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"WE GO ON AND ON ABOUT OUR DIFFERENCES. BUT, YOU KNOW, OUR DIFFERENCES ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN OUR SIMILARITIES."

-WILLIAM HALL



It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Milbank
Bulldogs**

VS



Groton Area Tigers

AT GROTON AREA

5:00 p.m.: **Girls C Game** - sponsored by Olson Development

6:15 p.m.: **Girls JV Game** - K & K Pharis Partnership

7:45 p.m.: **Girls Varsity Game**

Sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals

Blocker Construction, Groton Dairy Queen

Jark Real Estate, John Sieh Agency

Milbrandt Enterprises, Tyson DeHoet Trucking

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



From left to right: Gretchen Dinger (Flute) and Lydia Meier (Trumpet) Students are directed by Mrs. Desiree Yeigh and Mr. Austin Fordham. (Courtesy photo)

Dinger, Meier in Middle School All State Band

The South Dakota Music Education Association will present the SD Middle School All-State Band on March 7, 2020 at the Mitchell Performing Arts Center at 3:00 PM. This concert will feature over 200 6th-8th graders from across the state performing in two bands under the direction of Dr. Haley Armstrong (School of Mines & Technology) and Dr. Cassandra Bechard (University of Dubuque).

Groton Area School is proud to have Gretchen Dinger and Lydia Meier participating this year. Gretchen is a 7th grader and was selected as a fourth chair Honor Band Member. She is attending Middle School All State Band for the second year in a row. Lydia is an 8th grader and was selected to be apart of the Festival Band.

There is a \$5.00 admission fee for the concert, tickets will be available for purchase at the door the afternoon of the concert. Students 18 and under are free.

Congratulations Gretchen and Lydia! We are so proud of you!

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Groton Prairie Mixed

February 19 Team Standings: Shih Tzus 3, Jackelopes 3, Chipmunks 3, Coyotes 1, Cheetahs 1, Foxes 1

Men's High Games: Brad Waage 214, Roger Colestock 203, Roger Spanier 202

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier 197, Karen Spanier 176, Nancy Radke 165

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 567, Roger Colestock 539, Brad Larson 533

Women's High Series: Karen Spanier 485, Nicole Kassube 468, Darci Spanier 453

February 12 Team Standings: Jackelopes 83, Cheetahs 75 ½, Shih Tzus 72, Coyotes 68 ½, Foxes 68, Chipmunks 63

Men's High Games: Roger Spanier 211, Brad Waage 209, Brad Larson 204

Women's High Games: Karen Spanier 165, Sue Stanley 164, Nicole Kassube 162

Men's High Series: Brad Larson 565, Brad Waage 562, Tony Waage 547

Women's High Series: Karen Spanier 456, Sue Stanley 449, Nicole Kassube 442

Groton Coffee Cup League

Feb. 18 Team Standings: Biker Chix 21, Ten Pins 20, James Valley 14, Kens 9

High Games: Nancy Radke 171, 169; Vickie Kramp 162, 159; Heather Nelson 159

High Series: Nancy Radke 478, Vickie Kramp 468, Sam Bahr 159

Feb. 11 Team Standings: Biker Chix 18, Ten Pins 17, James Valley 13, Kens 8

High Games: Vickie Kramp 198, 188, Heather Nelson 147. Nancy Radke 145

High Series: Vickie Kramp 537, Nancy Radke 401, Heather Nelson 396

Conde National League

Feb. 17 Team Standings: Cubs 29, Giants 19, Mets 17, Tigers 16, Braves 14, Pirates 13

Men's High Games: Troy Lindberg 199, 197; Butch Farmen 196; Rick Carlson 196; Lance Frohling 186

Men's High Series: Troy Lindberg 545, Lance Frohling 536, Butch Farmen 532

Women's High Games: Mary Larson 197, Sandy Hoops 154, Nancy Radke 152

Women's High Series: Mary Larson 438, Nancy Radke 413, Sandy Hoops 407

Feb. 10 Team Standings: Cubs 25, Giants 16, Tigers 15, Mets 14, Braves 14, Pirates 12

Men's High Games: Ryan Bethke 221; Austin Schulke 211; Russ Bethke 208, 200; Butch Farmen 202

Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 599, Butch Farmen 548, Ryan Bethke 515

Women's High Games: Vickie Kramp 189, 187; Nancy Radke 169; Mary Larson 162

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 523, Nancy Radke 472, Mary Larson 448

SDHCA Calls on Legislature to Fund Long Term Care Urgent Action Needed to Increase Medicaid Reimbursement

The South Dakota Health Care Association (SDHCA) strongly urges legislators to commit adequate resources to fund long term care as they craft the state's budget prior to the end of the legislative session. Years of inadequate Medicaid reimbursement have resulted in the ongoing long term care funding and closure crisis.

"There have been six nursing home closures in the last two years, three of which have occurred since the end of the last legislative session. While we're thankful for last year's increased funding, the long term care closure crisis is far from over," said Mark B. Deak, SDHCA Executive Director. "We must do more to continue to deliver the best care possible for our parents, grandparents, and our other loved ones."

Medicaid reimbursement for nursing centers is currently set at such a low level that providers lose money for each resident on Medicaid. The most recent data demonstrates the Medicaid funding gap to be an average of \$42.33 per day for each Medicaid resident in their center. With 54% of all nursing center residents on Medicaid in South Dakota, that gap amounts to more than \$48 million in unreimbursed costs statewide.

The increase in reimbursement approved during the last legislative session was a significant step in the right direction, though clearly much more still needs to be done. As the legislature enters the final weeks of session, lawmakers on the Appropriations Committee must finalize a budget, and they will have the opportunity to prioritize funding for seniors and disabled South Dakotans who require long term care.

"The crisis in long term care was many years in the making. It will require significant funding to get back on track," continued Deak. "We call on lawmakers to continue to support nursing centers, caregivers, and our elderly and disabled South Dakotans."

Register for Pelican Lake's Becoming an Outdoor Family Event

WATERTOWN, S.D. – Registration for Pelican Lake Recreation Area's Becoming an Outdoor Family event opens Saturday, Feb. 29, at 7 a.m. CST.

Held July 15-17, the event is designed for beginner camping families, families who want to try new outdoor activities, and those who enjoy the company of like-minded families.

Workshop fee is \$90 per family. The fee includes instruction in four skills sessions, program materials, and equipment use during the workshop. The full schedule can be viewed online at gfp.sd.gov/outdoors-family.

The program includes instruction in your choice of four hands-on classes, participation in four general sessions, a t-shirt for each family member, and an electrical campsite for two nights. Families arrive Wednesday, July 15, and depart Friday, July 17. For an additional fee, registrants can come a day early or stay through the weekend, departing Sunday, July 19.

A park entrance license is required to enter the park and is not included in the registration fee. Participants are responsible for personal items such as bedding, towels, food, clothing, and a tent/camper.

Session choices include archery and air guns, birding and birdhouse building, deer hunting 101, fishing, geocaching and orienteering, wildlife hike, outdoor photography, paddling, plant and tree ID, trapping 101, and waterfowl hunting 101.

Friendly Fellows & Daisies November Meeting

The Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H club met November 10, 2019 at the United Methodist Church in Claremont. The meeting was called to order by President Hanna Miller. The American Flag pledge was led by Ashlynn Warrington, and Braden Boe led the 4-H pledge. The roll call topic was your favorite movie. The communications report was given by Andrew Marzahn, in which he read thank yous for premiums. The treasurer's report was presented by Colin Frey. There were no additions or improvements to the treasurer's report, and it was approved by Ashlynn Warrington and seconded by Natalia Warrington. The secretary's report was given by Mallory Miller. The secretary's report was approved by Logan Warrington and seconded by Axel Warrington. The old business was the Recognition Event held in Aberdeen. Old business was closed by Logan Warrington and seconded by Ashlynn Warrington. New business was the Newshound, and the new business was closed by Andrew Marzahn and seconded by Novalea Warrington. The meeting was adjourned by Braden Boe and seconded by Isaiah Scepaniak. There were three talks and demonstrations presented. The first demonstration was by Natalia Warrington and was about how to put together a clarinet and how to play clarinet scales. The second demonstration was by Jordan Zoellner about Dairy Show Day. The last demonstration was by Riley Zoellner, and his demonstration was about how to get a cow ready to lead for the fair. Lunch was served by Ashlynn and Logan Warrington.

--Submitted by Axel Warrington, Club Reporter.

Friendly Fellows & Daisies December Meeting

The Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H club met on December 1, 2019, at the Claremont United Methodist Church for its annual Christmas party. Members and their families present included Diane and Leo Warrington; Jason, Robyn, Logan, Aslynn, and Greyson Warrington; Neil, Amy, Axel, Natalia, Novalea, Ayce, and Aschar Warrington; Al and Sharon Grau; Darin, Walker, and Parker Zoellner; Troy Zoellner, Kristi and Rylen Ekern; Logan and Mike Ringgenberg; Ken and Janet Frey; Colin, Mike, and Sara Frey; Karen Boe; Mandy and Braden Boe; Renee, Wade, Nicole, and Andrew Marzahn; Eric, Melissa, Hanna, Mallory, and Tucker Miller; Carla and Kella Tracy; LeeAnn and Royal Tople; and Brad, Michelle, Blake, and Hailey Pauli; Colin, Emily, Hudson, Arthur, Paxton, and Briggs Eichler; and Stacey Anderson.

While at the party, members played card Bingo with the guests with prizes awarded. Piano solos were performed by Novalea Warrington, Axel Warrington, Natalia Warrington, and Ashlynn Warrington. Christmas carols were also sung by the 4-H members and provided gifts to the guests.

The club gathered baby supplies and food that was donated to Child Protection Services for their Community Service Project.

Each member introduced themselves and shared what project areas they completed projects in for the Brown County and State Fair. They also watched a slideshow of activities the club participated in from the past year, as well as highlighting individual and club accomplishments.

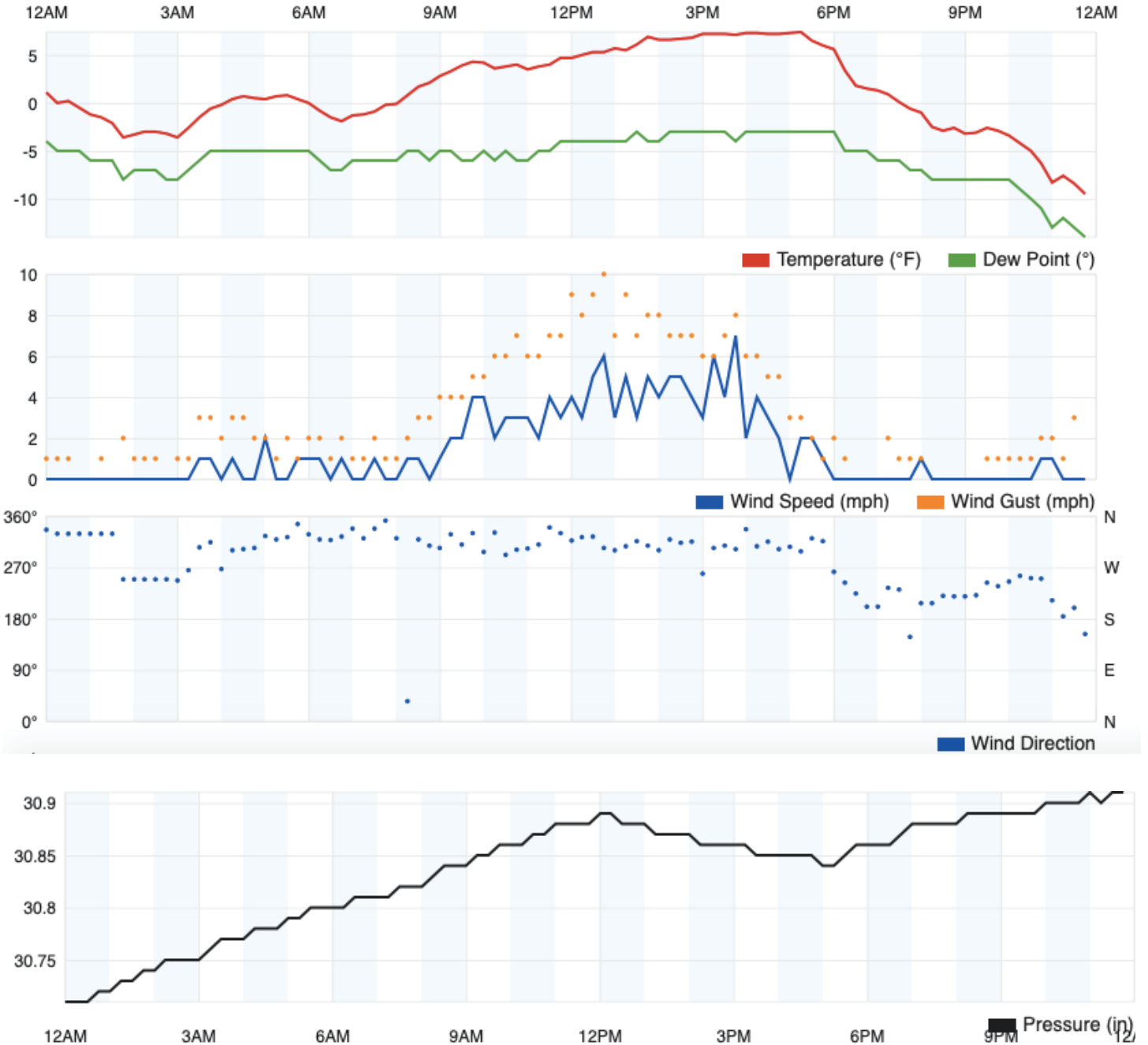
The Christmas party ended with a potluck meal and desserts. The next meeting will be held at the Jungle Lanes in Groton.

--Submitted by Axel Warrington, Club Reporter

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Bearcats slip past Lady Tigers in overtime

The Lady Tigers suffered an overtime loss to Webster Area on Tuesday in Webster, 55-53.

The first quarter was tied four times and there were three lead changes before it quarter ended tied at 14. Webster Area took the lead in the second quarter and built up an eight-point lead at 28-20. The Bearcats took a 28-22 lead into the locker room at half time.

Groton Area went on an eight point run and tied the game at 28 and then took the lead, 31-30. Groton Area led at the end of the third quarter, 35-32.

Groton Area opened up a five-point lead at 39-34, but the Bearcats battled back and tied the game at 41. Groton Area scored the next six points and took a 47-41 lead with 1:02 left in the game. Shoemaker made a pair of three-pointers down the stretch and Abby Snell made a shot with four seconds left to tie the game 50, sending the game into overtime.

Alyssa Thaller opened the overtime with a three-pointer, but it would be the only points Groton Area would score and Shoemaker would make two baskets and Alivia Baumgarn a free throw for the final 55-53 Webster Area win

Allyssa Locke had a season high 19 points in leading the Tigers plus she had seven rebounds, three assists and one steal before fouling out. Alyssa Thaler had 12 points, three rebounds, three assists and three steals. Brooke Gengerke had 11 points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals. Kaycie Hawkins had six points, three rebounds and one assist. Gracie Traphagen had five points and six rebounds. Trista Keith had four rebounds and one assist and Madeline Flihs had five rebounds and one assist.

The Tigers were 15 of 38 in field goals for 39 percent, four of 15 in three-pointers for 27 percent and was 11 of 20 from the line for 55 percent off of Webster Area's 19 team fouls. The Tigers had 32 rebounds, 14 turnovers, 12 assists and seven steals.

Webster Area was led in scoring by Cara Shoemaker with 21 points followed by Alivia Baumgarn with 14, Paige Snell nine, Abby Snell seven and Jaiden Bauer and Morgan Jager each had two points. Webster Area made 23 of 54 field goals for 43 percent and was four of 15 from the line for 27 percent off of Groton Area's 17 team fouls.

Webster Area won the junior varsity game, 45-25.

Scoring for Groton Area: Maddie Bjerke 8, Trista Keith 7, Aspen Johnson 4, Sydney Leicht 2, Lydia Meier 2, Anna Fjeldheim 1 and Madeline Flihs 1.

Both games were broadcast live on GDLIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Locke Electric and the South Dakota Army National Guard. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Larry and Kathy Harry.

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

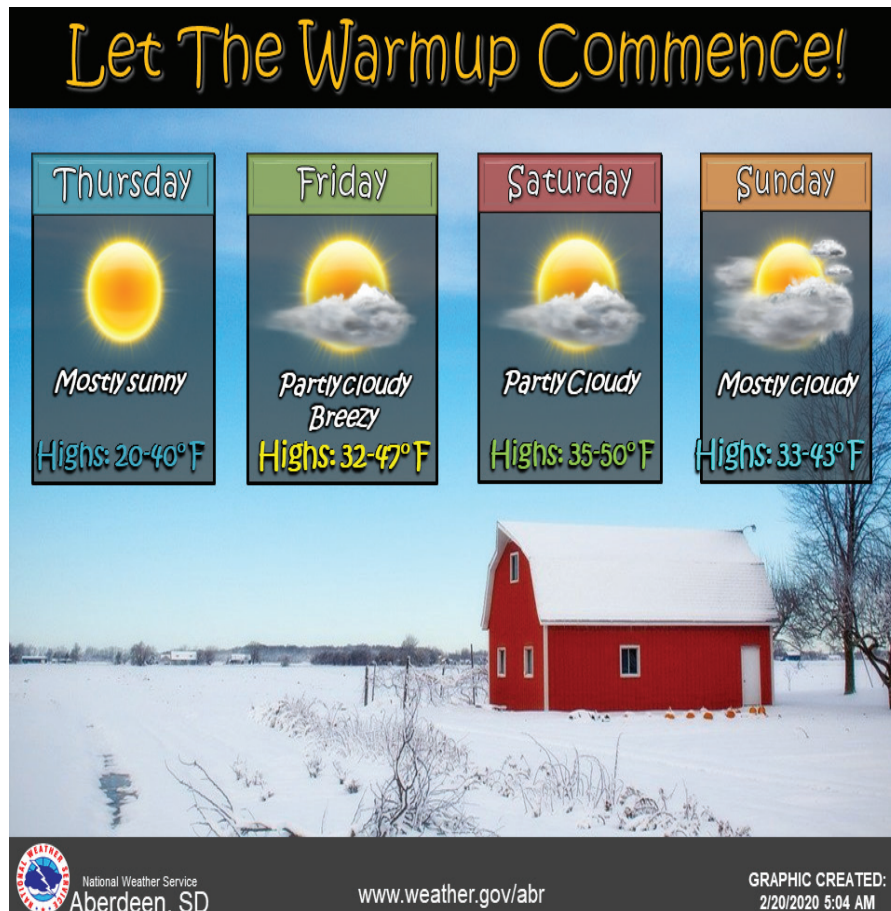
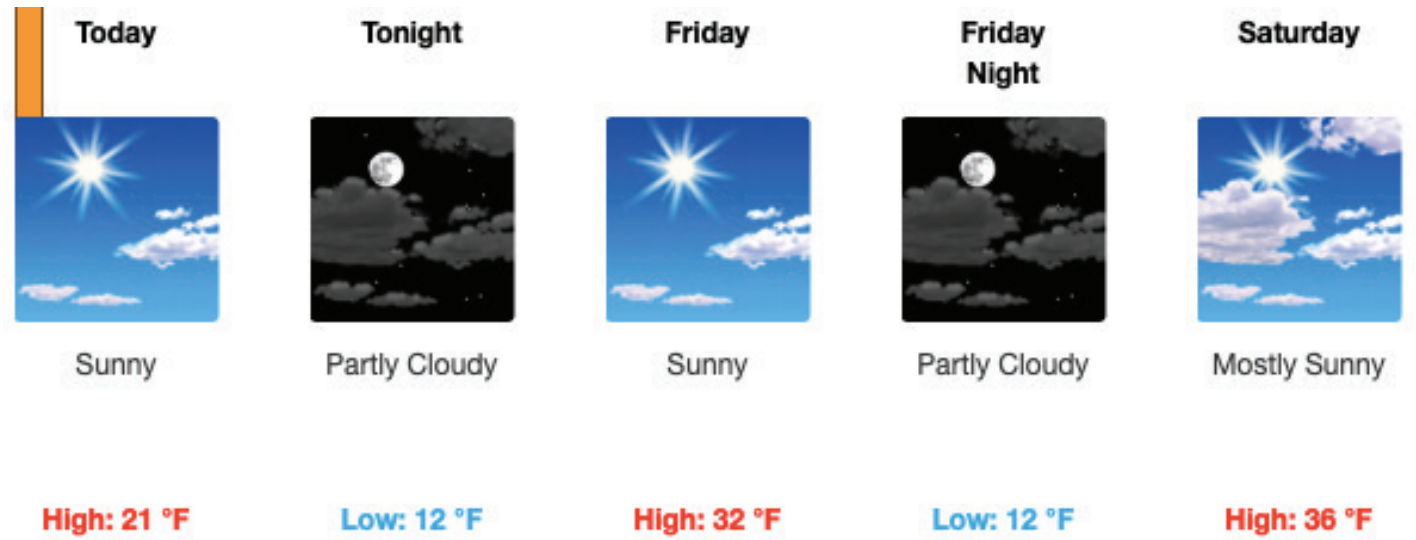
10:00am: Wrestling: Varsity Regions at Sisseton

Monday, February 24, 2020

Life Touch pictures at elementary school

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After a brisk morning, we warm back up today to near normal temperatures, and even warmer come the weekend! By Saturday, highs reach into the upper 30s for northeast SD and nearing 50 for central SD. Dry conditions are expected through the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

February 20, 1962: A round of heavy snow fell across the southeastern half of the state from the 20th through the 22nd, producing 10 inches of snow. Snowfall amounts included, 5 inches at Bryant, 6 inches at Kennebec, 7 inches at Redfield, Brookings, Mitchell, and Sioux Falls, 8 inches at Miller, and 10 inches at Huron. Snowfall amounts for the record-setting month of February 1962 ranged from 30 to 50 inches across much of the southeast part of the state.

February 20, 1997: Warm weather resulted in snowmelt runoff and ice breakup on the Bad River. As a result, the Bad River went above flood stage from Capa to Fort Pierre late in the evening of the 20th. Flood stage at Fort Pierre is 21 feet, and the river rose to around 25 feet on the 21st. The Bad River went below flood stage during the afternoon of the 22nd. Lowlands near the river were flooded along with some county roads with some of the roads damaged. Late in the evening of the 20th, the trailer court on the southern edge of Fort Pierre was evacuated where they did some sandbagging. Also, on the west side of Fort Pierre, some roads were flooded.

February 20, 2011: The snowfall/blizzard event on 20-21 February 2011 produced yet another round of impressive snowfall totals across central and northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. Storm total snowfall amounts ranged from 8" to 12" with locally higher amounts of more than 18" reported in a few locations.

1805 - The Potomac River was opened after being closed by ice for a period of two months. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1898 - Eastern Wisconsin experienced their biggest snowstorm of record. Racine received thirty inches, and drifts around Milwaukee measured fifteen feet high. (David Ludlum)

1912: An F3 tornado killed nine people and injured 50 others as it crossed Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana. Centenary College would be hit again in 1940.

1953 - A snowstorm in Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota produced drifts ten feet high which derailed trains. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm system over Arizona spread heavy snow from the Southern Rockies into the Southern Plains Region. Thunderstorms in central Texas produced golf ball size hail about the same time north central Texas was being blanketed with up to 8 inches of snow, closing many schools. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Snow and strong northerly winds ushered arctic air into the Great Lakes Region. The temperature at Sault Ste Marie MI plunged from 30 degrees at 5 AM to one below zero by 3 PM, with a wind chill reading of 40 degrees below zero. Five cities in Florida reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 90 degrees at Lakeland was just a degree shy of their February record. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing during the early afternoon produced severe weather from eastern Texas to Alabama and northwest Florida. Thunderstorms spawned a dozen tornadoes during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms also produced 90 mph winds around Vicksburg MS, and 100 mph winds around Jackson MS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy snow spread into southwestern Kansas and the panhandle region of Oklahoma and Texas. Heavier snowfall totals included 12 inches at Boise City OK, 11 inches at Liberal KS, and 10 inches at Spearman TX. Blowing and drifting snow closed roads in the Oklahoma panhandle. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: The temperature at the Civic Center in Los Angeles, California, soared to 95 degrees. This temperature is the highest ever recorded at the location during February.

2004: A nor'easter brought heavy snow and strong winds to the Nova Scotia and Prince Edwards Island from the 17th through the 20th. The Maritimers called this storm White Juan, a hurricane disguised as a blizzard. Halifax, Yarmouth, and Charlottetown broke all-time 24-hour snowfall records, receiving about 3 feet of snow. For Halifax, the 34.8 inches of snow on February 19 nearly doubled its previous record for a single day.

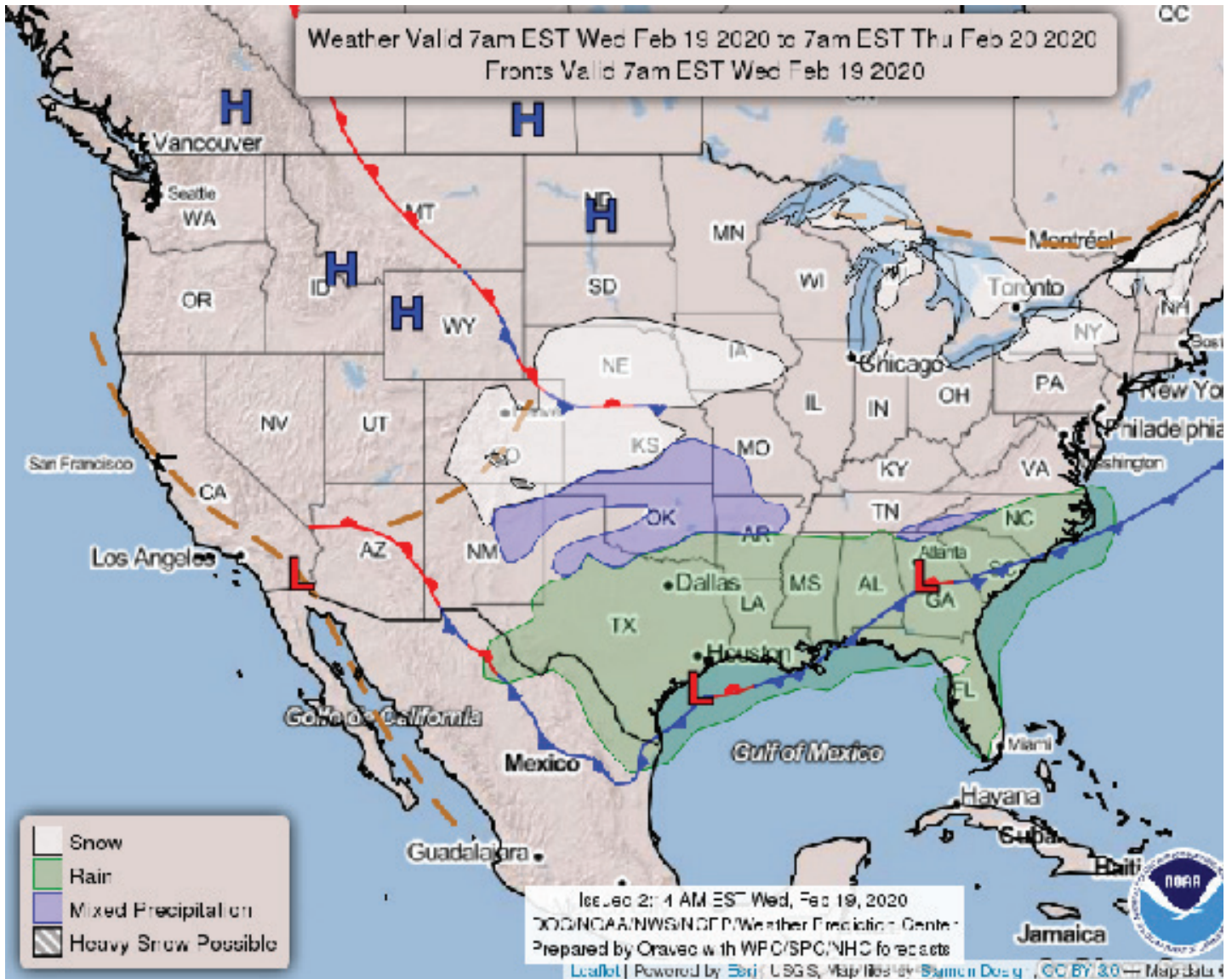
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 8 °F at 3:02 PM
Low Temp: -10 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 10 mph at 12:44 PM
Snow

Record High: 61° in 1930
Record Low: -30° in 1918
Average High: 30°F
Average Low: 9°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.33
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.80
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 6:08 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:26 a.m.



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SEIZE THE MOMENT!

A young, unemployed musician had spent weeks walking the streets of New York looking for work. One afternoon he walked into a theater, sat in the front row watching the organist closely. Finally, the organist stood up and left the stage for a break. At that moment he jumped up, ran to the organ, sat down on the bench and started to play an inspiring blues song.

Immediately, the owner ran onto the stage and began to reprimand him for what he had done. But the crowd began cheering loudly and clapping wildly. As he listened to the response of the audience, he realized what had happened, turned to the musician and said, "Want a job?"

"Yes!" said Count Basie and the career of one of the world's most recognized musicians began at that moment.

God often presents a "once in a lifetime" opportunity for us to use the talents He has given us. It may be in the least expected place at the most unusual time. But opportunities come and go. And when they come, we must be ready and willing to accept them for they are God at work in our lives, calling us to work with Him to achieve His purpose in the world. He will always give us the talents to do what He has called us to do. But, we must be ready to "accept the challenge" when the moment of opportunity comes and honor His calling on our lives.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to recognize and accept the opportunities for serving You that You set before us. Help us to use our gifts to serve You. In Jesus' Name, 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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-06-13-23-33

(one, six, thirteen, twenty-three, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$70,000

Lotto America

16-29-33-47-51, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 2

(sixteen, twenty-nine, thirty-three, forty-seven, fifty-one; Star Ball: ten; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.2 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Powerball

10-12-15-19-56, Powerball: 19, Power Play: 2

(ten, twelve, fifteen, nineteen, fifty-six; Powerball: nineteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Shahid guides North Dakota State past South Dakota 77-74

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Vinnie Shahid poured in 27 points to lead North Dakota State to a 77-74 victory over South Dakota on Wednesday night, stretching the Bison winning streak to seven games.

Shahid sank 7 of 16 shots, including just 1 of 5 from 3-point range, but he made 12 of 14 free throws for the Bison (20-7, 11-2 Summit League). Rocky Kreuser finished with 15 points, while Tyson Ward added 14 points and seven rebounds. Tyree Eady scored 10 with nine rebounds.

Tyler Peterson had 18 points and six rebounds to pace the Coyotes (19-10, 9-5). Triston Simpson added 17 points, while Tyler Hagedorn scored 13.

North Dakota State shot just 41% from the floor, including 8 of 22 from 3-point range (36%), and made 25 of 30 free throws. South Dakota shot 47% overall, 44% from distance (7 of 16) and made 13 of 16 foul shots.

The Bison improve to 2-0 against the Coyotes on the season. North Dakota State defeated South Dakota 72-70 on Jan. 15.

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

Elements of this story were generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

Wilson's 31 points pushes S. Dakota St. past N. Dakota

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Douglas Wilson tied a career-high 31 points and Noah Freidel scored 21 and South Dakota State beat North Dakota 94-83 on Wednesday night.

The Jackrabbits (21-8, 12-2 Summit League) moved a half-game ahead of idle North Dakota State (20-7, 11-2) atop the league standings. South Dakota State has won seven straight wraps up the regular season with a home game against South Dakota and at North Dakota State on Feb. 27.

South Dakota State led 44-39 at halftime before the Fighting Hawks (12-15, 6-7) used a 7-3 spurt to

start the second half. Freidel responded with a 3-pointer, and another 3 with 13:47 left, pushed the lead to 60-50. North Dakota never got within five points the rest of the way. The Jackrabbits finished shooting 34 of 53 (64.2%).

Filip Rebraca and Kienan Walter each scored 23 points for North Dakota. Rebraca finished 10-of-12 shooting and Marlon Stewart scored 21 and distributed eight assists.

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

House passes tougher punishments for texting and driving

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Lawmakers in the South Dakota House on Wednesday passed a bill that would make texting and driving a criminal offense.

Rep. Doug Barthel, a Sioux Falls Republican, said he introduced the bill after hearing the stories of people who died in accidents involving a texting driver. Barthel said he did not expect many people to be charged under the proposed law, but hoped it would act as a deterrent.

Current law allows punishing highway drivers who text with a fine of \$100. The bill would apply the ban to all roads and anyone using mobile devices for social networking sites. The bill exempts actions like making phone calls, contacting emergency services, or using GPS. It would increase violations to a criminal offense, punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

Some Republicans, who dominate the House, opposed the bill. They argued it would force drivers to prove their innocence if they were stopped by police officers who suspected them of texting and driving.

The bill will next be considered in the Senate. A similar bill failed by one vote in that body last year.

Noem's proposal to streamline county zoning clears committee

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem's proposal to overhaul the decision-making process for county zoning permits, including getting rid of a two-thirds majority vote requirement in some counties and making it more difficult to appeal permits once they are granted, cleared a Senate committee on Wednesday.

The proposal would pave the way for an increase in feedlots, an issue that has led to disputes and lawsuits in county zoning board decisions across the state. Opponents say Noem's proposal strips locals of their ability to influence zoning decisions and check the growth of feedlots and other projects that harm the environment. The Republican governor argues that it would spur investment in rural communities.

Noem made the unusual move of appearing before the committee on behalf of the bill.

"All of us have seen how broken this process is and how important it is that we fix it," she told legislators.

Noem said the bill would create a more predictable environment for investors and would help the next generation of farmers stay in the state. The bill would also apply to mining, wind farms and other agriculture infrastructure projects.

Jerry Schmidt, the president of the South Dakota Soybean Grower's Association, called the proposal, "a first step in breathing life back to our shrinking communities."

Several agriculture groups, chambers of commerce, banker associations and the South Dakota Association of County Commissioners supported the bill.

Travis Mockler, a farmer and Clay County commissioner, said the Sierra Club sued him over a permit he requested a year ago. He wanted to build a feedlot to provide a way for his children to take over his farm, but said he does not have the money for a prolonged legal battle with the environmental organization.

A growing number of feedlots, or concentrated animal feeding operations that can hold thousands of animals in a small area, have sparked controversy in the state.

Opponents point to problems in neighboring Iowa, where corporate farms pollute the air, contaminate water, and have been linked to ailments such as asthma.

The South Dakota Stock Growers Association, conservation groups, the Yankton Sioux tribe and several

individual farmers spoke in opposition to the bill.

Both sides claimed they were on the side of “local control” — a popular phrase in the halls of the conservative-dominated Capitol.

Noem has argued that the bill ensures local boards have control over decisions that she says could otherwise be “hijacked by a vocal few.” The bill would take away the two-thirds majority vote requirement that some counties have for permits and replace it with a simple majority of the board members present at a meeting.

Opponents argued that some projects should have that high bar to receive a permit because of the lasting affects they have on the local environment.

Nick Nemec, a rancher and former legislator, said the proposed law would “steamroll” locals who want to make their voice heard in the zoning process.

The process is already open, fair and allows for people who know the local conditions best to make decisions, said Rebecca Terk, a lobbyist with Dakota Rural Action, a farmer-led conservation group. She argued that the permitting processes should vary from county to county because each community is unique and has different concerns.

Noem’s proposal would give county officials the option to grant one type of permit based on a checklist of requirements without holding public meetings. Some counties already have that process in place.

It would also make it more difficult for people to appeal permits once they’re granted. The bill would give people three weeks to appeal the approval of a permit and require counties to make a decision on appeals within 60 days. It would only allow people who are “legitimately aggrieved” to file an appeal, require a two-thirds vote from county boards to reverse a permit decision, and make people who sue counties over the decision liable for attorney’s fees and damages.

It will next be considered by the full Senate.

North Dakota regulators OK expanded Dakota Access pipeline

JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota regulators on Wednesday unanimously approved expanded capacity for the Dakota Access pipeline, saying they believed the project had met exhaustive state and federal requirements.

The 3-0 vote by the all-Republican Public Service Commission came after the body signaled last month it was likely to approve a permit to expand the capacity of the pipeline, despite objections from opponents who said it would increase the probability of a disastrous oil spill.

Commissioners said they expect their decision to be challenged in state court.

Commissioner Julie Fedorchak said she welcomed such a review.

“I have no doubt issues are being addressed,” she said of regulators’ review.

Texas-based Energy Transfer proposed doubling the capacity of the pipeline last year to meet growing demand for oil shipments from North Dakota, without the need for additional pipelines or rail shipments. Commissioner Brian Kroshus said Wednesday that he believes the project would help take oil trucks off the road, reducing traffic fatalities.

The company plans to build a \$40 million pump station near Linton in south-central North Dakota. The new station is necessary to increase the volume of oil the pipeline can move.

The company also plans additional pumping stations in South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Commissioners in a South Dakota county last year approved a conditional use permit. Permits in the other states are pending. Iowa regulators want Energy Transfer to provide expert analysis to back up the company’s assertion that doubling the line’s capacity won’t increase the likelihood of a spill.

The \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile (1,886 kilometer) underground pipeline was subject to prolonged protests and hundreds of arrests during its construction in North Dakota in late 2016 and early 2017 because it crosses beneath the Missouri River, just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The tribe draws its water from the river and fears pollution. Energy Transfer insisted the pipeline would be safe, and said

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the expansion would be, too.

The pipeline has been moving North Dakota oil through South Dakota and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois since June 2017. Since some of the land in North Dakota falls outside of the pipeline corridor, permission was needed from the commission to build the pump station.

Opponents argued the commission should have considered effects all along the line and not solely at the pump station location.

"Today's decision demonstrates little to no consideration" to possible impacts of a spill or leak from the expanded pipeline, the tribe said in a statement after the vote. Tim Purdon, an attorney for the Standing Rock Sioux, said before Wednesday's vote that the tribe would review its legal options if the commission approved the project.

Allyson Two Bears, the tribe's director of environmental regulations, said she was "very, very disappointed" but not surprised by the commission's action.

"I see this as doubling our risk," she said in an interview.

Commissioners agreed with Energy Transfer's argument that they could consider a permit application only for the pump site. Commissioners said the state would not impose conditions beyond those required by the federal government, which has jurisdiction on the pipeline.

The company said in court filings that its pump station would produce only "minimal adverse effects on the environment and the citizens of North Dakota."

The company has said it hoped to start construction this spring, and finish within 10 months.

Lawmakers seek to push pregnant women to get drug treatment

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A House committee on Wednesday approved a bill that would encourage pregnant women with drug addictions to get treatment.

Rep. Spencer Gosch, a Glenham Republican, introduced the bill after hearing of a high rate of pregnant women with drug addiction. Current law allows those women to be charged with a felony if they possess or take drugs. The bill would let them avoid a drug conviction if they complete an addiction recovery program and seek prenatal care.

Gosch originally modeled his proposal on a 2014 Tennessee law that criminalized drug use by pregnant women. His original proposal would have allowed charging pregnant women with assault if they were found to be on drugs. After opposition from medical groups that said such laws discourage addicted women from seeking medical care, Gosch dropped the assault charge possibility from the legislation.

Lobbyists for medical groups they said they did not have enough time to review the changed bill and establish a position.

The bill will next head to the full House.

S. Korea reports 1st virus death; 2.5M urged to stay home

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea reported its first death from the new virus on Thursday while the mayor of a southeastern city urged its 2.5 million people to stay inside as infections linked to a church congregation spiked.

The death was the ninth confirmed from the virus outside mainland China. Other deaths have occurred in France, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the South Korean man, believed to be about 63 years old, died at a hospital on Wednesday and posthumously tested positive for the virus. Officials said he had been hospitalized due to schizophrenia for an extended period and recently suffered pneumonia symptoms.

The center also confirmed 22 additional cases of the virus, raising the total in South Korea to 104.

Twenty-one of those new cases were in and around the city of Daegu, where the mayor urged citizens

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earlier Thursday to stay home and wear masks even indoors if possible.

In a televised news conference, Mayor Kwon Young-jin expressed fears that rising infections in the region will soon overwhelm the city's health system and called for urgent help from the central government.

"National quarantine efforts that are currently focused on blocking the inflow of the virus (from China) and stemming its spread are inadequate for preventing the illness from circulating in local communities," Kwon said.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 49 of 73 new patients confirmed in the city's region in the past two days went to services at a Daegu church attended by a previously confirmed virus patient or contacted her elsewhere. That patient is a South Korean woman in her early 60s who has no recent record of overseas travel, according to center officials. She tested positive for the virus on Tuesday.

The center's director, Jung Eun-kyeong, told reporters that it's still unclear whether she was a "super spreader" of the disease or merely the first patient detected in the area. Jung said officials were screening some 1,000 people who attended services at the Shincheonji Church of Jesus with the woman on Feb. 9 and Feb. 16 and were placing them under home isolation.

The church, which claims about 200,000 followers in South Korea, said it has closed all of its 74 sanctuaries around the nation and told followers to instead watch its worship services on YouTube. It said in a statement that health officials were disinfecting its church in Daegu and were tracing the woman's contacts. The Daegu church has about 8,000 followers.

It said church officials have advised followers since late January to stay at home if they had recently traveled overseas or were experiencing even mild cold-like symptoms. But the woman assumed she had a common cold and kept coming to the church because she hadn't traveled overseas, church officials said.

"We think it's deeply regrettable ... for causing concerns to the local community," the statement said.

Shincheonji, which translates as "New heaven and new Earth," is a controversial new religious movement established in 1984 by Lee Man-hee. The church describes him as an angel of Jesus sent to testify about the fulfilled prophecies of the Book of Revelation.

The explosion of infections in Daegu and the neighboring region, as well as some new cases in the Seoul metropolitan area where the sources of infection are unclear, have raised concern that health authorities are losing track of the virus as it spreads more broadly in the country.

Kwon spoke shortly before South Korea's government acknowledged for the first time that the country was beginning to see "community transmission" of the illness, albeit at a "limited range."

"We are seeing infections in some areas like Seoul and Daegu where it's difficult to confirm the cause or routes of the infections," Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip said, adding that the government would need to change its quarantine strategy that has focused on tracing contacts.

In a telephone conversation with Kwon later Thursday, President Moon Jae-in said the central government will provide all available assistance to help Daegu fight the virus, according to the presidential Blue House.

Separately, Moon also talked on the phone with Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss cooperation in combating the virus. During the 30-minute call, they agreed to facilitate the sharing of information gained from infection treatments and strengthen cooperation between quarantine authorities, his office said.

Weather and protests hamper Ukraine quarantine efforts

by YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's effort to evacuate more than 70 people from China over the outbreak of a new virus faced setbacks Thursday as weather conditions delayed the return of the evacuees and protests broke out near a hospital where they were to be quarantined.

Several hundred residents in Ukraine's Poltava region protested seeking to stop officials from quarantining the evacuees in their village because they feared becoming infected. Demonstrators put up road blocks and burned tires, while Ukrainian media reported that there were clashes with police. More than 10 people were detained.

"The situation is rather heated," Poltava regional police spokesman Yuri Sulayev said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy weighed in, saying the protests showed “not the best side of our character.” He tried to reassure people that the quarantined evacuees wouldn’t pose any danger to residents of the village of Novi Sarzhany.

In a statement published on his Facebook page, Zelenskiy said the people evacuated from China are healthy and will live in a closed medical center run by the National Guard in the village as a precaution.

“In the next two weeks it will probably be the most guarded facility in the country,” Zelenskiy said.

In the early hours of Thursday, a plane with 45 Ukrainians and 27 other foreign nationals took off from Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak that has infected more than 75,000 people worldwide and killed over 2,100.

Authorities said those evacuated included people from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, as well as other countries.

The plane stopped off in Kazakhstan to drop off Kazakh passengers. Later, it sought to land in Kharkiv, a city in northeastern Ukraine, but could not due to bad weather conditions.

Instead it flew to Kyiv to refuel, and eventually arrived in Kharkiv.

Also Thursday, the Russian Embassy in Japan said that two more Russians aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship quarantined in Japan have been diagnosed with the virus. That raises to three the number of Russians on the ship confirmed to have the virus.

The two will be transferred to a hospital in Japan for treatment, according to the embassy.

The Diamond Princess has been docked in the Yokohama port near Tokyo since Feb. 4, when 10 people on board tested positive for the virus. So far 621 cases of the disease, which has been named COVID-19, have been confirmed among the the Diamond Princess’s original 3,711 people on board.

Russia so far has reported only two cases of the disease on its soil. Two Chinese nationals diagnosed with the virus and hospitalized in two different regions of Siberia in late January have recovered and have been released from hospitals.

Associated Press writer Daria Litvinova contributed from Moscow. See more AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak>

9 killed in suspected far-right attack in Germany

By DAVID McHUGH and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

HANAU, Germany (AP) — A 43-year-old German man shot and killed nine people at several locations in a Frankfurt suburb in attacks that appeared to have been motivated by far-right beliefs, officials said Thursday.

The gunman first attacked a hookah bar and a neighboring cafe in central Hanau at about 10 p.m. Wednesday, killing several people, before heading about 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) west and opening fire again, first on a car and then a sports bar, claiming more victims.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said that while the circumstances of the attack still needed to be fully investigated, the shootings exposed the “poison” of racism in German society. Merkel pledged to stand up against those who seek to divide the country.

“There is much to indicate that the perpetrator acted out of far-right extremist, racist motives. Out of hatred for people with other origins, other faiths or a different appearance,” the German leader said.

Hookah lounges are places where people gather to smoke flavored tobacco from Middle Eastern water pipes, and some of the victims appeared to be Turkish.

Witness Kadir Kose ran over from a cafe he runs nearby after he heard the first shots, initially assuming there was an altercation between family members.

“But when I heard the second shots I thought it was a terror attack,” Kose said.

He said he was shocked at the extent of the violence, saying that while fights or stabbing aren’t unheard of, “this is a whole other level, something we hear about from America.”

Witnesses and surveillance videos of the suspect’s getaway car led authorities quickly to his home, near

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the scene of the second attack, where he was found dead near the body of his 72-year-old mother, said Peter Beuth, the interior minister for the state of Hesse.

Neighbor Dieter Hog said he looked out his window and saw 25 or 30 police officers with dogs combing the area.

"They were running around looking for the fugitive who was involved," Hog told The Associated Press, adding that even though he lived close by he did not know the suspect.

Both the suspect and his mother had gunshot wounds, and the weapon was found on the suspect, Beuth said.

At the townhouse Thursday, forensic experts came and went from the building, and police kept people away.

A website believed to be the suspect's is being evaluated, Beuth said.

"Initial analysis of the web page of the suspect indicate a xenophobic motivation," he said. It does not appear, however, that the suspect was known either to police or Germany's domestic intelligence agency, he added.

He said federal prosecutors have taken over the investigation of the crime and are treating it as an act of domestic terrorism.

"This is an attack on our free and peaceful society," he said.

Following a conference call with Germany's state interior ministers, Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said on the basis of the investigation so far, "it was a right-radical xenophobic" attack, German news agency dpa reported.

The attack was quickly and broadly condemned by many organizations, including the Central Council of Muslims, the Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Germany, and the Central Council of Jews.

Merkel pledged that "everything will be done to investigate the circumstances of these terrible murders."

In unusually plain words, the German leader said: "Racism is a poison. Hatred is a poison."

"This poison exists in our society and its is responsible for far too many crimes," she added, citing the killings committed by a far-right gang known as the NSU, the fatal shooting last year of a regional politician from her party, and the attack on a synagogue in Halle in October.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the consulate in Frankfurt and the embassy in Berlin were trying to obtain obtain information about the attack, including the possibility that some of the victims were Turkish.

"According to the initial information, it was an attack with a racist motive, but we would need to wait for the (official) statement," he told state television TRT.

German news agency dpa reported that police are examining a video the suspect may have posted online several days earlier in which he details a conspiracy theory about child abuse in the United States. The authenticity of the video couldn't immediately be verified.

In the video, the dark-haired speaker wearing a white button-down shirt under a suit jacket, said he was delivering a "personal message to all Americans" that "your country is under control of invisible secret societies."

In a slow and deliberate voice, in accented English, he says there are "deep underground military bases" in which "they abuse, torture and kill little children."

He makes no reference to the far-right fringe QAnon movement in the U.S., but the missive is similar to the movement's central, but baseless belief that U.S. President Donald Trump is waging a secret campaign against enemies in the "deep state" and a child sex trafficking ring run by satanic pedophiles and cannibals.

On a website registered by someone with the same name as the man in the video, Tobias R., the owner says he was born in Hanau in 1977 and grew up in the city, later training with a bank and completing a business degree in 2007.

The attack comes amid growing concerns about far-right violence in Germany.

Merkel called off a planned visit Thursday to a university in Halle. Her spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said she was "being constantly kept abreast of the state of the investigations in Hanau."

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Halle was the site of a deadly anti-Semitic attack last year. A man expressing anti-Jewish views tried to shoot his way into a synagogue, failed and killed two passers-by before being arrested.

The shooting in Halle came months after the killing of Walter Luebcke, the regional politician from Merkel's party. The suspect had a long history of neo-Nazi activity and convictions for violent crime.

"Thoughts this morning are with the people of Hanau, in whose midst this terrible crime was committed," Seibert said on Twitter. "Deep sympathy for the affected families, who are grieving for their dead. We hope with those wounded that they will soon recover."

In addition to those killed, Beuth said one person was seriously wounded and multiple other people suffered less serious injuries.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted it was a day of "immense sadness" and pledged his "full support for Germany."

"I'm at the side of Chancellor Merkel in her fight for our values and the protection of our democracies," he said.

Geir Moulson and David Rising in Berlin, Michael Probst and Christoph Noelting in Hanau, and Suzan Fraser in Ankara contributed to this report. Jordans reported from Berlin.

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. **DEBATE NIGHT BRAWL** With both newcomer Michael Bloomberg and front-runner Bernie Sanders as frequent targets, the latest debate in Las Vegas featured the most aggressive sustained period of infighting.

2. **WHAT GERMANY SUSPECTS AS MOTIVE IN MASS SHOOTING** A 43-year-old German man shot and killed nine people at several locations in a Frankfurt suburb, attacks that appear to have been motivated by far-right beliefs, officials say.

3. **SOUTH KOREAN CITY MAKES MAJOR MOVE AGAINST VIRUS** The mayor of Daegu urges its 2.5 million people to refrain from going outside as cases of a new virus spike and implores the government in Seoul to help his city.

4. **PENTAGON CHIEF TO VISIT NUCLEAR BASE** Mark Esper is visiting a nuclear missile field in North Dakota to tout the administration's multibillion-dollar plan for modernization of the nuclear arsenal.

5. **WHO TRUMP TAPPED FOR TOP INTELLIGENCE POST** Richard Grenell, the U.S. ambassador to Germany and staunch presidential ally, will become acting director of national intelligence, commanding the nation's 17 spy agencies.

6. **SAINTS HEAD TO COURT** New Orleans' NFL team wants to block the release of hundreds of confidential emails detailing the public relations work the team did for the area's Roman Catholic archdiocese amid its sexual abuse crisis.

7. **WHAT WEINSTEIN JURORS ARE FOCUSING ON** The jury's deliberations have given a lot of attention to actress Annabella Sciorra's allegation that the once-heralded Hollywood mogul raped her in the mid-1990s.

8. **'PEOPLE ARE SEEING A VALUE IN STRAYS'** Street dogs in Egypt are finding popular acceptance after centuries of social and religious stigma.

9. **'BLACK IN SPACE' LOOKS AT FINAL FRONTIER OF CIVIL RIGHTS** A new documentary explores how black astronauts made it into space amid segregation, discrimination and the Cold War.

10. **NASCAR DRIVER GETS MEDICAL GREEN FLAG** Ryan Newman is released from a Florida hospital, two days after his frightening crash on the final lap of the Daytona 500.

Analysis: Dems' civility gives way to combustible conflict

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — Through a year of campaigning, the Democratic presidential candidates played nice, talking up party unity, disagreeing mostly politely on policy.

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No more.

Wednesday's debate signaled a sharp turn in the Democratic contest, with civility giving way to a combustible conflict that laid bare both the ideological divisions roiling the party and the personal animosities that have simmered for months.

Elizabeth Warren criticized Bernie Sanders for leading a movement that has provided a haven for online harassment. Amy Klobuchar accused Pete Buttigieg of calling her dumb. And all the candidates piled on first-time debate participant Mike Bloomberg, launching aggressive attacks on his record on race, gender and how he is wielding his vast personal wealth in pursuit of the Democratic nomination.

For many of the candidates, it was a strategy shift born of urgency and necessity. Though just two states have voted thus far, time is running out for some contenders, including former Vice President Joe Biden, to prove they still have a viable path to the nomination as the contest hurtles toward larger, more diverse states.

But the bare-knuckle politicking also carries risks for a party that is desperate to rally around a standard-bearer to take on President Donald Trump in November. Democratic voters have warned for months against intraparty conflict, fearful of damaging their eventual nominee in the general election.

And Republicans indeed appeared to relish Wednesday's infighting.

After the debate, Trump's campaign spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany declared: "The Democrat Party is in the midst of a full-scale meltdown."

Despite Democrats' attempts to maintain civility for much of the campaign, Wednesday's scorching showdown was likely inevitable given how crowded the field remains and how fast the primary calendar is moving. Nevada holds its caucus on Saturday, followed by South Carolina on Feb. 29, and more than a dozen states in the March 3 Super Tuesday contests.

Sanders' strong showings in the opening contests have left some rivals fearful he could begin to amass an insurmountable lead in March, when delegate-rich states like California and Texas vote. And more moderate candidates who view the Vermont senator — a self-described democratic socialist — as unelectable in November fear Bloomberg's late entry in the race could further divide up the anti-Sanders vote.

Bloomberg hasn't appeared on a ballot yet and won't for two more weeks. Yet he's quickly stood up a monstrous national campaign, and recent polls suggest he is getting a boost from the \$400 million in advertising he is plunging into states that vote on Super Tuesday and beyond.

Wednesday's debate marked the first opportunity for his rivals to begin puncturing the narrative he is carefully crafting on the airwaves. And they wasted little time in doing so.

Warren, who is urgently trying to salvage her once promising candidacy, was particularly blistering, comparing Bloomberg to another wealthy New Yorker: Trump.

"Democrats take a huge risk if we just substitute one arrogant billionaire for another," Warren said. She also repeatedly put Bloomberg on the defensive over nondisclosure agreements with some female employees at his eponymous media company.

For Warren, the fierce attacks marked a particularly sharp shift in strategy. She's repeatedly refused to allow herself to get drawn into direct combat with her rivals, but has appeared to get drowned out as a result. She finished a disappointing fourth in the New Hampshire primary, and unless she can rack up wins in the next two weeks, her candidacy is all but certain to end.

Bloomberg stepped on stage prepared for the attacks, which his rivals had been foreshadowing for days. Yet the former mayor and business mogul still appeared caught off guard by the ferocity of the pile-on, and he faltered at times in his defense, including when pressed on his past comments about women. He suggested female employees simply "didn't like a joke I told."

Bloomberg's campaign offered a tacit acknowledgement of his stumbles.

"It took him just 45 minutes in his first debate in 10 years to get his legs on the stage," said Kevin Sheekey, Bloomberg's campaign manager. "He was just warming up tonight."

Bloomberg was at his best when tangling with Sanders, a candidate he views as outside the mainstream and unelectable.

"I don't think there's any chance of the senator beating President Trump," Bloomberg said. "And if he goes and is the candidate, we will have Donald Trump for another four years. And we can't stand that."

Other candidates also piled on Sanders, accusing him of being too polarizing and too vague about the cost of the sweeping government-run health care policy at the center of his campaign. He beat back the criticisms as he has for months, predicting he could bring new voters into the electorate and use that enthusiasm to bend Washington to his will.

What was unclear at the end of the two-hour contest was how much clarity it provided for Democratic voters still searching for the candidate they believe has the best chance to defeat Trump. And the candidates themselves appeared prepared to fight on for months.

In the debate's final moments, all but Sanders found one thing to agree on: They are open to bringing the race for the nomination to the Democratic convention in July if no candidate emerges from the voting contests with a majority of the delegates in hand.

EDITOR'S NOTE — AP Washington Bureau Chief Julie Pace has covered the White House and politics since 2007. Follow her at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

Debate night brawl: Bloomberg, Sanders attacked by rivals

By **STEVE PEOPLES, ALEXANDRA JAFFE and MICHELLE L. PRICE** Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — From the opening bell, Democrats savaged New York billionaire Mike Bloomberg and raised pointed questions about Bernie Sanders' take-no-prisoners politics during a contentious debate Wednesday night that threatened to further muddy the party's urgent quest to defeat President Donald Trump.

Bloomberg, the former New York mayor who was once a Republican, was forced to defend his record and past comments related to race, gender and his personal wealth in an occasionally rocky debate stage debut. Sanders, meanwhile, tried to beat back pointed questions about his embrace of democratic socialism and his health following a heart attack last year.

The ninth debate of this cycle featured the most aggressive sustained period of infighting in the Democrats' yearlong search for a presidential nominee. The tension reflected growing anxiety among candidates and party leaders that the nomination fight could yield a candidate who will struggle to build a winning coalition in November to beat Trump.

The campaign is about to quickly intensify. Nevada votes on Saturday and South Carolina follows on February 29. More than a dozen states host Super Tuesday contests in less than two weeks with about one-third of the delegates needed to win the nomination at stake.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren was in a fight for survival and stood out with repeated attacks on Bloomberg. She sought to undermine him with core Democratic voters who are uncomfortable with his vast wealth, his offensive remarks about policing of minorities and demeaning comments about women, including those who worked at his company.

Warren labeled Bloomberg "a billionaire who calls people fat broads and horse-faced lesbians."

She wasn't alone.

Sanders lashed out at Bloomberg's policing policies as New York City mayor that Sanders said targeted "African-American and Latinos in an outrageous way."

And former Vice President Joe Biden charged that Bloomberg's "stop-and-frisk" policy ended up "throwing 5 million black men up against the wall."

Watching during his Western campaign swing, Trump joined the Bloomberg pile on. "Mini Mike Bloomberg's debate performance tonight was perhaps the worst in the history of debates, and there have been some really bad ones," Trump tweeted. "He was stumbling, bumbling and grossly incompetent. If this doesn't knock him out of the race, nothing will. Not so easy to do what I did!"

After the debate, Warren told reporters: "I have no doubt that Michael Bloomberg is reaching in his pocket right now, and spending another hundred million dollars to try to erase every American's memory

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about what happened on the debate stage.”

On a night that threatened to tarnish the shine of his carefully constructed TV-ad image, Bloomberg faltered when attacked on issues related to race and gender. But he was firm and unapologetic about his wealth and how he has used it to affect change important to Democrats. He took particular aim at Sanders and his self-description as a democratic socialist.

“I don’t think there’s any chance of the senator beating Donald Trump,” Bloomberg declared before noting Sanders’ rising wealth. “The best known socialist in the country happens to be a millionaire with three houses!”

Sanders defended owning multiple houses, noting he has one in Washington, where he works, and two in Vermont, the state he represents in the Senate.

While Bloomberg was the shiny new object Wednesday, the debate also marked a major test for Sanders, who is emerging as the front-runner in the Democrats’ nomination fight, whether his party’s establishment likes it or not. A growing group of donors, elected officials and political operatives fear that Sanders’ uncompromising progressive politics could be a disaster in the general election against Trump, yet they’ve struggled to coalesce behind a single moderate alternative.

Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, went after both Bloomberg and Sanders, warning that one threatened to “burn down” the Democratic Party and the other was trying to buy it.

He called them “the two most polarizing figures on this stage,” with little chance of defeating Trump or helping congressional Democrats in contests with Republicans.

Bloomberg and Sanders were prime targets, but the stakes were no less dire for the other four candidates on stage.

Longtime establishment favorite Biden, a two-term vice president, desperately needed to breathe new life into his flailing campaign, which entered the night at the bottom of a moderate muddle behind Buttigieg and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar. And after a bad finish last week in New Hampshire, Warren was fighting to resurrect her stalled White House bid.

A Warren campaign aide said on Twitter that her fiery first hour of debate was her best hour of fundraising “to date.”

The other leading progressive in the race, Sanders came under attack from Biden and Bloomberg for his embrace of democratic socialism.

Sanders, as he has repeatedly over the last year, defended the cost of his signature “Medicare for All” healthcare plan, which would eliminate the private insurance industry in favor of a government-backed healthcare system that would cover all Americans.

“When you asked Bernie how much it cost last time he said...‘We’ll find out,’” Biden quipped. “It costs over \$35 trillion, let’s get real.”

And ongoing animosity flared between Buttigieg and Klobuchar when the former Indiana mayor slammed the three-term Minnesota senator for failing to answer questions in a recent interview about Mexican policy and forgetting the name of the Mexican president.

Buttigieg noted that she’s on a committee that oversees trade issues in Mexico and she “was not able to speak to literally the first thing about the politics of the country.”

She shot back: “Are you trying to say I’m dumb? Are you mocking me here?”

Later in the night she lashed out at Buttigieg again: “I wish everyone else was as perfect as you, Pete.”

The debate closed with a question about the possibility that Democrats remain divided deep into the primary season with a final resolution coming during a contested national convention in July.

Asked if the candidate with the most delegates should be the nominee -- even if he or she is short of a delegate majority, almost every candidate suggested that the convention process should “work its way out,” as Biden put it.

Sanders, who helped force changes to the nomination process this year and hopes to take a significant delegate lead in the coming weeks, was the only exception.

“The person who has the most votes should become the nominee,” he said.

Peoples and Jaffe reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

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

Weinstein jurors focus on Sciorra as deliberations continue

NEW YORK (AP) — Jury deliberations in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial are set to continue for a third day on Thursday.

So far, jurors have been focusing a lot of attention on actress Annabella Sciorra's allegation that the once-heralded Hollywood mogul raped her in the mid-1990s.

Sciorra's allegation is too old to be charged on its own because of the statute of limitations, but it's a key component of the most serious charges that jurors are weighing in the closely watched #MeToo case.

Weinstein, 67, is charged with five counts stemming from the allegations of Sciorra and two other women — an aspiring actress who says he raped her in March 2013 and a former film and TV production assistant, Mimi Haleyi, who says he forcibly performed oral sex on her in March 2006.

Weinstein has maintained that any sexual contact was consensual.

Sciorra's account is the basis for two counts of predatory sexual assault, a charge that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. To convict Weinstein of that charge, jurors must agree on two things: that Weinstein raped Sciorra and that he committed one of the other charged offenses.

On Tuesday, signaling their interest in Sciorra, jurors sent a note seeking clarity on why Weinstein wasn't charged with other crimes stemming from her allegation, only to be told by the judge that they "must not speculate as to any other charges that are not before you."

The panel of seven men and five women finished Wednesday's round of deliberations by revisiting actress Rosie Perez's testimony about what she says Sciorra told her soon after the alleged rape.

Perez said her friend Sciorra had told her at some point in 1993, her voice shaking on the phone, that something had happened to her: "I think it was rape." Perez testified that months later, on a phone call from London, Sciorra said Weinstein was harassing her and she was scared.

"I said, 'He's the one that raped you,'" and they both began crying, Perez testified.

"Please go to the police," Perez said she told Sciorra.

She said Sciorra responded: "I can't — he'd destroy me."

When jurors return Thursday, they'll see emails that Weinstein sent about Sciorra, including ones to the private Israeli spy agency he allegedly enlisted to dig up dirt on would-be accusers as reporters closed in on him in 2017.

The Associated Press has a policy of not publishing the names of people who allege sexual assault without their consent. It is withholding the name of the rape accuser because it isn't clear whether she wishes to be identified publicly.

New Chinese virus cases decline, but method revised again

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — New virus cases in China have again declined, up just 394, after authorities on Thursday again changed how they count new daily infections. They are now discounting cases that came back negative after laboratory tests.

Another 114 people reportedly died from the new illness, COVID-19, as health inspectors went door-to-door to attempt to find every infected person in the worst-hit city of Wuhan.

Japan's health ministry said two former passengers of a virus-stricken cruise ship died, raising the number of deaths in Japan to three. The Diamond Princess has by far the most cases outside China with 621 passengers and crew testing positive.

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Mainland China has reported 2,118 deaths and 74,576 total cases. While the overall spread of the virus has been slowing, the situation remains severe in Hubei province and its capital, Wuhan, where the new coronavirus was first detected in December. More than 80% of the country's cases are in Hubei and 95% of the deaths, according to data from China's National Health Commission.

The new daily figure is a notable drop from the 1,749 cases recorded the previous day. The commission said 279 cases were deducted from the daily report after nucleic acid tests showed negative results.

The reduction in new cases in China was partly a result of health workers ceasing to diagnose patients on the spot, and refinements in the way symptoms were classified, according to Wang Guiqiang, an infectious disease specialist at the First Hospital connected with Beijing's elite Peking University.

Improvements in testing have allowed health workers to better assess those seeking treatment, Wang said.

Inspectors in protective suits went door-to-door Wednesday in Wuhan searching for every infected person. "This must be taken seriously," said Wang Zhonglin, the city's newly selected Communist Party secretary.

Cities in Hubei with a combined population of more than 60 million have been under lockdown since the Lunar New Year holiday. Authorities halted 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, with residents prevented from leaving their apartments.

The stringent measures have followed public fury over Hubei authorities' handling of the outbreak when it began. 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 about two dozen countries and has infected more than 1,000 people outside mainland China. Nine deaths have been confirmed outside the mainland — three in Japan, two in Hong Kong and one each in France, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan.

In South Korea, the mayor of the city of Daegu urged its 2.5 million people on Thursday not to go outside as cases of the virus spiked. Daegu has confirmed the illness in 13 people, 11 of whom either went to a church attended by a female patient or came into contact with her at a hospital, according to the disease control center. South Korea's Yonhap news agency also reported the country's first death from the virus.

Chinese scientists reported some troubling findings about how the virus spreads. Swabs were taken from 14 people who returned to Guangdong province in January after visiting Wuhan and developing the disease. High amounts of the virus were detected soon after symptoms started, more in the nose than in the throat, and the virus was also found in one of their close contacts who never showed any symptoms.

That adds to concern about potential spread of the virus by people who may not know they're infected. The report from the Guangdong Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention was published by the New England Journal of Medicine.

Associated Press journalists Marilynn Marchione in Milwaukee and Katie Tam in Hong Kong and researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

Can AI flag disease outbreaks faster than humans? Not quite

MATT O'BRIEN and CHRISTINA LARSON Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Did an artificial-intelligence system beat human doctors in warning the world of a severe coronavirus outbreak in China?

In a narrow sense, yes. But what the humans lacked in sheer speed, they more than made up in finesse.

Early warnings of disease outbreaks can help people and governments save lives. In the final days of 2019, an AI system in Boston sent out the first global alert about a new viral outbreak in China. But it took human intelligence to recognize the significance of the outbreak and then awaken response from

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the public health community.

What's more, the mere mortals produced a similar alert only a half-hour behind the AI systems.

For now, AI-powered disease-alert systems can still resemble car alarms — easily triggered and sometimes ignored. A network of medical experts and sleuths must still do the hard work of sifting through rumors to piece together the fuller picture. It's difficult to say what future AI systems, powered by ever larger datasets on outbreaks, may be able to accomplish.

The first public alert outside China about the novel coronavirus came on Dec. 30 from the automated HealthMap system at Boston Children's Hospital. At 11:12 p.m. local time, HealthMap sent an alert about unidentified pneumonia cases in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The system, which scans online news and social media reports, ranked the alert's seriousness as only 3 out of 5. It took days for HealthMap researchers to recognize its importance.

Four hours before the HealthMap notice, New York epidemiologist Marjorie Pollack had already started working on her own public alert, spurred by a growing sense of dread after reading a personal email she received that evening.

"This is being passed around the internet here," wrote her contact, who linked to a post on the Chinese social media forum Pincong. The post discussed a Wuhan health agency notice and read in part: "Unexplained pneumonia???"

Pollack, deputy editor of the volunteer-led Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases, known as ProMed, quickly mobilized a team to look into it. ProMed's more detailed report went out about 30 minutes after the terse HealthMap alert.

Early warning systems that scan social media, online news articles and government reports for signs of infectious disease outbreaks help inform global agencies such as the World Health Organization — giving international experts a head start when local bureaucratic hurdles and language barriers might otherwise get in the way.

Some systems, including ProMed, rely on human expertise. Others are partly or completely automated.

"These tools can help hold feet to the fire for government agencies," said John Brownstein, who runs the HealthMap system as chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital. "It forces people to be more open."

The last 48 hours of 2019 were a critical time for understanding the new virus and its significance. Earlier on Dec. 30, Wuhan Central Hospital doctor Li Wenliang warned his former classmates about the virus in a social media group — a move that led local authorities to summon him for questioning several hours later.

Li, who died Feb. 7 after contracting the virus, told The New York Times that it would have been better if officials had disclosed information about the epidemic earlier. "There should be more openness and transparency," he said.

ProMed reports are often incorporated into other outbreak warning systems, including those run by the World Health Organization, the Canadian government and the Toronto startup BlueDot. WHO also pools data from HealthMap and other sources.

Computer systems that scan online reports for information about disease outbreaks rely on natural language processing, the same branch of artificial intelligence that helps answer questions posed to a search engine or digital voice assistant.

But the algorithms can only be as effective as the data they are scouring, said Nita Madhav, CEO of San Francisco-based disease monitoring firm Metabiota, which first notified its clients about the outbreak in early January.

Madhav said that inconsistency in how different agencies report medical data can stymie algorithms. The text-scanning programs extract keywords from online text, but may fumble when organizations variously report new virus cases, cumulative virus cases, or new cases in a given time interval. The potential for confusion means there's almost always still a person involved in reviewing the data.

"There's still a bit of human in the loop," Madhav said.

Andrew Beam, a Harvard University epidemiologist, said that scanning online reports for key words can help reveal trends, but the accuracy depends on the quality of the data. He also notes that these tech-

niques aren't so novel.

"There is an art to intelligently scraping web sites," Beam said. "But it's also Google's core technology since the 1990s."

Google itself started its own Flu Trends service to detect outbreaks in 2008 by looking for patterns in search queries about flu symptoms. Experts criticized it for overestimating flu prevalence. Google shut down the website in 2015 and handed its technology to nonprofit organizations such as HealthMap to use Google data to build their own models.

Google is now working with Brownstein's team on a similar web-based approach for tracking the geographical spread of tick-borne Lyme disease.

Scientists are also using big data to model possible routes of early disease transmission.

In early January, Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease physician and researcher at Toronto General Hospital, analyzed commercial flight data with BlueDot founder Kamran Khan to see which cities outside mainland China were most connected to Wuhan.

Wuhan stopped outbound commercial air travel in late January — but not before an estimated 5 million people had fled the city, as the Wuhan mayor later told reporters.

"We showed that the highest volume of flights from Wuhan were to Thailand, Japan, and Hong Kong," Bogoch said. "Lo and behold, a few days later we started to see cases pop up in these places."

In 2016, the researchers used a similar approach to predict the spread of the Zika virus from Brazil to southern Florida.

Now that many governments have launched aggressive measures to curb disease transmission, it's harder to build algorithms to predict what's next, Bogoch said.

Artificial intelligence systems depend on vast amounts of prior data to train computers how to interpret new facts. But there are no close parallels to the way China is enforcing quarantine zones that impact hundreds of millions of people.

Larson reported from Washington.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

German security official says suspect in mass shooting appeared to have a far-right motive
HANAU, Germany (AP) — German security official says suspect in mass shooting appeared to have a far-right motive.

Suspect, 1 other found dead after 9 people killed in Germany

By MICHAEL PROBST Associated Press

HANAU, Germany (AP) — A man suspected of fatally shooting nine people in the German city of Hanau was found dead at his home early Thursday, hours after the attacks in and outside two hookah lounges, police said.

Officers also found another body at the same address, police said.

Police gave no details of the suspected gunman but said "there are currently no indications of further perpetrators." They did not give details of his possible motive or how he died, or specify why they believe "with a high degree of probability" that he was the assailant.

The number of dead in the shootings Wednesday evening rose to nine, a police statement said.

German news agency dpa reported, citing unnamed security officials, that a written claim of responsibility and a video were found and are being examined by police.

Henry Faltin, a spokesman for police in southeastern Hesse state, where Hanau is located, declined to comment on the dpa report, or a report by daily Bild that ammunition was also found in the suspect's vehicle.

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Officers sealed off and searched the apartment in Hanau's Kesselstadt district, near the scene of one of the shootings, after following up witness statements on a getaway car. Police said work to confirm the identities of the two bodies at the home was still underway, and they couldn't immediately give details either on them or the identities of the victims of the earlier shootings.

"Thoughts this morning are with the people of Hanau, in whose midst this terrible crime was committed," German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said on Twitter.

"Deep sympathy for the affected families, who are grieving for their dead," the spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said. "We hope with those wounded that they will soon recover."

Earlier Thursday, police said that eight people were killed and around five wounded. They said a dark vehicle was seen leaving the location of the first attack and another shooting was reported at a scene about 2 1/2 kilometers (1 1/2 miles) away.

Police officers swarmed central Hanau, cordoning off the area of one of the shootings as a helicopter hovered overhead. A car covered in thermal foil also could be seen, with shattered glass next to it. Forensic experts in white overalls collected evidence.

Hookah lounges are places where people gather to smoke flavored tobacco from Middle Eastern water pipes.

"This was a terrible evening that will certainly occupy us for a long, long time and we will remember with sadness," Hanau Mayor Claus Kaminsky told the Bild newspaper. Lawmaker Katja Leikert, a member of Merkel's center-right party who represents Hanau in the German parliament, tweeted that it was "a real horror scenario for us all."

Hanau is about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of Frankfurt. It has about 100,000 inhabitants and is in Hesse state.

Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

PM says Australians 'devastated' by domestic violence attack

SYDNEY (AP) — Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Thursday that Australians were "shocked, saddened and devastated" by the deaths of five people including three children after a car fire in apparent domestic violence.

Hannah Baxter, 31, and her children Aaliyah, 6, Lainah, 4, and Trey, 3, died after their car was set alight on a street in suburban Brisbane on Wednesday morning.

Baxter's estranged husband and the children's father, Rowan Baxter, allegedly doused his family with gas before setting the car alight.

The 42-year-old, a former player with the New Zealand Warriors in Australia's National Rugby League football competition, was found dead near the scene, reportedly after stabbing himself.

"Australians all over the country are just shocked, saddened and devastated about what has happened in a suburban street ... where Hannah and her three children were so senselessly and maddeningly murdered in what has occurred in a terrible act of violence," Morrison told reporters.

Angela Lynch, CEO of the Women's Legal Service in Queensland state, of which Brisbane is the capital, called for an overhaul of Australia's family court system.

"Domestic violence services are under pressure everywhere," she told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. She said that women were seeking assistance more than ever and "we should have the systems there, appropriate systems to be able to respond to them."

Carolyn Robinson, from the Beyond DV (domestic violence) organization, said the domestic welfare sector had been shocked by the incident. "Everyone's shocked, I mean in the DV sector, we all work with each other, we all support each other," Robinson told reporters.

"I did speak with several people yesterday, we're just all in shock. It couldn't have been predicted. I hope it never happens again," she said.

This story has corrected the spelling of Robinson's given name from Caroline to Carolyn.

Egypt's once-reviled street dogs get chance at a better life

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Karim Hegazi spends his days in a Cairo clinic taking care of animals long considered a menace in Egypt.

Stray dogs roam in almost every Cairo neighborhood — lurking in construction sites, scavenging through trash and howling nightly atop parked cars. The government says there's around 15 million of them. They bite some 200,000 people a year, according to the World Health Organization, and spread rabies, one of the world's most lethal diseases.

And if that wasn't reason enough to feel revulsion toward dogs, a famous Islamic saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad warns that angels won't enter your home if there's a dog inside.

Yet after centuries of stigma, the street dogs of Egypt are finding popular acceptance, and along with it, surging grassroots support. That includes adoption and medical care, as well as spaying and neutering to keep them from producing more puppies on the streets. Volunteers armed with giant fishing nets and tranquilizer darts embark on regular missions to catch, vaccinate and sterilize dogs before letting them loose.

These efforts are making inroads against the prevailing government policy of extermination by poison.

"I've seen a major shift ... people are seeing a value in strays," said Hegazi, 32, from his veterinary hospital in the upscale suburb of Maadi. He says he's no longer treating just foreign pooches, but also a growing number of adopted "baladi" dogs, the once-reviled Egyptian street breed. Even pious Muslim clients are taking in street dogs. Hegazi says they often reconcile their religious beliefs and love of dogs by keeping them in grassy yards or on rooftops.

Egypt's upper and middle classes have increasingly adopted Western-inspired ideas of dog ownership. Pet hotels, cafes and grooming emporiums are sprouting up in major Egyptian cities. Fueled by the rise of social media, enthusiasm for Cairo's dogs is "moving beyond snob culture," said local advocate Amina Abaza.

A Facebook forum for vet recommendations exploded into a community of 13,000 pet lovers trading stray rescue stories. Dozens of new shelters coordinate adoptions online, flooding Instagram feeds with images of abandoned puppies.

What has surfaced online is spilling into the streets. Some of Cairo's more well-to-do districts are mobilizing spay and neuter teams to counter what advocates describe as gruesome government methods to control the dog population.

The General Organization for Veterinary Services, an arm of the agricultural ministry, routinely sends authorities to kill strays by scattering poison in streets overnight, according to a dozen activists and residents. They say they've woken up to find carcasses piled on curbs, or sick dogs wailing in distress.

"It's a horrible way to die," said Mohamed Shehata, founder of Egyptian Vets for Animal Care, or EVAC. It's the country's first spay and neuter program, also based in Maadi.

The government organization did not respond to questions about its policy. But in a recent report, it described street dogs as a "time bomb that threatens our children," and defended the "merciful killing of dogs that are harmful to people," citing Islamic law.

After the French invaded Egypt in 1797, Napoleon Bonaparte's troops spent two nights shooting all of Cairo's street dogs because of their raucous noise. According to American historian Juan Cole, they were likely employed as informal watchdogs in the city's winding alleys. Major dog eradication campaigns in Egypt stemmed from the city's explosive growth in the early 1800s, when dogs became scavengers dependent on Cairo's ubiquitous mounds of garbage, said Alan Mikhail, professor of Ottoman history at Yale University. As part of a public hygiene push, authorities trapped, shot and poisoned dogs en masse.

These days, a consensus is emerging among experts that "poison is not a real solution to rabies or to overpopulation," said Shehata. A toxic substance called citrinin is used to kill off dogs, but most of it ends up seeping into soil and cement, poisoning gardeners, garbage workers and children playing in the street. Culling street dogs doesn't stop the spread of disease either, he added, as over 70% of the stray popula-

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tion must be vaccinated to attain herd immunity.

Shehata described his group's spaying and neutering efforts as "a more humane, scientific, and effective way," to regulate the country's strays. His group kicked off Egypt's first mass rabies vaccination drive this month, inspired by the WHO's goal to eliminate human deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030.

On a misty morning last weekend, teams of volunteers scampered after the wild dogs in Maadi, bolting down wide boulevards and trash-littered train tracks. A cacophony of yelps and barks filled the air as terrified dogs were trapped in nets, then injected with vaccines. Neighbors woken by the noise watched from their balconies in bewilderment. The method may appear ruthless, but Shehata insists it's for the best, and keeps the dogs rabies-immune for a year.

Volunteers also spay and neuter strays at the clinic. The dogs are dropped off where they were caught, with a notch cut in their ear to show they've been sterilized. The model is being replicated in at least five central Cairo districts, where local groups say they've seen dog populations stabilize or decline and the threat of rabies wane, although the government doesn't make rabies infection figures public.

Vigilante hunters still scatter poison in dog food and request government exterminators, said Rasha Hussein, a Maadi resident who runs a vet training center outside Cairo. But she said efforts by groups like EVAC have encouraged compassion. Residents now coordinate meal deliveries and medical checks for ear-tagged dogs that have become a mainstay in their areas. Just five years ago, EVAC volunteers were chased out of the neighborhood.

Shehata says his teams have treated some 10,000 stray dogs over the last few years.

Egypt's push follows successes in similar developing countries. Animal welfare proponents hope these gains can spark a worldwide movement.

Turkey's cities, which once promoted systematic slaughter of street dogs, now provide strays with government-sponsored medical evaluations, sterilization and shelter. Indian provinces historically ravaged by rabies, where Shehata trained, have driven down death rates through coordinated campaigns.

But leading veterinarians say Egypt's efforts still lack state funding or a legal framework to protect animals, meaning the future of the country's street dogs remains uncertain.

"We will do our best to reach our targets," said Hegazi while carrying his next patient, barking and snorting, into the exam room. "But it'll take a much longer time."

Takeaways from the Democratic debate

By **NICHOLAS RICCARDI** and **WILL WEISSERT** Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Six Democratic presidential hopefuls met on the debate stage in Las Vegas, but it was the newcomer, former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg, who received the most attention, and none of it positive. Here are some key takeaways from the debate.

THE \$60 BILLION PUNCHING BAG

Bloomberg was the object of scorn, ridicule and contempt. And that was just in the first five minutes of the debate.

With all candidates flashing heat, a measure of the urgency they feel to survive in what is becoming an increasingly bitter nomination fight, the attacks focused on Bloomberg were a clear measure of his perceived strength. He has spent more than \$400 million so far on advertising that in turn has given him strong standing in state and national polls.

Sen. Bernie Sanders recalled Bloomberg's support of stop-and-frisk policing targeting minorities. Sen. Elizabeth Warren recalled how Bloomberg had mocked women for being "horse-faced" and "fat" and compared him to Trump. Sen. Amy Klobuchar quipped that "I don't think you look at Donald Trump and say I think we need someone richer in the White House." Former Vice President Joe Biden said Bloomberg condoned racist police practices, and Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, said Bloomberg was trying to "buy out" the Democratic Party.

But his biggest struggle came when Warren hammered him over allegations of sexism and mistreatment of women in his company.

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Bloomberg attempted to defend his record and deflect the attacks on him by turning them into attacks on President Donald Trump. And he effectively raised questions about whether Americans would embrace a socialist like Sanders.

But the glare was harsh, and the attacks landed with force.

Even if you are worth \$60 billion it is hard to win a 5-on-1 fight.

NOT THE ERA OF GOOD FEELING

For eight debates, the Democrats largely tiptoed around disagreements except for desultory disputes about health care policies. But on Wednesday night, everyone came with sharp elbows.

It was almost impossible to keep track of the fights. Buttigieg and Klobuchar tussled over experience and the Minnesota senator forgetting the name of Mexico's president. Buttigieg and Sanders argued about the Vermont senator's big-ticket plans and refusal to release his full medical records. Warren clashed with Buttigieg and Klobuchar over their health care plans. And everyone piled onto Bloomberg.

The former New York mayor was the only candidate who didn't really go on the attack, other than the occasional swipe at the self-declared socialist Sanders.

In the end, that dynamic may again benefit Sanders, who leads in the polls and is watching his rivals spend most of their energy tearing each other down rather than targeting him.

RETURN OF WARREN THE FIGHTER

Warren rose to prominence in the Democratic field with a fighting spirit that defined the early months of her campaign. But her disappointing showings in Iowa and New Hampshire left her campaign struggling.

On Wednesday, she decided to get back into the fight.

She slammed Bloomberg -- that was no surprise as she's been an antagonist of billionaires playing in politics for years. But Warren also attacked Klobuchar, saying her health care plan was just a "Post-it note." She accused Buttigieg of being in debt to his rich campaign supporters and having a health care plan that was just a "PowerPoint" designed by his consultants. She slammed fellow liberal Sanders, accusing him of letting his supporters trash anyone with a plan.

But it was her prosecutorial approach to Bloomberg over his company's treatment of women that stood out.

Whatever happens on Saturday, and beyond, Warren regained her fighting voice.

THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Buttigieg, who finished in the top two in Iowa and New Hampshire with Sanders, reserved some of his harshest criticism for Sanders, a man 40 years his elder.

He warned that Democrats could wake up after more than a dozen states vote on Super Tuesday on March 3 and have only Bloomberg and Sanders left on the ballot. He then quipped that the party may want to nominate "someone who is actually a Democrat."

The crowd inside the Las Vegas casino hadn't yet finished chuckling and hooting when he continued by saying Sanders "wants to burn this party down" and Bloomberg "wants to buy this party out."

Sanders, a senator from Vermont and avowed democratic socialist, responded by saying that Buttigieg's campaign has been too reliant on "billionaire" big donors, touching off another intense exchange.

Their back and forth continued through criticism of Sanders supporters who have frequently been accused of bullying behavior online. Sanders said he personally had denounced such behavior. This prompted Buttigieg to say he believed the senator but, "What it is it about your campaign in particular that seems to be motivating this type of behavior?"

On this night, Buttigieg had the most at stake, with Sanders standing in Nevada polls well ahead of the man who has run even with him in the first two contests.

But Sanders did nothing likely to undermine his standing as the leading candidate so far.

DOES KLOBENTUM CONTINUE?

The last debate was rocket fuel for Klobuchar. Her strong performance vaulted her to a third-place finish in New Hampshire and onto Nevada. But it may be hard for lightning to strike twice.

The Minnesota senator often got drowned out in the high-octane bickering Wednesday, or pulled down

into the mud. At one point she pulled from her supply of ready quips, saying of Sanders and Bloomberg as they argued over capitalism that there is "a boxing rematch in Vegas on Saturday and these guys should go down there."

The most damaging exchange was between Klobuchar and Buttigieg, who have tangled before. Asked about her embarrassing gaffe in forgetting the name of Mexico's president, she had to fend off Buttigieg, who claimed it disproved her argument that Washington has prepared her to be president. She also alternately scrapped with and aligned with Warren.

"Are you calling me dumb?" Klobuchar asked Buttigieg incredulously. Later, she added, "I wish everyone was as perfect as you, Pete."

A little over a week ago in New Hampshire, Klobuchar clearly stood out. This time was much harder as everyone battled for survival.

DID BIDEN REVIVE HIS CAMPAIGN?

Another candidate in need of a big night to reverse perceptions that his campaign was struggling was Biden.

For a good portion of the debate, he receded. He joined in the attacks on Bloomberg, but largely avoided some of the more testy exchanges.

When Warren said that Biden was "in the pocket" of Republican Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, Biden fought back. He also tried to return to his "Middle Class Joe" biography about his family's financial struggles.

He did not offer voters any new rationale for voting for him.

NFL's Saints head to court in Catholic Church email dispute

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The New Orleans Saints headed to court Thursday in a bid to block the release of hundreds of confidential emails detailing the behind-the-scenes public relations work the team did for the area's Roman Catholic archdiocese amid its sexual abuse crisis.

The request comes amid claims that the NFL team joined the Archdiocese of New Orleans in a "pattern and practice" of concealing sexual abuse — an allegation the Saints have vehemently denied.

Attorneys for some two dozen men suing the church say the emails show team officials had a say in deciding which priests the archdiocese named on a 2018 list of dozens of "credibly accused" clergy members, a roster an Associated Press analysis found was undercounted by at least 20 names.

The Saints say their involvement was limited to a team executive preparing church leaders for the publicity surrounding the credibly accused list.

Retired Judge Carolyn Gill-Jefferson will hear arguments Thursday and recommend whether the 276 documents in question should be made public. She was appointed "special master" in the dispute by an Orleans Parish Civil District Court judge overseeing a lawsuit against the archdiocese over a longtime deacon accused of abusing schoolchildren decades ago.

The AP filed a motion urging the release of the emails, calling the communications a matter of "utmost public concern."

The news organization argued in court papers that the Saints and church leaders have not proved the documents are confidential, and that any privacy interests they have "are minimal compared to the public's concern about the roles the Archdiocese and the Saints played in managing public opinion."

The Saints say they have nothing to hide but have asked Gill-Jefferson to apply "the normal rules of civil discovery" in the lawsuit, rather than allowing attorneys for the men suing the church to "selectively disseminate" the emails before trial. The team has said it does not oppose the emails being made public at a later stage of the litigation.

"The Saints motion to maintain confidentiality is not rooted in a desire to conceal information," Saints attorneys wrote in court filings last week.

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Team owner Gayle Benson, a devout Catholic who has donated millions of dollars to church causes, said last week she is proud of the role the team played in assisting the archdiocese, efforts she said were part of a bid to help "heal the community."

Benson, who inherited the team following her husband Tom Benson's 2018 death, said the team's senior vice president of communications advised Archbishop Gregory Aymond to be "honest, complete and transparent" about clergy abuse.

The attorneys for the men suing the church, however, have said the Saints and archdiocese have misled the public about their coordination and the contents of the emails.

They argued in court papers that the public has a right to know "whether this is an untoward relationship designed not only to mitigate the PR fallout from the church sexual abuse crisis but also to spin some of the underlying facts."

AP FACT CHECK: Dems' debate flubs; Trump untruths at rally

By CALVIN WOODWARD and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The latest Democratic presidential debate was a raucous one, ripe for exaggerations and distortions as Mike Bloomberg made his debut on the debate stage and rivals went after him and each other. President Donald Trump weighed in on the feisty performance at a rally where he mischaracterized what some Democrats want to do with health care.

A look at how some of their claims Wednesday night stack up with the facts:

MIKE BLOOMBERG, on the stop-and-frisk policing policy when he was New York mayor: "What happened, however, was it got out of control and when we discovered — I discovered — that we were doing many, many, too many stop and frisks, we cut 95% of them out."

THE FACTS: That's a distortion of how stop and frisk declined. That happened because of a court order, not because Bloomberg learned that it was being overused.

In Bloomberg's first 10 years in office, the number of stop-and-frisk actions increased nearly 600% from when he took office in 2002, reaching a peak of nearly 686,000 stops in 2011. That declined to about 192,000 documented stops in 2013, his final year as mayor.

Bloomberg achieved his claim of a 95% cut by cherry-picking the quarterly high point of 203,500 stops in the first quarter of 2012 and comparing that with the 12,485 stops in the last quarter of 2013.

The former mayor defended the practice even after leaving office at the end of 2013 and only apologized for it a few weeks before declaring his candidacy for presidency.

TRUMP, on Bernie Sanders' "Medicare for all" plan: "Think of this: 180 million Americans are going to lose health care coverage under this plan. But if you don't mind, I'm not going to criticize it tonight. Let them keep going and I'll start talking about it about two weeks out from the election." — Arizona rally.

THE FACTS: That's a thorough misrepresentation of the Sanders plan as well as similar plans by Democrats in Congress. People wouldn't "lose" coverage. Under Sanders, they would be covered by a new and universal government plan that replaces private and job-based insurance. Democrats who stop short of proposing to replace private and job-based insurance would offer an option for people to take a Medicare-like plan, also toward the goal of ensuring universal coverage.

BLOOMBERG, citing his philanthropy's work with the Sierra Club: "Already we've closed 304 out of the 530 coal fire plants in the United States, and we've closed 80 out of the 200 or 300 that are in Europe."

THE FACTS: He's wrongly taking credit for driving the U.S. coal industry to its knees.

The U.S. coal industry's plunge is largely due to market forces, above all drops in prices of natural gas and renewable energy that have made costlier coal-fired power plants much less competitive for electric utilities. Bloomberg has indeed contributed huge sums to efforts to close coal plants and fight climate change, but against the backdrop of an industry besieged on other fronts.

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U.S. coal production peaked in 2008, but since then has fallen steadily. That's due largely to a boom in oil and gas production from U.S. shale, begun under the Obama administration, that made natural gas far more abundant and cheaper, and falling prices for wind and solar energy, partly because of improving technology in the renewable sector.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reaffirmed in a report in December the extent to which the market has turned away from coal.

ELIZABETH WARREN: Buttigieg's health care plan is "a thin version of a plan."

PETE BUTTIGIEG: His own proposal "is the plan that solves the problem."

THE FACTS: Warren, a Massachusetts senator, is quick to dismiss a plan that would cover virtually all U.S. citizens and legal residents.

An analysis of health care overhaul plans by the Urban Institute and the Commonwealth Fund found that an approach like the one advocated by Buttigieg, a former South Bend, Indiana, mayor, would reduce the number of uninsured people from 32 million to below 7 million, mainly people without legal permission to be in the country.

The proposal from Buttigieg features a new government-sponsored "public option" plan that even people with employer-sponsored coverage could join voluntarily.

Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Ellen Knickmeyer and Amanda Seitz contributed to this report.

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

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Newman released from hospital; Chastain to race Las Vegas

By JENNA FRYER AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Ryan Newman was released from a Florida hospital Wednesday, about 42 hours after his frightening crash on the final lap of the Daytona 500.

Roush Fenway Racing released a photo of Newman leaving a Daytona Beach hospital holding the hands of his two young daughters. The announcement came just a few hours after the team said he was fully alert and walking around the hospital.

The 42-year-old Indiana native was taken by ambulance directly from the track in serious condition following the crash Monday night. Doctors said two hours after the accident that Newman's injuries were not life-threatening, but no details have been released.

His release from the hospital was rapid. Roush Fenway said earlier Wednesday that Newman "continues to show great improvement." The team added that "true to his jovial nature, he has also been joking around with staff, friends and family while playing with his two daughters" and included a photo of Newman standing in a hospital gown, smiling with his arms around the girls.

Two hours later, he was leaving the hospital in jeans, a T-shirt and socks, holding hands with his girls. The team released a third photo of Newman and his daughters with the staff that treated him following his crash.

"First and foremost, our focus remains with Ryan and his family as he continues to recover," Roush Fenway president Steve Newmark said. "We also want to express our sincere gratitude to all of those who have offered support and taken the time to send their thoughts and prayers to Ryan, his family and everyone at Roush Fenway Racing."

"The NASCAR community has long prided itself on being a close-knit family. That is never more evident than during these types of moments."

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Added team principal owner John W. Henry: "All of us at Fenway Sports Group are thankful for the wonderful news about Ryan's progress, and his release from the hospital today. Ryan is one tough hombre and we wish him a full recovery. We look forward to seeing Ryan and his family at the track again soon."

Roush Fenway said Ross Chastain will pilot the No. 6 Ford beginning this weekend at Las Vegas Motor Speedway and that a timetable for Newman's return has yet to be determined.

Chastain is running for the Xfinity Series championship this year for Kaulig Racing, but drove in the Daytona 500 last weekend for Spire Motorsports in a car fielded by Chip Ganassi.

"We want to express our appreciation to everyone at Chip Ganassi Racing as well as Kaulig Racing for allowing Ross to fill in for Ryan in the No. 6 on such short notice," Newmark said.

Chastain, an eighth-generation watermelon farmer, is gradually trying to move into NASCAR's top Cup Series. He's got 72 career Cup starts for small teams but has been waiting for a break in competitive equipment.

Chastain has won three times in the Truck Series and twice in the Xfinity Series, including a win at Las Vegas in 2018.

"No one could ever take the place of Ryan Newman on the track, and I can't wait to have him back," Chastain tweeted. "As we continue to pray for a full and speedy recovery, I'll do my best to make him and everyone at Roush Fenway Racing proud."

Newman was injured when he crashed while leading NASCAR's biggest race. Contact from Ryan Blaney sent Newman spinning into the wall and his Ford went airborne, where it was then hit by Corey LaJoie in the driver side door.

The car landed on its roof, slid across Daytona International Speedway and came to a rest upside down and on fire, with gasoline pouring out of the vehicle. It took a safety team nearly 20 minutes to remove Newman from the car and he was taken directly to the hospital.

Blaney and LaJoie have stepped back from racing to process their roles in the accident. LaJoie climbed from his own burning car and dropped to his knees on the track, learning only after he was checked at the care center that Newman was injured.

Blaney seemed distraught as he paced beside his car following his second-place finish to Denny Hamlin. Fellow driver Bubba Wallace, one of Blaney's best friends, said he spent time with Blaney on Tuesday and advised him to stay off social media for a few days.

"He's holding up, of course devastated and bummed about the situation," Wallace posted on Twitter. "Had to sit there and explain to him could've happened to him or any of us in the field. IT'S RACING. Just unfortunate to be on either end of it."

Wallace also praised Blaney's attempt to push Newman to the win in a move of brand alliance for Ford. When Blaney tried to lock onto Newman's bumper to give him a shove the cars didn't align properly and Newman was instead hooked into a spin.

"I know Ford should be proud to have him under their banner because he was so content on pushing his Ford teammate to win the biggest race of the year," Wallace wrote. "Which makes it worse (because) a simple selfless gesture went south in the blink of an eye."

More AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/apf-AutoRacing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Passengers leave ship docked off Japan after quarantine ends

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

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

The quarantine's flop was underlined as Japanese 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.

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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 has the most infections outside of China, where the illness known as COVID-19 emerged late last year.

Many foreign governments 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 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."

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato initially said Wednesday that those with negative virus tests had fulfilled the Japanese quarantine requirement and were free to walk out and go home on public transportation. He said passengers were only asked to watch their health carefully for a few days and notify health authorities if they have any symptoms or worries.

But after meeting with experts later in the day, he urged the former passengers to refrain from non-essential outings and try to stay home for about two weeks.

"COVID-19 is not 100% known, and a lot of people got infected on the Diamond Princess. Taking those factors into consideration, we believe taking extra caution will contribute to preventing the risk of future infections," he said.

Some passengers said on Twitter they received health forms 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.

Still, Masao Sumida, an 84-year-old passenger from Chiba, near Tokyo, told NHK television he was worried people around him might have doubts. "I know I tested negative, but I'm afraid people may try to stay away from me," he said.

Mitsuo Kaku, a professor at Tohoku University's Laboratory of Infectious Disease, said on NHK that the risk of virus transmission by those who tested negative is low, but passengers who get off the ship should "use ample precautions" to protect themselves and people around them for about two more weeks.

About 500 passengers had left the ship by Wednesday evening, and Japanese officials were to spend the next three days disembarking about 2,000 others. The Diamond Princess was quarantined after one passenger who left the ship earlier in Hong Kong was found to have the virus.

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 in a report 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.

Some medical experts who assisted with the quarantine have said anti-infection measures were often sloppy on the ship. Four health workers — a quarantine official, a physician, a paramedic who took an infected passenger to a hospital and a health ministry official — became infected.

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

Before the quarantine on the ship had ended, the United States evacuated more than 300 Americans and put them in quarantine in the U.S. for another 14 days. South Korea on Wednesday returned seven people

from the cruise ship, placing the six South Koreans and one Japanese family member into quarantine.

Australia evacuated about 180 people early Thursday who will be staying for two weeks at a facility near the northern city of Darwin. And a chartered Cathay Pacific flight carrying 106 passengers arrived back in Hong Kong, which will quarantine them at a suburban government housing block.

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

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

Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo. Associated Press writer Maria Cheng in London contributed to this report.

Finally let off cruise, passengers desperate for flight home

By **MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer**

BANGKOK (AP) — The cheers of celebration have faded. The waving of roses has ceased. Having finally reached a friendly port in Cambodia willing to accept them after nearly two weeks of uncertainty at sea, hundreds of cruise ship passengers eyed warily over fears of a new virus are now simply trying to find a way home.

"We're in this sort of surreal world," said Lydia Miller, 55, of Orcas Island, Washington, who is camped out at a hotel in the capital, Phnom Penh, waiting for word on how she and her husband might be able to return to the U.S. "It's a weird feeling to travel and go on a trip and you don't know when you can come home."

The Westerdam arrived Feb. 13 in Cambodia after repeatedly being denied entry to other ports. The thrill of the moment, complete with a visit from the country's prime minister greeting passengers with hugs and flowers, has now evaporated for those still facing a logistical nightmare to get home.

Travel options already limited by the number of airlines serving Cambodia have been narrowed by a growing list of countries denying entry to passengers who were aboard the Westerdam.

A diplomat working with the passengers in Phnom Penh said getting people home remains complicated by individual countries' travel restrictions and a dearth of available flights. That was echoed by Holland America Line, which operates the Westerdam and has been coordinating passengers' flights.

"We showed up in a city unexpected and there's only so many flights a night and we have a lot of people we're trying to funnel through that system and we're putting a lot of stress on that system," Holland America's president, Orlando Ashford, said by phone from Phnom Penh.

"It's a math problem: How many people do you have? How many seats do you have?"

Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan are among those refusing to allow passengers in, making flying to Europe and the Americas difficult. Some airlines, such as Emirates, stop in Bangkok before proceeding to hubs such as Dubai, further limiting available flights.

Still, Ashford expressed hope that remaining passengers would be on their way home "in a couple of days."

Miller and her husband changed their travel arrangements three times as Holland America repeatedly revised its itinerary when Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and the American territory of Guam refused to allow it to dock. They spent hours walking 10 miles around the ship each day, listening to podcasts, making their way through a stash of issues of The New Yorker that they toted along and perfecting their pingpong game. They have flights scheduled for Saturday via Seoul, but know they won't be able to board them because the South Korean government would deny them entry.

When they finally disembarked the ship in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, Miller's husband, John, was so grateful he sunk to his knees and pressed his hands together in gratitude and joy. Their fears of being stuck at sea were gone, and the couple decided to make the most of their time, meandering along the Mekong River, buying street food and otherwise relishing their time in the Cambodian capital.

After one passenger from the ship was found to have contracted the illness known as COVID-19, though, they were directed to report to a hotel where other passengers were gathered and they knew getting

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home might not be so simple.

"It was just this horrible gut feeling that everything changed in that moment," she said.

Tony Martin-Vegue, whose wife, Christina Kerby, remains in Phnom Penh, began immediately preparing for her return home to California's Bay Area once she got off the ship. He cleaned the house and, with the couple's 10-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter, picked up flowers and a favorite local coffee and planned a party to welcome her home. Now he's not sure when that might happen.

"It's kind of limbo right now," he said. "I'm worried about how she's going to get home."

Kerby has chronicled her time aboard the Westerdam, from a poolside yoga class to daily ice cream offerings to a towel-folding demonstration. She wrote of feeling "jubilation and relief" as the ship pulled into port and the "terrible and frightening" ordeal of "doctors in moon suits" poking a long swab up her nose to test her for the virus. The immediate joy of reaching land has given way to the realization she doesn't know when she'll return home.

"As the days go on I just feel like the probability of getting her home soon seems to be shrinking as the disease spreads and governments are continuing to react to it," Martin-Vegue said. "This doesn't have an outcome that's around the corner."

The Westerdam, with 2,257 passengers and crew aboard, began letting passengers off on Friday as they found flights home. But that was stopped once news broke that an 83-year-old American woman who had been on the ship and subsequently traveled to Malaysia was found to be carrying the virus. Some 255 passengers and 747 crew members were held on the ship while further testing was conducted.

Cambodia's Ministry of Health said Wednesday that all the tests came back negative and that all passengers were reported to be healthy and fever-free. After that, remaining passengers were allowed off the ship.

They were taken to the same Phnom Penh hotel where others from the Westerdam milled around a sprawling lobby dotted with palm trees waiting for news on flights home. Two small American flags were set on a table with representatives from the U.S. Embassy; a big yellow kangaroo adorned a table for Australians. White boards announced news of flight arrangements and updates about new restrictions on which countries would allow passengers to pass through.

"We're going to any country that will safely accept and transit and allow our guests to transition," Ashford said.

Those who have already been on land for several days cautioned the newly disembarked guests to temper their expectations about reaching home soon.

The Millers, who run an inn at home, had saved up frequent flier miles for years for their trip and purposely picked a cruise itinerary with lots of time in port and fewer days simply sailing at sea. They were drawn by the thrill and uncertainty of travel, but now are just looking for the normalcy of routine, to share morning coffee at home, tend to their farm animals and talk to arriving guests.

"We love traveling and we love every day not knowing what's going to happen and just being spontaneous," Miller said. "But I'm longing for just the ordinary life right now of knowing what's going to be the next day."

Associated Press writers Grant Peck in Bangkok and Sopheng Cheang in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, contributed to this report.

Toxic Superfund cleanups decline to more than 30-year low

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration completed the fewest cleanups of toxic Superfund sites last year than any administration since the program's first years in the 1980s, figures released by the Environmental Protection Agency indicated Wednesday.

The federal government wrapped up cleanups at six Superfund sites around the country in the 2019 budget year, the fewest since three in 1986, EPA online records showed.

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The Superfund program was born out of the 1970's disaster at Love Canal in New York, where industrial contaminants poisoned groundwater, spurred complaints of health problems and prompted presidential emergency declarations. Congress started the Superfund program in 1980, with the mission of tackling the country's worst contaminated sites to remove the threat to surrounding residents and the environment.

President Donald Trump campaigned on pledges to cut environmental protections he saw as unfriendly to business. In office, Trump has presided over rollbacks and proposed rollbacks of a series of protections for air, water, wildlife and other environmental and public health concerns, as well as sharp declines in many categories of enforcement against polluters.

The EPA posted the 2019 figures on its website earlier this month. The tally also shows one cleanup completed so far this budget year.

"Cleaning up Superfund Sites has been and remains a top priority of this Administration," EPA spokeswoman Corry Schiermeyer said in response to questions from The Associated Press. "Many of the sites currently on the NPL (National Priorities List) are very large, complex and technically challenging and often require numerous construction projects to complete that are frequently phased in over many years."

Superfund cleanups completed fell into the single digits just once before in the past 20 years, in 2014.

The AP reported in January that the administration also has built up the biggest backlog of unfunded toxic Superfund cleanup projects in at least 15 years, nearly triple the number that were stalled for lack of money in the Obama era.

The administration called Superfund cleanups part of the core mission of the EPA. But Trump's budget proposal for next year calls for slashing money for the Superfund program by \$113 million. As in previous years, the White House asked Congress to cut the EPA budget by more than 20%.

Congress largely has ignored Trump's calls for EPA cuts, keeping the agency's money roughly stable.

Elizabeth Southerland, a former EPA official who now is part of a network of hundreds of former EPA staffers often critical of Trump rollbacks, said the administration was failing to brief Congress on how much it really needs for the program. She called it "heartbreaking" for the people at risk around the sites.

"Communities are being forced to live for years longer than necessary waiting for cleanup to be completed," Southerland said.

Under Trump, the EPA pointed to a different measure in declaring it was making progress on Superfund cleanups: the number of cleaned up sites officially deleted from the roster of more than 1,300 Superfund projects.

But deletions from the list typically reflect cleanup work done over decades and often completed on the ground years ago, meaning Trump frequently was taking credit for work done under President Barack Obama and other predecessors. The EPA said it deleted all or part of 27 sites from the list last year.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 20, the 51st day of 2020. There are 315 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth as he flew aboard Project Mercury's Friendship 7 spacecraft, which circled the globe three times in a flight lasting 4 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds before splashing down safely in the Atlantic Ocean 800 miles southeast of Bermuda.

On this date:

In 1792, President George Washington signed an act creating the United States Post Office Department.

In 1809, the Supreme Court ruled that no state legislature could annul the judgments or determine the jurisdictions of federal courts.

In 1862, William Wallace Lincoln, the 11-year-old son of President Abraham Lincoln and first lady Mary Todd Lincoln, died at the White House, apparently of typhoid fever.

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In 1905, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, upheld, 7-2, compulsory vaccination laws intended to protect the public's health.

In 1942, Lt. Edward "Butch" O'Hare became the U.S. Navy's first flying ace of World War II by shooting down five Japanese bombers while defending the aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* in the South Pacific.

In 1959, the Dow Jones industrial average closed above 600 for the first time, at 602.21.

In 1965, America's Ranger 8 spacecraft crashed on the moon, as planned, after sending back thousands of pictures of the lunar surface.

In 1971, the National Emergency Warning Center in Colorado erroneously ordered U.S. radio and TV stations off the air; some stations heeded the alert, which was not lifted for about 40 minutes.

In 1987, a bomb left by Unabomber Ted Kaczynski exploded behind a computer store in Salt Lake City, seriously injuring store owner Gary Wright. Soviet authorities released Jewish activist Josef Begun.

In 1998, Tara Lipinski of the U.S. won the ladies' figure skating gold medal at the Nagano (NAH'-guh-noh) Olympics; Michelle Kwan won the silver.

In 2003, a fire sparked by pyrotechnics broke out during a concert by the group Great White at The Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island, killing 100 people and injuring about 200 others.

In 2007, in a victory for President George W. Bush, a divided federal appeals court ruled that Guantanamo Bay detainees could not use the U.S. court system to challenge their indefinite imprisonment.

Ten years ago: Alexander Haig, a soldier and statesman who'd held high posts in three Republican administrations and some of the U.S. military's top jobs, died in Baltimore at 85. Floods and mudslides on the Portuguese island of Madeira claimed more than 40 lives.

Five years ago: Islamic State militants unleashed suicide bombings in eastern Libya, killing at least 40 people in what the group said was retaliation for Egyptian airstrikes against the extremists' aggressive new branch in North Africa. Maureen McDonnell, the wife of former Virginia Republican Gov. Bob McDonnell, was sentenced to one year and 1 day in prison for her role in a bribery scheme that destroyed her husband's political career.

One year ago: Police in Chicago said "Empire" actor Jessie Smollett was charged with making a false police report when he said he'd been attacked by two men who hurled racist and anti-gay slurs and looped a rope around his neck. (Prosecutors would drop the case in March.) College basketball star Zion Williamson was injured in the opening moments of Duke's 88-72 loss to North Carolina after his Nike shoe came apart; Williamson suffered a mild knee sprain. Police in Syracuse, New York, said longtime Syracuse basketball coach Jim Boeheim struck and killed a man along an interstate highway as he tried to avoid hitting the man's disabled vehicle; after an investigation, authorities filed no charges against Boeheim.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Sidney Poitier is 93. Racing Hall of Famer Bobby Unser is 86. Racing Hall of Famer Roger Penske is 83. Singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie is 79. Hockey Hall of Famer Phil Esposito is 78. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is 78. Movie director Mike Leigh is 77. Actress Brenda Blethyn is 74. Actress Sandy Duncan is 74. Actor Peter Strauss is 73. Rock musician Billy Zoom (X) is 72. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is 69. Country singer Kathie Baillie is 69. Actor John Voldstad is 69. Newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst is 66. Actor Anthony Head is 66. Country singer Leland Martin is 63. Actor James Wilby is 62. Rock musician Sebastian Steinberg is 61. Comedian Joel Hodgson (HAHD'-suhn) is 60. Basketball Hall of Famer Charles Barkley is 57. Rock musician Ian Brown (Stone Roses) is 57. Actor Willie Garson is 56. Actor French Stewart is 56. Actor Ron Eldard is 55. Model Cindy Crawford is 54. Actor Andrew Shue is 53. Actress Lili Taylor is 53. Actress Andrea Savage is 47. Singer Brian Littrell is 45. Actress Lauren Ambrose is 42. Actor Jay Hernandez is 42. Actress Chelsea Peretti is 42. Country musician Coy Bowles is 41. Actor Michael Zegen is 41. Actress Majandra Delfino is 39. Actor Jocko Sims is 39. Singer-musician Chris Thile (THEE'-lee) is 39. Actress-singer Jessie Mueller is 37. MLB All-Star pitcher Justin Verlander is 37. Comedian Trevor Noah is 36. Actor Jake Richardson is 35. Actress Daniella Pineda is 33. Actor Miles Teller is 33. Singer Rihanna is 32. Actor Jack Falahee is 31.

Thought for Today: "Life begets life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself that one becomes rich." — Sarah Bernhardt, French actress (1844-1923).