

Groton Daily Independent

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**No School today at
Groton Area.
Parent-Teacher Conferences
will run as scheduled starting
at 1:30 p.m.**



“A SOUL MATE IS NOT THE PERSON WHO
MAKES YOU THE HAPPIEST, BUT THE ONE
WHO MAKES YOU FEEL THE MOST.”

-SIERRA DEMULDER

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Rounds Report: Working to Expedite Disaster Recovery Projects February 12, 2020

I introduced bipartisan legislation today that would expedite the start of certain hazard mitigation projects after natural disasters, while grant applicants await federal assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) hazard mitigation grant program.

South Dakotans know all too well the damage that can be done by Mother Nature. When storms strike, communities work to rebuild as quickly as possible. State and local governments shouldn't have to wait on the federal bureaucracy to start simple construction projects following a natural disaster. Our bill will help to make sure federal funds continue to go toward eligible projects even after they've already been started, which makes the entire process more efficient.

Under current law, local stakeholders applying for federal funding for mitigation projects must wait until they receive a final eligibility determination from FEMA before they begin to purchase land or start construction on their project. If local officials purchase land or begin construction without an answer on their eligibility, the project is disqualified from receiving federal assistance. This requirement prevents important resiliency projects from starting and precludes communities from rebuilding as quickly as possible, ultimately making communities wait for years to find out they may not even be eligible.

For more information on our legislation, click [HERE](#).

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Dinger qualifies for state MathCounts Competition

The Northeastern South Dakota MathCounts Chapter Competition was held on Wednesday, February 5, 2020. Groton student, Gretchen Dinger, earned seventh place in the individual division. Gretchen Dinger was also one of the top four individuals that were not on the top two teams. This means that she qualifies for the state competition.

MathCounts is a nationwide coaching and competition program for middle school students that promotes excellence in mathematics. The state competition will be on Saturday, March 14 located in Pierre.



Individual Winners

The individual winners were, front row from left: Nancy Yang, 1st place, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Albert Shore, 2nd place, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Sampada Nepal, 3rd place, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Vanessa An, 4th place, George S. Mickelson Middle School.

Back row from left: Alex Shore, 5th place, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Ernest Ting, 6th place, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Gretchen Dinger, 7th place, Groton Area Middle/High School; Cason Hellwig, 8th place, Roncalli Junior High School.

Top 4 Individuals Advance to State MATHCOUNTS

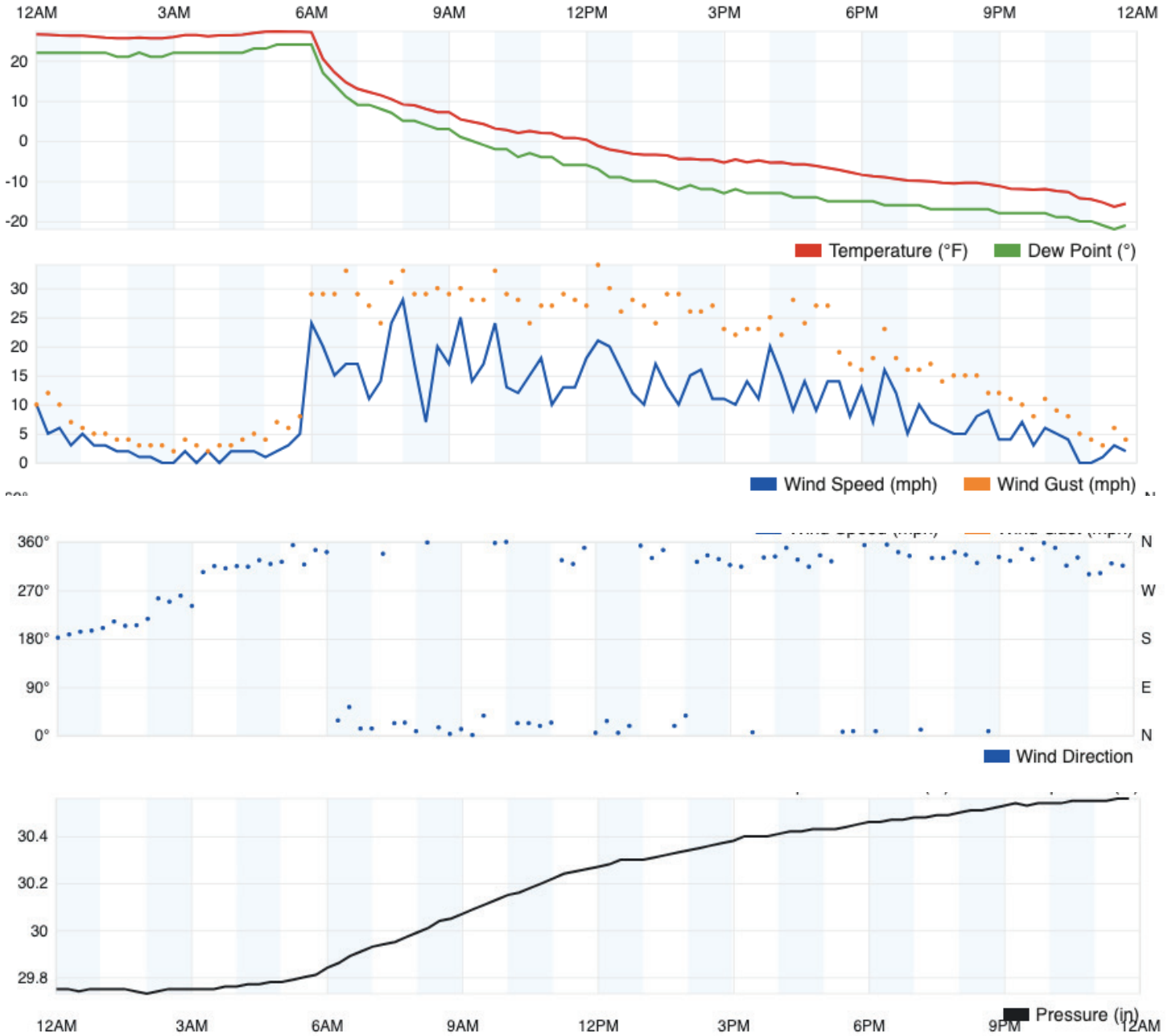
Northern State University hosted the MATHCOUNTS Chapter Competition on February 05, 2020. The individual winners were, front row from left Gretchen Dinger, Groton Area Middle/High School; Cason Hellwig, Roncalli Junior High School; Alex Shore, George S. Mickelson Middle School; Ernest Ting, George S. Mickelson Middle School.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Upcoming Events

Thursday, February 13, 2020

1:30pm- 8:30pm Parent/Teacher Conferences at GHS Gymnasium, Groton Area Elementary School

Friday, February 14, 2020

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg High School

NO SCHOOL - Faculty Inservice

Basketball Double Header at Warner. Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m., Girls Varsity at 6:30 p.m. followed by the Boys Varsity Game.

Saturday, February 15, 2020

Rushmore Challenge Debate at Harrisburg High School

10:00 a.m.: Junior High State Wrestling Tournament at Pierre High School

Basketball Doubleheader with Mobridge-Pollock coming to Groton Area. Girls JV at 2 p.m., Boys JV at 3 p.m., Girls Varsity at 4:30 p.m. followed by the Boys Varsity Game.

Sunday, February 16, 2020

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

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

Monday, February 17, 2020

President's Day - NO SCHOOL

Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli. C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV then Varsity.

Tuesday, February 18, 2020

Girls Varsity at Webster Area. JV game at 6:30 p.m. followed by Varsity Game.

7 pm.: City Council Meeting at Groton Community Center

Thursday, February 20, 2020

Girls Basketball hosts Milbank. C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV then Varsity

Friday, February 21, 2020

Boys Basketball at Milbank. C game at 5 p.m., followed by JV then Varsity.

6:30pm: Elementary PAC Science Night at Groton Area Elementary School






Saturday, February 22, 2020

Basketball: Boys 7th/8th Jamboree at Britton-Hecla High School

10:00am: Wrestling: Varsity Regions at Sisseton

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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Cold	Clear	Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	20% Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 0 °F	Low: -11 °F	High: 28 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 32 °F

Today
-5 to 15°

Tonight
-20 to 5°

 * Coolest east
Wind Chills as low as -35°

COLD TEMPERATURES
Warming Up Friday

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 2/13/2020 4:27 AM Central



Arctic high pressure remains over the region today and tonight. Very cold temperatures and light winds will result in bitter wind chills this morning and tonight mainly from the James Valley east.

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Today in Weather History

February 13, 1995: Snow fell over a broad strip from southwest to northeast South Dakota. The snow began as freezing rain in the northeast, and there were several vehicle accidents attributed to the icing. The most substantial snow was at Custer in the Black Hills with 14 inches. A few amounts of six to eight inches were reported over the plains of the southwest, central, and northeast South Dakota. Strong winds caused some blowing and drifting snow in northeastern South Dakota.

1905: Freezing temperatures were recorded over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. Morning lows of 29 degrees below zero at Gravette, Arkansas, 40 below at Lebanon Kansas, and 40 below at Warsaw Missouri established all-time records for those three states.

The low temperature at Vinita, Oklahoma plummeted to 27 degrees below zero. This temperature would be tied in the city of Watts in January 1930, and at Blackwell and Medford in February 2011. The negative 27-degree reading is cold enough to be the 2nd lowest temperature on record in Oklahoma. The coldest is 31 degrees below zero, recorded at Nowata on February 10th, 2011.

1958: Tallahassee, Florida recorded their most substantial snowfall on record with close to 3 inches.

1995: A National Weather Service Survey Team concluded a weak (F1) tornado occurred at the General Motors Desert Proving Grounds facility in Mesa Arizona. Moderate damage was observed. A roof was damaged, and about 20 vehicles were damaged and moved around. One car was lifted, moved several feet, and set down inside a roped off area containing solar exposure equipment. The tornado traveled northeast and lasted about five minutes.

2000: Late in the day and into the early morning hours of the 14th, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes over southwestern Georgia that killed 19, injured 202, and caused \$35 million dollars in damages. An F3 tornado hit southern Camilla, killing 11 and injuring 175 in the town.

1784 - Ice floes blocked the Mississippi River at New Orleans, then passed into the Gulf of Mexico. The only other time this occurred was during the "Great Arctic Outbreak" of 1899. (David Ludlum)

1885 - The "Friday the 13th" avalanche at Alva, UT, killed sixteen persons, and left thirteen others buried for twelve hours before being rescued. (David Ludlum)

1889 - It was the coldest morning of record along the Gulf Coast. The temperature dipped to 7 above zero at New Orleans LA and Pensacola FL, and plunged to -1 degree at Mobile AL. The mercury dipped to -2 degrees at Tallahassee, the coldest reading of record for the state of Florida. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain over central California. Chews Ridge reported nearly eleven inches of rain in 24 hours, and extensive flooding occurred in San Benito County. The Mount Rose ski resort in Nevada experienced a "white-out" with 60 mph winds and 36 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds in the wake of a storm in the northeastern U.S., gusting to 60 mph at Oswego NY, produced six foot snow drifts in northeastern Ohio. High winds in the mountains of Utah, gusting to 106 mph at the Snowbird ski resort, contributed to a forty car pile-up on Interstate 15, near the town of Bluffdale. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain and flash flooding from central Texas to western Pennsylvania. Up to ten inches of rain deluged western Kentucky in two days, with five day totals ranging up to 13.16 inches at Gilbertsville Dam KY. Flooding caused tens of millions of dollars damage, including 18 million dollars damage at Frankfort KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A slow moving cold front brought heavy snow to Utah, Colorado and Wyoming. Big Horn WY reported 15 inches of snow, and up to 22 inches was reported in Utah. In Colorado, 8 to 12 inches of snow fell over the northwest suburbs of Denver, while 16 to 22 inches was reported in the high mountain elevations west of Fort Collins. Strong winds accompanied the heavy snow, and bitter cold weather followed in its wake. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

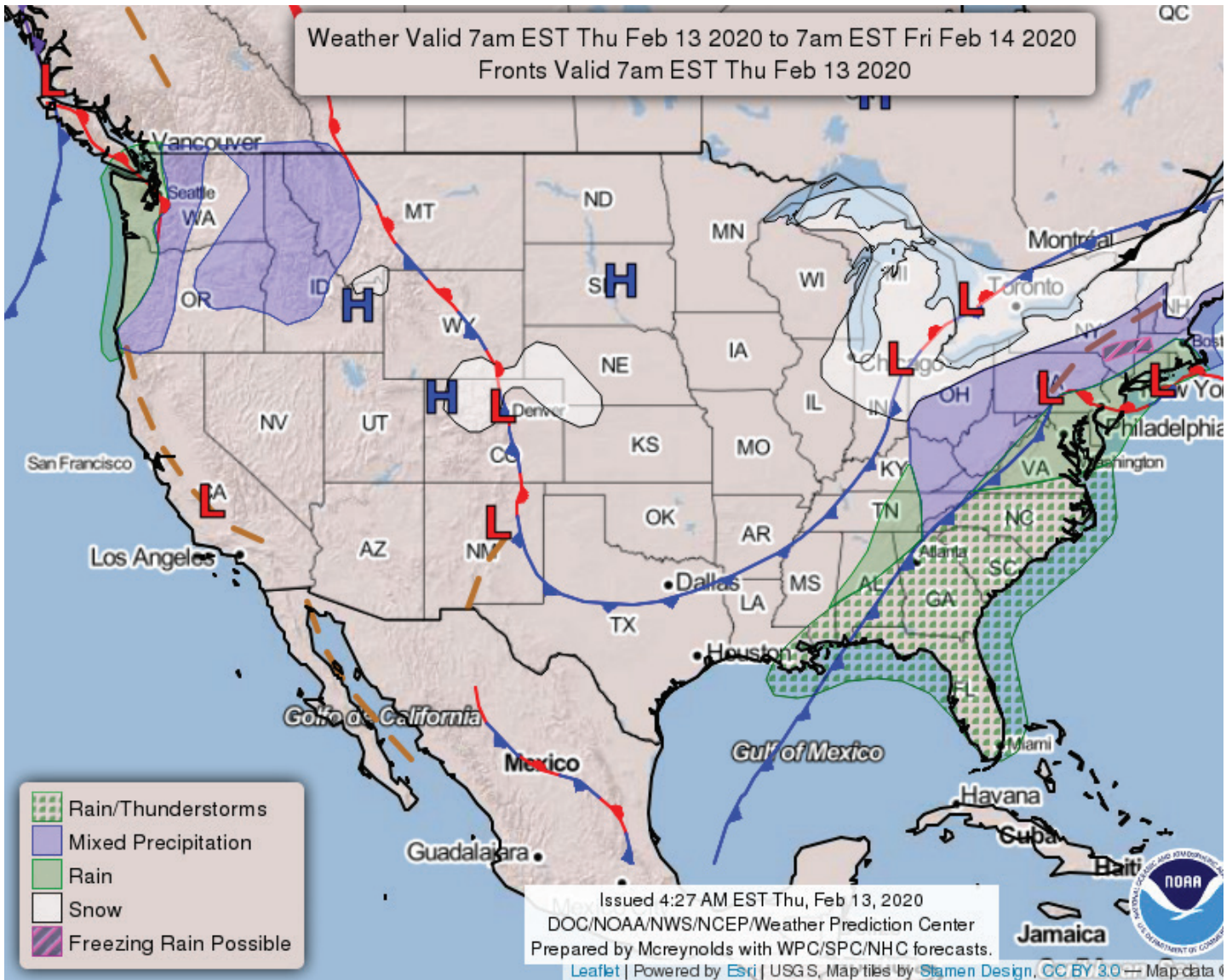
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 28 °F at 5:57 AM
Low Temp: -16 °F at 11:25 PM
Wind: 34 mph at 12:07 PM
Snow

Record High: 62° in 1921
Record Low: -36° in 1905
Average High: 27°F
Average Low: 6°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.17
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.64
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 5:56 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39 a.m.





MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS

President McKinley was having a difficult time making a decision between two qualified candidates for a key position in his cabinet. He labored long and hard knowing that his decision would affect the nation and the world.

One evening he boarded a crowded streetcar on his way home. After finding a seat he noticed one of the men he was considering for the position seated near the entrance. At the next stop, an elderly lady with a large cumbersome package struggled to get onboard.

The candidate for the position turned his eyes, pretending that he did not see the lady who was having a difficult time. He kept his seat while he looked out the window as though she did not exist. The president not only helped her with her package, but he also gave her his seat.

The next morning McKinley made his decision. The man's lack of kindness eliminated him from further consideration, and the other man received the appointment.

God is aware of every decision we make and how we live because it reflects who we are and what is important to us. Paul said: "be kind, tenderhearted, and loving toward one another."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make us aware of our decisions and deeds. What we do for and to and with others reflects our love for You. May our deeds always bless others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 03/14/2020 Youth Girls/Boys Basketball Tourney Grades 4th-6th (Baseball/Softball Foundation Fundraiser)
 - 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - 04/04/2020 Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - 04/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
 - 04/25-26/2020 Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
 - 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.
 - 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
 - 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
 - 06/05/2020 Athletic Fundraiser at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
 - 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney (4th of July)
 - 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
 - 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
 - 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
 - 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
 - 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
 - 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
 - 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
 - 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
 - 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
 - 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
 - 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

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News from the Associated Press

Blizzard closes schools in ND, Minn., strands storm chasers

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Forecasters have posted a blizzard warning for the eastern Dakotas and western Minnesota as snow, strong winds and plunging temperatures move in.

The storm is creating difficult travel conditions early Wednesday with a large number of schools canceling classes, including North Dakota State University and Minnesota State University Moorhead.

The blizzard proved too much for researchers tracking the storm in the Red River Valley between North Dakota and Minnesota. Vince Goden, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Grand Forks, North Dakota, told KFGO-AM the NOAA/National Weather Service Severe Storm Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma, sent a mobile, storm-chasing Doppler radar unit to the area to help study the blizzard. But Goden said the storm moved in "a little sooner" than expected, and the radar truck got stranded in a ditch west of Grand Forks early Wednesday.

The North Dakota Department of Transportation says Interstate 29 has reopened in both directions from the Canadian border to the state line of South Dakota. That stretch of interstate, a distance of more than 250 miles (402 kilometers), had been closed because of blowing and drifting snow and areas of near zero visibility.

Meteorologists expected wind gusts to 50 mph and whiteout conditions, especially in open, rural areas. Snow accumulations will be low, at 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) to 2 inches (5 centimeters).

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-02-10-19-35

(one, two, ten, nineteen, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$59,000

Lotto America

13-17-27-29-44, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 5

(thirteen, seventeen, twenty-seven, twenty-nine, forty-four; Star Ball: two; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$7.9 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$40 million

Powerball

14-47-54-55-68, Powerball: 25, Power Play: 2

(fourteen, forty-seven, fifty-four, fifty-five, sixty-eight; Powerball: twenty-five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$70 million

Umude lifts South Dakota over W. Illinois 85-72

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Stanley Umude had a season-high 28 points as South Dakota won its eighth consecutive game, topping Western Illinois 85-72 on Wednesday night.

Umude shot 10 for 13 from the field and grabbed six rebounds.

Tyler Hagedorn had 16 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota (19-8, 9-3 Summit League). Triston Simpson added 15 points and six assists. Tyler Peterson had seven rebounds.

Kobe Webster scored a career-high 29 points for the Leathernecks (5-17, 2-10), who have now lost seven consecutive games. Zion Young added 21 points.

The Coyotes leveled the season series against the Leathernecks with the win. Western Illinois defeated

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South Dakota 82-75 on Dec. 29. South Dakota plays Oral Roberts on the road on Saturday. Western Illinois takes on North Dakota at home on Saturday.

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

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Bill amendment would allow tribal IDs for voter registration

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A Republican lawmaker on Wednesday proposed a bill amendment that would add tribal IDs to the list of documents that can be used to register to vote in South Dakota — a measure aimed at encouraging registration in communities with low voter turnout.

The measure came after House Republicans shot down a similar proposal from Democrats last week.

Rep. Tamara St. John, a Republican from Sisseton and a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, on Wednesday said tribal IDs should be allowed for registration as long as the secretary of state's office has verified the information on voter registration forms, in agreement with the tribe that issued the ID.

The Democratic proposal last week did not require any such memorandum of understanding between individual tribes and the secretary of state. Republicans argued that it would have threatened the security of voter registration.

In the 2018 general election, tribal communities reported some of the lowest voter turnout figures in the state. Native Americans make up 9% of the state's total population.

St. John said the bill strikes a balance between keeping the tribes sovereign and making it easier for people to register to vote.

Tribes in South Dakota have enhanced the security and information on IDs in recent years, adding dates of birth, addresses and holographics. The IDs can be used to go through security at airports and to verify identity at voting booths.

St. John pushed for a Senate committee to amend a bill that would allow people to use state IDs other than driver's licenses to register to vote. The House passed that bill last week, but without the language allowing tribal IDs.

The amendment was unanimously approved by the Senate committee, but the committee did not have enough time to vote on the bill. If the bill is approved, it will be considered by the full Senate. The amended bill would then head back to the House for a vote.

South Dakota tribes speak against 'riot-boosting' penalties

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Native American groups opposed to the Keystone XL oil pipeline told South Dakota lawmakers Wednesday that Gov. Kristi Noem's plan to restore criminal penalties for urging riots would result in peaceful protesters being silenced.

The Republican governor proposed updates to the so-called "riot-boosting" laws after a judge struck down efforts last year to allow the state and counties to prosecute disruptive demonstrations against the pipeline. Several Indian tribes in the state opposed the bill, putting a strain on the governor's relationship with the tribes.

The new proposal sailed through a House committee on Wednesday, as Native American groups testified, prayed and protested at the Capitol.

The bill would update definitions of rioting and "incitement to riot" that are on the books and allow government entities to seek civil fines against people who "urge, instigate, incite, or direct" groups of three or more to using force or violence. The state agreed not to enforce parts of those laws in October as part

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of a settlement with the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Republican governor argues that the proposed laws are designed to protect people's rights to protest peacefully and even includes language to make that clear. She has said the civil penalties would keep taxpayers from having to pay for damage caused by riots.

Lester Thompson, the chairman of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, said the First Amendment already protects a person's to protest. He said the law would put protesters in a defensive position, vulnerable to laws that do not make it clear what constitutes violence during a riot.

"It could be me raising my fist," said Derrick Marks, a committee member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe. "Is that considered riot boosting? Is that considered violence?"

Katie Hruska, a lawyer with the governor's office, told the committee, "There is nothing in this bill that targets protests or criminalize protests in any way."

One of the reasons the judge found parts of a "riot boosting" law passed last year to be unconstitutional was because it was created in response to potential demonstrations against the Keystone XL pipeline. The governor's office has said that this is not the case this year.

Republicans on the House State Affairs committee almost all agreed that the law was necessary. Two Democrats and one Republican voted against the bill. It will next be considered by the Republican-dominated House.

Speaker Steven Haugaard, a Sioux Falls Republican, broke with his party to oppose the bill. He called last year's riot boosting laws "a significant mess." The bills were passed by the Legislature last year three days after Noem introduced it. The state later had to pay \$145,000 in legal fees to the ACLU as part of its legal settlement.

Haugaard said the proposal also puts "unnecessary strain" on the relationship between the state and Native Americans who feel targeted by the bill.

Candi Brings Plenty, a lobbyist for the ACLU and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said the bill "perpetuates the oppression" against Native American people and attempts to silence their protests. She pointed to the history of government actions that have abused Native American people. She organized a prayer and demonstration on the grounds of the Capitol before the committee meeting.

Spencer Gosch, a Republican from Glenham, said, "I don't want to make this a race thing. This is not what this is."

Noem has attempted to repair her relationship with tribes in the state after they opposed last year's riot boosting laws. She held a meeting with representatives from some of the tribes just before the session began to discuss pending legislation. She also opened drafts of this year's riot boosting legislation up to comment from the tribes. Five tribes — the Rosebud Sioux, Crow Creek Sioux, Yankton Sioux, Cheyenne River Sioux, and Oglala Sioux — responded to say they oppose the bill.

Noem has said she thinks the tribes are opposed to the riot boosting bill because they would not support anything to do with Keystone XL. She has tried to build bridges in other areas, and scheduled a press conference shortly after the riot boosting committee meeting to announce the creation of a new student art competition that she said would support Native American art in the state.

Cheyenne River Sioux wants toll revenue for road repair

EAGLE BUTTE, S.D. (AP) — The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe wants to take matters into its own hands to repair flood-damaged roads rather than wait for federal help.

The tribe is exploring the installation of toll booths to fund fixes of infrastructure damage resulting from recent record-setting flooding.

Chairman Harold Frazier says the revenue would also go to future repairs since a majority of the reservation's roads are vulnerable to weather.

Tribal spokesman Remi Bald Eagle tells the Rapid City Journal toll booths would be placed at entrances to state and federal roads that are on reservation land.

Bald Eagle said the tribe is studying how many vehicles pass through the reservation, what the toll price

should be, and whether there would be any negative repercussions to installing the booths.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, Feb. 7

State legislature wants outside help for lawsuits. Why not just pass constitutional laws?

For a disturbing number of Republican state lawmakers in South Dakota, the process of pushing poorly conceived bills is like a chess match. They're always looking one step ahead.

Not only can they somehow find the temerity to support discriminatory transgender legislation, bans on commercial surrogacy or anti-vaccination efforts, but they can start planning for the inevitable legal backlash of lining up against the United States Constitution or federal precedents.

Welcome to HB 1004, another in a series of measures by House Speaker Steven Haugaard seeking to provide greater autonomy to the legislative branch to pursue ideological ambitions without oversight from the governor, attorney general or anyone else with the state's best interests in mind.

HB 1004 would allow the legislative body to "employ legal counsel other than the attorney general ... to represent the Legislature in any court of this state or the United States." It also allows state lawmakers to raid the \$1 million legislative priority pilot program contingency fund to pay for these endeavors.

This would create a Wild West of reckless legislation in a statehouse already known for edicts so questionable they draw national headlines and outrage. To put it bluntly, it would earmark public funds to pay mercenaries to defend the indefensible, almost certainly ending in costly defeat.

These mercenaries would be of a certain ideological bent, of course. In the case of HB 1057, Fred Deutsch's effort to criminalize gender reassignment treatment for minors, the nonprofit Christian conservative group Liberty Counsel has offered to provide legal services when the state is inevitably sued.

For the record, Liberty Counsel believes we are in "a dangerous phase of American history in which government entities force people to reject God's design for His children and punish anyone who refuses to accept the harmful LGBT agenda."

Regardless of your beliefs, the notion of a group promoting discrimination and advocating for a certain religion (or any religion) while legally representing the public interest of taxpayers in South Dakota is a mind-blowing concept even for the GOPers in Pierre.

It's reminiscent of when Alliance Defending Freedom, another anti-LGBTQ group claiming to represent Christian values, offered to defend a doomed transgender bathroom bill in 2016. That disaster in the making was avoided when Gov. Dennis Daugaard vetoed the bill, but who knows where we're headed with this latest round of misguided legislative activity.

In addition to tacitly admitting they're passing legally dubious measures, lawmakers could be signaling a lack of confidence in Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg and his staff, though they didn't say so publicly.

The state took a beating when sued over Gov. Kristi Noem's "riot boosting" law aimed at Keystone XL pipeline protesters, which this editorial board flagged for being unconstitutional upon its passage. The state was forced to pay \$145,000 in legal fees to the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota.

The Republican establishment's decision to support Ravnsborg for attorney general despite a lack of courtroom experience compared to Democratic nominee Randy Seiler could carry the lesson of being careful what you wish for, particularly when public funds and reputations are at stake.

The ACLU, for the record, has already made it clear that they will challenge the constitutionality of Deutsch's transgender bill if it survives the Senate and is either signed by Noem or fights off a veto.

It would be unthinkable to have an outside Christian conservative group represent South Dakota in the ensuing legal proceedings, and almost as disconcerting to have our attorney general do the deed.

What do you call it, exactly, when sensible taxpayers are forced to root against themselves in a courtroom fight over the established rights of fellow citizens? For those of us who have been forced to sit through

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this nonsense far too many times, let's just call it checkmate.

Madison Daily Leader, Jan. 27

Down-river study will help South Dakota

Several Midwest states to the south and east of South Dakota will be working with the Army Corps of Engineers on a new study of Missouri River flows. The study should help South Dakota as well.

The Missouri River is the longest river in America. It starts in western Montana, flows through the Dakotas, then along the borders of Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas before going through Missouri on its way to intersecting with the Mississippi River near St. Louis.

There are 15 dams on the Missouri, most of them very small ones in Montana. Three of the largest five, however, are in South Dakota and are managed by the Army Corps for many purposes, including flood control, navigation, hydroelectric generation, irrigation and environmental protection.

The new study is being funded by the states of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri, along with the Army Corps. Those states have been hit especially hard with flooding in recent years.

The Master Manual is a complicated set of documents dictating how the river's flows are handled. There are often calls to revise the manual when constituents are unhappy.

Among the tougher parts of the job is weather forecasting. Precipitation throughout the Missouri River basin, and the timing of precipitation, are only partly predictable, and weather patterns may be changing with world weather changes.

The state of South Dakota isn't contributing money to the study, but we believe the state will benefit from the study. The 2011 floods were especially damaging and could recur unless the dams are managed differently.

We recognize how long it may take for the study and operating revisions. But we do think we will make progress in preventing massive flooding in upcoming years.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Feb. 11

Vaccination bill is a reckless idea

Needless to say, there is no better metaphor on this one: The proposed immunization bill in the South Dakota Legislature has really hit a raw nerve with a lot of people.

And rightly so, to be honest.

The legislation in question is House Bill 1235, which has been characterized by some as prohibiting schools from mandating that students have immunizations. It reads, "No public or nonpublic post-secondary educational institutions may mandate any immunizations for school entry. A public or private post-secondary educational institution may request any student to submit medical records. No educational institution may use coercive means to require immunization." It would make it a misdemeanor for any school to demand such immunizations. It would also make South Dakota the first state in the country to have no vaccine mandates.

The bill, which was introduced by Rep. Lee Qualm of Platte, has drawn a lot of national attention — which, as we know by now, is NEVER a good sign.

It also veers into the choppy waters of the anti-vaccination, or anti-vaxxer, debate — perhaps unintentionally, but there is no getting around that tie-in.

This is an unfortunate piece of legislation. In seeking a hands-off approach to personal health care and health prevention, it creates the very real danger of exposing more of the population to diseases that might otherwise not be seen as much of a threat.

District 18's lawmakers were in definite agreement on this matter during last Saturday's legislative cracker barrel. They pointed out the importance of vaccinations not only to protecting children from diseases but also in protecting adults. Rep. Jean Hunhoff, who is a nurse, pointed to the recent mumps outbreak in the region as a sign that safeguards are still needed.

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Vaccinations are a sensible line of defense. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, childhood vaccines are 90-99% effective in preventing diseases. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes that childhood immunization in this country has likely prevented about 419 million illnesses, 26.8 million hospitalizations and 936,000 early deaths among children born between 1994-2018.

Vaccinations have largely turned diseases such as polio and rubella that once stalked children into distant threats.

The rise of the anti-vaccination mentality has produced a resurgence of measles and mumps, thus reviving these threats.

That's why the response to — and against — HB 1235 has been so strong among many people. The move away from requiring immunizations is extremely questionable, to put it mildly.

If someone truly opposes vaccinations, the state does have a process that allows waivers for health or religious reasons. That should suffice.

For the large majority of people who see the removal of this mandate as questionable at best and embarrassingly dangerous at worst, the bill makes no sense at all.

Rejecting HB 1235 is the best and healthiest thing lawmakers can do.

Lawmakers getting new revenue estimates for state budget

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Lawmakers will get estimates on Wednesday on just how much money they will have to craft the state budget.

Gov. Kristi Noem estimated in December that the state budget would be tight as the state recovered from weather disasters in the last year. But since then, revenue figures have come in higher than expected. Legislators have said they want to find room in the budget to give pay increases to teachers, state employees, and community service providers.

The state is losing about \$20 million in tax revenue this year because it can no longer tax internet service.

Armed robbery suspect holds officers at bay, takes own life

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a suspect in a Rapid City armed robbery fatally shot himself after fleeing from law enforcement officers and engaging in an hours-long standoff.

The suspect, armed with a gun, held up Boyd's Drug Mart about 3 p.m. Tuesday, according to Rapid City police and the Custer County Sheriff's Office.

Witnesses were able to give police the license plate number of the suspect's vehicle.

A Custer County sheriff's deputy spotted the vehicle a short time later and officers pursued it into Custer where they surrounded it, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"For more than three hours, law enforcement attempted to negotiate with the suspect driver in an attempt to bring the incident to a peaceful resolution," according to a statement from law enforcement.

But the man shot himself around 7:30 p.m. and was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital after first responders tried to save him, the release said.

The man's identification is being withheld until his relatives are notified.

China reports spike in virus cases with new diagnosis method

By YANAN WANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Thursday reported 254 new deaths and a spike in virus cases of 15,152, after the hardest-hit province of Hubei applied a new classification system that broadens the scope of diagnoses for the outbreak, which has spread to more than 20 countries.

Japan also reported its first death, a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalized since early February. Two other places outside mainland China — Hong Kong and the Philippines — have previously confirmed one death each.

The new diagnostic approach came on the same day that Hubei and its stricken capital, Wuhan, replaced

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their top officials in an apparent response to public criticism of local authorities' handling of the epidemic.

The total deaths in mainland China since the outbreak began in December stood at 1,367, with the total number of confirmed cases mounting to 52,526. This figure now includes more than 13,000 cases of "clinical diagnosis" in Hubei, which appears to include those based on a doctors' analysis combined with lung imaging, as opposed to waiting for laboratory test results.

In breaking down the large number of new cases in China, National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said Hubei had adopted a revised diagnosis and treatment plan aimed at accelerating the identification and treatment of patients.

That adds a "clinical diagnosis case" classification to identify suspected cases who appear to have pneumonia so that patients can be accepted as soon as possible and treated as confirmed cases, Mi said, adding that should "reduce severe illness and mortality."

China also appointed new high-level officials in Hubei and Wuhan.

Former Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong succeeded Jiang Chaoliang as the ruling Communist Party chief in the beleaguered province, the Xinhua state news agency reported, while Wang Zhonglin took over from Ma Guoqiang as the party secretary in Wuhan.

The appointments follow the sacking earlier this week of two leaders of the provincial health commission. State media also reported that a slew of others were expelled from the party for transgressions related to the epidemic.

The public has widely criticized local officials for failing to respond quickly and decisively to the new virus. Authorities initially assured people that there was little to no risk of human-to-human transmission, a statement that was later retracted. Wuhan residents said hospitals were overcrowded and lacked sufficient medical supplies. Doctors who tried to share information early on were reprimanded by police for "spreading rumors."

Many countries have implemented travel restrictions on recent visitors to China, which has more than 99% of the world's reported infections.

In an unprecedented measure to contain the disease, recently named COVID-19, the Chinese government has placed the hardest-hit cities — home to more than 60 million — under lockdown.

World Health Organization spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the agency is seeking more clarity from China on the updates to its case definition and reporting protocol.

"It is our current understanding that the new case definition widens the net, and includes not only lab-confirmed cases but also clinically diagnosed cases based on symptoms and exposure," Jasarevic said in an email to The Associated Press.

"The jump in cases today reflects the broader definition," he said.

An advance team of WHO experts has been in China since Monday. The team is here to "discuss specific arrangements for the China-WHO joint mission with the Chinese side," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a daily online briefing.

"The purpose of the joint mission is that experts of both sides can have in-depth communication on the situation and efforts of prevention and control, and come up with advice for China and other affected countries," Geng said.

In Vietnam, official media reported that a village of 10,000 northwest of the capital, Hanoi, was put in lockdown due to a cluster of cases there.

The online newspaper VN Express cited a senior official of Vinh Phuc province as reporting an increase in cases in Son Loi. Vietnam has confirmed 16 cases, most of them in the province.

Japan's Health Ministry announced Thursday that 44 more people on a cruise ship quarantined in the port of Yokohama, near Tokyo, have tested positive for COVID-19. The ship has 218 infections among its 3,700 passengers and crew.

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told reporters five of the patients who were already sent to hospitals for isolation and treatment have severe symptoms and are on artificial respirators or under intensive care.

Another cruise ship, the Westerdam, finally docked Thursday in Cambodia after being turned away by

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several Asian and Pacific governments. No cases of the viral illness have been confirmed among its 1,455 passengers and 802 crew members, according to operator Holland America Line.

Thailand refused to allow the Westerdam to dock this week after it had already been turned away by the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan and Guam over virus concerns.

The Westerdam began its cruise in Singapore last month and its last stop before it was refused further landings was in Hong Kong, where 51 cases of the viral disease have been confirmed.

Associated Press writers Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo, Sopheng Cheang in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, Grant Peck in Bangkok, and researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

Warren Buffett's son helps Colombia kick cocaine curse

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

TIBU, Colombia (AP) — With Colombian military snipers in position, Howard Buffett descends from a helicopter and trudges through the wet grass in steel-toe boots chewed through by his dog's teeth.

Waiting under a tin-roofed shack is a small group of coca farmers. They've never heard of multi-billionaire investor Warren Buffett, but after decades of neglect by their own government they're grateful for the outstretched hand of his eldest son, who they refer to simply as "the gringo."

"There's a saying here: The less you know better," said Rubén Morantes, his leathery skin and calloused hands a testament to a lifetime of tillage in one of Colombia's most-dangerous territories, where outsiders are traditionally mistrusted.

For nearly two decades Buffett has crisscrossed the world giving away part of his father's fortune to promote food security, conflict mitigation and public safety. But his latest gamble is one of the most daunting yet: helping Colombia kick its cocaine curse.

He is focusing on Tibu, heart of the remote, notoriously lawless Catatumbo region bordering Venezuela where Buffett accompanied President Iván Duque.

Tibu has the second largest coca crop in all of Colombia — 28,200 acres (11,400 hectares), according to the United Nations. Drug production as well as violence has skyrocketed in the area since armed groups filled the void left by retreating rebels who signed a peace deal with the government in 2016.

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation has committed to spending \$200 million over the next few years to transform the impoverished municipality into a model of comprehensive state building. Plans include strengthening security forces and helping farmers secure land titles and substitute coca — the raw material for cocaine — with licit crops like cacao.

The first component is building 300 kilometers (185 miles) of roads to connect the municipality's 37,000 residents for the first time with national and international markets. It's a challenge made more difficult by lurking guerrillas who last year detonated a homemade bomb as army engineers were working on the road, killing five people and injuring several.

"The only way we have confidence that farmers can grow legal crops is if they can get those crops to market," Buffett told farmers during a visit last month with Duque to La Gabarra, a rural outpost in Tibu. It was the first time any Colombian president had visited the blood-soaked hamlet.

The plan envisions subsidies and training for farmers as they switch crops, as well as helping them find buyers. It also aims to strengthen infrastructure for local law enforcement.

But some experts worry Buffett's enthusiasm for speeding Colombia's development is no match for entrenched corruption in rural areas run like political fiefdoms. There's also the challenge posed by thousands of Venezuelan migrants who lack roots in the community and are being targeted for recruitment by criminal gangs.

A lot is riding on Buffett's investment.

Not since the start of the U.S.-led Plan Colombia two decades ago have so many resources converged on a single geographical area, said Álvaro Balcázar, who helped the government negotiate with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia the section of the peace deal focusing on illicit crops.

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"There's no precedent for something on such large a scale," Balcázar said. "But the region is strategic for consolidating peace in Colombia."

Like his father, Buffett, 65, has a reputation for folksy, Midwestern plain speech and self-effacing humor. Although he's a three-time college dropout, his father wants him to succeed him as the non-executive chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, the \$550 billion conglomerate that owns companies such as Duracell, Dairy Queen and GEICO insurance as well as major stakes in leading U.S. airlines and banks.

But he's spent much of his adult life roving the world taking wildlife photos and writing books. He's also a corn farmer and made headlines in 2017 by briefly serving as the sheriff of Macon County, Illinois, where he lives and his foundation is based.

He began exploring the world as a teenager on a trip to Soviet-controlled Prague in 1969 to visit one of the many exchange students his mother hosted at their home in Omaha, Nebraska. But his love of travel hasn't been matched by culinary curiosity: In Catatumbo, he carried around a blue, insulated lunch pack containing his requisite PB&J sandwich and a Dr. Pepper.

As a philanthropist, his priority now is helping Colombia and El Salvador, whose fight against drug trafficking has a direct impact on the U.S. Between the two countries he has already spent or committed \$310 million, including the funding in El Salvador of a new police forensics center and a modern system to help the country's prosecutors track criminal investigations.

As a volunteer police officer who logged 678 hours on patrol last year, Buffett has seen firsthand the human toll caused by drug addiction. A few weeks before traveling to Colombia, he and a partner were staking out a motel in Decatur, Illinois, at 1 a.m. when they arrested a man possessing crack. With him was a woman who said she had a drug problem, so Buffett paid for her to stay at the hotel two nights. Later, he referred her to a county rehab facility paid for with a gift from the Buffett Foundation in the hopes she would get help.

"These are people who need our help," he said. "They're not criminals."

He has turned to Latin America after years of focusing much of his attention on Africa and especially Rwanda, where he works with the government on sustainable agriculture. He spent so much time at his farm in South Africa in the 1990s that he obtained permanent residency.

Buffett began working in Colombia in 2008 helping pop star Shakira set up schools in her hometown of Barranquilla. He's also funded an army unit removing thousands of landmines strewn across former conflict zones. Leveraging his business contacts, he established a program to help around 100 families in southern Colombia switch from growing coca to producing high-quality coffee for Nespresso.

While an enthusiastic supporter of the 2016 peace deal, he has nonetheless struck a close relationship with Duque, a law-and-order conservative who rode into office attacking the agreement.

Duque has vowed to slash cocaine production in half by the end of 2023. Production of the drug skyrocketed after his predecessor — Nobel Peace Prize laureate Juan Manuel Santos — halted aerial eradication in 2015 due to health concerns over the herbicides used. But reaching that goal requires huge resources the government doesn't have, as well as overcoming the indifference of urban voters who are removed from the conflict and have their own growing list of demands.

That's where Buffett steps in.

The \$200 million Buffett has pledged for Tibu is more than triple what the government has spent the past two years altogether on public works in 170 high-risk municipalities that are part of a rural development rescue plan mandated by the peace deal. The U.S. Agency for International Development spends \$230 million annually in Colombia, although its projects are spread across the country.

Beyond the big check, long-time partners praise the Buffett Foundation for being independent and nimble. It's funded from an annual gift in Berkshire Hathaway stock by Warren Buffett, so it can take risks few are willing to attempt, development experts say.

"We're accountable mainly to the IRS," jokes Buffett, who sees setbacks like a venture capitalist who must eat crow before finding wild success.

"If you're a charity, and you're going to have your annual banquet to raise a lot of money, you can't

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stand up there and tell people how you had these five failures and this one success. People aren't going to write checks," he said. "We'll make a decision in five minutes if we know what we want to do."

He is skeptical of the U.S. government and United Nations, preferring not to work with either.

"The reason is because we can't depend on them," said Buffett, who said he was burned badly by USAID in 2011 when it abandoned a joint \$10 million seed program for starving farmers in South Sudan just as fighting broke out in the world's newest independent state.

"The bullets started flying and they pulled out. But it's like you're in South Sudan, so of course bullets are going to fly," he said.

Instead, the foundation relies on partners known for delivering results quickly and slim overhead — a combination he says is hard to find among the "beltway bandits" profiting from U.S. foreign aid outlays. One accompanying him to Catatumbo is Portland, Oregon-based Mercy Corps, which is helping farmers sort through Colombia's bureaucratic maze to obtain land titles.

In a nod to his father's reputation for common sense, Buffett seeks frequent counsel from the so-called "Oracle of Omaha."

"He's my sounding board, kind of like my conscience in a way," Buffett said. "But he never asks, 'Why are you doing that?' or 'Why you're taking that risk?'"

In Tibu, after cracking a few jokes and planting a cacao tree, he seemed beside himself with joy even as the presidential committee hustled to quickly depart as heavy fog threatened to maroon them in the middle of nowhere.

"I know Emilio is very worried about leaving," Buffett told the farmers through a translator, referring to Duque's post-conflict adviser, Emilio Archila. "But I'm not, because there's lots of chocolate here."

Joshua Goodman on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/APjoshgoodman>

Sudanese gov't reaches settlement deal with USS Cole victims

By NOHA ELHENAWY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's transitional government said Thursday it has reached a settlement with families of the victims of the 2000 attack on USS Cole in Yemen, in a bid to have the African country taken off the U.S. terrorism list and improve relations with the West.

The settlement is the latest step from Khartoum to end its international pariah status. Earlier this week, Sudan's provisional rulers said they had agreed to hand over longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court to face trial on charges of war crimes and genocide during the fighting in the western Darfur region.

Also, Sudan's interim leader, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, earlier this month met in Uganda with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who announced that Israel and Sudan would normalize relations after decades of enmity. Observers and Sudanese officials have said that the settlement with the USS Cole victims was among the last hurdles faced by Sudan on its path to being removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror.

At the time of the Oct. 12, 2000 attack in the Yemeni port of Aden that killed 17 sailors and wounded more than three dozen others, Sudan was accused of providing support to al-Qaida, which claimed responsibility for the attack.

Today, Sudan's interim authorities are desperate to have its listing by the U.S. as a state sponsor of terror lifted, in order to receive an injection of badly needed funds from international lending institutions. Sudan's justice ministry said that the agreement was signed with the victims' families last Friday but its statement gave no details of the settlement.

There was no immediate comment from Washington.

Sudan's information minister and interim government spokesman, Faisal Saleh, told The Associated Press over the phone that Justice Minister Nasr-Eddin Abdul-Bari had traveled last week to Washington to sign the deal, which included compensations for both those wounded and the families of those killed in the attack.

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He said the figures could not be disclosed because the Sudanese government is still in negotiations to reach a similar settlements with families of victims of the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. More than 200 people were killed in the attacks and more than 1,000 were wounded.

Saleh said, however, that the American side is free to disclose the amount if it wishes to do so.

The initial figures on the table had been in the billions, he said, but Sudan's interim government had "inherited an empty treasury." He said he hoped the international community would be sympathetic to the country's situation.

"We expect the United States and the world to understand and to be supportive instead of imposing more obstacles," he said.

For Sudan, being removed from the U.S. terror list will end the country's economic isolation and allow it to attract much-needed loans from international financial institutions in order to rebuild the economy after the popular uprising last year that toppled al-Bashir and installed the joint civilian-military sovereign council.

The new Sudanese rulers say they were not responsible for the attack on USS Cole and that they had negotiated the deal out of their desire "to resolve old terror claims inherited from the ousted regime" of al-Bashir.

In the USS Cole attack, two men in a boat detonated explosives alongside the U.S. destroyer as it was refueling in Aden. The victims' families, along with the wounded sailors, had sued the Sudanese government in U.S. courts demanding compensations.

In 2012, a federal judge issued a judgment of nearly \$315 million against Sudan but last March, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned that ruling on the grounds that Sudan had not been properly notified of the lawsuit.

Andrew C. Hall, a lawyer who represents survivors of the attack, said at the time that the victims, though disappointed with the ruling, would continue the case, along with a second related case filed by family members of the 17 sailors who died in the attack.

It wasn't clear when the 76-year-old al-Bashir could be handed over to the international court in the Netherlands. He faces three counts of genocide, five counts of crimes against humanity and two counts of war crimes for his alleged role in leading the deadly onslaught on civilians in response to a rebel insurgency in Darfur. The indictments were issued in 2009 and 2010, marking the first time the global court had charged a suspect with genocide.

Saleh also told the AP that the U.S. administration has set the overhaul of the country's security apparatus as another condition to remove Sudan from the terror list.

"The Americans believe the Sudan's support for terror was carried out through its security apparatus," Saleh, said. "So they want to be assured that there has been a radical change" in the way it operates.

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. CHINA VIRUS TOTALS SPIKE China reports 254 new daily deaths and an increase in new daily virus cases of 15,152 after new methodology was applied in the hardest-hit province of Hubei as to how cases are categorized.

2. CANDIDATES SET SIGHTS ON SUPER TUESDAY Nevada votes next, then South Carolina, but Democrats vying for their party's presidential nomination are already looking ahead to the biggest prize on the primary calendar.

3. 'I WAS SHOCKED THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE BABY' Environmental reports obtained by the AP detail accounts of "alarming" birth defects, miscarriages and other health problems among residents living in South Sudan's oil regions.

4. PRO-TRUMP EFFORT RAISES TENS OF MILLIONS IN A MONTH AP learns that groups backing the president raised more than \$60 million in January and have more than \$200 million on hand for November's election, shattering fundraising records.

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5. POMPEO, ESPER FACE PIVOTAL TRIP With tensions between the U.S. and Europe running high over numerous issues, the secretary of state and defense secretary are heading to Germany for an annual security forum.

6. WHO REACHED A DEAL WITH USS COLE FAMILIES Sudan says it's reached a settlement with relatives of the victims of the attack on USS Cole in Yemen which killed 17 sailors, part of an effort by Khartoum to have the country taken off the U.S. terrorism list.

7. BUFFETT'S DRUG WAR Howard Buffett, the eldest son of the billionaire investor, is spending \$200 million to help Colombia kick its cocaine curse.

8. MEDIA SEEK OPEN HEARING ON SAINTS, CHURCH EMAILS News outlets in New Orleans want access to a hearing on the confidentiality of emails between Roman Catholic officials and the city's NFL franchise concerning clergy sex-abuse scandals.

9. SNOOP DOGG SAYS HE'S SORRY After days of blistering criticism, the rapper apologizes to CBS' Gayle King for attacking her over her interview with former basketball star Lisa Leslie about the late Kobe Bryant.

10. ROENICK OUT AT NBC SPORTS The NHL analyst won't return to the network after he was suspended for making sexually suggestive comments about his co-workers during a podcast.

401(k)s hit records as workers sock away more, stocks jump

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — How's your 401(k) doing?

President Donald Trump likes to ask that question around the country, sometimes throwing out big gains like 90% or 95%. The average 401(k) did indeed hit a record last year, although its growth was considerably less than that.

The average 401(k) balance rose 17% last year to \$112,300 from the end of 2018, according to a review of 17.3 million accounts by Fidelity Investments. The average individual retirement account, or IRA, balance rose the same percentage to \$115,400.

Surging markets around the world were a big reason for the growth: The S&P 500 index had one of its best years in decades with a 31.5% return. Investments of all types logged gains, from junk bonds to stocks from developing economies.

But workers' better savings habits also played a big role.

Fidelity said the average worker set aside 8.9% of their pay in their 401(k) in the fourth quarter, a record. Combined with employer matches, the average total savings rate was 13.5% in the quarter, tying its record last reached in the spring of 2019.

"Nobody can control the market, so the behaviors of people contributing to their 401(k)s are what get us the most excited," said Katie Taylor, vice president of thought leadership at Fidelity. "We have people saving 13.5%, which is really close to the 15% that we recommend. That's a great story."

In many cases, workers may not even realize they're saving more. Most employers give the option for workers to automatically increase their contributions each year, without having to do anything. Some employers even automatically sign up their employees for these auto-escalation programs, requiring them to opt out if they don't want their contribution levels to steadily rise.

Such features are on top of programs where employers automatically enroll new hires in the 401(k) plan. They all lean on the power of inertia to help workers build up bigger nest eggs. It's a sharp turnaround from earlier years when workers had to take an extra step to join the 401(k) plan and fill out paperwork whenever they wanted their contribution levels to change.

"There's always a way, if you don't want to do it, where you can unenroll, but these automatic programs have been a game changer," Taylor said.

Consistent contributions — and giving them time to grow — are keys to building bigger portfolios. Among workers who have been in their 401(k) plan for 10 straight years, the average balance rose to a record \$328,200, according to Fidelity.

Such figures, though, count only people who have a 401(k). Many lower-income workers, particularly

at smaller employers, could not save in a 401(k) even if they wanted to because their companies don't offer access to one. Legislation passed late last year aims to make it easier for smaller employers to band together and offer plans.

Nearly half of all U.S. households aged 55 and over, 48%, had no retirement savings at all as of 2016, according to estimates from the Government Accountability Office.

Weinstein jury set to hear closing from #MeToo skeptic

By TOM HAYS and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Closing arguments at the Harvey Weinstein rape trial are set to begin Thursday, with the jury hearing first from a Chicago attorney who's taken #MeToo movement heat for representing the disgraced Hollywood mogul and making provocative mid-trial comments about his case outside of court.

Donna Rotunno faces the tricky task of convincing a Manhattan jury that there are too many inconsistencies and contradictions in the testimony of six Weinstein accusers who took the witness stand to convict her client — all without her breaking a promise made in defense opening statements that jurors wouldn't hear any "victim shaming."

In a podcast interview that aired last week, Rotunno said Weinstein is "well aware of the fact that his life is on the line here" and that he "deserves to have a voice out there."

Weinstein, 67, is charged with raping a woman in a Manhattan hotel room in 2013 and forcibly performing oral sex on a different woman in 2006. Other accusers testified as part of a prosecution effort to show he has used the same tactics to victimize many women over the years.

Weinstein, whose lawyers informed the court on Tuesday that he wouldn't testify, has maintained any sexual encounters were consensual.

The jury of seven men and five woman is scheduled to hear the prosecution closings on Friday before getting instructions on the law from Judge James Burke next week and starting deliberations.

In often emotional testimony stretching over three weeks, Weinstein's accusers described in lurid detail how he lured them to hotels in New York and Los Angeles on the pretense of promoting their acting careers before sexually assaulting them. The defense countered on cross-examination by confronting some with warm emails and other communications with Weinstein that continued for months or even years after the alleged attacks.

The jury has already heard about emails — certain to be a focus of Rotunno's closing — in which the victim of the alleged rape wrote to Weinstein afterward to accept party invitations from him, give him new phone numbers and even express gratitude. One read: "I feel so fabulous and beautiful, thank you for everything."

The lawyer is also likely to highlight the testimony of a friend and former roommate of the same accuser who said she never heard the woman say anything bad about the defendant. Instead, the woman once called Weinstein her "spiritual soulmate," the witness said.

Rotunno's closing argument will come less than a week after she came under fire on social media for a podcast interview in which she blamed victims for getting sexually assaulted. Rotunno told The New York Times' "The Daily" she'd never been attacked "because I would never put myself in that position."

In court, prosecutor Joan Illuzzi-Orbon questioned the timing of the interview and rebuked Rotunno for calling the prosecution's witnesses "liars."

"That was taped a long time ago," Rotunno interrupted, claiming that she hadn't talked to anyone in the media since the case began.

She was later contradicted by a Times spokeswoman, who told reporters the interview was recorded on Jan. 28 — five days after opening statements and the start of testimony.

On Twitter, follow Tom Hays at twitter.com/aptomhays and Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak

For more coverage of Harvey Weinstein's trial visit: apnews.com/HarveyWeinstein

With impeachment over, critics see Trump 'retribution tour'

By **AAMER MADHANI, JONATHAN LEMIRE and MARY CLARE JALONICK** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the week since his acquittal on impeachment charges, a fully emboldened President Donald Trump is demonstrating his determination to assert an iron grip on government, pushing his Justice Department to ease up on a longtime friend while using the levers of presidential powers to exact payback on real and perceived foes.

Trump has told confidants in recent days that he felt both vindicated and strengthened by his acquittal in the Senate, believing Republicans have rallied around him in unprecedented fashion while voters were turned off by the political process, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Since then, Trump and his aides have moved with haste to clear his administration of those he sees as insufficiently loyal, reaching all the way back to the time of former special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Democrats and outside analysts are raising red flags that Trump is exhibiting a post-impeachment thirst for vengeance that's gone beyond bending norms and could potentially cause lasting damage to institutions.

Some Republican senators, including Tennessee's Lamar Alexander, Maine's Susan Collins and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski, said they found Trump's effort to pressure Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy inappropriate. But they also expressed hope following his acquittal that Trump had learned a lesson from the episode.

Murkowski acknowledged Wednesday that "there haven't been very strong indicators this week that he has."

After Trump vented on Twitter this week about federal prosecutors recommending up to nine years in federal prison for his confidant Roger Stone, the Justice Department abruptly announced that it would reevaluate the recommended sentence. Justice officials insisted the timing was coincidental; they'd already been planning to pull the recommendation.

Stone was convicted in November of tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election. The Justice Department move to back away from the sentencing recommendation prompted the four attorneys who prosecuted Stone to quit the case. One left the Justice Department altogether.

In recent days, the White House has yanked a senior Treasury Department nomination away from a former Justice Department official who supervised the prosecutions of several of Trump advisers. The administration also fired an EPA official who claims he was ousted because he was deemed too friendly with Democrats.

Trump even suggested this week that the Pentagon investigate and potentially discipline former White House aide Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who provided damaging testimony about the president in the impeachment inquiry.

That came after White House officials last week told Vindman and his twin brother, also an Army officer who had been detailed to the White House National Security Council, that their services were no longer needed and that they would be reassigned to new duties by the Pentagon. Security then escorted the brothers off White House grounds.

"We are witnessing a crisis in the rule of law in America — unlike one we have ever seen before," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor Wednesday. Schumer called for the Justice Department's independent inspector general to probe the department's action in the Stone case. Later, House lawmakers announced Attorney General William Barr would come before them next month to answer questions.

Former Justice Department officials struggled to recall a precedent, describing it as norm-shattering turmoil that raises troubling questions about the apparent politicization of an agency meant to function

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independent of White House sway.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Michael Bromwich, a former federal prosecutor and Justice Department inspector general who has been representing former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe in a criminal investigation before the same U.S. attorney's office.

Trump turned testy during an Oval Office appearance when reporters asked him about interfering in the Stone case and whether he learned anything from his impeachment ordeal.

He slammed the four prosecutors who recommended the stiff sentence for Stone and asserted they "ought to apologize for a lot of the people whose lives they've ruined."

He described the lesson he gleaned from being just the third president to endure an impeachment trial: "Democrats are crooked. ... They're vicious, they shouldn't have brought impeachment and that my poll numbers are 10 points higher because of fake news."

Trump said he did not order Justice Department officials to change Stone's recommended sentence, though he claimed he would have had the "absolute right to do it" if he had wanted to. He used Twitter early Wednesday to congratulate Barr "for taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not even been brought."

As Democrats called for an investigation, several Republican lawmakers strained to defend Trump's actions.

"Certainly the president is entitled his opinion, and there would have been nothing wrong with the president picking up the phone, as I understand it, and talking to Justice," said Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican. "But I think this is a situation where the tweet was very problematic."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and Trump confidant, said he agreed the sentencing recommendation was excessive, but didn't think the president should have tweeted about an ongoing case.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has shown he doesn't like to wait for anything, let alone the end of a criminal case. But at moments, he has been willing to show restraint.

Early in his presidency, aides say, it took Trump an extraordinary measure of restraint to hold back on firing Attorney General Jeff Sessions in the months after he recused himself from the Russia investigation. The president reluctantly heeded the advice of his advisers and Republican allies not to dismiss the former Alabama senator until after the 2018 midterm elections.

But on the night of the election, as Republicans held onto the Senate but lost the House, Trump turned to those at a campaign party and said, simply, "I'm doing it now." Sessions was asked to resign the next day.

Similarly, Trump knew that the likely outcome of his impeachment trial would be acquittal at the hands of the GOP-controlled Senate. Reluctantly, he acquiesced to the advice of his aides and agreed to wait to retaliate for the probe, which he deemed a conspiracy conjured up by Democrats and the so-called Deep State, until the official verdict was reached.

Now, though, Trump is once again unleashed.

Some of his targets are far out of the public eye. Trump this week withdrew the nomination of Jessie Liu, a former U.S. attorney who oversaw federal prosecutions in the District of Columbia, for a senior Treasury Department post.

Liu had supervised the prosecution of several cases inherited from Mueller's probe into Russian interference into the 2016 election. Among those prosecuted under Liu's watch were Stone, 2016 deputy campaign chairman Rick Gates and former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Last week, a spokeswoman for former national security adviser John Bolton charged that the White House was "suppressing" the publication of Bolton's memoir about his time in the Trump administration with invalid claims that the manuscript includes classified material.

Bolton, according to excerpts of the manuscript leaked to the media during the Senate impeachment trial, says Trump told him he was conditioning the release of military aid to Ukraine on whether its government would help investigate Joe Biden and his son.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, accused Trump of being on a "retribution tour" and suggested that Senate Republicans — with the exception of Utah's Mitt Romney, who voted with Democrats to convict Trump on the abuse of power count — encouraged the president by turning a blind eye to his conduct.

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"It's pretty clear the president of the United States did learn a lesson: the lesson he can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, he can abuse his office, he'll never ever be held accountable by this Senate," Brown said. "

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro, Deb Riechmann, Mike Balsamo, Eric Tucker and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

AP Exclusive: Pro-Trump effort raises over \$60M in January

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pro-Trump groups raised more than \$60 million in January and have more than \$200 million on hand for this year's general election, shattering fundraising records on the path toward a goal of raising \$1 billion this cycle.

The Republican National Committee and President Donald Trump's campaign have raised more than \$525 million since the start of 2019 together with two joint-fundraising committees. The RNC and the Trump campaign provided the figures to The Associated Press. The January haul coincided with most of the Senate's impeachment trial, which resulted in the Republican president's acquittal earlier this month.

RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said, "We already have 500,000 volunteers trained and activated, and this record-breaking support is helping us grow our grassroots army even more."

Trump's 2020 campaign manager, Brad Parscale, said Democrats' "shameful impeachment hoax and dumpster fire primary process" have contributed to the "record-breaking financial support" for Trump's reelection.

"With President Trump's accomplishments, our massive data and ground operations and our strong fundraising numbers," Parscale said, "this campaign is going to be unstoppable in 2020."

The pro-Trump effort said it has gained more than 1 million new digital and direct mail donors since Democrats launched their push to impeach Trump in September 2019. The investigations proved to be a fundraising boon for Trump's campaign, even as the president was personally frustrated by the scar it will leave on his legacy.

The Trump team's haul and cash on hand were twice that of former President Barack Obama's campaign and the Democratic National Committee at the same point ahead of his 2012 reelection.

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

South Sudan buries reports on oil pollution, birth defects

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

PALOCH, South Sudan (AP) — The oil industry in South Sudan has left a landscape pocked with hundreds of open waste pits, the water and soil contaminated with toxic chemicals and heavy metals including mercury, manganese, and arsenic, according to four environmental reports obtained by The Associated Press.

The reports also contain accounts of "alarming" birth defects, miscarriages and other health problems among residents of the region and soldiers who have been stationed there. Residents describe women unable to get pregnant and having excessive numbers of miscarriages, and babies born with severe birth defects.

Abui Mou Kueth's infant son, Ping, was born with six fingers on both hands, one stunted leg, a deformed foot and kidney swelling.

"I was shocked the first time I saw the baby," she said, cradling him in her arms.

She said he was not able to breastfeed and needed special formula. "I am worried about his future."

The AP obtained the reports and supporting documents from people with close knowledge of the oil operations, one of whom works in the industry. The reports have never been released publicly.

The reports, which date as far back as 2013, were presented to the oil companies and South Sudan's

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ministry of petroleum but subsequently buried, according to four people with close knowledge of the oil operations and the documents. All spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of their safety.

"South Sudan is running one of the dirtiest and poorest managed oil operations on the planet," said Egbert Wesselink, the former head of a European coalition of more than 50 non-profit organizations focused on the impacts of the country's oil sector. He worked on the oil fields in South Sudan before the country gained independence in 2011, and now works with PAX, a Dutch-based human rights organization.

"I don't think there's a single major industrial operation on earth that's getting away with this," he said. There's been no clear link established between the pollution and the health problems.

But community leaders and lawmakers in the oil-rich areas in Upper Nile and Unity states -- in the northeast and north of the country bordering Ethiopia and Sudan -- accuse South Sudan's government and the two main oil consortiums, the Chinese-led Dar Petroleum Operating Co. and the Greater Pioneer Operating Co., of neglecting the issue and trying to silence those who have tried to expose the problem.

An AP reporter looking into the pollution and health issues was detained and questioned by government officials and government security forces working on behalf of the oil companies.

Neither company responded to multiple requests for comment on the reports, and did not answer detailed questions sent by email and text message from the AP.

The reports show that the government and the oil companies have been aware for years that contamination from drilling could be causing severe health problems in the local population. But little has been done, local residents say, to clean up the mess. Promises by the government and the oil companies to tackle the pollution have repeatedly been broken, they say.

"People are dying of unknown diseases," said Simon Ngor, a pastor with a church in Melut, a small village in the oil-rich area of Upper Nile state. "The oil company says they're working on it but I don't think they actually are."

The environmental and health problems are particularly damaging in South Sudan, a country that was only established nine years ago and shortly after was torn apart by civil war and famine. It's among the poorest nations in the world and depends on its oil industry to survive.

WASTE PITS, BIRTH DEFECTS

The oil-rich area around Paloch, a city in Upper Nile state, is dotted with exposed pools of toxic water. A chemical junkyard in Gumry town, about 45 minutes from Paloch, was strewn with overflowing containers of black sludge that seeped into the ground and were surrounded by toxic waste when an AP reporter visited in September 2018.

The air inside the yard, which was unsecured and easy to enter, smelled overwhelmingly of chemicals. Rows of stacked shipping containers lined the inner perimeter of the yard, some were left open exposing bags of what appeared to be chemicals. Many containers had labels stipulating there were hazardous toxins inside. Trash was heaped in various corners of the plot.

The junkyard caught fire in May and has yet to be cleaned up, according to a resident who visited in September and spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of their safety.

The AP interviewed more than two dozen people in Paloch and the surrounding areas, and residents reported alarming health problems that echoed those found in the buried reports: babies with birth defects, miscarriages and people dying of unexplained illnesses.

Dr. Bar Alony Wol, the county health department director, pulled out his phone in his small one-room office in Melut and pointed to a photo of a baby girl born in September 2018 with her intestines outside of her body. A few years ago, he said, he saw a baby born with no head.

"We're losing children," said Nyaweir Ayik Monyuak, chairman of the Women's Association in Melut. The 43-year-old lost two children of her own between 2008 and 2011.

She and a dozen other women were crowded on a tattered L-shaped sofa in a dimly lit shed that serves as a meeting place in Melut. One by one, the women took turns telling their harrowing stories.

Six had lost babies in the last 10 years. And all of them knew someone who had given birth to a child with deformities, had struggled to conceive or had miscarriages.

When some of the shyer women were hesitant to speak up, the more vocal ones encouraged them to

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share their experiences.

Ajok Ayel said she lost a child in 2010 and hasn't been able to get pregnant since.

"I'd like to leave if possible," said Jessica Uma, 34, who said she had two miscarriages in 2012 and 2013 and used to get body rashes when showering.

When doctors removed Ngor Maluol's dead daughter after she miscarried in 2018, the baby's head was concave and looked as if she'd been hit, she said.

Many women can't even get pregnant, Monyuak said.

Many of the residents said the health problems got worse after people started drinking water from white containers that began appearing several years ago in markets and along roadsides.

The same containers were strewn about the Dar Petroleum chemical junkyard, with labels saying they contained a chemical demulsifier called Phasetreat, used by the oil company during drilling to separate crude oil from water.

The containers, which were also mentioned in the 2013 report, had hazardous substance warning labels. The chemicals are supposed to be "taken to a suitable and authorized waste disposal site," according to a spokesperson for Clariant, one of the world's leading specialty chemical companies and provider of Phasetreat.

"Under no circumstances should these empty containers be used by people for any reason, in particular for holding drinking water," said Rick Steiner, an oil pollution adviser in Alaska who consults for governments, aid groups and the United Nations on oil spills.

It is unclear how the empty containers were taken from Dar Petroleum's secure compound. It took at least two years for the company to stop people from using them, local residents say.

"The oil company knew what was going on. There is no way the white containers could have left their yard without the staff in charge knowing. But they'll never take responsibility for it," said Ramadan Chan Liol, chairman of the Padang Community Union. The group represents people living around the oil areas in Unity and Upper Nile states and acts as a liaison with the oil company.

THE STUDIES

The four surveys bear out what AP found on the ground, and show that the government and oil companies are aware of the pollution and health problems. But the people who provided the reports to AP said they were purposely buried.

The earliest survey, from 2013, was led by then-Minister of Petroleum, Mining & Industry, Stephen Dhieu Dau, with support from the Ministry of Health.

A group of 10 South Sudanese researchers, including an infectious disease expert, an epidemiologist, several public health specialists and an environmentalist, toured the oil fields in Upper Nile and Unity states. They found that local residents were complaining of increased miscarriages, stillbirths and incidents of "malformed newborn babies" that didn't survive. The report, complete with photos, documented "alarming oil spillage" around some of the facilities and noted many people had drowned in the open ponds created by the oil companies.

In 2016, the same two government ministries as well as the environment ministry sent a team to Paloch to study why soldiers stationed there were falling ill.

Soil and water samples from the area, and biological samples from the soldiers were analyzed at the National Health Laboratory Service in South Africa. They found mercury levels in the water were seven times what is permissible under U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards, and manganese concentrations were 10 times higher than EPA allows, according to a summary of the study obtained by the AP. The chemicals were also found in the soil and in urine samples from some of the soldiers.

"These results are clearly indicating that heavy metals and petrochemicals have contaminated the area," the summary stated, and it recommended more studies to see if the pollution is connected with the health problems.

In July 2018, Greater Pioneer — which is comprised of the state-owned China National Petroleum Corp., the Malaysian state-owned Petronas as well as South Sudanese and Indian drillers — commissioned a study by EnviroCare, a South Sudanese waste management company, to determine the state of some oil

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operations in Unity state that had been abandoned during the country's civil war.

The company didn't do any chemical testing but did find significant oil spillage and water pollution at the waste treatment facility. It said that oil production was likely to have caused public health, safety and security hazards, injuries and accidental deaths, and land and water contamination.

One commissioner is quoted saying "some children were born with missing body parts."

The most recent study, from November 2018, was commissioned by Dar Petroleum to assess the chemical contamination in its oil fields and the surrounding areas.

Researchers took 146 samples of soil, fluids and unidentifiable chemicals and found "extremely high" levels of hydrocarbons — chemicals such as benzene that make up oil and natural gas and can cause serious health effects. It also documented 650 waste pits filled with water contaminated with arsenic and lead, and millions of liters of water contaminated with drilling chemicals sitting in ponds. The report showed at least some waste pit liners had been compromised and that flooding has allowed some chemicals to seep out of the oil field areas.

The report recommended a five-year clean-up that would cost about \$58 million. South Sudan expects its oil industry to generate \$99 million in revenue each month from July 2019 to June 2020, according to the national budget.

But to date no clean-up has been done, residents say.

'PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY'

There is no definitive proof that the pollution or the chemical containers caused the birth defects and other health problems that residents around Paloch are complaining of.

South Sudan's crippling five-year civil war that killed almost 400,000 people and displaced millions has created a dire humanitarian crisis, plunging pockets of the country into famine. Approximately 7 million people are reliant on aid and more than 5.5 million people could go hungry by early this year, according to a statement by the U.N. in December. Years of fighting have impeded people's access to medical care.

Exposure to toxic chemicals such as lead, arsenic, manganese and benzene can cause a variety of health problems including cancer, respiratory problems, impotence and stillbirths, according to the World Health Organization.

South Sudan has the seventh highest rate of pollution-related deaths in the world, according to the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution, an organization of national environment ministries, international development organizations and NGOs.

Two sets of data seen by the AP, one from a local advocacy group focused on the environment and another by the health ministry, noted an increase in birth deformities and premature deliveries in Unity state between 2015 and 2017.

Birth deformities around the oil fields in Ruweng state (formerly part of Unity state), almost tripled between 2015 and 2017, from 19% to 54%, according to an environmental study by the local advocacy group. The group asked not to be identified because it was still gathering information for the report, which has not yet been published because the research is ongoing.

Additionally, an internal letter from the ministry of health in Ruweng state that was intended for South Sudan's national health minister in 2018 documented a nearly threefold increase in premature deliveries between 2015 and 2017, from 41 cases to 118. The letter notes that the data were limited to hospital deliveries and excluded babies delivered at home.

The letter also notes that before oil production in the region, in 1999, "there were no alarming reports of women giving birth to deformed babies, experiencing premature birth(s) amongst other environmental related diseases."

Steiner, the American oil pollution adviser, said there is substantial medical literature linking hydrocarbon exposure with birth defects and that it can reasonably be concluded that petroleum exposure could be a contributing cause of the birth defects in the region.

"The pollution is a public health and environmental emergency," he said.

After the 2018 report on Upper Nile was presented to the government, officials acknowledged the prob-

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lem, calling it a "significant risk to the people living within the vicinity of the oil fields and the surrounding environment," and instructed Dar Petroleum to move ahead with the proposed clean-up, according to a December 2018 letter from the oil ministry seen by the AP.

But Dar Petroleum -- a consortium that includes China National Petroleum and Sinopec, another state-owned Chinese company, along with companies in Malaysia and Egypt and South Sudan's state owned oil company -- never acted, according to two people with close knowledge of the oil operations in the area who didn't want to be named for fear of their safety.

AP called China National Petroleum Corp. and Sinopec multiple times and sent detailed questions by email and fax, but neither company responded. The AP also reached out to Petronas, which did not respond to requests for comment.

South Sudan's 2012 Petroleum Act says anyone working in the oil industry must comply with best international practices on health and safety.

President Salva Kiir acknowledged in a statement in January that there is a pollution problem in the oil fields and surrounding areas, and said he wants to bring proper environmental standards to the country's oil exploration operations.

The government in January asked for proposals from companies to perform an "environmental audit" that will evaluate how to clean up the existing pollution and put in place best practices for future oil exploration.

BROKEN PROMISES

Residents, however, are skeptical, saying the government and oil companies have talked about cleaning up the pollution before.

In July 2018, after local residents complained about the pollution, Dar Petroleum sent a delegation of local leaders and government officials to an environmental lab in Uganda. The visit was organized by EnviroCare and EnviroServ, a waste management company based in South Africa with a branch in Uganda, to discuss cleaning up the oil fields, said Yuahanna Ayuel, the youth chairman in Melut.

But after the trip, residents say, the oil company said the clean-up was too expensive.

"I'm angry," Ayuel said. "Our environment is polluted. It's a problem and it's getting worse."

In February, Phillips Anyang Ngong, a human rights lawyer, sued South Sudan's Ministry of Petroleum, Greater Pioneer Operating Company and Nile Petroleum -- the country's state owned oil company, claiming the oil pollution caused health problems and loss of life and demanding \$500 million for victims. It's the first human rights lawsuit due to oil pollution filed in the country, he said.

"Companies are violating the law and the government is not intervening," he said. "It's a crisis that needs immediate attention now."

But the government doesn't appear to be in a hurry.

South Sudan's petroleum minister, Awow Daniel Chuang, said until there's scientific evidence tying health problems to oil pollution, no conclusions should be drawn.

"Only speculations are being made until scientific evidences are out to see the level of damages created by oil operations. Obviously there shouldn't be conclusions with evidences connected to deformation," he said.

Health experts who have tackled oil pollution in similar contexts say companies often try to hide any connection between pollution and health problems.

"Polluters try as much as possible not to let connections be drawn from pollution to health issues, they try to connect it to something else, like genetics. This is a known tactic," said Nnimmo Bassey, executive director for health at the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, a not-for-profit environmental group based in Nigeria.

Bassey's work focuses on the Niger Delta, where a 2011 U.N. environment report found pollution from over 50 years of oil operations in Ogoniland, Nigeria, penetrated further and deeper than people realized, causing grave health and environmental risks.

"They do it in South Sudan, in Nigeria, everywhere," he said.

That's what baby Ping's father, Cornelious Mayak Geer, believes is happening to his family.

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In July 2019, the Greater Pioneer Operating Company flew the family to Nairobi, Kenya, for what they thought would be medical treatment for Ping. Geer says the company told him that they would first do tests to determine if Ping's deformities were tied to oil pollution. If they found a link, they would pay for treatment, Geer says the company officials told him.

Doctors at the Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi told Geer that the baby needed surgery, according to Geer, but Greater Pioneer refused to pay. Geer says he pushed for medical tests to determine whether Ping's problems were linked to oil pollution, but the doctors in Nairobi said they couldn't do such tests.

Geer refused to give up, and in January, Greater Pioneer flew them to Berlin, where the whole family underwent 10 days of tests on their blood and hair and were sent home. The baby received no medical care.

Geer said the company told him the child's problems were genetic and not caused by oil pollution. But they never shared any test results with him.

"Results for the child will not come, they're still playing games," he said.

Geer is losing hope.

"The baby still cries day and night because of the pain and not feeling well," he said. "They're just buying time until the baby dies."

Nyawir Adoup, a 37-year-old Paloch resident whose home is a short drive from an open waste pit, had a similar experience. In 2013, she miscarried one baby and then a second baby was born dead without a nose or eyes. Dar Petroleum brought her and her husband first to Kenya and then to Germany for tests.

They spent more than a month in Germany in 2014, according to Adoup's husband, Deng Awaj Awol. But they have never received results.

"We weren't told what was happening and when we came back to Juba I asked for the results and they refused," Awol said.

In 2015, Adoup then gave birth to a second stillborn child, this one born with a gaping hole in its stomach.

"You could see through," she said. "I was crying."

The AP obtained a copy of the couple's medical report from Germany, which was dated Oct. 20, 2014. It was addressed to the health safety and environment department at Dar Petroleum and submitted by the doctor who accompanied the family. It showed they saw specialists in occupational medicine, nuclear medicine, gynecology and human genetics, according to the report.

Dr. Robert Middleberg, a forensic toxicologist at the NMS Labs in Horsham, Pennsylvania, reviewed the records and said they showed the couple were exposed to toxic chemicals, some of which are associated with inducing abortion. But, he said, the analyses were missing crucial details, including any numbers in the toxicology reports that he reviewed.

"Sometimes I still feel sick, my body isn't normal," said Adoup. "Sometimes I have nightmares of having another (child) like the previous ones."

Environmental experts say there is little incentive for multinational companies to do anything because it is easy to get away with things in impoverished countries like South Sudan.

That's in part because the country is so dependent upon its oil sector to survive.

Oil accounts for almost all the country's exports and more than 40% of its gross domestic product, according to the World Bank. As South Sudan emerges from years of fighting, it is trying to revive its economy by expanding the industry. In October, the ministry of petroleum announced plans to open 14 oil blocks this year for exploration.

"No one's really watching. The government is neither willing nor able to monitor and enforce its own environmental laws," said Luke Patey, senior researcher studying China's oil investments in Africa at the Danish Institute for International Studies.

He said the result is "a vicious cycle of negligence."

Associated Press researcher Chen Si contributed to this story.

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org

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Fear, boredom, adventure fill each day on quarantined ship

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan (AP) — Fear. Surprising moments of levity. Soul-crushing boredom.

Life on the Diamond Princess, the cruise ship quarantined in a Japanese port with scores of cases of a new virus, means experiencing all these things, according to interviews by The Associated Press with passengers and a growing stream of tweets and YouTube videos.

At times there's an almost festive atmosphere, as when locals on Jet Skis buzz the ship, shouting greetings. Other times, there's deep worry, like on the days when new cases of the illness are confirmed, pushing the total on the ship to 218 — the largest cluster of infections outside China. One passenger who became ill described the initial terror of being whisked to a hospital while covered in protective plastic, but also of the surprisingly mild symptoms.

The days pass with petty frustrations and inconveniences — tiny rooms, dirty sheets, boring food — and difficult work for the hundreds of crew members.

With the number of illnesses increasing, there's also a nagging doubt about whether this kind of quarantine works. Some experts question if keeping more than 3,500 passengers and crew in such close quarters might spread the viral disease, COVID-19.

With another week or more of quarantine to come, the AP looks inside the vacation cruise that's gone seriously off course:

THE GOOD

Even during the quarantine, it can seem like Cheryl and Paul Molesky are still on vacation.

The couple from Syracuse, New York, can be seen in their YouTube videos lounging, often in plush bathrobes, on their balcony, enjoying the sweeping views of a glittering, sun-streaked ocean and, on occasion, snow-capped Mount Fuji.

"We try to have an upbeat presentation and make sure that our attitude comes across that, we're not hurt, we're not in pain, ... we're actually just enjoying ourselves," Paul Molesky, a 78-year-old potter, said in an interview. "It's been very nice."

There was the time a man came to the docks in a Spider-Man costume and played music for an hour and a half to the delight of the passengers.

And the time, early in the quarantine, when eight people on Jet Skis cruised up, yelling out "Welcome!" and playing music. The passengers clapped and waved from their balconies.

The ship, which has 17 decks, has upped its internet service, and Cheryl spends several hours each day answering emails and texts and editing their YouTube videos.

"Now that we're here in quarantine we're getting so much attention. We never get that much attention at home," said 59-year-old Cheryl, a retired art and media teacher.

There's definite concern each time a new batch of confirmed cases is announced. But, Cheryl said, "Rather than just sit here and worry about, are we going to get the coronavirus, we decided to make the most of every day, and just forget about that for now. If it happens, it happens."

THE BORED

Elsewhere on the ship, a Japanese man in his 30s who refused to give his name because of privacy concerns said he spends his days mostly taking photos of each meal and posting them anonymously on Twitter.

"All I can do is to wait and tweet," he said.

The ship has a sushi restaurant, Japanese style bath and theater, but passengers are now mostly confined to their rooms. Many cabins — spread across decks with names such as Aloha, Dolphin and Emerald — are as small as, if not smaller, than many hotel rooms.

More affordable rooms on the ship are not much wider than a double bed and don't have much seating space aside from a desk chair, according to pictures posted in the ship's website. The cheapest ones don't

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even have windows. Many balcony rooms are around 222 square feet or less, according to the website. A lot of the interior rooms, which feature large mirrors in place of a window, are only 158 to 162 square feet.

Guests must often change their own sheets, clean their bathrooms and do their own laundry because contact with the crew has been limited since the first 10 cases were confirmed on board.

The days often revolve around food service. Knocking on four doors at once, an elaborate delivery choreography takes place: one masked and gloved crew member hands out the plates, another the silverware, while another checks off names and room numbers.

The boat has added more movies and TV channels to try to help with the boredom. People without balconies are allowed to walk on the deck for about an hour each day, as long as they keep 2 meters (yards) apart. Passengers chat and wave to each other from their balconies.

Passenger Matthew Smith has been compiling regular food reviews on Twitter, and often details his attempts to get extra coffee. He tweeted that he feels, while sitting in his room between meals, just like his cat "waiting for her daily serving of canned food. Is it time? Is it time?"

For the Japanese man on the ship, the food is one of the biggest reasons he wants to leave. "I miss Japanese food."

THE SCARED

In a recent video posted on Twitter, a group of men wearing Diamond Princess jackets, masks and what appear to be the uniforms of kitchen workers stand before a camera.

"We are scared. We appeal to the Indian government and the United Nations to help us, segregate us urgently," a man identified as crew member Binay Kumar Sarkar says after removing his mask. "We should be rescued immediately and reunited with our families before it is too late."

Some of the crew members who've tested positive for the virus are restaurant, bar or housekeeping staff who most likely had contact with passengers until Feb. 5 when the first test results were released and restaurants and bars were closed.

"Until the quarantine started, everything was business as usual, and everyone was freely moving around on board, so there are various possibilities of infection during that time," said Kazuho Taguchi, director of global health cooperation at the health ministry.

Crew members still share rooms, as the number of cabins for them is limited, Taguchi said.

One crew member, though, said he had been isolated in his own 6 by 10-foot (1.8 by 3-meter) cabin on the third deck near sea level for two days after he reported a sore throat.

"Everyone on the ship is scared. Many people are falling sick, and now the crew's getting sick too," he said, requesting that his name not be used because the cruise line company has told workers not to post anything about the situation on the ship to social media.

But while awaiting the results of a throat swab, he has been reading all the news he can find about the ship, and responding to worried friends and family.

Authorities in Japan say isolating people on board is the way to prevent the disease's spread; other experts say the measure could create more infection.

"More and more people are getting infected by people still in the incubation period or without symptoms while they are trapped on the ship, which is not good for disease prevention," Reiji Goto, a physician at the department of infectious diseases at Daiyukai General Hospital in Ichinomiya, told TBS television on Tuesday.

A hospital — not a ship — is the best place to keep people quarantined, according to Tara Smith, a professor who researches infectious diseases at Kent State University's College of Public Health. The Diamond Princess may have already had environmental contamination when the quarantine began, which puts passengers and crew at risk of further transmission. "I think this was done without a lot of thought to consequences of ongoing transmission within the ship and the mental health of the passengers," Smith said.

For some, the fear might be worse than the virus.

On Thursday, an Australian mother and daughter wearing face masks told Australia's Nine Network

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television from a Japanese hospital that officials took them off the ship after the daughter tested positive for coronavirus.

"They put me in, like, a wheelchair, sort of, and put like a plastic — almost like a bubble around it — and they were just wheeling me everywhere," the daughter, Bianca D'Silva, a 20-year-old law student, said.

Bianca and her mother, Suzanne, said they were both briefly ill, but feel fine now.

"Honestly, it just felt like your everyday cold. Like, I feel absolutely fine now, physically," Bianca said. "I had a bit of headache before and just a slight fever but that's about it, honestly."

Associated Press journalists Emily Wang and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo, Rod McGuirk in Australia and Vineeta Deepak and Emily Schmall in New Delhi contributed to this report.

Media seek open hearing on NFL team's emails with church

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

New Orleans news outlets were set to argue Thursday for an open hearing on the confidentiality of emails between Roman Catholic officials and the city's NFL franchise concerning clergy sex-abuse scandals.

As The Associated Press reported last month, victims' lawyers allege that hundreds of Saints emails show team executives did behind-the-scenes public relations damage control amid the Archdiocese of New Orleans' clergy abuse crisis. The team has gone to court to keep the emails from being made public, saying court rules would ordinarily keep them under seal and that the plaintiffs' lawyers want them released "for publicity purposes."

A state court hearing is scheduled in New Orleans next week before a court-appointed special master to determine whether they may be released.

The AP has been allowed to intervene in the effort to get the emails released and lawyers for the news cooperative are being allowed to participate in arguments for release of the emails. However, the Feb. 20 hearing before the special master was to be closed to the public.

The owners of The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate, WVUE-TV, WWL-TV and WDSU-TV have filed a motion for access to the hearing.

Judge Ellen Hazeur was set to hear arguments at Civil District Court in New Orleans.

The Saints, whose devoutly Catholic owner Gayle Benson is close friends with the local archbishop, have disputed as "outrageous" any suggestion that the team helped cover up crimes. They have accused plaintiffs' attorneys of mischaracterizing what is in the emails.

Benson said in a news release Monday that the NFL team played no role in determining which priests would be named in the list of "credibly accused" clergy published by the archdiocese.

Attorneys for about two dozen men suing the church allege in court filings that the confidential emails show executives joined in the church's "pattern and practice of concealing its crimes." The attorneys contend that included taking an active role in helping to shape the archdiocese's list of 57 credibly accused clergy, a roster an AP analysis found was undercounted by at least 20 names.

Some Democrats fear fallout from Sanders atop the ticket

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Sen. Bernie Sanders' robust start in the race for the presidential nomination is triggering alarm among congressional Democrats, with many warning that a ticket headed by the self-declared socialist could be devastating to the party's chances of winning the Senate and holding the House in November.

In anxious huddles around the Capitol, apprehensive Democrats are sharing their worries that Sanders' socialist label and unyielding embrace of controversial proposals like "Medicare for All" and the Green New Deal will repel voters in the affluent, moderate districts that flipped House control in 2018 and in closely divided states where Republican senators are vulnerable.

The Vermont independent narrowly won New Hampshire Tuesday on the heels of a strong showing in Iowa and is widely seen as a front-runner, along with former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

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"I'm a proud capitalist," said freshman Rep. Ben McAdams, D-Utah, in pointed contrast with Sanders. McAdams, who is supporting former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and whose Salt Lake City district will be among the toughest for Democrats to defend, said having a liberal like Sanders atop his party's ticket "would probably give me more opportunities to show my independence" from the party.

Another freshman from a competitive district, Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., said Democrats need a presidential nominee who "doesn't scare all those future former Republicans more than Trump scares them." And while acknowledging that Republicans plan to tar all Democrats with the socialist label, "There's one candidate for whom that would not be a lie."

Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., who backs the candidacy of former Vice President Joe Biden, warned a group of Democratic voters this week in Carson City, Nevada, that with Sanders atop the ticket, "you're not going to take back the Senate. There's not any way, because everybody's going to be tarred with the same brush. We will probably lose seats in the House."

In private conversations, other Democrats are more succinct. One House Democrat said colleagues from swing districts are scared by the prospects of a Sanders nomination, while another said moderates are increasingly concerned that a Sanders candidacy would devastate their prospects for winning the White House and retaining the House. The lawmakers insisted on anonymity to describe private conversations.

Democrats' jitters have Republicans rubbing their hands in delight.

"It's every Republican's dream come true," Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., a former leader of the House GOP's campaign committee, said of a possible Sanders nomination.

Republicans face an uphill fight in capturing control of the House, which Democrats lead 232-197, with one independent and five vacancies. The GOP controls the Senate 53-47 and is favored to retain its majority.

Biden supporters are happy to use apprehension about Sanders' impact on the party's strength in Congress as a tool for drumming up support.

Rep. Ami Bera, D-Calif., who's endorsed Biden, said if Sanders were nominated, Democrats from moderate districts "might actually have to run away from our nominee to get elected." And he added, "It's highly unlikely that Bernie Sanders will moderate his views, either."

Congressional Democrats have little to gain by openly disparaging the man who could well be their presidential nominee, and they say they're uncertain what they could do that would be effective. Any move to derail his candidacy that could be traced back to them would undoubtedly enrage Sanders and his impassioned supporters and risk the fury that split the party in 2016, when some Sanders backers never supported Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee.

Underscoring a reluctance to speak critically of Sanders, Rep. Cheri Bustos, D-Ill., chairwoman of House Democrats' campaign arm, sidestepped questions about how his nomination would affect her candidates' prospects. "We have a long way to go before we know who our nominee is," she said.

Asked how many nervous lawmakers have expressed their worries about Sanders to her, Bustos paused for four seconds before answering, "We have discussions about the nominee but, you know, it runs the gamut."

While many Democrats are reluctant to openly express dismay about Sanders, members of the House have spoken with their feet.

According to the website fivethirtyeight.com, Sanders has endorsements from only seven House members, all members of the progressive caucus from safely Democratic districts. Biden, in contrast, has backing from 41 House members, and has made a point of touting support from seven lawmakers from swing districts. Bloomberg, who hopes to poach Biden's position as the moderate alternative to Sanders, has racked up 11 endorsements from House lawmakers, five of whom occupy swing seats.

Progressives argue the fears are overblown. Republicans tried to tie Democrats to socialism and liberal causes like Medicare for All during the 2018 campaign, they note, yet Democrats won a resounding majority in the House. And they argue that nominating Sanders could change the electorate in ways that help the party.

"They don't want somebody that sells out," said Sanders backer Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., a member of the "squad" of young liberal freshmen. She added, "Please don't talk about only persuading Trumpers

and independents" to be open to an alternative candidate. "How about persuading the Democrats that haven't been engaged."

"The single most important thing for Democrats to take back the Senate is turnout," said Mike Lux, a liberal strategist who supports Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren in the presidential race. "We have to have a highly energized Democratic base turnout, a lot of young people coming out, voting not just in the presidential race but further down the ballot."

Yet Sanders' agenda is far from shared. Several top-tier Democratic Senate recruits, such as former astronaut Mark Kelly in Arizona, former state Sen. Cal Cunningham in North Carolina and former Gov. John Hickenlooper in Colorado, have explicitly distanced themselves from core Sanders positions like Medicare for All.

Hickenlooper, the likely Democratic nominee against Republican Sen. Cory Gardner, targeted Sanders during his own brief bid for the party's presidential nomination last year. At a Democratic debate last summer, Hickenlooper warned that Sanders' program would be "a disaster" at the ballot box.

"If you force Americans to make these radical changes," Hickenlooper said, "they're not going to go along."

Gardner, widely considered the most endangered Republican senator, has been openly pining for Sanders to be the nominee. "In 2018, Cory said 'the most dangerous thing to happen in America in the 2016 presidential election was Bernie Sanders' normalization of socialism,'" Gardner campaign spokesman Jerrod Dobkin said. "Two years later, Cory's been proven right."

Democrats skeptical of Sanders stressed that the nominating process has just begun.

Sen. Doug Jones of Alabama, who is considered the most endangered Democratic Senate incumbent this year, has endorsed Biden, a longtime friend. He said he wouldn't play "what-if games" about the top of the ticket and how it might affect his chances in deep-red Alabama.

"I still think that Biden is going to be the nominee," Jones said. "I still think that moderate voice that's out there is going to ultimately carry."

Fram reported from Washington.

Stormy US-Europe relations as top officials head to Munich

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some of President Donald Trump's top foreign policy priorities stand at pivotal moments as two high-level national security officials head to an annual security forum in Germany. Strains in the trans-Atlantic relationship have cast doubt on whether they can count on much help from European leaders in advancing Trump's agenda.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper's visit to Munich comes as the U.S. appears close to signing a truce in Afghanistan, is pushing for renewing sanctions on Iran, has introduced a new Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, and is trying to discourage allies from allowing the Chinese company Huawei to be part of next-generation wireless networks.

Meanwhile, in the background are worries about the global spread of the deadly new coronavirus from China.

The Munich conference, which opens Friday, attracts a wide array of foreign diplomats and national security officials and has been the venue for unexpected and sometimes surprising revelations. It has been marked by turbulent U.S.-European relations before, notably during the debate over the Iraq war in early 2003. But the current level of tension exceeds that of previous years and spans a wider range of issues.

Europe is unlikely to play a major role in what could be the biggest highlight: Pompeo and Esper are to meet Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on the sidelines of the conference on Friday amid strong indications that a seven-day "reduction in violence" agreement that would lead to formal negotiations between Afghanistan's factions and is close and likely imminent. A proposal is "on the table," Esper told reporters Wednesday in Brussels.

Trump has agreed in principle to the deal, the final details of which are being hammered out by U.S.

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special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar. People familiar with the plan's outlines say it calls for the successful conclusion of the weeklong truce to be followed within 10 days by the start of all-Afghan negotiations to set the road map for the country's political future.

U.S. officials have brushed aside claims that a Taliban ultimatum forced their hand. And, they noted that despite his campaign pledge to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan and elsewhere, Trump has nixed previous deals that appeared close in response to attacks on U.S. forces.

While Afghanistan has the potential to be the most significant development in Munich, others issues are more likely to highlight tensions with Europe — notably the future of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Pompeo, who has as many as 10 separate meetings with foreign officials and a speech crammed into his two-day visit, will arrive in Munich shortly after the State Department gave the clearest signal yet that the administration will deliver an ultimatum to its European allies on ending the accord.

The administration has been frustrated by the reluctance of Britain, France and Germany to move forward quickly with a process that could lead to the re-imposition of U.N. sanctions on Iran for violating the terms of the agreement. Iran has breached several limits on program imposed by the deal but maintains it is only responding to U.S. violations. Trump withdrew the United States from the deal.

The Europeans, who want to salvage the deal, have invoked a dispute resolution mechanism designed to resolve the issues or refer them to the U.N. Security Council, but U.S. officials aren't pleased with what they see as a lack of urgency in a process that can take months to complete.

Its patience nearing an end ahead of the October expiration of a U.N. arms embargo on Iran, the administration has laid out a path for it to keep the ban in place by forcing action in the Security Council.

In a document provided to Congress this week, the State Department said for the first time that the conditions for the automatic re-imposition, or "snapback," of U.N. sanctions lifted under the terms of the deal can be determined by any of the states that negotiated it.

The administration has already advanced the argument, advocated by Iran hawks, that despite Trump's withdrawal, the U.S. remains a "participant" in the deal as defined by the Security Council resolution that enshrined it.

The Europeans, not to mention Russia and China, have scoffed at that position but may not have any choice but to accept it as the resolution does not permit a veto on snapback. And, if the U.S. position is rejected by others it would create a major geo-political confrontation over sanctions that would pose serious risks to international commerce.

But the administration has now taken that a step further, arguing that the U.S. has the authority to determine if Iran is in "significant non-performance" with the deal's requirements. It says that because the criteria for significant non-performance are not spelled out in the U.N. resolution they can be defined broadly by any participant.

"We assess that the state initiating the snapback mechanism retains flexibility in interpreting what constitutes 'significant non-performance,'" the State Department said in a written response to a question on the matter from Sen. Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican and a leading Iran hawk in Congress.

The Europeans have resisted previous lobbying to join the U.S. in leaving the deal, but the administration is expected to push them harder in advocating for an extension of the arms embargo if they want to save it.

Beyond the differences over Iran, the U.S. is facing serious pushback from Europe on Trump's Middle East peace plan, which is widely seen as biased in favor of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians and inconsistent with previous guidelines for a settlement to the conflict.

On Tuesday, the European Union members of the Security Council — Belgium, Estonia, France and Germany— gave the plan the cold shoulder. "The U.S. initiative, as presented on 28 January, departs from these internationally agreed parameters," they said in a statement.

Pompeo and Esper also face an uphill battle in trying to prevent European countries from allowing the Chinese tech giant Huawei to play a role in their advanced 5G wireless networks. Despite dire warnings that a Huawei presence would compromise information security and threats that the U.S. could limit intelligence cooperation with countries in which the company operates, several nations have rejected an outright ban.

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Britain, notably, announced last month that it would allow Huawei to participate in certain non-sensitive areas of its networks, and European Union 5G guidelines fall far short of addressing U.S. concerns.

2020ers look to Super Tuesday even as 2 other states loom

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nevada votes next and then South Carolina. But top Democrats vying for their party's presidential nomination are already looking ahead to the biggest prize on the primary calendar: Super Tuesday, the slate of contests when more than a dozen states go to the polls.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren is holding a town hall on Thursday night in the Washington suburb of Arlington, Virginia, a day before Sen. Bernie Sanders makes two North Carolina stops, then hits Texas. Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, will campaign in California between fundraisers in San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

All four states vote March 3, along with a crush of others, from Alabama to Colorado and from Maine to Utah, as well as Warren's home state of Massachusetts and Sanders' native Vermont. More than 1,300 delegates to the Democratic National Convention are at stake, about a third of the total.

The focus on Super Tuesday comes at a pivotal point in the campaign. For Sanders and Buttigieg, who have emerged in strong positions after contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, the travel gives them an opportunity to show their national appeal and woo larger concentrations of nonwhite voters. For struggling candidates like Warren, it's a signal that they are still in the fight.

And for everyone, it's a chance to prove they won't cede this swath of delegate-rich states to Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire former New York mayor who has spent months building his campaign around Super Tuesday. He campaigned in Tennessee on Wednesday and will be in Texas and North Carolina on Thursday.

"All bets are off this cycle," said Texas Democratic strategist Colin Strother, who is bullish on Bloomberg's chances of resonating in his state and beyond.

So far, there's no sign that candidates are completely bypassing Nevada or South Carolina. Every leading contender will be in Nevada this weekend as early voting begins. Democrats will caucus there on Feb. 22.

But some are shifting their resources as they begin an awkward balancing act of paying attention to the remaining early states while stockpiling enough money to keep themselves in the conversation in the bevy of contests unfolding next month. Warren, for instance, will be in South Carolina on Friday but is pulling television advertising from the state after this weekend. Some of that money will instead go to the Super Tuesday state of Maine.

Bloomberg, who is self-funding his campaign, doesn't have to make such considerations. He's skipped the first four states to deploy a political shock-and-awe campaign after that, spending heavily on television ads while already hiring more than 2,100 staffers in 40 states and U.S. territories, including all voting on Super Tuesday.

Past candidates have tried to forgo the early states in favor of larger ones voting later, with little success -- including another former New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani, in 2008. But Bloomberg is making a larger bet on doing so than anyone has. He's worth an estimated \$60 billion and has already spent more than \$200 million to hastily build a campaign infrastructure -- with promises of plenty more where that came from.

The candidates doing battle before Super Tuesday, meanwhile, are a study in contrasts. Warren has deep campaign infrastructure in around 30 states but little momentum. Former Vice President Joe Biden left New Hampshire for South Carolina before the polls even closed on Tuesday, has important connections there and is counting on that to carry him in other southern Super Tuesday states. But he, so far, has fared worse than Warren.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar placed a strong third in New Hampshire but hasn't yet built a national campaign, while Buttigieg is on a roll but faces questions about his appeal beyond the early majority-white states.

Fresh off his New Hampshire win, Sanders has already predicted victory in Nevada and California, point-

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ing in part to his campaign's outreach to Hispanic voters. But he's also bet on record turnout that never materialized in Iowa, despite his efforts to grow the electorate.

Warren and Sanders have been sharply critical of Bloomberg, accusing him of trying to buy the election. In a memo coming out of New Hampshire, Warren's team sought to reassure supporters that it will find its political footing on Super Tuesday, arguing the senator should win the minimum support required to claim delegates -- at least 15% -- in 108 of the 150 districts voting, or two-thirds of the Super Tuesday map.

"Warren is poised to finish in the top two in eight of 14 Super Tuesday states and "in the top three in all of them," Warren's campaign manager, Roger Lau, wrote.

States like Texas and California are so large that on-the-ground retail politicking often doesn't work well there. But Super Tuesday state residents have already seen weeks of Bloomberg ads, Strother said, and that could potentially already be swaying those participating in early voting, which is underway in places like Minnesota.

"It's unprecedented what he's doing and the money he's spending," Strother said. "He's running a national campaign, which is what all these other candidates wish they could do."

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

Senate moves toward vote restraining Trump on Iran

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan measure limiting President Donald Trump's authority to launch military operations against Iran is moving toward approval in the Senate.

The resolution, authored by Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, asserts that Trump must win approval from Congress before engaging in further military action against Iran. Eight Republicans sided with Democrats Wednesday on a procedural motion to force a vote on the issue as soon as Thursday.

Kaine and other supporters said the resolution was not about Trump or even the presidency, but instead was an important reassertion of congressional power to declare war.

Answering a claim by some of Trump's supporters — and Trump himself — that the measure sends a signal of weakness to Iran and other potential adversaries, Kaine said the opposite was true.

"When we stand up for the rule of law — in a world that hungers for more rule of law — and say 'this decision is fundamental, and we have rules that we are going to follow so we can make a good decision,' that's a message of strength," Kaine said Wednesday.

Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah agreed. Lee supports Trump's foreign policy — including toward Iran — but said Congress cannot escape its constitutional responsibility to act on matters of war and peace.

"What the American people and the entire world will see from the debate we're about to have in the Senate is that there is abundant support for the United States taking tough positions with regard to Iran," Lee said Wednesday. "And as part of that we want to make sure that any military action that needs to be authorized is in fact properly authorized by Congress. That doesn't show weakness. That shows strength."

While Trump and other presidents "must always have the ability to defend the United States from imminent attack, the executive power to initiate war stops there," Kaine said. "An offensive war requires a congressional debate and vote."

The principle of congressional approval is established for an important reason, Kaine said. "If we're to order our young men and women ... to risk their lives in war, it should be on the basis of careful deliberation by the people's elected legislature and not on the say-so of any one person."

Trump disputed that, arguing in two tweets Wednesday that a vote against Kaine's proposal was important to national security and pointed to the Jan. 3 drone strike that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani.

"We are doing very well with Iran and this is not the time to show weakness. Americans overwhelmingly support our attack on terrorist Soleimani," Trump said. "If my hands were tied, Iran would have a field day. Sends a very bad signal. The Democrats are only doing this as an attempt to embarrass the Republican Party. Don't let it happen!"

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Tehran responded to the U.S. attack on Soleimani by launching missiles at two military bases in Iraq that house American troops. The attack caused traumatic brain injuries in at least 64 U.S. soldiers, the Pentagon said..

Democrats and Republicans alike criticized a briefing by the Trump administration shortly after the drone strike, saying U.S. officials offered vague information about a possible attack being planned by Iran but no substantial details.

Kaine has long pushed for action reasserting congressional power to declare war. At Republicans' request, he removed initial language that targeted Trump in favor of a generalized statement declaring that Congress has the sole power to declare war. The resolution also directs Trump to terminate use of military force against Iran or any part of its government without approval from Congress.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, a co-sponsor, called the resolution "much-needed and long overdue," adding that over the past decade, "Congress has too often abdicated its constitutional responsibility on authorizing the sustained use of military force."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and many other Republicans oppose the resolution, saying it would send the wrong message to U.S. allies.

The Democratic-controlled House passed a separate, nonbinding war powers resolution last month. If the Senate approves the Kaine measure, the House could take up the Senate resolution later this month, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said.

Two-thirds votes in the House and Senate would be needed to override an expected Trump veto.

Snoop Dogg apologizes to Gayle King for rant over Bryant

By **NEKESA MUMBI MOODY** AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After days of blistering criticism, Snoop Dogg has finally apologized to Gayle King for attacking her over her interview with former basketball star Lisa Leslie about the late Kobe Bryant.

"Two wrongs don't make no right. when you're wrong, you gotta fix it," he said in an Instagram post on Wednesday.

"So with that being said, Gayle King, I publicly tore you down by coming at you in a derogatory manner based off of emotions of me being angry at a question you asked. Overreacted," he said. "I should have handled it way different than that, I was raised way better than that, so I would like to apologize publicly for the language that I used and calling you out your name and just being disrespectful."

Snoop Dogg was furious that the "CBS This Morning" anchor brought up rape allegations from Bryant's past in her interview with Leslie, a friend of Bryant. The retired Lakers star was killed in a helicopter crash last month along with his young daughter and seven others.

Snoop Dogg went on Instagram and called King crude names. He also said she better back off "before we come get you," and posted a slew of insulting photos and memes about her.

King herself was angry at CBS News for promoting a snippet of what was a wide-ranging interview on social media, which drew sharp reaction and accusations from some that she crossed the line. King, in her own Instagram message last week, said she could see why people might be upset if they only saw a brief portion of what was discussed.

Snoop Dogg, a friend of Bryant and ardent Lakers fan, was hardly the only one angry at King for her questioning — LeBron James and even Bill Cosby were among her critics — but his comments were among the most inflammatory and seen as a threat. King's best friend, Oprah Winfrey, said that King was "not doing well" and getting death threats because of the interview.

Soon, an avalanche of support came in for King, from the head of CBS News to former Obama administration official Susan Rice to award winning author Ta-Nehisi Coates, who in an Instagram post chastised black men who attacked her.

"We did not calmly express our dislike of the question. We were too weak for that. We threatened. We dragged. And we attacked," he wrote. "It's wrong. We should want more. We should be better."

Snoop Dogg was also heavily criticized in essays in black media, including one that accused him of hat-

ing black women.

Last week, Snoop Dogg responded to some of the backlash and denied threatening King, but in Wednesday's post, he offered a full apology and said he was raised better than that. He said in the post's caption that a talk with his mother set him right.

"I didn't mean for it to be like that. I was just expressing myself for a friend that wasn't there to defend himself," he said.

He noted that he knows some people look up to him, so it added to his importance to apologize.

"Anytime you mess up, it's OK to fix it, it's OK to man up to say that you're wrong," he said. "I apologize. hopefully we can sit down and talk, privately."

After New Hampshire surge, Klobuchar turns to Nevada, beyond

By SARA BURNETT, HOLLY RAMER and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — It took a year of campaigning, countless stump speeches and an especially strong night on the debate stage for little-known Democratic presidential hopeful Amy Klobuchar to break into the top tier of the 2020 campaign in New Hampshire.

Now she has less than two weeks to make it count.

The Minnesota senator began working Wednesday to turn her better-than-expected third-place finish — and a surge of fundraising — into enough momentum to be competitive in next-up Nevada, South Carolina and beyond. For Klobuchar, that means consolidating establishment and moderate voters, picking up traction with black and Latino Democrats and introducing herself to most everyone else.

Her campaign launched two new television and digital ads in Nevada, and she was heading to Las Vegas to hold a Thursday campaign rally and speak at a town hall sponsored by a major Latino rights group. She also plans to stump over the next week in states that vote in the March 3 "Super Tuesday" contests, and is staffing up with help from the more than \$6 million she's raised since Friday's debate.

"We really shocked a lot of the pundits," Klobuchar said at a New York fundraiser Wednesday night. "I have had people count me out every single time, and I've come roaring back."

Tuesday's showing counted as a victory for a candidate who spent much of the campaign boasting about being in the "top five" of the crowded field. Klobuchar used the moment to put her no-nonsense appeal in the spotlight. She spoke of growing up the granddaughter of an iron ore miner, becoming the first female senator from Minnesota and defying expectations in the 2020 race and her plan to win the party's nomination.

"Because of you we are taking this campaign to Nevada. We are going to South Carolina, and we are taking this message of unity to the country," Klobuchar told cheering supporters Tuesday night.

The senator appeared to benefit Tuesday from former Vice President Joe Biden's sliding support, picking up moderate and conservative voters looking for an alternative to liberal Sen. Bernie Sanders, the New Hampshire winner, and rejecting political newcomer and second-place finisher Pete Buttigieg.

But Klobuchar's quest is still an uphill climb. The senator has focused almost all her time and campaign resources in Iowa and New Hampshire, building only spare operations in the states that follow on the primary calendar. She has polled poorly among minority voters, a big obstacle in more diverse states like Nevada and South Carolina. Although she will likely see a bump in support, more donations and new media attention, Klobuchar's challenge is to set up the infrastructure to capitalize on her moment.

She's starting from behind. Klobuchar's Nevada team wasn't hired until last fall and numbered fewer than a dozen until the campaign redeployed staff from Iowa last week, giving her about 30 people on the ground. Sanders, who essentially tied Buttigieg in Iowa, has been organizing in Nevada since April 2019 and has more than 250 staffers in the state. Biden has more than 80, Buttigieg has about 100 and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren has more than 50.

Klobuchar is now hoping the appeal that worked for her in New Hampshire will have a similar impact in Nevada on Feb. 22. The three-term senator campaigned as someone who has won even in conservative areas and who could draw support from Democrats, independents and disaffected Republicans to beat

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Trump. She also points to her record of getting things done in Washington and argues that proposals like "Medicare for All," backed by Sanders and Warren, are nonstarters in the Senate.

But it was Klobuchar's debate performance that appeared to have the biggest impact on her showing Tuesday. More than half of Klobuchar's supporters made up their minds in the last few days, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 3,000 Democratic primary voters in New Hampshire conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago.

Klobuchar went on the attack against Buttigieg and delivered a passionate closing promise to fight for the voters who don't feel seen or heard by politicians in Washington.

Those selling points helped convince voters like Linda Muchemore, a retiree from Greenland, New Hampshire, who settled on Klobuchar last week after leaning toward Warren.

Klobuchar's record in the Senate "spoke to me of somebody who could maybe heal the animosity we have," Muchemore said. "I found out that I'm not as liberal as I thought I was. Those moderate plans that Amy has speak more to me than Elizabeth's more radical, Bernie plans."

Klobuchar's late surge over Warren was a surprise twist in the race. Warren, from neighboring Massachusetts, has been leading in the polling, but both women have struggled to convince voters that a woman can win. On Tuesday night, Warren congratulated Klobuchar — "my friend and colleague" — and noted how wrong pundits are "when they count us out."

Klobuchar responded to "my friend Elizabeth" soon after.

"People told me just like they told her that they didn't think a woman could be elected," she said. "In my case it was elected to the U.S. Senate. No woman had ever done it before. But I came back, I defied expectations, and I won."

For much of the race, Klobuchar has lagged toward the back of the pack in fundraising and had just under \$5 million in reserve at the end of 2019 -- far less than all other leading contenders. Her goal coming out of Friday's debate was to raise \$1 million, a lifeline that would allow her to forge on in contests ahead. She quickly reached that amount and, to her own surprise, she doubled it within 24 hours.

By Tuesday, her campaign said that sum had climbed to \$4 million. She raised an additional \$2.5 million after polls closed Tuesday, with about 60% of donations coming from first-time donors, which the campaign called a sign that her message is resonating with voters and that her campaign has room to grow.

Unlike the other leading contenders in the race, Klobuchar is the only candidate who is not getting extra help from a super PAC or outside group, which can raise and spend unlimited sums so long as they do not coordinate advertising spending decisions with the candidate they support.

Burnett reported from Chicago. Associated Press reporters Brian Slodysko and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington and Michelle Price in Las Vegas contributed to this report.

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

Official: Puerto Rico govt loses \$2.6M in phishing scam

By DANICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Puerto Rico's government has lost more than \$2.6 million after falling for an email phishing scam, according to a senior official.

The finance director of the island's Industrial Development Company, Rubén Rivera, said in a complaint filed to police Wednesday that the agency sent the money to a fraudulent account.

Rivera said the government agency transferred the money on Jan. 17 after receiving an email that alleged a change to a banking account tied to remittance payments, according to a police statement.

Manuel Laboy, executive director of the agency, told The Associated Press that officials found out about the incident earlier this week and immediately reported it to the FBI.

"This is a very serious situation, extremely serious," he said. "We want it to be investigated until the last consequences."

Laboy declined to say how officials found out about the scam, whether anyone has been dismissed or how the company's operations have been affected by the missing funds. He said an internal investigation is under way to determine whether someone was negligent or did not follow standard procedure, adding that government officials are trying to recover the money.

"I cannot speculate about how these things might happen," he said, addressing heavy criticism from Puerto Ricans who were incredulous upon hearing the news.

Laboy added that his agency takes the management of public funds very seriously. "It's a big responsibility."

Police did not return calls for comment.

The situation comes as the U.S. territory remains mired in a 13-year recession that has in part forced the government to cut back on some services.

Bloomberg once blamed end of 'redlining' for 2008 collapse

By BRIAN SLODYKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the height of the 2008 economic collapse, then-New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said the elimination of a discriminatory housing practice known as "redlining" was responsible for instigating the meltdown.

"It all started back when there was a lot of pressure on banks to make loans to everyone," Bloomberg, now a Democratic presidential candidate, said at a forum that was hosted by Georgetown University in September 2008. "Redlining, if you remember, was the term where banks took whole neighborhoods and said, 'People in these neighborhoods are poor, they're not going to be able to pay off their mortgages, tell your salesmen don't go into those areas.'"

He continued: "And then Congress got involved -- local elected officials, as well -- and said, 'Oh that's not fair, these people should be able to get credit.' And once you started pushing in that direction, banks started making more and more loans where the credit of the person buying the house wasn't as good as you would like."

Bloomberg, a billionaire who built a media and financial services empire before turning to electoral politics, was correct that the financial crisis was triggered in part by banks extending loans to borrowers who were ill-suited to repay them. But by attributing the meltdown to the elimination of redlining, a practice used by banks to discriminate against minority borrowers, Bloomberg appears to be blaming policies intended to bring equality to the housing market.

The term redlining comes from the "red lines" those in the financial industry would draw on a map to denote areas deemed ineligible for credit, frequently based on race.

"It's been well documented that the 2008 crash was caused by unethical, predatory lending that deliberately targeted communities of color," said Debra Gore-Mann, president and CEO of the Greenlining Institute, a nonprofit that works for racial and economic justice. "People of color were sold trick loans with exploding interest rates designed to push them into foreclosure. Our communities of color and low income communities were the victims of the crash, not the cause."

Campaign spokesman Stu Loeser said that Bloomberg "attacked predatory lending" as mayor and, if elected president, has a plan to "help a million more Black families buy a house, and counteract the effects of redlining and the subprime mortgage crisis."

The campaign also pointed to efforts by Bloomberg's private philanthropy to help other cities craft policies that will help reduce evictions. He promised in a January speech to do a version of the very thing he criticized in 2008: Ask lenders to update their credit-scoring models, "because millions of black households don't have a credit score which is needed to get a mortgage."

After this story was published, Loeser added: "He's saying that something bad - the financial crisis - followed something good, which is the fight against redlining that he was part of as Mayor."

Bloomberg's 2008 remarks stand in contrast with the decadeslong positions some of his rivals have held.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's work as a professor and attorney has been devoted to the study of bankruptcy and the disastrous impact it has on the financial well-being of families. As a young Delaware

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senator, Joe Biden held hearings on unfair lending practices and sponsored legislation to ban discrimination in lending and crack down on industry figures who did.

The remarks are the latest instance of past comments by Bloomberg that have resurfaced in recent days that make him appear racially insensitive.

On Tuesday, an audio recording ricocheted around social media of the then-mayor defending his police department's use of the controversial "stop-and-frisk" tactic during a 2015 appearance at the Aspen Institute.

Under the program, New York City police officers made it a routine practice to stop and search multitudes of mostly black and Hispanic men to see if they were carrying weapons.

Although he has since apologized for his support for the policy, in the recording Bloomberg said that "95%" of murders and murder victims are young male minorities and that "you can just take the description, Xerox it and pass it out to all the cops." To combat crime, he said, "put a lot of cops where the crime is, which means in minority neighborhoods."

Bloomberg's resurfaced comments about redlining come as he's in the midst of a two-day tour of the South that in part is focused on building relationships with black voters who are the backbone of the Democratic Party. On Thursday, he plans to launch "Mike for Black America"

Speaking to reporters in Tennessee on Wednesday, he refused to directly apologize for the 2015 comments. In response to repeated questions, he said, "I don't think those words reflect how I led the most diverse city in the nation."

"I apologized for the practice and the pain that it caused," he said Wednesday. "It was five years ago. And, you know, it's just not the way that I think, and it doesn't reflect what I do every day."

Introducing Bloomberg at an event in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Dr. Elenora Woods, president of the city's NAACP chapter, said he would be a tireless fighter for economic justice for black Americans.

"Look, I know what racism looks like. I know what it looks like, and that's not Mike Bloomberg," she said.

Associated Press writers Alexandra Jaffe in Washington and Kathleen Ronayne in Chattanooga, Tenn., contributed to this report.

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

2 Ohio State football players dismissed amid rape charges

By MITCH STACY AP Sports Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Two Ohio State University football players were kicked off the team Wednesday after being charged with rape and kidnapping.

Defensive backs Amir Riep and Jahsen Wint, both 21, were booked into jail earlier in the day after they were charged with sexually assaulting a woman on Feb. 4 at the players' shared apartment.

"I am not making any statement on the criminal charges, but it is clear they did not live up to our standards and my expectations," coach Ryan Day said in a statement. "The athletics department will make sure they both continue to have access to the health and well-being resources available to students and student-athletes."

Day said he would not comment further on the case.

The men were scheduled to be arraigned Thursday morning. It was not immediately clear whether they had attorneys.

The woman told police that she was having consensual sex with Riep before Wint came into the room and both forced her to have sex.

After several minutes, they stopped and Riep told the woman that she needed to say what happened was "consensual on a video recording while laughing at her," according to police. Riep then told the woman she needed to shower before driving her back to her home.

"We are aware that two of our students have been arrested and criminally charged," Ohio State spokes-

man Ben Johnson said in a statement.

Riep is a 6-foot-1, 185-pound cornerback entering his senior season for Ohio State, while Wint is a 6-foot, 198-pound redshirt senior safety.

Riep was expected to compete for a starting job after the departures of Damon Arnette and Jeff Okudah. Wint, who got more playing time in 2018 than last season, would have been in the mix at strong safety.

The charges were a blow to a program that has avoided major off-the-field trouble as Day begins his second year at the helm. Last season, All-American defensive end Chase Young was suspended for two games after it came to light that he had accepted a personal loan in violation of NCAA rules.

Ohio State was 13-1 last season, its only loss against Clemson in a College Football Playoff semifinal. Spring practice starts March 2, and the Buckeyes open the 2020 season at home Sept. 5 against Bowling Green.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/Collegefootball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Follow Mitch Stacy at <http://twitter.com/mitchstacy>

Iowa Democratic Party chairman resigns after caucus chaos

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party announced his resignation Wednesday after a disastrous caucus process beset by technical glitches led to a dayslong delay in reporting the results, inconsistencies in the numbers and no clear winner.

The embarrassing episode also threatened Iowa's cherished status as the first voting contest of the presidential primary season and led both front-runners to request a partial canvass of the results.

"The fact is that Democrats deserved better than what happened on caucus night. As chair of this party, I am deeply sorry for what happened and bear the responsibility for any failures on behalf of the Iowa Democratic Party," Chairman Troy Price wrote in a resignation letter a week and a half after Iowa's caucuses.

"While it is my desire to stay in this role and see this process through to completion, I do believe it is time for the Iowa Democratic Party to begin looking forward, and my presence in my current role makes that more difficult."

Price said his departure would occur as soon as the state party elects a replacement, and he called an emergency Saturday meeting to do so.

After a breakdown in tallying the results on Feb. 3, it took until Feb. 6 for the state party, which operates the series of roughly 1,700 local meetings statewide, to issue what it said are complete results.

In those figures, released by the party, 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.

The Associated Press said it was unable to declare a winner, based on the available information. The results as reported by the Iowa Democratic Party, the AP believes, may not be fully accurate.

Price had called the delays in reporting results "unacceptable." He said the party would conduct a "thorough, transparent and independent examination" of what caused the delays. He apologized for the breakdown in the process.

Both Buttigieg's and Sanders' campaigns requested a partial canvass of the Iowa results, which the Iowa Democratic Party approved. The party says it expects the canvass of more than 80 precincts to begin on Sunday and last two days. A canvass is not a recount, but a check of the vote count against paper records created by caucus leaders to ensure the counts were reported accurately.

The party has said it will not change mistakes in the math and the only opportunity to correct it would be a recount, which would be the candidates' next option after the canvass is completed.

Price was elected to his second term as chairman of the state party in December 2018. In a statement released after his reelection, he noted that he was "incredibly proud" of the success that Iowa Democrats

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had in the 2018 midterms and looked forward to building on it.

"I cannot wait wait to work with them again on what could very well be one of the most consequential Iowa Caucuses of our time," he said.

Price previously was part of several Democratic campaigns in Iowa, including those of former President Barack Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Price also had served as the party's executive director and led One Iowa, an LGBT advocacy group.

The Iowa Democratic Party instituted new rules for the 2020 contest that were meant to enhance transparency in the process.

In previous years, the Iowa Democratic Party reported just one number: the number of state delegates won by each candidate. For the first time, the party this year reported two other numbers — who had the most votes at the beginning and at the end of the night.

The additional data is a nod to Sanders and his supporters, who argued that the previous rules essentially robbed him of victory in his 2016 race against Clinton. That contest ended in a narrow delegate victory for Clinton in Iowa.

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

Pope avoids question of married priests in Amazon document

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis refused Wednesday to approve the ordination of married men or women as deacons to address a shortage of priests in the Amazon, sidestepping a fraught issue that has divided the Catholic Church and emboldened his conservative critics.

In an eagerly awaited document, Francis didn't refer to recommendations by Amazonian bishops to consider married priests or women deacons. Rather, the pope urged bishops to pray for more priestly vocations and to send missionaries to a region where faithful Catholics in remote areas can go months or even years without Mass.

The pope's dodge disappointed liberals, who had hoped he would at least put both questions to further study. It outraged progressive Catholic women's groups. And it relieved conservatives who had used the debate over priestly celibacy to heighten their opposition to the pope, and saw his ducking of the issue as a victory.

Francis' document, "Beloved Amazon," is instead a love letter to the Amazonian rain forest and its indigenous peoples from the first Latin American pope. He has long been concerned about the violent exploitation of the Amazon's land, its importance to the global ecosystem and the injustices against its peoples.

Quoting poetry as frequently as past papal teachings, Francis addressed the document to all peoples of the world "to help awaken their affection and concern for that land which is also ours and to invite them to value it and acknowledge it as a sacred mystery."

Francis said he has four dreams for the Amazon: respecting the rights of the poor; celebrating their cultural riches; preserving its natural beauty and life; and showing the indigenous features of its Christian communities.

Francis had convened bishops from the Amazon's nine countries for a three-week synod in October to debate how the church can help preserve the delicate ecosystem from global warming and better minister to its people.

The Argentine Jesuit has long been sensitive to the plight of the Amazon, where Protestant and Pentecostal churches are making gains in the absence of vibrant Catholic communities where Mass can be regularly celebrated.

According to Catholic doctrine, only a priest can consecrate the Eucharistic hosts distributed at Mass, which the faithful believe are the body of Christ. Given the priest shortage, some remote communities only see a priest and attend a Mass once every few months or years. For Catholic communities in the Amazon, some of which date from the time of the Spanish colonization, the priest shortage coupled with

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the spread of evangelical churches risks the very Catholic nature of the communities.

In the synod's final document, most of the bishops called for establishing criteria so that "respected" married men in their communities who have already served as permanent deacons can be ordained as priests.

The bishops also urged the Vatican to reopen a study commission on ordaining women as deacons, which allows for preaching, celebrating weddings and baptisms, but not consecrating the Eucharist. Francis had created such a commission in 2016 at the insistence of nuns who want larger roles in church governance and ministry, but the group ended its work without reaching consensus.

Francis didn't mention either proposal in "Beloved Amazon" and didn't cite the synod's final document in his text or footnotes. But he did say he wanted to "officially present" the synod's work and urged the faithful to read the final document in full, suggesting he valued the input.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, a synod organizer, said its proposals "remain on the table" and have their own "certain moral authority." But the fact the pope didn't expressly approve the final document, and only presented it, means the proposals do not form part of his official teaching, said Cardinal Lorenzo Baldiseri, another organizer.

Francis did echo some of the synod's recommendations, calling for greater lay participation in the life of the church and saying the training of priests in the Amazon must be overhauled so they can better minister to indigenous peoples. He said "every effort should be made" to provide access to Mass.

"This urgent need leads me to urge all bishops, especially those in Latin America, not only to promote prayer for priestly vocations, but also to be more generous in encouraging those who display a missionary vocation to opt for the Amazon region," he wrote.

Dom Erwin Kräutler, an Austrian bishop who has spent the last 55 years in the Brazilian Amazon, said the situation is dire: more than 70% of Catholic communities in the Amazon don't receive a weekly Eucharist, and some have it once or twice a year.

"These communities are stripped of the Eucharist, the core of our faith," Kräutler said.

Conservatives rejoiced that Francis had refused to approve married priests.

"It is a great success, a great success for the faithful," said conservative Austrian activist Alexander Tschugguel, who was so alarmed at the "pagan" proceedings of the synod that he stole three wooden statues of a pregnant woman that were featured in the Vatican meetings and threw them in the Tiber River.

A conservative U.S. blogger, Thomas Peters, tweeted: "Deo gratias. The Holy Spirit has spared the Church."

The omission disappointed German Catholics. The issue of married priests is on the official agenda of a new process of dialogue between the German bishops' conference and a powerful lay group, the Central Committee of German Catholics.

"We regret very much that Pope Francis does not dare to move a step forward," said the head of the committee, Thomas Sternberg.

German Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen, a progressive who is rumored to be in the running to head the German bishops conference, said he "would have been happy" if Francis had allowed for married priests. His reluctance to do so, he told the German daily Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger, "is perhaps an expression of the hesitancy of a 2,000-year-old church."

Francis dismissed suggestions that ordaining women would serve them or the church. While agreeing that women should have greater decision-making and governance roles, Francis argued that they must find "other forms of service and charisms that are proper to women."

Women's advocacy groups blasted the document. Francis justified his refusal to consider ordained ministry for women as sparing them the risk of being "clericalized," or placed on a pedestal.

"This post-synodal document is a betrayal of women by denying them the grace of holy orders to do a ministry they are already carrying out," said Miriam Duignan of the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, a British-based progressive Catholic think tank.

Kate McElwee, executive director of Women's Ordination Conference, concurred.

"Recognizing women's work with diaconal ordination would be the first, most basic step towards righting the wrong of institutional sexism that hobbles our church as it attempts to respond to the moral crises of

our time," McElwee said in a statement.

The Catholic Church retains the priesthood for men, arguing that Christ and his apostles were male. While Eastern rite branches have married priests, and Anglican and Protestant priest converts can be married, the Roman rite church has had a tradition of priestly celibacy since the 11th century, imposed in part to ensure that priests' assets pass to the church, not to heirs.

In the weeks before the document's release, the question of a celibate priesthood made headlines after the publication of a book written by retired Pope Benedict XVI, and a conservative Vatican official, Cardinal Robert Sarah, reaffirmed its "necessity."

Benedict's participation in the book created controversy since it appeared he was trying to influence the thinking of the current pope, despite promises to remain "hidden from the world" when he resigned seven years ago. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni noted that Francis finished his document in December, before the book came out, making clear he wasn't swayed by Benedict's intervention.

Francis avoided the issue altogether, dedicating the entire first half of the document to the "injustice and crime" committed against the Amazonian peoples and their environment by local governments, foreign corporate interests and illegal mining and extraction.

"We cannot allow globalization to become a new version of colonialism," he wrote, adding that the church in the Amazon must have social justice at the forefront of its spirituality.

Clare Dixon, Latin America chief for the British Catholic aid agency CAFOD, said its environmental emphasis might help influence the climate change debate.

"But Francis is also imploring us to listen to the wisdom of the people of the Amazon, insisting that we learn from the way they live with the environment rather than in competition with it," she said.

AP writers Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, and Diane Jeantet in Rio de Janeiro contributed.

Jussie Smollett's image takes new hit with revived charges

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — He's stopped posting to his Twitter account, his last Instagram post was eight months ago, and his acting and singing careers appear to be at a standstill.

Former "Empire" actor Jussie Smollett has all but vanished from public view in the year since Chicago detectives accused him of paying two brothers to stage a racist and anti-gay attack on him because he was unhappy with his salary and wanted to promote his career.

But Smollett was thrust back into the spotlight on Tuesday after a grand jury indicted him for a second time on charges of lying to the police, in a case that drew worldwide attention.

David E. Johnson, the CEO and founder of Strategic Vision PR Group, an Atlanta-area public relations firm that has no ties to the case, said the new charges couldn't be worse news for Smollett if he had any hopes of reviving his career.

"It brings everything back," said Johnson. "Nobody was really talking about it. ... Now, unless he's acquitted and totally vindicated, this is the end of his career."

"Even people who were giving him the benefit of the doubt for so long" would not be able to defend him, Johnson said.

But Eric Rose, a partner in the public relations firm Englander Knabe & Allen, said that how the actor responds to the latest charges could determine whether he can recover.

"The public is extremely forgiving and allows people to make mistakes, but you have to own up to your mistakes and apologize in sincere fashion, and he has done none of that," said Rose, who specializes in reputation management and crisis communications. He said he doesn't believe Smollett's claims of innocence.

Smollett, who is black and gay, originally was charged with disorderly conduct in February 2019 for allegedly staging the attack and then lying about it to investigators.

His story — he said two men beat him up, shouted racist and anti-gay slurs, threw bleach on him and

put a noose around his neck — fell apart when brothers Abimbola and Olabinjo Osundairo, who were bodybuilders and aspiring actors whom Smollett knew from the “Empire” set and the gym, told police the actor had paid them \$3,500 to stage the attack.

Even so, the charges were abruptly dropped last March with little explanation, angering police officials and then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and leading to the appointment of a special prosecutor to review the decision.

Special Prosecutor Dan Webb said in a statement Tuesday that Smollett faces six felony counts of disorderly conduct stemming from four separate false reports that he gave to police.

Smollett, who has maintained his innocence, has spent the past year in legal fights with the city of Chicago, which sued him in an attempt to recover more than \$130,000 in overtime that was paid to officers involved in investigating Smollett’s report. Smollett’s attorneys have said the city should not be allowed to recover costs from Smollett because it accepted \$10,000 from the actor “as payment in full in connection with the dismissal of the charges against him.”

He sued the city last fall for malicious prosecution, and the case is still pending.

Smollett faced a fierce online backlash after he was charged last year, but he also probably has been avoiding social media on the advice of his attorneys, “because every word he says will be analyzed and could be used against him,” said Rose.

In response to the new charges, Smollett’s attorneys said in a statement that Webb “has not found any evidence of wrongdoing whatsoever” with the dismissal of the original charges and that they believe the new ones are politically motivated.

Smollett is scheduled to appear in court for arraignment on Feb. 24.

The former child star grew up to become a champion of LGBT rights and one of the few actors to play a black gay character on primetime TV.

On “Empire,” he played Jamal Lyon, a talented R&B singer struggling to earn his father’s approval and find his place in his dad’s music empire, and the role was his breakthrough. It became one of the biggest network shows to star a gay black character, and his work earned Emmy and Grammy nominations.

Smollett, who is also a musician and who released an R&B album, was interested in social justice causes. He joined The Human Rights Campaign’s Equality Rocks campaign, and his music videos explored issues such as LGBT rights and religious and racial prejudices.

A month before he reported the alleged attack, he traveled to Flint, Michigan, to deliver coats and school supplies to kids.

Check out more of the AP’s coverage of the Smollett case.

Follow Tammy Webber on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/twebber02>

Man charged in Walmart shooting appears in federal court

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Lawyers for the suspect in a shooting at a Walmart in Texas that killed 22 people waived a federal bond hearing and the reading of the indictment Wednesday, as survivors of the attack teared up and consoled one another.

Patrick Crusius, of Allen, Texas, is already being held without bond on state charges. His attorneys waived a reading of his 90-count federal indictment in which he was charged with hate crimes in the shooting, which targeted Latinos in the border city of El Paso. He has also been charged with capital murder under Texas state law.

Attorney David Lane asked a federal judge to waive a bond hearing for Crusius, 21, who is already being held without bond on the state charges under tight security at the El Paso County jail.

Crusius stood silently by Lane and showed no emotion as his attorney took questions from a federal judge. In court documents that Lane filed shortly after, Crusius entered a not guilty plea.

The hearing opens a federal prosecution against Crusius that will parallel the capital murder case un-

derway in state court.

County prosecutors in the state case are seeking the death penalty. Federal prosecutors told reporters last week that they were still deciding on what punishment to seek.

The court appearance comes six months after the Aug. 3 shooting in the majority Hispanic city federal prosecutors say was the result of militant racism. They have said that Crusius carried out the attack in order to scare Latinos into leaving the U.S., a plot they allege he outlined in a screed published online shortly before the attack.

More than 20 people survived the shooting with injuries; some underwent surgery in recent months, and one is still in the hospital. Hundreds more have suffered psychological trauma either because they were present or because a loved one was wounded, according to local officials.

Associated Press writer Jake Bleiberg in Dallas contributed to this report.

Follow the AP's coverage of the mass shooting in El Paso and the community's efforts to heal: <https://apnews.com/ElPasoTexasmassshooting>.

Jury finds Mar-a-Lago intruder not guilty of trespassing

Associated Press undefined

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — A Florida jury acquitted a Chinese woman Wednesday of trespassing at President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort after she testified she didn't understand a security guard who told her to leave.

However, jurors did find Jing Lu, 56, guilty of resisting a police officer without violence during her Dec. 18 arrest. The incident marked the second time in 2019 that a Chinese national was charged with illicitly entering Trump's Florida resort.

Prosecutors told jurors that Lu purposely intruded in a "calculated" and "planned" manner. She has been in custody since her arrest because her visa to remain in the United States has expired.

Prosecutors said she ignored a warning to leave the grounds and returned through a side entrance and continued taking pictures. Mar-a-Lago is now Trump's official residence, moving there from New York City last year, but he was not in Florida when Lu was arrested.

Lu, testifying through a Mandarin interpreter, said she paid \$200 for a Chinese guide to drop her off at various South Florida locations. She said her language barrier prevented her from understanding a security officer's orders to leave the property.

Security guard Murray Fulton told jurors he used hand gestures to make his warnings clear to her.

Lu's tour guide then took her to Palm Beach's Worth Avenue shopping district, where she was stopped by two Palm Beach police officers. They testified that she wouldn't consent to being questioned and resisted when they tried to handcuff her.

Lu testified that she was scared when the officers approached her, adding that she didn't know why she was being handcuffed.

Palm Beach County Judge Mark Eissey set Lu's sentencing for Friday. She faces up to one year in jail on the misdemeanor charge.

Mar-a-Lago has had a rash of security breaches, with at least three trespassing events over the past 14 months, two of them involving Chinese nationals.

Last March, Yujing Zhang, a 33-year-old Shanghai businesswoman, gained access to Mar-a-Lago by telling Secret Service agents she was there to swim. Club staff then confused her for a member's daughter and admitted her before she was stopped in the lobby by a suspicious clerk who alerted other agents.

Zhang was carrying a laptop, phones and other electronic gear, which led to initial speculation that she might be a spy, but she was never charged with espionage and text messages she exchanged with a trip organizer indicated she was a fan of the president and wanted to meet him or his family to discuss possible deals.

Zhang was found guilty in September of trespassing and lying to Secret Service agents. She was sentenced in November to time served and ordered deported.

Barr agrees to testify as Democrats question his leadership

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr has agreed to testify before the House Judiciary Committee next month, appearing for the first time before the panel as questions swirl about whether he intervened in the case of a longtime ally of President Donald Trump.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., released a letter Wednesday to Barr “to confirm your agreement to testify” on March 31. In the letter, Nadler and committee Democrats write that they have concerns that Barr has misused the criminal justice system for political purposes.

“In your tenure as attorney general, you have engaged in a pattern of conduct in legal matters relating to the president that raises significant concerns for this committee,” Nadler and the Democrats wrote.

The Justice Department confirmed Barr would testify. His appearance will be the first before the House Judiciary panel since he became attorney general a year ago, and since he declined an invitation to testify about special counsel Robert Mueller’s report after it was released.

The Democrats said they plan to ask Barr about the department’s decision this week to overrule four federal prosecutors and lower the amount of prison time it would seek for Trump’s confidant Roger Stone. The four prosecutors immediately quit the case, in which Stone was convicted of lying to Congress, witness tampering and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election.

They said they will also ask Barr about his department’s announcement that it is taking information that Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani is gathering in Ukraine about the president’s Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son. The House voted in December to impeach Trump because of his pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrats; the GOP-led Senate acquitted him this month.

“In the past week alone, you have taken steps that raise grave questions about your leadership,” the Democrats wrote.

After the department indicated it would overrule the prosecutors, Trump tweeted congratulations to Barr “for taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not have been brought,” suggesting the prosecutors had gone rogue.

The department insisted the decision to undo the sentencing recommendation was made Monday night, before Trump began tweeting about it, and that prosecutors had not spoken to the White House about it.

The Senate has shown less interest in grilling Barr on the Stone episode, defending the department’s decision to reduce the sentence and saying they didn’t expect to call him specifically to discuss it.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said Wednesday that he had spoken to the Justice Department and was told that their sentencing guidelines call for three and a half or four and a half years, instead of the seven to nine years the prosecutors had recommended.

“I don’t think any of us should tweet about an ongoing case, but having said that, I appreciate the Department of Justice making sure that their recommendations to the court are to seek justice for the law as it’s written,” Graham said.

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

After impeachment: Congress adrift, oversight uncertain

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inside the Capitol, it’s as if the impeachment of President Donald Trump never happened.

One week after the historic undertaking shuttered to a close, Congress is feverishly back at work em-

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boldened but also arguably diminished by the outcome.

Senate Republicans are flexing their new status as Trump's unshakable allies, hitching their election pursuits to his and looking the other way as the president seems to dole out favoritism for friends and payback for critics with apparent impunity. They're back to confirming record numbers of judicial nominees viewing impeachment politically as a net gain.

"We won and they lost," declared Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

House Democrats are frantically reviving their kitchen-table agenda of health care and pocketbook priorities, a direct appeal to voters after spending the past months focused on erecting a firewall against potential wrongdoing by the president.

What has become clear in the aftermath of the impeachment proceedings is the stark realization that the legislative branch can only carry the country so far as a check on the executive. It's now up to voters to decide.

The outcome leaves Congress adrift, its legislative agenda uncertain, its oversight role challenged. Both parties are in flux as the nation's political energy turns toward the presidential primaries ahead of the November election, when voters will also decide control of the House and Senate.

"Everything is at stake in November," said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic caucus chairman, as he implored Americans to prepare to vote "as if your life depends on it."

Democrats warn that Trump, far from having learned lessons from becoming the third impeached president, is in fact engaged in an escalating pattern of retribution and political favoritism that started as soon as he was acquitted by the Senate.

In a matter of days, the White House reassigned an Army officer, Lt. Col. Alex Vindman, a key witness in the impeachment inquiry, from the National Security Council, and pushed his twin brother, a council lawyer, out with him. Ambassador Gordon Sondland was recalled from his post.

Then, Trump tweeted it was "very unfair" that associate Roger Stone was being recommended for up to nine years in prison after being convicted of witness tampering, obstruction and lying to Congress in the Russia probe. The Justice Department swiftly backed off, four government prosecutors withdrew from the case and the White House nixed the nomination of Jessie Liu, the supervising attorney, who was in line for a Treasury post.

On Wednesday, Sen. Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer called on the Justice Department's inspector general to look into the matter. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., agreed there needs to be an investigation.

"What we are witnessing is a crisis in the rule of law in America," Schumer said.

"Republicans thought the president would learn his lesson. The lesson the president learned was that the Republican Party will not hold him accountable no matter how egregious his behavior," he said.

Some Republicans who indicated the president might temper his behavior acknowledged Wednesday the limits.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said, "There haven't been very strong indicators this week that he has."

"I said before that I would hope that the president would learn from that experience," said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

"The president is his own person, and I'm my own person, and you can judge whether you think he has."

Asked if the president has learned any lessons from impeachment, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said: "He seems the same as he did two weeks ago."

Democrats, though, are displaying only tepid enthusiasm for digging deeper into Trump's alleged wrongdoings after the Senate voted last week to acquit him of the charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress in the Ukraine matter.

Privately, Democrats say there is little expectation the House will issue a subpoena for John Bolton, the former national security adviser whose forthcoming book holds fresh revelations about Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden that was central to the impeachment charges.

Attorney General William Barr is scheduled to testify before the House Judiciary Committee in late March, it was announced Wednesday.

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But at a House hearing, Democrats declined to grill budget director Russell Vought, a key White House figure in Trump's Ukraine effort. He had defied a congressional subpoena in the impeachment inquiry, but appeared Wednesday to discuss the budget.

Otherwise, House Democrats are returning their focus to the health care, infrastructure and oversight issues that helped bring them to the House majority, and they hope in November will keep them in power.

"We certainly still have an oversight role to play," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a progressive caucus leader. "But what that looks like exactly is difficult to know."

Republicans, meanwhile, have a Senate calendar full of more confirmation votes on Trump's judicial nominees — poised to reach 200 federal judges since the start of his presidency in a matter of days.

At a private lunch with GOP senators this week, Vice President Mike Pence extolled the nation's economic numbers and faced hardly any criticisms, senators said.

Senate Republicans who were eager during the impeachment proceedings to launch their own investigations into Ukraine and Joe Biden now are unclear on next steps.

Instead, a bipartisan group with Sens. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., and Chris Murphy, D-Conn., announced Wednesday it will travel again to Ukraine to shore up relations as the ally confronts Russian aggression.

Meanwhile, there's a push from both parties for legislation to lower prescription drug prices and to rein in surprise medical bills, which are campaign priorities. There's an energy bill in the Senate and lands bills in the House.

Those are all legislative longshots in an election year, but perhaps better than the alternative, which is spending their days in the Capitol as many did Wednesday answering questions about Trump in the White House.

One Democrat, Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, opened a Banking Committee hearing with the Federal Reserve Board chairman to register his concerns about the post-impeachment environment.

"So many senators said we know he'll get better, we know the president has learned something from this," Brown told reporters later. "We know if they don't call him out, it will get worse."

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Matthew Daly, Andrew Taylor and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

Sanders in talks with DNC to headline big-dollar fundraiser

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bernie Sanders is in talks with the Democratic National Committee to headline the first of two party fundraisers, where he will likely appear before the same big-dollar donors that he has repeatedly railed against on the campaign trail.

A DNC official confirmed the conversations on Wednesday. They come as Sanders' relationship with the party's establishment takes on greater importance following a victory in Tuesday's New Hampshire presidential primary and an essential tie for first place last week in Iowa's caucuses.

While establishment leaders have raised alarms about Sanders' far-left candidacy in recent weeks, the strong finishes in the two opening contests of the 2020 primary season all but ensure he will be a force in party politics at least through the national convention in July.

Raising money for the party will be an especially urgent task in 2020. Whoever wins the primary will inherit a party that is \$6.5 million in debt and has been out-raised by over 6 to 1 by President Donald Trump and the Republican National Committee, who collectively pulled in more than \$600 million last year alone.

As a condition of gaining access to the party's voter file, all 2020 contenders — Sanders included — are required to headline at least two fundraisers for the DNC's "Unity Fund," which will go to the eventual nominee.

Sanders, the only presidential candidate who has yet to do an event for the party, has spent years railing against big-dollar fundraisers. His victory speech in New Hampshire was no exception.

"This is a movement from coast to coast which is demanding that we finally have an economy and a

government that works for all of us — not wealthy campaign contributors,” the Vermont senator told supporters.

He’s also railed repeatedly against the DNC, which he accused of rigging the 2016 primary in favor of rival Hillary Clinton.

As the headliner at one of their events, he will not only be courting big-dollar donors he has criticized, but he will also be doing so to raise money for an organization that he and his supporters have called corrupt.

Under campaign finance rules, a single donor attending a DNC event can cut a check exceeding \$300,000.

Sanders’ campaign didn’t immediately return a message seeking comment Wednesday.

While the details, including location and format, have yet to be locked in, a DNC official said talks with Sanders’ campaign are ongoing. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Report: Census Bureau at risk of not being ready for count

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

With the start of the 2020 census just a month away for most U.S. residents, the U.S. Census Bureau is behind in recruiting workers and establishing partnerships with civic groups, and it is at risk of missing some informational technology testing goals, according to a report released Wednesday.

While the Census Bureau has succeeded so far in early tasks of verifying addresses across the U.S. and launching an advertising campaign, the agency’s readiness for upcoming operations is mixed, according to the report from the Government Accountability Office.

The report was made public Wednesday during a hearing by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform.

The GAO report said the bureau was at risk of missing testing milestones for five IT operations, including one that will allow people to self-respond and another for following-up with households that haven’t answered the questions on their own.

“Where the risk is, is just time. We are in a pressure cooker of time to get things done,” said Nick Marinis, the GAO’s director of information technology.

Lawmakers held the hearing Wednesday to get an update from Census Bureau director Steven Dillingham and other agency officials on its readiness for the largest and most complex head count in U.S. history.

Dillingham testified that the bureau was on its way toward reaching its goals for hiring and partnerships.

“We are confident that we are on mission, on budget and on target,” Dillingham said. “The 2020 census is positioned for success.”

The chairwoman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, said the GAO report was sending “flashing red lights” that the bureau wasn’t ready.

“Whether through incompetence or intentional action, this administration’s failures risk causing grave harm to this year’s census that could jeopardize a complete and accurate count,” Democratic Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York said.

U.S. Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Debra Haaland of New Mexico, both Democrats, asked what the Census Bureau was doing to overcome misperceptions that there was a question about citizenship on the 2020 questionnaire. The U.S. Supreme Court last year rejected a Trump administration attempt to add a citizenship question to the form.

Research indicates that people respond to positive messages about the 2020 census, so instead of focusing on what could be considered a negative, like the citizenship question, “we enforce the positive,” Dillingham answered.

Other lawmakers, led by Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, were unhappy that the bureau hadn’t yet shared with them a breakdown by congressional district of the partnerships the agency had established in each congressional district. Dillingham said some partners hadn’t given permission to make their affiliation with the Census Bureau public.

Democratic Rep. Katie Porter of California told Census Bureau officials that some of her constituents had

received mail from the Republican National Committee that resembled a census form and she worried they would be confused by it. Maloney called the RNC mailings "outrageous."

Dillingham promised to look into the problem. "We don't want any confusion whatsoever," he said.

A party spokeswoman said Wednesday that the mailings clearly state they are from the Republican National Committee. They are labeled "2020 Congressional District Census" and state "the Republican Party is conducting a Census of key members and supporters in Congressional Districts all across our nation."

The 2020 Census started last month in a remote part of rural Alaska. But the rest of the nation won't be able to start answering the questionnaire until the middle of next month. For the first time, the U.S. Census Bureau is encouraging most participants to fill out the form online, although they can still answer the questions by telephone or by returning a paper form.

The 2020 count will help determine the allocation of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending and how many congressional seats each state gets.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

Police still searching for missing South Carolina girl, 6

CAYCE, S.C. (AP) — Hundreds of police officers continued to look Wednesday for a 6-year-old girl who hasn't been seen since shortly after getting off her school bus near her South Carolina home Monday.

Investigators have no evidence that Faye Marie Swetlik was kidnapped, but also have not ruled an abduction or that she walked away from her home or was harmed by someone she knew in the central city of Cayce, authorities said.

"We're still exploring every possibility to bring Faye home," Cayce Public Safety Officer Sgt. Evan Antley said.

Police on Wednesday released a video of the girl getting off her school bus Monday. Her family discovered her missing about 3:45 p.m. and called 911 after looking for her for about an hour, authorities have said.

"Her mother, her mother's boyfriend and her father have all been cooperative with us," Cayce Public Safety Director Byron Snellgrove said.

Investigators have sent more than 250 officers to talk with neighbors, have used tracking dogs and helicopters to search the area and have stopped motorists near the girl's home to question them. They have also asked residents with doorbell cameras in the area to share footage. State police and the FBI are assisting local police.

Flyers with Faye's picture have sprouted up all over Cayce, a city of 14,000 neighboring the state capital of Columbia.

"When she walks into a room she brightens it up. Everyone loves Faye," Snellgrove said. "Faye loves dresses, fancy shoes, spending time with her family, cats and playing outside."

Christian Cowan lives out his childhood fashion dream

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Christian Cowan equates showing his fashion collections with continuously living out a childhood dream.

"I'm always going to be so ecstatic every time I wake up and know I've got a show," Cowan told The Associated Press before his fall-winter collection rolled out Tuesday night at New York Fashion Week.

In a few short years, the 25-year British designer has developed a high-profile fan base within the artistic community. That sits well with him since he said it's musicians and actresses who inspire him in the first place.

Cowan counts Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, and Keke Palmer among celebrities who have embraced his designs. And then there's Cardi B. Cowan dressed the Grammy-winning recording artist for the cover of her debut album, "Invasion of Privacy."

"It was early on and she asked me for a few outfits, and I loved her and loved her personality. ... She

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only had a few tracks then and I loved them. So we loaned her looks and then we just built a friendship and a working relationship," Cowan said.

As for latest collection, Cowan calls it the most evolved he's ever done, right down to the custom fabrics and wide range of accessories.

"We are doing eyewear this season, we've got handbags, there's many more layers. It's just really evolving in its technique. It's just a big wow factor, deep show," Cowan said.

He worked in prints and earth tones rich in gold and brighter greens and put crystal-studded net face masks on some of his models. There was also a fair amount of black and purples. The collection showcased metallic and sequin mini-skirts, including a closing look with a gigantic bow on the back. In addition to bold pops of color, he included a head-to-toe leopard print look.

Cowan said he was inspired by various means of power, from natural and vivid to ritualistic and wealth. He explained some of the ways he chose to depict it: "Fireworks, which are a ceremonial aspect of power, and animal print, and ocelot, which is an animal-wear power."

He's also inspired by the powerful women who wear his designs.

"To see them enjoying my work, and kind of fueling what they do, is always, like, an honor," Cowan said.

While fashion week this time around has been lighter in celebrities than previous years, Cowan drew a few, including singer-songwriter Tinashe and singer Orville Peck. Actress Lisa Rinna and her fashion model daughters, Delilah Belle Hamlin and Amelia Hamlin, were also front row guests.

UN list targets firms linked to Israeli settlements

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The U.N. human rights office on Wednesday released a list of more than 100 companies it said are complicit in violating Palestinian human rights by operating in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank — a first-ever international attempt to name and shame businesses that has drawn fierce Israeli condemnation.

The list's publication after repeated delays escalated a looming showdown between Israel and the international community over its more than half-century policy of building settlements in the West Bank. Emboldened by a new U.S. Mideast initiative, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to annex Israel's more than 100 settlements, while the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague has indicated she will soon launch a war-crimes investigation into settlement policies.

The list included well known global companies, among them Airbnb, Motorola and General Mills. Although the vast majority of the world considers settlements illegal, Wednesday's report did not accuse the companies of violating international law. Instead, it appeared to be aimed at pressuring them by drawing negative attention to their ties to a much-maligned Israeli policy.

"I am conscious this issue has been, and will continue to be, highly contentious," said Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. "However, after an extensive and meticulous review process, we are satisfied this fact-based report reflects the serious consideration that has been given to this unprecedented and highly complex mandate."

The Human Rights Council in 2016 instructed the U.N.'s human rights office to create a "database" of companies deemed to be linked to or supportive of the settlements. Beginning with a potential list of over 300 companies, it narrowed it down to 112 firms involved in practices that raised human rights concerns, such as settlement construction, security services, banking and equipment that was used to demolish Palestinian property.

The report does not call for sanctions or have any concrete impact on the companies. But Israeli officials accused the report of caving in to pressure from the grassroots Palestinian-led boycott movement against Israel and raised concerns the list could be used as the basis for boycotts and other economic pressure against the companies.

In a statement, Netanyahu called the rights council "unimportant."

"Instead of the organization dealing with human rights, it only tries to disparage Israel. We strongly

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reject this contemptible effort," he said.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki hailed the list as a "victory for international law and for the diplomatic effort to dry up the sources of the colonial system represented by illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territory."

With broad international backing, the Palestinians claim the West Bank and east Jerusalem as parts of a future independent state. Israel, which captured both areas in the 1967 Mideast war, has annexed east Jerusalem — a step that is not internationally recognized — and said it has no intention of dismantling any of its West Bank settlements. Nearly 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, in addition to more than 200,000 in east Jerusalem.

In a reflection of how entrenched the settlements have become, the list is dominated by Israeli companies, including leading banks, construction companies, supermarkets and mobile phone operators.

But there also were international companies, including travel firms like Airbnb, Expedia, TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Opodo. Many offer vacation rentals in the settlements.

Other names include consumer food maker General Mills, tech and communications giants Motorola Solutions and Altice Europe, and infrastructure companies like France's Egis and Alstom, and British company JC Bamford Excavators.

In a statement to The Associated Press, JC Bamford said it is "not involved in the activities referred to in this report" and should not have been included. The company's products are offered through a local dealer, Comasco, that also appeared on the list.

Airbnb declined comment. The San Francisco company said in November 2018 that it was removing its listings in West Bank settlements. After some Israeli-American homeowners sued, the company reversed course and said it would donate all profits from the listings to humanitarian aid organizations.

Israel and the U.S. regularly accuse the Human Rights Council of anti-Israel bias, and the Trump administration withdrew the United States in 2018 — faulting the U.N. for accepting autocratic governments that the administration said have repeatedly violated human rights.

The rights council is made up of 47 governments, with countries like Libya, Venezuela and Somalia among its members. The overwhelming majority of resolutions passed by the council has focused on Israel and its treatment of Palestinians, and Israel is the only country in the world whose policies automatically face scrutiny at every council session.

For decades, the U.S. joined the rest of the international community in criticizing settlement construction. That began to change after President Donald Trump took office in 2017. Surrounded by advisers with close ties to the settlement movement, Trump took a more sympathetic line toward Israel and halted the automatic criticism of settlements of his predecessors.

In November, the U.S. said it did not consider settlements illegal. And last month, Trump unveiled a Mideast plan that would allow Israel to retain permanent control over large parts of the territory, including all of its settlements.

This warm U.S. embrace could cause trouble for Israel. Emboldened by the Trump plan, Netanyahu has vowed to soon annex the settlements — a step that International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has warned against as she prepares her decision on whether to open a war crimes inquiry. Under U.S. pressure, Netanyahu has put off his annexation plans until after March 2 Israeli elections.

The Palestinians have rejected Trump's plan, and other countries have expressed little support for it while remaining opposed to the settlements.

The rights council had never before requested such a list scrutinizing corporate activities. The report said its authors had communicated directly with the companies to allow them to defend themselves or say whether they had changed their practices. The report's authors called on the council to set up "a group of independent experts" to update the database each year.

Human Rights Watch, a vocal critic of the settlements, applauded the report.

"The long-awaited release of the U.N. settlement business database should put all companies on notice: To do business with illegal settlements is to aid in the commission of war crimes," said Bruno Stagno, HRW's deputy executive director for advocacy.

But Israel's allies accused the council of collaborating with the BDS movement — a grassroots Palestinian-led coalition that advocates boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel. The movement says it advocates nonviolent tactics to protest Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Israel and its allies say BDS has a deeper agenda of destroying the country and accuse it of anti-Semitism — a charge the movement strongly denies.

"The U.N. Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights has officially decided to endorse anti-Semitic BDS by issuing a defamatory list of companies it claims are supposedly involved in 'settlement activity,'" said Anne Herzberg, legal adviser for NGO Monitor, an Israeli advocacy group that is highly critical of the U.N.

But in a statement, the BDS movement called for action against the companies. "These companies must be held to account, including through strategic boycotts and divestment campaigns," it said.

Keaten reported from Geneva. Associated Press writer Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit contributed.

Jeremy Roenick won't return to NBC Sports after suspension

By **STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer**

Jeremy Roenick will not be returning to NBC Sports after his suspension for making inappropriate comments about coworkers.

A network spokesman confirmed to The Associated Press on Wednesday that Roenick will not be back on the air. The spokesman said NBC Sports would have no further comment.

Roenick announced the end of his tenure at NBC Sports in a video posted on Twitter.

"I'm very disappointed and angry today I will not be returning to NBC," Roenick said. "I'm also grateful that I've had the opportunity to share my love, my passion and my knowledge of the game with millions of people, millions of fans."

The longtime NHL player-turned-broadcaster added he won't be gone for long and said he'd be back "better and more motivated to bring you the best entertainment and the best that I have for the game of hockey."

NBC Sports suspended Roenick indefinitely without pay in late December after he made series of questionable remarks about fellow hockey broadcasters Kathryn Tappen, Patrick Sharp and Anson Carter during a recent appearance on the Spittin' Chiclets podcast.

On the podcast, Roenick discussed a vacation to Portugal with his wife and Tappen where he made repeated references to the NBC Sports anchor's appearance and joked about the possibility of the three of them having sex together. Later in the interview, Roenick called Sharp "so beautiful" and said: "I'd have to think about it if he asked me. ... I wouldn't say no right away" and then seemed to contrast Sharp's appearance with his and Carter's.

Roenick played 20 NHL seasons with the Blackhawks, Coyotes, Flyers, Sharks and Kings before moving into television. He had been an analyst at NBC Sports since 2010.

More AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/NHL> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Michael Kors reminds that staying in can be chic, glamorous

By **KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press**

NEW YORK (AP) — Michael Kors is so over leggings and sports bras. He used Wednesday's fall collection as a reminder that staying in and cozying up by the fire can still be chic and glamorous.

Blake Lively, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Issa Rae and Anna Wintour sat in the front row at the star-studded event held on the final day of New York Fashion Week.

The collection was all about dressing for a country getaway and unplugging from busy life with a strong equestrian feel, heavy on camels, grays and blacks with sparse hits of red and orange. Everything was draped with a cape, hood or cozy cowl neck — even a chunky tan sweater was complemented with a matching sweater tied around the neck for extra snuggles.

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The ubiquitous and often naked athleisure wear is "not sexy, it's not alluring," Kors said during a backstage interview with The Associated Press.

"I like casual clothes. We're American. We invented it, but now we've got to reel it back."

Lively, who came dressed in a menswear inspired look in a plaid vest, wide-leg trousers and white button down, said Kors brought her to her very first fashion show nearly a decade ago when she was the new girl in town.

"I didn't have any friends and then I get a call from Michael Kors saying, 'do you want to be my date to some fancy fashion show,'" said Lively, who gushed about the designer's kindness. "Sometimes we think of fashion as very standoffish, but my experience is that it's been very warm and welcoming."

Several young stars also attended the show, including actresses Dove Cameron and Olivia Holt and singer Kelsea Ballerini.

"I love the menswear vibes. I'm very into suits at the moment," said Cameron, who wore an oversized black striped suit jacket. "It's so sexy. Everything he does is so tailored."

Holt said it was her first time attending Kors' show.

"I don't spend a lot of time in the fashion world so to be able to be here and take it all in and embrace it and soak it all up is a really special experience," she told the AP.

The fall collection showed very little skin except for a handful of evening looks, which still kept with the relaxed chic vibe paired with sweaters, turtlenecks and capes. A long, gold pleated skirt was paired with a military jacket. A thick, alpaca fringed scarf was paired with a gunmetal sequined pleated dress.

Sharp tailoring gave slouchy trousers and riding pants an urban sense. Suede, leather and shearling outerwear was paired with fluid, pleated skirts and dresses.

Festive plaids, houndstooth and warm paisley prints studded the show. Everything was paired with boots — riding, over-the-knee wellies or stacked-heel city boots.

"How do you have the coziness that you find in the country ... but with polish that makes it work for a city street," Kors said.

Rae, who changed into a pretty, spring green Kors dress with ruffled shoulders and a tie-front neck, described her first fashion week as "crazy."

"I just changed. I'm going to change after this for the next (show)," said "The Photograph" actress, who said it's difficult finding a place to disrobe on the go.

"I'm not gonna change in the car. I know that," she laughed.

Joe Biden looks to South Carolina to resurrect his campaign

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Joe Biden brought his wounded presidential campaign to South Carolina on Tuesday, staking his hopes for a comeback on the loyalty of black voters in the state after a dismal finish in the New Hampshire primary magnified his disappointing finish in Iowa.

"I know this is going to be the fight of my life," Biden told about 200 enthusiastic supporters gathered near the South Carolina Capitol to hear the 77-year-old former vice president deliver an emotional appeal. Biden eagerly looked ahead as the nomination fight moves beyond the overwhelmingly white opening states to Nevada, South Carolina and a Super Tuesday slate where African Americans and Latinos will hold considerable sway.

"We just heard from the first two of 50 states. Two of them," Biden said. "That's the opening bell, not the closing bell."

The candidate argued that no Democratic nominee has succeeded without significant support from African Americans, the core of his base in a fractured primary field. The electorate in South Carolina's Feb. 29 primary, the first in the South, is expected to be more than 60% black and could approach 70%, according to state party leaders.

Still, there is little Democratic precedent for the kind of comeback Biden is trying to pull off. Since 1992, no Democrat has claimed the nomination in the modern primary system without winning either Iowa or

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New Hampshire.

Biden's campaign had said for months they didn't have to win either state, but that strategy didn't necessarily consider finishing so far off the pace. In recent days, Biden's donor base has since grown nervous, raising questions about his financial viability if he doesn't rebound quickly.

Biden boarded a private jet in Manchester on Tuesday evening — even before New Hampshire primary polls closed — ending an eight-day whirlwind that saw the former vice president go from a national front-runner for the nomination to a battered underdog.

He finished fourth in the Iowa caucuses, and with votes still being tabulated in New Hampshire, Biden was vying for fourth alongside Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Each was at risk of finishing without winning any delegates out of the nation's first primary.

In his remarks Tuesday night, Biden praised Iowa's and New Hampshire's opening roles, but argued that 99.9% of African Americans and 99.8% of Latinos haven't yet had the opportunity to cast Democratic primary ballots.

"Do not let anyone take this election away from you," he said in a speech that touted his deep political ties to South Carolina and to the black community.

Biden mentioned his relationship with South Carolina's lone Democratic congressman, Jim Clyburn, the highest ranking black lawmaker on Capitol Hill. He noted his service as President Barack Obama's top lieutenant. He recalled meeting South African leader Nelson Mandela. And he promised black Americans a seat at the table in the Oval Office.

"Too often your loyalty, your commitment, your support for this party has been taken for granted," he said. "I give you my word as a Biden that I never, ever, ever will."

Biden was introduced by his campaign co-chairman, Cedric Richmond, a Louisiana congressman and former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. Richmond recalled for the crowd the first question he asked himself when deciding who to support: "Who do I trust?"

South Carolina has been a springboard for the nominee before. Four years ago, Hillary Clinton and Sanders battled to a draw in Iowa and Sanders beat her in New Hampshire, prompting a round of hand-wringing from some party leaders and national media. Clinton went on to crush Sanders in South Carolina and the diverse states that immediately followed, building a delegate lead he could never overcome. Eight years earlier, it was Obama, the nation's first black president, who used the black vote to put distance between his campaign and Clinton.

This isn't a two-person race, though, and Biden is looking merely to return to contender status. But 2020 already has proven unusual, with no candidate having demonstrated the ability to build a broad coalition across the party's racial, ethnic and ideological factions. Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg achieved a split decision in Iowa and Sanders barely edged out Buttigieg in New Hampshire.

Sanders, a Vermont senator and democratic socialist, has paltry support among the party's establishment core, and for months he has trailed Biden in support among non-white Democrats. Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, has struggled to corral meaningful support from black or Latino voters.

The same is true for Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who finished just behind Biden in Iowa but finished third in New Hampshire.

Biden does have competition for the black vote in South Carolina. Billionaire businessman Tom Steyer has spent large sums on advertising, while Biden's financial struggles have left him largely absent from the state's airwaves. The former vice president will depend on voters like Tina Herbert, a Columbia attorney who was eager to see him Tuesday night.

"I thought it was important that I showed my face and showed my support for him tonight," she said. "I've been with him since Day One."

Herbert said she wasn't concerned about Biden's finishes in any other early states.

"We are not really receptive to outsiders, so we don't listen to their opinions, even when we should, good or bad," she said.

Associated Press writer Meg Kinnard in Columbia, S.C., contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that no Democratic presidential nominee since 1992, not ever, has claimed the nomination in the modern primary system without winning either Iowa or New Hampshire.

Ford recalls over 240K vehicles to fix suspension problem

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford is recalling over 240,000 SUVs and cars worldwide because a suspension part can fracture and increase the risk of a crash.

The recall covers the Ford Flex, Taurus police car, Taurus SHO and Lincoln MKT from the 2013 through 2018 model years. Most of the recalled vehicles are in North America.

Ford says if the suspension moves a lot on the vehicles, the rear toe links can fracture. Toe links help keep the rear suspension stable and the tires on the pavement.

The company says it's not aware of any crashes or injuries caused by the problem in this batch of recalled vehicles.

Dealers will replace toe links on both sides with new ones that are stronger. Owners will be notified starting March 2.

US troops clash with pro-government group in northeast Syria

By ALBERT AJI and ANDREW WILKS Associated Press

DAMASCUS (AP) — A Syrian was killed and another was wounded when government supporters attacked American troops and tried to block their way as their convoy drove through an army checkpoint in northeastern Syria, prompting a rare clash, state media and activists reported.

The U.S. military said its force came under fire, and that troops responded in self-defense. It said an investigation of the incident was underway.

Syrian state-run media said the man killed was a civilian and that he was among residents of a village east of the town of Qamishli who had gathered at the checkpoint and pelted the U.S. convoy with stones.

A video posted on state news agency SANA's website showed angry men firing small arms at a convoy of several armored U.S. vehicles flying the U.S. flag. Some residents pelted the convoy with stones, while another dumped a bucket full of dirt on the back of one vehicle.

In one of the worst incidents of violence against U.S. troops deployed in northeastern Syria, a small fire appears to ignite on an armored vehicle, apparently from fire bombs lobbed at the convoy. U.S. soldiers were seen standing in the middle of the melee, trying to disperse the crowd.

Other videos showed another vehicle stuck in the dirt, apparently having veered into a ditch, while another had a flat tire. In one video, a resident walked up to U.S. soldiers at one of the vehicles, holding a U.S. flag, screaming: "What do you want from our country? What is your business here?" A soldier tells the shouting man to "back off."

At that point, American troops fired live ammunition and smoke bombs at the residents, the reports said.

A U.S. military spokesman said coalition forces conducting a patrol near Qamishli encountered a checkpoint occupied by pro-Syrian government forces who ignored a series of warnings by coalition troops to de-escalate the situation. The patrol came under small-arms fire from unknown individuals, coalition spokesman Myles Caggins said, adding that coalition troops returned fire in self-defense.

"The situation was de-escalated and is under investigation," he said in a statement. Air Force Lt. Col. Carla Gleason, traveling with the U.S. defense secretary in Brussels, said no Americans were killed in the incident.

Asked about the incident, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said in Brussels he was told there was an "altercation," without providing details.

"As far as I know today's incident did not involve the Russians," he said.

In other violence in the country's northwest, Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces continued their advance in Idlib and Aleppo provinces near the border with Turkey. They took full control of a strategic

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highway that runs through the rebel-held territory and links the capital to northern Syria. The M5 highway had been under opposition control for most of the war.

Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement that Syrian troops fully cleared the M5.

"Syria's most important transport artery — the M5 highway linking the blocked northern capital of Aleppo with Hama, Homs and Damascus in the south — has been freed from terrorists," the statement said.

With support from Russia, Syrian troops have been on the offensive for weeks in Idlib and parts of nearby Aleppo provinces, unleashing a humanitarian crisis with 700,000 people fleeing their homes and surging north toward the Turkish border.

The U.N. human rights office in Geneva recorded incidents between Feb. 1-10 in which at least 85 civilians were killed, including 20 women and 27 children with most casualties in the so-called "de-escalation area" in Idlib, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Wednesday.

The Syrian war, now in its ninth year, has pulled in international players including the U.S., Russia and Turkey. Russia has supported Assad's government, while Turkey is the rebels' main backer.

Hundreds of U.S. troops are stationed in northeastern Syria, working with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to fight against the Islamic State group. The U.S. carries out patrols in northeastern Syria, but it was not immediately clear why the convoy drove into a government-controlled area Wednesday.

The clash marked a rare confrontation involving U.S. and Syrian troops in the crowded region where Russian forces are also deployed and was certain to escalate tensions.

At one point during the incident, U.S., Russian and Syrian flags could be seen next to each other, reflecting the complicated terrain in northeastern Syria. Some reports said a Russian convoy arrived on the scene to defuse the tension.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said residents and armed pro-government militiamen in Khirbet Ammu blocked the path of a U.S. convoy. The militia fired in the air, prompting the American troops to fire smoke bombs. Tension escalated and U.S. troops killed one person, the Observatory said.

The Observatory, which has a network of activists on the ground, said it was not clear if the person killed was a civilian or a militia member. The Observatory also said a Russian convoy arrived on the scene to defuse the tension.

The Idlib offensive has also triggered clashes between Syrian and Turkish troops in which 13 Turkish soldiers have died in one week.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Wednesday that Turkey could attack Syrian government forces anywhere in Syria if another Turkish soldier is hurt. He said Turkey is determined to force the Syrian military back from the gains it has made in Idlib, giving Syrian troops until the end of February to retreat.

"As of today, in the event of any minor harm to our soldiers, I announce that we will strike regime forces everywhere without being bound to Idlib or the boundaries of the Sochi agreement," Erdogan told a ruling party meeting in Ankara.

Erdogan was referring to the 2018 agreement between Russia and Turkey in which the two countries' troops would enforce a demilitarized zone in Idlib. As part of the agreement, Turkey established a dozen military observation posts in the province, where it backs some opposition groups. Several of these posts have been surrounded by government forces in recent weeks.

On Wednesday, opposition fighters, backed by Turkish artillery, launched an attack against new government positions along the highway.

Erdogan said he had spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin by telephone about the situation in Idlib.

The Kremlin said the phone conversation underlined the need to fully implement the Russian-Turkish agreements.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said despite a pledge by Turkey, militants in Idlib have continued to launch attacks on Syrian troops and threaten Russian facilities in Syria. "It's inadmissible and it runs contrary to the Sochi agreements," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Wilks reported from Ankara, Turkey. Associated Press writers Robert Burns in Brussels, Zeina Karam,

Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations and Sarah El Deeb in Beirut and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

Deval Patrick, last black candidate in 2020 race, drops out

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, the last remaining African American candidate in a Democratic presidential field once defined by its diversity, ended his 2020 campaign Wednesday after his late bid failed to catch fire or resonate with voters.

"The vote in New Hampshire last night was not enough for us to create the practical win at the campaign's back to go on to the next round of voting," Patrick said in a statement.

Patrick came in second-to-last in New Hampshire on Tuesday with just over 1,200 votes, after ignoring Iowa and focusing most of his time and resources on the first primary. His decision leaves just one other candidate of color, Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, a Samoan American, in the Democratic contest. It brings the number of Democrats in the presidential primary race to eight.

Patrick launched his bid for president in mid-November but failed to register in polling and fundraising and never made it onto a presidential debate stage. Patrick raised just \$2.2 million in the final six weeks of last year, and while a super PAC created to support his bid committed nearly that much to advertising in the early primary states last month, Patrick still barely registered in New Hampshire. He blamed in part what he characterized as a media narrative created around his late entry in the race. "I've met many people on the campaign trail who lament how they wished I had entered the race sooner," he said in a statement.

"We cannot keep mistaking media narratives for political outcomes. Political outcomes are entirely up to voters," he said.

It's a disappointing finish for someone who, in part because of his rhetorical skills, has long drawn comparisons to former President Barack Obama. The two men are personally close and Patrick counts some of Obama's aides and donors as part of his own inner circle. Valerie Jarrett, one of Obama's closest advisers, was one of Patrick's most prominent supporters.

But Obama has largely avoided wading into the race, and Patrick said throughout the primary that he didn't expect the former president to provide a boost to his bid.

Patrick hoped that by focusing on New Hampshire, the familiarity of a neighboring state would help boost his chances in the race. He offered what aides felt was a unique message in a field that ultimately boiled down largely to career politicians with little executive or private sector experience: that he had the track record as governor and through years of business experience to deliver on Democratic priorities like fighting climate change and reforming health care.

But another New England Democrat, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, won the state. Also, Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, emerged as the leading moderate, winning many of the same centrist voters Patrick had sought.

On the campaign trail, Patrick made a case for compassionate capitalism, the idea that businesses and government can work together in service of public good, and he drew on his time working for Bain Capital developing businesses that promote positive social change as evidence. While some donors and moderate Democrats said both his message and the messenger were sorely needed, in a primary season dominated by progressives' calls to break up big corporations and expand government aid programs, Patrick's arguments seemed to fall flat with some voters.

But in his Wednesday announcement, Patrick said that he heard from many voters on the trail who appreciated his moderation, and he warned the remaining candidates to avoid getting too bogged down in political divisions.

"Patriotism demands, now more than ever, that we reject false choices. Despite our righteous anger, Democrats don't have to hate Republicans to be good Democrats. ... In that same spirit, we don't have to hate moderation to be a good progressive," he said.

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

Study shows explosive growth in time spent streaming TV

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Streaming services like Netflix or Hulu account for 19% of television viewing in the United States now for people who have that capacity, virtually double what it was less than two years ago, a report out Wednesday said.

A Nielsen company study illustrated how quickly consumers have embraced streaming as an alternative to live TV. The percentage of time spent streaming has gone from 10% in a Nielsen study from March 2018 to 19% during the last three months of 2019.

More than half of consumers with the capacity to stream subscribe to two or more services, Nielsen found. And, in a survey, 93% said they planned to either increase or maintain that number.

"There is room for growth there," said Pete Katsingris, Nielsen's senior vice president for audience insights.

The average American spends a staggering 11 hours, 54 minutes each day connected to some form of media — TV, smartphones, radio, games — although that number is bloated because some of the usage is simultaneous, Nielsen said. That's up nearly an hour and a half in only a year.

Smartphone usage accounts for virtually all of the increase. People spent just under four hours a day on their phones in Nielsen's most recent study, compared to 2 hours, 31 minutes in the last three months of 2018.

A walk through the train on his daily commute shows Katsingris how absorbed people are in their phones, and they're becoming increasingly comfortable using them to watch video, he said.

"They are finding more and more ways to keep their attention occupied," he said.

Live television viewing is actually down in the past year (3 hours, 44 minutes to 3 hours, 27 minutes), explaining the worry in executive suites at television networks. Streaming time is up, from 29 minutes a day to 38 minutes in the same period.

Nielsen's report also illustrates a technological generation gap. People aged 18 to 34 spend five and a half hours a week on an Internet-connected device, compared to two and a half hours for people over age 65. Meanwhile, older folks spend nearly 50 hours a week in front of the television, compared to 20 hours for young people.

It's not like there's nothing to watch: Nielsen said consumers had access to 646,152 different movies or TV programs last year, up 10% in only a year.

There's something to be said for familiarity. Nielsen said the five most-watched programs on Netflix during the last three months of 2019 were episodes of programs that began on broadcast network TV: "The Office," "Friends," "Criminal Minds," "Grey's Anatomy" and "NCIS."

Review: Huey Lewis and The News' 'Weather' may be their last

By PABLO GORONDI Associated Press

"Weather" is the first album of original songs from Huey Lewis and The News in nearly two decades and it may also be their last.

Lewis has been suffering for decades from an inner-ear disorder that causes afflictions like hearing loss and vertigo, but the condition got much worse just days after the band finished mixing the songs on "Weather" with legendary studio wizard Bob Clearmountain.

Lewis suddenly lost hearing in both ears before a January 2018 concert in Dallas and it's been a struggle ever since, putting at risk any more recording sessions and live dates.

Even if it's just seven songs totaling barely 26 minutes, "Weather" sounds complete nevertheless, with the band's trademark sounds and usually festive moods present and accounted for.

First single "Her Love is Killin' Me" feels like a dusted-off classic from their 1980s heyday, and it's nearly that old, having been written back when guitarist Chris Hayes was still in the band. "While We're Young,"

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in light of what is now known, opens the album like a premonition — “Life is short/Let’s take advantage of every opportunity.”

“Pretty Girls Everywhere,” upholds the band’s custom of covers from the 1950’s and ‘60s which goes all the way back to their second album, “Picture This.” They have even recorded two full albums of covers, including their previous studio release, “Soulsville,” a 2010 collection of Stax deep cuts. Here, Eugene Church’s timeless tune includes some rollicking backing vocals and piano.

Acoustic guitar and lap steel bathe “One of the Boys” in country sounds, as it was originally written by Lewis for Willie Nelson. It ends the album on another poignant note — “Playing with my friends/Till the music ends.”

All in all, “Weather” is a short but sweet addition to the Huey Lewis and The News catalog, with its best songs worthy of inclusion in their next “Greatest Hits” package.

5 things I learned from binge-reading a 50-book crime series

By SOPHIA ROSENBAUM Associated Press

When you binge-read an entire 50-book series over five months, coming to the end feels like the final days of an amazing trip: You don’t want it to end, and at the same time you want to get back to your life.

I started reading J.D. Robb’s “In Death” series — a futuristic police procedural set in the mid-21st century — when I was in desperate need of escape. It was mid-August and, as an Associated Press editor, I had been through a particularly difficult news cycle: a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, followed by Jeffrey Epstein’s suicide. My mind was teeming with the details from both stories, and I was burnt out. I felt like I could only get to a quarter tank of gas, and every time a half tank was in view, my energy would get depleted again.

I had been on a good reading kick, ripping through some spectacular books including Tayari Jones’ “An American Marriage” and Tara Westover’s “Educated.” But I was looking for something lighter, more of a beach read. A friend described a series she had recently started — page-turning murder mysteries paired with a storybook love story — and said it might be a good fit for me.

Five months and 50 books later, I can say it definitely was.

My bingeing streak just ended with the 50th book, “Golden in Death,” which was released this month.

The “In Death” series is far from light reading. It centers around the life of Eve Dallas, a no-nonsense New York City police lieutenant. She’s a homicide cop, so there is murder in every book.

There’s the one where two lovers who think of themselves as a modern-day Bonnie and Clyde leave a trail of death, with their initials carved into their victims’ bodies. There are the ones tinged with terrorism: A young sniper trained by her drugged-out, former-cop father turns people into murder-minded zombies. Many of the books deal with rape, sexual assault or abuse, for more of a “Law & Order: SVU” vibe. And some are haunt-your-dreams scary.

J.D. Robb is the pen name for the prolific romance writer Nora Roberts, who started writing the series in 1995 and releases at least two new titles a year.

In the very first book, “Naked in Death,” we are introduced to a slew of what become recurring characters: Eve’s former partner and trainer, who becomes a father figure; the esteemed police commander; the maternal staff psychiatrist; Eve’s criminal-turned-singer bestie; and most importantly, Roarke.

The sexual tension leaps off the page when Eve meets Roarke, who is rich, handsome and happens to be her prime suspect. Eve’s moral code is black and white, which causes friction throughout the series with Roarke, who becomes her husband by the fourth book.

Roberts spends a lot of time building layer upon layer of intimacy into their relationship, so their partnership is believable while still being the epitome of #couplegoals. Their relationship is one of the things I loved most about the series, and miss most now that I’m caught up.

So what happens when you plunge into a 50-book series? Here are five things I learned:

THERE’S NOTHING LIKE ESCAPING INTO A GOOD BOOK ... OR 50

I lost touch with reading for a good chunk of my 20s. I blamed it on school, and then on my job. But

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getting back into a reading routine has done wonders for my life, and my brain. Reading requires undivided attention. You can't really read a book while you're texting someone or scrolling through Instagram or participating in any bad habits you're trying to kick.

About 10 books in, when I noticed I was starting to rip through a book a day, I started wondering: Was reading this much another bad habit?

Nervously, I asked my therapist about this obsession, admitting that most of my free time was spent escaping into Eve's world. My therapist said something like, "Of the compulsive habits to have, this seems relatively harmless, and maybe you really need it. It's only a problem if you start turning down social interactions or find it is interfering with your daily life."

I've always been inclined to binge. The medium doesn't matter — TV show, book, podcast — once I'm hooked, I need to know everything. Like that time I watched the entirety of "Gilmore Girls" in two months.

I read these books everywhere I went, using peripheral vision as I walked through the corridor to my office every morning, narrowly avoiding running into people. I would sneak in five minutes when the subway was delayed. I'd curl up on the couch with my cat on a rainy afternoon, fall asleep most nights with a book in my hand, read on the beach on vacation.

After meeting a colleague for the first time recently, she said, "You're the book woman. It's so good to finally meet you."

Crazy book lady, at your service.

YOU CAN, IN FACT, READ TOO MUCH

At 29, I'm not old, but I somewhat comically injured myself at least twice while reading the "In Death" series.

The first happened about 10 books in, when I got the strangest pain in my left pinky. It was particularly present when I would type; it felt like my finger had done one too many crunches. I was in the middle of reading when I said to my partner, "I can't figure out why my pinky hurts so much." He casually suggested it might have something to do with my new reading obsession, but I shot that down, feeling defensive.

I did notice, however, that I was holding the book like a martini glass, pinky out. Within days of changing my grip, the pain went away.

Then, toward the end of the book series, my right eye started twitching for about a week and a half. I was embarrassed, and Googled what might be the cause. Sure, I drank the occasional caffeinated tea, I probably could have gotten more sleep and I am almost always stressed. But about two days after I finished book No. 50, my eye twitch went away.

LIBRARIES ARE CANDY SHOPS FOR ADULTS

Rediscovering the library has been one of my favorite things about reading this series. I can't explain the excitement I would feel when I got an email notifying me that my books had come in and were ready for pickup. I loved going to get them and finding them bound together with a rubber band and marked with my initials. I would sometimes giggle when I placed a stack of 10 books on the scanner and it somehow correctly checked out all the right titles.

I only bought one book, in a moment of weakness over Labor Day weekend when I realized the library was going to be closed for four days and I hadn't ordered the next few books in time.

After that, I ordered them five or 10 at a time at the library.

It turns out I'm not the only one who loves the library. A recent Gallup poll found that Americans visited the library more frequently than the movie theater in 2019.

I AM NOT A COP, BUT I FELT LIKE I STARTED THINKING LIKE ONE

When you spend hours a day reading police procedurals, you start thinking like a cop, or at least how I imagine a cop thinks. I began paying more attention to details.

Looking at people on the subway, I would think about how I would describe them if I were called as a witness — their dimensions, physical attributes, clothing, tendencies — and then test myself when I got home to see if I remembered.

I'd pay attention to license plates of passing cars, though I never was able to remember those.

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FICTION IS NOT REALITY

Over the summer, a homeless man killed four people as they slept on the streets of New York City. Telling my partner about it, I started describing what would happen if this was Eve's case.

"I think you have a problem," he replied.

There was a particularly meta moment when I was reading a book that featured characters going to the Oscars because a movie about one of Eve's cases was nominated. Later that evening, I tuned into the Golden Globes and couldn't help but make comparisons between fiction and reality. If only "The Icove Agenda" (from Robb's "Origin in Death") won instead of "1917"...

Now that I'm caught up, I can't say I'm looking for another series to dive into. I did immediately binge "The Morning Show" because I had been neglecting my TV shows. But reading these books gave me what I wanted and needed. Just like a vacation, the series gave me a break from reality, and taught me how much I need that.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 13, the 44th day of 2020. There are 322 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 13, 1945, during World War II, Allied planes began bombing the German city of Dresden. The Soviets captured Budapest, Hungary, from the Germans.

On this date:

In 1633, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before the Inquisition, accused of defending Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of the other way around. (Galileo was found vehemently suspect of heresy and ended up being sentenced to a form of house arrest.)

In 1861, Abraham Lincoln was officially declared winner of the 1860 presidential election as electors cast their ballots.

In 1935, a jury in Flemington, New Jersey, found Bruno Richard Hauptmann guilty of first-degree murder in the kidnap-slaying of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh. (Hauptmann was later executed.)

In 1965, during the Vietnam War, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, an extended bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese.

In 1974, Nobel Prize-winning Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union.

In 1984, Konstantin Chernenko (chehr-NYEN'-koh) was chosen to be general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, succeeding the late Yuri Andropov.

In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, allied warplanes destroyed an underground shelter in Baghdad that had been identified as a military command center; Iraqi officials said 500 civilians were killed.

In 1998, Dr. David Satcher was sworn in as the 16th Surgeon General of the United States during an Oval Office ceremony.

In 2000, Tiger Woods saw his streak of six consecutive victories come to an end as he fell short to Phil Mickelson in the Buick Invitational.

In 2002, John Walker Lindh pleaded not guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Va., to conspiring to kill Americans and supporting the Taliban and terrorist organizations. (Lindh later pleaded guilty to lesser offenses and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He was released in September 2019 after serving 17 years of that sentence.)

In 2013, beginning a long farewell to his flock, a weary Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his final public Mass as pontiff, presiding over Ash Wednesday services inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

In 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia, the influential conservative and most provocative member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was found dead at a private residence in the Big Bend area of West Texas; he was 79.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama delivered a video address to the 7th U.S.-Islamic World Forum

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meeting in Doha, Qatar, as part of his continuing effort to repair strained U.S. relations with the world's Muslims. Hannah Kearney won the women's moguls for first U.S. gold medal at the Olympic Games in Vancouver; Apolo Anton Ohno won the silver medal in the short-track 1,500-meter speedskating final, to tie Bonnie Blair as the most decorated U.S. Winter Olympian.

Five years ago: Calling cyberspace the new "Wild West," President Barack Obama told the private sector during a White House cybersecurity summit at Stanford University that it needed to do more to stop cyber attacks aimed at the U.S. every day. Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, a Democrat, resigned amid suspicions his fiancée had used her relationship with him to land contracts for her green-energy consulting business.

One year ago: NASA's Mars rover "Opportunity," which had been built to operate for just three months on the planet's surface but kept rolling for years longer, was finally declared to be no longer operational, 15 years after it landed on Mars. The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Brock Long, resigned after a two-year tenure during which he managed the response to historic wildfires and major hurricanes but was dogged by questions about his use of government vehicles.

Today's Birthdays: U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager (ret.) is 97. Actress Kim Novak is 87. Actor George Segal is 86. Actor Bo Svenson is 79. Actress Stockard Channing is 76. Talk show host Jerry Springer is 76. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is 74. Singer Peter Gabriel is 70. Actor David Naughton is 69. Rock musician Peter Hook is 64. Actor Matt Salinger is 60. Singer Henry Rollins is 59. Actor Neal McDonough is 54. Singer Freedom Williams is 54. Actress Kelly Hu is 52. Rock singer Matt Berninger (The National) is 49. Rock musician Todd Harrell (formerly with 3 Doors Down) is 48. Country musician Scott Thomas (Parmalee) is 47. Singer Robbie Williams is 46. Singer-songwriter Feist is 44. Rhythm-and-blues performer Natalie Stewart is 41. Actress Mena Suvari (MEE'-nuh soo-VAHR'-ee) is 41. Rock musician Dash Hutton (Haim (HY'-ehm)) is 35. Actress Katie Volding is 31. Michael Joseph Jackson Jr. (also known as Prince Michael Jackson I) is 23.

Thought for Today: "An explanation of cause is not a justification by reason." — C.S. Lewis, English author (1898-1963).

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