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Baby Shower for Eva Roy Olson, daughter of Nick and Stephanie Olson, will be held Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015, at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eva was born October 7, 2015. They are registered at Target.

A winter storm has dumped 6-8 inches of snow on the Groton Area. Groton Area School is starting 2 hours late this morning due to the poor road conditions. The three-year-old pre-screening has been postponed.

Tuesday, December 1

Lisa Sippel Novice Debate in Groton after school
Practice ACT at GHS

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick, fruit, juice, milk.

School Menu: Meatballs, baked potato, tea buns, mixed vegetables, fruit.

Senior Menu: Chili, cornbread, coleslaw, lime pear Jell-O.

Birthdays: Darrel Hendrickson • Ahmad Shabazz Jr • Kevin Raap

10:00am: United Methodist Women's Bible Study

Postponed: 7th GBB host Clark/Willow Lake

Postponed: 8th GBB host Clark/Willow Lake

Wednesday, December 2

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

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, sweet potato fries, romaine salad, breadstick, fruit.

Senior Menu: Baked chicken, baked potato with sour cream, green beans, chocolate cake, whole wheat bread.

Birthdays: Leonard Garness • Liz Doeden • Cade Guthmiller • Meri Erickson

7:00am: United Methodist Men's Bible Study

12:00pm: Kiwanis meets at the Community Center

6:00pm: Baby Shower for Eva Roy Olson at Emmanuel Lutheran

6:45pm: Emmanuel Lutheran League

7:00pm: Emmanuel Lutheran Confirmation

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **Open**

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Oven Fresh Sandwiches Hot Desserts Snack Melts **New DQ BAKES!** OVER-HOT
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11 E Hwy 12, Groton ~ 397-8627

Wintertime recharge By Richard P. Holm MD

It's been known for eons that in this northern clime, some people feel the winter blues set in when the nights become long, but it was a physician from the National Institutes of Health in the '80s who first named that darkening of mood in winter as "seasonal affective disorder," S-A-D, or SAD. Paradoxically, with the holiday season, mood can significantly sadden in five to twenty percent of us, depending somewhat on how northern your exposure may be.

Some people are just minimally affected, but those with a major depressive illness or manic-depressive condition, may be severely impaired by seasonal change. Certainly those who socialize poorly, move less, live in darker places, and hibernate indoors are at higher risk for winter blues.

The theory is that long nights alter melatonin and serotonin brain chemical levels, changing our biological clocks. Some experts think SAD is a reflection of thousands of generations when food was scarce in winter, making it necessary to turn down and do less. It's not hard to believe that body juices and thus mood can be influenced by light. Think how poinsettia leaves turn red, or the Christmas cactus blossoms as our winter sets in.

Maybe it is not wrong to settle in on your favorite couch, in front of a warm fire, wrapped in a throw, engrossed in a good book, with a hot cup of your favorite winter beverage. Maybe even snatch a nap. Perhaps we should allow ourselves to take a little time to recharge before the excitement and high energy of spring and summer.

But we cannot forget how physical exercise every day keeps the doctor away. Winter without exertion means a springtime of weakness and injury. We must keep fit even during the winter weather and even if that means exercise indoors.

I read one report that those living in Iceland do not struggle with SAD. It's thought their lifestyle of rigorous outdoor winter physical activity, exposure to winter sun, and diet of vitamin D saturated fish is the tonic that prevents sadness.

For those who are possibly harmed by a bad mood brought on by the darker winter season, you might benefit from the Icelandic attitude of regular daily winter exercise, plenty of early morning light, outdoor sun when possible, and a diet that includes enough fish and/or vitamin D.

And maybe it's OK to take some time this winter to cozy up and recharge a little too.

Leasing v. Buying Your Next Car

By Nathaniel Sillin

According to Edmunds.com, more than 25 percent of new American cars are now financed by lease instead of loan, and most of the people making that choice are under age 35.

It's all about the lowest possible monthly payment.

Yet for drivers young and old, leasing has grown substantially because it can also be done with little or no money down and the chance to get a newer, better car for less money overall.

The main disadvantage? You won't own the car unless you buy it at the end of the lease, which may or may not be a good deal.

Experian Automotive – a division of the major credit reporting service – reported in mid-2015 a nearly \$100-a-month savings for those who lease cars versus those who buy their cars by loan. Their numbers showed the average monthly payment for a brand-new leased vehicle was \$394 a month against \$483 for a new vehicle purchased by loan.

So would leasing be a good deal for you? Don't decide without research, qualified advice and a thorough look at your finances. Start with the major pros and cons:

Leasing:

Pros: Lower down payments and monthly payments than required with a conventional auto loan; low repair costs thanks to factory warranties typically tied to the term of the lease (usually three years); easy drop-off or trade-in once the lease expires; and lower sales tax expense because the lease is based on only three or four years of use.

Cons: You're essentially renting a car, not buying it – payments are cheaper because you're really only paying interest and depreciation expense and not receiving any equity in the vehicle; annual mileage caps (usually 12,000-15,000 miles) come with stiff penalties if you exceed those limits; and potentially steep fees for excessive wear-and-tear on the car or early termination of the lease.

Buying:

Pros: Freedom to put as much or as little mileage, wear-and-tear and modification on the vehicle as you choose; long-term (100,000 miles or over) car ownership with good maintenance can be much more economical long term; and because you own the car, you can sell at any time.

Cons: You'll generally require a higher down payment than a lease; monthly loan payments are generally higher because unlike leasing, you'll be taking ownership of the car once it's paid off;; once factory warranties expire, you'll take on full maintenance costs for an aging car that may or may not be expensive; and you'll have more cash tied up in a depreciating asset for as long as you own the car.

All these positives and negatives aside, it's important to know that with loans and leases most details are negotiable, so it's important to do your research. Start by estimating how much car you can actually afford (<http://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/HowMuchCarCanYouAfford>) and seek out qualified financial

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and tax advice to shape how you'll approach the best possible deal for your financial situation.

For many, leasing requires more extensive study because this form of financing is relatively new to most drivers and the terminology (<http://www.cars.com/advice/>) can be daunting. But generally, the best deals depend on two major factors – negotiating the lowest price on the vehicle going in and making sure it's a vehicle that has a high estimated post-lease value. In short, the lessor's ability to keep making money on a high-value leased vehicle allows a lower monthly payment at the start.

Bottom line: If you need a vehicle, it pays to evaluate whether lease or purchase makes the most sense for you. Know your needs and get advice so you can make the most affordable choice for you.

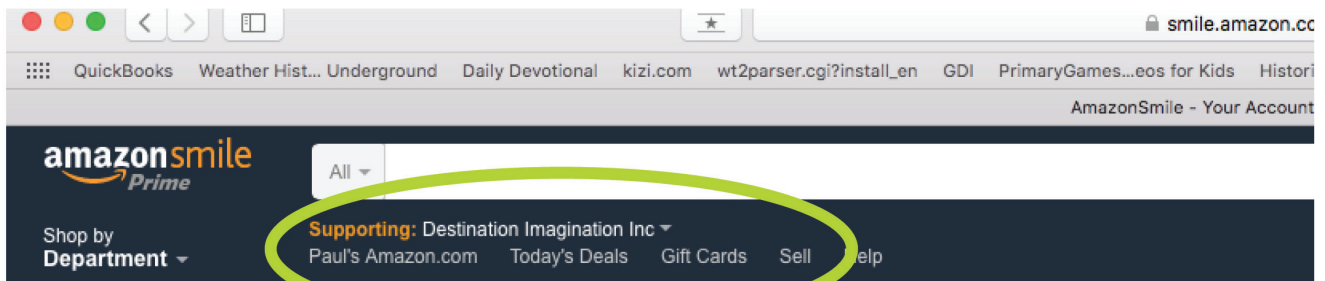
Nathaniel Sillin directs Visa's financial education programs. To follow Practical Money Skills on Twitter: www.twitter.com/PracticalMoney.

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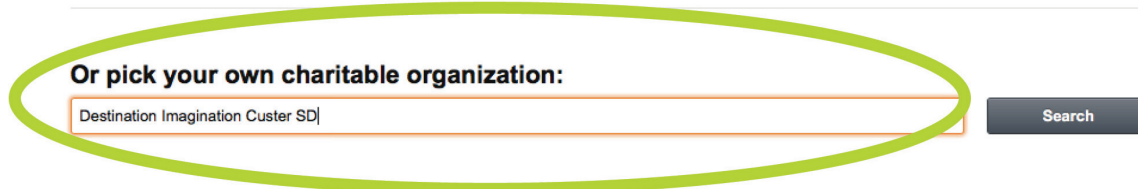
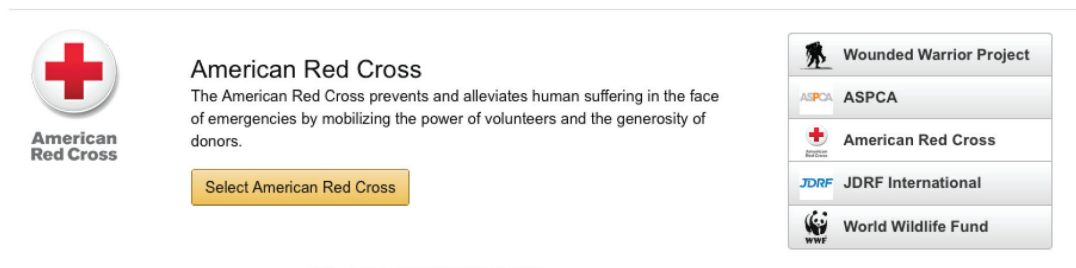
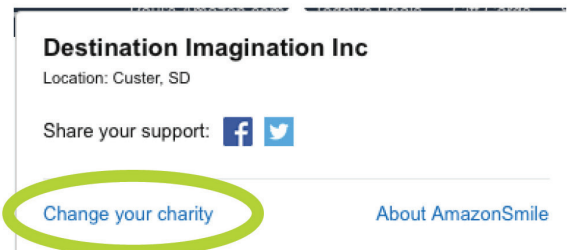
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Getting ready for your holiday shopping? Start at smile.amazon.com and select Destination Imagination of Custer, SD as your charity. A portion of your purchase will support South Dakota Destination Imagination. What could be easier?



When you go to smile.amazon.com, and you are logged in, there will be a SUPPORTING as circled above. Click on that and there will be a pop-up window as shown on the right. Click on Change your Charity. Then as shown below, type in Destination Imagination Custer SD, then click on Search. On the next screen, your selection will appear. Click Select.



REMEMBER - SHOP at SMILE.AMAZON.COM. If you shop at Amazon.com, we will not get anything. This is very important as most of us have Amazon.com as our bookmark.



Groton Chamber Holiday Boxes are out & about in Groton!

This Week (thru 11/27) – Groton Ford
\$25 Chamber Bucks OR Free Oil Change!

Next Week (thru 12/04) – Dairy Queen
\$25 Chamber Bucks OR 10" Ice Cream Cake!

Stop by each participating business and register for \$25
Groton Chamber Bucks – or a prize supplied by the business.
Prizes will be drawn weekly – starting over each week with
entries!



Merry
Christmas

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Today in Weather History

December 1, 1985: A storm system with heavy snow, strong winds, and blizzard conditions visited the region on December 1st through 2nd. Most of the snow fell in Minnesota. Snowfall across Minnesota increased from the south during the early morning of December 1st and had spread across most of the state by late morning. Winds in the west central and southwest part of the state increased to 40 to 50 miles per hour, causing blizzard conditions. By late morning, drifts had reached 3 feet and snow plows were pulled off roads from the southwest into central Minnesota due to restricted visibilities. Strong winds continued through the evening, gradually diminished during the morning of December 2nd. Strong winds and cold temperatures broke power lines and caused power outages over portions of southern and west central Minnesota during the afternoon of December 1st and the morning of December 2nd. Many highways were impassable and numerous businesses and schools were closed on the morning of December 2nd until residents could dig out. There were a few travelers that became stranded for up to 6 hours in their vehicles. Traffic accidents also accounted for a number of injuries and a few deaths. Further west, in South Dakota, strong winds gusted to around 40 mph and produced ground blizzard conditions over most of the state. The low visibilities, road conditions, and strong winds stranded a family for 25 hours south of Colome in Tripp County and another family for eight hours near Lee's Corner in Brule County. Many roads were blocked in the central and western parts of the state, and no travel was advised in the east. The blowing and drifting snow reduced visibilities to near zero and many accidents were reported. The strong winds, along with the previous day's snowfall, caused some damage, including the collapse of the roof of a large barn south of Bemis in Deuel County. Many church services were canceled on December 1, as were many schools on December 2. Temperatures became very cold during the morning of December 2 in the northwest part of the state. Camp Crook in Harding County reported a low of -36 F. Pierre had 2 inches of snow, Aberdeen, Castlewood, Clark, and Redfield had 3 inches, Bryant had 4 inches, Clear Lake, Milbank, and Wilmot had 8 inches. Timber Lake fell to -24F on the 2nd while McLaughlin fell to -30F.

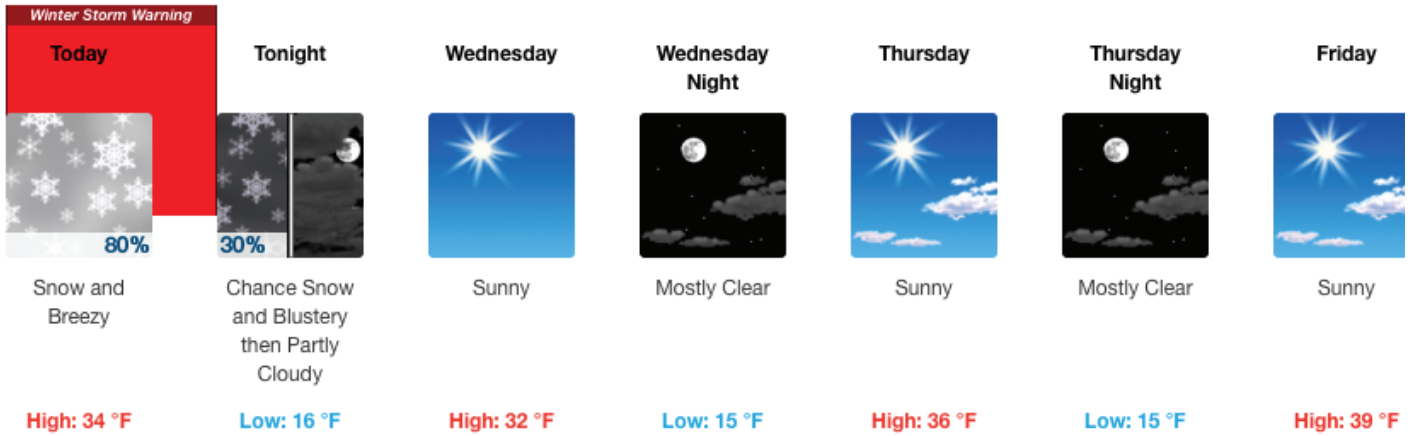
December 1, 1992: A storm system caused numerous traffic accidents and stranded several hundred travelers on December 1st across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota as Interstate 29 was closed between Watertown and Sisseton. Slush on roadways became ice as high wind gusts were up to 60 mph and snowfall of one to four inches brought blizzard conditions to some areas. Several semi-trucks jackknifed and many cars ran into ditches, causing minor injuries. At the same time, strong northwest winds further west in central and north central South Dakota gusted up to 67 mph on the 1st. The high winds shattered windows and blew down trees and signs. The wind rolled a van into a car, causing damage to both vehicles. Another car was damaged by a wind-blown dumpster. The wind also blew toppers off several pickup trucks, causing some damage.

December 1, 2007: A strong low pressure area moving across the central plains brought widespread heavy snowfall of 6 to 12 inches across northeast South Dakota. The snow began between 4 and 8 am and ended between 7 and 9 pm in the evening on December 1st. The heavy snow mainly affected travel and Saturday activities. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Clark, Conde, Faulkton, Redfield, and Watertown, 7 inches at Groton, Roscoe, and Sisseton, 8 inches at Britton, Summit, Bryant, 9 inches at Aberdeen and Kidder, and 12 inches at Big Stone City.

December 1, 2006: An early winter storm produced more than 6 inches of snow along a 1,000 mile long path from central Oklahoma to northern Michigan. This storm also produced significant freezing rain which impacted the St. Louis area. An estimated 500 or more homes and businesses were without power in the St. Louis area after this storm.

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Periods of Snow Through Today

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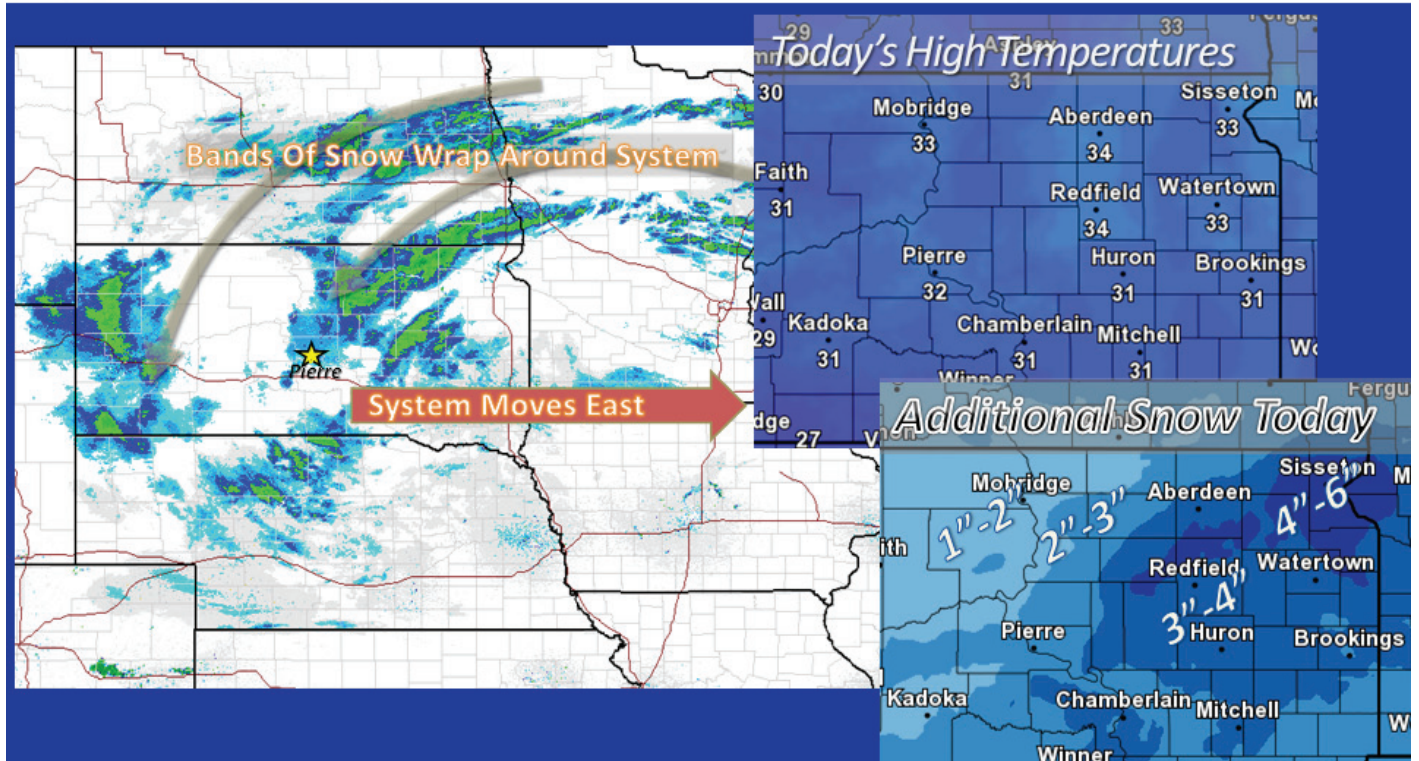
weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen



Published on: 12/01/2015 at 5:00AM

A winter storm system continues to effect the region. Expect periods of heavy snow through the morning, with a gradual decrease in snow intensity as the system moves east this afternoon. Northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota stand to see the greatest additional snow accumulations today. Winds will also be a little stronger, with gusts up to 30 mph likely.

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Yesterday's Weather

High: 32.3 at 12:26 AM

Low: 26.8 at 1:04 PM

High Gust: 14 at 7:34 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 62° in 1969

Record Low: -24° in 1893

Average High: 31°F

Average Low: 12°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.02

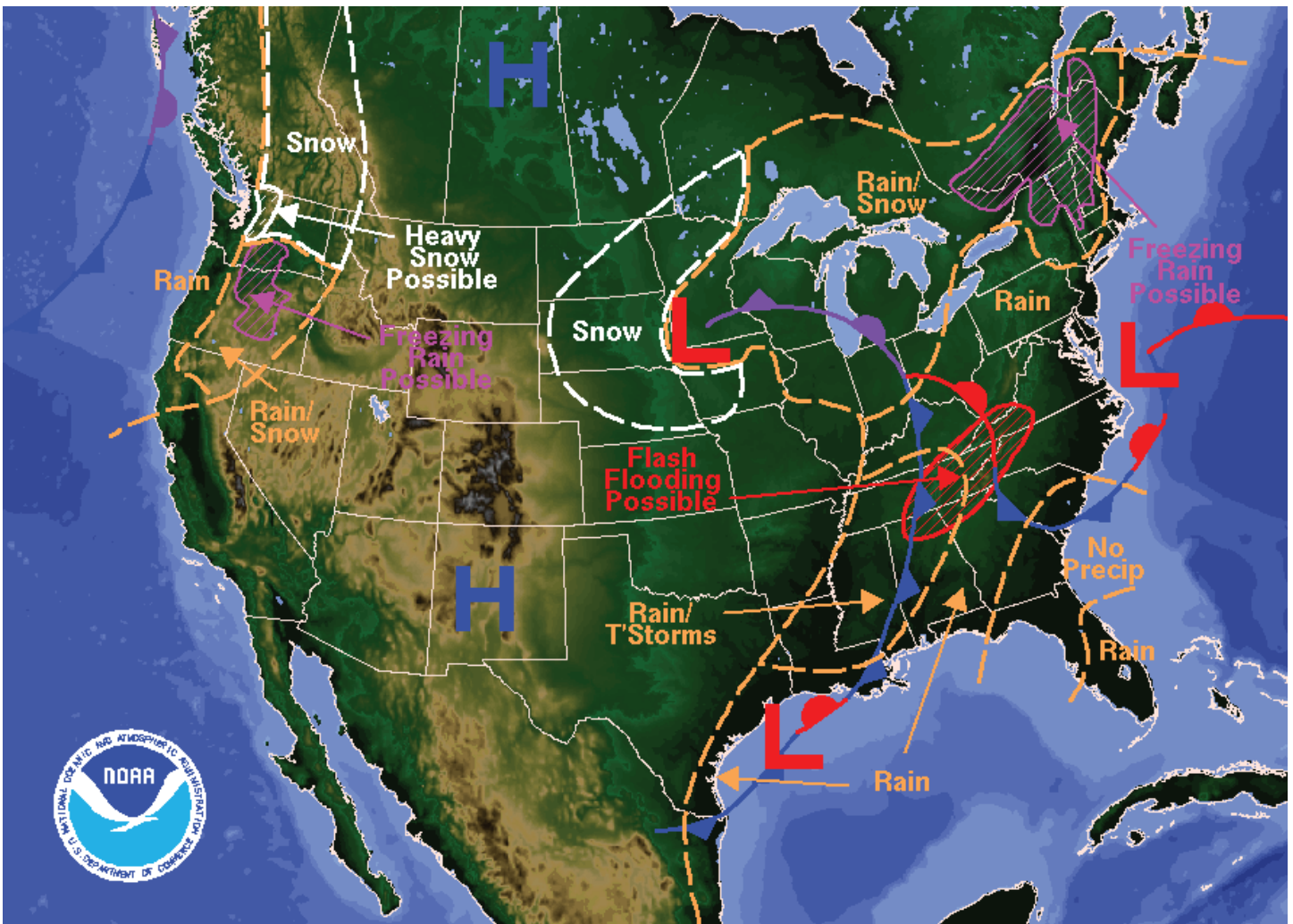
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.22

Precip Year to Date: 19.82

Sunset Tonight: 4:52 p.m.

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:54 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Tue, Dec 01, 2015, issued 4:30 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McCreynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



HEARING, ENCOURAGING, LISTENING

Years ago, my son ran to where I was sitting in front of a television trying to find an escape from the cares of the day. It had been a difficult twenty-four hours serving as a Navy chaplain in a large hospital. I was trying to escape from the stress and strain of being with sick and dying patients as the "Chaplain on Duty."

Whatever he said did not register. So he said it again and then asked, "Dad, did you hear me?"

"Of course, Son, I was listening carefully," was my reply.

Grabbing my face with his two little hands and looking into my eyes, he said, "Dad, I didn't ask if you were listening. I asked if you heard me." Then and there, I was taught the difference between listening and hearing.

The Psalmist recognized this difference, too. "You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them and You listen to their cry."

What a comforting thought! His ear is always open to the cries of His children and He waits attentively to hear their voices in times of need. What a beautiful picture of a loving Father. There is nothing we need to do to get His attention. Nor is there a magical formula to use when we pray. All we have to do is to cry out to Him.

We cry and He hears. His ear is always open for our particular voice. His eyes are always on us no matter where we may be. And His heart is always sensitive to our personal needs. When we cry, He hears, He listens, He understands and He will respond and meet our needs.

Prayer: Lord, You are above us but not beyond us. You hear us when we cry and respond when the time is right. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Psalm 10:17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

News from the Associated Press

Northern Plains snowstorm sets records in South Dakota, Iowa

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A lingering snowstorm over the northern Plains is setting records. The National Weather Service says 8.7 inches of snow fell in Sioux Falls Monday, breaking the city's record for the date of 7.6 inches in 1954.

Mitchell set a record with 7.2 inches, along with Sioux City, Iowa, with 6.6 inches. Those cities' previous records for the date had stood for about a quarter century or more.

The American News reports that conditions Monday afternoon in Aberdeen were so poor that an incoming flight was unable to land and instead returned to Minneapolis.

Winter weather warnings and advisories remain in place for much of the Dakotas. The weather service forecast calls for several more inches of snow by Tuesday evening. Several South Dakota schools announced late starts or canceled classes. Northern Plains snowstorm sets records in South Dakota, Iowa

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Survey gives yet another sign of Midwest

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Figures have plunged in a fourth straight monthly survey of supply managers in nine Midwest and Plains states, providing more evidence of a slowdown in the region's economy.

A report issued Tuesday says the overall Mid-American Business Conditions Index dropped to 40.7 last month from 41.9 in October, 47.7 in September and 49.6 in August.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss oversees the survey, and he again cites the strong U.S. dollar among the reasons for the region's economic slide.

The survey results are compiled into a collection of indexes ranging from zero to 100. Survey organizers say any score above 50 suggests economic growth. A score below that suggests decline.

The survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Minnehaha County convenience store robbed at gunpoint

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities in Minnehaha County are searching for a suspect following an armed robbery at a convenience store.

The sheriff's office says a man with a handgun demanded money from the clerk at Pump 'N Pak about 10 p.m. Monday, then drove off in the clerk's car.

The clerk wasn't hurt, and the vehicle was found abandoned a short distance away. Authorities did not disclose the amount of cash the robber took.

Justice Antonin Scalia to speak at Augustana University

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia will be in South Dakota this winter to speak at Augustana University.

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Scalia will give an address titled "Whether the U.S. Constitution is a Living Document" on March 9 at the university in Sioux Falls.

The speech is part of the school's Boe Forum on Public Affairs. Past speakers include former President George H.W. Bush, former Vice President Al Gore, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Queen Noor of Jordan and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Scalia, a conservative jurist, joined the court in 1986. He is the longest-serving justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. He considers himself a "textualist" who applies the words in the Constitution as they were understood by the founding fathers.

State of South Dakota establishing debt recovery center

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The state of South Dakota is establishing a new center to recover money owed to state agencies and programs.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard says that through the Obligation Recovery Center, state government will be able to more effectively engage those who owe debts to the state or to other residents. The center will collect debts such as unpaid taxes, university tuition or fees and court costs owed by criminal defendants.

Daugaard says the creation requires no upfront financial investment and it will help South Dakotans who are owed court-mandated restitution.

The Obligation Recovery Center was approved through the passage of a bill during the 2015 Legislative Session.

The state awarded the contract to CGI Technologies and Solutions Inc., which will handle customer service processes, expedited billing and self-service options.

Teams of students set to compete in Lego event at Mines

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Teams of students are set to compete with robots constructed from Legos in a contest meant to create innovative solutions for dealing with garbage.

The competition is scheduled for Saturday at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology.

Ten teams of students with members up to 14 years old are participating in the competition, which has been themed "Trash Tek." The goal is to develop solutions for dealing with trash such as recycling or reducing waste.

The event's winning team will move up to a state competition. The school says the highlight will be robot games where autonomous robots built from Legos will complete missions on a playing field.

Winter storm dumping snow on northern Plains

DIRK LAMMERS, Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Schools called off classes and road crews warned of hazardous conditions Monday as a snowstorm crawled across the northern Plains, while states farther south worked to recover from a weekend of icy weather and deadly flooding.

Snow made for a messy, slow commute in Minneapolis, while dozens of schools closed for the day because of snow in Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota. Up to a foot of snow was expected in eastern South Dakota and southwest Minnesota, while smaller amounts were forecast from Nebraska to Wisconsin through Tuesday.

By early Monday evening, about 4 inches of snow had fallen at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, the National Weather Service said. In southwestern Minnesota, about 6 inches of snow had fallen in Luverne, Pipestone and Worthington and 5 inches in Marshall. Menno, in southeastern South Dakota, reported 7 inches. Sioux Center, in northwestern Iowa, had 8 inches as of mid-afternoon.

Drivers across the region were dealing with slick, snow-packed roads and reduced visibility, said Todd Heitkamp, a meteorologist with the weather service in Sioux Falls, where police reported more than 70 accidents by midday. The Minnesota State Patrol reported nearly 250 crashes and spinouts in the Twin Cities Monday morning.

"If people don't need to be traveling, they shouldn't be," Heitkamp said. "Let the road crews do their jobs."

Sioux Falls was readying its snow clearing equipment, but the steady snowfall was expected to keep crews from plowing the city's residential neighborhoods until Tuesday. The weather also prompted Northern State University in Aberdeen, about 200 miles northeast, to cancel a women's basketball game Monday night.

Farther south, states were recovering after heavy rain and freezing rain over the Thanksgiving holiday.

Search crews in Texas found a body Monday in the submerged car of a woman who was swept off a bridge by floodwaters three days earlier near Fort Worth. Eight people died from the flooding in Texas over the past few days.

Teams also were working to restore power to tens of thousands of people in Oklahoma, where the governor issued a statewide disaster declaration after an ice storm knocked out power to about 150,000 utility customers over the weekend.

In Missouri, heavy rains have pushed the Mississippi River to near flood levels near St. Louis, though no damage has been reported. Flood warnings also persist in Arkansas.

South Dakota regulators grant Dakota Access Pipeline permit

JAMES NORD, Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota regulators approved a construction permit Monday for a pipeline that will cross through the state as it carries North Dakota oil to Illinois.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission voted 2-1 to approve the permit for the Dakota Access Pipeline, and construction on the roughly 270-mile leg could begin early next year.

The 1,130-mile pipeline, proposed by Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, would move at least 450,000 barrels of crude daily from the Bakken oil patch in western North Dakota through South Dakota and Iowa to an existing pipeline in Patoka, Illinois, where shippers can access Midwest and Gulf Coast markets.

While hailed as a safe and cost-effective way to transport crude oil, opponents worry the pipeline could lead to environmental contamination.

The \$3.8 billion project needs approval in all four states, but South Dakota is the first, the company said.

"This is an important infrastructure project that will provide a more direct, cost-effective, safer and environmentally responsible manner to transport this crude oil," spokeswoman Vicki Granado said in a statement. "We look forward to being a part of South Dakota's business and civic communities."

Public Utilities Commission Chairman Chris Nelson said the firm demonstrated that it has the legal right to have the permit issued.

Commissioner Gary Hanson, who voted against the permit, said he's concerned the pipeline is routed too close to fast-growing areas in the southeastern corner of South Dakota.

Hanson said he ultimately doesn't want to keep the project from being built, but said he just wants it "done right."

"The relative cost of rerouting this pipeline farther away from this growth area is pennies to the dollar for a multibillion-dollar pipeline," Hanson said.

Supporters of the project cite a need for energy security, point to the jobs it would create and maintain that transporting oil by pipeline is safer than moving it by rail or truck.

Opponents worry the pipeline could contaminate water supplies, farmland and archaeological sites, and harm habitat for wildlife, including endangered species.

Tony Helland, a member of conservation and family agriculture group Dakota Rural Action, said in a statement that the regulatory atmosphere in South Dakota favors incoming corporations and projects over the rights of state landowners.

The group said its unclear if there will be an appeal of the commission's decision.

The panel granted the permit with conditions. In addition to complying with state and local laws, Dakota Access — a company formed for the project — will give the commission quarterly reports, hire a liaison officer approved by the commission to deal with landowner disputes and log landowner concerns.

An independent third party, which must be approved by the commission, is also required to monitor compliance with the permit.

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ND standoff suspect pleads not guilty to felony charges

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A man who barricaded himself for 15 hours inside a Bismarck home last month and allegedly fired shots at police has pleaded not guilty to felony charges.

Thirty-six-year-old Brandon Lyon entered his pleas Monday to charges of attempted murder of a law enforcement officer, two counts of terrorizing and prohibited possession of a firearm. He faces up to 35 years in prison if convicted of all counts.

The standoff began the night of Oct. 12, when police say Lyon threatened to kill two people. He was arrested hours later after police used tear gas. Authorities say Lyon fired a gun at officers at one point during the standoff.

Prosecutor Julie Lawyer has said Lyon has an extensive criminal history in both North Dakota and South Dakota.

Lyon's attorney did not immediately return a call seeking comment Monday.

Head-on crash near Yankton causes fire, leaves 2 people dead

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — Two people are dead following a head-on crash that caused a car to catch on fire east of Yankton.

The state Highway Patrol says a 31-year-old man was driving a car on the wrong side of South Dakota Highway 50 around 5:30 a.m. Monday and collided head-on with an eastbound car driven by a 30-year-old woman.

The Highway Patrol says the collision caused the man's car to catch on fire. He was pronounced dead at the scene. The woman was transported to a Sioux Falls hospital, where she later died.

The drivers' names haven't been released.

The Highway Patrol says a pickup truck and a car driving through the crash scene each struck one of the vehicles involved in the collision. Neither the truck's nor the car's occupants were injured.

Comment period on VA hospital study extended through Feb. 5

HOT SPRINGS, S.D. (AP) — The Department of Veterans Affairs has extended the public comment period on a study that looks at the impact that closing a Hot Springs hospital would have on veterans.

The public will now have until Feb. 5 to comment on the study. The extension comes after South Dakota's congressional delegation sent a letter to VA Secretary Robert McDonald asking the agency to give people more time.

VA officials have proposed shuttering the historic Battle Mountain Sanitarium, transitioning long-term care services to Rapid City and leaving only an outpatient clinic in Hot Springs. Veterans have vehemently opposed this proposal.

The study released last month showed the VA's proposal would have an estimated 30-year cost of over \$148.5 million.

The public comment period was originally scheduled to end in early January.

Appalachia grasps for hope as coal loses its grip

JONATHAN FAHEY, AP Energy Writer

WELCH, W.Va. (AP) — The seams of coal in some of Eddie Asbury's mines in McDowell County are so thin workers can barely squeeze down them. They enter on carts nearly flat on their backs, the roof of the mine coursing by just a few inches in front of their faces. They don't stand up all day.

To keep his business operating with such a paltry amount of coal, Asbury has to do everything himself. He has no use for the shiny, multimillion-dollar mining machines on display this fall at the biannual coal show nearby. His equipment is secondhand stuff that he repairs and refurbishes. The coal he and his workers scrape out of the mountain is washed and prepared for sale in a plant Asbury and a colleague

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built themselves.

"It's how we survive," says Asbury, 66, a miner since 1971.

Even coal is barely surviving in coal country — and coal is about the only thing that Central Appalachia has. West Virginia is the only state in the country where more than half of adults are not working, according to the Census Bureau. It is tied with Kentucky for the highest percentage of residents collecting disability payments from Social Security, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. And the death rate among working-age adults is highest in the nation, 55 percent higher the national average, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And now the one main source for decent-paying work, the brutal life of coal, seems to be drying up for good. The thick, easy, cheap coal is gone, global competition is fierce, and clean air and water regulations are increasing costs and cutting into demand.

Central Appalachia's struggle is familiar to many rural regions across the U.S., where middle-class jobs are disappearing or gone and young people have no other choice than to leave to find opportunity. But the problems are amplified in coal country, where these difficult economic and social conditions have gripped the region for decades and where there is hardly any flat land to build anything.

Every year since 1979, West Virginia has led the country in the percentage of people who are either not working or looking for work. But businesses are reluctant to come set up shop in Central Appalachia and take advantage of the available labor in part because education levels are so low. Forty-two percent of prime-age West Virginians have no more than a high-school degree, nearly double the national average.

"We have a mismatch between the job skills that employers want and the job skills West Virginians have," says John Deskins, director of the Bureau for Business and Economic Research at West Virginia University. "It's a little bit grim. You can cut the data in multiple ways, and West Virginia still lags the nation."

But this crisis — and the realization that there won't be another coal boom in these parts — is leading to a growing understanding that new approaches are needed to help Central Appalachia emerge from decades of deep poverty, under-education and poor health.

Big federal and state programs and initiatives, some dating from the Lyndon Johnson administration, have failed to help the region diversify its economy much beyond digging or blasting coal out of mountains. If anything is going to help the people of Appalachia, poverty experts and residents of West Virginia now say, it's themselves: local entrepreneurs who know their communities and customers well, and are committed to them.

"We need to have some urgency and look at other possibilities because coal may not be here," says Dr. Donovan "Dino" Beckett, CEO of the Williamson Health and Wellness Center, who also is supporting a range of programs to help boost health and entrepreneurship. "But that's a controversial subject here because coal is a way of life."

Success, if it can come to coal country, will be the result of thousands of big risks taken by small-scale business people. It will be halting and arduous and it will come with failure. Many will have no choice but to leave, as tens of thousands already have in recent decades. And West Virginia may continue to lag the nation in social and economic demographics in the years to come.

Central Appalachia is not out of ideas, though, and it has not given up. Grass-roots approaches like Dino Beckett's programs to improve health in Mingo County, an apprentice program in Wayne County designed to give high school kids a better chance at a good job, and even Eddie Asbury's small-but-determined coal operation in McDowell County show how Central Appalachia may slowly begin to remake itself.

DARK TIMES FOR COAL

For more than a century, the coal seams that run through Appalachia have made the steel used to build U.S. cities and the electric power to light them. As technology has improved, though, it has taken fewer and fewer workers to mine that coal.

Coal employment and population in Appalachia were at their highest in the middle of the last century. West Virginia coal employment peaked at 130,000 miners in 1940 and is now under 20,000.

The same trend played across the nation. There are fewer than 80,000 coal miners in the U.S. — less than half the number of new jobs the U.S. economy adds every month. That's one-tenth the number of

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coal workers in the 1920s, and those fewer workers now produce nearly twice as much coal.

Most of those job losses happened long before coal's latest downturn. Mechanization began slashing the number of workers needed to mine coal in the 1960s, and then a collapse in the U.S. steel industry in 1980s further decimated miners' ranks.

Now employment is falling further because the world is trying to turn away from coal in hopes of protecting the environment and human health. Coal is by far the biggest source of carbon dioxide and airborne pollutants among fuels used to make electricity.

Coal will not go completely away anytime soon — it's the cheapest way to bring electricity to the 1.3 billion people who lack access to it, and even developed nations will still need to burn it as they transition to cleaner fuels. The carbon in coal will still be needed to mix with iron to make steel. But there is so much more coal than the world needs that only the cheapest global producers will survive.

In the U.S., where natural gas has become a cheaper alternative to coal to generate electricity, miners are facing an especially difficult market: Four major U.S. coal companies have filed for bankruptcy protection in the last 18 months.

Mining a thin seam of coal takes nearly as much labor, time and cost as mining a thick seam, but it yields a lot less coal. That makes the thin seams left in Central Appalachia too expensive to compete with cheaper coal being mined in places like Illinois, Wyoming, Australia and Indonesia. The industry will persist here, driven by small, determined operators like Asbury, but as a niche no longer able to support a region's economy.

"There's a reluctant realization that this is different," says Keith Burdette, West Virginia's commerce secretary and head of the state's economic development office, of the latest coal bust.

COAL COUNTRY

About the only flat land to build anything among the jumble of mountains in Southern West Virginia is in the hollows traced by small rivers, and that land sits in dangerous flood plains.

This unavoidable geography has hampered efforts to diversify the economy, despite decades of effort. There's one stoplight in all of McDowell County, and there isn't a four-lane highway to be found.

John F. Kennedy stopped in Welch, McDowell's county seat, as a presidential candidate in May 1960 and railed against the "poverty and hunger, the destroyed health" of children there. The first food stamps were given out in McDowell County, and Congress launched the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1965 to help increase job opportunities and make the region economically competitive.

Poverty experts say these efforts helped relieve the most acute conditions, but did little else. As coal employment declined, people fled because there was little else for them to do. McDowell County had a population of just under 100,000 in 1950. Since then, the county's population has fallen by four-fifths, to around 20,000.

"All we've got is coal," says Randy Campbell, one of Asbury's mine superintendents.

Even when land is found and developed, it can be hard to attract businesses. Tazewell County, across the border from McDowell in Virginia's coal country, built a 680-acre business and technology park and dangled incentives to try to entice companies to move in. It sits empty, five years after the county started marketing it.

To many, it is a massive failure of government at federal and local levels that a trend of declining employment, under-education and poor health has been allowed to continue for half a century without a comprehensive overhaul of development policy. For example, many states that rely on natural resource production have permanent funds created with taxes or royalties from resource production that can be tapped during downturns. West Virginia set one up only last year, and because of restrictions on when and how it can be funded, it is empty.

"Our policy makers haven't grappled with the realities, and it's to the detriment of coal communities," says Ted Boettner, executive director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. "When the new economy started taking off, it left West Virginia behind."

That may be starting to change. Burdette, the state's commerce secretary, says the state is considering approaches as radical as starting a homesteading program to attract people to the enormous number of

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abandoned buildings and empty lots.

"This is going to force us to do some things that maybe we wouldn't do otherwise but we probably should," he says. "It's going to take some real creative thinking."

JOBS AND LIFE SKILLS IN THE COALFIELDS

After Josh Napier graduated from high school in Wayne County, West Virginia, in 2011 with a major in building construction, all he could find were jobs at fast food restaurants. After stints at Taco Bell and Long John Silver's, he was working at Wendy's in the spring of 2012, his first child on the way, when he heard about Brandon Dennison.

"Every construction job I applied for required two years of experience," Napier says. "Brandon was the first person to give me the chance to actually work on a job."

Dennison wants to reduce poverty in his home state, so he devised a business plan in graduate school that uses some of the state's disadvantages, like its abandoned buildings, to create jobs.

His creation, Coalfield Development Corp., hires graduates of high school vocational programs to restore, repurpose or tear down old buildings, use old building materials to make furniture, or build new homes on reclaimed coalfield land.

Employees also are also required to take six hours of community college courses a week and three hours of life skills classes that help them with things like money management and healthy eating.

"If you don't have a job lined up, that 18-to-19 age becomes a cliff, and we see a lot of bad decisions," Dennison says.

Napier got hands-on construction experience working on several types of projects, including installation of solar panels, a skill he'd like to pursue in the future. He also took classes in parenting and anger management that he says have made him a better father.

The program is getting such a good response that Dennison plans to expand early next year to start similar businesses focused on agriculture, tourism and retail.

"We're trying to change mindsets in coal country, from 'the world is out to get me' to 'the world is full of opportunity,'" he says. "A huge focus of the training we do is around entrepreneurship and how to start a business."

Ron Haskins, a former White House and congressional adviser on welfare and poverty now at the Brookings Institution, says apprenticeship programs — especially ones that help workers pursue a degree — are desperately needed in rural regions nationwide.

They are among the best ways to foster an economy, based on businesses created by local residents who know the area and are committed to stay.

HEALTH, WELLNESS AND NEW BUSINESS

A sign entering Williamson, West Virginia reads "Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field," but the state of the sign is evidence that the billions have long left Mingo County. It's faded, and the "Welcome to Williamson" part of the sign is broken.

Residents still talk about how popular performers came through town in the 1920s and luxuries found only in a few places in the U.S. were sold in downtown shops.

Dino Beckett's parents told him those stories, and he's determined to get some of that vibrancy back.

It starts with improving the health of the residents. Fourteen percent of West Virginians in their prime working years have a disability that keeps them from working or limits what they can do, double the U.S. rate of 7 percent. And the state has by far the highest rate of death from drug overdoses in the nation, two and a half times the national rate, according to the CDC.

Beckett, 46, runs the Williamson Health and Wellness Center, which is working to address many of these issues. But the center also functions as a downtown engine of hope for the county.

"We wanted to start a clinic, but we wanted to be an economic driver for the area, too," he says.

He started a free clinic under a federal program to encourage treatment of underserved populations to go along with his more traditional doctor's office, and a Diabetes Coalition to address the extremely high rates of diabetes patients in the county.

Beckett also created a project called Sustainable Williamson that helped set up a farmer's market to

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provide access to healthier food and also runs programs to foster and support entrepreneurship.

This summer, Sustainable Williamson opened a space for budding entrepreneurs in a converted old furniture store called The Hub, where people with ideas for businesses can get support and advice. They sponsor training sessions and contests that help people refine their business pitches and compete for start-up money.

His groups try to get people to be more active by promoting and sponsoring daily lunchtime walks and monthly 5K runs.

Among the most popular is the Coal Dust 5K, which took place for the third time in September. By the end of the race, it looks a little like Williamson is teeming with miners again because the runners are doused with "coal dust" along the route. Of course, the "coal dust," like a Williamson full of miners, isn't real.

TRYING ANYTHING TO STAY HOME

After years working as a contractor and temporary worker in the coal industry, Mark Muncy finally landed a permanent job, with benefits, working for a mine owned by Alpha Natural Resources in the fall of 2013 near his home in Welch.

A year later, Alpha closed the mine and Muncy was out of work. Alpha, one of the country's biggest coal companies, is now in bankruptcy.

Muncy didn't want to go back to working a long-haul truck driver, as he had done years before, because it kept him away from his family too much.

His daughter Ashleigh loved to bake so he raised some money from a local acquaintance, got a government-backed economic development loan and opened the Riverside Cafe and Bakery in June.

"I didn't know what else to do," he says.

The plan was to run it with just his wife and four children. But the only salad bar in town proved too popular, and customers fell in love with Ashleigh's pizza rolls. By customer request, Muncy agreed to extend the restaurant's hours and stay open until midnight on nights when there's a local football game with hungry fans.

The restaurant is bringing in three times what Muncy's loan officer predicted it would — and he's had to hire three people.

Ashleigh's original plan was to keep her job at the local supermarket and bake on the side, but her baking just got too popular. Some of Ashleigh's biggest fans: the region's remaining miners, like those who work for Asbury, who come early in the morning and ask her to wrap the pizza rolls individually so they can eat them for lunch down in the mine.

Miners like Asbury and his workers won't disappear completely from the Riverside Cafe or from coal country, despite the region's dark future. The coal they mine is high-quality stuff, used for making steel, not electricity. It may even be used to build the frames for solar panels that Napier has learned to install, and that could further reduce demand for coal used for electricity.

Asbury is negotiating a lease for a new mine even now, in the depths of a bust.

He also is trying to work with the state on a plan to build a surface mine that would flatten a stretch of mountains but also create enough space for a highway to connect McDowell County with the two interstates that meet in Beckley — and perhaps spur some economic development unrelated to coal, finally, in Central Appalachia.

Black pastors press Trump on tone during closed-door meeting

JILL COLVIN, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Dozens of black pastors pressed Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump on Monday to address what some called his use of racially charged rhetoric, with several describing a meeting that became tense at times as attendees raised concerns about his blunt language.

While some left the gathering at Trump's skyscraper in midtown Manhattan with hopes their message had resonated, Trump said afterward he had no plans to change his approach, which he said had taken him to "first position in every single poll."

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"The beautiful thing about the meeting is that they didn't really ask me to change the tone," Trump said. "I think they really want to see victory, because ultimately it is about, we want to win and we want to win together."

At a rally later Monday in Macon, Georgia, Trump told a nearly all-white audience of about 5,000 that the meeting was "inspiring" and "unbelievable."

"It was a really terrific day," he said.

But several pastors who met in New York with the billionaire real estate mogul, who has held a consistent lead in preference polls of GOP voters for several months due in large part to his aggressive style of campaigning, said the session was a bit more complicated.

Bishop George Bloomer, who traveled to the gathering from North Carolina, said he arrived in New York with concerns about "the racial comments that have been made and the insensitive comments that have been made," including an incident earlier this month in which a black protester was roughed up by Trump supporters at a rally in Birmingham, Alabama.

Trump said after the incident, "Maybe he should have been roughed up because it was absolutely disgusting what he was doing."

"I asked him: 'Are you a racist? People are saying that about you,'" Bloomer said. "If you are seeking the African-American community to support you, at the least, you're not helping with these kind of things that are going on."

Bloomer said he told Trump that "if he wants to have our ear as a community, to at least tone down the rhetoric some kind of way, tone it down. And he said that he would."

Pastor Al Morgan of Launch Ministries in Raleigh, North Carolina, said part of the group's discussion focused on whether Trump should lighten up a bit.

"What he said was that he would take that into consideration," Morgan said. "So the thing was trying to be who he is, so you have to remain true to yourself. And, in his defense, that's gotten him where he is. So the thing is, how do you convey a person's heart with their personality? That's the dilemma."

Trump is seeking to replace President Barack Obama, who won two terms in the White House by bringing together a coalition of young people, single women and black and Hispanic voters.

Democrats maintain an enormous edge with African-American voters, with Republican presidential candidates faring poorly among minorities in the past two elections. In 2012, according to exit polls conducted for The Associated Press and television networks, 93 percent of black voters backed Obama. In 2008, the number was 95 percent.

But Trump has been courting the support of evangelical black clergy members and other African-American leaders as he works to broaden his appeal in a crowded Republican field.

In Georgia, radio host and failed 2012 presidential hopeful Herman Cain was among those who introduced Trump. Cain was the lone major black Republican candidate four years ago. Trump also interrupted his own 75-minute speech to bring another black Georgia Republican to the microphone. Bruce LeVell, who has served as party chairman in suburban Atlanta's Gwinnett County, announced his endorsement, drawing roars from Trump's backers.

Monday's meeting with the pastors was originally promoted by the campaign as an endorsement event, in which he would receive the backing of 100 black evangelical and religious leaders.

But many of those invited to the meet-and-greet objected to that description, saying they accepted the invitation only because they wanted to challenge Trump about what he's said as a candidate.

Trump kicked off his campaign with a speech in which he said some Mexican immigrants are rapists and criminals, and recently drew criticism for retweeting an image of inaccurate statistics that vastly over-represented the number of whites killed by blacks, among other errors.

In a letter published by Ebony magazine, more than 100 black religious leaders wrote that "Trump's racially inaccurate, insensitive and incendiary rhetoric should give those charged with the care of the spirits and souls of black people great pause."

They also expressed concern that Monday's gathering would "give Trump the appearance of legitimacy

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among those who follow your leadership and respect your position as clergy.”

Pastor Victor Couzens, from Cincinnati, Ohio, said he nonetheless felt an obligation to attend the meeting to hear what Trump had to say.

“It’s very unfortunate the way he has talked to not just the African-American community, but things he’s said about women and Mexicans and Muslims,” Couzens said. “But what’s more discouraging than the things that he has said is the fact that in the face of him saying all of these things, he continues to surge in the polls.”

And some attendees emerged expressing full-throated support for Trump.

“What we were able to do today was allow people to see his heart for themselves and to make up their own minds about him,” said Darrell Scott, the senior pastor of New Spirit Revival Center in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, who helped to organize the meeting. “They find out that he’s not the person that the media has depicted him to be.”

Today in History

The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 1, the 335th day of 2015. There are 30 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Dec. 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a black seamstress, was arrested after refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus; the incident sparked a year-long boycott of the buses by blacks.

On this date:

In 1824, the presidential election was turned over to the U.S. House of Representatives when a deadlock developed between John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, William H. Crawford and Henry Clay. (Adams ended up the winner.)

In 1860, the Charles Dickens novel “Great Expectations” was first published in weekly serial form.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln sent his Second Annual Message to Congress, in which he called for the abolition of slavery, and went on to say, “Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves.”

In 1921, the Navy flew the first non-rigid dirigible to use helium; the C-7 traveled from Hampton Roads, Virginia, to Washington, D.C.

In 1934, Soviet communist official Sergei M. Kirov, an associate of Josef Stalin, was assassinated in Leningrad, resulting in a massive purge.

In 1941, Japan’s Emperor Hirohito approved waging war against the United States, Britain and the Netherlands after his government rejected U.S. demands contained in the Hull Note.

In 1942, nationwide gasoline rationing went into effect in the United States.

In 1965, an airlift of refugees from Cuba to the United States began in which thousands of Cubans were allowed to leave their homeland.

In 1969, the U.S. government held its first draft lottery since World War II.

In 1973, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, died in Tel Aviv at age 87.

In 1989, Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican.

In 1990, British and French workers digging the Channel Tunnel between their countries finally met after knocking out a passage in a service tunnel.

Ten years ago: A roadside bomb killed 10 U.S. Marines near Fallujah, Iraq. South Africa’s highest court ruled in favor of gay marriage. A jury in Sarasota, Florida, recommended the death sentence for Joseph Smith, the killer of 11-year-old Carlie Brucia. A dog and its owner found the bodies of Sarah and Philip Gehring, two children who’d been fatally shot by their father and buried in rural Ohio. (Manuel Gehring had confessed to the slayings but strangled himself in prison before he could be tried.)

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Five years ago: President Barack Obama's bipartisan deficit commission unveiled its recommendations including lower income taxes, fewer tax breaks and higher age for retirement benefits (however, the panel failed to advance the package to Congress two days later by a vote of 11 in favor, 7 against, falling short of the 14 votes needed). LPGA players meeting in Orlando, Florida, voted to allow transgender players to compete on tour.

One year ago: President Barack Obama, after meeting with mayors, civil rights leaders and law enforcement officials at the White House, asked federal agencies for concrete recommendations to ensure the U.S. wasn't building a "militarized culture" within police departments.

Today's Birthdays: Former CIA director Stansfield Turner is 92. Singer Billy Paul is 80. Actor-director Woody Allen is 80. World Golf Hall of Famer Lee Trevino is 76. Singer Dianne Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 76. Country musician Casey Van Beek (The Tractors) is 73. Television producer David Salzman is 72. Rock singer-musician Eric Bloom (Blue Oyster Cult) is 71. Rock musician John Densmore (The Doors) is 71. Actress-singer Bette Midler is 70. Singer Gilbert O'Sullivan is 69. Former child actor Keith Thibodeaux (TV: "I Love Lucy") is 65. Actor Treat Williams is 64. Country singer Kim Richey is 59. Actress Charlene Tilton is 57. Actress-model Carol Alt is 55. Actor Jeremy Northam is 54. Actress Katherine LaNasa is 49. Producer-director Andrew Adamson is 49. Actor Nestor Carbonell is 48. Actress Golden Brooks is 45. Actress-comedian Sarah Silverman is 45. Actor Ron Melendez is 43. Contemporary Christian singer Bart Millard (MIL'urd) is 43. Actor-writer-producer David Hornsby is 40. Singer Sarah Masen is 40. Rock musician Brad Delson (Linkin Park) is 38. Actor Nate Torrence is 38. Rock/Christian music singer-songwriter Mat Kearney is 37. Rock musician Mika Fineo (Filter) is 34. Actor Charles Michael Davis is 31. R&B singer Janelle Monae is 30. Actress Ashley Monique Clark is 27. Actress Zoe Kravitz is 27. Pop singer Nico Sereba (Nico & Vinz) is 25. Actor Jackson Nicoll is 12.

Thought for Today: "I got a simple rule about everybody. If you don't treat me right, shame on you." — Louis Armstrong, American jazz musician (1900-1971).

Cyber Monday sales still on top, but losing some luster

MAE ANDERSON, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers traded bricks for clicks on Monday, flocking online to snap up "Cyber Monday" deals on everything from cashmere sweaters to Star Wars toys.

Now that shoppers are online all the time anyway, the 10-year-old shopping holiday has lost some of its luster as online sales on Thanksgiving and Black Friday pick up. But enough shoppers have been trained to look for "Cyber Monday" specific sales to ensure the holiday will still mean big bucks for retailers.

It's too early for sales figures, but Monday is still expected to be the biggest online shopping day ever, likely racking up more than \$3 billion in sales, according to research firm comScore.

As of 7 p.m. Monday, Adobe estimated Cyber Monday sales would rise 12 percent to \$2.98 billion by the end of the day. A more complete picture of Cyber Monday sales will be available when comScore releases figures on Wednesday.

"A lot of people wait to see if deals are better on Cyber Monday," said Forrester Research analyst Sucharita Mulpuru.

New Yorker Anna Osgoodby was one of the many online shoppers who spread her purchases throughout the holiday shopping weekend. On Black Friday, she took advantage of a 35 percent sale at online accessories retailer ahandwillow.com, buying earrings, a necklace and bracelet. Then she bought earrings and clutches on Monday during its 40 percent off sale.

"That extra 5 percent convinced me to buy a few more," she said.

Some hot sellers were in scarce supply by early afternoon on Monday. At Target, a Swagway hoverboard was sold out by early afternoon. The electronic transportation gadget had been \$100 off at \$399. Drones and some Star Wars toys were hard to find as well.

"There are certain hot products, hoverboards seem to be a phenomenon, they're selling out everywhere,"

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said Scot Wingo, chairman of ChannelAdvisor, which provides e-commerce services to retailers.

Adobe found 13 out of 100 product views returned an out-of-stock message as of 7 p.m., twice the normal rate.

And there were a few brief outages at sites like Neiman Marcus and Target and online payments company PayPal reported a brief interruption in service.

Retailers have been touting online deals since the beginning of November. And they no longer wait for Monday to roll out Cyber Monday deals, either. Amazon started "Lightning Deals" on Saturday and Walmart beginning all of its Cyber offers on 8 p.m. on Sunday.

"It's no longer about one day, but a season of digital deals," said Matthew Shay, president of retail trade group The National Retail Federation.

That seems to have taken a toll on brick-and-mortar shopping. Frenzied crowds seemed to be a thing of the past on Black Friday — the busy shopping day after Thanksgiving — and sales fell to \$10.4 billion this year, down from \$11.6 billion in 2014, according to preliminary figures from research firm ShopperTrak.

"Consumers are recognizing the Internet is the place to go for a deal any time, any day," said Gene Alvarez, managing vice president of research firm Gartner.

"I personally skip Black Friday just to shop Cyber Monday," said Mark Flores, a parks and recreation director from Lynwood, California. But this year, he started online shopping on Black Friday, buying five pairs of Sorel and Uggs shoes for gifts and eight Chromecast that were two for \$50 instead of \$35 off. He planned to shop on Cyber Monday too, but did not find compelling deals. "Nothing standing out so far," he said midmorning on Monday.

Research firm comScore expects online sales to rise 14 percent to \$70.06 billion during the November and December shopping period, slowing slightly from last year's 15 percent rise. Online sales make up 10 percent of overall retail sales, but that increases to 15 percent during the holidays as online shoppers snap up Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals, according to research firm Forrester.

The name "Cyber Monday" was coined in 2005 by the National Retail Federation's online arm, called Shop.org, to encourage people to shop online. The name was also a nod to online shopping being done at work where faster connections made it easier to browse. Now, even with broadband access, Cyber Monday continues to be a day when retailers pull out big promotions.

Santa obliges dad of sleeping boy with snoozing photo

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — When Donnie Walters took son Zeke to have his picture taken with Santa Claus, the 6-month-old boy couldn't stay awake while they waited in line.

So Santa obliged Walters and posed asleep with the snoozing child resting on his belly.

Walters posted the photos of the sleeping pair on Facebook. The photos taken Nov. 25 at Evansville's Eastland Mall and posted the following day have been liked 371,000 times and shared more than 195,000.

Walters tells USA Today that "everyone has been very kind." He says most comments referred to how much the pictures have brightened people's day.