



COSTA GETS FEISTY ON ELECTION CHALLENGE WHILE HOME FOR HOLIDAY

December 24, 2019 | David Taub

Jim Costa kept his calm while discussing his recent votes on issues that have gripped the country of late. He voted for impeachment, sharing his reasoning in a speech on the House floor. He celebrated legislative victories in his agricultur-

"I expect (Soria) to work hard. But, she won't work harder than I am. I always put my trust and faith in the voters of the Valley."

— Rep. Jim Costa

al wheelhouse: the USMCA, and the Farm Worker Modernization Act. But, when asked during a recent interview

about his reelection challenge, Costa turned feisty. "No one works harder than me. No one. Period," an animated Costa said, banging the table for emphasis. It was just one of several topics the Fresno Democrat talked about in a session with the media at his Fresno office.

On Reelection: No One Works Harder

Costa said he will ramp up his reelection campaign next month. He faces a March 3 primary challenge not only from Republican Kevin Cookingham, but also Democrats Esmeralda Soria and Kim Williams. Soria has campaigned hard and aggressively, but Costa said so has he. "I expect (Soria) to work hard. But, she won't work harder than I am. I always put my trust and faith in the voters of the Valley." While Soria has touted support from labor groups like SEIU and UFW founder Dolores Huerta, Costa rolled out a slew of unions that have his back such as a number of groups that represent federal employees (air traffic controllers, letter carriers, treasury).

Costa says part of the SEIU dissention came from his support of the Trade Promotion Authority. "Sometimes you get personalities that engage here and they have a difference of opinion. I'm very proud of the labor support that I have. I think after

the primary, I'll reunite this labor thing," Costa said. He said he has a broader base of support than his challengers, and more fundraising. He's also leading in Twitter followers (21,000) over main rival Soria (3,300). Gov. Gavin Newsom, U.S. Senators Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein have all endorsed Costa. But some Democrats recently took a shot at Costs for attending a White House Christmas party. "It's a campaign," Costa said in response to the criticism.

Related Story: 16th District House Race: Costa vs. Soria Fundraising

Costa on Impeachment

Costa voted in favor of impeachment. "Obviously something that has preoccupied the attention this week is the vote on the articles impeachment," he said. "It is something that I certainly did not want to do." he said. Costa said he did his homework before his impeachment vote, reviewing the Federalist

papers and rereading the Mueller Report. "I felt the evidence was overwhelming. I have an oath of office that I take to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

I did so realizing that America's national security is at risk," Cos"I don't know if there is a hard and fast timetable. I think we need to get past this one way or the other ... I don't think anyone in Congress wants to see this drawn out for months. I don't think it will be. It would be nice by the end of January or early February this was resolved one way or the other." — Rep. Jim Costa

ta said about his vote. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) has not yet transmitted the two articles of impeachment to the Senate for trial. Costa supports Pelosi, thinking she wants to make sure the trial process is fair. "I don't think she has cold feet," Costa said. He said he hopes Senate leadership from both parties work on rules for a trial. He pointed to...



December 23, 2019 | David Taub

Mayor Lee Brand vetoed the Fresno City Council's plan for recreational cannabis business regulations on Monday. The council long debated the plan, which included several social equity components, for stores to conduct business in Fresno. The final vote took place on Dec. 12, passing 4-3. A veto needs five council votes to overturn. But, councilman Miguel Arias — one of the co-sponsors of the business license plan — does not believe the veto will delay the eventual opening of recreational cannabis shops.

Related Story: Council Takes Aim at Leakers, Revises Cannabis Store Rules

Brand Cites Reasons for Veto

"While I believe that legal adult-use cannabis sales in the city

of Fresno are inevitable, I also believe we have a duty to be transparent and open in how that legislation is brought to constituents," Brand wrote in his veto message.

Among the specific reasons for the veto, Brand cited a desire for a supermajority (five votes) approval; to have locations maintain security video recordings for 90 days (now seven days); for the police department to recommend changes in security language; and opposition to a social equity rule requiring a labor peace agreement. Brand wrote "having a workforce of employees who belong to a labor union are in conflict and could make it more difficult to award social equity licenses to the most deserving applicants." Responded Arias: "I'm kind of perplexed by his veto message." Arias said he plans to meet with Brand on Tuesday to learn more about the mayor's...

ADOPT-A-FAMILY EFFORT BRINGS GIFTS AND CHRISTMAS CHEER TO COUNTY'S WEST SIDE

December 24, 2019 | GV Wire

An abundance of holiday cheer came to the homes of a dozen families in some of Fresno County's poorest communities this week. Each family was adopted by a local company or agency, whose employees purchased and wrapped gifts that were delivered just in time for Christmas. The families were selected with the help of two local school districts — Mendota Unified and Golden Plains Unified — which serve communities on Fresno County's impoverished west side.

Support from Local Companies and Agencies

The Adopt-a-Family program was coordinated for the second consecutive year by Fresno non-profit Alliance for Medical Outreach and Relief. AMOR recently broke ground on a comprehensive health and wellness resource center located in the city of Mendota. Other companies and agencies participating in this year's gift distribution included: Napa Auto Parts, FedEx Ground, Cargill, Fresno County Dept. of Child Support Services, Hobart & New Flyer, Fresno County District Attorney's Office...

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DEPUTIES SPREAD HOLIDAY CHEER BY HANDING OUT \$100 BILLS TO DRIVERS IN MADERA

December 24, 2019 | KMPH Aggregation

For most drivers, a feeling of fear and panic washes over them when they see red and blue lights in their rear view mirror. Drivers in Madera County experienced the complete opposite Monday, relief and gratitude.

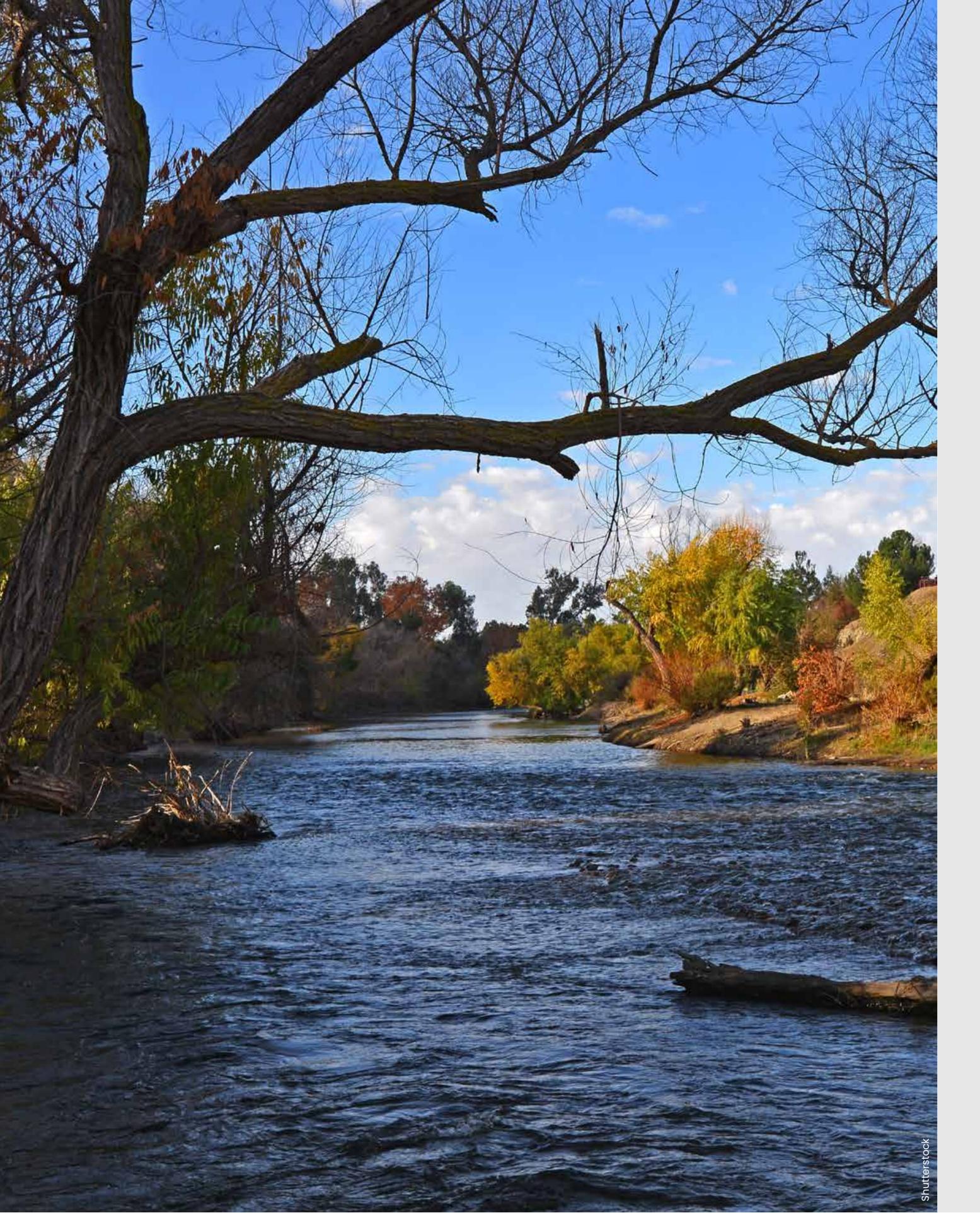
Madera County Sheriff's Office deputies spent the day pulling over drivers and handing out 50 \$100 bills. Sheriff Varney says that deputies usually only have contact with people when something stressful or bad is happening.

These random acts of kindness help deputies get an opportunity to talk with the public in a positive way, and help spread some holiday cheer.

The sheriff's office was able to hand out the money thanks to a \$5,000 donation from Agriland Farming Company Inc. This is the fifth year that they have partnered up with the sheriff's...

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CALIFORNIA CAN SOLVE WATER SHORTAGE WITH WATER IT HAS. HERE'S HOW.

December 26, 2019 | CalMatters

California is at a water crossroads. We can continue our costly, 100-year-old pattern of trying to find new water supplies, or we can choose instead to focus on smarter ways of using – and reusing – what we already have. With a population projected to top 50 million by mid-century, a booming economy and a changing climate, there is no question we need to shore up our water systems. But we don't need an all-of-the-above strategy that sacrifices affordability and environmental health. Just like with energy, we must focus on the solutions that are better for our planet and pocket-books.

Saving and Reusing Water Are Vital

The cheapest water is the water we save. Californians have made real strides to conserve over the past several decades. San Francisco and Los Angeles use the same

Farmers have dramatically increased economic output over the last 30 years while using the same amount of water—effectively producing more food and income for every drop of water.

amount (or less) water today as they did 30 years ago, despite substantial growth. And farmers have dramatically increased economic output over the last 30 years while using the same amount of water –

effectively producing more food and income for every drop of water. But far more can be done. Research from the Pacific Institute found that appliance and fixture upgrades, leak repair and landscape changes could reduce urban water use by up to 5 million acre-feet annually – enough water to supply more than 13 million families for a year.

On farms, precision irrigation and other water-wise practices could reduce water use by 6 million to 7 million acre-feet annually while maintaining food production and farmer income. This untapped potential for water efficiency should always be our first step towards water security.

Innovation Is Often Untapped

There are also new, innovative sources of local supply. Less than 20% of urban wastewater is being reused.

There are still more than a million acre-feet of treated water we could reclaim to meet local needs. Water reuse opportunities can be found across the

California has a chance to model what a truly resilient water system looks like, combining nature and technology to make the most of every drop and dollar.

state, but are especially important in coastal areas, where waste(d) water is discharged into and pollutes estuaries and the ocean. Urban runoff is another viable local option. Our cities were designed to remove rainwater to reduce flood risk, literally flushing freshwater down storm drains. Rain gardens, green streets, and parks can help us catch and store more rain.

While gray infrastructure like pipes and pumps will continue to play an important role in our water system, green infrastructure can turn urban spaces into a sponge that allows water to sink into the ground to replenish underground aquifers for later use. Water efficiency, reuse and rainwater capture not only save money compared with costly sources like seawater desalination, they also save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which will be key for avoiding unmanageable climate impacts.

Many Benefits of Water Conservation

Water conservation during California's last drought saved enough electricity to power the cities of Berkeley, Burbank and Santa Cruz for a year. Less energy use means less power plant pollution, helping California achieve our clean air and climate goals. There are other benefits to consider as well. Reuse reduces the need to divert water from streams already stressed by rising temperatures and shrinking snowpack and can curb ocean pollution associated with sewage outfalls...



WILDFIRES CAUSE TURMOIL IN CA PROPERTY INSURANCE MARKET

December 26, 2019 | AP News

NEW YORK — Kent Michitsch seemed to be running out of traditional options to insure the home he's lived in for more than 30 years northeast of San Diego as California's massive property insurance market reels from three consecutive years of destructive wildfires. Michitsch, 57, has received three non-renewal notices in three years, and says he feared getting a fourth one when his homeowners' policy comes up for renewal the middle of next year if it wasn't for California lawmakers' recent intervention in the market.

"It's constant worry and frustration. You know you're covered now, but I might have to look for a new policy next year yet again." Michitsch says he's never made a claim on his insurance and never had fire damage. Thousands of homeowners like Michitsch have lost their insurance policies in the last few years as insurers pull out of areas that are at risk of fire damage or stop insuring homes altogether. They've been forced to scramble to find coverage from regular insurance...

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SAN FRANCISCO CAFES ARE BANISHING DISPOSABLE COFFEE CUPS

December 24, 2019 | AP News

SAN FRANCISCO — A new cafe culture is brewing in the San Francisco area, where a growing number of coffee houses are banishing paper to-go cups and replacing them with everything from glass jars to rental mugs and BYO cup policies. What started as a small trend among neighborhood cafes to reduce waste is gaining support from some big names in the city's food and coffee world.

Celebrated chef Dominique Crenn, owner of the three-star Michelin restaurant Atelier Crenn, is opening a San Francisco cafe next year that will have no to-go bags or disposable coffee cups and will use no plastic. Customers who plan to sip and go at Boutique Crenn will be encouraged to bring their own coffee cups, says spokeswoman Kate Bittman. On a bigger scale, the Blue Bottle coffeehouse chain, which goes through about 15,000 to-go cups a month at its 70 U.S. locations, says it wants to "show our guests and the world that...

December 26, 2019 | AP News

A California law that makes it harder for companies to treat workers as independent contractors takes effect next week, forcing small businesses in and outside the state to rethink their staffing.

The law puts tough restrictions on who can be independent contractors or freelancers rather than employees. Supporters say it addresses inequities created by the growth of the gig economy, including the employment practices of ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft that use contractors. Company owners with independent contractors must now decide whether to hire them as employees or look for help in oth-

er states. Another alternative: asking these workers to start their own businesses, a setup the law allows. Although the law affects companies of all sizes and out-of-state businesses that use California contractors, it likely will have a greater impact on the many small businesses that have hired independent contractors because of limited staffing budgets.

WILLFORCE

Tamara Ellison has used independent contractors in both her consulting and construction businesses. She's expecting to hire five of her consulting contractors as employees to bring her company into compliance with the law. But she's also thinking she may have to limit the services she offers...

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TRUMP LASHES OUT AS IMPEACHMENT TRIAL STUCK IN LIMBO

December 24, 2019 | AP News

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump lashed out Tuesday as his Senate impeachment trial remains at an impasse, with Republican and Democratic leaders at odds over its format and whether witnesses should be called. Speaking at his private club in Palm Beach, Florida, after a teleconference call with troops stationed across the globe, Trump singled out Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is indefinitely holding up sending the articles of impeachment the House passed last week to the Republican-controlled Senate. "She hates the Republican Party. She hates all of the people that voted for me and the Republican Party," Trump charged on Christmas Eve. "She's doing a tremendous disservice to the country."

Trump has long seen a Senate trial, where he is almost certain to be acquitted, as an opportunity for vindication after he became the third president in the nation's history to be impeached by the House. "We have the majority and now they want McConnell to do wonderful things for them," Trump complained of Democrats, adding that he will leave it to Senate Majority Leader

"She hates the Republican Party. She hates all of the people that voted for me and the Republican Party. She's doing a tremendous disservice to the country." — President Donald Trump

Mitch McConnell to do whatever he thinks best. "He's very smart guy, a very good guy, a very fair guy. But they treated us very unfairly. And now they want fairness in the Senate," he said.

Schumer Is Demanding Witnesses Who Refused to Appear During House Committee Hearings

Pelosi has said she is waiting until she receives more clarity from McConnell about what a trial will look like. He has said he has not ruled out calling witnesses, but has also indicated that he is in no hurry to seek new testimony either. Meanwhile the Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, has countered that any trial without witnesses would be "Kafkaesque"

and a "sham." "Let's put it like this: If there are no documents and no witnesses, it will be very hard to come to an agreement," Schumer told The Associated Press on Monday. Schumer is demanding witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton. McConnell, who has all but promised a swift acquittal of the president, has resisted making any guarantees, and has cautioned Trump against seeking the testimo-

ny of witnesses for fear of prolonging the trial. Instead, McConnell appears to have secured Republican support for his plans to impose a framework drawn from the 1999 impeachment

"We haven't ruled out witnesses. We've said let's handle this case just like we did with President Clinton. Fair is fair." — Senate Majority Leader Mitch Mc-Connell

trial of President Bill Clinton. "We haven't ruled out witnesses," McConnell said Monday in an interview with "Fox and Friends." "We've said let's handle this case just like we did with President Clinton. Fair is fair."

That trial featured a 100-0 vote on arrangements that established two weeks of presentations and argument before a partisan tally in which Republicans, who held the majority, called a limited number of witnesses. But Democrats now would need Republican votes to secure witness testimony — and Republicans believe they have the votes to eventually block those requests.

Pelosi Has Delayed Sending the Articles of Impeachment to the Senate

In a letter Monday to all senators, Schumer argued that the circumstances in the Trump trial are different from those of Clinton's, who was impeached after a lengthy independent counsel investigation in which witnesses had already testified numerous times under oath. Schumer rejected the Clinton model, saying waiting...



December 23, 2019 | AP News

WASHINGTON — U.S. sales of newly built homes increased 1.3% in November from the prior month, a sign that low mortgage rates are pushing up purchases as well as prices. The Commerce Department said Monday that new single-family houses sold at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 719,000 last month.

Sales surged in the Northeast and West, but they were flat in the Midwest and fell in the South. New-home sales have increased 9.8% so far this year. The increase largely reflects a steady decline in mortgage rates, which has made borrowing cheaper and brought more people seeking to upgrade thei house into the market.

A Steady Decline in Mortgage Rates

Still, prices have moved upward as a result of construction lagging demand. The median new-home sales price was \$330,800, up 7.3% from a year ago. Demand has been stoked by a steady decline in mortgage rates over the past 12 months. The typical 30-year mortgage rate has fallen from roughly 4.9% a year ago to 3.8% this November. This decline in mortgage rates reflected the broader global...

cheaper and brought more people seeking to upgrade their

STUDENT WHO SAVED CLASSMATES FROM SHOOTING HONORED AS JEDI

December 26, 2019 | AP News

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — A North Carolina college student hailed by police as a hero for preventing more injuries and deaths after a gunman opened fire in a classroom has now been immortalized as a Jedi by the production company for the Star Wars franchise. News outlets report the family of Riley Howell, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte student who is described as a huge Star Wars fan, was tipped off by Lucasfilm, in May that it planned to honor him in a forthcoming book, "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker – The Visual Dictionary."

The book was released by publisher DK to coincide with the release of the new film "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker." In May, the fan relations team for Lucasfilm wrote a letter to Howell's family expressing condolences. "Riley's courage and selflessness brings out the Jedi in all of us," wrote fan relations team member Lucas Seastrom. "We hope that you...

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GENDER GAP OPENS AMONG HISPANICS WHO COULD BE KEY IN 2020

December 24, 2019 | AP News

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Yolanda Avila and Andres Pico are friends who sit next to each other on the Colorado Springs' city council. But politically the two couldn't be further apart — Avila is a durable Democrat and Pico an unflinching Republican.

It's a split that's common across the country, as Hispanics are divided along gender lines. Overall, Latinos are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, but Hispanic men are more likely than Hispanic women to vote Republican.

Last year, as about two-thirds of Latinos backed Democrats, Hispanic women were 9 percentage points more likely to vote for them than Hispanic men, according to AP VoteCast, a national survey of more than 115,000 midterm voters, including 7,738 Latinos. Though Hispanics started from a more Democratic baseline — 61% of men still backed that party's...

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IRAQ PRESIDENT REJECTS IRAN-BACKED BLOC'S NOMINEE AS PM

December 26, 2019 | AP News

BAGHDAD — Iraq's president refused Thursday to designate the Iran-backed parliamentary bloc's nominee for prime minister after he was rejected by anti-government protesters, saying he was prepared to submit his resignation to Parliament. Barham Saleh said in a statement issued by his office that he would not name

"This is a victory for the demonstrators and a victory for the blood of the martyrs. Because of street pressure, the candidate of the (political) parties was rejected, and we will not accept and we will not return to our homes if the party candidate is nominated." — activist Hassanein Gharib

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 Wednesday by the Fatah bloc, which includes leaders associated with the

Iran-supported paramilitary Popular Mobilization Forces. However, he was promptly rejected by Iraqi protesters, who poured into the streets to denounce his nomination over megaphones, calling for an independent candidate. Saleh, in the statement addressed to the parliament speaker, said his refusal to designate al-Eidani could be construed as a violation of the constitution and said he was therefore putting his resignation at the disposal of Parliament. He stopped short of actually submitting his resignation, leaving it up to the lawmakers to decide "as they see fit."

The move plunges the war-scarred country into further uncertainty and deepens a political impasse amid unprecedented mass protests that erupted on Oct. 1. The leaderless protesters are calling for the overthrow of Iraq's entire political class over corruption and mismanagement. The protests, concentrated in Baghdad and the mostly Shiite-inhabited south, have also turned into an uprising against Iran's political and military influence in the country.

Protesters Gathered in Baghdad's Tahrir Square

Shortly after he issued his statement Thursday, Saleh left Baghdad, headed to his hometown in the northern city of Sulaimaniyah. It was not clear how parliament would react to the resignation offer. According to the constitution, parliament has seven days to accept or reject a president's resignation before it automatically goes into effect, and Saleh's move did not amount to a resignation.

Related Story: A Scathing Pentagon Report Blames Trump for the Return of ISIS in Syria and

Protesters gathered in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, which has emerged as a focal point of the protests, celebrated Saleh's decision. "This is a victory for the demonstrators and a victory for the blood of the martyrs," said activist Hassanein Gharib. "Because of street pressure, the candidate of the (political) parties was rejected, and we will not accept and we will not return to our homes if the party candidate is nominated." A leading politician and former government official familiar with the latest developments said the situation was now open to all possibilities after Saleh offered to resign. He added that the president traveled to Sulaimaniyah in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region to get away from the pressures being exerted on him. "The situation is very dangerous." Iraq is going through a real crisis that may lead to the collapse of the state," he warned, speaking on condition of anonymity to divulge sensitive information.

There Are Two Main Blocs in the Iraqi Parliament Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi submitted his resignation late last month under mounting pressure from the protesters calling for his ouster. 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. According to Iraq's constitution, the largest bloc in parliament is required to...



December 26, 2019 | AP News

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — People along a swath of southern Asia gazed at the sky in marvel on Thursday at a "ring of fire" solar eclipse. The so-called annular eclipse, in which a thin outer ring of the sun is still visible, could be seen along a path stretching from India and Pakistan to Thailand and Indonesia.

Related Story: Christmas Day Sees The Third, Final And Most **Dangerous Solar Eclipse Of 2019**

The Previous Annular Solar Eclipse in February 2017 Authorities in Indonesia provided telescopes and hundreds

of special glasses to protect viewers' eyes. Thousands of people gazed at the sky and cheered and clapped as the sun transformed into a dark orb for more than two minutes, briefly plunging the sky into darkness. Hundreds of others prayed at nearby mosques. "How amazing to see the ring of fire when the sun disappeared slowly," said Firman Syahrizal, a resident of Sinabang in Indonesia's Banda Aceh province

who witnessed the eclipse with his family. The previous annular solar eclipse in February 2017 was also visible over a slice of Indonesia.



ISRAEL'S EMBATTLED NETANYAHU DECLARES VICTORY IN PRIMARY

December 26, 2019 | AP News

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared victory early Friday in his primary election battle for leadership of the Likud party, as TV stations predicted a landslide win for the longtime Israeli leader. The apparent victory means that Netanyahu will lead Likud into March elections, the country's third election in less than a year. He is also likely to seize on the victory as he battles criminal corruption charges.

"A giant victory," Netanyahu tweeted, just over an hour after polls closed. "Thanks to the members of Likud for the trust, support and love," he said. "God willing, I will lead Likud to a big victory in the coming elections." Partial results reported by Israeli TV stations showed Netanyahu capturing between 70% and 80% of the vote, trouncing his challenger, lawmaker Gideon Saar. Official results were expected later Friday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday faced the first serious internal challenge to his decade-long rule...

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SAUDIS SENTENCE 5 TO DEATH FOR JAMAL KHASHOGGI'S KILLING

December 23, 2019 | AP News

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — A court in Saudi Arabia sentenced five people to death Monday for the killing of Washington Post columnist and royal family critic Jamal Khashoggi, whose grisly slaying in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul drew international condemnation and cast a cloud of suspicion over Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Three other people were found guilty by Riyadh's criminal court of covering up the crime and were sentenced to a combined 24 years in prison, according to a statement read by the Saudi attorney general's office on state TV.

Related Story: Jamal Khashoggi: US Spy Chief Given Deadline to Name Saudi Writer's ...

In all, 11 people were put on trial in Saudi Arabia over the killing. The names of those found guilty were not made...

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