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Due to the current conditions and the weather forecast, the free ice skating clinic scheduled for today, Dec. 28, has been cancelled. Thanks for your understanding!

“ANYONE CAN GIVE UP, IT'S THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD TO DO. BUT TO HOLD IT TOGETHER WHEN EVERYONE ELSE WOULD UNDERSTAND IF YOU FELL APART, THAT'S TRUE STRENGTH.”

-AUTHOR UNKNOWN



Chicken Soup for the Soul

Out with the oldIn with the new!



Happy New Year!

Clown Around Daycare

207 N Washington St., Groton ~ 605/397-2633

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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A nice light on the flag flanked by falling snow on a Saturday morning at the Chris Frost home. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Big snow flakes were falling this morning. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Winter Storm Warning
URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

...WINTER STORM WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 6 AM CST MONDAY...

* WHAT...Heavy mixed precipitation. Additional snow accumulations of 11 to 15 inches and ice accumulations of up to one tenth of an inch. Winds gusting as high as 50 mph.

* WHERE...Brown, Hyde, Hand, Spink and Faulk Counties.

* WHEN...Until 6 AM CST Monday.

* IMPACTS...Travel will be very difficult to impossible. Areas of blowing snow will significantly reduce visibility. Gusty winds could bring down tree branches.

* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...The first of two waves of snow is ongoing and will bring 1 to 3 inches of snow through this morning. Then light snow and freezing drizzle is expected for much of the rest of today. The second wave will produce 10 to 13 inches Saturday night through Sunday night. In addition, there is the potential for blizzard conditions on Sunday, as winds gust to 50 mph.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

If you must travel, keep an extra flashlight, food, and water in your vehicle in case of an emergency.

The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

Weekend Storm Will Create Difficult Driving Conditions

PIERRE, S.D. – Officials are cautioning travelers that a winter storm making its way into South Dakota starting tonight (Friday), will likely make travel nearly impossible in many areas through the weekend and in to Monday.

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), freezing rain, moderate to heavy snow and winds in excess of 30 mph with gusts in excess of 50 mph will occur Friday evening thru Tuesday morning in varying degrees across the state.

Officials are encouraging motorists to move up travel plans to avoid driving during the storm system Saturday through Monday. A map of the affected area and projected snowfall totals can be found here: <https://www.weather.gov/> - click on South Dakota.

Motorists should visit www.safetravelusa.com/sd, download the SDDOT 511 app or call 5-1-1 to check the latest road conditions and travel advisories before heading out. Sign up for ClearPath511 for closure notifications by text message or email.

Travelers are reminded that SDDOT crews will plow until early evening hours as conditions allow. After that, winter maintenance will be suspended and will resume about 5 a.m. the next morning, weather permitting. Motorists are reminded to give snowplows plenty of room to work and do not pass unless it is safe. The safest place is eight car lengths behind the plow, they are placing chemicals and clearing the road in front of you.

If you must travel, the departments of Transportation and Public Safety recommend travelers also take the following steps.

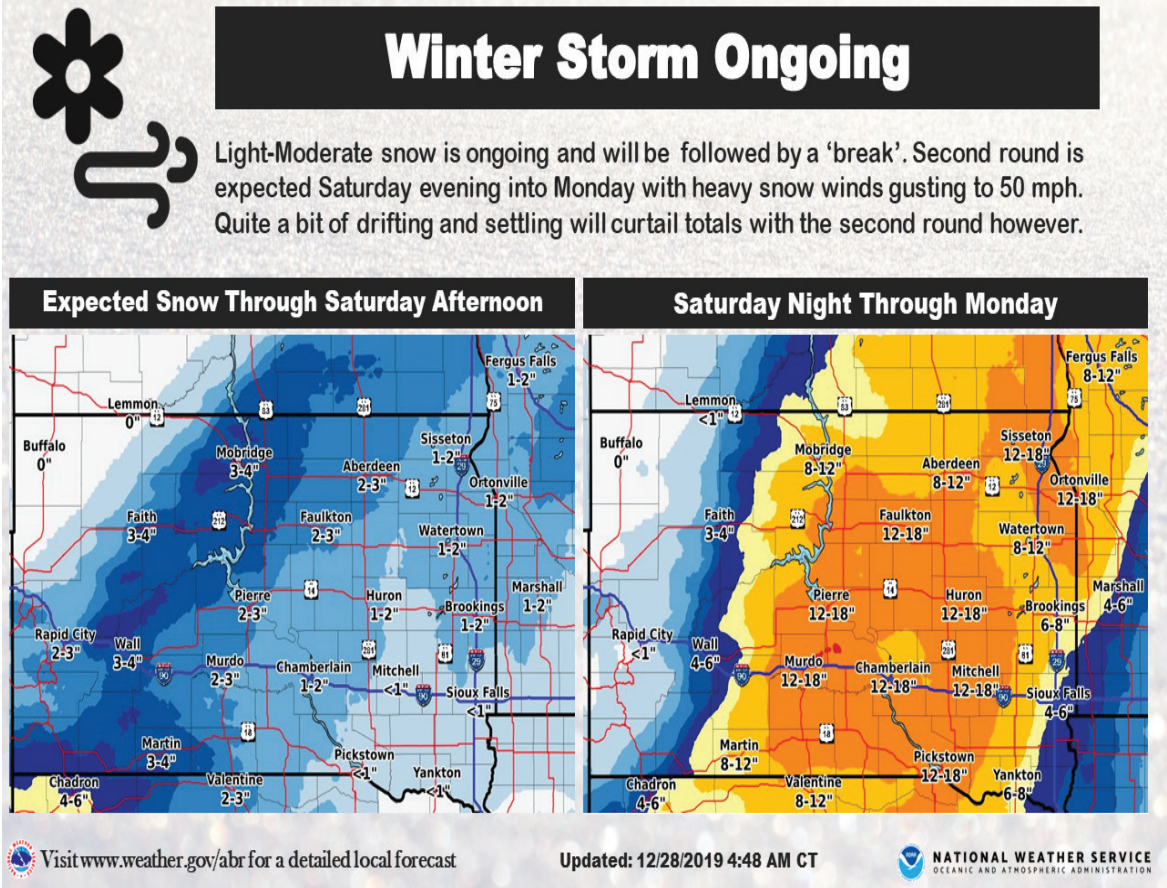
- Wear your seatbelt
- Travel during the day
- Drive with your headlights on (not daytime running lights) so you can be seen by other motorists from the front and rear
- Use highly traveled roads and highways
- Keep family and friends informed of your travel schedule and route
- Keep a winter weather survival kit in your car. The kit should include blankets, warm clothing, water, energy bars, a flashlight, a distress flag, a shovel and matches
- Travel with a charged cell phone, but don't rely on it to get you out of a bad situation
- Call 5-1-1 or visit safetravelusa.com for road conditions
- Change travel plans as weather conditions warrant

If you do get stranded:

- § Stay in your vehicle
- Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes an hour to stay warm
- When the engine is running, open a window slightly to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Periodically clearing snow from the exhaust pipe will also help prevent carbon monoxide buildup
- When it's dark outside, turn on the interior light so rescuers can see you
- Put up a distress flag, or spread a large colored cloth on the ground to attract attention from rescuers

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The first round of snow is ongoing this morning. During the day Saturday light snow and freezing rain may be possible. The second round will bring much heavier snow to the area. Heavy winds Sunday will create drifting and possibly white out conditions. Expect significant travel issues across the area, likely persisting into the start of next week, with this system.

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Today in Weather History

December 28, 2000: Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to around 65 mph, occurred across central and north central South Dakota in the morning. The high winds resulted in blizzard conditions at some locations just east of the Missouri River. Further east, in northeast South Dakota, northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph combined with newly fallen snow to generate blizzard conditions from the morning into the early afternoon hours. Travel was terrible in many places, and many motorists found themselves in ditches. There were also several non-injury accidents.

December 28, 1879: Tay Bridge is the main-line railway across the Tay River in Scotland, between the city of Dundee and the suburb of Wormit in Fife. During the evening hours of December 28, 1879, winds were said to blow at right angles to the bridge. Witnesses said the storm was as severe as they had seen in 20 to 30 years. The winds at Glasgow and Aberdeen were measured at 71 mph. Winds were estimated to be 80 mph in Dundee. A passenger train departed at 7:13 pm was said to disappear three minutes later. The train was found at the bottom of the river, along with the high rafters and much of the ironwork of their supporting piers. There were no survivors. The Court of Inquiry report concluded that "The fall of the bridge was occasioned by the insufficiency of the cross bracing and its fastenings to sustain the force of the gale."

1839 - The third storm in two weeks hit the northeastern U.S. It brought two more feet of snow to Hartford, CT, and Worcester, MA. Whole gales swept the coast causing many wrecks. (David Ludlum)

1897 - The temperature at Dayville, OR, hit 81 degrees to establish a state record for December. (The Weather Channel)

1924 - Iowa experienced its coldest December morning of record. Morning lows averaged 25 degrees below zero for the 104 weather stations across the state.

1955 - Anchorage, AK, was buried under 17.7 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1958 - Albuquerque, NM, received 14.2 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Up to twenty inches of snow buried southern Minnesota, and 20 to 40 mph northwesterly winds produced snow drifts six feet high, and reduced visibilities to near zero at times in blowing snow. There were a thousand traffic accidents in Michigan during the storm, resulting in thirty-five injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds behind a cold front claimed three lives in eastern Pennsylvania, and injured a dozen others in eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Maryland. Winds gusted to 87 mph at Hammonton NJ and in the Washington D.C. area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Squalls continued to bring snow to the Great Lakes Region, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior and Lake Ontario. Syracuse NY received 8.5 inches of snow to push the total for the month past their previous December record of 57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A severe snow storm hit northern California and southern Oregon. As much as 2 feet of snow fell along Interstate 5 closing a 150-mile stretch of the interstate, stranding hundreds of travelers. Winds from the storm caused power outages to more than 200,000 customers in California and Oregon. One man died of a heart attack after helping other drivers. (CNN)

2004 - Los Angeles (downtown) broke a daily rainfall record for the month of December (5.55 inches). This was the third wettest calendar day in Los Angeles since records began in 1877.

2005 - An outbreak of severe thunderstorms across portions of the southeast United States on the 28th produced hail, high winds and a few tornadoes. The states of Georgia and Tennessee were the most affected. (NCDC)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 34 °F at 3:20 PM

Low Temp: 18 °F at 6:52 AM

Wind: 8 mph at 11:22 AM

Day Rain: 2.5" snow. .23 of moisture content

Record High: 57° in 1898

Record Low: -24° in 1924

Average High: 23°F

Average Low: 3°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.45

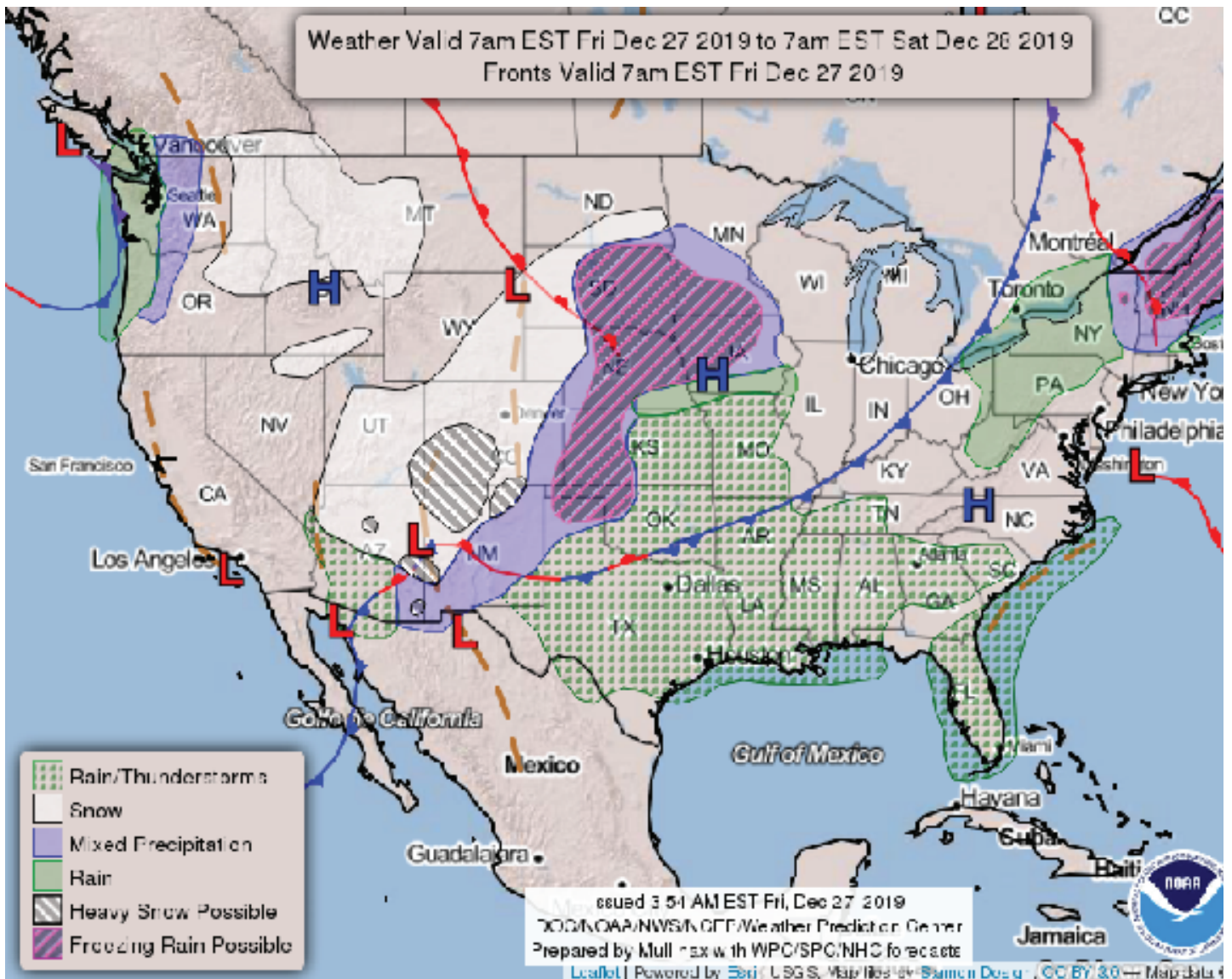
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.34

Average Precip to date: 21.65

Precip Year to Date: 28.29

Sunset Tonight: 4:58 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.



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WHY PARENTING MATTERS

There is limited information in Scripture that describes the home life of Jesus. Every now and then we get a glimpse of something. But there can be little doubt that God and His teachings were at the center of everything.

We read that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." No doubt His knowledge of and reverence for the Law and Prophets shaped His life and His reverence and relationship with His Heavenly Father and others.

Luke's Gospel tells us about a family trip to the temple. On the way home, they noticed that He was not with them. When they returned to the temple they found Him listening to and answering questions of the learned teachers. At the tender age of twelve Jesus demonstrated to others the deep understanding of God's Word that obviously came from His parents.

Mary and Joseph realized that they were obligated to God for the welfare and wellbeing of His one and only Son. While He was waiting to begin His public ministry He listened to their teachings and followed their examples of godly living.

Parents can never overlook or underestimate the influence and impact they have on their children. Parents must follow the example of Joseph and Mary in raising their children.

Prayer: We pray, Father, that parents will realize the important gift of a child and the trust You place in them to raise them to know, love, trust, obey and serve You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

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2019 Groton SD Community Events

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

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

- Bingo: every Wednesday at the Legion Post #39

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 01/26/2020 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m. Sharp (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- 04/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.
- 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
Groton Hosting State B American Legion Baseball Tournament
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/14/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

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News from the Associated Press

Police: 71-year-old man dies in rollover in Vermillion

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — A 71-year-old man has died after a rollover in Vermillion, police said. The crash happened around 3 p.m. Thursday at an intersection. Police say the man was extricated from the car and taken to a hospital, where he died. The intersection was closed for most of the day Thursday. The name of the victim was not released, the Argus Leader reported.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

17-34-40-63-64, Mega Ball: 24, Megaplier: 4

(seventeen, thirty-four, forty, sixty-three, sixty-four; Mega Ball: twenty-four; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$200 million

Driver crashes car into Watertown McDonald's; 1 hurt

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — One person was hurt and taken to a hospital when a 70-year-old woman from Canada crashed her car into a McDonald's in Watertown on Friday.

The woman from Winnipeg, Manitoba, was trying to park her Lincoln Town Car in front of the restaurant around noon when she crashed into the building. The woman told police that her foot slipped from the brake to the gas pedal, the Argus Leader reported.

The crash scattered debris, and one person was taken to the hospital. No one was struck by the car. The driver was evaluated at the scene.

Police are investigating the crash. No charges have been filed.

Jean Rounds, wife of US Sen. Rounds, set for radiation

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The wife of South Dakota U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds is set to complete her cancer treatment with radiation in January.

Jean Rounds underwent multiple rounds of chemotherapy and surgery this year after doctors discovered a malignant, high-grade aggressive tumor near her sciatic nerve. In a year-end email, the senator said the radiation treatment will be the final step in her cancer treatment and said that she is "on a path to recovery."

Jean Rounds underwent unexpected surgery earlier this month after complications from an earlier surgery.

Mike Rounds called the diagnosis and treatment his family's "most difficult challenge to date."

South Dakota woman sentenced to 14 years for killing stepdad

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota woman has been sentenced to 14 years in federal prison for killing her stepfather with a tire iron.

A federal judge sentenced 36-year-old Krystin Spotted Calf of Interior, South Dakota, last week for the death of Jeffrey Lynn Janis Sr.

Spotted Calf was convicted of second-degree murder. Prosecutors say early on Aug. 11, 2018, she struck Janis multiple times with a tire iron after a dispute. Janis died of head injuries. Spotted Calf will be on five years of supervised release after serving her prison time.

Flandreau Santee Sioux tribe's hemp plan approved

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe's plan to grow hemp became one of the first in the nation to get federal approval on Friday.

The Department of Agriculture announced that the Santee Sioux were among three tribes and three states to get approval under the 2018 farm bill. Two other tribes in South Dakota — the Oglala Sioux and Yankton Sioux — are still awaiting approval for their plans. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has opposed hemp cultivation in the state, but that hasn't stopped tribes from pursuing their own hemp plans.

Hemp farmers can start planting next year, but will need to be licensed by the tribe. The hemp must be tested to make sure it stays below the legal limit for THC — the compound that produces a high in marijuana.

Woman who stole from Boys & Girls club to pay back \$16,000

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a woman who admitted to stealing from the Boys & Girls Club of Aberdeen Area has pleaded guilty to misdemeanor petty theft.

The plea agreement requires Janet Pistulka, 59, of Aberdeen, to pay back \$16,000 before sentencing, the American News reports. She will receive a 30-day suspended jail sentence and be ordered to pay a \$288 fine.

Brown County Chief Deputy State's Attorney Ernest Thompson said he agreed to the plea agreement because it was in the best interest of the Boys & Girls Club, which would get immediate reimbursement for its loss as opposed to receiving payments over a period of time after sentencing.

Pistulka was a volunteer for the Boys & Girls Club who helped out with beer sales at the grandstand during the Brown County Fair.

Watertown theater to complete face-lift with sound system

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — An iconic opera house in Watertown that has been under repair for the last year is about to come to life with a new sound system and computerized LED lights.

Brookings-based Audio Video Connections is set to install the system in February inside the 130-year-old Goss Opera House. Chris Paulson, a member of the Friends of Goss board of directors, said it's the same system used in clubs and theaters named after legendary performers Dolly Parton and B.B. King.

"It's a real high-end product," Paulson told the Watertown Public Opinion. "We should have full coverage of the room."

The sound system consists of 12 speakers — six per side on the west and east ends — as well as two 18-inch sub woofers and high-end microphones. Paulson said the setup should allow the theater to attract major entertainment acts, including concerts and shows.

Board president Milt Carter declined to say how much the system cost, only that it was purchased at the recommendation and consent of major donors.

"We really went for something that's going to be not just for the local talent but also national talent," he said. "We want to be able to have a rock show here one night, tear it down and have a wedding here the next day, Then, the next weekend we could have a comedy show or an opera.

"It's going to be something that's going to put us on the map for this whole region as far as a venue for performers," Paulson added.

The new sound system will be paired with acoustic treatments to muffle the theater's echo tendencies.

"That's the first thing we're going to do," Paulson said of the acoustic treatments, promising the materials used will be applied so to preserve the theater's character.

The face-lift has also included new windows, a heating, air conditioning and ventilation system and ongoing infrastructure work.

Missy Sinner, the theater's executive director, said the board is booking shows from April through September.

Serena Williams aces AP Female Athlete of the Decade honors

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

Serena Williams dominated the decade, on the court and in conversation.

There were, to begin with, the dozen Grand Slam single titles — no other woman had more than three over the past 10 seasons — and the 3 1/2 years in a row at No. 1 in the WTA rankings.

And then there was the celebrity status that transcended tennis, making everything she did and said newsworthy, whether it was the triumphs and trophies and fashion statements or the disputes with tournament officials, the magazine covers or the Super Bowl ad with a message about women's power, the birth of her daughter or the health scare that followed.

Still winning matches and reaching Grand Slam finals into her late 30s, still mattering as much as ever, Williams was selected by The Associated Press as the Female Athlete of the Decade on Saturday after a vote by AP member sports editors and AP beat writers.

The AP Male Athlete of the Decade will be announced Sunday.

"When the history books are written, it could be that the great Serena Williams is the greatest athlete of all time. ... I like to call it the 'Serena Superpowers' — that champion's mindset. Irrespective of the adversity and the odds that are facing her, she always believes in herself," said Stacey Allaster, CEO of the WTA from 2009-15 and now chief executive for professional tennis at the U.S. Tennis Association, which runs the U.S. Open.

"Whether it was health issues; coming back; having a child; almost dying from that — she has endured it all and she is still in championship form," Allaster said. "Her records speak for themselves."

Gymnast Simone Biles, the 2019 AP Female Athlete of the Year, finished second to Williams in voting for the decade honor, followed by swimmer Katie Ledecky. Two ski racers were next, with Lindsey Vonn finishing fourth and Mikaela Shiffrin fifth.

Three of Williams' five AP Female Athlete of the Year awards came during the last decade, in 2013, 2015 and 2018. She also won in 2002 and 2009.

"She's been my idol growing up," Biles said.

"She's remained humble. She's stayed true to herself and her character and I think that's really neat about an athlete," Biles said. "Once you start winning, some get cocky, but she's stayed true to herself, win or lose."

It's the defeats that seem to drive Williams, helping propel her to heights rarely reached by any athlete in any sport.

"Whenever I lose, I get more determined, and it gives me something more to work toward," Williams said in a 2013 interview with the AP. "I don't get complacent, and I realize I need to work harder and I need to do better and I want to do better — or I wouldn't be playing the game."

With a best-in-the-game serve, powerful groundstrokes and relentless court coverage, she has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles, more than anyone else in her sport's professional era, which began in 1968.

More than half came from 2010-19: four at Wimbledon, three apiece at the U.S. Open and Australian Open, two at the French Open. That includes a run of four in a row from the U.S. Open in 2014 through Wimbledon in 2015, her second self-styled "Serena Slam."

Williams also was the runner-up another seven times at major tournaments over the past decade, including four of the seven she's entered since returning to the tour after having a baby in 2017.

In all, she made the final at 19 of the 33 majors she entered during the decade, a nearly 58% rate.

The decade began inauspiciously in 2010, when Williams cut her feet on broken glass at a restaurant and was hospitalized with blood clots in her lungs.

Among her many accomplishments, though:

- reaching at least one Slam final every year, a streak that dates to 2007;
- winning gold medals in singles and doubles (with her sister, Venus) at the 2012 Olympics;
- becoming the oldest woman to win a Grand Slam singles trophy in the professional era;
- becoming the oldest No. 1 in WTA history and equaling Steffi Graf's record for most consecutive

weeks atop the rankings;

— leading the tour with 37 singles titles, 11 more than anyone else in the decade.

The day she won Wimbledon in 2016, Williams discussed the way she constantly measures herself.

"I definitely feel like when I lose, I don't feel as good about myself," she said.

"But then I have to, like, remind myself that: 'You are Serena Williams!' You know? Like, 'Are you kidding me?'" Williams continued with a laugh. "And it's those moments that I have to just, like, come off and be like, 'Serena, do you know what you've done? Who you are? What you continue to do, not only in tennis (but also) off the court? Like, you're awesome.'"

More AP Tennis: <https://www.apnews.com/apf-Tennis> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Report: Small plane crashes in Louisiana, five dead

LAFAYETTE, La. (AP) — Five people are dead after a small plane crashed near a post office in southern Louisiana on Saturday, authorities said.

Lafayette Fire Chief Robert Benoit told KLFY-TV that the aircraft was an eight-passenger plane. He said there was one survivor in addition to the five fatalities. Three people on the ground were transported to the hospital. The report said a nearby Walmart store was evacuated as a precaution.

Acadian Ambulance said via Twitter that it responded to the scene of a "crash of a small civilian airplane" in Lafayette and transported a total of four patients: one who was on board the aircraft and three who were on the ground. There was no immediate information released on their conditions.

Eyewitnesses told KLFY TV that lights went out at homes and businesses near the crash and that they heard something that sounded like "a semi-truck." Several residents said they were without power. The report also said that three people on the ground were taken to hospitals.

Photos of the area where the plane crashed showed a blackened car as well as tree limbs scattered in the parking lot of a post office. The smoldering remains of the plane were resting in a field near the post office.

The Lafayette Police Department said via Twitter that local firefighters were handling the crash scene along the 300 block of Verot School Road while awaiting federal transportation authorities and asked motorists to avoid the area.

The fourth-largest city in Louisiana, Lafayette had a population of about 130,000 according to the 2018 census, and is located about 135 miles west of New Orleans.

A final fundraiser for man who boosted ice bucket challenge

GLOUCESTER, Mass. (AP) — Supporters of Pete Frates are taking one last chilly plunge for the former college baseball player whose battle with Lou Gehrig's disease helped spread the ALS ice bucket challenge.

The Frates family says Saturday's annual "Plunge for Pete" at Good Harbor Beach in Gloucester, Massachusetts, will be their last.

The event, in its eighth year, raised money for the Pete Frates #3 Fund, which helped pay for Frates' medical bills.

The former Boston College baseball player, who lived in Beverly, a suburb north of Boston, died Dec. 9 after a seven-year battle with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He would have turned 35 on Saturday.

John Frates, Pete's father, said the event has come "full circle," as the first one was also held on his son's birthday. "It's aligning perfectly for this one to be the last," he told The Gloucester Daily Times earlier this week.

The family has accumulated roughly \$500,000 in debt for their son's medical care, John Frates said, and the final fundraiser will hopefully help close the gap.

The family will continue to raise money for the separate Peter Frates Family Foundation, which helps other ALS patients cover home health care costs, he said.

Pete Frates' wife, Julie, said she'll participate in the plunge for the first time.

She has raised nearly \$300,000 and promises to jump into the winter waters of the North Atlantic wearing "Pete's favorite red white and blue bikini that I wore when we met on the Fourth of July, eight years ago," according to her Facebook fundraising page.

Organizers say nearly 300 people have signed up to take the actual plunge. That exceeds the peak of 250 participants the event saw in 2014, the year the ice bucket challenge went viral and raised more than \$200 million for ALS research worldwide, they say.

The ice bucket challenge involved pouring a bucket of ice water over one's head and posting a video of it on social media, and then challenging others to do the same or make a donation to charity. Most people did both.

The challenge began in 2014 when pro golfer Chris Kennedy challenged his wife's cousin Jeanette Senerchia, whose husband has ALS. Patient Pat Quinn, of Yonkers, New York, picked up on it and started its spread, but when Frates and his family got involved, the phenomenon exploded on social media.

ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that leads to paralysis because of the death of motor neurons in the spinal cord and brain. There is no known cure.

Truck bomb in Somali capital kills at least 78 at rush hour

By ABDI GULED undefined

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — A truck bomb exploded at a busy security checkpoint in Somalia's capital Saturday morning, killing at least 78 people including many students, authorities said. It was the worst attack in Mogadishu since the devastating 2017 bombing that killed hundreds.

The explosion ripped through rush hour as Somalia returned to work after its weekend. At least 125 people were wounded, Aamin Ambulance service director Abdiqadir Abdulrahman said, and hundreds of Mogadishu residents donated blood in response to desperate appeals.

President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed condemned the attack as a "heinous act of terror" and blamed the local al-Shabab extremist group, which is linked to al-Qaida and whose reach has extended to deadly attacks on luxury malls and schools in neighboring Kenya.

The bombing targeted a tax collection center, police Capt. Mohamed Hussein said, as a large plume of smoke rose above the capital.

Bodies lay on the ground amid the blackened skeletons of vehicles. At a hospital, families and friends picked through dozens of the dead, gingerly lifting sheets to peer at faces.

Most of those killed were university and other students returning to class, Mayor Omar Mohamud Mohamed said. Somalis mourned the deaths of so many young people in a country trying to rebuild itself after decades of conflict. Two Turkish brothers were among the dead, Somalia's foreign minister said, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the attack.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but al-Shabab often carries out such attacks. The extremist group was pushed out of Mogadishu several years ago but continues to target high-profile areas such as checkpoints and hotels in the seaside city.

Al-Shabab is now able to make its own explosives, its "weapon of choice," United Nations experts monitoring sanctions on Somalia said earlier this year. The group had previously relied on military-grade explosives captured during assaults on an African Union peacekeeping force.

Despite that advance in bomb-making, one security expert said the unlikely choice of target Saturday — a checkpoint at the western entrance to the capital — reflected al-Shabab's weakening capability to plan and execute attacks at will. Mogadishu recently introduced tougher security measures that Somali officials said make it more difficult to smuggle in explosives.

"It feels like they literally knew that their (car bomb) may not proceed through the checkpoint into the city undetected, considering the additional obstacles ahead, so bombing the busy checkpoint in a show of strength appeared to be an ideal decision," the Mogadishu-based Ahmed Barre told The Associated Press.

Al-Shabab was blamed for the truck bombing in Mogadishu in October 2017 that killed more than 500 people, but the group never claimed responsibility for the blast that led to widespread public outrage.

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Some analysts said al-Shabab didn't dare claim credit as its strategy of trying to sway public opinion by exposing government weakness had badly backfired.

"This explosion is similar like the one ... in 2017. This one occurred just a few steps away from where I am and it knocked me on the ground from its force. I have never seen such an explosion in my entire life," witness Abdurrahman Yusuf said.

The attack again raises concern about the readiness of Somali forces to take over responsibility for the Horn of Africa country's security in the coming months from the AU force.

Al-Shabab, the target of a growing number of U.S. airstrikes since President Donald Trump took office, controls parts of Somalia's southern and central regions. It funds itself with a "taxation" system that experts describe as extortion of businesses and travelers that brings in millions of dollars a year.

Video journalist Mohamed Sheikh Nor in Mogadishu contributed.

US astronaut sets record for longest spaceflight by a woman

Associated Press undefined

A U.S. astronaut set a record Saturday for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, breaking the old mark of 288 days with about two months left in her mission.

Christina Koch, a 40-year-old electrical engineer from Livingston, Montana, arrived at the International Space Station on March 14. She broke the record set by former space station commander Peggy Whitson in 2016-2017.

Koch is expected to spend a total of 328 days, or nearly 11 months, on board the space station before returning to Earth. Missions are typically six months, but NASA announced in April that it was extending her mission until February.

The U.S. record for longest space flight is 340 days set by Scott Kelly in 2015-2016. The world record is 15 months set in the 1990s by a Russian cosmonaut aboard the former Mir space station.

Koch's extended mission will help NASA learn about the effects of long spaceflights, data that NASA officials have said is needed to support future deep space exploration missions to the Moon and Mars.

Before breaking the endurance record for a woman in space, Koch set another milestone as part of the first all-female spacewalking team in October. It was Koch's fourth spacewalk.

She previously said she took a lot of helpful advice from Kelly's 2017 autobiography "Endurance."

Navy considers shipbuilding cuts for upcoming budget

By DAVID SHARP and LOLITA BALDOR Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Navy is proposing construction cutbacks and accelerated ship retirements that would delay, or sink, the Navy's goal of a larger fleet — and potentially hurt shipyards, according to an initial proposal.

The proposal would shrink the size of the fleet from today's level of 293 ships to 287 ships, a far cry from the official goal of 355 ships established in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act.

According to a defense official familiar with the memo, budget negotiations are ongoing and no final decisions have been made. But the Navy is looking at a number of ways to cut costs to fund other priorities, the official said.

One of the proposed cuts would reduce the number of Arleigh Burke-class destroyers planned for construction from 12 to seven over the next five years, trimming \$9.4 billion, or about 8%, from the shipbuilding budget, the official said.

Another potential cut would decommission Ticonderoga-class cruisers more quickly over the next five years, leaving nine in the fleet, rather than 13.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss preliminary budget planning discussions that have not been made public.

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"Either option runs counter to the Navy's stated requirement for a 355-ship fleet, and would not be well received on Capitol Hill given there's still consensus that the military and strategic threat from Russia and China is only increasing," said naval analyst Jay Korman of Avascent Group.

Defense analyst Norman Friedman said the proposal would represent a major reduction in anti-aircraft capability that is provided by destroyers and cruisers at a time when the Navy is facing more sophisticated threats from aircraft and missiles.

"If you were serious about facing down the Chinese, you'd probably want more of that than less," said Friedman.

Arleigh Burke-class destroyers are produced at two shipyards, Maine's Bath Iron Works, a General Dynamics subsidiary, and Ingalls Shipbuilding in Mississippi. A Bath spokesman declined to comment.

Republican Sen. Susan Collins and independent Sen. Angus King, of Maine, called the proposal "an abrupt reversal of the Navy's plan to increase the size of the fleet."

The senators noted that Congress will have the final say, and they suggested that much of the funding is already in the works. Just this past week, Congress appropriated \$5.1 billion for three destroyers, and a \$390 million increase in advanced procurement for a down payment on an additional ship next fiscal year, they said.

The proposed cost cutting comes as the Navy works to modernize its ballistic missile submarine fleet, replacing aging current Ohio-class subs with new Columbia-class nuclear subs. That program is putting pressure on the shipbuilding budget.

The Navy reportedly has some wiggle room in reaching the 355-ship fleet size with the suggestion that the battle force could include unmanned, as well as manned, warships.

The Navy said the discussions are "pre-decisional" and subject to change. "We will not comment on future shipbuilding decisions until the budget request is submitted to Congress next year," said Cmdr. Clay Doss, a Navy spokesman.

Baldor reported from Washington.

This story has been corrected to show one of the proposals would save \$9.4 billion, not \$94 billion, from the shipbuilding budget.

Even amid affluence of tech capital, local news struggles

JANIE HAR Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — The cities and suburbs on the eastern side of San Francisco Bay are home to 2.7 million people, a world-class University of California campus and bedroom communities for Silicon Valley that produce median incomes 50 percent higher than the national average.

What they no longer have is a thriving landscape of local daily newspapers.

Gone is the Oakland Tribune, the Contra Costa Times, The Daily Review of Hayward, The Argus of Fremont and the Tri-Valley Herald, among others. All had tens of thousands of readers during their heyday and served communities populous enough to be among the largest cities in many other states.

Ownership changes and consolidations have left the region known as the East Bay with just a single daily newspaper. The East Bay Times, based in Walnut Creek, attempts to cover a region nearly the size of Delaware with a fraction of the staff of the former dailies.

The growing number of places across the country with dwindling or no local news options has been associated with mostly rural and lower-income areas, places that have little resilience to counter the trend among readers and advertisers to go online. But the East Bay — among the wealthiest and highest educated regions in the country — shows that no place is immune to the struggles of the traditional news industry.

"It is really shocking that the place with the demographics and the business and the universities and the progressiveness, that this is a news desert ... " said U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier, a Democrat who represents a significant part of the East Bay.

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The former small business owner started his political career on the Concord City Council nearly three decades ago, where he recalls seeing at least one reporter in the front row of every meeting. DeSaulnier is so concerned about the state of local news that he has backed legislative action in Congress to support it.

One of those bills targets what he and others believe is a main culprit of the industry's woes — the big tech and social media companies that profit from the content news outlets produce without adequately sharing the profits.

Facebook and Google, among the most prominent of those targets, say they are not to blame for the news industry's downfall and have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to boost local news and help develop new business strategies. That includes backing for news sites in the East Bay, where many of the tech giants' employees live.

But some wonder if that philanthropy is too little, too late. In Fremont, Dan Smith used to have two copies of The Argus delivered daily, one to his family's funeral home for the obituaries placed on behalf of clients and the other to his home, where he turned to sports and comics.

But Smith, 60, no longer subscribes to a daily newspaper, after The Argus turned into a weekly insert to cover a community of nearly 240,000 people, where one of the local employers is electric car maker Tesla.

"Where does one go for local coverage, high school sports? What's going on with the city and the politics, and what's happening around the community?" he said. "How can I be part of my community if I don't know what's going on?"

Former journalists, civic leaders and others in the East Bay lament the loss of the community coverage that was once the staple of local dailies, many of which competed for scoops in towns where coverage areas overlapped.

In Richmond, a working-class city of 110,000 dominated by Chevron and its oil refinery, Mayor Tom Butt recalls a time when two reporters were posted full-time in the press room in the basement of City Hall.

"And everything that happened in the city of Richmond showed up in the newspaper the next day or two, a detailed, blow-by-blow account of every city council meeting, every planning commission meeting," Butt said.

Today, coverage of Richmond falls largely to two online publications. The graduate journalism school at the University of California, Berkeley staffs Richmond Confidential, which goes on hiatus during summer and winter breaks.

The city's largest employer, Chevron Corp., runs the other through a public relations firm. The Richmond Standard posts stories about crime, high school football and community events. It also provides "a voice for Chevron Products Company on civic issues."

The website has posted stories about a Chevron workforce program, its employees and philanthropy, including an article about Chevron taking kids to an Oakland A's game.

A few miles down Interstate 80, Martin Reynolds gazes up at the 22-story Tribune Tower that defines the Oakland skyline and was home to the Oakland Tribune for decades before the paper was sold and its headquarters moved. The Tribune's nameplate with fancy gold script remains over the building's main entrance.

The 142-year-old Tribune was the first African American-owned major metropolitan daily, and its staff took pride in its deep connection to the racially mixed city of over 400,000. The newspaper won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

Its reporters scoured the city's neighborhoods and institutions, and they filled the front page with Oakland-based stories, said Reynolds, who started as an intern and became editor in 2008. They also tried out new ideas in the digital age, such as blogging about life inside one of the city's most dangerous zip codes.

"We were just out there covering stuff all the time," said Reynolds, 51. "We even had a Berkeley bureau."

But ownership consolidated and newsrooms shrank. The Digital First-owned Bay Area News Group eventually announced it would collapse the East Bay's daily papers into one.

"There was a time when newspapers were so powerful and so meaningful and so influential to the community," Reynolds said. "To have lost that is a shame."

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Digital First has a record of consolidating newspapers and trimming staff, but it also has said that its business model keeps local journalism alive. The company staffs reporters throughout the region and has separate regional sections on the East Bay Times' website.

The East Bay Times won its own Pulitzer in 2017 for its coverage of a fatal warehouse fire in Oakland. Even then, it wasn't long before cutbacks resumed.

Bay Area News Group Executive Editor Frank Pine said he understands the loyalty people have for the newspapers they grew up with, but said there is no way to turn back time.

The East Bay Times has collaborated with other publications in efforts to beef up local reporting, including a recent in-depth project about law enforcement officers with criminal convictions. The news group also received a grant from Google to test a premium, ad-free service for subscribers.

"Our business — the business of news — continues to be distressed, and we're doing our level best to stabilize that business and make it sustainable into the future," Pine said.

The loss of so many daily news outlets in this relatively well-to-do region has a ring of irony: Much of the East Bay's wealth and growth is due to tech giants — Apple, Facebook and Google — whose headquarters are a mere bridge crossing away on the other side of San Francisco Bay.

The dominance of Facebook and Google, which rake in the majority of digital ad dollars, is a key reason the traditional news business has been struggling through a period of layoffs and readership decline.

Apple's iPhone conditioned people to abandon print and seek information with a swipe of a screen. Since the iPhone debuted in 2007, employment in U.S. newspaper newsrooms has dropped by nearly half, according to the Pew Research Center.

David Chavern, president and chief executive of the News Media Alliance, said Google and Facebook can solve the crisis affecting the news industry by paying more for content and sharing more data about the people who click on it.

"The fact of the matter is that both Google and Facebook control everything about the news experience, and yet they don't want to compensate the people who create that content," he said.

Newspaper ad revenue was \$50 billion in 2005, according to the Pew Research Center. Today, it's \$14 billion.

Representatives of Google and Facebook reject the suggestion that their companies are responsible for the decline of newspapers, saying business models, readership and the way society operates changed dramatically.

They say they are making it easier for people to subscribe and are offering grants, partnerships and training programs to boost local news, but draw the line at sharing digital revenue at the levels news executives want.

"It's not about providing artificial props to models that frankly are no longer valid," said Richard Gingras, vice president of news for Google. "It's not a healthy thing if you're dependent on other sources for revenue to allow you to do your journalistic work."

Google drives an invaluable amount of traffic to news sites, he said, and shares revenue with publications that use its advertising technology.

Campbell Brown, a former television journalist and current head of global news partnerships at Facebook, said publishers she talks to want to be less dependent on platforms such as Facebook.

"We have to find new business models," she said. "But it has to be something that's sustainable over the long term."

Both companies are putting money behind attempts to build different business models and resuscitate local news. In announcing an array of initiatives and partnerships, the companies have also said they understand that strong local journalism is critical for a healthy democracy.

Each has pledged \$300 million to boost journalism across the country, much of that at the local level where newsrooms have suffered the most; a University of North Carolina study found that more than

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2,000 weekly and daily papers have closed in the U.S. during the last 15 years.

Facebook sees promise in its accelerator program, which brings leaders from various news outlets together to brainstorm over flash sales, e-newsletters and other tools to boost revenue and attract subscribers.

Josh Mabry, Facebook's lead for local news partnerships, said publications need to remind people why local journalism matters — and why they should pay for it.

"Asking goes a long way," he said. "And I think, frankly, a lot of the publishers that we work with are learning how to market themselves in a way that maybe they haven't done in a while."

The program has helped several news outlets in the San Francisco Bay area, including a hyper-local website in Berkeley that used what it learned last year — along with grant money from Facebook — to sign up 343 members during its year-end membership drive. The previous year had seen just 23 new members during the same period.

"The program really injected a lot of discipline into what we were doing," said Tracey Taylor, co-founder and managing editor of the site, *Berkeleyside*.

Founded in 2009 by three journalists, *Berkeleyside* is a beacon in a bleak local news landscape. The site has a staff of seven and an annual operating budget of \$800,000, with just under half of its revenue from advertising, Taylor said.

Most of its readers live or work in the relatively wealthy and famously liberal college town, and they send tips and shape coverage, Taylor said.

Habits have changed, said Gingras, the Google vice president. Consumers no longer need the local newspaper for national news or movie show times. *Berkeleyside* is smart in doing exactly what publications need to do to thrive in the digital age, he said: connect with readers.

Berkeleyside isn't the only local outlet attempting to fill the news void created by the loss of the East Bay's dailies. Political bloggers, community volunteers and others have started their own sites, determined to inform their communities about schools, town councils and crime.

In a major boost for local journalism, *Berkeleyside* announced recently that it was branching out to cover Oakland with \$3 million in backing from Google and the American Journalism Project.

The two newsrooms will team up to cover the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and regional transportation, said Lance Knobel, *Berkeleyside* co-founder and CEO of the new non-profit that will oversee both sites. He is hoping that a combination of philanthropy and dedication to covering communities creatively will usher in a new era for local news. Knobel said he sees the hunger for that all around him.

"If we bring that sort of passion and caring and ability to tell stories and do deep reporting, there are a lot of people in the city who will say, 'Wow, I didn't know that about the place that I live in,' and will take an interest," he said.

The Associated Press has received grant funding from the Google News Initiative for its AP Verify and AP Story Share projects.

6 men become 1st to cross perilous Drake Passage unassisted

By AMANDA LEE MYERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — As freezing water thrashed their rowboat in some of the most treacherous waters in the world, six men fought for 13 days to make history, becoming the first people to traverse the infamous Drake Passage with nothing other than sheer manpower.

They dodged icebergs, held their breaths as giant whales breached near their small boat and rode building-sized waves while rowing 24 hours a day toward Antarctica.

The team of men from four countries finished crossing the Drake Passage on Wednesday in just under two weeks after pushing off from the southern tip of South America.

"This is a really big deal in Antarctic history to hear about this," said Wayne Ranney, a Flagstaff, Arizona-based geologist who has led expeditions to Antarctica and crossed the Drake Passage in motorized vessels more than 50 times. "One hundred percent of their progress was done with those 12 arms for 600

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(nautical) miles. That's just phenomenal. I can't even imagine."

Besides the threat to their lives, the men labored under grueling conditions. Their 29-foot (9-meter) rowboat, named the Ohana, had to be in constant motion to avoid capsizing. That meant three men would row for 90 minutes while the other three rested, still cold and wet.

"You're rowing inside an open hold, 40-foot sea waves are splashing in your face, near-freezing water is splashing over the bow," said 34-year-old Colin O'Brady of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, one of the six men on the boat.

"It was quite harrowing," O'Brady told The Associated Press on Thursday in his first interview after the journey. "By the end, we all lost a good amount of weight and were delirious from the sleep deprivation."

The men had to use a bucket to go to the bathroom. To rest, two men needed to lie shoulder to shoulder in a tiny space while a third would lay in a fetal position in an even smaller area.

"You're curled up and jammed into a small space, trying to get a few winks of sleep before the alarm would go off and boom, you're back at it again," O'Brady said.

The toughest part for O'Brady's fellow rower, Jamie Douglas-Hamilton of Edinburgh, Scotland, was the constant bombardment from the elements.

"We were hit by winds from every single direction ... and the seas down here are very violent — it's the roughest ocean in the world," the 38-year-old said. "We almost capsized many times, and the problem with that is the water is so cold that if you go in, you've probably got two to five minutes."

Physically, Douglas-Hamilton said he fought crippling seasickness and numb hands and feet. At one point, a strap he had to wear around his ankles while rowing wore through his boots and cut into his skin all the way to the bone.

"It was absolute agony," Douglas-Hamilton said.

The other men on the expedition were: Fiann Paul of Reykjavik, Iceland; Cameron Bellamy of Cape Town, South Africa; Andrew Towne of Grand Forks, North Dakota; and John Petersen of Oakland, California.

Paul, Douglas-Hamilton and Bellamy are record-breaking ocean rowers, Towne is a championship rower and has climbed the tallest mountain on every continent, and Petersen was a championship college rower.

In addition to storms and waves, the men dodged icebergs and whales that could easily have destroyed their small vessel. And then there were the mental challenges, especially during the night shift.

"At night we can't see the waves as they roll and crash into us and we can't see the horizon so there is no sense of progress," O'Brady wrote on Instagram as he documented the journey. "It feels like being inside of a washing machine, blindfolded where time is standing still."

Discovery documented the journey while following the men in a larger, motorized boat.

O'Brady's wife, Jenna Besaw, was on the Discovery boat running logistics and watching her husband's death-defying adventure.

"There have been some frightening, intense moments when our boat — a 120-foot-long boat — was lurching forward and up and over these massive waves, to see the rowboat hidden for minutes at a time was rather unnerving," Besaw said.

The row across the Drake Passage is just the latest adventure for O'Brady, who became the first person to traverse Antarctica alone without help last year.

A book about that journey is coming out on Jan. 14, 12 years to the day since O'Brady was severely burned in a fire in Thailand. After the fire, he said he was told he would never walk again.

He said that prognosis has helped fuel each new adventure.

"I am dreaming of what's next," O'Brady said. "To be determined, but I don't think my expedition life is over."

For Douglas-Hamilton, the journey across the Drake Passage might be his last time setting a record, and he's content with that.

"I would rank this as the toughest challenge any of us has ever done," he said. "This was such a good one, I'd be happy leaving it at this. The memories from this one will last forever."

Man, 60, dies after beating in \$1 Christmas Eve mugging

NEW YORK (AP) — A 60-year-old man who was punched and kicked during a \$1 mugging on Christmas Eve has died, police said Saturday.

Juan Fresnada died Friday afternoon at the Bronx hospital where he was taken in critical condition after the mugging early Tuesday, the New York Police Department said. Officers have released surveillance photos and videos in hopes of pinpointing suspects.

Police said Fresnada and another man, 29, were walking along Third Avenue in the Morrisania neighborhood of the Bronx around 1:30 a.m. when several muggers approached them and demanded their property. When they refused, they were attacked.

Surveillance video clips released by police show a man grabbing another man's shirt and swinging him to the ground, then hitting him. Later clips show two other men joining the attacker, one of them grasping a trash can, as the beaten man starts to stand up.

It's unclear whether he is Fresnada or the younger man, who declined medical attention, police said.

The muggers took \$1 from the men and fled, police said.

No contact information for Fresnada's family could immediately be found.

Thousands of koalas feared dead in Australia wildfires

By TRISTAN LAVALETTE Associated Press

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Thousands of koalas are feared to have died in a wildfire-ravaged area north of Sydney, further diminishing Australia's iconic marsupial, while the fire danger increased in the country's east on Saturday as temperatures soared.

The mid-northern coast of New South Wales was home to up to 28,000 koalas, but wildfires have significantly reduced their population in recent months. Koalas are native to Australia and are one of the country's most beloved animals, but they've been under threat due to a loss of habitat.

"Up to 30% of their habitat has been destroyed," Australia's environment minister, Sussan Ley, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. "We'll know more when the fires are calmed down and a proper assessment can be made."

Images shared of koalas drinking water after being rescued from the wildfires have gone viral on social media in recent days. "I get mail from all around the world from people absolutely moved and amazed by our wildlife volunteer response and also by the habits of these curious creatures," Ley said.

About 5 million hectares (12.35 million acres) of land have burned nationwide during the wildfire crisis, with nine people killed and more than 1,000 homes destroyed.

Fire danger in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory was upgraded to "severe" on Saturday, as high temperatures built up over the region. Sydney's western suburbs reached 41 degrees Celsius (106 Fahrenheit), while the inner city is expected to hit 31 C (88 F) on Sunday before reaching 35 C (95 F) on Tuesday.

Two wildfires in New South Wales are at the "watch and act" level issued by fire services.

Canberra, Australia's capital, peaked at 38 C (100 F) on Saturday, with oppressive temperatures forecast for the next seven days.

Meanwhile, New South Wales Emergency Services Minister David Elliott has gone on an overseas family vacation in the wake of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's much-criticized family trip to Hawaii.

Morrison, who apologized for going away, eventually cut short his vacation and returned to Sydney last weekend.

Elliott said he will be briefed daily while overseas. "If the bushfire situation should demand it, I will return home without hesitation," he said.

US mass killings hit new high in 2019, most were shootings

By LISA MARIE PANE Associated Press

The first one occurred 19 days into the new year when a man used an ax to kill four family members including his infant daughter. Five months later, 12 people were killed in a workplace shooting in Virginia. Twenty-two more died at a Walmart in El Paso in August.

A database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University shows that there were more mass killings in 2019 than any year dating back to at least the 1970s, punctuated by a chilling succession of deadly rampages during the summer.

In all, there were 41 mass killings, defined as when four or more people are killed excluding the perpetrator. Of those, 33 were mass shootings. More than 210 people were killed.

Most of the mass killings barely became national news, failing to resonate among the general public because they didn't spill into public places like massacres in El Paso and Odessa, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; Virginia Beach, Virginia; and Jersey City, New Jersey.

The majority of the killings involved people who knew each other — family disputes, drug or gang violence or people with beefs that directed their anger at co-workers or relatives.

In many cases, what set off the perpetrator remains a mystery.

That's the case with the very first mass killing of 2019, when a 42-year-old man took an ax and stabbed to death his mother, stepfather, girlfriend and 9-month-old daughter in Clackamas County, Oregon. Two others, a roommate and an 8-year-old girl managed to escape; the rampage ended when responding police fatally shot the killer.

The perpetrator had had occasional run-ins with police over the years, but what drove him to attack his family remains unknown. He had just gotten a job training mechanics at an auto dealership, and despite occasional arguments with his relatives, most said there was nothing out of the ordinary that raised significant red flags.

The incident in Oregon was one of 18 mass killings where family members were slain, and one of six that didn't involve a gun. Among other trends in 2019:

— The 41 mass killings were the most in a single year since the AP/USA Today and Northeastern database began tracking such events back to 2006, but other research going back to the 1970s shows no other year with as many mass slayings. The second-most killings in a year prior to 2019 was 38 in 2006.

— The 211 people killed in this year's cases is still eclipsed by the 224 victims in 2017, when the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history took place in Las Vegas.

— California, with some of the most strict gun laws in the country, had the most, with eight such mass slayings. But nearly half of U.S. states experienced a mass slaying, from big cities like New York, to tiny towns like Elkmont, Alabama, with a population of just under 475 people.

— Firearms were the weapon in all but eight of the mass killings. Other weapons included knives, axes and at least twice when the perpetrator set a mobile home on fire, killing those inside.

— Nine mass shootings occurred in a public place. Other mass killings occurred in homes, in the workplace or at a bar.

James Densley, a criminologist and professor at Metropolitan State University in Minnesota, said the AP/USA Today/Northeastern database confirms and mirrors what his own research into exclusively mass shootings has shown.

"What makes this even more exceptional is that mass killings are going up at a time when general homicides, overall homicides, are going down," Densley said. "As a percentage of homicides, these mass killings are also accounting for more deaths."

He believes it's partially a byproduct of an "angry and frustrated time" that we are living in. Densley also said crime tends to go in waves with the 1970s and 1980s seeing a number of serial killers, the 1990s marked by school shootings and child abductions and the early 2000s dominated by concerns over terrorism.

"This seems to be the age of mass shootings," Densley said.

He and James Alan Fox, a criminologist and professor at Northeastern University, also expressed worries

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about the "contagion effect," the focus on mass killings fueling other mass killings.

"These are still rare events. Clearly the risk is low but the fear is high," Fox said. "What fuels contagion is fear."

The mass shootings this year include the three in August in Texas and Dayton that stirred fresh urgency, especially among Democratic presidential candidates, to restrict access to firearms.

While the large death tolls attracted much of the attention, the killings inflicted a mental and physical toll on dozens of others. The database does not have a complete count of victims who were wounded, but among the three mass shootings in August alone, more than 65 people were injured.

Daniel Munoz, 28, of Odessa, was caught in the crossfire of the shooting that took place between a 10-mile (16-kilometer) stretch in West Texas. He was on his way to meet a friend at a bar when he saw a gunman and the barrel of a firearm. Instinctively, he got down just as his car was sprayed with bullets.

Munoz, who moved to Texas about a year ago to work in the oil industry, said he had actually been on edge since the Walmart shooting, which took place just 28 days earlier and about 300 miles (480 kilometers) away, worried that a shooting could happen anywhere at any time.

He remembers calling his mother after the El Paso shooting to encourage her to have a firearm at home or with her in case she needed to defend herself. He would say the same to friends, telling them before they went to a Walmart to bring a firearm in case they needed to protect themselves or others during an attack.

"You can't just always assume you're safe. In that moment, as soon as the El Paso shooting happened, I was on edge," Munoz said.

Adding to his anxiety is that, as a convicted felon, he's prohibited from possessing a firearm.

A few weeks later, as he sat behind the wheel of his car, he spotted the driver of an approaching car wielding a firearm.

"My worst nightmare became a reality," he said. "I'm the middle of a gunfight and I have no way to defend myself."

In the months since, the self-described social butterfly steers clear of crowds and can only tolerate so much socializing. He still drives the same car, still riddled with bullet holes on the side panels, a bullet hole in the headrest of the passenger seat and the words "evidence" scrawled on the doors. His shoulder remains pocked with bullet fragments.

Lee Mendelson dies; brought "Charlie Brown Christmas" to TV

By **ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lee Mendelson, the producer who changed the face of the holidays when he brought "A Charlie Brown Christmas" to television in 1965 and wrote the lyrics to its signature song, "Christmas Time Is Here," died on Christmas day, his son said.

Mendelson, who won a dozen Emmys in his long career, died at his home in Hillsborough, California, of congestive heart failure at age 86 after a long struggle with lung cancer, son Jason Mendelson told The Associated Press.

Lee Mendelson headed a team that included "Peanuts" author Charles Schulz, director Bill Melendez, and pianist and composer Vince Guaraldi, whose music for the show, including the opening "Christmas Time Is Here," has become as much a Christmas staple as the show itself.

Mendelson told The Cincinnati Enquirer in 2000 that he was short on time in finding a lyricist for the song, so he sketched out the six verses himself in "about 15 minutes on the backside of an envelope."

He found a choir from a church in his native Northern California to sing the song that sets the show's unforgettable tone, beginning with Mendelson's words:

"Christmas time is here, happiness and cheer, fun for all that children call, their favorite time of year."

The show won an Emmy and a Peabody Award and has aired on TV annually ever since. The team that made it would go on to create more than 50 network specials, four feature films and many other "Peanuts" projects.

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Mendelson also took other comic strips from newspapers to animated TV, including "Garfield," for which he produced a dozen television specials.

His death was first reported by The Daily Post of Palo Alto.

Born in San Francisco in 1933, Mendelson's family moved to nearby San Mateo when he was a boy, and later to nearby Hillsborough, where he went to high school.

He graduated from Stanford in 1954, served in the Air Force and worked for his father's fruit-and-vegetable company before going into TV for the Bay Area's KPIX-TV.

In 1963 he started his own production company and made a documentary on San Francisco Giants legend Willie Mays, "A Man Named Mays," that became a hit television special on NBC.

Mendelson liked to say that he decided to turn from the world's greatest baseball player to the world's worst: Charlie Brown.

He and Schulz originally worked on a "Peanuts" documentary that proved a hard sell for TV, but midway through 1965 a sponsor asked them if they could create the first comic strip's first animated special in time for Christmas.

Schulz wrote the now-familiar story of a depressed Charlie Brown seeking the meaning of Christmas, a school Christmas play with intractable actors including his dog Snoopy, a limp and unappreciated Christmas tree, and a recitation of the nativity story from his best friend Linus.

Mendelson hired Guaraldi to provide the music after hearing the jazz artist's song "Cast Your Fate to the Wind" while driving across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Mendelson said the team showed the special to executives at CBS a week before it was slated to air, and they hated it, with its hyper-simplicity, dour tone, biblical themes, lack of laugh track and actual children's voices instead of adults mimicking them, as was common.

"I really believed, if it hadn't been scheduled for the following week, there's no way they were gonna broadcast that show," Mendelson said on a 2004 documentary for the DVD of the special.

Instead, it went on to become perhaps the biggest holiday classic in television.

"It became part of everybody's Christmas holidays," Mendelson told The Los Angeles Times in 2015. "It was just passed on from generation to generation. ... We got this huge initial audience and never lost them."

Mendelson is survived by his wife, Ploenta, his children Lynda, Glenn, Jason and Sean, his stepson Ken and eight grandchildren.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>.

Drawn-out sex crimes case rattles Israel-Australia ties

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Nicole Meyer endured years of sexual abuse allegedly at the hands of her former school principal. She's had to watch as her alleged abuser fled her residence in Australia for Israel, evaded justice for years and is now undergoing a protracted extradition process that critics have deemed a farce.

The lengthy, Kafkaesque legal saga over the sex crimes suspect's fate has not only agonized Meyer but is testing the relationship between Israel and one of its closest allies, Australia. Malka Leifer's case is still far from resolved and even Australia's pro-Israel Jewish community is losing patience.

"When time and time and time again the process is just not moving forward, it's increasingly more difficult," said Meyer, 34, who lives in Melbourne. "Israel has an obligation to do the right thing."

Meyer and two of her sisters allege Leifer abused them while they were students at an ultra-Orthodox school in Melbourne, and there are said to be other victims. In 2008, as the allegations surfaced, the Israeli-born Leifer, a trusted teacher and school principal in an insular religious community, left her position at the school suddenly and returned to Israel, where she has lived since.

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault unless they grant permission, which Meyer has done.

In Australia, Leifer now faces 74 charges of sexual assault related to accusations brought forward by the three sisters. A judge in a civil suit against Leifer, 53, and the Adass Israel school where she taught,

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awarded Meyer's sister more than \$700,000 in damages. Meyer and another sister settled out of court. But in Israel, justice has been slow. Critics say the legal proceedings have been marred by needless delays and laughable hiccups and have even roped in a government minister in what has embarrassed the country in front of its stalwart ally.

The legal quagmire has driven a wedge between Israel and Australia, a country the Jewish state relies upon for diplomatic support against what it views as anti-Israel sentiment in international organizations. The Leifer case repeatedly comes up in discussions between the countries' leaders as well as in debates in Australia's parliament. Its twists and turns have exasperated some lawmakers.

"I do not doubt the independence and the integrity of the Israeli legal system, nor do I doubt the commitment of the Israeli Ministry of Justice to pursuing this case. But enough is enough. This case has gone on for far too long," Dave Sharma, a member of parliament for the ruling Liberal party and former Australian envoy to Israel told the Australian Parliament in October.

After Australia filed an extradition request, Leifer was put under house arrest in 2014 and underwent the beginnings of an extradition process that ended in 2016 when a mental health evaluation determined she wasn't fit to stand trial.

Leifer was again arrested in early 2018 after an investigation claimed to have caught her leading a seemingly normal life, contrary to what she told the court she was capable of as someone with a mental illness. The court asked for another psychological review and she has since been held in Israeli custody.

Since her initial arrest, the court has heard Leifer's case dozens of times. At the last hearing this month, a panel of psychiatrists set to deliver its ruling on Leifer's mental state said it needed more time because it appeared the panel was unaware of the scheduled hearing. A new hearing is set for Jan. 14, but with a separate trial over her extradition yet to begin, and appeals expected, it's unclear when, if ever, Leifer will face justice in Australia.

"It's really difficult to verbalize how we've seen this case evolve. I'm really left speechless," said Manny Waks, an advocate on behalf of the victims who has closely monitored the case. "Just a lack of professionalism, incompetence."

Perhaps most damning has been the alleged involvement in the case of Israel's ultra-Orthodox deputy health minister, Yaacov Litzman. Israeli police recommended charges of fraud and breach of trust be brought against Litzman for suspicions that he pressured ministry employees to skew Leifer's psychiatric evaluations in her favor. Israel's state prosecutor is expected to decide whether to file formal charges, though Litzman denies wrongdoing.

Both the Israeli Justice Ministry and the Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the Leifer case.

Leifer's lawyers warn that politics risks tainting the legal process.

"We call on all those related to the issue to act responsibly and to let the justice system in Israel, which is among the grandest in the world, carry out its work without prohibited pressure tactics," Tal Gabay and Yehuda Fried said in a statement.

On a first-ever visit by an Israeli leader to Australia in 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel has "no better friend" than Australia and called the country's staunchly pro-Israel Jewish community "unusually committed" to the Jewish state.

But that support has started to crack in the wake of the Leifer proceedings. Australian Jews and community organizations have spoke out against the country's handling of the case.

"As each court appearance passes without resulting in an extradition order, further trauma is inflicted on the survivors and the integrity of Israel's institutions is undermined," said Anton Block, who recently stepped down as head of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

Meyer said having justice run its course is the only thing that will bring her closure.

"I expect Israel to send her back," said Meyer. "It's an expectation that if they don't fulfill, I don't have an understanding of how I'll move on."

Associated Press writer Tristan Lavalette contributed to this report from Perth, Australia.

Hawaii tour helicopter crash kills 6, leaves 1 missing

By CALEB JONES Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — The search for the final person missing after a Hawaii tour helicopter crash killed six is expected to resume Saturday depending on weather, officials said.

There are no indications that anybody survived the crash, authorities said Friday night after the remains of six of the people on board were found. Authorities have not named those on board and said families are being notified.

The helicopter was set to tour the rugged and remote Kauai's Na Pali Coast, which is one of the most dramatic and sought-after destinations in Hawaii and was featured in the film "Jurassic Park." The plane crashed at the top of a mountain on the island of Kauai, authorities said.

A search began for the helicopter carrying a pilot and six passengers from two families after it was reported overdue Thursday evening. Two passengers are believed to be minors, the Coast Guard said.

Steep terrain, low visibility, choppy seas and rain had complicated the search, the agency said.

The helicopter company, identified as Safari Helicopters, contacted the Coast Guard about 6 p.m. Thursday to say the aircraft was about 30 minutes overdue, authorities said.

A person who answered the phone at a number listed for Safari Helicopters declined to comment and hung up.

According to a preliminary report, the pilot said the tour was leaving the Waimea Canyon area, known as the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," about 4:40 p.m., which was the last contact with the helicopter, Kauai police said.

The Eurocopter AS350 has an emergency electronic locator transmitter, but no signals were received. The locator devices are designed to activate when an aircraft crashes, Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Ian Gregor said in an email.

The FAA requires the locators to be able to withstand impact. However, it is possible for the device to stop working in an extreme crash, Gregor said.

He said the agency is looking at the company's safety record but likely won't have a full report until Monday. It's looking into the crash along with the National Transportation Safety Board, which announced Friday that it was sending three investigators to Kauai.

U.S. Rep. Ed Case of Hawaii cited fatal accidents over the years, blaming the FAA for not taking NTSB safety improvement efforts seriously and the industry for not regulating itself. He said "innocent lives are paying the price."

The FAA said it conducts random and regular surveillance on all Hawaii air tour operators and ensures companies address any issues. Gregor said the agency does not have concerns about the industry statewide.

The NTSB aviation accident database lists nine crashes of Hawaii helicopter sightseeing flights in the last 10 years, including three with fatalities.

After a Hawaii skydiving plane crashed and killed 11 people in June, the NTSB called on the FAA to tighten its regulations governing parachute operations. The FAA said at the time that it had made changes to address NTSB recommendations.

The chopper that crashed this week along a route used by all tour helicopters was found in a mountainous region inland from the Na Pali Coast, which is one of the most dramatic and sought-after destinations in Hawaii and was featured in the film "Jurassic Park." Towering mountains with deep ravines and huge waterfalls make up the interior of the uninhabited state park. Red rock cliffs with thick jungle canopies rise from the Pacific Ocean to over 4,000 feet (1,219 meters) high.

Ladd Sanger, a Texas-based aviation attorney and helicopter pilot who has handled several crash cases involving similar helicopters in Hawaii, said tour operators on Kauai face unique challenges because of weather and topography.

Kauai "has microclimates, so the weather at the airport is going to be different than up at the crash location," Sanger said. "Those microclimates can come on very quickly and dissipate quickly too, so the weather reporting is difficult."

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Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources spokesman Dan Dennison, who has spent years visiting and photographing the area, said winter brings more rain and turbulent seas.

"You can have very low ceilings. You can have fog and cloud banks that move in very quickly. You can have heavy rain and strong winds that make flying difficult if not impossible at times," he said.

The shoreline has beaches that could potentially serve as emergency landing zones, but they are "few and far between," Dennison said.

And even the beaches that are there would be a tight spot to land a helicopter.

"Kauai is incredibly unforgiving terrain," Sanger said. "If you lose the engine there's just really no place to land on the tour route that they were flying."

Associated Press writer Dan Joling in Anchorage, Alaska, contributed to this report.

Shooting inside suburban Denver mall kills 1; suspect sought

AURORA, Colo. (AP) — Gunfire broke out inside a mall in a Denver suburb on Friday, killing a 17-year-old boy and causing shoppers to scatter in search of hiding places, police officials and a witness said.

Aurora Police Department spokesman Anthony Camacho said officers were looking for at least one suspect who wielded a handgun in the shooting that occurred at 4 p.m. inside a J.C. Penney store at the Town Center at Aurora mall.

He said there was no ongoing threat inside the mall, which remained open except for the J.C. Penney. Yellow police tape cordoned off one entrance to the store.

"We do not believe there is a threat to the general public," he told reporters.

Camacho said he could not immediately confirm how many people were involved in the shooting. Further details on the teenager who was killed weren't immediately released.

It was the second shooting in the Aurora mall this month, Camacho said. A boy was injured in a Dec. 14 shooting at the mall.

In March, a 16-year-old boy was shot and killed in the mall's parking lot.

Police also responded to a call of shots fired at the mall on Nov. 30, but found no evidence of a firearm.

Officers patrolling the mall on Friday responded to reports of gunfire inside the store and found the boy wounded, Camacho said. The teen was taken to a hospital, where he died.

Police were trying to determine how the shooter got away, he added. He asked anyone with information to contact police.

Shoppers were told to shelter in place as police rushed to the scene.

A witness, Jalen Martin, told The Denver Post that he was walking in the mall when he heard a noise and saw people running.

"A few of the people who were in the cluster said, 'He's shooting; he's got a gun,'" Martin said.

He sprinted down an escalator and out of the mall as people ran into stores searching for places to hide, he said.

At least one police officer is assigned to the mall full-time, Camacho said. He assured residents that the mall is safe, especially during the holiday shopping season.

"We do feel that people can still come and shop here and bring their families here," Camacho said.

The mall is in the same city where a gunman opened fire in a movie theater in 2012, killing 12 people and injuring dozens more.

Hundreds of accused clergy left off church's sex abuse lists

By CLAUDIA LAUER and MEGHAN HOYER Associated Press

Richard J. Poster served time for possessing child pornography, violated his probation by having contact with children, admitted masturbating in the bushes near a church school and in 2005 was put on a sex offender registry. And yet the former Catholic priest was only just this month added to a list of clergy mem-

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bers credibly accused of child sexual abuse — after The Associated Press asked why he was not included.

Victims advocates had long criticized the Roman Catholic Church for not making public the names of credibly accused priests. Now, despite the dioceses' release of nearly 5,300 names, most in the last two years, critics say the lists are far from complete.

An AP analysis found more than 900 clergy members accused of child sexual abuse who were missing from lists released by the dioceses and religious orders where they served.

The AP reached that number by matching those public diocesan lists against a database of accused priests tracked by the group BishopAccountability.org and then scouring bankruptcy documents, lawsuits, settlement information, grand jury reports and media accounts.

More than a hundred of the former clergy members not listed by dioceses or religious orders had been charged with sexual crimes, including rape, solicitation and receiving or viewing child pornography.

On top of that, the AP found another nearly 400 priests and clergy members who were accused of abuse while serving in dioceses that have not yet released any names.

"No one should think, 'Oh, the bishops are releasing their lists, there's nothing left to do,'" said Terence McKiernan, co-founder of BishopAccountability.org, who has been tracking the abuse crisis and cataloging accused priests for almost two decades, accumulating a database of thousands of priests.

"There are a lot of holes in these lists," he said. "There's still a lot to do to get to actual, true transparency."

Church officials say that absent an admission of guilt, they have to weigh releasing a name against harming the reputation of priests who may have been falsely accused. By naming accused priests, they note, they also open themselves to lawsuits from those who maintain their innocence.

Earlier this month, former priest John Tormey sued the Providence, Rhode Island, diocese, saying his reputation was irreparably harmed by his inclusion on the diocese's credibly accused list. After the list was made public, he said he was asked to retire by the community college where he had worked for over a decade.

Some dioceses have excluded entire classes of clergy members from their lists — priests in religious orders, deceased priests who had only one allegation against them, priests ordained in foreign countries and, sometimes, deacons or seminarians ousted before they were ordained.

Others, like Poster, were excluded because of technicalities.

Poster's name was not included when the Davenport, Iowa, diocese issued its first list of two dozen credibly accused priests in 2008. The diocese said his crime of possessing more than 270 videos and images of child pornography on his work laptop was not originally a qualifying offense in the church's landmark charter on child abuse because there wasn't a direct victim.

After he was released from prison, the diocese found Poster a job as a maintenance man at its office, but he was fired less than a year later after admitting to masturbating in the bushes on the property, which abuts a Catholic high school. Still, the diocese did not list him.

Poster went on to violate the terms of his probation, admitting he had contact with minors at a bookstore and near an elementary school, federal court records unsealed at the AP's request show. A judge sent him back to jail for two months and imposed several other monitoring conditions.

Child pornography was added to the church's child abuse charter in 2011 and, though the diocese promised it would update its list of perpetrators as required under a court-approved bankruptcy plan, it never included Poster.

"It was an oversight," diocese spokesman Deacon David Montgomery told the AP. He said the public had been kept informed about the case through press releases issued from Poster's arrest until his removal from the priesthood in 2007.

Poster, now 54, lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, near a school and two parks. He hasn't been accused of any wrongdoing for more than a decade and declined to comment when reached by the AP, saying he preferred to stay out of the spotlight.

Of the 900 unlisted accused clergy members, more than a tenth had been charged with a sex-related crime — a higher percentage than those named publicly by dioceses and orders, the AP found.

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Dioceses varied widely in what they considered a credible accusation. Like Poster, some of the priests criminally charged with child pornography weren't listed because some dioceses said a victim needed to report a complaint. In addition to Poster, the AP review found 15 other priests charged with possessing, distributing or creating child pornography who were not included on any list.

Other dioceses created exceptions for a host of other reasons, ranging from cases being deemed not credible by a board of lay church people to the clergy members in question having since died and thus being unable to defend themselves.

"If your goal is protecting kids and healing victims, your lists will be as broad and detailed as possible. If your goal is protecting your reputation and institution, it will be narrow and vague. And that's the choice most bishops are making," said David Clohessy, the former executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, who now heads the group's St. Louis chapter.

The largest exceptions were made for the nearly 400 priests in religious orders who, while they serve in diocesan schools and parishes, don't report to the bishops.

Richard J. McCormick, a Salesian priest who worked at parishes, schools and religious camps in dioceses in Florida, New York, Massachusetts, Indiana and Louisiana, has been accused of molesting or having inappropriate contact with children from three states. In 2009, his order settled the first three civil claims against him. Yet he does not appear on any list of credibly accused clergy members.

McCormick finally faced criminal charges after one of his victims spotted the priest's name on a very different list — one posted in 2011 by a Boston lawyer, Mitchell Garabedian, who represents church sexual abuse victims.

Thirty years had gone by, but Joey Covino said he immediately recognized a photo of McCormick as the priest who had molested him over two summers at a Salesian camp, a woodsy retreat for underprivileged boys in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Covino's boyhood had revolved around church, where he served as an altar boy, played in a Catholic Little League and where his mother — raising four children on her own — gratefully accepted assistance from friendly priests.

When she sent Covino and his brothers back to the free camp for a second year, "I was petrified — petrified — and I couldn't say anything. I couldn't even ask my brothers to see if it had happened to them," said Covino, now 49 and a police officer in Revere, Massachusetts. "I've always told myself I should have done something. I should have fought back."

Covino said the entirety of his adult life had been altered by McCormick's abuse — failed relationships, his decisions to join the military and later the police, nightmares that plagued him. His decision to come forward led to McCormick being convicted of rape in 2014 and sentenced to up to 10 years. The priest since has pleaded guilty to assaulting another boy.

The Salesians, based in New Rochelle, New York, have never posted a list of credibly accused priests.

"Our men who have been credibly accused and have had accusations have been listed in the various dioceses that we serve," said Father Steve Ryan, vice provincial of the order.

Ryan said he was certain McCormick's name appeared on several lists, including Boston's.

But when Boston posted its list in 2011, Archbishop Sean Patrick O'Malley wrote that he was not including priests from religious orders or visiting clerics because the diocese "does not determine the outcome in such cases; that is the responsibility of the priest's order or diocese."

O'Malley since has called on religious orders to post their own lists, spokesman Terry Donilon said.

The AP found the Boston archdiocese has the most accused priests left off its list, with almost 80 not included. Nearly three-quarters, like McCormick, were priests from religious orders. Another dozen died before allegations were received — another exclusion cited by the archdiocese.

McCormick also is not on the New York archdiocese's list or lists posted by the Archdiocese of Gary, Indiana, and the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida — both places where he faced accusations.

After the AP inquired, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese in New Orleans, where McCormick served in 1991, said the archdiocese would seek to verify information about the priest and add him to its list.

If McCormick goes onto New Orleans' list, he would be excluded from the AP's undercount analysis,

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despite still being absent on lists in the other dioceses where he served. Because the AP counted only priests left off all lists, critics say the number of 900 unnamed priests represents just a tiny portion of the true scope of the underreporting problem.

Other priests excluded from the credibly accused lists were left off because of findings from the diocesan investigations process.

Review boards — independent panels in each diocese staffed with lay people to review allegations of abuse — make the initial recommendation on whether an allegation is credible. The standards those boards use to investigate claims and the process itself often is so shrouded from public view that some victims say they weren't allowed to attend when their allegations were discussed.

Dozens of priests whose accusers received payouts or legal settlements were left off credibly accused lists because review boards deemed the accusations not substantiated or because bishops or even the Vatican later overturned the board's findings on appeal. The standards for Vatican appeals are even more secretive.

In 2006, the Chicago Archdiocese's review board investigated a claim from two brothers who alleged a priest named Robert Stepek had abused them. The board found "reasonable cause to suspect that sexual abuse of minors occurred," but Stepek was restored to good standing in 2013 after a Vatican court said it was "unable to find evidence strong enough." The court found Stepek engaged in inappropriate behavior for a priest, however, and he remained without an assignment under restrictions until his death in 2016.

The AP found about 45 accused clergy members who did not appear on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's list of credibly accused priests. The archdiocese said they were excluded for a variety of reasons, including deciding that about a dozen priests found unsuitable for ministry by a review board due to conduct involving minors did not do anything that rose to the level of abuse.

A spokesman said the archdiocese has a thorough and transparent investigation process, but declined to comment on any of the individual cases of priests not named on its list.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro told the AP that he had to fight church leaders to release a groundbreaking 2018 grand jury report that named more than 300 predator priests and cataloged clergy abuse over seven decades in six of the state's dioceses, not including Philadelphia.

Several bishops played a direct role in covering up the abuse in Pennsylvania, Shapiro said.

"You can't put much stock in the lists that the church voluntarily provides because they cannot be trusted to police themselves," he said.

In Buffalo, New York, Bishop Richard Malone resigned under pressure earlier this month after his executive assistant leaked internal church documents to a reporter after becoming concerned the bishop had intentionally omitted dozens of names from its list of credibly accused priests.

Buffalo's list has more than doubled to 105 clergy members since those documents were released. Still, the AP found nearly three dozen accused priests who remain unnamed by the diocese.

The number of new claims being reported to law enforcement and church officials over the last two years has increased, spurred in part by revelations of abuse from high-ranking church officials such as former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and by the Pennsylvania grand jury report and the more than 20 other state investigations launched in its wake.

The AP found more than 130 priests who were accused in the last two years whose names do not appear on any lists. Another 37 unlisted priests were accused under New York's Child Victims Act, which recently opened a window for victims to file civil lawsuits regardless of the statute of limitations, a trend being echoed across the country.

Anne Burke, now chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, was part of the Catholic Church's inaugural National Review Board, a commission formed to help implement the church's 2002 child abuse charter.

"We gave our report and recommendations over 15 years ago. They never followed through. That was the final nail in the coffin as far as we were concerned in terms of the bishops ever being able to pull themselves away ... from the bureaucracy and be transparent," Burke said. "That is why we are here again today, and it's worse."

Many advocates say the church has a long way to go toward being transparent and are determined to

see that it becomes far more open about problem priests.

Attorney Jeff Anderson, known for suing dioceses for information on accused clergy, has released almost 30 various rosters of clergy he has received allegations against or whose names appear in church documents.

"We feel a fierce public imperative to continue to release our lists because those released by dioceses contain only a fraction of the true report," Anderson said. "And they lead people to believe they are coming clean when they are not."

It was a list that Anderson's law firm released in the Archdiocese of New York that led 34-year-old Joe Caramanno to file a complaint, decades after he said he was abused.

Caramanno had been hospitalized for an anxiety disorder when he was a teenager and part of his return to high school involved mandated meetings with a priest who controlled his medication. It was during those sessions that Caramanno said Monsignor John Paddack fondled him.

Caramanno, now a teacher, said it wasn't until he saw Paddack's name on Anderson's list that he felt he could come forward. "I needed the validation that it wasn't just me. It made it more real," he said.

The archdiocese's official list of credibly accused priests, released a few months after Anderson's, contains only half the names and does not include Paddack, who has stepped down during the ongoing investigation.

"It makes me wonder if I hadn't come forward ... would he still be an active priest?" said Caramanno, who has filed a lawsuit against the archdiocese under New York's Child Victims Act.

An archdiocese spokesman said a request for comment had been relayed to Paddack, but the priest did not respond.

Victims and advocates say the church should be transparent about investigations when allegations are received, arguing that trust in the church can be restored only if bishops are completely forthcoming.

Several dioceses have chosen to include priests under investigation on their lists, removing them if the allegations are determined to be unsubstantiated, but many others do not disclose investigations or include those names.

"Every cleric no matter where they came from or were ordained or went to school or who signs their paycheck ... all of that is hair-splitting and irrelevant," said Clohessy, of the group SNAP. "What matters is one question: Did or does this credibly accused predator have access to my flock ever? Even for a few hours. If the answer is yes, then that bishop needs to put that predator on his list."

AP reporters Ryan J. Foley, Adam Geller and Matt Sedensky and researcher Randy Herschaft contributed to this report.

DJ Don Imus, made and betrayed by his mouth, dead at 79

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Radio personality Don Imus, whose career was made and then undone by his acid tongue during a decades-long rise to stardom and an abrupt public plunge after a nationally broadcast racial slur, has died. He was 79.

Imus died Friday morning at Baylor Scott and White Medical Center in College Station, Texas, after being hospitalized since Christmas Eve, according to a statement issued by his family. Deirdre, his wife of 25 years, and his son Wyatt, 21, were at his side, with his son Zachary Don Cates returning from military service overseas.

He died of complications from lung disease.

Imus survived drug and alcohol woes, a raunchy appearance before President Clinton and several firings during his long career behind the microphone. But he was vilified and eventually fired after describing a women's college basketball team as "nappy headed hos."

His April 2007 racist and misogynist crack about the mostly black Rutgers squad, an oft-replayed 10-second snippet, crossed a line that Imus had long straddled as his irascible rants catapulted him to prominence. The remark was heard coast to coast on 60 radio stations and on a simulcast aired each morning on MSNBC.

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At the time, his "Imus in the Morning" show was home to presidential hopefuls, political pundits and his favorite musicians, a must-listen in the media and political corridors of New York and Washington. Ten years earlier, Time magazine had named him one of the 25 most influential Americans. But the remark made him an immediate pariah and he was dropped by CBS Radio and MSNBC.

Imus apologized repeatedly, calling his remark "completely inappropriate ... thoughtless and stupid," and met with the team to hear how his comment hurt them. Although he returned to radio, and the Fox Business Network simulcast his show for a number of years, he never approached the same influence before retiring in 2018.

The incident "did change my feelings about making fun of some people who didn't deserve to be made fun of and didn't have a mechanism to defend themselves," Imus told CBS News upon his retirement.

Imus' unsparing on-air persona was tempered by his off-air philanthropy, raising more than \$40 million for groups including the CJ Foundation for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. He ran a New Mexico ranch for dying children, and often used his radio show to solicit guests for donations.

A pediatric medical center bearing Imus' name was opened at the Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey.

Joe Scarborough, who replaced Imus in MSNBC's morning lineup, tweeted that "Morning Joe" owed its format to Imus.

"No one else could have gotten away with that much talk on cable news," Scarborough wrote. "Thanks for everything, Don, and Godspeed."

Yet even in death, he was a polarizing figure. Several African Americans on Twitter were unforgiving, saying, in effect, "good riddance." The Huffington Post headlined its obituary, "Don Imus, racist radio show host, dead at 79."

Even though Imus was unsparing in mocking politicians of all stripes — he called former Vice President Dick Cheney a "war criminal" — he was praised on Twitter Friday by conservative media personalities Sean Hannity and Mark Levin. Fox News Channel's Laura Ingraham said he was responsible for her radio career.

"Love him or hate him — & he gave his audience cause to do both — he was a giant in radio," tweeted CBS' Anthony Mason, who interviewed Imus at the time of his retirement.

Imus, born on a Riverside, California cattle ranch, was the oldest of two boys — his brother Fred later became an "Imus In the Morning" show regular. The family moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, where Imus joined the Marines before taking jobs as a freight train brakeman and uranium miner.

Only at age 28 did he appear on the airwaves. His caustic persona, though it would later serve him well, was initially a problem: Imus was canned by a small station in Stockton, California, for uttering the word "hell."

The controversy only enhanced his career, a pattern that continued throughout the decades.

Imus, moving to larger California stations, earned Billboard's "Disc Jockey of the Year" award for medium-sized markets after a stunt where he ordered 1,200 hamburgers to go from a local McDonald's.

He moved to Cleveland and by 1971, was doing the morning drive-time show on WNBC-AM in New York, the nation's largest and most competitive radio market. He brought along a destructive taste for vodka.

He was a "shock jock" before the term was coined, and listeners flocked to hear what outrageous things he'd say, like phoning people to wake them up and ask, "Are ya naked?" He played characters like the radio evangelist Rev. Billy Sol Hargis. His demons also made it an open question many mornings whether he'd show up for his 6 a.m. shift.

Imus was fired by WNBC but returned in triumph two years later adding a new vice: cocaine. While his career turned around, his first marriage, which produced daughters Nadine, Ashley, Elizabeth and Toni, fell apart.

Imus struggled with addiction until a 1987 stint at a Florida alcohol rehabilitation center, coming out just as WNBC became the fledgling all-sports station WFAN, which retained Imus' non-sports show as its morning anchor.

His career again soared. He was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame and MSNBC signed up his simulcast

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when the network started in 1996. He mixed comedy with A-list guests like Senators John Kerry and John McCain. Media personalities like NBC's Tim Russert and Frank Rich of The New York Times were regulars.

A book plug on Imus' show guaranteed sales, and authors were soon queuing up for a slot on the show.

Imus rarely missed a chance to get in trouble, even in the good times. He engaged in a long-running feud with shock jock Howard Stern, who usurped Imus' position as the No. 1 morning host in New York City.

But as he retired, Imus called Stern one of the top five radio personalities of all time. He gave himself the same rank, adding Arthur Godfrey, Wolfman Jack and Jack Benny.

"He had a big problem with me," Imus said about Stern. "I didn't with him."

In 1996, Imus outraged guests at the annual Radio and Television Correspondents Association Dinner in 1996, cracking wise about President Clinton's extramarital activities as the first lady sat stone-faced nearby. "We all know you're a pot-smoking weasel," Imus said at another point about Clinton.

A White House spokesman called Imus' bit "fairly tasteless."

One year later, he was sued by a Manhattan judge after ripping the jurist on air as a "creep" and "a senile old dirtbag." Critics carped over the show's content, with Imus deflecting most complaints by claiming he was an all-inclusive offender. However, one show regular was fired in 2005 after a particularly vile crack about cancer-stricken singer Kylie Minogue.

A February 2006 profile in Vanity Fair contained the quote that might best serve as Imus' epitaph.

"I talk to millions of people every day," he said while riding home in a limousine after one show. "I just like it when they can't talk back."

Imus remarried in December 1994, to the former Deirdre Coleman. They had one son, Wyatt, and adopted Zachary after he attended one of his camps for cancer-stricken children.

UN condemns human rights abuses against Myanmar's Rohingya

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution Friday strongly condemning human rights abuses against Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims and other minorities, including arbitrary arrests, torture, rape and deaths in detention.

The 193-member world body voted 134-9 with 28 abstentions in favor of the resolution which also calls on Myanmar's government to take urgent measures to combat incitement of hatred against the Rohingya and other minorities in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they do reflect world opinion.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long considered the Rohingya to be "Bengalis" from Bangladesh even though their families have lived in the country for generations. Nearly all have been denied citizenship since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless, and they are also denied freedom of movement and other basic rights.

The long-simmering Rohingya crisis exploded on Aug. 25, 2017, when Myanmar's military launched what it called a clearance campaign in Rakhine in response to an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. The campaign led to the mass Rohingya exodus to Bangladesh and to accusations that security forces committed mass rapes and killings and burned thousands of homes.

Myanmar's U.N. ambassador, Hau Do Suan called the resolution "another classic example of double-standards (and) selective and discriminatory application of human rights norms" designed "to exert unwanted political pressure on Myanmar."

He said the resolution did not attempt to find a solution to the complex situation in Rakhine state and refused to recognize government efforts to address the challenges.

The resolution, the ambassador said, "will sow seeds of distrust and will create further polarization of different communities in the region."

The resolution expresses alarm at the continuing influx of Rohingya Muslims to neighboring Bangladesh over the last four decades, now numbering 1.1 million including 744,000 who arrived since August 2017, "in the aftermath of atrocities committed by the security and armed forces of Myanmar."

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The assembly also expressed alarm at an independent international fact-finding mission's findings "of gross human rights violations and abuses suffered by Rohingya Muslims and other minorities" by the security forces, which the mission said "undoubtedly amount to the gravest crimes under international law."

The resolution called for an immediate cessation of fighting and hostilities.

It reiterated "deep distress at reports that unarmed individuals in Rakhine state have been and continue to be subjected to the excessive use of forces and violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law by the military and security and armed forces."

And it called for Myanmar's forces to protect all people, and for urgent steps to ensure justice for all rights violations

The resolution also urged the government "to expedite efforts to eliminate statelessness and the systematic and institutionalized discrimination" against the Rohingya and other minorities, to dismantle camps for Rohingyas and others displaced in Rakhine, and "to create the conditions necessary for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of all refugees, including Rohingya Muslim refugees."

It noted that the Rohingya have twice refused to return to Myanmar from Bangladesh because of the absence of these conditions.

Man who made 27,000 crosses for shooting victims is retiring

AURORA, Ill. (AP) — An Illinois man who made more than 27,000 crosses to commemorate victims of mass shootings across the country is retiring.

Greg Zanis came to realize, after 23 years, his Crosses for Losses ministry was beginning to take a personal and financial toll on him, according to The Beacon-News.

"I had a breaking point in El Paso," he said, referring to the mass shooting outside of a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. "I hadn't slept for two days, it was 106 degrees and I collapsed from the pressure when I heard there were two more victims of the mass shooting."

Zanis has set up crosses after the school shootings at Columbine, Sandy Hook and Parkland. He also placed crosses after the Las Vegas music festival shooting and the Orlando nightclub shooting.

"I leave a piece of my heart behind each time I go," he said.

In 2016 he made more than 700 crosses that were carried along Michigan Avenue in Chicago to honor each person who had been killed that year.

Earlier this year, Zanis found himself making crosses for his very own hometown of Aurora, Illinois, after a Henry Pratt Co. employee opened fire on his coworkers.

"After Orlando, it never stopped," Zanis said of the mass shootings. "The country had me on the road for a while every week. I have driven 850,000 miles to put up crosses. I slept in my truck and never had the money to cover what I was doing."

With donations from time to time, Zanis mainly relied on his own resources to build the crosses.

"At one point last year I was \$10,000 in debt and somebody covered that for me," he said. "Now I am \$14,000 in debt."

Zanis hopes to pass on his ministry to the nonprofit Lutheran Church Charities of Northbrook.

"I feel it is not the end of the ministry. It is the end of me doing it," he said.

NYC ups policing in Jewish areas after spate of attacks

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City is increasing its police presence in some Brooklyn neighborhoods with large Jewish populations after a string of possibly anti-Semitic attacks during the Hanukkah holiday, Mayor Bill de Blasio said after the latest episode happened Friday.

Besides making officers more visible in Borough Park, Crown Heights and Williamsburg, police will boost visits to houses of worship and some other places, the mayor tweeted.

"I feel pained that in this society, a place that is supposed to be of respect for everybody, a season when we're supposed to be respecting everybody, we see hate rearing its very ugly head. We will not accept it,"

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the Democrat said during a visit later Friday to Crown Heights, where he met with some representatives of the local Jewish community.

Around the city, police have gotten at least six reports this week — and eight since Dec. 13 — of attacks possibly propelled by anti-Jewish bias.

“It’s something that’s very alarming, and we treat it very seriously,” police Chief of Detectives Rodney Harrison said at a news conference Friday.

The attacks have happened as Jewish communities in the New York City metro area were already on edge after a deadly Dec. 10 shooting rampage at a northern New Jersey kosher market. New Jersey Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said the attack was driven by hatred of Jews and law enforcement.

“The persistent and violent anti-Semitic attacks on Jews in the New York area has reached a crisis level,” Eric Goldstein, the CEO of UJA-Federation of New York, said Friday. The organization is a large Jewish charity.

The latest incident happened around 12:40 a.m. Friday, when a woman slapped three other women in the face and head after encountering them on a Crown Heights corner, police said. The victims, who range in age from 22 to 31, suffered minor pain, police said.

Tiffany Harris, 30, was arrested on a hate-crime harassment charge. She was awaiting arraignment Friday. It wasn’t clear whether she had a lawyer who could comment on the charges, and no working telephone numbers for Harris could immediately be found.

Her arrest came hours after a hate crime assault arrest in Brooklyn’s Gravesend neighborhood. There, according to police and court documents, a woman was hit in the head with a bag by an attacker who jumped in front of her, made anti-Semitic comments and vowed that “your end is coming to you” Thursday afternoon. The victim, 34, was with her 3-year-old son.

The suspect, Ayana Logan, 42, was freed on supervised release after being arraigned Friday.

Her lawyer, Lauren Katzman, said she believed authorities were overreaching in casting the case as a hate crime.

“Ms. Logan is not guilty, and I look forward to fighting the case for her in court,” Katzman said.

On Monday, a Miami man was charged with hate-crime assault after police said he made an anti-Semitic remark and attacked a man in midtown Manhattan. The 65-year-old victim was punched and kicked, suffering cuts, police said.

He had been wearing a yarmulke, according to former state Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who has founded a group dedicated to combating anti-Semitism.

Steven Jorge, 28, is being held without bail, and a judge ordered a psychiatric exam for him, court records show. A message was left Friday for Jorge’s lawyer.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo told a state hate crimes task force to help police investigate the attack, calling it “a horrific and cowardly act of anti-Semitism.”

“It’s even more despicable that it occurred over the holidays,” the Democratic governor said in a statement Wednesday. Hanukkah began Sunday.

The New York Police Department’s Hate Crime Task Force is also investigating some other episodes this week as possibly motivated by anti-Semitism:

— Officers were told that two boys, ages 6 and 7, were accosted by a group of people while getting off an elevator in a Williamsburg apartment building Monday night, and one of the boys was hit, Harrison said. The attackers fled.

— A 25-year-old man told police he was walking on a Crown Heights street early Tuesday when a group of people started yelling anti-Semitic slurs at him and one threw a beverage at him. The suspects fled.

— Later Tuesday in Crown Heights, a 56-year-old man said that a group of people approached him, and that one of them punched him, while he was walking. No arrests have been made.

Associated Press writer Michael R. Sisak contributed to this report.

Major Southern California highways reopen after heavy snow

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Major interstates reopened in Southern California on Friday after lengthy closures caused by a cold storm that drenched the region and blanketed mountains and desert areas with heavy snow.

The notorious Grapevine section of Interstate 5 in towering Tejon Pass north of Los Angeles was finally opened after a 36-hour closure forced by dangerous conditions that set in Christmas night.

Vehicles were being escorted in both directions by California Highway Patrol units.

The storm had largely departed by Thursday evening but cold air remained. The CHP said the closure continued into Friday because overnight temperatures fell into single digits and miles of roadway froze.

In the inland region to the east, the Cajon Pass section of Interstate 15 reopened after being closed for many hours. The major route for travel between greater Los Angeles and Las Vegas also reopened in the Mojave Desert after a lengthy shutdown between Baker, California, and Primm, Nevada.

Adding to the traffic misery, accidents caused massive morning backups on icy State Route 14, a major commuter route between Los Angeles and high desert cities in the snow-blanketed Antelope Valley. Other high desert routes had similar problems.

The National Weather Service said the cold low pressure system that brought the heavy rain and snow to Southern California was over Arizona and moving east. Rain and snow made roads and highways slick in a broad area stretching from Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon in the north to southeastern Arizona, including the desert along Interstate 10 east of Benson.

In California, I-5 rises to more than 4,100 feet (1,250 meters) in Tejon Pass between Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley, making it susceptible to storm closures, especially on the steep section known as the Grapevine.

Cajon Pass rises to more than 3,700 feet (1,128 meters) between the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains on I-15, which also carries commuter traffic in addition to people traveling between southern Nevada and Southern California's cities.

Moisture wrapping around the low continued to bring some snow showers in the mountains in Southern California but that was expected to end.

Dry and warmer weather was expected in Southern California through most of the weekend. Another cold, low-pressure system was forecast to bring precipitation late Sunday through Monday before a drying trend sets in on New Year's Eve.

Navy SEALs call Edward Gallagher 'evil' in leaked videos

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Navy SEALs described their platoon leader, retired Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher, as "evil," "toxic" and "perfectly OK with killing anybody that was moving," in video footage of interviews obtained by The New York Times.

Gallagher's war crimes case earlier this year gained national attention after President Donald Trump intervened on his behalf despite strong objections from Pentagon leaders who said the president's move could damage the integrity of the military judicial system. The case also led to the Navy secretary's firing.

The footage published Friday was part of a trove of confidential Navy investigative materials that the Times obtained about the prosecution of Gallagher, who was accused of battlefield misconduct in Iraq. It shows members of Gallagher's SEAL Team 7 Alpha Platoon speaking to agents from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service about his conduct in sometimes emotional interviews.

They described how their chief seemed to love killing, how he targeted women and children and boasted that "burqas were flying."

The footage provides revealing insights of the men who worked with Gallagher and turned him in. They have never spoken publicly about the case, which has divided the elite fighting force known for its secrecy.

"The guy is freaking evil," Special Operator 1st Class Craig Miller says about Gallagher in one interview.

"The guy was toxic," Special Operator 1st Class Joshua Virens, a sniper, says in another.

Special Operator 1st Class Corey Scott, a medic in the platoon, says, "You could tell he was perfectly OK

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with killing anybody that was moving.”

The material also includes thousands of text messages that the SEALs sent to one another about Gallagher’s case and video from a SEAL’s helmet camera that shows Gallagher approach a barely conscious captive — a teenage Islamic State fighter — in May 2017. The camera then shuts off.

In video interviews, three SEALs said they saw Gallagher go on to stab the sedated captive for no reason and hold an impromptu ceremony over the body as if it were a trophy.

Miller called it “the most disgraceful thing I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Gallagher was charged with murder in the death of the wounded captive in Iraq, posing with the body in photos and shooting civilians. A jury of combat veterans acquitted him of all charges except one count for posing with a human casualty.

In the interviews, the platoon members told investigators that they tried repeatedly to report what they saw but no action was taken. In April 2018, they went outside the SEALs to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and Gallagher was arrested a few months later.

Gallagher has insisted that the charges against him were concocted by six disgruntled SEALs in his platoon who could not meet his high standards.

Reacting to the videos, Gallagher called the accusations “blatant lies” in a statement issued through his lawyer, the Times reported.

After his court-martial, Gallagher was demoted from chief petty officer to a 1st class petty officer.

Trump restored Gallagher’s rank and has repeatedly tweeted support for him, saying his case had been “handled very badly from the beginning.”

Gallagher, who was seeking to retire, was notified last month that a board of peers would determine if he should remain a SEAL.

Trump ordered the Navy to allow Gallagher to retire as a SEAL with his full rank intact. That led to the firing of Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer over his handling of the matter.

12 killed, dozens hurt after jetliner crashes in Kazakhstan

By VLADIMIR TRETYAKOV and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

ALMATY, Kazakhstan (AP) — A jetliner with 98 people aboard struggled to get airborne and crashed shortly after takeoff Friday in Kazakhstan, killing at least 12 people, authorities said.

The Bek Air jet, identified as a 23-year-old Fokker 100, hit a concrete wall and a two-story building soon after departing from Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city and former capital, airport officials said.

The aircraft’s tail also struck the runway twice during takeoff, indicating that it struggled to get off the ground, Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar said.

Fifty-four people were reported hospitalized with injuries, at least 10 of them in critical condition, officials said.

The cause of the predawn crash was unclear. Authorities quickly suspended all Bek Air and Fokker 100 flights in Kazakhstan while the investigation got underway.

One survivor said the plane started shaking less than two minutes after takeoff.

“At first, the left wing jolted really hard, then the right. The plane continued to gain altitude, shaking quite severely, and then went down,” Aslan Nazaraliyev told The Associated Press by phone.

Government officials said the jet underwent de-icing before the flight, but Nazaraliyev recalled that its wings were covered in ice, and passengers who used emergency exits over the wings slipped and fell. The weather in Almaty was clear, with temperatures just below freezing. The plane was flying to Nur-Sultan, the capital formerly known as Astana.

Video footage showed the front of the broken-up fuselage rammed against a building and the rear of the plane lying in a field next to the airport.

Passengers who survived may have been saved by the fact that the plane crashed at a lower speed and from a lower altitude because it was taking off, and it came down in terrain that may have eased the impact.

“The lower the speed, the lower the energy, and the fact that it lands on things that might not tear it

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up so much" all play a role, said Adrian Young, senior aviation consultant at the To70 consultancy in the Netherlands.

Cold weather may have helped prevent fire, Young said.

The plane built in 1996 included safety features that have increased passenger survival chances since the mid-1980s. Those features include stronger cabins less likely to crush or break apart and interior materials less apt to catch fire or emit toxic smoke.

"The more modern the aircraft you are sitting in, the better chance you have of escaping the accident," Young said.

Local authorities initially put the death toll at 15, but the interior ministry later revised the figure downward.

Officials in the Almaty branch of the health ministry could not explain why the figure was revised. They attributed the confusion to "agitation" at the site of the crash.

In a statement on its Facebook page, the airport said there was no fire, and a rescue operation began immediately.

Around 1,000 people were working at the snow-covered crash site. Dozens more in Almaty lined up at a local blood bank to donate for the injured.

The government promised to pay families of the dead around \$10,000 each.

The Fokker 100 is a mid-sized, twin-engine jet. The company that manufactured it went bankrupt in 1996, and production stopped the following year.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ordered an inspection of all airlines and aviation infrastructure in the country. Eighteen passenger airlines and four cargo carriers are currently registered in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic.

Kazakhstan's air-safety record is far from spotless. In 2009, all Kazakh airlines — with the exception of the flagship carrier Air Astana — were banned from operating in the European Union because they did not meet international safety standards. The ban was lifted in 2016.

Litvinova reported from Moscow. Associated Press Writer David McHugh contributed from Frankfurt, Germany.

UN official: Past decade has seen human rights 'backlash'

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The past decade has seen a backlash against human rights on every front, especially the rights of women and the LGBT communities, according to a top U.N. human rights official.

Andrew Gilmour, the outgoing assistant secretary-general for human rights, said the regression of the past 10 years hasn't equaled the advances that began in the late 1970s — but it is serious, widespread and regrettable.

He pointed to "populist authoritarian nationalists" in North America, South America, Europe and Asia, who he said are taking aim at the most vulnerable groups of society, including Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, Roma, and Mexican immigrants, as well as gays and women. He cited leaders who justify torture, the arrests and killing of journalists, the brutal repressions of demonstrations and "a whole closing of civil society space."

"I never thought that we would start hearing the terms 'concentration camps' again," Gilmour told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview. "And yet, in two countries of the world there's a real question."

He didn't name them but appeared to be referring to China's internment camps in western Xinjiang province, where an estimated 1 million members of the country's predominantly Muslim Uighur minority are being held; and detention centers on the United States' southern border, where mostly Central American migrants are being held while waiting to apply for asylum. Both countries strongly deny that concentration camp-like conditions exist.

Gilmour is leaving the United Nations on Dec. 31 after a 30-year career that has included posts in hot spots such as Iraq, South Sudan, Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and West Africa. Before taking

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up his current post in 2016, he served for four years as director of political, peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights affairs in former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's office.

Despite his dim view of the past decade, Gilmour — a Briton who previously worked in politics and journalism — said he didn't want to appear "relentlessly negative."

"The progress of human rights is certainly not a linear progression, and we have seen that," he said. "There was definite progression from the late '70s until the early years of this century. And we've now seen very much the counter-tendency of the last few years."

Gilmour said human rights were worse during the Cold War between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union, "but there wasn't a pushback as there is now."

He pointed to the fact that in the past eight years or so, many countries have adopted laws designed to restrict the funding and activities of nongovernmental organizations, especially human rights NGOs.

And he alleged that powerful U.N. member states stop human rights officials from speaking in the Security Council, while China and some other members "go to extraordinary lengths to prevent human rights defenders (from) entering the (U.N.) building even, let alone participate in the meetings."

In March 2018, for example, Russia used a procedural maneuver to block then-U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein from addressing a formal meeting of the Security Council, the U.N.'s most powerful body, Gilmour said.

Zeid was able to deliver his hard-hitting speech soon after, but only at a hurriedly organized informal council meeting where he decried "mind-numbing crimes" committed by all parties in Syria.

Gilmour also cited the United States' refusal to authorize the council to hold a meeting on the human rights situation in North Korea, a move that effectively killed the idea.

The rights of women and gays are also at stake, Gilmour said. He said nationalist authoritarian populist leaders such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have made "derogatory comments" about both groups.

He said the U.S. is "aggressively pushing" back against women's reproductive rights both at home and abroad. The result, he said, is that countries fearful of losing U.S. aid are cutting back their work on women's rights.

Gilmour also pointed out a report issued in September that cited 48 countries for punishing human rights defenders who have cooperated with the U.N.

"I feel that we really need to do more — everybody ... to defend those courageous defenders," he said.

Gilmour said the U.N. should also stand up when it comes to major violations of international law and major violations of human rights, but "I have found it extremely difficult to do so in all circumstances."

He said he was happy to hear that the new U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Kelly Craft, feels strongly about ensuring human rights.

"And I do hope that she will be gently and firmly held to that high standard," he said.

Gilmour said that after his departure from the U.N, he will take a fellowship at Oxford's All Souls College, where he will focus on the importance of uniting human rights and environmental rights groups.

"The human rights impact of climate change — it's going to be so monumental," he said.

As he relinquishes his post, Gilmour said he is counting on younger generations to take up the mantle of human rights and fight for other causes aimed at improving the world.

"What gives me hope as we start a new decade is that there will be a surge in youth activism that will help people to get courage, and to stand up for what they believe in," he said.

McGrath files to challenge McConnell in Senate race

By **BRUCE SCHREINER** Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Calling her party's victory in the Kentucky governor's race a jolt of momentum for her own bid to unseat a Republican incumbent, Democrat Amy McGrath on Friday officially filed to challenge Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in what looms as a bruising, big-spending campaign next year.

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McGrath, a retired Marine combat pilot, touted many of the same issues — health care and good-paying jobs — that Andy Beshear highlighted in ousting Republican incumbent Matt Bevin in last month's election for governor. Beshear ran a "great campaign" that focused on issues that hit home for Kentuckians, McGrath said in a phone interview with The Associated Press.

"It absolutely gives us momentum because it shows that against an unpopular Republican incumbent, a Democrat can win," McGrath said. "And we win by talking about those bread-and-butter issues that Kentuckians really care about.

"And that's what I'm going to be talking about over and over again," she said. "With Mitch McConnell, we're not going to get any progress on these things."

McGrath became the latest in a crowded field of candidates from both parties to file for McConnell's seat. McGrath, who lost a hotly contested congressional race last year, has shown her mettle as a fundraiser, raking in nearly \$11 million in her first few months as a Senate candidate, giving her a huge advantage over other Democratic candidates. McConnell has his own bulging campaign fund.

Another Democrat, Mike Broihier, also filed Friday as a U.S. Senate candidate. Broihier is a political newcomer with a broad resume as a Marine officer, farmer and small-town newspaperman.

Broihier also listed health care and the need for more good-paying jobs as key issues.

"Voters are energized," he said in an interview, adding that the coalition that put Beshear in the governor's office is "raring to go again" in the Senate race.

As the most powerful Republican in Congress, McConnell enters the race as a strong favorite in his pursuit of a seventh Senate term in 2020. The Republican senator touts his leadership position and his ability to deliver federal money for the Bluegrass State. This week, McConnell said he had a direct hand in securing \$400 million for a new veterans hospital in Louisville, \$25 million to fight Asian carp in western Kentucky and coal miner pension and health benefits.

McGrath tried to blunt that advantage of incumbency.

"Kentuckians know that his job is more than just bringing a check to Kentucky," she said Friday. "Where is his leadership on saving health care? Where is he at with the rising cost of prescription drugs? Why hasn't he done anything to stop the trade war that's hurting farmers and businesses in Kentucky? Where's he at with raising the minimum wage?"

"It's nice that he's getting money for Kentucky, but the rest of the job is so important," she added. "And it's actually bigger and broader and he's failing at all of these other things."

McConnell campaign manager Kevin Golden fired back, saying: "Amy McGrath knows she can't possibly make a cogent argument that she could do a fraction of the good Mitch McConnell does for Kentucky, so she's left with this disjointed, half-baked justification for her candidacy that is simply not ready for prime time."

McGrath said Friday she would work to strengthen the Affordable Care Act. She said she supports adding a public option to the health care law to give people "the choice of buying a government plan, much like I do as a military retiree." She also stressed the need for action to lower prescription costs.

In another jab at McConnell, McGrath said she supports term limits. She said there's "a real disconnect" between McConnell and "every day Kentuckians."

On the issue of impeachment, McGrath accused McConnell of shirking his "constitutional duty." She was referring to McConnell's comments that there would be "total coordination" between the White House and the Senate over the upcoming presidential impeachment trial.

McGrath said it was premature to say whether she would support the president's acquittal or conviction when the trial takes place. Senators should review the evidence and then make a judgment, she said.

Trump won Kentucky by a landslide in 2016 and will be a prohibitive favorite in the state next year when McGrath tries to dislodge McConnell. The Republican senator touts his close ties with Trump — from passing a tax overhaul to confirming conservative federal judges picked by the president.

But McGrath sees an opportunity to win over Trump supporters drawn to a political outsider.

"If you want more of the same, Mitch McConnell is your guy," McGrath said. "He is the ultimate insider.

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He is the epitome of dysfunction in Washington. You can't drain the swamp, as President Trump has touted doing, without getting rid of Mitch McConnell."

Lizzo named The Associated Press' Entertainer of the Year

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Breakthrough singer-rapper Lizzo has been named Entertainer of the Year by The Associated Press.

Voted by entertainment staffers of the news cooperative, Lizzo dominated the pop, R&B and rap charts in 2019 with songs like "Truth Hurts" and "Good As Hell." Though she released her first album in 2013, Lizzo dropped her major-label debut, "Cuz I Love You," this year and the success has made her the leading nominee at the 2020 Grammy Awards, where she is up for eight honors.

Outside of music, Lizzo has won over fans for promoting body positivity and denouncing fat shaming. Her live performances have been revered, and the 31-year-old classically trained flutist grinded as an independent and touring artist for years. She performed with Prince on his 2014 "Plectrumelectrum" album, released two years before his death.

Lizzo also had a role in the film "Hustlers," opposite Jennifer Lopez, Constance Wu and Cardi B, and she voiced a character in the animated picture "UglyDolls."

Lizzo was also named Entertainer of the Year by Time magazine.

US adds detail on how soldier died in Afghanistan this week

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. Special Forces soldier who died in Afghanistan this week was seizing a Taliban weapons cache when he was killed, the U.S. military said Friday.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Goble was with his unit when its members discovered an undisclosed amount of Taliban weapons in Kunduz Province, said Eric Pahon, a spokesman for the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Pahon said Goble and others were clearing out the cache when an explosion happened.

Pahon said the Taliban wrongly claimed that the service members were in a convoy and targeted by a roadside bomb during a raid.

Goble, 33, of Washington Township in Bergen County, New Jersey, was killed Monday and an Afghan service member was wounded. Goble served with the 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group.

Details about what type of weapon or ammunition exploded are still under investigation.

Controversy hits Romance Writers of America this holiday

By MARK KENNEDY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — There's not a lot of love at the Romance Writers of America this holiday season. Lots of passion, but not too much love.

The organization, which bills itself as the voice of romance writers and cites 9,000 members, has been upended over the way it has treated one of its authors, Courtney Milan, a Chinese American writer and a former chair of its Ethics Committee.

The Texas-based trade association initially accepted the vote of its Ethics Committee that Milan had violated the group's code with negative online comments about other writers and their work. Then, just before Christmas, it reversed course, rescinding its vote "pending a legal opinion." Now its entire leadership has changed.

The controversy was sparked this summer when Milan in a tweet called Kathryn Lynn Davis' 1999 book "Somewhere Lies the Moon" an "(expletive) racist mess." Davis and fellow writer Suzan Tisdale filed complaints. Milan was suspended Monday, sparking an outcry from fellow Romance Writers of America members and making #IStandWithCourtney trend.

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Author Felicia Grossman announced on Twitter that she had resigned her position at the association, saying it had “proven itself inconsistent with my values.” Author Alyssa Day called the decision to punish Milan “appallingly and profoundly wrongheaded.” Added writer Racheline Maltese: “Speaking out against racism is not an ethics violation.”

A letter from 28 organization leaders in various regional positions on Thursday asked for the resignation of the Romance Writers of America’s president, the president-elect and the executive director, calling “the handling of this situation is shameful.” The dissenting writers said a so-called “failure of leadership” made them “wonder if there is anywhere to go from here.”

The outreach group Bookstore Romance Day parted ways with the Romance Writers of America and best-selling author Deanna Raybourn returned the 2008 trophy she won from the organization for penning the Best Novel With Strong Romantic Elements, saying “I want no honors from them.”

The organization admitted in an open letter Thursday that the last several days left it at a “turning point.” President Carolyn Jewel, as well as board members Denny S. Bryce, Pintip Dunn, Seressia Glass, Tracey Livesay, Adrienne Mishel, Priscilla Oliveras, Erica Ridley and Farrah Rochon all resigned their positions.

“We have lost the trust of our membership and the romance community and we must find a way to rebuild that,” the organization said in a statement. “We will strive to uphold the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that we do.” Damon Suede, who had been named president-elect, was made president.

The tumult spiraled when Milan said she had been outraged by several sections of Davis’ book, including depictions of “exotic” Asian women (with “slanted almond eyes”) and a passage spoken by the fictional Chinese elder Madam Chin that “we are demure and quiet, as our mothers have trained us to be. We walk with our eyes lowered politely, and may not look higher than a man’s breast.”

Milan blasted back: “The notion of the submissive Chinese woman is a racist stereotype which fuels higher rates of violence against Asian women,” Milan wrote. “It is hard not to be upset about something that has done me and my loved ones real harm.”

Davis is white but she “immersed herself in Chinese culture for six years before writing the novel,” according to a statement by Tisdale. “Keep in mind, this book was written and published in the 1990’s,” she wrote.

Tisdale further alleged that Davis had lost a book deal over the online attacks and compared having Milan on the Romance Writers of America’s ethics committee to having a “neo-Nazi in charge of a UN human rights committee.”

In a twist, the Romance Writers of America this winter watched as another wholesome organization — The Hallmark Channel — found itself in controversy. The Hallmark Channel reversed itself and decided to reinstate commercials featuring same-sex couples that it had pulled following a complaint from a conservative group. The Romance Writers of America cheered the reversal, saying it hoped Hallmark “will choose the path of celebrating diversity and inclusivity.”

At least one romance author was looking toward a brighter new year. “The future of the organization may be shaky but our commitment to our beloved genre is not,” wrote Beverly Jenkins, whose next book is “On the Corner of Hope and Main.”

Mark Kennedy is at twitter.com/KennedyTwits

The Fun Guy: Kawhi Leonard is the AP’s male athlete of 2019

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

He was the Fun Guy. The board man who got paid. He overcame injury to reclaim his rightful place as one of the very best basketball players on the planet. He conquered the NBA world for a second time, bringing a championship to Canada. And then he joined the Los Angeles Clippers, ready to start anew.

“What it do, baby?”

For Kawhi Leonard in 2019, there finally is an answer to his infamous question: He did everything, without talking much.

Leonard is The Associated Press’ male athlete of the year for 2019, comfortably winning a vote by AP

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member sports editors and AP beat writers. He becomes the fifth NBA player to win the award, joining Larry Bird (1986), three-time recipient Michael Jordan (1991 through 1993), three-time recipient LeBron James (2013, 2016, 2018) and Stephen Curry (2015). The award has been made annually since 1931, and Simone Biles was announced Thursday as the women's recipient for 2019.

Leonard was the NBA Finals MVP for the second time, leading Toronto to its first championship — five years after he first smudged his fingerprints on both trophies with the San Antonio Spurs. He wound up leaving the Raptors in the summer for the Clippers, returning to his native Southern California and turning the historically woeful franchise into one of the top teams in the league.

"The ride was fun," Leonard said earlier this month on his return trip to Toronto, summing up his year with the Raptors. "I had a great time."

By now, it's no secret that Leonard is a man of few words.

He is not a man of few accomplishments.

He received more than twice as many points in the balloting as any of the other 18 vote-getters. Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson was second, followed by Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, tennis star Rafael Nadal and reigning NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks.

"Kawhi's pretty steady," said San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich, Leonard's former coach with the Spurs. "He's not a big talker. He doesn't try to find the limelight or anything like that. He's just a good guy who wanted to be good."

Somewhere along the way, he became great.

Leonard was the best player in last season's playoffs, after a regular season where he missed 22 games mostly because of what has become known as "load management" — the fancy term used on nights when he would sit out to rest. Leonard missed most of the 2017-18 season with the Spurs because of a complicated leg issue, and the NBA said last month that he is still dealing with "an ongoing injury to the patella tendon in his left knee."

He was limping at times in the playoffs, but it didn't matter. He averaged 30.5 points and 9.1 rebounds in the postseason, his 732 points in last year's playoffs ranking as the third-most in any NBA playoff year. In the biggest times, he came up the biggest — 15 points in the fourth quarter to carry Toronto past Milwaukee in the series-turning Game 5 of the Eastern Conference finals, and 17 points in the fourth quarter of Game 4 of the NBA Finals against Golden State to put the Raptors on the cusp of the title.

And, of course, he made The Shot: the four-bounce-off-the-rim, at-the-buzzer jump shot from the corner to beat Philadelphia in Game 7 of the second round.

"Without a doubt," Raptors coach Nick Nurse mused during the playoff run, "the best thing about this thing is that somehow I wound up on the sideline getting to watch this guy play up close."

Leonard performed at that lofty level even while dealing with a major distraction. During the NBA Finals, it was revealed that Leonard filed a federal lawsuit against Nike and claimed the footwear and apparel giant was blocking him from using a logo that he believes he owns.

"There's a lot of guys that are like, 'Look, I'm going to find a way to win and in a seven-game series I'm going to get the best of you in the end,'" said Miami's Jimmy Butler, who was with Philadelphia last season and saw up-close what makes Leonard tick. "But he's definitely up there. Your respect just grows. Push, pull, whatever he's got to do. ... He's going to find a way."

During the playoffs, Leonard's "I'm a fun guy" quote that he offered on his arrival in Toronto became a meme and a marketing slogan. So did his "Board man gets paid" line. And after the Raptors won the title, Serge Ibaka's video of Leonard went viral — they were in the back of a car, on the way to the parade, and Ibaka teed him up for the next unforgettable saying.

"Fun Guy, what's up baby?" Ibaka asked.

The answer was classic Leonard. Short, sweet, to the point.

"I'm playing to have fun and try to be the best player I can be," Leonard said. "I'm happy with myself and what I have done in my career and I'm just going to keep on from there. It's not about me being famous or want to have more fame than those guys. It's about me playing basketball and having fun on the floor."

'Mame,' 'Hello, Dolly!' composer Jerry Herman dies at 88

By MARK KENNEDY Associated Press

Tony Award-winning composer Jerry Herman, who wrote the cheerful, good-natured music and lyrics for such classic shows as "Mame," "Hello, Dolly!" and "La Cage aux Folles," died Thursday. He was 88.

His goddaughter Jane Dorian confirmed his death to The Associated Press early Friday. He died of pulmonary complications in Miami, where he had been living with his partner, real estate broker Terry Marler.

The creator of 10 Broadway shows and contributor to several more, Herman won two Tony Awards for best musical: "Hello, Dolly!" in 1964 and "La Cage aux Folles" in 1983. He also won two Grammys — for the "Mame" cast album and "Hello, Dolly!" as song of the year — and was a Kennedy Center honoree. He had three original Broadway productions playing at the same time from February 1969 to May 1969.

Tributes poured in Friday from Broadway royalty, including from Harvey Fierstein, who wrote the book of "La Cage aux Folles" alongside Herman's songs. "We lost one of the greats," Fierstein tweeted. "A collaborator and friend for almost 40 years. I cannot thank him enough for his love, trust, encouragement, support and laughter." Writer and host Seth Rudetsky honored Herman for writing "quintessential Broadway songs. Beautiful melodies and fantastic lyrics."

Herman wrote in the Rodgers and Hammerstein tradition, an optimistic composer at a time when others in his profession were exploring darker feelings and material. Just a few of his song titles revealed his depth of hope: "I'll Be Here Tomorrow," "The Best of Times," "Tap Your Troubles Away," "It's Today," "We Need a Little Christmas" and "Before the Parade Passes By." Even the title song to "Hello, Dolly!" is an advertisement to enjoy life.

Herman also had a direct, simple sense of melody and his lyrics had a natural, unforced quality. Over the years, he told the AP in 1995, "critics have sort of tossed me off as the popular and not the cerebral writer, and that was fine with me. That was exactly what I aimed at."

In accepting the Tony in 1984 for "La Cage Aux Folles," Herman said, "This award forever shatters a myth about the musical theater. There's been a rumor around for a couple of years that the simple, hummable show tune was no longer welcome on Broadway. Well, it's alive and well at the Palace Theatre.

Some saw that phrase — "the simple, hummable show tune" — as a subtle dig at Stephen Sondheim, known for challenging and complex songs and whose "Sunday in the Park with George" Herman had just bested. But Herman rejected any tension between the two musical theater giants.

"Only a small group of 'showbiz gossips' have constantly tried to create a feud between Mr. Sondheim and myself. I am as much of a Sondheim fan as you and everybody else in the world, and I believe that my comments upon winning the Tony for 'La Cage' clearly came from my delight with the show business community's endorsement of the simple melodic showtune which had been criticized by a few hard-nosed critics as being old fashioned," he said in a 2004 Q&A session with readers of Broadway.com.

Playwright Paul Rudnick on Friday praised Herman for providing "such joy." And director and choreographer Matthew Bourne said Herman's "feel-good shows full of melody and joy will live forever." Bernadette Peters, Elaine Paige and Carolee Carmello also mourned his passing, with Donna Murphy thanking the composer for "countless moments of explosive joy, deep poignancy, profound inspiration, humor and heartbreak."

Herman was born in New York in 1931 and raised in Jersey City. His parents ran a children's summer camp in the Catskills and he taught himself the piano. He noted that when he was born, his mother had a view of Broadway's Winter Garden Theatre marquee from her hospital bed.

Herman dated his intention to write musicals to the time his parents took him to "Annie Get Your Gun" and he went home and played five of Irving Berlin's songs on the piano.

"I thought what a gift this man has given a stranger. I wanted to give that gift to other people. That was my great inspiration, that night," he told The Associated Press in 1996.

After graduating from the University of Miami, Herman headed back to New York, writing and playing piano in a jazz club. He made his Broadway debut in 1960 contributing songs to the review "From A to Z" — alongside material by Fred Ebb and Woody Allen — and the next year tackled the entire score to a musical about the founding of the state of Israel, "Milk and Honey." It earned him his first Tony nomination.

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"Hello, Dolly!" starring Carol Channing opened in 1964 and ran for 2,844 performances, becoming Broadway's longest-running musical at the time. It won 10 Tonys and has been revived many times, most recently in 2017 with Bette Midler in the title role, a 19th-century widowed matchmaker who learns to live again.

"Mame" followed in 1966, starring Angela Lansbury, and went on to run for over 1,500 performances. She handed him his Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2009, saying he created songs like him: "bouncy, buoyant and optimistic."

In 1983 he had another hit with "La Cage aux Folles," a sweetly radical musical of its age, decades before the fight for marriage equality. It was a lavish adaptation of the successful French film about two gay men who own a splashy, drag nightclub on the Riviera. It contained the gay anthem "I Am What I Am" and ran for some 1,760 performances. Three of his shows, "Dear World," "The Grand Tour" and "Mack and Mabel," failed on Broadway.

Many of his songs have outlasted their vehicles: British ice skaters Torvill and Dean used the overture from "Mack and Mabel" to accompany a gold medal-winning routine in 1982. Writer-director Andrew Stanton used the Herman tunes "Put on Your Sunday Clothes" and "It Only Takes a Moment" to express the psyche of a love-starved, trash-compacting robot in the film "WALL-E."

Later in life, Herman composed a song for "Barney's Great Adventure," contributed the score for the 1996 made-for-TV movie "Mrs. Santa Claus" — earning Herman an Emmy nomination — and wrote his autobiography, "Showtune," published by Donald I. Fine.

"There has been no other music which took our breath away, that made us hum and cheer and respect ourselves more than a majestic Jerry Herman musical," said Dorian.

He is survived by his partner, Marler, and his goddaughters — Dorian and Dorian's own daughter, Sarah Haspel. Dorian said plans for a memorial service are still in the works for the man whose songs she said "are always on our lips and in our hearts."

AP reporters Lynn Elber in Los Angeles and Mallika Sen in New York contributed to this report.

Mark Kennedy is at twitter.com/KennedyTwits

Bali bombers' brother, bomb widow become friends, seek peace

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

TENGGULUN, Indonesia (AP) — The young Balinese widow stared across the courthouse at the man who had murdered her husband and 201 others, and longed to see him suffer.

Ever since that horrible night, when she realized amid the blackened body parts and smoldering debris that the father of her two little boys was dead, Ni Luh Erniati's rage at the men behind the bombing had remained locked deep inside. But now, it came roaring out.

She tried to scramble over a table blocking her path to hit Amrozi Nurhasyim, whose unrepentant grin throughout the trial over Indonesia's worst terrorist attack had earned him the nickname "The Smiling Assassin." And then she felt hands pulling her back, halting her bid for vengeance.

What would happen a decade later between her and Amrozi's brother — the man who had taught Amrozi how to make bombs — was unthinkable in that moment. Unthinkable that they would come face to face in a delicate attempt at reconciliation. Unthinkable that they would try to find the humanity in each other.

But inside that courthouse, and for years to come, Erniati wanted everyone associated with the 2002 bombings on the Indonesian island of Bali to be executed by firing squad. And she wanted to be the one to pull the trigger.

Her words to a reporter in 2012 were blunt: "I hate them," she said.

"I always will."

The practice of reconciling former terrorists and victims is rare and, to some, abhorrent. Yet it is gaining attention in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. While Islam in Indonesia is largely

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moderate, the country has battled Islamic militants since the Bali attacks. Last year, two families carried out suicide bombings at churches, and in October, a militant stabbed Indonesia's top security minister.

The attacks have left Indonesia hunting for ways to prevent terrorism — and to heal from it.

Indonesia embraces a so-called soft approach to counterterrorism, where officials recruit former militants to try to change extremist attitudes in their communities, and jailed terrorists go through deradicalization programs. Last year, Indonesia's government brought together dozens of former Islamic militants and victims for what was billed as a reconciliation conference. The results were mixed.

More quietly, over the past several years, there has been a growing alliance of former terrorists and victims brought together under the guidance of a group founded by the victim of a terrorist attack. Since 2013, 49 victims and six former extremists have reconciled through the Alliance for a Peaceful Indonesia, or AIDA. They have visited around 150 schools in parts of Indonesia known as hotbeds for extremist recruiters, sharing their stories with more than 8,000 students.

The hope is that if former terrorists and victims can learn to see each other as human, they can stop the cycle of vengeance. While reconciliation efforts have been launched after several large-scale conflicts — such as South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission — few attempts have been made in cases of terrorism.

"It's difficult for everyone to go through this," says Gema Varona, a Spanish researcher who studied reconciliation meetings between militants from the Basque separatist group ETA and their victims. "But it makes sense, because in terrorism, victims have been objectified. ... So we need that empathy."

Victims and perpetrators can learn to understand each other without legitimizing the violence, says Brunilda Pali, a board member of the European Forum for Restorative Justice.

"Understanding can help a lot," she says. "But it doesn't mean forgiving."

For Erniati, there was nothing at first to understand. How could she possibly understand something so horrific?

And why would she want to?

Erniati doesn't remember the first time she spotted the handsome, quiet waiter with the wavy black hair. But she remembers how much she and her fellow waitresses at the Sari Club idolized him.

Unlike the other men who worked at the popular nightclub, Gede Badrawan didn't flirt with customers. He only had eyes for Erniati.

Gede never asked her on a proper first date. They just fell into a relationship, and then into love, and a year later, into marriage. Two sons followed.

As a father, Gede was kind and doting. He took the family to play soccer at Kuta Beach, and to their favorite park. That park is the source of one of Erniati's most precious memories: of her younger son Made taking his first steps and starting to tumble, and of Gede catching him.

Around 11 p.m. on Oct. 12, 2002, Erniati had just settled into bed when a blast shattered the stillness.

She thought it was an electrical explosion. She didn't know that a suicide bomber had detonated himself inside Paddy's Pub, across the street from the Sari Club. She didn't know that seconds later, a van carrying a massive bomb and parked in front of the club had exploded. She wouldn't know until a witness told her much later that Gede had been standing near the van.

Erniati overheard people outside talking about bombs and body parts. She told herself Gede would return home after his shift ended.

When he didn't, she grew frantic. She wanted to search for him, but couldn't leave their sons — aged 9 and 1 — home alone. So Erniati, a Hindu, prayed for Gede until a friend arrived to watch the boys. As she sped toward the club on another friend's motorbike, she reassured herself: "My husband is alive. My husband is alive."

When she got there, she knew instantly that he was not. The club was a wasteland. At the hospital, she saw bodies so mangled they were unrecognizable.

The bombings had been carried out by al-Qaida-affiliated Islamic militant group Jemaah Islamiyah. The attack killed mostly Western tourists.

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It took four months before Erniati received confirmation that her husband was among the dead. When the forensics officer finally called, Erniati could manage only one question: "Exactly what condition is my husband's body in?"

"We probably identified about 70% of him," the officer replied. They had not found his head or his forearms or his abdomen or anything from the knees down.

For more than a year, Erniati continued to make Gede's breakfast, carefully laying the food on the table every morning, and throwing it away every night. He had been stolen from her so suddenly that part of her still felt he would come home.

Her tears made Made cry, so she shut herself in the bathroom to weep alone. She pretended for years that his father was simply away for work. He was 9 before she told him the truth.

In the midst of her agony, she searched for answers. But there were none to be found.

More than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from Bali, on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, Ali Fauzi had received word of the carnage.

He was, he says, as stunned as the rest of the world. Though he was one of Jemaah Islamiyah's most skilled bombmakers, and though three of his brothers had helped orchestrate the attack, Fauzi says he knew nothing of the plot.

He was raised in the east Java village of Tenggulun, which would become an epicenter of Islamic extremism. His radicalization, he says, was heavily influenced by his big brother Ali Ghufron. Ghufron, who often went by the alias Mukhlas, studied at an Islamic boarding school under the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiyah.

In 1994, the group sent Fauzi to a military-style camp in the Philippines, where he honed his knowledge of explosives. He became Jemaah Islamiyah's chief bomb instructor, teaching countless men — including his brothers — how to construct lethal devices.

Everything unraveled after the bombs erupted in Bali.

His brothers Mukhlas, Amrozi and Ali Imron were charged with the attack, along with several other members of Jemaah Islamiyah. Fauzi found himself on a police wanted list and fled to the Philippines, where he says he was jailed for three years on a charge of illegally joining the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. He was then extradited to Indonesia.

Fauzi was never charged with the bombings, but he spent months in police detention in Jakarta. It was there that the kindness of a police officer who helped get him medical treatment began to chip away at his convictions about people he had long seen as the enemy.

Yet it wasn't until a night years later, when he found himself staring at a Dutch man named Max Boon, that Fauzi truly understood the horror of his life's work.

Boon was sitting in his hotel room, waiting for a former terrorist to knock on his door. He was terrified.

Four years earlier, a suicide bomber had detonated his devices in the Jakarta JW Marriott lobby lounge, where then-33-year-old Boon was attending a business breakfast. Police suspected the attack had been orchestrated by Jemaah Islamiyah.

Boon suffered burns to over 70 percent of his body. Doctors amputated most of his left leg and his lower right leg.

Yet the attack hadn't shaken Boon's belief in the goodness of humans. He believed that had the bomber met him before the Marriott attack, he might have realized Boon wasn't his enemy.

Boon threw himself into peacebuilding efforts, working through the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at the Hague.

Fauzi, meanwhile, had been working to help deradicalize Islamic militants across Indonesia. Which is how he ended up shaking hands with Boon at a terrorism awareness conference in 2013.

Boon had already been planning a project in which terrorism victims would share their stories with students in areas targeted by extremist recruiters. He invited Fauzi to stop by his room to discuss the idea.

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Though Fauzi was not connected to the bombing that destroyed Boon's legs, Boon knew his history. As he waited, a dark thought rattled him: What if Fauzi was coming to finish the job?

But as Fauzi listened to the Dutch man talk about peace, he felt his heart crack.

That Boon, who was of a different faith, could forgive those who had caused him such pain rocked Fauzi to his core. He stared at the handsome young man sitting before him, with no legs where legs should be. And for the first time, he truly understood what a bomb does to a body and to a life.

Fauzi began to cry, and wrapped Boon in a hug. Boon hugged him back. Fauzi quickly agreed to meet other victims.

At the airport the next day, Fauzi sailed through security. But Boon's prosthetic legs set off the metal detector, forcing him to endure a pat-down. Boon turned to Fauzi and quipped: "So the former terrorist they let walk through, but the victim they have to control."

The former bombmaker burst out laughing and a friendship was born.

They had found the humanity in each other. Boon could only hope that when the others met Fauzi, they would find the same.

Erniati was filling her plate at a hotel buffet when Fauzi first approached her. Her heart pounded. How had she gotten here?

Months earlier, Boon had met with Erniati and several other bombing victims to present his idea. Erniati had balked.

For 12 years, she had struggled to move beyond her anger. The executions of Amrozi, Mukhlas and another convicted perpetrator had brought her no relief. The prospect of sitting down with a former terrorist sounded crazy.

A few victims, however, agreed to meet Fauzi for AIDA's pilot project. Afterward, their reviews were positive. Erniati warmed to the idea. Maybe he could answer her questions.

But now, staring at Fauzi inside the hotel where she and four other victims had gathered to meet him, she had no idea what to ask.

Fauzi's heart was pounding, too. "Hello," he said with a smile. "How are you?"

Erniati bristled. How could he smile after what he had done?

Her reply was curt: "I'm from Bali."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I apologize for what my brothers and my friends have done."

But Erniati couldn't get past his grin.

Fauzi saw the way the other victims were looking at him.

They hate me, he thought.

That night, Fauzi couldn't sleep. He lay in bed, fretting over what to say to Erniati and the others at their first official meeting.

When they finally convened around a table, Fauzi felt like a defendant on trial. Then Erniati began to tell her story.

As Fauzi listened, his awkwardness morphed into anguish. The image of Erniati searching for Gede amid the smoking ruins, of her struggles to raise their sons alone, was unbearable.

Fauzi had long been proud of his skills as a bombmaker. But in that moment, he wished he could erase everything he'd ever known about bombs.

He began to weep. "I'm sorry," he said through tears. "I'm very sorry."

Erniati looked at Fauzi and felt something shift within her. He was in pain, just as she was. Their pain came from different places, but it was pain all the same.

What he said meant less to her than what he felt. To Erniati, apologies are just words. But the ability to understand another person's suffering, she says, goes to the core of who you are.

The anger that had long suffocated her began to lift.

Fauzi excused himself to wash his tearstained face. When he returned, he told his own story, about his

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path in and out of radical ideology, and his commitment to peace.

His apologies, though, were not welcomed by all. One victim angrily rejected his words.

Fauzi understood. Were the situation reversed, he says, he doubts he would be as accepting as Boon and Erniati.

Over the next few years, Erniati and Fauzi grew closer. They visited schools with AIDA, sharing their story of reconciliation. Fauzi started a foundation called the Circle of Peace, which helps deradicalize extremists. Erniati was moved by his efforts, which seemed a genuine attempt to atone.

One day, Erniati asked Fauzi if she could see his home. It was a stunning request; The bombers had plotted the attack that killed her husband in a house not far away, and Mukhlas and Amrozi's families live just across the street.

But she wanted to see how Fauzi lived. And so, with some trepidation, Boon and others from AIDA agreed. As their car rolled into Fauzi's village, Erniati felt like she was entering a lion's den.

When she arrived at Fauzi's home, however, she found it reassuringly normal. There was laundry scattered around, just like at her house. Fauzi introduced her to his wife and children and showed her his goats.

When he had to break away to teach a class at Islamic school, he sent the group to a water park with his friend Iswanto, another former Jemaah Islamiyah militant. Erniati and Iswanto rode the rollercoaster together; for her, the ride was scarier than the one-time terrorist.

She and Fauzi became friends on Facebook. Fauzi sent Erniati a gem she had once mentioned was beautiful. She had it made into a necklace.

But she still couldn't accept what his brothers had done.

Erniati stands barefoot on the verandah of her modest home, slicing scissors through black fabric as Hindu chants ring out from a nearby temple. This is how she has kept her family alive for 17 years, through a small garment company an Australian man set up for Balinese bombing widows.

Her colleague, Warti, swings by. Like Erniati, Warti's husband was killed in the attack. Unlike Erniati, she has no desire to meet anyone associated with his killers. For her, all of that is best left in the past. To meet now, she says, would only cause her more pain.

"I don't want to dwell and keep thinking about it," she says.

Erniati understands this. She runs the Isana Dewata Foundation, an advocacy group for bombing victims, and knows everyone heals in different ways.

And reconciliation doesn't help everyone. Karen Brouneus, a Swedish psychologist, studied the effects of Rwanda's post-genocide, community-based court system, which focused on reconciliation. Her survey of 1,200 Rwandans found that those who participated in the courts had higher levels of depression and PTSD than those who didn't.

Those who have studied reconciliation efforts say victims must never be forced into them. The victims in AIDA's programs are all voluntary, Boon says. The foundation also carefully vets former extremists to ensure they have truly reformed, checking their background with Indonesian researchers and slowly getting to know them.

AIDA says the results of its efforts have been promising: Friendships have formed between former terrorists and victims. And after sharing their stories at schools, students' attitudes toward violence changed significantly, including a 68% decrease in those who agree they're entitled to revenge if they or their family fell victim to violence.

Fauzi himself acknowledges that reconciliation wouldn't work for every former militant.

"I realize that humans are different from one another," he says. "So it's not easy to take their hearts as a whole."

The uniqueness of these bonds is something that Jo Berry understands intimately. In 1984, Berry's father was killed in a bombing by the Irish Republican Army. In 2000, she asked to meet the man who planted the bomb, Patrick Magee, and the two became friends. Yet she has met plenty of former IRA activists she hopes to never meet again.

"It's not like there's one formula," she says. "And that's why I think it's really hard."

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Erniati found that her warmth toward Fauzi did not carry over to his brothers. In 2015, she visited one of them, Ali Imron, in jail. He too apologized, but she wasn't convinced.

Her feelings toward the executed Amrozi and Mukhlas are even more muddled.

When it comes to them, she says, she just wants to forget.

On a sunny morning in east Java, Erniati and Fauzi sit on his couch, nibbling dates. The smile that once enraged Erniati she now returns.

Outside, around a dozen ex-Jemaah Islamiyah militants prepare for a local bicycle race. Erniati smiles politely at them, but keeps her distance.

Fauzi still wrestles with guilt, but Erniati's acceptance of him has lessened the sting.

Erniati continues to meet with former militants. She hopes her story can put them on the right path. Her sadness returns on occasion. But her anger is gone.

Later, she heads to lunch with Iswanto, the ex-militant with whom she'd ridden the rollercoaster years before. Along the way, he gestures toward a fenced-off enclosure on the side of the road.

This, he tells her, is the burial site of Amrozi and Mukhlas.

Erniati stares at the grassy plot. Someday, she says, she would like to place flowers on their graves and send up a prayer.

She will pray for God to forgive the men who killed her husband.

Not because she accepts what they did. But because if God can forgive them, even if she can't, then maybe their spirits can help bring the world what Fauzi's friendship helped bring her: peace.

Associated Press writer Niniek Karmini contributed to this report.

Venezuela's poorest struggle to take care of their dead

By **RODRIGO ABD, SCOTT SMITH and SHEYLA URDANETA** Associated Press

MARACAIBO, Venezuela (AP) — The last time anybody in Nerio García's family heard his voice was on a crackly call from jail outside Maracaibo, Venezuela's second city. He called from a borrowed cellphone, pleading to his brother for help.

"Tell Mother to bring me some food," García, 29, said in the 2 a.m. call, relatives later recounted.

Another call from a fellow inmate said García had stolen a gun and escaped, drawing his mother, Juana Castillo, to the overcrowded jail in Cabimas. She was desperate for answers, but was instead told to go looking on the shoreline of nearby Lake Maracaibo. There, she found him shot between the eyes and floating in the water.

"I'm desperate," Castillo told The Associated Press, while with her son's body at a morgue near the jail. "I want to take my son home to bury him near me."

While the family may never know the truth of his death, the grisly discovery set the grief-stricken mother on a scramble to rescue her son's body from the water and to find enough money to bury him.

Death has become an overwhelming financial burden for many of Venezuela's poorest, who already struggle to find dignity in life. They scrape together food and shelter needed to get through each day, and a relative's death can become the breaking point.

The cost of transporting a body and buying a casket and burial plot for a funeral can run into the hundreds of dollars, or more. In Venezuela, most earn the minimum wage of roughly \$3 a month as hyperinflation devours pay.

Some overcome the financial burden of a relative's death by renting caskets, a cheaper option than buying. Others turn to amateur morticians, who embalm bodies at home and convert wooden furniture into coffins.

For many in Maracaibo, Venezuela's economic crash in the last five years hit especially hard. Once a center of the nation's vast oil wealth, production under two decades of socialist rule has plummeted to a fraction of its high, taking down residents' standard of living.

Opposition leader Juan Guaidó this year launched a campaign promising to oust President Nicolás Maduro

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and return the nation to its bygone prosperity. While the power struggle plays out, millions of Venezuelans remain caught in the middle. The poor and wealthy alike in Maracaibo live with rationed electricity, and despite the region's abundant oil, they often wait in line for days to gas up their cars.

Among life's struggles, too often comes the need to provide a relative with a funeral.

Community activist Carolina Leal has assumed the role of funeral director in her poor and often violent Maracaibo neighborhood of Altos de Milagro Norte, hoping to rid families of unnecessary misery she has seen too many times.

Leal said police only enter when they are coming to mete out deadly street justice, while too many others die from long, agonizing illnesses such as AIDS and tuberculosis. She has also witnessed deaths from malnutrition and poisoning from people eating garbage in the street.

"This slum here has turned into a living hell," Leal said. "Some bodies were decomposing at home because officials we asked didn't help. It's infuriating."

Leal has formed a team with two other neighbors who employ their unique skills to bring dignity to the dead. One busy month recently, Leal said she oversaw 12 funerals.

Upon learning of a death, carpenter Arturo Vielma visits the mourning family's home, asking what wooden furniture, like a table or standalone closet, they can spare for him to build a casket.

Roberto Molero next comes to embalm the body with no training other than seeing it done during a decade that he worked as a driver at a funeral home. This gives families time to mourn and come up with money while they make funeral arrangements before the body decomposes.

Molero's kit includes a sewing needle and thread to stitch together faces of those killed in violent clashes with police. He charges the equivalent of \$5.

"Not everyone can pay that, so some I've let go for free," Molero said. "What are you going to do if we grew up together?"

Leal's contribution stems from her former role as a socialist party enforcer. She says she has abandoned a violent past, but isn't shy about cajoling officials at the mayor's office to provide a burial place. Once, she pressed her point by bringing a coffin to city hall until officials found a grave site.

Venezuela's crisis has reshaped the funeral industry.

Funeral homes in Maracaibo said that in the last two years they have started renting caskets to families for \$50. The family returns the casket and sends their loved one's body to be cremated, making it dramatically cheaper than buying a coffin for \$100 to \$300.

Furniture maker Sergio Morales for years crafted tables, chairs, bed frames and night dressers, but as Venezuela's crisis deepened, he began using the same wood, nails and glue to build simple wooden caskets for less than \$100. They are on display outside on the street.

The indignities of death don't quickly end. Thieves often raid graves for valuables, while public cemeteries often go abandoned, overgrown with weeds.

When families cannot afford headstones for loved ones at the Maracaibo public cemetery, each rain storm erases any sign of a fresh grave, making it impossible for them to find their loved one's plot when they return.

García's mother described how she put aside an urge to find justice for her son's death and focused rather on how she would rescue his body and bury it. With help at the lake shore, they tied him to a tree so he didn't drift away, and next told police, who pulled the body from the water and delivered it to the morgue. The autopsy showed he was shot in the head and also in the back.

García had been jailed for two years following a family feud and was expected to go free just days after being shot in the jail, his attorney said. Instead, his mother and siblings set out borrowing money from neighbors to cover the funeral expenses.

They finally brought him home to a poor Maracaibo neighborhood, where the family lives in a half-built shack made of cinder blocks. It's only partially covered by a roof and lacks glass for the windows.

They mourned over the casket, placing a plastic bottle on the ground, scrawled with the word "donations." Incense burned to mask the smell, and his sisters took turns shooing away flies drawn to the decomposing body.

At the cemetery, they lowered the casket into a donated burial plot. His mother, shaky on her legs, stepped to the grave and placed inside three small loaves of bread and a malt drink.

She said this was her way of feeding her son, satisfying the hunger he had cried about in his final call home hours before his death.

Scott Smith on Twitter: @ScottSmithAP

Israel's Netanyahu shores up base but obstacles remain

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shored up his base with a landslide primary victory announced early Friday, but he will need a big win in national elections in March if he hopes to stay in office and gain immunity from prosecution on corruption charges.

Netanyahu handily defeated Gideon Saar, a former aide and Cabinet minister, in a Likud party primary held Thursday, winning 72% of the vote.

"This is the time to unite, to bring a sweeping victory to the Likud and the right in the Knesset elections," Netanyahu told reporters Friday. "The final and sweeping primary decision was a huge expression of trust in my way, in our way."

Only around half the party's 116,000 registered members turned out to vote, in part because of stormy weather. They represent the most faithful members of a party defined by fierce loyalty, which has only had four leaders since it was founded in the 1970s.

Netanyahu faces a much greater challenge in March — the third vote in less than a year — after failing to form a government in the last two elections, held in April and September.

This time around the stakes are much higher. Netanyahu was indicted last month on serious charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. His best hope of escaping prosecution is to gain a 61-seat majority in parliament that is willing to grant him immunity.

"A candidate for prime minister who is under indictment and requests immunity for himself is something we've never had," Yossi Verter wrote in the Haaretz newspaper. "It's hard to see how he, with all his sophisticated campaigning abilities, can make this situation work in his favor."

The September vote left Netanyahu's Likud in a virtual tie with the centrist Blue and White party led by former army chief of staff Benny Gantz. Neither was able to form a majority with their natural allies, and they were unable to form a national unity government in part because Blue and White refused to accept an indicted prime minister.

Polls indicate the March vote would produce a similar outcome, rounding out more than a year of uncertainty in which Netanyahu has led a caretaker government.

"It appears that the defendant Netanyahu, who is leading the State of Israel down a path of corruption, will continue to lead Likud," Gantz said in a statement. "Blue and White must achieve a decisive outcome that will extricate us from both political deadlock and a path of corruption."

The Supreme Court is meanwhile set to meet next week to consider whether an indicted member of parliament is eligible to become prime minister. It's unclear when a ruling would be handed down, but if the court finds Netanyahu ineligible it could precipitate a constitutional crisis.

Reuven Hazan, a political science professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said the court is likely to defer any ruling, potentially even until after the elections.

"They understand that if he wins big tonight and they turn around and say he cannot be prime minister, then although they've done their job, which is to make the right legal decision, that they will be in political turmoil that could rip the elections apart," Hazan said Thursday, before the primary results were announced.

Netanyahu is already Israel's longest-serving prime minister and has cultivated the image of a veteran statesman with close personal ties to President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin and other world leaders.

His refusal over the last decade to make any concessions to the Palestinians was rewarded after Trump

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took office, as the U.S. began openly siding with Israel on several key issues.

Netanyahu's hard-line stance on Iran has also proved popular. He was a staunch opponent of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which has unraveled since Trump withdrew from the agreement. A wave of Israeli strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in recent years has burnished Netanyahu's claims to having protected Israel from its enemies.

His fortunes have nevertheless waned over the past year. His party came in second place in September's elections, and two months later he was indicted on allegations of trading legislative and regulatory favors for lavish gifts and favorable media coverage.

Netanyahu has dismissed the indictment as an "attempted coup" by hostile media and law enforcement and has vowed to battle the charges from the prime minister's office.

The political uncertainty has led the Trump administration to delay the release of its long-anticipated Mideast peace plan.

The Palestinians have already rejected the plan, saying the administration is marching in lockstep with Israel's right-wing government. They point to Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, to cut off virtually all aid to the Palestinians and to reverse longstanding opposition to Jewish settlements in annexed east Jerusalem and the West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967 war.

Netanyahu has meanwhile said that Israel is on the cusp of securing U.S. support for the annexation of large parts of the occupied West Bank — but only if he remains in power.

That would all but extinguish the Palestinians' hope of one day establishing an independent state while cementing Netanyahu's legacy as a transformative leader.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu shifted away from the divisiveness of his previous campaigns and appeared rejuvenated as he met face-to-face with Likud supporters during a packed schedule of public events. He has long been seen as a political magician, and the new approach could allow him to pull off yet another comeback.

"One might say that Netanyahu seems reinvigorated and rejuvenated both for the election fight in March and the struggle against those corruption charges. Except that, in essence, they are two sides of the same coin," David Horowitz, the founding editor of the Times of Israel, wrote. "If he wins in March, he may have the political power to fend off those court cases as well with an immunity bid. If he loses, of course, even Likud may not again be so forgiving."

New Russian weapon can travel 27 times the speed of sound

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A new intercontinental weapon that can fly 27 times the speed of sound became operational Friday, Russia's defense minister reported to President Vladimir Putin, bolstering the country's nuclear strike capability.

Putin has described the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle as a technological breakthrough comparable to the 1957 Soviet launch of the first satellite. The new Russian weapon and a similar system being developed by China have troubled the United States, which has pondered defense strategies.

The Avangard is launched atop an intercontinental ballistic missile, but unlike a regular missile warhead that follows a predictable path after separation it can make sharp maneuvers in the atmosphere en route to target, making it much harder to intercept.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu informed Putin that the first missile unit equipped with the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle entered combat duty.

"I congratulate you on this landmark event for the military and the entire nation," Shoigu said later during a conference call with top military leaders.

The Strategic Missile Forces chief, Gen. Sergei Karakayev, said during the call that the Avangard was put on duty with a unit in the Orenburg region in the southern Ural Mountains.

Putin unveiled the Avangard among other prospective weapons systems in his state-of-the-nation address in March 2018, noting that its ability to make sharp maneuvers on its way to a target will render

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missile defense useless.

"It heads to target like a meteorite, like a fireball," he said at the time.

The Russian leader noted that Avangard is designed using new composite materials to withstand temperatures of up to 2,000 Celsius (3,632 Fahrenheit) resulting from a flight through the atmosphere at hypersonic speeds.

The military said the Avangard is capable of flying 27 times faster than the speed of sound. It carries a nuclear weapon of up to 2 megatons.

Putin has said Russia had to develop the Avangard and other prospective weapons systems because of U.S. efforts to develop a missile defense system that he claimed could erode Russia's nuclear deterrent. Moscow has scoffed at U.S. claims that its missile shield isn't intended to counter Russia's massive missile arsenals.

Earlier this week, Putin emphasized that Russia is the only country armed with hypersonic weapons. He noted that for the first time Russia is leading the world in developing an entire new class of weapons, unlike in the past when it was catching up with the U.S.

In December 2018, the Avangard was launched from the Dombarovskiy missile base in the southern Urals and successfully hit a practice target on the Kura shooting range on Kamchatka, 6,000 kilometers (3,700 miles) away.

Russian media reports indicated that the Avangard will first be mounted on Soviet-built RS-18B intercontinental ballistic missiles, code-named SS-19 by NATO. It is expected to be fitted to the prospective Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile after it becomes operational.

The Defense Ministry said last month it demonstrated the Avangard to a team of U.S. inspectors as part of transparency measures under the New Start nuclear arms treaty with the U.S.

The Russian military previously had commissioned another hypersonic weapon of a smaller range.

The Kinzhal (Dagger), which is carried by MiG-31 fighter jets, entered service with the Russian air force last year. Putin has said the missile flies 10 times faster than the speed of sound, has a range of more than 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) and can carry a nuclear or a conventional warhead. The military said it is capable of hitting both land targets and navy ships.

China has tested its own hypersonic glide vehicle, believed to be capable of traveling at least five times the speed of sound. It displayed the weapon called Dong Feng 17, or DF-17, at a military parade marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese state.

U.S. officials have talked about putting a layer of sensors in space to more quickly detect enemy missiles, particularly the hypersonic weapons. The administration also plans to study the idea of basing interceptors in space, so the U.S. can strike incoming enemy missiles during the first minutes of flight when the booster engines are still burning.

The Pentagon also has been working on the development of hypersonic weapons in recent years, and Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in August that he believes "it's probably a matter of a couple of years" before the U.S. has one. He has called it a priority as the military works to develop new long-range fire capabilities.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 28, the 362nd day of 2019. There are three days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 28, 1945, Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance.

On this date:

In 1612, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei observed the planet Neptune, but mistook it for a star. (Neptune wasn't officially discovered until 1846 by Johann Gottfried Galle.)

In 1832, John C. Calhoun became the first vice president of the United States to resign, stepping down

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because of differences with President Andrew Jackson.

In 1846, Iowa became the 29th state to be admitted to the Union.

In 1879, a section of the Tay Bridge in Dundee, Scotland, collapsed as a train was traveling over it, sending an estimated 75 people to their deaths in the river below.

In 1895, the Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, held the first public showing of their movies in Paris.

In 1908, a major earthquake followed by a tsunami devastated the Italian city of Messina, killing at least 70,000 people.

In 1961, the Tennessee Williams play "Night of the Iguana" opened on Broadway. Former first lady Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, the second wife of President Woodrow Wilson, died in Washington at age 89.

In 1972, Kim Il Sung, the premier of North Korea, was named the country's president under a new constitution.

In 1981, Elizabeth Jordan Carr, the first American "test-tube" baby, was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

In 1987, the bodies of 14 relatives of Ronald Gene Simmons were found at his home near Dover, Arkansas, after Simmons shot and killed two other people in Russellville. (Simmons, who never explained his motives, was executed in 1990.)

In 2001, the National Guard was called out to help Buffalo, New York, dig out from a paralyzing, 5-day storm that had unloaded nearly 7 feet of snow.

In 2007, Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was laid to rest as the country's army tried to quell a frenzy of rioting in the wake of her assassination.

Ten years ago: Al-Qaida in Yemen claimed responsibility for a Christmas Day attempt to blow up a U.S.-bound airliner. A bomb blast killed at least 44 people in a Shiite procession in the southern Pakistan city of Karachi. In Argentina, two men turned away from Buenos Aires were wed in Ushuaia (oo-SWY'-ah), the world's southernmost city, in Latin America's first same-sex marriage.

Five years ago: AirAsia Flight 8501, an Airbus A-320, crashed during a flight from Indonesia to Singapore, killing all 162 people on board. The war in Afghanistan, fought for 13 bloody years and still raging, came to a formal end with a quiet flag-lowering ceremony in Kabul that marked the transition of the fighting from U.S.-led combat troops to the country's own security forces.

One year ago: President Donald Trump canceled New Year's plans, deciding not to travel to Florida amid a partial government shutdown that was expected to continue into the new year. The Environmental Protection Agency became the latest government agency to furlough employees during the partial government shutdown, but said it would keep disaster-response teams and other essential workers on the job. After a two-day manhunt, authorities arrested a suspected drunken driver accused of killing a California police officer who had pulled him over; they said the man later identified as Paulo Virgen Mendoza was trying to flee back to Mexico, where he lived before illegally crossing into the U.S. (Virgen Mendoza has pleaded not guilty to murder in the shooting death of Cpl. Ronil Singh).

Today's Birthdays: Former United Auto Workers union president Owen Bieber is 90. Actress Nichelle Nichols is 87. Actress Dame Maggie Smith is 85. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., is 75. Former Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., is 73. Rock singer-musician Edgar Winter is 73. Funk musician Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste (The Meters) is 71. Actor Denzel Washington is 65. TV personality Gayle King is 65. Country singer Joe Diffie is 61. Country musician Mike McGuire (Shenandoah) is 61. Actor Chad McQueen is 59. Country singer-musician Marty Roe (Diamond Rio) is 59. Actor Malcolm Gets is 56. Actor Mauricio Mendoza is 50. Actress Elaine Hendrix is 49. Political commentator Ana Navarro is 48. Talk show host Seth Meyers is 46. Actor Brendan Hines is 43. Actor Joe Manganiello is 43. Actress Vanessa Ferlito is 42. Rhythm-and-blues singer John Legend is 41. Rapper-musician-producer Terrace Martin is 41. Actor Andre Holland is 40. Actress Sienna Miller is 38. Actress Beau Garrett (TV: "The Good Doctor") is 37. Pop singer Kasey Sheridan (Dream) is 33. Actor Thomas Dekker is 32. Actress Mackenzie Rosman is 30. Pop singer David Archuleta is 29. Actress Mary-Charles Jones (TV: "Kevin Can Wait") is 18. Actor Miles Brown is 15.

Thought for Today: "There is no luck except where there is discipline." — Irish proverb.

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