farm waste, and the growing threat from climate change. They have declined roughly 7% annually since the 1990s, a peer-reviewed study found. That is on par with the declines of tropical rain forests and coral reefs.

Some seagrass declines have occurred with stunning speed. Central California's scenic Morro Bay has lost more than 90% of its eelgrass since 2007.

"It's certainly not a pretty picture and may not get any prettier because of the climate change issues we are all dealing with," said Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Robert Orth, a professor who has studied seagrass for decades. "These plants are very sensitive to environmental characteristics — water quality, temperature."

In parts of the United States and other developed countries, there is growing recognition of the importance of seagrass and its sensitivity to nitrogen-rich runoff from sewage treatment plants and other sources. Too much nitrogen can spike algae growth, which clouds the water and blocks the sunlight seagrass needs to grow.

"We think this is a problem that has to be solved," said Ken Moraff, water division director for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New England region. Communities around the Great Bay have spent about \$200 million to upgrade wastewater treatment plants, resulting in some cutting nitrogen releases by up to 70%, according to EPA and officials in several Great Bay communities.

"We've seen other areas where reductions in nitrogen do result in the ecosystem starting to come back," Moraff said.

Studies have documented seagrass recovery in Boston, Tampa Bay and Long Island Sound.

Boston Harbor was once known as the dirtiest harbor in America because most waste went into the waters untreated.

Then the state invested \$3.8 billion in a treatment facility on Deer Island that was completed in 2001 and allowed wastewater to be piped almost 10 miles (16 kilometers) out into Massachusetts Bay. The state has documented an 80% decline in nitrogen levels in the harbor.

Tay Evans, a seagrass specialist with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, said there has been a corresponding 50% increase in eelgrass from 2006 to 2016. Now seagrass is growing in Governors Island Flats near Logan International Airport.

"It was astounding me," Evans said. "I dove there and saw what we would call a moonscape that was just mud. You come back and it's a lush meadow and then you're going to see all the animals — the winter flounder swimming through there, lobster walking around."

In Tampa Bay, seagrass beds are reaching levels not seen since the 1950s.

More than \$2.5 billion was spent on upgrades to sewage treatment plants, measures to address storm-water runoff and curbs on nitrogen emissions from power plants. That resulted in two-thirds less nitrogen going into the bay compared to the 1970s, according to Ed Sherwood, executive director of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program.

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Seagrass area nearly doubled to about 63 square miles (163 square kilometers). The water quality improvement along with a gill net ban has contributed to the recovery of several fish species including striped mullet, red drum and spotted sea trout.

But such stories can't mask the challenges.

Some recoveries such as those in parts of the Boston Harbor and the Great Bay are at risk from dredging. In other places, such as Chesapeake Bay, a decline in nitrogen has benefited many underwater plants but not eelgrass, which has declined since the 1990s.

Brooke Landry, a Maryland Department of Natural Resources biologist who monitors the bay's underwater vegetation, said that eelgrass, a coldwater species, may be more susceptible to heat events as seen in 2005 and 2010 — or to overly cloudy waters in the bay.

Scientists are also struggling to understand why eelgrass hasn't come back in California's Morro Bay.

"We have some theories," said Jennifer O'Leary, who studied the bay as a California Sea Grant researcher. She said the eelgrass decline has occurred in waters that are warmer, saltier, cloudier and less oxygenated than the bay's mouth, where eelgrass did well.

In New Hampshire, eelgrass has recovered about 20% in parts of the Great Bay, though it hasn't returned to several areas.

Some conservationists argue that bayside communities need to further reduce nitrogen releases through tens of millions of dollars in treatment plant improvements.

But several towns counter they have already made significant upgrades to their plants and that they should focus on cheaper options.

"You want to put your money where it's going to do the most good," said Portsmouth Deputy City Attorney Suzanne Woodland.

The EPA is considering allowing communities to hold off on treatment plant upgrades while they try to reduce nitrogen from stormwater runoff and septic tanks. Some communities upgraded sewage treatment voluntarily while others made upgrades to settle EPA enforcement actions.

Walking to his lab with his latest seagrass samples, University of New Hampshire's Short says that approach allows communities to avoid the painful steps necessary to ensure full recovery.

"It's easier to say no, no let the next guy pay for it," he said. "But now we are at the point where it's causing a huge issue. You don't have to believe the science. Go out there and look."

Selsky reported from Salem, Oregon.

Follow Casey on Twitter: @mcasey1, and Selsky on Twitter: @andrewselsky

Most US workers still pay price of no paid parental leave

By Alexandra Olson AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Nancy Glynn could not afford a funeral for her newborn son who died after a premature birth.

She was already taking time off from her job as a waitress in Manchester, New Hampshire, to recover from a C-section. Adding to her difficulties, her husband had an unplanned surgery just two days after the baby died.

Sawyer was cremated, his remains put into an urn the funeral home provided for free. The couple, who also had a 3-year-old son, struggled to pay the bills and their gas was cut off. A cousin set up a Go Fund Me campaign to help them pay the rent.

Glynn was back at work after just a few weeks, smiling for customers. She sometimes hid in the restaurant office to cry.

"Just seeing a family come in was triggering. Seeing a kid come in," said Glynn, who now works for several non-profits, including MomsRising, a group that advocates for paid parental leave and other policies. "But we had to make the money back."

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Glynn is on the losing side of a growing movement to provide U.S. workers with paid parental leave. Congress passed a bill earlier in the week giving the country's 2.1 million government employees 12 weeks of paid parental leave as part of a defense bill that President Donald Trump signed into law on Friday.

But it still leaves about 80% of U.S. workers in the private sector with no access to paid family leave. The U.S. is one of a handful of countries that lacks a federal policy, at least for new mothers, leaving employers to decide whether to offer it.

Disproportionately, paid leave has gone to higher-paid white collar workers.

Just 9% of wage earners in the bottom 25% have access to paid family leave, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That compares to 30% of wage earners in the top 25%.

The same year Sawyer died — 2015 — Netflix granted new parents a year of paid time off. Most other major tech companies have similar generous policies, as do big banks and major consulting firms.

Meanwhile, millions of construction workers, retail workers, public school teachers, warehouse and transportation workers and restaurant employees have to forego paychecks to take time to care for a new child.

As a waitress, Glynn belonged to the group least likely to have paid parental leave: part-time workers.

Women are historically more likely to work part-time than men, often because of caregiving responsibilities, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That usually means foregoing paid time off after giving birth — a trade-off that can be painful.

After she had her daughter, Daniella Knight took a part-time job for a website dedicated to helping parents train their babies to sleep through the night. It seemed perfect for the Virginia mom, a recent college graduate who could not afford childcare on top of payments on \$80,000 in student loans that she and her husband owed.

But when Knight became pregnant with her second child, the company did not offer any paid leave, and her family could not afford to lose her income. She was back at work after using up two weeks of vacation, racing to put together sleep plans for her clients every minute her own newborn was sleeping.

Three years later, Knight got pregnant again, a surprise. She considered an abortion rather than going through the same ordeal again.

"I did not think we could survive it. It's probably one of those things that will haunt me for the rest of my life, but my husband and I actually went to an abortion clinic," said Knight, who ultimately had the baby and now works as real estate agent.

Support for extending paid leave to part-time workers is slowly gaining traction in recognition that in many low-wage earners rely on multiple jobs to make ends meet, said Pronita Gupta, director of job quality at the Center for Law and Social Policy, an anti-poverty organization.

Target made waves in June when the retailer included part-time employees in an expanded paid family leave policy. Part-time employees are also covered to varying degrees under paid family leave laws that eight states, plus Washington, D.C., have or will soon implement.

In Congress, there is growing bipartisan support for a federal paid family leave policy for all workers, but progress has stalled over sharp differences over how to pay for it.

Many companies that rely on low-wage workers, small businesses and non-profits are unlikely to take on the cost of family leave without a government policy to help pay for it, said Harry Holzer, a professor of public policy at Georgetown University.

Colin Ma, founder of a digital marketing firm, said he has been unable to give his 10 employees paid parental leave for logistical and financial reasons.

Now it's affecting Ma personally: He is expecting a baby in May but won't take any time off beyond vacation out of fairness to his employees. That has upset his girlfriend, who is worried about juggling her own career in advertising while childcare falls largely on her shoulders.

"She wants more help, and I get it from her perspective because she is worried that maybe it's going to hurt her long-term career prospects," Ma said.

Even under the policy passed by Congress for federal workers, there are still gaps in coverage. For instance, federal workers do not get paid leave for their own serious illness or to care for a sick relative.

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More than 70% of the time, those are the reasons workers take time off under the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, which only guarantees unpaid leave.

That coverage would have made a big difference for Regan Lamphier, a New Hampshire postal worker whose son died suddenly in 2014 shortly after his eighth birthday. Relatives had to launch a Go Fund me campaign so that Lamphier and her husband, also a postal worker, could take a few weeks off to grieve.

Lamphier had struggled with no paid family leave since Ethan was born with severe disabilities. When he was 3, Ethan suffered a stroke that sent him to the hospital in Boston and rehab for six weeks. Lamphier spent her days looking after her son and nights sorting out U.S. mail, traveling between two states every day. She and her husband separated for six months under the strain.

"There just wasn't enough of me to go around," said Lamphier, who also advocates for MomsRising. "I don't know how I survived, but I didn't have a choice."

Us vs. them: Trump aiming to use impeachment to rev up base

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Using stark "us vs. them" language, President Donald Trump and his reelection campaign have begun framing his impeachment not as a judgment on his conduct but as a referendum on how Democrats regard him and his supporters.

Mere days from the start of an election year, the White House and its allies are painting Trump's impeachment on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress as an effort to undo his 2016 victory and discount the will of the people.

There was nothing subtle about Trump's pinned tweet shortly after impeachment: "In reality, they're not after me. They're after you," was plastered above a photo of Trump pointing at the reader. "I'm just in the way."

All but certain to be acquitted in next year's trial by the Republican-controlled Senate, Trump has considered a barnstorming tour after the yet-to-be-scheduled trial ends, hoping to use a backward-looking message to propel him forward in 2020. His campaign believes that anger at impeachment may be the motivation needed to bring out voters who stayed home in the 2016 election but approve of the president and are fed up with the Washington establishment.

"After three years of sinister witch hunts, hoaxes, scams," Trump roared during an impeachment-night rally in Michigan, "the House Democrats are trying to nullify the ballots of tens of millions of patriotic Americans."

The president's words evoked his 2016 campaign's closing message that his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, had mocked the "deplorables" who supported him. In 2020, he's ready to lean in once again on culture war divisions to portray his campaign as a movement under attack by the Washington status quo.

Trump's allies in the House struck a similar chord during the impeachment debate as several Republican lawmakers hammered home the word "hate," declaring that Democrats despised the president and his base. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., had gone out of her way days earlier to say she does not "hate" Trump.

"We face this horror because of this map," said Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., before a poster of red and blue states. "They call this Republican map flyover country, they call us deplorables, they fear our faith, they fear our strength, they fear our unity, they fear our vote, and they fear our president."

As lawmakers and Trump fled Washington for a holiday break, the timing and details of the Senate trial remained in doubt. Pelosi said she was delaying transmitting the two articles of impeachment to the Senate until she had more information on trial arrangements. Even with the expected Senate acquittal, Trump would be the first president to run for reelection after impeachment.

White House officials believe a lengthy trial delay would reinforce how, in their view, Pelosi has manipulated the process to deny Trump the opportunity to defend himself and clear his name. The hope is that could drive outrage among his supporters that would be sustained beyond a Senate vote.

Campaign officials say they have seen jumps in fundraising, volunteers and rally attendance since the impeachment inquiry began. Aides believe impeachment could be key in turning out the 8.8 million voters

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the campaign has identified as backing the president in 2016 and who still support him, but who did not come out to vote during the 2018 elections.

Republicans draw parallels with the fiery 2018 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, which rallied the GOP base and brought in new donors. Since the impeachment proceedings began, the Republican National Committee has seen 600,000 new donors. The campaign and the RNC took in \$10 million in small-dollar donations in just 48 hours during impeachment week.

"This lit up our base, lit up the people that are supporters of the president. They're frustrated, they're upset, and that motivates voters," campaign manager Brad Parscale said recently. "They have ignited a flame underneath them."

The campaign's bullishness stood in contrast to the somber tone struck by Democrats, including those running for president, who maintain that Trump's efforts to push Ukraine to investigate a Trump political foe are grounds for impeachment.

Democratic lawmakers say they are proceeding with efforts to impeach Trump out of constitutional duty, not for political gain, and all seven candidates on stage at the Democrats' debate on Thursday night backed impeachment. National polls have consistently shown Trump trailing most major Democratic candidates, including former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont, and Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana.

"I have no doubt his hardcore supporters will buy his lies on this but I think the vast majority of the country will see the fog and misdirection Trump tries to put up," said Karine Jean-Pierre, senior adviser at the liberal group MoveOn.org. "No amount of spin can cover up the fact that Trump is now only the third president to be impeached and the first ever to be impeached for seeking to undermine our elections and risk our national security."

Trump's advisers believe many voters who backed Trump three years ago, including those who were for Democrat Barack Obama in 2008 or 2012, supported him because they wanted a change in Washington. While Trump will be running next year as an incumbent, some Republican strategists believe he can still cast himself as an insurgent because he has been dogged by investigations that have denied him a fair chance to govern.

"The silver lining for the president with being impeached is that it gives him a continued rationale to run as the outsider who is being attacked by the elites for trying to bring big change to Washington," said Sam Nunberg, who advised Trump in his first campaign.

"He'll not only, as any sitting president, be able to point to what he's accomplished, he can say 'I was able to do all that even though I didn't have a real first term because I was under attack from Day One,'" Nunberg continued. "And he can say, 'If you send me back for a second term, it'll be our real first term.'"

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

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

India's leader defends new law as protests against it go on

By EMILY SCHMALL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Protesters angered by India's new citizenship law that excludes Muslims defied a ban against demonstrations on Sunday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi used a rally for his Hindu nationalist party to defend the legislation, accusing the opposition of pushing the country into a "fear psychosis."

Twenty-three people have been killed nationwide since the law was passed in Parliament earlier this month in protests that represent the first major roadblock for Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda since his party's landslide re-election last spring.

Most of the deaths have occurred in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where 20% of the state's 200

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million people are Muslim. Police, who deny any wrongdoing, said that among the 15 people killed in the state was an 8-year-old boy who died in a stampede in the city of Varanasi, the heart of Modi's parliamentary constituency. Since last week, police in Uttar Pradesh have taken nearly 900 people into custody for engaging in violence.

Authorities across the country have scrambled to contain the situation, banning public gatherings under Section 144, a British colonial-era law, and blocking internet access. India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued an advisory Friday night asking broadcasters across the country to refrain from using content that could inflame further violence.

A group of politicians from the opposition Trinamool Congress party who traveled to Uttar Pradesh on Sunday to meet with families of those killed in the violence were not permitted to leave the airport runway, police said.

"We will not permit them because Section 144 is imposed in the area and it can make the atmosphere more tense," said Uttar Pradesh's police chief, O.P. Singh.

In the southern state of Tamil Nadu, about 500 Muslim and leftist activists protested, defying a ban on public gatherings there.

Modi took the stage at a rally in the capital launching his Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign for New Delhi legislative assembly elections in February, and quickly turned to the contentious new law.

"People who are trying to spread lies and fear, look at my work. If you see any trace of divisiveness in my work, show it to the world," he said.

Modi accused the main opposition Congress party of conspiring "to push not only New Delhi but other parts of the country into a fear psychosis."

"They are trying every tactic to push me out of power," he said, urging protesters to desist from attacks on police and other violence.

The new law allows Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities who are in India illegally to become citizens if they can show they were persecuted because of their religion in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does not apply to Muslims.

Critics have slammed the legislation as a violation of India's secular constitution and have called it the latest effort by Modi's government to marginalize the country's 200 million Muslims.

Protests against the law 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 in August.

The demonstrations also follow a contentious process in the northeastern state of Assam meant to weed out foreigners living in the country illegally. Nearly 2 million people, about half Hindu and half Muslim, were excluded from an official list of citizens — called the National Register of Citizens, or NRC — and have been asked to prove their citizenship or else be considered foreign.

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

"First, we will bring the Citizenship Amendment Bill and will give citizenship to the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and Christian refugees, the religious minorities from the neighboring nations. Then, we will implement NRC to flush out the infiltrators from our country," Shah said in an election speech last April.

On Sunday, Modi denied the existence of a detention center, accusing the Congress party of spreading fear that Indian Muslims would be jailed there.

Modi contradicted Shah, saying that there had been no discussion yet of whether to execute a nationwide citizens registry.

He also said that his opponents resented him for his work strengthening India's ties to Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries.

A small band of supporters of Modi's party marched in New Delhi on Sunday. Activists from India's northeast, a mainly tribal area where people fear an influx of migrants will dilute their culture and political

sway, also held a rally in the capital.

The protests against the law began in Assam, the center of a decades-old movement against migrants, before spreading to predominantly Muslim universities and then nationwide.

"They understood what it was all about, and they have been very clear from the beginning that theirs was not an issue of Hindu versus Muslim or any religious identity," said historian Mridula Mukherjee.

"They could see through this maneuver very quickly, and that's why the mass upsurge started over there," she said.

Associated Press writers Rishabh Jain in New Delhi and Biswajeet Banerjee in Lucknow, India, contributed to this report.

6 killed, 13 injured in Las Vegas apartment building fire

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, PAUL DAVENPORT and MARC LEVY Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A fire in a three-story apartment building in downtown Las Vegas where residents were apparently using their stoves for heat killed six people and forced some residents to jump from upper-floor windows to escape the heavy smoke before dawn Saturday, authorities said.

Investigators reported that the fire started around a first-floor unit's stove and that residents had told them that there was no heat in the building, which sits a few blocks from downtown Las Vegas' touristy Fremont Street District.

Residents reported awakening to pounding on doors around 4 a.m.

By the time Matthew Sykes got his clothes on to flee, one end of his second-floor hallway was choked with thick black smoke, as was a stairwell, making it impassable for he and his wife.

"The whole place was like one big black cloud of smoke — couldn't get down the stairs," Sykes told The Associated Press.

Firefighters arriving at the scene began treating injured and using ladders to rescue numerous people already jumping or hanging from windows, fire department spokesman Tim Szymanski said. "The first thing that you think of is: We've got to rescue those people. A fall of 16 feet (4.9 meters) or higher can be fatal."

Thirteen people were injured, mostly from smoke inhalation, but victims also had fractures, Szymanski said.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that a pregnant woman in her first trimester fell after her hands slipped on a rope of bed sheets while descending from her third-floor apartment, leaving her with multiple fractures. Her husband told the newspaper that medical personnel told him the fetus' heartbeat appeared strong.

Three people were found dead in the apartment where the fire started, Szymanski said.

It wasn't immediately clear if anyone died after falling or jumping from windows, Szymanski said. No firefighters were injured.

The cause of the fire appeared to be accidental, and the fire was largely contained to the first-floor unit where it started in the stove area, Szymanski said. Firefighters found the burners on, Szymanski said.

Residents told investigators and reporters that some had been using their apartment's stoves for warmth because the building lacked heat. Temperatures overnight have been dipping into the high 30s, according to the National Weather Service. Meteorologist Chris Outler said the low was 40 degrees (4.4 Celsius) early Sunday.

A woman answering the phone at the office of the entity listed as the building's owner, Las Vegas Dragon Hotel LLC in Las Vegas, told the AP she was told not to comment. She said she would leave a message for Adolfo Orozco, the man listed in state incorporation records as the business' managing member.

A woman identifying herself as a co-owner of the apartment building, Malinda Mier, told news organizations that she was saddened, but did not say in a statement whether the building had heat.

Szymanski said firefighters reported hearing smoke alarms going off, but not fire alarms. The State Fire Marshal's Office will investigate for code violations, including any involving fire alarms, he said.

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The city's code enforcement office did not immediately return telephone messages Saturday. State law requires landlords to provide heat, but it also leaves it up to residents to notify the landlord.

Saturday's fire was possibly the deadliest in the Las Vegas area since 1980, when 87 people died and more than 700 were injured in a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel.

Fire officials said around 50 people were displaced and the Southern Nevada Red Cross said it sent personnel to provide assistance. County records list the building as having 41 units.

Because of the soot throughout the building, residents will not be able to go back into the building, Szymanski said.

Police had taped off the building, the front of which was blackened by smoke.

When he got out, Sykes saw one apartment on the first floor "was literally just fire and smoke coming out of the windows," he said.

He and his wife eventually got out of the building by making their way to a neighbor's apartment. There, they joined other residents in climbing one-by-one out of a bedroom window onto an air conditioning unit before dropping about 15 feet (4.57 meters) down to the ground below, Sykes said.

He and his wife helped four adults and four children escape, handing the children down to adults, he said.

Sykes said he heard a smoke alarm go off only after he and his wife were already out in the hallway contending with the smoke.

"I'm telling you, that place is totally not fit for anybody to live," he said.

Sykes, who said he'd lived there about six months, said there had been a small fire in the same building about six months ago.

The fire department warned the owner then that smoke detectors had to be installed, and they were put in about a month later, he said.

"But after that, this is what happens," he said. "Now my wife and I, we need to find a place to live. We're homeless for the time being."

The fire caused an estimated \$475,000 in damage, Szymanski told the Review-Journal.

Sal Moreno, who lives in the apartment building next door, said police banged on his door around 4:30 a.m. and he fled into a street lit up with police cars, ambulances and fire trucks.

"They made us leave," Moreno said. "There was people running out with their cats and their dog. ... It was hectic. It was hectic. It was crazy."

He said the building that burned was low-rent, and he'd heard some of the residents were using their ovens to stay warm because they didn't have heat.

"It's kind of a rough little neighborhood," he said.

Davenport reported from Phoenix. Associated Press reporter Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 23, the 357th day of 2019. There are eight days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 23, 1968, 82 crew members of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo were released by North Korea, 11 months after they had been captured.

On this date:

In 1783, George Washington resigned as commander in chief of the Continental Army and retired to his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

In 1805, Joseph Smith Jr., principal founder of the Mormon religious movement, was born in Sharon, Vermont.

In 1913, the Federal Reserve System was created as President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal

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Reserve Act.

In 1941, during World War II, American forces on Wake Island surrendered to the Japanese.

In 1948, former Japanese premier Hideki Tojo and six other Japanese war leaders were executed in Tokyo.

In 1954, the first successful human kidney transplant took place at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston as a surgical team removed a kidney from 23-year-old Ronald Herrick and implanted it in Herrick's twin brother, Richard.

In 1972, a 6.2-magnitude earthquake struck Nicaragua; the disaster claimed some 5,000 lives.

In 1975, Richard S. Welch, the Central Intelligence Agency station chief in Athens, was shot and killed outside his home by the militant group November 17.

In 1986, the experimental airplane Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan (ruh-TAN') and Jeana (JEE'-nuh) Yeager, completed the first non-stop, non-refueled round-the-world flight as it returned safely to Edwards Air Force Base in California.

In 1995, a fire in Dabwali, India, killed 446 people, more than half of them children, during a year-end party being held near the children's school.

In 1997, a federal jury in Denver convicted Terry Nichols of involuntary manslaughter and conspiracy for his role in the Oklahoma City bombing, declining to find him guilty of murder. (Nichols was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2001, Time magazine named New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani its Person of the Year for his steadfast response to the 9/11 terrorist attack.

Ten years ago: Richard and Mayumi Heene (HEE'-nee), the parents who'd pulled the "balloon boy" hoax in hopes of landing a reality TV show, were sentenced by a judge in Fort Collins, Colorado, to jail (90 days for him, 20 days for her). Gary Patterson, who'd guided TCU to its best season in 70 years, became the first Associated Press Coach of the Year from outside the six conferences with automatic BCS bids. Yitzhak Ahronovitch, captain of the Exodus during a 1947 attempt to take Holocaust survivors to Palestine, died in northern Israel at age 86.

Five years ago: The movie "The Interview" was put back into theaters when Sony Pictures Entertainment announced a limited release of the comedy that had provoked an international incident with North Korea and outrage over its canceled showing. The NFL's troubles with domestic violence were selected the sports story of the year in an annual vote conducted by The Associated Press.

One year ago: Amid criticism and fallout from the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, President Donald Trump pushed the Pentagon chief out the door two months earlier than planned; in a series of tweets, Trump appeared to question why he had put Mattis in his Cabinet in the first place.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ronnie Schell is 88. Former Emperor Akihito of Japan is 86. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Paul Hornung is 84. Actor Frederic Forrest is 83. Rock musician Jorma Kaukonen (YOR'-mah KOW'-kah-nen) is 79. Rock musician Ron Bushy is 78. Actor-comedian Harry Shearer is 76. U.S. Army Gen. Wesley K. Clark (ret.) is 75. Actress Susan Lucci is 73. Singer-musician Adrian Belew is 70. Rock musician Dave Murray (Iron Maiden) is 63. Actress Joan Severance is 61. Singer Terry Weeks is 56. Rock singer Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam) is 55. The former first lady of France, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, is 52. Rock musician Jamie Murphy is 44. Jazz musician Irvin Mayfield is 42. Actress Estella Warren is 41. Actress Elvy Yost is 32. Actress Anna Maria Perez de Tagle (TAG'-lee) is 29. Actor Spencer Daniels is 27. Actor Caleb Foote is 26.

Thought for Today: "Oh, for the good old days when people would stop Christmas shopping when they ran out of money." — Author unknown.

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