To overcome travel ban, some Americans taking cases to court

NEW YORK (AP) — Mohammed Hafar paced around the airport terminal — first to the monitor to check flight arrivals, then to the gift shop and lastly to the doors where international passengers were exiting. At last, out came Jana Hafar, his tall, slender, dark-haired teen daughter who had been forced by President Donald Trump’s travel ban to stay behind in Syria for months while her father, his wife and 10-year-old son started rebuilding their lives in Bloomfield, New Jersey, with no clear idea of when the family would be together again.

“Every time I speak to her, she ask, ‘When are they going to give me the visa?’” the elder Hafar said, recalling the days of uncertainty that took up the better part of this year.

Continued on Next Page

In this Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2019, photo, Mohammed Hafar buys a gift for his daughter Jana Hafar while waiting for her flight at JFK Airport in New York.

Associated Press
Continued from Front

There was “nothing I could tell her, because nobody knows when.”

That she landed at Kennedy Airport on a recent December day was testament to her father’s determination to keep his promise that they would be reunited and his willingness to go as far as suing the government in federal court. Advocates say the process for obtaining a travel ban waiver is still shrouded in unpredictability, which causes delays for thousands of American citizens waiting for loved ones. The “system is messed up,” said Curtis Morrison, the Los Angeles-based attorney who has filed several federal lawsuits, including Hafar’s, against the administration on behalf of dozens of plaintiffs from countries affected by the travel ban. Many of those he has represented have received visas. But he said those cases represent only a fraction of the people in need and that the decision to grant those visas is unfair to thousands of other immigrants who cannot sue or do not know how to take their frustrations to court.

“The government should not be able to do this,” Morrison said. “It should not be able to cherry-pick the visas that it wants to issue so that it can evade review.” The third version of the administration’s ban took effect in December 2017, keeping citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and North Korea, and government representatives from Venezuela, from traveling or immigrating to the United States. The Supreme Court upheld the ban in June 2018, in part because of the promised waiver system that would allow people to come despite the ban if certain criteria were met.

The government says 28,100 immigrant visa applications were filed by people seeking waivers to move to the U.S. between December 2017 and Oct. 31, 2019. Of those, 11,325 have been deemed qualified for waivers and 16,775 have not. It was unclear how many of those who have been deemed qualified have actually received visas and how quickly. At the beginning of 2019, waivers were being issued in a trickle, with only 2,673 granted for both immigrant and non-immigrant visas from December 2017 to January 2019, according to State Department figures.

In an emailed statement, the State Department said changes made in late June have “significantly” increased the number handed out monthly, and officials “believe this is more representative of the new normal” and that “applicants who qualify for a waiver will likely be issued their visa much sooner than possible before the changes.” But while some applications for immigrant and non-immigrant visas submitted in recent months are seeing faster processing and approval times, earlier cases are still languishing, with no transparency from the government, said Mahsa Khanbabai, an immigration lawyer in North Easton, Massachusetts.

“They have fooled people to think, ‘Oh, with our new automated process, it’s working now,’” Khanbabai said. “They’re able to distract by granting a few here and there. They’re fooling people into thinking that it works.”

Hafar, a Syria native and naturalized American citizen since 1996, had been living in Syria with his family when civil war started. He came back to the U.S. in 2012, assuming he could transfer citizenship to his children and apply separately for his wife to receive a green card making her a permanent legal resident. His wife got the card in early 2017, but paperwork problems got in the way of the children’s transfers, requiring him to submit immigrant petitions for them. He was told in 2018 that his son would get his visa, but there was no word on when Jana would.

“When I heard that, it was very, very painful for me,” Jana said last week in the family’s New Jersey apartment, where she never strayed far from her mother. “Because I understand my daughter’s feeling, even though Damascus has its cancer-stricken grandmother and her mother, who spent most of her time looking after him. There were frequent daily calls to her parents, who worried constantly about their daughter. She was too distraught to go to school and living in a country torn apart by armed conflict, even though Damascus had settled down.

Hafar couldn’t understand it. “I have my son and my wife here. Why on earth is my daughter back home?” he said.

Farida Chehata, an immigrant rights attorney for the Council on American-Islamic Relations in California, worked with the family before they sued...
Pennsylvania dioceses offer $84M to 564 clergy abuse victims

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM
Associated Press

Pennsylvania’s Roman Catholic dioceses have paid nearly $84 million to 564 victims of sexual abuse, a tally that’s sure to grow substantially in the new year as compensation fund administrators work through a backlog of claims, according to an Associated Press review.

Seven of the state’s eight dioceses launched victim compensation funds in the wake of a landmark grand jury report on sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. The funds were open to claims for a limited time this year. They are independently administered, though each diocese set its own rules on eligibility.

To date, the average payout across all seven dioceses has exceeded $148,000 — a fraction of what some adult victims of childhood abuse might have expected from a jury had they been permitted to take their claims to court. Under state law, victims of past abuse only have until age 30 to sue.

“These are all time-barred claims, so it’s not going to be the kind of numbers one sees in a courtroom,” said Camille Biros, who helps administer compensation funds for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and dioceses in Pittsburgh, Allentown, Erie and Scranton.

Lawmakers recently agreed to begin the lengthy process of amending the state constitution to allow a two-year window for civil suits otherwise barred by the statute of limitations, but there’s no guarantee that effort will bear fruit.

Childhood abuse victim David Zernhelt was unwilling to gamble that state lawmakers will follow through and give people like him access to the courts. Compensation fund administrators for the Diocese of Allentown recently offered $400,000 to Zernhelt, and he accepted it.

“It doesn’t make me rich,” said Zernhelt, 45, of Easton. “It creates a positive starting point for me. I can try to make my life a little bit better and put this behind me.”

Zernhelt applied to the compensation program and told the fund administrator a horrific story of abuse.

He said the Rev. Thomas Kerestus assaulted him two to four times a week for five years beginning when Zernhelt was 13. Zernhelt said that he and his family reported Kerestus — who died in 2014 and is named in the grand jury report — but that the diocese swept it under the rug. He said he was sexually abused by a second man, Gerald Royer, a defrocked priest also named in the report. “It caused a lot of emotional pain, a lot of depression, a lot of PTSD,” Zernhelt said.

Together, Allentown and the four other dioceses that hired Biros and veteran claims administrator Kenneth Feinberg to run their funds have received more than 1,500 claims, of which about 500 have been reviewed. Of those, 41 claims were rejected for lack of evidence or because they didn’t meet eligibility criteria, as some dioceses bar claims against religious order clergy, Catholic school officials and other lay leaders.

Another 391 victims accepted financial settlements.

“We try to be consistent with the claims in terms of the nature of the abuse, how long it went on, the age of the child, the effect of the abuse. We consider all that and use our judgement to determine the settlement offer,” Biros said. “We want to make sure everybody is treated as consistently as possible.”

She said a torrent of claims arrived in the week leading up to a Sept. 30 deadline. Biros expects it will take at least through June, and probably longer, to work through the backlog.

The dioceses agreed to pay victims after the grand jury concluded that more than 300 predator priests had molested more than 1,000 children since the 1940s — and that church leaders systematically covered it up.

In this Sept. 27, 2015 file photo, clouds are lit by the rising sun over St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church in Philadelphia. Associated Press
Iowa Democrat faces daunting prospect: winning rural voters

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE
Associated Press
WINTerset, Iowa (AP) — When Cindy Axne crunched through fresh snow and into the American Legion hall in Winterset, the freshman Iowa congresswoman knew most of the dozen constituents waiting inside the chilly room had likely voted against her.

The same was true later that day at her “Connect with your Congresswoman” event 50 miles away in Panora and at the previous week’s gatherings in Red Oak and Crescent. As Axne will readily acknowledge, venturing into hostile political territory is almost inevitable when you lost 15 of your district’s 16 counties in the last election.

But rather than focus on the supporters in urban Polk County who were enough to power her to victory, she is returning again and again to the deeply conservative small towns she lost as she tries to solve a puzzle that bedevils her party nationwide: Can a Democrat win over rural voters who now overwhelmingly back Republican candidates?

Her experience could be a lesson for candidates in both parties pondering the growing blocs of constituents who see themselves as part of an opposing political tribe. Can Republican candidates still reach residents of metropolitan areas that are growing more progressive? Then there are the Democrats who currently control the House but are now all but extinct in largely rural districts like Axne’s, which stretches from Des Moines west to the Nebraska border and south to Missouri.

With many elections closely contested, finding a way to at least lessen the overwhelming losses in opposing territory has become a high priority for candidates in both parties.

“She’s not going to be able to move heaven and earth, but there’s a couple percentage points that I’m sure are movable there,” said Seth McKee, a Texas Tech political science professor who has written about U.S. political polarization. He notes studies show that voters now are motivated more by their disdain for the opposing party than support for their own.

Axne edged out Republican incumbent David Young 49 percent to 47 percent in 2018 in what proved a strong year for Democrats, as they flipped 40 GOP House seats nationwide.

Now, Axne, 54, insists that just bolstering her margin for the next election isn’t enough. “I won’t spend most of my life in urban areas,” she said, “including starting her own digital marketing business and raising two sons with her husband in a Des Moines suburb, she said she’s always felt a connection with the country and the state’s small towns that stemmed from summers spent on her grandparents’ farm.

In her talks in communities like Winterset, Axne tells residents how she’s pushing to resolve trade disputes that have caused corn and soybean prices to plunge, about her legislation to expand rural broadband and about her entrepreneurial initiatives designed to help small towns, many of which have half the populations they had a century ago.

It’s a message that seems well suited to Winterset, a community of 5,200 people with a movie theater, coffee shop, cafe and antique stores lining the courthouse square. The seat of Madison County is largely dependent on the corn and soybean fields that surround the city but is also known as the birthplace of John Wayne and for the nearby covered bridges that were featured in the book and movie, The Bridges of Madison County.

Whether rural residents will take Axne’s promises to heart is another matter. Madison County is 97 percent white and reliably votes Republican. Axne lost Madison County 62% to 33% in 2018. And the totals in some of her district’s other rural counties were even more lopsided, with Axne losing by 33 points in Adair County, by 36 points in Adams County and 37 points in Page County for the central rural Polk County, which includes suburbs of Des Moines, gave Axne 66% of her total vote in the election, but it gets only a sliver of her attention now.

“I did not get into this position just to represent Democrats or just to represent the urban areas,” Axne said.

She maintains she can be an ally of rural residents. Besides face-to-face meetings with constituents, she spends time in rural radio stations and meets with weekly newspaper editors. In addition to winning over more rural voters, she’s set her sights on winning at least one more county, Dallas County, which includes suburban neighborhoods.

Young, who is seeking to win back his seat, doubts anyone is buying it.

“She talks of moderation and common sense when she’s in Iowa but in Washington she votes 97% of the time with Nancy Pelosi,” said Young, 51, who represented the district for two terms after a long career as an aide to Iowa U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley and other Republican lawmakers.

Young points to Axne’s support of environmental regulations he argues would hurt farmers, her skepticism toward Republicans’ 2017 tax cuts and her support for a public option for health insurance that he contends would hurt rural hospitals.

“She can spend time in the rural counties, and everybody should, but she’s getting no traction there,” Young said.
Police: Man held without bond in Tenn. bar stabbing

By TRAVIS LOLLER
Associated Press
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee man was being held without bond Thursday in the stabbing deaths of two men outside a Nashville bar, according to Nashville police.

Michael Mosley, 23, was charged with two counts of criminal homicide and one count of attempted criminal homicide in the deaths of Clayton Beathard, 22, and Paul Trapeni III, 21, and the wounding of a third man in an altercation that took place shortly before 3 a.m. on Saturday, according to police.

After a days-long search Mosley was captured on Christmas Day. He was found alone in a vacant house outside of Nashville, according to tweets from Nashville police.

Beathard was the brother of NFL quarterback C.J. Beathard of the San Francisco 49ers. He was attending Long Island University where he was the quarterback for the football team and majoring in Sports Management, according to The Tennessean newspaper.

He was also the brother of musician Tucker Beathard, son of country music songwriter Casey Beathard and grandson of NFL Hall of Famer Bobby Beathard, who won four Super Bowls as a general manager, The Tennessean reports.

Trapeni was a student at Rhodes College in Memphis, where he was a member of the class of 2020, according to his obituary.

A third man was wounded in the stabbing whom police have identified only as a 21-year-old University of Tennessee student. He suffered wounds to his arm and eye, police said.

The Saturday altercation started when Mosley made an “unwanted advancement toward a female friend of the victims,” according to a statement by Nashville police. A verbal dispute inside the Dogwood Bar turned physical once they got outside, police said.

Mosley previously was convicted of robbery, felony aggravated assault and misdemeanor assault. In the aggravated assault case, he was found to have stabbed a man and cut a woman in 2015.

In the misdemeanor assault case, he was found to have squirted urine out of a shampoo bottle onto a jail employee on Christmas Day that year.

The reward for information surrounding Mosley during the search had increased to $42,500 before his capture on Wednesday.

A judicial commissioner on Wednesday ordered Mosley be held without bond on the two criminal homicide charges and set a $5 million bond for the attempted criminal homicide charge.

A message left with an attorney who is listed as representing Mosley in a different case was not immediately returned Thursday morning.
By DON THOMPSON
Sacramento, Calif. (AP) — An inmate in solitary confinement at a California jail was refusing to leave his cell. The jailers’ usual response: Send an “extraction team” of corrections officers to burst into the cell and drag him out.

But not in Contra Costa County, one of three in the state using a k hinder, gentler approach in response to inmates who refuse to leave a cell. That change that experts say could be a national model for reducing the use of isolation cells.

So the inmate was asked: “What if we gave you a couple extra cookies and another sandwich? Would you move?” recalled Don Specter, the nonprofit Prison Law Office director who negotiated the new policies. “He said yes. ... They were like, ‘Wow.’”

More than a quarter of U.S. states and numerous smaller jurisdictions are looking for ways to reduce the use of solitary confinement, according to the Vera Institute of Justice, which encourages alternatives to practices behavioral experts say is dehumanizing and can worsen mental illness.

The new policies in California came after Specter’s firm sued seven of California’s 38 counties claiming that conditions had grown inhumane as jails absorbed inmates who previously would have served their sentences in state prisons.

The state in 2011 began sending less serious offenders to local jails for years at a time to ease crowding in state penitentiaries. Some jurisdictions nationwide are banning isolation for young offenders, pregnant women, or those with mental health diagnoses.

The California counties’ approach of generally limiting it to those who engage in continued violent behavior has dramatically reduced the number of inmates in isolation and the length of time they stay there.

Contra Costa started 2019 with about 100 people in solitary, most for more than a year. It had just three in isolation cells by December, after officials began using the new approach.

Sacramento County is also following the policy pioneered by Santa Clara County, while Fresno County is considering it. Among other things, it encourages the use of low-cost incentives to reward good behavior, like the opportunity to listen to the radio, watch a movie or get an extra snack.

Sacramento County has cut its isolated population roughly in half, to about 60 inmates, said Lt. Alex McCamy: “It’s a limited time frame and a limited group, but the initial impression is positive.”

Rick Raemisch, who restricted the use of solitary confinement when he headed Colorado’s prison system, said the violent, tense, dirty conditions in Santa Clara County’s jail improved markedly with the new policy.

“Think of yourself being in a cell the size of a parking space for 24 hours a day,” said Raemisch, who consulted with county officials. “At a minimum you’re going to get angry, and when you get angry you’re going to fight back.”

Inmates nationwide are most often segregated for nonviolent “nuisance infractions” like smoking, cursing, disobeying orders or having unauthorized items from the commissary, said the Vera Institute’s Sara Sullivan.

Santa Clara County once locked a woman in solitary confinement for 2½ years for talking back to correctional officers or yelling and banging on her cell door with other detainees, according to Specter’s lawsuit.

The California counties’ new policy of restricting its use to continued violent behavior could be seen as a national pilot program, Sullivan said.

New Jersey’s Middlesex County Adult Correctional Center has lowered the number of isolated inmates and the time they spend there, she said, but with a different approach that lets inmates out of their cells more frequently.

The Hampden County Correctional Center in Massachusetts increased its use of alternative sanctions and positive reinforcement. And Cook County, Illinois, no longer keeps troublesome inmates in isolation, allowing them to regularly spend time with about a half-dozen other inmates.

“There’s a decades-long effort to reform solitary, especially in prisons. But what we haven’t seen is a paired reform effort for jails,” said Amy Fettig, director of the American Civil Liberty Union’s Stop Solitary campaign. “In Santa Clara what we’re seeing is an attempt to reform the whole process.”

Long-term isolation can be so debilitating, Fettig said, that she’s had clients cut themselves “just to feel something because they’ve become numb.”

Santa Clara County, home to San Jose and Silicon Valley, once had 400 inmates in solitary confinement. Specter’s client in Santa Clara County had been in solitary confinement for nearly five years. By last fall there were about 40 inmates confined to isolation cells for an average of about two months, and just 26 by December.

Sgt. Todd Kendrick, president of the county’s corrections officers association, attributed the increase to other major incidents, including deaths in custody.

Like most jails, three-quarters or more of inmates had not been convicted of a crime and yet spent months or years awaiting trial in isolation. Under the new policy, “It’s really our philosophy to use that when it’s absolutely necessary, when there’s extraordinary risk,” Smith said. Jailers offering incentives to get inmates out of segregation as quickly as possible, often using a system in which inmates agree, in writing, not to assault each other.

One inmate refused for 1½ years to leave solitary because he had testified against other gang members, recalled Capt. Thomas Duran, who coordinates the program.

But he saw other longtime inmates leaving and eventually agreed to try it. Rather than put him immediately in with other inmates, deputies paired him with a single inmate — then two other inmates, then four and so on.

He spent more and more time out of his solitary cell until he was fully back into the general jail population. “We’re trying to set the inmates up not to fail,” Duran said.

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California jails use kinder approach to solitary confinement
Nonstop violence as Baltimore nears record homicide rate

By REGINA GARCIA CANO
BALTIMORE (AP) — Baltimore could wrap up 2019 with its highest per-capita homicide rate on record as killings of adults and minors alike for drugs, retribution, money or no clear reason continue to add up and city officials appear unable to stop the violence.

Police recorded 338 homicides as of Tuesday, following a week of relentless gunfire that saw eight people shot — three of them fatally — in one day and nine others — one fatally — another day. That total is up from 309 in 2018 and four shy of the 342 killings tallied in 2017 and 2015, the year when the city’s homicide rate suddenly spiked.

With just over 600,000 residents, Baltimore’s homicide rate would reach approximately 57 per 100,000 residents if the death toll reaches 342. That would eclipse the rate of 1993, when the city had a record 353 killings but was also much more populous. By contrast, New York City, much more populous, had 306 homicides through Dec. 15.

Police yellow tape and balloons have become makeshift memorials with residents, had 306 homicides with more than 8 million residents if the death toll reaches 342. That would make Baltimore the second most populous city in the United States. New York City had 353 killings but was also much more populous. By contrast, New York City, much more populous, had 306 homicides through Dec. 15.

Police yellow tape and balloons have become makeshift memorials with flowers, stuffed animals and balloons have become common in some neighborhoods of this deeply segregated city. Memorials can be found within blocks of each other at the same time.

“It’s a major concern for me, not just as a hopeful woman but as a citizen of Baltimore who grew up in inner city Baltimore,” said Carmichael “Stokey” Cannady, a reformed drug dealer turned community activist who wants to be mayor. “I remember when a person had a conflict and would have a fight at best, now these young kids, at the age of 13, 14 years old, are finding handguns in their possession and they use them as toys ... The whole system needs to be revamped.”

This is the fifth year in a row this Mid-Atlantic community dubbed “Charm City” has reported more than 300 killings. Before 2015, that number had generally been on the decline, but the trend reversed after civil unrest followed the death in police custody of a young black man, Freddie Gray.

Reasons for the upward trend vary and are subject to interpretation. Many accuse police of taking a hands-off approach to crime fighting since six of their own were charged in connection with Gray’s death. Others attribute it to the apparent free flow of illegal guns, the effects of a punishing opioid epidemic, social inequalities and a lack of decent jobs for many in disenfranchised neighborhoods. Some say political incompetence at City Hall also contributed.

Police Commissioner Michael Harrison, who was tapped this year to fix a dispirited department and regain residents’ trust, unveiled a five-year crime-fighting plan in July, that includes a goal of responding to calls within 10 minutes and prioritizing those threatening life or property.

The plan also contains recruitment strategies, community engagement efforts and accountability measures. But the department lacks the personnel and resources to achieve all the goals, and Harrison has acknowledged that the city’s deep-rooted “gun culture” also must be changed.

“People can expect that number to go down, we are building capacity, but we need to have some type of effect on the poverty, the housing, the education, the addiction, the skills, the jobs and the lack thereof, together at the same time,” Harrison told The Associated Press. “All of that has to be addressed while prosecuting people who commit crimes and preventing other people from committing those crimes. Otherwise, it continues and then you ask the question, ‘When does it stop?’ without fixing the reason it starts.”

Last week, the U.S. Department of Justice and members of the state’s congressional delegation announced additional resources to help Harrison and federal law enforcement in Maryland track guns, hire additional police officers and beef up task forces. Harrison, in a reverse-agreed to allow three surveillance airplanes to fly above the city for up to six months as part of a pilot program.

Law enforcement experts, however, warn it would be unfair to assume that law enforcement alone will reduce violent crime.

“Let’s not assume simply that by putting more officers this is going to lead to greater closure of cases or will be a deterrent,” Jeffrey Ian Ross, a criminologist at the University of Baltimore. “It may help families, it may put behind bars some more bad guys, but it doesn’t mean it necessarily leads to a decrease in crime and homicides.”

One reason for the surge in killings is that the police department is dealing with a shortage of officers, something that has long been an issue in Baltimore.

“People are more vulnerable,” said Anthony Oluseye Akinyemi, 56, who was shot and killed Saturday in the same area where a young black man, Freddie Gray, died in police custody of asphyxiation in 2015.

Akinyemi, who was convicted last week in Baltimore City Circuit Court of child abuse of a minor and was sentenced to life in prison, was killed while he was in federal immigration custody over the weekend, days after he was convicted of a sex offense and assault in Maryland.

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A Nigerian man dies in ICE custody after sex abuse conviction

SNOW HILL, Md. (AP) — A Nigerian man died in federal immigration custody over the weekend, days after he was convicted of a sex offense and assault in Maryland.

Anthony Oluseye Akinyemi, 56, died Saturday after being found unresponsive in his cell at the Worcester County Jail in Snow Hill, Maryland, according to a Monday news release from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The official cause of death was not immediately determined, but authorities believe Akinyemi killed himself. Akinyemi had been charged with sexual abuse of a minor and was convicted last week in Baltimore City Circuit Court. Officials said he entered the U.S. lawfully on a non-immigrant visa in 2017 but did not comply with the terms of his admission. He had been in ICE custody for less than 24 hours, authorities said.

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Putin says Russia is leading world in hypersonic weapons

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
MOSCOW (AP) — President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that Russia has got a strong edge in designing new weapons and that it has become the only country in the world to deploy hypersonic weapons.

Speaking at a meeting with top military brass, Putin said that for the first time in history Russia is now leading the world in developing an entire new class of weapons unlike in the past when it was catching up with the United States.

The Russian leader noted that during Cold War times, the Soviet Union was behind the United States in designing the atomic bomb and building strategic bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

"Now we have a situation that is unique in modern history when they are trying to catch up to us," he said. "Not a single country has hypersonic weapons, let alone hypersonic weapons of intercontinental range."

The Pentagon and the U.S. military services have been working on the development of hypersonic weapons in recent years, and Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in August that he believes "it's probably a matter of a couple of years" before the U.S. has one. He has called it a priority as the military works to develop new long-range fire capabilities.

The U.S. also has repeatedly warned Congress about hypersonic missiles being developed by Russia and China that will be harder to track and defeat. U.S. officials have talked about putting a layer of sensors in space to more quickly detect enemy missiles, particularly the more advanced hypersonic threats.

The administration also plans to study the idea of basing interceptors in space, so the U.S. can strike incoming enemy missiles during the first minutes of flight when the booster engines are still burning.

Asked to comment on Putin's remarks, a spokesman for the U.S. Defense Department, Lt. Col. Robert Carver, said Tuesday in an email, "We have seen the reporting but have nothing to add concerning Russia's claims."

Putin said that the first unit equipped with the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle is set to go on duty this month, while the air-launched Kinzhal hypersonic missiles already have entered service.

The Russian leader first mentioned the Avangard and the Kinzhal among other prospective weapons systems in his state-of-the-nation address in March 2018.

Putin said then that the Avangard has an intercontinental range and can fly in the atmosphere at a speed 20 times the speed of sound. He noted that the weapon's ability to change both its course and its altitude makes it immune to interception by the enemy.

"It's a weapon of the future, capable of penetrating both existing and prospective missile defense systems," Putin said Tuesday.

Protesters in Belarus sentenced to arrests, fines

Associated Press
MINSK, Belarus (AP) — Courts in Belarus on Thursday sentenced about 20 participants in protests against closer integration with Russia to short jail sentences and fines.

The opposition rallies earlier this month were triggered by two rounds of talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko.

Many in Belarus feared the negotiations on closer economic ties could pave way for Russia's takeover of its western neighbor. Such concerns were triggered by Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

A court in the Belarusian capital Minsk sentenced the protests' organizer Pavel Severinets to 15 days in jail and a fine equivalent to $610. About 20 participants in the rallies were also sentenced to fines and arrests by Minsk courts.

Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus for a quarter century with little tolerance for dissent, has relied on Russian energy subsidies and loans to keep his nation's Soviet-style economy afloat.

Russia has recently increased energy prices and cut subsidies for Belarus to push it toward closer integration, but the Belarusian leader rejected Moscow's overtures and vowed to uphold Belarus' independence.

Authorities allowed the unsanctioned rallies to proceed — an unusual show of tolerance in a country where police routinely disperse opposition protests.

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Erdogan: Turkey lawmakers to vote on sending troops to Libya

By SUZAN FRASER
ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkey's president said Thursday that the U.N.-support ed government in Libya has asked Ankara to send troops to help the administration in Tripoli defend the city from an offensive by rival forces. Turkish lawmakers could vote as early as next week on the move, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, adding that his government will submit a bill to allow for the deployment of Turkish forces to Libya.

Speaking to his ruling party's officials, Erdogan said the Tripoli government of Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj “invited” Turkey to send troops under a military cooperation agreement signed recently between the two. Ankara and Tripoli have also signed a maritime deal; both agree to comment on the report.

Turkey's officials, Erdogan said, Speaking to his ruling party's officials, Erdogan said the Tripoli government of Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj “invited” Turkey to send troops under a maritime cooperation agreement signed recently between the two. Ankara and Tripoli have also signed a maritime deal; both agree to send troops under a military cooperation agreement signed recently between the two. Ankara and Tripoli have also signed a maritime deal; both agree to comment on the report.

Sarraj's administration has faced an offensive since April by the rival government based in eastern Libya and forces loyal to commander Gen. Khalifa Hifter, who is trying to take Tripoli. "We will go to places where we are invited to, and not go to places we are not invited to," Erdogan aid. "At the moment, since there is such an invitation, we will accept this invitation..." Erdogan said the bill could be taken up by lawmakers on Jan. 8 or Jan. 9, as soon as parliament reconvenes from a recess. Erdogan's ruling party holds a majority in parliament, which signals the bill will easily pass in the house.

In related developments, a monitoring group that tracks Syria's civil war said Thursday that Turkey-backed Syrian rebels have opened four recruitment centers in northern Aleppo province for volunteer fighters for Libya. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the volunteers would be dispatched to Libya through Turkey and earn a lucrative monthly salary of about $1,800 to $2,000. There was no independent confirmation of the report.

Libya is divided between the two administrations, Sarraj's in Tripoli and the east-based government, each supported by an array of militias and foreign governments.

The fighting around Tripoli escalated in recent weeks after Hifter declared a "final" and decisive battle for the capital. Hifter is backed by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, as well as France and Russia, while the Tripoli-based government receives aid from Turkey, Qatar and Italy. Also Thursday, Hifter's forces resumed their shelling of the town of Misrata, to the west of Tripoli and a stronghold of a powerful militia that has been defending the capital on behalf of Sarraj's government.

Reports: UK family drowned in Spain didn't know how to swim

MADRID (AP) — Spanish news reports said Thursday that a member of the British family whose father and two children died in a swimming pool on Christmas Eve has told police that none of the three knew how to swim.

Spanish private news agency Europa Press and other media outlets said the family member testified before Civil Guard police.

No one was immediately available at the Civil Guard to comment on the report. Earlier, Civil Guard union spokesman officer Paco González said autopsy results show the three members died by drowning. Investigators were now trying to determine why they drowned, he said. Leading Spanish newspaper El País said the autopsy results also showed none of the three had bruises or suffered intoxication.

The deaths of the 53-year-old father, his 9-year-old daughter and 16-year-old son occurred Tuesday in the Club La Costa World pool in the town of Mijas.

Europa Press said the girl got into difficulty first. Her brother and father then jumped into the pool and tried to save her but all three drowned.

González said police inspected the pool and found no irregularities. "(Police officers) did not find any anomaly that could indicate a swirl or a suctioning current," he said.

In this photo taken on Tuesday Dec. 24, 2019, a civil guard van is parked at the entrance of the Club La Costa World holiday resort near Malaga, Spain. Associated Press
Iraq president rejects Iran-backed prime minister nominee

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA

Baghdad (AP) — Iraq's president refused on Thursday to designate a prime minister candidate nominated by the Iran-backed parliamentary bloc, plunging the country into further political uncertainty amid nearly three months of unprecedented mass protests.

President Barham Saleh said in a statement issued by his office that he would not name the governor of the southern Basra province, Asaad al-Eidani, as the country's next prime minister "to avoid more bloodshed and in order to safeguard civil peace."

Al-Eidani's name was proposed on Wednesday by the Fatah bloc, which includes leaders associated with the Iran-supported paramilitary Popular Mobilization Forces. His nomination was promptly rejected by Iraqi protesters who poured into the streets Wednesday demanding the return of the Iran-backed prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi late last month.

Demonstrators first took to the streets on Oct. 1 to call for the overthrow of Iraq's entire political class over corruption and mismanagement. The mass uprisings prompted the resignation of former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi late last month. More than 450 people have been killed since October, the vast majority of them protesters killed by security forces firing tear gas and live ammunition.

Concentrated in Baghdad and the mostly Shiite-inhabited south, the protests have since evolved into an uprising against Iran's political and military influence in the country.

Saleh said he was as prepared to submit his resignation to Parliament, as his refusal to designate al-Eidani could be construed as a violation of the constitution. He stopped short of actually stepping down, however, saying in a statement addressed to Parliament that he would leave it up to lawmakers to decide "as they see fit." Shortly after issuing the statement, the president left Baghdad for his hometown in the northern city of Sulaimaniyah.

Under the constitution, parliament has seven days to accept or reject a president's resignation before it automatically goes into effect. It was unclear how lawmakers would react, as Saleh did not officially resign.


A leading politician and former government official familiar with the latest developments said they presented a "real crisis that may lead to the collapse of the state."

Relief group: 216,000 have fled homes in northwest Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — More than 200,000 men, women and children fled their homes in northwest Syria in buses, trucks and cars in recent weeks, amid intense air and ground bombardment by government forces, a Syrian relief group said Wednesday.

Government forces have been bombarding southern and eastern Idlib province, the last rebel stronghold in the war-torn country, since late November. A ground offensive that began last week has displaced more people and government forces have captured more than 40 villages and hamlets, according to the Syrian army and opposition activists. The Syrian Response Coordination Group, a relief group active in northwestern Syria, said 216,632 people have fled their homes, many of them with no specific place to go. Many have been heading toward the Turkish border for safety.

Truckloads of civilians flee a Syrian military offensive in Idlib province on the main road near Hazano, Syria, Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2019.

The group said people fled from about 250 villages and towns, adding that 252 civilians, including 79 children have been killed as a result of the violence.

Before the ground offensive began last Thursday, the U.N. reported that some 60,000 Idlib residents had already been displaced since the government's bombing campaign began late last month.
Christmas typhoon leaves 20 dead in Philippines

By JIM GOMEZ
Associated Press
MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A strong typhoon that barreled through the central Philippines left at least 20 people dead and forced thousands to flee their homes, devastating Christmas celebrations in the predominantly Catholic country.

Typhoon Phanfone stranded many people in sea and airports at the peak of holiday travel, set off landslides, flooded low-lying villages, destroyed houses, downed trees and electrical poles and knocked out power in entire provinces.

One disaster response officer described the battered coastal town of Batad in Iloilo province as a “ghost town” on Christmas Day. “You can’t see anybody because there was a total blackout, you can’t hear anything. The town looked like a ghost town,” Cindy Ferrer of the regional Office of the Civil Defense said by phone.

The storm weakened slightly on Thursday as it blew into the South China Sea with sustained winds of 120 kilometers (74 miles) per hour and gusts of 150 kph (93 mph) after lashing island after island with fierce winds and pounding rain on Christmas Day, the weather agency said. Most of the 20 deaths reported by national police and local officials were due to drowning, falling trees and accidental electrocution.

A father, his three children and another relative were among those missing in hard-hit Iloilo province after a swollen river inundated their shanty, officials said.

The typhoon slammed into Eastern Samar province on Christmas Eve and then plowed across the archipelago’s central region on Christmas, slamming into seven coastal towns and island provinces without losing power, government forecasters said.

Provincial officials, army troops, police and volunteers spent Christmas away from home to tend to thousands of displaced residents in town gymnasiums and schools turned into emergency shelters. Many more people spent Christmas Eve, traditionally a time for family reunions, in bus terminals.

Japan executes first foreigner in 10 years in family murder

By MARI YAMAGUCHI
TOKYO (AP) — Japan executed its first foreigner in 10 years on Thursday, a Chinese man convicted in the 2003 murder and robbery of a family of four.

Wei Wei, 40, was hanged Thursday at a detention center in Fukuoka where he had been on death row for more than 16 years, Justice Minister Masako Mori said.

Wei was convicted of robbing and killing a clothing store owner and his wife and two children at their home in Fukuoka. He and two Chinese accomplices dumped the bodies into the ocean after attaching weights to them, Mori said at a news conference.

Japan has maintained the death penalty despite growing international criticism.

Mori said she signed the execution order after careful examination, taking into consideration the international anti-execution movement. She said Japan was a law-abiding country and the execution was based on its criminal justice system.

“It was an extremely cold-blooded and cruel case, in which (Wei) killed four innocent members of a happy family,” she said.

Wei’s two accomplices were tried in China, where one was sentenced to death and the other was given life imprisonment, according to Japan’s Kyodo News agency.

Amnesty International said the hanging showed Japan’s “shocking lack of respect for the right to life.”

“The country has shown that it lags far behind most of its peers,” Arnold Fang, an East Asia researcher for the group, said in a statement.
Colombia's conflict spills over to museum of memory

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — On a vacant grassy lot squeezed between several smoggy highways lies the property where Colombia's government hopes to build a large museum paying homage to victims of the country's long civil conflict. But for now, the terrain occupied only by a rusted cubic metal sculpture is a reminder of how polarized this South American nation remains.

In recent weeks, the future of the Museum of Memory has become a public feud because of the director overseeing it. President Iván Duque's appointee — history professor Dario Acevedo — is a conservative who has expressed a view of the conflict that critics say could excuse the state of much of its responsibility for the violence.

Acevedo has rejected a draft plan for the museum's content and has questioned the number of victims of the five-decade war. In response, some victim groups vow not to work with the historical center.

"What's at stake is potentially losing the opportunity for the museum to be another instrument through which to build peace in Colombia," said Rafael Tamayo, an academic who until recently served as the museum's leader.

The idea of a Museum of Memory dates to a 2011 law that vowed to make symbolic reparations to the estimated 8.6 million victims by creating a space of documentation and reflection.

The conflict has dominated a half-century of Colombian life. Marxist guerrillas formed the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in the mid-1960s to overthrow the government, redistribute land and erase economic inequality. The war evolved into battle between guerrillas, the state and paramilitary groups, complicated by the rise of the multi-billion-dollar cocaine trade. In decades of bombings, kidnappings and assassinations, millions were forcibly displaced and an estimated 260,000 left dead.

"For a nation struggling to recover from historical conflict and trauma, it is vital to create a narrative that resonates with public memory," said Jennifer Hansen-Gluecklich, who wrote a book examining the challenges faced by Holocaust museums. "But it can be a very tricky thing to do because of the question of consensus."

Colombia's conflict is especially difficult terrain, partly because it lacks a clear start and end. Though some 10,500 former guerrillas are now living as civilians, deadly skirmishes between remnants armed groups in the countryside persist.

Who should go down in history as a demon and who as a savior is a matter of fierce debate.

Were Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia rebels fighting for the poor or were they primarily a drug trafficking organization? Did former President Álvaro Uribe help Colombia move toward peace by pushing rebels to the verge of extinction — or the one who started new conflict by citing paramilitary violence against anyone who challenged powerful landlords? Many say all those descriptions are true at the same time.

"In Colombia the line between hero and villain is not clear," writer Santiago Villa noted in a recent El Espectador newspaper column. The debate has coincided with street protests against inequality, corruption and what critics perceive as Duque's lackluster implementation of a 2016 peace deal with the main rebel group.

Some protesters turned their attention to Acevedo, portraying him as a henchman for the ruling conservative political party intent on masking the state's role in crimes committed during the conflict.

"He's a thief," said Carlos Oviedo, 36, who held a sign railing against Acevedo at a protest outside a government building where events honoring victims are often held. "A thief of our historical memory."

When Acevedo was appointed in February to lead the National Center for Historical Memory, 89 victims' organizations urged Duque to reconsider. Several threatened to remove themselves if they contributed from the center's vaults. Even Acevedo's history professor colleagues objected.

Helicopters in Chile douse fire that destroyed 200 homes

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Helicopters dropped thousands of gallons of water on the outskirts of the Chilean port city of Valparaiso on Wednesday to extinguish a fire that destroyed more than 200 homes.

Dozens of people living in the city's Rocuant and San Roque hills sifted through the ruins of their homes after strong winds whipped the blaze through their neighborhoods Tuesday. Residents had been evacuated and there were no reports of casualties.

The fire destroyed more than 200 homes and affected more than 1,000 people, Agriculture Minister Antonio Walker said Wednesday evening.

Earlier, Interior Minister Gonzalo Blumel said authorities believe arson caused the blaze and urged people to report any suspicious activity.

"We're not certain, but everything indicates that yesterday's fire was intentional, and began in an area quite close to the homes," said Elio Passadore, emergency manager for Valparaiso.

The fire was doused in urban areas but remained "active" in the woods, said Ricardo Toro, head of Chile's national emergency office.

Many homes in the low-income neighborhoods where the fire occurred don't have running water and get their supply from tanker trucks a couple of times a week.

Wildfires have affected parts of Valparaiso several times in the last month as Chile contends with its worst drought on record.
Colombian Emeralds International: Fine jewelry and award-winning customer service

ORANJESTAD — Colombian Emeralds International’s mission is to offer customers fine jewelry of exceptional quality and value, through an award-winning customer service experience.

From humble beginnings with two stores in Freeport, Bahamas more than 40 years ago, Colombian Emeralds International has expanded to over 60 locations throughout the Caribbean, Central America and on-board Norwegian Cruise Lines.

Today, they are one of the largest retailers in the region, offering a large selection of renowned jewelry and watch brands. Their settings are artfully crafted to not only elevate their collection, but also the individuals who wear them. Like the exotic locations you travel to visit, they believe their pieces should be captivating and spectacular. With high-quality precious jewels, handcrafted designs, named collections and exceptional value, their exclusive pieces are given distinctive features that command the ultimate sense of luxury.

At Colombian Emeralds International, they take pride on being a trusted presence, welcoming travelers on their adventures. Offering precious reminders of their customer’s journeys to exotic locations. Their jewels are keepsakes that add brilliance to travelers’ day-to-day lives, and remind them of their treasured stories. With Colombian Emeralds International, you can be assured that within each of their gemstones, whether they be emeralds, diamonds, sapphires or rubies, you’ll find the color, clarity, cut and rarity to convey exactly the right sentiment for that special moment. The only thing left to do is discover it for yourself.

Colombian Emeralds International wishes all her clientele a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

For more information: www.colombianemeralds.com

Aruba to Me

ORANJESTAD – Aruba Today likes to welcome readers to participate in our newspaper. You can see that in our Honored Guest-publications, specials like on Valentine’s Day and on other occasions. Throughout the year you are always welcome to send us your vacation picture(s) together with completing the sentence: Aruba to me is …….. (Email: news@arubatoday.com)

For today’s newspaper we received a great picture from Melisa Morgan from New York with her cousin James from Washington, DC. She wrote to us:

“My ‘Aruba to me’ moment was during my recent visit last week in Wonder ARUBA. For the first time..... I had dinner on the beach at the fabulous “Passions on the Beach” restaurant with my cousin James W. Jones to continue my birthday celebration in Aruba. I made reservations and we went on December 8, 2019. My birthday is on December 6th but I celebrate all month!

The atmosphere of this restaurant on the beach is so serene... it is incredible. We got there at 6:00pm and sat right on Eagle Beach steps away from the water. We watch the beautiful colors of the sky change as we saw the sunset. Simply awesome and serene. What a beautiful experience on the beach to eat delicious food, watch the sunset and talk and take in you serene moments in Aruba.”
ORANJESTAD – As the end of the year quickly approaches, Aruba Airport Authority N.V. (AAA) is proud to share the news that 2019 has been showing great results thus far. The North American market is expected to surpass for the second time in Aruba Airport’s history the one million seat capacity mark with a busy winter season ahead.

For the 2nd year in a row:
AUA Airport projects 1 million seats out of North America

As for the winter season (October 1st, 2019 – March 31st, 2020) AAA has some exciting news to share with amongst others the announcement of 4 new scheduled and seasonal routes, being La Guardia, Chicago Medellin and Barranquilla!

- JetBlue further expands service to New York from 11 to 16 weekly flights as of June 2019 to October 2020. Planned increase as follows:
- Double daily flights on Fridays and Sundays only to everyday, including a 3rd and 4th flight on Saturdays.
- United Airlines further expands seasonal service to Chicago from 2 weekly to 5 weekly flights.
- American Airlines further expands the 1 weekly seasonal service to yearround. This now makes for six destinations to the “One Happy Island” Aruba with American Airlines. In addition, due to growing demand during the peak Christmas travel season, American Airlines will operate a larger aircraft A321 / A330 out of Philadelphia and Charlotte.
- Delta Air Lines will operate one additional weekly Boston service in December and January 2020.
- Avianca Airlines in order to offer travelers from Aruba more and better connectivity options, and taking advantage of Avianca’s global route network, the airline maintains 11 weekly frequencies despite the internal challenges experienced between the island and its connection center in Bogota, Colombia.
- Wingo Airlines keeps growing. By adding 2 new weekly service during peak months November, December and January 2020.
- Aruba Airlines will begin twice weekly nonstop service from Aruba to Barranquilla and Medellin December 2019.
- KLM grows capacity by flying more frequently the larger aircraft A330-300 to the destination as result an additional 45 seats on each rotation. Together with Delta Air Lines, partner in its transatlantic joint venture, KLM is strengthening its market position between North America and Europe.

With the addition of these flights, Aruba Airport will be served by 27 airlines, providing service to 32 international airports in 12 countries, and 28 destinations.

"AAA’s key focus will be to maintain current air service levels and capacity impact whilst supporting the destination’s efforts to generate demand. We are well aware of the extreme volatility of the airline industry and our commitment towards our partners is stronger than ever. The year ahead will have additional challenges and will require us to be flexible with our objectives and implementation strategies. Partnership will be extremely important during 2020 as competition is fierce and global," said AAA’s Air Service Development Manager Mrs. Jo-Anne Meaux-Arends.

At Aruba Airport we are proud to continue offering originating travelers/visitors the world’s best network of international routes to/from Aruba. Aruba Airport looks forward to welcoming all the visitors to the island in the winter season.
GroceriesToGo Aruba:
Delivering Groceries and Travel Essentials to Island Vacationers, Time Share Rentals, Hotels, Homes and Anyone in Aruba!

It is also for busy people who do not have time to spend standing in line at the grocery store. Jared Pick, CEO and founder of the company said, “Our mission is to provide quality products and convenient services to our customers that will allow them more time to enjoy their vacation and the wonders of Aruba, One Happy Island!” Pick’s family is originally from Aruba where his grandfather, known as Chipi Chipi, started La Moderna. GroceriesToGo Aruba is a family owned business where Karl Pick is CFO and Marilyn Pick is Marketing Director.

GroceriesToGo Aruba, www.GroceriesToGoAruba.com, is the first full service online grocery delivery business in Aruba. “The need to fill the families grocery order without having to take time away from your vacation to shop was our motivation to start our delivery service.” GroceriesToGo Aruba will strive to provide the most affordable and convenient service to our customers across the island who will also receive the highest quality customer service. “We take the hassle out of shopping in store, while still bringing the same great quality of your favorite products right to your front door.”

Our company will offer the service of conveniently delivering groceries to island vacationers and anyone living or staying on the island who are unable to, or simply would rather not grocery shop themselves. We will take orders online and fulfill each order personally before delivering the items to our customers (at Time Share Units, Hotel Rooms, Beach Houses, Homes, Yachts etc.).

GroceriesToGo Aruba can deliver your groceries and travel essentials directly whenever and whatever is most convenient for the customer. An excellent benefit to an online delivery service is that you can order online prior to your travels and have quality freshness waiting for you upon arrival, as well as order from us anytime during your stay here in Aruba. Our motto is “Save Time, Grocery Shop Online” www.GroceriesToGoAruba.com

PALM BEACH - GroceriesToGo Aruba has developed a convenient service that shops and delivers grocery items and essentials to vacationers and anyone on the island, allowing them more time to spend with family and friends while here on vacation.
9 Simple Practices How to Improve Your Well-Being Success

By Bonnie Gortler

ORANJESTAD — Do you have a set of goals you want to achieve? May all your dreams come true and this year be even better than the last. Have you thought about what are you ready to do differently to gain the results that you desire? If things haven’t been working out the way you want, then it’s time for you to have a new perspective.

Now is the time to enjoy your life, doing what you love while reaching your goals. Take note when you are happy and what you’re working on that excites you. When you feel this way, it’s a strong sign for you to be doing more within this area. Then ask yourself why do you love it so much and are so productive. The answer may help you realize what you may need to change. Decide to focus on the things you are passionate about, even if it takes time for you to excel and master success.

“Success is creating a healthy, wealthy, balanced, fun, inspired lifestyle, living life with love, happiness & inner peace.” ~Bonnie Gortler

Success is a journey that takes time. Personal, as well as professional success, can be learned and achieved; it’s by acknowledging your limitations, being consistent and disciplined doing the work. Fortunately, you don’t have to do it alone. It’s ok to ask for support to be in the best position for success. There are plenty of resources and trained professionals who can be of assistance to you. Don’t overwhelm yourself with too high expectations. Be gentle. There are limits to how much you can do each day.

Create a manageable plan that will help you reach your goals. By taking small steps, that considers your well-being, you will increase your creativity, reduce stress, and have more productivity. You will begin experiencing the inner peace that comes when you focus on the positives instead of what is not working. By continually feeding your mind pleasant thoughts, you silence the destructive voices that get in the way of you reaching your goals. With practice and patience, you begin to stop focusing on those pessimistic thoughts. Start today with a clear mindset and see how much more you enjoy life.

9 Simple Practices How to Improve Your Well-Being Success:

1. Surround yourself with people who you trust and support you.
2. Create three goals that you want to achieve. Break them down into smaller goals doing one goal at a time. Enjoy the process and keep away from focusing on the outcome.
3. Stop worrying about being perfect. Don’t avoid doing something that you want to because you fear what others might think. Act today, instead of saying I will do it tomorrow.
4. Find ways to reduce your workload. Do less, not more. Write a list to do and a list you delegate to someone else.
5. Create time for you and your family to have fun together for your overall health and well-being.
6. Listen to what your body is telling you. If you are constantly tired, get more rest. Slow down, regroup, so you energize your mind and body.
7. Be kind to yourself. Understand mistakes will happen. They are the lessons that will make you stronger and help you achieve your dreams and goals.
8. Respond instead of reacting if you are feeling irritated. Control your first impulsive reaction to answer right away. Count to 10 before you respond. If this doesn’t work, ask if you could get back to the person a little later.
9. Enjoy life without feeling stressed, irritated, or frustrated. Enjoy the smallest change you make will bring you closer to success in achieving your goals and dreams.

Enjoying the process one step at a time, celebrating your successes along the way. If you liked this article, you will love Bonnie’s Free eBook: Grow Your Wealth And Well-Being(https://bonniegortler.pages.com/wealth-and-well-being-ebook/).
Ode to Sports: Pats & Nats, a roster from A(stros) to Z(ion)

By FRED LIEF
AP Sports Writer

A year now passes. How’d I know?
Analytics guys told me so.
They crunched the data.
What’s it mean?
Anyone’s guess: 2019.

First Quarter
‘Bama toppled, it’s Clemson’s prize –
White House visit, with burgers, fries.
Fury nearing incoherence, Saints aghast:
No interference?
Super Bowl is kind of boring –

Pats and Brady, not much scoring.
Hall of Fame vote, Sandman enters.
All Rivera, no dissenters.
Osaka sure looks here to stay.

Australia makes her resume.
The neck, the back, the aching knees –
Vonn calls it quits, hangs up her skis.
Taking it to the hoop and hit.

James Harden scores on pace with Wilt.
Daytona: Hamlin has the car.
It’s 1-2-3 for JGR.

Machado, Padres get all sweet.
Zion’s sneaker is shredded wheat.

Harper’s contract gilds the lily.
A quick ride north up to Philly.

Kraft is busted, cries sabotage.

Adidas big-shot goes to jail.
Is college basketball for sale?

Does Nike dine on this foul stew?

Continued on Page 23
The irony, of course, is that there’s nothing casual or easy about it. Any of it. The greatest gymnast of all time and 2019 Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year only makes it seem that way.

Those jaw-dropping routines that are rewriting her sport’s code of points and redefining what can be done on the competition floor? Born from a mix of natural talent, hard work and a splash of ego.

The 25 world championship medals, the most by any gymnast ever? The result of a promise the 22-year-old made to herself when she returned to competition in 2017 after taking time off following her golden run at the 2016 Olympics.

The stoicism and grace she has shown in becoming an advocate for survivors — herself included — and an agent for change in the wake of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal that’s shaken USA Gymnastics to its core? The byproduct of a conscious decision to embrace the immense pressure typically associated with the world’s most wondrous blur. Her double-twisting double-flip beam dismount (the “double double”) is so tough the International Gymnastics Federation made the unusual decision to downplay its value in an effort to deter other gymnasts from even trying it.

This is both the blessing and the curse of making the nearly impossible look tantalizingly attainable. When Biles learned about the FIG’s decision, she vented on Twitter, her palpable frustration highlighting the reality she’s maintained even as her first name has become synonymous with her sport’s royalty. It can lead to a bit of a balancing act. In some ways, she’s still the kid from Texas who just wants to hang out with her boyfriend and her dog and go to the grocery story without being bothered. In other ways, she’s trying to be respectful of the world she’s built. Take the GOAT thing. It’s a title she embraces — Biles wore a goat-themed leotard during training at the national championships in August — but also takes with a grain of salt, determined to stay grounded even as the pressure around her grows. Yes, GOAT happens to be the acronym for her planned post-Olympic “Gold Over America Tour,” but ask her where the inspiration came from and she laughs and gives credit to a friend, Kevin, who came up in a group chat. It is both paying tribute to and winking at her status at the same time.

Biles has become well aware over the last three years that her every word and action carries far greater weight than she ever imagined. Her most impactful moment of 2019 might not have come during a meet but sitting for an interview on the eve of winning her record sixth national title, when she fought back tears while talking about how USA Gymnastics, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee sexualized and failed to protect athletes during an investigation into Nassar’s abusive behavior.

The moment went viral, as most things surrounding her tend to do these days. “I’m starting to realize it’s not just the gymnasternet anymore,” Biles said, using the term for her sport’s dedicated fans. “It’s an overall thing. It’s weird to get that kind of attention, but at the end of the day, I feel gymnastics has been overlooked in non-Olympic years. Yeah, it puts pressure on me. But I’m not trying to think about all the attention from the outside world.”

The attention figures to only grow in the run-up to Tokyo, where she will attempt to become the first female gymnast in more than half a century to repeat as Olympic champion. Her smiling face serves as the exclamation point at the end of every television promo for the Summer Games. Let it be known: The smile is real. That might not have always been the case, but it is now.
Leonard leads Clippers beat Lakers, 111-106

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kawhi Leonard scored 11 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter and had 12 rebounds to help the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Los Angeles Lakers 111-106 on Wednesday night in the NBA’s marquee Christmas game.

Montrezl Harrell had 18 points off the bench, Paul George added 17 and the Clippers improved to 2-0 against the Lakers this season.

Kyle Kuzma led Los Angeles with 25 points. LeBron James had 23 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds, and Anthony Davis had 24 points. The Lakers have lost four straight games.

Los Angeles had a chance to tie in the final seconds, but video review showed James touched the ball last after Patrick Beverley knocked it away as James went up for a 3.

George hit two free throws for the final margin.

76ERS 121, BUCKS 109

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Joel Embiid outplayed Giannis Antetokounmpo in Philadelphia’s first home Christmas game in 31 years, finishing with 31 points and 11 rebounds to help the 3-point happy 76ers beat Milwaukee.

Tobias Harris sank five 3s, Josh Richardson and Furkan Korkmaz each had four and even Embiid hit three as part of Philly’s season-high 21 3s (on 44 attempts) against a Bucks team that had the best record in the NBA.

Harris and Al Horford hit 3s over the final 90 seconds to push back a late Bucks run, and the Sixers improved to 16-2 at home.

Khris Middleton scored 31 points for Milwaukee, and Antetokounmpo had 18 points and 14 rebounds. Antetokounmpo got flustered over a perceived missed call and was whistled for a technical in the fourth.

PELICANS 112, NUGGETS 100

DENVER (AP) — Brandon Ingram scored 31 points, Derrick Favors grabbed 13 rebounds and the Pelicans surprised Denver to halt the Nuggets’ seven-game winning streak.

The Pelicans are now 2-0 against the Nuggets this season. They spoiled the festive mood at the Pepsi Center as the Nuggets played at home on Christmas for the first time in 25 years.

New Orleans sprang the upset despite committing 19 turnovers. The Pelicans pulled away late courtesy of the long-range shooting of Lonzo Ball and Ingram. They also out-rebounded the Nuggets, including 14 offensive boards.

New Orleans finished a four-game trip with a 3-1 mark, which includes consecutive wins for the first time in a month.

CELTICS 118, RAPTORS 102

TORONTO (AP) — Jaylen Brown scored 30 points, Kemba Walker had 22 and Boston beat Toronto in the first Christmas Day NBA game played in Canada.

Enes Kanter had 12 points and 11 rebounds as the Celtics snapped an eight-game losing streak north of the border and became the first Atlantic Division opponent to win in Toronto in more than four years.

Boston’s Gordon Hayward returned to the starting lineup after missing the past three games because of a sore left foot. He scored 14 points in 26 minutes.

Fred VanVleet scored 27 points in the Raptors’ second straight loss, and Chris Boucher had a career-high 24.

Toronto had gone an NBA-record 34 games between home losses to division foes.
AP source: White Sox agree to deal with Edwin Encarnación

By ANDREW SELIGMAN
CHICAGO (AP) — The Chicago White Sox have agreed to a $12 million, one-year contract with veteran slugger Edwin Encarnación, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Wednesday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been announced.

Encarnación is due $11 million in salary next season and a $1 million signing bonus, with the White Sox holding an option for the 2021 season.

Encarnación hit 34 home runs in 109 games for Seattle and the Yankees last season. The three-time All-Star led the American League with 21 homers when the Mariners dealt him to New York in June. But the Yankees declined an option for next season after he was limited by oblique problems down the stretch.

In this Oct. 4, 2019, file photo, New York Yankees designated hitter Edwin Encarnación runs down the first base line after hitting a double against the Minnesota Twins during the first inning of Game 1 of a baseball American League Division Series in New York.

Associated Press

The White Sox have been loading up around a promising young core, hoping to challenge in the AL Central after seven straight losing seasons. Encarnación joins former AL Cy Young Award winner Dallas Keuchel and catcher Yasmani Grandal as big-money additions this offseason.

The White Sox agreed Saturday to a $55.5 million, three-year deal with Keuchel, a day after finalizing a one-year contract with two-time All-Star pitcher Gio González. They also brought back Abreu on a $50 million, three-year deal and acquired outfielder Nomar Mazara from the Texas Rangers.

The White Sox were 72-89 last season, well behind the 101-win Minnesota Twins and 93-win Cleveland Indians. But they believe they are in position to make a big jump after missing the playoffs for the 13th time in 14 years since their 2005 World Series championship.

That's because young players established themselves in the majors and promising prospects remain in the pipeline. Tim Anderson led the majors with a .335 average last year. Yoán Moncada had a breakthrough season, hitting .315 with 25 homers and 79 RBIs. Eloy Jiménez showed pop as a rookie, with a .267 average, 31 homers and 79 RBIs. Prized outfielder Luis Robert figures to debut next spring, and top prospect Nick Madrigal might also be ready to get significant time at second base.

Keuchel and González will join a rotation led by All-Star Lucas Giolito that also includes Reynaldo Lopez and Dylan Cease. Promising young right-hander Michael Kopech is also expected to return following Tommy John surgery.
Amid hotshot passers, old men Brady and Brees roll on

By BARRY WILNER
AP Pro Football Writer

Between them, Tom Brady and Drew Brees have played 38 pro football seasons, 39 if you count 2008 when the New England star wrecked his knee in Week 1. Both probably should be long retired and counting the days until their induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Instead, they’re still singing away — and could be doing so against each other on Feb. 2 in a little thing called the Super Bowl.

No, 40-year-old quarterbacks should not still be setting NFL records. Yet Brees always seems to be doing so.

And certainly 42-year-old QBs don’t even belong on the field. But Brady has the Patriots in position for — not that most of America wants to read this — a fourth straight trip to the Super Bowl, and his 10th overall, with six wins.

The influx of hotshot arms, from Patrick Mahomes to Lamar Jackson, from Carson Wentz to Deshaun Watson, has captured so much attention through the football galaxy. Still, it’s the two 40-somethings who lord over the quarterbacking 40s. It is a dangerous, dependable and varied attack.

Orleans has a more dangerous, dependable and varied attack than does New England these days. Brady is at 539.

While neither passer is a stats freak, they certainly are aware of the numbers they have compiled.

“Obviously, before the season you know you are a certain distance away, but then once the season starts, you just focus on winning games and doing what I need to do as a quarterback of this team to put us in the best position to succeed,” Brees says.

“What that, I guess the statistics come, and maybe they add up, and then all of a sudden, you’re close enough to be within striking distance of some of those things.”

With Michael Thomas running routes for him, Brees could always be closing in on unthinkble numbers. Thomas already has broken the single-season record for receptions with 145, and he caught 42 of those from Teddy Bridgewater while Brees was sideline for five games with a thumb injury.

The presence of Thomas, running back Alvin Kamara, a solid offensive line and coach Sean Payton could be enticing enough for Brees to come back next year. Or he could walk away from the NFL with nothing to prove, particularly if the Saints can win a second NFL title since he ventured to the Big Easy in 2006. That’s certainly doable: If New Orleans beats weak Carolina on Sunday while Green Bay and San Francisco lose, the Saints will be the NFC’s top seed. A simple victory over the Panthers earns a bye.

New Orleans could wind up in an odd position for 2020 at quarterback because Bridgewater will be a high-demand free agent. The Saints would love to hang on to the 27-year-old Bridgewater, who went 5-0 replacing Brees. But at what price if Brees is still around? New England has similar questions to answer, and they will magnify after the playoffs. Brady has had an inconsistent season with little established talent around him. His only dependable veteran target is Julian Edelman, and the protection has been spotty at best. Unlike Brees, who still has the mobility to make plays outside the pocket, Brady is pretty much stationary.

He’s also perhaps the greatest pocket passer ever. Surely, the fiery, often combative (on the field) Brady is the most accomplished quarterback with his six rings. To ever dismiss him is foolish, and the Patriots are 12-3, just like the Saints.

But there are more negative vibes around Brady than ever. His pass rating could wind up his lowest since 2003. His contract ends after this season. There have been rumblings he wants out of New England, whether by retirement or, if you can imagine, by joining another club as a free agent.

Scallywag and Comanche lead Sydney to Hobart yacht race

SYDNEY (AP) — Hong Kong yacht Scallywag had a narrow lead over Comanche early Friday as the Sydney to Hobart race was slowed by light winds on its first night at sea.

Nine-time line honors winner Wild Oats XI, which led late Thursday, fell back to ninth and was in the worst position of the five super maxis. There was no immediate indication of any problems on Wild Oats XI, which underwent extensive repairs after it sustained mast and rigging damage in early November. InfoTrack was the first boat out of Sydney Harbour on Thursday afternoon. The yacht, which took line honors in 2016 as Perpetual Loyal, got a flying start as the race began in winds of 15 to 18 knots, or around 30 kph (18 mph).

InfoTrack was in fourth place on Friday morning, one spot behind the Monaco-registered Black Jack as four super maxis held the leading positions. The 628-nautical-mile race takes the yachts down the southeast coast of New South Wales and across the Bass Strait to Hobart, the capital of the island state of Tasmania. Scallywag was still about 390 nautical miles from Hobart.

Two-time winner Comanche set the race record of 1 day, 9 hours, 15 minutes in 2017, a record that is certain to stand this year.
Woods’ comeback at Masters named AP Sports Story of the Year

By EDDIE PELLS
AP National Writer

A green jacket. A heart-melting embrace. A stirring return to the top of golf by one of the sport’s all-time greats.

In choosing Tiger Woods’ victory at the Masters as The Associated Press press story of the year, voters went with the uplifting escape of a great comeback over alternatives that were as much about sports as the issues that enveloped them in 2019: politics, money and the growing push for equal pay and equal rights for women.

The ballots, a mix of AP member sports editors and AP beat writers, elevated Woods’ rousing victory at Augusta National over the runner-up entry: the U.S. women’s soccer team’s victory at the World Cup. That monthlong competition was punctuated by star Megan Rapinoe’s push for pay equality for the women’s team and an ongoing war of words with President Donald Trump.

Rapinoe’s efforts to use sports as a platform to discuss bigger issues was hardly a one-off in 2019. Of the top 12 stories in the voting, only three — titles won by the Toronto Raptors, Washington Nationals and University of Virginia basketball team — stuck mainly to what happened between the lines. All the rest — including the blown call that cost the Saints a chance at the Super Bowl, a California law that threatens to upend the NCAA and Simone Biles’ dominance at gymnastics’ world championships, set against the backdrop of the sex-abuse crisis consuming the sport in the U.S. — were long-running sagas that went beyond a single day or event. They painted sports not as an escape from the world’s problems but merely another window into them.

It’s no stretch to say that main story of 2019: politics, money and the growing push for equal pay and equal rights for women.

WNBA, players’ union says new labor agreement is close

NEW YORK (AP) — The WNBA and the players’ union announced Thursday that they have agreed to extend their labor agreement for two weeks as they continue to negotiate a new one.

The current collective bargaining agreement was reached in 2014. It was supposed to run through the 2021 season, but the players decided to opt out of the deal after the 2019 season. In October, the two sides extended the deadline to Dec. 31. “We are making substantial progress toward a new collective bargaining agreement which we expect to finalize soon,” the WNBA and players’ union said in a joint statement Thursday. “In the meantime, we have extended the current agreement through Jan. 15, 2020, and expect that free agency contract signings will begin on time on Feb. 1, 2020.”
Hayton, Lafreniere lead Canada over U.S. in junior ice hockey

OSTRAVA, Czech Republic (AP) — Alexis Lafreniere had a goal and three assists and Barrett Hayton scored two power play goals for Canada to beat the United States 6-4 to open the world junior ice hockey championship on Thursday.

Connor McMichael, Nolan Foote, and Ty Dellandrea also scored for Canada, and goaltender Nicolas Daws made 28 saves in the win.

The U.S. got a pair of goals and an assist from Shane Pinto. Canada, the most successful team in the competition with 17 titles, is determined to rebound from a sixth-place finish last year when it hosted the tournament. It faces Russia on Saturday.

The host Czech Republic defeated Russia 4-3 in Group B, and Switzerland topped Kazakhstan 5-3 in Group A.

Hayton added his second midway through the third for 4-2, then Nicholas Robertson and Pinto tied it at 4. Lafreniere, one of the top NHL draft prospects, scored the winner with 3:11 left, and Dellandrea finished it off with an empty net goal.

Virginia's men can puff their chest, with last year's finalist the U.S. a close behind.

Virginia's men can puff their chest, with last year's finalist the U.S. a 2-0 advantage.

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Canada needed a comeback in its opener, which it won.

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Canada, the most successful team in the competition with 17 titles, is determined to rebound from a sixth-place finish last year when it hosted the tournament. It needed a comeback in its first match.

Pinto and Arthur Kaliyev scored power play goals in the opening frame to give last year's finalist the U.S. a 2-0 advantage.

McMichael, Hayton, and Foote scored in a span of less than 10 minutes in the second period comeback by Canada.

Canada's Connor McMichael (17) scores a goal against the United States goaltender Spencer Knight during the second period at the World Junior Hockey Championships in Ostrava, Czech Republic, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2019. Associated Press

Hayton, McMichael, and Dellandrea finished it off with an empty net goal. The U.S. next plays Germany Friday.

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Rust Belt region banks on becoming hub for electric vehicles

By JOHN SEEWER
Associated Press

The day Youngstown's steel mills began shutting down 40 years ago remains fresh in the minds of those who live in the blue-collar corner of Ohio. Community leaders don't want the recent closing of General Motors' massive assembly plant to leave that same lingering gloom.

The region is embarking on an ambitious plan to become a research and production hub for electric vehicles and carve out a new economy for itself by mixing its industrial past with emerging technology.

There are positive signs already. GM in early December announced it will form a joint venture and hire more than 1,100 people at a new plant that it says will be among the largest electric vehicle battery cell factories in the world. And the Lordstown assembly plant that GM shut down in March has been sold to a newly formed company that intends to begin making electric trucks by late 2020.

But the Youngstown region, which for decades has been a symbol of the American Midwest's declining industrial might, faces plenty of competition from places like Detroit, Silicon Valley and China — all of which also are positioning to be centers for electric and autonomous vehicles.

While the electric transformation within the auto industry is just beginning to take shape, it's clear that fewer workers and factories will be needed to make cars that require fewer parts. Where those next clusters of electric vehicle manufacturing will sprout is yet to be determined.

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, a Democrat who represents the Youngstown area, thinks being involved with the development of electric vehicles early on is the best chance his hometown has had in decades to restore what has been lost.

"For a long time in our community, we were chasing smokestacks, chasing things that were on the decline," he said. "We're starting to move in a good direction."

Economic development leaders point out that the Youngstown area already is home to a large electric battery test lab and business incubators that are focused on energy and additive manufacturing through 3-D printing. Youngstown State University is breaking ground on an advanced manufacturing technology center and wants to play a part in training students to work in the electric vehicle industry.

"We want to take charge of our future. An opportunity like this really plays to our regional strengths," said Mike Hripko, the university's associate vice president for economic development and government relations.

For decades now, those in the Mahoning Valley have been counting on "the next big idea" with investors promising to build factories that would make electric vehicles. Fully electric vehicles currently make up only 1.5% of U.S. new vehicle sales, and LMC Automotive forecasts that will rise to only 7.5% by the end of the next decade.

"We're still in the early days of this," Smith said.

Uncertainty also surrounds what will happen with the former GM assembly plant. It was bought by Lordstown Motors Corp., a new company that wants to begin making electric trucks by late 2020 but also needs more investors before manufacturing can begin.

France fines Google $166 million for abusing ad dominance

PARIS (AP) — France’s competition authority fined Google 150 million euros ($166 million) on Friday for “abusing its dominant position” in the online ad market.

The agency said the U.S. tech company mistreated buyers of ads based on keywords. Methods used by its Google Ads platform are "opaque and difficult to understand" and the company applies them in an "unequal and arbitrary way," it said.

It also ordered Google to clarify the rules for Google Ads and its procedures for freezing accounts, to avoid “brutal and unjustified” suspensions.

It’s the latest in a string of European fines against Google, which faces very little competition for search engine business across the continent. The company has been hit in recent years with multimillion-dollar fines imposed by European Union authorities for unrelated antitrust cases and is also facing increasing regulator pressure on other fronts in Europe and the U.S.

Google said in a statement that it would appeal, and that its advertising policies are designed to protect consumers “from exploit- ative and abusive ads.”

The case originated from a complaint that online consulting company Gibmedia filed after Google suspended its ad account in 2015. During and after their protracted dispute, Google published similar ads to those run by Gibmedia, according to the ruling, which also cites other examples of companies Google suspended without justification.
5 Signs an Online Loan Is a Debt Trap

Associated Press

As you scan the crowded pages of Google search results for a low-cost loan, it can be difficult to decipher reputable lenders from predatory ones.

These lenders, who use abusive or unfair practices, offer loans with high rates and excessively long or short repayment terms that make the lender money but leave the borrower with a loan they may not be able to repay.

Payday loans are a common type of predatory loan. About 12 million Americans take them out every year, says Alex Horowitz, a senior research officer with the nonprofit public interest group Pew Charitable Trusts. These short-term, high-interest loans can trap borrowers in a cycle of debt.

“Consumers fare best when they have affordable payments — when they have a clear pathway out of debt,” he says.

Knowing what makes a loan dangerous can keep borrowers from falling into a debt trap. Here are five signs of a predatory loan.

**NO-CREDIT-CHECK ADS**

Some lenders advertise loans that don’t require a credit check, meaning the lender doesn’t obtain information about the borrower’s financial history and can’t gauge their ability to repay the loan.

Predatory lenders will often charge a much higher annual percentage rate to make up for the borrowers they inevitably default on their loan, says Brad Kingsley, a South Carolina-based financial planner with Cast Financial.

“If they’re making it super easy (to get a loan), then it’s a red flag,” he says. “Some pushback is positive.”

**FOCUS ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS**

Lenders that advertise low monthly payments on a loan without mentioning the APR or loan term should set off an alarm, Kingsley says.

Lenders may do this to distract from the loan’s term and rates, he says. Because predatory lenders offer loans with high fees and interest rates, borrowers should focus as much on the full cost of the loan — which an APR represents — as the monthly payments.

**SKY-HIGH RATES**

The APR on a loan shouldn’t come out to more than 36%, says Charla Rios, a researcher with the Center For Responsible Lending, a consumer advocacy group.

That maximum rate has been affirmed by multiple states and federal agencies because it gives borrowers a fair chance at repayment and incentivizes lenders to offer affordable loans, according to a 2013 report from the National Consumer Law Center, a policy-focused nonprofit that serves low-income people.

Many payday lenders charge APRs well above 100% and may not make that explicit on their homepage, Rios says.

If you can’t see an APR range anywhere on the lender’s website, you should be cautious about doing business with them, says Lauren Saunders, associate director of the National Consumer Law Center.

“If you have to hunt for [the APR], that’s a red flag,” she says.

**EXCESSIVELY LONG OR SHORT REPAYMENT PERIODS**

Payday lenders typically require a borrower to pay the loan back within a week or two. But some lenders offer small loans with high APRs and excessively long repayment periods, Horowitz says.

These loans can leave a borrower paying more in fees and interest than the amount they originally took out.

For example, a $1,200 loan with an 18-month repayment period and a 300% APR would result in monthly payments of about $305 and total interest of $4,299.

**ALL-IN-ONE PAYMENT REQUIREMENTS**

A predatory lender may have repayment terms that require a single payment or a handful of small payments, then a lump sum, also called balloon payments.

The average payday loan takes 36% of a borrower’s paycheck, Horowitz says. If a borrower can’t go without that income, they might take another payday loan to make up for the cost.

A reasonable loan repayment plan should center on a consistent share each paycheck, rather than a balloon payment, he says.

**GETTING OUT OF A PREDA TORY LOAN**

Borrowers who have a predatory loan can try a few avenues to get in better financial shape.

— SEEK FREE ADVICE: You may be able to find a nonprofit legal aid office in your area that offers free or inexpensive legal consultation. Rios says. Another option may be to search for a credit counselor to help you determine the best way forward.

In this Aug. 11, 2019, file photo an iPhone displays a Facebook page in New Orleans.
Conceptis Sudoku

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

**Yesterday's puzzle answer:**

Comics:

**Mutts**

Well, finally all the planning and shopping and decorating and cooking and cleaning and entertaining is over! Yes!

The most wonderful time of the year.

**6 Chix**

Listen here, buddy. I'm trying to get into the next room, but you keep getting in the way.

Blondie

Here's your Christmas catalog!

But Christmas is over!

Well, now you can see what you missed out on!

**Mother Goose & Grimm**

Boy, you're really exercising on that thing!

Yeah, I'm trying to get down to the same weight I had in college.

Mom, this is an elliptical, not a time machine.

**Baby Blues**

When do you want to take the Christmas lights down?

When every last trunk of holiday spirit is gone.

So not until we get the annual threatening letter from the Neighborhood Association. It's tradition.

**Zits**

Your mom is room-shaming your Instagram.

Tuh! Like that's gonna work.

That laundry pile is huge! Ooh! I'm ashamed.

Yikes, those are some nasty boxers.

Mom! I thought we agreed on no close-ups!


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Marriott Ocean Club
For rent 2020.
1-BR Oceanview $39K each
from:03/22/20-03/29/20(3)
:02/21/20-02/28/20(4)

Marriott Surf Club For Sale
Platinum Season
-2BR OceanView $16K
-2BR Oceanfront $28K

Divi Surf Club
Platinum Plus
WK51 Oceanview $39K
WK52 Oceanview $49K

Divi Links Golf
1-BR Oceanview $39K
Studio wk#1 $7K

28 weeks remain $16K

For Rent 2020
1 BR wk 3 $2200
La Cabana 1 BR wk 3 $1800
Gold Season
1 BR Oceanview $4K
2 BR Oceanview $9K

Aruba Divi Phoenix
2-BRPH WK49 $60
building5thfloor
32weeks on each $24K each
2-BRPH WK #1
building 6th floor
32 weeks $30K

Aruba Divi Phoenix
2 BR WK 50
building 6thfloor
32 weeks $22K
1-BRWK52
building 6th floor
32 weeks $16K

Divi Links Golf
1-BR WK51 $12.5K
Birdie 1 with 26 weeks
2BR WK51 $24K
Birdie 1 with 26 weeks
1-BRWK51 & 2
Birdie 9 with 30 weeks
on each $10K each
Studio WK52 $7.5K

eagle 3 with 23 weeks
1-BR WK53 $9K

Call: 630 1307
Johnnybaesch@gmail.com
facebookpage:resales&realty
What if you knew a cookie would take 20 minutes to run off?

By CANDICE CHOI
AP Food & Health Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — Would you put down that bag of chips if you saw it had 170 calories? What if the label said it would take 16 minutes of running to burn off those calories? Health experts for years have pushed for clearer food labeling to empower people to make better choices. In the U.S., a recent regulation requires calorie counts on packages to be bigger. Red, yellow and green labels signal the healthfulness of some foods in the United Kingdom. But with obesity rates persistently high, researchers are looking at whether more drastic approaches could help.

One attention-grabbing idea being explored: Labeling foods with “exercise calories,” or the amount of physical activity needed to burn them off. For example, a chocolate bar might say it has 230 calories, alongside icons indicating that amounts to 42 minutes of walking or 22 minutes of running. With calorie counts, experts worry the information doesn’t mean much if people don’t know how much they should be eating anyway. And with the “traffic light” system, people might not understand why a food is red — is it the fat, the sugar or something else?

It’s no surprise some people don’t pay attention to current labels, but exercise calories might be more useful, said Amanda Daley, a professor of behavioral medicine at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom. “They may still ignore it, but let’s give it a go. Let’s at least give them a chance to be able to easily understand,” she said. Not everyone finds the idea compelling. Regardless of whether it gets people to eat less, it could reinforce negative attitudes about exercise, said Yoni Freedhoff, an obesity expert at the University of Ottawa.

Red wolves court battle reignites as governor urges action

By JONATHAN DREW
RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The fight over the critically endangered red wolf has returned to court as North Carolina’s governor sought immediate help for the dozens or so remaining in the wild and federal biologists planned to transfer wolves into the recovery area for the first time in years.

In late November, Gov. Roy Cooper sent the secretary of the interior a sharply worded letter warning that, with no more than 14 known wolves in the wild, “the American red wolf is on the brink of extinction.” He noted that in 2019, no litters of red wolf pups were born in the wild for the first time in the history of the reintroduction program.

Red wolves once occupied much of the Eastern U.S. but were driven to near extinction by trapping, hunting and habitat loss before they were reintroduced to North Carolina in 1987. Their range is limited to five North Carolina counties. Another 200 live in captive breeding programs. Cooper wrote in the Nov. 22 letter that “changes in management strategies over the last several years have diminished the wild population to a dangerous level. This population decline has occurred despite the availability of proven conservation strategies such as coyote sterilization and captive wolf reintroductions.”

The letter follows a lawsuit filed earlier this year by the Center for Biological Diversity asking a judge to force the Fish and Wildlife Service to commit to a deadline for a new recovery plan and another by the Southern Environmental Law Center seeking documents pertaining to red wolf decision-making.

The Fish and Wildlife Service issued a statement in November saying it plans to begin updating the recovery plan in 2020 by appointing a panel of scientists to advise them on the process. “Although an updated recovery plan is not yet in place, the Service has engaged in recovery efforts and continues to do so,” the statement said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service Field Supervisor Pete Benjamin said at a Dec. 10 meeting with community members in eastern North Carolina that its biologists planned to move two wolves into the recovery area from a Florida refuge to promote breeding, according to the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife, which had staff members attending. A third wolf, a male, will be moved within the North Carolina recovery area to pair with a female, the groups said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service didn’t respond to email and phone messages asking questions about the wolf pairing and other aspects of the recovery.

Moving the wolves from Florida could help diversify the wild gene pool in North Carolina, but much more recovery work is needed, said Heather Clarkson, the Defenders’ Southeast outreach representative. “These ... pairs are great, but they’re just not enough,” she said in an interview. Conservation groups say the red wolf population has declined sharply as the government abandoned proven recovery methods. After red wolves were reintroduced to North Carolina, the wild population grew beyond 100 and remained stable through 2012. Wolf numbers were bolstered by releases of captive-born pups and sterilization of coyotes that competed for space.
Chant or rant? Surviving the most wonderful time of the year

By DAN ZEVIN
Associated Press
If the holidays leave you more stressed than centered, some experts say daily meditation sessions can help. The only question: Who has time to meditate when it takes 20 minutes just to find parking at the mall? Perhaps a more practical approach is Immediate Gratification Meditation. Try these tongue-in-cheek chants to maintain your serenity — or at least your sanity — all season long.

Holiday Mantra 1:
“I see the best in all houseguests.”
When hosting overnight guests, you’ll want to make them feel at home. And when they feel too much at home, you’ll want to mutter this mantra under your breath. Chant it in the bathroom and relax as you remove wet houseguest towels from the floor, plunge a toilet clogged with foreign houseguest matter, and extract a clump of houseguest hair from the shower drain. Chant it in the kitchen while custom-cooking meals that conform to their many dietary restrictions, and washing an endless stream of dishes while they attend to urgent Facebook updates. Finally, chant this mantra in the living room, and welcome the feeling of calm that comes over you as you figure out what they did to the remote control to make it stop working.

Holiday Mantra 2
“I celebrate the unique gifts of others.”
Chant this mantra instead of chanting, “I can tell that you put zero thought into this present.” Neutralize negativity as you unwrap an Amazon gift card from your spouse. Express gratitude for that re-gifted bottle of prosecco selected especially for you — by the person you gave it to last year, after someone gave it to you the year before. Float above mobs at the mall like a songbird, chirping this mantra as you try to return a sweater that is three sizes too small and did not come with a gift receipt. Remember, this mantra is easily recited in workplace settings as well. Try it during Secret Santa ceremonies where everyone is only allowed to spend 10 bucks. Before you know it, you’ll find your Zen when Muriel in Accounting gives you another bar of soap/pair of wacky novelty socks/box of Tic Tacs from the checkout counter at CVS.

Holiday Mantra 3
“I will be my best self once we’re done celebrating.”
This all-purpose mantra is best chanted when holiday traditions take their toll on your tranquility. Begin by whispering it when selecting and/or decorating a Christmas tree with the pathological perfectionist of your choice.

Queen Elizabeth II, close family celebrate Christmas

Associated Press
SANDRINGHAM, England (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II and her close family celebrated Christmas with a morning service at St. Mary Magdalene Church near her rural retreat at Sandringham in eastern England.
It was a festive event Wednesday as the queen was joined for the first time by Prince George, 6, and Princess Charlotte, 4, the two eldest children of Prince William and his wife, Kate. They left 1-year-old Prince Louis at home.
George and Charlotte walked to church hand in hand with their parents. Prince Charles, their grandfather, walked next to them. Prince Andrew, who has stepped down from royal duties because of his association with a convicted sex offender, attended an earlier church service with his brother Charles at his side. Prince Harry, his wife, Meghan, and their 7-month-old son, Archie, did not attend. They are spending the holiday in Canada with Meghan’s mother, Doria Ragland.
The royals were greeted by several hundred well-wishers who had gathered outside the church grounds. After the service, William, Kate and their two children mingled with the crowd to exchange Christmas greetings. Gemma Clark, who was in a wheelchair, gave Charlotte an inflatable pink flamingo and received a hug in return. She said the flamingo was called Felicity but that Charlotte is free to give it another name.

Queen Elizabeth II arrives to attend the Christmas day service at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham in Norfolk, England, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2019. Associated Press
A technical feat, ‘1917’ is great storytelling, too

Associated Press

It’s been a good time for World War I buffs — especially if they’re also movie buffs. A year ago director Peter Jackson applied state-of-the-art technology to century-old war footage to bring the Great War alive with sudden, stunning immediacy in his documentary “They Shall Not Grow Old.”

And now, in the feature film “1917,” another of our most talented directors, Sam Mendes, has similarly taken top technology — and the best cinematography, courtesy of Roger Deakins — to give us a different, equally compelling look at that cruel war, through the eyes of two ordinary soldiers asked to perform an extraordinary task.

The special sauce here, which you may have heard about: “1917” appears as if it were shot in one seamless take — or two, if you include one spot where it seems clear a break probably occurred. Actually, there are dozens of cuts, but they’re ingeniously hidden by editor Lee Smith, and the longest continuous shot’s only about eight minutes.

Yes, it’s a dazzling technical feat. One could also consider it a gimmick, or at least a method that threatens to distract the viewer’s attention. But that ignores the fact that this very filmmaking style is also hugely effective at delivering this particular story, in the most visceral way possible.

It’s a tale — inspired by stories Mendes heard from his own grandfather, who fought as a teenager — of two frightened young men, utterly unprepared for what they’re asked to do. And really, who WAS prepared? These were boys. If in Jackson’s documentary the most sobering sight of all was those frightened faces, many belonging to teens who’d lied about their youth in order to enlist, these shellshocked faces come alive here in the form of lance corporals Schofield and Blake — George MacKay and Dean-Charles Chapman, relative newcomers chosen to enforce the idea that these were unremarkable, ordinary men. The action begins in the afternoon of April 6, 1917, in northern France. Schofield and Blake are resting under a tree when a commanding officer orders Blake to “pick a man and bring your kit” — it’s not clear why. Blake enlists Schofield, and the two men head to the trench.

As they walk, the camera gradually pans wider and we see a field full of soldiers, more and more of them, resting, talking, doing their laundry. In the trench, General Erinmore (Colin Firth, one of several British stars, including Benedict Cumberbatch, Mark Strong and Richard Madden, who appear in brief cameos) describes their mission. It’s immediately clear why Blake was chosen. His older brother is part of a battalion planning to attack the Germans, believed to be retreating, the next morning. But the men — 1,600 of them — are heading into a trap, and will suffer catastrophic losses unless they can be stopped. The enemy has cut off all communications. “They have no idea what they’re in for,” says Erinmore, tersely.

The mission: to venture out into No Man’s Land and make the daunting journey on foot to warn the battalion, waiting in the woods near the town of Ecoust. Their only supplies: maps, torches, grenades, a little food, and their kits — oh, and a flare pistol given to them by Lt. Leslie, commander of the Yorks (a wonderfully wry Andrew Scott of “Fleabag,” providing a few seconds of what passes for levity), who seems fairly sure the lads won’t make it back alive.

As they climb out of the trenches and head into perilous territory — abandoned and desolate, piled with corpses of men and horses — they get to know each other better. Blake, the younger at 19, is chatty, humorous, good with maps and always at the ready with an amusing anecdote. He’s also starry-eyed about battlefield glory, and aspires to a medal. Schofield, a few years older, is less talkative, more stoic, with a bit more experience, and also more cynical. He won a medal but traded it for a bottle of French wine. We travel with these two young men as they traverse a hellish landscape, sometimes stepping on bloated bodies or running into a sun-bleached skeleton or burned corpse encased in barbed wire, with the camera usually following just behind as we share this real-time adventure.
Elizabeth Spencer, 'Light In the Piazza' author, dies at 98

By HILLEL ITALIE
Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Elizabeth Spencer, a grande dame of Southern literature who bravely navigated between the Jim Crow past and open-ended present in her novels and stories including the celebrated novella "Light In the Piazza," has died at 98.

Spencer, who sometimes went by her married name Elizabeth Rusher, died Sunday night in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, according to playwright Craig Lucas, who adapted "Light In the Piazza" for the stage.

Old enough to know ex-slaves and Civil War veterans, Spencer chronicled her complicated affection for her ties to tiny Carrollton, Mississippi — her determination to honor them and to leave them behind. Like her predecessor and fellow Mississippian, William Faulkner, she was an author praised by strangers and shunned by acquaintances.

"In a small town that's been there for ages, some people look and some sink in," she would write. "As for myself, I mainly just looked around me."

Her most famous work, "Light In the Piazza," is the story of a North Carolina woman, Miss Florence Aragon, who watches and worries as her mentally impaired daughter falls in love with an Italian. First published in The New Yorker and released in book form in 1960, it was an immediate critical favorite adapted into a 1962 movie that starred Olivia De Havilland and Yvette Mimieux and into a Broadway musical that in 2006 won six Tonys.

"She's not only an inspiring person on the page, but an amazing friend," said North Carolina-based novelist Allan Gurganus, whose friendship with Spencer began in 1972 when she wrote to congratulate him on a short story he published early in his career.

He described her as someone who believed in younger writers and encouraged them to achieve their promise. He noted that some of her work was recently chosen to become part of the nonprofit Library of America collection, which has published editions by authors including William Faulkner and Mark Twain.

"I think her importance as an American writer is just being recognized, even though she's been called a master since the 1940s," Gurganus said in a phone interview.

Admired by Eudora Welty and Alice Munro among others, Spencer wrote the novels "The Snare" and "The Salt Line" and dozens of short stories, most recently for the 2014 collection "Starting Over." She also completed a play, "For Lease or Sale," and the memoir "Landscapes of the Heart." Her many honors included the Rea Award and PEN/Malamud prize for lifetime achievement in short fiction, five O'Henry prizes for short stories and membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Spencer was a final link to her generation. She wrote in a 1969 interview: "For Lease or Sale," and the memoir "Landscapes of the Heart." Her many honors included the Rea Award and PEN/Malamud prize for lifetime achievement in short fiction, five O’Henry prizes for short stories and membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

was eased and haunted by the subservient presence of blacks, “an ugly system, of course,” Spencer wrote in her memoir. "But in that childhood time of enchantment and love, it never seemed to me anything but part of the eternal."

Carrollton labeled her early, and unfavorably, as “smart,” Taunted by her classmates, “ostacized and mocked at,” she would sneak off to the woods to write, acts of defiance that left her with “pangs of feeling different,” evasioness and secret anxieties.

She was an undergraduate at Belhaven College (now Belhaven University) in Jackson, Mississippi, and received a master's in literature from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Her first novel, "Fire In the Morning," was published in 1948, followed by "This Crooked Door" and "The Voice at the Back Door," the story of a candidate for sheriff who supports racial justice in a small Mississippi community. "The Voice at the Back Door" was recommended by a Pulitzer committee for the 1957 fiction prize, but rejected by the board. No fiction award was given that year.

Meanwhile, after traveling in Europe and living in Tennessee and Oxford, Mississippi, she returned to Carrollton in 1956 and found that no one was interested in her books.

Dancer born with one hand makes Radio City Rockettes history

Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — A dancer born with one hand is the first person with a visible disability ever hired by New York's famed Radio City Rockettes.

"I don't want to be known as the dancer who has one hand, and not because that's a bad thing," Sydney Mesher, who joined the Rockettes this season, told Newsday. "But because I've worked very hard to be where I am."

Mesher, 22, is missing a left hand because of sym-brachydactyly, a rare congenital condition. The Pace University graduate from Portland, Oregon, was hired by the Rockettes after her fourth audition. She said she has been "mesmerized" by the troupe, which dates to 1925, ever since first seeing them on TV in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Mesher said she started dancing as a child and attended a performing arts high school. In the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, audiences caught up in the show might not notice her missing hand, even where there are minor modifications to the act to accommodate her. In one number where the Rockettes ring a bell in each hand, she rings just one.

Rockettes creative director Karen Keeler called Mesher "an incredibly versatile dancer with a strong work ethic." Keeler said Mesher "is smart and determined, with an eye for detail."

The annual Radio City Christmas Spectacular runs through Jan. 5.

In this Oct. 22, 2019 photo, Rockette Sydney Mesher center right, takes part in a rehearsal at the Rockettes' rehearsal space in New York. Associated Press

Associated Press

Author Elizabeth Spencer is pictured in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in front of a personal library in 2005.
California’s Paso Robles area offers wine-tasters variety

By SALLY CARPENTER HALE

PASO ROBLES, California (AP) — Winemakers around this central California city can grow a mind-boggling variety of grapes thanks to a wide diversity of microclimates.

Visitors can take a tasting tour of European varietals — from Italy and Spain as well as France’s Rhone and Bordeaux regions.

The wine-growing area around Paso Robles is nearly three times the size of Napa Valley. Rainfall ranges from 10 to 30 inches per year in different areas, and elevations in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains rise from 700 feet to more than 2,400 feet. On the wetter and cooler west side of Paso Robles, Rhone-style varietals grow best. The drier and warmer east side works well for Bordeaux grapes.

Wine reviewers have taken note of the region’s more than 200 wineries.

Opolo Vineyards, for example, has nearly 300 acres of grapes on both the east and west sides and offers more than a dozen varietals, from the white Spanish albarine and French roussane to robust Italian reds sangiovese and tempranillo.

On an October wine-tasting trip, my husband, Rick, and I found Paso Robles to be a sweet spot between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The wildfiness that have plagued wine country to the north and south have not been an issue in this region. Tasting fees are reasonable: $10-$20. And the wine was excellent almost everywhere we went. From our centrally located hotel, we set out to sample the offerings from a cross-section of wineries clustered to the west and east, along with the Tin City warehouse district south of downtown.

Tablas Creek Winery pioneered Rhone-style winemaking in Paso Robles in the 1990s when French winery Chateau de Beaucastel and U.S. importer Vineyard Brands joined forces to find a California terroir similar to southern France.

Today, Tablas Creek produces 25,000 cases per year of a variety of whites and reds, including blends of mourvedre, counoise, syrah and grenache. We liked the 2017 mourvedre ($40), the 2018 picpoul blanc ($30) and the 2018 Dianthus rosé.

Nearby, Opolo Vineyards features an onsite inn and restaurant, and hosts special events as well as weddings. [There’s also a distillery, but we were all about the wine.] Standouts were the 2017 Mountain Zinfandel ($29) and 2017 Montagna Mare, a blend of Italian varietals barbera and sangiovese ($29).

Villa Creek Cellars on the west side requires a reservation and charges $20 for a flight of five wines. In its certified organic vineyards, the winery plants the most acreage in grenache, and makes only 2,500 cases per year.

Its Rhone-style reds really shine, especially the 2013 High Road, a blend of mourvedre, syrah and grenache ($105). The more affordable 2016 Willow Creek Cuvee ($60) is a blend of the same grapes, but with the grenache up front rather than the mourvedre. We were pleased to taste a southern Italian white grape, fiano, as part of our flight.

On the east side of town, Sculpterra Winery greets visitors with whimsical outdoor sculptures and tables for viewing and sipping, as well as a large patio. Ten dollars will buy you a flight of eight wines, including a tasty 2014 petite syrah ($50). We also were partial to the 2014 maquette ($44). Sculpterra also features weekend music and monthly events.

One of our favorite wineries was Giornata Wines, a small, family-run winery that makes 4,200 cases of Italian varietals in its Tin City warehouse. We especially enjoyed Giornata’s nebbiolo ($45), sangiovese ($35) and montepulciano ($35). The tasting fee is $10, but reservations are required for the tiny tasting room.

We were steered to Paix Sur Terre by servers at several other wineries and we quickly learned why. At only 1,200 cases per year, this boutique winery’s offerings were very good across the board. We especially liked the 2017 mourvedres: The Other One and Comes A Time (each $55) — produced in separate vineyards.

Niner Wine Estates offers food in addition to wine, which was a welcome sight at midday. The tasting room opens onto a large patio with expansive views of the vineyards. We liked all the reds we tasted, especially the 2016 syrah ($30) and the 2016 cabernet franc ($40).

We traveled north of downtown to J. Lohr Vineyards, whose cabernet sauvignon we’ve seen at retail stores around the country. The 2017 Seven Oaks vintage — of which 1 million cases were produced — sells for $17 at the winery, a few dollars more than we’ve spent on both the east and west coasts. The tasting pour were generous for our $15, however, and we loved the 2014 Carol’s Vineyard cab ($60), though it is sourced in Napa Valley.

This Oct. 13, 2019 photo shows Stephanie Terrizzi, co-owner of Giornata Wines during a tour of the winery in Paso Robles, Calif.

Associated Press