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Upcoming Events

Friday, February 7, 2020

Boys' Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. 7th grade game at 3 p.m., 8th grade game at 4 p.m., junior varsity game at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity game

It's Boys' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Tiospa Zina
Wambdi**



VS

Groton Area Tigers

8 p.m., Friday, Feb. 7, at Groton Area

Sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals
Blocker Construction, Groton Dairy Queen
Jark Real Estate, John Sieh Agency
Milbrandt Enterprises, Tyson DeHoet Trucking

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A fundraiser was held Tuesday during the Langford Area double header. Tshirts, Coins for Cancer and a Bake Sale were held for Camie Heminger. Camie was recently diagnosed with Stage 4 Carcinoid cancer. Her son, Douglas, is a junior at GHS. After the game on Tuesday, the girls team gathered around for a photo op. (Photo by Marjae Schinkel)

Girls beat Tiospa Zina

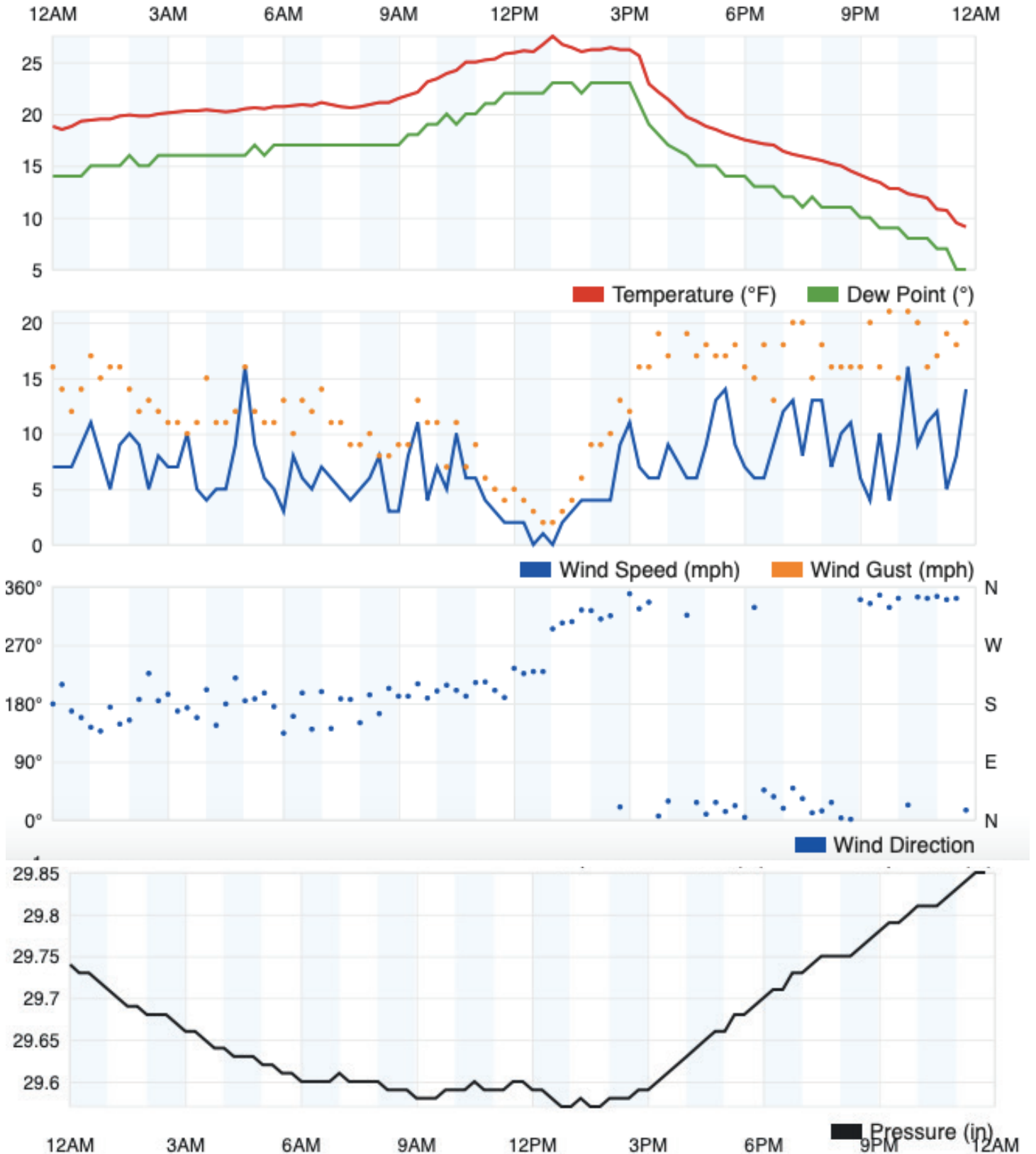
Groton Area used an 11-point rally to pull away with a 54-41 win over Tiospa Zina. Three players hit double figures for Groton Area with Gracie Traphagen leading the way with 14 points while Allyssa Locke had 13 and Brooke Gengerke 12.

The girls also won the junior varsity game, 34-16. Locke led the team with seven points which included five free throws.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Cold

High: 6 °F

Tonight



Increasing Clouds

Low: -3 °F

Saturday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 24 °F

Saturday Night



Snow Likely and Patchy Blowing Snow

Low: 13 °F

Sunday



Chance Snow then Mostly Sunny

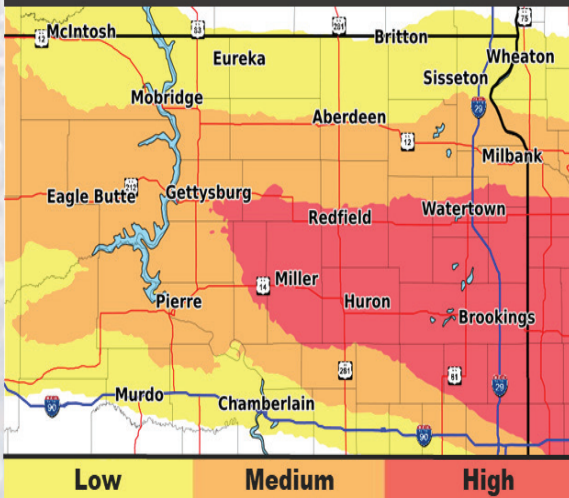
High: 19 °F



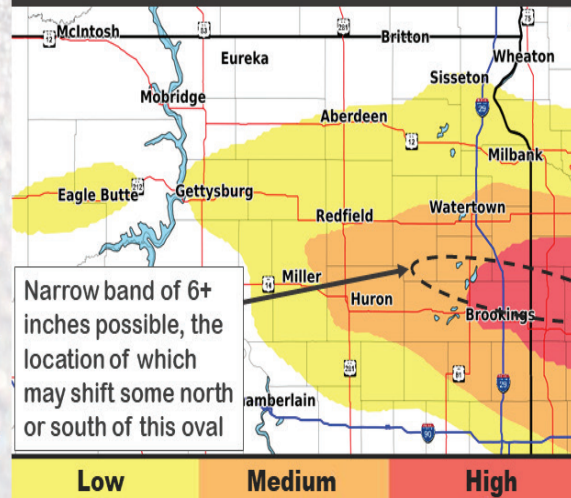
Accumulating Snow Sat PM – Sun AM

- A swath of 2 to 5 inches of snow, with locally higher amounts, appears likely across central and east central South Dakota mainly Saturday evening into Sunday morning.
- Breezy north winds Sunday morning and afternoon will lead to patchy blowing snow.
- **Travel will be impacted.** Keep an eye on the forecast, plan ahead, drive to conditions!

Potential for 2" plus of snow Noon Sat – Noon Sun



Potential for 4" plus of snow Noon Sat – Noon Sun



Narrow band of 6+ inches possible, the location of which may shift some north or south of this oval

Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 2/7/2020 5:14 AM CT



Today will be dry but cold with highs east of the Missouri River in the single digits. Lows tonight will dip into the single digits below zero along and east of the James River Valley. Warmer air for Saturday, but snow, moderate to heavy at times, moves across central SD during the afternoon and spreads east through the evening. Be aware if you have travel plans.

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Today in Weather History

February 7, 1994: Snow falling over the area produced heavy accumulations from central into northeast South Dakota with 11 inches at Kennebec and eight inches at Watertown from the 7th through the 9th. Extreme cold accompanied and followed the snow with low temperatures of 52 below zero at Promise and 45 below zero at Aberdeen on the 9th. Snow accumulation caused a roof to cave in on a drugstore at Bristol. A man died of exposure attempting to walk home near Sioux Falls after his car became stuck in a ditch.

February 7, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across central and northeast South Dakota, resulting in school and activities cancellations, closing of some businesses, and challenging if not impossible travel. Several people became stranded and had to be rescued. There were also flight cancellations and delays along with some vehicle accidents resulting in minor injuries. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Mound City, Mobridge, Eureka, 7 inches at Milbank and 6 SE McIntosh, 8 inches at Aberdeen, Ipswich, Selby, Iona, and Britton, 9 inches at Clark, 1 S Columbia, Isabel, Webster, and 10 inches at Roscoe, Watertown, and 1 W of Summit. Locations with snowfall of a foot included, Mission Ridge, Murdo, 4 NW Onida, Castlewood, 23 N Highmore, and Timber Lake. Thirteen inches of snow fell at Canning, and Fort Pierre, 14 inches fell at Gettysburg, Eagle Butte, and Pierre with 15 inches at Miller and 16 inches of snow at Clear Lake, Mellette, and Faulkton.

February 7, 2010: A compact but strong area of low pressure moved from Canada and across the Northern Plains from the 7th through the 9th. A prolonged period of moderate to heavy snow developed over far northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, bringing 6 to 8 inches of snow to the area. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Milbank, Wheaton, and Ortonville; 7 inches at Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Summit, Victor, Wilmot, and Browns Valley.

1812: The Hard Shock of the New Madrid Earthquake series strikes the area around the small town of New Madrid, Missouri. A three-mile-long island, Island #32, was completely sunk! The Mississippi River once again ran backward. This major shock marked the beginning of the end of New Madrid's extended ordeal, even though aftershocks would continue to be felt for years, and the fault is still active.

1835: A Great Freeze took place from February 2-9 across southern Georgia, southeastern South Carolina, and northern Florida. During this freeze, the St. Johns River was frozen, "several rods from the shore," and people were able to walk a distance from the shore. Many citruses and other fruit trees were killed to the ground, never to grow again, when temperatures reached as low as 1°F in Charleston and 8°F in Jacksonville. A Florida gentleman told a newspaper that the state, "appeared as desolate as if a fire had swept over it," after the severe freeze of that winter season. According to Florida Citrus Mutual, this freeze was so severe that it is considered an impact freeze. This indicates that the freeze, annihilate entire groves across the state, killing both mature and young citrus trees while causing a profound economic impact on the citrus industry and prompting growers to replant farther south. This freeze ended attempts to grow citrus in southern Georgia, southeastern South Carolina, and northern Florida.

1892: The temperature falls to 90 degrees below zero in Verkhoyansk, Russia, on this day. The temperature was considered the coldest temperature ever recorded in the Northern Hemisphere. However, this reading was done by a spirit thermometer, which is less accurate than a mercury thermometer. The accepted record was 90 degrees below zero in Oimaykon on February 6, 1933. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the World Meteorological Organization's World Weather and Climate Extremes Archive.

1933: The USS Ramapo, a 478 ft. Navy oiler was traveling from Manila to San Diego when it encountered the tallest rogue wave ever recorded. The wave measured 112 feet in height was caused by 70 mph winds over a broad fetch of the ocean.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 28 °F at 12:59 PM

Low Temp: 9 °F at 11:58 PM

Wind: 21 mph at 9:36 PM

Snow

Record High: 62° in 1987

Record Low: -42° in 1895

Average High: 26°F

Average Low: 4°F

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.09

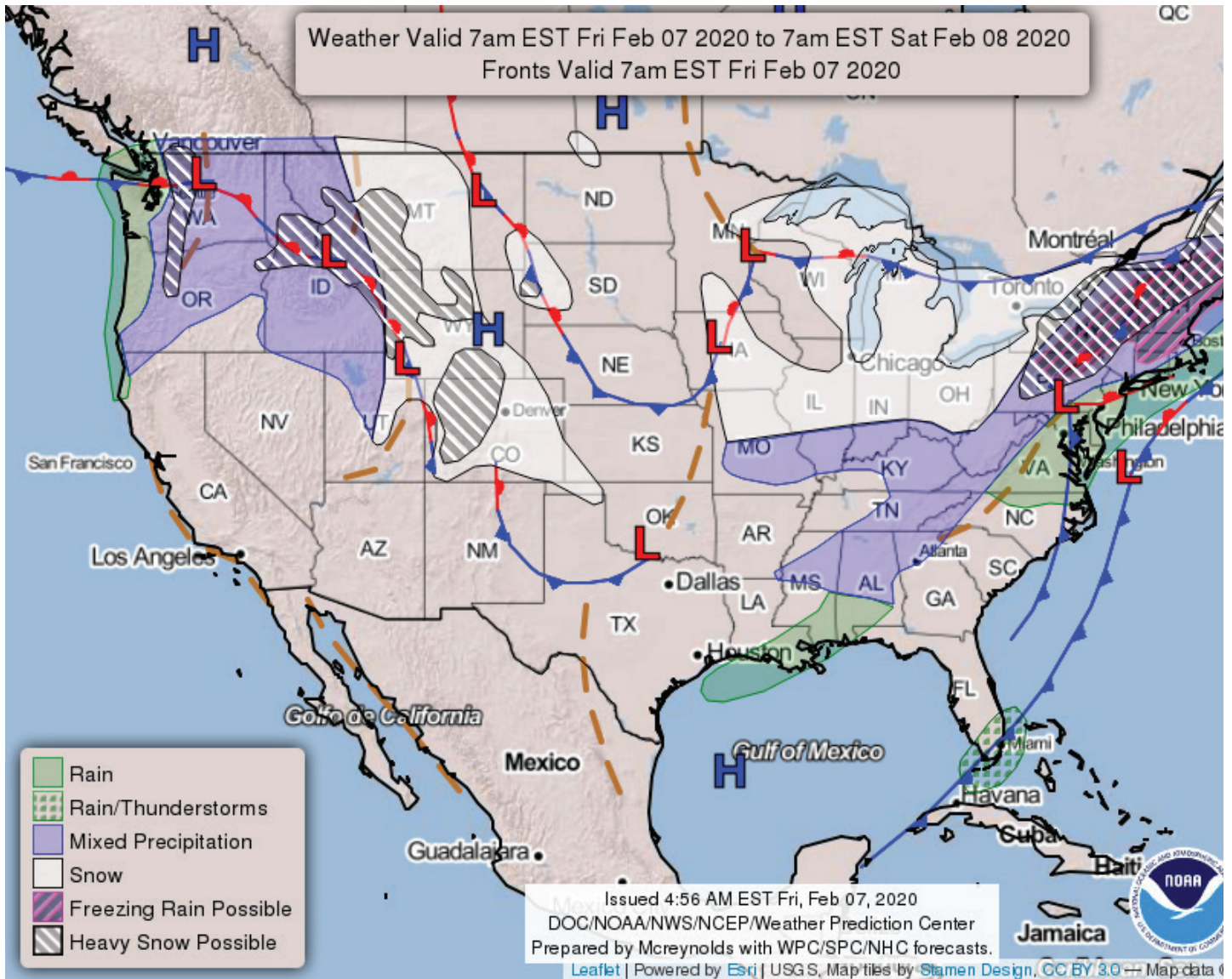
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.56

Precip Year to Date: 0.35

Sunset Tonight: 5:49 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46 a.m.



Issued 4:56 AM EST Fri, Feb 07, 2020
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts.

Leaflet | Powered by Esri | USGS, Map tiles by Stamen Design, CC BY 3.0, Map data ©

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FAILING IS NOT FATAL

A struggling single mother worked as a secretary in a Dallas bank. Electric typewriters had just been introduced, but there was no automatic way to correct mistakes. Bette Nesmith became frustrated when she would have to retype an entire page for one misspelled word.

Watching the painters decorate the bank windows for Christmas, she noticed that if they made a mistake, they would simply cover it with another color. No one knew the difference.

Intrigued, she began to experiment at home and eventually developed a white, water-based paint. Whenever she made a mistake, she would simply cover it with her new product and continue typing. One morning she took her "discovery" to work in a nail polish bottle. When others noticed what she was doing, they asked if she would provide some for them to use. It was from her "failings" at spelling, observing the work of others, and research that "Liquid Paper" was born.

When we fail, it is never final or fatal unless we give in and give up. The prophet Micah had some great advice for us. Micah said, "Though I fall I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light."

When we fail we must remember that "we can rise again!" We must look to the Lord for His strength to empower us, His Spirit to guide us, and His wisdom to enable us to succeed.

Prayer: Encourage us, Lord, when times are tough and we are tempted to quit, to rely completely on You. May we find strength, courage, and wisdom in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Micah 7:8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.

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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
- 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
Groton Hosting State B American Legion Baseball Tournament
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
- 11/14/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)

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News from the Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 64, Northwestern 45

Alcester-Hudson 59, Freeman 31

Arlington 76, Lake Preston 53

Canistota 64, Parker 45

Clark/Willow Lake 53, Deuel 34

Colman-Egan 70, Deubrook 60

DeSmet 70, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 23

Dell Rapids 76, Tri-Valley 46

Ethan 62, Scotland 22

Faith 80, Dupree 37

Florence/Henry 62, Langford 47

Hanson 81, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 66

Harding County 76, McIntosh 49

Hill City 44, Newell 42

Howard 56, Mitchell Christian 21

Lemmon 69, Tiospaye Topa 65

Leola/Frederick 57, Warner 49

Madison 58, Beresford 49

Marty Indian 59, Burke 51

North Central Co-Op 74, Wakpala 70

Platte-Geddes 61, Kimball/White Lake 48

Rapid City Christian 60, Kadoka Area 38

Sioux Falls Washington 74, Pierre 46

Sioux Valley 78, Flandreau 55

Tea Area 56, West Central 50

Wilmot 81, Great Plains Lutheran 62

Wolsey-Wessington 59, Castlewood 45

Yankton 60, Harrisburg 58

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 52, Brookings 19

Aberdeen Roncalli 63, Sisseton 31

Avon 68, Bon Homme 30

Canistota 67, Parker 61, OT

Castlewood 52, Wolsey-Wessington 23

Chamberlain 71, Todd County 57

Corsica/Stickney 61, Irene-Wakonda 46

Crow Creek 67, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 53

Deuel 61, Clark/Willow Lake 53

Freeman 49, Alcester-Hudson 30

Groton Area 54, Tiospa Zina Tribal 41

Hamlin 60, Webster 33

Hill City 60, Newell 44

Howard 56, Mitchell Christian 39

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James Valley Christian 54, Iroquois 29
Kadoka Area 58, Rapid City Christian 54
Lower Brule 68, Wessington Springs 26
Lyman 50, Highmore-Harrold 38
McCook Central/Montrose 66, Garretson 41
Menno 52, Canton 36
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 64, Hanson 50
New Underwood 53, Jones County 28
Rapid City Stevens 29, Rapid City Central 26
Redfield 55, Milbank 35
Sargent Central, N.D. 36, Britton-Hecla 32
Scotland 60, Platte-Geddes 42
Sioux Falls Christian 42, Vermillion 38
Sioux Falls Washington 56, Pierre 37
Tri-Valley 50, Dell Rapids 27
Wagner 52, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 40
Wakpala 64, North Central Co-Op 54
White River 49, Wall 35
Yankton 60, Harrisburg 58

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

South Dakota House OKs ban on commercial surrogacy agents

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Thursday passed a bill that would criminalize agents who facilitate commercial surrogate pregnancies in the state.

The proposal would make acting as a surrogacy agent a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail. It also calls for the Legislature to study the issue over the next year.

The bill aims to make South Dakota one of a handful of states to ban commercial surrogacy contracts. It will next be considered by the Senate.

A few Republicans split with their party to vote against the bill. Several were concerned that it would have unintended consequences on altruistic surrogacies.

Rep. Jon Hansen, the Dell Rapids Republican who introduced the bill, argued that without regulations on such contracts, the door is open to abuse.

“The custody of human beings should never be determined by a commercial contract,” he said.

The bill exempts “altruistic” surrogate pregnancies and allows for the surrogate and child’s health care costs to be covered, according to Hansen.

Hansen noted that when it comes to adoption, there are laws that oversee the process to protect children. He argued that surrogacy contracts could be used to pressure a surrogate to get an abortion if the parents decided they didn’t want the pregnancy to proceed.

Opponents disagreed, saying that surrogacy contracts actually protect women.

Emilee Gheling, said her agency, Dakota Surrogacy, is the only surrogacy agency she knows of in the state and that the bill targets it. She said she runs the agency to protect parents, surrogates and children. She conducts psychological screenings, health tests and a legal process to protect everyone involved.

Gheling estimated that there are only a handful of surrogacies in South Dakota every year. She gathered at the Capitol with a group of women who have been surrogates, have had children through surrogacy, or are working to find a surrogate.

The women said a community of families involved with surrogacy has developed in the state that is centered around creating children. They said surrogacy is sometimes the only option that parents have

for a child due to the expense and complications that can arise from adoption.

The women said they were open to regulation of the issue, but that the bill had too many flaws. It would go into effect on July 1 if passed, halting surrogacy plans for some families.

"They still chose to move forward with a piece of legislation that they admit has many issues," said Lisa Rahja, who had a child through surrogacy. "They don't want to take the time that creates the best solution."

The women also feared the proposed law could push surrogacies underground. They argued that people desperate to start a family would go to places like Facebook or Craigslist to find surrogates. Gheling noted that people can seek surrogacies out of state, but the proposed law could create complications with that because it also nulls surrogacy contracts in South Dakota.

Gheling said parents typically pay a surrogate \$15,000 to \$25,000 to compensate her for the pain and discomfort of pregnancy.

Rounds announces reelection campaign for Senate

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds announced on Thursday that he is seeking reelection after recent months of uncertainty while his wife underwent treatment for cancer.

The first-term Republican and former South Dakota governor made the announcement the day after voting to acquit President Donald Trump of impeachment charges. He will face a state representative in the Republican primary.

Rounds told The Associated Press that his wife, Jean, is wrapping up the last few weeks of treatment for a malignant, high-grade aggressive tumor near her sciatic nerve. He called the diagnosis and treatment his family's "most difficult challenge to date."

He said the experience has motivated him to ensure "that every family has the adequate healthcare that we have." But Rounds criticized Democratic proposals for government-run health care, saying he instead wants to address unclear medical billing and the high cost of prescription drugs.

GOP state Rep. Scyller Borglum is mounting a primary challenge to Rounds and has tried to position herself as the more right-wing candidate. She has criticized him for being slow to oppose Trump's impeachment.

Rounds has aligned himself closely with the president, a position he said has given him the opportunity to remind Trump of policies that affect the agriculture industry.

"I'm going to be with the president as long as it's good for South Dakota," he said.

Rounds holds a significant cash advantage over Borglum. He holds over \$1.8 million; she has just over \$8,000 and has made a personal loan of \$12,000 to her campaign.

Rounds served two terms as governor and cast himself as still belonging to the state. He said he lives in Fort Pierre and only travels to Washington, D.C. when necessary.

Two Democrats have announced they will be running for the Senate seat — former state Rep. Dan Ahlers and Clara Hart, who holds several local leadership positions in Sioux Falls.

This story has been corrected to show that Rounds lives in Fort Pierre, not Pierre.

ACLU sues Montana over Keystone XL protest plans

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Civil liberties advocates are taking Montana officials to court to force the public release of documents detailing the government's planned response to anticipated protests against the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

The ACLU of Montana filed a lawsuit Thursday in state District Court in Helena against the Department of Emergency Services and the Division of Criminal Investigation. The American Civil Liberties Union alleges the two agencies are involved in a coordinated effort by federal and state officials to crack down on protesters if the pipeline is built.

State officials had no immediate response to the allegations, Montana Department of Justice spokesman

John Barnes said.

The 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) Keystone pipeline is proposed by TC Energy of Canada. It would transport up to 830,000 barrels (35 million gallons) of crude daily from western Canada to U.S. refineries.

It was rejected under the Obama administration over climate change worries and other environmental concerns, but was revived when President Donald Trump took office.

According to the lawsuit, the two Montana agencies responded to a 2018 Freedom of Information Act request by producing heavily-redacted documents and imposing a gag order on the documents they did provide.

The ACLU sued federal officials on similar grounds in 2018 and last year waged a successful court battle against proposed laws in South Dakota meant to prevent disruptive Keystone XL pipeline demonstrations.

Officials have sought to head off a repeat of the kind of protests mounted against the Dakota Access pipeline in North Dakota that resulted in 761 arrests over a six-month span beginning in late 2016.

Advocates to Urge Lawmakers to Prioritize Suicide Prevention in Pierre

PIERRE, S.D., Feb. 6, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States and the ninth leading cause of death in South Dakota. On Thursday, February 13, advocates from the South Dakota Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the largest suicide prevention organization in the United States, will meet with lawmakers to urge their support of future legislative efforts to implement education and training objectives of the state's most recent 2020-2025 Suicide Prevention Plan, including bringing suicide prevention policies and protocols to South Dakota schools and training health professionals in suicide assessment, treatment, and management.

"I speak up for suicide prevention in South Dakota to be the voice for those we've lost to suicide and those of us left behind wondering what we could have done to save our loved ones. We cannot save lives without adequate prevention, education, research, and intervention strategies. I fight for my brother, Mike Peterson, my students I've lost, and those with lived experience who are fighting hard to stay alive every day," said Anna Eidem, AFSP South Dakota Field Advocate and Board Member.

The AFSP South Dakota Capitol Day is a special day for all who have a connection with or a personal story around the topic of suicide. Volunteers will meet with their legislators to share their stories about why they participate in this advocacy effort, giving a human face to this important public health problem. Advocates hope that by sharing their stories, they will help lawmakers understand that investments in mental health and suicide prevention can save lives.

AFSP South Dakota advocates are part of a larger national movement of AFSP volunteer advocates who will visit state capitols across the United States in 2020 to bring best practices in suicide prevention to legislators and their staff. To learn more about AFSP's advocacy efforts, visit here: <https://afsp.org/our-work/advocacy/>.

On average, 132 Americans died by suicide each day in 2018, and upwards of 90% of those individuals had a diagnosable mental health condition at the time of their death. AFSP volunteers will urge state lawmakers to be the voice for the thousands of residents across the state affected by mental health conditions and suicide each year.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, with a Public Policy Office in Washington, D.C. AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states and the District of Columbia with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest Annual Report, and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

View original content to download multimedia: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/advocates->

to-urge-lawmakers-to-prioritize-suicide-prevention-in-pierre-301000629.html
SOURCE American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Hemp bill approved by House committee with Noem's support

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A House committee on Thursday unanimously approved a bill to legalize and regulate the growth, processing and transportation of industrial hemp in South Dakota.

The bill's advancement to the House floor marked progress on an issue that divided legislators and Gov. Kristi Noem last year, but disagreements remain on how to fund the hemp program.

The Republican governor vetoed a bill that would have allowed industrial hemp last year. She said in the fall she would veto a hemp bill again this year because it could lead to legalizing marijuana, but changed her position just before the session began.

Noem said she still doesn't think industrial hemp is a good idea, but her office worked with legislators to craft the bill this year and she spoke in favor of the bill before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources committee. She wants the hemp program to be regulated by "four guardrails" that would provide for the program's enforcement, regulation, transportation permitting, and funding.

Both hemp and marijuana are derived from cannabis plants. But hemp is allowed under Department of Agriculture guidelines if it has less than 0.3% of THC, the compound in marijuana that produces a high.

House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, a Republican from Platte, introduced this year's bill and said proponents of the proposal have had three meetings with the governor's office to work out the details. He expected it to pass the House.

Funding the program may still become a sticking point.

"There are legislators who don't think they need to pay for the program," Noem said.

She estimates it will cost almost \$3.5 million to get the program up and running and has asked the Legislature to find room in the state budget for it. The money includes funding for holding drug evidence, four service dogs and test kits.

But some legislators said the funding demands are "holding the bill hostage."

Rep. Herman Otten, a Lennox Republican, said the state would need to pay for testing and regulating hemp anyway because the state cannot stop it from being transported through the state. Several Indian tribes in the state are also planning to grow hemp.

Health Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon said the increased volume of hemp would require new testing equipment that the state's labs don't currently have.

Qualm remained positive about finding the funding and said he thinks farmers could begin growing hemp this year. The state's plan would still need to be approved by the Department of Agriculture.

The proposal calls for a maximum fee of \$500 to apply for a license to grow hemp, \$2,000 to apply for a processing license and \$25 for a permit to transport it. Growers and processors would also have to pay inspection fees. The bill would make it a Class 2 misdemeanor to purchase, transport or receive raw hemp without a license. It also allows for the sale of CBD products, but does not allow hemp to be smoked.

Woman burned by vape pen battery explosion in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Emergency responders say a woman suffered burns when her vape pen battery exploded in her coat pocket at a Sioux Falls bank.

The 31-year-old woman was in the CorTrust Bank when the battery exploded and caught fire, according to Sioux Falls Fire Rescue.

Battalion Chief Steve Brunette tells the Argus Leader the woman suffered burns to her hand and part of her torso.

Brunette said it's not the first time his department has responded to a vape pen-related fire and that there have been a few similar cases in recent years.

The woman drove herself to the hospital for treatment.

Ireland's two-party system shaken by Sinn Fein surge

By JILL LAWLESS and NICOLAE DUMITRACHE Associated Press

DUBLIN (AP) — Ireland's elections are usually two-horse races. But this time there's a third contender, as a party with historic links to the Irish Republican Army soars in the polls.

As Irish voters prepare to choose a new parliament on Saturday, a restive electorate is rattling the two parties that have dominated the country's politics since it won independence from Britain a century ago, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Polls show a surprise surge — maybe even a lead — for Sinn Fein, the party historically linked to the IRA and its violent struggle for a united Ireland.

Sinn Fein is a major force in Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., but has long been a minor political player in the Republic, shunned by the bigger parties because of its ties to the IRA. But the party's left-wing proposals for tackling Ireland's housing crisis and creaking healthcare system are striking a chord, especially with young voters.

Sinn Fein President Mary Lou McDonald said this week that there was a "thirst for change" in Ireland.

"Fianna Fail and Fine Gael — essentially identical parties — have had it all their own way now for almost a century," she said.

The two big parties, whose origins lie on opposing sides of Ireland's 1920s civil war, are fierce rivals but share a broadly center-right outlook. For decades power has alternated between them.

Ireland's next Taoiseach, or prime minister, is highly likely to be either current Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Fine Gael or Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin.

But support for the two parties has fallen since the 2008 global financial crisis, which hit the debt-fueled "Celtic Tiger" economy particularly hard. Ireland was pushed to the brink of bankruptcy and forced to seek a humiliating international bailout that was followed by years of austerity.

The last election, four years ago saw voters shift in big numbers to protest parties and independents. It produced a Fine Gael minority government propped up by Fianna Fail votes.

Varadkar took office after becoming Fine Gael leader in 2017. The son of an Indian doctor and an Irish nurse, he was Ireland's youngest-ever Taoiseach and its first openly gay leader. For many, he was the face of a confident, modern Ireland that has loosened the grip of the Roman Catholic church, legalized abortion and same-sex marriage, revitalized a long-stagnant economy and built up a thriving high-tech sector.

Internationally, Varadkar was the face of Ireland during Britain's lengthy divorce negotiations with the European Union. The outcome of those talks was crucial to Ireland, the only EU country to share a land border with the U.K.

Most people think Varadkar and his party handled Brexit well, securing guarantees that people and goods will continue to flow freely between Ireland and the north. But that's unlikely to bring him an electoral reward. Polls suggest Fine Gael is trailing both Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail, though the margins are narrow.

Jonathan Evershed, a postdoctoral researcher in government and politics at University College Cork, said Varadkar wasn't getting much credit for his leadership on Brexit because Britain's exit from the now 27-nation bloc, which became official on Jan. 31, is widely seen as "mission accomplished — there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland."

That has left an election dominated by domestic problems, especially a growing homelessness crisis, house prices that have risen faster than incomes and a public health system that hasn't kept up with demand.

Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fail say they will build more houses, ease hospital overcrowding and cut waiting times for medical treatment. But their proposals look like tinkering compared to Sinn Fein's more radical — and costly — plans to raise taxes on the wealthy, freeze rents, build tens of thousands of new homes and lower the state pension age.

The big parties say Sinn Fein's socialist plans would hurt businesses and hit economic growth. And they have tried to remind voters of the party's ties to past violence.

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Sinn Fein's links with the IRA, which disarmed after Northern Ireland's 1998 peace accord, became an issue late in the election, when the mother of a Northern Ireland man who was beaten to death in 2007 — a killing the family blames on the IRA — accused party members of slandering her son as a criminal and failing to reveal what they knew about his death.

Sinn Fein denied Irish republicans were involved in the killing, but the party was put on the defensive. McDonald — a capable, 50-year-old Dubliner who has helped the party shed its hard-line Troubles-era image — condemned the murder as "barbaric."

Sinn Fein's struggle for a united Ireland has been on the back burner during the election, but it is calling for a referendum on Northern Ireland rejoining the south within five years. That's not something an Irish government could deliver without the support of Britain and Northern Ireland — highly unlikely in the short term.

But Brexit looks likely to nudge Northern Ireland's economy closer to that of its southern neighbor, and could yet increase pressure for a poll on unification.

Under Ireland's proportional representation system, no party is likely to get the 80 seats they need for a majority in the 160-seat Dail, parliament's lower house, so some form of coalition government is likely.

Sinn Fein is running only 42 candidates, too few to win outright, but could hold the balance of power. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael both say they won't form a coalition with Sinn Fein — but their resolve could be tested if the party does well.

Evershed said that, whatever the result, the election "has demonstrated the extent to which Sinn Fein has moved into the political mainstream."

"They play the long game," he said of the nationalist party. "If they don't get into government this time, I think that they will view whatever happens as nonetheless a success, because it becomes a staging post for the next time."

Varadkar, battling to keep his job, made a plea for voters to think before casting their ballots.

"Bear in mind that all change isn't change for the better," Varadkar said Tuesday during a televised leaders' debate. "We saw in Britain with Brexit, people voting for change and they got Brexit. We saw Donald Trump being elected in the U.S. — that's not the kind of change we want."

Jill Lawless reported from London.

Turkey sends more troops, tanks to Syria amid Idlib assault

By SARAH EL DEEB and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Several Turkish armored vehicles and tanks entered rebel-controlled northwestern Syria early on Friday, the latest reinforcements sent in by Ankara amid a Syrian government offensive that this week brought the two countries' troops into a rare direct confrontation.

The Syrian government, backed by its ally Russia, has kept up a military offensive in Idlib province, aimed at securing a strategic highway that runs along rebel-controlled territory. President Bashar Assad's forces have seized dozens of rebel-held towns and villages in the past two months, displacing hundreds of people in the process.

Turkey, which backs the Syrian opposition and has been monitoring a cease-fire in the rebel enclave, protested the government offensive, calling it a violation of the truce it negotiated with Russia. In recent weeks, Ankara sent in troops and equipment to reinforce monitoring points it set up to observe a previous cease-fire, which has since crumbled, but also deployed around towns threatened by the Syrian military advances.

The deployment and the new defensive role brought Turkish troops into a direct and rare confrontation with Syria troops that killed at least eight Turkish military and civilian personnel and 13 Syrian soldiers on Monday.

An Associated Press video shows a long line of armored vehicles and trucks, carrying tanks, filing into rebel-controlled rural areas of Idlib province on Friday. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human

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Rights, which monitors the war, said the new troops deployed west of the town of Saraqeb. It was fifth known deployment of new troops into Syria over the last week, according to the Observatory and other opposition news outlets.

Syrian government troops took control of the former rebel town of Saraqeb this week. The town is strategic because it sits on the intersection of two major highways, one linking the capital, Damascus, to the north, and another connecting the country's west and east.

The Turkish military posts erected around Saraqeb didn't stop the military advance, which left some of those Turkish posts are now behind Syrian lines.

For weeks, Syrian troops, backed by Russian air force, have been advancing in rebel territory as the cease-fire deal reached in 2018 unraveled. The offensive has displaced over half a million people, many of them arriving in open air and temporary shelters, often near the borders with Turkey. Idlib and nearby rural Aleppo are the last rebel-held areas in Syria and are home to more than 3 million people, most of them already displaced by previous rounds of violence.

Turkish officials say three Turkish observation posts are currently inside Syrian government-controlled areas in Idlib. A security official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with government rules, insisted the posts would not be evacuated.

Turkey's Defense Ministry warned the army would respond "even more forcefully" to any attack on the observation posts. "Our observation posts will continue carrying out duties," the ministry said.

There was a brief reprieve from the fighting Friday, apparently caused in part by bad weather, including a rainstorm.

On Thursday, Russia announced that a number of its soldiers had been killed in a northern Syrian province alongside Turkish servicemen, without saying when the incident occurred or how many were killed. The Russian foreign ministry blamed "terrorists" for the deaths.

The violence has also raised tension between Moscow and Ankara, which have been working together to secure cease-fires and political talks despite backing opposite sides of the conflict.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said a Russian delegation is scheduled to arrive in Ankara on Saturday to discuss the situation in Idlib. A meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin could follow "if necessary," Cavusoglu told reporters.

"We will do whatever is necessary to stop the human drama, the disaster (in Idlib)," Cavusoglu said.

Bad weather moves into Eastern states; 5 dead in South

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Nearly 150,000 homes and businesses in the southeastern United States were without power early Friday after a powerful storm raked the region. At least five people were killed.

Florida bore the brunt of the power outages, with nearly 75,000, according to poweroutages.us. The Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia also reported outages, and tornado watches and warnings were in effect Thursday night from northern Florida up through North Carolina.

The National Weather Service advised early Friday that the storm system was strengthening in the mid-Atlantic region, bringing rain and snow, ice and high winds northward. Up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow was forecast Friday in parts of West Virginia, where classes were canceled across more than half the state. Wind gusts of up to 55 mph were predicted from the nation's capital up through New Jersey. Dense fog was settling in over New York City and its suburbs.

The weather destroyed mobile homes in Mississippi and Alabama, caused mudslides in Tennessee and Kentucky and flooded communities that shoulder waterways across the Appalachian region. Rain kept falling over a path of splintered trees and sagging power lines that stretched from Louisiana into Virginia. School districts canceled classes in state after state as bad weather rolled through.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency Thursday evening because of heavy rains and extreme flooding. More than 500 people in southwestern Virginia were displaced by flooding and needed rescue from their homes, he said in a statement.

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Meanwhile, the Tennessee Valley Authority warned that people residing near rivers and lakes should prepare for rapidly changing water levels. The TVA is managing rising water behind 49 dams to avert major flooding, but with more rain expected next week, the agency may have to release water downstream, said James Everett, senior manager of the TVA's river forecast center in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Authorities confirmed five storm-related fatalities, in Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee.

One person was killed and another was injured as high winds destroyed two mobile homes near the town of Demopolis, Alabama, the Storm Prediction Center reported. The victim, Anita Rembert, was in one of the homes with her husband, child and two grandchildren, said Kevin McKinney, emergency management director for Marengo County. A man was injured but the children were unhurt, he said.

High winds there left roadsides strewn with plywood, insulation, broken trees and twisted metal. The National Weather Service was checking the site for signs of a tornado.

Weather-related crashes left at least four people dead and numerous authorities pleaded with motorists to avoid driving where they couldn't see the pavement.

A driver died in South Carolina when a tree fell on an SUV near Fort Mill, Highway Patrol Master Trooper Gary Miller said. The driver's name wasn't immediately released.

In North Carolina's Gaston County, Terry Roger Fisher was killed after his pickup truck hydroplaned in heavy rain, plunged down a 25-foot (8-meter) embankment and overturned in a creek, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol said, according to news outlets.

An unidentified man died and two others were injured Thursday when a car hydroplaned in Knoxville, Tennessee, and hit a truck, police said in a news release.

And in Tennessee, 36-year-old teacher Brooke Sampson was killed and four people were injured when a rain-soaked tree fell on a van carrying Sevierville city employees, officials said. The crash, though still under investigation, appeared to have been weather-related according to preliminary information, said Tennessee Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Bill Miller.

Flooding, meanwhile, forced rescuers to suspend their search for a vehicle missing with a person inside it in north Alabama's Buck's Pocket State Park. The vehicle quickly disappeared Wednesday in waters too dangerous for divers to search.

"As the car started shifting because of the water we noticed what appeared to be an arm reaching out," witness Kirkland Follis, who called 911, told WHNT-TV.

Associated Press staffers Rogelio Solis in Pickens, Mississippi; Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina; Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Florida; Jeff Martin and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta; Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee; Becky Yonker in Louisville, Kentucky; John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia; Kevin McGill in New Orleans; and Jonathan Drew in Raleigh, North Carolina contributed to this report.

Doctor's death unleashes mourning, fury at Chinese officials

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The death of a young doctor who was reprimanded for warning about China's new virus triggered an outpouring Friday of praise for him and fury that communist authorities put politics above public safety.

In death, Dr. Li Wenliang became the face of simmering anger at the ruling Communist Party's controls over information and complaints that officials lie about or hide disease outbreaks, chemical spills, dangerous consumer products or financial frauds.

The 34-year-old ophthalmologist died overnight at Wuhan Central Hospital, where he worked and likely contracted the virus while treating patients in the early days of the outbreak.

"A hero who released information about Wuhan's epidemic in the early stage, Dr. Li Wenliang is immortal," the China Center for Disease Control's chief scientist, Zeng Guang, wrote on the Sina Weibo microblog

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service.

Police in December had reprimanded eight doctors including Li for warning friends on social media about the emerging threat. China's supreme court later criticized the police, but the ruling party also has tightened its grip on information about the outbreak.

Weibo users have left hundreds of thousands of messages below Li's last post.

A post by one of Li's coworkers, an emergency room nurse, said the freezing Wuhan weather was "as gloomy as my mood."

"To you, we are angels and so strong. But how strong a heart can watch the people around me fall one by one without being shocked?" wrote Li Mengping on her verified account.

Others placed blame for the deaths on Chinese officials, not an animal species from where the virus might have spread, and said those who made trouble for the doctor should face consequences. The most pointed online comments were quickly deleted by censors.

The ruling party has faced similar accusations of bungling or thuggish behavior following previous disasters. They include the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, a 2005 chemical spill that disrupted water supplies to millions of people in China's northeast, sales of tainted milk that sickened thousands of children and the failure of private finance companies after the global economic crisis.

In each case, officials were accused of trying to conceal or delay release of information members of the public said they needed to protect themselves.

The party often responds by allowing the public to vent temporarily, then uses its control of media and the internet to stifle criticism. Critics who persist can be jailed on vague charges of spreading rumors or making trouble.

On the streets of Beijing, the capital, residents expressed sadness and said that China should learn from Li.

"He is such a nice person, but still didn't pull through," said Ning Yanqing. "Those left do not dare to speak out. Alas, I don't know what to say."

Some online comments Friday hinted at broader dissatisfaction with the party and Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has tightened controls on society since taking power in 2012.

The most powerful Chinese leader since at least the 1980s, Xi gave himself the option of remaining president for life by changing the Chinese constitution in 2018 to remove a two-term limit.

Referring to one of Xi's propaganda initiatives, a message that circulated on social media said, "My 'Chinese Dream' is broken."

In Wuhan, local leaders were accused of telling doctors in December not to publicize the spreading virus in order to avoid casting a shadow over the annual meeting of a local legislative body.

As the virus spread, doctors were ordered to delete posts on social media that appealed for donations of medical supplies. That prompted complaints authorities were more worried about image than public safety.

Li was detained by police after warning about the virus on a social media group for his former classmates.

The latest episode is unusually awkward for the ruling party because Li was a physician, part of a group who are regarded as overworked, underpaid heroes who are China's line of defense against a frightening new disease.

"He showed a responsible attitude toward the society," said Cai Lin, a Beijing resident. "He is honest and faithful. So I think the whole society should reflect on this."

The World Health Organization, which has complimented China's response to the outbreak, said in a tweet that "We are deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. Li Wenliang. We all need to celebrate work that he did on" the virus.

The official propaganda apparatus tried Friday to mollify the public.

"Some of Li Wenliang's experiences during his life reflect shortcomings and deficiencies in epidemic prevention and control," said state television on its website.

The Chinese ambassador to Washington, Cui Tiankai, said in Twitter, a service the ruling party's internet censorship blocks the public from seeing, "Really saddened by the death of Dr. Li Wenliang. He was a very devoted doctor. We are so grateful to him for what he has done in our joint efforts fighting against #2019nCoV."

The government announced a team from Beijing would be sent to Wuhan to investigate "issues reported by the masses involving Dr. Li Wenliang."

AP researcher Chen Si in Zhengzhou, China, and video journalist Olivia Zhang and researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

China probes virus alarm doctor death, cruise ships shunned

By **KEN MORITSUGU** and **MARI YAMAGUCHI** Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's top Communist Party investigators are looking into "relevant issues raised by the public" about a whistleblower doctor who was threatened by police after publicizing his concerns about the new virus and has now died from it. The party's announcement Friday came as the death toll in mainland China rose to at least 636. The outbreak has now infected more than 31,200 people worldwide.

Cruise ship passengers faced more woe as Japan reported 41 new cases on a quarantined ship and turned away another.

President Xi Jinping spoke by phone with President Donald Trump, who said the U.S. was working closely with China to help. Xi urged the U.S. to "respond reasonably" to the outbreak, echoing complaints that some countries are overreacting by restricting Chinese travelers. Those complaints come even while China keeps around 50 million residents of the hardest-hit city of Wuhan and surrounding areas under indefinite quarantine.

A look at the latest developments:

TREATMENT OF WHISTLEBLOWER DOCTOR INVESTIGATED

Following an online uproar over the government's treatment of Dr. Li Wenliang, the ruling Communist Party said it was sending an investigation team to "fully investigate relevant issues raised by the public" regarding the case.

Li, 34, was one of eight medical professionals in Wuhan who tried to warn colleagues and others when the government did not. He wrote on his Weibo microblog account that on Dec. 3 he saw a test sample that indicated the presence of a coronavirus similar to SARS, which killed nearly 800 people in a 2002-2003 outbreak.

Li wrote that after he reported seven patients had contracted the virus, he was visited on Jan. 3 by police, who forced him to sign a statement admitting to having spread falsehoods and warning him of punishment if he continued.

Li wrote that he developed a cough on Jan. 10, fever on Jan. 11 and was hospitalized on Jan. 12, after which he began having trouble breathing. His death was confirmed early Friday, prompting a deluge of messages of mourning and outrage at the way he and the seven others were treated. Even the staunchly pro-government Global Times newspaper weighed in, noting that the eight whistleblowers' treatment "was evidence of local authorities' incompetence to tackle a contagious and deadly virus."

CRUISE SHIP WOES

Japan confirmed 41 new cases of the virus on the quarantined Diamond Princess, adding to 20 escorted off the ship earlier. The nearly 3,700 passengers and crew still on board remain under 14-day quarantines.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said foreign passengers on another ship, Holland America's Westerdam, won't be allowed into Japan. He said suspected virus patients were on board, but the Seattle-based operator denied anyone had virus.

The ship with more than 2,000 people was currently near Ishigaki, one of Okinawa's outer islands, and was seeking another port, said Overseas Travel Agency official Mie Matsubara.

"Everyone is starting to reject the ship and we are getting desperate," she said. "We hope we can go somewhere so that passengers can land."

At least four other cruise ships, two foreign and two Japanese-operated, are headed to Japan by the end of the month, Transport Minister Kazuyoshi Akaba said, urging port authorities around the country to turn them away.

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XI, TRUMP TALK VIRUS RESPONSE, TRADE

China's state media said President Xi Jinping urged the U.S. to "respond reasonably" to the virus outbreak in a phone call with President Donald Trump.

"A people's war against the virus has been launched," Xi was quoted as saying by broadcaster CCTV, using timeworn communist terminology. "We hope the U.S. side can assess the epidemic in a calm manner and adopt and adjust its response measures in a reasonable way."

Beijing has complained that the U.S. was flying its citizens out of Wuhan but not providing any assistance to China.

Trump later tweeted that "great discipline is taking place in China" and Xi was leading strongly in the fight against the virus.

Xi said China has "made the most comprehensive and strict measures of prevention and control" and the efforts are "gradually yielding positive results."

WUHAN RESIDENTS SAY GETTING HELP NOT EASY

Wuhan has added thousands of treatment beds by building two new hospitals and adapting gymnasiums and other spaces where patients can be treated in isolation. Thousands of additional military and civilian medical workers have been sent to the city.

Still, those inside the quarantine area speak of a medical system completely overwhelmed.

Chen Jiabin, 22, told The Associated Press by phone from Wuhan that his father fell ill on Jan. 28 but had to return home because no hospital would accept him. When he called for an ambulance after his father's fever spiked on Thursday morning, Chen said he was told 400 people were waiting ahead of him.

"We were just told to wait and wait," Chen said.

Mother-of-two Rong Qin, 32, posted on Weibo that she was told by local officials that even those with a positive diagnosis have to wait for beds.

"As far as I know, there have already been many people queuing up for help," wrote Rong, whose 67-year-old father has been feeling unwell and is awaiting his test results.

"What I am hoping now is to put my father in a public quarantine facility so that he doesn't pass the infection on to other family members," Rong wrote.

Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo. Associated Press writer Foster Klug in Yokohama, Japan, contributed to this report.

Heavy rain, floods lash eastern Australia, help with fires

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Heavy rains lashed parts of the wildfire and drought-stricken Australian east coast on Friday, bringing some flooding in Sydney and relief to firefighters still dealing with dozens of blazes in New South Wales.

New South Wales is the state hardest hit by wildfires that have killed at least 33 and destroyed more than 3,000 homes in an unprecedented fire season that began late in a record-dry 2019.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said he was optimistic the rain will help extinguish some blazes over the coming days. He said there were still 42 fires burning in the state, with 17 of those not contained.

"The rain is good for business and farms as well as being really good for quenching some of these fires we've been dealing with for many, many months," he said.

"We don't want to see lots of widespread damage and disruption from flooding, but it is certainly a welcome change to the relentless campaign of hot, dry weather," he added.

Firefighters can't contain major blazes across the southeast without heavy rain. The rain forecast to move southwest from the northeastern coast over the next week would be the first substantial soakings to reach dozens of fires that have spread for weeks.

Heavy rain and flash-flooding warnings extend across most of the New South Wales coast. Authorities say they rescued six people stranded from flood water in New South Wales since Wednesday.

Democrats prepare for New Hampshire debate as urgency rises

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — The Democratic Party's seven strongest presidential contenders are preparing for what could be the fiercest debate stage clash of the 2020 primary season as candidates look to survive the gauntlet of contests that lie ahead.

The field has been shaken and reshaped by chaotic Iowa caucuses earlier this week, and Friday's debate in New Hampshire — coming four days before the state's primary — offers new opportunity and risk for the shrinking pool of White House hopefuls.

Two candidates, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and former Midwestern mayor Pete Buttigieg, enter the night as the top targets, having emerged from Iowa essentially tied for the lead. Those trailing after the first contest — including former Vice President Joe Biden, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar — have an urgent need to demonstrate strength.

Billionaire activist Tom Steyer and New York entrepreneur Andrew Yang, meanwhile, are fighting to prove they belong in the conversation.

The rapidly evolving dynamic means that the candidates have a very real incentive to mix it up with their Democratic rivals in the 8 p.m. debate hosted by ABC. They may not get another chance.

"This is the time when voters are eager for candidates to show they can compare and contrast, but also show they're in it to win it," said Democratic strategist Lily Adams, who worked on California Sen. Kamala Harris' unsuccessful 2020 presidential campaign. "Expect it to get more feisty."

Indeed, it was a debate at this same stage in New Hampshire four years ago on the Republican side that then-New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie devastated Florida Sen. Marco Rubio's presidential ambitions with a well-timed take-down. Rubio never recovered, making it easier for Donald Trump to emerge as his party's presidential nominee.

The stakes are particularly high this week for Biden, who has played front-runner in virtually every one of the previous seven debates but left Iowa in distant fourth place. While reporting irregularities have blunted the impact of the Iowa contest, Biden's weakness rattled supporters who encouraged him to take an aggressive tack Friday night.

One of Biden's more prominent New Hampshire backers, Democratic operative Jim Demers, said this is the time to fight.

"People want to see the fire, they want to see fight and they want to see the differences," he said.

Lest there be any doubt about his intentions, Biden adopted a decidedly more aggressive tone with his rivals in the days leading up to Friday's debate, having largely avoided direct attacks against other Democrats for much of the last year. But Wednesday in New Hampshire, the former vice president went after Sanders and Buttigieg by name and questioned their ability to beat Trump.

On Sanders, Biden seized on the Vermont senator's status as a self-described democratic socialist. And on Buttigieg, he knocked the 38-year-old former mayor's inexperience.

Biden also conceded the obvious — that his Iowa finish was underwhelming at best. He called it a "gut punch" before embracing the underdog role: "This isn't the first time in my life I've been knocked down."

The seven-person field also highlights the evolution of the Democrats' 2020 nomination fight, which began with more than two dozen candidates and has been effectively whittled down to a handful of top-tier contenders.

There are clear dividing lines based on ideology, age and gender. But just one of the candidates on stage, Yang, is an ethnic minority.

Two African Americans and the only Latino candidate were forced from the race even before voting began. The only black contender still in the running, former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, did not meet the polling or fundraising thresholds to qualify for Friday's event.

Beyond Biden's struggles, there are several subplots to watch.

The debate is the first since a progressive feud erupted on national television between Sanders and

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Warren. The Massachusetts senator refused to shake her New England neighbor's hand and accused him of calling her a liar moments after the Jan. 14 meeting in Iowa.

The pointed exchange threatened to cause a permanent fissure in the Democratic Party's far-left flank. Warren has embraced her gender as a political strength in the weeks since, highlighting the successes of female candidates in the Trump era and her own record of defeating a male Republican to earn a seat in the Senate.

That said, she stressed unity at campaign stops in recent days: "We've got to pull together as a party. We cannot repeat 2016," she said.

She even points to her sprawling campaign organization to prove her dedication to party unity, noting that aides from rival candidates no longer in the race have chosen to work for her.

"I have an open campaign," Warren said during a rally Wednesday at a community college in Nashua. "An inclusive campaign, a campaign that invites people in."

Yet Warren has been willing to attack before. Aside from the post-debate skirmish with Sanders, she seized on Buttigieg's fundraising practices in past meetings.

While Warren and Sanders as presidential candidates have sworn off wealthy donors, Buttigieg and the rest of the field have continued to hold private finance events with big donors, some with connections to Wall Street. In fact, Buttigieg took the unusual step of leaving New Hampshire this week to hold three fundraisers with wealthy donors in the New York area.

Buttigieg should expect to be under attack Friday night, said Joel Benenson, a debate adviser to Buttigieg last year and a prominent Democratic pollster.

"He's got to be prepared for incoming from the people behind him, who are going to be punching up and trying to take votes away," Benenson said.

"He's got to be prepared to counterpunch, as well, and push back strenuously, but drive his message even when he's responding," he added. "If they draw sharp contrasts, he has to, as well."

Associated Press writers Will Weissert in Manchester, N.H., and Thomas Beaumont in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

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

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

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

1. **DEMOCRATS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE FEEL URGENCY** Under pressure to perform now that voting has begun, the Democratic Party's strongest seven candidates will hold a debate just four days before the state's primary election.

2. **DEMOCRATS FACE STARK REALITY AFTER ACQUITTAL** Now they must figure out how the impeachment ordeal will affect the legislative and political landscape for the rest of this election year.

3. **CRUISE SHIP TURNED AWAY AS VIRUS ALARM DOCTOR DIES IN CHINA** Japan reports 41 new cases of a virus on a quarantined cruise ship and turns away another luxury liner while the death toll in China rises to 636, including a whistleblower doctor.

4. **'THEY WANT MORE LAND AND LESS ARABS'** Israel's Arab citizens view the Trump administration's plan for a future Palestinian state as a forced transfer, comparing it to the segregation of apartheid-era South Africa.

5. **SERBIA STRUGGLES WITH POPULATION DECLINE** The Balkan nation and other countries in the region are facing a similar problem where shrinking villages are undermining economic growth and development.

6. **HIGH WATER LEVELS WREAK HAVOC IN GREAT LAKES** The five inland seas are bursting at the seams during the region's wettest period in more than a century, which scientists say is likely connected to the warming climate.

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7. TRUMP: US OPERATION KILLED AL-QAIDA LEADER IN YEMEN Qassim al-Rimi claimed responsibility for last year's shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola, where a Saudi aviation trainee killed three American sailors.

8. BAD WEATHER HEADS NORTH AFTER RAKING US SOUTHEAST Forecasters say that a storm system that killed four in the southeastern U.S. is expected to strengthen in the mid-Atlantic region, bringing snow, ice and rain.

9. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM JOBS REPORT With China's viral outbreak disrupting trade and Boeing's troubles weighing on American factories, it may provide evidence of the U.S. economy's enduring health.

10. WARRIORS, TIMBERWOLVES MAKE BIG TRADE Andrew Wiggins is going from Minnesota to Golden State, allowing D'Angelo Russell to team up with his good friend, Wolves star Karl-Anthony Towns.

Trump's acquittal confronts Dems with election year choices

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's impeachment ended with a reminder of why House Speaker Nancy Pelosi resisted the idea for so long — an acquittal everyone saw coming, followed by a bombastic presidential victory lap and a bump in his poll numbers just as the 2020 campaign officially began.

Now Democrats have to decide how to navigate the legislative and political landscape that they've helped reshape.

Pelosi's nationally televised ripping of her copy of Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday night underscored the acrid atmosphere that will make partisan cooperation on any issue difficult. Major legislative compromises were always going to be hard this election year, but the impeachment fight only deepened partisan bitterness and made progress less likely.

"Because we have to," No. 2 House Democratic leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland said when asked how Congress and Trump could cooperate on health care and other issues. He added, "I'd be foolish to be optimistic because we have not done that so far."

Democrats must also decide how vigorously to continue investigations, including into impeachment's focus: Trump's effort to pressure Ukraine's leaders to bolster his reelection by seeking dirt on rival Joe Biden. The GOP-controlled Senate acquitted Trump on Wednesday of both articles of impeachment, with Utah Sen. Mitt Romney the sole lawmaker defying party lines.

Former White House national security adviser John Bolton could still have damaging information about Trump and has expressed a willingness to testify if subpoenaed. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., told reporters Wednesday that House panels would likely summon Bolton and pursue other Trump probes as well.

"When you have a lawless president, you have to bring that to the fore, you have to spotlight that," Nadler said.

Even as they consider the path ahead, neither Pelosi nor Democrats controlling the House are second-guessing their decision to impeach Trump.

Pelosi stood as a bulwark against impeachment for months as pro-impeachment sentiment rose steadily in her caucus, but when Trump's dealings with Ukraine came to light in September, the floodgates were forced open.

"Once Ukraine happened, we had no choice but to proceed," said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt.

"And had we not (acted)," Welch added, "there would have been a huge price to pay politically."

While that's a popular view with Democrats' dominant liberal wing, many think an overemphasis on Trump investigations risks feeding the Republican narrative that overreaching Democrats are obsessed with pursuing him. They also worry about detracting from Democrats' focus on pocketbook issues that helped them capture House control in the 2018 elections.

"I'm hoping that's a side show, and the big show is let's work for the American people" on issues like health care and infrastructure," said Rep. Lou Correa, D-Calif., co-chairman of the Blue Dog Coalition, which represents around 25 moderate House Democrats.

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Assessing impeachment's political impact ahead of November's elections is at least as fraught.

Democrats say despite Trump's acquittal, the trial trained prolonged attention on his sordid behavior and lashed GOP senators to him with their votes absolving him. They say that will weaken their reelection bids of GOP senators in swing states like Colorado, Maine and Arizona.

"This reinforced the view that Trump is unethical and lacking in integrity," said Democratic pollster Geoffrey Garin. "And it's exposed a number of Republican senators as hacks beholden to the president and Mitch McConnell," the Senate majority leader from Kentucky whom Democrats love to target.

Republicans counter that the effort has electrified GOP voters just months before Election Day, citing a Gallup Poll showing Trump with a 49% job approval rating, the highest of his presidency. They say Pelosi made tactical errors that exposed Democrats' impeachment drive as a blatantly political exercise, in the process weakening more than two dozen House Democrats from Trump-won districts.

"The President has his highest approval rating since he's been in office," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "I can tell you as a poll watcher who's looking at polls in certain Senate races every one of our people in tough races, every one of them, is in better shape today than they were before the impeachment trial started."

Republicans were especially critical of House Democrats' decision to not fight more in the courts to obtain testimony and documents. Democrats said they dropped such efforts because Trump could have forced legal battles lasting months, effectively derailing the impeachment effort. Republicans said that decision made it easy to portray Democrats as caring less about a serious investigation than politics.

"You didn't even bother to pull all the levers," said Scott Jennings, a longtime political adviser to McConnell.

Many Democrats say there would have been no way to prevent Republicans from complaining that the investigation was political and lacked sufficient evidence.

"They'd have said that if you'd produced volumes more evidence," said John Lawrence, Pelosi's chief of staff for eight years ending in 2013.

And while Democrats collected compelling evidence against Trump, they made the mistake of thinking they'd win by appealing broadly to voters, said Brendan Buck, a GOP consultant who's advised congressional leaders. Republicans prevailed by aiming their arguments at the GOP's core conservative supporters, a tactic that has driven Trump's presidency.

"Democrats seemed to play by the old rules and the president played by the new rules," Buck said.

One moderate House Democrat said Democrats facing difficult reelection fights from Trump-leaning districts think Pelosi made tactical decisions that could jeopardize them.

That includes her one-month delay in formally sending the House's impeachment articles to the Senate. That fed the GOP argument that the effort was political, said the Democrat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

This Democrat said lawmakers also recoiled at Pelosi's decision to sign the impeachment articles and distribute pens as mementos to colleagues. The Democrat said voters in their districts often cited that televised ceremony as evidence that impeachment was politically motivated.

"They ran as, 'I'm not just a regular Democrat, I'll reach across party lines,'" said former Rep. Tom Davis, R-Va., who once ran the House GOP's campaign organization. "And here they are impeaching the president like this."

One thing many from both parties agree on: By November, impeachment could well be superseded by other issues and will likely be conflated into an overall referendum on Trump.

"My honest guess is that the public will very rapidly turn to kitchen table issues," said former Rep. David Obey, D-Wis.

To win New Hampshire, Warren has to go through Sanders

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Elizabeth Warren's path to victory may have to go through fellow progressive Bernie Sanders. And after Sanders' strong showing in Iowa, that path became far more difficult heading

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into Tuesday's New Hampshire primary.

The challenge for Warren is to somehow outshine Sanders in a state where he has a long record of enthusiastic and durable backing. There isn't much daylight between them to do that on the big issues that most excite the Democratic Party's liberal wing: universal, government-run health insurance under the "Medicare for All" plan, tuition-free college and aggressive plans to fight climate change.

Sanders, a Vermont senator, also has a yawning financial advantage. His campaign announced raking in \$25 million in January alone — more than seven times the fundraising goal of \$3.5 million that Warren set for herself over the same period. Sanders' strong performance in Monday's Iowa caucuses could mean a fundraising bump for him, while Warren will have a harder time exciting donors about her third-place finish in Iowa.

Warren, a senator from Massachusetts, has more than 1,000 staffers in 31 states and says she has the sprawling political organization to compete nationwide. But maintaining such a large staff is costly and, even if she can afford it, having the most impressive ground game of any candidate didn't help her much in Iowa.

Warren, nonetheless, insists her campaign "is built for the long haul."

"I see Iowa as showing them our team can work," she said when asked about her political ground game producing underwhelming Iowa results. "We were out there all over the state and bringing in volunteers, and the Iowa team is now leaving Iowa and going to other parts of the country."

But Warren has also canceled \$350,000 in planned television advertising for later this month in Nevada and South Carolina, which vote after New Hampshire. She said it wasn't a change in strategy but rather "about the fact that we completely finance our campaign through grassroots, and I just want to be careful about how we spend our money."

Indeed, Warren has shunned traditional, large fundraisers and relied instead mostly on small donations made online — a model similar to Sanders'. That means Warren's core supporters can keep donating to her in modest amounts for the long haul, though some may not want to without seeing results.

Her campaign says it softens the financial blow from having a large staff and payroll by not spending money on things other candidates are, like outside pollsters, consultants or advertisers. It acknowledged canceling some advertising but pointed to a digital ad it released Wednesday featuring 2010 footage of then-President Barack Obama praising Warren's work as head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a watchdog agency the senator considers one of the highlights of her career.

Tying Warren to Obama is taking a page out of the playbook of Joe Biden, who has made his work as vice president during the administration a centerpiece of his 2020 White House bid. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has also started airing a new ad showing his association with Obama.

Rebecca Katz, a New York-based progressive strategist, said that while Sanders and Warren might eventually have to compete in a Democratic primary where there can only be one winner, direct competition is still a long way off.

"Progressives have plenty of time to pick the candidate that they want," Katz said. "The path for the moderates in this race is much more complicated than it is for the progressives. There are two progressives and at least four moderates."

Some of Warren's top allies now see room for her support to grow, arguing that Biden's failure to crack the top three in Iowa gives her a chance to appeal to Democrats who were holding out for someone more "electable" to beat President Donald Trump in November's general election.

"Warren beats Pete and Warren beats Sanders if this gets down to one-on-one match-ups -- because voters across the party are inspired by her," said Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. "The challenge in the next few weeks is making the case that Warren is the best combination of being a bold progressive who is effective and who can defeat Trump."

The longer it takes for her to make that case, the more pressure Warren could face. Still, Derrick Crowe of the progressive group Peoples' Action, which has endorsed Sanders, said many on the left don't view backing Sanders as a slight to Warren.

"I do think that we want to make sure that, as the race goes on, the progressive lane is the strongest

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lane," Crowe said. "We want those progressive ideas winning for as long as we can."

In the meantime, Warren won't say she needs a first-place finish in New Hampshire. "This isn't about the numbers as much as it is about the people, the enthusiasm," she said.

Sanders, whose strong tactical organization in Iowa helped propel him, has demonstrated to an even greater degree that he is playing a long game. He said he would have liked to have seen higher turnout in Monday's Iowa caucuses but was heartened to see that participation by voters under 29 years old had increased, calling it a "good start."

Sanders trounced Hillary Clinton by 22 points in New Hampshire during the 2016 Democratic presidential primary and has already predicted victory in New Hampshire and Nevada. Vermont borders New Hampshire, but so does Massachusetts, meaning both Warren and Sanders are known political commodities.

Sanders is expanding television advertising in Nevada and plans to spend \$5.5 million on TV and digital advertising in 10 states. He's also vowing to win the largest state voting March 3 on "Super Tuesday," California, thanks in no small measure to inroads he has made with Latino voters.

So far, Sanders and Warren have had a few moments of friction, like when Warren accused Sanders of calling her a liar after a recent debate.

But both have stressed unity. Warren even recalls Sanders' protracted primary battle with Clinton in proclaiming, "We've got to pull together as a party. We cannot repeat 2016."

Two areas in which Warren has drawn a contrast with Sanders are in noting that she's hired many former staffers from candidates who left the race and in saying she can beat Trump as a woman. She had pointed out that female candidates have done better in recent cycles than their male counterparts, especially in 2018, when they helped Democrats retake the House.

"In 2020," Warren says, "we can and we should have a woman president."

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

Shrinking country: Serbia struggles with population decline

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BLAGOJEV KAMEN, Serbia (AP) — Uros Trainovic remembers when his small mining village in eastern Serbia was a vibrant home to 200 families, had a school of its own, a doctor and a shop.

How times have changed. Now, 60-odd years later, it's a ghost village with just eight residents.

The transformation of Blagojev Kamen is not unique in a country that experienced years of war and sanctions in the 1990s following the break-up of Yugoslavia. In a twist of historical irony, one of the causes behind those years of war was the idea of creating a Greater Serbia out of the ashes of the former Yugoslavia.

Near-empty villages with abandoned, crumbling houses can be seen all over Serbia — a clear symptom of a shrinking population that is raising acute questions over the economic well-being of the country. The decline is happening so fast it's considered a national emergency and the United Nations has stepped in to help.

"This village used to be full of people, I used to go to school here," the 71-year-old Trainovic recalls.

"It is such a pity and so sad that everybody left ... now there are only few of us and there are no young people any more."

However it's measured, the numbers look stark.

According to the World Bank, Serbia's population of just below 7 million is projected to fall to 5.8 million by 2050. That would represent a 25% fall since 1990.

The Serbian government says the Balkan country is effectively losing a town each year, and that as many as 18 municipalities have fewer than 10,000 people: "We are 103 people less each day."

Population changes are a fact of life across Europe, but the problem is acutely different in Central and Eastern Europe where the low fertility rates that are commonplace in developed countries combine with high migration rates and low immigration more akin to developing nations.

The economic knock-on effects on a country striving to join the European Union are evident and amount to

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billions of dollars in the short term. In the longer run, there are also costs related to the fact that a smaller population of working age will have to contribute more to support the ranks of those of pensionable age.

The U.N. Development Program and the U.N. Population Fund have assembled a group of seven international experts of different backgrounds and specialties to help out. The members visited Serbia last month for a fact-finding mission.

Wolfgang Lutz, an Austrian expert in demographics at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, or IIASA, said the main problem is related to the make-up of those leaving Serbia rather than the overall population decline.

"We see that it tends to be the better-educated, the more highly skilled, the more highly motivated mobile people who are leaving and that is certainly a drain of the human capital," he told The Associated Press in an interview.

Reflecting the decades of crisis are villages like Blagojev Kamen. It had flourished when a nearby gold mine kept the area alive before and after World War II, but its fortunes have sunk as the mine closed down in the mid-1990s.

Trainovic said there are still gold and other minerals in the mine but that it needs investment and hard work.

"One of my sons is in Germany and the other one is in Austria," he said. "They visit often but they have nothing to return to."

Serbia's government has tried to buck the trend, offering financial benefits for couples with multiple children, state-backed IVF, the renovation of schools and day care centers, aid to families in rural areas or backing for businesses in villages.

Ruth Finkelstein, an assistant professor from Columbia University who is an expert on aging and its social implications, said Serbia should also strive to find a role for its growing elderly population.

"Room after room, people focus only on the young people," she said.

It's not only Serbia that is worried.

Serbia's neighbor Croatia, which currently holds the European Union's rotating six-month presidency, has made the "pressing issue of demographic challenges" a priority. Croatia's rural areas have been emptying at an alarming rate while more than 15% of Croatia's 4.2 million people are living and working abroad. Bulgaria and Ukraine are two others enduring population declines.

Stjepan Sterc, a prominent Croatian demography expert, thinks the efforts to deal with the problems so far across the Balkans are not enough and that the tax system has to be more focused on reversing the trends.

"Demography should be recognized as the essence of economic development so that the most important encouragement tool is directed toward it," he said.

Lutz, who directs the World Population Program for the IIASA, said small countries can have a competitive advantage.

"I've seen a lot of pessimism, I've seen a lot of panic even about what is happening," he said. "The challenge is to convert this ... into some action that is positive, making this a more revitalized, more vibrant society again, that looks into the future."

Palestinians deny US charges of incitement, blame Trump plan

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Palestinians on Friday rejected U.S. allegations of incitement after a day of clashes and attacks left three Palestinians dead and more than a dozen Israelis wounded.

They instead linked the violence to President Donald Trump's Mideast initiative, which heavily favors Israel on all the most contentious issues of the conflict and would allow it to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.

"Those who introduce plans for annexation and apartheid and the legalization of occupation and settlements are the ones who bear full responsibility for deepening the cycle of violence and extremism," senior

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Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said in a statement.

He was responding to remarks delivered the day before by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and the architect of the Mideast blueprint, who had blamed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for the latest violence.

"Don't call for days of rage and encourage (your) people to pursue violence if they're not getting what they want," Kushner said on Thursday, after briefing the U.N. Security Council on the plan.

He said Abbas "was surprised with how good the plan was for the Palestinian people, but he locked himself into a position" by rejecting it before it came out.

Erekat said Abbas will soon bring his own plan to the Security Council, one that he said is rooted in international law and based on a two-state solution along the 1967 lines.

The Palestinians want an independent state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, territories seized by Israel in the 1967 war. They view Israel's settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem — which are home to some 700,000 people — as a major obstacle to peace. Most of the international community views the settlements as illegal.

The Trump plan would allow Israel to annex all its settlements as well as the strategic Jordan Valley. It would give the Palestinians limited autonomy in several chunks of territory with a capital on the outskirts of Jerusalem, but only if they meet nearly impossible conditions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has eagerly embraced the plan. The Palestinians have adamantly rejected it, but Abbas has not called for violence.

His security forces work with Israel to combat militant groups in the parts of the West Bank where Israel allows them to operate. Abbas has threatened to cut off security coordination in response to the Trump plan, but is not believed to have done so.

Abbas' forces are not allowed to operate in Jerusalem, where two of the three attacks took place Thursday, or near the West Bank settlements. He has no control over the Gaza Strip, where the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power from his forces in 2007.

His policy of cooperating with Israel on security is deeply unpopular among Palestinians, many of whom see it as serving the Israeli occupation.

High water wreaks havoc on Great Lakes, swamping communities

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

MANISTEE, Mich. (AP) — Rita Alton has an unusual morning routine these days: Wake up. Get dressed. Go outside to see if her house is closer to tumbling down an 80-foot (24.4-meter) cliff into Lake Michigan.

When her father built the 1,000-square-foot (93-square-meter), brick bungalow in the early 1950s near Manistee, Michigan, more than an acre of land lay between it and the drop-off overlooking the giant fresh-water sea. But erosion has accelerated dramatically as the lake approaches its highest levels in recorded history, hurling powerful waves into the mostly clay bluff.

Now, the jagged cliff top is about eight feet from Alton's back deck.

"It's never been like this, never," she said on a recent morning, peering down the snow-dusted hillside as bitter gusts churned surf along the shoreline below. "The destruction is just incredible."

On New Year's Eve, an unoccupied cottage near Muskegon, Michigan, plunged from an embankment to the water's edge. Another down the coast was dismantled a month earlier to prevent the same fate.

High water is wreaking havoc across the Great Lakes, which are bursting at the seams less than a decade after bottoming out. The sharp turnabout is fueled by the region's wettest period in more than a century that scientists say is likely connected to the warming climate. No relief is in sight, as forecasters expect the lakes to remain high well into 2020 and perhaps longer.

The toll is extensive: homes and businesses flooded; roads and sidewalks crumbled; beaches washed away; parks were rendered unusable. Docks that boats previously couldn't reach because the water was too shallow are now submerged.

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At one point last year, ferry service was halted in the Lake Erie island community of Put-In-Bay after the vessels' landing spot disappeared beneath the waves. On Mackinac Island in Lake Huron, portions of the only paved road washed away.

Homeowners and agencies are extending battered seawalls, constructing berms and piling stones and sandbags. Some are elevating houses or moving them farther inland. Even shanties in a historic Michigan fishing village dating to 1903 are being raised. The state's environment department has issued more than 400 permits for such projects.

The situation is inspiring soul-searching over how to cope with a long-term challenge unique to this region. While communities along ocean coasts brace for rising seas, experts say the Great Lakes can now expect repeated, abrupt swings between extreme highs and lows.

"It wasn't long ago they were worried about Lake Michigan drying up. Now it's full," said Rich Warner, emergency services director for Muskegon County. "All these ups and downs — I don't know if that's something you can truly plan for."

Levels are always changing in the Great Lakes, which together hold about 90% of the surface fresh water in the U.S. They typically decline in fall and winter, then rise in spring and summer as melting snow and rainfall replenish them. Broader fluctuations take place over longer periods. Levels surged in the 1980s before dropping sharply in the 2000s.

But increasingly, the highs are higher and the lows lower — and the variations happen faster. Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan had bigger jumps between 2013-14 than during any comparable period. It took just seven years to go from record slumps to all-time peaks.

Lakes Ontario and Erie last year reached their highest points since record keeping began in 1918. Superior surpassed several all-time monthly averages and did so again in January. Lakes Huron and Michigan did likewise last month, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit.

Even Ontario, where a hydropower dam provides more stability, has experienced record highs twice in the past three years.

"That's not supposed to happen," said Drew Gronewold, a University of Michigan hydrologist. "That lake is carefully regulated."

Climate change is believed to influence water temperatures and precipitation, which wage a constant tug-of-war with lake levels. Warmer water boosts evaporation, which pushed levels downward about 20 years ago. But as the atmosphere warms, it sucks up more moisture from other regions and dumps it into the lakes, filling them back up.

"Those two forces are increasing in intensity at the same time," suggesting the up-and-down shifts may become more extreme, Gronewold said.

How long before the waters recede is anyone's guess. The Army Corps predicts the lakes will exceed their long-term averages through June. Michigan and Huron already are 17 inches (43 centimeters) higher than a year ago.

Another ominous sign: Ice cover is light this winter. Shoreline ice provides a buffer against pounding waters. In its absence, Chicago's Lake Michigan waterfront was battered by waves reaching 23 feet (7 meters) high during a mid-January storm.

That means the potential for further damage will increase as spring snowmelt and rains arrive, said Ethan Theuerkauf, a Michigan State University geologist.

"This would include extensive beach, dune and bluff erosion, but also damage to coastal infrastructure and more lakefront homes falling in," he said.

Members of Congress from the region are seeking federal funds for barrier construction, dredging and restoring shorelines. State lawmakers in Michigan are pushing to expand the criteria for declaring emergencies that could trigger government assistance for people struggling to protect their homes.

But local officials acknowledge a need for innovative approaches to the lakes' increasing fickleness.

In South Haven, Michigan, consultants have developed a \$16.3 million list of infrastructure projects, including installing structures to absorb and dispel energy from Lake Michigan waves.

The Lake Erie town of Luna Pier, Michigan, is considering spending millions to replace dikes built nearly

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a half-century ago — a steep price for a village of only 1,500 residents. A waterfront hotel on Mackinac Island has hired specialists from Finland to revise its drainage.

“The climate is doing some weird and crazy things and we need to be prepared with stronger and more flexible infrastructure instead of just covering cracks,” said Herasanna Richards, legislative associate with the Michigan Municipal League.

The recent surge also has rekindled longstanding debates over what government can do to control levels — particularly on Lake Ontario, where they’re partially regulated by outflows to the St. Lawrence River through a hydropower dam. A U.S.-Canadian commission oversees how much water leaves the lake, based on the needs of competing interests such as shoreline homeowners, commercial shippers and wetlands.

Meanwhile, some people living along Lake Huron and Lake Michigan are demanding that Canada stop releasing water from two hydro projects into Lake Superior, even though it has elevated levels only by a few inches since the 1940s.

“Every inch counts,” said Don Olendorf, a leader of a property owners’ group pushing for the change. His house is about 30 feet (9 meters) from the edge of an eroding Lake Michigan bluff.

Alton, whose house is precariously close to the Manistee-area cliff, says she can’t afford to move it. She has pleaded for help from local officials without success.

“At some point I’m going to have to leave,” she said, “because it’s going to go over.”

Follow John Flesher on Twitter at @johnflesher.

Anger at Trump plan could mobilize Arab voters in Israel

By **JOSEPH KRAUSS** and **MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH** Associated Press

UMM AL-FAHM, Israel (AP) — It might have seemed to be one of the more innocuous elements in President Donald Trump’s deeply divisive Middle East peace initiative: the suggestion that a densely populated Arab region of Israel be added to a future Palestinian state, if both sides agree.

Instead, the proposal has infuriated many of Israel’s Arab citizens, who view it as a form of forced transfer. They want no part in the Palestinian state envisioned by the Trump administration, with many comparing it to the areas set aside for black South Africans as part of the apartheid government’s policy of racial segregation.

The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank also has adamantly rejected the plan, which would allow Israel to annex all of its settlements and large parts of the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians with limited autonomy in an archipelago of enclaves surrounded by Israel.

Inside Israel, outrage over the plan could once again mobilize Arab voters ahead of elections next month, potentially denying Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu another term and throwing the implementation of the Trump plan — already a long shot — into greater doubt.

Arab citizens make up about 20% of Israel’s population. They can vote but face discrimination and higher levels of poverty. They have close family ties to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and many identify as Palestinians. But they are also deeply rooted in lands that are now part of Israel, and most are immersed in Israeli society. Their political parties advocate reform, not partition.

Many Jewish-Israelis nevertheless view Arab citizens with suspicion, seeing them as a fifth column sympathetic to the country’s enemies. A small number have been implicated in attacks, including on Thursday, when Israeli police say they shot and killed an Arab citizen in Jerusalem’s Old City after he opened fire and slightly wounded a police officer.

The Trump plan, released last week, “contemplates the possibility” that an area known as the Arab Triangle, which abuts the West Bank and is home to more than 250,000 Arab citizens, could be added to a future Palestinian state if both sides agree. The border would be redrawn, and no one would be uprooted from their homes.

But it raises questions of consent, as residents of the area have little power over the Israeli government or the Palestinian Authority.

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Jamal Zahalka, a former member of the Israeli parliament from the staunchly pro-Palestinian Balad party, said the plan is the latest iteration of a decades-old Israeli policy of maximizing territory while preserving its Jewish majority.

"They want more land and less Arabs, that's the point," Zahalka said.

"We will have the bantustan of the triangle here, part of the Palestinian bantustans," he added, using a term for segregated homelands from apartheid-era South Africa.

Since the Middle East peace initiative was announced last week, U.S. officials have played down the brief section of the 50-page plan that discusses the Arab Triangle.

"This is a territorial re-allocation. It is not intended to affect anybody's citizenship," Ambassador David Friedman told reporters last week.

"If there was interest in it, I would suspect there would be a lengthy legal discussion on how to implement it," he added. "The Palestinians are welcome to engage."

Israeli media have cited unnamed officials as saying Netanyahu has no intention of implementing the idea and is focused on other parts of the plan. His office declined to comment on the reports or the idea of transferring the Arab Triangle.

But the idea is not new.

Avigdor Lieberman, head of the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, has long advocated the transfer of populated Arab areas to a Palestinian state. His party platform states that Arabs could choose Palestinian citizenship to help "end the duality from which they suffer." A senior party official declined to comment on the Trump plan, saying they were still studying it.

Israeli officials' reluctance to discuss the issue could reflect political calculations ahead of the election — the third in less than a year after no one was able to form a majority coalition.

Netanyahu has inveighed against Arab citizens ahead of past elections in order to mobilize his right-wing base. Before September's vote, he had proposed posting cameras at Arab voting stations, accusing his opponents of trying to "steal" the election.

Those tactics backfired when an Arab coalition emerged as the third largest bloc in parliament, contributing to Netanyahu's failure to form a government.

Arab voters had sat out many past elections because of squabbling among their leaders and apathy borne of marginalization. No Arab party has ever sat in an Israeli government, and none of Israel's main parties have invited them to do so.

Hassan Jabareen, the head of the Adalah human rights group, which focuses on Arab citizens, predicts the Trump plan will help rally Arab voters against Netanyahu.

"You have a new campaign, a new goal, a new objective, and a new discourse," he said.

In a broader sense, the plan could hasten the transition from a struggle for Palestinian independence to one demanding civil rights in one binational state. With the Palestinian population of Israel and the occupied territories nearing parity with the Jewish population, that would threaten Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state.

Jabareen says that with the release of the Trump plan, Palestinians are increasingly comparing the situation to apartheid, adding that the "remedy to apartheid is a one-state solution."

Mohammed Mahameed lives in Umm al-Fahm, an Arab town in the heart of the triangle that Israelis have long associated with extremism because it is a bastion of political Islamists. But the 22-year-old plays soccer in a mostly Jewish league.

He says he gets along well with his teammates, most of whom are Jewish, and is warmly welcomed when he plays in cities and towns across Israel.

"I received love there that I cannot describe, really," he said. "We didn't look at anything in a racist way."

He fears that Umm al-Fahm may one day be cut off from the rest of Israel by roadblocks and checkpoints, preventing residents from traveling for work or recreation.

He didn't vote in September but plans to next month.

Residents of the Arab Triangle have close ties to other Arab communities across Israel, and many own

land and businesses in different parts of the country. Many work in Jewish communities and send their children to Israeli universities.

Safa Aghbaria, another Umm al-Fahm resident, said the plan is a "crazy, unrealistic idea."

"We are Palestinians, but they don't have the right to transfer us to another authority," she said. "We are here in our land."

Associated Press producer Audrey Horowitz contributed to this report.

King angry at CBS promo of interview questions about Bryant

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In the wake of a social media backlash, CBS' Gayle King says she is embarrassed and angry with how the network promoted part of her interview with WNBA star Lisa Leslie that concerned the late Kobe Bryant.

King responded via Twitter on Thursday to address the reaction to a video clip from her wide-ranging "CBS This Morning" interview with Leslie that aired Tuesday. The clip, distributed online and on CBS News' social media accounts, focused on a portion of the interview where Leslie addressed a sexual assault charge that had been brought against Bryant and dismissed.

Bryant died in a helicopter crash in Southern California on Jan. 26.

"I know that if I had only seen the clip that you saw, I'd be extremely angry with me, too," King said. "I am mortified, I am embarrassed and I'm very angry."

CBS responded by agreeing that the excerpt "did not reflect the nature and tone" of the complete interview. "We are addressing the internal process that led to this and changes have already been made," CBS said.

It wasn't clear what those changes were. It's a delicate situation for the news division, where King is likely its most bankable star.

In the interview, King asked Leslie whether Bryant's legacy had been complicated by the assault case. Leslie said it hasn't, and called on the media to be more respectful of Bryant's memory. When Leslie noted that she had never seen improper behavior from Bryant, King said that she most likely wouldn't have been in a position to see it.

After the alleged victim decided not to pursue the case, she and Bryant reached a settlement in 2005. Bryant, who was 24 at the time of the Colorado incident, said he had committed adultery, but not sexual assault.

King was taken to task on social media for bringing the topic up. "Woke up to this interview and was just really pissed off," actress Vivica A. Fox tweeted.

Rapper Snoop Dogg attacked King in a profane Twitter video that concluded with urging her to back off "before we come get you."

Actor, rap artist and television executive 50 Cent said in an interview with The Associated Press that he thought it was unfair to bring up the old allegations because Bryant was no longer around to defend himself.

"It's just not the right thing to do," he said.

Even Bill Cosby, weighed in from prison — or at least his official Twitter account did. In response to Snoop Dogg, disgraced comedian and convicted sex offender wrote: "When they brought me to my gated community and placed me inside of my penthouse, they didn't win nor did they silence me. It's so sad and disappointing that successful Black Women are being used to tarnish the image and legacy of successful Black Men even in death"

In her Twitter video, King said that she'd been advised to say nothing about the issue and ride it out, "but that's not good enough for me.

"I really want people to understand what happened here and how I'm feeling about it," she said.

Associated Press writer Gary Gerard Hamilton contributed to this report.

DNC chair calls for 're canvass' of Iowa results after delays

By STEVE PEOPLES, JULIE PACE and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of the Democratic National Committee has called for a "re canvass" of the results of the Iowa caucuses, saying it was needed to "assure public confidence" after three days of technical issues and delays.

"Enough is enough," party leader Tom Perez wrote on Twitter.

Following the Iowa Democratic Party's release of new results late Thursday night, former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg leads Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders by two state delegate equivalents out of 2,152 counted. That is a margin of 0.09 percentage points. Both candidates have declared themselves victorious.

However, there is evidence the party has not accurately tabulated some of its results, including those released late Thursday that the party reported as complete.

The Associated Press is unable to declare a winner.

The state party apologized for technical glitches with an app that slowed down reporting of results from Monday's caucuses and has spent the week trying to verify results. However, it was unclear if the party planned to follow the directive of the national leader to re canvass those results, a process that would likely require state officials to review caucus math worksheets completed at more than 1,600 caucus sites to ensure the calculations were done correctly and matched the reported results.

Iowa chairman Troy Price suggested in a statement Thursday that he would only pursue a re canvass if one was requested by a campaign.

The caucus crisis was an embarrassing twist after months of promoting Iowa as a chance for Democrats to find some clarity in a jumbled 2020 field. Instead, after a buildup that featured seven rounds of debates, nearly \$1 billion spent nationwide and a year of political jockeying, caucus day ended with no winner and no official results.

Campaigning in New Hampshire, Sanders called the Iowa Democratic Party's management of the caucuses a "screw-up" that has been "extremely unfair" to the candidates and their supporters.

"We've got enough of Iowa," he said later Thursday at a CNN town hall. "I think we should move onto New Hampshire."

Iowa marked the first contest in a primary season that will span all 50 states and several U.S. territories, ending at the party's national convention in July.

As first reported by The New York Times, numerous precincts reported results that contained errors or were inconsistent with party rules. For example, the AP confirmed that dozens of precincts reported more final alignment votes than first alignment votes, which is not possible under party rules. In other precincts, viable candidates lost votes from the first alignment tally to the final, which is also inconsistent with party rules.

Some precincts made apparent errors in awarding state delegate equivalents to candidates. A handful of precincts awarded more state delegate equivalents than they had available. A few others didn't award all of theirs.

The trouble began with an app that the Iowa Democratic Party used to tabulate the results of the contest. The app was rolled out shortly before caucusing began and did not go through rigorous testing.

The problems were compounded when phone lines for reporting the outcomes became jammed, with many callers placed on hold for hours in order to report outcomes. Party officials said the backlog was exacerbated by calls from people around the country who accessed the number and appeared intent on disrupting the process.

"There was a moment in the night where, it became clear, 'Oh, the phone number just became available to the entire country,'" said Iowa state Auditor Rob Sand, who was answering calls for the party. "It was a pretty big problem."

President Donald Trump relished in the Democratic turmoil.

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"The Democrats, they can't count some simple votes and yet they want to take over your health care system," Trump said at a White House event Thursday celebrating his impeachment trial acquittal. "Think of that — no, think of that."

The chaos surrounding the reporting breakdown seems sure to blunt the impact of Iowa's election, which typically rewards winners with a surge of momentum heading into subsequent primary contests. But without a winner called, Democrats have quickly turned their focus to New Hampshire, which holds the next voting contest on Tuesday.

Buttigieg and Sanders will emerge from Iowa's caucuses with the most delegates to the party's national convention, regardless of which one eventually wins the contest. They have each won at least 11 national delegates, with a handful of delegates still to be awarded, according to the AP delegate count. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren has won at least five delegates, while former Vice President Joe Biden has won at least two and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar has at least one.

Iowa will award 41 pledged delegates to the Democratic National Convention this summer. There are 11 delegates still to be awarded as the state party sorts out the final results of the caucuses.

Candidates must win a majority of pledged delegates to the party's national convention to win the Democratic nomination for president on the first ballot. This year, that's 1,191 pledged delegates.

The two Iowa leaders, Buttigieg and Sanders, are separated by 40 years in age and conflicting ideology. Sanders, a 78-year-old self-described democratic socialist, has been a progressive powerhouse for decades. Buttigieg, a 38-year-old former municipal official, represents the more moderate wing of the Democratic Party. Buttigieg is also the first openly gay candidate to earn presidential primary delegates.

Sanders narrowly lost the Iowa caucuses in 2016 to Hillary Clinton and pushed the party to make changes to the process this year, including releasing three different sets of results: a tally of candidate support at the start of the caucuses, their levels of support after those backing candidates with less than 15% got to make a second choice and the number of state delegate equivalents each candidate receives. The AP will determine a winner based on state delegates.

Given the tight race, former DNC Chairwoman Donna Brazile said the party needs to "get this right" so the eventual nominee isn't saddled with questions of legitimacy.

"It's a combination of embarrassment and not being prepared for the various mishaps that can take place when you try to do something new and different," she said.

Party activist John Deeth, who organized the caucuses in Iowa's most Democratic county, Johnson, said he welcomed a recanvass and would help as needed.

"It makes sense to look everything over again and get it right," he said.

Deeth said that he believed the review would uncover some data entry errors as well as some math and rounding errors in how delegates at each precinct were awarded. Volunteers running the precincts did their best, he said, but likely made some minor mistakes.

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writers Ryan J. Foley in Iowa City, Iowa, Will Weissert in Manchester, N.H., Bill Barrow in Atlanta, and Stephen Ohlemacher and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Iowa's state auditor is named Rob Sand, not Rob Sands.

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

January US jobs report may provide clarity amid disruptions

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With China's viral outbreak disrupting trade and Boeing's troubles weighing on American factories, the January U.S. jobs report on Friday may provide timely evidence of the U.S. economy's enduring health.

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Economists estimate that employers added 161,000 jobs last month and that the unemployment rate remained at a 50-year low of 3.5%, according to data provider FactSet. That pace of hiring would be weaker than the monthly average of the past two years yet still more than enough to reduce unemployment over time.

The closely watched jobs report comes in the same week that President Donald Trump boasted of his economic record in his State of the Union address, previewing a central campaign theme in his re-election bid.

Friday's hiring figures may call into question some of the president's triumphalism about the job market under his watch. Along with January's hiring data, the Labor Department is expected to report that the United States had 500,000 fewer jobs in March 2019 than previously estimated. That would be a relatively small change in an economy with 150 million jobs. But it would still indicate that there was less hiring in the 12 months that ended in March, at a time of robust economic growth, than had been assumed.

"It takes a little bloom off the rose," said Joe Brusuelas, an economist at RSM, a tax advisory and consulting firm.

The change stems from annual revisions the government makes after receiving a count of total jobs from tax records, which are released with a delay. Sharp revisions, like those expected on Friday, typically mean that the government didn't precisely estimate how many new companies were started or how many went out of business.

Preliminary results released in August suggest that the revisions largely reflect ways in which the economy is evolving. For example, the revisions will likely reduce total retail jobs by 146,000, a reflection of the retail sector's continuing troubles. Macy's this week became the latest department store to announce job cuts: The company said it would close 125 stores and lay off 2,000 workers at its corporate offices.

At the same time, the Labor Department estimated in August that its revisions would add nearly 79,000 jobs in transportation and warehousing, a sector fueled by the rapid growth of online shopping. A category that includes newer higher-tech jobs, like data analysis, will gain an estimated 33,000 jobs.

Still, the downward revision doesn't necessarily point to a broader slowdown in hiring. Unseasonably warm weather last month might have given a boost to January's job growth. Warmer weather means that more construction work can be done, raising demand for workers. And restaurants and hotels tend to add staff as more Americans travel and eat out in warm weather.

China's deadly viral outbreak has sickened thousands and shut down stores and factories in that country. But its impact likely came too late in the month to affect Friday's U.S. jobs report.

Factory hiring, however, may be reduced by Boeing's decision to suspend production of its troubled aircraft, the 737 MAX. The aerospace industry last year added about 1,500 jobs a month but will likely shed jobs for at least the first few months of this year.

One Boeing supplier, Spirit Aerosystems, has said it will cut 2,800 jobs. Those layoffs occurred after the government's survey for last month, so they probably won't show up until the jobs report for February is issued next month.

Economists will also closely watch wage data, because pay raises have slowed since early 2019 despite the ultra-low unemployment. Pay growth might have picked up slightly in January because 21 states raised their minimum wages at the start of the year, benefiting nearly 7 million workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

In the meantime, consumers remain confident about the economy and are spending steadily, benefiting such industries as restaurants, hotels, health care and banking.

Manufacturing also grew in January after five months of contraction, according to a survey of purchasing managers by the Institute for Supply Management. Even so, while orders and production grew, factories were still cutting jobs, the survey found. American companies as a whole have cut back sharply on investment and expansion, in part because of Trump's trade conflicts. That pullback in spending may continue to hamper manufacturers.

Still, Americans are buying more homes, buoyed by lower borrowing costs that stem in part from the

Federal Reserve's three interest rate cuts last year. Home construction surged in December to its highest level in 13 years.

All told, economists have forecast that the economy will expand at a roughly 2% annual rate in the first three months of this year, roughly the same as its 2.1% annual growth in the final three months of last year.

McConnell remaking Senate in age of Trump, impeachment

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Long before Donald Trump's impeachment landed in the Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had one piece of advice for the president: Focus on the House.

Get it up. Use maximum effort. Make sure Republicans are united. And leave the Senate to him.

The Republican leader encouraged the president not to turn attention on wayward GOP senators, like Mitt Romney, who were "troubled" by Trump's actions toward Ukraine, but to stir the partisan passions of the House.

It was the GOP leader's central strategy to produce as partisan an impeachment as possible -- too polarizing for any centrists to touch -- to secure Republican acquittal in the Senate.

"He understood right from the start, this was crooked politics," said Trump, singling McConnell out for praise Thursday at the White House. "You did a fantastic job."

In the aftermath of only the third presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history, McConnell's power over the Senate is now without doubt. His approach reflects the times of the Trump era, but also is shaping them.

Even before the senators even took the oath to uphold "impartial justice," it was all but over. The Senate would have nowhere near the two-thirds majority needed to convict the president. McConnell announced he was not an impartial juror, but one working closely with the White House, and few strayed from his plan for speedy acquittal.

The Kentucky Republican may be less "Master of the Senate," as historian Robert Caro indelibly labeled Lyndon B. Johnson, than master of a Senate that is being transformed in the age of Trump.

McConnell's political brand centers on being an institutionalist, a keeper of traditions of the Senate he yearned to join since young adulthood. Yet in leading the majority, he is breaking old norms, introducing new ones and capitalizing on Trump's hold over the party.

Much like the way he rewrote the Senate rules to ensure confirmation of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court on largely party-line votes, McConnell became the architect of a presidential impeachment trial that drifted from precedent. It was first without new witnesses or Senate deliberations, a shift for the chamber long heralded as the world's greatest deliberative body.

Far from preserving the Senate's historic role, McConnell is demonstrably changing it.

"Mitch McConnell, from the beginning, sided with the president in conceiving the entire impeachment process as illegitimate," said Timothy Naftali, a clinical professor of history at New York University, and co-author of a book on impeachment.

The Senate is often referred to as a cooling saucer, tempering the House heat. McConnell drew on that tradition to impress on senators their historic role in cooling the House's partisan passions.

"House Democrats may have descended into pure factionalism, but the United States Senate must not," he said on the eve of the trial.

"The Senate was designed to stabilize our institutions. To break partisan fevers. To stop short-term passions from destroying our long-term future," McConnell told them.

After McConnell encouraged the president to fire-up partisan fervor in the House to ensure a party-line impeachment vote in December, the Senate followed suit, delivering the first party-line presidential acquittal in the nation's history.

"The passions that he should have been cooling in the Senate were the Republican partisan passions of the House," Naftali said.

Romney was the only Republican to cross party lines to convict.

Ahead of the trial, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said he tried three times to engage Mc-

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Connell on terms before the House's articles of impeachment were transmitted to the Senate. But he says he was rebuffed.

"I said, Mitch, whenever you're ready, I want to sit down and talk," Schumer told The Associated Press. "I got no bites."

When McConnell presented GOP senators with his own plan for organizing the trial, he found little dissent. He had been discussing it privately with them for months. The main objection was his proposed 12-hour sessions, so a hand-scribbled change allowed for shorter days. It was an easy fix.

By the time the trial was ready to begin, "He's already finished," said Josh Holmes, a former McConnell aide. "It's the hallmark of his career."

It wasn't all McConnell's doing that brought Republicans in line. Trump maintains an extraordinary hold on his party. And Democrats own partisan passions against the president made it easier for Republicans to defend him.

The House approved the articles of impeachment in December on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's disciplined timeline, resulting in in the quickest, most partisan impeachment vote in history.

Once the trial began, GOP senators soured on the first day when Schumer protested McConnell's refusal to allow more witnesses, forcing a series of midnight votes that some Republicans saw as overtly partisan.

When Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., asked Chief Justice John Roberts during the trial if he would cast a tie-breaking vote, one key centrist, GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, was done.

"Enough," she said later, announcing she would not vote to convict, blaming all sides for what she viewed as a new partisan low.

Trent Lott, the Republican Senate leader during then-President Bill Clinton's impeachment two decades ago, acknowledges times are different than when his party joined with Democrats to acquit the president of charges stemming from a sex scandal at the White House.

"One thing that's different we had a center," Lott said in an interview. "The center has just disappeared."

What McConnell rarely did, though, throughout the months long impeachment inquiry, was publicly dispute the facts of the case against Trump.

Democrats say Trump pressured a fragile ally, Ukraine, to conduct political investigations of Democratic rival Joe Biden, or risk losing its U.S. military aid. He then obstructed Congress as it probed a whistleblower's complaint about it.

A half-dozen Republican senators spoke of their unease with the president's actions. "Wrong," said Tennessee Sen. Lamar Alexander. "Shameful," said Murkowski. Susan Collins, Marco Rubio, Rob Portman and others called his behavior inappropriate.

But they also said the charges didn't rise to impeachable offenses and it would be better to let the voters in the 2020 election decide. McConnell and Trump both face re-election in fall.

Ahead of Wednesday's vote, McConnell told his colleagues, "The United States Senate was made for moments like this."

Then, without further debate, the Senate voted to acquit.

Campaigner or commander in chief? No difference for Trump

By **AAMER MADHANI** and **JILL COLVIN** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dispatching Cabinet secretaries across the country to woo Iowa voters. Using private cash to finance an official made-for-TV moment. Delivering a State of the Union address that doubled as a campaign kickoff speech. Holding an impeachment acquittal victory rally in the White House East Room.

President Donald Trump made clear this week that he has no qualms about using the powers of his office to court voters in an election year. As he emerges from the impeachment drama, claiming vindication, Trump appears all the more emboldened to blur the lines between public and private endeavors.

That mindset was on full display Thursday as he used the White House as the setting for a scorched-earth victory speech celebrating his acquittal by the Senate following his impeachment by the House.

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Just days earlier, Trump delivered a speech in front of a joint session of Congress that could have been mistaken for a low-key Trump rally, complete with partisan incantations from Republicans in the chamber of "Four more years!" Similar chants have rung out through various rooms of the White House as Trump has hosted events that took on sharply partisan tones.

Several Democratic lawmakers expressed frustration following the State of the Union that Trump went overboard on the politics in what is supposed to be a constitutionally proscribed opportunity to "give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union."

"I get it — presidents use their last SOTU to make the case for re-election," Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., wrote on Twitter. "But that crossed a line."

At one point in his address, Trump announced with an Oprah Winfrey-level of drama that Philadelphia fourth grader Janiyah Davis would be getting a scholarship, allowing her to bypass her local public school.

Addressing himself directly to the little girl, seated near first lady Melania Trump in the gallery, Trump said he could "proudly announce tonight that an Opportunity Scholarship has become available, it is going to you and you will soon be heading to the school of your choice!"

It turns out the money wasn't coming from any pot of state or federal dollars.

Instead, it came from the personal accounts of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. Elizabeth Hill, a Department of Education spokeswoman, told The Associated Press that DeVos, who donates her annual salary to charity, would be "directly providing the scholarship for Janiyah" and that the money would go directly to the school of her family's choosing.

Hill declined to say how Davis had come to the department's attention.

Donald Sherman, deputy director of the nonprofit government watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, said the arrangement "certainly could be unethical" and was "at minimum unseemly."

"The president made it sound like this young woman was benefiting from some government program when in fact when she was benefiting from the personal benevolence of Secretary DeVos, which has a political upside for her boss," Sherman said.

It wasn't the only time this week that Trump's Cabinet secretaries took a detour into political efforts.

In the lead-up to the kickoff Iowa presidential caucuses Feb. 3, Trump's campaign flooded the state with more than 80 surrogates, including a long list of senior administration officials. Among those participating: DeVos, as well as the secretaries of commerce, interior, and housing and urban development, and the acting White House chief of staff.

The campaign chartered a 737 to ferry the governmental pep squad to and from Washington.

Under federal law, civilian employees in the executive branch cannot use their titles when doing political work, so announcements about the events referred to Cabinet officials without their titles. They are also prohibited from taking part in any partisan activity while on the clock. The president and vice president are exempt from the rules.

Next week, the campaign will again be deploying top surrogates — this time to polling locations across New Hampshire, which votes Tuesday.

It's a familiar tactic for presidents — Republicans and Democrats alike.

President Barack Obama, for instance, allowed five members of his Cabinet to address the party's 2012 convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, as he sought reelection. But four years later, as his former secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, sought the White House, Obama decided to prohibit Cabinet members from taking part as he sought to separate his administration from the politics of the moment.

Obama was also accused of using other levers of the federal government to bolster his 2012 reelection chances when he took executive action to protect "Dreamer" immigrants who came to the country illegally as children. In 2012, Kathleen Sebelius, Obama's health and human services secretary, was also cited for violating federal law prohibiting Cabinet members from engaging in politics on the clock when she called for the president's reelection and touted the candidacy of another Democrat at an event she was attending in her official capacity.

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Trump, for his part, has repeatedly stepped over the line.

The independent government watchdog Office of Special Counsel has cited the president's top advisers on multiple occasions for violating the Hatch Act, which bars federal employees from engaging in certain political activities, including playing "any active part" in a campaign.

In November 2018, the watchdog found six White House officials in violation for tweeting or retweeting the president's 2016 campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" from their official Twitter accounts. Most notably, the office recommended in June 2019 that White House counselor Kellyanne Conway be fired.

Trump refused to take action against Conway, suggesting that the office was trying to take away her right to free speech.

Trump's policy actions that further his political aims also have raised eyebrows, though it's a murky area, and all presidents advance causes that are in sync with their political aims.

In the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections, as Trump was trying to energize his base voters and stanch Republican losses, the president issued dire warnings from the Oval Office about an "invasion" of migrants and deployed the U.S. military to the southern border in what many saw as a political stunt.

More than a year ago, his administration recognized Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the nation's legitimate president and called on socialist leader Nicolás Maduro to resign. Trump invited Guaidó to attend the State of the Union as a special guest and dedicated a moment in the address to pledging solidarity with the leader.

Susan MacManus, a political scientist at the University of South Florida, saw Trump's shout-out to Guaidó as one of several carefully calibrated moments in the speech aimed at courting a specific voting bloc.

While all presidents pepper the annual address with lines that highlight groups or individuals who are important to their electoral chances, MacManus said, Trump took it to another level with a speech full of moments aimed at various blocs of voters, including African Americans, military families and conservatives.

"This was a classic example of micro-targeting of people that he thinks he needs," MacManus said.

Follow Madhani and Colvin on Twitter and <https://twitter.com/AamerISmad> and <https://twitter.com/colvinj>

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

Syrian army enters key town as Turkey beefs up its troops

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **DARIA LITVINOVA** Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian government troops entered a strategic town in the country's last rebel stronghold Thursday after fierce clashes with opposition fighters, even as Turkey sent reinforcements seeking to curtail the offensive, Syrian state media reported.

The push by President Bashar Assad's forces into towns and villages in the northwestern Idlib province has caused the displacement of more than a half million people in just over two months, compounding a humanitarian disaster in the region packed with internally displaced people. It has also angered Turkey and risked a military confrontation between Turkish and Syrian troops.

The town of Saraqeb, near the Turkish border, has been at the center of intense fighting for days. Opposition fighters pushed out government soldiers who entered it Wednesday, while Turkey sent in new reinforcements Thursday and threatened to use force to compel the Syrian forces to retreat by the end of the month.

The town sits at the intersection of two major highways, one linking the capital Damascus to the north and another connecting the country's west and east.

State news agency SANA and state-run Al-Ikhbariya TV said Syrian army units entered the town before nightfall and were combing it for remaining fighters and explosives.

The Syrian army had earlier besieged the town and at least four Turkish military posts set up to protect Saraqeb against the advance were also besieged.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitoring group, said army

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units entered Saraqeb but had not yet taken control.

Video taken by The Associated Press showed rebel fighters lobbing shells at government troops from around the town of Binnish, northwest of Saraqeb. Fighters stacked artillery shells and burned tires.

"Today, we are burning tires for the war that's hitting the town of Binnish," said one unidentified fighter, pledging to defeat anyone who tried to advance on the town. "Let them come here and we will stomp on their head one after another," he added.

The government advance came after a rare confrontation between Turkey and Syria forces Monday that killed seven Turkish soldiers and a Turkish civilian member of the military, as well as 13 Syrian soldiers.

In Moscow, Russia's Foreign Ministry announced that Russian soldiers had been killed in a northern Syrian province alongside Turkish servicemen, without saying when the incident occurred or how many were killed. The ministry blamed "terrorists" for the deaths.

Russia is a main backer of Assad's forces, while Turkey supports insurgents fighting his government.

Syrian troops have been advancing since December into the country's last rebel stronghold, which spans Idlib province and parts of nearby Aleppo. Turkish troops are deployed in some of those rebel-held areas to monitor an earlier cease-fire that has since collapsed.

The U.N. special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, called for an urgent and sustained cease-fire, restrictions on support for terrorist groups, "serious exploration of a strengthened international presence with the consent of Syrian authorities," and a serious effort to tackle the issue of foreign fighters.

"What we are now seeing creates the very real prospect of a bloody and protracted last stand on the Turkish border, with grave consequences for civilians — and the risk of dispersal of foreign terrorist fighters and ongoing insurgency afterward," he warned at an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Britain, France and the United States.

The Syrian offensive to retake the rebel held areas in the northwest has led to a humanitarian crisis, with more than 580,000 civilians fleeing their homes since the beginning of December, according to the U.N. Many of them have sought safety in areas close to the border with Turkey. At least 53 health facilities have suspended work in the area, according to the World Health Organization.

U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said the "humanitarian catastrophe" has substantially escalated as shelling and airstrikes on dozens of communities force civilians "to move north and west into the ever-smaller enclave controlled by non-government groups." That area is now "dramatically overcrowded" and "needs are growing exponentially," with hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk, in addition to those who have fled since December, he said.

"Time is short. The front-line has now moved to within a few kilometers of Idlib city, the largest urban center in the northwest," Lowcock said.

Turkey has set up four military posts to prevent Syrian government forces from marching deeper into Idlib, Syria's Foreign Ministry said. It said Turkish troops have "flagrantly violated" Syria's border and deployed in several areas, including the villages of Binnish, Taftanaz and Maaret Musreen.

Idlib province is home to some 3 million people, many of them displaced from other parts of Syria in earlier bouts of violence.

The European Union called Thursday for an end to the fighting and urged warring factions to allow aid workers and supplies into the area.

"Bombings and other attacks on civilians in north-west Syria must stop," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and the bloc's Crisis Management Commissioner Janez Lenarcic said in a statement.

They said the EU, a major aid donor, would continue to provide help but that "unimpeded, safe and secure access" was required.

The Observatory said Syrian warplanes on Thursday attacked a military air base in the village of Taftanaz, where Turkish troops deployed recently.

The Observatory said Syrian rebels later launched an attack under the cover of intense Turkish artillery shelling on the village of Nairab, which Syrian troops captured earlier in the week.

The insurgents carried out at least one suicide attack with an armored personnel carrier rigged with

explosives, according to citizen journalist Taher al-Omar, who is embedded with the militants on the edge of the village.

Turkish leaders have repeatedly called on Russia to "rein in" Syrian government forces.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov responded Thursday that Russia was concerned about the concentration of insurgent groups in Idlib and their "continuing activity."

Peskov said the Kremlin doesn't rule out a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to discuss the situation in Syria.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said a delegation from Russia would arrive in Turkey soon for talks on the situation following the attack on Turkish soldiers. He said a follow-up meeting between Erdogan and Putin could also take place "if there is a need."

Associated Press writer Bassem Mroue reported this story in Beirut and AP writer Daria Litvinova reported from Moscow. AP writers Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, Sarah El Deeb in Beirut and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

DNC chair calls for 'recanvass' of Iowa results after delays

By STEVE PEOPLES, JULIE PACE and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of the Democratic National Committee on Thursday called for a "recanvass" of the results of the Iowa caucuses, saying it was needed to "assure public confidence" after three days of technical issues and delays.

"Enough is enough," party leader Tom Perez wrote on Twitter.

Following the Iowa Democratic Party's release of new results late Thursday night, former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg leads Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders by two state delegate equivalents out of 2,152 counted. That is a margin of 0.09 percentage points. Both candidates have declared themselves victorious.

However, there is evidence the party has not accurately tabulated some of its results, including those released late Thursday that the party reported as complete.

The Associated Press is unable to declare a winner.

The state party apologized for technical glitches with an app that slowed down reporting of results from Monday's caucuses and has spent the week trying to verify results. However, it was unclear if the party planned to follow the directive of the national leader to recanvass those results, a process that would likely require state officials to review caucus math worksheets completed at more than 1,600 caucus sites to ensure the calculations were done correctly and matched the reported results.

Iowa chairman Troy Price suggested in a statement Thursday that he would only pursue a recanvass if one was requested by a campaign.

The caucus crisis was an embarrassing twist after months of promoting Iowa as a chance for Democrats to find some clarity in a jumbled 2020 field. Instead, after a buildup that featured seven rounds of debates, nearly \$1 billion spent nationwide and a year of political jockeying, caucus day ended with no winner and no official results.

Campaigning in New Hampshire, Sanders called the Iowa Democratic Party's management of the caucuses a "screw-up" that has been "extremely unfair" to the candidates and their supporters.

"We've got enough of Iowa," he said later Thursday at a CNN town hall. "I think we should move onto New Hampshire."

Iowa marked the first contest in a primary season that will span all 50 states and several U.S. territories, ending at the party's national convention in July.

As first reported by The New York Times, numerous precincts reported results that contained errors or were inconsistent with party rules. For example, the AP confirmed that dozens of precincts reported more final alignment votes than first alignment votes, which is not possible under party rules. In other precincts, viable candidates lost votes from the first alignment tally to the final, which is also inconsistent

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The trouble began with an app that the Iowa Democratic Party used to tabulate the results of the contest. The app was rolled out shortly before caucusing began and did not go through rigorous testing.

The problems were compounded when phone lines for reporting the outcomes became jammed, with many callers placed on hold for hours in order to report outcomes. Party officials said the backlog was exacerbated by calls from people around the country who accessed the number and appeared intent on disrupting the process.

"There was a moment in the night where, it became clear, 'Oh, the phone number just became available to the entire country,'" said Iowa state Auditor Rob Sand, who was answering calls for the party. "It was a pretty big problem."

President Donald Trump relished in the Democratic turmoil.

"The Democrats, they can't count some simple votes and yet they want to take over your health care system," Trump said at a White House event Thursday celebrating his impeachment trial acquittal. "Think of that — no, think of that."

The chaos surrounding the reporting breakdown seems sure to blunt the impact of Iowa's election, which typically rewards winners with a surge of momentum heading into subsequent primary contests. But without a winner called, Democrats have quickly turned their focus to New Hampshire, which holds the next voting contest on Tuesday.

Buttigieg and Sanders will emerge from Iowa's caucuses with the most delegates to the party's national convention, regardless of which one eventually wins the contest. They have each won at least 11 national delegates, with a handful of delegates still to be awarded, according to the AP delegate count. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren has won at least five delegates, while former Vice President Joe Biden has won at least two and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar has at least one.

Iowa will award 41 pledged delegates to the Democratic National Convention this summer. There are 11 delegates still to be awarded as the state party sorts out the final results of the caucuses.

Candidates must win a majority of pledged delegates to the party's national convention to win the Democratic nomination for president on the first ballot. This year, that's 1,191 pledged delegates.

The two Iowa leaders, Buttigieg and Sanders, are separated by 40 years in age and conflicting ideology.

Sanders, a 78-year-old self-described democratic socialist, has been a progressive powerhouse for decades. Buttigieg, a 38-year-old former municipal official, represents the more moderate wing of the Democratic Party. Buttigieg is also the first openly gay candidate to earn presidential primary delegates.

Sanders narrowly lost the Iowa caucuses in 2016 to Hillary Clinton and pushed the party to make changes to the process this year, including releasing three different sets of results: a tally of candidate support at the start of the caucuses, their levels of support after those backing candidates with less than 15% got to make a second choice and the number of state delegate equivalents each candidate receives. The AP will determine a winner based on state delegates.

Given the tight race, former DNC Chairwoman Donna Brazile said the party needs to "get this right" so the eventual nominee isn't saddled with questions of legitimacy.

"It's a combination of embarrassment and not being prepared for the various mishaps that can take place when you try to do something new and different," she said.

Party activist John Deeth, who organized the caucuses in Iowa's most Democratic county, Johnson, said he welcomed a recanvass and would help as needed.

"It makes sense to look everything over again and get it right," he said.

Deeth said that he believed the review would uncover some data entry errors as well as some math and rounding errors in how delegates at each precinct were awarded. Volunteers running the precincts did their best, he said, but likely made some minor mistakes.

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Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writers Ryan J. Foley in Iowa City, Iowa, Will Weissert in Manchester, N.H., Bill Barrow in Atlanta, and Stephen Ohlemacher and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Iowa's state auditor is named Rob Sand, not Rob Sands.

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

Amid irregularities, AP unable to declare winner in Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The Associated Press said Thursday that it is unable to declare a winner of Iowa's Democratic caucuses.

Following the Iowa Democratic Party's release of new results late Thursday night, former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg leads Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders by two state delegate equivalents out of 2,152 counted. That is a margin of 0.09 percentage points.

However, there is evidence the party has not accurately tabulated some of its results, including those released late Thursday that the party reported as complete. The AP's tabulation of the party's results are at 99% of precincts reporting, with data missing from one of 1,765 precincts, among other issues.

Further, even as the Iowa Democratic Party's effort to complete its tabulation of the caucus results continued Thursday, Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez asked the Iowa Democratic Party to conduct a recanvass. That is not a recount, but rather a check of the vote count to ensure the results were added correctly.

Perez sought the recanvass following days of uncertainty about the results reported by the Iowa Democratic Party, which includes technology problems with the mobile phone app used by the party to collect results from caucus sites, an overwhelming number of calls to the party's backup phone system and a subsequent delay of several days of reporting the results.

The Iowa Democratic Party suggested it may not comply with Perez's request, issuing a statement that said it would conduct a recanvass if one was requested by one of the candidates.

"The Associated Press calls a race when there is a clear indication of a winner. Because of a tight margin between former Mayor Pete Buttigieg and Sen. Bernie Sanders and the irregularities in this year's caucus process, it is not possible to determine a winner at this point," said Sally Buzbee, AP's senior vice president and executive editor.

The AP will continue to monitor the race, as well as the results of any potential recanvass or recount.

Architect of US peace plan blames Palestinians for violence

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The chief architect of the U.S. blueprint to resolve the decades-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians on Thursday blamed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for soaring tensions and violence in the occupied West Bank since the plan's release last week.

Jared Kushner, the son-in-law and adviser to President Donald Trump who spent nearly three years working on the plan, said leaders who are ready for a state "don't call for days of rage and encourage their people to pursue violence if they're not getting what they want."

He said he thinks Abbas "was surprised with how good the plan was for the Palestinian people, but he locked himself into a position" by rejecting it before it came out.

The Palestinian president is going to different forums and putting forward old talking points when the situation on the ground has changed and "this might be the last chance that they have to actually resolve it in a good way," Kushner said.

Abbas is scheduled to address the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday and then appear at a news conference with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, an opponent of the U.S. plan who was forced to

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resign a decade ago ahead of a corruption indictment that later sent him to prison for 16 months.

Kushner called Olmert's appearance "almost pathetic."

Leaders who had their chances and failed should be encouraging other people's efforts in trying to make peace, "as opposed to trying to grab a headline when you're irrelevant and try ... to get involved in a situation to get some attention," Kushner said.

"It comes from a lot of jealousy that they couldn't get it done themselves," he added.

After briefing the U.N. Security Council at a private lunch at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Kushner told a small group of journalists that the U.S. proposal may be the last chance because the rate of expansion of Israeli settlements may preclude a contiguous Palestinian state.

Right now, Kushner said, "it's very, very difficult to have a contiguous state where you can drive from the top to the bottom."

"If you look at the rate of expansion of Israeli settlements and if you look at the aspirations of the Palestinian people you're about to get to a crossroad where you almost can't come back," he said.

He said the 180-page plan "was what we got Israel to agree to" and the most constructive thing the Palestinians can do is to sit down with the Israelis and go over it "line by line."

"If they would like to meet, we're happy to do it, but we're not going to chase them," Kushner said.

He called his meeting with the Security Council "very constructive," with lots of questions. British Ambassador Karen Pierce, reflecting the comments of other members, called it "interesting and productive."

The U.S. plan, unveiled by President Donald Trump on Jan. 28, envisions a disjointed Palestinian state that turns over key parts of the West Bank to Israel, siding with Israel on key contentious issues including borders and the status of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — for an independent state and the removal of many of the more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these areas.

But under terms of the "peace vision" that Kushner oversaw, all Israeli settlers would remain in place, and Israel would retain sovereignty over all of its settlements as well as the strategic Jordan Valley.

The proposed Palestinian state would be demilitarized and give Israel overall security control. In addition, the areas of east Jerusalem offered to the Palestinians for a capital consist of poor, crowded neighborhoods located behind a hulking concrete separation barrier.

Kushner, who will continue to oversee the peace plan, said he and his team will follow up with the announcement shortly that a U.S.-Israeli commission is being established to turn its "conceptual map" into a detailed map with the goal of making sure "you can have contiguous territory" for a Palestinian state.

It can take "a couple of months" for technical teams to come up with a map, Kushner said, and during that time he and his team plan to consult with European and Middle Eastern governments to further explain the plan.

He said that "there's a ton of cracks" in European unity on the U.S. proposal.

"The European Union was not able to get a consensus statement on this, which shows that there's a lot of people ... interested in working on a new approach, which is good," Kushner said.

In the Arab world, he said, "you saw a wide range of statements. A lot of people put out neutral statements, which is good. You saw people put out supportive statements, which was good. And you saw very few critical statements, which I thought was very interesting."

Arab leaders want to focus on tackling radicalization and extremism and providing economic prosperity for their people, and the international community is "tired of this issue" and wants to see it resolved, Kushner said.

Looking back at the lengthy process of drafting the plan, Kushner said that during four meetings with Abbas, "I never felt like he was willing to get into details, either because he's not a detail oriented person or because he didn't know what he wanted to accomplish."

"He liked high-level principles, but you can't solve problems in high-level principles and so they chose not to meet with us again," Kushner added.

Calling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "the hardest problem in the world" to solve, he said the peace plan

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is "a good first step" to start a discussion "that leads to a better pathway."

"Not doing anything was not an option," Kushner said. "I think the noble thing is to pursue peace and to try to figure out how do you take a complicated problem and make badly needed progress."

Storms sweep over Southeast with rain, wind, floods; 4 dead

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — A powerful winter storm raked the Southeast on Thursday with high winds, rain and floods that killed at least four people and injured several more across a dozen states. Rescue crews repeatedly pulled people from cars that got stuck in high water, but couldn't reach a person whose vehicle disappeared into a rain-swollen creek.

The storm front destroyed mobile homes in Mississippi and Alabama, caused mudslides in Tennessee and Kentucky and flooded communities that shoulder waterways across the Appalachian region. In Florida, high winds prompted the closure of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge spanning Tampa Bay, the Florida Highway Patrol said. Tornado watches were in effect Thursday night from northern Florida up through North Carolina.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency Thursday evening because of heavy rains and extreme flooding in several areas. More than 500 people in and around Richlands, in southwestern Virginia, were displaced by flooding and needed rescue from their homes, he said in a statement.

In Harlan County, Kentucky, two mobile homes floated away as dozens of families were evacuated amid rising water, authorities said.

"It's a very bad situation that continues to worsen by the hour," said Harlan County Judge Executive Dan Mosley.

Rain kept falling over a path of splintered trees and sagging power lines that stretched from Louisiana into Virginia. School districts canceled classes in state after state as bad weather rolled through.

One person was killed and another was injured as high winds destroyed two mobile homes near the town of Demopolis, Alabama, the Storm Prediction Center reported.

The victim, Anita Rembert, was in one of the homes with her husband, her child and two grandchildren, said Kevin McKinney, emergency management director for Marengo County. The man was injured but the children were unhurt, he said.

High winds there left roadsides strewn with plywood, insulation, broken trees and twisted metal. The National Weather Service was checking the site for signs of a tornado.

Weather-related crashes left at least three people dead and numerous authorities pleaded with motorists to avoid driving where they couldn't see the pavement.

A driver died in South Carolina when a tree fell on an SUV near Fort Mill, Highway Patrol Master Trooper Gary Miller said. The driver's name wasn't immediately released.

In North Carolina's Gaston County, a driver was killed after his pickup truck hydroplaned in heavy rain, plunged down a 25-foot (8-meter) embankment and overturned in a creek, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol said, according to news outlets. Terry Roger Fisher was pronounced dead at the scene.

An unidentified man died and two others were injured Thursday when a car hydroplaned in Knoxville, Tennessee, and hit a truck, police said in a news release.

In Pickens, Mississippi, the ceiling caved in and furniture flew around 64-year-old Emma Carter's mobile home. She considered herself lucky after surviving an apparent tornado.

Carter, her two daughters and two grandsons were inside when the strongest winds hit Wednesday afternoon. Her grandson, DeMarkus Sly, 19, told everyone to lie flat and cover their heads as aluminum sheeting from nearby structures slammed into the home.

"We are blessed that nobody got hurt, that nobody got killed," Carter said.

Flooding, meanwhile, forced rescuers to suspend their search for a vehicle missing with a person inside it in north Alabama's Buck's Pocket State Park.

"As the car started shifting because of the water we noticed what appeared to be an arm reaching out," witness Kirkland Follis, who called 911, told WHNT-TV. The vehicle quickly disappeared Wednesday

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in waters too dangerous for divers to search.

In Tennessee, 36-year-old teacher Brooke Sampson was killed and four people were injured Thursday when a rain-soaked tree fell on a van carrying Sevierville city employees, officials said.

The crash, though still under investigation, appeared to have been weather-related according to preliminary information, said Lt. Bill Miller, a spokesman for the Tennessee Highway Patrol.

Tree limbs and fences were toppled when a confirmed tornado hit the Birmingham suburb of Helena, officials said, and some roads and parking lots were covered by floodwaters. A yellow taxi was abandoned in high water early Thursday on an interstate ramp in Birmingham.

Anyone who lives near rivers and lakes in the Tennessee Valley should prepare for rapidly changing water levels, said James Everett, senior manager of the TVA's river forecast center in Knoxville, Tennessee. He said the TVA is managing water levels behind 49 dams to avert major flooding, but with more rain expected next week, the agency may have to release water downstream.

In Kentucky, Harlan, Bell and Knox counties declared states of emergency. Bell Judge-Executive Albey Brock said the heavy rains washed out roads and led to rock slides and water rescues.

In Georgia, a tree crashed onto the interstate in Dunwoody, north of Atlanta, crumpling a car but causing no serious injuries, authorities said. Huge trees toppled and snapped in the state's northwestern Gordon County, smashing a home and blowing roofs off outbuildings.

Students were told to shelter in place while tornado warnings were in effect in the Atlanta suburbs and at the University of Georgia in Athens. Children in the Lawrenceville area huddled in school hallways as the weather moved through.

In southern West Virginia, residents at a nursing home were asked to remain inside after a road leading directly into the facility buckled during heavy rains.

The airport in North Carolina's largest city evacuated a control tower and advised people to shelter in place because of a tornado warning. Charlotte-Douglas International Airport later tweeted that an inspection of its airfield showed no damage. More than 460 flights into and out of the airport were canceled Thursday.

More than 110,000 homes and businesses were without power across the South, according to power-outage.us, and the rain was forecast to continue into Friday across much of the region.

Associated Press staffers Rogelio Solis in Pickens, Mississippi; Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, S.C.; Bobby Calvin in Tallahassee, Fla.; Jeff Martin and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta; Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tenn.; Becky Yonker in Louisville, Ky.; John Raby in Charleston, W.Va.; Kevin McGill in New Orleans; and Jonathan Drew in Raleigh, N.C.; contributed to this report.

Experts scramble, but new virus vaccine may not come in time

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The flu-like virus that exploded from China has researchers worldwide once again scrambling to find a vaccine against a surprise health threat, with no guarantee one will arrive in time.

Just days after Chinese scientists shared the genetic map of the culprit coronavirus, researchers at the U.S. National Institutes of Health had engineered a possible key ingredient for a vaccine they hope to begin testing by April.

Scientists from Australia to France, along with a list of biotech and vaccine companies, jumped in the race, pursuing different types of inoculations.

And Texas researchers froze an experimental vaccine developed too late to fight an earlier coronavirus — SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome — but are pushing U.S. and Chinese authorities to give it a try this time around. Because the new virus is a close cousin of SARS, it just might protect, said Dr. Peter Hotez of Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital.

All that work is coming at lightning speed compared to past outbreaks. Yet many experts agree it still may take a year — if every step along the way goes well — for any vaccine to be ready for widespread use. That's if it's even needed by then.

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Globally, more than 31,400 people are infected and the death toll climbed past 630. The overwhelming majority are in China, but more than 310 people with the illness have been reported in over two dozen other countries.

For now, health officials are isolating the sick to fight spread of the virus, which causes fever, cough and in severe cases pneumonia. With no specific treatment, some doctors also are experimenting with antiviral medicines developed for other conditions.

"Ours is already manufactured and could take off pretty quickly," said Hotez, who created the earlier SARS vaccine with Texas Children's colleague Maria Elena Bottazzi. But "there's still no road map for what you do to make a vaccine in the midst of a devastating public health outbreak."

NIH specialists say rather than chasing outbreaks, it's time to pursue prototype vaccine designs that could work for entire virus families, ready to be pulled off the shelf at the first sign of a new disease.

"We have the technology now. It's feasible from an engineering and biological standpoint," said Dr. Barney Graham, deputy director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases' Vaccine Research Center. Without that step, "we're going to be at risk for new pandemics."

A FASTER VACCINE RECIPE

Traditionally, making vaccines required first growing lots of virus in a lab. The NIH team is pursuing a newer and far faster method: Simply use a piece of the virus' genetic code, called messenger RNA or mRNA, that instructs cells to make a particular protein.

"We think of RNA as the software of life," said Dr. Tal Zaks, chief medical officer of Moderna Inc., which is developing mRNA vaccines for other diseases and working with NIH on the new coronavirus.

Inject the right piece and "you've taught the body to make its own medicine," he explained. As cells produce just that protein, the immune system learns to recognize it, primed to attack if the entire virus ever comes along.

The target: A protein aptly named "spike" that lets the virus bind to cells. It studs the surface of coronaviruses — the new one as well as its cousins SARS, which erupted in China in 2002 and spread to 26 countries, and MERS, or Middle East respiratory syndrome, which emerged in 2012.

Graham's team zeroed in on the RNA responsible for the new virus' production of spike and then — because prior research showed the protein can change shape — engineered a more stable version of it.

Moderna is manufacturing samples of the synthetic mRNA vaccine for NIH to use in animal studies and, hopefully within three months, first-stage safety tests in people. If further testing proves it really works, the hope is scientists could simply swap in a new spike code if another coronavirus comes along.

That's important because after three such outbreaks in less than 20 years, "this is not the last," predicted Dr. Mark Denison, a virologist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. It's key to find vaccine "strategies that go after these unique things common to every coronavirus."

WHAT ELSE IS IN THE PIPELINE

Inovio Pharmaceuticals is pursuing a similar approach with synthetic DNA, and recently reported promising results from first-stage testing of a MERS vaccine. It's collaborating with a Chinese company, Beijing Advaccine, in hopes of being able to test a new vaccine candidate in China later this year.

In France, researchers at the Pasteur Institute are piggybacking on the tried-and-true vaccine against measles. They've had some early success mixing genetic material from other viruses into that vaccine, and now hope to put the immune system on alert against this new coronavirus in the same way.

"The work we're doing now involves making a vaccine against measles but re-engineered in the sense that it has antigens from the new coronavirus," said virologist Frederic Tangy, head of Pasteur's vaccine innovation department.

What about Hotez's old SARS vaccine? In that case a piece of the spike protein was genetically engineered and grown in a lab, a classic vaccine technology compared to the newer and less proven Moderna and Inovio approaches. The Texas researchers showed the vaccine protected animals but in 2016 ran out of money for further testing and froze what was left. Every six months, Hotez thaws a small sample to make sure it's still usable.

CHASING OUTBREAKS

Past outbreaks are full of such missed opportunities: There's no commercial vaccine for MERS even though illnesses still occur. The birth defect-causing Zika outbreak was ending by the time experimental shots were ready to test.

The bright spot: Ebola vaccines. Some candidates began early testing during the massive Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014-2016, although the outbreak waned before scientists had proof they worked. But authorities and vaccine companies kept up the research, and by 2018 shots were ready to help tamp down an outbreak still smoldering in Congo.

The World Health Organization will meet next week to identify promising drug and vaccine candidates for the new coronavirus and fast-track their development, much like happened with Ebola.

"To put it bluntly, we're shadow boxing," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "We need to bring this shadow out into the light so that we can attack it properly."

Associated Press writers Rodrique Ngowi in Boston, Alex Turnbull in Paris and Maria Cheng in London contributed to this report.

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Trump says U.S. operation killed al-Qaida leader in Yemen

By DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the U.S. at his direction has conducted a counter-terrorism operation in Yemen that killed Qassim al-Rimi, an al-Qaida leader who claimed responsibility for last year's deadly shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola, where a Saudi aviation trainee killed three American sailors.

Al-Rimi is a founder of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. The affiliate has long been considered the global network's most dangerous branch for its attempts to carry out attacks on the U.S. mainland. Trump said the U.S. and its allies are safer as a result of his death.

"We will continue to protect the American people by tracking down and eliminating terrorists who seek to do us harm," Trump said.

While Trump confirmed reports that al-Rimi had been killed, he did not say when the U.S. operation was conducted or offer any details about how it was carried out.

Al-Rimi had said in an 18-minute video that his group was responsible for the Dec. 6 shooting at the base. He called the shooter, Saudi Air Force officer Mohammed Alshamrani, a "courageous knight" and a "hero." The shooter opened fire inside a classroom at the base, killing three people and wounding two sheriff's deputies before one of the deputies killed him. Eight others were also hurt.

The shooting focused public attention on the presence of foreign students in American military training programs and exposed shortcomings in the screening of cadets. In January, the U.S. sent home 21 Saudi military students, saying the trainees had jihadist or anti-American sentiments on social media pages or had "contact with child pornography," including in internet chat rooms.

Trump's announcement confirmed earlier indications that al-Rimi had been killed. In late January, a suspected U.S. drone strike destroyed a building housing al-Qaida militants in eastern Yemen. Also, on Feb. 1, Trump retweeted several other tweets and media reports that seemed to offer confirmation that the strike had killed al-Rimi.

AP Source: Bryant memorial set for Feb. 24 at Staples Center

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A public memorial service for Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven others killed in a helicopter crash is planned for Feb. 24 at Staples Center, a person with knowledge of the details told

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The Associated Press on Thursday.

The arena is where Bryant starred for the Los Angeles Lakers for most of his two-decade career and the date 2/24 corresponds with the No. 24 jersey he wore and the No. 2 worn by his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna.

No official announcement about the memorial has been made. The person who provided the information to the AP is knowledgeable about the planning and spoke only on condition of anonymity. The Los Angeles Times was first to report the event, citing two anonymous sources with knowledge of the planning.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has said a memorial would be held but his office had no immediate comment, nor did the Lakers or Staples Center.

Bryant was killed when the helicopter carrying him, his daughter and the others crashed into a mountain-side in Calabasas, California, while flying to a girls basketball tournament at his Mamba Sports Academy. Gianna's team was coached by Bryant and was playing in the tournament.

No cause for the crash has been determined, though a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Board is expected soon.

Fans spontaneously swarmed Staples Center within hours of the Jan. 26 crash, creating a massive memorial of flowers, balloons, jerseys, stuffed toys and basketballs. The items were removed Monday and fans were urged to donate to a Bryant foundation rather than bring more gifts and flowers.

Bryant's widow Vanessa had requested some items, which were to be cataloged and shipped to the family. Flowers will be composted and spread around plants near Staples Center.

Staples, which opened in 1999, has played host to other memorials, including for Michael Jackson and, last year, for rapper Nipsey Hussle. Bryant, who joined the NBA in 1996, played for the Lakers at the Forum for three seasons.

The Los Angeles Clippers and the Memphis Grizzlies have a 7:30 p.m. game the same day at the arena.

A public memorial for Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli, his wife, Keri, and daughter Alyssa will be held Feb. 10 at Angel Stadium of Anaheim. Also killed in the crash were pilot Ara Zobayan and Bryant friends Christina Mauser, Sarah Chester and her daughter Payton.

US lets autonomous vehicle bypass human-driver safety rules

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — For the first time, the U.S. government's highway safety agency has approved a company's request to deploy a self-driving vehicle that doesn't need to meet the same federal safety standards for cars and trucks driven by humans.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration granted temporary approval for Silicon Valley robotics company Nuro to run low-speed autonomous delivery vehicles that were designed without any accommodations for human drivers. That means no side and rear-view mirrors, windshield wipers, steering wheels or brake pedals.

The vehicles previously were subject to federal standards for low-speed vehicles that travel under 25 miles per hour. Those didn't need to have steering wheels, brake pedals or human backup drivers, but were required to have windshield wipers, backup camera displays and mirrors. Nuro's battery-powered vehicles can be monitored and controlled remotely by a human operator, if needed.

The approval is the first sign that NHTSA is moving from abstract statements and voluntary standards governing autonomous vehicles to actual regulation, said Bryant Walker Smith, a University of South Carolina law professor who studies vehicle automation. It's a signal that the agency, which has stated publicly that it doesn't want to stand in the way of the new technology, is likely to approve more vehicles, he said.

"This is the first time that the agency said 'yes we approve this vehicle that does not meet traditional driver-oriented standards,'" he said. "That's a big step because it makes it much more concrete, more real for the agency and really for the public."

Under the temporary approval, Nuro will have to make real-time safety reports to the agency. Nuro also will have to hold regular meetings with the agency and reach out to the community in areas where the

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vehicles will travel.

"NHTSA is dedicated to facilitating the safe testing and deployment of advanced vehicle technologies, including innovative vehicle designs, which hold great promise for future safety improvements. As always, we will not hesitate to use defect authority to protect public safety as necessary," said NHTSA Acting Administrator James Owens.

The agency will use enforcement powers if it finds any evidence of an unreasonable risk to safety, the statement said.

In December Nuro announced plans to use its low-speed delivery vehicles in partnership with Walmart to deliver groceries to customers in Houston. The service was to start early this year and use the vehicles as well as automated Toyota Prius hybrid cars. Nuro also was testing deliveries with Kroger in Arizona and Houston.

Nuro, of Mountain View, California, announced new version of its automated delivery vehicle called the "R2" on Thursday. It's the second generation of a vehicle that's custom built to deliver goods, but not people.

The company said it plans to deploy fewer than 100 vehicles this year, but has permission from NHTSA to eventually run as many as 2,500.

The delivery vehicles, equipped with laser, camera and radar sensors, will travel with regular traffic on public roads.

The exemption from motor vehicle standards from NHTSA also allows Nuro to run its rear cameras all the time. Current standards require backup camera displays to turn off when vehicles are moving forward so the displays don't distract human drivers, the company said.

Nuro said in a statement that the R2 has a front-end that protects pedestrians by collapsing inward. It's also equipped with temperature controls to keep perishable goods or meals fresh.

The vehicles make curbside deliveries to humans who can open the storage compartments with a code that's sent to them and unload the goods.

Nuro said NHTSA's approval came after three years of work with the agency.

"By replacing heavy passenger vehicles utilized for shopping and other errands, Nuro is ushering in a new era of neighborhood-friendly and socially responsible zero-occupant vehicles," the company said in its statement.

Company co-founder and President Dave Ferguson said NHTSA's decision "shows that exemption can mean more safety."

Still unresolved is an application from General Motors to allow a self-driving Chevrolet Bolt that doesn't meet safety standards for human-driven vehicles that travel at higher speeds. GM wants the Bolt to be allowed without a steering wheel or brake pedals.

Tech companies and automakers have been able to test autonomous vehicles without NHTSA approval in the past because they have had steering wheels, brake pedals and other features required of human-piloted cars and trucks.

Women vying for Oscars salute their progress, snubs aside

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — The mood at Diane von Furstenberg's lunch honoring this year's female Oscar contenders could have been downbeat, given the shutout of women directors for Sunday's awards. Instead, it was celebratory and defiant.

The 30-plus nominees who gathered at von Furstenberg's home, tucked into elegant and secluded grounds, cheered as the women spoke in turn. Laura Dern, a best supporting actress nominee for "Marriage Story," kicked things off Wednesday by recalling von Furstenberg's first nominees' lunch six years ago.

A single couch was enough to hold the handful of women, Dern told the packed room, adding, "I look forward to that entire garden to be filled in a few years!"

Von Furstenberg and Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences CEO Dawn Hudson said a record 67 nominations went to women this year, which Hudson called representative of a trend in the academy that

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has long tilted heavily male. Half the newly invited members are women, she said, and the leadership is changing as well.

"When I started with the academy nine years ago there were six female governors, and it was hard for our voices to be heard around the big table," Hudson said. "And today there are 25."

Greta Gerwig, excluded from the best director category for "Little Women" despite its best-picture bid, was on hand briefly before dashing out, it was explained, to get back home to her baby.

"That's OK. As long as she gets the Oscar," a guest called out. Gerwig is a nominee for best adapted screenplay.

Former studio chief Amy Pascal, who produced "Little Women," offered an industry veteran's perspective.

"On behalf of Greta and myself, yeah, it would have been better if she got nominated. But 'Little Women' is the third movie in the history of the Oscars that is produced, directed and written" by women, Pascal said, drawing applause.

That's good, she said, "but more is better."

Krysty Wilson-Cairns, who earned a best original screenplay nod for "1917," said the film has been her passport to many parties and some telling moments.

"Every time I say I'm the writer of '1917,' people go, 'huh?' and those people are unfailingly male. And today, not one single person in this room has gone, 'huh?'" she said. "So i just want to say thank you for that."

Karen Rupert Toliver, a producer of the nominated animated short "Hair Love," marveled at being in the room with her industry "heroes." Toliver was among the few nominees of color attending the lunch in a year that produced only one nod for a non-white actor, Cynthia Erivo in "Harriet."

Women are making impressive strides in documentaries and animation, as was emphasized by the nearly 20 guests with nods in those categories.

Julia Reichert, who earned her fourth and latest nomination for the documentary "American Factory," summoned memories from her early career. One was hearing that a woman can control the family's shopping budget "but you don't want to give her \$5 million to make a movie."

"This is an actual quote from a producer guy back then. And how do we get from there to where we are?" Reichert said, suggesting two reasons.

"We're not accepting patriarchy, not accepting the way the males have done it. We have our own way and we're going to make our own way. The other thing is solidarity, solidarity among women," Reichert said, drawing shouts of "Yes!" from other guests.

Some reinforced the value of sisterhood with their own stories. Kirstine Barfod, who with Sigrid Dyekjaer produced the nominated documentary "The Cave," about a heroic doctor and her staff in war-torn Syria, said it was Dyekjaer's faith in her abilities that helped make her career possible.

Work, not awards, should be the main goal, Dern said in an interview at the lunch.

"We need to take the focus off of the lack of accolades for women and look at the lack of opportunities. You can't say five movies were made by women, and they got snubbed. Well, OK, but of the 300 guys who got to make them, there were a bunch of guys who got snubbed," Dern said. "We need to change the numbers."

Anita Hill, head of a commission scrutinizing sexual abuse and harassment in the entertainment and media sectors, said hearing women of proven value say they are not getting treated fairly "has inspired me to do my work even harder."

Many guests tipped their hat to von Furstenberg, with Pascal calling the fashion magnate a woman who "takes charge every day and doesn't take 'no' for an answer and built her own empire."

Hudson saluted her for her dedication to the long-planned academy museum that is slated to open this year.

Actress Tessa Thompson, a lunch co-host, said the facility will "do justice to the stories of women in film," a promise echoed by the museum's new head, Bill Kramer.

"We pledge to be inclusive. We pledge to tell complete, complicated stories. And we're doing it with your

help," he said. The museum's opening date will be announced soon, Kramer said.

Lynn Elber can be reached at lelber@ap.org and on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/lynnelber>

Chinese doctor who sounded the alarm about the virus dies

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese doctor who got in trouble with authorities in the communist country for sounding an early warning about the coronavirus outbreak died Friday after coming down with the illness.

The Wuhan Central Hospital said on its social media account that Dr. Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old ophthalmologist, was "unfortunately infected during the fight against the pneumonia epidemic of the new coronavirus infection."

"We deeply regret and mourn this," it added.

Li was reprimanded by local police for "spreading rumors" about the illness in late December, according to news reports. The outbreak, centered in Wuhan, has now infected over 28,200 people globally and killed more than 560, triggering travel restrictions and quarantines around the world and a crisis inside the country of 1.4 billion.

The World Health Organization tweeted: "We are deeply saddened by the passing of Dr Li Wenliang. We all need to celebrate work that he did" on the virus.

Within a half-hour of announcing earlier Friday that Li was in critical condition, the hospital received nearly 500,000 comments on its social media post, many of them from people hoping Li would pull through. One wrote: "We are not going to bed. We are here waiting for a miracle."

Li was among a number of medical professionals in Wuhan who tried to warn colleagues and others when the government did not, The New York Times reported earlier this week. It said that after the mystery illness had stricken seven patients at a hospital, Li said of them in an online chat group Dec. 30: "Quarantined in the emergency department."

Another participant in the chat responded by wondering, "Is SARS coming again?" — a reference to the 2002-03 viral outbreak that killed hundreds, the newspaper said.

Wuhan health officials summoned Li in the middle of the night to explain why he shared the information, and police later forced him to sign a statement admitting to "illegal behavior," the Times said.

"If the officials had disclosed information about the epidemic earlier," Li said in an interview in the Times via text messages, "I think it would have been a lot better. There should be more openness and transparency."

In other developments in the outbreak:

YOUNGEST PATIENT

A newborn in China became the youngest known person infected with the virus.

The baby was born Saturday in Wuhan and confirmed positive just 36 hours after birth, authorities said. But precisely how the child became infected was unclear.

"The baby was immediately separated from the mother after the birth and has been under artificial feeding. There was no close contact with the parents, yet it was diagnosed with the disease," Zeng Lingkong, director of neonatal diseases at Wuhan Children's Hospital, told Chinese TV.

Zeng said other infected mothers have given birth to babies who tested negative, so it is not yet known if the virus can be transmitted in the womb.

MORE HOSPITAL BEDS

China finished building a second new hospital Thursday to isolate and treat patients — a 1,500-bed center in Wuhan. Earlier this week, another rapidly constructed, 1,000-bed hospital in Wuhan with prefabricated wards and isolation rooms began taking patients.

Authorities also moved people with milder symptoms into makeshift hospitals at sports arenas, exhibition halls and other public spaces.

All together, more than 50 million people are under virtual quarantine in hard-hit Hubei province in an

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unprecedented — and unproven — bid to bring the outbreak under control.

In Hong Kong, hospital workers demanding a shutdown of the territory's border with mainland China were on strike for a fourth day. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced a 14-day quarantine of all travelers entering the city from the mainland starting Saturday, but the government has refused to seal the border entirely.

QUARANTINED CRUISE SHIPS

Two docked cruise ships with thousands of passengers and crew members remained under 14-day quarantines in Hong Kong and Japan.

Ten passengers confirmed to have the virus were escorted off the Diamond Princess at the port of Yokohama near Tokyo, after 10 others were taken off the previous day. About 3,700 people were confined aboard the ship.

"It's going to be like a floating prison," passenger David Abel lamented on Facebook. He had set out on a 50th wedding anniversary luxury cruise but found himself in his cabin, eating a "lettuce sandwich with some chicken inside."

More than 3,600 people on the other quarantined ship, the World Dream, underwent screening after eight passengers were diagnosed with the virus.

NEW DRUG

Testing of a new antiviral drug was set to begin on a group of patients Thursday, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The drug, Remdesivir, is made by U.S. biotech company Gilead Sciences.

Antivirals and other drugs can reduce the severity of an illness, but "so far, no antivirals have been proven effective" against the new virus, said Thanarak Plipat, deputy director-general of Thailand's Disease Control Department in the Health Ministry. He said there are a lot of unknowns, "but we have a lot of hope as well."

MORE FALLOUT

From Europe to Australia and the U.S., universities that host Chinese students or have study-abroad programs are scrambling to assess the risks, and some are canceling opportunities and prohibiting student travel.

Central banks in the Philippines and Thailand have cut their interest rates to fend off economic damage from the outbreak in China, the world's second-biggest economy, with 1.4 billion people. China is a major source of tourists in Asia, and corporations around the world depend on its factories to supply products and its consumers to buy them.

The organizers of the Tokyo Olympics again sought to allay fears that the 2020 Games could be postponed or canceled because of the crisis.

Associated Press writers Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo and Elaine Kurtenbach in Bangkok contributed to this report.

DHS cuts New Yorkers off from 'trusted traveler' programs

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — New York residents will be cut off from "trusted traveler" programs that speed their re-entry into the country, a senior Homeland Security official said Thursday, blaming a new state law that prohibits immigration agents from accessing motor vehicle records.

Tens of thousands of New Yorkers will face the inconvenience of slower re-entry because of a law that acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Ken Cuccinelli says puts public safety at risk by preventing federal agents from quickly accessing vehicle and criminal records.

"I know other states are looking at laws like this," Cuccinelli said. "We would urge them to reconsider."

The decision to freeze New Yorkers' access to Global Entry and three other programs, which the New York governor dismissed as "extortion," reflects an escalation of the conflict between President Donald Trump and states and cities that have declared themselves sanctuaries for immigrants in the country without legal authorization.

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New York's "Green Light" law, which went into effect in December, allows people to get a driver's license even if they don't have legal residency in the United States. It includes a provision prohibiting the Department of Motor Vehicles from providing any data to entities that enforce immigration law unless a judge orders it to do so.

That makes it a target for Trump, who has made immigration enforcement a cornerstone of his presidency and knows it's a subject that motivates his base. The sweeping move came a day after Trump slammed New York in his State of the Union address.

The DHS action on trusted travelers could have economic consequences. It applies to nearly 30,000 commercial truck drivers enrolled in a program that eases their crossing at four U.S.-Canada ports of entry in upstate New York.

Cuccinelli told reporters on a conference call that the New York law endangers the public and federal agents, who can't quickly confirm someone's identification, check for fugitive warrants or see if a person has a criminal record.

"Obviously, we would urge New York to undo that law and restore some sanity to its own attempts to help preserve public safety," he said.

New York state officials and other administration critics dismissed the DHS action as a political stunt, noting the trusted traveler programs don't require a driver's license. Participants must submit a passport, fingerprints and undergo background checks, allowing them streamlined return to the U.S.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo defended the Green Light law, saying it improved public safety by ensuring drivers have licenses regardless of their immigration status. The state barred immigration agents from accessing the records to prevent the government from using DMV records to deport people in the country without legal residency.

The governor said Homeland Security made no effort to work with state officials to work out an alternative way to access criminal records before deciding to suspend New Yorkers from the trusted traveler programs. "They didn't do that," he said, "They just issued a letter press release immediately because it's all politics."

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat, called the action "political retribution" by the federal government. "There is no factual basis for this policy," she said. "Its true design is to punish New York for embracing diversity and inclusion."

Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat who chairs the House Homeland Security Committee, said suspending access to Global Entry and the other programs will undermine border security and make travel less efficient. "Congress needs to respond to this abuse of power," he said.

Global Entry and the three other traveler programs enable people to enter the U.S. without having to pass through the standard immigration and customs checkpoints.

The permits must be renewed every five years. Cuccinelli said about 175,000 New York residents in trusted traveler programs will be kicked out over the course of 2020 as their permits expire.

At the U.S. Customs House in lower Manhattan, where there is an office in which Global Entry interviews are held, a federal employee was turning away people Thursday if they were New York residents.

DHS will also immediately remove about 50,000 people who were given conditional approval and were awaiting completion of an interview for full membership along with 30,000 who have submitted an application and hadn't yet been approved.

The agency said the export of vehicles from New York will also be "significantly" delayed because the Green Light law hinders its ability to validate documents used to establish ownership.

Cuccinelli said DHS is considering additional penalties against New York and evaluating the progress of a similar proposal in Washington state. "They should know that their citizens are going to lose the convenience of entering these trusted traveler programs just as New York's did," he said.

Other states have allowed people in the country without legal authorization to obtain a driver's license, but New York is the only state that has banned the Department of Motor Vehicles from sharing records with DHS, Heather Swift, a spokeswoman for the agency, said on Twitter.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement recently sent subpoenas to law enforcement in Denver and New

York seeking information on immigrants they hope to deport, and federal prosecutors in New York say they're prepared to take the subpoena to court to enforce contempt charges if law enforcement doesn't comply.

DHS officials have said efforts to interfere with immigration enforcement keep them from upholding U.S. laws and endanger public safety by thwarting the deportation of criminals.

Associated Press writers Ryan Tarinelli in Albany, New York; Deepti Hajela in New York City; and Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump unleashes impeachment fury in acquittal 'celebration'

By JILL COLVIN, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Exulting in his impeachment acquittal, a defiant President Donald Trump took a scorched-earth victory lap Thursday, unleashing his fury against those who tried to remove him from office and pointing ahead to his reelection campaign.

Triumphantly waving newspaper front pages that declared him "ACQUITTED," Trump denounced the impeachment proceedings as a "disgrace" and portrayed himself as a victim of political foes he labeled "scum," "sleaze bags" and "crooked" people. Hours earlier, he unleashed broadsides that stunned the crowd at an annual bipartisan prayer breakfast

"It was evil, it was corrupt, it was dirty cops," Trump declared in a packed White House East Room, where he was surrounded by several hundred of his most loyal supporters. "This should never ever happen to another president, ever."

He conceded nothing in regard to charges that he improperly withheld a White House meeting and U.S. military aid in an effort to pressure Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden and other political matters.

"We went through hell, unfairly," he insisted. "Did nothing wrong."

His comments were a clear sign that, post-impeachment, Trump is emboldened like never before as he barrels ahead in his reelection fight with a united Republican Party behind him. And his remarks stood in stark contrast to the apology offered by President Bill Clinton when he faced the American people in the aftermath of his own impeachment acquittal in 1999.

In a brief Rose Garden address, Clinton was somber: "I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and on the American people."

The only contrition Trump offered was to his own family, apologizing "for having them go through a phony, rotten deal."

Trump had plenty else to say, however. Venting for more than an hour, he ticked off names of the "vicious and mean" people he felt had wronged him: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff and former FBI Director James Comey. And he reveled in the verdict handed down by the GOP-controlled Senate Wednesday, saluting one-by-one in Oscar acceptance speech-fashion the "warrior" GOP lawmakers who had backed him both in the Capitol and on television.

"Now we have that gorgeous word. I never thought it would sound so good," Trump said. "It's called 'total acquittal.'"

One person unmentioned: Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, whose involvement with Ukraine helped drive Trump's push for investigations that led to his becoming just the third president in U.S. history to be impeached by the House.

Trump's remarks, delivered with the aid of scribbled notes but no teleprompter, served as a dramatic contrast to his State of the Union address earlier this week. Standing before Congress Tuesday night, Trump hewed closely to his script and offered an optimistic message to the country with no mention of impeachment.

This time, his remarks were rambling and replete with profane language, comedic interludes and plenty of tangents and asides. He ribbed Ohio Rep. James Jordan, a college wrestling champion, for rarely wear-

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ing a suit jacket, saying, "He's obviously very proud of his body." And he delivered a dramatic reading of text messages between two of his favorite targets, former FBI agent Peter Strzok and lawyer Lisa Page, who played a role in the special counsel's investigation of Russian interference to help Trump in the 2016 election.

"This is really not a press conference. It's not a speech. It's not anything," Trump remarked at one point. "It's a celebration."

He declared that the Republican Party had never been more unified and predicted momentum from the acquittal would carry him to reelection this November.

But he also predicted that he may have to fend off another impeachment challenge, perhaps for something as trivial as jaywalking.

"We'll probably have to do it again because these people have gone stone-cold crazy," the president said.

Earlier Thursday, Trump shattered the usual veneer of bipartisanship at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington by unleashing his fury against those who tried to impeach him, with Pelosi sitting on stage.

"As everybody knows, my family, our great country and your president have been put through a terrible ordeal by some very dishonest and corrupt people," Trump said at the annual event.

His remarks were especially jarring coming after a series of Scripture-quoting speeches, including a keynote address by Arthur Brooks, a Harvard professor and president of a conservative think tank, who had bemoaned a "crisis of contempt and polarization" in the nation and urged those gathered to "love your enemies."

"I don't know if I agree with you," Trump said as he took the microphone, and then he proceeded to demonstrate it.

"I don't like people who use their faith as justification for doing what they know is wrong," he said in an apparent reference to Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump critic who cited his faith in becoming the only Republican to vote for Trump's removal.

"Nor do I like people who say 'I pray for you' when you know that is not so," he said, in a reference to Pelosi, who has offered that message for the president when the two leaders have sparred publicly.

The House speaker, who shook her head at various points during Trump's remarks, later told reporters they were "so completely inappropriate, especially at a prayer breakfast." She took particular issue with his swipe at Romney's faith and said that, yes, she does pray for the president.

Trump later said he "meant every word."

The president and his allies have been on a victory lap since Wednesday, gloating publicly and behind closed doors.

Indeed, the night of the impeachment vote was one of revelry for members of the president's circle. In Washington, many, including Trump's eldest son, Donald Jr., the son's girlfriend, former Fox News host Kimberly Guilfoyle, and the president's former campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, gathered at the president's hotel a few blocks from the White House, one of the few MAGA safe zones in the deeply Democratic city.

The president himself remained at the White House but worked the phones, calling confidants.

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Venezuela rounds up US oil executives as Guaidó visits DC

MIAMI (AP) — Six American oil executives under house arrest in Venezuela were rounded up by police hours after President Donald Trump met Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's chief opponent at the White House, according to family members of the men.

Alirio Zambrano said early Thursday that the executives of Houston-based Citgo were abruptly taken from their homes last night by the SEBIN intelligence police. Zambrano, the brother of two of the six detained men, said their current whereabouts are unknown.

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"We demand to know they are safe but more importantly their freedom!" Zambrano said on social media, adding that he was very worried about the detainees.

The State Department and Maduro's government have yet to comment.

But the move comes two months after the men were granted house arrest and just hours after Trump welcomed opposition leader Juan Guaidó to the White House in a show of support for his flagging, year-old campaign to oust Maduro.

In Washington on Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stood alongside Guaidó and called for the release of the American oil executives.

Maduro condemned Trump's embrace of Guaidó while socialist party boss Diosdado Cabello, who is widely seen as the second most powerful person in Venezuela's government, vowed to retaliate for the meeting.

"Every time they do something, we're going to turn harder to the left and see who squeals," Cabello said Wednesday night in his weekly TV program.

The six men were hauled away by masked security agents while at a meeting in Caracas just before Thanksgiving in 2017. They had been lured to Venezuela in order to attend a meeting at the headquarters of Citgo's parent, state-run oil giant PDVSA.

The group flew out on a corporate jet. They included Tomeu Vadell, vice president of refining; Gustavo Cardenas, head of strategic shareholder relations as well as government and public affairs; Jorge Toledo, vice president of supply and marketing; Alirio Zambrano, vice president and general manager of Citgo's Corpus Christi refinery; Jose Luis Zambrano, vice president of shared services; and Jose Angel Pereira, the president of Citgo.

In recent weeks, speculation has swirled that Maduro's government may release the men in a bid to mend ties with the Trump administration, which has been aggressively pushing for his removal.

The men are awaiting trial on corruption charges stemming from a never executed plan to refinance some \$4 billion in Citgo bonds by offering a 50% stake in the company as collateral.

Prosecutors accuse the men of maneuvering to benefit from the proposed deal.

But many believe the men, five of whom are naturalized U.S. citizens and the other a legal resident, are being held as political bargaining chips as relations between the U.S. and Venezuela have deteriorated. They cite as evidence of irregularities the decisions by Venezuelan Judge Rosvelin Gil to postpone 15 straight times a preliminary hearing.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence in April called for the men's release after meeting with family members at the White House.

"We are going to stand with you until they are free and until Venezuela is free," he said at the time.

It's unclear whether Guaidó discussed the men during his meeting Wednesday with Trump. A senior U.S. official briefing reporters in advance of the visit didn't mention the detention.

Family members in the U.S. last spoke to the men Wednesday afternoon, according to a person familiar with the situation who spoke on the condition of anonymity and wasn't authorized to discuss the matter. Shortly after, the men were all rearrested during raids within a short span of one another, the person said.

Prosecutors rest case in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial

By MICHAEL R. SISK and TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prosecutors in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial rested their case Thursday after more than two weeks of testimony punctuated by harrowing accounts from six women, including some who said he ignored pleas of "no, no, no" and justified his behavior as the cost of getting ahead in Hollywood.

Now Weinstein's lawyers will start calling witnesses of their own as the landmark celebrity trial moves one step closer to a verdict. They haven't said whether Weinstein himself will testify. Doing so could bring big risks because prosecutors would be able to grill him about each of the allegations that jurors have already heard about in vivid detail.

Weinstein attorney Donna Rotunno immediately asked the judge to dismiss the case, arguing that testimony from the woman he is charged with raping "does not in any way show a forcible act by Mr.

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Weinstein." The judge rejected the request.

Among the witnesses the defense is expected to call is a psychologist who specializes in human memory. The defense is looking to raise doubts about the women's recollections of encounters that in some cases are more than a decade or two old.

The criminal charges at the trial in New York City are based on two allegations: that Weinstein raped a woman in March 2013 and that he forced oral sex on another woman in 2006.

The allegations against Weinstein helped fuel the #MeToo movement. If convicted, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

Weinstein, 67, maintains that any sexual encounters were consensual but taking the witness to say so could be risky.

"I tell my clients once you take the stand you have lost your shield which is me, and you are on your own," said defense lawyer Brian McMonagle, who helped secure a mistrial in Bill Cosby's first sexual assault trial in 2017. Cosby was later convicted.

"In my experience as a prosecutor and defense attorney, it is rare to see a client take the stand," he said. "The problem is that some jurors do hold that against you."

Prosecutors ended their case after the last of the other accusers allowed to testify finished telling jurors about about an encounter with the disgraced movie mogul in 2013.

Lauren Marie Young, a model from suburban Philadelphia, testified that Weinstein invited her to his Beverly Hills hotel room, lured her to the bathroom, stripped off his clothes, pulled down her dress and groped her breast. Her allegation is part of a criminal case that was filed against Weinstein in California just as this trial was getting underway.

Additional women, including Young, have been allowed to testify in the New York case as prosecutors attempt to show there was a practiced method to Weinstein's attacks, including inviting women to his hotel room to discuss business, then disrobing and demanding sexual favors.

Her testimony bookended that of the first accuser to testify, actress Annabella Sciorra, who alleges Weinstein barged into her apartment in the mid-1990s, threw her on a bed and raped her as she tried to fight him off by kicking and punching him.

In between, jurors heard similar stories of Weinstein ingratiating himself with much younger women, appearing to show interest in helping their careers before getting them into a hotel room or an apartment and violating them.

Most were aspiring actresses. Sciorra was a star on the rise. Another, the 2006 accuser Mimi Haley, was looking at the time to get more involved in behind-the-scenes aspects of the entertainment business.

The defense planned to open its case Thursday by calling two men who knew Sciorra: the director of a early 1990s film she starred in for Weinstein's movie studio and a former agent who Weinstein later enlisted to figure out if the actress was speaking to reporters about his alleged misconduct.

Over the past few weeks, jurors also were reminded of the complexity of the women's relationships with Weinstein.

For example, the woman Weinstein is charged with raping faced three days of questioning, much of it on cross-examination, as Weinstein's lawyers scoured friendly, sometimes flirtatious emails she sent the film producer after the alleged assault.

The woman acknowledged meeting Weinstein for other sexual encounters. She said she kept in touch because "his ego was so fragile" and that contacting him "made me feel safe."

At one point, Weinstein lawyer Rotunno asked the woman why she would accept favors from "your rapist." The woman turned to jurors and declared: "I want the jury to know that he is my rapist."

Prosecutors also showed jurors emails that suggest it was Weinstein trying to keep their complex relationship afloat, pining for meetings with messages like, "R u meeting me or forgetting me..."

The Associated Press has a policy of not publishing the names of people who allege sexual assault without their consent. It is withholding name of the rape accuser because it isn't clear if she wishes to be identified publicly.

Prosecutors attempted to thwart the defense's focus on some of the women's continued interactions

with Weinstein by calling to the witness stand a forensic psychiatrist who specializes in victim behavior.

Dr. Barbara Ziv, who testified at the 2018 retrial that led to Cosby's sexual assault conviction in Pennsylvania, said most victims in such cases continue to have contact with their attackers for fear of retaliation and because many hope what happened "is just an aberration."

The trial has moved far quicker than anyone involved anticipated. Jurors were initially told to expect six weeks of testimony. Now the case could be decided by mid-February.

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak and Tom Hays at <https://twitter.com/aptomhays>

Universities cancel study-abroad programs amid virus fears

By MICHAEL MELIA and KANTELE FRANKO Associated Press

As concerns about China's virus outbreak spread, universities are scrambling to assess the risks to their programs, and some are canceling study-abroad opportunities and prohibiting travel affecting hundreds of thousands of students.

From Europe to Australia and the United States, universities in countries that host Chinese students have reconsidered academic-related travel to and from China. In the U.S., the cancellations add to the tension between two governments whose relations were already sour.

The scare threatens to cause lasting damage to growing academic exchange programs that reached new heights over the last decade and a half, experts say.

The travel restrictions also complicate planning for conferences and campus events in the U.S. that scholars from China might attend.

"That door has been, if not slammed shut, certainly closed for the immediate future," said Michael Schoenfeld, Duke University's vice president for public affairs and government relations.

After U.S. officials recommended against nonessential trips to China, many universities limited travel there, including Duke, which also operates a campus in China in a partnership with Wuhan University, which is in the city at the center of the outbreak.

Duke Kunshan University closed its campus in Kunshan to nonessential personnel until Feb. 24. The school also helped students who had recently applied for Chinese residency get their passports from local officials so they could travel home and started developing online learning plans for them.

Two of the 12 confirmed U.S. cases are linked to college campuses. One diagnosis was confirmed at Arizona State University and another at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, which said the infected student had recently traveled to Wuhan.

The virus represents an unprecedented disruption for the academic ties between the U.S. and China, said Brad Farnsworth, vice president of global engagement at the American Council on Education.

He recalled the SARS crisis in 2002 and 2003, when the severe acute respiratory syndrome that originated in China killed nearly 800 people.

"The whole higher education relationship was not nearly as complex as it is now," Farnsworth said. "We have many, many more students going in both directions."

Many academic collaborations could be rescheduled if the crisis is resolved quickly, but the longer it lasts, the deeper the damage will be, he added.

China sends far more students to the United States than any other country — more than 369,000 in the last academic year, according to the Institute of International Education. The U.S. typically sends more than 11,000 students to China annually. Lately, the relationship has been strained by visa difficulties, trade conflicts and U.S. concerns about security risks posed by visiting Chinese students.

"This doesn't help the current situation, which is very tense right now," Farnsworth said. "This is a low point in U.S.-China higher education relations, there's no question."

China's consul general in New York, Huang Ping, said Tuesday at a news conference that students who returned to the U.S. from Hubei province, which includes Wuhan, should report to health officials so they can be monitored. He urged the international community to work together to combat the illness, saying

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the "virus is the enemy, not the Chinese."

In Germany, the Berlin Free University and Berlin Institute of Technology each said they would not allow visits from China or approve trips to China until further notice. Paderborn University said it was reviewing any China travel plans made by students or doctoral candidates.

A spokesman for Silesian University in the Czech Republic said the school postponed exchange programs for 38 Chinese students. Several other schools issued similar cancellations, but Masaryk University in the Czech city of Brno said it was still ready to accept 24 students from China who are expected in two weeks.

Tens of thousands of Chinese students enrolled in Australian universities are stranded in their home country. Monash University has extended its summer break to give students and staff more time to return. Classes had been scheduled to begin on March 2.

Most Chinese students studying in the U.S. were already in place for classes when the virus emerged, but worries about the illness have led many schools to cancel plans to send Americans to China for an upcoming semester.

At the University of Arkansas, where China has been a popular study-abroad destination, especially for business students, about 60 students who had been planning to travel there beginning in May saw their programs canceled.

The university made the decision a week ago, before students had to make financial commitments, and it has been working to arrange opportunities in other parts of the world for the affected students, said Sarah Malloy, the university's director of study abroad and international exchange.

One Arkansas student, Lancaster Richmond, had been planning to visit Beijing and Shanghai to fulfill a requirement of her MBA program. Now the 24-year-old is planning to visit Chile this summer instead.

"I was obviously disappointed, but I also understand the university is doing whatever they can in our best interest," she said. "It made my parents a little more comfortable as well. They'd obviously been following the news."

Worries about the virus have altered some rhythms of campus life, including cancellations of Chinese New Year events at the University of Akron and the University of Arizona. But many universities say they are emphasizing precautions such as frequent hand-washing.

Andrew Thomas, chief clinical officer at Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center, said the university is monitoring the situation but trying not to be "over the top to the point that we're causing more concern and fear than is warranted in the community."

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which enrolls over 5,500 students from China, said some of its students from Wuhan who traveled home during winter break opted to self-quarantine or wear masks while going to class to protect others. Several institutions urged anybody returning from China to isolate themselves for two weeks as a precaution.

At Northeastern University, graduate student Lele Luan said that while some fellow Chinese students have taken to wearing masks around campus in Boston, he does not feel the need.

"They told me it's very safe here," he said. "So I don't do anything special to protect myself."

At the University of California, Berkeley, the Tang Center for health services tried last week to share tips on managing anxiety about the virus. But it faced backlash for a list suggesting that "normal reactions" might include xenophobia and "fears about interacting with those who might be from Asia."

Asian Americans quickly expressed outrage on social media. The center apologized for "any misunderstanding it may have caused" and changed the wording.

Melia reported from Hartford, Connecticut, and Franko from Columbus, Ohio. Associated Press writers Karel Janicek in Prague, David Rising in Berlin, Rod McGuirk in Canberra, Australia, and Rodrique Ngowi in Boston also contributed to this report.

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NASA's record-setting Koch, crewmates safely back from space

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — NASA astronaut Christina Koch, who spent nearly 11 months in orbit to set a record for the longest spaceflight by a woman, landed safely Thursday in Kazakhstan along with two International Space Station crewmates.

The Soyuz capsule carrying Koch, station Commander Luca Parmitano of the European Space Agency and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Skvortsov, touched down southeast of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, at 3:12 p.m. (0912 GMT).

Koch wrapped up a 328-day mission after her first flight into space, providing researchers the opportunity to observe the effects of long-duration spaceflight on a woman. The study is important since NASA plans to return to the moon under the Artemis program and prepare for the human exploration of Mars.

Koch smiled and gave a thumbs-up as a support team helped her out of the capsule and placed her in a chair for a quick post-flight check-up alongside her crew mates. Russian space officials said they were in good shape.

Koch, who grew up in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and now lives near the Gulf of Mexico in Galveston, Texas, with her husband, Bob, told The Associated Press last month that taking part in the first all-female spacewalk was the highlight of her mission.

Koch said she and fellow NASA astronaut Jessica Meir appreciated that the Oct. 18 spacewalk "could serve as an inspiration for future space explorers."

Parmitano and Skvortsov spent 201 days in space.

After preliminary medical evaluations, the crew will be flown by Russian helicopters to the city of Karaganda in Kazakhstan. Koch and Parmitano will then board a NASA plane bound for Cologne, Germany, where Parmitano will be greeted by European space officials before Koch proceeds home to Houston.

Skvortsov will be flown to the Star City Cosmonaut Training Center outside Moscow.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 7, the 38th day of 2020. There are 328 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 7, 1964, the Beatles arrived at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport to begin their first American tour.

On this date:

In 1812, author Charles Dickens was born in Landport, Portsmouth, England.

In 1817, America's first public gas street lamp was lighted in Baltimore at the corner of Market and Lemon streets (now East Baltimore and Holliday streets).

In 1940, Walt Disney's second animated feature, "Pinocchio," premiered in New York.

In 1943, the government abruptly announced that wartime rationing of shoes made of leather would go into effect in two days, limiting consumers to buying three pairs per person per year. (Rationing was lifted in October 1945.)

In 1948, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower resigned as U.S. Army chief of staff; he was succeeded by Gen. Omar Bradley.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy imposed a full trade embargo on Cuba.

In 1984, space shuttle Challenger astronauts Bruce McCandless II and Robert L. Stewart went on the first untethered spacewalk, which lasted nearly six hours.

In 1986, the Philippines held a presidential election marred by charges of fraud against the incumbent, Ferdinand E. Marcos. Haitian President-for-Life Jean-Claude Duvalier (doo-VAHL-yay') fled his country, ending 28 years of his family's rule.

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In 1991, Jean-Bertrand Aristide (zhahn behr-TRAHN' ahr-ihs-TEED') was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of Haiti (he was overthrown by the military the following September).

In 1998, the Winter Olympic Games were opened in Nagano, Japan, by Emperor Akihito.

In 1999, Jordan's King Hussein died of cancer at age 63; he was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdullah (ab-DUHL'-uh).

In 2001, death claimed singer-actress Dale Evans at age 88 and author Anne Morrow Lindbergh, widow of aviator Charles Lindbergh, at age 94.

Ten years ago: A nearly completed Kleen Energy Systems power plant in Middletown, Connecticut, exploded, killing six people and injuring 50. Pro-Russian opposition leader Viktor Yanukovich (yah-noo-KOH'-vich) declared victory in Ukraine's presidential runoff, but his opponents rejected the claim, saying the vote was too close to call. (Yanukovich was inaugurated Feb. 25.) The New Orleans Saints rallied for a 31-17 Super Bowl victory over the Indianapolis Colts.

Five years ago: Olympic gold medalist Bruce (now Caitlyn) Jenner was involved in a fatal multiple-vehicle crash on Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu, California, that left one woman dead and several others injured. In a memo released by NBC, Brian Williams said he was stepping away temporarily from the anchor chair of the "NBC Nightly News" amid questions about his recollections of war coverage in Iraq (Williams ended up being permanently removed from the principal anchor chair, but remained with NBC News).

One year ago: Former U.S. Rep. John Dingell, the longest-serving member of Congress in American history, died at his home in Dearborn, Michigan at the age of 92; the Democrat had served in the House for 59 years before retiring in 2014. Democrats launched a sweeping plan to transform the U.S. economy to combat climate change and create thousands of jobs in renewable energy; at least six senators running for president or considering White House bids backed the "Green New Deal." Albert Finney, one of the most respected and versatile actors of his generation, died at a London hospital at the age of 82. Frank Robinson, the first black manager in Major League Baseball, died in Los Angeles at the age of 83.

Today's Birthdays: Author Gay Talese is 88. Former Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., is 85. Reggae musician Brian Travers (UB40) is 61. Comedy writer Robert Smigel (SMY'-guh) is 60. Actor James Spader is 60. Country singer Garth Brooks is 58. Rock musician David Bryan (Bon Jovi) is 58. Actor-comedian Eddie Izzard is 58. Actor-comedian Chris Rock is 55. Actor Jason Gedrick is 53. Actress Essence Atkins is 48. Rock singer-musician Wes Borland is 45. Rock musician Tom Blankenship (My Morning Jacket) is 42. Actor Ashton Kutcher is 42. Actress Tina Majorino is 35. Actress Deborah Ann Woll is 35. NBA player Isaiah Thomas is 31. NHL center Steven Stamkos is 30.

Thought for Today: "A day wasted on others is not wasted on one's self." — Charles Dickens (born this date in 1812, died 1870).

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