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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

"FOR LAST YEAR'S
WORDS BELONG
TO LAST YEAR'S
LANGUAGE.
AND NEXT YEAR'S
WORDS AWAIT
ANOTHER VOICE."

-T.S. ELIOT



**We're here to put our precision ag tools to
work for you into the 2020s and beyond!**

2020



FULL CIRCLE AG

Tomorrow's Vision Today

AGRONOMY • ENERGY • FEED • GRAIN • CONSULTING

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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State Park Fees Increase Jan. 1

PIERRE, S.D. – The New Year will bring fee changes to South Dakota State Parks. Changes will affect park entrance licenses and select camping fees.

“The modest increases for individuals would potentially mean an additional \$3 million in revenue for Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) to maintain and repair park amenities and necessities, like roads and bridges,” said GFP deputy secretary Kevin Robling. “We need to make sure our parks are meeting the high standards of excellence that all our park visitors expect, now and for generations to come.”

Annual licenses to state parks will be \$36 with a daily fee of \$8. A 7-day motorcycle pass to Custer State Park will be \$20. In campgrounds, prime campsites will increase to \$26, preferred sites to \$23 and modern to \$20. Fees for non-electric, tent-only sites will be going down in some cases. These sites will now be consistently \$15 statewide.

This is the first park entrance fee increase since 2014. The changes are in line with the rate of inflation and with fees in surrounding states.



Terri Mount Seljeskog posted a video on Facebook that showed semi after semi north of Sioux Falls in the ditch shortly after the interstate was opened. This video was shot at 2:30 p.m. on Monday.

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Today



Sunny

High: 18 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 14 °F

New Year's Day



Mostly Cloudy

High: 31 °F

Wednesday Night



Mostly Cloudy

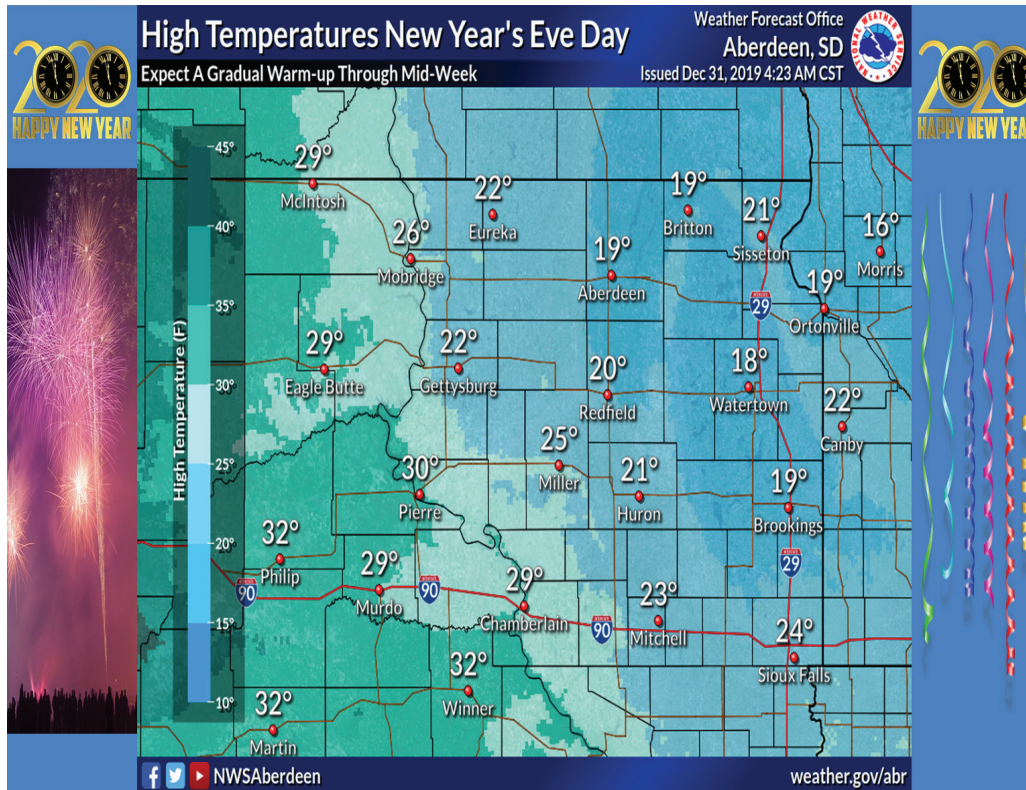
Low: 25 °F

Thursday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 33 °F



Looks like dry weather will be back for much of the next week, while Alberta Clipper systems work their way along the U.S. and Canada border. Today starts off rather cold for some folks, but a gradual warm up is in store through Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

2010: An area of low pressure moved across the Northern Plains on New Year's Eve bringing widespread heavy snowfall along with blizzard conditions. Bitter cold northwest winds of 25 to 40 mph combined with additional snowfall of 6 to 10 inches brought reduced visibility to near zero across much of the region. This storm was the second blizzard in two days across the area. The blizzard conditions continued into early New Year's Day. Both Interstates 29 and 90 were closed from the 31st until Sunday, January 2nd. There were several stranded motorists along Highway 83 with five people being rescued. The total snowfall amounts from the two storms ranged from 6 to 15 inches across the region.

The two-day snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte; 7 inches at Doland; 8 inches at Mobridge and Gann Valley; 9 inches at Castlewood; 10 inches at Murdo, Clark, Ipswich, Kennebec, and Watertown and 11 inches at Clear Lake and Bryant. Locations with a foot or more of snow included 12 inches at Aberdeen, Gettysburg, Highmore, Milbank, Mission Ridge, and Bowdle; 13 inches at Eureka, Pierre, Onida, and Blunt; 14 inches at Mellette, Sisseton, Victor, and Roscoe with 15 inches at Britton, Webster, and Redfield. The snowfall began between 6 am and noon CST on the 31st and ended between 4 am and 11 am CST on January 1st.

1876: A heavy snowstorm hit southern Arkansas, with amounts well over 20 inches in places. 28 inches was reported near Warren, and 24–28 inches was reported at Arkansas City.

1890: According to the National Meteorological Library and Archive from the United Kingdom, during December 1890, Westminster, England saw zero hours of sunshine.

1933: During the last week of December, a series of winter storms pounded the mountainside with 12 inches of rain near Los Angeles. More rain occurred on New Year's Eve, including 4.86 inches in downtown Los Angeles. The 4.86 inches is currently the fourth most rainfall to occur in one day in downtown Los Angeles since 1877. Around midnight, hillsides in at least three mountain locations collapsed sending millions of tons of mud and debris into the Crescenta Valley neighborhoods below. Crescenta Valley is a few miles north of Los Angeles. This mudslide destroyed more than 400 homes. Following the disaster, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the County of Los Angeles built a flood control system of catch basins, and concrete storm drains, designed to prevent a repeat of the 1934 disaster.

1967: The kickoff temperature for the NFL Championship Game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Green Bay Packers was -13°F with a wind chill of -36°F. This game is known as the "Ice Bowl."

2000: The "Snow Bowl" was played between Mississippi St and Texas A&M at Independence Stadium in Shreveport, Louisiana. Snow began about a half hour before kickoff and didn't stop until well after the bowl game.

1917 - The temperature at Lewisburg, WV, plunged to 37 degrees below zero to set a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1929 - Greenland Ranch, in Death Valley, California, went the entire year without measurable precipitation. (The Weather Channel)

1933 - A 24 hour rainfall of 7.36 inches set the stage for the worst flood in Los Angeles history. Flooding claimed 44 lives. (David Ludlum)

1941 - Snow which began on New Year's Eve became a major blizzard on New Year's Day, burying Des Moines, IA, under 19.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1947 - A late afternoon tornado touched down 10 miles north of Shreveport LA, and dissipated south of El Dorado AR. The tornado, as much as 400 yards in width, killed 18 persons. It damaged or destroyed two thirds of the structures at Cotton Valley LA. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - Perhaps the worst blizzard in the history of the state of Maine finally came to an end. The storm produced 40 inches in 24 hours at Orono, and a total of 46 inches at Ripogenus Dam. Gale force winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high around Bangor. A disastrous icestorm was over Georgia and South Carolina. It ravaged the two states for days causing more than seven million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 25 °F at 8:00 PM

Low Temp: 15 °F at 7:33 AM

Wind: 32 mph at 2:20 AM

Day Precip: 0.00

Saturday: 2.5" snow. .23 of moisture content

Sunday: 4" Snow 0.31 moisture content

Monday: 4" Snow 0.41 moisture content

TOTAL STORM SO FAR: 10.5" Snow .95 moisture

Record High: 47° in 1999, 1912

Record Low: -39° in 1967

Average High: 22°F

Average Low: 2°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.50

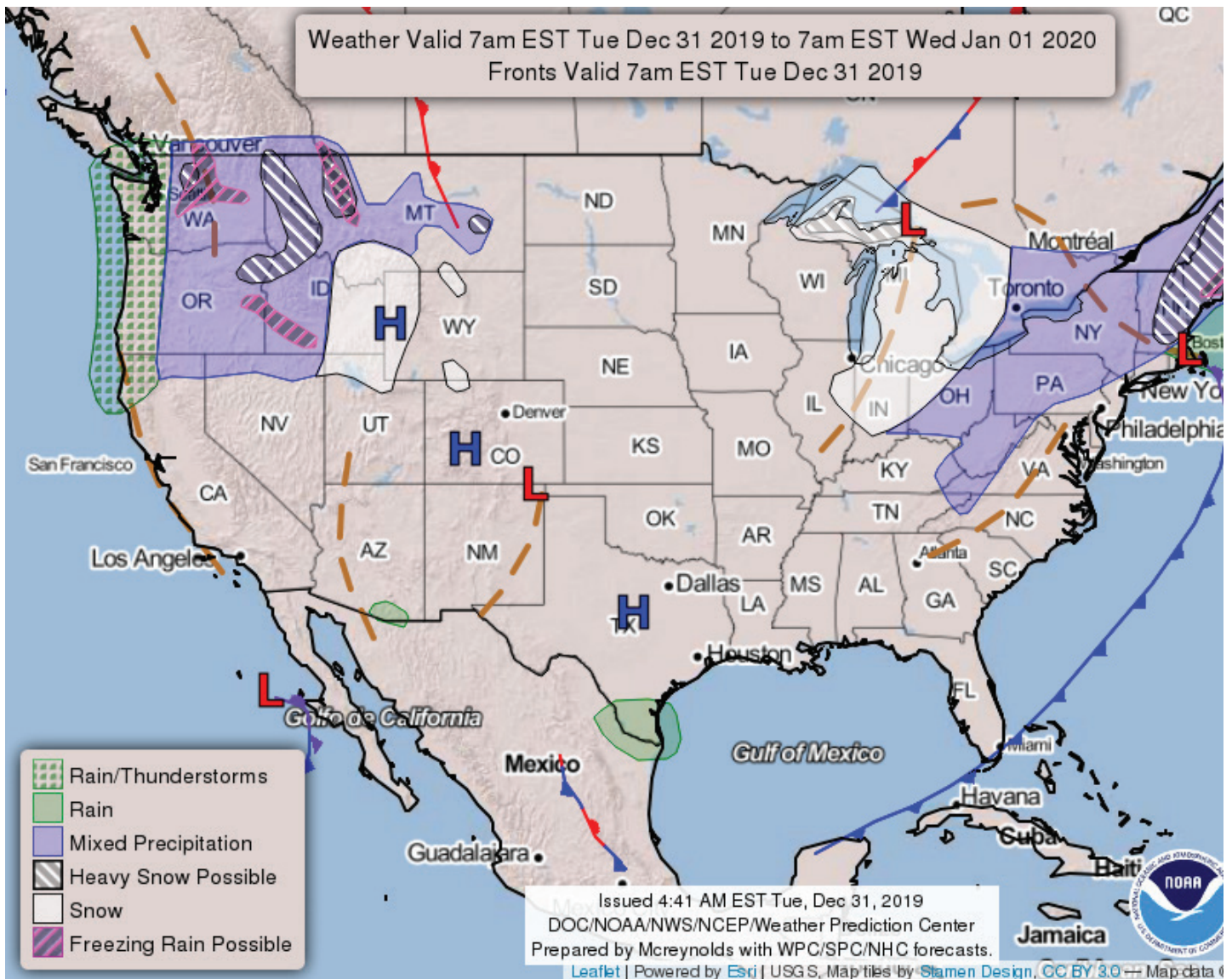
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.65

Average Precip to date: 21.70

Precip Year to Date: 28.60

Sunset Tonight: 5:00 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:14 a.m.



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SOME FINAL WORDS

Often what we find depends on what we look for. Here are a few things to look for in the days we will face in the year to come:

Look for God's presence. When fear grips us or failure would defeat us, or if life's challenges seem to be larger than we are, or the nights are longer than usual, remember, we are never alone if Jesus rules and reigns in our lives. He promised that "He will never leave us nor forsake us." When life turns to shambles, He will wrap His loving arms around us and protect us because He is with us.

Look for God's power. The psalmist said that "God is our refuge and strength." Often we look to people for insights and advice when we are faced with difficult problems. But their solutions are never as good as the solutions that come from God. God is the greatest asset any Christian has but we must go to Him and draw from His strength and power.

Look for God's provision. "My God shall supply all your needs." Though we may fail Him, He will not fail us. Though we may fail to claim His promises, it does not mean they are not available. If we look to and trust in Him, He will not let us down.

Prayer: Father, we look to You in faith believing that You will meet our every need if we trust You. Lord, help our unbelief! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: 1 Kings 8:56-58; Psalm 46:1-3; Philippians 4:19

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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 **AP** Associated Press

Monday's Scores By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL

Dell Rapids St. Mary 60, Chester 30
Rapid City Central 69, Douglas 59
George Watson Classic=
Custer 81, Hemingford, Neb. 45
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Ethan vs. Ipswich, ccd.
Faulkton vs. Iroquois, ccd.
Gayville-Volin vs. Hitchcock-Tulare, ccd.
McIntosh vs. James Valley Christian, ccd.
Rapid City Christian vs. Madison, ccd.
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket vs. Miller, ccd.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Dell Rapids St. Mary 60, Chester 48
Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 51, Lemmon 37
Marshall, Minn. 67, Brandon Valley 53
Rapid City Central 47, Douglas 41, OT
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 77, Benilde-St. Margaret's, Minn. 44
George Watson Classic=
Custer 50, Hemingford, Neb. 31

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

Explosion at South Dakota petroleum distributor hurts 3

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Three people were hurt in an explosion at a South Dakota petroleum distributor on Monday, the company's co-owner said.

The explosion happened around 2 p.m. in the truck maintenance shop of Harms Oil just west of Aberdeen. Co-owner Jason Harms confirms three people were hurt. Harms said all three were taken to a hospital. Harms said he's unsure what caused the explosion.

Traffic on nearby Highway 12 was blocked shortly after the explosion, the Aberdeen News reported. Heavy smoke could be seen following the explosion.

Brown County Emergency Management Director Scott Meints said crews had the fire under control about three hours later. He said the maintenance shop was severely damaged.

The explosion is under investigation.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press

Aberdeen American News, Dec. 29

Hopes, dreams for the coming year

Here are some of our hopes and dreams for the new year:

— Our farming and ranching friends get a big break with better conditions and prices. Also, we hope for a better year ahead for those businesses who serve the agriculture community.

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- A safe 2020 and beyond for those people who protect us and help us in our times of trouble.
- The flooding in the Upper Midwest subsides. The list of South Dakota communities flooded with water problems in 2019 was long.
- Our state lawmakers find a way to get our teachers a raise.
- The many people who suffered tragedies in 2019 find strength and healing.
- After being canceled by a freak snow storm, likely for the first time in history, that the 2020 Northern State University Gypsy Day homecoming parade will be one of the best in history.
- Aberdeen continues to successfully host high school state tournaments in 2020 and beyond.
- Vaping becomes an uncool fad that fades quickly.
- Aberdeen and our neighboring communities find ways to strengthen their economic positions.
- Those with addiction, as well as their families, find help and comfort.
- We experience a remaining winter light on snow and modest cold.
- Northern State and Presentation College find ways to increase their enrollments and ways to remain vital and attractive.
- The Aberdeen Wings defend their North American Hockey League crown.
- Aberdeen's new \$300 million AGP Soybean plant continues to sprout new opportunities.
- The 2020 Brown County Fair gets a break from the weather and has one of its best years ever.
- Continued recovery for Britton-Hecla football player Trevor Zuehlke.
- There are no fatal vehicle accidents or plane crashes to report on, as we in South Dakota certainly seemed to have more than our share this past year.
- 2020 is known as the year when our state and nation made significant progress on solving some of the major, decades-long issues our Native American friends and neighbors suffer from on reservations.
- The best for the Malchows, a multi-generational Aberdeen business family who witnessed a devastating Main Street fire burn down their operation in 2019.
- Volunteerism goes up and crime goes down. And no more broken window sprees.
- Aberdeen Mayor Travis Schuanaman continues to find his stride in his second year of leadership.
- We find ways to praise our snow removal personnel rather than to criticize them.
- Kindness and serving others go viral worldwide.
- All sides of our nation's political landscape recapture some respect for each other.
- Mosquitoes and their viruses stay away this spring, summer and fall.
- We continue to find opportunities for young workers to help convince them to stay in our region.
- The many area businesses that need workers find good people to fill their openings.
- The South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired finds someone as kind, caring and qualified as Marje Kaiser when she retires in 2020 as the superintendent of the school in Aberdeen.
- Aberdeen continues to be and gets better at being welcoming community to all.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Dec. 26

The end of 2019: The things I've seen

"I've seen things you people wouldn't believe." — Roy Batty, a replicant (artificial human) in the 1982 movie "Blade Runner," which took place in the bleak dystopian future of 2019.

Actually, those words (which were spoken by actor Rutger Hauer, who passed away this year) paraphrase something I said on the afternoon of March 13, in the midst of a massive storm that dropped nearly 3 inches of rain on frozen ground that might as well have been asphalt and concrete. I'd just returned to the office after shooting flood photos, pulled one of them up on a computer, then showed it to a coworker. I prefaced it by saying it was something I had never seen before: It was Yankton's Eighth and Broadway intersection underwater as Marne Creek surged out of its banks, and an abandoned car was floundering in this flash sea. (It was the same photo we used atop Thursday's year-end review.) It was an incredible sight.

At the end of each year, the things I've seen always stand out more in retrospect. The images reflect the experiences I personally encountered while working as a reporter, a photographer and, really, an

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observer of life here.

In 2019, I saw things that I wouldn't have believed when the year started.

In fact, I'm still seeing them now. This week, I gazed out across the James River frozen literally bank-full in northern Yankton County. It looked like you could go from the normally elevated bank and walk across the river — which is now a field of choppy, jutting ice — to the other, elevated side without being aware of where you were at all.

That was just the most recent of so many images that stick in my mind now.

After the bomb cyclone in March, I saw huge slabs of ice lying in fields out in the county. They had been washed out of frozen stock dams. Some of these slabs were at least a foot thick.

I saw floodwater in places I had never seen it before, and at heights that were record setting.

I saw Auld-Brokaw Trail looking like it had been targeted by a blitzkrieg.

I saw corn that actually WASN'T knee-high by the Fourth of July.

I also saw too many fields where there were no crops at all, which compelled me to better understand the term "prevent planting."

I saw that South Dakotans were all on meth and we were advertising it.

I saw a lot of familiar things, too. For instance, there were discharges at Gavins Point Dam creating a roaring, churning torrent through the spillway gates — but this time, for more than eight months. And I think I saw more "road closed" signs than I've ever seen before. (In fact, some counties actually ran out of such signs.)

Not everything could technically be considered a "new" sight. For instance, the photos I saw from Niobrara after the bomb cyclone looked a lot like ancient images in our archives of 19th century ice jams on the Missouri River, with massive chunks of ice crushing anything in its path.

I also saw some things this year that were genuinely good.

I saw the Mount Marty College campus — and, really, the school itself — transform in ways I have never seen, expected or even hoped. (This also produced one of the more awkward moments of the year: I came into the office one night after being away and sports editor James D. Cimburek told me MMC was adding football. I looked at the calendar, which said April 1, and naturally replied, "Yeah, right ...")

I saw work begin on Yankton's aquatics center, which, deep down, I never really thought would happen.

I saw work on Yankton's water plant finally near its end.

I saw local soldiers come home from service abroad — not a rare vision anymore, unfortunately, but always a welcome one.

I saw incredible acts of kindness in the face of disaster, as well as in the course of everyday life. But, based on what I've always seen here, that didn't surprise me at all.

Alas, I saw a lot of people arguing politics with such fervent conviction that it seemed like two completely different realities were fighting ferociously for the same prime real estate in the American mind set.

With that, I'm not sure what I see when I look toward 2020, other than it will be an angry time and uncertain time on many fronts.

Looking back allows you to also look ahead with the hope that things will be better next year than they were this year. In that respect, the bar for 2020 seems quite low, but it could be formidable all the same.

The 1975 song "I Believe in Father Christmas" by Greg Lake (at least I got to drop in one prog rock reference before this year was out) includes the line, "I wish you a brave New Year." That sentiment surely speaks to this moment. We've seen a lot, after all, and there's a lot in store in the months to come.

Be brave, and let's see what happens ... ____

Powerful winter storm lingers in Upper Midwest

DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A fierce winter storm that created blizzard conditions in parts of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota shut down interstates, led to hundreds of vehicle crashes and brought a metropolitan area of more than 200,000 people to a standstill on Monday morning.

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Residents in the Fargo and Moorhead, Minnesota area who are used to snowstorms were told to stay home after a foot of heavy, wet snow made that fell on top of a sheet of ice made travel difficult and stoked early fears about spring flooding.

"This is one the worst storms we've had, just because we had ice on the bottom of it and we received several more inches than we expected," Fargo Mayor Tim Mahoney said. "We're telling people to be patient. Help your neighbor if you can. If you can make it a little easier for them to get around, please do that."

While the blizzard warnings were allowed to expire in the Dakotas and some portions of the interstate highways were allowed to open, the storm continued to linger in the region. The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning in northeastern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where periods of heavy snow and gusty winds were expected to create difficult travel conditions.

Forecasters expected 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) to 14 inches (35.5 centimeters) of snow along Lake Superior's south shore. Wind gusts topping 60 mph whipped up waves that crashed over shoreline barriers in Duluth and Grand Marais, Minnesota, causing localized flooding Sunday.

Greg Gust, National Weather Service meteorologist in Grand Forks, North Dakota, said the heaviest band of snow fell from Watertown, South Dakota through the Red River Valley corridor in eastern North Dakota, where amounts of 18 inches (45.72 centimeters) were common. Gust said the highest total so far is 21 inches (53.34 centimeters) in Ypsilanti — North Dakota, not Michigan.

Roof collapses were reported in Fargo and Virginia, Minnesota. Gust said the heavy, wet "Igloo snow" was making both driving and shoveling dangerous. He advised that snow clearing be done slowly on Monday, especially since the upcoming week calls for little measurable precipitation and above-normal temperatures.

"It's a lot of heavy snow to move out of the way," Gust said.. "People should really take it easy. After that, enjoy the above-zero weather."

North Dakota Highway Patrol Captain Bryan Niewand said law enforcement responded to more than 50 rescue calls, most from people who drove on secondary roads because the interstates were shut down. Cass County Sheriff Jesse Jahner said some stranded travelers spent the night at a church in Page, northwest of Fargo.

Sleigh rides were canceled in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Snow wasn't the only issue during the weekend blast. Freezing rain on Saturday caused nearly 500 crashes on Minnesota roads and caused Metro Transit bus service to shut down in the Twin Cities, the first interruption of service in eight years.

Jonathan Wolfe, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Duluth, told the Star Tribune that Sunday's precipitation and winds were just the first round of what he called an unusually strong winter storm. This season is already one of the top five snowiest to date for the area.

It also continued a trend of wet fall and early winter weather in the Red River Valley, where residents have dealt with chronic spring flooding for years. A diversion structure in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which prevents the north-flowing river from flooding the city, opened its floodgates in the fall for the first time, Gust said.

"The spring thaw and rain are always key factors (to a flood)," Gust said. "But we're getting there. It's setting up for a significant event."

Rapid City officer kills gunman who shot man; 3rd man dies

RAPID CITY, S. D. (AP) — A Rapid City police officer fatally shot a gunman who opened fire on law officers after he killed a man in an apartment complex, authorities said Monday. An 81-year-old man who was evacuated from the building during the gunfire also died after suffering an apparent medical issue.

Officers were called to the apartment building about 5 p.m. Sunday on a report of shots fired, Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom said.

When officers arrived a man on the second floor of the building began shooting at them, striking one of their vehicles.

"It was very dynamic, very chaotic as it unfolded," the sheriff said at a news conference.

Don Hedrick, assistant chief of the Rapid City police, said some residents in the building were told to

evacuate and others to shelter in place.

Police officers, sheriff's deputies and South Dakota Highway Patrol troopers responded to the scene, Hedrick said.

Officers climbed a stairwell to reach the second floor and encountered the gunman, armed with a rifle, in the stairway. Rapid City police Officer Garrett Mastin, a three-year veteran of the department, shot and killed the gunman, identified as 29-year-old Patrick Alden of Rapid City.

Police identified the victim as 64-year-old David Ironhorse of Rapid City, Police believe Alden lived in the apartment building, according to the Rapid City Journal. No officers were hurt.

Thomas Trout, 81, of Rapid City, was among two elderly residents of the apartment who evacuated the building during the gunfire. Trout was found unresponsive in a vehicle a short time later and died after apparently suffering "a health-related issue complicated by the urgency of evacuation," police said.

"There's no question in my mind that the brave actions of our officers helped save lives," Hedrick, the assistant police chief, said in a statement.

The South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation will handle the case because the incident involved law enforcement fatally shooting someone, Thom said. Mastin is on standard administrative leave.

Libya militias rake in millions in European migration funds

By MAGGIE MICHAEL, LORI HINNANT and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — When the European Union started funneling millions of euros into Libya to slow the tide of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, the money came with EU promises to improve detention centers notorious for abuse and fight human trafficking.

That hasn't happened. Instead, the misery of migrants in Libya has spawned a thriving and highly lucrative web of businesses funded in part by the EU and enabled by the United Nations, an Associated Press investigation has found.

The EU has sent more than 327.9 million euros to Libya, with an additional 41 million approved in early December, largely funneled through U.N. agencies. The AP found that in a country without a functioning government, huge sums of European money have been diverted to intertwined networks of militiamen, traffickers and coast guard members who exploit migrants. In some cases, U.N. officials knew militia networks were getting the money, according to internal emails.

The militias torture, extort and otherwise abuse migrants for ransoms in detention centers under the nose of the U.N., often in compounds that receive millions in European money, the AP investigation showed. Many migrants also simply disappear from detention centers, sold to traffickers or to other centers.

The same militias conspire with some members of Libyan coast guard units. The coast guard gets training and equipment from Europe to keep migrants away from its shores. But coast guard members return some migrants to the detention centers under deals with militias, the AP found, and receive bribes to let others pass en route to Europe.

The militias involved in abuse and trafficking also skim off European funds given through the U.N. to feed and otherwise help migrants, who go hungry. For example, millions of euros in U.N. food contracts were under negotiation with a company controlled by a militia leader, even as other U.N. teams raised alarms about starvation in his detention center, according to emails obtained by the AP and interviews with at least a half-dozen Libyan officials.

In many cases, the money goes to neighboring Tunisia to be laundered, and then flows back to the militias in Libya.

This story is part of an occasional series, "Outsourcing Migrants," produced with the support of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

The story of Prudence Aimée and her family shows how migrants are exploited at every stage of their journey through Libya.

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Aimée left Cameroon in 2015, and when her family heard nothing from her for a year, they thought she was dead. But she was in detention and incommunicado. In nine months at the Abu Salim detention center, she told the AP, she saw “European Union milk” and diapers delivered by U.N. staff pilfered before they could reach migrant children, including her toddler son. Aimée herself would spend two days at a time without food or drink, she said.

In 2017, an Arab man came looking for her with a photo of her on his phone.

“They called my family and told them they had found me,” she said. “That’s when my family sent money.” Weeping, Aimée said her family paid a ransom equivalent of \$670 to get her out of the center. She could not say who got the money.

She was moved to an informal warehouse and eventually sold to yet another detention center, where yet another ransom — \$750 this time — had to be raised from her family. Her captors finally released the young mother, who got on a boat that made it past the coast guard patrol, after her husband paid \$850 for the passage. A European humanitarian ship rescued Aimée, but her husband remains in Libya.

Aimée was one of more than 50 migrants interviewed by the AP at sea, in Europe, Tunisia and Rwanda, and in furtive messages from inside detention centers in Libya. Journalists also spoke with Libyan government officials, aid workers and businessmen in Tripoli, obtained internal U.N. emails and analyzed budget documents and contracts.

The issue of migration has convulsed Europe since the influx of more than a million people in 2015 and 2016, fleeing violence and poverty in the Mideast, Afghanistan and Africa. In 2015, the European Union set up a fund intended to curb migration from Africa, from which money is sent to Libya. The EU gives the money mainly through the U.N.’s International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the High Commissioner for Refugees. (UNHCR).

But Libya is plagued by corruption and caught in a civil war. The west, including the capital Tripoli, is ruled by a U.N.-brokered government, while the east is ruled by another government supported by army commander Khalifa Hifter. The chaos is ideal for profiteers making money off migrants.

The EU’s own documents show it was aware of the dangers of effectively outsourcing its migration crisis to Libya. Budget documents from as early as 2017 for a 90 million euro outlay warned of a medium-to-high risk that Europe’s support would lead to more human rights violations against migrants, and that the Libyan government would deny access to detention centers. A recent EU assessment found the world was likely to get the “wrong perception” that European money could be seen as supporting abuse.

Despite the roles they play in the detention system in Libya, both the EU and the U.N. say they want the centers closed. In a statement to the AP, the EU said that under international law, it is not responsible for what goes on inside the centers.

“Libyan authorities have to provide the detained refugees and migrants with adequate and quality food while ensuring that conditions in detention centers uphold international agreed standards,” the statement said.

The EU also says more than half of the money in its fund for Africa is used to help and protect migrants, and that it relies on the U.N. to spend the money wisely.

The U.N. said the situation in Libya is highly complex, and it has to work with whoever runs the detention centers to preserve access to vulnerable migrants.

“UNHCR does not choose its counterparts,” said Charlie Yaxley, a spokesman for the U.N. refugee agency. “Some presumably also have allegiances with local militias.”

After two weeks of being questioned by the AP, UNHCR said it would change its policy on awarding of food and aid contracts for migrants through intermediaries.

“Due in part to the escalating conflict in Tripoli and the possible risk to the integrity of UNHCR’s programme, UNHCR decided to contract directly for these services from 1 January 2020,” Yaxley said.

Julien Raickman, who until recently was the Libya mission chief for the aid group Médecins Sans Frontières, also known as Doctors Without Borders, believes the problem starts with Europe’s unwillingness to deal with the politics of migration.

“If you were to treat dogs in Europe the way these people are treated, it would be considered a societal

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problem," he said.

EXTORTION INSIDE THE DETENTION CENTERS

About 5,000 migrants in Libya are crowded into between 16 and 23 detention centers at any given time, depending on who is counting and when. Most are concentrated in the west, where the militias are more powerful than the weak U.N.-backed government.

Aid intended for migrants helps support the al-Nasr Martyrs detention center, named for the militia that controls it, in the western coastal town of Zawiya. The U.N.'s migration agency, the IOM, keeps a temporary office there for medical checks of migrants, and its staff and that of the UNHCR visit the compound regularly.

Yet migrants at the center are tortured for ransoms to be freed and trafficked for more money, only to be intercepted at sea by the coast guard and brought back to the center, according to more than a dozen migrants, Libyan aid workers, Libyan officials and European human rights groups. A UNHCR report in late 2018 noted the allegations as well, and the head of the militia, Mohammed Kachlaf, is under U.N. sanctions for human trafficking. Kachlaf, other militia leaders named by the AP and the Libyan coast guard all did not respond to requests for comment.

Many migrants recalled being cut, shot and whipped with electrified hoses and wooden boards. They also heard the screams of others emerging from the cell blocks off-limits to U.N. aid workers.

Families back home are made to listen during the torture to get them to pay, or are sent videos afterward.

Eric Boakye, a Ghanaian, was locked in the al-Nasr Martyrs center twice, both times after he was intercepted at sea, most recently around three years ago. The first time, his jailers simply took the money on him and set him free. He tried again to cross and was again picked up by the coast guard and returned to his jailers.

"They cut me with a knife on my back and beat me with sticks," he said, lifting his shirt to show the scars lining his back. "Each and every day they beat us to call our family and send money." The new price for freedom: Around \$2,000.

That was more than his family could scrape together. Boakye finally managed to escape. He worked small jobs for some time to save money, then tried to cross again. On his fourth try, he was picked up by the Ocean Viking humanitarian ship to be taken to Italy. In all, Boakye had paid \$4,300 to get out of Libya.

Fathi al-Far, the head of the al-Nasr International Relief and Development agency, which operates at the center and has ties to the militia, denied that migrants are mistreated. He blamed "misinformation" on migrants who blew things out of proportion in an attempt to get asylum.

"I am not saying it's paradise -- we have people who have never worked before with the migrants, they are not trained," he said. But he called the al-Nasr Martyrs detention center "the most beautiful in the country."

At least five former detainees showed an AP journalist scars from their injuries at the center, which they said were inflicted by guards or ransom seekers making demands to their families. One man had bullet wounds to both feet, and another had cuts on his back from a sharp blade. All said they had to pay to get out.

Five to seven people are freed every day after they pay anywhere from \$1,800 to \$8,500 each, the former migrants said. At al-Nasr, they said, the militia gets around \$14,000 every day from ransoms; at Tarek al-Sikka, a detention center in Tripoli, it was closer to \$17,000 a day, they said. They based their estimates on what they and others detained with them had paid, by scraping together money from family and friends.

The militias also make money from selling groups of migrants, who then often simply disappear from a center. An analysis commissioned by the EU and released earlier this month by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime noted that the detention centers profit by selling migrants among themselves and to traffickers, as well as into prostitution and forced labor.

Hundreds of migrants this year who were intercepted at sea and taken to detention centers had vanished by the time international aid groups visited, according to Médecins Sans Frontières. There's no way to tell where they went, but MSF suspects they were sold to another detention center or to traffickers.

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A former guard at the Khoms center acknowledged to the AP that migrants often were seized in large numbers by men armed with anti-aircraft guns and RPGs. He said he couldn't keep his colleagues from abusing the migrants or traffickers from taking them out of the center.

"I don't want to remember what happened," he said. The IOM was present at Khoms, he noted, but the center closed last year.

A man who remains detained at the al-Nasr Martyrs center said Libyans frequently arrive in the middle of the night to take people. Twice this fall, he said, they tried to load a group of mostly women into a small convoy of vehicles but failed because the center's detainees revolted.

Fighting engulfed Zawiya last week, but migrants remained locked inside the al-Nasr Martyrs center, which is also being used for weapons storage.

TRAFFICKING AND INTERCEPTION AT SEA

Even when migrants pay to be released from the detention centers, they are rarely free. Instead, the militias sell them to traffickers, who promise to take them across the Mediterranean to Europe for a further fee. These traffickers work hand in hand with some coast guard members, the AP found.

The Libyan coast guard is supported by both the U.N. and the EU. The IOM highlights its cooperation with the coast guard on its Libya home page. Europe has spent more than 90 million euros since 2017 for training and faster boats for the Libyan coast guard to stop migrants from ending up in Europe.

This fall, Italy renewed a memorandum of understanding with Libya to support the coast guard with training and vessels, and it delivered 10 new speedboats to Libya in November.

In internal documents obtained in September by the European watchdog group Statewatch, the European Council described the coast guard as "operating effectively, thus confirming the process achieved over the past three years." The Libyan coast guard says it intercepted nearly 9,000 people in 2019 en route to Europe and returned them to Libya this year, after quietly extending its coastal rescue zone 100 miles offshore with European encouragement.

What's unclear is how often militias paid the coast guard to intercept these people and bring them back to the detention centers -- the business more than a dozen migrants described at the al-Nasr Martyrs facility in Zawiya.

The coast guard unit at Zawiya is commanded by Abdel-Rahman Milad, who has sanctions against him for human trafficking by the U.N.'s Security Council. Yet when his men intercept boats carrying migrants, they contact U.N. staff at disembarkation points for cursory medical checks.

Despite the sanctions and an arrest warrant against him, Milad remains free because he has the support of the al-Nasr militia. In 2017, before the sanctions, Milad was even flown to Rome, along with a militia leader, Mohammed al-Khoja, as part of a Libyan delegation for a U.N.-sponsored migration meeting. In response to the sanctions, Milad denied any links to human smuggling and said traffickers wear uniforms similar to those of his men.

Migrants named at least two other operations along the coast, at Zuwara and Tripoli, that they said operated along the same lines as Milad's. Neither center responded to requests for comment.

The International Organization for Migration acknowledged to the AP that it has to work with partners who might have contacts with local militias.

"Without those contacts it would be impossible to operate in those areas and for IOM to provide support services to migrants and the local population," said IOM spokeswoman Safa Msehli. "Failure to provide that support would have compounded the misery of hundreds of men, women and children."

The story of Abdullah, a Sudanese man who made two attempts to flee Libya, shows just how lucrative the cycle of trafficking and interception really is.

All told, the group of 47 in his first crossing from Tripoli over a year ago had paid a uniformed Libyan and his cronies \$127,000 in a mix of dollars, euros and Libyan dinars for the chance to leave their detention center and cross in two boats. They were intercepted in a coast guard boat by the same uniformed Libyan, shaken down for their cell phones and more money, and tossed back into detention.

"We talked to him and asked him, why did you let us out and then arrest us?" said Abdullah, who asked that only his first name be used because he was afraid of retaliation. "He beat two of us who brought it up."

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Abdullah later ended up in the al-Nasr Martyrs detention center, where he learned the new price list for release and an attempted crossing based on nationality: Ethiopians, \$5,000; Somalis \$6,800; Moroccans and Egyptians, \$8,100; and finally Bangladeshis, a minimum \$18,500. Across the board, women pay more.

Abdullah scraped together another ransom payment and another crossing fee. Last July, he and 18 others paid \$48,000 in total for a boat with a malfunctioning engine that sputtered to a stop within hours.

After a few days stuck at sea off the Libyan coast under a sweltering sun, they threw a dead man overboard and waited for their own lives to end. Instead, they were rescued on their ninth day at sea by Tunisian fishermen, who took them back to Tunisia.

"There are only three ways out of the prison: You escape, you pay ransom, or you die," Abdullah said, referring to the detention center.

In all, Abdullah spent a total of \$3,300 to leave Libya's detention centers and take to the sea. He ended up barely 100 miles away.

Sometimes members of the coast guard make money by doing exactly what the EU wants them to prevent: Letting migrants cross, according to Tarik Lamloum, the head of the Libyan human rights organization Beladi. Traffickers pay the coast guard a bribe of around \$10,000 per boat that is allowed to pass, with around five to six boats launching at a time when conditions are favorable, he said.

The head of Libya's Department for Combating Irregular Migration or DCIM, the agency responsible for the detention centers under the Ministry of Interior, acknowledged corruption and collusion among the militias and the coast guard and traffickers, and even within the government itself.

"They are in bed with them, as well as people from my own agency," said Al Mabrouk Abdel-Hafez.

SKIMMING PROFITS

Beyond the direct abuse of migrants, the militia network also profits by siphoning off money from EU funds sent for their food and security -- even those earmarked for a U.N.-run migrant center, according to more than a dozen officials and aid workers in Libya and Tunisia, as well as internal U.N. emails and meeting minutes seen by The Associated Press.

An audit in May of the UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency responsible for the center, found a lack of oversight and accountability at nearly all levels of spending in the Libya mission. The audit identified inexplicable payments in American dollars to Libyan firms and deliveries of goods that were never verified.

In December 2018, during the period reviewed in the audit, the U.N. launched its migrant center in Tripoli, known as the Gathering and Departure Facility or GDF, as an "alternative to detention." For the recipients of the services contracts, sent through the Libyan government agency Libaid, it was a windfall.

Millions of euros in contracts for food and migrant aid went to at least one company linked to al-Khoja, the militia leader flown to Rome for the U.N. migration meeting, according to internal U.N. emails seen by the AP, two senior Libyan officials and an international aid worker. Al-Khoja is also the deputy head of the DCIM, the government agency responsible for the detention centers.

One of the Libyan officials saw the multimillion-euro catering contract with a company named Ard al-Watan, or The Land of the Nation, which al-Khoja controls.

"We feel like this is al-Khoja's fiefdom. He controls everything. He shuts the doors and he opens the doors," said the official, a former employee at the U.N. center who like other Libyan officials spoke anonymously out of fear for his safety. He said al-Khoja used sections of the U.N. center to train his militia fighters and built a luxury apartment inside.

Even as the contracts for the U.N. center were negotiated, Libyan officials said, three Libyan government agencies, including the prosecutor's office, were investigating al-Khoja in connection with the disappearance of \$570 million from government spending allocated to feed migrants in detention centers in the west.

At the time, al-Khoja already ran another center for migrants, Tarik al-Sikka, notorious for abuses including beating, hard labor and a massive ransom scheme. Tekila, an Eritrean refugee, said that for two years at Tarik al-Sikka, he and other migrants lived on macaroni, even after he was among 25 people who came down with tuberculosis, a disease exacerbated by malnutrition. Tekila asked that only his first name be used for his safety.

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"When there is little food, there is no choice but to go to sleep," he said.

Despite internal U.N. emails warning of severe malnutrition inside Tarik al-Sikka, U.N. officials in February and March 2018 repeatedly visited the detention center to negotiate the future opening of the GDF. AP saw emails confirming that by July 2018, the UNHCR's chief of mission was notified that companies controlled by al-Khoja's militia would receive subcontracts for services.

Yaxley, the spokesman for UNHCR, emphasized that the officials the agency works with are "all under the authority of the Ministry of Interior." He said UNHCR monitors expenses to make sure its standard rules are followed, and may withhold payments otherwise.

A senior official at LibAid, the Libyan government agency that managed the center with the U.N., said the contracts are worth at least \$7 million for catering, cleaning and security, and 30 out of the 65 LibAid staff were essentially ghost employees who showed up on the payroll, sight unseen.

The U.N. center was "a treasure trove," the senior Libaid official lamented. "There was no way you could operate while being surrounded by Tripoli militias. It was a big gamble."

An internal U.N. communication from early 2019 shows it was aware of the problem. The note found a high risk that food for the U.N. center was being diverted to militias, given the amount budgeted compared to the amount migrants were eating.

In general, around 50 dinars a day, or \$35, is budgeted per detainee for food and other essentials for all centers, according to two Libyan officials, two owners of food catering companies and an international aid worker. Of that, only around 2 dinars is actually spent on meals, according to their rough calculations and migrants' descriptions.

Despite the investigations into al-Khoja, Tarik al-Sikka and another detention center shared a 996,000-euro grant from the EU and Italy in February.

At the Zawiya center, emergency goods delivered by U.N. agencies ended up redistributed "half for the prisoners, half for the workers," said Orobosa Bright, a Nigerian who endured three stints there for a total of 11 months. Many of the goods end up on Libya's black market as well, Libyan officials and international aid workers say.

IOM's spokeswoman said "aid diversion is a reality" in Libya and beyond, and that the agency does its best.

"Were it to become a regular occurrence IOM would be forced to re-evaluate the support it is providing to migrants in detention centres under DCIM despite our awareness that any reduction in this lifesaving assistance will add to the misery of the migrants," Msehli said.

Despite the corruption, the detention system in Libya is still expanding in places, with money from Europe. At a detention center in Sabaa where migrants are already going hungry, they were forced to build yet another wing funded by the Italian government, said Lamloum, the Libyan aid worker. The Italian government did not respond to a request for comment.

Lamloum sent a photo of the new prison. It has no windows.

TUNISIA LAUNDERING

The money earned off the suffering of migrants is whitewashed in money laundering operations in Tunisia, Libya's neighbor.

In the town of Ben Gardane, dozens of money-changing stalls transform Libyan dinars, dollars and euros into Tunisian currency before the money continues on its way to the capital, Tunis. Even Libyans without residency can open a bank account.

Tunisia also offers another opportunity for militia networks to make money off European funds earmarked for migrants. Because of Libya's dysfunctional banking system, where cash is scarce and militias control accounts, international organizations give contracts, usually in dollars, to Libyan organizations with bank accounts in Tunisia. The vendors compound the money the money on Libya's black-market exchange, which ranges between 4 and 9 times greater than the official rate.

Libya's government handed over more than 100 files to Tunisia earlier this year listing companies under investigation for fraud and money laundering.

The companies largely involve militia warlords and politicians, according to Nadia Saadi, a manager at the

Tunisian anti-corruption authority. The laundering involves cash payments for real estate, falsified customs documents and faked bills for fictitious companies.

"All in all, Libya is run by militias," said a senior Libyan judicial official, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of risking his life. "Whatever governments say, and whatever uniform they wear, or stickers they put....this is the bottom line."

Husni Bey, a prominent businessman in Libya, said the idea of Europe sending aid money to Libya, a once-wealthy country suffering from corruption, was ill-conceived from the beginning.

"Europe wants to buy those who can stop smuggling with all of these programs," Bey said. "They would be much better off blacklisting the names of those involved in human trafficking, fuel and drug smuggling and charging them with crimes, instead of giving them money."

Hinnant reported from Zarzis, Tunisia. Brito reported from aboard the Ocean Viking. Contributors include Lorne Cook in Brussels; Rami Musa in Benghazi, Libya, and Jamey Keaten in Geneva.

Militiamen breach US Embassy in Baghdad; Trump blames Iran

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Dozens of Iraqi Shiite militiamen and their supporters broke into the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday, smashing a main door and setting fire to a reception area, angered over deadly U.S. airstrikes targeting the Iran-backed militia. U.S. guards fired tear gas and palls of smoke rose over the grounds.

An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw flames rising from inside the compound and at least three U.S. soldiers on the roof of the main embassy building. There was a fire at the reception area near the compound's parking lot but it was unclear what had caused it. A man on a loudspeaker urged the mob not to enter the compound, saying: "The message was delivered."

President Donald Trump blamed Iran for the embassy breach and called on Iraq to protect the diplomatic mission.

"Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will. Now Iran is orchestrating an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. They will be held fully responsible. In addition, we expect Iraq to use its forces to protect the Embassy, and so notified!" he tweeted from his estate in Palm Beach, Florida.

There were no reports of casualties, but the unprecedented breach was one of the worst attacks on the embassy in recent memory. It followed deadly U.S. airstrikes on Sunday that killed 25 fighters of the Iran-backed militia in Iraq, the Kataeb Hezbollah. The U.S. military said the airstrikes were in retaliation for last week's killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it had blamed on the militia.

The developments represent a major downturn in Iraq-U.S. relations that could further undermine U.S. influence in the region and also weaken Washington's hand in its maximum pressure campaign against Iran.

Iraq has long struggled to balance its ties with the U.S. and Iran, both allies of the Iraqi government. But the government's angry reaction to the U.S. airstrikes and its apparent decision not to prevent the protesters from reaching the embassy signaled a sharp deterioration of U.S.-Iraq relations.

Iraqi security forces made no effort to stop the protesters as they marched to the heavily-fortified Green Zone after a funeral held for those killed in the U.S. airstrikes, letting them pass through a security checkpoint leading to the area.

The mob of marchers, many of them in militia uniforms, shouted "Down, Down USA!" and "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" outside the compound, hurling water and stones over its walls. The mob set fire to three trailers used by security guards along the wall. AP journalists saw some try to scale the walls.

Others then smashed the gates used by cars to enter and dozens pushed into the compound. The protesters stopped in a corridor after about 5 meters (16 feet), and were only about 200 meters away from the main building. Half a dozen U.S. soldiers were seen on the roof of the main building, their guns were

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pointed at the protesters. Smoke from the tear gas rose in the area.

The protesters raised yellow militia flags and taunted the embassy's security staff who remained behind the glass windows in the gates' reception area. They hung a poster on the wall declaring, "America is an aggressor" and sprayed graffiti on the wall and windows reading, "Closed in the name of the resistance."

An Iraqi employee at the embassy told the AP that the embassy's security team had evacuated some local staff from a rear gate while others left by helicopters as the rest remained inside "safe" areas within the embassy. The employee spoke on condition of anonymity because of not being authorized to speak to journalists.

Some commanders of militia factions loyal to Iran had joined the protesters. Among them was Hadi al-Amiri, the head of the state-sanctioned paramilitary Popular Mobilization Units, the umbrella group for the Iran-backed militias.

At least three protesters appeared to have difficulties breathing from tear gas. No one was immediately reported hurt in the rampage, and security staff had withdrawn to inside the embassy earlier, soon after protesters gathered outside. There was no immediate comment from the U.S. Embassy.

Yassine al-Yasseri, Iraq's interior minister, also appeared outside the embassy at one point and walked around to inspect the scene. He told the AP that the prime minister had warned the U.S. strikes on the Shiite militiamen would have serious consequences.

"This is one of the implications," al-Yasseri said. "This is a problem and is embarrassing to the government."

He said more security will be deployed to separate the protesters from the embassy, an indication the Iraqi troops would not move in to break up the crowd by force.

Seven armored vehicles with about 30 Iraqi soldiers arrived near the embassy hours after the violence erupted, deploying near the embassy walls but not close to the breached area. Four vehicles carrying riot police approached the embassy later but were forced back by the protesters who blocked their path.

There was no immediate comment from the Pentagon and the State Department.

The U.S. airstrikes — the largest targeting an Iraqi state-sanctioned militia in recent years — and the subsequent calls by the militia for retaliation, represent a new escalation in the proxy war between the U.S. and Iran playing out in the Middle East.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday's strikes send the message that the U.S. will not tolerate actions by Iran that jeopardize American lives.

The Iranian-backed Iraqi militia had vowed Monday to retaliate for the U.S. military strikes. The attack and vows for revenge raised concerns of new attacks that could threaten American interests in the region.

The U.S. attack also outraged both the militias and the Iraqi government, which said it will reconsider its relationship with the U.S.-led coalition — the first time it has said it will do so since an agreement was struck to keep some U.S. troops in the country. It called the attack a "flagrant violation" of its sovereignty.

In a partly televised meeting Monday, Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi told Cabinet members that he had tried to stop the U.S. operation "but there was insistence" from American officials. He declared three days of mourning for those killed in the U.S. strikes, starting Tuesday.

The U.S. military said "precision defensive strikes" were conducted against five sites of Kataeb Hezbollah, or Hezbollah Brigades in Iraq and Syria. The group, which is a separate force from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, operates under the umbrella of the state-sanctioned militias known collectively as the Popular Mobilization Forces. Many of them are supported by Iran.

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville in Washington, Samya Kullab in New York and Zeina Karam in Beirut contributed to this report.

Prompt care was key to Sanders' recovery from heart attack

By WILL WEISSERT and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

Bernie Sanders suffered "modest heart muscle damage" during his recent heart attack but has since

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recovered well and is fit enough for the rigors of the presidential campaign and the White House should he win it, according to letters released Monday by his primary care physician and two cardiologists.

The 78-year-old Vermont senator is the oldest candidate in the 2020 presidential race and had vowed to release detailed medical records by the end of the year. His campaign did so the day before New Year's Eve, and the letters provide the most detail it has given to date showing that Sanders received prompt treatment to reopen his clogged artery with stents following his heart attack, which occurred while he campaigned in Las Vegas on Oct. 1.

After a first heart attack, standard questions include the likelihood of another and whether the heart's muscle was damaged badly enough to trigger later heart failure. While his heart was damaged, Sanders has had no other symptoms, his blood pressure and heart rate are "in optimal ranges," and his heart is functioning normally, with the ability to exercise "well above average," wrote his cardiologist, Dr. Martin LeWinter, of the University of Vermont Medical Center.

The key test to show that was a treadmill exercise test in which doctors watch for signs of trouble during strong exertion. Sanders' exercise capacity this month was "average" for a healthy man his age without heart disease, and he was able to exercise to a level about 50% higher than men his age who do have heart disease, wrote University of Vermont cardiac rehabilitation chief Dr. Philip Ades and exercise physiologist Patrick Savage in a separate letter.

"At this point, I see no reason he cannot continue campaigning without limitation and, should he be elected, I am confident he has the mental and physical stamina to fully undertake the rigors of the presidency," LeWinter wrote, also noting that Sanders had made an "uneventful" recovery from his heart attack.

Sanders' heart attack occurred in an artery often called the "widow-maker," and the fact that he received prompt treatment to reopen that blood vessel helps explain how well he's doing, said Dr. Mary Ann McLaughlin, director of cardiovascular health and wellness at Mount Sinai Heart in New York. She reviewed Sanders' health information.

She was reassured by the exercise testing that Sanders' heart is strong.

"I do not see a reason why he would not be able to function effectively in a high stress job," she said. "Fortunately the stress test revealed normal blood flow to his heart."

The stents that propped open his artery do carry a risk of blood clots, so it's important that he stay on his blood-thinning medication long term, McLaughlin noted.

Sanders is taking additional medications that are routine after a heart attack, including a blood pressure medicine that also can improve function after damage to heart muscle, she noted. He also uses a statin to keep his cholesterol in check and another medication for an unrelated condition, low thyroid levels.

A letter from Brian Monahan, the congressional attending physician in Washington, noted that Sanders was initially taking additional medications after his heart attack but that those "were stopped based on your progress."

"Your heart muscle strength has improved. You have never had symptoms of congestive heart failure," Monahan wrote to Sanders. "The heart chamber sizes, wall thickness, estimated pressures, and heart valves are normal."

He added: "You are in good health currently and you have been engaging vigorously in the rigors of your campaign, travel, and other scheduled activities without any limitation."

Sanders spent several days post-heart attack recuperating in his Vermont home. He's said previously that he had felt symptoms for weeks that he "should have paid more attention to," including being especially fatigued after long campaign days, having trouble sleeping and sometimes feeling a "little unsteady" at the podium while speaking at events.

The senator's staff initially said stents were inserted for a blocked artery, revealing only two days after he was first hospitalized that he had suffered a heart attack. Sanders has bristled at the notion that his campaign was less than forthcoming about his condition, saying that it released as much information as it could, as fast as possible, and that the full details only came later.

Sanders is the latest in a string of Democrats 70 and older to release medical records as age continues

to be a factor in the race.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, 77, had promised to release his medical records before the Iowa caucuses on Feb. 3. A doctor's report issued earlier this month said Biden is in overall good shape and keeps his cholesterol at healthy levels with the use of a statin medication. He's also had a persistent irregular heartbeat.

Also this month, 70-year-old Elizabeth Warren released a note from her doctor saying that she is "in excellent health" and that her only major medical concern is an underactive thyroid gland, which the Massachusetts senator easily treats with medication, the only kind she takes.

Michael Bloomberg's doctor declared the 77-year-old former New York City mayor to be in "outstanding health," though he is receiving treatment for several medical conditions, including an irregular heartbeat. Bloomberg also had a stent put in his heart to clear an artery in 2000.

Donald Trump, now 73, became the oldest newly inaugurated first-term president in January 2017. He has been criticized for releasing only cursory details on his health while running for the White House.

On a Saturday in November, Trump visited Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, a stop that wasn't listed on the president's schedule and came just nine months after his last physical. Trump later said he went through a "very routine physical" and blamed the media for sparking unfounded fears that the visit meant he was ill.

Ex-Nissan boss Ghosn in Lebanon, left Japan over 'injustice'

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Nissan's former Chairman Carlos Ghosn said Tuesday from Lebanon that he was not fleeing justice but instead left Japan to avoid "injustice and political persecution" over financial misconduct allegations during his tenure leading the automaker.

Ghosn had been released on bail by a Tokyo court while awaiting trial but was not allowed to travel overseas. He disclosed his location in a statement through his representatives that did not describe how he left Japan, where he had been under surveillance. He promised to talk to reporters next week.

"I am now in Lebanon and will no longer be held hostage by a rigged Japanese justice system where guilt is presumed, discrimination is rampant, and basic human rights are denied, in flagrant disregard of Japan's legal obligations under international law and treaties it is bound to uphold," the statement said.

Japanese media quoted prosecutors speaking anonymously who said they did not know how Ghosn had left.

Ghosn, who is of Lebanese origin and holds French, Lebanese and Brazilian passports, was arrested in November 2018 and was expected to face trial in April 2020.

Prosecutors fought his release, but a court granted him bail with conditions that he be monitored and he could not meet with his wife, Carole, who is also of Lebanese origin. Recently the court allowed them to speak by video calls.

Japan does not have an extradition treaty with Lebanon. It is unclear what steps authorities might take.

Ghosn has repeatedly asserted his innocence, saying authorities trumped up charges to prevent a possible fuller merger between Nissan Motor Co. and alliance partner Renault SA.

He has been charged with under-reporting his future compensation and breach of trust.

During his release on bail, Ghosn had been going daily to the office of his main lawyer, Junichiro Hironaka, to work on his case, except on weekends and holidays.

Hironaka told reporters Tuesday afternoon that he was stunned that Ghosn had jumped bail and denied any involvement in or knowledge of the escape. He said the lawyers had all of Ghosn's three passports and was puzzled by how he could have left the country.

The last time he spoke to Ghosn was on Christmas Day, and he has never been consulted about leaving for Lebanon, Hironaka told reporters outside his law office in Tokyo.

He said the lawyers still need to decide on their next action, besides filing a required report to the judicial authorities. His office was closed for the New Year's holiday in Japan.

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"Maybe he thought he won't get a fair trial," Hironaka said, stressing that he continues to believe Ghosn is innocent. "I can't blame him for thinking that way."

He called the circumstances of Ghosn's arrest, the seizure of evidence and the strict bail conditions unfair. In the first official Lebanese comment on Ghosn's arrival, state minister for presidential affairs Selim Jreissati told the An-Nahar newspaper that Ghosn entered Lebanon legally through the airport with his French passport and his Lebanese ID.

Jreissati told the paper that in a meeting with Japan's deputy foreign minister, he presented a file to the Japanese authorities asking for Ghosn to be handed over to be tried in Lebanon according to international anti-corruption laws, of which Lebanon is a signatory. He added that since there was no official word from Japan and it was not yet clear how Ghosn came to Lebanon, the government there will take no formal stance.

Jreissati did not immediately respond to calls from The Associated Press.

Ghosn had posted 1.5 billion yen (\$14 million) bail on two separate releases. He had been rearrested on additional charges after an earlier release.

Earlier, Ricardo Karam, a television host and friend of Ghosn, told The Associated Press that Ghosn arrived in Lebanon on Monday morning.

"He is home," Karam said in a message. "It's a big adventure."

Karam declined to elaborate.

The Lebanon-based newspaper Al-Joumhouriya said Ghosn arrived in Beirut from Turkey aboard a private jet.

The French government reacted with both surprise and confusion.

"Mr. Carlos Ghosn is not above the laws, be they French or Japanese," said Agnes Pannier-Runacher, a junior finance minister. But she added that "he has French nationality and we owe him consular support, as we owe all French nationals."

Speaking to broadcaster BFM-TV, she said, "I was surprised as you when I learned about this escape."

Ghosn was credited with leading a spectacular turnaround at Nissan beginning in the late 1990s, rescuing the automaker from near-bankruptcy.

People in Lebanon took special pride in the auto industry icon, who speaks fluent Arabic and visited the country regularly. Born in Brazil, where his Lebanese grandfather had sought his fortune, Ghosn grew up in Beirut, where he spent part of his childhood at a Jesuit school.

Before his fall from grace, Ghosn was also a celebrity in Japan, revered for his managerial acumen.

Nissan did not have immediate comment Tuesday. The Japanese automaker of the March subcompact, Leaf electric car and Infiniti luxury models has also been charged as a company in relation to Ghosn's alleged financial crimes.

Japanese securities regulators recently recommended Nissan be fined 2.4 billion yen (\$22 million) over disclosure documents from 2014 to 2017. Nissan has said it accepted the penalty and had corrected its securities documents in May.

The company's sales and profits have tumbled and its brand image is tarnished. It has acknowledged lapses in its governance and has promised to improve its transparency.

Another former Nissan executive, Greg Kelly, an American, was arrested at the same time as Ghosn and is awaiting trial. He has said he is innocent.

Hiroto Saikawa, who replaced Ghosn as head of Nissan, announced his resignation in September after financial misconduct allegations surfaced against him related to dubious income. He has not been charged with any crime.

The conviction rate in Japan exceeds 99% and winning an acquittal through a lengthy appeals process could take years. Rights activists in Japan and abroad say Japan's judicial system does not presume innocence enough and relies heavily on long detentions that lead to false confessions.

The charges Ghosn faces carry a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

He is accused of under-reporting his post-retirement compensation and breach of trust in diverting Nis-

san money and allegedly having it shoulder his personal investment losses. The other allegations against him involve payments to a Saudi dealership, as well as funds paid to an Oman business that purportedly were diverted to entities run by Ghosn.

Ghosn has said that the compensation was never decided, that Nissan never suffered losses from the investments and that all the payments were for legitimate business services.

Ghosn's case has drawn intense media attention in Japan. When he was released from custody in March, the former executive normally seen in luxury suits wore a surgical mask and dressed like a construction worker to avoid media scrutiny under the advice of one of his lawyers. Japanese media still spotted him and followed his car.

Associated Press writers Sarah El Deeb and Zeina Karam in Beirut and John Leicester in Paris contributed to this report.

Yuri Kageyama is on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

Lawsuit: Famed Jesuit abused boy 1,000 times around world

By MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — One day in May of 1970, an 11-year-old boy and his disabled sister were sitting on the curb outside a Chicago tavern, waiting for their mother to come out. When a priest with crinkly eyes and a ready smile happened by and offered the family a ride home, they could not have been happier.

The boy, Robert J. Goldberg, now 61, would pay dearly for the favor, enduring what he describes as years of psychological control and sexual abuse he suffered while working as a child valet for the late Rev. Donald J. McGuire. He remained in the Jesuit's thrall for nearly 40 years, even volunteering to testify on McGuire's behalf during criminal trials that ultimately resulted in a 25-year prison sentence for the priest.

But today, Goldberg says he has finally broken the hold McGuire once had on him. And he has begun to tell his story, in interviews with The Associated Press and in a lawsuit he filed Monday in California state court in San Francisco.

The lawsuit charges that McGuire, a globe-trotting Jesuit with ties to Saint Teresa of Calcutta, abused Goldberg "more than 1,000 times, in multiple states and countries," during sojourns to spiritual retreats throughout the United States and Europe.

On these trips, the lawsuit says, McGuire referred to Goldberg as his "protégé." All the while, the suit says, the boy carried his briefcase, ran errands and often endured daily abuse that included "sexual touching, oral copulation and anal penetration."

The lawsuit filed Monday doesn't currently name any defendants, but Goldberg's attorneys say the defendants will include the Jesuit religious order in the United States and the order's top leader in Rome, among others. They also say that Goldberg's abuse occurred at a time when powerful church officials — including Mother Teresa, who was elevated to sainthood by Pope Francis three years ago — knew that McGuire had been repeatedly accused of sexually abusing boys. Church officials went to great lengths to cover up his crimes, the suit alleges.

In the nearly two decades since the clergy abuse scandal erupted, thousands of survivors have stepped forward to tell their painful stories. Hundreds more revealed their abuse in lawsuits earlier this year, when the state of New York opened a one-year window that allows survivors to file child sex abuse lawsuits without regard to the statute of limitations. And hundreds more, including Goldberg, are expected to step forward as a similar window opens Jan. 1 in California.

But many victims still suffer in silence, often taking decades to step forward, if they ever do. Advocates say that Catholic priests, as representatives of God and respected members of their communities, are often able to exert control over the children they target, especially when they are helping the child or their families overcome poverty or other obstacles.

Terence McKiernan of BishopAccountability.org, which tracks the abuse crisis and maintains a data base

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of accused priests, said abusers in the Jesuit religious order are well-equipped to exercise psychological control over their victims because of the order's reputation as administrators of dozens of colleges and high schools in the United States alone.

"Everyone knows the Jesuits are smart and the Jesuits are sophisticated," he said. "And they often bring enormous sophistication to the abuse they perpetrate."

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Goldberg's journey from supporter to accuser took years to complete. The final stretch began last fall, on a cold October night in the suburbs of Chicago.

Tyrone Cefalu, another former assistant to McGuire, was watching TV at his home when he got an unexpected call from Goldberg and his sister. Cefalu and Goldberg had bonded over the years, discussing their time with McGuire and what they knew about the priest's dark side.

Goldberg, a scruffy former dog breeder, and his older sister Debbie, who has Down syndrome, had been living in southwest Virginia's coal country. But they had fled their home because Bobby feared a Virginia social service agency was trying to take Debbie away from him.

Now they were holed up at a nearby gas station, wondering if Cefalu could meet them and help them out. After some missed signals, Cefalu found the pair huddled under blankets in the back of a U-Haul cube truck, parked behind a church in Forest Park, Illinois — out of gas, out of money, and out of luck.

For Goldberg, it could have been the end of the road. Years of hard living had left him with a variety of ailments, including tumors in his throat and the loss of several teeth, which made it difficult for him to speak.

But that evening, against all odds, marked a new beginning. Goldberg and his sister followed Cefalu home, and Cefalu and his wife made beds for them in their living room. Over the next several weeks, the two one-time McGuire supporters explored their shared history, recalling McGuire as a messianic retreat leader able to instill loyalty in his victims and their families, many of them wealthy, devout Catholics.

"He was very controlling. I had no say whatsoever," Goldberg told the AP, recalling the years he spent working and living with McGuire. "Whatever he told my mother he wanted me to do, I had to do it."

The key to Goldberg's slow transformation was Cefalu, who was once so devoted to McGuire that he spent six years working full time on the celebrated priest's defense, through two criminal trials and various appeals. His labors included scanning documents for McGuire's attorneys, drumming up witnesses, and investigating McGuire's accusers.

"McGuire asked me to find the dirt on those guys, and I found the dirt," he told the AP.

Like Goldberg, Cefalu met McGuire when he was a boy, but his circumstances were different. Goldberg was being raised by a single, Catholic mother of limited means — his Jewish father had recently died. Cefalu, by contrast, was part of a middle-class family and was headed for Loyola Academy, a prestigious Jesuit prep school where McGuire had been a teacher.

McGuire was a family friend who frequently appeared at the family home for dinner, Cefalu said. His family attended weekly Mass to hear McGuire sermonize and took part in his spiritual retreats, events where McGuire began to acquire a cult-like following.

"When he said Mass he would give a sermon that would go on for 45 minutes and everybody loved it," Cefalu recalled. "He'd been all over the world and could tell stories. He could sing. The guy was mesmerizing."

McGuire also won supporters by doing favors. "He'd tutor poor kids and help them get into good schools and graduate from good schools," Cefalu said. "If your family had problems, he would be there for you, and almost every family had some kind of serious problem that he could deal with."

During those years, Cefalu recalled, he began helping at his father's print shop, which produced McGuire's personal Christmas cards, a measure of his growing reach. "We started out printing 200 cards and that went up to 5,000," Cefalu said. "The guy had a following."

ROVING MINISTRY

After Goldberg and his family met McGuire that fateful day in 1970, the priest quickly ingratiated himself

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with Goldberg's mother, persuading her that Goldberg would be better off living under his supervision, according to the lawsuit.

During this time, Goldberg would spend evenings at McGuire's living quarters and sometimes would return to his family's home with McGuire, who would sleep with him in his bed. Meanwhile, Goldberg's mother came to rely on the funds that McGuire paid Goldberg for working as his assistant, \$300 to \$500 a week.

If Goldberg rebelled, by running off with his friends or refusing to have sex, McGuire punished him by locking him in a room for hours, Goldberg said.

McGuire also used sex as a punishment, he added. He said that once, when he got into an accident with McGuire's car, the priest ordered him to make amends by performing a menu of sexual favors.

Goldberg and his family followed along in 1976 when McGuire moved to San Francisco to assume a teaching assignment at the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit school, and promote a roving ministry in which he presided over religious retreats for wealthy Catholics, collecting large donations along the way.

It was during this time that McGuire developed ties with Mother Teresa, becoming her spiritual adviser while vetting nuns seeking to join the religious order she founded, the Missionaries of Charity.

In 1981, following new accusations of inappropriate relationships with boys — part of a series of accusations that had begun in the early 1960s — McGuire lost his teaching assignment and returned to Chicago. Once again, Goldberg and his family followed him, and Goldberg continued to give in to McGuire's sexual demands.

In 1990, Goldberg's family moved to Virginia. Even after the move, Goldberg said, he continued to rely on McGuire for financial support, especially during a three-year prison term for a drug conviction.

"There's a lot of things I remember, and a lot of things I try not to remember," he said.

A PREDATORY HISTORY

Shortly after McGuire was ordained, in 1961, the Chicago Province of Jesuits (now part of the Midwest Jesuits) began hearing from church officials concerned about the young priest's relationships with boys. The complaints would keep coming for the next half century, continuing even after McGuire was defrocked and sentenced to prison.

They started when McGuire was living in Europe, in the early '60s, when church officials in Germany and Austria sent alarming reports of McGuire's activities. One official in Austria wrote that McGuire had "much relations with young boys, particularly some boys who work in our kitchen and who used to go to his room."

As a result, the Jesuits recalled McGuire from Europe but assigned him to a teaching position at Loyola Academy, where he molested students who would later file lawsuits and receive significant monetary settlements.

Each time the Jesuits received complaints that McGuire was sexually abusing boys, they would move him to another post, where he would continue his predatory behavior. Even after a psychiatric evaluation showed McGuire was sexually attracted to underage boys, the Jesuits continued to insist he was a priest in good standing, in part due to the urging of Mother Teresa.

In a letter dated Feb. 2, 1994, after McGuire had been released from a residential treatment center, the future saint wrote to the leader of the Chicago Jesuits, saying she had received a letter from McGuire and believed that the accusations lodged against him were untrue. "I have confidence and trust in Fr. McGuire and wish to see his vital ministry resume as soon as possible," she wrote.

Mother Teresa got her wish, and McGuire continued his world-wide ministry, "openly traveling with young boys as his companions," according to Goldberg's lawsuit.

In 2002, after yet another complaint, the Jesuits restricted McGuire's ministry to the Chicago Archdiocese. In 2003, the first of several lawsuits against McGuire and his Jesuit superiors were filed.

Months later, a Wisconsin district attorney began investigating allegations that McGuire had abused two Loyola students during a trip in the late 1960s to the Lake Geneva resort area. The investigation led to a trial where nuns from Mother Teresa's religious order, wearing their distinctive white and blue habits, packed the courtroom. They wore buttons that said: "I support Fr. McGuire."

Despite that outpouring, McGuire was convicted. And while he was free on appeal he was charged by

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federal authorities with molesting another boy on trips to Austria and Switzerland. Once again, McGuire was convicted while protesting his innocence, leading to his 25-year prison term.

Officials in the Jesuits' Midwest Province could not be reached for comment Monday.

In 2012, the Chicago Jesuit official who received Mother Teresa's letter, the Rev. Bradley M. Schaeffer, issued a statement apologizing for failing to rein McGuire in. "I deeply regret that my actions were not enough to prevent him from engaging in these horrific crimes," he said.

Last year, when the Midwest Jesuits released a list naming 65 accused Jesuits, including McGuire, Provincial Brian G. Paulson issued a similar apology. "We are painfully aware that in earlier decades, some Midwest Jesuits were not removed from ministry quickly enough," he said. "We are deeply sorrowful."

TOO MUCH TO BEAR

It was only after McGuire began serving his 25-year federal prison sentence, in 2009, that Cefalu began to doubt his innocence. The turning point, he said, came when he was sorting McGuire's belongings and discovered a color slide that captured him as a naked 13-year-old, changing into his underwear during a trip to Canada with McGuire and another young teen.

"That really pissed me off," he said.

When he confronted McGuire during a visit to the federal prison in Texas where he was serving his sentence and McGuire denied taking the photo, Cefalu said, he knew the priest was lying. Back home in suburban Chicago, as he pored over more than 40 boxes of McGuire's records, his skepticism only grew.

Reading the documents was unsettling, Cefalu said, because he'd been one of McGuire's chief supporters, to the point where McGuire had appointed him to be his legal representative while in prison. In addition, Cefalu had known several of McGuire's victims while attending Loyola Academy, the Catholic prep school, during the late 1960s and early '70s.

The experience made Cefalu rethink the "horse bites" McGuire would sometimes give him, pinching him hard on his upper thigh and then placing his hand over his groin, exclaiming, "Gotcha!" Cefalu provided details of his alleged abuse by McGuire and another Jesuit in a lawsuit he filed five years ago, without the help of an attorney, in Cook County Circuit Court.

After reading the records McGuire had entrusted to him, Cefalu began reaching out to McGuire's other victims, hoping they might answer his many questions. And as McGuire's victims began filing lawsuits, they reached out to him.

Goldberg also knew McGuire's victims, not as an alumnus of Loyola Academy, but through the years he'd spent working as McGuire's assistant.

After the former priest was sent to prison, Cefalu and Goldberg occasionally talked on the phone and began to reassess their histories with the charismatic priest they had known. Their conversations continued after McGuire died behind bars in 2017, at age 86.

But it wasn't until Goldberg's desperate call to Cefalu in October 2018 that Goldberg's decision to go public with his allegations against McGuire and the church began to take shape.

MAKING PEACE

After Cefalu found Goldberg and his sister huddled in the back of their U-Haul in late 2018, Goldberg began revealing more details of his abuse to Cefalu. Cefalu came to believe that Goldberg had been abused over a longer period than any of McGuire's other victims.

Yet when Goldberg said he was ready to file a lawsuit, Cefalu hesitated.

Since discovering the nude photograph of himself in McGuire's files, he has nursed a growing antipathy for the Jesuits and the role they played covering up McGuire's crimes.

But his disdain for lawyers is nearly as great. "I have found that the lawyers, the psychiatrists, the therapists, have turned this whole thing into an industry," he said. "They're not interested in healing the people."

On the other hand, Cefalu understood that, without legal and financial help, Goldberg and his sister would likely remain homeless.

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So, he grudgingly introduced them to a trio of lawyers with experience representing McGuire's victims: Chicago attorneys Marc Pearlman and Melissa Anderson, and Jeff Anderson, the Minnesota attorney who has represented clergy abuse survivors since the 1980s.

"They have a success rate, and Bobby needed a success," Cefalu said.

Today, the Goldbergs and their bullmastiff, Boss, remain inseparable, living in a modest duplex outside Chicago with help from a nearby nondenominational church and a generous individual who befriended Debbie while she was hospitalized for a staph infection.

During hours of interviews conducted with the AP over two days, Goldberg said his feelings about McGuire began to change after hearing victims testify at McGuire's criminal trial in Chicago, where he was scheduled to testify on the priest's behalf but never was called to the witness stand. In his head, he recalls, he imagined saying to McGuire: "I'll pray for you. You have no remorse for what you did to me or the others."

Goldberg was often tearful as he told his story, while his older sister looked on. He said he felt a sense of relief and connection with other people while unburdening himself, and that he has started to make peace with his memories of the priest who, he says, dominated his life and his family for so long.

"I have to forgive him, so I can get into heaven," he said.

Revelers around the world usher in the new decade

Revelers around the globe are bidding farewell to a decade that will be remembered for the rise of social media, the Arab Spring, the #MeToo movement and, of course, President Donald Trump.

A look at how the world is ushering in 2020:

AUSTRALIA

More than a million people descended on a hazy Sydney Harbour and surrounding areas ahead of the ringing in of the new year despite the ongoing wildfire crisis ravaging New South Wales, Australia's most populous state.

The planned 9 p.m. fireworks over Sydney's iconic landmarks was delayed by 15 minutes due to strong winds, but revelers clearly enjoyed themselves in a desperately needed tonic for the state.

New South Wales has copped the brunt of the wildfire damage, which has razed more than 1,000 homes nationwide and killed 12 people in the past few months.

Some communities have canceled New Year's fireworks celebrations, but Sydney Harbour's popular display was granted an exemption to a total fireworks ban that is in place there and elsewhere to prevent new wildfires.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's major cities greeted the new year with traditional fireworks. In Auckland, half a ton of fireworks burst from the Sky Tower above the city center.

New Zealanders saw off the old year without regret.

On March 15, a lone gunman identified killed 51 people and wounded dozens at two mosques in the South Island city of Christchurch. In December, an eruption of volcanic White Island off the east coast of the North Island killed at least 19 tourists and tour guides.

KIRIBATI

The Pacific island nation of Kiribati was one of the first countries to welcome the new decade. The nation's 3,200 coral atolls are strewn more than 3 million square miles, straddling the equator.

As the new year begins, Kiribati finds itself on the front line of the battle against climate change, facing drought and rising sea levels.

In 2020, a project funded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Green Climate Fund and Kiribati's government brings hope of providing safe and climate-secure drinking water to the main island of Tarawa, which is home to most of the nation's 110,000 people.

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SAMOA

In Samoa, New Year's Eve was more somber than usual. While fireworks erupted at midnight from Mount Vaea, overlooking the capital, Apia, the end of the year was a time of sadness and remembrance.

A measles epidemic in late 2019 claimed 81 lives, mostly children under 5.

More than 5,600 measles cases were recorded in the nation of just under 200,000. With the epidemic now contained, the Samoa Observer newspaper named as its Person of the Year health workers who fought the outbreak.

"We have experienced extreme sadness and sorrow," the newspaper said. "Since the first measles death, the pain has only deepened. But amidst much hopelessness and tears, we have also seen the best of mankind in this country's response."

JAPAN

People flocked to temples and shrines in Japan, offering incense with their prayers to celebrate the passing of a year and the the first New Year's of the Reiwa era.

Under Japan's old-style calendar, linked to emperors' rules, Reiwa started in May, after Emperor Akihito stepped down and his son Naruhito became emperor.

Although Reiwa is entering its second year with 2020, Jan. 1 still marks Reiwa's first New Year's, the most important holiday in Japan.

"We have a new era and so I am hoping things will be better, although 2019 was also a good year because nothing bad happened," said Masashi Ogami, 38, who ran a sweet rice wine stall at Zojoji Temple in Tokyo, drawing a crowd of revelers.

Other stalls sold fried noodles and candied apples, as well as little figures and amulets in the shape of mice, the zodiac animal for 2020. Since the Year of the Mouse starts off the Asian zodiac, it's associated with starting anew.

The first year of the new decade will see Tokyo host the 2020 Olympics, an event that is creating much anticipation for the capital and the entire nation.

SOUTH KOREA

Thousands of South Koreans filled cold downtown streets in Seoul ahead of a traditional bell-tolling ceremony near City Hall to send off an exhausting 2019 highlighted by political scandals, decaying job markets and crumbling diplomacy with North Korea.

Dignitaries picked to ring the old Bosingak bell at midnight included South Korean Major League Baseball pitcher Hyun-Jin Ryu and Pengsoo, a giant penguin character with a gruff voice and blunt personality that emerged as one of the country's biggest TV stars in 2019.

The annual tolling of the "peace bell" at Imjingak park near the border with North Korea was canceled due to quarantine measures following an outbreak of African swine fever.

Sonny Mehta, visionary head of Alfred A. Knopf, dies at 77

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sonny Mehta, the urbane and astute head of Alfred A. Knopf who guided one of the book world's most esteemed imprints to new heights through a blend of prize-winning literature by Toni Morrison and Cormac McCarthy among others and blockbusters such as "Fifty Shades of Grey" and "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," has died at age 77.

Mehta, the husband of author Gita Mehta, died Monday at his home in Manhattan. According to Knopf, the cause was complications from pneumonia.

The bearded, chain-smoking Mehta spoke carefully and chose wisely, helping Knopf thrive even as the industry faced the jarring changes of corporate consolidation, the demise of thousands of independent stores and the rise of e-books.

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An accomplished publisher and editor since his mid-20s, he succeeded the revered Robert Gottlieb in 1987 as just the third Knopf editor-in-chief in its 72-year history and over the following decades fashioned his own record of critical and commercial success. He continued to publish celebrated authors signed on by Gottlieb, including Morrison and Robert Caro, while adding newer talent such as Tommy Orange, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Karen Russell.

Knopf also was home to some of the best-selling works in recent times. In 2008, Mehta acquired U.S. rights to a trilogy of crime fiction by a dead Swedish journalist, Stieg Larsson's "Millennium" series, which went on to sell tens of millions of copies. In 2012, the paperback imprint Vintage won a bidding war for an explicit erotic trilogy that at the time could only be read digitally, E L James' "Fifty Shades" novels. Other top sellers released during Mehta's reign included Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In," Bill Clinton's "My Life" and Cheryl Strayed's "Wild." When the Center for Fiction honored Mehta in 2018 with a lifetime achievement award, tributes were written by Joan Didion, Haruki Murakami and Anne Tyler, who praised "his precision" and "deft assurance" and called him the "Fred Astaire of editing."

Knopf's catalog often reflected Mehta's own broad curiosity. In a single season, the publisher might release new fiction by Morrison and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, crime novels by P.D. James and James Ellroy, poetry by Anne Carson and Philip Levine, history by John Keegan and Joseph Ellis, humor by Nora Ephron and memoirs by Bill Clinton or Katharine Hepburn or Andre Agassi. Knopf also appreciated the rewards of patience, allowing Caro to spend years between each installment of his Lyndon Johnson biographies, a decades-long project that sold hundreds of thousands of copies and brought Caro numerous awards.

Mehta was born Ajai Singh Mehta, the bookish son of Indian diplomat Amrik Singh Mehta. He lived everywhere from Geneva to Nepal as a child and graduated from Cambridge University with degrees in history and English literature. Choosing book publishing over his parents' wishes he become a diplomat. Mehta needed little time to make an impact in London, helping to launch the literary career of his college friend Germaine Greer and introducing British readers to the profane Americana of Hunter S. Thompson. With Pan Books, he released works by rising authors such as Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie, while signing up Jackie Collins, Douglas Adams and other best-sellers. He was Gottlieb's personal choice to take over at Knopf, but still faced initial wariness from the staff.

"People ... had the terrible fear that I was going to suddenly publish Jackie Collins over here and really sort of lower the tone of the place," Mehta told Publishers Weekly in 2015. "I think the difference was that I probably encouraged people to market a lot more than they were in the habit of doing. I encouraged them to look at a certain type of literary fiction and see it wasn't necessarily intended for some kind of ghetto, that there was a bigger market for it."

Mehta survived numerous transformations at Knopf, notably the 1999 acquisition by the German conglomerate Bertelsmann AG and the 2012 merger with Penguin Group, and outlasted company rivals such as Random House President Ann Godoff and Bantam Dell publisher Irwyn Applebaum. He was widely credited for expanding the company's international reach and acquiring Vintage and making it one of publishing's most successful paperback imprints, becoming so involved he even redesigned the covers. He also helped keep Knopf, now the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a stable and desired place to work.

Authors from Caro to John Updike remained with the publisher for decades and so did top editors such as Judith Jones, who helped discover Julia Child and other cookbook writers; Ashbel Green, who edited nonfiction authors such as Ellis and former President George H.W. Bush; and Carol Brown Janeway, who acquired English-language editions for fiction by Nobel laureates Heinrich Boll and Imre Kertesz. Mehta himself edited Don Winslow's acclaimed crime novel "The Cartel" and numerous other works.

"On a good day, I am still convinced I have the best job in the world," Mehta told Vanity Fair in 2016, explaining that he had recently finished a novella by Graham Swift. "I opened it and didn't know what to expect, and I read it in one sitting right here in the office, utterly mesmerized. Sometimes you find something new and you just say 'Wow.'"

Raging wildfires trap 4,000 at Australian town's waterfront

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By **TRISTAN LAVALETTE** Associated Press

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Wildfires burning across Australia's two most populous states on Tuesday trapped residents of a seaside town in apocalyptic conditions, destroyed many properties and caused at least two fatalities.

About 5 million hectares (12.35 million acres) of land have burned nationwide during the wildfire crisis, with 12 people confirmed dead and more than 1,000 homes destroyed.

The annual Australian fire season, which peaks during the Southern Hemisphere summer, started early after an unusually warm and dry winter. Record-breaking heat and windy conditions triggered wildfires in New South Wales and Queensland states in September.

In the southeastern town of Mallacoota in Victoria state, around 4,000 residents fled toward the waterside as winds pushed an emergency-level wildfire toward their homes. The town was shrouded in darkness from the smoke before turning an unnerving shade of bright red.

Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews said there were plans to evacuate the trapped people by sea. There also were grave fears for four people missing. "We can't confirm their whereabouts," Andrews told reporters on Tuesday.

Andrews has requested assistance from 70 firefighters from the United States and Canada.

Victoria Emergency Services Commissioner Andrew Crisp confirmed "significant" property losses across the region.

Fire conditions worsened in Victoria and New South Wales after oppressive heat Monday mixed with strong winds and lightning.

Police in New South Wales said Tuesday that two men, believed to be father and son, died in a house in the wildfire-ravaged southeast town of Cobargo, while there are fears for another man missing.

"They were obviously trying to do their best with the fire as it came through in the early hours of the morning," New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner Gary Worboys said. "The other person that we are trying to get to, we think that person was trying to defend their property in the early hours of the morning."

On Monday, a firefighter was killed when extreme winds flipped his truck. Samuel McPaul, 28, was the third volunteer firefighter in New South Wales to have died in the past two weeks. He was an expectant father.

The state's Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said a "significant" number of properties had been destroyed.

Some communities canceled New Year's fireworks celebrations, but Sydney's popular display over its iconic harbor front was to go ahead. The city was granted an exemption to a total fireworks ban that is in place there and elsewhere to prevent new wildfires.

Sydney's popular celebrations were expected to attract around a million spectators and generate 130 million Australian dollars (\$91 million) for New South Wales' economy.

Churchill Airport? Plan to rename Heathrow never moved ahead

LONDON (AP) — Newly public documents reveal that former British Prime Minister John Major was interested in renaming Heathrow Airport after wartime leader Winston Churchill but never moved forward on the idea.

Documents released Tuesday show that Major considered the idea in 1996 after receiving a letter urging him to drop the "stupid" name of Heathrow from the UK's busiest airport.

"New York has Kennedy Airport, Paris has De Gaulle and we have the stupid name of Heathrow," wrote businessman Harvey Spack to the prime minister.

"It should be renamed with the name of the greatest man of the century, who has no truly great memorial in our country. I can only see this as a tremendous boost to the 'feel-good factor' for all of us."

The letter indicated that Spack knew Major and felt comfortable addressing him as "Dear John."

Major wrote back expressing interest: "Thank you for your intriguing idea about renaming Heathrow

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Airport after Sir Winston Churchill. I am looking into this, and I am grateful to you for raising it.”

But Major never proposed the change.

The sprawling airport was named Heathrow after the small village of that name that was removed to make way for it.

While Churchill never received the honor, slain Beatle John Lennon did get similar recognition from his home city: when the Liverpool airport was renamed Liverpool John Lennon Airport in 2001.

It was the first British airport named after an individual.

Bring on 2020: Some Democrats end year with campaign events

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Many of the Democratic candidates looking to unseat President Donald Trump in 2020 are spending the last day of 2019 ringing in the new year with would-be supporters. Elizabeth Warren is marking her anniversary of forming a presidential exploratory committee with a speech at Boston’s Old South Meeting House on Tuesday highlighting how she’d stamp out government corruption. The Congregational church is famous for being the organizing point for the Boston Tea Party in 1773.

Bernie Sanders is holding a year-end news conference followed by an evening “Big New Year’s Bash” featuring what the campaign describes as “Prince’s longtime backing band” in Des Moines, the capital of Iowa, which holds its lead-off caucuses on Feb. 3. Also campaigning in Iowa is New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, who has a pair of house parties on Tuesday afternoon.

Businessman Andrew Yang has invited supporters to mark midnight at a late-night party in New Hampshire, which is set to hold the first primary, on Feb. 11. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar is doing an afternoon town hall in New Hampshire, while Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet also is traveling in the state.

The crush of events reflects how little time there is to spare before voting begins. Even though campaigning ground to a near halt for Christmas Eve and Christmas, candidates are betting voters will be more amenable to their messages on the final day of the year.

“You’ve got to use every minute,” said Kelly Dietrich, founder and CEO of the National Democratic Training Committee, which trains candidates and staff all over the country.

Not everyone is getting into the New Year’s Eve action. Former Vice President Joe Biden campaigned Monday in New Hampshire and had scheduled no public events Tuesday. Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana, has a New Year’s Eve calendar similarly clear of public events.

Most of the candidates don’t have events scheduled for New Year’s Day, though former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick is planning to attend services at Mother Emanuel in Charleston, South Carolina, where nine African American churchgoers were shot to death in 2015.

Dietrich said that sometimes activities like door-knocking can be more effective for candidates during the holidays since many people are home from work. They can also use times of traditional parties, like New Year’s Eve, to rally volunteers and others who have helped with campaigning over the long haul.

Warren, who was a Harvard Law School professor before becoming a senator in 2012, will be on her home turf in Boston. While Yang will be in New Hampshire, his supporters are holding a separate New Year’s Eve party to “watch the ball drop” in his home state of New York.

Fundraising also typically declines between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. But Dietrich said candidates still use the time to work the phones, and he instructs clients to touch base with past donors who haven’t reached maximum donation limits, reminding them to do so before the end of the year.

“You can’t take time off when you’re running for president,” he said. “Your vacation happens the day after the general election.”

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

Officials: Hanukkah attack suspect researched Hitler online

By RYAN TARINELLI, JIM MUSTIAN and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

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MONSEY, N.Y. (AP) — A man charged with federal hate crimes Monday in a bloody attack on a Hanukkah celebration had handwritten journals containing anti-Semitic references and had recently used his phone to look up information on Hitler and the location of synagogues, authorities said.

Grafton Thomas, 37, was held without bail after appearing in federal court in White Plains on five counts of obstructing the free exercise of religious beliefs by attempting to kill with a dangerous weapon. Five people were stabbed and slashed in the Saturday attack north of New York City.

A blood-stained 18-inch (45-centimeter) machete was recovered from his car, along with a knife smeared with dried blood and hair, prosecutors said in a criminal complaint.

Thomas, his ankles shackled, shuffled into the courtroom in a prison jumpsuit, telling a judge who asked him if his head was clear that he was "not clear at all" and needed sleep. But he added: "I am coherent."

His court-appointed attorney, Susanne Brody, said Thomas has struggled with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Another attorney retained by his family, Michael Sussman, said Thomas had been hearing voices and may have stopped taking psychiatric medications recently.

The stabbings on the seventh night of Hanukkah came amid a series of violent attacks targeting Jews in the region that have led to increased security, particularly around religious gatherings.

A criminal complaint said journals recovered from Thomas' home in Greenwood Lake included comments questioning "why ppl mourned for anti-Semitism when there is Semitic genocide" and a page with drawings of a Star of David and a swastika.

A phone recovered from his car included repeated internet searches for "Why did Hitler hate the Jews" as well as "German Jewish Temples near me" and "Prominent companies founded by Jews in America," the complaint said.

On the day of the stabbings, the phone's browser was used to access an article titled: "New York City Increases Police Presence in Jewish Neighborhoods After Possible Anti-Semitic Attacks. Here's What To Know," the complaint said.

Sussman told reporters he visited Thomas' home and found stacks of notes he described as "the ramblings of a disturbed individual" but nothing to point to an "anti-Semitic motive" or suggest Thomas intentionally targeted the rabbi's home.

"My impression from speaking with him is that he needs serious psychiatric evaluation," Sussman said. "His explanations were not terribly coherent."

Thomas' family said he was raised to embrace tolerance but has a long history of mental illness, including multiple hospitalizations.

"He has no history of like violent acts and no convictions for any crime," his family said in a statement. "He has no known history of anti-Semitism and was raised in a home which embraced and respected all religions and races. He is not a member of any hate groups."

Thomas served in the Marines and was president of his class at a high school in Queens, Sussman said. He attended William Paterson University between 2005 and 2007, the university confirmed, where he played football as a walk-on running back.

Thomas' family said his mental health deteriorated over the years. He would hear voices and have trouble completing sentences at times. Thomas said a voice talked to him about property that was in the rabbi's house, according to Sussman.

In court papers filed in a 2013 eviction case in Utah, Thomas said he suffered from schizophrenia, depression and anxiety and his "conditions are spontaneous and untamed."

Thomas was arrested within two hours of the Saturday night attack in Monsey. When police pulled his car over in Manhattan, he had blood all over his clothing and smelled of bleach but said "almost nothing" to the arresting officers, officials said.

Thomas' aunt told The Associated Press that he had a "germ phobia" and obsessively washed his hands and feet with bleach.

She said Thomas grew up in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn and "lived peacefully" among Jewish neighbors. She said Thomas had not been taking his medication and recently went missing for a week.

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The woman spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear she would lose her government job for speaking publicly.

"They're making him look like this monster," she said in a telephone interview. "My nephew is not a monster. He's just sick. He just needs help."

According to the complaint, Thomas, a scarf covering his face, entered the rabbi's home next door to a synagogue and said "no one is leaving." He then took out a machete and started stabbing and slashing people in the home packed with dozens of congregants, the complaint said.

The five victims suffered serious injuries — including a severed finger, slash wounds and deep lacerations — and at least one was in critical condition with a skull fracture, the complaint said.

On Sunday, Thomas pleaded not guilty to charged including five counts of attempted murder. He was detained on \$5 million bail.

In a release, U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman said Thomas "targeted his victims in the midst of a religious ceremony, transforming a joyous Hanukkah celebration into a scene of carnage and pain."

Thomas' criminal history includes an arrest for assaulting a police horse, according to an official briefed on the investigation who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity. A lawyer representing Thomas at the arraignment said he had no convictions.

The criminal complaint said one passage in Thomas' journals stated that the "Hebrew Israelites" took from the "ebidnoid Israelites." The FBI agent who wrote the complaint said that appeared to be a reference to the Black Hebrew Israelite movement, some branches of which have been associated with anti-Semitism.

The attack was the latest in a string of violence targeting Jews in the region, including a Dec. 10 massacre at a kosher grocery store in New Jersey. Last month in Monsey, a man was stabbed while walking to a synagogue. No arrest has been made in that stabbing.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, said Saturday's savagery was the 13th anti-Semitic attack in New York since Dec. 8.

Monsey, near the New Jersey state line about 35 miles (56 kilometers) north of New York City, is one of several Hudson Valley communities that has seen a rising population of Hasidic Jews in recent years. At a Sunday celebration that was planned before the attack, several members of the community stood guard armed with assault-style rifles.

"The Jewish community is utterly terrified," Evan Bernstein, the regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of New York and New Jersey, said in a statement. "No one should have to live like this."

In New York City, the Rev. Al Sharpton appeared Monday with Jewish and other faith leaders at his Harlem headquarters and said he was disturbed and upset that several of the suspects in recent attacks on Jews have been black.

"We cannot remain silent as we see a consistent pattern of attacks on people based on their faith and who they are," Sharpton said. "You can't fight hate against you if you aren't willing to fight hate against everybody else."

___ Mustian and Neumeister reported from New York. Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in New York contributed to this report.

Firearms instructor took out gunman at Texas church service

By JAKE BLEIBERG and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

WHITE SETTLEMENT, Texas (AP) — Alarms went off in Jack Wilson's head the moment a man wearing a fake beard, a wig, a hat and a long coat walked into a Texas church for Sunday services.

By the time the man approached a communion server and pulled out a shotgun, Wilson and another security volunteer were already reaching for their own guns.

The attacker shot the other volunteer, Richard White, and then the server, Anton "Tony" Wallace, sending congregants scrambling for cover. The gunman was heading toward the front of the sanctuary as Wilson searched for a clear line of fire.

"I didn't have a clear window," he said, referring to church members who "were jumping, going cha-

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otic." Wilson, a 71-year-old firearms instructor who has also been a reserve sheriff's deputy, said: "They were standing up. I had to wait about half a second, or a second, to get my shot. I fired one round. The subject went down."

Wilson's single shot quickly ended the attack that killed Wallace, 64, and White, 67, at the West Freeway Church of Christ in the Fort Worth-area town of White Settlement. He said the entire confrontation was over in no more than six seconds. More than 240 congregants were in the church at the time.

"The only clear shot I had was his head because I still had people in the pews that were not all the way down as low as they could. That was my one shot," Wilson said Monday from his home in nearby Granbury.

As Wilson approached the fallen attacker, he noticed five or six other members of the volunteer security team he had trained with their guns drawn. Wilson said they had their eyes on the man since he arrived. During the service, White and Wilson had stationed themselves at the back of the church, watching him.

The Texas Department of Public Safety on Monday identified the attacker as Keith Thomas Kinnunen, 43. His motive is under investigation.

Speaking outside the church Monday, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said authorities "can't prevent mental illness from occurring, and we can't prevent every crazy person from pulling a gun. But we can be prepared like this church was."

Britt Farmer, senior minister of the church, said Sunday, "We lost two great men today, but it could have been a lot worse."

Wilson described the attacker's gun as a short-barreled 12-gauge shotgun with a pistol grip. Shotguns with barrels less than 18 inches long are restricted under federal law and can be legally owned in Texas only if they are registered with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

After the shooting, Texas officials hailed the state's gun laws, including a measure enacted this year that affirmed the right of licensed handgun holders to carry a weapon in places of worship, unless the facility bans them.

That law was passed in the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history, which was also at a church. In the 2017 massacre at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, a man who opened fire on a Sunday morning congregation killed more than two dozen people. He later killed himself.

President Donald Trump also tweeted his appreciation for state's gun legislation Monday night, saying, "Lives were saved by these heroes, and Texas laws allowing them to carry arms!"

Isabel Arreola told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram that she sat near the gunman in White Settlement and that she had never seen him before. She said he was wearing what appeared to be a disguise and made her uncomfortable.

"I was so surprised because I did not know that so many in the church were armed," she said.

Sunday's shooting was the second attack on a religious gathering in the U.S. in less than 24 hours. On Saturday night, a man stabbed five people as they celebrated Hanukkah in an Orthodox Jewish community north of New York City.

Wallace's daughter, Tiffany Wallace, told Dallas TV station KXAS that her father was a deacon at the church.

"I ran toward my dad, and the last thing I remember is him asking for oxygen. And I was just holding him, telling him I loved him and that he was going to make it," Wallace said.

"You just wonder why? How can someone so evil, the devil, step into the church and do this," she said.

White's daughter-in-law, Misty York White, called him a hero on Facebook: "You stood up against evil and sacrificed your life. Many lives were saved because of your actions. You have always been a hero to us but the whole world is seeing you as a hero now. We love you, we miss you, we are heartbroken."

Matthew DeSarno, the agent in charge of the FBI's Dallas office, said the assailant was "relatively transient" but had roots in the area.

Paxton said Monday that the shooter appeared to be "more of a loner." "I don't think he had a lot of connections to very many people," he said.

Investigators searched Kinnunen's home in nearby River Oaks, a small city where police said his depart-

ment's only contact with the gunman was a couple of traffic citations. But Kinnunen appeared to have more serious brushes in other jurisdictions. He was arrested in 2009 on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon in Fort Worth and in 2013 for theft, according to Tarrant County court records.

He was arrested in 2016 in New Jersey after police found him with 12-gauge shotgun and rounds wrapped in plastic in the area of an oil refinery, according to the Herald News Tribune in East Brunswick. It was not immediately clear how those charges were resolved.

In a 2009 affidavit requesting a court-appointed attorney, Kinnunen listed having a wife and said he was living with four children, according to court records. He told the court he was self-employed in landscaping and irrigation work.

Kinnunen's extensive criminal record also included assault charges in Oklahoma and Arizona.

Court records from Grady County, Oklahoma, obtained by Dallas television station KXAS, show that Kinnunen's ex-wife sought a protective order in 2012 in which Cindy Glasgow-Voegel described her husband as a "violent, paranoid person with a long line of assault and batteries with and without firearms. He is a religious fanatic, says he's battling a demon."

Church officials held a closed meeting and prayer vigil just for church members Monday evening. Farmer told the crowd that he had encountered Kinnunen in the past.

"I had seen him. I had visited with him. I had given him food," Farmer said.

White Settlement's website says it was named by local Native Americans in the 1800s for white families then settling in the area. City leaders who worried that the name detracted from the city's image proposed renaming it in 2005, but voters overwhelmingly rejected the idea.

Wilson said the church started the security team about 18 months ago after moving to a new building and becoming concerned about crime in the area. Wilson has been a firearms instructor since 1995, spent six years in the Army National Guard and was a Hood County reserve deputy. He said some of the security team members he trained were at first afraid to touch a gun.

"I don't feel like I killed a human, I killed an evil," Wilson said. "That's how I'm coping with the situation."

Associated Press writers Paul J. Weber in Austin, Jamie Stengle in Dallas, Jill Bleed in Little Rock, Arkansas, and news researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

3 years in, no sign of Trump's replacement for Obamacare

By AAMER MADHANI and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a candidate for the White House, Donald Trump repeatedly promised that he would "immediately" replace President Barack Obama's health care law with a plan of his own that would provide "insurance for everybody."

Back then, Trump made it sound that his plan — "much less expensive and much better" than the Affordable Care Act — was imminent. And he put drug companies on notice that their pricing power no longer would be "politically protected."

Nearly three years after taking office, Americans still are waiting for Trump's big health insurance reveal. Prescription drug prices have edged lower, but with major legislation stuck in Congress it's unclear if that relief is the start of a trend or merely a blip.

Meantime the uninsured rate has gone up on Trump's watch, rising in 2018 for the first time in nearly a decade to 8.5% of the population, or 27.5 million people, according to the Census Bureau.

"Every time Trump utters the words ACA or Obamacare, he ends up frightening more people," said Andy Slavitt, who served as acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services during the Obama administration. He's "deepening their fear of what they have to lose."

White House officials argue that the president is improving the health care system in other ways, without dismantling private health care.

White House spokesman Judd Deere noted Trump's signing of the "Right-to-Try" act that allows some patients facing life-threatening diseases to access unapproved treatment, revamping the U.S. kidney dona-

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tion system and the FDA approving more generic drugs as key improvements. Trump has also launched a drive to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"The president's policies are improving the American health care system for everyone, not just those in the individual market," Deere said.

But as Trump gears up for his reelection campaign, the lack of a health care plan is an issue that Democrats believe they can use against him. Particularly since he's still seeking to overturn "Obamacare" in court.

This month, a federal appeals court struck down the ACA's individual mandate, the requirement that Americans carry health insurance, but sidestepped a ruling on the law's overall constitutionality. The attorneys general of Texas and 18 other Republican-led states filed the underlying lawsuit, which was defended by Democrats and the U.S. House. Texas argued that due to the unlawfulness of the individual mandate, "Obamacare" must be entirely scrapped.

Trump welcomed the ruling as a major victory. Texas v. United States appears destined to be taken up by the Supreme Court, potentially teeing up a constitutional showdown before the 2020 presidential election.

In a letter Monday to Democratic lawmakers, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi singled out the court case. "The Trump administration continues to firmly support the recent ruling in the 5th Circuit, which they hope will move them one step closer to obliterating every protection and benefit of the Affordable Care Act," Pelosi wrote, urging Democrats to keep health care front and center in 2020.

Accused of trying to dismantle his predecessor's health care law with no provision for millions who depend on it, Trump and senior administration officials have periodically teased that a plan was just around the corner.

In August, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Seema Verma, said officials were "actively engaged in conversations and working on things," while Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway suggested that same month an announcement was on the horizon.

In June, Trump told ABC News that he'd roll out his "phenomenal health care plan" in a couple of months, and that it would be a central part of his reelection pitch.

The country is still waiting. Meantime Trump officials say the administration has made strides by championing transparency on hospital prices, pursuing a range of actions to curb prescription drug costs, and expanding lower-cost health insurance alternatives for small businesses and individuals.

One of Trump's small business options — association health plans — is tied up in court. And taken together, the administration's health insurance options are modest when compared with Trump's original goal of rolling back the ACA.

Since Trump has not come through on his promise of a big plan, internecine skirmishes among 2020 Democratic presidential hopefuls have largely driven the health care debate in recent months.

Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are leading the push among liberals for a "Medicare for All" plan that would effectively end private health insurance while more moderate candidates, like Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar, advocate for what they contend is a more attainable expansion of Medicare.

Brad Woodhouse, a former Democratic National Committee official and executive director of the Obamacare advocacy group Protect Our Care, said it is important for Democrats to "put down the knives they've been wielding against one another on health care."

"Instead turn their attention to this president and Republicans who are trying to take it away," Woodhouse counseled.

Some Democratic hopefuls appear to be doing just that.

During a campaign stop in Memphis, Tennessee, this month, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg called out Trump on health care, saying the president is "determined to throw Americans off the boat, without giving them a lifeline."

Polling suggests Trump's failure to follow through on his promise to deliver a revamped health care system could be a drag on his reelection effort.

Voters have consistently named health care as one of their highest concerns in polling. And more narrowly, a recent Gallup-West Health poll found that 66% of adults believe the Trump administration has

made little or no progress curtailing prescription drug costs.

Prescription drug prices did drop 1% in 2018, according to nonpartisan experts at U.S. Health and Human Services.

That was the first such price drop in 45 years, driven by declines for generic drugs, which account for nearly 9 out of 10 prescriptions dispensed. Prices continued to rise for brand-name drugs, although at a more moderate pace.

Trump's broadsides against the pharmaceutical industry might well have helped check prices, though drug companies have been hammered by every major Democrat as well as many Republican lawmakers.

Trump says a health insurance overhaul can be done in a second term if voters give him a Republican Congress as well as a reelection win.

But Trump and the GOP had that chance when they were in full control and unable to deliver, because Republicans don't agree among themselves.

Trump could still score a big win on prescription drugs before the 2020 election. He's backing a bipartisan Senate bill that would limit what Medicare recipients pay out of pocket for their medicines and require drug companies to pay rebates to the government if they increase prices above inflation.

Passing it would require the cooperation of Pelosi, harshly criticized by Trump over impeachment.

China has pain pill addicts too, but no one's counting them

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

SHANGHAI (AP) —

Wu Yi was supposed to die. At age 26, his cancer was spreading.

His doctor gave him five years to live and a prescription for OxyContin.

Six years later, he was still alive. And still taking OxyContin. Wu said his doctor told him that OxyContin is not addictive, but when Wu tried to stop, he couldn't.

"This drug is addictive," Wu said. "One hundred percent addictive."

A thousand miles (1,600 km) away, in the ancient trading city of Xi'an, Yin Hao shoved eight pills of Tylox, a combination painkiller that contains the opioid oxycodone, in his mouth. Yin had started taking Tylox after getting injured in a fight six years earlier.

"Do you know how f----- much I don't want to take drugs?" he said. "My mouth says don't take it, but my body is more honest and figures out a way to get it."

Both Wu and Yin fell into opioid abuse the same way many Americans did, through a doctor's prescription. But officially, in China, they don't exist.

Addicts like Wu and Yin struggle in the shadows of a system that offers few treatment options and fails to count them in official statistics on drug abuse, the Associated Press found, making it difficult to assess abuse risks as China's consumption of opioid painkillers rises. In a society where shame about drug addiction is strong, many believe that strict controls on painkiller use will protect China from a U.S.-style addiction outbreak.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Associated Press, supported by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, is investigating the global spread of opioids and its consequences.

As the backlash against opioid painkillers drove down U.S. consumption, pharmaceutical companies began chasing profits in places like China, Australia and Europe using the same controversial sales tactics they did in North America. In 2017, more than half the doses of five major opioid painkillers went to countries other than the U.S. and Canada, the first time that has happened since at least 2000, data from the International Narcotics Control Board shows.

Chinese officials have blamed out-of-control demand and poor oversight for the U.S. opioid epidemic, discounting the role of Chinese supply. Meanwhile, painkiller addicts in China remain largely invisible and, despite strict regulations, can turn to online black markets for opioids and other prescription drugs. The

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AP found previously unreported trafficking of OxyContin and Tylox on e-commerce and social media platforms run by China's largest technology companies.

Only 11,132 cases of medical drug abuse were reported in China in 2016, according to the most recent publicly available national drug abuse surveillance report. But reporting is voluntary and drawn from a small sample of institutions including law enforcement agencies, drug rehabilitation centers and some hospitals.

The China Food and Drug Administration said in the 2016 report that it was trying to do better but for the time being "the nature of medical drug abuse in the population cannot be confirmed."

Hao Wei, president of the Chinese Association of Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment, said he believes abuse of prescription opioids is limited in China, but added that official data largely overlooks prescription drug abuse.

"What is recorded is the tip of the iceberg," he said.

China's National Medical Products Administration and the National Narcotics Control Commission did not respond to requests for comment.

A VISIT FROM THE GOD OF DEATH

Wu was diagnosed with lymphoma in October 2013.

Cancer transformed Wu from a baby-faced boy to a sallow wraith immobilized on a gurney. Doctors cut chemotherapy short after he developed an infection, he said, and his existence narrowed to a single, searing reality: Pain.

For six months, Wu lay in bed. Strange bulges, filled with pink fluid, appeared on his legs. It felt like his bones were swelling until they were ready to burst.

"At that time, I wanted to commit suicide because it was too painful," he said. "But I wasn't able to, because my leg joints and shoulder joints didn't work."

Wu said a doctor at Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou gave him his first prescription for OxyContin in 2014, telling him he could take as much as he wanted.

As a late-stage cancer patient, Wu was exactly the kind of person OxyContin was meant to help. And the pills brought him relief. But even as the U.S. death toll from opioid overdoses approached 400,000, no one in China warned Wu about addiction risks, he said, not his doctor or the nurses or the drug company sales representative who visited him at his bedside.

The sales rep told AP she worked for Mundipharma, a Chinese company that is owned by the Sackler family, which also owns Purdue Pharma, the American company whose sales of OxyContin allegedly helped drive the U.S. opioid crisis. She told AP she has left Mundipharma but confirmed she used to visit some patients in the hospital. She refused to discuss further details. Three other former Mundipharma employees also told AP they regularly visited patients in the hospital, sometimes disguising themselves as doctors.

A doctor from Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center told AP that sales reps are not allowed to visit patients. He said he warns patients about OxyContin's abuse risks but acknowledged not all doctors do. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk with foreign media.

In a statement to AP, Mundipharma denied that sales staff visit patients and said it has checks and balances in place to "ensure strict compliance with medical protocols, laws and regulations."

Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center did not respond to requests for comment.

THE PICKAXE

Yin Hao, who also goes by Yin Qiang, struggled to remember life before pain pills. He thought back to when was 21 years old, strong and wiry, working at a nightclub. He had knock-off Burberry sheets, a mortgage in his name, and a girl he planned to marry.

Then one night in 2013, he and his friends got into a fight with some older, richer guys, and someone drove a pickaxe into his waist.

The hospital sent him home with four boxes of Tylox, a combination of acetaminophen and oxycodone, the active ingredient in OxyContin. Tylox is manufactured by SpecGx, a subsidiary of Mallinckrodt, which has faced lawsuits in the U.S. accusing it of helping stoke the opioid abuse crisis.

Mallinckrodt has denied the allegations.

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Yin said his doctor didn't tell him the medicine could be addictive. Within six months, he was taking 30 pills a day.

Yin needed more and more pills to function. He opened dozens of accounts with online pharmacies to buy Tylox. Many didn't require a prescription. Once he wrote a three-character Chinese profanity on a piece of paper and uploaded a photo of that instead of a prescription. The pills came anyway, he said. He figured pharmacies wanted the sale almost as much as he wanted the drugs. His excessive consumption didn't trigger any alarms.

Yin lost 60 pounds. He wondered if his kidneys would fail and was convinced Tylox had changed the color of his eyes. "My nerves are a mess, my bones are misplaced and I have become lazy, irritable, extreme," he said. "Experts say that if you take this medicine because of pain, it's not addictive. This is rubbish."

JUST CHEW IT

In early 2016, a doctor told Wu the cancer had come back. He signed an organ donation form, and posted it on social media with a message: "Although I don't know when the journey of life will end, when that moment comes, I will leave behind a bunch of flowers, roses that blossom from my body."

The proximity of death clarified Wu's ambition. He had dropped out of school at fifteen and hustled to start a catering business, which collapsed when he got sick.

Now, Wu dreamed of leaving his parents' home in Yangjiang, a coastal city in southern Guangdong province, and moving to Shenzhen, China's dazzling southern boom town, to make music.

"If people don't let me make music, I will die with everlasting regret, he said."

Wu taught himself composition and piano from videos posted online at Bilibili, a video-sharing platform.

By 2018, Wu's cancer was in remission and he could walk with a crutch. The pain was under control, but he kept taking OxyContin. "Once you take that drug, I've said it, it's just like going home," he said. "There's a sense of belonging and safety."

But the longer Wu took the pills, the less effective they were, he said. Wu started taking OxyContin with a half bottle of strong Chinese liquor, which he had delivered secretly to his house.

He also noticed the package insert for OxyContin says not to chew it, which releases the active ingredient, oxycodone, all at once rather than over time. Chewing the pills made them hit with more intensity. "As long as you try chewing it once, there's no way for you not to chew it the next time," he said.

MORE TERRIBLE THAN GHOSTS

Yin had vowed dozens of times to quit Tylox. He tried ice baths, saunas, and Russian vodka. He took a fistful of an antipsychotic that made him feel like his heart had stopped. He went to hypnosis and consulted cheap doctors online.

Yin said he'd gone to hospitals for help, but doctors around Panjin, the town in northeastern China where he lived with his grandparents, didn't seem to know what withdrawal was. Some told him to go to a psychiatric hospital; others prescribed more Tylox, he said.

He moved to South Korea for a fresh start, but said he got deported after fighting with a policeman.

Once he rented a hotel room in the northeastern city of Dalian, shackled his leg to the radiator and threw the key out the window, he said. He binged on horror movies and cigarettes to distract himself and spent a few sweaty, aching hours alone, writhing in a bed that felt like it was made of fire. Then he broke the lock on his shackles, ran to a pharmacy and bought more Tylox.

On March 6, Yin woke up at 6 a.m. determined to go cold turkey. It hurt to chew. He soaked biscuits in water and gummed them; a little while later, they were diarrhea.

"If I fail and go back to taking the medicine, I will fall apart," he said on his sixth day of sobriety.

Yin said he hoped his story would be a warning to others. If he could make a single vulnerable person understand the consequences of taking this drug, it would be one thing in his life he didn't regret.

"I used to be afraid of ghosts, but now I think this is more terrible than ghosts," he said.

BLACK MARKETS

Wu's family had poured out all their meager fortune to pay his medical bills. He said health insurance had covered roughly 30 to 60 percent of the cost, depending on where he got treatment. To pay the rest, the

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family sold their house in August 2014. His parents, who planted orange trees before he got sick, picked up short-term jobs, like cleaning restaurants.

As 2018 rolled into 2019, Wu was still spending 1,500 yuan (\$215) a month on OxyContin. His parents told him he was poisoning himself and started locking up his pills.

In April, he again swore to his family he would stop. Instead, he secretly spent his last 2,000 yuan on OxyContin.

When he went to the hospital to pick up his pills, he signed consent form that instructed him not to give the medicine to anyone else, but did not warn about the risk addiction or abuse, a copy of the signed form shows.

Wu trolled internet forums for cheaper, second-hand OxyContin. He joined an online community of opioid dealers and abusers, and grieving family members eager to get rid of left-over pain medicine.

Wu left his contact information in a thread about OxyContin on Tianya, an internet forum. He said someone offered him OxyContin left over after a family member died, but he decided to stay focused on surviving on four pills a day, down from six.

In the U.S., online sales fueled the spread of opioid abuse. Major tech platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, have struggled to purge themselves of illicit listings.

China has some of the strictest regulation of opioids in the world, which many believe will prevent a U.S.-style addiction outbreak. But AP found illicit trafficking of opioids on the open internet in China as well.

In a brief survey, AP identified thirteen active vendors selling OxyContin and Tylox on Tencent's popular WeChat and QQ platforms, Alibaba's second-hand marketplace Xianyu, Baidu's Tieba forum, as well as Sina Corp.'s Weibo microblogging site and Zhuan Zhuan, another second-hand marketplace. Vendors often used one platform to find customers and another to execute sales. In addition, Tianya had dozens of posts from people selling or seeking OxyContin over the past few years.

The AP did not make any purchases and could not confirm the authenticity of the pills.

"Mundipharma China has no knowledge of the diversion of its products on e-commerce and social media platforms," the company said in a statement to AP.

Mallinckrodt's specialty generics subsidiary SpecGx sells its pain pills to a Chinese importer. In a statement, the company said it "has no manufacturing, distribution, sales force or in-country presence in China."

Alibaba's Xianyu, known as Idle Fish in English, said it removed listings that violated marketplace policies after AP pointed out illicit opioid sales. The company said it prohibits "illegal behavior by third-party sellers on the platform." Sina Corp., which runs Weibo, said that after finding violations, it ran a campaign in March to clean-up illicit content about medicines and medical equipment. Xianyu, Tencent, Baidu and Sina Corp. all said they actively monitor their platforms and encourage users to proactively report illicit activity.

Tianya and 58.com, which runs Zhuan Zhuan, didn't respond to requests for comment.

IT'S GOOD I DIDN'T DIE

On April 28, Wu ran out of money and stopped taking OxyContin. The fact that he was alive the year after he was supposed to be dead gave him hope. "I'm still young," Wu said. "I have a lot of things to do."

Four days later, he told a doctor at Yangchun People's Hospital he couldn't stop taking OxyContin and hadn't slept in days. He left with a prescription for benzodiazepine sleeping pills and a warning not to take more than three at a time. He took 15.

The next day, he went back for more, but the doctor didn't want to give him more than day's supply. Wu lay on the hospital floor and refused to budge.

"I am suffering so much," he called out. "Why do you treat me like this?"

Wu said he managed to get more sleeping pills that week by visiting different doctors. He'd take 20 or more at a time. The pills stunned him, he said, but didn't put him to sleep. At night, he'd just fall down, unconscious.

"It's good I didn't die," he said.

Doctors at Yangchun People's Hospital eventually cut him off and told him to go to a mental hospital, he said.

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Yangchun People's Hospital did not respond to requests for comment.

On May 29, Wu got his brain scanned at the Yangchun Minfu Psychiatric Hospital, medical records show. Doctors there first told Wu he was suffering from schizophrenia, then changed their diagnosis to depression, he said.

Wu didn't believe he was mentally ill. He said he told doctors he was going through opioid withdrawal. He said he was given an anti-depressant and an anti-psychotic.

A man who picked up the phone at Yangchun Minfu Psychiatric Hospital said the facility has no addiction treatment program and had never dealt with prescription pill abuse. He refused to give his name and hung up the phone.

Wu's body began to swell. Terrified his cancer was back, he checked into the oncology ward of Yangchun People's Hospital on June 15. A blood test came back clean, he said. His cancer was still in remission.

By the end of June, the worst of the withdrawal symptoms were gone.

THE WORLD WITHOUT HIM IS AN ABYSS

Despite the officially low numbers of pill addicts, the Chinese government was concerned enough about painkiller abuse that in September it pulled combination opioid painkillers, including Tylox, from most pharmacies.

On September 18, Yin Hao posted an elegy to Tylox on WeChat. The world without Tylox, he wrote, "is an abyss."

He said he was taking more than 100 Tylox pills a day, which added up to over 500 mg of oxycodone and 32,500 mg of acetaminophen. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control says a dose of just 33 mg of oxycodone a day doubles the risk of overdose. Taking more than 4,000 mg of acetaminophen daily can result in severe liver damage and death.

Before the new regulations took effect, it was easy to get Tylox from pharmacies in certain cities and online without a prescription. Earlier this year, AP identified five pharmacies selling Tylox without a prescription. In addition, three of six online pharmacies that said they had Tylox in stock sold it without a prescription, AP found.

A month after the new rules took effect, Yin had just two pills left. He thought about committing a crime or using harder drugs so the police would force him into a mandatory detox center.

By November Yin's pill box was full again. He claimed he was able to buy Tylox illegally from some online pharmacies. He said he lied to doctors at hospitals to get more pills, though not everyone fell for it.

Yin said he got Tylox sales agents to sell him bulk pills directly and bribed a courier not to examine his packages. He declined to share their names with AP, and it was impossible to verify his claim.

Sometimes Yin worried police were following him. He didn't want to go to prison, he said. He wanted to go to rehab.

If he could unspool his life and wind it up again, Yin said the second time round he would take pain instead of Tylox.

WU'S DREAM

At 9:40 a.m. on September 23, Wu took a bus to Shenzhen and found a cheap third-floor room for rent.

"My dream is making music," Wu said in an interview earlier this month. "But in the two months since I came to Shenzhen, I have found the reality and dream are pretty different. Reality is crueler."

Wu's face and hands seemed too big for his narrow hips. He was trying to get his body in better shape to prepare for hip replacement surgery, which he hopes to have next year. He flashed a smile and said he'd earn enough from singing to pay for the operation, but so far he's barely making rent.

Around 1 a.m. early one Friday, Wu strapped a bottle of water onto the wheeled cart he uses to haul his amplifier around, grabbed his crutch and thumped down the stairs. He yanked his gear into the dark December chill and headed over to a strip of restaurants to see if he could sell any songs.

At 1:15 a.m. it started to rain. Bad luck. There was hardly anyone around. A friendly restaurant manager let him sit under a bright blue awning until the rain stopped.

Wu picked up his crutch and hauled his amplifier down a block and up a block and down a block again, peering into each small restaurant for stragglers who might pay him 30 yuan (\$4) to sing.

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At 2:45 a.m., people at a table laden with empty beers took Wu's menu of songs, mostly Cantonese hits from the Eighties and Nineties, and after long deliberation, picked one. Wu sat in the cold near a hunk of glistening meat on display and waited for the people at the table to go to the bathroom and buy more cigarettes.

Finally, Wu began to sing, a song called, "My Good Brothers."

"Thank you," he said when he was done.

No one clapped.

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Associated Press researcher Chen Si contributed to this report. Associated Press researcher Yu Bing contributed from Beijing.

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Trump signs law to reduce robocalls, though they won't end

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — An anti-robocalls measure signed into law Monday by President Donald Trump should help reduce the torrent of unwanted calls promising lower interest rates or pretending to be the IRS, though it won't make all such calls disappear.

The new law gives authorities more enforcement powers and could speed up measures the industry is already taking to identify robocalls. And when phone companies block robocalls, they must do so without charging consumers. This should help Americans dodge many of these annoying calls.

"American families deserve control over their communications, and this legislation will update our laws and regulations to stiffen penalties, increase transparency, and enhance government collaboration to stop unwanted solicitation," White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said.

The law is a "big victory," said Consumer Reports' Maureen Mahoney. "The key is requiring these phone companies to help stop the calls before they reach the consumer and do it at no additional charge."

The robocall problem has exploded because cheap software makes it easy to make mass calls. Americans collectively get billions of robocalls each month. Such calls have disrupted operations at hospitals by diverting staff time to deal with calls faked to look as though they are coming from inside the hospital. Scams conducted through such calls have also defrauded people out of millions of dollars. Many people now avoid answering calls altogether if they come from unknown numbers.

Under federal law, it's already illegal to fake numbers on Caller ID to defraud or cause harm. Scams are also prohibited, as are automated telemarketing calls from legitimate companies that don't already have written permission. YouMail's robocall index says that half of all robocalls today are fraudulent.

But enforcement has been tough. Federal agencies have fined scammers hundreds of millions of dollars, but it's been difficult to collect. Many of the callers are overseas. It's hard to throw the fraudsters in jail.

The new law builds on steps taken by the country's communications regulator, the Federal Communications Commission, as well as state attorneys general and industry groups.

The FCC has clarified that phone companies can block unwanted calls without first asking customers, paving the way to broaden the rollout of call-blocking services. The law says phone companies cannot charge for these services.

Another important step is getting rid of "spoofed" numbers, or when a scammer fakes Caller ID to look like it's coming from the same area code or an important government agency like the IRS. The industry is developing a system to tell people when the Caller ID number is real.

The new law requires all phone companies to put this system in place, which Mahoney said will mean phone companies have to try to stop these calls before they reach the consumer. This technology doesn't work for home phones connected to an old-school copper landline; the law calls on the FCC and phone companies to come up with an alternative for those customers.

The FCC also gets more time to fine robocallers and do so without warning them first. The bill also calls for tougher fines when individuals intentionally violate the law and pushes the agency to work with the

Justice Department to go after criminals. Over the long term, that could act as a deterrent.

Nonetheless, determined scammers and telemarketers will likely find ways to get through, given the availability of cheap dialing technology and the big potential payoff from victims. Think of how malware on personal computers is still a problem despite antivirus software. Automated callers could circumvent new safety measures by buying or hijacking real numbers to make calls.

"They'll always find ways around this," said Paul Florack, vice president of product management for Transaction Network Services, which runs robocall analytics for Verizon, Sprint and other phone companies.

And not every robocall is considered illegal. Some robocalls are helpful reminders from pharmacies that a prescription is ready, or schools advising a snow day. If you've given written permission, a cable company or cruise line can pitch you with marketing calls that consist of prerecorded messages. While a House version of the measure would have made it harder for legitimate companies to make such calls, that measure was dropped in the version that became law.

The law also does nothing about telemarketing calls that aren't automated. A human can still pester you unless you sign up for the Do Not Call registry, which scammers often ignore anyway.

And even when phone companies have in place the system for verifying Caller ID, not all phones support it. A year ago, T-Mobile started telling customers if the number ringing them was "verified," but it can't do that on Apple's iPhones until after the call has ended. That's because Apple software doesn't allow it, Florack said. Apple didn't reply to a request for comment.

The law says phone companies can't charge extra for blocking robocalls, though it doesn't require that such services or apps be made available to everyone. AT&T's version, for instance, isn't rolled out yet to its 18 million customers on lower-income-skewing prepaid plans.

But ideally, Mahoney said, a consumer wouldn't have to take any action by downloading an app — as the carrier would be able to block calls automatically.

Cliffs, jungle a big hurdle for feds in Hawaii copter crash

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — The remote and rugged terrain on the Hawaiian island of Kauai where a sightseeing helicopter crashed, killing all seven people aboard, could make it difficult or even impossible to piece together what led to the wreck.

Federal investigators who arrived Sunday are calling the inaccessible area of steep cliffs and thick jungle canopies one of the most challenging crash sites they have seen.

Getting a team to the actual site was proving to be one of the initial challenges, National Transportation Safety Board spokesman Eric Weiss said Monday.

"The logistics of this particular site are very challenging, even by NTSB standards," Weiss said. "I can't exaggerate the difficulty of the terrain."

Before the helicopter crashed on a mountaintop Thursday, it was set to tour the rugged Na Pali Coast, the picturesque and remote northern shoreline of Kauai that was featured in the film "Jurassic Park."

The copter apparently struck a cliff face before falling 50 to 100 yards (45 to 90 meters) about a 1 mile (2 kilometers) inland, Kauai fire Battalion Chief Solomon Konoho told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

The team of investigators from Alaska and Washington state planned to fly over the crash site in a helicopter Monday and then come up with a plan on getting people to the area, Weiss said.

Sometimes it's been impossible for investigators to reach wrecks.

The NTSB couldn't determine why an Alaska sightseeing airplane crashed into a mountain in Denali National Park in 2018, killing a pilot and four passengers from Poland, because it couldn't reach the wreckage. The plane crashed on a near-vertical mountainside covered by snow and ice and later got buried when a glacier split apart.

In Hawaii, federal investigators have started their work remotely even if they can't get to the Kauai site, Weiss said, including studying the fast-changing weather at the time of the crash.

National Weather Service meteorologist Gavin Shigesato said the agency was not releasing information

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on Thursday's weather conditions on Kauai.

"We're going to hold off on any comments at this time just for the NTSB to do their investigation," he said. "In that mountainous terrain, there are not a lot of observations that can be taken, but we'll leave that up to the incident report of the NTSB."

The inaccessibility of the site also could hamper efforts to bring the wreckage elsewhere to study it.

"I don't know if that will be possible in this case," Weiss said.

Six people from two different families and a pilot were on the flight. Police said the flight manifest listed the pilot as Paul Matero, 69, of Wailua, Hawaii. Two of the passengers were 47-year-old Amy Gannon and 13-year-old Jocelyn Gannon of Wisconsin.

The four other passengers, including two girls who were 10 and 13, were from Switzerland, officials said.

Because of that, there's been a delay in releasing their names, said Coco Zickos, a spokeswoman for Kauai County. She said officials expect to release the names once they have finished notifying relatives.

Experts say Kauai's topography and weather pose unique challenges to pilots and that it would be difficult to find anywhere to make an emergency landing. U.S. Rep. Ed Case of Hawaii has said more needs to be done to make tour helicopters and small planes safe.

The helicopter company, Safari Helicopters, has had 11 enforcement actions since 1994, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

"We closed all of them with warning letters or letters of correction, which are on the low end of the enforcement scale," FAA spokesman Ian Gregor said.

FAA records showed four previous incidents involving Safari Helicopters since 2001. None involved major injuries.

The company contacted the Coast Guard on Thursday evening after the tour did not return as scheduled. A search began, but steep terrain, low visibility, choppy seas and rain complicated the effort.

The company's owner, Preston Myers, said in a statement that Matero had 12 years of experience on Kauai and was a "seasoned member of our team."

Associated Press writer Dan Joling in Anchorage, Alaska, and Caleb Jones in Honolulu contributed to this report.

Sharon Stone's dating profile restored after being blocked

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sharon Stone can now return to mingling on Bumble without being kicked off the dating app.

A Bumble spokesperson said in a statement Monday that Stone's profile has been restored after it was "mistakenly" blocked. The 61-year-old Golden Globe-winning actress said on Twitter the day before that Bumble closed her account and she asked, "Is being me exclusionary? Don't shut me out the hive."

Bumble apologized for the confusion but thought users could have viewed Stone's profile as fake because there was no verification.

"Being the icon that she is, we can understand how so many of our users felt it was too good to be true once they noticed her profile wasn't photo verified," the statement said. "Photo verification is just one of the many ways to connect with confidence on Bumble."

Bumble extended an offer to host Stone for a few hours of profile prep at their headquarters in Austin, Texas.

Stone is best known for starring in the 1992 drama "Basic Instinct" and the 1995 crime film "Casino." She has been married twice, the first to producer Michael Greenburg and then journalist Phil Bronstein, who she divorced in 2004.

The actress' rep didn't immediately return an email message from The Associated Press.

Ex-Nissan boss Ghosn, facing Japan trial, arrives in Beirut

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By **SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press**

BEIRUT (AP) — Former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn, who is awaiting trial in Japan on charges of financial misconduct, has arrived in Beirut, a close friend said Monday. He apparently jumped bail.

It was not clear how Ghosn, who is of Lebanese origin and holds French and Lebanese passports, left Japan where he was under surveillance and is expected to face trial in April 2020.

Ricardo Karam, a television host and friend of Ghosn who interviewed him several times, told The Associated Press Ghosn arrived in Lebanon Monday morning.

"He is home," Karam told the AP in a message. "It's a big adventure."

Karam declined to elaborate. Local media first reported Ghosn arrived in Lebanon but didn't offer details. There was no immediate comment from Japan or from Lebanese officials.

Ghosn, 65, has been on bail in Tokyo since April and is facing charges of hiding income and financial misconduct. He has denied the charges. He had been under strict bail conditions in Japan after spending more than 120 days in detention.

Lebanon-based paper Al-Joumhouriya said Ghosn arrived in Beirut from Turkey aboard a private jet. AP has not been able to confirm those details or how he was able to leave Tokyo.

A house known to belong to Ghosn in a Beirut neighborhood had security guards outside with two lights on Monday night, but no sign otherwise of anyone inside. The guards denied he was inside, although one said he was in Lebanon without saying how he knew that.

Ghosn was arrested last year in Japan and has been charged with under-reporting his compensation and other financial misconduct. He denies wrongdoing and was out on bail. His trial had not started.

Ghosn's lawyers say the allegations are a result of trumped-up charges rooted in a conspiracy among Nissan, government officials and prosecutors to oust Ghosn to prevent a fuller merger with Nissan's alliance partner, Renault SA of France.

Ghosn, one of the auto industry's biggest stars before his downfall, is credited with leading Nissan from near-bankruptcy to lucrative growth.

Even as he fell from grace internationally, Ghosn was still treated as a hero in Lebanon, where many had long held hopes he would one day play a bigger role in politics, or help rescue its failing economy.

Politicians across the board mobilized in his defense after his arrest in Japan, with some suggesting his detention may be part of a political or business-motivated conspiracy.

The Lebanese took special pride in the auto industry icon, who speaks fluent Arabic and visited regularly. Born in Brazil, where his Lebanese grandfather had sought his fortune, Ghosn grew up in Beirut, where he spent part of his childhood at a Jesuit school.

His wife, Carole Nahas, is also of Lebanese heritage. In November, Ghosn was allowed to talk to his wife after an eight-month ban on such contact while he awaits trial.

Japanese Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Keisuke Suzuki visited Beirut earlier this month where he met with the Lebanese president and foreign minister.

Associated Press writer Zeina Karam in Beirut contributed reporting.

Today in History

By **The Associated Press** undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 31, the 365th and final day of 2019.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 31, 1986, 97 people were killed when fire broke out in the Dupont Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (Three hotel workers later pleaded guilty in connection with the blaze.)

On this date:

In 1775, during the Revolutionary War, the British repulsed an attack by Continental Army generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold at Quebec; Montgomery was killed.

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In 1879, Thomas Edison first publicly demonstrated his electric incandescent light by illuminating some 40 bulbs at his laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey.

In 1904, New York's Times Square saw its first New Year's Eve celebration, with an estimated 200,000 people in attendance.

In 1951, the Marshall Plan expired after distributing more than \$12 billion in foreign aid.

In 1972, Major League baseball player Roberto Clemente, 38, was killed when a plane he chartered and was traveling on to bring relief supplies to earthquake-devastated Nicaragua crashed shortly after takeoff from Puerto Rico.

In 1974, private U.S. citizens were allowed to buy and own gold for the first time in more than 40 years.

In 1985, singer Rick Nelson, 45, and six other people were killed when fire broke out aboard a DC-3 that was taking the group to a New Year's Eve performance in Dallas.

In 1987, Robert Mugabe (moo-GAH'-bay) was sworn in as Zimbabwe's first executive president.

In 1991, representatives of the government of El Salvador and rebels reached agreement at the United Nations on a peace accord to end 12 years of civil war.

In 1999, Russian President Boris Yeltsin announced his resignation (he was succeeded by Vladimir Putin).

In 1997, Michael Kennedy, the 39-year-old son of the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, was killed in a skiing accident on Aspen Mountain in Colorado. Pianist Floyd Cramer died in Nashville at age 64.

In 2001, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani spent his final day in office praising police, firefighters, and other city employees in the wake of 9/11, and said he had no regrets about returning to private life.

Ten years ago: A lone gunman dressed in black killed five people in Espoo, Finland, four of them at a crowded shopping mall, before returning home and taking his own life.

Five years ago: In one of his final acts as Maryland governor, Democrat Martin O'Malley announced that he would commute the sentences of four death-row inmates to life in prison without parole. A stampede at Shanghai's glitzy riverfront during New Year celebrations resulted in 36 deaths. Actor Edward Herrmann, 71, died at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York.

One year ago: Despite some New Year's Eve gains, stocks finished 2018 with their worst yearly showing in a decade; the S&P 500 ended the year 6.2 percent lower than where it began. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren took the first major step toward a presidential campaign, telling supporters she would more formally announce a campaign plan in early 2019. House Democrats unveiled a package of bills that would re-open the federal government without approved funding for President Donald Trump's border wall with Mexico; Trump, meanwhile, told Fox News Channel that he was "ready, willing and able" to negotiate an end to the partial shutdown that had stretched into its 10th day.

Today's Birthdays: TV producer George Schlatter is 90. Actor Sir Anthony Hopkins is 82. Actor Tim Conside (TV: "My Three Sons") is 79. Actress Sarah Miles is 78. Actress Barbara Carrera is 78. Rock musician Andy Summers is 77. Actor Sir Ben Kingsley is 76. Producer-director Taylor Hackford is 75. Fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg is 73. Actor Tim Matheson is 72. Pop singer Burton Cummings is 72. Actor Joe Dallesandro is 71. Rock musician Tom Hamilton (Aerosmith) is 68. Actor James Remar is 66. Actress Bebe Neuwirth is 61. Actor Val Kilmer is 60. Singer Paul Westerberg is 60. Actor Don Diamont is 57. Rock musician Ric Ivanisevich (Oleander) is 57. Rock musician Scott Ian (Anthrax) is 56. Actress Gong Li is 54. Author Nicholas Sparks is 54. Actor Lance Reddick is 50. Pop singer Joe McIntyre is 47. Rock musician Mikko Siren (Apocalyptica) is 44. Donald Trump Jr. is 42. Rapper PSY (Park Jae-sang) is 42. Rock musician Bob Bryar is 40. Rock musician Jason Sechrist (Portugal. The Man) is 40. Actor Ricky Whittle is 40. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., is 40. Actor/singer Erich Bergen is 34. DJ/vocalist Drew Taggart (The Chainsmokers) is 30. Olympic gold medal gymnast Gabby Douglas is 24.

Thought for Today: "Youth is when you're allowed to stay up late on New Year's Eve. Middle age is when you're forced to!" — William E. Vaughan, American newspaper columnist (1915-1977).

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