



GWire

WEEKLY DIGEST
SEPTEMBER 28, 2018

**FRESNO UNIFIED
CANDIDATE FORUM
DEBATES »**

**CALIFORNIA BALLOT
INITIATIVE SEEKS TO END
HIGH-SPEED RAIL »**

**GOP AGREES TO FBI PROBE
OF KAVANAUGH, DELAYING
SENATE VOTE »**

FRESNO UNIFIED CANDIDATE FORUMS

Edison, Sunnyside, McLane, and Bullard Area

September 25-26, 2018

David Taub & Myles Barker

Thomas, Fuentes Address Class Sizes at Area 1 Candidates Forum

Ways to fund the reduction of class sizes, the best way to approach student discipline and how to ensure everyone in school feels safe were a few of the questions that Fresno Unified Area 1 candidates Keshia Thomas and Robert Fuentes answered Monday evening at GV Wire's Candidate Forum.

GV Wire Operations Manager Randy Reed moderated the 40-minute forum at CMAC's downtown studio on Van Ness Avenue.

Thomas, an educator and businesswoman, and Fuentes, a civil rights attorney, are vying to succeed Lindsay Cal Johnson, who decided not to run again after representing the Edison community for 12 years...

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More Homework? More Taxes? Highlights from Sunnyside Area Debate.

Mark Ratchford kept a serious face all night. He doesn't like the direction of Fresno Unified and wasn't shy talking about it.

Ratchford, educator Karl Diaz, and incumbent Valerie Davis met Monday (Sept. 24) night at the CMAC studios downtown in a debate among candidates for the Fresno Unified trustee seat representing the Sunnyside High School area.

Question after question, Ratchford, a local businessman in the water purification business, expressed dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, from the budget to special education to school safety.

Davis, first elected in 2004 and running for her fifth term, touted lowering classroom sizes and building new classrooms during her opening statements...

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Trustee Race: Islas Says De La Cerda Hasn't Done Enough for Students

Christopher De La Cerda cited boosting Career Technical Education and early learning, upgrading campus safety and expanding health services as accomplishments worthy of another four-year term on the Fresno Unified school board Tuesday night.

But Veva Islas, who is challenging De La Cerda for the McLane High area seat, said that much more change and elevation of student learning is needed.

Whether Measure X funds are being used wisely, the best way to fund the reduction of classroom sizes, and what can be done to increase educational attainment were among the questions posed at GV Wire's Area 4 candidates forum...

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A Congenial Fresno Unified Debate to Replace Ashjian

The four candidates hoping to succeed Brooke Ashjian to represent the Bullard High School region on the Fresno Unified school board debated congenially Tuesday (Sept. 26) night. In the one-hour forum, no one yelled or screamed at each other. The four candidates had ample time to answer questions from moderator Bill McEwen, GV Wire's news director.

Things were so copacetic, that afterward, candidates engaged in handshakes, hugs, and smiles after sharing views on taxes, school safety, and Measure X spending, among many topics.

Terri Edwards kibitzed with the wife and daughter of one of her opponents, Terry Slatic. Nasreen Johnson, a publicist for Fresno EOC, and Amanda Karabian, a self-described mom, joined Edwards, an administrator with the Parents University program at Fresno Unified and Slatic, a retired Marine Corps officer and business...

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YANG AND CHAVEZ TRADE ACCUSATIONS

GV Wire Illustration / Alexis DeSha

September 25, 2018 | David Taub

Things are getting negative in the race for the Fresno City Council District 5 seat. The two candidates vying to represent southeast Fresno are trading accusations impugning each other's character. GV Wire asked incumbent Luis Chavez and challenger Paula Yang to respond.

Yang Accuses Chavez of Destroying Signs

In a Facebook video, Yang accused Luis Chavez's campaign of desecrating her campaign signs. "Somebody, my opponent's team, came out here and they vandalized my sign," she said on camera, with her last name cut out of a giant sign on a street corner. She reiterated the accusations during an interview with GV Wire. "Right after the primary election, two days later, 50 of my signs were stolen. Who would have done it? Who would want 50 signs of Paula Yang" she asked.

Asked if she had any proof of Chavez's involvement, Yang said she didn't. "People see it in the road. How would it look, you representing me as an individual? And you, go out there and put my name, Paula Yang, up. And, your team comes out and

decapitates my name out. Who would have done it?" she said. Yang said gender may be a motivator. "I'm the only female. I know he ran his campaign in office for 10 years. He's never attacked nobody. But, I'm a woman. Why?"

Chavez denied the accusations. "I've never touched anybody's signs. I wish I had spare time because I would spend it more wisely than touching people's signs. I think that shows a lot about her inexperience and not having done this before," Chavez said.

Yang's Voting Record

Chavez raised has questions about Yang's voting record. According to the Fresno County election clerk's office, Yang voted in Fresno in the general elections of 2006 and 2008, then not again until the 2016 presidential election.

Asked to explain the eight-year gap, she said, "I'm not too sure about the registering of that part." She mentioned that she lived back and forth between Fresno and Merced...

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ROLL BACK MILEAGE STANDARDS? FEDS HEAR REASONS NOT TO IN FRESNO.

September 25, 2018 | David Taub

In the first of three straight days of hearings around the country, Californians let the federal Dept. of Transportation know how they felt about proposed regulations to change mileage standards. For the most part, those who spoke in Fresno on Monday are against President Donald Trump's proposal to, as opponents put it, roll back the standards.

The sessions heard comments on updating fuel economy and emission rules. The hearings move to Dearborn, Mich. today and Pittsburgh on Wednesday (Sept. 26). "We are asking the EPA to represent those of us who have asthma and respiratory disease," said Janet DietzKamei, 73, a member of the Central Valley Clean Air Coalition. DietzKamei said she is unable to leave her Fresno home on some days because the air is so polluted...

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GV Wire Photo/David Taub

FRESNO STATE DUO TAKES MYSTERY OUT OF PISTACHIO CROP SIZE

September 24, 2018 | Myles Barker

Pistachio growers now have an online device they can use to predict the size of their harvest. The [Pistachio Predictor Calculator](#) will help growers with their harvest, market and budget planning, said Shawn Ashkan, an agricultural engineer at Fresno State.

He said the main goal of the online device is for farmers to be able to predict their pistachio yield early in the season — particularly by the end of winter. Ashkan, with help from [Gurreet Brar](#), a Fresno State plant science professor, created the calculator to fill a void in the pistachio industry.

"Pistachio growers need this tool to estimate the yield for the current yield for the harvest equipment, planning, for the storage, and for the pricing to compete in the international market," Ashkan said...

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Photo: Fresno State News

CALIFORNIA BALLOT INITIATIVE SEEKS TO END HIGH-SPEED RAIL

September 25, 2018 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Opponents of the California gas tax increase passed by state legislators last year on Tuesday proposed a new ballot measure for 2020 to provide money for road repairs and eliminate the state's \$77 billion high-speed rail project. The backers of the 2020 measure are also behind Proposition 6, which will ask voters in November if they want to repeal the state's recent gas tax hike, which raised the state gas tax 12 cents per gallon. They contend the state can use existing revenue for transportation projects.

The 2020 initiative would change the state constitution to require that revenue from existing gas taxes be spent only for road and bridge work. California's Democratic-led legislature passed the increase on fuel taxes and vehicle fees last year. It is expected to raise about \$5 billion a year for highway and road improvements and transit programs. Republicans and Democrats agree the state needs a transportation overhaul but disagree on how to pay for it.

Critical to Maintain the State's Infrastructure

Last year, a Democratic state lawmaker from Orange County was recalled over his support for the fuel tax increase. Those who support the tax increase contend it's critical to maintain the state's infrastructure. Those who argue for repeal say gasoline has become too expensive and the legislature should find other funding sources to cover the state's transportation needs.

California's high-speed rail project has become politically fraught as costs spike and the project's end date pushes farther back. Voters approved roughly \$10 billion in bonds in 2008 to construct a high-speed train

that would take passengers between Los Angeles and San Francisco in less than three hours. It was supposed to cost about \$40 billion. Now, the cost has ballooned to an expected \$77 billion — with the completion date pushed back to 2033.

Construction is underway in the state's Central Valley agricultural heartland, but the high-speed rail authority does not have enough money to complete the first phase from Bakersfield to San Francisco. As of April, the project had between \$20 and \$28 billion in hand.

Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown is a staunch supporter, while Republicans largely detest the project.

Ballot Measure Would Halt Funding for High-Speed Rail

Money for the project comes from the bonds, federal dollars and revenue from the state's cap-and-trade program that requires businesses to buy credits to emit greenhouse gases.

The proposed ballot measure would halt funding for high-speed rail, force the state to cease activities on it and use any unspent bond money to retire the debt. The federal money has already been spent. The initiative does not specify how the cap-and-trade money earmarked for rail would be redirected.

The ambitious proposal is currently California's largest single infrastructure project. Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown is a staunch supporter, while Republicans largely detest the project.

Some Democrats in the Legislature have grown frustrated by the cost overruns and delays. Republican gubernatorial candidate John Cox says he'd kill the project, while Democratic Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom said he...

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SUSPECT IN DEADLY CALIFORNIA ATTACKS WAS DEPORTED 6 TIMES

AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

September 26, 2018 | AP News

LOS ANGELES — A Texas man suspected of killing three people and seriously injuring four in a string of attacks on sleeping Southern California men — most of them homeless — had a long criminal history and had been deported from the United States six times, immigration officials said Tuesday night. Ramon Escobar, 47, who was believed homeless himself, likely targeted victims to rob them, Los Angeles police Capt. William Hayes told reporters at a news conference Tuesday.

Escobar could be charged Wednesday with murder and attempted murder in connection with a weekslong string of attacks. Meanwhile, authorities in Houston investigated him

for the disappearance of his aunt and uncle. Escobar was being held without bail but U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officials have filed a detainer seeking to take him into custody if he is released, the agency said.

Escobar was first ordered removed from the country in 1988 and was deported to his native El Salvador six times between 1997 and 2011, ICE said in a statement Tuesday night. He was released from ICE custody last year after appealing his latest immigration case, ICE said but the agency didn't indicate his current legal status. Hayes called Escobar a "violent predator" and said investigators believe he drove to...

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CALIFORNIA TIGHTENS RULES FOR CONCEALED WEAPONS

September 27, 2018 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Californians will have to undergo at least eight hours of training, including live-fire exercises, before carrying a concealed weapon, under one of several firearms bills acted on by Gov. Jerry Brown. The bill helps standardize the state's current patchwork requirements for obtaining concealed weapons permits. It was among dozens of bills that the Democratic governor announced signing or vetoing Wednesday.

Current law allows sheriffs and police chiefs to require up to 16 hours of training before granting the permits. But there is no minimum standard and no requirement that gun owners actually demonstrate they can safely shoot their handguns. Most sheriffs already have similar requirements, said both proponents and a spokesman for a gun owners' group. Most concealed weapons classes already span two days, with practice at firing ranges. But supporters including major law enforcement groups say adding the minimal requirement is a...

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AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File

SF'S NEW \$2B TRANSIT TERMINAL CLOSES OVER BEAM CRACK

September 26, 2018 | AP News

SAN FRANCISCO — The so-called "Grand Central of the West" is closed out of safety concerns after workers discovered a crack in a support beam of the \$2 billion transit terminal that opened just last month. Workers discovered the crack early Tuesday while installing roofing tiles at the Salesforce Transit Center, according to its executive director Mark Zabaneh. Engineers spent the day inspecting the damage and Zabaneh said they decided to shut the station around 5 p.m., just as the afternoon rush hour started.

Zabaneh said the cause and the extent of the damage were unknown and the decision to close the terminal was made out of an "abundance of caution." He said structural engineers would be working at the building Tuesday night to assess whether it is safe for people to return. Zabaneh said the crack was found near a weld on a stress-bearing horizontal beam...

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AP Photo/Eric Risberg



Michael Reynolds/Pool Image via AP

GOP AGREES TO FBI PROBE OF KAVANAUGH, DELAYING SENATE VOTE

September 28, 2018 | AP News

WASHINGTON — After a dramatic flurry of last-minute negotiations, Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh cleared a key procedural hurdle Friday, but his confirmation prospects were still deeply uncertain as Republicans agreed to ask for a new FBI investigation into sexual assault allegations. Under pressure from moderate members, Republican leaders said they would allow the new probe for up to one week, slowing their rush to confirm Kavanaugh shortly after the new high court term opens on Monday.

It was unclear whether President Donald Trump backed the new timeline, cobbled together in private negotiations Friday. The talks were forced by Sen. Jeff Flake, a moderate Republican who surprised colleagues by announcing his support for Kavanaugh early Friday only to call for further investigation a few hours later. Trump, who previously accused the Democrats of obstruction and opposed the FBI probing the allegations against his nominee, said merely that he would “let the Senate handle that.” In fact, it’s the White House that would have to ask the FBI to investigate.

An Emotional, Hours-Long Hearing

Friday’s developments unfolded a day after Kavanaugh and an accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, testified in an emotional, hours-long hearing that was televised nationwide. Kavanaugh angrily denied the allegation that he assaulted Ford while they were both in high school,

The committee vote was 11-10 along party lines.

but she said she was “100 percent” certain he was her attacker. Flake, a key moderate Republican, was at the center of Friday’s drama and uncertainty. In the morning, he announced that he would support Kavanaugh’s nomination. Shortly after, he was confronted in an elevator by two women who, through tears, implored him to change his mind. The stunning confrontation was captured by television cameras.

After huddling privately with his colleagues, Flake announced he would vote to advance Kavanaugh’s nomination to the full Senate only if the FBI were to investigate the allegations against the judge. Democrats have been calling for such an probe, though Republicans and the White House have insisted it’s unnecessary. The committee vote was 11-10 along party lines.

Flake said that after discussing the matter with fellow senators, he felt it “would be proper to delay the floor vote for up to but not more than one week.”

A Handful of Undecided Senators

Attention quickly turned to a handful of undecided senators. West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin said he supported Flake’s call to push off a full Senate vote until the FBI investigates Ford’s allegation.

Republicans say reopening the FBI investigation is unnecessary because committee members have had the opportunity to question both Kavanaugh and Ford and other potential witnesses have submitted sworn statements.

He said the probe should happen “so that our country can have confidence in the outcome of this vote.” It was unclear if Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska would do the same.

With a 51-49 majority, Senate Republicans have little margin for error on a final vote, especially given the fact that several Democrats facing tough re-election prospects this fall announced their opposition to Kavanaugh on Friday. Sens. Bill Nelson of Florida, Joe Donnelly of Indiana and Jon Tester of Montana all said they would vote no. During Thursday’s hearing, Democrats repeatedly peppered Kavanaugh with questions about whether he would support an FBI investigation. He demurred, saying he would back whatever the committee decided to do. The FBI conducts background checks for...

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BILL COSBY SENTENCED TO 3 TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON IN SEX CASE

AP Photo/Matt Slocum

September 25, 2018 | AP News

NORRISTOWN, Pa. — His Hollywood career and good-guy image in ruins, an 81-year-old Bill Cosby was sentenced Tuesday to three to 10 years behind bars for drugging and sexually assaulting a woman, becoming the first celebrity of the #MeToo era to be sent to prison. The punishment all but completed the dizzying, late-in-life fall for the comedian, former TV star and breaker of racial barriers.

“It is time for justice. Mr. Cosby, this has all circled back to you. The time has come,” Montgomery County Judge Steven O’Neill said. He quoted from victim Andrea Constand’s own

statement to the court, in which she said Cosby took her “beautiful, young spirit and crushed it.” Cosby declined the opportunity to address the court before the sentence came down.

The punishment came at the end of a two-day hearing at which the judge **declared Cosby a “sexually violent predator”** — a modern-day scarlet letter that subjects him to monthly counseling for the rest of his life and requires that neighbors and schools be notified of his whereabouts. The comic once known as America’s Dad for his role on the top-rated...

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BORDER PATROL’S FIRST FEMALE CHIEF HOPES TO INSPIRE WOMEN

September 26, 2018 | AP News

WASHINGTON — U.S. Border Patrol Chief Carla Provost says she hopes she can inspire other women to sign up with the agency, which has just one female agent for every 20 men. “If you’re a woman in law enforcement, I don’t care where you’re at, you’re a minority,” Provost told The Associated Press in an interview.

Provost, who joined the agency in 1995 and became its acting chief in April 2017, took over last month as the first female chief in its 94-year history. The Border Patrol and its 19,000 agents have been under a constant spotlight. Curbing immigration remains at the top of President Donald Trump’s priorities, and the administration plans to add 5,000 Border Patrol agents. The agency has come under fire for its checkpoints within 100 miles of the border. And it faced withering criticism for its role in the administration’s zero-tolerance...

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GRIZZLIES GET BACK US PROTECTIONS, ROCKIES HUNTS BLOCKED

September 25, 2018 | AP News

BILLINGS, Mont. — The first public grizzly bear hunts in the Northern Rockies in almost three decades have been blocked by a U.S. judge who rejected government claims that the fearsome predators had recovered from near-extirmination. U.S. District Judge Dana Christensen ordered federal protections restored on Monday for more than 700 bruins in and around Yellowstone National Park.

Wyoming and Idaho were on the cusp of allowing hunters to kill up to 23 bears this fall — the first planned hunts in the U.S. outside Alaska since 1991. The ruling was condemned by state officials who spent months planning the hunts, but there was no immediate word on whether an appeal seeking to overturn the ruling would be filed. Christensen wrote in his ruling that the case was “not about the ethics of hunting.” Rather, he said, it was about whether federal officials...

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Alan Rogers/The Casper Star-Tribune via AP



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

TRUMP BACKS TWO-STATE SOLUTION FOR ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

September 26, 2018 | AP News

UNITED NATIONS — For the first time since taking office, President Donald Trump endorsed a two-state solution as the best way to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, as he met Wednesday at the U.N. with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump told reporters that he believes that two states — **Israel and one for the Palestinians** — “works best.” He has previously been vague on the topic, suggesting that he would support whatever the parties might agree to, including possibly a one-state resolution, which might see the Palestinian territories become part of Israel.

“I like (a) two-state solution,” Trump said as he posed for photographs with Netanyahu. “That’s what I think works best. That’s my feeling. Now you may have a different feeling. I don’t think so. But I think two-state solution works best.” The president added that his much anticipated but still unreleased Mideast peace plan could be presented in the next two to four months but was not specific as to timing.

Trump Says Embassy Move Will Help Peace Efforts

Trump has been heavily criticized by the Palestinians for a series of moves that they say show distinct bias toward Israel, starting with his recognition last year of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The Palestinians also claim the holy city as the capital of an eventual state.

Earlier this year, Trump followed up on the recognition by moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a step that was widely protested by Palestinians and others in the Arab world. His administration has also slashed aid to the Palestinians by hundreds of millions of dollars and ended U.S. support for the U.N. agency that helps Palestinian refugees.

Trump and his national security team have defended their position, saying that decades of attempts to forge Israeli-Palestinian peace have failed. He said Wednesday that the embassy move would actually help peace efforts by recognizing the reality that Israel identifies Jerusalem as its capital. But, he added that Israel would have to make concessions to the Palestinians in any negotiations.

“Israel got the first chip and it’s a big one,” Trump said. “By taking off the table the embassy moving to Jerusalem, that was always the primary ingredient as to why deals couldn’t get done. Now that’s off the table. Now, that will also mean that Israel will have to do something that is good for the other side.”

US Will Continue Sanctions on Iran

Netanyahu thanked Trump for his support, his decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and said U.S.-Israel relations have never been better than under his administration. On Tuesday, Trump attacked Iran in his annual address to the U.N. General Assembly, accusing its leaders of corruption and spreading chaos throughout the Middle East and beyond.

He also vowed to continue to impose sanctions on Iran. “Thank you for your strong words yesterday in the General Assembly against the corrupt terrorist regime in Iran,” Netanyahu said. “They back up your strong words and strong actions.”

Watch Retired FBI Legal Attaché Explain Barriers to Peace »



US CONSIDERS LIMIT ON GREEN CARDS

AP Photo/Denis Poroy

September 24, 2018 | AP News

SAN DIEGO — The Trump administration has proposed rules that could deny green cards to immigrants if they use Medicaid, food stamps, housing vouchers and other forms of public assistance. Federal law already requires those seeking green cards to prove they will not be a burden — or “public charge” — but the new rules detail a broad range of programs that could disqualify them.

The Department of Homeland Security said Saturday that current and past receipt of certain public benefits above thresholds would be considered “a heavily weighed negative factor” in granting green cards as well as temporary stays.

The proposal “will clearly define long-standing law to ensure that those seeking to enter and remain in the United States either temporarily or permanently can support themselves financially and will not be reliant on public benefits,” the department said.

The 447-page proposal published on the department's website will appear in the Federal Register “in the coming weeks,” triggering a 60-day public comment period before it takes effect. Coming less than seven weeks before midterm elections, the announcement could help galvanize voters who have backed or opposed Trump's broad crackdown on legal...

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POPE: PRIESTLY ABUSE SCANDALS DRIVING CATHOLIC FAITHFUL

September 25, 2018 | AP News

TALLINN, Estonia — Pope Francis acknowledged Tuesday that **priestly sex abuse scandals** are outraging the Catholic faithful and driving them away, and said the church must change its ways if it wants to keep future generations. Francis referred directly to the crisis convulsing his papacy on the fourth and final day of his Baltic pilgrimage, which coincided with the release of a devastating new report into decades of sex abuse and cover-ups in Germany.

Francis told young people in Estonia, considered one of the least religious countries in the world, that he knew many young people felt the church had nothing to offer them and simply doesn't understand their problems today. “They are outraged by sexual and economic scandals that do not meet with clear condemnation, by our unpreparedness to really appreciate the lives and sensibilities of the young, and simply by the passive role we assign them,” he told Catholic...

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AP Photo/Andrew Medichini

WAILS, VOWS OF REVENGE AT IRAN FUNERAL AFTER PARADE ATTACK

September 24, 2018 | AP News

AHVAZ, Iran — Amid wails and vows of revenge, thousands of Iranians on Monday attended a mass funeral service for victims of a weekend attack targeting a military parade that killed at least 25 people. The dead from Saturday's attack in the southwestern city of Ahvaz, blamed on Arab separatists, ranged from a disabled war hero to a four-year-old boy. The assault killed members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard, including conscripts, wounded over 60 others and further ratcheted up tensions across the Persian Gulf ahead of this week's United Nations General Assembly.

The father of 4-year-old victim Mohammad Taha lay atop his son's flag-draped coffin sobbing, a public display of grief near the Sarallah Mosque in Ahvaz, the capital of Iran's oil-rich province of Khuzestan. Women in long black chadors held back tears while rhythmically striking their chests, a traditional way of showing grief. Mourners also played drums...

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