

NATIONAL NEWS

AROUND THE NATION

TEXAS

Floods force residents to boil water for safety

AUSTIN, Texas - The rains started innocently enough - a refreshing break from a summer-long drought that had parched the landscape and sent residents of this water-loving city for relief, swimming and boating in its spectacular man-made lakes.

But what has happened is more insidious: The season has become one of the wettest autumns on record, causing five deaths in the Central Texas region and tainting an entire city's water supply.

This city of 1 million people took the unprecedented step this week of asking residents to boil drinking water for three minutes to kill any bacteria, the culmination of a series of floods that have deposited large amounts of sediment from the soil, as well as oil and other pollutants into its water system, overwhelming its water-treatment plants.

The warning intensified Tuesday, when the contamination triggered a state-mandated boil-water notice.

Texas' rainfall this autumn has been historic: Since Sept. 1, Central Texas has gotten anywhere from 200 to 500 percent of the normal rainfall it receives, according to the National Weather Service.

Fifteen inches of rain have fallen in Austin, marking the 18th wettest fall. Suddenly, a drought is a deluge.

- Washington Post

NEW YORK

Mega Millions winning ticket sold in S. Carolina

NEW YORK - We are sorry to report you did not win the Mega Millions jackpot - unless you're one very lucky person in South Carolina.

Someone there probably couldn't believe their eyes when the magic numbers for the \$1.54 billion prize were announced Tuesday night: 5, 28, 62, 65, 70; and the Mega Ball: 5.

The winning ticket was sold at a convenience store, KC Mart No. 7, in Simpsonville. The winner has not yet come forward and has 180 days to do so.

"We don't know at this point whether it's one person or a group of persons, or anything about the identity of the player," said Tony Cooper, chief operating officer of the South Carolina Education Lottery.

It's possible the public will never learn who won. South Carolina is one of a handful of states and territories where lottery winners can remain anonymous.

- New York Times

MICHIGAN

Mishandling of remains of fetus leads to suit

DETROIT - The Detroit parents of a stillborn child are suing Ascension St. John, accusing the hospital of losing the child's remains, which were ultimately found in a Tupperware-like container that was being used as a paperweight in the Cantrell Funeral Home.

The lawsuit was filed in the wake of recent news that a string of Detroit funeral homes have mishandled the remains of fetuses and stillborn babies in their care. "It's just really, really - they're all sad - but this one especially is just disturbing, and I don't use that word lightly," said the plaintiffs' lawyer, Bill Colovos.

On Jan. 30, 2014, Erika and Christopher Hinson's son "Baby Ellis" was stillborn at Ascension St. John in Detroit. Over the next three months, the lawsuit alleges, Erika Hinson contacted the hospital continuously in order to have Baby Ellis' remains buried.

It's not clear where Ascension St. John kept the remains. The hospital had not yet reviewed the lawsuit and declined to comment immediately.

- Detroit Free Press

Here's why a 50-degree day in fall feels so cold

By NIRAJ CHOKSHI

NEW YORK TIMES

BOSTON - That first cold spell of the season always feels especially harsh.

If you've ever wondered, from beneath several layers of clothing, whether you were overreacting to those frigid early fall days, take solace. It may not just be in your head: The human body takes time to acclimate to the cold.

"We kind of get a global response over time over the winter so that a 50-degree day in, say, February, feels glorious, whereas at this time of year it feels chilly," said John Castellani, a physiologist who specializes in cold weather research at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental

Medicine in Massachusetts. Some experts argue that the shift in perception is mostly psychological, but others, including Castellani, say there's more to it: The evidence suggests that the body grows to tolerate the cold over time.

"There's a classic saying that 'man in the cold is not necessarily a cold man,'" said Mike Tipton, a professor of physiology at the University of Portsmouth in Britain who studies temperature regulation in the body. When the temperature drops, sensors in the skin known as thermoreceptors detect that change and send signals to the hypothalamus, a small, versatile region of the brain sometimes referred to as the body's thermostat.

To maintain a safe core body temperature, the hypothalamus may then direct the body to do one of two things.

The main response is a process known as vasoconstriction: the tightening of blood vessels on the body's periphery to shunt warm blood away from the extremities and skin and back toward the core. The body may also shiver to generate heat. "When the skin senses cold temperatures, its first response really is to protect the inside," Castellani said.

Over time, though, those responses can change.

Studies of people throughout the world have found that those frequently exposed to the cold simply begin to tolerate it more by shivering or constricting blood vessels less.

Indigenous populations in the Australian and African deserts and the Arctic, for example, have been found to have a less pronounced response to

the cold than those not subjected to the same frigid conditions.

The same has been found even among people subjected to the cold in more limited ways. For example, fishermen and fish filleters who work long hours with their hands in cold water have been found to have higher hand temperatures when their hands are placed in frigid water compared with control subjects. That, Castellani said, explains how a person in a cool climate might adapt to winter over time. "We experience that cold air on our cheeks all winter long, and basically that skin doesn't constrict as much," he said. "We've habituated in that area, and because the skin's a little warmer that's why it feels warmer. That's why the cold October day feels much colder than that same day in February."



New York Times

Dean Skelos, center, arrives at Federal District Court in Manhattan on Wednesday. The former New York State Senate majority leader who wielded power in the Legislature for nearly a decade, was sentenced to four years and three months in prison for corruption.

Skelos, ex-New York Senate leader, gets 4 years and 3 months in prison after retrial

By BENJAMIN WEISER AND VIVIAN WANG

NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK - Dean G. Skelos, the former New York state Senate majority leader who wielded sweeping power in the Legislature for nearly a decade, was sentenced to four years and three months in prison on Wednesday for a corruption scheme involving his son.

Skelos, 70, a Republican from Long Island, had been retried after an earlier conviction, in 2015, was overturned on appeal. After that trial, he was sentenced to five years.

Skelos had forged a formidable reputation in New York politics as one of "three men in a room" who largely controlled decision-making in Albany. The trio also included Sheldon Silver, the former Democratic speaker of the Assembly, who was also convicted of corruption in a separate retrial this year; and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who has not been accused of any wrongdoing.

But Skelos' reign came to a swift and ignominious end when federal prosecutors charged in 2015 that he had abused his power by pressuring business executives to give his son about \$300,000 for a patchwork of no-show or low-show jobs.

Skelos had made clear, the govern-

ment said, that he would kill legislation that the executives' firms were seeking if they did not comply with his demands.

In remarks to the judge before the sentence was imposed, Skelos spoke at length about his love for his family, including his son, and pleaded with the judge to consider how a harsh sentence would affect them.

"I truly am remorseful, your honor," he said. "I have disappointed so many, and that's what troubles me. I'll never get over that."

The judge, Kimba M. Wood of U.S. District Court in Manhattan, praised Skelos' long career of helping his constituents. But that career had been corrupted, she said, after his ascension to the pinnacles of power.

"Once you became the Senate majority leader, you began to ignore in part what I have called your moral compass," Wood said.

She continued, "What makes your crimes particularly serious is you corrupted major governmental processes."

Hours after his sentencing, Skelos' son, Adam, 36, was separately given a sentence of four years in prison. He had previously been sentenced to 6.5 years.

Both men were retried and con-

victed in July after their original convictions were overturned by a federal appeals panel, which cited a 2016 Supreme Court decision that narrowed the legal definition of corruption.

The panel found Wood's jury instructions were too broad and jurors might have convicted the Skeloses for conduct that was not unlawful under the Supreme Court ruling.

In a departure from the original trial, Dean Skelos took the unusual step of testifying in his own defense at the retrial. Under questioning by his lawyer, G. Robert Gage Jr., he said he had sought help for his son only as a concerned father, and he denied ever intending to trade official actions for that help.

"Absolutely not," he said. "That's not the way I was brought up."

He also criticized Adam, whom he described as volatile and sometimes abrasive, for invoking his name as he looked for work.

On Wednesday, Wood suggested that Skelos had been unrepentant and his testimony, at times, outright false. While a four-year sentence would have otherwise been appropriate, she said, his lies warranted an additional three months.

"When you testified, you disclaimed any criminal responsibility," the judge

said, adding, "Although a defendant has a right to testify in his own defense, giving false testimony must be punished."

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan had cited Skelos' testimony at the retrial - "he lied repeatedly," the government wrote - to argue that he deserved an even greater sentence than he received after his first trial.

A prosecutor, Thomas A. McKay, expressed sympathy for Skelos' family, but said the senator knew he was putting his family in jeopardy by breaking the law.

He also noted that the former senator continued to collect a pension of nearly \$100,000 a year, "paid for by the victims of his crime: the people of New York."

The convictions of Skelos and Silver, as well as several other leading political figures this year, cast a harsh spotlight on the culture of secrecy and influence peddling in the state capital.

In March, Joseph Percoco, a former top adviser to Cuomo, was convicted in a bribery case and sentenced to six years in prison; in July, Alain E. Kaloyeros, the principal architect of Cuomo's economic revitalization program for upstate and western New York, was convicted in a bid-rigging scheme.

Whistleblower complaint targets Virginia-based charity

By SARAH KLEINER

CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

FALLS CHURCH, Va. - A former staffer at a Virginia-based charity alleges in a new whistleblower complaint that his former employer is bilking donors out of millions of dollars - money intended to help homeless veterans.

The staffer, James C. Edgar of Virginia, formally asked the IRS to revoke the not-for-profit status of the Circle of Friends for American Veterans and the Center for American Homeless Veterans, two nonprofits run by retired Army Maj. Brian Arthur Hampton in Falls Church, Va.

Hampton's organizations, and the

telemarketers he's paid millions of dollars to raise money, were the focus of a months-long investigation by the Center for Public Integrity.

Attorneys general in New York and Virginia subsequently launched investigations into Hampton's Center for American Homeless Veterans.

Both offices declined to comment on the status of their investigations. "Using paid fundraising companies, Brian A. Hampton - the owner and president - has been paying himself hundreds of thousands of dollars from the millions of dollars the fundraisers generate," Edgar wrote to the IRS. "He also pays back to the fundraisers over 90 percent of what is raised. Virtually

none of that money goes to any public purpose."

The IRS responded to Edgar's complaint in a letter dated Oct. 4, according to a document provided to the Center for Public Integrity by Edgar.

If an investigation is launched based on his allegations, it could potentially "take several years until final resolution of all tax matters," Layne Carver of the IRS wrote.

The IRS declined to discuss Edgar's complaint, citing confidentiality laws. Hampton, who has previously denied wrongdoing, did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.

Hampton employed Edgar as director of programs for his charitable or-

ganizations.

Edgar also worked for much of this year as political director for Put Vets First! PAC, a veterans-focused political action committee Hampton also operates.

Edgar is seeking a financial award from the IRS through the agency's whistleblower program, should the IRS collect money from Hampton.

"While performing my duties, I discovered I was not providing any benefit to homeless American veterans," Edgar wrote to the IRS. Nonprofits are exempt from paying corporate income tax. Edgar said he believes the charities have illegally benefited from this exemption.