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MIDDLE EAST

Gas prices spark unrest

SALVATION ARMY

Donating at kettles is going mobile

By Kathleen Foody
The Associated Press

CHICAGO ■ Carolyn Harper made her pitch for donations to the Salvation Army with a smile on her face and a bell in her hand, trying to convince shoppers along Chicago's busy Michigan Avenue that there was "no line, no wait."

Despite her prodding, half a dozen people apologetically explained they had no cash to drop into the bright red kettle. Most passed on before Harper could explain there's a new way to donate to the classic fundraising campaign this year: with a smartphone.

Heather Bishop, 35, was among those who did wait to hear about the non-cash option. She quickly completed her electronic donation while keeping an eye on her two young children after a stop at the American Girl store.

"It was fast, very easy," Bishop said, adding that she was visiting the city from Wisconsin and doesn't carry cash while on trips. "All of my giving is online."

KETTLES • 10A

THANKSGIVING

Turkey comes with a side of impeachment?

By Dan Sewell
The Associated Press

CINCINNATI ■ Some people heading to Thanksgiving gatherings predict it's not just the turkey that will get roasted.

Polarized over Republican Donald Trump's presidency, Americans are deeply split on a looming historic impeachment. Many families reflect the nation's divisions, setting up heated holiday debates in households with a taste for politics.

Bryan Wright of Cincinnati said "impeachment will definitely come up" as a divisive topic at his extended family's holiday meal.

TRUMP • 11A

ANSWERS AT LAST



Ruben Valdez holds a photo of his uncle, Paul Valdez who was captured by Germans during World War II. He escaped but was found April 13, 1944, and executed with seven other American soldiers by German troops at a monastery in Montebuono, Italy. An Italian historian was able to tell the family of Paul Valdez's fate.

Aaron Ontiveroz, The Denver Post

A Colorado family finds closure 75 years after Germans killed soldier in Italy

By Alex Burness
The Denver Post

One day last April, months before Ruben Valdez would die in his sleep, he received a phone call from a woman in Rome whom he had never met.

The woman, Raffaella Cortese, had been nervous to make the call. She wasn't sure she had the right number. And even if she did, she wasn't sure how to tell Valdez why she was calling. Cortese, a World War II historian, had tracked down the previously untold story of how Valdez's brother, Paul, died in a small Italian town at the hands of the Germans.

When Valdez picked up, Cortese intro-

duced herself and explained that Paul Horatio Valdez had been a prisoner of the Germans as early as December 1942, that in January 1944 he had been forced on a train headed for a German concentration camp. A bomb that hit the train killed hundreds, but Paul and seven other American soldiers survived and sneaked off to the countryside outside of Rome. For weeks they lived in hiding, moving from place to place to evade the Germans.

The eight Americans eventually reached the hilly town of Montebuono, where, on

VALDEZ • 4A

Iranian leadership blames U.S. "conspiracy" as gas stations, banks attacked by thousands of protesters

By Jon Gambrell
The Associated Press

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES ■ Protesters angry over government-set gasoline prices spiking in Iran attacked hundreds of banks, police outposts and gas stations in the demonstrations, Tehran acknowledged Wednesday as its supreme leader alleged without evidence that a "conspiracy" involving the U.S. caused the unrest.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made the comment while addressing members of the Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij force, which help put down the demonstrations. Meanwhile, one lawmaker was quoted as saying authorities arrested more than 7,000 people over the protests while a security official claimed demonstrators attempted to take over Iranian state television.

The remarks represent the latest swing in the response by Iran's Shiite theocracy to the protests, which has seen officials either downplay or demonize demonstrators. Unlike the 2009 Green Movement protests over Iran's disputed presidential election, or its 2017 economic protests, demonstrations this month rapidly turned violent within a day, showing the boiling anger of many as the country's economy struggles under renewed American sanctions.

Iran's government still hasn't offered any statistics on injuries, arrests or deaths in the protests and security crackdown that followed government-set gasoline prices rising Nov. 15. Amnesty International says it believes the violence killed at least 143 people, which Iran disputes without offering any evidence to support its claims.

In comments reported by state media, Khamenei said the Iranian people extinguished "a very dangerous deep conspiracy that cost so much money and effort." He praised the police, the Guard and the Basij for "entering the field and carrying out their task in a very difficult confrontation."

Khamenei, who has final say on all matters of state, described the protests as being orchestrated by "global arrogance," which he often uses to refer to the U.S., "and Zionists." He described America as seeing the price hikes as an "opportunity" to bring their "troops" to the field but the "move was destroyed by the people."

Wednesday marks the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Basij. Videos from the protest purport to show plainclothes Basij officials and others on motorcycles beating and detaining protesters.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's ruling Shiite theocracy, simi-

IRAN • 1A

feminine hygiene products in nurses' offices, they're not easily accessible, and sometimes students are too embarrassed to ask

acts at no cost to the user. The bill was passed into law, and Denver eliminated the sales and use tax on feminine hygiene prod-

vada) will be bringing a bill to require public schools to stock feminine hygiene products!" the

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VALDEZ

«FROM 1A

April 13, 1944, the Germans found and brutally murdered them, Cortese told Valdez. She explained that the monastery atop the town is decorated with frescoes, and that on some of them one can still see bullet holes from the day the Americans were slaughtered.

At the other end of the phone line in Colorado, Valdez, in his 80s and in declining health, said nothing.

"I was really embarrassed, thinking maybe I had the wrong person," Cortese said.

He finally spoke.

"Horacio," he whispered, correcting Cortese's pronunciation of the middle name. "He was my brother."

"At that point," Cortese said last week by phone from Italy, "I said, 'Sir what can I add? What can I do?'"

She could've stayed on the phone for hours. Finding the lost stories of dead World War II soldiers is her greatest passion, and she's very good at it. Italy's largest newspaper, *La Repubblica*, recently published her exhaustive report, "The Lost Platoon," on 15 American soldiers of Italian origin who were murdered by the Germans in northern Italy.

"People deserve the little contribution in their desperation that I can give them, to close the circle," she said. "The families have this huge question mark, and sorrow."

"Don't forget him"

To Ruben Valdez, the story of Paul had been filled with question marks. Ruben, the youngest of nine, would in his adult life ascend to become an influential figure in state politics, serving as the state's first Latino speaker of the House.

He was a giant at the Capitol whose presence, those who knew him say, is still felt.

But in 1944, Ruben was 7, and four of his brothers were World War II soldiers. The other three survived. But Paul died, and then, two years later, their father did, too. These two events would force Ruben to drop out of school at 15 to support his mother and siblings by taking a job at the Pueblo brickyard.

He later went back to school and became the first in his family to graduate college. He rose through union ranks and ran for, and won, a seat in the Colorado House in 1970.

His children said Ruben never forgot Paul. The family had Paul's old prayer book, which had a bullet hole in it, and his prisoner-of-war tag, written in

acts at no cost to the user. The bill was passed into law, and Denver eliminated the sales and use tax on feminine hygiene prod-



The Valdez family had Paul's prayer book and prisoner-of-war tag, but knew little about him. Aaron Ontiveroz, *The Denver Post*

German. But Ruben never knew much more about him.

"He always wanted us to remember, especially on holidays or Veterans Day," said Ruben's eldest, who is also named Ruben. "He would remind us: 'My brother, your uncle Paul, was killed in World War II, and don't forget him.' But as far as we knew, we just knew the basics, that he had been captured and killed in action."

By the time Cortese called, the elder Ruben was too weak to engage at any length. But the closure she offered through her research elated him, said daughter Peggy Valdez.

"It was just amazing to see my dad light up," she said. "It was one of the highlights of his final year."

That final year was a constellation of ailments; Ruben's legs got weaker, and doctors found he had an issue in his spinal cord. Soon he could not walk or get out of bed on his own.

A doctor suggested surgery on his neck, which he got, but he needed another two surgeries after that. His leg was amputated, and he suffered heart problems, too. On Sept. 30 of this year, he went to sleep and never woke up.

Added son Ruben, of his father's end of life, "He was pretty depressed about everything, not wanting to go on. When he found out about his brother, it lit a light inside of him, and I think it really made him feel the best that he had felt."

A particular joy for him was a

Skype call Cortese arranged between Valdez family members and residents of Montebuono, including the mayor and several elderly people who knew Paul and the seven other American soldiers, and who witnessed their slaughter. The two groups spoke for about an hour, with Cortese translating.

"We're waiting for you"

Last week, through Cortese, some of these witnesses shared memories with *The Denver Post*.

"I have a special place in my heart for those young Americans," said Alfredo Sapora, who was 12 when Paul Valdez died. "We were seven children in the family, and my mother managed to take care of us all by herself. Of course she took care of the eight young men, too."

"The word about the murder spread very quickly," said Nello Luchetti, who was 13. "I went up the mountain and saw these poor fellows riddled with bullets. A spy, a horrible spy, had given information to the Germans that they were there."

"I was only 10, but I felt so sad," said Tommaso Abati. "My father went up to the monastery with the parish priest. He had fought in World War I and had never seen anything as cruel."

Montebuono is about 40 miles outside of Rome. Fewer than 1,000 people live there. And the massacre that claimed Paul Valdez remains a defining moment for the town.

"I told the mayor of Montebuono I'd come see him," said the younger Ruben. "He said, 'We're waiting for you.'"

The elder Ruben also wanted very much to go there, but he was in no shape for such a trip. In November, five weeks after he died, his son and his daughter-in-law flew to Italy. They connected with Cortese and went together to Montebuono. They dined with the mayor and on the morning of Nov. 10 they walked in a procession through the town's winding streets.

There was a Mass, and then they all went to the hilltop monument for the fallen soldiers. The son Ruben spoke to the crowd, and Cortese translated.

They retreated to Rome and shared memories and meals.

Ruben and his wife returned to Colorado two weeks ago. He described Cortese as "amazing" and "an angel."

Peggy said other Valdez family members plan to make the trip to Montebuono next year. For all involved, the connection and the friendship that has resulted is surreal.

"If I close my eyes, to tell you what I remember in a flash," Cortese said, "it's Ruben coming all the way from Colorado, Ruben on top of a mountain in Italy, seeing for the first time the name of his uncle on a plaque."

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