

A Super quarterback showdown

IN SPORTS: After Sunday's wins, Rolling Meadows grad Jimmy Garoppolo, left, will lead the 49ers against Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs in Super Bowl LIV



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Term limits the biggest question

But there's a host of other issues for suburban voters to decide in March primary

BY CHRISTOPHER PLACEK cplacek@dailyherald.com

While their names may not be listed, a March 17 ballot question in Elk Grove Village will be a de facto referendum on Mayor Craig Johnson and his long-tenured board of trustees.

The binding municipal ret- legislative and countywide roactive term limits question — if it survives remaining legal challenges — is among the queries voters in the Northwest suburbs will consider when they go to the polls March 17.

Though it is a primary election with Democratic and Republican presidential,

candidates, those who want to vote only in referendums can request a nonpartisan ballot.

The Elk Grove question would ask voters whether the mayor and village trustees should be able to serve no more than two consecutive 4-year terms. If approved, it would prevent four longtime

incumbents — including Johnson, the mayor since 1997 — from running again in April 2021.

A Cook County judge last week declared a 2019 state law barring retroactive local term limits unconstitutional, but a remaining objection from

See **BALLOT** on **PAGE 4**



BOB SUSNIARA/bsusniara@dailyherald.com. July 2017 Barrington Area Unit District 220 wants voters to authorize borrowing \$147 million. DETAILS ON PAGE 4.

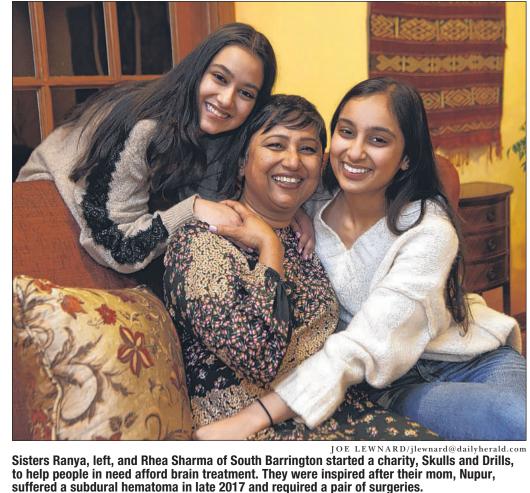
Scare inspires suburban sisters to create a charity called Skulls and Drills

Mom's OK, so it's time to help others

By JENNIFER SHEA Daily Herald correspondent

For Rhea and Ranya Sharma, creating a charity meant triumphing over their worst fears.

It all started around the



State Senate chooses its new leader

By Jerry Nowicki AND PETER HANCOCK Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — State Sen. Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat, was elected by his peers as the 39th president of the Illinois Senate on Sunday after hours of behind-thescenes negotiations.

The race had been weeks in the making, and by the time the closed-door negotiations began Sunday shortly after 11 a.m., the field of candidates was down to two: Harmon, who has served in the chamber since 2003, and Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat and the majority leader, who has served in the Senate since 1998.



was then occupied by John Cullerton, who relinquished the gavel Sunday prior to the vote on Harmon. The doors to that

office were locked to the public and media.

Harmon succeeds Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat who surprised his colleagues in November by announcing his plans to step down.

Harmon reportedly held a 22-17 lead after the first blind ballot, with two senators calling in their votes via phone.

holidays in 2017, with the most terrifying moment of their lives: their mother lying in a hospital bed at Amita St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates, tubes coming out of her head.

Nupur Sharma had a subdural hematoma, a pooling of blood outside the brain, and needed emergency surgery. Her daughters, now a senior and a sophomore at Barrington High School, think it occurred when she accidentally banged her head while opening a car door.

"My sister and I didn't headaches, dizziness, nausea

really know what was going on," Rhea said. "I think that image basically broke us. It was a really scary moment, and one that affected us deeply."

Doctors told them the surgery was successful. Still, a month later, their mother was back in the hospital with the same symptoms — splitting

— and in need of another surgery.

She got it, and this time she recovered completely.

"The doctors (at St. Alexius) were really down-to-earth and really explained what the issue was," Rhea said. "I really appreciated that."

It took Rhea, 17, and Ranya, 15, a while to recover from the experience, too. As they did, they were struck by how lucky they'd been. Their mother was able to get the surgery she needed, twice. Insurance covered most of the costs. The family didn't go bankrupt from one bad health scare.

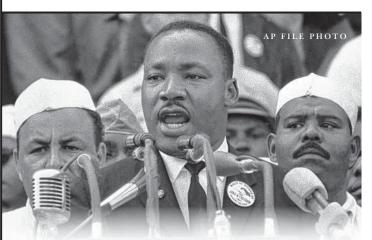
"Toward the end of 2018, when our mom was doing a lot better and our world was

See CHARITY on PAGE 5

The negotiations took place in the Senate president's

Midway through the second round of negotiations,

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MARTIN LUTHER KING [R. DAY

Keeping the dream alive

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looks to future	Memphis event	MLK Day 2020	with our list

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Feds want to hear about your long wait for a freight train



MARNI **PYKE THE SUBURBS** IN TRANSIT

Fuming in the idling car while an interminable freight train steals 20 minutes you'll never get back? Get revenge - or at least get on the record - by reporting the delay to a new Federal Railroad Administration database.

The agency recently launched the website www.fra.dot.gov/ blockedcrossings with the intent of capturing data on blocked crossings to help identify chronic situations where trains

cause traffic jams and ham- U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springstring first-responders for long stretches of time.

"The FRA understands that blocked crossings pose potential safety risks and negatively impact quality of life in locations where trains routinely stand idle for extended periods," a spokesman said.

It will "help empower the public to hold the freight railroads accountable when they are blocking crossings," said

field Democrat who lobbied to create and fund the website. Freight trains have grown in

length by about 25% since 2008, with trains on some railroads averaging 1.2 to 1.4 miles in 2017, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

"Blocked crossings are an ongoing problem without a solution," Illinois Commerce

See **TRANSIT** on **PAGE 5**



A freight train blocks a crossing in Prospect Heights. The Federal Railroad Administration has created a website to report train delays.

Transit: No laws on how long a train can block a crossing

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Commission Railroad Safety Specialist Steve Laffey said.

No laws regulate how long a train can obstruct a crossing, and railroads are tight-lipped about the issue.

Once enough valid and reliable data on train obstructions is gathered, it will be made public, the FRA promises.

Finding worst cases will help "communities work with railroads to minimize or prevent their recurrence," officials said.

But will knowledge equal power? The hope is communities that experience the worst train-generated gridlock could lobby for federal dollars to build grade separations or use the knowledge to pressure railroads to offer operational fixes.

Participants who visit the website can scroll a map that designates specific crossings and give the reason for the blocked crossing and how long they had to wait. There's also a chance to advise about problems like stymied ambulances or pedestrians crawling under trains, as happened in June 2018 in Barrington when a stalled CN train blocked crossings for one hour.

"I am glad FRA is launching it and I think it will be helpful," Barrington Mayor Karen Darch said. "Actually, though, having the railroads report their delays which exceed 10 minutes, as the Surface Transportation Board had CN do ... would yield even more effec-

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One more thing

Hey ... weren't freight trains shorter a few years back? It's not your faulty memory, a Government Accountability Office report shows.

Seven major railroads operating in the U.S. are running longer than average trains on specific routes, although some indicated that's just a small percentage of total traffic. "One railroad said it runs a 3-mile-long train twice week," the GOA noted.

Your voice

Lots of folks are revving up for the Chicago Auto Show Feb. 8-17, at McCormick Place in Chicago, including Steve Vondrak of Palatine. It's a 12-year tradition for him and adult son, Andy. "I love the luxury SUVs and am always switching back and forth year to year between the Escalades and the Navigators. The Cadillac XT4 and XT5 really grabbed both our attentions last year," Vondrak wrote.

Lynne Kalberg of Schaumburg drives a 2008 Honda Odyssey dubbed "the Nana bus" that is "able to transport all six of my grandchildren." Her husband drives a 2008 Honda CR-V, and the couple plan to downsize to one automobile. "Having different makes and models of cars in one place, indoors, would be very helpful for us," she wrote.

Downsizing became a necessity Jan. 15 after Ken and the CR-V collided with a deer, Kalberg said. "The cost of repair would be more than the Blue Book value of a 2008," she noted.

Illinois: Harmon

won in a 37-12 vote

Continued from Page 1

Sen. Emil Jones III, a Chicago Democrat whose father was the previous Senate president before Cullerton, spoke briefly with reporters about the intensity of the negotiations.

"I don't want to say hard feelings, but strong emotions," he said of tension among Democrats. "The stakes are high, so emotions are running."

The race appeared to divide the Senate Black Caucus. Jones, who is black, said he backed Harmon in the race. But Lightford, also black, was vying to become the first woman elected Senate president.

"I did vote for him (Harmon) on the first round," Jones said. "Going back and forth, sitting down with both candidates, I had to make a decision for my district. I want to best represent my district and I picked which person I want to help me represent my district."

Democrats emerged from their closed-door caucus shortly before 5 p.m. with a deal that Lightford would concede the race and support Harmon, but that she would also stay on as majority leader. After the caucus meeting, the full Senate convened for the formal vote.

"Don and I have neighboring districts, and we have since 2002," Lightford said in a speech nominating Harmon. "So we've been neighbors in the Western suburbs and on the West Side of Chicago. We've been neighbors in our district offices, Senate offices, we've been neighbors here on the Senate floor.

"I can't think of anyone else who would do a wonderful job of leading our caucus, and I look forward to working with him in unity."

The vote went 37-12 in Harmon's favor. Two of the Senate's 40 Democrats were absent from the chamber and Cullerton abstained. Harmon and Minority Leader Bill Brady, a Bloomington Republican, voted for each other as Republicans ceremoniously nominated Brady for the post. After the vote, Harmon said he expects unity from

Democrats. "You know, we're Democrats, we fight with each other. but we always seem to come together and rally around the important issues for working families of Illinois," he said. "I have no doubt that there will be work involved, but we will be able to do that successfully and move forward as a very united caucus.' Harmon, 53, was born and raised in Oak Park. During the 2019 session, he was the principal sponsor in the Senate of the proposed constitutional amendment to overhaul the state's income tax system, which will appear on the November ballot. Earlier, he pushed for legislation to require gun dealers to be licensed by the state and to expand early childhood education programs.



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tive and comprehensive data."

CN was ordered to report blocked crossing occurrences from 2009 through 2017 after it merged with the EJ&E Railroad that runs through the suburbs. The data showed multiple cases of blockages lasting over an hour.

Meanwhile, Illinois crashes at railway tracks intersecting with roads in public areas jumped from 66 between Jan. 1 and Oct. 31, 2018, to 85 during the same period in 2019, Laffey reported. There were 13 fatalities in 2018 and 17 in 2019.

What's the worst crossing for train delays on your commute? Drop an email to

More at Midway

A new discount airline is coming to Midway International Airport. Allegiant announced last week it would start offering service between Midway and the following cities: Allentown, Pennsylvania; Des Moines, Iowa; Savannah, Georgia; Asheville, North Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Destin/Fort Walton Beach, Florida. As an incentive, some fares will be as low as \$35 one-way. To learn more, go to allegiantair.com.

Charity: Sisters starting with patients in U.S., India

Continued from Page 1

coming back together, we started just becoming more aware of all the blessings that we had," Ranya said.

With that in mind, the sisters in early 2019 formed Skulls & Drills. The nonprofit aims to help fund brain surgeries for people who need one but cannot afford it.

Their goal is to partner with doctors and hospitals around the world. To begin, they're targeting India and the U.S.

In the U.S., brain injuries cost about \$76 billion annually in medical expenses. Traumatic brain injury is the primary cause of death and disability for children and young adults, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders.

More than 280,000 people were hospitalized with brain injuries in 2010, the last year for which Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has made data available.

In India, traumatic brain injury is a major public health

problem. More than 1 million people suffer serious head injuries every year, according to the Indian Head Injury Foundation.

Rhea and Ranya have been collaborating with Dr. Sonal Gupta, the director of neurosurgery at Fortis Hospital in New Delhi, to build a list of criteria for patients to receive assistance. The Sharmas said their story resonated with Gupta, who, after working in rural areas of India, had seen her share of traumatic brain injuries.

"We're getting actually near the end of that process and are getting ready to offer some aid," Ranya said.

They've raised about \$3,000 so far. Their first fundraiser was at their graduation ceremony from Indian classical dance lessons. Their second fundraiser was a bake sale.

While it's been a challenge to run their own charity, Rhea said she drew inspiration from a philanthropy summer camp where she learned about the ways teenagers can make a difference. It taught her "to empathize with people who don't have as much as you," she said.

And Ranya said their mother has been a constant source of guidance and support.

When their mother was in the hospital, they were afraid to share their struggle with others. But "creating this nonprofit organization was being more open about what our family went through," Ranya said.

They hope to help families who are facing the same nightmare by getting what funds they have to deserving brain injury patients.

"I definitely think that experience with our mom impacted our plans for the future," Ranya said. "We want to expand Skulls & Drills even further ... just seeing it all become possible for those who need it."

"Hopefully as we grow we can extend to all areas of the world," Rhea said.

The sisters have started a GoFundMe campaign. More information is available at skullsanddrills.org.



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