

# Groton Daily Independent

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It's Boys' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM

 **Milbank Bulldogs** VS 

**Groton Area Tigers**

AT MILBANK ON FEB. 21, 2020

5:00 p.m.: **Boys C Game** - sponsored by Ronayne Law Office

6:15 p.m.: **Boys JV Game** - Julie & Carson Larson Family

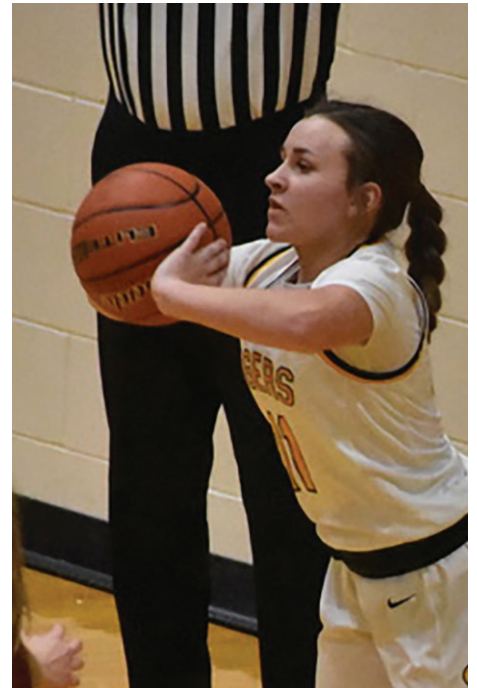
7:45 p.m.: **Boys Varsity Game**  
Sponsored by Aberdeen Chrysler Center

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



**Madeline Flihs ties up Maurina Street in the scramble for the basketball.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Allyssa Locke gets ready to inbound the ball.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Lady Tigers beat Milbank

Groton Area's defense provided problems for Milbank's shooters as the Tigers posted a 41-35 win over Milbank. The game was played in Groton Thursday night.

Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 9-6, 15-12 and 33-24. Groton Area opened up an 10-point lead in the game, 40-30, and held off a late Milbank rally for the win.

Gracie Traphagen led the Tigers with 19 points followed by Alyssa Thaller and Allyssa Locke with seven apiece, Brooke Gengerke had four and Madeline Flihs and Kaycie Hawkins each had two points.

Groton Area made 14 of 47 shots for 29 percent while Milbank was 15 of 43 for 35 percent. From the line, Groton Area was 10 of 16 for 63 percent off of Milbank's 17 team fouls and Milbank was three of five for 60 percent off of Groton Area's nine team fouls. The Tigers had eight turnovers while Milbank had 11.

Maurina Street led the Bulldogs with 15 points while Jaecy Engebretson had 12, Madi Thue four and Lindsey Mertens and Isabella Anderson each had two points.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 29-14. Scoring for Groton Area: Trista Keith 5, Sydney Leicht 4, Shallyn Foertsch 4, Maddie bjerke 4, Aspen Johnson 3, Emma Schinkel 3, Marlee Tollifson 2, Madeline Fleihs 2, Cadence Feist 1.

Jenna Dexter led Milbank with eight.

Milbank made a basket with four seconds left to win the C game, 31-29. Scoring for Groton Area: Emma Schinkel 10, Anna Fjeldheim 6, Carly Guthmiller 5, Sydney Leicht 4, Lydai Meier 2 and Cadence Feist 2.



**Gracie Traphagen looks for an opening through the Milbank defense.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

- Paul Kosel

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## Groton City Council February 18 Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2020

The Groton City Council met on the above date at 7:00pm at the Community Center for their second monthly meeting with the following members present: Wells, Blackmun, Cutler, Babcock and Mayor Hanlon presiding. Also present were: Attorney Drew Johnson, Finance Officer Hope Block, and Kathy Sundermeyer.

Public comments were welcomed pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1, but none were received.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Blackmun and seconded by Cutler. All members voted aye.

Moved by Wells and seconded by Babcock to authorize the following bills for payment. All members voted aye.

Payroll	\$20,898.65	Employee salaries
Executive	323.2	
Administrative	\$3,326.95	
Public Safety	\$7,246.02	
Public Works	\$9,110.88	
Culture & Recreation	\$891.60	
First State Bank	\$6,918.68	SS and WH
First State Bank	\$466.66	HSA contributions
Consolidated Fed Credit Union	\$1,050.00	Employee savings
City of Groton	\$509.96	Utility deposit refunds
SD Retirement System	\$8,308.27	Employee retirement
FOP Lodge #4	\$100.00	2020 dues
Burt Glover	\$0.23	Utility deposit refund
Blake Merkel	\$140.04	Utility deposit refund
Bill Spreeman	\$441.13	Utility deposit refund and overpayment
Darin Stange	\$24.77	Utility deposit refund
Web Water	\$13,594.23	Water 1/20
Pressure Washer Central	\$42.95	Battery tender charger
Full Circle Ag	\$60.00	Sewer pump station generator rent
Heartland Power	\$75,918.91	Power 1/20
James Valley	\$608.45	Utilities
MJs Sinclair	\$1,573.47	Gas, oil, put tires on patrol vehicle
United States Postal Service	\$198.38	Utility billing postage
Auto Zone	\$763.84	Oil, filters
SD Supplemental Retirement	\$285.00	Employee retirement
A&B Solutions	\$218.95	Copier rent
Terex	\$30.73	Digger truck spring
April Abeln	\$244.98	Med flex
Cole Paper	\$120.00	Trash bags
WAPA	\$23,561.07	Power 1/20
Locators & Supplies	\$112.84	Hydrant marker
Graham	\$595.96	Ford patrol vehicle snow tires
Branden Abeln	\$94.00	Lunch Huron Federal Surplus trip, personal phone use
Landon Johnson	\$14.00	Lunch Huron Federal Surplus trip

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Paul Kosel \$80.00 Personal phone use  
Dan Sunne \$880.08 Personal phone use, med flex  
Groton Ford \$453.75 Check engine light on, replaced plugs and coil boots on 17 Ford  
Avera Occupational Medicine \$101.95 Drug testing  
Share Corp \$122.28 Shop soap  
Best Western \$209.98 LJ lodging for JUTS  
Ken's Food Fair \$145.02 Gas, paper products  
Heartland Waste \$8,276.85 Garbage hauling 1/20  
Crawford \$6.33 Yellow dump truck drain valve  
SD Federal Property Agency \$563.75 Sand bags, screwdrivers, magnets, plyers, microwave,  
rubber bands, ratchet, picks, hammer, gloves, boots, tool boxes  
Menards \$49.99 Shop jack stands  
Groton Independent \$44.66 Publishing

The January finance report was approved on a motion by Blackmun and seconded by Wells. All members voted aye.

Moved by Cutler and seconded by Babcock to approve the following resolution regarding Ken's First Addition to the City of Groton.

Be it resolved by the City Council of Groton, South Dakota, that the plat showing Ken's First Addition to the City of Groton in the NW ¼ NW ¼ of section 19-T123N-R60W of the 5th P.M., Brown County, South Dakota having been examined, is hereby approved in accordance with the provisions of SDCL 11-3, and any amendments thereof.

All members voted aye.

Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Wells to approve the first reading of the Summer Salary Ordinance #733 as read. All members voted aye.

Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Cutler to approve Mayor Hanlon to sign the 2018/2019 Audit Engagement Letter with Eide Bailly. All members voted aye.

A reminder was given that petitions must be submitted by February 28th at 5:00pm.

The South Dakota Housing Development Authority is offering an opportunity for communities to participate in Paint – South Dakota for 2020 to help someone in need paint their home, and further information for that can be obtained at City Hall.

Moved by Blackmun and seconded by Cutler to adjourn the meeting at 7:32pm. All members voted aye.

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Scott Hanlon, Mayor

Hope Block, Finance Officer

Published once at the total approximate cost of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

## Upcoming Events

### 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

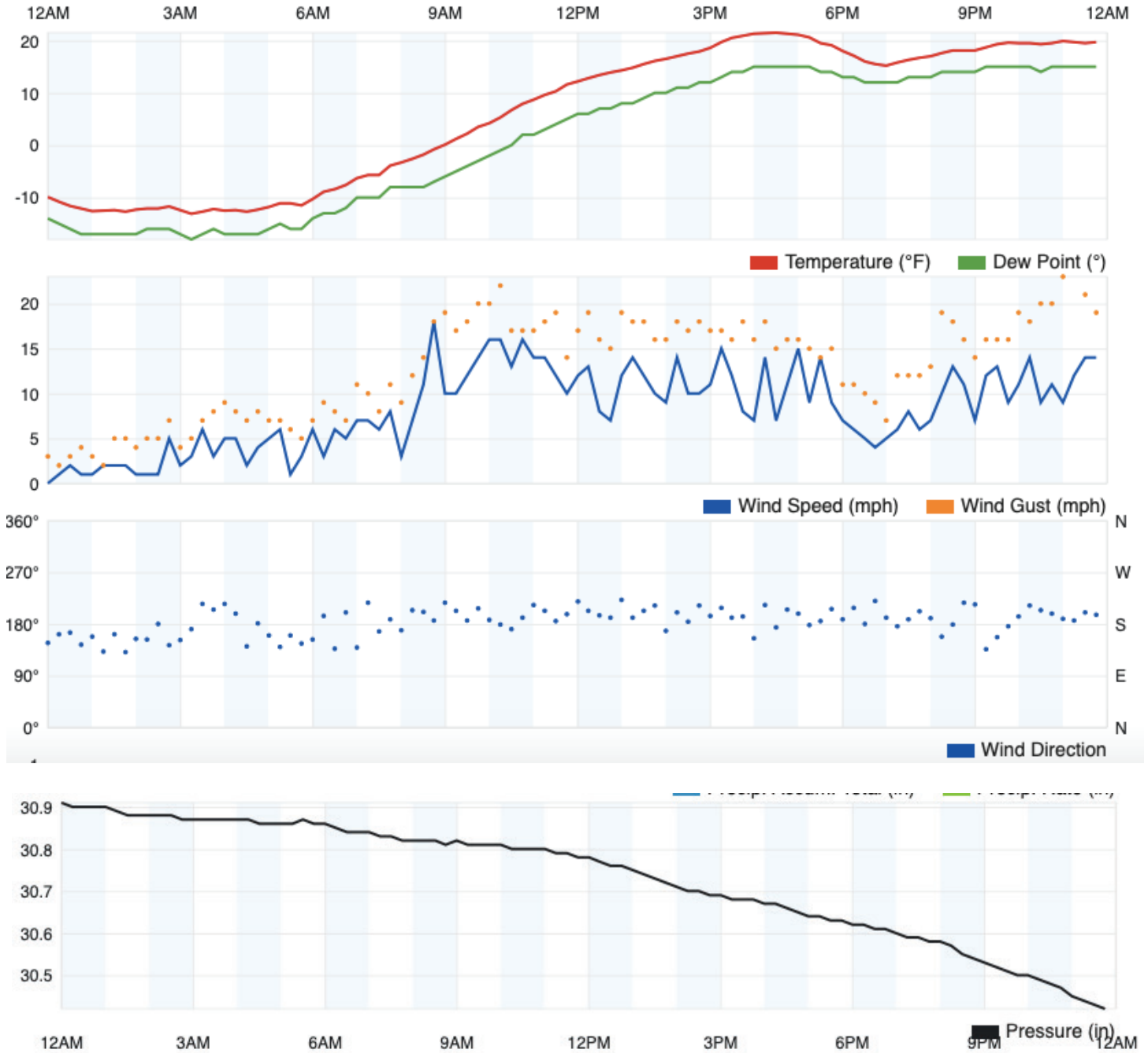
### Monday, February 24, 2020

Life Touch pictures at elementary school

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 32 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 11 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 35 °F

Saturday  
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 21 °F

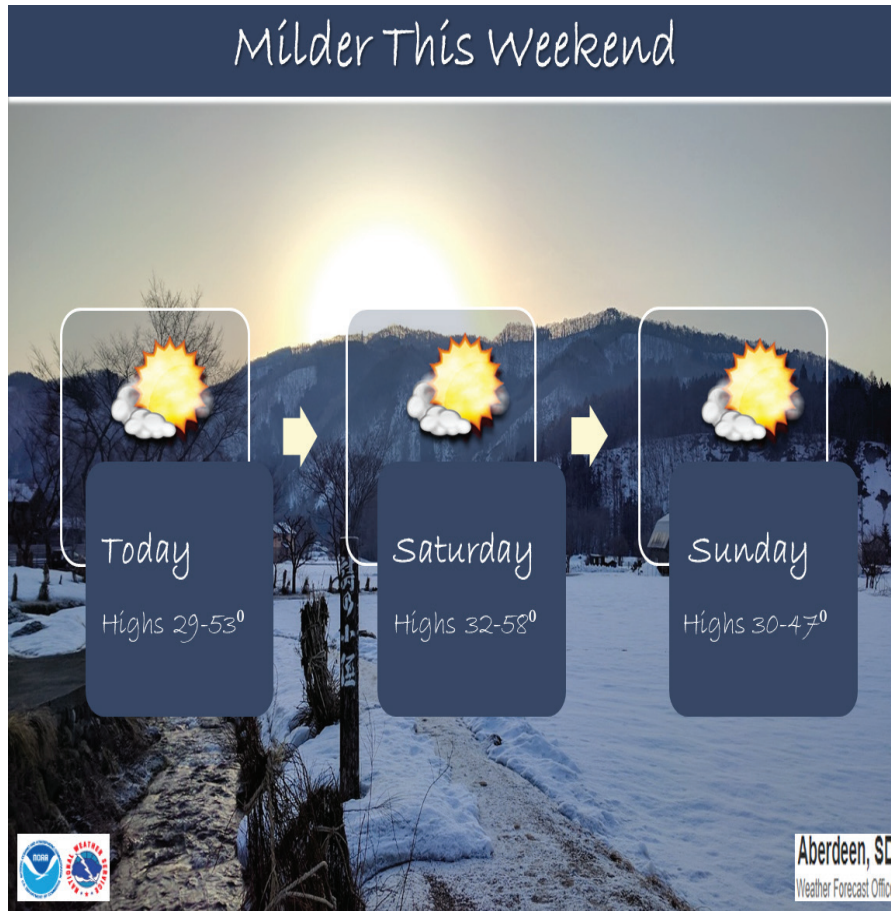
Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 35 °F

## Milder This Weekend



Southwesterly flow will usher in a milder air mass to the region through the weekend.

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## Today in Weather History

February 21, 1918: An unusual warm-up of 83 degrees in just 12 hours at Granville, North Dakota from Chinook winds. The temperature soared from an early morning low of 33 degrees below zero to an afternoon temperature of 50 degrees. Chinook winds are caused by the compression of Pacific air descending the Rockies. Compressing the air causes it to heat up, resulting in the dramatic temperature rises.

February 21, 1969: Heavy snow, along with winds of 15 to 25 mph caused blowing and drifting snow which closed many roads. Snowfall amounts of 5 to 12 inches were typical across eastern South Dakota from the 20th to the 22nd. Some snowfall amounts included, 5 inches at Clear Lake and Brookings, 6 inches at Wilmot, 7 inches at Milbank, Redfield and Mitchell, 8 inches at Conde, 9 inches at Webster, Sioux Falls, and Huron.

1971: A massive tornado outbreak occurred in the Delta region of northeastern Louisiana and Mississippi. The first significant tornado touched down at about 2:50 p.m. in Louisiana and crossed into Mississippi. 46 were killed by this twister, which struck the towns of Dehli and Inverness. 121 people lost their lives that day, including 110 in Mississippi. A total of 1600 people were injured, 900 homes severely damaged or destroyed. The total loss was around 19 million dollars.

1918 - A spectacular chinook wind at Granville, ND, caused the temperature to spurt from a morning low of 33 degrees below zero to an afternoon high of 50 degrees above zero. (David Ludlum)

1935 - Frequent duststorms occurred in eastern Colorado during the month, forcing schools to close and people to stay indoors. A fatality occurred on this date when two section cars collided on the railroad near Arriba CO, due to poor visibility. (The Weather Channel)

1936 - The temperature at Langdon, ND, climbed above zero for the first time in six weeks. Readings never got above freezing during all three winter months. (David Ludlum)

1971 - An outbreak of tornadoes hit northeastern Louisiana and northern and central Mississippi. The tornadoes claimed 121 lives, including 110 in Mississippi. Three tornadoes accounted for 118 of the deaths. There are 1600 persons injured, 900 homes were destroyed or badly damaged, and total damage was 19 million dollars. (David Ludlum)

1971 - Elk City, OK, was buried under 36 inches of snow to establish a 24 hour snowfall record for the state. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Low pressure over central California produced gale force winds along the coast, and produced thunderstorms which pelted Stockton, Oakland and San Jose with small hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A storm tracking across southern Canada produced high winds in the north central U.S., with gusted to 90 mph reported at Boulder CO. The high winds snapped trees and power lines, and ripped shingles off roofs. The Kentucky Fried Chicken Bucket was blown off their store in Havre MT. An eighteen foot fiberglass bear was blown off its stand along a store front in west Cody WY, and sailed east into downtown Cody before the owners were able to transport their wandering bear back home in a horse trailer. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing during the morning hours spread severe weather across Georgia and the Carolinas. Strong thunderstorm winds caused one death and thirteen injuries in North Carolina, and another four injuries in South Carolina. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Overnight thunderstorms produced heavy rain in central Texas. Rainfall totals ranged up to 2.80 inches at Camp Verde, with 2.20 inches reported at Leakey. Thunderstorms early in the day produced high winds in southern Texas, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Alice. Daytime thunderstorms in eastern Texas drenched Rosenberg with four inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

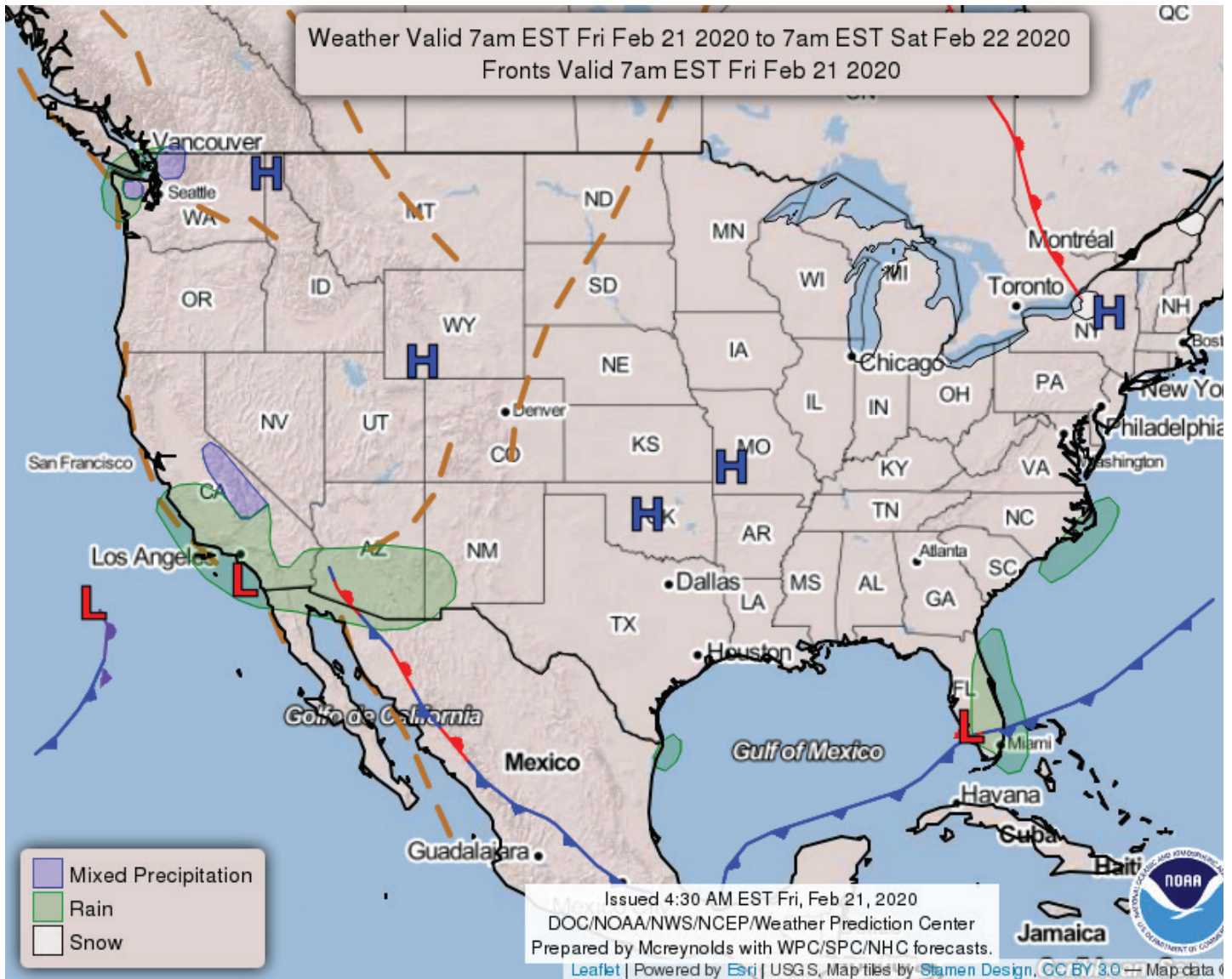
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 22 °F at 4:24 PM**  
**Low Temp: -13 °F at 3:13 AM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 10:58 PM**  
**Snow**

**Record High: 64° in 2017**  
**Record Low: -30° in 1918**  
**Average High: 30°F**  
**Average Low: 10°F**  
**Average Precip in Feb.: 0.35**  
**Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.82**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.35**  
**Sunset Tonight: 6:09 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25 a.m.**





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## SHOP CAREFULLY

"Supermarket behavior" is fascinating to watch. It seems as though people change when they enter the door, get their cart, and begin to walk through the aisles with searching eyes

The cart becomes a very special "space" that will eventually be filled with various items for particular purposes and various - even strange - needs. We would consider someone strange or weird if they met us at the door and said, "Here, take my cart and fill it with whatever you think I want, and I'll meet you at the check-out area."

Often, however, we do that with our minds. We become careless with what we read, what we watch, what or who we listen to, or what we think about. It can be dangerous, just as it would be dangerous if we allowed some stranger to fill our shopping cart with unwholesome "trash."

We are warned in Proverbs to "guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life." In the Bible, the heart is the "keeper" of our feelings and thoughts, it guides our decisions, and provides solutions for our problems. The heart is critical in the battle between wisdom and foolishness, righteousness and evil. That's why it is so important for us to set "boundaries" or "guards" around our heads and hearts. We must control the content that goes in or is kept out of our "carts" - our heads and hearts - or we will end up with poisons that kill.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be very careful about the things that enter into our minds, and then control our lives. Guard our thoughts so that our minds avoid sinful thoughts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life.

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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

## Five GOP-led states seek to block Equal Rights Amendment

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Five Republican-led states are seeking to block an effort by three Democratic-led states to see the Equal Rights Amendment is adopted into the U.S. Constitution.

The five states — Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Nebraska and South Dakota — filed a motion on Thursday to intervene in a lawsuit filed by Virginia, Nevada and Illinois. All five rescinded their approvals of the ERA amendment before a congressionally mandated ratification deadline more than 40 years ago, Tennessee Attorney General Herbert Slatery said Thursday.

“Tennessee has an interest in ensuring that its vote to reject the ERA is given effect,” Slatery said.

Virginia recently became the 38th state to ratify the measure designed to guarantee women the same legal rights men enjoy. “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex,” it says.

Constitutional amendments must be ratified by three-quarters of the 50 states, or 38. But the ERA’s future is uncertain, in part because the ratification deadline set by Congress expired so long ago.

Enforcing that rule fell to the archivist of the United States, David Ferriero, who announced that he would “take no action to certify the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment.” The three Democratic attorneys general sued Ferriero, arguing that the deadline, first set for 1979 and later extended to 1982, is not binding.

## Thursday’s Scores By The Associated Press

### BOYS BASKETBALL=

Burke 58, Wagner 43  
Canistota 77, Irene-Wakonda 50  
Canton 52, Alcester-Hudson 30  
Custer 65, Lead-Deadwood 40  
DeSmet 67, Deuel 40  
Dupree 59, Newell 52  
Flandreau 64, Flandreau Indian 54  
Florence/Henry 49, Warner 40  
Freeman Academy/Marion 54, Menno 39  
Gayville-Volin 62, Freeman 41  
Hanson 53, Corsica/Stickney 44  
Harrisburg 78, Sioux Falls Christian 72  
Howard 67, Dell Rapids St. Mary 65  
Huron 67, Sioux Falls O’Gorman 53  
Ipswich 73, Potter County 67  
Leola/Frederick 69, North Central Co-Op 24  
Marty Indian 70, Colome 32  
Oelrichs 71, Takini 37  
Rapid City Christian 65, New Underwood 29  
Rapid City Stevens 70, Rapid City Central 54  
Red Cloud 66, Sturgis Brown 48  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 56, Mitchell Christian 27  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 50, Brandon Valley 39  
Sioux Valley 72, Garretson 46  
Sisseton 61, Hamlin 55

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Spearfish 68, Douglas 67  
Sully Buttes 67, Faulkton 32  
Tiospaye Topa 50, Crazy Horse 46  
Todd County 58, Pine Ridge 57  
Waverly-South Shore 70, Great Plains Lutheran 61  
West Central 50, McCook Central/Montrose 36  
Wolsey-Wessington 59, Hitchcock-Tulare 27  
GIRLS BASKETBALL=  
Aberdeen Roncalli 61, Britton-Hecla 14  
Baltic 40, Elkton-Lake Benton 38  
Belle Fourche 49, New Underwood 37  
Canton 58, Alcester-Hudson 37  
Castlewood 61, Estelline/Hendricks 34  
Centerville 49, Canistota 46  
Crazy Horse 66, Tiospaye Topa 40  
DeSmet 49, Deuel 41  
Dupree 66, Newell 60  
Faulkton 56, Sully Buttes 48  
Flandreau 56, Flandreau Indian 34  
Freeman 62, Gayville-Volin 31  
Garretson 56, Sioux Valley 49  
Gregory 69, Burke 61  
Groton Area 41, Milbank 35  
Hamlin 61, Sisseton 43  
Hanson 55, Kimball/White Lake 33  
Harrisburg 50, Aberdeen Central 38  
Howard 55, Dell Rapids St. Mary 24  
Ipswich 53, Potter County 46  
Jones County 43, Lyman 30  
Kadoka Area 58, Bennett County 44  
Lead-Deadwood 41, Custer 30  
Lemmon 65, McIntosh 27  
Lennox 50, Tri-Valley 23  
Little Wound 57, Lower Brule 50  
Madison 73, Dell Rapids 45  
Marty Indian 54, Colome 51  
McCook Central/Montrose 71, Chester 32  
Menno 56, Freeman Academy/Marion 25  
Miller 62, Highmore-Harrold 26  
Mobridge-Pollock 60, Stanley County 25  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 47, Parkston 34  
North Central Co-Op 51, Leola/Frederick 23  
Oelrichs 69, Takini 30  
Red Cloud 73, Sturgis Brown 29  
Redfield 55, Clark/Willow Lake 46  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 61, Mitchell Christian 31  
Scotland 52, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 45  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 69, Huron 46  
Sioux Falls Washington 62, Brandon Valley 53  
Spearfish 36, Douglas 27

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Tea Area 64, Parker 35  
Vermillion 66, Irene-Wakonda 47  
Waubay/Summit 71, Wakpala 66  
Waverly-South Shore 60, Great Plains Lutheran 38  
Webster 54, Tiospa Zina Tribal 30  
Wolsey-Wessington 61, Hitchcock-Tulare 50  
Yankton 43, Mitchell 38

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

## No. 20 South Dakota clinches at least share of Summit title

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Ciara Duffy scored 22 points on 10-of-15 shooting and No. 20 South Dakota beat North Dakota State 96-57 on Thursday night to clinch at least a share of the Summit League regular-season title.

Chloe Lamb added 15 points, Taylor Frederick 12 and Hannah Sjerven 11 with 10 rebounds for the Coyotes (25-2, 14-0), who won their 14 consecutive game and have a two-game lead over second-place South Dakota State with two games to go. The rivals play at South Dakota State on Saturday.

The Coyotes shot 51.5 percent, made 22 of 28 free throws and scored 31 points off 24 Bison turnovers. South Dakota led 25-18 after one quarter, expanded the lead to 49-25 by halftime then had a 31-point third quarter to go up by 37. The Coyotes led by as many 42 in the fourth quarter.

Michelle Gaislerova scored 15 points and Ryan Cobbins 10 for NDSU (8-17, 5-8).

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/Womenscollegebasketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Tribal leaders see slow progress despite legislative defeats

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Rep. Shawn Bordeaux is having a tough week. In the span of 24 hours, he witnessed three bills he introduced with the backing of at least one Native American tribe effectively killed in a legislative committee.

It didn't come as a shock to the Democrat from Mission, who is also a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Bordeaux is a perennial champion of bills that don't gain much ground in the South Dakota Legislature — issues supported by tribal members. So far this legislative session, none of the 12 bills he's introduced have won a committee's approval.

The lawmaker has responded to what he calls an attempt to "marginalize our issues" with a flurry of bills and sometimes poignant rants. Though his bills often lose year after year, he said that sometimes its about marginal victories — he gains an audience for issues and may slowly win votes one mind at a time. Several of his bills this year gained bi-partisan support on the State-Tribal Relations committee.

On Wednesday night, a House committee voted down a proposal that had the backing of a majority of the nine tribes in the state, asking the Legislature to support a request to Congress to repeal the Dakota Removal Act, an 1863 law that forcefully removed Dakota tribes from Minnesota after a conflict with white settlers there. Lester Thompson, the chairman of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, compared the law to the Jim Crow laws of the South.

But Rep. Tamara St. John, a Republican from Sisseton and a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, spoke in opposition to the proposal. She pointed out that not all Dakota tribes support the idea.

That was enough to convince Republican lawmakers to vote down the proposal.

Thompson said the action would continue to strain the state's relationship with the tribes. Many tribal members deal with historical trauma from the forceful removal from Minnesota of their grandparents and

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great-grandparents, Thompson said.

"When you get legislators that continually poke the wounds, that hurt continues," he said.

But the bill's defeat was a familiar action for Thompson and other tribal leaders.

A proposal to allow tribes to access a fund for law enforcement costs related to pipeline builds was also shot down Wednesday. Last week, legislators opposed a bill to force school districts to allow graduates to wear beaded graduation caps that have cultural significance. And the week before that, lawmakers tabled a proposal to create a Commission made up of representatives from the tribes because it was not clear if every tribe supported it.

Lawmakers are often hesitant to pass a bill unless it has the endorsement of every tribe in the state.

Not every bill addressing Native American issues has died. The Senate passed a bill that would require businesses to accept tribal IDs. And a Senate committee on Thursday approved a bill that would allow four community-based schools that would teach Native American culture and language. Supporters of the schools bill said they had leaders from every tribe in the state sign off on the proposal before presenting it.

Despite the legislative defeats, Thompson said he will continue to make the 65-mile drive to Pierre to work the halls of the Capitol. He's beginning to see incremental progress on some of the issues.

He pointed to a handful of Republicans who broke with their party to vote against a so-called riot boosting bill this year. The Republican-dominated House passed the bill amid protests from Native American groups on Tuesday.

Jason Cooke, the vice chairman of the Yankton Sioux Tribe who also frequents the Capitol, said he plans to push to get elected tribal leaders to call in to testify on bills.

"If we're not at the table, we're on the menu," he said.

## South Dakota committee advances Native American schools plan

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A proposal to establish South Dakota schools focused on Native American language and culture won unanimous approval Thursday in a Senate committee, despite warnings from education lobbyists that the schools could siphon money away from districts.

The plan headed next to the full Senate for a floor vote has already gone through three committees and eight revisions, changing enough that Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has become a supporter.

Educators want to start four Oceti Sakowin schools that would teach a curriculum centered around Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota language and culture.

Many education groups, however, said they were reluctant opponents. They applauded the attempts to improve education for Native American students but said the proposal was not clear enough on how the schools would be implemented and that the current system already allows for curriculum innovations.

"If you're not successful, this could be a colossal failure," said Dianna Miller, a lobbyist for the Large School Group.

The schools would have to apply to school districts to establish a school within the district and they receive funding based on the number of students enrolled in the schools. They would purchase or lease school facilities independently from the school districts.

Educators who want to start the Oceti Sakowin schools traveled to the state Capitol nearly three weeks ago to tell lawmakers how the current school system is not working for many Native American students — leading to drop-outs and students feeling ashamed of their identity.

Despite initial opposition from Noem's office, senators were convinced enough by the educators' passion to give the bill a chance, said Sarah Pierce, the director for the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition, the group trying to start the schools. Senators gave the group two weeks to work with the governor's office to come up with a revised proposal.

"That gave us the needed momentum," Pierce said.

In that time, the bill underwent several rewrites, but the group got to make their case about why the schools would give Native Americans a chance to educate on their own terms and how that may result

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in better rates of high school graduation and college attendance. They compromised on some aspects of the bill to get the governor's office on board.

The bill originally called the schools "charter" schools, which aren't allowed in South Dakota. The bill relabeled them as "community-based" schools.

"We have nothing to lose, to be honest," said Sen. Troy Heinert, a Mission Democrat who introduced the bill. He has aggressively pushed the concept to the governor's office and education groups, even lobbying the lobbyists to sit down and hash out the bill.

## **MGM Resorts hack affected a reported 10.6M former guests**

LAS VEGAS (AP) — MGM Resorts International has confirmed the company was hacked after a report was released detailing information from more than 10 million former hotel guests was compromised.

ZDNet released a report Wednesday revealing 10,683,188 guests were affected after the company's cloud server was hacked, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

MGM Resorts declined to confirm the actual number of affected guests because the data included duplicates.

Someone had gained unauthorized access to certain information including guest names, phone numbers, drivers license and passport information, MGM Resorts said in a statement. No financial, payment card or password data was involved, the company said.

"At MGM Resorts, we take our responsibility to protect guest data very seriously, and we have strengthened and enhanced the security of our network to prevent this from happening again," the statement said.

MGM Resorts notified potential guests who were affected and hired two cybersecurity forensics firms to assist with an internal investigation, review and remediation, officials said.

About 52,000 people were notified about the hack in compliance with state laws, many of those were from South Dakota, which has a law requiring notification for most hacks, the newspaper reported.

## **University of Wyoming trustees pick 3 president finalists**

LARAMIE, Wyo. (AP) — University of Wyoming trustees have chosen three finalists for the job of university president.

The three, announced Thursday, are: Gregory W. Bowman, dean of West Virginia University College of Law; Edward Seidel, vice president for economic development and innovation for the University of Illinois system; and Daniel M. White, chancellor of University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

The next president will succeed Laurie Nichols. Trustees didn't renew Nichols' contract in 2019 after investigating interactions she had with employees, a process Nichols has described as unfair.

Nichols is now president of Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota.

Trustees have scheduled Bowman for visits Monday and Tuesday, Seidel on Tuesday and Wednesday, and White on Wednesday and Thursday.

Each candidate will take part in their own breakfast with students, forum with faculty, forum with university staff and community reception in Laramie. Each will also participate in public forums in Casper.

All forums will be live-streamed. Trustees will meanwhile seek public comments on each candidate through online surveys.

Trustees plan to interview the candidates in executive session Thursday and could extend a job offer during the week of March 2.

The next president will begin at the start of the state fiscal year on July 1.

## **Fatal screwdriver stabbing. Self-defense or murder?**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Jurors in a Rapid City federal courtroom will decide whether a woman accused of fatally stabbing her boyfriend with a screwdriver was acting in self-defense or committed murder.

Prosecutors say Doreen Brown may have been in an abusive relationship with Donald "Donnie" McMillan,

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but had no reason to kill him.

The defense has countered that McMillian was attacking Brown with a tree branch and that she was defending herself at her home in Pine Ridge last June.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Heather Sazama told jurors Wednesday the couple argued and physically abused each other nearly every day when they drank alcohol, the Rapid City Journal reported.

June 27 was "just another ordinary day for these two" but this time Brown, who had been drinking, "took it too far," Sazama said.

McMillan was attacking Brown on her front porch with a tree branch that day, said Jennifer Albertson, assistant federal public defender.

Brown "doesn't want to kill him," but she did want to make McMillan stop so she grabbed a screwdriver from the ground, Albertson said.

Brown nicked her boyfriend in the back several times but that didn't stop McMillan, Albertson said. Brown then stabbed McMillan in the chest but wasn't aiming for his heart.

The trial continues Thursday.

## Germany to raise police presence after racist shooting

BERLIN (AP) — German authorities will step up the police presence throughout the country and keep a closer watch on mosques and other sites after the racially motivated shootings that killed nine people, the country's top security official said Friday.

A 43-year-old German man fatally shot the victims of immigrant backgrounds in the Frankfurt suburb of Hanau on Wednesday night before killing his mother and himself. The man, identified as Tobias Rathjen, left a number of rambling texts and videos espousing racist views and claiming to have been under surveillance since birth.

Meanwhile, officials confirmed they had received a letter from the suspect last November in which he sought help from authorities in stopping the surveillance he believed he was under. The letter didn't ring any alarm bells with prosecutors, authorities said.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said state-level security officials and security agencies he consulted Thursday agreed to increase the law enforcement presence around the country. Seehofer said there would be more surveillance at "sensitive sites," including mosques, and a high police presence at railway stations, airports and borders.

"The threat posed by far-right extremism, anti-Semitism and racism is very high in Germany," Seehofer told reporters in Berlin.

Thousands of people gathered in cities across Germany on Thursday evening to hold vigils for the shooting victims but also to express anger that authorities haven't done enough to prevent attacks despite a string of incidents in recent years.

Some also called for a crackdown on the extremist and anti-migrant ideology that has crept into mainstream political debate with the rise of the Alternative for Germany party, or AfD.

A top official in the center-left Social Democratic Party, a junior partner in Chancellor Angela Merkel's governing coalition, accused AfD of providing ideological fodder to people like the Hanau shooter.

"One person carried out the shooting in Hanau, that's what it looks like, but there were many that supplied him with ammunition, and AfD definitely belongs to them," Lars Klingbeil told German public broadcaster ARD on Friday.

Parts of Alternative for Germany already were under close scrutiny from Germany's domestic intelligence agency. The party has rejected all responsibility for far-right attacks, including an anti-Semitic attack on a synagogue and the killing of a regional politician last year.

One key question in the investigation is whether authorities or others were aware the suspect posed a threat.

"That's one of the points that's particularly interesting to me in this investigation," said Seehofer. "Who knew what."



Peter Frank, Germany's chief federal prosecutor, said the investigation would concentrate on the suspect's movements prior to the attack, and whether he had had contact with other people. The suspect's father was being questioned as a witness, he said.

Frank acknowledged that his office had received a letter from the suspect three months ago. The letter didn't contain many of the more explicit racist and genocidal comments later found in the document posted on Rathjen's website and didn't prompt any action from prosecutors, Frank said.

Seehofer noted that rules intended to ensure stricter background checks on gun owners came into force Thursday — a day after the attack — but that he was open to the idea of tightening the rules further.

One hurdle to effective communication between different branches of government in Germany is the country's treasured notion of privacy, along with the complex web of local, regional, state and federal authorities that might be involved in checking a person's suitability for gun ownership.

"We will always respect data protection," said Seehofer. "But the discussion about data protection mustn't push aside the discussion about security in this country."

## **US: Taliban's 'reduction of violence' deal to start tonight**

**By KATHY GANNON and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press**

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The seven-day "reduction of violence" deal promised by the Taliban will begin on Friday night, a senior U.S. State Department official said, without specifying the exact time. That will start the countdown to the signing of a peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States at the end of the month.

That peace agreement, to be signed in Doha, Qatar, on Feb. 29, will pave the way for a withdrawal of U.S. troops and intra-Afghan negotiations. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the peace agreement will also lead to an eventual permanent cease-fire.

"We are preparing for the signing to take place on February 29," Pompeo said in a statement. "Intra-Afghan negotiations will start soon thereafter, and will build on this fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and the future political road map for Afghanistan."

The State Department official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the deal.

But the road ahead is fraught with difficulties.

It's still not clear who will represent Kabul at the negotiation table for the intra-Afghan talks, considered a key pillar in finding a lasting peace in the war-torn country. The Afghan election commission earlier this week declared President Ashraf Ghani the winner of the presidential elections held in September but his rivals quickly denounced his win.

The Taliban have refused to talk to Ghani's government and also denounced the election results, saying they will talk to government representatives but only as ordinary Afghans.

Pompeo's statement did not say who would participate in the intra-Afghan negotiations from Kabul, saying only that "intra-Afghan negotiations will start soon" after the signing in Doha "and will build on this fundamental step to deliver a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire and the future political road map for Afghanistan."

The Taliban issued their own statement on the reduction of violence deal.

"Both parties will now create a suitable security situation in advance of agreement signing date, extend invitations to senior representatives of numerous countries and organizations to participate in the signing ceremony, make arrangements for the release of prisoners, structure a path for intra-Afghan negotiations with various political parties of the country and finally lay the groundwork for peace across the country with the withdrawal of all foreign forces," the Taliban said in a statement Friday.

The Taliban added that they will not allow "the land of Afghanistan to be used against security of others so that our people can live a peaceful and prosperous life under the shade of an Islamic system."

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## 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. **INTEL OFFICIALS: RUSSIA BOOSTING TRUMP CANDIDACY** The warning raises questions about the integrity of the presidential campaign and whether the Trump administration is taking the proper steps to combat the kind of interference that the U.S. saw in 2016.

2. **SOUTH KOREA UPS EMERGENCY RESPONSE** China's neighbor reports 100 new virus cases, bringing the country's total to over 200 while Seoul bans rallies in major downtown areas in efforts to fight the outbreak.

3. **GRIEF, ANGER AND CALLS FOR ACTION IN GERMANY** Thousands gather in cities across the country to hold vigils for the nine victims of a racially motivated shooting, amid growing calls for authorities to crack down on far-right extremism.

4. **IRANIANS HEAD TO THE POLLS** They are voting for a new parliament, with turnout seen as a key measure of support for the Islamic Republic's leadership as sanctions weigh on the economy and isolate the country diplomatically.

5. **BLOOMBERG STRUGGLING IN #METOO ERA** The billionaire was caught flat-footed during much of this week's debate when rival Elizabeth Warren blasted his company's use of non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual harassment.

6. **POLITICAL CLIMATE CHANGES IN NEVADA** California transplants have brought their politics with them and a tech boom has drawn the young and college-educated, demographic groups that lean left as do Hispanics.

7. **WRESTLER ADDS TO ABUSE ALLEGATIONS** Olympian Andy Hrovat accuses a University of Michigan doctor of touching him inappropriately during medical exams at the school in the late 1990s.

8. **'IT'S ONE OF THOSE ICONIC ARTIFACTS'** A salvage firm wants to recover the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Machine that transmitted the Titanic's increasingly frantic distress calls.

9. **TRUMP NOT A FAN OF 'PARASITE'** The president complained that the Oscar winner for best picture was made in South Korea, prompting the U.S. distributor of the film to shoot back on Twitter that Trump would have trouble reading the subtitles.

10. **US WOMEN SOCCER PLAYERS SUE FOR EQUAL PAY** Players on the national team are seeking more than \$66 million in damages as part of their gender discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation.

## IS supporter pleads guilty to St. Paul's Cathedral bomb plot

LONDON (AP) — A British woman who supported the Islamic State group pleaded guilty Friday to plotting to bomb St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

Safiyya Amira Shaikh, 36, from Middlesex in southeast England, admitted to the preparation of terrorist acts and dissemination of terrorist publications. She spoke at a hearing at Central London Criminal Court.

Prosecutors said Shaikh made contact with someone who could prepare explosives and went on a reconnaissance trip to scope out the historic site.

She also shared terrorist documents through groups using the Telegram messaging app between August 2019 and October 2019.

She is to be sentenced May 12.

## Trump apparently not a fan of 'Parasite' movie

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is apparently not a fan of "Parasite," his biggest complaint being that the movie was made in South Korea.

Trump started talking about the Academy Awards during a campaign rally in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on Thursday. Parasite was named best picture, becoming the first non-English-language film to get the top honor.

"What the hell was that all about?" Trump said. "We've got enough problems with South Korea with

trade. On top of that, they give them best movie of the year. Was it good? I don't know."

Neon, the U.S. distributor for the subtitled film, shot back on Twitter: "Understandable. He can't read."

The audience booed when Trump mentioned the Academy Awards and then cheered when he said: "Can we get like 'Gone with the Wind' back please? 'Sunset Boulevard,' so many great movies."

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

## Iran votes in parliament elections that favor conservatives

By **NASSER KARIMI** Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranians were voting for a new parliament Friday, with turnout seen as a key measure of support for Iran's leadership as sanctions weigh on the economy and U.S. pressure isolates the country diplomatically.

The disqualification of more than 7,000 potential candidates, most of them reformists and moderates, raised the possibility of lower-than-usual turnout. Among those disqualified were 90 sitting members of parliament who had wanted to run for re-election.

Also looming over the election is the threat of the new coronavirus and many voters headed to the polls with face masks. Iranian health authorities on Friday confirmed two new deaths from the virus, which first emerged in China in December, bringing the total death toll in Iran to four, from among 18 confirmed cases. The first two patients that died were elderly citizens in the city of Qom. Concerns over the spread of the virus prompted authorities in Iran to close all schools and Shiite seminaries in Qom.

Iran's leadership and state media urged voter participation, with some framing it as a religious duty. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei cast his ballot at a mosque near his Tehran office shortly after polls opened at 8 a.m. and urged Iranians to the polls.

"Anyone who cares about Iran's national interests should participate in the election," he said. Earlier in the week, Khamenei said high voter turnout will thwart "plots and plans" by Americans and supporters of Israel against Iran.

"Enemies want to see what the results of the U.S. maximum pressure are," he said, referring to U.S. sanctions and pressure from Washington that have strangled Iran's ability to sell its oil abroad, forcing its economy into recession.

After the disqualifications, around 7,000 candidates were left vying for a place in the 290-seat chamber across 208 constituencies.

After casting his ballot, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called on the nation to stage another "victory" by massive voting. "Our enemies will be disappointed more than before," Rouhani said.

On the eve of the vote, the Trump administration ratcheted up its campaign of pressure on Iran by imposing sanctions on two senior officials of the Guardian Council, the body of clerics and judges that decides which candidates may run in elections. The U.S. also sanctioned three members of Iran's elections supervisory committee, saying all those targeted were responsible for silencing the voice of the Iranian people by rejecting thousands of people from running.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized the election as a "sham" and a vote that "is not free or fair."

One of the sanctioned officials, Guardian Council's spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, described Washington's latest move as "custom-made and illegitimate sanctions," dismissing the measure as just another example of America's "regional tyranny."

Tensions with the United States could strengthen hard-liners by reinforcing long-held distrust of the West. A parliament stacked with hard-liners could favor expanding the budget for the Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has been sanctioned by the U.S. It could also tilt public policy debates toward hard-liners who are opposed to engagement with the U.S.

The crisis with between Tehran and Washington spiked after a U.S. airstrike in January killed Iran's top

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general, Qassem Soleimani. The strike led to a tense confrontation in which Iranian forces accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane after it took off from Tehran, killing all 176 people on board. Most of those killed were Iranian.

The shoot-down, and attempts by officials to initially conceal the cause of the crash sparked public anger and protests in Iran.

The election is being held at a time of growing economic hardship.

Iranians have seen the price of basic goods skyrocket, inflation and unemployment rise and the local currency plummet since President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear agreement with world powers and imposed sanctions. The economic woes faced by ordinary Iranians fueled anti-government protests in November. International human rights groups say at least 300 people were killed in the protests.

The parliament in Iran does not have power to dictate major policies, but it does debate the annual budget and the possible impeachment of ministers. Power in Iran ultimately rests with Khamenei, who has final say on all key matters.

Local TV stations broadcast images from Qom, around 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the capital, Tehran, showing women and men, some wearing face masks for protection, lining up in separate lines to vote on Friday. Qom is a popular religious destination and a center of learning and religious studies for Shiite Muslims from inside Iran, as well as Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.

The Tehran governor tried to calm fears over the new virus, saying voters didn't have to mark their fingers with ink after voting. Using the ink was optional, said Anoushirvan Bandpay, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"People should not be worry about spreading coronavirus," he added.

Current parliament speaker Ali Larijani decided to step down after 11 years and is not running for reelection, though he was shown voting in his city of Qom on Friday. Mohammad Baqher Qalibaf, the former mayor of Tehran who is also the former head of the Revolutionary Guard air force, is seen as one of the front-runners to succeed Larijani.

The current parliament, elected in 2016, had more than 100 reformists and moderates, with the rest of the chamber split between independents and hard-liners. Some 90 current lawmakers were also barred from running in Friday's election.

Nearly 58 million Iranians, out of a population of more than 80 million, are eligible to vote. Every Iranian above the age of 18 can vote.

Turnout has been over 50% in previous parliamentary elections. In 2016, it was nearly 62%.

The polls close at 6 p.m., though polling stations have in the past stayed open late into the night to give people more time to cast their vote. Friday is a day of rest in Iran, as is the case across most Muslim countries.

Initial results are expected to be announced on Saturday. Presidential elections are expected to take place in 2021.

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Associated Press writer Aya Batrawy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

## Intel officials say Russia boosting Trump candidacy

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK** and **MICHAEL BALSAMO** The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Intelligence officials have warned lawmakers that Russia is interfering in the 2020 election campaign to help President Donald Trump get reelected, three officials familiar with the closed-door briefing said Thursday.

The warning raises questions about the integrity of the presidential campaign and whether Trump's administration is taking the proper steps to combat the kind of interference that the U.S. saw in 2016.

The officials asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence. They said the briefing last week focused on Russia's efforts to influence the 2020 election and sow discord in the American electorate.

The warning was first reported by The New York Times and The Washington Post. A senior administration

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officials said the news infuriated Trump, who complained that Democrats would use the information against him. Over the course of his presidency, Trump has dismissed the intelligence community's assessment of Russia's 2016 election interference as a conspiracy to undermine his victory. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the private meeting.

One day after the Feb. 13 briefing to the House Intelligence Committee, Trump berated the then-director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire, and he announced this week that Maguire would be replaced by Richard Grenell, a Trump loyalist.

U.S. intelligence agencies say Russia interfered in the 2016 election through social media campaigns and stealing and distributing emails from Democratic accounts. They say Russia was trying to boost Trump's campaign and add chaos to the American political process. Special counsel Robert Mueller concluded that Russian interference was "sweeping and systematic," but he did not find a criminal conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign.

Republican lawmakers who were in last week's briefing by the DNI's chief election official, Shelby Pierson, pushed back by noting that Trump has been tough on Russia, one of the officials said.

While Trump has imposed severe economic sanctions on Russia, he also has spoken warmly of Russian leader Vladimir Putin and withdrawn troops from areas, like Syria, where Moscow could fill the vacuum. He delayed military aid last year to Ukraine, a Russian adversary — a decision that was at the core of his impeachment proceedings.

The Times said Trump was angry that the House briefing was made before the panel's chairman, Rep. Adam Schiff, who led the impeachment proceedings.

Trump on Thursday formally appointed Grenell, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, to replace Maguire as the new acting director of national intelligence. Maguire was required to step down soon under federal law governing acting appointments. The Times cited two administration officials as saying the timing, after the intelligence briefing, was coincidental.

Grenell's background is primarily in politics and media affairs. He lacks the extensive national security and military experience of Maguire, as well as previous holders of the position overseeing the nation's 17 intelligence agencies.

His appointment does little to heal the president's fraught relations with the intelligence community, which Trump has derided as part of a "deep state" of entrenched bureaucrats that seek to undermine his agenda. The administration has most notably feuded with the intelligence community over the Russian interference and the events surrounding Trump's impeachment.

Pierson told NPR in an interview that aired last month that the Russians "are already engaging in influence operations relative to candidates going into 2020. But we do not have evidence at this time that our adversaries are directly looking at interfering with vote counts or the vote tallies."

Pierson, appointed in July 2019 by then-Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, works with intelligence agencies like the CIA, the FBI, the National Security Agency and the Department of Homeland Security to identify anyone seeking to interfere with U.S. elections.

Pierson told NPR that the U.S. doesn't know exactly what the Russians are planning, but she said it's not just a Russia problem.

"We're still also concerned about China, Iran, non-state actors, hacktivists and frankly — certainly for DHS and FBI - even Americans that might be looking to undermine confidence in the elections."

At an open hearing this month, FBI Director Christopher Wray told the House Judiciary Committee that Russia was engaged in "information warfare" heading into the November election, but that law enforcement had not seen efforts to target America's infrastructure. He said Russia is relying on a covert social media campaign to divide the American public.

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Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani, Deb Riechmann and Zeke Miller in Las Vegas contributed to this report.

## Virus cases balloon in S. Korea as outbreak shifts, spreads

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM** and **MATT SEDENSKY** Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Schools were shuttered, churches told worshipers to stay away and some mass gatherings were banned as cases of a new virus swelled Friday in South Korea, the newest front in a widening global outbreak.

The country said a total of 204 people were infected with the virus, quadruple the number it had two days earlier, as a crisis centered in China has begun strongly reverberating elsewhere.

The multiplying caseload in South Korea showed the ease with which the illness can spread. Though initial infections were linked to China, new ones have not involved international travel.

“We have entered an emergency phase,” Prime Minister Chung Se-kyun said in televised comments at the start of a government meeting on the health emergency. “Our efforts until now had been focused on blocking the illness from entering the country. But we will now shift the focus on preventing the illness from spreading further in local communities.”

Daegu, a southeastern city of 2.5 million that is the country’s fourth largest, emerged as the focus of government efforts to contain the disease known as COVID-19, and Chung promised support to ease a shortage in hospital beds, medical personnel and equipment. Mayor Kwon Young-jin of Daegu has urged residents to stay inside, even wearing masks at home, to stem further infection.

The first case in Daegu was reported on Tuesday. By Friday, the area had 153.

Nationwide, the numbers told of a ballooning problem. There were 20 new cases reported Wednesday, 53 on Thursday and 100 on Friday.

The central government declared a “special management zone” around Daegu on Friday, which didn’t restrict movement of residents or supersede local officials’ power but served as official recognition of the problem. A total of 110 infections have been confirmed in Daegu and surrounding areas, including South Korea’s first fatality from COVID-19.

Most of those cases have been linked to a single house of worship, a branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, where a woman in her 60s attended two services before testing positive for the virus.

About 1,000 others who attended services with the woman have been isolated in their homes for screening, and health authorities say they’re trying to monitor thousands of other church members.

All 74 sites operated by the Shincheonji Church have been closed and worshipers have been told to instead watch services online for a sect whose leader claims to be an angel of Christ, but who is dismissed by many outsiders as a cult leader. Its teachings revolve largely around the Book of Revelation, a chapter of the New Testament known mostly for its apocalyptic foreshadowing.

Health and city officials say the woman eyed as a potential transmitter at the church had contact with some 1,160 people, both at the church and at a restaurant and a hospital where she was treated for injuries from a car accident. That raised fears that South Korea — which before Wednesday had recorded just 31 cases of the virus — should brace for a further surge.

“I hope South Korea will do everything to contain this outbreak at this early stage,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization.

Usually bustling downtown streets of Daegu were nearly deserted Friday as people wearing face masks lined up at clinics seeking testing. Crowds formed in supermarkets where shelves of ramen and curry were nearly bare. Eight hundred area schools, due to start a new academic year on March 2, delayed their openings by a week.

“Panic is taking hold,” said Daegu resident Huh Mi-yeon. “People are scared of any situation where they would run into another person.”

Elsewhere in the country, angst grew too. In the capital of Seoul, major downtown rallies were banned, and fears of the virus led many to avoid shops and restaurants and instead eat at home and order necessities online. Buses and subways were full of mask-clad commuters.

The first three cases in the country’s 600,000-member military also sprung up on separate bases Friday, bringing added concern. A sailor on Jeju Island and an army officer in North Chungcheong province both

tested positive. Both had made recent visits to Daegu, officials said. A third infection was reported in an air force officer who is based in Daegu but who had recently traveled to military headquarters in central South Korea, the defense ministry said, prompting the quarantine of 80 soldiers there.

Globally, more than 76,000 people have been infected in 27 countries, and more than 2,200 have died. Even as new alarms were sounded elsewhere in Asia, in China, where the vast majority of cases have occurred, officials have expressed optimism over the number of new infections, which has been trending downward. China said Friday 889 new cases were recorded in the preceding 24 hours and 118 additional deaths.

Sedensky reported from Bangkok. Associated Press writer Tong-hyung Kim contributed to this report.

## South Korea ups emergency response as viral cases surge

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's government banned major rallies in its capital and declared a health emergency in its fourth largest city as 100 new virus cases were reported Friday, bringing the country's total to 204.

The spike forced officials to focus on steps to contain the domestic spread of the disease, not just its entry from abroad.

Most of the new cases have been reported since Wednesday. The increase, especially in and around Daegu city in the southeast, has raised fears the outbreak is overwhelming the region's medical system. Many of the cases have been linked to a church in the city.

In the capital, Seoul, officials banned major downtown rallies and shut down a big park to avoid mass public gatherings where the virus could spread. Workers in protective gear also sprayed disinfectant in the city's subway.

And the first three cases were confirmed in South Korea's 600,000-member military, a navy sailor, an army officer and an air force officer who all had links to Daegu.

Prime Minister Chung Se-kyun said in a televised statement the central government will concentrate its support to the southeastern region to ease a shortage in sickbeds, medical personnel and equipment.

"A month into the (COVID-19) outbreak, we have entered an emergency phase," Chung said. "Our efforts until now had been focused on blocking the illness from entering the country. But we will now shift the focus on preventing the illness from spreading further in local communities."

The surge of infections in Daegu and several cases in Seoul with unclear infection routes forced government officials to acknowledge Thursday for the first time that the virus was circulating in the local population.

Initial cases of the illness in South Korea had been connected to China, where the virus has infected 75,000 people and caused more than 2,200 deaths. South Korea on Thursday reported its first virus-related death, one of 11 outside mainland China.

Daegu Mayor Kwon Young-jin on Thursday urged the city's 2.5 million people to stay home and wear masks even indoors if possible.

Officials on Jeju Island said a 22-year-old navy sailor based on the island tested positive for the virus on Friday, days after visiting Daegu for a vacation. The sailor currently hospitalized at a civilian hospital on the island is Jeju's first virus patient. The Jeju provincial office said in a statement officials convened an emergency meeting Friday to discuss how to prevent the spread of the disease.

The Defense Ministry said the sailor is also the first virus case in South Korea's military. Other sailors who contacted him at the Jeju base were placed under quarantine and all other soldiers there were also ordered to wear masks, according to a ministry statement.

The ministry said an air force officer based in Daegu who has recently been on a temporary assignment at the military headquarters in central South Korea also was diagnosed with the virus.

Later Friday, North Chungcheong Province governor Lee Si-jong told reporters that an army officer based in the central province also tested positive for the virus.

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Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo ordered military officials to closely coordinate with health authorities to prevent the virus from spreading inside the military and work out special quarantine steps. Jeong also ordered the military to strictly restrict all enlisted troops from vacationing and meeting visitors from outside, according to his ministry.

Most of the new cases in the southeastern region are linked to a church in Daegu.

The Shincheonji 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, which has about 8,000 followers.

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.

President Moon Jae-in ordered swifter action to trace down to those who recently visited the Daegu church and a hospital in another southeastern city of Cheongdo, where many virus cases were also reported in the past three days. Moon cited an examination of visitors' books at hospital funeral halls, according to Moon's office.

Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon said Friday that the city will keep the Seoul branches of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus closed until the outbreak comes under control. He said authorities will close some 3,500 senior welfare centers across the city, saying that COVID-19 poses a greater health risk for the elderly or those with existing medical condition.

The World Health Organization said the jump in cases in South Korea doesn't signal an increased risk of a global pandemic. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the new cases were mostly linked to known, existing clusters of infections and that South Korean authorities were following them very closely.

"The number of cases are really manageable, and I hope South Korea will do everything to contain this outbreak at this early stage," he said.

He noted that more than half of the COVID-19 cases outside China are from Diamond Prince cruise ship docked in Japan.

## **Stress, rumors, even violence: Virus fear goes viral**

**By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press**

TOKYO (AP) — You might have heard that the fear of a new virus from China is spreading faster than the actual virus.

From earnest officials trying to calm a building panic. From your spouse. From the know-it-all who rattles off the many much more likely ways you're going to die: smoking, car accidents, the flu.

None of it seems to matter.

As the number of cases rises — more than 76,000 and counting — fear is advancing like a tsunami. And not just in the areas surrounding the Chinese city of Wuhan, the site of the vast majority of coronavirus infections.

Subway cars in Tokyo and Seoul look more like hospital wards, with armies of masked commuters shooting dirty looks at the slightest cough or sneeze. A restaurant owner in a South Korean Chinatown says visitors have dropped by 90%.

You've probably got a better chance of winning the lottery than buying face masks in parts of Asia. Conferences and events have been disrupted from Beijing to Barcelona to Boston. Quarrels in Japan; riots in Ukraine. Rumors that toilet paper and napkins could be used as masks emptied East Asian store shelves of paper goods.

"Fear is a very strong emotion, and the prevailing fear over the new coronavirus drives people to do things irrationally without thinking straight," said Bernie Huang, 31, a high school teacher in Taipei, Taiwan, who resisted the city's now-easing toilet paper buying spree.



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If you take the long view, panic has marched in lockstep with pandemic for as long as history has been recorded. The plague that devastated Athens in the fifth century BC. The Black Death that eradicated much of Europe in the 14th century. And, more recently, AIDS, Ebola, SARS, MERS, swine and bird flu.

Scientists, statisticians and people well away from the line of fire may scoff, but the fear, which is spread by word of mouth and, more rapidly, through online posts, is real.

"Fear can do more harm than the virus," Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in response to panic buying of toilet paper, canned food and instant noodles after the government raised a risk alert over the new virus.

It's perhaps most keenly felt in the places where crowds gather: churches, shopping areas, schools.

In the Philippines, nearly half of the pews were empty for recent Sunday Masses in many churches. At a Protestant church in northern Seoul, officials switched entirely to online worship after it was found that a virus patient had attended services days before he tested positive.

The huge Lotte Department Store in Seoul closed for several days for disinfection after it was found that a Chinese tourist with the virus visited. It reportedly lost about 20 billion won (\$16.9 million) in revenue, based on figures by financial analysts.

A mobile trade fair in Barcelona was canceled. PlayStation maker Sony pulled out of a video game conference in Boston over "increasing concerns" related to the virus. Organizers said the event will go on next week but "with enhanced cleaning."

At Namdaemun, Seoul's largest traditional market, businesses saw huge drops in sales after an infected person was found to have visited the area last month.

"Merchants say their businesses are now dying," said Chun Yong-bum, head of an association of thousands of merchants at Namdaemun.

The South Korean Education Ministry recently issued an advisory to universities to postpone the March start of the upcoming semester because of worries that thousands of Chinese students will return to schools from abroad.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in expressed worries that "excessively bloated fear" was hurting South Korea's economy by suppressing public consumption and leisure activities.

The most eagerly-awaited gathering in Asia — the upcoming Summer Olympics in Tokyo — has been beset by fear, too.

Although he later backtracked, Tokyo Olympic CEO Toshiko Muto said recently that he was "seriously worried" the virus could disrupt the Olympics and Paralympics.

"One thing I am noticing at the moment is fear is spreading quicker than the virus, and it is important that we quell that fear," said Craig Spence, the spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee.

In Japan, fear and the virus have intersected most visibly on a huge cruise ship in the port of Yokohama, where thousands of passengers and crew were quarantined for two weeks as hundreds of people on board tested positive for the virus.

One quarantined passenger hung a banner that read: "No information ... Stressed. Many bad rumors."

The internet fomented many of those rumors.

In Malaysia, a social media rumor that mandarin oranges carry the virus caused some initial panic until health officials debunked it.

When news broke that a journalist who reports on Japan's leader had contact with an infected driver and was in self-quarantine, a web edition of the Weekly Post tabloid magazine declared: "Coronavirus has sent shockwaves to the prime minister's office."

Fear, and possibly a dark sense of humor, may also help explain some odd behavior: images of people using orange peels as face masks; children in strollers wrapped in what looks like dry cleaning plastic.

In Taiwan, people began stocking up on toilet paper and napkins after a rumor on the internet said they could be used as masks to stop the spread of viruses, said Yang Bo-ken, deputy director of the government's Industrial Development Bureau.

Taiwan's Criminal Investigation Bureau recommended the prosecution of three women on allegations

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they used the popular LINE social media service to suggest using table napkins, sanitary napkins and toilet paper as a mask substitute, a bureau spokesperson said.

The fear has also led to lawlessness.

In Kobe, Japan, 6,000 surgical masks were reported stolen from a hospital.

Several hundred residents fearing infection in Ukraine clashed for hours with police as they blocked a road to a building where more than 70 people evacuated from China because of the virus were to be quarantined.

Two passengers on a subway in Fukuoka, Japan, quarreled after a man not wearing a mask started coughing, prompting the man next to him to press an emergency alarm, Kyodo News reported.

"Fear is spreading among passengers. We plan to promote cough etiquette, such as wearing facial masks," a city transport official told the news agency.

In Hong Kong, where people queued up for essential goods outside shops, three people with knives allegedly robbed a deliveryman outside a supermarket of precious toilet rolls reportedly worth more than 1,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$128).

Governments have not always known how to handle the situation.

Eight Samoan citizens were refused entry at the nation's airport and sent back to Fiji reportedly because they'd transited through Singapore, which the government labels a "high risk" country, according to the Samoa Observer.

And when a Canadian teen collapsed at a building in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a medical team in hazmat suits arrived. The health ministry later said it was a precautionary measure and the teen was virus free.

AP journalists Kim Tong-hyung, Jung-yoon Kim and Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea; Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo; Ralph Jennings in Taipei, Taiwan; and Eileen Ng in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; contributed to this story.

Foster Klug is AP's News Director for the Koreas, Japan, Australia and the South Pacific. He has covered Asia since 2005. Follow at [www.twitter.com/APKlug](http://www.twitter.com/APKlug)

## American women seek more than \$66M in damages from US Soccer

By RONALD BLUM AP Sports Writer

Players on the U.S. women's national team are seeking more than \$66 million in damages as part of their gender discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation.

The damages were included in slew of papers filed Thursday night in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles ahead of a trial scheduled to start May 5.

Among the documents filed were the separate collective bargaining agreements of the U.S. men's and women's teams, which had not previously been made public.

Players on the women's national team sued the federation last March alleging institutionalized gender discrimination that includes inequitable compensation between the men's and women's teams.

Each side in the class-action lawsuit asked for a summary judgment in their favor. The estimate of damages, including interest, was provided by Finnie Bevin Cook, an economist from Deiter Consulting Group, which was retained by the suing players.

The collective bargaining agreements showed a disparity in bonuses but also highlighted the different pay structures between the two teams.

"Women's national team players are paid differently because they specifically asked for and negotiated a completely different contract than the men's national team, despite being offered, and rejecting, a similar pay-to-play agreement during the past negotiations," U.S. Soccer said in a statement. "Their preference was a contract that provides significant additional benefits that the men's national team does not have,

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including guaranteed annual salaries, medical and dental insurance, paid child-care assistance, paid pregnancy and parental leave, severance benefits, salary continuation during periods of injury, access to a retirement plan, multiple bonuses and more."

Molly Levinson, spokeswoman for the plaintiffs, disputed the federation's assertions.

"In the most recent CBA negotiation, USSF repeatedly said that equal pay was not an option regardless of pay structure," Levinson said in a statement. "USSF proposed a 'pay to play structure' with less pay across the board. In every instance for a friendly or competitive match, the women players were offered less pay than their male counterparts. This is the very definition of gender discrimination, and of course the players rejected it."

The lawsuit has drawn worldwide attention. When the U.S. won the World Cup final last summer in France, fans in the crowd chanted "Equal Pay! Equal Pay!"

Earlier this month, the players union for the men's national team urged the federation to sharply increase pay for the women's team, while also accusing the governing body of making low-ball offers in current contract negotiations with the men's team.

Also among the documents filed Thursday were numerous pre-trial depositions. Megan Rapinoe, the reigning FIFA Player of the Year, was deposed Jan. 16. She said Russell Sawyer, an outside lawyer for the USSF, stated during a bargaining session in June 2016 that "market realities are such that the women do not deserve to be paid equally to the men."

USSF President Carlos Cordeiro was asked during a Jan. 29 deposition about a statement he made when campaigning that "our female players have not been treated equally."

"I felt then and I still feel to a degree, that the lack of opportunity for our female players was really what was at the root of some of their issues," Cordeiro said. "The fact that the Women's World Cup generates a fraction of revenue and a fraction of what the men get paid is a reflection, frankly, of lack of opportunity. ... Women's soccer outside of the United States doesn't have the same degree of respect."

Former USSF President Sunil Gulati, speaking during a Dec. 17 deposition, discussed the distinctions between men's and women's soccer.

"There is an absolute difference, which not everyone seemed to agree to, but do I think that it's less attractive or less entertaining? I'm not saying that. Or relative quality, I'm not saying that," he said. "But I'm also not saying, in terms of absolute level of -- whether it's speed or strength, they're the same. I think most people would accept that, too."

A U.S. man who was on the roster for all 16 qualifiers during the failed effort to reach the 2018 World Cup earned \$179,375 in payments from the U.S. Soccer Federation.

An American woman received \$52,500 for being on the roster for the five World Cup qualifiers last year plus \$147,500 for her time at the World Cup, including a \$37,500 roster bonus and \$110,000 for winning the title in France.

The USSF keeps 16-21 women's players under contract in each year of the current labor deal, which runs through 2021, and pays each a \$100,000 salary. The federation also pays a minimum 22 players assigned to a club in the National Women's Soccer League, with each receiving \$72,500 to \$77,500 this year.

Women receive 75% of salary on maternity leave for up to one year, and a player has the longer of three months or two training camps to return to full fitness. A player can receive 75% of salary for up to three months when adopting a child and a \$50 daily stipend for child care during training and play. The USSF also pays for health, dental and vision insurance for the women.

When the men last qualified for the World Cup in 2014, their player pool got a \$2 million payment, and each player earned \$55,000 for making the roster and \$5,500 per match. The player pool earned \$175,000 per point for the group phase, a total of \$700,000, plus \$3.6 million for reaching the round of 16.

The USSF in its filing pointed out it received \$9 million from FIFA for the men reaching the second round of the 2014 World Cup, but \$2 million for the women winning in 2015 and \$4 million for their victory in 2019.

There is parity per diem: the women get \$62.50 daily while in the U.S. and \$75 internationally, the same as the men received under terms of their expired deal that covered 2015-18. And men and women both receive \$1.50 per paid attendance for home matches controlled by the USSF.

AP Sports Writer Anne Peterson contributed to this report.

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/Soccer> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## **New Zealand killer of British backpacker sentenced to life**

**By NICK PERRY Associated Press**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A New Zealand man was sentenced to life in prison Friday for murdering a young British backpacker, whose mother told the court the stealing of her daughter's life had ripped a hole in her heart.

Grace Millane was strangled to death on her 22nd birthday in December 2018 by a man she met through the dating app Tinder.

She went out for drinks with him before returning to his hotel apartment in central Auckland, where he killed her. He stuffed her body into a suitcase, drove to a forest and buried it in a shallow grave, where police found it a week later.

The name of the 28-year-old man is being kept secret for now by court order, a restriction that's sometimes imposed in the New Zealand judicial system for reasons such as another pending trial.

Defense lawyers had claimed the death was accidental after the pair engaged in consensual erotic choking that went too far. A jury in November rejected that argument and found the man guilty.

Murder typically comes with a life sentence in New Zealand, so at stake at Friday's sentencing at the Auckland High Court was the number of years the killer would serve in jail before becoming eligible for parole. The judge set the minimum non-parole period at 17 years after the defense had argued for 12.

Judge Simon Moore ended up agreeing with prosecutors, saying the naked photos the man took of Millane after her death were correctly described as depraved and underscored his total lack of empathy toward her. Moore said callousness was shown by a hardened mind and a "numbness of the soul."

"Grace was vulnerable. She was a young woman in a strange country, and you were a stranger who she trusted," the judge said, according to news organization Stuff.

Earlier, the victim's mother Gillian Millane told the court via video link that the killer had ripped a hole in her heart by stealing her daughter's life.

"She died terrified and alone in a room with you," Gillian Millane said, according to the New Zealand Herald. The man in the dock kept his head bowed, rubbed his face and had his eyes closed, the newspaper reported.

The lead detective on the case, Detective Inspector Scott Beard, told reporters afterward that the defense argument that it was rough sex gone wrong had re-victimized Millane and her family.

"Strangling someone for five to 10 minutes till they die is not rough sex," the detective said. Jurors had heard during the trial that the man must have continued strangling Millane for some time after she had passed out.

Grace Millane's death shocked many in New Zealand, which prides itself on welcoming tourists and where many people travel abroad themselves. Hundreds of people attended candlelight vigils after she died, and Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern spoke about New Zealanders feeling "hurt and shame" that she was killed in their country.

Tourism is one of New Zealand's largest industries, accounting for more than 20% of foreign exchange earnings and about 6% of the overall economy.

The case has been closely followed in Britain as well.

## Wrestler adds to abuse allegations against university doctor

By LARRY LAGE, DAVID EGGERT, KATHLEEN FOODY and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Michigan (AP) — An Olympic wrestler on Thursday accused a University of Michigan doctor of touching him inappropriately during medical exams at the school and said the physician's reputation for such conduct was well known among his teammates.

Andy Hrovat, who competed for the U.S. in the 2008 Summer Olympics, told The Associated Press that the encounters with the late Dr. Robert E. Anderson happened during his freshman year in 1998.

"I would like to let people know that it's OK to come out," Hrovat said in an interview from his attorney's office in Denver. "It's OK to let your voice be heard."

He is the first athlete to make public accusations against Anderson following complaints this week from other former students that the doctor sexually abused them decades ago. The revelations echo high-profile sexual abuse allegations made against sports doctors at other universities.

"I was warned about him from teammates, saying, 'If anything happens and you go see the doctor, he's going to inappropriately touch you, that's just what Dr. A does,'" Hrovat recalled.

He declined to describe the exam, saying he was uncomfortable talking about it.

"To me, the mental part of it of having to go in there knowing that this doctor was going to touch you inappropriately is what sticks out most in my mind," he said.

Hrovat said he did not tell then-Michigan wrestling coach Dale Bahr or anyone in athletic administration about Anderson's conduct.

"In my mind, he normalized what he was doing and made you think that was just a normal part of the procedure," he said. "So why would you tell somebody?"

Also Thursday, the university president apologized to "anyone who was harmed" by Anderson. His comment came a day after the school announced that it had launched an investigation into Anderson's behavior following abuse allegations from five former patients.

Another former student, Gary Bailey, told the AP that Anderson dropped his pants and asked him to fondle his genitals in a medical exam during Bailey's senior year in 1968 or 1969. Bailey said he filled out a complaint form to the University Health Service within a month or so, writing that the behavior was "inappropriate."

"I never heard anything about it ever again," said Bailey, now 72.

Officials have acknowledged that some university employees were aware of accusations against the doctor prior to a 2018 complaint that led to a police investigation.

University President Mark Schlissel opened a meeting of the school's Board of Regents Thursday by reading a prepared statement about Anderson, who died in 2008.

"The patient-physician relationship involves a solemn commitment and trust," he said. "The allegations are highly disturbing. On behalf of the university, I apologize to anyone who was harmed by Dr. Anderson."

University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald said Thursday that, since the investigation was announced, 22 people have called a hotline to report on interactions with the onetime director of the University Health Service and physician for the football team. Fitzgerald said he did not have detailed information about the individual callers or what they described. He said some of the callers reported having no issues with Anderson.

"It was a traumatic thing at the time," Bailey said of his experience with Anderson. While the abuse has not "ruined my life or anything, it may have other people and that's why I'm bringing my story to light."

Bailey, who is gay, said Anderson "preyed a little bit on people who were gay ... because he sort of thought that they wouldn't say anything because, you know, people were pretty closeted back then." He said he told friends about the abuse decades ago.

Bailey, of Dowagiac, Michigan, first publicly spoke to The Detroit News.

Another man, Robert Julian Stone, told the AP on Wednesday that Anderson assaulted him during a medical appointment at the university's health center in 1971. Stone said he alerted university officials last

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summer, inspired by the national #MeToo movement against sexual misconduct.

The AP left phone messages with two of Anderson's three children. An email was sent to the third seeking comment.

Fitzgerald said he could not elaborate on investigators' finding that some university employees were aware of accusations against the doctor prior to the 2018 complaint that led to a police investigation.

John Manly, a lawyer for many of the hundreds of victims of now-imprisoned former Michigan State University sports doctor Larry Nassar, said Thursday that half a dozen people have called his California-based firm alleging abuse by Anderson – mostly ex-football players and wrestlers. He said they were fearful of what could happen to their positions on teams or at the school if they reported what he did to them.

"As men in their 30s up to their 60s, there is a real shame associated with this," he said. "Most didn't speak up because they were concerned he wouldn't clear them to play. And if you're not cleared by the doctor, you lose your athletic scholarship. He had tremendous control. These at the time boys and young men were subjected to this stuff knowing that if they said anything, they were fearful he would retaliate."

Manly urged the university to ensure that alleged victims have a neutral third party, either law enforcement or a counseling service, to call to discuss what happened to them. He said he is concerned that the school has asked people to reach out directly through the hotline.

"My experience has been that's much more about liability protection than helping the victims," Manly said. "It's really important that one of America's greatest universities act like it and treat these people not as adversaries but as people that are injured and that deserve support. My fear is that's not happening."

The university said the July 2018 complaint came from a former student athlete who wrote to Athletic Director Warde Manuel alleging abuse by Anderson during medical exams in the early 1970s.

Fitzgerald said he also could not answer questions about the scope of the police investigation, including whether investigators reviewed Anderson's resignation as head of the health service in 1980 or his retirement in 2003.

The university police department referred the AP to the university's Division of Public Safety and Security for questions about the investigation. A spokeswoman for the division did not immediately return an email with specific questions about the investigation.

Washtenaw County prosecutors first received the police department's report in late April or early May of 2019, said Steven Hiller, assistant chief prosecuting attorney.

A prosecutor concluded that summer that no criminal charges could be authorized because the primary suspect had died and none of the offenses were within Michigan's six-year statute of limitations, Hiller said Thursday.

The university had said Wednesday in a statement that it was making the information public following a determination on Tuesday by prosecutors that no criminal charges would be authorized. Fitzgerald referred questions about the discrepancy to the county prosecutor's office and did not immediately respond to additional inquiries.

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Footy reported from Chicago. Eggert reported from Lansing, Michigan.

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Associated Press researchers Jennifer Farrar, Randy Herschaft and Rhonda Shafner in New York and AP Writer Tammy Webber in Chicago and Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

## Democrats try to blunt strong California showing for Sanders

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California is the largest prize in the calculations of any Democratic presidential candidate, but it rarely seems that way.

But no one is underselling California this time. Bernie Sanders has been working the state for months, organizing intensively among Latinos and young voters, producing campaign materials in seven languages,

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going, as one aide said, "where most candidates don't go." Mike Bloomberg has tried to counter Sanders with saturation advertising, including buying time at television stations in Arizona, Nevada and Oregon that also reach California. Pete Buttigieg held three public events in the past week to capitalize on his early state momentum. Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren remain competitive.

The attention reflects a growing concern among Sanders' rivals that if he performs well enough in the state, with its 415 delegates at stake on Super Tuesday, March 3, that he could build a delegate lead that is difficult to catch.

"California's one of those unique places because these presidential elections don't play out here very often," said Ace Smith, one of the state's best known political strategists. "There's just a real thirst."

Competing in the state isn't simple; it is home to some of the nation's most expensive media markets, there are roughly 20 million voters, and delegates are awarded both on the statewide level and in each of the 53 congressional districts. A candidate must hit 15% statewide to get a share of 144 delegates. Another 271 awarded by reaching 15% in a congressional district, with heavily Democratic districts offering more delegates.

Sanders' campaign has long counted California as important, deploying more than 80 staff here last year and sending Sanders regularly. He'll hold two rallies Friday in heavily Latino areas, on top of an event earlier this week in the San Francisco Bay Area, a Democratic stronghold rich with delegates.

He's running television ads in every market. Campaign staffers were out just days after ballots dropped on Feb. 3, knocking on doors offering to collect them, a legal practice in California, and his events have booths set up to collect them. And he is trying to show that organizing can be more potent than TV ads.

Smith, who ran Hillary Clinton's 2016 operation in the state, said the key question for Sanders is how high his support can go. If it hits close to 40%, it will be harder for multiple other contenders to win delegates, allowing him to run up the score.

Recent polls show Sanders in front of other top candidates in the state, with Biden, Bloomberg, Buttigieg and Warren all hovering near the threshold for receiving delegates.

Rafael N avar, Sanders' state director, said the campaign believes he will win delegates in every congressional district.

"We've prioritized where most presidential campaigns don't go," he said.

Bloomberg, meanwhile, is blanketing every single television market in the state with ads, in addition to those out-of-state markets that reach California viewers. He is also buying advertisements in weekly newspapers in rural areas, hoping to hit voters who may not be getting much communication from Democrats.

He last campaigned in the state on Feb. 3, the day of the Iowa caucuses, traveling from the state capital of Sacramento to Fresno, in the state's farm belt, and ending the day outside Los Angeles. Dan Kanninen, the campaign's states director, said Bloomberg is similarly trying to win delegates in every district.

"It's premature to put a number on what we hope to get," Kanninen said, but he warned Sanders could run away with delegates if non-Sanders voters don't consolidate behind a single alternative. "Voting for a candidate who's going to get 5% or 6% does have the danger of creating the scenario around that threshold that could get Bernie a lead that's almost insurmountable."

Bloomberg's advertising is buoyed by roughly 300 staff members on the ground, by far the most of any campaign, led by strategists with deep California experience. The campaign will have held 1,000 organizing events in the state by March 3, spokesman Mike Buckley said, including niche get togethers like "Surfers for Mike" and "Scientists for Mike."

California is also home to some of the country's biggest Democratic donors. Bloomberg isn't taking any campaign contributions, but he's set up "leadership committees" of would-be donors who hold events akin to fundraisers where people can learn from Bloomberg allies about his campaign plans and policies.

Buttigieg in particular has done well with the California donor class; he's regularly held fundraisers in Hollywood and has raised nearly \$10 million from California donors, more than from any other state. His challenge is to translate that support to votes.

He visited Sacramento and the farming city of Turlock last week and spent Thursday at a televised town hall in the Los Angeles media market. For candidates that can't afford to blanket the airwaves with ads,

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earning free media through campaign events is critical, said Smith, the California strategist.

Buttigieg's campaign is holding volunteer organizing events in at least 47 congressional districts this weekend, spokesman Ben Halle said. He declined to say which six districts haven't yet been organized.

Buttigieg's campaign has sent out a memo warning of a Super Tuesday scenario where Sanders dominates. And he, like Bloomberg, is arguing he's the single best candidate to go head-to-head with Sanders. Both have urged the other to drop out.

Biden, meanwhile, has only held public events twice in the state since November and has no television advertising, though he has a digital buy. He's more urgently focused on reviving his struggling campaign in Nevada and South Carolina, which vote next.

Warren similarly has spent no time in the state this year, though her campaign is hosting multiple events targeting Latino voters this week and has more than four dozen staff members. A spokesman declined to say if she plans to run TV ads. Amy Klobuchar has virtually no campaign infrastructure in the state, and her campaign just announced a seven state Super Tuesday ad buy that does not include California. Tom Steyer, the race's other billionaire and a California resident, is also up on the airwaves.

So far, just 8% of Democratic mail voters have returned ballots, according to tracking by Political Data Inc. Just a fraction of the state's 5 million independent voters have requested the ability to vote in the Democratic primary, prompting the Sanders campaign to schedule a Friday press conference to highlight and explain the process.

Roughly 5% of Latino voters who vote by mail have returned ballots, and less than 5% of those ages 18 to 34 have, according to Political Data Inc.'s tracking. Both are key demographics for Sanders campaign.

## Democrats big money pledges give way to reality of 2020 race

By **BRIAN SLODYSKO** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many Democratic presidential candidates launched their campaigns last year with bold pledges to reject help from super PACs and dark money groups. But as the realities of a tough primary fight sink in, those promises are fading away.

Elizabeth Warren, one of the fiercest critics of money in politics, was the latest White House hopeful this week to accept help from a big money organization that can raise and spend unlimited amounts on behalf of political candidates. Former Vice President Joe Biden, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Bernie Sanders have done much the same.

The Democratic battle to take on President Donald Trump is entering a critical new phase as more than a dozen states vote within the next couple of weeks with about one third of the delegates needed to win the nomination at stake. Campaign finance disclosures made to the Federal Election Commission on Thursday offered the clearest look yet at who will have the resources to forge on deep into the calendar and who will be forced to soon reckon with the sustainability of their candidacy.

The disclosures include campaign spending and fundraising details for the month of January and laid bare the stark financial choices ahead for those other than former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Sanders.

Bloomberg, a billionaire, has plunged over \$400 million into his campaign, while Sanders is propelled by an army of contributors whose renewable stream of small online contributions helped him amass \$25 million in January alone.

"Our campaign has built a nationwide organization that is engaging voters daily," said Bloomberg campaign manager Kevin Sheekey. "With over 2,400 staff across 43 states today, Mike is the only candidate with the record and resources to build the national infrastructure Democrats need to beat Donald Trump."

In contrast, Warren raised \$10.4 million, held just \$2.2 million in reserve at the month's end and took out a \$400,000 line of credit. Since then, in the month of February her campaign said she has since raised \$17 million, some of it after a spirited debate performance Wednesday night.

Former Vice President Joe Biden raised \$8.8 million in January and had \$7.1 million in the bank. And Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar had \$2.8 million on hand, though she has raised more than \$6 million



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since a breakout debate performance before the New Hampshire primary.

Even Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, whose improbable rise to prominence was fueled in part by his massive fundraising success earlier in the contest reported taking in a lackluster \$6 million in January. He also had just \$6.6 million cash on hand after burning through \$14.1 million that month. His campaign says he has since taken in another \$11 million, but has not said how much of that he has spent.

That gives Sanders and Bloomberg an overwhelming advantage heading into Super Tuesday on March 3, when more than a dozen states will hold contests.

Party leaders have long worried that Sanders, a democratic socialist, would lose to Trump because of his embrace of left wing politics. Now, after a neck-and-neck showing against Buttigieg in Iowa, followed by a win in New Hampshire, he's the one best poised to capture nomination.

Bloomberg, with his limitless resources, has emerged as a centrist candidate who has the money to compete with Sanders. But after a widely-panned debate performance on Wednesday where he was eviscerated by Warren, some are doubting that possibility, too.

Many now rue that early days of the primary were dominated by pledges of the sources of money campaigns would reject rather than building a fundraising network to compete with Trump. Along with the Republican National Committee, he has raised more than \$525 million for his reelection effort since the start of 2019.

"It was a huge mistake to try to adhere to this level of financial purity. The only person who can do it is Bernie Sanders — no one else can. Barack Obama couldn't, Hillary Clinton couldn't and Donald Trump can't," said Rufus Gifford a prominent Democratic fundraiser who held high-level posts in both of Obama's campaigns. "That will be the lesson of this primary — especially if Bernie Sanders wins."

Warren, a Massachusetts senator, was a notable addition on Thursday to the ranks of people acquiescing to help from a super PAC, which are prohibited from coordinate spending decisions with candidates they support.

"It can't be the case that a bunch of people keep them and only one or two don't," she said while campaigning in Nevada.

On Wednesday, the group Persist PAC announced it would spend more than \$1 million on advertising supporting her.

"While we respect their views and agree on the need for campaign finance reform, we believe this election is too important and we want to do what we can within the bounds of existing law to support them," said Christina Reynolds, vice president of the group EMILY's List, which contributed \$250,000 to the group, as well as another called Kitchen Table Conversations PAC that is supporting Klobuchar.

In the past, Warren and her allies sought to pressure rivals to reject their support. She sharply criticized Biden for reversing his super PAC pledge in November. The group backing him, Unite the Country, has spent \$7.2 million on his behalf.

Her campaign also targeted Buttigieg, who is backed by VoteVets, an organization that operates both a super PAC. The group, which backs veterans running for office, like Buttigieg, has spent over \$630,000 on ads supporting him in Nevada, which will hold its caucuses on Saturday.

Even Sanders, who has railed for years against super PACs and nonprofit dark money groups, has relied on them for help. He's supported by Our Revolution and a handful of other nonprofits, which function much the same as super PACs but not have to disclose their donors and will not have to report the financial activity to the IRS until after the election. He founded Our Revolution after his 2016 loss to Hillary Clinton, which has taken in nearly \$1 million, according to tax filings for 2016, 2017 and 2018. Much of it came from those who contributed six-figure sums. During the 2016 election he also benefited from ad spending by National Nurses United super PAC.

Warren said her reversal was prompted, in part, by Bloomberg and fellow billionaire Tom Steyer.

"They have the equivalent of a super PAC -- it's known as their sock drawer," she said during a CNN townhall Thursday.

Associated Press writer Sara Burnett in Chicago contributed to this report.

## Tech boom, suburban growth drive Nevada's Democratic shift

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Twenty years ago, long before Nevada was part of the early presidential selection process, the phone typically rang unanswered at Washoe County Democratic Party headquarters in Reno during mid-term elections.

"We had a small conference room and a tiny reception area, but no staff at all," recalls Chris Wicker, who started a seven-year run as county party chairman in 2002.

"There wasn't any state party focus up here except in presidential years. If you talked to people, they would say 'I didn't know there was a Democratic Party in Washoe County,'" he said.

In the last decade Nevada has undergone a political transformation from Republican outpost to a contested battleground to emerging Democratic hotbed. All but one member of the state's congressional delegation is a Democrat along with all but one of the statewide officer holders. The Democratic swing has been so pronounced that President Donald Trump's campaign views Minnesota — a state that hasn't voted for a GOP presidential candidate since 1972 — as friendlier territory than Nevada. When Democrats caucus here Saturday to pick their preferred nominee for president, there will be 165,000 more total registered Democrats in Nevada than in 2008, the first time the state held its closely watched contest.

Nowhere is the new blue streak clearer than in northern Nevada's Washoe County, a place not long ago considered a GOP stronghold. But as the growing suburbs tucked into the shadow of the Sierra have changed, so has Nevada's political landscape.

California transplants have brought their politics with them. A tech boom — spurred by companies like Tesla, Apple and Microsoft — has drawn the young and college-educated, demographic groups that lean left as do Hispanics who made up 29% of Nevada's population in 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Now the phone is ringing all the time in county Democratic headquarters in Reno, which is staffed year-round.

For decades, the key to Republicans winning a statewide election in Nevada was to sweep the more conservative rural counties and build just enough of a margin in the Reno-Sparks area to offset heavily Democratic Clark County.

In 2008, President Obama became the first Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964 to carry Washoe County. Just four years earlier, Vice President Dick Cheney capped a campaign swing across the country with an appearance at a Sparks high school in a working class neighborhood the night before George W. Bush won re-election against Democrat John Kerry.

The GOP hasn't carried Washoe County — or Nevada — in a presidential election since. Thanks in part to the once red bastion of Washoe, Nevada was one of the few swing states that sided with Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump in 2016.

"You guys have turned this state around," former Vice President Joe Biden told hundreds gathered last month in the same Sparks High School gymnasium where Cheney rallied the GOP troops in 2004. "You sort of hold the keys to the kingdom here."

Republicans argue they have a comeback plan, one bankrolled by an incumbent president popular with his party and party donors. Keith Schipper, Nevada spokesman for the Trump campaign, said the GOP has built a "top-notch ground-game operation, unparalleled data program, and vast fundraising war chest" that will out match Democrats.

Most Democrats credit former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid with building Democrats formidable ground force statewide. Reid for years collaborated with organized labor, worked with groups registering new, Latino and young voters and used clout to bring the early caucus and its national spotlight to Nevada. But demographic changes sweeping the West also worked in Democrats favor.

"I think we honestly have now joined the rest of the West Coast and Democrats are basically going to be

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in control like they have been for some time in Washington, Oregon, Hawaii," said Fred Lokken, longtime head of the political science department at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno.

Bob Fulkerson, longtime leader of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada — a coalition of labor, social justice and minority groups in Reno — said a growing population of Asians and Pacific Islanders is adding to the influx of Hispanics, who the state demographer projects will account for one-third of Nevadans by 2029.

"I think we're undergoing a sea change largely driven by demographics," Fulkerson said. "It has been happening in Clark County for decades and now it is happening in Washoe."

Those changes are seen at Democratic party events and in the prominence of progressive groups. But not all the California transplants are Democrats.

Wicker, the former Washoe County Democratic chairman, said the influx from California is a "mixed bag" politically.

"Many people are coming to northern Nevada to avoid taxes, or their company is moving here. They are not necessarily naturally Democrats just because they came from California," he said, adding that many young people register non-partisan but show up at progressive group's events.

But some observers note Nevada's Republican Party hasn't necessarily tapped into that new pool of voters. The party took a turn to the right, embraced hard line tea party politics and then later Trump's bombastic, anti-immigration platform.

"It's too conservative for many Republicans," Lokken said.

As they ramp up their push to win Nevada back, Republicans are focusing on an economic message aimed at nonpartisan and moderate voters and arguing it's Democrats that are too far out of the mainstream.

"If these 2020 Democrats honestly believe their socialist agenda is a winning message in Nevada, they are going to be severely disappointed," Nevada GOP Chairman Michael McDonald said in a statement following Wednesday night's Democratic debate in Las Vegas. One of the leading Democrats in the race, including the one, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, identifies as a democratic socialist.

Republicans have been trying to grab the spotlight from Democrats whenever possible this week. Trump stayed overnight at his Trump-branded hotel in Las Vegas before he spoke at an event at police headquarters Thursday and planned a noon rally Friday at the convention center.

Republicans don't have a caucus in Nevada this year. Instead, the state party's central committee plans to meet in Pahrump Saturday to become the first Western state to formally bind their delegates to Trump.

## Trump savoring scrambled Dem race, Bloomberg's debate debut

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Relishing in Democrats' jumbled primary in the wake of a fractious debate, President Donald Trump offered stinging criticism of his rivals as he sought to take advantage of the moment.

Making a rare four-day swing through the West, Trump was exuding reelection confidence Thursday at a campaign rally in Colorado, after taking in the prior night's prize fight of a debate in Las Vegas. He reveled in the intra-party squabbling and the weak debut debate performance turned in by former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, according to aides and allies.

"I don't know if anyone watched last night's debate," Trump told an arena of raucous supporters. "It got very big ratings, and you know what, Mini Mike didn't do well last night. I was going to send him a note, saying it's not easy doing what I do is it?"

He offered other biting assessments of the Democratic contenders, contrasting them to his own performance in debates four years ago.

"I became president because of the debates because unlike Mini Mike I could answer questions," Trump said.

Feeling reelection odds rising after his acquittal in the Senate impeachment trial and his campaign's record fundraising, Trump seized on the deep divisions and personal tiffs on display in the Democratic field.

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But his preoccupation with the scrambled nomination race for the Democrats seeking to replace him has been clear throughout the trip.

When Trump woke up Thursday morning in his gilded Las Vegas hotel, his base during the four-state western trip, he tuned in to the post-debate coverage and displayed his glee.

Repurposing one of Bloomberg's own quotes about the Democratic infighting, Trump tweeted: "The real winner last night was Donald Trump." He tacked on his own coda: "I agree!"

The night before, after a campaign rally in Phoenix, Trump summoned reporters to his office aboard Air Force One to join him in watching a replay of the debate on the return flight to Las Vegas. He was scheduled to hold a rally in the city — his third in as many days — Friday on the eve of the caucuses, as he did before contests in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Bloomberg has been the most disconcerting force in the 2020 race for Trump since the ultra-billionaire entered the fray in November and spent more than \$400 million, which rocketed him in the polls in just three months.

Bloomberg's willingness to spend near-unlimited sums to defeat Trump this fall, and the mocking tone of many of his ads, have deeply rankled the president.

Trump's campaign had organized itself around the strategy that it would be able to paint any rival as an extreme liberal, a "socialist" or worse, and concerns mounted that strategists would have to come up with a different plan should Bloomberg win the nomination.

Trump's team saw the debate as validating his reelection strategy and providing a fresh opening for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a self-described Democratic socialist, to gain a significant delegate lead on Super Tuesday. The president was hopeful that panic from more moderate Democrats at Sanders' rise would only further fracture the Democratic Party.

On Thursday, Trump predicted the debate would be the end of Bloomberg's campaign, and said Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar's campaign was also mortally wounded.

"I think you lost two last night," he said in Colorado, adding that "it looks like Bernie" will emerge as the Democratic nominee.

Trump on Thursday placed a round of calls to confidants, echoing the thoughts he had posted on Twitter — at times with more colorful language — and opining that Bloomberg did not appear ready for the moment, according to two Republicans close to the White House who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Long insecure about Bloomberg's wealth, Trump told confidants that the debate proved money alone did not lead to his own electoral success.

Between three rallies and a pair of high-dollar fundraisers, Trump sought to use his western swing to highlight administration policies that delivered on campaign promises and appealed to key demographics.

On Wednesday, he ceremoniously signed new environmental regulations that eased water restrictions on farmers in the heavily Republican California Central Valley. On Thursday, Trump spoke to a graduating class of ex-prisoners in a renewed appeal to communities of color, as he championed his administration's work on criminal justice reform.

In Colorado Springs, Trump was rallying support for Republican Sen. Cory Gardner, who is considered one of the most vulnerable senators seeking reelection this year.

"We are going to win Colorado in a landslide and you're going to help us get Cory Gardner across that line because he's been with us 100%," Trump said, referencing his vote in the impeachment trial. "There was no waver with Cory."

Between touting his administration's accomplishments and attacking his opponents, Trump also critiqued the Academy Awards for awarding best picture to the South Korean film *Parasite* — the first foreign language film to win an Oscar.

"How bad were the Academy Awards this year," Trump said. "And the winner is: a movie from South Korea. What's that all about?"

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Associated Press staff writer James Anderson in Colorado Springs and Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report. Lemire reported from Washington.

## **Bloomberg struggles to respond to politics of #MeToo era**

**By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mike Bloomberg's name last appeared on a ballot a decade before #MeToo transformed cultural mores surrounding sexual harassment and the treatment of women. As he campaigns for the presidency, the 78-year-old billionaire is struggling to adjust.

The former New York City mayor was caught flat-footed during much of Wednesday night's debate when rival Elizabeth Warren blasted his company's use of non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual harassment. She sought to portray such agreements as endemic of a broader culture of sexism at the company, Bloomberg LP, when he was CEO.

Bloomberg's response was dismissive. He said those who alleged misconduct "didn't like a joke I told" and argued that non-disclosure agreements were "consensual" deals supported by the women involved.

The response struck some women as out of touch with how the #MeToo movement has reshaped the conversation around sexual harassment in the workplace — and the use of non-disclosure agreements in particular. Employment lawyer Debra Katz, who represented accuser Christine Blasey Ford in her Senate testimony against then-Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, said Bloomberg's comments "really missed the mark."

"I think Bloomberg's comments were tone-deaf," she said. "In this moment, when we now understand that many NDAs were entered into in coercive manners, it's incumbent upon companies and especially those (led by people) like Bloomberg, who are public figures, to agree to revisit these issues."

The episode could cost Bloomberg some support from women, who are crucial to winning the Democratic nomination and defeating President Donald Trump. Warren kept up the pressure on Thursday, saying when women complain, Bloomberg can "throw a little money on it, put a little gag in the woman's mouth."

Bloomberg campaigned Thursday in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he showed no sign of changing his approach, bemoaning the division on display during the debate and reinforcing his central point that he's best positioned to beat Trump.

Still, his rise in the polls is prompting scrutiny of Bloomberg's company. Bloomberg LP has reportedly faced nearly 40 lawsuits involving 65 plaintiffs on an array of employment issues between 1996 and 2016. It's unclear how many of these cases were related to sexual harassment, but a number of recent media reports have disclosed charges of sexist comments made by Bloomberg and other managers at the company.

Earlier this month, The Washington Post published a long-rumored joke book of crude comments Bloomberg allegedly made about women from 1990. His campaign has said he never made any of the comments disclosed in the booklet.

But Tina Tchen, the CEO and president of Time's Up, the organization created to fight sexual harassment in the wake of #MeToo, said she wasn't surprised by allegations about the culture at Bloomberg LP.

"Being in the finance world, having worked in a corporate law firm myself in the '80s and '90s, I think it's fair to say that workplaces, especially the Wall Street workplace, was a very different place in terms of the comments that were considered normal and accepted," she said.

But she said, now, "most companies have evolved, and are continuing to evolve," particularly on the issue of NDAs. She noted that NDAs have "long been a tool that have silenced survivors of sexual harassment ... and really take agency away from survivors."

They can also make it tougher for a company to correct a culture of sexual harassment, because the secrecy surrounding these incidents mean employees and managers don't know how widespread they are. Tchen said it would be perfectly reasonable for Bloomberg to amend the NDAs now.

"Knowing what we all know now about the workplace and sexual harassment, are you willing to, now, allow folks to speak up about their experience?" she asked.

Many types of litigation, from insurance cases to product liability, are routinely settled through confi-

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dential settlements.

In sexual misconduct cases, they've served to protect the privacy of victims as well as the careers and reputations of the accused, including comedian Bill Cosby, Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, Fox News host Bill O'Reilly and other powerful men.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, some think the practice should be revisited.

"One interesting thing is whether it will be an end to the confidentiality pledge," Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said at a February 2018 event at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

"I hope those agreements will not be enforced by courts," she added in a revised version of the speech published last year.

Katz said that while there's a role for non-disclosure agreements to help victims preserve their privacy, and that the majority of her clients prefer to keep their agreements confidential, she believes public figures like Bloomberg should release them from the secrecy clause if they want to go public.

"Certainly in this environment, Bloomberg needs to be transparent," she said. "And, if in fact, there was nothing that implicated his conduct in these agreements, he should want to have them be made public. But to the extent that he presided as CEO of these companies and simply paid settlements as the cost of doing business, and didn't take appropriate corrective measures, that's certainly something that should be important for voters to know about."

A number of current and former employees have spoken out in defense of Bloomberg, and say his promotion of women and advocacy on women's issues has long been one of his strengths. Bloomberg himself noted on the debate stage that he has employed and elevated many women to positions of leadership within his organization and his mayoral administration. He appointed the first woman to serve as deputy mayor, and has donated tens of millions of dollars to organizations promoting women's reproductive rights and other women's rights efforts.

Fatima Shah, who currently serves on the campaign as national director overseeing coalitions and constituencies and worked in the Bloomberg administration from 2006 until he left office, said he made clear in his administration that women "were all clear partners in the work that we were doing." She suggested a few incidents that occurred at Bloomberg LP, which employs thousands of people globally, were "wrongly layered onto Mike."

"As a father, as a brother, as a son, as a mayor, as a business leader and philanthropist, his leadership has consistently focused on engaging women, on issues that matter to women," she said.

But his refusal to acknowledge and apologize for issues within his company come in stark contrast to how some of his Democratic opponents have addressed similar issues throughout the campaign. After several women said Joe Biden made them feel uncomfortable with unwanted physical contact, he pledged to "be more mindful about respecting personal space in the future." And Bernie Sanders apologized and enacted reforms after women came forward with claims of sexual harassment on his 2016 campaign.

Some of Bloomberg's critics from his time as mayor say his refusal to show a similar level of contrition is unsurprising. Melissa Mark-Viverito, a former New York City Council speaker who did battle with Bloomberg frequently, said his debate performance "very much reminds me of the Mike Bloomberg that I knew."

"It does continue to reinforce that image that people have that he is out of touch and has no willingness to understand or address that," she said.

Indeed, that may be the continued political fallout for Bloomberg if he fails to address the issue, warned Democratic strategist Maria Cardona. She suggested Bloomberg's refusal to apologize for the conduct at his company could blur the very clear distinction the candidate has tried to draw between himself and Trump, who has faced many more and far more salacious claims of sexual harassment directed at him personally, but who has also never taken responsibility for any wrongdoing.

"If Bloomberg really wants to be the one that unequivocally is left standing as the one Democrat that can fight Trump, I don't think he's going to be able to do that until he puts this to rest," she said.

Dale reported from Philadelphia.

## Wounded but defiant, Bloomberg promises to keep fighting

By STEVE PEOPLES and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — His aura suddenly shattered, a defiant Michael Bloomberg sent a pointed message Thursday to a political world grappling with his underwhelming presidential debate debut: He's not going away.

The New York ultra-billionaire lashed out at leading Democratic rival Bernie Sanders and President Donald Trump, addressing voters face to face in the Super Tuesday state of Utah. That was just hours after struggling to answer dangerous yet predictable questions about his record on race, gender and wealth during a nationally televised beatdown that rattled would-be supporters and thrilled critics in both parties.

Bloomberg didn't go easy in his own review of the Las Vegas debate:

"How was your night last night? Look, the real winner in the debate last night was Donald Trump," Bloomberg told a crowd of several hundred in Utah's largest city.

But then he added: "He thinks I'm going to go away. Wrong, Donald."

Though never onstage with his rivals before Wednesday night, the former New York mayor has built support in national polls though huge expenditures on polished television ads. He released a campaign finance report Thursday that reminded rivals in both parties of his indisputable advantage in the 2020 contest: Money.

Specifically, the man worth an estimated \$60 billion reported spending \$409 million through the first nine weeks of his presidential campaign, including \$220 million last month alone.

Still, there were signs that his debate performance shook the confidence of would-be supporters who, just 24 hours earlier, believed Bloomberg might be the ideal candidate for the Democratic Party's anxious establishment to rally behind. Instead, a new reality began to settle in, at least among some prominent donors and political operatives, who acknowledged a stark divide between the strength of Bloomberg-the-brand and Bloomberg-the-candidate.

"I've never seen a billionaire get disemboweled before, but good God, that was bad," said Boyd Brown, a South Carolina-based Democratic strategist who was considering backing Bloomberg earlier in the week. "I don't see how he bounces back from that."

Some prominent donors weren't impressed either.

Rufus Gifford, a leading fundraiser for both of Barack Obama's presidential campaigns, said, "As a Biden supporter but also someone who respects Mayor Bloomberg, he did nothing last night that encouraged me to look in a different direction."

Trump and his allies were downright giddy.

Former Trump senior adviser Steve Bannon said he's not dismissing Bloomberg after one debate given his extraordinary political assets — organization, a sophisticated data operation and an unlimited bank account — yet the "myth of Bloomberg" has been replaced by a new reality.

"Elizabeth Warren skinned him alive in front of the nation. And if you can't beat Fauxcahontas in February, you're not going to beat Donald Trump in October," Bannon said.

The leading Republican strategist said it was "malpractice by his senior advisers" to put Bloomberg onstage before the March 3 Super Tuesday primaries since Bloomberg won't be on the ballot until then.

Those senior advisers declined to respond to requests for comment, though immediately after the debate, campaign manager Kevin Sheekey noted that Bloomberg hadn't debated in more than a decade.

"He was just warming up," Sheekey said.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg's Democratic rivals were seeking to capitalize on his struggles.

During an appearance outside Las Vegas, Warren said, "Last night was a lot of fun," because Bloomberg was held accountable.

"I have really had it with billionaires, regardless of party, who think that the rules don't apply to them," she said.

In the debate, Warren pressed Bloomberg to say how many nondisclosure agreements his company

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has signed preventing women from talking about complaints of harassment. She leaned in further on Thursday, saying that when women complain, Bloomberg can “throw a little money on it, put a little gag in the woman’s mouth.”

Back at Bloomberg’s event in Utah, organizers offered voters free coffee and fruit plates.

In his speech, the former New York City mayor assailed only one fellow Democrat, Sanders, the self-described democratic socialist who has emerged as the front-runner in the party’s nomination fight. Bloomberg warned that his party “may very well be on the way to nominating somebody who cannot win in November. And if we choose a candidate who appeals to a small base like Sen. Sanders it will be a fatal error.”

And ignoring his own poor debate debut, he declared himself best positioned to defeat Trump in this fall’s general election.

“We all know that Trump is a bully. But I say, I’m a New Yorker, and I know how to deal with bullies. I did it all the time,” Bloomberg said. “I’m not afraid of Trump and he knows it. And he sees our poll numbers and he is scared.”

Voters won’t have a chance to prove Bloomberg right or wrong until March 3, also known as Super Tuesday, when he will appear on a ballot for the first time.

Utah voter Jo Parrish, a 66-year-old retired residential appraiser, waited in line in the cold to see Bloomberg on Thursday.

Holding a cup of coffee passed out by the campaign, she said she originally liked Joe Biden but fears that Trump’s unfounded attacks against his son have taken their toll. A self-described moderate Democrat, Parrish said Sanders isn’t too liberal for her personally, but she’s not sure he can beat Trump.

Bloomberg’s debate performance didn’t scare her away from Bloomberg.

“I watched the debate, I thought he got picked on,” Parrish said. “He didn’t come across real personable, but I don’t care if he’s personable or not as long as he can beat Trump.”

Peoples reported from Washington. AP writer Brian Slodysko in Washington and Jonathan Cooper in Las Vegas contributed.

## NFL owners approve negotiated terms for new labor agreement

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL has put the labor ball in the players’ hands.

In a somewhat surprisingly strong decision, the 32 team owners voted Thursday to “accept the negotiated terms on the principles of a new collective bargaining agreement.”

Details of that agreement were not forthcoming from any of the owners or Commissioner Roger Goodell. They quickly scurried from a Manhattan hotel without nothing more than “sorry, can’t help you,” or “I can’t comment” when asked about the proposed CBA.

Now the onus is on the players, who have a conference call Friday involving the union executive committee and player representatives. The NFL Players Association said it would not comment Thursday on the NFL’s announcement.

Such quick action by the owners indicates their eagerness to replace the 10-year labor agreement that concludes in March 2021. Several elements of a new CBA could be implemented for the upcoming season should the players vote in favor of it.

That, of course, is no given. Should the players vote against accepting this proposal or seek further negotiations, the NFL has said the current agreement would remain in place for 2020. A league statement put a deadline on acceptance by the union, saying “since the clubs and players need to have a system in place and know the rules that they will operate under by next week.”

The league’s business year begins March 18.

Among the items in that proposal, according to several people familiar with the negotiations but speaking anonymously because they are not authorized to release such information:



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— A 17-game schedule, which always has been a stumbling block in talks with the NFL Players Association. More roster spots per team would be a must for the players.

A 17th game would preferably be played at neutral sites, which one of the people familiar with the talks said could include non-NFL U.S. venues as well as Europe, Mexico and Brazil.

— A reduction of the preseason, initially from four games to three.

— A higher share of revenues for the players; the current number is 47 percent. The cut the players would receive is dependent on the length of the regular season, but would remain below 50 percent regardless.

— An expansion of the playoffs, something the NFL has been seeking for years.

Commissioner Roger Goodell suggested back in 2015 that increasing the postseason field to seven teams in each conference was in the works. The owners could unilaterally add a wild-card team in the AFC and the NFC, but are willing to make such a move part of a new CBA.

The provisions for two more wild-card games, developed years ago, would have only the team with the best record in each conference receiving a bye for the first weekend of the playoffs.

There's even a chance one of those wild-card matchups would be played on a Monday night.

Also being considered is a second bye week to go with a 17th game, although almost certainly not for the 2020 season. The expansion of the playoffs easily could occur this year, however, if a new CBA is reached.

The current labor agreement was reached in 2011 after a 4½-month lockout of the players.

In a copy of a union fact sheet posted on Twitter by sports attorney Darren Heitner, several other items were revealed.

The players are seeking a neutral decision maker on some disciplinary cases to replace Goodell, something the commissioner's office always has fought.

Also on the fact sheet are upgraded pensions for past and current players; increases in minimum salaries; larger practice squads with fewer limitations; reduced workouts in preseason; narrowing the testing period for players for marijuana use, plus lowered discipline for using it; and a reduction in on-field fines.

\_\_\_ More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Trump ally Roger Stone sentenced to over 3 years in prison

By **ASHRAF KHALIL, MARK SHERMAN and MICHAEL BALSAMO** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roger Stone, a longtime confidant of President Donald Trump, was sentenced to more than three years in prison Thursday for obstructing a congressional investigation in a case that has sparked fears about presidential interference in the justice system.

Soon after Judge Amy Berman Jackson pronounced sentence, Trump publicly decried Stone's conviction as unfair and prominent Republican legislators were giving tacit support for a pardon. But Trump said he wasn't ready to act just yet.

"I want the process to play out. I think that's the best thing to do because I would love to see Roger exonerated," he said. "I'm going to watch the process. I'm going to watch very closely. ... At some point I'll make a determination."

The case was marked by the Justice Department's extraordinary about-face on a sentencing recommendation and a very public dispute between Trump and Attorney General William Barr, who said the president was undermining the department's historical independence and making "it impossible for me to do my job."

The president responded by asserting that he was the "chief law enforcement officer of the federal government."

Stone was convicted in November on all seven counts of an indictment that accused him of lying to Congress, tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the 2016 election.

He was the sixth Trump aide or adviser to be convicted on charges brought as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into possible Russian interference in the 2016 election.

At sentencing Thursday, Jackson grilled federal prosecutor John Crabb on the department's decision to

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replace a tough sentencing recommendation for Stone with a more lenient one, which had prompted the original prosecution team to quit the case. Trump had called the original recommendation of seven to nine years a "miscarriage of justice."

Jackson pointedly told Crabb that he might know less about the case than anyone in the room.

Jackson said the evidence clearly showed that Stone testified falsely to Congress and repeatedly pressured a potential witness to either back up his lie or refuse to testify.

Near the end, Jackson's voice rose in anger as she said that Stone's entire defense strategy seemed to amount to "So What?" Stone did not testify and called no witnesses on his behalf.

"This is NOT campaign hijinks. This was not Roger being Roger. You lied to Congress," she told Stone. "The dismay and disgust ... at the defendant's actions in our polarized climate should transcend (political) parties."

She sentenced Stone to 40 months in prison, plus two years' probation and a \$20,000 fine.

Stone remained largely expressionless throughout the proceedings. As he left the Washington, D.C., courthouse and got into a black SUV without speaking to reporters, crowds of protesters engaged in dueling chants of "Pardon Roger Stone!" and "Lock him up!"

His attorney Bruce Rogow said Stone and his team would have no comment. The judge delayed execution of his sentence while she considers Stone's motion for a new trial.

Even before Trump said he would hold off a decision on a pardon, Republican and Democratic legislators were staking out positions on one.

Democratic House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff of California tweeted after the sentencing that "to pardon Stone when his crimes were committed to protect Trump would be a breathtaking act of corruption."

But Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a staunch Trump ally, signaled early support for such a move, tweeting that Trump has "all the legal authority in the world" to pardon Stone if he chooses.

The sentencing came amid Trump's unrelenting defense of his longtime confidant. The president has repeatedly maintained that the jury was tainted against him and his allies.

Prosecutor Crabb asked the judge to impose "a substantial period of incarceration." Stone's attorney Seth Ginsberg repeated the defense team's plea that Stone get no prison time. Stone declined to address the court.

While clearly displeased with the mixed messages from the Justice Department, Jackson said she agreed that the initial sentencing recommendation was too harsh.

The evidence presented at Stone's trial didn't directly address Mueller's conclusion that there was insufficient evidence to prove a criminal conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia to tip the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. But it provided new insight into the scramble inside the Trump campaign when it was revealed in July 2016 that the anti-secrecy site WikiLeaks was in possession of more than 19,000 emails hacked from the servers of the Democratic National Committee. U.S. intelligence agencies have said Russia was the source of the hacked material.

Witnesses testified that Trump's campaign viewed Stone as an "access point" to WikiLeaks and tried to use him to get advance word about hacked emails damaging to Hillary Clinton.

Prosecutors argued that Stone had lied to Congress about his conversations about WikiLeaks with New York radio host and comedian Randy Credico.

During the 2016 campaign, Stone mentioned in interviews and public appearances that he was in contact with founder Julian Assange through a trusted intermediary and hinted at inside knowledge of WikiLeaks' plans.

Testimony revealed that Stone, while appearing before the House Intelligence Committee, named Credico as his intermediary to Assange and pressured Credico not to contradict him.

After Credico was contacted by Congress, he reached out to Stone, who told him he should "stonewall it" and "plead the fifth," he testified. Credico also testified during Stone's trial that Stone repeatedly told him to "do a 'Frank Pentangeli,'" a reference to a character in "The Godfather: Part II" who lies before Congress.

Prosecutors also charged that Stone had threatened Credico's therapy dog, Bianca, saying he was "going

to take that dog away from you.”

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

## TV analyst? Spokesman? Freed ex-governor goes job hunting

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Job wanted: Ex-governor and ex-con with strong speaking skills and good hair seeking employment.

Fresh out of prison thanks to a commutation this week from President Donald Trump, former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is in the hunt for a post-prison career.

“I need to start working and providing for my family,” the 63-year-old told Fox News this week. He didn’t elaborate on the kind of job he is seeking.

Job hunts have gotten Blagojevich in trouble before.

His expletive-laden talk captured on FBI wiretaps about landing a job or campaign cash for naming someone to Barack Obama’s vacated U.S. Senate seat is part of what led to his multiple corruption convictions.

Here’s a look at what jobs might be out there for the one-time contestant on Trump’s “Celebrity Apprentice” reality TV show:

Q: WHAT ARE THE RANGE OF POSSIBLE JOBS?

A: His options could include becoming a commentator on a cable news channel, where criminal convictions aren’t necessarily a disqualification. A self-employed podcaster could be another option.

Blagojevich could try to parlay his relative fame into a gig on another reality TV show. Producers might see his sometimes engaging and offbeat character as a draw.

Blagojevich himself mused about dream jobs in the secret recordings of his phone that played central roles at his two corruption trials.

“Why can’t I be ambassador to India?” he is heard telling an aide. He later adds, “Gotta think I can at least be ambassador to Macedonia.”

He also talked about heading a philanthropic organization.

He could do a book. A confessional-type book could attract interest, one in which he describes a metamorphosis as he served eight years of a 14-year sentence. But the only obvious change in Blagojevich is that his trademark thick hair changed from black to white.

His insistence that he never did anything wrong is wholly unchanged.

When his Fox News interviewer asked Wednesday if he felt even a “modicum of regret” for decisions that led to his imprisonment, Blagojevich responded promptly, “No.” He added categorically: “I broke no laws. I crossed no lines.”

He has spoken at length in recent days about what he described as an overzealous federal justice system, echoing Trump. That could position him as a spokesman for an advocacy organization that agrees with him.

Q: MIGHT TRUMP OFFER HIM A JOB?

A: That seems far-fetched. But it’s possible Blagojevich believes Trump could follow up a commutation with a job offer in his administration.

In recent days, it sometimes seemed Blagojevich might be pining for something more from Trump.

The Chicago Democrat heaped praise on the Republican president as he addressed reporters outside his home Wednesday, a day after his release from a federal prison in Colorado. Blagojevich went so far as to say he’d vote for Trump, calling himself a “Trumpocrat.”

Q: WHAT SALARY MIGHT HE BE LOOKING FOR?

A: At trial, prosecutors highlighted Blagojevich’s extravagant tastes. They said he and his wife, Patti, spent more than \$400,000 on clothes that included tailored suits and furs. On a single day, he even shelled out \$1,300 on ties.

As governor, Blagojevich made a salary of around \$177,000. In wiretaps, he sounds unimpressed when someone mentions that being the head of a nonprofit might bring in \$200,000 or \$300,000. “Oh, that’s

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all?" he says.

Blagojevich and his wife were awash in more than \$200,000 in consumer debt when he was arrested in 2008. Their debts deepened as his legal bills stacked up.

Q: WHAT MIGHT CURTAIL HIS JOB PROSPECTS?

A: His severely tainted reputation, for starters. Many employers may be reluctant to associate their companies with a disgraced politician whose convictions included trying to shake down the CEO of a children's hospital.

Agents arrested then-Gov. Blagojevich after wiretaps recorded him gushing about using his power to appoint someone to the Senate seat to land a well-pay job or campaign cash, saying the leverage it provided was "f----- golden."

Prosecutors cited that comment to explain why they moved fast to arrest Blagojevich. An appeals court later tossed convictions based on his bid for a job but upheld ones based on his attempt to trade an appointment for money.

Blagojevich can't run for office in Illinois under conditions set by state legislators when they ousted him as governor in 2009.

Blagojevich, who got his law degree from Pepperdine University in 1983, can probably cross lawyer off the prospective jobs list.

The Illinois Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission is scheduled to hold a hearing next week that will likely lead to his disbarment. A former complaint says his crimes "adversely reflect on his honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer."

Q: WHAT ARE HIS QUALIFICATIONS?

A: After law school, Blagojevich worked as a Cook County prosecutor. Years later, he won an Illinois House seat, then U.S. House seat. He won the Illinois governorship in 2002 running on a pledge to crack down on corruption.

The son of Serbian-American parents is well-read and has a good memory, sometimes showing that by naming all the U.S. presidents in the proper order.

As a politician, he demonstrated a Bill Clinton-like ability to connect with people of disparate backgrounds. Perhaps that could open the way to a sales or marketing job.

But he's often demonstrated a lack of common sense and everyday know-how.

Trump fired him from "Celebrity Apprentice" after Blagojevich struggled with basic tasks like sending emails from a cellphone.

Former staff recall Blagojevich as disengaged and disorganized as governor, and that he was someone who would go out of his way to avoid hearing bad news.

Blagojevich would go so far as hiding in a bathroom to avoid discussing the state budget with his budget director, a former deputy governor, Robert Greenlee, testified at one of Blagojevich's trials.

Blagojevich also had trouble focusing on legislation and could let paperwork pile up, Greenlee said. Among the duties Blagojevich rarely got to were petitions from Illinois state prisoners desperately seeking gubernatorial pardons.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mtarm>

## Turkish soldiers killed in Syria amid threats of escalation

By SUZAN FRASER and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Two Turkish soldiers were killed Thursday in an airstrike in northwestern Syria, Turkey said, after an attack by Ankara-backed opposition forces that targeted Syrian government troops. The deaths came after the Turkish president threatened to expand his nation's involvement in Syria if another one of his troops were hurt.

At least 15 Turkish soldiers have been killed in Syria this month amid a crushing offensive by Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces aimed at recapturing remaining opposition-held areas in the region.

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Intent on halting the advance, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had vowed Feb. 12 to take military action "everywhere in Syria" if another Turkish soldier was killed or wounded.

The multiple front offensive has triggered the biggest single wave of fleeing civilians in Syria's nine-year war, displacing nearly 1 million people who have rushed toward the Turkish border and are sheltering in tents or sleeping rough in harsh winter weather.

It has also risked completely shattering a fragile cooperation between Ankara and Moscow, which back opposing sides of the Syria war. Ankara has sent thousands of soldiers to northwestern Syria to try to stem the Syrian government advance on the province near the Turkish border, leading to the repeated flare-ups.

Thursday's exchange marked a serious escalation that risks growing into a full-blown conflict between Turkey and Syria. Erdogan has also called on Assad's forces to retreat from Idlib or face an "imminent" Turkish attack.

The exchange began after opposition fighters shelled Syrian government forces and entered the village of Nairab, which Assad's forces had captured Feb. 3, the Turkish Anadolu agency said.

The Russian military said the militants' actions "were supported by Turkish artillery fire," which allowed them to break through the Syrian army's defenses. Four Syrian soldiers were wounded in the Turkish shelling, it said.

At the Syrian military's request, Russian Su-24 bombers then struck the militants to prevent them from advancing and allowing Syrian government forces to "successfully repel all attacks," the military added.

It was not immediately clear whether it was the Russian airstrikes that killed the two Turkish soldiers and injured five others.

Fahrettin Altun, a top aide to Erdogan, said the attack was carried out by Syrian government forces. On Twitter, he wrote: "The blood of our martyrs won't be left unaccounted for."

The Turkish Defense Ministry tweeted that as many as 50 Syrian government soldiers were killed and that five tanks, two armored personnel carriers and other equipment were destroyed.

In Moscow, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova raised what she called "serious concern about the Turkish military support for the militants."

"This incident represents a violation of the Russian-Turkish agreements on separation between the armed opposition and terrorists and the creation of a demilitarized zone. It risks provoking further escalation of the conflict in that part of Syria's territory," she said in a statement.

Turkey and Russia have closely coordinated their moves in recent years in Idlib province. Turkey maintains observation posts in northern Syria that were set up to monitor a 2018 cease-fire agreement with Russia. The truce collapsed in late 2019, leading to the current Syrian offensive, backed by Russia.

Russian officials have said they hold Turkey responsible for the collapse of the cease-fire deal, saying Ankara had not held up its end to rein in militants who continued attacking Syrian and Russian targets.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar on Thursday rejected the Russian assertion, saying Ankara was making progress against radical groups in Idlib when the Syrian government launched its offensive.

Ankara sent in thousands of additional troops and armored vehicles in recent weeks, vowing to halt the government's advance.

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

Akar said Turkey's military has prepared "plans A, B and C" for a possible offensive in Idlib.

So far, talks between Turkish and Russian officials have failed to reach agreements that would ease tensions there.

"While both Russia and Turkey likely seek to maintain their cooperation across Syria more broadly, growing tensions in Idlib between the two countries threatens to derail that cooperation," said expert Mona Yacoubian, in an analysis for the United States Institute for Peace.

Akar said Turkey had no intention to come "head to head with Russia," insisting that Turkey's aim was to ensure that the Syrian government abides by the cease-fire agreement for the province.

Asked how Washington can support Turkey in Idlib, he said the United States or other NATO countries

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could deploy Patriot missile defense systems on the Turkish border with Syria to guard against possible attacks from Syrian territory.

"In the past, they sent us air defense batteries. Our country faces a missile threat. ... In this way, there could be a support (through the deployment) of Patriot batteries," Akar said.

In Washington, a U.S. official said the United States was aware of Turkey's request for Patriot missiles for use on the border with Syria. But no decision have been made, said the official, who agreed to comment on the matter only on condition of anonymity.

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed Idlib in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Kremlin said, noting the leaders emphasized the need to avoid "negative humanitarian consequences for the civilian population."

In the call, Putin "underlined the need to take efficient measures to neutralize the terrorist threat while respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria," it said, adding that the leaders of France and Germany offered to help reduce tensions.

The French offered a slightly different version of the conversation, saying in a statement after the call that Merkel and Macron "warned President Putin about the humanitarian situation for the civilian population in Idlib," and called for an immediate stop to hostilities and an end to the blocking of humanitarian aid. Macron and Merkel said they were available to meet quickly with Putin and Erdogan to find a political solution.

The region is seeing 900,000 people on the run in Idlib during a bitterly cold winter with nowhere to go. Aid organizations said they were overwhelmed and facing severe shortages.

"We are burning through our supplies much faster than anticipated. We just do not know how long this will continue, how many more people will need help and for how long, a level of emergency that is impossible to comprehend," said Mercy Corps country director Kieren Barnes.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said a massive cross-border operation was underway in Syria's northwest to assist civilians.

"A total of 1,227 trucks of humanitarian assistance crossed from Turkey through Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam cross-border checks last month compared to 928 trucks in December," Dujarric said. "This is the largest amount of aid the United Nations has sent across the Syrian-Turkish border in (any month) since the operation was authorized in 2014."

In the attack on the village of Nairab, the Anadolu agency said the opposition moved in after Syrian government targets there were hit by artillery fire. They destroyed a tank and an APC belonging to Syrian forces and seized a second tank, according to the report.

Syrian opposition activists confirmed the report, saying Turkey-backed insurgents stormed the village near the strategic town of Saraqeb, both of which were held by Syrian troops.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Syria war monitor, said the clashes and bombardment in and near Nairab left two Turkish soldiers dead as well as killing 14 insurgents and 11 pro-government fighters. It said the opposition forces withdrew from the village by evening.

Syrian state TV reported that government forces have repelled the attacks on Nairab.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Russian and Turkish delegations would hold more talks on reducing tensions in Idlib province and that the Turkish and Russian leaders could meet too, if needed.

"It is true that at the moment, there are differences in the (two sides') positions," Cavusoglu told state broadcaster TRT. The delegations narrowed their differences a bit but "are not yet at the point we want" to be, he said.

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Associated Press writer Suzan Fraser reported this story in Ankara and AP writer Vladimir Isachenkov reported from Moscow. AP writers Lolita C. Baldor in Washington, Bassem Mroue in Beirut, Angela Charlton in Paris and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

## Ukrainians hurl stones at evacuees from China

By DMYTRO VLASOV and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

NOVI SANZHARY, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's effort to quarantine more than 70 people evacuated from China over the new virus outbreak plunged into chaos Thursday as local residents opposing the move hurled stones at the evacuees and clashed with police.

Officials deplored the violence and the country's health minister pledged to share evacuees' quarantine for two weeks in a bid to reassure protesters who fear they'll be infected.

Buses carrying evacuees were finally able to reach the designated place of quarantine after hours of clashes. The masked evacuees, exhausted by the long journey, were peeking through bus windows as they drove slowly under a heavy police escort.

Stones shattered a window in one of the buses, but the evacuees appeared unhurt.

Since the early morning, several hundred residents of the village of Novi Sanzhary in Ukraine's central Poltava region had cut the road to a sanitarium intended to host the evacuees, fearing they could become infected. Demonstrators, some of whom appeared drunk, put up road blocks, burned tires and clashed with riot police who moved to clear access. One protester tried to ram police lines with his car.

Nine police officers and one civilian were hospitalized, the regional police said in a statement.

Ukrainian police said 24 protesters were detained. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who personally visited the site to try to calm the crowd, said he was shocked by the aggression.

"What we saw was shameful," he said in televised remarks. "It was one of the biggest disappointments in my life."

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 local residents.

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.

Ukraine's health minister, Zoryana Skaletska, said she would join the evacuees in quarantine for two weeks to help assuage villagers' concerns. She urged residents to show sympathy and support for the evacuees and emphasized that the quarantine facility is in full conformity with international standards.

"I was shocked by the panic, rejection, negative feelings and aggression," she said. "It was even a greater shock for the people who were evacuated from China."

But municipal legislators in the village vowed to continue opposing the evacuation, saying that the sanitarium's sewage system is linked to the one in the village and ends up in a nearby wastewater facility.

"We can't allow putting the health and life of local residents at risk, and demand that top officials take urgent moves to prevent people from China from being put here," they said in a statement.

Amid the clashes between local residents and police, Ukraine's Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk said he will immediately fly to the site to personally oversee things.

In the early hours of Thursday, a plane with 45 Ukrainians and 27 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.

Those evacuated included people from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama and other countries.

Argentina's Foreign Ministry in a statement thanked Ukraine for its "generosity" and China for its collaboration.

The plane stopped 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.

In Slovenia, authorities said two of six Slovenian citizens who were on the cruise ship have been hospitalized in Japan after testing positive for the virus. The four others have tested negative. Two of them have arrived back in Slovenia and will be quarantined at home for two weeks.

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.

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Associated Press writer Dmytro Vlasov reported this sotyr in Novi Sanzhary and AP writer Yuras Karmanau reported from Minsk, Belarus. AP writers Daria Litvinova and Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

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See more AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak>

## **New threats emerge in outbreak while China voices optimism**

**By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press**

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese health officials expressed new optimism Thursday over the deadly virus outbreak while authorities in South Korea's fourth-largest city urged residents to hunker down as fears nagged communities far from the illness' epicenter.

The confidence voiced by China's government came as it reported a reduced number of new infections. But doubts remained about the true trajectory of the epidemic as China again changed its method of counting and new threats emerged outside the country.

"The downward trend will not be reversed," insisted Ding Xiangyang, deputy chief secretary of the State Council and a member of the central government's supervision group.

Whatever promises were aired where the illness poses its biggest threat, countries around the world continued to grapple with the rippling effects. The latest front in the widening global fight against COVID-19 emerged in Daegu, South Korea, where the city's 2.5 million residents were urged to stay inside, wearing masks even indoors to stem further infection.

Mayor Kwon Young-jin made a nationally televised appeal for those preventative measures, warning that a rash of new cases could overwhelm the health system. He pleaded for help from the country's central government.

Daegu and surrounding towns reported 35 new cases of the coronavirus on Thursday.

The flare-up came more than 1,400 kilometers (900 miles) from COVID-19's epicenter across the Yellow Sea in China's Hubei province and its capital of Wuhan, a sign of the risks the virus potentially poses to communities across the region and beyond.

"Everything that is not known about this is causing concern," said Dr. David Heymann, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Though all but about 1,000 of more than 75,000 reported cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in China, scattered cases have erupted elsewhere.

Iran announced three more infections Thursday, a day after it reported its first two deaths stemming from the virus, and South Korea reported its first fatality. Japan said two former passengers of the Diamond Princess cruise ship had died of the illness, bringing the death toll there to three.

A total of 11 deaths have been confirmed outside mainland China, including two in Hong Kong and one each in France, the Philippines and Taiwan.

The trajectory of the outbreak remained clouded by China's zigzagging daily reports of new cases and shifting ways of tallying them.



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The number of new cases in China declined again Thursday, to 394, a notable shift from the 1,749 figure released a day earlier. Another 114 deaths in China were linked to the virus.

But those statistics came after yet another change in how cases are counted.

Last week, China's National Health Commission said officials in Hubei would record new infections without waiting for laboratory test results, relying instead on doctors' diagnoses and lung imaging. But on Thursday it returned to its prior way of counting, a decision sure to aggravate observers who say consistency is key to understanding COVID-19's path.

The health commission said it was reducing its count of infections by 279 after lab tests found they had wrongly been included in the tally.

Feng Yong, an official for health matters at the Chinese diplomatic mission in Geneva, said the reason for the reversal was that the country's laboratory capacity had improved dramatically so all patients can now be tested.

Last week, when the methodology was changed, "we did not have enough capacity to give laboratory tests," Feng told The Associated Press. "So that's the reason we included all the suspected cases, in order to let them get treatment."

"Now we have the laboratory capacity, so now they can adjust the case definition again," he said.

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 even leaving their apartments.

The stringent moves have followed public fury over Hubei authorities' handling of the outbreak at its outset. The risk of human-to-human transmission was played down 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.

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Associated Press journalists Jamey Keaten in Geneva; Marilynn Marchione in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Aniruddha Ghosal in New Delhi; Katie Tam in Hong Kong and researcher Yu Bing in Beijing contributed to this report.

## German gunman calling for genocide kills 9 people

By **DAVID McHUGH, DAVID RISING and FRANK JORDANS** Associated Press

HANAU, Germany (AP) — A German who shot and killed nine people of foreign background in a rampage that began at a hookah bar frequented by immigrants had posted an online rant calling for the "complete extermination" of many "races or cultures in our midst," authorities said Thursday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the attack exposed the "poison" of racism in the country.

The gunman, Tobias Rathjen, 43, was found dead at his home along with his mother, and authorities said they were treating the rampage as an act of domestic terrorism.

Turks, ethnic Kurds and people with backgrounds from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Romania were among those killed, according to news reports. Turkey's ambassador said five of the dead were Turkish citizens. People of Turkish background make up Germany's single largest minority.

Rathjen opened fire at the hookah bar and a neighboring cafe in the Frankfurt suburb of Hanau around 10 p.m. Wednesday, killing several people, then traveled about 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) and fired on a car and a sports bar, claiming more victims. In addition to the dead, six people were injured, one seriously, authorities said.

Hookah lounges are places where people gather to smoke flavored tobacco from Middle Eastern water pipes. Metin Kan, who knew many of the victims, said it was obvious why the gunman chose the neighborhood.

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"Look, a hookah bar there, a gaming parlor there, a doner kebab place there — it's a place frequented by immigrants," he said. "Why this hatred of foreigners? We all get along here."

Kadir Kose, who runs a cafe nearby, said he was shocked at the extent of the violence: "This is a whole other level, something we hear about from America."

The bloodshed came amid growing concerns about far-right violence in Germany and stepped-up efforts to crack down on it, including last week's detention of a dozen men on suspicion they were planning attacks against politicians and minorities.

"This poison exists in our society and its is responsible for far too many crimes," Merkel said, citing the killings of 10 people across the country between 2000 and 2007 by a far-right gang, the fatal shooting last year of a regional politician from her party, and a deadly attack outside a synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur in October.

She 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," she said. "Out of hatred for people with other origins, other faiths or a different appearance."

While investigators said it appeared the gunman acted alone, Germany's federal prosecutor, Peter Frank, said authorities are trying to find out whether there were others who knew of or supported the attack. He added that his office is looking into any contacts the killer may have had inside Germany or abroad.

Peter Beuth, interior minister for the state of Hesse, said it does not appear Rathjen had a criminal record or was on the radar of Germany's domestic intelligence agency.

Witnesses and surveillance video of the getaway car led authorities quickly to the gunman's home, where he and his 72-year-old mother were found dead with gunshot wounds, apparently bringing the number of victims killed to 10.

Frank identified the gunman only as Tobias R., in line with German privacy laws, and confirmed he had posted extremist videos and a screed with "confused ideas and far-fetched conspiracy theories" on his website, which has since been taken down. He identified himself on the website as Tobias Rathjen.

"We now have ethnic groups, races or cultures in our midst that are destructive in every respect," Rathjen wrote in his rambling, 24-page screed on his website. He said he envisioned first a "rough cleaning" and then a "fine cleaning" that could halve the world's population.

"The following people must be completely exterminated," he wrote, then went on to list two dozen countries, most of them Muslim.

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

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called it a "heinous attack" and expressed confidence that German authorities "will exert all kinds of effort to shed light on all aspects of this attack."

In his rant, Rathjen also detailed fears that he had been under government surveillance for years and blamed the monitoring for his inability to have a relationship with a woman. He also claimed to have approached police several times with conspiracy theories.

Separately, he sought help last year in finding out who was allegedly observing him from a Austrian man, Bernd Gloggnitzer, who teaches "remote viewing," a practice that adherents claim gives them the ability to sense the unseen.

"I didn't reply because I could tell from the email that he was a nutcase," Gloggnitzer told The Associated Press. He said Rathjen forwarded to him a criminal complaint that he had drawn up and sent to Germany's federal prosecutors, and "it was one conspiracy theory after another."

In the criminal complaint that he drew up, Rathjen said that he worked for a price comparison website as a sales consultant but quit to devote all his attention to investigating the alleged surveillance. On his own website, he said he was born and raised in Hanau and earned a business degree.

He had a license to possess a gun, first issued in 2013, local authorities told Germany's dpa news agency. Local media reported he owned three 9 mm pistols. Some 5.4 million of Germany's 83 million people have guns. Owners must undergo background checks, including showing that they are not mentally ill.

German police were also examining a video Rathjen may have posted online several days before the

attack in which he detailed a conspiracy theory about child abuse in the United States, dpa reported.

He made no reference to the far-right QAnon movement in the U.S., but the message was similar to the fringe group's central, baseless belief that President Donald Trump is under attack from "deep state" enemies and that satanists and cannibals are running a child sex trafficking ring.

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

## **Struggling Victoria's Secret sold as women demand comfort**

**By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and MICHELLE CHAPMAN Associated Press**

NEW YORK (AP) — Victoria's Secret, which once defined sexy with its leggy supermodels in their lacy bras and oversized angel wings, has a new owner.

Now, the big question is whether the once sought after but now struggling brand can be reinvented for a new generation of women demanding more comfortable styles.

The company's owner, L Brands, said Thursday that the private-equity firm Sycamore Partners will buy 55% of Victoria's Secret for about \$525 million. The Columbus, Ohio, company will keep the remaining 45% stake. After the sale, L Brands will be left with its Bath & Body Works chain and Victoria's Secret will become a private company.

Les Wexner, 82, who founded the parent company in 1963, will step down as chairman and CEO after the transaction is completed and become chairman emeritus. Wexner has been grappling with his own troubles, including questions over his ties to the late financier Jeffrey Epstein, who was indicted on sex-trafficking charges.

The selling price for Victoria's Secret signifies a marked decline for a brand with hundreds of stores that booked about \$7 billion in revenue last year. Shares of L Brands slid more than 7% Thursday though they recovered somewhat by late afternoon. Shares were down nearly 4%, or 88 cents, to close at \$23.42.

In a statement, Wexner said the deal will provide the best path to restoring Victoria's Secret's businesses to their "historical levels of profitability and growth." The deal will also allow the company to reduce debt and Sycamore will bring a "fresh perspective and greater focus to the business," he said.

To successfully turn around Victoria's Secret, Sycamore will need to change up the corporate culture, reinvent the fashions and redesign the stores to make them more contemporary, experts say. Sycamore manages a \$10 billion portfolio including such struggling retailers as Belk, Hot Topic and Talbots.

The management team at Victoria's Secret essentially was designing what men want, not what women want, said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail.

"The brand is very embedded in the past," said Saunders. "It was always about men feeling good. It should be about making women feel good about themselves."

Victoria's Secret had a long unparalleled run of success. The brand was founded by the late Roy Larson Raymond in the late 1970s after he felt embarrassed about purchasing lingerie for his wife. Wexner, the founder of the then Limited Stores Inc., purchased Victoria's Secret in 1982 and turned it into a powerful retail force. By the mid-1990s, Victoria's Secret lit up runways and later filled the internet with its supermodels and an annual television special that mixed fashion, beauty and music.

That glamour has faded and so have sales in the last few years. The show was canceled last year, and shares of Victoria Secret's parent have gone from triple digits less than five years ago to a quarter of that today.

Victoria's Secret struggled to keep up with competition and failed to respond to changing tastes among women who want more comfortable styles. Rivals like Adore Me and ThirdLove, which have sprouted up online and marketed themselves heavily on social media platforms like Instagram, have focused on fit and comfort while offering more options for different body types. Meanwhile, American Eagle's Aerie lingerie chain, which partners with women activists like Manuela Baron, has also lured customers away from Victoria's Secret.

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And in the era of the #MeToo movement, women are looking for brands that focus on positive reinforcement of their bodies.

"Victoria's Secret will need to empower women, not make them spectacles," said Jon Reily, senior vice president and global head of commerce strategy at digital consultancy Isobar.

Stacey Widlitz, president of SW Retail Advisors, a retail consultancy, said that Victoria's Secret designs in the last few years were going in the opposite direction of what women wanted, ever sexier and poorer quality.

And while last year Victoria's Secret started featuring more diverse models, including its first openly transgender model, the moves fell short.

Victoria's Secret suffered a 12% drop in same-store sales during the most recent holiday season. L Brands said Thursday that same-store sales declined 10% at Victoria's Secret during the fourth quarter. Bath & Body Works, which has been a bright spot, enjoyed a 10% increase. The skincare chain represents more than 80% of L Brands' operating profit.

"The (Victoria's Secret) brand has lost its way, while the lingerie market is not large or high growth, and has become commoditized," Randal Konik, an analyst at Jefferies, wrote Thursday. "Furthermore, with athleisure taking over, the need for regular bras continues to wane."

The company has also been beset by allegations of a toxic work environment and its founder recently apologized for his ties to Epstein, who was found hanged in his jail cell after his indictment. L Brands' Chief Marketing Officer Ed Razek resigned last August after making controversial comments about why transsexuals shouldn't be models at its annual fashion event.

Epstein started managing Wexner's money in the late 1980s and helped straighten out the finances for a real estate development backed by Wexner in a wealthy suburb of Columbus. Wexner has said he completely severed ties with Epstein nearly 12 years ago and accused him of misappropriating "vast sums" of his fortune.

Wexner offered an apology at the opening address of L Brands' annual investor day last fall, saying he was "embarrassed" by his former ties with Epstein.

Wexner is the longest-serving CEO of an S&P 500 company. He founded what would eventually become L Brands in 1963 with The Limited retail chain, according to the company's website. Wexner owns approximately 16.71% of L Brands, according to FactSet.

Mike Robbins, a San Francisco-based corporate culture expert who has advised such chains as Gap and Sephora, said the team at Victoria's Secret will have to retrain workers and have more people with diverse voices.

"They have a lot of work to do — within the company and also outside with the customers," Robbins said. "The companies that are able to have great culture attract the best employees."

## NFL Saints backed by church in effort to keep emails secret

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — An attorney for New Orleans' Roman Catholic archdiocese Thursday strongly defended the New Orleans Saints' behind-the-scenes help in dealing with the clergy sex abuse crisis, saying the legal effort to release hundreds of confidential emails between them is aimed at trying to shame those "who had the audacity" to back the church.

Claims that the NFL team's public relations help was improper are "nothing more than a clear attack on the Catholic faith and the Catholic Church for wrongs of the past that the church has acknowledged," attorney E. Dirk Wegmann argued.

He added that the emails are private and "should not be parsed through simply for the purpose of annoying or embarrassing — or bringing public scrutiny on — individuals who supported the church."

The impassioned remarks came amid a court hearing on the Saints' request to keep secret hundreds of emails the team exchanged with the archdiocese in 2018 and 2019. A special master overseeing the proceeding was not expected to rule immediately.

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The hearing comes amid claims the Saints joined the church in a "pattern and practice" of concealing sexual abuse — an allegation team officials 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. An Associated Press analysis found that roster 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 heard arguments from attorneys for the archdiocese, the Saints and the AP, which broke news of the emails and filed a motion urging their release.

AP attorney Mary Ellen Roy argued that neither the Saints nor the archdiocese had met their legal burden to demonstrate the emails are confidential. The news organization argued in court papers that any privacy interests "are minimal compared to the public's concern about the roles the Archdiocese and the Saints played in managing public opinion."

"They're trying to have it both ways," Roy said. "They're trying to say, 'Everything we did was fine and dandy, but let us tell you that. Don't look at them yourselves and make your own determination of that.'"

Gill-Jefferson 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 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.

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."

Wegmann, the archdiocese attorney, said the AP's reporting on the Saints' involvement ignited a "media storm."

"It was like you threw a match in a warehouse full of gasoline," he said.

All the while, Wegmann added, church leaders have been contending with some claims of clergy abuse that "could not ever have happened" based on the assignments of certain priests.

"The fact that an allegation is made does not mean ... that you get a red letter," he said.

## New Mexico sues Google over collection of children's data

By **SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN** Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — New Mexico's attorney general sued Google Thursday over allegations the tech company is illegally collecting personal data generated by children in violation of federal and state laws.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Albuquerque claims Google is using its education services package that is marketed to school districts, teachers and parents as a way to spy on children and their families.

Attorney General Hector Balderas said that while the company touts Google Education as a valuable

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tool for resource-deprived schools, it is a means to monitor children while they browse the internet in the classroom and at home on private networks. He said the information being mined includes everything from physical locations to websites visited, videos watched, saved passwords and contact lists.

The state is seeking unspecified civil penalties.

"Student safety should be the number one priority of any company providing services to our children, particularly in schools," Balderas said in a statement. "Tracking student data without parental consent is not only illegal, it is dangerous."

Google dismissed the claims as "factually wrong," saying the G Suite for Education package allows schools to control account access and requires that schools obtain parental consent when necessary.

"We do not use personal information from users in primary and secondary schools to target ads," said company spokesman Jose Castaneda. "School districts can decide how best to use Google for education in their classrooms and we are committed to partnering with them."

Unlike Europe, the U.S. has no overarching national law governing data collection and privacy. Instead, it has a patchwork of state and federal laws that protect specific types of data, such as consumer health, financial information and the personal data generated by younger children.

New Mexico's claim cites violations of the state's Unfair Practices Act and the federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which requires websites and online services to obtain parental consent before collecting any information from children under 13. In a separate case, Google already has agreed to pay \$170 million combined to the Federal Trade Commission and New York state to settle allegations its YouTube video service collected personal data on children without their parents' consent.

According to the New Mexico lawsuit, outside its Google Education platform, the company prohibits children in the U.S. under the age of 13 from having their own Google accounts. The state contends Google is attempting to get around this by using its education services to "secretly gain access to troves of information" about New Mexico children.

The attorney general's office filed a similar lawsuit against Google and other tech companies in 2018, targeting what Balderas described as illegal data collection from child-directed mobile apps. That case still is pending in federal court, but the companies have denied wrongdoing.

The latest lawsuit claims more than 80 million teachers and students use Google's education platform. Balderas said in a letter to New Mexico school officials that there was no immediate harm if they continue using the products and that the lawsuit shouldn't interrupt activities in the classroom.

## Infighting and online hoaxes mar Democrats' campaign

By **DAVID KLEPPER and AMANDA SEITZ** Associated Press

RINDGE, N.H. (AP) — A group of Los Angeles artists were awaiting the results of the Democratic Party's Iowa caucuses, hoping Bernie Sanders would win, when they fired off a hashtag on Twitter poking fun at Pete Buttigieg.

By the next morning, the hashtag — #MayorCheat — was trending worldwide.

"That's so funny that we're the first people to make this joke," said Nick Thorburn, a 38-year-old musician. Not everyone was laughing.

Some on social media capitalized on the trending hashtag to spread misinformation or conspiracy theories about Buttigieg, including claims that he had colluded with the Democratic Party to rig the caucuses. Other accounts accused Russian trolls of promoting the hashtag to divide Democrats.

Yet it wasn't the work of Russian trolls, or even Republican pranksters.

The inaccurate insults were traded online among fellow Democrats. And it's the type of left-wing misinformation that, combined with a prolonged primary contest, has some worried about the party's ability to unite ahead of November.

"I hope people, if their candidate doesn't get the nomination, can still support whoever does," said Gary Klar, a retired school teacher from Hancock, N.H. who supports Joe Biden but said he will vote for whoever wins the party's nomination. "We don't want sour grapes."

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As the tight race moves on to Nevada and South Carolina, the online misinformation has not died down. Unsupported claims making the rounds in recent days include assertions that one Democratic candidate has a history of heart attacks and that another killed dogs as a child.

Propagating an online smear against a rival requires only coining a snappy hashtag, creating a satirical meme or simply stating the threads of a conspiracy theory. Those tactics are the new normal in political campaigning, explained Susan Etlinger, an industry analyst for Altimeter, which researches and advises on disruptive technologies.

"Anybody with an agenda, a little bit of a budget and some time can figure out a way to troll, to create a bot or to use cheap fakes," said Etlinger, referring to automated accounts and manipulated images. "We're entering this phase now that we have to take for a given that for any election ... there's a potential for a lot of misinformation."

The Democratic infighting echoes 2016, when supporters of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders accused the Democratic Party of favoring the eventual nominee, Hillary Clinton. Many Sanders supporters were suspicious of party insiders and news outlets that they believed unfairly boosted Clinton, said Pat Cote, a Sanders supporter.

Cote said he now tweets several times a day about Sanders, his rivals or the election.

Earlier this week, he tweeted to his 33,300 followers that the upcoming Nevada caucus is "going to be a disaster and nothing is being done to stop it. The only explanation is that this is done by design."

Cote said social media has emerged as a key way for Sanders supporters to organize and push back against what they see as an unfriendly establishment.

"If you don't win Twitter you're not going to win the election," he said. Blaming Sanders' supporters for online misinformation or abuse is unfair, Cote said. "Every campaign has toxic supporters."

In the days that followed the Iowa caucuses, as the results remained in limbo, some progressive Twitter users claimed Buttigieg's campaign had developed the failed app that was used to count the votes in Iowa. (It didn't.) Others began posting images of rats that mentioned Buttigieg.

Republicans also got in on the action, promoting the idea that the Iowa results were tainted for the Democrats. Shortly after the Iowa Democratic Party announced it was reviewing results for "quality control," Trump's campaign manager Brad Parscale tweeted: "Quality control = rigged?"

Since then, the online tenor of the race has become a campaign talking point.

During Wednesday's Democratic debate in Nevada, Sen. Elizabeth Warren was asked whether such attacks from Sanders' supporters might make it difficult to unite the party. Warren last month found herself on the receiving end of online attacks when accounts claiming to support Sanders flooded Twitter with the snake emojis and the terms #NeverWarren and #WarrenIsASnake, after she claimed that Sanders had told her privately in 2018 that a woman could not win the presidency.

"Look, I have said many times before, we are all responsible for our supporters," Warren said in response. "And we need to step up. That's what leadership is all about."

Sanders argued back that his own backers have been targeted with "vicious, racist, sexist attacks" and that most of his supporters don't send hateful messages online.

"We have over 10.6 million people on Twitter, and 99.9 percent of them are decent human beings, are working people, are people who believe in justice, compassion, and love," he said. "And if there are a few people who make ugly remarks... I disown those people."

Mike Bloomberg's campaign also released a campaign video Monday on Twitter criticizing "Bernie Bros.," the nickname given to some of Sanders' most vocal online supporters.

"We need to unite to defeat Trump in November. This type of 'energy' is not going to get us there," Michael Bloomberg wrote Monday in a tweet that accompanied the new campaign ad.

The nicknames and taunts that Sanders' supporters hurl at rival campaigns is a familiar strategy, and one that Trump has successfully employed for years, said Rita Kirk, a political communication expert at Southern Methodist University.

During a contentious 2016 Republican primary, Trump branded GOP challengers Sen. Marco Rubio and Sen. Ted Cruz as "Lil' Rubio" and "Lyin' Ted," respectively. Trump's supporters often repeat the insults

during chants at the president's rallies or online.

Those jibes are meant to influence how voters view a candidate.

"Sanders' demographic is young people who are super social media savvy and (to them) it's just fun — they want to come up with the first trending statement," Kirk said. "But it affects an image of that person, whether you like them or not."

Seitz reported from Chicago.

## AP FACT CHECK: Dems' sticky health debate; Trump's rally

By CALVIN WOODWARD, HOPE YEN and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Who's got the goods on health care policy? That question was an undercurrent in the feisty Democratic presidential debate as rivals stood accused of being lightweights who have done little more than put up Post-it notes or slideshows on the subject.

Also in the Las Vegas debate, Mike Bloomberg spoke of coming to the realization that stop-and-frisk policing policies were being overused by his police department when he was New York mayor. Actually, a judge ruled against the practice and the mayor assailed the "dangerous" decision at the time.

From Phoenix, President Donald Trump ribbed the debating Democrats and twisted the health plans of some of them in the process.

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

### POST-ITS?

ELIZABETH WARREN on Amy Klobuchar's health plan: "It is like a Post-it note, insert plan here. ... Amy, I looked online at your plan. It's two paragraphs."

THE FACTS: That's not true. Klobuchar's health care policies run thousands of words online, addressing coverage, substance abuse and mental health, prescription drugs and the elderly. Some of her material lacks specifics found in the plans of several of her rivals. Yet aspects of her agenda are grounded in detailed legislation led or supported by the senator from Minnesota.

It's true that Klobuchar's main health policy page devotes two paragraphs to summarizing her way of achieving universal coverage. But that's not the extent of her plan.

KLOBUCHAR, smiling: "I must say, I take personal offense since Post-it notes were invented in my state."

THE FACTS: Yes, Post-it notes are one of the most well-known consumer products of St. Paul-based 3M, once known as the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co.

BERNIE SANDERS, to Pete Buttigieg: "Let's level, Pete. Under your plan, which is a maintenance continuation of the status quo —"

WARREN: Buttigieg's health care plan is "not a plan. It's a PowerPoint."

THE FACTS: It's more than the status quo and more than a PowerPoint presentation. Buttigieg's plan would cover almost all U.S. citizens and legal residents, even if it's not as far reaching as the proposals of Sanders and Warren.

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 would reduce the number of uninsured people from more than 32 million to below 7 million. Those 7 million would mainly be people who are in the country illegally.

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

Warren's put-down of Buttigieg's plan comes after she reconsidered her own approach to "Medicare for All," deciding to proceed in stages. She would first expand coverage by building on existing programs and postpone the push for a system fully run by the government until the third year of her presidency.



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## STOP AND FRISK

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 had a revelation. When the ruling came out, Bloomberg called it a "dangerous decision made by a judge who I think does not understand how policing works and what is compliant with the U.S. Constitution."

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

TRUMP, on 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.

## DIRTY COAL

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.

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.

Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire in New York, Ellen Knickmeyer in Washington and Amanda Seitz in Chicago contributed to this report.

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

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## Israel to probe failed company of Netanyahu's challenger

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli prosecutors on Thursday announced the opening of a criminal investigation into the failed start-up of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's challenger, shaking up the final days of what has been a bitter and tumultuous election campaign.

The announcement did not say whether Benny Gantz is a suspect. But it came less than two weeks before the March 2 election and during a campaign in which Gantz's Blue and White party has painted itself as a clean and scandal-free alternative to Netanyahu, who is to go on trial for corruption next month.

In a statement, the Justice Ministry said that after examining documents and considering other evidence, "the acting state prosecutor has decided to move the subject of the suspicions surrounding the company 'Fifth Dimension' to a criminal investigation."

"The investigation will be conducted by Israeli police," it added.

After retiring from the army, Gantz headed Fifth Dimension, a cybersecurity company that entered talks with Israeli police over the sale of its product. According to Israel's state comptroller, a governmental watchdog, the police may have violated acquisition laws by granting the company a multimillion dollar contract without a public tender. Fifth Dimension later went bankrupt.

Gantz did not immediately comment. But earlier in the day, amid reports that a criminal probe was imminent, he denied any wrongdoing.

"It all sounds like political pressure to get this thing on the public's agenda," Gantz told Israel's Army Radio. "I am totally at ease. This was checked in the past and no criminal suspicion was found."

Gantz and Netanyahu are locked in a tight race, the third vote in less than a year after two elections in 2019 ended inconclusively. Pre-election surveys have predicted similar results in next month's vote, potentially extending the deadlock.

It's not clear if the investigation into Fifth Dimension will move the needle. The months leading up to the campaign have been marked by other bombshells, including the unveiling of President Donald Trump's Mideast plan and the announcement that Netanyahu's trial will begin March 17. Neither had much of an effect on opinion polls.

But it is an embarrassment for Gantz, a former military chief who has made Netanyahu's legal troubles the centerpiece of his campaign while trying to present a squeaky clean image.

Netanyahu was charged last year with accepting bribes, breach of trust and fraud in three cases in which he is accused of receiving lavish gifts from billionaire friends and of exchanging regulatory favors with media moguls for more palatable coverage of him and his family.

Netanyahu denies wrongdoing and claims the charges have been trumped up by a hostile justice system, police and media that are out to get him.

At a campaign rally in the southern city of Beersheba late Thursday, Netanyahu called on prosecutors to investigate Gantz and other senior Blue and White figures.

"The public needs to know the truth," he said.

## AP-NORC poll: More Americans worry about flu than new virus

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

A wide share of Americans are at least moderately confident in U.S. health officials' ability to handle emerging viruses, and more express concern about catching the flu than catching the new coronavirus, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The findings are encouraging to those banking on Americans' trust in the health officials who are ordering quarantines and travel restrictions to contain the virus first detected in China.

"Our ability to control the virus hangs on people's willingness to accept the advice of health authorities," said Jennifer Nuzzo of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in Baltimore. If the virus spreads more widely, public trust will become even more important, Nuzzo said.

News of the coronavirus outbreak is pervasive, with about half saying they have heard or read a lot about

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it. People who say they've heard a lot about the outbreak are more likely to say they're very concerned about it than people who have heard less than that, but high levels of concern are still rare.

Like many Americans, Chris Harris of Iowa City is keeping up with the news, but is not worried about the new coronavirus. He's more worried about influenza.

"I don't want to miss work," said Harris, a 51-year-old certified financial planner who's had his annual flu shot. "I'd be out for a few days and it would put me farther behind."

Comparable shares of Americans — roughly 2 in 10 — say they are very worried about getting the coronavirus and the flu.

Roughly another 2 in 10 say they are moderately worried about the coronavirus, but more than half of Americans say they are not concerned.

More have concerns about getting the flu: About 4 in 10 say they are moderately worried, while just about 3 in 10 say they are not.

That concern is appropriate considering U.S. health officials estimate the nation has already seen at least 14,000 deaths from flu this season, said Janet Baseman of the University of Washington School of Public Health in Seattle.

"That's a threat we have year after year," Baseman said. In contrast, there have been 15 cases of the new virus in the United States, plus some Americans who were told they had it as they left a quarantined cruise ship in Japan. One U.S. citizen died in China.

Concern about the coronavirus is roughly equal among Americans who have had a flu shot in the past year and those who have not, the poll found.

Sarah Burton, 57, of suburban Indianapolis got her flu shot this year. The environmental management consultant said she's more worried about the flu than about the new virus and she feels confident the U.S. health care system could handle an outbreak of a new pathogen.

"We're fortunate in the country that we don't have to panic about these things," she said of the new virus. "We should be able to deal with this type of situation in this country with our massive resources."

About a third of those polled have high confidence in officials' ability to handle an outbreak, while about 4 in 10 are moderately confident. About 2 in 10 say they are not confident.

"All this potentially could change when we start finding more cases in the U.S.," said Nuzzo, the health security expert. "It will be different when they hear somebody in their community has the virus."

That may happen.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is starting an effort to see if the virus is spreading silently. The CDC is adding coronavirus testing to the network that normally tracks flu. When a patient sample tests negative for flu, lab workers will check it for the new virus.

The extra tests will start in public health labs in five cities: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago and New York, then expand around the country.

As for Burton, she intends to stay informed about the new virus by reading three newspapers.

"The scary thing for me is they don't know how to stop it yet," Burton said.

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The AP-NORC poll of 1,074 adults was conducted Feb. 13-16 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.2 percentage points. Respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods and later were interviewed online or by phone.

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Online:

AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>

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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.

## In rough US flu season for kids, vaccine working OK so far

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It may end up being a bad flu season for kids, but early signs suggest the vaccine is working OK.

The vaccine has been more than 50% effective in preventing flu illness severe enough to send a child to the doctor's office, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. Health experts consider that pretty good.

The vaccines are made each year to protect against three or four different kinds of flu virus. The ingredients are based on predictions of what strains will make people sick the following winter. It doesn't always work out.

This flu season has featured two waves, each dominated by a different virus. Both of those flu bugs are considered dangerous to children, but tend not to be as dangerous to the elderly.

Health officials grew worried when it became clear that the vaccine didn't match the Type B flu strain that ended up causing most early season illnesses. But the CDC estimates that the vaccine has been about 50% effective against that strain in children.

And the vaccine has been about 55% effective among kids against the Type A strain that has caused a second wave of flu illnesses.

"These estimates are reassuring," said the CDC's Brendan Flannery, who oversees the agency's system for evaluating flu vaccine effectiveness.

Vaccines against many infectious diseases aren't considered successful unless they are at least 90% effective. But flu is particularly challenging, partly because the virus can so quickly change. Overall, flu vaccine averages around 40%.

This season, the vaccine has been 45% effective against both types of flu across all ages.

That can change as the flu season progresses. Updated vaccine effectiveness numbers are expected later this year.

One troubling finding: This season's vaccine has been virtually ineffective vs. the Type A virus in younger adults. The reason is a mystery, but may change as more data comes in, Flannery said.

U.S. health officials have counted 92 child flu deaths this year, up from the same time last year but fewer than were counted by this point in 2018. In all, the CDC estimates at least 14,000 Americans have died of the flu this season.

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## New visa rules set off 'panic wave' in immigrant communities

By PHILIP MARCELO and SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — After nearly a dozen years moving through the U.S. visa system, Sai Kyaw's brother and sister and their families were at the finish line: a final interview before they could leave Myanmar to join him in Massachusetts and work at his restaurant.

Then a dramatic turn in U.S. immigration policy halted their plans. The interview was postponed, and it's not clear when, or whether, it will be rescheduled.

"It's terrible," Kyaw said. "There's nothing we can really do except pray. They've been waiting 12 years. If they have to wait another 12 years, they will."

His is just one of many stories of confusion, sorrow and outrage spreading across some immigrant communities after the announcement of a Trump administration policy that is expected to all but shut down family-based immigration from Myanmar, also known as Burma, as well as Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan and Eritrea. The policy also restricts visas from Sudan and Tanzania.

"There's a panic wave going through the community," said Grace Mobosi-Enwensi, president of the Minnesota Institute for Nigerian Development, a nonprofit group.

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In signing a proclamation last month that takes effect Friday, President Donald Trump said those countries failed to meet minimum security standards. It was his latest crackdown on his signature issue of immigration.

Calls about the restrictions have flooded legal advocacy groups and lawyers' offices. A Boston-area Burmese church is trying to intervene to help congregants. The United African Organization has held legal clinics in Chicago to walk people through their options.

The rules are certain to face legal challenges, but in the meantime, activists have organized around #MuslimBan and #AfricaBan on social media and ramped up lobbying efforts to press Congress to pass the No Ban Act, which would limit the president's ability to restrict entry to the U.S.

Roughly 10,000 people received immigration-based visas from Nigeria, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan and Myanmar in the 2018 fiscal year, according to federal data analyzed by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute. More than half were from Nigeria, the most populous African nation.

The ripple of emotion has been felt strongest among America's roughly 380,000 Nigerian immigrants and their children. They are one of the most educated immigrant groups. More than 60% percent of people with Nigerian ancestry who are at least 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is more than twice the general U.S. population rate of 29%, according to 2017 census data.

Tope Aladele, who is seeking a visa for his wife in Nigeria, has faint hope that she will be able to come to the U.S.

"I thought this year I could at least celebrate Christmas with her," said Aladele, a U.S. citizen who works as a nursing assistant in the Chicago area. "I'm just hoping and praying."

Citizenship and Immigration Services officials declined to comment on the concerns of affected families, deferring to the Department of Homeland Security. Agency officials did not respond to emails seeking comment.

Unlike previous travel bans, the new rules are narrower. They halt immigrant visas from Nigeria, Eritrea, Myanmar and Kyrgystan, covering people who want to live in the U.S. permanently and are sponsored by family members or employers. They also eliminate participation in a visa lottery program in which a computer randomly selects up to 55,000 people for visas from underrepresented countries. Sudan and Tanzania will also be barred from the lottery.

The ban does not affect immigrants traveling to the U.S. for a temporary stay, including tourists and students, or immigrants already in the U.S. There are exceptions, including dual citizenship holders.

In Chicago, the United African Organization hosted dozens of people at legal clinics. Many had questions about their spouses and children. One was Osemeh Otoboh, 46, a Nigerian citizen with a green card who has applied for two of his teenage children from a previous marriage to come to the U.S.

Though their visas were recently approved, the suburban Chicago man married to a U.S. citizen was worried. His children live in Lagos, and he wants them to pursue an education in the United States.

"I don't even know how to explain it to them," Otoboh said of the restrictions.

Experts have questioned the administration's national security reasoning since there are no restrictions on tourist or student visas, which can take less time and vetting to get. Officials in at least one country, Nigeria, have said they are working to address security concerns, such as information sharing.

Activists said the restrictions amount to another travel ban like the one that was widely decried as targeting Muslims. The Supreme Court upheld that ban as lawful in 2018. It restricted travel from several Muslim-majority countries including Iran, Somalia and Syria.

Sudan and Kyrgyzstan are also majority-Muslim countries. Nigeria, the world's seventh-most populous nation, has a large Muslim population too.

"It's a continuation of this administration's racist and xenophobic immigration framework that they use," said Mustafa Jumale, a policy manager for the Black Alliance for Just Immigration.

Some churches have also sprung into action.

At the Overseas Burmese Christian Fellowship in Boston, Pastor Clifford Maung says he has relayed the concerns of two families in his congregation to national Baptist church leaders and is prepared to appeal to the U.S. government on their behalf.

"You hope for the best. We grew up under a similar situation in Burma with an oppressive government so this is something we are used to," he said. "But it shouldn't happen in America."

Maung says one of those affected is his cousin, whose wife has already been approved for a visa and is awaiting medical clearance, which was supposed to come as soon as this week.

Another affected family is that of S'Tha Sein, who arrived with his wife and youngest daughter in December. The 53-year-old Sein says his eldest daughter was also approved for a visa but tested positive for tuberculosis and was not allowed to travel with them.

The 21-year-old college student is slated to be reevaluated next month after receiving treatment, but Sein says the new restrictions throw uncertainty into the prolonged immigration process, which the family began in 2006.

"We've been praying that this law will change," Sein said after attending church services this past Sunday with his family, siblings and elderly parents. "We just want to be able to live together."

Tareen reported from Chicago.

## Amid 'Anonymous' fallout, NSC adviser reassigned

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Victoria Coates, a top official on the National Security Council, is being reassigned amid fallout over the identity of the author of the inside-the-White House tell-all book by "Anonymous."

Coates, who serves as national security adviser for the Middle East and North Africa, will be joining the Department of Energy as a senior adviser to Secretary Dan Brouillette, the NSC announced Thursday.

The move comes amid renewed speculation about the author of the book, "A Warning," and a New York Times essay that were deeply critical of President Donald Trump, written under the pen name "Anonymous."

But a senior administration official insisted the move had nothing to do with the speculation, saying top White House officials reject rumors that have circulated in recent weeks suggesting Coates is the author. The move, they said, has been in the works for several weeks.

"We are enthusiastic about adding Dr. Coates to DOE, where her expertise on the Middle East and national security policy will be helpful," Brouillette said in a statement. "She will play an important role on our team."

"While I'm sad to lose an important member of our team, Victoria will be a big asset to Secretary Brouillette as he executes the President's energy security policy priorities," Robert C. O'Brien, who leads the NSC, added.

The move also comes as the president has been working to rid the administration of those he deems insufficiently loyal in the wake of his acquittal on impeachment charges. Since then, Trump has ousted staffers at the National Security Council and State Department and pulled the nomination of a top Treasury Department pick who had overseen cases involving Trump's former aides as a U.S. attorney.

At the same time, Trump has been bringing back longtime aides he believes he can trust as he heads into what is expected to be a bruising general election campaign.

Trump this week renewed questions about the identity of "Anonymous" when he told reporters that he knew who it was. Asked whether he believes the person still works at the White House, Trump responded: "We know a lot. In fact, when I want to get something out to the press, I tell certain people. And it's amazing, it gets out there. But, so far, I'm leaving it that way."

White House spokesman Hogan Gidley declined to say Wednesday why, if Trump knows the person's identity, they would still be working in his administration.

In the book, published by the Hachette Book Group in November, the writer claims senior administration officials considered resigning as a group in 2018 in a "midnight self-massacre" to protest Trump's conduct, but ultimately decided such an act would do more harm than good.

## Iran announces 3 new cases of new virus after 2 deaths

By AMIR VAHDAT Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran said Thursday that three more people have been infected with the new virus that originated in central China, following an announcement the day before that two people had died of the illness caused by the virus in the Iranian city of Qom.

All schools and universities, including religious Shiite seminaries, were shut down in the holy city of Qom, according to the official IRNA news agency. Other news reports said Iran had recently evacuated 60 Iranian students from Wuhan, the Chinese city at the epicenter of the epidemic.

Qom, located around 140 kilometers (86 miles) south of the capital, Tehran, is a popular religious destination and a center of learning and religious studies for Shiite Muslims from inside Iran, as well as Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan and Azerbaijan. It is also known for its cattle farms.

An official in Iran's health ministry, Kiyanoush Jahanpour said on his twitter account that the number of confirmed cases of the virus in Iran was five, including the two elderly Iranian citizens who died on Wednesday in Qom.

IRNA reported that the three new cases are all Iranians residing in Qom, with one of the infected having visited the city of Arak. Mohammad Mahdi Gouya, Iran's deputy health minister, said they did not appear to have had any contact with Chinese nationals.

Iranian authorities were now investigating the origin of the disease, and its possible link with religious pilgrims from Pakistan or other countries.

Iran's health minister, Saeed Namaki said the roughly 60 Iranian students evacuated from Wuhan had been quarantined upon their return to Iran and were discharged after 14 days without any health problems.

Iran once relied heavily on China to buy its oil and some Chinese companies have continued doing business with Iran in the face of U.S. sanctions. Unlike other countries — such as Saudi Arabia, which barred its citizens and residents from traveling to China — Iran has not imposed such measures on travel there.

The new virus emerged in Wuhan, China in December. Since then, more than 75,000 people have been infected globally, with more than 2,000 deaths being reported, mostly in China.

The new virus comes from a large family of coronaviruses, some causing nothing worse than a cold. It causes cold- and flu-like symptoms, including cough and fever, and in more severe cases, shortness of breath. It can worsen to pneumonia, which can be fatal. The World Health Organization recently named the illness it causes COVID-19, referring to both coronavirus and its origin late last year.

There have been few virus cases in the Middle East so far. Nine cases have been confirmed in the United Arab Emirates, which is a popular tourist destination, and one case in Egypt. Of the nine in the UAE, seven are Chinese nationals, one is a Filipino and another an Indian national.

Iran's neighbor Iraq, which has reported no cases of the virus, took measures to contain it by suspending visas on arrival for Iranian passport holders and direct flights between the two countries.

Iraq's Transport Ministry said in a statement that flights by national carrier Iraqi Airways to Iran were suspended. The decision, the statement said, was based on a Health Ministry recommendation to take the necessary measures to prevent the virus from reaching Iraq.

Iraq's Interior Ministry reversed a decision to allow Iranian nationals to obtain visas on arrival in Iraq, according to a statement.

Omar al-Waeli, head of Iraq's Border Ports Authority, said medical personnel had been dispatched to conduct checks on Iraqi nationals returning from Iran.

Meanwhile, Egypt's national air carrier announced Thursday that it would resume flights to China as of Feb. 27 after nearly three weeks of suspension.

Egypt Air said in a statement it will operate one flight a week between Cairo and two Chinese cities, Beijing and Guangzhou. Before the suspension, the carrier used to operate a daily flight to Guangzhou and three weekly ones to Beijing and Hangzhou.

\_\_\_\_\_ Associated Press writers Noha ElHennawy in Cairo and Samya Kullab in Baghdad contributed to this report.

## Hair Club for Men founder -- and client - Sy Sperling dies

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Hair Club for Men founder Sy Sperling, famous for the TV commercials where he proclaimed “I’m not only the Hair Club president but I’m also a client,” died in Florida. He was 78. Sperling died Wednesday in Boca Raton after a lengthy illness, spokeswoman Terri Lynn said Thursday. In the late 1960s, Sperling was a balding New York City swimming pool salesman who was growing frustrated with toupees. “If you’re dating and going to be having special moments, how do you explain, ‘I got to take my hair off now?’” he said.

Using a weaving technique he learned from his hair stylist, Sperling took \$10,000 in credit card debt to open his own salon on Madison Avenue where he perfected a system where a nylon mesh cap was glued to the scalp. The client’s remaining hair would grow through it and then hair purchased from women that matched the color was woven into the mesh. The clients would then come in several times a year for adjustments.

Business took off but by the late 1970s had stagnated. Word of mouth was unreliable as many clients weren’t eager to tell their friends they were using a hair-replacement system. He began advertising on television and in 1982, he went national with commercials running 400 times daily on late-night TV. They became so ubiquitous they were spoofed on the “Tonight” show and “Saturday Night Live.”

The ads featured before and after photographs of men who used the system, ending with Sperling himself who would proclaim in his slightly stilted and stiff manner, “I’m not only the Hair Club president but I’m also a client.” He then held up a photo of himself without his hair. The commercials cost him \$12 million annually, but were generating 10,000 calls a month.

By 1991, Hair Club for Men had 40 franchises. Men paid between \$2,000 and \$3,500 for the system and then \$65 for maintenance appointments. Revenue reached \$100 million annually.

“For Men” was later dropped from the name as women who lost hair naturally and from cancer treatments became clients. He started Hair Club for Kids, which provided free hair to children who lost theirs in cancer treatments.

Sperling sold the business to a group of investors in 2000 for \$45 million.

He is survived by his wife, Susan, daughter Shari Sperling, son Andrew Sperling and sister, Rosalie Slute.

\_\_\_ A previous version of this story incorrectly reported that Sperling died Thursday.

## Trump taps loyalist Grenell as nation’s top intel official

By ZEKE MILLER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced that Richard Grenell, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, will become acting director of national intelligence, a move that puts a staunch Trump ally in charge of the nation’s 17 spy agencies, which the president has only tepidly embraced.

“Rick has represented our Country exceedingly well and I look forward to working with him,” Trump tweeted on Wednesday. A White House statement Thursday said Grenell “is committed to a nonpolitical, nonpartisan approach” to the job.

Grenell follows Joseph Maguire, who has been acting national intelligence director since August. It was unclear if Maguire would return to the National Counterterrorism Center. “I would like to thank Joe Maguire for the wonderful job he has done,” Trump tweeted, “and we look forward to working with him closely, perhaps in another capacity within the Administration!”

Grenell, a loyal and outspoken Trump supporter, becomes the first openly gay member of Trump’s Cabinet. He has been the U.S. ambassador to Germany since 2018. He previously served as U.S. spokesman at the United Nations in the George W. Bush administration, including under then-Ambassador John Bolton.

News of the announcement was quickly criticized by those who said the job should be held by someone with deep experience in intelligence. Trump named Grenell acting national intelligence director, meaning he would not have to be confirmed by the Senate.



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Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Trump had "selected an individual without any intelligence experience to serve as the leader of the nation's intelligence community in an acting capacity."

Warner accused the president of trying to sidestep the Senate's constitutional authority to advise and consent on critical national security positions.

"The intelligence community deserves stability and an experienced individual to lead them in a time of massive national and global security challenges," Warner said in a statement. "Now more than ever our country needs a Senate-confirmed intelligence director who will provide the best intelligence and analysis, regardless of whether or not it's expedient for the president who has appointed him."

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 was signed by President George W. Bush after 9/11 to improve the sharing of information among all the intelligence agencies. The law states that the president shall appoint a national intelligence director with the advice and consent of the Senate. It also states: "Any individual nominated for appointment as Director of National Intelligence shall have extensive national security expertise."

Susan Hennessey, a fellow in national security law at Brookings Institution and a former attorney at the National Security Agency, tweeted: "This should frighten you. Not just brazen politicization of intelligence, but also someone who is utterly incompetent in an important security role. The guardrails are gone."

Trump named Maguire to the position after Texas GOP Rep. John Ratcliffe removed himself from consideration after just five days amid criticism about his lack of intelligence experience and qualifications for the job.

Maguire became acting director the same day that former National Intelligence Director Dan Coats' resignation took effect. It was also the same day that deputy national intelligence director Sue Gordon walked out the door. Democrats denounced the shake-up at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and accused Trump of pushing out two dedicated intelligence professionals.

## Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 21, the 52nd day of 2020. There are 314 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 21, 1975, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former White House aides H.R. Halde- man and John D. Ehrlichman were sentenced to 2 1/2 to 8 years in prison for their roles in the Watergate cover-up (each ended up serving a year and a-half).

On this date:

In 1613, Mikhail Romanov, 16, was unanimously chosen by Russia's national assembly to be czar, begin- ning a dynasty that would last three centuries.

In 1862, Nathaniel Gordon became the first and only American slave-trader to be executed under the U.S. Piracy Law of 1820 as he was hanged in New York.

In 1945, during the World War II Battle of Iwo Jima, the escort carrier USS Bismarck Sea was sunk by kamikazes with the loss of 318 men.

In 1958, the USS Gudgeon (SS-567) became the first American submarine to complete a round-the-world cruise, eight months after departing from Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

In 1964, the first shipment of U.S. wheat purchased by the Soviet Union arrived in the port of Odessa.

In 1965, black Muslim leader and civil rights activist Malcolm X, 39, was shot to death inside Harlem's Audubon Ballroom in New York by assassins identified as members of the Nation of Islam. (Three men were convicted of murder and imprisoned; all were eventually paroled.)

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon began his historic visit to China as he and his wife, Pat, arrived in Beijing.

In 1973, Israeli fighter planes shot down Libyan Arab Airlines Flight 114 over the Sinai Desert, killing all

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but five of the 113 people on board.

In 1992, Kristi Yamaguchi (yah-mah-GOO'-chee) of the United States won the gold medal in ladies' figure skating at the Albertville (AL-buhr-vihl) Olympics; Midori Ito (mee-doh-ree ee-toh) of Japan won the silver, Nancy Kerrigan of the U.S., the bronze.

In 1995, Chicago adventurer Steve Fossett became the first person to fly solo across the Pacific Ocean by balloon, landing in Leader, Saskatchewan, Canada.

In 2013, Drew Peterson, the Chicago-area police officer who gained notoriety after his much-younger fourth wife, Stacy Peterson, vanished in 2007, was sentenced to 38 years in prison for murdering his third wife, Kathleen Savio.

In 2018, the Rev. Billy Graham, a confidant of presidents and the most widely heard Christian evangelist in history, died at his North Carolina home; he was 99. A week after the Florida school shooting, President Donald Trump met with teen survivors of school violence and parents of slain children; Trump promised to be "very strong on background checks" and suggested he supported letting some teachers and other school employees carry weapons.

Ten years ago: A mistaken U.S. missile attack killed 23 civilians in Afghanistan. (Four American officers were later reprimanded.) The United States stunned Canada 5-3 to advance to the Olympic men's hockey quarterfinals in Vancouver. Bode (BOH'-dee) Miller finally captured his elusive gold medal, winning the super-combined for his third medal in three events. Spectator Susan Zimmer, 52, was killed at the NHRA Arizona Nationals at Firebird International Raceway in Chandler when a tire flew off a crashing dragster and struck her.

Five years ago: U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter made his international debut with a visit to Afghanistan to see American troops and commanders, meet with Afghan leaders and assess whether U.S. withdrawal plans were too risky to Afghan security. Activists, actors, and politicians gathered in New York City at the place where civil rights leader Malcolm X was shot to death 50 years earlier. Jazz trumpeter Clark Terry, 94, died in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

One year ago: Peter Tork, who rose to teen-idol fame in the 1960s playing the lovably clueless bass guitarist in the made-for-television rock band The Monkees, died at the age of 77. Teachers in Oakland, California, went on strike in the latest in a wave of teacher activism that had included walkouts in Denver, Los Angeles and West Virginia. North Carolina's election board ordered a new election for the state's last vacant congressional seat; Republican Mark Harris had dropped his bid to be declared the winner after conceding that his lead was tainted by evidence of ballot-tampering. (Republican Dan Bishop won a special election in September.) Opening the first-ever Vatican summit on preventing clergy sexual abuse, Pope Francis warned 190 bishops and religious superiors that their flocks were demanding concrete action to punish predator priests and keep children safe.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director Bob Rafelson is 87. Actor Gary Lockwood is 83. Actor-director Richard Beymer is 81. Actor Peter McEnery is 80. U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., is 80. Film/music company executive David Geffen is 77. Actress Tyne Daly is 74. Actor Anthony Daniels is 74. Tricia Nixon Cox is 74. Former Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, is 73. Rock musician Jerry Harrison (The Heads) is 71. Actress Christine Ebersole is 67. Actor William Petersen is 67. Actor Kelsey Grammer is 65. Country singer Mary Chapin Carpenter is 62. Actor Kim Coates is 62. Actor Jack Coleman is 62. Actor Christopher Atkins is 59. Actor William Baldwin is 57. Rock musician Michael Ward is 53. Actress Aunjanue Ellis is 51. Blues musician Corey Harris is 51. Country singer Eric Heatherly is 50. Rock musician Eric Wilson is 50. Rock musician Tad Kinchla (Blues Traveler) is 47. Singer Rhiannon Giddens (Carolina Chocolate Drops) is 43. Actor Tituss Burgess is 41. Actress Jennifer Love Hewitt is 41. Comedian-actor Jordan Peele is 41. Actor Brendan Sexton III is 40. Singer Charlotte Church is 34. Actress Ashley Greene is 33. Actress Ellen Page is 33. Actor Corbin Bleu is 31. Actress Hayley Orrantia is 26. Actress Sophie Turner is 24.

Thought for Today: "There is nothing more horrifying than stupidity in action." — Adlai E. Stevenson, American politician and diplomat (1900-1965).

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