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In the news

■ **Pedro Sanchez**, the socialist prime minister of Spain, said plans to scrap their "golden visas" that allow wealthy people from outside the European Union to obtain residency permits on investing more than half a million dollars in real estate was part of a push to make housing "a right, not a speculative business."

■ **Boris Behncke**, a volcanologist at the Italian National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology's Mount Etna observatory, said Etna is "the most prolific volcano on this planet in terms of vapor rings," as the volcano released a string of smoke rings over the weekend.

■ **Ray Kluender**, an assistant professor at Harvard Business School, said "We were disappointed, we don't want to sugarcoat it," after a study he co-wrote with other researchers found medical debt relief did not improve the mental health or credit scores of debtors on average.

■ **Pat Sajak**, the 76-year-old host of "Wheel of Fortune," is set to have his last appearance for the show on June 7 in the season 41 finale of the game show.

■ **Emmanuel Macron**, the president of France, said "our Entente Cordiale remains as relevant as ever," as France and Great Britain held similar ceremonies celebrating the 120th anniversary of their 1904 diplomatic agreement.

■ **Cliver Alcala**, a 62-year-old Venezuelan army general who twice tried to mount coups against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, was sentenced to more than 21 years in prison after admitting to providing weapons to the Revoluationary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

■ **Cindy Zipf**, executive director of the Clean Ocean Action environment group, called a report of everything gathered from Jersey shore beaches last year "a guilt list of our region's worst littering ways," with objects ranging from bottle caps and plastic pieces to a severed Barbie head and a food fryer.

■ **Taylor Celestine**, a 22-year-old Georgia woman, was arrested and charged with attempted murder after telling staff of a Florida hotel as she checked out that she was going on a God-directed shooting rampage because of the solar eclipse before shooting two drivers on Interstate 10.

■ **Mohamad Hussein**, a Detroit landlord, agreed to pay $190,000 to settle allegations of sexual harassment against women living in his buildings or were prospective tenants.

WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK
Today Showers, few storms.
High 68 with east-southeast wind around 10 mph.
Tonight Showers then thunderstorm.
Low 60.

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State shares a moment

Eclipse watchers (from left) Emily Luthra, Trevor Claiborne, both from Truckee, Calif., and Julie and Doug Goldberg of Norfolk, Neb., watch the sky during the two minutes of totality at Clinton Presidential Library during the eclipse in Little Rock on Monday. More photos at arkansasonline.com/49eclipse/.
(Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Staton Breidenthal)

Eclipse is said to be 'magical'

DANIEL McFADIN, JOSH SNYDER AND BILL BOWDEN
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Just as it had been predicted, the roughly four minutes of totality provided by Monday's total solar eclipse arrived in Russellville at 1:50 p.m and began leaving four minutes later.

At least a few thousand people gathered in the downtown area cheered and whistled and counted down to the big moment as if it were New Year's Eve.

Darian Oliphant, who had made the trip to Russellville from Utah by way of Missouri with his three kids and his partner, Laureen, called the moment "magical."

It was "spooky in the best way."

From the southwest corner of the state to the northeast corner, the eclipse — the state's first since 1918 — made its slow march across Arkansas without a hitch Monday. The crowds that had gathered along its path, though falling short of expectations in terms of numbers, were duly impressed.

Making it better, Arkansas had managed to defy the weather predictions.

When early afternoon suddenly turned into 8 p.m., the skies were almost completely clear. Not a drop had been felt all day in Russellville, the eclipse's epicenter in the state.

A once-in-a-lifetime moment in Arkansas had been picture perfect, even if there weren't 1.5 million visitors in the state.

According to National Weather Service Senior Forecaster Joe Goudsward, the eclipse was right on schedule and the weather was not a problem.

"For much of the state, it was less of a factor than we were initially thinking. There was still a fairly decent deal of high clouds, but it wasn't as extensive as we were originally thinking," he said.

"We still had the lower clouds across parts of southwest and southeast

See **ECLIPSE**, Page 6A

Spectators hail from near and far

Californians, French among distant visitors to Arkansas

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Jim Rasmussen and his girlfriend Alyse Marlinda did not plan to be in Russellville, let alone Arkansas, on Monday.

Natives of Pleasanton, Calif., an East Bay city, they had originally set their sights on Eagle Pass, a town on the border of Texas and Mexico.

Then the weather forecast for Texas took a turn for the worst.

"With the weather change, with the cloudiness, all the way out in Barstow, California, we hooked up with (Interstate) 40, just kept going east crossing our fingers that something would open up," Rasmussen said while sitting in a lawn chair in the shade next to the Depot Stage.

Since Friday at 3 p.m., the couple had been eastbound and down in a rented RV, "the smallest one we could get."

Along for the ride was their dog, Lucy, a white poodle mix.

"Literally one of us was driving and the other person was just reloading weather reports the entire time," Rasmussen said.

"We knew that we wanted to be on that path of totality. We didn't think that we'd have to drive this far."

They arrived in Russellville about 10 a.m., just over 2½ hours before the eclipse would begin to set in.

Why did Rasmussen, who works for a traffic control company, make a trek halfway across the country for a celestial event that would last for only a few hours, with four minutes of totality?

Rasmussen experienced the last total solar eclipse in 2017.

"I find it a profoundly spiritual experience," Rasmussen explained. "Of all the places in the universe for this to happen, it happens to be the place where

See **VISITORS**, Page 5A

The sun reaches totality during the solar eclipse as seen at Burns Park in North Little Rock on Monday.
(Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Colin Murphey)

Crowds for eclipse fail to materialize

DYLAN SHERMAN AND AARON GETTINGER
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

In the days leading up to Monday's eclipse, managers of some Arkansas restaurants and a handful of mayors said they were prepared for a horde of tourists attracted to the path of totality and a glimpse of history.

The governor declared a state of emergency "out of an abundance of caution," over concerns about a strain on the state's highways.

But reports indicate there weren't as many visitors as predicted, and even worse for some businesses and small-town festivals, the locals stayed at home.

Elgin Hamner, owner of Wood Grill Buffet in Benton, said he saw a decrease in total sales, and called Saturday a "complete disaster," with sales down almost 40% compared with a normal Saturday.

"That is something you don't see unless it's snowing," he said.

The restaurant, normally closed on Mondays, opened in part to deal with people in its parking lot observing the eclipse.

But Hamner said the roads seemed as bare as the day after Christmas.

"I think what we are seeing is pockets of good

See **BUSINESS**, Page 5A

Camille Gill (left) and her husband, Drew Gill, drink a beer at one of the tables set up along Main Street in Argenta during the eclipse on Monday. More photos at arkansasonline.com/49eclipse/.
(Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Stephen Swofford)

LGBTQ+ advocates slam Vatican's 'Infinite Dignity'

NICOLE WINFIELD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican on Monday declared gender-affirming surgery and surrogacy as grave violations of human dignity, putting them on par with abortion and euthanasia as practices that it said reject God's plan for human life.

The Vatican's doctrine office issued "Infinite Dignity," a 20-page declaration that has been in the works for five years. After substantial revision in recent months, it was approved March 25 by Pope Francis, who ordered its publication.

From a pope who has made outreach to the LGBTQ+ community a hallmark of his papacy, the document was received as a setback, albeit predictable, by transgender Catholics. But its message was also consistent with the Argentine Jesuit's long-standing belief that while trans people should be welcomed in the church, so-called gender ideologies should not.

In its most eagerly anticipated section, the Vatican repeated its rejection of "gender theory," or the idea that one's biological sex can change. It said God created man and woman as biologically different, separate beings, and said people must not tinker with that or try to "make oneself God."

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