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WEEKLY DIGEST
AUGUST 16, 2019

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LOCAL

KARBASSI TAKES DISTRICT 2 COUNCIL SEAT IN RUNAWAY WIN

August 13, 2019 | David Taub

Perhaps the most joyous person in the room at an election return party was the elder Mike Karbassi. Neither a cane nor a stoop in his walk prevented him from going around from guest to guest telling them how proud he was of his son, the younger Mike Karbassi, and presumptive winner of a special election to serve

as northwest Fresno's city councilmember.

For Karbassi, his first order of business will be handling a backlog of constituent issues. The District 2 seat has been vacant since April, when its previous occupant, Steve Brandau, resigned after winning a special election of his own for a seat on the Fresno County Board of Supervisors.

The elder Karbassi relayed stories about how his son always worked hard, starting at the age of seven, at his Persian rug store.

Apparently, that hard work never ceased. "It's been a long nine months. We kept it clean. I walked a lot. You go day after day and you're working hard. But, you never know. It is up to the voters to decide. I'm really honored the voters appreciated the hard work. They graced me this opportunity to serve them. I'm very humbled right now," the councilman-elect said.

Transitioning to City Hall

Karbassi's campaign team expects him to be sworn in by Labor Day (Sept. 2). There is a council meeting on Thursday (Aug. 15), but the election won't be certified by then. The next meeting after that is Aug. 22, followed by a nearly month-long lay-off until Sept. 19. For Karbassi, his first order of business will be handling a backlog of constituent issues. The District 2 seat has been vacant since April, when its previous occupant, Steve Brandau, resigned after winning a special election of his own for a seat on the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. Until he officially takes his seat, Karbassi says

he will meet with city department heads and learn as much as he can.

Outraised Opponents

The election saw five active candidates. Karbassi outraised them financially, taking in \$162,938 as of the last reporting date. He locked up key endorsements early from the likes of police chief (and 2020 mayoral candidate) Jerry Dyer, Sheriff Margaret Mims, and Assemblyman (and former mayor) Jim Patterson. Karbassi built a coalition that crossed traditional party lines. Although he is a registered Democrat, Karbassi won the support of Fresno's conservatives. He took a pro-law enforcement, pro-business stance that helped make him the front runner. One campaign staffer says Karbassi absorbed the energy of the campaign from his opponents early and kept the momentum going. "Now the work begins," Karbassi said.

Gordon Offers Congratulations

Unofficial election night results showed Karbassi with 59% of the vote with all 26 precincts reporting. The top-three saw Lawrence Garcia with 16%, and Jared Gordon at 11%. The results tallied 8,164 total votes, with about 7,100 coming in from vote-by-mail. The preliminary turnout was 18%. "Congratulations to Fresno's newest council member, Mike Karbassi. Mike was a tireless campaigner, and I hope he will be equally tireless in representing the people of northwest Fresno. I wish him the best of luck," Gordon told GV Wire. Karbassi noted he was once in his opponents shoes, losing the 2008 council race for the same seat to Andreas Borgeas (now a state senator). Karbassi's message to the others: "Keep going. Tomorrow is a new day." With the win, Karbassi will assume Brandau's term which runs through January 2021. The next election for the term beyond that takes place March 2020, less than seven...

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AMOR WELLNESS CENTER AIMS TO MAKE MENDOTA A HEALTHIER CITY

GV Wire/ Veronique Parker

August 16, 2019 | Nancy Price

MENDOTA — Mendota residents who need to see a doctor or specialist now might have to travel 40 miles to the nearest hospital or specialty care clinic, but that’s about to change. Health care and other social services will be provided in the **AMOR Wellness Center**, a rural health clinic and neighborhood resource center being built by the Alliance for Medical Outreach & Relief (AMOR).

The groundbreaking ceremony Friday morning brought elected officials, Mendota Unified school kids, health care and social service agency representatives, families, and AMOR officials to the center’s site at the corner of Belmont and Derrick avenues.

The wellness center and neighborhood resource center will be housed in two buildings totaling 20,000 square feet and will be within walking distance of Mendota’s local library, high school, middle school, and eldercare facility.

Health Care Needed in Evenings and Weekends

In addition to daytime hours, the clinic will be open during evenings and on weekends to accommodate the long workdays of farmworkers and their families. It will be staffed by Madera Community Hospital employees,

“Mendota, like many other rural communities across the county, has never had the medical, social, and youth development services it needs to thrive,” said Davena Witcher, AMOR’s executive director. “The AMOR Wellness Center is going to change this dynamic forever, and thanks to our partners, we are building a sustainable model for rural communities that will be duplicated across the country.”

The need for such services is great in Mendota, which has been designated as a “shortage area” for primary care, mental health, and dental health services by the California Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development. Mayor Robert...

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NEW SAFETY BARRIERS IN DOWNTOWN CLOVIS CAN STOP A THREE TON TRUCK

August 12, 2019 | Randy Reed

Clovis is beefing up efforts to protect the crowds of people who are drawn to the city’s popular Old Town events. Retractable steel barriers, called bollards, will be installed at key intersections starting this week. When raised, they block off streets from normal traffic and are also designed to prevent potential vehicle attacks. City officials believe the installation is the first of its kind in Fresno County. Police chief Curt Fleming says its one of several steps Clovis is taking to protect the public from dangers in public spaces that have occurred elsewhere in recent years. “It’s tragic to keep seeing these things occur,” Fleming said “We had talks about how we address it here, locally.”

Four Old Town Intersections Will be Hardened

Those talks resulted in the decision to harden intersections against possible threats. The city council approved spending \$288,000 for the project in January. The final price tag came to just over \$262,000. In the coming few weeks, bollards...

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City of Clovis

VALLEY DEMOCRATS DECLARE WAR ON INVASIVE SWAMP RATS

August 12, 2019 | GV Wire

Rep. Josh Harder of Turlock put on waders and traipsed through the water in search of swamp rats recently. The goal: Publicizing a bill that he and three other California Democrats have introduced targeting nutria, an invasive species from South America creating havoc with irrigation canals and levees. “It sounds ridiculous, but these swamp rats are actually a major problem for our water infrastructure,” Harder said in a news release. “My bill would revive a program that helped successfully get rid of the pests in Maryland and bring millions of dollars in federal help to the Central Valley.”

Nutria Eradicated in California in the 1970s

California has been down this road before. Nutria were brought to the United States in the late 1800s to build up the fur trade. They finally were eradicated in California in the 1970s. But, in 2017, they returned to the Central Valley. Since then, they have been rapidly multiplying, burrowing, and devouring...

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STATE

UNDER NEWSOM, HOUSING CRISIS GETS WORSE, NOT BETTER

August 13, 2019 | GV Wire

Gov. Gavin Newsom's **grand plan of building 3.5 million housing units** by 2025 is off to a terrible start. In the first six months of 2019, builders gained approval for 51,178 new homes in California, nearly 20% fewer than the same period a year earlier. That puts the state on track for the first meaningful annual decline since the recession, **The Los Angeles Times reports**. Most alarm-

In the first six months of 2019, builders gained approval for 51,178 new homes in California, nearly 20% fewer than the same period a year earlier.

ing: multi-family construction, the biggest need, was down 23%.

"We are going in exactly the wrong direction," said Christopher Thornberg, founding partner of

Beacon Economics. And, in fact, **a report prepared by Beacon Economics** for next10.org found that "certain jurisdictions in California will not meet their low-income housing production targets for more than 1,000 years."

The Fresno-Clovis Story

The same report shows that Fresno and Clovis are doing well with housing for moderate and above-moderate income residents. However, Fresno is not projected to **meet its housing goals for very low and low-income families** until 2057 and beyond. In those same categories, the projected fulfillment dates in Clovis are the years 3000 and 2108, respectively.

Causes of the 2019 Slowdown

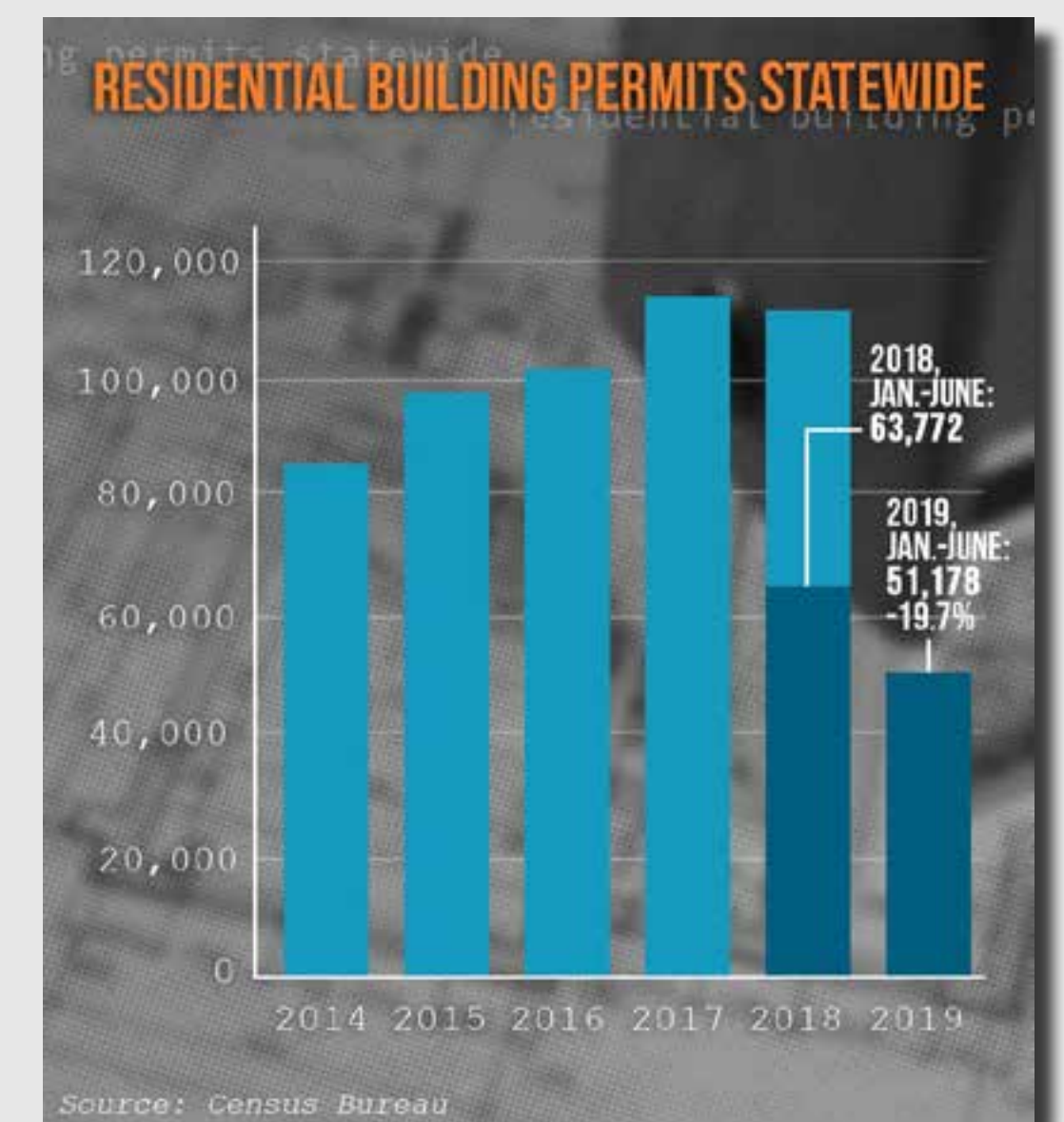
What's behind the 2019 slowdown? Builders, particularly in Southern California, point to high costs for land, labor, materials and government fees. And there are the Trump administration's tariffs on building products and appliances from foreign countries. For some builders, their potential profit margin is so small that it doesn't justify the risks of construction. According to John Burns Real Estate Consulting, costs for labor and materials rose 7.2% in June in Northern California compared

with a year earlier, while home prices were essentially flat. In Southern California, costs rose 2.1% while prices increased by 2%. But perhaps the biggest hurdle is the not-in-my-backyard sentiments of residents and voters. This results in many local governments, especially cities, slowing or even opposing large-scale housing construction. At the behest of city officials throughout California, the Legislature killed a bill to overcome NIMBYism, **Senate Bill 50**, before the summer recess.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage is 3.6% — down from 4.94% in November, according to Freddie Mac.

Mortgage Rates Falling

One bright spot for both home buyers and builders: The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage is 3.6% — down from 4.94% in November, according to Freddie Mac.





ARMENIAN, JEWISH GROUPS UPSET OVER EXCLUSION IN STATE CURRICULUM

GV Wire Composite/Alexis DeSha

August 13, 2019 | David Taub

According to a draft proposal of the state's ethnic studies model curriculum, Armenians and Jews aren't worthy of inclusion. Neither are their genocides.

Organizations representing both groups want that fixed. The curriculum is supposed to make California high school students more aware of the many ethnic groups comprising the Golden State. Instead, it has drawn sharp criticism from Armenian and Jewish leaders. The public comment period for the state Board of Education closes this Thursday (Aug. 15). The state has already received hundreds of comments criticizing the plan. Even the [Los Angeles Times editorial board](#),

often viewed as a sounding board of liberal ideals, blasted the first draft. CALmatters columnist Dan Walters wrote "the bomb is now exploding."

Related Story: Walters: Ethnic Studies Time Bomb Explodes

Armenian Community Opposes Exclusion

Armen Sahakyan, executive director of the western region of the Armenian National Committee of America, said the exclusion of his group is troubling. "It's certainly concerning to us that this proposed model curriculum has omitted some of the groups that have been living in the state for over 100...

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AP File

CALIFORNIA COUNTIES SUE OVER PUBLIC BENEFIT IMMIGRATION RULE

August 13, 2019 | AP News

SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco and Santa Clara counties filed the first lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's new rules to deny green cards to migrants who use Medicaid, food stamps, housing vouchers or other forms of public assistance. The lawsuit, filed Tuesday, came after the Department of Homeland Security's [announcement](#) Monday of its expanded "public charge" rules to restrict legal immigration.

In a [filing](#), the counties of Santa Clara and San Francisco argued that the rules will worsen the health and well-being of their residents, increase public health risks and financially harm the counties. The rules, the counties argued, would result in a "chilling effect" in which migrants forgo or disenroll from federal public assistance programs to reduce the risk of being denied a green card. This practice would mean that the cost of services would shift from federal to state...

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA OFFICER RESCUES DOG KICKED OUT OF CAR

August 13, 2019 | AP News

PLACERVILLE — The California Highway Patrol is trying to find who kicked out a dog out of vehicle and abandoned the animal on the side of Highway 50 in Placerville.

The CHP's Placerville office says witnesses on Sunday reported seeing a vehicle slow down before someone kicked the dog out and the vehicle sped off.

Related Story: It's Not OK to Shoot a Dog and Leave It to Die

It says an officer quickly got there and rescued the dog before it was hurt.

The agency is asking anyone with information on who may have abandoned the dog to call CHP Placerville...

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Facebook/CHP-Placerville



AP/Carolyn Kaster

U.S. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A MONARCH BUTTERFLY?

August 14, 2019 | AP News

GREENBELT, Md. — Hand-raising monarch butterflies in the midst of a global extinction crisis, Laura Moore

Another coming change will end across-the-board protections for creatures newly listed as threatened. Conservation groups say that will leave them unprotected for months or years, as officials, conservationists and industries and landowners hash out each species' survival plan.

and her neighbors gather round in her suburban Maryland yard to launch a butterfly newly emerged from its chrysalis. Eager to play his part, 3-year-old Thomas Powell flaps his arms and exclaims, "I'm flying! I'm flying!" Moore moves to release the hours-old monarch onto the boy's outstretched

finger, but the butterfly, its wings a vivid orange and black, has another idea. It banks away, beginning its new life up in the green shelter of a nearby tree.

Monarchs are in trouble, despite efforts by Moore and countless other volunteers and organizations across the United States to nurture the beloved butterfly. The [Trump administration's new order weakening the Endangered Species Act](#) could well make things worse for the monarch, one of more than 1 million species that are struggling around the globe. Rapid development and climate change are escalating the rates of species loss, according to a May United Nations report.

For monarchs, farming and other human development have eradicated state-size swaths of native milkweed habitat, cutting the butterfly's numbers by 90% over the past two decades. With its count falling 99% to the low tens of thousands in the western United States last year, the monarch is now under government consideration for listing under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. But if the Trump administration's latest action survives threatened legal challenges, there will be sweeping changes to how the government provides protections, and which creatures receive them.

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Change Will End Across-the-Board Protections

Administration officials say the changes, expected to go into effect next month, will reduce regulation while still protecting animals and plants. But conservation advocates and Democratic lawmakers say the overhaul will force more to extinction, delaying and denying protections. The administration will for the first time reserve the option to estimate and publicize the financial cost of saving a species in advance of any decision on whether to do so.

Monarchs compete for habitat with soybean and corn farmers, whose crops are valued in the low tens of billions of dollars annually. For mountain caribou, sage grouse, the Humboldt marten in California's old-growth redwoods and other creatures, it's logging, oil and gas development, ranching, and other industry driving struggling species out of their ranges. Another coming change will end across-the-board protections for creatures newly listed as threatened. Conservation groups say that will leave them unprotected for months or years, as officials, conservationists and industries and landowners hash out each species' survival plan, case by case.

The rule also will limit consideration of threats facing a species to the "foreseeable" future, which conservation groups say allows the administration to ignore the growing harm of global warming. Along with farming, climate change is one of the main drivers of the monarch's threatened extinction, disrupting an annual 3,000-mile migration synched to springtime and the blossoming of wildflowers. In 2002, a single wet storm followed by a freeze killed an estimated 450 million monarchs in their winter home in Mexico, piling wings inches deep on a forest floor.

'Monarchs Connect People to Nature'

In the meantime, volunteers like Moore grow plants...



TRUMP OFFICIAL: STATUE OF LIBERTY POEM REFERS TO EUROPEANS ONLY

August 13, 2019 | AP News

WASHINGTON — The acting director of Citizenship and Immigration Services says the inscription on the Statue of Liberty welcoming immigrants into the country is about “people coming from Europe.”

Ken Cuccinelli said Tuesday on CNN that the poem referred to Europeans coming from “class-based societies where people were considered wretched if they weren’t in the right class.” His comment came a day after the Trump administration announced it would seek to deny green cards to migrants who use public assistance. Cuccinelli was asked earlier

Tuesday on NPR whether the words “give me your tired, your poor” were part of the American ethos. Cuccinelli responded: “They certainly are. Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge.”

Federal law already requires those seeking to become permanent residents or gain legal status to prove they will not be a burden to the U.S. — a “public charge,” in government speak —but the new rules detail a broader range of programs that could disqualify them. It’s part of a dramatic overhaul...

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AP File

ICE RAIDS RAISE QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT THE EMPLOYERS?

August 14, 2019 | AP News

HOUSTON — The images of children crying after their parents were arrested in a massive immigration raid in Mississippi revived a longstanding complaint: Unauthorized workers are jailed or deported, while the managers and business owners who profit from their labor often go unprosecuted.

Under President Donald Trump, the number of business owners and managers who face criminal charges for employing unauthorized workers has stayed almost the same, even as almost every other enforcement measure has surged.

Last week’s raids at seven chicken-processing plants were the largest worksite operation conducted under the Trump administration. The operation led to 680 arrests of people in the U.S. illegally, with expected criminal charges to follow for some. But no plant owners or top managers were...

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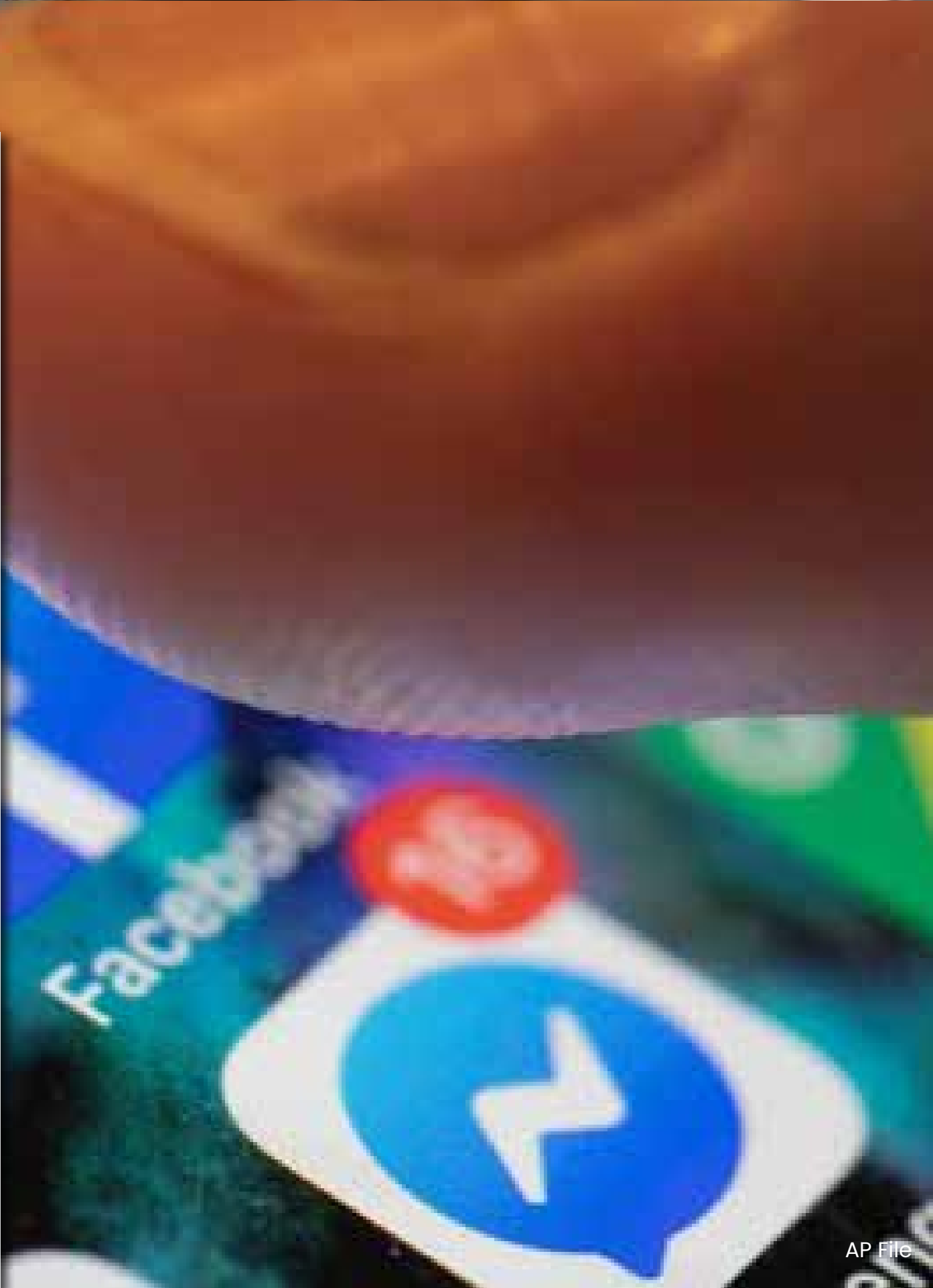
PRIVACY QUESTIONS AS HUMANS REVIEWED USER AUDIO AT FACEBOOK

August 15, 2019 | AP News

NEW YORK — Facebook has paid contractors to transcribe audio clips from users of its Messenger service, raising privacy concerns for a company with a history of privacy lapses. The practice was, until recently, common in the tech industry. Companies say the use of humans helps improve their services. But users aren’t typically aware that humans and not just computers are reviewing audio.

Transcriptions done by humans raise bigger concerns because of the potential of rogue employees or contractors leaking details. The practice at Google emerged after some of its Dutch language audio snippets were leaked. More than 1,000 recordings were obtained by Belgian broadcaster VRT NWS, which noted that some contained sensitive personal conversations — as well as information that identified the person speaking. “We feel we have some control over machines,” said Jamie Winterton, director of strategy at...

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WORLD

ISRAEL BANS ENTRY TO OUTSPOKEN US CONGRESSWOMEN

August 15, 2019 | AP News

JERUSALEM — Israel said Thursday that it will bar two Democratic congresswomen from entering the country ahead of a planned visit over their support for a Palestinian-led boycott movement, a decision announced shortly after President Donald Trump tweeted that it

Shortly before the decision was announced, Trump had tweeted that “it would show great weakness” if Israel allowed them to visit. “They hate Israel & all Jewish people, & there is nothing that can be said or done to change their minds.” He went on to call the two congresswomen “a disgrace.”

would “show great weakness” to allow them in. The move to bar Reps. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota from visiting the close American ally appeared to be unprecedented, and marked a deep foray by Israel into America’s bitterly polarized politics. It is also a sharp escalation of Israel’s campaign against the interna-

tional boycott movement. Interior Minister Aryeh Deri issued a statement saying that after consultations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials he decided not to allow Tlaib and Omar to enter because of “their boycott activities against Israel.”

Trump Says Congresswomen ‘a Disgrace’

The two newly-elected Muslim members of Congress are outspoken critics of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. Tlaib’s family immigrated to the United States from the West Bank. Shortly before the decision was announced, Trump had tweeted that “it would show great weakness” if Israel allowed them to visit. “They hate Israel & all Jewish people, & there is nothing that can be said or done to change their minds.” He went on to call the two congresswomen “a disgrace.” Israel has sought to combat the BDS movement, which advocates boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israeli businesses, universities and cultural institutions. The country passed a law permitting a ban on entry to any

activist who “knowingly issues a call for boycotting Israel.” Last month, however, Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer had said Israel would not deny entry to any member of Congress. Supporters of the boycott movement say it is a non-violent way to protest Israeli policies and call for Palestinian rights. Critics say the movement aims to delegitimize Israel and ultimately erase it from the map, replacing it with a binational state.

Israel Regularly Hosts U.S. Delegations

Israel often hosts delegations of U.S. representatives and senators, who usually meet with senior Israeli officials as well as Palestinian officials in the occupied West Bank. The decision to ban the congresswomen could further sharpen divisions among U.S. Democrats over Israel ahead of the 2020 elections. Republicans have amplified the views of left-wing Democrats like Tlaib and Omar to present the party as deeply divided and at odds with Israel. Democratic leaders have pushed back, reiterating the party’s strong support for Israel, in part to protect representatives from more conservative districts. In July, the Democratic-led House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution against the BDS movement.

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Tlaib and Omar have also been the target of repeated attacks by President Donald Trump in recent months, including a series of racist tweets on July 14 in which he said they should “go back” to the “broken” countries they came from. Both are U.S. citizens and Tlaib was born in the United States. The two are members of the so-called “Squad” of newly-elected left-wing Democrats, along with Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts. American Jewish organizations had objected to barring the two Democrats from...

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TROOPS LET SOME MUSLIMS GO TO MOSQUES IN LOCKED-DOWN KASHMIR

August 13, 2019 | AP News

SRINAGAR, India — Troops in Indian-administered Kashmir allowed some Muslims to walk to local mosques alone or in pairs to mark the Eid al-Adha festival Monday on the eighth day of an unprecedented security lockdown imposed as India stripped the disputed region of its autonomy.

Thousands of additional troops were sent to the most-ly-Muslim region before India's Hindu nationalist-led government said Aug. 5 it was revoking Kashmir's special constitutional status and downgrading its statehood. All communications and the internet remained cut off to limit protests against the decision in the Himalayan region where

most people oppose Indian rule. Streets were deserted, with most people staying indoors and authorities not allowing large groups to gather.

"Our hearts are on fire," said Habibullah Bhat, 75, who said he came out to pray on the Islamic holy day despite his failing health. "India has thrown us into the dark ages, but God is on our side and our resistance will win." Hundreds of worshippers gathered on a Srinagar street after the prayers and chanted, "We want freedom" and "Go India, go back," witnesses said. Officials said the protest ended peacefully. Elsewhere, two people were injured in violence, senior police...

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AP/Mstyslav Chernov

NASA SCIENTISTS FLY OVER GREENLAND TO TRACK MELTING ICE

August 15, 2019 | AP News

ABOARD A NASA RESEARCH PLANE — NASA scientists are crisscrossing Greenland on a mission to track melting ice. Greenland has been melting faster in the last decade and this summer, it has seen two of the biggest melts on record since 2012.

[Related Story: UN Climate Report: Change Land Use to Avoid a Hungry Future](#)

Global warming is the chief culprit, but scientists want to know how this is happening. Both warmer air and warmer water are eating away at Greenland, causing it to lose billions of tons of ice daily in the summer.

A team of scientists and engineers aboard a research plane this week are dropping probes into the ice to help figure out which is the bigger cause. If water is playing a bigger role than scientists had thought, that could mean seas will be...

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HBO'S 'OUR BOYS' ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DRAMA IS MUST-SEE TV

August 12, 2019 | GV Wire

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Wednesday leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire demonstration of newly developed, short-range ballistic missiles intended to send a warning to the United States and South Korea over their The new HBO docudrama "Our Boys" — a riveting look at the killings of Israeli and Palestinian teenagers that led to the 2014 Gaza war — premieres Monday night.



Co-created by Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers, the [10-part series](#) dramatizes the abduction of three Israeli teens in the West Bank and examines the hatred and violence that followed. The series "is done in such a thoughtful and sensitive manner that it demands to be viewed by as large an audience as possible, both locally and globally," [writes Adrian Hennigan for the left-leaning Israeli newspaper Haaretz](#). The Associated Press provides this synopsis of the tragic events in the summer of 2014: "In June 2014, Israeli teens Gilad Shaer...

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