

Groton Daily Independent

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HC Doors
Aberdeen 225-3631
www.holtey.com
Commercial & Residential Overhead Doors
Opens Remotes Parts Repairs
Emergency Service Sales Installation
Russell D Holtey - Owner

Two bedroom apartment in the Rix Apartments (former city apartments) at 407 N Garfield

FOR RENT

Attached garage.

Major appliances included.

\$700 per month

Roger: 605/397-7118

Thursday, December 4

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, corn, Romaine salad, fruit.

Senior Menu: Ham, sweet potatoes, peas, Acini dePepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Birthdays: Brennan McMahon • Caitlyn Howard • Samantha Larson • Darlys Kampa • Drew Johnson
9:30am: Emmanuel Lutheran India Circle
2:00pm: Emmanuel Lutheran Nigeria Circle

Friday, December 5

State Festival Oral Interp at Huron

School Breakfast: Cereal, yogurt, fruit, juice, milk.

School Lunch: Chicken quesadilla, green beans, veggie cups, fruit.

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, rice pilaf, California blend veggies, peach crisp, whole wheat bread.

Birthdays: Ilse Cameron • Andy Jondahl • Angela Osterman • Corelea Wolter

Saturday, December 6

State Festival Oral Interp at Huron

Birthdays: Diane Paul Barwin • Maddie Howard • Nancy Sundstrom • Karen Wolter

9:00am: United Methodist Lay Ministry Effective Evangelism Course

10:00am: JHGBB Jamboree at Groton with Leola-Frederick, Webster and Britton

10:00am: Wrestling at Clark

10:00am: United Methodist Pastor at Rosewood Court

4:30pm: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Mass

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **OPEN**

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is back at 10 East Railroad Ave. Don't forget, there is also a dumpster at the city shop for aluminum cans with the proceeds going to the pool.

Clarifications on the 2016 SD DOT Project

The South Dakota Department of Transportation is seeing property owners along SD Highway 37 in Groton as the state explains what is going to happen in the project area. About half of the property owners made an appointment to visit with DOT officials. According to Neil Schochenmaier, Road Design Supervisor, that is a normal turnout. Everyone was called in the affected areas.

One of the rumors floating around that was reported at the city council meeting was that the school would have to move the west side fence and crows nest. Schochenmaier said that is false. The fence and crows nest do not encroach into the state's right-of-way. Only one or two trees on the north end might have to go.

Another rumor floating around is that traffic lights will be installed at the intersection of US 12 and SD 37. That is correct. Schochenmaier said that today's stats do not need traffic lights, but he said that the expected increase in truck traffic to the ethanal plant will warrant traffic lights. Turning lanes will also be added on US 12 and in order for that to happen, US 12 will be widen 12' on the north side, going east and west for about 500'. Four new arms will be installed at the intersection. The two existing arms are not long enough to place traffic lights in the center of the turning lane.

There will be sidewalk installed on the east side of US 12 from Railroad Avenue, north all the way to US 12, and then turn east for one block to tie into the existing sidewalk on the south side of US 12. Normally, the sidewalk is at or one inch higher than the curb; however, with the steep ditches, Schochenmaier said that the sidewalks will be about five to six inches lower than the curb, reducing the amount of fill. From the curb, there will be a 5' boulevard followed by a 5' sidewalk. Sidewalk will also be installed on the west side from Railroad Avenue north to Sixth Avenue West.

SD37 will be closed during construction. There will be graveled crossings to get from the west side to the east side of town.

Sidewalk is 5' boulevard and 5' sidewalk. It will be about 5-6 inches lower than the curb to help reduce the amount of fill that will be needed. Normally the sidewalk is at the same level or an inch or two higher than the curb.

Bids for the project will be let in early 2016 with construction to begin after the winter weather leaves.

Groton Tour of Homes Sunday, December 7 1-5pm

featuring the beautiful homes of:

Dale & Sandy Carr
Glenn & Wendy Cooper
Jarod & Kristie Flihs
Nikki Kotzer

Refreshments served @GHS.

Tickets \$8 available from Show Choir students, Lori's Pharmacy, Olde Bank Floral 'N More, First State Bank and at the Groton HS Arena on the day of the event.



Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Jackelopes 18, Chipmunks 14, Coyotes 11, Foxes 11, Pocket Gophers 10, Killer Chihuahuas 8

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter 257, 177, Angie Carlson 177, Sue Stanley 172

Men's High Games: Brad Larson 213, Roger Colestock 208, Rick Carlson 207, Brad Waage 207, 200, Ryan Schelle 202, Mike Siegler 201

Women's High Series: Vicki Walter 565, Sue Stanley 467, Darci Spanier 436

Men's High Series: Brad Waage 603, Rick Carlson 559, Brad Larson 557

4 Reasons Why Retirees Don't Need a Nest Egg

Conventional Wisdom Has Its Flaws for
Middle America, Says President of Advisory Firm

We are quickly coming to a reckoning in this country regarding the well-being of retirees, says Jeff Bucher, a financial advisor who helps working-class Americans plan their golden years.

"I suppose it's cliché for the head of a financial firm to say that he cares for his community, but we really do put our money where our mouth is," says Bucher, who, through his firm, Citizen Advisory Group, (www.citizenadvisory.com), has contributed to the local Boys & Girls Club, the Make-A-Wish Foundation and to development of an Olympic training center for wrestling at Ohio State University, his alma mater, where he earned a wrestling scholarship.

"My clients represent the bulk of America: honest, hard-working and typically blue collar or middle class. Most of them weren't executives at Fortune 500 companies, and many are stressed out when they first come to us because they've been sold this idea of needing x-amount for a retirement nest egg."

In reality, you don't need a hulking nest egg to get by in retirement, and you may be better off without one, says Bucher, who explains why.

- Lifetime income vs. nest egg; reconsider what wealth means to you. What's preferable to you: stockpiling money throughout the entirety of your earning years so that you can have a large nest egg for retirement, or investing your money wisely so that you can both use it during your younger years and receive paychecks during retirement?

"Two million dollars in savings is not the optimal perspective for true wealth," Bucher says. "True wealth is not serving money; it's having your money serve you. I'm more interested in offering folks true wealth via ethical financial structures suited to individual goals."

- Obsession with a nest egg prevents you from doing things. Consider the mentality of an obsessive nest-egger: Hoard your hard-earned money your entire life, decade after decade, straight through retirement. Don't spend anything on travel, or a vacation home, or anything else you may enjoy, because you have to protect the egg.

Life is short, and by the end of it, these folks haven't done anything but work and save money.

Classifieds

House for Rent

Two-bedroom house in Groton. Full basement, breezeway, attached garage, large yard. Wheelchair accessible. Furnished, appliances included. \$700/month. Less with lease. (941) 525-4515.

Apartments For Rent

ONE AND TWO bedroom apartment for rent. HDS subsidized. Rent includes utilities and heat. No smoking. Pets okay. Contact Darlene Daly at 605/397-8131.

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"You don't have to be a millionaire to do so many things for yourself, family and community with your money," he says.

- Consider supplementing a smaller savings with a part-time job – seriously. You hear the scare tactics – Grandma doesn't want to spend her golden years greeting shoppers at Walmart.

"That's nonsense; retirees are some of the most talented people in our country, working as a greeter is not their only option," he says. "Most of us have something we'd like to do that we couldn't during our earning years. Retirement is the perfect time to indulge that passion! People are better off staying active, no matter who or how old they are."

Supplemental income through a fun, part-time job cuts the income needed from a retirement nest egg and adds healthy activity. Teach swimming at the local YMCA, work at a golf course or as an usher at a sports venue. Or start a small business selling the crafts you've developed a skill for creating.

- Volunteering actually saves retirees money. When you're at a job, you don't have much opportunity to spend money. You won't run up the electric bill at home, nor go to the movies, amusement parks, shopping or use much money getting there. While working, you're too busy, and the same is true when folks volunteer somewhere. Volunteering at the hospital or elsewhere gives retirees purpose, engages their minds and bodies, gives them the happy knowledge that they're helping others, and prevents them from spending money on entertainment to keep from being bored!

About Jeff Bucher

Jeff Bucher is president of Citizen Advisory Group, (www.citizenadvisory.com), and is an Investment Advisor Representative of AlphaStar Capital Management, an SEC Registered Investment Advisor. He has a life and health insurance license with the state of Ohio. His membership affiliations include the exclusive Ed Slott's Master Elite IRA Advisor Group™, National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors (NAIFA), the National Association of Fixed Annuities (NAFA) and the Forum 400. He has earned Top of the Table honors through the Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT). Bucher is a former standout wrestler at The Ohio State University, where he earned an athletic scholarship and honed his leadership skills en route to earning four varsity letters.



Weber Landscaping

is extending its Christmas Tree Open House
Saturday, Dec. 6, 1-4 p.m.
204 N. State St., Groton

Small ornaments- 25% off
Large ornaments- 50% off



Join Mr. and Mrs. Claus for activities from 2-4 p.m. with Smores over a campfire at 3:30 p.m.



Mr. and Mrs. Claus and Santa's elves will also be teaching how to string cranberries!

Come get your trees, wreaths, garland and planters and have fun, too!



Interactive Dashboards Illustrate Higher Education Data

RAPID CITY, S.D. – With the help of modern software technology, the South Dakota Board of Regents has created a set of interactive dashboards to help make key data points about public higher education more understandable and useful to the public and policymakers.

Regents' staff this week unveiled a set of interactive visualizations that focus on higher education data points of particular interest. The dashboards are found online at <http://www.sdbor.edu/dashboards/>. "The fundamental aim of these dashboards is to convert complex data into useful information," said Jack Warner, the regents' executive director and CEO.

Interactive dashboards allow users to modify certain features of the dashboard view online, using filters, drill-downs, or variables to focus on data points of particular interest. These controls give users maximum flexibility to locate and analyze data relevant to a given topic.

Initial data currently posted on the regents' dashboard website present information on South Dakota students' transition from high school to the public universities, distance education, graduate production and placement, proficiency exam results, affordability, minimum progression standards, and freshmen migration rates. More data sets will be developed into interactive dashboards and posted on the website over time.

"These dashboards represent our effort to place maximum information into the hands of our stakeholders: board members, higher education staff, lawmakers, outside agencies, and the general public," Warner said. "Our goals are to increase transparency, inform public conversations about the university system, and raise the visibility of public higher education in those dialogues."

Study Calls for Increased Efforts to Boost Graduate Production

RAPID CITY, S.D. – The latest South Dakota Board of Regents' study on placement of its college graduates finds that a "robust majority" of students remain in South Dakota following completion of a public university degree.

This finding underscores the strong economic value of intensifying the public universities' efforts to boost graduate production across South Dakota, said Jack Warner, the regents' executive director and CEO. "While jobs are the engine of economic growth, South Dakota's prospects are tied equally to the availability of skilled workers," Warner said. "If current workforce trends persist, our emerging workforce may be both too few and insufficiently educated to meet the state's occupational demands."

The most recent data, based on public university graduation cohorts from 2013, confirm that 73 percent of South Dakota resident students will remain here the year following college graduation to either work or to pursue additional postsecondary education. For out-of-state students completing degrees at South Dakota public universities, the percentage that remained was nearly 33 percent.

Warner noted this in-state placement rate has climbed steadily since 2005-06, as more students graduate from the public universities. "While these findings are encouraging, it is important for us to focus on sustaining and improving these rates in the coming years," he said.

Another regents' study released this week confirmed that South Dakota is a net importer of college freshmen. Data from the fall of 2012 showed that 1,382 South Dakota students went to out-of-state colleges and universities as freshmen, while 2,693 non-residents were drawn to South Dakota institutions during the same term. That was a net gain of 1,311 students.

The supply of new jobs in South Dakota is growing and will be increasingly knowledge based, Warner said. By 2020, 65 percent of South Dakota jobs are expected to require some level of postsecondary education.

The placement study examined data sets from the Board of Regents, the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation, and the National Student Clearinghouse to determine the extent to which public university degree completers were retained in state after graduation. That full study is posted at http://www.sdbor.edu/theboard/agenda/2014/December/14_BOR1214.pdf. The freshmen migration study can found online at http://www.sdbor.edu/theboard/agenda/2014/December/13_BOR1214.pdf.

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November Climate Information

November 2014 was very cold month across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. Average monthly temperatures were from nearly 6 to 8 degrees below normal across the region. As a result, most locations finished out the month with one of their top ten coldest Novembers on record. Wheaton had their second coldest November on record with Sisseton having their third coldest on record. Mobridge and Watertown finished November with their fifth coldest on record while Pierre and Aberdeen had their sixth coldest on record. November started out warm across the region with highs mainly in the 50s and 60s. After the snowfall around the 10th, the bottom fell out with Arctic air moving in.

Temperatures dropped to much below normal and pretty much stayed there throughout the month. The precipitation for the month varied across the region from below to near to above ranging from a third of an inch to nearly an inch. The wettest locations were Sisseton and Mobridge with Timber Lake and Wheaton the driest. The main snowfall came early in the month where 2 to 8 inches fell across the region.

By contrast, Australia had their warmest November on record.

NOVEMBER 2014

Temperature Data	Aberdeen	Sisseton	Wheaton	Watertown
Warmest Temperature / Date	68 / 7th	58 / 2nd, 7th	57 / 3rd	59 / 7th
Coldest Temperature / Date	-17 / 14th	-15 / 27th	-10 / 27th	-14 / 27th
Average High / Departure from Normal	32.6 / -7.0	31.1 / -9.1	29.8 / -8.8	30.2 / -8.8
Average Low / Departure from Normal	11.3 / -7.6	13.4 / -8.1	13.3 / -7.1	12.8 / -7.8
Monthly Average / Departure from Normal	21.9 / -7.4	22.3 / -8.5	21.5 / -8.0	21.5 / -8.3
Precipitation Data				
Monthly Precipitation / Departure from Normal	0.64 / -0.09	0.95 / -1.6	0.86 / -0.27	0.72 / -0.04
Monthly Snowfall / Departure from Normal	8.1 / +1.1	8.4 / -1.1	5.8 / +1.2	10.4 / +5.5
Most Precipitation in 24 hours / Date	0.36 / 9-10th	0.65 / 9-10th	0.34 / 10th	0.32 / 10th
Most Snow in 24 hours / Date	5.5 / 9-10th	6.2 / 9-10th	2.7 / 10th	7.5 / 10th
Temperature Data	Pierre	Kennebec	Mobridge	Timber Lake
Warmest Temperature / Date	68 / 7th	69 / 7th	67 / 2nd, 7th	67 / 2nd
Coldest Temperature / Date	-8 / 14th	-14 / 14th	-3 / 13th	-6 / 13th, 16th
Average High / Departure from Normal	37.2 / -6.9	40.2 / -5.3	34.5 / -8.3	34.4 / -7.5
Average Low / Departure from Normal	16.0 / -7.3	15.5 / -7.1	15.9 / -5.2	14.4 / -6.8
Monthly Average / Departure from Normal	26.6 / -7.1	27.9 / -6.1	25.2 / -6.7	24.4 / -7.2
Precipitation Data				
Monthly Precipitation / Departure from Normal	0.80 / +0.04	0.74 / +0.02	0.80 / +0.32	0.35 / -0.26
Monthly Snowfall / Departure from Normal	9.0 / +3.7	9.5 / +3.2	7.5 / +2.8	3.7 / -2.2
Most Precipitation in 24 hours / Date	0.32 / 10th	0.30 / 15th	0.54 / 9-10th	0.19 / 10th
Most Snow in 24 hours / Date	4.5 / 10th	5.0 / 15th	6.0 / 9-10th	1.9 / 10th

Putney Putovers 4-H

October:

Elementary School, with President Ashley Gibbs calling the meeting to order. Flag pledges were led by Dylan Krueger, Cole Simon, and Lucas Simon. Roll call was answered with the reason you joined 4-H. The secretary's report was approved by Ashley Gibbs and seconded by Hailey Monson. Alexis Hanten gave the treasurer's report. Shyla Larson moved to accept the report and Cole Simon seconded. There were bills of \$722.80.

In old business, in honor of National 4-H Week, the club created a display at the Groton Area Elementary School. This served as the club's activity for October. There was no other old business.

First on the agenda in new business was promoting 4-H during National 4-H Week which was October 5th-11th; club enrollment, and 4-H Recognition Banquet, November 9th. Next was the election of new officers. The 2014-15 officers are Carly Wheeting-president, Hailey Monson- vice president, Alexis Simon-secretary, Ashley Gibbs- treasurer The Putney Putovers 4-H Club met Tuesday, September 30 at the Groton Area, and Cole Simon- photographer.

The November meeting will be determined.

-Alexis Simon, secretary

November:

The Putney Putovers 4-H Club met Tuesday, November 25th at the Groton Community Center, with President Carly Wheeting leading the meeting. Flag pledges were led by Alexis Hanten, Caleb Hanten, and Hannah Monson. Roll call was answered with your favorite Christmas song. The secretary's report was approved by Caleb Hanten and seconded by Ashley Gibbs. Ashley Gibbs gave the treasurer's report. Lucas Simon moved to accept the report and Cole Simon seconded. There were no bills. Carly Wheeting and Ashley Gibbs reported community service. Both of them helped with the PAC basketball tournament and Ashley Gibbs sang at church.

In new business, the Recognition event was held on November 9th, project plaques are available to personalize, Brown County is sponsoring two scholarships, the National 4-H conference is April 11-16th, 4-H BB gun safety course is in January, 4-H archery safety course is in January, mandatory market beef weigh-in will take place in February, there will be an upcoming horse committee meeting, and a reminder to enroll or re-enroll as a member or volunteer on 4-H online.

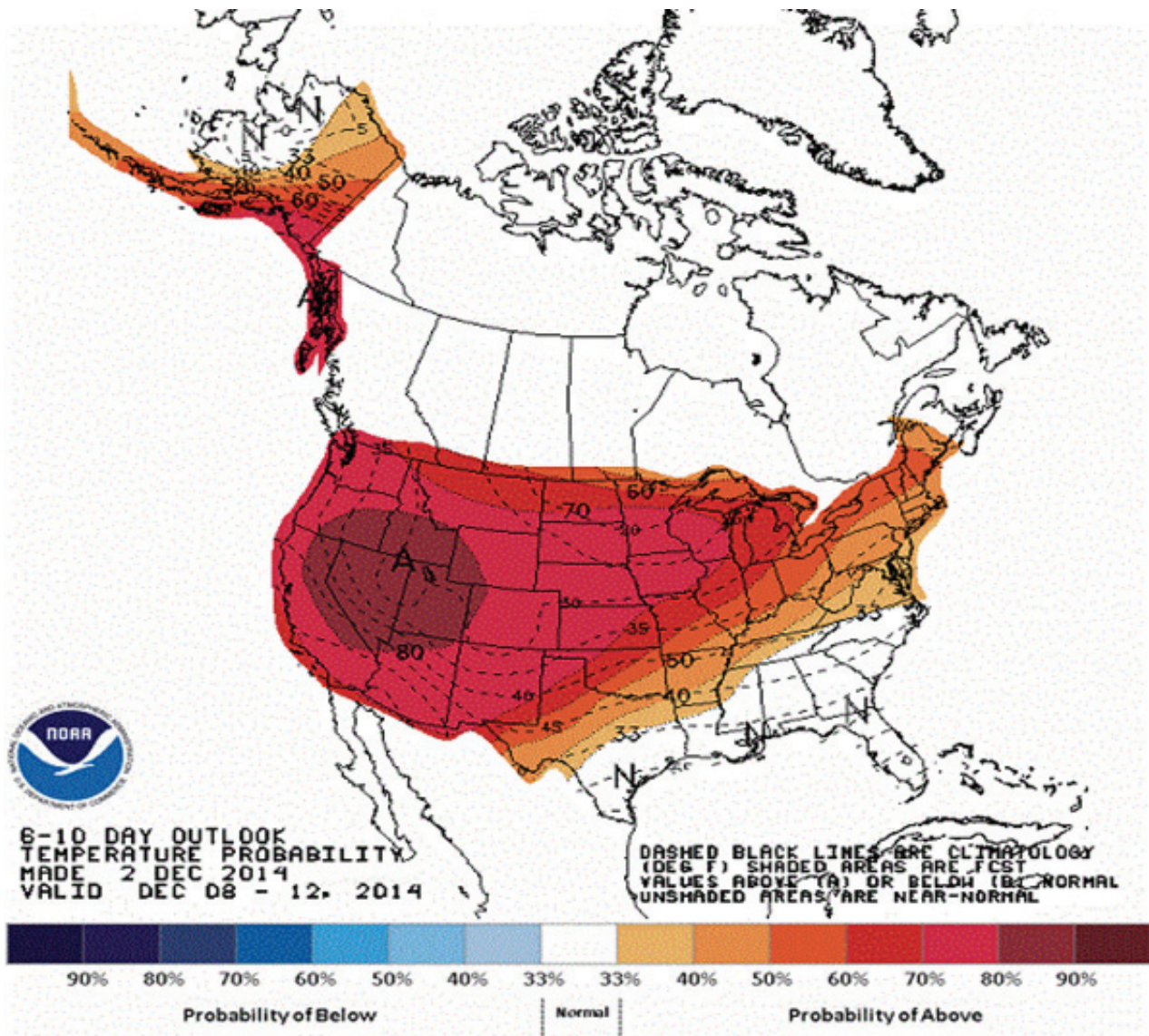
Hostesses for this meeting were Carly Wheeting and Ashley Gibbs. There were no talks or demonstrations. There will be no December meeting and the January meeting, hostesses, community service report and roll call will be determined. The adjournment was moved by Caleb Hanten and seconded by Hailey Monson.

-Alexis Simon, secretary

Warmup Expected Next Week

Near to above normal temperatures are expected to continue through the week, weekend, and even through next week. With these warmer temperatures, most of the snow will disappear by next week. In fact, temperatures next week may be much above normal as upper level high pressure ridging builds over the region. High temperatures through the weekend across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota are expected to be mostly in the 30s and lower 40s with some mid to upper 20s northeast. Normal temperatures for this time of year are in the upper 20s to the middle 30s across the region.

At this time, the outlook shown below for next week calls for a greater than 70 percent probability of above normal temperatures across South Dakota. With mainly bare ground and sunshine for next week, highs should be mostly in the 30s and 40s across the region with some 50s, possible. As we get closer, this forecast will change with the possibility of even warmer temperatures across the region.



Today in Weather History

1985: Light snow and strong winds gusting to near 40 mph caused ground blizzard conditions over parts of central and western sections of South Dakota on the 3rd. Schools were canceled in the Huron area, and some roads were blocked due to the strong winds and blowing and drifting snow.

1991: Strong northwesterly winds behind a departing surface low brought blizzard conditions and dangerously cold wind chill readings across west central and southwest Minnesota on the 3rd. A general 1 to 3 inch snowfall occurred across the area, and combined with winds gusting to 50 mph at times to generate whiteout conditions from the morning into the evening. Air temperatures combined with the strong wind to produce wind chill values ranging from 30 to 50 below zero. A number of schools and businesses were closed during the morning as the storm intensified. Several car accidents and jackknifed tractor-semitrailers littered roadways. Many roads were closed at the height of the storm. Power outages occurred over a small portion of the area due to the strong winds downing ice-covered power lines.

1886: A great snowstorm dumped up to 42 inches of snow in the southern Appalachian Mountains. 33 inches fell at Asheville, NC and 25 inches fell at Rome, GA.

1905: Today the Weather Bureau received its first weather report from a ship at sea via wireless.

1983: Birmingham, AL was drenched with 9.22 inches of rain in just 24 hours, literally submerging traffic. The cloudburst drenched the ongoing Iron Bowl with rain so hard that the field could hardly be seen. That storm went on to produce an F3 tornado and kill two people.

1856 - A severe blizzard began to rage across Iowa and Kansas. It produced as much as 16 inches of snow in Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1926 - Yuma, AZ, was soaked with 1.10 inch of rain, and by the 10th of the month had received 4.43 inches, making it the wettest December of record. The average annual rainfall for Yuma is 3.38 inches. (3rd-10th) (The Weather Channel)

1983 - Birmingham, AL, was drenched with 9.22 inches of rain in 24 hours. The rains caused severe flash flooding which literally submerged traffic. (The Weather Channel)






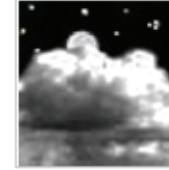

1987 - Stormy weather in the northwestern U.S. finally began to abate, but not before Gold Beach OR was drenched with 7.94 inches of rain in 24 hours. Low pressure spread snow from the Upper Mississippi Valley to the Central Appalachians. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Gale force winds ushered cold air into the northeastern U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 48 mph at Buffalo NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Heavy snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in northern New England. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to 31 inches, at Limestone. Presque Isle ME reported a record 30 inches of snow in 24 hours, along with wind gusts to 46 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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TODAY	TONIGHT	FRIDAY	FRIDAY NIGHT	SATURDAY	SATURDAY NIGHT	SUNDAY
						
Sunny High: 35 °F	Mostly Cloudy Low: 14 °F	Mostly Sunny High: 29 °F	Partly Cloudy Low: 6 °F	Mostly Sunny High: 27 °F	Mostly Cloudy Low: 20 °F	Partly Sunny High: 38 °F



Warmer Temperatures Today

Follow us on Social Media

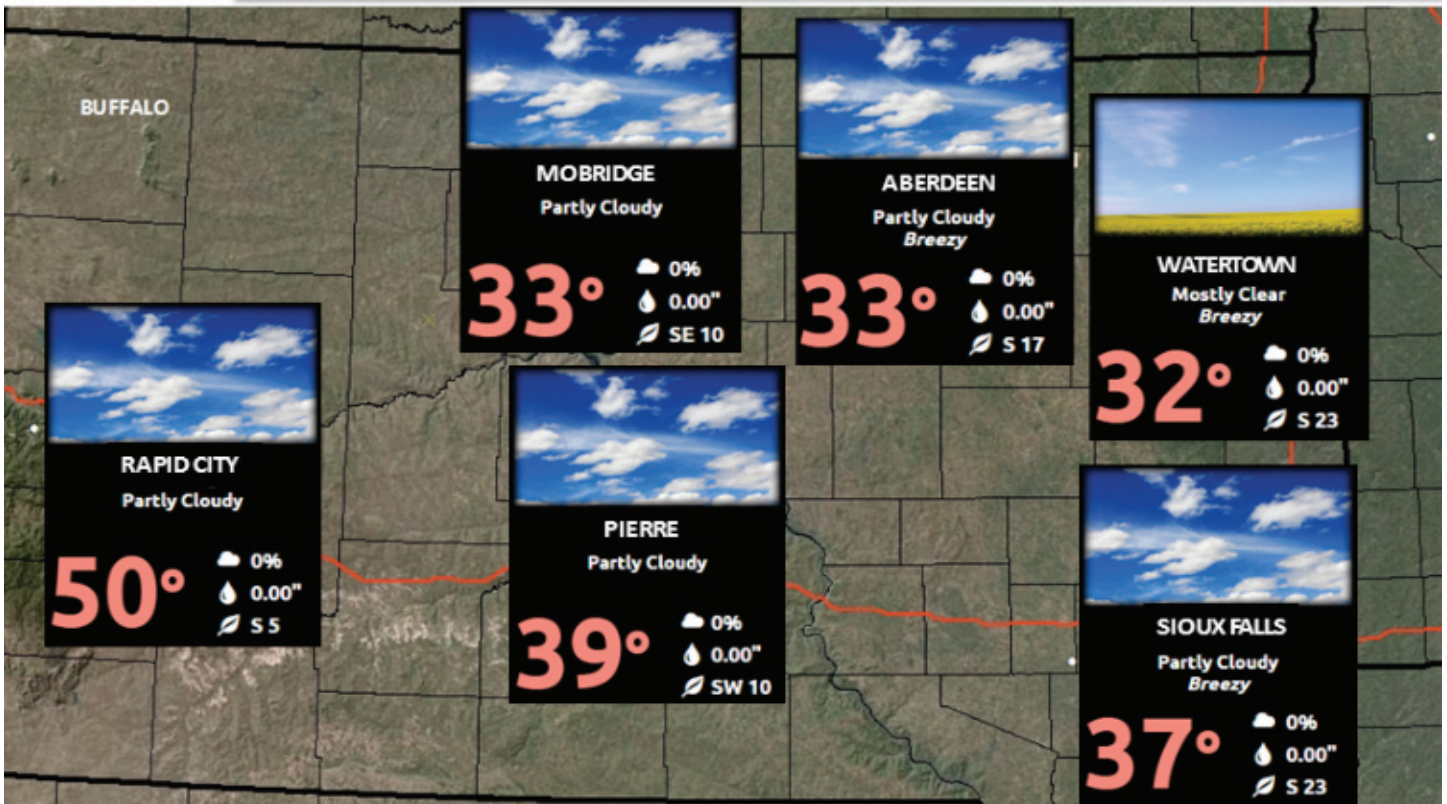
weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen



All is quiet on the weather front today. Warmer temperatures and a southerly breeze can be expected across the region.

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Yesterday's Weather

High: 23.7°F at 9:11 PM

Low: 4.8°F at 7:48 AM

Wind Chill:

High Gust: 15 mph at 4:24 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 56° in 1979

Record Low: -18° in 1927

Average High: 29°F

Average Low: 10°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.05

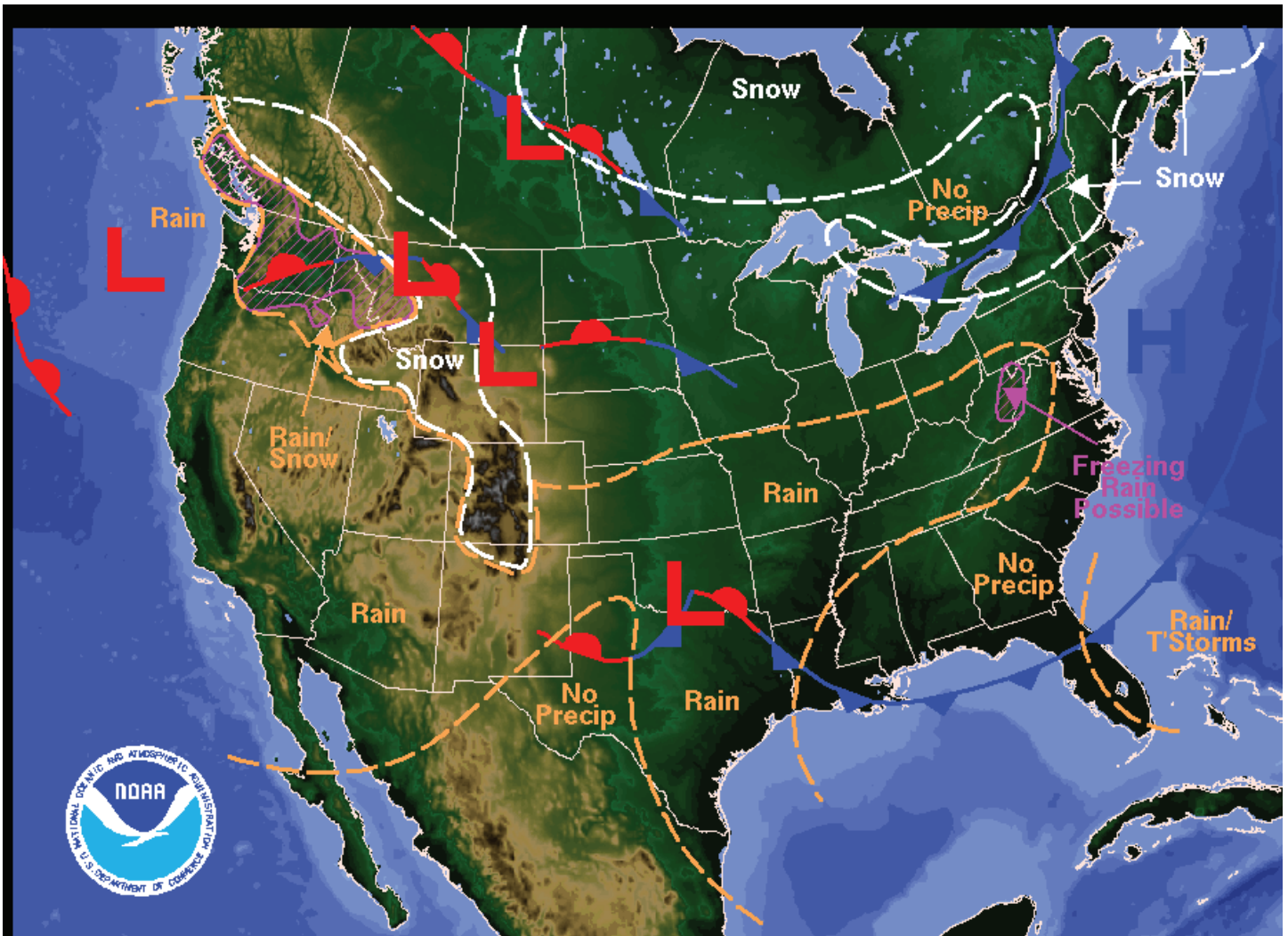
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.25

Precip Year to Date: 13.99

Sunset Tonight: 4:51 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Dec 04, 2014, issued 2:59 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



THE GOLDEN RULE

A second grade teacher asked her class, "Who can quote the golden rule?"

"Whoever has the gold," said Timothy, "makes the rules!"

That is the way most individuals understand the rules of life: Wealth makes might. But does that make things right?

Jesus said, "Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."

It is not always easy for us to put others in our place and treat them as we wish to be treated. It is easier for us to put ourselves first and expect others to serve us.

In this verse Jesus teaches that the way you and I wish to be treated must determine the way that we treat others. This is not always easy, but it is essential for the Christian. If we have been born again, we should love others the way He loves us – with all of our hearts, minds and souls. Jesus also said that we should love others as we love ourselves.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is never easy to put others ahead of ourselves. It seems so natural to put ourselves ahead of others. But in giving us Your Son, You set the example for us. We must always put the needs of others first. May we do this in Your Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Wind gusts stall launch of new Orion spacecraft

MARCIA DUNN, AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA stood poised to usher in a new era of exploration Thursday with the premier launch of its new Orion spacecraft.

The unmanned test flight was set to begin with a sunrise liftoff, but was delayed after a boat strayed into the launch-danger zone and a minor rocket issue popped up. Then a wind gust halted the count-down at the three-minute, 43-second mark.

NASA was monitoring the winds before setting a new launch time. "No show-stoppers," stressed launch commentator Mike Curie, noting the team had until midmorning to send Orion on its way.

It's the first attempt to send a spacecraft capable of carrying humans beyond a couple hundred miles of Earth since the Apollo moon program.

The ultimate goal, in the decades ahead, is to use Orion to carry people to Mars and back.

NASA anticipated 26,000 guests for the historic send-off — the roads leading into Kennedy Space Center were packed well before dawn — and the atmosphere was reminiscent of the shuttle-flying days. "Go Orion!!" urged a hotel billboard in nearby Cocoa Beach.

Curie noted Thursday was the 16th anniversary of the launch of the first U.S. piece of the International Space Station, by shuttle Endeavour. "That was the beginning of the space station, and today is the dawn of Orion," he said.

Orion is aiming for two orbits on this inaugural run. On the second lap around the home planet, the spacecraft should reach a peak altitude of 3,600 miles, high enough to ensure a re-entry speed of 20,000 mph and an environment of 4,000 degrees. Splashdown will be in the Pacific off the Mexican Baja coast, where Navy ships already are waiting.

NASA's Mission Control in Houston was all set to oversee the entire 4½-hour operation. The flight program was loaded into Orion's computers well in advance, allowing the spacecraft to fly essentially

on autopilot. Flight controllers could intervene in the event of an emergency breakdown.

The spacecraft is rigged with 1,200 sensors to gauge everything from heat to vibration to radiation. At 11 feet tall with a 16.5-foot base, Orion is bigger than the old-time Apollo capsules and, obviously, more advanced. As NASA's program manager Mark Geyer noted, "The inside of the capsule is totally different."

NASA deliberately kept astronauts off this first Orion.

Managers want to test the risk-

FRIDAY IS FRIED CHICKEN DAY
Served with Mashed Potatoes & Gravy

Serving 5-9 p.m.

WE'VE GOT WINGS!
Every Wednesday!

ANDOVER BAR & GRILL
120 S Main St. • 298-5252

iest parts of the spacecraft — the heat shield, parachutes, various jettisoning components — before committing to a crew. The earliest Orion might carry passengers is 2021; asteroids are on the space agency's radar sometime in the 2020s and Mars, the grand prize, in the 2030s.

Lockheed Martin Corp., which is handling the \$370 million test flight for NASA, opted for the powerful Delta IV rocket this time around. Future Orion missions will rely on NASA's still-in-development mega-rocket known as SLS, or Space Launch System. The first Orion-SLS combo launch is targeted for 2018.

NASA's last trip beyond low-Earth orbit in a vessel built for people was Apollo 17 in December 1972.

"It's a thrilling prospect when you think about actually exploring the solar system," space station commander Butch Wilmore said from orbit as the Orion countdown entered its final hour. "Who knows where it will take us, who knows where it will go. We'll find out as time goes forward, but this first step is a huge one."

Education program to help people with disabilities

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Augustana College in Sioux Falls has been awarded a state contract to provide post-secondary education to young adults with disabilities in South Dakota.

The state Department of Human Services established the three-year pilot program after asking for proposals from institutions that would grant access to courses and provide work opportunities.

DHS Secretary Gloria Pearson says the agency will conduct research, collect data and evaluate outcomes as part of the test, with the hope of creating a successful plan that can continue.

Augustana College will implement a program called Augie Access for South Dakota residents 18 to 24 years old who have a diagnosis of an intellectual or developmental disability and who have completed a vocational interest assessment.

The program will allow up to five new students annually.

Police: Rapid City man arrested for crash, drugs

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Police say a Rapid City man is facing methamphetamine-related charges following a hit-and-run crash.

Rapid City police said Wednesday 29-year-old Derek Jones is charged with third-offense DUI, possession of methamphetamine, possession of drug paraphernalia and leaving the scene of an accident. Police say Jones drove away after his vehicle crashed into another vehicle Tuesday afternoon.

Police found the vehicle and arrested Jones. It's unclear if he was under the influence of meth at the time.

He is being held in Pennington County Jail. Online jail records don't indicate an attorney.

SD sex offender fails to register, gets 15 months

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A convicted sex offender living on an Indian reservation in South Dakota has been sentenced to 15 months in prison for failing to register.

U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson says 25-year-old Patrick Black Spotted Horse was also sentenced to five years of supervised release. The Rosebud man earlier pleaded guilty to one count of failure to register as a sex offender.

Authorities say Black Spotted Horse absconded from his residence in Rapid City on July 12 and was arrested on July 31 on outstanding tribal warrants on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation.

Authorities say Black Spotted Horse knowingly failed to register and update his registration from the

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time he left his Rapid City residence until he was arrested.

Black Spotted Horse is under the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service.

USDA grants nearly \$400,000 SD tribal colleges

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has announced nearly \$400,000 in grants for tribal community colleges in South Dakota.

The grants announced on Wednesday are available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Community Facilities program. In South Dakota, the Oglala Lakota College will get \$145,302, Sinte Gleska University will receive \$120,000 and the Sisseton Wahpeton College will pull in \$125,549. The schools will use the grants on projects ranging from renovating instructional centers to buying student buses.

The announcement came out of the 2014 White House Tribal Nations Conference.

Montana St. drills SD School of Mines 79-41

BOZEMAN, Mont. (AP) — Michael Dison scored a career-high 24 points and Marcus Colbert added a career-best 10 assists as Montana State drilled the Division II South Dakota School of Mines 79-41 on Wednesday night.

Dison, with five 3-pointers Wednesday, has scored 73 points in the Bobcats' (2-5) last three games. Stephan Holm added 16 points with four 3-pointers and Terrell Brown scored 11 points as Montana State dominated. The Bobcats scored 29 points off 20 forced turnovers, hit 12 3-pointers and out-rebounded the Hardrockers 49-40.

The Hardrockers (2-7) scored just 15 points on 14-percent shooting in the first half and finished at 23 percent, making 14 of 59 shots.

Brian Orr led with 17 points.

Montana State made just 10 of 25 baskets in the first half, Colbert assisting on six. He also grabbed a career-high six steals and scored nine points. Eric Norman added a career-high six blocks.

South Dakota St cruises past Wayne (Neb) 89-55

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Cody Larson scored 16 points, Deondre Parks added 14 more and South Dakota State cruised to an 89-55 win over Wayne State on Wednesday night.

Sparked by back-to-back Larson buckets, South Dakota State (3-3) took control with a 14-3 run early in the first period that was capped by a 3-pointer from Cory Jacobsen to make it 26-12 with 8:38 to play before the break. The Jackrabbits took a 42-27 advantage into the locker room, then continued to pull away in the second half.

Reed Tellinghuisen contributed 10 points and Larson also had a team-high six rebounds for South Dakota State, which shot 61.5 percent from the floor and was 8 of 17 from 3-point range.

Wayne State, a Division II team, was led by Jordan Cornelius, who had 10 points and was the only Wildcats player to reach double figures in the game.

South Dakota students to lobby for tuition freeze

JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota College students plan to press lawmakers to pay for a tuition freeze at the state's public universities — something that Gov. Dennis Daugaard didn't include in his

budget plan.

South Dakota Student Federation executive director Jess Peterson on Wednesday said students will lobby during the upcoming legislative session for a continuation of the in-state student tuition freeze, for which the Board of Regents requested \$6.8 million to maintain in the next state budget period.

Board of Regents CEO Jack Warner called the tuition freeze the regents' top request but said the board will support Daugaard's budget proposal won't push lawmakers to fund a continuation of the freeze.

Daugaard on Tuesday recommended about \$4.5 million in new state funding for the regents — much less than the \$12.8 million in ongoing state aid requested by the governing body, which oversees South Dakota's six state universities. Daugaard said the state lacks the money to continue funding the freeze.

"While we were disappointed, we certainly understand the state's in a more challenging financial position than it was a year ago," Warner said.

Daugaard proposed about \$50 million in new general fund spending in his budget for fiscal year 2016. Lower-than-expected revenues kept the Republican governor from seeking larger spending hikes, and the budget contains no general fund tax increases. Lawmakers said after the address that the governor's recommendation is a starting point for debate once the Legislature convenes in mid-January.

Warner said the board will review the budget plan at a meeting Thursday.

Peterson was at the Capitol watching the budget address. She said students don't have a concrete plan yet on how to push for the freeze, but said they'll make it a focus come January.

Warner and Peterson praised Daugaard's proposal for funding building maintenance. They also lauded about \$1.3 million in the proposal to bump the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship from \$5,000 to \$6,500 per student.

In-state tuition at public South Dakota universities for fiscal year 2015 ranges from \$3,993 to \$4,164 depending on the institution.

Republican Rep. Jacqueline Sly, who chaired the House Education committee during the 2014 session, praised the students for engaging in the political process. She said it's unclear where the state's economy will head or if they'll be able to persuade lawmakers to allocate the extra funding.

"There are strange things that happen sometimes in the Legislature," Sly said.

Multistate coalition sues over immigration order

WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas is leading a 17-state coalition suing over President Barack Obama's recently announced executive actions on immigration, arguing in a lawsuit filed Wednesday that the move "tramples" key portions of the U.S. Constitution.

Many top Republicans have denounced Obama's order, which was designed to spare millions living illegally in the United States from deportation. But Texas Gov.-elect and current Attorney General Greg Abbott took it a step further, filing a formal legal challenge in federal court in the Southern District of Texas.

His state is joined by 16 other mostly conservative ones, largely in the south and Midwest, such as Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana and the Carolinas. They aren't seeking monetary damages, but instead want the courts to block Obama's actions.

While Abbott had pledged for weeks that his state would sue, the span of the coalition Texas put together surprised both proponents and opponents of the executive order.

Announced Nov. 20, Obama's order extends protection from deportation and the right to work to an estimated 4.1 million parents of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents who have lived in the coun-

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try for at least five years and to hundreds of thousands more young people.

The lawsuit raises two major objections: that Obama violated the "Take Care Clause" of the U.S. Constitution — which Abbott said limits the scope of presidential power — and that the order will "exacerbate the humanitarian crisis along the southern border, which will affect increased state investment in law enforcement, health care and education."

Abbott said it's up to the president to "execute the law, not de facto make law."

White House spokeswoman Brandi Hoffine repeated the administration's response to other criticisms to Obama's executive order: The president is not out of legal bounds. "The Supreme Court and Congress have made clear that federal officials can set priorities in enforcing our immigration laws," she said.

Past U.S. Supreme Court decisions have granted immigration officials "broad discretion" on deportation matters, and dozens of legal scholars have already written in support of Obama's executive actions on the issue.

Republican presidents, including Ronald Reagan, issued executive orders pertaining to immigration, but Abbott said those were in response to actions by Congress and maintained that high-court precedent would show Obama is abusing his power.

"We joined this lawsuit to stand up once again with other state attorneys general and governors against an out-of-control executive branch," West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the executive director of a Hispanic engagement nonprofit said the states involved with the lawsuit "have listened to a right-wing, xenophobic faction of their party" and are "on the wrong side of history."

"We've seen that Latinos, overwhelmingly, are united in support of the president's actions," said Arturo Carmona, head of Presente.org, which has more than 300,000 members. "Republicans will suffer the consequences in November 2016."

Overwhelmingly elected governor last month, Abbott has been Texas attorney general since 2002. Wednesday marks the 31st time he has sued the federal government since Obama took office. Many of those were over environmental regulations or the White House's signature health care law.

This lawsuit could make things awkward come Friday, when Abbott travels to Washington to meet with Obama as part of a group of newly elected governors.

Potential 2016 presidential candidate and current Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who leaves office in January, spoke out against the executive order Wednesday hours before Abbott's announcement. He said Obama's move could trigger another flood of people pouring across the Texas-Mexico border and create chaos that could be exploited by drug- and people-smugglers.

"In effect, his action placed a neon sign on our border, assuring people that they could ignore the law of the United States," said Perry, who has deployed up to 1,000 National Guard troops to the border.

Perry and other top Texas conservatives have said Obama's separate 2012 executive order delaying the deportation of children brought into the U.S. illegally by their parents triggered an unprecedented wave of unaccompanied minors and families, mostly from Central America, crossing the border this summer. Immigration advocates dispute that, saying the influx was caused by many factors.

But Abbott believes his state can predict the effects of Obama's most recent move on the 2012 order. "Texas," he said, "has been at the epicenter of the results of the president's executive action."

Obama plan aims to help young American Indians

BLAKE NICHOLSON, Associated Press

NEDRA PICKLER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pledging to fulfill a “sacred responsibility,” President Barack Obama unveiled an initiative Wednesday aimed at improving dire conditions and creating opportunities for American Indian youth, more than a third of whom live in poverty.

Obama’s Generation Indigenous initiative calls for programs focused on better preparing young American Indians for college and careers, and developing leadership skills through the Department of Education and the Aspen Institute’s Center for Native American Youth. Members of the president’s staff also plan to visit reservations next year.

“Nothing gets me angrier than when I get a sense that our young people early in life are already feeling like opportunities are foreclosed to them,” Obama said. “Because that’s not who we are.”

The White House did not provide a cost estimate for the initiative, but a spokeswoman said the administration plans to fund it with existing money and the help of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

The announcement, made as part of the White House Tribal Nations Conference that Obama hosted on Wednesday, comes five months after the president and his wife visited the impoverished Standing Rock Indian Reservation in the Dakotas.

The 3,600-square-mile reservation is home to about 8,500 people, many of whom live in run-down homes, and where the unemployment rate runs as high as 20 percent. The suicide rate for American Indians aged 15 to 24 is more than twice the national rate.

Vice President Joe Biden said in a morning appearance before the conference that for Obama, helping Indian youth is “something that he came back from his June visit fired up about doing something about.” Obama reflected on that visit during his own speech to the conference, recalling stories that children told him there about challenges they faced on the reservation, such as depression and alcohol abuse.

“We walked away shaken, because some of these kids were carrying burdens no young person should have to carry, and it was heartbreaking,” Obama said.

Wednesday’s conference involved leaders from 566 federally recognized tribal nations, along with 36 White House Youth Ambassadors chosen from around the country through an essay contest.

“People who grow up in a poverty culture sometimes need guidance, need values, need a little bit of structure,” said Chase Iron Eyes, an attorney and Native American rights activist from Standing Rock who is attending the conference.

“Through some of the things the administration is doing, it looks like they’re trying to do that,” he said. “Youth — they just need the right tools, and maybe they can empower themselves.”

The White House also released a report Wednesday acknowledging failures in federal policy and highlighting the need for more tribal help in the areas of economic development, health and education. Slightly more than two-thirds of Native youth graduate from high school, according to the 2014 Native Youth Report.

One of the report’s recommendations is to strengthen tribal control of the education system on reservations. Officials are working to overhaul the Bureau of Indian Education, which is responsible for educating 48,000 Indian students in 23 states, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said.

Jewell estimated it would cost more than \$1 billion to fix schools with crumbling infrastructures. Officials are pursuing money through Congress, existing government programs and philanthropic organizations.

“We have to get creative,” Jewell said.

SD among coalition suing over immigration order

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota is among a 17-state coalition that has filed a federal lawsuit over the Obama administration's recently announced executive actions on immigration.

Many top Republicans have denounced the president's unilateral move designed to spare from deportation as many as 5 million people living illegally in the United States. Texas is leading the coalition of states, which are mostly in the South and Midwest.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley says President Barack Obama's actions exceed his authority and constitutional power on immigration reform. Jackley says joining the suit won't cost anything to South Dakota.

Texas Gov.-elect Greg Abbott is leading the challenge filed Wednesday in federal court in the Southern District of Texas. Abbot argues that Obama's action "tramples" portions of the U.S. Constitution.

Woman claims rings found in Salvation Army kettle

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota woman has claimed the engagement ring and wedding band found in a Salvation Army red kettle.

Katie Christie of Sioux Falls was reunited with her lost jewelry Wednesday after the Salvation Army put out an alert Tuesday looking for the owner of the rings. The jewelry was found in a red kettle at the downtown Sunshine Foods in Sioux Falls last week.

Christie took off the rings to apply hand lotion. She says she put them in her coin purse, but forgot they were there when she dumped change into the kettle.

Thune: Airspace expansion decision could be in Feb

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Sen. John Thune says a final decision on an expansion of training airspace for bombers from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota could come as soon as February.

The Republican senator says the Air Force is expected to make its decision on the proposed expansion of the Power River Training Complex late next month. The Federal Aviation Administration then would consider it. Thune says he's worked with the agency to get an answer in about 45 days.

Officials say the expanded training airspace would be used by B-1 and B-52 bombers and could save the military \$23 million a year by reducing the number of sorties now being sent to Utah and Nevada for exercises. Thune says the expansion is key to the base's long-term survival.

Sioux tribes buy final piece of sacred site in SD

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Sioux tribes have purchased the final 437 acres of a site in western South Dakota's Black Hills that they consider sacred.

The Great Sioux Nation in 2012 raised \$9 million with the help of celebrities including P. Diddy and Bette Midler to buy back 1,900 acres of land the tribes call Pe' Sla (pay shlaw) from private landowners who had put it up for sale.

The Rapid City Journal reports (<http://bit.ly/11U8NZh>) that the tribes plan to introduce a small herd of buffalo on the land.

An 1868 treaty set aside the Black Hills and other land for the Sioux, but Congress passed a law nine years later seizing the land after the discovery of gold in western South Dakota.

21 named to South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Three-time track and field Olympian Cindy Greiner, former Minnesota Vikings linebacker Ben Leber and two-time world boxing champion Battling Nelson are among 21 people being inducted into the South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame.

This year's class will be inducted at a banquet April 11 at the Sioux Falls Convention Center. Ticket information will be released later.

Also selected this year were athletes Phyllis Hunter (tennis), Jill (Theeler) Schlekeway (track), Jane Wipf Wiebe (running), Chad Nelson (basketball), Grover Potts (football), Oliver Garnier (baseball), Dale Palmer (track/football), A.B. Tyler (polo), Alice Bauer (golf) and Billy Etbauer (rodeo); coaches Ward Lambert (basketball), David Gottsleben (track), Vic Godfrey (track) and Rollie Greeno (track); contributors Bob Laskowski (media), Doug Evans (physical education) and Neysa Villa (volunteer); and athlete/coach/contributor Paul Sheeks in several sports.

Wheat Growers plans \$3.2M facility in northeast SD

BATH, S.D. (AP) — The Wheat Growers grain and agronomy cooperative is planning a \$3.2 million facility in northeastern South Dakota to train members about the latest innovations and technologies in agriculture.

The facility will be near the co-op's Grebner Grain Terminal between Aberdeen and Bath. It will feature a classroom-style display and demonstration area with seating for about 60 people, and will have the ability to stream live video to other Wheat Growers facilities. The space also might be rented out for community events, co-op Regional Manager Phil Gilbert told the American News.

"We also see the center being used by educational institutions such as South Dakota State University, Lake Area Technical institute and Mitchell Technical Institute for training and education," Steve Briggs, Wheat Growers senior vice president for agronomy and corporate marketing, said in a statement.

Wheat Growers has 5,400 members in South Dakota and eastern North Dakota who grow wheat, corn and soybeans. The new facility will be the co-op's main work area for equipment maintenance, and will have an area where members can bring equipment for modifications such as fertilizer attachments and computer hardware installations.

The project "shows the continued support of our board to enhance Wheat Growers' capabilities in delivering innovation to the farm," Briggs said.

The 36,000-square-foot facility is expected to be operating by next fall. Gilbert said the center will create new jobs, though he did not give a number.

10 Things to Know for Today

The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. PROTESTS ERUPT AFTER GRAND JURY CLEARS WHITE POLICEMAN IN CHOKEHOLD DEATH

Thousands march in New York City to protest ruling in the killing of unarmed black man.

2. WHO IS IN A UNIQUE PLACE TO ADDRESS CHOKEHOLD CASE

Mayor Bill de Blasio, who is white but has a black son, was elected on a campaign to mend relations between the city's police force and communities of color.

3. AL-QAIDA THREATENS TO KILL US HOSTAGE

The terrorist group's Yemen affiliate releases a video in which American Luke Somers pleads to be saved from his captors.

4. PUTIN CONFIDENT IN QUELLING CHECHNYA VIOLENCE

The Russian president says local forces, loyal to the Kremlin, will deal effectively with a gun battle that broke out in Grozny and led to nine deaths.

5. REVOLUTIONARY CONVICTION FUELS KURDS' FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE

Part five of an AP series from inside the besieged city of Kobani shows a sense of camaraderie uniting its defenders against the extremist group.

6. AP SOURCES: RISE IN MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS

An increase of 8% in reported cases comes on the heels of a staggering 50% surge in 2013.

7. DITCH BRINGS MORE TENSION BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

A 300-mile trench that Islamabad is digging along a disputed border with its neighbor is causing much anxiety in Kabul.

8. CROWD FLOCKING TO KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

Some 26,000 guests are expected to jam the Florida facility for the sunrise launch of the Orion spacecraft, which someday may be used to visit Mars.

9. MINI HORSES PROVIDE SICK KIDS WITH THERAPY

The almost mythical-looking animals bring comfort to ailing children who wonder at their fairytale looks.

10. WHAT THE 2015 COLOR OF THE YEAR IS

Pantone picks marsala, a not-too-risky shade of red, inspired by the cooking wine that has the same name.

AP News in Brief

Decision on chokehold death highlights jury process, sends thousands onto streets in protest

NEW YORK (AP) — The cell phone video of the last moments of Eric Garner's life was watched millions of times on the Internet, clearly showing a white police officer holding the unarmed black man in a chokehold, even as he repeatedly gasped, "I can't breathe."

But despite that visual evidence, and a medical examiner's ruling that the chokehold contributed to the death, a Staten Island grand jury decided Wednesday not to bring any charges against the officer involved, sending thousands of protesters onto New York's streets, where they marched, chanted and blocked traffic into the next morning.

While legal experts note it's impossible to know how the grand jurors reached their conclusion, they say the Garner case, like Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri, once again raised concerns about the influence local prosecutors have over the process of charging the police officers they work with on a daily basis.

"The video speaks for itself," said Jeffrey Fagan, a professor at Columbia Law School. "It appears to show negligence. But if we learned anything from the Brown case, it's the power of prosecutors to construct and manage a narrative in a way that can shape the outcome."

Ekow N. Yankah, a professor at Cardozo School of Law, agreed that, "It is hard to understand how a jury doesn't see any probable cause that a crime has been committed or is being committed when looking at that video, especially."

De Blasio draws upon family experience to console NYC after grand jury decision

NEW YORK (AP) — He is a white man with a black son, a mayor elected on a campaign centered on mending relations between the nation's largest police force and the communities of color who feel mistreated and, at times, endangered by the police.

As Bill de Blasio spoke Wednesday night, his voice halting, in the aftermath of a grand jury's decision not to indict a white police officer in the chokehold death a black Staten Island man, he drew upon the experiences of his own family to connect with disheartened New Yorkers. He said he and his wife, Chirlane, have had to have painful conversations with their teenage son, Dante, about "how to take special care with any encounter he may have with police officers."

"I've had to worry over the years, Chirlane has had to worry: Is Dante safe each night?" he said. "And not just from some of the painful realities of crime and violence in some of our neighborhoods but safe from the very people they want to have faith in as their protectors."

He recalled how President Barack Obama turned to him last week during a White House meeting following the violence that exploded in Missouri last month after a grand jury there did not indict a white officer in the shooting death of another black man, Michael Brown.

"And the President of the United States — he had met Dante a few months ago — said Dante reminded him of what he looked like as a teenager," de Blasio said in a speech on Staten Island carried nationally on the cable news networks. "He said 'I know you see this crisis through a very personal lens.' I said to him I did."

INSIDE KOBANI: Kurdish fighters battling IS group driven by revolutionary fervor, conviction

KOBANI, Syria (AP) — The men and women of Kobani call one another "heval" — Kurdish for 'comrade' — and fight with revolutionary conviction, vowing to liberate what they regard as Kurdish land from Islamic State group militants.

Amid the wasteland and destroyed buildings, a sense of camaraderie has developed among the town's defenders who have for more than two months doggedly fought off the advances by the extremists.

Often, members of the same family can be found on the front lines.

Nineteen-year-old Shida's father was a fighter before her. After he was killed, she gave up hopes of becoming an artist and decided she must follow in his footsteps to honor his example. She says her mother supports her decision. One of her six brothers is also fighting, the rest of her siblings are living in Turkey.

"I will not allow the enemy to take away my land and its soil," she said. "I will not leave my land."

Gun battle breaks out in Russia's restive republic of Chechnya, at least 9 dead

GROZNY, Russia (AP) — A gun battle broke out early Thursday in the capital of Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, leaving at least three traffic police officers and six gunmen dead, authorities said. The fighting punctured the patina of stability ensured by years of heavy-handed rule by a Kremlin-appointed leader.

The violence erupted hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin began his annual state of the

nation address in Moscow. In his address, Putin said he was confident that local Chechen forces were capable of dealing with the "rebels," who he suggested were receiving support from abroad.

Security officials said militants traveling in three cars entered the republic's capital, Grozny, at 1 a.m. local time, killing three traffic police at a checkpoint. The Moscow-based National Anti-Terrorist Committee, a federal agency, said the militants then occupied the multi-story Press House in central Grozny, which was later destroyed by fire, killing six gunmen. Russian news agencies quoted unidentified Health Ministry sources as saying at least 10 officers were killed, but the number wasn't officially confirmed.

The Anti-Terrorist Committee said more gunmen had been found in a nearby school and an operation was underway to "liquidate" them. No students or teachers were in the school when it was seized by the militants, RIA Novosti quoted vice principal Islam Dzhabrailov as saying.

The mood was tense in Grozny on Thursday with heavy-caliber gunfire heard in the background and the area around the Press House and the school building cordoned off.

Putin defends Russia's foreign policy as protection of its sovereignty, national pride

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin in his annual speech on Thursday defended the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy, saying the actions are necessary for his country's survival.

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in March and was later accused of supplying pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine with ammunition and manpower.

Putin in his annual state-of-the-nation address at the Grand Kremlin Palace on Thursday defended the annexation of Crimea, describing the peninsula as Russia's spiritual ground, "our Temple Mount," and added that national pride and sovereignty are "a necessary condition for survival" of Russia.

"If for many European countries, sovereignty and national pride are forgotten concepts and a luxury, then for the Russian Federation a true sovereignty is an absolutely necessary condition of its existence," he told a full room of Cabinet ministers, lawmakers and community leaders. "I want to stress: either we will be sovereign, or we will dissolve in the world. And, of course, other nations must understand this as well."

More than 4,300 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine in what the West and the Ukrainian government says is a conflict fueled by Russian money.

Yemen's al-Qaida branch threatens to kill American hostage held over a year, US monitors say

SANAA, Yemen (AP) — Al-Qaida's affiliate in Yemen is threatening to kill an American hostage kidnapped over a year ago and has given Washington three days to meet several unspecified demands, a U.S. terrorism monitoring group said Thursday.

The SITE Intelligence Group said it obtained a video by Yemen's al-Qaida offshoot featuring the hostage, identified as 33-year-old Luke Somers, an American photojournalist born in Britain.

Somers was kidnapped in September 2013 from a street in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, where he had worked as a photojournalist for the Yemen Times.

He was likely among a group of hostages who were the objective of a joint rescue mission by U.S. operation forces and Yemeni troops last month that freed eight captives in a remote corner of Yemen.

At the time, a Yemeni official said the mission failed to liberate five others, including an American journalist and a Briton who were moved elsewhere by their al-Qaida captors days before the raid. The

American was not identified by name and Yemen did not officially confirm the participation of U.S. commandos in the rescue mission — a rare instance of U.S. forces intervening on the ground in Yemen.

Defense bill backing Obama's expansion of military operations against extremists nears passage

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is moving toward passage of a \$585 billion defense policy bill that gives President Barack Obama the authority to expand U.S. military operations against Islamic extremists in Iraq and Syria.

The sweeping legislation authorizes spending for the nation's defense, from construction of ships, planes and war-fighting equipment to a 1 percent pay raise for the troops, while maintaining the prohibition on transferring terror suspects from the federal prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the United States.

The House is expected to vote Thursday and send the measure to the Senate, where Republicans are divided over the inclusion of unrelated provisions expanding wilderness areas in the West. Proponents of the measure hope to finish the bill next week and send it to Obama for his signature.

In a rare instance of bipartisanship, Congress has passed the defense policy bill for 52 consecutive years. This year, work on the bill has added poignancy as the chairmen of the Armed Services committees in the Senate and House are retiring. Michigan Democratic Sen. Carl Levin is leaving after 36 years; California Republican Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon is stepping down after 22 years.

The overall legislation endorses Obama's latest request to Congress in the 4-month-old war against Islamic State militants who brutally rule large sections of Iraq and Syria. Obama sought billions for the stepped-up operation and the dispatch of up to 1,500 more American troops; the bill provides \$5 billion.

NASA poised to usher in new era of exploration with Orion launch; test flight drawing crowds

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA stood poised to usher in a new era of exploration Thursday with the premier launch of its new Orion spacecraft.

The unmanned test flight was set to begin with a sunrise liftoff.

It's the first attempt to send a spacecraft capable of carrying humans beyond a couple hundred miles of Earth since the Apollo moon program.

The ultimate goal, in the decades ahead, is to use Orion to carry people to Mars and back.

NASA anticipated 26,000 guests for the historic send-off — the roads leading into Kennedy Space Center were packed well before dawn — and the atmosphere was reminiscent of the shuttle-flying days. "Go Orion!!" urged a hotel billboard in nearby Cocoa Beach.

Mythical-looking mini horses trot into hospital to bring animal-assisted therapy to sick kids

CHICAGO (AP) — Though it may sound like one, this is no joke: Two miniature horses trotted into a hospital.

Doctors and patients did double-takes when the equine visitors ambled down long corridors in the pediatric unit at Chicago's Rush University Medical Center. Wide-eyed youngsters hooked up to IV poles

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stepped into hallways to get a glimpse, and kids too sick to leave their rooms beamed with delight when the little long-lashed horses showed up for some bedside nuzzling.

Mystery and Lunar, small as big dogs, are equines on a medical mission to offer comfort care and distraction therapy for ailing patients. It is a role often taken on by dogs in health-care settings — animal therapy, according to studies and anecdotal reports, may benefit health, perhaps even speeding healing and recovery.

Mini-horses add an extra element of delight — many kids don't know they exist outside of fairy tales. "I want one," said 14-year-old Elizabeth Duncan, stroking Mystery's nose from her propped-up hospital bed.

Today in History

The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Dec. 4, the 338th day of 2014. There are 27 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 4, 1984, a five-day hijack drama began as four armed men seized a Kuwaiti airliner en route to Pakistan and forced it to land in Tehran, where the hijackers killed American passenger Charles Hegna. (A second American, William Stanford, also was killed during the siege before Iranian security seized control of the plane.)

On this date:

In 1214, Alexander II became King of Scots at age 16 upon the death of his father, William the Lion.

In 1619, a group of settlers from Bristol, England, arrived at Berkeley Hundred in present-day Charles City County, Virginia, where they held a service thanking God for their safe arrival.

In 1783, Gen. George Washington bade farewell to his Continental Army officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York.

In 1816, James Monroe of Virginia was elected the fifth president of the United States.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson left Washington on a trip to France to attend the Versailles (veh-SY') Peace Conference.

In 1945, the Senate approved U.S. participation in the United Nations by a vote of 65-7.

In 1954, the first Burger King stand was opened in Miami by James McLamore and David Edgerton.

In 1965, the United States launched Gemini 7 with Air Force Lt. Col. Frank Borman and Navy Cmdr. James A. Lovell aboard.

In 1978, San Francisco got its first female mayor as City Supervisor Dianne Feinstein (FYN'-styn) was named to replace the assassinated George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee).

In 1980, the bodies of four American churchwomen slain in El Salvador two days earlier were unearthed. (Five Salvadoran national guardsmen were later convicted of murdering nuns Ita Ford, Maura Clarke and Dorothy Kazel, and lay worker Jean Donovan.)

In 1991, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson, the longest held of the Western hostages in Lebanon, was released after nearly seven years in captivity.

In 1996, the Mars Pathfinder lifted off from Cape Canaveral and began speeding toward the red planet on a 310 million-mile odyssey. (It arrived on Mars in July 1997.)

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush received the president of Pakistan, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, in the Oval Office; afterward, Bush pronounced himself "very pleased" with Pakistan's efforts to flush out terrorists.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama began putting the finishing touches on a fresh job creation

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proposal, telling a community college crowd in Allentown, Pennsylvania, "I still consider one job lost one job too many." Gunmen and a suicide bomber attacked a mosque in a military installation in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, killing 35. Paula Hawkins, a Republican who in 1980 became the first woman elected to a full U.S. Senate term without a family political connection, died in Orlando, Florida, at age 82.

One year ago: A senior commander in the militant group Hezbollah, Hassan al-Laquis, was shot dead outside his home in Lebanon, the latest in a series of attacks against the Iranian-backed organization, which accused Israel of the attack. Oscar De La Hoya was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame; two of his contemporaries in the modern era - Puerto Rican star Felix "Tito" Trinidad and Joe Calzaghe of Wales - were also selected.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Ronnie Corbett (TV: "The Two Ronnies") is 84. Game show host Wink Martindale is 81. Pop singer Freddy Cannon is 78. Actor-producer Max Baer Jr. is 77. Actress Gemma Jones is 72. Rock musician Bob Mosley (Moby Grape) is 72. Singer-musician Chris Hillman is 70. Musician Terry Woods (The Pogues) is 67. Rock singer Southside Johnny Lyon is 66. Actor Jeff Bridges is 65. Rock musician Gary Rossington (Lynyrd Skynyrd; the Rossington Collins Band) is 63. Actress Patricia Wettig is 63. Actor Tony Todd is 60. Jazz singer Cassandra Wilson is 59. Country musician Brian Prout (Diamond Rio) is 59. Rock musician Bob Griffin (The BoDeans) is 55. Rock singer Vinnie Dombroski (Sponge) is 52. Actress Marisa Tomei is 50. Actress Chelsea Noble is 50. Actor-comedian Fred Armisen is 48. Rapper Jay-Z is 45. Actor Kevin Sussman is 44. Actress-model Tyra Banks is 41. Country singer Lila McCann is 33. Actress Lindsay Felton is 30. Actor Orlando Brown is 27.

Thought for Today: "A person reveals his character by nothing so clearly as the joke he resents." - Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, German scientist (1742-1799).