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Chicken Soup
for the Soul.

“BE GLAD OF
LIFE BECAUSE
IT GIVES YOU
THE CHANCE
TO LOVE AND
TO WORK AND
TO PLAY AND
TO LOOK UP AT
THE STARS.”

-HENRY VAN DYKE

Office: 397-2440
Cell: 397-7550
9 N. 3rd St., Groton

Installation
Service & Repair
Underground & Aerial Work

**HAPPY
NEW
YEAR**

**Locke
Electric**

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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EMPLOYMENT

The Groton Area School District is accepting applications for the position of Certified Sign Language Interpreter. Applicants should complete and submit the certified staff application form along with a current cover letter, resume, and three letters of recommendation. All materials should be submitted to Joe Schwan, Superintendent PO Box 410 Groton, SD 57445. EOE

Upcoming Events

Thursday, January 9, 2020

6:00 p.m.: Wrestling at Redfield

Carnival of Silver Skates Costume Hand-outs, 4-8 p.m., St. John's Lutheran Church

Friday, January 10, 2020

Basketball double header hosting Hamlin (Girls junior varsity at 4 p.m., Boys junior varsity at 5 p.m., Girls varsity at 6:30 p.m., Boys varsity to follow)

Saturday, January 11, 2020

12:30 p.m.: Girls' Varsity Basketball Classic at Redfield. Groton Area vs. St. Francis Indian School

CANCELLED: Boys at Varsity Classic at the Sanford Pentagon

10 a.m.: Wrestling at Miller Tournament

Sunday, January 12, 2020

2:00pm- 6:00pm: Open Gym at GHS Arena

2:00-4:00 PM Grades JK-8 (Students must be accompanied by an adult) 4:00-6:00 PM Grades 6-12

Monday, January 13, 2020

6 p.m.: Junior high basketball games at Warner. 7th grade at 6 p.m., 8th grade at 7 p.m.

6 p.m.: Junior high wrestling tournament in Groton

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Tuesday, January 14, 2020

5:15 p.m.: Combined 7th/8th grade boys basketball game vs. Aberdeen Christian at the Aberdeen Civic Arena

6:30 p.m.: Boys' basketball game at Aberdeen Christian High School. Junior varsity at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game.

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

8:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.: MathCounts at Aberdeen Simmons Middle School

Thursday, January 16, 2020

6:30 p.m.: Girls' Basketball hosts Sisseton. JV game at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game.

Friday, January 17, 2020

Silver Bowl Debate at Sioux Falls

No School - Faculty Inservice

6 p.m.: Boys' basketball at Sisseton. JV game at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game.

Saturday, January 18, 2020

Silver Bowl Debate in Sioux Falls

10:00am: Basketball: Boys 7th/8th Jamboree @ Groton Area High School

10:00am: Wrestling: Varsity Tournament at Potter County (Gettysburg)

Sunday, January 19, 2020

2:00pm- 6:00pm: Open Gym at GHS Arena

2:00-4:00 PM Grades JK-8 (Students must be accompanied by an adult) 4:00-6:00 PM Grades 6-12

Monday, January 20, 2020

6:30pm: GBB hosts Langford Area. JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

CRP Enrollment Options

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) is currently taking applications to enroll environmentally sensitive agricultural land into perennial cover for 10 to 15 years through the federally funded Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Participants receive annual rental payments and 50 percent cost-share to establish the perennial cover, which can be grasses, forbs, and/or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. The 2018 Farm Bill created more haying and grazing management opportunities for land enrolled in CRP as well.

A cropping history of 4 out of 6 years from 2012 to 2017 is required to enroll cropland. It also must be physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Land that was previously enrolled in CRP and expired on Sept. 30 of 2017, 2018 or 2019 that was not allowed to be re-enrolled in those years, has one chance to be re-enrolled this year. Land currently enrolled that will be expiring on Sept. 30, 2020 is also currently eligible to be re-enrolled in CRP.

Through February 28th, 2020, applications can be submitted through the general CRP enrollment period. Each offer is ranked according its Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) score. The EBI assesses the value of each offer for wildlife habitat, air quality, water quality, reduced erosion, and benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period. After the enrollment period ends, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture will decide what the EBI score will need to be at or above to be accepted. Offers that are accepted will have contract start dates of October 1st, 2020.

Here are a few tips to help increase your general CRP offer's EBI score and your chances of it being accepted.

Offer a high diversity mix of native species.

Establish pollinator friendly habitat or add a food plot.

Consider offering only the portions of your fields with the highest erodibility index value. Your local FSA office can help you determine what your erodibility index values are.

As a last resort, consider accepting less than the maximum rental rate.

Another option to enroll environmentally sensitive land into CRP is through the non-competitive continuous CRP enrollment. Cropland must meet the same basic eligibility requirements as for a general CRP enrollment, but must also meet additional targeted environmental requirements. Practices like buffer strips, wetland restoration, duck nesting habitat, pollinator habitat, prairie strips, windbreaks, shelterbelts, or living snow fences are eligible to be enrolled through continuous CRP. Marginal pasture land may also be eligible.

Continuous CRP enrolled land also receives an annual rental rate and 50% cost-share. New land enrolled through continuous CRP also receives a Signup Incentive Payment equal to 32.5 percent of the first full year annual rental payment and an additional Practice Incentive Payment of 5 percent for installing the practice. These incentive payments are not available for land enrolled through general CRP.

New land can be enrolled in continuous CRP year-round. Land that was previously enrolled in CRP and expired on Sept. 30 of 2017, 2018 or 2019, and was unable to re-enroll in those years, has one chance to be re-enrolled through Continuous CRP through August 21st, 2020. Land currently enrolled that will be expiring on Sept. 30, 2020 can be re-enrolled in continuous CRP starting April 1st through August 21st, 2020.

CRP plays an important role in South Dakota's wildlife populations. "The undisturbed grassland habitat that CRP provides is vitally important for grassland nesting songbirds, pheasants, waterfowl, as well as big game species like white-tailed deer," said Chad Switzer, GFP wildlife program administrator. "There is a proven record of the benefits of CRP in South Dakota in both influencing wildlife populations and by providing producers with another option in their land management decisions."

For more information or to submit an offer, agricultural producers should set up an appointment with their local USDA Farm Service Agency Office or attend one of these upcoming CRP workshops.

1/14 Herreid Community Center, 1-3 P.M.

1/14 Crooks Community Center, 7-8:30 P.M.

1/16 Chamberlain Community Center, 7-8 P.M.

1/16 Aberdeen, Barnett Center Room 50 at NSU, 7-8:30 P.M.

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- 1/17 Clear Lake 4-H Building, 2-4:40 P.M.
- 1/22 Britton, Marshall Co. Community Center, 3 -5 P.M.
- 1/23 Florence Community Center, 6-8 P.M.
- 1/28 Pierre Izaak Walton League Clubhouse, 6-8 P.M.
- 1/29 Wessington Springs, Springs Inn Café, 1:30 P.M.
- 1/29 Lake Norden Community Center, 6-8 P.M.
- 1/30 Webster, Day County Courthouse, 10 A.M. - 2 P.M.

Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists are also available to answer any questions you may have about how CRP could work for you.

Wildlife Diversity Small Grant Proposals Being Accepted

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Wildlife Diversity Program is accepting proposals for the Wildlife Diversity Small Grants Program. This program provides funding for researchers, educators and naturalists to carry out projects focused on native wildlife. Funding for the 2020 Small Grants Program totals \$20,000 for projects focused on education and outreach for native wildlife species and their habitats.

Grants from this program have funded education, research, and monitoring projects focused on native wildlife and habitats since 1997. A wide range of projects have been completed to date, ranging from spider surveys of the Fort Pierre National Grasslands to assessing the risk of plague in black-footed ferrets.

"GFP recognizes that there is a tremendous pool of talent and expertise outside the agency that can be very beneficial to the mission of our Wildlife Division," said Casey Heimerl, a wildlife biologist with the department. "By making small grants available, we are able to utilize this talent and expertise. The diverse projects that have been completed in the last 23 years have resulted in numerous publications in scientific journals, popular educational products, and a tremendous amount of new information on native wildlife species and their habitats."

Proposals are due by February 14, 2020.

For more information, contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at (605) 773-4345 or send an email to Casey.Heimerl@state.sd.us. Additional information and grant application forms can be found online at gfp.sd.gov/small-grants-program.

Thompson receives scholarship at South Dakota State

BROOKINGS, S.D. – Jan. 8, 2020 – South Dakota State University student James Thompson received the Wilmer L. and Adele Davis Scholarship in Plant Science this academic year.

Thompson, a senior from Groton, is majoring in agronomy.

The son of Lee and Jennifer Thompson, he is a 2016 Groton Area High School graduate.

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Today



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 24 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: -1 °F

Friday



Cold

High: 6 °F

Friday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: -16 °F

Saturday



Cold

High: 4 °F

Today



23 to 35°

Tonight



-2 to 8°

chance of light snow,
mainly w of the Missouri
River

Friday



4 to 12°

chance of light snow s of
US-212, mainly in the
morning

Temperature Trends

Above Average High Temperatures since December 21st to swing to
Well Below Average from Friday through next week

January 2020

Maximum Temperature Departure from Average (°F)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 37° +15° 22°	2 35° +13° 22°	3 35° +13° 22°	4 28° +6° 22°
5 42° +20° 22°	6 32° +10° 22°	7 24° +2° 22°	8 18° -4° 22°	9 slightly above average	10 WELL BELOW AVERAGE	11 WELL BELOW AVERAGE
12 WELL BELOW AVERAGE						
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NWS Aberdeen - Aberdeen Airport



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

weather.gov/abr

Graphic Created
1/9/2020 3:54 AM

Colder Air and Light Snow to Arrive Tonight. After slightly above average temperatures today, an Arctic cold front will push into the region tonight. Light snow will move across central and southern South Dakota through Friday. Generally an inch or less of snow is expected, although locations in central South Dakota may see up to 2 inches of snow. Much colder air will move in for Friday and Saturday. Well below average temperatures will continue through next week.

Today in Weather History

January 9, 1982: Winds of 20 to 40 mph accompanied by 1 to 3 inches of snow created ground blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills from the 9th through mid-afternoon on the 12th. There were two deaths from the exposure that were attributed to the storm, including a 69-year old Scotland woman and a woman from Veblen in Marshall County. Both tried to walk after their vehicles stalled. Near zero visibilities and snowdrifts to 5 feet high forced closures of numerous highways. Also, minor power outages were reported.

January 9, 1997: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a deep Arctic High brought widespread and prolonged blizzard conditions, heavy drifting snow, and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 80 below to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. North winds were from 30 to 50 mph gusting to 60 mph. The clipper dropped from 2 to 7 inches of snowfall on top of an already solid 2 to 5-foot snowpack. As with previous storms, most roads again became blocked by huge snowdrifts. As a result of the blockage and the blizzard conditions, both Interstates 29 and 90 closed along with all state highways leaving hundreds of people stranded to wait out the storm. This winter has been the worst for road closings. Many people became stuck in snowdrifts or went off the road because of low visibility, and had to be rescued. One dramatic rescue near Webster, involving tens of rescue workers, occurred after a woman was stranded in her vehicle for nearly 40 hours. A couple with a one-year-old was rescued after spending a night in their car, and they were unharmed. A Wakpala woman died from carbon monoxide poisoning in her stalled pickup on Highway 1806 near Wakpala. Emergency personnel had a tough time responding to emergencies. Some emergencies took up to several hours to go short distances. A rural Leola man died when emergency workers could not get to him in time. In McLaughlin, seven people had to be taken by air ambulance, because there was no way out.

All area schools were closed the 9th and 10th with most schools at this point in the winter season missing over 7 days. A state record was set when Faulkton School had closed for its 13th day. Mail was delayed, and area airports had flight delays or were closed. Many businesses were also closed and were suffering from economic losses as a result of this storm and previous storms because customers could not get to them. Many grocery stores ran low or out of bread, milk, and other food necessities. There were some power outages across the area but were not widespread. The power was out at Isabel, Timber Lake, and Firesteel, for as much as 8 hours. The power outage in Isabel resulted in extensive water pipe breaks at the Isabel School. Willow Lake was without power for over 2 days. Some homes across the area were also without heat for several days in the bitter cold. The majority of ranchers were unable to access feed for cattle, sheep, and hogs. As a result of the extreme conditions and lack of food, over fifty thousand livestock died. Also, many livestock suffered frostbite and were significantly weakened. There were also a lot of wildlife and pheasants killed. As a result, the Emergency Feed Grain Donation Program was activated for the ranchers. One rancher said that he had been ranching in this area for 34 years and had never lost cattle before. Also, some dairy farmers had to dump their milk because trucks could not get them in time.

Some people were trapped in their homes up to several days as snowdrifts buried their homes and blocked the roads, with some people having to crawl out their windows. In Wilmot, a 12-foot drift covered the community home, where residents had to turn the lights on during the day. As a result of snow removal budget depletions and other storm damages, President Clinton declared all of the counties a disaster area. Snowplows from Iowa, Nebraska, and plows and manpower from the South Dakota National Guard helped to break through hundreds of roads. The snowdrifts in some places were packed so hard and were measured at 300 pounds per square inch. Some longtime residents said this has been the worst winter they had seen in their lifetimes. The total damage estimate for this January blizzard and for the previous January winter storm is 50 million dollars. This includes the added snow removal costs, livestock losses, building damages, and other economic losses.

1880: A rapidly deepening low-pressure system produced powerful winds along the Pacific Northwest coast. While wind measurements were limited, there were widespread reports of wind damage.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 17 °F at 10:15 PM

Low Temp: -5 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 3:52 PM

Day Precip:

Record High: 53° in 2012

Record Low: -31° in 1977, 2010

Average High: 22°F

Average Low: 1°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.14

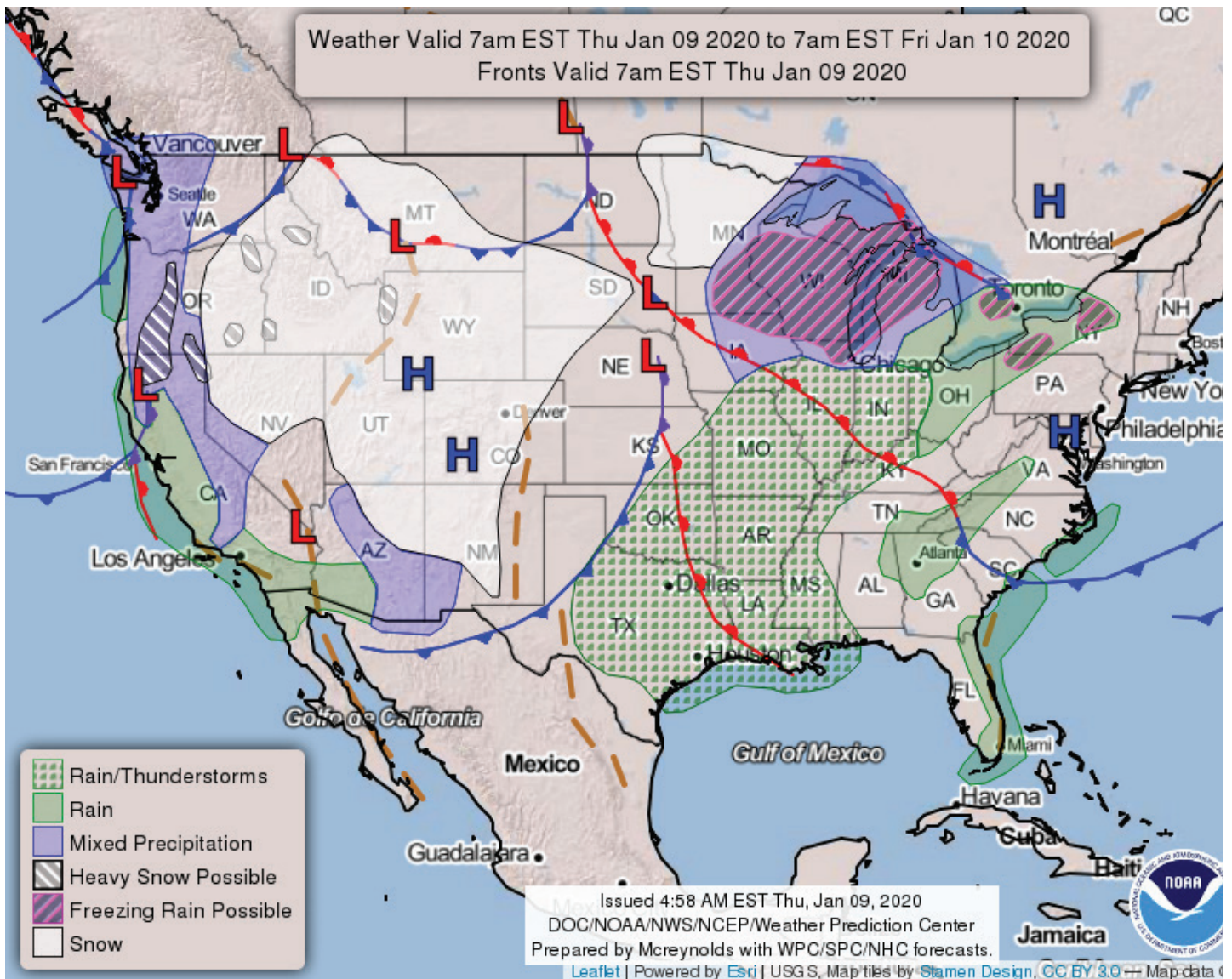
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.14

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:09 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 a.m.



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GOD'S GOOD GIFTS

It was that quiet time of the day just before the sunset. Sitting on his front porch, H.C. Booth was fascinated as columns of dust swirled past him and then suddenly disappeared from sight.

As he watched the swirling dust, he wondered and asked himself a question: "What if it was possible to reverse the wind, and instead of it blowing the dust, pull it back?" After much thought and many experiments, he invented the vacuum cleaner in 1901.

Each day God brings many "columns of dust and dirt" into our lives. Often they seem routine and repetitive, troubling or trying, frustrating or frivolous. We are disturbed by them, become exasperated with them, and wish they would go away. Our peace evaporates and our rage rises. But, there is hope!

James has some good advice for us. He says, "If you need wisdom – if you want to know what God wants you to do – ask Him and He will gladly tell you and give you what you need." This wisdom he speaks of is "practical discernment or sensible insight" – the ability to make wise decisions during difficult times. And, we have His promise that at all times and in every situation, if we only ask, He'll give us His insight and guide our choices to make life acceptable.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to see that things do not need to remain the way they are. We have Your word that if we ask for Your insight You will surely give it to us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Ephesians 4:32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash

02-05-25-28-35

(two, five, twenty-five, twenty-eight, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

01-11-31-38-49, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 2

(one, eleven, thirty-one, thirty-eight, forty-nine; Star Ball: four; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$6.91 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$80 million

Powerball

02-04-07-43-56, Powerball: 22, Power Play: 4

(two, four, seven, forty-three, fifty-six; Powerball: twenty-two; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$258 million

Wilson scores 31 to lift S. Dakota St. past Denver 80-68

DENVER (AP) — Douglas Wilson had a season-high 31 points as South Dakota State ended its seven-game road losing streak, beating Denver 80-68 on Wednesday night.

Matt Dentlinger had 12 points for South Dakota State (12-7, 3-1 Summit League). Noah Freidel added 11 points. Baylor Scheierman had 11 points and seven rebounds for the visiting team.

South Dakota State entered the locker room at the half trailing 46-37, but the Jackrabbits were able to outscore the Pioneers 43-22 in the second half to pull away for the victory. The Pioneers' 46 first-half points marked a season high for the team.

Ade Murkey had 17 points for the Pioneers (4-14, 0-4), who have now lost nine games in a row. Jase Townsend added 15 points. Robert Jones had 11 points and 11 rebounds.

South Dakota State takes on Purdue Fort Wayne on the road on Saturday. Denver faces Western Illinois on the road on Saturday.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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Wednesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Crazy Horse 60, Takini 40

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

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Injured man dropped off at Sioux Falls hospital in tub

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police are investigating after an injured man was dropped off at a hospital in a plastic tub.

The 18-year-old Sioux Falls man was dropped off at an emergency room Tuesday afternoon, police spokesman Sam Clemens said. The driver left after dropping the man off at the hospital.

The victim suffered life-threatening injuries, including skull injuries. Clemens did not know how the man was injured.

Police were able to identify the man who dropped off the victim at the hospital through the victim's family members, along with other people who may be involved, he said.

"We have a lot more questions than answers," Clemens said.

The investigation is ongoing, the Argus Leader reported.

Justice Department: Too late to pass Equal Rights Amendment

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The Justice Department has thrown a roadblock into efforts to revive the Equal Rights Amendment, finding that an expired pair of deadlines imposed by Congress on ratification of the measure means it's too late for additional states to ratify it now.

The memo by Assistant Attorney General Steven Engel comes as Virginia is poised to become the decisive 38th state to approve the ERA nearly four decades after Congress sent it to states in 1972, attaching a 1979 ratification deadline to it.

That deadline was later extended to 1982. During that time just 35 states ratified it — three short of the 38 needed.

"Because three-fourths of the state legislatures did not ratify before the deadline that Congress imposed, the Equal Rights Amendment has failed of adoption and is no longer pending before the States," Engel wrote.

"Accordingly, even if one or more state legislatures were to ratify the proposed amendment, it would not become part of the Constitution," he added.

Engel's finding is unlikely to be the last word on the amendment.

Democratic Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring said Wednesday he's going to make sure the will of Virginians is carried out and the ERA is added to the Constitution.

"Women in America deserve to have equality guaranteed in the Constitution," Herring said in a statement. "The fact that Republican attorneys general are suing to block the ERA, and that they now have the support of the Trump Administration, is absolutely repugnant."

On Tuesday, supporters of the ERA filed a federal lawsuit in Massachusetts aimed at clearing a legal path for adoption of the amendment.

The lawsuit argues that because the deadline was set forth in legislation authorizing states to ratify the amendment — and not in the three-sentence amendment itself — it's not constitutionally binding and Virginia's vote would put the amendment over the top.

"We are not surprised that the Trump administration acted swiftly to declare its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment," said Wendy Murphy, a lawyer for Equal Means Equal, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit in Massachusetts. "This development makes our lawsuit even more urgent."

Engel also said Congress may not revive a proposed amendment after a ratification deadline has expired. He said the only option is for Congress to begin the process again.

Efforts by ERA opponents are underway to block its ultimate adoption as the Constitution's 28th Amendment, including a lawsuit filed in federal court in mid-December by Alabama, Louisiana and South Dakota.

Conservative activists have depicted the ERA as a threat to their stances on abortion and transgender rights.

The language of the ERA states that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Lebanon issues travel ban for fugitive ex-Nissan chief Ghosn

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese prosecutors issued a travel ban for fugitive ex-Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn and asked him to hand in his French passport on Thursday, following an Interpol-issued notice against him, a judicial official said.

The travel ban comes after Ghosn was interrogated by prosecutors for nearly two hours over the notice about the charges he faces in Japan over financial misconduct.

The prosecutors also formally asked Japanese authorities for their file on the charges against Ghosn in order to review the case, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

Lebanon last week received the Interpol-issued wanted notice, which is a non-binding request to law enforcement agencies worldwide that they locate and provisionally arrest a fugitive.

At the hearing, Ghosn was asked to provide an address he resides at in Lebanon and was banned from traveling out of the country, the official said. He was also asked to hand in his French passport. It was not immediately clear what legal procedures would follow.

Lebanon and Japan do not have an extradition treaty, and the Interpol notice does not require that Lebanese authorities arrest him. The authorities say Ghosn entered Lebanon on a valid passport, casting doubt on the possibility they would hand him over to Japan.

Interpol cannot compel Lebanon to arrest Ghosn and it will be up to the local law enforcement authorities to decide what to do.

On his first public appearance since he fled Japan, Ghosn on Wednesday railed against the Japanese justice system, accusing it of violating his basic rights and disputing all allegations against him as “untrue and baseless.”

He told a press conference in Beirut that he doesn’t trust he would have a fair trial in Japan but said he was ready to face justice anywhere else.

Ghosn, a French, Lebanese and Brazilian national, showed up in Lebanon on Dec. 30, after an audacious and improbable escape from surveillance in Japan. Lebanese officials said he entered legally, with a French passport and a Lebanese identification card.

While a travel ban restricts Ghosn’s movement, it also offers him a degree of protection by Lebanese authorities who would presumably ensure he complies with the ban. France also doesn’t have an extradition treaty with Japan.

According to the official, Ghosn was also interrogated on a separate report against him over a 2008 visit to Israel. Lebanon and Israel are technically at war. No decision was taken regarding this case, which according to Lebanese law can be punishable between one and 10 years in jail.

Two Lebanese lawyers submitted a report to the Public Prosecutor’s Office saying the trip violated Lebanese law. The violation may not be prosecutable, given that it has happened 12 years earlier. A famous Lebanese director, who also carries a French passport, questioned over the same violation in 2017 was not prosecuted because the visit was three years prior.

Ghosn’s lawyer, Carlos Abou Jaoude confirmed that his client was questioned in the two separate cases — the Interpol notice and the Israel trip. He told reporters Ghosn was confident in the Lebanese judicial system.

At Wednesday’s press conference, Ghosn apologized to the Lebanese, saying he never wished to offend anyone when he traveled to Israel as a French national after Nissan asked him to announce the launch of electric cars there.

Tokyo prosecutors, who arrested him in late 2018, said Ghosn had “only himself to blame” for for four-month-long detention and for the strict bail conditions that followed, such as being banned from seeing his wife.

“Defendant Ghosn was deemed a high-profile risk, which is obvious from the fact that he actually fled,” they said.

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Ghosn thanked the Lebanese authorities for their hospitality and defended its judicial system, which has long faced accusations of corruption and favoritism. He said he would be ready to stand trial "anywhere where I think I can have a fair trial." He declined to say where that might be.

With big gestures and a five-part slide presentation, Ghosn brought his case to the global media in a performance that at times resembled a corporate presentation. Combative, spirited, and at times rambling, he described conditions of detention in Japan that made him feel "dead ... like an animal" in a country where he asserted he had "zero chance" of a fair trial.

He said he was held in solitary confinement for 130 days, was interrogated day and night for hours, appeared in handcuffs and a leash around his waist and was denied rights to see his wife for months.

In his 150-minute conference Wednesday, Ghosn attacked Japanese prosecutors, saying they were "aided and abated by petty, vindictive and lawless individuals" in the government, Nissan and its law firm. He said it was them, not him, "who are destroying Japan's reputation on the global stage."

On Tuesday, Tokyo prosecutors obtained an arrest warrant for Ghosn's Lebanese wife Carole on suspicion of perjury, a charge unrelated to his escape. However, Japanese justice officials acknowledge that it's unclear whether the Ghosns can be brought back to Japan to face charges.

Nissan has said it was still pursuing legal action against Ghosn despite his escape.

10 Things to Know for Today

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

1. **IRAN SAYS UKRAINIAN PLANE WAS ON FIRE, TRIED TO TURN BACK** Ukraine is considering a missile strike or terrorism as possible theories for the crash of a Ukrainian jetliner, despite Iran's contention that mechanical failure doomed the flight that killed 176 people.

2. **STANDOFF OVER IMPEACHMENT TRIAL DEEPENS** While House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is demanding more details and witnesses, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says there will be "no haggling" with Democrats.

3. **HOUSE TO VOTE ON RESTRAINING TRUMP'S WAR POWERS** The largely symbolic vote comes amid intensifying Democratic criticism of the U.S. killing of a top Iranian general.

4. **HAWKISH GULF ARAB STRATEGY BEING TESTED** The killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani appears to have caught Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf allies off-guard, thrusting the region closer to full-blown conflict.

5. **BRITISH ROYALS ROCKED BY SURPRISE ANNOUNCEMENT** A rift in the British monarchy is growing after Prince Harry and Meghan say they plan to "step back" from royal duties.

6. **VILLAGE VS FACEBOOK** A tiny Oregon town is trying to stop the social media giant from using property to build a landing spot for an ultra-high-speed, undersea cable connecting America with Asia.

7. **GHOSN HIT WITH TRAVEL BAN** Lebanese prosecutors issue the ban for fugitive ex-Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn, charged with financial misconduct in Japan, following an Interpol notice.

8. **WHAT MAKES AUSTRALIAN WILDFIRES FIGHT UNIQUE** Rural Fire Service in New South Wales consists of 72,000 people who make up the world's largest volunteer fire service.

9. **WHO WON BIG AT NATIONAL BOARD OF REVIEW** Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman" is toasted as the year's best film at the New York awards ceremony.

10. **'I STILL HAVE MORE TO PROVE'** In an Instagram post, 42-year-old NFL quarterback Tom Brady gives another indication that he isn't done playing football.

Booker: Impeachment trial could be 'big blow' to my campaign

By **JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Cory Booker said a looming impeachment trial and other pressing issues in Washington could deal a "big, big blow" to his Democratic presidential campaign by keeping him away from Iowa in the final weeks before the Feb. 3 caucuses.

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Booker is one of five senators running for the Democratic nomination who face the prospect of spending the lead-up to the first-in-the-nation caucuses in the Senate chamber as jurors in President Donald Trump's trial instead of barnstorming Iowa. The challenge for Booker is particularly acute, given that he has struggled to break into the top tier of candidates and needs a strong showing in Iowa to keep his campaign going.

"It's going to be a challenging four weeks in the caucus for us," Booker said in an interview on The Associated Press' "Ground Game" podcast. "If we can't raise more money in this final stretch, we won't be able to do the things that other campaigns with more money can do to show presence."

The New Jersey senator wouldn't say how much money his campaign needs to raise to stay competitive in Iowa, including through television advertising, if he's marooned in Washington during a Senate trial. His campaign has been candid about previous fundraising struggles, announcing in September that he could be forced to end his campaign unless he raised \$1.7 million in 10 days. He cleared that bar and stayed in the race.

Yet Booker's standing remains tenuous. He failed to meet the polling requirements for the last Democratic debate and has not qualified for next week's faceoff. A poor showing in Iowa, where his campaign has plunged significant resources, would make it difficult for him to continue in the race.

"If our pathway to victory ever closes off, I'm not staying in," said Booker, who predicted he would "upset expectations in Iowa."

"Whether that's one, two, three, four, I don't know. But we will definitely upset expectations," he said.

Booker spoke to the AP on Wednesday just after attending an all-Senate briefing with administration officials on the intelligence used to justify last week's targeted killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Like most Democratic senators, and a small group of Republicans, Booker said he was unconvinced by the administration's argument that an imminent threat against Americans justified the killing.

The hastily scheduled briefing prompted Booker to cancel events in Iowa to return to Washington. His schedule for the rest of the month is also in limbo as congressional leaders haggle over how and when to launch the Trump impeachment trial.

"If this trial lasts two weeks, that is literally dozens of events we won't be able to do," Booker said.

Other candidates facing the same predicament are Sens. Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar and Michael Bennet.

Booker has repeatedly sidestepped opportunities to draw sharp contrasts with some of his rival candidates, saying he doesn't want the party's eventual nominee to be weakened by the time they face off against Trump in the general election. Booker said he also has genuine friendships with several of the candidates and has bonded with others during the course of the grueling campaign.

He singled out Joe Biden for an assist in his relationship with actress girlfriend Rosario Dawson. Booker said Dawson called the former vice president one of his "best wingmen" after Biden sang his praises when they met at a recent primary debate.

"A solid to him for being one of the most persuasive arguments that Rosario Dawson should double-down in her relationship with me," Booker said of Biden.

Follow Julie Pace at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

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

Iran sends mixed signals as tensions with US ease

By **AMIR VAHDAT** and **JOSEPH KRAUSS** Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran sent mixed signals Thursday as tensions with the U.S. appeared to ease, with President Hassan Rouhani warning of a "very dangerous response" if the U.S. makes "another mistake" and a senior commander vowing "harsher revenge" for the killing of a top Iranian general.

Both sides appeared to step back on Wednesday after Iran launched a series of ballistic missiles at two

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military bases housing American troops in Iraq without causing any casualties. Iran said the attack was retaliation for the U.S. strike that killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the architect of its regional security strategy, in Iraq earlier this week.

Rouhani said the strike on the bases was a legitimate act of self-defense under the U.N. Charter, but he warned that "if the U.S. makes another mistake, it will receive a very dangerous response."

In addition to launching the missile attack, Iran also abandoned its remaining commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal, which President Donald Trump had walked away from in May 2018. But Rouhani said Thursday that Iran would continue to cooperate with U.N. inspectors.

Senior Iranian military commanders struck a more defiant tone.

Abdollah Araghi, a member of Iran's joint chiefs of staff, said the country's Revolutionary Guard "will impose a more severe revenge on the enemy in the near future," according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

Tasnim also quoted Gen. Ali Fadavi, the acting commander of the Guard, as saying the missile attack was "just one of the manifestations of our abilities."

"We sent dozens of missiles into the heart of the U.S. bases in Iraq and they couldn't do a damned thing," he was quoted as saying.

On Wednesday, Trump signalled that he would not retaliate militarily for the strike on the bases. That raised hopes that the current standoff, which brought the two countries to the brink of an all-out war, may be winding down.

Rouhani spoke by phone Thursday with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, urging Britain to denounce the killing of Soleimani.

As head of Iran's elite Quds Force, Soleimani had mobilized armed proxies across the region and was blamed for deadly attacks against Americans going back to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. In Iran, he is seen by many as a national hero who played a key role in defeating the Islamic State group and resisting Western hegemony.

Without Soleimani's efforts leading forces in Syria and Iraq against IS, "you would not have peace and security in London today," Rouhani was quoted as saying by Vice President Alireza Moezi, who tweeted about the call with Johnson.

Downing Street confirmed the call, saying Johnson called for "an end to hostilities" in the Gulf. It said the U.K. stands by the nuclear deal and is urging Iran to return to full compliance.

Krauss reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writer Jill Lawless in London contributed.

Fugitive Ghosn brings global attention to Japanese justice

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Though former Nissan Chairman Ghosn is unlikely to stand trial in a real court, he has made himself a key witness in putting Japan's justice system on trial.

In his first public appearance after fleeing to Lebanon, Ghosn lambasted what he called unfair detention and bail conditions, saying he was presumed guilty and had "zero chance" of a fair trial in a system rigged against him.

"I didn't run from justice, I left Japan because I wanted justice," the former auto industry icon said at a spirited two-hour news conference in Beirut.

With little chance they can extradite him, Japanese authorities struck back with words Thursday.

Tokyo prosecutors, who arrested him in late 2018, said Ghosn had "only himself to blame" for being detained 130 days before being released and for strict bail conditions like being banned from seeing his wife.

"Defendant Ghosn was deemed a high-profile risk, which is obvious from the fact that he actually fled," they said.

Justice Minister Masako Mori denounced Ghosn's comments as erroneous and credited Japan's extremely

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low crime rate to a judicial system rooted in "its history and culture."

Ghosn's remarks, however, highlighted many of the issues human rights advocates call problematic in Japan's justice system.

Because of Japan's extremely low crime rate, how suspects are treated is surprisingly unknown to Japanese, who tend to trust authoritative figures and assume no one gets arrested without a reason.

In Japan, suspects can be detained in solitary confinement without charge for up to 23 days. Charges can be filed piecemeal to prolong incarceration. Suspects are routinely grilled for hours each day without a lawyer present. Critics call the detention conditions mental torture.

Japan's conviction rate is higher than 99%, a number that critics, including Ghosn, say indicates unfairness.

Japanese officials insist the conviction rate is so high because they don't make mistakes and only guilty people are prosecuted. At the same time, they insist there's a presumption of innocence.

It's an entrenched system that not only leads to confessions but also has judges thinking suspects are guilty, says Tokyo defense lawyer Seiho Cho, who has been trying to change it.

"They really believe that this system is functioning efficiently and correctly," he said.

Cho said Ghosn was a high-profile case and the way regular suspects are treated is worse.

Those who insist they are innocent especially are detained longer, some for hundreds of days. Bans on contact with family members are also common, he said.

The ban in Ghosn's case cited the risk his wife Carole might tamper with evidence. An arrest warrant was issued this week for Carole Ghosn on suspicion of perjury.

Carlos Ghosn argued the ban on contact with his wife was illogical because he was allowed to meet with other family members, implying the decision was meant to wear him out. His decision to escape was driven by his desire to be with his wife, he said.

The preparation for Ghosn's trial had already taken a year, and the date for his trial was undecided. He was charged with underreporting of future income and breach of trust in diverting Nissan Motor Co. money for personal gain, the two separate charges complicating and prolonging his trial process.

If convicted, he could face 15 years in prison. Prosecutors also can appeal district court decisions.

"Even when they are eventually exonerated, they have already lost so much," Cho said, noting some suspects have lost their jobs, their reputation, even their families.

Among the famous cases of wrongful convictions is Iwao Hakamada, who spent 48 years in prison until new DNA evidence won his release from death row in 2014. He had been questioned, beaten and bullied by police daily in detention and confessed to murdering a family of four, but asserted his innocence when his trial began.

Frenchman Mark Karpeles was arrested in 2015 after his bitcoin exchange collapsed. He spent 11 months in detention, although he was eventually cleared of embezzlement and fraud allegations. He got a suspended sentence, meaning no additional jail time was required, on a conviction on charges of manipulating electronic data. He is appealing. Karpeles said he was an innocent victim of hackers.

A true-life story of a man who refused to sign a confession that he groped a woman on a crowded commuter train became a popular 2007 movie. The film depicts a five-year legal battle for exoneration, highlighting the burden of proof of innocence was on the accused rather than police and prosecutors proving guilt.

Although Ghosn has drawn attention to the system's possible flaws, Cho was worried about a backlash, with release on bail getting tighter.

"We had gradually been making progress, but this could set us back," Cho said.

For example, with the idea of introducing an electronic tether, which Japan lacks and Ghosn had proposed to get bail, fewer people could end up getting bail, and, on top of that, be electronically monitored.

Interpol has published a wanted notice for Ghosn but it is non-binding. Chief government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said whether Ghosn would be extradited was Lebanon's decision but that Japan would cooperate with international organizations "so that Japan's criminal justice system can be operated appropriately."

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Jacques Deguest, an expert on Japanese law and business, thinks Ghosn's case is so embarrassing for Japan it may discourage some non-Japanese from wanting to invest or live there.

"Prosecutors are regarded as guardians and protectors of Japanese culture," said Deguest, an investor, lawyer and consultant.

Their super-efficient, but often brutal, practices have resisted change, but sometimes pressures from abroad can bring it about, Deguest said.

"Change happens often through crisis because it forces people to be uncomfortable with the status quo and forces them to move on," he said.

"This Ghosn case is great in terms of magnitude because it has the power to put the external pressure on Japan that we all love," Deguest said.

Ghosn was careful not to blame the people of Japan for what he called the nation's injustices.

He led Nissan for two decades, steering the automaker back from near-bankruptcy to a thriving brand, although sales and profits have tumbled since his arrest.

Ghosn said people on the streets who spotted him while he was out on bail would come up to him.

They would tell him, he said in Japanese, "Ghosn-san gambatte kudsai," using the honorific for his name, saying: "Hang in there."

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

Iran says Ukrainian plane was on fire, tried to turn back

By AMIR VAHDAT, JON GAMBRELL and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The crew of a Ukrainian jetliner that crashed in Iran, killing all 176 people on board, never made a radio call for help and were trying to turn back for the airport when their burning plane went down, an initial Iranian investigative report said Thursday. Ukraine, meanwhile, said it considered a missile strike as one of several possible theories for the crash, despite Iran's denials.

The Iranian report suggests that a sudden emergency struck the Boeing 737 operated by Ukrainian International Airlines early on Wednesday morning, when it crashed, just minutes after taking off from Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran.

Investigators from Iran's Civil Aviation Organization offered no immediate explanation for the disaster, however. Iranian officials initially blamed a technical malfunction for the crash, something initially backed by Ukrainian officials before they said they wouldn't speculate amid an ongoing investigation.

The crash came just a few hours after Iran launched a ballistic missile attack against Iraqi military bases housing U.S. troops amid a confrontation with Washington over it killing an Iranian Revolutionary Guard general in a drone strike last week.

The Ukrainian International Airlines took off at 6:12 a.m. Wednesday, after nearly an hour's delay at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport, the main airport for travelers in Iran. It gained altitude heading west, reaching nearly 8,000 feet, according to both the report and flight-tracking data.

Then something went wrong, though "no radio messages were received from the pilot regarding unusual situations," the report said. In emergencies, pilots typically immediately contact air-traffic controllers.

Eyewitnesses, including the crew of another flight passing above it, described seeing the plane engulfed in flames before crashing at 6:18 a.m., the report said.

The crash caused a massive explosion when the plane hit the ground, likely because the aircraft had been fully loaded with fuel for the flight to Kyiv, Ukraine.

The report also confirmed that both of the so-called "black boxes" that contain data and cockpit communications from the plane had been recovered, though they sustained damage and some parts of their memory was lost. It also said that investigators have initially ruled out laser or electromagnetic interference as causing the crash.

Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's Security Council, told Ukrainian media that officials had several working theories regarding the crash, including a missile strike.

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"A strike by a missile, possibly a Tor missile system, is among the main (theories), as information has surfaced on the internet about elements of a missile being found near the site of the crash," Danilov said. He did not elaborate on where he saw the information on the internet.

Ukrainian investigators that arrived in Iran earlier on Thursday currently await permission from Iranian authorities to examine the crash site and look for missile fragments, Danilov said.

The Tor is a Russian-made missile system. Russia delivered 29 Tor-M1s to Iran in 2007 as part of a \$700 million contract signed in December 2005. Iran has displayed the missiles in military parades as well.

Iran did not immediately respond to the Ukrainian comments. However, Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, the spokesman of the Iranian armed forces, denied a missile hit the airplane in a comments reported Wednesday by the semiofficial Fars news agency. He dismissed the allegation as "psychological warfare" by foreign-based Iranian opposition groups.

Ukraine has a grim history with missile attacks, including in July 2014 when one such strike downed a Malaysian Airlines flight over eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people aboard.

Danilov also said other possible causes under consideration included a drone or another flying object crashing into the plane, a terrorist attack or an engine malfunction causing an explosion. However, no terror group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The plane was carrying 167 passengers and nine crew members from several countries, including 82 Iranians, at least 63 Canadians and 11 Ukrainians, according to officials. The crash just before dawn scattered flaming debris and passengers' belongings across a wide stretch of farmland.

Many of the passengers were believed to be international students attending universities in Canada; they were making their way back to Toronto by way of Kyiv after visiting with family during the winter break.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he planned to call Iranian President Hassan Rouhani about the crash and the investigation.

"Undoubtedly, the priority for Ukraine is to identify the causes of the plane crash," Zelenskiy said. "We will surely find out the truth."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said 138 of the passengers were bound for Canada.. The flight also included a family of four and newlyweds, too. The manifest listed several teenagers and children, some as young as 1 or 2.

The crash ranked among the worst losses of life for Canadians in an aviation disaster. The flag over Parliament in Ottawa was lowered to half-staff, and Trudeau vowed to get to the bottom of the disaster.

"Know that all Canadians are grieving with you," he said, addressing the victims' families.

Ukrainian officials, for their part, initially agreed with Iranian suspicions that the 3½-year-old plane was brought down by mechanical trouble but later backed away from that and declined to offer a cause while the investigation is going on.

While the cause of the tragedy remained unknown, the disaster could further damage Boeing's reputation, which has been battered by the furor over two deadly crashes involving a different model of the Boeing jet, the much-newer 737 Max, which has been grounded for nearly 10 months. The uproar led to the firing of the company's CEO last month.

Boeing extended condolences to the victims' families and said it stands ready to assist.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Litvinova from Moscow.

Facebook again declines to limit political ad targeting

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Facebook has decided not to limit how political ads can be targeted to specific groups of people, as its main digital-ad rival Google did in November to fight misinformation. Neither will it ban political ads outright, as Twitter did last October. And it still won't fact check them, as it's faced pressure to do.

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Instead, it is announcing much more limited “transparency features” that aim to give users slightly more control over how many political ads they see and to make its online library of political ads easier to use.

These steps appear unlikely to assuage critics — including some of the company’s rank and file employees — who say Facebook has too much power and not enough limits when it comes to its effects on elections and democracy itself.

Since last fall, Facebook has insisted that it won’t fact-check political ads, a move that critics say gives politicians license to lie in ads that can’t be easily monitored by outsiders. CEO Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly argued that “political speech is important” and that Facebook doesn’t want to interfere with it.

Google, the digital ads leader, is limiting political-ad targeting to broad categories such as sex, age and postal code.

Facebook said in a blog post Thursday that it considered limiting the targeting of political ads. But the social network said it learned about their importance for “reaching key audiences” after conducting outreach with political campaigns from both U.S. parties, political groups and nonprofits.

The company said it was guided by the principle that “people should be able to hear from those who wish to lead them, warts and all, and that what they say should be scrutinized and debated in public.”

Facebook does plan to let users choose to see “fewer” political and social-issue ads, although it won’t let people exclude them entirely. It will also let people search the ad library for exact phrases and to limit their search results using filters such as ad-audience size, dates and regions reached.

The transparency changes will go into effect over the next three months in the U.S. and other countries where Facebook puts “paid for by” disclaimers on political ads. The political-ad controls won’t roll out in the U.S. until early summer; the company will “eventually” expand them to other regions.

UK royals scramble to contain Harry, Meghan announcement

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

Britain’s royal family scrambled Thursday to contain the fallout from the surprise announcement by Prince Harry and Meghan that they plan “to step back” from royal duties and pursue a new path that will allow them to be financially independent.

The couple’s announcement that they planned to forge a “progressive” new path for royals in the modern world and clearly upset senior royals — who apparently weren’t told of the decision in advance. Hours after Harry and Meghan’s announcement, Buckingham Palace issued a second statement, saying many issues still had to be worked out before the couple’s plan could be realized.

A statement issued Wednesday evening by Buckingham Palace, described as “a personal message from the Duke and Duchess of Sussex,” said Harry and Meghan intend to become financially independent and to “balance” their time between the U.K. and North America.

“After many months of reflection and internal discussions, we have chosen to make a transition this year in starting to carve out a progressive new role within this institution,” the statement said. “We intend to step back as ‘senior’ members of the royal family and work to become financially independent, while continuing to fully support her majesty the queen.”

The rift dominated Britain’s media, which reported that Queen Elizabeth II had not been informed of the decision. The Sun described the departure as “Megxit” — a play on Brexit, Britain’s departure from the European Union. The term was also adopted by the New York Post, another title owned by Rupert Murdoch — which featured a cover cartoon drawing of the duchess holding a cigarette while Harry cradles a beer in front of a television.

The 35-year-old Harry is Elizabeth’s grandson and sixth in line to the British throne. With his ginger hair and beard, he is one of the royal family’s most recognizable and popular members and has spent his entire life in the glare of the public eye.

Before marrying the prince in a royal wedding watched around the world in 2018, the 38-year-old Duchess of Sussex was American actress Meghan Markle, star of the TV legal drama “Suits.” The couple’s first child, Archie, was born in May 2019.

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The message about their future plans was also posted on the couple's official Instagram page and referred readers to a website, sussexroyal.com, for information.

The statement and launching of the website was apparently not cleared with senior royals or their advisers. Buckingham Palace's later communique hinted that Harry and Meghan's statement had caught the royal household by surprise. The palace statement said discussions with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex were "at an early stage."

"We understand their desire to take a different approach, but these are complicated issues that will take time to work through," it read.

It was not known exactly where in the Americas the couple plan to spend their time. Meghan grew up in Los Angeles and lived in Toronto while filming "Suits." Harry and his family skipped the queen's traditional Christmas gathering at her Sandringham estate last month to spend the holidays on Vancouver Island off the west coast of Canada and see Markle's mother Doria, who lives in California.

The royal pair described their new roles on their new website. The site noted that the Sovereign Grant, which funds the monarchy, covers just 5% of the costs for the duke and duchess and is used for their official office expenses but they want to cut this financial tie.

The couple also announced a new media relations policy "to ensure diverse and open access to their work." The policy includes opting out of a pool system that guarantees media coverage of royal events to Britain's media.

"Under this system, the rota, or pool, gives these British media representatives the opportunity to exclusively cover an event, on the understanding that they will share factual material obtained with other members of their sector who request it," the website said. "The current system predates the dramatic transformation of news reporting in the digital age."

As an actress and a human rights activist, the duchess was accustomed to media attention before her marriage, but she has made no secret of the fact that the transition to being a global celebrity and part of Britain's royal family was difficult. The royal couple particularly took issue with their treatment at the hands of the British tabloids, whose aggressive coverage of all things royal is legendary.

The royal couple revealed their struggles with the media during an ITV documentary "Harry & Meghan: An African Journey," which followed them on a recent tour of Southern Africa. Both said they had struggled with the spotlight, particularly because they say much of what is printed is untrue.

The duchess told ITV last year that her British friends warned her not to marry the prince because of the intense media scrutiny that would follow in his country. But the U.S. television star said she "naively" dismissed the warnings, because as an American she didn't understand how the British press worked.

"I never thought this would be easy, but I thought it would be fair. And that is the part that is hard to reconcile," she said. "But (I) just take each day as it comes."

The duchess said the pressure was aggravated by the fact that she went quickly from being a newlywed to being pregnant and then a new mother.

The British media have also made much of an alleged split between Harry and his older brother, Prince William, who is second in line to the throne. Harry and Meghan last year opted out of living at Kensington Palace in London, where William and his family lives, and moved to a Frogmore Cottage at Windsor.

In the ITV interview, Harry acknowledged there have been some differences between him and the 37-year-old William, although he said most of what has been printed about a rift between the two brothers has been "created out of nothing."

"Part of this role and part of this job and this family being under the pressure that it's under, inevitably stuff happens," he said. "But, look, we're brothers. We'll always be brothers. We're certainly on different paths at the moment, but I will always be there for him, as I know he'll always be there for me."

Associated Press reporters Jill Lawless and Gregory Katz contributed.

Follow full AP coverage at <https://www.apnews.com/PrinceHarry>

Risky Gulf Arab strategy tested by killing of Iran general

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirate (AP) — U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf have loudly pushed for hawkish policies by Washington to pressure, isolate and cripple Iran, but this high-stakes strategy is now being put to the test by the unexpected U.S. strike that killed Iran's most powerful military commander last week, thrusting the region closer to full-blown conflict.

Even as Gulf Arab states — like Israel — lobbied hard for tough U.S. sanctions and maximum pressure on Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have wanted to avoid outright war.

Friday's airstrike that killed the Revolutionary Guard's powerful Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani, appears to have caught America's Gulf allies off-guard. Now they are trying to make sure the major escalation by President Donald Trump doesn't drag them further into the cross-hairs of rising tensions between Washington and Tehran.

Iran, which held an unprecedented multi-city funeral procession for Soleimani that drew millions to the streets to mourn him, retaliated early Wednesday by firing a series of ballistic missiles at two military bases in Iraq where American troops are stationed.

Trump signaled he would not retaliate militarily, but vowed to continue his campaign of maximum pressure and economic sanctions on Iran.

As the region braces for what comes next, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are calling for de-escalation.

Saudi Arabia dispatched Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman to Washington, where he met with Trump and the U.S. president's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner at the White House on Monday. The kingdom says he discussed "efforts to reduce tensions and avoid escalations that could further destabilize the region in light of the Iranian regime's provocations and destabilizing activities."

Qatar's foreign minister, meanwhile, traveled to Tehran the day after the killing of Soleimani and also called for de-escalation.

"Nobody wants the outbreak of conventional war because when conventional war happens there are no winners, there are just a series of losers," said Mohammed Alyahya, the Saudi editor-in-chief of the Al-Arabiya English news website.

This latest round of tensions has pushed oil prices up, with Brent crude trading around \$70 a barrel. UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei said on Wednesday there is no risk at the moment to the movement of oil in the region or any shortages in oil supply.

He noted, however, that Soleimani's killing was "definitely an escalation."

"Iran is a neighbor. We are (geographically) very close to Iran and the last thing we want is another tension in the Middle East," the energy minister said, reiterating calls for de-escalation.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia have long wanted the U.S. to push back Tehran's drive to spread influence and power across the region, and Soleimani was central to Iran's ambitions. Viewed by Sunni Muslims across much of the region as a menacing figure, his role as Quds Force commander put him in charge of lethal Shiite proxy militias in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen fighting against Gulf Arab interests. In Iran, he's hailed as a national hero who defied U.S. pressure.

Even after Soleimani's killing, there's little indication they've stopped skirting the dangerous line between maximum pressure and war.

Alyahya said the pressure strategy is still needed to stop Iran's Quds Force but he acknowledged that "it is a very risky game, and if it backfires, the consequences are grave."

Robert Malley, who heads International Crisis Group and served on Obama's National Security Council, said Gulf countries are likely satisfied that Soleimani was killed, but are also worried because Iran could inflict serious damage on their economies.

"I think they are now sending the message to the U.S. and to others: 'Let's not let this go too far because you're living very far away ... we're going to be the ones who will pay the price and you won't be here to protect us,'" he said.

The Persian Gulf could be another target of Iranian retaliation. It hosts more than 30,000 U.S. troops,

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including the Navy's 5th Fleet stationed in Bahrain, U.S. Army's Central forward headquarters in Kuwait and at the sprawling Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The U.S. also has hundreds of troops in Saudi Arabia and advanced drones, F-35 fighter jets and several thousand military personnel in Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi.

Already over the summer, a series of attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and a major missile and drone attack on Saudi oil facilities were blamed on Iran. Tehran denied responsibility, though it did seize oil tankers around the crucial Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, through which 20% of the world's crude oil travels.

Over the weekend, the U.S. warned American citizens in Saudi Arabia of a heightened risk of missile and drone strikes, particularly near military bases, oil and gas facilities and other critical civilian infrastructure.

Since the September attack on Saudi Arabia, which temporarily halved its oil production, there appears to have been a quiet effort at diplomacy between Iran and the kingdom to ease tensions. But there's no sign either side had inched closer to overcoming their rivalry.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi told lawmakers in Baghdad on Sunday that he had been scheduled to meet Soleimani the morning he was killed. He said Soleimani was carrying a message from Iran's supreme leader in response to a Saudi message relayed through Iraq to Iran about "important agreements and breakthroughs in Iraq and the region." Neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia have confirmed Abdul-Mahdi's comments.

Alyahya called Abdul-Mahdi's account "an intricate tall tale." Echoing widespread Saudi sentiment, he said Soleimani was no dove for peace.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday also dismissed the notion as "propagandist" and suggested that the Saudis share his view that Soleimani was not in Iraq on a peace mission.

Complicating the Gulf rulers' calculations are questions about whether Trump's decision to order the strike on Soleimani was made impulsively or is part of a longer-term strategy.

Gulf allies have been questioning Trump's reliability as a security partner. Though he has strengthened America's military presence in the Gulf amid rising tensions with Iran, Trump did not step in to militarily defend Saudi interests after the attack on oil sites and backed away from retaliation when Iran shot down a U.S. surveillance drone in the Strait of Hormuz.

In remarks on Wednesday Trump stated: "We are independent, and we do not need Middle East oil" and said he would ask NATO to step up its involvement in the region.

"The constant thing about Trump is he's unpredictable," Emirati political analyst Abdulkhaleq Abdullah said. "We didn't that he would do this. Now, we don't know what he will do next."

"Is America ready for revenge of a sort coming from Iran? Is the region ready for a sharp escalation?" asked Abdullah.

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

An Olympic First: Cardboard beds for Tokyo Athletes Village

STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Tokyo Olympic athletes beware — particularly larger ones.

The bed frames in the Athletes Village at this year's Olympics will be made of cardboard. Sturdy cardboard. "Those beds can stand up to 200 kilograms," explained Takashi Kitajima, the general manager of the Athletes Village, speaking through an interpreter.

That's about 440 pounds, and surely no Olympic athlete weighs that much.

"They are stronger than wooden beds," Kitajima added.

He also took into account the possibility of a wild room celebration after, say, a gold-medal victory.

"Of course, wood and cardboard would each break if you jumped on them," he said.

The single bed frames will be recycled into paper products after the games. The mattress components — the mattresses are not made of cardboard — will be recycled into plastic products.

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The mattress is broken up into three distinct sections, and the firmness of each can be adjusted.

The idea was to use materials that could be remade after the Olympics and Paralympics. But the cardboard frames and supports should give the rooms a spartan look.

Organizers showed off the beds and a few other furnishings on Thursday at their headquarters. The entire Athletes Village complex will be completed in June. The Olympics open on July 24 followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 25.

"The organizing committee was thinking about recyclable items, and the bed was one of the ideas," Kitajima explained, crediting local Olympic sponsor Airweave Inc. for the execution.

Organizers say this is the first time that the beds and bedding in the Athletes Village have been made of renewable materials.

The Athletes Village being built alongside Tokyo Bay will comprise 18,000 beds for the Olympics and be composed to 21 apartment towers. Even more building construction is being planned in the next several years.

Real estate ads say the units will be sold off afterward, or rented, with sale prices starting from about 54 million yen — or about \$500,000 — and soaring to three or four times that much. Some fear the apartments will flood the market, possibly impacting property values.

The units will be sold off by various real estate companies. Ads suggest many of the units will be slightly larger than a typical apartment in Tokyo, which is about 60-70 square meters — or 650-750 square feet.

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

Facebook riles tiny Oregon town with plan for undersea cable

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

TIERRA DEL MAR, Ore. (AP) — A battle playing out in a tiny Oregon town with no stoplights or cellphone service is pitting residents against one of the world's biggest tech companies.

Locals in coastal Tierra del Mar are trying to stop Facebook from using property in their quiet community to build a landing spot for an ultra high-speed, undersea cable connecting America with Asia.

Representatives of the social media giant say Tierra del Mar is one of the few places on the U.S. West Coast suitable for the cable, which will feature the latest fiber optic technologies. It will link multiple U.S. locations, including Facebook's huge data center in the central Oregon town of Prineville, with Japan and the Philippines, and will help meet an increasing demand for internet services worldwide, the company says.

But locals say vibrations from drilling to bring the submarine cable ashore in this village of some 200 houses might damage home foundations and septic systems. They also point out that Tierra del Mar, arrayed along a pristine beach, is zoned residential. If the county and state allow the project, they say, more commercial ventures will come calling.

"This is a huge precedent. Once you open the shores to these companies coming anywhere they want to, Oregon's coast is pretty much wide open season," resident Patricia Rogers told county officials in written remarks.

Tierra del Mar, 65 miles (105 kilometers) southwest of Portland, is home to a mix of professionals and retirees who share a love of the unspoiled beach that is fringed with coastal pines and the deer, bald eagles and rare seabirds that inhabit the area. It has two businesses, a rock shop and antiques store, and no cell service, apparently because providers don't consider it profitable enough.

In recent years, locals fiercely opposed a plan by investors to turn a former farm just to the north into a high-end golf course. The site ultimately opened instead as a state nature area.

Residents' attention turned to Facebook in 2018 when a subsidiary bought the empty lot for the cable landing from former NFL and University of Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington. County records show Edge Cable Holdings, USA, paid him \$495,000 for the beachfront property, about the size of 10 tennis courts.

Locals worry the project will pave the way for cell towers, power junctions and additional cable sites.

Rogers, who owns a house adjacent to the Facebook lot, stood on the beach in stormy weather Wednes-

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day as waves charged the shore. A sign apparently toppled by the high tide said "Keep Facebook off our beach."

Rogers pointed to two other empty lots nearby.

"If Facebook gets (approval), well, two companies will get those, and we'll have three of these drilling projects within a half a mile of each other," she said.

Others say they like Tierra del Mar the way it is and feel Facebook is ignoring their wishes.

"I am extremely angry about and opposed to the cavalier attitude that an amoral multi-national, multi-billion dollar corporation has taken to this tiny residentially zoned portion of Tillamook County," resident Carol J. Griffith said in written comments.

Facebook representatives told county officials the horizontal directional drilling will last about a month, and all that will remain is a manhole cover. They said they carefully chose the Tierra del Mar site, avoiding areas where fishermen trawl and keeping to places that allow burial of the cable so nets won't snag on it. They also had to skirt undersea canyons and federally protected fish habitat.

The company declined to provide other details about the project but told The Associated Press in a statement: "With more people using the internet, existing internet infrastructure is struggling to handle all the traffic. These new cable projects help people connect more efficiently."

The clash comes as internet use by the world's population has reached 4.1 billion people, or 54% of the global population, up from 1.6 billion people in 2008, according to the International Telecommunication Union, a United Nations agency.

Almost all of that messaging and internet browsing goes through fiber optic cables, not satellites in the heavens, said Kristian Nielsen, vice president of Submarine Telecoms Forum, a Virginia-based trade magazine.

When data, including phone calls, goes intercontinental, say between North America, Europe and Asia, undersea fiber optic cables are used 99% of the time, Nielsen said in a telephone interview.

"The reality is that the cloud is actually under the ocean," said Nicole Starosielski, associate professor of media, culture and communication at New York University. "Files in the cloud are typically housed in a data center. But it doesn't become a cloud unless there are cables."

Undersea cables have around 800 landing points around the world, according to Submarine Telecoms Forum. Nielsen said opposition to them is rare.

The one Facebook wants to put in Tierra del Mar splits off in the Pacific Ocean from the Jupiter cable that Facebook, Amazon and telecommunications companies from Japan, the Philippines and Hong Kong are invested in. The main trunk would land in Hermosa Beach, California, with the Oregon branch solely owned by Facebook.

Under the ground, the fiber optic cable would connect with another one running down the coast 4 miles (6 kilometers) to a cable landing site in a bigger coastal town, Pacific City, where four cables are already in place. Facebook says that site cannot fit a fifth cable and cited a risk of crossing cables.

But residents are dubious.

"I don't know why they chose this place when they could have taken the cable down to Pacific City," said Lee King, owner of the Pier Avenue Rock Shop.

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

House to vote on restraining Trump's actions against Iran

By **MATTHEW DALY** and **ALAN FRAM** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House will vote Thursday on a measure limiting President Donald Trump's ability to take military action against Iran as Democratic criticism of the U.S. killing of a top Iranian general intensified.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., announced the planned vote in a one-page statement that said last week's drone strike that killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani was "provocative and disproportionate."

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The Democratic war powers resolution seems certain to pass over solid Republican opposition. A similar proposal by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., faces an uphill fight in the GOP-run Senate.

Because of a procedural dispute between the two parties, it was unclear whether Thursday's vote would be a step toward binding Trump's hands on Iran or a symbolic gesture of opposition by Democrats.

Republicans say the proposal — a special type of resolution that does not get the president's signature — does not have the force of law. Democrats say that under the 1973 War Powers Act, it would be binding if also approved by the Senate. The matter has not been definitively decided by federal courts.

The House vote was scheduled shortly after a briefing on Iran Wednesday by top administration officials that many Democrats criticized as lacking specific justification for the killing. Iran retaliated early Wednesday local time by launching missiles at two military bases in Iraq that house American troops. No casualties were reported.

"Members of Congress have serious, urgent concerns about the Administration's decision to engage in hostilities against Iran and about its lack of strategy moving forward," Pelosi said in her statement.

"Congress hereby directs the President to terminate the use of United States Armed Forces to engage in hostilities in or against Iran or any part of its government or military" unless Congress declares war on that country or enacts legislation authorizing use of force to prevent an attack on the U.S. and its forces, the five-page resolution says.

"I think it's extremely important that we as a country, if we are going to -- either intentionally or accidentally -- slide into war, that we have a debate about it," said freshman Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., the measure's sponsor. Slotkin is a former CIA analyst and Pentagon official who served in Iraq.

"I want to understand ... what's your strategy?" she said, referring to the Trump administration. "How do you know you're succeeding and not just escalating us into something more and more dangerous? We are owed concrete, specific details on strategy."

The showdown between the White House and Capitol Hill was the latest example of Trump's willingness to break the norms in Washington. Trump did not consult with congressional leaders ahead of the attack that killed the Iranian general and afterward sent Congress a notification explaining the rationale, but kept it classified.

Congress has allowed its war powers role to erode since the passage of Authorization for Use of Military Force in 2001 to fight terrorism after the 9/11 attacks, and passage of another AUMF for the invasion of Iraq in 2002.

Fallout from those votes deeply divided Congress and the nation, with many lawmakers, particularly Democrats, now saying they were mistakes. Yet Congress has been paralyzed on the question of whether to repeal or change those authorities.

Trump, facing one of the greatest tests of his presidency, said Wednesday that Iran appeared to be "standing down" and said the U.S. response would be to put in place new economic sanctions "until Iran changes its behavior."

The strikes by Iran had pushed Tehran and Washington perilously close to all-out conflict and put the world's attention on Trump as he weighed whether to respond with more military force.

Republicans have largely supported Trump's actions, saying the president was well within his power to take out Iran's architect of proxy operations against Americans in the Middle East. The U.S. considered Soleimani a terrorist.

"How much is enough? How many more Americans did Soleimani need to kill before somebody supports taking him out?" asked Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 Republican in the House. The world is a safer place without Soleimani in it, he added.

Democrats were unconvinced that the threat posed by Soleimani was imminent or that other alternatives to the killing were pursued in good faith. By not disclosing many details of the threat, Trump was asking the American public to trust the very intelligence reports he has often disparaged, Democrats said.

Some Republicans also criticized the briefing by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other top officials. Sen. Mike Lee of Utah said it was "probably the worst briefing I've seen, at least on a military issue," in

the nine years he's served in the Senate.

Lee called it "distressing" that officials suggested it would only embolden Iran if lawmakers debated the merits of further military action. He walked into the briefing undecided, Lee said, but left it favoring the war powers resolution being offered by Kaine.

"It is not acceptable for officials within the executive branch of government ... to come in and tell us that we can't debate and discuss the appropriateness of military intervention against Iran," Lee said. "It's un-American, it's unconstitutional, and it's wrong."

Pelosi said the House may also consider additional legislation to repeal the 2002 Iraq authorization of force and a separate bill to prohibit funding for military action against Iran not authorized by Congress.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Padmananda Rama contributed to this story.

Aussie has spent 53 years fighting fires, including his own

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

TOMERONG, Australia (AP) — The wildfire was behaving erratically last week, and Doug Schutz and his team needed to make a quick decision. So they moved a bulldozer from another job and used it to widen a firebreak. That likely helped prevent hundreds of homes from going up in flames.

If anybody was qualified to make that call, it was Schutz. He began volunteering with the Rural Fire Service in Australia's New South Wales state some 53 years ago, at the age of 13, back when Land Rovers were used as firetrucks. Now captain of the Tomerong brigade, Schutz has also been the victim of a wildfire that burned down his business on Christmas Day in 2001.

Schutz is part of an army of 72,000 people from across the state who make up the world's largest volunteer fire service. They've been at the forefront of fighting wildfires that have devastated parts of Australia since September. At least 26 people have been killed by the fires, including three volunteer firefighters.

"I've lived here all my life, and seen a lot of fires. And this one just doesn't want to do what it's supposed to do," Schutz said. "This fire has its own agenda. In some ways, I nearly think it's got a brain. When you think you've got a handle on it, it will sneak around the backdoor and bite you on the bum."

The wildfires have destroyed 2,000 homes and continue to burn, threatening to flare up again as temperatures rise.

To rural folks around the state, people like Schutz are heroes. House after house in affected areas have hung makeshift banners offering thanks to the people they call "firies." It's a far cry from how many Australians view their leader, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has been widely ridiculed for his response to the disaster.

Like the other volunteers, Schutz has never been paid a cent for his work. This season he's been fighting the wildfires every day since Nov. 29, neglecting his own business in the process. He smiles at the irony: In his day job, he produces and sells large quantities of firewood for residential homes on his 118-acre (48-hectare) property.

People from other countries who are used to relying on professional fire services find the Australian volunteer model hard to understand, but Schutz said it's how they like it.

Gary Creer, a volunteer firefighter for 20 years, said he was in the fortunate position of being employed by the government, which doesn't dock any pay from people who take time off to fight fires.

"But there are a lot of people out here who are self-employed, and running their own businesses, and they're giving up thousands and thousands of dollars in lost income," he said.

Last week, Schutz and two other brigade leaders decided to overrule objections by some to their plan to divert the bulldozer. Creer said they were proved right when the wind changed.

"They helped us steer this fire around the whole of the bay and basin area, and kept it going north, and kept us safe," Creer said.

This week, Schutz watched on as other volunteers deliberately set alight undergrowth in the forest near Tomerong, using a mixture of diesel and gasoline. It was part of a controlled burn aimed at starving the

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wildfires of fuel should they approach again.

Schutz said firefighting is in his blood. His father was a founding member of the volunteer brigade in Tomerong, which has a population of about 1,000. He said his dad used to fundraise at local dances for equipment like new rakes.

"We just grew up with it. And in a community like this, local knowledge is everything," Schutz said. "I could take you down any track, pretty well anywhere here, and tell you exactly what's down it. So you don't learn that in five minutes."

Schutz said the 2001 fire was the most intense he has experienced. Fireballs the size of basketballs, fueled by leaves and brush, came raining down on the volunteers as they tried to save homes. Schutz said he and his partner, Colleen Brittain, who is also a volunteer, were too busy keeping other houses safe to consider whether their own home might be in danger.

"Then one of the brigade said, 'You better get to your own place now,'" Schutz said. "The main fire had already gone through. So everything was on fire. The firewood was on fire."

Schutz and other volunteers saved his house and work shed, although he said the damage to the business set him back years.

"We had 4,000 tons of wood there at the time," Schutz said. "The next day we were looking at a pile of ash."

He said the size of the current fires, which have burned an area twice the size of the U.S. state of Maryland, is hard to comprehend, and he wonders how they can be stopped.

"Some other people in some other countries probably think that we're a bunch of idiots for living here," Schutz said. "But it's what we are, what we deal with. And the Australian bush, although it's a lovely place to be, is very dangerous in its own right. Obviously, for this one reason of fire, which can bite you at any time."

McConnell, Pelosi stand firm as impeachment remains frozen

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK, ALAN FRAM and LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The standoff over President Donald Trump's impeachment trial deepened as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said there will be "no haggling" with Democrats as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi demands for more details and witnesses.

McConnell's Senate majority has the leverage Republicans need to launch Trump's trial toward swift acquittal of the charges, but Pelosi's reluctance to transmit the articles of impeachment leaves the proceedings at a standstill.

What started as a seemingly minor delay over process and procedures is now a high-stakes showdown between two skilled leaders facing off over the rare impeachment trial, only the third in the nation's history.

"There will be no haggling with the House over Senate procedure," McConnell, R-Ky., said Wednesday before meeting with Trump at the White House. "We will not cede our authority to try this impeachment. The House Democrats' turn is over."

Three weeks have passed since the House impeached Trump on the charge that he abused the power of his office by pressuring Ukraine's new leader to investigate Democrats, using as leverage \$400 million in military assistance for the U.S. ally as it counters Russia at its border. Trump insists he did nothing wrong, but his defiance of the House Democrats' investigation led to an additional charge of obstruction of Congress.

Senators from both sides are eager to serve as jurors for Trump's day in court. The trial will be conducted in the Senate, where Republicans have a thin majority.

But even as McConnell spoke from the Senate floor, Pelosi, D-Calif., was giving no indication of her willingness to agree to his terms. In a closed-door meeting with the House Democratic caucus, she spoke instead about the crisis in the Middle East, with Iran's retaliatory ballistic missile attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq, according to several Democrats in the room.

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The impeachment timeline is complicating the political calendar, with the weeklong trial now expected to bump into presidential primaries. Several Democratic senators are running for the party nomination.

Returning to Washington from the campaign trail, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., told reporters she was confident in Pelosi's plan.

"I have no doubt that she will get this right," Warren said. "Some things are more important than politics, and the impeachment of a president is certainly one of those. No one is above the law, not even the president."

Another 2020 hopeful, Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., said: "Those articles will come over here for a vote in due time."

The showdown is expected to be resolved this week, lawmakers said.

Pelosi wants McConnell to "immediately" make public the details of his trial proposal, according to a letter to colleagues. She wants to know how much time will be devoted to the trial and other details about the "arena" before announcing her choice of House managers to try the case in the Senate, according to Democrats familiar with the situation and granted anonymity to discuss it.

"Sadly, Leader McConnell has made clear that his loyalty is to the President and not the Constitution," Pelosi wrote to colleagues late Tuesday. She said the process he is outlining is "unfair."

The confrontation over a Senate trial had been building for weeks. But McConnell gained ground when he announced Tuesday that he has support from the majority of senators to start a trial structured like the last one, against President Bill Clinton in 1999. Those proceedings also began without an agreement on witnesses.

"We have the votes," McConnell told reporters.

It takes 51 votes for agreement on the trial proceedings, and with Republicans holding a 53-47 Senate majority McConnell has a slight advantage if he can hold GOP senators together. Democrats are trying to peel off support from a few Republicans to support their demands.

McConnell, who has resisted calling new witnesses, expects a speedy trial that will end with Trump acquitted of the charges. He complained about Pelosi's "endless appetite for these cynical games" and said it will be up to senators to decide if they want more testimony.

On the Senate floor Wednesday, Democratic leader Chuck Schumer promised he would force votes on witnesses, requiring senators to choose whether they want to hear from Trump former national security adviser John Bolton and others.

"When the Senate has votes on witnesses and documents, my Republican colleagues will have to answer to not just the president," Schumer said. "The American people do not want a cover-up."

Some Senate Democrats have said the time has come for Pelosi to send the articles so the trial can begin. Pelosi has yet to choose House impeachment managers for the trial, a politically sensitive next step with many lawmakers vying to be candidates. But aides downplayed any rift between the leaders, saying senators are simply eager to have their say on Trump's impeachment.

Schumer, who talks daily with Pelosi, said the speaker is doing "a very good job and she is seeking to maximize our ability to get facts and evidence."

Pelosi told House leaders in a private meeting Tuesday that she believed the decision to delay the articles was working as a strategy to apply pressure on the Senate for a more fulsome trial, according to those in that meeting.

"People are united," said Democratic Rep. Mike Thompson of California about the mood in the House caucus.

Republicans countered that Democrats rushed to impeach and then delayed the process. At their own lunch Wednesday, Republican senators were privately split on next steps, with some seeking ways to compel Pelosi to act while others were content to let impeachment slip.

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville, Matthew Daly and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

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Analysis: Trump changes terms of 2020 race with Iran turmoil

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The election was always going to be about Donald Trump.

But over the span of a few days, the yearslong focus on the Republican president's performance on the economy, health care and immigration has been overtaken by an urgent debate over foreign policy and war. And as the sprint to Iowa's Feb. 3 caucuses begins, both Trump and his Democratic rivals are being forced to navigate a delicate and dangerous military conflict with Iran that injects a new level of uncertainty into the 2020 contest.

For Democrats, the politics of war now could play a major role in shaping how voters view the winnowing field. And for Trump, who relentlessly cheerleads the American economy, it marked a departure from the standard fare of his rallies and tweets and became the most dangerous moment of his 3-year-old presidency.

In a carefully scripted speech, the brash president met the moment with a rare dose of restraint. Less than 24 hours after missiles from Iran rained down on military bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq, he downplayed the impact of the attack.

"The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it," a solemn Trump declared.

The measured approach reflects the political sensitivity of a situation that Trump helped create by ordering the killing of Iran's top general late last week.

The president is leading a political party openly feuding with itself over America's role in global affairs. One faction is cheering his "America First" campaign promises to stop "endless wars." Another wants Iran to pay a painful price for an attack that violated the clear red line Trump outlined in a social media post days earlier.

For a day at least, Trump appeared to placate both factions with a speech that toed the line between humility and strength.

Fox News host Sean Hannity, who appeared to be cheering for a fierce U.S. counterattack before Trump's speech, was unusually silent in the hours afterward. Sen. Rand Paul, perhaps the Senate GOP's most fervent isolationist, tweeted that he was "pleased that President Trump has pulled back and taken the preferred path of no further military action."

This phase of the conflict has only just begun, however.

The president's actions in the coming days and weeks will mean far more than the scripted words in one speech. Trump, of course, has struggled with discipline and consistency throughout his presidency — especially on social media.

One misplaced tweet or off-handed comment at a political rally could shatter the fragile peace. He is scheduled to face thousands of his supporters Thursday night in Ohio, where his thoughts on Iran almost certainly won't be as scripted.

"Trump's not out of the woods," said Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who predicted that remnants of the military conflict would help shape the 2020 election even if no further military action takes place.

Indeed, even if the infighting within his party dies down, Trump will face legitimate questions in the months ahead about his muddled foreign policy, which has scrambled alliances across the globe and emboldened some of America's most dangerous adversaries, including Russia and North Korea.

After maligning NATO for much of his presidency, Trump on Wednesday called for the alliance of Western nations to take a greater role in the Middle East. And he falsely blamed the Obama administration for providing funding for the Iranian missile attack, ignoring his own 2018 decision to abandon the international agreement to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

During a campaign appearance in Chicago, Democratic White House hopeful Michael Bloomberg urged Trump not to act "rashly or recklessly."

The prospect of a wartime election may be new in 2020, but the shift would mark a return to normalcy of sorts in presidential politics, at least in this century. International affairs and military conflict have played a central role in almost every presidential contest since 2000.

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The 2004 contest came just a year after President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq. Obama beat Republican war hero John McCain in a 2008 election shaped by voter fatigue over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And in 2016, Trump effectively turned the tables by casting Democrat Hillary Clinton as an establishment-minded globalist who would pursue endless wars.

While Trump sought to de-escalate on Wednesday, Democratic candidates sorted through what the conflict means for them. No one stands to gain — or lose — more in a foreign policy election than former Vice President Joe Biden.

“Biden just won the nomination,” South Carolina-based Democratic strategist Boyd Brown, a Biden supporter, said as the first news reports revealed the extent of the Iranian missile attacks.

While Brown is far from objective, variations of his idea rippled through the political stratosphere as Democratic voters paused to rethink the terms of a 2020 nomination fight through the lens of war. The party’s far-left wing, in particular, was forced to face the fact that the overwhelming strength of their preferred candidates, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, lies in their grasp of domestic priorities like health care and income inequality, not international affairs.

For all his experience on the world stage, however, Biden has yet to put to rest stubborn questions about his 2003 vote as a Delaware senator to authorize military force against Iraq. It was that vote, followed by Bush’s invasion, that triggered nearly two decades of military conflict that shapes conditions in Middle East today.

But despite any questions Democrats will face, do not expect Trump to cede his leading role in the 2020 drama anytime soon.

As the world waits to see whether the peace with Iran will last, Trump’s impeachment trial in the Senate is just days away.

EDITOR’S NOTE — National Political Writer Steve Peoples has covered presidential politics for The Associated Press since 2011.

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

Fence-scaling Venezuela opposition leader rekindles his mojo

By **CHRISTINE ARMARIO** and **FABIOLA SANCHEZ** Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — In a crisp black suit with a bright blue tie, Juan Guaidó pushed and shoved his way through rows of helmet-clad national guardsmen, cursing and scolding them like schoolchildren for blocking him from entering Venezuela’s congress.

“You don’t get to decide who gets in!” he yelled, inching his face up close to the young man impeding his access to the legislature’s ornate halls.

In recent days, the opposition leader who drew thousands of Venezuelans to the streets last year only to see his momentum steadily fizzle as President Nicolás Maduro remains firmly in power appears to have gotten his mojo back.

Images of the man recognized by the U.S. and over 50 other nations as Venezuela’s rightful president scaling the National Assembly’s spiked iron fence, tussling with national guardsmen and taking a spirited oath, shouted into a darkened congress operating without electricity, seem to have riled up his base once more.

“Today he’s the star once again,” said Luis Vicente León, president of Datanalisis, a Caracas-based polling company. But, the analyst added: “It won’t be enough. He needs to convert his potential energy into kinetic energy.”

Much is resting on the 36-year-old lawmaker’s shoulders: Whether he can capitalize on the new momentum could determine whether the opposition’s flagging movement reinvents itself or drifts into the sidelines of history.

A significant test will come later this week when Venezuelans decide whether or not to heed his call for

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a new round of protests. Many are skeptical that Guaidó can still mobilize large numbers. An estimated 4.5 million people have fled the country, many of them the young people most likely to protest. Countless others are too preoccupied trying to meet basic needs like finding food and medicine to turn out for a demonstration that might not change anything.

Guaidó will also have to rally disparate opposition factions that united to re-elect him as head of the National Assembly over whether or not to participate in this year's legislative elections. Thus far, the opposition hasn't articulated a joint strategy. Many are weary of participating in a vote with Maduro still in power, pointing out that the current National Electoral Council is still stacked heavily in the president's favor.

Others note that if they don't run, Maduro's government could gain control of what many see as Venezuela's last democratic institution.

At the center of it all is Guaidó, who in his new fighting stance appears to be drawing a page from the epic, age-old David and Goliath narrative of the virtuous underdog rushing to the rescue.

"Regaining momentum is important," said Maryhen Jiménez, a Venezuelan-born lecturer in politics at Oxford University. "But then there is the other side of the story, which is the passion of Venezuelans for a hero."

Guaidó leaped into the international limelight nearly one year ago when he climbed up on a stage before thousands of Venezuelans filling densely packed city blocks to declare himself the beleaguered nation's interim president on grounds that it was his constitutional right to step in because Maduro's reelection was not legitimate.

The previously unknown backbencher was immediately recognized by U.S. President Donald Trump and dozens of other nations stretching from Ecuador to Estonia.

He led a forceful street campaign, but a series of missteps proved costly.

In February, he snuck into Colombia, defying a Supreme Court order prohibiting him from leaving the country, to oversee the entry of international humanitarian aid into Venezuela. But state security forces refused to let the goods in, staying loyal to Maduro, who had prohibited them from allowing supplies in across the border.

Then came a blundered attempt at sparking a military revolt in late April. Though a few dozen soldiers joined Guaidó and his mentor, Leopoldo López, in urging the nation's armed forces to turn against Maduro, most stayed in their barracks.

Compelled to negotiate, Guaidó and the Maduro government sat down for talks in Barbados mediated by Norway that started out promising but went nowhere. A series of corruption scandals involved purported misuse of funds for deserted soldiers and opposition lawmakers secretly doing the bidding of government allies left the opposition decidedly bruised.

By December, Guaidó's approval rating had plummeted to 38 percent, down from a high of 61 percent 10 months before, León said.

Not only had Venezuelans grown distrustful of Guaidó, they'd also steadily lost faith that Maduro's unpopular government could be removed. Whereas in February over 70 percent stated in polls that they believed there'd be a change within three months, by December only 21 percent were optimistic, León said.

Sunday was expected to be more of the same: A showing of hands in favor of renewing Guaidó's reelection as head of the National Assembly, with some abstention or votes against by factions who are upset with his leadership.

Instead, it turned into a galvanizing moment.

Thick rows of green-uniformed national guardsmen blocked Guaidó and other opposition lawmakers from entering. At one point, he tried scaling the National Assembly's fence, only to be pulled down the tail of his suit.

Inside, Luis Parra, a one-time Guaidó ally who had been expelled by an opposition party for allegedly taking bribes to favor government associates, declared that he was the new National Assembly president, claiming to have garnered 81 votes of 150 lawmakers present, though a detailed tally has not been provided.

Separately, Guaidó held a session at a Venezuelan newspaper in which the opposition says he obtained 100 votes, including from some of his skeptics.

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When Parra tried to hold a session Tuesday, Guaidó and a caravan of lawmaker supporters stormed past national guardsmen and forcibly entered the legislative building, sending the Maduro-backed leaders inside scrambling.

"Today, lawmakers delivered a victory for the Venezuelan people," Guaidó said triumphantly.

But how long might it last?

In some ways, little or nothing has changed: Maduro still has control of the military and the backing of powerful institutions like the Supreme Court, while Guaidó leads a largely powerless institution with no ability to enforce its proposals.

"Once the dust is settled, he'll continue to face the same challenges," said Diego Moya Ocampos, a political risk analyst.

In one potentially telling sign, there have been no spontaneous protests in Sunday's aftermath, suggesting that the public's anger over Maduro's attempted power grab could be limited, or at least still too focused on other pressing matters.

Still, Moya Ocampos said he expects to see more forceful Guaidó in the days head, exercising stronger rhetoric. Guaidó's decision to leave the party of his mentor, Voluntad Popular, could also free him up to take bolder moves.

"I think we are going to see a more independent Guaidó, more autonomous in his actions and regaining momentum," Moya Ocampos said.

Supporters like Eduardo Bravo, an actor and activist, said they are elated to see the opposition leader taking riskier actions to salvage his moment.

"He knew he had to do something decisive that would generate emotion, because this is an emotional country," Bravo, 49, said Wednesday. "It was like watching democracy say: 'I'm here and I'm entering because this is my space.'"

An active protester, Bravo said he considered Guaidó's actions a "180 degree" shift.

"He's filled with hope people who felt very deceived," Bravo said. "We'll see it in the streets in the weeks ahead when people turn out again."

— Armario reported from Bogota, Colombia.

Justin Bieber says he's battling Lyme disease

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Justin Bieber says that he has been battling Lyme disease.

In an Instagram post on Wednesday, the pop star wrote that "it's been a rough couple years but (I'm) getting the right treatment that will help treat this so far incurable disease and I will be back and better than ever."

Lyme disease is transmitted by Ixodes ticks, also known as deer ticks. Lyme can cause flu-like conditions, neurological problems, joint pain and other symptoms. Though Bieber called it incurable, in the vast majority of cases, Lyme disease is successfully treated with antibiotics.

"While a lot of people kept saying Justin Bieber looks like (expletive), on meth etc. they failed to realize I've been recently diagnosed with Lyme disease, not only that but had a serious case of chronic mono which affected my, skin, brain function, energy, and overall health," Bieber wrote.

The Grammy-winning singer said he will discuss battling the tick-borne infection on his upcoming YouTube docu-series, "Justin Bieber: Seasons," which debuts Jan. 27. The 10-episode show will follow Bieber while he creates his new album and will also highlight his private life.

"You can learn all that I've been battling and OVERCOMING!!," he wrote.

Trebek: 'Jeopardy!' retirement isn't imminent despite cancer

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — The brief farewell that Alex Trebek says will close his final "Jeopardy!" episode isn't on the horizon.

"I don't foresee that 30-second moment coming up in the near future," Trebek said Wednesday, referring to his request for time to close out his decades-long run with the quiz show.

While treatment for pancreatic cancer is taking a toll, Trebek said he's not ready to retire although he's mulled it in recent years. He spoke during a panel promoting "'Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time'" with top contestants Ken Jennings, Brad Rutter and James Holzhauer. The prime-time contest is airing this week on ABC.

"When you've been in the same job for that long period of time and you're in advanced years, it behooves you at some point to think about retiring. Now, thinking about retiring and retiring are two different things," he said. "As long as I feel my skills have not diminished too much, and as long as I'm enjoying spending time with bright people like these three (contestants) ... then I'll continue doing it."

Harry Friedman, the program's long-time executive producer, said no successor was lined up.

Trebek, 79, was candid when asked about his health. He announced his pancreatic diagnosis last March, and said Wednesday he's between progress reports.

"Some days are better than others. My resistance is lower than most of you, of course, because of the treatments I've been having, the chemotherapy and, as you can tell, the cold that seems to be going around. But this is the second time I've had it in the past month," he said, his voice slightly hoarse.

"They've me off one of my chemo drugs, which was killing me," he said, adding that he's having tests done Thursday and "then maybe another week or so before I find out where things stand."

He also was candid about less debilitating effects of disease and its treatment, including the hair loss that's been covered by a wig and a deep tan cast to his skin. He also expressed concern about his recent performance on "Jeopardy!," which he began hosting in 1984.

"I seemed a little slower in the ad-lib portions. I could still deliver the clues at a rapid pace ... but I feel that I was not having one of my best weeks. Some weeks are good, some weeks are bad, but it comes with the territory," he said, conceding that his wife didn't share his assessment.

Neither does Rutter, who first competed on the show in 2000 and is the all-time top money winner.

"He's absolutely the best who's ever done it. He's very modest. He'll tell you that you don't owe him anything. But we all do," Rutter said. "There wouldn't be any 'Jeopardy!' without Alex. And 'Jeopardy!' changed my life."

Trebek was asked what he'll do when he does retire. "Drink," was his straight-faced reply.

"No," he added. "I'll work around the house."

Asked what he will most miss about "Jeopardy!" he reply was swift.

"I tell audiences who come to our tapings that the thing I enjoy most about the show is the 30 minutes I spend on stage with the contestants, because I love spending time with bright people. ... I hate spending time with stupid people," he said, drawing laughs.

Mississippi moms question state as they bury slain inmates

By JEFF AMY and STACEY PLAISANCE Associated Press

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP) — Manslaughter isn't supposed to be a death sentence. Nor is burglary. Nor is armed robbery, selling cocaine or stealing a vehicle.

But that is what the mothers of three inmates say was ultimately given to their sons, all of whom were killed in prison violence last week. As they plan their children's funerals, they are demanding answers. They want to know what happened, and why.

All three prisoners were slain by fellow inmates at Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman last week. Two other inmates were killed in prisons elsewhere in the state. The outbreak of violence has brought national attention to problems that have long plagued Mississippi's overstretched prison system.

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The mothers were told by their sons' fellow inmates that their deaths were gruesome.

"He was beat. He was stabbed. His chest, stomach. ... He has, well, he had, a lot of bruises and things on him," says Jeffrie Holliman of Hattiesburg, mother of 32-year-old Roosevelt Holliman, who died Jan. 2.

Rotonia Gates, the mother of Walter "Keon" Gates, says she's been told not to look at the body of her 25-year-old son after he was repeatedly stabbed on Dec. 31. But she says inmates with contraband cell-phones sent her graphic pictures and descriptions of what happened.

"All the information I've gotten has come from inside," says Gates, a Southaven resident.

Denorris Howell's body was so covered in blood that Sunflower County Coroner Heather Burton initially announced he had been stabbed on Friday, but later revised that to say he'd suffered a different kind of neck wound.

Relatives of all three inmates say they have few answers from prison officials, and they question whether guards acted properly.

"They're not releasing any information," Rotonia Gates says. "It seems like they're trying to hide something."

The Mississippi Department of Corrections has provided few answers to repeated questions from The Associated Press about the cause and manner of the prisoners' deaths and how the department has responded.

"I have no information to add to your story or stories," spokeswoman Grace Simmons Fisher said in an email Wednesday. "Thank you for asking."

Advocacy groups have asked the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate. They have criticized state lawmakers and officials for writing laws that they say have resulted in Mississippi having the third-highest incarceration rate in the U.S.

Prison officials themselves say they have only had enough money to fill half of available guard posts, and they say the pay is far too low. The starting salary for guards is \$25,650.

Gates was the first to die at Parchman. Rotonia Gates says Keon was her "knee baby," the second-youngest of her five children. She describes a smart child who got into trouble if teachers didn't push him in school.

Eventually, that mischief led to worse trouble: burglarizing houses. But Rotonia Gates says she had hope that her son was ready to change his ways and was encouraged by her interactions with him when he was paroled. The parole turned out to be a mistake, however, and Walter Gates was taken back to prison. He was expected to be paroled again this spring.

Gates says she doesn't know if her son was a gang member, and bristles at prison officials attributing his death to gang violence. But she knows conditions at the prison were bad. She says her son didn't have a mattress to sleep on and got sick because rain poured into the prison.

Roosevelt Holliman's sister, Theresa Holliman, says photos taken on cellphones obtained illegally by the prisoners show rats crawling over some of them.

"You just see them laying on the ground, basically worse than animals," she says.

She says she also was told that some of the inmates had no heat.

In July, prison officials asked the state for more than \$22 million to reroof and renovate a 1,400-bed complex known as Unit 29, writing in a budget request that it had "deteriorated to a point that it is no longer safe for staff or inmates."

Gates and Wilkins both say their sons had pleaded for help or transfers to safer spaces before they died in the violence. Wilkins says Howell talked to her hours before his death.

"He was telling me, 'Mom, get us some help, I'm fearing for my life, I'm fearing for my life. I need help now. Please get someone,'" Wilkins says.

The relatives also question whether guards contributed to their sons' deaths, since inmates were supposed to be confined to their cells or bunk areas.

The Mississippi Department of Corrections has not answered questions from the AP about whether officials are investigating guard conduct. A number of state prison guards in the past have been charged with bringing in contraband drugs and cellphones and have been accused of aiding gangs.

"How can this have happened?" asks Gates. "What can we do to prevent this? The families need relief."

Somebody's going to have to answer for this. That's too many deaths, and for what?"

Amy reported from Atlanta.

Follow Jeff Amy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jeffamy>

Analysis: Trump seeks election-year out after Iran strikes

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump said Iran was "standing down" from possible conflict with the U.S. But Trump himself was just as eager for an out.

Trump, by declining to take military action in retaliation for Iranian missile strikes against Iraqi bases that house U.S. troops, edged the nation back from the brink of a war that could have destabilized the Middle East. That fits with his broader foreign policy pattern: talk tough but stay away from armed conflict.

And that approach, mixed with a bit of luck and Iran's own desire to avoid open conflict, could allow Trump to pull off dual election-year goals of projecting strength while placating those who backed him because of his promise to withdraw the United States from "endless" wars in the Middle East.

"This was clearly a speech that was designed to avoid the need to take further military action or open war, which I don't think is the president's desire or Iran's desire," said retired Adm. James Stavridis, NATO's former supreme allied commander. "He's in a very narrow space here: He wants to look tough and presidential but he campaigned on getting us out of these wars."

Trump began casting about for an off-ramp as tens of thousands of Iranians mourned the death of Gen. Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike and Tehran talked vengeance. When Iranian rockets flew over Iraq and slammed into two bases housing American soldiers Tuesday night, the president and his team waited before deciding on a response.

After daylight broke, and it became clear that there were no American casualties, Trump took to the podium at the White House to frame the attack as a win for the U.S. He said the next move from Washington would be sanctions, not missiles.

"Our great American forces are prepared for anything. Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world," Trump said from the White House.

But Trump's moment of self-styled triumph could be fleeting, particularly in a region as volatile as the Middle East. There is no guarantee that Tuesday's rockets will be the end of Iran's retaliation, and future operations could involve covert militia action or cyber warfare that would be tougher for the U.S. to pin on Tehran.

As the Iran crisis began to deepen last month, the stakes were clearly higher than with some of Trump's other international entanglements.

Iran has long loomed as a rising threat, with tensions escalating after Trump pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal negotiated during the Obama years. Iran seethed as Trump instituted a series of crippling sanctions in a "maximum pressure" campaign meant to keep Tehran from building a nuclear weapon.

When Iran-backed militias launched a strike that killed an American contractor and raided the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, Trump was presented with an array of possible responses. To the surprise of his national security team, Trump opted for the most dramatic option: a strike to kill Soleimani.

The ramifications of the strike were unknown: How would Iran retaliate? Would it target other countries or compel the U.S. to strike again? Other U.S. presidents had chances to take out Soleimani but opted against the decision for fear of igniting a war.

But Trump, normally loath to risk transforming a standoff into a shooting war, slipped out of a meeting with campaign staff at his Mar-a-Lago resort to approve the lethal strike.

Iran countered with its missile strikes Tuesday night but the rockets did not claim any lives. The response allowed Tehran to appease Iranian hardliners without further provoking Trump into a massive response.

And Trump, in the aftermath, pushed for NATO to step in and do more in the Mideast, though it was

not immediately clear if that was a rare nod to the importance of the long-standing military alliance or yet another exhortation for it to spend more resources.

Trump has long made opposition to war part of his political identity. Though he briefly supported the 2003 Iraq war, he later became a fierce opponent, declaring it a waste of American lives and resources.

His foreign policy promises during the campaign were consistently incoherent: While he pledged to pull the U.S. out of the Middle East, he also has pledged to “bomb the hell” out of the Islamic State.

Since taking office, he has launched limited missile strikes against Syria, and authorized the killing of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi there, yet also pulled out the vast majority of American military personnel. The al-Baghdadi killing became a staple in Trump campaign ads.

And in North Korea, the situation perhaps most analogous to Iran, Trump first issued bellicose warnings the U.S. could unleash “fire and fury” on Pyongyang before lowering the temperature and trying to avoid military conflict.

“Trump risks a lot of political capital by deploying tens of thousands of troops to the Mideast. A core part of his appeal to a lot of voters was to end endless wars and this Iran episode has put that at risk,” said Republican strategist Alex Conant. “But if Trump can project strength without having to face any real consequences, that’s a clear win for him. If he can kill a terrorist and not face any real-world blowback, that’s nothing but political upside for him.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: Lemire has covered politics and the White House for the Associated Press since 2013.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>

Ukrainian jet crash kills 176, sets off mourning in Canada

By **DAVID KOENIG** and **JON GAMBRELL** Associated Press

The crash of a Ukrainian jetliner that killed 176 people in Iran touched off mourning Wednesday in both Ukraine and Canada — where many of the victims were from or were headed — and raised a host of questions about what went wrong. But U.S. intelligence officials said there was no immediate evidence it was shot down.

The jetliner, a Boeing 737 operated by Ukrainian International Airlines, went down on the outskirts of Tehran during takeoff just hours after Iran launched a barrage of missiles at U.S. forces. While the timing of the disaster led some aviation experts to wonder whether it was brought down by a missile, Iranian officials disputed any such suggestion and blamed mechanical trouble.

“The rumors about the plane are completely false and no military or political expert has confirmed it,” Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, spokesman for the Iranian armed forces, was quoted by the semiofficial Fars news agency as saying. He said the rumors were “psychological warfare” by the government’s opponents.

In Washington, a Democrat who attended a classified briefing from Trump administration officials on Capitol Hill — including Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and CIA Director Gina Haspel — said the briefers had no intelligence indicating the plane was shot down. The lawmaker spoke on condition of anonymity.

The plane, en route to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, was carrying 167 passengers and nine crew members from several countries, including 82 Iranians, at least 63 Canadians and 11 Ukrainians, according to officials. The crash just before dawn scattered flaming debris and passengers’ belongings across a wide stretch of farmland.

Many of the passengers were believed to be international students attending universities in Canada; they were making their way back to Toronto by way of Kyiv after visiting with family during the winter break.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said 138 of the passengers were bound for Canada. The flight also included a family of four and newlyweds, too. The manifest listed several teenagers and children, some as young as 1 or 2.

The crash ranked among the worst losses of life for Canadians in an aviation disaster. The flag over

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Parliament in Ottawa was lowered to half-staff, and Trudeau vowed to get to the bottom of the disaster. "Know that all Canadians are grieving with you," he said, addressing the victims' families.

Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy cut short a visit to Oman to return to Kyiv and said a team of Ukrainian experts would go to Tehran to help investigate the crash.

"Our priority is to find the truth and everyone responsible for the tragedy," he wrote in a Facebook statement.

Ukrainian officials, for their part, initially agreed that the 3½-year-old plane was brought down by mechanical trouble but later backed away from that and declined to offer a cause while the investigation is going on.

While the cause of the tragedy remained unknown, the disaster could further damage Boeing's reputation, which has been battered by the furor over two deadly crashes involving a different model of the Boeing jet, the much-newer 737 Max, which has been grounded for nearly 10 months. The uproar led to the firing of the company's CEO last month.

Boeing extended condolences to the victims' families and said it stands ready to assist.

Authorities said they found the plane's so-called black boxes, which record cockpit conversations and instrument data.

But given the near state of war between Iran and the U.S., it was not immediately clear whether the Iranians would share the devices with investigators from the United States and its allies or whether Tehran would invite the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board to take part.

Normally investigators from the country of the plane's origin -- in this case, the U.S. -- participate in the investigation of major crashes in other nations.

Immediately after the crash Qassem Biniyaz, a spokesman for Iran's Road and Transportation Ministry, said it appeared a fire erupted in one of its engines and the pilot lost control of the plane, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. The news report did not explain how Iranian authorities knew that.

Major world airlines, meanwhile, rerouted flights crossing the Middle East to avoid danger amid escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran, and the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration barred American flights from certain Persian Gulf airspace, warning of the "potential for miscalculation or misidentification" of civilian aircraft.

Ukraine International Airlines President Yevhen Dykhne, said the aircraft "was one of the best planes we had, with an amazing, reliable crew." The jet last underwent routine maintenance on Monday, according to the airline. As for the pilots, it said, "Given the crew's experience, error probability is minimal. We do not even consider such a chance."

The Ukrainian plane slammed into the ground near the town of Shahedshahr, causing fires that lit up the darkened fields before daybreak. Din Mohammad Qassemi said he had been watching the news about the Iranian missile attack on U.S. troops in Iraq in revenge for the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani when he heard the crash.

"I heard a massive explosion and all the houses started to shake. There was fire everywhere," he said. "At first I thought (the Americans) have hit here with missiles and went in the basement as a shelter. After a while, I went out and saw a plane has crashed over there. Body parts were lying around everywhere."

The crash left a wide field of debris scattered across farmland, including pieces of the shattered aircraft, a child's cartoon-covered electric toothbrush, a stuffed animal, luggage and electronics.

It was the first fatal crash involving Ukraine International Airlines, which began flying in 1992, according to the Aviation Safety Network, which tracks accidents.

As for the Boeing 737-800 model that went down, thousands of the twin-engine jetliners introduced in the late 1990s are in use around the world, and it has one of the best safety records among popular airliners.

The Aviation Safety Network said there have been eight fatal crashes involving the Boeing 737-800 out of nearly 5,000 built. A FlyDubai crash in Russia in 2016 killed 62 people, and an Air India Express disaster in India in 2010 left more than 150 dead.

The 737-800s have been the subject of inspections and repairs since last year, after airlines started

reporting cracks in a part that keeps the wings attached to the fuselage.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Koenig from Dallas. Associated Press writers Adam Schreck in Bangkok; Daria Litvinova in Moscow; Inna Varenysia and Dmytro Vlasov in Kyiv, Ukraine; Carlo Piovano in London; and Rob Gillies in Toronto contributed to this report.

Prince Harry and Meghan to 'step back' as senior UK royals

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, say they plan "to step back" as senior members of Britain's royal family, a stunning announcement that underscores the couple's wish to forge a new path for royals in the modern world.

A statement issued Wednesday evening by Buckingham Palace, described as "a personal message from the Duke and Duchess of Sussex," said Harry and Meghan intend to become financially independent" and to "balance" their time between the U.K. and North America.

"After many months of reflection and internal discussions, we have chosen to make a transition this year in starting to carve out a progressive new role within this institution," the statement said. "We intend to step back as 'senior' members of the royal family and work to become financially independent, while continuing to fully support her majesty the queen."

The 35-year-old Harry, the youngest son of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana, is Queen Elizabeth II's grandson and sixth in line to the British throne. With his ginger hair and beard, he has become one of the royal family's most popular members.

Before marrying the prince in a royal wedding watched around the world in 2018, the 38-year-old Duchess of Sussex was an American actress known as Meghan Markle and a star of the TV show "Suits." The couple's first child, Archie, was born in May 2019.

In their statement, the couple did not reveal where in North America they plan to make a second home, but they cited their baby as a reason why they decided to live part of their time outside Britain.

"This geographic balance will enable us to raise our son with an appreciation for the royal tradition into which he was born, while also providing our family with the space to focus on the next chapter, including the launch of our new charitable entity," it read.

Hours later, Buckingham Palace issued a second statement, hinting that the first had caught some in the royal household by surprise. The statement said discussions with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex were "at an early stage."

"We understand their desire to take a different approach, but these are complicated issues that will take time to work through," it read.

Harry and his family skipped the queen's traditional Christmas gathering at her Sandringham country estate last month to visit Canada and to see Markle's mother, who lives in California. Meghan grew up in Los Angeles and lived in Toronto while filming "Suits."

The message about the couple's plans also appeared on their official Instagram feed, along with a link to a website, sussexroyal.com, where followers could find more information.

The website elaborated on why they are seeking financial independence from the monarchy's funding mechanism, known as the "Sovereign Grant." A page on the site states the grant they are forsaking covers just 5% of the costs for the duke and duchess and is used for their official office expenses.

Meghan and Harry "value the ability to earn a professional income, which in the current structure they are prohibited from doing," the website states. "Their Royal Highnesses feel this new approach will enable them to continue to carry out their duties for Her Majesty the Queen, while having the future financial autonomy to work externally.

As an actress and a human rights activist, the duchess was accustomed to media attention before her marriage, but she has made no secret that the transition to being a global celebrity and part of Britain's royal family was difficult.

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The royal couple particularly took issue with their treatment at the hands of the British tabloids, whose aggressive coverage of all things royal is legendary.

In October, Meghan sued a newspaper for copyright infringement for publishing a letter she wrote to her estranged father. Later that month, Harry brought his own claim against two of the most popular tabloids over alleged hacking of phone voicemail messages.

The prince also lashed out at the British media for its treatment of Meghan, accusing the press of hounding his wife the same way it did his mother. Princess Diana died in a 1997 car crash while trying to elude paparazzi in Paris.

"My deepest fear is history repeating itself. I've seen what happens when someone I love is commoditized to the point that they are no longer treated or seen as a real person. I lost my mother and now I watch my wife falling victim to the same powerful forces," Harry said.

The royal couple revealed their struggles with the media during an ITV documentary "Harry & Meghan: An African Journey," which followed them on their autumn tour of Southern Africa. Both said they had struggled with the spotlight and that much of what was printed about them is untrue.

The duchess told ITV that her British friends warned her not to marry the prince because of the intense media scrutiny that would follow in his country. But the U.S. television star said she "naively" dismissed the warnings, because as an American she didn't understand how the British press worked.

"I never thought this would be easy, but I thought it would be fair. And that is the part that is hard to reconcile," Meghan said. "But (I) just take each day as it comes."

The duchess said the pressure was aggravated by the fact that she went quickly from being a newlywed to being pregnant and then a new mother.

The British media have also made much of an alleged rift between Harry and his older brother, Prince William, who is second in line to the throne. Harry and Meghan last year opted out of living at Kensington Palace in London, where William and his family lives, and moved to a Frogmore Cottage at Windsor.

In the ITV interview, Harry acknowledged there have been some differences between him and the 37-year-old William, although he said most of what has been printed about a rift between the two brothers has been "created out of nothing."

"Part of this role and part of this job and this family being under the pressure that it's under, inevitably stuff happens," he said. "But, look, we're brothers. We'll always be brothers. We're certainly on different paths at the moment, but I will always be there for him, as I know he'll always be there for me."

This story corrects the year that the royal couple was married to 2018.

'Obamacare' mandate: hot for lawyers, ho-hum to consumers

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The repeal of an unpopular fine for people without health insurance has had little impact on "Obamacare" sign-ups or premiums, a gap between the real world and legal arguments from conservatives again challenging the Affordable Care Act.

The 10-year-old law has proved more resilient than its creators or detractors imagined, even as the Supreme Court considers whether to take up the latest effort to roll it back.

Opponents argue that the constitutionality of the entire 900-page law hinges on the now-toothless penalty for not having health insurance. Collected as a tax by the IRS, the penalty was intended to enforce the law's "individual mandate" that Americans be insured. A previous Republican-led Congress set the fines to \$0, effective last year.

"We've gotten a lot of evidence by now about what the market looks like without a mandate penalty, and on the whole it looks pretty stable, which is surprising because that's not what most people would have expected when the ACA was being written," said Cynthia Cox, who directs research on the health law for the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

A Kaiser study released this week found that removal of the penalty pushed premiums up about 5%

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going into 2019, but the bottom line was a wash because of other factors. Insurers appeared to be making healthy profits.

The penalty was thought to be critical when the law was being written in 2009-2010. The idea was to nudge healthy people to sign up, helping keep premiums in check. But Cox said there's no indication that healthy people have dropped out in droves. In one telling statistic, the Kaiser study found that average hospital days per 1,000 people enrolled dipped slightly in 2019, even after the penalty was eliminated.

Partial sign-up numbers for 2020 released Wednesday by the government point to stability. Nearly 8.3 million people enrolled in the 38 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov website. That's down only about 2% from last year, when one additional state was using HealthCare.gov. A final count including that state — Nevada — and others that run their own sign-up efforts is expected by the spring.

The insurance mandate was the central issue when the Supreme Court first upheld the health care law in 2012, over a year before HealthCare.gov opened for business.

Chief Justice John Roberts cast the key vote in that 5-4 decision. He found that Congress lacked constitutional authority to require that Americans have health insurance. But because Congress has broad powers to levy taxes, Roberts ruled that a tax on people who did not purchase coverage offered them was constitutional. That allowed the law to survive what's still seen as its most serious legal challenge.

Kathleen Sebelius, health secretary for President Barack Obama, said in 2012 that it was generally accepted that the insurance mandate was part of a three-legged stool key to stable markets. The other two legs were taxpayer-provided subsidies for premiums and a guarantee that patients with preexisting medical conditions could no longer be turned down or charged more.

"It was thought that the trade-off for changing the rules on preexisting conditions would have to be ... some penalty incentive so you would get healthy people in the pool, along with not-healthy people," Sebelius said. "What became clear when the law went into effect (in 2014) is that the subsidies in many ways provided a greater incentive for people get health insurance."

Those subsidies are designed so that low- and moderate-income households only spend a fixed percentage of their incomes on premiums, shielding consumers from high sticker prices.

Cox agreed that the law's "carrots" seem to have made more of a difference than its "stick."

Fast-forward to 2018 and a coalition of conservative states led by Texas won a lower court decision that the insurance mandate was still critical, in a legal and constitutional sense.

U.S. District Court Judge Reed O'Connor in Texas ruled that by zeroing out the tax penalty, Congress rendered the insurance mandate unconstitutional, and without it the entire health law must fall. President Donald Trump agreed.

Recently, a federal appeals court in New Orleans agreed with O'Connor that an unenforceable insurance mandate is unconstitutional. But the appeals court sent the case back to him to see whether other parts of the law can stand.

Defending the law, a coalition of Democratic-led states, along with the U.S. House, appealed to the Supreme Court, seeking a fast-track decision amid this year's presidential election. The court has asked lawyers for the conservative states to respond by Friday on the timing question.

University of Michigan law professor Nicholas Bagley said the stability of the health insurance markets exposes "the artificiality" of the conservatives' argument.

"It really goes to show how ridiculous it is to claim that Congress understood the mandate to be so essential that if it were to be red-lined out, the rest of the law would have to fall," said Bagley.

Not so fast, said Andrew Schlafly, a lawyer representing groups siding with Texas and the other GOP-led states opposing the law.

"The question is not whether in reality (the ACA) can work without the mandate," said Schlafly. "The test is whether it was intended to work without the mandate.

"Theory does matter to these Supreme Court justices," he added, "and they do take theory seriously."

Are child crusaders, heroes fair game for adult critics?

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The point where childhood ends and adulthood begins isn't as straightforward as it seems. Add the limelight and things can get complicated for young people who either voluntarily or through circumstances live very public lives.

Those public lives often come with heaping helpings of adult-size sniping. But are children and adolescents who find themselves under global microscopes still entitled to age-appropriate protection from the harshness of public discourse? And, more importantly, can they handle it?

Children and teens, in this era of blurred boundaries, have at their disposal mobile megaphones — for the first time in human history — to reach the entire world. That allows them to be heard, and potentially taken seriously, by hundreds of millions of people, all the way up to heads of state who include the president of the United States.

But does it give those who hear them the right to slap back? At what point does the imperative to treat children more gently collide with their decision to enter the marketplace of ideas — and what happens when it does?

In 2012, 16-year-old gymnast Gabby Douglas became the first African American woman — and woman of color of any nationality — to win Olympic gold in the individual all-around. The feat was joyous, but some on social media bemoaned that her hair wasn't perfect.

The teen clapped back: "Are you kidding me? I just made history. And you're focusing on my hair?"

When climate activist Greta Thunberg, who just turned 17, was named Time magazine's 2019 person of the year, President Donald Trump took to Twitter to call her choice "ridiculous," going on to say: "Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!"

To that, Thunberg responded by changing her Twitter profile to mock the president's words. She told The Intercept: "Honestly, I think it's funny."

Since Serena Williams was a teen, when Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize after being shot in the face, with the ascent of 18-year-old pop star Billie Eilish and in the aftermath of the mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida, that turned young survivors into gun control activists, the treatment of young people in the public eye has had its ups and downs.

"For anyone who shares public opinions about civic and social issues, like Greta Thunberg and the Parkland teens have done, it can cut both ways. It can be empowering for young people to use their voices in such a public way. Young people can also be especially effective in changing public conversations about important issues. People listen to young people in a different way," said Dr. Parissa Ballard, a developmental psychologist at Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

"At the same time, public political engagement can be very stressful and can put young people in a vulnerable position when they receive criticism or people publicly disagree," said Ballard, whose research focuses on the intersection of civic engagement and adolescent health and wellness.

Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who began speaking out for gun reform soon after the shooting there were already in a devastating position when they faced accusations that some were "crisis actors" and the group was under the manipulation of gun control advocates.

The teens were unfazed.

"There are people who are going to be putting us down. It doesn't matter. Everything we're doing, it can't be stopped," Diego Pfeiffer, an 18-year-old senior at the time, told The Miami Herald in February 2018. "We are children and we have a message. They are bashing survivors of a school shooting. You can go ahead, but our message is going to be heard loud and clear."

Development psychologists prefer to speak of stages when describing life's slide from childhood into adolescence and on to young adulthood, such as the onset of biological changes and shifts in social roles. Some use more rigid measures, considering childhood to extend through age 12, with adolescence roughly between 12 and 18 and young adulthood the period between 18 and 25.

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Richard West, an Emerson College communications professor who focuses on family, bullying and identity, said that's only part of the story for young people who prematurely find themselves in adult spaces.

"These are individuals who are emotionally driven and passionately obsessed with having a dialogue," he said. "I don't feel that they should be held to a standard that we hold, for instance, a president or an ambassador."

Finding that line isn't easy.

"We all need to jump in. It's not just Greta's family. It's not the Parkland kids' families. It should be all of us jumping in when we see something or hear something that might be completely out of line with the values of this country," West said. "We don't have the value as a country of attacking young people who might be activists."

Jumping in is exactly what former first lady Michelle Obama did on Twitter after Trump's "chill" tweet about Greta.

"Don't let anyone dim your light," Obama urged Greta. "Like the girls I've met in Vietnam and all over the world, you have so much to offer us all. Ignore the doubters and know that millions of people are cheering you on."

Eilish, who grew popular in 2016 with her SoundCloud single Ocean Eyes, has long been surrounded by family in her entourage, including her parents and her older brother and collaborator, Finneas Baird O'Connell. But fame has had its rough spots nonetheless.

"I forget sometimes that they're not literally my friends," she told Variety of her fans. "It's weird, like, that's probably the biggest con in it all: that people I've never met think I'm really close friends with them. And then they forget that I'm not, and sometimes say stuff at meet-and-greets or post things that are joking or sarcastic about how bad I look in (a certain) photo, and I'm like, wow, that's so mean. But then I remember that it's just part of being friends — you make fun of your friends as a joke, and they make fun of you back — so it's all love, and I really, really don't want it to change."

Ballard, too, sees a key role for supportive adults when public young people face detractors, especially those like Greta and the Parkland survivors who are up against grown-ups with immense power and resources.

"Adults can support young activists by helping them understand the range of possible reactions they might get and to help manage their expectations about public political engagement," she said.

Daryl Van Tongeren, an associate professor of psychology at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, specializes, in part, on questions of morality.

"I think sadly in our society they do sometimes forfeit their childhoods, but I don't think that they should have to," he said. "I think as a society we view them as no longer being children and somehow we now have rights to kind of put them in a different realm, put them in a different category. It's a moment for us to pause and say, just because this is happening, does that mean that it's good or it's healthy or it's right?"

Williams, who is now 38 and owns 23 Grand Slam singles titles, knows some of the issues well.

"People have been talking about my body for a really long time," she told The Fader in 2016. "Good things, great things, negative things. People are entitled to have their opinions, but what matters most is how I feel about me, because that's what's going to permeate the room I'm sitting in."

New US plan keeps autonomous vehicle standards voluntary

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

The Trump administration on Wednesday unveiled its most recent round of guidelines for autonomous vehicle makers that rely on voluntary standards despite calls for specific regulations.

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao announced the proposed guidelines in a speech at the CES gadget show in Las Vegas, saying in prepared remarks that "AV 4.0" will ensure U.S. leadership in developing new technologies.

But the guidelines fall short of expectations of auto safety advocates and the National Transportation Safety Board. In November, the NTSB, which investigates crashes and makes safety recommendations,

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condemned a lack of state and federal regulation for testing autonomous vehicles.

The NTSB said Chao's department failed to lead in regulating the new technology and put autonomous vehicle advancement ahead of saving lives.

In her remarks, Chao said that AV 4.0, a joint effort between her department and the White House, unifies autonomous vehicle work across 38 federal departments and agencies. It also establishes a list of government principles and says that safety is her department's No. 1 priority.

"It recognizes the value of private sector leadership in AV research, development and integration," she said.

The principles include protecting users and communities, promoting efficient markets by protecting intellectual property and modernizing regulations, and facilitating coordinated standards and policies.

"The goals are simple, clear and consistent," she said. "Improve safety, security and quality of life for all Americans."

Other areas of focus include security and cybersecurity, ensuring privacy and data security and enhancing mobility and accessibility.

But the guidelines offer few specifics on how the government will accomplish the goals or put the principles into force.

While the guidelines say that the U.S. government "will promote voluntary consensus standards," there are few details on what the standards should say.

"Voluntary consensus standards can be validated by testing protocols, are supported by private sector conformity assessment schemes, and offer flexibility and responsiveness to the rapid pace of innovation," the document says.

The government will enforce existing laws to ensure companies don't make deceptive claims about the capabilities or limitations of autonomous vehicle technology, according to the document.

The guidelines will be published in the Federal Register, followed by a public comment period.

Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit, called AV 4.0 a "regurgitation" of voluntary standards that have not held the industry accountable.

"I would say it's high on promises and light on detail," she said Wednesday. "This is a science experiment playing out in real time on our roadways without any safeguards or assurances."

The Trump administration, she said, seems to think that innovation and regulation can't exist at the same time. Her group wants to see the government set minimum standards, like it did with the requirement for seat belts, and let the industry go beyond them.

"Regulations should inspire innovation," Chase said.

AV 4.0 comes less than two months after the NTSB criticized another federal agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, for failing to regulate autonomous vehicle testing on public roads. The criticism came just before the board found that a distracted human safety driver was the main cause of a fatal 2018 Arizona crash involving an Uber autonomous test vehicle that ran down a pedestrian.

Among the NTSB's recommendations were that NHTSA require car developers to submit safety reports, and that NHTSA review the plans to make sure companies have safeguards in place that require human safety drivers to pay attention to the road.

Currently the reports are voluntary and only 16 of about 80 companies testing self-driving vehicles have filed them, according to the NTSB.

"The manufacturers are not going to be objective in evaluating their own safety assessments," NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt said at a Senate hearing in November. "There needs to be a federal look at these assessments to make sure that they are done properly."

NHTSA is the government's road safety agency and part of Chao's department. Its acting administrator, James Owens, told senators that the agency will review the NTSB recommendations.

The agency previously has said it doesn't want to stand in the way of innovation in autonomous vehicles because they have tremendous life-saving potential.

Hollywood-backed Quibi thinks you'll pay for its video bites

By MAE ANDERSON and RACHEL LERMAN AP Technology Writers

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A startup heavily backed by Hollywood is wagering that you're ready to set aside YouTube and TikTok to watch star-studded short videos on your phone — for a price.

The company behind this billion-dollar bet is Quibi (KWIH-bee), which is preparing to offer movies, shows and other short form video designed for viewing in short bursts on mobile devices. It's an enormous gamble, especially considering that several earlier efforts in mobile entertainment — most notably Verizon's ill-fated Go90 service — fell flat.

Founded by former Disney studios chief and DreamWorks co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg and helmed by former Hewlett Packard Enterprise CEO Meg Whitman, Quibi is heavy on big ideas and Hollywood muscle. It has backing from all the major movie studios and entertainment companies, \$1 billion invested in original programming and star power in the form of creators and producers from Steven Spielberg to Chrissy Teigen.

Quibi plans to launch on April 6. It will charge \$5 a month for an ad-supported service, and \$8 a month for an ad-free version.

Company executives argued at CES that Quibi will offer the first entertainment platform designed exclusively for the phone. In an interview at CES, Katzenberg said it represents the first time "professional storytellers" have tackled the problem of delivering a high-quality viewing experience on mobile.

But the big question is whether a subscription service like Quibi can attract mobile viewers — particularly younger ones — already immersed in an ocean of free-to-watch short video on YouTube and other social-media services. It will also go up against roughly a half-dozen other paid streaming platforms from Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu to Disney Plus and upcoming services from WarnerMedia and NBCUniversal.

During the keynote Quibi previewed shows including "Don't Look Deeper," a sci-fi show starring Don Cheadle and Emily Mortimer, and "#Freerayshawn" a crime thriller starring Laurence Fishburne as a cop and executive produced by "Training Day" director Antoine Fuqua. Shows and movies, as well as other material like news and weather, are designed to be watched in "quick bites" of 10 minutes or less.

"Paid premium short form' (video) has never been in the same sentence. It has never really been proven," said Seth Shapiro, managing partner at Pacific Strategy Partners. "That's the challenge." Among other things, he noted, it's already possible for people to watch those other services in the same quick bites Quibi plans.

Quibi executives at the CES gadget show in Las Vegas showed off technology on Wednesday designed to make video viewing on the phone easier. For instance, it will let you watch full-screen video whether you hold the phone upright or sideways.

Filmmakers deliver two edits to the company, one vertical, one horizontal, and Quibi stitches them together with one audio track. Some creators have incorporated that feature into their productions, as in one show in which horizontal viewing delivers a traditional picture — but turning the phone upright displays a view from the main character's phone camera.

Advertisers, at least, are on board. Quibi said it has sold out its \$150 million first-year advertising slots to blue-chip companies including Procter & Gamble, Anheuser Busch, General Mills, Google, T-Mobile and Walmart. Ads will appear before shows and aren't skippable.

Jeff Wlodarczak, principal analyst at Pivotal Research Group, says he understands why advertisers are flocking to the product. Millennials can be hard to reach, he said, and when a brand places ads on YouTube or Snapchat, they never quite know what kind of video they might end up next to.

Quibi offers a safe place for advertisers by delivering a known quantity "as opposed to people doing something stupid on YouTube," he said.

That advertising model will stick around, Whitman said. Quibi guarantees that all creators own their own intellectual property, and can repackage it and take it wherever else they want after seven years. It brought creators in, but it also means that Quibi needs both subscriber dollars and advertising revenue to stay afloat.

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The company just closed on another \$400 million equity funding round from investors, Whitman said, and has a plan to be profitable "soon."

Others have tried short form content, mostly in ad-supported form. Facebook Watch features original shows with episodes as short as 12 or 13 minutes, but none have garnered much buzz or mainstream attention so far. Verizon pulled the plug on Go90 in 2018, roughly three years after it launched; several concurrent efforts have also shut down. Meanwhile, Netflix, Amazon and Hulu have all been experimenting with short-form offerings, many of them in comedy.

Quibi is "either brilliant or tone deaf," said Tim Hanlon, CEO of Vertere Group. "I just don't know what the answer is and I don't think anybody does."

Mae Anderson reported from New York.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump minimizes IS risk, distorts Iran payout

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump wrongly dismissed the continuing threat of the Islamic State group and spread a false tale of the U.S. paying out billions of dollars to Iran as part of the multinational deal freezing its nuclear program in an address Wednesday that fell short on facts.

He also made an assertion that is as dubious as it was provocative: that the Iranian missiles fired by Tehran at two military bases hosting U.S. forces in Iraq were paid for by money "made available" to Iran by the Obama administration.

A look at some of the president's claims in his remarks on Iran's missile strike on the two Iraqi bases:

TRUMP: "Three months ago, after destroying 100% of ISIS and its territorial caliphate ..."

THE FACTS: His claim of a 100% defeat is misleading as the Islamic State still poses a threat.

IS was defeated in Iraq in 2017, then lost the last of its land holdings in Syria in March, marking the end of the extremists' self-declared caliphate.

Still, extremist sleeper cells have continued to launch attacks in Iraq and Syria and are believed to be responsible for targeted killings against local officials and members of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

As recently as this week, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the fight against ISIS in Syria was continuing.

IS controlled large swaths of northern and eastern Syria, where it declared a caliphate in 2014, along with large parts of neighboring Iraq.

U.N. experts warned in August that IS leaders are aiming to consolidate and create conditions for an "eventual resurgence in its Iraqi and Syrian heartlands."

TRUMP: "Iran's hostility substantially increased after the foolish Iran nuclear deal was signed in 2013. And they were given \$150 billion, not to mention \$1.8 billion in cash."

THE FACTS: There was no \$150 billion payout from the U.S. treasury or other countries.

When Iran signed the multinational deal to restrain its nuclear development in return for being freed from sanctions, it regained access to its own assets, which had been frozen abroad. Iran was allowed to get its money back. The deal actually was signed in 2015, after a 2013 preliminary agreement. Trump has taken the U.S. out of it.

The \$1.8 billion is a separate matter. A payout of roughly that amount did come from the U.S. treasury. It was to pay an old IOU.

In the 1970s, Iran paid the U.S. \$400 million for military equipment that was never delivered because the government was overthrown and diplomatic relations ruptured. After the nuclear deal, the U.S. and Iran announced they had settled the matter, with the U.S. agreeing to pay the \$400 million principal along with about \$1.3 billion in interest.

The \$400 million was paid in cash and flown to Tehran on a cargo plane, which gave rise to Trump's previous dramatic accounts of money stuffed in barrels or boxes and delivered in the dead of night. The arrangement provided for the interest to be paid later, not crammed into containers.

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TRUMP: "The missiles fired last night at us and our allies were paid for with the funds made available by the last administration."

THE FACTS: That accusation comes without corroboration. The administration has offered no information supporting the contention that in regaining access to \$150 billion of its assets that had been frozen abroad, Iran steered a chunk of that money to the missiles that hit the bases in Iraq.

"I doubt anyone has the insight into Iran's budgetary mechanisms to say that this money was used for this purpose," said Gerald Feierstein, a career U.S. diplomat who retired in 2016 as the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs.

"It's a funds-are-fungible kind of argument," he said. "I mean, if they have money, can you say that dollar went directly to buy a missile, as opposed to freeing up another dollar that went to buy a missile?"

Gen. Joseph Votel, who retired from the U.S. Army in March as the top military commander for the Middle East, said he was not aware of any specific intelligence on this question. "I don't have anything that would particularly support that," he said. "I'm not saying it did or it didn't, but I don't have details to demonstrate it one way or the other."

As President Barack Obama's secretary of state, John Kerry said it was possible Iran would use some of the money being returned to it for malign activities. Whether it did in this case has not been established.

Iran has many sources of revenue, despite the severe pinch of sanctions. Oil sales to China and other countries dominate its exports. It also sells chemicals, plastics, fruits and more abroad.

TRUMP: "We are independent, and we do not need Middle East oil."

THE FACTS: Trump's declaration of energy independence is premature. The U.S. still needs plenty of oil from the Mideast.

The volume of U.S. oil imports from the Persian Gulf alone — 23 million barrels in October — would not be easy to make up elsewhere, at least not without major changes in U.S. demand or production.

Technological advances like fracking and horizontal drilling have allowed the U.S. to greatly increase production, but demand remains brisk and the country still imports millions of barrels of oil from Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iraq and other countries. Moreover, much of what the U.S. produces is hard for domestic refiners to convert to practical use. So the U.S. exports that production and imports oil that is more suitable for American refineries to handle.

On energy more broadly, the U.S. is indeed close to parity on how much energy it produces and how much it consumes. In some months, it produces more than it consumes. But it has not achieved self-sufficiency. In the first nine months of last year, it imported about as much energy as it exported.

TRUMP: "The American military has been completely rebuilt under my administration, at a cost of \$2.5 trillion."

THE FACTS: That's an exaggeration.

It's true that his administration has accelerated a sharp buildup in defense spending, including a respite from what the U.S. military considered to be crippling spending limits under budget sequestration.

But a number of new Pentagon weapons programs, such as the F-35 fighter jet, were started years before the Trump administration. And it will take years for freshly ordered tanks, planes and other weapons to be built, delivered and put to use.

The Air Force's Minuteman 3 missiles, a key part of the U.S. nuclear force, for instance, have been operating since the early 1970s and the modernization was begun under the Obama administration. They are due to be replaced with a new version, but not until later this decade.

Associated Press writers Michael Biesecker, Lolita C. Baldor, Matthew Daly, Robert Burns and Cal Woodward contributed to this report.

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

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Case of 2 missing kids grows to include deaths, cult rumors

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Two dead spouses, two missing children and rumors of a cult. Confusion is growing around a series of mysterious deaths and the disappearances of a 7-year-old boy and 17-year-old girl that tie back to a couple who have since vanished themselves.

Joshua "JJ" Vallow and Tylee Ryan haven't been seen since September. Lori Vallow and her husband, Chad Daybell, never reported them missing and disappeared soon after being questioned about the children. What has followed is a twisted tale spanning two states that revealed the deaths of both their previous spouses, the couple's doomsday beliefs and children who slowly slipped away from relatives who are desperate to find them.

"All I want before I go is just to see those children, and especially — and I'm being greedy — especially my boy JJ. My little man," grandfather Larry Woodcock said Tuesday at a press conference in Idaho announcing a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the kids.

Wife Kay Woodcock's brother, Charles Vallow, adopted JJ when he was a baby. Charles and his wife, Lori Vallow, also raised Lori's daughter from a previous relationship at their home in suburban Phoenix.

Lori Vallow was a hairdresser, always keeping JJ's hair trimmed and styled, Larry Woodcock said. The Woodcocks, who live in Lake Charles, Louisiana, visited their grandson often and shared frequent phone calls and video chats when they couldn't be there in person.

"I do know that Lori always had the best, the absolute best interest in heart for JJ. She and Charles were the absolute best parents," he said.

But things began to change a few years ago, Kay Woodcock said. Her brother confided that he feared Lori was cheating on him with Chad Daybell, an author of several religious-themed fiction books about prophecies and the end of the world.

Charles Vallow eventually filed divorce documents in an Arizona court last February claiming that Lori believed she was a "translated being" and "a god assigned to carry out the work of the 144,000 at Christ's second coming in July 2020," The Arizona Republic newspaper reported.

He also accused Lori of threatening to kill him if he got in her way, prompting him to seek a protection order.

"He was highly concerned about it: Her emotional state, her mental state, and the fact that she had made threats about him," Kay Woodcock said Tuesday. "It all culminated into that cult that she's in."

Lori Vallow and Daybell did Preparing A People podcasts run by a small multimedia company that says it's not a cult or even a group to join and distanced itself from the couple's beliefs. It advertises its lectures, podcasts and videos as readying people for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Charles and Lori Vallow's divorce was never completed — Charles was killed in July by Lori's brother, Alex Cox. Cox told authorities that the shooting was in self-defense after Charles Vallow hit him with a baseball bat, but the case is unsolved. Whatever the findings, Cox won't stand trial — he died of unknown causes in December. Toxicology results could take weeks.

Kay Woodcock said Lori acted strangely when she told the family about Charles' death, not mentioning the cause. A relative had to search Charles' name online to find out he had been shot.

"We knew it was a murder, we knew Charles' death wasn't a justifiable homicide," Kay Woodcock said. "It was like they set him up."

After the death, Kay and Larry Woodcock said they had a harder time reaching JJ. The once-frequent calls dwindled and grew short. The last one, in August, lasted just 36 seconds and seemed scripted, they said.

That month, Lori moved to Rexburg, Idaho, with the kids. It brought her closer to Chad Daybell's hometown of Salem, Idaho, where he lived with his wife, Tammy Daybell.

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The Daybells ran a publishing company that produced his fiction books about end times and theology around The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as other authors' works. He also spoke at Preparing A People events, hosted by Color My Media.

"Preparing A People' is part of a media company that films speakers on a variety of topics not affiliated with any specific religion," Color My Media owners Michael and Nancy James wrote on the company's website. "It is not a 'group' and is not a 'Cult' or something people join, but has educational lecture events that can be attended or watched on video."

They also said they didn't share any of Daybell or Vallow's beliefs "if they are contrary to Christian principles of honesty, integrity and truth or if they do not align with the doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Church spokesman Eric Hawkins declined to comment, saying the case doesn't involve the faith.

Two months after Lori Vallow moved to Idaho, Tammy Daybell died at her home. She was just 49, and her obituary said she died of natural causes on Oct. 19. Police would later question that and have her body exhumed for an autopsy, whose results have not been released yet.

Chad Daybell married Lori Vallow just two weeks after Tammy's death.

In the meantime, relatives were growing more concerned about the children. Larry and Kay Woodcock said they were only able to reach JJ a few times after his father died in July. They have left voice messages, emails and texts since August but haven't heard back.

Investigators later determined JJ and Tylee had not been seen since September, but Lori Vallow and Chad Daybell never reported them missing.

Julie Rowe, a self-described "visionary" and "energy worker" who says she has long been friends with Daybell, uploaded a video on her website defending him and claiming his innocence in the children's disappearances and the death of his previous wife. She said Daybell repeatedly told her he had a vision of Tammy's death. Rowe claimed to have the same vision.

"My angels tell me that Chad Daybell is being falsely accused of the suspicious death of his wife," she said in the video. "I have talked to Tammy's spirit."

Two days before Thanksgiving, officers visited Lori and Chad to check on the children after getting calls from worried family members.

Investigators said the couple claimed JJ and Tylee were visiting relatives in Arizona. After discovering the lie, investigators returned to the home the next day — only to find Lori and Chad had left town.

Local, regional and state authorities are still searching for the couple and the children, with help from the FBI. Chad and Lori have been named persons of interest in the children's disappearances.

Sheriff's deputies searched Daybell's home last week, removing 43 items including computers, cellphones, medication and journals.

An attorney for the couple didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Underfunded IRS struggles to send refunds, answer calls

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL AP Personal Finance Writer

2019 was another tough year for the IRS, according to a new federal report.

Burdened with years of budget cuts and a recent increase in workload to implement a new tax law, the IRS struggled to deliver on its mission in the past fiscal year. The annual report from the Office of Taxpayer Advocate found that in the 2019 fiscal year, among other problems, the IRS was late in sending legitimate refunds to many taxpayers and failed to answer the majority of phone calls from taxpayers. The agency also failed to collect billions in unpaid taxes.

The Taxpayer Advocate's role — while inside the IRS — is to ensure sure taxpayer rights are being fairly represented. Among those duties is an annual report to Congress, which lists the most serious problems facing taxpayers. The report is often critical of the agency, and this year's edition released Wednesday was no exception.

The Advocate's report found that the IRS is one of the lowest performing federal agencies in terms of

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customer service. The agency answered only 29 percent of the 100 million telephone calls it got during the 2019 fiscal year.

That's a problem not just for those wanting help filing taxes, but also those with more serious issues. People facing enforcement action — such as wage garnishment, bank levies or more — were not always able to reach the IRS to make them aware of hardships, which could potentially free them from those levies.

The IRS has increased the online tools and assistance it provides to taxpayers. At the same time, other forms of live support, such as Taxpayer Assistance Centers, have dwindled. So some people still find it difficult to get the help they need.

The primary problem is that IRS has been struggling with a massive shortage of funding and an increased workload. Its budget has been reduced by about 20% since 2010, after adjusting for inflation. And the number of full-time employees has declined by about 22% during that time. Meanwhile it had to manage a sweeping overhaul of federal tax law. The agency's future looks challenging too: A recent report from the IRS estimates that about 31% of its remaining workforce will retire within the next 5 years.

"The biggest issue the IRS faces is on the resources, being just underfunded for a long time. That shows up in customer service...audits, the IT system is way out of date," said Mark Mazur, director of the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center. "On all fronts they are under-resourced."

While the advocates office said the budget problem is at the core of the agency's shortcomings, it also noted some could be attributed to "a culture in which the agency focuses on its own priorities without adequately factoring in the needs of taxpayers."

For example, the report said that the IRS also is struggling to enforce the law "with fairness to all." Case in point, the IRS has been unable to collect an annual average of about \$381 billion in unpaid taxes between 2011 and 2013 period. This suggests each U.S. household is effectively paying \$3,000 to subsidize noncompliance by others.

Additionally, many taxpayers who file legitimate returns waited weeks or months for a return in the past year because of a new fraud filter. The new filter flagged and stopped the processing of nearly 1.1 million returns. But ultimately, its false positive rate was 71 percent; meaning that 71 out of every 100 refunds stopped were eventually determined to be legitimate.

The Taxpayer Advocate's office urges Congress to increase funding for the IRS and consider the additional tax revenue it could generate with adequate resources. The report called it "economically irrational to underfund the IRS."

The report comes as the IRS is developing a new strategic plan as part of the Taxpayer First Act, which became law on July 1. The law aims to broadly redesign the IRS and strengthen taxpayer rights. The agency must send its plan for how to do so to Congress in the fall.

The latest report is also the first of its kind since the departure of Taxpayer Advocate Nina Olsen, who held the role for 18 years and retired five months ago. A permanent replacement has not been appointed. Acting Taxpayer Advocate Bridget Roberts, who submitted the report, argues that a permanent replacement is critical to meet its obligations to taxpayers, particularly "given the current crossroads at which the IRS finds itself."

Stabbings, shootings, assaults weigh on US Jewish youth

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When a man spewed anti-Semitic slurs and spat on her face, Shoshana Blum remembered her ancestors who survived the Holocaust, and instead of looking down - she defiantly stared at him eye to eye.

The 20-year-old junior at City College of New York left the subway in tears. But months after the attack, she continues to wear proudly the same Star of David necklace she wore that day, and on Sunday, she joined thousands of people in a solidarity march against a rise in anti-Semitism and acts of hate.

"It's important to stand strong in my Judaism," she said. "If this is what's happening when we're out being proud Jewish people, what's it going to be like if we're afraid and in hiding?"

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Many young Jewish people in the United States say their generation is searching for ways to cope with an alarming string of recent anti-Semitic attacks across the country.

The "No Hate, No Fear" march on Sunday came as a response to anti-Semitic violence, including the targeting of a kosher grocery in Jersey City, New Jersey, and a knife attack that injured five people at a Hanukkah celebration north of New York City.

"We thought that anti-Semitism was a thing of the past. We learned about it but never thought we would live in it," said Rabbi Jon Leener, 31, who runs Base BKLYN, a home-based ministry that aims to reach out to millennials and Jews of all backgrounds. He attended Sunday's solidarity march and published a photo with his three-year-old son on his shoulders. They held a banner that read: "I love being Jewish because I love Shabbat."

In the past five years, Leener and his wife, Faith, have welcomed thousands of people into their home-based ministry rooted in openness. Minutes before a class or a Shabbat dinner, he always walked to the front door and unlocked it because the couple believes in a Judaism where no door is shut or locked.

"This is all changing now. After Pittsburgh, after Poway, after Halle (Germany), after Jersey City, after Monsey we no longer keep the door unlock(ed)," he recently said on Facebook.

Visitors now must buzz in and Leener installed a security camera for the front door.

"I'm angry that this is our new reality. I hate that anti-Semitism is changing how I practice and share my Judaism to the world," he said.

Anti-Semitic attacks rose worldwide by 13% in 2018 compared to the previous year, according to a report by Tel Aviv University's Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary Jewry. The report recorded nearly 400 cases worldwide, with more than a quarter of the major violent cases taking place in the U.S.

The surge of violent attacks on the Jewish community, most recently in Monsey, New York, have caused consternation nationwide.

"After the stabbing in Monsey, I told my mom, 'This is crazy. He was arrested less than a mile from here, while we were at Shul (synagogue) and celebrating Hanukkah,'" said Blum, who was raised in Chabad-Lubavitch, an Orthodox Jewish Hasidic movement.

The first time that Blum witnessed hate against Jews she was seven. The victim was her father, Rabbi Yonah Blum, who was the head of Columbia University's Chabad House for 23 years. As they walked from synagogue near the campus, a man came up behind him yelling anti-Semitic slurs and slapped his black fedora and his skullcap off his head.

"We're very separated people when it comes to different topics ... but something that has been coming up since the (Monsey) attack, is that we all stand together," she said on a recent Friday as she prepared for the start of the Jewish Sabbath.

Since the Dec. 10 fatal shootings at a Jewish grocery store in Jersey City, there have been 33 anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S., including 26 in New York and New Jersey, according to the Anti-Defamation League's Tracker of Anti-Semitic Incidents.

During a recent trip to a conference of young Jewish leaders in New York City, Hezzy Segal, 16, sometimes tucked his yarmulke under his purple Minnesota Vikings snow hat.

"I've never been scared of being Jewish, but with the rise in anti-Semitism, I was more aware of it," said the Minnetonka, Minnesota teen. "It's sad, it's scary for all Jews."

Forty-five percent of teenagers feel that anti-Semitism is a problem for today's teens, according to the largest study of Jewish teens conducted in North America. The Jewish Education Project's GenZ Now Research Report included 18,000 respondents and was published in March 2019.

"I've already been on my guard a lot," said Thando Mlauzi, 25, a UCLA junior, who is majoring in English.

"One of my hopes and dreams is that we live in a world, in a society, where it doesn't matter that I'm black and Jewish," said Mlauzi, who converted to Judaism in 2018.

On a recent Friday, Alexandra Cohen, 29, chopped tomatoes before guests arrived for a Shabbat dinner in her studio apartment decorated with menorahs and flags of Israel.

Cohen said that her connection to Judaism grew stronger after someone put an anti-Semitic message

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on the door of her dorm at Johns Hopkins University, and later when she traveled to Israel. She said she is combating the negative environment by exposing the positive side of Jewish life.

The Anti-Defamation League has worked on initiatives, including its "No Place for Hate" anti-bias, anti-bullying initiative, which is in place in schools. Another includes working with juvenile offenders who are involved in some of the incidents.

Reformed neo-Nazi Shannon Foley Martinez helps people quit hate organizations. She feels she must spread the message that people can change their lives. She hopes her story is a warning to parents.

"People have preconceived notions of who they think violent white supremacists are," said Martinez, who at 15 became a skinhead who spouted white supremacist rhetoric, gave stiff-armed Nazi salutes and tagged walls with swastikas.

"I grew up in a family with two middle-class parents who have been married for 51 years, I was one of the smartest kids in my class, I was a championship athlete at one point of my life. I don't fit what people's ideas are of who is vulnerable to radicalize into these ideas," she said.

"My story is important because of that. We have to look at ourselves and our children and think: 'This could be my child. Am I actively and intentionally taking steps to not find resonance and find resistance to hate?'"

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Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 9, the ninth day of 2020. There are 357 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 9, 1945, during World War II, American forces began landing on the shores of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines as the Battle of Luzon got underway, resulting in an Allied victory over Imperial Japanese forces.

On this date:

In 1788, Connecticut became the fifth state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1861, Mississippi became the second state to secede from the Union, the same day the Star of the West, a merchant vessel bringing reinforcements and supplies to Federal troops at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, retreated because of artillery fire.

In 1913, Richard Milhous Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, was born in Yorba Linda, California.

In 1916, the World War I Battle of Gallipoli ended after eight months with an Ottoman Empire victory as Allied forces withdrew.

In 1951, the United Nations headquarters in New York officially opened.

In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his State of the Union address to Congress, warned of the threat of Communist imperialism.

In 1959, the Western series "Rawhide" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1987, the White House released a January 1986 memorandum prepared for President Ronald Reagan by Lt. Col. Oliver L. North showing a link between U.S. arms sales to Iran and the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

In 1997, a Comair commuter plane crashed 18 miles short of the Detroit Metropolitan Airport, killing all 29 people on board.

In 2001, Linda Chavez withdrew her bid to be President-elect George W. Bush's Secretary of Labor because of controversy over an immigrant in the U.S. illegally who'd once lived with her.

In 2006, confirmation hearings opened in Washington for Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito. "The Phantom of the Opera" leapt past "Cats" to become the longest-running show in Broadway history (a