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WEEKLY DIGEST
JANUARY 3, 2020

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LOCAL

FRESNO REWIND 2019: THE YEAR IN PICTURES

December 30, 2019 | GV Wire

Fresno in 2019 was filled with highs and lows. Here are some of the memorable news images from throughout the year and the stories behind them.

January: Remembering David McDonald

Fresno area businessman and philanthropist David McDonald died in January at the age of 69. McDonald built Pelco, which made security cameras, into a manufacturing powerhouse after moving it from southern California to Fresno in the early 1980s. He and his partners sold the company to a French firm, Schneider Electric, for about \$1.5 billion in 2007. His civic contributions included leading the successful effort to pass a sales tax increase to support the Fresno Chaffee Zoo, the creation of the California 9/11 Memorial on the Pelco campus, and a \$2 million contribution to build the Miss Winkles Pet Adoption Center in Clovis.

February: KISS Rocks Fresno

Fresno fans wanted the best, and KISS gave it to them. The legendary rock band rocked Save Mart Center as part of their “final” tour in a February show featuring lasers, fireworks, flaming guitars. KISS bookended a blazing, 20-song set with their two most famous songs, opening with “Detroit Rock City” and closing with “Rock and Roll All Nite.” The two-hour show was pure KISS: loud and powerful.

March: Locals Among California’s Women of the Year

A select group of area women was honored by the state Legislature in March for their contributions

to the local community. Among those named was healthcare advocate Davena Witcher, Executive Director of Fresno-based AMOR – Alliance for Medical Outreach and Relief. Witcher was named Woman of the Year by state Sen. Andreas Borgeas (R-Fresno) for her efforts, which include the development of a health resource center for underserved residents of Mendota. The west Fresno County community is among the state’s most impoverished areas.

April: Armenian Genocide Recognized in Fresno

Fresno community leaders gathered at City Hall to raise the Armenian flag and commemorate the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks from 1915 through 1918. While California and 48 other states officially recognize the genocide, the U.S. government does not. In December, however, both houses of Congress took the historic step of approving a resolution affirming the Armenian genocide occurred and acknowledging Turkey’s responsibility for the atrocity.

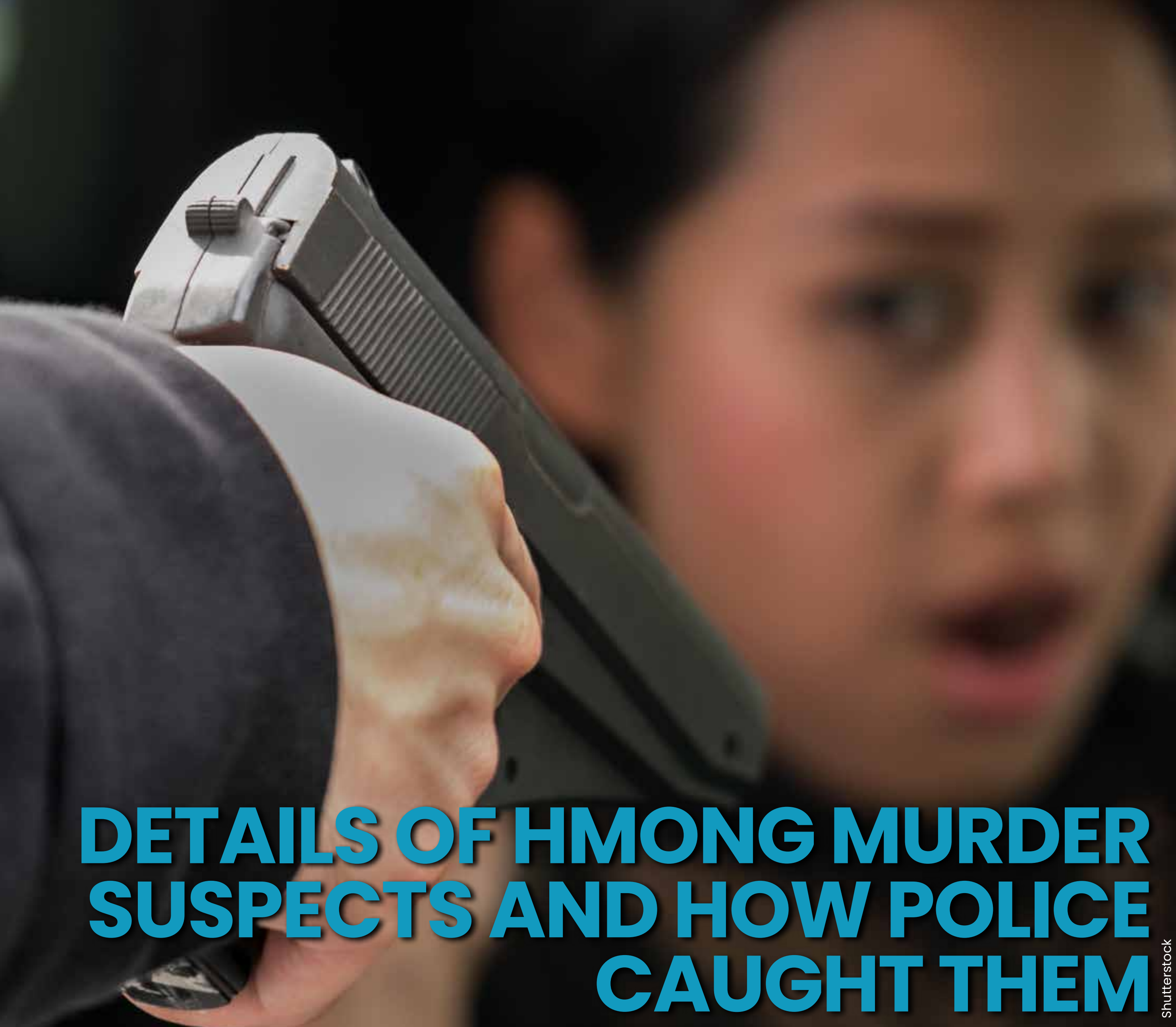
May: Assemblyman Arambula Acquitted

Fresno Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula (D) was acquitted of child abuse charges in May after being accused of injuring his young daughter while disciplining her. Arambula and his daughter both testified during the trial. Assistant District Attorney Steve Wright said the case was aimed at holding Arambula accountable. Defense attorney Margarita Martinez-Baly said the charges were politically motivated.

June: Area Muslims Mark End of Ramadan

The end of the annual Ramadan fast was celebrated in early June at the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno with prayers, food, and gifts to the underserved. During the event, Imam Seyed Ali Ghazvini led worshippers in an appeal for peace. “Our message is to be an agent of peace. Promote peace in your...

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DETAILS OF HMONG MURDER SUSPECTS AND HOW POLICE CAUGHT THEM

Shutterstock

January 2, 2020 | David Taub

Shortly after the brother of a Mongolian Boys Society member was killed in a Fresno home invasion in the early hours of Nov. 17, gang members met to plan a retaliatory hit. That is some of the new information revealed in the federal criminal complaint filed against three men for the Nov. 17 quadruple homicide at a football-watching party that evening. The federal complaint takes readers into the violent world of the Mongolian Boys Society and tells of the gang’s formation and most notorious crimes.

Complaint Details Information

The complaint, filed by Cory Hastings, a Fresno Police gang task force officer, detailed the conspiracy charges against Pao Choua Vang, Jhovanny Delgado, and Johnny Xiong, who were charged in federal court Thursday. According to court docu-

ments, all three men waived their Miranda rights and talked openly with investigators about planning and carrying out the homicidal attack. Fresno County District Attorney Lisa Smitcamp charged four additional men — Ger Lee, Anthony Montes, Porge Kue, and Billy Xiong — with four counts of murder, and 12 counts of attempted murder.

Gang Retaliation

Randy Xiong died in a shooting at an apartment complex at 3904 E. Dwight Way in Fresno on Nov. 17. MBS members met, believing the rival Asian Crips gang was responsible. The most recent incident of bad blood stemmed from a wedding the night before on Nov. 16 in Fresno, attended by both MBS and Asian Crips members. The MBS gang decided to take revenge at a home on 5361 E. Lamona Avenue in Fresno, near...

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IF PERFECT ATTENDANCE IS GOAL FOR KIDS, WHY NOT FOR FUSD TRUSTEES?

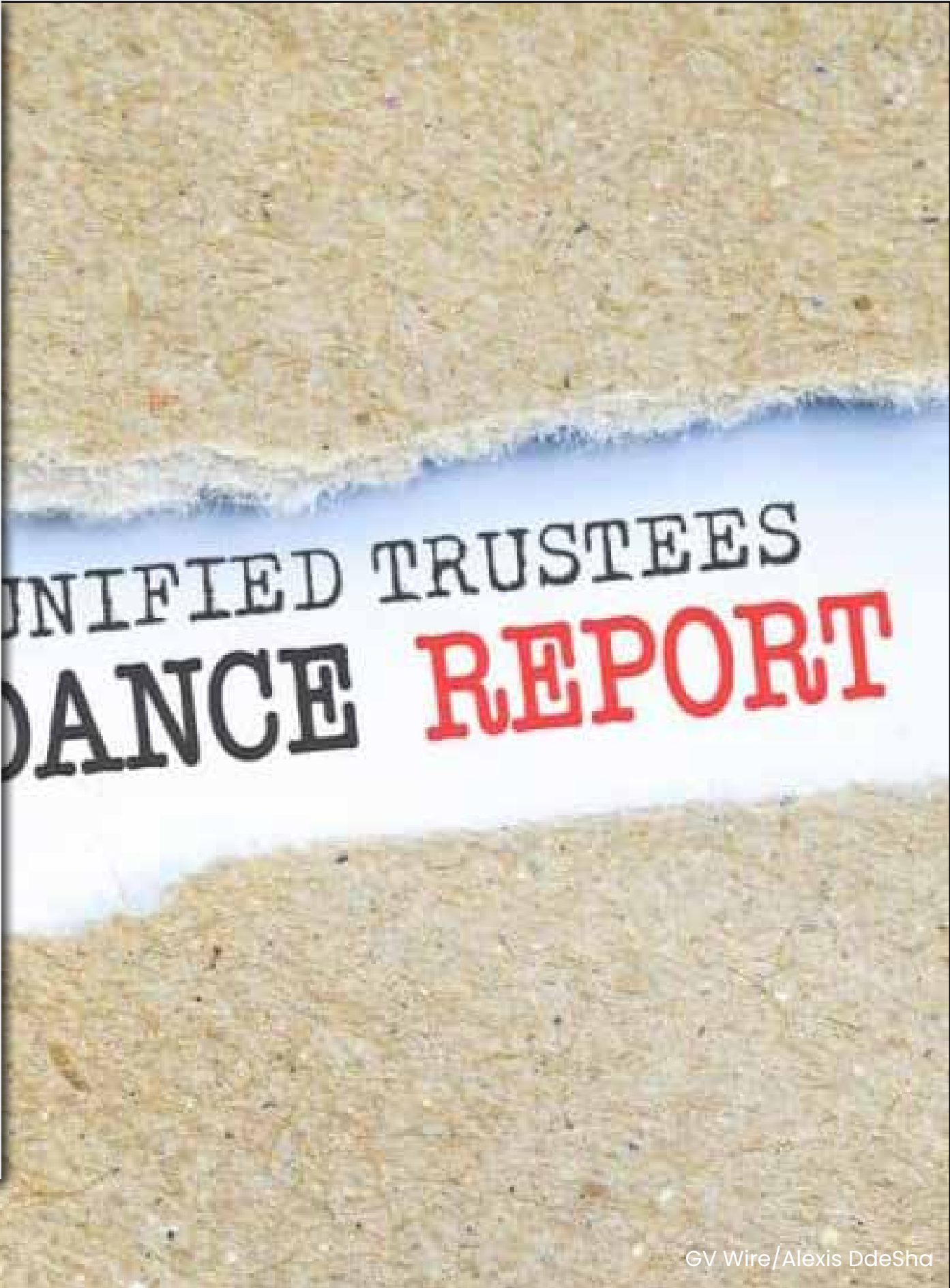
December 31, 2019 | Nancy Price

When it came time at the Dec. 18 Fresno Unified board meeting to vote on a proposed charter high school and a \$30,000 communications services contract, trustees Elizabeth Jonasson Rosas and Veva Islas were missing from the dais. It wasn't their first absences in 2019.

According to district records, Jonasson Rosas missed two special meetings, a regular meeting and a workshop, left one regular meeting at the end of the closed session, and slipped out of two other meetings — including the Dec. 18 board meeting — before reappearing hours later. Islas was absent from two regular meetings and one special meeting, arrived a few minutes late for a special meeting, and left a regular board meeting for more than four hours before returning.

Only two Fresno Unified School District trustees — Carol Mills and Terry Slatik — had perfect attendance at the board’s 22 regular meetings, seven special meetings, and a workshop in...

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GV Wire/Alexis DdeSha



AP File

IN FRESNO, STEYER SAYS HE’S THE ONE TO BEAT ‘FAKE’ TRUMP

December 30, 2019 | David Taub

Tom Steyer says he is the Democrat who can defeat President Donald Trump. The self-described progressive presidential candidate campaigned in Fresno on Monday, all the while dismissing his low polling numbers. “(Trump) is going to run on his economic record. I spent 30 years building a business from scratch. He’s a fake,” Steyer said. “He’s a failed businessperson. He’s a fake president. I can go on stage and take him down on that.”

He added that conventional politicians do not do well against Trump. Labor leader Chuck Riojas and IBEW Local 100 leader Ronny Jungk hosted Steyer on a tour of an electrician training facility near the airport. Afterward, Steyer met with labor, business, and elected leaders for a roundtable. Steyer, the billionaire industrialist from San Francisco, entered the race in July. Before that, he funded a campaign urging Congress to impeach Trump. Steyer is also one of the top political contributors to Democratic causes. Steyer has spent \$83 million on his...

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NEW CALIFORNIA LAWS HELP ANIMALS, FIRE VICTIMS, IMMIGRANTS

December 30, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Hundreds of new California laws take effect with the start of the new year, including measures stemming from the devastating wildfires that have swept the state. Others address animal rights, criminal justice, businesses and health care. Among them:

Wildfires

In a step to curb greenhouse gas emissions, California becomes the first state to require new homes to install solar panels, which the California Energy Commission says could add about \$9,500 to the cost of a new home. But another new law exempts homeowners forced to rebuild because of a wildfire or other natural disaster. The state is temporarily suspending its lengthy environmental review process for areas affected by the 2018 Camp Fire wildfire in a bid to speed up reconstruction of housing after the state's most destructive wildfire displaced more than 50,000 people. But the law does not include the city of Chico because the mayor and most of the city council opposed it.

California becomes the first state to ban commercial or recreational fur trapping. It remains legal to trap animals for other purposes, including pest control and public health.

State entities can waive or reduce governmental licensing fees for businesses experiencing hardship and displacement after wildfires and other emergencies. Caregivers can face enhanced civil penalties if they abandon the elderly in disasters such as wildfires. The law responds to the abandonment of seniors at two Santa Rosa assisted living centers during wildfires in 2017.

Animal Welfare

California becomes the first state to ban commercial or recreational fur trapping. It remains legal to trap animals for other purposes, including pest control and public health. It is also the first state to bar cosmetic companies from selling products in California if they

were tested on animals. California becomes the third state, behind Hawaii and New Jersey, to ban most animals from circuses, including bears, tigers, elephants and monkeys. The law exempts rodeos and does not apply to domesticated dogs, cats and horses. It's illegal to hunt, trap or kill bobcats in California until 2025, when the state can begin issuing limited licenses as part of a bobcat management plan. California's ban on importing and selling alligator or crocodile products takes effect, though the state of Louisiana is suing to block the prohibition. California becomes the latest state to allow for the eventual use of road-killed deer, elk, pronghorn antelope and wild pigs. But wildlife wardens warn it's still illegal to collect roadkill because a state permitting and tracking program is not yet in place. It's illegal to smoke or dispose of cigar and cigarette waste in California state parks and beaches. The law covers traditional cigarettes and electric smoking devices, but smoking will still be allowed in parking lots. Supporters say it will provide a healthier environment for people, fish and wildlife.

California is the first state to bar health and dental co-pays for all inmates. California has one of nine state prison systems that already banned the charges, but the American Civil Liberties Union says California is the first to also abolish the practice in county jails.

Criminal Justice

California is the first state to bar health and dental co-pays for all inmates. California has one of nine state prison systems that already banned the charges, but the American Civil Liberties Union says California is the first to also abolish the practice in county jails. Police are barred for three years from using facial recognition software in body-worn cameras in a move that follows New Hampshire and Oregon. Victims of violent crime have seven years, up from three, to seek...

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GAVIN NEWSOM HAD 'BAPTISM BY FIRE' IN 1ST YEAR AS GOVERNOR

December 30, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — During his inaugural address last January, Gov. Gavin Newsom made only a passing reference to wildfires and never mentioned the state's largest utility, Pacific Gas & Electric. Both soon became inescapable topics.

PG&E filed for bankruptcy barely three weeks after the Democratic governor was sworn in, triggering a series of events that defined the former San Francisco mayor's first year as leader of the country's most populous state. Newsom worked with state lawmakers to create financial stability for PG&E and the state's two other investor-owned utilities; developed a plan that required them to strengthen their safe-

ty measures; and forcefully reacted when the utilities shut off the lights to millions of Californians. "He certainly had baptism by fire, and I'm not even kidding," said state Senate leader Toni Atkins, a San Diego Democrat. PG&E's bankruptcy was prompted by an estimated \$30 billion in liability from wildfires sparked by its equipment in 2017 and 2018, including the state's deadliest and most destructive blaze, which killed 85 and nearly leveled the city of Paradise.

Fearing further financial consequences, PG&E instituted wide-scale blackouts when weather created high fire danger. In previous years, utility lines and other equipment sparked...

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AP File

UBER, POSTMATES SUE TO CHALLENGE CALIFORNIA'S NEW LABOR LAW

December 31, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — Ride-share company Uber and on-demand meal delivery service Postmates sued Monday to block a broad new California law aimed at giving wage and benefit protections to people who work as independent contractors. The lawsuit filed in U.S. court in Los Angeles argues that the law set to take effect Wednesday violates federal and state constitutional guarantees of equal protection and due process.

Uber said it will try to link the lawsuit to another legal challenge filed in mid-December by associations representing freelance writers and photographers. The California Trucking Association filed the first challenge to the law in November on behalf of independent truckers. The law creates the nation's strictest test by which workers must be considered employees and it could set a precedent for other states. The latest challenge includes two independent workers who wrote about their concerns with the new law. "This has...

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48-YEAR-OLD ELEPHANT EUTHANIZED AT SAN DIEGO ZOO

December 31, 2019 | AP News

SAN DIEGO — Tembo, a 48-year-old elephant, was euthanized at the San Diego Zoo after a sudden change in her health following longtime treatment for age-related ailments, the zoo announced Monday. The female African bush elephant died Sunday. "She had been under veterinary care, including stem cell therapy to alleviate age-related ailments over a long period of time," the zoo tweeted.

"On Saturday, animal care staff noted a sudden change in Tembo's condition, including behaviors that indicated severe discomfort," the zoo tweeted. "After evaluating quality of life options, staff made the difficult decision to compassionately euthanize her." Tembo had lived at the zoo since 1983. Before that she was privately owned and had been an animal actor, the zoo said. Tembo appeared in the 1974 television series "Born Free." Tembo was one of four elephants at the zoo. The others are an African bush elephant named Shaba and two Asian elephants, Mary and Devi. African bush elephants can...

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San Diego Zoo



U.S. WITH BIRTHS DOWN, U.S. HAD SLOWEST GROWTH RATE IN A CENTURY

December 31, 2019 | AP News

ORLANDO, Fla. — The past year's population growth rate in the United States was the slowest in a century due to declining births, increasing deaths and the slow-down of international migration, according to figures released Monday by the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. grew from 2018 to 2019 by almost a half percent, or about 1.5 million people, with the population standing at 328 million this year, according to population estimates. That's the slowest growth rate in the U.S. since 1917 to 1918, when the nation was involved in World War I, said William Frey, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution.

For the first time in decades, natural increase — the number of births minus the number of deaths — was less than 1 million in the U.S. due to an aging population of Baby Boomers, whose oldest members entered their 70s within the past several years. As the large Boomer population continues to age, this trend is going to continue. "Some of these things are locked into place. With the aging of the population, as the Baby

"Some of these things are locked into place. With the aging of the population, as the Baby Boomers move into their 70s and 80s, there are going to be higher numbers of deaths. That means proportionately fewer women of child bearing age, so even if they have children, it's still going to be less."
— William Frey, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution

For the first time this decade, Puerto Rico had a population increase. The island, battered by economic stagnation and Hurricane Maria in the past several years,

Boomers move into their 70s and 80s, there are going to be higher numbers of deaths," Frey said. "That means proportionately fewer women of child bearing age, so even if they have children, it's still going to be less."

Four states had a natural decrease, where deaths outnumbered births: West Virginia, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

increased by 340 people between 2018 and 2019, with people moving to the island offsetting natural decrease.

Ten States Had Population Declines in the Past Year

International migration to the U.S. decreased to 595,000 people from 2018 to 2019, dropping from as many as 1 million international migrants in 2016, according to the population estimates. Immigration restrictions by the Trump administration combined with a perception that the

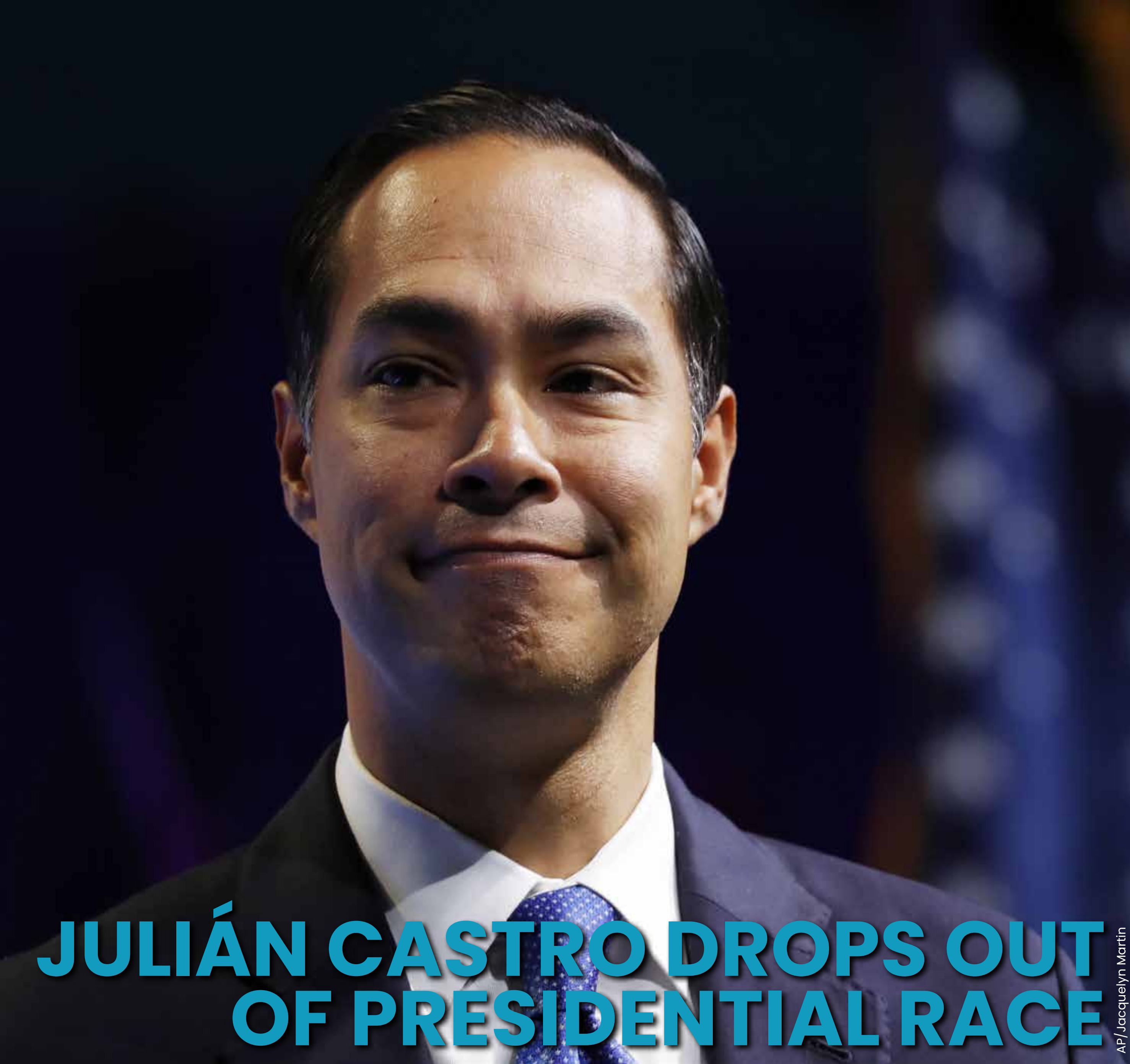
U.S. has fewer economic opportunities than it did before the recession a decade ago contributed to the decline, Frey said. "Immigration is a wildcard in that it is something we can

do something about," Frey said. "Immigrants tend to be younger and have children, and they can make a population younger." Ten states had population declines in the past year. They included New York, which lost almost 77,000 people; Illinois, which lost almost 51,000 residents; West Virginia, which lost more than 12,000 people; Louisiana, which lost almost 11,000 residents; and Connecticut, which lost 6,200 people. Mississippi, Hawaii, New Jersey, Alaska and Vermont each lost less than 5,000 residents.

Regionally, the South saw the greatest population growth from 2018 to 2019, increasing 0.8% due to natural increase and people moving from others parts of the country. The Northeast had a population decrease for the first time this decade, declining 0.1% due primarily to people moving away. Monday's population estimates also offer a preview of which states may gain or lose congressional seats from next year's apportionment process using figures from the 2020 Census. The process divvies up the 435 U.S. House seats among...

"Immigration is a wildcard in that it is something we can do something about. Immigrants tend to be younger and have children, and they can make a population younger."
— William Frey

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JULIÁN CASTRO DROPS OUT OF PRESIDENTIAL RACE

AP/Jacquelyn Martin

January 2, 2020 | AP News

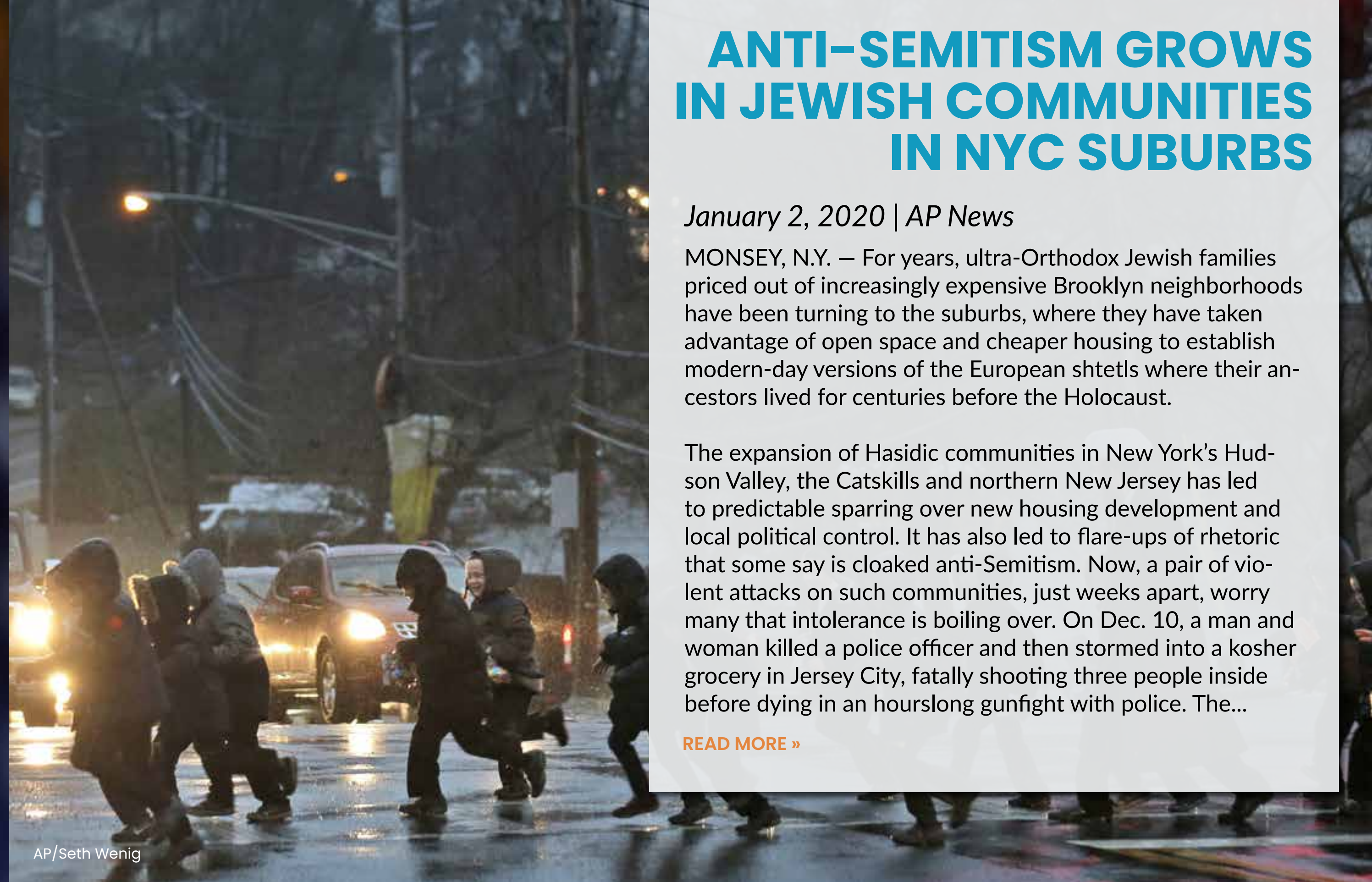
AUSTIN, Texas — Former Obama housing secretary Julián Castro, the only Latino in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary race, on Thursday ended his campaign that had pushed the field on immigration and swung hard at rivals on the debate stage but never found a foothold to climb from the back of the pack.

“I’m so proud of the campaign we’ve run together. We’ve shaped the conversation on so many important issues in this race, stood up for the most vulnerable people and given a voice to those who are often forgotten,” Castro said in an

online video. “But with only a month until the Iowa caucuses, and given the circumstances of this campaign season, I have determined that it simply isn’t our time.”

The video continues, “So today it’s with a heavy heart and with profound gratitude that I will suspend my campaign for president. To all who have been inspired by our campaign, especially our young people, keep reaching for your dreams — and keep fighting for what you believe in.” Castro, who launched his campaign in January, dropped out after failing to garner enough support in the polls or donations to make...

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AP/Seth Wenig

ANTI-SEMITISM GROWS IN JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN NYC SUBURBS

January 2, 2020 | AP News

MONSEY, N.Y. — For years, ultra-Orthodox Jewish families priced out of increasingly expensive Brooklyn neighborhoods have been turning to the suburbs, where they have taken advantage of open space and cheaper housing to establish modern-day versions of the European shtetls where their ancestors lived for centuries before the Holocaust.

The expansion of Hasidic communities in New York’s Hudson Valley, the Catskills and northern New Jersey has led to predictable sparring over new housing development and local political control. It has also led to flare-ups of rhetoric that some say is cloaked anti-Semitism. Now, a pair of violent attacks on such communities, just weeks apart, worry many that intolerance is boiling over. On Dec. 10, a man and woman killed a police officer and then stormed into a kosher grocery in Jersey City, fatally shooting three people inside before dying in an hourslong gunfight with police. The...

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GOODBYE ROBOCALLS? PROBABLY NOT.

December 31, 2019 | AP News

NEW YORK — An anti-robocalls measure signed into law Monday by President Donald Trump should help reduce the torrent of unwanted calls promising lower interest rates or pretending to be the IRS, though it won’t make all such calls disappear.

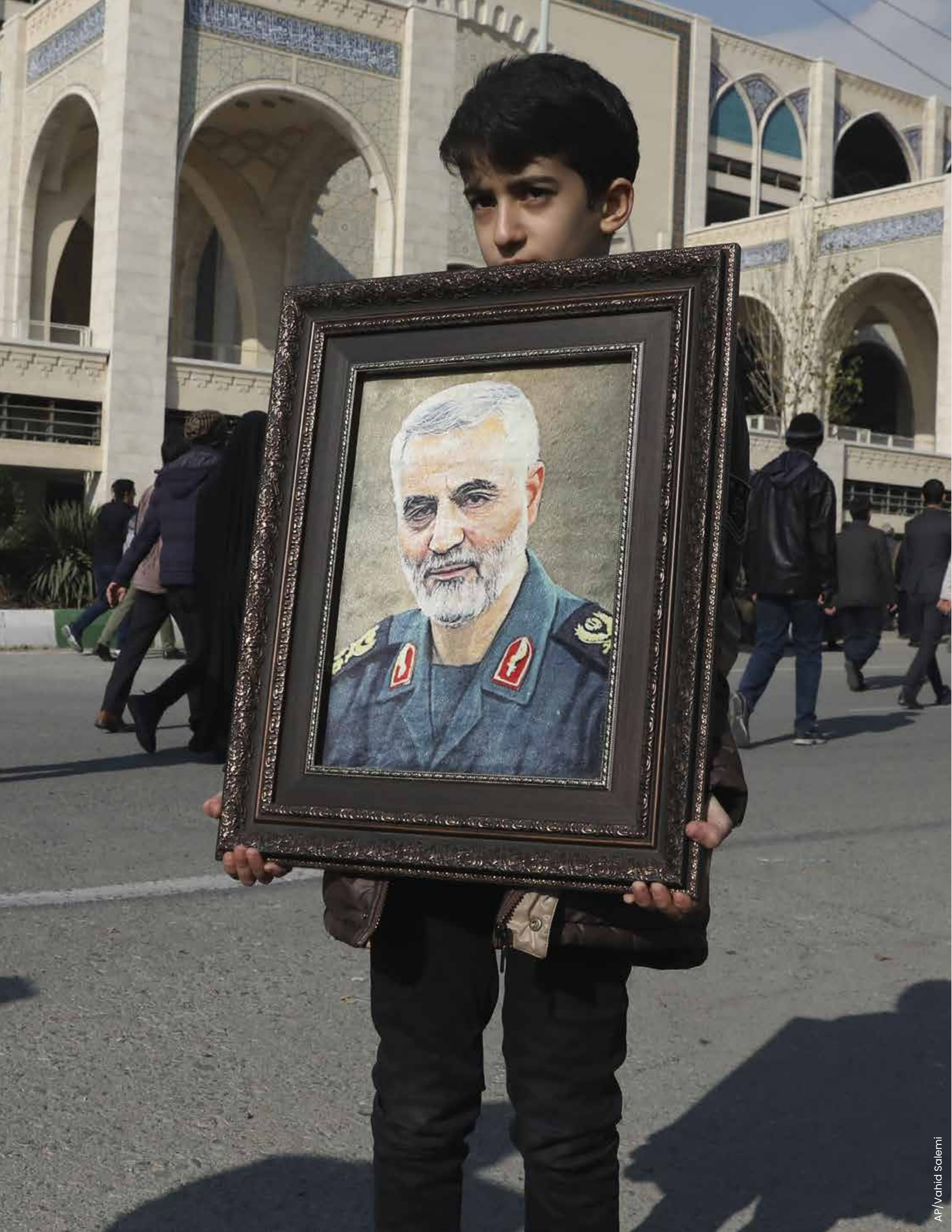
The new law gives authorities more enforcement powers and could speed up measures the industry is already taking to identify robocalls. And when phone companies block robocalls, they must do so without charging consumers. This should help Americans dodge many of these annoying calls.

“American families deserve control over their communications, and this legislation will update our laws and regulations to stiffen penalties, increase transparency, and enhance government collaboration to stop unwanted solicitation,” White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said. The...

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AP/Steven Senne



AP/Vahid Salemi

WORLD

US KILLS IRAN'S MOST POWERFUL GENERAL IN BAGHDAD AIR STRIKE

January 2, 2020 | AP News

BAGHDAD, IRAQ — The United States killed Iran's top general and the architect of Tehran's proxy wars in the Middle East in an airstrike at Baghdad's international airport Friday, an attack that threatens to dramatically ratchet up tensions in the region. The targeted killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds

The targeted killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, could draw forceful Iranian retaliation against American interests in the region and spiral into a far larger conflict between the U.S. and Iran, endangering U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and beyond.

Force, could draw forceful Iranian retaliation against American interests in the region and spiral into a far larger conflict between the U.S. and Iran, endangering U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and beyond. The Defense Department said it killed Soleimani because he "was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region." It also accused Soleimani of approving the attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad earlier this week.

Threat of Retaliation from Iran

An adviser to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani quickly warned U.S. President Donald Trump of retaliation from Tehran. "Trump through his gamble has dragged the U.S. into the most dangerous situation in the region," Hessameddin Ashena wrote on the social media app Telegram. "Whoever put his foot beyond the red line should be ready to face its consequences." Trump was vacationing on his estate in Palm Beach, Florida, but sent out a tweet of an American flag. The strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iran-backed militias known as the Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF, the officials said. The dramatic attack comes at the start of a year in which Trump faces both a Senate trial following his impeachment by the U.S. House and a re-election campaign. It marks a potential turning point in the Middle East and represents

a drastic change for American policy toward Iran after months of tensions. Tehran shot down a U.S. military surveillance drone and seized oil tankers. The U.S. also blames Iran for a series of attacks targeting tankers, as well as a September assault on Saudi Arabia's oil industry that temporarily halved its production.

Soleimani Killed by American Drone

The tensions take root in Trump's decision in May 2018 to withdraw the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, struck under his predecessor, Barack Obama. Soleimani was the target of Friday's U.S. attack, which was conducted by an armed American drone, according to a U.S. official. His vehicle was struck on an access road near the Baghdad airport. A senior Iraqi security official said the airstrike took place near the cargo area after Soleimani left his plane to be greeted by al-Muhandis and others. The official said the plane had arrived from either Lebanon or Syria. Two officials from the PMF said Suleimani's body was torn to pieces in the attack, while they did not find the body of al-Muhandis. A senior politician said Soleimani's body was identified by the ring he wore. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject and because they were not authorized to give official statements.

Trump Allies Praise U.S. Action

It's unclear what legal authority the U.S. relied on to carry out the attack. American presidents claim broad authority to act without congressional approval when U.S. personnel or interests are facing an imminent threat. The Pentagon did not provide evidence to back up its assertion that Soleimani was planning new attacks against Americans. Democratic Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Trump owes a full explanation to Congress and the American people. "The present authorizations for use of military force in no way cover starting a possible new war. This step could bring the...

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AUSTRALIA SENDING AID TO WILDFIRE TOWNS AS DEATH TOLL RISES

@AvatTheHuman via AP

January 2, 2020 | AP News

PERTH, Australia — Australia deployed military ships and aircraft Wednesday to help communities ravaged by apocalyptic wildfires that have left at least 17 people dead nationwide and sent thousands of residents and holidaymakers fleeing to the shoreline.

Navy ships and military aircraft were bringing water, food and fuel to towns where supplies were depleted and roads were cut off by the fires. Authorities confirmed three bodies were found Wednesday at Lake Conjola on the south coast of New South Wales, bringing the death toll in the state to 15. More than 175 homes have been destroyed in the re-

gion. Some 4,000 people in the coastal town of Mallacoota fled to the shore as winds pushed a fire toward their homes under a sky darkened by smoke and turned blood-red by flames. Stranded residents and vacationers slept in their cars, and gas stations and surf clubs transformed into evacuation areas. Dozens of homes burned before winds changed direction late Tuesday, sparing the rest of the town.

Victoria Emergency Commissioner Andrew Crisp told reporters the Australian Defence Force was moving naval assets to Mallacoota on a supply mission that would last two weeks and helicopters would also fly in more firefighters since...

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AP/Andrew Harnik

TRUMP SAYS HE'LL SIGN FIRST-STEP CHINA TRADE DEAL ON JAN. 15

December 31, 2019 | AP News

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The first phase of a U.S.-China trade agreement will be inked at the White House in mid-January, President Donald Trump announced Tuesday, adding that he will visit Beijing at a later date to open another round of talks aimed at resolving other sticking points in the relationship.

The so-called “Phase One” agreement is smaller than the comprehensive deal Trump had hoped for and leaves many of the thorniest issues between the two countries for future talks. Few economists expect any resolution of “Phase Two” before the presidential election in 2020. And the two sides have yet to release detailed documentation of the pact, making it difficult to evaluate. Trump said high-level Chinese government officials will attend the signing on Jan. 15 of “our very large and comprehensive Phase One Trade Deal with China.” “At a later date I will be going to Beijing where talks will begin on Phase Two!” Trump said in his tweet. He did...

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IN AFGHANISTAN, JAILED TALIBAN AWAIT PEACE, THEIR FREEDOM

December 30, 2019 | AP News

PUL-E-CHARKHI, Afghanistan — Thousands of Taliban prisoners jailed in Afghanistan as insurgents see a peace deal being hammered out between the United States and the Taliban as their ticket to freedom. They know a prisoner release is a key pillar of any agreement that brings an end to Afghanistan's 18-year war, Washington's longest military engagement.

A list of about 5,000 Taliban prisoners has been given to the Americans and their release has been written into the agreement under discussion, said a Taliban official familiar with the on-again, off-again talks taking place in Qatar. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. U.S. and Afghan government officials have said a prisoner release is part of the negotiation. But some analysts say freeing prisoners could undermine peace in Afghanistan. “There’s a need for Afghan and U.S. officials...

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AP/Rahmat Gul

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