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The Groton Area Girls Basketball team lost a hard fought battle to Webster Area Tuesday night in Webster. The Bearcats won, 55-53, in overtime.

We'll have the story details in tomorrow's edition



GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Special School Board Meeting

February 19, 2020 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Executive session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2(2) for a student issue.

ADJOURN

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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National Gas Price Average Jumps Two Cents

February 18, 2020 - State gas price averages are fluctuating across the country, causing the national gas price average to increase by two cents on the week to \$2.44. Since last week, most states saw gas price increases or decreases by as much as three cents. However, eight states did see prices increase by a nickel or more.

"Domestic wholesale gasoline and global crude oil prices increased last week causing gas prices to fluctuate," said Marilyn Buskohl, AAA spokesperson. "Pump prices in the week ahead could see further volatility depending on movement of the oil market as well as U.S. gasoline demand and stock levels numbers."

South Dakota Gas Prices

Today \$2.36

Yesterday \$2.35

Last week \$2.34

Last month \$2.46

Last year \$2.20

Today's national average is 11 cents cheaper than last month, but 13 cents more expensive than last year.

Quick Stats

The nation's top 10 largest weekly changes are: Indiana (+12 cents), Delaware (+8 cents), Ohio (+7 cents), South Carolina (+7 cents), Illinois (+6 cents), Michigan (+6 cents), Colorado (-5 cents), New Mexico (+5 cents), North Carolina (+4 cents) and Maryland (+4 cents).

The nation's top 10 least expensive markets are: Texas (\$2.09), Missouri (\$2.09), Mississippi (\$2.10), Louisiana (\$2.11), Oklahoma (\$2.14), Arkansas (\$2.16), Alabama (\$2.16), Kansas (\$2.16), South Carolina (\$2.18) and Virginia (\$2.20).

Great Lakes and Central States

A number of Great Lakes and Central States are paying more to fill-up at the pump. Indiana (+12 cents), Ohio (+7 cents), Illinois (+6 cents) and Michigan (+6 cents) had the largest jumps in the region and rank among the 10 biggest changes in the country. Not every state saw increases on the week, North Dakota (-3 cents) saw the largest decrease in the region.

Regional gas price averages range from \$2.09 in Missouri to \$2.59 in Illinois. These states rank on the top 10 least and most expensive lists, respectively. Kansas (\$2.16) also lands on the top 10 cheapest averages rankings.

Gas prices in the region have seen fluctuation in the last week as gasoline stocks increased by a little more than 100,000 bbl. Energy Information Administration (EIA) data shows that regional stocks have steadily built since mid-November, registering total stocks at a healthy 58.7 million bbl. Regional refinery utilization is also strong at 91%. Gas prices are likely to see some volatility this week, but overall most states in the region will see price changes of a few pennies.

Oil Market Dynamics

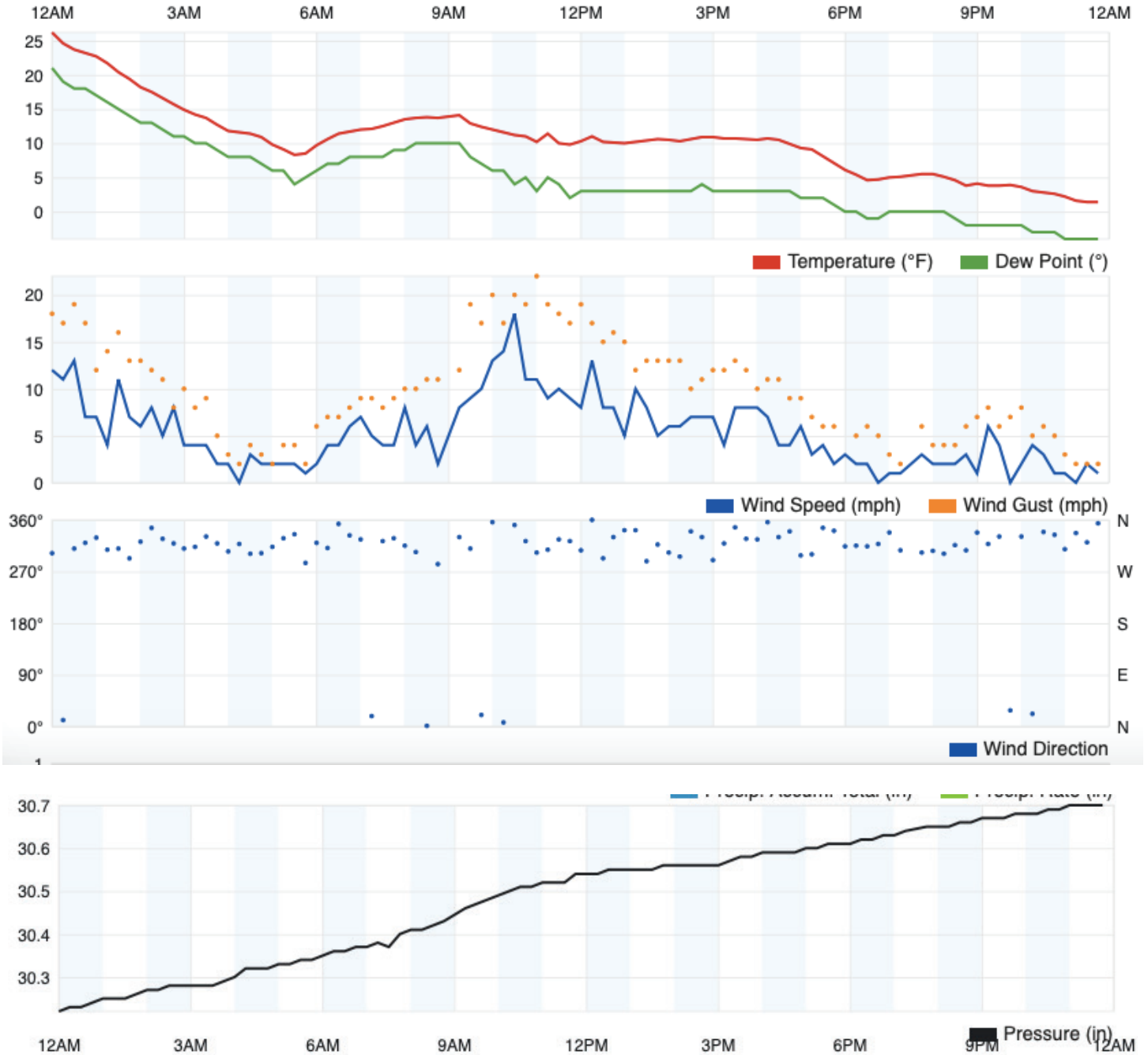
At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI increased by \$1.73 to settle at \$52.05. Crude prices increased at the end of last week after reports emerged that the coronavirus had potentially reached its peak. Market watchers ended the week optimistic that global crude demand, which is expected to drop due to reduced travel as a result of the growing international public health crisis, would not suffer further. However, if occurrences of the virus continue to increase this week, the market may struggle to hold onto price gains. Until it appears that the public health threat from the virus declines and China's industrial sector recovers from the impact of the virus on production, crude prices are likely to continue facing downward pressure.

Motorists can find current gas prices along their route with the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. The app can also be used to map a route, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Upcoming Events

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

Monday, February 24, 2020

Life Touch pictures at elementary school

Broton Daily Independent

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Today



Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Sunny

High: 13 °F ↓

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: -14 °F

Wednesday



Cold

High: 6 °F

Wednesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: -10 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 19 °F

Cold Today, Warming Up Thursday!



Today

- Clouds clearing up, light winds
- Highs 3-15°F



Tonight

- Partly cloudy
- Lows -6 to -12°F in northeast, 0-5°F in central SD



Thursday

- Partly cloudy to mostly sunny
- Highs 18-28°F in northeast, 30-38°F in central SD



Aberdeen, SD
Weather Forecast Office

Mostly dry conditions are expected as we move towards the weekend. The cold continues Wednesday into Thursday morning, but warms up later Thursday, with highs reaching near normal and even warmer temps expected this weekend.

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Today in Weather History

February 19, 2000: Due to the arid and windy conditions, a fire believed to be started by a discarded cigarette, burnt about 1,300-acre of grassland between Kennebec and Lower Brule. The fire threatened a ranch but changed directions before anyone had to be evacuated.

February 19, 2008: An Arctic air mass along with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills during the evening and early morning hours to northeast South Dakota. Wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero. The winds diminished in the early morning hours of the 20th, allowing air temperatures to fall to record or near-record lows across northeast South Dakota. Ten new record lows, ranging from 23 to 30 degrees below zero, were set for February 20th. Several water pipes were broken in Aberdeen and Roslyn. Also, many vehicles did not start along with late school starts or closings.

1884: Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 people and causing three million dollars damage. The tornado outbreak hit Georgia and the Carolinas the hardest.

1888: Severe thunderstorms over southern Illinois spawned a violent tornado in Jefferson County and devastated the southeast half of Mount Vernon. The tornado killed 24 people, injured 80 others, and destroyed or damaged 300 homes and 50 businesses. Overturned wood stoves ignited many fires in the wreckage. This tornado currently stands as the 9th deadliest Illinois tornado on record. This event was one of the first disasters to which the American Red Cross responded.

1884 - Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 persons and causing three million dollars damage. Georgia and the Carolinas hardest were hit in the tornado outbreak. (David Ludlum)

1888 - A tornado struck Mount Vernon IL. The tornado killed sixteen persons along its 62 mile path. (David Ludlum)

1954 - High winds across the southern half of the Great Plains, gusting to 85 mph, caused the worst duststorms since the 1930s. Graders were needed in places to clear fence high dirt drifts. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm over the southern and central Rockies produced 28 inches of snow at Echo Lake CO, and two feet of snow at Gascon NM and Los Alamos NM. Mora County NM was declared a disaster area following the storm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Valdosta GA with more than five inches of rain, and the 24 hour rainfall total of 7.10 inches at Apalachicola FL more than doubled their previous 24 hour record for February. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought heavy snow to parts of Nebraska, with six inches reported at Loup City and Surprise. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A moist Pacific storm worked its way into New Mexico and southern Colorado. Up to 36 inches of snow blanketed the Wolf Creek and Red Mountain passes of southwest Colorado, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported around Trinidad. In New Mexico, the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains were blanketed with 9 to 28 inches of snow, and 50 to 60 mph wind gusts were reported from Taos to Albuquerque. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - Strong winds reaching as high as 40 mph with gusts to 53 mph topple the 48 year old National Christmas tree. The 42 foot tall Colorado blue spruce sat just south of the White House on the Ellipse. It was transplanted there from York, Pennsylvania in 1978. The Weather Doctor

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 26 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 1 °F at 11:55 PM

Wind: 22 mph at 10:54 AM

Snow

Record High: 62° in 1930

Record Low: -34° in 1929

Average High: 29°F

Average Low: 9°F

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.31

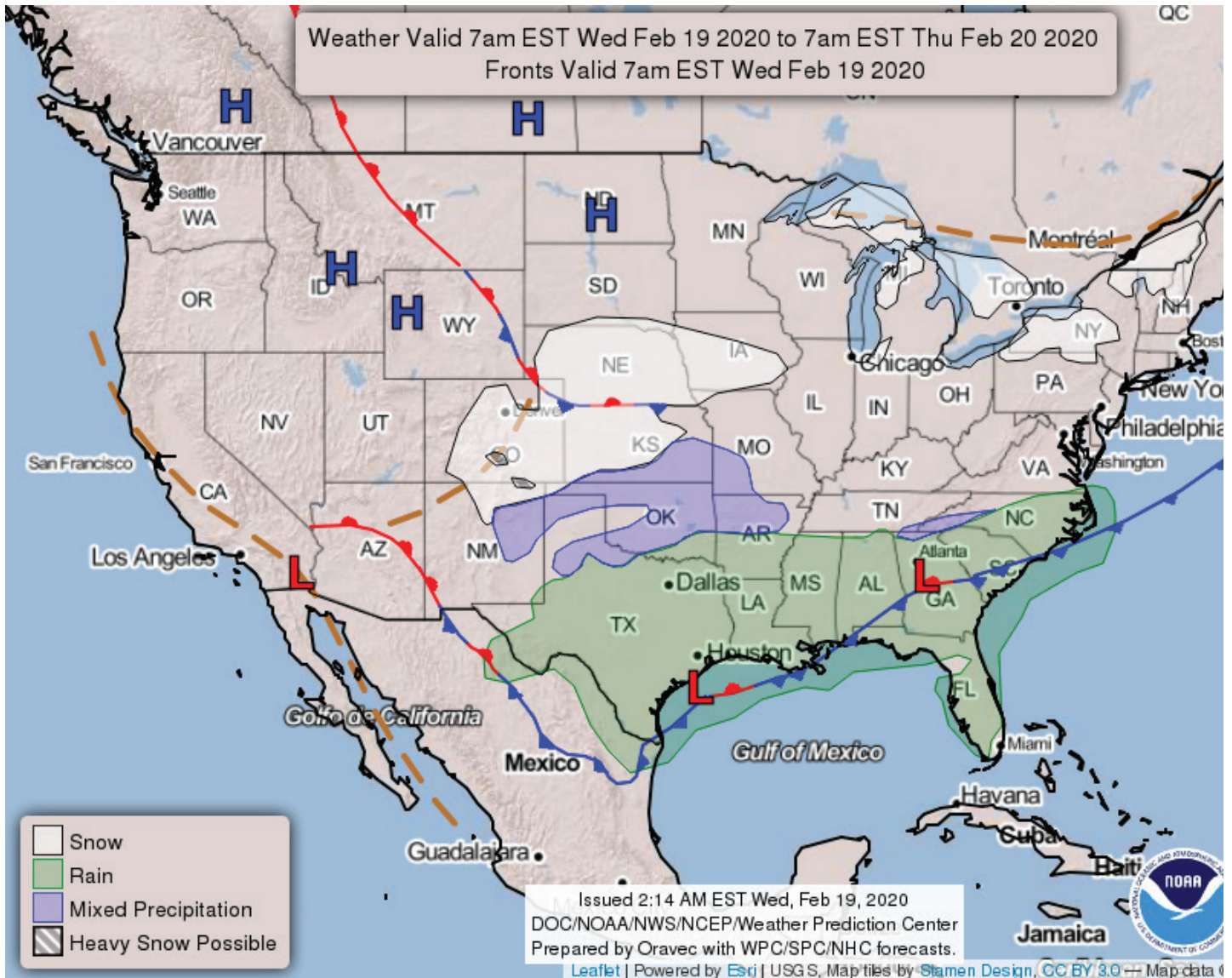
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.78

Precip Year to Date: 0.35

Sunset Tonight: 6:06 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:28 a.m.



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SALVATION AND CHANGE

"Never trust Tom. I did and he disappointed me. Not only once, but twice!" said his employer.

"But why should I not trust him?" his friend asked.

"People never change. Once a thief, always a thief! Once a liar, always a liar," he raged.

But that is not always true.

Few people were more despised than the tax collectors in Jesus' day. The Romans were attempting to establish a world empire, and it was a costly venture. They needed money!

To accomplish their goal, they levied heavy taxes on all of the nations that were under their control. Without the tax collectors, the Empire could not survive. So, it was no surprise that the people were shocked when Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus. How could someone as honest as Jesus associate with such a dishonest thief and liar as Zacchaeus?

However, when confronted by Jesus, he realized his sins and shortcomings and that he needed to straighten out his life. And he did! "Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. If I have cheated anyone of anything, I will pay him back four times." And he did.

The new birth brings new behaviors. When God changes the inside, people will see it by the way we act on the outside. No change on the outside? No change on the inside.

Prayer: Forgive us, Father, if we claim to be born again but continue to live sinful lives. May we repent now, give our hearts and lives to You, and become "new creations in Christ!" Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 90:17 And may the Lord our God show us his approval and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful!

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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)
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- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

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News from the Associated Press

Zebra mussels bill advances in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Legislation to prevent the spread of zebra mussels in South Dakota is headed for the state Senate. It received unanimous approval from the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Tuesday.

The bill, which has already passed the House, requires people to decontaminate their boats by cleaning and draining them after leaving the water. It also creates inspection stations.

The Argus Leader reports senators were told the invasive species has now been found in four South Dakota lakes. Zebra mussels can cause a foul taste and smell in drinking water, increase algae and alter aquatic food chains.

The widespread invasive species wasn't found in South Dakota until 2016 when the zebra mussels were discovered in Lewis and Clark Lake and McCook Lake. It was found to have spread to Sharpe and Francis Case lakes last year.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

06-12-39-61-70, Mega Ball: 4, Megaplier: 3

(six, twelve, thirty-nine, sixty-one, seventy; Mega Ball: four; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$45 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 66, Watertown 53

Aberdeen Christian 53, Langford 47

Belle Fourche 61, Sturgis Brown 40

Bridgewater-Emery 61, Irene-Wakonda 41

Burke 66, Colome 37

Canton 56, West Central 49

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 87, St. Francis Indian 57

Corsica/Stickney 75, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 42

Crow Creek 90, Lower Brule 55

Dakota Valley 85, Sioux City, West, Iowa 75

DeSmet 67, Deubrook 43

Dell Rapids 79, Sisseton 57

Ethan 70, Freeman 26

Faulkton 57, Miller 50

Flandreau 62, Baltic 43

Florence/Henry 52, Great Plains Lutheran 38

Gayville-Volin 52, Hitchcock-Tulare 42

Hamlin 61, Britton-Hecla 47

Harding County 66, New England, N.D. 52

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Harrisburg 56, Brandon Valley 45
Highmore-Harrold 79, Iroquois 72
Huron 71, Brookings 55
Lennox 53, Beresford 33
Marshall, Minn. 51, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 50
Mitchell 80, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 74
Mobridge-Pollock 72, Stanley County 41
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 51, Bon Homme 48
Northwestern 49, Redfield 46
Parker 57, Garretson 49
Pine Ridge 62, Little Wound 58
Platte-Geddes 67, Winner 59
Sioux Valley 84, Castlewood 45
St. Thomas More 80, Hot Springs 24
Tiospa Zina Tribal 58, Clark/Willow Lake 42
Vermillion 62, Wagner 26
Viborg-Hurley 72, Menno 19
Wall 61, Oelrichs 29
Warner 39, Waverly-South Shore 32
Wessington Springs 66, Kimball/White Lake 50
Wilmot 80, Tri-State 60
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Arlington 53, Chester 28
Bridgewater-Emery 58, Irene-Wakonda 54
Castlewood 61, Sioux Valley 37
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 59, Bennett County 32
Clark/Willow Lake 61, Tiospa Zina Tribal 28
Corsica/Stickney 52, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 36
DeSmet 39, Deubrook 25
Dell Rapids St. Mary 39, Elkton-Lake Benton 38
Edgemont 38, Hot Springs 31
Estelline/Hendricks 60, Iroquois 31
Ethan 53, Freeman 35
Faith 76, Philip 29
Flandreau 67, Baltic 34
Florence/Henry 66, Great Plains Lutheran 25
Hamlin 64, Britton-Hecla 15
Herreid/Selby Area 63, Potter County 31
Hill City 56, Custer 38
Huron 57, Brookings 48
Ipswich 63, Highmore-Harrold 58, OT
Kimball/White Lake 63, Wessington Springs 34
Lake Preston 63, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 37
Langford 58, Aberdeen Christian 25
Lennox 61, Beresford 34
Little Wound 59, Todd County 53
Miller 59, Faulkton 37
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 61, Bon Homme 41
New Underwood 44, Newell 31
Parker 59, Garretson 56

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Parkston 57, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 32
Rapid City Stevens 63, Spearfish 39
Redfield 48, Northwestern 40
Scotland 69, Canistota 47
Sioux Falls Lincoln 63, Harrisburg 57
Sioux Falls Washington 60, Watertown 48
St. Thomas More 61, Douglas 33
Sturgis Brown 41, Belle Fourche 39
Sully Buttes 78, Sunshine Bible Academy 24
Timber Lake 65, Tiospaye Topa 27
Vermillion 64, Wagner 54
Viborg-Hurley 59, Menno 58
Wall 49, Oelrichs 39
Webster 55, Groton Area 53, OT
Winner 63, Platte-Geddes 23
Wolsey-Wessington 52, Mitchell Christian 40
Yankton 53, Sioux Falls Christian 32

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

House passes 'riot boosting' bill amid protests

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House passed a bill Tuesday pushed by Gov. Kristi Noem that would revamp the state's riot laws with criminal and civil penalties for those who urge rioting.

The push has sparked conflict between Noem and Native American tribal members, who say the law is an attempt to "silence" peaceful protests against the Keystone XL pipeline. The governor argues that the law does not apply to peaceful protests and is intended to enforce the rule of law in the state. Noem has attempted to foster cooperation on other issues in the last week.

As the House passed the bill, a protester named Tasina Smith shouted from a balcony overlooking the floor of the House, yelling that law enforcement at Standing Rock had used laws on "incitement to riot" against people who were peacefully protesting. She was escorted out of the room by security.

Others demonstrated before the vote in the central hall of the Capitol building.

"Kristi Noem, we are not a riot," nearly a dozen protesters chanted as they danced to a drumbeat and held banners to protest the "riot boosting" bill. The protesters demonstrated for several minutes before Capitol police asked them to leave because they did not have a permit for the event.

A judge found parts of last year's "riot boosting" laws to be unconstitutional, in part because they were aimed at demonstrations against the Keystone XL pipeline. Noem has made it clear that this is not the case this year. But several lawmakers said they were in favor of this year's bill because it would prevent situations like what happened at Standing Rock when people demonstrated against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The state coined the term "riot boosting" last year as it paved the way for the state, counties or other municipalities to make people or organizations liable for rioting or inciting riots. The governor said the civil penalties would make it possible for the state or counties to recoup damages from riots.

"It's pretty simple, it's about upholding the rule of law," said Rep. Jon Hansen, a Dell Rapids Republican. He said that people are welcome to peacefully protest and the the law is only aimed at "those who would burn, those who would destroy, those who would assault."

The bill is not that simple, said Rep. Peri Pourier, a Democrat from Pine Ridge and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. She argued tribal members would see it as "weaponization" of the law against them.

"If I am a law-abiding citizen and there is a chance that I could spend five to ten years in the state penitentiary and lose my voting rights, it is going to deter me from protesting," she said.

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Rep. Tim Rounds, a Pierre Republican, broke with his party to vote against the bill because he felt the punishments were too severe. The bill makes "incitement to riot" a class five felony, punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Noem has argued that the bill uses the "narrowest" definitions of "incitement to riot" to protect people and property while also protecting free speech. Parts of a law pushed by the governor last year were found to be unconstitutional by a judge after the American Civil Liberties Union sued the state. Lawmakers passed that law three days after it was introduced.

The revamped bill includes "instigating, inciting, or directing" force or violence as examples of urging a riot. The governor argues that the proposal will pass what's known as the Brandenburg test for free speech, which stipulates that authorities can't prosecute speech unless the speech intends to cause a crime, is likely to cause it, and the crime is imminent.

But Pourier warned that the law's passage would come with the cost of deteriorating trust between the state and tribes. She called lawmakers to "listen to understand" the experiences and history of tribal members who have become distrustful of the state.

Speaker Steven Haugaard, a Sioux Falls Republican, also voted against the bill and took a moment after the vote to address the opponents who had attended the session. He said the bill is mostly intended "to clear up the mess that was created last year" and that he hoped the tribal community would not take it as an insult.

South Dakota legislators OK ban on plastics bans

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House approved a bill Tuesday to block towns and cities from banning plastic bags, cups and straws.

The Senate has already approved the bill, so it moves to Gov. Kristi Noem for action. A spokeswoman said the governor would be reviewing the legislation.

Retail groups supported the ban on plastics bans, saying they make it more expensive for stores to supply alternatives. State lawmakers said they wanted to preempt local bans.

Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender, a Republican, criticized the bill, calling it government overreach. Environmental groups and Democrats also opposed the bill.

The idea of a plastics ban gained some traction in Sioux Falls after the Big Sioux River flooded last year and left plastic bags strung in trees and bushes.

The House passed on a 46-24 vote Tuesday, its second try after failing by three votes in the chamber last week.

Man dies in grain bin accident in eastern South Dakota

ELKTON, S.D. (AP) — Authorities in eastern South Dakota say a 27-year-old man has died in a grain bin accident.

Emergency crews were called Monday to rural Elkton on a report of a person possibly trapped inside of a grain bin with corn in it. Sections of the grain bin were removed to empty the corn. Christopher Robert Bauman was found dead inside the bin, Brookings County sheriff's authorities said.

Bauman had been augering corn from the bin. Authorities don't know why he entered the grain bin. The sheriff's office is investigating.

South Dakota governor backs Native American culture schools

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A proposal to start schools in South Dakota that focus on teaching Native American language and culture has gained a key ally in Gov. Kristi Noem.

Noem has found herself at odds with many of the tribes in South Dakota as she pushed revamped laws to punish the "urging" of riots ahead of expected construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. The Republican

governor is looking for common ground with the tribes on things like law enforcement, meth addiction treatment and education.

After initially opposing the proposal for Oceti Sakowin schools that teach Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota language and culture, Noem's office helped present a revamped bill to a Senate committee on Tuesday. The schools would attempt to address the low rates of high school graduation and college attendance in some Native American communities in the state.

The governor opposed the proposal when it was presented two weeks ago. Her advisers said at the time that the bill's language was "fundamentally flawed" and that culturally-relevant curricula would have been possible in the current system. But senators liked the idea enough to give the schools' proponents and the governor's office time to rewrite the proposal.

They came back with a compromise: The bill would still allow for the creation of the schools, but they would be administered through school districts and be subject to the same certifications and oversight as other schools. That helped win the governor's support.

Tiffany Sanderson, the governor's education policy adviser, said the new proposal "opens an entirely new school option in our state," allowing for innovation and focusing on students' needs.

Educators who are trying to open the schools want to model the schools from Native American Community Academy Schools in New Mexico, which focus on students' identity as Native Americans and encouraging their culture.

The bill would not allow for more than four schools in the state. Educators are hoping to start schools on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations, as well as in Rapid City.

Sen. Troy Heinert, a Democrat from Mission who introduced the bill, said the proposal allows Native Americans to educate "on our own terms" and create a break from a history of the government implementing curricula that seeks to erase Sioux culture.

Education groups, including lobbyists representing school boards, will likely still oppose the proposal. The bill originally labeled the schools as "charter" schools, but changed the term to "community-based" schools. The state currently does not allow for charter schools.

The bill's language is still being worked out and the Senate committee decided to wait until Thursday to decide on whether to approve it. They will also hear from opponents then.

Completely rewriting a bill during the Legislative session is unusual. But the governor, lawmakers and Native American educators all agreed that education needs to be improved among Native American students. "We can't wait another year," Heinert said. "We've been waiting too long for this."

Clearing the Senate Education committee would be just the first step for the proposal. It would still face the full Senate and House.

Fire burns 4 businesses in downtown Hot Springs

HOT SPRINGS, S.D. (AP) — Four downtown businesses in a small southwestern South Dakota community have been lost in a fire.

The Vault restaurant, China Buffet, Heartsong Quilts and an ice cream shop were burned in the massive fire Monday night in Hot Springs, Mayor George Kotti and Fall River Emergency Management director Frank Maynard said.

No other businesses were threatened and no injuries were reported, Maynard said Tuesday.

Officials said the fire began in the Vault restaurant about 8:30 p.m. Firefighters from area communities provided mutual aid and kept the fire from spreading further and igniting propane tanks in the rear of the businesses.

Kotti says some apartments attached to the quilt shop also burned. The businesses with sandstone facades are in the city's historic district.

"I did talk to one of the business owners and he plans to rebuild. I think that epitomizes the way we want to face this," Kotti said.

Hot Springs has a population of about 3,700 and is about 57 miles (92 kilometers) south of Rapid City.

Excerpts from recent South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, Feb. 14

Saying 'no' should be enough. We need a legal definition of 'consent'

When a South Dakota judge can't provide the jury in a rape case with a legal definition of "consent" despite all three charges against the defendant including the word, as happened late last year in Minnehaha County, it's high time South Dakota lawmakers get to work defining it.

It's important to note that South Dakota is not alone in that lack of clarity. Around half the states in the U.S. don't have a legal definition of consent regarding sexual crime statutes. Even among the states that do, the definitions aren't uniform because society itself hasn't agreed on what "consent" looks like. As a nation, we're finally beginning to openly talk about it in the wake of high-profile celebrity sexual assault accusations and the "Me Too" movement.

From a practical standpoint, there's no consensus among attorneys as to what impact revising the way consent is defined would have in jury trials. The potential violation of the United States Constitution by shifting the burden of proof of consent to the defense further confounds the issue. Additional concerns regarding defendants' knowledge of what "consent" was at the time of the act prevented a recent meeting of the American Bar Association from concurring on a definition.

Minnesota law dating back to the 1970s says that consent comprises "Words or overt actions by a person indicating a freely given present agreement to perform a particular sexual act with the actor." Lindsay Brice, policy director for the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, told the Argus Leader that "prosecution has indicated that the definition of consent is not a roadblock to charging cases." Ramsey County Chief Public Defender James Fleming adds, "We've been able to work with this definition."

Perhaps more troubling than the lack of a clear definition in South Dakota law is, as Beadle County State's Attorney Mike Moore asserts, that "lack of consent is not part of our rape statute." Sexual contact without consent with a person capable of giving consent is a misdemeanor charge. Consent only applies to felony rape charges when the victim is incapable of giving it. It doesn't matter if "no means no," because violating someone's right to personal sovereignty by ignoring their will alone doesn't merit a felony rape charge. It only counts as rape if you can prove that you were forced or coerced.

Recent statistics find that more than two-thirds of rapes and sexual assault are not reported. Why? Survivors worry about retaliation from the perpetrator and society. They don't think authorities will do anything to help. They don't think that their being raped or sexually assaulted is important enough.

Above all, "Sexual assault is a very humiliating and dehumanizing act against someone," according to psychotherapist Beverly Engel in a 2018 analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice. "Victims are often too ashamed to come forward" because "in our culture, we tend to blame victims." Even of the fraction of rapes that are reported, the latest FBI statistics reveal that fewer than one-third eventually result in the perpetrator being punished.

Initiating public dialogue about consent is especially important in South Dakota. The Compass Center in Sioux Falls cites statistics that one of every six American women has survived an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. South Dakota's rate of per capita forcible rapes is one and a half times the national average. Native American women are two and a half times more likely than other ethnic groups in the U.S. to be sexually assaulted, and 73% of sexual assaults are perpetrated by a non-stranger.

If sharpening our statutes can bring justice to sexual assault survivors who currently feel helpless within the legal system, the conversation needs to start here and now.

Madison Daily Leader, Feb. 13

Anti-vaccination bill is an unhealthy idea

We haven't yet heard the testimony in committee, but the introduction of House Bill 1235 in the South

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Dakota Legislature seems like a step in the wrong direction.

HB 1235 essentially prohibits any South Dakota school -- public or private, at any level -- from requiring the vaccination of incoming students. Doing so would be a Class 1 misdemeanor. The bill would make South Dakota the only state to have no vaccine mandates.

We're all aware of the anti-vaccination movement in recent years. Despite scientific consensus that recommended vaccines are safe and effective, unsubstantiated scares regarding their safety still occur.

The most recent surge was started by a 1998 paper published in a British medical journal linking the MMR vaccine and autism. The paper was later discredited and the author was proven to have deliberately falsified information and barred from practicing medicine.

But it only takes a celebrity or two on social media to cause some parents to refuse vaccines. The result is disease outbreaks and deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Ironically, the nation that has benefited most from vaccines, the United States, is among those with anti-immunization movements. Undeveloped countries around the world are begging for vaccines to prevent diseases that harm or kill their children.

The Centers for Disease Control says 14 childhood diseases are preventable by vaccination, including chicken pox, mumps, measles, and whooping cough. Unfortunately, many of these illnesses that once seemed eradicated in the United States have re-emerged in large part due to the anti-immunization movement.

In addition, children who contract these illnesses also put other children, and adults, at risk. That is reason enough to maintain the requirement for incoming students to be immunized to attend school.

Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, Feb. 17

Offer driver's license exams in Spanish

Economic vitality in South Dakota can take many forms — and, as we are learning, speaks more than one language.

That reality is recognized in Senate Bill 70, which would permit the state to offer driver's license written exams in Spanish.

This isn't a new issue, having appeared in at least one previous legislative session. It's back again and is making headway, having passed the South Dakota Senate last week by a 24-11 margin. The bill now heads to the House.

There are a lot of supporters of this bill — especially from the business development background. They see it as more than a convenience for Spanish-speaking laborers. They also view it as a necessity to attract and keep new workers so South Dakota businesses can actually do business, thrive and expand.

To put it another way, this state — like so many other states — really needs workers to fill jobs and create opportunities. The fact is that some of that help will have to come from outside the country. These people usually speak Spanish — and they are in demand. Offering driver's license written exams in Spanish would be one way of easing that transition for living in this state.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. V.J. Smith, R-Brookings, said there are an estimated 35,000 people in South Dakota who hail from a Hispanic background, according to the Argus Leader. The numbers are growing, and they are becoming an increasingly important and sought-after component of the state's labor force.

Opponents of the measure argue that laborers who don't learn English will have a hard time fitting in or making headway in this state, and there is some validity to that as far as it goes.

But being able to drive a vehicle to get to a job, or to perform a job, is also important. A Spanish-language driver's license exam could help ease that transition.

The concept of offering such documentation in more than one language isn't new. Sen. Arthur Rusch, R-Vermillion, noted in the Senate floor debate that South Dakota's 1889 constitution was printed in multiple languages so that a broad swath of this new state's multi-ethnic population could read it.

Nor is the idea of offering a Spanish-language test a radical concept. In fact, South Dakota is one of just three states, along with Utah and Wyoming, which does not provide such testing. (This matter of South Dakota being one of the few states left that does things a certain way seems to be a recurring theme

coursing throughout some legislation this session.)

This bill is a sensible step in addressing the state's labor shortage and its inevitable need to reach out to Spanish-language workers that businesses in South Dakota are going to need. It deserves passage.

Yemen's Houthi rebels impeding UN aid flow, demand a cut

By MAGGIE MICHAEL Associated Press

Yemen's Houthi rebels have blocked half of the United Nations' aid delivery programs in the war-torn country — a strong-arm tactic to force the agency to give them greater control over the massive humanitarian campaign, along with a cut of billions of dollars in foreign assistance, according to aid officials and internal documents obtained by The Associated Press.

The rebel group has made granting access to areas under their control contingent on a flurry of conditions that aid agencies reject, in part because it would give the Houthis greater sway over who receives aid, documents and interviews show.

The Houthis' obstruction has hindered several programs that feed the near-starving population and help those displaced by the nearly 6-year civil war, a senior U.N. official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the situation.

"Over 2 million beneficiaries ... are directly affected," the official said.

The Houthis have been pushing back against U.N. efforts to tighten monitoring of some \$370 million a year that its agencies already give to government institutions controlled mostly by the rebel group, documents show. That money is supposed to pay salaries and other administration costs, but more than a third of the money spent last year wasn't audited, according to an internal document leaked to the AP.

The U.N. has largely kept quiet in public about the pressure, but behind the scenes the agency and international donors are digging in against the Houthi demands. The AP spoke to seven workers and officials from U.N. and independent agencies about the situation. All spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. The AP also saw dozens of documents, including emails of aid officials.

In October, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, sent a letter to the Houthi-appointed prime minister complaining about a long list of demands.

The "overwhelming majority" of them impede or delay delivery of aid and many violate humanitarian principles, she said in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by the AP.

For months, the Houthis demanded a 2% cut from the entire aid budget be given to them, a condition the U.N. and donors rejected. In an email to the AP, a spokesperson for the U.S. Agency for International Development said Houthi attempts "to implement a tax on humanitarian assistance are unacceptable and directly contradict international humanitarian principles." The United States donated \$686 million to Yemen in 2019, according to USAID.

Last week, the Houthis appeared to back off the 2% demand, but continue to press for other concessions, according to aid officials.

During a meeting in Brussels last Thursday, aid agencies and international donors threatened to reduce aid if Houthis continue to impose restrictions on U.N. operations in Yemen.

The situation "has reached a breaking point," they said in a statement.

At least one agency, the World Food Program, is currently considering cutting back the monthly food aid it delivers to 12 million Yemenis every other month, a U.N. official said. "It's unfortunate that people will suffer but this is on the Houthis," the official said. "They can't use people as hostages for too long."

The Houthis' demands have stoked longtime concerns among aid agencies over the rebels' diverting of humanitarian funds and supplies into their own or their supporters' pockets or toward their war effort.

Delivering aid in a war zone has always posed a problem for U.N. agencies. But officials said the situation in Yemen has been especially challenging.

The Houthis have withheld visas and permissions for equipment and supplies and refused to grant clearances for U.N. missions to move through rebel-controlled areas. Aid workers said agency leaders' past willingness to concede to some of the rebels' demands has emboldened the Houthi leaders to push for more.

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Nearly 300,000 pregnant and nursing mothers and children under age 5 haven't received nutrition supplements for more than six months because the Houthis "held beneficiaries hostage to the 2%" demand, another U.N. official said.

In another example, Houthi authorities for months delayed permission to distribute 2,000 tons of food — enough to feed 160,000 people — in the district of Aslam, where the AP previously found starving villagers reduced to eating boiled leaves. When approval came in November, the food had spoiled "beyond the point of salvage," another aid official said.

Houthi leaders have remained defiant in the face of U.N. pushback.

"Yemen will survive" if agencies suspend aid, Abdul-Mohsen Tawoos, secretary-general of the Houthi agency coordinating international aid, told European donors during a Jan. 20 Skype call. Minutes of the call were obtained by the AP.

He said the Houthis wanted to reach an agreement with the U.N. and its donors, but "won't be bullied."

Tawoos accused Grande, the top U.N. official in Yemen, of sending false reports about Houthis restricting the movement of U.N. humanitarian operations. Houthi leaders have threatened to expel her from the country.

The U.N.'s massive aid program, totaling \$8.35 billion dollars since 2015, is vital to keeping many Yemenis alive. The U.N. calls the situation in Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Ten million people in the country are on the brink of famine and 80% of the population of 29 million in need of aid, according to the U.N.

More than 3 million people have been displaced, cholera epidemics have killed hundreds, and at least 2.2 million children under 5 suffer from severe malnutrition, the agency said.

The Iranian-backed Houthi rebels control the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north, where most of the population lives and the need for aid is greatest. They are at war with a U.S.-backed, Saudi-led coalition fighting on behalf of the internationally recognized government.

With the economy in freefall, the U.N. aid effort is a major source of foreign currency into the country.

The U.N. received around \$3 billion in 2019 in international donations for its campaign, short of its \$4.2 billion goal.

The Houthi demand for 2% of that budget would funnel \$60-\$80 million into the coffers of their aid-coordination agency, the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation, known as SCMCHA.

Qassim Hussein al-Houthi, the head of the international agencies department in the Houthi presidency, said the money was necessary for SCMCHA's operating expenses.

"It carries heavy financial burden. It's in charge of facilitating, distributing, security, and organizing the work of the agencies," he said.

Al-Houthi argued that it's the U.N. agencies that spend a much larger percentage of their budgets on administration without "real oversight." He said the U.N. aid delivery programs blocked by the Houthis "are not a priority for the Yemen people."

Harassment, intimidation and suspected embezzling of funds by Houthis have been going on for years, aid workers said, and have gotten worse since the rebels created their aid coordination agency in early 2018. Since then, Houthi-led security agencies have arrested local workers, blocked aid missions or held up supplies, according to internal emails and documents seen by the AP.

"Not even a simple project can be carried out in northern Yemen without the consent and supervision of this body," said a Yemeni chief of a local aid organization.

The U.N. rarely pushed back, calculating that aid had to be delivered at any cost.

U.N. agencies continued to put hundreds of millions of dollars into Houthi accounts for "capacity building," a common practice in humanitarian programs to ensure government bodies function.

Some of the money went to salaries for doctors, teachers and other vital employees who have otherwise gone without pay amid the war. Millions more went to the Houthi aid agency for administrative costs and salaries.

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Aid workers privately expressed concerns about the funds from U.N. aid agencies being diverted into the coffers of Houthi leaders or their supporters.

UNICEF told the AP in a statement that its funds were strictly monitored and no instances of diversions were found. The World Health Organization said all its spending was "subject to internal and external audit," as well as frequent internal reviews on multiple levels. WHO also said it found no evidence that its funds have been diverted.

Still, last summer, the U.N. requested all agencies report how much they were giving in direct cash transfers. In 2019, the total reached \$370 million, around 10% of the entire international aid budget for Yemen, according to a U.N. spreadsheet obtained by the AP. Around \$133 million was marked in the spreadsheet as "not audited."

Some officials in the Houthi aid body, SCMCHA, appear to be receiving multiple salaries, the data shows. For a time, three U.N. agencies were each giving salaries to the body's president, his deputy and general managers. Each of the officials received a total of \$10,000 a month from the agencies, the spreadsheet shows.

The U.N. refugee agency also gave SCMCHA \$1 million every three months for office rental and administrative costs, while the U.N. migration agency gave the office another \$200,000 for furniture and fiber optics.

U.N. officials said Grande was "genuinely shocked when she learned about the arrangements."

"She had no idea about the scale of it," said one senior U.N. official. "Her reaction after that was, we have to fix the situation."

Over the past year, U.N. agencies, lead by Grande, began pushing back against Houthi demands.

First, the World Food Program suspended aid for a couple of months in some areas around Sanaa and demanded biometric registering of beneficiaries to ensure deliveries go to those truly in need. The Houthis initially agreed but later refused to follow through with the biometric registering.

The U.N. then moved to prevent double-paying of salaries, and its agencies tightened auditing of the funds it provided.

UNICEF, for example, said it decided in November to re-assess all 243 partners it works with, including government ones, and cut down dramatically on funds put into Houthi coffers. The agency said it would start paying suppliers and contractors directly.

The moves by the U.N. have prompted the Houthis to launch a media campaign denouncing the humanitarian agency as corrupt and wasteful.

Further escalation came after the Houthi aid body in November was put under the leadership of the Houthi president's chief of staff, making it more powerful, several aid officials said.

An already difficult environment to work in "became extremely suffocating with threats (and) directives," one of the officials said.

SCMCHA's new leadership imposed more than 200 new directives on humanitarian agencies, six aid officials told the AP.

Some directives — such as requiring agencies to disclose the identities of aid recipients and involving Houthi authorities in assessments of need — would give the rebels even greater power to steer aid to their supporters, aid workers fear.

Other demands seemed aimed at monitoring and intimidating, such as ordering local Yemeni staffers to get Houthi permission to take U.N. training courses abroad and then to report back the content of those workshops. Houthis officials also require the segregation of women and men in U.N.-run programs in some areas.

The Houthis also demanded a new agreement giving them a hand in assigning U.N. contracts with suppliers and picking local partners to implement programs, according to a draft of their proposal seen by the AP. It also gives them the right to screen U.N. hires in Yemen and take over the budget of monitoring programs.

Aid agencies have refused to sign the agreement.

Several humanitarian workers said the Houthis are also trying to force the U.N. to work with NGOs they favor, particularly an organization known as Bonyan, which is filled with Houthi affiliates. The brother of

Houthi leader Abdel Malek al-Houthi, Ibrahim al-Houthi, was a board member until his death last summer. Houthi leaders stopped the U.N. agencies from delivering food in Yemen's Hodeida province, unless they used Bonyan for the distribution.

Despite the disputes between the Houthis and the U.N, aid officials continue to appeal to international donors for money to address the crisis in Yemen.

Over the summer, Grande pleaded to donor countries for more funds to meet the \$4.2 billion goal.

"When money doesn't come, people die," she said.

But one international aid official said more money isn't the issue.

"I don't want more funds. I want the space to spend what I have," he said.

Follow Associated Press investigative reporter Maggie Michael at <https://twitter.com/mokhbersahafi>
Contact AP's Global Investigations team at Investigative@ap.org

Passengers begin leaving after ship's virus quarantine ends

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan (AP) — About 500 passengers left the cruise ship Diamond Princess on Wednesday at the end of a much-criticized two-week quarantine aboard the vessel, docked in Japan, that failed to stop the spread of the new virus among passengers and crew.

The quarantine's flop was underlined as authorities announced 79 more cases, bringing the total on the ship to 621. Results were still pending for some other passengers and crew among the original 3,711 people on board.

Japan's government has been questioned over its decision to keep people on the ship, which some experts have called a perfect virus incubator. The Diamond Princess is the site of the most infections outside of China, where the illness named COVID-19 emerged late last year.

Many foreign governments say they won't let passengers from the ship return unless they go through another quarantine period, so it was striking to see passengers disembark, get into taxis and disappear into Yokohama, where the ship is docked.

Japanese soldiers helped escort some passengers, including an elderly man in a wheelchair who wore a mask and held a cane. Some passengers got on buses to be transported to train stations. Some people still in their cabins waved farewell from their balconies to those who had already been processed.

"I'm a bit concerned if I'm OK to get off the ship, but it was getting very difficult physically," a 77-year-old man from Saitama, near Tokyo, who got off with his wife, told Kyodo News. "For now, we just want to celebrate."

Those disembarking with negative virus tests have fulfilled the Japanese quarantine requirement and are free to walk out and go home on public transportation, Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said Wednesday.

He said the plan was approved by experts at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases. Passengers are only asked to watch their health carefully for a few days and notify local health authorities if they have any symptoms or worries, he said.

Some passengers said on Twitter they received health forms earlier in the morning asking if they had symptoms such as a headache, fever or coughing. Passengers who tested negative and had no symptoms still had to get their body temperature checked before leaving.

Passengers were provided with a certificate stating their negative test results and completion of the quarantine.

About 500 passengers who planned to leave on Wednesday had all left the ship by evening, and Japanese officials are to spend the next three days conducting the disembarkation of about 2,000 others. The Diamond Princess was quarantined in Yokohama near Tokyo after one passenger who left the ship earlier in Hong Kong was found to have the virus.

Even though Japanese officials insist the number of infected patients is leveling off, cases on the ship continue to mount daily. On Tuesday, 88 people tested positive; a day after 99 others were found to be

infected.

Crew members, who couldn't be confined to their rooms because they were working, are expected to stay on the ship.

The National Institute of Infectious Diseases said a report released Wednesday that the crew had not been fully isolated during the quarantine period. It said the quarantine was effective in reducing transmission among passengers, and that the increase in cases toward the end was mostly among crew or passengers in shared cabins.

"It should be noted that due to the nature of the ship, individual isolation of all those aboard was not possible," it said.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said a more controlled health watch for the crew members is starting now because they can be spread out and kept in isolation by using vacated passenger rooms.

The ship's operator, Princess Cruises, said in a statement Tuesday that people who tested positive recently were still on the ship as they waited for transportation to hospitals.

The safety and transport logistics for moving hundreds of people will test Japanese officials.

The United States evacuated more than 300 people over the weekend who are now in quarantine in the U.S. for another 14 days. South Korea earlier Wednesday returned seven people from the cruise ship, placing the six South Koreans and one Japanese family member into quarantine.

Other foreign passengers were to be picked up by chartered flights sent from Canada, Australia, Italy and Hong Kong.

Suga has defended Japan's handling of the quarantine. "In the beginning, the United States expressed gratitude for the Japanese side. And there are many Americans who chose to stay on the ship," he said.

The U.S. government said Americans who remained on board instead of returning on chartered flights cannot return home for at least two weeks after they come ashore. Other governments picking up passengers have similar policies.

U.S. officials cited the passengers' possible exposure to the virus while on board the Diamond Princess.

Japanese health officials say the 14-day quarantine on the ship was adequate, noting that all but one of more than 500 Japanese who earlier were flown back from the center of the virus in China and initially tested negative were virus-free at the end of their 14-day quarantines.

The officials also defended the precautions taken on the ship. About 1,000 crew members were told to wear surgical masks, wash their hands, use disinfectant sprays and stop operations at restaurants, bars and other entertainment areas after Feb. 5, when the first group of 10 infections was reported and the start of the 14-day quarantine was announced.

Passengers were instructed to stay in their cabins and not walk around or contact other passengers. Those in windowless cabins could go out on the deck for about an hour each day.

Crew members continued to serve guests by delivering food, letters, towels and amenities, and entering passenger cabins for cleaning. Crew members also ate in groups in a crew mess hall.

Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo.

Syria's Aleppo airport resumes flights amid nearby offensive

By ALBERT AJI and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

ALEPPO, Syria (AP) — A Syrian commercial flight landed at Aleppo airport on Wednesday from Damascus, marking the resumption of domestic flights between Syria's two largest cities for the first time since 2012 — even as nearby, the government's onslaught continued with airstrikes reportedly hitting several rebel-held towns and villages.

The flight carrying Syrian officials and journalists was a symbolic message from President Bashar Assad's government, days after its forces consolidated control over the northwestern province of Aleppo and seized the last segments of the strategic M5 highway linking Aleppo to Damascus. The motorway between Syria's two biggest cities was being repaired and was scheduled to reopen in coming days, for the first time in

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eight years.

Backed by heavy Russian air strikes, government forces have for weeks been pushing a crushing military campaign to recapture the Aleppo countryside and parts of neighboring Idlib province in northwestern Syria, the last rebel-held areas in the country.

The widening multi-front offensive has sent hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians fleeing towards the border with Turkey in one of the biggest single displacements of the nine-year war. Escaping the bombs, many of them left with their belongings piled up on vehicles and are now staying in tents, in open fields and under trees in freezing temperatures near the Turkish border. The U.N. has put the number of those displaced since Dec. 1 at more than 900,000 civilians — more than half of them women and children.

Satellite images illustrated the staggering scale of the internal displacement, concentrated within a small space in the country's northwest, near the border with Turkey.

The images from Colorado-based Maxar Technologies show an enormous number of refugee tents and shelters for internally displaced people near Kafaldin and Deir Hassan in Idlib province. A comparison with images of the same area taken a year ago shows the rapid expansion of informal camps, as hundreds of thousands of civilians scrambled to escape the onslaught. The images also show tents near the edge of a quarry in a nearby area.

The military campaign has killed hundreds of civilians and disrupted aid distribution, with the bitter winter compounding the suffering.

On Wednesday, opposition activists reported airstrikes and shelling on several rebel-held areas in the country's northwest, mostly near the towns of Daret Azzeh and Atareb. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitoring group, reported more than 120 airstrikes on the last rebel stronghold on Tuesday alone.

The Syrian Civil Defense, a group active in Idlib, reported that four civilians were killed and 18 were wounded in Tuesday's airstrikes and shelling on several parts of Idlib.

The Syrian Air flight landed at Aleppo airport after a 40-minute flight from Damascus on Wednesday and was welcomed by a military band on the tarmac. Syrian warplanes flew low overhead in a show of force and celebration. Earlier in the day, Syrian Tourism Minister Rami Radwan Martini and Transport Minister Ali Hammoud opened the airport for business.

Hammoud said the opening of the airport is a "great joy" for Syrians and a "dream" for the ministry.

The airport has been closed since 2012 due to fighting, after Aleppo fell into rebel hands. Backed by Russia and Iran, the Syrian army drove the rebels from Aleppo in December 2016, after a crushing years-long siege and bombardment campaign. The airport opened briefly in 2017 to much fanfare but was closed again due to security concerns.

The government's offensive in Idlib has strained ties between Ankara and Moscow, which support opposing sides of the Syria war but for the past few years have been closely coordinating their moves in Idlib province.

A truce reached between the two countries collapsed in late 2019, leading to the current Russian-backed offensive.

Turkey arms and trains the Syrian opposition and has sent thousands of troops and military reinforcements to Idlib in recent weeks in an effort to stem the Syrian government's advances. That has led to rare clashes between Turkish and Syrian troops with fatalities on both sides.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that time was running up for Syrian government forces to retreat from Syria's northwestern Idlib province and warned of an "imminent" Turkish intervention to force the retreat.

Erdogan spoke a day after a top Turkish official said talks between Russian and Turkish delegation meant to reduce tensions in Idlib did not yield a "satisfactory result" for Ankara. The official said however, that the sides agreed to continue talks.

Turkey is pressing Russia to force the Syrian government to retreat to positions they held before the advance in Idlib and Aleppo.

"We are delivering our final warnings. We have not reached the desired results as yet." Erdogan said, addressing legislators from his ruling party in Parliament. "The operation in Idlib is a matter of time. We could enter (Idlib) suddenly one night."

Karam reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, and Bassem Mroue in Beirut contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Syria's tourism minister is Radwan Martini, not Bishr al-Yazigi.

Ex-Gov. Blagojevich returns to Chicago, maintains innocence

By MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Rod Blagojevich returned home to Chicago early Wednesday, shaking hands and signing autographs after President Donald Trump cut short the 14-year prison sentence handed to the former Illinois governor for political corruption.

Blagojevich landed at O'Hare airport hours after walking out of a Colorado prison where he served eight years, promising to work for judicial and criminal justice reform while maintaining his innocence.

"I didn't do the things they said I did and they lied on me," Blagojevich, a one-time contestant on Trump's reality TV show "Celebrity Apprentice," told WGN-TV as he walked through the airport greeting travelers who welcomed him home.

Blagojevich, 63, hails from a state with a long history of pay-to-play schemes. He was convicted in 2011 of crimes that included seeking to sell an appointment to Barack Obama's old Senate seat and trying to shake down a children's hospital.

Trump, who announced clemency for 11 people on Tuesday, called Blagojevich's punishment excessive.

"That was a tremendously powerful, ridiculous sentence in my opinion and in the opinion of many others," Trump told reporters in Washington.

Blagojevich told WGN-TV he learned of his commutation when other inmates told him they saw it on the news, insisting he "had no inkling it was coming."

Trump had said repeatedly in recent years that he was considering taking executive action in Blagojevich's case, only to back away from the idea.

"I'm profoundly grateful to President Trump and it's a profound and everlasting gratitude," Blagojevich told WGN. "He didn't have to do this, he's a Republican president and I was a Democratic governor."

Blagojevich was rushed by media and supporters as he exited the airport in Chicago early Wednesday, signing a few autographs before getting into a white SUV and speeding out of the airport toward his home in Chicago's Ravenswood neighborhood. There he was rushed through a crowd of journalists and supporters to his front door.

The silver-haired former governor stopped briefly on his porch and said he was happy to be home with his wife and children before disappearing into the house, where he and his family planned a "homecoming press conference" later Wednesday.

Blagojevich was famously fastidious about his dark hair as governor, but it went all white because hair dyes are banned in prison.

Some in Illinois, including the current governor, said Tuesday that setting Blagojevich free was a mistake.

Trump "has abused his pardon power in inexplicable ways to reward his friends and condone corruption, and I deeply believe this pardon sends the wrong message at the wrong time," Gov. J.B. Pritzker said in a written statement.

Many Republicans agreed.

"In a state where corrupt, machine-style politics is still all too common, it's important that those found guilty serve their prison sentence in its entirety," said the chairman of the Illinois GOP, Tim Schneider.

Trump made clear that he saw similarities between efforts to investigate his own conduct and those who took down Blagojevich.

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"It was a prosecution by the same people — Comey, Fitzpatrick, the same group," Trump said. He was referring to Patrick Fitzgerald, the former U.S. attorney who prosecuted Blagojevich and now represents former FBI Director James Comey, whom Trump fired from the agency in May 2017. Comey was not at the FBI or anywhere in the Department of Justice during the investigation and indictment of Blagojevich.

The Illinois House in January 2009 voted 114-1 to impeach Blagojevich, and the state Senate voted unanimously to remove him, making him the first Illinois governor in history to be removed by lawmakers. He entered prison in March 2012.

Blagojevich's wife, Patti, went on a media blitz in 2018 to encourage Trump to step in, praising the president and likening the investigation of her husband to special prosecutor Robert Mueller's probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election — a probe Trump long characterized as a "witch hunt."

Blagojevich's conviction was notable, even in a state where four of the last 10 governors have gone to prison for corruption. Judge James Zagel — who sentenced Blagojevich to the longest prison term yet for an Illinois politician — said when a governor "goes bad, the fabric of Illinois is torn and disfigured."

After his Dec. 9, 2008, arrest while still governor, Blagojevich became known for his foul-mouthed rants on wiretaps. On the most notorious recording, he gushed about profiting by naming someone to the seat Obama vacated to become president: "I've got this thing and it's f----- golden. And I'm just not giving it up for f----- nothing."

Prosecutors have balked at the notion long promoted by Blagojevich that he engaged in common political horse-trading and was a victim of an overzealous U.S. attorney. After Blagojevich's arrest, Fitzgerald said the governor had gone on "a political corruption crime spree" that would make Abraham Lincoln turn over in his grave.

A joint statement from Fitzgerald and the lead prosecutors at Blagojevich's trial, none of whom work in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago anymore, stopped short of criticizing Trump's decision. But they highlighted the convictions, including for trying to shake down the children's hospital, saying, "Mr. Blagojevich remains a felon."

Mueller — a subject of Trump's derision — was FBI director during the investigation into Blagojevich.

Trump expressed some sympathy for Blagojevich when he appeared on "Celebrity Apprentice" in 2010, before his first corruption trial started. When Trump "fired" Blagojevich as a contestant, he praised him for how he was fighting his criminal case, telling him, "You have a hell of a lot of guts."

Blagojevich's first trial ended with the jury unable to reach a verdict, except for a single conviction, for lying to the FBI.

At his second trial in 2011, Blagojevich testified, describing himself as a flawed dreamer grounded in his parents' working-class values. He sought to humanize himself to counteract the seemingly greedy governor heard on wiretap recordings played in court. He said the hours of FBI recordings were the ramblings of a politician who liked to think out loud.

He was convicted on 18 counts. The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago in 2015 tossed out five of the convictions, including ones in which he offered to appoint someone to a high-paying job in the Senate.

The appeals court ordered the trial judge to resentence Blagojevich but suggested it would be appropriate to hand him the same sentence, given the gravity of the crimes.

"I've made a whole bunch of mistakes but I didn't break any laws," Blagojevich told ABC 7 Chicago in Denver before boarding his Tuesday night flight. "I crossed no lines. And the things I talked about doing were legal and this was routine politics and the ones who did it are the ones who broke the laws and the ones who frankly should meet and face some accountability."

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mtarm>. Associated Press Writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Follow the AP's coverage of the Rod Blagojevich case: <https://www.apnews.com/RodBlagojevich>.

Turkish court to issue verdict in rights activists' trial

By ROBERT BADENBIECK and SUZAN FRASER undefined

ISTANBUL (AP) — A group of human rights activists delivered their final statements in their own defense on Wednesday before a court in Istanbul hands down a verdict in their closely-watched trial on charges of belonging to or aiding terror groups.

The case against Amnesty International's former Turkey chairman and 10 other activists heightened concerns about Turkey's treatment of human rights defenders and helped sour Turkey's relations with European nations, notably with Germany.

The trial comes a day after Turkish prosecutors ordered a prominent philanthropist, Osman Kavala, detained for alleged ties to a 2016 coup attempt, just hours after a court acquitted him on terrorism-related charges and ordered his release from jail after 840 days. Human Rights Watch called the decision to re-arrest Kavala "vindictive and lawless."

Ten activists — including Amnesty International Turkey director Idil Eser, German citizen Peter Steudtner and Swede Ali Gharavi — were detained in a police raid in July 2017, while attending a digital security training workshop on Buyukada island, off Istanbul. The 11th activist, Amnesty's former Turkey chairman, Taner Kilic, was detained separately a month earlier in the city of Izmir. All of the defendants have since been released pending a verdict in the trial.

Ten defendants were charged with aiding terrorist organizations, including Kurdish and left-wing militants and the network led by a U.S.-based cleric, which the Turkish government blames for the 2016 coup attempt and has designated as a terror group.

Kilic is accused of membership in cleric Fethullah Gulen's network. The accusation was based on his alleged use of an encrypted mobile messaging application. Officials say the application was used by members of Gulen's network to communicate with each other. Gulen denies allegations that he engineered the coup attempt.

All 11 defendants have rejected the accusations against them.

Hundreds of supporters arrived at the courthouse in support of the activists.

Feray Salman, Human Rights Joint Platform called the trial "a sort of a punishment process for human rights defenders ... and for human rights."

"A legal scandal transpired," she said.

In a statement released before the trial, Amnesty International called on the court to acquit the defendants "for justice to be done."

"They should never have been investigated, let alone imprisoned or prosecuted," Amnesty said.

Germany's Foreign Ministry said Tuesday it was watching closely the case against Kilic and the "Istanbul 10."

Turkey has arrested some 77,000 people and has dismissed around 130,000 others from state jobs since the coup. The crackdown was initially launched to deal with the alleged coup-plotters, but critics say it was expanded to include other government opponents, including human rights defenders.

The activists' trial coincided with the release of stinging report by Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, urging Turkish authorities to respect the independence of the judiciary, and to stop targeting human rights defenders, whom she said were being prosecuted for conducting "legitimate activities."

The report said: "The Commissioner notes a widespread pattern of judicial actions targeting human rights defenders, which amount to a misuse of criminal proceedings to silence them and to discourage civil society engagement."

Separately, Mijatovic also criticized philanthropist Kavala's re-arrest saying the new charges brought against him had "no credibility" and amounted "to ill-treatment."

"I call on the Turkish judiciary and the Council of Judges and Prosecutors to assume their responsibility, by not giving a judicial confirmation to such abuses of criminal proceedings, and by reigning in such prosecutors," she said.

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday appeared to approve of Kavala's re-arrest, denouncing "attempts to acquit him."

He described the 2013 anti-government protests as being a "heinous attack similar to military coups and terrorism" that allegedly cost the country billions of dollars.

Fraser reported from Ankara, Turkey.

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. AP: BARR MULLS RESIGNATION The attorney general tells people close to him he's considering quitting his post after Trump wouldn't heed his warning to stop tweeting about Justice Department cases, an administration official tells the AP.

2. ROD BLAGOJEVICH WALKS FREE The former Illinois governor is back in his Chicago home after being released from prison after Trump cut short his 14-year sentence for political corruption.

3. 'WE JUST WANT TO CELEBRATE' Hundreds of passengers begin leaving the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan after the end of a much-criticized, two-week quarantine that failed to stop the spread of a new virus.

4. WHERE THERE WAS A SYMBOLIC FLIGHT AMID WAR A commercial flight from Damascus carrying Syrian officials and journalists lands in Aleppo for the first time in years, while nearby, a government onslaught has displaced more than 900,000 civilians in the northwest.

5. INTO THE HEAT OF DEBATE BATTLE IN VEGAS The first major test of billionaire Mike Bloomberg's presidential campaign plays out in the city of high rollers when he faces questions and sharp elbows from other candidates on the stage for the first time.

6. 'WHEN MONEY DOESN'T COME, PEOPLE DIE' As Yemenis go hungry, many food deliveries have been blocked as Houthi rebels demand the U.N. give them a cut of the billions of dollars in international aid money, AP learns.

7. YEMEN DRONES LINKED TO IRAN A small instrument within drones that targeted the heart of Saudi Arabia's oil industry and those in the arsenal of Yemen's Houthi rebels match components recovered in downed Iranian drones, reports say.

8. EX-AUSTRALIAN LEADER DISCLOSES FLIGHT 370 THEORY Tony Abbott claims top Malaysian government officials suspected the vanishing of the Malaysian Airlines jetliner almost six years ago was a mass murder-suicide by the pilot.

9. ROBERT DURST BEING TRIED FOR OLD MURDER The eccentric real estate heir, now 76, is accused of fatally shooting his best friend in 2000 to keep her silent about the disappearance and presumed 1982 killing of his wife.

10. 'NOW IS JUST THE RIGHT TIME' Eight years after the singer's death, a holographic Whitney Houston will appear on a concert stage again with a European tour and U.S. dates expected to follow.

Sanders hopes early strength will prove he can beat Trump

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Terry Reece has long been skeptical that voters would back Bernie Sanders, a 78-year-old self-described democratic socialist who is just months removed from a heart attack. Then the Vermont senator essentially tied for first place in the Democratic Party's Iowa caucuses and won its New Hampshire primary.

That forced Reece to rethink his assumptions about who can win the nomination. After months of leaning toward former Vice President Joe Biden, Reece filled out a preference card for Sanders during early voting this week in the Nevada caucuses.

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"I think that people are kind of wanting to turn the pages and get more radical, or switch from the status quo," said Reece, a 62-year-old African American who owns a small media company in Las Vegas.

That's exactly the sentiment Sanders is counting on to carry him to victory in the battle to take on President Donald Trump. Since the early days of Sanders' second presidential campaign, he and his supporters have sought to allay concerns that he's a fringe candidate whose call for political revolution would doom the party to another humiliating defeat. The strong showing in Iowa and New Hampshire gives him fresh evidence to make that case.

"The reason that we are going to win here in Nevada, with your help, the reason that we are going to win the Democratic nomination, with your help, the reason we are going to beat Trump is we have an agenda that speaks to the needs of working families, not the billionaire class," Sanders told a crowd at the University of Nevada Las Vegas on Tuesday.

Sanders faces high expectations in Nevada, which formally holds its Democratic presidential caucuses on Saturday. He has a strong organization and has generated enthusiasm among younger and Latino voters. But there are plenty of hurdles that could dent his confidence in the weeks ahead.

Former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg is expected to use his debate stage premiere on Wednesday to attack Sanders' broad call for economic and political revolution as unworkable and too liberal for more mainstream voters who simply want to defeat Trump. Sanders hasn't fully united the party's liberal wing and was denied the most coveted union endorsement in Nevada. His trademark "Medicare for All" proposal could unnerve voters in both major political parties who worry about higher taxes and the loss of private health insurance.

And while Sanders has notched a win, he has yet to post a commanding victory. Pete Buttigieg, the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, essentially tied with Sanders in Iowa and finished closely behind him in New Hampshire, a state the senator won by more than 20 percentage points in 2016.

Campaigning in Las Vegas on Tuesday, Buttigieg again raised questions about whether Sanders could unify the party against Trump.

"Sen. Sanders, I think, speaks to a lot of ideals that we all share," Buttigieg said. "But right now we need to make sure we're drawing as many people as we can into our coalition. And if the message goes out, 'Your choices are you either need to be for a revolution or you must be for the status quo,' I don't think most of us see ourselves in that picture."

But as the Democratic contest unfolds, many voters may see a win as a win and make their decisions accordingly, said Tim Miller, a former strategist with Jeb Bush's failed Republican presidential campaign in 2016.

"Voters want a winner," Miller said. "Voters want someone who can win in November, and there is a sheen that comes from winning primaries."

Miller is one of several analysts in both parties who see parallels between the Republican contest in 2016 and this year's Democratic primary. In both cases, a party outsider held a grip on a tight group of supporters while a bevy of centrists split the vote against him. As Trump kept scoring victories in the 2016 primaries, he eventually won backing from GOP voters who might not have liked him but were focused on defeating Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The question for Sanders, an independent senator from Vermont, is whether the party will similarly warm to him if he can pile up more victories. For now, much of the Democratic establishment thinks it's impossible for him to win the presidency during a growing economy. Some House Democrats are openly expressing concern that a Sanders nomination could cost the party control of that chamber.

Miller said that argument may not resonate with Democratic voters who, like Trump supporters, are increasingly skeptical of political institutions.

"A lot of voters have lost confidence in their ability to predict who will win," he said.

Sanders could have a challenging time finding a winning path against Trump. He is poorly positioned in the perennial swing state of Florida, with its older voters and population of Cuban immigrants, many of whom have a visceral dislike of socialism. It's unlikely that Sanders could flip growing Sun Belt states like Arizona, Georgia or Texas, because a Democratic victory in those places depends on both motivating the

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states' expanding minority populations and converting moderate white Republicans.

That leaves Sanders' clearest path through the trio of Rust Belt states that gave Trump his 2016 victory — Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. Notably, Sanders has proposed banning fracking, which could be a liability in Pennsylvania, where the drilling process is a key part of the state's economy.

But Jeff Weaver, a senior adviser to Sanders, said the senator has routinely been underestimated by election handicappers.

"This electability thing has been greatly overblown by candidates who had a more traditional approach but haven't proved that electable," Weaver said. "I do think the American people are hungry for someone who will take on the political and economic elite."

Weaver said Sanders wins about one-quarter of Republicans in his home state in Vermont and noted that he won 23 states in the long 2016 Democratic primary against Clinton. He identified rural Western states like Montana and the Dakotas as places a Sanders campaign could contest in the general election, and added that Democratic gubernatorial candidates in the key Rust Belt states of Michigan and Wisconsin asked Sanders to campaign for them in 2016.

"Some of the moderates say, 'We've seen the polls and we want Bernie Sanders here in the general election,'" Weaver said.

Still, Sanders seems to be retooling his stump speech in ways that might ease concerns from some moderates. As he campaigned in Nevada over the past several days, he didn't call for political revolution or mention democratic socialism.

And when he attacks his rivals, Sanders is focusing less on ideological purity and more on what it will take to beat Trump.

"In order to win in November, we are going to need a multi-generational, multiracial campaign of energy and excitement that creates the highest voter turnout in American history," he said at the Clark County Democratic Party dinner on Saturday.

Then he turned to Bloomberg, the billionaire who is emerging as a centrist foil to Sanders.

"The simple truth is Mayor Bloomberg, with all of his money, will not create the sort of energy and excitement to have the voter turnout we must have to defeat Donald Trump," Sanders said.

That's resonating among his supporters. Jeanette Kano, an information technology worker in Las Vegas, knows plenty of Trump Republicans from growing up in Kansas.

"They say they would have voted for Bernie," she said.

She thinks Sanders can peel that sort of voter from the president.

Margaret Hines, a writer and artist in Reno, voted for Clinton in the 2016 primary but backs Sanders this time precisely because of the significant changes he's proposed.

"I don't think vanilla is going to do it this time," she said.

Associated Press writers Jonathan J. Cooper in Las Vegas and Scott Sonner in Reno, Nev., contributed to this report.

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

5 questions for next Democratic debate, Mike Bloomberg's 1st

LAS VEGAS (AP) — There's a new kid in town for the ninth Democratic debate, Mike Bloomberg, the self-funding billionaire presidential candidate. Five questions ahead of the faceoff Wednesday night in Las Vegas: HOW DOES BLOOMBERG STACK UP?

No candidate has the potential to upend the race for the Democratic presidential nomination more than Bloomberg, the former New York mayor and billionaire owner of a financial data and news empire.

He has spent more than \$400 million on advertising and has risen in national polling as a result. That has allowed him a place on the debate stage in Las Vegas, after the Democratic National Committee dropped an additional requirement of reaching a certain number of donors. Since Bloomberg accepts no donations,

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polls were the only way he could qualify.

He has demonstrated the power of essentially an unlimited budget, but he will have to directly engage with five other contenders who have been debating one another for months, holding town halls and answering voters' questions.

How does Bloomberg deal with the inevitable attacks from rivals, and how can he sell himself in person to voters?

WHO TAKES THE MOST INCOMING?

The Democratic race is entering a critical phase, in which Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders is breaking out as an early front-runner while more moderate candidates are splintering voters. But Sanders has yet to win even 30% of the vote.

Sanders is likely to be a target at the debate, but Bloomberg is likely to be tested at least as vigorously. At the last debate, it was former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, fresh off a strong showing in Iowa, who drew the most fire.

Also worth watching is where moderates other than Bloomberg train their fire: on an ascendant Sanders, trying to blunt his rise, or on the rivals in their own lane, hoping to clear a path?

WHO IS THIS DEBATE'S KLOBUCHAR?

The debate before the New Hampshire primary proved to be a lifeline to Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar. Her strong performance helped stoke millions of dollars in overnight donations and, a few days later, a surprise third-place finish, likely at the expense of Buttigieg, who finished a close second to Sanders. She now says she has the resources to be competitive through Super Tuesday, on March 3.

Will there be another breakout star on Wednesday night? With four candidates bunched behind Sanders' poll numbers and Bloomberg's billions, there's plenty of hunger for a big night. Can anyone seize the spotlight?

HOW DOES BIDEN HANDLE IMMIGRATION?

In Nevada, a state with a formidable immigrant population, it's almost inevitable that the candidates will be asked about the issue. It's been a particularly tricky one for former Vice President Joe Biden, who's repeatedly been confronted by activists over the Obama administration's deportation record.

Late last week Biden called the pace of deportations in President Barack Obama's first term "a big mistake" during an interview with Univision anchor Jorge Ramos. But will the issue resurface Wednesday night, and will other candidates try to pile on? It would be a risky move as they will be implicitly criticizing Obama, who remains incredibly popular among Democratic voters.

CAN WARREN MAKE A COMEBACK?

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's campaign is in trouble. Unlike Biden, she has no upcoming states where she's likely to do well. (The former vice president is expected to win the next state, South Carolina.) Unlike Klobuchar and Buttigieg, she's not on an upward trajectory — she's been heading in a different direction. And she lacks the growing national footprint of Sanders and Bloomberg.

In the New Hampshire debate, Warren was oddly subdued. Her campaign has shifted from its policy wonk message of a fighter for the middle class and is now trying to sell Warren as a unifier.

That puts her in a tough spot during a part of the campaign where she needs to break out. Fortunately for her, Bloomberg makes a tempting target — Warren's political career stems from a revulsion at the role of big money in politics and of excesses on Wall Street. Can she use him as a punching bag to get off the ropes?

Warren, whose allies pushed for Bloomberg to have to answer to voters on the debate stage, may have telegraphed her intentions in a tweet Tuesday: "It's a shame Mike Bloomberg can buy his way into the debate. But at least now primary voters curious about how each candidate will take on Donald Trump can get a live demonstration of how we each take on an egomaniac billionaire."

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

Pompeo says South Africa land seizures would be 'disastrous'

By ELIAS MESERET Associated Press

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — America's top diplomat on Wednesday asserted that South Africa's plan to allow expropriation of private property without compensation would be "disastrous" for the country's economy and its people.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made the comments in an address in Ethiopia on the final day of an Africa visit largely aimed at countering China's influence on the continent of more than 1.2 billion people.

"Be wary of authoritarian regimes and their empty promises," he said, without naming names. "They breed corruption, dependency and instability."

There was no immediate government response in South Africa to Pompeo's comments.

Land is a sensitive issue in South Africa, which is one of the world's most unequal countries in part because of the legacy of the former racist system of apartheid that ended in 1994.

Some members of the ruling African National Congress and the populist opposition Economic Freedom Fighters have pressed for redistribution of land, arguing that it will help right past wrongs in which many black people were forced off their property.

Critics have warned against what happened in neighboring Zimbabwe, where sometimes violent land seizures from white farmers scared away some investors and deepened that once-prosperous country's economic collapse.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa last week in his state of the nation address said the government plans to accelerate land redistribution this year. The government also plans to table an expropriation bill "that outlines the circumstances under which expropriation of land without compensation would be permissible," he said.

Ramaphosa has called land redistribution necessary to "redress a grave historical injustice." South Africa's government calls the dispossession of land by the 1913 Natives Land Act "apartheid's original sin," and one which continues to shape land ownership today.

The president also has attempted to soothe investors by saying there will be no chaotic or illegal land grabs, mindful of the need to not scare away business in a country with unemployment at a decade high of 29%.

This is not the first time the Trump administration has spoken out on South Africa's moves to redistribute land.

In 2018, President Donald Trump claimed that South Africa was seizing farms and that many farmers were being killed. In fact, farmers have been killed for more than 20 years in what is widely seen as part of the country's high crime rate, and experts say white farmers have not been the target.

The secretary of state is the first Cabinet official to visit Africa in 18 months. He also stopped in Senegal and Angola on a trip that seeks to reassert U.S. interests on a continent that many have accused the Trump administration of largely neglecting.

China, Africa's top trading partner for a decade now, is a major U.S. concern. Numerous other global powers have turned their focus to the continent of more than 1.2 billion people, many of them young.

Analysts have said a key task for Pompeo is countering the recent messaging out of Washington. New visa restrictions target Nigerians, Sudanese, Tanzanians and Eritreans, and the Pentagon is considering cutting the U.S. military presence on the continent even as Islamic extremism spikes in West Africa's Sahel region.

"Peace in Africa will be won by Africans," Pompeo told reporters Tuesday.

Cara Anna in Johannesburg contributed.

China's virus center vows no patient unchecked as cases fall

By YANAN WANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Protective suit-clad inspectors in the epicenter of China's viral outbreak went door-to-door Wednesday to find every infected person in the central city suffering most from an epidemic that is

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showing signs of waning as new cases fell for a second day.

Wuhan, where the new form of coronavirus emerged, is on the final day of a campaign to root out anyone with symptoms whom authorities may have missed so far.

"This must be taken seriously," said Wang Zhonglin, the city's newly minted Communist Party secretary. "If a single new case is found (after Wednesday), the district leaders will be held responsible."

His remarks were published on Hubei's provincial website, alongside the declaration, "If the masses cannot mobilize, it's impossible to fight a people's war."

Mainland China reported Wednesday 1,749 new cases and 136 additional deaths. While the overall spread of the COVID-19 illness has been slowing, the situation remains severe in Hubei province, which has Wuhan as its capital. Infections in Hubei constitute more than 80% of the country's 74,185 total cases and 95% of its 2,004 deaths, according to data from China's National Health Commission.

Cities in Hubei with a combined population of more than 60 million have been under lockdown since the Lunar New Year holiday last month, usually the busiest time of the year for travel. Authorities put a halt to nearly all transportation and movement except for quarantine efforts, medical care and delivery of food and basic necessities. "Wartime" measures were implemented in some places where residents were prevented from leaving their apartments altogether.

The stringent measures have followed public fury over Hubei authorities' handling of the epidemic when it began in December. The risk of human-to-human transmission was downplayed, and doctors who tried to warn the public were reprimanded by police. Wuhan residents reported overcrowding in hospitals and futile attempts to seek treatment.

Many countries have also set up border screenings and airlines have canceled flights to and from China to prevent further spread of the disease, which has been detected in around two dozen countries and caused about 1,000 confirmed cases outside mainland China. Five deaths have been reported outside the mainland, in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and France.

In Hong Kong, a spokesman for Princess Margaret Hospital reported the city's second death out of 62 cases. Media reported the victim was a 70-year-old man with underlying illnesses.

The much-criticized quarantine of a cruise ship in Japan ends later Wednesday. The Diamond Princess' 542 virus cases were the most in any place outside of China, and medical experts have called its quarantine a failure.

South Korea evacuated six South Koreans and a Japanese family member from the ship, and they began an additional 14-day quarantine Wednesday. More than 300 American passengers were evacuated earlier and are quarantined in the United States, including at least 14 who had tested positive for the virus.

On Tuesday, the U.S. government said the more than 100 American passengers who stayed on the ship or were hospitalized in Japan would have to wait for another two weeks before they could return to the U.S.

Passengers from the MS Westerdam, another cruise ship, have tested negative for the virus, Cambodia's Health Ministry announced Wednesday.

Seven hundred of the Westerdam's passengers had already left Cambodia after the ship docked last week, only to have one woman test positive for the virus when she arrived in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The discovery that the 83-year-old American woman harbored the virus caused the suspension of plans to send home the other passengers still in Cambodia.

The dispersal of those who had already left for various countries has caused concern that they might be undetected carriers of the virus, and health authorities in several nations were tracing them to take protective measures.

"Prevention and control work is at a critical time," Chinese President Xi Jinping said during a phone call Tuesday evening with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, according to Chinese state media.

Likewise, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told The Associated Press in an interview in Lahore, Pakistan, that the viral outbreak "is not out of control, but it is a very dangerous situation." He said that "the risks are enormous and we need to be prepared worldwide for that."

Outside Hubei, other localities have imposed quarantine measures to varying degrees. Residential neighborhoods in Beijing have placed limits on the number of people per household who can go out, and those

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who do must carry exit-entry cards. In Shanghai, police detained a man for 10 days for repeatedly leaving the house and taking public transportation when he was supposed to be under quarantine at home.

Despite such warnings, Beijing was showing signs of coming back to life this week, with road traffic at around a quarter of usual, up from virtually nothing a week ago. While most restaurants, stores and office buildings remained closed, others had reopened.

The country may postpone its biggest political meeting of the year, the annual congress due to start in March, to avoid having people travel to the capital while the virus is still spreading. One of the automotive industry's biggest events, China's biannual auto show, was postponed, and many sports and entertainment events have been delayed or canceled.

The U.S. also upgraded its travel advisory for China to Level 4, telling its citizens not to travel to anywhere in the country and advising those currently in China to attempt to depart by commercial means.

"In the event that the situation further deteriorates, the ability of the U.S. Embassy and Consulates to provide assistance to U.S. nationals within China may be limited. The United States is not offering chartered evacuation flights from China," the notice said.

"We strongly urge U.S. citizens remaining in China to stay home as much as possible and limit contact with others, including large gatherings. Consider stocking up on food and other supplies to limit movement outside the home," the notice said. The U.S. previously flew out scores of its citizens on charter flights from Wuhan but does not have any further plans to do so, it said.

Also on Wednesday, China said it was expelling three Wall Street Journal reporters over the headline for an opinion column which referred to the current virus outbreak in China and called the country the "Real Sick Man of Asia."

In a statement Wednesday, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the Feb. 3 op-ed by Bard College Professor Walter Russel Mead "smears the efforts of the Chinese government and people on fighting (the virus) epidemic."

Long sensitive to its portrayal in global media, China has been pushing a narrative of transparency and tight control over the current outbreak, while emphasizing the sacrifices made by its health workers and ordinary citizens.

Associated Press writers Kathy Gannon in Lahore, Pakistan, Sopheng Cheang in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Eileen Ng in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

Devices found in missiles, Yemen drones link Iran to attacks

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A small instrument inside the drones that targeted the heart of Saudi Arabia's oil industry and those in the arsenal of Yemen's Houthi rebels match components recovered in downed Iranian drones in Afghanistan and Iraq, two reports say.

These gyroscopes have only been found inside drones manufactured by Iran, Conflict Armament Research said in a report released on Wednesday. That follows a recently released report from the United Nations, saying its experts saw a similar gyroscope from an Iranian drone obtained by the U.S. military in Afghanistan, as well as in a shipment of cruise missiles seized in the Arabian Sea bound for Yemen.

The discovery further ties Iran to an attack that briefly halved Saudi Arabia's oil output and saw energy prices spike by a level unseen since the 1991 Gulf War. It also ties Iran to the arming of the rebel Houthis in Yemen's long civil war. Iran denies it had a hand in that assault but has increasingly promoted its influence over the Houthis and launched a ballistic missile attack on American troops in Iraq after a U.S. drone strike killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad last month.

"This gyroscope ... we've seen it now enough times in Iranian-manufactured material to be able to confidently say that the presence of it in a Houthi-produced item suggests that the material was supplied from Iran," Jonah Leff of Conflict Armament Research told The Associated Press.

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Iran's mission to the U.N. declined to immediately respond to queries from the AP.

Media officials from the rebel Houthis, who hold Yemen's capital, Sanaa, and have been battling a Saudi-led coalition since March 2015, declined an interview request. A U.N. Security Council resolution prohibits arms transfers to the Houthis.

A gyroscope is a device that helps orient and guide a drone or missile to its target. The gyroscopes in question bear no manufacturer's name and come in at least two versions labeled as V9 and V10, according to the reports. Their four-digit serial numbers also appear sequential, suggesting the same manufacturer had built all of those found.

The Houthi's Qasef-1 drone carries the V10 gyroscope, which is "identical" to one found in an Iranian-made Ababil-3 drone, which Islamic State group fighters reportedly recovered in Iraq, Conflict Armament Research said. Weapons experts found the V9 version of the gyroscope in drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles, used in the September attack on Abqaiq, home of a crucial oil processing facility for Saudi Arabia, the U.N. report said.

"According to UAV experts familiar with this technology, such vertical gyroscopes have not been observed in any UAVs other than those manufactured by Iran," Conflict Armament Research said in its report, which was funded by the European Union and the governments of Germany and the United Arab Emirates.

The U.N. report simply said that "the manufacturer of the gyroscope remains unknown." However, it noted finding similar V10 gyroscopes "among the debris of both Samad and Qasef UAVs, which have been used by the Houthi forces."

The U.N. also said its experts saw a V9 gyroscope on display in Washington at a military display showing an Iranian Shahed-123 that American officials say they recovered in Afghanistan in October 2016, after it crash-landed.

Images of the gyroscopes match those in the Conflict Armament Research report. A similar gyroscope could be seen inside a cruise missile seized by the U.S. Navy in a November raid on a traditional dhow shipping boat in the Arabian Sea. A computer terminal also seized with the missiles, likely used with the weapons, bore Farsi characters on its keyboard.

The U.S. and the Saudi-led coalition have long said that Iran supplies weapons to the Houthis, ranging from assault rifles to the ballistic missiles fired into the kingdom. The U.S. Navy announced a new weapons cache find aboard a dhow this month, but it wasn't clear if the same gyroscopes were inside missiles recovered in this find.

Drones used by the Houthis have done everything, from crashing into Patriot missile batteries to exploding overhead and showering deadly shrapnel on targets. An exploding Houthi drone in a January 2019 attack on a military parade near Aden killed at least six people, including the commander of military intelligence for Yemen's internationally recognized government.

Iran, in turn, has long denied arming the Houthis, but that veil slowly lifted after the January U.S. drone strike killed Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, whose expeditionary Quds Forces led Iran's work with allied proxy forces in Yemen and elsewhere. Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh of the Guard's aerospace program recently gave a speech in front of a Houthi flag, as well as those of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, Hamas and others in an effort to project Iran's power.

But previously, Iran's murky arming of militant groups gave it plausible deniability and an ability to strike at opponents without being directly blamed, analysts say. While the wider confrontation with the U.S. since President Donald Trump pulled out of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers has seen Tehran's military claim launched attacks, other claims still could come from Tehran-allied militants.

That makes tracing weapons important, Leff said. The Conflict Armament Research report also said some components used in Houthi drones had been seen in homemade explosives recovered on the island nation of Bahrain as well.

"For them to line up with many of the components that we're seeing in these UAVs for us suggests that there are some well-established supply lines," he said. "There's another research question that would be drilling down to, you know, who are the parties involved in actually trafficking these items into Yemen. That we have less information on."

Associated Press writer Ahmed al-Haj in Sanaa, Yemen, contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

Bong happy 'Parasite' succeeded despite disparity it showed

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM** and **KIM TONG-HYUNG** Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Oscar-winning "Parasite" director Bong Joon-ho said Wednesday the film's "biggest pleasure and the most significant meaning" to him is that it succeeded even though the audiences might feel uncomfortable with his explicit description of bitter wealth disparity in modern society.

Bong's dark comic thriller about two families on the opposite ends of South Korea's social spectrum is a history-making film. It won best picture at this month's 92nd Academy Awards ceremony, becoming the first non-English-language film to get the top honor. Bong and his film clinched three other Oscars.

Bong told reporters that the movie's story has not only "funny, comic" elements but also "bitter, painful natures" of the disparity between the haves and have-nots in modern society.

"I didn't want to avoid such a part even a little bit," Bong told a nationally televised news conference. "Audiences might hate that or feel uncomfortable to watch it ... but I thought the only option I can have for this movie is depicting the world we live as frankly as possible, though that might be risky commercially."

Noting that "Parasite" was already commercially successful in North America, France, Vietnam, Japan, the United Kingdom and his native South Korea even before his Oscar triumph, Bong said, "Regardless of the (Oscar) wins, the biggest pleasure and the most significant meaning was the fact that many audiences around the world of our times respond to the movie."

The class satire tells the story of how a family of four poor, unemployed people living in a slum basement apartment comically infiltrates a wealthy family residing at a luxurious mansion before things unravel violently and tragically.

Bong already had commercial and critical success with his 2013 sci-fi film "Snowpiercer," which starred Chris Evans and Tilda Swinton along with South Korean "Parasite" actor Song Kang-ho. But nothing that's come before has been remotely as successful as "Parasite," a profoundly South Korean film shot in the Korean language.

Along with the best picture award, Bong was also named best director and co-shared another Oscar title, best original screenplay, with "Parasite" co-writer Han Jin Won. The film won best international feature film as well.

The movie, which is also the first South Korean film to win an Oscar, has made Bong a national hero. Ahead of April's parliamentary elections in South Korea, some politicians even proposed setting up a Bong statue, establishing a street named after him and rebuilding the house where he was born.

Asked about such proposals, Bong joked, "I hope people will talk about such things after I die."

Bong said that he will leave it to critics, journalists and fans to analyze the movie's commercial appeal, and that he'd fully focus on working on this next film.

At the same news conference, actress Lee Jeong-eun, who plays a live-in housekeeper for the wealthy family in "Parasite," said the movie portrayed universal problems such as unemployment "in a very interesting yet an in-depth manner." Han said he believes many audiences sympathized with the movie's 10 main characters, who "have their own dramas and have their own reasons to live."

Bong said he was ready for a break after a successful yet exhausting Oscars campaign. But he said prominent American director Martin Scorsese pleaded that he get back to work quickly.

"I just read his letter a few hours ago and it was an honor," Bong said. "He said I did a good job and should rest, but only a little because he and everyone else was eagerly waiting for my next film."

Bong had mentioned his admiration of Scorsese while receiving the directing Oscar, inspiring an impromptu standing ovation from the crowd.

Bong said he was discussing with HBO making a TV adaptation of "Parasite," with American director

and screenwriter Adam McKay agreeing to be a writer on the series, which could run five or six episodes. "We have smoothly taken the first step with HBO," said Bong, while denying reports that Mark Ruffalo and Swinton have been finalized as cast members.

"The TV adaptation of 'Snowpiercer' is planned to air in May, but since we started talking about it in 2014 or 2015, it took about five years. (The TV version of) 'Parasite' might take quite a while too," he said.

In the spirit of Whitney: Houston Hologram tour set to begin

By **ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer**

BURBANK, Calif. (AP) — Whitney Houston is about to appear on the concert stage again.

Eight years after her death, a holographic Houston will embark on a European tour that starts in England on Feb. 25 and runs through early April, with U.S. dates expected to follow.

"Now is just the right time," said Pat Houston, the singer's sister-in-law, former manager and the executor of her estate, which is producing the show in collaboration with BASE Hologram. "In the spirit of Whitney, I know we're doing all the right things right now."

Last week, a few dozen members of the media were given a dress-rehearsal preview in Burbank, California of most of "An Evening With Whitney: The Whitney Houston Hologram Tour," which features a Houston projected onto a nearly invisible scrim on a stage with real dancers and a live backing band.

The concert set includes most of her biggest hits — "How Will I Know," "Saving All My Love For You," "I Will Always Love You," along with some unexpected rarities, including a cover of Steve Winwood's "Higher Love" that Houston first recorded three decades ago.

The show, which was first conceived five years ago, used a body double along with hundreds of hours of Houston performances and extensive CGI synthesizing.

"We created the hologram the same way they did Carrie Fisher in the 'Star Wars' movie 'Rogue One,'" said Marty Tudor, CEO of BASE Hologram, which has previously revived performing versions of dead singers including Roy Orbison and Maria Callas. "It's lengthy, it's tedious, it's a big, complicated process, but I think it worked."

The ambitious performance is the modest brainchild of Whitney Houston herself, in at least one respect.

While on her final European tour, she had an "unplugged" section of her show, with a stripped down band and minimal fanfare. Houston liked that so much that shortly before her death at age 48 on the eve of the 2012 Grammy Awards, she expressed a desire to one day do an entire tour that way.

That concept became the model for the hologram concert.

"This is something that she wanted to do," Pat Houston said after the media preview of the show. "I get very emotional watching this, because it is so, so close to what she wanted. The only thing missing is her, physically."

On first appearance it's clear how far holographic technology has come since previous iterations like Tupac's holographic stint with Snoop Dogg at Coachella in 2012, with little of the flickering unreality audiences expect. Houston's appearance in a gold gown looks magically realistic.

The limits are more apparent as the concert goes on, with the projection beam visible and Houston's movements minimal, but those shortcomings are unlikely to bother the hardcore fans the tour is likely to draw.

Houston was never one for elaborate choreography or flashy moves anyway, and her small gestures — a quivering jaw on long-held notes, fluttering fingers for vocal flourishes, are all captured here.

"Whitney didn't dance a lot, but when she did do her little moves, they were so perfectly Whitney," said Fatima Robinson, who choreographed the show. "We did lots of studying her behavior in her videos. We would study her movements, and find the best moments in some of the live videos that just really embody her."

The show still features plenty of dancing, via four backup dancers and two moving backup singers, all of whom occasionally interact with the hologram.

But Houston mostly preferred to let her voice do the work, and that part of the show works seamlessly,

through a blend of studio takes and live performances. Close listeners may think they're hearing the album version of a hit before it swerves into seemingly spontaneous moments that give it a live feeling.

The sound crew also found moments of between-song patter from Houston that were eternal enough to use for the new show.

"May God bless you and keep you, and let us pray for peace, and pray for the answer," she says toward the end of the set.

The production may be most effective when it embraces its holographic possibilities — including having Houston swarmed in a shimmering shower of golden sparks during the climactic performance of "I Will Always Love You."

Dressing the Houston hologram provided its own set of problems and possibilities.

"The first thing is, you can't do black," Timothy Snell, who oversaw the wardrobe for the show, said with a mock gasp. "And black and sparkles are your first go-to. But Whitney also loved color."

Along with the gold gown, her outfits include a shimmering orange jumpsuit and a floor-length pink flowered coat.

"She liked to look sophisticated and timeless," Snell said. "And those timeless looks really show up here."

AP source: Barr tells people he might quit over Trump tweets

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr has told people close to him he's considering quitting his post after President Donald Trump wouldn't heed his warning to stop tweeting about Justice Department cases, an administration official told The Associated Press.

The revelation came days after Barr took a public swipe at the president, saying in a television interview that Trump's tweets about Justice Department cases and staffers make it "impossible" for him to do his job. The next day, Trump ignored Barr's request and insisted that he has the "legal right" to intervene in criminal cases and sidestep the Justice Department's historical independence.

The administration official was not authorized to discuss Barr's private remarks and requested anonymity.

It's unclear how seriously Barr has considered resigning or whether he is instead trying to pressure Trump to back off his provocative tweets about the Justice Department. Barr's spokeswoman said late Tuesday that the attorney general "has no plans to resign."

Barr is one of the president's closest allies in the administration and has been a staunch defender of Trump's policy decisions. But considering resigning from his post suggests he sees the Justice Department's reputation as an institution that makes decisions on criminal cases independently, unmoved and unbound by political sway, as more important than his allegiance to the president.

Trump tweeted on Tuesday that he's considering suing those involved in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation and opined that his confidant Roger Stone deserved a new trial after being convicted of witness tampering and obstruction.

Barr's comments about Trump's tweets came during an interview with ABC News just days after his Justice Department overruled its own prosecutors — who had recommended in a court filing that Stone be sentenced to seven to nine years in prison — and took the extraordinary step of lowering the amount of prison time it would seek. All four prosecutors from Stone's trial quit the case and one left the Justice Department altogether.

The reversal came after Trump blasted the original sentencing recommendation as "very horrible and unfair," though officials have insisted the decision to make a new recommendation came before Trump's tweet.

"I'm happy to say that, in fact, the president has never asked me to do anything in a criminal case," Barr said in the ABC News interview. "However, to have public statements and tweets made about the department, about our people ... about cases pending in the department, and about judges before whom we have cases, make it impossible for me to do my job and to assure the courts and the prosecutors in the department that we're doing our work with integrity."

The attorney general had been sharing the same sentiment privately with Trump for several weeks, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press. The person was not authorized to discuss Barr's private conversations and requested anonymity.

Speaking to reporters earlier Tuesday, Trump said he understood his tweets makes Barr's job harder, but he showed no signs of relenting. He said he had "total confidence in my attorney general" but insisted that "everybody has the right to speak their mind." He added: "And I probably wouldn't have gotten here without social media because I certainly don't get fair press."

"Yeah, I do make his job harder. I do agree with that. I think that's true," he said. "He's a very straight shooter. We have a great attorney general, and he's working very hard. ... But I will say this: Social media, for me, has been very important because it gives me a voice, because I don't get that voice in the press. In the media, I don't get that voice. So I'm allowed to have a voice."

Barr, serving in his second stint as attorney general, sought to paint himself as an independent leader who would not bow to political pressure. But Democrats have repeatedly accused Barr of acting more like the president's personal attorney than the attorney general. Barr proved to be a largely reliable Trump ally and defender of presidential power.

Trump would likely face a challenge trying to find a replacement for Barr, who is overseeing several investigations that are important to the president, including a criminal investigation into the origins of the Russia probe. Any nominee would face a grilling in the Senate.

Some Democrats have called for Barr to resign, and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called on the Justice Department's inspector general to open an investigation into Barr's role in the sentencing reversal. More than 1,100 former Justice Department prosecutors called on Barr to resign in a letter released Sunday, insisting that Barr's decision to intervene in Stone's case tarnished the department's reputation.

In recent days, a stream of Trump allies, including Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, have issued statements expressing their full confidence in the attorney general. But Trump has a low tolerance for criticism, especially public criticism, from his allies and often fires back in kind.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Graham released a joint statement on Tuesday, calling Barr a "man of the highest character and unquestionable integrity."

"I think he's doing an excellent job," Trump said of the attorney general on Tuesday. "He's a strong guy."

Miller reported from Beverly Hills, Calif. Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

China turns to internet for food supplies amid virus fears

By **JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer**

BEIJING (AP) — Wang Feng, house-bound by China's virus outbreak, counts on the parka-clad delivery drivers of e-commerce giant JD.com to keep her kitchen stocked.

Demand for online food vendors has surged since China's government told the public to stay home as part of the most sweeping anti-disease controls ever imposed.

On Tuesday, Wang's phone buzzed with a text message that a delivery had arrived. The retiree bundled up against the winter cold, put on a face mask and emerged from her apartment complex to collect walnut milk and other goods from shelves on the sidewalk — an anti-virus measure to limit contact with drivers who normally go door to door.

"They work really hard, and it's dangerous," said Wang. "Without their services, we would not be able to survive at all."

JD.com Inc. and rivals including Pinduoduo, Missfresh Inc. and Alibaba Group's Hema are scrambling to fill a boom in orders while trying to protect their employees.

E-commerce is one of the few industries to thrive after anti-virus controls starting in late January closed factories, restaurants, cinemas, offices and shops nationwide and extinguished auto and real estate sales.

The government is trying to revive economic activity but has told anyone who can work from home to stay there. Some cities have imposed controls that allow only one member of a family out each day. That

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creates a ready market for online entertainment and shopping.

"I can't go out and can't go to work," said one of Wang's neighbors, Chen Guang, who was picking up a box of vegetables from the sidewalk shelves under a sign that said, "Contactless Distribution Point."

Chen, who wore an entry pass for his apartment complex around his neck, said he shops online two to three times a week to replenish kitchen supplies.

JD says over the past month, its drivers delivered 71,500 tons of rice, flour and other grains — 20 times more than the same period last year, — 27 million liters of cooking oil and 50,000 tons of meat, eggs, vegetables and other fresh products.

Pinduoduo said orders for apples, strawberries and other fresh fruit from its 586,000 sellers of agricultural products were up 120% in January.

Disease fears in other Asian markets also have propelled e-commerce demand for food and hygiene supplies. The Korea Economic Daily said online mask sales in South Korea rose 37,000% in January over a year earlier.

Chinese e-commerce companies emerged in a market that lacked credit cards, reliable delivery and other features their counterparts in the United States and Europe take for granted. That required JD, Alibaba and some other competitors to create their own online payments systems or networks of warehouses and delivery drivers.

JD has a 180,000-strong workforce of drivers and warehouse workers and says it is hiring 20,000 more to meet demand. The company said Dada Group, a delivery service in which JD is an investor, is adding 15,000 to its workforce.

At a JD distribution center on Beijing's southeast side, employees in red parkas, masks and gloves sorted packages and sprayed them with disinfectant.

Goods from oranges and toilet paper to 32-packs of beer and cat litter came off trucks on one side of the building and passed down a conveyor belt to be sorted for individual drivers. Padded blue boxes held fresh fruit and vegetables.

On the other side of the building, drivers loaded battery-powered three-wheeled delivery vans emblazoned with JD's logo, a cartoon dog called Joy.

The average driver delivers 150 to 190 packages a day, according to Sun Lansong, the facility's manager. "Customers used to buy a lot of electronics," Sun said. "Now they are buying rice, noodles, grain, oil, disinfectant, masks and so on."

Sun said distribution center employees and drivers spray packages, vehicles and their work stations with disinfectant and wash their hands repeatedly during the day. All are issued masks and gloves.

"Before, it might have been rude to talk to people while wearing a mask. But now it feels much better," said Sun.

Other companies say they impose similar safety measures.

Yanxuan, an online consumer products vendor owned by NetEase Inc., said it is giving away masks, hand sanitizer and other anti-disease products in Hubei, the province at the center of the outbreak.

Pinduoduo Inc. announced the launch of a "Help the Farmers" channel this week to allow customers to buy directly from producers in poor areas.

It said that was intended to support suppliers that are having trouble getting shipments to traditional markets due to anti-virus measures. The company promised 500 million yuan (\$70 million) to subsidize purchases.

Traditional grocery stores are open and heavily stocked as the government tries to reassure the public that food supplies are ample following a bout of panic buying after most access to the central city of Wuhan was suspended on Jan. 23. But many households are avoiding going out at all.

"Now everyone pays more attention to it, for their own and everyone's safety, to try to go out as little as possible, responding to the nation's call," Wang said.

E-commerce companies also have been squeezed by the anti-disease controls. Employees were stranded in their hometowns following the Lunar New Year holiday after bus and train services in some areas were

suspended to contain the outbreak.

Sun said one of his facility's employees from Hubei, the province at the center of the outbreak, and two from neighboring Henan province had yet to return.

"I'm not afraid. Still the same. It feels like coming to work is making a contribution to society," said Sun. "It sounds like this virus is terrible. In fact, the virus can be prevented."

The volume of goods being delivered has risen 30% since the outbreak, said a JD driver, Li Hu. He said the effort required is partly offset by only being allowed to take packages to a sidewalk collection point.

"Customers are very supportive," Li said. "They all understand the volume is bigger. They are short of daily necessities," he said. "As soon as we arrive and call, customers come down immediately."

Police: Girl, 6, was killed by neighbor who then killed self

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A 6-year-old girl who disappeared from her front yard after school was killed by a neighbor who then killed himself, authorities said Tuesday.

Faye Marie Swetlik died of asphyxiation just hours after she was abducted, Lexington County Coroner Margaret Fisher told reporters Tuesday, refusing to say if she was strangled or suffocated.

Faye's body was found nearly three days later in woods near her home and had been put there just hours earlier, Fisher said.

Between that time, investigators had spoken with the suspect. Coty Scott Taylor let them search his home a few doors down from the girl. They saw nothing to suggest the girl was ever there, Cayce Public Safety Director Byron Snellgrove said.

Reporters asked Snellgrove if investigators knew where the girl was. "We do not know at this time," Snellgrove said.

Shortly after the girl's body was found, authorities said, they were called to Taylor's home where he was found dead on his back porch, covered in blood.

Taylor, 30, slit his own throat, Fisher said in a statement released after Tuesday's news conference, in which the coroner only wanted to talk in front of cameras about the girl.

Fisher also refused to release any details about the condition of the girl's body or disclose any other way she might have been injured out of respect for her family.

Snellgrove also didn't talk about why Taylor, with no criminal record, would have kidnapped the girl. He said last week that Taylor did not know the girl or her family.

"DNA was tested and did connect and link the residence, the deceased male and Faye to that location," Snellgrove said.

The girl was last seen alive playing in her Cayce front yard after getting off the school bus on Feb. 10. More than 200 officers searched over three days for her, knocking on every door in her neighborhood and checking every vehicle going in and out.

They knocked on Taylor's door, too, the day before he killed himself, Snellgrove said.

"He was cooperative and gave consent to agents to look through the house. Those agents did not see anything that alerted them to believe he had knowledge or was in any way involved in Faye's disappearance at that time," Snellgrove said.

The clue that cracked the case came from a trash can. Investigators followed a trash truck going around the neighborhood Thursday and sifted through every can as it was emptied. Inside Taylor's can, Snellgrove said, they found a rain boot matching one Faye was wearing and a ladle full of dirt.

Snellgrove said he ordered a search near the area and personally found the girl's body which was "moved in shadow of the night."

Taylor had a roommate who was not home much while the girl was missing, said Snellgrove, adding the roommate appeared to know nothing about the abduction.

"It appears (Taylor) is the sole perpetrator of the crime," Snellgrove said of Taylor.

The girl's disappearance shocked Cayce, a town of about 13,000 just west of Columbia, the state capital.

Several prayer vigils were held while she was missing and after her body was found.

More than 100 people came out in pouring rain for a candlelight vigil Tuesday evening at Cayce City Hall. Many wiped away tears as Snellgrove lit the first candle and city council members passed the flame around.

Snellgrove appeared to choke up while announcing the girl's death just hours after finding her body.

"This was not just an investigation or a case to us. Faye Swetlik quickly grabbed all of our hearts," Snellgrove said Tuesday.

The girl had started school at Springdale Elementary in August and made an immediate impact, bringing sunshine as she bounded into school for breakfast and finding a bunch of friends, Principal Hope Vrana said at the vigil.

"Everyone quickly grew to love her smile, her joyful spirit and her very kind heart," Vrana added.

A public memorial for Faye will be held at 7 p.m. Friday at Trinity Baptist Church in Cayce.

Fisher said her heart broke for the girl's family, who lost a child as she simply played in her front yard.

"You and Faye will remain in my heart forever," the coroner said.

This version of the story corrects to say the coroner said the girl was asphyxiated, but did not give details

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>

Bernie Sanders' campaign to request recount of Iowa caucuses

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign plans to ask for a partial recount of the Iowa caucus results after the state Democratic Party released results of its recanvass late Tuesday that show Sanders and Pete Buttigieg in an effective tie.

Sanders campaign senior adviser Jeff Weaver told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday that the campaign has had a representative in contact with the Iowa Democratic Party throughout the recanvass process. "Based on what we understand to be the results, we intend to ask for a recount," he said.

A Sanders spokesman confirmed that the campaign still planned to pursue a recount after the party released its updated results.

In the new results, released by the Iowa Democratic Party, Buttigieg has 563.207 state delegate equivalents and Sanders has 563.127 state delegate equivalents out of 2,152 counted. That is a margin of 0.004 percentage points.

The AP remains unable to declare a winner based on the available information, as the results may still not be fully accurate and are still subject to the recount.

The caucuses were roiled by significant issues in collecting and reporting data from individual precincts on caucus night. There were also errors in the complicated mathematical equations used to calculate the results in individual caucus sites that became evident as the party began to release caucus data throughout the week.

The Iowa Democratic Party had previously said publicly that the only opportunity to correct the math would be a recount, but after a vote by its state central committee, the party changed that policy. It agreed to change some mathematical errors during the recanvass, in instances where "the rules were misapplied in the awarding of delegates" to viable candidates. That changed the results of the caucuses slightly, but resulted only in a slimmer margin separating the two front-runners.

The state party corrected 29 precincts overall in the recanvass, 26 of those because of mathematical errors and 3 because of reporting errors.

In a recount, party officials use the preference cards that caucusgoers filled out outlining their first and second choices in the room on caucus night and rerun all the math in each individual precinct.

The Iowa Democratic Party states in its Recount and Recanvass manual that "only evidence suggesting errors that would change the allocation of one or more National Delegates will be considered an adequate justification for a recount." That means the errors must be significant enough to change the outcome of

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the overall caucus.

Iowa awards 41 national delegates in its caucuses. As it stands, Buttigieg has 13 and Sanders has 12. Trailing behind are Elizabeth Warren with eight, Joe Biden with six and Amy Klobuchar with one.

The 41st and final delegate from Iowa will go to the overall winner. The caucus won't formally come to an end until the recount is completed.

In its recanvass request, the Sanders campaign outlined 25 precincts and three satellite caucuses where it believes correcting faulty math could swing the delegate allocation in Sanders' favor and deliver him, not Buttigieg, that final delegate.

Until this year, the only results reported from that process was a tally of the number of state convention delegates — or "state delegate equivalents" — awarded to each candidate.

For the first time, the party in 2020 released three sets of results from its caucuses: adding the "first alignment" and "final alignment" of caucusgoers to the number of "state delegate equivalents" each candidate received.

During the caucuses, voters arriving at their caucus site filled out a card that listed their first choice; those results determined the "first alignment." Caucusgoers whose first-choice candidate failed to get at least 15% of the vote at their caucus site could switch their support to a different candidate. After they had done so, the results were tabulated again to determine the caucus site's "final alignment."

The AP has always declared the winner of the Iowa caucuses based on state delegate equivalents, which are calculated from the final alignment votes. That's because Democrats choose their overall nominee based on delegates.

While the first alignment and final alignment provide insight into the process, state delegate equivalents have the most direct bearing on the metric Democrats use to pick their nominee — delegates to the party's national convention.

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

'Good Times' Ja'Net DuBois dies; co-wrote 'Jeffersons' theme

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ja'Net DuBois, who played the vivacious neighbor Willona Woods on "Good Times" and composed and sang the theme song for "The Jeffersons," has died.

DuBois' song "Movin' on Up" provided a joyous intro to "The Jeffersons" during the show's 10-season run. BernNadette Stanis, who played Thelma Evans Anderson on "Good Times" and remained close to DuBois, said she learned of her death Tuesday from the actress' daughter.

"She used to keep us laughing all the time," Stanis said, warmly recalling her friend. "She was very, very talented. If she wasn't singing ... she was creating a character to make us laugh."

Police in Glendale, California, said they received a report about DuBois' death late Monday. She appeared to have died of natural causes and no investigation is ongoing, police Sgt. Dan Stubbs said. No additional details, including her age, were immediately available.

Stanis said DuBois appeared to be in good health when they appeared two weeks ago at a signing event. Her birth date was something she kept to herself, Stanis said.

"Nobody really knows," said Stanis, who recalled telling DuBois, "Oh, you're so lucky. Nobody knows your age, girl!"

DuBois had a prolific career beyond the 1970s hit "Good Times," winning two Emmy Awards for her voice work on the WB series "The PJs."

DuBois' Willona was the single, sexy neighbor and best friend to star Esther Rolle's Florida Evans. Though the comedy had plenty of one-liners, DuBois' appearances gave an extra dose of comedic relief. DuBois showed off more of her dramatic skills when a young Janet Jackson joined the show as the abused child Penny; DuBois' character would go on to adopt Penny, and the story line also forged a long, close relationship between DuBois and Jackson, who would go on to become a multiplatinum superstar; she cast DuBois as her mother in her 1986 "Control" video.

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Jackson paid tribute to DuBois in an Instagram post on Tuesday.

"I am so very saddened to hear my longtime friend Ja'Net DuBois has passed away. I saw first hand how she broke stereotypes and changed the landscape for Black women in entertainment," she wrote. "I'm grateful in recent years I had a chance to see her and create more lasting memories. I pray for comfort for all her family and friends."

Oscar-winner Viola Davis, who played the role of Florida in the live version of "Good Times" that aired on ABC in December, posted a picture of herself, DuBois, Stanis, Tiffany Haddish (who played Willona) and Corinne Foxx on the set of the broadcast.

"Oh man!!! Just saw you! What a pleasure it was to meet you," she wrote. "You shaped so much of the best memories of my childhood! God bless you, Ja'net DuBois!"

DuBois' career started in theater, where she appeared in Broadway productions of "Golden Boy" and "A Raisin in the Sun," according to a biography on her website. A performance in "The Hot I Baltimore" in Los Angeles caught the eye of Norman Lear, who developed "Good Times" and "The Jeffersons."

DuBois' Willona was a "true diva back then, fancy dressing, the wigs, doing the thing. ... the real woman woman," said Stanis. "She brought it, didn't she?"

Her film credits included 1970's "Diary of a Mad Housewife," "I'm Gonna Git You Sucka" and "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle."

She was credited in numerous other films as varied as "Basic Instinct," "Next Friday" and "Tropic Thunder," which included "Movin' on Up."

DuBois was a co-founder of the Pan African Film Festival, which since 1992 has showcased films meant to promote a greater cultural understanding of people of African descent.

The festival, which is being held in Los Angeles and runs through Sunday, on Tuesday released an image mourning DuBois, calling her "Our Founder, Now Our Angel."

This story has corrected the capitalization of DuBois' last name throughout.

Actress Zoe Caldwell, Tony winner for 'Medea,' dies at 86

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Zoe Caldwell, a four-time Tony Award winner who brought humanity to larger-than-life characters, whether it be the dotty schoolteacher Miss Jean Brodie, an aging opera star Maria Callas or the betrayed, murderous Medea, has died. She was 86.

Her son Charlie Whitehead said Caldwell died peacefully Sunday at her home in Pound Ridge, New York. Whitehead said her death was due to complications from Parkinson's disease.

The Australian-born actress played in regional theaters around the English-speaking world before becoming the toast of Broadway in 1968, and winning her second Tony, for "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie."

Among her other characters were Cleopatra, Saint Joan, Mother Courage and authors Colette and Lillian Hellman. As she matured, she accepted only roles that offer a particular challenge. If she thought, "Oh, I can do that," she didn't want to do them, she said in 1986.

Three of her four Tonys came in collaborations with her husband, Robert Whitehead, who was one of Broadway's most prolific producers of serious drama.

She cited his influence in her decision to do "Medea," the ancient Greek drama of a woman who is betrayed by her lover and kills their children in revenge. It won her a third Tony in 1982.

"Medea wasn't a character I believed in until my Robert started to talk to me about her in human terms," she told The New York Times a few days after the Tony ceremony. "I suddenly understood how a creative force of nature can become destructive if it is mucked up, polluted, depurified — like the atom."

Times critic Frank Rich cited the flashes of sensuality — which she said derived from the study of Greek painting and sculpture — and wit that she brought to the character.

"When, at last, the crime is at hand, the actress fully dramatizes the struggle between her hunger for revenge and her love of her sons," Rich wrote. "Like the gods, we can understand, if not pardon, the primal

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impulse that drives her to the ultimate act of annihilation."

Terrence McNally's "Master Class," which debuted on Broadway in 1995, was another joint effort with Whitehead. It won Caldwell her fourth Tony and brought Whitehead, as producer, the Tony for best play.

She played Callas as the opera superstar critiques, cajoles and inspires a trio of budding singers taking part in the uniquely intense musical education session called a master class.

"A performance is a struggle. You have to win," she says as Callas.

Then-Associated Press drama critic Michael Kuchwara called Caldwell "incandescent" and said she gave "the performance of her career."

Already well-known to those who followed regional theater, she had made her Broadway debut in "The Devils" in late 1965, temporarily replacing for Anne Bancroft, who injured her back.

Caldwell was quickly announced for a role as a society columnist in "Slapstick Tragedy," Tennessee Williams' pair of one-act plays. The production lasted less than a week on Broadway in February 1966 — but it brought Caldwell her first Tony, for best featured actress.

Broadway stardom arrived two years later for "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie." The story of an eccentric Scottish schoolteacher with pro-fascist tendencies originated as a novel by Muriel Spark. The role had already been successful for Vanessa Redgrave in London and would eventually win an Oscar for Maggie Smith.

The Washington Post, noting others had played the role, said that "so masterfully exact is Miss Caldwell that watching her you will probably feel that hers is the only way (to play it). ... Almost at the instant we first see Miss Brodie, the actress has found a perfect mannerism."

The New York Times said Caldwell "flounces onto the stage like a sparrow with illusions of grandeur."

She and producer Whitehead married later that year. She told writer Rex Reed that far from pushing her into the Brodie role, Whitehead "wasn't keen on me for the part" until the playwright, Jay Presson Allen, campaigned for her.

Caldwell added Broadway directing to her resume starting in 1977 with a comedy, "An Almost Perfect Person," starring Colleen Dewhurst. In 1991, she directed Jason Robards and Judith Ivey in "Park Your Car in Harvard Yard." She was last on Broadway in 2003 as the Mystery Guest Star in "The Play What I Wrote." She also lent her voice to the "Lilo & Stitch" cartoons and appeared in the 2011 film "Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close."

She spent much of her early career on the road.

After touring in a wide variety of plays in Australia, she came to England and got to tackle a succession of Shakespearean roles.

"I was always afraid of growing comfortable, so I would jump from job to job, whatever I was offered," she told The Associated Press in 1986. "I would go from Stratford-on-Avon to a small repertory company and back to London."

She traveled to Canada for parts at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. In the United States, she did regional theater work at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and the Goodman Theater in Chicago.

At that time, she said she didn't turn down any job.

"It was a heck of a long apprenticeship, but I would recommend it to any actress," she told The New York Times in 1968.

Caldwell was born in 1933 in Melbourne, Australia, to a family struggling to make it through the Depression. In her memoir, "I Will Be Cleopatra," she wrote that she knew at an early age that her job would be "keeping audiences awake and in their seats."

"I knew this because it was the only thing I could do," she wrote. Despite the family's tight budget, the Caldwells were regular theater-goers, she wrote, and "I saw every singer, dancer, actor, or vaudevillian who came to Melbourne."

She made her stage debut at age 9 in a Melbourne production of "Peter Pan."

Her husband died in 2002 at age 86, shortly after he had received a special Tony Award for his nearly 60-year career. Among his other honors were a best play Tony for "A Man for All Seasons" in 1962 and a best revival Tony for "Death of a Salesman" in 1984.

She and Whitehead had two sons, Sam and Charlie. In addition to her two sons, she is survived by two

grandchildren.

"I always knew I would be an actor. I am an actor," she told the AP in 1986. "But being a wife and a mother still seems to me to be some kind of extraordinary stuff."

Former Associated Press writer Polly Anderson contributed to this report.

Experts ponder why cruise ship quarantine failed in Japan

By MARIA CHENG and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — As an extraordinary two-week quarantine of a cruise ship ends Wednesday in Japan, many scientists say it was a failed experiment: The ship seemed to become an incubator for a new virus instead of an isolation facility meant to prevent the worsening of an outbreak.

The viral illness that emerged last last year in central China has sickened tens of thousands of people, but the 542 cases confirmed among the ship's 3,711 original passengers and crew are the most anywhere outside of China.

The Diamond Princess cruise ship is also the only place where health officials have seen the disease spread easily among people beyond China.

The question is: Why?

The Japanese government has repeatedly defended the effectiveness of the quarantine. But some experts suggest it may have been less than rigorous.

In a possible sign of lax protocols, three Japanese health officials who helped conduct the quarantine checks on the ship were also infected.

"There are sometimes environments in which disease can spread in a more efficient way," said Dr. Michael Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program. Ryan said cruise ships in particular were known to occasionally accelerate spread.

"It's an unfortunate event occurring on the ship and we trust that the authorities in Japan and the governments who are taking back people will be able to follow up those individuals in the appropriate way," he said.

Japan's health minister, Katsunobu Kato, told reporters Tuesday that all passengers who remained on the cruise ship have had samples taken and that those who tested negative would start getting off the vessel beginning Wednesday, when their required 14-day quarantine is scheduled to end.

"They all want to go home as early as possible, and we hope to assist them so that everyone can get home smoothly," Kato said.

But it may not be that simple. U.S. health officials on Tuesday told Americans who declined to come home on government-chartered flights over the weekend that they wouldn't be allowed back into the country for at least 14 days after they had left the Diamond Princess.

"Obviously the quarantine hasn't worked, and this ship has now become a source of infection," said Dr. Nathalie MacDermott, an outbreak expert at King's College London.

She said the exact mechanism of the virus' spread was unknown. Although scientists believe the disease is spread mostly by droplets — when people cough or sneeze — it's possible there are other ways of transmission.

"We need to understand how the quarantine measures on board were implemented, what the air filtration on board is like, how the cabins are connected and how waste products are disposed of," MacDermott said.

"There could also be another mode of transmission we're not familiar with," she said, noting the possibility of environmental spread and the importance of "deep-cleaning" the entire ship to prevent people from touching contaminated surfaces.

During the 2002-2003 outbreak of SARS, a related virus, more than 300 people were infected through a defective sewage system in a Hong Kong housing estate. MacDermott said it was possible there was a similar issue aboard the Diamond Princess.

"There's no reason this (quarantine) should not have worked if it had been done properly," she said.

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Cruise ships have sometimes been struck by outbreaks of diseases like norovirus, which can spread quickly in the close quarters of a boat and among elderly passengers with weaker immune systems. But MacDermott said it would be highly unusual for an entire boat to be quarantined.

"They might quarantine the people affected in their rooms until they're 48 hours clear of symptoms, but certainly not all passengers," she said.

Some passengers on the Diamond Princess described the ship as a "floating prison" but were allowed to walk on the decks every day while wearing a mask and were told to keep their distance from others.

"I suspect people were not as isolated from other people as we would have thought," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia in England. He said the continued spread of the virus could be due to compliance problems.

"It's difficult to enforce a quarantine in a ship environment and I'm absolutely sure there were some passengers who think they're not going to let anyone tell them what they can and cannot do," he said. He suggested that if the passengers had been quarantined on land, having more space might have allowed for better infection control procedures. But he acknowledged that attempting to quarantine more than 3,700 people was logistically challenging.

Hunter said it was "a huge disappointment" that the quarantine hadn't curbed the spread of the virus and that it was unfortunate some passengers returning to their home countries would now face a second period of isolation.

"Given how the virus has continued to spread, we have to presume everyone leaving the ship is potentially infected, and therefore they have to go through another two-week quarantine period," he said. "Not to do so would be reckless."

Japanese health officials say a 14-day quarantine on the ship is adequate, noting that all but one of more than 500 Japanese returnees from the epicenter of the virus in China who initially tested negative were found to be virus-free at the end of their 14-day quarantine.

Those officials also defended precautions taken on the ship. About 1,000 crew members were told to wear surgical masks, wash their hands, use disinfectant sprays and stop operations at restaurants, bars and other entertainment areas after Feb. 5, when the first group of 10 infections was reported and the start of the 14-day quarantine was announced.

Passengers were instructed to stay in their cabins and not walk around or contact other passengers. Those in windowless cabins could go out on the deck for about an hour each day.

The quarantine was largely for passengers because crew members kept sharing double rooms and continued to serve guests by delivering food, letters, towels and amenities, and entering passenger cabins for cleaning. Crew members also ate in groups in a crew mess hall.

"Unlike passengers, crew members share their rooms, they share food, and that's why some of them are infected even after the quarantine started," said Shigeru Omi, a former regional director for the World Health Organization.

Omi said quarantine is one of the measures considered effective early on. But the virus has already made its way into local communities across Japan, where untraceable cases have been popping up, he said.

At this stage, "the spreading of the virus will be inevitable, and that's why quarantine is out of the question," Omi said.

He said the focus now should shift from border control to preventing the spread in local communities.

Other scientists said that passengers should have been removed from the ship from the beginning.

"Boats are notorious places for being incubators for viruses," said Arthur Caplan, a professor of bioethics at the New York University School of Medicine. "It's only morally justified to keep people on the boat if there are no other options."

Caplan said that a second quarantine was warranted, but that officials had done a poor job of explaining what would happen if their original plan failed.

"It's never good to lose your civil liberties and your rights of movement, but two more weeks of quarantine is not an undue burden if you're trying to protect spread of a disease," he said.

Cheng reported from London. Associated Press writer Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

LA adopts new 'war room' strategy for tackling homelessness

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles city and county officials on Tuesday announced a new strategy to speed the process of getting homeless people into permanent housing that is modeled on the federal government's response to natural disasters.

The creation of a "Housing Central Command" marks an overhaul of how agencies work together in addressing the growing number of people living on the street, according to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Previously the system was slowed by red tape and gaps in information showing what housing units were available and who is eligible to move into them, officials said.

In some cases there was a waiting period of 10 months from a person being matched to housing to signing a lease.

"Nobody was holding the full picture of resources," said LAHSA interim executive director Heidi Marston. "Our systems weren't talking to each other."

The new initiative uses a "war room model" inspired by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's approach to finding homes for people suddenly displaced by hurricanes, Marston said.

Now officials will have access to real-time data showing housing availability as well as funding streams, according to LAHSA.

Since the launch in December, officials have identified some 3,000 potential housing units that were previously not part of the overall inventory, Marston said.

The central command is a major step toward restructuring a response system overseen by LAHSA that also includes housing and development authorities, the mayor's office and health departments.

"We have a high number of people who need to be rehoused rapidly," Marson said of the situation in greater Los Angeles, where officials have declared homelessness a state of emergency. Including crisis-response experts on a day-to-day basis shows that officials are treating the problem with the urgency it deserves, she said.

In its 2019 count, the authority reported that there were close to 60,000 homeless people living in LA County, with more than 36,000 of them in the city. All but about 25% live on the streets.

Freeway overpasses are lined with tents, and it's a common sight to see someone pushing a shopping cart filled with belongings through downtown.

According to LAHSA and Mayor Eric Garcetti's office, an average of 130 homeless people in Los Angeles move into housing daily. However, an average of 150 people become homeless every day.

"The homelessness crisis demands an emergency response, and moving the needle means being nimble, flexible and creative with our resources," Garcetti said in a statement praising the new strategy.

Through the new process, officials also discovered \$30 million of a \$107 million grant from HUD to Los Angeles in 2017 had gone unspent within a calendar-year deadline, LAHSA said.

That happened because of low vacancy rates and higher market rates than public housing authorities could pay, LAHSA officials said, along with "landlord bias" against tenants with mental disorders or a history of homelessness.

"It is completely unacceptable that housing funds were left unspent when our unsheltered neighbors continue to languish out on the street," said LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis. The new efforts will leave behind a "disjointed" system and "maximize all of the region's resources," she said.

Solis represents East Los Angeles, one of two neighborhoods including downtown where the new command structure is being tested starting this week. LAHSA staff will set up shop at local housing authorities, where they can shepherd and troubleshoot applications.

Tuesday's announcement comes a week after Garcetti and HUD Secretary Ben Carson met in Los Angeles to announce the formation of a joint working group to address homelessness. Garcetti and Carson

told the Los Angeles Times that they were close to a deal to use federal and state funds to open more homeless shelters in the city.

Earlier this month, the county Board of Supervisors called for a re-evaluation of the structure of LAHSA's operation following an audit last August that found the authority failed to meet goals for placing people into permanent housing.

Boy Scouts seek bankruptcy, urge victims to step forward

By DAVID CRARY and BRADY McCOMBS AP National Writer

The Boy Scouts of America urged victims to come forward Tuesday as the historic, 110-year-old organization filed for bankruptcy protection in the first step toward creating a huge compensation fund for potentially thousands of men who were molested as youngsters decades ago by scoutmasters or other leaders.

The Scouts resorted to Chapter 11 in hopes of surviving a barrage of lawsuits, many of them made possible by recent changes in state laws to allow people to sue over long-ago sexual abuse.

Bankruptcy will enable the organization to put those cases on hold for now and continue operating. But ultimately the Boy Scouts could be forced to sell some of their vast property holdings, including campgrounds and hiking trails, to raise money for a victims' fund that could top \$1 billion.

The Boy Scouts estimated 1,000 to 5,000 victims will seek compensation.

"The BSA encourages victims to come forward to file a claim as the bankruptcy process moves forward," the organization said in a statement.

James Kretschmer of Houston, one of those suing, said he was molested by a Scout leader in the mid-1970s in the Spokane, Washington, area. The bankruptcy, he said, "is a shame because at its core and what it was supposed to be, the Boy Scouts is a beautiful organization."

"But you know, anything can be corrupted," he added. "And if they're not going to protect the people that they've entrusted with the children, then shut it down and move on."

More than 12,000 boys have been molested by 7,800 abusers since the 1920s, according to Boy Scout files revealed in court papers.

Evan Smola said two new victims had already called his law office in Chicago on Tuesday morning, bringing the firm's total to 319.

"The opportunity to tell your story is a cathartic and healing experience," Smola said. "It's very painful when they actually do it, but getting it off your chest is a big step."

It will be up to the court to set a deadline for filing claims. The amount of money each victim will receive is likely to depend on what assets are turned over and how many people come forward.

The filing in Wilmington, Delaware, sets in motion what could be one of the biggest, most complex bankruptcies ever seen, given the Scouts' 50-state presence. The organization listed assets of \$1 billion to \$10 billion and liabilities of \$500 million to \$1 billion.

"We are outraged that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our programs to harm innocent children," said Roger Mosby, the Boy Scouts' president and CEO. "While we know nothing can undo the tragic abuse that victims suffered, we believe the Chapter 11 process, with the proposed trust structure, will provide equitable compensation to all victims while maintaining the BSA's important mission."

The Boy Scouts are the latest major American institution to face a heavy price over sexual abuse. Roman Catholic dioceses across the country and schools such as Penn State and Michigan State have paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years.

The bankruptcy represents a painful turn for an organization that has been a pillar of American civic life for generations and a training ground for future leaders. Achieving the rank of Eagle Scout has long been a proud accomplishment that politicians, businessmen, astronauts and others put on their resumes and in their official biographies.

"I'm sad for all the victims who were preyed upon by people entrusted with their care. I'm sad that no amount of money will undo their trauma," said Jackson Cooper, an Eagle Scout who is now a prosecutor in Louisville, Kentucky. "Whatever consequences come for BSA are no concern of mine. I only hope, if they

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continue to operate, they build robust systems to protect the young people in their care.”

The Boy Scouts’ finances have been strained in recent years by declining membership and sex-abuse settlements.

The number of youths taking part in scouting has dropped below 2 million, down from a peak of more than 4 million during the 1970s. Its membership rolls took a big hit Jan. 1 when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cut ties and withdrew more than 400,000 scouts in favor of programs of its own.

The financial outlook worsened last year after New York, Arizona, New Jersey and California relaxed their statutes of limitations to make it easier for victims to file claims. Teams of lawyers across the U.S. have been signing up clients by the hundreds to sue the Boy Scouts.

Most of the new cases date to the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s, before the Boy Scouts adopted mandatory criminal background checks, abuse-prevention training for all staff and volunteers, and a rule that two or more adult leaders must be present during all activities. Many of the lawsuits accuse the group of negligence and cover-ups.

Wayne Perry, a member of the organization’s national board and past president, said Scout families won’t notice any differences as a result of the bankruptcy. He touted the protections now in place for young people.

“Today, we are really, really good. Were we always good? No, nobody was good 50 years ago, 40 years ago, 30 years ago,” Perry said.

Amid the crush of lawsuits, the Scouts recently mortgaged some of their major properties, including their national headquarters in Irving, Texas, and the 140,000-acre Philmont Ranch in New Mexico.

One unanswered question is whether the Boy Scouts’ 261 local councils — and their campgrounds and other assets — will be dragged into the case, even though the Boy Scouts said the councils are legally separate entities and they were not part of the bankruptcy filing.

Mike Pfau, a Seattle-based attorney whose firm is representing scores of men nationwide, said the plaintiffs may go after the local councils’ property holdings, too.

“We believe the real property held by the local councils may be worth significantly more than the Boy Scouts’ assets,” he said. He said one question will be whether the Boy Scouts transferred property to their local councils to try to put it out of the reach of those suing.

Perry said he hopes the court remembers that the Boy Scouts are teaching leadership and life skills to children. “You have to take into account the balancing of the victims, but (also) the fact that the kids today who are joining Scouting had nothing to do with those bad behaviors of criminal acts of perpetrators who are long gone,” he said.

Plaintiffs’ attorneys trace the Boy Scouts’ fall to 2010, when a jury awarded a former Scout nearly \$20 million in a lawsuit in Portland, Oregon. The trial led the Oregon Supreme Court to release 20,000 pages of confidential Boy Scout files on 1,200 people after The Associated Press and other news organizations fought for their disclosure.

Until last spring, the organization had insisted it never knowingly allowed a predator to work with youths. But in May, the AP reported that attorneys for abuse victims had identified multiple cases in which known predators were allowed to return to leadership posts. The next day, the Boy Scouts acknowledged the truth.

McCombs reported from Salt Lake City. Associated Press video journalist John Mone also contributed to this story.

Soggy neighborhoods under flash-flood warning in Mississippi

By **ROGELIO V. SOLIS** Associated Press

RIDGELAND, Miss. (AP) — Forecasters expected more heavy rains in parts of the flood-ravaged South on Tuesday, prolonging the misery for worried people who still can’t get back in homes surrounded by water.

Some of the hardest-hit areas were under a flash flood watch, as the National Weather Service said as much as 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain, and even more in some spots — was expected to fall in a short

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amount of time in central Mississippi.

The national Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland, projected the greatest likelihood of heavy rains in a band from eastern Louisiana across central parts of Mississippi and Alabama and into far west Georgia.

Authorities around Mississippi's capital city of Jackson warned hundreds of residents not to return home until they get an all-clear following devastating flooding on Monday.

The receding flood left muddy water marks on the sides of cars at the Harbor Pines Mobile Home Community in suburban Ridgeland, not far from where managers of the Ross Barnett Reservoir have been trying to contain the swollen Pearl River. Water still surrounded dozens of trailer homes on Tuesday, but the water level had fallen 2 feet (0.6 meters) or more since Monday.

Anxious to get back into the home she evacuated on Thursday, Gloria Vera couldn't reach her trailer because it was still surrounded by as much as 5 feet (1.5 meters) of water. She didn't yet know if water got inside.

"I took nothing from the house when I left, only the clothes I am wearing," Vera said in Spanish.

Dorothy Freeman felt fortunate because her mobile home was above water and she was able to get back in long enough to feed her cat and pick up personal items including her Bible.

"I'm praying for the people in the Jackson area that were hit even harder than us," said Freeman, 87, who has lived in the community 21 years.

Crews were going lot-to-lot to check the duct work beneath mobile homes to determine how many had been inundated by water. The power remained off as a precaution and it wasn't clear when residents would be allowed back home.

A near-record rainy winter led to agonizing choices for reservoir managers, who have had to release water that worsens flooding for some people living downstream while saving many other properties from damage.

The intensity and frequency of extreme rain events that fuel major flooding have increased in the Southeast, according to the most recent National Climate Assessment, released by the White House in 2018. Southern states are particularly vulnerable to increasingly heavy rains, according to the report, which cites four floods that each did more than \$1 billion in damage between 2014 and 2016.

In the Savannah, Tennessee, area, two houses slid down a muddy bluff just below the Pickwick Dam on Saturday as the Tennessee Valley Authority released more than 2.5 million gallons (9.5 million liters) per second, adding to the anguish for owners of about 75 flooded properties downstream.

Hardin County Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Melvin Martin said the landslide claimed not only two houses, whose residents got out safely, but also about 100 yards (91 meters) of the blufftop road. Meanwhile, most of the homes down by the river are vacation homes that were built on stilts, Martin said.

Boat captain Sam Evans, who lives in a historic riverboat on Pickwick Lake, says this year's flooding is among the worst he's seen. Navigating the Tennessee River by boat, he's watched the banks gradually erode, and said it was only a matter of time before the bluff gave way.

"It has slowly been eroding and it finally let go," Evans told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The area suffered a devastating flood in 2003, but then about 14 years passed without a catastrophe, and developers got busy selling riverfront properties, Evans said. He thinks the buyers weren't fully aware of the danger.

"Out-of-towners came in that didn't do their homework," he said. "Here comes a flood and it wipes them out ... Buyer-beware when you buy below the dam. "

Things changed about three years ago, he said. "We've had three floods in the last three years, about the same time every year," Evans said.

Darrell Guinn, a manager at the TVA River Forecast Center, said Tuesday that the river system is now at level where it can absorb more rain without further impacting flooded areas.

Sprawling fields turned into large lakes throughout West Tennessee, including in the small town of Halls, where a cold rain fell steadily Tuesday. A Tennessee Department of Transportation crew worked to close state Highway 88 outside Halls, as water began moving over the road that connects U.S. Highway 51 and

the Mississippi River.

US tells remaining cruise passengers: Stay out for 2 weeks

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. government made good on its warning to Americans who chose to remain on board a quarantined cruise ship in Japan, telling them they cannot return home for at least two weeks after they come ashore.

U.S. officials notified the passengers Tuesday of the travel restriction, citing their possible exposure to the new virus while on board the Diamond Princess. More than 100 U.S. citizens are still on the ship or in Japanese hospitals.

A two-week quarantine of the Diamond Princess ends Wednesday. Over the weekend, more than 300 American passengers, including some who tested positive for coronavirus, left Japan on charter flights. Most of them remain under quarantine at military bases in California and Texas, although about a dozen have been moved to a hospital.

Some Americans decided to take their chances and stay on the ship. On Tuesday, they were told their names would be put on a travel restriction list. The letter from U.S. health authorities said the passengers would not be issued a boarding pass or allowed on a flight "until you are no longer at risk of spreading infection during travel."

The letter also warned them against trying to enter the country through Mexico or Canada or at a seaport, saying "you will be stopped by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials."

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US border clampdown forces Venezuelan teen into Mexico alone

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Venezuelan teenager has been forced back to Mexico by U.S. government authorities who denied her claims that she was fleeing political repression and violence, even after they accepted the same claims from her father.

The teenager, who is being identified by only her first name, Branyerly, is living alone in Matamoros, Mexico, across from Brownsville. According to her attorney, U.S. border agents on Monday and Tuesday denied her requests not to be sent back under the Trump administration's so-called "Remain in Mexico" program for migrants.

Branyerly and her father could not request asylum under another Trump policy, a ban on most asylum claims at the southern border for people who came through a "third country." But in January, an immigration judge allowed her father, Branly, into the U.S. by granting what's called withholding of removal, which requires meeting a higher legal standard.

That same judge denied withholding for Branyerly, who was 17 when she originally arrived at the border and is now 18. Both she and her father say the immigration judge, Monica Thompson Guidry, asked him most questions during the hearing and asked her relatively few. The final result came as a shock to both of them.

She tried to request parole Monday at one of the bridges connecting Brownsville and Matamoros. She was taken into an office on the U.S. side briefly, then told to return to Mexico.

"I already lived one nightmare in Venezuela and another here," Branyerly said.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has overseen an economic collapse and political turmoil that's led to hundreds of thousands of people seeking refuge in the United States and elsewhere.

President Donald Trump in his State of the Union address this month called Maduro a "socialist dictator" and said "all Americans are united with the Venezuelan people in their righteous struggle for freedom." But many Venezuelans seeking refuge in the U.S. have been barred by a series of Trump administration policies clamping down on asylum.

"It's not only ironic but it smacks of speaking out of both sides of your mouth," said Jodi Goodwin, Branyerly's attorney.

Branly says his political problems began when he rejected a job that would have required him to support the ruling party. After he turned down the job, Branly says, he started receiving threatening calls at his home, saying his wife and daughter would be kidnapped.

He and his wife left Venezuela for the U.S. in early 2019, leaving their daughter with a family friend. But she was soon threatened as well. So Branly returned to Venezuela to find Branyerly, then traveled with her through Mexico to the southern U.S. border. They arrived in July, shortly before her 18th birthday, and were placed into the "Remain in Mexico" program until their January hearing.

Goodwin said Branyerly was in a "particularly vulnerable situation" as the daughter of a known political activist.

"She is vulnerable as a migrant. She is vulnerable as a child. She is vulnerable as a woman," Goodwin wrote in her request to U.S. Customs and Border Protection that Branyerly be allowed into the U.S. while her immigration case continues. "In other words, there are any number of categories within which it is easy to tell that she is vulnerable being alone in Mexico."

CBP declined to comment Tuesday.

As Branly spoke about his daughter's plight in Mexico and the guilt he feels, he began to weep. His voice choked up.

"What I care about is my daughter," he said. "How did they do it for me but not my daughter? I don't understand. I don't understand."

Russia and Turkey agree on more talks on Syria amid crisis

By SUZAN FRASER and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Talks between Russia and Turkey meant to reduce tensions in northwestern Syria did not yield a "satisfactory result" for Ankara, but both sides agreed to continue negotiations, a spokesman for Turkey's president said Tuesday.

Turkey and Russia support rival groups in the Syrian conflict and for the past few years have been closely coordinating their moves in Idlib province. A truce reached between the two countries collapsed in late 2019, leading to an offensive by Russian-backed Syrian troops who captured wide areas in the last rebel stronghold and triggered one of the civil war's worst humanitarian crises with about 900,000 people fleeing their homes.

A Turkish delegation ended two days of talks with Russian officials in Moscow, and Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesman for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said both sides agreed to meet again.

"We did not accept the document and map that was presented to us," Kalin said, adding that Turkey's position was for a return to the lines laid out under a cease-fire agreement for Idlib in 2018.

Briefing journalists after a Cabinet meeting, Kalin also said it was out of the question for Turkey to move the positions of its observation posts.

Turkey will continue sending in reinforcements "to protect the region and civilians," Kalin said, adding that Ankara would respond to any attack against its troops "in the strongest way, like we did in the past weeks."

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that "both sides noted their adherence to the existing agreements that envisage measures to reduce tensions, ease the humanitarian situation and continue the fight against terrorism."

The end of the talks came hours after the U.N. human rights chief urged Syrian government forces and their allies to allow safe corridors in conflict areas in northwestern Syria, where a military offensive has unleashed a massive wave of fleeing civilians in one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in the long civil war.

Michelle Bachelet told reporters in Geneva it was "cruel beyond belief" that civilians live under plastic sheeting in freezing conditions while getting bombed.

Her appeal came after a day after Syrian President Bashar Assad pledged to press ahead with a military

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campaign in the northwest that has displaced many people from their homes since the start of December, according to U.N. officials.

Many of the civilians are sleeping in open fields and under trees in freezing temperatures.

"Children and families are caught between the violence, the biting cold, the lack of food and the desperate living conditions. Such abject disregard for the safety and well-being of children and families is beyond the pale and must not go on," said Henrietta Ford, executive director of the U.N.'s children agency.

About half the region's population had already fled other parts of Syria, and displacement refugee camps are full. Aid organizations, including the U.N. World Food Program, have been forced to stop food distribution temporarily because the fighting has disrupted the movement of trucks bringing supplies to the region.

Backed by Russian air power, Syrian government troops have made swift advances, seizing dozens of towns and villages in Idlib province and nearby rural areas around Aleppo.

In the past week, Assad's forces have secured a strategic highway known as the M5 and consolidated control over Aleppo province for the first time since 2012, dealing a severe blow to the opposition now fighting to hold its last bastion in Idlib.

Turkey has restarted joint patrols with the Russian military in northeastern Syria after a two-week hiatus due to the escalation in Idlib, the Russian military said.

The government's rapid advances have sparked rare clashes between Syria and Turkey, which backs Syria's rebels and has troops in the region to monitor a 2018 cease-fire deal. Turkey's president has warned Assad to halt the advance and sent thousands of troops and equipment into the opposition enclave to try to stall the Syrian government offensive.

Already home to more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, Turkey fears a new influx of people may overwhelm its borders which it has kept sealed in recent years.

The resumption of joint patrols in Hassakeh, in eastern Syria, was a possible sign of easing tensions.

The U.N. Human Rights Office said it recorded 298 civilian deaths in Idlib and Aleppo, where the government offensive has been concentrated, since Jan. 1. It said 93 percent of those deaths were caused by the Syrian government and its allies. In addition, 10 medical facilities and 19 educational facilities were either directly hit or affected by nearby strikes, the U.N. office said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres decried suffering of Syrians as "horrible" in the 9-year-old civil war.

In an interview with The Associated Press in Lahore, Pakistan, Guterres called for an immediate cease-fire, urging Turkey, Russia and Iran to find a political solution.

Bachelet also urged all parties begin an immediate cease-fire and ensure the protection of all civilians. She called on the Syrian government and its allies to allow humanitarian corridors in conflict areas to permit the safe passage of civilians.

"No shelter is now safe," Bachelet said. "And as the government offensive continues and people are forced into smaller and smaller pockets, I fear even more people will be killed."

Syrian opposition activists, meanwhile, reported airstrikes on several rebel-held areas Tuesday, including the outskirts of the town of Atareb and Daret Azzeh.

Keaten reported from Geneva. Associated Press writers Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow, Kathy Gannon in Lahore, Pakistan, and Bassem Mroue in Beirut contributed.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 19, the 50th day of 2020. There are 316 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 19, 1945, Operation Detachment began during World War II as some 30,000 U.S. Marines began landing on Iwo Jima, where they commenced a successful month-long battle to seize control of the

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island from Japanese forces.

On this date:

In 1803, Congress voted to accept Ohio's borders and constitution.

In 1807, former Vice President Aaron Burr, accused of treason, was arrested in the Mississippi Territory, in present-day Alabama. (Burr was acquitted at trial.)

In 1846, the Texas state government was formally installed in Austin, with J. Pinckney Henderson taking the oath of office as governor.

In 1878, Thomas Edison received a U.S. patent for "an improvement in phonograph or speaking machines."

In 1934, the U.S. Army Air Corps began delivering mail after President Franklin D. Roosevelt canceled private contracts that had come under suspicion. (The hastily arranged, ill-equipped military flights claimed the lives of a dozen pilots, sparking a public outcry before they were dropped several months later.)

In 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the relocation and internment of people of Japanese ancestry, including U.S.-born citizens. Imperial Japanese warplanes raided the Australian city of Darwin; at least 243 people were killed.

In 1968, the children's program "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," created by and starring Fred Rogers, made its network debut on National Educational Television, a forerunner of PBS, beginning a 31-season run.

In 1986, the U.S. Senate approved, 83-11, the Genocide Convention, an international treaty outlawing "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group," nearly 37 years after the pact was first submitted for ratification.

In 1997, Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping), the last of China's major Communist revolutionaries, died at age 92.

In 2003, an Iranian military plane carrying 275 members of the elite Revolutionary Guards crashed in southeastern Iran, killing all on board.

In 2006, Israel halted the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars in tax money to the Palestinians after Hamas took control of the Palestinian parliament.

In 2008, an ailing Fidel Castro resigned the Cuban presidency after nearly a half-century in power; his brother Raul was later named to succeed him.

Ten years ago: In a televised 13-minute statement, golfer Tiger Woods admitted infidelity and acknowledged receiving therapy. The FBI concluded that Army scientist Bruce Ivins acted alone in the 2001 anthrax mailings that killed five people, and formally closed the case. Pope Benedict XVI approved sainthood for Mother Mary MacKillop, who became Australia's first saint.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama urged delegates from 63 countries at a summit on violent extremism to "confront the warped ideology" espoused by terror groups, particularly using Islam to justify violence.

One year ago: Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders said he would again seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020. President Donald Trump directed the Pentagon to develop plans for a new Space Force within the Air Force, accepting less than the full-fledged department he had wanted. Designer Karl Lagerfeld, whose creations at Chanel and Fendi had an unprecedented impact on the entire fashion industry, died in Paris. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg returned to the Supreme Court bench, eight weeks after surgery for lung cancer. Former Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher Don Newcombe, who was one of the first black players in the major leagues and went on to win the Rookie of the Year, MVP and Cy Yong awards, died at 92 after a long illness.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Smokey Robinson is 80. Actress Carlin Glynn is 80. Former Sony Corp. Chairman Howard Stringer is 78. Singer Lou Christie is 77. Actor Michael Nader is 75. Rock musician Tony Iommi (Black Sabbath, Heaven and Hell) is 72. Actor Stephen Nichols is 69. Author Amy Tan is 68. Actor Jeff Daniels is 65. Rock singer-musician Dave Wakeling is 64. Talk show host Lorianne Crook is 63. Actor Ray Winstone is 63. Actor Leslie David Baker is 62. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is 61. Britain's Prince Andrew is 60. Tennis Hall of Famer Hana Mandlikova is 58. Singer Seal is 57. Actress Jessica Tuck is 57. Country musician Ralph McCauley (Wild Horses) is 56. Rock musician Jon Fishman (Phish) is 55. Actress Justine Bateman is 54. Actor Benicio Del Toro is 53. Actress Bellamy Young is 50. Rock musician Daniel

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Adair is 45. Pop singer-actress Haylie Duff is 35. Actress Arielle Kebbel is 35. Christian rock musician Seth Morrison (Skillet) is 32. Actor Luke Pasqualino is 30. Actress Victoria Justice is 27. Actor David (dah-VEED') Mazouz (TV: "Gotham") is 19. Actress Millie Bobby Brown is 16.

Thought for Today: "Passion and prejudice govern the world; only under the name of reason." — John Wesley, English theologian (1703-1791).

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