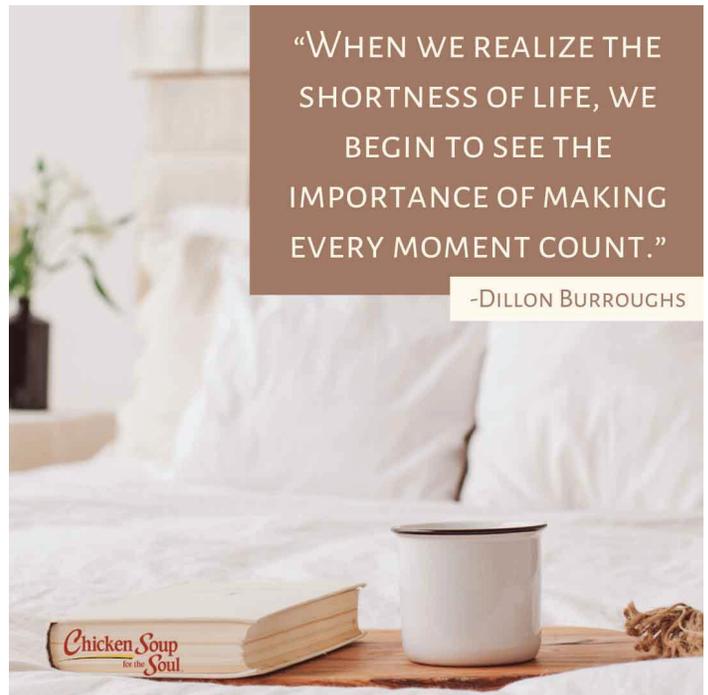


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Upcoming Events

Thursday, February 27, 2020

Double header basketball vs. Deuel at Clear Lake. Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 4 p.m., Girls Varsity at 6:30 p.m. and Boys Varsity at 8 p.m.

Friday, February 28, 2020

National Qualifier at Brookings High School.

State Wrestling Tournament at Sioux Falls.

Boys' Basketball make-up game at Sisseton. C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV game then the varsity game.

Saturday, February 29, 2020

National Qualifier at Brookings High School.

State Wrestling Tournament at Sioux Falls.

Robotics at Mitchell Technical Institute

Show Choir competition at Vermillion

Sunday, March 1, 2020

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

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Petitions due 5 p.m. Friday

Petitions for the Groton City Council and the Groton Area School District are due by 5 p.m. Friday. As of Tuesday, two petitions were handed in for both races.

According to Groton Area Business Manager Mike Weber, incumbents Steve Smith and Grant Rix have turned in their petitions for their three-year term. Weber also said that one other petition was downloaded from the Secretary of State website. That one has not yet been returned.

Meanwhile City Finance Officer Hope Block provided an update on the Groton City Council openings.

Councilman, Ward 1, 2 year term: Incumbent David Blackmun has taken out a petition but has not turned it in yet.

Councilman, Ward 1, 1 year term: Incumbent Jon Cutler has taken out a petition, but has not turned it in yet.

Councilman, Ward 2, 2 year term: Troy Lindberg has turned in his petition. Incumbent David McGannon has not taken out a petition.

Councilman, Ward 3, 2 year term: Kristie Flihs has turned in her petition. That spot was held by Burt Glover who has moved out of the city limits.

Attention Senior Citizens!!
We are offering our student
rate for you. Limited time only!
Call/Text Paul 605-397-7460.
Or Tina at 397-7285.

13 Main St., Downtown Groton

Open 24/7

GDI Living  **Fitness**

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A pep rally was held Tuesday afternoon for the five Groton Area grapplers heading to the state tournament this weekend in Sioux Falls. The high school wrestlers had to grapple with a younger Tuff Tiger and all of the younger Tuff Tigers won! Pictured above are Dragr Monson pictured with Parker Zoellner, Grady O'Neill with Kyson Kucker, Christian Ehresmann pictured with Bentley Ehresmann, Lane Krueger pictured with Keagan Kucker and Thomas Cranford pictured with Mason Locke. In front in the referee for the event, Ryan Scepaniak. A recording of the event is posted on the video archives under Other Events. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Coffee Cup League

Feb. 25 Team Standings: Ten Pins 24, Biker Chix 21, James Valley 17, Kens 10
High Games: Vickie Kramp 201, Nancy Radke 179, Mary Jane Jark 168
High Series: Vickie Kramp 511, Nancy Radke 452, Mary Jane Jark 449

Conde National League

Feb. 24 Team Standings: Cubs 29, Mets 21, Giants 19, Braves 18, Tigers 17, Pirates 16
Men's High Games: Lance Frohling 200, 179; Ryan Bethke 180; Tim Olson 174.
Men's High Series: Lance Frohling 544, Ryan Bethke 462, Butch Farmen 459
Women's High Games: Sandy Hoops 195, Nancy Radke 184, Mary Larson 181.
Women's High Series: Joyce Walter 488, Vickie Kramp 488, Mary Larson 477, Nancy Radke 469.

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Flood Information

Flooding is the nation's most common natural disaster. Flooding can happen in every U.S. state and territory. However, all floods are not alike. Some can develop slowly during an extended period of rain, or in a warming trend following a heavy snow. Others, such as flash floods, can occur quickly, even without any visible signs of rain. Be prepared for flooding no matter where you live, but particularly if you are in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam. Even a very small stream or dry creek bed can overflow and create flooding.

Prepare for Flooding

Elevate the furnace, water heater, and electric panel in your home if you live in an area that has a high flood risk.

Consider installing "check valves" to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home.

If feasible, construct barriers to stop floodwater from entering the building and seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds.

Property insurance does not typically cover flood damage. Talk to your insurance provider about your policy and consider if you need additional coverage.

Get a kit of emergency supplies and prepare a portable kit in case you have to evacuate.

Familiarize yourself with the terms that are used to identify a thunderstorm hazard, including understanding the difference between a severe thunderstorm watch and a severe thunderstorm warning.

A flood watch or flash flood warning means there is a possibility of flooding or a flash flood in your area.

Be Prepared to Evacuate

If time allows, bring in outside furniture and move your valuables to higher places in your home. Unplug electrical appliances, moving them to higher levels, if possible. However, do not touch an electric appliance if you are wet or standing in water.

If you have a car, fill the gas tank in case you have to evacuate.

A flood warning means a flood is occurring or will likely occur soon. If you are advised to evacuate do so immediately.

A flash flood warning means a flash flood is occurring. Seek higher ground immediately; do not wait for instructions.

Visit NOAA Watch for more weather-related information.

Plan to Evacuate

Plan how you will leave and where you will go if you are advised to evacuate.

If you do not have a car, plan alternate means of evacuating.

Plan places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.

Identify several places you could go in an emergency, a friend's home in another town, a motel or public shelter.

If you have a car, keep a half tank of gas in it at all times in case you need to evacuate.

Become familiar with alternate routes and other means of transportation out of your area.

Take your emergency supply kit.

Lock the door behind you.

Listen to NOAA Weather Radio for information.

Take your pets with you, but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters. Plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency.

Call or email the "out-of-state" contact in your family communications plan.

Tell them where you are going.

Leave a note telling others when you left and where you are going.

Check with neighbors who may need a ride.

Do not walk through moving water, if possible. Look for areas where the water is not moving. What might seem like a small amount of moving water can easily knock you down.

Do not drive into flooded areas. If your vehicle becomes surrounded by rising water, get out quickly and move to higher ground, if possible.

Stay Informed

Local authorities may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should listen to NOAA Weather Radio, watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for official news and instructions as they become available.

If it has been raining hard for several hours or if it has been raining steadily for days there may be the potential for flooding. Use common sense and available information. If water is rising quickly or you see a moving wall of mud or debris, immediately move to higher ground.

Stay out of flood waters, if possible. The water may be contaminated or electrically charged. However, should you find yourself trapped in your vehicle in rising water get out immediately and seek higher ground.

Stay away from downed power lines to avoid the risk of electric shock or electrocution.

Do not return to your home until local authorities say it is safe. Even after flood waters recede, roads may be weakened and could collapse. Buildings may be unstable, and drinking water may be contaminated.

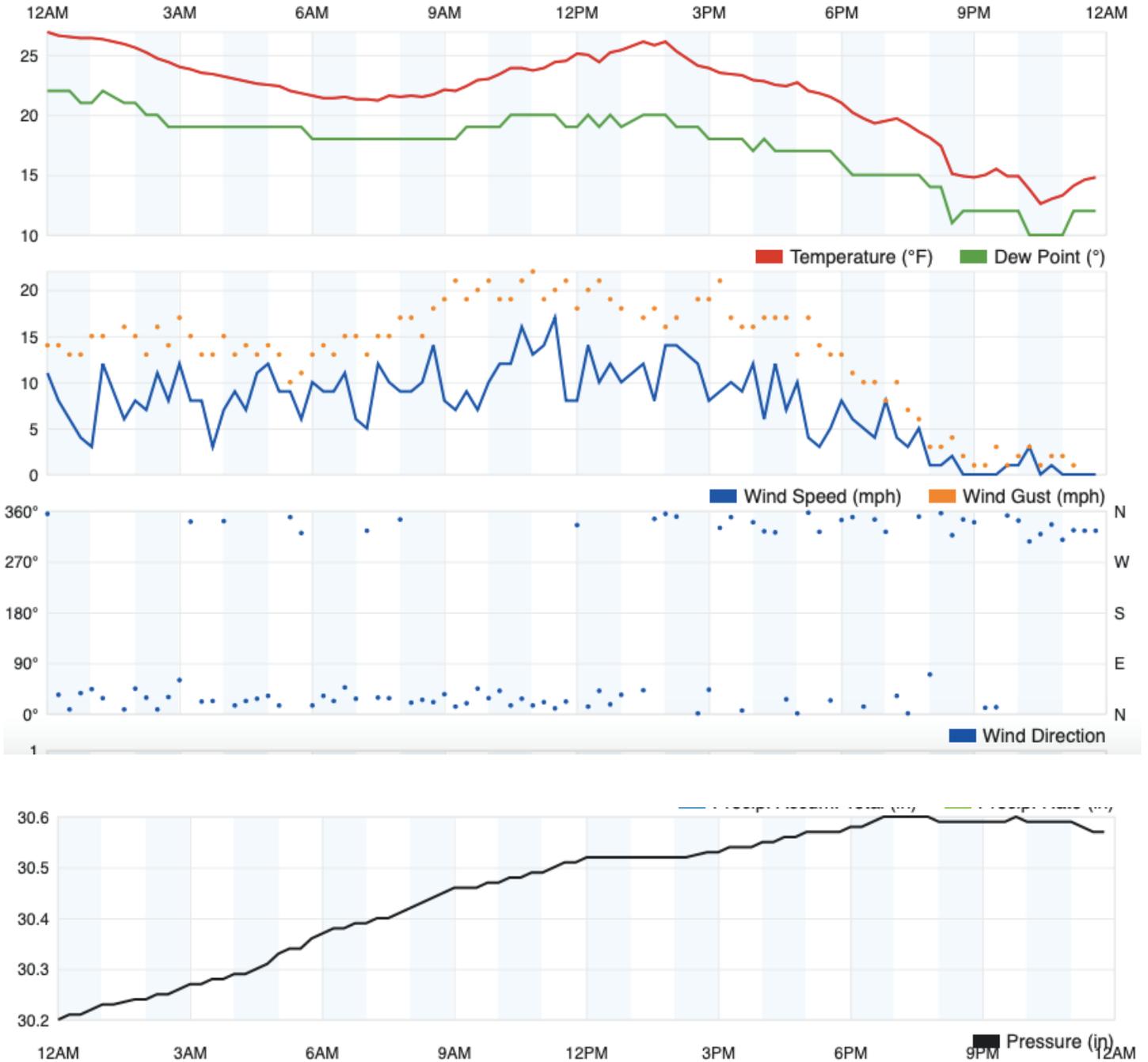
Use common sense and exercise caution.

For more information on how you can be prepared for a flood, visit <https://www.floodsmart.gov/>.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny

High: 23 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 8 °F

Thursday



Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Cloudy

High: 28 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

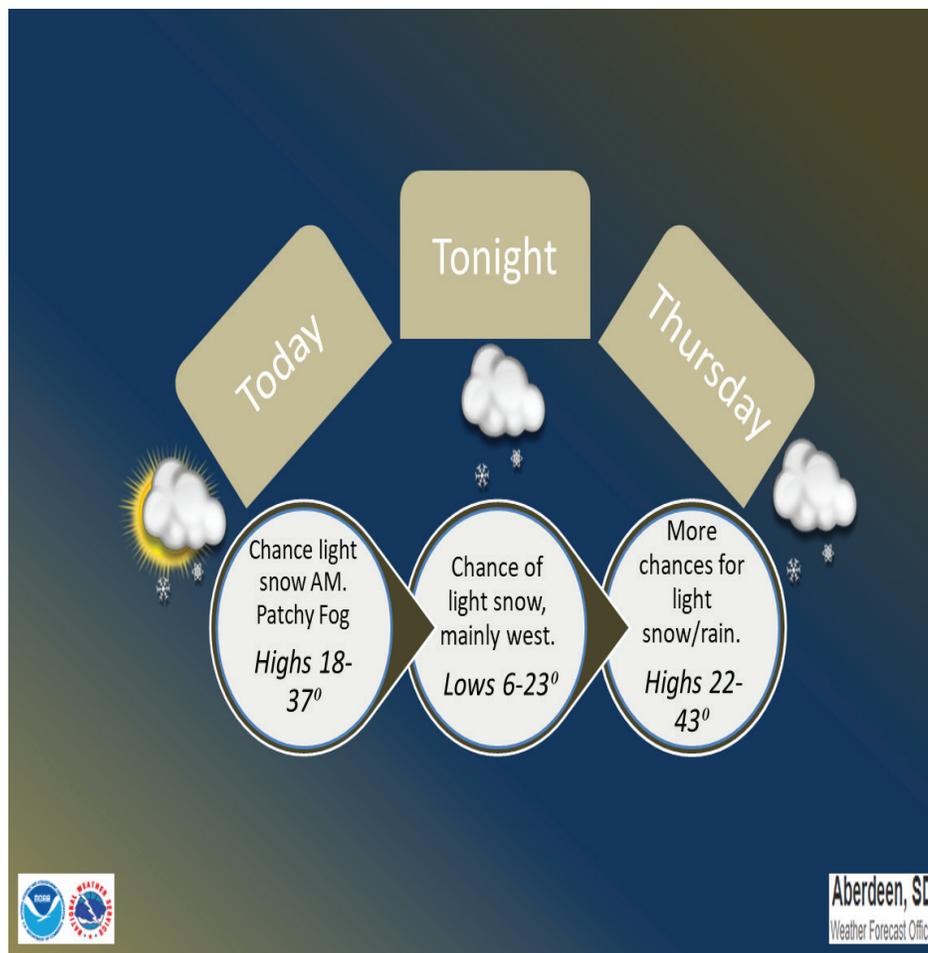
Low: 19 °F

Friday



Partly Sunny

High: 36 °F



Light snow is possible over the region through Thursday, but mainly west and far east. Little to no accumulation is expected. Temperatures will remain below normal for most areas, but a warm-up is expected for the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

February 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell on the 26th and the 27th in western and central South Dakota near the northern border of the state. McLaughlin received 14 inches, Eureka 12 inches, and McIntosh 11 inches. Snowfall amounts dropped off to two to four inches about 20 miles south of the northern border.

February 26, 1998: A strong area of low pressure moved across central and northeast South Dakota from the morning of the 26th to the morning of the 27th. As the low moved northeast, cold north winds of 25 to 35 mph gusting to 45 mph caused widespread rain to change over to snow. Many roads became icy and poor visibilities in snow and blowing snow, and low wind chills developed. Four to 8 inches of snow fell across the counties bordering the Missouri River and in far western McPherson and far western Edmunds counties. Many area schools were dismissed early or canceled. Some residents, especially West River, lost power during the storm. Many McIntosh residents were without power for over 24 hours. Numerous activities and sports events were canceled. Some car accidents did not result in injury. A semi rolled onto its side northwest of Gettysburg on the 26th. Ranchers also experienced some calving problems as a result of the winter storm. Some snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Selby, Herreid, and Mobridge, 5 inches at Isabel, 6 inches at Gettysburg, 7 inches about 11 miles east of Hosmer, and 8 inches at McIntosh. Some large drifts also developed, especially West River, as a result of the heavy snow and strong winds.

February 26, 2009: A vigorous, but relatively fast-moving winter storm system tracked across South Dakota Wednesday night and Thursday. Even with the reasonably quick movement of the system, storm total snowfall amounts were quite impressive. In fact, during the peak of the snowstorm, snowfall rates of 1" to 2" per hour were observed!

1910: Parts of Washington State were in the midst of a storm that produced 129 inches of snow at Laconia between the 24th and the 26th, a single storm record for the state. A series of storms, which began on the 23rd, led to a deadly avalanche on the first of March. By late on the 28th, the snow had changed to rain, setting the stage for disaster.

1972: The Buffalo Creek disaster occurred in the Buffalo Creek Hollow of Logan County in West Virginia. A coal slag dam on the Middle Fork of Buffalo Creek burst, sending a fifty-foot wall of water down a narrow valley killing 125 persons and causing 51 million dollars damage. Three days of rain atop a six-inch snow cover caused the dam to break.

1987 - A slow moving storm in the southwestern U.S. spread heavy snow from the southern and central Rockies into the Central High Plains Region. Totals in Colorado ranged up to 62 inches at Purgatory. Colorado Springs CO reported a February record of 14.8 inches of snow in 24 hours. Lander WY received four inches in one hour, 13 inches in seven hours, and a record storm total of 26 inches. High winds created near blizzard conditions at Colorado Springs. Fairplay CO reported 43 inches of snow, with drifts ten feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Eight cities in the central and western U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Lamoni IA with a reading of 67 degrees. Temperatures in North Dakota were as warm as those in Florida. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought snow to parts of the central U.S. which just one day earlier were enjoying temperatures in the 60s. Snowfall totals in Missouri ranged up to nine inches at Rolla. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Unseasonably cold weather followed in the wake of the winter storm in the northeastern U.S. Ten cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Syracuse NY with a reading of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing temperatures in southeastern Virginia caused considerable damage to plants and fruit trees. The barometric pressure reading of 30.88 inches at Wilmington NC was February record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - A major snowstorm dumps up to 20 inches of snow in the Charlotte metropolitan area. Charlotte's third largest snowstorm on record accumulates 11.6 inches at the airport.

2011: The tallest tree in Wales falls after a wind storm. Located on the Lake Vyrnwy Estate, this 124-year-old Douglas fir stood at 63.7 m (208.9 feet). The tree reportedly was leaning over and had two substantial cracks in the main trunk. This tree would be carved into a giant hand.

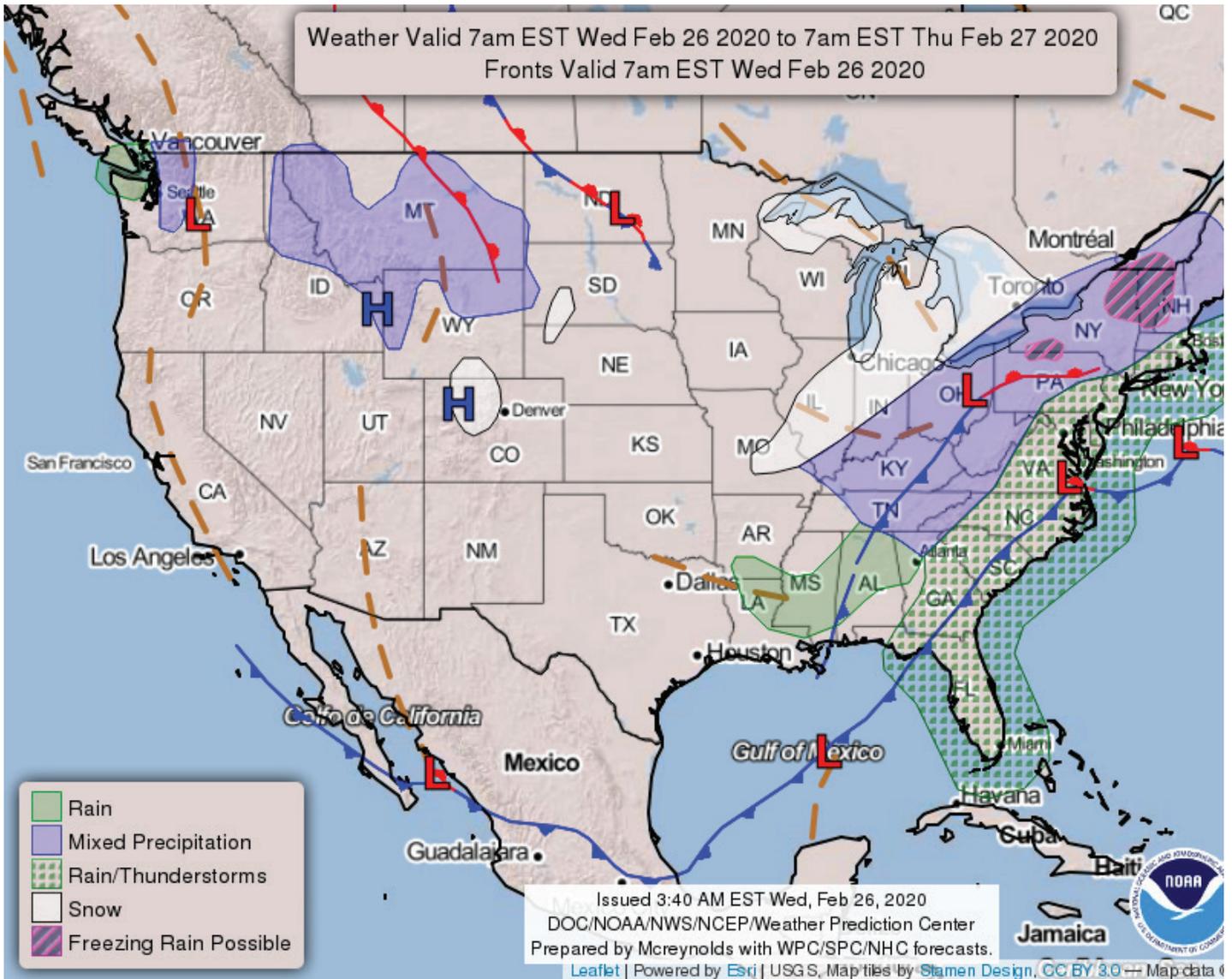
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 27 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 12 °F at 10:25 PM
Wind: 24 mph at 11:02 AM
Snow

Record High: 65° in 1896
Record Low: -20° in 1962, 1897
Average High: 32°F
Average Low: 12°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.47
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.94
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 6:16 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16 a.m.



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WHAT NOW?

Each afternoon an old farmer and his Labrador retriever would walk to the train station, sit down together, and wait for the train to arrive at three o'clock. When the engine appeared, the dog would jump up, wag his tail, wait for the train to get closer, and then race alongside it.

One day a stranger said to the farmer, "That's a crazy dog you got there, mister. Does he actually think he can catch that train?"

"Nope," said the farmer. "And he wouldn't know what to do with it if he did."

We often behave like that dog. We see things that are larger than life itself and go after them in hot pursuit. We might conquer them or they might actually conquer us. But in the end, most of them have no eternal value to us.

In His message about worry, Jesus advised us not to be concerned about worldly things – things that are here today and gone tomorrow. He warned that "these worldly things dominate the minds of unbelievers." Now, that's an interesting way to look at our lives if we want to test the importance of our faith and who or what we believe in!

Our focus then as believers? "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else." When our priorities are with God's, we will no longer chase things that really do not matter.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to trust in You, believing that You know what we need and will supply it. May we focus on Your Kingdom above all else, today and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 6:25-34 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

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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)
 - 05/11/2020 Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 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
 - 06/20/2020 Shriner's Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 06/26/2020 Groton Businesses Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 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
 - 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 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 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

02-09-43-49-63, Mega Ball: 15, Megaplier: 2

(two, nine, forty-three, forty-nine, sixty-three; Mega Ball: fifteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$55 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$70 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Beresford 73, Wagner 54

Custer 70, Hill City 22

Dell Rapids 82, Canton 63

Flandreau 45, Parker 40

Highmore 60, Ipswich 56

Huron 78, Harrisburg 47

Lennox 76, Dakota Valley 74

McCook Central/Montrose 52, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 46

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 62, Sioux Falls Lincoln 55

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 68, Brookings 49

Sioux Falls Washington 65, Mitchell 56

Vermillion 87, Flandreau Indian 58

Webster 67, Redfield 56

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Douglas vs. Sturgis Brown, ccd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 52, Pierre 30

Beresford 58, Wagner 46

Canton 61, Dell Rapids 40

Chamberlain 60, Stanley County 20

Flandreau 69, Parker 44

Flandreau Indian 57, Deuel 55

Garretson 56, Baltic 27

Huron 63, Harrisburg 48

Lennox 64, Dakota Valley 42

Madison 47, Milbank 39

McCook Central/Montrose 77, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 57

Mobridge-Pollock 61, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 58

Rapid City Stevens 48, Rapid City Central 37

Redfield 53, Webster 45, OT

Sioux Falls Washington 53, Mitchell 43

Tea Area 80, Tri-Valley 67

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West Central 64, Sioux Falls Christian 43
Winner 54, Miller 45
Class B Region 1=
Quarterfinal=
Langford 49, Great Plains Lutheran 17
Northwestern 65, Aberdeen Christian 51
Waubay/Summit 56, Wilmot 42
Waverly-South Shore 50, Warner 26
Class B Region 2=
Quarterfinal=
Faulkton 64, North Central Co-Op 37
Herreid/Selby Area 68, Potter County 43
Ipswich 60, Highmore-Harrold 56
Sully Buttes 43, Lower Brule 34
Class B Region 3=
Quarterfinal=
Castlewood 54, Wolsey-Wessington 28
DeSmet 53, James Valley Christian 32
Deubrook 33, Arlington 26
Estelline/Hendricks 60, Hitchcock-Tulare 57
Class B Region 4=
Quarterfinal=
Colman-Egan 42, Dell Rapids St. Mary 32
Ethan 63, Chester 22
Hanson 57, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 40
Howard 46, Mitchell Christian 25
Class B Region 5=
Quarterfinal=
Bridgewater-Emery 60, Menno 46
Freeman 43, Scotland 41
Irene-Wakonda 74, Canistota 62
Viborg-Hurley 56, Centerville 32
Class B Region 6=
Quarterfinal=
Avon 62, Gregory 44
Corsica/Stickney 59, Bon Homme 23
Kimball/White Lake 46, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 34
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 60, Burke 53

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

Storm closes roads in Black Hills of western South Dakota

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Officials say a fast-moving storm through the Black Hills made driving treacherous in some spots and presented a challenge for voters heading to the polls on Tuesday for a Rapid City school bond election.

More than a foot of snow fell in downtown Rapid City since the storm began Monday. A National Weather Service meteorologist says parts of the Northern Black Hills saw 27 to 31 inches (69 to 79 centimeters) of snow.

Tony Mangan, spokesman for the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, told the Rapid City Journal

that troopers were responding to numerous storm-related crashes. That included a jackknifed semitrailer blocking the westbound lane of Interstate 90 at Spearfish. No injuries were reported.

The weather service said conditions are expected to improve later Tuesday. But a winter storm watch is out for the Northern Black Hills for heavy snow from Wednesday evening through Thursday afternoon. Forecasters say 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of snow are possible.

Attorney general's probation rollback passes Senate

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate on Tuesday narrowly passed Attorney General Jason Ravensborg's proposal to give judges the ability to send low-level felons to prison rather than probation if they don't cooperate with law enforcement investigations.

Lawmakers are looking for ways to address increasing rates of meth addiction and drug arrests in the state, but were split on whether tougher law enforcement or addiction treatment is the best approach. Ravensborg's proposal comes from the "tough on crime" strategy. He argued that it would allow police to go after drug dealers rather than just users, but that increased addiction treatment is also important.

"This is a massive puzzle, and there's not just one piece that fixes it all," he said.

Gov. Kristi Noem is requesting \$3.7 million in the state budget to bolster addiction programs and law enforcement for drug crimes.

The Republican attorney general's bill would allow judges to rescind presumptive probation, which stipulates that certain low-level felons be sentenced to probation rather than prison, if they don't help with law enforcement investigations. Ravensborg thinks that most people will cooperate with law enforcement, leading to more dealer busts.

But opponents of the bill were concerned this would mean parolees would be pressured into buying drugs in police stings, something they felt could be dangerous and detrimental to them overcoming their addictions.

Ravensborg said that cooperation with law enforcement may include drug buys, but that they happen in a "controlled" environment with police nearby.

The attorney general in 2018 campaigned on getting rid of the program, but his efforts to do so last year failed in the Legislature after it was estimated the repeal would cost the state \$54 million over ten years. Noem opposed that proposal.

The bill that senators passed on Tuesday would incarcerate an estimated 88 more people and cost the state \$8.48 million over 10 years in prison and jail costs.

"At some point we need to realize that continuing to put money into building prisons, into locking people away as prisoners doesn't really solve any problems," said Sen. Craig Kennedy, a Yankton Democrat.

The bill cleared the Senate by just three votes. It will next be considered by the House.

The attorney general is pushing another proposal that would disqualify people from presumptive probation if they have more than two felonies in a 10-year period. That bill is still awaiting a committee hearing.

Senate passes ban on university faculty unions

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate on Tuesday passed a proposal to get rid of the faculty union at the state's universities.

The union has at times been instrumental in resisting proposals from lawmakers to shake up the university system. The Board of Regents that oversees the state's universities has resisted oversight from lawmakers in recent years. Gov. Kristi Noem supports the proposal.

The governor's office and other proponents argue that the contract negotiations are costly and prevent universities from adapting through the hiring of professors without tenure.

"The current system couldn't be much farther from flexible and adaptive," said Senate Majority Leader Kris Langer, a Dell Rapids Republican.

Opponents argued that the bill threatens the ability of the state to recruit faculty. They said professors would be hesitant to come to a university system that does not allow collective bargaining.

But Sen. Jeff Partridge, a Rapid City Republican, said the the state's funding of the university system remains flat at about \$225 million annually. He said schools need to be more creative in making the money stretch farther.

Union membership has also dwindled in recent years, according to lawmakers.

The House is considering a similar bill, but that is still awaiting a committee hearing.

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Jackknifed truck injures Wyoming Highway Patrol trooper

COLONY, Wyo. (AP) — A crash in northeastern Wyoming has injured a Wyoming Highway Patrol trooper. Patrol officials said Tuesday the trooper was in the driver's seat of a patrol vehicle after a previous wreck Monday on U.S. Highway 212 when a truck jackknifed.

The truck hit the back of the patrol vehicle, knocking the trooper unconscious. Another driver stopped and called for help on the trooper's radio.

Patrol officials say the trooper was hospitalized in Spearfish, South Dakota. They didn't disclose the trooper's condition or identity.

The trooper's patrol dog also was in the vehicle but unhurt.

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Industrial hemp bill ready for Senate vote

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota Senate committee on Tuesday unanimously approved a proposal to legalize industrial hemp.

It will now be considered by the full Senate before it can head to Gov. Kristi Noem's desk to either be vetoed or signed into law. The Republican governor vetoed a similar proposal last year, but this year changed her position and told lawmakers she would not veto it again if they came up with provisions for its enforcement, regulation, transportation permitting, and funding.

Lawmakers are still working out the funding. The governor's office wants them to find \$3.5 million in the state budget to get the hemp program up and running. The budget must be passed by the end of the session in three weeks.

The bill would allow people to grow hemp if they have a minimum plot size of 5 acres and keep the THC level of the plant below 0.3%. THC is the compound that produces a high in marijuana. It would also allow hemp to be processed into CBD oil and other products. Farmers and hemp processors would need to pay for a license from the state and obtain a permit to transport it.

SD lawmakers reject bill to stop school vaccine requirements

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Tuesday rejected a proposal to stop schools from requiring students to get vaccinations.

A House committee heard emotional testimony from parents on both sides of the issue but decided to effectively kill the bill, saying it would have resulted in decreased vaccination rates and could have caused outbreaks in vaccine-preventable diseases.

Supporters of the bill said South Dakota is the first state Legislature this year to consider a proposal to end school vaccine requirements, but that the issue is now being carried by lawmakers in a few other states. They hoped that despite the bill's defeat, their doubts about vaccinations would gain credence in the state.

Gov. Kristi Noem opposed the bill and told reporters last week that vaccinations have saved millions of lives. Doctors, as well as lobbyists from medical groups, hospitals, business groups, universities and schools, also lined up to voice their opposition.

Neil Rohe, a Sioux Falls chiropractor, spoke in support of the bill and raised medical concerns about vaccinations.

Catie Clobes, a mother from Montrose, Minnesota, who showed a photo of her infant daughter as she told lawmakers how she died shortly after receiving vaccinations. Angie Wehrkamp, a mother from Sioux Falls, showed a photo of her 2-year-old daughter who died after contracting the flu.

Other parents emotionally testified about how the bill would risk the safety of their children with conditions that weaken their immune systems. Doctors told lawmakers that a law like this could result in the deaths of hundreds of children from preventable diseases.

Dozens of families packed the room. Many came with a group called Health Freedom South Dakota that is advocating for the end to school vaccine requirements.

Mya Olson, the group's founder, argued that the bill was not about the safety of vaccines, though she questioned their safety repeatedly, but about the rights of parents to choose to vaccinate their children.

Rep. Tim Rounds, a Pierre Republican, disagreed. "This is a vaccine bill. There is no question, no doubt about it."

The state does not require vaccinations for students with religious exemptions and weakened immune systems. But Olson pointed out that Catholic schools in the state are no longer allowing Catholics to claim religious exemptions. Catholic schools still permit religious exemptions for non-Catholic students.

Department of Health Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon, who spoke in opposition to the bill, said, "Families on both sides of the argument are the most vested in these issues."

She encouraged parents to learn about the benefits and potential side-effects of vaccinations but said

she was concerned about misinformation about vaccines being spread on social media.

The Department of Health promotes vaccines as safe and important for keeping kids healthy. Over 96% of kindergartners in the state have been vaccinated for measles, mumps, and rubella, representing one of the highest coverage rates in the nation, according to the Department of Health. The state has not had a reported case of measles since 2015.

Despite the bill dying, Benson Hsu, a pediatrician with Sanford Children's Hospital, said he was worried that legislation like this would raise doubts about vaccinations, which medical experts have overwhelmingly found to be safe and effective.

Olson said her group has received 350 applications for membership since the bill's introduction. And House Majority Leader Lee Qualm, the Platte Republican who introduced the bill, said he sees the legislation as a conversation-starter on the issue. He hopes it is something that the conservative-dominated Legislature takes another look at before next year's session.

Almost \$4M in work planned at Devils Tower National Monument

GILLETTE, Wyo. (AP) — The National Park Service is about to begin facility and trail work totaling almost \$4 million in Devils Tower National Monument in northeastern Wyoming.

The work will include making an overlook trail more accessible to people who are in wheelchairs or have other physical limitations.

Plans also call for improving access to restrooms, a visitor center and a trail to the base of Devils Tower. Parking lots, visitor center exhibits and trail signs also will see improvements.

Funding will come from a variety of sources including a portion of entrance fees, the Gillette News-Record reports.

"It's been a long time planned and a long time coming to make sure that all these funding sources came together for us," said Nick Myers, the national monument's chief of interpretation.

Work is expected to begin this week, weather permitting, and should be done by November, Myers said.

Previous major work at Devils Tower occurred in the 1950s, ahead of the 50th anniversary of the National Park Service in 1966.

Devils Tower is what remains of magma that pushed up through the earth and solidified some 50 million years ago. The formation stands about 900 feet (275 meters) above the surrounding landscape.

Established in 1906, Devils Tower National Monument was the first U.S. national monument.

Man suspected of drunken driving in pedestrian fatal

HARTFORD, S.D. (AP) — Authorities are holding a South Dakota man suspected of driving drunk when he allegedly struck and killed a woman walking her dog in Hartford.

Officers were called around 9 p.m. Monday after the woman was struck. She is identified as 41-year-old Nichole Gail Anderson. Authorities say she died at the scene.

A 31-year-old Hartford man was arrested and booked into jail late Monday on charges including vehicular homicide. Authorities say the man called police about the crash and was arrested at the scene.

Authorities would not say how much alcohol the driver had in his system other than it was above the legal limit, the Argus Leader reported.

New Lakota healing program is expanding in Pennington County

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A new Lakota cultural and healing program in South Dakota is expanding after officials say it helped those who commit crimes get back on the right track.

State's Attorney Mark Vargo said the Pennington County jail and his office are expanding the Seven Directions program this year to ensure that incarcerated participants are released with a new mindset and skills, the Rapid City Journal reported. Vargo noted that it is difficult for offenders to change their behavior if they are released into the same environment with no treatment.

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"The pilot programs have shown great promise," Vargo said at a news conference Monday.

Seven Directions has had a "profound impact" on participants and the entire "dynamics of the cell blocks" because those involved share the skills they learn with others, Jail Commander Rob Yantis noted.

Chissie Spencer and Ruth Cedar Face, who have worked in the mental health and addiction fields since 1993, run Seven Directions. The pair began offering classes last spring in the jail and at the Fork Real Cafe for people on pretrial release and probation. Courses also are provided for those who joined the adult diversion program, which expunges criminal charges for successful participants. The classes will soon expand to the inpatient addiction program at the Care Campus.

"Everything we do is clinical but we use it in our traditional ways," said Cedar Face, a licensed addiction counselor from Porcupine.

Damon Patton, a black 39-year-old electrician and commercial driver, said he was filled with anger after being booked last March into the county jail on an armed robbery charge. However, Patton noted that the programs taught him to deal with his emotions and connect with his culture.

"It helped me recognize my strengths and my weaknesses ... where I was right in life and where I was wrong in life. It helped me want to live a better life, make better choices," said Patton, who also identifies as Lakota. "It also helped me want to learn my culture."

After graduating from the program's 10-week course, Patton accepted a plea deal and was recently released from jail to begin his probation sentence. He continues to participate in Seven Directions classes.

Corps increasing water flowing into lower Missouri River

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The amount of water being released into the Missouri River from Gavins Point Dam will be increased again to free up more space in the reservoirs upstream before spring.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said Tuesday that the amount of water flowing out of Gavins Point on the Nebraska-South Dakota border will be increased later this week to 41,000 cubic feet (1160.99 cubic meters) per second. That is up from the current 35,000 cubic feet (991.09 cubic meters) per second.

The current releases from Gavins Point dam are more than double what is typical for this time of year.

The Corps is working to clear out as much space as possible in the reservoirs ahead of what is expected to be another wet year.

"This is keeping with our aggressive strategy to maintain as much flood control storage as possible for as long as possible," said John Remus, who leads the Corps' Missouri River Basin Water Management Division.

Overall, the reservoirs along the Missouri River currently have 16.2 million acre feet of space available for flood control.

Iran raises its death toll to 19 amid 139 coronavirus cases

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's president said Tehran has no immediate plans to quarantine cities over the new coronavirus rapidly spreading across the country, even as the Islamic Republic suffers the highest death toll outside of China with 19 killed amid 139 cases confirmed on Wednesday.

President Hassan Rouhani went on to acknowledge that it may take "one, two or three weeks" to get control of the virus in Iran, linked to most of the over 210 confirmed cases of the virus now spread across the Mideast. That comes after the top official in charge of Iran's response to the coronavirus tested positive for the illness after a day earlier trying to downplay the disease.

Still, Rouhani sought to portray the virus crisis in terms of Iran's tense relations with the U.S.

"Coronavirus must not be turned into a weapon for our enemies to halt work and production in our country," Rouhani said, according to a transcript posted to the Iranian presidency's website.

Iranian state television reported Wednesday that 19 people have been killed by the new coronavirus amid 139 confirmed cases in the country so far.

The announcement by a state TV anchor came as Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour urged

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Iranians to avoid "nonessential travel," particularly to the hard-hit provinces of the country such as Gilan and Qom.

The coronavirus has infected more than 80,000 people globally, causing over 2,700 deaths, mainly in China. The World Health Organization has named the illness COVID-19.

Experts remain concerned that Iran may be underreporting cases and deaths, given the rapid spread from Iran across the Persian Gulf. Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, a hard-line lawmaker in Iran alleged Monday there had been 50 deaths in the Iranian city of Qom alone, which was denied by authorities.

Meanwhile, Wednesday's figures still showed no cases confirmed in the Iranian city of Mashhad, though a number of cases now reported in Kuwait are linked to Mashhad.

In Tehran overnight, workers disinfected mass-transit buses and the capital's underground metro system, removing overhead handles in an effort to limit areas the virus could be picked up from. Traffic again appeared lighter on Tehran's normally gridlocked roads amid a winter rain, as signs warned Iranians not to touch surfaces in crowded areas.

"We must be optimistic, because pessimism causes us to attract this disease," said Afsaneh Azarloo, a Tehran resident. "We should be optimistic and hope that nothing bad will happen to us."

That optimism was not shared by another passer-by, who merely gave his name as Saeed.

"I'm worried. It's the first time I have left home after a week," he said. "My home is now my workplace too."

Rouhani's estimate of as much as three weeks to control the virus comes after officials repeatedly downplaying the virus previously. That's sparked more concern among Iranians already angry over nationwide economic protests, the U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general and Iran accidentally shooting down a Ukrainian jetliner and then denying it for days. A recent parliamentary election also saw the country's lowest-ever recorded turnout.

Jahanpour on Tuesday suggested it could take as long as late April to control the virus. And with the Persian New Year, or Nowruz, coming March 20, experts worry about the virus spreading even further across the country if not stopped by then.

"Containment of the COVID-19 virus within Iran will be a challenge because of Iran's poor health infrastructure and traditional unwillingness to communicate freely and openly across all branches of government and between health institutions," the Austin, Texas private intelligence firm Stratfor said.

That worry was echoed by analysts at the Eurasia Group.

"Tehran is likely significantly underestimating the risk posed by an outbreak of coronavirus to its citizens, economy and neighbors," the analysts wrote. "Iran has a relatively robust public health system, although it has been weakened by US sanctions. But a breakdown in national-level decision-making has severely hampered its ability contain the spread of the virus."

Meanwhile Wednesday, Egyptian airport officials said the country's national carrier, EgyptAir, has indefinitely extended the suspension of its flights to and from China, for the safety of its passengers. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to brief journalists.

Associated Press journalists Amir Vahdat, Saeed Sarmadi and Mehdi Fattahi in Tehran, Iran, and Samy Magdy in Cairo contributed to this report.

Caution, cancellations mark Ash Wednesday in time of virus

By NICOLE WINFIELD and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican was going ahead with plans for Pope Francis to celebrate the Ash Wednesday ritual kicking off the Catholic Church's Lenten season, but elsewhere in Italy Masses were canceled over fears of the new coronavirus and other Catholic countries took precautions.

In the Philippines — Asia's only majority Roman Catholic country — priests sprinkled ashes on the heads of the faithful rather than making the mark of the cross on their foreheads to avoid physical contact.

"Wherever the ash is placed, on the forehead or on the head, the feeling is the same, it's uplifting,"

Editha Lorenzo, a 49-year-old mother of two wearing a face mask, told The Associated Press in Manila.

At the Vatican, Francis held his general audience as usual in St. Peter's Square and sent his prayers to victims of the virus and the medical personnel treating them. A handful of the thousands of people gathered wore face masks to protect against the virus, which originated in China and has infected thousands globally including more than 300 people in Italy.

Francis kissed at least one child as he looped through the square in his popemobile and made a point to shake hands with the faithful sitting in the front row. Usually, he only waves. He also greeted prelates with a handshake at the beginning and end of the gathering, but it appeared most clergy were refraining from kissing Francis' ring or embracing him, as they normally would do.

"I want to again express my closeness to those suffering from the coronavirus and the health care workers who are treating them, as well as the civil authorities and all those who are working to help patients and stop the contagion," Francis said.

Later in the day Francis is to celebrate an Ash Wednesday Mass at a Rome church, a procession and ritual that begins the 40-day Lenten period of fasting and penance in the run-up to Holy Week and Easter.

Already the patriarchate of Venice canceled the Ash Wednesday Mass scheduled for St. Mark's Basilica, after a handful of elderly people in the lagoon city tested positive for the virus. The surrounding Veneto region is home to the second main cluster of cases in Italy.

In the Philippines, the Rev. Victorino Cueto, rector of the popular National Shrine of our Mother of Perpetual Help in the Manila metropolis, said the practice of sprinkling ash on heads of devotees was a precaution to prevent the spread of infections but actually is an old tradition based on the Old Testament.

"It's better to be cautious," said churchgoer Evet Accion.

On Good Friday, which marks Christ's death on the cross, bishops in the Philippines strongly suggested that churchgoers refrain from kissing or touching the cross, a common practice among Catholics. "Instead, the faithful are requested to genuflect or make a profound bow as they venerate the cross," said Archbishop Romulo Valles, who heads the bishops' conference.

Last month, the bishops recommended that Catholics receive the Eucharistic host by the hand instead of the mouth and avoid holding hands in prayer during Masses as precautions amid the viral scare.

Gomez reported from Manila, Philippines.

Tokyo organizers, government take offensive on virus threat

By **STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer**

TOKYO (AP) — Tokyo Olympic organizers and the Japanese government went on the offensive Wednesday after a senior IOC member said the 2020 Games were being threatened by the spread of a viral outbreak, with their fate probably decided in the next three months.

Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto abruptly called a news conference late Wednesday afternoon to address comments from former International Olympic Committee vice president Dick Pound in an interview with The Associated Press.

"Our basic thoughts are that we will go ahead with the Olympic and Paralympic Games as scheduled," Muto said, speaking in Japanese. "For the time being, the situation of the coronavirus infection is, admittedly, difficult to predict, but we will take measures such that we'll have a safe Olympic and Paralympic Games."

The viral outbreak that began in China has infected more than 80,000 people and killed more than 2,700 globally. China has reported 2,715 deaths among 78,064 cases on the mainland. Five deaths in Japan have been attributed to the virus and the COVID-19 illness it causes.

Pound has been a member of the IOC since 1978, serving two terms as vice president, and was the founding president of the World Anti-Doping Agency. He has served 13 years longer than IOC president Thomas Bach. He also represented Canada as a swimmer at the Olympics.

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"You could certainly go to two months out if you had to," Pound told the AP in a telephone interview from his home in Montreal. "By and large you're looking at a cancellation. This is the new war, and you have to face it. In and around there folks are going to have to say: 'Is this under sufficient control that we can be confident of going to Tokyo or not?'"

Pound was speaking as a rank-and-file member and not part of the IOC's present leadership, but his opinions are often sought in IOC circles.

"That the end of May is the time-limit, we have never thought of this or heard of such a comment," Muto said. "So when we asked about this we received a response saying that is not the position of the IOC."

The IOC has repeatedly said the Tokyo Games will go ahead and has said it is following the advice of the World Health Organization, a United Nations agency.

Japanese virologist Dr. Hitoshi Oshitani, who formerly worked for the WHO, said last week he could not forecast what the situation with the virus would be in five months.

The Olympics open on July 24 with 11,000 athletes, followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 25 with 4,400 athletes.

At a government task force meeting Wednesday on the virus outbreak, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he was asking organizers to cancel or postpone major sports or cultural events over the next two weeks.

"The next one-to-two weeks is extremely important for the prevention of the escalation of the infection," Abe said. "We ask organizers to cancel, postpone or scale down the size of such events."

He did not name specific events but said he was speaking about nationwide events that attract large crowds.

The three-month window also goes for sponsors and television broadcasters who need to firm up planning. Not to mention travelers, athletes and fans with 7.8 million tickets available for the Olympics and 2.3 million for the Paralympics.

As the games draw near, Pound said: "A lot of things have to start happening. You've got to start ramping up your security, your food, the Olympic Village, the hotels. The media folks will be in their building their studios."

Muto declined to speculate about the future condition of the virus.

"I don't think I can talk based on presumptions over what might happen months ahead," Muto said. "The Prime Minister has announced measures to be taken over the next two weeks and so we, too, are taking that into consideration. The biggest problem would be if this novel coronavirus infections spreads far and wide, so the most important thing to do is to take measures to prevent that from happening."

He also said the torch relay would go ahead. It is to start in Japan on March 26 in Fukushima prefecture, located 250 kilometers (150 miles) northeast of Tokyo.

"We absolutely do not think of canceling (the torch relay)," Muto said. "We'd like to think about how to implement it while preventing the spread of infection, including scaling down, or other ways."

Olympics Minister Seiko Hashimoto, speaking in parliament on Wednesday, said "we believe it is necessary to make a worst case scenario in order to improve our operation to achieve success."

She added plans were being made "so that we can safely hold the Tokyo Olympics."

Also Wednesday, Japan's Kyodo news agency reported that the Colombian Olympic Committee has decided not to participate in pre-Olympic training camps in southern Japan.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Globe braces for long battle against virus as cases spread

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Scientists raced to find a treatment, crews scrubbed everything from money to buses, and quarantines were enforced Wednesday from a beachfront resort in the Atlantic to an uninhabited island in the Pacific as the world fought the spread of a new virus.

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Worries over the ever-expanding economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis multiplied, with factories idled, trade routes frozen and tourism crippled, while a growing list of countries braced for the illness to claim new territory. Even the Olympics, five months away, wasn't far enough off to keep people from wondering if it would go on as planned.

"We don't expect a miracle in the short term," said Kianoush Jahanpour of the health ministry in Iran, where an official tally of infections of 139 was doubted by some who thought the problem was far bigger.

About 81,000 people around the globe were sickened by the coronavirus that kept finding new targets.

In Europe, where Germany, France and Spain were among the places with a growing caseload, an expanding cluster of more than 200 cases in northern Italy was eyed as a source for transmissions. In the Middle East, where cases increased in Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq, blame was directed toward Iran. In Asia, where the crisis originated late last year in China, threats continued to emerge around the region, with South Korea battling a mass outbreak centered in the 2.5 million-person city of Daegu.

Though the virus pushed into countries both rich and poor, its arrival in places with little ability to detect, respond and contain it brought concern it could run rampant there and spread easily elsewhere.

"We're going to be trying to slow down the spread so that our hospitals are not overwhelmed in one big gulp, one big hit," said Ian Mackay, who studies viruses at the University of Queensland in Australia.

In South Korea, workers sanitized public buses, while in China, banks disinfected banknotes using ultraviolet rays. In Germany, authorities stressed "sneezing etiquette," while in the United States, doctors announced a clinical trial of a possible coronavirus treatment.

Around the world, as Christians marked the start of the holy season of Lent with Ash Wednesday, worshipers found churches closed and rituals changed by virus fears. Even in St. Peter's Square, many of those gathered for Pope Francis' weekly audience wore face masks and clergy appeared to refrain from embracing the pontiff or kissing his ring.

Services in Singapore were broadcast online to keep people from crowded sanctuaries where germs could spread, bishops in South Korea shuttered churches for what they said was the first time in the Catholic Church's 236-year history there, and in Malaysia and the Philippines, ashes were sprinkled on the heads of those marking the start of Lent instead of using a damp thumb to trace a cross of ashes.

"We would like to be cautious so that the coronavirus will not spread," said the Rev. Victorino Cueto, rector of the National Shrine of our Mother of Perpetual Help in Manila in the Philippines.

Major gatherings were eyed warily, with organizers scrambling to respond in the face of the epidemic. Looming largest of all are the Olympic games, whose opening ceremonies are scheduled for July 24 in Tokyo. A member of the International Olympic Committee, Richard Pound, sounded alarms a day earlier, saying the virus could force a cancellation of the games. The Japanese government, in turn, gave mixed signals, insisting they would go forward yet urging that sports events now be curtailed.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for major sports and cultural events in the coming two weeks to be canceled or postponed to stem further infections. Meanwhile, the top government spokesman said Olympics preparations would proceed and the games would go on as planned.

Among the other crowded places that had officials worried: Military bases.

The South Korean military announced additional infections among its troops, with 20 cases on its bases and some 9,570 people in isolation. The U.S. military, which has 28,500 troops in South Korea, confirmed the first infection of an American soldier, a 23-year-old man based at Camp Carroll near Daegu, a day after Americans said a military spouse also had contracted the illness. Bowling alleys, movie theaters and a golf course on four American bases in the country were closed.

"This is a setback, it's true, there's no getting around that. But it's not the end of the war," Col. Edward Ballanco, commander of the U.S. Army Garrison Daegu told troops in a video message. "We are very well equipped to fight this thing off."

Italy recorded 52 new infections on Wednesday and Greece became the newest country to see a case of the virus. South Korea announced 284 new cases, largely in Daegu, bringing its total to 1,261. China, still the epicenter of the crisis even as new outposts caught the world's attention, reported 406 new cases

and 52 more deaths. The country has a total of 78,604 cases of the virus and 2,715 fatalities.

China said Wednesday that those sickened by the virus included 555 prisoners who officials said likely became infected by guards using the same bus station as a nearby pulmonary hospital. In a twist, China is now heavily regulating arrivals from abroad, with authorities placing South Koreans under monitoring, state broadcaster CCTV reported, after five people on a flight showed signs of fever.

And Indonesia said it evacuated 188 crew members from the World Dream cruise ship and planned to take them to remote Sebaru Island. The workers were released from quarantine in Hong Kong after finding no infections, but authorities mandated an additional observation period.

Sedensky reported from Bangkok. Associated Press writers Jim Gomez and Joael Calupitan in Manila, Philippines; Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea; Stephen Wade and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo; Nicole Winfield in Vatican City; Aniruddha Ghosal in New Delhi; and Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

Debate takeaways: Bernie bruised but not broken

By **BILL BARROW** and **NICHOLAS RICCARDI** Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Democrats held their final debate before the South Carolina presidential primary and the critical Super Tuesday contests that follow three days later.

Here are some key takeaways.

BERNIE BASH

Bernie Sanders is rarely a quiet voice, but he has managed to get through nine debates with few bruises. That ended Tuesday night when he was attacked on multiple fronts by every opponent.

The overarching themes: Sanders can rile up a crowd but can't get things done. He is unelectable as a democratic socialist. He will drag down the Democratic House majority.

"Can anyone imagine moderate Republicans voting for him?" former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg asked. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar noted that Sanders' proposals cost \$60 trillion — triple the U.S. economy. "The math does not add up," she warned.

Sanders parried some of the blows but also got into shouting matches. Asked by a moderate how he'd pay for his plans, he responded coolly, "How many hours do you have?"

Centrist Democrats who hoped the Vermont senator would come off as not electable may be heartened, but so could Sanders' supporters who see their candidate as passionate and authentically unpolished.

BLOOMBERG TRIES TO BOUNCE BACK

The good news for Bloomberg is this debate didn't go as badly as the last one. The bad news is no one is grading on the curve.

He ceded prime target status to Sanders, but took his share of criticism. He still got scratched and occasionally came off as brittle.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren continued to be his nemesis, slamming him for funding Republican senators and for accusations that women at his company were mistreated. She brought up an allegation that Bloomberg had told a pregnant woman in his employ to "kill it" — which Bloomberg heatedly denied.

Later, he tried to make a joke about how everyone else onstage should have been scared to show up "after I did such a good job of beating them last week."

The joke was one of many he offered up that didn't land. A comedian's timing he does not possess. A billionaire's wallet, though, he does. And he bought advertising for the commercial breaks during the debate.

BIDEN BALANCED

Former Vice President Joe Biden has called South Carolina his "firewall," even before his dismal finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire. If he gets the breakthrough he needs, it probably won't be because of a sterling debate performance.

Biden seemed as comfortable as he has on any Democratic debate stage since the first encounters last June. But he little to offer a new rationale for his candidacy.

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He emphasized his affinity for issues dear to black voters and reminded them of his decades-long advocacy.

Overall, it was a steady performance when Biden most needed it. And he expressed some confidence. Pressed on whether he'd drop out if he doesn't win Saturday, Biden declared, "I'm going to win South Carolina."

WARREN'S CASE AGAINST SANDERS (AND BLOOMBERG)

Warren had to make a difficult straddle at the debate — she wanted to spotlight her liberal positions to pry voters from front-runner Sanders, but she also had to make a pitch for why they should back her rather than him.

She has been hesitant to fully voice her criticism of Sanders but leaned into it Tuesday night. "Bernie's winning right now because the Democratic Party is a progressive party and progressive ideas are popular ideas," she said.

Warren also reprised her attacks on Bloomberg, which might not help her win votes, but clearly helps her raise money.

BUTTIGIEG: ANOTHER GOOD NIGHT, BUT WILL IT MEAN VOTES?

If the race were about skill on the debate stage, it might be hard to deny Pete Buttigieg the nomination. He continued to answer questions with calm and clarity, and showed he could throw an elbow too.

But his path forward is still unclear, given that his support is overwhelmingly white — and the Democratic electorates in most upcoming primaries are not.

Buttigieg helped lead the moderates' charge against Bernie Sanders, almost mocking the idea of a general election between Sanders and President Donald Trump. "Imagine spending the better part of 2020" listening to such a match-up, he pondered.

It added up to another consistent performance for Buttigieg. The question is whether that will mean anything at the ballot box.

KLOBUCHAR FIGHTS TO BE HEARD

The star of the New Hampshire debate had to fight to be heard in Charleston.

Klobuchar pulled out some of her go-to lines — like the one about checking with the duck hunters in her family as she formulates gun control policies — but she was often cut off by moderators for going over her time.

She consistently made the case for a Midwestern moderate as the best candidate to take on Trump. She hammered Sanders on the cost of his plans.

And she had one striking moment, when she was asked about coronavirus and said the issue was too serious for politics. "I'm not going to give my campaign website," Klobuchar said. Instead, she pointed viewers to CDC.gov, the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But she had a hard time breaking through at a time she may have needed it most.

THE OTHER BILLIONAIRE

Tom Steyer has pinned his hopes on snatching South Carolina from Biden. But on Tuesday he looked like someone whose momentum has been yanked away.

Steyer spluttered after Biden accused him of investing in private prisons as a hedge fund manager. He condemned both Sanders and Bloomberg as unelectable but never was able to make a clear case for himself.

Without a clear win in South Carolina, it's hard to see how Steyer wins anywhere else.

MODERATE MUDDLE CONTINUES

The moderate, anti-Bernie lane remains crowded. So crowded that several candidates couldn't agree on a strategy to clear some of the space.

Buttigieg acted as if Biden wasn't on the stage at all, trying to make himself the clear alternative to Sanders. Biden and Bloomberg barely acknowledged one another. Klobuchar and Buttigieg did not renew their blood feud.

The jumble underscores the uncertainty of the race beyond the reality that Sanders is still the front-

runner. He's not a commanding one yet. But he may not have to be if the moderate muddle continues.

WHITE STAGE, BLACK VOTE

The seven white Democratic presidential candidates took turns offering various reasons black voters should support them. Some attacked their rivals — or struggled to defend their own records.

Biden immediately took aim at Sanders for contemplating a primary challenge to President Barack Obama, the nation's first black president, in 2012.

Steyer said he'd spent his career and his political activists fighting for, among other things, "racial justice." But Biden went after him, too, for his investments in private prisons.

The scenes highlight the oddity of an all-white slate of presidential candidates in party where about four out of 10 voters are non-white. It's even more stark in South Carolina, where black voters are likely to make up more than 60% of the primary electorate.

When they weren't attacking each other on race, several candidates found ways to name drop Rep. Jim Clyburn, the House majority whip and the most influential Democrat in the state. Clyburn is expected to endorse a candidate Wednesday.

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

Generic drugmakers sold most opioids during overdose crisis

By **GEOFF MULVIHILL** and **LARRY FENN** Associated Press

Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals doled out lavish perks for top U.S. employees who hit or beat sales goals for prescription opioids and other drugs: six-figure bonuses and a chance to snag a coveted "President's Club" award, which could mean vacations to Hawaii, the Caribbean or Mexico.

The company placed that same staff in charge of reporting any sales of its painkillers that appeared to be suspicious, including to distributors or pharmacies requesting extreme volumes of its most potent formulas. Asked during a federal court deposition last year whether she believed it was appropriate to put incentive-motivated sales staff in charge of calling out questionable sales, Karen Harper, who oversaw Mallinckrodt's suspicious order monitoring system, said yes.

In fact, as the nation's opioid overdose crisis began to explode, not a single order with the company between August 2008 and October 2010 rose from the level of "peculiar" to "suspicious," the category that would have triggered a report to authorities, according to Harper's deposition.

The court documents reveal a company culture that allowed Mallinckrodt to become one of the giants of the prescription opioid market at a time when overdoses were claiming tens of thousands of American lives. The company, based in England, announced a tentative \$1.6 billion settlement Tuesday with state and local governments in the U.S. If finalized, the deal would end lawsuits nationwide over the company's role in the epidemic.

Purdue Pharma has been the poster child for the U.S. opioid crisis, mostly because of aggressive marketing of its signature painkiller, OxyContin. Lesser known is the role of generic opioid manufacturers like Mallinckrodt that produced the vast majority of painkillers during the height of the overdose epidemic. While they may not have been sending sales representatives to encourage prescribing like Purdue, they were filling more and more orders for the drugs — so many that Mallinckrodt couldn't always produce enough to fill them all.

Nationwide distribution data released in a sprawling federal court case and analyzed by The Associated Press shows that Mallinckrodt's U.S. subsidiary, SpecGX, and another generic drugmaker, Actavis Pharma, produced the vast amount of prescription opioids distributed throughout the country.

From 2006 to 2014, Mallinckrodt's subsidiary shipped more than 2.2 billion high-potency oxycodone pills, nearly one-third of its total in that time period, according to the data analysis. Actavis was even more prolific, shipping more than 2.4 billion pills.

The court records made public last year by the U.S. District Court in Cleveland showed some Mallinckrodt employees were more focused on sales than public safety. At least one joked about the rising use of the

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drugs with a customer.

In January 2009, Victor Borelli, a Mallinckrodt salesman, exchanged emails with Steve Cochrane, who worked at drug distributor KeySource.

"Keep them coming," Cochrane wrote. "Flying out of here. It's like people are addicted to these things or something. Oh, wait, people are."

Borelli responded: "Just like Doritos. Keep eating, we'll make more." After the comment became public, the company disavowed it, calling it "callous."

Borelli said that as a reward for sales, he got bonuses ranging from \$101,000 to \$119,000 from 2008 through 2010, and that he twice received the company's President Club award. That scored him vacations to St. Thomas and other tropical getaways.

Borelli and other Mallinckrodt employees answered lawyers' questions under oath ahead of what was expected to be the first federal trial over the toll of opioids. The company ended up settling with the plaintiffs — the Ohio counties of Cuyahoga and Summit. Other major defendants also reached deals.

Another opioid trial is scheduled to begin next month in Central Islip, New York, which has created a renewed push among drugmakers and distributors to settle thousands of opioid-related lawsuits.

Mallinckrodt agreed with lawyers suing on behalf of local governments nationwide to pay its settlement amount over eight years. Most of the money is to go into a fund intended for drug treatment and other programs to aid recovery from an epidemic that has been linked to more than 430,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000.

The deal is still subject to some negotiations and must be approved by a bankruptcy court. It's the first proposed opioid settlement that has overwhelming support from the key lawyers for the governments suing to try to hold the drug industry accountable for the crisis. Teva, which now owns Actavis, is negotiating a separate settlement.

In a deposition last year, Douglas Boothe, who was CEO of Actavis in the U.S. and the Americas from 2008 through 2012, was asked about the company's responsibilities for flagging large and suspicious orders of prescription painkillers.

"I don't think we had responsibility for, accountability for preventing diversion," he said. "We had responsibility and accountability for making certain that the orders that we received were valid from licensed pharmacies and were within our suspicious order monitoring thresholds. ... Once it goes outside of our chain of custody, we have no capability or responsibility or accountability."

One of the main destinations for both companies' opioids was Florida, where so-called pill mills drew people from Appalachia and beyond. One deposition from a Mallinckrodt sales representative says that 47 percent of the company's high-potency opioids made in 2010 ended up in Florida.

Steve Becker, a former Mallinckrodt salesman who worked for the company from 2000 to 2014, said he wasn't aware of a system for monitoring suspicious orders. When asked if employees had incentives to report such orders, he said no.

But there were incentives to sell more, Becker said in a 2018 deposition. Employees said they frequently had back orders for pain pills.

"We're doing our due diligence in selling our product to the various accounts, and we're doing what we're supposed to be doing, according to the DEA," Becker said. "When (distributors) then sell their product, it's their due diligence to know where that product is going."

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Fenn, a data journalist, reported from New York.

Associated Press writers Mark Gillispie in Cleveland and Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this article.

Follow Mulvihill at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>

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. **BERNIE SANDERS TAKES HITS AS FRONT-RUNNER** Democrats unleash a roaring assault against the Vermont senator, but moderates did little to draw separation among themselves, a dynamic that has so far only benefited Sanders.

2. **SOUTH KOREAN VIRUS CASES JUMP AGAIN** The majority of the nearly 300 new cases, including a 23-year-old American soldier who was based in Camp Carroll, are in the hard-hit Daegu area.

3. **WHAT EXPERTS EXPECT WITH VIRUS OUTBREAK** Scientists can't tell yet just how deadly the new respiratory virus that's spreading the globe really is, but they do expect a steep learning curve for countries not already hit.

4. **WHO IS MORE CULPABLE IN OPIOID EPIDEMIC** The maker of OxyContin is often seen as the key villain in the deadly opioid crisis, but makers of generic drugs shipped far more of the powerful prescription painkillers.

5. **DEATH TOLL RISES FROM NEW DELHI RIOTS** At least 20 people were killed in three days of clashes in the Indian capital, apparently sparked by Trump's state visit, a number that is expected to rise.

6. **GLOBAL SHARES CONTINUE SLIDE** World markets fall on growing fears that a new virus' spread may be unstoppable, hurting global growth considerably.

7. **WHERE MEXICO'S DRUG WAR HAS SPREAD** Gangland killings have shifted to the conservative industrial heartland state of Guanajuato, where booming foreign investment continues even as the area becomes Mexico's most violent.

8. **MUBARAK TO BE LAID TO REST** Egypt is holding a full-honors military funeral for the country's former autocratic president, who was ousted from power in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising that swept much of the region.

9. **'I FELT LIKE WE HAVE CONQUERED GOLIATH'** Soprano Luz del Alba Rubio says she was in shock after seeing opera legend Placido Domingo's apology for sexual harassment and felt emboldened to speak up about her experiences with him.

10. **THE GAMES WILL GO ON** A day after a former IOC executive asserted that the Tokyo Olympics could be imperiled by a viral outbreak, a Japanese government spokesman says planning will continue for the Summer Games.

Sanders faces brunt of the attacks at South Carolina debate

By STEVE PEOPLES, MEG KINNARD and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Democrats unleashed a roaring assault against Bernie Sanders and seized on Mike Bloomberg's past with women in the workplace during a contentious debate that tested the strength of the two men at the center of the party's presidential nomination fight.

As the undeniable Democratic front-runner, Sanders faced the brunt of the attacks for much of the night, and for one of the few times, fellow progressive Elizabeth Warren was among the critics. The Massachusetts senator pressed the case that she could execute ideas that the Vermont senator could only talk about.

"Bernie and I agree on a lot of things," she said. "But I think I would make a better president than Bernie."

A group of moderates, meanwhile, fought to emerge as the chief Sanders alternative.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, who is seeking a strong win in South Carolina to keep his campaign afloat, argued only he has the experience to lead in the world. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar repeatedly contended that she alone could win the votes of battleground state moderates. And former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg pointed to Sanders' self-described democratic socialism and his recent comments expressing admiration for Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's push for education.

"I am not looking forward to a scenario where it comes down to Donald Trump with his nostalgia for the social order of the 1950s and Bernie Sanders with a nostalgia for the revolutionary politics of the 1960s,"

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Buttigieg declared.

But the moderates did little to draw separation among themselves, a dynamic that has so far only benefited the Vermont senator. Sanders fought back throughout the night, pointing to polls that showed him beating the Republican president and noting all the recent attention he's gotten: "I'm hearing my name mentioned a little bit tonight. I wonder why."

Trump, who returned to Washington early Wednesday after a two-day trip to India, responded to a reporter's shouted question about whether he'd seen the debate: "I did," he said while stepping into a car. "Not too good, not too good."

The intensity of Tuesday's forum, with candidates repeatedly shouting over each other, reflected the reality that the Democrats' establishment wing is quickly running out of time to stop Sanders' rise. Even some critics, Bloomberg among them, conceded that Sanders could build an insurmountable delegate lead as soon as next week.

The 10th debate of the 2020 primary season, sponsored by CBS and the Congressional Black Caucus Institute, was just four days before South Carolina's first-in-the-South primary and one week before more than a dozen states vote on Super Tuesday. The Democratic White House hopefuls will not stand side by side on the debate stage again until the middle of March. That made Tuesday's debate likely the last chance for some candidates to save themselves and alter the trajectory of the nomination fight.

Though Sanders was at the center of the attacks, the night was actually something of a high point in his political career. After spending nearly three decades as an agitator who delighted in tearing into his party's establishment, that very party establishment was suddenly fighting to take him down, a clear sign of his rising status as the leading candidate for the nomination.

Bloomberg also faced sustained attacks that gave him an opportunity to redeem himself after a bad debate debut one week earlier. Warren cut hard at his record as a businessman, bringing up reports of one particular allegation that he told a pregnant employee "to kill it," a reference to the woman's unborn child. Bloomberg fiercely denied the allegation, but acknowledged he sometimes made comments that were inappropriate.

Bloomberg "cannot earn the trust of the core of the Democratic Party," Warren said. "He is the riskiest candidate standing on this stage."

But Bloomberg will likely remain a force in the contest even as other candidates may quickly face tough choices about the sustainability of their campaigns. Bloomberg has already spent more than \$500 million on a national advertising campaign, and his fortune ensures he will remain a factor at least through Super Tuesday.

From the earliest moments of the debate, Bloomberg sought to portray a clear contrast with Sanders. He said Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agree that Sanders would be the best outcome for the Democrats.

"Vladimir Putin thinks Donald Trump should be president of the United States and that's why Russia is helping you get elected so you lose to him," the former New York mayor said.

Last week, Sanders acknowledged that he'd been briefed by intelligence officials who said that Russia is attempting to interfere in the elections to benefit him. He responded to Bloomberg on Tuesday with a direct statement for Putin: "Hey, Mr. Putin, if I'm president of the United States, trust me you're not going to interfere in any more American elections."

But the skepticism for Sanders was a constant.

Buttigieg raised concerns that a Sanders nomination would cost Democrats the House and make it harder to retake the Senate.

"We're not going to win these critical, critical House and Senate races if people in those races have to explain why the nominee of the Democratic Party is telling people to look at the bright side of the Castro regime," Buttigieg said.

And Bloomberg said Sanders wouldn't be able to build a winning coalition that includes Republicans unhappy with Trump's performance in the White House.

"Can anyone in this room imagine moderate Republican going over and voting for him," he said. "You

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have to do that or you can't win."

Warren, who raised questions about Sanders' electability earlier in the night, intercepted that criticism, arguing that a "progressive agenda is popular."

The South Carolina contest offers the first real look at the influence African American voters play in the Democrats' presidential nomination process. Biden is trying to make a big impression in the state, where he was long viewed as the unquestioned front-runner because of his support from black voters. But heading into Saturday's primary after three consecutive underwhelming finishes, there were signs that the former vice president's African American support may be slipping.

One reason: Tom Steyer. The billionaire activist has been pouring money into African American outreach, which threatens to peel away some of the support Biden badly needs.

Steyer noted Tuesday that he was the only candidate on stage who supported reparations for descendants of slaves.

Bloomberg, who for years defended New York's stop-and-frisk policing policy that a federal court struck down, made an overt appeal to the nation's black voters.

"I know that if I were black, my success would have been a lot harder to achieve," he said. "That's a fact that we've got to do something about."

The attacks against Sanders did not slow as the night went on.

He was forced to defend his position on Israel, having condemned the American ally for its treatment of Palestinians.

"Sadly, tragically in Israel, through Bibi Netanyahu, you have a reactionary racist, who is now running that country," said Sanders, who would be the country's first Jewish president. He added: "What you cannot ignore is the suffering of the Palestinian people."

And Biden slammed Sanders for his record on gun control, seizing on the Vermont senator's support of the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, legislation that protects gun manufacturers and sellers from laws that attempt to hold them liable for dealing firearms that end up in the hand of criminals.

"My friend to my right, and others, have in fact also given in to gun manufacturers absolute immunity," said Biden. "Imagine if I stood here and said, 'We give immunity to drug companies. We give immunity to tobacco companies.'"

"That has caused carnage on our streets. "

Sanders proudly highlighted his "D minus" rating from the pro-gun organization. And just last week, several gun control advocates who survived the Parkland, Florida, school shooting endorsed him.

Moving forward from the fiery debate, there are questions about the Democratic Party's ability to unify behind a nominee .

Klobuchar perhaps summed up her party's challenge best: "If we spend the next 10 months tearing our party apart, Donald Trump is going to spend the next four years tearing this country apart."

Peoples and Madhani reported from Washington.

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

Death toll rises to 20 from Delhi riots during Trump trip

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and EMILY SCHMALL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 20 people were killed and 189 injured in three days of clashes in New Delhi that coincided with President Donald Trump's first state visit to India, with the death toll expected to rise as hospitals continue to take in the wounded, authorities said Wednesday.

Violence between Hindu mobs and Muslims protesting a new citizenship law that fast-tracks naturalization for foreign-born religious minorities of all major faiths in South Asia except Islam left shops, Muslim shrines and public vehicles smoldering.

The dead included a policeman and an intelligence bureau officer and the government has banned public

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assembly in the affected areas.

While riots wracked northeastern New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted a lavish reception for Trump, including a rally in his home state of Gujarat attended by more than 100,000 people and the signing of an agreement to purchase more than \$3 billion of American helicopters and other military hardware.

On Wednesday, Modi broke his silence on the clashes, tweeting that "peace and harmony are central to (India's) ethos. I appeal to my sisters and brothers of Delhi to maintain peace and brotherhood at all times."

New Delhi's top elected official, Chief Minister Arvind Kerjwal, called for Modi's home minister, Amit Shah, to send the army to areas in a northeastern corner of the sprawling capital affected by the riots.

Police characterized the situation as tense but under control. Schools remained closed.

Sonia Gandhi, a leader of the Congress party, India's main opposition group, called for Shah to resign. She accused Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party of creating an environment of hatred and its leaders of inciting violence with provocative speeches that sought to paint protesters against the citizenship law as anti-nationalist, Pakistan-funded Muslims.

The clashes escalated Tuesday, according to Rouf Khan, a resident of Mustafabad, an area in the capital's northeast.

Khan said mobs with iron rods, bricks and bamboo sticks attacked the homes of Muslims while chanting "Jai Shri Ram," or "Victory to Lord Ram," the popular Hindu god of the religious epic "Ramayana."

As Air Force One flew Trump and his delegation out of New Delhi late Tuesday, Muslim families huddled in a mosque in the city's northeast, praying that Hindu mobs wouldn't burn it down.

"After forcing their way inside the homes, they went on a rampage and started beating people and breaking household items," Khan said of the mobs, adding that he and his family had to run and take shelter inside a mosque that he said was guarded by thousands of Muslim men.

"I don't know if our house was burned or not, but when we were running away we heard them asking people to pour kerosene and burn everything down," Khan said.

Some of the dead had bullet wounds, according to Dr. Sunil Kumar, medical director of the Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital.

Others came to the hospital with gunshot and stab wounds and head injuries.

Among them was Mohammad Sameer, 17, who was being treated for a gunshot wound to his chest Wednesday at Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital.

Speaking to The Associated Press after having an operation, Sameer said he was standing on his family's apartment terrace watching Hindu mobs enter Mustafabad when he was shot in the chest.

"When Sameer was shot, I took him on my shoulders and ran downstairs," said the boy's father, Mohammad Akram. "But when the mob saw us, they beat me and my injured son. He was bleeding very badly. While they were beating with sticks, they kept on chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' slogans and threatened to barge inside our homes."

Akram said he managed to get his son into a vehicle, but they were stopped several times by Hindus demanding they pull their pants down to show whether they were circumcised before they managed to escape from the area and reach the emergency room. Muslims are generally circumcised, while Hindus are not.

In Kardampura, a Muslim-majority area where a youth was shot and killed on Monday, hundreds of police personnel in riot gear patrolled the area and asked people to stay indoors, while residents said they were living in fear.

"We are scared and don't know where to go," said one resident, Dr. Jeevan Ali Khan. "If the government wanted, they could have stopped these riots."

Close by, black smoke still rose on Wednesday afternoon from a market that sold tires and second-hand car parts in Gokalpuri as fireman tried to douse the smoldering fire.

The violence drew sharp reactions from U.S. lawmakers, with Rep. Rashida Talib, a Democrat from Michigan, tweeting, "This week, Trump visited India but the real story should be the communal violence targeting Muslims in Delhi right now."

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Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned the killing of Muslims, saying: "Now 200 million Muslims in India are being targeted. The world community must act now."

Trump told reporters Tuesday that he had heard about the violence but had not discussed it with Modi. Instead, Trump gloated about his reception in India.

India has been rocked by violence since Parliament approved the citizenship law in December. Opponents have said the country is moving toward a religious citizenship test, but Trump declined to comment on it.

"I don't want to discuss that. I want to leave that to India and hopefully they're going to make the right decision for the people," he said.

Associated Press journalists Ashok Sharma and Shonal Ganguly contributed to this report.

Analysis: Sanders learns what it's like to be a front-runner

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Bernie Sanders has spent much of his career on the political margins, an outsider looking in.

Now, the protest politician is learning what it's like to be the front-runner for a major political party.

Sanders was the target of persistent attacks in Tuesday's Democratic presidential debate, both from his more moderate rivals and the competitor closest to him philosophically, Sen. Elizabeth Warren. He faced granular questions about the cost and scope of his sweeping domestic policy agenda. His leadership credentials were challenged and his temperament tested like no time in his career.

"I've been hearing my name mentioned a little bit tonight. I wonder why," Sanders quipped.

The pile-on indeed reflected the new reality of the Democratic race for the White House. Riding a wave of enthusiasm among young voters and the strength of an increasingly diverse coalition, Sanders has won two of the first three contests and effectively tied in the third. He's competing aggressively in South Carolina, which votes Saturday, and could pull away from the field in the all-important delegate lead in next week's Super Tuesday contests.

For Sanders, this is new political terrain.

He's spent 40 years in politics as an agitator and an outsider. He's run for office as an independent and is a loner on Capitol Hill. He prides himself on being ideologically rigid and has been willing to criticize Democratic leaders, including former President Barack Obama, for what he's seen as politically expedient compromises.

Now, four years after his insurgent White House bid made him a household name, he's poised to become the Democratic standard-bearer, and the party's pick to take on President Donald Trump in November.

Sanders' strength has rattled many Democrats, who fear that his uncompromising liberal ideology will turn off voters in swing states, particularly suburban women who were crucial to the party's takeover of the House in 2018. Donors and other party elites are anxiously hoping a more moderate candidate can overtake him in the coming weeks, but they concede those prospects are increasingly unlikely unless there's a significant swing in the race.

His rivals tried to engineer a shift in the trajectory of the race in Tuesday's debate. They pummeled the Vermont senator with a fierce onslaught of attacks and, at times, put him on the defensive.

Former Vice President Joe Biden challenged Sanders' effectiveness as a lawmaker, saying, "Bernie, in fact, hasn't passed much of anything."

Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, accused Sanders of moving the goalposts on the costs of his sweeping policy proposals, including a "Medicare for All" health insurance system.

Former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg charged that Sanders would not only lose to Trump, but his nomination would result in a "catastrophe" for Democratic House and Senate candidates running in more moderate states and districts.

"Can anybody in this room imagine moderate Republicans going over and voting for him?" Bloomberg

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asked.

Even Warren, a friend and ideological partner of Sanders, took him on vigorously for the first time, finally giving in to supporters who have urged her to explicitly cast herself as the more pragmatic and effective progressive candidate in the race.

"Bernie and I agree on a lot of things, but I think I would make a better president than Bernie," Warren said.

Sanders was prepared for the onslaught. When faced with questions about his electability, he rattled off polls showing him beating Trump in a head-to-head contest. When pressed about the feasibility of his pricey, government-backed policy agenda, he said it was a misconception that his policies are radical.

Yet Sanders was also forced to concede that he had made a "bad vote" in voting against stricter gun control legislation in the Senate.

And when he defended favorable comments he made recently about longtime Cuban leader Fidel Castro, he appeared caught off-guard when some in the audience in the debate hall in Charleston, South Carolina, jeered.

"Really? Really?" he challenged the crowd.

The intraparty offensive came as a relief to supporters of Sanders' rivals, who have urgently been raising alarms about his prospects in the general election and warning that time is running out to block his path to the nomination.

"You saw him pressed, finally pressed by the other candidates," said Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Bloomberg supporter.

The coming days will test whether the increased scrutiny of Sanders raised new doubts for voters. He's not expected to win in South Carolina but, flush with cash, he is pouring resources into the state this week in hopes of pulling off a surprise and blocking out Biden, who needs a convincing win to continue his campaign.

But Sanders' real focus is on the delegate-rich states that quickly follow March 3, including California, the primary's biggest prize. A win there could start to put the race out of reach for the rest of the field.

Sanders' team voiced confidence after the debate, arguing the senator benefited from being the focus of the field's attention.

"They threw everything at him," said Nina Turner, a former Ohio state senator and a prominent Sanders backer. "He was in the center of that stage, where all the rest of them wanted to be."

Associated Press writers Bill Barrow and Meg Kinnard contributed to this report.

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

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

US, South Korea militaries face new enemy in viral outbreak

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The U.S. and South Korean militaries, used to being on guard for threats from North Korea, face a new and formidable enemy that could hurt battle readiness: a virus spreading around the world that has infected more than 1,200 people in South Korea.

As the new coronavirus, which was first found in China, has begun to sweep through South Korea, soldiers stationed in close quarters on bases throughout the country are at particular risk. Already 20 South Korean soldiers and one American have tested positive.

In response the allies are taking aggressive measures to guard against a viral outbreak and are even considering curtailing a key joint military exercise, something experts say is inevitable because if the virus were to spread through the ranks it could significantly weaken their ability to fight if necessary.

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"In the military, soldiers are living as a group. So even if just one person contracts the virus at his base, its aftermath would be really tremendous," said Kim Dae-young, an analyst at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. "This year, no military training can be the best option."

The virus has infected more than 80,000 people worldwide, mostly in China, though over the past week South Korea has become the second-worst affected country after an outbreak centered in the southeast around its fourth-largest city, Daegu.

South Korea boasts a 600,000-strong military, while the U.S. stations 28,500 troops in the country largely as a deterrent to possible North Korean aggression. Daegu, with a population of about 2.5 million people, is near four American bases.

The United States Forces Korea on Monday said that a USFK widowed dependent tested positive for the virus. On Wednesday the U.S. reported that a 23-year-old soldier had tested positive and would be treated at Camp Humphreys near Seoul. It said the soldier was originally based at Camp Carroll near Daegu.

South Korea has suspended some unilateral field training, placed 9,570 troops under quarantine and banned most of its enlisted soldiers from leaving their bases. The U.S. military is also urging its personnel to avoid handshakes and large gatherings if possible.

At Camp Walker in Daegu, the U.S. has prohibited active-duty soldiers there from visiting public gatherings and places off-base, such as grocery stores, bars and restaurants, without permission. The infected U.S. soldier at Camp Carroll visited Camp Walker earlier this week.

Col. Edward Ballanco, commander of the U.S. Army Garrison Daegu, said bowling alleys, movie theaters and a golf course at the four U.S. bases in the Daegu region were closed after the soldier's case was confirmed, and that all restaurants there were only serving take-out meals.

Restaurants, bars and stores near U.S. bases in South Korea have been hit hard by the outbreak.

"The number of customers has been declining outrageously," said Song Doo Hak, owner of a hamburger restaurant near a U.S. air base near Seoul. "I've never experienced this kind of situation."

Song said he used to receive about 200 customers, about 40% of them U.S. service members, each day. He said he now receives about 15 customers a day. He said four U.S. soldiers visited his restaurant on Tuesday but none on Wednesday.

"Primero," a Mexican restaurant near Camp Walker in Daegu, has seen its customers evaporate over the past week. The restaurant's owner, who asked to be named only by her surname Ji citing privacy concerns, said revenue was down by at least 90%.

Concerned about the possibility that her restaurant becomes linked to a future infection, Ji has closed the dining room and is now serving only take-out meals.

"There's nothing I can do until the outbreak comes under control," she said.

After a meeting in Washington on Monday, the U.S. and South Korean defense chiefs told reporters that the virus threatens their military exercise schedules.

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said both countries "are looking at scaling back" some training because of worries about the coronavirus. He added that he is confident that the allies will find a way to protect troops while also making sure that both countries "remain fully ready to deal with any threats that we might face together."

South Korean Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo separately ordered officials to take all necessary steps to prevent quarantine measures from hurting South Korea's military readiness.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries have regularly held drills since the 1950-53 Korean War and they have become a major source of animosity with North Korea, which views them as rehearsals for an invasion.

North Korea hasn't officially reported a single case of the new virus. But experts say an epidemic in North Korea could be dire because of its chronic lack of medical supplies and poor health care infrastructure. Pyongyang's state media has called anti-virus quarantine efforts "a matter of national existence."

In response to the virus, the North has likely drastically reduced its military activities as well, said Moon Seong Mook, a retired South Korean army brigadier general who participated in inter-Korean military talks.

"The North likely reduced training and any other movement of military units as it intensifies national efforts to stem the spread of the virus," Moon said.

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The U.S. military is also taking precautions for its some 50,000 personnel in Japan, which has seen more than 800 people infected by the virus, most of them linked to a cruise ship.

U.S. Forces Japan said Wednesday that it was elevating the health precautions, requiring units to consider limiting or cancelling meetings, training events and large social gatherings as they monitor developments in areas close to American bases.

U.S. Forces in Japan also restricted non-essential travel to South Korea, while leisure or non-essential travel is now prohibited for American personnel and their families.

"The overall risk to individual USFJ members in Japan remains low," said USFJ spokesman Capt. Tyler Hopkins. "The command encourages strict hygiene measures to reduce the risk of transmission."

The outbreak comes at a delicate time in the decades-long alliance between Washington and Seoul. President Donald Trump has openly demanded a big increase in South Korea's financial contribution to U.S. troop deployment in the country.

Kim Hyo-eun, whose 22-year-old son is performing his mandatory military service at a South Korean army base near Seoul, is watching the situation with increased unease.

"While I am relieved that the infections announced by the military so far haven't been about my son's unit, I am still worried because the illness is spreading so rapidly," she said.

"If the virus continues to spread," she said, "I think I will have to talk to my son again and ask what I can do to help keep him safe."

Associated Press writer Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

How deadly is new coronavirus? It's still too early to tell

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists can't tell yet how deadly the new virus that's spreading around the globe really is — and deepening the mystery, the fatality rate differs even within China.

As infections of the virus that causes COVID-19 surge in other countries, even a low fatality rate can add up to lots of victims, and understanding why one place fares better than another becomes critical to unravel.

"You could have bad outcomes with this initially until you really get the hang of how to manage" it, Dr. Bruce Aylward, the World Health Organization envoy who led a team of scientists just back from China, warned Tuesday.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE DEATH RATE?

In the central China city of Wuhan, where the new coronavirus first exploded, 2% to 4% of patients have died, according to WHO. But in the rest of hard-hit China, the death rate was strikingly lower, 0.7%.

There's nothing different about the virus from one place to another. Instead, the never-before-seen strain of coronavirus struck Wuhan fast — before anyone knew what the illness was — and overwhelmed health facilities. As is usual at the beginning of an outbreak, the first patients were severely ill before they sought care, Aylward said.

By the time people were getting sick in other parts of China, authorities were better able to spot milder cases — meaning there were more known infections for each death counted.

And while there are no specific treatments for COVID-19, earlier supportive care may help, too. China went from about 15 days between onset of symptoms and hospitalization early in the outbreak, to about three days more recently.

Still, Aylward expressed frustration at people saying: "Oh, the mortality rate's not so bad because there's way more mild cases.' Sorry, the same number of people that were dying, still die."

WHAT ABOUT DEATHS OUTSIDE OF CHINA?

Until the past week, most people diagnosed outside of China had become infected while traveling there. People who travel generally are healthier and thus may be better able to recover, noted Johns Hopkins University outbreak specialist Lauren Sauer. And countries began screening returning travelers, spotting infections far earlier in places where the medical system wasn't already strained.

That's now changing, with clusters of cases in Japan, Italy and Iran, and the death toll outside of China growing.

Aylward cautioned that authorities should be careful of "artificially high" death rates early on: Some of those countries likely are seeing the sickest patients at first and missing milder cases, just like Wuhan did.

HOW DOES COVID-19 COMPARE TO OTHER DISEASES?

A cousin of this new virus caused the far deadlier severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in 2003, and about 10% of SARS patients died.

Flu is a different virus family, and some strains are deadlier than others. On average, the death rate from seasonal flu is about 0.1%, said Dr. Anthony Fauci of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

That's far lower than what has been calculated so far for COVID-19. But millions of people get the flu every year around the world, leading to an annual death toll in the hundreds of thousands.

WHO'S MOST AT RISK FROM COVID-19?

Older people, especially those with chronic illnesses such as heart or lung diseases, are more at risk.

Among younger people, deaths are rarer, Aylward said. But some young deaths have made headlines, such as the 34-year-old doctor in China who was reprimanded by communist authorities for sounding an early alarm about the virus only to later succumb to it.

In China, 80% of patients are mildly ill when the virus is detected, compared with 13% who already are severely ill. While the sickest to start with are at highest risk of death, Aylward said, a fraction of the mildly ill do go on to die — for unknown reasons.

On average, however, WHO says people with mild cases recover in about two weeks, while those who are sicker can take anywhere from three to six weeks.

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Disney CEO Bob Iger steps down in surprise announcement

By MAE ANDERSON and TALI ARBEL AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Disney CEO Bob Iger, who steered the company's absorption of Star Wars, Pixar, Marvel and Fox's entertainment businesses and the launch of a Netflix challenger, is stepping down immediately, the company said in a surprise announcement Tuesday.

The Walt Disney Co. named as his replacement Bob Chapek, most recently chairman of Disney's parks, experiences and products business.

"Did not see this coming -- Wowza," tweeted LightShed media analyst Rich Greenfield.

Iger will remain executive chairman through the end of his contract on Dec. 31, 2021. Besides leading the board, Iger said he will spend more time on Disney's creative endeavors, including the ESPN sports network, the newly acquired Fox studios and the Hulu and Disney Plus streaming services. He said he could not do that while running Disney on a day-to-day basis.

"It was not accelerated for any particular reason other than I felt the need was now to make this change," Iger said on a conference call with reporters and analysts.

Iger steered Disney through the successful purchases of Lucasfilms, Marvel, Pixar and other brands that became big moneymakers for Disney. Last year, the top five movies in U.S. and Canada theaters were all Disney movies, including two from Marvel and one from Pixar. With the Dec. 20 release of the latest "Star Wars" movie, Disney had seven movies that each sold at least \$1 billion in tickets worldwide last year.

Iger's most recent coup was orchestrating a \$71 billion purchase of Fox's entertainment business in March and launching the Disney Plus streaming service in November. That service got nearly 29 million paid subscribers in less than three months. In a statement, Iger said it was the "optimal time" for a transition.

Pivotal Research Group analyst Jeffrey Wlodarczak said Iger had implied he would stay until his contract ended in 2021.

"On the other hand, they just successfully closed the Fox deal and had an unquestionably successful

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launch of Disney Plus so maybe he felt earlier was better to hand off the reins," he said.

Colin Gillis, director of research at Chatham Road Partners, said the choice of Chapek seems solid because his parks division has had success.

Chapek said that while he has not led television networks or streaming services, his background in consumer-oriented businesses should help. Chapek and Iger both stressed that Disney would continue on the direction it had already been taking.

Disney is facing challenges to its traditional media business as cord-cutting picks up, meaning less fees from cable and satellite companies to carry Disney networks such as ABC, ESPN and Freeform. Disney's own streaming services require the company to forgo money in licensing revenue, although the company is betting that money from subscriptions will eventually make up for that.

In the short term, Disney parks in Hong Kong and Shanghai, China, remain closed because of the coronavirus outbreak. In a CNBC interview, Chapek said the outbreak may be a "bump in the road," but he said the company could weather it given "affinity for the brand."

Iger told CNBC he had no plans to stay with Disney beyond next year.

Iger's appointment as CEO in 2005 had been accompanied by controversy and protest from dissident shareholders Roy E. Disney and Stanley Gold. But he has come to be seen as a golden-boy top executive, and even someone who could run for president.

Iger told Vogue in 2018 that he had started seriously exploring a run for president because he is "horrified at the state of politics in America today," but the Fox deal stopped his plans. Oprah Winfrey told Vogue that she "really, really pushed him to run."

Iger, a former weatherman, joined ABC in 1974, 22 years before Disney bought the network.

At ABC, Iger developed such successful programs as "Home Improvement," "The Drew Carey Show," and "America's Funniest Home Videos" and was instrumental in launching the quiz show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." He was also criticized for cancelling well-regarded but expensive shows such as "Twin Peaks" and "thirtysomething."

Since Iger became CEO, Disney's stock price has risen fivefold. Its stock fell more than 2% in extended trading following the announcement, on top of a broader market selloff on virus fears during regular trading.

Iger, 69, was the second-highest paid CEO in 2018, as calculated by The Associated Press and Equilar, an executive data firm. He earned \$65.6 million. The top earner was Discovery's David Zaslav who earned \$129.5 million.

Susan Arnold, the independent lead director of the Disney board, said succession planning had been ongoing for several years.

Chapek, 60, is only the seventh CEO in Disney history. Chapek was head of the parks, experiences and products division since it was created in 2018. He was previously head of parks and resorts and before that president of consumer products.

NTSB: Tesla Autopilot, distracted driver caused fatal crash

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tesla's partially automated driving system steered an electric SUV into a concrete barrier on a Silicon Valley freeway because it was operating under conditions it couldn't handle and because the driver likely was distracted by playing a game on his smartphone, the National Transportation Safety Board has found.

The board made the determination Tuesday in the fatal crash, and provided nine new recommendations to prevent partially automated vehicle crashes in the future. Among the recommendations is for tech companies to design smartphones and other electronic devices so they don't operate if they are within a driver's reach, unless it's an emergency.

Chairman Robert Sumwalt said the problem of drivers distracted by smartphones will keep spreading if nothing is done.

"If we don't get on top of it, it's going to be a coronavirus," he said in calling for government regulations

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and company policies prohibiting driver use of smartphones.

Much of the board's frustration was directed at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and to Tesla, which have not acted on recommendations the NTSB passed two years ago. The NTSB investigates crashes but only has authority to make recommendations. NHTSA can enforce the advice, and manufacturers also can act on it.

But Sumwalt said if they don't, "then we are wasting our time. Safety will not be improved. We are counting on them to do their job."

For Tesla, the board repeated previous recommendations that it install safeguards to stop its Autopilot driving system from operating in conditions it wasn't designed to navigate. The board also wants Tesla to design a more effective system to make sure the driver is always paying attention.

If Tesla doesn't add driver monitoring safeguards, misuse of Autopilot is expected "and the risk for future crashes will remain," the board wrote in one of its findings.

Tuesday's hearing focused on the March 2018 crash of a Tesla Model X SUV, in which Autopilot was engaged when the vehicle swerved and slammed into a concrete barrier dividing freeway and exit lanes in Mountain View, Calif., killing Apple engineer Walter Huang.

Just before the crash, the Tesla steered to the left into a paved area between the freeway travel lanes and an exit ramp, the NTSB said. It accelerated to 71 mph and crashed into the end of the concrete barrier. The car's forward collision avoidance system didn't alert Huang, and its automatic emergency braking did not activate, the NTSB said.

Also, Huang did not brake, and there was no steering movement detected to avoid the crash, the board's staff said.

NTSB staff members said they couldn't pinpoint exactly why the car steered into the barrier, but it likely was a combination of faded lane lines, bright sunshine that affected the cameras, and a closer-than-normal vehicle in the lane ahead of the Tesla.

The board also found that Huang likely would have lived if a cushion at the end of the barrier had been repaired by California transportation officials. That cushion had been damaged in a crash 11 days before Huang was killed.

Recommendations to NHTSA included expanded testing to make sure partially automated systems can avoid running into common obstacles such as a barrier. The board also asks that NHTSA evaluate Autopilot to determine where it can safely operate and to develop and enforce standards for monitoring drivers so they pay attention while using the systems.

NHTSA has told the NTSB it has investigations open into 14 Tesla crashes and would use its enforcement of safety defects to take action if needed.

The agency issued a statement saying it will review the NTSB's report and that all commercially available vehicles require human drivers to stay in control at all times.

"Distraction-affected crashes are a major concern, including those involving advanced driver assistance features," the statement said.

Sumwalt said at the start of Tuesday's hearing that systems like Autopilot cannot drive themselves, yet drivers continue to use them without paying attention.

"This means that when driving in the supposed 'self-driving' mode, you can't read a book, you can't watch a movie or TV show, you can't text and you can't play video games," he said.

Under questioning from board members, Robert Molloy, the NTSB's director of highway safety, said the NHTSA is taking a hands-off approach to regulating new automated driving systems like Autopilot. Molloy called the approach "misguided," and said nothing is more disappointing than seeing recommendations ignored by Tesla and NHTSA.

"They need to do more," he said of the federal highway safety agency.

Autopilot is designed to keep a vehicle in its lane and keep a safe distance from vehicles in front of it. It also can change lanes with driver approval. Tesla says Autopilot is intended to be used for driver assistance and that drivers must be ready to intervene at all times.

Sumwalt said the board had made recommendations to six automakers in 2017 to stop the problem and only Tesla has failed to respond.

Teslas can sense a driver applying force to the steering wheel, and if that doesn't happen, it will issue visual and audio warnings. But monitoring steering wheel torque, "is a poor surrogate measure" of monitoring the driver, Ensar Becic, the NTSB's human performance and automation highway safety expert told the board.

Messages were left Tuesday seeking comment from Tesla.

Sumwalt said the NTSB had called for technology more than nine years ago to disable distracting functions of smartphones while the user is driving, but no action has been taken.

Don Karol, the NTSB's project manager for highway safety, told the board that the staff is recommending that cell phone companies program phones to automatically lock out distracting functions such as games and phone calls while someone is driving. The staff also recommends that companies enact policies to prevent use of company issued cell phones while workers are driving.

Tesla has said Autopilot was put out initially in "beta," meaning it was being tested and improved as bugs were identified, Karol told the board.

That brought a response from Vice Chairman Bruce Landsburg, who said if the system has known bugs, "it's probably pretty foreseeable that somebody's going to have a problem with it. And then they (Tesla) come back and say 'oh, we warned you.'"

Body cam captures 6-year-old's tearful pleas during arrest

Associated Press undefined

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A police officer's body camera shows a 6-year-old Florida girl crying and begging officers not to arrest her as one fastens zip ties around her wrists at a charter school.

The video that Kaia Rolle's family shared with the Orlando Sentinel and other media outlets Monday shows the girl being arrested in September for kicking and punching staff members at her Orlando charter school.

"What are those for?" Kaia asks about the zip ties in the video.

"They're for you," Officer Dennis Turner says before another officer tightens them around her wrists and Kaia begins weeping.

Turner was fired shortly after the arrest. Orlando Police Chief Orlando Rolon said at the time that Turner, a reserve officer, didn't follow department policy of getting the approval of a watch commander to arrest someone younger than 12.

"Help me. Help me, please!" Kaia pleads through tears.

As she is being walked to the vehicle, she cries, "I don't want to go in a police car."

The second officer, who has not been identified, responds, "You don't want to? ... You have to."

"Please, give me a second chance," Kaia says.

The video shows the officer lifting the sobbing girl into the back seat of the police vehicle and putting a seat belt around her.

A short time later, Turner returns to the office to talk to Lucious & Emma Nixon Academy administrators, who appear dismayed by what they have witnessed in the school office.

The officer tells them that the juvenile detention center where Kaia was headed is "not like you think." Turner tells the administrators he has made 6,000 arrests, including a 7-year-old.

When school employees tell the officer that Kaia is 6, not 8 like he thought, he replies, "Now she has broken the record."

Turner had worked in the police agency's reserve unit, which is mostly made up of retired officers who pick up extra-duty jobs for pay. Because he was a reserve officer, he was not a member of the collective bargaining unit, and the police union didn't represent him, Shawn Dunlap of the Fraternal Order of Police Orlando Lodge 25, said in an email Tuesday.

School resource officers came under close scrutiny in Florida after former Broward Deputy Scot Peterson failed to engage a shooter at a Parkland high school in 2018. He was charged last year with child neglect,

culpable negligence and perjury. That case is ongoing.

The Orlando case drew yet more attention to the role of police in schools.

Jeff Kaye, president of California-based School Safety Operations Inc., said in an email that the officer would not only have been fired in some other states but possibly charged with a crime, such as oppression under color of authority.

School administrators might have been better served by contacting the child's parents and working with a counselor, rather than calling police, Kaye said.

"As long as everyone is safe, take a deep breath, slow things down, and make good commonsense decisions," Kaye said. "I can't think of any reason to ever arrest a 6-year-old child, but I say that based on my training and experience and not that of others."

Kaye said he's had several several school districts contact him since the video's release saying they want to re-examine their school resource officer programs, because they don't want something similar to happen in their schools.

Officials have said that Turner also arrested a 6-year-old boy at another school on the same day as Kaia's arrest for misdemeanor battery in an unrelated incident. However, the boy's arrest was halted by superiors before the child made it through the full arrest process.

State Attorney Aramis Ayala said last September that she was dismissing misdemeanor battery charges against both children.

Indian nation destroys own buildings over leadership dispute

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

A leadership dispute within the Cayuga Indian Nation took a stunning turn over the weekend when nation leader Clint Halftown sent bulldozers to demolish a working daycare center, store, schoolhouse and other buildings controlled by tribe members who oppose his authority.

In response to the surprise, dead-of-night show of power, several Cayuga families who oppose Halftown have sent their children out of town, fearing the bulldozers will come next for their homes in a dispute that is dividing families and confounding local authorities, who say they are powerless to intercede in the sovereign nation's issues.

The early morning raids by tribal law enforcement Saturday reduced a dozen buildings in the town of Seneca Falls to hulking piles of lumber and drywall, drawing condemnation from local and federal officials who called the action domestic terrorism.

"They came in there with drawn handguns, put them to the heads of the security people who were in the buildings and told them if they moved they would be shot. And they destroyed these buildings," said attorney Joe Heath, who represents a faction of traditional Cayuga members who split with tribal leadership about 20 years ago in a dispute over casino gambling.

The anti-Halftown Unity Council in 2014 claimed control of some of the buildings that were destroyed early Saturday. Halftown said the nation was retaking possession of stolen property.

Halftown is the federally recognized leader of the roughly 500-member western New York tribe. He said in a statement Saturday that he had demolished the structures to prevent them from becoming "a target for any further friction in the community going forward."

Halftown has not responded to requests for an interview.

Leanna Young, a mother of four who managed the destroyed convenience store, said 32 children from Cayuga families have been sent to live away from Cayuga-owned houses over concerns that the nation's police could return to knock down their homes. Young sent her three youngest children to stay with relatives out of town.

She said many families had been at the school house, teaching their children how to pound and wash corn and tap maple trees for their sap, the night before it was wrecked to the ground.

"We all woke up on Saturday to find it all demolished. It's heartbreaking," said Young, part of the group that opposes gambling and favors the preservation of Cayuga history and traditions, including a leadership

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structure of clan mothers and chiefs, rather than a single leader.

Young said her brother was working security when the Cayuga Nation police pulled him from his car at 2 a.m. Saturday, bound his hands with zip ties and detained him while the bulldozers moved in and destroyed the businesses that support Halftown detractors, which also include a cannery, ice cream and miniature golf business, and several cottages.

Seven people were detained in the process. All but one, who allegedly was found to possess drugs, were released.

In Seneca Falls, best known as the birth place of the women's rights movement, the divide between the Cayugas widened in the early 2000s amid disagreement over Halftown's push to build a resort casino in the Catskill Mountains.

After his opponents took control of several properties six years ago, the Cayuga Indian Nation sought to recover them through a state court lawsuit, but the state's highest court ruled New York could not get involved in a sovereign nation's leadership dispute.

A decision by the U.S. Interior Department in November recognized Halftown as the federal representative of the tribe and his council as "the nation's government for all purposes."

The rulings have tied the hands of local police.

"To look back and say, 'How can they do that?' — It's just not that simple for us," Seneca Falls Police Chief Stuart Peenstra said. "Normally we would not allow that. But in these instances ... we have to allow that, and it doesn't settle well with us either but we have to stick by the letter of the law."

Sen. Charles Schumer has demanded an investigation by the Department of Justice and Department of the Interior, which governs tribal issues, saying the nation surely must have broken some law.

"What happened was awful. It cannot go unpunished," the New York Democrat told reporters.

The Seneca County Board of Supervisors, in the meantime, has passed resolutions seeking an investigation by the U.S. Attorney in Buffalo, the deployment of U.S. Marshals and the freezing of federal funds to the Cayuga Indian Nation until the issues have been resolved.

The board does not want to pick sides, board Chairman Bob Hayssen said, but described Halftown's actions as "vicious."

Some families, though, have been divided by the dispute, Young said.

"There are some families who believe in the traditional way and their brothers and sisters or maybe their aunts and uncles, they don't. They follow Clint Halftown and it's caused a divide between them," she said.

The Cayuga Indian Nation is the latest New York tribe to be upset by factionalism.

In central New York, Ray Halbritter has remained leader of the Oneida Indian Nation for decades despite sometimes bitter opposition from a group of traditionalists who have in the past likened him to a dictator.

A gambling dispute among Mohawk Indians in 1990 flared into violence and claimed two lives, continuing a long-simmering feud over how to preserve their traditional way of life.

Thompson reported from Buffalo. AP Reporter Michael Hill contributed from Albany.

Placido Domingo apology prompts new accuser to step forward

By JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The words "I am truly sorry" have not been uttered often in the #MeToo era. So when soprano Luz del Alba Rubio woke up Tuesday to see an apology from opera superstar Placido Domingo, she was in shock.

"I felt like we have conquered Goliath. Now we don't have to be scared to speak out," said Rubio, who stepped forward Tuesday to add her voice to the women accusing the legendary tenor of sexual harassment and abuse of power.

Domingo's statement came after the U.S. union that represents much of the opera world said its investigators found the opera star and former general director at Washington National Opera and Los Angeles Opera had behaved inappropriately over the course of two decades.

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"I have taken time over the last several months to reflect on the allegations that various colleagues of mine have made against me," Domingo said in a statement issued in connection with the findings. "I respect that these women finally felt comfortable enough to speak out, and I want them to know that I am truly sorry for the hurt that I caused them. I accept full responsibility for my actions, and I have grown from this experience."

The words marked a stunning reversal from the opera superstar's initial statements, tinged with disbelief at the accusations reported last year by The Associated Press that he sexually harassed multiple women.

"I believed that all of my interactions and relationships were always welcomed and consensual," he said in August.

In September, when the AP reported on more accusations, Domingo called the claims "riddled with inconsistencies and, as with the first story, in many ways, simply incorrect."

The full results of the investigation by the American Guild of Musical Artists investigation have not been made public, but people familiar with the findings told the AP that investigators found 27 people who said they were sexually harassed or witnessed inappropriate behavior by Domingo.

As with the accusations made to the AP, the investigation found that the allegations included unsolicited physical touching that ranged from kisses on the mouth to groping, late-night phone calls in which Domingo asked women to come to his residence, and inviting women to go out with him socially with such persistence that some felt they were being stalked, the people familiar with the findings said.

The investigation, conducted by lawyers from the firm Cozen O'Conner, found the accusations to be credible and showed a clear pattern of abuse of power by Domingo that spanned the 1990s and 2000s, according to the people familiar with its contents who spoke anonymously because they were not authorized to publicly disclose the findings.

Rubio said Domingo's apology was deeply appreciated, but also called it clearly the work of lawyers and lacking in conviction.

"Before, he was a denier. Then, he was a victim. Now, he is looking for redemption," said Rubio, a soprano from Uruguay. "If he means it, if he is really sorry, I would ask him to apologize to us, face to face. There have been women suffering for 20 years. He should ask for our forgiveness."

Rubio said she was in her 20s and singing in Rome in 1999 when Domingo heard her and asked her to come to Washington National Opera, where he was artistic director.

She was excited to land roles in three operas, but said Domingo began calling her constantly, often late at night, and was uncomfortably affectionate, constantly kissing her too close to her lips and touching her. But he was her childhood idol and the industry's power broker, so when he invited her to his apartment one night to review a video of her singing, she accepted. He began kissing her, she said, and she pushed him away, telling him, "Maestro, I cannot do this. I am not that kind of person." After that, she said she was never again hired to work at Washington National Opera and roles he had promised her never materialized.

Singers Patricia Wulf and Angela Turner Wilson, two accusers who related accounts in AP's earlier stories, expressed mixed emotions about Domingo's new statement.

"I sincerely appreciate his apology. I really do," said Wulf, a mezzo-soprano. But she also called on AGMA to stand with his accusers and expel Domingo from its membership.

In a joint statement, Wulf and Wilson said, "An expulsion from the union would signal that the industry is learning from its mistakes and that sexual harassment and abuse -- perpetrated by industry complicity -- will not be tolerated in the future."

Wulf has described repeated, unwanted propositions by Domingo when she sang with him at Washington National Opera in 1998. Wilson, a soprano, said that after weeks of pursuing her, Domingo forcefully grabbed her bare breast under her robe in a backstage room at Washington National Opera in 1999.

Wulf noted that coming a day after the conviction of Harvey Weinstein, Domingo's apology and admission highlighted the gradations of harassment that can exist in the workplace -- particularly in the entertainment industry.

She and others said they were terrified of being blacklisted or killing their careers if they reported him

or rebuffed his advances.

Domingo, 79, addressed that fear in his statement Tuesday.

"I understand now that some women may have feared expressing themselves honestly because of a concern that their careers would be adversely affected if they did so. While that was never my intention, no one should ever be made to feel that way," he said. "I am committed to affecting positive change in the opera industry so that no one else has to have that same experience. It is my fervent wish that the result will be a safer place to work for all in the opera industry, and I hope that my example in moving forward will encourage others to follow."

In a brief statement, the union said the inquiry found Domingo "engaged in inappropriate activity, ranging from flirtation to sexual advances, in and outside of the workplace." Asked for additional details, spokeswoman Alicia Cook said AGMA did not plan to release the report.

An internal email sent Tuesday to AGMA's Board of Governors that was viewed by the AP said the union had quietly been negotiating a settlement deal of \$500,000 with Domingo in exchange for a promise not to disclose details of the investigation, but that the deal fell apart after the findings were leaked to AP.

Domingo's spokeswoman Nancy Seltzer disputed that account. "Our discussions with the union are ongoing. Nothing is off the table."

Sexual harassment attorney Debra Katz, who represents Wilson and Wulf, called on AGMA to make the findings of its investigation public.

"It is an outrage that they are not issuing this report," she said, adding "he is saying he's learned. What has he learned? Has he learned that hitting on women and groping is not OK? This apology is too little and way too late."

Asian shares slide on fears virus will stunt global economy

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares slid Wednesday following another sharp fall on Wall Street as fears spread that the growing virus outbreak will put the brakes on the global economy.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 declined 1.1% to 22,357.39, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dipped 2.1% to 6,720.70. South Korea's Kospi lost 1.1% at 2,080.46. Hong Kong's Hang Seng declined 0.6% to 26,722.29. The Shanghai Composite reversed early losses, gaining 0.3% to 3,022.21.

Shares fell in Taiwan and most of Southeast Asia but rose in Malaysia following recent losses due to political turmoil.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 has lost 7.6% in the last four days since hitting a record high last Wednesday. That's the benchmark index's worst such stretch since the end of 2018, resulting in \$2.14 trillion in losses, according to S&P Global. Tuesday also marked the first back-to-back 3% losses for the index since the summer of 2015.

The latest wave of selling came as more companies, including United Airlines and Mastercard, warned the outbreak will hurt their finances, and more cases were reported in Europe and the Middle East, far from the epicenter in China. Meanwhile, U.S. health officials called on Americans to be prepared for the disease to spread in the United States, where there are currently just a few dozen cases.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 879 points, for a two-day loss of 1,911 points. Travel-related stocks took another drubbing, bringing the two-day loss for American Airlines to 16.9%. The large publicly traded cruise operators have also suffered double-digit losses.

The worst-case scenario for investors — where the virus spreads around the world and cripples supply chains and the global economy — hasn't changed in the last few weeks. But the probability of it happening has risen, said Yung-Yu Ma, chief investment strategist at BMO Wealth Management.

"It's the combination of South Korea, Japan, Italy and even Iran" reporting virus cases, Ma said. "That really woke up the market."

The S&P 500 index fell 3%, the Dow lost 3.2% and the Nasdaq dropped 2.8%, erasing its gains for the year.

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Technology stocks, which rely heavily on China for both sales and supply chains, once again led the decline. Apple dropped 3.4% and chipmaker Nvidia slid 4.1%.

Bond prices continued rising. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell as low as 1.31%, a record, according to TradeWeb, before recovering somewhat to 1.35% in the late afternoon. The yield is down from 1.37% late Monday and far below the 1.90% it stood at in early 2020.

The lower bond yields, which force interest rates lower on mortgages and other loans, weighed on banks. JPMorgan Chase slid 4.5% and Bank of America fell 5%.

Real estate companies and utilities also fell, though they held up better than the rest of the market as investors favored safe-play stocks.

The viral outbreak that originated in China has now infected more than 80,000 people globally, with more cases being reported in Europe and the Middle East. The majority of cases and deaths remain centered in China, but the rapid spread to other parts of the world has spooked markets and raised fears that it will hurt the global economy.

On Tuesday, U.S. health officials warned that it's inevitable the virus will spread more widely in America. "It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen - and how many people in this country will have severe illness," Dr. Nancy Messonnier of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a call with reporters.

United Airlines tumbled 6.5% after withdrawing its financial forecasts for the year because of the impact on demand for air travel. Mastercard dropped 6.7% after saying the impact on cross-border travel and business could cut into its revenue, depending on the duration and severity of the virus outbreak.

Moderna surged 27.8% after the company sent its potential virus vaccine to government researchers for additional testing. The biotechnology company is one several drug developers racing to develop vaccine.

Energy companies have been some of the hardest hit on worries that a weakened global economy will burn less fuel. Exxon Mobil is down 10.2% over the last four days, and the slump has wiped away nearly \$26 billion in market value.

But the losses extend far beyond the energy sector. A rapidly spreading virus threatens factories, shipments of parts and customers for businesses around the world. At Apple, which said last week that the virus will force it to fall sort of a previous quarterly revenue forecast, \$158.6 billion in market value has vanished in the last four days.

The chief risk is that the stock market was already "priced to perfection," or something close to it, before the virus worries exploded, according to Brian Nick, chief investment strategist at Nuveen.

After getting the benefit of three interest-rate cuts from the Federal Reserve last year and the consummation of a "Phase 1" U.S.-China trade deal, investors were willing to pay high prices for stocks on the expectation that profits would grow in the future.

The S&P 500 was recently trading at its most expensive level, relative to its expected earnings per share, since the dot-com bubble was deflating in 2002, according to FactSet.

If profit growth doesn't ramp up this year, that makes a highly priced stock market even more vulnerable.

ENERGY: Benchmark crude oil rose 35 cents to \$50.25 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It fell \$1.53 to \$49.90 a barrel Tuesday. Brent crude oil, the international standard, rose 36 cents to \$54.62 a barrel.

CURRENCIES: The dollar rose to 110.51 Japanese yen from 110.19 yen on Tuesday. The euro slid to \$1.0868 from \$1.0882.

AP Business writers Alex Veiga, Stan Choe, Damian J. Troise and AP Medical Writer Mike Stobbe contributed.

Democrats band together to knock Sanders during debate clash

By **STEVE PEOPLES, MEG KINNARD and AAMER MADHANI** Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Democrats unleashed a roaring assault against Bernie Sanders and seized on Mike Bloomberg's past with women in the workplace during a contentious debate Tuesday night that tested the strength of the two men at the center of the party's presidential nomination fight.

As the undeniable Democratic front-runner, Sanders faced the brunt of the attacks for much of the night, and for one of the few times, fellow progressive Elizabeth Warren was among the critics. The Massachusetts senator pressed the case that she could execute ideas that the Vermont senator could only talk about.

"Bernie and I agree on a lot of things," she said. "But I think I would make a better president than Bernie."

A group of moderates, meanwhile, fought to emerge as the chief Sanders alternative.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, who is seeking a strong win in South Carolina to keep his campaign afloat, argued only he has the experience to lead in the world. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota repeatedly contended that she alone could win the votes of battleground state moderates. And Pete Buttigieg pointed to Sanders' self-described democratic socialism and his recent comments expressing admiration for Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's push for education.

"I am not looking forward to a scenario where it comes down to Donald Trump with his nostalgia for the social order of the 1950s and Bernie Sanders with a nostalgia for the revolutionary politics of the 1960s," the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, declared.

But the moderates did little to draw separation among themselves, a dynamic that has so far only benefited the Vermont senator. Sanders fought back throughout the night, pointing to polls that showed him beating the Republican president and noting all the recent attention he's gotten: "I'm hearing my name mentioned a little bit tonight. I wonder why?"

The intensity of Tuesday's forum, with candidates repeatedly shouting over each other, reflected the reality that the Democrats' establishment wing is quickly running out of time to stop Sanders' rise. Even some critics, Bloomberg among them, conceded that Sanders could build an insurmountable delegate lead as soon as next week.

The 10th debate of the 2020 primary season, sponsored by CBS and the Congressional Black Caucus Institute, was just four days before South Carolina's first-in-the-South primary and one week before more than a dozen states vote on Super Tuesday. The Democratic White House hopefuls will not stand side-by-side on the debate stage again until the middle of March. That made Tuesday's debate likely the last chance for some candidates to save themselves and alter the trajectory of the nomination fight.

Though Sanders was at the center of the attacks, the night was actually something of a high point in his political career. After spending nearly three decades as an agitator who delighted in tearing into his party's establishment, that very party establishment was suddenly fighting to take him down, a clear sign of his rising status as the leading candidate for the nomination.

Bloomberg also faced sustained attacks that gave him an opportunity to redeem himself after a bad debate debut one week earlier. Warren cut hard at his record as a businessman, bringing up reports of one particular allegation that he told a pregnant employee "to kill it," a reference to the woman's unborn child. Bloomberg fiercely denied the allegation, but acknowledged he sometimes made comments that were inappropriate.

Bloomberg "cannot earn the trust of the core of the Democratic Party," Warren said. "He is the riskiest candidate standing on this stage."

But Bloomberg will likely remain a force in the contest even as other candidates may quickly face tough choices about the sustainability of their campaigns. Bloomberg has already spent more than \$500 million on a national advertising campaign, and his fortune ensures he will remain a factor at least through Super Tuesday.

From the earliest moments of the debate, Bloomberg sought to portray a clear contrast with Sanders. He said Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agree that Sanders would be the best outcome for the Democrats.

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"Vladimir Putin thinks Donald Trump should be president of the United States and that's why Russia is helping you get elected so you lose to him," Bloomberg said.

Last week, Sanders acknowledged that he'd been briefed by intelligence officials who said that Russia is attempting to interfere in the elections to benefit him. He responded to Bloomberg on Tuesday with a direct statement for Putin: "Hey, Mr. Putin, if I'm president of the United States, trust me you're not going to interfere in any more American elections."

But the skepticism for Sanders was a constant.

Buttigieg raised concerns that a Sanders nomination would cost Democrats the House and make it harder to retake the Senate.

"We're not going to win these critical, critical House and Senate races if people in those races have to explain why the nominee of the Democratic Party is telling people to look at the bright side of the Castro regime," Buttigieg said.

And Bloomberg said Sanders wouldn't be able to build a winning coalition that includes Republicans unhappy with Trump's performance in the White House.

"Can anyone in this room imagine moderate Republican going over and voting for him," he said. "You have to do that or you can't win."

Warren, who raised questions about Sanders' electability earlier in the night, intercepted that criticism, arguing that a "progressive agenda is popular."

The South Carolina contest offers the first real look at the influence African American voters play in the Democrats' presidential nomination process. Biden is trying to make a big impression in the state, where he was long viewed as the unquestioned front-runner because of his support from black voters. But heading into Saturday's primary after three consecutive underwhelming finishes, there were signs that the former vice president's African American support may be slipping.

One reason: Tom Steyer. The billionaire activist has been pouring money into African American outreach, which threatens to peel away some of the support Biden badly needs.

Steyer noted Tuesday that he was the only candidate on stage who supported reparations for descendants of slaves.

Bloomberg, who for years defended New York City's stop-and-frisk policing policy that a federal court struck down, made an overt appeal to the nation's black voters.

"I know that if I were black, my success would have been a lot harder to achieve," he said. "That's a fact that we've got to do something about."

The attacks against Sanders did not slow as the night went on.

He was forced to defend his position on Israel, having condemned the American ally for its treatment of Palestinians.

"Sadly, tragically in Israel, through Bibi Netanyahu, you have a reactionary racist, who is now running that country," said Sanders. who would be the country's first Jewish president. He added: "What you cannot ignore is the suffering of the Palestinian people."

And Biden slammed Sanders for his record on gun control, seizing on the Vermont senator's support of the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, legislation that protects gun manufacturers and sellers from laws that attempt to hold them liable for dealing firearms that end up in the hand of criminals.

"My friend to my right, and others, have in fact also given in to gun manufacturers absolute immunity," said Biden. "Imagine if I stood here and said, 'We give immunity to drug companies. We give immunity to tobacco companies.'

"That has caused carnage on our streets. "

Sanders proudly highlighted his "D minus" rating from the pro-gun organization. And just last week, several gun control advocates who survived the Parkland, Florida, school shooting endorsed him.

Moving forward from the fiery debate, there are questions about the Democratic Party's ability to unify behind a nominee .

Klobuchar perhaps summed up her party's challenge best: "If we spend the next 10 months tearing our party apart, Donald Trump is going to spend the next four years tearing this country apart."

Peoples and Madhani reported from Washington.

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

Violence, industry co-exist in conservative Mexican state

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

IRAPUATO, Mexico (AP) — Mexico's drug war has long played out in dusty northern border cities or the poppy fields of its southern mountains, but now the killings have moved to the conservative industrial heartland state of Guanajuato, creating a strange duality: shiny new auto plants and booming foreign investment even as the state becomes Mexico's most violent.

Gleaming four-lane highways pass sprawling automotive plants and people carry yoga mats and sip chai at outdoor cafes in upscale suburbs. Several new luxury subdivisions spring up every year in the state's colonial city of San Miguel de Allende, which is popular with foreigners.

But Guanajuato's visible wealth contrasts with its grim headlines: Seven men lined up in a junkyard and shot. Gunmen open fire in a roadside eatery, leaving nine customers dead in a lake of blood. Seven people are gunned down at a street-side taco stand.

That was just one week in late January when the government said Guanajuato, which has around 5% of Mexico's population, suffered 20% of its homicides. In 2019, the state had a homicide rate of about 61 per 100,000 inhabitants, making it Mexico's most violent.

It is not the auto plant executives or foreigners who are getting killed, as local officials like to point out. The violence arises from a bloody war between the home-grown Santa Rosa de Lima gang and the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel, which is waging a major offensive to move into Guanajuato. The state is attractive to drug cartels for the same reason it is to auto manufacturers — road and rail networks that lead straight to the U.S. border.

The head of the state's security commission, Sofia Huett, defines Guanajuato's odd dynamic this way: "Sometimes people confuse the violence with a lack of public safety in Guanajuato, and in fact they are two different things."

What Huett apparently means is that what officials define as decent, law-abiding people aren't being killed. Criminals are killing criminals is a refrain repeatedly heard, along with the belief that most of the criminals are from outside the deeply Roman Catholic state — a reference to the invading gang from Jalisco and violence spilling over from Michoacan.

"The murders in Guanajuato are not killings carried out during robberies," Huett said. For example, she notes that muggings in the state are among the lowest in the nation. "The majority of crimes, the ones that most affect inhabitants, are well below the national average."

Most investors — and even local officials — seem prepared ignore the wave of homicides as just gang members killing gang members.

"There are victims who are caught in the crossfire, and they are the ones I really feel sorry for," said Ricardo Ortiz, mayor of the city of Irapuato. "But we can't be expected to protect people who are doing bad things."

Moises Guerrero, mayor of Apaseo El Grande, where a new, \$1 billion Toyota pickup assembly plant opened this month, also minimizes the spillover of the gang war onto citizens and investors. Referring to targeted killings by cartel gunmen, Guerrero said: "They don't make mistakes. They go after the person they are after."

Huett says that "between 80 and 85% of the homicides in Guanajuato are related to criminal activities." She also points the finger at people from out of state. "If we look at 10 people who have been arrested, often of those 10 only one or two of the suspects come from Guanajuato."

That kind of statement has caused untold grief for crime victims like Alondra Mora, whose husband, Miguel Flores Lopez, disappeared Jan. 10 after he was dragged from his taxi by armed men. Mora chokes

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up as she shows a photo of him in the humble house they rented on the outskirts of Irapuato. The house is so tiny that visitors' knees touch when they sit in armchairs in the living room.

Mora and her husband came to Guanajuato from their native gang-plagued state of Michoacan in mid-2019, looking to build her shoe-retail business in what they viewed as a more prosperous state.

"They have to stop discriminating," Mora said of Guanajuato state officials. "If people with money are kidnapped, how long is it before they are released? One day? But for those who don't have money, it costs them their lives, because they don't even look for them."

Mora experienced first-hand Guanajuato's willingness to ignore the killings of poor migrants from other states.

"When I went to file the missing person report, the guy who took my statement was making fun of us for being from Michoacan, saying: 'Why did you have to come here?'" she recalled.

Prosecutors even asked her to investigate the case for herself, she said. The couple's bank debit card had been used after her husband's disappearance, and she had to ask the bank where the withdrawal was made. Prosecutors never checked phone records, apparently eager to write it off as a gang killing.

"As far as they're concerned, everybody who disappears was involved in something bad," Mora said.

Maria Guadalupe Gallardo López is one of approximately 80 activists looking for missing relatives in the Guanajuato as part of the group "A Tu Encuentro," roughly "Looking for You."

Armed men took her husband, Juan Carlos Medina Serrano, from their house Dec. 3. A few days later, authorities found 19 rotting bodies buried in a backyard in a nearby town, but it took two months for them to notify Gallardo Lopez that her husband had been among the bodies. He was identified by genetic testing.

With the dismembered body returned to the family in a sealed box, the family quickly held a poverty-stricken wake for him, with a few candles next to a cross of quick-lime sprinkled on the bare floor of their dwelling. On a table, a candle burned before a figure of St. Judas Tadeo, Mexico's patron saint of lost or desperate causes popular in the underworld.

Gallardo López can't, or won't, explain what her husband did for a living. "He sold things ... on the street," she said vaguely. But she also said that if police and prosecutors keep writing off deaths like her husband's, it won't be good for anybody.

"They have to do their job. If they don't take action, if they don't do their job, they are going to keep finding people like this," she said. "I don't want anybody to have go through what I did."

While families like hers suffer, many in Guanajuato live lives largely untouched by the violence.

Jorge Barroso, the young marketing director at Tennis Court athletic shoes, whose factory is in Guanajuato's shoe-making capital of Leon, says he lives without fear, going out to restaurants or clubs as he wishes.

"The truth is, I don't even perceive it," Barroso said. "When I read about this stuff in the newspapers, it's like they're talking about another state."

Gov. Diego Sinhue says "Guanajuato is not Sinaloa," the Mexican state that became famous as the cradle of the drug cartel of the same name.

But like Sinaloa, Guanajuato has a home-grown gang, the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel. The gang, named after a small farming hamlet, got its start robbing freight trains and then turned to stealing gasoline and diesel from an oil refinery in the city of Salamanca.

When the government cracked down on fuel theft, the Santa Rosa gang turned to extorting protection payments from local businesses, going industry by industry. First they shook down tortilla shops, then auto dealerships and real estate agents. Now they are apparently focusing on bars and nightclubs.

Part of Guanajuato's odd reality stems from its success at cracking down on crimes that hurt businesses together with its inability to stop the drug gang war.

Theft from railroad cars — which only a few years ago started to affect shipments of tires and auto parts — fell dramatically after soldiers and police were posted on the rail lines, and huge billboards were put up along the tracks saying : "Crackdown on railway theft: prison terms of up to 17 years. This means you. Jail without bail."

In other parts of Mexico, protesters, pressure groups or cartel gunmen regularly block roads and train tracks, but that doesn't happen in Guanajuato. While the state isn't very strenuous in investigating homi-

cides, protesters are hit with the toughest possible charges, including terrorism.

"Here, there are no road blockades by protest groups or criminals, and in the end that is attractive for business," said Huett, the security commissioner.

Last year, 79 police officers were killed in the state. To stem the onslaught, the federal government has made Guanajuato a priority, constructing some of the first National Guard barracks here.

Worst hit has been the town of Apaseo El Alto, where Mayor Maria del Carmen Ortiz took office after her husband — the leading candidate to fill the office — was shot to death in 2018. Between late 2019 and early 2020, her police chief, a town councilman and a police officer were shot to death.

"2018, 2019 were terrible years," she concedes.

AP FACT CHECK: Dems implore fact checkers to back them up

By CALVIN WOODWARD and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They flailed their arms, talked over each other and at one point called for backup, asking fact checkers to come to their rescue.

The last debate before a crucial stage of the primaries was an often unruly affair as the Democratic presidential contenders powered past the moderators in a scramble to take credit and occasionally dodge blame on a range of subjects. Distortions ensued.

A look at some of their claims Tuesday night in Charleston, South Carolina, and how they compare with reality:

JOE BIDEN: "A hundred and fifty million people have been killed since 2007, when Bernie voted to exempt the gun manufacturers from liability."

THE FACTS: Biden vastly overstated gun deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports about 413,000 gun deaths from 2007 to 2018, a far cry from 150 million, which equates to close to half the U.S. population. More than half of the gun deaths in 2018 were from suicide, says the CDC. His campaign acknowledged he misspoke.

BERNIE SANDERS: "What every study out there — conservative or progressive — says, 'Medicare for All' will save money."

THE FACTS: Not true. Some studies say that, some don't.

Sanders, a Vermont senator, cites a recent medical journal article in *The Lancet*, which estimated "Medicare for All" would save more than \$450 billion annually, or about 13%.

But other studies have found a Sanders-like single-payer plan would cost more, partly because free health care would increase the demand for services.

A study last fall from the Commonwealth Fund and the Urban Institute estimated that such a plan would increase national health spending by about \$720 billion. A Rand study estimated spending would increase 1.8% under a national single-payer plan.

AMY KLOBUCHAR: "I am the author of the bill to close the boyfriend loophole that says that domestic abusers can't go out and get an AK-47."

BIDEN: "I wrote that law."

KLOBUCHAR: "You didn't write that bill, I wrote that bill."

BIDEN: "I wrote the bill, the Violence Against Women Act, that took (guns) out of the hands of people who abused their wife."

KLOBUCHAR: "OK we'll have a fact check look at this."

BIDEN: "No, let's look at the fact check. The only thing (is) that that boyfriend loophole was not covered, I couldn't get that covered. You, in fact, as a senator tried to get it covered and Mitch McConnell is holding it up on his desk right now."

THE FACTS: Klobuchar, a Minnesota senator, correctly called out the former vice president for seeming to take credit for legislation closing the "boyfriend loophole." Biden conceded the point, then correctly

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pointed out that the loophole has not been eliminated in law.

In short, Biden did write the legislation that became the Violence Against Women Act, one of his most prominent achievements. The 1994 law sets out services and specific protections for victims of domestic violence.

Klobuchar took the lead in the Senate on legislation passed by the House that would extend the law's protections to help women who are threatened by abusive partners who are not a spouse, ex-spouse or parent of a common child — in other words, boyfriends or dating partners. But that effort, opposed by the National Rifle Association, has been hung up in the Senate.

MIKE BLOOMBERG, responding to Elizabeth Warren's demand that he lift non-disclosure agreements for all women who signed them: "We are doing that, senator."

THE FACTS: He hasn't done that.

Bloomberg agreed to release three women from non-disclosure agreements in situations where they specifically identified an issue with him. But many more former Bloomberg employees have signed such agreements, having to do with the culture and work environment at his company. He hasn't freed them from their obligation to stay quiet about their complaints.

ELIZABETH WARREN: "At least I didn't have a boss who said to me 'kill it' the way that Mayor Bloomberg is alleged to have said to one of his pregnant employees."

BLOOMBERG: "I never said that."

THE FACTS: The woman who made the allegation against Bloomberg recounted it in a legal filing.

Former Bloomberg employee Sekiko Sekai Garrison, 55, filed a complaint against Mike Bloomberg and his company with the New York Division of Human Rights in 1995. In Garrison's written complaint, she recounted several personal interactions with Bloomberg when she worked at the company.

In one incident, Garrison said Bloomberg approached her near the office coffee machines and asked if she was still married, according to the complaint.

Garrison says she responded that her marriage was great and that she was pregnant with her first child, and alleged that Bloomberg replied: "Kill it." Bloomberg has denied that the exchange happened, but in her complaint, she transcribed a voicemail she says Bloomberg later left on her voicemail, apologizing and saying he meant the "kill it" remark as a joke. Her complaint was eventually settled as part of a lawsuit with no admission of guilt, and she resigned from the company.

BLOOMBERG, on China's president, Xi Jinping: "In terms of whether he's a dictator, he does serve at the behest of the Politburo, their group of people. There's no question he has an enormous amount of power. But he does play to his constituency."

THE FACTS: He's minimizing Xi's broad powers in China.

Xi serves as the head of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee and is also head of state and leader of the party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. The Politburo and its standing committee aren't generally viewed as a check on his power. Although Xi's moves to accumulate power have been criticized by some non-party intellectuals, he faces no clear rivals or constraints on his power.

However, a faltering economy and the knock-on effects of the coronavirus outbreak that originated in China are seen as placing him under greater pressure than he has previously faced.

Associated Press writers Alexandra Jaffe, Amanda Seitz, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

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

While India seems to love Trump, the reality isn't so simple

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

Looking out over the world's largest cricket stadium, the seats jammed with more than 100,000 people, India's prime minister heaped praise on his American visitor.

"The leadership of President Trump has served humanity," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Monday, highlighting Trump's fight against terrorism and calling his 36-hour visit to India a watershed in India-U.S. relations.

The crowds cheered. Trump beamed.

"The ties between India and the U.S. are no longer just any other partnership," Modi said. "It is a far greater and closer relationship."

India, it seems, loves Donald Trump. It seemed obvious from the thousands who turned out to wave as his motorcade snaked through the city of Ahmedabad, and from the tens of thousands who filled the city's new stadium. It seemed obvious from the hug that Modi gave Trump after he descended from Air Force One, and from the hundreds of billboards proclaiming Trump's visit.

But it's not so simple.

Because while Trump is genuinely popular in India, his clamorous and carefully choreographed welcome was also about Asian geopolitics, China's growing power and a masterful Indian politician who gave his American visitor exactly what he wanted.

Modi "is doing this not necessarily because he loves Trump," said Tanvi Madan, the director of the India Project at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. "It's very much about Trump as the leader of the U.S. and recognizing what it is that Trump himself likes."

Trump likes crowds — big crowds — and the foot soldiers of India's political parties have long known how to corral enough people to make any politician look popular. In a city like Ahmedabad, the capital of Modi's home state of Gujarat and the center of his power base, it wouldn't take much effort to fill a cavernous sports stadium. It was more surprising that a handful of seats remained empty, and that some in the stands had left even before Trump had finished his speech.

For India, good relations with the U.S. are deeply important: They signal that India is a serious global player, an issue that has long been important to New Delhi, and help cement an alliance that both nations see as a counterweight to China's rise.

"For both countries, their biggest rival is China," said John Echeverri-Gent, a professor at the University of Virginia whose research often focuses on India. "China is rapidly expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean, which India has long considered its backyard and its exclusive realm for security concerns."

"It's very clearly a major concern for both India and the United States," he said.

Trump isn't the first U.S. president that Modi has courted. In 2015, then-President Barack Obama was the first American chief guest at India's Republic Day parade, a powerful symbolic gesture. Obama also got a Modi hug, and the media in both countries were soon writing about the two leaders' "bromance."

Trump is popular in India, even if some of that is simply because he's the U.S. president. A 2019 Pew Research Center poll showed that 56% of Indians had confidence in Trump's abilities in world affairs, one of only a handful of countries where he has that level of approval. But Obama was also popular: Before he left office, he had 58% approval in world affairs among Indians.

The Pew poll also indicated that Trump's support was higher among supporters of Modi's Hindu nationalist party.

That's not surprising. Both men have fired up their nationalist bases with anti-Muslim rhetoric and government policies, from Trump's travel bans to Modi's crackdown in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

And Trump's Indian support is far from universal. Protests against his trip roiled cities from New Delhi to Hyderabad to the far northeastern city of Gauhati, although those demonstrations were mostly overshadowed by protests over a new Indian citizenship law that Modi backs.

Modi, who is widely popular in India, has faced weeks of protests over the law, which provides fast track naturalization for some foreign-born religious minorities — but not Muslims. While Trump talked about

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ties with India on Tuesday, Hindus and Muslims fought in violent clashes that left at least 10 people dead over two days.

In some ways, Modi and Trump are powerful echoes of each other.

They have overlapping political styles. Both are populists who see themselves as brash, rule-breaking outsiders who disdain their countries' traditional elites. Both are seen by their critics as having authoritarian leanings. Both surround themselves with officials who rarely question their decisions.

But are they friends?

Trump says yes. "Really, we feel very strongly about each other," he said at a New Delhi press briefing. But many observers aren't so sure.

"The question is how much of this is real chemistry, as opposed to what I'd call planned chemistry" orchestrated for diplomatic reasons, said Madan. "It's so hard to know if you're not in the room."

Certainly, Modi understands America's importance to India. While the two countries continue to bicker about trade issues, the prime minister organized a welcome that impressed even India's news media, which have watched countless choreographed mass political rallies.

"There is no other country for whose leader India would hold such an event, and for which an Indian prime minister would lavish such rhetoric," the Hindustan Times said in an editorial.

"The spectacle and the sound were worth a thousand agreements."

California wildfire victims fear they'll be last in payout

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A \$13.5 billion settlement between victims of California's catastrophic wildfires and the utility blamed for causing them was supposed to bring some peace and hope to people still reeling from the devastation.

Instead, the deal has sparked confusion, resentment, suspicion and despair as the victims, government agencies, and lawyers grapple for their piece of the pie.

More than 81,000 have filed claims to the settlement fund, setting the stage for a potential scrum as Pacific Gas & Electric scrambles to emerge from one of the most complex bankruptcy cases in U.S. history by June 30.

"How is it in any way fair that the actual victims of this fire, or any of the fires, are put at the very, very bottom of the priority list," wrote Michelle Barker, 54, in a recent letter to U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Dennis Montali, who is overseeing the settlement. Barker lost her home to the 2018 fire that wiped out Paradise, California.

The tensions may boil over during a hearing Wednesday focusing on whether federal and state agencies are entitled to tap the fund to recoup any of the \$4 billion they doled out after the wildfires. Health chain Adventist Health is also seeking at least \$1 billion for losses from its heavily damaged hospital in Paradise, and lawyers could try to take up to a third.

Victims are also upset that half the settlement, or \$6.75 billion, would be paid in stock from PG&E, the company responsible for ruining their lives.

The stock payment may prove a clever strategy, said San Francisco bankruptcy attorney Michael Sweet, because that could make it more difficult for California Gov. Gavin Newsom to follow through on threats of a government-backed takeover if PG&E doesn't make reforms.

A government takeover would likely cause the company's stock to drop, further diminishing the value of the victims' settlement.

"They are turning the victims into human shields," Sweet said. "You only go into bankruptcy because there isn't enough to go around for everyone."

Barker, who lost her Paradise home, is among dozens making passionate pleas to Montali asking him to rework a deal he approved in December. More than 1,600 wildfire victims signed an online petition calling the settlement unfair.

PG&E "is building off of our losses in a sense," said Jason Meek, 48, whose Northern California wine

country home was destroyed in 2017. "It's important in my view that this settlement is done with thought and care."

The possibility of government agencies tapping the fund has outraged people still looking for new places to live after losing their homes and, in some cases, still grieving loved ones who perished during the worst wildfires in modern U.S. history.

Montali, who also presided over PG&E's previous bankruptcy from 2001-2004, has never left any doubt that compensating the wildfire victims is his top priority in the new case, which began in January 2019. Claimants have since filed more than \$50 billion in wildfire claims, which the utility has proposed settling for a total of \$25.5 billion, which includes reimbursement for insurers and other things.

Attorneys representing the victims concede the settlement isn't perfect, but they say it's the best deal possible under the circumstances.

Still, there is a growing sentiment among victims that they're getting such a raw deal they should reject it, even if that means waiting longer to be paid.

"I want you to know that many of us understand what is happening and that we will move heaven and earth to stop it," vowed Lisa Williams, 59, another survivor of the 2018 Camp Fire, in a Feb. 6 letter. Williams, who now lives in Las Vegas, started a wildfire victims group on Facebook opposing the current deal.

Compounding frustration over the plan to pay them in stock, PG&E agreed to an all-cash settlement of \$11 billion to reimburse about 110 insurers for losses paid out to policyholders.

"Not only do we have to wait to get paid but we'd have to depend on the company's recovery," said Meek, who said he has moved many times since losing his house, and is nowhere close to rebuilding on his property. "If a fire comes again, what will happen to the stock price?"

The last time PG&E emerged from bankruptcy in April 2004, its stock more than doubled while paying out billions of dollars in dividends. PG&E's stock has sunk as low as \$3.55 four months ago, but has since rebounded to \$16 to \$18 per share, largely on hopes the company will be able to deliver on its projection of record profits as it bounces back from bankruptcy.

Court documents say none of the victims will have to accept PG&E stock if they don't want it but the process for choosing an alternative hasn't been spelled out yet.

Sarah Bates, a 67-year-old former nurse who moved to Virginia after losing her Paradise home in 2018, said those affected the most are being "tossed aside."

"I don't have a lot of faith that I'm going to see any significant compensation at the end of it all," Bates said.

East Africa's huge locust outbreak now spreads to Congo

By **RODNEY MUHUMUZA** Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — A small group of desert locusts has entered Congo, marking the first time the voracious insects have been seen in the Central African country since 1944, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Agency said Tuesday as U.N. agencies warned of a "major hunger threat" in East Africa from the flying pests.

Kenya, Somalia and Uganda have been battling the swarms in the worst locust outbreak that parts of East Africa have seen in 70 years. The U.N. said swarms have also been sighted in Djibouti, Eritrea and Tanzania and recently reached South Sudan, a country where roughly half the population already faces hunger after years of civil war.

A joint statement Tuesday from FAO director-general Qu Dongyu, U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock, and World Food Program Executive Director David Beasley called the swarms of locusts "a scourge of biblical proportions" and "a graphic and shocking reminder of this region's vulnerability."

The FAO said mature locusts, carried in part by the wind, arrived on the western shore of Lake Albert in eastern Congo on Friday near the town of Bunia. The country has not seen locusts for 75 years, it said.

"Needless to say the potential impact of locusts on a country still grappling with complex conflict, Ebola and measles outbreaks, high levels of displacement, and chronic food insecurity would be devastating," the U.N. officials said in the joint statement.

Locust swarms can reach the size of major cities and can destroy crops and devastate pasture for animals. Experts have warned that the outbreak is affecting millions of already vulnerable people across the region. Uganda's government said Tuesday it was trying to contain a large swarm and will need more resources to control the infestation that has spread to over 20 districts in the north. Soldiers have been battling swarms using hand-held spray pumps, while experts have said aerial spraying is the only effective control. The U.N. recently raised its aid appeal from \$76 million to \$138 million, saying the need for more help is urgent.

"This funding will ensure that activities to control the locusts can take place before new swarms emerge," the U.N. officials said, noting that to date only \$33 million has been received or committed.

Experts have warned that the number of locusts if unchecked could grow 500 times by June, when drier weather is expected in the region.

"WFP has estimated the cost of responding to the impact of locusts on food security alone to be at least 15 times higher than the cost of preventing the spread now," the U.N. officials said in the statement.

A changing climate has contributed to this outbreak as a warming Indian Ocean means more powerful tropical cyclones hitting the region. A cyclone late last year in Somalia brought heavy rains that fed fresh vegetation to fuel the locusts that were carried in by the wind from the Arabian Peninsula.

Desert locusts have a reproduction cycle of three months, the U.N. officials said, and mature swarms are laying eggs in vast areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, "many of which are already hatching."

"In just a few weeks, the next generation of the pests will transition from their juvenile stage and take wing in a renewed frenzy of destructive swarm activity," the joint statement said.

This is a time when farmers' crops begin to sprout, which could devastate East Africa's most important crop of the year, the U.N. officials said.

"But that doesn't have to happen," they said. "The window of opportunity is still open. The time to act is now."

Edith M. Lederer contributed to this report from the United Nations

'A world of hurt': 39 states to investigate Juul's marketing

By **DAVE COLLINS** and **MATTHEW PERRONE** Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A coalition of 39 states will look into the marketing and sales of vaping products by Juul Labs, including whether the company targeted youths and made misleading claims about nicotine content in its devices, officials announced Tuesday.

Attorneys general from Connecticut, Florida, Nevada, Oregon and Texas said they will lead the multi-state investigation into San Francisco-based Juul, which also is facing lawsuits by teenagers and others who say they became addicted to the company's vaping products.

The state officials said they also will investigate the company's claims about the risk, safety and effectiveness of its vaping products as smoking cessation devices.

"I will not prejudge where this investigation will lead," Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said in a statement, "but we will follow every fact and are prepared to take strong action in conjunction with states across the nation to protect public health."

Juul released a statement saying it has halted television, print and digital advertising and eliminated most flavors in response to concerns by government officials and others.

"We will continue to reset the vapor category in the U.S. and seek to earn the trust of society by working cooperatively with attorneys general, regulators, public health officials, and other stakeholders to combat underage use and transition adult smokers from combustible cigarettes," the statement said.

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody said underage vaping has become an epidemic across the country.

"I cannot sit on the sidelines while this public health epidemic grows, and our next generation becomes addicted to nicotine," Moody said.

Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford added, "Preying on children and those looking for help to quit

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smoking is the one of the most despicable examples of risking people's lives for corporate profit."

The scope of the investigation by dozens of states leaves Juul with little choice but to change its marketing practices, said James Tierney, a former attorney general of Maine.

"When you see these kinds of numbers, it means they're in a world of hurt," said Tierney, a lecturer at Harvard Law School. "They can't seriously litigate this."

The brainchild of two Stanford University design students, Juul launched in 2015 and quickly rocketed to the top of the multibillion-dollar vaping market.

The company initially sold its high-nicotine pods in fruit and dessert flavors, including mango, mint and creme. The products have become a scourge in U.S. high schools, with one in four teenagers reportedly vaping in the past month, according to the latest federal figures. Juul is the most popular brand, preferred by 60% of high schoolers.

Juul's meteoric rise has been followed by a hasty retreat in recent months amid a nationwide political backlash over vaping.

Although Juul remains the dominant player in the U.S. vaping market, the company has made several concessions, including halting its advertising and pulling all its flavors except menthol and tobacco from the market. The Food and Drug Administration recently put in place flavor restrictions designed to curb use of small, pod-based e-cigarettes like Juul.

The FDA and a congressional panel are investigating whether the company's early marketing efforts — which included online influencers and product giveaways — deliberately targeted minors.

Nine attorneys general previously announced lawsuits against the company, most alleging that the company adopted the playbook of Big Tobacco by luring teens with youth-oriented marketing while failing to stop underage sales.

Massachusetts' Maura Healey sued the company this month, citing company records to allege that Juul bought advertisements on websites designed for teens and children, including Seventeen.com, Nickjr.com and Cartoonnetwork.com.

California sued Juul Labs in November, alleging the company deliberately marketed and sold its flavored nicotine products to teenagers by, among other things, using bright colors and youthful models to attract underage users and failing to adequately verify customers' ages and identities on its website.

President Donald Trump late last year signed a law raising the minimum age to purchase all tobacco and vaping products from 18 to 21 nationwide. Juul supported the measure, citing the need to curb underage vaping.

A spokeswoman for Tong said officials could not provide a complete list of the 39 states, saying some states are barred from disclosing investigations.

Other states investigating include Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, according to official announcements.

Juul's biggest investor is the tobacco giant Altria, maker of Marlboro cigarettes, which owns a one-third stake in the company. Since October, Altria has slashed the value of its Juul investment by more than \$8.5 billion, citing the company's mounting legal challenges.

Attorneys general have repeatedly banded together to force settlements with powerful industries.

In 1998, 46 state officials reached a \$200 billion settlement with major tobacco companies for smoking-related diseases and medical expenses.

More recently, nearly all states have sued opioid drugmakers and distributors for their alleged role in the epidemic of drug addiction tied to prescription painkillers.

Perrone reported from Washington.

Trump says 2 justices should sit out cases, but they decide

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A month before the Supreme Court takes up cases over his tax returns and financial records, President Donald Trump on Tuesday made the unusual suggestion that two liberal justices should not take part in those or any other cases involving him or his administration.

The remarks critical of Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor, New Yorkers like Trump, came during a news conference in India, where Trump was wrapping up a 36-hour visit full of praise and pageantry. They followed tweets in a similar vein.

Justices decide for themselves when to step aside from cases the court is considering, and it is highly unlikely either justice would sit out cases involving Trump, including two cases the court will hear on Mar. 31 over subpoenas for Trump's tax, bank and financial records. The president wants the justices to reject demands for the records issued by House committees and the Manhattan district attorney.

The justices and Chief Justice John Roberts, who chided Trump in 2018 for his criticism of an "Obama judge," had no comment, court spokeswoman Kathy Arberg said.

Trump's comments were the most critical he has been of sitting justices since he took office, though he has not shied away from piling on complaints about federal judges who have ruled against him or, notably, convicted ally Roger Stone. Even as he was flying home from India Thursday, Trump tweeted from Air Force One that U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson, as well as the jury foreperson for Stone's trial, were "totally biased."

His comments about Ginsburg stem from interviews in 2016 with The Associated Press and other media outlets that were critical of Trump, then a candidate for president. She quickly apologized for her "ill-advised" remarks, but Ginsburg has not recused herself from any Trump case so far.

His ire at Sotomayor appears to be referencing a dissenting opinion she wrote on Friday. The president said the justice was "trying to shame people with perhaps a different view into voting her way and that's so inappropriate."

But regardless of party and ideology, justices have said they write dissenting opinions to do just that — change the minds of people with whom they disagree through persuasive reasoning. Indeed, sometimes draft dissents are so successful that they become majority opinions of the court.

Sotomayor wrote the opinion in a dispute over the administration's new wealth test for immigrants. Lower courts had blocked the new policy from taking effect nationwide, but the court split 5-4 in January, with conservatives in the majority, granting a stay of the lower court orders. This allowed the rule to take effect everywhere but in Illinois because that state was under a separate court order blocking the policy.

Then on Friday, the court granted the administration's emergency request to be allowed to enforce the rule in Illinois, too. Again, the four liberal justices noted their dissent, but Sotomayor went further, issuing a written opinion.

"Claiming one emergency after another, the Government has recently sought stays in an unprecedented number of cases, demanding immediate attention and consuming limited Court resources in each. And with each successive application, of course, its cries of urgency ring increasingly hollow," Sotomayor wrote.

Trump's complaints about judges began well before he won the White House. He harshly criticized Roberts for his vote in 2012 to uphold the Affordable Care Act. In 2016, he said he wouldn't get a fair hearing in a lawsuit over Trump University in front of an Indiana-born judge of Mexican descent because Trump had proposed building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The criticism continued once Trump was in office. In 2018, Trump lambasted an "Obama judge" who had ruled against a Trump asylum policy. That provoked the rare rebuke from Roberts.

"We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges. What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them," Roberts said.

He added, "The independent judiciary is something we should all be thankful for."

Trump, needing the last word, defended his own comment, tweeting defiantly, "Sorry Justice Roberts."

Study begins in US to test possible coronavirus treatment

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The first clinical trial in the U.S. of a possible coronavirus treatment is underway in Nebraska and is eventually expected to include 400 patients at 50 locations around the world, officials said Tuesday.

Half of the patients in the international study will receive the antiviral medicine remdesivir while the other half will receive a placebo. Several other studies, including one looking at the same drug, are already underway internationally.

Dr. Andre Kalil, who will oversee the study at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, said the clinical trial was developed quickly in response to the virus outbreak that originated in China. Patients who are hospitalized with the COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, will be eligible to join the trial if they have at least moderate symptoms.

“The goal here is to help the people that need it the most,” Kalil said.

Fourteen people who were evacuated from a cruise ship in Japan are being treated at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Twelve of them have tested positive for COVID-19.

There are no proven treatments or vaccines for the new and mysterious virus, which has infected more than 80,000 people worldwide and killed more than 2,700, with the overwhelming majority of cases in China.

Doctors give patients fluids and pain relievers to try to ease the symptoms, which can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In the case of those who are severely ill, doctors use ventilators to help them breathe or a machine that pumps and oxygenates their blood outside the body, easing the burden on the heart and lungs.

At least two patient studies are already underway in China, including the other study involving remdesivir, which is made by Gilead Sciences, and another that tests a combination HIV drug containing lopinavir and ritonavir.

In a draft research plan published last month, the World Health Organization said remdesivir was considered “the most promising candidate.” It was used briefly in some Ebola patients in Congo before that study stopped. But the WHO cited laboratory studies that suggested it might be able to target SARS and MERS, which are cousins of the new virus.

Gilead has provided the drug for use in a small number of patients, including a man in Washington state who fell ill after a trip to Wuhan, the Chinese city at the center of the outbreak. He is no longer hospitalized, but it is not clear whether the remdesivir helped him.

AP-NORC poll: Most Americans plan to participate in census

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Most Americans say they are likely to participate in the 2020 census, but some doubt that the U.S. Census Bureau will keep their personal information confidential, a new poll shows.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 7 in 10 Americans say it's extremely or very likely they will participate in the census this year by filling out a questionnaire. Another 2 in 10 say it's somewhat likely.

That's higher than what the Census Bureau predicts — a self-response rate of 6 in 10 people. But the bureau's past research shows that people say they are going to participate in the census at a higher rate than they actually do.

“People respond to a survey question as they think they are expected to behave,” Kenneth Prewitt, a former Census Bureau director in the Clinton administration, said in an email.

The poll shows that older, white and highly educated adults express greater certainty that they will participate than younger adults, black and Hispanic Americans and those without college degrees.

It also shows that the more partisan people are, the more likely they are to participate. At least 7 in 10 Democrats and Republicans are very likely to answer, compared with about half of Americans who don't identify with or lean toward either party.

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"It might be that they understand the importance of the census in distributing political representation and want to make sure they get their fair share," John Thompson, a former director of the U.S. Census Bureau in the Obama administration, said in an email.

The 2020 census will help determine how \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is distributed. It will also determine how many congressional seats each state gets, as well as the makeup of legislative districts in a process known as redistricting.

People can start answering the questions in mid-March, either online, by telephone or by mailing in a paper form.

"I think it's important. It's a civic duty," said Quintin Sharpe, a 21-year-old college student, who's studying business at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Compared with the share saying they'll participate, 57%, say it's highly important to them to be counted in the census. About a quarter say it's moderately important.

The poll shows about a third of Americans are very or extremely confident that the U.S. Census Bureau will keep their personal information confidential, while roughly the same share say they are moderately confident. About another third have little to no confidence in the agency to keep private information private, even though the bureau is legally required to do so.

About a quarter of Americans report a great deal of confidence in the people running the U.S. Census Bureau, and roughly two-thirds say they have some confidence.

Joe Domas, a 57-year-old carpenter in Paris, Tennessee, said he plans to fill out the census form but won't answer every question. The questionnaire asks how many people live in a household; whether their home is owned or rented; the age, race and sex of every person living in the home; and how they are related.

"I don't divulge a lot of personal information. I just give them a head count, pretty much," Domas said. "I'm not into government intrusion, and the way the internet is, people leak information."

A majority say they have heard or read about the count of every person living in the U.S., the largest peacetime operation the federal government undertakes, but just 2 in 10 say they know "a lot." About a third say they have heard or read little or nothing at all.

That will likely change after the Census Bureau expanded its advertising campaign last week. The goal of the \$500 million education and outreach effort is to reach 99% of the 140 million U.S. households with messages about the importance of participating in the 2020 census.

Many of those who say they will take the survey this year think they will complete it online. Close to half say that's their likely format, with another 2 in 10 saying they expect to fill out and mail in a paper questionnaire. Just 4% say they prefer phone, but 30% say they don't know yet how they will respond. This is the first decennial census in which most participants are being encouraged to fill out the form online.

Gil Parks, a 60-year-old retired financial planner from Stephenville, Texas, said he still hasn't decided if he will answer questions online or use the paper form. Parks and his wife often drive to a ranch they own an hour south of where they live to keep tabs on building projects and baby calves.

"If we have a paper form, my wife could fill it out while we are driving down there and driving back," Parks said.

Majorities across racial and ethnic groups say they are highly likely to participate, but about half of white Americans are "extremely" likely, compared with about 3 in 10 black and Hispanic Americans.

About 8 in 10 college-educated Americans, but just about two-thirds of those without a degree, say they are highly likely to participate.

Similarly, roughly 8 in 10 adults older than 45 say they are very likely to complete a census questionnaire, compared with just over half of younger adults.

There's also a significant age gap in the preferred form of answering the questions. Just about a quarter of adults ages 60 and older who will participate say they will take the survey online, compared with more than half of those who are younger. Older adults are also somewhat more likely than younger adults to express high confidence in the Census Bureau to keep their information private, 37% among those 45 and older and 25% among younger adults.

"Getting accurate data is important," said Parks, who also is chair of the local Republican Party. "We

need to know who is here, and what not."

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.

Online:

AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

Church shooter Dylann Roof staged death row hunger strike

By **MICHAEL BALSAMO** and **JAMES MARTINEZ** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White supremacist mass murderer Dylann Roof staged a hunger strike this month while on federal death row, alleging in letters to The Associated Press that he's been "targeted by staff," "verbally harassed and abused without cause" and "treated disproportionately harsh."

The 25-year-old Roof, who killed nine black church members during a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, told the AP in a letter dated Feb. 13 that the staff at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, feel justified in their conduct "since I am hated by the general public."

A person familiar with the matter said Roof had been on a hunger strike but was no longer on one, as of this week. The person couldn't immediately provide specific details about the length of the hunger strike or whether medical staff needed to intervene. The person wasn't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Roof wrote in his letter to the AP that he went on the hunger strike to protest the treatment he received from a Bureau of Prisons disciplinary hearing officer over earlier complaints that he was refused access to the law library and access to a copy machine to file legal papers.

Roof's Feb. 13 letter indicated he was already "several days" into a hunger strike, and he wrote in a follow-up letter that the protest ended a day later after corrections officers forcibly tried to take his blood and insert an IV into his arm, causing him to briefly pass out.

"I feel confident I could have gone much, much longer without food," Roof wrote in the Feb. 16 follow-up letter. "It's just not worth being murdered over."

The allegations could not immediately be verified and a spokeswoman for the Bureau of Prisons said the agency had no comment on Roof's allegations, citing privacy concerns.

Roof's lawyers said in a statement that they were "working with BOP to resolve the issues addressed in the letters."

Roof's lawyers filed an appeal to his federal convictions and death sentence last month, arguing that he was mentally ill when he represented himself at his capital trial.

In a 321-page legal brief, Roof's lawyers asked a federal appeals court in Richmond, Virginia, to review 20 issues, including errors they say were made by the judge and prosecutors that "tainted" his sentencing. One of their main arguments is that U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel should not have allowed Roof to represent himself during the penalty phase of his trial because he was a 22-year-old ninth-grade dropout "who believed his sentence didn't matter because white nationalists would free him from prison after an impending race war."

Roof is the first person to be ordered executed for a federal hate crime. Attorney General William Barr announced in July that the government would resume executions and scheduled five executions — though Roof is not included among that group — ending an informal moratorium on federal capital punishment as the issue receded from the public domain. The Supreme Court has temporarily halted the executions after some of the chosen inmates challenged the new execution procedures in court.

Martinez reported from New York; AP writer Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina contributed to this report.

Brazilian politicians avoid Carnival as they become targets

By ANNA JEAN KAISER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — At Rio's annual Carnival celebration Monday night, comedian and composer Marcelo Adnet stood atop a float for the Sao Clemente samba school dressed in a sequin suit imitating Brazil's far-right president.

He mimicked Jair Bolsonaro's signature finger-gun gesture while dancers surrounded him holding picket signs making fun of some of the president's quotes, including his accusation that actor and activist Leonardo DiCaprio was responsible for the Amazon fires in 2019.

The previous night, the Mangueira samba school also took a jab at Bolsonaro, for his advocacy for looser gun laws. Part of the lyrics of their samba song rang out, "No messiah with a gun in his hands" — a reference to Bolsonaro's middle name, Messias.

But Bolsonaro himself was nowhere to be seen at the country's most famous party. Instead, he was posting videos of him at the beach and sharing some of the few positive tributes party-goers were making to him on social media.

Likewise, other politicians once more passed on the opportunity to see and be seen in Rio's parade, ending a tradition that had lasted decades with important revelers from both the political left and the right.

While the Carnival parade used to be a chance for Brazilian politicians to bask in the reflected glory of the celebration, today they often find themselves at the center of samba schools' criticisms and so are avoiding Brazil's largest cultural show.

"Carnival is becoming more and more critical," said Igor Capanema, a participant in the parade Monday night. "The schools are going more in a direction for us to make these important criticisms about what we are living, where we are living, why we're living this and who we're talking about."

Rio's Sambadrome was inaugurated in 1984, at a time Brazil's military dictatorship was nearing its end. At first local politicians were the only ones attending.

But it all changed in 1994 when President Itamar Franco, who had inherited the presidency with the impeachment of Fernando Collor, decided to go to the Sambadrome to add a popular touch to his quiet persona. During the parades, he was photographed hand in hand with a reveler.

The military did not like the images from that night because the young woman next to Franco was not wearing any underwear, which they considered undignified for a president. But politicians quickly noticed Franco had become more popular because of Carnival.

His successors — Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff — all attended the parade, either on the job or during election campaigns. And so did their opponents.

"Politicians are a bit afraid of the people," Carlos Lupi, president of Brazil's Labor Democratic Party, told journalists at the Sambadrome.

Lupi has attended every parade for almost two decades and comes on the floor with several samba schools. He said that since the mammoth "Car Wash" corruption investigation that has ensnared dozens from the government and business elite, he has seen fewer politicians at Carnival events.

"People don't want to take pictures with politicians anymore," Lupi said.

Sergio Praça, a political scientist at Getulio Vargas Foundation University, said barbs from the samba school have become more pointed.

"Carnival has always been political, but the criticisms used to be more broad," he said. "In recent years, we've seen the criticisms become more personalized and go after specific politicians."

He noted deeply unpopular ex-President Michel Temer was portrayed as a "neoliberal vampire" with dollar bills coming out of his collar.

Bolsonaro is the leader of Brazil's sharp swing toward rightist, conservative politicians who tend to reject Carnival as debauchery and excessive. The country is also slowly recovering from a brutal recession and

is about to enter the seventh year of the sweeping "Car Wash" corruption scandal.

"Things haven't been good in Brazil for several years, so politicians being seen at these parties with lots of celebration and alcohol would look bad," Praça said.

Rio's mayor, Marcelo Crivella, an evangelical bishop, has gained infamy among Carnival's revelers for cutting the budget for the samba schools' elaborate parades and failing to participate in a traditional, light-hearted ceremony at which the mayor turns over the key to the city to the King of Carnival. Since taking office, he has never shown up at the Sambadrome — this year, the fourth and final year of his first term, was no different.

"People always say, 'The mayor doesn't like Carnival, the mayor's a person of God who wants to put an end to our party,'" Crivella complained to reporters Friday. "I've been a person of God since I was a child, but I respect everyone," he added, saying he watched that night's parade from a nearby security center instead of inside the Sambadrome.

Rio de Janeiro state Gov. Wilson Witzel made what local press called a "discreet" appearance at the Sambodrome on Sunday, entering the runway briefly only to be booed by the crowd and retreat.

The Sao Clemente school's last float on Monday night was called "the fake news factory" and was led by a giant puppet of Pinocchio and included a huge cellphone screen exchanging WhatsApp messages of misinformation that has flown around far-right social networks.

"Brazil posted, went viral, didn't even look! And the entire country did the samba, fell victim fake news!" part of the school's samba lyrics read.

Bolsonaro was elected at the end of 2018 on a campaign largely run on social media, and his opponents have accused him of disseminating misinformation. The Brazilian fact-checking site Aos Fatos says it has tallied 691 misleading or false claims by the president since he took office in January 2019.

"This isn't a protest against politics, but against bad politicians who lie to get themselves elected," said Marcio Tavares, another performer in Sao Clemente's parade.

Associated Press writer Mauricio Savarese and video journalist Diarlei Rodrigues contributed to this report.

Hot Pockets heir gets 5 months in prison for college scam

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — An heir to the Hot Pockets fortune was sentenced to five months in prison Tuesday for trying to cheat and bribe her daughters' way into school as part of a nationwide college admissions scam.

Michelle Janavs, whose father and uncle invented the microwavable Hot Pockets turnovers before selling their company, showed no emotion as the judge delivered his sentence after she apologized for abandoning her moral compass and hurting her family and friends.

"I am so very sorry that I tried to create an unfair advantage for my children," she said.

The judge told Janavs that prison time was needed to deter others who might have the gall to use their wealth to break the law and dismissed her argument that her actions were motivated by a love for her children.

The "vast majority of parents do not brazenly try to push their kids in the side door" of universities through bribery, U.S. District Judge Nathaniel Gorton said. "They don't love their children any less than you do. They just play by the rules of common decency and fair play."

Janavs, of Newport Coast, California, is among nearly two dozen prominent parents who have admitted to participating in the scheme by paying huge sums to people willing to cheat on entrance exams for their children or pretend their kids were star athletes for sports they didn't play.

Janavs admitted to paying the consultant at the center of the scheme, Rick Singer, \$100,000 to have a proctor correct her two daughters' ACT exam answers. She also agreed to pay \$200,000 to have one of her daughters labeled as a fake beach volleyball recruit at the University of Southern California but was arrested before the girl was formally admitted, prosecutors said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristen Kearney asked for 21 months behind bars, telling the judge that Janavs

showed a “flagrant disrespect for right and wrong and an attitude that she is untouchable.”

“She believed she and her children were deserving of an illicit edge over other students and no one could stop her,” Kearney said.

Janavs’ lawyers portrayed her in court documents as a dedicated mother and philanthropist who fell for Singer’s “manipulative sales tactics” because of the love for her children and stress of the hypercompetitive college admissions process.

They argued that the actions were out of character for Janavs, who after working for her father’s company dedicated her life to volunteer work and charities to help underprivileged children.

“She is a truly good human being. She did an extremely wrong thing here,” Thomas H. Bienert, Jr. told the judge.

Her family’s company, Chef America, was sold to Nestle in 2002 for more than \$2 billion.

Other parents who have pleaded guilty in the case include “Desperate Housewives” star Felicity Huffman, who was sentenced to two weeks in prison for paying \$15,000 to have a proctor correct her daughter’s SAT answers.

Fifteen other parents — including “Full House” actress Lori Loughlin and her fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli— are fighting the charges. The couple, who are charged with paying \$500,000 to get their daughters into USC, could go on trial as early as October.

As world scrambles, experts warn virus spread in US certain

By ADAM GELLER and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. health officials warned Tuesday that the burgeoning coronavirus is certain to spread more widely in the country at some point, even as their counterparts in Europe and Asia scrambled to contain new outbreaks of the illness.

“It’s not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen — and how many people in this country will have severe illness,” Dr. Nancy Messonnier of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a call with reporters.

The CDC’s call for Americans to be prepared added new urgency to response efforts that, until this week, focused on a disease largely confined to China, where it apparently originated, and neighboring countries.

In other developments Tuesday:

— New clusters of the illness popped up far from China, causing increased concerns for officials in some of the wealthiest nations in Europe and Asia, as well as in countries with far fewer resources. But many remained uncertain about how best to contain it.

The new outbreaks were reported in places as far-flung as Italy and Iran, France and Algeria, and Spain’s Canary Islands. The tiny Persian Gulf nation of Bahrain said it had 17 cases, including a school bus driver who had transported students as recently as Sunday.

In Iran, the head of the country’s virus task force, who just a day earlier had urged the public not to overreact about the spread of the disease, tested positive himself. The official, Iraj Harirchi, posted a new video online, promising authorities would bring the virus under control within weeks.

But a ministry spokesman, Kianoush Jahanpour, said it could take at least until the Persian New Year’s holiday on March 20, or as long as late April, to contain the disease. “We don’t expect a miracle in the short term,” he said.

— Officials in South Korea said they were racing to contain an outbreak that has grown to nearly 1,000 cases.

“It’s a matter of speed and time: We must create a clear turning point within this week,” President Moon Jae-in said. In the largest cluster, in the city of Daegu and nearby towns, many shops remained closed Tuesday and activity in some neighborhoods came to a near standstill.

On a U.S. military base in Daegu, the center of infections in South Korea, officials said a 61-year-old widow of a U.S. service member had also been infected. It was the first known case among people related to the thousands of U.S. troops stationed in the country.

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— The virus' toll continued to mount, even as Chinese officials reported a slowing in the number of new cases. As of Tuesday, the spread of the illness had sickened some 80,000 people worldwide and caused about 2,700 deaths.

The vast majority of those infections remain in China, where 518 new cases were reported Tuesday and another 71 deaths, 68 of them in the central city of Wuhan, where the epidemic was first detected in December. The updates bring mainland China's totals to 77,780 cases and 2,666 deaths, according to the World Health Organization.

WHO said the fatality rate was between 2% and 4% in Wuhan and 0.7% elsewhere in China.

Dr. Bruce Aylward, the WHO envoy who led a team just back from China, told reporters Tuesday the reason for the large discrepancy was partly because the disease hit Wuhan early and fast, when "people didn't know what we were dealing with, were learning how to treat this."

At the beginning of the outbreak, "people were finding severe disease, that's why the alarm bell went off," Aylward said. But now with more aggressive testing, mild cases are being diagnosed and isolated.

— In Italy's north, where more than 200 people were sickened, a dozen towns were sealed off and police wearing face masks patrolled. Italian Health Minister Roberto Speranza huddled in Rome with counterparts from bordering countries — France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia — as well as with those from Germany and Croatia, two countries whose citizens are among frequent visitors to Italy. Among the shared points of view emerging from the meeting, Speranza told reporters, was this one: "Closing borders is inappropriate" as a response. Italian officials reported 322 cases of the virus, including 11 deaths.

Croatia and Austria reported their first cases of the virus. And an Italian doctor staying at a hotel in the Canary Islands tested positive for the virus, prompting the quarantine of hundreds of guests.

Croatia, Hungary and Ireland advised against traveling to Italy's affected area, one of a number of government moves seeking to limit further exposure.

— The virus' spread fueled apprehension in world financial markets. In the U.S., stock indexes piled on a second consecutive day of losses, falling more than 3 percent. Investor fears that the outbreak will slow the world economy drove increased demand for low-risk U.S. government bonds.

"It's the combination of South Korea, Japan, Italy and even Iran" reporting virus cases, said Yung-Yu Ma, chief investment strategist at BMO Wealth Management. "That really woke up the market, that these four places in different places around the globe can go from low concern to high concern in a matter of days and that we could potentially wake up a week from now and it could be five to 10 additional places."

European markets also fell. The Euro Stoxx index lost 2.1%. Markets in Asia were mixed.

— Uncertainly remained over how best to stem the spread of the illness. Italy had taken Europe's most stringent preventative measures against COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, and yet became home to the biggest outbreak outside Asia. Experts in Japan, with one of the world's most sophisticated health systems, acknowledged the country's handling of the virus-stricken Diamond Princess cruise ship was flawed and could have allowed the problem to magnify.

Japanese officials said they would urge a change to the country's deeply ingrained work culture in a bid to stem the illness. The government urged employers to allow workers to telecommute and have more flexible hours, simple moves Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed hope could help control the spread.

Kim reported from Seoul, South Korea. Associated Press writers Matt Sedensky in Bangkok, Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo, Lauran Neergaard in Washington, Mike Stobbe and Stan Choe in New York, and Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

Coronavirus poses tough challenge for economic policymakers

By PAUL WISEMAN and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The fast-moving coronavirus isn't just confounding health officials. It's also bedeviling policymakers and central bankers who are struggling to assess the economic damage from an outbreak that's reached 37 countries and territories, infected 80,000 people and killed 2,700 worldwide.

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They don't know where or how fast the virus will spread. They can't draw on clear precedents to consider what to do. And the tools they normally use to fight economic slumps — interest-rate cuts, government spending hikes and tax relief — either might not work very well, lack broad support or carry their own risks.

If they overreact, policymakers can cause self-defeating panic. Yet if they respond too slowly or timidly, they risk having the economic damage deepen and spread.

Stock markets tumbled and bond yields sank Tuesday for a second day on rising fears that COVID-19 and the quarantines being imposed to fight it are obstructing global supply chains and could derail corporate earnings and the global economy. The Dow Jones industrial plunged 878 points — 3% — after plummeting more than 1,000 points Monday, the sharpest drop in two years.

"This outbreak will have a significant effect on worldwide demand for tourism, travel, and other services, while the supply chain disruptions and increased uncertainty will hurt current production as well as investment," said Eswar Prasad, a Cornell University economist. "The timing of the outbreak is especially unfortunate ... Europe and Japan are flirting with recession while China and India had been losing growth momentum."

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, suggested that the European Central Bank has little ability to counteract a recession. It has cut its benchmark rate into negative territory, to -0.5%, and is already buying government bonds to try to further lower longer-term rates.

"What is the policy response in Europe?" Zandi asked. "There is none."

With so many other economies overseas struggling, the U.S. would likely suffer a hit just from the overseas slowdown, he said.

Catherine Mann, chief economist at Citi, said the financial services giant has cut its forecast for global economic growth this year to 2.5%, the weakest pace since the Great Recession more than a decade ago.

When the virus began grabbing headlines last month, most economists were relatively sanguine about the economic damage it could cause. They predicted a repeat of what happened when the SARS outbreak hit China and its neighbors in 2003: A short-lived blow to economic output, followed by a relatively quick rebound.

But the virus has proved virulent and fast-moving. No one expected the virus to slam countries as far-flung as Italy and South Korea. And the quarantines and lock-downs that governments have imposed to try to stop the outbreak have brought business to a standstill in hard-hit places such as Chinese industrial hub of Wuhan, a city of 11 million where COVID-19 originated.

What happens in China carries far greater economic weight than it did 17 years ago. Back then, China accounted for just 4% of the global economy. Now, it's 16%. And its factories and warehouses are deeply integrated with the rest of the world, supplying toys, shoes, cellphones to importers around the world.

"This is unprecedented," said Sung Won Sohn, an economist at Loyola Marymount University in California. "That's one of the reasons we cannot really say this will be another SARS."

Policymakers have decades of experience fighting traditional downturns. Typically, consumers and businesses lose confidence. They become reluctant to spend and invest, potentially creating a self-fulfilling downward spiral.

In response, governments can inject money into public works projects or approve sharp tax cuts. The Federal Reserve and other central banks can slash interest rates. Given enough of a financial incentive to borrow and spend, consumers eventually will open their wallets. And companies will hire, buy equipment and open new factories, offices and shops.

So revving up demand is something policymakers are used to. But this time, they don't have a go-to remedy for the kind of supply shock that the coronavirus is causing -- the lockdown of factories in China and elsewhere that is cutting off the flow of raw materials and finished products to customers around the globe.

"Fed policy can't fix that," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at the tax advisory firm RSM.

The virus and the health measures that are meant to combat it are depressing consumer demand. Families quarantined in Wuhan and elsewhere tend to "stay at home and cut back on discretionary spending

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for eating, recreation and travel," said economist Paul Sheard, senior fellow at Harvard Kennedy School. Earlier this week, Beijing pledged to enact tax cuts and other aid to help companies recover from the crisis. Chinese officials expressed confidence that economic growth can meet the Communist Party's targets despite anti-virus policies that have shut down much of the world's No. 2 economy.

Elsewhere, policymakers face difficult decisions.

"A big looming shock calls for an early and aggressive policy response, but such a response could turn out to be unnecessary and look panicky," Sheard said. On the other hand, if COVID-19 continues to inflict damage, "policymakers who take an inordinate wait-and-see approach will look to have been heavy-footed and complacent in retrospect."

So far, the Fed has chosen to monitor the health crisis and its economic fallout and hold off on any decision to cut rates below their already low levels. Its cautious approach is beginning to draw criticism from some.

"They need to be proactive," said Loyola Marymount's Sohn.

Fed officials have made clear that they are monitoring the virus but do not have a clear handle on its current or potential impact.

"I'm really a data wonk — I'll look at anything that moves," Richard Clarida, vice chair of the Federal Reserve, said Tuesday at an economics conference. But he said it's "still too soon to even speculate about either the size or the persistence" of the coronavirus' effects.

Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said this week that the Fed will keep in close touch with its business contacts to see how the disease affects their sales and outlooks. That may be where policymakers will see the first signs of an impact.

The Fed reduced rates three times last year, leaving its benchmark rate in a low range of 1.5% to 1.75%. There's little more room to cut. Likewise, the government has already enacted tax cuts and spending increases that have put the nation on track to record its first \$1 trillion budget deficit in eight years.

"There really isn't much we can do in terms of fiscal policy," Sohn said. "Our deficits are so high, and it takes time for Congress to act. I'm not expecting much from the administration."

Larry Kudlow, President Donald Trump's top economic adviser, however, promised Tuesday that "we will be ready with a number of measures, emergency measures, common sense measures" if the virus' "contagion rate picks up."

AP Writer Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Paul Wiseman on Twitter at @PaulWisemanAP and Christopher Rugaber at <http://Twitter.com/ChrisRugaber>

'Time is everything': World braces for spread of new virus

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

China's massive travel restrictions, house-to-house checks, huge isolation wards and lockdowns of entire cities bought the world valuable time to prepare for the global spread of the new virus.

But with troubling outbreaks now emerging in Italy, South Korea and Iran, and U.S. health officials warning Tuesday it's inevitable it will spread more widely in America, the question is: Did the world use that time wisely and is it ready for a potential pandemic?

"It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen — and how many people in this country will have severe illness," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some countries are putting price caps on face masks to combat price gouging, while others are using loudspeakers on trucks to keep residents informed. In the United States and many other nations, public health officials are turning to guidelines written for pandemic flu and discussing the possibility of school closures, telecommuting and canceling events.

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Countries could be doing even more: training hundreds of workers to trace the virus' spread from person to person and planning to commandeer entire hospital wards or even entire hospitals, said Dr. Bruce Aylward, the World Health Organization's envoy to China, briefing reporters Tuesday about lessons learned by the recently returned team of international scientists he led.

"Time is everything in this disease," Aylward said. "Days make a difference with a disease like this."

The U.S. National Institutes of Health's infectious disease chief, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said the world is "teetering very, very close" to a pandemic. He credits China's response for giving other nations some breathing room.

China locked down tens of millions of its citizens and other nations imposed travel restrictions, reducing the number of people who needed health checks or quarantines outside the Asian country.

It "gave us time to really brush off our pandemic preparedness plans and get ready for the kinds of things we have to do," Fauci said. "And we've actually been quite successful because the travel-related cases, we've been able to identify, to isolate" and to track down those they came in contact with.

With no vaccine or medicine available yet, preparations are focused on what's called "social distancing" — limiting opportunities for people to gather and spread the virus.

That played out in Italy this week. With cases climbing, authorities cut short the popular Venice Carnival and closed down Milan's La Scala opera house. In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called on companies to allow employees to work from home, while the Tokyo Marathon has been restricted to elite runners and other public events have been canceled.

Is the rest of the world ready?

In Africa, three-quarters of countries have a flu pandemic plan, but most are outdated, according to authors of a modeling study published last week in *The Lancet* medical journal. The slightly better news is that the African nations most connected to China by air travel — Egypt, Algeria and South Africa — also have the most prepared health systems on the continent.

Elsewhere, Thailand said it would establish special clinics to examine people with flu-like symptoms to detect infections early. Sri Lanka and Laos imposed price ceilings for face masks, while India restricted the export of personal protective equipment.

India's health ministry has been framing step-by-step instructions to deal with sustained transmissions that will be circulated to the 250,000 village councils that are the most basic unit of the country's sprawling administration.

Vietnam is using music videos on social media to reach the public. In Malaysia, loudspeakers on trucks blare information through the streets.

In Europe, portable pods set up at United Kingdom hospitals will be used to assess people suspected of infection while keeping them apart from others. France developed a quick test for the virus and has shared it with poorer nations. German authorities are stressing "sneezing etiquette" and Russia is screening people at airports, railway stations and those riding public transportation.

In the U.S., hospitals and emergency workers for years have practiced for a possible deadly, fast-spreading flu. Those drills helped the first hospitals to treat U.S. patients suffering from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

Other hospitals are paying attention. The CDC has been talking to the American Hospital Association, which in turn communicates coronavirus news daily to its nearly 5,000 member hospitals. Hospitals are reviewing infection control measures, considering using telemedicine to keep potentially infectious patients from making unnecessary trips to the hospital and conserving dwindling supplies of masks and gloves.

What's more, the CDC has held 17 different calls reaching more than 11,000 companies and organizations, including stadiums, universities, faith leaders, retailers and large corporations. U.S. health authorities are talking to city, county and state health departments about being ready to cancel mass gathering events, close schools and take other steps.

The CDC's Messonnier said Tuesday she had contacted her children's school district to ask about plans for using internet-based education should schools need to close temporarily, as some did in 2009 during

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an outbreak of H1N1 flu. She encouraged American parents to do the same, and to ask their employers whether they'll be able to work from home.

"We want to make sure the American public is prepared," Messonnier said.

How prepared are U.S. hospitals?

"It depends on caseload and location. I would suspect most hospitals are prepared to handle one to two cases, but if there is ongoing local transmission with many cases, most are likely not prepared just yet for a surge of patients and the 'worried well,'" Dr. Jennifer Lighter, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at NYU Langone in New York, said in an email.

In the U.S., a vaccine candidate is inching closer to first-step safety studies in people, as Moderna Inc. has delivered test doses to Fauci's NIH institute. Some other companies say they have candidates that could begin testing in a few months. Still, even if those first safety studies show no red flags, specialists believe it would take at least a year to have something ready for widespread use. That's longer than it took in 2009, during the H1N1 flu pandemic — because that time around, scientists only had to adjust regular flu vaccines, not start from scratch.

The head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said the U.N. health agency's team in China found the fatality rate between 2% and 4% in the hard-hit city of Wuhan, the virus' epicenter, and 0.7% elsewhere.

The world is "simply not ready," said the WHO's Aylward. "It can get ready very fast, but the big shift has to be in the mindset."

Aylward advised other countries to do "really practical things" now to get ready.

Among them: Do you have hundreds of workers lined up and trained to trace the contacts of infected patients, or will you be training them after a cluster pops up?

Can you take over entire hospital wards, or even entire hospitals, to isolate patients?

Are hospitals buying ventilators and checking oxygen supplies?

Countries must improve testing capacity — and instructions so health workers know which travelers should be tested as the number of affected countries rises, said Johns Hopkins University emergency response specialist Lauren Sauer. She pointed to how Canada diagnosed the first traveler from Iran arriving there with COVID-19, before many other countries even considered adding Iran to the at-risk list.

If the disease does spread globally, everyone is likely to feel it, said Nancy Foster, a vice president of the American Hospital Association. Even those who aren't ill may need to help friends and family in isolation or have their own health appointments delayed.

"There will be a lot of people affected even if they never become ill themselves," she said.

Associated Press writers Lauran Neergaard in Washington; Mike Stobbe in New York; Victoria Milko in Jakarta, Indonesia; Aniruddha Ghosal in New Delhi; Bharatha Mallawarachi in Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Julhas Alam in Dhaka, Bangladesh, contributed to this report.

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Bloomberg's influence stretches far and wide

By RYAN J. FOLEY and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

When Mike Bloomberg held a rally this month at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, the signs of his wealth and influence were everywhere.

Former Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, long a paid adviser to one of Bloomberg's charitable programs and now to his campaign, warmed up the crowd with chants of "Mike will get it done!" That followed a performance of the Nick Jonas song "Jealous" by an a capella group from the University of Pennsylvania, where Bloomberg has funded public health research.

"Bloomberg interns" have worked at the National Constitution Center and other Philadelphia cultural sites

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thanks to his largesse, and Bloomberg gave the center's former CEO a \$50,000 donation for his successful 2016 run for state treasurer.

Across the city, soda sales had dropped after a 2017 tax increase that Bloomberg spent millions to pass, study and defend with the support of Mayor Jim Kenney, whose reelection he backed last year with \$1 million in outside spending. And the Bloomberg-endorsed state attorney general was leading a data-driven campaign against gun crime in the city.

Bloomberg told the crowd that his spending had transformed American life: It helped shut down 300 coal-fired power plants, strengthen gun laws in 20 states and flip the U.S. House to a Democratic majority. The self-made business news and information tycoon boasted that he would be the only New York billionaire in a race against President Donald Trump, who has been accused of exaggerating his riches and running a fake charity.

Bloomberg's presidential campaign has been powered by his estimated \$60 billion fortune and by years of political and charitable giving that have given him a foundation of goodwill across the U.S. Bloomberg has long said he wants to give away nearly all of his fortune before he dies, and wants to use the money to tackle big problems that government has failed to solve.

His spending has dramatically increased since he completed his third term as New York mayor in 2013, making him one of the nation's most important philanthropists and political donors and giving him achievements to tout in his self-funded advertising blitz.

But perhaps just as important, it has created a sprawling network of powerful people and groups who have used his money to win elections, fund advocacy campaigns, pay for signature municipal and education programs and conduct important research, an Associated Press review has found.

Many of those beneficiaries and their associates are backing Bloomberg's late-launched campaign, giving the former Republican a base of Democratic Party institutional and grassroots support that he might lack if he wasn't one of the world's richest men.

They include members of Congress who were elected and reelected with his help, mayors who attended his prestigious training program at Harvard University, and gun control and environmental activists who admire his commitments to their causes. Even celebrity endorsers, from actor Ted Danson to singer John Cougar Mellencamp, have ties to his philanthropy, the AP found.

CLOUT ALL OVER

"He had the wealth to give away money for years to build friends, to build political allies, to build relationships, in ways that the average American doesn't have, can't do. That's a huge advantage," said Paul S. Ryan, a vice president at Common Cause, a government watchdog group.

The AP found signs of Bloomberg's clout all over.

A congresswoman from the Virgin Islands said she endorsed Bloomberg after his foundation helped residents there recover from devastating tropical storms in 2017. A former candidate for governor in Iowa whose campaign received \$250,000 from Bloomberg in 2018 caucused for him this month even though Bloomberg wasn't competing in the first-in-the-nation contest. The former mayor of Rhode Island's largest city says he'll endorse Bloomberg if asked, pointing to a \$5 million prize Bloomberg gave his city in 2013 and the millions of people Bloomberg's giving has helped.

His rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination have accused Bloomberg of trying to buy the election by spending \$400 million of his own money to blanket voters with ads ahead of Super Tuesday on March 3, when voters in 14 states cast their ballots.

But that is a fraction of the spending of prior years that laid the ground work for Bloomberg's campaign and has given him validators to defend his record against allegations of racism and sexism. It's helped him rise to the field's top tier while skipping the first four states and participating in a single debate in which he struggled through blistering attacks from his rivals.

"I have no doubt he is about to drop another \$100 million ... in order to erase America's memory of what happened on that debate stage," Sen. Elizabeth Warren said after Wednesday's debate in Las Vegas.

Even some who support Bloomberg's philanthropic efforts say his vast spending is unhealthy for de-

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mocracy.

"It's about the principle of someone with great wealth distorting certain debates or certain social movements or influencing the direction of actual political elections," said Megan Tompkins-Stange, a University of Michigan professor who studies how elite philanthropic foundations influence public policy. She said that "no one person should have that much influence in the public sphere."

His supporters, though, tout the deep and positive impact of his work. Danson said in a Facebook message last week that Bloomberg has "the strongest track record on climate change and will do the most to fight it." Bloomberg's foundation between 2014 and 2018 gave more than \$32 million to the group Oceana, which focuses on protecting the world's oceans. Danson and another Bloomberg endorser, the actor Sam Waterston, sit on Oceana's board.

The AP review documented \$1.65 billion in grants that Bloomberg's New York-based Bloomberg Family Foundation doled out to hundreds of cities, universities, cultural groups and global institutions from 2014 through 2018, the last year in which they have been itemized in tax filings.

From Boston to Baltimore and Anchorage to Arlington, the money has helped fight climate change, championed a range of public health initiatives, promoted new programs in cities and schools and helped scores of arts and cultural institutions stay open.

The foundation's annual grant spending tripled between 2014 and 2018, when it reached \$445 million.

That sum is only a portion of the total given by Bloomberg Philanthropies, which encompasses all of the former mayor's giving: through his foundation, his company and personally. Bloomberg Philanthropies has said that from 2014 through 2018, it distributed more than \$2.9 billion. More than \$1 billion of that remains unknown to the public because only gifts that go through his foundation are required to be disclosed.

Then there's the record \$3.3 billion that Bloomberg Philanthropies says it distributed in 2019. His campaign says most of the increase can be attributed to a \$1.8 billion gift to his alma mater, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, for financial aid and new investments to fight climate change and youth tobacco use. But those gifts aren't legally required to be even partially disclosed until after the election.

During Wednesday's debate, when asked why he hasn't released his tax returns, Bloomberg noted that the biggest item on them "is all the money I give away. And we list that, every single donation I make, and you can get that from our foundation anytime you want."

His campaign told AP after the debate that his tax returns would soon be released and they would provide "more clarity" about his billions in previously undisclosed donations.

Using publicly available information, the AP identified dozens of current and former mayors who have publicly endorsed Bloomberg's campaign after benefiting in one of several ways from his charitable giving. At least 20 attended the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, a one-year training program for municipal leaders that his foundation sponsors.

Several others have led cities that have received programming grants from Bloomberg Philanthropies or, in at least two cases, been paid to work as an adviser or board member.

Nutter has been a high-profile surrogate for Bloomberg's campaign as its national political chair, defending him against allegations of racism that stem from the stop-and-frisk policy in New York that disproportionately targeted young black men.

Nutter's consulting firm was paid \$45,000 in January by the campaign and is owed \$4,000 more, according to a campaign disclosure. Nutter had previously been a paid adviser for What Works Cities, a Bloomberg Philanthropies initiative that promotes municipal innovation.

Dozens of Bloomberg's employees have moved from the philanthropies to the campaign, which said its endorsements were totally separate from grant funding.

Bloomberg's campaign said only a small percentage of mayors whose cities he has helped are supporting him. Kenney, for instance, has campaigned for Warren.

"But if an elected official has seen up close how hard Mike works to find solutions to America's toughest problems and thinks that's exactly what we need in the White House, we think that's a pretty good reason to support someone," spokeswoman Rachel Nagler said.

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The AP's review tracked more than \$150 million that Bloomberg gave to dozens of candidates for state and federal office and political groups since 2014. That money helped Democrats take control of the U.S. House in 2018, pass laws and referendums requiring universal background checks on gun sales in key states and advocate for higher soda and tobacco taxes in some cities and states.

His spending soared in the 2018 midterm elections to a high of \$110 million — an investment that he credits with helping install Nancy Pelosi as House speaker and leading to Trump's impeachment.

Bloomberg's super PAC in 2018 spent millions running ads praising Democratic candidates and attacking their Republican opponents, helping win 21 of 24 races that it got involved in. At least 16 Democratic members of Congress have endorsed Bloomberg for president, including four whose candidacies were direct beneficiaries of his PAC spending.

Several others indirectly benefited from Bloomberg's generosity because their campaigns were supported by one or more of the key Democratic Party-aligned groups to which he gave tens of millions of dollars. Those groups include Emily's List, Planned Parenthood, the League of Conservation Voters and Vote Vets.

LIKE A MACHINE

Bloomberg's spending has continued in the early weeks of his presidential campaign. He gave \$10 million to a group supporting the House Democrats, \$5 million to a voting rights group led by Stacey Abrams, who nearly won the Georgia governor's race in 2018, and smaller donations to several state Democratic Party groups.

"He's like a new machine. Rather than based in the party, it's based on his immense and vast wealth," said Douglas Muzzio, a professor who studies voting behavior and politics at Baruch College in New York City.

He said Bloomberg has long targeted his philanthropic and political giving so that it hits "sources of influence" who are ideologically compatible with his centrist, data-driven approach and key policy initiatives.

That playbook, Muzzio said, dates back to Bloomberg's 12 years as New York mayor, when his donations to community groups helped blunt the impact of city budget cuts, boosted his support and neutralized potential opposition.

"The reality is that I constantly heard from friends, and normal Democrats, 'Oh, sorry, Mark, what can I do? He gave my organization \$100,000,'" said Mark Green, a Democrat whom Bloomberg defeated in the 2001 mayoral election.

In 2008, as Bloomberg was pushing to extend New York's term limits so he could run for a third term, he was able to gather support from nonprofit groups, such as the Doe Fund, a group that helps the homeless, that had benefited from his personal fortune. The measure passed the city council, and Bloomberg went on to win for a third time.

Campaign spokeswoman Nagler denied that Bloomberg used his money when he was mayor to gather support or quiet opposition, "and we are not doing it now."

Bloomberg has not only increased his giving dramatically since then, he has invested heavily in nationwide grassroots groups that can pressure lawmakers and run advocacy campaigns.

Among the most potent is Everytown for Gun Safety, whose scores of activists have pushed to tighten gun laws and elect supportive state and federal lawmakers across the nation.

The group was formed in 2013 as a merger between a group founded by Bloomberg, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, and Moms Demand Action, which was inspired by the 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

Bloomberg has given tens of millions of dollars to the group, which is independent but led by one of his former mayoral aides. His presidential campaign spent \$3.2 million last year to rent Everytown's email list, and many moms, in their signature red T-shirts, are frequently spotted at his campaign events.

Another Bloomberg investment that has paid dividends for his cause and his campaign is his more than \$100 million in contributions to the Sierra Club for its Beyond Coal and Beyond Carbon programs, which it says have closed more than 300 coal plants across the country.

He cites that achievement in campaign ads that do not mention the Sierra Club, which has 3.8 million grassroots supporters and is among the most important environmental groups active in politics.

The group's executive director, Michael Brune, told the AP the money has had a huge impact on its work,

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allowing it to expand and meet its goals more quickly. Bloomberg's campaign asked for an endorsement from the Sierra Club, but Brune said they didn't feel pressured. The group, he said, is not likely to make an endorsement in the Democratic primary, in keeping with its longstanding practice.

The campaign against coal did help Bloomberg snag the endorsement of Mellencamp, who is featured in an ad targeting rural voters that has been viewed 6 million times on YouTube in recent weeks. Mellencamp recorded a song for the 2017 coal-focused documentary "From the Ashes," which was funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

DEFENDING BLOOMBERG

Bloomberg's influence was on display at an event in Providence, Rhode Island, this month, when Gov. Gina Raimondo became the first governor to endorse Bloomberg's candidacy.

The room was packed with several of the state's influential Democrats, people wearing red Moms Demand Action shirts, as well as a handful of protesters angry about Bloomberg's record, including stop and frisk.

Raimondo and the state Democratic Party have received thousands of dollars from Bloomberg and his daughter, and groups he gave millions to in 2014 spent more than \$1 million to help her win the governor's seat.

After Raimondo introduced him, Bloomberg noted that Johns Hopkins was supporting her administration's public health work, mentioned his investment in a push to register more voters, and noted that his spending helped Democrats win the House in 2018 "so that Nancy Pelosi took over and then she started the impeachment process."

Within days, Raimondo found herself defending Bloomberg against old allegations of sexist remarks at his company, saying he has changed his behavior and has a record of giving to causes that help women.

Melissa Jenkins, a Moms Demand Action volunteer who attended the Providence event, said she was considering voting for him, in part due to his giving to causes she cares about.

"He's a self-made billionaire, and he's used his privilege to help underprivileged people and to help causes that he believes in," Jenkins said after the event.

Other politicians grateful for prior financial support and hopeful for future funding have joined Bloomberg at events.

He launched his campaign in Virginia, where his spending helped Democrats defeat two Republican incumbents in House races in 2018 and last year win majorities in both houses of the General Assembly. Key to the latter effort was more than \$2.5 million spent by Everytown and the Beyond Carbon Action Fund supporting Democrats in key races.

"Mayor Bloomberg has been a steady force here in the commonwealth and he has never, ever, said no to us," said former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

Bloomberg was a featured speaker at the Virginia Democrats' annual fundraising dinner earlier this month, and gave the state party \$50,000 the day before he spoke.

After being sworn in last month, Virginia lawmakers moved swiftly to advance stricter gun laws backed by Everytown, including universal background checks on gun purchases and temporary court-ordered seizures of guns from owners exhibiting troubling behaviors.

Republicans accused Democrats of being beholden to Bloomberg, and the NRA put his face on a billboard next to the interstate warning that he wanted to confiscate guns. Bloomberg is hoping to win the state's primary next week.

In Pennsylvania, which has its primary in April, Bloomberg has wielded his influence for years for politicians of both parties in a state that Trump narrowly carried in his upset 2016 election victory.

Bloomberg's super PAC, Independence USA, spent \$6 million supporting Republican U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey's narrow 2016 reelection win over Democrat Katie McGinty. The money funded ads praising Toomey as a man of integrity who tried to strengthen gun laws after the school shooting in Newtown.

For any other Democrat, helping a Republican opponent win a crucial race might be a deal-breaker. But before and after his support for Toomey, Bloomberg has showered state Democrats' campaigns, party organizations and causes they support with donations that appear to have mended fences.

Bloomberg's foundation last year announced a \$10 million grant to help Pennsylvania battle the opioid

crisis. That donation was hailed as a potential "turning point in our efforts" by Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, who has received \$350,000 in campaign donations from Bloomberg since 2014.

Everytown recently announced that it would spend heavily this year if necessary to support the reelection of Democratic Attorney General Josh Shapiro, who has used his office to battle gun violence in Philadelphia and beyond in ways that activists praise as innovative. Shapiro's 2016 campaign received \$250,000 from Bloomberg.

Also on this November's ballot: state Treasurer Joe Torsella, the former CEO of the National Constitution Center, who received the \$50,000 donation from Bloomberg in 2016.

"He has definitely put a lot of chips on this table — all over the place," said former Pennsylvania Democratic Party chairman Jim Burn. "Let's see if he can cash in."

Foley reported from Iowa City, Iowa, and Smith from Providence, Rhode Island. Associated Press reporter Alan Suderman contributed from Richmond, Virginia, and Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner contributed from New York.

Trump defends Modi, refuses to weigh in on citizenship law

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Defending the host who has showered him with pageantry, President Donald Trump refused Tuesday to speak out publicly against an Indian citizenship law pushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that has sparked deadly protests over discrimination against Muslims during the president's visit.

With at least 10 people killed in violent protests during his two-day visit, Trump told reporters that he didn't want to discuss the amendment that provides fast-track naturalization for some foreign-born religious minorities but not Muslims. The law is raising fears the country is inching nearer to a religious citizenship test.

"I want to leave that to India and hopefully they will make the right decision," Trump said. A senior administration official had told reporters before the trip that the U.S. was concerned about the developments.

The tip-toeing came as Trump was winding up a 36-hour visit to the subcontinent in which he was showered with praise at a mega rally in Ahmedabad, toured the majestic Taj Mahal, and held talks with Modi. Cities were plastered with billboards heralding Trump's arrival, his travel routes were lined with enthusiastic crowds, and colorfully costumed dancers and musicians entertained him at every turn.

As Trump as being feted, at least 10 people were killed and 150 injured in two days of clashes between supporters and opponents of the new citizenship amendment. On Tuesday, an angry group of Hindus carrying pickaxes and iron rods hurled rocks at Muslims. Protesters in several areas of northeast Delhi threw stones and set shops and vehicles on fire.

And black smoke rose into the sky after Hindu protesters set fruit and vegetable shops and a Muslim shrine on fire in northeast New Delhi, witnesses said. Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds.

Asked about the protests during a press conference before his departure, Trump said he had raised the issue of religious freedom with Modi and that the prime minister was "incredible" on the subject.

"He wants people to have religious freedom," said Trump, who shares much in common with Modi in both substance and style. The president himself proposed temporarily barring all Muslims from entering the U.S. during his 2016 campaign and successfully implemented a travel ban that targets travelers from certain majority-Muslim countries. Trump spoke at length during Monday's rally about the threat posed by "radical Islamic terrorism" and his administration's efforts to defeat it.

While Monday's events were mostly for show, Trump turned to substance Tuesday, spending much of the day meeting with Modi in New Delhi. Trump emerged from the talks saying he was optimistic about prospects for ultimately completing a trade deal, though he offered no details about what — if anything — has been agreed to.

"Our teams have made tremendous progress on a comprehensive trade agreement and I'm optimistic we can reach a deal that will be of great importance to both countries," Trump told reporters. He said

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that if a deal happens, it will likely be "towards the end of the year."

The two countries have been engaged in a trade standoff since Trump imposed tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium exports. India responded with higher penalties on U.S. agricultural goods and restrictions on medical devices, prompting the U.S. to strip India of its decades-old trade preferences.

The day began with an elaborate welcome ceremony in front of the grand Rashtrapati Bhavan Presidential Palace in New Delhi. Cannons fired as the president's armored car rolled through the palace gates accompanied by red-uniformed guards on horseback. The ceremony included hundreds of military officials marching with instruments and swords.

Later, Trump and the first lady participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at Raj Ghat, a memorial to Mohandas Gandhi in New Delhi at the site where the famed Indian independence leader was cremated after his assassination in January 1948.

"The last two days were amazing in every sense of the word," Trump said, describing the trip as "unforgettable," "extraordinary" and an expression of "love."

Yet Trump's domestic squabbles were never far from mind, as he lashed out against his Democratic rivals, warning of economic calamity if he loses his reelection race in November, and slammed a pair of of liberal-leaning Supreme Court justices, saying they should recuse themselves from cases involving him and his administration.

At a meeting with Indian business leaders, Trump abandoned the tradition of avoiding domestic politics while traveling abroad and claimed that, "if the wrong person gets elected, everything will come to a halt" and unemployment will soar.

Trump had joked as he took the stage for his press conference that he would be "very, very conservative" in his answers to avoid diverting attention from his "fantastic two days" in India.

Instead, he quickly criticized Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor, the latter for a blistering dissent that was critical of the Trump administration's rush to claim emergencies when asking the Supreme Court to review cases.

The Republican president also said he had not been briefed on intelligence suggesting Russia is meddling in the 2020 election, either to bolster himself or Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders.

"I want no help from any country and I haven't been given help from any country," Trump said, despite Russia's well-documented meddling in the 2016 election to help him win.

Trump ended his visit with a state banquet at the opulent presidential palace in New Delhi that featured a menu with American-friendly twists on traditional Indian dishes before boarding his flight back to the U.S.

Associated Press writers Deb Riechmann and Darlene Superville in Washington and Sheikh Saaliq in New Delhi contributed to this report.

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IOC member casts doubt on postponing or moving Tokyo Games

By **STEPHEN WADE** AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — A senior member of the International Olympic Committee said Tuesday that if it proves too dangerous to hold the Olympics in Tokyo this summer because of the coronavirus outbreak, organizers are more likely to cancel it altogether than to postpone or move it.

Dick Pound, a former Canadian swimming champion who has been on the IOC since 1978, making him its longest-serving member, estimated there is a three-month window — perhaps a two-month one — to decide the fate of the Tokyo Olympics, meaning a decision could be put off until late May.

"In and around that time, I'd say folks are going to have to ask: 'Is this under sufficient control that we can be confident about going to Tokyo or not?'" he said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press.

As the games draw near, he said, "a lot of things have to start happening. You've got to start ramping up your security, your food, the Olympic Village, the hotels. The media folks will be in there building their

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studios.”

If the IOC decides the games cannot go forward as scheduled in Tokyo, “you’re probably looking at a cancellation,” he said.

The viral outbreak that began in China two months ago has infected more than 80,000 people globally and killed over 2,700, the vast majority of them in China. But the virus has gained a foothold in South Korea, the Middle East and Europe, raising fears of a pandemic. Japan itself has reported four deaths.

Pound encouraged athletes to keep training. About 11,000 are expected for the Olympics, which open July 24, and 4,400 are bound for the Paralympics, which open Aug. 25.

“As far as we all know, you’re going to be in Tokyo,” Pound said. “All indications are at this stage that it will be business as usual. So keep focused on your sport and be sure that the IOC is not going to send you into a pandemic situation.”

The modern Olympics, which date to 1896, have been canceled only during wartime. The Olympics in 1940 were supposed to be in Tokyo but were called off because of Japan’s war with China and World War II. The Rio Games in Brazil went on as scheduled in 2016 despite the outbreak of the Zika virus.

Pound repeated the IOC’s stance — that it is relying on consultations with the World Health Organization, a United Nations body, to make any move.

As for the possibility of postponement, he said: “You just don’t postpone something on the size and scale of the Olympics. There’s so many moving parts, so many countries and different seasons, and competitive seasons, and television seasons. You can’t just say, ‘We’ll do it in October.’”

Pound said moving to another city also seems unlikely “because there are few places in the world that could think of gearing up facilities in that short time to put something on.”

London mayoral candidate Shaun Bailey has suggested the British capital as an alternative. Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike suggested the offer was an attempt to use the virus for political purposes.

Pound said he would not favor a scattering of Olympic events to other places around the world because that wouldn’t “constitute an Olympic Games. You’d end up with a series of world championships.” He also said it would be extremely difficult to spread around the various sports over a 17-day period with only a few months’ notice.

Holding the Olympics in Tokyo but postponing them by a few months would be unlikely to satisfy North American broadcasters, whose schedules are full in the fall with American pro football, college football, European soccer, basketball, baseball and ice hockey. Other world broadcasters also have jammed schedules.

“It would be tough to get the kind of blanket coverage that people expect around the Olympic Games,” Pound said.

He also cast doubt on the possibility of a one-year delay. Japan is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the Olympics, although a national audit board says the country is spending twice that much.

“You have to ask if you can hold the bubble together for an extra year,” Pound said. “Then, of course, you have to fit all of this into the entire international sports schedule.”

Pound said the IOC has been building up an emergency fund, reported to be about \$1 billion, for unforeseen circumstances to help the IOC and the international sports federations that depend on income from the IOC. About 73% of the IOC’s \$5.7 billion income in a four-year Olympic cycle comes from broadcast rights.

“It’s not an insurable risk, and it’s not one that can be attributed to one or the other of the parties,” he said. “So everybody takes their lumps. There would be a lack of revenue on the Olympic movement side.”

Pound said the future of the Tokyo Games is largely out of the IOC’s hands and depends on the course the virus takes.

“If it gets to be something like the Spanish flu,” Pound said, referring to the deadly pandemic early in the 20th century that killed millions, “at that level of lethality, then everybody’s got to take their medicine.”

JPMorgan to stop lending to coal companies, arctic drillers

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — JPMorgan Chase & Co. will no longer do business with coal companies and will restrict financing to companies that drill in the Arctic, the company announced Tuesday.

The announcement came in tandem with the bank announcing it would extend \$200 billion in financing to clean and renewable energy companies by 2025. The bank is currently holding its annual investor day in San Francisco, where the announcement was made.

JPMorgan still provides some loans to coal companies, but plans to phase those out by 2024. Further the bank will only lend to power companies to build coal power plants when the design includes carbon capture technology.

JPMorgan's Arctic drilling financing ban focuses on any project financing where the underlying assets would come from new oil and gas development. Existing oil and gas development in the Arctic would still be eligible for financing, the company said.

Despite the announcement, JPMorgan still has sizable exposure to the fossil fuel industry. The New York-based company provides significant financing to oil and gas companies. One of JPMorgan's directors is the former head of Exxon Mobil Corp., Lee R. Raymond.

Iranian clerics keep shrines open, even as virus spreads

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Shiite shrines that attract tens of millions of visitors annually have come under focus in Iran as the country grapples with the spread of the coronavirus.

The outbreak of the virus in Iran prompted the government to request the closure of major shrines in cities like Qom, Mashhad and Shiraz, but Iran's powerful clerics have rejected or ignored the notices. The decision to keep the shrines open shows the power of Iran's religious establishment and the Shiite theocracy's approach to the widening crisis.

While the government has suspended school across much of Iran this week and canceled soccer matches and screenings at cinemas, the continued access to the shrines has raised questions about the government's willingness to respond decisively and rapidly to the virus, which has infected people in several cities and been confirmed in travelers from Iran in eight countries.

On Tuesday, a government official repeated a request for the shrines to be closed.

"At the moment we absolutely support the temporary closure of any type of human gathering, including tourist areas and pilgrimage sites," Iranian Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told The Associated Press.

The shrines, housed in gloriously built mosques, attract not just daily worshipers but also millions of visitors each year who touch or kiss the tombs' protective bars. The virus is believed to be spread through droplets when people cough or sneeze, although specialists don't think the virus can survive on surfaces for very long.

Iraqi authorities on Monday closed the gold-domed shrine of Imam Ali, the revered 7th century founder of the Shiite sect. The rare move came after a 22-year-old Iranian student was confirmed positive for the virus in the city of Najaf, marking the first case in Iraq.

Iraqi health officials in masks and gloves disinfected the shrine, as pilgrims and clerics also in masks walked in the courtyard outside. Health workers also were seen in Najaf's old quarter, a maze of alleys and old homes, apparently going door to door to test classmates and neighbors of the infected student. Nearby hotels for pilgrims were almost deserted after authorities closed the borders to Iranian nationals.

Iran has nearly 11,000 shrines for Shiite saints, with the most popular located in the northeastern cities of Mashhad and Qom.

The Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad is the largest complex housing a tomb in Iran and its most visited, drawing about 20 million people a year. Kuwait has reported that five travelers returning from Mashhad

tested positive for the virus, but Iran has yet to confirm a single case in the city.

Ali Akbar Hosseini, a cleric in Qom, questioned why it was necessary to shut the shrines.

"Closing shrines carries a bitter message. Here is a sanctuary for people, and people seated in a corner of the shrine will cause no problem," he was quoted in the official IRNA news agency saying on Saturday.

He added that foreigners, mainly from Pakistan and India, had a larger presence at the shrine in Qom than Iranians.

Another cleric and head of the shrine, Mohammad Saeedi, said the spread of the virus in Qom was exaggerated. "The enemy wants to spread fear in the hearts and portray Qom as an unsecured city," he said.

Religious seminaries and schools in Qom were closed last week to prevent the spread of the virus after the first confirmed cases in Iran were reported there. The religious schools in Qom attract Shiites from across Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Bahrain and other countries, but so too does the holy city's shrine of Fatima Masumeh, which has remained open and is disinfected daily.

The Health Ministry said 15 people in Iran have died out of 95 people infected nationwide.

A lawmaker from Qom publicly disputed the official figures, saying 50 people had died in that city from the virus, although the government rejected his assertion. The lawmaker, Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani, also alleged on Twitter that deaths from the virus are being labeled as "respiratory illness," suggesting a cover-up by government-run hospitals.

His criticism reflects deep-seated mistrust of President Hassan Rouhani's government and frustration with how the regime has handled a range of recent crises.

Iran's national broadcaster showed the streets of Qom teeming with crowds Tuesday. A woman was interviewed saying she had recovered from the virus.

Despite the story's upbeat spin, state TV also confirmed the provincial health department chief in Qom, Mohammad Reza Qadir, had been infected and was now under quarantine.

About 100 Pakistanis, mostly Shiite pilgrims, are quarantined at a government building in Pakistan after returning from Iran, where they had visited holy sites. There are still more than 7,000 Pakistani pilgrims in Iran. Pakistani authorities say all citizens returning from Iran will be tested for the virus.

The novel coronavirus has infected more than 80,000 people globally, causing around 2,700 deaths, mainly in China. A team of World Health Organization officials was expected in Iran on Tuesday amid concerns over whether the country could become a seeding ground for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health care systems. In addition to Iraq, a case was confirmed in Afghanistan in a person who recently visited Iran.

At least 34 people with links to Iran have tested positive for the virus. Some of those cases were confirmed in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon and Canada.

Countries bordering Iran have sealed their crossings and barred Iranians from entry. With the exception of Qatar, Gulf Arab states also suspended flights to Iran, and Bahrain halted indirect flights there through Dubai.

Lebanon has suspended flights taking pilgrims to Shiite holy sites in both Iran and Iraq.

Associated Press writers Munir Ahmed in Islamabad, Pakistan, Nasser Karimi in Tehran and Qassim Abdul-Zahra in Baghdad contributed.

Syrian troops press ahead with campaign as strikes kill 16

By SUZAN FRASER and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Airstrikes on rebel-controlled northwest Syria killed at least 16 people Tuesday, including two students and two teachers, opposition activists said, as government forces captured a town considered a symbol of the uprising against President Bashar Assad.

The capture of Kafranbel was another blow to insurgents after government gains over the past three months. Kafranbel was a major opposition-held town that gained attention in the early years of the Syrian conflict because of weekly anti-government protests that included humorous English-language banners

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carried by protesters.

The banners were initiated by anti-government journalist Raed Fares who was shot dead in the town along with his friend Hammoud al-Juneid in November 2018. Fares was a harsh critic of Islamic militants who control much of Idlib.

The government controlled Syrian Central Military Media said Kafranbel was captured late Tuesday after fierce fighting with al-Qaida-linked militants. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the town was taken by the government after punishing bombardment from the air and ground.

The violence came as Turkey's president announced that a Russian delegation would arrive the following day to resume talks aimed at easing tensions in the northwest Idlib region. The area is the country's last rebel-controlled stronghold and the Syrian government's military campaign there, backed by Russia, has created a humanitarian catastrophe with nearly 1 million people displaced from their homes since Dec. 1.

Most of them are now crowding areas close to the border with Turkey, living in camps, shelters, abandoned homes and in open fields. It is the largest single displacement of Syria's war, now in its ninth year.

In response to the upsurge in violence, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the U.N. has launched a revised appeal for \$500 million to assist at least 1.1 million people in need. He said discussions are under way with Turkey double the number of trucks crossing the border with humanitarian aid from 50 to 100.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said no consensus was reached for a four-way meeting next month between the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey meant to address the crisis. He added, however, that Russia's Vladimir Putin may still come to Turkey next week for a bilateral meeting. Moscow has so far not confirmed a March 5 visit by the Russian president to Turkey.

Tensions have been running high between Turkey and Russia, which support opposing sides of the war in Syria. The Syrian government offensive has shattered a fragile cease-fire agreement that Turkey and Russia reached in 2018 and Turkey has threatened military action unless Syrian forces retreat to positions they held before the advance by the end of February.

"Russia supports Syria at the highest level," Erdogan told reporters before departing for a visit to Azerbaijan. "Even if they deny it, we have evidence. We are forced to be in this fight."

Turkish officials had reported small progress in two previous rounds of Turkey-Russia meetings but said the results were not satisfactory.

Turkey had set up a dozen observation posts as part of the 2018 agreement, many of which are now behind Syrian government lines. Ankara also sent thousands of additional troops into Idlib in recent weeks and has frequently engaged in military exchanges with Syrian troops.

At least 16 Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes this month during the Syrian government's push on the last rebel stronghold.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a news conference at the State Department Tuesday that the Syrian government's offensive "only heightens the risk of conflict with our NATO ally, Turkey," adding that the U.S. was working together with Turkey "on seeing what we can do together."

He called for a permanent cease-fire, saying "the regime will not be able to obtain military victory."

The fighting appeared to intensify, however, with dozens of airstrikes reported Tuesday.

Opposition activists and a war monitor said at least 16 people were killed in Idlib province Tuesday. They included two students and two teachers who were killed in Idlib city when a school was struck with a cluster bomb-filled rocket, and 10 civilians who were killed in airstrikes on the town of Maarat Misreen in Idlib province. The deaths were reported by the Observatory and Idlib-based opposition activist Hadi Abdullah.

The Observatory and Idlib-based opposition activist Taher al-Omar said insurgents captured the village of Nairab late Monday after intense fighting with government forces that had captured the village earlier this month. The village is close to the town of Saraqeb where two major highways in the country meet.

To the south of Nairab, Syrian troops captured two new villages raising to 10 the number of areas captured in the province since Monday, according to state media.

The capture of Maaret Tamater and Maaret Seen paved the way for government forces to storm Kafranbel.

In Damascus, one civilian was killed and two others were injured by bombs planted in two cars near

Umayyad Square in the Syrian capital Damascus, state-run news agency SANA said. It was not immediately clear who the target was.

Mroue reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria; Matthew Lee in Washington and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

Iran says official who played down virus fears is infected

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The head of an Iranian government task force on the coronavirus who had urged the public not to overreact about its spread has tested positive for the illness himself, authorities said Tuesday, as new cases emanating from the country rapidly emerged across the Middle East.

Only a day earlier, a coughing and heavily sweating Iraj Harirchi said at a televised news conference in Tehran that “the situation is almost stable in the country.”

The acknowledgement of Harirchi’s illness underscores a growing crisis of confidence felt by many in Iran after nationwide economic protests, a U.S. drone striking killing a top Iranian general and Iran accidentally shooting down a commercial jetliner and insisting for days that it hadn’t.

Iran on Tuesday also saw a crucial air link cut to the United Arab Emirates, home to the world’s busiest airport for international travel in Dubai, as Bahrain announced more confirmed cases of the virus from passengers who transited through the UAE. The number of cases also increased sharply elsewhere in the region.

Qatar Airways, one of the Mideast’s biggest carriers, also said it was essentially halting operations to Iran and South Korea until further notice.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour confirmed Harirchi had the virus. Harirchi himself posted an online video saying he had it and that he had quarantined himself at home. He promised that authorities would bring the virus under control.

“I wanted to tell you that, rest assured that with efforts of your servants at the Health Ministry ... and backed by you people, the government and all elements of the establishment, we will be victorious in our combat against this virus within the next few weeks,” Harirchi said.

On Monday, however, he had offered a far different assessment while repeatedly wiping his brow while standing beside government spokesman Ali Rabiei.

“Currently the situation is almost stable in the country and we could manage to minimize the problem,” Harirchi said. He also said that “quarantines belong to the Stone Age.”

That optimism, while no longer held by Harirchi, also appeared to be undercut by Jahanpour himself on Tuesday. The Health Ministry spokesman suggested it may take at least until Nowruz, the Persian New Year on March 20, for Iran to reach a point where the virus was contained. He added that a more “pessimistic” assessment suggested Iran would contain it by late April.

“We don’t expect a miracle in the short term,” Jahanpour said.

A prominent pro-reform lawmaker, Mamoud Sadeghi of Tehran, also said in a tweet that he tested positive for the virus.

The coronavirus has infected more than 80,000 people globally, causing about 2,700 deaths, mainly in China. The World Health Organization has named the illness COVID-19.

Jahanpour on Tuesday said 15 people had died in Iran so far amid 95 confirmed cases. However, experts remain concerned Iran may be underreporting cases and deaths, given the rapid spread from Iran across the Persian Gulf.

A hard-line lawmaker in Iran alleged Monday there had been 50 deaths in the Iranian city of Qom alone, which was denied by authorities.

“What do you have to say about those buried in Qom cemetery?” tweeted lawmaker Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani. “Practitioners in hospitals write ‘respiratory problems’ as the cause of death. But you know that they are from those quarantined for corona.”

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While Farahani's politics make him eager to undercut moderate President Hassan Rouhani, his earlier warning that Qom's top doctor fighting the coronavirus also had been infected has proven to be true.

Rouhani said he opposed closing public and government offices.

"This is one of the plots by the enemy to shut down the country through spreading fear," he said in a speech, although he also urged people to avoid crowds, including at major Shiite shrines.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. is "deeply concerned" that Iran "may have suppressed vital details about the outbreak."

"All nations, including Iran, should tell the truth about the coronavirus and cooperate with international aid organizations," he said.

The UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority said it would halt all flights to and from Iran. The announcement came hours after busy Dubai International Airport said there would be restrictions on flights there.

The UAE, home to long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad, remains a key international transit route for Iran's 80 million people.

"All passenger and cargo aircraft traveling to and from Iran will be suspended for a period of one week, and could be up for extension," the authority said.

Passengers on a Mahan Air flight from Tehran to Dubai on Tuesday said their flight was delayed some two hours, only to repeatedly circle the UAE city-state, then land and sit for another two hours before authorities agreed to let them off. The passengers, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution, said authorities let them walk off one at a time while being monitored with a thermal scanner.

Emirates, the government-owned carrier based in Dubai, flies daily to Tehran. Its low-cost partner airline, FlyDubai, serves several Iranian cities, as does the Sharjah-based low-cost carrier Air Arabia.

The announcement came after Bahrain said it would suspend all flights from Dubai and Sharjah, a neighboring UAE emirate home to Air Arabia, for 48 hours. The small island nation off Saudi Arabia announced its first cases of the virus on Monday. By Tuesday, Bahrain said it had 23 confirmed cases.

Dubai had been screening passengers on flights from China, where the outbreak began in December. Emirates and Etihad still fly to Beijing as the UAE works to maintain close ties with China.

Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman also announced their first cases of the virus Monday and connected them to travel with Iran. The UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, has reported 13 cases of the virus. Most of those were connected to Chinese travel.

Also Tuesday, Kuwait raised the number of its infected cases from five to eight, according to the state-run KUNA news agency. It said the three latest cases involved Kuwaiti citizens just back from Iran. The five previously reported cases were passengers on a flight from the Iranian city of Mashhad, where Iran's government has not yet announced a single case of the virus.

Iraq's Health Ministry said four new cases of coronavirus were diagnosed in the northern province of Kirkuk. It said the afflicted were members of an Iraqi family who had returned recently from Iran. Iraq announced its first case Monday in the Shiite Muslim holy city of Najaf: an Iranian student who has since returned to Iran.

The northern region, which shares a border with Iran, is a hub of economic activity and the primary gateway for the Kurdistan Regional Government to import Iranian goods and fuel, and Kurds in Erbil lined up for gas, fearing shortages. The KRG also suspended working hours across educational institutions for a month.

Harirchi, the ailing Iranian official, had the following advice for worried Iranians: "Take care of yourselves. This virus is a democrat virus! It does not differentiate between the rich and the poor or official and non-official and anyone could get it."

Associated Press writers Aya Batrawy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Nasser Karimi, Saeed Sarmadi, Mohammad Nasiri and Mehdi Fattahi in Tehran, Iran; Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey; Munir Ahmed in Islamabad; and Samya Kullab in Baghdad contributed.

Trump says without evidence Dems leak intel to hurt Sanders

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — President Donald Trump suggested on Tuesday that Democrats who don't want Bernie Sanders to win their party's presidential nomination tried to hurt the senator's chances by leaking information about Russian activities promoting his campaign. Trump gave no evidence for his claim.

"Bernie is probably winning — looks like he's winning and he's got a head of steam," Trump said during a news conference near the end of his two-day visit to India. "And they maybe don't want him for obvious reasons. ... So they put out a thing that Russia is backing him."

Trump accused California Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House intelligence committee, of leaking the information to the media. Schiff has denied the allegation.

Sanders has confirmed that U.S. officials told him last month about Russian efforts to boost his chances to challenge Trump in November.

Trump said he thought it was "strange" that U.S. officials told Sanders but nobody told him.

"It's highly exaggerated. I think it's disgraceful. I think it was leaks from the intel committee," Trump said. "I think probably Schiff leaked it. He shouldn't be leaking things like that."

It wasn't the first time that Trump levied the accusation against Schiff. He earlier tweeted that election security officials "supposedly told Crazy Bernie (Sanders) that Russia was looking at him, not me. This is all a big scam between Intel and the Democrats. They want Bernie OUT & hate `Trump.'"

"Nice deflection, Mr. President. But your false claims fool no one," Schiff tweeted over the weekend. "You welcomed Russian help in 2016, tried to coerce Ukraine's help in 2019, and won't protect our elections in 2020."

Trump's comments come amid conflicting accounts about what U.S. election security officials told members of the House intelligence committee during a recent closed-door hearing and how sensitive election security information has leaked into the public domain.

People familiar with the congressional briefing earlier this month said election security officials indicated that the Kremlin was looking to help Trump win reelection. But a senior official with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said Monday that Shelby Pierson, a top election security official who was one of the officials who briefed the committee, did not tell lawmakers that Russia is aiding Trump's reelection. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive information.

"I want no help from any country, and I haven't been given help from any country," Trump told reporters.

A nearly two-year investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller concluded that there was a sophisticated, Kremlin-led operation to sow division in the U.S. and upend the 2016 election by using cyberattacks and social media as weapons.

Election security experts say it's clear that Russia is again trying to influence the U.S. election, including through the spread of misinformation to raise skepticism about the U.S. electoral process.

But top U.S. officials, including Trump's national security adviser Robert O'Brien, have said they have not seen any intelligence or analyses indicating that Russia has been specifically aiding Trump's reelection.

In 2016, Russia's meddling "evolved from a generalized program designed in 2014 and 2015 to undermine the U.S. electoral system, to a targeted operation that by early 2016 favored candidate Trump and disparaged candidate (Hillary) Clinton," according to the Mueller report.

Trump was asked whether former acting national intelligence director Joseph Maguire was forced out as part of an effort to purge administration officials seen as being disloyal to Trump. "I don't think it's a big problem," he said. "I don't think it's very many people."

The Republican president said Maguire was not forced out. He said Maguire's tenure as acting director was to end on March 11. He called Maguire an "excellent guy" and said he chose U.S. Ambassador Richard Grenell to replace him as acting director until he can nominate someone to oversee the nation's 17 intelligence agencies.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 26, the 57th day of 2020. There are 309 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 26, 1993, a truck bomb built by Islamic extremists exploded in the parking garage of the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000 others. (The bomb failed to topple the North Tower into the South Tower, as the terrorists had hoped; both structures were destroyed in the 9/11 attack eight years later.)

On this date:

In 1616, astronomer Galileo Galilei met with a Roman Inquisition official, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, who ordered him to abandon the "heretical" concept of heliocentrism, which held that the earth revolved around the sun, instead of the other way around.

In 1904, the United States and Panama proclaimed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to undertake efforts to build a ship canal across the Panama isthmus.

In 1916, actor-comedian Jackie Gleason was born in Brooklyn, New York.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional act establishing Mount McKinley National Park (now Denali National Park) in the Alaska Territory.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional act establishing Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

In 1929, President Calvin Coolidge signed a measure establishing Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

In 1940, the United States Air Defense Command was created.

In 1952, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that Britain had developed its own atomic bomb.

In 1966, South Korean troops sent to fight in the Vietnam War massacred at least 380 civilians in Go Dai hamlet.

In 1984, the last U.S. Marines deployed to Beirut as part of an international peacekeeping force withdrew from the Lebanese capital.

In 1994, a jury in San Antonio acquitted 11 followers of David Koresh of murder, rejecting claims they had ambushed federal agents; five were convicted of voluntary manslaughter.

In 1998, a jury in Amarillo, Texas, rejected an \$11 million lawsuit brought by Texas cattlemen who blamed Oprah Winfrey's talk show for a price fall after a segment on food safety that included a discussion about mad cow disease.

Ten years ago: New York Gov. David Paterson announced he wouldn't seek reelection amid a criminal investigation over his handling of a domestic violence complaint against a top aide. (Investigators found no evidence of witness tampering.) At the Vancouver Olympics, the Americans reached 34 medals with a silver and a bronze in short-track speedskating.

Five years ago: Internet activists declared victory over the nation's big cable companies after the Federal Communications Commission voted 3-2 to impose the toughest rules yet on broadband service to prevent companies like Comcast, Verizon and AT&T from creating paid fast lanes and slowing or blocking web traffic. "Jihadi John," the masked knife-wielding Islamic State militant seen in execution videos, was identified as Mohammed Emwazi, a London-raised university graduate known to British intelligence for more than five years. Theodore Hesburgh, 97, a Catholic priest who transformed the University of Notre Dame into a school known almost as much for academics as football and who championed human rights around the globe, died in South Bend, Indiana.

One year ago: After making his way from Pyongyang in an armored train, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un arrived in Vietnam's capital ahead of a summit with President Donald Trump, who arrived later in the day aboard Air Force One. A federal appeals court cleared AT&T's takeover of Time Warner, rejecting claims from the Trump administration that the \$81 billion deal would harm consumers and reduce competition.

Today's Birthdays: Game show host Tom Kennedy is 93. Country-rock musician Paul Cotton (Poco) is 77.

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Actor-director Bill Duke is 77. Singer Mitch Ryder is 75. Actress Marta Kristen (TV: "Lost in Space") is 75. Rock musician Jonathan Cain (Journey) is 70. Singer Michael Bolton is 67. The president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (REH'-jehp TY'-ihp UR'-doh-wahn), is 66. Actor Greg Germann is 62. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., is 62. Bandleader John McDaniel is 59. Actor-martial artist Mark Dacascos is 56. Actress Jennifer Grant is 54. Rock musician Tim Commerford (Audioslave) is 52. Singer Erykah Badu (EHR'-ih-kah bah-DOO') is 49. Actor Maz Jobrani (TV: "Superior Donuts") is 48. Rhythm-and-blues singer Rico Wade (Society of Soul) is 48. Olympic gold medal swimmer Jenny Thompson is 47. Rhythm-and-blues singer Kyle Norman (Jagged Edge) is 45. Actor Greg Kinnear is 43. Rock musician Chris Culos (O.A.R.) is 41. Rhythm-and-blues singer Corinne Bailey Rae is 41. Country singer Rodney Hayden is 40. Pop singer Nate Ruess (roos) (fun.) is 38. Tennis player Li Na is 38. Latin singer Natalia Lafourcade is 36. Actress Teresa Palmer is 34. Actor Alex Heartman is 30. Actress Taylor Dooley is 27.

Thought for Today: "If you have it and you know you have it, then you have it. If you have it and don't know you have it, you don't have it. If you don't have it but you think you have it, then you have it." — Jackie Gleason (1916-1987).

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