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THE VOICE OF INTERIOR ALASKA

Inside Today Gorsuch establishes conservative credentials in first year on Supreme Court. » A6

Couple question tax code after fire

Their home destroyed, Hunts sought relief but didn't get it

By Amanda Bohman

Ron and Jane Hunt lost a house in a fire Jan. 8. A couple days later, Ron Hunt said he went to the Fairbanks

North Star Borough to report the fire. 'I was expecting to get a property tax adjustment,' he said. That's not what happened. Hunt learned that he would be required to pay his full tax bill — \$6,977.92 — on the North Pole property, even though the 2,700-square-foot house, a rental and an attached 3,000-square-foot shop were reduced to rubble. The Hunts live next door to the

rental property but continued to use the shop. 'I was stunned,' Hunt said. 'The building wasn't there. We were taxed on something that didn't exist anymore. ... Everybody needs to know how unfair it is.' Hunt pressed the Borough Assembly to change the law, but the measure that passed Sept. 28, he said, falls short of offering meaningful assistance.



The remains of 2180 Shale Court, property owned by Ron and Jane Hunt, after a fire Jan. 8. PHOTO COURTESY RON HUNT

TAXES » A3

GOOD MORNING weather forecast section with sun icon, weather details, and aurora forecast.



The Pioneer Park train offered free rides Saturday at the annual holiday bazaar at the Pioneer Park Civic Center. Below: Products such as locally produced honey were for sale. DOROTHY CHOMICZ/NEWS-MINER PHOTOS

Hundreds attend holiday bazaar

By Dorothy Chomicz

Hundreds of people flocked to the Pioneer Park Civic Center on Saturday to ride the train, take photos with Santa Claus, see a restored locomotive and buy presents from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the annual holiday bazaar.



checked children exclaimed, 'That was fun!' and 'Can we do it again?' as the riders disembarked at the Tanana Valley Railroad Museum. Inside the museum,

volunteers served hot chocolate, hot cider and candy canes as people lined up to take photos with the 119-year-old Porter locomotive, which served in the Yukon and Alaska

gold rushes. By this time, Santa also was in the center, posing for photos with people of all ages. All three levels of the center were crammed to capacity with about 80 vendors selling baked goods, jewelry, quilts, honey, decorated bottles and just about everything else one could possibly want. All events, including face painting and storytime, were free of charge. Contact staff writer Dorothy Chomicz at 459-7582. Follow her on Twitter: @FDNMerime.

Blaze destroys Nenana landmark

By Dorothy Chomicz

A landmark Nenana building that was at various times a courthouse, city office and post office before becoming a popular bar was destroyed in a fire Friday night. Addam Parsons, a volunteer firefighter and EMT with the Nenana Fire Department, said the blaze started at about 4:30 p.m. in a cabin attached to Jester's Palace. Parsons said he believed the fire traveled down a connecting passageway and made its way up the wall to the roof, where it quickly became uncontrollable.

FIRE » A6



Jester's Palace, in Nenana, was destroyed in a fire Friday night. PHOTO COURTESY CHARLOTTE WHITE

Chena Hot Springs Resort advertisement featuring 50% off room rates, holiday specials, and contact information.

Gorsuch shows conservative cred in 1st year on court

By Mark Sherman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — More than 2,000 conservatives in tuxedos and gowns recently filled Union Station's main hall for a steak dinner and the chance to cheer the man who saved the Supreme Court from liberal control.

Justice Neil Gorsuch didn't disappoint them, just as he hasn't in his first seven months on the Supreme Court.

"Tonight I can report that a person can be both a publicly committed originalist and textualist and be confirmed to the Supreme Court," Gorsuch said to sustained applause from members of the Federalist Society, using terms by

which conservatives often seek to distinguish themselves from more liberal judges.

The 50-year-old justice has been almost exactly what conservatives hoped for and liberals dreaded when he joined the court in April. He has consistently, even aggressively, lined up with the court's most conservative justices.

During arguments, Gorsuch has asked repeatedly about the original understanding of parts of the Constitution and laws, and he has raised questions about some long-standing court precedents, including the civil rights landmark ruling on "one person, one vote."

Liberals' despair about Gorsuch goes beyond his



Supreme Court Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch speaks at the Federalist Society's 2017 National Lawyers Convention on Nov. 16 in Washington.

AP FILE PHOTO/SAIT SERKAN GURBUZ

judicial actions. He occupies a seat once held by Justice Antonin Scalia that they thought Obama would get to fill. But Senate Republicans refused to consider Obama's nomi-

nee, a strategy that paid off when Donald Trump unexpectedly won the White House.

Gorsuch likes to remind audiences of his relative youth, despite his head of

silver hair, suggesting a long tenure on the bench. In front of a nonpartisan audience last month, he talked about his teenage daughters and the regular, early morning 17-mile bike rides along the C&O canal that he does with a friend.

Reviews of Gorsuch's time on the court have varied with the ideological bent of his reviewers.

While his confirmation was pending, the liberal Alliance for Justice worried that Gorsuch would often embrace the most conservative outcome on the high court.

"Our concerns were confirmed," said Nan Aron, the group's president.

Daniel Epps, a Washington University law professor in St. Louis and one-

time law clerk to Justice Anthony Kennedy, said he finds Gorsuch's style sometimes grating, less so the substance of his questions at arguments.

During a high-profile argument about politics in redistricting in October, Gorsuch began a question by suggesting that "maybe we can just for a second talk about the arcane matter, the Constitution."

To Epps, the tone was all wrong. "I'd love to see a bit more recognition that the court deals with really hard questions that many people, including his colleagues, have struggled with for a long time. If someone thinks he has all the answers, maybe he's missing something important," he said.

IN BRIEF

France, Italy tackle violence on women

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday launched an initiative to combat violence and harassment against women in



Macron

France, aiming to erase a sense of shame that breeds silence among victims and changing what he said is the country's sexist culture.

In a nearly hourlong speech at the Elysee Presidential Palace, Macron noted that 123 women died in attacks against them in France last year. Holding a moment of silence for them, he declared: "It is time for shame to change camps."

In neighboring Italy, the head of the Chamber of Deputies marked International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women by noting with dismay that the "Weinstein case" hasn't inspired women to speak out on workplace harassment or assault like it has in the United States and other parts of Europe.

Laura Boldrini was referring to the onslaught of revelations after sexual harassment and assault allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein were made public.

"The Weinstein case lifted the lid on the shame of (sexual) abuse" in the glamorous world of U.S. cinema, "setting off an avalanche in many other areas of

society," Boldrini said, addressing a special gathering in which all the 630 seats, usually occupied by lawmakers in Parliament's lower house, were filled by guests who came to speak of their rebellion against being victims of men.

Survivors recall mosque attack; 305 dead

ISMAILIA, EGYPT — They arrived in five SUVs, took positions across from the mosque's door and windows, and just as the imam was about to deliver his Friday sermon from atop the pulpit, they opened fire and tossed grenades at the estimated 500 worshippers inside. When the violence finally stopped, more than 300 people, including 27 children, had been killed and 128 injured.

As the gunfire rang out and the blasts shook the mosque, worshippers screamed and cried out in pain. A stampede broke out in the rush toward a door leading to the washrooms. Others tried desperately to force their way out of the windows.

Those who survived spoke of children screaming as they saw parents and old-

er brothers mowed down by gunfire or shredded by the blasts. Some marveled at their narrow escape from a certain death. Some families lost all or most male members in the massacre.

So composed were the militants that they methodically checked their victims for any sign of life after the initial round of blazing gunfire. Those still moving or breathing received a bullet to the head or the chest, the witnesses said. When the ambulances arrived they shot at them, repelling them as they got back into their vehicles and fled.

Friday's assault was Egypt's deadliest attack by Islamic extremists in the country's modern history, a grim milestone in a long-running fight against an insurgency led by a local affiliate of the Islamic State group.

Found after Burning Man festival: shoes, dentures

RENO, NEV. — The usual suspects top this year's list of the most frequently lost items in the Nevada desert at the annual Burning Man

festival: 582 cellphones, 570 backpacks and 529 IDs.

Still missing are a marching band hat with gold mirror tiles, a furry cheetah vest with orange lining, a headdress with horns and a chainmail loincloth skirt.

As of mid-November, Burning Man's Terry Schoop says they've recovered 2,479 items and returned 1,279. He says they average about a 60 percent return rate.

Other stuff lost but not-yet-found include a wedding ring, a flute, some "fire nun chucks" and Dutch and Australian driver's licenses.

Articles waiting to be claimed on Burning Man's website include 200 shirts, 100 jackets, 80 hydration backpacks and 50 pairs of eyeglasses.

There's also dozens of sets of keys whose owners probably have good stories to tell.

From wire reports

FIRE

Continued from A1

Fire crews from Clear Air Station and Anderson Volunteer Fire Department responded. About 50,000 gallons of water was used during the seven-hour battle. The roof eventually collapsed and the outer walls started to burn, prompting the city mayor and one of the building's owners to push the walls down with a city tractor. This allowed fire crews to enter the building and fully extinguish the fire, Parsons said.

The cabin was saved but probably not salvageable.

"The tops are black by the ceiling, the windows are all broken out and we had to break both doors down. The inside is burned very badly. Between water damage and the fire damage, there's probably nothing useful in it," Parsons said.

Nenana resident Marilyn Duggar said Jester's Palace was built in the early 1900s and was used by mushers as a meeting place after the post office moved out of it. The building was empty until it was purchased by the Royal Order of Jesters, an offshoot of the Shriners Club, about six or seven years ago. The organization remodeled the building and turned it into "a really fun bar," Duggar said.

Parsons said Nenana residents are disappointed over the loss.

"It really had a lot of value to the community," she said. "It was really old, but it looked nice. It wasn't a dirty bar. It was a classy place."

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Contact staff writer Dorothy Chomicz at 459-7582. Follow her on Twitter: @FDNMerime.

GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION PFOA/PFOS

Community Information Meeting

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Noel Wien Library
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INTERIOR/NATION

Crush of business awaits Congress

By Andrew Taylor
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The crush of unfinished business facing lawmakers Monday when they return to the Capitol would be daunting even if Washington were functioning at peak efficiency.

It's an agenda whose core items — tax cuts, a potential government shutdown, lots of leftover spending bills — could unravel just as easily as advance in factionalism, gamesmanship and a toxic political environment.

There's only a four-week window until a Christmas deadline, barely enough time for complicated negotiations even if December stays on the rails. And that's hardly a sure bet in President Donald Trump's capital.

Trump and congressional leaders plan a meeting Tuesday to discuss how to sidestep a shutdown and work through the legislative to-do list.

For the optimistic, it's plain that Democrats and Republicans have reasons to cooperate, particularly on spending increases for the Pentagon and domestic agencies whose budgets otherwise would be frozen. An additional round of hurricane aid should be bipartisan, and efforts to reauthorize a popular health care program for children seem to be on track.

Republicans are advancing their cherished tax cut measure under special rules that mean Senate Democrats cannot use delaying tactics. The measure passed the House just before the Thanksgiving break and moves to the Senate floor this coming week.

After the Senate GOP's failure on health care this summer, the majority party is under enormous pressure to produce a victory on taxes. Still, GOP deficit hawks such as Sens. Bob Corker of Tennessee and Jeff Flake of Arizona remain uneasy about the overhaul.

While Democrats are largely sidelined on taxes,



The Capitol, seen Oct. 30, will be open for business Monday when Congress returns from its Thanksgiving break. AP FILE PHOTO/J. SCOTT APPELWHITE

they hold leverage over a mix of budget-related issues.

First, there's the need to avert a government shutdown after a temporary spending bill expires on Dec. 8. The most likely scenario, congressional aides say, is for an additional extension until Christmas. On a parallel track are talks to raise spending limits that are keeping agency budgets essentially frozen unless those caps are raised. If that happens, then negotiations could begin in earnest on a massive catchall spending measure in hopes of having it signed into law by year's end.

Taxes have gotten all the attention so far, but the showdown over a potential shutdown right before Christmas could soon take center stage. Democrats are counting on GOP fears of a holiday season closure to ensure Republican concessions during December talks.

Both sides would have to make concessions that may upset partisans in either party. Just as House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., fears a revolt on the right, House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California risks an uprising on her left. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.,

round out the quartet of top negotiators.

“Everybody's got complicated politics. The chance of short-term failure is pretty high — short-term failure being a shutdown,” said Steve Elmendorf, a Democratic lobbyist. “But the four of them, assuming they don't want to shut the government down for a long time, are going to have to come to an accommodation.”

Talks on the spending caps are stuck, however, aides say. A GOP offer to lift the Pentagon budget by more than \$54 billion next year and nondefense limits by \$37 billion was rejected by Democrats demanding balance between the two sides of the ledger.

Long-delayed battles over immigration and Trump's promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border are huge obstacles. Many Democrats whose votes are needed on the spending bills insist they won't vote for any legislation that includes the wall. Trump

remains dead set on his \$1.6 billion request for a down payment on the project.

Those same Democrats also insist that Congress must act by year's end to protect immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children and whose protected status is set to lapse next year. Trump backs the idea despite issuing an executive order reversing the Obama administration protections, starting next spring. Conservatives oppose drawing in the immigration issue to legislation to keep the government running.

Hurricane relief is adding one more wrinkle.

Congress has approved more than \$50 billion in aid in response to a series of devastating hurricanes. The most recent request by the White House is the largest yet at \$44 billion, but it's not nearly enough to satisfy the powerful Texas delegation, which is pressing behind the scenes for more.



The North Pole home of Ron and Jane Hunt is shown prior to Jan. 8, when a fire destroyed it. PHOTO COURTESY RON HUNT

TAXES

Continued from A1

State law allows municipalities to offer disaster tax relief, but the borough had no mechanism to offer the tax relief until recently after Assemblymen Lance Roberts and Guy Sattley proposed it.

“I had no idea until a constituent wrote us,” Roberts said as he explained his disaster tax relief proposal at an assembly committee meeting in September. “I immediately jumped on this. Government should always have some flexibility and be merciful to its citizens, especially those in extremely bad circumstances.”

Roberts and Sattley proposed a simple fix, they said. After a disaster, such as a fire, the borough reassesses the property and “we kick back the taxes,” Roberts said.

The idea drew support. “It feels like we are adding insult to injury, or injury to injury, to ask (people) to pay taxes on something that isn't there,” said Assemblyman John Davies, whose term has since expired.

The measure adopted by the assembly was a substitute by Borough Mayor Karl Kassel, who said he was concerned about the borough being hit by a massive disaster and going bankrupt providing property owners with tax relief.

“If we had a large disaster in our community and had to refund millions upon millions of dollars,” Kassel said, “we wouldn't be able to provide the services that the people in the disaster needed.”

His proposal, which eventually was adopted, added requirements including that the disaster tax relief would apply only to uninsured property and that it would exclude major disasters declared by the president, the governor or the borough mayor.

The tax relief, which would be prorated from the date of the disaster, is capped at \$10,000 and the loss to the taxpayer must exceed \$30,000.

When the measure went before the assembly for approval, Roberts amended it so that commercial and rental properties could qualify. But

“It feels like we are adding insult to injury, or injury to injury, to ask (people) to pay taxes on something that isn't there.”

John Davies, former assemblyman

an amendment to allow relief for insured properties failed.

“If they are getting reimbursed from their insurance company, we wouldn't want to double reimburse them,” Kassel said.

Sattley, whose term also expired in October, voted against Kassel's proposal, saying it “wipes out the entire ordinance and overly complicates it.”

Roberts also had doubts, though he voted for the measure.

“I am not sure it's going to end up helping anybody,” he said.

Hunt agreed. Under the new law, he would not qualify for tax relief for his destroyed rental property and shop. Hunt said the fire was caused by a woodstove mishap.

He said the tools in his shop were not insured — a mistake on his part — and that the check from the insurance company for the house and shop didn't completely cover his loss.

Hunt said he plans to wait a year until he rebuilds to avoid a year of property taxes as a way to compensate himself for paying taxes on the property that burned.

“They wasted a bunch of money and time in passing something that doesn't help the majority of the borough residents,” he said.

Contact staff writer Amanda Bohman at 459-7587. Follow her on Twitter: @FDNMBorough.

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